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Comparative urbanism: the adaptation of European rationalism to tropical metropolises from the perspective of Franco-Brazilian formation.

Comparative urbanism: adapting European rationalism to tropical metropolises from the perspective of French Brazilian academic formation

Manoel Brancante - Architect and Urban Planner from Mackenzie University (1970). Postgraduate and Bachelor's degree in Urban Planning from Université Paris VIII (1975). Master's degree in Urban Planning from Université Paris VIII (1976). Specialist in urban and regional planning with academic experience in Europe and Brazil.

Summary

This article explores the convergences and divergences between the Brazilian and French schools of urbanism in the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting the author's academic trajectory between Mackenzie University and Université Paris VIII. It analyzes how modernist rationalism, hegemonic in Brazil, was confronted and enriched by the sociological and critical theories of French urbanism after 1968. The study discusses the application of European planning models in tropical contexts, addressing themes such as zoning, social housing, and the role of infrastructure in structuring the territory. It argues that the uncritical importation of exogenous models fails by ignoring Brazilian socio-spatial specificities, advocating for a design synthesis that unites French methodological rigor with the creativity and flexibility necessary to intervene in the complexity of the Latin American metropolis.

Keywords: Comparative Urbanism. Urban Planning. French School. Brazilian Modernism. Université Paris VIII. Mackenzie.

Abstract

This article explores the convergences and divergences between the Brazilian and French schools of urbanism in the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting the author's academic trajectory between Mackenzie University and Université Paris VIII. It analyzes how modernist rationalism, hegemonic in Brazil, was confronted and enriched by the sociological and critical theories of French urbanism post-1968.

The study discusses the application of European planning models in tropical contexts, addressing themes such as zoning, social housing, and the role of infrastructure in structuring the territory. It is argued that the uncritical importation of exogenous models fails by ignoring Brazilian socio-spatial specificities, advocating a design synthesis that unites French methodological rigor with the creativity and flexibility necessary to intervene in the complexity of the Latin American metropolis.

Keywords: Comparative Urbanism. Urban Planning. French School. Brazilian Modernism. Université Paris VIII. Mackenzie.

INTRODUCTION

The training of architects and urban planners in the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s was marked due to profound epistemological transformations. On one hand, Brazil was experiencing the height of modernism. late and technocratic planning of military governments; on the other hand, France, especially the Université Paris VIII (Vincennes) was buzzing with critical thought after May '68, questioning the Rigidity of functionalist urbanism. This article, based on the dual degree obtained in Mackenzie (1970) and in Paris VIII (1975-1976), proposes a reflection on the dialogue between these two traditions. The aim is to understand how the overlap of these distinct academic experiences forges an urban planning practice capable of facing the challenges of contemporary tropical cities.



1. The Modernist Legacy and the Design Rigor of Mackenzie

The education provided at Mackenzie University in the late 1960s was deeply... rooted in the precepts of the Modern Movement, adapted to the Brazilian reality by the School Paulista. The curriculum emphasized construction techniques, the use of reinforced concrete, and structural clarity as defining elements of architecture and urban planning. The city was viewed through the lens of the Charter of Athens, where the segregation of functions (living, working, recreation, and circulation) guided the design. The learning focused on problem-solving through drawing, with the belief that the project's capacity to order urban chaos and promote social progress through form. The design rigor learned at Mackenzie instilled in the architect a discipline. A methodology focused on efficiency and economy of means. The drawing board was the laboratory where... The ideal city was often conceived as a *tabula rasa*, ignoring pre-existing historical and social conditions in favor of a new rational order. Large road structures and slab-like buildings dominated the academic imagination, reflecting the developmental optimism of the time. The infrastructure was not just support, but the very backbone of the urban project, capable of stitching together the fabric of the city and to enable metropolitan expansion. However, this solid technical training was often lacking from a deeper sociological reflection on the users of the space. The inhabitant was an abstraction, the "Modulor", and not a complex social subject embedded in a class struggle for rights to the city. Urban planning was a top-down, state-run activity, where the architect assumed the role of demiurge. This vision, while effective for the production of large-scale works and master plans. Technocratic approaches proved insufficient to deal with growing informality and inequalities. structural aspects of Brazilian cities. The experience at Mackenzie provided the technical tools. Essential for the profession: mastery of scale, understanding of topography, and the ability to... To materialize ideas into executable projects. The emphasis on structure and materiality prepared the professional to engage with engineering and to address the physical challenges of construction. city. However, the limitations of the orthodox modernist model were beginning to become evident. Faced with the complexity of the real metropolis, which resisted the simplistic ordering of zoning. functional. The transition to Europe required a critical reassessment of this baggage. The confrontation with cities shaped by centuries of history and with an academic debate that questioned the planner's authority revealed the gaps in strictly technical training. Modernism Brazilian architecture, although aesthetically celebrated, needed to be confronted with new urban theories emerging on the international scene, seeking a humanization of space and a greater Social participation in the planning process. The Mackenzie base, therefore, served as the a solid foundation upon which new layers of knowledge would be built. The ability to



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Designing and understanding the city as a physical reality remained central, but the need to expand the

Expanding the scope of action beyond the drawing board has become imperative. Urban planning could no longer be just that drawing; it also needed to be politics, sociology, and geography.

2. The Epistemological Rupture in Paris VIII and the Right to the City

Entering the Université Paris VIII in the mid-1970s represented a shock.

Cultural and academic. The university, born from the events of May '68, was an experimental center.

of critical thinking, where architecture and urban planning were taught in close connection with the

Philosophy, sociology, and human geography. The influence of thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre and his...

The theory of the "Right to the City" permeated the academic environment, shifting the focus away from urban form.

for the social processes that produce it. The city is no longer seen merely as an artifact.

The physical space is to be understood as the locus of the reproduction of social relations of production.

The curriculum at Paris VIII challenged the functionalism of the Athens Charter. Instead of segregating functions,

The mixed-use model, the vitality of the street, and the valorization of public space as an arena were advocated.

Politics. A critique of technocratic urbanism, which served the interests of real estate capital and...

The authoritarian state was central. The student was encouraged to descend from the ivory tower of planning.

and to engage with the reality experienced by the inhabitants, understanding the dynamics of appropriation.

of the space that often subverted the official design. The teaching methodology was

Interdisciplinary and participatory. Seminars, debates, and fieldwork replaced lectures.

traditional expository methods. Urban analysis incorporated tools from anthropology and semiotics.

seeking to read the city as a text full of meanings and conflicts. The environmental issue, a theme

From the master's thesis developed later, it began to emerge as a dimension

fundamental to planning, no longer as a resource to be exploited, but as a system.

finite to be preserved. This immersion in French critical thought allowed for the deconstruction of certain

certainties of Brazilian modernism. The idea that good architecture, by itself, could redeem the

Society was put to the test. It was understood that space is not neutral; it is political. Planning

Urban planning, therefore, is not merely a technical matter of efficient resource allocation, but a field...

of power struggles. This politicized perspective on urbanism has enriched design practice,

incorporating the dimension of equity and social justice as criteria for evaluating projects.

The experience in Paris also exposed the urban planner to European housing and transportation policies.

with its successes and failures. The study of the *Villes Nouvelles* (New Cities) around Paris offered

A real laboratory for analysis on urban decentralization and the creation of new centralities.

A comparison between the French model of strong state intervention and the Brazilian laissez-faire model.

The peripheral area highlighted the importance of the State's role in regulating land use and providing for

Quality public infrastructure. The synthesis between Mackenzie's technical rigor and the social critique of



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Paris VIII forged a hybrid professional profile. The urban planner did not abandon the project, but moved on to...

to see it as an instrument of social transformation that must engage with the context, the history.

and the aspirations of the community. The "Right to the City" has ceased to be a slogan and has become a reality.

guiding principle of urban planning practice, seeking to build more inclusive cities and

democratic.

3. Zoning vs. Mixed-Use Development: The Dilemma of Urban Structuring

One of the central points of the comparative urban planning debate lies in the opposition between

Strict functional zoning and mixed-use development. Brazilian urban planning, influenced by

American urban planning and functionalist modernism tended to view zoning as

The ideal tool for organizing the chaotic growth of metropolises. The separation between zones

industrial, commercial and residential buildings aimed to protect quality of life and avoid conflicts of interest.

neighborhood and optimize traffic flow. However, the application of this model in cities like São

Paulo's development resulted in socio-spatial segregation, monotonous dormitory neighborhoods, and a dependency.

The unsustainable nature of individual transportation to connect dispersed functions. In contrast, the school

A French perspective from the 1970s, absorbed during her master's degree, highlighted the importance of the city.

Traditional, compact, and complex. The mix of uses was seen as essential to guarantee the

urban vitality, street safety ("eyes on the street" as Jane Jacobs called it) and the reduction of distances to

displacement. The neighborhood should be a self-sufficient unit, where housing, work, commerce and

Leisure activities should coexist in harmony. This vision criticized the sterility of large housing complexes.

peripheral areas and advocated for the reintegration of urban functions. The application of these concepts in reality

Tropical environments demand adaptations. Brazil's climate, culture, and economy impose distinct dynamics.

The street in Brazil is a space of intense sociability, but also of conflict. The mix, if not

While regulated, it can cause inconvenience, but its absence leads to insecurity and urban desertification.

The challenge for a planner trained in this dual tradition is to find the balance: promoting diversity.

of uses without compromising environmental quality, using urban design to mediate the

Conflicts arise between different activities. Infrastructure plays a crucial role in this arrangement.

While segregated zoning requires large road corridors to connect the fragments

Urban environments require a capillary network of public transportation and active mobility.

European experience shows that investment in high-capacity public transport is the

structuring the territory, allowing densification along transport axes and freeing up the

The remaining urban fabric should be allocated for more human-friendly uses. Zoning, therefore, should not be abandoned.

but made more flexible. The use of instruments such as inclusive zoning, urban operations

Consortiums and mixed-use zones allow for inducing the desired urban development, instead

It's not just about restricting it. Regulation should focus more on the urban form and the impact on the neighborhood.



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which in the strict typology of the activity. Urban morphology, a subject dear to the French school, becomes a
A richer design tool than the color patch on the zoning map. The proposed synthesis.
It is an urbanism that values complexity. The city is not a machine for living, but a...
Living organism. Planning should foster diversity, encounter, and exchange, characteristics
Essential aspects of urban life. Overcoming monofunctional zoning is a necessary step towards...
To build more resilient, economical, and pleasant cities to live in, restoring a human scale.
lost in the road-centric scale of the 20th century.

4. Social Housing and the Production of Peripheral Space

The issue of social housing is central in both Brazil and France, but approached from a different perspective.
distinct forms. In Brazil, the mass production of housing by the BNH (National Housing Bank)
Housing) at the time of graduation focused on quantity and cost reduction, resulting in
large standardized housing complexes, located in peripheral areas lacking
infrastructure and services. This production logic reinforced segregation and created ghettos of poverty.
disconnected from the formal city and job opportunities. The architect, in this system, was
often a mere executor of standard plans, with little room for innovation or adaptation to
context. In France, the postwar period also saw the construction of large complexes (*Grands*).
Ensembles), but by the 1970s, the postgraduate period, this model was already in crisis and
being severely criticized. French housing policy was beginning to seek more alternatives.
integrated into the urban fabric, enhancing the architecture, typological diversity and quality of
Public spaces. The rehabilitation of historical centers and the integration of social housing in areas.
Established groups were gaining strength, seeking to prevent the ghettoization of the peripheries. The transposition of the critique
French research, applied to the Brazilian context, highlighted the flaws in our model. The Brazilian periphery is not...
The urban planner states that it is merely the location of popular housing, a place of state absence and self-construction.
Those trained within this interface realize that the solution lies not only in building new units, but
in the urbanization of favelas, in land regularization, and in the improvement of existing spaces. A
Housing cannot be treated as an isolated commodity, but as part of a right to the city that...
It includes access to transportation, education, healthcare, and culture. The European experience with industrialization.
Construction and prefabrication, topics of interest during stays abroad, offers lessons.
These are important techniques, but they must be adapted to the local economic and technological reality.
Design flexibility is essential to allow housing to evolve with the family, incorporating
The culture of "add-on" additions should be planned and implemented safely. Social housing projects must provide for this.
Spaces for commerce, services, and leisure, breaking with the monofunctionality of the complexes.
bedrooms. The aesthetic and symbolic dimension of housing is also relevant. The dignity of
Housing depends on architectural quality and attention to common spaces. The French school



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It teaches that public space is an extension of the home, and its design should encourage appropriation and... coexistence. In tropical Brazil, the street, the square, and the backyard have vital climatic and social functions that do not These factors can be ignored by the standardized design. It is concluded that the production of social housing should... It should be diverse, decentralized, and participatory. The State should act not only as a builder, but as a regulator and facilitator, ensuring that urban land fulfills its social function. The application The concepts learned in Paris VIII about the sociology of dwelling allow for the design of policies. more humane and effective housing solutions that address the quantitative deficit without neglecting the urban planning quality and social integration.

5. Infrastructure as an Urban Catalyst

Urban infrastructure, in the Mackenzie tradition, was frequently viewed from the perspective of In engineering, sanitation works, viaducts, and avenues were necessary technical elements for the... The functioning of the urban machine. However, the perspective developed during the master's degree in France, and further explored in the thesis on the Rio-Santos highway, revealed infrastructure as the main agent of... Territorial transformation. A road, a subway line, or a sanitation network not only They meet an existing demand, but induce new dynamics of occupation, appreciation and use of the This "structuring" view of infrastructure places the urban planner in the position of strategist. The layout of a road defines growth vectors; the location of a transport station creates New urban centers. Infrastructure planning must therefore precede and guide development. urban, and not just playing catch-up to remedy problems in already established cities. in a disorderly manner. The French concept of *Aménagement du Territoire* (Territorial Planning). It integrates economic, social, and physical planning, using infrastructure as a tool for... To reduce regional inequalities and promote balanced development. In Brazil, the dissociation The gap between infrastructure planning and land-use planning has created dysfunctional cities. The expansion of water, electricity, and transportation networks often follows the logic of political pressure or real estate development, instead of a coherent master plan. The result is sprawling, expensive urbanization and Inefficient, where infrastructure always arrives late and in a precarious state in the outskirts. The application The knowledge gained allows us to propose a model where investment in infrastructure is... financed by the land value increase that he himself generates, through value capture instruments. The environmental dimension of infrastructure also takes center stage. Urban drainage should not be not just buried piping, but linear parks, retention ponds, and rain gardens that integrate Water and landscape. Mobility is not just about moving cars, but about accessibility and... Quality of life. Green infrastructure, a modern concept that engages with urban ecology. Studied in Paris, it proposes the use of nature as infrastructure, providing essential services such as Thermal regulation and flood control. The aesthetics of the infrastructure is another point of convergence.



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Great works don't have to be urban scars; they can be architectural landmarks and spaces of...

Coexistence. Viaducts can house parks or services beneath their spans; treatment plants.

They can be integrated into environmental education spaces. The reconciliation between technique (engineering)

And art (architecture), a hallmark of the complete training of the architect-urban planner, allows for transformation.

Functional equipment in urban assets that enhance the landscape. In short, infrastructure is...

The key to restructuring tropical metropolises is integrated planning, which articulates...

Transportation, land use, and the environment are the only way to overcome urban chaos. A systemic view.

The skills acquired through international training allow one to design infrastructures that are, at the same time,

Technically efficient, socially just, and environmentally sustainable.

6. The Role of the Architect-Urban Planner in Public Policy

The Franco-Brazilian training culminates in a reflection on the political role of the architect.

Urban planner. In Brazil during the 1970s, the professional oscillated between being a technocrat serving the State.

authoritarian and the liberal professional geared towards the private market. In post-1968 France, the urban planner was prompted to be a social agent, a mediator between public power and the community, an advocate.

of collective interest. This tension defines the professional identity of the contemporary urban planner. A

Working in public policy requires more than technical competence; it demands negotiation skills.

Understanding of legislative processes and sensitivity to listening to the demands of the population.

An urban planner is not the sole possessor of truth, but a technician capable of translating social aspirations into concrete forms.

Spatial and legal norms. The preparation of Master Plans, zoning laws and projects of

Urban intervention is a political act that defines who has the right to the city and how public resources are used.

Resources will be allocated. International academic experience broadens the repertoire of solutions and tools.

available. Knowledge of urban management models from Europe, such as public-private partnerships.

private companies with clear social obligations, design competitions and participatory councils,

It offers alternatives to the traditional Brazilian bureaucratic model. The adaptation of these instruments

However, it requires a deep understanding of the local reality and existing power structures.

Professional ethics are the guiding principle behind this work. The commitment to environmental sustainability,

As evidenced in the master's thesis, social justice should guide all design decisions.

Urban planners must resist the pressures of predatory real estate speculation and political populism that

They seek easy and immediate solutions. Urban planning is a long-term activity that

It requires a vision for the future and intergenerational responsibility. Continuing education and research are...

fundamental to maintaining a professional's relevance. The city changes rapidly, and the challenges

Climate, technological, and demographic changes demand constant updating. The connection with the

The university, maintained through advanced academic degrees, allows the urban planner to bring to the...

Public management incorporates theoretical and technical innovations, revitalizing administration and improving policies.



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Urban planning. Finally, the architect-urban planner must be a communicator. Technical language must be...

Translated so that society understands the challenges of planning. The democratization of

Urban planning involves the ability to explain why a particular project is necessary, what its objectives are, and what they are.

its impacts and how it benefits the community. The urban planner formed at the confluence of cultures.

Brazilian and French women have the ability to move between these worlds, combining tropical creativity.

to European analytical rigor in pursuit of better cities.

CONCLUSION

The academic path that links Mackenzie University to Université Paris VIII constitutes a privileged laboratory for the analysis of comparative urbanism. The central thesis of this article is that a synthesis between Brazilian modernist rationalism and French sociological critical thought.

It offers a robust set of tools to face the challenges of contemporary tropical metropolises.

The Mackenzie experience provided the technical foundation, mastery of scale, and understanding of the materiality of the city's construction. The experience in Paris VIII, in turn, introduced the dimension political, social and environmental, questioning the dogmas of functionalism and paving the way for a

A more humane and complex urban planning. Comparative zoning analysis revealed that segregation

A rigid, uncritically imported functional model has generated fragmented and unequal cities in Brazil.

a renewed appreciation for mixed-use development and the compact city, inspired by European urban tradition.

It points to ways to revitalize urban centers and create more vibrant neighborhoods.

Safe. However, this application must be mediated by cultural and climatic specificities.

Locally, avoiding the simple transposition of models that do not engage with Brazilian reality. In

In the field of social housing, the critique of large peripheral housing complexes, consolidated in France in the...

The 1970s warned of the dangers of mass-produced and dehumanized housing. The solution lies in...

through the integration of housing into the urban fabric, through the provision of infrastructure and services, and through valuing architecture as an element of dignity. The urban planner must act not only in

design of the housing unit, but in the conception of habitat in its broadest sense, guaranteeing the

The right to the city for the working classes. Infrastructure, a topic explored in depth in the master's thesis.

Regarding the Rio-Santos highway, it emerged as the structuring element of the territory. The systemic vision acquired

In postgraduate studies, one can understand great works not as ends in themselves, but as...

development vectors that should be planned in an integrated way with land use and

Environmental conservation. Neglecting the environmental and social impacts of infrastructure is costly.

expensive for the country, requiring a paradigm shift towards more sustainable and resilient projects. A

The environmental issue, pioneered in the author's academic training, became the central theme.

A cross-cutting element in all modern urban planning. The city can no longer be conceived in opposition.

to nature, but as part of an ecosystem. The management of water resources, the protection of



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Biodiversity and adaptation to climate change are imperatives that demand a [missing word - likely "responsibility" or "competence"] from the urban planner.

Multidisciplinary technical knowledge and a firm ethical stance. The role of the State and participation.

Social aspects were also reevaluated in light of the French experience. Technocratic planning and

The authoritarian approach proved unsustainable. The construction of the city must be a democratic process and

participatory, where the urban planner's technical knowledge serves to enhance public debate and

To make collective aspirations viable. Urban governance requires transparency, negotiation and

Commitment to the common good. In short, Franco-Brazilian education allows one to overcome the false

The dichotomy between theory and practice, between technique and politics. The complete urban planner is the one who can...

Design with rigor, plan strategically, and act with social sensitivity. Lessons learned.

In Paris and São Paulo, when merged, they create an urban planning practice capable of transforming the

In reality, we are building cities that are both functionally efficient and fair.

Socially and environmentally balanced. This is the challenge and responsibility bequeathed by this.

A unique academic trajectory.

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