

Fall 2012
University Tour

catalytic communities

"Favelas at the Vanguard:
Rethinking Our Assumptions in
Sustainable Development"

*Building on last year's lecture series:
"Pre-Olympic Rio: The Dynamics of Urban Change"*

A 1-hour presentation that can be tailored to complement a semester's teaching in Urban Studies, Journalism, Architecture, Latin American Studies, Brazilian Studies, Public Policy, Communications, Film Studies, International Development, Social Entrepreneurship, or Nonprofit Management.



Speaker: Theresa Williamson, Ph.D.

CatComm.org

Fall 2012 University Tour

Dr. Williamson's contribution to the March 2012 New York Times debate on Mega Events:

Brazil is Missing an Opportunity to Invest in the Favelas

"Rio de Janeiro is preparing to host the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016, and these mega-events give the nation's elite a chance to speed up whatever strategies were already on their wish lists. In Rio, where real estate interests control the city's politicians and media, decisions are made on their behalf.

About 1.2 million people, or 22 percent of Rio's population, live in favelas. The only affordable housing solution capable of meeting Rio's needs is to improve services and integrate the favelas; replacing them is not an option. Since the late 1800s, migrants have settled unoccupied land in and around Brazil's cities. Residents invest heavily in their homes, over generations, even if a family does not hold a title to the land. These favela dwellers faced eviction during the military dictatorship from the '60s to the '80s but achieved a significant victory in 1988, when Brazil's constitution established five years as the term for "adverse possession," the process of acquiring ownership through use rather than through payment.

In preparing for the World Cup and the Olympics, Rio could make long-term investments and integrate the favelas. Instead it is aggravating its problems.

Much has been accomplished. A recent study of 92,000 people across six pacified favelas showed 95 percent of homes were brick and concrete, 75 percent had tile floors, 44 percent had computers, and 90 percent of working-age residents were employed. As the Chinese diplomat Sha Zukang exclaimed on a recent visit, "This is not a slum!"


In preparing for the World Cup and the Olympics, the city has an opportunity to make long-term investments and integrate the favelas, by providing the missing support services like education, job training, health care, day care and sanitation, in addition to security and land title. Instead, interventions toward the favelas are taking two counterproductive forms.

First, smaller, unknown, often peaceful communities occupying now-valuable land are forcibly evicted under the pretext of mega-event development, often with no clear justification. Residents are relocated to small, vertical, isolated public housing units two hours from the city center. There are also notable cases of evictees left homeless or starting over on newly squatted land. It is estimated that 170,000 people will be evicted "for" mega-events across Brazil.

Second, larger, well-known communities are receiving "integration" programs, mainly police pacification units. This increased police presence makes a favela safer, and thus makes the land more valuable and the rents higher. This is followed by the formalization of local businesses and payments for utilities. Next up is land title. The result: a fast track to gentrification, publicly funded under the auspices of "combating poverty" and "integrating the city."

Rio will apparently be "made safe for the Olympics" by pushing its lowest-income residents to peripheral areas, where crime is also heading. Here in Brazil, and especially in Rio, we have a tradition of inequality — and its natural consequence, crime — and it appears the upcoming mega-events will only exacerbate it.

It would be much more creative, cost-effective and empowering if resources were targeted to participatory integration. That would be an Olympic legacy to be proud of: Rio would offer a model to be applied around the globe. With U.N.-Habitat predicting that 3 billion people will live in slums by 2050, the world could use such leadership."



"In preparing for the World Cup and the Olympics, Rio could make long-term investments and integrate the favelas. Instead it is aggravating its problems."

Fall 2012 University Tour



About the Talk

From October 22nd through November 2nd, 2012, Dr. Theresa Williamson, Founder and Executive Director of Catalytic Communities, will be conducting a speaking tour at universities across the United States.

Her talk, "Favela as a Sustainable Model: Breaking Old Assumptions in Sustainable Development" will build on the growing global dialogue around informal settlements (sometimes called 'slums' or 'favelas'), particularly consolidated ones like those in Rio, and the potential lessons they offer towards a sustainable urbanization worldwide.



the talk tailored to individual needs.

If requested, the talk can be preceded by showing students the film [Favela as a Sustainable Model](#), launched by Catalytic Communities during the UN Rio+20 sustainability conference in June 2012.

Each talk will put Rio's favelas in historical and socio-economic context, with particular attention to the build-up to the 2016 Olympics, the role of the favelas in this transition and the potential their integration into the city offers as a model worldwide. Please do not hesitate to [contact us](#) to have

Few are in Williamson's position to offer a community perspective to the current transformations unfolding in Rio — a perspective rarely available at a distance.

Fall 2012 University Tour

More about Theresa Williamson

Founder & Executive Director, Catalytic Communities



Recently interviewed for [Next American City](#), [NPR's Worldview](#), and the Irish radio doc [The Right to Remain in Silence](#), invited to debate in the [New York Times](#), and featured last year in [O Globo](#) and [Marie Claire](#), Catalytic Communities (CatComm) founder Theresa Williamson has become an outspoken and respected advocate on behalf of Rio de Janeiro's favelas in the face of current fast-paced transformations.

In May 2004 Theresa received her Ph.D. from the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania. Entitled *Catalytic Communities: The Birth of a Dot Org*, her dissertation won the 2005 Gill-Chin Lim Award for Best Dissertation on International Planning and was one of three finalists for the 2004 Barclay Gibbs Jones Award for the Best Dissertation in Planning. She has published articles from this dissertation and related research in *Progressive Planning*, *The Journal of Urban Technology*, and *Cidadania.org*. Theresa's undergraduate degree was in Biological Anthropology at Swarthmore College, which took her to live a semester in Madagascar studying lemur thermoregulatory behavior. She also received concentrations in Environmental Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies. Though raised primarily in the Washington DC area, Theresa is a dual Brazilian and British citizen and lives in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

More about Catalytic Communities

Since 2000, Catalytic Communities (CatComm) has provided capacity-building and technology training, media exposure, meeting spaces, and global networks of support to over 2000 leaders from over 250 low-income communities across Rio de Janeiro. As a result, the tide is beginning to turn on the stigma these communities historically face. They are increasingly recognized as creative, self-built neighborhoods that comprise an important niche [within the urban fabric](#), one worthy of recognition, respect and investment.

Winner of a [2006 Tech Award](#) from the Tech Museum of Innovation in Silicon Valley, and recognized for its 'actionable ideas' by the UN, CatComm makes strategic use of media and networks to link grassroots community groups in Rio de Janeiro with networks of exchange and support. In the lead-up to the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, CatComm is the only organization in Rio working at the intersection of community development, social media, and global networks. In recent years we have provided social media, journalism and video trainings for community organizers to communicate and attract visibility to community actions and perspectives in the lead-up to these mega-events. Our community news site, [RioOnWatch](#), is Rio's only English-language community news site and is used as a feeder site for alternative and mainstream international media worldwide. Our most recent initiative, the documentary [Favela as a Sustainable Model](#), is already attracting attention from housing advocates, academic researchers, and officials at the UN.

For further information, or to book, contact Catalytic Communities
at u-tour@catcomm.org or 301-637-7360.



CatComm.org