

The pure and slave science of large scale urban projects: convergences between Belo Horizonte north and south projects, Brazil

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Recent world prospects of urban population growth have put cities at the centre of global challenges debate. All over the world, massive investments are pushing urban regeneration initiatives, essentially through Large Scale Urban Projects (LSUPs). In the last three decades, this group of urban interventions has been linking urban renewal, mobility infrastructure improvements, and large architectural interventions through public private partnerships and selective deregulation in urban policy. This paper analyses the dichotomy between the pros and cons of global LSUP to discuss the agents' role in two Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Area LSUPs.

In general, the arguments in favour of LSUPs associate these with international urban design, architecture and city management best practice. In this background, LSUPs are a 'pure science' oriented by urban design technique. On this basis, LSUPs distortions and impacts tend to be blamed on external factors, such as lack of political will or speculative action of economic forces. On the other hand, LSUPs can be criticised for being a 'slave science' to neoliberal determinism in urban policy, i.e. a final product of market friendly urban policies. On this basis, LSUPs problems are not a distortion, but result of a bigger process.

The paper discusses how that such pure and slave dichotomy has an important role in LSUPs production by comparing two LSUPs in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The first one uses the Aerotropolis approach to articulate a set of interventions in the North Vector of Belo Horizonte. The second one named C-SUL is a new district driven by new urbanism concepts. In both projects a political and economic deterministic view

has been articulated with private consultants. In the first project, the American academic and airport business consultant John Kasarda's presence is used to legitimate the investment concentration in the airport region, despite tensions with the environmental impact and social agenda. In the same project, the Brazilian modern architect Oscar Niemeyer presence is used to articulate politic tradition with monumental iconic architecture. In the C-SUL project, the Brazilian politician architect Jaime Lerner's presence determined the new elite condominium concept promoted by traditional real estate investors. In both LSUPs the final urban form has been enabled to solve mobility and environmental problems or promote equity, inclusivity and diversity. On the contrary, these projects are likely to aggravate environmental problems, increase spatial inequality and spend high investments in inadequate mobility systems.

To understand the role of these pure science agents in these local LSUPs production, the analysis uses Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. The first step for such discussion is the identification of *relational* and *dispositional* field properties. Relational properties describe how the external determinisms act on the field of forces and how the field handles external demands. This analysis shows the low or high field permeability to external determinism. In addition, dispositional properties describe how agent hierarchy inside the field deal with these determinisms and preserving their internal rules and hierarchy. About the role of agents, the paper shows how dominant agents use and accumulate different capitals inside the field to preserve their position.

Ending the argument, the paper presents a reflection about chances for changing the field structure. The central idea is that the field of forces is vulnerable to destabilizations that can change its rules and hierarchy, even in a timely manner, and enable 'back doors' or 'cracks' to change urban policy, urban forms or both. The proposal for affecting these is oriented by three strategies: (a) focusing efforts on moments of *low field permeability* that allows greater capacity for urban planners' action on the final projects; (b) focusing efforts on agents' *empowerment* to change internal field rules and decision-making processes; and (c) focusing on re-thinking planning, urban design and architecture agents' disposition using Bourdieu *habitus* concept.