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Vinicius Gorczeski

Magyar Tudományos Akadémia / Hungarian Academy of Sciences
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Crackland: symbol of Brazil's drug policy failure

Vinicius Gorczeski

Centre for Social Sciences, email: vinicius.gorczeski@tk.mta.hu; +36.1.2246700/5213

Abstract “Crackland”, located in the heart of Sao Paulo, is Brazil's most long-standing open drugs scene, where crack cocaine users settled and where violence spread for the past two decades. This paper seeks to analyze the paradoxical mechanisms adopted by policymakers and law enforcement in the city of Sao Paulo that led Crackland and problems stemming from its very existence to root and persist. First, this paper introduces an overview of the current Crackland landscape and failed attempts to deal with it. Then, it relates that to a rooted history of war on drugs in the city and in Brazil as driving forces undermining progressive and internationally recognized approaches to dealing with illegal drug usage. An example of promising policy, the Open Arms program, suffered from the lack authorities' capabilities to steer the program and stumbled upon conflicting legislation before it was declared to be dismantled. Subsequently, ways to improve the program under the current policy framework will be analyzed through international best practices in law and drugs policies.

Keywords Crackland, Open Arms, war on drugs, crack cocaine, drug policy, law on drugs

Crackland: symbol of Brazil's drug policy failure



Fig 1. Crackland's region, located in the heart of São Paulo, Brazil. ¹

In the heart of São Paulo, Brazil's largest and richest city, stands what has been known by any *paulistano* as “Cracolândia” —or “Crackland”, Brazil's most long-lived open drugs scene.² Near Luz, a symbolic train station, passengers face a scene of misery: garbage is scattered over and around pavements, many falling-apart tents hide

¹ Crackland, June 9, 2017, São Paulo, in Government of the State of São Paulo, by Alexandre Carvalho / Government of the State of São Paulo, June 9, 2017, accessed December 12, 2017, <http://www.saopaulo.sp.gov.br/spnoticias/pesquisa-pioneira-revela-o-perfil-dos-frequentadores-da-cracolandia/>.

² Sam Cowie, “Inside Crackland: The Open-Air Drug Market That São Paulo Just Can't Kick,” *The Guardian*, November 27, 2017, sec. Cities, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/27/inside-crackland-open-air-crack-market-sao-paulo>.

facades, aimless people are seen, wandering here and there; some of them passengers; hundreds of them crack cocaine takers.³ The police force is always around but never there, and what concerns them is not crack cocaine usage, but an unpredictable possibility that crack users will resort to violence at any moment to exchange products for drugs on the streets.

Every once in a while, there are crackdowns, publicly released as positive achievements by São Paulo's state Secretary of Social Development,⁴ but there are also conflicting findings being published at the same time showing that crackdowns haven't been effective enough to dismantle the most popular open drug scene in the city.⁵

³ Sam Cowie, "Inside Crackland: The Open-Air Drug Market That São Paulo Just Can't Kick," *The Guardian*, November 27, 2017, sec. Cities, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/27/inside-crackland-open-air-crack-market-sao-paulo>.

⁴ A recent one, that took place in May aiming at terminating Crackland, for instance, has publicized that more than 50 people were taken into custody, but it neglects the fact that Crackland is still there: "Denarc presents assessment of megaoperation in Crackland," Governo do Estado de São Paulo, May 23, 2017, <http://www.saopaulo.sp.gov.br/spnoticias/denarc-apresenta-balanco-da-megaoperacao-realizada-na-cracolandia/>.

⁵ Sam Cowie, "Inside Crackland: The Open-Air Drug Market That São Paulo Just Can't Kick," *The Guardian*, November 27, 2017, sec. Cities, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/27/inside-crackland-open-air-crack-market-sao-paulo>.

The last one was in May 2017⁶, but Crackland resisted and it is still there—and for more than 20 years.⁷

What was taken for a great success became a reason for public embarrassment a month after May's crackdown, in June 2017. The same Secretary of Social Development then released a comprehensive study about Crackland—the report was made with the United Nations Development Program—, showing that the size of the issue in São Paulo has been underestimated; the often repressive response has, like others in the past, fallen into inefficacy: not only did the place's population jumped by 180% in a year at Crackland, from 709 people to 1.861, but the number of women settling at Crackland increased five folds, to a rampant 642 frequenters in the same period.⁸

These numbers may have shocked supporters of repressive methods against crack users in Crackland. But it didn't surprise anyone used to recognize a fact: the place has become the country's biggest symbol of failure in dealing with crack cocaine.

The reason why Crackland is still there derives from a paradoxical combination of methods in tackling drug usage there. Even though new progressive forces informing the public debate about drugs using scientific evidence have grown wider and louder in the country in the last years—encouraging the establishment of new harm reduction policies—, Brazil still has a prohibitionist “War on Drugs” policy

⁶ “Denarc presents assessment of megaoperation in Crackland,” Governo do Estado de São Paulo, May 23, 2017, <http://www.saopaulo.sp.gov.br/spnoticias/denarc-apresenta-balanco-da-megaoperacao-realizada-na-cracolandia/>.

⁷ Marcelo Ribeiro et al., “The Brazilian ‘Cracolândia’ Open Drug Scene and the Challenge of Implementing a Comprehensive and Effective Drug Policy: Editorial,” *Addiction* 111, no. 4 (April 2016): 571–73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/add.13151>.

⁸ Government of the State of São Paulo, ed., “Profile of drug users at Crackland” (Secretary of Social Development of the State of São Paulo, 2017), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzuqMfbpwX4wb3kyQzdwTIRrbHc/view>.

approach, based on an ambiguous legislation, that combines repression by the police forces with punishment for drug users and dealers.⁹

That led the program under the label harm reduction to address Crackland's issues, known as "Open Arms"—implemented by São Paulo's City—to be modest in design (but ambitious in goals), lacking some of the best practices found in similar projects on responding to open drug scenes, as those implemented in Canada and European cities. The latter examples included in their responses not only the need of giving users a crack use kit, but they were also thought to be a multi-sector policy combining harm reduction with law enforcement.¹⁰

The problem goes beyond that. Open Arms suffer from inconsistency in its implementation. As long as critiques—normally from conservative movements—emerge, some of its policy components get at stake. The reason is simple. Brazil's policymakers are highly sensitive to conservative movements' criticisms when the first signs of failure of a progressive approach toward drugs are highlighted by the media. That's crucial because it impedes any critical, serious, and accurate evaluation of a policy response — and put solutions at risk to properly handle Crackland. And the current legislation on drugs has a key role in supporting such evasive political responses.

A history of War on Drugs

According to an extensive account of Brazil's drug policy history, the country has followed the drug regime worldwide and the American "War on Drugs" approach since the middle of the last

⁹ Thiago Rodrigues and Beatriz Caiuby Labate, "Brazilian Drug Policy: Tension Between Repression and Alternatives," *SpringerLink*, 2016, 187–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29082-9_11.

¹⁰ Helge Waal et al., "Open Drug Scenes: Responses of Five European Cities," *BMC Public Health* 14 (August 16, 2014): 853, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-853>.

century, adopting local policies, such as the “Toxics Law” in 1976, that not only mirrored the prohibitionist approach but also established heavier penalties for drug users involved in criminal activities.¹¹ The more prohibitionist approach was later boosted by the military dictatorship in Brazil — from 1964 to 1985— using as an argument the need of a moral regeneration of the country’s population in response to a more progressive wave started by vocal opponents of the dictatorship.¹²

The possession of any illegal drugs was forbidden, therefore keeping consumers as criminals.¹³ In 2006, a promising new law on drugs came into force, but it was limited in theory and scope and had controversial points: drug users would not, technically, commit a legal offense if possessing any amount of illegal psychoactive, whereas the penalties for drug trafficking would be harsher —for dealing, it increased minimum sentences from 3 to 5 years in prison.¹⁴

In reality, however, the practices would remain the same as before, as the new law didn’t bring any clarity in making a distinction

¹¹ Thiago Rodrigues and Beatriz Caiuby Labate, “Brazilian Drug Policy: Tension Between Repression and Alternatives,” *SpringerLink*, 2016, 187–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29082-9_11.

¹² Thiago Rodrigues and Beatriz Caiuby Labate, “Brazilian Drug Policy: Tension Between Repression and Alternatives,” *SpringerLink*, 2016, 187–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29082-9_11.

¹³ Thiago Rodrigues and Beatriz Caiuby Labate, “Brazilian Drug Policy: Tension Between Repression and Alternatives,” *SpringerLink*, 2016, 187–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29082-9_11.

¹⁴ Luciana Boiteux, “Drugs and Prisons: The Repression of Drugs and the Increase of the Brazilian Penitentiary Population,” *Systems Overload-Drug Laws and Prisons in Latin America. Amsterdam/Washington: Transnational Institute/Washington Office Latin America*, 2011, 30–8. Also see: Thiago Rodrigues and Beatriz Caiuby Labate, “Brazilian Drug Policy: Tension Between Repression and Alternatives,” *SpringerLink*, 2016, 187–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29082-9_11.

between drug dealers and drug users.¹⁵ The criminalization is indeed an adverse reality. A study has given plenty of evidence that Brazil's repressive law enforcement practices on drugs contributed to boosting the country's prison population in the last two decades.¹⁶ According to Brazil's latest comprehensive report on prisons, of 2014, about 600 thousand people were in jail, of which 40% were pretrial detainees.¹⁷ The same report says that almost 30% of the prisons' population was charged with drug trafficking.

Eventually, the new law ended up favoring the criminalization: the decision of making a distinction between "drug user" and "drug dealer" would be left for the traditionally repressive police force when reporting a detainee, and it would be later confirmed by judges handling such cases.¹⁸ Their strategy was selective: black, poor, and marginalized people would be the ones charged with drug

¹⁵ Luciana Boiteux, "Drugs and Prisons: The Repression of Drugs and the Increase of the Brazilian Penitentiary Population," *Systems Overload-Drug Laws and Prisons in Latin America*. Amsterdam/Washington: Transnational Institute/Washington Office Latin America, 2011, 30–8.

¹⁶ Luciana Boiteux, "Drugs and Prisons: The Repression of Drugs and the Increase of the Brazilian Penitentiary Population," *Systems Overload-Drug Laws and Prisons in Latin America*. Amsterdam/Washington: Transnational Institute/Washington Office Latin America, 2011, 30–8.

¹⁷ Eline Caldas, "MJ releases new report on Brazilian prison's population," Multimidia, accessed December 10, 2017, <http://www.justica.gov.br/radio/mj-divulga-novo-relatorio-sobre-populacao-carceraria-brasileira>.

¹⁸ Thiago Rodrigues and Beatriz Caiuby Labate, "Brazilian Drug Policy: Tension Between Repression and Alternatives," *SpringerLink*, 2016, 187–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29082-9_11.

trafficking—overcrowding prisons—with the government failing to control for supply or demand of illegal drugs.¹⁹

Numbers are rare and perhaps inaccurate, but Brazil is possibly one of the largest markets for crack cocaine in the world.²⁰ The most extensive survey on the matter was published in 2014 by the Ministry of Health of Brazil in association with a local institution. It has shown that, in 2012— when the survey was conducted—, about 366 thousand people used crack regularly in all of the country’s capitals.²¹ The same report says that in Brazil’s capitals, 1.000 people did illicit drugs regularly in the previous six months. Thus, more than a third did crack.

New organizations devoted to advocating for more evidence-based policies on drugs emerged in the country in the last years to give some balance to the discussion, such as the Brazilian Drug Policy Platform²². It aggregated other drug policy institutes born in the 2000s, a period in which new progressive bills on drugs came out and are in debate in the country’s federal legislative houses.²³ That helped

¹⁹ Luciana Boiteux, “Drugs and Prisons: The Repression of Drugs and the Increase of the Brazilian Penitentiary Population,” *Systems Overload-Drug Laws and Prisons in Latin America*. Amsterdam/Washington: Transnational Institute/Washington Office Latin America, 2011, 30–8.

²⁰ Marcelo Ribeiro et al., “The Brazilian ‘Cracolândia’ Open Drug Scene and the Challenge of Implementing a Comprehensive and Effective Drug Policy: Editorial,” *Addiction* 111, no. 4 (April 2016): 571–73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/add.13151>.

²¹ Francisco Inácio Pinkusfeld Monteiro Bastos, “National Survey on Crack Usage: Who Are the Users of Crack And/Or Similar of Brazil? How Many in Brazilian Capitals?” (Rio de Janeiro: ICICT, 2014), <https://www.arca.fiocruz.br/bitstream/iciict/10019/2/UsodeCrack.pdf>.

²² “Brazilian Drug Policy Platform,” accessed December 11, 2017, <http://idpc.net/profile/brazilian-drug-policy-platform>.

²³ Thiago Rodrigues and Beatriz Caiuby Labate, “Brazilian Drug Policy: Tension Between Repression and Alternatives,” *SpringerLink*, 2016, 187–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29082-9_11.

the country move the debate forward, and *cannabidiol* was regulated in Brazil in 2015 by the National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA).²⁴ A long discussion on decriminalization of illegal drugs in Brazil, by the Supreme Court, is still ongoing, based on an appeal taken to the court, and three out of 11 judges have voted for the decriminalization in that case—the remaining judges haven't voted yet,²⁵ while some of those who did, like Luis Roberto Barroso,²⁶ have been advocating worldwide for the decriminalization of illegal drugs for personal use.²⁷ Barroso has stated needs a new policy, to override the current “police, weapons, and numerous arrests” policy method that has failed.²⁸

²⁴ Jean Marcel Carvalho França, *The history of marijuana in Brazil* (São Paulo: Três Estrelas, 2015).

²⁵ Raphael Martins, “Score at STF Is at 3 X 0 for Drugs Decriminalization,” *Exame*, August 2, 2017, <https://exame.abril.com.br/brasil/placar-no-stf-esta-em-3x0-para-descriminalizacao-de-drogas/>.

²⁶ Felipe Rocondo, “Read the Vote of Judge Barroso on the Drugs Case - JOTA,” accessed December 12, 2017, <https://www.jota.info/docs/leia-o-voto-do-ministro-barroso-no-julgamento-das-drogas-10092015>.

²⁷ Luís Roberto Barroso, “Brazil Must Legalise Drugs – Its Existing Policy Just Destroys Lives | Luís Roberto Barroso,” *The Guardian*, November 15, 2017, sec. Global development, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/nov/15/brazil-must-legalise-drugs-existing-policy-destroys-lives-luis-roberto-barroso-supreme-court-judge>.

²⁸ Luís Roberto Barroso, “Brazil Must Legalise Drugs – Its Existing Policy Just Destroys Lives | Luís Roberto Barroso,” *The Guardian*, November 15, 2017, sec. Global development, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/nov/15/brazil-must-legalise-drugs-existing-policy-destroys-lives-luis-roberto-barroso-supreme-court-judge>.

“Open Arms”

It's under such a mixed debate that, in 2014, the first City Hall program on harm reduction aimed at solving São Paulo's largest open drug scenes issues turned up, promoted by Fernando Haddad, the left-wing politician from the Worker's Party.²⁹ The program was an attempt to rethink the latest repressive policies levied on Crackland by previous administrations of São Paulo's City Hall, such as the “Operation Cleaning”, of 2005; “Operation Dignity”, of 2007; and “Operation Tightness” of 2012, all of them characterized by the use of force and repression against crack cocaine users in Crackland³⁰; a policy that ended up decreasing the number of users in the place, but that would later either return to Crackland or spread across other central streets of the city.³¹

Aimed at boosting society's support to address the crack issue at Crackland, Open Arms offered beneficiaries a R\$ 15-voucher (US\$ 4.57 in current value), a place for them to shelter at a nearby hotel,

²⁹ “Report on the preliminary evaluation survey of the program ‘Open Arms’” (São Paulo: Brazilian Drug Policy Platform (PBPD)/ Brazilian Institute of Criminal Sciences, 2016), <http://pbpd.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Pesquisa-De-Bra%C3%A7os-Abertos-1-2.pdf>.

³⁰ “Report on the preliminary evaluation survey of the program ‘Open Arms’” (São Paulo: Brazilian Drug Policy Platform (PBPD)/ Brazilian Institute of Criminal Sciences, 2016), <http://pbpd.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Pesquisa-De-Bra%C3%A7os-Abertos-1-2.pdf>.

³¹ Sam Cowie, “Inside Crackland: The Open-Air Drug Market That São Paulo Just Can't Kick,” *The Guardian*, November 27, 2017, sec. Cities, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/27/inside-crackland-open-air-crack-market-sao-paulo>.

and cleaning jobs.³² At the place, municipal police bases were set around the place.³³

The program, however, didn't incorporate components such as crack use kits or drug dependency alternatives that were, for instance, adopted by other countries to deal with open drug scenes. Even so, owing to the huge step forward in Brazil's drug policy history, Open Arms was welcomed by organizations that bet on harm reduction approaches.³⁴ Two years after the program was launched, signs of success were seen. More than 500 crack users had a place to shelter, other 280 were waiting for new vacancies in the program, making it a reference at international level.³⁵

Things would change after the election of the new mayor, Pedro Doria, who took power in 2017. Despite the results of a survey conducted by the major Brazilian newspaper saying that 69% of the city's population approved the Open Arms program (against 22% of the population that opposed it),³⁶ Doria, reviving the previous repressive policies, declared war on Crackland and sent 900 police

³² São Paulo City Hall, "Open Arms Program" (São Paulo), accessed December 11, 2017, <http://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/upload/saude/DBAAGO2015.pdf>.

³³ Marcelo Ribeiro et al., "The Brazilian 'Cracolândia' Open Drug Scene and the Challenge of Implementing a Comprehensive and Effective Drug Policy: Editorial," *Addiction* 111, no. 4 (April 2016): 571–73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/add.13151>.

³⁴ Sarah Evans, "Crack: harm reduction" (São Paulo: Open Society Foundations, January 2017), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/crack-reduzir-danos-20170313.pdf>.

³⁵ Sarah Evans, "Crack: harm reduction" (São Paulo: Open Society Foundations, January 2017), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/crack-reduzir-danos-20170313.pdf>.

³⁶ "Program Aimed at Combating Crack at SP Is Supported by 69% of the Population," accessed December 11, 2017, <http://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaopublica/2016/07/1792846-programa-de-combate-ao-crack-no-centro-de-sp-tem-apoio-de-69.shtml>.

officers to dismantle it in May 2017.³⁷ It did so after news came out stating that hotel's facilities aimed at sheltering crack users had been taken over by drug traffickers.³⁸ Soon after the crackdown, Crackland goes well³⁹ and its population has returned and increased, as mentioned before. Doria didn't stop there, and the policy is stumbling on inconsistencies. The hotel dedicated to sheltering drug users, a key component of the program, will be shut down by December of 2017.⁴⁰

Can “Open Arms” get better?

Arguments saying that the policy is not working as a way of justifying a repressive setback shouldn't be taken too seriously and don't offer evidenced reasons for its termination. No such a program—aiming specifically at the crack cocaine users— would be perfect alone. A study that reviewed policies on open drug scenes in five European cities—Amsterdam, Vienna, Lisbon, Zürich, and Frankfurt, has concluded that the best way of handling the situation is to

³⁷ Sam Cowie, “Inside Crackland: The Open-Air Drug Market That São Paulo Just Can't Kick,” *The Guardian*, November 27, 2017, sec. Cities, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/27/inside-crackland-open-air-crack-market-sao-paulo>.

³⁸ Juliana Gagnani, “Drug Street Fair at Crackland Becomes a Stalemate to Doria,” *Folha de S.Paulo*, accessed December 11, 2017, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2017/04/1878466-feira-da-droga-vira-impasse-para-programa-de-doria-na-cracolandia.shtml>.

³⁹ Sam Cowie, “Inside Crackland: The Open-Air Drug Market That São Paulo Just Can't Kick,” *The Guardian*, November 27, 2017, sec. Cities, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/27/inside-crackland-open-air-crack-market-sao-paulo>.

⁴⁰ Sam Cowie, “Inside Crackland: The Open-Air Drug Market That São Paulo Just Can't Kick,” *The Guardian*, November 27, 2017, sec. Cities, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/27/inside-crackland-open-air-crack-market-sao-paulo>.

implement a holistic response: that involves not only law enforcement, but also prevention, and treatment of users in addition to harm reduction methods; none of these cities achieved their positive results only relying on treatment, medial, and social support (as it is the case in Crackland).⁴¹

On one hand, it was only when the cities established a multi-sector approach, embedded in a comprehensive policy on drugs, that they could achieve coexistence between drug users and their neighbors.⁴² At the same time, harm reduction could be achieved.⁴³

The same study mentioned above, however, points out that only when political forces mobilized at the local (managing the program) and national level (establishing a guidance that favored such policies) that positive results could be achieved.

Besides that, another finding was crucial: long-term policies combining control and support to users and their neighbors around open drug scenes were set at the design stage, creating an understanding that no short-term program could be effective for obtaining positive results, let alone for providing enough information for proper evaluations.⁴⁴ The key message found in the report was that changes in social, economic, and political thinking are necessary to take place for policies to work. A thing that requires long periods of time. If a multi-sector approach be incorporated in its guidance, Open

⁴¹ Helge Waal et al., "Open Drug Scenes: Responses of Five European Cities," *BMC Public Health* 14 (August 16, 2014): 853, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-853>.

⁴² Helge Waal et al., "Open Drug Scenes: Responses of Five European Cities," *BMC Public Health* 14 (August 16, 2014): 853, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-853>.

⁴³ Helge Waal et al., "Open Drug Scenes: Responses of Five European Cities," *BMC Public Health* 14 (August 16, 2014): 853, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-853>.

⁴⁴ Helge Waal et al., "Open Drug Scenes: Responses of Five European Cities," *BMC Public Health* 14 (August 16, 2014): 853, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-853>.

Arms is likely to obtain better results for drug users and for those living in neighboring areas. But it can get even better.

Instead of including only treatment and prevention, the City Hall should think of dependency as well. A more ambitious harm reduction policy could prevent crack cocaine users from spreading contagious diseases, such as hepatitis C virus and HIV, according to a report that evaluated harm reduction policies in Toronto, Vancouver, Halifax, and other Canadian cities.⁴⁵ The same report shows that these diseases were found among crack cocaine users in higher numbers than in the local population in these cities. Thus, as with needle exchange programs for heroin users, crack use kits aim at making crack usage less dangerous for users by offering mouthpieces, glass stems (that users can use as a pipe), brass screens (used to hold the crack “rock” when added to a pipe), in addition to other items such as condoms.⁴⁶

Therefore, not only does the method help prevent users from sharing infected pipes with other users, it does also work as a physical way of protecting users from acquiring burned lips, cuts, and oral sores.⁴⁷ An evaluation report on the Ottawa experience has shown that, in a span of a year, risks associated to crack reduced owing to the distribution of crack use kits.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ “Distributing Safer Crack Use Kits in Canada” (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, September 2008), <http://librarypdf.catie.ca/PDF/ATI-20000s/26038.pdf>.

⁴⁶ “Distributing Safer Crack Use Kits in Canada” (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, September 2008), <http://librarypdf.catie.ca/PDF/ATI-20000s/26038.pdf>.

⁴⁷ S. Faruque et al., “Crack Cocaine Smoking and Oral Sores in Three Inner-City Neighborhoods,” *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes and Human Retrovirology: Official Publication of the International Retrovirology Association* 13, no. 1 (September 1996): 87–92.

⁴⁸ Lynne Leonard, Emily DeRubeis, and Nicholas Birkett, “City of Ottawa Public Health Safer Crack Use Initiative Evaluation Report” (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2006), http://www.ohrdp.ca/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Final_Crack_Report_ES_f.pdf.

Even though more liberal in approach, such component can work as an effective ingredient in the current Open Arms structure. There shouldn't be reasons for avoiding such step forward: The latest report on Crackland from 2017 has shown that such health issues are, evidently, not limited to Canadian crack users; hepatitis C, B, HIV, and other communicable diseases were also detected in higher numbers among users in Crackland.⁴⁹

A way to go

The political shift with the ascension of Doria as the mayor of São Paulo represented a setback toward a catastrophic repressive method to address Crackland. The lack of political support to Open Arms and the termination of a component in it, as mentioned before, show a lack of understanding that policies involving crack take long periods of time to show results. Inconsistency is a mark of the current political approach in the region, making it difficult to evaluate results.

On the other hand, the program itself should consider the dependency of crack users —by offering crack use kits— as a way of improving the program's efficiency in the long run. The evidence makes obvious that a trimmed harm reduction project, combined with some communitarian and non-violent police and economic and social aspects altogether, may boost the chances of success, as elaborated before.

If implemented and, over time, showing positive results, the program would help illuminate the current debate on Brazil's drug policy, already divided between conservative and liberal forces. It could even support for the decriminalization of illegal drugs for personal use, in light of the Supreme Tribunal Court's current debate on the matter;

⁴⁹ Government of the State of São Paulo, ed., "Profile of drug users at Crackland" (Secretary of Social Development of the State of São Paulo, 2017),

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzuqMfbpwX4wb3kyQzdwTIRrbHc/view>.

let alone pushing for the approval of more liberal bills under discussion in the legislative power.

As everything else—especially the repressive approach by the police— has failed, it's time for policymakers to envision changes. However unlikely, if a new approach fails it would certainly not be as catastrophic as the current lost battle in Crackland, engaged by the use of force by public officials for the past 20 years.

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Körtvélyesi Zsolt, Szilágyi Emese

Honlap: <http://jog.tk.mta.hu/mtalwp>

E-mail: mta.law-wp@tk.mta.hu

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