

## **Culture and right to the city politics in post-2010 Belo Horizonte: baixo centro in dispute**

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The lower downtown (baixo centro) of Belo Horizonte has been going through interesting transformations and sociospatial dynamics since the turn of the decade. After a neoliberal turn in the city's urban policy in 2009, breaking with a cycle of progressive planning administrations that had been in power since 1993 in tune with the Brazilian right to the city/urban reform movements, the area became a site of resistance and contestations to this new hegemony. This assemblage of processes started after a specific political-cultural event began in the area in early 2010: Praia da Estação (Station Beach), a weekly call for an urban beach over the pure concrete of Praça da Estação (Station Square), more than 400 km from the coast, organized by cultural producers, actors, filmmakers and artists. The event (still happening each summer in the same spot, after generating several spin-offs in cultural-resistance movements in the city) is a party-protest against a city decree prohibiting the free use of the square as a site for open cultural events, legislating that these uses had to pay a fee to the city that only large events with big corporate sponsors would be able to afford. In the meantime, a group of MCs and rappers started organizing a weekly event under a bridge next to the square, that quickly gained popularity, attracting a large number of graffiti artists who would intervene in the surroundings, making the city react in attempts to discipline the events. These two anchoring cultural activities turned the area into a reference point for other groups and actors seeking to reclaim public space, and also for social movements holding open meetings and assemblies. The latter went through an important inflexion during the June 2013 series of protests that hit Brazilian streets, as activists used the same space under the bridge for organizing the Assembleia Popular Horizontal (Popular Horizontal Assembly – APH), a series of meetings destined to discuss the protests that quickly turned into a social movement forum for approaching public policy, human rights and right to the city issues. This forum was divided into thematic working groups that ranged from police violence to social housing and public transit, and a few of them became new movements afterwards. The culture working group started organizing occupations in the area, a whole day event, open for artists to intervene and display their work as they wished – without the authorization or any support from the city. The city's response to this series of events came in many forms, comprising architectural interventions and projects for official cultural projects destined to the area.

The objective of this paper is to approach this assemblage of conflicting events and actors in their webs of sociospatial relations, having the aesthetic dimension of the political character of space as an important perspective to capture their attempts to act on a subjective dimension of the urban. I argue that this is a foundational dimension for the political transformations they

seek, in the direction of a renewal of right to the city struggles in the Belo Horizonte context of metropolitan Brazil.

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