

CIUDADELA LA GRANJA

A CHILEAN WORK IN ECUADOR

Andrea Masuero

Academic Coordinator, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile Doctorate in Architecture and Urban Studies Program.

Romy Hecht

Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile School of Architecture

The acceptance of Modern architecture in Chile was somehow connected to the acceptance of the garden city model, particularly in the central valleys. This is a case of transference of that planning pattern, where real estate and exile met.

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The architecture developed in Chile during the 50's and 60's defined a period of plenty and changes, especially in aspects relating to public works and collective housing projects that sought to assume a new social role and interpret current ideas in modern architecture on a local plane. The more notable examples of this period, independent of their effective capacity to achieve these objectives, are found in the *Unidad Vecinal Providencia* (1953-56) of Carlos Barella and Isaac Eskenazi; the *Unidad Vecinal Portales* (1954-64) and the *Remodelación San Borja* (1967-70) by Carlos Bresciani, Héctor Valdés, Fernando Castillo y Carlos Huidobro; and the *Villa Frei* by Jorge Larrain, Osvaldo Larrain and Diego Balmaceda (1964-67). The *Ciudadela La Granja* by Sergio Larrain García-Moreno, Jorge Swinburn and Ignacio Covarrubias represents another of these examples of Chilean collective architecture, this time executed in Quito, Ecuador.

Designed and built between 1971 and 1975, the *Ciudadela La Granja* of Quito (so-named by the common term *Ciudadela*¹ used in Ecuador to refer to housing complexes) constitutes an architectural proposal of modern housing. Although it appears out of phase with the entrance of the said ideals of Latin-American context, it is possibly the first materialized in the country and, certainly, the only significant built work abroad by the office of García-Moreno, Swinburn and Covarrubias.²

The project was developed around the basic principles of modern urbanism, assuming the growth and expansion urban limits starting from the structural plans to the development of the supporting infrastructure, built to facilitate and provide clear systems of circulation and sanitation. The dwelling is the protagonist of the *Ciudadela*, that was planned in conjunction with a series of rational operations capable of establishing the appropriate functional mechanisms to maintain its *health*: the separation of vehicular and pedestrian paths, the incorporation of greenery as a soothing entity within urban context and the incorporation of natural light as a key element in the organization of the interior space of the dwellings. The social sense of the modern collective dwelling appears here not as a utopist experiment transcending economy, but as a path to offering a different way of life from the persistently rural city with almost no high-rise residential buildings.

Forced by the difficult political and economic situation that existed in Chile at the beginning of the 70's and taking advantage of the fact that his mother's family was from Ecuador, Larrain García-Moreno decided to move to Quito in 1971. Before this, he had already acted as Director of the School of Architecture (1949-1952) and Dean of the Architecture Faculty at the Universidad

Católica de Chile (1952-67), as well as had an active role in public life as Chilean ambassador to Peru (1968-71). Also, in 1956, he established his office with Swinburn y Covarrubias.³

Thanks to his conviction and great capacity for negotiation that characterized his academic, professional and political work, Larrain G.-M. convinced María Augusta Urrutia, owner of the lands corresponding to the then Hacienda La Granja on the Pichincha Hill, to desist with the low-income housing project originally designated so as to take advantage of the value gain inherent to the privileged topographical situation of the site in the north of the city (Swinburn, 2010). Like Quito, framed by mountains to configure a long city removed from the generic condition of the colonial grid, the complex is developed as an open fragment, but at the same time, defined by its geographic condition that includes the hill and the Rumichaca Ravine that goes down from the Pichincha. By that time, the landscape was defined by its agricultural structure in which the first high-rise buildings had begun to emerge. In that context, the architects supposed a city proposal that incorporated volumes associated with low and medium-height dwellings in a kind of transition facing the surrounding context, large towers and commercial buildings.

The *Ciudadela La Granja* occupies a site of approximately 15 hectares in an elongated shape, running along the slope with an average of 12% as well as the whole border of the hill⁴. On its longest face, the site was divided in 4 macro-blocks bordered by three main avenues and integrated with the city, materializing the image of Larrain G.-M. for the project: a private boulevard as a sequence of paths, groves of trees and gardens combined with residences and commerce for the middle class⁵. In consequence, from the moment of its conception the social housing program was eliminated and replaced by the possibility of configuring, from the layout of a series of simple, refined volumes, a complex with a communitarian character for the middle class in a composed plaza that dominates the geographic surroundings.⁶

The complex was structured around the succession of a series of forty-one, five-floor apartment buildings of two types: first, 16 elongated, terraced blocks called D and E, placed parallel to the slope lines on the east and west extremes of the site and joined by boxes of circulation that form continuous blocks; the presence of terraces differentiates 120 m² units, being an unusual element in the architecture in Quito during that time. The second type is situated on the south border: twenty-five compact blocks called A1 and A2, containing 2 apartments per floor (also 120 m²) with an almost square plan, alternately ascending and joined by a circulation core.

The four-storey, regular plan scheme established a proportion resulting in cubical volumes that adapt to the sloping terrain. Also, the layout of parking lots and the construction of stone platforms where the buildings stand contribute to the resolution of the meet-

1 Literally meaning citadel (Translator's note).

2 Apart from the *Ciudadela*, the office designed a complex of ten houses on Inglaterra Street, built in 1973, and a residential building on Av. González Suárez, next to Hotel Quito (unbuilt).

3 During the construction of the project, Swinburn and Covarrubias remained in Chile, making periodical trips of up to two months to supervise progress. As DESCO – a Chilean company – was executing the complex building, several professionals had to relocate to Quito during construction.

4 Originally the project occupied 20 ha of terrain.

5 The word boulevard is understood here in its modern usage, utilized to name the new open streets between neighborhoods in Paris, even though in the Granja said circulation is materialized alongside the edification.

6 In fact, later Mrs. Urrutia would donate other sites in the south of Quito for building social projects that would be financed, in part, by the profits obtained from the Granja sales (Swinburn, 2010).

ing between slope and volume. Complementing the apartment buildings, three kinds of houses were built: a series of smaller row-houses C and D associated with 10 commercial spaces (un-built) divided the complex; 200 m² shared wall houses –type A2– take advantage of Utreras St. level change, having a direct access to a second floor *piano nobile*; lastly, there were patio houses or type B, also 200 m², laid out in an L and defined by a combination of flat and sloped roofs for the different sides of the volume: it appear isolated depending on the side it is seen from. This detail supports the densification of the complex without the usual expense of semidetached housing. The continuous façade, intervened with light recesses achieves the reinterpretation of Quito's colonial past, just like the main garden of the house contained by the volume as a patio and protected, in consequence, from the public environment.

The complex also contemplates community and commercial infrastructure (partially built) and two kinds of towers (un-built): a volume with a polygonal plan, situated on the main and lowest corner of the plot (at Mariana de Jesús and América avenues) proposed a kind of building-entrance following the skyscraper model for Argel by Le Corbusier. This corner –the most public of the project– proposed a series of open plazas as terraces equipped with a theater, a supermarket and linear commercial spaces in an operation similar to that of the Remodelación San Borja in Santiago.

The second type of towers was defined by a complex of four square plan volumes that crowned the urbanization in the highest part of the site. The towers would have up to thirteen floors, simulating that built in 1968 by Larrain G.-M., Swinburn and Covarrubias in the Plaza Baquedano of Santiago and operating, in consequence, as a series of urban landmarks capable of establishing a relationship between the sort of citadel effectively defined by the complex, the natural backdrop and the rest of the city.

If the proposal was characterized by its desire for anonymity, in it the towers achieve the function of standards capable of marking the site, identifying the complex. This operation was not unknown for the office, as they had already executed something similar in the Miramar Towers in Viña del Mar, where they used three triangular towers as urban landmarks. These were similar to those realized by Bresciani, Valdés, Castillo Velasco and Huidobro in the Tajamar Towers (1967) which operated as an effective limit to Providencia Avenue, while also marking the entrance to the east Santiago.

The *Ciudadela* is structured from the topography, taking advantage of the views toward the Pichincha hill to the east and towards the city. It does not form traditional urban blocks defined by a direct relationship to the street: the buildings are placed over the terrain adjusting themselves to the slope, between gardens, with their main avenues hidden behind trees and with accesses situated in the parking plazas, acting as intermediaries among the blocks. This series of open spaces configuring half of the total area of the proposal, sought to complement the surrounding facades, define points of pause in the path and both frame and articulate a series of spaces of urban importance even though the complex is private.

This garden-city idea, recurring in areas of east Santiago, was and is a singular notion in Quito. The proposal structured in a centripetal fashion, with housing blocks operating as a border that looks toward the central axis, partially open with shared circulation, sought to establish a minimal formal distinction between the garden areas, esplanades and accesses of each unit. Each house has its own interior patio offering an open private space accentuating the idea of a green carpet of modern urbanism that considers vegetation as an element capable of unifying the complex: it is effectively perceived from the exterior as a garden.

Gardens and constructions define different intensities of occupation along the generally continuous surface. In this case the carpet is neither flat nor exclusively green but defined by the relief of the terrain in an operation that reiterates ideas developed and tested in Chilean architecture.

The incorporation of elements of the natural surroundings is a common practice found in Chilean modern architecture that also appears in the La Granja project. The Pichincha hill is a point of reference for the central axis and articulator of the whole complex. In the 40's, Larrain G.-M. had already built the Verbo Divino School in Santiago with Emilio Duhart, Mario Pérez de Arce Lavín and Alberto Piwonka: it had open U-shaped courtyards defined by volumes that perfectly framed the mountains. Years later, also with Duhart, Larrain G.-M. would build the Alianza Francesa, whose main courtyard is defined by the view of the Andean masses. This operation appears in the Unidad Vecinal Portales, where the distant profile of the mountain is integrated to and defines the horizontal volumetric composition of the complex; the CEPAL headquarters by Duhart is another example where the building is an artificial counterpoint to the Manquehue hill. But probably the main Chilean reference to the pedestrian axis oriented by the views of the Pichincha hill is the project for the Achupallas urbanization designed in the 50's by Larrain G.-M. and Duhart. This residential complex was organized around a central axis that permitted a distant view of Valparaíso, joining the urbanization and the city.

In a certain way, the Ciudadela project can be defined as an insistent effort to group dissimilar buildings based on a construction strategy of active, interstitial voids where the relationship with the surrounding landscape give sense to the result. Regarding car circulations, the proposal accepts the highway-street as a central element but without interrupting the fluidity of the pedestrian path proposed by the scheme, an act supported by the Athens Letter establishing the prohibition of the placement of dwellings along connecting arteries. The car is left in parking lots that are converted in plazas from where the complex is accessed on foot in a way similar to that of the Remodelación San Borja but not the same degree of radicality.

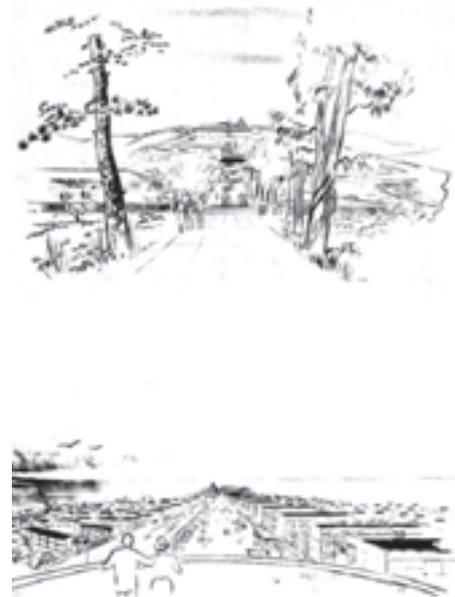
The pedestrian circulations are distinguished as paths differentiated from those of the car, melting between gardens and buildings. This prioritized role of green areas is asociable with the CIAM proposal that presented them as a solution for high-rise dwellings standing at a distance that allowed for the construction of large areas, ideally green, to a degree that facilitates that a dwelling/area relationship was determined by the characteristics of the terrain and sunlight. In the city of Quito, being above the Equator line, the sun enters from all sides; in this complex the blocks are sufficiently separated to permit sunlight and ventilation to all dwellings. The long blocks have a traditional orientation with facades that fully use the east and west, while the compact blocks on the slopes are ventilated on all sides without hardly any existing hierarchy.

The Granja was built in phases and was never finished in its totality. Of the original proposal twenty-five of the buildings with type D and E apartments were built in the first block from east to west. The C and D apartments that were designed in the fourth block were not built and in their place only a strip was built whose design, though following the lines of the complex, was executed by another studio⁷. Buildings with square plans, the patio houses, and the lookout houses were built in the sec-

⁷ After that border to the west, the block and the adjacent site were designated for hospitals and health centers.



Fachada torre de vivienda. Fuente: Archivo personal Jorge Swinburn
 Facade residential tower. Source: Personal archive of Jorge Swinburn



Dibujos para la urbanización Achupallas, Viña del Mar. Proyecto de Sergio Larraín y Emilio Duhart, 1954. Fuente: Archivo de Originales SLGM, Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Estudios Urbanos UC
 Achupallas development, Viña del Mar; Sergio Larraín y Emilio Duhart, 1954. Source: Originals archive SLGM, Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Estudios Urbanos UC



Elevación general del conjunto y sus alrededores. Fuente: Archivo personal de Jorge Swinburn
 General elevation of the complex and its surroundings. Source: Personal archive of Jorge Swinburn



Torres de Tamar, Providencia, Santiago. Proyecto de Carlos Bresciani, Héctor Valdés, Fernando Castillo y Carlos García Huidobro, 1954. Fuente: PÉREZ OYARZUN, Fernando. *Bresciani, Valdés, Castillo, Huidobro*. Ediciones ARQ, Santiago, 2006
 Tamar Towers, Providencia, Santiago; Carlos Bresciani, Héctor Valdés, Fernando Castillo y Carlos García Huidobro architects, 1954. Source: PÉREZ OYARZUN, Fernando. *Bresciani, Valdés, Castillo, Huidobro*. Ediciones ARQ, Santiago, 2006

ond block. The commercial spaces were not built at all. In the third block a section of the area of patio houses, lookout houses and square plan buildings were realized. The area designated for school and recreational infrastructure has not materialized and the area is still unconsolidated.

In a way, the repetition of a basic element such as single-family dwellings, the lack of definition of its repetition possibilities, the flexibility of proposing different layouts and the degree of non-conclusion support the modern condition of the complex that supersedes the forms or references with which to achieve a situation of programming that normalized the difficult relationship between a private program, the search for social interaction and the anxiety to materialized an urban function. In consequence, and such as the name suggests, the Ciudadela La Granja is simultaneously a city and building, public and private, structure and infrastructure. **ARQ**

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Andrea Masuero

Architect, Universidad Central del Ecuador, 1998; Master in Architecture, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2002. Currently she is Academic Coordinator of the Doctorate in Architecture and Urban Studies Program at the UC.

Romy Hecht

Architect and Master in Architecture, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1998; Ph.D. in History and Theory of Architecture, Princeton University, 2009. She is Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies of the UC School of Architecture, where she is Assistant professor in undergraduate and graduate studies in History and Theory of Site and Landscape.