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**MUTATIONS OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF LATIN AMERICAN CITIES**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Along the history, the Latin American cities have been influenced by different architectures that have affected their structure and landscape.

In this context, this work looks for explanations for these architectural questions, starting from an external vision of the urban landscape.

**2. ORIGINS OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE**

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the economical pretensions of the European countries led Spain and Portugal „to conquer“ Latin America through two very defined orientations. These were the mercantile promoted by the bourgeoisie and the territorial, motivated by the feudal nobility's pressures. All of them had great success in the „New American India“. They arrived on America and started to create the history of cities<sup>1</sup>.

About the history of the Latin American cities, Macedo (1987) identified three basic forms of organization of the landscape:

In the first form, Spanish and Portuguese that occupied the territory had two options. The first one, use the advantage of the existing aboriginal settlement structure and the second one, when the hostility conditions were extreme, to make the choice of an area with minimum conditions of habitability and security<sup>2</sup>.

In this time prevailed landscapes of small farms, where the rarefied constructions indicated the birth of the city. The economy of them was based on alternative

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<sup>1</sup> Before the Portuguese and Spanish arrival existed consolidated civilizations.

<sup>2</sup> To be in safety not only of the constants natives attacks but later of other nations too.

models of feudalism applied in Europe that soon developed to others stages by the influence of the mercantilism .

The second form corresponds to the horizontal landscape where the insertion of low constructions<sup>3</sup> of no more than one or two floors was the characteristics of the urban structure. In the case of the Spanish America cities the constructions happened in great lots with the typical form of the house with a central yard. In Brazil the configuration was different according to the limitations of space distribution of the houses .

In the urban meshes, it becomes strong the presence of the first important constructions of the cities, such as the churches and the forts, these last ones in the case of the littoral cities. In this context, the religious element was the key for the domination (also psychological) and the control of territory. Whereas the forts had two intentions: the Portuguese made them monumental to demonstrate their power and the Spaniard made them smaller to provide protection to the conquered territory.

The layout and the landscape reached dram atility and monumentality with those types of constructions but later these characteristics had a recess period. Gradually the cities grew in horizontal form and the society continued to be traditional and of exporting raw economy.

The third form can be classified as the vertical landscape. The crises of thirties come to stimulate alternatives of development that included the national industrialization and other themes. These models acquired validity after Second World War. Also the churches and forts started to emphasize more the vertical direction in some way trying to compete with the neighbor.

Finally as a superior stage of the previous form continues the growth and the vertical speculation of cities. The emergence of the Modern Architecture, symbol of the socio-economic and technological potentialities of the industrial revolution was established in Latin America although the society still was traditional and with little industrialization. In this context the cities start to lose the characteristics of its urban landscape .

### **3. CHANGES OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE**

The perception and the common sense are the first and more natural interaction forms between the people and the space through the body and the senses. This fact is not incidental, the simple exit and the contact of the man with the exterior makes that each one has an intention. Thus, each individual collects concepts and readings that will be incorporate to urban memory (collective memory) and configuring and conditioning the identification and the appropriation of the city.

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<sup>3</sup> The origins of model houses came from Spain and Portugal, but with techniques and materials adaptations of each country.

With perplexity, it is verified that the urban patterns of the last centuries suffered changes, not only typologies but also the structure, which has transformed the landscape of the Latin American cities. For many years, the hegemonic and dominant language of churches was the support of events of this landscape, nowadays there isn't much left. These changes have been displaced by a phenomenon that exceeds the limits of the space and that no longer considers the image as the synthesis of the condensation of values and also as an integral part of signs and symbols.

An example is the Colombian city San Juan de Pasto<sup>4</sup>, where the construction of the urban landscape was the result of the imposition of the Spanish colonization and the religious element as a factor for the domination of the territory. This zone was previously occupied by indigenous: Pastos and Quillacingas. In spite of the strong convergence of the church as a point of reference and symbol for the population, independent of any creed, race or political tendency, the introduction of new buildings has altered the configuration of the urban landscape.

The definition of the current processes of renewal and urban changes in the Latin American cities should be classified intensively in magnitude and relatively short as in time execution<sup>5</sup>. However, these are deeply precarious in architectural resources that show transitory sensations about the image.

In this point of view, the current changes in volume, mass and scale of the landscape of the Latin American cities are linked to a landscape construction process around the national and international tourism competition and the attraction of diverse investments. This happens as form waits on the process of economic globalization by means of the sale of the cities.

The competitiveness of the capitalist world produces a new space not only demanded by the order of the production, but also by the order of the information, consumption and communication. This is established from a model (city-model) constructed in top of urban signs, which in such a way fixes the image of the city in the local scale how much in the world-wide scale (Sánchez, 2001). The identity that it defined with the search of the „proper I“, to be national and of the essential sense of a people, was lost.

Brazil has Curitiba<sup>6</sup> as a reference of this context. The incorporation of the sale city in the planning strategies and urban politics creates a modern city image that is intensely stimulated by the media, for the urban marketing and for the

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<sup>4</sup> Colombia's city the capital of Nariño's state, it was founded in 1537. It is far away around 865km from the country's capital: Santa Fé de Bogotá.

<sup>5</sup> It's necessary to point out that the cities had their own character almost without modifications until the end of the 19th Century, the urban structure had only increased about few blocks around the central square, but the churches continued being the manipulators of the landscape.

<sup>6</sup> Curitiba is the capital of Paraná state founded in 1894, it is far away around 1147km from the country's capital and has approximately 1.587.315 people, it is well known by the municipal investments called "City Marketing".

strategies of the local power that change the initial image of the city. As exemplified, the old image of the city yields place to a new international order.

In Brazil still stands out the Brasilia's<sup>7</sup> case. In spite of recent foundation and to be considered as Cultural Human Heritage, this modernist city starts from a certain way to suffer changes in its landscape. This happened in reason of the dominant capitalist order, which imposes a city model that assists to the new demands of the international context. According to Kohlsdorf (1980) the significant alterations suffered in the silhouette of the city finish for modifying the strong force, always pointed out by the residents.

Previously, the landscape of Latin American cities was impregnated by the identity of their local resident values. This gives place for an international order taken root in the precepts of a capitalist world. In spite of years, decades and until centuries of consolidation of a landscape that, at first, would not adapt the sudden and agile incorporations, the reality imposes the possibility and the need of such transformations.

Some cities, with a modernist tendency or that have little time of foundation, can recycle and accept new contents relatively in the easy and almost natural way, because an excessive and disordered reality allows it. However, the conditions of San Juan de Pas to and Brasilia, for instance, should not allow radical experiences since the identification of the urban landscape became patrimonial and the essential element in the collectivity life.

#### **4. THE URBAN LANDSCAPE'S FUTURE**

The architecture, in the incessant search of the modern, escaped from the traditional models of constructions and inexplicably denied a line that print continuity, looking for new known models in the expressive centers with a national and international level. Advanced typologies are able to compete for contrast with the natural landscape and the environment, a disloyal ability that transforms the secular images of Latin American cities.

The explanation about what have happened in the spatial context of many cities is because there was not a measure on time that allowed the selective choice of future constructions. The adopted current pattern configured the landscape's city in a fast reading, objective and that universal almost capable by itself to advance the people's thought that until this moment never witnessed such landscape. An idea about the modernity is the best form to idealize the city as totally integrated, homogenized with impersonal buildings.

Actually in the Latin Americans cities happen the sale of the space with the objective „to stimulate or to attract private companies through the creation of

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<sup>7</sup> Inaugurated on April 21 of 1960, Brasilia is the capital of Brazil and it is the political decision center. It is a modern city projected by Lúcio Costa and has more than 2.051.146 people.

*pre-conditions by a lucrative investment*" (Harvey, 1989). This induces changes in the urban landscape through the adoption of standardized architectural models of the dominant capitalist order.

Certainly, nowadays it can be seen the degradation and the gradual decadence of the cities, because there are a contradiction, incompetence, antagonism and ignorance of the understanding between the traditional past and the modern.

Such transformations should look for more maintainable interventions with smaller implications on the landscape's cities. The prospective direction and preservation must be capable to leave for the new generations an authentic patrimonial legacy that inserts in the concept of the changes the valorization of the local aspects.

The Latin America cities are not able and shouldn't stay immobile as a piece of isolated collection museum, for it to oppose their nature is by transforming, bringing up to date and reaching great objectives and purposes. However, the landscape and all the relationships that provoke in the development of collective memory should be always considered.

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