

The urban politics of sports mega-events in the Global South and North: domination and resistance in struggles over mega-events' development projects

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A new urban agenda based on and in the Global South has been demanded by scholars such as Jennifer Robinson (2002, 2014), Ananya Roy (2011, 2014) and Colin McFarlane (2012). They have been particularly highlighting the importance of urban issues that currently affect most of the world population but have not been addressed by Global North perspectives. Also recently some developing nations have been hosting sports mega-events, seemingly reversing a long term trend of winning bids from developed countries - the latter only hosted or will host one of the six FIFA World Cups and three of the five Summer Olympic Games in the twenty-first century. These changes create a new scenario that reinforces those demands made by current urban studies.

Targeting both problematics, the present paper aims to address issues of urban politics that are emerging in the Global South as neoliberal policies boosted by the attraction of sports mega-events encounter the highly unequal and informal environments of developing nations. By looking at how local governments have tried to avoid dissent during the implementation of large scale development projects associated with sports mega-events and how local communities have reacted to such initiatives, this work intends to analyse the particular ways in which political strategies and tactics of domination and resistance are taking shape under such conditions, contrasting them to those that have emerged in Global North host cities.

Using a theoretical framework that combines Gramscian (Gramsci, 1971) and Bourdieusian concepts (Bourdieu, 1989), the main research questions orienting this paper are: 1) how the combination between coercive and hegemonic strategies is

manifested in different cases of conflicts over development projects associated with sports mega-events? 2) how are the concrete actions underpinning these strategies taken by social agents in terms of their utilisation of economic, cultural and social capital? and 3) what are the possible correlations between their tactical/strategic options and the different levels of informality found in the Global South and North?

Empirical evidence is based on fieldwork recently undertaken by the author on four cases: the construction of the Olympic Parks for Rio 2016 and London 2012; and the regeneration projects related to the refurbishment of the Ellis Park Stadium in Johannesburg for the 2010 FIFA World Cup and the Maracanã Stadium in Rio de Janeiro for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. This allows a double analytical movement: a South-North comparison (Rio-London) and a South-South comparison (Rio-Johannesburg). The methodology consists of semi-structured interviews with community leaders, support groups and local government officials coupled with the analysis of policy documents, media files, and academic literature.

As a preliminary result, the author points out that keeping informal settlements as grey spaces (Yiftachel, 2009), which are sometimes considered as plannable and entitled to upgrading and other times as outlaw second class territories that don't deserve the same status given to formal areas, is key for the prevalence of coercive strategies in the Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg cases. The ambiguity and arbitrariness of informality as a mode of planning (Roy, 2005) creates room for a wide range of state coercion tools, which goes from law enforcement to intimidation, cooptation and the use of force itself.

On the other hand, the lack of such ambiguities in the London case, mostly represented by the right formally given to anyone for contesting and obstructing the Olympic Park plans through institutional arrangements specifically made for this purpose, points towards the predominance of hegemonic instruments over coercive means of domination. By establishing an "agreement to disagree", any potential dissenter can be dismissed by ideological tools within a framework designed and implemented by the State, leaving coercion, in the form of law enforcement, as a last resort.

However, the consequences of such strategies are varied and dependent on

other local historical conditions. The two Rio cases showed that resistance to development plans from affected communities has been partially successful, forcing the State to significantly compromise. This was mostly based on high levels of social capital, which allowed local communities to go much beyond their own economic and cultural capital limitations and “jump scales” (Smith, 1992), forming networks of resistance. Some similarities were found in the Johannesburg case, although in a minor degree, as the connections and bonds between actors of resistance were more limited. Conversely, the London case presented a lack of social capital leading to atomization and weakening of dissenters.

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