

SPECIAL REPORT



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Rio 2016

PERSPECTIVES BEYOND THE MEGA-EVENT



Politheor: European Policy Network

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Rio 2016: Perspectives beyond the mega-event

Editor: Simon Marijsse

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Introduction

Since the 1984 LA Olympics, the Games have gone hand in hand with attracting foreign investment capital, boosting tourism and constructing large scale infrastructures. 8 Years later, the Barcelona Olympics presented us with an even larger story of visual promise and urban transformation. Post-Olympics Barcelona started to symbolize the blueprint for urban regeneration.

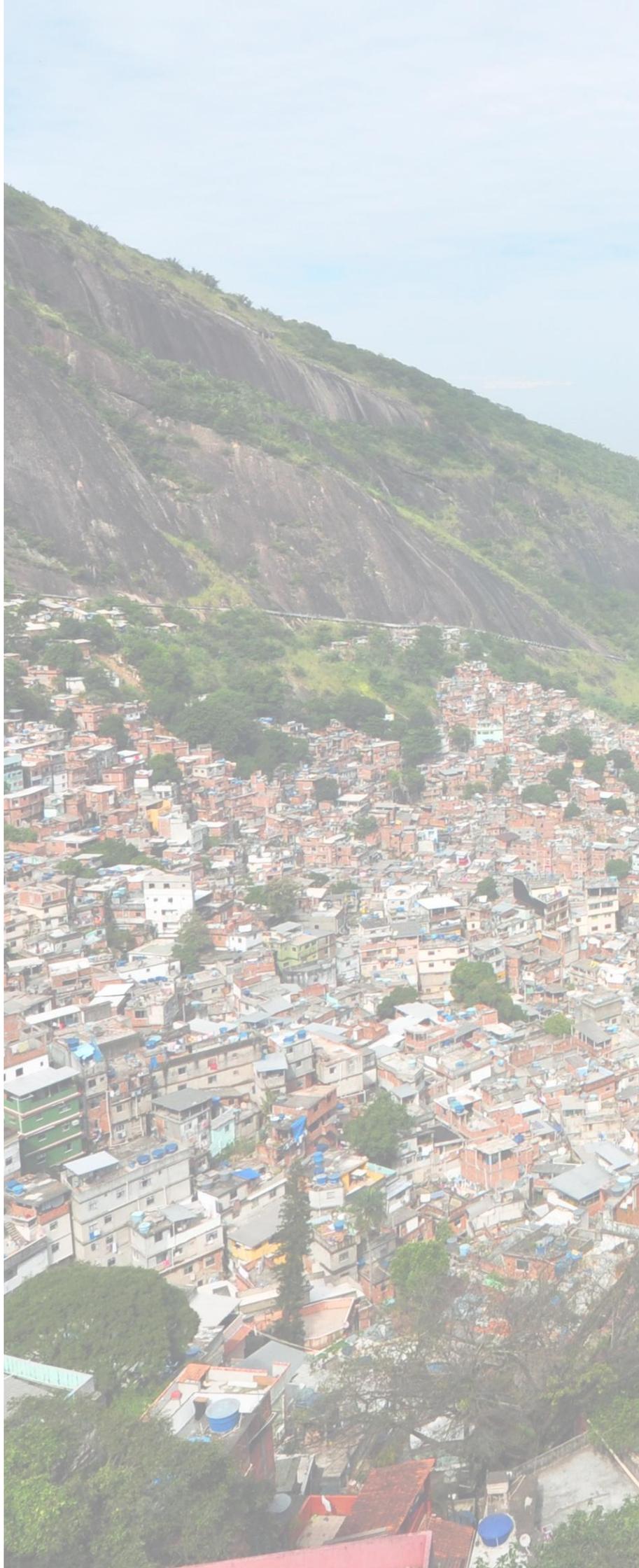
Consider Rio de Janeiro. Over the past decade Rio has hosted the Pan-American Games (2007), the World Cup (2014), and now, on the 5th of August, the Rio Olympics will kick off. Not only is Rio de Janeiro the first Latin American city to host the Games, but it also differs vastly from Barcelona and Los Angeles in size, economy and society. It's a mega-city with a metropolitan area that counts over 12 million people, that copes with a stubbornly persisting social divide, and that is already one of the tourist hot spots on the globe. Simply *applying* the Barcelona model to Rio has unfortunately revealed its deleterious consequences over the past months. Is there a way to make these global events more sustainable in itself or to use them as a stepping stone to build our inclusive cities of the future?

In between the large, dreamy billboards and the newly constructed impressive Olympic stadiums and hotels, lies the shady realm of house removals, ecological threats and social exclusion. Yet this is not the only story. More than ever has Rio shown how mega-events also foster community solidarity, raise social mobilization or put important, often neglected, issues back to the foreground. In this Special Report, ten opinion articles tackle, each from within their policy field, the changes, failures and new initiatives that occurred over the last months in Rio. To understand these changes within a wider context, Dr. Janice E. Perlman shared with us her expertise on public policy and urban planning, and voiced her concerns on what she sees to be happening now and what to expect for and aspire to beyond the Olympics.

Simon Marijsse, Editor

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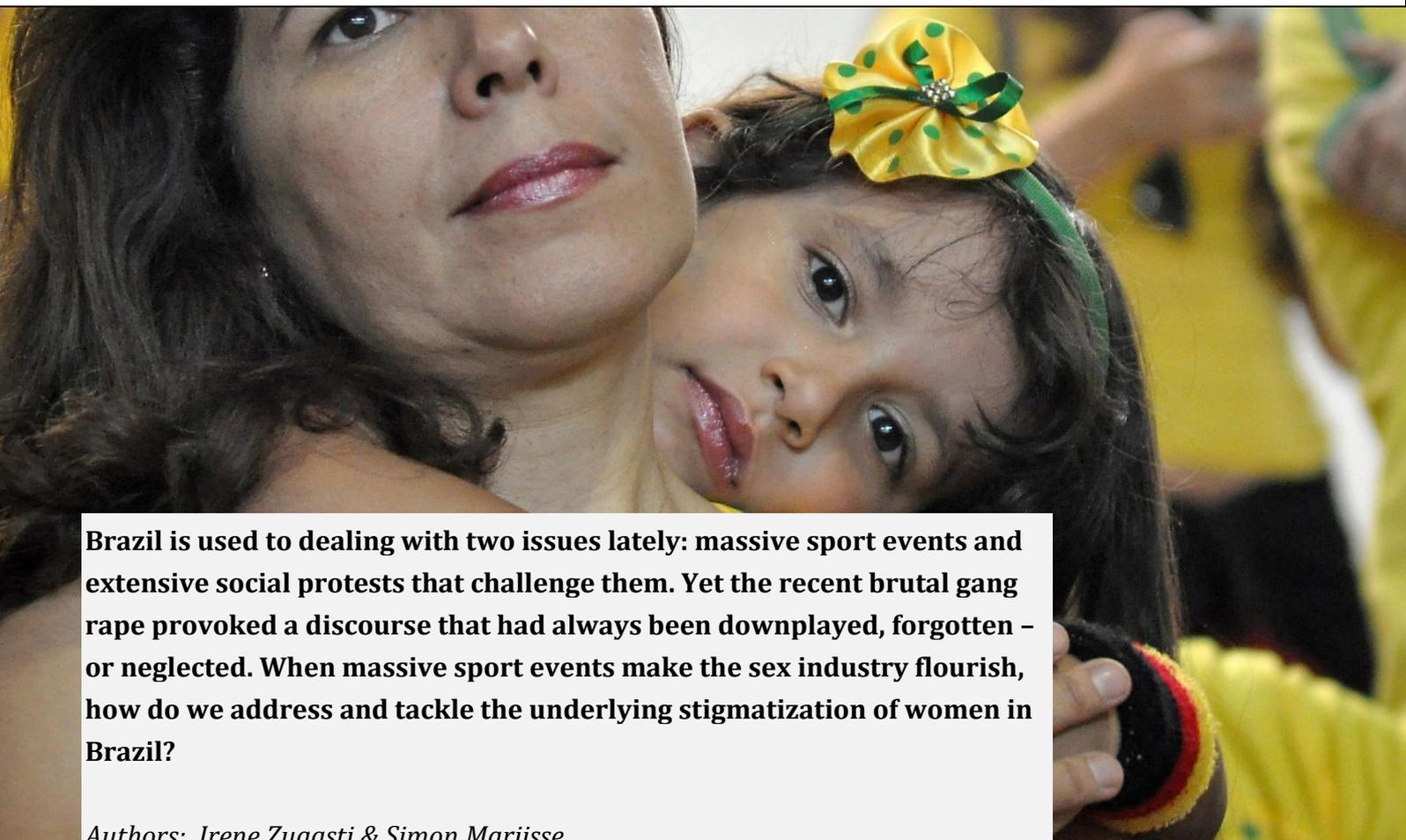
Jakub Rusek is a PhD candidate at the University of Munich. He currently works at the EASAC (European Academies Science Advisory Council) as Assistant liaison officer and at FEDRA (Federation of Regional Actors) as a Young Regional Ambassador.

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Tine Stausholm has a BSc in biology and an MSc in biogeography, both obtained in her native Denmark. She has been working with science communication and public engagement since her graduation. Alongside this she has done research and surveying of land use and cover in the EU for Eurostat.

There is something –missing– about Brazil: Women, social protest and massive sports events



Brazil is used to dealing with two issues lately: massive sport events and extensive social protests that challenge them. Yet the recent brutal gang rape provoked a discourse that had always been downplayed, forgotten – or neglected. When massive sport events make the sex industry flourish, how do we address and tackle the underlying stigmatization of women in Brazil?

Authors: Irene Zugasti & Simon Marijsse

Mega-events, like the World cup held in 2014, may have caused many disruptive effects in Brazil, but they also gave momentum to local grassroots organizations to establish local, national and transnational networks. The potential of these social movements should not be omitted. The *Sem Teto* and *Sem Terra* Workers Movement, the housing movements (UMM), the Free Fare Movement (MPL), students, middle class urban population and especially the Popular Committees that emerged during the World Cup; all of them have been active, working on inclusion of youth population and communities from the outskirts of the cities.

As the World Cup passed, its success was unanimously celebrated for the excitement it brought to the public worldwide, and the money and attention it brought to its sponsors, investors and advertisers.

An estimated 280 million people watched matches online or on a mobile device, millions of dollars were earned – in fact, 7.2 billion USD in tax revenue were received by Brazil as a result of investments in the World Cup – 5,154,386 attended FIFA Fan Fests in Brazil, with Rio de Janeiro's spectacular Copacabana site attracting 937,330 - the highest number in any individual city.

Yet activists and media echoed a phenomenon that was too obvious to obviate: the rise of prostitution as a consequence of these sport events. Though prostitution is legal in Brazil, it seems that 'the younger, the better', has become its motto. As of 2012 an estimated half a million children worked as child prostitutes in Brazil. To prevent sex tourism involving minors, even the [EU launched a campaign](#) that is still active for the [Olympics](#). But, extreme

poverty, social exclusion and women's role in society were never the important issues back then. Combating the reasons for women to exercise prostitution was not as urgent as the desire to idealize a certain image of the Cup and to profit from consumers' voracity.

With the horrifying [gang rape committed in Rio in March](#) things started to be vocalized. When 30 men assaulted a 16 year-old girl who lived in a favela in Santa Cruz, recorded the aggression and posted it on social networks, it was firstly considered by some analysts as a "minor" case in the middle of Brazil's turmoil. Yet it has put a major social problem back into the spotlight: the role of women in Brazil public policies, spaces, and discourses.

The current discourse focuses on a structural problem that experts have called a "Culture of rape." This *culture* is reflected in the high rates of prostitution, child sex, femicide and sex tourism. Each of them symptomatic of a wider problem: the diminished role of women in Brazilian society and the feminization of poverty in a country instability of which is affecting the place and security of women, while some empowering feminist movements lead the way of social protest.

Cultura do estupro describes the normalization of sexual assault in a society. It's a culture in which a high rate of sexual violence coexists with prevalent attitudes, norms and practices that normalize, excuse, tolerate, or even condone sexual assault and rape. In Brazil, 47,636 rapes were reported to the police in 2014, and statistics reveal that just 35% of the cases are declared. This is perfectly exemplified by the mentioned case of gang rape and the wave of misogynistic victim-blaming comments that followed it. The latest research IPN (2014) conducted, asserts this: 26% of respondents considered that "women who wear clothes that show the body deserve to be attacked." Another recent polemic came up when Twitter users began leering at a blond 12-year-old named Valentina Schulz that was competing on

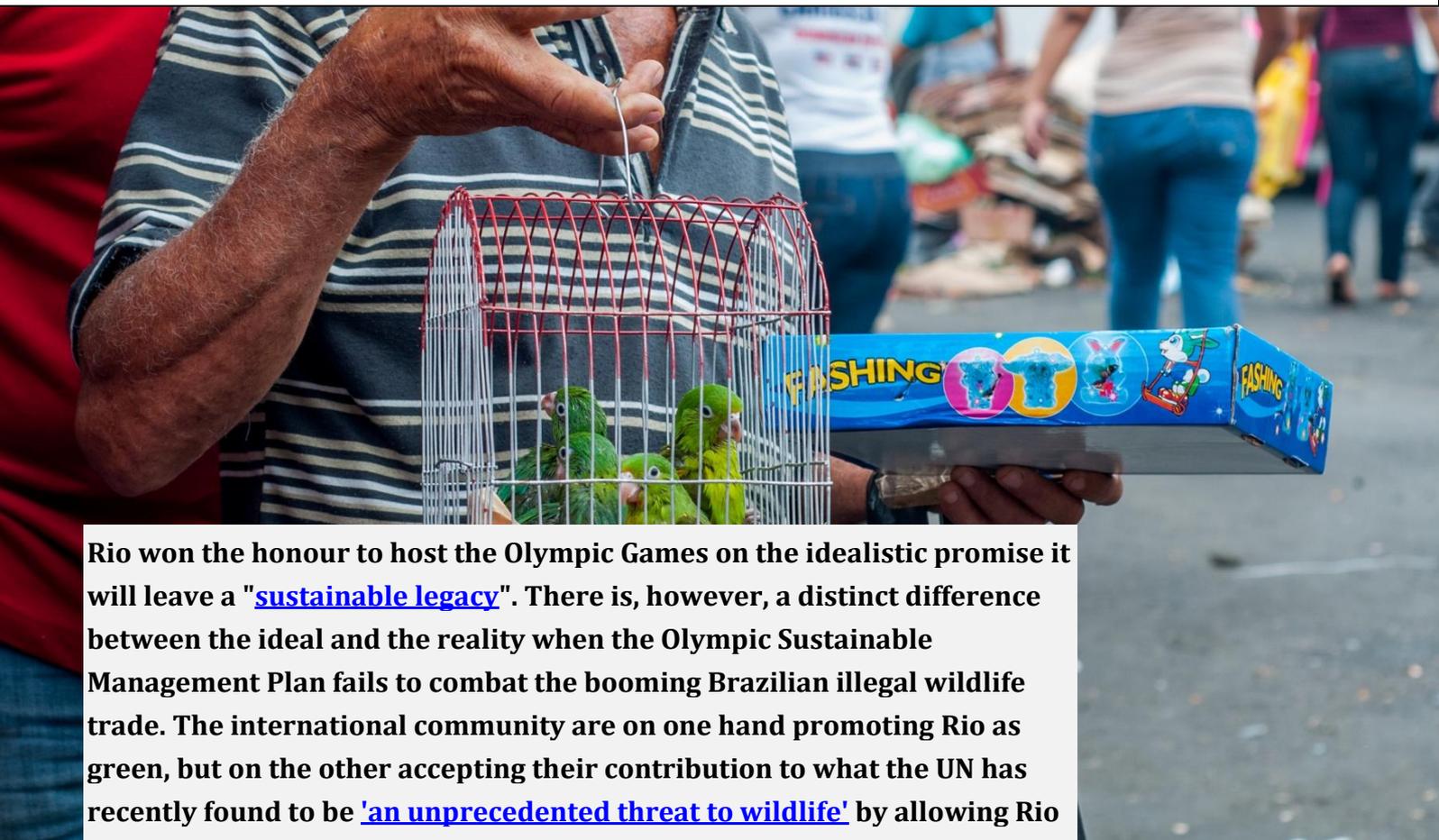
a reality TV cooking competition. One man tweeted: "About this Valentina: if it's consensual, is it pedophilia?" Another posted: "Let me keep quiet, not to be jailed."

The gang rape case caused a considerable virtual counter-mobilization under the hashtag *#EstuproNuncaMais*, that led to massive demonstrations all over the country, supported by a worldwide movement of solidarity. Then, government started to act. Something is stirring in Brazil and, in the middle of the political and social hassle, it finally seems that the ball is in the women's possession.

Recently, the [the Regional Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and Girls in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) launched a Manifesto for the eradication of sex tourism and sexual exploitation during the 2016 Olympics. In it they point towards the clear link between the increase in demand, the growing sexual exploitation of women, children and adolescents in the sex trade, the legalization of prostitution and the occurrence of big sporting events. They plead it is essential for Brazil to assume an official position against sex tourism during the Olympics and to respect the international treaties on trafficking and sexual exploitation.

There is an urgent need for a legal and political framework that reflects these social demands and that ensures the rights of women in Brazil. Only legal tools can reinforce the potential of activists, organizations and associations. When sexual and gender based violence is not taken seriously by law and law enforcement, Olympic Games may turn into another opportunity for the sex industry, trafficking networks and aggressors to prey, especially taking advantage from the impoverished communities that are marginalized during the development processes in the bright, colorful and welcoming Brazil.

The Rio Olympics: Green or a Greenwash?



Rio won the honour to host the Olympic Games on the idealistic promise it will leave a "[sustainable legacy](#)". There is, however, a distinct difference between the ideal and the reality when the Olympic Sustainable Management Plan fails to combat the booming Brazilian illegal wildlife trade. The international community are on one hand promoting Rio as green, but on the other accepting their contribution to what the UN has recently found to be '[an unprecedented threat to wildlife](#)' by allowing Rio to host the world's biggest international sporting event.

Author: Louise Montgomery

Much of the negativity surrounding the Rio Olympics warns of the Zika virus', the political and economic insecurities and the gang culture endemic to the city's favelas.

This op-ed, however, will focus on a largely ignored topic that poses an imminent and increasing risk to the world's natural heritage: Wildlife trafficking. The protection of wildlife, on which healthy ecosystems depend, are core to a policy of sustainability. It will be contended that there is a grave hypocrisy when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) purport [sustainability](#) as the theme of the games when it is commonplace to find hundreds of poached wild animals caged up for sale in the street markets of Rio, the host of the international games.

Wildlife Trafficking Statistics

Wildlife trafficking is the fourth largest illegal trade in the world. A new report published by the UNEP and INTERPOL named, '[The Rise of Environmental Crime](#)' has found the value of environmental crime to have increased by 26%, now estimating that the illegal wildlife trade is worth \$7-23 billion a year, a revenue less only than arms, drugs and human trafficking.

Approximately [38million](#) animals are taken from the wild in Brazil every year. It is estimated that 75- 90% die in transport and only a small fraction of around 250,000 are seized by federal police.

Wildlife trafficking is viewed on the ground as a minor crime with a major market. Wild birds

make up around 80% of the illegal trade in Brazil. Their value as regular pets is engrained in Brazilian culture which is evident in that [60-80%](#) of birds illegally caught are thought to remain within Brazil.

As such, local street markets are not hidden away and vendors are not intimidating thugs dealing stolen goods to evil bird collectors. Rather, markets are a lively scene with friendly traders selling 'pets' to excited children or simply, your average Joe.

Brazilian Approach

Under the 1998 Environmental Crimes Law, it is a crime to *inter alia* keep animals in captivity without a legal permit, to poach wild animals and to sell and/or export wildlife illegally. However, prosecution is seldom, penalties are weak and fines are rarely paid.

In a country considered to have the wealthiest biological diversity in the world, which is also vastly rich in unemployment, it should be no surprise that the lucrative wildlife trade is a common source of income.

Wildlife is a readily available natural resource that is viewed not so much as natural heritage, but as an accepted commodity for trade to make a living.

Zero Tolerance or Laissez Faire?

The UN has just launched an international campaign called "[Wild for Life](#)" to prevent the loss of biodiversity, save yet more species from being poached to extinction and protect our natural heritage under the theme "[zero tolerance for the illegal wildlife trade](#)".

It is highly hypocritical for the international community to be beckoned to eradicate the illegal wildlife trade and at the same time to flood the streets of a city with a wholly laissez faire approach to the illegal sale of wild animals.

The IOC Sustainable Management Plan is set up to improve ["the social, physical and](#)

[environmental fabric of the city"](#). There are ongoing training, clean up and restoration programmes and protection of biodiversity features throughout.

However, wildlife trafficking, which is deemed to be the biggest threat to species survival, is absent.

Brazilian Capability

Brazil has been hailed by the UNEP and INTERPOL to have achieved '[the biggest single success](#)' in protecting biodiversity. In only five years the deforestation of the Amazon has been reduced by 76%. The key factor for this achievement was bestowing the full responsibility to coordinate efforts from one base, the Executive Office of the Presidency, in collaboration with the Federal Police.

While it is unclear how much of the \$3.9 billion in issued fines have been paid, and how many prosecutions from the 700 arrests were pursued, the reduction in deforestation is an incredible victory that required systematic coordination and action.

However, an ecosystem depends on the interconnectedness of species. The damage caused by wildlife trade can be just as detrimental as deforestation. Species like wild birds are just as important for the functioning of a healthy rainforest as the existence of the rainforest is to provide a habitat.

So while this success is a vital step in the preservation of the natural world, a celebration can only begin when this effort is replicated to prevent animals from being poached from the very forests that have been saved as their home.

Continued enforcement, satellite monitoring and increased public awareness will be paramount to change public perception to zero tolerance for the Olympics and beyond.

The unexpected champion: How Rio's favelas strive to go green while Olympic legacy falls short



The municipal government of Rio de Janeiro has promised to urbanize its favelas by 2020, but projects supposed to upgrade the favelas' infrastructure and create jobs have quickly [lost momentum](#). Fortunately, an unexpected champion has emerged, as residents of favelas have come together and taken the initiative to “green” their communities with reforestation projects, rooftop solar panels and community food gardening, highlighting how sustainable urban design should be done.

Author: Crystal Chow

Rio's foundering attempts to capitalize on the forthcoming Olympics also sits awkwardly alongside the [forced eviction in the Vila Autódromo favela](#), leaving many to question if these low-income communities are being cast out to make way for upscale development under the pretext of the Olympics. Maybe it's the time we start empowering these communities, not displace them.

The issue of favelas' implication to urban sustainability dates back to the 19th century, when favelas first emerged as the landless underclass took up residence in irregular settlements in urban Rio. The 1940s saw the massive expansion of favelas into the urban peripheries. Countless migrants were driven to the cities by industrialization, only to find themselves trapped in the same shantytowns they had built. Denied physical access to the

urban core and basic infrastructure, the favelas eventually became synonymous with destitution and hotbeds of street crime.

It wasn't until the 1970s, after government's repeated attempts to eradicate the tenements, that certain urbanization policies were put forth to modernize and improve their living conditions. However, in the absence of an effective approach to address urban poverty, the social stigma attached to the favelas persists.

It doesn't help that their expansion has raised environmental and security concerns. In order to make space, residents had to cut down trees, and were blamed for the environmental degradation and the increased risk of natural disasters, such as landslides.

Against this backdrop, the government had decided [to erect walls surrounding Rio's most notorious favelas](#) in 2009, claiming they serve as “eco-barriers” to prevent further deforestation and geo-hazards. With their spatial divisiveness and symbolic segregation, the construction of these walls was met with vocal opposition from the communities. Worse still, by shifting the blame onto the “favelados” – a pejorative term for the favelas’ residents - the government failed to recognize the institutional deficit as well as the perpetuating inequality underneath.

Ironically, the government conveniently leaves out the fact that among those who recently settled in favelas, are the same people who had been forced out of their native lands due to escalating deforestation in the Amazon. In 2014, [there were reportedly around 22,000 indigenous Brazilian Indians residing in favelas](#), where they struggle to assimilate into urban lifestyle.

The conventional wisdom goes that communities with low socioeconomic status would be less likely to participate in public affairs, let alone campaign for environmental advancement. The Brazilian grassroots movement, however, tells a different story.

It appears the urban poor do care about the environment; a [study](#) suggests that both community activism and environmentalism share a rich history among the largest favelas in Rio. They link their community involvement to a citizens’ movement that encompasses a range of issues including the environment, access to public services, and democracy.

Meanwhile, the longstanding government neglect and the favelas’ informal nature also give room to decentralized, community-based solutions.

Consider the Rocinha favela’s alternative to the “eco-barriers” in 2009 as an example. Instead of constructing looming walls, Rocinha, the largest favela in Rio, counter-proposed building

a community park with nature paths and communal green space. The municipal government ultimately agreed to act on the proposal, hailing the success of a strong community leadership.

The Rocinha is among the first favelas [to dispel the negative image associated with drugs and violence by transforming into sustainable models](#). The community greening program comes with significant social gains as well, since more jobs have been created for young people to get out of street crimes.

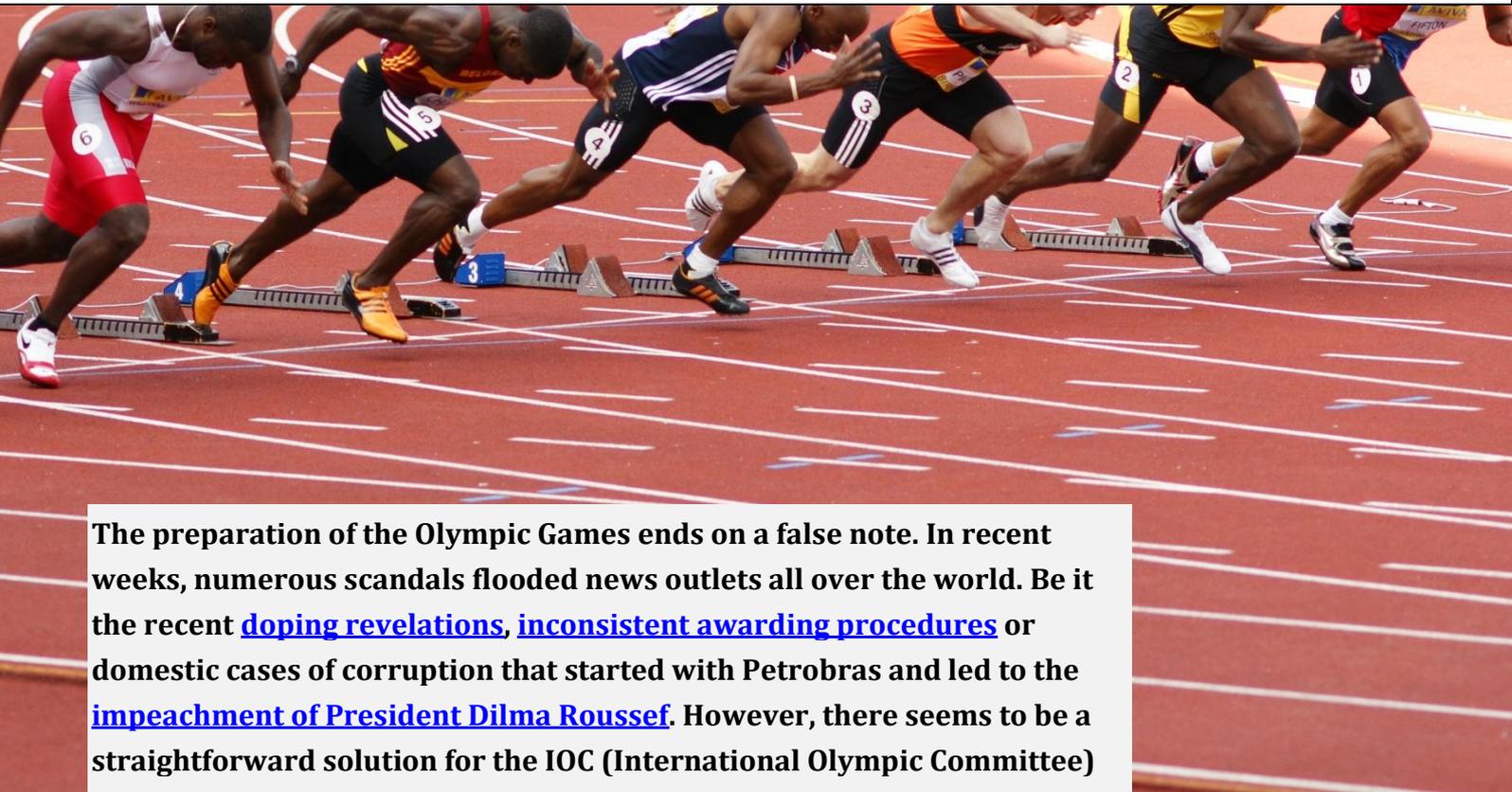
Since then, with the support from authorities and local NGOs, [more favelas have followed suit](#), paving the way for a possible nation-wide implementation. Not only do these projects demystify the perception that favelas are necessarily unsustainable, but they also help forge cooperation between the government and the communities while reducing red-tapes in the process.

Can Rio realize the Olympic legacy to benefit the environment and the well-being of its citizens? The answer hinges on the government’s ability to push forward a holistic framework of socially inclusive policies - including technical and infrastructure support, investment on education and entrepreneurship. And, on top of that, a better forest governance, urban planning and public housing scheme that would reduce the growth of favelas in big cities.

The prospect is clouded by uncertainties though, with Brazil’s administration currently plagued by President Rousseff’s impeachment, social unrest and economic downturn, as well as the Zika virus epidemic.

Perhaps the time has come for these once subjugated communities to rise up and influence national policy from the bottom-up. The world certainly has much to learn from them.

Ready, Set, Go: Fighting Olympic Corruption



The preparation of the Olympic Games ends on a false note. In recent weeks, numerous scandals flooded news outlets all over the world. Be it the recent [doping revelations](#), [inconsistent awarding procedures](#) or domestic cases of corruption that started with Petrobras and led to the [impeachment of President Dilma Roussef](#). However, there seems to be a straightforward solution for the IOC (International Olympic Committee) to mitigate the scandals related to the construction of the Olympic infrastructure: transparency in public procurement procedures.

Author: Cedric Algoed

Foul play: Situating the problem

Amidst the global outcries for justice, the [Brazilian federal police](#) investigate the allocation of all federal funds to the Olympic Games. Five construction firms, responsible for the major chunk of infrastructure works, are directly connected to the [Petrobras scandal](#). Future announcements on the investigation are expected in the next couple of weeks. The investigation shows how deeply embedded corruption is in Brazil and casts a big shadow over Rio 2016.

Apart from the fairness and reputation arguments, why should we be worried about corruption? For quite some time, economists have been discussing corruption's effect on economic growth. [A relatively recent literature study](#) has found little support for the hypothesis that corruption fuels growth.

Recent evidence tilts slightly in favor of the 'corruption is bad'-camp. One of the most viable policy suggestions to remedy corruption is transparency. Pro-transparency measures lower corruption and facilitate growth.

The NGO Transparency International [voiced their concern](#) over rampant corruption during the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics. Back then, Transparency International hoped that the IOC would review its voting criteria. At the end of 2014 the IOC published the [Olympic Agenda 2020](#) with 40 recommendations for the future. The IOC did not mention any upcoming change with regard to the voting procedure. Although the IOC vowed to oppose any form of corruption and aimed to increase the transparency of its own financial structure, no concrete measures were proposed.

Another oft-heard concern is that sport and politics should remain separated. Countries will most certainly oppose too pervasive policy measures. At the same time, the IOC resembles an enterprise and invests considerably in the Olympics. The IOC devoted [an estimated 1.5 billion dollars](#) to Rio 2016. It has to safeguard the reputation of its product. The IOC can reasonably require some control over the whole process in order to avoid any major scandals.

Inbounds: A transparent solution

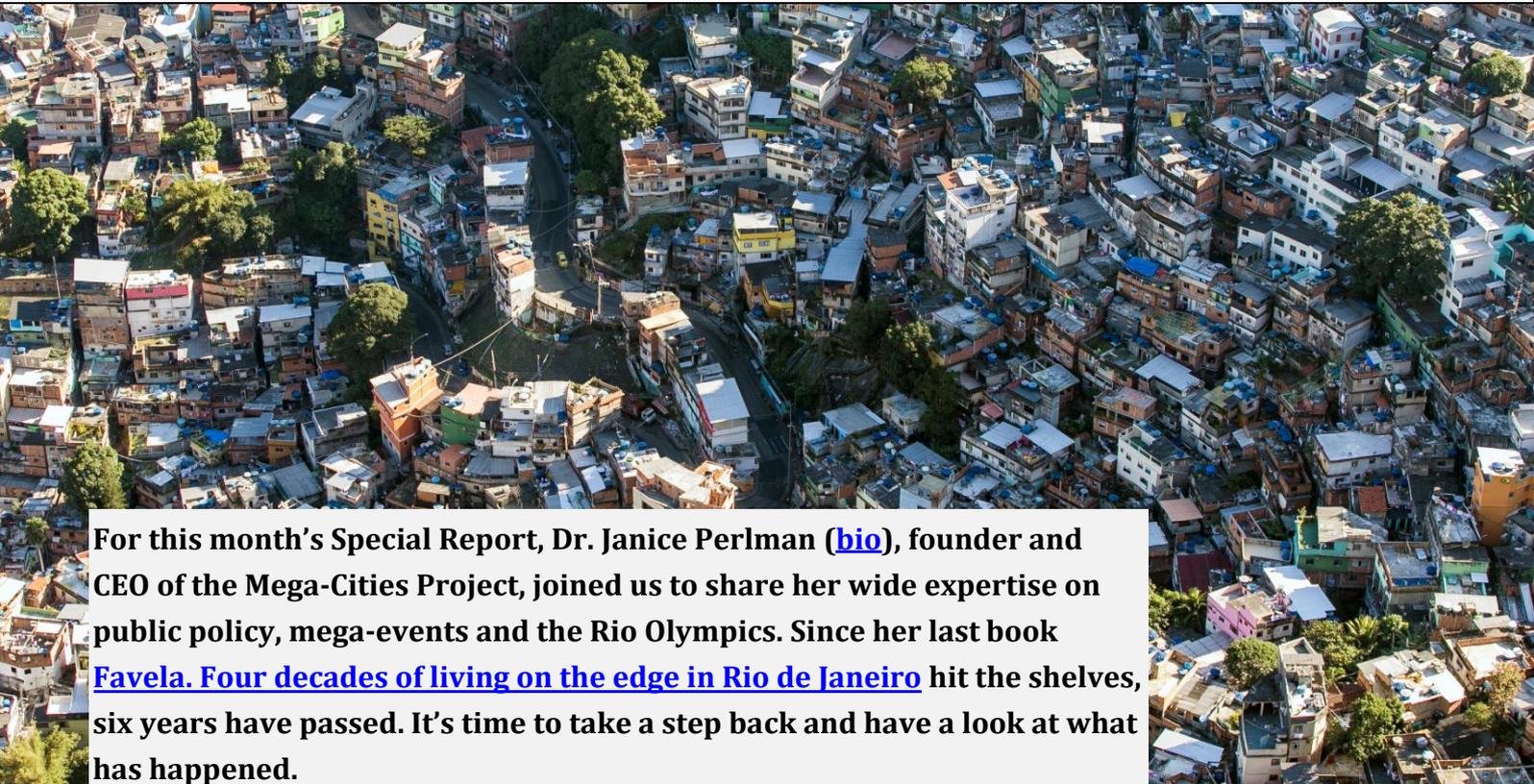
The IOC should assume a more active role during the construction phase of the Olympics. Ideally, the IOC needs to supervise and validate all the contracts of construction works. This relatively small change has three advantages. First, it takes into account the persistency of corruption and the aversion towards too political solutions. Second, the host city does not have to publicly share contracting info and retains much of its freedom. Third, for the IOC this is a low effort-high reward plan that preserves its neutrality. Suggestions that the Olympics should not go to corrupt countries exclude potential host cities while not offering any constructive solution in return.

These new requirements should be integrated into [the application procedure](#). Thus far, little to no attention is spent on corruption. Current buzzwords include sustainability and governance, but the practical consequences remain unaddressed. A closer look at [the commission report](#) of the candidate cities for the 2016 Olympic Games reveal that the buzzwords are without consequences. The document mainly discusses funding, revenues, and infrastructure. The commission report of the 2020 Olympic Games tells a similar story.

The IOC appears almost uninterested in investing in accountability mechanisms to protect its own Olympics. Even regardless of the economic arguments, the corruption scandals harm the reputation of the Games. In the long-term, this can result in disinterest and

according [to a critical voice](#), the death of the Olympic Games. A cynical soul may remark that it would be rather hypocrite of the IOC to demand anti-corruption measures of its host cities. Yet, the pragmatist in me answers that any progress is better than none. The suggested mechanisms would not require a great policy overhaul for the IOC or the host city. The IOC will only be actively involved in the supervision of public procurement procedures. It should control the competitiveness of contracts. If the IOC does not change its attitude towards corruption, it may very well mean the slow death of the Olympics.

Janice Perlman: “There are so many things in Rio that are never talked about and that are absolutely heroic.”



For this month’s Special Report, Dr. Janice Perlman ([bio](#)), founder and CEO of the Mega-Cities Project, joined us to share her wide expertise on public policy, mega-events and the Rio Olympics. Since her last book [Favela. Four decades of living on the edge in Rio de Janeiro](#) hit the shelves, six years have passed. It’s time to take a step back and have a look at what has happened.

Author: Simon Marijsse, Politheor | Editor, International Affairs

SM: It is remarkable how you have combined academic and public policy worlds during your career. How did it all start?

JP: From an early age I had become very interested in how knowledge, research and participation in another culture can generate benefits for local communities. I believe this can be done by establishing a connection between these communities and the level of policy via a bridging person, or by giving a voice to people who normally don’t have one.

When I was an undergraduate at Cornell University, an experiment started by Alan Holmberg had disproven a popular theory that hypothesized that you could only change people through generations. For his famous *Vicos Experiment*, Holmberg had bought a *hacienda* in Peru and focused on a community

which had a set of “*non-modern values*”: they thought more about the past, they didn’t plan for the future, neither were they interested in experimenting, etc. In a later stage Cornell turned the property over to the owners themselves. When they returned three years later, they saw that people had changed. They were experimenting, planning for the future, determining their own fate and benefiting from their work. It showed to me that the myths and folk tales of society are not as powerful as questions like: who benefits from your work, who’s in charge and who’s taking the decisions that affect your life?

How did you first get involved in Brazil?

During my first year as an undergraduate, I participated to a theatrical cultural exchange in Latin America. We also travelled to Brazil.

When we arrived there, we found ourselves in the middle of political turmoil in 1963 right before the military coup. Students were discussing an alternative non-capitalist, non-communist, non-socialist model. They were looking for a new social contract that would be indigenous to Brazil and that would learn from the mistakes of the previous systems. Up to this day, I believe we still need to think about this and pose that very same question.

How did you start combining the academic with the grassroots level?

During the '70s, when UC Berkeley hired me at the graduate school of City and Regional Planning, I started studying social urban movements, which I called in a paper *grassrooting the system*. All across the US, I studied community based organizations. I had always been interested in how popular movements could generate an alternative to money and power, but the most important function had not been documenting what was going on in those times. In fact, I realized I was being the disseminator of what one group was doing to another in a pre-internet era. All these people were fighting the same struggles like rights to get loans for housing or to get better schools, but none of them knew that the other was doing the same or was facing the same challenges. By staying at and visiting all these groups, I was able to affect reality via my research as I saw the importance of empowering people by putting people in touch with each other and by creating coalitions.

And the policy level?

During the Carter administration, I was invited to be the coordinator of the *Inter-Agency National Urban Policy* within the area *Neighborhoods*. There I got to see how difficult it is to coordinate and to find a strong common

ground - even at the national level when you have an official presidential mandate that covers all the different ministries and departments. It was a huge process but equally thrilling. People felt empowered because they were asked what they would do about the neighborhood themselves. The project itself was a big eye opener for me because I saw the commitment grow when people were given the chance to be heard and felt like they can make a difference.

The findings were published as a national urban policy, but it received heavy backlash. The word *urban* was not accepted. Back then, for example in the World Bank, the idea was still persistent that development equals rural development. Over the past decades we saw how an anti-urban bias, though belatedly, started to lessen. Back then, however, it was already clear that the world was becoming urban. The urban space was going to determine the country.

As you mentioned, you have also worked for the World Bank. How did you combine your anthropological experiences with World Bank initiatives?

In 1978 I was hired by the World Bank. I helped the new urban projects department and had to analyze why it hadn't been as effective as intended. In Jakarta for example, the World Bank had implemented expensive dredging systems. Yet after a year the canals would turn back into sewage as the compounds would not be maintained. When I arrived there and spoke to the local community based organizations, I understood the problem. They told me they had thought the drainage was a service, not a onetime thing. The World Bank had neither contacted them, nor informed them about how to maintain the compounds. There had been a complete disconnect because the World Bank

hadn't thought about the human interface. Ultimately I experienced the World Bank to host many bright and creative people, but it remains difficult for them to be innovative or to reach the organization's primary mission within its institutional boundaries.

The anthropological perspective served to be very interesting both within my work at the World Bank as well as at the *New York City Partnership*. In the latter I let people from big firms and companies meet community organizers from more distant communities. I let them meet on a bus that would tour through the communities and would allow the community organizers to show their projects. However, by bringing them together, though they differed in vision, they started to recognize each other as having common traits like dedication and creativity and it eventually caused them to change their prejudices towards each other.

Could you tell us a bit more about the scope and origin of the Mega-cities Project?

The initial question of the Mega-cities Project is: how can we apply the advances of science and technology over the last 100 years to urban infrastructure, in order to make cities more sustainable, effective, and able to reach the whole population? The solution is shaped in a combination of the different experiences I have had.

During the '80s, there was the prospect that by the year 2000 the world would count 23 cities with more than 10 million people each - a tendency of global urbanization which I had actually witnessed earlier during a field work stay in the rural *interior* of Brazil. To tackle this, I started to combine the idea of working in partnership with different sectors, with the idea of discovering on the grassroots level what is actually working and sharing it with other places which have the same problems. There is the fundamental idea that you can find common problems in places that seem very



[Picture 1] Dr. Janice Perlman speaking at the Third World Urban Forum in 2006.

diverse because these problems are systemic in all low income communities.

Back then the mayors of these cities started to visit me at Berkeley because I had already written about *mega-cities*, but I didn't have concrete answers to their problems. I realized, however, that if they'd come together and listen to each other, then they could learn from each other too. At the Megacities Project we focus on the grassroots communities in these cities one by one. We work with mayors, urban planners, the private sector and academia, and find out how to make these cities function better within the often limited financial resources they have and the environmental dangers they face. Yet their biggest resource is people. I wanted to create a positive upward cycle that would spiral upwards and in which each moment would give more hope and optimism. I think that anyone who wants to be a knowledge creator within the topic of urbanization has to link public policy makers to grassroots groups and social change, which is unfortunately not happening enough in academia.

Future plans?

My vision for the future is to create the next generation of the megacities project. We coined it [MC²](#), short for Mega-cities/Mega-changes. This next step will combine the next generation of technology and young people and the global exposure that these young people share. The mere possibility for them to talk from and show their community through technology

like Skype is amazing and fosters so much potential.

What were your first thoughts when you started considering these mega-events and Rio de Janeiro?

Initially I thought that, because the whole world would focus on Rio between these mega-events, there might be an opportunity to showcase Rio as an inclusive city. Perhaps we could show that the way the World Cup focused on impressing the larger public, is but one way to approach it. There could also be an inclusive one which praises the right to the city and which brings the mega-events to everyone.

Was this possible? What struck you the most when you arrived?

The title of my current study is *mega-events, public policies and the fate of Rio's favelas*.

I thought I could use my previous experience and access to bring the voices of the people in the favela and the NGO's into the policy debate so that they could be heard. I started the study in 2015 and it will go on till one year after the Games. However when I arrived, the idea I had in mind was already impossible. There were neither debates nor dialogues about the policies.

Two promising projects really disappointed me when I arrived there. The first is *O Pacto do Rio*. Initially it was intended to be a new kind of partnership between the city government, the nonprofit sector, UNDP and some private sector members to try to generate a real strategic plan for Rio. It would encompass not only the Olympics but would reach beyond it and would envision Rio as a unified city. It was supposed to be linked to UPP Social and was

brought up in the same way as what Rio's mayor Eduardo Paes said about *Morar Carioca*. This was the second disappointment. Both started as great visionary ideas but didn't continue their focus on inclusive sustainable cities. For *Morar Carioca* in specific, most of the grand investments ultimately went to the upper-class district of *Barra da Tijuca* and the harbor, *Porto Maravilha*. Similarly, when UPP (community policing) started, residents in favelas quickly lost hope and told me they expect for the drug traffickers to return the day after the Olympics have ended. The community policing will leave, switch power with the traffickers and all will return to the original status quo. However, we see that this has started more quickly than we anticipated – even before the Olympics have actually begun.

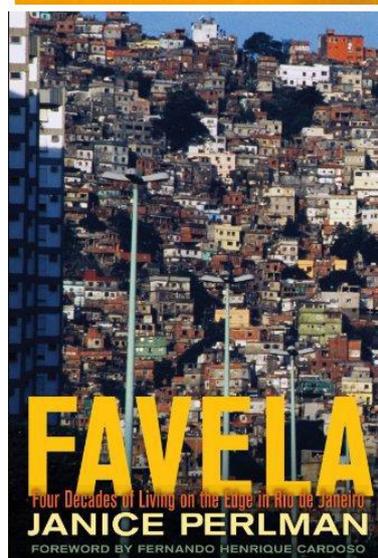
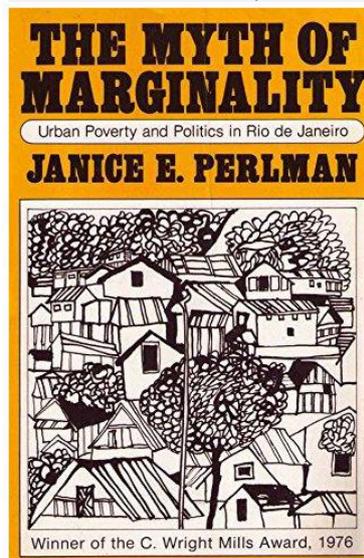
How did you cope with this disappointment?

I saw that many voices were merely criticizing what was going on in Rio. That's when I decided the scope of my research. Though it is true that many policies have failed dramatically, some of them still are *partly* interesting. Just like parts of *O Pacto do Rio* and *Morar Carioca*, parts of the *UPP project* were promising. Similarly, there are things that are good and promising that *are* happening right now despite of the chaos, but that no one notices or talks about. I labeled these "*promising initiatives under the radar*". I visit these places and try to visualize these initiatives across all sectors. Not just in favelas, but also in NGO's, the governmental level, and even the private sector.

Can you give some examples of these initiatives?

I try to uncover what isn't part of the sad story. The first promising

[Picture 2] Four decades of research on Rio de Janeiro.



thing I saw, was that young people in the favelas and young people in the *suburbios*, or more popular *barrios*, were making a common cause. They organized meetings sponsored by *Casa Fluminense* called *Rio de Encontros*. For me, it means that kids in the favelas expanded their constituency by recognizing that very often they face the same problems as the kids in some *suburbios*, like low income, no job prospects, etc. This recognition was returned and collectively they started to focus, instead of at the municipal or state level, on the whole metropolitan region. Together they created a vision for the post Olympics in 2017.

These types of meetings enable people of different neighborhoods and of different ages, skin tones or social classes to meet and raise their voice. In this movement, the youth is taking the stigma of *favela* and is turning it around. They voice their own ideas and state that they're proud to be from the favela, that they don't want to leave it and that they resist to this tendency of favela gentrification. Just like other forms of youth collectivization like *Forum de Juventudes* and *Agência de Redes para Juventude* it shows a new, vibrant youth that is ready to voice their ideas.

Secondly, there is a large movement of people recording the identity and history of their favela. They do this by using new technologies, posting interviews with older residents online or by founding a local museum. I do not see this as a causal reaction to the Olympics, but rather as the next level of awareness of this generation. When I talk to people in favelas they tell me the following: "For us it doesn't really matter if Olympics happen or if the impeachment succeeds. I still need to put food on the table for my kids, I still need to manage and keep them in school as I work three

different jobs. What difference is it to me?" To me that's a good perspective when the city puts their focus on these mega-events. Daily life in the favelas is not going to be affected or changed greatly, except for the ones undergoing dire removals. Perhaps some will benefit marginally from improvements in transportation infrastructure, but in the end, most of them won't.

Thirdly, I see an enormous flowering of cultural expression and the value of cultural production manifested in dance, theatre, etc. These expressions contest the city. Not only do they show people in favelas live their lives to the fullest, but they also articulate a new evaluation of what is valuable. By refusing to be

removed to and housed in large, anonymous apartment buildings, they also appreciate the proximity, connection and close bond between people in communities themselves.

"Daily life in the favelas is not going to be affected or changed greatly, except for the ones undergoing dire removals. Perhaps some will benefit marginally from improvements in transportation infrastructure, but in the end, most of them won't."

What about the promising initiatives beyond the favelas?

Rio has created a metropolitan governance council (*Câmara Metropolitana de Integração Governamental do Rio de Janeiro (CIG)*) run by Vicente Loureiro. This council is establishing new plans for 2017 and beyond. They are changing the legislation so the sub mayors of the 29 municipalities will have an increased incentive to participate in their neighborhoods and to intensify connections between neighborhoods. I believe we need to look at the other movement within the official formal society as well, which is definitely taking the right step here.

There have also been initiatives like *Minha casa minha vida entidades*. They're collectives of residents that apply for the same amount of money per unit as *Minha Casa Minha Vida* construction companies and they do their own

design, building or sub contracting. It is very much based on housing movements like *Sem Teto* and *Sem Terra*. Within this spirit there are also initiatives like collective land ownerships, land banks and cooperatives.

Removals instigate solidarity and resistance?

The movement of protecting these communities was definitely incentivized by all these new removals. In *Favela* I wrote that I never expected to see housing removals again. These current removals have been very well documented so far, but it has also sparked a lot of solidarity. In hindsight, the largest solidarity movement occurred during the first round of removals between '68 and '78. Back then there was a huge strength in community organizations because they had a common cause.

Currently, in all of the communities, even if things aren't necessarily perfect, new issues about the right to the city, the identity of the people in favelas and the role of youth are being brought up. Whether people are fighting against housing removals because of the construction of new roads or the Olympic stadiums, or they are fighting gentrification; in all these cases, they have shown to be very creative.

For example, look at the communication courses given by *Oi Kabum*, *VozeRio* and the

Comitê Popular. They have given young people the chance to document and communicate via social media. This is and will become a very powerful tool.

When you look at the removal of *Vila Autódromo*; there was a large solidarity movement that neither would have been possible, nor would have become so strong without the availability of sophisticated communication technologies and platforms. Similarly, there is a community in *Deodoro* that fought against a road being constructed right through the community of 2000 houses.

To tackle this, they made an alternative video that shows how the road could actually go around.

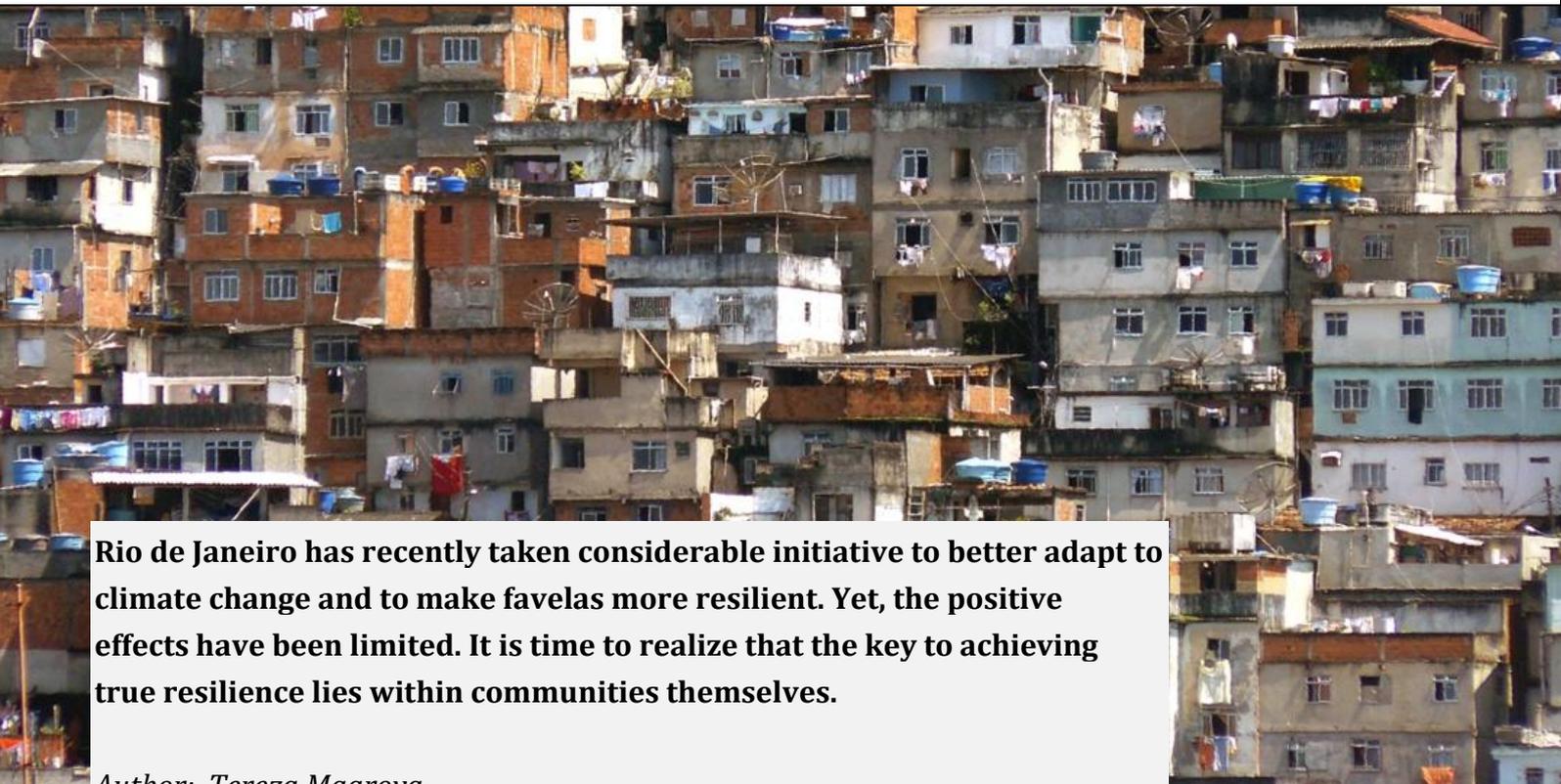
In the end, through negotiations, they figured out how to spare the houses.

There are so many things in Rio that are never talked about and that are absolutely heroic. I'm going to try to identify them. It's an ongoing inspiration when you see what people are doing. There is no reason for intellectuals and academics to give up and think everything is over or to say that "just because it's a capitalist system, there is nothing to be done." People's lives continue. You might determine the macro narrative of the story, but that's not the only one. I'm cheering for the other story.

[Picture 3] Dr. Janice Perlman in the first years of her research in Rio de Janeiro.



Community leadership in Rio's Favelas: a showcase for resilience



Rio de Janeiro has recently taken considerable initiative to better adapt to climate change and to make favelas more resilient. Yet, the positive effects have been limited. It is time to realize that the key to achieving true resilience lies within communities themselves.

Author: Tereza Maarova

Rio de Janeiro has been identified as “[the city most affected by climate change in South America](#).” Sea level rise is predicted to submerge Rio even if the Earth’s temperature rises only by 1.5°C (the new global goal following the 2015 Paris agreement). Torrential rains have already resulted in major disasters in the last decade, destroying people’s homes and lives that aren’t always possible to rebuild. Climate-related events will continue to affect urban metropolises such as Rio, costing cities considerable resources and further widening the social inequality gap.

It is crucial for countries and cities facing the biggest climate-related risks to invest into resilience or those feeling most of the heat will be those with the least resources to adapt, such as favela residents. Rio’s favelas have been praised for being a new model of urban sustainability as they are organically developed, high density, mixed-use neighborhoods with a strong sense of community and leadership. Yet, their often-

hazardous location on hillsides, poor storm water management system, and lower average income also increases their vulnerability to climate-related hazards like landslides.

On a national level, Brazil has made significant commitments to adapt to climate change - at least verbally. It is the first country to have fully complied with the [Compact of Mayors](#) initiative. In their [Second national communication](#) to UNFCCC, key adaptation measures for urban areas included the following recommendations: “offering housing alternatives to low-income populations that are currently living in areas of risk” and “development and implementation of urban design plans with focus on urban and environmental comfort.” However, talking is not enough – it is time to deliver.

On a local level, the city of Rio de Janeiro has initiated several climate adaptation projects aiming especially at favela residents. But so far, community priorities have largely been

ignored, projects are years behind schedule, and many families located in the unfortunate proximity to the 2016 Olympic Games sites were forcefully displaced.

One of Rio's recent projects is the soon-to-be Olympic Village, called Ihla Pura (the *pure island*), and it was supposed to be a sustainability super star. But it not only ignores most social sustainability criteria, the project even contributed to the evictions from Vila Autodromo – a favela that got the muddiest end of the stick. So even though Ihla Pura is the first project in Brazil to receive the LEED-ND accreditation, when a project barely passes with a score of only [47 out of 110](#), I question how *sustainable* it actually is. And when I learn that it received ZERO credits for community outreach, mixed-income diverse communities, mixed-use neighborhood centers, and storm water management, I wonder if even **one** of Rio's residents was included in the Ihla Pura project. It is clear that the project had no direct positive impact on the local community, but what's worse is that it already had a serious negative impact and that it might have contributed to increased vulnerability of certain families, simply because favela residents did not have a say.

The Morar Carioca initiative is another classic example of Rio's promise to strengthen the resilience of favela residents, without any substantial results. Similarly to Ihla Pura, Morar Carioca was praised for its sustainability features, winning the [2013 C40 & Siemens Climate Leadership Sustainable Communities award](#). It was supposed to be the ultimate legacy of the 2016 Olympic Games. So what does this legacy look like so far? It is hard to tell, as countless projects planned never even started.

Climate change adaptation cannot only be a top-down, far-removed process that is entirely designed and managed by donors. For adaptation to be truly successful, people have to lead the way based on their self-identified

needs and individual strengths. Community leadership is key as it can ensure citizen priorities are addressed during policy development, but also implementation. If authorities are not held accountable for their actions – or inactions – projects like a storm water management system will be promised but will never materialize.

Strong leadership is already present in many favelas and has proven to be a powerful force for driving climate change adaptation projects, such as the [Sewage biosystem](#) project of Favela Vale Encantado and the [LEED-UP](#) initiative.

Adaptation also requires a more coordinated and larger scale response, but citizens still play a crucial role. Rio's state-of-the-art [Operations Centre](#) and partnership with [NASA](#) for better monitoring and management of environmental hazards will certainly make the city as a whole more resilient. And such projects are beyond the capacity of communities to design and manage. Yet, by monitoring project finances, demanding transparency, and holding the government accountable for mismanagement, people can ensure that their needs are met. And because it affects people's future directly, people will care, and people will do everything they can to assure the best possible future for themselves and their communities.

By supporting citizens to develop tools that will allow them to monitor and track government spending on adaptation projects, ensuring accountability, and focusing on context-based approaches, with context-based solutions, resilience can become a reality. Governments need to keep this in mind to ensure that UNFCCC and national processes are enforced at the local level.

More powerful favelas will be more resilient favelas. Rio's infamous neighborhoods are the best positioned to ensure a bright future for the next generations.

Development through sport: the EU and the Olympics



Sport has become an essential tool in the European Union's [soft power](#) approach. Over the past few years, the political vision promoting economic development through sport has become a standard practice in Europe's policies of solidarity and sustainable development. Yet, how can the European experience help improve the Olympic ideal of developing sport to promote peace and prosperity among nations?

Author: Melina Monjour

Sport is the biggest social phenomenon in the EU, as approximately [60% of European citizens participate in sporting activities on a regular basis](#). It plays a key role in the fields of integration, education and health. In the recent years, the sports European movement has taken a pro-active attitude. In this sense, the [White Paper](#) adopted in 2007 by the European Commission acknowledges that sport can contribute to the Lisbon objectives of growth and job creation. Nonetheless, a more structured legal basis, addressing both its needs and weaknesses, for example regarding racism and doping, is required for the future.

The European Union seeks to promote development through sport in other parts of the world, by creating synergies with sport organisations, the UN and local authorities. The memorandum of understanding signed between the Commission and FIFA in 2006 to

make football a force for development in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries is an example in this respect. Thus, the existing ties between olympism and the European Union values, that resulted in the creation of the European Olympic Committee, offer a great opportunity for EU policymakers to reinforce the role of sport as a fundamental tool for [urban and regional development and regeneration](#).

[More generally, the EU has the capacity to contribute to sport policy debates thanks to its long-standing experience](#). In the recent years the EU member states hosted the Olympic Games in 1992 in Barcelona, in 2004 in Athens and in 2012 in London. Countries that do not have a strong regulatory framework in the field of sport can significantly benefit from the experience of EU member states. Moreover, they have a set of best practices at their

disposal that have helped managing in a successful way these mega-events. The EU has already included security related issues during major international sport events in its policy dialogue and cooperation with partner countries. In the context of the Olympics, it can help to stimulate the upgrading of infrastructures and foster new partnerships.

The second Nutrition for Growth Summit organised by Generation Nutrition will be hosted in Rio the day before the opening ceremony, on 4th August 2016. It will gather a wide range of civil society organisations working on under-nutrition at a global level. This is an example of how linking politics and sport could be an effective force. The idea of organising a meeting of World leaders for the Olympic opening ceremony, in order to tackle this urgent issue, has already proved successful during the “hunger summit” in London in 2012, during the last Olympics games. [As the eyes of the world are watching, sport events become a powerful communication platform that can be used to expose development issues.](#) In this sense, the European Union has taken a strong leadership in the area of food and nutrition security over recent years, and during the previous summit on malnutrition in London, by committing to reduce stunting by at least 7 million by 2025.

It is a clever strategy to link the Olympics with the under nutrition issue, as it allows a constant evaluation, as well as creating a space for repeated interaction, following the pace of this sport competition every four years. Public attention and media coverage force to build commitments, as well as developing an increasing sense of accountability. Moreover, these kinds of events tend to gather a varied number of actors and help matching the intentions with good practice, especially regarding the necessary financial support.

In conclusion, there is a clear role for the EU on several levels in the area of sport for development and prosperity. EU member

states can help implementing better practices in sport thanks to their experience and use the Olympics as a platform for improving broader political and economic issues.

Rio 2016's Unenduring Legacy



The 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro have been heralded from the start as 'legacy games'. One key component of the Rio 2016 legacy plan is increased sport participation for low-income children and youth, with a number of public programs set up, and substantial funding channeled, toward this goal. Months before the Games are scheduled to begin, however, this legacy has yet to leave a lasting mark.

Author: Izza Tahir

Rio de Janeiro's candidature bid for the 2016 Games described its intent to invest in sport as a catalyst for social integration through the implementation of key programs such as [fostering social inclusion through sport and the expansion of sports infrastructure](#). As part of an overarching sport participation legacy for not just Rio but the entire country, with its derivative health and social benefits, the government promised to bring these benefits to those in most need of them: the at-risk children and youth living in low-income areas such as Rio's *favelas*, or urban slums. However, because of inadequately designed policies and poorly implemented programs, the sport legacy aimed at this marginalized population is likely to be ineffective and unenduring.

To support its sport participation legacy, the government established a number of programs aimed specifically at low-income youth, the most high-profile of which are the *Vilas*

Olímpicas of Rio de Janeiro. The program creates public spaces for sport and physical activity in 22 low-income areas across Rio which previously lacked such facilities. For 18 of these *Vilas*, catering to 140,000 individuals, the municipal government entered into a [funding partnership](#) with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the FC Barcelona Foundation and the National Basketball Association (NBA) to strengthen the programming provided at the *Vilas* to promote social inclusion, violence prevention, education, health and other social benefits for marginalized youth through sport participation.

A [2012 report](#) set out to examine to what extent, if any, these benefits had actually materialized through the *Vilas* program, and discovered that while the beneficiaries were enthusiastic about these facilities, most were not optimistic about any lasting legacy

enduring beyond the Games. The key problem was a lack of effective implementation of the project. Many of the facilities were already in a state of disrepair, and because of inconsistent management and inadequate funding available for maintenance and repair, residents were in fact not able to enjoy full access to them.

The *Vilas* project highlights the heavy bias in the government's sport participation policy towards investment in sport infrastructure, at the cost of long-term planning to ensure sustainable funding for the maintenance and continued operation of this infrastructure. The policy also ignores the need for a long-term vision to promote sport and an active lifestyle for health and social benefits. For instance, the participants of the 2012 study had perceived no government effort to promote the Olympic sporting values. [Another report](#) from November 2015 also echoed these findings, documenting the absence of any sporting legacy beyond infrastructure development.

This failure to implement a long-term sport participation legacy for Rio's marginalized youth is in fact reflective of Brazilian's sport policy more broadly, as Brazilian sport programs and their continued funding have historically been heavily dependent on political will and administrative whimsy. Another problem is the public-private partnerships (PPPs) that the government is inordinately proud of. In the case of the Rio 2016 Games, the sub-contracting of the construction of the Olympic sites to the private sector means that the latter will foot 60% of the bill. However, this very arrangement makes these sites and programs prone to inconsistent and unaccountable service delivery, unstable management, discontinuity, or privatization when the Games are over - which the experience of [the 2007 Pan-Am Games in Brazil](#) has shown to have been the case.

It may be argued, of course, that in fact, sport participation legacies are something of a myth; there is very little empirical evidence to show

the effects of such legacies enduring beyond the events themselves, especially on individuals not already inclined toward sport. Moreover, not only is such a legacy intangible by nature and difficult to implement successfully, but that it is even more difficult to measure its effects.

While these are valid observations, it is still possible for policymakers to develop and implement a more robust strategy towards increasing sport participation in high-risk youth, one that goes beyond simply constructing more sporting venues, and allocates funding towards ensuring the continued successful running of programs designed to first, raise public awareness about the multiple benefits of sport and exercise, and second, to provide spaces for marginalized youth to engage in such activities. For instance, a general public awareness campaign can be linked to a project like the *Vilas Olímpicas*, and could harness the power of social media to reach and influence youth, especially as *favela* youth are active users of the Internet (see Custodio 2014).

It is vitally important that with billions of dollars being spent on hosting mega-events such as the Olympic Games, these events leave behind a lasting legacy. It is even more important that those who are marginalized and at-risk in society derive long-term benefits from this legacy. This legacy will not endure, however, until policies are implemented with a long-term vision and commitment- and a legacy that does not endure is not a legacy.

All eyes on Rio: Blessing or curse for local tourism?



The Olympic Games have manifested themselves as global extravaganzas that attract eyes from all over the world to its host city. Such worldwide attention has the power of attracting tourists long after the Games are over – look at what the 2010 FIFA World Cup did for South Africa. However, extensive media coverage might just as well expose flaws rather than strengths. Will the 2016 Olympic Games convince spectators that Rio de Janeiro, and Brazil at large, are the ultimate holiday destination? It is time for citizens, businesses and government to unite in an effort to showcase Rio’s unique beauty and spirit.

Author: Elien Verstraeten

Rio de Janeiro is a city that captures imagination. It has been nicknamed the 'Cidade Maravilhosa' (Marvelous City), and remains the most popular tourist destination in Brazil. In 2014, the city welcomed 1.8 million foreign tourists (a [34% increase](#) compared to 2009), mainly due to mega-events such as the annual Carnival and the 2014 FIFA World Cup. However, as pointed out by Neusvaldo Ferreira Lima, Director of the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism, Brazil only receives 0,5% of the world's foreign tourists, which is ["well below \[its\] potential"](#). Two years after the FIFA World Cup, Brazil is hoping to, once again, take center stage in the media and tourism landscape by organizing the 2016 summer Olympics. Contrary to the World Cup, the Games will remain concentrated in the city of Rio de Janeiro. While the long-term economic benefits of hosting the Games (if any) are expected to spread throughout the country, the burden of

organizing the event rests heavily on Rio's shoulders.

Back in 2009, when Rio won the bid for the 2016 Olympic Games, the mega-city was growing at a [real annual rate of 2.1%](#). In 2014, after hosting the World Cup, the annual GDP growth rate had already been cut by more than half – [reaching 1%](#). Today, Brazil has plunged into a deep economic recession, dragging its urban economies down with it. Much of the initial optimism about the Games and Brazil's global economic future has vanished, or has simply been overshadowed by other issues. The rapid spread of the ZIKA virus, corruption scandals (e.g. Petrobras) and anti-government demonstrations seem to paralyze the country's economy and social life. As a result, ticket sales for the Games have been slow – even at an average price of 18\$ per ticket, which is affordable for most Brazilians.

Besides the domestic visitors, between [380,000 and 400,000](#) foreign visitors are expected to arrive in Rio for the Games. Embratur, also known as the Brazilian Tourism Board, has been carrying out campaigns and events overseas to increase this number. Their task is significantly complicated by the growing fear concerning the [Zika epidemic](#) in Brazil. Gang violence, [poor water quality](#) and lack of decent infrastructure are other concerns likely to dissuade foreigners from attending the events. On top of this, 'regular' foreign tourists might postpone their visit in order to avoid the congestion, crowds and rising consumer prices associated with the events. All in all, the short-term inflow of tourists during the Games is likely to be modest. Instead, there is an urgent need for a clear and long-term development strategy aimed at convincing the millions of TV- and online spectators that Rio is the ultimate holiday destination. Here are a few issues for policymakers to consider.

First of all, the Olympic experience will be nothing like the World Cup's. Visitors are likely to be [closely associated](#) with the sports events, e.g. relatives of athletes, journalists, sponsors. They are also expected to spend more and demand [higher-quality goods and services](#). Events will be spread out throughout the city, requiring visitors to travel more frequently (as opposed to the World Cup, which was concentrated in the South). While Rio has the unique opportunity of showcasing its potential for business and urban renewal, it also carries the heavy responsibilities associated with organizing this mega-event.

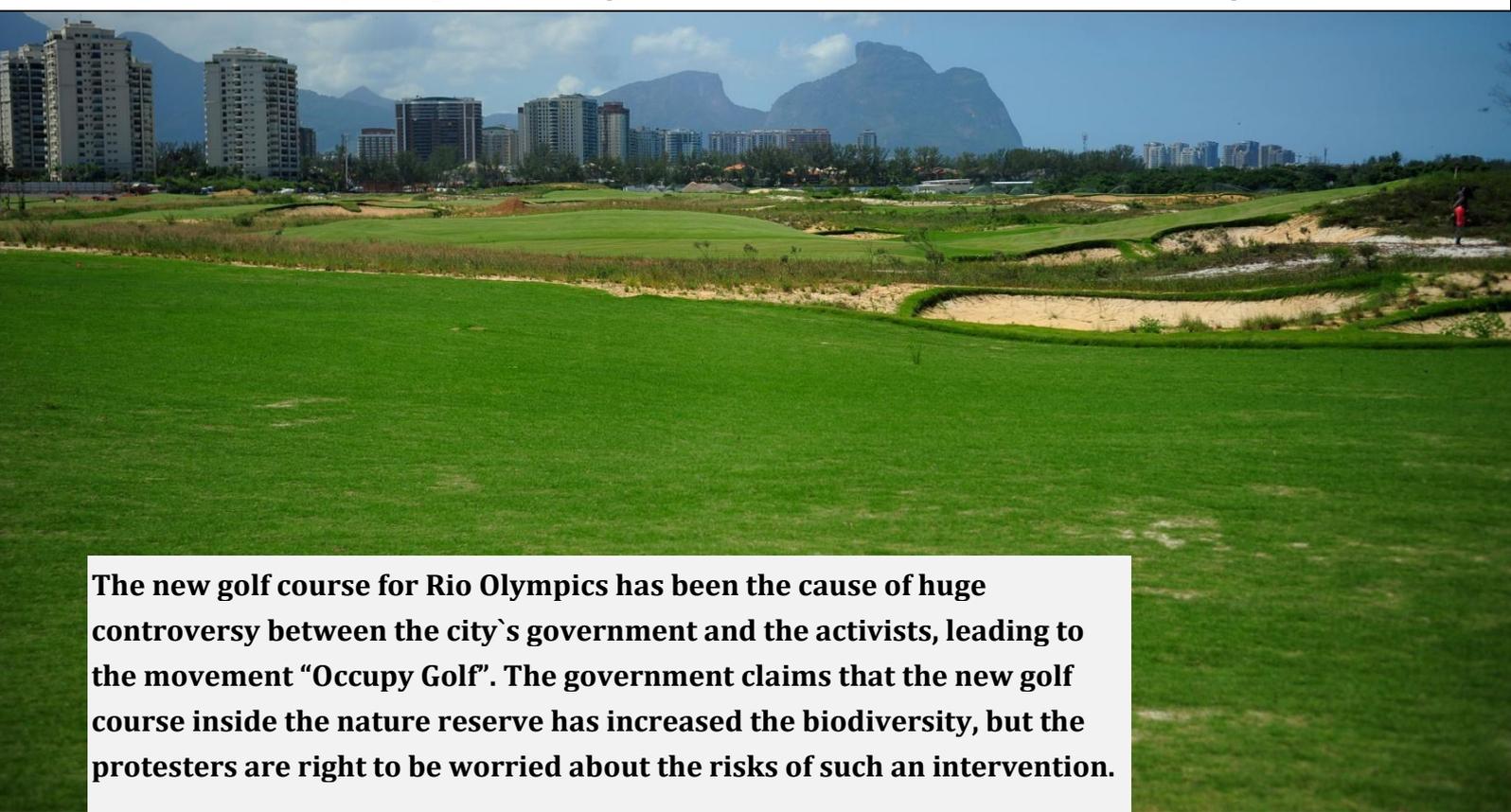
Second of all, Rio's citizens need to get in the spirit of the Games. The upcoming events have received little attention in the local press so far, and other economic and political issues seem to occupy the citizens' minds. The Games are often considered an [event for outsiders](#), far removed from day-to-day life. Still, it would be a mistake to under-estimate the power of a good party. The national pride associated with hosting the Games can infuse hope and

dynamism among the population. It also lures in tourists who are charmed by the population's hospitality. Eventually, it could transform the opinion of foreign investors about the development potential of the country as a whole.

Lastly, Rio needs to focus on its Olympic legacy. There are already signs of innovative and inclusive business opportunities emerging under the impulse of the upcoming events. For example, the government's efforts to reduce violence in Rio's favelas (slum settlements) have led tourists to the [Favelinha 'slum' hostel](#), which offers a cheap and culturally-enriching alternative to hotel accommodation. The Olympic Games can certainly act as a catalyst for long-overdue public investments and urban renewal, the 1992 Barcelona Olympics being the clearest example. However, there is no recipe for success, and much will depend on how well the city manages to brand these investments to the outside world.

If Rio, and Brazil at large, want to increase their share of global foreign travelers, they need to carefully consider how to use the Olympic Games as a platform for post-Olympic urban development and efficient city branding. While the economic recessions, political scandals and health issues certainly deserve attention, ['the show must go on'](#), no matter how big the crisis. Therefore, local businesses, government and citizens should collaborate and take this opportunity to showcase the city's unique strengths: stunning urban landscapes, a lively party atmosphere and a pioneering [technology hub](#). Only through clear development strategies and civic participation will Rio manage to successfully carry its Olympic legacy into the future, and attract the much-anticipated inflows of tourists that could boost its economy.

The New Olympic Golf Course: Risks vs. Benefits?



The new golf course for Rio Olympics has been the cause of huge controversy between the city's government and the activists, leading to the movement "Occupy Golf". The government claims that the new golf course inside the nature reserve has increased the biodiversity, but the protesters are right to be worried about the risks of such an intervention.

Author: Jakub Rusek

Barra de Tijuca is the new golf course is inside the Marapendi reserve covered by protected Atlantic Forest (Mata Atlântica). Just like any Olympic sport, golf also needed a decent venue. Rio 2016 will re-introduce golf into the Olympics after more than 100 years. The choice was not one of the two already existing golf courses, as one would expect, but on an entirely new one. However, the development of the golf course without conducting proper environmental assessment raises the possibility of irreversible biodiversity consequences.

Biodiversity in the context of Atlantic forest

Atlantic forest is an ecosystem with one of the highest biodiversity, similar to the one of Amazon. It is home to numerous endemic and [endangered species](#), including the yellow-necked alligator and the crested guan. The habitat is already [highly fragmented](#) (80% is contained in forest fragments smaller than 50

hectares) due to farming, urban development, illegal logging, and further threatened by invasive species. The problem of fragmentation is not just the loss of the habitat on the cleared land, but whole cascade of consequences on the large surrounding area. For example, even a road through the forest can trigger whole cascade of species replacement.

Biodiversity is not just a simple list of the species, but it is one of the most important elements of environmental sustainability. Humans completely depend on numerous plants, animals and microbes, most of those we are not even aware of, through the ecosystem services they are providing. The [ecosystem services](#) are life support systems that are provided by the environment, spanning different areas (providing food, pollination, climate regulation).

What are the risks to biodiversity?

The biodiversity richer systems have higher primary productivity and resilience - ability to absorb shocks. For example, one species can substitute another because it deals better with threats (such as disease or disruption) and system as a whole can still function. But biodiversity is not a parameter where higher is necessarily better. The parts of ecosystem are complementing each other and this balance may be disturbed by introducing additional species. In the Atlantic forest, several invasive species are already spreading and replacing the original ones (for example an [African grass](#) species which were introduced to provide cattle with fast growing food).

Golf and biodiversity

Several studies have assessed the [impact of golf courses](#) on the local biodiversity, suggesting their potential as a [measure for biodiversity increase](#). This however depends on the land they replace. On the one hand, the ecological value of golf courses increases, when they are located in the areas of high human impact such as urban or [agricultural land](#). It allows the ecosystems to develop, for example, because the land is not mowed - soil is not disturbed. Additionally, golf courses serve as sort of islands of nature surrounded by crop monocultures or settlements, thus providing a refuge for species. This is only true when the golf courses are subject to well [planning and management](#) such as the sustainable use of pesticides and irrigation or avoiding the use of invasive alien species (which can spread outside the course and replace the natural species). On the other hand, the ecological value of a golf course decreases when it replaces natural or nature conservation areas.

Third golf course in Rio

Barra de Tijuca seems to be the area of both natural and human-influenced land types. A part of the land needed to be restored due to sand extraction activities and deposit of

cement, surrounded by the ecosystem of Atlantic forest. Rio de Janeiro already had two golf courses, established before Barra de Tijuca - Gávea Golf Club and the Golf Club Itanhangá. The latter could have been renovated for 25 million US\$, whereas the completely new course would cost just 1 million more. Weighting these two possibilities, the mayor (without considering conducting an environmental impact assessment) decided to have a third course for almost the same money. Was it also the most sustainable one? The [report](#) by the State of Rio de Janeiro's Department of Justice claims that the presence of the golf course increased the biodiversity in the area.

The recent report focuses on the fact that there have been more species than before, but there are two reasons not to celebrate yet. Firstly, the [biodiversity assessment](#) is complex and for such claims, it requires more than just the count of species. Secondly, it is better not to interfere with ecosystems such as the Atlantic forest, and leave the [recovery process](#) to the nature, as the undisturbed natural forests are the places with the highest biodiversity. In the EU, there are less than 5% of such areas. It is very praiseworthy, that the area, which was partially damaged due to wild urban development, got restored. However, to plant grass instead of mangroves and flatten sandbanks are highly hazardous management practices inside the natural reserve.

The benefits from the third golf course in the country where this sport is [far from popular](#), or even accessible, are not worth the risk of irreversible alterations in ecosystem services resulting from the biodiversity changes.

Not-so-green games for a blue planet



The organisers of the Rio Olympic Games promised to clean up Rio's dangerously polluted waterways and provide sanitation for at least 80% of the inhabitants before 2016. As the games draw near, they admit that they have failed, but claim that there are no risks to athletes or to the general public.

Photo: Silvia Izquierdo/AP

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Back in 2009 Rio de Janeiro won the rights to organise the 2016 Olympic and Paralympics games. During the bidding process, Rio branded its vision for the event as "Green Games for a Blue Planet". One of the major pledges made was the "cleaning and regeneration of Rio's waterways and lakes, through government projects for major new water treatment and sewerage works".

The pledge was necessary because Rio has neglected to prioritise public sanitation for decades. This lack of focus, combined with intense urbanisation, has now created a city of more than 6 million inhabitants, many of whom do not even have access to basic sanitation. Raw sewage, including animal carcasses and household items, ends up in the Guanabara Bay on whose shores the city is located. This creates severe pollution and human health issues. Testing done by the Associated Press (AP) last July revealed some disease-causing viruses measured at levels up to [1.7 million](#)

[times](#) more than what is considered hazardous in the US and Europe.

Water pollution in Rio de Janeiro is not a new issue. The Guanabara Bay Clean-Up Programme was launched in the early '90s by the state government. The aim was to improve environmental and sanitary conditions of the Rio metropolitan area. The programme has not made much progress. By 2008, only [32%](#) of the total sewage was treated.

Broken Promises

A specific goal set in Rio's bid book was to raise this level to [80%](#) before 2016. This they have also failed to accomplish. The number currently stands at 49%. Despite the lack of action, and their acknowledgement of failure to meet own targets, Brazilian officials insist that there is no danger to the public including the sailors and surfers who are to compete in the bay. The German sailor Erik Heil, might disagree. Shortly after having sailed in an Olympic event test last

August, he had to undergo treatment for a flesh eating bacteria. He is only one of the many athletes who have already fallen ill.

Despite having had decades to deal with the problem, little has been done. It seems to be very low on the list of current priorities. Brazil is facing a deluge of problems: From a massive economic recession and a president being impeached for corruption. Additionally, huge public protests occur over the brutal evictions of residents from their homes, in order to make way for stadiums and the Olympic City. Regardless of the magnitude of problems, the Brazilian government seems determined that nothing is going to steal its moment in the spotlight; even though this enormous PR exercise costs approximately [US\\$11 billion](#). This money could instead have been spent on improving the lives of the poor and the environment of the city they live in.

The Brazilian government is not the only one to ignore the problems piling up on the eve of the games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is also burying its head in the sand, trying to ignore anything which might compromise the success of the first ever Olympic Games to be held in South America. The IOC has, amongst other things, reneged on a promise it made in the wake of the AP test report: A promise to carry out viral testing of the venue waters. It now states that the organisers are to follow test procedures established by the World Health Organisation (WHO). These focus only on testing for bacteria. Something that makes the results look a lot less scary, since bacteria breaks down in salt water a lot faster than viruses do.

Sacrificing the Olympic Ideals

This refusal to deal with the problems isn't because the IOC is without options. The [Olympic Charter](#) allows the IOC to withdraw the permission to host the games *at any time* if it has any concerns. The IOC seems determined to plough ahead though, even if it means running over its own [Olympic Ideals](#) in the process. Ideals which, among other things,

state that the Olympic Movement is about "protecting the health of the athletes".

Evidently it seems that the IOC is ignoring its own principles. Likewise, Brazil is failing to protect its own citizens and live up to its international obligations. The [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#), which include commitment to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, seems to have been wilfully ignored. Why? To make sure Rio looks good on the world's TV screens for a few days in August.

