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University of Toronto

Doctoral Stipend 2012

Economies of Deviance: Sex Work and Sport Mega-Event

Project Summary

In proposing a dissertation topic, I built from the sport for development literature to argue that (sport) event-led urban development could not be contained within or used to solely advance the socio-politicoeconomic agenda of the bourgeois, cosmopolitan class. Using this vantage point, I developed an interest in investigating the informal (sometimes viewed as deviant) economies located within host communities that seek to generate a profit from the influx of an international tourist market. These economies use the sport mega-event as a platform to either attract business or mobilize radically different cultural sensibilities. This interest led to an invitation to participate in an ongoing research collaborative with the Observatory of Prostitution at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) as a graduate student research assistant.

Research Methods

Specifically, I was based in Rio de Janeiro and focused on the movement of those involved in sex as work. That is, in the month before the first whistle was blown to the sound of the last, and in the immediate haze that followed in the aftermath, I observed each zone known for commercial sex across Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (i.e., Copacabana Beach, Ipanema Beach, Centro, Lapa and Vila Mimososa) and interacted with/learned from the working women, clientele and local law enforcement. Specifically, I examined:

1. The opportunities and difficulties faced as a result of the sport mega-event;
2. The strategies used to capitalize on/overcome these opportunities/difficulties; and
3. Whether these strategies helped to establish sustainable event-related legacies for those engaging in sex as work.

In an attempt to address each research question, I relied upon the collection of qualitative data and employed the following ethnographic methodologies: (i) document analyses of relevant prostitution² related material, specifically those disseminated as a result of the event; (ii) participant observations of sex workers' labour rights organizations, volunteers and the working/living conditions of its members; and finally, (iii) semi-structured interviews conducted with the key informants identified in the data collection process.

Research Results

RQ1. Opportunities and difficulties faced as a result of the sport mega-event

- i. Balcony Bar and Hotel Lido, located in Copacabana beach across from the FIFA Fan Zone, which famously served as a main site for sex work, was closed on June 12, 2014, the opening day of World Cup. The rationale provided by local law enforcement was due to a reported case of child sexual exploitation; however, the Child Welfare Council of the South Zone (Conselho Tutelar da Zona Sul) did

not document a single case of sexual exploitation in the period before or immediately after the 2014 World Cup.

- ii. Despite the increase in police surveillance on the street, the closure of Balcony Bar and Hotel Lido decreased the level of securitization for working women, due to the fact that most of women had to now travel to an unknown area with a client for a date.
- iii. Despite the increased risk, the number of women working in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro (i.e., along Copacabana and Ipanema) increased over the course of the event. Along with Maracanã Stadium, Copacabana was the main area for World Cup activities in Rio de Janeiro — with FIFA Fan Fest, an exuberant amount of local law enforcement, FIFA staff (housed between Copacabana Palace and Sofitel) and international media. With limited opportunities for work in an indoor venue located downtown or in Vila Mimosa, women travelled to the South Zone (Copacabana Beach, Ipanema Beach and Lapa) to capitalize on the influx of tourism to recuperate the business lost. Of these women, several complained about working on the street due to the amount of drunk and disorderly men. Meanwhile, with the influx of workingwomen into a small tourist sector, competition over international clientele was fierce.
- iv. Prior to the World Cup, the (inter)national media predicted a sharp increase in the sexual exploitation of children, young people and women. Nevertheless, no data collected on behalf of the Observatory of Prostitution or the agencies in which we consulted, reported a single incident of child sexual exploitation connected to the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

RQ2. The strategies used to capitalize on/overcome these opportunities/difficulties

- i. In order to capitalizing on the opportunities made available as a result of hosting an internationally recognized sport mega-event, several of the women reported a new (business or otherwise) connection established between other working women, activist agencies, local law enforcement, (inter)national media and clientele.
- ii. Aside from the creation of a new social network or linkage, those involved in sex as work were (somewhat forcibly) encouraged to migrate to other “tourist-saturated” communities within Rio de Janeiro 3 thus affording the women opportunities to experience a new working environment or establish business online — one which could prove to be more profitable in the future or contribute to new (transferable) knowledge (e.g., learn about the freelance market on the street versus working at a brothel downtown).

RQ3. Whether these strategies help to establish sustainable event-related legacies for those engaging in sex as work

- I. Further research is needed to be conducted in order to determine whether or not a relationship established during FIFA 2014 was able to last well-after the event has died. It is possible that such an alliance could be useful next urban event, such as the 2015 Carnival or even the 2016 Summer Olympic Games.
- II. Furthermore, and related to the above, additional data collection and analyses are needed to determine whether the knowledge and/or skill set accumulated as a result of aiding in the 2014 host effort, translated into future use. Moreover, I am curious to learn whether this information is used to informed Carnival 2015 and/or Olympic 2015 business strategies.

Policy Implications

In particular, this research project has provided insight into the insidious, informal economies which underpin every internationally-recognized sport mega-event while establishing a dataset that could be used to later compared and contrasted with the Canadian context — specifically, with the hosting of the 2015 Pan/Parapan American event.

Next Steps

Given the success of the 2014 World Cup project, we conducted additional ethnographic work during the 2015 Carnival in further preparation for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. The data collected across each separate event will afford us with the information needed to better understand the manner in which informal economies organize in the midst of rapid urban change, and potentially (economically, socially and politically) profit from the more formalized injections of global capital.