



The city and the sea: reflexions about Rio de Janeiro's port region

A cidade e o mar: reflexões sobre a região portuária do Rio de Janeiro

La ciudad y el mar: reflexiones sobre la región portuaria de Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract

The port of Rio de Janeiro faced two major urban transformations – the Passos Reform (early 20th century) and the Porto Maravilha project (21st century), the latter as part of the legacy of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Port regions around the world have undergone conversion processes to tourism and leisure places. In Porto Maravilha, cultural spaces have been built, such as Museu do Rio and Museu do Amanhã, besides an Aquarium (AquaRio) and a huge Ferris Wheel. But how has this project impacted the environment, more specifically Guanabara Bay? How does the port region ‘dialogue’ with Guanabara Bay? We aim to understand how the waterfront has been incorporated into the urban renewal project through a brief historical research.

Keywords: Rio de Janeiro; Guanabara Bay; Port; Porto Maravilha; Urban Regeneration.

Resumo

O porto da cidade do Rio de Janeiro sofreu duas grandes transformações urbanas – a Reforma Passos (início do século XX) e o projeto Porto Maravilha (século XXI), esse como parte do legado dos Jogos Olímpicos Rio 2016. Entre esses dois momentos, as regiões portuárias no mundo passaram por processos de conversão para lugares de turismo e de lazer. No caso do Porto Maravilha, foram construídos espaços culturais, como Museu do Rio e Museu do Amanhã, além do Aquário Marinho do Rio (Aquário) e de uma roda gigante. Mas, e o meio ambiente, mais especificamente a Baía de Guanabara, como ela foi (é) impactada nesse projeto? Como a região portuária ‘dialoga’ com a Baía de Guanabara? Nosso objetivo é, por meio de uma breve pesquisa histórica, entender de que forma a frente d’água foi incorporada ao projeto de renovação urbana.

Palavras-chave: Rio de Janeiro; Baía de Guanabara; Zona Portuária; Porto Maravilha; Transformação Urbana.

Resumen

El puerto de la ciudad de Río de Janeiro pasó por dos grandes transformaciones urbanas: la Reforma de Passos (principios del siglo XX) y el proyecto Porto Maravilha (siglo XXI), este último como parte del legado de los Juegos Olímpicos de Río 2016. Regiones portuarias en el mundo han pasado por procesos de conversión a lugares de turismo y ocio. En el caso de Porto Maravilha, se construyeron espacios culturales, como el Museu do Rio y el Museu do Amanhã, además del Acuario de Rio Marinho (AquaRio) y una noria. Pero, ¿qué pasa con el medio ambiente, más específicamente la Bahía de Guanabara, impactada por este proyecto? ¿Cómo ‘dialoga’ la región portuaria con la Bahía de Guanabara? Nuestro objetivo es, a través de una breve investigación histórica, comprender cómo se incorporó la costanera al proyecto de renovación urbana.

Palabras clave: Rio de Janeiro; Bahía de Guanabara; Puerto; Porto Maravilha; Transformación Urbana.



INTRODUCTION

Since it is common to all, the interaction between peoples has always been done through the sea, with the oceans being one of the main factors responsible for the territories formed in contemporary times. For Polónia and Antunes (2016), the large business flows and their financial movements (both internal and external) were signed in ports, areas of vital importance for contemporary world development. As gateways for other people, the port's interior had an operational structure with warehouses and production arsenals, forming a system of economic, political, social, and cultural forces. Honorato (2011) highlights the intense amount of people's movement in the ports, whether permanent – residents and local workers – or transient, formed by workers from different parts of the world, generating a rich exchange of lived experiences.

Over time – along with the city itself formation – a “port community” was developed, that is, a heterogeneous group of people, including traders (large and small), business owners related to food, lodging, entertainment, as well as port workers (stevedores, ushers, masters, etc.), workers, shopkeepers, casual workers, handymen. In short, the whole range of people who depend, directly or indirectly, on port activity varies historically [. . .] (Honorato, 2011, p. 124).

In this context, it should be noted that, in 2001 (under Mayor Cesar Maia's management), Rio's port area was contemplated with a restructuring project, which served as the “Porto Maravilha” project embryo (an integral part of Rio 2016 Olympic Games legacy). Massey (2008) associates urban space evolution with the place's history, shaped by man with his relationships and city differentiations. The site must be evaluated continuously, not just by specific time frames. The city presents an intense relationship network, with numerous identification processes, socioeconomic differences, and racial prejudices, which generate inequalities, severe problems, and conflicts in cities, as Rosendahl and Côrrea (1998) pointed out. Halbwachs (2006) says that memory is social and collective and directly relates to society and thought. Massey (2008) complements the reasoning by stating that, due to its complexity, space will never have all established interconnections and interconnected places. Places with vast historical richness have marks of their communities, as highlighted by Santos and Coelho (2009). Therefore, port regions undergo revitalization processes without respect for their identity characteristics (following only the dictates and aspects imposed by globalization) and undergo a process of de-characterization. For the municipal technocracy, a city would be “global” if

configured as a “node” or “nodal point” between the national economy and the world Market, bringing together in its territory a large number of transnational companies whose economic activities were concentrated in the specialized



services and high technology sector to the detriment of industrial activities (Reis, 2017, p. 116).

Most of the world's population lives approximately 50 km from the coast, about 2/3, according to the UN. Therefore, the relationship of coastal cities with the sea needs to change. It is necessary to review your planning given the sea level rise and the extensive climate changes that have been taking place. Aiming to complement the reasoning, Marques (2003) highlighted at the beginning of the 21st century that, currently, 40% of the beaches are buffeted by some erosive process and lose ground to the sea, while 10% of the Brazilian coast occurs the opposite – the sand advances over the ocean, a phenomenon called progradation –, according to the first national survey conclusions in the coastal profile.¹

Although the sea is essential in the city's formation historical process (including the fact that it has oil and gas reserves and provides medicinal compounds from sea creatures), Beatley (2014) mentions that society still does not understand the fundamental importance of the sea, because its environment is still unknown in many aspects, presenting itself as a nature element that is close and far from man at the same time.

This article reflects on how civil society in Rio de Janeiro interacts with the sea (in this case, Guanabara Bay) based on the city's port region (specifically the Porto Maravilha project). This study also presents contributions regarding the speeches and communication practices related to Porto Maravilha, regarding the introduction of new landscapes for the "Rio de Janeiro tourist menu," based on the premise that the urban transformation process in the port region aimed to turn it into a "reference for the city" (Porto Maravilha website), and this discourse necessarily involves culture appropriation as a value, either through history rescue or new cultural landscape invention. As an essential point of discussion in this article, we are interested in understanding how (or if) the process of the urban regeneration of the degraded area of the port has included its waterfront – the Guanabara Bay, improving "the connection between the city and the sea," as the discourse of the seafront project in Genoa, Italy (Florian, 2022).

It should be emphasized that this article is an integral part of the Doctoral thesis entitled "The City and the Sea: Urban Enhancement Interventions with a Focus on Aquarium," defended by Alessandra de Figueiredo Tarcsay in August 2021 at the Post-Graduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism (PPGAU) of the Fluminense Federal University (UFF), which received Capes' (Improvement of Higher Education Personnel Coordination) funding for practically two years, throughout the doctorate.

1 Available at: <https://revistapesquisa.fapesp.br/as-praias-perdidas/>. Access on: Feb 23., 2023.



Guanabara Bay: Rio de Janeiro's city "toothless mouth"

Surrounded by its rocks and islands, with geological formations dating back thousands of years, full of coves and mangroves in times when its waters were clear, with the Atlantic Forest spreading green in every corner and vast land and sea fauna, Guanabara Bay has always been a wonder object on the part of those who see it for the first time.²

Bathing the city of Rio and several municipalities in Rio's Metropolitan Region, Guanabara Bay is also home to the Sugarloaf Mountain, which "became a fundamental part of reference for identifying the city, as it is located at the most extreme point, on the left side of the bay entrance" (Perrotta, 2015, p. 172). According to the Rio Memórias website, when referring to the city's landscape, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Straus defined Guanabara Bay as a "toothless mouth," as shown below:

After that, I feel even more embarrassed to talk about Rio de Janeiro, which I dislike despite its often-celebrated beauty. How shall I say? Rio's landscape seems not on the scale of its dimensions. Sugarloaf, Corcovado, all these highly praised spots appear to the traveler who penetrates the bay like stumps of lost teeth in the four corners of a toothless mouth.³

In this context, it is worth emphasizing the Tupi Guarani origin of the word "guaná," which can be translated as "the breast from which the sea springs." In other words,

the language gave its name to Guanabara Bay, which bathes and makes history in Rio de Janeiro's state. The waters (which accompanied Tupinambás and Tamoios indigenous peoples' occupation and saw the Portuguese arrival in Brazil lands) also helped to build the carioca identity. Still, today, they are the consequences portrait that the globalized metropolis model construction can bring to the nature surrounding it. Negligence and human intervention have stained one of Rio's greatest postcards.⁴

Environmental issues in the Guanabara Bay are complex. Its accelerated urbanization negatively affected both terrestrial and aquatic natural environments since external agents contaminate local organisms, altering the region's air, soil, and water. From 1960, Rio's state demographic growth underwent a boom in

2 Available at: <https://riomemorias.com.br/memoria/da-mais-bela-a-boca-banguela-a-baia-de-guanabara-sob-olhares-do-mundo/>. Access on: 23 Feb., 2023.

3 Available at: <https://riomemorias.com.br/memoria/da-mais-bela-a-boca-banguela-a-baia-de-guanabara-sob-olhares-do-mundo/>. Access on: 23 Feb., 2023.

4 Available at: <https://riomemorias.com.br/memoria/da-mais-bela-a-boca-banguela-a-baia-de-guanabara-sob-olhares-do-mundo/>. Access on: 23 Feb., 2023.



terms of urbanization and industrialization, and, due to an inefficiency in many surrounding municipalities collection, the beaches and islands. And the bottom of the bay received intense waste (Amador, 2013).

Despite the news that occurred on social networks reporting cleaner waters impression during the Covid-19 pandemic, what happened, according to Bragança (2020), was that it was a high tide cycle season, where the waters may appear to be cleaner. The UFRJ Hydrobiology Laboratory coordinator, Rodolfo Paranhos, mentions in an interview with Daniele Bragança that, in addition to the high tide, there were two storm surges in the bay in April 2020. The numerous sewage and garbage evictions continued to occur.

Sergio Ricardo, founder of the Baía Viva movement, in an article for Diário do Rio (2020), pointed out that, in addition to the tidal cycle, what may have led to this impression was the considerable decrease in maritime flow – there is around 10.000/year in the bay. In case of a possible industrial and petroleum residue reduction, these data could only be proven by water sample reports from Inea, which were suspended at the time.

The contamination sources are numerous: untreated sewage that discharges organic matter and pathogenic microorganisms, heavy metals, visible solid waste, and high numbers. This situation is observed in the rivers that flow into the bay and its beaches; neglect affects everyone. The recent report by Inea (2022) presented an average for Guanabara Bay's water quality during 2014-2021, in which none of the 13 analyzed points showed good and excellent indexes: seven points obtained a worst quality index, nine a bad situation, and five regular. With the report presented, it is proven that the problem has only worsened over the years.

It should be noted that the ports, in the 20th century, began to develop separately from the city; with technological advancement, maritime activities have undergone significant changes, such as the requirement for a smaller number of workers, which has led to several ports around the world abandonment and degradation, as pointed out by Monié and Vasconcelos (2019). In this sense, it is worth asking: in the face of the new reality, how will the restructuring projects of port regions aimed at tourism serve local communities?

Polónia (2008) affirms that it is essential that urban transformations in port regions understand and respect their construction model, historical formation, and evolution over the years. Regeneration projects in the port areas must avoid globalized characteristics and respect their built heritage, culture, religion, and current economy. These regions tend to worsen if these factors are not analyzed and understood. Table 1 below illustrates the elements of political lines of investigation considering governance and urban and environmental factors. It can be noticed that the items listed must act together, i.e., by communing its space with the city, the port needs to meet the following factors: local political



connections, adequate urban planning, and geoeconomic and geomorphological constitutions (Table 1).

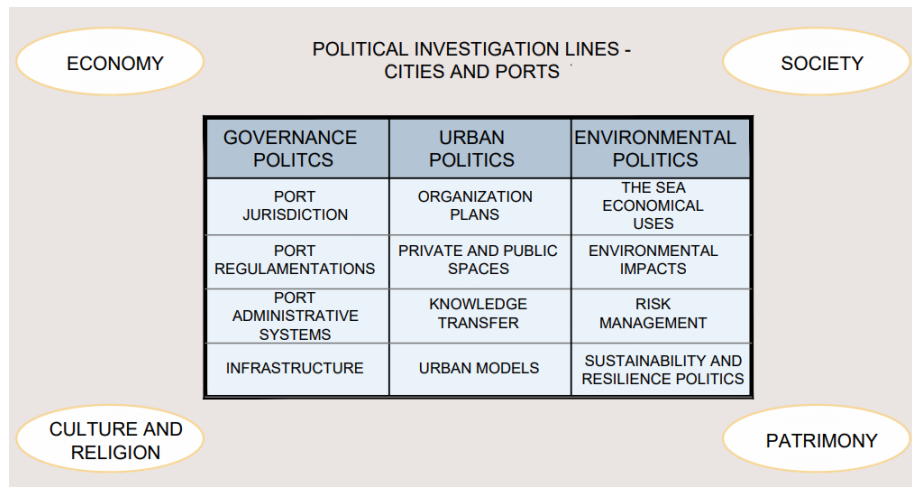


Table 1: Political Investigation Lines: Cities and Ports. Source: adapted from Tarcsay (2021) based on Polónia's (2008) presentation.

However, gentrification and many existing measurement practices in the area that comprises the port area commonly erupt under the demands of the “global city,” as discussed below.

The transformations occurred in Rio de Janeiro’s port region and Porto Maravilha

The connection between Rio’s municipality and the sea is evident. The city’s coastline allowed vessels to stop along the coast, facilitating product loading/unloading, which led to its foundation in the 16th century. With that, over time, the port community was establishing itself in the place, as mentioned by Honorato (2011). And, next to the city’s central area, the port function started to be always present; and, while it was susceptible to attacks at the beginning of its colonization, it gained prominence as the country’s largest gold exporter. Analyzing the dark and sad side of its history, the city was known for its slave trade market.

It is worth noting that, over the years, Guanabara Bay’s natural look has been drastically altered, with floodplains, mangrove drainage, and the consequent impact on rivers and lakes. The terrain was rugged next to the port region, with islands, cliffs, and coves, which fishermen initially inhabited. Throughout the 18th century, Amador (1997) mentions wharves, warehouse construction in Rio’s city, and protected anchorages in its coves, such as Valongo, which received enslaved people.



Due to the Portuguese court's arrival in 1808, the region's scenario gradually changed. Honorato (2011) highlights Dom João VI's concern to stimulate transport development, shipbuilding manufacture, and the so-called native ports improvement, mainly with ships' free movement after the ports opening on January 28, 1808. Despite this, the port region did not grow significantly, and changes occurred gradually. In this urban transformation process, Amador (1997) points out that the environmental damage was countless, with landfills and dissections, the decrease in the several coves, gables, estuaries, beaches, islands, and islets, which were disfigured or destroyed (and many islands ended up being incorporated into the mainland by landfills). At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Rio de Janeiro commanded the country's port activities. For Rabha (2006), the region underwent its first major significant change with Pereira Passos' renovation which affected several areas of the city (including bringing a massive landfill with pieces of Castelo Mountain to the port area). It was responsible for the operations port displacement to the Caju neighborhood, which already had more modern mooring points for the time.

Santos (2011) points out that, at the time, the concern was Spanish flu and malaria growth cases in ports (as occurred in Santos, which suffered a ban on its operations due to the diseases). Because it was very strangled, the port region needed to support large vessels. The local population, numerous at the beginning of the 20th century and very concentrated in the hills (such as Providência), was ignored. This time became known as the "demolitions era" (Honorato, 2011) and arrived concerned with roads opening and widening.

Rabha (2006, p. 252) points out that

facilities at Gamboa Pier were the great port Project of the early 20th century, with 3.150m, 20 berths, a draft of 7 to 10.30m, and 18 internal warehouses with 60.000 m² and 16.000 m² of uncovered área. Still, they lagged port operation and logistics with more modern concepts.

In the 1970s, changes in the port's operational logistics led to a user outflow and a smaller employee number, which resulted in the area's isolation from the rest of the city. Another scenario emerged for Rio's port a century after the transformations in port regions worldwide, as Honorato (2011) points out. Consolidated traditional structures, previously necessary, were replaced by containers and the implementation of new transport logistics. The 10m bay draft, which could reach 13m with effort and dredging, became an operational constraint for large grain and oil tankers. From then on, oil pipelines were built to supply the Duque de Caxias Refinery (Reduc), belonging to Petrobras' system. Located on Guanabara Bay shores, it is important to emphasize that Reduc is one of the companies that most pollute the bay, responsible for oils and other toxic substances irregularly depositing in its waters. In 2019, the Federal Public



Prosecutor's office even asked for Reduc to be condemned for the pollution caused by the company in the bay.⁵

After several attempts and projects to regenerate the region, several warehouses released along the coast by Docas do Rio de Janeiro Company resulted in the "Porto Maravilha" project implementation (Figure 1). For Santos and Porto (2021, p. 38), in the 21st century, the city's port region underwent a new restructuring process under former mayor César Maia's administration, which served as Porto Maravilha project embryo, part of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games legacy.

Then, changes in the master plan (dated in 1992), the primary instrument of urban policy for municipal development, were implemented in the port region in 2009 by complementary law nº 101, which instituted the Urban Consortium Operation (OUC) of Rio de Janeiro port, the first one approved by the City Council. Its execution was based on a flexible urban plan with concessions, benefits, counterparts, and civil society participation. It is an urban intervention and regulation of the real estate market. The nature of a legal order is procedural, and its content enables it to acquire the "urban undertaking" title (Castriota, 2009).

A Public-Private Partnership (PPP) was established in which public payments remunerate the private sector. Established by the municipality, the Urban Development Company of the Rio de Janeiro Port Region (Cdurp) is the City Council's Urban Consortium Operation Porto Maravilha manager. Cdurp is responsible for coordinating the other public and private bodies and the Porto Novo Concessionaire, composed of three companies – Odebrecht, OAS, and Carioca Engenharia, responsible for carrying out the regeneration project and services in the Rio de Janeiro port region.

Figure 1 shows the project's main focus section, with the sorts of use in different colors, the color typology of the main roads in the region, and their main kinds of users. To carry out the "Porto Maravilha" project, there is again the concern with road improvements, leading to the demolition of Avenida Perimetral, replaced by two arterial roads: Via Binário do Porto and the Marcelo Alencar tunnel (green on the map). Initially, the Perimetral would be demolished up to Praça Mauá, where the tunnel would emerge, and the road would continue as the primary access to the Gasometer. Due to this alteration, Orla Conde was inaugurated, connecting cultural spots initially included in the project.

5 Available at: <https://www.mpf.mp.br/rj/sala-de-imprensa/noticias-rj/mpf-pede-a-condenacao-da-reduc-pr-poluicao-na-baia-de-guanabara>. Access on: Feb 23 2023.



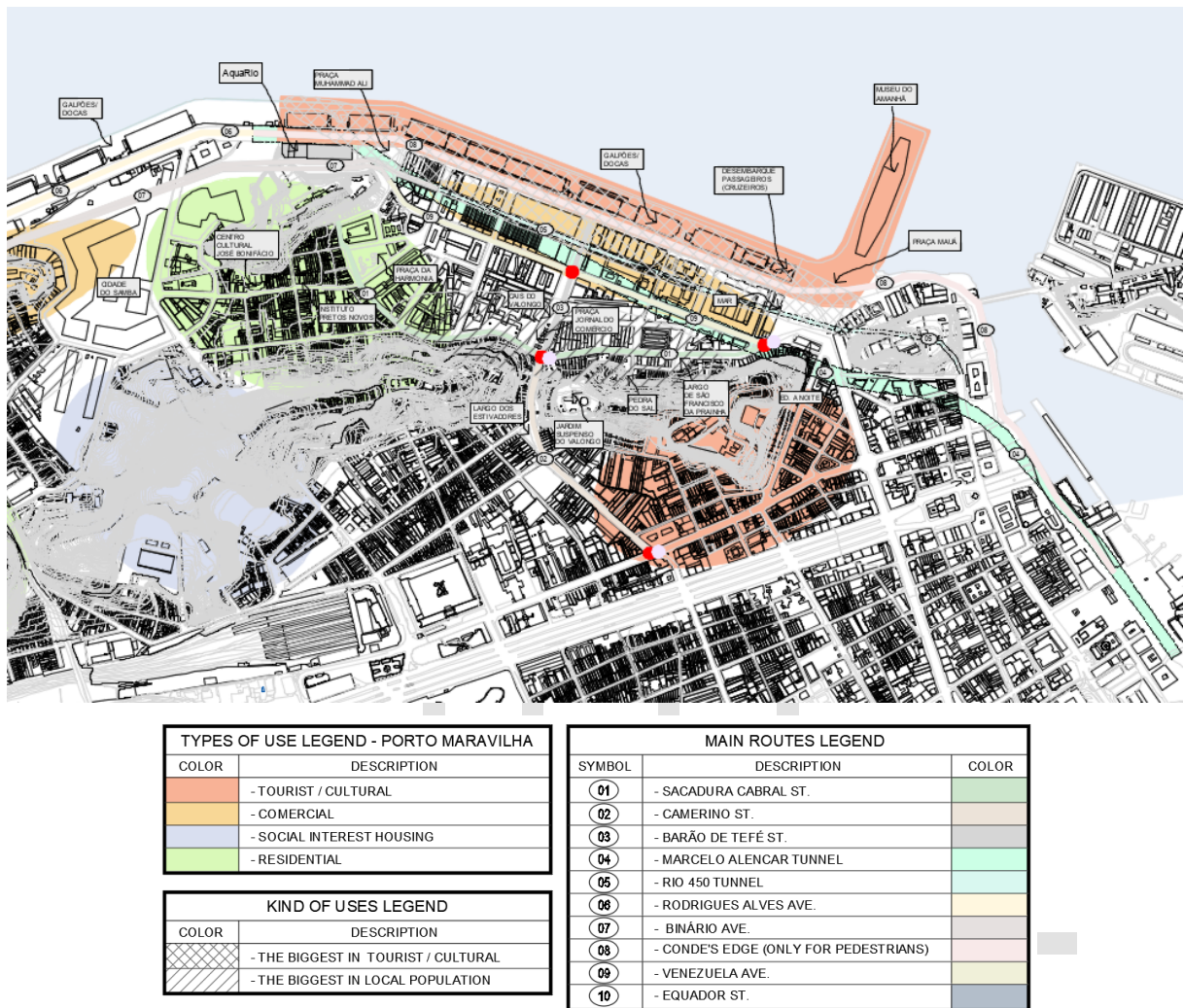


Figure 1: Port Region: Porto Maravilha Project (partial). Source: adapted from Tarcsay (2021).

As a mobility option for the regenerated, the Light Rail Vehicle (VLT in Portuguese) was created, integrating all public transport modes, which only occurred in 2019. However, the VLT fare value is still high (and it is equivalent to the municipal bus ticket price), thus hindering people with lower purchasing power mobility. Currently, there are three lines in operation, well below the six lines initially proposed. Thus, the VLT is practically used by workers on their lunch break, as quoted by Franco (2017).

The VLT integrates several touristic structures and monuments, such as MAR (Museu de Arte do Rio), Museu do Amanhã, and AquaRio, which is quite essential. Santos and Porto (2021, p. 48-49) mention that museums “seem to update the image of the port and the city of Rio de Janeiro through tourist consumption, considering the flow of visitors to both institutions and the occupation of Praça Mauá.” The main tourist buildings are in Figure 1, such as the Historic and Archaeological Circuit of African Heritage, inaugurated in November 2011 as part of a public policy to value the memory and protection of this cultural heritage.

However, few regional commercial, residential, and social support structures do not generate connections to the new space. In a severe economic and financial crisis scenario, the Cepacs (Construction Additional Potential Certificates), created with encouraging private sector real estate investment promise, did not go as expected. According to Mesentier and Moreira (2014), such a fact occurred with the monument's appreciation as cultural assets, being treated as small theme parks and attracting many tourists from different regions, which caused a gentrification process. The area redefinition was only possible due to the local population takeover in the region, aiming to "call consuming public attention." Sant'Anna (2017) addresses the importance that a place dedicated only to tourist attractions does not seek to preserve the region but rather "take advantage" of the heritage history and beauty to shape it according to their interests.

The urban regeneration process in Rio de Janeiro's port area must contemplate an integrated action, including social, cultural, economic, environmental, and urban-territorial dimensions (Vilares, 2003; Moura *et al.*, 2006). These multifaceted problems in urban areas (Moura *et al.*, 2006) still need to be resolved. We have, for example, the chronic pollution of Guanabara Bay, the gentrification process of port neighborhoods, and the 'invention' of new landscapes, such as the new Praça Mauá.

CONCLUSIONS

As highlighted by the 2010 census, Rio de Janeiro's metropolitan region is the largest urban coastal agglomeration, with 11.5 million inhabitants, as mentioned by Nobre (2011). But Rio's city suffers from socioeconomic inequality and, in its evolutionary process, displaced the population with lower purchasing power away from the urban center, without sanitary infrastructure, causing sewage to be often dumped in rivers and the Bay, which also suffers from numerous "dumps" around.

If, on the one hand, Porto Maravilha has gathered many interventions to transform its urban space into a tourist hub, with entertainment and leisure anchors, such as Museu do Amanhã and Museu do Rio, and a 'touch' of local culture, with the Historical and Archaeological Circuit of the African Heritage, and has undergone abrupt changes in road network, which have imposed a new occupational urban network, on the other hand, the project has not included a new perception of Guanabara Bay, nor the port itself. The commercial port, owned by the Union, has not been incorporated into the Public-Private Partnership. Part of the Olympic legacy, just like Porto Maravilha, the de-pollution of Guanabara Bay did not occur. Unfortunately, in the region's urban operation, the integration among the port's logistics services, the social and cultural memory, projects aimed at the environment, the local development, and the number of resident population before Porto Maravilha cannot be seen.



It is worth noting that the formation process and port region's urban evolution were not adequately concerned with environmental issues, which need to be present in any urban planning, regardless of the desired objective (Bush, Doyon, 2019), and this is a challenge to improve life quality in cities. As Modai-Snir and Van Ham (2018) pointed out, towns with accelerated growth generate profound social inequality, thus resulting in numerous environmental impacts, as observed in Rio's municipality. Therefore, an urban restructuring process, such as Poto Maravilha, needs to be planned in an integrated way, considering social, cultural, and environmental bias. The point for future research is: due to the economic and financial crisis that has affected the city of Rio de Janeiro after the Olympic Games and Covid-19 (which has reshaped the workplaces in the central and port region), what will happen to the Porto Maravilha project?

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