

Rio de Janeiro's transformations for the mega-events: history, urban regeneration and grassroots creative experiences in the port area.

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Abstract

Trying to answer the question 'For whom are the urban transformations?' associated with the host of the World Cup 2014 and Olympics 2016, this paper aims to present the history, urban interventions and potential of learning from grassroots creative experiences within Rio de Janeiro's port area. In doing so, this descriptive effort wishes to collaborate with the major discussion about the challenges and opportunities of city making in Global South cities.

1. Introduction

Porto Maravilha is returning a **historical treasure to Rio**, and at the same time integrating areas with great housing, cultural and economic potential, which will be **transformed** into an **example of modernity**. (CEDURP, 2013b)

In the context of huge city transformations associated with the host of the World Cup 2014 and Olympics 2016, this paper aims to present the urban regeneration project that is taking place in Rio de Janeiro's port area: the *Porto Maravilha* project. This descriptive effort focuses on the overall contingency of these recent urban transformations presenting the historical relevance, abandonment period and socially excluded population of Rio de Janeiro's port area. Casting a critical eye towards official phrases such as the one quoted in the beginning of this session the paper explains: firstly, why the port area is considered the historical treasure of Rio de Janeiro; secondly, the sequence of urban interventions that transformed the port throughout the years; and thirdly, the different discourses and interests behind the idea of transforming the area into an 'example of modernity'.

Trying to answer the question 'For whom are the urban interventions?' and based on the analysis of official documents and ten days of observation and application of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, this paper briefly presents both an overview of the expected social impact of the mega-events in Rio de Janeiro port area and two grassroots creative experiences that are already taking place within this area. However, it is important to highlight that these two experiences are presented having in mind the postcolonial urban studies claim of an urban theory able to learn from cities everywhere (McFarlane, 2011, Robinson, 2006, Robinson, 2011) and conscious of the role of creativity in city-making (Sandercock, 2003, Landry, 2008) . Fleshing out the importance of learning from these experiences, which for a long time were the few initiatives that have encouraged the dialogue between this forgotten area and the city, this work discusses the revitalization process related with mega-events and underscores the potential for learning from creative urban experiences in both Rio de Janeiro and other cities of the 'Global South'.

2. Historical treasure: Rio de Janeiro and its port area

Rio de Janeiro dates back to 1565. Slowly spreading along the seashore and developing on top of, and limited by, four hills, the city took almost 300 years to properly blossom. The turning point happened with the arrival of the entire Portuguese Court in 1808 and consequent transference of the Kingdom of Portugal from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Sigaud, 2000). Escaping from the Napoleonic forces in Europe, the King of Portugal declared Rio de Janeiro the new capital of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and Algarves and implemented huge transformations within the city. From allowing the commercial exchanges between Brazil and all nations considered friends of Portugal to urbanizing the city to properly house the Portuguese Court, the presence of the King John VI propelled Rio de Janeiro's development, particularly surrounding the port area where the city was born.

Economically, other than the services related to the court, the city's development has been based on three main activities. The historical compendium book *História dos Bairros: Saúde, Gamboa e Santo Cristo* details each of these economic activities and how they have influenced Rio de Janeiro's urban landscape, particularly focusing on the history of three neighborhoods that formed the port area, and consequently the beginnings of the city. One of the most important activities was the exploration of regular stones for the construction of houses and for doing earthworks in many of the native mangroves areas that used to bring mobility difficulties and harden the city connections. These quarries were actually something broadly available, since they used the hills that once limited and was within the city. The second economic activity was the coffee trading. Following the arrival of the Portuguese Court, the coffee started being produced on a large scale, which were then stored and distributed via Rio de Janeiro's quays. As Cardoso et al. (1987) have mentioned, with the advent of the coffee, quays and warehouses multiplied in the region (Cardoso et al., 1987, author's translation). The expansion of the coffee culture throughout Brazil during the 19th century brought wealth to Rio de Janeiro, allowing then investment in transport, such as train, services and urban infrastructure to support the booming urban population.

The third activity was associated precisely with maritime commercialization, more specifically with the quays and associated warehouses, which previously had developed slowly throughout the years and that subsequent to the royal family arrival, had flourished. Initially inhabited by fisherman and slaves dealers, the quay area became a place of smithies, warehouses, in particular coffee warehouses, which were built at the seashore and more often on the land reclaimed from the sea. Associated with the construction of the Railway station and train lines connecting this port area with the countryside, the area's infrastructure had reached breaking point. As indicated by Cardoso et al. (1987), after 10 years of the distribution of imported products via Rio de Janeiro and the exportation of Brazilian products, mostly coffee, through the same quays, the port area of Rio de Janeiro became developed, diverse and populated. This population, in turn, was mainly comprised of workers from the quays and the industries located in the local area due to the available infrastructure.

However, Cardoso et al. (1987) highlighted that although Rio de Janeiro's vocation to be a port area and all the quays and commercialization in the region, the area was not properly equipped to be described as such. Despite the implementation of small initiatives such as the D Pedro II Docks and Maritime Station, launched respectively in 1875 and 1879, the establishment of a proper port area only happened at the beginning of the 20th century, in the context of other urban regeneration processes around Rio de Janeiro. Featuring among the world's 15 biggest ports at that time (Cardoso et al., 1987), in 1903 the port finally received the necessary financial and technical investment from the federal government in a contract with a British company and support from the Technical Commission for the Port Constructions.

Launched in 1910, the port was then considered the symbol of the huge transformations of Rio de Janeiro's old coast. Being built on a vast piece of land reclaimed from the sea its construction has 'permanently distanced the old maritime neighborhoods from the sea, and the land reclaimed areas have never truly integrated itself with the old areas' (Cardoso et al., 1987, author's translation). More importantly, the port construction and associated urbanization have consolidated the grassroots character of the area. For instance, it was within these maritime neighborhoods that the port, mill and warehouse's workers managed to live and mingle, and was there that the first slum of Brazil appeared [which was called *Favela Hill* and is the reason for all the slums areas in Brazil being called *favelas*].

The remarkable character of the port area population is what explains the area being the cradle of samba and other cultural grassroots manifestations that are so associated with the Brazilian melting pot of culture, races and beliefs. The catholic celebrations and other cultural traits from the Portuguese and some Spanish have mixed with the African roots of the black people that were also historically connected with the area. Being the place where the slave market was established, where the African Gods has been worshiped [in Pedra do Sal, place that till nowadays hosts samba and other cultural manifestations] and where most of the slaves and free men worked and lived, the port area has also been known as 'Little Africa' [*Pequena Africa* in Portuguese]. Actually, all the urban interventions and the lack of them have somehow fostered the segregation of this area from the rest of the city, as well as the crystallization of the port area of Rio de Janeiro as the living history of Brazil and metonym of the country's mixture.

2.1 The urban interventions and the abyss between port area and city

If we want to work towards a politics of inclusion, then we had better have a good understanding of the exclusionary effects of planning's past practices. (Sandercock, 2003)

As a consequence of all the above-mentioned transformations that Rio de Janeiro had witnessed throughout the 19th century, the capital of the new Brazilian republic was facing many urban issues and had its first comprehensive urban renovation process in the beginning of the 20th century. Besides the economic, urban and social changes boosted by the arrival of the royal family, the slavery abolishment in 1888, the Republic proclamation in 1889 followed by increasing migration to the city, has accelerate the need for Rio de Janeiro's 'modernization, sanitation and civilization' (Cardoso et al., 1987, author's translation). Known as Pereira Passos's Renovation, due to the name of Rio de Janeiro's mayor at that time, from 1902 to 1906 urban renovation focused on widening existing roads and building new roads – especially in the city center, and the construction of the port and revitalization of its surrounding area. Besides these urban interventions, which were inspired by Haussmann's Paris, the government has created rules and regulations changing and disciplined the life within the city, followed by sanitation campaigns against such outbreaks as yellow fever and bubonic plague.

History shows that the Pereira Passos's urban interventions have been based on large demolition projects as well as the eviction of a huge number of people from the city center and port area. However, 'regardless of the destruction of a big share of the houses in the area, the old maritime neighborhoods have absorbed a huge population of low income earners displaced during the demolitions that were taking place in the city' (Cardoso et al., 1987, author's translation). Therefore, in addition to the naval workers immigrants, mostly Portuguese and Spanish, and the black population that used to be based in these maritime neighborhoods, who after the abolishment of slavery, also remained in the area, the port area received the huge number of evicted people from the Pereira Passos's interventions. The *Favela Hill*, which is known as *Providência Hill*, is an example of that, since the number of deprived houses increase from 100 in 1904 to 1458 in 1933 (Cardoso et al., 1987).

Additionally, despite the aimed revitalization of the port area, these urban interventions of the beginning of the 20th century marked the physical separation between the port and the city. For instance, the two large avenues constructed on the reclaimed land have materially 'delimited the differences between the 'modern' and previous occupation' (SMU & IPP Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 2003)

It is important to highlight that although this urban renovation is considered the first comprehensive plan with this objective for Rio de Janeiro, other initiatives have happened before. For instance, due to the precarious constructions and disorderly occupation, around 1870 urban works and renovation projects were necessary in these hill settlements with some of them having been done to avoid landslides. Moreover, the urban development of the second half of 19th century has opened up streets and other smaller thoroughfares towards and within these hills. However, the vertiginous increase of population and construction on these hills did not follow on the same path as the urban services and required infrastructure. It is due to the fact that most of the investments at that time was focusing on the maritime coast (Cardoso et al., 1987). Another initiative in urban 'renovation' happened during the administration of Rio de Janeiro's mayor Barata Ribeiro who from 1891 to 1893 has focused on evicting the unsound collective habitations in the center of the city and ended up removing a lot of poor people from their homes.

Other than the Pereira Passos's urban interventions, Rio de Janeiro have passed through two more urban plans, called Apache Plan [1926] and Doxiades [1960 to 63], that have not impacted the situation of the port area, and the construction of *Presidente Vargas Avenue* and the *Perimetral Highway* which have magnified the physical urban divide between port and city. From the 1940 to the 1970, the functionalism way of thought has influenced the urban interventions in Rio de Janeiro and the construction of these two large avenues are a symbol of that. At more than 3.5 kms in length and connecting the *Mauá Square* at the heart of the 'old Rio' and the north region of the city, the federal president Getúlio Vargas constructed the 4 carriageways avenue in 1940, as a way of modernizing the capital of Brazil at that time. The *Perimetral*, on the other way, has its construction started in the 1950's but was only completed at the beginning of 1970, after Rio de Janeiro had lost its post of capital city of Brazil for the newly constructed Brasília. At 4 km in length, the elevated avenue connected the main entrance road of Rio de Janeiro, called Brazil Avenue, directly to the city center, crossing over the port area that has been since then entirely isolated and fragmented from the city.

All in all, the 3 constituent neighborhoods of the port area, namely *Santo Cristo*, *Gamboa* and *Saúde*, were excluded from the city's development. As Cardoso et al. (1987) comments, whilst the city was being modernized through its high-rises, the port neighborhoods had their forms, activities and traditions crystalized. This neglecting situation is reflected in the demographic numbers of these neighborhoods. For instance, this area that is considered the Administrative Region One [RA 1] by the city management has the 24th Human Development Index between the other 32 RA's of Rio de Janeiro and has witnessed the continuous decrease of its population. Whilst the city's population has increased, from 1991 to 2000, these maritime neighborhoods have decreased in population, and the ones who stay are mostly living in deprived conditions. In 2000, from the 40,486 people who were living there, 43%, or 17,409 people was living in slums (Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 2010).

3. Mega-events and Rio de Janeiro's urban transformations

Following the widespread belief that hosting mega-events represents a way to expedite the country's economic and social development, Brazil, in particular the city of Rio de Janeiro, has channeled efforts in attracting such events since 1990s. Although Brazil has already hosted the World Football Cup in 1950, the aim of bidding for a mega-event as a 'mechanism for transforming the space of the city while at the same time acting as a platform to project

those transformations to the international community' [Gaffney, p.24] date back to the unsuccessful bids of Rio de Janeiro for hosting the Olympics in 2004 and 2012. Within this mindset, Brazil, more specifically Rio de Janeiro has hosted the Pan-American Games in 2007, which despite costing 10 times more than its first projection, was considered a 'successful' event by the media and international sports organizations. Consequently, counting on the 2007's experience and with a comprehensive bidding document highlighting the importance of such events in Latin America and the social, environmental and economic impact of such mega-events, Brazil has won, firstly the FIFA World Cup 2014 and Confederation's Football Cup 2013, and secondly the Olympic Games of 2016. The Olympic Games 2016 will be exclusively hosted by Rio de Janeiro.

However, it is important to highlight the 'ongoing critical analyses regarding the ability and likelihood of sport mega-events to deliver sustainable, tangible, and egalitarian development in the Global South, as well as the propensity for sport-focused development initiatives to align with modernization and/or neo-liberal approaches and philosophy that may fall short of challenging or redressing structural inequalities' (Darnell, 2010). Agreeing with that, Lenskyj (2008) underscores that financial loss, temporary cessation of democratic process following the big international organizations rules and regulations [FIFA, IOC, etc.], production of militarized and exclusionary spaces, home evictions, among other dramatic city changes are the common ground of most of the mega-event's city hosts. Diving more deeply in the specific case of Rio de Janeiro, Gaffney (2010) argues that 'the transformations that mega-events wreak are permanent, impose temporary forms of governance that elide democratic institutions, install new and enduring surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms, while both creating and exacerbating unequal geographies of power within the city at large' .

Reflecting the above-mentioned challenges and blurry facts related with hosting such mega-events, Rio de Janeiro is facing huge urban transformations that are mostly guided by the extra-governmental entities which drives the transformation of the city from a place for living and working, to a place to be consumed (Gaffney, 2010). From the 55 billions of Brazilian Reals that Rio de Janeiro will receive as an investment for the World Cup and Olympics, 33,1 billion of Brazilian Reals will be for infrastructure (Tabak, 2011). However, as highlighted by Gaffney (2010), from the transportation system to the Olympic Villas that will be constructed, the transference of public money to serve the private interest is clear. This affirmation can be clearly seen in the report made by the National Coalition of Local Committees for a People's World Cup and Olympics (2012). This document highlights that among the huge investments in infrastructure and transport, which is extremely necessary to the current challenges of mobility within the city, are mainly focusing in connect touristic and sports facilities. Furthermore, this report as well as other authors such as Gaffney (2010); Mello and Gaffney (2010); and Darnell (2010) have mentioned the bias choices regarding the areas where the *Bus Rapid Transit* [BRT] and *Light Rail Transit* [LRT] transportations have been chosen to pass. For instance, the LRT that will cross the *Barra da Tijuca* neighborhood area are requiring the removal of houses of low income families that are just next to middle and high class areas, literally freeing the area from the 'undesirable' slums and consequently increasing the value of that land.

The investments in Rio de Janeiro for the mega-events include the above-mentioned transport infrastructure comprising the modernization and expansion of the subway, construction of BRT and LRT and the renovation of the international airport. Other than that, sports facilities will be constructed and renovated. For instance, the *Maracanã* Stadium, which has recently been renovated for the Pan-American games at the cost of 430 million Brazilian Reals, has just finished another renovation exercise costing 1.049 billion Brazilian Reals. Furthermore, the Olympics and World cup will have a huge impact in developing urban regeneration projects. Regarding these projects, one of the most important and ambitious is the *Porto Maravilha* project. After a long time being forgotten by the government, the historical port area of Rio de Janeiro is the object of a huge urban regeneration process.

3.1 *Porto Maravilha Project*

After more than 50 years of abandonment and following the global trends of revitalizations of old industrial and port zones in a reconfiguration of land use, the previously mentioned historical maritime neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro have regained government attention. Hidden beneath the *Perimetral* Highway and facing problems such as lack of renewed sewage and light systems, crime and violence, the governmental eye came back to the area a few years before the announcement of the Olympics in 2009. However, it was in October 2009, with the advent of the mega-events that the federal, state and municipal governments have made a joint effort to redevelop the area, using the mega-events and developing specific rules and regulations as a way of attracting the private initiative to invest in the area. Then, after a comprehensive study about other port area revitalization experiences, in particular Puerto Madero Port in Buenos Aires, Argentina; the Barcelona experience during the Olympics of 1992; the Rotterdam port revitalization and even another Brazilian experience in the capital of Pará state, the docks revitalization in Belém, the *Porto Maravilha* project has been launched (CEDURP, 2013b).

Thus, after experiencing the different stages of being from the heart of the history to a simple passageway, the port area has received the biggest Public Private Partnership [PPP] in Brazil, with an investment of 7.3 billion Brazilian Reals. After winning a bidding process, the *Porto Novo* Consortium, which is the result of a partnership between three of the biggest construction companies in Brazil, namely Noberto Odebrecht, OAS e *Carioca Engenharia*, has assumed the planning, execution and maintenance of the *Porto Maravilha* project. This project covers 5 million square meters of the city and includes the three old maritime neighborhoods with their more than 20,000 people. This area has been chosen for this major urban intervention for different reasons, in particular due to its huge tourism potential and the fact that 75% of this area belongs to the state. Based on this later aspect, the decision makers involved expected that this land ownership peculiarity would ease the necessary expropriations and consequently decrease the public resistance (Mello and Gaffney, 2010).

One of the project's premises is to undertake the urban intervention without using public money, relying principally on private investment. In order to do that, the CEDUR – Rio de Janeiro Port Region Urban Development Company, which is the mixed economy company formed by a municipal complementary law to manage the *Porto Maravilha* Project, has created the CEPACs. As highlighted at the *Porto Maravilha's* official website, the acronym CEPAC describes the name, in Portuguese, of Certificates of Additional Construction Potential, and they are the 'titles used to finance Urban Operations in Consortium, which recover degraded areas in the cities' (CEDURP, 2013b). More specifically, these CEPACs are titles that could be financially negotiated allowing the investor to buy the rights of building edifices with more floors than what was originally allowed in the area. As Mello and Gaffney (2010) criticizes, the CEPACs acquisition represents the buying of the right of disrespecting the urban laws previously established for the region. Despite such criticisms, the CEPACs were sold in 2011 in a single package for 3.5 billion Brazilian Reals. The money has been transferred to the *Porto Maravilha* project and as a consequence nowadays some parts of the port area will have buildings with 40 floors and above.

The main urban transformations aimed through the *Porto Maravilha* project concentrate on changing the current status and feature of the neighborhood. The objective is to develop a new cultural and entertainment center, attracting both private investment related with that as well as various population profile, increasing the number of residents from the current 22,000 to 100,000 within 15 years. Under the administrative concession of *Porto Novo* Consortium, one museum has already been constructed – MAR [Art Museum of Rio] – some areas such as *Morro da Conceição* has had its electrical cables renovated, part of the *Perimetral* Highway has been demolished and one tunnel has almost been completed as a substitute for the demolished highway. Other than that, this urban intervention intends to build another

museum designed by the Spanish 'star' architect Santiago Calatrava, to construct a Light Rail Transit [LRT], renovate the whole area's urban infrastructure from sewage system to water and public light and to implement new urban standards in approximately 70% of the streets. Moreover, within the 35 years concession, this private consortium is responsible for both the maintenance of the area's infrastructure and the service provision, which ranges from trash collection to traffic control and urban sanitation (CEDURP, 2013a).

Despite recognizing the importance of an urban regeneration project in the area given that the current local population deserves access to public services and infrastructure, many urban specialists [(Gaffney, 2010); (Mello and Gaffney, 2010); (Darnell, 2010); (Passos and Sánchez, 2011, Passos and Sánchez, 2012); (National Coalition of Local Committees for a People's World Cup and Olympics, 2012)] criticize the way it has been done until now. The common ground of understanding among these specialists is that the *Porto Maravilha* project, utilizing the mega-event's urban boosting discourse, represents the privatization of urban planning and transformation of the city from a place to live to a place to be consumed. As emphasized by Gaffney (2010), 'as with most mega-events, development is highly uneven and tends to benefit private developers and construction interests while creating spaces for wealthy residents and the international tourist class'. What is more, in its yearly report, the National Coalition of Local Committees for a People's World Cup and Olympics (2012), has highlighted that other than removing some people from the place where they have been living for years in order to open space for the 'development', the non-participative urban interventions that are taking place in the port area will indirectly force the majority of low income population to look for another place to live due to the high cost of living and the neighborhood's drastic profile modification [gentrification]. This highlighted fact can easily be confirmed when checking the vertiginous increase of the land price within the port area, which since the beginning of the project in 2010, has already increased 300%. (Passos and Sánchez, 2011)

4. For whom are the urban transformations?

'Rio de Janeiro has fully engaged the process of making itself into an Olympic City where the workers will stream down from the favelas to built sportive constellations that are intended for use by the international tourist class and the upper state of Brazilian society'. (Gaffney, 2010)

The provocative question of this section reflects the current challenging scenario not only of the urban interventions, related with the mega-events within the port area, but also in the whole country. Particularly in the case of *Porto Maravilha* urban revitalization process, as highlighted before, it targets a specific type of tourist and serves private companies and a particular group that sees the area as a place to be consumed. Thus, one may ask: after such a long history and with a large population living there for generations, are the port area's people really being represented in this urban 'revitalization'? More broadly, starting from 13th of June 2013, while the Confederation Football Cup was taking place as a training experience for the World Cup, the whole country came out onto the streets in demonstrations against a huge list of issues related, among others, with a crises of the current democratic representations in Brazil. From the outset, criticism against the way the *Porto Maravilha* project have been planned is just one among other examples of why Brazil's population went to the streets. Far from discussing the reasons and outcomes of these ongoing demonstrations, it is important to highlight that they do represent the Brazilians dissatisfaction regarding the way things have been planned and executed. The 'crises of representativeness', as it has been called during the manifestations, are expressed by the 200 million Brazilians who pay the high taxes and vote, and then expect to receive the basic public services that addresses the population's general issues and represent the country's will.

Saying that and adding Gaffney (2010)'s quotation that opened this section, the 'crises of representativeness' within the port area urban intervention become explicit. With almost half of its population living in slums and with a strong sense of solidarity in order to handle the everyday life, it is easily assumed that the 50 floor buildings and other 'modern' artifacts are not necessarily being constructed to address the basic needs of this population. For instance, analyzing the official documents and through interviews with *CEDURP*, it has been clear that although the *Porto Maravilha* project has some initiatives related with 'capacity building' within the area, most of the small commerce of the region will not survive the urban transformations. Moreover, as much as the official discourse says the opposite – justified under the existence of the 'Cultural Port' and 'Citizen Port' initiatives within *Porto Maravilha* project – the grassroots character of the region will not be fully reflected in a museum or other initiative addressed to an international tourist. As mentioned by Mello and Gaffney (2010), the current situation of the mega-events in Rio de Janeiro, as well as historically in their previous editions in other Global South countries, fosters the already existent social inequalities. As highlighted by Preuss (2004), 'in developing countries, the economic impact created by the Games is smaller than in industrialized countries [...] if the games neither support an urgently needed city development nor the economic impact to be expected then only a positive image and promotion effect may occur' [p.285].

More broadly, recent debates in urban theory, which not necessarily address the mega-event's social legacy but defend the importance of learning from cities' experiences everywhere, have also advanced in the discussion of the question: 'for whom are the urban transformations?' The postcolonial urban theory has put a question mark on the well-accepted assumption that for a city to be modern, it should follow certain patterns well accepted in the mainstream urban theory. Jennifer Robinson (2006, Robinson, 2011), one of the key scholars of this area, defends a postcolonial urban theory committed to challenging the 'colonial and neo-imperial power relations that remain deeply embedded in the assumptions and practices of contemporary urban theory'. For her,

'these are certainly evident in the practice of dividing, categorizing and assuming hierarchical relations amongst cities, but they are also visible in accounts of urban modernity – the creativity, dynamism and innovativeness of cities – which have assumed a privileged relationship with certain wealthy, Western cities. By contrast, a post-colonial urban studies would draw its inspiration from all cities, and all cities would be understood as autonomous and creative (Robinson, 2006)."

This means, to take the provocative question on the title of this session, that when the mega-events urban transformations are driven to develop the city in a way that it can position itself among the other 'western' 'modern' 'global' cities, the grassroots experiences are usually suppressed in order to give space for the city progress and development. If the above-mentioned issue is exactly 'for whom are the urban interventions?', the collaboration of the postcolonial urban discussions goes on the revision of 'why the city should follow the same 'First world' features in order to be 'modern'. Using this different approach toward the urban regeneration process such as the one that is taking place in Rio de Janeiro's port area, the question becomes how to learn from the things that have already taken place within the urban terrain?

Addressing this question, McFarlane (2011), who is another postcolonial urban study's advocate, focuses on these everyday practices of cities everywhere and raises the question, among the discussion of urban learning, of how these grassroots experiences take place and how to learn from and with them? For him, and also for this paper, 'the urban learning is not exhausted by the specificity of particular encounters with urban form or process, but is instead embedded in the current of people's lifeworlds and is shaped **relationally**' (McFarlane, 2011). Saying that, and looking more narrowly to the Rio de Janeiro's port area revitalization, one would agree that is possible to draw a more 'situated' urban practice if paying attention to the ways that the local population already copes and addresses their own

issues. For instance: How this people, who have been there for generations, dealt with the structural and symbolic separation between the port area and the city?

5. Bridging the gap: grassroots creative experiences within the port area

The aforesaid sequence of occurrences and urban interventions within Rio de Janeiro port area have briefly explained the abandonment and fragmented situation that the area and its population were facing until 2010, when the mega-events have triggered a series of transformations. However, as discussed in the previous section, the premises of such mega-events' driven urban revitalization do not necessarily address the priority issues of the local area and its population. Moreover, another point discussed above incorporates the importance of learning from the urban solutions that are already taking place within people lifeworlds.

Therefore, using McFarlane's idea of urban learning as something 'embedded in the current of people lifeworlds and shaped relationally' (McFarlane, 2011) and focusing on potential examples taking place within Rio de Janeiro's port area, two initiatives will be briefly presented here. Among the various issues, this paper has chosen the abandonment situation and the lack of connections and dialogue between the city and its port region as the area to looking for these grassroots creative experiences that could trigger a further discussion about more situated ways of addressing these population latent urban issues.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the option of calling these grassroots experiences as 'creative' draws on Landry (2008) discussion of the need for a paradigm change within the urban realm. For Landry, the urban transformations are nowadays 'moving from an 'urban engineering' approach to urban development, to a 'creative city-making' approach' (Landry, 2008). Saying that, and also stressing the importance of learning within this process, he defends that creativity is 'applied imagination using qualities such as intelligence, inventiveness and learning along the way' (Landry, 2008). Another author that has also addressed the role of grassroots creative experiences as a way of urban planners to learn and discuss potential urban interventions is Sandercock (2003). She argues that:

'There are different kinds of appropriate knowledge in planning. Local communities have experiential, grounded, contextual, intuitive knowledges, manifested through speech, songs, stories, and various visual forms. Planners have to learn to access these *other ways of knowing*' (Sandercock, 2003) [p.34].

Hence, one of the experiences worthy to comment here is the Samba group *Escravos da Mauá*. For 21 years, this group composed by government employees, who work in the public buildings of the port area, some port dwellers and friends have fostered the revitalization of Rio de Janeiro's port area through art, culture and fun. With monthly open rehearsals, this group brings people from the 'city' and from the local area to sing and dance samba inside the port area. As something done by people who are truly committed to the region, the *Escravos da Mauá*, whose name is a tribute to the slaves and other black people who were the reason for the are been called 'The Little Africa', has not only 'sang' the local area, but published historical CD-ROMs telling the story of these maritime neighborhoods. Using lyrics that celebrate the pioneers of samba, who were originally from that location, the samba group that plays every carnival has received various prizes for its value and appreciation effort within the port area. One of them, for example, is from the Architects Institute of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro that honored the group with the 'Urbanity prize' of 2000, which is given to the initiatives that foster the preservation and revitalization of the historical and cultural heritage, and occupies the public space in a creative way. As it is stated in *Escravos da Mauá's* website,

'The samba group *Escravos da Mauá* and the samba gathering of Mauá represent our strong commitment to occupy the public spaces of Rio de Janeiro with happiness, samba, love and peace' (*Escravos da Mauá*, 2013, author's translation)

Another grassroots creative experience that has taken place for more than 10 years in *Morro da Conceição*, which is one of the historical hills of the port area, is the Mauá Project. It happens on 8th of December of every year, at the same day of celebration dedicated to worship the catholic saint *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* within the region. On that day, the artists, who live and work at their houses at *Morro da Conceição*, open their doors to the visitors displaying their arts and the particular features and lifestyles of one of the first inhabited hills of Rio de Janeiro. This initiative, which has encouraged dialogue and attracted people from in and outside the port area, is currently passing through an interesting process that reinforces McFarlane (2011)'s understanding of urban learning as something 'embedded in the current of people's lifeworlds and shaped **relationally**' (McFarlane, 2011). Recently, a private institution, which is associated with the *Porto Maravilha* project, has approached the core group of artists of Mauá Project looking for the possibility of institutionalizing the event, amplifying its impact, number of visitors, etc. However, this effort generated some clashes between the artists and the relational sense that used to connect the group throughout the years has slightly changed to a more capitalist relation. Some of the artists, for example, have requested salaries from this private institution in order to do something that once had been started under their own mutual help and interest.

The recent urban revitalization process undertaken by the *Porto Maravilha* project has somehow impacted both of these cases. In the Mauá project, the impact was expressed through the attempt to institutionalize something that was strongly connected with the relation of trust among the core artists and also between them and *Morro da Conceição's* neighborhood. After some clashes, some of the artists have stuck together and decided to do the event again in the way they have always believed. The *Escravos da Mauá's* case, on the other hand, has felt the impact and answer it in a different way. After witnessing the discussions about urban revitalization, the *Escravos da Mauá* group has felt the importance of shedding light on the historical actors and cultural groups that throughout the long period of port area abandonment have kept the area alive and conscious of its importance within Rio de Janeiro scenario. This can be seen in the lyrics and performance of *Escravos da Mauá* during the last carnival [2013]. For the first time after 20 years of performances, they have changed their usual route. They have done that in order to show the crowd most of the historical treasures and main cultural and artistic groups within the port area. These other groups in turn have joined the performance and done their share of the show, which can be considered as the art materialization of the relational aspect of the urban learning process.

However, drawing on Sandercock (2003) one should agree that the *Porto Maravilha* urban intervention is just one point of view of how the port area should be regenerated. These grassroots creative experiences have been shaping the city and particularly the port area in their own way. They are shaping their own history intersected 'with struggles over space and place-claiming, with planning policies and resistances to them, with traditions of indigenous planning, and with questions of belonging and identity and acceptance of difference'(Sandercock, 2003). They represents, as mentioned by McFarlane (2011), the 'inseparable mixture of habits of craft and literature with popular images and slogans *that* is obviously a means for making a living, but it is constituted by forms of knowing that are at once spiritual, popular, traditional, fantastical, and modern.'

6. Conclusion

After presenting the history, urban transformations and potential of learning from grassroots creative experiences within Rio de Janeiro's port area, this paper wishes to collaborate with the major discussion about the challenges and opportunities of city-making in the Global South. Bringing back the quotation presented in the introduction, which says that the '*Porto*

Maravilha is returning a historical treasure to Rio, and at the same time integrating areas with great housing, cultural and economic potential, which will be transformed into an example of modernity' (CEDURP, 2013b), the question that urges to be addressed is: For whom Rio de Janeiro's port area will be an 'example of modernity'? Based in which principles?

Looking forward to answering that, this paper first commitment was to have a better 'understanding of the exclusionary effects of planning's past practices' in Rio de Janeiro, and particularly in the port area in order to understand how the future plans could address the local citizens ways of being modern. (Sandercock, 2003) In doing so, the historical value of the port area, its urban segregation and consequent need for an urban intervention that takes into account the connection of this area with the city were highlighted. However, this later emphasized need has been recently driven by the mega-events urban transformations in Rio de Janeiro. For instance, utilizing the mega-event's urban boosting discourse, the Rio de Janeiro's port area urban regeneration – the *Porto Maravilha* project, represents the privatization of urban planning and transformation of the city from a place to live to a place to be consumed.

Nevertheless, this paper has also showed the exclusionary side effects that mega-events urban interventions have brought to Rio de Janeiro, a case that does not differ from other developing cities. As mentioned before, the current impact caused by mega-events in Rio de Janeiro, as well as historically in other Global South cities, stimulates the already existing social inequalities in these areas. As highlighted by Preuss (2004), 'in developing countries, the economic impact created by the Games is smaller than in industrialized countries [...] if the games neither support an urgently needed city development nor the economic impact to be expected then only a positive image and promotion effect may occur' [p.285]. In line with this argument, both issues – the economical deprivation of former citizens of the areas of Rio de Janeiro that are under huge urban transformation; and its consequent gentrification process – were discussed by the National Coalition of Local Committees for a People's World Cup and Olympics (2012).

Saying that and following Sandercock (2003)'s argument about an urban planning dedicated to diversity, one should agree that in order to urban interventions to be considered effectively inclusive, the planners would have to take into consideration both the exclusionary effects of the urban transformations in Rio de Janeiro's port area throughout the years and the '*other ways of knowing*' that take place in the everyday life of people who live and use the area. Therefore, the option of looking at the creative grassroots experiences as a creative way of city making represents the attempt of learning from what is already taking place on the ground. Their attempt to bridge the gap between the city and the port area calls the urban specialists attention to the everyday experiences that usually take place within the urban terrain of cities everywhere. This is particularly common in Global South cities due to their recent city booming and associated social urban issues. These locations have witnessed many forms of improvisation of their dwellers learning to 'negotiate cities through incremental experience'. As mentioned by McFarlane (2011),

'Improvisation is, however, just one way in which people learn to negotiate cities through incremental experience. For example, given the diverse nature of many large cities, urbanities often need to learn to negotiate a wide range of groups, identities and places'. [p.43]

All in all, the analyses of the grassroots creative experiences that are already taking place in a city requires open eyes committed to seeing things differently and capable of understanding the importance of creativity as something constructed relationally within the urban terrain. The briefly presentation of the two cases intends to highlight the importance of learning from these experiences, as they have already invented their own ways of addressing their social issues. On the other hand, they do not necessarily reflect the expectations of the private companies, international tourists or other types of interest that

look at the city as a place to be consumed. Other than that, these grassroots creative experiences are calling the urban planners to learn from 'another ways of knowing' (Sandercock, 2003) that happen in cities everywhere (McFarlane, 2011, Robinson, 2006, Robinson, 2011) and showcase the role of creativity in the city making (Landry, 2008).

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