



A TVA for the Amazon forest?

The making of development experts

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Abstract: *This article aims to analyze the courses of the Superintendência de Valorização Econômica da Amazônia (SPVEA), the government agency responsible for development projects in the Brazilian Amazon. In the 1950s, SPVEA held courses for the technical experts that were going to implement the region's development plans. Amidst several intervention projects in the Amazon Forest, the teaching of modern planning techniques intended to award technical status to the actions taken and to remove political influence from the plans. The sources used in this paper are the syllabi of the courses held at Fundação Getúlio Vargas in the 1950s for future SPVEA workers as well as reports, books and advertising materials published by the agency itself. Through these historical sources, it will be possible to perceive the reception and adaptation of planning and development ideas that circulated in Brazil during the Cold War.*

Keywords: New Deal, Tennessee Valley Authority, transnational history, development planning, Amazon

Introdução

We aim not to treat the matter from a sentimental standpoint. Instead, we prefer to objectively show that the Brazilian Amazon holds resources that can be immediately employed to make the region flourish on its feet, hence contributing to the development of Brazil and our fellow nations on the continent (Governo Federal do Brasil, 1954: VI)

These were the words used by Rômulo Barreto de Almeida, head of the President's Economic Advisory Office, to open a technical-administrative conference tasked with raising issues and finding possible solutions for the Brazilian Amazon, a target region of several projects during the Getúlio Vargas administrations (1930-1945 and 1951-1954). His choice was not random. Almeida was involved in projects in Acre (a Brazilian territory forming part of the Amazon region) and became a member of the Comissão Mista Brasileiro-Americana de Estudos Econômicos, also known as Missão Abbink, which in 1948 and 1949 assessed strategies for promoting economic development.¹ In 1951, he joined the advisory board of the Companhia Hidrelétrica do São Francisco (CHESF), the first Brazilian regional planning agency.² The Estado Novo dictatorial regime (1937-1945) understood that the main

¹ For more, refer to the following entries on Dicionário Histórico Biográfico do CPDOC: <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-tematico/missao-abbink#:~:text=Nome%20com%20que%20se%20tornou,por%20Ot%C3%A1vio%20Gouveia%20de%20Bulh%C3%B5es>.

² For more, refer to the following entries on Dicionário Histórico Biográfico do CPDOC: <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/romulo-barreto-de-almeida>.

<http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-tematico/companhia-hidro-eletrica-do-sao-francisco-chesf>.



drivers for improving the region were sanitation and colonization (Andrade/Hochman, 2007). During Getulio Vargas's dictatorship, the Brazilian Amazon was seen as a place that would meet its fortune through state intervention bringing occupation and rational exploration to its wilderness (Andrade, 2010). As stated by Garfield (2013), this was a period of intense exchange between Brazilian and American professionals, and this resulted in improvements in local sanitary and scientific structures as well as in knowledge of nature and Amazonian peoples. During the 1940s, the federal government started giving priority to the Amazon region. From then on, the region was not seen as a 'geographical spectrum' anymore (Pádua, 2000).

This can be seen in the political debates both during the dictatorship and the subsequent democratic governments. There are constant references to a relationship between State intervention and rationality.³ Several initiatives to catalog the local fauna and flora were set in motion, such as the failed attempt to establish The Instituto Internacional da Hileia Amazônica (IIHA) in 1947 (Maio/Sá, 2000; Magalhães/Maio, 2007) and the successful establishment of the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisa da Amazônia (INPA) in 1952. The 1946 constitutional assembly took the first step in this direction. The constitutional provision 199 was approved, which allocated 3% of the Federal Government budget to the 'economic valorization' of the Amazon. A commission formed by intellectuals and local politicians controlled the resources and implemented the plans.

Due to the political turmoil that marked the 1950s in Brazil, the commission responsible for the planning (Comissão Para a Valorização Econômica da Amazônica – CEPVEA) only gathered again in 1951, during the second Vargas administration, to outline the goals and areas to be targeted by the Superintendência do Plano de Valorização Econômica da Amazônia (SPVEA), which would only be established in 1953. The objective of the SPVEA was to carry on the 'rational exploitation' of the region. In the 1950s, the plan used the resources available at the time: technical training and modern planning techniques were considered the best tools to overcome potential political interference in the regional agency. The managers' objective was also to establish international ties with its main inspiration, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the famous USA regional development agency, which began its work in 1933. However, for this ambitious project to happen, it would be necessary to teach modern planning and development techniques to the experts that would lead the process.

This article aims to analyze the technical courses held at the educational institution Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV) during the 1950s. The sources used are the syllabi of the courses for future SPVEA workers held at FGV as well as reports, books and advertising materials published by the SPVEA itself. With these historical sources, I intend to analyze both the local discourses on development and the training of the Brazilian experts. The hypothesis of this paper is that the 'neutral' technocracy, which the SPVEA sought to embody, was not left unscathed of political influence, which in turn was seen as the main threat to the development of the Amazon by policymakers at the time. Through these technical courses, Brazilian experts adapted the modernization ideals which circulated in those years to a local context, with its specific challenges, issues and resolutions. Embracing technical solutions to solve sociocultural challenges was a characteristic of the Cold War era,

[http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-tematico/missao-abbink#:~:text=Ap%C3%B3s%20o%20regresso%20de%20Snyder,pleiteados%20ao%20governo%20norte%20americano](http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-tematico/missao-abbink#:~:text=Ap%C3%B3s%20o%20regresso%20de%20Snyder,pleiteados%20ao%20governo%20norte%20americano.). Last accessed 25 January 2020.

³ The responsible engineer for constructing the Belém-Brasília highway, Bernardo Sayão, died after falling from a tree a few days before the road was open in 1959.



as Chastain and Lorak (2020) argue. In this paper, I contribute with a little piece of a broader historical context, which is the circulation of knowledge and the plurality and contingency of these expert ideas in the Cold War years. Gilbert Joseph (2019) addresses that the Latin American Cold War was waged by ‘technocrats and experts’, and the webs of expertise they wove helped to materialize the political ideologies and other strategies of that era (p.143). According to Chastain and Lorak (2020) the Cold War raised the stakes of expert knowledge in concrete ways.

We share the perspective of integration and comparison of historical processes beyond national borders, such as developmentalism and the global responses to the Great Depression. For Ioris (2017), any successful analysis of development experiences in Brazil between the first and the second half of the twentieth century must consider similar experiences around the world. Kiran Patel (2016) states that the global responses to the Great Depression must be understood not only as economic phenomena but as broader symptoms of a Western modernity crisis that led the United States to a critical repositioning in the world. Therefore, the regional planning and development experiences worldwide, before and after World War II, are the product of appropriations and the expanded use of New Deal-related ideas, the broad economic restructuring program implemented by the United States government after the 1929 crisis. Accordingly, the prevalence of democracy in the West during the postwar period cannot be simply attributed to the military victory of the Allies. It must also consider the achievements of the New Deal, which revealed that democracy and capitalism could coexist despite the authoritarian experiences of European fascisms. By changing the relationship between state and society, the New Deal influenced many projects in countries of diverse economic development levels.

‘We are all planners now’

Most of the countries involved in World War II embraced the planning philosophy (Judt, 2005). The disasters of the interwar period appeared, to the Europeans, intertwined with the total failure of attempts at social organization: ‘If democracy was to work, if it was to recover its appeal, it would have to be planned’ (Judt, 2005: 81). Therefore, planning became a defined and variable technopolitical response to the societal challenges (Cardoso, 1955). For Hobsbawm (1995), this idea was integrated into the constant renovations of capitalism as the hegemonic economic system of the postwar period. Many successful capitalist experiences of the time were produced by centralized industrialization projects planned, supported, managed, and supervised by the state. Postwar capitalism renewed itself ‘to a point it became unrecognizable’ (Crosland *apud* Hobsbawm, 1995: 265). Lessons learned from the great tragedies influenced the economic analysis of policymakers. Their proposals stemmed from a number of shared insights: The interwar catastrophe was mainly due to the collapse of the international system and the world fragmentation it caused; the global system could only be stabilized having the American economy and its currency as protagonists (the U.S. Dollar); the Great Depression was a product of the failure of the unrestricted free market; mass unemployment must be avoided at all costs for social and political reasons. Consequently, the free market would have to accept being supplemented by public planning and economic management (Hobsbawm, 1995).

In 1930, British economist Evan Durban stated: ‘We are all planners now’ (Patel, 2016: 91). The debate during the interwar period was over the failure of American liberalism and the success of the Soviet Five-Year Plan: whereas capitalist countries and their colonies faced a deep economic crisis, the USSR transitioned from a



decaying agricultural economy to thriving industrial power in less than a decade. Consequently, for Patel (2016), the planning hype was caused by a mix of need, fear, and fascination. The meaning of ‘planning’ changed throughout the 1930s: at the beginning of the decade, the term defined a planning cartel under the command of the state, whereas towards the end of the 1930s, its critics defined planning as a form of collectivism. The broad and extensive pilot projects of regional development in Latin America date from 1934 in Cuba, 1935 in Chile, Venezuela, and Mexico (Patel, 206: 93-94). Such plans were in line with the local demands and reality, focusing on land reform, labor rights, and the nationalization of natural resources. The 1930s were a great laboratory for an economic mindset which would rule the postwar period in the West, exercising a great deal of influence over development of the welfare state.

Based on Keynes’s work, those economists advocated that a healthy society would support its increasing productivity with a strong consumer market, which reinforced the plan of the social democrat parties to guarantee full employment, reasonable salaries, and an adequate coverage of social welfare services (Padrós, 2000). The democrat social program envisioned economic growth and a fully employed mass of workers earning reasonable salaries and protected by the Welfare State. Thus, the state became the driver of several measures, like public works, workers’ capacitation, and the establishment of several welfare programs (family assistance, housing assistance, healthcare assistance, and financial support) (Padrós, 2000). According to Hobsbawm (1995), the ‘Great Leap Forward’ of capitalism took place on a vast scale, causing unprecedented social consequences. Capitalism was going through substantial restructuring and reformation. Moreover, the world was experiencing a tremendous increase in globalization levels and the internationalization of the economy. A ‘mixed economic system’ emerged, allowing countries to better plan and manage economic modernization. Latin America was part of this process. In 1972, Walter Stöhr listed 73 regional development programs which had been implemented in the American continent.⁴ In addition to the expansion of regional development policies, a great theoretical effort to understand regional inequalities was made, alongside the formulation of planning and public intervention techniques (Diniz, 2009).

During the 1950s, Brazilian policymakers praised the relative success of intervention experiences in the so-called developed countries. Little by little, ideological and practical aspects of planning were incorporated into the Brazilian administration and became fundamental features of the Brazilian state. Several independent processes converged to an increasing rationalization of the government’s economic policies. Among those were the economic policies developed during the 1930s and 1940s and the government’s experiences facing the increasing social, economic, and political disparities of Brazilian society (Ianni, 1979). Several party manifestos and declarations published by economic congresses were in favor of planning economic activities. ‘Planners’ tried to distance themselves from the liberal assertion that state intervention would inescapably lead to a dictatorship (Bielschowsky, 2000).

As a consequence of the dissemination of a planning mindset throughout Brazil – especially after the end of the Getúlio Vargas dictatorship in 1945 –, several regional development agencies such as Comissão do Plano de Valorização Econômica da Amazônia (1946), Comissão do Vale de São Francisco (1948) and Superintendência de Desenvolvimento do Nordeste (1959) were established

⁴ All the programs listed by Stöhr are in his book *El desarrollo regional in América Latina*, published in 1972.



(D'Araújo, 1992).⁵ The targets of such initiatives were the northeastern region due to its droughts, the Amazon, where long-standing challenges had to be overcome, and the São Francisco valley, which was to be exploited economically. Therefore, the 'valorization' of the Amazon region would necessarily be driven by planning and colonization attempts, thus reviving a key theme from the official discourse of the 1940s: the demographic emptiness. The boost received by the recovery projects of the Amazon must be put into perspective with the circumstances that brought the region to the national spotlight after the first Vargas administration (1930-1945). Moreover, the polemic involving the episode of the 'Rubber Soldiers' served as a political pressure tool in the hands of Amazonian politicians. Workers recruited to extract rubber for the Allied's war effort between 1942 and 1945 disappeared after the conflict ended (Campos, 2006; Secreto, 2007; Andrade, 2012). The most alarming analysis considered 300.000 people to be missing or dead. But the 'valorization' program needed an inspiration.

In 1933, the United States established the leading regional planning and administration model of the time, the TVA. Subsequently, Brazilian regional development agencies took inspiration from it (D'Araújo, 1992). Managed by a decentralized and flexible governmental body, the TVA encompassed projects to recover the Tennessee valley, where the natural (eroded lands) and social conditions were the main cause of the population's low income level. Due to its success in planning and directing resources to the execution of essential projects, in applying scientific approaches and techniques, in integrating local communities in the enterprise as well as thanks to its pioneering and missionary spirit and its accountability to Congress, the TVA became a model (D'Araújo, 1992). The principal characteristic of the agency was to employ qualified workers through meritocracy, thus avoiding any influence of the 'Deep South' politicians in the conception and execution of the valley's recovery (Brose, 2015). Top-notch technical professionals were in charge of the TVA, most of them from the north of the country. Therefore, the agency was able to work with local rural communities and change society without having to bow to local politicians who were known to be racist and corrupt.

Consequently, the local paternalistic ties became weaker, which led to the election of new politicians allowing broader social change (Brose, 2015). The technical body believed that an increase in living standards and education levels of the rural population of the Tennessee valley would erode the archaic and clientelist political bases of the Deep South. The keywords of the regional agency's discourse, messages, and books were development, democracy, progress, and industrialization.

Such ideas were in line with the agendas of the leaders of peripheral countries, which were avid for not solely relying on monocultures anymore and sought to promote the urbanization of their eminently rural societies. The TVA was advertised as the greatest accomplishment of the New Deal. Its replications, in the East and the West, especially in the postwar period, are proof of that (Patel, 2016). The experts of that time referred to it as the grandfather of all regional development projects. In 1943, biologist Julian Huxley stated that the TVA was the best way for democracies to achieve efficiency and coordination without bowing to totalitarian regimes (Patel, 2016). World War II made the agency a national icon of welfare and modernization; it also helped to spread the 'American model' worldwide. *TVA*:

⁵ It is essential to highlight that several development projects were designed in the first Vargas administration, like the Vale do Rio Doce Company in 1940, and several projects for exploiting the San Francisco River, which served as a starting point for the Commission in 1948. See Paula (2010) and Pereira/Espindola/Martins (2019).



Democracy on March, by David Eli Lilienthal, the agency's director, sold 200.000 copies and was translated to 19 languages. It celebrated the TVA as a democratic way of planning, superior to communism and fascism. According to Ekbladh (2011: 48), the TVA was the 'grand synecdoche, standing for a wider liberal approach to economic and social development both domestically and internationally (...) it would become nearly synonymous with liberal development itself'.

Many regional planning proposals were presented worldwide between 1940 and 1960, adapting the original features of the TVA (administrative autonomy, meritocratic technical body, lack of political interference) to local realities. According to Brose (2015), the Brazilian managers got to know the TVA model in the courses ministered by Luís Inácio de Anhaia Melo at USP in the 1940s. In 1941, communist representative Catullo Branco, then an engineer of the São Paulo State Secretary of Public Works, visited Tennessee to study the TVA's work. Upon returning, he led a campaign for the expropriation of the electricity distributors in the State of São Paulo. After the Cooke Mission, in 1942, the Brazilian government started following the TVA closely.⁶ João Alberto Barros, then minister of Economic Mobilization, suggested that the agency should study the São Francisco valley. As a result, a monograph describing the application of the TVA methodology to the region was published (Brose, 2015). For Chiquito (2015), the beginning of the postwar period until the late 1950s was when Brazil was turned into a sort of laboratory for the American experiments related to the 'Good Neighbor Policy'.

In 1946, Oren Reed, chief engineer of the TVA, reviewed the project developed by the commission responsible for the development of the São Francisco valley. Moreover, the 'apolitical' and 'neutral' character of the regional agency did not align with the projects developed in a country that had been under dictatorial rule for over 15 years and was still seeking political stability amidst the increasing power struggle between the União Democrática Nacional (UDN) and the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB), especially during the second Vargas administration. The 'Amazon case' is a chapter in the expansion of planning and development ideals – and its adaptation to Brazilian reality – in the postwar years. The first step was the teaching of the professionals that would lead the development of the Brazilian Amazon, the technical experts.

Forming Experts for the Planning Era

In 1945 Machado Neto, director of the Associação Comercial de São Paulo stated that 'today choosing between planning and the old *laissez-faire* is not an option. One can only choose between good and bad planning, (...) planning and democracy are perfectly able to coexist' (*apud* Bielschowsky, 2000: 300). For Brazilian industrialists of the 1950s, heavily influenced by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the state should set goals and activities that would allow Brazil to overcome its peripheric condition. The planning perspective they pursued was essentially global, encompassing two ideas: First, state and private sector should organize their activities in such a way that the actions of the former would not directly interfere in the affairs of the latter; second, planning had to encompass a broad spectrum of factors related to development (investment, employment, consumption, imports) (Colistete, 2002).

⁶ The Cooke Mission, a U.S. economic cooperative mission, arrived in Brazil in 1942 to work together with the Comissão de Mobilização Econômica do Brasil, during the war years.



In the Brazil of the 1950s, an excessive growth of the third urban sector followed industrialization, thus rising a better paid and qualified professional, the technical expert.

The valorization of the 'expert' became not only a rational requirement of economic development but also a tool to legitimize state planning and interventions. Having this sort of professional in charge conveyed the image that state actions would be neutral, capable, and, mainly, apolitical. The other side of the coin meant experts were well paid and consumed worldly goods, like home appliances and automobiles. (Mendonça, 1986: 47)

Aiming to form qualified professionals, SPVEA and FGV organized a regional planning course focused on the Amazon region at the newly open Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública e de Empresas (EBAPE). The course was held in Belém do Para, and it was the first regional planning course ever held in Brazil. It was open to SPVEA employees and to other members of the Brazilian administration (Silva, 1960). The course aimed to teach the main ideas and information regarding the planning and management of the Amazon region's natural, economic, and human resources. The course had several topics, such as psychology of planning, postwar planning in France and French Africa, political aspects of planning, implementation of projects, and financial planning (Friedmann, 2011). Benedicto Silva was the man in charge of this partnership at the FGV and the EBAPE. In the introductory lecture, Silva stated that the course was necessary due to the weak performance of the recent economic development initiatives of the Brazilian government (Silva, 1960). The main goals of the development program were to induce changes in techniques, habits, and practices of local stakeholders (Idem). 'Change' was the keyword. The means to achieve it was the experts' work, who would be trained in the latest planning trends.

Arthur César Ferreira Reis, first SPVEA superintendent and renowned local intellectual, was the first teacher of the course. Like other Amazonian intellectuals, Reis presided over several state agencies. He was also responsible for studies of the historical factors that prevented the 'integration' of the Amazon with the so-called more developed Brazilian regions. In his work, he highlighted that since colonial times, administrations were worried about maintaining the Amazon as a profitable area for the country but did not take any further action. Reinforcing the nationalist character of Brazilian developmentalism, Reis (1955) stated that the fundamental goals of such 'economic valorization' were to establish equal conditions for Brazilian citizens independent of the region they lived in and to guarantee Brazil's national security, which he perceived as threatened by the ambitions of the international powers.

According to Reis, despite being an 'almost desert region', the Amazon held the raw materials necessary for the country's development. Administrators sought to protect the Amazon from imperialist ambitions since colonial times, as seen in the treaties of Utrecht (1713), Madrid (1750), and San Ildefonso (1777), and the prohibition of foreign vessels on the Amazon during the Brazilian Empire. Reis argued that the latter act, signed by the Brazilian Emperor, had led foreign countries to believe that Brazil had adopted a 'closed-door policy' similar to China, and that there had been a joint action of foreign powers to force Brazil to open the Amazon River to navigation and economic exploitation (Reis, 1955). The statement above includes the main components of the discourse about the Amazon region in the postwar years. According to Reis, it was the least developed region of Brazil, undergoing an intense process of desertification and in constant danger of foreign invasion (Reis, 1955). Arthur Reis quoted *Evolução do povo brasileiro* and *Idealismo da constituição* by sociologist Oliveira Viana, who advocated executive centralization, to



support his point that the development of the Amazon region should be directly managed by the Brazilian state, without the interference of other intermediaries.

Besides classes and conferences, the agreement established between SPVEA and FGV fostered the publication of monographs to support SPVEA's work. These works were published by EBAPE in the *Casos de Planejamento Regional* series. It aimed to publicize to the experts that worked at these agencies case studies of regional development processes. In addition to books describing the features of SPVEA, it published editions about the Commission for the São Francisco Valley, the Ten-Year plan for the development of the Belgian Congo, the Hydroelectric Brokopondo (Suriname) Development, and the TVA. Iberê de Souza Cardoso, an administrator associated with FGV, wrote the monograph on the Amazon regional agency. He pictured the long battle of the Amazonian parliament members to secure the agency's establishment, starting with the constitutional provision included in the 1946 charter and ending with the start of SPVEA's activities in 1953. Iberê Cardoso drew attention to the fact that the TVA inspired the general action guidelines of SPVEA (formation of experts, decentralized administration, and exploration of natural resources). He underscored the differences between both agencies and stated that SPVEA needed to pursue its own line of action:

There is no comparison between the extension of the Brazilian Amazon and Tennessee Valley (...) The U.S.A. holds far more technical and financial resources than Brazil. [...] The problems of the Tennessee Valley are totally different and far easier to solve than those found in the Amazon. (...) The Tennessee can be compared to the Uiracoera river, one of the feeders of the Branco River that, despite being one of the longest rivers in the Americas, is only an affluent of the Negro River, the main tributary of the Amazon River [...] (Cardoso, 1955: 38)

Therefore, the proposed solutions should be adapted to the local context, following local and regional infrastructure, instead of simply copying measures adopted in other countries (Cardoso, 1955). John R.P. Friedmann, from U.S. Operations Mission to Brazil, fresh out of the University of Chicago, and a collaborator of the TVA, was put at EBAPE's disposal thanks to the U.S. government collaboration established by the Point Four Program (Silva, 1960).⁷ Benedicto Silva explained the possible impacts of planning for Brazil:

The planner, the modern magician, became the craftsman of progress. Brazil finally acknowledged the virtues of planning [...] Regional planning is taking a vital role as a powerful, almost invincible, tool in the struggle that three-thirds of the world is fighting against underdevelopment. No other country offers better opportunities for the use of regional planning than Brazil. In continental sized countries, it is possible to find a broad spectrum of underdevelopment categories. Applying [Ernst] Wageman's rating system to all regions of Brazil shows its limitations. Here super capitalist areas, like São Paulo and the Federal District [Rio de Janeiro], and acapitalist zones, such as Mato Grosso and Amazonas, coexist in the same country. (Silva, 1960: 1)

Capitalism and the concept of planning were becoming compatible for Brazilian elites (Bielschowsky, 2000). Policymakers gradually introduced planning concepts in the Brazilian economic routine with the 1947 Plano Salte, during the government of Eurico Gaspar Dutra (1946-1951). Friedmann stated the differences between planning and controlling. According to him, not all control is planned; planning

⁷ Point IV Program, established under de Truman administration in 1949, was a technical and economic cooperation program for Latin American countries amid the disputes of the Cold War. See Andrade (2015).



means forecasting the future, whereas controls were imposed irrationally, without considering the foreseeable future (Friedmann, 1960).

It is interesting to note that matters related to local societies and economic development were considered essential topics in the course taught by Friedmann. According to him, regional cultures developed in countries where regions had communication restrictions. Hence, regional development took place more or less independently of the rest of the country, adapting to the local physical environment. Friedmann also made reference to the great contributions from sociologists and anthropologists, which stated that planning should be adapted to the tastes, values, and costumes of the local people. To receive support from locals, planners ought to do their job considering the specificities of areas where cultural traits were homogeneous and where localism was stronger (Friedmann, 1960). Planning would be, in fact, men acting as a group, to consciously manipulate and control the environment to reach previously established goals (Friedmann, 1960: 7)

Years later, Friedmann stated his impressions about the course held in Belém. In hindsight, he concludes that the technocratic utopia which believed that particular actions like planning would raise the standard of living of the so-called underdeveloped countries. Actually, this power struggle, where countries should develop such planning projects to receive international help, was linked to the missionary feeling of men from that time. In his memoirs published in 2011, he described the period in which he collaborated with the training of Brazilian planners:

Planning, especially its version linked to development, and with the two distinctive terms often conflated, was the watchword of the post-war era, lately imported to Brazil. [...] It was time, I thought, to put some of my own, still incoherent thoughts together about what planning might mean, beginning with the question that puzzled many of us: What is this new-fangled soft technology called planning? It was a bizarre experiment, to say the least. Young and inexperienced, profoundly ignorant of the country where I was teaching, I nevertheless held forth with great assurance about how the Amazon might be 'developed' through this imported, all-purpose and largely unanalyzed term. [...] I remained in Brazil for nearly three years, with all the missionary zeal of someone who was conscious of participating in an historical experiment in which countries whose economies were said to be 'underdeveloped' would, by embracing rational, comprehensive planning, achieve higher levels of material well-being for their populations. [...] As understood at the time, [planning] was a technocratic utopia that allowed governments to announce their intentions in a cascade of long-, middle-, and short-range plans that for all their normative character often by-passed political realities. (Friedmann, 2011: 1-3).

What do you know about SPVEA? Turning the Amazonian men into experts

The coordination and advertising sector of SPVEA stated that such ideas ought to be transmitted more directly to professionals from the agency. How could one transform the future employee into a professional 'committed to the cause'? Luiz Augusto de Castro Soares, the editor of SPVEA, wrote an employee handbook entitled *What do you know about SPVEA?* to inform and raise the employees' awareness of their roles in the agency. The editor engaged concepts such as productivity, collective spirit, and commitment to address his audience.

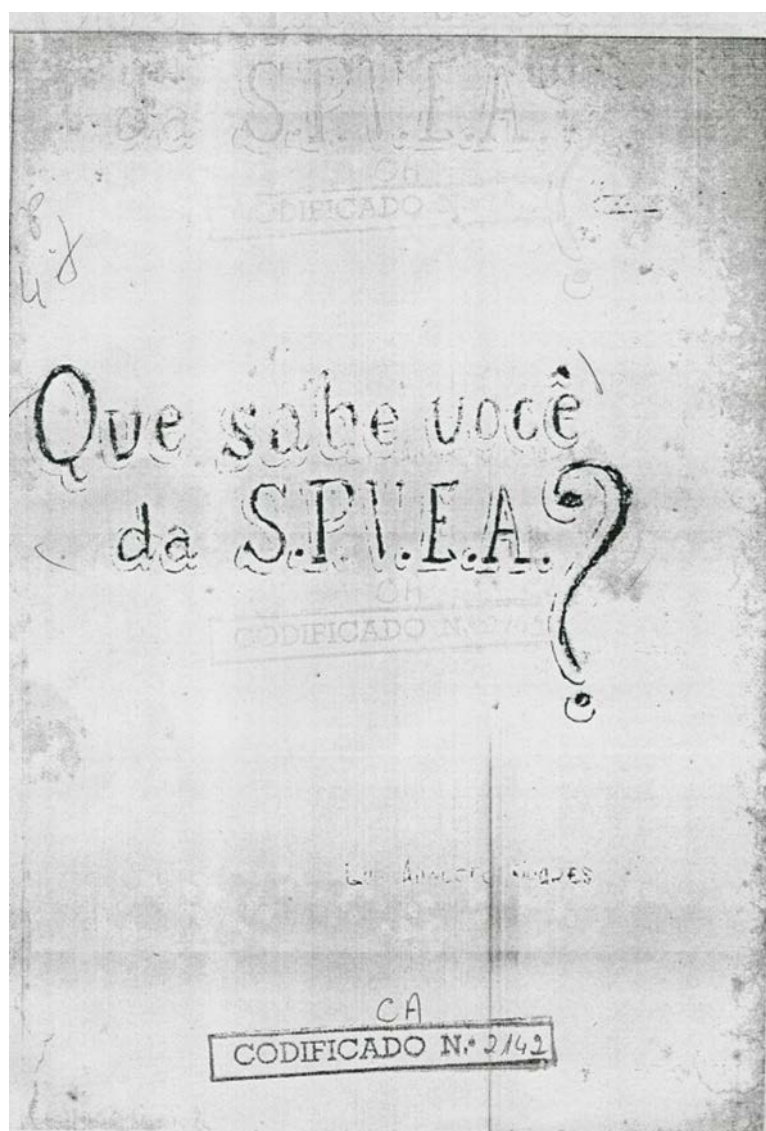


Figure 1: Cover of the handbook 'What do you know about SPVEA?', by Luiz Augusto C. Soares, 1955



Figure 2: 'Is your profession considered just a necessary evil?' (Soares, 1955: 3)

According to the handbook, the employee had to bear in mind that his job was not ordinary. He was not expected to fulfill the essential obligations of regular employees, like being on time, not making serious mistakes, and indifferently performing his duties. The SPVEA employee would have to walk the extra mile to achieve the desired level of commitment and be fully in line with the objects of the agency:

We do not want to believe that you - voter and patriot - evolved to the point of reacting against this unhealthy negativism of those who do not believe in human dignity anymore and are only worried about winning, even if at the expense of being servile. We cannot believe you want to be held accountable for the failure of such an enterprise that transcends regional matters. We are talking about taking civilization from the coast to the backlands and recover Brazil, its most extensive territorial area, while we still have time. (Soares, 1955: 8)

The *Economic Valorization Plan* was not to be faced as an ordinary endeavor but as a pioneer enterprise that would demand teamwork, regularity, idealism, love, and civic pride. Individualisms (I) should be left aside to privilege the group (we) that represented the agency (Soares, 1955). The employee should embrace the values and the collective ideals of the agency. His job was of national importance: to prevent the unordered urban sprawl of big cities. Development was presented as a solution for overly populated cities. It would curb the growth of slums, where 'the marginalized individuals of society dwell' (Soares, 1955: 3). Amazonians would no longer have to seek job opportunities in big cities to escape from hunger and poverty. Performing an excellent job at SPVEA would positively affect the country.



Figure 3: 'We achieve teamwork when "I" is replaced by "us" and the goals of the organization overcome personalistic modes' (Soares, 1955: 6)

SPVEA should care for the people of the Amazon so they would not have to move to big cities. The 'civilizational' features from the Brazilian coast would migrate to the Amazon region, not the other way around. The handbook contained recommendations for employees to show respect towards public affairs. Also, they should care for the population that had never received decent service, had been exploited, and had not had their voices heard by an agency established to serve them. (Soares, 1955). Lastly, caring for the countrymen would be essential for the plan to work.

Look at the countryman, this ragged, sick, half-bred shaped by the necessities of a hard life, surviving ignorantly and underfed without any type of social assistance, like a pariah, a human waste in its own country. From your standpoint, this man may just be lazy or indolent. Believe me, it is not the case! [...] However, these men are constantly forgotten and ignored by the government and politicians, who only turn their attention to them [...] when there are elections and when it is necessary to bag for their votes. [These men] do not have access to school and hospitals, [...] the mighty jungle crushes them, where they live isolated like pygmies in a land of giants. So far, they have only received waste from civilization (Soares, 1955: 2)

The booklet emphasizes that these forgotten men were also Brazilians and that SPVEA would offer their first opportunity of 'integration' into society. It represents the Amazonian as an individual in a constant lost battle against nature and distant from 'civilization'. Such constructs of the reality of the Amazon, based on the works of naturalists and local writers, remained the predominant view of the region in Brazil of the 1950s, a country that was trying to 'integrate' the region using the 'developed' or 'civilized' coastal zones as a model to be applied to the Amazon. SPVEA's work would also comprise helping to improve educational and sanitary conditions in which the countrymen lived. Social happiness would only be attainable



through efficient planning for the Amazon. According to the author, this underdeveloped area should absorb the populational surplus of other regions of the country and produce the necessary goods and raw materials to offset hunger in the rest of Brazil and the world.

SPVEA presented several unique characteristics of the Amazon region to its staff. The agency aimed to develop a work plan encompassing several academic fields. Those reports would be published by the agency's press. *Conceito de Amazônia* (*Notions of the Amazon*) (1955), by literary critic Eidorfe Moreira, described several hydrographic, zoogeographic, economic, and political concepts that would serve as a base for understanding the region. The author highlighted the many difficulties in developing this part of the world, where 'the relationship between men and nature was one of the hardest ever seen' (Moreira, 1955: 4). Around the same time, in 1955, *Psicologia do homem da Amazônia* (*Psychology of the Amazonian*) by Carlos Mendonça was published. It described the historical formation of the Amazonian population and its 'ethnic types': the Brazilian mixed-race man, his wife and folklore, the man from the backlands, the white man, and the black man. Mendonça also started a comprehensive survey of the living conditions in the Amazon. His project was supported by important institutions acting in the region, such as: Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública (Special Public Health Service, SESP) and Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Carlos Mendonça highlighted that 'currently, one of the main features of the Brazilian mixed-race man [...] are his assimilating habits [...] in a remarkable acculturation routine' (Mendonça, 1955: 9).

Conclusion

A fully detailed inventory of the volumes published by SPVEA is yet to be performed. We know so far that many were printed. The *Editora SPVEA* published almost all reports during the period in which the agency was active (1953-1966).⁸ After all, the projects that SPVEA were supposed to develop were undertaken by other institutions and agencies already acting in the Brazilian Amazon, like SESP, Museu Goeldi, and the Food and Agriculture Organization. This UN agency surveyed the local fauna and flora as part of an agreement signed with the Brazilian government. After analyzing the first Five-Year Valorization Plan, Thomas Mougey (2018) concluded: despite not creating an actual acceleration of the production and consumption standards related to the *Great Acceleration*, SPVEA helped to insert the Amazon in a technocratic culture and invested in new methods and techniques that transformed the bio-social composition of the region and the symbolic representations which connected the Amazon to the economic exploration of the rest of the country.⁹ As Batista (2016) points out, SPVEA undertook fieldwork to survey deposits of minerals like cassiterite, bauxite, iron, chromite, and manganese, but the studies produced were not highly effective. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of SPVEA as a research topic, nor does it corroborate the memory constructed by the military dictatorship that presented the agency as a

⁸ Three Parliamentary Commissions of Inquiry held at the house of representatives investigated SPVEA while the agency was active. None of them were able to identify crimes, but they tainted the agency's reputation as corrupt. The Military Regime exploited this lousy reputation when it decided to create a new agency called Superintendência de Desenvolvimento da Amazônia (Superintendency for the Development of Amazonia - SUDAM).

⁹ A series of human-made events and the intensive use of natural resources and their incorporation into the planetary economic system would be responsible for driving the *Great Acceleration*. See Acker/Fischer (2018).



corrupt institution. On the contrary, researching SPVEA can bring to light the transmission of ideas that created the policymakers' perception of the Brazilian Amazon, especially the knowledge routes that tried to adapt concepts developed by U.S. technocrats to unique local contexts. Brito (2001) highlights that the agency could only employ 8% of its budget on personnel. Therefore, most of the staff were employees transferred from other agencies or government office. Thus, many officials were appointed thanks to political ties, not expertise or merit. Due to the lack of proper human resources, there was political interference in technical decisions (Pereira, 1976). Lastly, the claims of the technocrats were seized by the political forces of the period, proving that ideological and technical affairs cannot be separated, contrary to what recent narratives have been arguing.

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