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NEOLIBERALISM, SPATIAL PRODUCTS AND UNIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURES IN FLORIANÓPOLIS AND LAUSANNE, BRAZIL

NEOLIBERALISMO, PRODUCTOS ESPACIALES E INFRAESTRUTURAS UNIVERSITARIAS EN FLORIANÓPOLIS Y LAUSANNE, BRASIL

NEOLIBERALISMO, PRODUTOS ESPACIAIS E INFRAESTRUTURAS UNIVERSITÁRIAS EM FLORIANÓPOLIS E LAUSANNE, BRASIL



Figure 0. RLC. Planters prevent access where floor unevenness poses a danger. Source: Author's file from 2023.

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ABSTRACT

Neoliberal logics have transformed universities and impacted their architectural artifacts. Concomitantly, a qualitative change in infrastructural studies addresses the material and discursive dimensions of infrastructures in a cohesive manner and opens up new methodological possibilities. In this article, we draw on the concept of the spatial product to describe buildings in which the logics of neoliberalism appear materially and spatially embedded. Our research begins with two artifacts that have very different characteristics and contexts. The first is the Rolex Learning Center (RLC) at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in Switzerland, and the second is the Center for Culture and Events (CCEven) at the Federal University of Santa Catarina in Florianópolis, Brazil. This unusual pair reveals microcosms of their institutions and campuses, reflecting the contradictions and interscalar pressures that affect universities. We analyze how, in these educational infrastructures, the immediate and the global are mutually constructed and projected, also as spatial products. Our primary sources include design materials, institutional documents, and statements from relevant actors involved in the processes of constituting university space, allowing us to situate these two artifacts within an expanded network of relationships. The discussion we propose expands the possibilities for critical architectural and infrastructure analysis, both in terms of physical support and as a methodological-interpretative tool. Our results show that RCL and CCEven are inseparable and active in multiscale transformative processes within their respective institutions, and that they contribute to the construction of a theoretical framework in which architectural criticism confronts the weight of neoliberalism on architectural forms, programs, and lexicons.

Keywords: architectural criticism, campuses, infrastructural turn, globalization, university

RESUMEN

Las racionalidades neoliberales han transformado las universidades e incidido en sus artefactos arquitectónicos. De forma concomitante, un cambio cualitativo en los estudios de infraestructura aborda las dimensiones materiales y discursivas de las infraestructuras de manera cohesiva y despliega nuevas posibilidades metodológicas. En este artículo, recurrimos al concepto de producto espacial para describir edificios en los que las lógicas del neoliberalismo aparecen incrustadas, tanto material como espacialmente. Nuestra investigación parte de dos artefactos con características y contextos muy diferentes. El primero es el Rolex Learning Centre (RLC) en la École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, en Suiza, y el segundo es el Centro de Cultura e Eventos (CCEven) en la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina, en Florianópolis, Brasil. Este par inusual revela microcosmos de sus instituciones y campus, reflejando las contradicciones y presiones interescales que afectan a las universidades. Analizamos cómo, en estas infraestructuras educativas, lo inmediato y lo global se construyen y proyectan mutuamente, también como productos espaciales. Nuestras fuentes primarias incluyen materiales de diseño, documentos institucionales y declaraciones de actores relevantes en los procesos de constitución del espacio universitario, lo que nos permite situar estos dos artefactos en una red ampliada de relaciones. La discusión que proponemos amplía la posibilidad de un análisis arquitectónico e infraestructura crítico en términos de soporte físico y como herramienta metodológica-interpretativa. Nuestros resultados nos permiten ver cómo el RCL y el CCEven son inseparables e incluso actúan activamente en procesos transformadores a múltiples escalas dentro de sus respectivas instituciones. Además, contribuyen a la construcción de un marco teórico en el que la crítica arquitectónica enfrenta el peso del neoliberalismo sobre las formas, los programas y los léxicos arquitectónicos.

Palabras clave: campus, ciudades universitarias, crítica de arquitectura, virada infraestructural, globalización

RESUMO

Racionalidades neoliberais têm transformado as universidades e impactado seus artefatos arquitetônicos. Concomitantemente, uma mudança qualitativa nos estudos infraestruturais aborda as dimensões materiais e discursivas das infraestruturas de modo coeso e, ao fazê-lo, abre novas possibilidades metodológicas. Neste artigo, amparamo-nos no conceito de “produto espacial” para descrever edifícios nos quais as lógicas do neoliberalismo aparecem material e espacialmente incorporadas. Nossa investigação parte de dois objetos com características e contextos muito distintos. O primeiro é o Rolex Learning Center (RLC), na École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, na Suíça, e o segundo, o Centro de Cultura e Eventos (CCEven), na Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, em Florianópolis, Brasil. Esse par inusitado revela microcosmos de suas instituições e respectivos campi, refletindo contradições e pressões interescares que afetam as universidades contemporâneas. Analisamos como, nessas infraestruturas educacionais, o imediato e o global se constroem e se projetam mutuamente, também enquanto produtos espaciais. Nossas fontes primárias incluem materiais projetuais, documentos institucionais e declarações de atores relevantes nos processos constitutivos do espaço universitário, o que nos permite posicionar esses dois artefatos em uma rede ampliada de relações. A discussão que propomos expande a possibilidade de análise crítica arquitetônica e infraestrutural, tanto na qualidade de suporte físico quanto de ferramenta metodológica-interpretativa. Os resultados evidenciam que o RLC e o CCEven são indissociáveis e atuantes em processos transformadores multiescares em suas respectivas instituições, além de contribuírem para a construção de um arcabouço teórico no qual a crítica de arquitetura enfrenta o peso do neoliberalismo sobre as formas, os programas e os léxicos arquitetônicos.

Palavras-chave: campus; cidades universitárias; crítica de arquitetura; globalização; virada infraestrutural

INTRODUCTION

In Lausanne, Switzerland, two concrete topographic surfaces enclose a glazed plane. The voids that traverse the building's rectangular plan create, among other environments, areas of rest and student coexistence, a library, and an auditorium. Much farther south, in the capital of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil, in a socioeconomic context that bears little resemblance to the aforementioned one, two large porticoes dominate the predominantly opaque facades of one of the state's largest event centers. The Swiss building is the Rolex Learning Center (RLC) at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). The Brazilian example is at the headquarters of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) and houses the Culture and Events Center (CCEven). We take these two university buildings as institutional microcosms of both their respective campuses and, more significantly, of the recent state of university infrastructures under neoliberalism. The two artifacts, although emerging from different scenarios, embody the interscalar pressures that have marked universities. They also open a source of discussion on the analytical potential indicated by infrastructure studies.

The debate over an “infrastructural shift” has gained momentum in urbanism-related areas in recent years. This approach understands infrastructures as material arrangements, such as the buildings of a university campus, and as discursive and organizational devices that operate jointly. If this alteration broadened the urbanistic field, it still appears contingently in the examination of architectural artifacts. From this, two central repositionings that we have developed in this paper can be deduced. The first analyzes neoliberalization processes as part of the sociotechnical network that the University comprises. This conceptual extension of infrastructure displaces campuses and universities in the scenario of asymmetric globalization. The space generated there, called infrastructural in this paper, evidences historical changes and socio-technical systems that articulate, uninterruptedly, local and global scales. The second repositioning examines the relational characteristics of university infrastructures. From this, it is inferred that their existence and functioning arise from broader dynamics that shape both their form and their effects.

Neoliberal processes have reduced universities to the role of service providers. Something less apparent is how neoliberalization organizes the built environment in universities and, in doing so, transforms it into an economic asset. In this context, we can treat some educational infrastructures as “spatial products”. In essence, this term designates the physical and regulatory arrangements that serve as a vehicle for global capital, encapsulating and reproducing its rationalities as an infrastructure with an embedded political agenda (Easterling, 2005). The juxtaposition of RLC and CCE, even beyond their shared methodological orientation, allows one to observe how parallel realities, formed in different socio-technical and socioeconomic contexts, become mutually readable. By bringing together these two fields of observation, a contribution is made to an architectural critique that recognizes the need to complexify scales, ranging from technical detail to territory, from everyday practices to institutional logics, and to situate architecture in broad infrastructural networks. The comparison shows operational variations of

these processes and their direct material and expressive effects, which require tools capable of articulating materiality, politics, and form. This is also where the gaps we work with are found. Although the infrastructural turn offers tools for integrating the discussion of architectural artifacts, this approach remains incipient in the architectural discipline. Architecture criticism has rarely faced the weight of neoliberalism on forms and lexicons, focusing almost always on urban or segregation dynamics and leaving its morphological, programmatic, or aesthetic implications in the background. Finally, if in the Global North this theme is little visited, in South America this approach remains, to the best of our knowledge, virtually unexplored.

FROM ALMA MATER TO SPATIAL PRODUCT

The term *Alma Mater*, “nurturing mother”, designates the institution where one graduated and evokes an intimate personal bond with the place of academic formation. Western universities have established themselves as a phenomenon capable of undergoing processes of secularization, bureaucratization within nation-states, and, later, expansion beyond Europe (Shils & Roberts, 2004). It is not appropriate to detail this path here, but it is in the most recent phases of university history that transformations associated with globalization are evident. This process manifests differently in each territory, giving rise to reservations about the use of overly broad concepts. Still, university infrastructures allow connecting local and universal scales, accompanying the very expansion of capitalism (Souza, 2011). In this perspective, Barboza & Dauß (2022) argue that understanding campuses requires thinking of them simultaneously in the singular and plural, since their forms express both territorial and global logical roots.

Even where public financing remains the main source of income, such as in Brazilian federal institutions of Higher Education (IFES) or German universities, a privatist rationality is diffusing and reconfiguring governance, financing, and spatial organization. In this setting, internationalization drives instruments such as academic rankings, standardized performance metrics, and evaluation systems. In Brazil, this rationality gained strength with the Support Program for the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities (REUNI), launched in 2007. Even though it has expanded access, the program has consolidated a management model by linking the implementation of proposals to the government's budget capacity, emphasizing indicators such as the relationship between the number of students and the number of professors, resource optimization and curriculum flexibility, often conditioning the release of funds to these parameters (Andrade, Lucena, & Barleta, 2018; Léda & Mancebo, 2009).

In Europe, the Bologna Declaration established a common higher education space from 1999 and encouraged universities to anchor themselves in the formation of globally competitive research centers focused on performance, innovation, and the construction of international networks (Hertig, 2016; Lorenz, 2011; Lund, 2020). In this context, rankings also play

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

a central role in imposing standardized, high-impact evaluation systems on institutional priorities and financing strategies, often to the detriment of local specificities (Burrell & Fourcade, 2021). At the same time, the demand for “useful” and immediately applicable research is growing, which intensifies utilitarian and profit-oriented criteria (Fleming, 2021; Wedlin, 2020). The growing dependence on corporations, private donors and foundations – such as the role of the latter in the Brazilian IFES – further reinforces this movement.

Neoliberalism is a proteiform project, with a high capacity for mutation, which aims to build a state based on a set of technologies and infrastructures that yearn not for the withdrawal of the state, but for its mobilization, by virtue of a market order. Between adaptable local practices and a fierce competitive emphasis, neoliberalism also produces its own aesthetic framework and cultural sensitivity (Clarke, 2008; Laval & Sorondo, 2022; McGuigan, 2016; Biebricher & Ptak, 2020). This project was consolidated in Europe between 1970 and 1980, in response to the crisis and stagnation of the welfare state, through austerity and market reforms. In Latin America, it intensified after 1980, mainly due to the imposition of structural adjustment policies agreed upon by regional governments and international organizations. In Brazil, the expansion occurred from redemocratization, when economic reforms made the market more flexible, privatized companies, and reduced the state’s role, impacting social and educational policies and the functioning of the IFES (Costa & Silva, 2019).

The conceptualization of a so-called “knowledge society” qualitatively changes universities. In the USA of the 1960s, this paradigm redefined knowledge, moving it from a relatively stable public good to a continuous flow regulated by intellectual property, in which the student body is also a consuming public (Slobodian, 2020). The diffusion of this model intensified mainly through the American concept of soft power, via technical cooperation with Latin America and Europe. In Brazil, the work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and partnerships with the Ministry of Education intensified since the 1950s and culminated in the educational reforms of the late 1960s (Cunha, 2007). The neoliberal bias in higher education expanded in the governments of the early 1990s, with Presidents Collor and Franco; it was then consolidated in the period of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995 to 2002), with private expansion, and returned, reconfigured, in the Lula and Dilma governments, aligned with the guidelines of the World Bank to expand universities and spaces in them (Chaves & Amaral, 2016).

Ignoring that these modifications affect the university’s built environment makes it difficult to study the territory of universities, not least because, as it is sought to demonstrate, infrastructures are both relational and shaped by movements far less immediate than a quick analysis might suppose. Disregarding that these dimensions interact on campuses limits the analysis to the formal and functional, preventing the recognition of how they participate in broader flows and how the ubiquitous presence of neoliberalism modifies

their functioning and materiality. Precisely here, the idea of spatial products, proposed by Easterling (2005), is useful, as it demonstrates how certain urban and architectural developments circulate globally as standardized models that express the logics of transnational corporate capitalism. This movement accompanies the transition from centralized, universalist infrastructures to segmented, unequal networks; it shifts from the state to the private sphere (Graham & Marvin, 2022).

In the humanities, recent conceptualizations of infrastructure recognize its historical, political, and cultural dimensions and support a qualitative shift in studies of the area. As a term, “infrastructure” appears in French and is linked to the physical base on which the railway tracks were laid; only at the beginning of the 20th century did it begin to include elements such as bridges and embankments. Since then, researchers have been continuously expanding the concept, which explains its widespread use (Richter, 2018; van Laak, 2018). For Edwards (2002), infrastructures shape and are shaped by the conditions of modernity, connecting scales of time, space, and social organization. Richter (2018) proposes something similar when defending a hermeneutics of infrastructures capable of revealing historical changes, power relations, inequalities, and technological systems. For both, the infrastructure exceeds the hardware; it is always material and discursive.

Universities, in this sense, constitute complex infrastructures, comprising buildings, technologies, administrative routines, financing systems, and institutional values. Their buildings operate as organizational devices that stabilize practices and contribute to the continuous fabrication of the institution itself (Martin, 2010; Martin, 2021). It is possible to bring the concept of spatial product closer to the idea that, in the campus's daily operations, different infrastructures intersect to produce space. In this key, the organizational and architectural models that circulate transnationally arrive at campuses as standardized protocols, but are only effective when they meet local institutional conditions, which modulate and sometimes transform them. This process inserts campuses into management and regulatory matrices that combine global and local scales and act as spatial production devices.

The architectural artifacts emerging from these dynamics represent the organizations that house and actively participate in producing their modes of operation, capturing contingencies and reconfiguring practices. Distancing from strictly economic approaches, Spencer (2021) redefines contemporary architecture as a technology of power dedicated to the production of neoliberal subjectivity. Design and its discourse thus act as mechanisms of conformity that sculpt ideal profiles for maintaining the neoliberal order, such as the student-entrepreneur, the citizen-consumer, and the flexible worker. Thus, a network of reciprocities forms among artifacts, actors, technologies, and economies, in which materiality is crucial. This paper's theoretical framework supports the understanding that built artifacts, management systems, and political processes act as infrastructures that co-produce the campus by combining global and local scales. University buildings condense norms, technologies, and managerial flows, functioning as operational devices

of the institution. Neoliberalization reconfigures this group by reorganizing supply networks, segmenting access, and shifting power to corporate actors, changing the campus's infrastructural configuration.

METHODOLOGY

The method followed here is anchored in the critical approach to architecture and guided by the qualitative change that has shaped the study of infrastructures, which requires integrating architectural production, the dynamics of neoliberalization, and transformations of university infrastructures. The choice of two contrasting cases, the CCEven of UFSC and the RLC of EPFL, stems from this need. Both condense tensions between public and private financing, serve as markers of institutional visibility, and crystallize changes in management, governance, and systems of provision, although in widely different national and institutional contexts. Complementary movements advance the research. First, the transformations at UFSC and EPFL, situating inflections in management and financing in the broader context of neoliberalization, are examined. Next, the buildings' design is analyzed using technical documentation, institutional archives, and available public materials. At RLC, the analysis focused on public materials related to the building, especially versions published in specialized journals – such as Gregory (2010) and BauNetz (N.D.) – and on official institutional dissemination materials via EPFL (2010). At CCEven, the analysis focuses on the original 1995 project, obtained from the archives of the Department of Architecture and Engineering at UFSC, as well as on the as-built project, accessed via the same file. In both cases, visits to the buildings were instrumental in the elaboration of the analyses. An investigation was also conducted into how each university presented these projects, examining expectations, discourses, and symbolic uses. Finally, the actors involved in the promotion and financing of the works are considered, highlighting different connections between architecture, the market, and governance. This paper condenses these layers, combining description, interpretation, and criticism; it seeks to link heterogeneous materials ranging from institutional documents and project archives to public discourses and the media. It is judged that this approach makes visible connections that would otherwise remain scattered, without weakening the text's conceptual and methodological rigor.

THE CLOCK AND THE ELEPHANT

Lausanne

In the late 1960s, Rolex launched the “*You’d Wear a Rolex*” campaign with minimalist advertisements in which a wrist adorned with the famous clock amplified scenes that conveyed a great professional performance. The slogan, in Helvetica, announced: “*If you were... tomorrow, you’d wear a Rolex,*” and it supported the message. (Figure 1). Among the images, we saw the Palais des Nations—the headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva – and the headquarters building of the same organization in New York, comprising a prestigious repertoire. However, what does this announcement

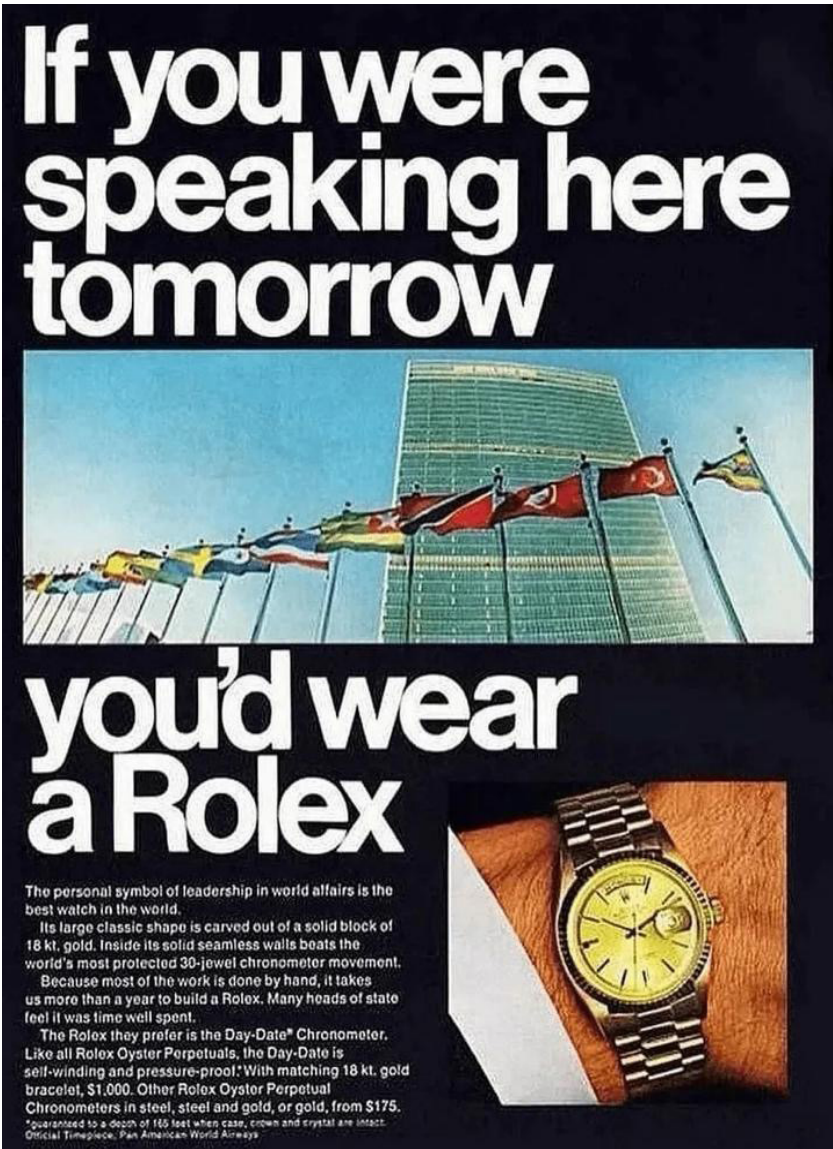


Figure 1. Rolex advertising campaign, circa 1960. The piece associates the advertised product with the symbolism of leadership and authority linked to the United Nations headquarters building. Source: Avdić Pašagić (2024).

help one understand about the current state of research and educational infrastructures, and about a building built decades later? The RLC is proposed as a paradigm of the intersection of university infrastructures with architectural spatial products. This building was the result of a project by the Japanese office SANAA and was built at EPFL between 2005 and 2010. It occupies a central part of the campus designed by Zweifel + Strickler in the 1960s. There, the University and the business sector work together to strengthen the combination of academic excellence and corporate partnership.

EPFL, founded in 1853, underwent significant transformation throughout the 20th century, culminating in its integration into the Swiss federal system in 1969, after which it was strengthened as a research university and expanded its international presence. The RLC offers an accurate entry point for discussing how the transition from a national university system to international and global structures fits within the campus's spatial organization.

As an architectural artifact, it materializes this passage and allows exploring three decisive fronts. First, it translates curricular and institutional guidelines into a built form, revealing how academic policies are converted into space. Second, it incorporates central principles of infrastructure theory, such as visibility, transparency, and friction reduction, as evidenced by its emphasis on fluidity. Third, it makes explicit the articulation between these dimensions and the corporate interests that financed the building – especially those of Rolex, whose brand underpins the narrative of the “historical overcomer” (Marchl, 2019). It is a global status symbol that the RLC converts into symbolic University capital.

Between 1880 and 1930, Switzerland prioritized vocational training in higher education. The expansion of academic education gained momentum only in the 1990s and 2000s, and even today it occurs unevenly, since the German-speaking region is home to the most prestigious universities (Orosz, 2018). Since 1960, the Confederation has taken a more active role and promoted shared governance (Goastellec, 2017). As in other contexts, internationalization reorganized power relations and brought the Swiss system closer to European and North American standards. The Bologna Process expanded governmental instruments and strengthened institutional autonomy. At the same time, it paved the way for internal reforms that accelerated internationalization, modified investment models, and increased private presence in a previously mostly public sector (Bieber, 2016). In this scenario, the dispute over investments and international competition has also transformed the institutions' physical space.

At EPFL, the spatial transformation of the campus, which the RLC epitomizes, has become a strategic asset for recruiting faculty from prestigious institutions. The University went on to publicize its ability to offer competitive funding, modern infrastructure, and attractive salaries (Escher, 2018; Jiang, 2022). When Patrick Aebischer assumed the presidency of the institution, EPFL adopted new public management practices, reduced direct government supervision, and assumed greater autonomy supported by performance financing. This strategy attracted professors from Berkeley, Google, and Harvard, but also increased dependence on external resources amid federal retrenchment (Escher, 2018). Aebischer advocated “a university where traditional boundaries [...] are replaced by a spirit of collaboration or true scientific inspiration” (EPFL, 2010). This vision has shaped the RLC as an architectural artifact from the beginning. In 2005, when launching the building competition, it was defined that the project should act as a landmark in the landscape and symbol of this institutional expansion based on flexibility and independence (Bisbrouck, 2006).

SANAA conceived the RLC as a rectangular volume oriented along the east-west axis, aligned with the Route Cantonale and visible upon arrival at the campus. The Japanese architectural firm founded by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, two of the most influential names in contemporary architecture, became known for projects that combine formal lightness, transparency, apparent simplicity, and innovative spatial solutions. The building houses



Figure 2. View of the main auditorium of the RLC. The ubiquity of the name of the building's main sponsoring company appears both in the object – the clock – and in the other visual communication elements of the program.
Source: Author's file from 2023.

the multimedia library, study areas, a multipurpose hall, and workspaces. Companies such as Rolex, the main donor, Logitech, Credit Suisse, and Nestlé financed part of the project's 110 million Swiss francs (EPFL, 2010). The precision associated with Rolex appears in the building on an enlarged scale and reinforces its role as EPFL's advertising piece, articulating design, image, and corporate architecture (Figure 2). As Horn (2022) points out, these elements integrate an organization's visual identity and involve multiple sensory levels. The corporate image shapes public perception, while the corporate architecture translates values and beliefs into physical structures that convey symbolism and create experiences. At the RLC, EPFL, Rolex, and other sponsors simultaneously activate these plans, transforming the building into a spatial product that combines academic function and brand operation (Figure 3).

All building elements, including the roof, are designed to flex and respond to structural and environmental variations. To allow these movements, the internal ceilings were joined, and the curved glass facades were fitted with

Figure 3. RLC seen from one of the inner courtyards. The concrete topographic surfaces surrounding the glazed plane, which forms most of the work's fences, are noted. Source: Author's file from 2023.



bespoke panels that move independently (Bollinger, Grohmann & Weilandt, 2010). The university and the architects faced the challenge of organizing the uses in a form that approximates an artificial relief rather than a conventional building. Spatial continuity, which brings together all activities in a single program, expresses a bold conceptual gesture and underpins constructive experimentation and technological innovation. In this scenario, technology also redefines cultural norms and modes of use. Although the building appears in the literature and official publications as “free of physical barriers” (BauNetz, n.d.; EPFL, 2010), its materiality reveals adjustments that relativize this narrative. Gregory (2010) points out that SANAA prioritized the fluidity of the plan and made the structure secondary, but downplays the building's practical challenges. One of them is the internal inclination that reaches 30°, which forced the adoption of specific, sometimes improvised, solutions to ensure safety in everyday use (Figure 4).

Fluidity emerges as a central concept, perhaps more influential than technological radicalism itself. In dialogue with infrastructure theories, ideas



of flow, transparency, and continuity have come to shape the relational, kinetic, and formal qualities of architecture and urban spaces. Transparency, understood in the infrastructural study as a tendency for such systems to become invisible when they work and visible when they fail, is a key category for understanding infrastructures, but recent literature has complicated this notion, showing that transparency and fluidity are more ambiguous and less stable phenomena than classical formulations suggest (Larkin, 2021; Star, 1999). In this sense, the university presents the RLC as a “fluid space”, where areas of study, coexistence, and external environments are continuously connected (EPFL, 2010). Last (2014) argues that SANAA breaks with traditional models based on rigid oppositions – such as those of form and function or of interior and exterior – and privileges adaptation. The form avoids single narratives and refuses fixed directions or closed programs. However, this indeterminacy, often celebrated as emancipatory, also reveals the naturalization of neoliberal rationalities: it exalts flexibility, indeterminacy, and self-organization, while the building asserts itself as an institutional icon and instrument of privileged power that architecture helps stabilize (Pavan, 2026; Spencer, 2021).

Florianópolis

Anyone who enters UFSC’s Trindade campus from the North can hardly ignore the building. Imposing in size, it is organized around a monumental portico that concentrates the composition. Behind it, two volumes stand out: to the West, housing support rooms; to the East, the large auditorium.

Figure 4. RLC. Planters prevent access where floor unevenness poses a danger. Source: Author’s file from 2023.



Figure 5. North facade of the CCEven. Source: Author's file from 2023.

The north facade displays the university's name. During extensive work, CCEven earned the nickname “White Elephant”, in a mixture of humor and criticism (Figure 5). Today, the space hosts more than 150 graduations a year, as well as numerous academic and cultural events. Differences from RLC are not restricted to context. The building is older, with another form and a distinct program. Conceived in 1995 and built over almost a decade, it predates REUNI and reflects the dynamics of the post-return-to-democracy period, marked by privatization and the advancement of the neoliberal agenda in the FHC government. As a case study, it reveals how these ideals have impacted university infrastructure and redefined internal relations, keeping public universities aligned with neoliberal rationality.

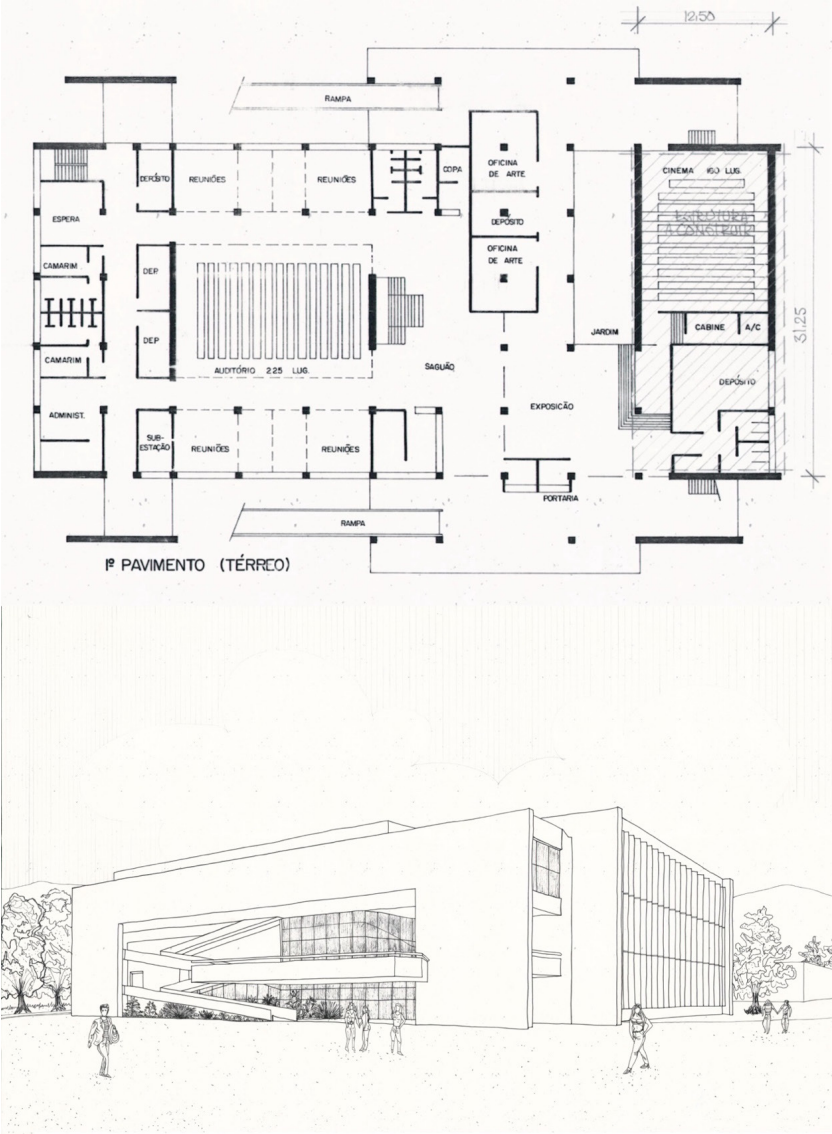
UFSC emerged in 1960 from the meeting of isolated faculties, a common process in the formation of federal universities. Of the first urban plans – “by Duarte and Mange in 1957 and by Souza, Peña and Guntzel in 1964” – little was built, and the campus ended up being implemented without a general plan (Ripper-Kos, Pavan & Poeta-Mangrich, 2020). As in the rest of the country, the campus was strategic in training human resources for regional development and for the public machine. In the late 1970s, the economic crisis interrupted infrastructure expansion, and many works were paralyzed until the end of the 1990s. The landscape plan of

Burle Marx (1969-70) was partially implemented and opened only in 1992. The process of preparing a Master Plan (1998-2005) generated more reports than concrete interventions (Pimenta et al., 1998; Ripper-Kós et al., 2020). The FHC period combined cuts and restrictions on IFES with typical stimuli of neoliberal rationality, by authorizing private-sector profits and reinforcing the transfer of resources to these institutions at the expense of public ones. However, as discussed, neoliberal reason also involves postural and philosophical changes that extend to university management. Although it is difficult to define a starting point of this transition, we can highlight some markers. Already in the university reforms of 1968, in the authoritarian and technocratic context of the military regime, an important principle is found. In interactions with USAID technicians, actions aimed at reducing dependence on the centralizing model and guiding universities towards efficiency standards, eliminating redundancies, and rationalizing physical and administrative structures were observed (Ripper-Kós et al., 2020).

As contradictory as it may seem, even in the military period, a university system less dependent on the state was already being designed. The Manual on the integral planning of the university campus (Atcon, 1970), written by Atcon and central to the reforms, proposed a campus model to reduce construction and operating costs. The work also criticized what it understood as management inefficiency and a supposed moral bankruptcy associated with a lack of discipline. This approach advocated flexibility and austerity, while relegating social factors to the background. The document outlined precise protocols and guided universities to pursue greater spatial self-sufficiency, particularly through internal technical offices responsible for the development and ongoing adaptation of the campus. For institutions in transition, these guidelines sought to decrease dependence on state resources in spatial governance.

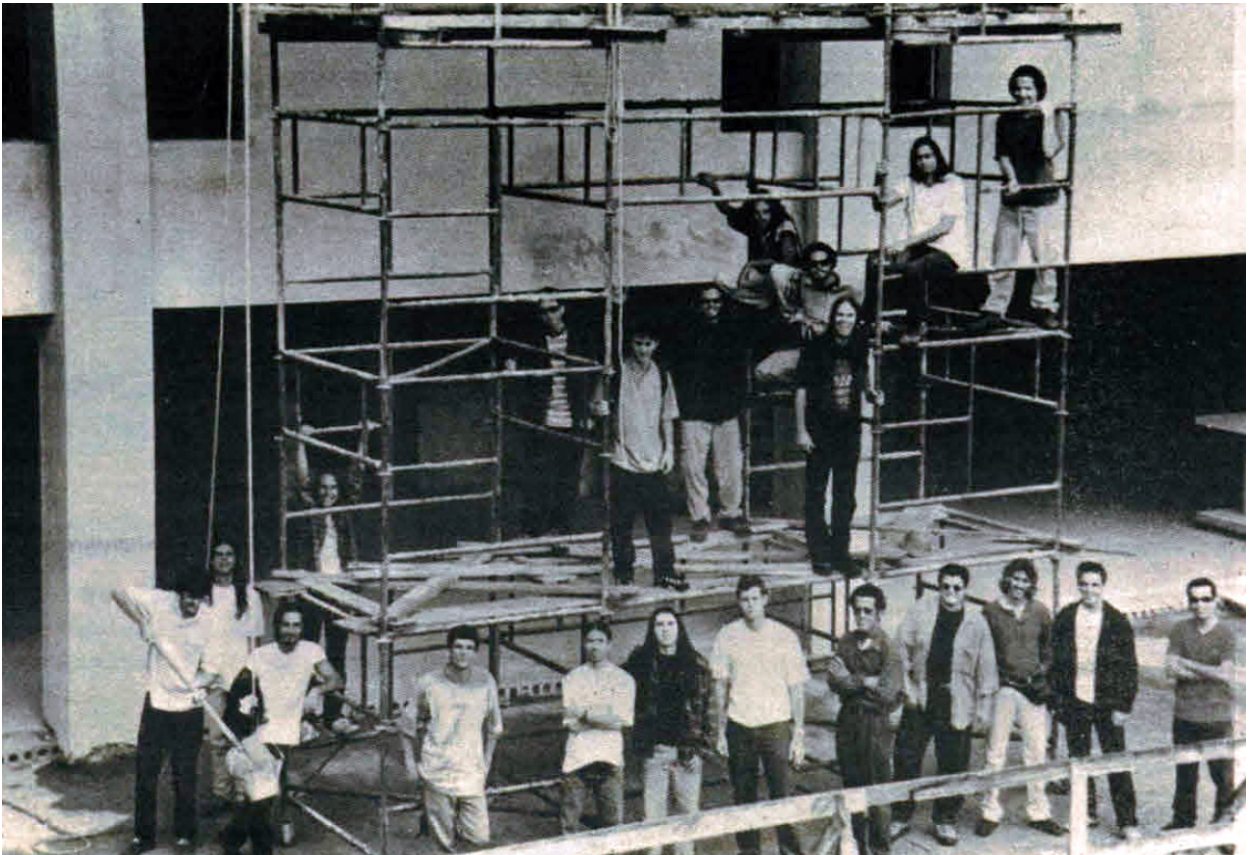
Going back to the “elephant”, in the original project, the external structure was already close to the current one, with a rectangular floor plan, a dominant portico, ground-floor access, and first-floor balconies facing Citizenship Square and the Rectory. Two discrete setbacks on the large walls, which act as pillars, reinforce the visual weight of the ensemble and create a tension that seems to challenge its stability. The main difference is the absence of the podium that today raises the building, from which the monumental ramp leading to the first floor departs. Although the shell has remained, the interior has changed significantly. The main access would lead to an exhibition space that, next to an internal garden, would serve as the entrance to two programs: a smaller auditorium beneath the current central auditorium and a cinema. The ground floor also housed art workshops, meeting rooms, and support areas. On the first floor, the large auditorium structured the program, accompanied by a foyer, a raised square, visually connected to the internal courtyard, an external stage facing the rectory, and a row of workshops (Figure 6). The project, from 1995, is by Luiz Roberto Mayr, then the university's architect. Throughout the

Figure 6. CCEven. Project by Luiz R. Mayr. 1995. The plan for the original project, shown above, focuses on social-use programs that were later removed when other actors, notably foundations such as FEESC, joined the body of financiers for the work. Source: Department of Architecture and Engineering of UFSC. Prepared by the Authors.



construction, much of this conception was modified to enable profitable spaces of interest to the financiers – the new actors that enabled the completion of the work.

In 1996, more than a year after the start of the works, UFSC resorted to the Rouanet Law to resume the project, which had been paralyzed after the contractors’ abandonment, leading to lawsuits to release part of the R\$ 1.68 million contracted (Figure 7). With scarce resources and amid the increasing outsourcing of services considered peripheral, the university hired new companies solely to ensure the basics: a roof and an auditorium (University Journal [JU], 1996; Scarduelli, 1999). The most lasting effect of this crisis came from the profound redefinition of the program. The ground floor was reconfigured, and almost all public spaces disappeared. To complete the work, UFSC received funding from the Stemmer Foundation (FEESC) in 2003 and, in return, gave the foundation the use of a large part



of the ground floor for twenty years (UFSC, 2023b). The move affected precisely one of the most symbolic buildings on campus. As a result, the community was deprived of an important space for the university to engage with society, and the building's open character was diminished (Ripper-Kós et al., 2020). During almost the entire FEESC occupation, a Spanish bank and a bookstore shared the space — the bank branch was on the main facade.

Figure 7. In 1999, Students held an exhibition in the CCEven building, still under construction; the action was part of a protest against the work stoppage.
Source: Campos (1999).

Infrastructures reconfigure social dynamics and, at the same time, open up new possibilities of expression, functioning as a diffuse cultural condition that reveals the technical means as mediating and transforming agents. Its effect is neither linear nor driven by a single goal, but stems from the wide reach of technical networks. This impact produces discrete but relevant transformations, both in the organization of space and social relations and in the forms of imagination and visual creation (Schabacher, 2022). The so-called aesthetics of fluidity forms an aesthetic– ideological regime that translates neoliberal principles –such as mobility, flexibility, unrestricted circulation, and self–organization– into continuous forms and smoothed curves. This appearance of spontaneity and freedom masks, under the rhetoric of complexity and emergence, the material relations of production and power that sustain the built space. Formal fluidity thus functions as a technology of legitimation, naturalizing processes guided by specific political

CONCLUSIONS

and economic interests. Jameson (1998) points out that new architectural styles arise when certain investment regimes, supported by specific technologies and infrastructures, are consolidated. From this perspective, infrastructure is understood as an expanded concept that allows for the analysis of buildings themselves as spatial and symbolic artifacts that record how universities have responded to external pressures and continue to shape the campus.

The two artifacts thematized here demonstrate the viability of the concept of “spatial product” by helping to describe architectural ensembles in which neoliberal rationality appears embedded and inscribed. The RLC, for example, inaugurated a cycle of ventures that sensitively transformed the campus. It creates practices and displaces them, serving as a precursor case study that guides how other projects may emerge on campus. Above all, it offers a “closed package”, in the sense that Easterling (2005) gives to spatial products: the combination of emblematic work, cutting-edge architecture, established names, specific aesthetic principles and public-private partnerships. This set continues to inform EPFL’s institutional advertising and professional attraction strategies. We see this in the EPFL Pavilions project, a low, almost 200-meter-long building by Kuma and Kobler. The same occurs in the Double Deck project by the Architect Dominique Perrault, whose work is expected to be completed by 2028 (EPFL, 2012; EPFL, 2024). Both resume the logic of flexibility and innovation that the RLC helped institute. At UFSC, CCEven recently opened another chapter in this relationship with foundations such as FEESC. The building’s physical space is still debated, almost twenty years later. The concession to the companies ended, and CCEven entered a new inflection point: the bank branch vacated its space, and the bookstore that occupies part of the ground floor re-discusses a possible rental agreement with the university, which depends on the revenue generated to supplement its budget (UFSC, 2023a).

This paper seeks to highlight how the material and immaterial dimensions are intertwined in the contemporary production of campuses, posing an inherent challenge to the vision of infrastructure as a concept that spans heterogeneous scales and objects. The idea of the university is not fixed; it continually remakes itself from multiple worlds of knowledge. As Martin (2021) notes, each scale – from the relations between society and the university to the internal interactions between faculties and disciplines – rests on material and historical foundations. The strength of these institutions comes precisely from this constant movement of transition. In this scenario, neoliberalism imposes a new physical, administrative, symbolic, and epistemological frontier by redefining the conditions of knowledge production, reconfiguring infrastructures, and imposing market-aligned metrics. There are paths this study has not taken. A deeper investigation of the contexts of EPFL and UFSC would bring new layers of complexity, sufficient to support their own articles. For example, it is pertinent to note that the two buildings, in terms of form, expression, and materiality, are linked to a modern lexicon of 20th-century architectural production. Still,

it has been chosen to treat them together, through spatial products, to make visible parallel realities that, although distant, dialogue with one another by showing how similar pressures produce different infrastructural responses. This gesture strengthens a critical reading of university architecture, shifts the debate beyond the building, and accompanies important advances in infrastructure studies in other disciplines.

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CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS CRediT

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