

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY, DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT AND URBAN FORM IN BELO HORIZONTE, BRAZIL

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Abstract

The article deals with the issue of urban form as a result of citizen actions processed at its center. After a brief theoretical introduction that discusses the issue of the right to the city and the differential space (according to Henri Lefebvre), we draw an overview of urban social movements in Brazil and how they led to the creation of popular councils and to a greater awareness of the urban phenomenon. The second part focuses on the issue of the right to the memory and how the shape of the city of Belo Horizonte had to adapt to it by popular pressure. The conclusion identifies recent popular pressures and possibilities of transformation that can come of them, in a process that we called "accelerated history."

Keywords

Urban Form, Urban Movements, Urban Memory

1. INTRODUCTION: THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AND THE BRAZILIAN LAW

1.1. Considerations regarding to the right to the city

One of the main issues that the urban phenomenon has brought to contemporary is the appropriation of urban space and the right to a fair and universal appropriation, considering that cities are the locus par excellence of the achievement of socio-economic relations and cultural as well as a product of these relationships.

When we examine the issue through the lens of Henri Lefebvre, we can understand that capitalism constantly reproduces urban orders that reflect its own logic, which, at the same time, opens a large space for contestation and reaction of those social groups who are excluded, even if these groups react by sectors (environment, culture, housing, etc.). The triad established by the French author - designed space, lived space, perceived space - allows us, in turn, understand how urban form dialogue with different actors: the space is designed for planners and politicians, lived space is the result of the daily dynamics linked to popular ownership and either of the relations of power and production, and the perceived spaces are related with symbolic appropriations from different social groups. "Inhabit" the city, according to the Lefebvrian concept, is deeply connected to the concept of appropriation, which, in turn, presents itself as a fullness of actions related to these three dimensions of the space. Conflicts occur exactly when this fullness is not reached by the different groups, with the emergence of contradictions and conflicts between wants and needs and also with the different "times surrounded in a space" (Lefebvre, 1972, p.187). Now, if there are different ways of living, you can not consider the city as a homogeneous space, despite its materiality that tends to appear as it was "freeze" in their morphology. The tendency to confuse reality with its concrete physical form leads to erroneous conclusions about the urban spaces as these variety of scenarios have allowed only a single one. If we are aware of it, we are led naturally to the notion that urban space is not homogeneous, enabling us to speak of a "differential" space.

We are therefore in the realm of differences and the constant transformation, considering a multiplicity of agents and forms of appropriation, with multiple causes and motivations, as those derived from culture and heritage or from the environment or also from housing, mobility, beyond the traditional class struggles from the asymmetry of the relations of production. What occurs in practice, however, is the treatment of these differences from the homogenizing statutes, including laws, dealing as equals situations and different people that are not equals, causing social contradictions. The supposed neutrality, in fact a corollary of homogenization, produced in Brazil, a legal apparatus that confirms that social exclusion historically present in the colonization of the country, not producing at all, fairer cities, aggravating the social contradictions. For HL, the space would be therefore only a medium that always leads to a deeper cause, beyond their appearances (Lefebvre, 2008, p. 71). Since it is not defined by the homogenizing project of industrial rationality (Lefebvre, 2008, p. 42), the urban space-time appears as a differential, with dual properties in a myriad of conflicts. The solution for urban complexity is therefore not homogeneous in their treatment disguised as "immobile" urban plans or that consider population as a homogeneous group.

What we perceive in the management and planning of conventional methods in the Brazilian cities are laws that freeze the cities and overlook the deep social abyss that divides and characterizes our

society, not considering as well the different motivations in the fight for various rights to the city. In this sense, the right to the city is not only to live in the center or be able to go to any part. In fact, the right to the city involves more complex and flexible issues such as the fair distribution of the costs and bonuses generated by the *Urbis*, breaking the invisible social barriers which segregate their spaces, and open the possibility of different forms of ownership of its spatial diversity, the viability of urban mobility. For securing the rights, we must also ensure the means for them to exercise.

1.2. "The right to the city" movements in Brazil

During the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1986), the exponential growth of cities manifested the social injustices in the distribution of its territory and the precarious state of housing and mobility, among other sectors, that large portions of its residents were submitted. However, by the very political conditions of a dictatorial regime, the social movements had not the vigor that characterizes the post- democratization period, but rehearsed some principles that would be established only by law enacted in 2001, known as the "Statute of the City ", which governs the use of urban space, considering the social function of property.

The organized social movements in Brazil have had their origin in the early twentieth century, initially more like claiming movements, of local scale, the neighborhood or district boundaries, still in a tone of "humble request". In the 1970s, began to rehearse as more organized movements, like those related to housing. At the end of the decade and throughout the 1980s, the struggles were extended to various topics such as sanitation, environment, transport, and associations also began performing more politicized and articulated with each other.

For these decades, in turn, there were also implanted and matured NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations), which, in one form or another, been associated with social movements to point out other possibilities for urban planning thanks to the "potential role of own activism as 'planners' and protagonists of an alternative to the official planning and conservative "planning (SOUZA E RODRIGUES, 2004, p. 12). Such activism, about which we comment some more later, contributed decisively to the creation of this "Statute of the City" that, in its text, provides and encourages a more democratic management of cities through collegiate bodies of urban policy at the national, state and municipal levels.

1.3. Movements related to Housing

As we saw before, movements related to housing, perhaps the cradle of urban social activism in Brazil, born from neighborhood associations, but also received a strong influence of a rural movement, the MST (Landless Movement), which claimed the redistribution of unused land and an effective land reform in the country. From both movements appeared in major Brazilian cities the MTST (Homeless Workers Movement), whose main strategy was to fight for housing by the occupation of buildings and vacant lots in order to start negotiations with owners and governments.

1.4. Movements related to Environment

As a characteristic of the environmental causes, which are quite diffuse, the movements related to environment present a diversity of flags. It is our specific interest to exam the question of mining, since it is the main economic base of Minas Gerais (Brazilian state that is the focus of this article), and exemplify an economic power that can keep itself apart of urban plans and legislation. The mining activity in Minas Gerais accounts for over 45% of the national mineral production, and where the mining productive chain accounts for over 35% of its GDP. It results in a great power of the mining companies, of course. It results that state and local Governments are stressed between two equal and opposite actions, one of economic origin represented the interests of mining companies and other with social origins, represented primarily for its organized groups that fight under the banner of environmental protection as well the most vulnerable social groups affected by mining stocks.

In fact, most of the time, when the mining interests identify deposits of high economic interest, their action is to establish strategies for their exploitation, regardless of their location (in environmentally sensitive or culturally rich places) or of the problems that these mines may cause with the surrounding societies. The license methodological logic - anchored in Environmental Impact Studies and based on mitigation of these impacts and environmental compensation - leads to a practice that allows mining anywhere depending only of a well done negotiation. These negotiations, in each case, are more or less tense depending on the environmental and social vulnerability of places, but are considered normal in the process, as almost "natural" to follow steps. The same logic implies that the "compensation" or "mitigating effects of impacts" will be sufficient or to restore the landscape and environmental potential of mined areas or to replace them with something better, more "useful" to society. Mediating the two opponent parties, appears the government, without sufficient organization, also pressured by the need for money and other social benefits (such as employment generation and momentary wealth), acting under a legal basis that only legitimizes the rules of the game.

1.5. Movements linked to culture

As we have shown, one of the main characteristics of urban social movements in Brazil is grounded in issues of identity and sharing experiences. These questions relate naturally to the realm of culture where, through their own instruments of expression, it is possible to channel a major urban activism. One of the strongest forms of this activism in Brazil can be represented by the *hip hop* movement, and in its sub-products, *Rap* and *funk*, the *break* (street dance) and *graffiti* (street art).

The *hip hop* was born in the North American black neighborhoods in the 70s and was based on artistic expression as a political form of complaint against social segregation, ethnic and residential. Precisely because it is a product of the local and territory, with strong identity source, the movement spread through the symbolic places of the city, including reference sites and places with historic and cultural heritage. The importance of *hip hop* and urban social activism goes beyond its specific language and contributes to the expansion of political awareness, breaking the divisions that characterizes segmented manifestations.

Through the cultural dimension, we can rescue an important form of appropriation of the cities and

the right to its enjoyment.

1.6. The "Statute of the City"

The legacy of the military dictatorship period in Brazil in terms of urban planning is marked by imposition and technicality. At that time, the model of occupation of the Brazilian territory was being replaced from rural to urban, with a significant exodus from the countryside to the cities, which has caused, from the late 1950s to the present day, a figure of more than 80% of people concentrated in the cities, especially in big ones, being vertiginous the growth of sub-dwellings in towns and slums, resulting from a chronic income concentration and unequal distribution of wealth in the country. In the period between 1964 and 1988, before the first new Federal Constitution after the democratization, urban planning was marked by cabinet decisions without popular participation and controlled by interests of the ruling classes.

It was natural, therefore, that intellectual, technical and most enlightened leaders of the country fight for reforming the city management, more focused on social issues and more balanced cities. Despite the constitutional advances, but also because the large resistance of the more conservative sectors, these urban rights would see only consolidated as an effective practice after 13 years of the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, so called the "citizen" one, by the law called "Statute of the City", on July, 10th, 2001.

In its general principles, the law seeks sustainable and fair cities based in the right to urban land, democratic management, cooperation between governments and society in social service interest, prevent and correct the negative effects of urban growth, ordination control of land use, patterns of production and consumption of goods and services and urban expansion compatible with environmental, social and economic sustainability, fair distribution of benefits and burdens of urbanization, valuing the natural environment, cultural heritage, historical, artistic, archaeological and landscape, land regularization and urbanization of occupied areas, between others.

The transfer of text to practice has been the challenge for which Brazilian cities has undergone in the last decade and that has been accomplished with much difficulty, far from its fullness, not achieving the aspects of the right to the city linked to the differential space which Lefebvre tells us. This is the vacuum filled by diffuse and sector social movements.

1.7. The recent urban riots in Brazil

After the enactment of the Statute of the City, perhaps due to this delay in their practice or their inability to reach the core of the causes of urban injustice merger, many of the traditional movements continue to be practiced, now with the powerful aid of social networking sites . The most obvious example of this was the massive popular demonstrations in June 2013 in Brazil. The trigger them was the increase in rates of urban transport in major Brazilian cities, which are radically opposed various youth groups throughout the country. In reality, these groups were already feeling uncomfortable by the impositions of FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) for the hosting of the World Cup 2014 in Brazil and to the enormous expense of building stadiums, works deemed unnecessary in the face of so many most urgent demands for the entire Brazilian nation. So it was that during the Confederations Cup test event for the World Cup, crowds of protesters

mobilized by networks took to the streets in various protests in the various host cities. The claims were the most diverse, including as to public transportation, but to criticize the form of organization of the Brazilian State. Similarly diverse and multiple forms, the profile of demonstrators ranged from families, young and old, to groups such as the *Black Blocks*, they understood that the only way to change the mechanisms would be called "direct action": looting, crashing and lynching . The country watched perplexed the great social upheaval and, given the diffuse nature of the demonstrations, not yet fully assimilated in its content. It is, however, a new and important form of social activism and has been considered a strong participation strategy to new forms of governance. "a fight for participatory democracy, unlike the old movements for citizenship in a representative democracy." (BOAVENTURA SANTOS, apud SANTOS, 2004, p. 146).



Figure 1. Popular Movement in the Station Square, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

2. BRAZILIAN CITIES AND THE RIGHT TO MEMORY: THE CASE OF BELO HORIZONTE

2.1. Brazilian cities and the right to memory

Brazilian historical centers, like other centers in different parts of the planet, suffered severe problems of deterioration caused by functional specialization and its abandonment by the more affluent classes who have ceased to inhabit these places.

As we saw earlier, the abrupt growth of Brazilian cities most occurred in a period in which the planning legislation was not comprehensive enough and the perversities of social inequalities were not as clear for much of the population and at a time when the housing problems were solved by technicians on the urban fringe. At that time also the central areas of cities were not as valued in its symbolic importance, for a "short" understanding of the idea of cultural heritage connected essentially to the historical and artistic exceptionality, neglecting the broader cultural issues related to the popular appropriation of urban centers.

Although most Brazilian cities of medium and large had a disfigured landscape, large cities were the places where their central areas have been most sacrificed according to the "model" of Brazilian urban development. In the major cities of the country, especially from the sixties of the twentieth century, began the pressures to stop the degradation of buildings and urban public spaces that presented historical character, evoking the right to memory and linking cultural preservation to environmental preservation itself. A policy of preservation of historical and artistic heritage in the country had been consolidated since 1937 with the creation of a federal conservation law and the Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage that came gaining prestige since its struggle for the preservation of our heritage mainly represented by historic colonial cities of Minas Gerais and the historic centers of the coastal cities of the same period. It was thanks to this incipient awareness of preservation that, despite the dictatorship and the economic difficulties governments sought to create mechanisms for nature conservation. In that first moment safeguard, in the 1970s, through a purely economic view, efforts were to ensure the return on investment in heritage conservation through tourism.

With the democratization of the country there increased local demands for the right to memory and post-1988 Constitution, with emphasis given to it by municipalities, began to grow municipal councils to preserve their local heritage.

2.2. The case of Belo Horizonte

The city of Belo Horizonte, inaugurated in 1897, was born as the first city designed in the newly created Brazilian Republic (1889), under the aegis of scientific positivism and the celebration of civil values, at all opposed to Ouro Preto, a colonial town connected with the cycle gold, which had hitherto been their capital. Its design, like Washington and Montevideo, positivist and hygienist, had a scenographic morphology fulfilling a dream modernity, a city of the modern times, in a rigid compartmentalization of functions and orthogonal layout cut by broad diagonal avenues proposing points of interest in multiple crossings pathways, where stood the main urban facilities. Their public buildings, built at the neoclassical style, exalted the values of the Republic and democracy in their ornamentation.

Its growth has been exponential. In 1920, at just 23 years, the city already had 55,000 inhabitants and in 1930, 140,000. in 1950, approximately 350,000 inhabitants. In 1960 doubled its number (700,000) and in 1970 almost doubled again (1.2 million inhabitants). By that time, about 10% of the population was living in slums. The developmental spurt combined with the increasing population of the capital, consolidated the city hypercenter and at the same time promoted a constant replacement of old buildings - if one can call them "old" buildings.

So, with the Central Zone occupied almost in its entirety, the 1970s and 1980s years witnessed a continuous process of finding alternative uses and buildings, due specifically to real estate speculation, without any regard to the urban landscape or historical-values cultural. Because of an intensive land occupation and permissive urban laws, the center of the city becomes vertical and dense, thus destroying important symbolic references to the population of BH. Only after the 1988 Federal Constitution the municipality creates the legislation to protect its heritage, which experienced their first positions in the last years of the 1980s, but only consolidated as public policy since 1992.

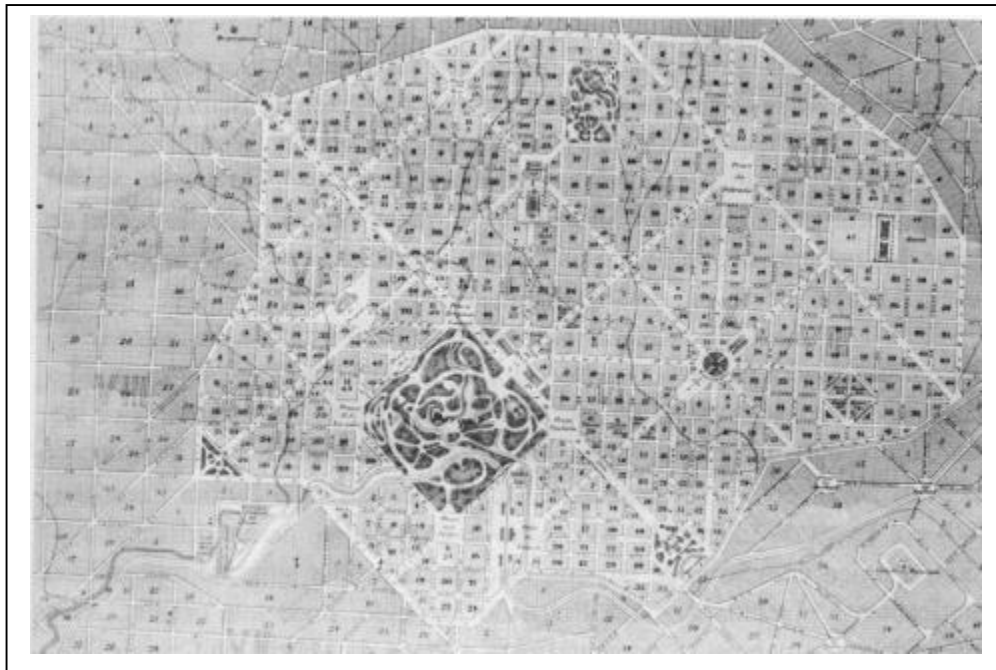


Figure 2. The original plan for the City of Belo Horizonte, 1894

2.3. History of struggles to preserve in Belo Horizonte

The central area of Belo Horizonte has not escaped much to the Brazilian model of urbanization and its particular story is curious because it is a young city (1897), based on full force of positivism and eclectic architecture and had his youth coincided with the moment of the great migration flows that swelled our metropolises in the sixties and seventies. This combination of factors has made the city became very quickly, replacing copies of great architectural value, reconfiguring urban spaces and changing allocations, urban rhythms and rituals. In some places, within a period of less than one hundred years, we watch four generations of buildings.

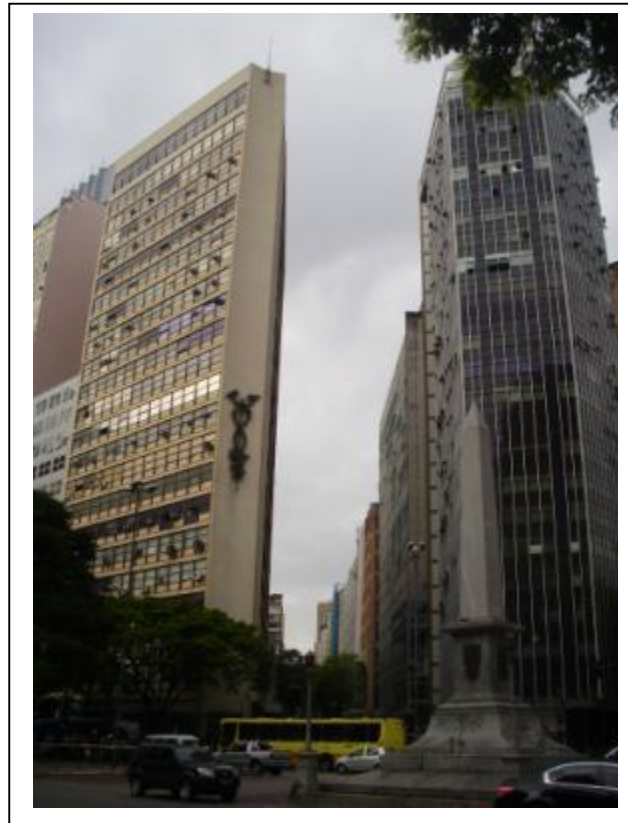


Figure 3. Vertical buildings in the Center of Belo Horizonte

2.4. The Municipal Heritage Council and the urban historical sites

Popular pressures and new legal possibilities obtained with the democratic Constitution of 1988 created, in Belo Horizonte, the Deliberative Council of the Municipality Cultural Heritage (CDPCM), which, established in 1989 by law, held a protecting effort on their referential and symbolic sites in 1994. The adopted methodology used for this protection was based not only on urban materiality, its buildings and urban streets, but also on different forms of appropriation of the city, based on studies of urban anthropology (MAGNANI, 1984) which sought to identify spatial units defined by the collective practice of its members. The categories "pieces, patches, gateways and pathways", created for analyses these units were used in order to identify the characteristics of each set studied from the point of view of the uses, activities and social groups that characterize them. The "patches" are the portions of urban areas differentiated by its symbolic character, whose boundaries are physically anchored in landscape elements, such as typologies and architectural frameworks that give it identity. The "pieces" have more fluid boundaries, since come into existence only from the consolidation of the use of private appropriation of the space by different social groups. The concept of pathway applies to "flows in the wider space of the city and within the patches", consisting of the extension of the notion of piece beyond the neighborhood or urban area studied. Finally, pathways

lead from one point to another through the “gateways”. "These are spaces, landmarks and voids that shape the urban landscape passages."

The protection of the built heritage in Belo Horizonte has the virtue of not just stick to the built and isolated, exceptional and curiosity. In its conception, the public policies that take care of the issue try to identify urban clusters that exhibit the cohesion of various elements such as image, appropriation, identity, common history, among others. These policies seek to identify the intangible elements that fuel and are propitiated by built, the "argument" that personalizes each area and determines its “*genius loci*”. This image of the environment is based on the expressive power of the sites and in their ability to present themselves at their specialty. The general expression of their houses and streets, iconic images that punctuate the landscape form this single personality. The iconic images (landmarks) are important because identity also occurs from "figures" and through our relationship with these significant figures that appear as “things”, in a phenomenological approach. These "things" punctuate our existence and in addition work for us, as elements of guidance. Both functions work on the spatial relationship between the figures: if the identity is given from embodied forms, guidance captures the spatial order. The orientation, in its existential roots, therefore, relates not only to how to locate, but also as an experience of meaningful spaces.

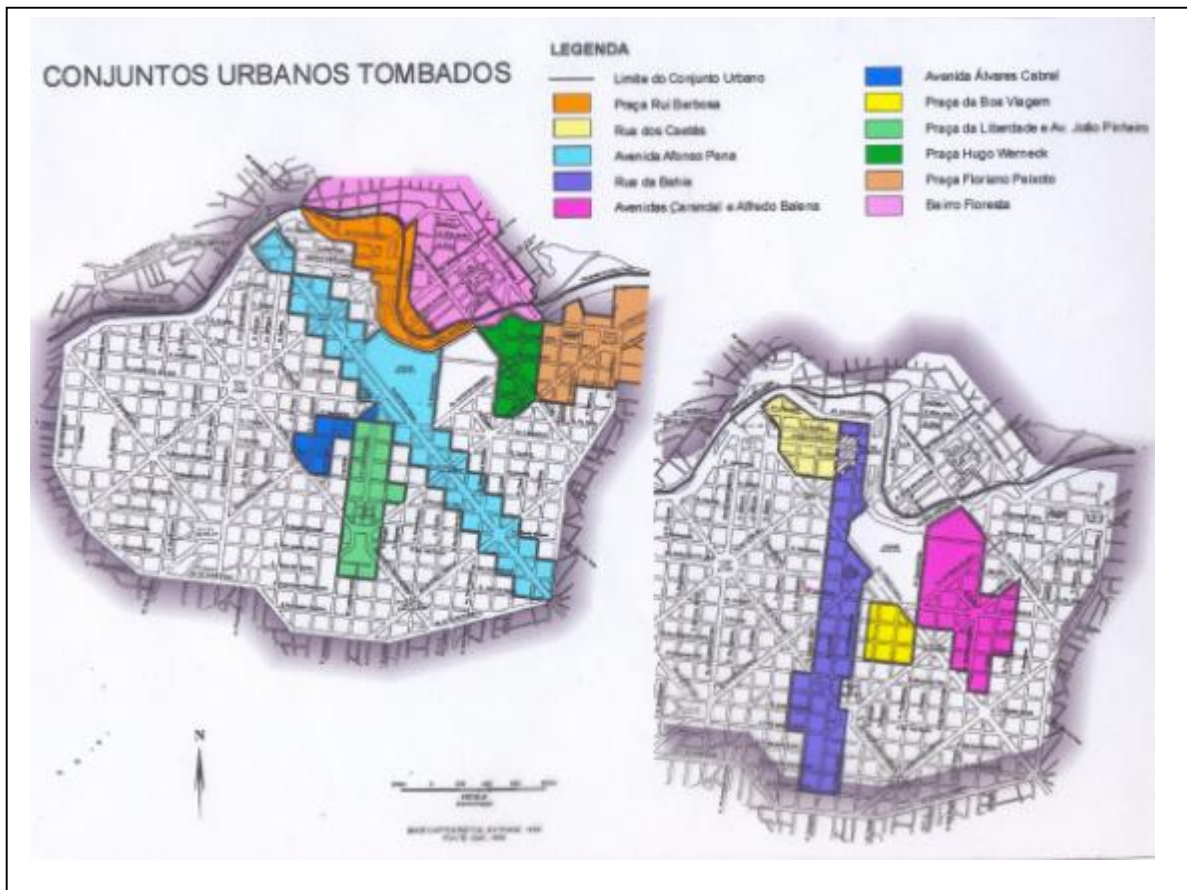


Figure 4. The heritage sets of Belo Horizonte

There is no way to understand the historical and cultural heritage from a static and purely visual approach. The Architecture is a useful art and not merely visual and the "classification" of architectural structures as heritage should must respect that artistic, historical and cultural specificity. We must understand, however, that the transformations caused by the usage dynamics should be performed so that the inevitable transformations do in culturally sustainable basis. Identifying these sustainable basis broadly (material and immaterial) is the lesson that the look of Cultural Heritage brings to urban planning in general and contemporary ways of dealing with the city.

3. CONCLUSIONS: A BRAZILIAN CASE AND THE "ACCELERATED HISTORY"

Culture, understood in its largest sense, is the field of the common and shared values, a kind of a filter by which the same community group perceives the world and interacts with it. It is the element of identity and inter-group cohesion, source of values that guide the society of these groups. Thus, culture emerges as an important tool for understanding reality to the extent that it arises as a major factor of a collective identity creation and key resistance weapon: it is a guiding principle of the communities in a highly dynamic time. Also face their diachronic character that connects the ideas of permanence and transformation, culture provides insights for understanding social reality, helping to identify stable patterns within a dynamic reality, revealing, for example, the reasons for the failure of any governmental measure due to its consistence or not within the view of a certain group. Furthermore, the understanding of the city as a fact and cultural product allows more clearly envision their tendencies, appropriations and vocations.

In Brazil, as indeed throughout Latin America, where the speed of urban transformation is too large, we can establish the concept of "accelerated history," marked by social tensions that seek to reverse the liability and strong social pressure for urgent interventions of urban requalification. The control of these transformations is an urgent task of society to ensure at the same time the multiplicity of the Lefebvre's "differential space" and the preservation of historical spaces, besides the need of identity and orientation of the people memory. How to ensure this balance is the methodological challenge that puts us the present time.

The cultural issue has been increasingly present in urban planning and governance of cities, historic centers are revalued by the agenda of the preservation of cultural heritage, not only by the debates it provides, but mainly because it became one of the prevailing themes of citizen participation. Beside the heritage issue, there is the appropriation of spaces of large cities by various social groups represented by different urban "tribes" that use cultural expression as an affirmation of their identities and, through it, the urban fabric as a stage of its manifestations.

The methodologies of urban planning used in the last century were little attempted to these movements. In urban plans developed during these years the culture appears as a point of sector analysis, usually thought by a punctual manner and in its final chapters. The absence of an investigation of local cultures ends up generating errors in the implementation of strategies and management, in addition to distorting the true meaning and the symbolic expression of the sites where planning applies. For example, in understanding the cities, it is necessary to incorporate,

beyond the "objective" data, the relationship of the population with its physical space: the rhythms and rituals of appropriation of urban spaces, the imagery associated with them, their memory and historical evolution. Thus, culture is a key element of planning and not as "sector element." Through it, we can even replace the "functional" idea of planning, quantitative and usually linked to normalization, by qualitative, which give us more operational aspects to management and strategies. The traditional way to understand the concept of "preserving cultural heritage" is to preserve things "as they are" or "the most close to it", which would correspond to a set of specific procedures aimed at this goal. It is notorious, in the "Science of Restoration", the distinction between "conservation" and "restoration", declared with almost unanimous adhesion of restorative compared to the first, considered more authentic, although the distinctions between the two are not as clear as may seem.

Anyway, conservation seems to be restricted to the object, excluding the technician who does it, and with an emphasis on the visual aspect, since this is the dimension that actually matter.

There are, however, alternative ways to understand that the maintenance is not only centered on the object, but mainly in our ability to interact it with the subject. In this field, conservation and transformation, that in principle could be presented as opposites, earning a revealing convergence: "conservation" could be the ability to preserve the transformation, through the continued ability of opening meanings for different generations, with their Culture cuts in their specific time. In these cases, conservation procedures would be related not only with the object, but to the relations that determine significance which should requires new methodological contributions, certainly not just visual.

Therefore, there is no way to think a contemporary agenda of cities without examining the issues related to culture and the urban cultural heritage not as a mere collection of objects, in face of the multiple symbolic appropriations existing in the constant process of transformation. It is necessary a radical return to the concept of culture so that we can resize its presence in urban plans and replace this current logic that reduces culture to its objects (material heritage) or cultural commercial exhibitions or a mere economic activity, in order to understand it in its nobler function. The culture, under the anthropological point of view, is the key intermediary between self and the world in which he lives. Establishes a system of values and codes that allow the individual to understand society, the place and time in which they live and relate with them, using the cultural key itself in the process.

Through culture we can better understand the fundamentals that generate attitudes of urban appropriations, the motivations of different forms of ownership and urban, including issues related to morphology, together, of course, to the traditional inter-relationships between history and culture. The investigation of the repercussions of cultural issues in the urban fabric is a vast field to be explored.

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