

THE HISTORICAL CENTRE AS AN OBJECT OF DESIRE

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Abstract

This paper seeks to set out some hypotheses and ideas with regard to the relationship between: the historical centre, as a public space, and large urban projects, in the sense that the historical centre is a public space par excellence and, therefore, is an element around which the city is articulated; that converts it – over and above all else - into a large urban project (GPU in Sp.) This proposition takes place in the optimistic context of the city as a solution and when considering the historical centre as an object of desire. The importance of historical centres is rooted in the possibility of preserving and making the most of memory – to generate feelings of identity by function and belonging – and of this being converted into a platform of innovation for the city as a whole. Therefore it is important to have a social subject as the conscious will (planning). What is important is the construction of a single government of public character (transparent, legitimate and representative) which is capable of taking on this right. This is why all this is more a projection and object of desire than of reality.

Key words: *historic center, local government, desire, urban project*

1.0 Introduction

This paper seeks to set out some hypotheses and ideas with regard to the relationship between: the historical centre, as a public space, and large urban projects, in the sense that the historical centre is a public space par excellence and, therefore, is an element around which the city is articulated; that converts it – over and above all else - into a large urban project (GPU in Sp.) This proposition takes place in the optimistic context of the city as a solution and when considering the historical centre as an object of desire. To make this idea a reality, the following three guiding principles are taken as the starting points:

First, one needs to set out with an optimistic vision of the city in the sense that the city is less a problem and more a solution. And this vision has to do with the need to overcome the stigma and pessimism which has been made of it, in a two-fold sense: on the one hand, as if it were a source of anomie and chaos which is expressed, for example, as its being regarded as a concrete jungle, as a fount which generates violence, as a space which creates poverty (neo-Malthusianism) and, on the other hand, as the decree of death which is periodically pronounced on the city . From these negative conceptions of the city one reaches the thought that to resolve these problems one must restrain the process of

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migration from the country to the city so that cities stop growing and, thus, the problems will not increase.

At this point of this century and after an accelerated process of urbanization in Latin America, the equivocation can be fearlessly stated that poverty is reduced in cities, that cities make it more possible to change the inequitable standards of gender than the countryside does (Arboleda, 2004), while in the countryside are seated traditional cultures which assign asymmetric and specific roles to women, in the city women are made public, are made free.

A second point which guides this line of argument refers to the fact Latin America is undergoing a period of giving new value to the built city and, within this, to a greater degree, to types of centrality: historical and the urban ones – which coincide in some cases – in a context of internationalization. This revaluation has, among other matters, two explicit determining factors: the process of globalization and demographic transition.

The return to the constructed city is due to what the process of globalization introduces, for example, significant variables at the urban level: on the one hand, the reduction of distant territories, the change in pace of cities and the drop in the number of inhabitants displaced on account of the new modalities of culture at home, amongst which can be mentioned telework, cinema and food; and on the other hand, because the fundamental ambits of socialization take place in significant public spaces such as the centralities or the so-called artefacts of globalization (De Mattos, 2002).

Revaluing the constructed city also arises from demographic transition which is explained by the fact that in 1950 Latin America had a population concentration in cities which bordered on 41%, at this stage of the 21st century it has reached about 80% (Hábitat, 2000); this means that in a period of a little more than 50 years the population available for migration has significantly reduced: of the 60 per cent which existed in 1950 all that is left today is 20 per cent.

This demographic change has direct consequences for the analysis which interest us: on the one hand, that cities have stopped growing in the accelerated manner which had been taking place, which may make us think less about a city based on size and more about one of quality and, on the other hand, which closes the circle of migration from the country to the city and new forms of migration are opened up, such as international and inter-urban ones. International migration gives way to the birth of the second, third and fourth cities of our countries outside national territories and, including, Latin America. It is also as a result of this that the region receives a flow of economic resources by way of remittances, amounting to not less than thirty thousand million dollars as an annual average.

Globalization and demographic transition lead to the existence of a double inter-related movement in the city: the return to the constructed city in a context of internationalization, which gives rise to the need to introduce the concept of cosmopolitan introspection, as a distinctive streak of current urbanization in Latin America, different from that of the prior period which was characterized by creating peripheries and forming metropolitan areas.

In the context of these changes which the Latin American city is undergoing, the historic centrality must acquire new functions, for which it has recourse to promoting and constructing large urban projects (GPU in Sp.). In this new adaptation to the cutting-edge poles of urban development, enormous investments are required which keep it up-to-date within the city, in such a way that it is not a brake on acceleration but rather an engine for it.

This is where the two-fold condition that guides this paper appears: the historical centre is the city's public space par excellence and, through it, it must be converted into the platform of innovation for the whole of city life and into the object of desire of the city that is possible; that is, that the historical centrality must be understood as a projection and not just as a memory.

In order to flesh out this proposal, an expository logic will follow in which the following aspects will be dealt with: first of all, one in which three hypotheses are formulated regarding the destiny of historical centres: the purpose of historical centres, the new historical centres, the strengthening of centrality in order to conceive it, in this last hypothesis, within the task of its being considered a "large urban project". Secondly, one in which the proposal is developed of the historical centre as the city's public space par excellence, which comes from symbiosis (meeting place), the symbolic (identities) and the polis (civic) and, as such, must evolve into being the strategic element of the city's structure. Thirdly, one in which it is sought to present the historical centre as a projection, as the "large urban project" (GPU), which allows it to be converted – from its historical and cultural roots – into the transforming element for the city as a whole. And finally, as a fourth point, to offer some conclusions which have arisen from these reflections.

2.0 Hypotheses on the future of historical centers

In Latin America the pattern of urbanization has entered a process of full transformation: while in the 1940s urbanization led to the expansion of the periphery, nowadays it is heading for the existing city: it has moved from an exogenous and centrifugal tendency of urban sprawl to an endogenous and centripetal one. It is an urbanization which has moved from the traditional concept of frontier city to that of a networked city.

With this return to prioritizing the constructed urban being, the historical centre demands a singular weight and its nature changes; new rights are laid down linked to accessibilities, intra-urban centralities, existing symbologies and the social relations which sustain it; the historical centrality is given new value and a demand is laid down for new methodologies, techniques and concepts which open up new analytical outlooks and intervention mechanisms which go beyond the paradigms of monuments.

What can happen to the historical centre in this context, if we take into account that it is a historical product which is born, matures and dies, like all social processes do? We also need to enquire about the outcome which the transformation and refunctionalization of historical centres can have in relation to urban structures as a whole.

The attempt to answer these questions leads to our formulating three hypotheses regarding their future, that in fact are more a combination of them than just one in a pure state, yet there is always one which has more weight than the others. Independently of the hypotheses set out, historical centres are undergoing a dynamic that leads one to think that their future is at stake and that much will depend on the policies which will be drawn up. But it is nevertheless recognised there are limitations which have conservationist and developmental foci. These hypotheses are as follows:

3.0 We may be witnessing the end of historical centers.

If we set out by taking the most negative and pessimistic option, it can be construed that historical centres are dying. The hypothesis of the end of historical centrality is sustained, on the one hand, on the principle that every historical process evolves from its birth until its probable death and, on the other, on the historical axis that its birth is associated with a sign of crisis and with its death in the wings arising from the process of differentiating

between an urban centre and a historical centre, in which the former extracts the functions of centrality from the latter and, in this process, the latter becomes degraded on account of this loss or fading away of its central functions.

The leaking away of the functions of historical centres tends to come about when when it stops being the whole city (*urbe*) and, as such, it begins to lose the very diversity of urban life. It is the city's growth which leads to this being overcome and, also, to its being a continent of the historical centre being born. The moment at which historical centres lose their centrality functions they are deemed to be dying and require renovation to counteract this. Historical centres can erode or drain away by various routes, such as the following:

If they deteriorate because of the departure of political representation functions, because, for example, they reduce their ability to construct integrative identities which form the spectrum of social imagination. When the organs of political representation leave, centrality is lost as is representation in settings above the historical centre itself. Thus we see that with the relocation of the activities of the Presidency of the Republic, the most important representation and policy integration functions of a historical centre are lost from a historical centre, from a city and from a country: democracy. Instructive cases we have of this are from Mexico and Cuba where the functions were relocated within the city and there is the extreme case of Rio de Janeiro where it was produced outside that urban ambit (*urbe*).

Also if they lose because of relocation of certain trading functions through headquarters being transferred to new centralities (in some cases their branches are maintained in the centre), because of the creation of cutting-edge economic firms outside the historical centre and because commerce, industry and services become precarious - as economic activities become informal - in the historical centre.

Historical centres lose centrality when they become homogeneous, for example, by tilting the balance of the structural contradiction between historico-cultural wealth and socio-economic poverty through tourism or poverty. In the first case, the priority of tourist activity, justified as a mechanism of internationalization, economic development which is not contaminating (industry without chimneys), is revealed as quite to the contrary: it is a sector which highly contaminates culture, the economy, policy, architecture and urbanism; this must be rethought beginning with a multi-cultural option and defined in renovation policies. But it also tends to uniformity under the form of gentrifying activities (on residential land), without reducing poverty and, better said, expelling the poor.

And the second, accumulated poverty, in tension with historical wealth, is taking its conversion into a redoubt of poverty, with which the historical centres of the poor are converted into poor historical centres and the most glaring structural contradiction, between historico-cultural wealth opposed to socio-economic poverty, ends up tilting the balance towards the erosion of wealth because poverty operates like King Midas but in reverse: everything that touches it erodes it. Tenancy under the form of shacks (very few of the many make a lot), or of street trading which privatizes public space and of prostitution, etc are obvious displays of this claim.

Historical centres also lose their centrality status when accessibility and speed and linking up with the city are reduced, for example, by pedestrianization, by technological backwardness, by rupturing the social networks and by scant connectivity.

But historical centres do not only lose centrality because of general processes but also because of incorrect public policies. Society is drained away by monumentalist policies which tend to favour the physical patrimony denominated, and make the past the aim of

intervention and to diminish the existing rich social capital; and developmental policies which wipe out the past, increase the price of land and strengthen gentrification.

Examples of historical centres which have lost their centrality and been transformed into historical areas or neighbourhoods are San Telmo in Buenos Aires or La Candelaria in Bogotá; mention must also be made of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic or Cartagena in Colombia which has one single proposal linked to tourism, which has led to their becoming operational but as historical enclaves. There are moreover those which tend to empty themselves of society due to historical centres speeding up the loss of their resident population. To sum up, with the loss of centrality, historical centres are transformed into historical places or neighbourhoods and stop being what they are: centres, because they have been peripheralized.

4.0 We may be undergoing the appearance of other forms of centrality.

The hypothesis of the appearance of new and newish forms of centrality is based on the following lines of thought:

- First that the transformation of the centre is from a space for meeting to another of flows. An interesting case to analyze is that of the formation of longitudinal centralities, in which centrality is not a concentric point but a succession of linear points. Two types of cases illustrate the claim: on the one hand, that which occurs in the city of Bogotá – starting with the transportation system called Transmilenio, which structures a set of colinear public spaces on the base of this axis. And, on the other, in the city of La Paz in which it takes shape from its historical centre to the Av. El Prado and that of Mexico City in which it also spins out from its historical centre to the Av. Reforma, in these two cases following the principle of linear centrality.
- A second line of thinking is that which arises from the integration of several centralities, each of which originated at distinct historical moments of the city under the continuous or network modality. One can cite the case of Quito, in which the historical centre, which was the place where the city was founded and therefore of colonial origin, is linked up to the so-called Mariscal Sucre, founded in the middle of the 20th century. Today these two centralities link up to form together a new centrality in which technology, times, their functions are distinct, but which liaise extensively as a new form of continuous centrality. The same thing happens, but by conurbation, between the historical centre of Mexico City when it is linked to those of Coyoacán and Xochimilco.
- A third line of approach refers to the existence of spatially discontinuous centralities. How are historical centres in discontinuous spaces to be understood which which are well beyond the frontiers defined through physical content? With the processes of globalization and international migration, a set of centralities begins to develop which are symbolic of, for example, the emigrants who integrate the city within, with the city without. In Ecuador, the historical centre of the city of Cuenca is integrated with the city of Murcia through the Parque del Retiro, a place in which Ecuadoreans are concentrated for economic and cultural interchange as well as to form social networks and establish discontinuous spatial links appropriate for symbolic communities in transnational social spaces (Beck, 1998) The same occurs between Lima with Constitution Square in Santiago or between Managua with the Plaza de la Merced in San José. This means that the centralities are articulated socially, culturally and economically without there being a continuous space.

- A fourth possibility for historical centrality is that which is inscribed in the definition of the “non- places” (Augé, 2000), a creation of globalization. It may be a centrality which is constructed in the periphery with cutting-edge technology and highly differentiated and exclusive accessibility. The most emblematic and interesting examples are the cases of the centrality constructed in the periphery of Mexico City, under the name of the Santa Fe Corporative Centre, or the Berrini Centre in San Pablo. This is where a new form of centrality appears, which is also historical despite its low value in terms of age, but it orders the city and how its urbanization unfolds.

Mention may also be made of those smaller scale central places but which are highly specialized and fragmented. They appear under the forms of artefacts of globalization, as are the examples of: airports (Río de Janeiro), ports (Valparaíso), World Trade Centers (Bogotá), malls (Lima), stadiums (Buenos Aires), convention centres (Cartagena) and fairs (San Pablo), thematic parks (Mexico City) and business centres (Santiago), etc (De Mattos).

- And last of all, a fifth possibility, which is virtual centrality, in which the portals of the Internet fulfil the role of a diffuse centrality lacking territorial references.

5.0 Strengthening historical centrality.

The third hypothesis is that of strengthening historical centres, which appears more as a projection and desire than a reality. And it sets off from the principle that the strengthening of historical centrality will be possible if it is considered integrally based on the tensions of wealth-poverty, local-global, historical-urban centrality (Carrión, F. 2001) and on the following four conditions:

The historical centre must assume its public role starting with the reconstruction of the two-fold dimension which it bears: as a public space which permits the renovation not only of the ambit which it contains but of the city as a whole, because it is this space which intergrates and organizes. And as a public object of government, so that it recovers and reverts the historical deterioration of the public function. That which is today considered the historical centre was the whole city and, therefore, it had its own government; but when the city grew this government lost exclusivity over this part, thus beginning the deterioration of this important part of the historical centre. Thus an important consideration for strengthening historical centres is to have an organ of government which is autonomous, representative and legitimate.

It is indispensable to have an economic vision of the historical centre which generates conditions for positioning, competitiveness and connectivity by incorporating cutting-edge technologies and productive reconversion (arts and crafts, services, industry) in a context of modernization which adds more value and time to the past; that is, a process which adds historical value to centrality. If what is wanted is for a historical centre to be what is originally was, what will be achieved is to freeze it in time, but if the trail of its history is followed – which is what the spaces of greatest change within the city are – policies for transformation, development and sustainability must be set out and not policies for conservation and preservation.

What is required are social policies (health, education, housing, employment) in historical centres, because unless there are these, the inverse figure of King Midas will end up eroding the great historical and cultural wealth which they possess; out of this comes the need to redistribute society’s resources and the need to generate an improvement in the

living conditions of those who live there, so that they may ascend the social scale rather than be excluded.

6.0 The historical centre as a public space

The city is a public space (Bohigas, 2003) because it is of public domain; that is, it is a space where collective wills are expressed and formed so that society is represented in its rights and duties (citizenship). It is a meeting place of diverse matters, where the warmth of a city and its urbanism is expressed. But also, according to Borja (2003), the city is a set of meeting places or a system of meaningful places, just as much for the urban totality as for its parts. That is, that the city has meeting places and meaningful places operating in a system so that it can exist as such.

These meeting places and meaningful points are the public spaces, because they bring together the following three fundamental components: the symbiotic, the symbolic and the polis. The public space is a symbiotic space in the sense that it generates integration, liaison, encounter and connectivity of the distinct parts and does so based on two determining features: the first, that which gives it sense and shape to collective life by way of integrating society. And the other, that of giving order and unity to the city through its strategic capacity for coordination.

In this context, the historical centre is the meeting space par excellence both because of its centrality which is by being the focal point of the city and also through the passage of time which has allowed it to acquire a value as history. By this two-fold quality: of spatiality (centrality) and temporality (history), it is the meeting place of a population who live in spaces which go beyond it (transterritoriality) and it is also the ambit where distinct societies are found coming from distinct times and moments (transtemporality). This condition assigns to the centre the particular symbiotic quality of the coming together of the plurality of spaces, times and patrimonial subjects, a question which allows the introduction of the concept of derived citizenship, in terms of distinct societies coming from different moments meeting each other. The historical centre transcends time and space, producing: transmission between generations and alterity in transnational symbolic communities.

The historical centre, as a public space, is a symbolic space because it possesses a heritage of symbols which generate multiple, collective and simultaneous identities. The symbolic loading comes from the two-fold condition which it has as a centrality and as a history-laden accumulation which leads to an identity loading which sees to it – in both a figurative and real sense – that citizenship is identified and represented based on its functional feature (centrality) and its sense of belonging (history). The symbolic power which is concentrated in time and in space is very high; it is the most significant in the city, to such an extent that it imprints character on its whole urban essence (urbe).

With the immense symbolic power which the historical centre possesses, as a public space, it is the place where society is made visible and is represented. This is why, for example, politics finds a form of making itself visible here, as exemplified by Equadorean or Bolivian Indians, the Mothers of Mayo in Argentina or the Zapatistas in Mexico: and of institutional representation which is sealed by the presence of the Palace of the Government, whether this be national or local. In the same way, the economic function and religious activity achieve important degrees of social protection. Thus historical centres need to be heterogeneous so that they may potentialize the multiple and simultaneous forms of identity.

And also the historical centre, as a public space, is the ambit of the polis, because it is the place in the city of greatest dispute, both of symbolic power of which it is the bearer as of the state's modernization policies, between the public and private sectors. No other place in the city is so disputed because the patrimonial subjects confront and stand up to each other as they construct citizenship.

Urban and historical centralities are the fundamental elements of all public spaces. Nevertheless, in Latin America, there is a process of depopulation of the centrality, as is illustrated by the cases of Bogotá, Quito, Santiago, Mexico City and Lima, to name only some. Contradicting this process there is a tidal wave of people who travel daily to them: in Quito, Lima and Mexico City about 8 times more people than live there, commute. Why? Because the centrality is a public space which concentrates information, forms of representation and markets, in addition to organizing collective life and the city. This is why the public space par excellence is the centrality – urban and historical –, the place from which one departs, to which one arrives and from which the city is structured.

The historical centre is a public space not by its parts (the monumentalist vision) but by the great public and collective significance which the whole possesses. It is a space for everyone, because it grants a sense of collective identity to the population, but in a context of dispute for symbolic power. It is an ambit for meeting in which the population disputes, socializes and exchanges (goods, services, information). But it is also like this because it has a public order which is highly specialized and defined: on the one hand, laws, ordinances and codes and, on the other, a complete institutional stamp which is capable of producing a public management of co-action, regulation and administration. In this collective space there is a public appropriation, a form of public management, a collective outlook and some multiple identities which come from distinct actors, both from within and without the zone, as well as from times past and present.

Nevertheless, today the city is organized more from the sphere of the private than the public sector. Currently the market has more weight than it used to have, to the extent that public management is subordinated to it, and the public space has moved on from being one that structures to one that is being structured, residually or marginally, losing its original functions or, in some cases, being substituted by other more functional spaces in current urbanism, such as: the shopping mall and the social club. In this way, the public space – such as squares – end up being, on the one hand, a waste using the economic logic of the maximization of greed and, on the other, a necessary evil to meet the norms of urbanism.

We are suffering from agrophobia (Borja, 39, 2003) which attacks historical centres in distinct ways, such as: rupturing the unity through the intervention of isolated projects, privatization of the forms of management (Firms, Corporations), the presence of large amounts of capital (Benetton in Havana and Carlos Slim in México) and the gentrification of prestige activities. Each one of these forms leads to new forms of constructing identities on the basis of the market and, therefore, of consumption. Globalization homogenizes, thus undermining the base of existence of the historical centre.

But also there is the transit of the segregated city – typical of initial modernity – from which the parts that used to shape the city were integrated into the whole by means of the public space, and then came fragmented city – a sign of the second phase of modernity – in which there exist discontinuous constellations of spatial fragments (Castells, 438, 1999), which end up by diluting urban unity and give way to the appearance of the phenomenon of urban foreignness. Currently cities are full of people who do not fit in anywhere, who have lost a sense of belonging to the urban essence (*urbe*), who have created frontiers of a distinct type (social, physical) and who are, in their daily

displacements, the population who have to identify themselves, constantly and continually, to an authority of security personnel...privately contracted.

The public space cannot fulfil a marginal or residual function. It needs to return to having the function which it always had so that it may be the strategic space which is that of integrating society and structuring the city. And as the historical centre is the place which changes most in the city and is the public space par excellence, not by its parts but as a whole; its function must be that of converting itself into a platform of innovation which gives a new direction to the city. For all these reasons it must be converted into a great urban project (GPU).

7.0 The historical centre as a project

The historical centre must not be thought of as regression to what it once was or what it is currently. The historical centre must be conceived as a feeling directed towards a predetermined end; that is to say, it must be converted into a project which assumes the sense of the future desired. Therefore, project and desire go hand-in-hand. It is in this way, the historical centre must be renewed based on a preconcept which allows it to be converted into a proposal – a significant and large-scale one – in anticipation of foreseen results and as a form of consciously bringing forward the future. That is to say, it must be converted into an object of desire based on a social subject with a conscious will .

In central areas Large Urban Projects (GPU) have always been constructed, principally, for example, through initiatives tending to improve accessibility to them (transit routes), to make the spaces adequate for new demands (commerce, car parks), to renovate old buildings (monuments) or to replace architectonic structures with high-rise buildings. In other words. They were isolated and insufficient sectorial interventions which broke, in many cases, with historical continuity. Today, under the new reigning conceptions and because of the precarious results evidenced by these types of actions, the historical central areas must be seen in their totality as a Large Urban Project (GPU) .

It must be taken into consideration that the most important urban transformations have developed historically upon the base of large projects. This means that large projects are not new in urbanism, because they have always existed in particular historical contexts. Their scale varies from the changes which produce at the level of the neighbourhood to their upper limit which is the construction of new cities, as in the cases of Brasilia and Chandigar. Nevertheless there is the logic that leads one to believe that at moments of historical turning points, the city must change and re-condition itself by means of large urban investments. In modern history, key sets of circumstances can be pin-pointed: the industrial revolution and globalization.

The Industrial Revolution saw an acceleration of urbanization which led to large projects being carried out which sought to make the city fit for industrialization . Population growth through migration from the countryside to the city, the shift of the means of production towards the the places of concentration of demand, the presence of the automobile and the appearance of steel and concrete led to the transformation of the peripheries and urban centralities by means of large projects. Thus, can be mentioned, in the centrality, for example, the building of large axes and ring roads (the urban renovation of Paris by Haussmann) and the construction of new buildings (railway stations, depositories, hotels). But also on the periphery, there were massive programmes of social housing (the garden city).

If throughout history there have been changes provoked by the construction of GPU, what can be asked is: What is now new as a result of globalization?

A century after the Industrial Revolution we have a new wave of large urban projects which are sustained in technological exchanges, in the new logic of global accumulation (globalization) in the city's conversion into a relevant political actor and into a strategic place for neoliberal accumulation, typical of the second modernity (Beck, 1998). In Latin America we are undergoing these processes, to which are added the particularities of the region, in which demographic transformations, changes in the institutional signposts of government and new forms of emigration of the population stand out. In this way, the city moves on from being considered as a space of places to one of flows, and development is conceived as the city's productivity through competitiveness, connectivity and positioning.

Four types of large urban projects (GPU) have been developed:

i. A first type of large urban project could be the appearance of new cities, sited in strategic places of globalization, as can be seen in certain frontier cordons between Mexico and USA or between Brazil and Argentina. Also ports which obey new strategic positionings which have sprung up in the global urban network or certain cities which formerly thrived but are today totally distinct, to the extent that one could say they have been re-founded.

ii. A second type of GPU is in the form of recycling and reconversion of old urban and architectonic structures which came from an industrial past (in Mexico City, the reconversion of the Loreto y Peña Pobre paper factory in Cuicuilco Square), docklands (in Buenos Aires with Puerto Madero), airport freight facilities (Cerrillos in Santiago) or historical centralities (Historic Centre of Quito). There has been a re-functionalization of certain degraded architectonic structures in order to bring them up to standard with the new modernity, such as, for example: a Central Warehouse converted into a shopping mall (Buenos Aires), a railway station transformed into a cultural centre (Santiago), a convent converted into a hotel (Cartagena, Cuzco, Santo Domingo), a hospital houses a city museum (Quito) and a housing estate transformed into universities (la Candelaria, Bogotá).

iii. A third type of GPU is related to the construction of new structures related to the moment, such as the artefacts of globalization: shopping malls, airports, stadiums, World Trade Center, which seek to position the city in a strategic place of globalization.

iv. And finally, the reconversion of the old historical centralities (Malecón 2000), the development of the new centralities, (Santa Fe in Mexico, la Cité in Buenos Aires) and the formation of extended centralities (the Transmilenio in Bogotá)

In the context of neoliberal policies, of the crisis of the national state and of the weight which the market bears down on urban development, urban planning loses signification. Physical planning born during the industrial revolution falls into disuse and strategic planning gives ground. In view of this and of the reigning pragmatism large urban projects take on relevance, and have a two-fold virtue: they show results in the short term and are converted into the locomotors which throw up new initiatives which integrate the population and generate multiple identities.

The development of large urban projects GPU questions Urban Planning in its distinct versions (physical, strategic) because regulations are seen as a brake on competitiveness and positioning, their design takes time and proposals for the long term are scarcely viable in a rapidly changing world. Moreover, because of their technocratic form and content, they generate an important social limitation: they do not end up producing social adhesions. The urban planning crisis also comes straight from the crisis of the public sector and of the

few results obtained. Nevertheless they must not be seen as antagonistic but as complementary activities.

This supposes, as a starting point, considering the historical centre as a public space which is an object of desire, which ought to have its public management reconstructed under the form of a single government. In this context, urban planning appears as a demand or claim and the historical centre as a large urban project (GPU) with an outreach beyond the local .

8.0 Conclusions

The historical centre – as a whole – is the public space par excellence of the city and, therefore, the fundamental element in the social integration and structuring of the city. As this does not take place nowadays – given that there is agrophobia – the historical centre appears as an object of desire and as a project of variable scale, according to its patrimonial signification.

From this conclusion out of the matrix, others become of no less value, such as:

- With the new pattern of urbanization in Latin America – of cosmopolitan introspection – the constructed city acquires a new function and a greater weighting in the urban essence (urbe).. This fact determines that urban and historical centralities can assume – as a project and desire – roles of encounter (symbiotic), representation (symbolic) and dispute (polis) in social and urban terms.
- Historical centres are public spaces which have elements of social integration – which must improve their multiple accessibility to contrarrest urban foreignness – and of urban structuring – which must recover the centrality in order to project the city desterrando urban fractionilization.-.
- In the current historical context, historical centres have been converted into privileged places of production of memory intentando, in this way, to break away from the uniformity which globalization seeks to impose; in this sense, the historical centre is converted into a symbol but of local identity resistance and, moreover, into a platform of innovation for the whole city, given that it is the public space which structures and which most changes in the city and, for this reason, that which accumulates more time (the value of history).
- Historical centres are civic places by which invisible society makes itself visible and through which alterity is generated. It is from this that there is a need for a public organism which might institutionalize this civic character (representative), which might propel its being a large urban project (legitimacy) and which is accountable for its acts (transparency).
- Just as there are no cities without a citizenship, there is no citizenship without a state; because of which any proposal on the historical centre must have this indissoluble triad present: citizenship, city and state because only in this way will there be more citizens for more city and, vice versa, more city for more citizens.

In other words, the importance of historical centres is rooted in the possibility of preserving and making the most of memory – to generate feelings of identity by function and belonging – and of this being converted into a platform of innovation for the city as a whole. Therefore it is important to have a social subject as the conscious will (planning). Therefore what is important is the construction of a single government of public character

(transparent, legitimate and representative) which is capable of taking on this right. This is why all this is more a projection and object of desire than of reality.

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