

High-quality public spaces as the key to planning a great city: Bocaiuva, MG, as a case study

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According to Tuan (1983), space and place are two distinct concepts, which require attention to their definitions. If we think of space as something, which enables movement, we can infer that place is pause, therefore, the existing pauses on the movement make the location become a place. The research subject of this current study is the city and how meaningful its public spaces are as to planning a great city by making people occupy these places, as well as how public spaces make a city work by contributing to its “image” (Lynch, 2011).

Amanda Burden (2014) states that “cities are fundamentally about people, and where people go and where people meet are at the core of what makes a city work. So even more important than buildings in a city are the public spaces in between them”.

Bocaiuva, according to IBGE (2015) data, is a small city in northern Minas Gerais, Brasil, which has approximately fifty thousand inhabitants and a story guided by religiousness and tradition expressed on people’s manners. Most of these manners are established in public spaces such as neighborhood sidewalks and squares where people interact with each other. Nonetheless, these traditions have been lost since people do not take over the public spaces as they used to do before.

By observing people’s behavior in downtown Bocaiuva, a concern about the use of these spaces was raised. The city has a significant quantity of squares along its urban fabric especially in the central area, however they do not have a desirable infrastructure to provide a comfortable experience to the wearers, and as a result people avoid these spaces. Furthermore, still concerning the central area, the main avenue, gateway to the city, does not have elements that help create a positive image,

especially because of the existence of urban voids, underused buildings and sidewalks that lack accessibility.

Thus, it is necessary to think about procedures to mitigate this sense of abandonment working with the concept of urban regeneration of the city center, as well as the enhancement of nodal points in Bocaiúva urban fabric in order to contribute to the urban development of the city as a whole.

The design strategies will be guided by the changes the inhabitants consider more important to the city's public spaces. These data were not only collected through semi-structured questionnaire to improve the goals of the research, but also to provide a solid source that helps design spaces which correspond to the community's desires.

The collective memory is the basis for the construction of identity and citizenship; it is, thus, a social force of immense power (Pereira; Freire, 2002). From this point, the adoption of oral history as a methodology to develop an urban intervention is, according to Pereira and Freire (2002), "an excellent technique to perform an initial survey of issues and develop new theories".

The preservation of the cultural environment is important to the urban activity because it ensures the survival of historical and artistic legacy for humankind's own delight (Silva, 2012). In this context, memory is an element that builds the identity of the site, also strengthens the community's self-esteem, when the opinion of the population regarding the image of the city is considered in the project, leading to a common good (Pereira; Freire, 2002).

It is observed, in the community's speech, a constant evocation of the elements that composed the city in the past as to: more humanized squares or emblematic buildings which have lost their original importance or even a very strong appeal for the return of the previously developed cultural activities which are not performed anymore.

The reference points of the city reflect its history, because they belong to the memory of the city, however, it is not possible to recover these areas and revive the ancient activities that often do not match the current reality. Thus, it is necessary to find new uses and new activities that bring life to these spaces (Lerner, 2005) without losing the features of their identity.

In conclusion, this study provides, as a result, consistent sources to develop an urban regeneration project, which intends to requalify the city of Bocaiuva. Consequently, multiple proposed interventions will enhance the social, economic and functional capabilities in order to improve the quality of life of resident population. The RE prefix placed in words such as “requalify” used in this context represents explicit references of what once existed in the city. When urban renewal makes room for rehabilitation, the historical value of the city and of the man as a cultural being, is recognized (Vasconcellos and Mello, 2006).