CONDIA + ORNELAS TRAVELING PRIZE

Kylee O'Dell

kyleeo@ksu.edu
316 . 204 . 8175

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

I've come to understand architecture as inherently political. When characterized as apolitical, the built environment risks displacing communities, marginalizing histories, and erasing community stories. This belief has motivated me to amplify the voices of those often excluded and to actively challenge the systems that perpetuate these exclusions. What started as a personal passion has evolved into a design philosophy rooted in social justice and community engagement.

This exploration of architecture's role in shaping social, political, and cultural contexts has manifested in my design work. Early in my education, I tackled the pressing social issues surrounding New York City's housing crisis, focusing on housing-first policies and spatial solutions for marginalized communities. This project marked the first time I grounded my design in policy research, addressing the socio-political context that gives form to the built environment. Later, I worked with Cornerstones of Care, a Kansas City-based NGO supporting neglected youth. The design incorporated housing, trade school opportunities, and community engagement on site. By integrating sociological studies and statistics on the transitions of foster youth to adulthood, I was able to align my design process with the lived realities of vulnerable populations.

I continued to build on this interdisciplinary approach during my study abroad experience. In courses on the Scandinavian welfare state and contemporary activist movements, I explored the complex relationships between policy, infrastructure, and social change. As the only architecture student in these courses, my professors were initially surprised by the spatial approach

I brought to class discussions, providing insights on how the built environment shapes and is shaped by societal structures. This experience embedded itself in my studio project located in Nørrebro, Copenhagen's most diverse neighborhood. There, I engaged with Syrian and Ukrainian refugees, listening to their personal narratives of displacement and marginalization. These conversations, paired with socio-political frameworks I was studying, became the foundation for my design proposal. I was able to consider how space could not only respond to these challenges but also become a tool for fostering inclusion and belonging in a community marked by division.

This focus on socially responsive design continues to inform my current studio project, which centers on the idea of the World Expo. While the project requires addressing the structural demands of such a large-scale event, it also presents an opportunity to create spaces that are both culturally and socially responsive to the surrounding community. The goal of the proposal is to instill continued life in an underdeveloped space through an adaptable park. This work has refined my approach to architecture, continually emphasizing the intersection of immediate needs with long-term social impact.

My inquiry into the life of Olympic sites began unexpectedly during a study tour to Tallinn, Estonia. It was here that we toured Talinna Linnahall, a once vibrant Soviet era Olympic venue now abandoned and in a state of disrepair and decay. As we walked through its vast, deteriorating spaces, our guide painted a vivid picture of the energy the structure had once held during the 1980 Summer Olympics. What was once a symbol of global unity, ambition, and architectural innovation now stood as a faint echo of its energized past, overshadowed by its abandoned state and the contemporary needs of the surrounding community. My topic focuses on the contrast between history, present, and future, echoing the fate of many Olympic projects.
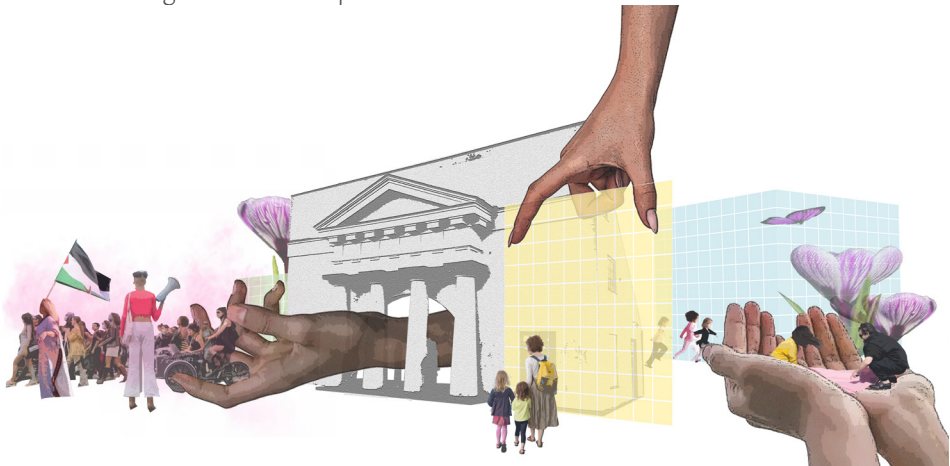
Project and Protect - Collage capturing the complex identity of Nørrebro

CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

Masters of Architecture
Kansas State University
[aug. 2020 - present]

EXPERIENCE

Oz Journal 47 Editor
Oz Architecture Journal
[May 2024 - present]

Architecture Intern
Multistudio KC Office
[may 2024 - present]

Graduate Teaching Assistant
Environmental Systems I
[aug. 2023 - present]

Gateway Decathlon Competition
Collegiate Team Member
[sep. 2023 - aug. 2024]

Graphics Assistant
APDesign Communication & Events
[jan. 2023 - july 2023]

AWARDS

DLR Group Scholarship
Kansas City Architectural Foundation
[june 2024]

Oscar Ekdahl Lectureship in Architecture & Design
Kansas State University
[jan. 2023]

KCAF Daw/Jarvis/Goodman Scholarship
Kansas City Architectural Foundation
[may 2023]

Women in Design - KC Scholarship
Kansas City Architectural Foundation
[june 2022]

OURCI Summer Research Award
Kansas State University
[may 2022]

LEADERSHIP

President
Women in Design [WiD+]
[dec. 2020 - dec. 2022]

Peer Educator
College of APDesign
[aug. 2024 - present]

Student Representative
Intercultural Collaborative Committee
[dec. 2021 - dec. 2023]

Public Relations/Historian
AIAS | Freedom by Design
[dec. 2021 - dec. 2022]

RESEARCH

Collaging the Pilgrimage Experience
OURCI Summer Research Award
[may 2022 - dec. 2022]

SKILLSETS

Drafting
Rhino
AutoCAD
Revit

Digital
Adobe Creative Suites
V-Ray + Enscape
Microsoft Office

Creative
Photography
Videography
Collage
Animation

Fabrication
Casting
Woodworking
3D printing
Metalworking
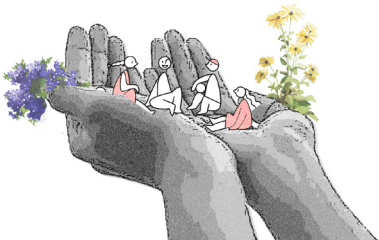
RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The Olympic Legacy

The Olympic Games are celebrated as a symbol of global unity and competition, yet their architectural skeletons can reveal a more controversial legacy. In 2004, the Athens Olympics became a cautionary tale for Olympic development. Struggling with underuse, financial strain, and costly maintenance issues, the complex failed to integrate into the city's long-term plan, leaving deteriorating structures in its place. In 2008, the Beijing Olympics featured many architecturally impressive venues, but struggled to find long-term use for these spaces. While globally celebrated, the design highlights the disconnect between grand-scale Olympic architecture and local community needs.

This controversial legacy is relevant when looking at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. The contrast between the global excitement and the local discourse highlights political, economic, and social consequences that can result from the architecture of international events.

Rio de Janeiro: A Case Study

"The games may be a two-week-long show for the rest of us, but for the displaced, the disruption they cause could last a lifetime."

The 2016 Olympics were marketed as a transformative opportunity, promising economic growth, urban revitalization, and infrastructural development. The reality of the development was heavy public spending, mass displacement, and environmental degradation. Among the most significant of these impacts was the erasure of favela communities and ecologically protected areas to create space for Olympic venues, many of which quickly deteriorated post-event.

Historical Perspectives

Nearly 40 years before the Olympic games, Lina Bo Bardi was designing the SESC Pompéia sports and cultural center in Sao Paolo. When she visited the site, she discovered that the space had been spontaneously claimed by local residents for community gatherings. Instead of demolishing their space, she preserved and enhanced the community use, building the additional program around their activities.

This serves as a powerful historical precedent to the 2016 games, which often ignored local well-being in favor of idealized urban development. Her passion for underscoring community needs in her work reveals a predisposition to community-centered development. Bo Bardi's focus on socially inclusive architecture and her dedication to public space will serve as a guiding philosophy and framework.

SESC Pompéia - Interior (Top), Exterior (Bottom)

Thesis Statement

This research examines the spatial and socio-political implications of Olympic architecture in Rio de Janeiro before, during, and after the games. The sites sit in varied conditions ranging from abandoned and destroyed to revitalized and in progress. This range of outcomes provide a more nuanced understanding of the games success and can serve as a precedent for future Olympic development.

Phases of Transformation

The research will focus on three phases of these sites: before, during, and after the games.

Before: The pre-Olympic phase will look at the history of the sites prior to the Games, with a particular focus on what was erased or disrupted in the development process. The vague documentation of these communities before will require a study of analogous areas to reconstruct the original activities on the site.

During: The Olympic games last 16 days, a brief moment in contrast to their use before and after the event. During this phase, I will explore the international excitement of these Olympic sites and how they were perceived by the public versus the local communities. I will also note the proposed future for these sites to contextualize the After.

After: The post-Olympic phase will focus on what happened to these venues once the Games were over. Through site visits and analysis, This phase will explore the consequences of these sites and their continued relationship to local communities.
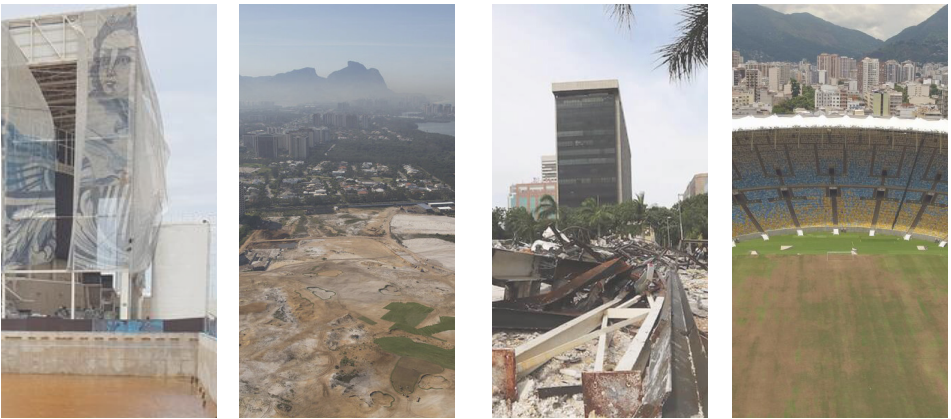
The 2016 Olympic impact - Aquatic Stadium (left), Golf Course, Media Center, Maracanã Stadium (right)

Notable Sites

Future Arena (temporary)
Built as a temporary handball venue, the arena was intended to be dismantled and converted into schools. Initially abandoned, the first school is now set to open in 2024.

Olympic Aquatics Stadium (temporary)
Designed as a temporary venue, the Aquatics Stadium was left in disrepair until recent deconstruction. The venue displaced residents of the Morro do Canoas favela.

Media Center (temporary)
Originally planned as a temporary venue, the Media Center's demolition site has now been deemed a health hazard.

Rio Olympic Velodrome (permanent)
Designed as a permanent venue for track cycling, the Velodrome has faced structural issues and neglect since the conclusion of the games.

Maracanã Stadium (existing)
Built for the World Cup and renovated for the Olympics, Maracanã remains a permanent yet neglected structure. The expansion displaced local communities.

Deodoro Stadium (temporary)
Intended to be a temporary venue, Deodoro is now largely abandoned. Built near the Morro do Alemão and Morro do Adeus favelas, residents were displaced for Olympic development.

Olympic Village (permanent)
Meant to be a luxury residential area post-Games, the Olympic Village has suffered from underdevelopment. The construction of the Olympic Village involved clearing local communities.

Olympic Golf Course (permanent)
Built on a protected ecological area, this golf course is in sporadic use and remains a point of environmental concern.

Olympic BMX Track (permanent)
Intended for public-use post Olympic games, the site quickly deteriorated. Excitingly, this is now a rare case of Olympic restoration.

Barra Olympic Park (permanent)
A central hub during the games, it was intended to be developed in Rio's urban plan. The surrounding community was partially cleared due to gentrification.

Research methodology

The research methodology will be both analytical and exploratory, combining field visits and archival research to construct the larger narrative surrounding these Olympic sites. Site analysis will play a crucial role in uncovering contemporary site activities. This approach will provide a more holistic understanding of the relationship between Olympic infrastructure and local communities.

Research Output

The research will produce a series of three digital collages for each site, capturing the layered history, architectural changes, and socio-political shifts before, during, and after the Olympic Games. These collages will be accompanied by an animated sequence that merges the images, revealing the evolution of activity and transformation over time.
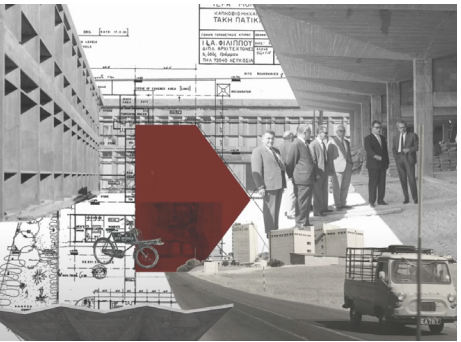
Firelei Baez (Top), Anatomy of a Wallpaper (Bottom)