

Reshaping São Paulo under Global Modernization

Zeuler Lima

School of Architecture, Washington University in Saint Louis, USA

This paper addresses the conflicting relationship between global modernization and models and strategies of urbanization in São Paulo, the largest metropolis in Brazil.

São Paulo is the living testimony of the struggle between local, national, and globalizing models of urbanization. The city has undergone significant transformations as part of its adjustment to the transnational economic restructuring in the last couple of decades and aspires to a prominent position among emerging global cities. As a marginal global city, São Paulo is becoming part of the spatial dispersal of activities around the planet and requires new forms of local concentration of top-level management, businesses, services and cultural capital.

Three different contemporary models coexist in the competition between three different areas of economic centrality: the European historic center, the North American Central Business District and the North American Edge City. At the same time, the city at large faces the outcome of local historic processes of uneven forms of social, cultural and urban development.

Methodologically, the procedure based on public and private partnerships and on legal instruments to promote real estate development has rapidly changed the models through which the production of urban space takes place. The demise of modernist master plans, which predominated from the 1950s to the 1980s in Brazil, has yielded to practices of urbanization controlled by the game of global symbolic and financial transactions.

These practices have produced images of the city that are both spectacular and catastrophic. They confirm the fact that global modernization primarily allows for closer connection among elites around the world, but also that these forms urbanization weaken the effectiveness of democratic urban plans and policies and that they simultaneously accentuate global and local disjunctions.

Introduction

Arriving in São Paulo by plane is an impressive scene: a vast gray mosaic of highrises, unfinished self-built houses, industrial buildings, and endless wavy streets patched up over the many hills that shape the two large valleys of Tietê and Pinheiros Rivers. This uneven mosaic contrasts with the glossy images shown in the aircraft monitors while various pictures and languages describe beautiful places in the city to business people and to the economy class. More than ever, the bird's eye image of cities that used to be the privilege of visionary architects, designers, and planners has become part of our global reality. More than ever, these professionals have struggled to keep their urban visions in focus and to provide creative and critical alternatives to local and large-scale transformations that affect large contemporary cities.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion about urban models and practices that define global cities, especially in the southern hemisphere, by presenting the practices that different public administrations have promoted in São Paulo in the last decade. Global cities represent both a concept and concrete places. As a concept, they operate as part of transnational economic flows as well as of collective social and cultural imaginaries. They advance the notion of isolated world cities of industrial capitalism by enhancing the connectivity of metropolitan markets around the globe. As concrete places, they are the local spaces where social and political negotiations over the material and symbolic conditions of global modernization take place. As they overlap world, national, and local spheres, global cities represent an ambivalent phenomenon in the case of countries and metropolitan areas that remain in the margins of capitalism and that have undergone intense economic, social, and cultural adaptation.

The staging of global urban centralities in São Paulo

At first sight it is hard to imagine that little more than a century ago São Paulo, the largest metropolitan area in South America with over fifteen million residents, was a small town of a few thousand residents. São Paulo became a capitalist city and boomed in the turn of the 1900s as it centralized the wealth accumulated from a strong coffee economy, the same wealth that later allowed for the development of business and industrialization. The city expanded as the result of by real estate and infrastructure development and a few urban embellishment projects, but without consistent plans that provide large-scale coherence between urban morphology and socio-economic opportunities. São Paulo grew extremely fast and became a complex and heterogeneous territory punctuated by pockets of modern urban amenities and areas of extreme poverty.

São Paulo became a large metropolis in the 1930s and 1940s. At the time, engineers Prestes Maia and Ulhôa Cintra devised a large theoretical scheme for São Paulo illustrated by vast panoramas of a metropolis structured by dense urban blocks, monumental buildings, and an efficient system of avenues. The scheme was based on the image of Vienna's Ringstrasse, on Joseph Stübben's schemes for Dessau in Germany, and mainly on Burnham's plan for Chicago. Prestes Maia transformed it into a plan named Plan of Avenues in 1930, when he was the city's secretary of public works. The plan defined a succession of concentric rings connected by a series of radial avenues departing from the historic center of the city. The main goal of the plan was to move traffic out of the congested downtown and to expand the core of urban services focusing on urban decentralization, provision of low cost housing, and automobile circulation.

Prestes Maia maintained that the city had primarily invested in opening streets in new subdivisions since First World War without defining comprehensive principles for urban development. This procedure benefited private investors but it also created problems for the organization of a fast growing city. He insisted that the city needed to invest in public urban planning. This was the first - and probably the last - time that morphology and aesthetics were part of the comprehensive reflection about the urban design and development of the city of São Paulo. Prestes Maia was appointed mayor between 1938 and 1945, during Getúlio Vargas's regime, and started to implement modified versions of his plan of avenues. The plan was supported by new zoning legislation that promoted the construction of highrises, the creation of national mortgage policies, and the emergence of a local middle class. However, Maia's Plan of Avenues never achieved full completion, leaving the city with a faulty regulatory street system limited to central areas where the wealth and resources were concentrated.

The limited effects of the plan and the densification that came with the promotion of highrise construction ended up contradicting Maia's ambition and reinforcing the long-lasting pattern of urban expansion based on the isolated development of infrastructure and transportation systems, and creating what has been traditionally called "real-estate avenues." Throughout the second part of the 20th century public and private investments in urbanization migrated from the historic center of the city towards southwestern areas developing a sequence of isolated urban centers with considerable concentration of cultural and economic resources in its path. The three most important of these centers are the historic downtown, consolidated in the first part of the twentieth century, the area around Paulista Avenue, transformed into a prominent Central Business District in the 1960s, and the emerging financial and business district along the southern stretch of Pinheiros river.

Not only is the city a mosaic, but the historic process of formation and development of such economic centers also differs profoundly from case to case. They enjoy privileged positions in the urban life of São Paulo but coexist in a struggle for public and private resources, mainly since the end of more than two decades of military regime in the late 1980s. During that period, mayors were not democratically elected but appointed by the military. Consequently, their urban policies responded to general development plans defined by the central government, which were largely devoted to the creation and construction of basic infrastructure. As the country moved into democratic representation and adopted neo-liberal economic policies in the 1990s, different city administrations promoted urban policies and real estate initiatives to allow for national and transnational capital to competitively reshape these areas.

The development of these areas contributed to change the image of parts of São Paulo but also unveiled paradoxes of urban modernization in the margins of global capitalism. The connection of the city's economy and culture to global flows requires the concentration of costly world-class standards of urbanization, services, and population organized around specialized and controlled urban spaces. As a consequence of this process, the three major centers of the city started to compete for investments without the existence of consistent urban and metropolitan plans to guarantee equitable distribution of public and private resources. The common element among the changes taking place in the historic downtown, and along Paulista Avenue and Pinheiros River was their reliance on the partnership between powerful private institutions and the city administration. Private institutions create business associations and coalitions in order to pressure the City to improve urban infrastructure and to deregulate zoning legislation supporting private real estate development.

The new centralities of São Paulo strive to materialize the relationship between global and local markets and to reshape their own images according to different international patterns of

urbanization. For example, the envisioned projects for the downtown area reproduce elements of both European and North-American historic centers by valuing new and traditional architectural monuments and public spaces. Paulista Avenue reinvests in its image as a Central Business District emulating the vitality of the Midtown area of New York City. Berrini Avenue and the new developments along Pinheiros River present elements of edge cities that emerged in the suburbs of north-American metropolises and now punctuate large cities around the world. In all cases, the representations of city life and morphology are isolated in fragments that clustered in the dispersed and uneven territory of São Paulo.

The current development of urban centralities São Paulo in advances the history of lack of effective comprehensive plans in the city, and the concentration of resources is controlled by two complementary mechanisms. The regulation of urban development has gradually moved from the hand of the state into the hands of public-private partnerships, greatly benefiting private gains in detriment of collective and public interest. In this context, the City has often legitimized private practices by creating legal instruments called “urban operations,” which fosters real estate investments in specific areas of economic development through zoning deregulation and the construction of infrastructure. These procedures satisfy in principle the collective imaginary and the investment conditions of global cities, but their benefits are not accessible in the daily life of a diverse and largely impoverished population of a large metropolis such as São Paulo. This means that, with the burden of its own historic disjunctions, São Paulo faces new struggles. As globalization provides growing possibilities for economic development, cultural identification and social imagination, it also reinforces the boundaries that mark spatial and social inequity in the city. This gap promotes different phenomena from eviction to the creation of residential enclaves, from the privatization of public spaces to the criminalization of poverty.

Three urban centralities in the age of global modernization

The most complex case of contemporary development of urban centralities in São Paulo is the revitalization of the historic downtown. The downtown area has suffered economic divestment since the 1950s because of the migration of resources to areas such as Paulista Avenue, but it continues to be an intensely used part of the city. Since the 1970s and mostly since the late 1980s, the city started to promote initiatives to revitalize this important symbolic area even though they have not generated broad-ranging results. The administration of mayor Luiza Erundina (1989-1992), from left-wing Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party), took on the effort of previous governments and promoted several studies for the recovery of important streets, buildings and public areas in the historic center of the city. Her administration had a strong social agenda and proposed the investment of resources in the economically and socially depressed urban regions such as the historic downtown and many areas in the outskirts of the city as opposed to the concentration of investments in consolidated business areas. It was during her mandate that the City consolidated the creation of “urban operations” as a legal mechanism to promote fiscal incentives and to improve specific urban areas that was expanded by other administrations.

In 1991, at the end of Luiza Erundina’s mandate, the director of Bank Boston in São Paulo, whose headquarters are located downtown, proposed the creation of Associação Viva o Centro (Live Downtown Partnership), which should be a technical and political instrument for negotiating the improvement of the historic center with the City administration. His proposal was largely based on the Boston example of Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market from the 1960s. Contrasting interests composed Associação Viva o Centro since its origin as a public-private

partnership. On the one hand it represented major banks, financial institutions, and property owners in the downtown area. On the other hand the technical body that included designers, planners, and social workers was divided between traditional planning practices and critical urban and academic experiences. The plans and programs for the historic downtown combined traditional and corporate methods of diagnosis, planning, and implementation in two-year phases, and urban experiments that should foster the coexistence of different social groups in the city.

In the initial phase, Viva o Centro promoted debates about urban and social programs in the downtown area and invited local and international architects, planners and urban designers to work as consultants, who advocated the development model for Barcelona in the 1980s, legitimizing the process in a global scale. In the following phase, they developed a system of complementary urban design projects based on two important design competitions for Anhangabaú Valley and Dom Pedro I Park that took place in the 1980s. The competitions proposed the complete revitalization two major nodes of the historic center that had been designed as parks in the early 20th century and that have been transformed into large-scale transportation hubs of freeways and bus terminals in the last fifty years. Viva o Centro saw these areas as potential catalysts for urban redevelopment influenced by the notion of benign contamination¹ conveyed by international consultants. The plans included the restoration of historic buildings, improvement of public spaces and pedestrian areas, and the introduction of cultural institutions and entertainment activities that would help transform the symbolic image of the city.

The result of 1992 mayoral elections changed the priorities for the historic center and interrupted the continuity of the work organized by Viva o Centro. Industrialist Paulo Maluf (1993-1996), Erundina's right-wing successor from Partido da Frente Liberal (Liberal Front Party), drove the investment of public resources in the historic downtown, because he had personal interest in other areas such as Paulista Avenue and the southern region of the city. In order to counteract the actions of Viva o Centro, the new mayor created ProCentro, an urban development agency within the City Hall that should deregulate building and zoning legislation in order to attract national and international capital and to promote real estate development.² During this period, Viva o Centro continued its original plan, organized a large database of the downtown region, and proposed a few urban design schemes for five strategic poles of economic redevelopment in the downtown area. However, conflicts between the interests of the association, different city administrations, and private investors made the realization of concrete programs and plans impossible.

Mayor Paulo Maluf faced charges of corruption and was not reelected. However, his party succeeded in setting up and electing candidate Nelson Pitta (1997-2000) as a puppet in the hands of the previous mayor. The new **City** leader continued to prioritize the interest of politicians and developers in detriment of broader social and urban problems faced by a large population of São Paulo. The most controversial event of this administration, which clearly illustrates the desire for transforming São Paulo into a global city, erupted in the area of Dom Pedro I Park in the beginning of year 2000. The area had been previously considered by Viva o Centro as a strategic public space that should guide further developments in the surrounding areas. Instead, local and international press, including the front page of the New York Times,³ announced the construction of what should have been the tallest building in the world in São Paulo. The creation of the 104-story tower was part of a plan supported by the City to develop the area occupied by the Dom Pedro I Park. It allowed the joint venture between local Brasilinvest and Maharishi Global Development Fund to take advantage of zoning deregulation, tax benefits and public urban improvements and infrastructure razing the whole area. This

development would have crowned a boom of high-rises in the city projecting São Paulo in the international scene, when the financial markets were at their peak.

The end of Celso Pitta's mandate in 2000 was marked by charges of corruption and even an impeachment trial. Since then, the City has gone back to the control of Partido dos Trabalhadores, under the leadership of mayor Marta Suplicy (2001 - present), whose policies have not substantially resolved urban problems in the downtown area. Changes in the administration from left to right and back have dramatically contributed to the discontinuity of plans and policies as well to the inversion of priorities from socially and culturally sustainable economic plans to overtly aggressive real estate development incentives. So far only punctual improvements have taken place in the historic downtown, most of them promoting the cultural and symbolic capital of the area.

Even though the current administration has invested in low-income housing in the historic center, most of the initial social and cultural programs organized by Viva o Centro that dealt with problems such as homeless people, street vendors, crime, and street children, either lost their political clout or were neutralized to protect private interests in the area. Debates and workshops organized in the early 1990s to discuss such problems now seem to have worked as a smoke screen involving the action of private entrepreneurs. Parts of the historic center have become more policed and visually and culturally appealing to property owners and to the middle class, who visit the city in their locked-up cars, and start to occupy the urban lofts created by the local real estate market.⁴ As a result, instead of providing democratic alternatives to the existing urban and social problems, the partial investments in the downtown area have contributed to highlight the inequalities and to establish clear symbolic and spatial boundaries between different social groups in the historic center of the city.

The second case of reinvestment in urban centralities in São Paulo relates to the revitalization of Paulista Avenue. Unlike the historic downtown, it is based on the image of an exclusive business district. Paulista Avenue was created in the 1890s as a luxury residential development catering to the emerging elites of the coffee economy. The New York Stock Exchange crisis completely changed this panorama and, in the 1940s, the ensemble of large villas along Avenida Paulista yielded a landscape of commercial and residential highrises that systematically drained resources from the historic center. In the 1980s, the avenue achieved the limit of its development potential, and started to show signs of physical deterioration, which was accentuated by the emigration of real estate investments to urban areas along Pinheiros river valley.

In 1995, former mayor and industrialist Paulo Maluf, who has economic interest in the avenue, organized a commission to propose the urban revitalization of the area. He nominated the owner of Itaú Bank, Olavo Setúbal - himself a former mayor of São Paulo during the military regime - to coordinate the work together with representatives of business and financial institutions along Paulista Avenue. The committee soon became Associação Paulista Viva (Paulista Lives Association) following the model of Associação Viva o Centro but without the same constituency. Paulista Viva does not have a technical body and is directed by the leaders of financial and commercial corporations in the area. Their goal has been to recover the symbolic image of power and excellence that the avenue enjoyed until the 1980s, aspiring to the images of north-American Central Business District and in particular Park Avenue and Sixth Avenue in New York City.⁵

In order to achieve the envisioned urban recovery of the avenue, Associação Paulista Viva organized an urban design competition in 1996, which generated controversy among local architects and urban planners. The plan followed the early proposals of former mayor José de Figueiredo Ferraz (1971-1973), which privileged vehicular flows and corporate interests, was strongly criticized, because it reduced the solutions to transportation issues and enhanced the

process of gentrification along the avenue. There was no follow up to the competition, but the vision of excellence has continued to prevail over the complex spatial, economic, and social configuration of Paulista Avenue in the works that have been implemented since then. For example, the city created legal mechanisms prohibiting public demonstrations and reinforcing labor inspection that results in the persecution of street vendors. Also, the architectural typologies of high-rises and the proposal for open collective spaces have become increasingly defensive and privatized, and surveillance systems with cameras and private security guards increasingly take over the domain of public spaces.

While the imagined space of Paulista Avenue draws from the image of Midtown Manhattan, its actual space remains a unique place of social diversity and conflicts in the city - from street vendors to businesspeople, from antique fairs to areas of male prostitution, from soccer celebration to political demonstrations. Under the control of exclusive plans for urban maintenance and real estate market recovery, future plans for Paulista Avenue push it from being the collective symbol experiments in urban and cultural life between the 1960s and 1980s into the domain of an exclusive business district with renovated international, and now global, appeal. If the revitalization plan for the avenue is implemented, it will highly impact both residents and the popular classes that share its public spaces, by limiting both their presence and their action in those spaces.⁶

The third area of urban development, the area along Berrini Avenue and the southeastern part of Pinheiros River valley, is one that can be described as a truly new urban centrality since it did not exist as an active economic center. This is the part of the city that was more intensely transformed than the previous two examples, mostly because it happened in a less consolidated urban fabric and controlled by legal mechanisms that overtly privileged real estate development.

The contemporary development of Pinheiros river valley historically started with the development of Berrini Avenue by Bratke-Collet Corporation, a local design and development company, in the mid-1970s. The firm bought 30 large lots along the avenue and built more than 50 office buildings over 10 years in an area previously occupied by lower middle-class houses and squatters. This case illustrates one of the many examples of what in São Paulo has been traditionally defined as "real estate avenues," giving continuity to a process of urban development initiated with the partial execution of Prestes Maia's Plan of Avenues in the late 1930s. These areas consist of the large investment of public resources in specific areas of real estate development in the city often connected to the construction of highrises.

Berrini Avenue became a special case among such avenues, because it legitimized the economic potential of Pinheiros river valley and attracted massive investments from local and international real estate and financial markets. The local press continuously announced the construction boom along the river valley in the late 1990s as the formation of the strongest economic pole in Latin America. This advertisement attracted agents of global real estate and financial markets to invest in large malls, high-rise office buildings, corporate centers and luxury condominiums that were built with the participation of international capital.

British Richard Ellis International Property Consultants and Birmann Development Company, a local developer associated with North-American Turner Construction Corporation⁷ have controlled most of the private projects in the area. However, a lot of controversy surrounded these projects in the late 1990s. During the mandate of mayor Celso Pitta (1997-2000), a local coalition between developers and corporations created Associação de Promoção Habitacional (Association for Housing Promotion) in order to develop the area with support from the City administration. They worked behind closed doors directing a large amount of public money to build world-class infrastructure and taking advantage of the legal mechanism provided by "urban operations." Their main goal was to redesign and redeveloped the intersection

between Berrini Avenue and Águas Espraiadas Avenue. This flat flood area, as the name shows, consisted of an avenue built along a small tributary of Pinheiros River perpendicular to the north bank of the valley. As it is often the case in São Paulo, left over spaces in flood areas tend to be overseen by the City and are often squatted by shantytowns.

Even though the large population of the shantytown had occupied the area for over a decade, and consistently lobbied for infrastructure and land ownership negotiations, nothing was done, and they remained illegal residents in the area. Responding to the growing demand of Associação de Promoção Habitacional (Association for Housing Promotion) - an ironic name in itself - the City decided to evict the whole population of the shantytown in 1997. In a few weeks, almost 12,000 residents were removed from the area in a confrontation with the City and the police. Their houses and shacks were immediately torn down in order to keep them from coming back and to liberate land for the creation of new corporate skyscrapers and luxury condominiums. Only very few residents were relocated into public housing projects in distant areas, while the majority of the population was left to their own devices. Until 2001, when the Federal Government approved the City Statute, the large population of squatters in Brazilian cities did not have access to basic rights of land property. This law created a mechanism to transform a long history of more than 150 years that has kept most urban and rural dwellers vulnerable to the operations of large landowners. However, in the case of Berrini Avenue, the new law came too late.

As a result, the combination between traditional land-parceling system, urban policies, and real estate development practices that historically defined the expansion of São Paulo created a hybrid landscape in the region along Berrini Avenue and Pinheiros River. From a certain distance, the area resembles north-American edge cities and increasingly concentrates corporate and gated residential highrises. From within, it reflects similar patterns to other areas of the city with individual and public transportation defining a social divide as well as the lack of systematic plans for the creation of public spaces and social and cultural equipments that are not for consumption. Buildings are turned to the inside, designed for car accessibility, and highly controlled by security systems. These practices of urban modernization promote safety and comfort to business, and middle and upper classes but it also enhances social disjunctions. By reducing urban images, policies, and practices to satisfy business and corporate demands in a city like São Paulo underprivileged citizens keep been pushed away from potential economic and cultural benefits that come with this transformation.

The three examples of urban investment policies and strategies described above illustrate the effects of how São Paulo has merged traditional practices of urban modernization with patterns defined by global market forces. The benefits of such practices are limited to a few groups, the results of modernization are uneven, and the image of economic vitality that accompanies new urban centralities is put on at a high cost. The competition between intra-urban regions for scarce public and private investments under different administrations, and the manipulation of the traditional division between legal and clandestine urban areas by the local elites contribute to the dissolution of the sense of the city as a collective and public institution.

In short, the staging of global capital, urban images, and social and cultural imaginaries in the current development of São Paulo represents a challenge to the notion of city itself and to the purpose of urbanism as a critical discipline in general. The result of urban plans and policies for new urban centralities operates in the overlap between international real estate and financial development. It encourages the connection with global economy and the political orientation of different city administrations that privilege contrasting goals in the local urban, social, and economic level. Physically and socially, globalization provides new opportunities for information and capital flows. However, it also contributes to the creation of urban – or, in fact, anti-urban – poles with little tolerance for the complex relations that constitutes their

everyday life, and in which the forms of social existence and cultural representation that economically insolvent are pushed into the realm of semi-citizenship and illegitimacy. The development of new urban centralities in São Paulo provides examples of the paradoxes in the constituency of global cities in the margins of capitalism both in conceptual and concrete terms.

São Paulo as a global city: urban practices without urban models?

The expansion of global modernization and the growing size and number of megalopolises in the Southern hemisphere presents a new constellation to think about urban development. The reorganization of economic urban centers in São Paulo may provide a few elements to rethink this issue. The meaning of global cities and the urban models and practices that define them is often related to production, finances, information, and labor flows. Yet, less work has been done to investigate this phenomenon from the relation between the circulation of urban models, practices and images around the globe and the local regime of practices of urban development.

Globalization is a notion that represents a complex phenomenon of cultural, economic, political, and social transformations in the restructuring of capitalism and in the forms of resistance to it. Both from the practical and epistemological viewpoints, Global modernization is the unfolding of previous historical processes of capitalist expansion at the same time that it presents a set of completely new facts and challenges. It provides connectivity between elites around the world by shrinking the distance between them but also by expanding the circulation of cultural and material values and models that inform local, national, and global policies and practices. This phenomenon has a large impact in different urbanized regions of the planet.

The internationalization of capitalist cities is not a new phenomenon since it has been in place and become more intense since the later decades of the 19th century. What is new in this process is that it renegotiates the role that cities and nation states have in the flow of information and commodities around the world. Under globalization, strategic cities - or global cities - concentrate the connective nodes of contemporary capitalism. This concentration materializes in the local emergence of new urban centralities defused in sprawling metropolises where the physical space of the city conflicts with the dematerialized space of information and communication technologies.

Saskia Sassen's definition of global city translates the expanded dimension of transnational corporate economy predominantly controlled by the northern hemisphere.⁸ The globalization of capitalism requires the reorganization of urban centralities as the concrete local dimension where the flow of commodities and information - a process that is both economic and cultural - can be materialized. These centralities must be equipped as strategic nodes that concentrate physical and informational infrastructure as well as qualified markets of workers and consumers. They provide the urban images and a place-bound ground for the fluidity of the transnational economy.

The representation of global cities, both spatially and as a concept, depends on the physical dispersal of megacities to exist. What this all means is that the heterogeneous grid of cities that materializes the global economy requires the distribution of homogeneous clusters of urban amenities around the planet in order to function efficiently. Some of these cities follow changing models of urban development and corporate productivity, while others simply adopt new economic practices that have enormous impact in their physical and social development. Large cities increasingly share the economic and political role previously played only by nation states but they are still organized in a hierarchical system that maintains cities such as São Paulo in a marginal position. As contemporary practices of urbanization in marginal global cities point

to concrete social and spatial tensions they also corroborate the methodological crisis in urbanism.

One of the questions that emerge from this line of thinking is whether global cities have an urban and spatial model or simply reproduce fragments of city as representations that legitimize specific economic practices at high social and environmental cost in a local level. The problem of urban models has haunted the study of contemporary cities since World War II. The discipline of urbanism itself has been called into question several times. There has been increasing evidence in the last half-century that the physical planning of cities has not been able to achieve the utopian claims for redefining social and economic order and for mastering the vicissitudes of urban life either in capitalist or in socialist societies. Historically, the control of urban development and the creation of policies controlled by the state have yielded the predominance of market principles and practices of real estate development in the way large metropolises grow.

The definition of urbanism as a discipline in the second part of the 19th century responded to the need to organize the space of the modern city, its population, and its productive potential. Architects and urban planners became the translators of the techno-scientific rationality of modernity and the right-hand of nation states in the realization of socializing and civilizing projects. The dawn of functionalist urban planning took place together with the development of capitalist urbanization and the stabilization of nation states, which aimed at the unification of the production system in the space of the modern metropolis.

The model of total planning translated the utopia of human emancipation through the practice of rational, bureaucratic, and physical control of social antagonisms and diverse political projects. Modern urban planning was based on theories of objective spatial and social change, originally developed by the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAMs) in the first part of the 20th century. This discourse fostered unified representations of the city. They overlooked conflicts and undermined the logic of everyday life in order to absorb multiple ideological, social, and cultural practices into the singular economic and theoretical logic that sustained urban development.

The restructuring of world economy since the end of World War II - and mainly after the 1970s - has been marked by the impossibility of such a project and by the dispersal of production and consumption systems around the world. This process has been dominated by neo-liberal policies that define the deterritorialization of capital flows, and followed by the strengthening of transnational economic connectivity, and the destabilization of the nation-building projects of Third-World and socialist states. In this context, large cities in the leading nations of capitalism no longer need to create and maintain unified markets and populations as in an earlier phase of capitalism, and consequently the functionalist and totalizing model that followed it became more and more ineffective.

The functional organization of urban development that equals totality with unity and singularity was an ideological approach shaped in an economic context primarily defined by industrial production. It conceptually carried out the modernist promise of universal utopias commanded by strong nation states. This model has become inappropriate in the hands of consumption and financial markets commanded by multinational corporations in agreement with local governments. Critics of functionalism together with postmodern urban theorists have advocated the notions of difference and fragmentation in order to counter the traditional totalizing model of modern functionalism, and to recognize the changing constituency of contemporary cities. Urban design was born in this context as a discipline and a professional practice to rethink the development of capitalist cities that experienced a process of deindustrialization, suburbanization, and social segregation.

The fragmented model represents unity through the clustering of urban nodes instead of the representation of the city as an integrated whole. However, the claims for difference and fragments were co-opted by local and global economic agents, often turning critical efforts into their opposite purpose. This ideological and practical twist ended up corroborating the contemporary crisis of urbanism. As a result the practice of urbanization by fragments, which aimed at enriching the fabric of contemporary metropolises, became the new mode of urban development with high levels of unevenness. The weakening control of urban planning by the public sphere has gradually been replaced by the privatization of decision-making and policies for urban development. This political choice tends to enhance the activity of land and real estate market in its new phase of suburbanized, corporate, and privatized expansion, clustering and isolating the representation of urbanity in specific areas of investment with unforeseen consequences to the spatial, social, and economic organization of large metropolitan regions.

The fragmentation of megacities is not simply a compromise to the demise of the notion of urban totality or the consequence of difficult control of greater metropolitan regions. It is also related to the fact that new global elites do not see the spatial and social unity and continuity of large urban agglomerations as a political priority, since the forms of material and symbolic production and consumption become more deterritorialized with globalization. Unity happens within city fragments, that is in specific spaces of the metropolis that are connected to the transnational flows of capital, people, information, and resources. Instead of unified cities, what global modernization stages an archipelago of excellence amidst an ocean of increasing urban and environmental problems around the globe and mostly in the southern hemisphere.

Methodologically the increasing influence of the private sector in the decision-making process of urban policies introduced corporate planning as a model for urban development in the 1980s and mostly in the 1990s. This method, which comes from the business sphere, largely reduces the purpose of the city to market strategies and the social rights to the city to rights of consumption. Strategic planning has had direct and indirect influence in the reorganization of large metropolis. For example, even though it did not generate an urban model for São Paulo, it strongly resonated in the presence of international star-architects, urban designers, and thinkers such as Jordi Borja and Manuel Castells who were guest consultants in workshops and debates organized by technical groups such as Associação Viva o Centro during the 1990s. Unlike São Paulo, the City of Rio de Janeiro adopted strategic planning as an urban development model supported by programs organized by international agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nation's Habitat Program.⁹

Ironically in both models - state-controlled functionalism and corporate post-functionalism - the urban practices that derive from them often overlook the complex existence of real cities and their everyday life. The transfer of these models to large cities in marginal positions of capitalism set up even more complicated scenarios. Booming megacities in the southern hemisphere absorb these changes without solving previous basic urban problems and defining a broad social safety net. The restructuring of the role of marginal global cities such as São Paulo often happens in a background of political struggles and corruption, economic instability, and social inequity.

In the case of São Paulo, the legal mechanism of "urban operations" reinforced in the last decade is the one that comes closer to an organized model for urban development. However this can be a misleading interpretation. The theoretical framework that defines it has elements of urban design as it deals with fragments of the city, and elements of strategic planning as it locates areas of economic development. Yet, it is none of them. In reality, "urban operations" build upon the long tradition of "real-estate avenues" that branched out from Prestes Maia's Plan of Avenues created in the 1930s. They maintain the practice of urban development based on transportation systems that has characterized the expansion of São Paulo in the second part

of the 20th century. During this period the City has systematically avoided master plans with the exception of legal approved in the early 1970s and in the late 1990s, and even these cases have been questioned in their effectiveness.

The current creation of new urban centralities in São Paulo has benefited from the method of “urban operations” in order to promote controlled practices of real estate development and to attract national and foreign investors. These operations and the partnerships that control them foster, with their surgical method as the title loosely unveils, a fragmented process of urbanization. They increase the economic value of specific urban areas, by investing in the symbolic value of cultural institutions or by creating sophisticated urban infrastructure, but they present a perverse side. As they modernize the infrastructure and the architectural landscape of the city, they often eliminate the presence of undesirable and economically insolvent social groups. “Urban operations,” remain a series of abstract legal mechanisms for the incentive of localized real estate development and capital investment without an overarching urban model that sustains them or even rearticulates in the complex and uneven physical and social spaces of the city.

The reorganization of urban centralities in the context of global modernization redefines how public and private resources are channeled in the development of contemporary cities and what kinds of construction and services public administrations choose to promote. The public sphere has lost its central position in the definition of urban policies and projects. And so have architects and urban planners, who lost their position as public allies and technical experts in the eyes of politicians and developers. The control of territorial planning has gone from the hands of the state to the hands of corporate initiative, brought about by the much-celebrated partnerships between public and private agents and the reduction of the performance of cities to market values.

The examples of the booming redevelopment along Pinheiros river in the south of the city and the attempted project for the construction of Maharishi São Paulo Tower in the downtown area illustrate the risk in limiting urbanization to such procedures and in tying them so strongly to the fluidity of global economic processes. These events raise questions about the circumstances under which poorer and marginal global cities like São Paulo become global cities and reveal how disjunctive the connectivity between marginal megacities and global forces can be. Urban operations generally foster large-scale developments, but their lack of democratic urban vision enhances the image of anti-urbanism in the city.

The urban development along Pinheiros River caused the eviction of shantytown dwellers to accommodate several international corporations, but there is no guarantee that changes in the global market will keep them there. The construction of Maharishi megatower would have produced even more serious consequences with its questionable model of *tabula rasa*. What on the surface level seemed to have great visual impact in the landscape of the city in fact would have more serious underlying consequences. The city was about to face the devastation of an area of more than fifty urban blocks by the architectural version of a Trojan horse. What was really at stake in the controversy around the building was the consolidation of an overt state of urban *laissez-faire* by the city administration. The deregulation of zoning and land-use laws to competitively attract real estate investments showed how unpredictable this mechanism can be.

The theories and models that guide the development of contemporary global cities are often in the paradoxical threshold between the critical assessment of complex urban realities and the legitimization of political and economic practices. In the case of São Paulo this situation is even more critical because practices of real estate development subscribe to the changes in global capitalism without a clear urban model. The investment in urban centralities in São Paulo empowers the city internationally and improves areas that are already consolidated locally, however it reduces the political decision making process of urban development to

economic practices and excludes a large population from the direct benefits that stem from them. Segregation becomes stronger and the sense of social belonging in the city, which includes the access to housing and basic services, is limited to those citizens capable of market consumption. Consequently, the lack of inclusive urban plans and models and of democratic processes to support them leave behind alternatives that would enable the city to better articulate its complex physical and social reality.

Marginal global cities such as São Paulo experience the increasing unbalance between social inclusion and exclusion in an aggravating pace. Cases of total social exclusion are not rare in these cities and they present a crucial political and social problem that cannot be only solved by economic policies alone, mainly free market policies that tend to increase social gaps.¹⁰ The generalization of the notion of global city to encompass megacities connected to transnational markets is problematic because of the gaps and disjunctions formed in the different levels, forms and scales of connectivity that they establish. The overview of such cities tends to mask the fact that they become global cities only because they are submitted to strong transnational and national hierarchies. They belong to a different kind of urban reality in the planetary grid of economic centers, which is represented by the global geography of centrality and marginality.¹¹

Final considerations

Not only have the size, scale and dynamics of cities changed locally, nationally, and internationally, the way we experience, imagine and model them has also undergone significant transformations. In Brazil, urban planning has often been a highly disputed field with little accomplishments. Historically, Brasília illustrates the strict interpretation of modern functionalism and Curitiba exemplifies a city articulated in fragments and smaller scales. Despite the critical implications of such historic choices, large metropolitan areas such as São Paulo have not had the same opportunity. Old methods merge with new practices and images that circulate around the globe in the complex political and physical configuration of Brazilian metropolises. The time of totalitarian and universalizing utopias of modern planning is gone, and it has been replaced by more fragmented practices. However, these more limited forms of urbanization still respond to economic, social and cultural conditions and practices that are specific to each situation. These conditions are not just consequence of economic processes, they also have a constitutive role in the struggles that define and redefine contemporary cities.

One of the questions that remain open in the process of transnational circulation of urban practices and models is to what extent the current transformation of São Paulo as a global city – even if a marginal one – is a concrete reality or an ideological discourse that legitimizes local processes of centralization of resources for real estate development. Despite the attachment to global flows, the increasingly harsh reality of daily life, social representation and forms of collective and subjective identification in these cities are still mostly defined by local and national conditions. It is impossible to imagine and to implement large-scale urban projects in Brazilian cities catering only to middle and upper classes without the implementation of strict mechanisms of social and spatial control, surveillance, and exclusion. If real democratic mechanisms are not created to counter-balance the privatization of urban development and the restriction of access to social and legal rights, megacities like São Paulo will continuously experience the Sisyphean task of dealing with opposite effects in its efforts of urban improvement.

The future perspectives of São Paulo may look bleak, but there are also new elements in the struggles over the formation global urban centralities that provide the possibility for new

insights. One of the positive aspects of this process is the fact that there have been very few times in the life of the city with so much open debate about the uneven condition of its urbanization. The impact of global forces in the city has created new conflicts but it has also shed new light in the problems that were already in place. As incipient and fragile as this democratic practice may be, it seems to be a good start to raise questions and to articulate alternatives for the urban dynamics of marginal global cities in general and São Paulo in particular. The fading dichotomies between urban center and periphery, and between local and global spheres introduce new elements in the game. It is not as much a question of choice between the utopian vision of plans or the catastrophic situation of reality but about alternatives that emerge from the disjunctions between them.

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End notes

- 1 Jordi Borja, the Catalan urbanist who worked as an influential international consultant for the downtown renovation project often used the term “benign contamination,” to describe how the concentrating investments in strategic places of the city would benefit adjacent areas. See BORJA & CASTELLS, 1997.
- 2 The plan envisioned by ProCentro was tied with the request for a large loan from the Inter-American Development Bank See the plan and loan proposal at <http://www.iadb.org/exr/doc98/apr/br1479e.pdf>
- 3 For more details on the megatower see Lima, 2000, p.12.
- 4 Prefeitura Municipal de São Paulo, “Lofts podem transformar o centro da cidade, diz prefeita”, in http://www6.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/noticias/sec/comunicacao_e_informacao/2004/04/0005
- 5 According to Alex Thiele, director of Paulista Viva Association, the urban project that served as a reference was the refurbishment of Champs-Élysées in Paris, following a similar model to the revitalization of the historic downtown (interview with Alex Thiele, May 2001).
- 6 The plan proposes an urban open space along the avenue that functions according to mechanisms that outlaw public demonstrations and reinforces city inspection that results in the persecution of street vendors. See Paulista Viva (1997).
- 7 See Frugoli, 2000, p. 190.
- 8 Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas has been one of the most prolific voices in investigating the spatial and physical development of megacities around the world. His work about sprawling American and Chinese cities, and more recently African cities, illustrates how intense the restructuring of capitalism has been to these cities. However, his fascination with this kind of dispersing urbanization should be seen with caution, because it tends to reproduce a totalizing approach to cities the usually external and a-historical condition of his observations and diminish the critical potential of his work. See Koolhaas et al., 2001.
- 9 See Vainer 1999:1.
- 10 Even the inclusion of new urban subjects in these metropolises is problematic. Following Michael Dear’s argument, they can be separated in two major categories. On the one hand, we find groups and individuals who are integrated in the new economy and who enjoy relative long-term socio-economic security. On the other hand, we find those groups who are irregularly connected to current economic activities, and who live with great degree of uncertainty. These latter groups are more vulnerable to economic and cultural marginalization because of their limited access to resources, and more vulnerable to criminalization because of social intolerance and the dismantlement of the welfare state. See Dear 2000, p.152.
- 11 This geographic configuration of centrality and marginality is described in Saskia Sassen’s evaluation of the problems of globalization. Sassen, 1998.