

IMPORTING PLANNING IDEAS, MIRRORING PROGRESS: THE HINTERLAND AND THE METROPOLIS IN MID- TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

By 1950, the northern region of Paraná State was an affluent settlement zone, due mainly to the prosperous coffee-growing industry and a relatively recent systematic colonization scheme, with its deliberate process of urbanization, which had been responsible for a network of planned new towns. The region was economically and culturally tied to the dominant city of São Paulo, and the changing image of northern Paraná's main towns - Londrina and Maringá - was basically the result of the work of prestigious São-Paulo-based architects and town planners that had been hired by the local elite. Notably, modern architecture and urbanism were imported as a means of achieving modernity: a targeted instrument of civilization, even in a colonization zone where material conditions were relatively unfavorable. In fact, the acts of borrowing, rejection, imitation, adaptation, and transformation can be observed in the movement of ideas. Thus, this paper aims to analyze the two-way relationship established between the most influential Brazilian metropolis and the wealthy provincial hinterland longing to mirror its modern features. More precisely, it aims to account for foreign influences and local aspirations and initiatives as the global mechanisms responsible not only for the diffusion of modern planning and architectural practices but also for the construction of the pioneering regional identity of northern Paraná State.

INTRODUCTION: THE MOVEMENT OF IDEAS

The diffusion of foreign ideas about architecture and town planning in Brazil has relied upon foreign consultants, trips and studies abroad, international conferences and publishing. Likewise, equivalent mechanisms were responsible for the diffusion of metropolitan ideas throughout the hinterland. Thus, the inland work of São Paulo-based professionals put forward innovative ideas and models. As a matter of fact, nomads, pilgrims, and migrant architects and planners all contributed to setting up a fairly common expression of modernist architecture and urbanism throughout the nation (Segawa, 1997, 131; Leme, 2000; Leme, 2004).

The modern metropolitan environment - the 'theatre of progress', as Koolhaas (2008, 31) named it - catalyzes new socio-cultural expressions and progressive ideas. Due to its leading economic position and avant-garde cultural production, early-twentieth-century São Paulo exhibited that very status (Sevcenko, 1992), which was to be subsequently mirrored by provincial societies, as the creative and dominating role played by modern metropolises endorsed urban

globalization and the circulation of cultural models (Almandoz, 2008).

Latin America's historical economic dependence contributed to the association, by local elites, of modernity and progress to everything foreign. Even so, dependent societies did not always show a passive attitude; a deliberate and conscious 'borrowing' of the dominant civilization's cultural manifestations can also be noticed. Thus, cultural deference and local aspirations for modernity, progress and civilization endorsed the circulation of ideas (Almandoz, 2008) and, eventually, came to be motivators in the construction processes of local identities.

Strictly, a colonization process is nothing but the insertion of a particular culture in a strange place (Koolhaas, 2008, 275). However, a foreign cultural value is only embraced as long as it fits the general system of the welcoming culture, and furthermore, alien cultural values are normally only partly accepted, having possible new meanings added to them, as cultural assimilation mainly works through an innovative process of recreation (Tota, 2000, 193). Indeed, studies on the international diffusion of planning ideas in architecture and urbanism have depicted borrowings, rejections, imitations, adaptations, and transformations occurring during the diffusion processes (Leme, 2004; Sutcliffe, 1981; Pinheiro, 2002; Rodgers, 1998; Montaner, 1995; Frampton, 1982).

Within a more specific context - the relationship between the hinterland and the metropolis in mid-twentieth Brazil - the case is no different. By that time, the newly occupied northern region of Paraná state, in the south of Brazil, had undergone a systematic colonization scheme and deliberate urbanization process as part of a private British land-speculation initiative. The British land company first introduced ideas of the Garden City movement, particularly the Social City scheme. The colonization policy then shifted to a satellite-town scheme (Rego and Meneguetti, 2010). The comprehensive regional planning measures, planned new towns, and a purpose-built railway, not to mention the fertile soil and a favorable coffee-growing policy, resulted in the rapid and stunning development of the region (Rego, 2009; Rego, 2011).

The foundation of planned new towns in this remote territory was a sign of progress and its stimulating, catalytic effect. The act of the forest being replaced by the urbanization process portrayed the spectacle of modernity. Between 1940 and 1950, the population of the region grew 186%; twice the population growth rate of Paraná state. In 1950, nearly half of Paraná state's towns were based in its northern region. Northern Paraná's main towns developed at an impressive rate. Londrina, founded in 1931, weighed in with 16 different bank branches by 1950, by which time nearly two new buildings were being built every single day (Prandini, 1954). Maringá, founded in 1947, had 14 different bank branches by 1953, and in that same year, 598 planning permissions were approved (Luz, 1997). These towns had direct daily flights to São Paulo, and between 1958 and 1962 Londrina airport was the third busiest airport in Brazil, just after São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Suzuki, 2003). Actually, northern Paraná state's economy was closely attached to the city of São Paulo - the financial, commercial, and technical center where its coffee crop - the 'green gold' - was traded and, then, shipped abroad from a nearby port (Sevcenko, 1992; Müller, 1956; Monbeig, 1935; Fresca; Carvalho, 2007).

Some significant public and private 'modern buildings painstakingly designed by famous architects' were being built during this era in these towns according to the 'functional style' (A Pioneira, 1952). In Londrina, where timber was abundant, wooden houses had been banned in order to 'improve the aspect of a modern *urbs*'. At the same time, the first master plan for Londrina, which was elaborated by Francisco Prestes Maia, the former mayor of São Paulo, brought about important (and polemic) measures for ordered town growth according to the 'modern principles of urbanism' (Maia, 1952; *Lei Municipal 133/1951*). Maringá's cathedral, a one-hundred-meter-high cone-shaped reinforced-concrete building designed in 1957 by the São Paulo-based architect José Augusto Belucci, endorsed the modern garden-city-like town layout created by the civil engineer Jorge de Macedo Vieira, who was also based in São Paulo.

It is widely known that the production of Brazilian modernist architecture - a portrait of the fascinating urban culture of the mid-twentieth century - was related to the construction of the country's national identity: a progressive, reformist effort to overcome its underdeveloped, archaic image (Martins, 2010; Bastos; Zein, 2010; Segawa, 1997). Thus, the national ideal of social and physical transformation did not contrast with the dream of northern Paraná's pioneering settlement zone, since the profile of northern Paraná's settlers and migrants was considered as being people in search of a better new life in a society under construction; an opportunity to erase the past, to re-start and prosper under a new identity (Pellegrini, 2003). The modernist architecture and urbanism was indeed 'an emblematic option of a town [Londrina] eager to become more than a hamlet in the hinterland' (Suzuki, 2003, 21).

However, despite a solid and vibrant economy, the poor local commerce and incipient industrial activity did not offer favorable conditions for the realization of an architectural style that required technology, unusual materials and qualified workers. For example, in order to build Londrina's new bus station, a modernist steel and concrete building designed by São Paulo-based architect João Batista Vilanova Artigas, the municipality had to 'import' the construction materials from São Paulo (Mindlin, 1999, 250). Interestingly, therefore, northern Paraná's urbanization was not synonymous with industrialization. What is more, there was a gaping abyss between the modern technology and modernist aesthetics that were emerging in the towns and their chiefly agrarian societies.

Considering that the construction of progressive foreign planning ideas about architecture and urbanism in northern Paraná State seems to have been less the result of external economic pressure than of internal cultural demand - that is to say, metropolitan ideas seem to have been 'imported', responding to local aspirations (Ward, 2000; Nasr and Volait, 2003; Almandoz 2010) - the focus of this paper is on the bidirectional relationship between São Paulo (capital) city and the northern Paraná hinterland. More precisely, it will account for the agents and the motivations that put it to work.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM IN A PIONEERING SETTLEMENT ZONE: CIVILIZATION AND PROGRESS

The vortex of modernist achievements was mainly experienced in northern

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Paraná through the massive process of the almost simultaneous foundation of several new towns (Rego, 2009). Londrina - 'capital of a new world, still unordered and confusing' (*O Cruzeiro*, 1952) - was the first new town founded by the British land company in 1931 and less than two decades later, due to its 'green gold' income, the first modernist buildings and high-rises were being built there, replacing the original humble wooden constructions. Additionally, a comprehensive urban plan was implemented in order to improve town growth. It was a new society and a town under construction with 'unsettling and important social ferment' (*O Cruzeiro*, 1952).

Internationally cherished as an expression of the developing country's cultural identity (Bastos; Zein, 2010; Goodwin, 1943; Mindlin, 1956), Brazilian modernist architecture was at that time enflaming national pride. The local press was not unaware of it and announced enthusiastically that 'very modern buildings in functional style were transforming the Londrina townscape day by day' (A Pioneira, 1952). New urban measures were also praised, for they would 'bring about a methodical and ordered town development, thus avoiding the risk of future stumbles and difficulties faced by cities that grew unadvisedly' (A Pioneira, 1952).

"Today the town [of Londrina] not only grows vertically but also sprawls, conquering surrounding coffee trees that give way to modern residential neighborhoods (...) which portray well-defined characteristics, for they have been designed according to the topography, the context and the relationship with the urban area" (A Pioneira, 1953, s.n.).



Figure 1. Léo Ribeiro de Moraes. *Jardim Shangri-lá*, Londrina's first garden suburb, c.1950. Source: Museu Histórico de Londrina, 1960.

The article was basically referring to a new 'aristocratic residential neighborhood' laid out according to formal Garden City aspects and principles of zoning (Fig. 1). These features were only possible due to the recently implemented urban law, which favored winding streets in contrast to the existing traditional urban grid. Zoning was a relatively new 'modernizing urban practice' that had been systematically applied in São Paulo city by the mayor Prestes Maia (Somekh, 1997). Actually, in his *Estudo de urbanismo para a cidade de Londrina* (Study on urbanism for the town of Londrina), Prestes Maia prescribed many of the topics he adopted in the master plan he had designed for São Paulo (Maia, 1930), namely the radio-concentric systems of avenues, the multi nuclei structure with secondary centers for regional commerce, the functional zoning, and 'ideas of *neighborhood unit* [originally in English], garden-cities, garden-suburbs, linear cities and other urban models relating to the organization and grouping' of buildings (Lei 133/1951, 1951).



Figure 2. Advertisement of a Londrina modernist residential skyscraper: sign of progress and status. Source: Biblioteca Municipal de Londrina, 1957.

Local media thus performed what has been called 'development journalism' as it was disseminating ideas of change, preparing a favorable environment for innovations, and encouraging new behaviors (Boni; Komarchesqui; Rodrigues, 2010) (Fig. 2 and 3). The cultural and economic elite, public administrators and

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organized civil societies were also involved in the town modernization process.



Figure 3. Centro Comercial - a twenty-two-floor mixed-use building in Londrina. Source: Museu Histórico de Londrina, 1959.

The *Sociedade Amigos de Londrina* - SAL (Friends of Londrina Society) was a civil organization founded in 1946 by 136 influential citizens and opinion-formers interested in promoting actions in order to accelerate the development of the town, particularly in terms of town planning and infrastructure. Deliberating on urban improvements, education, culture and social assistance, SAL backed many of the Town Hall's decisions, including the hiring of the former mayor of São Paulo to prepare the town's master plan and two São Paulo-based architects - João Batista Vilanova Artigas and Carlos Cascaldi - to design modern (and modernist) public buildings, particularly the new bus station (1948), the town nursery (1950), a hospital (1948), a theatre (1948), a sports club (1950) and the municipal stadium (1953). Some of these buildings are listed as local heritage; the bus station building (Fig. 4) is a widely celebrated design (Suzuki, 2003; Cavalcanti, 2001; Kamita, 2000; Castelnou, 2002; Bruand, 1991). Artigas and Cascaldi also designed private buildings in the town, including the mayor's house (1952), a car agency (1951), and a high-rise office building (1948), for the local population seemed to have adopted

'modernity as a value'. The *Sociedade Evangélica Beneficente* (Beneficial Evangelical Society) also hired a renowned São Paulo-based architect, Ícaro de Castro Melo, to design their (modernist) new hospital building in 1955.

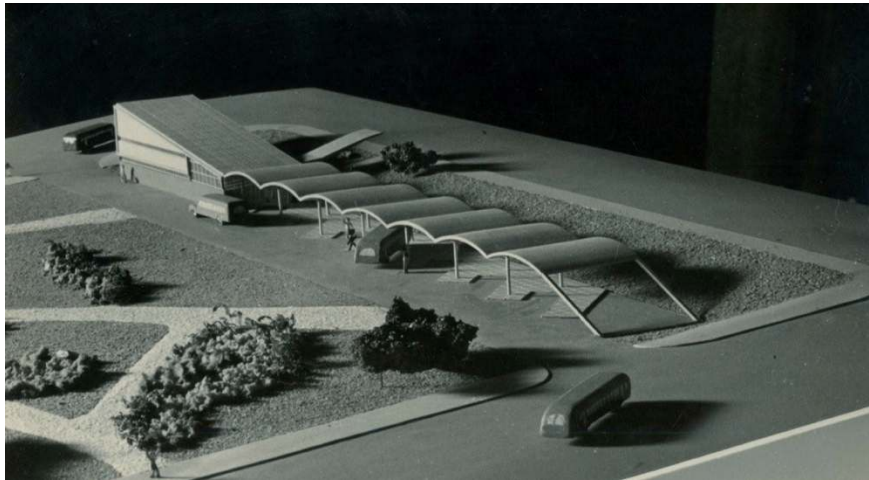


Figure 4. João Batista Vilanova Artigas and Carlos Cascaldi. *Londrina bus station*, 1948. Source: Museu Histórico de Londrina.

According to Artigas, his inventive modernist buildings in Londrina were designed in consonance with the pioneering spirit of the town (*Vilanova Artigas*, 1997, 67). Actually, years later he admitted to having experienced such a freedom for creation in Londrina that he hardly found it again thereafter (Suzuki, 2003, 22). Nevertheless, despite that rare freedom, Artigas' design for the mayor's house avoided the radical internal layouts he was adopting for residential layouts in São Paulo.¹ It seems a progressive, fashionable image was desired, but not its truly revolutionary implications.

Local agents definitely played an active role in diffusing foreign ideas about modern architecture and town planning, as noticed elsewhere (Nasr; Volait, 2003). But they were not the only ones, for foreign companies also backed the town's modernization process by hiring modernist São Paulo-based professionals to design their local branches. Architects Rino Levi and Jacques Pillon were both hired to design local branches in Londrina and nearby towns for São Paulo banks that were establishing themselves in the settlement zone. This was also the case for the German architect Phillip Lohbauer, who designed one of Londrina's first skyscrapers: a 1949 eleven-story mixed-use building. He was also hired by the land company to design churches, public squares, play

¹ Artigas' house designs in São Paulo normally depicted kitchen and laundry areas at the front part of the house, while the living room used to be at its rear part in order to benefit from the intimacy of the backyard, thus inverting the traditional display of Brazilian urban houses.

grounds, airports, nurseries, schools, private houses and commercial buildings - more than forty in total - not only in Londrina but in the neighboring towns as well.



Figure 5. Jorge de Macedo Vieira. *Maringá*, a new town laid out according to the formal principles of the Garden City model. Source: Museu da Bacia do Paraná, 1972.

Although Maringá was a younger town, its development process was not so different (Fig. 5). Built in 1947 according to a layout based on the formal principles of the Garden City model and certain concepts of the City Beautiful movement, particularly noticed in its civic center design (Rego, 2010), Maringá also depicted modern architecture and town planning as a sign of progress and civilization. Inaugurating the new board of directors of the land company, this town was primarily designed by Jorge de Macedo Vieira, the São Paulo-based civil engineer who became particularly famous for designing garden suburbs after having had the opportunity to work with Sir Barry Parker during the time the English town planner spent in Brazil. Garden suburbs had furnished a modern image for São Paulo (Passos; Emidio, 2009; Segawa, 2004; Bacelli, 1982). Maringá conveyed a totally different and, thus, modern urban form in regional terms. Pompous avenues and boulevard, winding streets, specific residential areas, urban parks, a grand civic center and sports center, roundabouts, and secondary centers denoted not only a modern town but also a progressive town, as it had been completely planned.

In 1950, the land company's board of directors also hired an architect from São Paulo - José Augusto Belucci - to design their hotel in the town center according to the 'principles of functional architecture'. The 'foreign' modernist architect was also hired by the local powers to design other relevant buildings. He designed the city's modern cathedral, according to the aspirations of the local cardinal, based upon the São Paulo school of architecture style, that is to say,

Brazilian brutalism (Fig. 6). He also designed several buildings and spaces for public administrators; namely, public squares, a theatre, the cemetery, the airport, and the town hall. He also designed the premises of a wealthy sport club for the local society.



Figure 6. José Augusto Bellucci. *Maringá Cathedral*. Source: Departamento de Patrimônio Histórico, Prefeitura Municipal de Maringá, 1957.

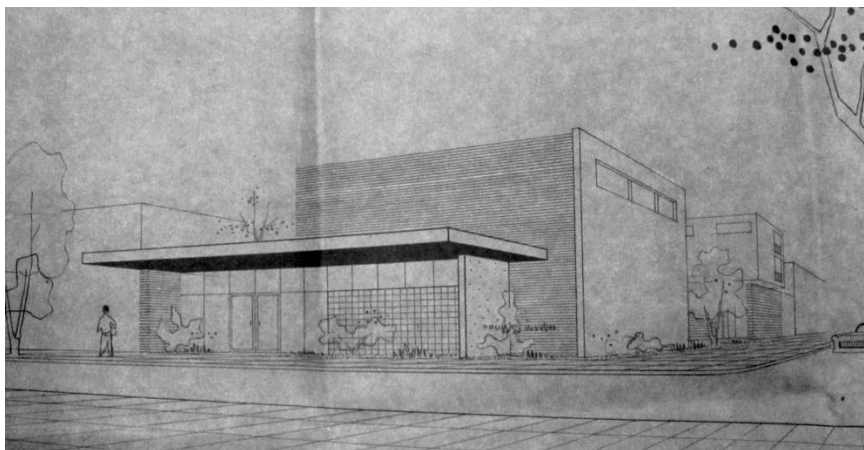


Figure 7. Rino Levi. *Sul Americano Bank Branch in Maringá*. Source: Biblioteca da Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, Universidade de São Paulo, 1956.

Rino Levi was also hired to design another bank branch (Fig. 7) and, interestingly, while staying in town at the modern hotel designed by Belucci, Levi was invited to give a lecture on his work in São Paulo, which was mainly attended by local engineers. Ícaro de Castro Melo was also called in to design a country club - an episode regarded as a payback by a group of rival citizens who had not been admitted into the existing local club. Melo himself was widely recognized as being an award-winning sportsman and an architect who specialized in sports building layouts, having designed the famous Ibirapuera arena, in São Paulo.

These 'foreign' professionals - architects, engineers, and town planners who were acquainted with each other in their home town (most of them graduated at the same college and all of them shared the same ideals) - fulfilled the aspirations of local elites for a progressive and civilized urban environment, that implied up-to-date metropolitan technology, modernist simplicity, and innovative aesthetics.

CONCLUSION: BUILDING PIONEERING TOWNS

The capital city-hinterland connection resulted in the movement of commodities, goods, people, fashions, tastes, ideas, and aspirations, evidencing certain permeability between two different but related worlds. Modern ideas of architecture and urbanism debated throughout the world and already experienced in São Paulo city, namely the 'functional style', the City Beautiful movement, the formal principles of the garden city and suburbs, the concept of civic design, and the practice of zoning, helped to transform and improve the precarious townscapes of the northern Paraná colonization zone. In addition, they endorsed a sense of progress that the pioneering settlers were proud of, for aesthetic forms are never neutral and townscapes are but cultural products. Architecture and urbanism, in short, supported the local expression of development.

On the one hand, the work of São Paulo-based architects, town planners and civil engineers in northern Paraná played out, on a regional scale, the global mechanisms of the international diffusion of planning ideas and models, for these 'foreign' professionals were hired by local societies and civil organizations longing for innovative aspects of the metropolitan environment they either experienced in trips to São Paulo or observed in the press. These professionals were also sent to the hinterland by metropolitan companies interested in establishing a modern and impressive image for their subsidiary buildings. Thus, metropolitan ideas of global circulation were also taken to the northern Paraná settlement zone as metropolitan business reached the hinterland. Moreover, these ideas were borrowed from the metropolis as the hinterland elite longed for what the powerful and prestigious metropolitan society depicted as a sign of cultural development and economic progress. In any case, it encouraged both a process of knowhow and technology transfer and the exchange and enrichment of cultural values. On the other hand, the northern Paraná settlement zone offered these pioneering professionals the opportunity to put into practice modern ideas of town planning and architecture.

By framing northern Paraná's aspirations and its fascination with São Paulo, this paper can also further understanding of the diffusion process of modernist architecture and urbanism throughout the Brazilian hinterland. For, according to Martins (2010), at a certain time in Brazil's history, the middle class, even in the hinterland towns, adopted the modernity as a cultural value and, what is more, took design as an expression of this value.

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