



Urbanistica n. 125

September-December 2005

Distribution by www.planum.net

Angela Barbanente

The social function of territory and of town planning: demands, projects, and problems

edited by Elio Trusiani

Elio Trusiani

Raquel Rolnik

Gislene Pereira

Maria do Rocio Morais do Rosario

Elio Trusiani

Cristina de Araujo Lima

Yara Vicentini

José Pessôa

Problems, policies, and research

Urban policy in Brazil: national strategies and local practices

Institutional innovations and social-spatial differences

Lula's government and the Ministry of Cities

The City Statute: new avenues for urban management

Curitiba: the challenge of the sustainable city

Three questions to Jaime Lerner

The Metropolitan Region of Curitiba

Brazilian cities between modernization and marginality

Preserving historic centres in Brazil: ideas and practices

Alberto Magnaghi

Projects and implementation

Exercises in statutory and participatory planning: the Prato TCP

edited by Sandra Bonfiglioli

Marco Mareggi

Gisella Bassanini

Luc Gwiazdzinski

Maurizio Vogliazzo, Decio Guardigli

Marco Albini

Alberico B. Belgiojoso

Lorenza Perelli

Gian Carlo Calza

Alain Guez

Profiles and practices

The city of time and the culture of planning

The spillovers from urban time policies

Women's views of the transformation of the city. A research workshop

The city of the night

Festen. A memorandum for the workshop *Architecture of festivity*

The places of mobility, or the design of temporality inhabited public spaces

Events, museums and paths for urban renewal

Art transforms public spaces

Les Halles. A time architecture workshop

Time aspects in the design of Les Halles in Paris

Mario Sechi

Methods and tools

City centres and peripheries in Pier Paolo Pasolini and Paolo Volponi

Pierluigi Properzi

The reformist governance of the territory. The need for a project

Giovanni Circella, Mario Binetti,

Margherita Mascia

The Prospect Theory and the prediction of traveler behaviour

Received books

Preserving historic centres in Brazil: ideas and practices

José Pessôa

The preservation movement of historic cities, particularly colonial cities, was born in Brazil in 1933, in order to recognize the baroque architecture as the effect of national identity. Preservation actions have promoted an homogeneous treatment of urban landscape-plat bands in Ouro Preto were thrown down, while houses with different colors in Parati were painted white, not to mention other examples. Searching for stylistic homogenization, preservation actions have produced an image which many Brazilian historic centers still carry today. Faced with the extraordinary growing demand for new constructions in Ouro Preto, in the 60's new rules established architectural language as a kind of "false colonial" style. The concept of historic center was originated in Europe and linked to the idea of a European city since its settlement: a piece of territory, appropriated by men, physically delimited (walls) and consolidated, clearly opposing to the countryside in regard to its landscape and function. The transformation of this concept in the Latin American world could not be easily carried out, due to the difficulty in considering remaining mining settlements and other missionary or crossroad towns as consolidated urban spaces. On the other hand, the lack of distinction between countryside and city in Portuguese American history is a phenomenon not yet widely studied, a fact that has influenced Brazilian historic center delimitation. There were just a few

incomplete and temporary walls, such as the ones in Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, or the recently discovered ones in Recife and São Paulo. When there were clear limits, it was due to site conditions, such as the hills which surround the historic centers in Laguna and São Francisco do Sul. In the late 70's there were some political changes with regard to urban preservation actions, inserting them in a general political concept of tourist development. As a consequence, a larger group of Brazilian cities was included, being characterized by 19th and early 20th century heterogeneous architectural styles, such as the city of Petropolis, close to Rio de Janeiro. In the 90's a large revitalization project of Salvador's historic neighborhood was started, looking forward to transform it into a commercial, cultural and tourist center. The time available for this revitalization program was short and the interpretation of constructive systems was insufficient, nevertheless this intervention become a strong model of real-estate speculation taking place in many historic centers, with equally discussible effects. A singular experience was started in 1990 with Brasilia's city plan preservation act. Modern architecture appeared in this heritage panorama as an extension of a colonial aesthetic identity that projected Brazil into the future. The unadorned simplicity of colonial architecture made of mud walls and wood provided an alibi for nationalizing the international and functionalist architecture in opposition to the dominant academic style. Following its inauguration in 1960, Brasilia's so-called Pilot Plan was occupied in a rather uneven manner,

mostly on the south side of its Residential Axis. After a decade the city was still incomplete. Its planning principles came under a great deal of criticism, which brought Lucio Costa to the following answer in 1974: "As far as I can tell, this urge to prematurely reformulate the proposals of Brasilia's original Pilot Plan come mainly from two sectors that have paradoxically joined forces, even if for opposite reasons. I am referring to developers interested in high-density occupation of the city and their usual appeal for fewer restrictions on heights; then there are architects and urban designers who, considering as 'outdated' the principles shaping the conception of Brasilia and its intrinsic architectural order, also would like to abolish the principle of pre-established building heights, in order to make Brasilia a more whimsical, concentrated, and dynamic city, in the manner of experiences now in vogue around the world-in short, they would like the city to be something other than what it is". Pressure to modify urban criteria was raised during the 80's, which led to a reaction movement of city plan preservation. It was obvious for those interested in conservation that just preserving the group of existing buildings would not be enough to guarantee further development under the original city planning principles. In addition to this, the author of the city himself was very critical about the quality of many buildings. Therefore, it was impossible to consider the preservation of buildings with low quality architecture through traditional city protection rules. The solution was the unusual preservation of an urban plan, in other words, the protection of settling and spatial principles which

characterize each one of the scales composing Brasilia's civitas. There are four original scales proposed by Lucio Costa in Brasilia: monumental, concentrated, bucolic and residential. The "monumental scale" refers to the east-west axis, also called Monumental Axis, where the Federal government buildings and the headquarters of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers are located. The Presidential Palace, the Supreme Courthouse and the National Congress are located in the eastern limit, in a square named 'Three Powers' by Lucio Costa. The buildings mentioned above and the adjacent Itamaraty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the Justice Palace located at the end of the Ministries Esplanade, were completely preserved. All these buildings were designed by Oscar Niemeyer and they all form the palatial complex along the city's Monumental Axis. Since the preservation's act main objective is to guarantee the esplanade's monumental perspective, new annexes can be built as long as they don't exceed the height of existing structures of the ministerial buildings. The 'concentrated scale' which governs the city center has, in fact, never worked as such. The centre is divided by two intersecting axes and its various sectors are overly segregated into particular functions such as banks, businesses, shops, hotels, entertainment centers, hospitals, public agencies, radio and TV stations, all strewn across four distinct areas. Connections between the various sectors are difficult. The 'bucolic scale' refers to Brasilia's unique garden-city character. Low-density land occupation was originally proposed for the Pilot Plan:

super-quadrads, for instance, occupy 15 percent of the land and there are huge lawns, deemed non-aedificandi, that cover vast open areas on both axes. A more symbolic character is drawn by the contrast between the region's native savannah-like vegetation (cerrado) and the city's vast and tidy lawns. This was in order to remind residents and visitors of the successful civilizing endeavor of building a new capital, Brasilia, as a metaphor for Brazil and the Americas.

The 'residential scale' refers to the *superquadrads* that are arranged along the Residential Axis. The process of occupation of the *superquadrads* was slow and uneven. The initial occupation model adopted for the first South Wing *superquadrads*, as they had been sketched out by Lucio Costa and designed by Oscar Niemeyer, was followed, with minor variations, in most of the *superquadrads*.

Thirty years separate Brasilia's foundation from its classification as a historic monument. The conservation model proposed by Italo Campofiorito, who joined Oscar Niemeyer's team during Brasilia's construction, is totally unprecedented in the field of cultural heritage. By shifting the object of conservation from actual historical buildings to the criteria that informed their construction, Campofiorito reaffirms the conceptual validity that produced the city in the first place.

New buildings are required to have six floors above a pilotis level that must be free of any partitions except around access and reception areas. Driveways and a twenty-meter-wide green belt around each *superquadra* are to be maintained or created. New functions in the *interquadrads*

can only include certain activities, i.e., educational, athletic, recreational, cultural, and religious facilities.

The innovative manner in which Brasilia was legally protected has provoked occasional perplexity among those in charge of the city's conservation. Having been accustomed to the strict conservation of historical centers, the staff of the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute (Iphan) find it hard to accept *superquadrads* that depart from the "Lucio Costa stamp" i.e., a set of eleven slab buildings. On the other hand, the garden-city proposal is vulnerable to all facets of Brazilian life and tends to regularly clash with an urban scene of surging violence. There is a consequent pressure to transform *superquadrads* into gated communities.

The conservation of the city's master plan rather than existing buildings is a guaranty that the city will be completed according to the same criteria that guided its early implementation, that is to say, construction is to be carried out as proposed by a Brazilian modernist utopia. As an utopia is characterized by its atemporality, those who drafted Brasilia's protection rules were right in their attempt to preserve the memory of an idea, while history takes upon itself to transform the city.