Urban Reforms and the Birth of City Planning in Rio de Janeiro and Recife (1904-1945)

Dr. Joel Outtes*

Introduction

Capitalism, for its reproduction, must always shape the built environment according to its needs.[1] Capital earns time through urban modernization, reducing distances and accelerating the speed of the circulation of commodities, putting up its reproduction to higher levels. This process has been called "the annihilation of space by time".[2] Cities, in their historical development, arrive at a stage in which their structures become obstacles for capitalistic expansion. This moment is important in the study of urban historical geography. It permits the observation of how this contradiction is resolved, in which ways, in which economic, social, political and cultural contexts, and under which struggles, consensus and conflicts. Urban reforms are implemented in this moment. There we find a turning point in which the State intervenes, mobilizing capital and labour to undertake public works, demolishing old insalubrious districts, opening avenues and constructing buildings for public services.

Urban reforms also have the characteristic of increasing the demand for the labour force, by the supply of employment through public works. This aspect of public works becomes even more important when there is a political threat. The economical demands of the working class are partly fulfilled by wages received as a result of public works expenditures, reducing unemployment, poverty and political threats. This process is double-faced, because modernization through urban reforms implies a reorganization of functions in the city. If on one hand public works distribute wages in the labour market, on the other hand the reorganization of the urban territory creates a movement of intra-urban migration in which rents rise and the working

class is conducted to dwellings in the periphery. The other option to the working class is to reduce their consumption, while remaining in the city centre. The former case brings easier social control and is especially important in cities with a tradition of working class revolts. Urban reforms rely on both decisions and works of a significant size, such as expropriation laws and financial resources. This latter aspect seems to be always present in urban reforms. Municipal budgets are not sufficient for the amount of capital required in investments of this magnitude. In other words, urban reform is preceded by financial reforms. It is necessary to have a "revolution in the credit system to revolutionate space relations".[3]

If the mid-nineteenth century was the period in which Haussmann's urban reform was undertaken in Paris,[4] the three first decades of the twentieth century was the period in which some of the most important urban reforms took place in South American cities. In Brazil, the urban reform of Rio de Janeiro was undertaken during the government of the engineer and mayor Pereira Passos (1902-1906), called a "Tropical Haussmann", by a Minister of Foreign Affairs.[5] In this experience, as in others, working class housing and insalubrious streets in the centre were demolished and the population moved out, in part to far neighbourhoods beside the railways and in part to favelas (shacks) placed on the hills around the centre.[6] Sao Paulo also had its urban reform in the governments of the mayors Antônio Prado (1899-1911) and Raimundo Duprat (1911-1914), when many infrastructures were improved, as was the case of the transportation system.[7] Recife, third largest city in population in Brazil until the middle of the century, had a smaller reform, limited to bairro do Recife, the district beside the port (1909-1913). During this period, a project for a new water supply and sewerage system was also implemented.[8] Argentina did not escape from this tendency. At least Buenos Aires passed by an urban reform in the beginning of the century, during the tenure of mayor Alvear.[9]

Financial Changes

The turn of the century marked a cycle of urban reforms in South America. From the late 1920s until the 1940s a second cycle took place. This new cycle was associated, among other causes, at least in Brazil, with World War II and especially with structural changes to financial supports in the ways of production of the built environment. These urban reforms were also related to political needs and cultural models. Until the 1940s real estate was a privileged locus of

investment of capital generated from commerce and industry, as well as   agriculture. In the absence of a financial market in which intersectorial transferences between economical agents could take place, real estate was a very good kind of investment. In the context of World War II, when imports were suspended, the commercial balance experienced a huge superavit, inflating the monetary basis. This improved credit supply, which added to the speculative wages which affected all markets, especially that of building materials, created, jointly with financial changes, an unprecedented building boom.

The expansion of the Workers' Co-operative Funds (IAP) and insurance companies created a true financial revolution. Many small banks were set up with very little capital, operating partly with the Workers' Co-operative Funds and becoming important in real estate financing. Financial circuits did not only play a part in building credit supply. Banks also made large investments in real estate, which resulted in a liquidity crisis of the banking system, stopping governmental investments in real estate. Capitalization and insurance companies invested their reserves in real estate and borrowed money for this purpose. Martinelli, Lar Brasileiro, Sulacap, Sulamérica and Aliança da Bahia, for instance, were companies which built monumental skyscrapers, leaving their symbols in the urbanscape through their office buildings. In parallel to those investors, the Institutos de Aposentadoria e Pensões (IAPs - Workers' Co-operative Funds) bought large quantities of urban land, constructing commercial buildings, flats and social housing, becoming one of the greatest urban landowners in the country. Urban reforms undertaken by municipal governments in cities like Rio de Janeiro and Recife were done with the aid of the IAPs, which invested largely in central areas.[10]

Political Struggles

Another feature of this process of modernization, which has not yet been explored in the literature, is the relationship between urban reforms and the political struggles of the working class. The movement called the 1930s Revolution was a turning point in Brazilian history. It changed the political system from a false democracy (1899-1930) to a period of transition without elections (1930-1937), culminating in the dictatorship of the Estado Novo (1937-1945). In 1935 a curious communist revolt took place.[11] One might not exclude the possibility of social control through urban reforms. At least in Recife, the colonial

townscape constituted by narrow and irregular streets seems to have played a part, resulting in a difficult control of the battle.

Indeed, the implementation of urban reforms was not free of conflicts. These can be divided into two categories: conflicts with renters and householders and conflicts with groups of intellectuals who intended to preserve the old townscape, especially colonial churches and monuments. Since 1927, householders in Recife, in the district of Santo Antônio, which was condemned to demolition for the opening of large avenues, demanded to be exempted from taxes, arguing that they could not rent their buildings because they would have to remain closed until they were demolished (a municipal law required them for expropriation). This demand was satisfied by a decision of the City Council. Another problem was that when the renters knew that the buildings in which they were living would be demolished, they stopped paying their rents. Some curious cases were registered, such as that of a rich householder who started to paint his property, which was among other houses being demolished, in an attempt to rent it again. This initiative was discovered and forbidden by the City Plan Commission. Renters did not want to leave their homes. A strong rainfall demolished one building, killing five individuals and induced renters to move out. After this tragedy the Director of the Department of Public Health condemned 28 buildings to demolition.[12]

Housing Crises

The demolition of a large quantity of buildings, in Recife and in Rio de Janeiro, both in the two cycles of urban reform, created two housing crises.[13] Following these crises rents rose and it was almost impossible to find a dwelling. Even the quantity of casas de comodos decreased.[14] Many of them were located in districts which were demolished and others were converted to a different use. It is difficult to measure accurately how many homes were demolished. In Recife, the demolition of Santo Antônio district alone for the opening of main avenues like Dez de Novembro (10th November), the inauguration date of the dictatorship of the Estado Novo, totalled 357 buildings.[15] In general, these buildings had at least two floors. Since they normally had a workshop for craft workers and at least one home in each building, one can consider that at least 357 homes disappeared in the district. As the average family in this period was constituted by 5 individuals, it can be stated that at least 1,785 persons moved out of the district, 0,5% of the 346,000 inhabitants of the city.

In Rio de Janeiro, in a district in which 22,8% of the buildings were casas de comodos (the highest proportion in the city), a survey carried out in 1945 showed that from 337 casas de comodos which had been inhabited some years before, housing 10,000 persons, 30 were demolished, 9 closed down and 61 put to other use, which means a reduction of almost one third. This tendency was prevalent at least from the time of Pereira Passos' reform. The reduction in the number of casas de comodos went from 3,401 in 1906 to 2,967 in 1920 and only 1,047 in 1945. As a proportion of the housing stock, casas de comodos went from 3,6% to 2,3% and 0,3% in the respective period. The urban reform in Rio during the second cycle resulted in the demolition of 2400 residential buildings with a population of around 18,200 persons. For the opening of Presidente Vargas Avenue 525 buildings were demolished, resulting in a marked rise in prices of urban land in central areas. Land prices rose 2,188% between 1936 and 1954, ~~when~~ while prices of civil construction rose 733% and the cost of living 789%.[16] The second cycle of urban reforms consolidated a housing pattern of the urban poor characterized by favelas located on hills and over marshlands around the centre or out in the suburbs, near the railways. The number of favelas rose 71,7% between 1933 and 1940. The housing crisis during a building boom can be explained by a change in the pattern of the housing market during this period. The explanation was that housing built were expensive and for sale, not for rent. This became particularly true after the politization of the crisis, when the State enacted the Housing Rent Act of 1942, which forbade rent rises for houses already rented.[17]

The Birth of City Planning

Since the late 1920s and especially in the 1930s there was a change both in thought and practice regarding urban problems. This period was characterized by the proposition of city plans. It was no longer a question of building company towns or renewing city centres with casas de comodos and favelas. The new paradigm was to plan the city as a whole and to control its growth. In this process there was an influence of European urban reformers, especially those associated with the Société Française des Urbanistes and the Musée Social of Paris.[18] In the beginning of the century some Brazilian engineers had links with European professional societies, such as the Association Génerale des Hygiénistes et Techniciens Municipaux (AGHTM). Francisco Saturnino de Britto, a sanitary engineer who carried out

many projects for systems of sewerage and water supply for Brazilian cities and also plans of extension, was membre d'honneur of the AGHTM. This engineer was awarded a prize in the Exposition de la Cité Reconstitué in 1916 for his work "Le Tracé Sanitaire des Villes".[19] Other engineers also participated in this network of reformers, such as Victor da Silva Freire, a city planner who was very important in the origins of city planning in São Paulo. While in the early twentieth century there was only a small elite of professionals who was up to date with all the knowledge about urban problems being produced in Europe, after the second half of the 1920s this knowledge was applied and diffused in Brazil.

The visit of Donat-Alfred Agache to Brazil in 1927 was quite important in this sense. This planner, one of the founders of city planning in France, was a member of many institutions for urban reform, such as the Musée Social, in which he was a member of the section d'hygiene urbaine et rurale (urban and rural public health board), founded in 1908.[20] Agache was invited to design a plan for Rio de Janeiro and Recife and lectured for engineers, city planners and architects in both cities. These lectures seem to have played an important part in the development of city planning ideas.[21] At least in Recife, where he did not propose a plan, his lectures were frequently cited in the planning discussion.[22]

Agache designed a plan for Rio de Janeiro in 1930. With the 1930s Revolution, all that was identified with the old regime was considered a sign of corruption and the plan was ignored, although some ideas were modified and implemented in the following years. The plan also influenced other Brazilian planners. Ideas similar to those contained in his plan appeared in a plan designed by Fernando Almeida for Recife in October 1931, as well as in the plans of Nestor de Figueiredo for this city. At the same time that Agache was designing his plan for Rio de Janeiro, the architect-engineer Francisco Prestes Maia was proposing his plan for São Paulo. In this last plan the influence is more American than French, but the circulation system was a mix of ideas developed by European planners such as Stubben and Eugéne Hénard.[23]

Although Agache's sojourn in Brazil contributed to the development of planning, other visits were also important, especially for the professional formation of the young generation of planners. Atilio Corrêa Lima, an architect who graduated at the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio was awarded a scholarship and travelled to Paris, where he studied urbanism at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Urbains. In

Paris, he was in contact with many French urban reformers and was influenced by them. Upon his return to Brazil, Corrêa Lima designed plans for various cities, such as Goiânia, a new town planned to be the capital of the State of Goias. In Paris, his thesis was a plan for Niteroi, a city in Guanabara Bay.[24] In 1936, Corrêa Lima was invited to propose a plan for Recife. Another political change, the dictatorship of the Estado Novo, meant the cancellation of his contract. Other professionals also studied in foreign countries, such as Washington de Azevedo, who did a graduate course at Harvard. This engineer worked as a consultant and city planner, being invited jointly with Prestes Maia by the City Plan Commission of Recife to analyse the plan of Nestor de Figueiredo in 1932.[25]

Many plans and ideas proposed before the 1930s Revolution were implemented during the Estado Novo. In São Paulo, the implementation of Prestes Maia's plan began in 1938, when he became mayor (1938-1945). In Rio de Janeiro some of the ideas of Agache were followed, such as the opening of Presidente Vargas Avenue, which was undertaken in the early 1940s during the government of Mayor Henrique Dodsworth (1937-1945). Recife also followed this tendency. João Florence de Ulhôa Cintra, Director of Public Works of São Paulo, for which he had proposed a new system of avenues with Prestes Maia before the Plano de Avenidas (Plan of Avenues), visited the city in 1943 and proposed another plan. In this plan he employed some of the ideas of Nestor de Figueiredo, such as the opening of Dantas Barreto Avenue.

Despite the reorganization of the urban territory by public works, conflicts with householders and renters, the displacement of population, and the housing crisis, these reforms were part of a larger movement, that of the birth of city planning as a new discipline.[26] As a result, a new practice related to urban problems and a new knowledge emerged: city planning. A new professional was also created: the city planner. City planning became institutionalised with the creation of positions in the state apparatus and courses in many universities. The proposition of city plans was followed by a new rationale, that of Taylorism, technical rationalism and the re-creation of cities as a mirror of industry, even if Brazil and Argentina had agricultural rather than industrial economies, with the majority of the population still living in rural areas. Zoning was also part of this rationale. All plans included industrial, commercial, university and residential zones.

This period also presented a change in professional representations. Engineering, a technical profession, occupied

important positions in the municipal administration. Engineers and city planners thought that representative institutions, typical of democratic societies, were not efficient. Politics was in opposition to the needs of the modern city. This authoritarian thought was implemented both in Brazil and Argentina in this period; in Brazil, with the "Vargas years" and the dictatorship of the Estado Novo (1937-1945) and in Argentina, with the governments of Uiraburu and Justo. These governments inaugurated State intervention in the labour market with the creation of welfare and labour laws. Intervention in the labour market was also followed by social policies, such as the housing policy, characterised by the construction of social housing financed by Workers' Co-operative Funds.[27]

Conclusion

The period analysed in this essay is extremely important for South American history. Certain social, urban and housing policies were initiated between 1926 and 1945. The implementation of working class discipline was the aim of all those reforms. Indeed, the creation of city planning was part of a process of population management in an age of arrangements in the labour market for economic growth through industrial activities in which social peace and skilled workers were necessary. These changes brought another image of the city, a new townscape and a different experience of living. These developments were characterised by proto-modern architecture, skyscrapers built on large avenues, distant housing with long journeys to work for the poorest, or overcrowded favelas around the city centre.

Notes
*Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil,
E-mails: outtes@uol.com.br, outtes@yahoo.co.uk

[1] HARVEY, David, *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, pp. 163-164.
[2] HARVEY, David, "Between space and time: reflections on the geographical imagination", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 80, 1990, 418-434, pp. 418.
[3] HARVEY, David, "Paris 1850-1870", in *Conciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, pp. 82.
[4] For further information about Haussmann's reform see CARS, Jean de & PINON, Pierre, *Paris/Haussmann: "Le Paris d'Haussmann"*, Paris, Editions du Pavillon de

l'Arsenal-Picard Editeur, 1991, and MAHOUT, Christian & MONCAN, Patrice. *Le Paris du Baron Haussmann: Paris sous le Second Empire*, Paris, Editions SEESAM-RCI,1991.

[5] BENCHIMOL, Jaime Larry, *Pereira Passos: um Haussmann Tropical; as transformações urbanas do Rio de Janeiro no inicio do século XX*, Rio de Janeiro, COPPE/UFRJ M. Phil. Thesis, unpublished, 1982.

[6] ABREU, Mauricio de Almeida, *Evolução Urbana do Rio de Janeiro*, Rio de Janeiro, 2nd ed., IPLANRIO/ Jorge Zahar Editor, 1988.

[7] ROLNIK, Raquel, *Cada um no seu lugar! São Paulo, inicio da industrialização: geografia do poder*, São Paulo, FAU/USP M. Phil. Thesis, unpublished, 1981.

[8] LUBAMBO, Catia Wanderley, *Bairro do Recife: do Corpo Santo ao Marco Zero*, Recife, Ed. Massangana, 1991.

[9] ROMERO, José Luiz, *Latinoamerica: las ciudades y las ideas*, Buenos Aires, Siglo Veintiuno, 1976.

[10] Melo, Marcus André Barreto Campelo de (1990): "O Estado, o boom do século e a crise da habitação: Rio de Janeiro e Recife (1937-1946)", in Gomes, Marco Aurélio Filgueiras & Fernandes, Ana Maria (Eds.) (1992): *Cidade & História: modernização das cidades Brasileiras nos séculos XIX e XX*, Salvador: Centro Editorial da Universidade Federal da Bahia, pp. 147-158. I developed the involvement of the IAPS with the reform of Recife in detail in Outtes, Joel (1997): *O Recife: a gênese do urbanismo (1927-1943),* Recife: Massangana.

[11] For those political movements see TOTA, Antonio Pedro, *O Estado Novo*, São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1987; TRONCA, Italo Arnaldo, *Revolução de 1930: a dominação oculta*, São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1985; DECCA, Edgard Salvadori de, *1930, O Silêncio dos Vencidos*, São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1981 and OLIVEIRA, Lucia Lippi; VELLOSO, Mônica Pimenta & GOMES, Ana Maria de Castro (Eds.). *Estado Novo, Ideologia e Poder*, Rio de Janeiro, Zahar, 1982.

[12] OUTTES, Joel. "'O Corpo de um Heroi Esquartejado': a reforma urbana do bairro de Santo Antônio em Recife no Estado Novo", *paper presented at the Seminario de Historia Urbana*, Salvador, 1990, also in GOMES, M. & FERNANDES, A., *op. cit.*

[13] For a housing crisis in London, see JONES, Gareth Stedman. *Outcast London: a study on the relationship between classes in Victorian Society*, London, Pantheon books, 3 ed., 1984, pp. 215-230.

[14] Old bourgeois house, insalubrious and overcrowded, that is shared among many families, each one living in a part of it.

[15] OUTTES, Joel. "A Desconstrução do Recife Colonial (1927-1945)", *paper presented at the IV Encontro Nacional da ANPUR (Associação Nacional de Pos-Graduação e Pesquisa em Planejamento Urbano e Regional)*, Salvador, 1991.

[16] MELO, M. A. B., *op. cit.*

[17] Idem.

[18] For the Musée Social see ELWITT, Sanford. "Social Reform and Social Order in Late Nineteenth-Century France: the Musée Social and its friends", *French Historical Studies*, 11, Spring 1980, pp. 431-451.

[19] AGHTM. *Exposition de la Cité Reconstituée; Esthétique et Hygiene*, Paris, Imprimerie Centrale de la Bourse, 1917, pp. 73.

[20] For an analysis of the composition and activities of this board see OSTI, Giovanna. "La section d'hygiène urbaine et rurale du Musée Social", in BURLEN, Katherine (Ed.). *La banlieu oasis. Henri Sellier et les cités-jardins*, Saint Denis, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1987, pp. 59-66.

[21] For the contents of these lectures see the first part of AGACHE, Donalt-Alfred. *Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, extensão, remodelação e embellezamento*, Paris, Foyer Brésilien, 1930.

[22] For the trip of Agache in Recife see OUTTES, J. *"Un chapitre inconnu de la vie de l'urbaniste Agache"*, forthcoming.

[23] LEME, M. Cristina da Silva. *ReVisão do Plano de Avenidas: um estudo sobre o planejamento urbano em São Paulo, 1930*, São Paulo, FAUUSP PhD Thesis, unpublished, 1990.

[24] Corrêa Lima, Attilio (1932): "Avant projet d'aménagement et extension de la ville de 'Niterói', capitale de l'Etat de Rio de Janeiro", *La Vie Urbaine, nouvelle série*, 8: 97-127 & 9: 179-241 and Corrêa Lima, Attilio (1932): *Avant-projet d'aménagement et d'extension de la ville de Niterói au Brésil*, Paris: Fréal.

[25] For Azevedo's opinion about Figueiredo's plan see AZEVEDO, Washington. *Urbanismo no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, Casa Editora Henrique Velho, 1934.

[26] For the birth of city planning in different countries see SUTCLIFFE, Anthony (Ed.). *British Town Planning: the formative years*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1981; SUTCLIFFE, A. *Towards the Planned City: Germany, Britain, The United States and France, 1780-1914*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981; TOPALOV, Christian. *Naissance de l'Urbanisme Moderne et Reforme de l'Habitat Populaire aux Etats-Unis, 1900-1940*, Paris, Centre de Sociologie Urbaine, 1988; GAUDIN, Jean-Pierre. *l'Avenir en Plan: technique et politique dans la prévision urbaine, 1900-1930*, Paris, Champ Vallon, 1985; CHERRY, Gordon. *The Evolution of British Town Planning*, Health an Reach, Leonard Hill books, 1974; OUTTES, Joel. *O Recife Pregado à Cruz das Grandes Avenidas: contribuição à historia do urbanismo*, Recife, MDU-UFPE M. Phil. Thesis, unpublished, 1991 and SCHAFFER, D. (Ed.). *Two Centuries of American Planning*, London, Mansell Publishing, 1988.

[27] For social reform see WARD, David. "Social Reform, Social Survey and the Discovery of the Modern City", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 80, 1990.

Abstract.

This paper discusses urban reforms and the birth of city planning in Rio de Janeiro and Recife between the years 1904 and 1945. It deals with financial changes, political struggles, housing crises and the birth of city planning itself. The paper concludes that these urban reforms brought another image of the city, a new townscape and a different experience of living. These developments were characterised by proto-modern architecture, skyscrapers built on large avenues, distant housing with long journeys to work for the poorest, or overcrowded favelas (slum setlements) around the city centre.

Keywords: Urban reforms, modernization, Latin American cities, Brazilian cities, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, social exclusion, urban social segregation, slums, slum setlements.