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# Hashtag-City: Constructing a New Public Space at Civic Square in São José do Rio Preto, São Paulo, Brazil

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## Abstract

This research presents surveys and analyzes that are being developed in urban areas deteriorated, along the

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former abandoned or occupied by marginal uses along the rail line from the countryside of São Paulo in Brazil structures. Spaces which once were of great importance for the development, strength and construction of the modernized image of cities like São José do Rio Preto, municipality with approximately 400 thousand inhabitants, in the northwestern portion of São Paulo, but which by many factors come into disuse. In contrast, sporadic events that happen in place, add up the recent political actions that are articulated in social networks and electronic media to reoccupy the public space, configuring, in our reading, a dense "datascape"<sup>1</sup>, which seek to characterize here.

## Keywords

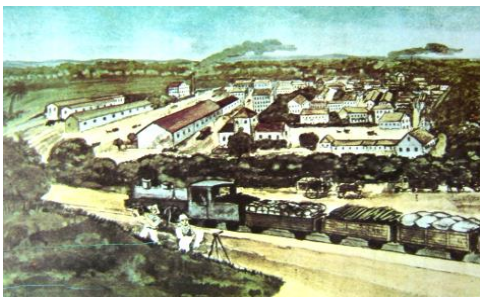
Public space; datascape; cyberspace, politics action; Brazil.

## ACM Classification Keywords

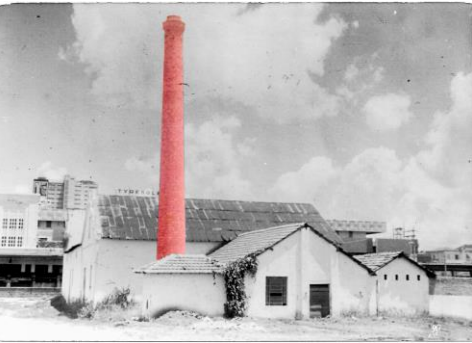
J.5 [Arts and Humanities]: Architecture; C.2 [Computer-Communication Networks]: Network Architecture and Design---Wireless communication.

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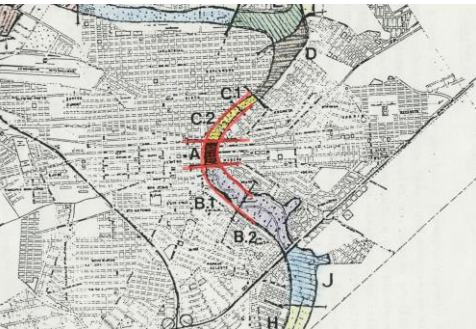
<sup>1</sup> Datascape is a concept that goes beyond the idea of visual landscape as it thickens, besides the determination of the benchmarks of the territory and the description of the new signs of the contemporary city, the construction of the city landscape composed of several layers, such as a palimpsest, compiled and reverberated by the new information systems.



"How Rio Preto is seen through the eyes of ignorance". Source: Unknown Author, 1929.



In the picture above, one of the grain processing sheds. The building was demolished in order to clear space for a new public square. Source: Municipal Public File, image of the 1970s.



The footprint of the public square – highlighted in orange – is shaped as a HASHTAG symbol. The Rio Preto and the train line and the Gal. Glicério street and the Viaduct Alberto Andaló Avenue in the opposite direction.

**Introduction**

This work reads an urban area located in the city of São José do Rio Preto, Sao Paulo, Brazil that suffered several interventions over the last century. In the past gave way to a shed agricultural processing, behind the train station, which in the 70s was demolished to be occupied by a number of modernist buildings. However, this project was partially built. That site is now the Civic Square in the city, a deteriorated space equipped with marginal uses, but receives some events that may make him occasionally a place open to the possibilities . Recently, although, the municipal government is considering replacing it with a intra urban bus terminal, which triggered in social networks and the internet a demonstration that aims to demonstrate the occupation of that square by the community in general. So, we construct here an historical reading of this place and the dynamics that intersect space and cyberspace, a new public dimension of the square . A "datascape ", we call here Hashtag-City.

**The Datascape Research<sup>2</sup>**

The coming of the rails to the city of São José do Rio Preto, in the interior of São Paulo STATE, Brazil, in the early twentieth century brought important structural changes to the urban space. The city became the center of trade and services in the northwestern region of São Paulo, plus diffuser hub of ideas, due to the increase of its economy and population growth.

In 1912, the implementation chosen for the railway station, near the central city area was created from the

<sup>2</sup> The datascape Research is a construct of information "in process" and density about a place, composed of different languages, by a mixture of graphics, cuts, maps, perspectives, images of the present and the past, comments etc... Which can be superimposed, juxtaposed, tweeted, posted on facebook, blogs, websites and so on.

grounding on the left bank of the Rio Preto. This region, due to its proximity to the railway line and favorable geography, also became conducive to lead to industrialization of the city. So gradually, its surroundings was being occupied with various factories related to culture of cotton<sup>3</sup> and small grains plus numerous sheds for storage and processing.

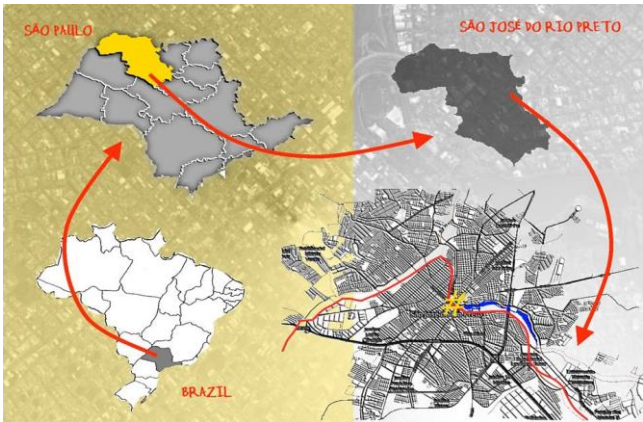
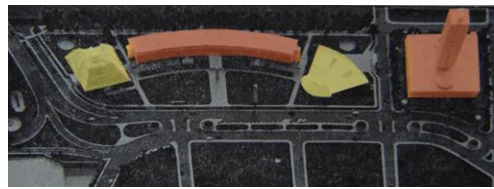


Figure 1 - Location of São José do Rio Preto, Sao Paulo, Brazil. Source: Authors, 2014.

Some of these buildings from the past are still standing. However, the most of them were demolished to make way for construction of the image of progress and modernization, started from 1950s.

<sup>3</sup> At that time coffee production had gone through a crisis, not being more strongly linked to the richness of the region, urging the search for new and more profitable agricultural products [5].



Above, the project approved the tender for the construction of the Civic Square. Only the first modernist style building (left to right) was completed.



Figure 2 - As was the area before the construction of the Civic Square. Source: Municipal Public File, edited by the authors.

In addition the obsolescence of the railroad in the country and declining industrial activity in the central region, at which time the city witnessed its ancient wooded parks being destroyed in favor of a modern design, its low houses being replaced by high-rise buildings, and called "cultura caipira"<sup>4</sup> being disowned by progressive ideals, at the same time the construction of Brasilia.

Thus, this surge of modernization would lead to the realization of a design competition to build a civic square behind of the train station, consisting of set of modernist buildings.

By political differences, only one building was constructed, the Municipal Library. Given its monumental scale, incongruous context, a new landscape design was devised to mitigate its impact and give new use to set that had not materialized<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The term "caipira" is linked to the traditions that were brought by man from the countryside to the cities of São Paulo and in harmony with nature, given their nomadic origin. Cf. CANDIDO, A. *Os parceiros do Rio Bonito: estudo sobre o caipira paulista e a transformação dos seus meios de vida*. 9ª ed. São Paulo, Duas Cidades, Ed. 34, 2001 [2].

<sup>5</sup> The city then hired the architects of ERPLAN - Regional Planning Office - Mirthes I. S. Baffi e Jamil José Kfourri, for the new Civic Square "Leonardo Gomes" landscape design [4].

Today, this building houses, plus the Municipal Library, the Secretary of Culture of the Municipality of São José do Rio Preto and the Pinacoteca.

Even so, the civic character of the place, localized the barrier of the railroad, perhaps never, in fact, achieved by the difficulty of access to the local population. Over time the square was gaining an aspect of neglect, poor lighting at night, old banks and vegetation without care. Currently, its image is read by Rio Preto's community as a dangerous place, it is used predominantly as a shelter for homeless people, drug users and prostitution.

However, sometimes events beyond the local daily occur. For some years the square was the official space for that to happen the "Bienal do Livro" (a cultural event about books), also became a stage to give rise to major International Theatre Festival (FIT) of São José do Rio Preto. Housed in 2013, concerts promoted by the State Government of São Paulo to the "Virada Cultural Paulista" (a annual event that promotes all kinds of culture), in 2014 the carnival city and occasionally is used as the test site for the Battery Universidade Estadual Paulista "Júlio de Mesquita Filho" - Campus São José do Rio Preto.

In these opportunities, new imaginary arise for the civic square and this, finally, takes its eminently public character, crossing the marginal uses of place and new social actors that together build a space of possibilities. So, perhaps, poetry, theater, music and the drums are able to reverse the rise of space, under the logic of a "carnival"<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Only during the carnival, signs of social demarcation levels are subverted. This is because, carnival costumes allow for a lack of distinction between rich and poor, erudite and popular, private and public. Since medieval times, in the days of



The Library's marquee serving as shelter.



The square as a place of exhibition of graffiti.



The UNESP drummers practicing at the square alongside local residents. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxOe-l7kklf>



The Square was used as stage of the International Theatre Festival. #FIT



Virada Cultural Paulista 2013 at Civic Square.

#Shows Links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAFKa3GwS70>

<http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/sao-jose-do-rio-preto-aracatuba/noticia/2013/05/virada-cultural-em-rio-preto-sp-tem-shows-de-gaby-amarantos-e-nasi.html>



" Na Praça é de Graça" ong's website and some videos that illustrates its public appropriation.

#Demonstration Links:

<https://www.facebook.com/napracaedegraca?fref=ts>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJCLRD0rmlQ>

Recently the City Hall of São José do Rio Preto proposed a project would eliminate the Civic Square for the construction of a new intra urban bus terminal. Because of this, a demonstration among local citizens, to fight this government proposition arises. This action is known as "Na Praça é de Graça"<sup>7</sup> (In the Square is for free) and aims to demonstrate the importance of this area for the townspeople.

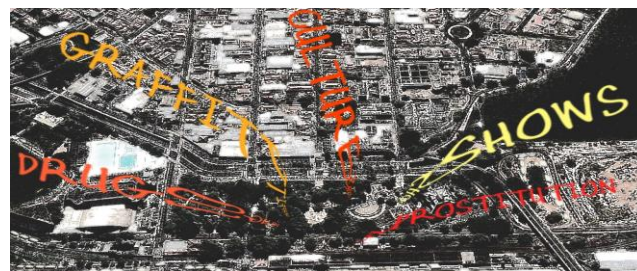


Figure 3 - The square as a datascape in a space open to the opportunities. Source: Authors, 2014.

This demonstration reveals itself as a political action that inherent to the use of the civic square and publicity of the square space. Through social networks: facebook, twitter more people are invited to participate in events promoted in place. Electronic media, such as youtube, are used to disseminate videos that demonstrate the diversity of uses that have occurred in

carnival, the medieval city was constituted as a free space, eminently of the people, it is stated as the place of inversion [3].

<sup>7</sup> The demonstration "Na Praça é de Graça" follows the line of other such as "Você Praça Acho Graça, Você Prédio Acho Tédio" conceived by journalist and photographer Dafne Sampaio that provided the stencil that reads the demonstration on his blog and like this they can scatter the idea across the country.

the square and make a call for people to be part of these events, one eventual site<sup>8</sup>.

Under these new dynamics that intersect space and cyberspace builds a new public dimension of the square. A datascape, which we call here Hashtag-City.

<http://redesenhourbano.wix.com/pracacivicariopreto>

### Acknowledgements

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<sup>8</sup> According to the thinking of the French philosopher Alain Badiou, against the regime of consensus that has plastered social bonds, the possibility of occurrence, even though rare, of heterogeneities necessarily gives for political actions triggered by an event [1].