



The preservation of cultural heritage in the recently established small towns of northwest São Paulo

A preservação do patrimônio cultural nas pequenas cidades de formação recente do
noroeste paulista

La preservación del patrimonio cultural en los pequeños pueblos de reciente formación
del noroeste de São Paulo

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RESUMO

Apesar da Constituição Federal de 1988 ter consagrado uma visão ampla e democrática de patrimônio cultural, as práticas do campo preservacionista muitas vezes persistem numa visão restrita do que deva ser consagrado como bem cultural. Mantém-se uma ideia geral difusa de que os patrimônios seriam apenas aquelas construções monumentais, ou assinadas por grandes artistas ou ainda produzidas em tempos longínquos. Essa concepção, na contramão do que propõe o texto constitucional ao campo da preservação, deixa de fora uma imensa maioria de cidades brasileiras, pequenas e de formação recente. Este trabalho visa contribuir para a desconstrução da limitante ideia de patrimônio cultural restrita à apenas bens monumentais e, conseqüentemente, aos instrumentos tradicionais de preservação, por meio da discussão sobre o patrimônio cultural em pequenas cidades de formação recente, com foco no noroeste paulista. A partir da revisão bibliográfica de autores como Gatti e Zandonade (2017), Endlich e Detoni (2022), Campos e Inoue (2020), Fontenele e Oksman (2018), pretende-se discutir e possibilitar uma compreensão crítica e ampliada sobre o conceito de patrimônio cultural. Ao discutir sobre a relação do patrimônio e as pequenas cidades de formação recente no noroeste paulista, objetiva-se trazer uma reflexão sobre como as cidades podem ser capazes de abranger o patrimônio local, não apenas visando a sua tutela perante as mudanças eminentes da cidade e seus espaços, mas também a fim de preservar e ressignificar sua identidade urbana no decorrer do tempo e das gerações, propiciando mais qualidade de vida, a apropriação e a identificação das pessoas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Patrimônio Cultural. Pequenas Cidades. Noroeste Paulista.

SUMMARY

Despite the 1988 Federal Constitution enshrining a broad and democratic vision of cultural heritage, practices in the preservation field often persist with a narrow view of what should be considered cultural heritage. There remains a general and diffuse idea that heritage encompasses only monumental constructions, works by great artists, or creations from distant times. This conception, contrary to what the constitutional text proposes for the field of preservation, excludes a vast majority of Brazilian cities, particularly smaller and more recently established ones. This work aims to contribute to deconstructing the limiting idea of cultural heritage being restricted to only monumental assets and, consequently, to traditional preservation instruments. This will be achieved through a discussion on cultural heritage in small, recently established cities, focusing on the northwest of São Paulo state. Based on a literature review of authors such as Gatti and Zandonade (2017), Endlich and Detoni (2022), Campos and Inoue (2020), and Fontenele and Oksman (2018), the intention is to foster a critical and expanded understanding of the concept of cultural heritage. By discussing the relationship between heritage and small, recently established cities in the northwest of São Paulo, the aim is to reflect on how these cities can encompass local heritage, not only to protect it against imminent changes in the city and its spaces but also to preserve and reinterpret their urban identity over time and generations, thereby providing better quality of life, and fostering the appropriation and identification of the residents.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Heritage. Small Towns. Northwestern São Paulo.

RESUMEN

A pesar de que la Constitución Federal de 1988 consagró una visión amplia y democrática del patrimonio cultural, las prácticas en el campo de la preservación a menudo persisten con una visión restringida de lo que debe ser considerado patrimonio cultural. Se mantiene una idea general y difusa de que los patrimonios son solo aquellas construcciones monumentales, obras de grandes artistas o creaciones de tiempos lejanos. Esta concepción, contraria a lo que propone el texto constitucional para el campo de la preservación, excluye a una vasta mayoría de ciudades brasileñas, especialmente las pequeñas y de formación reciente. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo contribuir a la desconstrucción de la idea limitante del patrimonio cultural restringido únicamente a bienes monumentales y, conseqüentemente, a los instrumentos tradicionales de preservación, a través de una discusión sobre el patrimonio cultural en pequeñas ciudades de formación reciente, con un enfoque en el noroeste paulista. Basándose en la revisión bibliográfica de autores como Gatti y Zandonade (2017), Endlich y Detoni (2022), Campos e Inoue (2020), Fontenele y Oksman (2018), se pretende fomentar una comprensión crítica y ampliada del concepto de patrimonio cultural. Al analizar la relación entre el patrimonio y las pequeñas ciudades de formación reciente en el noroeste paulista, se busca reflexionar sobre cómo estas ciudades pueden abarcar el patrimonio local, no solo para protegerlo ante los cambios inminentes de la ciudad y sus espacios, sino también para preservar y ressignificar su identidad urbana a lo largo del tiempo y las generaciones, proporcionando una mejor calidad de vida y fomentando la apropiación e identificación de los residentes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Patrimonio Cultural. Pequeñas Cidades. Noroeste de São Paulo.



INTRODUCTION

The current Brazilian urban landscape is dominated by small and medium-sized towns, as pointed out by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Out of a total of 5,570 municipalities, 3,935 have populations of up to 20,000 inhabitants, which corresponds to 70.6% of all Brazilian cities. This figure rises to 94% when considering municipalities with populations under 100,000 inhabitants, while large cities (over 500,000 inhabitants) account for only 1% of the total Brazilian municipalities (IBGE, 2022).

This highlights the importance of focusing attention on these small towns, which dominate the Brazilian urban landscape, through studies, reflections, and data collection that reflect their realities—whether addressing problems, potentials, social character, and traditions—and proposing urban solutions to improve the lives of these populations as well as their urban landscapes.

According to Gatti and Zandonade (2017), small and medium-sized towns have very peculiar characteristics in their ways of life and in their relationships between people and with the environment in which they live. Consequently, this directly influences various aspects of the landscape, culture, traditions, and daily dynamics. However, as discussed by Endlich and Detoni (2021), the lack of sufficient studies leads to an idealization or mythification of these places. Even though they are often seen as spaces of tranquility, slower pace of life, and a society deeply rooted in close neighborly relationships, compared to large cities, they still present areas of insecurity, inequalities, and contemporary contradictions.

This paper derives from an ongoing master's dissertation within the Postgraduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism at the Federal University of Uberlândia (PPGAU-UFU), titled "The public space as common heritage in small, recently established municipalities: a study in the center of Colina-SP," and focuses on a specific aspect regarding small towns: the preservation of cultural heritage. How do small, recently established towns address memory and identity? How do they implement (or fail to implement) policies for protecting and caring for local heritage? These are some of the underlying questions guiding the ongoing research, which focuses on the northwest region of São Paulo.

The aim of this research is to emphasize the importance of considering all towns as historical, regardless of whether they have been established for a few decades or hundreds of years. After all, every history is important to its people. The passage of time may lead to morphological and urban landscape differences, but this does not establish a hierarchy of greater importance for older cities. On the contrary, all cities require attention to urban planning and cultural preservation (BAUMGARTNER; BITTENCOURT; CELESTINO, 2021).

Another aspect to consider is the notion of heritage itself, which remains closely tied to monumentality and exceptionality, thereby excluding much of the modest local heritage. This stands in stark opposition to the Brazilian constitutional text, which—aligned with global trends—enshrined a broader and more democratic view of cultural heritage.

Given this reality, the aim of this paper is to debate, disseminate, and reaffirm the



importance of preserving modest and recent heritage assets that carry the identity and memory of the local population, particularly for newer generations and local governments in the recently established small towns of northwest São Paulo, by presenting some specific strategies.

Regarding the analysis method, bibliographic research was conducted on the topic, presenting current discussions on the perception of cultural heritage in Brazil and offering a comparative reflection on how this applies to small, recently established towns in the northwest of São Paulo. Relevant authors on the subject such as Gatti and Zandonade (2017); Endlich and Detoni (2022); Baumgartner, Bittencourt, and Celestino (2021); Campos and Inoue (2020); Meneses (2009); Motta (2023); Fontenele and Oksman (2018) were analyzed.

As a result of this article, based on the debates and theoretical reflections developed so far, some strategies have been proposed on how towns can encompass local heritage—not only to protect it from the imminent changes in the city and its spaces but also to preserve and reframe their urban identity over time and across generations, thereby providing better quality of life, fostering a sense of belonging, and strengthening people's identification with their local heritage.

1. SMALL RECENTLY ESTABLISHED TOWNS IN NORTHWEST SÃO PAULO

The definition of "small towns" is a term widely debated in geography and urbanism, with various approaches regarding its conceptualization, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Therefore, there is no precise and unanimous concept globally, as it varies according to each author, country, state, and even within regions, adapting to the local reality.

One commonly used approach is the quantitative factor, considering the number of inhabitants per town to classify it as small. From this perspective, Santos (1989) defines small towns as those with populations of up to 20,000 inhabitants, while Corrêa (1999) considers up to 50,000 inhabitants.

However, depending on the topic, the number of inhabitants may not be the most important element. Therefore, there is a qualitative debate for conceptualizing small towns. Santos (1979) and Endlich (2006) are examples of authors who propose a classification considering not only the number of inhabitants but also the dynamics that occur in the towns. This way, factors such as economy, local labor, consumption, the reach and importance within a network of towns, among others, are considered, along with social, economic, political, and urbanistic issues.

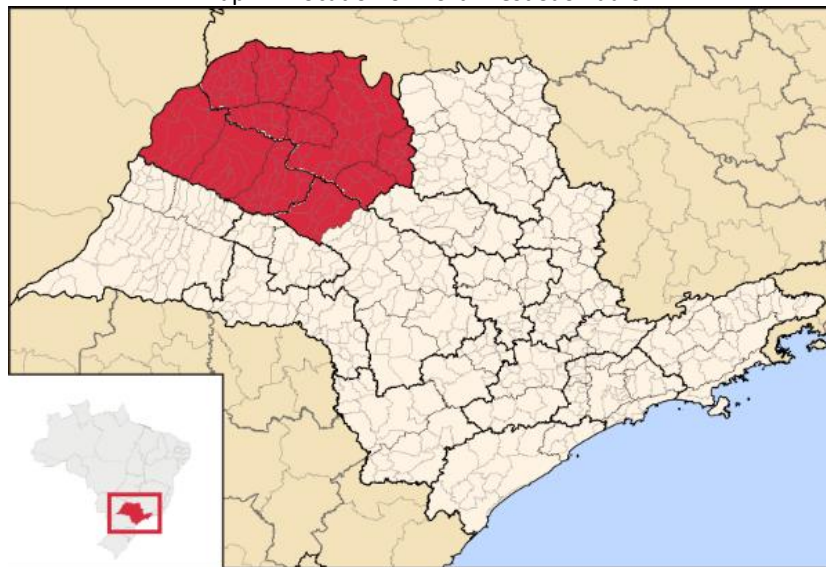
For this article, the quantitative aspect was prioritized, defining small towns as those with up to 20,000 inhabitants, as the theme discussed revolves around the perspective of local residents regarding their heritage.

1.1 The Recent Formation of Towns in Northwest São Paulo

Brazil's urban development has always been closely tied to its economic cycles. It was during the coffee cycle that the urbanization of the state of São Paulo, both in the capital and the interior—previously known as the “São Paulo backlands”—truly consolidated. This term for these lands emerged because they were depicted on maps as "backlands" since the colonial period in Brazil, which, broadly speaking, was divided between the coast and the backlands. The "coast" referred to areas already dominated by colonizers, meaning the coastal regions, while the "backlands" were more inland, unknown, and less explored territories. Thus, the contrast between the backlands and the coast, civilization and wilderness, urban and rural, was very pronounced (LIMA, 1998).

Even after Independence and the formation of the Brazilian Empire, maps from that time referred to the northwest of São Paulo as “unknown backlands” (map 1). According to Figueirôa (2008), little was known about what lay there, apart from the native peoples, but the territory was already coveted for incorporation into the productive cycle. It was only in the last quarter of the 19th century, in 1886, that a Geographic and Geological Commission was discussed and established to scientifically study these unknown areas of São Paulo’s interior. The goal was to explore and determine which economic activities were best suited for the region. Therefore, the São Paulo backlands were seen as a kind of “reserve” made up of land and nature, intended for exploitation by the prevailing economic forces of the state (FIGUEIRÔA, 2008).

Map 1 – Location of Northwest São Paulo.



Source: Noroeste Paulista (2023).

Even with the advent of the Republic in 1889, the interests and plans of the former slaveholding, agro-exporting, and large landowning elite persisted. Politicians, intellectuals, and the elite aimed to "civilize" and modernize the São Paulo backlands in order to improve Brazil's image abroad, as the country was facing various epidemic outbreaks and an outdated rural production system at the time. Thus, the Geographic and Geological Commission advanced its work on the São Paulo territory, especially those areas to be integrated into the productive circuit (FIGUEIRÔA, 2008).

With vast areas suitable for coffee cultivation (some of which were known as "terra roxa," one of the best soils for agriculture), the first railway company, Companhia Noroeste do



Brasil, was soon established with the intent of integrating the backlands into the country's productive cycle (GHIRARDELLO, 2002), which was already established in the Vale do Paraíba and around Campinas.

According to Campos and Inoue (2020), the implementation of railway companies can be divided into two phases: the first, termed "cata-café" railways, was characterized by a lack of planning, disorganization of the railway network, and limited connection with other parts of the territory, with railroads built solely to reach the coffee plantations in the interior. The second phase saw the emergence of "strategic railways," which were implemented following a structured expansion plan, reaching strategic points within the São Paulo territory.

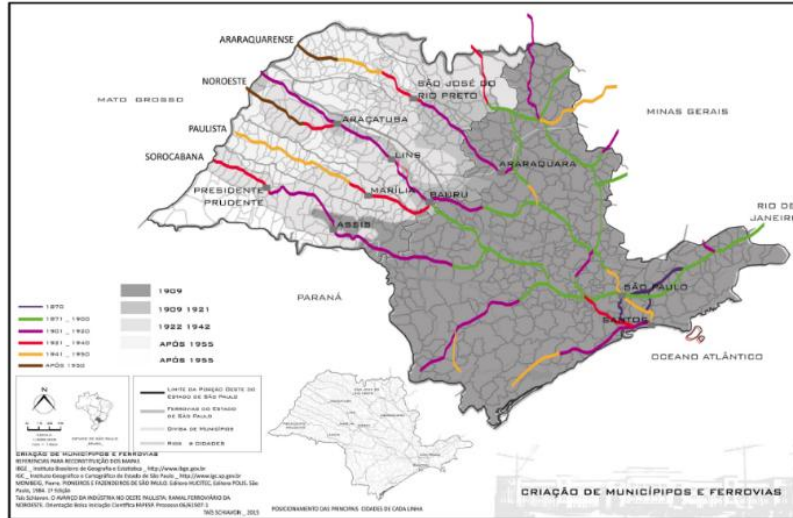
From the 1890s onwards, São Paulo railway companies began adopting new expansion strategies. Driven by the wave of euphoria affecting the Brazilian economy, these companies started planning the expansion of their lines into regions beyond the production zones. In addition to the traditional companies, many were established with the goal of exploring the northwest and west of São Paulo, still covered by tropical forests and inhabited by various indigenous ethnic groups, or, as has been emphasized throughout the text, as a territorial reserve. Companies such as Sorocabana, Araraquarense, and Banco União de São Paulo aimed to traverse the "unoccupied" lands of the São Paulo backlands and reach the state of Mato Grosso in the Brazilian Midwest (CAMPOS AND INOUE, 2020, p.185-186).

Thus, as highlighted by Campos and Inoue (2020), the "strategic railways" were the technical means employed to initiate the annexation of these areas into the national productive circuit, through the development of an extensive and well-connected railway network designed by Engineer Adolpho Augusto Pinto. It was through the railways that several small towns in northwest São Paulo were formed, with their development and connection to trade, service, and export/import centers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, linking them to the cities of Campinas, São Paulo, and Santos.

It is worth noting that the railways were not only responsible for the emergence of new towns in São Paulo but also for the "renaissance," consolidation, and development of several existing towns within the territory, as well as the state itself (maps 2 and 3).

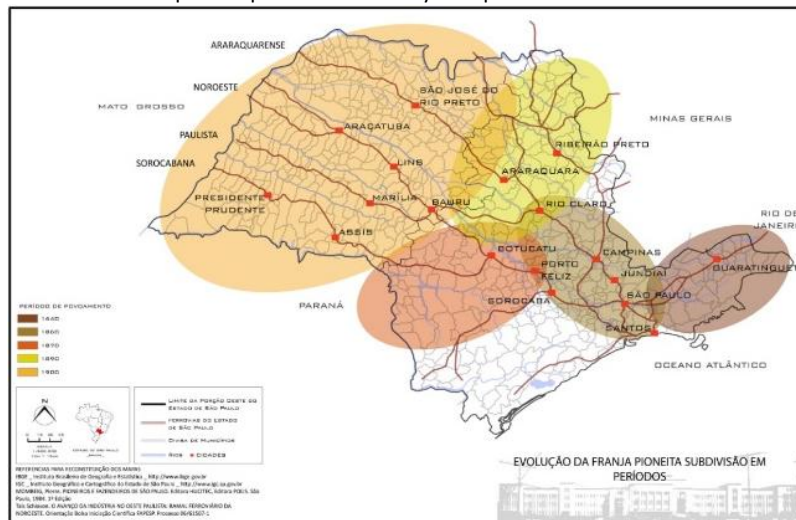
In the 1870s and 1880s, the arrival of railways transformed the São Paulo territory. New towns blossomed along the tracks, such as Reboças (now Sumaré), while others, like Rio Claro, São Carlos, and Araraquara, experienced a surge in urban development as the railways cut through their quiet villages. It is not without reason that many authors assert that the railway brought about a second founding of these cities (CAMPOS AND INOUE, 2020, p. 193).

Map 2 – Development of Municipalities and Railways in the State of São Paulo.



Source: Schiavon (2020, p. 10).

Map 3 – Expansion of Railway Companies in São Paulo.



Source: Schiavon (2020, p. 9).

Thus, the companies (in their strategic phase) developed a complex network, where their lines opened up new producing territories and supported the establishment of new towns and the development of existing ones. These towns, in turn, supported the needs of agricultural production and the transportation of goods by the railways, thereby completing a "territorial modernization cycle," which was part of the plan of the agro-exporting and landowning elite, as previously mentioned.

The most profitable activity for these Brazilian railway companies was the transportation of agricultural products. Thus, promoting the opening of new production fronts was a way to generate a new source of revenue for the company. In this scheme, the towns played a crucial role. To enable agriculture in a given region, it was necessary to have nearby towns where essential services for agricultural activities could be established, such as warehouses, banks, commerce, and, most importantly, recruitment of labor for the fields. This is why these and other railway companies promoted the urbanization of their lines to support the development of agricultural



activities (CAMPOS AND INOUE, 2020, p. 195).

Far beyond being just a network for the transportation of coffee production, as discussed by Santos (2002, p. 262), the entire network is also "social and political, through the people, messages, and values it carries." In other words, the railways promoted the occupation of northwest São Paulo, creating a flow for the transport of goods to the port of Santos, but also in the opposite direction, from the coast and the capital to the interior. This developed a new "exchange" of values, cultures, customs, people, architectural styles, and lifestyles for northwest São Paulo.

The urbanization of inland towns led to the development of other types of infrastructure, such as electrification for power supply, lighting, sanitation works, and the establishment of public health and education services. The telegraph system was first implemented through the railway companies. Through the tracks, all types of goods, mail, and news from the capital arrived. Newspapers traveled by rail. By the early 1960s, the occupation of the "unknown backlands" was nearly complete and its lands fully integrated into the productive circuit (CAMPOS AND INOUE, 2020, p. 197).

The coffee economy generated enormous wealth for the country, leading to the growth and emergence of several new cities and contributing to the recreation of habits and customs reflected in architecture and urban planning. The elites "recreated" European traditions through the diffusion of arts and the importation of culture, including fashion, prestigious places to frequent, and the construction of their homes and cities (with parks, squares, theaters, cinemas, and more).

The large influx of European immigrants who came to work on the coffee plantations in search of a new life, due to the immigration policy promoted by the government at the time, also contributed to this acculturation, which had a direct impact on society, architecture, urban planning, and landscaping. Today, we can still observe in the cities the socioeconomic and cultural transformations brought about by the coffee cycle, through the material and immaterial heritage left by the "black gold."

As described by Cano (1977), to enable agriculture in the region, it was necessary to have a network of nearby towns providing various essential services for agricultural activities (warehouses, banks, commerce, and services), as well as attracting people to work in the fields and in these support towns. Thus, the foundation of several small towns in northwest São Paulo was established, supported by this extensive network aiding the coffee complex: producing areas (estates), towns with their service support, and the railway for transporting production, all interdependent on each other.

1.2 Characteristics of Small Cities in Northwest São Paulo: Landscape and Memory

As observed so far, many urban centers began with a railway station, and alongside it, a railway town. As noted by Inoue (2021), for example, only the Companhia Paulista was



responsible for 62 railway towns, and thus, 62 municipalities were structured around this implementation, making them recent and, in many cases, small towns.

Associated with the structuring of cities and railways was also the development of industrialization and the service sector to meet the demands of the Companies, railway workers, as well as the new towns and their populations. Cotton factories for making coffee sacks, electricity companies, sanitation and urban services, telegraphs, banking agencies (both national and international), forestry nurseries, and eucalyptus processing industries (for firewood, sleepers, construction wood, and paper), slaughterhouses, among others (INOUE, 2021).

Regarding the descriptions of the new coffee towns, according to Inoue (2021), the Railway Companies, along with the construction of their lines, built stations and workers' houses for the railway towns. However, not all workers were able to live in these towns due to difficulties in renting, as there were extensive waiting lists. Consequently, alongside the railway towns, other towns were built by private entrepreneurs to rent to families who could not secure houses built by the companies. This rental housing activity was quite profitable due to the speculation caused by the scarcity of housing, which attracted many investors to the region, leading to the construction of several new houses in these new towns. However, this real estate speculation continued until 1942, when the "Tenant Law" was implemented, which regulated rental activities.

The company's control over workers was exercised through the deduction of rent from their salaries, which often allowed the industry to maintain lower wages while charging lower rents. Upon retirement from the Company, workers were required to vacate their houses. For a long time, working on the railways was a source of pride and a mark of a good job, so many children of railway workers continued to work for the company and remained in the town. Consequently, many of these houses were passed down from one generation to the next. Even today, one can find children of railway workers living in the houses of the Companhia Paulista, especially in cities where the houses were sold to their employees (INOUE, 2021, p. 29).

As observed by Inoue (2021), most of the time was spent at work on the railways, living in the railway towns, and free time was often spent with other railway workers within the railway town itself. This created the concept of the "railway family," fostering a strong sense of pride among the families working for the company. This sentiment can still be observed today, even after the dissolution of these railway companies.

The typologies of houses in the workers' villages were simple, typically consisting of two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom, either internal or external. Some had wood-burning stoves in the kitchen with external chimneys, as described by Inoue (2021). Due to the sanitary concerns of the time, it was common for constructions to have a small basement to prevent ground moisture from rising to the walls. Additionally, most had a backyard. It was common for other houses around the railway village to follow this typology or something very similar. Thus, adhering to the ideals of the time, the housing typologies in the small recently founded cities of the northwest Paulista region were structured.

There were also urban facilities that supported local life. The main types of leisure facilities, for example, were football fields and recreational clubs, where various activities took



place, such as cinema, dances, and swimming pools. However, it should be noted that these spaces were initiated by the railway workers themselves, who sometimes received "some donation from the company's directors or a donation of part of the company's land for the construction of these facilities" (INOUE, 2021, p. 31).

Therefore, much of the structuring, characteristics, landscape, and memory of these new cities are due to the railway workers, as well as other workers (from "support" services), and not only to the Railway Companies. It was these workers who began to shape their identity and the urban dynamics in the small cities of the northwest Paulista region.

It should also be noted that these new cities "displaced" the traditional Brazilian urban formation, which was centered around the Matriz Church and its Plaza, moving instead to the Railway Station area, as highlighted by Inoue (2021).

Finally, the urban dynamics and the interior Paulista society are intrinsically linked to the history of coffee, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization. Immigrants, railway workers, and other workers from cities and fields traveled back and forth between the interior and the capital, and vice versa. The railways also carried news, newspapers, architectural styles, clothing, and lifestyles, along with all the urban living and its dynamics, identity, and memory.

It is also worth noting the close relationship between these cities and the countryside, due to their structuring derived from coffee plantations and railways. Not only through economic connections but also through cultural aspects brought by immigrants, especially Italians who came to this region, as well as aspects of their lifestyle.

The small cities of the northwest Paulista region have very peculiar characteristics in their ways of life, their relationships among people, and their environment. This directly reflects various aspects of the landscape, culture, traditions, and city dynamics. As observed by Gatti and Zandonade (2017), the specificities seen in these small territories reflect a life with still-rural characteristics, which can be verified through some peculiar points, such as:

- I. Natural elements in the daily life of populations: animal husbandry (such as raising chickens, horses, cattle) and use of natural rivers/streams for consumption and leisure;
- II. Social relations: strong proximity between neighbors. Sidewalks and quiet streets are used as spaces for socializing and leisure, where activities such as play, conversations, exercise, and traditional events (fairs, June festivals, markets) take place;
- III. Traditional ways of life: cultural practices, regional festivals, and everyday actions that are passed down from generation to generation, shaping the identity and character of the community and the space.

Therefore, it is worth noting that in the small cities of recent foundation in the northwest of São Paulo, the focus is not only on the railways, their companies, and stations but also on the numerous workers from both the city and the countryside. These individuals, spanning generations, have been crucial in shaping the history, landscape, and identity of these



cities. Hence, it is important to recognize and preserve the character of the place and its people, respecting their ways of life, culture, and traditions, without imposing technical models from other realities, in order to honor their own landscape and memory.

2. THE PERCEPTION AND PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN BRAZIL

The scope of cultural heritage in Brazil was redefined starting from the 1988 Federal Constitution, which broadened the concept of heritage compared to the previously existing definition outlined in Decree-Law No. 25, dated November 30, 1937. The term "National Historical and Artistic Heritage" was replaced by "Brazilian Cultural Heritage." This change incorporated the concept of cultural reference, expanding the types of assets eligible for recognition to include intangible aspects such as traditional festivals, customs, dances, and more (IPHAN, 2014). Furthermore, among tangible assets, there was also a shift to include a wider range of typologies and timeframes, representing a broader spectrum of goods and cultures, acknowledging the multiple and diverse groups that constitute Brazilian society and identity (MOTTA, 2023).

Previously, according to Decree-Law No. 25/37, the safeguarding of national heritage was restricted to the public sphere (MENESES, 2009, p. 33), focusing on tangible assets (movable or immovable) of exceptional artistic, archaeological, ethnographic, and bibliographic value or representative of memorable events in Brazilian history (BRASIL, 1937). Today, with the current Federal Constitution, Article 216 defines cultural heritage as both tangible and intangible assets "individually or collectively representing the identity, action, and memory of the different groups forming Brazilian society" (BRASIL, 1988). Thus, the Brazilian Constitution includes in its heritage forms of expression; scientific, artistic, and technological creations; ways of creating, doing, and living; works, objects, documents, buildings, and spaces designated for artistic and cultural manifestations; urban ensembles and sites of historical, landscape, artistic, archaeological, paleontological, ecological, and scientific value (BRASIL, 1988).

In its text, Article 216 of the Constitution adopted a concept related to the idea of cultural reference of social groups, regardless of the characteristics of the assets, focusing on the meanings attributed to them. Until then, constitutional texts only specified the types of assets deserving of protection, corresponding to certain aesthetic, stylistic, monumental, landscape characteristics, and memorable historical events, always recognized by intellectual elites. That is, they did not provide a concept through which material assets differing from established standards could be valued for public protection, nor did they include intangible assets (MOTTA, 2023, p. 7).

This discussion about the expansion of the concept of heritage is neither new nor exclusive to Brazil. Various authors have already addressed the "need to broaden the debate and recognition of spaces imbued with value, beyond the valorization of established monuments, to encompass representations and memories of a larger segment of society" (FONTENELE; OKSMAN, 2018). However, it is only in the second half of the 20th century that these issues have consolidated into topics extending beyond mere recognition and preservation of cultural heritage, with profound discussions on "places of memory and consciousness" and



"intangible heritage" (FONTENELE; OKSMAN, 2018).

In this process of expanding the concept of heritage, many tensions and conflicts emerge from different strata of society, which seek to be represented by this cultural capital. Societies have different values, so what may be considered heritage by one group may not be by another. Thus, it is impossible to create a universal catalog that covers all possible preservation actions. It is up to local populations and governments to identify, recognize, and preserve their own heritages. Therefore, the field of heritage demands in-depth and multidisciplinary studies to address the complexity of the topic and recognize the importance of various types of heritage in society, understanding the inherent tensions and disputes in the preservation field.

Another important issue to consider in the discussion of the heritage field and preservation actions is related to the "spaces of dispute" within cities. Some urban areas are recognized and highlighted as part of the urban historical process, due to their buildings or urban layout, and are therefore often seen as objects of dispute and interest for various groups, as opportunities—whether for profit, visibility, or other reasons. Fontenele and Oksman (2018) cite examples such as vacated central metropolitan areas, old train yards, railway stations, warehouses, and port areas as "places of dispute," which are often targeted for urban interventions in revitalization and restoration efforts, aiming to recover heritage and encourage more intensive use of the area.

The issue is further compounded because, in these "areas to be revitalized," it is common for low-income residents to be displaced to promote other uses and attract different, often transient or tourist populations, thus removing local daily life and creating a "more attractive" and commercial scenario. These policies aim to attract investments in tourism, services, and commerce, prioritizing the creation of a marketable scenario under the guise of heritage preservation and space revitalization. Thus, interventions in heritage for cultural preservation become subject to economic interests. This is a very serious and exclusionary issue, as purported "heritage preservation" often only seeks to advance personal investment interests, focusing on the market and real estate speculation of the area, rather than the genuine preservation of the local population's identity, memory, and history.

Another facet of this reduction of culturally valuable urban areas to the interests of the real estate market and investments is the exclusion of other areas and urban profiles, which are more modest or less economically "attractive," often leading to their neglect. In this scenario, small recently founded cities fall outside the scope of investors' attention and, even among their residents and local leaders, are seen as having "little heritage interest," maintaining a view that, as Meneses (2009, p. 34) argues, follows the outdated premise "as if cultural value were exclusively identifiable from certain traits inherently present in the assets," rather than a social fact, with "cultural values (general values) not created by the government, but by society" (MENESES, 2009, p. 33).

2.1 The Heritage Reality of Recently Founded Small Cities in Northwestern São Paulo



Looking at the small and recently founded cities in northwestern São Paulo, it becomes apparent that the issue of heritage faces significant challenges. Despite their particularities, these places often lack a local heritage policy, with difficulties in implementing effective practices tailored to their specific needs, as well as a shortage of qualified local professionals for managing public policies related to heritage, and insufficient and limited studies on the subject.

This is primarily due to the preservation standards that focus on assets with exceptional characteristics, monumental significance, and/or centuries of history materialized. Even with the expansion of the concept of cultural heritage by the Constitution, this understanding persists among a significant portion of people in these São Paulo municipalities, as if in these places, due to their not-so-distant past and modest architectural features, there was nothing worthy of recognition as heritage and its preservation. However, as seen so far, every place carries its own history, which holds importance for recognition and preservation for its people, as it is part of their identity.

In addition to the importance of recognizing local heritage, and not just what is recognized nationally and internationally, in order to preserve and affirm the values of history and memory of various societal groups and transmit this to future generations, identifying local heritage also represents an act of strength and a form of reclamation. The recognition and safeguarding of Brazilian cultural heritage, whether modest or grand, old or recent, is also a way to ensure the right to the city, as established by the Statute of the City (2001), and a way to exercise Brazilian citizenship. There should be no “hierarchy of importance” among cultural heritages, as each one is unique and carries history and value for its people (BRASIL, 2001).

However, what is often observed in the small recently founded cities of northwestern São Paulo is the inefficiency and/or lack of political instruments addressing local heritage. It is evident that simply replicating tools and public policies that have been successful in large municipalities is not a guarantee of success, as the small cities in northwestern São Paulo have social specificities as well as environmental and urban dynamics that result in a different relationship between public spaces, cultural heritage, and people.

In these cities, it is common to see greater involvement in matters concerning local heritage among the older generations. However, many of these claims are nostalgic, reflecting memories of times they have lived through. But what about the future “heirs of the city,” i.e., the people from more recent generations? What have the cities done in terms of encouraging the recognition of their own heritage and urban identity? Some initiatives on the topic, aiming to involve the younger population of the city, reflect the little interest the subject generates, especially among young people.

The result of this absence of public policies focused on the protection of local heritage is often a lack of urban identity and weak appropriation of public spaces and their valuation as collective/common heritage, as well as the loss of collective memories about the history of the population and their city, especially among recent generations.



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As discussed, the expansion of the concept of cultural heritage has included the possibility of preservation and access for different social layers, which have begun to claim recognition for their cultural assets, which were previously restricted to specific groups, i.e., the elites. Gradually, preservation policies in Brazil have been incorporating other representations, aiming to fulfill “its constitutional duty to respect popular expressions as references for groups previously disregarded in preservation policies. However, concerning material heritage, it is observed that the diversity of cultural references is still incipient...” (MOTTA, 2023, p. 32).

In this challenging scenario, small recently founded cities, not only in northwestern São Paulo but in many other similar small towns, face even greater difficulties. Inefficiency or lack of local cultural preservation policies, a shortage of officials responsible for this area in municipal governments, and a limited perception of the importance of conserving memory and identity as a pressing urban issue are observed.

Given this reality, it is noted that the cultural assets of these places are left to national or state bodies for the preservation of local heritage. However, such local heritage often does not receive recognition precisely because it pertains to local memory rather than state or national significance. Therefore, the creation of municipal preservation bodies in these areas is essential, as they would effectively work on preserving local heritage, which, even in its modest and recent characteristics, represents the memory and history of the people living there, defining their identities.

However, it is known that small cities face difficulties in maintaining a municipal preservation body with specialized professionals and adequate structure due to a lack of resources, specialized professionals, and weak political sensitivity from governments on this issue. Nevertheless, as addressed by Rocha et al. (2021), the ICMS-Cultural Heritage, a tool used by the State of Minas Gerais, “has stimulated the movement to safeguard heritage by the municipalities themselves.” Thus, this tool encourages the municipalization of preservation practices (not relying solely on state and national bodies), thereby obtaining the necessary resources for a municipal body dedicated to the recognition and preservation of local heritage.

Finally, the active participation of the community in recognizing assets that represent local identity is crucial, thereby legitimizing the adoption of management strategies. To achieve this, it is necessary to involve the population, especially the younger generations, who will be responsible for continuing this legacy. The processes of patrimonialization, referring to the recognition and safeguarding of heritage for future generations, must consider the active involvement of youth, as they are the “heirs” of the city and, consequently, responsible for imminent urban transformations and the recognition and safeguarding of heritage for future generations.

Thus, heritage education is a key pathway to instigating changes in this scenario, as the participation of young people in patrimonialization processes does not occur in many cases and is not widely addressed, despite being a significant and increasingly recognized phenomenon in cultural heritage preservation, as evidenced by recent efforts and actions by IPHAN, such as in



Ceilândia in 2019 (IPHAN, 2020).

Heritage education plays a crucial role, as it not only promotes the value of heritage but also contributes to the promotion of the right to the city, democracy, equality, and the cultural and social representation of diverse groups within Brazilian society. Through it, individuals and communities are encouraged to recognize, value, and preserve heritage, contributing to a more inclusive, democratic, and just society by reaffirming and claiming their spaces of representation and identity in the cities.

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