

Beatriz Garcia | full responses to [interview with Exame Magazine](#), journalist Talita Abrantes (August 2017)

1) Your study '[The cultural legacy of Rio 2016: The Story, one year on](#)' suggests that in the end, Brazil's image came across negatively. Where did we go wrong?

The scales being tipped more towards a negative 'image' of Brazil and Rio with regards to the legacy of the Rio 2016 Games is due to the almost complete dominance of articles dedicated to the immediate decline of the Olympic Park/Olympic buildings in Barra de Tijuca. This has been a principal focus within media coverage for each Games edition (most notably, as was the case for Athens 2004), as it's a common problem. However, in Rio's case, it became practically the **only** story to be told, once the Games were over.

Needless to say, political controversies in Brazil and the exacerbated economic problems in Rio added to the situation, and to the negative association with the legacy of the Games (in contrast to the positive and celebratory coverage during the two weeks of sporting activity and of the Opening Ceremony, which was considered an immediate success).

The big mistake that the organisers at Rio 2016 made was not having a more sophisticated communication strategy in place to explain the cultural dimension of the Games (going beyond things like competitions), and the lack of support for the official Cultural Programme or the Cultural Olympiad (the *Celebra* programme, which had practically no presence in international or Brazilian national media coverage).

The concept and the vision of the *Celebra* programme was very interesting, and its ambitions could have ended in creating a valuable cultural legacy. However, *Celebra* was not treated as an important part of the official narrative (or of the official Programme) of the Games in 2016, and, as a result, the public were not aware of it and the press did not cover it.

The activities based at the Olympic Boulevard (particularly Porto Maravilhas) were a huge success in the city, and garnered a lot of media attention during the Games. The transformation of Rio city centre and the new use of a large public space is a real example of cultural legacy here. However, this has not appeared as part of Rio's legacy in the international press, nor is it something that has been associated as a Games success story. This was a huge missed opportunity when weighing up Rio 2016 and its long-term impacts.

2) Why is cultural capital so important for cities? Did Rio miss an opportunity here?

A city's cultural capital is essential: it's what gives a sense of the history and the identity of a city, what distinguishes one city from another, what generates pride amongst its citizens, and what inspires younger generations.

Rio's cultural capital is very rich, diverse, and deep, and it goes far beyond that which is foregrounded internationally for the tourist market. With the Olympic Games, Rio had a chance to expose the richness of the Carioca – and Brazilian – culture, going beyond the clichés associated with the city and the country.

This was the objective of the *Celebra* programme, but it lost both its support and its budget, and it was not promoted as part of the official narrative. This was a missed opportunity.

The Olympic Boulevard (which was located in Porto Maravilhas, the most successful and often crowded of three Boulevard areas, which also had sections in Parque Madureira and Campo Grande) was an excellent concept with a very positive impact on the level of generating community, group meetings between different people, and a new way to appreciate and enjoy public spaces that had been seen previously as obsolete or underused. It was a programme that contributed to generating 'cultural capital' for Rio, and it had positive impact and legacy locally. Rio missed a chance in not making certain that this experience was known about internationally. However, given that the success of these spaces is ongoing – and it's true that these are spaces associated with Rio 2016 and which are viewed by citizens as an Olympic legacy – this is something that could change if businesses in the city were to work on their communication strategies.

3) What did other cities, such as Sydney, Athens, and London, do to capitalise on cultural legacy?

Sydney and London are stand-out examples of Games edition that place a particular (and successful) emphasis on the cultural dimension of the Olympic Games, and were successful in attracting media attention.

In the case of Sydney, the biggest cultural and media success was the concept of Live Sites, which were free events in public spaces with large screens broadcasting the Games and presenting cultural activities in iconic surroundings in the city (this concept became common practice in following editions of the Games, including at Rio with regards to the Olympic Boulevard). Sydney also introduced four Olympic Arts Festivals in the four years in the run-up to the Games which had a transformatory impact in the Australian arts and culture worlds.

London introduced what is considered as one of the most ambitious Cultural Olympiads (the programme running at national level over four years) and also produced an arts festival, the *London 2012 Festival*, which took place in London during the Games and which secured media attention and positive arts reviews. The great legacy of this programme was the concept entitled 'Inspired by 2012', a new way of promoting cultural activity associated with the Olympic Games, as well as the use of unusual spaces to exhibit high quality art, stimulating collaboration amongst new kinds of organizations.

Athens also worked hard on its Olympic cultural capital, with a Cultural Olympiad with a large budget and a specific organisation completely dedicated to the management of the Cultural Olympiad over four years (the Hellenic Culture Organisation). Nonetheless, Athens did not obtain as much international media coverage about the Cultural Programme as was the case with London and Sydney.

4) The study suggests that the political and economic crises may have displaced the cultural legacy of the Rio 2016 Games for Brazil. If the socio-historical context had been different, would the result have been different?

Yes, it is well possible that if it weren't for these crises, the cultural legacy of the Games would have been greater and more present in the narrative surrounding the Games, for several reasons:

- A) It is possible that the budget for Rio 2016's official cultural programme, Celebra would not have undergone so many cuts, and that the political support for the official Cultural Programme could have been greater.
- B) It is certain that the media attention would have been more extensive, and that there would have been more time to discuss the symbolic and emotional value of the Games – which was prominent, above all due to the Opening Ceremony - but also in the context of the new 'centre of Rio' with Porto Maravilha being a great success for group meetings. The fact that the various crises dominated the media as soon as the Games were over also adds to the collective memory and pride associated with the Games. Games editions in cities such as Barcelona in 1992 are recorded as being huge successes, mainly because the symbolic narrative of the Games was very powerful.

(See also responses to Question 1)

5) Besides the crisis, is it possible to say that there were mistakes made in the Games' planning?

Yes, there were significant planning mistakes – the Cultural Programme did not have the necessary infrastructure, or a clear communication strategy. The cultural activities were more or less uncoordinated. Collaboration between other important Brazilian cities such as Sao Paulo and Bahia was not well organised, and these cities could have contributed a lot to the cultural and symbolic narrative of the Games.

It is also important to remember that the Games could have been narrated from a more powerful aspect as the Latin American/South American Games. No programme or narrative was organised on a continental level (despite this having been part of the original vision for the Games) and this was an example of mistakes made in planning.

6) As for the organizers the physical structure for the Games is always a priority, how can the IOC's Agenda 2020 change such a logic?

By placing greater emphasis on the symbolic value of the Games, and the fundamental relevant of the official Cultural Programme – the Cultural Olympiad – as a basic contributor to a lasting legacy of the Games. The cultural context of the Games is the thing that contributes to generating pride long-term, and contributes to generating identity and a specific memory about each Games edition – as something unique and different, which could not happen anywhere else.

The IOC have a role to carry out, offering more leadership in the area of culture. This is starting now, with the creation of the Foundation for Culture and Olympic Heritage and a Cultural Action Plan. This was evidenced in Rio's Artists in Residence programme, which included some of the most successful cultural activities during Rio 2016: the work of the artist JR and his work 'Inside Out' and 'Giants'.

7) Despite the mistakes, can you outline any successful initiatives from Rio 2016 in terms of cultural legacy?

Yes, there were some initiatives at Rio that were very important and successful with regards to cultural legacy. I have mentioned them in previous responses. They include:

- The Olympic Boulevard/the various activities in Porto Maravilha, which resulted in a large new space from group meetings with a large symbolic meaning for Rio as a city
- The work by JR as Artist in Residence – his cultural legacy is important as a referent for other Olympic Games
- The Opening Ceremony, with its relative simplicity (in comparison with other ceremonies) and the clarity/originality of its environmental message
- The design of the look for Rio – a good concept, again of great value for future Games; although, sadly, it was not seen enough during the Games due to problems of operational delivery

**Find more updates and background information about this study via the
Institute of Cultural Capital:**

<http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/?research=reimaging-brazilian-cities-urban-images-and-cultural-narratives-in-the-wake-of-the-rio-2016-olympic-games>