

# Rio of Imaginaries: City, Mega-Events and Strategic Planning

## *Rio de imaginários: cidade, megaeventos e planejamento estratégico*

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### ABSTRACT

From urban administrators to artists, through entrepreneurs and advertisers, the “Rio” brand is known and consumed worldwide. The media projection that the city had during the preparations and the realization of the 2016 Olympic Games enabled the construction of an imaginary, which is widely used in the intention of legitimizing institutional practices that modified the space and readjusted it to the interests of governmental and business coalitions. This governance model looks at the city and manages it, literally, as a commodity that must be valued and worshipped in order to project itself in an international market where it competes with other cities. In this article, we intend to discuss the mutations of Rio (and the Rio brand) using as parameters, in addition to the historical context, the Passos Reform in the early twentieth century and the interventions operated in the city with a view to the World Cup and the Olympics.

**Keywords:** Rio de Janeiro; mega-events; imaginary; strategic planning.

### RESUMO

*De gestores urbanos a artistas, passando por empresários e publicitários, a marca “Rio” é mundialmente conhecida e consumida. A projeção midiática que a cidade teve durante os preparativos e a realização dos Jogos Olímpicos de 2016 possibilitou a construção de um imaginário largamente utilizado na intenção de legitimar práticas institucionais que modificaram o espaço e o readequaram aos interesses de coalizões governamentais e empresariais. Esse modelo de governança olha para a cidade e a administra, literalmente, como uma mercadoria que deve ser valorizada e cultuada, a fim de se projetar num mercado internacional onde concorre com outras cidades. Pretendemos debater, neste artigo, as mutações do Rio (e da marca Rio) utilizando como parâmetros, além do contexto histórico, a Reforma Passos, no começo do século XX, e as intervenções operadas na cidade com vistas à Copa e às Olimpíadas.*

**Palavras-chave:** Rio de Janeiro; megaeventos; imaginário; planejamento estratégico.

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## INTRODUCTION

From “Paris of the tropics”, in the early twentieth century, to “Olympic City”, in the early twenty-first century, Rio de Janeiro as a brand has some denominations that, throughout its history, reflect the moment which the city goes through and the way it is administered. Scenario of music, movies, soap operas, poems and romance novels, “from Leme to Pontal, there is nothing like it”, as put by Tim Maia. Tom Jobim declared that his soul sang when he saw Rio de Janeiro. Fernanda Abreu does not get enough of repeating that Rio 40° is the purgatory of beauty and chaos. James Bond had an epic fight against “Jaws” in the Sugar Loaf cable car, and those scenes, at the same time, showed a life and death struggle and projected images of one of the main postcards and panoramic views of Rio and its beaches to the world.<sup>1</sup>

Natural *habitat* of the girl from Ipanema, sang even by Frank Sinatra, Rio de Janeiro is the most fetishized city in Brazil, and maybe even in Latin America. We listed some examples in a good-tempered tone to emphasize that, from urban administrators to artists, entrepreneurs to advertisers, the “Rio” brand is globally known and consumed. But what is the origin of that? How was this city historically ordered to receive such appositives that provide several meanings to this brand? In this article, we intend to debate the mutations of Rio (and the Rio brand) using not only its historical context as a parameter, but also the Passos Reform, in the early twentieth century, and the interventions the city went through after 2010, aiming at hosting the World Cup and the Olympics. We understand these changes as a branding mechanism aiming at attracting investments to the city through media exposure.

When and how do cities reinvent their cultural repertoire and symbolic heritage? The accumulation of symbolic capital in the cities clearly depends on a series of factors, among which are the cultural expressions sedimented by historical legacy, economic and political strength of the city, investment and presence of the State, global dimension of the metropolis, and the action of the capitalist enterprise that reinvents cities as arenas of consumption and entertainment. Mega-events, such as the Olympics, are iconic contests that demand an agenda of urban remodeling. (Jaguaribe, 2011, p. 2)

We also highlight the connection between the urban requalification processes which Rio has gone through after 2010, aiming at the 2016 Olympics, and the creative economy based on these cultural, social and economic dynamics built in agreement with the cultural richness of the city. In this sense, tourism stands out as one of the main actors of this chain, which counts on two yearly ephemerides that are globally known: carnival and new year’s, which project the “carioquice”<sup>2</sup> image and spirit internationally.

Verena Andreatta, in *Cidades quadradas, paraísos circulares* (2006), shows us, through ten urban plans applied in Rio up to this day, how the city was planned in

<sup>1</sup> Scenes from the movie “Moonraker”, from 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Expression used by the City Hall in 2015, as motto of the “Rio 450” campaign, aiming at highlighting the practices and attitudes that are typical of cariocas.

each one of these moments, and remarkably draws attention to the administrations of Francisco Pereira Passos and Carlos Sampaio, in the early twentieth century, as embryos of an extremely worshipped “calling”<sup>3</sup> which, for some, is something to be proud of: the international projection of the city as a host for mega-events. The so-called Passos Reform (1902-1906) was inaugural in this sense and led to the 1908 National Exhibition. The following municipal administrations, of Paulo de Frontin and Carlos Sampaio, followed the same path, and the peak of these two decades of interventions in the urban tissue occurred with the International Exhibition of 1922.

Among the Exhibits carried out in the city in 1908 and 1922, the Central Avenue was built (nowadays, Rio Branco), as well as Beira Mar Avenue, the Copacabana tunnel and the accesses to Botafogo through the coast mountains; sanitation services began around the Lagoon; The São Cristóvão Field was definitely colonized, with the demolition of Morro do Senado; and a new port was created, incorporating the islands of Moça and Melões, with the new accesses through the new streets Rodrigues Alves and Francisco Bicalho. The 1908 Exhibition started the process of incorporating Urca to the city. (Andreatta, 2006, p. 60)

A second moment emphasized by the author began in 1993, in the first management of César Maia, when the so-called “strategic planning”, based on the idea of urban entrepreneurship (Harvey, 2005), was adopted. This governance model looks at the city and literally administers it as a commodity that should be appreciated and worshipped, in order to project it in an international market, competing with other cities. What for? To attract investments. How? By hosting mega-events with great media projection, such as: the World Cup, the Olympics, Formula 1, Pan American games, great music festivals, among others. This model of urban administration continues in the administrations of Luiz Paulo Conde. In the past ten years, Rio hosted the World Youth Day (2013), the World Cup (2014) and the Olympics (2016). As the mayor Eduardo Paes mentioned, at the time,<sup>3</sup> that his intention was to solidify the image of Rio as the global-city of South America.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, particularly, there seems to be a general consensus emerging all over the advanced capitalist world: the positive benefits are obtained by the cities that adopt an entrepreneur posture in relation to economic development. It is noteworthy that this consensus, apparently, is spread through national borders, and even in political parties and ideologies. (Harvey, 2005, p. 167)

We chose this time frame because practically one century after the urban reforms triggered by Pereira Passos, which led to two mega-events – The 1908 National Exhibition and the International one, in 1922 –, in the decade of 2010 another large program of changes in the urban tissue began, aiming at the World Cup 2014 and the Olympics in 2016. We already mentioned that the reforms in the early twentieth century did not exactly aim at the conduction of these exhibits, unlike the

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3 Eduardo Paes is in his third term in Rio’s city hall. The first one was from 2008 to 2012, when he was re-elected until 2016. In 2020, Paes was. Again elected for mayor, until 2024.

4 Story from *Isto É* magazine, from December 9, 2016.

interventions that took place after 2010, whose targets were the aforementioned sports mega-events. We will further discuss it throughout the article. For that, we were based on bibliography we considered relevant for the debate about the city of Rio de Janeiro and mega-events.

The spectacularization of Rio's image, when elected to host the Olympics in October, 2009, enabled the construction of largely mediatized imaginary that became a legitimizing factor for the urban reforms, with the purpose of changing space and readapting it to the interests of governmental and corporate coalitions. The phenomenon can be verified through an excessively coincidental confluence between the corporate media discourse, institutional discourse and the several constructions executed by local governments in the city. Public policies, therefore, take on a notoriously neo-liberal bias in which governments think and make the city thinking much more about enabling the wishes of the market than in promoting well-being and quality of life for the population.

### **THE PARIS OF THE TROPICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A "CALLING"**

The first big urban reform program implemented in Rio de Janeiro took place during the administration of mayor Francisco Pereira Passos, between 1902 and 1906. At that time, a local elite that had just reached political power aimed at modernizing the city and freeing it from colonial vestiges. Inspired by baron Haussmann (who reformulated the city of Paris in the nineteenth century), mayor Passos completely changed Rio's central area, shaping it with the avenues and blocks we know up to this date.

The Passos Reform left the imperial city behind and made it more modern and adequate to the capitalist dynamics of the time. The opening of large avenues enabled the connection between the port and the city, dynamized dislocations with electric trams and the first vehicles, besides encouraging individuals to go out in the street, which facilitated the control of deviant attitudes. The reordering of space also led to a re-education of bodies and behaviors: dressing codes, ways of walking, interacting, partying and manifesting.

To better understand the scenario, we need to go back to the nineteenth century, especially after the 1870s, when Brazil began to receive large contingents of European immigrants, as well as generous loans from foreign banks (especially British ones). The increasing number of salaried employees was incompatible with a slaveholding society. "The cities grew, and the country began to see an emerging capitalist elite that had reached some economic strength, and, therefore, began to claim for more political participation" (Chalhoub, 2001, p. 248). In this context, the Abolition of Slavery (1888) and the Proclamation of the Republic (1889) were natural consequences of this process. Florestan Fernandes (2005) refers to this historical fact as: "Brazilian bourgeois revolutions", highlighting the time when this liberal capitalist elite consolidates itself in power.

Based on this scenario, of a country that is more and more inserted in the capitalist world order, there was no sense in having a capital with colonial traces. "With

the approval of the Federal Congress, president Rodrigues Alves negotiated a loan of 8.5 million pounds from a group of English bankers, to finance the constructions to reformulate the capital” (Chalhoub, 2001, p. 250). This was the first time the city would go through a large spatial reorganization.

The central area of Rio de Janeiro was totally reformed, and the neuralgic point was the opening of Central Avenue; then, the realignment of all blocks in the region. The “Bota Abaixo”<sup>5</sup> of Pereira Passos, as it became popularly known, besides aesthetics, also considered local healthiness and raised Rio to a new level, from colonial city to capitalist city, establishing a new relationship between residents and the city.

Central Avenue, with refined commerce, fashion and tissue stores and bookstores, became a catwalk where one would go to notice and be noticed. The habit of going out, walking around town, became a normal practice. The Passos Reform not only operated a series of urban changes in the city, but it also reflected on the habits of its citizens. All of this modern wave which Rio was going through in the first decades of the twentieth century incorporated a new repertoire of actions and representations. In it, the beauty of this “new” city stood out, as well as the organization skills of the local administration and the population receptivity. With these qualities, the new capital that projected itself began to be thought of as a possible attractive pole for foreign investment through events.

“The first test the city went through was the 1908 National Exhibition, to celebrate the centenary of the opening of ports to friendly nations. It was the first mega-event conducted in Rio, and it gathered exhibitors from all over Brazil and Portugal” (Levy, 2008, p. 53). There, we showed the world what the young tropical national could already produce.

In 1922, the “Paris of the Tropics”<sup>6</sup> was definitely opening up to the world by hosting an International Exposition. Carlos Sampaio, mayor at the time, understood the city as a business platform. Therefore, it was necessary to develop its own scenario, one that would show the world the new image the capital was trying to send. The demolition of Castelo hill and the consequent landfill of the area – located between the Santa Luzia beach and the Glória cove –, where the exposition was installed, deepened the new urban order, expelling the poor population that still lived downtown. As Richard Sennet mentions, in *Carne e Pedra* (1994), urban “renovation” has pushed poverty, concentrating it in further places. In Rio’s case, to other hills in the center of the city.

[...] the Mayor, right after taking the office and fulfilling an old wish, had removed from the center of the city, “on behalf of aeration and hygiene”, the place that originated the city in the sixteenth century – Castelo hill. Even

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5 Term used at the time to mention the urban reforms initiated by mayor Francisco Pereira Passos due to the large number of demolitions.

6 Term used at the time to mention the city of Rio de Janeiro, after the conclusion of the reforms in the center of the city, and its deep aesthetic similarity to Paris.

though it was a historical site, the hill had become a place of residence for several poor families, who benefited from cheap rents in the old constructions that were there. However, its location had increased in value, it was two steps away from Rio Branco Avenue [...] (Abreu, 2008. p. 76)

Sampaio chose the financial path so that Rio became competitive in business generally. The new proposed aesthetics implied placing the city in the international list of the main hosts for events and businesses, such as London and Paris. A modern urban organization integrated with the Passos Reform would enrich the central region of the city even more.

The Rio de Janeiro from the early twentieth century, as it happened in expositions in Paris and London, in the nineteenth century, also appreciated monumentality as a weapon that would turn the city into one of the international locations conducive to triumphant capitalism. This happens based on a self-image desired by the Brazilian elite, against the abyss that existed between the utopia of European progress and the colonial delay that marked South American countries. (Freitas, 2011, p. 8)

The opening of the International Exposition took place on September 7, 1922, and ended in the first week of July, 1923. It worked as a showcase of progress and a mirror for cosmopolitan, Europeanized and modern self-image, designed to appease the anxieties of the local elite, eager to show off a civilized tropical culture for foreign eyes. "The 1922 contest can be considered as the image of a clean, civilized and aseptic city that had been desired since the Passos Reform, initiated two decades ago" (Levy, 2010, p. 44).

## FROM MARVELLOUS CITY TO BROKEN CITY

In 1935, the march composed by André Filho and Aurora Miranda (1935) chanted verses that marked that carnival and the history of the city itself: "Marvellous city, full of infinite charms. Marvellous city, heart of Brazil" (*Cidade maravilhosa, cheia de encantos mil. Cidade maravilhosa, coração do meu Brasil*). In the first half of the twentieth century, the cultural and political strength of Rio de Janeiro, capital of the Republic, made the city sort of the beacon of the nation. Who would not like to live in Copacabana, walk around the remodeled downtown area, have some tea in Colombo confectionery or eat Portuguese candies in Cavé?

Together with the interventions initiated with the Passos Reform, the city began to expand towards the South. Glória, Catete and Botafogo were already inhabited neighborhoods, but Copacabana, Ipanema and Leme were not. With the arrival of trams to the beach neighborhood in 1892, and the inauguration of Copacabana Palace hotel, in 1923, the image of the place began to change and attract not only investments, but also the attention of the local elite, which began to exchange their country houses in Botafogo, or large two-story houses in the center, for seafront properties. Life at the little princess of the sea<sup>7</sup> became an object of desire.

<sup>7</sup> Expression used after the 1930s to refer to the Copacabana neighborhood, highlighting its cultural and economic splendor at the time.

Together with this flow towards the Atlantic South zone, other constructions were launched, such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Santos Dumont airport, the Gustavo Capanema building, the Glória hotel, the Pasmado tunnel, the Canoas viaduct, the Santa Barbara and Rebouças tunnels, besides the conclusion of the gardens in Flamengo Park, in 1965. Thus, the Marvellous City was built.

The image of "Marvellous City" is owed to these constructions, as an archetype of harmonization with nature, which was spread around the world. The paradox that assumes that such an image was fabricated precisely on constructions of such range and artificiality has been remarked, reminding us of the happy premonition made by Roman poet Rutilio Namaciano: you made a city out of what used to be the world. (Andreatta, 2006, p. 67)

Within this developmentalist aura, triggered during the Vargas Era (1930–1945), Brazil hosted the 1950 World Cup. Rio, being the capital and with the newly launched Maracanã stadium, was the main host, held the opening ceremony and the final game against Uruguai, of Ghiggia, author of the goal that silenced more than 100 thousand people in the stadium, and made two nations cry: one of sadness, one of joy.

The decision to host the World Cup back then not only met the interests of the sport; many other elements were at stake at that time, such as the projection of an image of Brazil, especially of Rio de Janeiro, to the world, accompanying a process that had been designed since the turn of the twentieth century, when the country tried to erase its colonial heritage to the benefit of a modern image. Therefore, besides the soccer results, the image of the country towards the world was at stake, and a chance to definitely project Brazil as entrepreneur, modern and victorious towards development in the international scenario. These aspirations were explicit in the discourses of Mário Filho, member of the organization committee, who often revealed that "*To believe in the World Cup and in Maracanã is to believe in Brazil*". (Correa; Soares, 2015, p. 15, emphasis from the original)

But life is not a bed of roses. After decades of prosperity, Rio began to lose its political prestige, which directly affected local economy. The first pillar to come down was the loss of Federal District status, since the capital was transferred to Brasília in 1960. With the atrophy of its political weight, severe economic emptying took over the city, and reached its worst moment in 1980. Therefore, the same Marvellous City that reflected the potentials of the nation began to witness its socioeconomic imbalance and the worsening of inequalities of all kinds.

With economic retraction, urban violence began to impose itself as the main problem of the city after the 1980s, with increasing military power of criminal factions that dominated local drug trafficking. If in the nineteenth century Rio was stigmatized for its dirt and smell of sewage in the streets, and severe epidemics that devastated the city, in the end of the twentieth century the progression of urban criminality gave us the nickname of "broken city",<sup>8</sup> referring to the deep social inequalities that separated the slums from Southern suburbs.

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<sup>8</sup> Expression signed by Zuenir Ventura, homonymous work, published in 1994.

Even so, with all these problems, the city hosted, in 1985 and 1991, the two first editions of what can be considered as the largest music festival in Brazil: Rock in Rio. Success was so great that the concert became part of national and carioca history as the first musical mega-event that was able to bring, for the first time, great stars of international music to Brazil and help several national bands and musicians to take off their careers.

However, the origin of Rock in Rio is not directly related to music, but instead, to commercial interests, considering the objective of its directors, publicity entrepreneurs, was to promote a new beer brand among the young audience. For that, they idealized a campaign that would surpass the limits of conventional advertisement. The Brahma brewery used the services of Artplan agency – owned by Roberto Medina – to strengthen the image of its product in the market. The strategy the advertisers came up with was to launch a subproduct of Brahma addressed to the young audience. As Medina said:

Brahma wanted to rejuvenate the Brahma Chopp brand, which had been down. We proposed to launch a type of beer focused on a younger audience, and sign it as “Brahma quality”. So, the attributes of modern days would be transferred in a more natural manner. We launched Malt 90, which reached 14% of the market, a huge success. With this performance, we proposed to do Rock in Rio, which represented complete madness from its conception.<sup>9</sup>

Rock in Rio (RiR) is one of the examples that allows us to illustrate the power of the Rio brand. The festival came at a time the city was decadent, and still, has always been a success in terms of audience and financial profit to its sponsors. Rio hosted several editions of RiR, and the festival also took place in other cities, such as Lisbon, Madrid and Las Vegas, still called Rock in Rio. Why didn't Artplan, the event's organizer, change the name to Rock in *Lisbon*, Rock in *Madrid*, or Rock in *Vegas*? To answer this question, we were inspired by Isleide Fontenelle to say that the Rio brand has an imagery load that transcends the fact of being in the city, pointing to an intimate relationship between culture, subjectiveness and fetishism. It is what the author calls “illusion of shape”; Rio simply subsists for its name, even if the individual is not there or has never been there.

## **OLYMPIC CITY: RIO *BRANDING* IN THE XXI CENTURY**

Maybe this is, today, one of the most popular ideas among urban neo-planners: the city is a commodity to be sold in an extremely competitive market, in which other cities are also for sale. This would explain that the so-called urban marketing is more and more known as a specific and determinant sphere of the city planning and management process. (Vainer, 2000, p. 78)

<sup>9</sup> Interview granted to the website Portal da Propaganda. Available at: [http://www.portaldapropaganda.com/comunicacao/entrevista/2003/02/0001/index\\_html?pagina=4](http://www.portaldapropaganda.com/comunicacao/entrevista/2003/02/0001/index_html?pagina=4). Access on April 27, 2022.



In the early 2010s, the city of Rio de Janeiro went through its most extensive urban reform program. Unlike previous ones, which focused more on the central region, the changes took place in different parts of the city at the same time. The reason that triggered these reformulations, once again, was the update of the city for the new global capitalist dynamics. The agent that enables this project is its “calling” to host mega-events. The World Cup (2014) and the Olympics (2016) were the mottos used by local governments to trigger a series of urban reforms that apply not only to the physical plan, but essentially to the symbolic plan. To build an image, sell it in the media, in order to strengthen its trade value,<sup>10</sup> and sell it.

Brand management (branding) is the effort to think about the identity that it represents and incorporate audience response about how they see it in the routine, that is, its image. City branding is a continuous building and rebuilding process, which inserts the brand itself in people’s memories. Brand images are mostly consequences of what the brand communicates plus the experiences associated with it. And, in a world ruled by information and communication technologies, it is impossible to think about identity without thinking about image, or to think about image without thinking about communication. (Reis, 2016, p. 22)

Since 1993, during the first administration of mayor César Maia, Rio began to be thought of and administered according to the logic of strategic planning or, as David Harvey proposes, urban entrepreneurship. Since then, this logic has been present in all municipal administrations.

This type of urban governance is mainly oriented towards the creation of local investment patterns, not only in physical infrastructure, such as transport and communications, port facilities, sanitation, water supply, but also in social infrastructure related to education, science and technology, social control, culture and quality of life. The purpose is to generate enough synergy in the process of urbanization so that monopoly incomes are obtained, both for private interests and state powers. (Harvey, 2005, p. 232)

It is interesting to observe a key concept in Harvey’s approach, the one about monopoly income. As monopoly income we can point out the set of singularities, particularities and authenticity that provides an object, an individual, or even a city, with symbolic capital that can only be found there. Such as wine’s *terroir*. Without question, this monopoly income is a result of strong discursive construction which involves historical narratives, collective memories and cultural practices, always surrounded by a strong operating speech which gives meaning to such claims. In this sense, mass communication means play an essential role in the construction (or reinforcement) of these hegemonic approaches.

In Rio de Janeiro’s case, there are two mega-events annually inserted in the city’s calendar, both with vast imaginary, widely used by local governments and

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<sup>10</sup> Marxian concept.

corporate coalitions in order to potentialize the Rio brand: carnival and new-year's eve. It does not mean that these two are the only pillars of monopoly income, but they surely stand out. Not coincidentally, these are two popular celebrations that began to be promoted by the city hall since the early 1990s, with features of mega-events. Carnival and new-year's eve in Rio turned into products of the Rio brand, annually fueling this brand with strong imagery load. Then, representations are reinforced, or reformulated, so that this brand continues to be profitable for governments and investors. The origin of this process lies in an older concept, with a long history, which leads to the contemporary "society of images": fetishism.

Fetishism is not an invention of capitalism. However, it is with the historical emergence of capitalist society that, in Marx, the concept gets a very special connotation: the author appropriates himself with the initial notion of fetish – the idea of the artifice, appearance — but it will show that, in a society addressed to the production of commodities, fetish-objects purely gain economic exchange value. (Fontenelle, 2002, p. 281)

The set of urban interventions the city went through after 2010, while causing physical changes in the urban tissue, generated new landscapes that enables a renovation in mediatic approaches. From there, Rio began to abandon the appositive "Marvellous City" and adopted a new one: Olympic City. All of that took place at a time when Brazil obtained significant economic growth and was sedimented in the world as an emerging country. Its symbol city had to be leveraged to a new standard again. In this moment, Eduardo Paes, beginning his second term as mayor, began to refer to Rio as a global city.

Here, we highlight another interest point of contact between processes of urban requalification and the field of creative economy:

Unesco places creative economy as a way to boost economic growth and represent an alternative for development, especially for emphasizing creativity and for being able to use cultural and social characteristics of each region as advantages in the development and production of unique and competitive goods and services. (Teixeira *et al.*, 2016, p. 7)

Therefore, practically one century after the Passos Reform, Rio went through another extensive urban reform program — the justification mentioned by the city hall and the state government was that these reordering was in accordance with a broad agenda required by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for the World Cup and the Olympics, respectively. Without such interventions, it would be impossible to carry out these mega-events.

In the central region, the construction work focused on the demolition of Perimetral and the opening of Binário avenue and Marcelo Alencar tunnel, which were alternatives for the extinct viaduct in order to revitalize the region of Mauá square. Rio Branco avenue also went through a great reformulation

aiming at the installation of VLT (light rail). All that was boosted by the Porto Maravilha project, which included the construction of Museum of Tomorrow and Rio Art Museum (MAR).

Harvey (2005) mentions that public-private partnerships (PPP) are a widely used strategy by urban entrepreneurship. In this sense, the Porto Maravilha project was the largest PPP that existed in Brazil. Conducted by the Urban Development Company of the Port Region of Rio de Janeiro (CDURP), a legal person from the city, and Porto Novo concessionaire, formed by construction companies OAS, Norberto Odebrecht Brasil and Christiani-Nielsen Engenharia Ltda., it was based on a municipal law from 2009, which created the Consorted Urban Operation from the Rio Port Region, and involved an area of five million square feet close to the main avenues of the city: Rio Branco and Presidente Vargas. Besides the aforementioned road changes, the project included the construction of houses and had the support from the Federal Government through “Minha Casa, Minha Vida” program.<sup>11</sup>

The West zone — especially Barra da Tijuca — was the city neighborhood with the largest road transformations. The installation of bus rapid transit (BRT) in Américas avenue and the opening of the Grota Funda tunnel established a direct connection between Barra and Santa Cruz — this corridor was called Transoeste by the City Hall. Concomitantly, Ayrton Senna avenue was reformulated to optimize the flow of vehicles in Abelardo Bueno avenue, where the Olympic Park was built, extinguishing the Jacarepaguá racetrack. There, most games of the 2016 Olympics took place. Besides Transoeste, other express corridors were open in the Barra da Tijuca region to Galeão International Airport, and Transolympic, which connects Barra to the Deodoro neighborhood, enabling the transit between the West zone and Brasil Avenue.

The South zone, on the other hand, had changes related to the expansion of the subway line to Barra da Tijuca, going through Leblon. Between São Conrado and Barra da Tijuca, a new tunnel was opened for the duplication of Joá Bridge. In the North zone, constructions were circumscribed around the Maracanã stadium, which was remodeled to host some World Cup games and the opening and closing ceremony of the Olympic Games.

In the scope of public security, the state government began the installation of the Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) in communities considered to be dangerous by the Public Security Secretariat. Implemented in the administrations of governor Sérgio Cabral, the UPPs were part of this package of modifications operated in the city. Using this set of ongoing transformations, the state and municipal governments began to operate new city branding, a reformulation of the urban space and the Rio brand, in order to make it more attractive for investors and, consequently, for new mega-events.

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<sup>11</sup> Data obtained from the journal of the Federation of Institutions for Social Welfare and Education (FASE), from June 11, 2014.

Considering the exposed, we noticed a pattern from city hall urban planners and the state government to look at the city and administer it considering an economist logic. The fetishization of the place is recognized all the time to create a hegemonical common sense that is favorable to that dynamic. An example of that is the live coverage – almost a *reality show* – of the implantation of UPPs in Complexo do Alemão and Rocinha. During the broadcast, the feeling was that sooner or later Ayrton Senna's victory theme would start playing.<sup>12</sup>

The same city that, for decades, was publicized by hegemonic media as being chaotic, broken and dominated by outlaws, in a little more than two years became pacified and drug trafficking was fully eradicated in communities with UPPs, at least for the newspapers. Technical communication processes, when activated by local governments, play an important role in the organization and control of social life in the city. The association between local governments and mass communication means work in order to generate new representations and ideologies, reformulating and standardizing the city's imaginary, both for the local citizen and the tourists. The current urban society experiences the growing influence of communication means, especially after the popularization of internet access. In this sense, while information is spread, time and differences are minimized; besides, there is a homogenization between public and private spaces.

In this sense, mass communication vehicles, with technological modernization, are thought of as great transmitters of communication strategies from urban governments and dominant coalitions, united around urban restructuring projects, aiming at the reproduction of society. As privileged channels for spreading the ideology of those who build the city projects, mass communication means also gain an essential cultural and political role: of means that build the social urban imaginary and agents of the official urban image. (Sánchez, 2010, p. 82)

The city, when thought of and transformed in a product, is a marketing lever for other products associated with it. When the place's image is produced and sold, there is a connection between the spatial restructuring policies and the private capital interests. Therefore, this "revitalization" of Rio, which intended to be the "Olympic City", aimed at reordering high standard activities of production and consumption.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

"The expansion of mediatic and informational reality accelerates the symbolic expansion of consumption" (Sánchez, 2010, p. 78). With the exposed in this article, it is safe to say we are living at a time called "post-modernity" by some people, which means, more and more, a fusion between culture and economy. "Cultural production is now oriented towards the production of goods" (Jameson, 1996, p. 76). The entertainment industry would be the greatest expression of this dynamics, and

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<sup>12</sup> Brazilian instrumental song composed by maestro Eduardo Souto Neto, after a request from Globo network, to be used in Formula 1 broadcasts when a Brazilian pilot would win the race.

mega-events clarify this idea, combined with strong aesthetic, imagery and publicity appeal — marketing pieces that are closely related to a fetishist and spectacular dynamics that is now more prevalent than ever. The characteristics of contemporary cultural production are related to the new needs of capital reproduction, and comprise a quick, ephemeral and easy to replace logic.

“If in the past capitalism had clearly separated symbolic from economic, now the economic deeply penetrates the kingdom of symbol, and the libidinal body is attached to the imperatives of profit” (Eagleton, 1993, p. 18). In this context, strategic planning thinks of the city, the production of space surrounds the needs of capital accumulation, and not the citizens’ well-being. It is the triumph of exchange value to the detriment of use value.

It is complicated to establish a precise comparison between the urban reordering operated in the city of Rio de Janeiro in the early twentieth century and now, in the early twenty-first century. The historical and economic contexts are different, but maybe it is possible to state that, at that time, mega-events were a consequence that confirmed transformations in urban tissue. Now, these reformulations are requirements for mega-events and an entire industry that supports them.

Therefore, we show that the origin of the difficulty to think about a long-term urban planning policy in Rio comes from the past, because when a city is thought of as a recipient for international mega-events, the word ‘continuity’ does not exist; everything is constituted based on market interests, and the citizen becomes secondary. This contingent planning results in a city addressed to consumption in the logic of entertainment. In the development of an entertainment society,<sup>13</sup> the city is constituted as the stage of events, and, at the same time, turns into a commodity.

The strength of the Rio brand is exactly in its ability to adjust to several meanings, reflecting an empty society that keeps searching for references to be followed. The brand gives meaning to what is experienced, and is a guide for socially legitimate representations.

The brand name helps us prove that; think about how many meanings are attributed to the McDonald’s brand, and how many different images and meanings this name has carried since it appeared, in the 1930s. So, if objectively we know that the brand is hollow, on the other hand it is capable of incarnating a story and “printing it” in a well-defined picture, therefore recovering some sense of totality, which becomes essential at a historical time in which culture has become disposable. (Fontenelle, 2002, p. 296)

Therefore, the production of the commodity-city also involves the production of representations that accompany it. This city is conceived as a place where the private is declared, producing signs that seem to make consumption wishes and fantasies shaped by global values come true. In this context, it is not enough to reform the city physically; it is necessary to sell it and, by doing so, what is sold is an

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13 In reference to the approach of Guy Debord (1997).

updated image of it. This new urban management model allows us to understand that the so-called “global thinking” is no more than a varnish, a make-up of neoliberal ideology, and strategic planning is its aspect concerning urbanism.

The “commodity-city, product that is apparently concluded and translated in urban image, ready to enter information circuits and flow and international communication, does not allow to identify how its construction took place; its history seems to be hidden; its genesis, forgotten. According to Marx, guiding the look towards the genesis of merchandise allows to discover social, economic and cultural systems, power arrangements, hierarchy, games of interest that took place to build it. In effect, his known statement about the “commodity fetishism” seems to be adequate to what happens with cities transformed in images, which is the sphere of symbolic circulation. There, they fight against other images of cities that respond to the pressures of the modernizing rationality of globalization. In this process, qualitatively distinct cities may become equivalent or similar in their branding, in how they are promoted in the market. (Sánchez, 2010, p. 71)

Therefore, we point out some aspects for the logic of city-marketing: spatial changes (construction), changes in the city image (branding) and a justification that can seduce the population, building the official discourse and enabling profit to investors. Mega-events are central elements that enable this mechanism.

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