

# The Creation of a Public Design Office at the Federal University of Sao Paulo. Case Study: the Cities Institute at the East Zone Campus

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I will tell the story of the efforts made to set up a public design office in Brazil, and in particular, at a public university that is undergoing an expansion, located in the city São Paulo, at a time when architectural offices in state bodies were being closed, which is something that is not new: it is part of the dismantling of the national state by neoliberal reforms, story which I will briefly narrate.

Besides presenting the São Paulo Federal University Public Design Office, its organizational structure, and main projects underway, I will emphasize the design of a new Campus dedicated to an institute of cities, with the goal of training architects, urban planners, engineers, geographers, designers, and public administrators aiming at producing knowledge, methodologies and tools for designing strategies and actions that could transform and humanize our cities.

## **Dismantle of the Public Design Intelligence**

The neoliberal policies that have been implemented in Brazil since late 1980s after the moratorium on foreign debt payments and the interference of the International Monetary Fund, have occurred simultaneously to the re-democratization process, after the military regime. The results were contradictory and conflicting: on the one hand, the rebuilding of democratic institutions, political parties, trade unions, and social movements, which resulted in the adoption of the new Constitution of 1988, named the “Citizens’ Constitution” given its broadening of social rights and citizenship; and on the other hand, the so-called

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“structural adjustment”, with a set of neoliberal reforms, including the “State Reform” with transfer of part of public policies, enterprises, and operational capabilities to the private sector. This clash between constitutional advancement, designing a State of social well-fare and expansion of rights, and a setback disguised as modernity, reducing the State's capacity to act in public policies, led to an impasse in which we find ourselves up to these days in Brazil.

The Reform of the Brazilian State carried out during the 1990s reduced the size of the public sector (currently public servants in Brazil account for 10.7% of the economically active population, while in European countries, they account for on average 20% or more) – which worsened the quality of public services, notably public education, depriving the poorest population of adequate care, and pushing the middle classes into hiring private services in health, education, transportation, security, culture and so on. It also weakened the state intelligence agencies (exception made to the military intelligence and that of repression). The State Reform thus reached places where strategic information and knowledge were kept, places capable of identifying problems, characterizing demands, planning actions, and formulating policies, programs and projects - at all levels. Public-private partnerships, public concessions to private companies, handing projects over to construction companies, transferring management responsibilities to private companies and so on are examples of this shifting of public capacity to the private sector. All this obviously associated with transnational businesses, not to mention, internally, with main political parties, private businesses and interests, project financiers, and multilateral organizations such as the World Bank.

**Public Design Offices** in Brazil have always had difficulties structuring themselves as authentic technical bureaucracy, in the Weberian sense of the term. Nor could it be any different, for in just over 50 years, between years 1930 and 1985, Brazil has experienced five coups and two long periods of dictatorship --, and in the so-called "democratic" period, the excess of commissioned positions indicated by politicians, and the interference of parties and private companies on public policies, had prevented republican long-lasting state actions. That is why one of the pillars for dismantling the state was to destroy the thinking centers of the public system, leaving it at the mercy of politicians, private companies, contractors, and developers.

In Brazil, neither there is an obligation of the government to put out public buildings to competition, as usually occurs in the European Community. Competitions are rare, and

the bidding legislation and the administrative case-law turn them, practically speaking, unfeasible. The law of biddings in Brazil allows for contracting works with partial design (called Basic Design), and recently, due to the Olympics and the World Cup, without any design, according to the new bidding system. Thus, enormous power is increasingly being given to construction companies to define the characteristics and qualities of public projects – while **public design offices** are being dismantled. And it goes without saying that the solutions adopted benefit primarily the companies themselves and the politicians associated with them – and not the public interest, the environment, and the population’s well-being.

Not by chance, budgets for construction works multiply far above from what is allowed by law - the main subterfuge to justify contract imbalances are the so-called design mistakes and unforeseen factors, apart from corruption itself. In cases when prices cannot be changed, in sealed biddings of turnkey type, it is the quality of the works that is modified and sometimes compromised. Building companies come to the limits of technique, strength of materials, and replacement of prescriptions to ensure their profits. These limits are sometimes exceeded resulting in collapses and landslides, as occurred in the São Paulo subway when a huge crater swallowed houses, vehicles, and people.

The privatization of the state began to take place from inside, in the management of projects, increasingly dependent on companies called “Management Companies”. These companies replace the State in functions that would legally be its assignment, such as planning, preparation of bids, projects initial design, services supervision and evaluation, the receipt of construction works. The dismantling of the State’s capacity for strategic analysis, rational recognition of demands, planning solutions, budgeting and monitoring the implementation of projects and policies had disastrous consequences.

Exemplary public companies, such as the São Paulo Metro, the State Housing Company (CDHU), and the Water and Sanitation Company (Sabesp) had drastically reduced their technical framework and transferred their decisions to private companies. The result is that today, São Paulo undergoes its largest water supply crisis in history due to lack of planning and investment in expansion and maintenance of reservoirs, besides not having treated much of its sewage. The Metro, after the collapse of a section of the yellow line (funded by the World Bank, the first private concession within the public subway system), has several lines and stations whose design and works were suspended or paralyzed, undergoes a spiteful loss of design quality of its structures and buildings, as well as corruption

scandals associated with the purchase of trains and equipment. The Housing Company also reduced its technical staff, and no longer develops projects, limiting itself to advising on public funds contracts by private construction companies - companies which define locations and projects, and also finance political campaigns.

This type of private management of public works and services, which I have analyzed in my master's thesis, breaks the "culture of public design" and the historical collection of methodologies and solutions within the state administration. One of the public managers I interviewed commented that "the turnover of people in management companies is too high", and that the government, reduced in its administrative capacity "end up by not being able to form a nucleus of knowledge and project management." Another respondent admits, "I coordinate, but can't do much: all skilled labor is borne by private companies." Another one says that "the end result is that management companies have all the resources we do not have today. Even if they make it available to the executive area, they usually won't be able to absorb it. Even if the work is coordinated between us, we have to be careful because the internal coordinator of the management company has systematic control over the information." And he concludes, if the public bodies "do not give due value to their internal management teams and strengthen them, we will in fact lose."

The main **Public Design Office** of the City of São Paulo, the EDIF, or Department of Buildings, which used to be an example of projects planning and execution of public works, mainly educational facilities such as the Development Centre of Urban and Community Equipment, CEDEC, created during the first popular management post-dictatorship in São Paulo's (1989-92), with educator Paulo Freire, and architects Mayumi Souza Lima and João Filgueiras Lima (known as Lele) heading the project; and more recently the CEUs or Unified Education Centers, coordinated by teacher Cida Perez and architect Alexandre Delijaicov and staff. With the change in management and the departure of Perez and Delijaicov, the Edif began to be dismantled, and the CEUs were reshaped by a private company associated with interests of the new party in office and to the structural systems sold by a large construction company, with clear drop in design quality, and the end of the shared management model with the neighborhood community.

To the dismantling of **Public Design Offices**, one needs to add the discredit that working in the public sector has in the training of young professionals in the architecture and urbanism schools. The majority of teachers and pedagogical projects does not prepare and is

even unaware of the architect's and urbanist role in the public sector. In addition, they encourage the idealized figure of the creative artist, autonomous or self-employed, awarded and acknowledged in the privileged circle of his peers. Almost every architecture student is trained to mimic the star system of international architecture, dreams to have an office with his surname printed, appear on magazine's covers, and one day be discovered by an international reviewer as the new Brazilian promise to the world's architecture, replacing Oscar Niemeyer and Paulo Mendes da Rocha.

In the other hand, in Brazil's social imaginary, as we know --and not only in Brazil -- civil servants are those mediocre bureaucrats, devoid of creativity and sensitivity. How could they be good architects? Public career in Brazil may be attractive in privileged sectors, the so-called state careers', usually in the judiciary, treasury, federal revenue departments, and high public officials, both military and civilian. But for architects and urban planners, this is a place for those who perhaps have lower career ambitions, crave stability or do not want to be annoyed by private clients. In addition to wages often below the floor category and, the lack of a specific career, the public architect usually receives responsibilities far higher than the remuneration and prestige conferred to him.

Ultimately, in this context, to keep, enlarge or create a **Public Design Office** is really something that goes opposite, it is nonetheless still a very necessary action so that Brazil could, at some time, build quality and universal social welfare policies, with well-designed services and public buildings, conceived and managed in conjunction with its users and communities.

### **Unifesp Public Design Office**

The Federal University of São Paulo was originally an important school of medicine, which, since the years 2000s, decided to broaden its fields of knowledge and campuses, so that it finally becomes an actual university, in the true meaning of the word. The first stage of its expansion, between 2007 and 2012, was gigantic: it went from 1 to 6 campuses, from 1,500 (one thousand five hundred) to 12,000 (twelve thousand) students, from 500 to 1,600 (one thousand six hundred) post graduate teachers. Even though strongly encouraged by the federal government and its network of federal universities (currently with 63 universities across the country), this expansion was conducted without planning, with no unity between the pedagogical projects, and without a **Public Design Office**. Each new campus was under

precarious conditions, buildings were rented or simply transferred, chaotic maintenance and uncoordinated actions, resulting in non-viable operational structures. As a result there was a sequence of strikes, student dropouts, teacher evasion, clashes with the police, imprisonment of students.

I joined the dean's office management in 2012, along with socialist dean Soraya Smaili, elected in this context of demonstrations and strikes. For the first time in history, this movement won over the hegemony of the medical elite (patrimonial, patriarchal, and sexist), with a project of democratization of the university, and organizing of its expansion with transparency and republicanism. We then began to restructure the university based on the management program we were elected for, and I specifically started close collaboration with the planning dean's office, the planning council (which became the most representative and democratic of the university), and with the creation of a **Public Design Office**. Until then, the architectural and engineering sector of the university had little support, no prestige, no technical guidance or consistent policies, and not enough technical staff. There was only 15 professionals to take care of the entire university, and the three campuses in expansion hadn't any professional with technical background. The campuses were linked to the administration dean's office, coordinated by an orthopedic medical doctor and teacher, with no technical background to organize and guide the planning of the university infrastructures. His job was to respond to demands in a reactive, emergencial, and little reflexive way.

The Ministry of Education, which the Federal University of São Paulo is bound to as a public independent agency, also did not provide any support in this field. In my first visit to the Ministry, in Brasilia, I found that they relied on a minimum body of engineers and architects, did not supervise universities masterplans, designs or construction works, nor did they had any land policies for campuses, neither a project database that could allow for exchange of solutions, and the evaluation of performance and economics of university buildings. The expansion of the public network of federal universities -- which doubled in number of students in less than ten years -- was taking place without any policy for the development of infrastructures, was dependent on local conditions of each university, had no coordination, qualified personnel, and had generally mediocre design projects -- instead of harnessing the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of the construction industry, of sustainable technologies and quality in architectural and urban design in Brazil.

Without the support of a Ministry of Education prepared to plan and guide the growth of the universities, we needed to take action on our own. Thus, we transferred the architectural and engineering team to the nascent UNIFESP planning dean's office, created a policy for the staff, and hired dozens of new technical staff through competitive examination, and attracted contingent of experienced technicians from other sectors of the University. We currently have 63 professionals and 15 trainees (which are part of the public sector internship-learning program), distributed between the central office and the six local offices, one at each campus. This growth in staff number was achieved thanks to the dean's support and through persuading the entire university of the importance of this department to equate the accumulated demands of the infrastructure needed in the expansion. To some extent, the crisis and chaos of the first five years of expansion were an opportunity to structure the university department of planning, building design and construction.

The central office consists of 4 departments, with their respective directors and teams. They are: 1) Properties Department, responsible for land policy, acquisition and receipt of properties, regulation and civil security of properties and their users, monitor environmental licensing, and ensure updated documentation and asset valuation control; 2) Department of Master Plans, responsible for planning the growth and consolidation of the campuses, with Participatory Infrastructure Master Plans as its main tool; creates quantitative and qualitative indicators for each use and function, conducts the conceptual development and preliminary studies of new buildings, in a constant dialogue with the campuses and their users through forums, hearings and commissions - and finally, announce bids for construction drawings; 3) Department of Buildings, responsible to bid the works, track budgets, oversee the implementation, ensure safety at construction sites and the environmental aspects associated with them, receive the buildings when ready and put them into operation, including supervising maintenance contracts and services; 4) Department of Laboratories, responsible for a very delicate area of the infrastructure that has its own requirements and standards, it comprises the teaching and research laboratories, animal facilities, and additional equipment; manages not only the resources of university construction works, but also technical reserves, and research promotion funds.

In the campuses, the **local design offices** are named "Infrastructure Divisions", and they are in charge of less complex local aspects, associated with the campus daily life. Major actions of greater investment and complexity are conducted by the local divisions together

with the planning dean's office. A Technical Board was created to coordinate these actions, in order to favor an exchange between all the professionals of the sector; they will take care of both administrative procedures and technical analysis and decisions. For specific projects, Technical Working Groups and the campus Dean's Office will work together, creating a cooperation-resolution realm between central and local offices.

In addition to developing preliminary studies with our own team and broaden the discussion with technicians and the academic community on the campus, we will open design competitions. We had determined that distinguished buildings such as libraries, theaters, and museums would be the ones to start the competitions, while the Public Design Office team will focus on the academic buildings themselves, of classrooms, laboratories, studios, workshops, administrative offices, faculty offices. However, at another meeting in Brasilia, the Minister of Education personally advised me not to hold competitions, affirming that this was an adventure with great chance of failure, having even alarmed the dean. Design competitions are foreseen in the Brazilian bidding law, but not often put into practice. At the end, I had the permission to open competitions only for the six sets of student housing, since that was already a request formalized by the Board of Student Affairs.

Still, I heard comments in the corridors of the Ministry that I was directing the dean to consume precious civil servants positions of the university with architects, engineers and buildings technicians, when this "service" should be increasingly outsourced and delivered to management companies. Several positions in the field of manual labour at universities had already been extinguished, such as masons, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and there would come the time when the positions of architects and engineers, if not extinct, would be minimized in order to hire private companies. But we are obstinate and did quite the opposite, we have expanded the original team four fold, and now we are sure to be in the right path, having recovered the design intelligence and response capacity of our university.

### **Cities Institute and the East Zone Campus**

Another initiative that we conducted during this period and that was the result of a joint venture between the planning area and other deans' offices, mainly the dean of undergraduate studies, was the creation of the Political Pedagogical Project of a new Campus, to be located in the East Zone of the city of São Paulo, traditional place of dwelling of the city's working class, a campus in which a Cities Institute would be implemented. The



region is the home to 4 million people, and houses many organized social movements which struggle to improve São Paulo's living conditions. There, in the years 1980s, Paulo Freire, when acting as secretary of education of São Paulo, in dialogue with local movements, began to envision the proposal of a "Worker's University", inspired by the pedagogy of liberation - not implemented at the time but that served as inspiration for our political-pedagogical project.

The site of an old steelworks was obtained through mobilization of local movements for the implementation of the Federal University. They also gained the status of players in the definition of the pedagogical project, and the University set up a joint committee composed of 12 representatives of the university and 12 representatives of local social movements, to organize the discussions on the implementation of the campus. There were public hearings, popular consultation about the most desired courses, meetings for planning, seminars and workshops. We defined that the methodology for proposing a pedagogical project for the campus should be based on the recognition of the regional problem-situation, and subsequent generating themes, in accordance with Paulo Freire methodology, for only after, define the actual courses.

In this sense, we sought to create coherence between participatory process, local context, historical struggles, the influence of Paulo Freire, and the political-pedagogical proposal under development. The problem-situation that led to the choice of the generator theme became clear along the process: it was the living conditions in cities, the production and transformation of urban life, the resolution of problems afflicting the Brazilian people, and poor urban infrastructure. The theme converged with the fact that Unifesp did not yet offered courses in management, planning and city design - which facilitated the internal process of the university, eliminating the need to double existing courses.

The first draft of the Cities Institute was then created, composed of eight undergraduate courses with integrated activities, and convergent and transdisciplinary research lines and university extension. They are: public administration (with an emphasis on city management), architecture and urbanism (in Brazil, by law, architecture and urbanism are two built-in courses), geography (bachelor's degree and teacher training for basic education network), civil engineering, environmental and sanitary engineering, urban mobility and transport engineering, public design (with an emphasis on communication, urban services and equipment), and tourism.

The Ministry of Education and the University Council have already authorized the opening of five courses. We have already consolidated a document (bilingual and available on our

website) containing the institute's complete political pedagogical project and the debates that gave rise to it. We are currently developing the pedagogical projects of each one of these first five courses, with a commission testing types of curriculum integration and simulating convergent academic semesters, and holding public debates which have already engaged over 50 collaborators from different areas associated with the five initial undergraduate courses.

Institutes similar to ours have recently been established in other countries of the global South, which, like us, are challenged by rapid urbanization and chaotic and unequal cities. In Bangalore, India, the Indian Institute for Human Settlements was recently opened. In South Africa, there is the African Centre for Cities, at the University of Cape Town. Some institutes in Latin America and Brazil have sought convergences between the courses of Geography, Architecture, Urban Planning, and Engineering. The latest and most innovative one was the Latin American Institute of Technologies and Territorial Infrastructures (ILATIT), at the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA), located in the city of Foz do Iguaçu. In terms of a global network of cities institutes and human settlements, São Paulo is a strategic location because of the problems it accumulates, its recognized social and cultural activism, with its critical and constructive force, and also for being the largest metropolis of the southern hemisphere.

The full bilingual document of the political pedagogical project is available at our website. I have also brought some copies with me.

In briefest summary, the Unifesp Cities Institute is based on the following principles:

- Public vocation guided by social demands and national development;
- Relevance and topicality in the choice of teaching, extension and research topics;
- The understanding that social problems and solutions must be thought considering their territorial dimension;
- The defense of pleasure in the relation with knowledge, creating teaching and learning environments that are creative, stimulating, participatory, and collaborative;
- Teaching, research, and extension in dialogue with the civil society and its citizens, with those for which the city is a way of life and a use value;
- Interlocution with other agents involved in the production of the city, in that the city is understood as a collective work;
- Act in an interdisciplinary and collective way for understanding and solving complex problems;

- The inseparability of theory and practice, avoiding curriculum fragmentation into closed compartments;
- The inseparability of means and ends, as a way to avoid the autonomisation of solutions in relation to actual contexts and problems;
- Proposition of social and sustainable policies and technologies, as opposed to technologies that degrade, exploit and subordinate workers and natural resources;
- Defense of the history of places and the quality of the built environment as an inseparable principle for the progressive transformation of the cities in places of solidarity, harmony, happiness, and wellbeing for all citizens.

From the point of view of teaching methodologies, I will summarize the proposals:

- **Learning as a Narrative Form.** The courses have a guideline and several complementary narratives, recognized and treaded by the students. To build a learning plot based on a narrative which is part of a live experience (immediate) produces genealogy and contextualization of the problems (time, place and theory), future studies, and problem solving through imaginative projectual action (as praxis). The goal is to avoid fragmented, labyrinthine curriculum, in which the student fulfills tasks (if so), and does not build self-awareness in his learning process.
- **Progressive Synthesis and Autonomy.** The consolidation of the knowledges covered in the teaching and learning processes, and experienced throughout the course, occurs through progressive reviews created by the students along their training, and through continuous integration/dialogue with the other courses. The reviews are done along the course through the following progressive vectors: Vector of complexity of topics/problems; Vector of representation techniques (to know how to narrate / communicate / achieve); Vector of autonomy and students choices. The reviews occur along the Course Units by means of:
  - Field Experiences Journals (see, hear, register)
  - Move through different scales (local, regional, national, and global)
  - Move through different temporalities (regression–progression in historical time)
  - Dialogues between knowledges (exchanges with “nonacademic” knowledges)
  - Individual and collective work and activities (identity and cooperation)
  - In class rapid-response exercises (method and reasoned intuition)

- Slow studies and projects, of accumulation in systematic reflection-action (in depth)
- **Record of Training Process.** It is the learning journal of each student, encouraging him to keep a reflective perspective on his own learning process, in order to become aware of methods, problematizations, prospective and projective paths. The record is a free-format notebook produced by the student, who ‘stitches’ the connections of his learning, with the support of his tutor, and with open discussions, ending in a final product to be presented together with the course conclusion work.
- **Thematic Centers.** Promotes the relationship between blocks of course units and the multiple forms of knowledge achievement around generating themes, which can be half-yearly or bi-monthly, and research and design problems that organize the curriculum matrix. The narrative allows the student to return to the themes when he is in different levels of maturity throughout the course, in a progressive learning spiral.
- **Integrated Pedagogical Teaching Areas (ELO or link in Portuguese).** These areas are defined by specific generating themes and exchanges, avoiding tight disciplinary segmentation. They are:
  - **thematic pedagogical offices**, focused on contexts and real problems to be faced through design and public policies;
  - **Laboratories for teaching the basics**, applied sciences, languages and theory;
  - **Workshops for practical experimentation** at construction sites, using models, prototypes, graphic products and recycling, as well as a center for environmental monitoring.

From the standpoint of the physical facilities, a masterplan for the progressive occupation of the campus was made with the support of LabProj (Design Lab), coordinated by Prof. Alexandre Delijaicov, and which was the topic of a design exercise for the students of the third year of FAUUSP. Preliminary studies of the buildings were executed by the Unifesp Public Design Office, and are currently under development to proceed with construction drawings and the bids for the construction work.

The guideline was to approach the Campus East Zone as an experimental area for cities production and management, in which the very campus itself is an object of research and intervention. These include testing new construction technologies and innovative spatial forms;

reflect on its relationship with the urban context and landscape, including the conservation area and springs in there located; conduct environmental and waste management policy, continuous monitoring of emissions, water reuse and energy efficiency, in order to reduce its ecological footprint; combine and switch study time with “work” time (at the workshops of the old factory, maintained as production area); undertake pilot actions of intervention, maintenance and recovery of the campus buildings, furniture and equipment; hold plenary and working groups for the evaluation, mapping, planning and management of the campus, as an exercise of managing a small town; all with the goal of becoming a sustainable, constructively innovative, welcoming, and democratic campus.

The Campus East Zone also allows that various historical layers of use and occupation of the land to remain active in some way, both physically and educationally. They are: the Permanent Preservation Area - APP of about 25,000m<sup>2</sup> of native forest and two springs, streams tributaries of the Rio Jacu; the first anthropic use of the land was as a family farm of Japanese immigrants, producer of fruits and vegetables, part of the São Paulo East green belt; its conversion into industrial area in the late 1970s, with the installation of Metalurgica Gazarra, one of the main factories of East Zone, occupying an important place in the workers’ memory; and, finally, its transformation into a university campus. In such a way that the masterplan dialogues with these material and immaterial, environmental and built heritage. Either with the restoration and management of the APP, and the recovery of the two springs and streams; with the allocation of at least 10,000m<sup>2</sup> for urban agriculture, with a vegetable garden and orchard, which will supply the University Cafeteria; the maintenance and renovation of the main building of the Gazarra industry, for the installation of large workshops and the experimental construction site; and finally, new university buildings. So that distinct times and natures are interrelated, dialogue, and are educational areas that raise the awareness of their historical sense, heritages, and memories.

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Despite the difficulties of all kinds, in iniquity and unresolved historical problems of our society, Brazil is a country that fascinates and still has a lot to do, learn and invent. Our country is experiencing a new and severe economic, political, social crisis – nonetheless, we won’t succumb. The little adventure at the Federal University of São Paulo I have just narrate to you is an example of constructive resistance –a place where many Brazilians knew how to draw their creative power, from everyday survival to important political and cultural movements. There are still many

obstacles to be overcome and basic conditions to be guaranteed for maintaining and strengthening our Public Design Office and the Cities Institute, but one thing is certain: we will not fail to face obstinately, critically and creatively, the challenges that our time imposes on us.