FIG 1 Edificio UNCTAD III. En construcción / *Under construction*. 1971.
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AN EXCEPTIONAL TRAJECTORY

CIVIC INTEGRATION AND COLLECTIVE DESIGN IN THE UNCTAD III BUILDING

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It is hard to find in Chilean history a building more exceptional than the UNCTAD III. Not only its original project conditions –deadline, team, location and political relevance– transformed it into a unique case, but also its further trajectory, which went hand in hand with the country's political history. This paper analyzes these paths, pointing out the technological and social conditions that allowed the building to become a reflection of the society that has surrounded it.

KEYWORDS · architecture, Chile, Unidad Popular, developmentalism, horizontality

In 1971 the director of the Banco Iberoamericano de Desarrollo (BID), Chilean economist Felipe Herrera, reached an agreement with the general secretary of the United Nations, U Thant, stating that Chile would host the Third United Nations Conference for Trade And Development in April 1972 leaving aside the other option, Mexico. As a branch of the United Nations, the UNCTAD was formed as an area of global political discussion that looked to overcome the underdeveloped condition of a group of countries outside the large economies in the Cold War period. The previous conferences had taken place in India and Geneva, where the headquarters were located ("El desafío de UNCTAD en Chile", 1972).

A few years earlier the building for the headquarters of the Economic Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean –ECLAC– had been built in Santiago; this organism signaled the coordination that was typical of the national projects of developmentalism that had been underway since the 1920s (Duhart, 1966). In this way the UNCTAD conference would go further by coordinating such attempts to configure a model of development capable of representing alternative realities. One of the strategies used to achieve this was the 'model of import substitution' that left behind not only the ineffective model of selling raw materials with no added value, but also the extreme and expensive technological dependence it implied (Herrera, 1970).

Herrera's achievement also meant that the conference would be realized within an exceptional context: the ongoing materialization of a development project in charge of the

FIG 2 Fachada suroriente / *Southwest facade*. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

FIG 3 Edificio en construcción, vista hacia Casa Central UC. / *Building under construction, view towards UC Central Campus.* Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

Gobierno de la Coalición de Partidos Politíticos de la Unidad Popular led by President Salvador Allende, elected in 1970.

The responsibility of hosting this conference, plus the cultural transformations this political project aimed to represent, led to the decision of constructing of a new building which was not only though to be the symbol of the conference but also would serve to demonstrate the hosting country's ability to realize it (FIGS. 2-6). This challenge implied leaving aside the assumption that the 'third world' depended on wealthier nations to provide the means for development, proving instead that from an underdeveloped reality it was possible to construct the required social and material structure (Stuven, 2007).

AN EXCEPTIONAL DEADLINE

The architectural program required implied the construction of a building that, according to the professional associations at the time, would take two to three years to complete; however, in this case the deadline was in ten months (Wong, 2010). The conditions of this project promoted by a government that captured global interest, both from supporters and critics made the question unavoidable: would Chile be able to implement the necessary infrastructure?

The possibility of modifying existing structures was considered, but it was finally decided that a section of the San Borja renovation –located north of the Alameda– would be used. This enhanced the idea that the conference and building were at the heart of a city, unlike the relatively isolated location of the ECLAC building.

The public organism in charge of implementing the building was the Urban Improvement Corporation –CORMU– a branch of the Ministry of Housing created in the mid 1960s that was granted considerable freedom of action. During the presidency of Salvador Allende, the CORMU worked with a directory that included the architect Jorge Wong as vice-president, and architect Miguel Lawner and lawyer Fernando Cortéz as executive directors.

Due to the time constraints, it was not possible to call the project to competition, so a group was formed of architects that represented the two main architecture schools in Chile, the Universidad de Chile and the Universidad Católica de Santiago.

FIG 4 Edificio UNCTAD III. Interior / *Interior*. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

FIG 5 Edificio UNCTAD III. Hall principal / *Main hall*. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

In this way Hugo Gaggero, José Medina, Juan Echenique, José Covacevic and Sergio González formed the group of architects, along with the Ministry representative, architect and executive director of the CORMU, Miguel Lawner.

When the architects were briefed on the challenge of this project, Medina proposed to start by building a 'tent' or 'table' (a stereometric Corten steel structure) supported by a series of great concrete columns (FIGS. 7, 8). Using this system, a part of the building could be built downwards, 'hanging' it from the steel structure, while simultaneously building upwards from the base.

This method would allow for the division of the team into two groups that could work in parallel: Gaggero and Medina would take charge of the plaque, while Echenique and Covacevic would oversee the erection of the tower. Meanwhile Sergio González took on the role of coordinator and would act as correspondent between the architects and suppliers, the organization of construction workers and the institutions related to the project.

The need to finalize the project within such a limited time period meant that the problems in the design would be resolved through direct modifications of the models, as there was no time to draw new plans before the execution of tasks. It can be said that the decisive factor that permitted the realization of the project was the horizontal condition of team work, which meant that workers would take on the responsibility of decision-making throughout the construction, as was confirmed in the final declaration of Sergio Gonzalez and Rufino Mejías, the representative of the workers, published on national press when the building was handed over in 1972: "UNCTAD III is a symbol of a new style of work, teamwork, mutual support between technicians and builders..." (González et al., 1972).

FORMATIVE PRECEDENTS

The generation of architects that studied at the Universidad de Chile during the reforms of 1946 had teamwork as a characteristic as well as the need for interdisciplinary work, replacing the architect-artist character for the one of a technician dedicated to resolving the challenges of developing countries (Schapira, 2006).

FIG 6 Edificio UNCTAD III. Sala de lectura / *Reading room*.
Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

One of the main characters to shape this vision was the architect Tibor Weiner –exiled in Chile since 1939, and a former student of the Bauhaus during Hannes Meyer's term– who focused on organizational systems based on the ideas of 'co-op design' (Maulén, 2015). This design strategy came from his experience working with the Swiss housing cooperatives at the start of the 20s and was translated to a process of design in which the community should take an active participation in the process. Eliminating the boundaries between fields of specialization typical of the modernity of the 19th Century, this cooperative will was always in relation to the challenges specific the context. After Meyer's dismissal from the Bauhaus in 1930, Weiner along with a group of alumni followed Meyer and worked with him in the Soviet Union (Franklin, 2015).

Shortly before this, in the brief period of the education reform of 1928, the movement of Chilean teachers had laid the grounds for the implementation of theories of the 'active school' (Reyes, 2014), which had certain repercussions on the reform endeavors of the Architecture School at the Universidad de Chile in 1933, which implemented a form of joint government that lasted for a number of months. This process served as a reference to students that called for reforms in 1945, and the theories of Weiner were quickly adopted and defended as complimentary (Barrenechea et al, 1999).

The reform took on the format of a methodology in which students were organized in work groups from their first year, strengthening the identification and solution of problems with innovative methods such as interviewing the population at the periphery in order to gain information and better resolve academic challenges. In open opposition to classic methods where students mechanically repeat back the contents given by the professor, this new approach generated the model of the comprehensive architect that prized teamwork, which became characteristic of the entire professional career of the student (Schapira, 2006).[2]

This way of working was also reflected in the discussion for new urban planning of cities in the 50s, which was evolving under the shared idea that the city was a living organism where everything was interconnected and so should be planned in a collective and interdisciplinary manner in the long term (Freifeld, 2003).

Thus, by the beginning of Salvador Allende's government institutions like the CORMU worked in direct affiliation with the social housing committees (Lawner, 2013). This horizontal and cooperative way of working made the project for the UNCTAD III building exceptional, which was reinforced by the latest available technologies (Stuven, 2007).

In a way the discussion for an alternative model of development that was already underway among the representatives of the countries involved in the conference also had a correlation with the way of organizing team work, a characteristic not only limited to this new model but also

2   Among the first graduates from this plan were Miguel Lawner and Sergio González, both involved in the development of the UNCTAD III building.

FIG 7 Edificio UNCTAD III. Estructura estereométrica de techo. / *Stereometric roof structure*. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

FIG 8 Edificio UNCTAD III. Columnas en construcción, vista hacia Casa Central UC. / *Columns under construction, looking towards the UC Central campus*. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

present for at least thirty years in the work produced at the Universidad de Chile. In this way the project for the UNCTAD III building can be seen as the greatest example and the best expression of this model of work (Maulén, 2015).

INCORPORATION OF TECHNOLOGY

In parallel to the work of the CORMU and the Ministry of Housing, the CORFO [Chile's Economic Development Agency] had implemented a model to use the new digital technologies of the time. For this they had hired the English cybernetic engineer Stafford Beer, who had participated with Cedric Price and Gordon Pask in the cybernetic development of the Fun Palace. Beer had promoted the idea of the 'second cybernetic': a process that was no longer unidirectional (meaning that the control of the productive processes could include biological, social and economic factors), allowing the receptors take on a crucial role in generating the process, or giving them the ability to reformulate the information received (Beer, 1981). In this way the ideas of Beer were different to the original idea of cybernetics from the start of the 40s when it referred to a control of productive –and even biological– processes through technology.

For his work with the CORFO at the start of the 70s Beer defined the basis of a 'viable system model' –VSM– (Beer, 1981) as three elements with which you could identify a space for the decision of an individual or a group, the environment to be intervened, and the technology that establishes the relationship between both, always in a harmonious way. With these three basic elements it would be possible to project the fourth: the heterarchical action, an alternative to hierarchy according to the 'collaborative and decentralized independence' type of model.[3]

This under-researched coincidence, along with the horizontal use of digital technology, shows an underlying

3   The author thanks the engineer Javier Vazquez, from Holon Lab Framework, for this explanation.
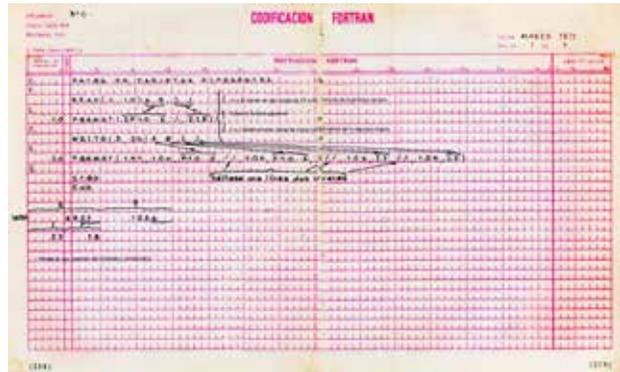
FIG 9 Edificio UNCTAD III. Instructivo de ingreso de información en tarjetas IBM en 1972. / *Manual for entering information on IBM cards in 1972.*
Fuente / *Source*: HARDING Inés y MICHELOW Jaime, *Elementos de Computación.* Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1973.

common sense of the time, a culture that adopts different technologies and does things differently. This can be seen in the case of the planning of housing in the first year of Salvador Allende's government (Stuven, 2007), or in the informational project that the Universidad Técnica del Estado started to develop for its regional branches (Kirberg, 1979).

An example of the horizontal digital culture of the time can be seen in the model of work and business boards that was implemented by the construction company DESCO. This model enables the discussion of decisions about a project in the format of assemblies including all those involved, in which decisions were taken between directors and workers. This working model was critical in the completion in record time of tower 12 in the project for San Borja, as well as in the building of the Ministry of Labor. This precedent was decisive for DESCO to be assigned the construction of the plaque for the UNCTAD III building.

In parallel the information engineer of the CORMU, Hellmuth Stuven had been trained in the use of the predictive software PERT with the CPM methodology. As with the first Internet (ARPANET) the PERT, a by-product of the Cold War, was created to design the Polaris missiles in 1958 and was also used in the Apollo XI project. As predictive software, the PERT was capable of tracing a Gantt chart calculating 100,000 activities simultaneously, a task unmatched by any analogue system. While calculating these time lines multiplied by 100,000, it could also draw a critical route consisting of a series of activities to be executed in a strict order and chronological time. It could also simultaneously calculate the activities that could suffer delays of a minute, an hour or a day without affecting the critical line. Stuven's first experiment with the PERT consisted of calculating the activities necessary to start the construction of 100,000 houses in the first year of Salvador Allende's government. After this, Stuven trained around 75 site managers of the project UNCTAD III to insert information daily into the Gantt charts and finally into IBM information cards with which they could calculate the details of the critical route, as it wouldn't only be a technical inspector, but also the builders themselves that would input the information and then follow the instructions of the line

FIG 10 Edificio UNCTAD III. Vitral *Volantín* de Juan Bernal Ponce. / *Volantin (stained glass) by Juan Bernal Ponce.* 1972. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

FIG 11 Edificio UNCTAD III. Iluminación del escenógrafo Bernardo Trumper. Lámparas diseñadas por Ramón López. / *Lighting by scenographer Bernardo Trumper. Lamps designed by Ramón López.* 1972. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

of weekly activity (Stuven, 2007) (FIG. 9). This is a clear example of how the model was adopted and made effective, a condition that was translated into all the areas of the project. To a certain extent, this example would have confirmed to President Allende that the workers had the ability to take responsibility of other areas of production (Talesnik, 2013:140), an idea reflected in an agreement between the Workers Union and the government, which proposed the administration of production through assembly representatives (Harnecker et al, 1972).

According to Sergio González, during a strike called upon by the professional associations, he started to work on the project along with Rufino Mejías, a representative of the workers. González said that he instructed a group of workers to use white helmets; after they refused, he convinced them by reminding them that they were the ones that best knew the building process—an argument that convinced the workers. So, when the engineers returned from their strike González told them that their presence would not be necessary for another week (González, 2002).

THE SERIALIZED ART OF CIVIC INTEGRATION

The problem of the project was not only to complete the building on time for the conference, but also to organize a second use for it once the event was over. In September 1972, two months after the conference had ended (having taken place between April and June of that year), the building was transformed into a cultural center. In this way it would host a program that would lend itself to the materialization of the government's program of social cohesion. Therefore, for the new Centro Cultural Metropolitano Gabriela Mistral, whose management was assumed by Irma Cáceres de Almeyda and her team, the greatest challenge was to translate the strengthening and communication of popular culture into a program of activities for the center (Cáceres, 2009).

This spirit was verified in the assignment given to a group of artists to collaborate in line with the idea of the integration between art and architecture, realizing works that would form part of the building's design instead of being mere objects of contemplation (FIGS. 10-13). For example Iván Vial constructed

FIG 12 Edificio UNCTAD III. Escultura giratoria *Tercer Mundo* de Sergio González. / *Third World (rotating sculpture) by Sergio Gonzalez.* 1972. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

FIG 13 Edificio UNCTAD III. Puerta diseñada por Juan Egenau. / *Door designed by Juan Egenau.* Tiradores de puerta diseñados por Ricardo Mesa. / *Door handles designed by Ricardo Mesa.* 1972. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

an acoustic panel; Nemesio Antúnez created lines in ceramic as a sign leading to the popular dining room, the nucleus of the activities of the building (FIGS. 10-13); and Carlos Ortúzar decided to pay tribute to the conference with a kinetic sculpture called *El cuarto mundo* [The Fourth World] (Molina, 2015), that was finished by workers of the steel workshop Jemo that, although on strike, worked voluntarily for the completion of the north façade of the UNCTAD III building ("Con trabajo voluntario...", 1972) (FIGS. 16, 17).

The great challenge for Irma Cáceres was to translate all these intentions into a cultural program (Ercilla, 1972). In this way for example she rejected donations from the Museo de la Solidaridad, as the assembly spaces would have had to be sacrificed in order to accommodate a more traditional museum collection. On the contrary the first milestone of its functioning was the Tower of Women, a training organism that received advising from the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional –CEREN– [Center for the Study of National Reality] and from the professors of the Universidad Técnica del Estado (Fontaine, 1972).

In this way the cultural center encouraged the activities of the unions, the student organizations and agriculture workers, as well as holding national and international meetings of scientists and artistic activities (Yubero, 1972).

THE COMPETITION FOR RECUPERATION

Immediately following the military coup the building was taken over by the new authorities, undergoing a drastic transformation: from cultural center was converted into a fortress. At the same time its original decree was changed along with its name, becoming Diego Portales, and was used as a base for military operations, as La Moneda palace had become inoperable after the bombings of September 1973 (Decreto Ley 190, 1973).

The military continued to administer the emblematic building after the return to democracy in 1990 and even after the fire in March 2006 in which the eastern wing of the plaque was destroyed. Immediately after this, the opinion of the public and the authorities divided. On the one hand important members of the government, supported by certain conservative

FIG 14 Edificio UNCTAD III. Acceso comedor / *Access to the dinning hall.*
Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

FIG 15 Edificio UNCTAD III. Comedor / *Dinning hall.*
Fuente / *Source*: Archivo personal de Sergio González.

media suggested the selling of the building, opening it to the real estate market. One of the announcements that provoked greatest resistance was the declaration of Vivianne Blanlot –at the time Minister of Defense– stating that it had already been decided that the building would be sold (Herman, 2010). Added to this, a declaration of influential architects on the front page of *El Mercurio*'s "Artes y Letras" magazine suggested that the best option was to eliminate the unaffected remains of the building.[4]

However, several voices from the citizenship appeared, demanding the restitution of the construction to its original vocation, and claiming that in no case should it be demolished and handed over to the real estate market. One of the figures in this process was Sergio Troncoso, the leader of the union of constructors, excavators and plumbers, who had represented the union of the workers of the popular dining room in the building's first period. The leader, supported by José Santos, formerly a construction worker in the same project, wrote an unanswered letter to Paulina Urrutia, Minister of Culture at the time (Troncoso, 2010). Other figures that had demonstrated their opinion since the fire also participated in the effort (Lawner. 2006). In this way one of the most important actions taken was the call for a meeting at the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende by architects and artists that had participated in the original construction of the UNCTAD III building (Balmes et al., 2006; Cáceres et al., 2006).

However, until the year 2007, the forces that pushed for the reconstruction of the cultural center and its original vocation were also dealing with generations for whom the towering building symbolized the military government and its continuity there, even after the elections of 1989 (Lawner, 2015).

In any case, the efforts of the citizens were successful in stopping the intentions of the former Minister of Defense to sell the site and concluded with a declaration of the president Michelle Bachelet to form an inter-ministry committee –entrusting the Ministry of National Assets, the Ministry of

4   See: Rojahelis, Javier. "Juicio al Edificio Diego Portales, ¿salvarlo o reemplazarlo?". In Artes y Letras, y Cultura, *El Mercurio*, Santiago de Chile, 12 de agosto de 2007. E1-E3.
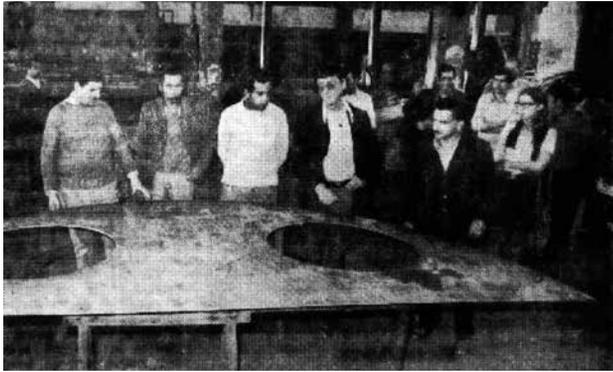
FIG 16 Trabajadores de la maestranza JEMO terminan obra de Carlos Ortúzar para edificio UNCTAD III durante un paro. / *Workers of the JEMO steel factory working –during a strike– for Carlos Ortuzar sculpture for the UNCTAD III building.* Foto sin autor publicada en el diario El Siglo, 30 de marzo de 1972. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo DIBAM.

FIG 17 Edificio UNCTAD III. Escultura *El cuarto mundo* de Carlos Ortúzar. / *The fourth world, sculpture by Carlos Ortúzar.* © Roberto Santandreu / Archivo arquitectos José Medina, Sergio González y Miguel Lawner.

Public Works, the Ministry Culture and Arts, and the Ministry of Education– to call a public international competition for a new Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral in the same site. However, the enormous cultural changes of the country were once again seen on the occasion, with one of the clearest examples being that many participants didn't consider the founding axis of the project to be the original cultural program of 1972, that had aimed towards the strengthening and communication of popular culture. In parallel a sectorial study declared that the new center would be focused on the performing arts and music.

This, the majority of the proposals entered in the international competition didn't consider the idea of social cohesion as a goal in itself. Because of this the jury decided on a selection of five proposals, and asked the teams to reformulate their goals. Through this procedure was selected as the winning project the proposal by architect Cristián Fernández Eyzaguirre in collaboration with the office Lateral, formed by Sebastián Barahona and Christian Yutronic.

In a forum that took place in the Universidad de Chile in 2010, Fernández himself recognized the common ideas that prevailed at that time, commenting that in the development of the project they had tried to maintain the spirit of the former building, but when considering that the trajectory of the building was a reminder of a history that divided Chileans, they had decided to make a neutral building that could unify different social sectors. In the same forum, and in response to this declaration, Manuel Garretón, who was awarded the Premio Nacional de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales in 2007, declared that the building "could never be neutral", and that it was necessary to expose in detail the history of its original conception as well as all the subsequent events that it had suffered.[5] In 1972 Garretón was the director of the CEREN of the Pontificia Universidad Católica, an organism that advised the original Centro Cultural Metropolitano Gabriela Mistral, and from which he had been

5   Debate. "De la UNCTAD III al Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral: memoria y proyecto". Wednesday June 23, 2010. Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Universidad de Chile.

exonerated after the military coup. His words in the forum are still relevant and should remind us of the pending debate over the trajectory of a particularly exceptional building that, after over four decades, is still questioning us as a society. **ARQ**

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