

## OBSERVATÓRIO DA PROSTITUIÇÃO IPPUR-UFRJ

### Who we are

Prostitution Policy Watch (*O Observatório da Prostituição*) is an extension and research project of the Institute for Urban and Regional Planning of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (IPPUR-UFRJ) which unites professors, researchers and students of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro-UFRJ, the Gender Studies Center PAGU from the State University of Campinas-UNICAMP, and the Fluminense Federal University-UFF. The project is conducted in partnership with ONG Davida – Prostitution, Civil Rights and Health; the Brazilian Interdisciplinary Association of AIDS-ABIA; the Public Archive of the State of Rio de Janeiro-APERJ and the Brazilian Network of Prostitutes. (We would particularly like to thank ABIA for giving us meeting and working space during the Games and for their help in writing this press release.) Since 2013, we have been undertaking ethnographic, bibliographic, and documentary research into prostitution in the city of Rio de Janeiro, as well as conducting extension activities around the topic, seeking to widen the public and political space for debates regarding sex work while privileging in these debates the voices and opinions of sex workers who seek recognition of prostitution and a form of legitimate labor.

### ***The Impacts of Megaevents on Sex Markets in Rio de Janeiro Project***

Once again, Rio de Janeiro has played host to a sporting mega-event: the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games. As we did during the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Prostitution Policy Watch went into the field to accompany the changes the Games would cause in our local sexual markets (you can access PPW's World Cup Preliminary Report in English here: [https://www.dropbox.com/s/ya8kn02r0fdmvsj/Observatory%20of%20Prostitution\\_World%20Cup%20Preliminary%20Report\\_20140903.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/ya8kn02r0fdmvsj/Observatory%20of%20Prostitution_World%20Cup%20Preliminary%20Report_20140903.pdf?dl=0)). This time in addition to Davida and ABIA, we also worked in partnership with the Grupo Pela Vidda – RJ, Transrevolução and the Casa Nem.

During the Olympics, we sought to observe and analyze how public policies have intensified “public events” in “revitalized areas” and how this has re-ordered the informal labor and commerce markets of the city. In particular, we were interested in how these new configurations of space, law and urban mobility would affect the professional lives of sex workers. In order to achieve this goal, we brought together a team composed of 6 PhD-level researchers, 8 scholarship students from the UFRJ, 3 associate researchers and 15 sex workers. Using participant-observation ethnography, these people observed and recorded life in Rio's principal commercial sex zones during the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

This time, we added a visual component to our research. Sex worker researchers produced audio and visual images of their daily lives during the Games, and received training and support from a collective of photographers and filmmakers throughout the process. These images and recordings will be displayed through a virtual exhibition online that will be curated by the sex workers themselves. Their images show how their daily lives are not different from those of the other citizens who live, work, play, sleep and move through our city. They have much to teach us about urban politics in times of managed crisis, such as sporting mega-events, and were a critical component to our overall research project – showing the importance amplifying sex workers' voices and participation in research, and supporting alternative forms of knowledge production.

Our ethnographic research involved placing teams of researchers in the principal areas of Rio's

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sex markets in Barra da Tijuca, Copacabana, Downtown and Vila Mimososa (whose venues were established via mappings carried out between 2012-2016). These teams produced field notes, detailing their observations, conversations and interactions with the diverse groups of people who circulate in these areas, concentrating on how the Olympic Games affected their lives.

The urban interventions and projects carried out in preparation for the games have reorganized sexual commerce in Rio and, because of this, many sex workers are no longer working or living in the same regions as before. The distribution of sex work and workers in Rio has changed due to the numerous modifications made in the city's infra- and legal structure due to the games. One of our Project's main objectives is thus recording these changes and their impacts upon the lives of sex workers.

Another focus of our project is on the militarization and securitization of the city and the effects that this has had on Rio's sex markets. As we observed during the 2014 World Cup, constant and ostentatious policing in the city's main commercial sex districts can end up creating difficulties for sex workers. In the weeks before the Cup, police operations that closed sex work venues resulted in the arbitrary arrest of sex workers and numerous violations of their human rights. Two major operations symbolized this repression in 2014, with both taking place right before the Cup. The first occurred in May with the police raid on the so-called "Caixa" building in Niterói, resulting in the illegal arrest of over 120 sex workers. The second operation took place on the day the World Cup began and closed down Balcony Bar, a well-known establishment where tourists met and negotiated with sex workers in Copacabana.

We concentrated our fieldwork during the Olympic Games, but have continued to go into the field over the past few weeks following the games in order to conduct more structured interviews. We will continue with intensive fieldwork until the end of September, following the Paralympic Games.

A preliminary analysis of the data we have collected shows that the moral panics produced by the mainstream media before and during mega sporting events (increases in trafficking of persons and the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents) has, once again, not come to pass. During the World Cup, demand for commercial sex declined – a fact noticed and complained about by many sex workers in Rio. During the Cup we confirmed that most sex venues in Rio were generally sustained by local Brazilian clients and not foreign or national tourists. Sexual commerce, as a whole, declined in Rio during the event because the Cup generated a large number of holidays (an average of two a week) which shuttered downtown (the densest concentration of sex work venues) and altered the daily routines of the Brazilian men who are these venues primarily customers. We thought that it was very likely that a similar phenomena would be observed during the 2016 Olympic Games.

In the months before the Olympics, however, a new factor appeared: economic and political crisis. The sex workers we interviewed before the Games were almost unanimous in declaring that more people were selling sex, but that there were fewer clients – that offer, in other words, was outstripping demand. Universally, this was attributed to the economic downturn Brazil, and Rio in particular, was suffering. As the date for the Opening Ceremony loomed near, the sex workers we interviewed who had worked during the Cup and had experienced the earlier mega-event-related decline in sexual commerce were also worried that the Olympics would cause a further fall in the already low number of clients, although they hoped this would not be the case.

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### **What is our initial evaluation of the sale of sex in the city during the 2016 Games? What effects did it cause on demand for commercial sex?<sup>1</sup>**

Offer was much higher than demand during the Olympic Games. There was an increase in the number of women working in the main venues of the city. This increase was probably more due to the crisis than the Games, however, given that in most places, the rise occurred at least 8 months before the Olympics began. With very few exceptions, however, we did not see a significant increase in a demand for sexual services in Rio during the months of August and September 2016. Even though an estimated one million people had come through Rio for the Games, the majority of sex work venues appear to have seen both a drop in the number of clients frequenting them and in the number of men who were willing to pay for sex.

Up to now, the large majority of the sex workers we talked to have evaluated the Games as being bad for business. Both sex workers and venue owners and managers affirm that the Olympics did not meet their already reduced expectations in terms of the level of consumption of sexual services. We still have to analyze all of our data, particularly with regards to what portion of this decline was caused by the Olympics and what by the more general, on-going economic crisis. We can say, however, that there appears to have been a great degree of variation in terms of movement in the sex venues of Rio and that this variation was geographically larger than during the World's Cup.

So far, we have only uncovered one venue (in Barra da Tijuca) where demand for sexual services seems to have consistently grow during the Games. This growth, however, seems to have been strictly local and limited, as even other venues nearby in the same neighborhood did not see a larger number of clients come in during the Games.

In general, it seems that the Games did not meet expectations when it came to the number of tourists willing to pay for sex. However, as was the case during the World Cup, we noticed that the Games generated a great degree of sex worker mobility within the sexscape of Rio de Janeiro. Sex workers from Downtown and Vila Mimosa headed out to Copacabana and Barra da Tijuca (many had already planned these movements months before, based on their experiences during the Cup). Others switched venues to Praça Mauá or moved from Barra da Tijuca to Copacabana when it turned out that the number of clients in Barra was low. Sexual commerce ended up being much more dispersed throughout the city during the Olympics, as compared to the World Cup, due to the fact that the tourists, competitors and venues were also more widely geographically distributed.

The number of holidays associated with the Olympics was lower than those associated with the Cup and the event itself was much shorter. For this reason, the movement of clients in Downtown and Vila Mimosa (the main commercial sex regions of Rio, which are almost solely frequented by local men) did not see an abrupt fall-off in terms of the number of clients, as had been the case during the FIFA event. Most venues saw a some decrease in customers, however, in terms of what would have been considered normal for this time of year (and in comparison with the movement of the months prior to the Cup). Copacabana (the neighborhood most associated with sexual tourism), however, saw a sharp decrease in the number of clients in comparison to the Cup, where this region saw the largest growth in number of clients in the city. This relative decrease in

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<sup>1</sup> This interview was originally published by Sexuality Policy Watch: <http://sxpolitics.org/olympics-2016-a-preliminary-overview-over-sex-work/15636>. It has been slightly updated for this preliminary report.

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comparison with the Cup, however, also amounted to a small increase from what would have been the normal movement for August and September in the neighborhood. Given the large increase in the number of women working on Copacabana and the small increase in the number of clients, many sex workers appear to have experienced this as an overall decrease in the number of paid tricks.

The fourth region we studied, Vila Mimosa, once again saw a sharp decrease in the number of customers relative to the normal movement in the neighborhood. In this sense, the experience of the World Cup seems to have been repeated during the Olympic Games, with VM being almost empty of customers on many days during the Olympics.

We only saw a significant increase in customers in two venues: the above-mentioned venue in Barra (a club relatively close to the Olympic Village) and in Praça Mauá, whose main club saw a 30% rise in the number of clients and sex workers. It should be noted in this context that while Praça Mauá contained one of the main tourist events organized for the Games (with immense public T.V.s and food trucks, as well as the new Museum of Tomorrow), most of the men in this club were the club's traditional clientele: seamen and crew members from cruise ships, mostly from the Philippines, India and other East and South Asian countries.

### **What difficulties and/or threats did sex workers face during the Games? Were there reports of violence or repression?**

Overall, it seems that there was less violence and repression directed towards sex workers in Rio de Janeiro's main red light districts during the Olympic Games than there was shortly before and during the World Cup. We are still investigating why this might be, yet believe it might be, once again, a result of the ongoing economic and political crisis. It might have meant that there simply wasn't any money available at the state level for the kind of "grandstanding" anti-prostitution military police operations which took place at the Cup and which were, in general, apparently directed at improving the property values of regions targeted for gentrification schemes – said schemes perhaps no longer having the political or financial capital necessary to move forward.

Some women reported being evicted from the streets around the Maracanã soccer stadium by police. It was difficult to know, however, whether this was the result of anti-prostitution operations or more general security measures designed to clear all non-spectators from the region around the stadium (which would host the Games' Opening and Closing Ceremonies). In Copacabana, several acts of violence against trans sex workers were reported before the games, generally at the hands of private security personnel who were illegally patrolling the main streets of the neighborhood.

We are still researching the police operation against a "modeling agency" portrayed as sexually exploiting minors near the Olympic village. Although portrayed as sexual exploitation, it is important to note that this excuse is often mobilized in anti-prostitution operations. No exploiters and no girls or women were found in the raid and, currently, the only information that's publically available about the agency's operations comes from rumors and press releases. Another series of operations against street prostitution in Barra da Tijuca/Recreio before the Games revealed the presence of three under-aged girls (16, 16 and 17 years old) working Avenida Lucio Costa along the coast. Adult sex workers were detained by police in these investigations, but in discussions conducted by the PPW with adult sex workers along Lucio Custo during the Games, we were

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informed that “The police are only going after minors and are leaving us alone”. We are currently involved in post-Games evaluation meetings with city and state security and welfare personnel in order to relate their experiences during the Olympics, and will do interviews with those involved in these operations to clarify what happened.

We did register several cases of “pornophobia” or “whorephobia” during the Olympics on the part of tourists or local residents, particularly in places where sex workers were circulating outside of spaces widely known for being sex work establishments. In the middleclass neighborhood of Ipanema, for example (which is adjacent to Copacabana), we witnessed physical and symbolic aggressions by non-sex worker Brazilian women being directed against the sex workers who “invaded” middle class nightlife venues. We also heard several narratives of abolitionist rhetoric being employed by male tourists in order to justify non-payment for sex in situations of seduction. Often, the rhetoric was employed in symbolically violent ways. Many sex workers talked about their negative experiences in trying to move about and work in spaces that they understood to be “controlled by playboys” (i.e. middle- and upperclass men and women), such as Praça Mauá, Praça XV and the bars and clubs of Ipanema. In other words, it seems that an increase in the presence of sex workers in these areas resulted in greater levels of publically acceptable pornophobic acts, both on the part of women who were not working and on the part of the men using these spaces to obtain non-commercial sexual liaisons.

### **What preliminary parallels can we draw between the 2016 Olympics and the 2014 World Cup? What similarities and differences can be identified with regards to prostitution during both megaevents?**

To being with, let us state the obvious: prostitution occurs in Rio all year long and not only during mega-events. Our mapping of the city’s sexscape in 2009 revealed 279 discrete sexual commercial venues in the city of Rio de Janeiro alone, without taking into consideration any of the suburbs. The large majority of the clients who frequent these venues are local male citizens and not tourists or foreigners.

That said, both events evidenced a series of factors that influenced the configuration of sexual commerce in the city and these need to be taken into consideration in any attempt to compare the effects of the Cup and the Olympics.

In the months leading up to the Olympic Games, for example, Rio’s ongoing economic crisis, compounded by the constant urban construction projects being undertaken throughout the city, ended up forcing the closure of a number of commercial sex venues. This resulted in the concentration of sex workers in a smaller number of venues. Meanwhile, new workers were being drawn into the market through under- or unemployment in other economic sectors, while the economic crisis reduced the amount of money clients were willing to spend on sex. As a result, the commercial sexual economy of Rio de Janeiro was at its lowest and least lucrative point in over twenty years, even before the Games began. Sex workers and brothel owners and managers hoped that the Olympics would improve things, but those who had worked through the Cup and witnessed the decline of sexual commerce in Vila Mimosa and Downtown weren’t very optimistic.

During the 2014 games, fan and tourist activities were concentrated around the FIFA Fan Fest in Copacabana and in Maracanã Stadium. This resulted in a large concentration of tourists near the commercial sexual venues of Copacabana, while other regions of the city – Vila Mimosa and

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Downtown, in particular – were left almost empty. Frequent holidays (twice a week) made the situation even worse, draining Downtown and Vila of their normal local clientele. As a result, many venues in these two regions closed down for the Cup while many of those in Copacabana saw a significant boom in business.

During the Olympics, there were fewer holidays and, even when they occurred, the fact that Games' related fan events were occurring all over town – and particularly Downtown – meant that none of the main commercial sexual regions (with the exception of Vila Mimosa) were ever completely abandoned by tourists or the local population. Copacabana continued to be an important center for tourism-related activities, as well as the stage for many competitive events. It's importance relative to other areas of the city was greatly lessened, however. This was also the case with regards to sexual commerce. What had been an overall drop of 15% city-wide, coupled with a 100% increase in Copa during the Cup seems to have been much more spread out during the Olympics. We still have to run the numbers, but it seems that Copa may have seen a 33-50% increase in the number of clients, relative to its normal movement at this time of year, while most other venues saw smaller decreases or no decreases in comparison to the Cup.

The Olympics were thus less disruptive of sex work as a whole in Rio de Janeiro than was the World Cup. Summing up, then, what we have observed with regards to Rio de Janeiro as a whole, is that sexual commerce was maintained at normal or slightly improved levels Downtown during the Games, but did not reach the levels hoped for by sex workers and brothel owners/managers. On the other hand, Copacabana did not see a huge concentration of clients, as was the case during the World Cup. Numbers of clients increased during the Games, but not massively. Even so, it seems that Copacabana still concentrated an above-average number of clients and sex workers during the Games. Meanwhile, Vila Mimosa seems to have been equally abandoned during the Cup and the Games, with local clients disappearing and tourists not making up the slack. Normal movement only returned to the Vila in the weeks following the Olympics' closing ceremony. In Barra da Tijuca, movement increased but was heavily concentrated in one main venue.

In other words, the effects of the Olympic Games on sexual commerce in Rio seem to have been much more mobile than during the World Cup, which was characterized by a large concentration of clients in Copacabana. Furthermore, movement would mysteriously improve or decrease on a daily basis. One notorious Downtown sauna, for example, which generally has a steady and reliable clientele, would register enormous activity one day, followed by a steep drop off the very next. The reasons for these swings are, as yet, unexplained. Very few venues, however, could say that they saw a significant increase in the number of clients purchasing sex during the Olympic Games.

### **When will we finish our research and release our preliminary report?**

By the end of October 2016. We are also organizing a book of our experiences during the Cup and the Games, containing more detailed analyses of our data. For further information, contact Prostitution Policy Watch: +55 21 96548-6273 and [observatoriodaprostituicao@gmail.com](mailto:observatoriodaprostituicao@gmail.com).