

FIG 1 Remodelación San Borja. Proyecto original / Original project, CORMU. Fuente / Source: Revista AUCA 16, 1969.

THE GARDEN OF INTERSECTING PATHS

THE REMODELACIÓN SAN BORJA AND THE SCHOOLS OF ARCHITECTURE¹

Rodrigo Pérez de Arce

Profesor, Escuela de Arquitectura,
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile

Chilean cities have had few exceptional moments. The period of the Corporation for Urban Improvement (CORMU) between 1965 and 1975 was one of them. By analyzing the Remodelación San Borja in Santiago, perhaps the most ambitious project built by the CORMU during Frei Montalva's term, this text reminds us that when utopias were not yet replaced by pragmatism, architecture schools did contribute to the construction of the city from the state's apparatus.

KEYWORDS · project, towers, utopia, CORMU, Santiago

Towards the end of the 1970s and for a period of about six years, several professors at the School of Architecture of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) were involved in urban endeavors of great importance for Santiago, at a time in which the state was introducing the possibility of an urban renovation, enabling a fluid interaction between the worlds of academia and practice.²

From 1967 to 1969, under the deanship of Horacio Borgheresi, new professors replaced figures such as Emilio Duhart and Fernando Castillo Velasco. In this context the professor Jaime Bellalta's arrival from England coincided with his integration as Head of the Technical Department of the recently created Corporation of Urban Improvement, CORMU,³ whose directory also included the professor Nicolás García. Bellalta's presence gave a particular importance to the relationship between the school and the city. His previous position as professor of the School of Architecture of the UC in Valparaíso (PUCV) also led to the establishment of an affiliation between both schools.⁴ In this way, within a short time the various studios and

1 Editor's note: This text is a revised edition of a article of the same name published in 1994 in the book *Cien años de arquitectura en la Universidad Católica*. Edited by Wren Strabucchi. (Santiago: Ediciones ARQ, 1994). For this new publication, together with the author we have revised sources, added new bibliographical references and detailed some aspects of the original text.

2 The essay was realized according to the enriching studios of Bellalta and Gutiérrez from the last years of my studies. Aiming to reconstitute the events, I interviewed the following architects participating in CORMU: Patricio Gross, Sergio Miranda, Pablo Gutiérrez, Jorge Luhrs and Ernesto Labbé.

3 On the 16th December 1965 the Ministerio de la Vivienda y Urbanismo was created. One of its four corporations was the Mejoramiento Urbano, (Urban Improvement) whose directors were the architects Gastón Saint Jean and Nicolás García.

4 Although in England, Jaime Bellalta maintained his links with the School of Valparaíso participating in a series of poetic acts with Godofredo Iommi.

departments of CORMU included an important group of young faculty from the PUC as well as architects formed at the PUCV, who had a significant influence on it.

This text considers the pioneering years of CORMU, from its establishment in 1965 during Frei's government until the start of the socialist government of the Unidad Popular, which introduced changes in its direction. While during the first years there was an explicit determination to sustain architectural principles under the political pressures faced, in its second period CORMU proceeded to constitute itself as merely another instrument in the state's production of housing. The renewed urban spirit gradually faded and gave way to a vindictive social vision, whose consequence was an increase in the influence of political issues. It was an exceptional period of significant state intervention in the development of cities under a social and equalitarian ideal.

In disciplinary terms, the notions derived from the 1933 Charter of Athens (published in Chile in 1946) continued to direct local urbanism, at least in the development of regulation plans and the so-called 'housing problem'. However, this idea was not necessarily consistent: there were discrepancies in the realms of academia as well as practice, manifested in studios such as that of Fernando Domeyko for the western neighborhood of Santiago that was based on the architectural and morphological readings of a traditional neighborhood, qualities that were generally ignored by the planning entities. Similar topics were dealt with in the studios of Raúl Irrarrázaval and Patricio Gross, where traditional rural compounds in central Chile were presented not only as models of classical lineage but also as embodiments of a certain timeless condition. At the time, the professor Jaime Garretón was developing his "Cibernetic theory of the city and its system", suggesting an interpretation of the city based on the communication theory (Garretón, 1975).

On an international level, it is worth recalling certain relevant facts: alternative speculations about the city were gaining attention in Chile, from Archigram to the proposals of Van Eyck, the Smithsons and Candilis. Towards 1966, for example, the professor Reginald Malcolmson of the Illinois Institute of Technology visited the PUC presenting his idea of the "Metro-linear City", a megastructure in its most fundamental and mechanical version. Meanwhile, and with their own particular development, the impact of Brasilia (1956-63) and Chandigarh (1951-65) was weakened as they were considered slightly outdated. The explorations of Louis Kahn for the center of Philadelphia (1951-57) introduced dimensions that were renovating but unsettling for possible scenarios for the city, due to their veiled references to Piranesi and the uncertainty of their real urban consequences. This period also saw the start of the publication of the Spanish versions of *A City is not a Tree* by Christopher Alexander (1968), *The Architecture of the City* by Aldo Rossi (1971), and *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* by Robert Venturi (1972), works that significantly changed the course of architectural thought.⁵

5 The dates stated refer to the publication of the Spanish version of these texts.

Latin America –being more utopian than the developed world on a political level and less utopian in terms of projects– was generally characterized by the turmoil of political and social changes. Cities were growing frantically and in part informally or openly illegally. The strength of the territorial and cultural change was felt in the extensive and precarious marginal settlements. The staggering reality of the urban process diminished any hope of stability or unity, attracting the attention of different groups: some intuiting that infrastructure was the only permanent reality in the city, and understanding the technical possibilities as a true liberation from the ancestral weight of architecture, while others read –in the frenetic growth of the misery belts in the third world– a force whose course should not be institutionalized. Ivan Illich and John Turner proclaimed the “freedom to build” (Turner, 1967), that is, freedom from the existing administrative and professional channels.

Between these two extremes there were instances such as the International Competition for Housing PREVI Lima, Peru, realized in 1969, in which Sterling, Van Eyck and Alexander participated, among others. Their proposals were characterized by the relationship between the structural work conceived by architects and a posterior completion by the inhabitants, recognizing a necessity to understand the city’s construction as a collective and at least partially open task. Philippe Boudon published a study on the urbanization of Pessac realized by Le Corbusier, revealing the enormous cultural breach that separated the architect from his (unknown) clients. Le Corbusier himself had declared about the case: “it is life that possesses the truth and the architect that is mistaken...” (Boudon, 1972).

Towards 1973 a critical conscience of architecture was rising with regards to the generation of cities by routes alternative to the market or institutionalization;⁶ slums were, also in Santiago, an everyday reality. Since the revolts of the sixties, radical postures appeared which considered that architecture –perhaps because of its own longevity– was an aged discipline with values suspiciously close to those of the old regime. Permanence and conservativeness were seen as equivalent. Tensions of this kind would eventually bring about the crisis of the PUC at the beginning of the seventies: the urgency of the so-called ‘national reality’ made the academic discourse intolerable for many. However, while towards the end of the sixties politics was increasingly affecting all the realms of action, the PUCV managed to avoid this pressure.

Although not all these facts are strictly consistent with the chronology of the events that we have chosen to study, all these anxieties were somehow felt during the period concerned. In the Unidad Popular government, specifically in the VII EXPO of 1972, Martín Pawley, subsumed by ideas of technological production and the process of urban change, proposed to use the idle capacity of the Citroën car factory to fabricate economic housing components. Pawley would go on to publish

⁶ In his book *Modern Movements in Architecture*, Charles Jencks proposes a relationship between Drop City in Colorado, USA, and a slum in Lima, Peru as examples of an urban “resistance” in activist traditions. (Jencks, 1973)

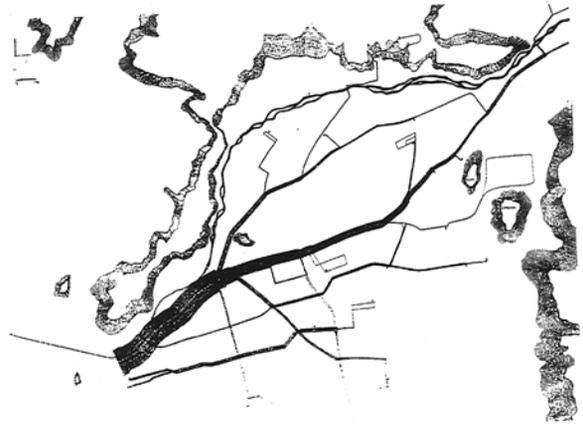


FIG 2 Catastro de Santiago, CORMU, Redes de transporte. / *Survey of Santiago's transport networks, CORMU.* Fuente / *Source:* Boza, Stagno, Rodríguez "Densidad intensidad". Tesis de título Escuela de Arquitectura PUC, agosto 1966.

Garbage Housing, in which he promoted the recycling of waste produced by the consumer society and its transformation into construction materials (Pawley, 1973; Pérez de Arce, 2015). In 1972, an international competition of architecture for the western area of Santiago was realized. The winning project (Bares, Bo, García) extensively used the typology of towers introduced years earlier by CORMU (Rigotti, 2015). Since that time, the idea of a project of the city from architecture has not been repeated in Chile in such a protagonist and comprehensive way as the one by CORMU.

The paths traced by the two architecture schools clearly diverge in substantial aspects: their terms of reference, their perceptions and their methods; PUC was marked by a decidedly professional emphasis; while the PUCV, more inquisitive and adventurous, was characterized by the search for a redefinition of architecture.

My argument is that these divergent paths managed to intersect in the development of the San Borja scheme. On a wider scope, I propose that CORMU experience was characterized in its first years by the presence of these actors and their proposals. The public corporation fostered a professional rather than academic exchange, mainly around a collective body of projects. When we refer to instances of professional exchange we understand them within a body of projects that were mainly of collective authorship. Even though in CORMU there were also architects formed in other universities, they were not as influential in this period. Although this is neither the first nor the last occasion on which the agendas of the two schools met, we can say that it was –with no trace of nostalgia– an exceptional and isolated instance.⁷

THE CORPORATION OF URBAN IMPROVEMENT (CORMU)

This new and powerful State organism entered the scene towards 1965. Its agenda was urban development in its most extensive

⁷ The most significant and recent was the invitation of Alberto Cruz y Godofredo Iommi to teach the Amereida Seminary Santiago in the year 1989.



FIG 3 Plan Metropolitano del Gran Santiago. / *Metropolitan Plan for the Greater Santiago*. CORMU, MINVU, sin fecha / *no date*. Fuente / *Source*: Strabucchi, 1994:148.

sense: the improvement of cities.⁸ Because of this CORMU can be differentiated from other public departments linked to the problem of the city, as they were created as institutions dedicated to specific aspects of the urban spectrum: (social) housing, infrastructure, transport and others. Another exceptional characteristic of CORMU was its architectural approach to urban planning.

The need to outline a wide theoretic frame to coherently approach urban renovation brought CORMU to the realization of a first general mapping of Santiago and its potential transformation. The Corporation proposed the short-term strategic acquisition of key sites for a good development of the city, for which it was necessary to define an urban strategy. Led by the new technical department, this would be materialized in a series of plans that focused on topography, infrastructure (housing, transport, underground and aerial networks, and water supply and irrigation systems among others) as well as buildings. In this way they obtained a visual register of the urban topography (FIG. 2). Beyond the documental value of these testimonies, an image of the city that conjugated its visible aspects and its invisible realities was configured in a new interpretative synthesis. The graphic quality of these documents and some of their themes made them similar to certain maps realized by the Architecture Institute of Valparaiso, which were developed with the aim of constructing a vision of America: fluvial networks, cities, mountain ranges and ocean grounds. If the hypothesis of a relationship between representation and architectural content was accepted and extended to the urban realm, it would be possible to read in

⁸ CORMU: publication of the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism. Compilation of projects.

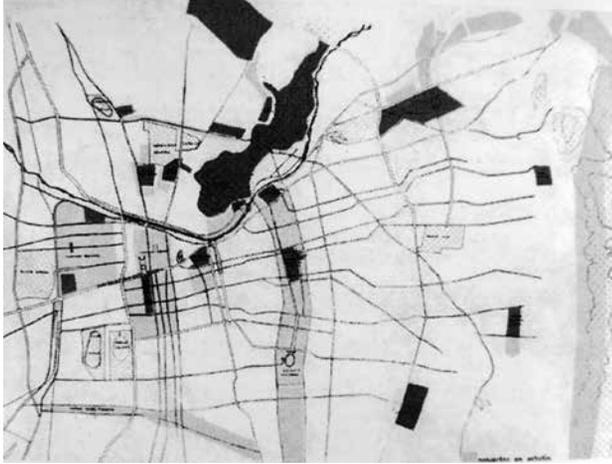


FIG 4 Proyectos CORMU en Santiago. / *CORMU projects in Santiago.*
Fuente / *Source:* Publicación CORMU, MINVU.

the plans of CORMU a first position from which to face the urban phenomenon of Santiago.

As a first concretion of the urban project, CORMU sketched a Metropolitan Plan of Gran Santiago (FIG. 3) in open contradiction to the existing Master plan as well as to the radio concentric networks devised by the Ministry of Public Works. In this plan, where a sort of matrix idea of the city was used, CORMU suggested the urbanization of the foothills in view of an alternative urban condition with the benefits of nature where people of different socioeconomic levels would mix "...in conditions of nature (air, sun, greenery), in which... the different socioeconomic levels would be completely urbanized, definitively abandoning the current situation of segregation..."⁹ Clearly the language has been inherited from modern postulates. The virgin terrains or those of scarce urbanity of the foothills would therefore be converted into reserves for an alternative city.

In parallel to these developments of the Eastern foothills, there were other strategies aimed at repopulating degraded areas in downtown Santiago: this was the framework for urban renewal of San Borja.

CORMU realized many other studies such as, for example, the projects Barrio Cívico, Parque Inés de Suárez, Fundo San Luis, Módulo Urbano (western Santiago), Parque Metropolitano and Parque Cerro Blanco. The San Luis project alone would affect 70,000 inhabitants, exemplifying the importance of these projects and the power of the Corporation (FIG. 4). It was this enormous power, together with the scope of its agenda that would for some years generate the sensation that urban renovation was feasible and that in it architects played a protagonist role. This was evidenced in the logo of the new Corporation, which combined a reading of the morphology of traditional blocks with the introduction of the urban module for western Santiago, illustrating an interpretation of the city as a project and its intimate relationship with architecture (FIG. 5).

THE PROJECTS WORKSHOP

Initially located on the San Cristóbal hill, far from the city and simultaneously in control of it, the projects workshop seems to have enjoyed an unusual condition: a collective, speculative studio, free in its discussions, with a great capacity for initiative and connected to large, real projects.

There is no doubt that its extraordinary location was unexpected for a public office. According to one of the participants the working atmosphere was "something that was uncommon in public administration". At the heart of the studio there was a large common space. Discussions held within it generated an atmosphere that was similar to an *atelier* or an academic studio. The presence of professors Jaime Bellalta and Miguel Eyquem among the numerous young architects contributed an expanded and mature perspective.¹⁰

In general, projects were developed according to a phased method whereby CORMU fixed general characteristics –some

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The workshop counted with the participation of the professors Patricio Gross, Ernesto Labbé, Pablo Gutiérrez, Sergio Miranda, and the alumni Cristián Boza, Walter Bruce and Jorge Luhrs, among others. These were all alumni or professors of the PUC.



FIG 5 Logotipo / Logo
CORMU, Corporación de
Mejoramiento Urbano. MINVU,
Ministerio de la Vivienda y
Urbanismo. Fuente / Source:
Strabucchi, 1994:148.

abstract such as density and others specific and project-based such as the three-dimensional treatment of the building's skin— allowing for specific development by the private project teams—architects and building companies— that were selected through tender.

CORMU architects laid the project conditions that allowed for the inscription of individual works, while guaranteeing the quality and coherence of the urban proposal. The scope and complexity made it necessary to outline certain generic project criteria such as, for example, the determination of typologies to be used in different contexts. Such method led to the definition of the housing tower format with six apartments per floor, and its twenty-storey height, establishing a key unit in San Borja that was later adopted by many other projects (FIGS. 6, 7). The generalization of the tower as a typology for the urban renovation corresponded only partially to a formal intention. Its incorporation also adhered to an attempt to modernize the building industry, while its size was defined by structural, economic and financial conditions. In any case its effect was decisive and brought with it a new level of monumentalization.

However it is important to recognize the significance of the tower in the image of a new city, its identity as an idea of modernity and its undeniable capacity of seduction. Towards the end of the seventies the Santiago skyline was still dominated by the horizontality of a city that was extended along the valley. The Torres de Tajamar (Bresciani, Valdés, Castillo, Huidobro, 1962/67), Endesa (Larraguibel, Aguirre, Etcheberry 1962/67) and Santiago Centro (Aguirre, 1966/70, 1978/82) announced the changes in the urban horizon and were witnesses of the new possibilities facing a city that was still anchored to the ground.

At CORMU, the tower was defined as an *a priori* element. Treated as a brick, it was the product of an equation whose terms were only partially submitted to architectural criteria, representing a condition of optimization and an urban opportunity for renovation. The residential tower extensively introduced by CORMU had a cellular plan and therefore a reduced interior space in comparison to the open plan of corporative towers. The relatively monumental dimensions of the exterior volume were contradicted by the small domestic size of the interiors.

Once the tower was established as an urban prototype, a work method was set whereby the organization of these pre-established large scale urban elements prevented a more nuanced appraisal to the context. In this context volumetric models were used as tools to define the urban forms in front of a context that was hard to foresee. Facing variables such as financing, program or the actual availability of land, the model allowed for the displacing those typified elements until some satisfactory level of concretion was reached. Even the very mechanisms used to represent the city corresponded to those urban aspects privileged in the project: volumes were more important than any other concern. Furthermore, the presence of large urban models would give the studio a character similar to the strategy room of a high military command: a stock of towers was always available.¹¹

¹¹ According to descriptions by Sergio Miranda and Pablo Gutiérrez, on occasions they worked directly on the models, redistributing, adding and subtracting towers.

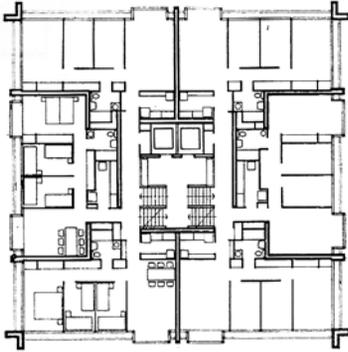


FIG 6 Remodelación San Borja. Planta tipo torres 1, 2 y 3 / *Type floor plan towers 1, 2, 3.* Arquitectos / *Architects:* Bresciani, Valdés Castillo, Huidobro. Fuente / *Source:* Revista AUCA 16, 1969.

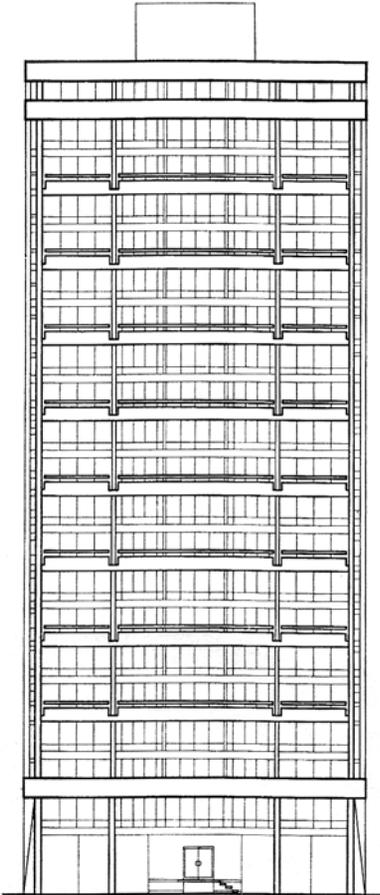


FIG 7 Remodelación San Borja. Elevación torres 1, 2 y 3 / *Facade towers 1, 2, 3.* Arquitectos / *Architects:* Bresciani, Valdés Castillo, Huidobro. Fuente / *Source:* Revista AUCA 16, 1969.

CORMU AND THE VERTICAL CITY

The presence of housing towers would characterize many of CORMU projects. Although the extensive use of the typology risked of dismissing the potential of the different urban locations, in some cases exceptions were permitted in order to acknowledge the specificity of the project.

The proposal of the 'urban module', a prototype scheme for the western sector of Santiago, evidenced the intention to place the tower within the morphology of the neighborhood blocks: the tower as an invariable module, contextualized by a ring, sensitive to the requirements of the place in its program and disposition (FIG. 8). The progressive scheme of the urban module suggests a process of phagocytosis in which new forms progressively engulf an old structure. Therefore, the urban module introduced temporality as a projective ingredient along with an idea of morphological substitution, making the tower at the heart of the block to co-exist with the traditional neighborhood. In this way the temporal dimension set forth in the urban module implied an understanding of the urban phenomenon as a participatory and changing fact.

The urban module, however, was an exception. In most cases the tower was valued as an instrument to liberate the ground, making the city permeable and generating large green areas. Independent of the individual characteristics of its architects, CORMU kept to the canons of modern urbanism by adopting spatial fluidity and the prevalence of green spaces as generic objects. The relative transparency of the first floors had, in these cases, an almost moral connotation facing the historic city: the new city emerged as a space without corners under the rule of a complete visual accessibility.

Meanwhile in the terrains of the San Luis estate in Las Condes the most spectacular project to be realized by the Corporation was being drawn up. If many of its authors considered San Borja as an impure project (all too submitted to contingencies and pressures), San Luis, projected in a virgin site in a neighborhood that was practically non-existent, appeared as a possibility to deal directly with the geography. Its central space, of geographic scale, was extended along an axis defined by the peaks of the San Cristobal and El Plomo hills. In spite of its suburban location, San Luis proposed a metropolitan condition, a possible centrality for the neighborhoods of the east side of Santiago. The towers of San Luis were planned as compact groups that also included stepped buildings (called 'shoes') and blocks of a lower height; this arrangement of nucleuses made them similar to the ideas of clusters proposed by the Smithsons. In charge of this project was Miguel Eyquem, professor and member of the PUCV who, perhaps influenced by his experience as an airplane pilot, measured spaces in relation to geography.

THE REMODELACIÓN SAN BORJA: THE CITY AND THE TOWERS

Located at the center of Santiago, the place of the renovation mostly corresponded to the site occupied by the San Borja Hospital whose installations would be entirely demolished with the only exception of its chapel. The elimination of a street would allow for the creation of a 'superblock'. The main element

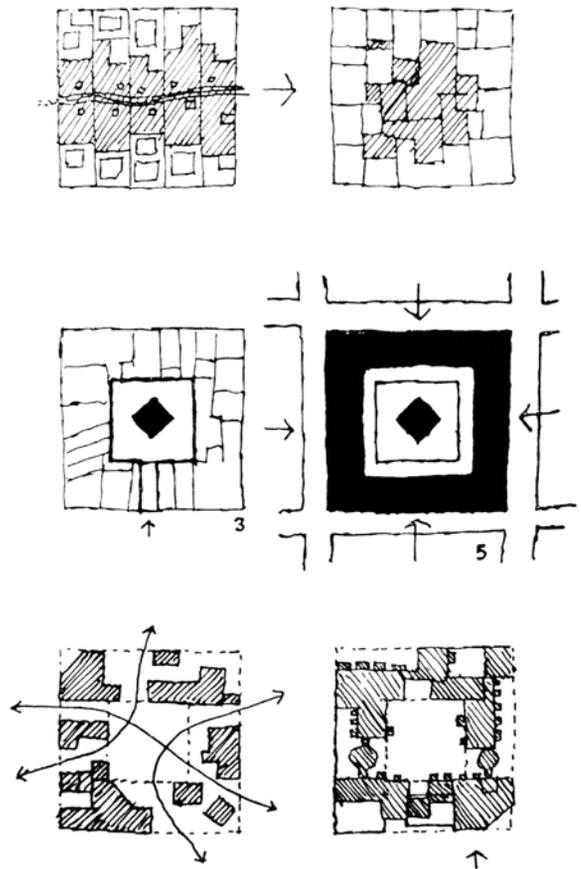


FIG 8 Módulo urbano: proceso de implementación. / *Urban module: implementation process.* Fuente / *Source:* Publicación CORMU, MINVU.

of the project was a new park whose urban character would be ensured by its location. Its plan combined a cross of extremely dissimilar wings and a general outline of rounded borders. In this way the form of the park had a certain iconic value similar to that of a logo.¹²

Clearing space in the park, as happens with a group of people who observe a street spectacle, there were around twenty towers of the same plan and height (FIG. 9). In the same way, on the ground and on the first levels there was a horizontal system constituted by bridges and interconnected nucleuses also linked to the towers (FIG. 10). The project also included blocks with stepped facades located in relation to the principal accesses of the park. Known within CORMU as 'shoes', their height mediated between the towers and the horizontal elements. This typology did not reach the interest of the companies that applied to the tender, generating instead great expectations among the architects. In this way the project imagined by Arturo Baeza was realized neither in San Luis nor in San Borja. The project also included *chapa* buildings

¹² Sergio Miranda made me see the memorable form of the park as a conducive condition for the presentation of the project in its various public and institutional instances.

as an exceptional category that joined onto the blind walls of a pre-existing building, in this way integrating it to the project.

The San Borja project therefore introduced the massive incorporation of residential towers into Santiago with a drive that was markedly different to those previously proposed like the Torres de Tajamar, whose condition was strongly singular in its position and its compositional and sculptural character.¹³ Thus the San Borja project could be seen as both a place in the city –in this way exceptional– and as a manifestation of more generic urban principles: a tension between the park as a unique entity and the towers as a repeatable and extendable proposal. In this case the towers were introduced into San Borja according to a general orchestration of disposition, form and height. In spite of the verticality of the towers there was a predominant, strong horizontality determined by the heights, which was the same for them all, independent of variations at the ground level. This configuration of a virtual space contained by towers, as a solid and uniform colonnade, reminds us of Le Corbusier's intention of creating an urbanism of Cartesian towers in open contrast with Manhattan's frenetic urbanism of the real estate speculation, described by him as an urbanity by "teenagers of the machine age" (Le Corbusier, 1937).

In this way the San Borja project would confirm the unitary, formal, totalizing intention of the first modern urbanism and its heroic period, leaning on geometry and formal relationships to generate a sense of coherence within the city. In other words, although the properties of the Cartesian skyscraper reappeared in San Borja, radically different arrangements were proposed: a variable distance between towers and diagonal relationships between corners, erasing the invisible guidelines that structured the built intervals according to a mathematical ordering, giving way to a more diffused layout.

BORDERS AND CENTER:

CENTRIPETAL AND CENTRIFUGAL OPTIONS

The San Borja project was conceived to be realized in stages largely marked by contingent situations as, for example, the acquisition of different strips of land to be used, or simply by reorientations and changes in the conceptual principles that guided the urban operation. Among the differences that appeared in these stages are, for instance, the relationships to the borders and the definition of the central spaces. At some point, the latter were conceived as partially urbanized places in a scheme similar to projects like the Unidad Vecinal Portales in Santiago, in which a gradient of scales was proposed between a central park and its built borders.

Once the principle of the central park was applied, the project's focused and centripetal character was established. However, inconsistent attitudes facing its external borders appeared, especially towards the Alameda, whose presence –tangential to the park– could not be overlooked. Therefore

¹³ Conceived "as a transparent sculpture situated in front of the majestic landscape of the Andes" according to the description of the architects Bresciani, Valdés, Castillo, Huidobro.



FIG 9 Vista de la maqueta de la Remodelación San Borja / *Remodelación San Borja: view of the model.* Fuente / *Source:* Publicidad viviendas AGSA. / *AGSA Housing Advertisement.* Revista *AUCA* 16, 1969.

combined with the ring of towers scheme there appeared towers on both sides of the Alameda, introducing a centrifugal force.

The two main instruments used to relate to the borders, towers and plaques, also established two extreme situations: one level on the ground floor and another aerial; one normative and the other able to accommodate the needs of the context; one discontinuous and punctual and the other continuous.

In fact the question of the urban insertion of San Borja is ultimately of ideological order: the project can be understood either as an autonomous nucleus or as an alternative idea of the city, in this way holding a potential of replacing an urban modality for another radically opposite. In the project this utopian and totalizing intention reappeared, and in other moments the intention of a fragmented urban insertion was seen. For example, it was even considered the possibility of completely remodeling the campus Casa Central of the Pontificia Universidad Católica –with the exception of its three historic courtyards– to transform it into a cultural center as it was neighboring the project (FIG. 11). Finally what was at stake was the extent of the intention to renovate: the capacity of recreating the city or the affirmation of the city as a changing entity. Seen in this way we can understand the relative indifference of a complex whose borders would have to be replaced sooner or later. Another key to interpret this appears in the plan for San Borja-Diez de Julio: the so-called ‘pedestrian directions’ manifested in systems conforming alternative routes within the city, whether by its rotated positions in relation to the urban lines or by the declared autonomy with regard to the ground and singular situations. Once again the diagonal appeared as an element of urban reform in Santiago and once again the body of the city would stubbornly reject it.

THE SAN BORJA PARK

In the general plan for the San Borja Park, the heart of the project and the main public place, its character of a unitary nucleus was clear, similar to that of Regent’s Park in London and different in this way to several modern projects where buildings



FIG 10 Remodelación San Borja. Trama de pasarelas elevadas, planta de conjunto. / Network of elevated walkways, plan. Fuente / Source: Redibujo a partir de planta de proyecto original. / Redraw based on the original project.

were distributed within a park and not around it. As we have seen, CORMU encouraged the idea of a unitary garden. This would reach the magnitude of two kilometers in the largest axis of the San Luis project and a great development (as an addition of green spaces in the Inés de Suárez project in Providencia).

Dominating the San Borja Park an axis –monumental in its dimensions but lacking in borders– was extended: a pavement, a wide, directed path without a precise destination leading south. This axis contrasted the centrality of the park as a long line crossing an oval. Reiterated by the location of stepped buildings at its entry points, the axis of San Borja suggested some collective ritual as the explanation of its apparent monumentality and formal rigor. The only construction located in the park was a museum whose program was never specified. A park with a museum, like the Parque Forestal and the Quinta Normal. Furthermore, the San Borja Park would absorb the green courtyards of the old hospital, materializing another level of interaction between the existing and the new city.

Few vestiges of the idea of a large-scale park remain today. The current San Borja Park corresponds to a later project whose size is a minor fraction of the original area (FIG. 12). In spite of this the central idea of a calm, green ‘superblock’ at one side of the Alameda is taken, an idea that was used as a fundamental element for its publicity at the time.

THE ELEVATED PATHS

In the San Borja Park the main theme of modern urbanism was reintroduced: the dream of a three-dimensional city characterized by a network of elevated paths (FIG. 10). These ideas were recovered under the argument of separating wheeled and pedestrian traffic as, for example, in the projects of Hilberseimer or the remodeling of the Barbican Centre in London. There can be many readings of this intention to separate and multiply the ground. Be it for biological affinities (the metaphor of the organ as an urban element) or for mechanical affinities (the metaphor of the city as a machine), the separation between paths and ground

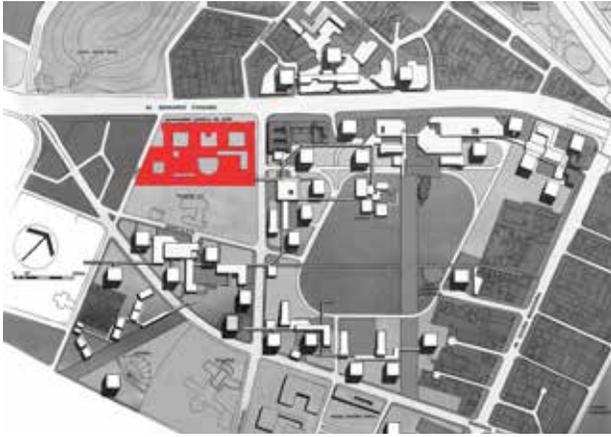


FIG 11 Remodelación San Borja. Casa Central Pontificia Universidad Católica en contexto del plan. / *Central Campus of the Pontificia Universidad Católica in the context of the plan.* Fuente / *Source:* Redibujo a partir de planta de proyecto original. / *Redraw based on the original project.*



FIG 12 Situación actual del parque San Borja, comparada con el proyecto original. / *Current state of the San Borja Park compared to the original project.* Fuente / *Source:* Redibujo a partir de proyecto original. / *Drawing based on the original project.*

brings up questions that go beyond their apparent functionalist logics, as is manifested both in isolated architectural works and urban proposals.

Already in the sixties some of the Team Ten members presented their first urban realizations, such as the Smithsons' proposal for the reconstruction of Berlin (1958), some examples of the New Towns Programme in England and some projects of megastructures such as the urban center of Cumbernauld, the Free University of Berlin, and the project of the Venice Hospital. With a strong horizontal component, these proposed urban spaces and networks of elevated paths. The mat buildings proposed by the Smithsons entered into the scene planting new urban forms that were not opposed to the street-corridors that Le Corbusier had dismissed. Germán Brandes' winning entry for the competition of the San Joaquín campus of the PUC in 1963 is also part of these explorations (FIG. 13).

The elevated paths proposed ways to access and contemplate the space of the park, also connecting those urban nuclei that complement the mono-functional program of the towers. In Santiago, a network of elevated paths already existed in the Unidad Vecinal Portales, however it was developed in a purely residential atmosphere. In San Borja, on the contrary, the elevated paths were a counterpoint to the towers (continuous grids and discontinuous points), linking the urban nuclei situated around the park and adding a diversity that was lacking in the mono-functional program of the residential towers.

The three-dimensionality of San Borja, however, was not only reduced to housing and elevated paths. The rationalization of the built space proposed by CORMU ultimately supposed a restructuring of the urban underground to mirror the restructuring of the more public levels. In this way the Remodelación San Borja would implement a network of communal installations organized around a system of underground streets. The proposition of a heating plant capable of covering the needs of the complex and its immediate surroundings –and whose fuel could come from the waste of the housing towers– indicated the expected level of

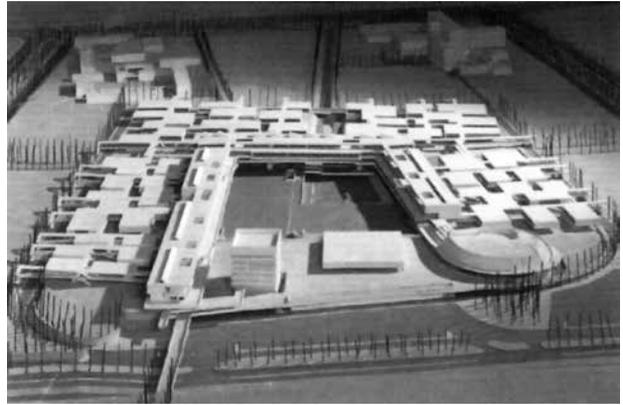


FIG 13 Maqueta proyecto campus San Joaquín, de Germán Brandes. / *San Joaquín Campus Project model by Germán Brandes.* Fuente / Source: Strabucchi, 1994:158.

technical excellence. A water capturing system in the underground reinforced the unitary sense of the project and its urban autonomy.

INCIDENCE OF THE CROSSED PATHS

It may be strange to think today that among the events associated with the project for the park at Cerro Blanco –realized by **CORMU** based on the proposal by the architect Eliana Wacholtz– a ‘poetic act’ was realized. Until then this ritual had been limited to the internal activities of the **PUCV**. This time however its concretization coincided with the definition of a metropolitan project to be realized by a government department.¹⁴ In the same way it is curious that in reaction to a crisis in the **PUC** in Santiago, Jaime Bellalta would also propose a poetic act of ‘re-founding Santiago’ to focus the vision and the objectives of a school in crisis.

According to its promoters the poetic act contains an almost oracular quality of revealing and fixing the destiny of a place. In this way the poetic act radicalizes the differences that exist between those that adhere to planning in its scientific (and ultimately positivist) sense, and those that understand the city as a problem that involves transcendental values. Although the thesis of the relation between architecture and poetry was developed by the architect Alberto Cruz and the poet Godofredo Iommi, and elaborated as a fundament of action for the architects of the **PUCV**, the exploration of this relationship would be increasingly common in the **PUC**, although in most cases as an echo, devoid of content. For example, in the introduction of a thesis guided in 1968 by Jaime Bellalta and realized by three students that worked at **CORMU** we read: “We suggest here a poetic position facing the urban fact, which allows us to propose a will that is expressed beyond mere functionalisms (...) to realize a poetic act is to place oneself beyond the contingent reality...” Although this thesis reached certain notoriety, its contents did not seem very different to a functionalist vision, a condition demonstrated in the elaboration of a methodology used to measure relationships between urban density and intensity, reiterating the quantifiable phenomenon and the operative character of the urban phenomenon.

¹⁴ Parque Cerro Blanco. Revista *CA* n° 16, June 1976. This project was realized in 1968 and was never built.

FIG 14 Maqueta conjunto remodelación San Borja. / Remodelación San Borja model. Fuente / Source: Revista AUCA 16, 1969.



Another level of shared ideas between the schools was the *Taller del Espacio* [Space Studio] directed by Octavio Sotomayor, a former student of Valparaíso, who introduced to first year students a postulation proper of the PUCV: observation as a fundamental fact of the process of architecture. Until then the curriculum of first year had only considered the plastic studio (with a clear affiliation to the Bauhaus and composition) as the step before the project. However, the branch inaugurated by Sotomayor prioritized the most contingent relations with the political and social ideas of the period of the Unidad Popular, establishing a connection that was difficult to sustain between a reality at the limit of a permanent emergency and a more liberated and speculative academic thought. Therefore soon the thesis of the national reality would overcome speculations that would obstruct an efficient action. In this way the idea of the project based on observation was its only legacy.

Although there were different paths of influence from Valparaíso to Santiago –a completely unbalanced traffic of influences–, in the PUC there was a more decided relationship between teaching and project (whether of architecture or urbanism) in a context of permanent realizations disputed with architects from the Universidad de Chile. With more strength than in Valparaíso, a greater permeability with the international architecture culture also occurred in Santiago.

We talk about two streams of thought, two intellectual lines, two experiences with a distant common stem represented by architects of the architecture schools of the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso and the Pontificia Universidad Católica. Behind these streams, the weight of some of the common affiliations was felt: the modern movement (and especially Le Corbusier) and the Team Ten in the urban project. In this context, for a few years, CORMU made possible an exchange of ideas and an intense debate of possibilities around the city and in the face of projects of great relevance whose feasibility seemed possible.

EPILOGUE

There is no doubt –at least on paper– that the proposals of CORMU reached a utopian quality. If the Remodelación San Borja represented the initial battlefield, the San Luis project maintained the hope of a new city; for instance in the proposal of productive orchards, the magnitude of its tree lined axis conceived in relation to the geographic facts and its metropolitan character.

The step between the initial vision and the actual facts must have been severe. It is not coincidental that none of CORMU projects were completed integrally according to their original plans. Towards 1977, the architect Miguel Eyquem declared:

The city is made by everyone. Here we speak as if architects had the initiatives of all these ideas, and in reality possibly none of them came from an architect... What we understand here is the nostalgia of having form, architects cannot help but have form... let's erase form... it is difficult to do, but let's try to erase our form... the only transcendental reality is that of a process... (Eyquem, 1977)

The dilemma of form versus process was a central question in the urban thought of the sixties. On the one hand the aim of the city as a readable figure, as a stable and recognizable image understood under the goal of permanence. On the other hand, the triumph of life as a changing fact over the fixation of the form; the constant possibility of new realities; flow over permanence.

There are not many remaining built witnesses of CORMU projects: perhaps San Borja is its most important urban legacy and yet only an unfinished and degraded fragment of it remains. The archives were destroyed so it would be impossible to reconstitute in detail the evolution of the projects of the Corporation (FIG. 14). From the images and realizations that remain there prevail characteristics of modern urbanism in its orthodox streams: the monumentalization of housing, the zoning of functions or the vertical garden city. These are common features between San Borja and San Luis, and are closer to a formal intention than to an opening towards the processes. Many of the most original aspects of these projects were not realized. However, the idea of establishing radical forms can be recognized in them: open lines, tower horizons and geographic scale axis.

In the last academic studio that we had as students of fifth year at the PUC, Pablo Gutiérrez, professor and member of the design team of CORMU, gave us the task of considering the necessities of the Parque Metropolitano of the San Cristobal hill –under the charge of the Corporation– and the urban settlement of the Roosevelt Villa on the foothills, which at the time was not formalized. In its precarious condition, the settlement represented the reality of the urban process in a poor area of Santiago. Its site, inscribed on the border of the park, had been declared a green area. Our studio attempted to reconcile the institutional criteria with the realities of the neighborhood. Form and process; global vision and local reality; current experience and urban future. In this way the dilemma announced by Miguel Eyquem was presented as a key problem. Ultimately, CORMU opted for the form and not for its oblivion and, independent of their origins, its architects always took that path. **ARQ**

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RODRIGO PÉREZ DE ARCE

<rperezd@uc.cl>

Architect, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile, 1972. Diploma Architectural Association, London, UK, 1975. PhD, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas, Venezuela, 2011. Tenured Professor, Escuela de Arquitectura, Universidad Católica de Chile. He has taught at the Architectural Association, University of Bath, University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University, amongst others. His books include *Valparaíso School: Open City Group* (2003), and *Domicilio Urbano* (ARQ, 2006, 2012).
