

# Catalytic Communities University Tour



Since 2010, Catalytic Communities' Executive Director, Theresa Williamson, Ph.D., has given lectures at universities across the United States on a range of topics related to favelas and issues of urban development in Rio de Janeiro. This is one of the ways that we disseminate information, support research efforts and build awareness of important issues affecting Rio's favelas.

## 2015 Lectures and Workshops

**Rio de Janeiro: Mega-Events and Dynamics of Urban Change**

**RioOnWatch: How Hyper-Local News Can Change the World**

**Favelas as Sustainable Development: Rethinking Our Assumptions**

**Community Responses to Eviction, Gentrification and Police Violence in Pre-Olympic Rio de Janeiro**

**Social Entrepreneurship: Scaling by Example**

"It was a terrific talk. That's my opinion, as both an academic and an activist. And the feedback from everyone else I talked to has been nothing but superlatives. Everyone thought it was informative, the analysis was complex and nuanced, and it gave us great insights into the political and organizing scenes in Rio and Brazil. I'm very pleased and would definitely recommend her talk to others."

— Dr. Thomas Angotti,  
CUNY/Hunter College

**WEST COAST  
WEEK 1  
11/16-11/20**

**MID-WEST  
WEEK 2  
11/9-11/13**

**EAST COAST  
WEEK 3  
11/2-11/6**

**DATES FLEXIBLE**

**U-TOUR@CatComm.org**



## About the Tour

**WILLIAMSON** is available for two main visit options: a two hour seminar or lecture, or a full-day campus visit, which could involve speaking with classes, study abroad programs, a departmental conference or a workshop. There is also an option to show our award-winning film, *Favela as a Sustainable Model*. All honoraria are paid to Catalytic Communities, a 501[c][3] nonprofit, to further efforts on behalf of Rio de Janeiro's favelas.

Few are in Williamson's position to offer a community perspective on the current transformations unfolding in Rio, a perspective rarely available at a distance. The presentation incorporates the very latest in breaking news and community responses. It is informed by the experience of favela residents and up-to-date research. Audience members are left with a full understanding of the context which is shaping Rio de Janeiro today and the organization and institutions involved.



## About CatComm

**BASED** in Rio de Janeiro and with a US 501[c][3] charitable status, Catalytic Communities (CatComm) is an empowerment, communications, think tank, and advocacy NGO working since 2000 on behalf of Rio's favelas at the intersection of sustainable community development, human rights, local-global networks, communications, and urban planning. CatComm supports and empowers residents of informal settlements, evolving strategically to support their needs as they arise.

CatComm functions as a news source, agenda setter, movement builder and research collaborative with the intention of supporting favela development. Providing strategic training and communications—and functioning as a connector organization between favela civil society (community journalists and organizers, neighborhood collectives and associations), global civil society (international media and international advocates and activists), and academics and researchers—CatComm draws on the tools and resources of its collaborative and adaptive network to address the broad issues facing Rio's favelas. CatComm builds knowledge and awareness across local and international spheres, resulting in policy recommendations and transforming public opinion through advocacy strategies.

CatComm champions an asset-based approach based on favela qualities and working to incubate a fair, rights-based and participatory model of favela integration to be exported as a solution to the challenges posed by informal housing worldwide. We conscientiously incubate programs to support Rio de Janeiro's informal settlements knowing such communities will constitute a third of the world's population by 2050 (3 of 9 billion), and documenting what we do to serve as an example for other cities across the globe.



## About Rio de Janeiro

**AFTER** decades of stagnation marked by poor governance and disinvestment, by 2010 Rio de Janeiro grew to be one of the fastest growing cities in the Americas. Pricier than New York and receiving more than double the international investment of São Paulo, the city was eager to take advantage of recent offshore oil discoveries and having been selected to host the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games to reconstitute itself as a “global city.”

Yet despite initial optimistic press coverage and significant work on the part of the city administration to engender a positive international image, the tide turned in 2013 and, following mass protests, a city applauded just months prior was suddenly seen as having lost its opportunity--rather than empowering and integrating citizens, mega-event inspired policies were instead exacerbating the city’s already infamous inequality. Known as the “Marvelous City” for its geologic beauty, Rio is also known as the “Divided City” by locals as rich and poor live side by side yet face historic segregation and stark disparities in access to public services.

How is Rio’s “coming of age” unfolding? What is the role of the two mega-events in this process? What is happening in the city’s 600-plus favela communities? What exactly are favelas? How is the city currently handling these communities and its deep historic divides? Could the sustainable development of Rio’s favelas offer a housing model for the rest of our rapidly urbanizing world? How has the community media and creative organizing affected the scenario? And, finally, how could Rio transform the present state of affairs--increasingly seen as dark and chaotic--into a unique opportunity to grow and consolidate its economy without compromising its unique cultural heritage, and in a way that reduces inequality?



## About Theresa Williamson

Catalytic Communities (CatComm) founder Theresa Williamson has become an outspoken and respected advocate and informant on behalf of Rio de Janeiro's favelas in the face of fast-paced urban transformations. With a small and agile team at CatComm, she works to promote a more creative, inclusive, and empowering integration between the city's informal and formal communities, where favelas are recognized for their heritage status and their residents are served as equal citizens. Williamson is also editor-in-chief of RioOnWatch, a watchdog news site and favela news service. Since 2010, the site has been tracking the increasingly intense impacts of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games on Rio's favelas, providing a global platform for often-ignored community perspectives and valuable insights for other cities around the world.

She won the 2012 National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials' John D. Lange International Award for her contribution to the international housing debate and has had three opinion pieces published in The New York Times. She has also been quoted by The New York Times, The Guardian, the BBC World News, Al Jazeera America, NPR's Worldview, and many other international media outlets.

In May 2004, she received her PhD from the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation won the 2005 Gill-Chin Lim Award for Best Dissertation on International Planning and led to articles and related research published in Progressive Planning, the Journal of Urban Technology, and at Cidadania.org.

Williamson received her undergraduate degree in Biological Anthropology from Swarthmore College. Raised in the Washington, D.C. area, she is a dual Brazilian and British citizen and lives with her daughter in Rio de Janeiro.

