

## **Contemporary urbanization and simultaneous processes of urban concentration and urban sprawl: case study of Porto Maravilha Urban Operation**

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Contemporary urbanization is characterized by a new phenomenon, in which there is a simultaneous occurrence of both urban concentration and urban sprawl, mainly in metropolitan areas. This brings to new urban structures and new spatial forms, according to Gottdiener (1985), including both the redevelopment of downtown areas – with the renewal of historical, industrial and port areas – and urban growth and urban sprawl – characterized by new areas disconnected from the existing urban forms, interspersed with vacant land. Centralities are created or reinforced – becoming multiples, distributed and interconnected –, following the process of spatial decentralization (CASTELLS, 1996). These changes occur with a growth of highway systems, followed by a higher demand of housing, commerce and service to suburban and exurban areas, bringing downtown areas to a decline. Urban renewal of central areas can bring to its gentrification, which moves poorer residents out of urban areas into suburbs or more depressed areas – expanding even more the urbanization.

This indicates there is a change in the old Fordist metropolis and its socio-spatial organization, originating the contemporary Postmetropolis, whose urbanization process is structured by larger regional scales (SOJA, 2000). The urban configuration starts to be formed as “constellations” or “nebulae” of urban cores (REIS, 2006). Their sprawled and concentrated areas are connected through the transportation routes and through the information and communication networks.

Contemporary urbanization is characterized by emblematic projects, urban reconfiguration and major events – strategies of city marketing, whose objective is to restructure the cities to promote them and insert them in the globalized world. In order

to attract major investments, the cities are seen as commodities and as brands, and are often called “spectacle cities”.

City marketing strategies are expected to convey a sense of social belonging and self-esteem to the local population, and to help neutralizing conflicts and cultural differences among them. These elements are intended to include cities in the global competition for capital and investments, making the urbanization dominated by a “pensée unique” – consensual thinking. (ARANTES, VAINER, MARICATO, 2000) In this context, contemporary urban interventions tend to “stage” the cities, in which everything is consumable and contemplative. Local people are seen only as supporting actors following a script and forming a frequently manipulated mass. The concepts of society and consumerism merge and the notion of citizenship changes – as individuals start to be seen as consumers, and the city, as a market.

In Brazil, cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro suffered deindustrialization since the 1980s. Old Fordist industrial plants were closed or moved to metropolitan suburbs or further away. During the same time, there was an economic crisis happening in the country. Simultaneously, new centralities started to grow in expanding areas, attracting higher valuable activities to them (mainly commercial and service). These changes brought the old central areas to decay, followed by a decrease in its population. These cities urged to be restructured, and new economic functions needed to be created. In this scenario, emblematic projects and urban reconfiguration arose in Brazilian cities (apart from São Paulo, where it happened since the 1980s). Also, attempts by the cities to attract international major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games, started to happen.

In Rio de Janeiro, the “Operação Urbana Consorciada Porto Maravilha” (Porto Maravilha Urban Operation) was created to revitalize the old port area, which is part of the city downtown. The Operation was institutionalized in the end of 2009. Plans and laws, and a partnership with the private sector, were established to ensure the project’s implementation. The Operation was made possible through an administrative consortium (Public-Private Partnership) that was created to perform works and services and manage the area, including the public spaces and its services. The

prediction is that the entire region is transformed by 2016, just in time for the Olympic Games Rio 2016.

Like other emblematic projects, urban restructuring planned by Porto Maravilha is based on the development of new, representative buildings and interventions that tend to become new landmarks, which are created to be “symbols” of the project – and also to attract more private investments.

In this Operation, economics and politics are more important than the technical aspects. Therefore, social issues are forgotten, and local population’s lifestyles, along with their culture and identity, are not included in the intervention plans and projects. Moreover, the Operation had no clear instruments for popular participation. This was aggravated by government programmes and decisions implying the arbitrary removal of some favela’s residents, which were resettled in distant places that offer fewer options of commerce and service – and therefore do not offer the same life conditions to them. After six years since the starting of the Operation, a Social Housing Plan was finally established. This plan was created after all the land where the Operation is taking place was already divided into various lots by real state agencies.

This paper analyses Porto Maravilha Urban Operation in the context of the simultaneous processes of urban concentration and urban sprawl in the metropolis of Rio de Janeiro. The initial hypothesis is that the “revitalization” promoted by Porto Maravilha in its central area reinforces urban expansion, which increases both processes of urban concentration and urban sprawl.

The methodology of research consisted on a theoretical study about contemporary urbanization, especially about international models of emblematic projects and urban reconfiguration related to urban renewal and city marketing. In this paper, Porto Maravilha is characterized and has each of its elements analyzed. Afterwards, the paper will show how the Operation is in the present days. Field research that was conducted will also be presented, which will bring to a comprehension of its impacts and real legacy to the city.

The analysis results will bring to an overall understanding of the phenomena associated with contemporary urbanization. Also, they will add to the debate on emblematic projects, urban reconfiguration and major events, which transform the

cities in “businesses machines”. Such cities are seen not as places to live, but as places to consume – moreover, space and time are seen as products. These reflections are intended to help constructing new, alternative projects that incorporate popular participation effectively, and can be truly useful to local people interests.