

# LISTED PUBLIC HERITAGE OR SHOPPING MALL?

## Latent conflicts at the Lagoa Rowing Stadium

Renato Alves e Silva

**ABSTRACT:** The recognition of 20th-century architecture in Brazil is still a field restricted to specialists, which makes the remaining assets of this collection susceptible to defacement or even destruction. The designation of the Lagoa Rowing Stadium as a historic landmark by the city of Rio de Janeiro gives us the possibility of reflecting on the existing dispute between the public interest, protected by the listing in 2005, versus the financial voracity of private groups toward the asset in question. Grotesque defacement was undertaken starting in 2003 with the approval of the State and city administrations, including the intent to turn the sports complex into a business complex, thereby distorting the original proposal from the 1950s.

**KEYWORDS:** Modern Movement, Built heritage, Listed buildings, Preservation, Adaptive re-use

### THE CONCEPT OF THE LAGOA ROWING STADIUM

The Lagoa Rowing Stadium was a project by architect and rowing athlete Benedicto de Barros in partnership with structural analysis engineer Antonio Arlindo Laviola—another athlete in the same sport—, made possible through the political influence of attorney at law Carlos Osório de Almeida, another rowing enthusiast. It was designed at a time when the city had a high number of rowers. Construction began in 1950, and the stadium was inaugurated in 1954.

The zoning of the stadium divided the facility into two blocks. Block 1 housed the social and administrative wing under a fan-shaped grandstand supported by monumental “V-shaped pillars,” which dominated the whole architectural ensemble when seen from Borges de Medeiros Avenue. The relationship with the lagoon and the concern with visual permeability guided Benedicto de Barros’s project (IRPH, 2003, p. 8), which included glass cladding on the pavements above an open ground level, located under the grandstand. Block 2 would complement the first, lending itself to multiple uses, combining another grandstand—this time extensive in length—with a boat parking area stretching at the bottom.

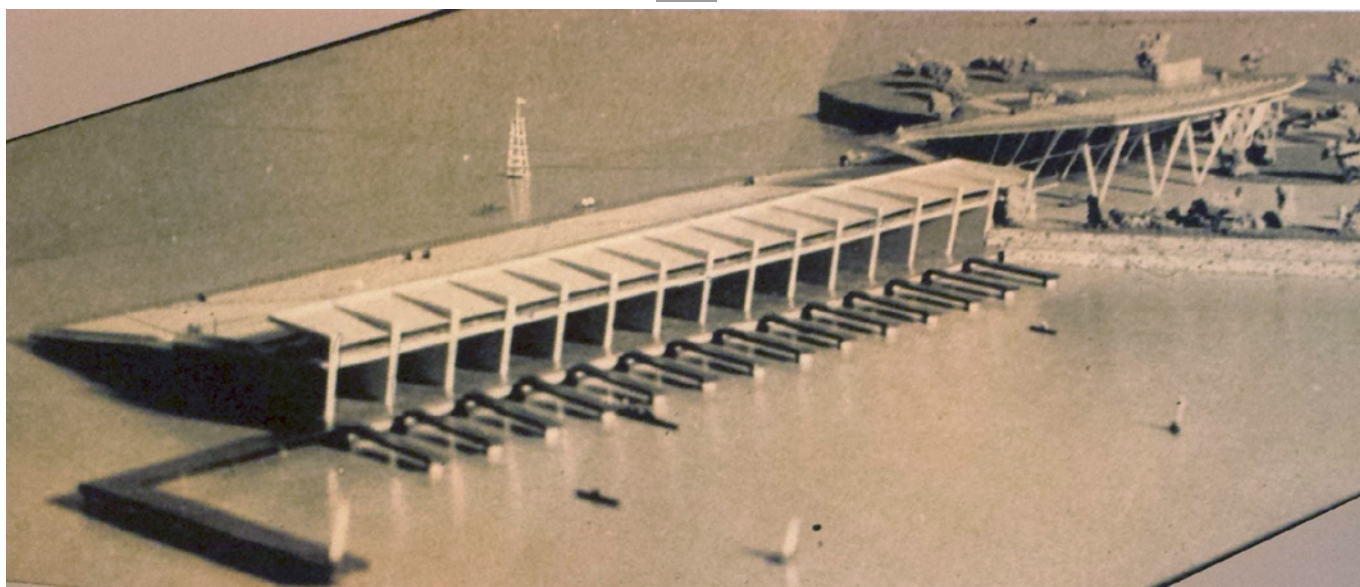
In the original proposal, both blocks had extensions of their grandstands masterfully “leaning” over the lagoon to bring the public closer to the rowing lanes. However, these were never realized since only approximately half the



01 Benedicto de Barros and Antonio Arlindo Laviola, Lagoa Rowing Stadium Project, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, date unknown. Scale model of the original project with graphic analysis performed on image. © Listing Process 12/000.343/03, IRPH, p.7.

space initially allocated for spectators was actually built—and at a distance of about thirty meters from the water’s edge. In the scale model built for the original project (IRPH, 2003, p. 7), access to the boathouses—the parking spots—was provided from the waterside; thus eliminating the need to move the boats across land. Unfortunately, this plan was never implemented either, and the area destined for this access by the water was later grounded and used for other purposes. Of the fourteen projected boat bays, only eight were built, and even those were largely improvised. To this end, a building adjacent to Block 2 was inaugurated in 1975, fulfilling this function.

The construction of the rowing stadium consolidated the Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon as the rowing hub in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Before it was built, the sport was practiced in scattered locations and was subject to constant intervention at various points of the city’s shore. With the new stadium, a suitable ambiance for rowing was built to last.



02 View of the building complex, with the boathouses connected to the lake's water surface, date unknown. Scale model of the original project. © Listing Process 12/000.343/03, IRPH, p. 7.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon was listed by the City Hall through the *Departamento Geral de Patrimônio Cultural–DGPC* (General Department of Cultural Heritage) in 1986 and by the federal government through the *Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional–Iphan* (National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage) in 2000. As early as the first half of the 1970s,

*“Bill 130 of 1975 begins to impose conditions aimed at defending the landscape and the ambiance of the lagoon, especially the panoramic views of its shores, and establishes that occupation of the shore—a free area classed as non aedificandi—was to be managed by the city administration.”*

*(IRPH, 2003, p. 29)*

The desire to protect the lagoon was made official with the opening of case 07/014.748/85<sup>1</sup> in the DGPC, as petitioned by the *Associação de Moradores e Amigos de Ipanema–AMAI* (Association of Residents and Friends of Ipanema) and other associations in the vicinity, who demanded that the lagoon be listed as a heritage site. Only the water surface was granted by provisional decree 5921 of July 3, 1986, and subsequently by the definitive decree 9396 of June 13, 1990. The petition was made by a letter dated May 28, 1985, “in view of the need to protect it from landfills that were gradually increasing; with the construction of extensions to the clubs; and leisure facilities that generated intense water pollution” (*Ibid.*, p. 29).

It should be noted that in this process of listing, there is a study called “*Projeto Lagoa 1989*” (Lagoa Project 1989), in which modern buildings were already being considered for listing: Vasco Nautical Headquarters, Monte Líbano Club, and Lagoa Hospital, in addition to a peculiar residential building authored by architect Simeon Fisher in

the vicinity of Fonte da Saudade Street. This shows that there was already concern for the preservation of works connected to the Modern Architectural Movement. The study was prepared by the *Departamento de Inventário e Planejamento–DIP* (Inventory and Planning Department) and the *Divisão de Cadastro e Pesquisa* (Registration and Research Division), both linked to the DGPC. The mentioned assets would be designated in 2002 by case 12/000.748/02.<sup>2</sup>

The request for listing the Lagoa Rowing Stadium was made in 2003 by engineer Luiz José da Silva Barros, son of architect Benedicto de Barros, a former rowing athlete and, at the time, a counselor for Flamengo Regatta Club—the official name of the soccer club with the largest number of fans in the world, which started as a rowing club. The reasons for the petition included, most notably, the son’s effort to save his father’s iconic work and the preservation of the collective memory of a group connected to sports, which gained the support of well-known rowers and architects in championing the cause. A third reason was to keep the space open for public use, as it had been since the stadium was built on the edge of the lagoon, preventing it from being converted into a private enterprise with restricted access and posing an obstacle to the full contemplation and experience of the lagoon scenery, whose water surface was already part of city and federal landscape heritage, as described earlier.

What triggered the preservation action were the repairs made under the pretext of upgrading the space for hosting the 2007 Pan American Games, which disregarded the conceptual guidelines and the consolidated structure conceived in Benedicto de Barros’ project.

The drama of the stadium reflects the systematic abandonment by the public authorities that led the state government to grant use of the former complex to the private sector—without opening a bidding process (BID)



03 Satellite image from 2019 showing the current state of the Lagoon Shopping Mall, with aspects reminiscent of the old rowing stadium. The stretch of the lagoon to provide access to the boathouses in the Barros project and which, since the 1960s, had already been grounded, became a park in 2016. © Google Earth. March 26, 2019. [Accessed April 23, 2021]

and in deviation of purpose. A contract was signed on September 22, 1997 between the administration of Governor Marcello Alencar and the grantee, the Glen Entertainment Group (made up mostly of Uruguayan partners). The group undertook grotesque defacement starting in 2003 with the goal of turning the stadium into a shopping mall—named “Lagoon”—after the Pan American games, thus disfiguring the original proposal from the 1950s. The request to list the public building addressed to City Hall would be yet another effort to curb the destruction of the modern asset, faced with a predatory onslaught by financial interests.

Heritage listing was granted in 2005, but unfortunately, it did not stop the Lagoon shopping mall from being built over what remained of the increasingly unrecognizable Lagoa Rowing Stadium. “Lagoon” was inaugurated in 2010, concluding the denounced dilapidation of the sports complex, although it already had official status as a city heritage site.

The situation resembles the case of *Marina da Glória*—a kind of public dock with support for small boats situated in the neighborhood of Glória—which has long ceased to be public to give way to exploitation by private groups. A brief digression is called for about the concept that guided its construction and the effective use throughout the years, as it shares many similarities with the developments that took place in the case of the Lagoa Rowing Stadium.

## THE CASE OF MARINA DA GLÓRIA

Architect Amaro Machado carried out studies commissioned by the *Marina da Glória* program between 1975 and 1977. The marina was part of the program for Flamengo Park, a “park-way” located in the South Zone of Rio, facing Guanabara Bay. With a professional career associated with names such as Oscar Niemeyer and Sérgio Bernardes, in his private life, Machado was a (sailor) athlete—as were the designers of the rowing stadium, Benedicto de Barros and Arlindo Laviola, which is believed to have contributed in a particular way to his in-depth knowledge and engagement when taking on the job.

In 1976, Iphan approved the project drawn up by Machado. Because Flamengo Park had been listed as a federal heritage site since 1965, any subsequent interventions had to go through the preservation agency. The project was done in partnership with Roberto Burle Marx, who was in charge of the landscape treatment around the inlet. The public marina was inaugurated in 1979, occupying a total area of around 2.700,00 m<sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, Amaro Machado would be required to make adaptations to his initial ideas: he was given the ungrateful task of adding on to the project where he had warned add-ons were dispensable. Beginning in 1987, he added more stores to the main block and reduced the area for the boathouses, yielding to pressures that went against the original principles of the proposal for the site. Later, he was forced to give up his walkway slab—for pedestrian circulation—to design the administrative wing and a restaurant instead, once again disfiguring the initial concept. This time, his disapproval was even greater. The tensile structure first idealized to crown the building, a solution that took advantage of the lightness of the material and favored its discretion, was subsequently executed not by him, and without the participation. In disregard of the original proposal, it turned into a disrespectful copy of the plastic conception of the piece once visualized by Machado. The situation would only become worse when the structure was replaced by a warehouse ceiling, which is still in place. It would be appropriate to organize the facility’s history in chronological order since the 1970s.

In 1976, the administration of the Marina—even before its inauguration—would be transferred to the city hall administration, specifically to the *Empresa de Turismo do Município do Rio de Janeiro S.A.–Riotur* (City of Rio de Janeiro Tourism Agency). With its “Marina Rio” project approved by Iphan, the idea of building a pavilion for keeping the boats, around which all public activities would be organized, was consolidated.



04 Marina da Glória, with a highlight on the main pavilion designed by Amaro Machado in 1976, in perfect harmony with the park’s landscape. Scale model of the Marina da Glória preliminary project. © CAU Collection, YEAR. Available at <https://www.caurj.gov.br/acervo-caurj/>. [Accessed June 3, 2021].



In 1979, Mayor Marcos Tamoyo inaugurated the Marina, and the last military president, João Figueiredo—then at the beginning of his term—tried to separate the port facility from the rest of Flamengo Park, granting it permanently to municipal jurisdiction. The head of state wished to turn the space into a sort of club, foreshadowing the deviation of purpose that would become the norm from then on. His intention did not materialize, but the idea remained that Marina da Glória was a separate entity in its own right in the middle of Flamengo Park and, therefore, was not intended for public use.

In 1987, the pavilion designed in 1976 was executed. Another 11 stores were added, a project that saw Amaro Machado in charge. It should be noted that the lack of a firm stance by the federal body in charge of the protection of the park, at the time called *Secretaria do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional—Sphan* (Secretariat of National Historic and Art Heritage), ended up allowing the interventions to take place. In 1988, Riotur proposed the construction of a panoramic restaurant overlooking the pavilion—the one designed by Amaro Machado— which, this time, was vetoed by the preservation body.

In 1996, City Hall outsourced—in a questionable maneuver—the administration of Flamengo Park to the *Empresa Brasileira de Terraplenagem—EBTE* (Brazilian Earthworks Company) for a period of ten years.

In 2005, the project for the 2007 Pan American Games was presented, and like what happened with the Lagoa Rowing Stadium, the international event was used again as an excuse for the undertaking of modifications supposedly needed to meet the demands of the sailing races.

In 2006, the EBTE contract was renewed for another thirty years, and in March, the construction of a new stretch of bike path inside the Marina began. Between the night of April 28 and the following day, the picnic grounds were laid waste. In 2008, that same area was paved.

On December 15, 2009, EBTE “sold” the management of the Marina to EBX, from the business group owned by one of the richest entrepreneurs in the country at the time, Eike Batista, who had recently bought a famous luxury hotel in the neighborhood of Glória. On March 31, 2010, the company launched a closed tender of projects for new changes in Marina da Glória. Bids were received on the very same day.

In 2013, a municipal decree created a special commission for Marina da Glória to set parameters for works on the site. The decree also determined that a heterogeneous commission be created, comprising two representatives from City Hall, one from Iphan and another from the *Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil—IAB* (Brazilian Institute of Architects). The newly created group then discussed the project of Eike Batista’s company for the Marina, and in the



05 The main pavilion of the Marina with a “warehouse ceiling” today, with the project signed by architect Eduardo Mondolfo (built in 2016), radically altering Amaro Machado’s original proposal. © Agência Estado, 2016.

same year, EBTE lost its grant of the facility as punishment for the pecuniary transfer of duties that were exclusively theirs—grants of any kind to the private sector were forbidden. Despite the sentence, in that same year, MGX—then the legal name of the company that held “control” of the Marina—changed its name to “BR Marinas S.A.” and the Marina became part of another unit of this private company that managed other similar facilities across Brazil.

In practical terms, the impact caused by the collusion between segments of both public and private sectors against the common good was the closure of a collective space and the curbing of freedom of movement. The Marina was turned into a mooring for upper-class clients and a space for private events, made possible by a succession of modifications to Amaro Machado’s project that destroyed the concept of democratic appropriation and harmonious integration of the facility into the lush landscape of the park. There are currently several lawsuits demanding that the Marina be reverted to public use. Most of them were filed by members of society represented by entities such as the *Federação das Associações de Moradores do Município do Rio de Janeiro—FAM-Rio* (Federation of Neighborhood Associations of the City of Rio de Janeiro).<sup>3</sup>

### MUNICIPAL LISTING OF THE LAGOA ROWING STADIUM

Through case number 12/000.343/03 by the municipality, filed in the *Instituto Rio Patrimônio da Humanidade—IRPH* (Rio Institute of Humanity Heritage) in 2003 (s. endnote 1), the Lagoa Rowing Stadium was granted the status as a cultural heritage site. At the *Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Cultural—Inepac* (State Institute of Cultural Heritage), a petition<sup>4</sup> was forwarded on February 11 of the same year, but nothing could be ascertained about its developments. Almost a decade later, in 2012, case number 1664-T-12 was filed at Iphan, again petitioning for the heritage listing of the facility, but it was denied.

Regarding the heritage listing by the IRPH, the proponent Luiz José da Silva Barros, among the justifications for the petition, presented those drafted by the architects Pedro Rivera and Clarissa da Costa Moreira:

*"[...] The Lagoa Rowing Stadium is being threatened by this phenomenon where private investors intend to open new restaurants, concert houses and cinemas for the middle and upper classes in one of the main public leisure areas of the city, the Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon.*

*The lagoon is a public and democratic space par excellence and an important natural landmark of the city, which justified its being listed by Iphan in 1973" [in actual fact, the case was opened this year, but the decision to list the lagoon only came in the year 2000].*

*"We also understand that the existing facilities by the lagoon, which benefit from it, must be public and, above all, must preserve the visibility of the lagoon.*

*[...] The Rowing Stadium is one of the few public pieces of modern architecture in Rio de Janeiro, the first rowing stadium in the country, and constitutes an important example of modern Brazilian architecture.*

*[...] For the reasons presented above, and doing our duty as citizens to care for the public good of Rio de Janeiro, we petition for the definitive listing of the Lagoa Rowing Stadium so that it can be used in a way compatible with the building itself and with the environment that surrounds it, and mainly to preserve for the people of Rio de Janeiro one of city's great landmarks and the free access to it"*  
(Rivera, Moreira, 2003).

Architect Oscar Niemeyer himself made the following statement:

*"It is difficult for an architect to express himself about the work of his colleagues in the profession. I, for one, always refuse to do so.*

*The project of the Rowing Stadium, modern and already integrated into the lagoon landscape, was designed by Benedicto de Barros, a talented architect.*

*Faced with the decision of the municipality to repair it and turn it into a culture center, I confess that if it were up to me to make such a decision, as an architect and friend of Benedicto's, I would refuse the idea"*  
(Niemeyer, 2003).



06 The lightness of the 1950s Block 1, with the V-shaped pillars elegantly supporting the grandstand, complemented by the subtlety of the pilotis and the translucent floors. © Available at <http://urbecarioa.com.br/o-nao-legado-do-estadio-de-remo-da-lagoa-rodrigo-de-freitas/>. O "Não-Legado" do Estádio de Remo da Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas. [Accessed April 23, 2021].

Responding to Luiz José da Silva Barros' appeal, sports representatives also participated in the petition for listing. Former Olympic rower Valter Hime issued his opinion:

*"[...] Transfiguring our stadium would be as disastrous as turning the Maracanã Stadium into a shopping mall, or the Statue of Christ the Redeemer into a giant billboard, or even leasing the Sugar Loaf to a hotel chain."*  
(Hime, 2003).

Finally, highlighting that the petition for listing was "filed by Luiz José da Silva Barros, and endorsed by personalities from the world of sport and architecture" (Lima, p. 29, 2003), the councilor and reporter of the petition for the listing the Lagoa Rowing Stadium at the *Conselho Municipal de Proteção do Patrimônio Cultural do Rio de Janeiro-CMPC* (Municipal Council for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Rio de Janeiro), Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima, submitted her opinion to that collegiate on August 20, 2003, where she states the following:

*"[...] Because it is a representative work of Modern architecture - with many characteristic elements of the Modern Movement - and also rich in affectionate meanings for the city as a whole and especially for rowing enthusiasts, my opinion is that the entire building complex should be listed, with the admission, at the discretion of the protective body, of works for support, training and infrastructure facilities to enable the stadium to host international level rowing competitions in order to encourage the election of Rio de Janeiro for the 2012 Olympics. I also suggest that criteria be set for complementary activities that can enhance the building complex [highlighted by the author]."*  
(Lima, 2003, p. 30).

It should be noted that by suggesting in her final remark that "criteria be set for complementary activities that can





07 The original design turned into a monolithic block housing a shopping mall, hiding the view to the lagoon and extinguishing the monumentality of the pillars. © Riotur, Verônica Peixoto, Year.

enhance the building complex,” the reviewer implies a somewhat vague position, which might lead to permission being given for the use of stadium premises for other activities than those exclusively sports-related. The City of Rio listing would only happen two years later, on April 12, 2005, by decree 25.237, *Diário Oficial* (Official Gazette), Rio de Janeiro, April 14, 2005, sanctioned by Mayor Cesar Maia.

In practical terms, the predatory action undertaken by the licensee—illegally constituted, it should be noted here—which turned the public facility into a private trade enterprise, did not encounter major obstacles to achieving its goals. Most of the site is occupied by a shopping mall housing restaurants, movie theaters, improvised terraces on the grandstands, events of various natures, and parking lots occupying a considerable share of the grounds until today. It should also be stressed that the erasure of the memory of the former Lagoa Rowing Stadium was

deliberately prosecuted: its original name was suppressed in favor of the logo with the inscription “Lagoon,” suggesting to those who never knew the sports building complex the idea that the shopping mall has always been located there.

According to the facts described here, from the desire to build a definitive space on the banks of the Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon that would welcome the practice of rowing in the city of Rio de Janeiro to the moment when dominant groups decided to seize the public facility for private purposes, one realizes how fragile the right of the public to access city property is when confronted by a controlling minority holding political power and financial resources.

The recent vote in the *Câmara Municipal de Vereadores do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro City Council) of complementary bill 174/2020—nicknamed “*Lei dos Puxadinhos*” (“Add-on Bill”) because it addresses the flexibilization of construction norms in force—illustrates the difficulty of ordinary citizens, even when mobilized in associations, to assert their rights against a system carefully articulated to serve questionable interests, operating by distortion legal devices to cater for private ambitions.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The interference of financial capital in the fate of public facilities can be seen clearly in the interventions and defacement undertaken on the Lagoa Rowing Stadium, as well as on the Marina da Glória. In both cases, even in a succinct analysis, it does not take much effort to come to the conclusion that the concept of “public space” is



08 The Lagoa Rowing Stadium today, now also serving as a billboard for the G20 Summit to be held in Rio de Janeiro in November 2014. © Renato Alves, 2014.

summarily ignored in all of them at the first opportunity when a profitable business possibility is spotted—with the aggravating factor that both of them were listed heritage sites.

Another aspect to be emphasized is the position taken by the preservation bodies. Even if the legal instrument for heritage listing continues to play a crucial role in protecting existing assets against the speculative greed of the market, it needs to be complemented with assertive actions of management and energetic supervision so that it is not lost in the subjective field of intentions—or in the risky territory of omission—, instead of having the expected protective effect. The restrictions that guarantee the protection of assets must be enforced, and prior to that, when assets are proposed for listing, attention must be paid to setting clear guidelines, thereby avoiding allowing interpretations that will favor groups interested in relativizing their application.

In fact, the struggle to preserve existing assets that we wish to perpetuate, including the physical and symbolic aspects that led to them being listed, does not end with the act of listing itself. From all that has been seen, we understand as essential the mediating role that guardianship bodies play in the mobilization of society, especially because the arm wrestling between the collective and the private interests is an unequal dispute, most of the time tending toward the side that holds the monetary and political power. But in spite of this conclusion, evoking the blow that toppled the giant Goliath, insistence and strategy can produce the desired effect, provided that many “Davids” combine forces to resist on the battlefield instituted by the voracity of the current system.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Listing process number 07/014.748/85, assets surrounding the Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon, Rio de Janeiro City Hall/ Archive of the Conselho Municipal de Proteção do Patrimônio Cultural do Rio de Janeiro (CMPC) – Municipal Council for Protection of Cultural Heritage of Rio de Janeiro –.
- 2 It was not possible to find the data for process 12/000.748/02. However, analyzing process 12/000.343/03 [of the listing of the Lagoa Remo Stadium], a compendium of files called “Preliminary file of listed properties” was found, relating to Decree 21,306, of April 19<sup>th</sup>. 2002, which refers to the listing of assets around Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas.
- 3 Testimony of jurist and Professor Sonia Rabello, then President of the Federação das Associações de Moradores do Município do Rio de Janeiro (FAM-Rio) – Federation of Neighborhood Associations of the City of Rio de Janeiro –, for the public hearing on the case of Marina da Glória, at the Federal Prosecutor’s Office. Rio de Janeiro, April 17, 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p7bTV\\_qlHY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p7bTV_qlHY) Accessed February 22, 2017.
- 4 File in “Excel” format entitled “Updated list of Listing Petitions - June 2016”, supplied by architect Sergio Linhares Miguel de Souza on June 21, 2018, then director of the Departamento de Pesquisa e Documentação (DPD) do Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Cultural (Inepac) – Research and Documentation Department (DPD) of the State Institute of Cultural Heritage (Inepac).