

PUBLIC SPACE AND THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT

São Paulo Modernist Case Study Briefing

(c. 2016 FAU Research Team, University of São Paulo)

CENTRO CULTURAL DE SÃO PAULO (CCSP)



CONTENTS

PROJECT INFORMATION

1. BUILDING CHRONOLOGY
 2. PRODUCTION
 3. POLICY AND IDEOLOGY
 4. DESIGN
 5. MATERIALS/CONSTRUCTION/ENVIRONMENT
 6. RECEPTION
- BIBLIOGRAPHY

PROJECT INFORMATION

Case Study: CCSP (Centro Cultural de São Paulo), Rua Vergueiro 1000, Paraíso, São Paulo

Dates: 1976 - 1982

Architects: Eurico Prado Lopes and Luiz Benedito Castro Telles, Plae Arquitetura e Urbanismo

Client: Secretaria da Cultura da Prefeitura do Município de São Paulo

Engineers +
Contractors: SADE – Sul Americana de Engenharia S.A.

Site area: 22,000 m² (plot)

Tender price: 42.6 million reais (in 1982). 1,700 reais/metre.

1. BUILDING CHRONOLOGY

- 1968-74 Construction of Linea 1 (Blue line). New metro station, Vergueiro, opens in 1974.
- 1974 Roger Zmekhol wins first competition for a new business district on Vergueiro metro site. Competition run by EMURB (Empresa Municipal de Urbanização - Municipal Company of Urbanisation).
- 1974-75 Eurico Prado Lopes President of IAB - São Paulo (Institute of Brazilian Architects).
- 1976 Eurico Prado Lopes and Luiz Benedito Castro Telles, directors of Plae Arquitetura e Urbanismo, won a second public competition to build a new library on the Vergueiro metro site.
- 1976-79 CCSP design development
- 1979 CCSP's programme expanded by new mayor - Reynaldo de Barros – and his new head of the Municipal Department of Culture – Mario Chamie – from a library to a cultural centre with a library.
- 1979-82 Construction of CCSP
- May 1982 CCSP opens, 70% complete, just before Mayor de Barros resigns to run for state governor. The architects aren't mentioned.
- Early 2000s CCSP almost abandoned.

2. PRODUCTION

2a) Client/ Architect Relationship

There were two sets of relationships between the same client and the same architects, but under different mayors with different political agendas. The first was between Mayor Olavo Setubal, his head of the Department of Culture, Sábato Magaldi, and the architects Prado Lopes and Telles. The second was between Mayor Reynaldo de Barros and his Culture Secretary, Mario Chamie, and the same architects. Between one administration and the other, the project's programme changed from a very large library filling the site to a cultural centre containing a library. Both administrations belonged to the ARENA party, and both were sensitive to accusations of constructing an 'elitist' building. For this reason, Setubal rejected Prado Lopes and Telles' first design for the library, forcing them to come up with a second version, closer to the one that was built. The design was to change a third time, however, under Mayor de Barros, when his Cultural Secretary, Chamie, changed the programme from library to cultural centre. To counterbalance the concentration of culture in the city centre, Chamie set up the "Periphery Project". For this he

commissioned thirteen small libraries, and didn't see the point of a very large library capable of holding one million volumes in one of these peripheral districts. Five months after construction on CCSP began, he therefore ordered a space that "would not have divisions of age groups or social classes, would have as few doors as possible, interconnecting, integrating, if possible, with the landscape, maintaining it inside the Cultural Centre, having glass installed instead of opaque walls" (Interview of Mario Chamie by Daisy Perelmutter, June 28, 2006, Mario de Andrade Library.¹ This remarkable brief is an accurate description of the building as it stands today, and one wonders how much it redirected the architects in the third iteration of their design.

2b) Context

The 1970s in Brazil was a decade of extremes. It was the most severe and repressive period of the military regime that began in 1964. It also saw the repeal in 1978 of Institutional Act n.5, an act that since 1968 gave full control of the legislature and judiciary to the executive branch of government. It was a decade consolidating a centralized economy that privileged national industrialisation and manufacturing industries by imposing tariffs on foreign goods. The result, however, was a growing inequality between an industrial class and labourers. Demographically, the 1970s saw the peak in net rural to urban migration with 17.4 million people moving from the countryside to cities (Martine and McGranahan 2010: 14), a trend growing since the 1940s, and stabilising thereafter.

The rapid urbanisation between the 1940s and 1970s in Brazil meant that urban infrastructure was a priority. In São Paulo one key intervention was the design and construction of the metro system, which began operation on 14 September 1974. Construction of the metro upended entire blocks of city that were then redesigned after the completion of works. The CCSP results from one of these interventions, deriving from a competition following the design and build of the Vergueiro Station on Linea 1 (the Blue line), about one kilometre from the centre of the city.

2c) Programme

Two factors became essential in defining the site and the programme of the CCSP. First, a 22,000 square metre plot of land became available for development on the former construction site for Vergueiro metro station. Second the city's main public library Mário de Andrade Library, built in 1942, had outgrown its premises. While an original public competition produced a speculative mixed use residential and commercial highrise development for the Vergueiro site, the recently appointed Mayor Olavo Setúbal (1975-1978) favoured cultural buildings in a new city-wide plan. Setúbal appointed theatre critic Sábado Magaldi to head his newly inaugurated cultural secretariat under whose leadership a committee was formed in the Municipal Urbanisation Company EMURB in order to consider the Vergueiro as a future city library. EMURB appointed Prado Lopes and Telles as members of the committee and in 1976, they won a public competition to build a new library on the metro site, not without accusations of favouritism from rival architects.

¹ Available at http://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/upload/Depoimento_Mario_Chamie_1256675522.pdf

2d) Practice: Private | Client: Public

The architects of the CCSP, Prado Lopes and Telles, were part of an emerging generation of architects, having both graduated in 1966 from the School of Architecture at the Mackenzie University. They were one generation down from Mendes da Rocha, and two generations down from Artigas, leader of the São Paulo School, so that although they were identified with it, they were open to working with the business community and innovating office layouts, and open to building materials other than exposed concrete. Together Lopes and Telles set up PLAE, an architectural practice specialising in corporate work, which they ran until the death of Prado Lopes in 1985. In the 1960s and 70s, architectural debate and discourse centred around the Brazilian Institute of Architects (IAB), of which Prado Lopes was a director from 1974-1975, just after Paulo Mendes da Rocha, and just before winning the public competition to design the CCSP in 1976.

3. POLICY AND IDEOLOGY

3a) Planning policy in São Paulo

During the first wave of growth, the President of the state of São Paulo, João Theodoro (1872-1875), was responsible for the first large scale urban development in the centre of São Paulo, in particular, the Várzea do Carmo and the Bairro da Luz, which responded to the opening of the São Paulo Railway Co. (1867) and the Cia. Paulista de Estradas de Ferro (1872). Antônio da Silva Prado, the first mayor of the City of São Paulo (1889 - 1911), was responsible for the creation of Tiradentes Avenue, the Municipal Theater, the Santa Ifigênia overpass, the remodelling of Luz, Arouche, and Paissandu squares, and Ibirapuera Park. The Baron of Duprat (Mayor from 1911-1914), was responsible for the creation of two large downtown parks, the Parque D. Pedro and Parque Anhangabaú (Toledo, 1996).

In the 1920s, Garden-City neighbourhoods in Companhia City, introduced a new concept of urban occupation, based on a better use of lots (Toledo, 1996). When José Pires do Rio became Mayor of São Paulo (1926-1930), he initiated projects and legislation that would transform the landscape and ambience of the city: the channelling of the Tietê River and straightening of the Pinheiros River; the public use of parks, such as Ibirapuera, Água Funda and Água Branca; the writing of a municipal building code (1929), and the making of the Topographical Map of the City of São Paulo. The use of aerial photography enabled a very precise mapping of the city that would serve as the basis for several urban designs that followed.

Perhaps the initiative with the most repercussions, which Benedito Lima de Toledo called a “key event in the history of the urbanisation of São Paulo” ((Toledo, 1996: 115) was the publication of the *Plan for Avenues for the City of São Paulo*, published in 1930. The proposal was based on an analysis of the city’s problems, and on studies of capital cities such as Berlin, Paris and Moscow. The *Plan* prioritised roads and transportation in urban planning, proposing a radial-perimetral

road system which would make possible the reorganisation of the downtown area to cope with the city's expansion (Toledo, 1996).

Partially implemented under Mayor Prestes Maia (1938 - 1945), the *Plan for Avenues* introduced zoning laws, set a range of building heights for new construction, reprogrammed part of the road system, encouraged downtown "verticalisation", and widened streets, transforming the entire city into a massive construction site (Toledo, 1996).

Prestes Maia returned to city government as elected mayor in 1961, but found a completely different situation from that in his first administration. With the city unable to collect taxes and unable to rely on state and federal financing, and opposition to the continuous urban expansion he had championed, he was unable to do pursue his *Plan for Avenues*. The military coup of 1964 brought enormous changes to the lives of the population, especially after *Institutional Act No. 5* of December 13, 1968, which marked the beginning of the grimmest and most repressive period of the dictatorship.² Ironically, the fiscal reform undertaken by the military regime, along with the adoption of comprehensive urban planning, allowed the city of São Paulo to resume its development.

The Basic Urbanization Plan (PUB) of 1968 created a new system of large highways, incorporating the radialroads within a broader grid system. According to Renato Anelli, the primary aim of the PUB was to facilitate access to services for the entire city, and reduce travel time, which would open up development in new areas, stimulating new employment and housing.

As the city grew, public transportation was also pursued. Construction of the Metropolitano de São Paulo (Metrô) began in 1966 under Mayor Faria Lima (1965 - 1969).³ The tunnels were made by trenching and filling, which caused great disruption on the surface, but after construction, these areas cleared for the Metro were now opportunities for urban interventions. Gave rise to the establishment of EMURB (Municipal Company of Urbanisation) in 1971, tasked with carrying out urban improvements and urban renewal projects of which Vergueiro was one.

3b) Political parties

Municipal

969–71 Paulo Salim Maluf, National Alliance for Renewal – ARENA, mayor appointed by the state governor

1971-73 José Carlos de Figueiredo Ferraz, mayor appointed by the state governor

1973 João Brasil Vita, National Alliance for Renewal – ARENA, as President of the City Council, he was acting mayor after the resignation of Figueiredo Ferraz

1973–75 Miguel Colasuono (), National Alliance for Renewal ARENA, appointed by the state

² This only ended ten years later in 1979, when *Constitutional Amendment 11* revoked the institutional acts that violated the Constitution.

³ Danon, Diana Dorothea, Fragelli, Marcelo. *O Metro de São Paulo*. 1975

governor

1975-79 Olavo Egídio Setubal, National Alliance for Renewal, ARENA, mayor appointed by the state governor

1979–82 Reynaldo Egydio de Barros, National Alliance for Renewal, ARENA, mayor appointed by the state governor;

National

During the period of the military dictatorship, during the government of General Castello Branco (1964-1967), the multi-party political system in effect until then was abolished, and replaced by a two-party system. With the military's consent, two political parties established: the National Alliance for Renewal (ARENA) on the right, and the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) on the left. In 1979, under the regime of General Figueiredo (1978-1985), multi-party participation was again permitted. ARENA was renamed the Social Democratic Party (PDS), while the MDB became the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB). Other parties were also created, such as the Workers' Party (PT) and the Democrat Workers' Party (PDT).

3c) Client's position

In 1979, a new mayoral administration appointed the poet Mario Chamie as head of the Municipal Secretariat of Culture and embarked on a project to bring libraries to the periphery (Serapião 2013, p.83). In this context the programme of EMURB's planned library was expanded to become a cultural centre. Some commentators pointed to the inauguration of the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1977 as a precedent for multi-purpose cultural spaces, a comparison vehemently rejected by client and architect alike, not wishing to be associated on the client's side, with something as bourgeois as the Pompidou Centre, and on the architects' side, with an object so conventionally confrontational in urban terms.

3d) Architects' position

Historically, architectural modernism in Brazil has been described as a fluid circulation between inside and outside, epitomised, perhaps, by Vilanova Artigas' Faculty of Architecture Building on the University of Sao Paulo Campus, where the original design included no full enclosures, no seal from the exterior world. Rather, a set of folding formal transitions marked the movement between in and out. Equally, in much of the work of Lina Bo Bardi, elements of nature pierce the boundary between inside and out, going so far as to design the large plaza below the MASP (Museu de Arte de Sao Paulo) as a fluid extension of the museum, and intended to host exhibitions that moved between the interior and the exterior.

In the CCSP, the creation of two internal streets in the final design, the low and long horizontal orientation and the incorporation of the original trees on the site into the final design suggest that the architects intended the life of the street and the life of the cultural centre to not just reflect one another, but bleed into each other. In Telles' words the building was a democratic act, marked,

perhaps, by the suggested spatial parity between 'low' or 'popular' street culture (outside) and 'high' or 'organised' culture (inside). While there remain formal sites of administration, turnstiles to the library, and the ability to close off spaces for performance and rehearsal, the CCSP's circulation spaces are an extension of the street.

4. DESIGN

4a) Design intentions (client)

The city's original intention for the site was for a new business district with corporate towers called Nova Vergueiro, an extension of downtown. The city body in charge of the development of the site, EMURB (Municipal Company of Construction and Urbanisation) wanted to hand over the design, construction and management of the buildings to the private sector, but not ownership of the land. This contentious business-oriented plan was dropped in favour of the creation of a new library for the city. EMURB hired a design firm to join the library committee: Plae Arquitetura e Urbanismo headed by young architects Lopes and Telles, who won the 1976 open competition to design the library.

4b) Design intentions (architect)

The architects configured the designs around the idea 'to create two streets that cross the entire library' (Serapião 2013, p.81). The architects worked up a design that privileged circulation and loose-fit spaces, and construction began in 1979. They worked up a proposal that hugged the ground, and may have been influenced by Paulo Mendes da Rocha's Brazilian Pavilion at the Expo 1970 in Osaka. Upon presentation to Mayor Setúbal, the design was thrown out, seen as being too elite for a Mayor who had foregrounded public transportation, and the pedestrianisation of streets in the city centre as hallmarks of his administration (Serapião 2013: 80).

While there were several shifts in the brief for the CCSP building, from library to cultural centre, the core conceit for the final design became an idea that the programming and spaces of a cultural centre could, and should, mirror public life in the street, and therefore in spatial terms the two should merge seamlessly the one into the other. The development of two internal streets; the long, horizontality of the building; and, the incorporation of existing landscape elements all contributed to this seamless integration. In Telles' own words, 'All of this [programme] was more or less expected, the exhibitions, music, sound, everything had been incorporated, the plastic arts, studio spaces. Everything in the street, and near the street, because the street is the greatest meeting place' (Serapião 2013: 83). From the façade on the Rua Vergueiro, one cannot visualise the full extent of the volume of the CCSP. It appears as a single-storey building that meets the curve of the street for some 400m. The extent of the horizontal building length is a second and important design intention that creates the condition more of a streetscape with multiple buildings attached or open from the inside, than a singular building.

The entryways appear more like alternative routes in the sidewalk rather than formal approaches to an institution. Once inside, internal streets on both sides of the vast centre extend the length. The four-storey difference in levels becomes visible as multiple walkways criss-cross down to the various programme areas. The design of these internal streets is so seamless that exiting Vergueiro station, one could use the CCSP as a through route. Equally, as a spine connecting the multiple more formal sites of cultural production and performance, it plays host to a large number of edge condition social activities, informal in nature.

Third, upon visiting the site, Prado Lopes and Telles recall seeing the trees left over after the construction had finished. They decided to construct the building around the trees, incorporating them into their design. This attention to existing landscape, the curve of the streetscape, and the circulatory routes from outside in, achieve the design intention of a connection between the street and the stage. Reflecting on the value of designing the building as a streetscape, Telles recalled: “[t]here are multiple paths that can bring you to the same place...It is possible to censor theatre, music and literature. But [the dictatorship] was unable to censor architecture because it is difficult to understand the intentions contained within a design. We made a space to bring people together, a democratic building developed under a military dictatorship!” (Serapião 2013: 81). Some 30 years later, the CCSP continues to be heavily used, with a mix of formally programmed and informal activities.

5. MATERIALS/ CONSTRUCTION/ ENVIRONMENT

Steel columns and concrete beams. Each column consists of eight radially arranged symmetrical plates. The beams have metal bases, and span up to 37.5 m. It took only eight workers in a smithy on the outskirts of the city to make them.

This technique allowed us to explore with the same freedom we do with reinforced concrete, bestowing upon the set a greater slenderness and more precise lines, avoiding falsework and the excessive and artisanal use of wood. (Prado Lopes in Serapião 2013: 67)

This specification had ethical as well as aesthetic implications: metalwork required more skill and less onerous working conditions than reinforced concrete, which was used almost universally in Brazil.

6. RECEPTION

6a) Reception then by media and specialists

Jorge Amado (writer), letter to Mario Chamie, Municipal Department of Culture, 1982:

The cultural center is something stunning. I love it.

Lisette Lagnado, Folha de S. Paulo, November 6, 1990:

[The exhibition rooms were the] “most active space in the city.”

6b) Reception now

Fernando Serapaio, *centro cultural são paulo – espaço e vida*, São Paulo: Editora Monolito, 2012:

Technical imperfections that accompanied the space for three decades result from design and construction problems ... caused by the change in the building’s use from library to cultural center. As the decision was taken with construction in progress, the design was adapted. If it had been designed from the get go as a cultural center the result would certainly have been different. ...[I]f we compare an ideal exhibition space for visual arts with the rooms of CCSP we see that those located on Vergueiro have low ceilings, curved beams that interfere with the set [sic], excessive natural lighting and poor artificial lighting... (P.99)

The management of the Cultural Center left the artistic class on the alert even before inauguration day. First because multidisciplinary equipment [sic] of that magnitude was a novelty... Thus a paradigm shift was imminent. The second (and main) reason for suspicion was its paternity, its DNA, it was after all the progeny of an authoritarian government.

...[T]he construction is the materialization of the end of the economic miracle, with its large infrastructure projects. What few realize is that its libertarian architecture is an answer to three years of repression. The space carries this contradiction: on the one hand, the scale and manner of construction reveal an era of imposition; on the other, its open design as an extension of the street shouts freedom. (P.126)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bruand, Yves, *Arquitetura contemporânea no Brasil*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981.

Campos, Candido Malta et al., *São Paulo: Metrópole em transito – percursos urbanos e culturais*. São Paulo: Editora Senac, 2004.

Chamie, Mario, *Mémoria ativa 2: Coleção de Centro Cultural São Paulo, ano 1*. São Paulo: Secretaria Municipal da Cultura, 1982.

Segawa, Hugo, *Arquiteturas no Brasil: 1900-1990*. São Paulo: Edusp, 2002.