

Focus Experience

#1

Educating Cities
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Title

Paths in the City

Basic data

Transformation process of the centre of Belo Horizonte (Brazil)

City: Belo Horizonte

Country: Brazil

Number of inhabitants: 2.300.000

Topics: Urban development, policy and administration, citizenship participation

Principles of the Charter of Educating Cities: 1, 4, 6, 11, 18

Summary

Starting in the 70s, Belo Horizonte went through a process of motorization, accompanied by public investment in thoroughfares in order to avoid traffic problems and improve vehicular flow. This process involved an increase in sound, visual and environmental pollution that had a negative impact on the urban landscape, the quality of life, pedestrian safety and the organization of social life in urban spaces.

As from 1993, the City Council of Belo Horizonte began to correct this type of urban design that prioritized the automobile over pedestrians. Amongst the measures that were taken of special note have been those aimed at to impede the investment of public funds in major works to expand the road network that placed pedestrian safety and welfare in the background. As from 2000 a new stage has begun on this challenge, marked by a recovery of public spaces to the benefit of a more human city and a more sustainable culture of mobility.

In this context, in 2002, the "Paths in the City" program was launched to recover public spaces in the city centre and which consists of the creation of a network of streets free of barriers that are safe and comfortable for pedestrians, connected to the public transport system. The program, which has broad citizen support, has transformed the centre of the city into a more appealing place, accessible to the population, improving town planning conditions and habitability, while fostering social, cultural and economic development.



Praça da Estação



Estação Square



Rua Rio de Janeiro



Rio de Janeiro Street

Objectives

- To generate open, welcoming urban spaces in the city.
- To foster citizen participation in town planning projects.
- To encourage the citizenry to stroll in the city centre and appropriate it for themselves
- To develop awareness, understanding and appreciation of urban environmental quality.

Methodology

First phase (2002-2006)

The city's public transport company, BHTRANS, and the local regional government of Centro Sur began a series of actions to refurbish and improve the intersections and pavements of the streets, avenues and squares, in order to facilitate pedestrian movement, access to public transport and the enjoyment of the city space.

Actions carried out in this period: improvement of the conditions of the pedestrian cross-walks at the intersections of Sete Square; improvement of the pavements and refurbishments of the fronts of historic buildings on Caetés Street; refurbishment of the esplanade in Estação Square; improvement in access to public health centres, adapting them to the use of persons with mobility handicaps; and an increase in the number of pedestrian cross-walks with traffic lights.

Second phase (2007-2009)

The "Paths in the City" objectives were incorporated in the strategic plan of the city centre and in the mobility plan. In this stage, the urban renovation projects followed these directives: Organisation of vehicular traffic in order to improve the efficiency of public transport; implementation of bicycle lanes; creation of incentives for the use of non-motorised ways of travelling; and



Carijós Street

increase and improvement of signage for pedestrians and people with special needs. Following these directives, Carijós and Rio de Janeiro streets, Amazonas Avenue, Arrudas Boulevard and Soares Square were improved.

The urban transformation of Rio de Janeiro Street began on the basis of a field study that consisted of auditory, sensory, olfactory and visual rounds. During these rounds the surrounding environmental noises, the smells, the condition of the pavement and the obstacles to pedestrians (the sensory round was made by two individuals, one with reduced mobility and another who was sight impaired) were monitored, and the fronts of buildings that did not match the urban style of their surroundings were photographed. With this information the City Council decided to harmonise the landscape of this public space by planting aromatic trees, eliminating obstacles on the pavement, signage and guidance for the handicapped, reduction of traffic speed limits, pedestrian overpasses, etc.

The refurbishment of Plaza Raul Soares was chosen by the population as a priority in the digital participatory budget. The City Council makes available to the public Internet access points and a toll free telephone number so that people can contribute their ideas and participate in the decision-making on projects in which public funds will be invested. This is how this square was chosen, which had once been a marginalized area, and has now become a space for democracy, diversity and socialisation.

Social and urban context

Assessment

Contact

Current phase:

According to the strategic plan and the mobility plan, executive projects were developed in order to be implemented into the new improvement phase of the public transport network, such as, for example, the BRT (swift bus transport), which involves, amongst other actions, works in the sidewalks, the reorganisation of the traffic lanes, the improvement of the public transport system in the city centre, the creation of new stops and connectivity of different city areas by public transport.



September the 7th Square

All these refurbishments have been accompanied by awareness campaigns in order to promote a change in the culture of mobility and foster respect for pedestrians.

Belo Horizonte is the capital and main services, knowledge and technology hub in the State of Minas Gerais, a region located in southwest Brazil.



Belo Horizonte Aerial View

The first settlements date back to the beginning of the 18th century, but the city, as it is known today, was planned in 1897, based on the models of Paris and Washington. It went through a major growth in population in the last few years of the 20th century, and now has 2.3 million inhabitants.

-Safe, appealing spaces have been created in the city centre that are more adapted to pedestrians, and have notably increased the number of people on these streets.

-Connectivity in the city has improved through public transport.

-The citizenry has participated in the decision-making in the improvements made.

-Establishing a new culture of behaviour in the city that prioritises pedestrians will take time.

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