

➤ The City Within the City: the University City, History and Urbanism in a Latin American Case Study*

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Abstract: The slowed university city planning process in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, from 1942 to 1962, presents itself as a microcosm, a meaningful example of the role of university cities in the broader context of contemporary Latin American cities. As was the case in Mexico City, Caracas and Bogotá, the triumph of modernism in architectural plans for the Belo Horizonte University City was in tune with political projects for modernity and development. The confrontation between two projects – neoclassical versus modernist – acquired significant political meaning in a debate on the university's role in the broader context of nation-building. This paper, which focuses on a case study, demonstrates how university cities are urban spaces of great plasticity and have been able to accommodate – over decades – different visions of the social role of knowledge and the university.

Keywords: University City; Modernism; Urban history; Brazil; 20th Century.

Resumo: O longo processo de planificação de uma Cidade Universitária em Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil, entre 1942 e 1962, apresenta-se como um microcosmos, um exemplo significativo da relação das Cidades Universitárias com o contexto mais amplo das cidades latino-americanas contemporâneas. Tal como na Cidade do México, Caracas e Bogotá, o triunfo da arquitetura modernista na construção da Cidade Universitária em Belo Horizonte sintonizou-se a projetos de modernidade e desenvolvimento. O confronto entre dois projetos – neoclássico *versus* modernista – adquiriu importantes sentidos políticos, configurando-se como um verdadeiro debate sobre o papel da Universidade na construção nacional. O caso focalizado neste artigo demonstra como as Cidades Universitárias são espaços urbanos de grande plasticidade, capazes de abrigar, ao longo das décadas, diferentes visões sobre o papel social do conhecimento e da universidade.

Palavras chave: Cidade Universitária; Modernismo; Historia urbana; Brasil; Século xx.

Introduction

In 1962, the inauguration of a university city in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil occurred in tandem with several decisive historical events. It was congruent with wide-ranging demands for the organisation of higher education which were the result of worldwide economic growth, industrialisation and urbanisation that included an impressive expansion of university cities throughout the world. It was also in line with the ideas

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of modernity and urban innovation: between 1940 and 1943, the construction of a new district – Pampulha – in which the land designated for the university was located, extended the city towards the north. In Pampulha, important buildings were designed by the architect Oscar Niemeyer, who, a few years later, would participate in the construction of the city of Brasília and emerge as one of the most important names of the Latin American modernist avant-garde movement (Gorelik 2005a: 16-26; Santiago 1975: 111-117).

This study focuses on the case of Belo Horizonte and develops two principal arguments. Firstly, I propose that the university city itself is important in understanding the contemporary history of Latin America. As in several other Latin American cities, in Belo Horizonte, the creation of a university city was related to profound socio-historical changes. The idealisation and construction of the university cities and the problems that arose in the period after their inauguration are part of the history of the cities in which they are situated, with their characteristics, contradictions and challenges.

Secondly, I argue that the success of a modernist proposal for the university city in Belo Horizonte strengthened a particular conception of its role in Brazil's nation-building process. As in other Latin American university cities – Mexico City, Caracas, Bogota, and Recife – the modernist architectural plans matched expectations of development and progress. In the case of Belo Horizonte, a confrontation between two projects – a neoclassical project versus a modernist university city – proved significant.

The “campus boom”

By the middle of the twentieth century, research, higher education and technical training had become strategic points on the road to wealth and national progress, and resulted in the unprecedented construction of university cities both in the Americas and in Europe. Especially after the Second World War, industrialisation, the expansion of capital, increases in population and an interest in carrying out scientific and technological research were some of the factors that advanced higher education. Social diversification in expanding cities, the change in the role of women, and the spaces opened up by increasingly complex societies with respect to their products and services encouraged the search for social betterment and, among other things, generated expectations of professional education and the enjoyment of cultural heritage. The need to open up the university to the public rather than limiting it to the outnumbered elite became a pressing concern.¹

In Latin America, the construction of university cities was facilitated by these great impulses. Starting in the 1930s, several Latin American states emerged as fundamental agents in the building and organisation of national projects. Modernising elites rejected old growth models based only on the exploitation of primary products and, especially in the fifties, defended development models based on industrialisation for import substitution, in which the state would assume a decisive role.² Higher education became an essential demand of civil society within the contexts of population and urban growth,

1 Muthesius (2001: 11-14); Brawne (1967: 5-13); Dober (1963: 3-12); Dober (1967: 120-121); Smith (2008: 23-42); Atcon (1966: 3).

2 Bulmer-Thomas (2005: 19, 71-76); French-Davis/Muñoz/Palma (2005: 129-135, 143-150); Hobsbawm (1995: 253-261).

industrialisation and, especially, blind faith in development as a panacea for poverty and other obstacles.³

It is already being said that the cultural history of Latin America is the history of its cities, which have played a decisive historical role since the colonial period, although the inhabitants of Latin America lived predominantly in rural areas until the 1930s.⁴ The following decades witnessed an impressive change, with migration waves and urban baby booms. Latin American cities – cocoons of modernity or actual “cultural arenas” (Morse 2005: 1) – became the centres of economic and demographic life. Between 1950 and 1975, the population density in Latin American cities grew from 39% to 54%. In this process of great urbanisation, the city appeared to be a privileged location, “a machine for inventing modernity, spreading, and reproducing it” (Gorelik 2005a: 49) and an instrument for attaining a different kind of society.⁵

Such intense urbanisation stimulated the production of a wide range of academic studies on the topic between 1950 and 1970. Several scholars defended the theories of dependence and development in a tone of modernising reform. Other authors had a revolutionary city in mind.⁶ Another reason for such optimism was the creation of the ECLA (Economic Commission for Latin America) in 1948. ECLA intellectuals, such as Raul Prebisch and Celso Furtado, claimed that development, industrialisation and planning could transform peripheral countries and free them from misery and hindrance. Higher education and the subsequent development of science and technology would be an important tool for development. Under the influence of ideas such as these, which highlighted the role of universities in national development, several scientists worked with their governments in decision-making and influenced the manner in which public policies were conducted.⁷

Certainly, urban transformations were beset by numerous tensions and latent contradictions, which generated large social gaps and severe urban problems that subsequently became evident. However, in the 1950s, the atmosphere was euphoric, with the involvement of the emerging middle classes in the new industrial activities; the state civil service, which had generated positions and social prestige; and the expansion of the service sector.

A middle class emerged within this context of increasing complexity in Latin American cities. The middle class acted as contradictory protagonists who were torn between attempts to ascend socially through merit, their attachment to prestigious symbols, the search for stability, and the maintenance of social hierarchy. In this process of identity construction, men and women began presenting themselves as middle class and dedicated themselves strongly to distinguishing the middle class from the manual labour masses. They valued education as a means of social ascent, respectability, and prestige.⁸

3 Escobar (1995: 3-54); Cueto (1994: ix-xx).

4 Rama (1984: 87); Gorelik (2005a: 49); Armus/Lear (1998: 291). On the differences and parallels between Hispanic and Brazilian cities, see Holanda (1991: 61-99); Morse (1974: 40-42).

5 Gorelik (2005b: 117); Morse (1971: 21); Gutiérrez (1983: 601-660); Oliveira/Roberts (2005: 298-304).

6 Gorelik (2005b: 203); Armus/Lear (1998: 293); Bohar (1984: 535-554).

7 Schwartzman (2001: 253-275); Schwartzman (1984: 199-232); Schwartzman (1985: 101-116); Figueiredo (1990: 138-150).

8 Loeza (1988: 11-13, 23-42); Parker (1998: 125, 206); Barr-Melej (2001: 10-12, 141); Owensby (1999: 58-62); Souza/Lamounier (2010).

Therefore, an emphasis on education and a nationalist perspective were prominent features of the modernisation planned in the mid-twentieth century – the “continental rebirth” (Rama 1985: 128 f.) The construction of university cities maintained the tradition of concentrating cultural activities within the city.⁹

A curious dialogue among the dominant political elites and the modernist avant-garde created a consensus on the strategic role of architecture in the constitution of a national modernity. In countries such as Venezuela, Mexico and Brazil, modernist architecture had, in fact, become state architecture. Numerous architectural projects arose as real landmarks of modernisation in several countries and were heavily financed by the state (Gorelik 2005a: 31).

In this context, the foundation of university cities assumed a singular importance with clear political attributes, as it merged dreams of development, the search for scientific-technological knowledge and impressive artistic achievement. Many Latin American university cities would arise as icons of governments seeking the creation of a national identity, economic development, and the cultural and professional formation of their people. Curiously, such projects assumed rather diversified hues, and the large political upheavals that were occurring in Latin American countries were responsible for the differing interpretations of the role that should be attributed to a university. The university became equally prominent on the agendas of liberal and civil governments as well as on those of military dictatorships.

A pioneering example of the university city is the Ciudad Blanca, the local name for the Universidad Nacional de Colombia University City in Bogotá. At its foundation in 1936, evoking the figure of the liberal hero Rafael Uribe, President Alfonso López Pumarejo upheld the ideal of a modern Colombia (Sader/Jinkings 2006: 233). The government hired German architect Leopold Rother, who designed several of the buildings in accordance with the avant-garde spirit.¹⁰

Planning for the university city of the Universidad Central de Venezuela began in 1942. The university city appeared to be the climax of a modernist avant-garde project and was placed in the charge of Venezuelan architect Carlos Villanueva.¹¹

The political significance of the construction of university cities in Latin America appears clearly in the words of the architect Carlos Lazo at the ceremony that marked the beginning of the construction of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma Metropolitana do México (UNAM) in 1950. On this occasion, Lazo stated that he was not simply placing a cornerstone in the first building of the university city but “placing the cornerstone in the effervescent construction of our Mexico” (Universidade Nacional Autónoma de México 1979: 138).¹² In Brazil, university cities were constructed to house the educational projects of democratic national-developmental governments, such as those of Juscelino

9 “In Latin America, education, particularly higher education, was a privilege accorded exclusively to the city” (Szchuman 1996: 24). In both the USA and England, several universities were established in the countryside.

10 Gutiérrez (1983: 590); Viviescas (2007: 1); Zalamea (1937: 26); Sánchez Botero (2009: 519-556).

11 Marón (1994: 330 f., 436-448); Pérez Rancel (1999: 1-6); Jaua (1999: 1-7); Gutiérrez (1983: 618-621, 672-674); Granados Valdés (1974: 88).

12 On the architectural modernist projects of the Universidad Autónoma de México, see also Sociedad (1956: 278-329).

Kubitschek (1956-1961) and João Goulart (1961-1964), and to satisfy the expectations and plans of the military dictatorship after 1964.¹³

The specific case of the Belo Horizonte University City is the epitome of the context of expansion and transformation on Latin American campuses. A city within a city, the Universidade de Minas Gerais (UMG)¹⁴ campus would be the arena of a great controversy. Throughout the forties and the fifties, partisans of different projects – neoclassical and modernist – found themselves in a politically and culturally charged conflict, competing for the role that academic knowledge in Brazil was to play.

A new city within a new district

The inauguration of the university city in Belo Horizonte in 1962 occurred only two years after the foundation of Brasília, the new Brazilian capital. These two events were related.

In 1960, Brasília appeared to be the pinnacle of an epoch of optimism – the “golden years” in Brazilian society – and an example of how government, development, urbanism and modernist architecture came together. President Juscelino Kubitschek, whose election claim was that he would advance the country 50 years within the five-year period of his term of office (1956-1961), shifted the political centre of Brazil into its own dedicated area. This move was meant to bring the state’s power inwards and to affirm the potential of Brazilian industry, which would consolidate a road vehicle economy. Brasília was a true “museum of modernity”. Since its foundation, Brasília has been criticised by many analysts as an elitist and segregationist spatial project condemned to decadence. The new capital has been lauded by others for its wider political sense and for its “nobility of intention” in daring to embody the utopia of a new ethical, civic and humanistic order through movement in a space that has the potential to transform human relations.¹⁵ The capital carried within itself the contradictions of Brazilian political society of the time, torn between an obsession with development and an impasse in the search for a democratic society.

Brasília has achieved worldwide fame, which reinforced the partnership among politicians, architects, and urbanism professionals. In governments marked by the centralisation of public power, modern architecture affirms itself not merely as an aesthetic tendency but as a real force for cultural innovation.¹⁶ However, this was not the first time that these parties had come together. Since 1940, when he was mayor of Belo Horizonte city, Kubitschek had been able to count on Niemeyer, and together they presented and finished the Pampulha project, a symbol of the modernisation that was desired for the entire region. The area of Pampulha consisted of an architectural complex built around an artificial lake, an attraction that stimulated the activities around the various buildings

13 Departamento Administrativo do Serviço Público (1954); Chaves (2003); Neves (2005: 106-113); Silva (2005: 89-94); Xavier (2005: 42-59); Mammi (2005: 28-54).

14 It became Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) in 1965.

15 Gorelik (2005a: 151-166); Gutiérrez (1983: 693-700); Brandão (2006: 70-73); Fausto (2004: 419); Gomes (2002: 247-253); Brandão (2003: 8-21).

16 Kubitschek (1956: 2). On Brasília and cultural renovation see Gorelik (2005a: 162); Casalarde (2007: 26-31).

projected by Niemeyer, which included a church, a museum, a casino, a dance hall, a yacht club, gardens designed by Burle Marx, paintings by Candido Portinari, sculptures and reliefs, and mosaics and tiles. A wide driveway was created so that cars could participate in the charming landscape that encouraged new urban social habits and was dotted with many of the more expensive and elegant mansions in the city.

When Pampulha was inaugurated in 1943, Belo Horizonte was still a young city. Founded in 1897, it had gone from being a planned city to the new capital of the state of Minas Gerais. In those years, this change of capital (the capital had previously been located in the city of Ouro Preto) was attuned to the positivistic ideals of progress and civilisation that had emerged victorious with the Proclamation of the Republic in Brazil (1889) and with the search for a new economic impulse in Minas Gerais. In the eighteenth century, Minas Gerais had been a region of intense gold and diamond exploitation, and Ouro Preto had emerged as the greatest example of this opulent baroque society. Throughout the nineteenth century, with the reduction in gold reserves, the whole region transformed into an area of farming and breeding, and the development of cities was linked to the trade in subsistence goods and the supply of basic consumer goods. After the Republic, the foundation of Belo Horizonte was intended as a break with the colonial and slave-based past.¹⁷

The new capital was designed according to blueprints, with chequered avenues like a chess board. Technicians and engineers presented the city, at the end of the nineteenth century, as the mark of an inaugural era. Belo Horizonte was planned for up to two hundred thousand inhabitants and was situated in an area that was surrounded by a green agricultural belt. The search for progress included both the dynamism of rural activities and the organisation of an active urban centre, from whence the actions of the public authorities radiated (Mumford 1965: 661-664; Arruda 2003).

In the 1940s, the municipal government supported plans for specialisation in production; the iron and the steel industries were to be the leaders. In the old city centre, the skyscrapers bore witness to the intensification of the trade and service sectors. The population grew staggeringly, from 211,377 inhabitants in 1940 to 352,724 in 1950, 693,328 in 1960 and 1,235,030 in 1970.¹⁸

The valorisation of industry and import substitution, to the detriment of the old agricultural activities (a feature which, at that time, characterised several Latin American economies) certainly justified the destruction of the green belt for urban expansion. An industrial park was inaugurated west of Belo Horizonte in 1941. To the north, the construction of Pampulha replaced the area's farms with a modernist urban utopia, just as the light curves of Niemeyer's buildings broke radically with the chequered landscape that was predominant in the foundational projects at the end of the nineteenth century. In the words of the architect himself, he wanted an architecture guided by imagination, not by the square (Starling 2002: 33-35; Casalarde 2007: 26-31).

In this context, the Minas Gerais state government expropriated a large area for the construction of a university city. The donation was made effective in 1942 by Benedito

17 Julião (1996: 49-57); Mello (1994: 27-30); Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte (1994: 13-35).

18 Carvalho (2005: 55-78); Dulci (1999: 68-76); Eakin (2006: 89-128). See also: Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs (1949): *Belo Horizonte: a planned city with a plan*. USA: video. Available on <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0e2rUTPPxV4>> (part 1) and <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UODeUB65LSg>> (part 2) (01.02.2012).

Valadares, whom Vargas appointed as governor of Minas Gerais from 1933 to the end of the dictatorship in 1945. Valadares' decision certainly considered the need created by economic diversification, population growth, the demand for specialised personnel and the education of ruling local elites in an economy that was being revitalised by the strong iron and steel-based industrialisation of the region, and the cement and electrical power industries. This state sponsorship was also in tune with the cultural politics inaugurated in Brazil by Getúlio Vargas during the *Estado Novo* dictatorship. His minister of Education and Health, Gustavo Capanema, who was born in Minas Gerais, "integrated cultural programming into the lexicon and practice of federal power", which transformed Brazilian culture into "a charge of the state" (Williams 2001: 14).

Farm Dalva, which was disappropriated for the university city, was located in the suburban part of the municipality of Belo Horizonte. The area comprised 298.8 ha. With the shifting of the cultural and social centre towards the north of the city, Farm Dalva's proximity to the architectural complex of Pampulha placed it in the way of the intended urban renewal.¹⁹

According to the report of Dr Ernesto Campos – member of the commission for the construction of the Universidade do Brasil campus in Rio de Janeiro and subordinate to Minister Capanema – the area chosen for the university city in Belo Horizonte was adequate. Situating the infrastructure of urban life, services, and university housing for professors, students and staff together would make possible their common utilisation and, consequently, would be more economic and rational. Open parking space would be guaranteed, as cars would become increasingly necessary to shorten the distance from the city centre. Campos congratulated governor Benedito Valadares on planning an organised and equipped academic centre. In his opinion, the future of Brazil depended on this type of initiative.²⁰

The university city's foundation stone was laid in 1943, the same year that the architectural complex in Pampulha was inaugurated. These events encouraged hopes of cultural and intellectual renewal in a new era of development.

In 1946, a movement contested the location of the campus (perhaps connected with the rejection of everything that could be seen as a legacy of the Vargas dictatorship). Some professors proposed the use of an area in the west of the municipality near the recently inaugurated industrial centre (Gameleira). However, the University Council, the institution's highest decision-making body, upheld the use of the Pampulha region (Moraes 1971: 162). Between industrial Gameleira and Pampulha – a symbol of the intellectual, cultural and social renovation of the city – the second prevailed. This certainly illuminated the modern, avant-garde profile that was attributed to the university within this context and the refinement with which the undertaking should have been endowed. In the same year, the Minas Gerais government decreed the creation of a University City Building

19 "Certidão de registro de imóvel desapropriado para construção da Cidade Universitária", 1942. Registro de Imóveis, Cartório do Primeiro Ofício, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Talão 123, p. 143. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Caixa 1, Pasta 1, 1955, anexo 8. On Farm Dalva see also Moraes (1971: 157-159) and Guimarães (1975: 1-4).

20 Campos, Ernesto e Souza: "Parecer ao governador Benedito Valadares sobre o Plano Geral da Cidade Universitária", 1947. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Caixa 1, Pasta 1, 1955, Anexo 5, 29 p.

Commission, which was composed of a government body, the Rector, and two engineers. Eduardo Pederneiras, whose office was in Rio de Janeiro, was chosen as chief engineer. The government gave three hundred thousand cruzeiros to fund the initial activities of the Commission and established a yearly budget until the end of the works.²¹

The start of the earthworks was recorded in photographs. On the right in one of the photographs, we can see the altar that was improvised for the inaugural mass (Fig. 1). The Military Police Band is on the left, as is the garland that decorated and delimited the locale of the ceremony. Almost at the centre of the two spaces, projected inside the boundary that is marked out by the garland, there is a tractor, a symbol of the trail-blazing to be done and the modernity that will be introduced to the landscape of low brush and shacks. In contrast to most of those present, who were watching the altar, a boy faced the lens. Attracted by the tractor, he was probably fascinated by the equipment. Consciously or not, the photographer has conferred on the tractor and the boy – the future generation – the roles of protagonists in the picture.²²

FIGURE 1
Inauguration ceremony for the university city works, 1946²³



21 “Decreto Lei n. 1759”. *Leis Mineiras*, 11 June 1946. Library of the Arquivo Público Mineiro, Belo Horizonte, vol. 1946/Minas Gerais, *Diário do Executivo*, 12 June 1946, p. 1, col. 1. According to the exchange rates of 1946, 300,000 cruzeiros = USD 18,182. *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, XXI, 6808, 11.06.1946, Second section, p. 1.

22 On the use of photographs as historical documents, see Schwartz (2007: 966-992).

23 Document in the charge of the Departamento de Planejamento Físico e Obras, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais.

Between the neoclassical and the modern: the university city as a contested terrain

In January 1952, Juscelino Kubistchek, the Minas Gerais state governor, wrote a letter to the Rector of the university with a curious request. Considering the growth of higher education in the state and the prospects for future progress, he questioned the neoclassical plan initially presented for the university city. Pampulha was a district of great architectural beauty, and the buildings – constructed during his previous term as Belo Horizonte’s mayor – represented “one of the most significant confluences of modern art” in Brazil. The university city should, necessarily, harmonise with the features of modern architecture for its aggrandisement “as another demonstration of artistic culture” (Kubistchek 2002: 20).

This missive was one strategic addition to a wider debate that had been initiated in 1944 when the architect Edmundo Fontenelle stated that the sketches that had been presented by Pederneiras’ office “did not satisfy the true demands of a modern university”. In his report to the Rector, he harshly criticised the initial plans. He complained about the illogical road system inside the university city and the location of the principal entrance and of several faculties. Most importantly, he disapproved of the lack of available space to accommodate the future demands of new laboratories and research institutes, which would be essential for the country in its “vertiginous post-war progress process”.²⁴ Over the following years, the polemic would intensify. This debate was also about the present and future of Brazil, a topic that developed into a culture war in those years, a true battle ground where the role of the university in shaping Brazilianness would be decided.²⁵

Fontenelle was one of the first architects to graduate from the Architectural School of Belo Horizonte, which was founded in 1930 and integrated into the University of Minas Gerais (UMG) in 1944. From the school’s early years, the Architectural School had been in tune with avant-garde tendencies, and its principal aim was to offer a creative architectural practice. It was the first time architecture had been taught outside a polytechnic school, ushering a new era in which the discipline was understood to have a creative component. Its founders desired to break with the neoclassical style that had been proposed for Belo Horizonte since its construction in 1897 and reiterated throughout the decades. They admired Lucio Costa and Le Corbusier and insisted on the revolutionary cultural and social role to be performed by renewed urbanism and architecture (Figueiredo 1946: 20; Ribeiro 1999: 1-15).

In 1947, the public exhibition of the neoclassical project’s scale model provoked harsh criticism of the Minas Gerais architects. The various technical and aesthetic criticisms made explicit the great concern over the meaning to be assumed by this new space within the city’s cultural environment. In August 1951, the Institute of Brazilian Architects (IAB) released a manifesto on the construction of the Minas Gerais University City. According to this document, the university city had to be constructed with eyes focused on the future.

24 Fontenelle, Edmundo: “Parecer ao governador Benedito Valadares”, 1944. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Caixa 1, Pasta 1, 1955, Anexo 4, p. 4.

25 For an analysis of how “the metaphor of a field of struggles seems entirely appropriate in characterising a historical process in which competing interests assume oppositional, relative positions to win the moral and political capital necessary to shape the terrain in which culture is produced, consumed, and understood”, see Williams (2001: 122).

It also proposed numerous technical alterations designed to bring the project into conformity with the land and the local environment. The manifesto's conception of what the university should represent for society and the role of urban and architectural concepts in that historical Brazilian context.

The document noted elementary flaws in the initial plan for the campus that disrespected the most basic architectural rules. There were errors concerning the circulation of people and of air, luminosity, conformity between the buildings and the type of ground. However, the most relevant consideration went far beyond technical issues. The IAB accused Pederneira's project of being not only irrational but also totally ignorant of modern architectural practice: the University City Building Commission did not have an architect. According to the manifesto, at a time when Minas had revolutionised architecture and urbanism in Brazil, the university – a place whence promising movements of scientific, technological and cultural innovation should issue – should, obligatorily, be in tune with what was most modern instead of being regulated by the pseudo classical aesthetic of the rigid and conventional buildings that had been proposed in the original plan. The university should be planned with eyes turned to the future.²⁶ (Fig. 2)

FIGURE 2
Drawing of a building for the university city in Belo Horizonte,
following the 1947 neoclassical plan²⁷



26 “Manifesto do Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil sobre a construção da cidade universitária”. Belo Horizonte, 1951. Library of the Escola de Arquitetura da UFMG, (711.57/159m/1951F), 72 pp. See also Moraes (1971: 159, 243).

27 Machado Filho, Aires da Mata/Moraes, Eduardo Affonso de: “Universidade de Minas Gerais”. Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo/Buenos Aires: Service dos Países Baixos S.A., 1952. Setor Memória UFMG da Biblioteca Central da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (378.4/815.1/U58), p. 66.

Kubistchek's letter became a decisive piece in this debate. On 2 May 1952, the Rector called on the University Council and decided to nominate three renowned experts to a commission whose mission was the evaluation of the university city plans: Adolfo Morales de los Rios Filho (engineer-architect, president of the Federal Council of Engineering and Architecture), Alvaro Vital Brasil (engineer-architect who planned one of the first modernist buildings in Brazil, the "Ester Building", in São Paulo in 1936) and Paulo Ferreira dos Santos (professor of the National Faculty of Architecture, University of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, where he created the first course on the history of architecture in Brazil).²⁸

In their report, Rios, Vital Brasil and Santos suggested that the first plan should be shelved and a new commission be nominated to formulate another plan. They praised the possibilities offered by modernist architecture's new usage of reinforced concrete and the lightness and visibility of the structures. They preached 'sincerity in construction'. Their references were the university city of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma Metropolitana do México and the Universidad Central de Caracas, which were always mentioned as models. They also worked with their eyes set on the university cities under construction in other Brazilian cities, such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Recife.²⁹

For many professors and student leaders, the fight against the architectural plan proposed initially, which was considered 'pseudo-classical', also meant opposing the traditional university model, which produced erudite people who were not familiar with the practical experience, innovation, creativity and boldness necessary for urban and industrial development processes. Many people considered the rigid, compact structure and regular lines of the buildings to be evocative of an old-fashioned university; accepting such a university would mean turning back time, whereas the university design should in fact aim for the future. Modern architecture seemed to be more appropriate for the dream of the new university that would adopt the experimental, scientific and technological teaching necessary for the development of a Brazilian nation able to support the expanding labour market.³⁰

In addition to the symbolism blended into the modernist defence, there were political elements involved in the debate. The University of Minas Gerais became a federal institution in 1949.³¹ Until then, the university was sponsored by the state of Minas Gerais. In 1952 – the same year that Kubistchek sent the letter to the Rector in which he asked for a modernist plan for the university city – Minas Gerais's Legislative Assembly proposed

28 "Atas do Conselho Universitário", 19.02.1952, livro IV, p. 190-191; "Atas do Conselho Universitário", 02.05.1952, livro V, p. 19-21. Documents in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte. See also Guimarães (1952: 19).

29 Rios, Adolfo Morales de Los; Brasil, Alvaro Vital; Santos, Paulo: "Parecer da comissão de técnicos designada sobre os planos e projetos da cidade universitária". Belo Horizonte, 1952. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Caixa 1, Pasta 1, 1955, Anexo b 7, pp. 1-12.

30 "Manifesto do Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil sobre a construção da cidade universitária". Belo Horizonte, 1951. Library of the Escola de Arquitetura da UFMG, (711.57/I59m/1951F), p. 4; Guimarães (1952: 19); "Território universitário: proposta de modelo". Belo Horizonte, 1970. Library of the Escola de Arquitetura da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, (711.57/U58/1970), p. 1-5; "Relatório diagnóstico da UFMG pela Comissão Central de Planejamento". Belo Horizonte, 1966. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, p. 19.

31 "Lei 971 de 16.12.1949". *Diário Oficial da União*, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, 19.12.1949, Seção 1, p. 17.513

the end of the state subsidy to UMG. The Rector wrote to Kubistchek. He answered immediately and promised that he would strive to maintain the subsidy.³²

The law project remained an item on the Legislative Assembly's agenda until the end of 1954. Kubistchek reiterated his support for UMG several times. Coincidentally or not, he only took concrete steps to further the interests of the institution when the University Council finally nominated another commission to present a new university city plan.³³ The Commission was composed of five members. Lincoln Continentino was the urbanist and engineer who revised the urban plan for Belo Horizonte in 1940 (Continentino 1941: p. 41-59). Adhemar Rodrigues was professor of UMG's Engineering School. Sylvio de Vasconcellos and Eduardo Mendes Guimarães Junior, professors of the Architectural School, were important members of the modernism movement in Minas Gerais. Vasconcellos had been the chief of the Minas Gerais section of the Historical and Artistic Patrimony National Institute (IPHAN) since 1939 and became president of the IAB-Minas in 1955 (Brasileiro 2008: 41-45). Italo Pezzuti, an avant-garde architect, was nominated by Kubistchek. The commission guaranteed a plan for the university city that corresponded with the modernism of Pampulha, one of the noteworthy accomplishments of Kubistchek's Belo Horizonte prefecture management term (1940-1945). At that time, Kubistchek was preparing his candidature for the 1955 Brazil Presidency elections and promised "Fifty years in five" of development and progress (Kubistchek 1956: 2). During his term as Brazil's president (1956-1961), he led the construction of Brasília and invited Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer to plan it. In the Belo Horizonte University City controversy, the neoclassical plan did not fit Kubistchek's political program. The victory of the neoclassical plan would signify a defeat for Juscelino. That plan was out of tune with Pampulha, the brand new postcard of Belo Horizonte, which was constructed to revolutionise the city landscape with its decisive touch of modernity.

After the Commission's report, the university abandoned the initial urban plan and began the work necessary to complete the new one.³⁴ The Rector's Office, inaugurated on October 1962, was the first building in the university city and was designed by Eduardo Mendes Guimarães Junior and Italo Pezzuti (Moraes 1971: 248-50). The building was erected with glass over an imposing *pilotis* and offered a vision of transparency and lightness. (Fig. 3) If, in 1942, the donation of that land had occurred in the middle of the Vargas dictatorship, the celebrations for the opening of the university city occurred during a period of political democracy and widespread social activism.

The university was the target of varying expectations about what role it should assume in the construction of a modern and democratic society. The presence of President João Goulart (1961-1964) at the inauguration ceremony for the new Rector's Office took on a

32 "Atas do Conselho Universitário", 31.10.1952, livro V, p 75. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte. See also Kubistchek Juscelino: Carta de 29.10.1952. Anexada em: "Atas do Conselho Universitário", 31.10.1952, livro V, p. 76. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte.

33 "Atas do Conselho Universitário", 03.10.1954, livro V, pp. 195-201. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte.

34 Continentino, Lincoln/Rodrigues, Adhemar/Guimarães Junior, Eduardo Mendes/Pezzuti, Italo/Vasconcellos, Sylvio de (1955): "Cidade universitária, memorial da comissão técnica". Belo Horizonte, 1955. Manuscript. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte. Caixa 1, pasta 1.

special meaning within the wider context of the direction in which higher education was heading in the country. A few months earlier, Goulart had presided over the inauguration of the Universidade de Brasília campus. During the ceremony, many speeches highlighted the need for a new university for the country to overcome backwardness, ensure scientific and cultural independence, and transform parameters, values and practices in Brazilian society. The university should prepare citizens to search for democratic solutions to development, promote social progress, and bring scientists, researchers, and artists together and ensure the material means, autonomy and liberty necessary for them to dedicate themselves to the search for knowledge and its applications for the benefit of humankind. Since the construction of Brasília, Lúcio Costa and Niemeyer had chosen the location of the university city. In May 1962, they assumed the coordination of the planning for its expansion (Fundação Universidade de Brasília 1962: 17-18).

FIGURE 3

Rector's Office at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, October 1962³⁵



However, despite this developmentalist euphoria, the country was living through a particularly tense time. João Goulart faced strong opposition from the right, which had accused him of being a communist. The president had outlined important changes in Brazil: profound plans for social reforms, such as agrarian, bank, tax, urban and university reform, were drawn up; steps for bringing economic units under the control of Brazilian nationals and nationalisation of the economy; voting rights for the illiterate;

35 Photograph of the Setor de Coleções Especiais da Biblioteca Universitária, Coleção Memória Intelectual da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Caixa 1, foto n. 5.

and legalisation of the Communist Party. Brazil had also strengthened its commercial links with Eastern European countries. In September 1962, a profit remittance law was approved by Congress, contrary to the interests of international capital. Education became the focus of a national plan with wide-ranging objectives and a privileged budget, launched in the same month as the inauguration of the UMG campus. The plan involved renowned intellectuals on the left who were connected with education all over the country. The aim of the plan was to extinguish illiteracy in Brazil and invest in the technical education of workers who would be useful to the industrial sector by significantly increasing the number of universities and establishing university autonomy and professorial liberty in the exercise of higher teaching (Gomes 2002: 427-431; Fausto 2004: 443-457). The inauguration of the Rector's Office in Belo Horizonte occurred at the peak of the Cuban Missile crisis. On this occasion, Brazil adopted an ambiguous position that displeased both the left and the conservative sectors: it functioned as an intermediary between Cuba and the USA, but at the same time, it affirmed Brazil's principles of non-intervention and the self-determination of peoples.

Accordingly, in this complex context, the opening of the university city was accompanied by diverse expectations. It certainly satisfied demands for the training of elites and the preparation of qualified labour required by urban expansion, industrialisation and the demographic explosion. However, there also existed utopian designs in which development would appear as a sure path to autonomy and democracy and the university would undertake an authentic social revolution. This whole context was decisive in the triumph of the modernist urban and architectural plans for the works on the campus in Belo Horizonte, in which the aesthetic conceptions presented themselves as being full of political content.

In 1964, a military *coup d'état* deposed João Goulart; this changed the direction of Brazilian history by narrowing the political arena and bringing about the persecution, elimination, and exile of a large number of people. Kubistchek – a very important actor in the controversy over the UMG university city – was deprived of his political rights. Brazilian universities suffered countless setbacks. All over the country, professors and students were persecuted, and some of them were arrested. In Minas Gerais, Sylvio de Vasconcellos, the avant-garde architect who participated in the commission for a modernist university city plan and who had been director of the School of Architecture since 1964, was dismissed from his post by the military government and exiled. Difficult times were ahead and the earlier plurality of the university city projects was rejected. In the 1950s, the UMG university city's location had been justified as a means of accompanying the shift of the axis of the city in the direction of modernity. After 1964, its distance from the original perimeter of the city began to be seen with suspicion and as part of a strategy of isolation, alienation and the demobilisation of the political movements and demonstrations that the university could integrate or organise.

During the sixties, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, founded in 1961) worked on the remodelling of various Latin American and Caribbean universities. Rudolph Atcon was one of its most important advisors and had a significant presence in countries such as Chile, Honduras, Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil. The adoption of the North American approach to the construction and the use of campuses was stimulated by the educational directives of the military dictatorship. According to the USAID technicians who visited Brazil, a university should be like a company. The

technicians defended the decentralised location of the campus as a factor that favoured greater effectiveness in the work of researchers and students by removing them from everyday distractions and allowing them to concentrate exclusively on obtaining results. The university city space that had previously sheltered political and social concepts and the impetus for innovation now seemed to serve efforts to conduct a university project on conservative principles.³⁶ USAID technicians emphasised the role to be played by the university, which should necessarily make itself available to the young people of the middle classes and adequately train human resources. The technicians also defended the foundation of new campuses (Atcon 1966: 3-22). The USAID supported research that was applicable to economic and social development, with a utilitarian view of university research and teaching – imposed by the needs of industrialised societies – that overlooked the intellectual tradition of several Latin American countries. With this logic, “the now current social development future in Europe and North America” (Steger 1970: 38) was being presented as the only option for Latin America.³⁷ The role of universities would be to collaborate with technological and industrial applications in these predetermined pathways.

In Belo Horizonte, construction work on the UMG campus continued in a very different atmosphere from the euphoric one that had inspired its idealisation in harrowing political times. In 1966, the Rector lamented the desolate aspect of the university city landscape, where large areas had been abandoned and destroyed by erosion and were interspersed only by some thin brush.³⁸ The first units to move to the campus were predominantly centralised institutions of basic teaching and thus conformed rather faithfully to the North American model. Several faculties that were traditionally politically active – such as medicine and law – remained located in the city centre and it was in these, for many decades, that the cultural and political life of the university was pursued more actively.³⁹

Final remarks

This study has focused on the planning and the construction of the Belo Horizonte University City in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and presented it as a microcosm of broader historical and social conditions. From the donation of the land by the state government (1942) to the inauguration of the first building (1962), the university city project was in tune with the context of industrialisation, urban growth, expansion of the tertiary sector, the demographic explosion, the road vehicle economy, and the ascent of the middle class.

As exemplified by the case of Belo Horizonte, university cities in Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia were inaugurated in moments of intense growth in their respective cities, hosted bold modernist architecture and art projects, were given state funding, and were built in areas towards which urban development was supposed to extend, thus

36 Atcon (1966: 82 f.); Boschetti (2007: 221-229). On Brazilian universities during the military government, see Motta (2008: 30-67); Cunha (2000: 151-204).

37 Steger (1970: 35-38); Boschetti (2007: 221-229); Fávero (1996: 17-36); Pimenta (1998: 39-78).

38 “Atas do Conselho Universitário”, 04.04.1966, Livro 12, p. 97. Document in the charge of the Secretaria dos Órgãos de Deliberação Superior da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte.

39 Duarte (2007: 1-19); Resende/Neves (1998); Pimenta (2007: 21).

stimulating a car culture. Therefore, such parallels allow us to conclude that – despite each city’s specific features – there are several similarities that enable a more general view of university cities in twentieth-century Latin America.

The controversy that opposed a neoclassical and a modernist plan for the university city emerged in a decisive way that was full of symbolism and involved professors, architects and municipal, state and national interests. The arguments in defence of a modernist plan laden with cultural and political meaning were mixed with expectations of development and combined to shape democratic Brazilian nation-building.

Finally, the case of Belo Horizonte exemplifies the plasticity of the university cities. These places have harboured different perspectives on the role of the university and academic knowledge in contemporary Latin American society.

Today, Latin American universities face new challenges. The urban, architectural and artistic heritages of the university cities have been a privileged repository of collective memory and strategic places both in terms of creating transformational knowledge and in bringing forth new social practices.

In Belo Horizonte, the university city became a city within the city, literally surrounded by busy traffic avenues. The city has grown all around the campus. The campus has acquired new meanings and has provided space for new practices and controversies. In a Brazilian democratic era, the university community has been recovering and reinventing some of the historical, social and cultural meanings that were inherited from its founders. The presence of the state remains decisive in academic management. However, in a democracy, state politics frequently result from the conflicts that occur among several political pressure groups. This time, efforts have been channelled towards a politics of social inclusion and towards increasing sponsorship of research. Day by day, the production of scientific, technical, cultural and artistic academic knowledge in this contested terrain is in tune with the search for political autonomy in a globalised and complex world.

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