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## 4th Urbanism and urban planners in Brazil seminar (4thSUUB), Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2019. Ideas, practices and institutions in the formation of urbanism and urban planners in Brazil. CONFERENCE REPORT

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The 4th Urbanism and Urban Planners Seminar in Brazil (IV SUUB 2019) was held in Belo Horizonte on September 4-7 2019. This biannual seminar, created by the Interdisciplinary Center for City Studies of the Campinas State University (UNICAMP) and the Research Group on the History of Urbanism and the City of the Brasilia University (UnB), has become one of the main forums in Brazil to debate the historical production of knowledge about urbanism and urban and regional planning. After the previous seminars held in the National University of Brasilia (2013), the University of São Paulo (2015) and Federal University of Pernambuco (2017), the School of Architecture of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) hosted researchers to discuss the history of urbanism as a profession and field of knowledge, and its professional practices (Figures 1 and 2).

The 3rd SUUB seminar underlined how Brazilian urban planning history had been an interdisciplinary field linking architecture, engineering, geography, sociology, economics and other disciplines. It has also been one that is characterized by multi-scalar practices, and which harnesses a diverse range of methods and theoretical perspectives.<sup>1</sup> The 2019 seminar focused on the distinction between urbanism and urban and regional planning in Brazil, and the transnational diffusion of ideas and the theories and methodologies mobilized by professionals and institutions. In addition, it presented historical perspectives on the training of Brazilian urban planners as generalist professionals either through formal learning in schools and universities, or through practical experience in public institutions, consulting firms, and the links between teaching and professional practice.

Contributions that considered the formative path of urban planners, the professional training offered by urban studies institutions, the foundational theories and methods underpinning the teaching and professional practice of urbanism, were welcomed. In general, studies on institutions and organisms that played important roles in the training of urban planners and urbanism, and on formal education or professional practice alike were privileged. Urbanists' formative theoretical conceptions, methodologies and practical experiences and urbanism and the trajectory of urbanism and planning, as well as references to the latter and their continuities and displacements, were discussed.

The most distinguished researchers in this field from both northern and southern Brazil and representatives of the main universities and institutions such as the International Planning History Society (IPHS), the National Association for Urban and Regional Planning Graduate Programmes and Research (ANPUR) among others, attended the seminar.



**Figure 1.** School of Architecture/UFMG. Source: <http://www.arq.ufmg.br>.

In the opening session, the Director of the Architecture School professor Mauricio Campomori highlighted the importance of the seminar as a way of resisting the process of intellectual dismantling Brazilian public universities which has been particularly active in recent months, and underlined the historic role of urban planners in building fairer urban spaces in the context of underdevelopment.

Belo Horizonte, the city that hosted the event and its 158 researchers and students, was the first state capital in Brazil that was planned according to the principles of modern urbanism by the team directed by Brazilian sanitation engineer Aarão Reis (1853-1936) in the 1890s. Today, the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region is the third-largest in Brazil and is home to almost 6 million inhabitants.



**Figure 2.** Auditorium, School of Architecture/UFMG. Source: IV SUUB Archives/ Lucca Mezzacappa.

The region is known for its important icons of architecture and urbanism such as the *Pampulha Modern Ensemble* (Figure 3) that was inscribed in 2016 on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list. Its gorgeous natural and landscape heritage include the *Curral Ridge* (Figure 4) and the *Manga-beiras Park*, designed by the Landscape Architect, Roberto Burle Marx (1909-1994).



**Figure 3.** Pampulha Modern Ensemble. Author: Marcelo Rosa.

Professor Sarah Feldman (São Paulo University) (Figure 5) gave the conference's opening lecture, titled 'Institutional framing: professional education, practicing and disciplinary borders' and exposed the intense action and interaction of national and transnational institutions such as universities, international agencies, public agencies, non-governmental institutions and other bodies. She discussed the mediating of the latter between different groups and interests, between ideas and practices, in Brazilian urban planning between the 1930s and 1970s. In this period, she argued, urban planners played an important role in public administration. When it was conceived, the idea of comprehensive planning of all aspects of urban life required professionals who were active in multiple fields of knowledge. By focusing on institutional framings, she interpreted the changes to the legal-institutional framework, the international agreements established by the federal government, as well as the articulation between urban planners and political, economic and professional groups, and organized sectors of civil society.

Professor Geraldo Costa (Minas Gerais Federal University) presented the history of urban planning as a provider of multidisciplinary training (Figure 6) in his lecture 'Urban planning theories and practices: reflections drawn from experience'. He discussed the trajectory of urban and metropolitan planning in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in various political and economic periods - from the civil-military dictatorial regime in the 1960s-70s to the 2000s, and after re-democratization. In addition, he assessed the intertwinement of the institutional mobilization of planning and development theories with his own personal practical experience in major planning institutions. He skillfully took his audience on a multi-scalar journey, plunging them into technicians' day-to-day metropolitan planning practices, before providing them with a bird's eye view with far-reaching insights into tempo-spatial continuities and ruptures.

The roundtable speakers included: Professor Maria Cristina Leme's (FAUUSP) discussion of 'Architecture and Urbanism the redefinition of boundaries in the approximations between the two fields'; Professor Maria Stella Bresciani's (UNICAMP) thought-provoking presentation 'Interweaving interdisciplinarity in the education of urban planners'; and Professor Ana Fernandes' (UFBA) 'Authorism and prosopography in urbanism. Thoughts and empiricism'.



**Figure 4.** Belo Horizonte city with ridges. Author: Charles Tôres.



**Figure 5.** Opening conference: Sarah Feldman (IAU/USP). Source: IV SUUB Archives/ author: Lucca Mezzacappa.



**Figure 6.** Opening conference: Geraldo Magela Costa (IGC/UFMG). Source: IV SUUB Archives/ author: Lucca Mezzacappa.

The seminar usually only features a limited number of selected papers, roundtables and conferences, and avoids parallel sessions. Thus, all participants focus on unique sessions and attend all presentations, thereby optimizing the chances for debate. The programme was structured around five thematic sessions, three roundtables with invited guests who addressed the themes ‘Urbanism and planning in Belo Horizonte: ideas, actions and institutions’, ‘Education and training of planners’ and ‘Institutions, urbanism and planning’.

The seminar saw fruitful exchanges between experts, and new generations of researchers, dedicated to the study of professional trajectories and the circulation of ideas. It encouraged the exchange of knowledge and experiences between scholars from Brazil, America and Europa. Finally, it highlighted the co-existence of authorial urbanism, ‘unauthorized’ planning and collective authorship and, lastly, many important contemporary historiographic issues.

## Note

1. see: IV SUUB, Annals (Belo Horizonte: EAUFMG, 2019)

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).