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## Branding Brazilian slums through 'freeware' cultural production: the case of Rio de Janeiro

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# Branding Brazilian slums through "freeware" cultural production: the case of Rio de Janeiro

## P. Tourism, cultural and creative industries and regional development

Antonio Russo (1)

This paper reflects on a “cultural industry model” with important potential for local development, which is the network of independent cultural producers of Brazilian slums.

The landscape of *favelas* is unique: plagued by poverty and crime, they have come to encapsulate the worst aspects of chaotic urban growth in Latin American cities, and are consequently reified as spaces violating the “social norms” of sustainable urban development. Maybe more in Rio de Janeiro than in any other Brazilian or Latin-American cities, *favelas* are nevertheless important components of an urban cultural landscape of outstanding value, but just as difficult to conceptualise. They are also a unique form of informal urbanisation, and – as pointed out by a critical current of political scientists – they have affirmed as spaces of social emancipation and resistance.

Recognising the social value of Rio’s *favelas* brings us to explore the way in which they have been developing as spaces of creative expression, according to a peculiar model anchored on freeware and hacker culture, and receiving the support of the federal government’s cultural policy. This model made a remarkable change in the way they came to be “legitimised” by the metropolitan society above the criminalising discourses of mainstream commercial media. The free cultural products of *favelas* promote community pride, recognition and visibility, and ultimately inclusion, but also job creation in its peculiar consumption filiere, especially when the potential as “tourist brand” is taken into account.

For this reason, short-circuiting a “creative” creative industry development policy, UNESCO’s landscape protection strategy, and the (increasingly ambitious) Rio de Janeiro agenda of tourism development and place marketing, has become of paramount importance for making a giant step out of the poverty issue, and in this sense Rio could serve as a template for the whole Latin American continent, to say the least.

*Key words:* Creative production, hackerism, slums, urban development, tourism, branding

*JEL codes:* Z10, Z13, R30

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Large cities in Latin America may well have been the cradle of post-colonial national societies, but at least since the beginning of the 20th century they have also concentrated the direst effects of uneven development, becoming the living image of democratic deficit (De Oliveira and Roberts 1996; Hoffmann and Centeno 2003; Davis 2006). The progressive concentration of “urban problems” in those areas also meant that the crisis of the 1990s has hit these areas hardest, accelerating their decline and inducing in some cases a reaction by progressive city governments who started to elaborate strategies for revitalization and regeneration, though, for the most part, these projects remained on paper or gave results below expectations (see Sosa 2010, for the case of Buenos Aires; Segre 2004, for the case of Rio de Janeiro; and Alves 2008, for case of Sao Paulo).

The recent turn in Latin American politics coincides with a watershed period in which the largest Latin American countries, mostly untouched by the global financial crisis, are growing at “tiger” pace. Brazil had one of the fastest growing economies throughout the 2000s decade, touching yearly rates of 8 percent; Argentina seems to be finally recovering from the debt and inflation problems that plunged the country into a deep social crisis by the mid-1990s and is now following on Brazil’s steps; and Colombia, on the way to improving its image as a safe investment location, has boosted its exports of primary resources to levels unseen in this century. Cities like São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Medellin, Porto Alegre and Santiago are not only and not anymore the culmination and gateways of national industrial systems, but are rapidly diversifying their economies and accomplishing their own ways of transition to post-Fordism.

In this favourable context, cities are bound to regain a new type of centrality, in different forms from the postcolonial epoch and in a different relation with the rest of the world than in the past, similarly to what happened in many other European and North American cities in the last decades. This change, of which evident signs are already tangible, has potentially profound social implications and is stirring the debate around claims for a more just urban society. Social movements with the most intense relations with local and national politics are pre-eminently urban and are very active in claiming their “right to the city”: the most evident aspects of transition to a post-Fordist economy take place in cities, which concentrate the creative workforce that sustains such economic change.

Tourism development is hardly alien to those transformations, and may even have a positive role in accompanying the process of transition and regeneration of Latin American cities: either for making them open, appreciated and loved to the world, and so triggering new “bilateral” global connections, or because much emphasis is given in official discourses by regional governments and international organizations to tourism development as a “greening”, “including”, “pacifying” strategy that promises to exert profound effects on the urban reality.

This chapter explores a specific angle of this broad issue, specifically the way in which sectors of the Latin America urban communities that identify with their degraded living settlements – the slums or *favelas* – are negotiating their legitimacy and inclusion as urban stakeholders through a powerful branding of their creative expression. They do

so by adopting a new discourse by which the products of creativity, such as popular art, new media and events, are freely produced and consumed by anybody and distributed globally, thus sidestepping the cultural boundaries erected throughout the modern period by the “white” bourgeoisie and their institutional media, and fully embracing a post-Fordist paradigm of acquiring information, recoding and sharing it, but from a grassroots perspective.

These creative products have the potential to reconnect disadvantaged communities to urban development, for instance through tourism, which is increasingly pursuing breaks with such creative landscapes, or through the cultural industries, which may come to integrate them horizontally, achieving multiple objectives, such as inclusion and emancipation, a genuine “sanitization” of slum areas, and a new brand for Latin America as one containing smart and sustainable places based on the recognition and valorisation of difference. These insights are based on field research conducted by me in 2010 in Rio de Janeiro, one of the most emblematic places of this “cultural shift” in development politics.

## **2. RIO DE JANEIRO: THE WORLD OF *FAVELAS* VS THE CORPORATE TOURIST CITY**

The city of Rio de Janeiro is home to approximately 6,100,000 inhabitants. As such, it is the second city of Brazil after São Paulo, the third largest in Latin America and among the world’s ten largest cities. Its metropolitan area, including 19 municipalities in the Fluminense region, contains more than 11 million people, ranking it twenty-first in the world. It is the capital of the Rio de Janeiro State, and has been the capital of Brazil from 1822 to 1960.

In the early 20th century, Rio was assuming the traits of a world city, where the taste for high culture and fashion (absorbed from Europe) fused with the rich popular culture of the former African slaves and the descendants of the Portuguese into a kaleidoscopic environment, involving designed streetscapes and manicured natural areas, important theatre and musical productions, and a vivid intellectual scene, side by side with the frantic rhythms of samba and a penchant for street life. This unique cultural landscape<sup>1</sup> caught the attention of the world elites and nurtured an imagery that contributes to this date to affirm Rio as a “world brand” and an exotic tourist destination.

In the last 30 years many manufacturers have moved to regions with better access to the market and labour conditions. Besides, key administrative functions were lost out to Brasilia when the capital moved there 50 years ago, breaking down a large part of the “bureaucracy economy” of the city. The end of a 20-year military regime in the mid-1970s put added pressure for economic recovery, but Rio has been lagging behind

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<sup>1</sup> This term, introduced by geographer Carl Sauer in 1925, refers to the process of fashioning “from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result” (Sauer 1925). In the case of this study, the medium should be understood as the urban area; indeed “urban cultural landscapes” are a preservation category for UNESCO.

in the development of advanced services to replace traditional functions, widely overcome by São Paulo as a “global city” well positioned within the web of the knowledge economy.

The problems of urban violence contributed significantly to the decline of Rio’s allure, reflecting an objective escalation of criminality which occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s, but also an increasing preoccupation of the middle classes for their personal security, and possibly the mounting pressure by capital and “power coalitions” to eradicate the problem altogether through the forced removal of *favelas*. In fact, as violent crime rates have wavered over recent years, the space they occupy in the media seems to be constantly on the rise. This general feeling of unsafety contributed to chasing away visitors and international investors, and aligned Rio with other Latin American cities in the trend toward the suburbanization and fencing of middle-class livelihoods, eroding substantially the “carioca” traditional lifestyle based on mixedness and street-life.

However, in the last decade things started to change: as Brazil is on the verge of joining the club of the world’s economic powerhouses, things for Rio look even rosier. New ambitious projects that should reinforce the economic outlook of the city have been recently presented, channelling the equivalent of some \$80 billion of private investments into the state economy (more than half of it in the petrochemical complex) in the 2010–12 period. Only a small part of this investment (\$3 billion) will fall on the city proper, but it still represents an important lever for the transformation of the economy and for urban development, like the urbanization of *favelas*.

Tourism is already strong of Rio, but in spite of its natural and cultural assets, already attracting 2.7 million arrivals into the city, it is the oncoming sports mega-events of 2014 (the soccer World Cup, whose final will be played in Rio, and whose headquarters will be based there) and 2016 (Olympics) that promise to represent key turning points for the city economy, for which the successful organization of the Pan American Games of 2007 has produced a demonstrable effect.<sup>2</sup> These events are also expected to achieve a “scale jump” in the international positioning of Rio and enhance its far-from-good transport and accommodation infrastructure with a new airport terminal and an extension of the underground rail network.

Another important *grand projet* is the renovation of the port area which connects the downtown of Rio with its northern shore. This could be considered the realization of the strategic plan “Porto Maravilha” (see Fig. 1) endorsed at the beginning of the 2000s, based on an in-depth analysis of Rio’s weaknesses and opportunities in the face of global changes. The plan was designed to create a fresh city brand for Rio, involving the renovation of its waterfront, to be refurbished and partly reconstructed around an “edutainment” complex. The present alignment of political orientations at all three governance levels (national, state and city) has finally given way to the first lot of works, counting on a \$1.7 billion financial backup from the federal government, and

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<sup>2</sup> While the occupancy rate went down a good 10 percent in the last decade, it caught up slightly in 2010 to an estimated average annual rate of 75–77 percent, and Rio, as mentioned above, is leading again the ranking of the most visited cities. Visits to all the main attractions have increased during the last year, as have international arrivals at the airport (up 10 percent in the same period).

including all sorts of iconic “cultural” facilities such as a poly-functional building by “starchitect” Santiago Calatrava, luxury property, tourist and commercial facilities as well as social housing projects and education and research facilities.

**Fig. 1 – Location of Rio’s *favelas* and main redevelopment projects**



It is nevertheless today acknowledged that progression in the construction of a more solid, “global” economic outlook cannot proceed separate to the solution of the city’s dire social problems (Urani 2008), although there is still a strong debate on whether the ongoing “corporatization” of the city should come first and be a lever for the reduction of poverty, or whether the latter issue should be given priority over boosterist development on ethical as well as sustainability grounds.

The first signs of real progress in the reduction of poverty and crime – arguably the result of successful federal policies in the social and cultural fields – have led politicians, private parties and civic organizations to express a consensus that something may finally change for the better. *Favelas* have ceased to be considered illegal settlements, as specifically written down in the 1988 Constitution, and most of them by now have become established neighbourhoods with basic city services, though still concentrating dire poverty and social problems.

A more critical appraisal of recent developments suggests that the goal of a more just society may be not so rapidly attained, as processes of eviction of the slummed population are currently intensifying under the pressure of the corporate agenda, echoed louder than ever by the media.

However, we may be witnessing a new phenomenon altogether, rather than a mere amelioration of the living conditions of the worse-off. Award-winning feature movies like *Cidade de Deus* (director F. Mireilles) and *Tropa de Elite* (J. Padilha) gave global projection to the problems of slums, urban violence, drug wars and class divisions, raising an awareness which is opening the discursive field to first-person accounts of slummed lives and legitimizing the antagonistic stances of *favela*-based social movements. This is also contributing to the development of niche forms of tourism which is interested in allowing people a closer look at what is happening in the “interstices” of the corporate city. Some *favelas* have even started to get equipped to welcome (and in some cases already accommodate) tourists, a radical turn for places that were the epitome of no-go areas for tourists and middle-class residents until very recently. In this way, *favelas* – and especially their human and cultural landscape – are changing into something of a new brand for a more cohesive Rio de Janeiro, which is contested but intriguing. In the next section I will analyze the process by which this brand is being constructed “from the bottom”.

### **3. THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF FAVELAS: BRANDING THE FREEWARE**

In the favourable context described above, efforts to brand Rio de Janeiro as a global destination and a “growing” city are intensifying. This also contributes to valorising the city’s exceptional urban landscape. One way this is being done is the “boosterist” refurbishment of its urban infrastructure, and especially its waterfront, and the transformation of the run-down downtown areas (*Centro*) with new functions oriented to a global audience of mobile consumers, investors and corporate workers.

The other (to some extent complementary) strategy is to recuperate and rehabilitate the cultural landscape of Rio and brand the city as one of the most diverse and archetypal monumental capitals of Latin America. In this sense, Rio de Janeiro has finally (after 4 failed attempts with a different orientation) received the status of UNESCO’s World Heritage Site for its “carioca cultural landscape”. This inclusion represents the highest recognition of the city’s universal value as an outstanding example of integration and mutual moulding of natural and socio-cultural elements, which is worth preserving in its essential features as a symbol of human achievement. More pragmatically, it is a way to give this landscape a conservation framework and to have its application monitored according to international standards face to the chaotic development that took place in the last decades and the mounting redevelopment pressures in view of the future mega-events cited above.

This objective raises many questions and expectations. What exactly should be emphasized (and branded to visitors) as “unique” and “worth preserving” is not a trivial question. Political interests and rapidly shifting opportunities have been defining the way in which this candidature was presented, and it is possibly the “sensitive” nature of the issue that has delayed the presentation of an actual proposal to UNESCO: after three aborted attempts focusing mostly on physical landscape elements, the new dossier finally developed a more integral, dynamic notion of cultural landscape based on intangible elements. This shifting focus is bound to take in multiple elements of the cultural landscape of Rio de Janeiro in the social sphere, their inner diversity and

contradictions, and the way they are being put to use and integrated into a city brand which conveys significant meaning.

One of these is certainly the social landscape of poverty and the creative expressions of the narration of – and resistance against – exclusion that has materialized throughout history in specific areas of the city. For instance, Samba originates from the celebrations of former slaves in their very first settlements in downtown districts adjacent to the port, to be later transferred and fused with other musical styles in the industrial suburbs of the Fluminense region. The Carnival is a celebration of diversity and integration and is a challenge to the constituted order introduced by humble workers of Portuguese descent. The *bossa nova* was a new musical style picked up by intellectuals and artists who opposed conservative values and flourished into a “scene” in middle-class Ipanema. And the celebrated city beaches, with their wide open space appropriated by the city’s outcast in wild games, represent the democratic “soccer landscape” of Brazil. However, today, the most pulling creative expressions of antagonism and identity affirmation are concentrated in *favelas*.

*Favelas*, or slums, are interspersed throughout the city and they also form a unique element of Rio’s landscape, an exceptional (and highly creative) form of informal urban settlement developed in the interstices of the “legitimate” city, mostly by urbanization of the seemingly inaccessible peaks that mark Rio’s cityscape. Poorly serviced with basic facilities like water, electricity and paved roads, they continue to be an eye-catcher on the way toward renewing the Rio brand in terms of smart and sustainable growth.

Comparing census data (IBGE 2002), the total number of inhabitants of *favelas* in the city was estimated at around 882,000 in 1991 and 1,092,000 in 2001 (a 0.38 percent growth per year). *Favelas* occupy an area of around 37 square km., corresponding to 6.3 percent of the city’s total extension. Their social composition is today more mixed and representative of what is found in the rest of the city than in the past, though distinctively younger, poorer, black and less educated, even compared to the most popular neighbourhoods.

The distinctive cultural landscape of *favelas* is highly reflective of the dual discourse by which, on one side, society acknowledges them as a unique social structure and consumption space, but on the other side still considers it a “world apart”: criminal, unhealthy, a space to be cleared out, its inhabitants transferred to other zones for “their own sake” (Corrêa and Queiroz Ribeiro 2001) (Fig. 2). Their proximity to residential middle-class neighbourhoods makes the divisions existing in the Brazilian – and specifically carioca – society more evident; hence, as suggested by Albergaria (2010), their reification.

In this context, it is not surprising that the most visible cultural expressions of *favelas* reflect this “oppositional” identity (Fig. 3), not even attempting to be inclusive in spite of their increasing popularity with middle-class youth, and maybe this is why they have been so firmly targeted and stigmatized by politics and the media.<sup>3</sup>

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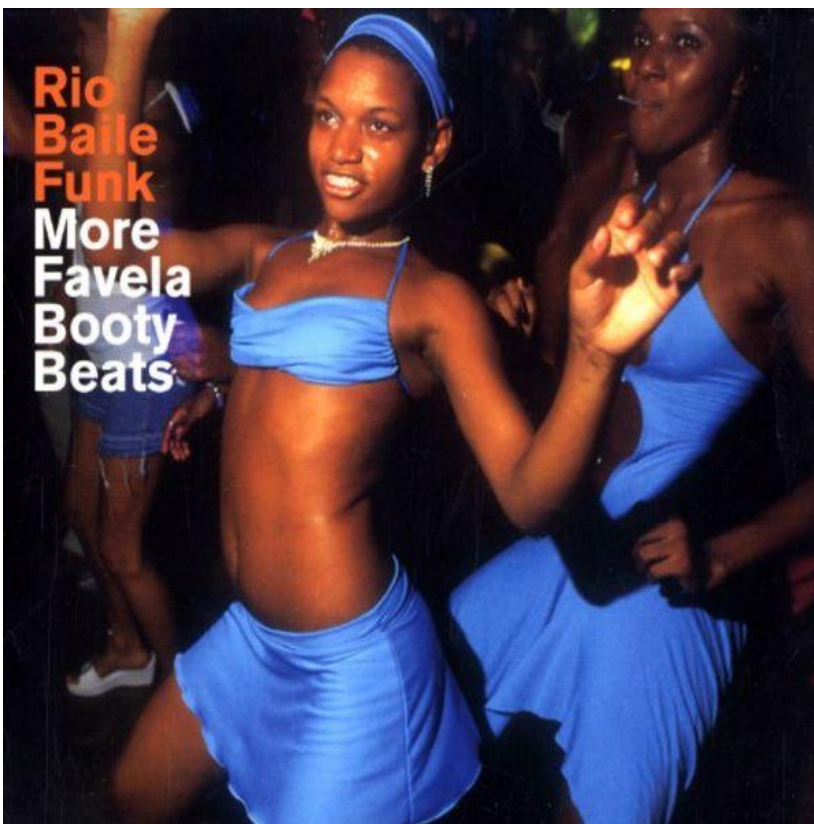
<sup>3</sup> Herschmann (1997) discusses the process by which the local and national media, by presenting urban juvenile violence in an ideologically biased way, amplifying it and reifying poverty, also opened important spaces of “negotiation” around conflictive issues by



**Fig. 2 – Representations of *favelas*:** Military policy “liberating” the Alemao complex from drug gangs: a show-off of force and brutality that has been given very string exposure on the media.



**Fig. 3 – Representations of *favelas*:** The “baile funk” as a brand of oppositional identity.



glamorizing violence, and so brought about a legitimacy of such cultural languages – and from there, an acknowledgment of the problems that inspire them – by turning them into a cultural commodity (he makes this case for the “funk” musical movement born in Rio’s *favelas*).

From this point of view, they constitute a spatially organized form of bio-resistance, by which community organizations and civic movements, and especially the young black groups, develop a new subjectivity (Cocco 2011), whose most poignant aspects (and those which have more chances to achieve, if not straightforward social integration, at least a tangible improvement of living conditions in *favelas*) regard the contemporary cultural and artistic realm.

At the centre of this development, there is unbounded connectivity provided by the internet, which promises to overcome the invisible barrier keeping *favelas* segregated. According to Vieira (2008), the internet has created such new relational power that is also changing the way in which the *favela* sees itself and is represented in the mainstream, giving its cultural production a new perspective and mobilizing it globally: it does not have to be legitimized anymore by the local institutions and power coalitions, it legitimizes itself through its success and global projection.

Another pillar of this turn is the acknowledgment of “hacker culture” as a form of social activism (Coleman and Golub 2008), affirming the right to acquire, recode and reuse information from digital sources into new collective identities as a form of subversion against the establishment in the industries of culture and representation (see also Castells 2003: 122–4). Especially in the field of music, “neo-artisanal” musical genres, like funk, *tecnobrega* from Pará and the new *electro-forró* of Pernambuco, have emerged as parallel, “low cost” cultural industries, largely based on the illegal acquisition and creative manipulation of musical themes and sources, and not only for the infringement of copyrights, but, more radically, because in most cases electricity and telephone connections in *favelas* are “hacked” from regular lines in the legitimate city (only recently there was a move from the state government to provide most slums with regular wiring, and a plan to provide city centre *favelas* with free Wi-Fi connection is being implemented).

These musical products (mostly in the shape of digital files) arrive directly to the consumer and without having to depend on corporate intermediaries. In a matter of minutes, the “funk” produced by youngsters in Rio’s *favelas* goes straight to informal street markets in Maputo, Mozambique or other cities in Portuguese-speaking countries, where local youngsters can easily relate to the social issues that it voices. Business is not done through the sale of CDs, which are normally downloaded and reproduced freely, but from live shows. These attract ever larger young audiences into *favelas*, while local DJs perform regularly in clubs in Sao Paulo, New York, Amsterdam or London, bringing back a “legal” source of income into the feeble *favela* economy and developing all sorts of supply chain networks, from fashion to advertisement and video-art. By making a virtue out of necessity, this model can be seen as a global laboratory of the cultural industries of the future, anticipating global trends in the production, distribution and organization of musical creations. Locally, the turn in representation perspectives also has important symbolic effects: Vieira (2008) notes that successful *funkeiros* are substituting drug lords as “heroes” in the collective imagery of the *favela*’s youth.

The change in the way communities represent and narrate themselves extends to other genres. In music video-clips, feature movies and theatre productions, the artists of the *favelas* and suburbs talk about their everyday life, which does not sum up to only violence, drugs and death, as the rest of the urban community tends to think, but

touches issues of conviviality, diversity, civic rights and gender parity. An example is the movie *5x Favela, Agora por Nós Mesmos*, which was entirely produced, in every aspect, by *favela* residents. In this movie, only one episode showcases drugs and violence. The winning performance is in fact *Christmas Story* based in the scenic Vidigal community and interpreted by the respected collective *Nos do Morro*. Another example of this global projection is the cooperation established by designers in the Rocinha community with the influential “creative factory” Fabrica.

The creative dynamism of *favelas*, together with the ongoing “regularization” of their situation, has attracted the interest of another important global audience, that of tourists. The issue of poverty or slum tourism acquired visibility in critical studies of tourism (Freire-Medeiros 2009; Williams 2008; Frenzel and Koens 2012). Generally, this literature identifies a paradoxical counterpoint between the stated objective of benefiting deprived communities through the income generated by tourism, and the commodification of poverty, transformed into a “show” for visitors within the framework of “dark tourism” (Stone 2006), though the works quoted above introduce a more optimistic angle of slum tourism as breaking down cultural barriers and raising global awareness.

**Fig. 4 – Creative design of *favela* landscapes**



Rio’s *favelas* have been receiving visitors since at least a decade, when “Rocinha tours” started to be advertised on specialized websites and showcased in guidebooks such as Lonely Planet. These tours are strictly limited to groups accompanied by authorized guides and are backed up by NGOs that would “negotiate” visits with local gangs so as to ensure visitors’ safety. Visitors are picked up at their South Zone hotels, driven up Rocinha’s narrow alleys, and then they get to walk through these “forbidden” places, talk to local activists and simple residents, buy local products and crafts, and possibly

enjoy a home-cooked meal, but mainly they have a direct, unmediated impression of a landscape of injustice. For most participants, this is an illuminating (and thrilling) experience; the media coverage of recent episodes of violence, as well as the internationally successful movies featuring *favelas*, have paradoxically turned this sort of “reality tour” into a blockbuster instead of scaring tourists away. It should be said that there are very few other places where this type of experience is offered with a similar level of professionalism and safety. Rio’s *morros* also have an inherent attractiveness due to their location and views, which shantytowns in say Mexico City or São Paulo don’t have, and also a certain joyful “ambience” that most slums lack.

The attractiveness of slums is now extending to other aspects than “voyeurism” or awareness-raising: community organizations are setting up their own proper visitor attractions, like interpretation centres and “*favela* museums”, but also cultural venues and events, small-scale festivals, dance gigs, street markets, workshops and courses, research and educational centres, as well as an embryonic tourism infrastructure, like small guesthouses and tourist restaurants, bank offices, and public transport, in increasingly designed spaces (Fig. 4). These resources are accessible to independent visitors, who today venture to *favelas* in increasing numbers without a guide or big concerns for their safety.

**Fig. 5 – Negating the existence of *favelas* in official tourism representations**



The success of visits to *favelas* has started a fashion of sorts: every weekend the South Zone youth virtually flocks to Rocinha to take part in “funk dances” and other events. Other poor areas of the immense suburb of Rio – like Madureira, the cradle of Samba schools; or Vigário Geral, with its very active “black” music and dance schools; and the municipality of Nova Iguaçu, an epicentre of grassroots theatre products – have started to be visited by small numbers of unorganized tourists, moved by curiosity for a “genuine” encounter with local contemporary culture, but also by the large exposure

that finally the independent media and the Web are giving to these “niches” in the cultural aspect of this great city. No “official” tourist leaflet showcases these attractions, but an increasing number of tourists are today familiar with these creative brands and are willing to engage with the reality they define.

Wrapping up, *favelas* may continue to be criminalized especially by the conservative media as “illegal” settlements reproducing violence. Yet, by involving approximately a million people, and providing unprecedented opportunities for disadvantaged youth groups that “officialist” cultural stances would never give, they cannot be neglected anymore as places of creative expression, as neither can the reality that such expressions portray and the claims advanced through it by local activists.

**Fig. 6 – Building bridges between *favelas* and the booming event capital. Redevelopment project at Morro Providencia**



The development and consolidation of a global cultural brand for Rio as a creative city, though, needs intuitional support in terms of urban policy: removing slums by evictions, “normalizing” the cultural scene through heavy police surveillance and sanctioning hacker activities goes in the opposite direction of dissolving these creative impulses, or, worse, leaving them at the mercy of the criminal gangs. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate these approaches: the non-existence of *favelas* in official tourist maps, focusing on the south side leisurely attractions and where *morros* are just expanses of green towering over the city, contrasts with new projects which acknowledge the existence (and the social and historical value) of *favelas* and reconnect the 13,000 inhabitants of the oldest community of Rio with a comprehensive urban project (in this case, the regenerating waterfront including the oldest part of the historical centre).

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS: SOFT-BRANDING DIVERSITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

According to Mike Davis (2006), the formation and criminalization of slums in the developing world (but not exclusively) is today one of the most problematic aspects of contemporary urbanization and a phenomenon that elucidates a global model of development which pursues the interests of corporate agendas against the legitimate rights of the working classes of the world. In his work he presents the formation of urban slums as germane to the unregulated exploitation of cheap manpower to feed the growth agendas of capitalism, mostly with the complicity of malleable national governments.

This position is not without critics (for instance, see Angotti 2006 and Capel 2007) whose main angle is the fact that slums are not just hopeless spaces but are also liberating important opportunities for personal emancipation, organized resistance and the creative reconfiguration of lives which challenge “from the margin” the agendas of institutions and corporations, coherently with the transformation of a society triggered by the post-Fordist turn.

The case of Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas* and their burgeoning creative economy is an illustration of this trend: criminalized by the media, sanctioned by institutions, controlled by criminal gangs, the slummed population has nevertheless managed to elaborate, and most importantly diffuse, their own cultural languages using the opportunities found in the “breaches” of the system and making themselves visible to a global audience: not only the physical and legal breach that *favelas* per se represent, but also the economic breaches of copyright infringement, hacking and de-intermediation. This is feeding a whole new value chain that is finally presenting a real development opportunity for an excluded sector of the urban population and a consumption filière “at the margin” which successfully negotiates a new, positive collective identity for the urban poor. This global, almost “ageographic”, brand is also picked up locally by the “traveling audiences” represented by tourists, legitimizing the role of *favelas* and their cultural landscape as attractions in the context of a world destination like Rio de Janeiro. In this new context urban juvenile cultures and their “violent” practices are not anymore an element of “danger” to tourism, with negative implications on the construction of the tourist city, but a force of socio-spatial reconnection and diversification.

The cultural landscape of Rio de Janeiro that I have presented has unlimited resources for generating solutions to exclusion and poverty, especially if the main stewards of such landscape, its communities, are actively involved in the process of negotiation and affirmation of this brand, which could become a “soft” undertone by which Rio projects a global image of a historical and at the same time contemporary, but also open, cohesive and diverse cultural capital of Brazil. If this strategy prevails over corporate agendas, it could become a model to be exported and adapted in many other Latin American cities.

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