

## **Porto Maravilha: Rio de Janeiro's port revitalization project in critical perspective**

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### PANEL

Helena Galiza

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This panel takes a critical look at Porto Maravilha, an emblematic yet highly controversial urban mega-project that seeks to revitalize Rio de Janeiro's old port district. Launched in 2009 as part of Olympic-related urban transformations, this project represents the largest public-private-partnership in Brazilian history. It aims to turn five square kilometers of devalued housing and industrial buildings into a world-class, upscale mixed-use entertainment district, through the stimulation of real estate activity, the construction of cultural facilities and the development of tourist attractions. Meant to be the city's new world class showcase, it wishes to attract upmarket businesses and residents, going as far as tripling its current population. Porto Maravilha encompasses five urban neighborhoods that have a rich yet fragile social, cultural and

ethnic history. The area was long known as “Little Africa”, home of the world’s most important slave market, and birthplace of many Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions such as samba and capoeira, which are both recognized by UNESCO as part of Brazil’s immaterial heritage. Once a dynamic commercial and industrial neighborhood, the area experienced a decline in its traditional activities during the second half of 20th century. Its low income residential character was accentuated by the conversion of properties and vacant sites into tenements and informal housing settlements. The communities who have long inhabited the port are now threatened by revitalization efforts that seek to exploit the architectural qualities of the local built environment and the cultural vibrancy of the area, and to draw upon their valuation potential. The panel thus investigates the rise of a new, exceptional, form of neoliberal urban regeneration in the Latin American landscape, that combines an event-led redevelopment strategy related to the 2016 Olympics with a cultural regeneration model. This approach is characterized by a form of politico-legal exceptionalism, marked by an increasingly authoritarian mode of governance, that legitimizes the imposition of exceptional measures and derogations in order to accelerate the regeneration process. Drawing upon David Harvey, Neil Smith, Sharon Zukin and other critical urban theorists, the panel discusses the impacts of this approach, in terms of population displacement, gentrification, heritage conservation, social polarization and the commodification of urban space. It discusses the role of this entrepreneurial approach in the reconfiguration of power relations at the local level, with the growing involvement of private sector actors and other non-elected participants in decision-making. It demonstrates how this new planning model fosters an exclusive vision of urban regeneration that can open the way for the state-assisted privatization of the urban realm, reconfigure the urban landscape to serve the needs of capital and exacerbate socio-spatial segregation. Together, the five papers included in this multidisciplinary and multinational panel attempt to paint the most complete picture possible of the many struggles, tensions and opportunities faced by different actors implicated in this project. Each of the papers approaches Porto Maravilha from a different angle : Helena Galiza will discuss issues related to public policy regarding housing and evictions ; Yue Zhang will talk of the conservation of material and immaterial heritage ; João Monteiro will



explain urban policy and legislation issues; Julia Andrade will focus on the Port's social and racial history; Anne-Marie Broudehoux and Fernanda Sánchez will jointly discuss aspects related to the instrumentalization of culture and urban image construction. The panel also aims to raise important questions about urban redevelopment in the twenty-first century city, at a time when innovation is valued, especially in the urban field. Each paper will underline innovative ways in which the problems posed by urban redevelopment could be alleviated and thus result in a more equal, just and safe urban environment for all. Participants: Anne-Marie Broudehoux – University of Quebec at Montreal – UQAM - Chair Helena Galiza - Rio de Janeiro's Federal University – UFRJ Yue Zhang - Chicago's University of Illinois - UIC João Monteiro - University of Quebec at Montreal – UQAM Julia Andrade - Rio de Janeiro's State University - UERJ Fernanda Sánchez - Niteroi's Federal Fluminense University – UFF