

Institutions, practices and professional performance. Case studies to the history of planning in Brazil

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The starting point of this article is the result of the investigations and inquiries carried out by members of a collective entitled Territorial Studies Group and Urban History (GESTHU), registered in the Directory of the CNPq Research Groups and based at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Dedicated to the analysis of the role of urban settlements in the structuring of territory from a historical perspective, we seek to understand the nature of the interventions within the social and state agents from records of the action programs both public and private in order to compose a repertoire covering the various entrepreneurs, actors and confrontations. It is an effort aimed at carrying out studies questioning the political and territorial experiences and urbanistic organization of space at various periods in Brazilian history. We believe that many of these practices are territorial planning precursors and we recognize that the imperial and republican projects have common ground when mean the “invention of territories” with the conquest, appropriation and fixation in different regions.

The perspective of this article is the analysis of actions taken in different locations in Brazil and the characterization of their materiality. We understand that the complex process of conquest and control of space during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries imposes a discussion of the differentiated importance - within the overall policy implemented by the Brazilian State - of the social determinants of spatial organization including the circulation of ideas, discourses, thoughts and the urban practices, as well as the professionals responsible for planning.

The objective is therefore to continue these concerns that have been investigated from the formation of this Group. It is presented a set of three practices leading up to and / or that marked the institutionalization of the Brazilian planning for 100 years from the mid-nineteenth century. The first example refers to the results of a current research focused on the resonances of the romantic socialist ideology in urban projects for the imperial capital, implemented or not. The city of Rio de Janeiro is observed during the second half of the nineteenth century when proposals for social harmony, progress, abolition of slavery and hygienist precepts and transformation of the colonial metropolis were brought into the country by men and books.

The second example is located at the beginning of the republican period marked by the debate on the need for modernization based on the expansion of transport routes and the introduction of new production methods with use of foreign labor. The construction of the capital of Minas Gerais, designed to represent the new times, reveals the conflicts around two projects: to boost urban activities or to develop the agricultural sector. This dilemma, which showed the political and economic power of regional elites, would culminate in a change in the initial plan of the new capital, when areas previously intended for installation of suburbs are now aiming to implement a rural area. It is in this context that the immigration of settlers becomes an important state policy.

The third example is linked to the 1930s, during the government of Getúlio Vargas, when the intervention policy was outlined by the Departments of Municipalities, also known as “daspinhos”. The state's department of Rio de Janeiro, created in 1939, in addition to technically advise municipalities with regard to budgetary, administrative, legal and even aspects of engineering, took office for the control of territory. It is analyzed the operating dynamic of this public institution in the Urban Planning Exhibition, 1942, in which the projects demonstrate the articulation of political party claims involving the governor, technical consultancies carried out in the prefectures and the making of urban plans by contractors offices.