



## **From Hamlets to Capital: The Transformation of a Brazilian Mining Town**

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Mining towns are particularly interesting from a planning perspective because some begin without any planning at all, coming about instead by the locations of mineral deposits. This paper discusses one such settlement and its transformations - the mining town of Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Mining towns were one of several settlement types in Brazil's colonial period, including ecclesiastical and governmental centers, the settlements of the religious orders (aldeias) and the fugitive slave settlements (Quilombos) as well. What happened in Ouro Preto is that it began as a mining town and evolved into a governmental center. At first, in the eighteenth century, Portuguese and Luso-Brazilians surged to the region of Minas Gerais as they sought great riches from the wealth of gold deposits. These would-be miners brought with them huge numbers of African and some indigenous Brazilian slaves who also became major players in the settlement of the region. Numerous towns emerged, including Ouro Preto. First called Vila Rica, it evolved through many linkages between the numerous small, scattered mining hamlets nestled within a range of mountains, eventually become a large urbanized settlement. This town eventually became the capital of Minas Gerais. The basic issues addressed here include: whether Ouro Preto was planned or unplanned; how this mining settlement compares in form, architecture and infrastructure to its sister city of Mariana, an ecclesiastical town only twelve kilometers away; how Ouro Preto's development compares to other mining towns in the Americas; what the early maps and other remaining evidence tells us about the evolution of the Ouro Preto hamlets into one sprawling town; the planning guidelines, laws, and regulations, used in these transformations as well as the challenges of topography, materials, and expertise that faced the settlers. Specifically, the paper discusses the knowledge and/or use of planning principals such as the Laws of the Indies and decrees from the Portuguese crown and how that impacted settlement patterns. Surviving drawings from the planning process, maps from a number of historical periods, archival legal documents and chronicles as well as existing town layouts provide the basis for this town settlement analysis. This urban transformation is worth studying not only for historical interest but also as food for thought for contemporary planning challenges.

**KEY WORDS:** Ouro Preto, Brazilian Colonial Town, Laws of the Indies, Iberian Colony.