

“Parklets” Pave the Way Forward for Brazilian Cities

By Fabio Nazareth

How cities allocate scarce public street space sends a powerful message. In Brazil, after decades of road building and cars taking over street spaces, cities are reclaiming public spaces for people—not cars—to use. Parking is one of the ways that cars use up street space, and one of the more innovative ways to take that space back is the creation of “parklets,” or small parks replacing parking spaces.



The idea behind parklets is quite simple: take away one or two parking spots, and turn them into new public spaces. Parklets can have benches, chairs, tables, trees, and bike racks, providing much-needed public space at a low cost. The first parklets were built in San Francisco in 2010. This, along with its groundbreaking parking reform program, SFpark, won the city the 2012 Sustainable Transport Award, which it shared with Medellín, Colombia. The idea has since spread around the world.

Belo Horizonte, Brazil, began creating parklets in March 2014. Less than a month later, São Paulo followed, as part of a progressive new master plan. The plan includes the landmark step of eliminating parking requirements along transit corridors citywide.

By August 2015, São Paulo had forty-two

parklets implemented and ninety-two plans from private companies to create additional ones, concentrated in the downtown area. Under the new policy, any private citizen or private company can sponsor a parklet. The city plans to implement more than thirty-two public parklets in areas outside the city center by the end of the year.

This fall, Rio de Janeiro followed suit, creating even more new spaces. Belo Horizonte, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro jointly won the 2015 Sustainable Transport Award, demonstrating that creating public spaces is an important part of a larger transportation plan—and a way to show what sort of cities they want to be.

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Parklets in São Paulo and Leblon, Rio de Janeiro