

Camila Ferrari

Doutora em Arquitetura e Urbanismo.
Pesquisadora, Instituto de Arquitetura e
Urbanismo
Universidade de São Paulo
São Carlos, Brasil
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5654-008X>
camila.ferrari@usp.br

BRAZILIAN AND ARGENTINIAN SOCIAL HOUSING (1960-1980): POLITICS, ARCHITECTURE, AND URBANSCAPE

HABITAÇÃO SOCIAL BRASILEIRA E ARGENTINA
(1960-1980): POLÍTICA, ARQUITETURA E CIDADE

VIVIENDA SOCIAL BRASILEÑA Y ARGENTINA
(1960-1980): POLÍTICA, ARQUITECTURA Y CIUDAD



Figure 0. Presidente Castelo Branco Housing Complex. Source: Negrelos (2021, p.263).

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ABSTRACT

State-funded housing production in Latin America underwent significant changes in the mid-20th century, driven by changes in the global political and economic landscape. Since the 1930s, architecture and the state had worked together to adapt modern design to the local context, but in the 1960s, new governmental actions in urban, social, and economic development, marked by a clear reduction of modern ideals, were established and remained in place until the 1980s. This research aimed to compare, from a transnational perspective, the social housing in São Paulo and Buenos Aires, the largest cities in Brazil and Argentina, between the 1960s and 1980s, to unravel the socio-spatial implications of housing policies during that period in the two metropolises. In addition to analyzing morphological similarities and differences, it is interesting to record the relationships between politics and architecture in those contexts, recognizing that they affected not only the formal aspects of social housing but also the population's lifestyles. The research revealed similarities, such as the close relationship between governments and large construction companies, the main entities responsible for building mega-housing projects during that period. At the same time, significant differences were also revealed, especially regarding housing projects: in the Brazilian case, based on extensiveness and horizontality; in the Argentinian case, on intensive and vertical occupation; and on the issue of project authorship, attributed to promoting entities in the former and to architectural firms in the latter. The conclusions indicate that, at that time, state housing production prioritized economic development over social issues.

Keywords: Buenos Aires, housing complexes, dictatorships, housing policy, São Paulo

RESUMO

A produção habitacional estatal na América Latina experimentou transformações substanciais em meados do século XX, impulsionadas pela mutação do panorama político-econômico global. Desde a década de 1930, a Arquitetura e o Estado atuaram conjuntamente na adaptação do projeto moderno ao contexto local. Todavia, nos anos 1960, novas ações governamentais voltadas ao desenvolvimento urbano, social e econômico – com acentuado declínio do ideário moderno – estabeleceram-se e perduraram até a década de 1980. O objetivo desta pesquisa foi comparar a habitação social em São Paulo e Buenos Aires, as maiores metrópoles do Brasil e da Argentina, entre as décadas de 1960 e 1980, visando elucidar as implicações socioespaciais das políticas habitacionais do período sob uma perspectiva transnacional. Além de analisar convergências e divergências morfológicas, interessa registrar as interlocuções entre a política e a arquitetura naqueles contextos, sob a premissa de que tais dinâmicas impactaram não apenas o aspecto formal da habitação social, mas também os modos de vida da população. A pesquisa evidenciou semelhanças, como a proximidade entre governos e grandes construtoras, principais responsáveis pela execução dos megaconjuntos habitacionais do período. Simultaneamente, detectaram-se disparidades significativas, sobretudo quanto aos projetos habitacionais, baseados, no caso brasileiro, na extensividade e horizontalidade, e, no caso argentino, na ocupação intensiva e verticalizada. Essa divergência estendeu-se, igualmente, à autoria dos projetos, atribuída aos órgãos promotores no primeiro contexto e a escritórios de arquitetura no segundo. As conclusões indicam que, no período em questão, a produção habitacional estatal priorizou o desenvolvimento econômico em detrimento das demandas sociais.

Palavras chaves: Buenos Aires, conjuntos habitacionais, ditaduras, política habitacional, São Paulo

RESUMEN

La producción de vivienda estatal en América Latina experimentó cambios significativos a mediados del siglo XX, impulsados por transformaciones en el panorama político y económico mundial. Desde la década de 1930, la arquitectura y el Estado habían trabajado para adaptar el diseño moderno al contexto local, pero en la década de 1960 se implementaron nuevas acciones gubernamentales en materia de desarrollo urbano, social y económico, con una clara reducción de los ideales modernos, que se mantuvieron hasta la década de 1980. El objetivo de esta investigación fue comparar la vivienda social en São Paulo y Buenos Aires, las ciudades más grandes de Brasil y Argentina, entre las décadas de 1960 y 1980, con el fin de dilucidar las implicaciones socioespaciales de las políticas de vivienda en ambas metrópolis, en el contexto latinoamericano, desde una perspectiva transnacional. Además de analizar las similitudes y diferencias en el diseño, se registran las relaciones entre la política y la arquitectura en dichos contextos, entendiendo que estas impactaron no solo el aspecto formal de la vivienda, sino también el estilo de vida de la población. La investigación reveló similitudes, como la estrecha relación entre los gobiernos y las grandes constructoras, las principales entidades responsables de la ejecución de megaproyectos de vivienda durante ese período. Al mismo tiempo, se evidenciaron diferencias significativas, especialmente en lo que respecta a los proyectos de vivienda: en el caso brasileño, basados en la extensión y la horizontalidad; y en el caso argentino, en la ocupación intensiva y vertical, así como en la cuestión de la autoría del proyecto, atribuida a los organismos promotores en el primer caso y a los estudios de arquitectura en el segundo. Las conclusiones indican que, en aquel entonces, la producción estatal de vivienda priorizaba el desarrollo económico en detrimento de las cuestiones sociales.

Palabras clave: Buenos Aires, conjuntos habitacionales, dictaduras, política de vivienda, São Paulo

INTRODUCTION

This work is based on research investigating state housing production from a historical perspective to clarify the current understanding of the housing issue in Latin America. The research is set within transnational historiography and adopts a comparative approach (Bloch, 1998; Barros, 2014; Weinstein, 2015), a methodological strategy justified by the premise that the housing issue transcends national borders, especially in the context of Latin American dictatorships. As suggested by Devoto and Fausto (2008), the potential of comparative research between Brazil and Argentina has already been confirmed, especially in the field of politics, with studies on Vargasism and Peronism. Due to their spatial proximity and parallel historical development, the two societies are influenced by the “same great causes [...] that go back at least in part to a common origin” (Bloch, 1998, p. 123). The dictatorships of the two countries in the second half of the 20th century, although rooted in their respective national histories, are situated within the broader context of the Cold War and the regional and international dynamics it produced. The trend of military intervention in politics was justified by combating the “communist threat”; in this scenario, authoritarian governments, consolidated through coups, violently repressed dissent, aligning themselves with developmental interests.

The dictatorial regimes devised new policies, bodies, and models for housing production. There is the construction of massive housing complexes, linked to the nature of the (re)settlement of precarious occupations and aligned with the valorization of private capital through the construction industry. The Brazilian case was analyzed in the studies of Pulhez (2014) and Negrelos (2021), while the Argentine case was examined by Yujnovsky (1984) and Ballent (2018). In the collection they organized, which compares the Argentine and Brazilian dictatorships, Lvovich and Motta (2023) include a chapter on housing, written by Samuel Oliveira and Gabriela Gomes. The latter also published an article comparing the housing policies of the Brazilian and Argentine dictatorships between 1964 and 1973 (Oliveira & Gomes, 2021). This text is based on key research and advances, analyzing two cases to highlight, through a comparison of selected housing complexes, how the relations between politics and architecture established by dictatorships are embedded in housing production and the configuration of urban space. For this work, we take São Paulo and Buenos Aires, the largest metropolises in their respective countries, as Case Studies.

The analysis transcended the morphological evaluation, aiming to understand the relationship among politics, architecture, and society in the two cities. In both cases, dictatorial regimes used housing as a tool of legitimization, social control, and ideological expression. The analysis highlighted how housing policies have affected society – including issues of housing access and socio-spatial segregation-and the long-term effects on the configuration of cities. In addition to analyzing project convergences and divergences, it is interesting to examine how architecture indirectly strengthened or questioned political power, and to reveal the limits and possibilities of planning in those contexts. We consider that the analysis helps situate these groups within the political, economic, and social context of each

country and contributes to discussions about the role of the state in the production of urban space in Latin America.

In Brazil, the ideology of homeownership, assumed by the state and intrinsically linked to the commodification of housing, sought to establish an identity between the worker-owner and capital, aiming to disarticulate popular organization. By basing the urban housing policy on a banking institution, the regime boosted civil construction, with the expectation of generating jobs and strengthening the economy. However, the priority given to the construction of large housing complexes, often in peripheral areas and with insufficient infrastructure, has led to serious social and urban problems. Urban development, in this context, tended to “skip” areas not yet allotted, valorizing the intermediate arable land by extending infrastructure to the complexes (Negrelos, 2021). Within the scope of space production, this same logic was manifested in the way the workforce itself sought to address the housing issue (the triad of own house–self-construction–working-class lotting), since access to state housing was restricted, thereby marginalizing a large portion of the population.

In Argentina, the right to the city and citizenship, which Peronism had guaranteed to workers, was put in check by dictatorships. These, in defining who was worthy of living in the capital, demanded that they “deserve” housing in the housing complexes promoted by the authoritarian state. This ideological and strategic vision conceived the capital as the “showcase of the country” – a place for “decent people” – and that it should express order, cleanliness, and the absence (or concealment) of poverty and its reflections, such as crime, subversion, and popular unrest (Oszlak, 2019). Urban remodeling in Buenos Aires adopted a metropolitan logic, prompting the construction of large complexes in areas historically neglected by the real estate market, thereby ensuring the valorization of urban land (Lvovich & Motta, 2023). Many of these complexes were erected where slums once stood, which were eradicated, with their residents being compulsorily displaced outside the capital.

Latin America gained prominence in the Western scenario during the Cold War, a period marked by the convergence of several factors that shaped the reality of the region's countries, with an emphasis on diverse forms of assistance and institutional support from, above all, the United States¹. In this context, the “Latin American city” was understood as the *locus* of development, associating urban modernization with economic growth (Gorelik, 2024). However, this modernization reduced demand for rural labor, which, combined with other factors, drove the rural exodus in several countries.

The ideology of “developmentalism” advocated active state intervention to foster industrialization as a means of overcoming underdevelopment. It is not surprising, therefore, that such a doctrine has been articulated and found support in authoritarian regimes. In this scenario, in nations such as Brazil and

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

¹ The Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), the Inter-American Center for Housing and Planning (CINVA), and the Inter-American Planning Society (SIAP) stand out. Also noteworthy are the actions and works promoted by the Alliance for Progress and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

Argentina, housing policy prioritized an economic bias in development, often to the detriment of urban or social issues, establishing a strategic partnership between military governments and big finance capital and civil construction (Yujnovsky, 1984; Campos, Brandão, & Lemos, 2020).

After 1960, amid a new political, social, and economic landscape, the architectural field gradually began to question the repertoire that had produced housing complexes based on modernist ideology between 1930 and 1960. Subsequent discussions in the field focused on topics such as urban reform, agrarian reform, *favela* rehabilitation, identity and regionalism, and criticism of the modernist ideology itself. New ways of inhabiting and producing urban space were needed. It was seen that, contrary to expectations, technological, industrial, and social development lagged behind the advanced urbanization process, indicating that the city could not be merely an instrument of modernization.

Urbanization and housing production in São Paulo and Buenos Aires

Intense countryside-to-city migration accelerated urbanization from the 1960s onward. Capitals and large urban centers became magnets, registering unprecedented population growth. This urban expansion, often rapid and disorganized, combined with ineffective public policies, has led to the proliferation of precarious settlements, especially in the peripheries, exposing deep social disparities. The 1960 Census revealed that São Paulo was already the most populous city in Brazil, with 3,825,351 inhabitants; by 1970, its metropolitan area covered 37 municipalities and totaled 8,139,730 inhabitants. The Argentine Census of 1960 recorded 2,966,634 inhabitants in Buenos Aires and a population almost three times larger in the 24 municipalities of Greater Buenos Aires.

If, in the 1940s, population growth boosted the supply of labor for the industries that developed in São Paulo and Buenos Aires, from 1960, this dynamic changed significantly. In São Paulo, the continued expansion of the industrial sector failed to absorb the vast “reserve army” of migrant workers. In Buenos Aires, the crisis of the industrialization model and the welfare state resulted in massive unemployment. Not by chance, amid accelerated urbanization and growing demand for infrastructure, the governments of both countries saw civil construction as a strategic solution. This sector was intensively supported to absorb part of the surplus labor concentrated in urban areas. Thus, housing policies had a dual objective: to combat the housing shortage and, simultaneously, to serve as a motor of industrialization, a job bank, and an instrument for managing social pressures (Azevedo & Andrade, 2011). In Brazil, the ideology of “*casa própria* or own house” ensured that the worker-owner prioritized his family security over the class struggle; in Argentina, the policy of aggrandizing the federal capital resulted in the accommodation of part of the population in the “*Ciudad modelo* or model city”. However,

it imposed a massive displacement – about 200,000 people–, especially of the “*villera*” population, out of that area (Lvovich & Motta, 2023).

The construction of “mega-complexes” marks the 1960-1980 period, representing the state’s response to a multifaceted crisis of employment, housing, social conflicts, and unorganized urbanization. According to Negrelos (2021, p.69), the “megacomplexes” arise from an interpretation of the modern movement, adopting its principles “in the sense of the extreme rationalism of construction, “[...] to achieve maximum economy, that is, rather than conceptual rationalism, budget efficiency”. In this analysis, the term “megacomplex” will be used to designate projects with more than 1,000 housing units. However, the “interpretation of the modern movement” has taken quite different forms in Buenos Aires and São Paulo. In Buenos Aires, constructive rationalism aligned with conceptual rationalism and new formal propositions, allowing some groups of the time to be visualized in the panorama of postmodern architecture. In São Paulo, constructive rationalism reached its peak, characterized by the extensive use and repetition of housing typologies.

Political instability characterizes the broad period between the decline of Peronism in 1955 and 1983 in Argentina, marked by the alternation of authoritarian and democratic regimes. In this context, the housing issue was addressed by an institutional complex that stood out for implementing several “plans”. The problem of favelas - the *villas miseria* or *villas de emergencia*- began in 1958 with the Immediate Action Plan and persisted throughout the period; through the PEVE – Emergency Village Eradication Plan (Law 16.601 of 1964) – and the VEA -Viviendas Económicas Argentinas Plan between 1969 and 1973 (Riera, 2021), when Buenos Aires’ megacomplexes were built. The VEA plan became the instrument that supported the construction industry, favoring large construction companies and a more concentrated industrial sector, by using the state as an economic dynamizer (Oliveira & Gomes, 2021). The promotion of tenders under the “project and price” system, through which those responsible for the design and implementation of state-funded complexes were selected, favored the connection between architectural firms and construction companies (Yujnovsky, 1984). At the same time, the construction of large housing complexes entailed an overvaluation of urban land.

After the 1964 coup in Brazil, the Varguista institutional complex was replaced by a new state apparatus focused on housing production. This was primarily structured around the National Housing Bank (BNH) and Housing Companies (COHABs), while the construction of the complexes was left to private initiatives. The COHABs formed “land banks” by acquiring arable land, often still rural, and boosting its value through infrastructure built to accommodate the complexes and through speculation. The “BNH housing complexes” used standard housing units developed by COHABs, adaptable to different construction processes and spaces. The responsibility for the executive project and

for implementing the complexes through bidding was left with the contracted construction companies. The Companhia Metropolitana de Habitação de São Paulo (COHAB-SP), the main promoter body in the municipality during the period, was created in 1965. Added to this production is the action of the Caixa Estadual de Casas para o Povo (CECAP). With a diverse structure, CECAP was in charge of the project (prepared by a technical team) and the marketing of housing units on donated land (Negrelos, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

“[...] in our domain, what is comparable? It is unquestionably this: to choose in one or more different social circles two or more phenomena which seem, at first sight, to present certain analogies to each other; to describe the curves of their evolution, to find the similarities and the differences, and, as far as possible, to explain the one and the other. (Bloch, 1998, p. 120)

Comparative history offers the possibility of a “reciprocal illumination” between distinct phenomena, allowing, when confronting two realities, to highlight the essential characteristics of one and show aspects of the other; and, simultaneously, identify the absence of elements in both (Barros, 2014). Studying Brazil and Argentina between 1960 and 1980 allows us to analyze diverse responses to similar contexts and processes, shedding light on the relations between politics and architecture in Latin America. The discrepancies in housing policies and in the possibilities for action within the architectural field have resulted in markedly different productions, whose urban and social impact on the population has been documented by historiography (Yujnovsky, 1984; Negrelos, 2021) and can be observed contemporaneously, even in current housing guidelines.

The case studies were selected because they showed the desired comparative aspects. Although they share similarities, such as peripheral location, they are distinguished in Argentine projects by the impact of architects’ participation, often alienated from Brazilian production. In Buenos Aires, in complexes of single-family units, the Garden-City referent persists; in São Paulo, such an urban paradigm is suppressed. In the verticalized complexes, Buenos Aires highlights the referential of the superblock/ neighborhood unit and a search for identity expressed in architecture, while São Paulo resorts to the repetition of typologies, without any formal connection to the notion of identity.

The analyzed material comprises secondary and iconographic sources, whose summarized results will be presented in a textual narrative, with the contribution of images, and from a comparative and transnational perspective.

DEVELOPMENT

Between 1955 and 1983, 36 housing projects were promoted in Greater Buenos Aires, totaling 35,188 units. Of this total, ten have between 1,000 and 10,000 housing units. In the 1960s, almost all of the capital's territory was occupied. However, most of the complexes were built in this area, especially



Figure 1. Location of housing projects in Greater Buenos Aires (1955-1983). Source: Prepared by the author.

on land near the southern administrative boundary along the Matanza-Riachuelo River (Figure 1). This was the least urbanized area of the capital, consisting mainly of floodplains that, nevertheless, had been occupied since the 1940s by migrants from the country's interior in search of employment in Buenos Aires' industry. Many of these occupations were "replaced" by housing developments as part of eradication plans. Most of them are mixed complexes, with *pavilions* (blocks with up to four floors), *monoblocks* (vertical), and towers, prioritized.

In 1962, the occupied area of São Paulo largely exceeded the municipal limit to the southeast, following coastal connecting roads and, in the east, expanded into neighboring municipalities. It was in these vectors, where new industries had been established since the 1940s, that most of the 27 large housing complexes produced by COHAB-SP were concentrated, totaling 84,386 units (Figure 2). Of this total, 16 projects have more than 1,000 housing units, three of which have more than 10,000. In 1972, CECAP delivered a single mega-complex in Guarulhos, in the metropolitan area. As for the typologies, the complexes are mainly mixed, comprising single-family units and blocks.

In both cases, socio-spatial segregation processes are evident (Aravecchia-Botas et al., 2026). In Buenos Aires, the various plans to eradicate *favelas* have disarticulated the *villeras* organizations and reclaimed land from the capital in a proposal for urban redevelopment, which resulted in the construction of complexes considered “*model cities*” in areas hitherto neglected by the real estate market, guaranteeing their valorization (Oliveira & Gomes, 2021). The prioritization of access to housing for middle-income segments of the population implied that a large portion of



Figure 2. Location of housing projects in Greater São Paulo (1964-1986). Source: Prepared by the author.

Figure 3. City of General Belgrano. Source: Catenazzi and Boselli (1999, p.44).



the poor population was excluded from benefits in São Paulo, resulting, by the end of the period, in the deepening of social inequalities and the intense growth of *favelas* (Negrelos, 2021).

In both cities, some projects recover the modern identity of housing and the city, particularly from the blocks' complexes (Ferrari, 2018), but above all from the urban project. In Buenos Aires, the urban referential of the garden-suburb appears in the conception of “Park-neighborhoods”. This is the case of General Belgrano (1965-72, 3,024 units), built on 107 hectares in La Matanza, in the metropolitan area, with support from the IDB. The aesthetic (and ideological) referential of the Peronist chalet was abandoned, prioritizing unadorned construction, while maintaining the park as an urban foundation, incorporating extensive green areas and collective equipment (Figure 3). The project, led by architect César Ferrari, is authored by the Municipal Housing



Figure 4. City of Tiradentes.
Source: Instituto Bixiga (n.d.)

Commission.

In the case of São Paulo, Comas (1986, p.127) records “two design formulas used alone or in juxtaposition”, where one can recognize and consider the “BNH housing complex as an architectural standard”. The first “is not distinguished from a modest urbanization of detached single-family houses, except for the repetitiveness of fiber cement roofs [...] that make up entire and long blocks” (Figure 4). The single-family houses of the city of Tiradentes (1984, 3,346 units²) are repeated throughout the 286-hectare plot and have a simple plan and reduced area, designed by COHAB-SP itself. The Garden-City reference, found in complexes built between 1930 and 1960 (Ferrari, 2018), is abandoned in favor of the “corridor” layout, which is associated with extensive earthworks and is common to several complexes of the period.

Comparatively, in addition to the dimensions of the occupied areas, the discrepancy in urban design and in the implementation of the units stands out, highlighting variations in the rotation and distribution of housing typologies in General Belgrano, as well as the reference to the garden-suburb/neighborhood unit. On the other hand, in Tiradentes – although there is no Complex Floorplan – it is possible to observe, in the aerial photo, the “long blocks” of identical units, without any variation. It can be stated that the concept of identity applies to the first case study, but not to the second.

The Alfredo Palacios Neighborhood, known as Catalinas Sur (Figure 5), differs formally from modern projects in that it uses towers rather than stock housing. However, it adopted the neighborhood-unit urban planning layout. In the 1.6-hectare complex, color was used as a distinctive element, with bright hues typical of tenements in the La Boca neighborhood, where it is located. The project is authored by architects Nicolás Susta and Estanislao Kocourek and engineer Miguel Garrone (Dunowicz, 2000).

² Add up to 8,216 units in multi-family blocks.

Figure 5. Alfredo Palacios Neighborhood. Source: Garrone et al. (1963/1964).

Figure 6. Presidente Castelo Branco Housing Complex. Source: Negrelos (2021, p.263).

Figure 7. CECAP Park. Source: Housing Complex in Cumbica. (Motta, 1970, p. 32).

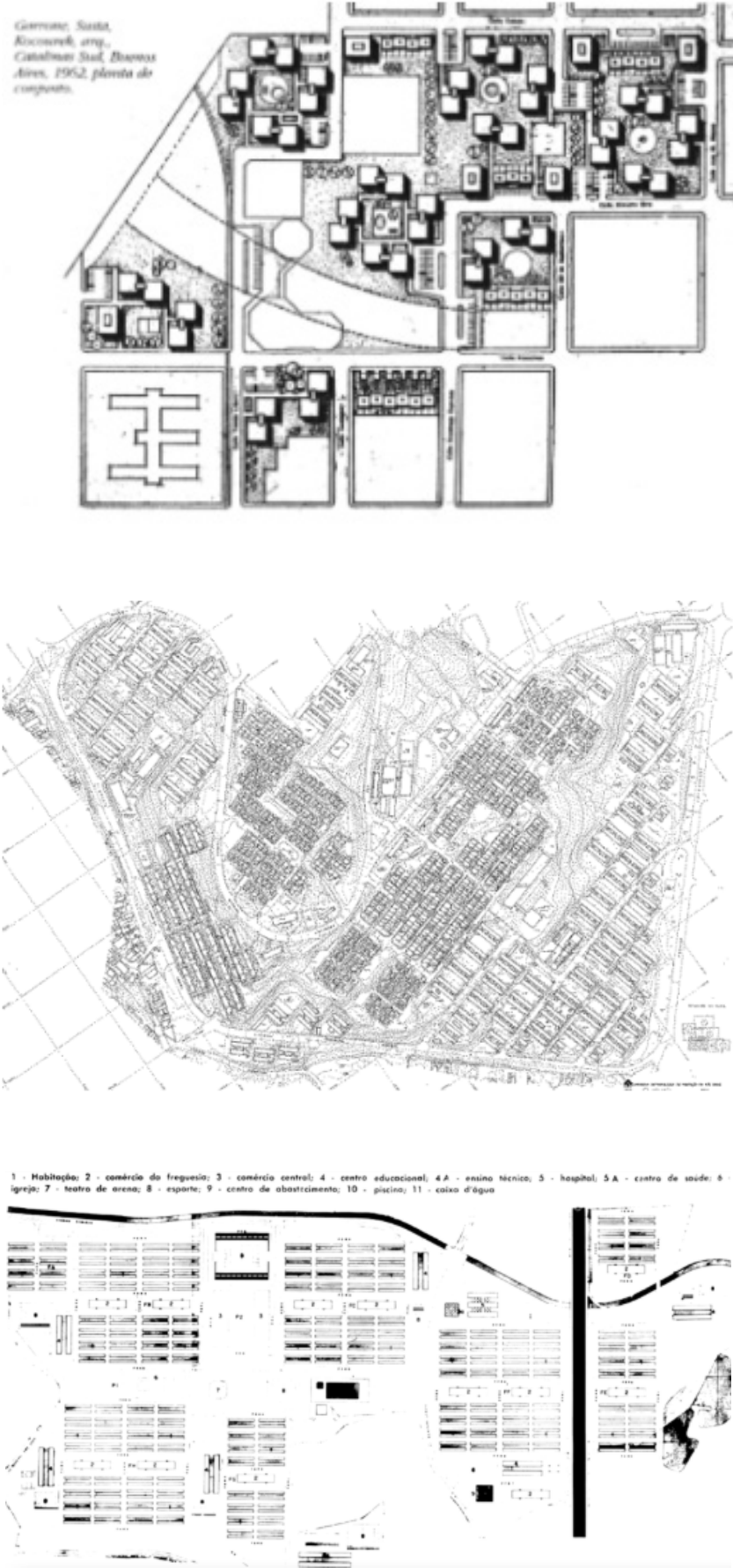




Figure 8. General Savio Urban Complex. Source: Risolía & Aizenberg (2010, p.149).

The second typology identified by Comas (1986, p.127) is revealed precisely in the set of identical laminar blocks, whose “doors have no consistent relationship with the internal or peripheral streets”. The Presidente Castelo Branco housing complex (1972-1983; 14,358 units), in Carapicuíba (Figure 6), represents this category, grouping blocks and single-family units in different sectors of the 240-hectare plot.

The CECAP Park in Guarulhos (1972: 480 units; 1980: 4,680 units), designed by Vilanova Artigas, Fábio Penteado, Paulo Mendes da Rocha, Alfredo Paesani, Maria Giselda Visconti, and Ruy Gama, differs from COHAB-SP production in many respects. The laminar multifamily block with three floors on pilotis was designed specifically for this complex, and the urban project (Figure 7) was organized into “parishes” -a concept analogous to the neighborhood unit – each with different equipment and free areas.

In the vertical complexes, the greatest asymmetries between Argentine and Brazilian projects occur. This phenomenon is attributed, above all, to the fact that in Buenos Aires these projects were the subject of competitions in which architects and construction companies collaborated on the execution of the complexes; in São Paulo, conversely, COHAB-SP elaborated standard projects, which construction companies replicated in accordance with local contingencies. Verticalization and intensive occupation are much more common in Buenos Aires than in São Paulo, whose periphery had large unoccupied complexes – unlike the Argentine capital, whose largest complexes, in area, are located in the Metropolitan Region. It is also noteworthy that, in Argentine cases, it is possible to note the affinity of urban projects with the reference of the “superblock/neighborhood unit”, while, in São Paulo, according to Negrelos (2021), few projects had an urban planning that aimed to transcend the mere implementation of the largest possible number of housing units. From the end of the 1960s through the 1970s, the



Figure 9. Soldati Urban Complex. Source: Bielus et al. (1973).

megacomplexes of Buenos Aires were formally presented in line with the “international urban renewal of the time, led by the group of Architects known as Team X” (Ballent, 2018, p. 43).

The General Savio Urban Complex (Lugano I and II) (1967-1983; 9,104 units), the first of Buenos Aires’ mega-complexes, was built with the support of the IDB as part of the PEVE (Ballent, 2018). The project occupies 67 hectares and consists of monoblocks of 15 floors on pilotis, arranged in groups “arranged with breaks” (Dunowicz, 2000) that form large common-use spaces, with green areas and collective equipment (Figure 8). The work was carried out by a team of 33 architects and 30 engineers (along with other specialists), among whom Allende, Berllot, Ferrari, Schiaffi, Soucarros, and Viviani (Dunowicz, 2000) stand out.

The Comandante Piedrabuena Urban Complex (1974; 2,100 units; 14.4 hectares) also features monoblocks and pavilions in “connected semicircles” (Dunowicz, 2000). The project was designed by Estudio MSGSSV, a firm with significant activity in the housing sector at the time, by architects Flora Manteola, Javier Sánchez Gómez, Josefina Santos, Justo Solsona, and Rafael Viñoly. Another landmark is the Soldati Urban Complex (1972-1975; 3,200 units), which, with its 19.2 hectares, stood out for its unique architectural and urban composition, the result of the articulation of pavilions, monoblocks, and towers. The result was a diverse volumetry and conformation in the



Figure 10. Publication of Cohab-SP in June 1980 regarding the Itaquera II/III housing complex. Source: Reports of Cohab Itaquera I (n.d.).

floor plan, with courtyards and free areas between the buildings (Figure 9). The firm Staff (Jorge Goldemberg, Olga Wainstein-Krasuk, and Angela Teresa Bielus) was responsible for this project and, with this compositional model, was successful in several other competitions.

In contrast, the mega-complexes of São Paulo are highlighted by historiography not for their formal attributes, but for encompassing thousands of housing units and, especially, for their extensively occupied areas. Among them, the Padre José de Anchieta, Padre Manoel da Nóbrega, and Padre Manoel de Paiva (1977, 1980, and 1981, respectively) and José Bonifácio (1978-1982) complexes stand out and comprise what Negrelos (2021) calls the “Itaquera complex” (Figure 10). In all, these groups add up to 34,122 housing units in horizontal and vertical multifamily and single-family typologies, both designed by COHAB-SP. The complex, with 415 hectares, constituted a strong growth driver in the East sector. The “East Zone” of São Paulo, where Tiradentes is also located, still carries the stigma of being a “place of housing complexes”.

From the 1960s onward, the intensification of the urbanization process in both Buenos Aires and São Paulo contributed to the growth of precarious settlements. It reinforced the need for public housing policies. In the context of dictatorial regimes, based on developmentalism, civil construction was conceived as a solution not only to the housing issue, but, above all, to unemployment and economic development. Ideologically, housing has emerged as a symbol of the state's concern for the population and, paradoxically, as a tool to confront the “communist threat” identified in working-class struggles. In this process, the construction of “mega-complex” housing was adopted in both metropolises, with significant convergences and disparities.

The predominantly peripheral location of housing projects in both regimes functioned less as an urban solution and more as an instrument

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for consolidating social and economic domination. In this scenario, socio-spatial segregation was not a side effect but an implicit and deliberate result of political decisions. Despite the scale of the housing complexes of the period, the priority of serving middle-income populations accentuated the pre-existing social divides, relegating such strata to poorly integrated urban or suburban areas – whether in megacomplexes or by self-construction –, consolidating socio-spatial segregation as a structural feature of the two metropolises.

Between the 1940s and 1950s, the large scale of Buenos Aires projects was a distinguishing feature compared to São Paulo projects (Ferrari, 2018). However, this dynamic reversed dramatically in the subsequent period, analyzed here, in which the scale of São Paulo's projects became predominant. The megacomplexes of São Paulo occupy hundreds of hectares in peripheral areas that, in several cases, acted as vectors of growth and conurbation, redefining the metropolitan urban landscape. In contrast, the megacomplexes of Buenos Aires, with few exceptions, were erected on considerably smaller strips of arable land. However, they also formed fragmented landscapes, mainly due to their verticalization and the dissonant typology of the surrounding areas.

In the megacomplexes of São Paulo, the concern fell primarily on the number of housing units offered, favoring the construction companies' rationalist logic. The adoption of standard designs facilitated large-scale production but, due to the extent of the occupied areas, often entailed extensive earthworks that disfigured the original topography. The logic of socio-spatial segregation is evidenced not only by peripheral location but also by the scarcity of equipment, mobility, and urban infrastructure (Aravecchia-Botas et al., 2026).

Buenos Aires' megacomplexes stand out for engaging with postmodern precepts such as "fabric", "branches", and "streets in the air", creating expandable systems of circulation and social interaction. Unlike the Brazilian case, the Argentine competition system allowed large architectural firms to associate with construction companies to elaborate and implement projects, enabling professionals to translate latent discussions in the Latin American architectural field into practice (Weinstein, 2015). Despite this, the authoritarian context suppressed the social dimension in favor of an ideological "urban cleansing".

It is considered that the evident differences between housing production in São Paulo and Buenos Aires stem from a fundamental aspect: the degree of the architects' protagonism in the process. In both cases, there is an engagement between political power and the construction industry, particularly represented by large construction companies. However, there was a distancing between the state and architecture in housing production. Only in Argentina is it possible to affirm that architects acted in state production – albeit externally to the bureaucratic apparatus, through competitions. In contrast, in Brazil, they were removed from the space they

had previously occupied during the alliance between the state and the modern movement.

When analyzing contemporaneity, the logic remains almost unchanged. The alienation of architecture in the production of urban space, driven by big capital and represented and taken up by the construction industry, is perpetuated by current housing policies. Despite the marks left by these groups (segregation, ecological, urban, and social problems), the production of social housing, with some exceptions, still submits to the rationality of construction companies, with typologies that refer to projects built between 1960 and 1980: extensive and horizontal in São Paulo and intensive and vertical in Buenos Aires. The transnational historical perspective helps rescue the role of the state in the production of urban space, as well as the trajectory of the architectural field itself and its relationship with politics, providing, perhaps, a basis for claiming the place once occupied by the modern movement and now overwhelmed by authoritarian regimes.

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