Planning for Protest: the spatial dimensions of civil resistance movements in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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Planning for Protest:
the spatial dimensions of civil resistance movements in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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This research project seeks to better understand how protests of varying sizes take place in public spaces, focusing on the city of Rio de Janeiro. The relationship between cities and protests has increasingly gained importance as urban areas throughout the world become epicenters for demanding greater political rights and expanded notions of citizenship (Harvey, 2003) (Vicino, 2017). Understanding the dynamics of protest in Rio de Janeiro is particularly important right now as the city struggles to overcome a financial crisis following nearly a decade of hosting international mega-events including the 2016 Olympics. Unstable funding has led to a public security crisis as the city grapples with a surge in criminal violence and a national corruption scandal. The combination of these problems has placed enormous pressure on civil society to stand up against injustice and communicate demands from the most underrepresented sectors of society. Protests are an essential tool of civil society, but their effectiveness often depends on the ability to access and move through urban spaces. Using qualitative data from interviews with activist leaders and the distribution of an online survey, I evaluate how space matters for protests in Rio. This paper explores how activists employ different strategies to perform protests in public spaces, overcome spatial challenges or restrictions, and communicate messages of civil resistance.

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