Disciplining society through the city

The genesis of city planning in Brazil and Argentina (1894-1945)*

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Abstract

This paper looks at the genesis of a discourse on urbanismo (city planning) in Brazil and Argentina between 1894 and 1945 using the ideas of Michel Foucault on discipline and his concept of bio-power. The demographic pattern of the major cities in both countries from 1890 onwards and the renewals of the centres of these cities are also discussed. Other sections are dedicated to the plans proposed for the same cities in the 1920s and to urban representations, such as ideas about social reform, the role of hygiene as a point of departure for planning, and the relationship of ideas on Taylorism (scientific management) and the city.

The paper also discusses the planners opposition to elections, when they claimed that they were the only ones qualified to deal with urban problems and therefore they should be employed in the state apparatus.

Other concerns of the paper are the use of planning as an element of nation building and ideas defining eugenics (race betterment) as an important aspect of city planning. I conclude by arguing that, if implemented, city planning was a way of creating an industrial culture, disciplining society through the city, although the industrial proletariat has never made up the majority of the population in Brazil or Argentina. Even if many aspects of the plans proposed for both countries were not implemented, the discourse of planners can be seen as a will to discipline society through the city. This discipline would affect the freedom of movement of human bodies, and is therefore approached through Foucault’s concepts of bio-power and discipline.

Keywords: cultural relations, international history Foucault, city planning, Latin America, Brazil, Argentina, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo.

Resumen

Este artículo observa la génesis de un discurso sobre el urbanismo (planeación de la ciudad) en Brasil y Argentina entre 1894 y 1945 utilizando las ideas de Michel Foucault sobre la disciplina y su concepto del bio-poder. Son discutidas el patrón demográfico de las grandes ciudades en ambos países de 1890 en adelante y también las renovaciones de los centros de estas ciudades.

Se dedican otras secciones a los planes propuestos para las mismas ciudades en los años de 1920 en adelante y a las representaciones urbanas, tales como las ideas sobre la reforma social, el rol de la higiene como un punto de partida para la planeación, y la relación de ideas del Taylorismo (dirección científica) y la ciudad. El artículo también discute la oposi-
ción de los planificadores a las elecciones, cuando ellos exigieron que fueran los únicos calificados para tratar con los problemas urbanos y, por consiguiente, ellos deberían ser empleados en el aparato estatal.

Otras preocupaciones del artículo son el uso de la planeación como un elemento de la construcción de nación y las ideas que definen las eugenesias (mejora de la raza) como un aspecto importante de planeación de la ciudad. Se concluye que si se llevó a cabo la planeación de la ciudad, fue una manera de crear una cultura industrial, disciplinando a la sociedad a través de la ciudad, no obstante el proletariado industrial nunca ha constituido la mayoría de la población en Brasil o Argentina. Aún cuando muchos aspectos propuestos por los planes para ambos países no se llevaron a cabo, el discurso de los planificadores puede ser visto como una disciplina impuesta a la sociedad a través de la ciudad. Esta disciplina afectaría la libertad de movimiento de los cuerpos humanos, y por consiguiente estaría próxima a los conceptos Foucaultianos del bio-poder y la disciplina.

Palabras clave: relaciones culturales, historia internacional, Foucault, planeación de la ciudad, Latinoamérica, Brasil, Argentina, Río de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, São Paulo.

Introduction

In Brazil, the rise of city planning took place in the same period in which government began to intervene in social questions through the creation of labour legislation and welfare policies. According to Foucault, knowledge, discourse and power are strongly associated (Foucault, 1968; Foucault, 1977). In the case of city planning, the creation of institutions such as City Plan Commissions or Boards charged with planning and controlling urban growth inside the state apparatus can be seen as these effects of truth. There were changes from the turn of the century to the 1920s in the South American planning movement. In just a few years the concept of planning expanded from isolated interventions in specific parts of the urban territory to the planning of the city as a whole and the control of urban growth. Instead of repairing what had developed in an unsuitable way, there appeared the idea of creating rules to force things to happen in a pre-defined way.

Foucault criticised some traditional interpretations of power either because they were centred on the question of sovereignty or in juridical aspects, or because power was analysed from the Marxist viewpoint in terms of the state apparatus. The problem of how power was exercised in concrete terms, in its details, with its specificity, its techniques and tactics, was not taken into consideration in previous explanations. It is from this consideration that Foucault develops his concept of bio-power, a concept of power related to concrete constraints over aspects of the human body such as movement, freedom to come and go, health, youth, age sexuality and so on. This concept at least partly explains his interest in themes such as prisons, hospitals, asylums, and work-houses where such an idea could be checked, observed and measured.

On the other hand, the use of this concept just for the analysis of relationships within these kinds of institutions shows the weakness and limitation of such a proposal. The question that remains from the perception of this limitation is whether or how far this kind of approach could be used for the analysis of city planning. In fact, city planning decisions have a direct impact on the human body. The closing of certain areas for certain activities, for instance, is a limitation on the freedom of movement. A decision of such a type is an infinitely small level of restriction on the body, being therefore a kind of bio-power. In other words, zoning decisions, such as restricted use of areas, prohibition of parking in certain streets, allocation of parts of a waterfront for discharge of freight from ships instead of swimming—all of these have an effect on individual freedom. If a person is the place in which freedom is completely suppressed, a restrictive zone is a place in which freedom is slightly diminished.

Foucault states that if power was just repressive, it just said ‘no’ every time, it would not be obeyed. He says that what maintains power and makes it acceptable is the fact that it produces things, induces pleasures, shares knowledge and produces discourses. It should be considered as a productive network that crosses the whole social body rather than a negative instance that has repression as its function. According to Foucault, repression is more costly and less effective than implementing technologies for inducing behaviour. Even if he does not give any statistical or quantitative evidence of that, for which he has been criticised more than once, especially by historians, some suggestions are given that are appropriate for city planning. The implementation of city planning is an acceptable form of power which produces things and shapes knowledge. The whole set of city planning texts and techniques is proof of that. I will develop these ideas for the case of Brazilian city planning starting with the following quotation:

Urbanising is facilitating, disciplining, embellishing, giving man the elements of a life that distinguishes him more and more from the initial inferior era of the human community. The urbanisation of the city will give the town hall the means for raising the standard of life of the people, building houses and protecting the city from shameful slums (Campbell, 1938: 3)."
With these words, José Campelo, journalist and member of the City Plan Commission of Recife, celebrated the delivery of a plan for renewing the centre of this Brazilian city in 1938. The ideas in his speech do not belong just to him. Let us take another example. Another social reformer, another city, another date: Marcelo Mendonça, engineer and one of the founders of the Instituto Central de Arquitetos in Rio de Janeiro, presenting a paper in São Paulo at the Primeiro Congresso de Habitação in 1931, thought the same.

Visiting the slums of the Federal Capital is sufficient to give a clear view of this problem. From them, one can say, come all moral and material miseries and all vices. In the slums there is tuberculosis and alcoholism. Low instincts are developed. Physical health of especially needs more moral and physical hygiene. In this repulsive environment, the worker constitutes his family and establishes his home. If his home is in this condition, nothing is more desirable than escaping to forget and looking for entertainment in the bar; he goes more and more, giving himself over to vices like gambling and drinking. Back at his house, he finds a repulsive room. The girls in this environment lose all notions of honour and dignity in short, the slums are the direct causes of the working class’s lack of organisation: they are an absolute obstacle to the physical and moral uplifting of the working class. They must be demolished (Mendonça, 1931: 141).

This view of urban problems through the eyes of two professors deeply involved in the genesis of the South American city planning movement is striking for prejudice and fear of the crowd. This essay explores the genesis of a discourse on city planning, placing it in the heart of its contemporary cultural landscape. In order to do so, an overview of urban growth, changes in its population, and the physical and moral uplift of the worker constitute the point of departure. The period from 1890 to 1920 was crucial to the definition of the contemporary cultural landscape of the cities of South America.

The Growth of Cities

From the late nineteenth century, South American cities experienced great demographic growth. Rio de Janeiro doubled its population in 16 years, with a growth of more than a quarter of a million inhabitants between 1890 and 1906. Buenos Aires experienced the same process, with its population growing by almost 1.2 million between 1890 and 1928. Recife and Rosario, in Brazil and Argentina respectively, were among the fastest-growing cities in the world. Recife in Brazil and Rosario in Argentina, cities less important than those aforementioned, also recorded undeniable demographic growth. Cities of similar size, both with populations of more than 100,000 inhabitants, experienced comparable demographic curves, at least between 1900 and 1920. Recife doubled its population in that period, when it surpassed 200,000 inhabitants. Rosario doubled in size within ten years (1900-1910). When Recife reached 233,000 inhabitants in 1920, the population of Rosario remained larger, with a quarter of a million inhabitants. Even with a reduction of its rate of growth from 100% between 1900-1910 to 25% in the following decade, that signifies a considerable increase.

If one continues by comparing the three most important cities in Brazil and Argentina - Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires - after 1906, the rate of demographic growth is still high. Between 1906 and 1920, Rio, which grew more than Buenos Aires, had an increase of 42.5%. The population of Buenos Aires, slightly smaller than that of Rio in 1890, surpassed it by 20% in 1906, with a total of more than one million inhabitants, and has remained larger than that of Rio since then. In 1920, the so-called "Par is of South America" had a population growth of more than half a million. That meant that almost 700,000 additional inhabitants lived in Buenos Aires three times the size of the second-ranking Argentinean city in that period - Rosario. Thereafter, Rosario underwent a population growth of 53% between 1920 and 1928, incorporating more than three quarters of a million people into its space. That meant that in just eight years it absorbed a number of inhabitants almost equivalent to the population of the second largest Brazilian city at that time, São Paulo itself not a small city anymore, with a population of more than 800,000. Between 1905 and 1930, São Paulo tripled its population, adding more than half a million inhabitants and growing from 279,000 to 822,400. In the same period, the Argentine capital, which grew less rapidly than these two Brazilian cities, doubled its population again, adding almost 1,200,000 more inhabitants.

Table 1. Population of the major cities in Brazil and Argentina 1890-1928 (x 1,000 inhabitants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City/Year</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1893</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1906</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1928</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires (2-4)</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>1063</td>
<td>1577</td>
<td>1738</td>
<td>2230</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recife (1, 5)</td>
<td>112 (1)</td>
<td>100/113 (5)</td>
<td>233/239 (5)</td>
<td>346</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio de Janeiro (1, 6)</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>1158</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario (4, 7)</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>São Paulo (1)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>822,4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Renewal of Central Districts

The enormous demographic growth experienced in South America created an overburdening of services. The city centre, a place where the industry, commerce and consequently the jobs were located, received a significant part of this population increase. Densification of the urban core originated mainly from the wish of the population to live in the centre, close to jobs (Sargent, 1974:29). Such concentration of population created a deterioration in the housing stock and urban conditions as a whole. The unemployed and the most oppressed fractions of the working class found two ways of housing themselves. First there were the corredos or casas de encostas in Brazil or conventillos in Argentina, a kind of housing consisting of former upper middle class houses with many overcrowded rooms. A further possible variation of the corredo were various houses assembled in a quadrangle built on the same plot. The second alternative comprised the mecambos (shacks) and favelas (slum settlements), self-constructed, ephemeral, insalubrious houses built either with natural materials such as sand, coconut leaves, with bits of traditional materials such as bricks and tiles or a mix of all of this. These houses were built on plots not belonging to the dwellers themselves and often in places where it was difficult to implement urban services and infrastructure, for example, hills and marshlands.

When the economy reached a certain stage of development, the question of circulation was raised. The urban structure became an obstacle to economic development. In South America, in order to speed up the circulation of people and commodities through the transport system as well as for public health reasons, the state intervened in the cities. This intervention was characterised by the renewal of central districts in the largest cities. In Rio there was a renowned renewal of the city centre, undertaken during the administration of the engineer Pereira Passos (a Tropical Haussmann according to the diplomat Bandão do Rio Branco) during his tenure of mayor (1902-1906) (Benichimol, 1982). This renewal was characterised by the demolition of San Isidro Hill as well as many buildings, including cortiços, which was essential for opening avenues (Abreu, 1988:63). This was accompanied by huge sanitation works carried out under the direction of the hygienist Oswaldo Cruz, which resulted in a significant reduction of mortality due to contagious illness for certain social groups, especially yellow fever for the European population (Roeder, 1986).

Evidence that circulation was fundamental during that period is the fact that the port was also reformed and enlarged, southern districts like Copacabana and Jardins Botânicos were linked with the centre through the construction of the Leme Tunnel, inaugurated in 1906, and technological changes took place in the system of public transport with the replacement of animals by electrical power through the electrification of many tramways companies such as Companhia Jardim Botânico in 1904 and the companies in Crisóstomo, Carris Urbanos and Vila Isabel in 1905. These three companies were united under the Canadian enterprise which held the concession for the supply of electricity to the city, the Rio de Janeiro Tramways, Light and Power Company Limited (Abreu, 1988:63, 66-67).

São Paulo also undertook public works. During the administration of the mayor Antonio Prado (1899-1911), Angélica Avenue was opened, among others, and the transport system was technologically improved, becoming electric. During the administration of Raimundo Du Prat (1911-1914), other streets were enlarged, such as Liberdade and Boa Vista, as well as squares like Praça da Sé and Praça de São Francisco. At that time, Santa Efigênia flyover was constructed alongside the enlargement of São João Avenue to permit the construction of a ring road (Osele, 1983: 82). These improvements were part of partial projects proposed alongside a debate on the organisation of the city centre held between 1906 and 1911 in São Paulo. The point of departure for this discussion was the construction of the Teatro Municipal (1903-1911), an eclectic building designed by the architect Ramos de Azevedo and a symbol of the European modernity implemented by the governmental elite. The construction of the theatre beside the Anhangabaú Valley, where an infected stream received the sewage of a slaughterhouse, but where there were still rural features such as vegetable and tea plantations originated a series of proposals for the embellishment of the valley and its landscape (Simões, 1990-79-80). The first of these proposals was presented to the city council by the ex-Director of Public Works of Rio, Augusto Carlos da Silva Telles, who became city councillor in São Paulo. It was characterised by aesthetic preoccupations, and the wish to solve circulation problems related to the narrowness of Liberdade street, and was forwarded for analysis by the committee of works, justice and finances of the council (Simões, 1990-80-83).

The proposal was forgotten for a year-and-a-half despite the support of other councilors, when it was re-adopted by Silva Telles in 1988, presented as a bill and studied by engineers Victor da Silva Freire and Eugênio Guillen, Director and Vice-Director of the Direcção de Obras Municipales respectively (Simões, 1990-84-86). The project received amendments in the commissions of the council and became a law in which the ideas of Telles were simplified for financial reasons because of expropriations and private interest, losing its aesthetic ideals and becoming merely an answer to traffic problems. With the

4. See a description of the favelas and mecambos see Mariana Fibe (1935).
5. The renewal was based on a plan prepared by a committee in the 1870s, of which Passos was a member; for the report of this committee see Comissão de Frenamente da Cidade de Lisboa (1875) and Comissão de Frenamente da Cidade de Lisboa (1875). There are two reports preserved a debate with engineer Vitor Soares. For his commission see Soares (1875). 4. See a study of the plan in the context of the project in which was proposed see Gomes (1993).
7. For a study on that company see McDowall (1988).
passing of the bill, the council negotiated with the state government to get support for the improvements and to be included in its budget for 1911 (Simões, 1990:92). At the same time, the provincial government promoted another project for the city centre designed by architect Samuel Augusto das Neves from the Secretaria de Agricultura, Comércio and Obras Publicas, which was published in the newspaper Correio Paulistano. This project answered the interests of landowners in the region and was probably designed in accordance with them, permitting the reconstruction of their buildings in Libero Badaró street in exchange for the donation of land for its extension and alignment with other streets (Simões, 1990:98-99).

Neves' project proposed a large Haussmann-like boulevard at Anhangabauh Valley, in opposition to the ideas put forward by Victor da Silva Freire and Eugênio Guillem, which were close to the ideas of Camilo Sitte (1843-1903) in his book Der Stadtebau nach seinen künstlerischen grund sätzen, which valued the conservation of the existing spontaneous design instead of straight boulevards. More than just a confrontation between state and municipal administrations, the two proposals led to a debate that had as its most important moment the lecture given by the main source of inspiration. On that occasion, Victor da Silva Freire used foreign experience to make an important point: instead of the adoption of partial projects such as those being discussed, a plano geral (general plan) needed to be drawn up for the whole city (Freire, 1911:110 & 111). A few months after Victor Freire's lecture, the mayor engaged the French landscape architect Joseph Antoine André Bouvard to analyse the concurrent projects. In his report, Bouvard proposed a conciliatory solution, adopting ideas contained in both proposals and sharing the execution of his project between the authors of the previous schemes. The urban project was to be undertaken by municipal engineers, while the buildings would be designed by the architectural office of Samuel das Neves. These proposals were finally executed in the city centre of São Paulo during the period when Raimundo Duprat was mayor (Oselo, 1983:60-63 & Simões, 1990:116-126).

Recife also faced a similar process. One of the city's central districts was renewed, with the improvement of its traffic conditions through the reform of its port between 1909 and 1913. This project was also undertaken for public health reasons, in fact, a sewerage and water supply project was proposed by the sanitary engineer Francisco Saturnino de Brito and executed between 1909 and 1917.9.10 The period was also one of significant changes in urban circulation. The tramways of companies such as the Recife Street Car Company, which were originally drawn by animal traction, became electrified in 1914, slightly later than in the other large cities, when the concession for this service was taken over by the Pernambuco Tramways Light and Power Limited, a company owned by English shareholders, which had acquired the concession to supply electricity to the city.11

On the other side of Paraná River, in Argentina, similar developments took place in the capital city. Earlier than in Brazilian cities, and after the approval of a project by the city council in 1889 during the administration of mayor Torcuato de Alvear (1880-1887), the opening of Avenida de Mayo was implemented (Bragos, 1991; 8; Hardoy, 1955:105), linking the Plaza de Mayo, where the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace lies, to Plaza Lorea, where the National Parliament building was constructed and inaugurated in 1906 (formerly it was located at Plaza de Mayo) (Scobie, 1974:109-113). The Avenida de Mayo was inaugurated in 1894 and completed in 1896 (Hardoy, 1955:100). Buenos Aires had a project drawn up by Bouvard as well. In 1906, before his trip to São Paulo, Bouvard was engaged in this task when a committee was appointed to work with him.12 The French planner also drew a plan for Rosario (San Vicente, 1986).

As in São Paulo some years later, Bouvard's project for Buenos Aires reconciled previous studies proposed by local professionals. In the early twentieth century, a debate took place, related to the celebration of the centenary of Argentina's independence, regarding the physical transformation of the capital. On one hand there were the defenders of diagonal avenues as a solution for circulation problems. This debate took place in the national parliament in 1905. The project of diagonal avenues was defended by deputies Eugenio Badaró and Canton, while the project of orthogonal roads was supported by three deputies — Miguel Desplat (author of a work on urban improvements in 1906) (Desplat, 1906), Varela and Pérez (Novick, 1990:4). Other proposals were presented during this debate. A third project was designed in 1906 by the architect Henrique Chanourdie, director of Arquitectura, the journal of the Sociedad Central de Arquitectos (Chanourdie, 1906-1907). This was the range of planning ideas when Carlos Torcuato de Alvear, mayor of Buenos Aires (1907-1909), invited Bouvard to draw up a project for the city. The parliamentary debate ended in 1912, with the promulgation of expropriation laws to open two diagonal avenues departing...
from the Plaza de Mayo as well as a large north-south avenue. One year before, a building code had been approved with control of the regularity of façades as its main goal. 12 Despite their diversity and wealth, all these projects proposed in both countries were characterized by a partial and fragmentary approach to planning, never taking into account the whole urban territory as a unit for intervention.

The Genesis of City Planning

During the first two decades of the twentieth century the idea of city planning, defined as a project taking the whole city as a site of intervention, was established in both Brazil and Argentina. In Argentina, in 1906, the architect Christopheersen claimed the need to elaborate a plan for Buenos Aires, and in Brazil, the engineer and architect Victor da Silva Freire, when invited by students of Escola Politecnica to give a lecture in 1911 on two concurrent partial projects proposed for the centre of São Paulo, talked about the same need. In 1917, Saturnino Brito, a sanitary engineer engaged in the planning and construction of Recife’s water supply and sewerage systems, echoed the same idea.

In both countries, the 1920s signalled the birth of the first modern plans proposed for their cities. In 1923, a committee was created in Buenos Aires, the Comisión de Estética Edilicia, charged with proposing a city plan and in Rio de Janeiro, Alfred Agache, a French city planner was appointed for the same purpose four years later (Agache, 1930). The same year the State Parliament of Pernambuco voted in a law entitled the governor to employ Agache to draw up a plan for the capital, Recife (Outets 1997: 67-70). In 1929 the engineer Prestes Maia was also working on the so-called Plan of Avenues for São Paulo (Maia, 1930). 13 These cities, despite differences of population, had the same preoccupation in the same period: planning their growth and controlling their expansion. This new attitude proved a turning point in the paradigm of thinking about, and intervening in, cities. It was no longer merely a question of opening new avenues to improve the circulation of traffic or renewing slum infested city centres as in previous cases.

Within the 23 years separating the claims of Christopheersen and the publication of Agache’s plan, city planning was born in Brazil and Argentina, changing practice in this field in just a few years. New procedures were created in this practice. Gathering detailed knowledge of urban conditions before planning became a novel preoccupation, from which originated surveys of demographic growth, public health and past epidemiics, systems of transport, the municipal budget and the life story of the city. New institutions were proposed to monitor and guarantee the implementation of the plans. After being approved, the plans always resulted in a law establishing new, more complex and restrictive building codes.

The implementation of the plans and the institutionalisation of city planning as an autonomous discipline took place in both countries under interventionist and anti-liberal political regimes, such as the Vargas years in Brazil (1930-1945), especially the dictatorship of the Estado Novo (New State) (1937-1945), and in Argentina under the military governments of General José F. Uriburu (1930-1932) and presidents Augustín P. Justo (1932-1938), Roberto M. Ortiz (1938-1940) and Ramón S. Castillo (1940-1942) (Scobie, 1971:260-261). Under these governments some of Agache’s proposals for Rio de Janeiro were implemented and the Plano de Avenidas (Plan of Avenues) in São Paulo was executed, as well as part of the proposals contained in Nestor de Figueiredo’s plan for Recife. In Buenos Aires the Oficina del Plan de Urbanización (Urbanisation Plan Office) was created in 1932, followed by a plan proposed in 1935 by the German city planner Werner Hegemann and the Argentinian Kalnay and Carlos Mana della Paolera.

On the one hand, there was a new practice related to urban management. On the other, there was the birth of a new kind of knowledge: urbanism or what was called ‘the science of city planning’. This so-called ‘new science’ implied the creation of new producers of this knowledge, new intellectuals and professionals, the city planners. Such knowledge was institutionalised, becoming an autonomous profession through the teaching of city planning in the universities. In 1929, the first professorship in city planning was created in Argentina at the Facultad de Ciencias Físicas y Naturales of the Universidad de Rosario, when della Paolera was appointed to the post. In Brazil, lectures on city planning were instituted in São Paulo in 1923 at Mackenzie College and in 1926 at the Escola Politecnica (Ficher, 1989:1:230), in Rio de Janeiro at the Universidad do Distrito Federal in 1935 and in Recife at the Escola de Belas Artes in the following year.

The proposal of plans for the whole city signalled a new spatial dimension for solving urban problems, was followed by a new rationale. This rationale included features such as Taylorism, technical rationalism and the re-creation of the city as a mirror of the factory reflecting its functional logic, even if these countries had agricultural rather than industrial economies, for the majority of the population was living in rural areas, in spite of the Argentine concentration of population in Buenos Aires. From the 1920s to the 1940s there was a change in the representation of the city. Following the discourse of city planners, technical rationalism and scientific logic should regulate the attitudes and behaviour of society through the city. Engineering, a technical profession par excellence, took over important posts in the municipal administration. A significant number of the mayors in the most important Brazilian cities had engineering degrees during the years 1930-1945. The hegemony of technology resulted in the idea that city planning was scientific and according to the planners it was considered of general interest to the whole society. The discourse of engineers and city planners included the idea that representative institutions, typical of democratic societies, were not efficient. In their view, politics was in opposition to the
needs of the modern city. This authoritarianism became a reality, at least at the municipal level, under the interventionist and anti-liberal governments of the 1930s and 1940s.

The movement for urban and housing reform was part of a larger one: the movement for social reform. In this sense, city planners, doctors, engineers, lawyers, mayors and activists in the housing movement must be seen as social reformers. Before the institutionalisation of city planning and the adoption of housing policy by the state, these social reformers frequented organisations such as professional associations, philanthropic entities, charity societies, anti-alcohol leagues, clubs of engineers, institutes of architects and medical federations. In these spaces, the reform ideal appeared, was debated and developed. The language and the discourse of the new knowledge was forged in these institutions, where professional competencies were also legitimised.

The discourse of city planners in this period included a project for disciplining society through the city. This project was invested with the current ideas in the cultural landscape of the period, such as positivism, social hygiene and eugenics. As the aim therein was to modify the daily behaviour and attitudes of the population through the induction of certain rules and patterns, it can be seen as a disciplinary practice similar in some respects to imprisonment as analysed by Foucault (Foucault, 1975a).

Urban Representations

The discourse of the city planners produced a portrait of the city, society and political power. A coherent line of thought was constructed in the mind of the professionals, who invented a social question that arose in the cities and built a representation of daily life called "urban problems". Like every line, this one was an ensemble of points very closely linked in order to be visible. The point of departure was housing. In the view of the planners, the dwellings in which the poor or even the working class lived were dirty and dangerous. If the house was seen as unhealthy, undesirable, unsuitable, how would those who looked at it this way look at the ensemble, the city? Did those who viewed the house as unsanitary view the city as healthy, clean, beautiful? The picture of the city they give is dual: one in colour, the other, black and white-both developed on the same aged, distressed and dirty photographic paper. On one hand, the exuberance of nature-it's light and the tonalities of rainbow-appear in the colour pictures.

The Brazilian cities, with their funny avenues, their expressive mountains, their seductive beaches, their picturesque palaces, their clear and blue sky; have something magnetic, fascinating and absorbing which makes one drunk and enchanted when one sees them for the first time (Oliveira, 1940a: 187).

This is not the entire picture of the city. The light is turned off, the colours are erased, and even the magnetism, the fascination, the wonder and the pleasure of drunkenness is transformed into repulsion, distance and depression when the same photographer turns the face of the same paper to show a black and white picture.

Unhappy, there is also as in cities of other countries, the other side of the coin, the opposite of the beauty, the shadow of the magnificent painting. In the Brazilian cities, there is also, as in cities of other countries, ensembles of slums, blighted areas and all kinds of miserable dwellings (Oliveira, 1940a: 187).

From many pictures like this, a panorama is built establishing a link, a sequence and a coherence between each slide. This link is the determining effect of the environment on man, woman, family and society. The environment was thought to influence man and determine his behaviour, but this same environment could be transformed by man, changing the preconditions of its influence. Such a reflection is found in the minds of South American planners:

The main goal of city planning is salubrious housing, hygienic working places, airy entertainment houses and aesthetic taste for the happiness of man. Public power shall provide large free spaces, for the practice of sports, gardening and leisure for the poor, because it has been proved through statistics that where there are parks, swimming pools, squares, playgrounds, health and hygiene are improved so that morals are changed and child delinquency diminishes in a notable way (Prado, 1941: 42). 14

Social Reform

Despite determining physical and moral behaviour, the environment could itself be changed.

Welcome to this assembly of peace and fraternity, which has brought us together in the common effort of seeking for social justice with the intention of improving life through work that brings dignity, for a just wage, and for a home that is fitting for the human family (Cafferata, 1939: 183).

The social question is an ensemble composed of diverse elements: housing, health, vice, alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, crime; in short, the social question is a complex of social problems. Turning to the planners, the social problems to which they had to give answers were social housing and especially the city in their eyes, the city was chaotic, problematic, and it degraded the younger generations. According to them, the population lived in overcrowded housing, the streets in the slums were insufficiently wide to let in the hygienic solar rays to shine and such unsanitary conditions facilitated the diffusion of epidemics. All these things happened because the cities grew transformed, and reshaped; if decadence takes place, there is at least a hope of improvement, and this improvement can take place just through a change in the living conditions of the people, re-education of the poor, and a social reform. This solution to the social question was proposed on both sides of the rivers Plate and Paraná. The deputy Juan Cafferata, delegate of the municipality of Córdoba (Argentina) at the Primero Congreso Latinoamericano de la Vivienda Popular (First Pan American Low Cost Housing Congress) said so very clearly in his opening speech in 1939.

14 For another statement of a very similar content see Estiva (1939).
In the view of contemporary observers, the spread of physical and moral disease, that belief was fundamental to the genesis of social medicine. If the origin of illnesses was perceived as caused by decayed emissions, attention should be paid to the city, the place where people lived at high density. Previously the task of medicine was to cure, but from this period, when one mistrusted the environment, the air included, forecasting became the great task. Avoiding contagion was at that time more important than to cure, instead of treatment, prevention became the key word. This turning point, where medicine becomes social, can be identified with the genesis of institutions charged with specialized practices: the control of epidemics, vaccination and the institutionalization of the medical profession (Foucault, 1974). The birth of social medicine signifies new fields of expertise, those of the hygienist, a kind of urban doctor who witnesses the legitimation of a new profession: his own.

From the viewpoint of representation, the city is seen as a place of life and disease. Despite the changes in the scientific bases of medical knowledge around 1870, with the replacement of the miasmatic theory by the microbial one, corresponding to a development in experimental research in bacteriology and microbiology, the representation of the city as a place of illness persisted. A good example of the power of this representation is that in all cases of renewal of city centres at the beginning of the century, as well as in all the plans proposed for cities, a hygienic discourse was presented.

The strength of this representation was so powerful that urban functions were presented through an organic metaphor. According to this, the city was seen as a living organism whose functions corresponded to those of animal biology. These ideas were used, among others, in the plan proposed by Agache for Rio de Janeiro, as well as in that proposed by Corrêa Lima for Recife. The engineer Baptista de Oliveira used this metaphor as well:

The circulatory system of the cities is constituted by streets and avenues. This system brings and distributes the substances necessary to life to all points of the urban body. The heart is the centre of the city, to which point all the currents of circulation converge. The muscular system is represented by the network of electrical lines that contain the energy necessary for industry and its system of transport. The lungs of a city are their fine spaces, avenues, places, gardens, parks, playgrounds etc., to the same way that cells extract oxygen from the human body through contact with the veins of the arterial system; the houses receive the air and the light, indispensable to their sanitation, through the openings of the windows. The water and sewerage network is perfectly comparable to the digestive organs. The large food markets constitute the stomach of the city food systems. The city's market is analogous to the digestive organs, the city's market is the place where all living organisms come to be organized through an analogy between living and non-living systems. Health is the most precious of all values, essential condition of beauty and happiness for the agglomeration as well as the human being (Oliveira, 1940: 213).
Another indication of the power of this idea is that the word diagnóstico, of medical etymological origin, is still used to designate the phase of the identification of problems in urban planning in Brazil. The city is a sick organism, for which urban doctors, the city planners, might offer the prescription necessary to cure it.

The Productive City: Taylor as a Model

In the cultural landscape of South America in the early twentieth century another idea played an important role: positivism. The idea that science might rule human activity and the hegemony of reason in decisions concerning society was very much alive in the debate about city planning. The physician Américo Pêra da Silva, for instance, criticised the government during the Primeiro Congresso de Habitação (First Housing Congress) at São Paulo, accusing it of:

[... always being timid in the realisation that what science has established as fundamental is absolutely necessary (Silva, 1931:149).

The engineer Armando Godoy adopted a similar viewpoint when, eight years earlier, he defined city planning with these words:

[... the human spirit that concentrates on the study of the complex life of the big urban centres permitted by the observations accumulated in the many documents that history offers us and especially in the data given by statistics, since ancient times, we can say, successfully founded the basis of a new scene, which starts to fructify and deliver undeniable services to mankind (Godoy, 1923:39).

The city planners' representations go further, to be just scientific being considered insufficient. It was necessary to push science to its limits, apply it to all fields, in this endeavour to enlarge reason's scope for action, the ideas developed by Taylor had an important role. The participation of the engineer Enrique Doria in the Congresso de Habitação (Housing Congress) in 1931; a year of recession and therefore of shortages in the production of goods and services, now that the pernury of the 1929 crisis was still in the air, is like a pearl in the crystalline waters of this sea of positivism:

Everything will depend on scientific organisation, on Taylorism in action; Science instead of empiricism; Harmony instead of discord; Co-operation instead of individualism; Maximum profit instead of reduced production; Preparation of each man; to give him profit and maximum prosperity (Dória, 1931:53).

Taylorist rationalisation had another great moment with Brazilian city planners. Ten years later, the Jornadas de Habitação (Housing Workshops) sponsored by IDORT, the Instituto de Racionalização e Organização do Trabalho (Institute for the Rationalisation and Organisation of Work), took place simultaneously in two different cities. The name of this institution, founded in 1931, revealed its intentions: to rationalise building methods and bring Taylorism to the construction sites. Taylorism was a central idea in the practice of city planning. From the end of the 1920s there was no city plan in which its application, zoning, was not employed. This kind of instrument, selecting parts of the city for particular functions, has impacts on body movement in as much as only certain activities are allowed being therefore a kind of bio-power as discussed by Foucault.

Even if the countries in question did not yet possess industrial economies at that time, with the majority of their population still living in the countryside despite the enormous size of their largest cities, the zoning idea was highly indicative of the transposition of the rationality of the industrial production system to city planning. As in a factory, where with Fordism each step of the production process is undertaken separately, the city, through zoning, would have each urban function taking place in specific parts of its territory:

A new order is necessary, because we cannot continue with the stove in the living room, the bed in the dining room and the wardrobe in the kitchen; our cities look like this with the factory in the housing district, the hospital in the commercial zone, and the school on a shaky and tumultuous surface. In domestic life this is anarchy and disorder. In urban life this is noise, traffic jam, lack of hygiene or in other words 'defect', pandemonium and lack of sanitation (Cavalcanti, 1942: 45).

Planners and Power

Parallel to this process, another movement had taken place, one of criticising urban administration and through it the government. An engineer at the Primeiro Congresso Argentino de Urbanismo (First Argentine City Planning Congress) in 1935 observed:

Frequently, we find ourselves in the municipalities with people who have very personal criteria regarding all the problems inherent in the city. Influenced by political factors, they authorise concessions or implement certain works, sometimes inopportune or precipitate, without taking into account the priorities [...]. Obliging the same village to pay an exorbitant amount to the detriment of its economy because of a nonsensical direction [...]. (Sufriz, 1935:131).

One of the most commonly employed justifications for criticising municipal government was the turnover of those in power. The change of mayor in a municipality meant an interruption in public works and their abandonment. The implementation of long-term ideas such as those characteristic of city plans could never take place that way. Representative institutions, typical of democratic societies, were considered inefficient in the eyes of the planners. In Brazil, in 1940, a chronicler of Urbanismo e Viação pointed out that:

The most important thing, anyway, is not to draw the plans but to reach the execution phase [...]. The worst thing is when administrators change and no one wants to follow the rules adopted by
The criticism of inefficacy therefore becomes a refusal of democracy in the mind of the planners, a model of government is built. This government was supposed to be strong, authoritarian, and centralised with only professionals in the main posts. Elections, the way by which those who sometimes represent the interests of the population but are not specialists can climb to power are not seen as a positive element in politics. Someone who had been sitting in the room of Grêmio Polytechnico in São Paulo in 1911, would have listened to these very ideas professed by an invited lecturer who would profit from his erudition on the international experience to feed his argument:

The municipal administration, in Great Britain, is taken in charge by businessmen: the city councillors are recruited almost exclusively from traders, industrialists and company bosses. To be elected a city councillor is considered as a true distinction, awarded by the classes that represent the role of the agglomeration in the economic forces of the nation. This choice is traditionally independent of any difference in political beliefs. The election procedure is very easy [...] the law states that when there is just one candidate he shall directly be considered elected; the percentage of elections that go to a ballot is low, even in times when there is more effervescence in the party struggle. In this way, the designated names are trusted by the citizens [...] it is very common to find a mayor that remains twenty or thirty uninterrupted years in the post [...] This competition factor is what allows English and German municipalities to solve the most complicated questions in a rapid and efficient way. In each post there is the right man. Polémics about the service offered are rare, the one who is in government is the one who knows more [...] During this time the Parisian City Council made itself impotent with long debates. That is because, despite the precise nature and the intelligence of the race it is very easy for an incompetent to reach the post of councillor (Freire, 1911: 95-96).

It is not difficult to see which kind of political regime would be appreciated according to these thoughts. In a government in which there is complete continuity there is no space for democracy or need for elections. The political regime corresponding to this picture is a dictatorship. In fact, history showed that it was exactly this kind of government that took over in Brazil with the coup d'état in 1937, inviting city planners to become mayors, and, in so doing, gaining their support. José Estelita, Director of the Secretaria de Viação e Obras Públícas in the State of Pernambuco, saw this process in the following way:

In the past, before the coup d'état of 10 November 1937, politicians (true politics) dominated the cities; where panics grew and developed there could not exist either discipline or respect for the law. Urban lack of discipline was a reflexion of the general lack of discipline of the country. Before the Estado Novo, talk about city planning, the science which can be defined as disciplinary co-ordination, the science which is the perfect relationship between things, would have been utopian. Today, anyway, the ambition is different and we can already exchange ideas in congresses and adopt with advantage measures to sanitise the cities (Estelita, 1941: 44).

Building the Nation

The zeitgeist of that period was invested with another element: nationalism. On the Brazilian side one can quote as an example of this nationalist wave the scholarship of Alberto Torres, characterised by books like Problema Nacional Brasileiro and A Organização Nacional, the foundation of the Liga de Defesa Nacional created in São Paulo by the poet Otavio Bilac, who claimed an educational role for the army, the foundation of Revista do Brasil, the foundation of the Communist Party in 1922; the lieutenants revolt; the week of modern arts in São Paulo; and the integralista movement, a Brazilian version of fascism. 16

On the Argentine side similar events took place, such as the foundation of the Liga Patriótica Argentina in 1919; new historical studies from the 1930s centred on a critique of the British imperialism in the country; the foundation in 1935 of a young nationalista movement, the FORJA, Fuerza de Orientación Radical de la Juventud Argentina, and the political opposition to the monopoly of the tramway service in Buenos Aires by English companies.17

In the planners' discourse, nationalism appeared in at least two different ways. The first was the idea of a national, regional and even indigenous architecture and city planning. One can find this view in one of the papers presented at the Primeiro Congresso Brasileiro de Urbanismo.

Our professionals, based in foreign literature, are used to think with European and American data, identifying themselves with the solutions of these countries. They travel to study and sometimes acquire a spirit of contempt for our backwardness and, not rarely, the joking spirit of the scientist that knows the great solutions, resorting always in a disregard for the study of our milieus. We do not accept the absurdity of condemning travel or foreign culture, — we know they are indispensable and enlightening— but what is necessary is that with these travels and with that culture we profit from the foreign experience and not escape from ours. We should not forget that solutions must be given to our needs, according to our resources and adapted to the habits of our population and not just copied from abroad (Bueno & Bueno, 1941: 33).

The idea of a national city planning, Brazilian, adapted to the beaches, forests and plains of its territory, according with the habits and traditions of the country, was very clear in the disposal

16. For a general discussion on the subject see Hirsch (1939); for a description of some aspects in Brazil see Perutz (1939); 15-19; for an analysis see several chapters in Fausto (1977: 2nd part).

course of the engineer Jeronimo Cavalcanti during a send-off lunch for his travel to Belém, in the Amazon region, where he was appointed to take charge of the town hall. The new mayor observed:

I am not going to do imported city planning. I'm going to do indigenous planning, based on the anthropography of the city; with the tendencies of its people, its history and its habitat, and draw up a plan founded on its past and tradition, that will satisfy the present needs and open the way to the future (Cavalcanti, 1943:34).

Another way of expressing nationalist feeling is by tapping a country's working capacity in nations just 400 years old, the future is still to be built. Huge territories have to be populated and virgin lands colonised. The bases of a great country might be founded through the construction of new centres of civilisation: the cities. In this sense, the role of the national worker might be reconsidered. The construction of a new town, Goiania, was a good opportunity for this kind of nationalism:

From this viewpoint we can say - and be proud - that using our own capabilities, we can perform lots of things that sceptics consider utopian. When we started Goiania everybody laughed with sarcasm and doubt. This disregard, this sarcasm, provoked numerous disappointments. Many lost faith in the victory, abandoning the struggle half-way and deserting the caravan. On the other hand, this same sarcasm, this same disregard, this same irony provoked many ironical ideas. From this viewpoint we can say - and be proud - that using our own capabilities, we can perform lots of things that sceptics consider utopian. When we started Goiania everybody laughed with sarcasm and doubt. This disregard, this sarcasm, provoked numerous disappointments. Many lost faith in the victory, abandoning the struggle half-way and deserting the caravan. On the other hand, this same sarcasm, this same disregard, this same irony provoked many ironical ideas.

The City: Place for Degeneration?

Racial issues were also taken into account as an element in the construction of national identity. Especially in Brazil, where there is a racial mix of the black slaves imported from Africa, the indigenous population and the white Portuguese colonisers, the national project was constructed through an attempt to justify this melting pot under the aegis of the false idea of racial democracy and the absence of discrimination. Even if the ethnic mix of the people was considered positive, the idea of improving the national race was not absent. Eugenics, the idea of a racial betterment, constituted a frequent feature in the urban discourse. From the most general viewpoint of public health, particularly after the Terceiro Congresso Brasileiro de Higiene held in 1926, eugenics became one of the most powerful keywords of the hygienic movement. In 1929 the Primeiro Congresso Brasileiro de Eugenismo took place.

These ideas poisoned the planner's discourse. The betterment of the race required the overthrowing of obstacles to racial isolation, which was seen as a possible return to primitive life and tribal habits. This issue sometimes comes together with a psychiatric analysis of the society. Among the planners, the most direct allusion to this was that made by the members of the Rotary Club of Rio de Janeiro:

The dominant ethnic element in the favelas are the blacks, to which other alienated elements ally themselves. The tendency of the blacks to isolate themselves from white civilisation, to which they don't want to be subjugates, is a current observable fact in South American republics. Among us, it is manifested in an ostensible way, due to the absence of coercive measures. Back to its rural expression, it satisfies violent impulses from the unconscious. The return to primitive life enables the blacks to satisfy their racial tendencies, their fetishist practices, their dances and the macumba. The favelas of Rio as well as the mocambos of Recife are rare African survivals [...] (Mariano Filho, Amarante, & Campello, 1941:53).

The favelas and the insalubrious dwellings of the poor were depicted as negative and having racial bias, planning and housing policy were portrayed as the other side of the coin:

Social housing doesn't simply solve the problems of the inhabitants. The question might be seen from a social viewpoint. The development of the black community is based on it. From the promiscuous life in the corticós grew up gangs of perverts and delinquents, contaminated by terrible illnesses. The individual house, aired and enlightening, is the cellula mater of the strong races (Albuquerque, 1931:22).

The concept of degeneration was part of the early twentieth century South American cultural landscape, being employed in the construction of the city as a social problem. The social question was represented through the metaphor of a progressive hereditary illness that contaminates a body. Life under certain physical conditions was supposed to weaken human health and energy. According to this representation, from one generation to another, descendants become increasingly weak, sick, unwilling to work, useless to society. Again the ideas on the social question are found in the planners' discourse:

Insalubrious housing has many inconveniences: moral decadence, physical decadence and biological decadence, transmitting to the following generations the calamitous mistakes for which those who acquire them in the present are not responsible. A family which lives in the promiscuity of a house lacking the most rudimentary comfort, perpetuating the senzals drama in the twentieth century, degenerates physically and morally (Oliveira, 1940b: 195).

Such a representation is such an influential one that in the text written by Carlos Maria de Paula when he created the symbol of city planning, the idea is expressed through its opposite - improvement, regeneration:

The contest of nature by the city is a promising gift of health and beauty for the planners. The following generations will appreciate the results of the planners' prodigious efforts in this crusade to regenerate the living conditions of human society (de Paula, 1940:223-224).


20. Senzalas was the place where the slaves lived in the farms of colonial Brazil.
Conclusion

As in the case of prisons, discussed by Foucault, the birth of city planning was linked to a project for transforming individuals. The way in which criminals are described in the discourse of criminology, or even in the related pages of the newspapers, closely resembles the way that the slum-dwelling urban poor were described by the city planners: Foucault explains the depiction of criminals as a way of constituting the people as a moral body separated from delinquency. In an argument presented by D. A. H. Agache (1930), "Ses sao inaugural", in Instituto de Engenharia de Sao Paulo Congresso de Habitação, 24 April 1938, pp. 1, 3, 5, 7 & 8.

As we compare this with the representation of city planners, we see that those who live in slums are depicted in a similar way. Propaganda was part of the city planning movement. The presence of journalists in city plan commissions, as was the case in Recife, as well as the coverage of certain newspapers presenting the state of the city planning discussions, seems to be good evidence of this. Interviews with city planners were published in newspapers and many of them gave broadcast lectures setting out city planning principles. The speech quoted in the beginning of this paper, for instance, was broadcast. It is important and fascinating to study the discourse of city planners.

For me, it partly reveals how society was thought to be shaped it this way, as was the case with city planning.

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Will professionals ‘return’ to the centre of Latin America cities?

The residential aspirations of professional households in Puebla, Mexico

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