



Preserving the (right kind of) city: the urban politics of the middle-classes in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

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3 **Preserving the (right kind of) city: the urban politics of the middle-classes in Belo**
4 **Horizonte, Brazil**
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8 **Abstract:** Since re-democratisation, Brazil has experienced a slow but continuous process of
9 urban reform, with the introduction of legal and institutional developments that favour
10 participatory democracy in urban policy. Legal innovations such as the City Statute have been
11 celebrated for expanding the “right to the city” to marginalised populations. While most studies
12 examine the struggles of the urban poor, I focus on middle-class citizens, showing how such
13 legal developments have unevenly affected the ways in which different social groups are able
14 to impact the production of urban space. The two cases explored in this study concern residents
15 struggles to preserve their middle-class neighbourhoods against change triggered by projects
16 related to the hosting of the 2014 World Cup in Belo Horizonte/Brazil. The first looks at the
17 Musas Street residents’ fight against the construction of a luxury hotel in their neighbourhood,
18 while the second examines the Pampulha residents’ struggle against the presence of street
19 vendors and football fans in their streets. My findings show that through the articulation of legal
20 discourses, middle-class claims on the need for preserving the environment and the city’s
21 cultural heritage are legitimised by the actions of the local state. The paper thus looks beyond
22 neoliberalism, showing that socio-spatial segregation and inequality should not be regarded
23 solely as the product of state-capital alliances for engendering capital accumulation through
24 spatial restructuring, but also as the result of the uneven capacities of those living in the city to
25 access the state resources and legitimise certain forms of inhabitation of urban space.
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41 **Keywords:** Class, Inequality, Politics, Governance, Middle-Classes, Urban Law
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46 **1. Introduction**

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48 It is not news to anyone that, despite the different trajectories of urbanisation
49 experienced within the region, Latin American cities are socially segregated (Sabatini, 2006).
50 The process of “peripheral urbanisation” (Caldeira, 2016) has generated unequal cities, in
51 which areas well-provided with infrastructure co-exist with informal settlements, large
52 peripheries and, more recently, gated communities. In Brazil, the “insurgent citizens” in the
53 autoconstructed peripheries have contested their exclusion claiming the “right to the city”
54 (Lefebvre, 1968) they have built on their own (Holston, 2008). As a result, since re-
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3 democratisation, the country has experienced the growth of pioneering experiments in
4 participatory democracy (Caldeira and Holston, 2015). The process reached its peak with the
5 approval in 2001 of the City Statute (CS), a federal law that explicitly recognizes the “right to
6 the city” (RTC) as a collective right (Fernandes, 2007). Nonetheless, if the RTC is the “right to
7 change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart’s desire” (Harvey, 2008, p.23), one
8 might ask whose desire is actually shaping Latin American cities. If re-democratisation, in
9 Brazil has expanded the channels of participation in the making of urban policy, how are
10 different social groups exploring those channels? How are the legal and institutional
11 developments created after the 1988 Constitution employed to legitimise different demands?
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20 In this paper, I will explore the ways in which middle-class residents mobilise the law
21 to justify their claims upon space. Since the approval of the CS, there has been a growing
22 number of contributions analysing the shortcomings of the Brazilian socio-urban reform
23 (Rolnik, 2013; Sánchez and Broudehoux, 2013; Vainer, 2015). I argue that much like the
24 tradition of critical urban studies in the Global South, this prolific scholarship on Brazil has
25 tended to emphasise the struggles of marginalised populations (Fischer et al., 2014; Freitas,
26 2017) or the profit-seeking urban developments promoted by state-elite coalitions (Gaffney,
27 2013; Rolnik, 2013). I thus propose to switch the focus to the political practices of middle-class
28 citizens who make use of “invited spaces” (Miraftab, 2004) and mobilise legal frameworks
29 spurred by insurgent movements to shape urban space and produce the “right kind of city”
30 (Centner, 2012).
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39 In order to do so, I explore two case studies of neighbourhood conflicts in the midst of
40 the preparation for the 2014 World Cup in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The attention to middle-class
41 residents in this paper stems largely from the realisation that the role of the middle-classes in
42 shaping urban space in the Global South has remained under-analysed (Ghertner, 2012;
43 Lemanski, 2017). My findings show that through the articulation of legal discourses, middle-
44 class claims on the city’s cultural heritage and the need to preserve the environment are
45 legitimised by the state. The findings further suggest that socio-spatial inequality should not be
46 regarded solely as the product of state-capital alliances for engendering capital accumulation
47 through urban redevelopment, but also as the result of the uneven capacities of those living in
48 the city to access the state resources and legitimise certain forms of inhabitancy of urban space.
49 The paper thus reveals another limitation of the Brazilian urban reform, showing how the
50 institutionalisation of the RTC framework allows its mobilisation by more affluent citizens
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3 whose political practice may further the very same socio-spatial inequalities that spurred these
4 urban policy innovations.
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7 This work draws on qualitative data regarding two cases in which middle-class citizens
8 are affected by World Cup-related projects. The data was gathered during eight months of
9 fieldwork, conducted between 2014 and 2016 in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. I rely mainly on semi-
10 structured interviews conducted with key actors complemented with other types of data. The
11 case studies subject to this study include the Musas Street residents' fight against the
12 construction of a luxury hotel in their neighbourhood, and the Pampulha residents' struggle
13 against the large presence of football fans and informal street vendors in their streets.
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20 The rest of this paper is divided into five sections. In the second section, I present a
21 discussion about recent legal and institutional developments in Brazil, while also engaging with
22 current debates in urban studies regarding the role of middle-class citizens in shaping urban
23 space. Section three discusses details about the case selection and the methodology. The fourth
24 section presents the qualitative data analysis with a focus on legal discourses deployed by
25 middle-class residents in their struggle to preserve the environment and the city's heritage. The
26 final section presents concluding discussions about the cases in the light of theory.
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32 **2. The middle-class and the right to the city**

33 *2.1. Socio-spatial segregation, insurgency and urban reform in Brazil*

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35 According to Sabatini et al. (2001, p.27), "Residential segregation can be defined, in
36 general terms, as the degree of spatial proximity or territorial agglomeration of families
37 belonging to the same social group, whether it is defined in ethnic, age, religious or
38 socioeconomic preferences, among other possibilities". The phenomenon is an important
39 mechanism through which socioeconomic inequality is reproduced and its occurrence has been
40 identified and analysed in multiple Latin American cities (Kaztman and Retamoso, 2005;
41 Rodríguez and Arriagada, 2004; Sabatini, 2006).
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50 Brazil is no exception and much has been written about the country's unequal socio-
51 spatial pattern, "marked by unregulated capitalist development and inadequate access to
52 housing and land for low-income urban populations" (Friendly and Stiphany, 2019, p.273).
53 Analysing the Brazilian experience, Holston (2008) has focused on the political practices of
54 segregated citizens in the informal autoconstructed peripheries. He argues that the same process
55 that excluded the urban poor from "formal" forms of citizenship has created an "insurgent
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3 citizenship” movement, through which the disenfranchised could claim their rights and their
4 place in the city (Hoston, 2008).
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7 This movement gained momentum during the country’s re-democratisation process
8 when a new window for popular participation was provided, culminating with an intense social
9 mobilisation and debate around the elaboration of the 1988 Constitution (Caldeira and Holston,
10 2015; Maricato, 1988). Since then, a slow but continuous process of urban reform evolved, with
11 the introduction of legal and institutional changes which turned the country into “a ‘laboratory’
12 for new local governance and direct democracy strategies” (Friendly and Stiphany, 2019,
13 p.274).
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19 Moreover, after more than ten years of intense debates, a new legal–urban order was
20 established with the approval of the 2001 City Statute (CS) (Fernandes, 2007). This federal law,
21 which was mandated by the constitution’s chapter on urban policy, is considered a ground-
22 breaking development that explicitly recognizes the “right to the city” (RTC) as a collective
23 right (Fernandes, 2011). The statute was organized around three main pillars: “the recognition
24 of security of tenure for low-income squatters, the struggle against real estate speculation and
25 the democratisation of the decision-making process related to urban policies, opening spaces
26 for direct participation” (Rolnik, 2013, p.55).
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33 Nevertheless, this same period also saw the rise of neoliberalism in Brazil. Since the
34 approval of the CS, there is a growing number of contributions analysing how these congruent,
35 but conflicting projects – neoliberalism and democratisation – have influenced the course of
36 urban policy making in contradictory ways (Caldeira and Holston, 2015; Fourchard, 2011;
37 Rolnik, 2013). Such scholarship provides different and complementary explanations to what
38 has been known as the socio-urban reform “impasse” (Maricato, 2011): notwithstanding the
39 most advanced and celebrated urban laws and instruments in the world, Brazilian cities have
40 been continuously characterised by deepening socio-spatial inequalities, persistent insecurity
41 of tenure in informal settlements and mounting environmental contradictions (Arantes, 2013;
42 Klink and Denaldi, 2016).
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51 Many critical scholars (Rolnik, 2013; Sánchez and Broudehoux, 2013; Vainer, 2015)
52 have turned their attention to the mode of neoliberal urban governance characterised by the
53 appropriation of new progressive planning instruments and tools by state-capital alliances
54 interested in promoting “local growth machines” (Molotch, 1976) in the context of urban
55 entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989). For Klink and Denaldi (2016, p.404), the “disappointing
56 results of ‘really existing’ Brazilian urban reform” are explained by the shift from a “radical
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3 rights-based project” based on “autonomy and community-driven praxis” to a “professionalized
4 practice of urban reform” centred on the state.
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7 Although not guaranteeing rights, the development of progressive legislation certainly
8 altered the conditions in which both resistance, policy-making and critical thinking has
9 developed since. In the context of preparations for the 2014 World Cup, studies have shown,
10 for instance, how the partial recognition of informal residents’ rights was incorporated as part
11 of the strategies to successfully implement exclusionary urban-development projects (Freitas,
12 2017; Nogueira, 2017).
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18 Focusing on recent experiences of participatory planning, Caldeira and Holston (2015)
19 have analysed the making of São Paulo’s Master Plan (2002) and Zoning Law (2004). They
20 describe how the participatory process has engendered a competition between citizens divided
21 into class-based groupings with different resources and abilities to affect the results. That, they
22 argue, can lead to the use of the new planning instruments to reproduce existing inequalities.
23 Therefore, even when “participatory democracy” is effective in terms of decision making, it
24 does not necessarily translate into greater social justice. That happens because those inhabiting
25 the “formal” city also engage in this process, claiming their right to affect the way space is
26 shaped. The institutional developments and the new channels for participation emerging as a
27 response to insurgency have not erased society’s stratifications and inequalities, but rather
28 become entwined with those. In this paper, I will add to this debate, focusing on middle-class
29 citizens and their engagement with participatory channels and legal discourses as strategies to
30 shape space, a topic that has started to receive more attention recently.
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41 *2.2. The politics of the urban middle-class*

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43 The concept of middle-class has been enunciated in multiple ways and there is no
44 consensus regarding what classify a group as middle-class (Lentz, 2015). In this paper, class is
45 defined as a “sociocultural phenomenon growing out of industrial relations of production and
46 the modern state”, that also incorporates “notions such as status and habitus” considering their
47 relevance for class relations (Heiman et al., 2012, p.9). Moreover, class is approached not as a
48 category, but rather as a social process (Thompson, 1978): class distinction is hence achieved
49 through a set of practices in which social actors continually reaffirm their membership to a
50 group by distinguishing themselves from others (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, considering that
51 society and space are co-produced (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005), one must acknowledge the
52 need to incorporate spatial practices into the analysis of such repertoire of boundary-work
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3 (Mercer, 2018). As argued by Heiman et al (2012, p.26): “Spaces are critical for subject making
4 not simply in terms of marking the physical spatialisation of class” but also because classed
5 subjects are made in those same spaces. A similar argument is made by Zhang (2012, p.214)
6 who states that “socioeconomic differences get spatialised and materialised through the
7 remaking of urban communities.” Class and urban spatial production are thus mutually
8 constitutive processes.
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14 Recently, the “explosion of the world middle-class” (Das, 2009, p.89) has provoked a
15 renaissance of the scholarship on this social group on a global scale (Lentz, 2015, p.14).
16 Nevertheless, whereas in the Global North, a vast scholarship has dealt with the middle-classes
17 and their spatial practices, in the global South, there is a tendency to focus on elites and the
18 poor rather than on those in between (Mercer, 2018). A similar account is given by Lemanski
19 and Tawa Lama-Rewal (2013) who argue for a focus on “urban citizens who are neither ‘elite’
20 nor ‘poor’”, exploring how the practices of these citizens can help disrupt binary categories that
21 have dominated the discussions regarding participatory urban governance.
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29 Considering the case of Brazil, the political relevance of the middle-classes in key
30 moments of the recent past has been recognised and discussed in a few studies (Caldeira, 2000;
31 O’Dougherty, 1999; Saes, 1985). Despite that, little account of the role of this social group in
32 shaping urban policy has been observed. Writing in the 1980s, Oliveira (1982) has argued that
33 the cities in Brazil were becoming the expression of middle-class aspirations. Industrialisation
34 was then fostering a new class structure, in which the weight of the middle-classes was
35 vigorously growing. Such emerging urban middle-classes became the support of
36 authoritarianism in Brazilian society, while the relationship of the state with the urban was
37 determined by the demands of this social class. Although recognising the importance of the
38 middle-class in shaping urban space, Oliveira’s (1982) work does not explore the channels
39 through which their demands produce material outcomes. His discussion thus resembles recent
40 studies about the new Indian middle-classes who Ghertner (2014, p.177) has criticised for
41 creating “the assumption that the emergence of this new elite in and of itself explains the
42 consolidation of the ‘world class’ city-building project at hand.” In order to identify which
43 forces are shaping cities, he argues, one must reveal the political mechanisms that allow the
44 demands of the middle-class to gain fruition.
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57 This task has been partially taken by Vasconcellos (1997), who investigated the
58 transformation of São Paulo into a middle-class city during the dictatorship. In the context of
59 authoritarianism, the middle-class was selected as the partner to support modernisation. Their
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3 interests “were represented, inside the state, by transportation planners and engineers who
4 promoted the ideology of modernisation” (Vasconcellos, 1997, p.294). He thus concludes that
5 despite the influence of powerful economic and political sectors, the middle-classes were also
6 capable of influencing public policy decisions efficiently. Also looking at São Paulo, Caldeira
7 (2000) has described how, in the 1980s and 1990s, the economic crisis and rising criminality
8 rates were engendering new patterns of socio-spatial segregation beyond the classical centre-
9 periphery dichotomy. São Paulo was becoming “a city of walls, with a population obsessed by
10 security and social discrimination” (ibid, p.232). In her analysis, those walls were both material
11 and discursive. In order to safeguard their social position, the middle and upper-classes were
12 struggling to differentiate themselves from the lower classes. For Caldeira (1996, p.303) the
13 citizens confined in the rising number of fortified enclaves were “abandoning the traditional
14 public sphere of the streets to the poor, the ‘marginal,’ and the homeless.”

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17 In Latin American, recent studies on gentrification have highlighted how the
18 development of real estate projects aimed at middle-income consumers has contributed to the
19 displacement of the urban poor from desirable city areas (Lees et al., 2016). Those discussions
20 highlight the need to further explore how the shaping of cities according to the demands of
21 privileged social groups can impair the ability of the urban poor to belong. Nevertheless, those
22 investigations are mostly concerned with the housing strategies of marginalised citizens or the
23 powerful coalitions behind urban redevelopment.

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26 In this paper, I am interested in looking at the political practices of middle-class citizens
27 who want to be part of the city, analyzing how they organize to claim the right to shape the
28 urban space thus affecting the environment where they live. In Brazil, as we have seen, after
29 democratisation, many legal frameworks and channels for citizenship engagement have been
30 developed. At the same time, neoliberal modes of urban governance have emerged, turning
31 cities into sites of profit-seeking developments that deepen socio-spatial inequalities (Freitas,
32 2017; Klink and Denaldi, 2016). Despite the existence of a burgeoning literature addressing
33 this paradox, the role played by middle-class citizens – who are neither the promoters of urban
34 development or their dispossessed – remains under-analysed. I thus attempt to breach this gap,
35 by looking at how middle-class views of city-making become influential in multiple ways
36 (Ghertner, 2014), revealing their ability to make use of “invited spaces” (Miraftab, 2004) and
37 articulate legal discourses rooted in the RTC framework.

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40 Drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of distinction, Centner (2012) investigates how
41 contentious middle classes in Global South cities articulate a RTC to create socio-spatial
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3 distinction in the urban realm, which unlike Lefebvre's progressive aspirations, results in the
4 formation of exclusionary spaces. He has noted that "different groups that invoke middle-class
5 labels attempt to distinguish and mobilise around visions of what they see as the right kind of
6 city, often with very specific discourses of liveability, morality and citizenship" (ibid, p.248).
7 Such "right kind of city" must thus be produced in relation to the public interest, which is best
8 represented by the good citizens who have the moral stance to defend the common good.
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14 Similarly, others have focused on the spatial practices of the middle-classes in Global
15 South contexts, revealing how space and social class are mutually reproduced. Looking at Dar
16 as Salam suburbs, Mercer (2018) explored the process of class 'boundary work' in which
17 middle-class residents are shaping the suburban spaces that, in turn, shape their distinctiveness
18 as a social class. For the case of Delhi, Schindler (2016) analysed how associations of the new
19 middle-class seek to regulate the use of urban space by street hawkers. His work reveals how
20 class boundaries are constructed mutually by social groups through inter-class relationships that
21 are not necessarily conflictive.
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29 Building on those contributions I hence seek to add to recent debates regarding the
30 potential of the middle-classes to "act in opposition to or in solidarity with those named as
31 'poor'" (Lawson, 2012, p.1). Talking about Indian urbanism, Roy (2012, p.26) holds a
32 pessimistic view:
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36 (...) the making of the 'world-class' city has hinged on violent evictions of the
37 urban poor – of squatters, vendors, pavement dwellers. Such forms of erasure and
38 exclusion have been supported by the urban middle classes as a reclaiming of the
39 'good city' and as a protection of the urban commons. This theme of spatial order,
40 championed by the middle-classes, shows how the political activism of the middle
41 classes often eschews class rhetoric and takes up civil society causes.
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50 In this paper, I thus look at middle-class interactions with the urban poor, the elite and
51 the state. While they are not seeking to segregate themselves in gated communities, middle-
52 class residents in this study want to preserve their spaces from change in order to preserve their
53 middle-class lifestyles. The discussion emphasises how social class and space are produced in
54 tandem, interrogating how the struggles of middle-class citizens to produce the "right kind of
55 city" (Centner, 2012) may contribute to deepen socio-spatial inequalities.
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3. Methodology

3.1. Selection of case studies

In 2014, Brazil has hosted the FIFA World Cup. Most studies looking at the Brazilian experience have explored how mega-events¹ created opportunities for the promotion of capital accumulation that often lead to the displacement of the urban poor, generally focusing on the case of Rio de Janeiro (Gaffney, 2013; Sánchez and Broudehoux, 2013; Vainer, 2015). I thus propose to switch the lenses towards middle-class groups affected by redevelopment who organise to contest urban change in Belo Horizonte, an ordinary city (Robinson, 2006)

I explore two World Cup-related conflicts that have affected middle-class residents: the Mineirão stadium redevelopment at Pampulha and the attempt to build a luxurious hotel at Santa Lúcia. Figure 1 shows the location of the two areas in the city of Belo Horizonte while also presenting a few images of the selected regions. Moreover, Figure 2 exhibits income data for the two areas, vis-à-vis Belo Horizonte and Brazil. One can notice that, comparatively, those living in these regions belong to higher economic strata.

Please insert Figure 1 and Figure 2

¹ Mega-events are usually described in the literature as “large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance” (Roche, 2002, p.1).

3.2. *Data collection*

Data were collected during eight months of field work between 2014 and 2016. I have conducted semi-structured interviews with 45 relevant actors – residents, social activists, state agents, informal workers, among others – involved in the two selected cases. The interviewed residents at Pampulha belong to the local association (Pró-Civitas), whereas those at Santa Lúcia were involved with the “Save the Musas movement”. In order to protect the privacy of participants, all names have been anonymized.

3.3. *Note on the difficulty of studying the (Brazilian) middle-class*

Following the economic “evidence” of a growing “global middle-class” in developing countries (Kharas, 2010), studies in Brazil have discussed the emergence of the so-called “new middle-class” (Neri, 2008).² However, I argue that the people depicted in this paper are not part of the “new middle-class”, but rather the traditional middle-class – formed by liberal professionals, civil servants, university professors, small business owners, company managers, etc – whose emergence is connected with the process of industrialisation (Oliveira, 1982). In order to classify those described in this study as “middle-class”, I have relied on my interactions with the interviewees and the information disclosed during interviews. Nonetheless, I do not intend to argue that the groups I am discussing represent some ideal middle-class type or that their actions can be extrapolated to represent this ambiguous and politically fragmented group. However, I sustain that the spatial practices of the groups discussed are important for the maintenance of their social class status.

4. **Preserving middle-class spaces**

4.1. *Musas Street: preserving the environment*

In May of 2011, the local newspapers in Belo Horizonte were announcing the construction of a five-star hotel at Musas street, in the neighbourhood of Santa Lúcia. The headline celebrated optimistically the improvement in the city’s hospitality infrastructure for

² The “new middle-class” phenomenon has been challenged by Pochmann (2012), who noticed its over reliance on income data.

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3 hosting the 2014 World Cup. Moreover, the article emphasised how the project would require
4 a deal between the entrepreneur and the city hall, allowing the former to buy a piece of the
5 street separating two plots. The 27-storey luxury hotel was planned to be built in an area where
6 the city's master plan only allowed for constructions up to 9 meters. Despite the violation of
7 construction regulations for the area, the company benefited from the municipal Law
8 9.952/2010, created to encourage the construction of hotels envisioning the hosting of the
9 World Cup. The legislation made possible the use of an instrument of the CS - the "urban
10 operation" - for the entire city, making construction limits flexible.
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18 The transaction could thus be regarded as "exceptional" (Vainer, 2015), since it required
19 bending norms to promote a profit-seeking state-capital coalition facilitated by the hosting of a
20 mega-event. Nonetheless, despite the efforts of the municipal government to enable its
21 construction, the hotel was never built due to the efforts of a local neighbourhood collective –
22 the "Save the Musas" movement – formed mainly by the middle-class residents of the street.
23 The case thus points towards a more complex landscape in which urban space emerges as the
24 product of ongoing disputes between unevenly empowered actors (Schindler, 2014; Nogueira,
25 2017).
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32 Matheus, a small businessman with a law degree who had just recently moved to the
33 area, was one of the most active members of the "Save the Musas". I first met him in September
34 2015 at his house, located at Musas street. We talked for more than two hours, sitting outside
35 in his barbecue area facing the pool. He was keen to narrate how he had to adapt his house's
36 project, reducing it in 20 centimetres, to meet the municipal regulations. Matheus, however,
37 claimed to have accepted the condition with no issues, since it was "the requirement of the
38 law." He further added, "as a legalist I must comply with [the law], right? The citizen has to
39 comply." He was thus outraged by the violations found in the hotel deal, questioning the city
40 hall's discretionary interpretation of local planning guidelines.
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48 The residents used several simultaneous tactics to successfully stop the project. Firstly,
49 they challenged the street "sale", as Antonio – a well-known professor at the Minas Gerais
50 Federal University – narrated to me during an interview in his campus office, which he shares
51 with another colleague. At first the city hall tried to transfer the street to the private company
52 without a public bid. The transaction was then justified by the inexistence of other potential
53 interested buyers. Antonio then questioned this decision by declaring his own interest in buying
54 the land. Although he never actually intended to buy it, he hoped, as in fact happened, that his
55 action would force the cancellation of the transference. Eventually, a public bid was launched
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3 but also questioned by the residents through a lawsuit. Finally, in July of 2012, the deal was
4 sealed in a second public bid, in which the company interested in the hotel was the winner,
5 buying the land for over 1.2 million pounds.
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9 Secondly, the residents challenged the hotel construction, pointing out the illegalities of
10 the project. In this process, the Public Ministry (PM) became an important partner, giving
11 legitimacy to their legal claims. Roberta, the public prosecutor in charge, explained her views
12 on the validity of the municipal law that turned construction parameters flexible.
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16 It [the law] has a serious problem, first because it has authorized urban operations
17 anywhere in the city, right? This is not viable because the City Statute says that
18 when you create an urban operation you must delimit the affected area. (Roberta,
19 Public Prosecutor – 28/10/15)
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26 Moreover, the main argument employed by the residents and the PM was the potential
27 environmental impact of the project. Firstly, Musas street is located within the Serra do Curral
28 “Special Guidelines Area”, with special planning regulations. Secondly, the project was placed
29 within a 3-km radio from an environmental protected area - the Ecological Reserve of
30 Cercadinho. Both arguments were mentioned in three reports issued by the PM opposing the
31 sanctioning of the construction license; first to the mayor, then to the Municipal Environment
32 Council (COMAM) and finally to the Regional State Environmental Policy Council (COPAM).
33 Both councils are “invited spaces” (Miraftab, 2004) created after re-democratisation with the
34 aim to enhance participatory democracy in policy-making.
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43 Moreover, all three reports used the constitutional right to the environment and the local
44 and regional state’s responsibility to protecting it as legal arguments. Additionally, the CS was
45 quoted, emphasising paragraph 4 of the 2nd article, which describes all three levels of
46 government as responsible for “planning the development of cities, the spatial distribution of
47 the population and the economic activities of the municipality, as well as the territory under its
48 influence, as to avoid and correct any urban growth distortions and negative impacts over the
49 environment.” Eventually, despite the PM’s pressure, the entrepreneur received all the
50 necessary licenses in October 2013. Nonetheless, the original legislation required the hotels to
51 be in operation by the end of March 2014, or they would be fined. The entrepreneur then asked
52 for an extension to complete the project that was denied by the City Hall.
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3 In this case, legal-institutional frameworks emerging as a result of the urban poor
4 insurgent struggles for the “right to the city” (Holston, 2008) are deployed by both sides. On
5 the one hand, the urban operation (an instrument of the CS) is enacted to make regulations
6 flexible and stimulate capital accumulation instead of promoting greater social justice (Rolnik,
7 2013; Vainer, 2015). On the other hand, the residents of Musas street have successfully used
8 both the legislation and the participatory channels to delay the process until the construction
9 became unfeasible. Moreover, environment protection is a fundamental argument that allows
10 their demands to be legally framed as representing the “public interest” (Ghertner, 2013).
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18 Thirdly, an important aspect to this case was the ability of the residents to escalate their
19 struggles, turning an issue that would directly impact only a few into a city-wide issue. For
20 those critical of his government, the case of Musas street was a straightforward example of the
21 mayor’s wrongdoings, involving the privatisation of public spaces, the under-the-table
22 agreements with private developers and the use of planning for promoting urban speculation.
23 Such arguments resonated with the grievances of social activists gathered in a local grassroots
24 movement - the *Fora Lacerda*³ - created in 2011, which became a space for “Save the Musas”
25 to become amplified. Moreover, the residents also built alliances with others (such as local
26 politicians, the MP, the Institute of Brazilian Architects) drawing from their personal social
27 networks to promote their movement. Finally, as educated people, they had access to the
28 knowledge necessary to substantiate their claims.
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38 The discussion shows how at least two elements associated with the “middle-class” have
39 played a fundamental role. Firstly, “morality” (Liechty, 2012; O’Dougherty, 1999) emerges as
40 an important feature to validate the residents’ demands. They are not defending their own
41 interests, but the preservation of the environment and, therefore, the public interest (Ghertner,
42 2013). Secondly, the access to social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) – social networks
43 and education – allows residents to escalate their struggle. As argued by Centner (2008, p.197),
44 urban space is shaped by “groups with differentiated access to forms of capital” that make use
45 of those to make claims thus fashioning “particular kinds of places.” Therefore, one can say
46 that, in this case, access to different forms of capital are relevant to claim space, which is in
47 itself an element of class distinction (Zhang, 2012).
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58 ³ In Portuguese, *fora* means “out” in the imperative. The name of the movement is thus a demand: the
59 protesters wanted Lacerda out of the government.
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4.2. *Pampulha, preserving the world's heritage*

The Pampulha region was completely redeveloped in the 1940s and the project has been regarded as the first important autonomous work of Oscar Niemeyer, marking the birth of Brazilian modernist architecture (Segre, 2012). The complex built around the Pampulha Lake has become an iconic mark of Belo Horizonte and one of its most important post cards. In 2016 the Pampulha Modern Ensemble has been recognised by UNESCO as a site of world cultural heritage. In the long process that led to this recognition, Pampulha's neighbourhood association created in 2003 – Pró-Civitas – has played an important role.

In their website, the association describes current efforts to improve their results: “we have been working together with neighbouring associations to try to enforce the City Statute (Federal Law of 2001), which guarantees citizens the right to participate in the elaboration of the rules of the environment in which they live.”⁴ The “right to the city” legal framework is thus explicitly utilised to justify their political practice.

Since 2005, Pró-Civitas has been circulating a small newspaper.⁵ In an interview in the first edition, the president, Julia, talked about the association's greatest challenge.

I would like to have involved more people in our work. Surely our results would have been even more substantial. But the association is still very young and we will get there soon. Certainly, this is the natural course of events when you intend to promote the common good for people with few individual needs. (Pró-Civitas Journal – March 2005, p.7)

One can thus note that the association represents people who are not demanding minimum rights, but citizens with access to substantive citizenship, that is, that enjoy political, civil and social rights (Marshall, 2009). It is then a challenge to get the middle-class residents “with few individual needs” involved. The association seeks to affect public policy and to enforce the “rule of law” in order to promote the preservation of the neighbourhood, improving the well-being of citizens.

⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.pro-civitas.org.br/Apresentacao.html>. Accessed on 02/08/2015.

⁵ The publication is available on their website (<http://www.pro-civitas.org.br/jornais/>).

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3 In the mid-2000s, they led a successful campaign that stopped a change in the city's
4 zoning law which would have allowed the construction of high-rising buildings in the area
5 surrounding the Pampulha Lake. The issue was discussed during an interview by the association
6 treasurer, Alessandra, a civil servant who lives in the area since 1982. She lives in a spacious
7 and comfortable two-floor house, just a few blocks from the Mineirão stadium, where she
8 narrated the association's ongoing concern with the verticalisation issue.
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14 Now the legislation is more rigid, but nothing guarantees that [it won't change]. In
15 the future, in a short period of time, the pressure might arise from businessmen to
16 make it [the zoning law] flexible again. (Alessandra – 25/08/2015)
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21 The campaign against verticalisation is hence framed as a wider political struggle
22 against the remaking of the city by speculators acting in tandem with the state to promote private
23 interests. Those efforts could thus be interpreted within the “right to the city” framework, as a
24 struggle against the rise of urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989) for a more just and
25 inclusive city. However, a closer look at the association's political practice reveals its ambiguity
26 and the limited capacity of residents to act in solidarity with the urban poor (Lawson, 2012).
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32 According to its president, Julia, Pró-Civitas has been one of the key actors promoting
33 the conservation of the neighbourhood and its heritage. Despite the concerns of “urbanists”
34 with the irreversible environmental impacts that could endanger the Pampulha Lake, she argued
35 that the economic pressures to densify the region have always existed. Julia is particularly fond
36 of the work of Candido Malta, an urbanist from São Paulo, whose work she recommended me
37 after explaining briefly the main points of his theory.⁶
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43 He thinks that there are two classes of urban predators, the unconscious ones, totally
44 unprepared people, the *favelas* and such, and the others who are aware, who are
45 doing that to make a profit, with no concern for the city. (Julia – 24/08/2016)
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51 In her interpretation, therefore, the elite and the poor are joined in the same category.
52 The role of the middle-class is hence to fight against the depredatory practices of those trying
53 to make a profit or, alternatively, trying to make a living. Discussing the Brazilian middle-class
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58 ⁶ It is important to emphasise that I do not believe this description is an accurate portrayal of Candido
59 Malta's ideas, but rather a personal interpretation, which is the relevant part for the analysis.
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3 in the early 1990s, O'Dougherty (1999, p.153) has identified how these citizens “construct a
4 political identity founded on a moral code versus one depicted as opportunistic and corrupt in
5 Brazilian government and society.” In this case, one can observe the same traces of “moral
6 superiority” that authorises the good citizens to safeguard the city and the public interest from
7 the two groups of “urban predators”. In common, both groups have the disrespect for the laws,
8 which the association struggles to enforce. Since the redevelopment of the Mineirão stadium,⁷
9 promoted in the context of Belo Horizonte’s preparation for the 2014 World Cup, Pró-Civitas
10 has dealt with the second type of “urban predator”, the urban poor who struggle to make a living
11 while disregarding the law.
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19 Before its renovation, Mineirão stadium was surrounded by open space and several
20 street vendors would sell food and beverages to football fans during match days. When the
21 stadium closed in 2010, the workers were displaced and the area became privatised and
22 enclosed. In the absence of the informal market, the football fans got in the habit of remaining
23 in the outside area of the stadium, buying drinks from street vendors and even promoting private
24 barbecues on the streets of the neighbourhood. The situation caused real fury among the
25 residents, who hence began to demand actions from the local council to reduce the impacts of
26 the stadium in their neighbourhood.
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33 In their task to dismantle this burgeoning local informal economy, the residents are in
34 constant contact with Marcia, the director of the Pampulha council’s inspection office. Their
35 claims were justified by a 2003 municipal law (Code of Placements) that explicitly prohibits
36 the activity of street vendors in public spaces. According to Marcia, one of her greatest
37 achievements in 2015 was the praise she received from the association in a letter.
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43 So, it goes like this: “Relevant improvements have been observed in the residential
44 areas leading to a reduction in the number of residents’ complaints. Much more is
45 yet to be achieved, but the work executed thus far makes us optimistic.” (...) I was
46 very happy when I received it because it shows that we are on the right path, that
47 we are not being negligent. (Interview with Marcia, Pampulha Council – 16/12/15)
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57 ⁷ The modernisation was completed through a public private partnership between the state and the Minas
58 Arena consortium formed by three major construction companies that will be responsible for managing
59 the new Multipurpose Arena until 2037. The total cost was BRL 666.30 million (GBP 200.09 million).
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3 Marcia's narrative reveals the important role of the residents in the neighbourhood's
4 governance regime. As argued by Schindler (2016, p.250), "the state is simply one of a number
5 of actors struggling to regulate activity, land-use and service provision." In this case, middle-
6 class citizens employed the law as a discursive tool to reconstitute the notion of "public interest"
7 in order to shape urban space according to a certain vision of urban order (Roy, 2012; Ghertner,
8 2013). In the name of heritage preservation, the residents use the "right city" framework and
9 legality to (de)legitimise different uses of urban space aiming to produce the "right kind of city"
10 (Centner, 2012). Both their ability to access the state and use the law are facilitated by their
11 middle-class status (Ghertner, 2014), whereas the reproduction of class distinction is itself
12 engendered by the preservation of middle-class spaces.
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23 **5. Concluding discussions: the "good" citizens claiming the "right kind of city"**

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26 The critical urban studies literature in Brazil has followed the worldwide trend of this
27 scholarship: it focuses either on the elites, usually colluded with the state, or the struggles of
28 the urban poor (Lemanski, 2017). In this paper, I explored the politics of middle-class citizens
29 in their attempts to make the "right kind of city" (Centner, 2012). Middle-class citizens'
30 political practices were analysed as part of their strategies to reproduce their social class status
31 (Mercer, 2018; Zhang, 2012). These citizens are not struggling against displacement or for basic
32 needs; they want to be part of local urban governance regimes, affecting the rules of the
33 environment in which they live.
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40 In order to explore middle-class attempts to preserve their place in the city, I have
41 focused on the law and the ways in which residents employ the legal discourse to justify their
42 claims upon space. Since re-democratisation, Brazil has experienced a process of gradual legal
43 and institutional development that has broadened the channels and instruments for participatory
44 democracy in planning and in many governmental areas (Fernandes, 2011). While progressive
45 legislation and instruments, such as the CS, were established through the past struggles of the
46 movement of those excluded from urbanisation in Brazil, their incorporation in the legislation
47 have made them available for more affluent citizens who took advantage of such legislation to
48 advance their own needs. Although not always successful, middle-class citizens in this study
49 had access to resources and were, thus, empowered to participate in the politics of urban space
50 production. That raises questions about the effectiveness of participatory democracy, since the
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3 actual outcome of legal and institutional developments created to enhance social justice hinges
4 upon the balance of power among different social classes.
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7 In both cases analysed, residents of middle-class areas struggle to preserve their
8 neighbourhoods against change. In their discourses, their demands are justified by
9 concerns over the protection of the environment and the city's heritage. In the case of Musas
10 Street, the state's attempt to accommodate the needs of an international mega-event is
11 challenged by a few discontent residents. The process through which legality is suspended to
12 make rules flexible in order to promote investments (Vainer, 2015) is interrupted. The case,
13 therefore, points towards a more complex situation in which the capital-state alliance is not able
14 to impose its agenda. Power is more dispersed among the actors involved and middle-class
15 residents actively participate in the local urban governance regime (Schindler, 2016). The law
16 plays a central role as citizens articulate their claims in juridical terms. In their discourses, the
17 project is challenged not because of its potential impact on their lives, but because it is deemed
18 illegal, as it does not comply with planning regulations and it is potentially disastrous for the
19 constitutionally protected environmental heritage. Legal and institutional innovations arising
20 from insurgency aimed to support the poor and the marginalised become instruments for the
21 middle-classes to claim their own right to participate urban space governance.
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34 In the case of Pampulha, the local neighbourhood association plays an active role in
35 promoting the region's preservation, a site of world heritage. In the aftermath of the 2014 World
36 Cup, the residents mobilise against negative impacts in the region caused by the local stadium
37 renovation. As a result of spatial restructuring, their quiet residential streets are turned into a
38 burgeoning informal market, where street vendors sell beer and other beverages to football fans
39 with no legal authorization for sales. In this context, residents organise against informal street
40 vendors, demanding intervention from the local state, which seeks to meet their demands.
41 Middle-class citizens thus use legality, in the name of morality and spatial order, to
42 (de)legitimise uses of urban space according to their own ideas of how the city should be
43 ordered. In their fight to preserve the world's heritage site, the Pampulha residents also employ
44 legal discourses, evoking the City Statute to justify their right to participate and the Code of
45 Placements to demand the control of the informal economy. However, they are not fighting
46 against exclusion, but rather for the preservation of their neighbourhood as it is by demanding
47 state actions against the illegal activities of the urban poor.
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58 Within critical urban studies, cities are analysed as spaces in constant change to
59 accommodate the needs of capital accumulation. Nonetheless, this process is not uncontested,
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3 as people react against the commodification of urban land, trying to protect their ways of living
4 and belonging to the city against the creative destructive forces of capitalism (Harvey, 2008).
5 Not much, however, is said about how different social class groups are more or less empowered
6 to protect their ways of belonging to the city. The two cases analysed are not about the struggle
7 of the urban poor, excluded and marginalised from the city, but organised citizens “with few
8 individual needs” who also claim their right to “participate in the elaboration of the rules of the
9 environment in which they live”. Such middle-class politics were often described by
10 participants in this study as struggles against state-capital alliances interested in promoting real
11 estate speculation at the expense of citizens’ wellbeing. One could thus potentially locate such
12 efforts in the “right to the city” agenda. Nevertheless, in their argument, the elites are joined in
13 the same category as the urban poor: both ignore the rule of law that the ‘good citizens’ aim to
14 safeguard. The “moral superiority” (O’Dougherty, 1999) of the middle-class allows these
15 citizens to stand in contrast with those groups; they represent the public interest, which
16 legitimise their efforts to regulate urban space.
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28 While the residents of Musas Street are struggling against a luxurious development, the
29 residents at Pampulha are aimed at the urban poor, hence showcasing how middle-class politics
30 can be either progressive or conservative. Common in both cases, however, is the wish to
31 preserve middle-class ways of belonging to the city as the driving force of residents’ political
32 actions. Preserving middle-class spaces, in this regard, also contributes to the reproduction of
33 (re)produce middle-class distinction (Zhang, 2012), revealing the interrelation between the
34 making of middle-class spaces and class boundary-work (Mercer, 2018). Although in these
35 cases residents are not effectively “building” urban space, they struggle to shape it in
36 accordance with their own notions of spatial order (Roy, 2012). Similarly to what Ghertner
37 (2013) has discussed for the case of India, here too we see the use of environmental (and
38 heritage) preservation as arguments that provide legitimacy to potentially exclusionary
39 demands. Therefore, although residents may articulate claims around the “right to the city”,
40 those are translated into “an exclusive right to the city, crafted essentially as the circumscribed
41 property of a certain group” (Centner, 2012, p.248). The preservation of middle-class spaces is
42 thus also about the preservation of a certain middle-class lifestyle, which is constructed in
43 relation to space and urban belonging.
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56 Unlike the middle-classes who have chosen to self-segregate in gated communities
57 (Caldeira, 1996), in this paper, I dealt with middle-class citizens who want to be part of the city.
58 They claim the right to shape the urban space, to affect the environment where they live.
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3 Nevertheless, they also want to fashion places in accordance with their own views, building in
4 the process a much subtler type of wall. These middle-class citizens do not want to leave the
5 polis but rather to engage in the political arena to preserve middle-class spaces. I argue that
6 Brazil's socio-urban reform has institutionalized the mechanisms of participatory democracy,
7 making those tools available for citizens who are better equipped to make use of such
8 innovations to affect city-making. I thus look beyond neoliberalism as the only process guiding
9 Brazil's urban future, by revealing how social stratification is entangled with urban policy. I
10 argue that more attention to the role of the middle-classes in local regimes of governance is
11 needed in order to reveal the everyday mundane ways in which socio-spatial inequalities are
12 reproduced and challenged.
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7 **Figure 1.** Location and overview of case study areas
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9 1.1 Map of Belo Horizonte



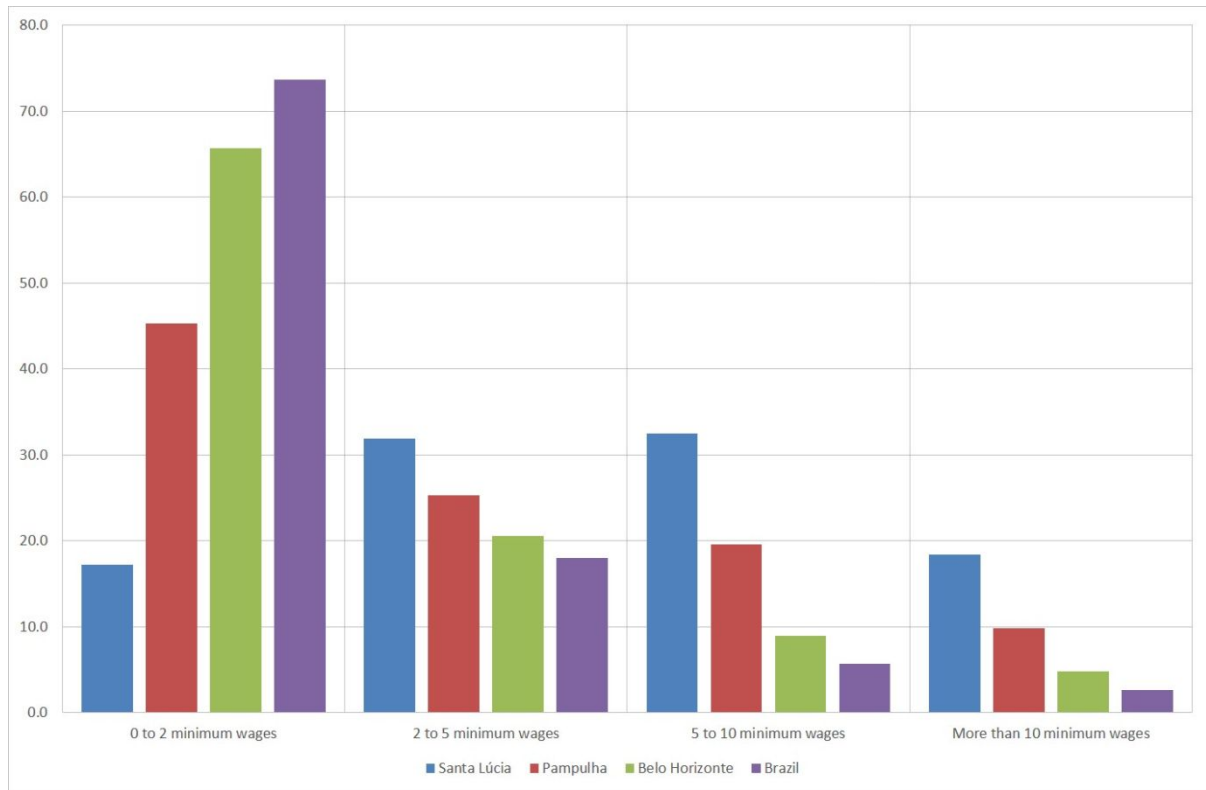
10 1.2. Pampulha region overview



11 1.3. Musas street overview



Figure 2. Share of the population per income group for 2010: Pampulha and Santa Lúcia versus Belo Horizonte and Brazil

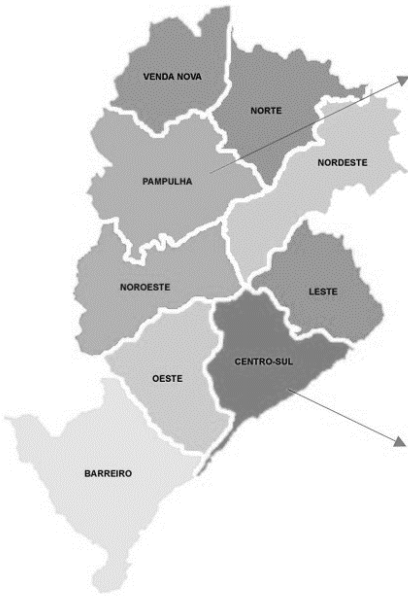


Source: Author's elaboration with data from IBGE and PBH.

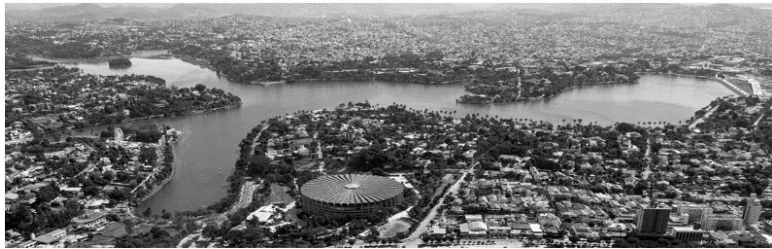
Note: The value of the minimum wage in July 2010 was R\$510 (£187).

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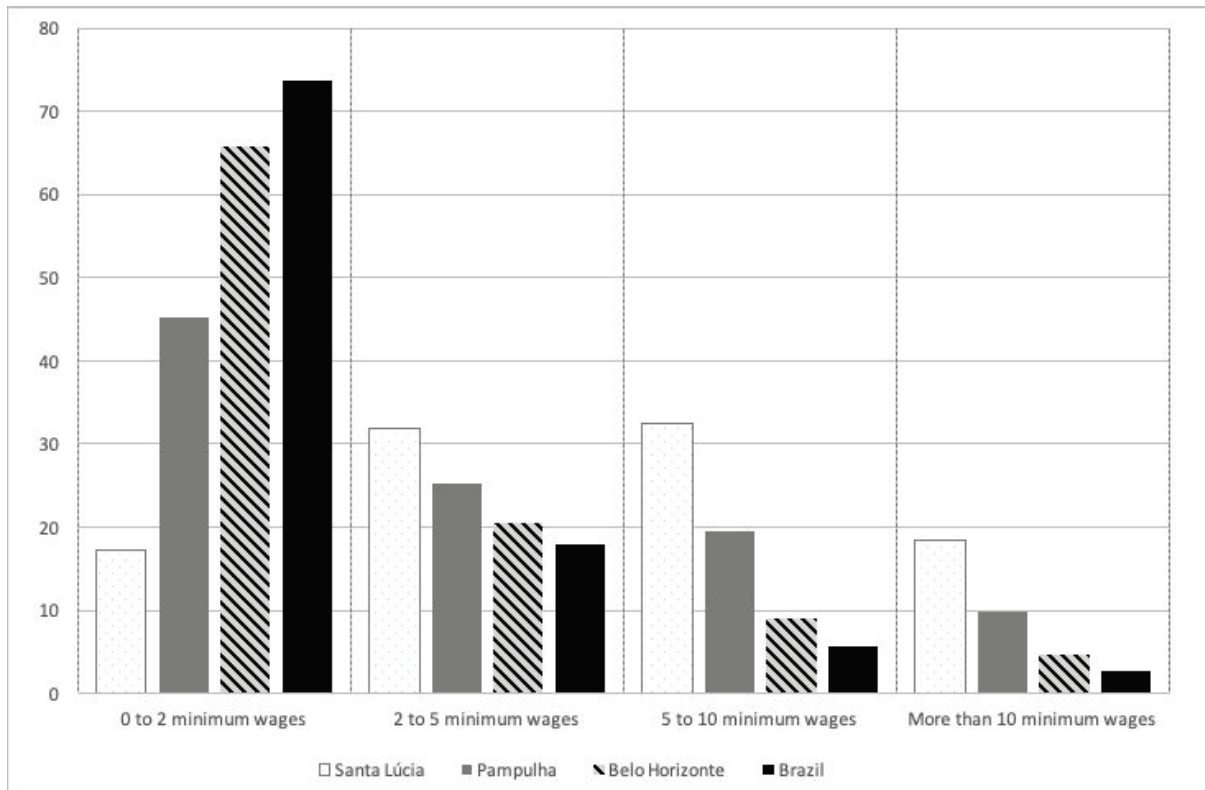
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