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Design Exchanges in Mid-Twentieth Century Buenos Aires

The Programme Parque Almirante Brown and its Process of Creative Appropriation

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Summary

This article offers a critical analysis of planning and housing design in mid-twentieth century Buenos Aires, Argentina, within the wider global context of modern design and architecture. In particular, the article focuses on an urban development programme, Parque Almirante Brown (PAB), and on its design perspectives towards slums, shantytowns and social housing. The PAB creatively intertwined elements from different design and planning traditions, including urban design approaches fostered by the *Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne* (CIAM).

This article argues that the way in which the PAB incorporated these approaches implied a selection of concepts that responded to the government’s political agenda. In other words, it was only through their intersection with local political anxieties that international ideas were materialised in the actual design of the programme. Specifically with regard to informal settlements, the PAB followed modern architecture conceptions based on slum clearance. Simultaneously, it filtered-out those ideas which celebrated the vernacular, registered positive aspects in slum life, or granted agency to grassroots groups. Thus, despite contemporaneous discussions which engaged with bottom-up participation, such as those of the Team 10, the PAB ultimately proposed the eradication of the shantytowns and the forceful displacement of their inhabitants.

Keywords: Buenos Aires, housing design, modernism, Parque Almirante Brown, urban design, vernacular

Introduction

This article offers a critical analysis of planning and housing design in mid-twentieth century Buenos Aires, Argentina, within the wider global context of modern design and architecture. In particular, the article focuses on an urban development programme, Parque Almirante Brown (PAB; literally 'Admiral Brown Park'), and on its design perspectives towards slums, shantytowns and social housing. The argument is developed in a twofold manner. First, it is proposed that the PAB creatively intertwined elements from different design and planning traditions, while simultaneously representing a culmination of the local debate concerning the South West of Buenos Aires. More specifically, the PAB embraced high-modernist urban design approaches inspired by the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM; International Congresses of Modern Architecture), and simultaneously incorporated elements of inter-American planning discourse as promoted in specialised meetings and conferences during the 1950s.

Second, the article contends that the way how the PAB incorporated elements from the cited approaches implied the selection and filtering out of concepts, in line with the national government's agenda. In other words, while the PAB engaged with international discussions of urban and housing design, it was only the intersection of these with local political anxieties that actually informed it. Regarding informal settlements specifically, the PAB followed conceptions originally promoted both by the CIAM and inter-American discussions which entailed slum clearance and zoning for modern housing and urban development. At the same time, PAB housing design engaged with select architectural features inspired by the modern architecture of the contemporaneous Team 10. However, it filtered-out those Team 10 ideas which celebrated the vernacular, registered positive aspects in slum life, or granted agency to grassroots groups; as well as the Inter-American recommendations to support self-construction. Thus, despite contemporaneous discussions which could have led to an engagement with bottom-up participation, the PAB ultimately proposed the eradication of the shantytowns and the forceful displacement of their inhabitants. The PAB was a long term project carried out during two elected governments and a dictatorship within the international

context of the Cold War. Of the design approaches mentioned, this article will focus on the PAB's engagement with high-modernist CIAM and Team 10 conceptions.

This article contributes to current discussions in design history by incorporating a case study located in the Global South, normally excluded from mainstream narratives, especially in English language; by presenting a non-canonical example of architectural and urban design contextualised in its political and social dimensions; and by analysing a modern case of anonymous authorship designed by the technical team of a local government institution (the architects' names were never publicly revealed). Thus, the lack of information about the designers' biographies interestingly leads to a detachment from more traditional, Pevsnerian, approaches focused on individual architects.[1] In this way, the article helps to both expand and redefine the boundaries of design studies, these conceptualised as the study of 'the conception and planning of the artificial',[2] supporting Jilly Traganou's argument for their engagement with architectural studies.[3] Simultaneously, it contributes to the recent global turn in the discipline of design history, and to an emerging 'genuinely global'[4] line of inquiry in Sarah Lichtman's words.

The PAB has received extremely scarce, if any, scholarly attention. This research gap is surprising in a context where the South West of Buenos Aires has recently moved to the forefront of the urban discussion. The main studies to partially address the PAB are Andrea Catenazzi and Teresa Boselli's 'Los arquitectos proyectistas y las políticas oficiales de vivienda' and Leandro Benmergui's 'The Alliance for Progress and Housing Policy in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires in the 1960s', both focused on housing.[5] While Catenazzi and Boselli analyse the role of architects as housing designers within public offices, in contrast to private practice, Benmergui highlights the PAB transnational dimension under the Cold War. Regarding the appropriation and use of modern architecture ideas in Latin America, in contrast, there is a wider spectrum of works, including Jorge Francisco Liernur and Pablo Pschepiurca's *La red austral* and Valerie Fraser's *Building the New World*.[6] This article contributes to such expanding field by offering a critical analysis of the way in which foreign ideas of modern

design were creatively, and also politically, appropriated through the study of a case which is yet to receive thorough scholarly consideration.

Parque Almirante Brown

Parque Almirante Brown was a municipal programme of sanitisation of the marshland areas of South-West of Buenos Aires carried out between 1961 and the mid-1970s. The South of the city had traditionally been the site of industry and working class residence, as it consisted of lower land exposed to regular floods. The South-West, in particular, was a floodplain which had been left largely undeveloped until the 1960s. In addition, from the 1920s it partially became an open-air garbage dump. When, by the mid-twentieth century, increasing migration to the city concided with a saturated housing market, the vacant grounds of the South West became a key location for the lowest-income migrants to settle, creating or expanding shantytowns. The PAB programme covered a wide area of the South-West within the Capital City district, roughly equivalent to the current Comuna 8 (Fig. 1). It is worth noting that 'Parque Almirante Brown' was the term used to refer to both an urban programme and the area it comprised, but not literally to a park as its Spanish name could seem to indicate.

The PAB proposed to drain the South West marshlands by creating two regulating lakes (transporting soil from its lowest to its highest grounds) and by completing the channelling underground of a brook that crossed the floodplains (Fig. 2). Following these interventions, the grounds were zoned to include leisure facilities (sports areas, a zoo, a theatre, an open-air exhibitions site, commercial and gastronomic areas); educational premises (primary and secondary schools, plus a university); buildings for public uses such as a hospital, a police station, and a fire station; and, importantly, housing (Fig. 3).[7] Only a few of the former were built. Regarding shantytowns, the PAB design proposed their full demolition and the relocation of their residents. The PAB was designed and implemented by the Municipality's housing department, the Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda (CMV; Municipal Housing Commission). In addition, it received partial funding from the Inter-American Development Bank in 1965.

The PAB can be read as the culmination of a series of debates regarding the South West of Buenos Aires. Draining and urbanising the marshlands had been an aspiration of the national state and the Municipality of Buenos Aires since early in the twentieth century, with some proposals designing the area as a set of fringe parks (such as Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier's in 1925 or Manuel González Maseda's in 1935) and with others regarding it as an extension of the urban fabric of its surroundings.[8] It was the former perspective that prevailed in the long run. Amongst those proposals, a sequence of CIAM-inspired designs started gaining increasing importance. The first of them was the 'Plan Director para Buenos Aires', elaborated by Juan Kurchan and Jorge Ferrari Hardoy in collaboration with Swiss architect Le Corbusier between 1937 and 1940.[9]It proposed the densification of the urban fabric towards the city centre and the riverbank. Regarding the South-West, it envisaged a large park, the Parque del Sur, echoing Forestier's and Maseda's ideas. The Plan Director followed the ideas promoted in the Athens Charter (the key document condensing the CIAM views) through its emphasis on sunlight and ventilation in all inhabited spaces; its management of urban growth through high population densities materialised in high-rise blocks; and the use of zoning.[10] The Plan Director was incorporated into the state sphere in 1947 through a municipal department especially created to this aim, the 'Estudio del Plan de Buenos Aires' (EPBA; Plan for Buenos Aires Office).[11] The activities of the EPBA only lasted until 1949, and the plan that it produced was never realised. Its work was, however, vital for the advancement of debates about urban design in Buenos Aires, including the conception of the PAB.

In the context of these initiatives, a particularly important design for the South West was the scheme produced by architects Ítala Fulvia Villa and Horacio Nazar in 1945, which studied the area in depth and provided a detailed proposal combining green spaces, public utilities and housing.[12] Villa and Nazar's design was the first urban design specifically focused on the floodplains. It followed a CIAM approach in its use of zoning and housing design, simultaneously echoing earlier conceptions of the South West as an expanse of green space on the city's margins. Villa and Nazar's plan was rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the

South West in contrast to the aforementioned initiatives which represented it in extremely vague terms.

The ideas, aspirations and concerns about the South West narrated thus far would only be materialised in the 1960s with the implementation of the PAB programme. Indeed, the PAB was itself embedded within a modern master plan for Greater Buenos Aires, the 'Plan Regulador de Buenos Aires' (PRBA; Regulatory Plan of Buenos Aires).[13] The municipal office developing the PRBA included key members of the previously dismantled EPBA, which it took as a point of departure. However, the PRBA went beyond what the EPBA had proposed in the 1940s: while the EPBA had sought to concentrate the city in the coast through high-rise blocks, the PRBA proposed decentralisation into local centres; it studied issues such as transport in greater detail; and it prescribed localised proposals for areas such as the South-West. In fact, as argued by Liernur and Pschepiurca, the proposal previously advanced by the EPBA had not been an urban plan as such but rather an architectural design of metropolitan scale.[14] In this sense, the PRBA can be read as the first modern masterplan for Buenos Aires. The office in charge of the PRBA was dismantled in 1966, before the completion of the plan. The PAB programme, however, continued to be developed since it was implemented by another department, the CMV.

The creation of the PAB followed indications given by the PRBA in 1961.[15] Amongst other things, the PRBA prescribed the 'saneamiento' of the South West marshlands: a term whose scope was never clearly traced, but which implied, in practical terms, the draining and clearing of the grounds and their management through the assignment of land uses. Thus, the PAB design reflected the high modernist imaginary of the city in a series of aspects. First, it was based on a concern about the city's lack of green spaces (and corresponding lack of sunlight and ventilation), and it presented itself as a solution. Second, it proceeded to zoning, i.e., assigning specific functions such as lodging, working, leisure and circulation to urban land, as promoted by the CIAM Athens Charter. Third, for the function of housing, the PAB design took the form of high-rise pavilions floating over green areas. Finally, in its broader

assumptions and gestures, the PAB shared the CIAM design approach of sweeping away existing features to make room for a new environment considered better suited to modern times. The idea of rupture with the past was, in fact, crucial for the Modern Movement – as it was for the artistic avant-gardes closely related to it – both regarding past architectural styles as well as spaces which were considered inefficient or unhealthy.[16]

Unsurprisingly, and in line with the early-CIAM approach towards European slums, the PAB aimed at the complete removal of shantytowns and their replacement with green areas and modern housing. However, PAB housing was offered to families with higher budgets than those inhabiting shantytowns, who were thus very likely to be displaced. In fact, the alternative accommodation offered to evicted residents was based on their income. It must be remembered that, regarding *îlots insalubres* or slums, the Athens Charter specifically stated that they should be 'demolished and replaced by green surfaces: adjacent neighbourhoods will become sanitised'.[17] No consideration was given, however, to the future of their inhabitants.

The forced eviction of shantytown residents was not new in Buenos Aires. Already in 1956 the first state plan to address shantytowns, the Plan de Emergencia (PE; Emergency Plan), had prescribed their removal and the relocation of their residents into purpose-built social housing.[18] This plan regarded residents as indolent and uneducated, and therefore responsible for their squalid living conditions. Thus, the housing units designed by the PE were conceived of as 'adaptation dwellings', as it was argued that residents needed to undergo a process of re-education. This idea of shantytown eradication, framed by a view of shantytown residents as undeserving poor, was echoed in later pieces of local legislation during the period 1958-1962.[19] From the same basic premises (although phrased in gentler language) the PAB judged that shantytown residents possessed different 'psychological, cultural or moral characteristics'[20] than those living elsewhere in the city, and that they would benefit from being forcefully mixed with other low-income families such as those relocated from tenements.

The housing offered by the PAB was structured into two main schemes. One was the complex Lugano I-II, designed as high-density pavilions set within large green areas (Fig. 4).[21] Lugano I-II was presented as the housing 'of the year 2000', with a discourse which

emphasised modernity and comfort.[22] Second, the CMV had purchased land in a surrounding district, La Matanza, to construct a neighbourhood for evicted shantytown residents: Ciudad General Belgrano (CGB; General Belgrano City).[23] Both complexes were composed of a repetition of minimum dwelling units designed for optimum ventilation and sunlight, with separate bedrooms for different family members and modern (though tight) living rooms, kitchens and bathrooms (Fig. 5). The complexes included common facilities such as shops, sports centres and clubs.

To stay in the PAB area families needed to earn enough to afford the instalments for purchasing units in Lugano I-II. These were subsidised, but still largely unaffordable for the majority of the shantytown population. The alternative option was to buy a unit further away in CGB at a lower price. We learn from later documents, however, that 20% of the shantytown population were eventually able to buy Lugano I-II units, and only 30% bought those in CGB.[24] The situation of those unable to afford any of the aforementioned options was not addressed in the PAB: in 1965 the CMV stated that '[t]hose who for some reason did not have enough income to purchase units in Ciudad General Belgrano will be notified and *orientated towards other particular solutions*'.[25] The ambiguity implied in this phrase is not clarified at any point in the document, and this is the only mention of families in this situation. This meant, in practice, that after 1968 they were sent to small and extremely precarious units located in the city's margins, which in turn developed into new shantytowns.[26]

Shantytown residents contested eradication discourses and practices by organising local committees by shantytown and working with a city-wide shantytown organisation. Some political parties, such as the Communists and the Socialists, supported them in this endeavour, while the parties in government maintained more ambiguous positions.[27] As it will be explained, the preferred party of the working classes was proscribed throughout the period 1955-1973. Dictatorships, meanwhile, promoted eradication and harassed shantytown groups. The families forced into precarious units were largely trapped in them in a context of rising unemployment from the mid-1970s onwards.

CIAM ideas in Argentina: Team 10 in the South-West?

It has been argued that the housing produced in the PAB followed the architectural premises of Team 10 (a group of young modernist architects who reacted against the mainstream tenets of the Modern Movement in the late 1950s) through its design for Lugano I-II.[28] There are design elements in Lugano which can certainly be understood to have been inspired by Team 10, such as the inter-connection of otherwise isolated pavilions via the use of internal and elevated streets; the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic; or the attempt to create a new urban landscape.[29] Indeed, incorporating the considerations of a contemporaneous architectural approach into the PAB design may have been a natural step. However, it is equally possible to argue that there is a fundamental gap between the Team 10 and the PAB approaches which does not reside in their design outputs, or in the architectural components used, but in their very conceptual premises. In fact, the Team 10 had developed a rich celebration of vernacular traditions, the role of the user, and the liveliness of slums, together with a re-conceptualization of urban design that prioritised human experience over strict functional zoning, which was entirely absent from the PAB.[30]

Starting in 1953, and gaining further momentum throughout the 1960s, young architects affiliated to the CIAM such as Aldo Van Eyck, Georges Candilis and Shadrach Woods, as well as Alison and Peter Smithson, started to heavily question the modern architectural principles sustained by the Athens Charter, which they considered overly dehumanising and too orthodox in their approach to functionalism. Gathering together in 1953, the group set out to organise the 10th CIAM conference, which led to its name as Team 10. The team was heterogeneous, but held together by its members' shared understanding of urban space, their approach towards urban design, and their criticism of the earlier CIAM perspective.

Team 10 understood space as the expression of human behaviour. This led to a radical shift in the CIAM consideration of nineteenth-century slums (in this case, in reference to overcrowding in central areas) and vernacular architecture. Instead of conceiving of slums as the epitome of unhygienic living conditions, disorder and lack of efficiency, for example, Van Eyck described them as 'the first manifestation of a population which escaped anonymity and

[...] intended to make recognised its own right to define itself in relation to total space',[31] contrasting them with the sterile modern designs that were the normal outcome of slum clearance. Likewise, vernacular or spontaneous architecture was read as a community's spatial expression. In fact, in the context of a wave of independence movements across emerging African nations, a number of architects had developed an interest in vernacular architecture. This can be seen in van Eyck's visits to Africa (1947-52 and 1960) and his writings on Dogon and Pueblo architecture;[32] in the work undertaken by Candilis, Woods, Michel Écochard and others in Morocco;[33] or, later (beyond the Team 10), in the success of Bernard Rudofsky's Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Architecture without Architects*.[34]

Écochard, Candilis and Woods's work in Morocco was additionally concerned with the challenge of housing large numbers of people, in response to accommodation needs, through non-alienating ways of modern design: 'l'habitat pour le plus grand nombre' (housing for the greatest number).[35] The main preoccupation here concerned how to provide a solution which reflected the scale of the problem while at the same time leading to humanised environments.[36] Van Eyck opened up a similar debate regarding the 'aesthetics of number', focused on understanding the individual as a means of understanding the whole: 'Quantity cannot be humanized [...] as long as we don't know what a large number of people really is, or for that matter, what a single person really is'.[37] Finally, it is possible to argue that Team 10's enthusiastic attention to architectural practices outside the West, such as African vernacular or squatter settlements, implied a turning-point regarding the values pursued by architects. Indeed, although some of these conceptions may appear as romanticised today, they were ground breaking in their context, and implicitly questioned the very place of the West in the hierarchy of production of architectural meaning.

In addition to re-casting conceptions of slums, vernacular architecture, and mass-scale housing, Team 10 challenged early CIAM ideas about urban space. Cities were not structured, for Team 10, according to four abstract functions, but articulated instead on the basis of increasing scales of human association as perceived by the individual: family, street, district and city.[38] Slightly later, in the late 1960s, a concern for user participation started to gain

momentum, as can be seen in the work of architects such as Ralph Erskine, Giancarlo di Carlo or Lucien Kroll (the first two related to the Team 10).[39]

It is difficult to read any of these perspectives in the design, the text or the approach of the PAB. In fact, ideas such as the scales of association and the aesthetics of number, or the interest in the vernacular, do not seem to feature in a design such as Lugano I-II, and are also notably absent from the official discourse about the project which emphasised efficiency and infrastructure. Even more strikingly, the Team 10's celebration of slums and its interest in spontaneous architecture sit completely at odds with the PAB's contempt for shantytown residents and its eradication perspective. More broadly, Team 10's careful approach to the user; the conception of users' identities as reflected in, while continuously constructed by, their built environments; or the celebration of users' appropriation and spatial practices are difficult to read not only in the concepts underpinning Lugano I-II but also in its centralised process of design and construction. Beyond housing, Team 10's questioning of the early-CIAM principles of urban functioning remained absent from the PAB, which instead used zoning.

The relative absence of Team 10 concepts within 1960s Buenos Aires state urban and housing design may at first sight seem surprising. After a few decades of debate and its incorporation into social housing during 1945-1955, modern design had secured a fairly comfortable place as the architecture of the state.[40] However, as we have seen, state programmes such as those implemented in the South-West tended to work on the basis of a high modernist approach rather than a revised version of the modern city as advanced by the Team 10. In this regard, the PAB can be considered anachronistic to the discussions of its era. This preference responded to the functionality of the early CIAM for state agendas. For example, had it suited the state perspective, the Team 10s' celebration of self-construction, read as a reflection of human culture, could have been used when designing for the South-West. Although the South West shantytowns did not correspond exactly to the vernacular architecture that Team 10 members had observed in rural native towns, and they likewise differed from European slums, their qualities of self-construction and the contrast of their spatialities with repetitive design could have been used in the PAB for incorporating a wider

range of responses to local conditions than large-scale top-down housing. In fact, in a context where vast solutions were necessary but where it was vital to take into account social networks and to avoid alienated environments, the Team 10 questioning of the mass scale was particularly relevant. Engaging the user could have also ensured that shantytown residents were well served by the programme, which was ultimately not the case. Finally, the Team 10 implicit revision of Western cultural prerogatives could have served in Buenos Aires to de-link from pre-established planning assumptions and observe local issues anew. Nevertheless, considerations such as these were not incorporated nor mentioned. The Argentine state and the Buenos Aires municipality, in fact, were mainly concerned about the control of non-compliant populations, and aimed at linking themselves to the imaginary of a functionalist, efficient environment. By taking into consideration the governments' anxieties and agendas, therefore, it can be argued that it was precisely *because* of their questioning of hierarchies and excessive simplification that Team 10 approaches were ignored by the PAB, which preferred to stick to an early CIAM vision.

The selections and decisions made in the PAB are thus not surprising given its political context, which was structured around the proscription of the majority party, Peronism, entailing the repression of working class' agency and voice. In fact, the political situation in Argentina between 1955 and 1983 was extremely unstable, with predominance of military governments, or governments placed under tight military control.

In sync with the rest of Latin America, Argentina had thrived economically since the development of its export economy in the 1870s. The export of agricultural and livestock products funded the import of manufactured goods. At the same time the country received large waves of international immigration from Europe. This model, however, proved unsustainable in the face of the 1929 international crisis, which led to the gradual re-structuring of the national economy toward a model of import substitutions. This fuelled the expansion of the consumption goods industry and resulted in further urban growth, now largely facilitated through internal migrations from rural areas to larger cities. The

government of Juan Domingo Perón (1945-1955) deepened the industrialisation process and sought to redistribute its benefits. However, the opposition brought him down in 1955 when a coup d'état replaced his government with a heterogeneous coalition, sending Perón personally into exile and proscribing his party and its symbols.[41]

It was against this background that the PAB programme was conceived of and implemented. Three different governments ruled Argentina between 1961 and 1973, with the commonality however of the prescription of Peronism, and with it an explicit policy of silencing the working classes. Perón's administration had however left a lasting memory in those classes, who remained Peronist throughout the decades that followed. Thus, the governments elected during the proscription of Peronism enjoyed limited legitimacy as they were not the real choice of the electorate.

The elections called in 1958 were won by Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962). The PAB was originally fashioned during his administration. Frondizi aimed to expand industrialisation to heavy industry, and to exploit Argentina's oil reserves. To achieve the latter he opened the country to foreign investment. This model, termed developmentalism, was maintained (albeit with alterations) until 1976. It was supported by development theory in the social sciences, which regarded cities as a key agent to induce 'modernisation' in Latin America, understood as the advancement of industry and the gradual abandonment of traditional (especially rural) cultural practices.[42] However, lacking popular support and distrusted by the military, Frondizi was overthrown by a further coup d'état in 1962.

José María Guido, head of the Senate, completed Frondizi's term in office, in an attempt by the military to appear faithful to constitutional rule. Arturo Illia (1963-1966) won the following elections. With Peronism prohibited, however, the legitimacy of his government was extremely weak. Illia implemented policies of nationalisation and social redistribution trying to win the working class support. During his government the PAB started proper, first with municipal funds and after 1965 with an Inter-American Development Bank loan. However, Illia was not able to build lasting alliances to back up his position. Criticised by both

Peronists and anti-Peronists, he was overthrown in 1966 by the fourth coup d'état of the century.

The dictator that followed, Juan Carlos Onganía, took power with ambitious rhetoric but without a clear government plan. The official discourse now explicitly invoked a narrow conception of Western values closely linked to Christian civilisation, anti-Communism and reduced individual freedom.[43] Real wages declined with protests initially suffocated by political repression. By 1969, however, popular discontent had grown enough to lead to a massive uprising in the city of Córdoba. What ensued was a rapidly growing spiral of popular mobilisation. In June 1970 Onganía had to hand power to other members of the military and in 1971, in an attempt to achieve social calm, the government lifted the ban on Peronism. In March 1973 Perón's candidate, Héctor Cámpora, won a national election, and in October of the same year he was replaced by Perón.

Given this political context, it becomes clear why the CMV preferred an early CIAM approach when designing the PAB. Whether under tutelary democracies or dictatorships, the state departments implementing plans during the 1960s were working in a context where the population's choices and political participation were not valued as a priority. This translated into the planning field: why would a government that aimed at subduing the working classes value, or even incorporate, grassroots, non-compliant architecture? Also natural was the persistence of epistemological hierarchies regarding Western thought: indeed a government devoted to the advancement of Western values (as the dictatorships explicitly were, and also implicitly the elected governments) held no interest in engaging with a design approach that may challenge their universality. Regarding the mass scale, the PAB was presented in terms of efficiency: grasping the complexity of the urban situation and the subtleties of different human associations therefore did not rank high in its priorities. In addition, large construction companies devoted resources to lobby governments during this period, influencing state decisions that economically benefited them such as the production of large numbers of repeated units.[44] Finally, it must be remembered that, following the series of plans developed since the Plan Director, early-CIAM urban design was by the 1960s fully consolidated as a

technical option. The governments which ruled Argentina were anxious to justify their positions in power. Thus, returning to well-established intellectual tools rather than experimenting with newer approaches responded better to their attempt to portray themselves as the epitome of modernity, effectiveness and order.[45]

Influence/Selection/Transformation

Jorge Francisco Liernur has discussed the concepts of 'selection' and 'transformation' in opposition to that of 'influence' when analysing the ways in which North-Atlantic conceptualisations were (re-)articulated in Argentina. According to Liernur's argument, the incorporation of foreign ideas and practices within a local peripheral canon does not entail a passive process of reception, or 'influence', but rather the careful selection of only some of the conceptual features produced elsewhere.[46] Liernur underlines the autonomy and creativity embodied in this practice. Thus, he questions traditional approaches to Argentine architectural history which read the local production as mere imperfect copying – a conceptual scheme that he calls 'headquarter offices/branch'.[47] From Liernur's perspective, therefore, the incorporation of modern conceptions into Argentine architecture did not consist of the mechanical transcription of foreign constructs but of a creative action through which a new type of construct was produced. As part of a broader discussion of Argentine culture, Beatriz Sarlo developed a similar argument in relation to writer Jorge Luis Borges. Sarlo observed that Borges plays with different types of foreign influence, free from the constraints that history and cultural tradition place on authors in their original contexts. In doing so, Borges re-articulates the Argentine literary tradition: '...the re-arrangement of national [Argentine] cultural traditions allows him to trim, choose and go over the foreign literatures without prejudices'.[48] Thus, the case of Borges exemplifies the ways in which, according to Sarlo, artists at the (so-called) peripheries enjoy the freedom to choose and experiment with external influences in a playful and creative fashion.

In *La red austral* Liernur and Pschepiurca go one step further by comparing the incorporation of an external element – in this case an artist/architect, Le Corbusier – into a

local milieu with a chemical transformation, where a reagent is introduced into a given substance, thus leading to the synthesis of a new product.[49] With this analogy Liernur and Pschepiurca are stressing the fact that both elements are active in the process, and both emerge from it transformed. Thus, in their analysis of Le Corbusier's 1929 visit to Argentina, these authors are just as interested in its repercussions in the Buenos Aires architectural milieu as they are in its effect on Le Corbusier's thinking and production. Along the same lines, in other writings, Liernur analyses how post-war British architects incorporated elements of Brazilian architecture, such as the brise-soleil, into their designs;[50] or the influence of North African architectural styles for the adoption of the flat roof in Western Modern Architecture.[51]

Liernur's approach is particularly useful for understanding the process of incorporation of CIAM ideas into the PAB, since it highlights the fact that concepts originated in other contexts are incorporated selectively into new designs, and transformed through the same process of incorporation. However, it leaves the hierarchies between periphery and centre, as well as the political implications of the practices analysed, insufficiently questioned. Indeed, the political, social and economic contexts where the cited selections and transformations took place were those of an imbalance of power, both internationally and within nations. Across the Americas, the adoption of cultural practices originating in Europe was not accidental but was, instead, the result of a long-term active process of military, political and economic colonisation. Hispanic America, in particular, witnessed not only the imposition of religious, cultural and social practices by those holding military supremacy but also the systematic destruction of indigenous lives and cultures. The appropriation and adaptation of cultural constructs, therefore, did not represent a process equally shared by the various intervening parties but rather one closely linked to the exercise of power. Furthermore, in demographic terms, the Spanish conquest left a legacy in which those in power were culturally – and often ethnically – identified with the European.[52] Following the independence of what today are Hispanic American nations, the role of local élites became central to the articulation of national cultural milieus. Thus, when seeking to develop, transform or enrich national cultures, those élites returned to the European tradition because it held for them a

position of prestige and represented an effective tool with which to reinforce their own symbolic power. These tensions were reflected in the spatial structuring of Hispanic American cities and the distribution of population within them not only during the Colonial era but also after independence.[53] In the case of Argentina, following independence the Spanish cultural legacy was rejected by the local élite, and it was therefore a French cultural model that was adopted, later joined by the Anglo-Saxon.[54] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, alarmed by the massive affluence of South European immigrants whom they regarded as uncultivated, those same Argentine élites partially reclaimed colonial cultural heritage in an attempt at differentiating themselves from those recently arrived, as can be seen through the emergence of Neocolonial architecture, amongst other manifestations.[55]

It is thus possible to see that the discussions, appropriations, transformations and selections related to the modern city in Argentina took place in a context crossed by tensions of political and cultural power. First, we note a material imbalance: that of the larger economic and military power of North-Atlantic countries in contrast to Latin American ones, pre-dated in former centuries by the open colonisation by Portugal and Spain. Simultaneously, and related to the former point, a symbolic imbalance was in place: ideas and works produced in the North carried, for decision-making actors, a greater or more relevant semantic power than those produced in the South. In relation to this, it is worth noting that internal debates and contradictions within North-Atlantic narratives (such as, for example, within modern architecture, the debate between high modernism and the Team 10) were often ignored when incorporated in the South. This simplification followed social or political reasons relevant to each case.[56] However, it simultaneously deprived the narratives of their complexity, and the appropriation process of its potential transformative power. In other words, while the internal tensions of modern architecture (the ambiguity of colonial discourse, in postcolonial terms) could have produced new conceptions and new agencies when interrogated from and used by Buenos Aires practice, the process of selection undertaken by the PAB instead perpetuated existing power structures.[57]

Conclusion

By the time shantytowns were expanding in Buenos Aires to accommodate increasing migrations to the city modern urban planning was gaining momentum throughout the Americas and worldwide. Mid-twentieth century Argentine planning synthesised an existing tradition of CIAM-inspired urban design for Buenos Aires with local concerns (such as the sanitisation of the South West) and the state position held towards shantytowns. In other words, it incorporated ideas originally produced in other geographical and socio-economic contexts and applied them to the local territory – a process which was not free of tensions.

Through its study and contextualisation of historical evidence this article has shown that the incorporation of ideas promoted by the CIAM into the PAB was part of a longer genealogy of plans for South West Buenos Aires, and that it filtered out some relevant concepts which were discussed internationally. These decisions were driven by the broader state (both national and municipal) agenda. More specifically, from those debates held by the modern architectural movement, the PAB programme recovered ideas such as slum clearance, the densification of target locations, urban structuring and land use, and modes of housing design attentive to light and sun in the form of high-rise pavilions. It ignored, however, crucial aspects such as the celebration of users' input and the value attributed to architectural vernaculars, which had been developed by architects such as those of the Team 10 as an antidote to the potentially dehumanising aspects of modernism. None of these discussions were used to reconceptualise the role of shantytowns in the city. Shantytowns were, instead, subject to eradication since they did not comply with the idea of modernity that the state sustained.

The adoption of foreign concepts into the PAB served the local authorities but not the local residents (especially those living in shantytowns). It may also be argued that, to a certain extent, it did not serve the local milieu of planners and architects either. In fact, although the Buenos Aires planning tradition matured through the design of the series of initiatives which culminated in the PAB, it was not faced with the challenge of synthesising a Modern planning approach fully able to respond to residents's needs. In this way local professionals ultimately missed the opportunity to incorporate voices dissident to that of centralised power.

Team 10 approaches never gained political prominence in Buenos Aires, which is to say that their prominence as discourse within the architectural milieu never permeated the field of local authority planning. Having said that, however, it is possible to argue that the Team 10 had an *indirect* influence on Argentine interventions in shantytowns through the recommendations of the 1976 United Nations conference Habitat I, where British architect John FC Turner played a leading role. Self-built housing was increasingly celebrated throughout the 1950s and 1960s in the Americas, and Turner's work in Peru crystallised these approaches.[58] Turner played a key role in Habitat I, which marked the moment when self-construction consolidated as a United Nations recommendation for governments. Turner had been trained in London, and had closely collaborated with Giancarlo di Carlo. Starting from 1976 and continuing until the present day, then, the idea of site improvements gradually replaced that of slum clearance in the views of local and national authorities.

The selective use, appropriation and recasting of international discussions by governments anxious to control the population and to portray themselves as champions of economic and industrial progress can be read through the ideas of selection and transformation advanced by Liernur and Pschepiurca. However, any design exchange occurs within a specific political context. In the case of the PAB, the proscription of the majority party and the Western bias of the successive governments reflected a deeply entrenched disregard for people's agency and spontaneous housing construction. The creative practice of selectively incorporating conceptual elements produced for other urban contexts and transforming them, and the intervening parties, in the process thus became, in the PAB, a backward-looking operation that excluded those elements which could have entailed innovation. In other words, in its creative process of adaptation of modern design constructs, the PAB neglected a possible re-conceptualisation of the shantytowns and embarked instead on an initiative that would displace and disadvantage their residents.

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[3] Jilly Traganou, 'Architectural and Spatial Design Studies: Inscribing Architecture in Design Studies', *Design History* 22, no. 2 (2009): 173–181.

[4] Sarah Lichtman, 'Reconsidering the History of Design Survey', *Design History* 22, no. 4 (2009): 341–350, 347.

[5] Catenazzi and Boselli, op. cit.; Leandro Benmergui, 'The Alliance for Progress and Housing Policy in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires in the 1960s', *Urban History* 36, special issue no. 2 (2009): 303–26.

[6] Jorge Francisco Liernur and Pablo Pschepiurca, *La red austral: Obras y proyectos de Le Corbusier y sus discípulos en la Argentina (1924-1965)*, Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes/Prometeo, 2008; Valerie Fraser, *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America 1930-1960*, London Verso, 2000.

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[9] Liernur and Pschepiurca, op. cit., 177–218.

[10] *La Charte d'Athènes*, Paris: Plon, 1943, 1979 Kraus reprint. See also Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, London: MIT Press, 2000.

[11] Anahi Ballent, *Las huellas de la política: vivienda, ciudad, peronismo en Buenos Aires, 1943-1955*, Bernal, Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes/Prometeo, 2005, 230–235; Liernur and Pschepiurca, op. cit., 75–236.

[12] Ítala Fulvia Villa and Horacio Nazar, 'Urbanización del Bajo de Flores', *Revista de Información Municipal*, Memoria Sintética 1943-44-45 (1945): 637–673.

[13] Ordenanza Municipal 14.627/1958, *Boletín Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* 10,959, Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1958).

[14] Liernur and Pschepiurca, op. cit., 235.

[15] Organización del Plan Regulador, *Saneamiento, urbanización y desarrollo del Parque Almirante Brown y su zona de influencia*.

[16] Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning* (New York: Dover, 1987), 5–12.

[17] *La Charte d'Athènes*, 141–142, my translation.

[18] Comisión Nacional de la Vivienda, *Plan de Emergencia: Informe elevado al Poder Ejecutivo Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión, 1956).

[19] Resolución Municipal 14.449, *Boletín Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* 10,916 (1958); Resolución Municipal 15.694, *H. Concejo Deliberante*, Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (1959); Decreto Municipal 15.759, *Boletín Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* 11,940 (1962); 'Declaran la guerra a las villas', *Nuestra Palabra*, 11 June 1963.

[20]Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado*, Chapter VII.5, my translation.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Parque Almirante Brown, Conjunto Urbano Lugano I-II* (Buenos Aires, 1973), 7.

[23]Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado*, Chapter IV.1.

[24]Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, 'Acta nº 111/70' (Buenos Aires: 1970), appendix I, p. 1; Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, 'C.M.V. _ Villas de Emergencia', Buenos Aires: 1970.

[25] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado*, Chapter VII.5, par.2, my translation and my emphasis.

[26] Oscar Yujnovsky, *Claves políticas del problema habitacional argentino (1955-1981)*, (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Latinoamericano, 1984), 166–167; Eduardo Blaustein, *Prohibido vivir aquí: una historia de los planes de erradicación de villas de la última dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, 2001), 131–137.

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[28] Anahi Ballent, 'Vivienda de interés social', in *Diccionario de Arquitectura en la Argentina*, ed. Jorge Francisco Liernur and Fernando Aliata (Buenos Aires: Clarín, 2004),VI: 176-187; Benmergui, op. cit., 319–320.

[29] Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, *Centro Urbano Integrado*; 'Lugano I-II, Parque Almirante Brown, Buenos Aires, 1967/68', *Summa* 18 (1969): 53–62; 'Barrio Lugano I y II', *Nuestra Arquitectura* 464 (1970): 42–46; 'Conjunto Lugano I y II', *Construcciones* 227 (1971): 360–66.

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[31] Aldo van Eyck, 'The Role of the Architect', in *Team 10 Primer*, 24–28.

[32] Aldo van Eyck, 'Architecture of Dogon', *Architectural Forum* (September 1961): 116–21; Aldo van Eyck, 'Straling van Het Configuratieve', *Forum* 3 (1962): 81–94; Aldo van Eyck, 'Dogon: Mand-Huis-Dorp-Wereld', *Forum* (July 1967): 30–50; Francis Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck – The Shape of Relativity* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1998), 143–49.

[33]Mumford, op. cit., 209–11 and 227–33.

[34] Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964).

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[36] Georges Candilis, 'Grouping of Dwellings', in *Team 10 Primer*, 74–76.

[37] Aldo van Eyck, 'Nagele Schools, 1960', in *Team 10 Primer*, 83.

[38] Smithson, op. cit., 76–82.

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[47] Liernur, 'El discreto encanto', 61.

[48] Beatriz Sarlo, *Borges, a Writer on the Edge* (London: Verso, 1993).

[49] Liernur and Pschepiurca, op. cit., 22–23.

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[55] Liernur, 'El discreto encanto', 68.

[56] In addition to the example analysed in this article, see Liernur, 'El discreto encanto', 61-70.

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