



FROM THE CRITICISM OF THE SUPERQUADRA TO THE WALLED BLOCK: THE CASE OF ÁGUAS CLARAS IN BRASÍLIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses processes involved in the transformation of Águas Claras' materiality, a neighborhood designed in Brasília, Federal District, whose project aspired to mimic the streets and the avenues with wide sidewalks typical of the so-called "traditional cities" as opposed to the modernist urban model – ample green spaces, roads separated from pedestrian flows and isolated buildings – that characterizes the Pilot Plan of Brasília, located only 19 kilometers from the analyzed site. In addition to the criticism established about Brasília as urban subject, Águas Claras is characterized as a break in the metropolitan landscape of the region, previously marked by the horizontality of its satellite cities and by the disperse occupation of the territory. The intense verticalization, much higher than the 12 floors initially foreseen in Paulo Zimbres' design contracted in 1991, configures walled blocks as small closed condominiums, despite the premises of profuse public spaces in his design. This study discusses the ambiguities of the design as a narrative of dispute and conflict that (re)configures the territory and the landscape over time. The main conclusions are the way in which the issue of design crosses substantially different urban models, albeit in different ways, in addition to observations about the tortuous relationship between urban design, aspirations of modernity, social classes and urban legislation.

Keywords: Aguas Claras. Brasilia. Superblocks. Walls. Urban design.

RESUMO

Este artigo discute processos envolvidos na transformação da materialidade de Águas Claras, bairro planejado em Brasília, Distrito Federal, cujo projeto aspirava mimetizar as ruas e avenidas com largas calçadas típicas das ditas "cidades tradicionais" em contraposição ao modelo urbanístico de matriz modernista – amplos espaços verdes, vias separadas dos fluxos de pedestres e edifícios isolados – que caracteriza o Plano Piloto de Brasília, distante apenas 19 quilômetros do sítio analisado. Para além da crítica estabelecida acerca de Brasília enquanto tema urbanístico, Águas Claras caracteriza-se como ruptura na paisagem metropolitana da região, antes marcada pela horizontalidade de suas cidades satélites e pela ocupação dispersa no território. A intensa verticalização, muito superior aos 12 pavimentos previstos inicialmente no projeto de Paulo Zimbres contratado em 1991, configura quadras muradas como pequenos condomínios fechados, apesar das premissas de profusos espaços públicos em seu projeto. Este estudo discute as ambiguidades do projeto enquanto *narrativa* de disputa e conflito que (re)configura o território e a paisagem ao longo do tempo. Surgem como conclusões principais a maneira pela qual a questão do projeto atravessa modelos urbanísticos substancialmente distintos, ainda que de maneiras variadas, além de apontamentos acerca da tortuosa relação entre projeto urbanístico, aspirações de modernidade, classes sociais e legislação urbanística.

Palavras-chave: Águas Claras. Brasília. Projeto urbano. Superquadra. Muros.

INTRODUCTION

The Brasilia project and its construction are sometimes recognized or spelled out in the literature (BENEVOLO 2005, FICHER 2009, FRAMPTON 1997, VIDAL 2009) as the culmination of the Modern Movement, manifesting principles and paradigms of CIAM - Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne -, an influential forum for debates in the first half of the 20th century. The winning project of the Pilot Plan for the new Brazilian capital, created by Lucio Costa in 1957, crosses two perpendicular axes, the Monumental and the Road axis, where the first houses the civic squares, palaces and government buildings and the second axis configures a wide forest interspersed with housing of up to six floors and on free pilotis with public access, freeing the grassy and intensely wooded ground for common use.

This landscape-urban component deeply marks Brasília. The inspiration for the city-park concept was evident. The composition of each superblock would end up referring to that of an internal courtyard, being surrounded by trees, where - according to Costa - even the residents of the highest floors could have visual contact with children playing in the green and children's leisure areas inside the block. Thus, given its configuration, the Superblock of the Pilot Plan represented a rupture in relation to the traditional urban block model designed by the ownership of lots and boundaries between the public and the private.

The debate and criticism intensified in the 1980s in Brazil focused on the rarefied densification in urban plans with a modernist matrix, that is, the spacing in the occupation of urban land due to the profusion of empty and green spaces, which would constitute an opposition to morphology of the block divided into lots with contiguous buildings, where only the front façades face the street, common in European cities, which Le Corbusier called *rue-corridor* (CORBUSIER

2004 [1930]). In addition to the excessive use of individual transport, this characteristic was one of the most striking elements of the criticism oriented to the urban design of the Pilot Plan of Brasília (BICCA 1985, HOLANDA 1985a, HOLSTON 1993 [1989], FRAMPTON 1997). The lack of "corners" in blocks for chance encounters and the road design aimed at the automobile were the main arguments that reverberated the already consolidated criticism to the precepts of the Modern Movement as a whole (JACOBS 2011 [1961], VENTURI 2004 [1966], HALL 2013 [1988]), including authors such as Vicente Del Rio (1990), Juan Luis Mascaró (1987) and Carlos Nelson dos Santos (1988). Recently, they continue to be reissued by authors such as Jan Gehl (2014) and Rem Koolhaas (2016). What can be seen is that Brasília went from thesis to antithesis.

From the criticism cultivated in the context of the search for new alternative urban models to the Pilot Plan of Brasília, Águas Claras is born, the result of a planning guideline aimed at consolidating the urbanization axis along the Parque Taguatinga Road - EPTG (acronym in Portuguese), access road to the Pilot Plan. Shortly afterwards, the creation of Águas Claras would become one of the main agendas of housing policy in the southwestern region of the Federal District, filling a territorial gap between occupations adjacent to the Pilot Plan and Taguatinga, Ceilândia and the then newly created Samambaia, at the time still called "satellite cities".

The city was planned according to urban paradigms that favored traditional typologies with blocks with wide sidewalks, commercial galleries on the lower floors that would serve as a base for residential buildings up to 12 floors high. There would be a new coalition between the circulation of pedestrians and vehicles in the resumption of street-corridors, characterized as boulevards, especially in the two main avenues of the city along the subway line. The two avenues configured the regulatory layout of the project: the city blocks arranged in parallel

blocks were formed by lots that defined the interface between public and private use on urban land.

However, another landscape in Águas Claras rises after more than three decades of its project. Nowadays, the Administrative Region of Águas Claras in the Federal District¹ draws attention on the horizon of a Brasília-metropolis. This is mainly due to its characteristic concentration of tall buildings, many of which reach 36 floors. The sharp verticalization contrasts with the remaining sprawling urbanization and is substantially different from that represented by the authors of the neighborhood project in the forecasts embedded in the perspectives of the urban project.

Many of the commercial galleries suggested in the urban plan were not accepted by the construction companies and housing cooperatives that started the first constructions. Despite the possibility of commercial use, many of the buildings decided on a common typology of the Brasília landscape: the ground floor in pilotis with collective areas for their residents, but with the boundary of the lot fenced for privacy and control of the tenants.

Railings and walls were raised along the pedestrian route and make up another landscape in Águas Claras, reflecting the model of enclave that was built there. Security cameras and spotlights watch corners and streets while leisure equipment already present in squares or normally found in public areas is offered inside the condominiums. The set of these elements has a marked impact on the configuration

of a walled landscape with little interface with the streets and avenues that make up the blocks, except for a few exceptions.

It is important to note that there is an abundance of bibliography on aspects related to environmental characteristics and sustainability² in Águas Claras, but this article proposes to address and contribute to the scarce debate regarding a specific aspect of the materialization and redefinition of the project. It is recognized that, despite trying to disassociate itself from the Pilot Plan project, Águas Claras ended up incorporating part of its urban elements - such as buildings on pilotis and isolated buildings in some blocks, to name a few examples -, but positioning them among walls.

In this way, this work starts from the outlined criticism to the superblocks of Brasília and to its composition, advancing when discussing the intention of constituting the block in Águas Claras and assuming the street-corridor as a reference. Then, it is argued that criticisms of some of the principles of the Modern Movement greatly fueled the Águas Claras project in the construction of a dichotomy, mainly in its argument and representation, but that this was insufficient for an accurate materialization of the project and for the overcoming the issues listed by the critic. In addition, it is noted that, although several points of convergence with the original project are perceived today in the materiality of the new neighborhood, they coexist with the presence of unwanted characteristics and that are disconnected from criticism of the Pilot Plan of Brasília.

¹ Administrative Regions (ARs) are a subdivision of the Federal District administration. Its physical (polygonal) limits define areas of action and jurisdiction for local administrations, providing local and less centralized government coordination.

² This bibliography deals mainly with aspects such as noise, heat islands, energy efficiency, in short, the environmental characteristics of Águas Claras, as well as dealing with topics on sustainability, energy performance and construction aspects that take the neighborhood as a specific case (GARAVELLI, et al. 2010, CAMPANHONI, Implementation of buildings in Águas Claras-DF: influence on the environmental thermal performance of open spaces 2011, FERNANDES, BAPTISTA and BIAS 2011, OLIVEIRA, SPOSITO and BLUMENSCHHEIN 2012, LIMA and SOUZA 2014, CARVALHO JÚNIOR, et al. 2016). Regarding the genesis and the transformations carried out in Águas Claras, some bibliography has been published (WILLIAMS 2007, PAVIANI 2010a, 2010b, SERRANO 2010, CAMPANHONI 2013, SILVA 2016) and there are also specific theses and dissertations that address the case (FRANÇA 2008, M.E. OLIVEIRA 2009, PEREIRA 2016).

PROJECT ISSUES: THE PILOT PLAN SUPERBLOCK AND THE RESUMPTION OF THE BLOCK IN ÁGUAS CLARAS

It is in the Pilot Plan project that the built materiality could be observed and judged with more emphasis as the most faithful fulfillment of the precepts of the Athens Charter. As Kenneth Frampton (1997) has already pointed out, the statement produced in the first CIAM, in 1928, understood that constructive activity should be closely linked to the evolution and development of human life. The set of ideas generated in this series of events came to be systematized in the document entitled “Athens Charter”, a product of the IV CIAM, in 1933. In that document, several articles pointed out how the city of the 20th century should be thought: recognized, fundamentally, as The Functional City (FRAMPTON 1997). The debates that led to this conception were the result of the reality of the 19th century, when, on the one hand, sanitary problems in urban centers gained prominence and, on the other hand, there was an accelerated emergence of technologies from machines that made possible changes in the ways of life of the populations (SECCHI 2009).

The Charter emanated the modern rationality of the West from the global north. It did this by understanding the city as a set of specific functions that should be articulated so that the urban day-to-day life was supposed to be more organized and efficient. This document quickly became one of the main references for modern architecture and urbanism, with lasting repercussions. This was a remarkable fact and is exemplified in the contest for the Pilot Plan of Brasília, 26 years after the publication of the document. Laurent Vidal points out, when discussing the contest’s proposals:

The presented projects have a common thread: their rationalist inspiration. Each one, more or less explicitly, organizes the city around the four main functions defined by

the Athens Charter: to inhabit, to work, to cultivate the body and the spirit, to circulate. The old street is systematically replaced by a new concept, giving priority to free spaces and isolated blocks. The general shape of the plans and constituent parts obey strict geometric regularity. (VIDAL 2009, 203)

Lucio Costa’s project, which became the winner of the event, did not differ substantially from his competitors in this aspect. Starting from twenty-three textual points that are developed as principles when conceptualizing, characterizing and dimensioning the city, Costa produced an internal coherence for the project and granted it a symbolic power that manifested more clearly a project of modernity and social emancipation inherent to the ambition of the country’s government. This dimension was highlighted by the evaluating jury. As Sir William Holford, an English urban plan member who judged the projects presented in the contest, stated:

The way I understand this contest is that it is a contest of ideas, not details. No architect, firm or company can prepare, at this stage, a defined work plan that covers real economic and social details and costs. Therefore, the conditions of the contest required only an outline of the project and a memo illustrating the competitor’s ideas. This was compulsory. (HOLFORD 2002, 52 sic.)

The project presented by Costa shows, however, a synthesis of urban propositions elaborated since the period of the Industrial Revolution and during the first half of the 20th century - characterized by a paradigmatic position of the precepts of the Modern Movement and which represented the programmatic face of modernity (HEYNEN 1999) of the global north. Among these propositions from which Costa drew inspiration for the Pilot Plan project, the most evident are, for example, Linear City, by Arturo Soria y Mata (1882), and Garden City, by Ebenezer Howard (1898, 1902). However, what is little considered in

the critical review of the project are the influences of urbanization processes in Brazil, especially throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Costa was also profoundly knowledgeable about the founding of new cities in the country's hinterland.

The desire to take possession of the territory and the appropriation of modern European ideas are part of the same narrative of configuration of Brasília, particularly in the residential area along the Road Axis, formed by the sequence of Superblocks - a central and structuring element in Costa's project. On the other hand, the superblocks also refer to the ideas of Clarence Perry (1923) when reconsidering the concept of Neighborhood Units and resemble the sector representations of Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse (1931).

For Costa, the conception of the Superblocks also concerned the rapprochement of the inhabitant with the place of residence. He writes:

As for the residential problem, there was a solution to create a continuous sequence of large blocks arranged, in double or simple order, on both sides of the road lane, and framed by a wide, densely wooded lane, with large trees, prevailing in each a specific plant species, with grassy ground and a supplementary intermittent curtain of shrubs and foliage, to better protect, regardless of the observer's position, the contents of the blocks, always seen in the background and as if cushioned in the landscape. Provision that has the double advantage of guaranteeing urban planning even when the density, category, pattern or architectural quality of buildings

varies, and offering residents extensive shaded areas for walking and leisure, regardless of the free areas provided within the blocks themselves. (COSTA 1995, 291-292)

In the overall composition, the system of four superblocks would form the Neighborhood Unit along the road axis. In these units, there would be the implementation of a system of parks and recreation, as well as other equipment for collective use. Namely: health facilities, neighborhood libraries, churches and schools and a variety of common equipment inside the superblocks, always surrounded by stores adjacent to traffic routes. Characterizing his own proposal, Costa concludes by stating that "this is how, being monumental, it is also comfortable, efficient, welcoming and intimate. And at the same time, spilled and concise, bucolic and urban, lyrical and functional" (COSTA 1995, 295).

In this way, he aspired for a reconnection between residents and the bucolic and building dimension, starting from the structuring and a coherent relationship between the near and surrounding spaces. These should be wooded and free, amalgamating aspects of the countryside, of a certain rurality, with the city (Figure 1). Under this assumption, Costa indicated that the inhabitants would have the opportunity to enjoy the better of these two universes, solving the conflict of the traditional dichotomy - real and symbolic - between countryside and city, between rural and urban³.

Thus, the housing composition in Superblocks, more recently considered one of the most important innovations in Costa's project (EL-DAHDAH 2005, GORELIK 2005, 2012, FERREIRA e GOROVITZ

³ The sociology classics were quick to point out as a central component of the advent of European modernity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries the transition from rural to urban. This discussion is more strongly present in the texts of Ferdinand Tönnies (2001 [1887]) and Georg Simmel (1987[1902]), but it also finds support in the writings of Émile Durkheim (2004 [1895]). Subsequently, Henri Lefebvre (1999[1970], 2012[1968]) addresses this dichotomy in a more detailed and specific way. Despite the diverse interpretations and characteristics of the perceptions of these authors, there is a certain consensus in their work about how industrialization and, as a continuous act, urbanization have changed lifestyles and social cosmology itself - as opposed to the countryside, the rural and life in (small) community, placed in a dichotomous position in relation to life in society in the city. These discussions reverberated in the field of urbanism, whose disciplinary consolidation took place almost concurrently with that of sociology.



*Figure 1: Aerial view of two Superblocks and a commercial area in the Pilot Plan of Brasília.
Source: Joana França photographs.*

2009), in the 1980s became one of its most criticized components (BICCA 1985, HOLANDA 1985a, 1985b, HOLSTON 1993[1989]). Consequently, it would be an urban characteristic to be overcome.

Under the guise of another ambition of modernity, but still underpinning the North-inspired ideal, Paulo Zimbres would make clear, in the Águas Claras project, the influence received from European and American cities such as Edinburgh and New York, by which he expressed admiration at the presence of what he calls “urbanity”, recognized in the density of the urban fabric, in the blocks and in the large presence of pedestrians. As Williams writes:

The visual references of the Águas Claras plan include New York, Milan and Edinburgh, this being the city where Zimbres studied in the early 1970s. They also include the Pilot Plan itself, which the architect considers as a fundamentally urban space, albeit a type of space that rarely ratifies its urbanity. (WILLIAMS 2007, 2)

It is at the Descriptive Memorial of the Neighborhood of Águas Claras that you can trace the components and principles that governed the project. First, the urban mesh should be organized along the subway line, conforming the pattern of typical blocks and the forecast of diversified uses:

The neighborhood develops along the subway lines, with the constitution of a binary system of traffic routes and the launch of mixed blocks for homes, shops and services. In parallel to these blocks, large residential blocks were set up. Aiming at favoring economic activities, great flexibility was allowed as to the possible land uses in the strip of blocks located along the subway. (ZIMBRES E REIS ARQ. ASSOCIADOS 1991, 6, sic.)

Then the MDE (Portuguese acronym for Descriptive Memorial) discusses the potential volumetries and about the desire to establish a centrality for the neighborhood. These elements are used as resources to redesign a model closer to the said traditional city. Note in the rhetoric present in the text:

The creation of a rich and pleasant built environment led to the adoption of different typologies, traditionally used in several Brazilian cities. It was also a matter of ensuring a great freedom of design for the future projects of the buildings that will be built there. In this way, the virtues of traditional cities were happily combined with achievements of contemporary urbanism.

Commerce will be concentrated especially in the central area of the neighborhood, in the secondary centers located around subway stations and along roads that constitute the binary system, where public facilities, service stations and institutional areas for churches, associations etc. will also be located. (ZIMBRES E REIS ARQ. ASSOCIADOS 1991, 8)

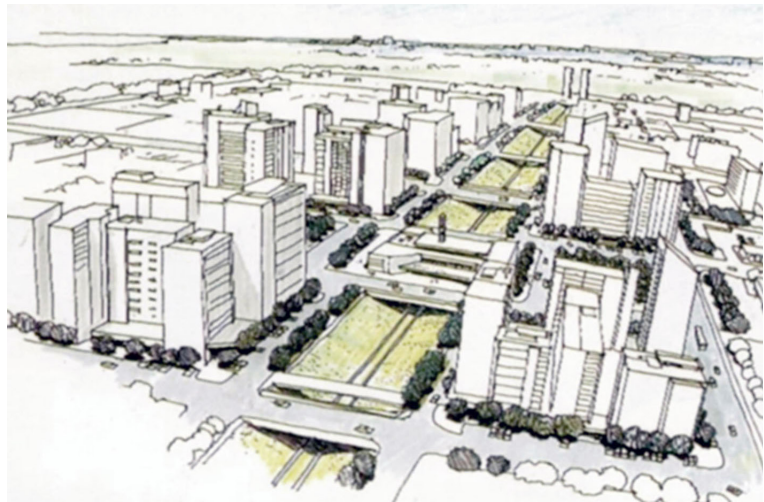
In addition, it is noteworthy that the subway, a demand that preceded the urban project and that

appeared as a premise to be incorporated, was recognized as an acceptable contingency. The railway line had already been established and cut the area for the installation of the neighborhood: it was a substantially important division in the land. Zimbres did not seem to see a first-rate problem there, he established the urban project with the line creating the neighborhood and suggested the construction of small bridges to overcome this open gap. Some of the bridges would be intended for vehicles, while others would be for pedestrians only - including the suggestion of installing shops in some of them (ZIMBRES E REIS ARQ. ASSOCIADOS 1991).

Zimbres defended densification, valued the presence of pedestrians and the mixture of uses, mainly opposing the Pilot Plan model, considering it to be a fragmented and dispersed composition - fundamentally on the residential scale of Costa's project. These components are expressed in the references adopted, as mentioned, but also in the discourse. In Águas Claras urban design and its representations (Figures 2, 3 and 4) these aspects are demonstrated and indicated, also revealing the inspiration in avenues and commercial galleries along the sidewalks, in the street-corridor model, with the provision of fewer free areas and the composition of a more compact and less permeable urban mesh whose morphology is based on the pattern: building volume, pedestrian path, motorized circulation path.

However, little was mentioned that this did not represent an absolute denial of the urbanism of the Pilot Plan. Zimbres refers to the blocks he proposes with *cul-de-sac* designed for Águas Claras as "Superblocks" (Figures 5 and 6), in an obvious reference to the units designed by Costa when rescuing them as a rhetorical element to define the housing areas of his own design.

Figure 2, 3 and 4: Sketches of the *Águas Claras* project.
1991.
Source: Illustrations provided by Urban Architect Paulo
Zimbres. Author's personal file.



urban structure elements

- residential units
 - superblocks
 - traditional blocks
- areas of employment and services
 - traditional blocks: mixed use
 - trade and services along arterials
 - large areas
 - hospitals
 - campus
 - industry and supply sector
 - commercial centers



Figure 5: Excerpt from the presentation “Águas Claras Project: an urban planning exercise in the Federal District - 1991” and excerpt from the project and representation of the Águas Claras Project Occupation Plan. 1991.

Source: Illustrations provided by Urban Architect Paulo Zimbres. Author's personal file.



Figure 6: excerpt from the presentation “Águas Claras Project: an urban planning exercise in the Federal District - 1991” with representation of the Águas Claras Project Occupation Plan. 1991.

Source: Illustrations provided by Urban Architect Paulo Zimbres. Author's personal file.

ÁGUAS CLARAS: FROM THE BREATH OF CRITICISM TO THE WALLS

In the late 1950s, the Federal District had Taguatinga⁴, which had already been defined as the future satellite city of the Pilot Plan (PAVIANI 2010a), given the increasing consolidation of Núcleo Bandeirante - called Cidade Livre. There were also settlements prior to construction, such as Planaltina and Brazlândia, and a set of temporary occupations. Later, but, like Taguatinga, also on the southwest axis of the Federal District, the satellite city of Ceilândia (1971) was installed and Samambaia (1985) more than ten years later. In this context, Águas Claras did not emerge as another urban project in the region, but as part of governmental actions that sought to align the housing deficits and policies aimed at the social control of the territory (GOUVÊA 1995). It is worth mentioning that a large part of the land ownership is public in the Federal District, which allowed the State to take direct action in its form of occupation. To make mass transport viable to Samambaia and other urban centers being created – such as Riacho Fundo and Recanto das Emas – and to make the connection between the Pilot Plan and the entire urbanized area in the southwest axis economically viable, the occupation of regions considered empty was necessary along the future subway route.

In 1991, when the urban project was commissioned from Paulo Zimbres' office, the government's intention (PAVIANI 2010b) went against what the 1977 PEOT⁵ predicted. As indicated in that document, the location, about 19 km from the Pilot Plan of Brasília, would be designed to house activities in the tertiary and quaternary sectors⁶, with housing use not being foreseen, as it was a low-density occupation area, to preserve the Paranoá basin.

Zimbres, however, was asked for an exclusively residential neighborhood. The urban planner, in turn, did not comply with what was required of him and elaborated a proposal that questioned the model of urban occupation of the territory with horizontal, discontinuous and dispersed urban mesh (Figure 7). As Richard Williams explains when analyzing the project:

The architect had been asked to plan a dormitory neighborhood; however, instead, he worked to make the new settlement a dense element of urbanism in the European tradition, projecting based on the experience of the traditional urban centers of Brazilian and European cities. Optimistically, he named the plan “An exercise in urbanization in the Federal District”. (WILLIAMS 2007, 2)

In 1992⁷ authorization is given for the implantation of Águas Claras as a district in Administrative Region III, Taguatinga. Currently, however, Águas Claras is known in the region exactly for being composed almost entirely of closed vertical condominiums and high-rise buildings, something that generates great contrast in view of the urban context of lower and spread profile of the whole of the Federal District. In addition, although designed for the appreciation of pedestrians, sidewalks in general are narrow and flanked by railings, windowless façade, walls or parking lots. Intense and long traffic jams are also part of the local routine, highlighting the high use of individual motorized transport. Some very specific contingencies ended up generating these results.

Since the beginning of construction, back in 1992, the buildings were undertakings carried out by cooperatives of public workers, but this model did not prosper, having shown financial incapacity. Many of the works

⁴ Taguatinga was originally created in 1958 under the name “Vila Sarah Kubitschek”, which was later changed. It was the first satellite city in the Federal District.

⁵ PEOT – Portuguese acronym for Structural Plan for Territorial Organization (1977), prepared by SEPLAN (Portuguese acronym for Planning Secretariat, Federal District).

⁶ The tertiary sector of the economy refers to activities that provide services, but also trade in goods. The quaternary sector of the economy, on the other hand, refers mainly to the production and sharing of information and knowledge.

⁷ Law No. 385, of December 16, 1992.

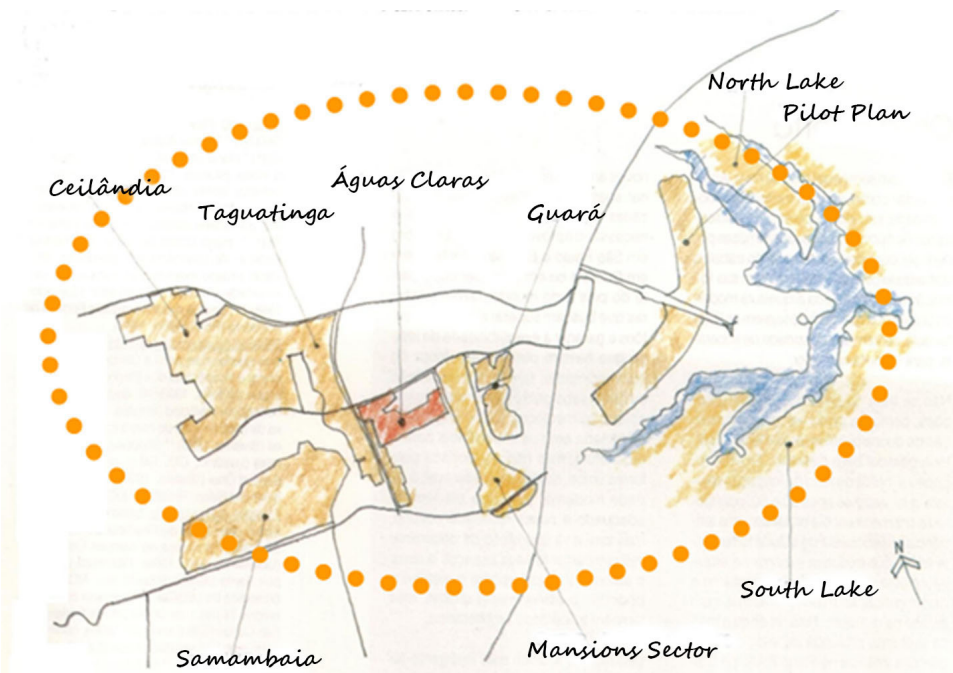


Figure 7: Situation study produced by Paulo Zimbres and his team. 1991. Source: Presentation “Águas Claras: an urban planning exercise in the Federal District – 1991”. Material provided by Urban Architect Paulo Zimbres. Author’s personal file.

and land ended up being taken over or acquired by developers and construction companies (SILVA 2016). Several of the cooperatives were forced to declare bankruptcy in the meantime. From this imbroglio there are striking changes, such as the increase or reduction of the initial number of buildings installed in the same land or the architecture of these buildings. It is also at this time that the urbanization of Águas Claras starts to be more intensely subjected to the dynamics of the real estate market, with repercussions on the projects’ needs programs and on the prices charged. At the time, it was important to the government the appreciation and quickly occupation of the place and, concomitantly, the real estate industry was heated and eager, especially in the face of real estate appreciation (SERRANO 2010) due to the increase in the housing demand of the local middle classes or affluent to the Federal District (SILVA 2016).

A second important contingency refers to the fact that Águas Claras was founded as a neighborhood in Taguatinga, RA III. This meant that the project

being installed was under the regulation of the legislation applicable to Taguatinga. At the time of its implementation, as set out in the Occupancy Plan attached to Law No. 385 of December 16, 1992, the maximum number of floors for buildings – initially scheduled for up to 12 – has already been changed, jumping to 15. In addition, utilization coefficients for all types of uses are established: commercial, housing, mixed, etc.

It is, however, with the approval of the Local Master Plan (Portuguese acronym: PDL) of Taguatinga in 1998⁸ that the potential for transformation of Águas Claras is expanded, with profound consequences on the reality of the neighborhood (JATOBÁ 2010). Being located as a neighborhood of RA III, Águas Claras was submitted to the same legislation that then came into force in Taguatinga, ignoring the design specificities defined by Zimbres and his team and the intentions to which his initial project seemed to have been directed. The two most notable consequences of this fact and whose impact on the landscape and

⁸ Complementary Law No. 90 of March 11, 1998. Local Master Plan for the Administrative Region of Taguatinga, RA-III.

urban experiences deserve to be highlighted are, first, the change in the gauge of 15 - already after the first change - maximum floors for an absence of limits, coming to exist as regulation of the construction limit only the utilization coefficients, which, also changed, have become higher than previously. The argument for these changes, anchored in the urban densification logic presented in the PDOT of 1992⁹ and relatively reinforced - mainly for the southwest axis of the FD - in the PDOT of 1997¹⁰, was that with higher utilization coefficients, urban occupation would be optimized, urban voids would be avoided and the population density would be increased. Today Águas Claras houses buildings with up to 36 floors.

The second consequence concerns the fact that it was also the PDL of Taguatinga that enabled streets flanked by windowless façades to become a common figure in Águas Claras. A convergence of constraints created an environment that allowed this type of situation. The legislation in force did not provide incentives for developers to prefer, for example, giving treatment to the facades of buildings that was friendly to pedestrians or that chose to allocate these spaces to the installation of commercial establishments - included in the admitted activities and advised as an option. Although there are several locations in Águas Claras with shops installed on the façades of buildings at street level, it can be seen in several streets and avenues that the street and the interface between public and private has been ignored. It was a decision delegated to the developers responsible for the projects. More seriously, there are cases in which only the outcrop of garages per meter above street level occurred - a circumstance allowed at the time and assumed as an option in most cases. Regarding this landscape of railings, walls and façades, several authors made the same observation:

In the two main avenues of the city of Águas Claras there is a monotonous sequence of residential buildings in sheets, with garages and leisure areas on the ground floor and with physical barriers constituted by walls. (...) in the initial proposal of the city, on some roads, the ground floor housed local commerce, but this practically did not occur, as garages occupying the ground floor are perceived, configuring long blind walls in the public urban space, and in some blocks the pilotis are free, but the buildings are walled and eliminate the necessary visibility for pedestrians in traditional superblocks. (M. E. OLIVEIRA 2009, 70)

It happens that the legislation allowed the outcrop of the garages, not considering them as a computable area in the utilization coefficient until the third parking floor built¹¹. In other words, building the garages above ground - which would drastically reduce the costs of the construction - did not impact the project's use limit, because there was no floor limit, and therefore had no impact on the number of units that would be offered for sale. In summary: it was a profitable option for those responsible for construction. Several builders and developers have chosen this possibility due to the high costs of excavation and underground construction. Soon, it became a widespread practice among the companies responsible for building the projects to opt for the outcrop, erecting several windowless façades without any interface with the street and reaching 12 meters in height even in busy avenues, as can be seen in photographs taken in several observations made during research visits to the neighborhood (Figures 8 and 9).

Similarly, the constant presence of railings and walls flanking pedestrian sidewalks (Figure 10) is

⁹ Law No. 353 of 18 November, 1992. Master Plan for Territorial Planning, FD.

¹⁰ Law No. 17 of January 28, 1997. Master Plan for Territorial Planning, FD.

¹¹ Article 72, Section I, Chapter III. Complementary Law No. 90 of March 11, 1998. Local Master Plan for the Administrative Region of Taguatinga, RA-III.



Figure 8: Photographs of a mix of streets and avenues in Águas Claras showing a profusion of occurrences of windowless façades. Source: author's personal file.

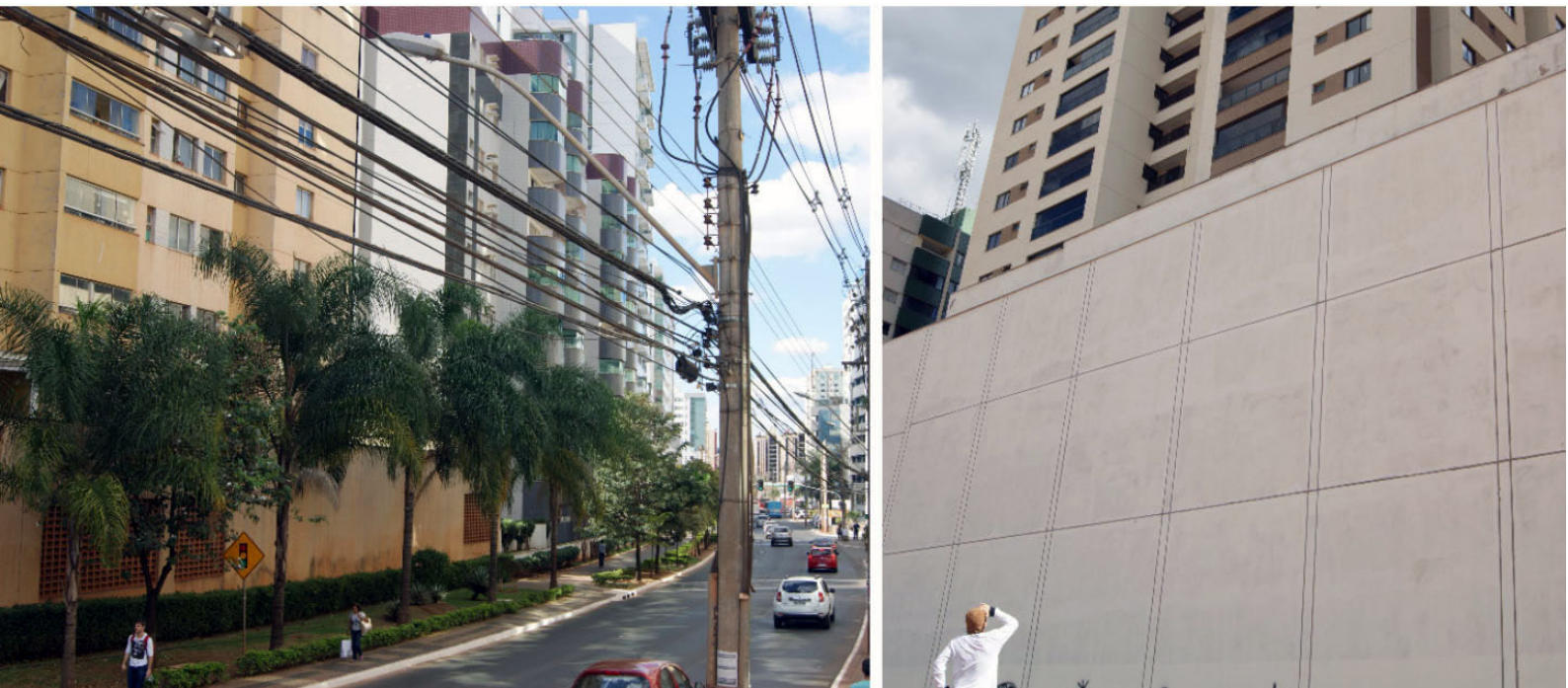


Figure 9: Photographs of a mix of streets and avenues in Águas Claras showing a profusion of occurrences of windowless façades. Source: author's personal file.

another possibility facilitated by legislation. Neither is considered for the purpose of accounting for the occupancy rate and, due to a widespread local demand for security and control instruments and artifacts fueled by a daily fear policy, they have become common items (PEREIRA, 2016).

Besides that, in Águas Claras, there are enterprises that offer services commonly found in urban commerce, but internally, within the condominium lots. When services are not offered, it is usual to find at least leisure areas, gymnastics or children's recreation – even though these facilities are profuse



*Figure 10: photographs of a mix of streets and avenues in Águas Claras showing a series of bars and security devices that line the public sidewalk.
Source: author's personal file.*

in local public spaces, existing at a distance of a few meters from the residential complexes. It is a specific way of life, a particular urban conformation.

The buildings form closed condominiums and under the slogan of safety and quality of life, are complexes composed of leisure areas with swimming pools, playground, party room, barbecue grills, gym, sauna and sports courts. (FRANÇA 2008, 163)

It is remarkable how many of the activities in general bequeathed to the public domain of the street and found in areas of collective and public use were internalized in these constructions. It appears that the condominiums incorporated services, activities and functions with the apparent intention of reducing the need to leave the fenced areas to go to the street under the arguments of the dangerousness existing in the public space and the convenience of having these services much closer.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: *SUI GENERIS* TO WHAT EXTENT?

Águas Claras exemplifies how the problems indicated by the criticism of Brasília cross time and go beyond modern urbanism. Although there are points with the presence of a flow of pedestrians, street commerce and activity in the public space, desert areas predominate, with low circulation and which present elements of constant surveillance and control that cause discomfort in any passerby. Although there was an intention to erect spaces inspired by the street corridor at different points, Águas Claras was not able to fully recover the patterns modeled after Edinburgh, New York or Milan and presented by Zimbres as ideals.

Despite its great relational importance, given its physical proximity and its history contingent on the Pilot Plan of Brasília, Águas Claras is today one of the most characteristic middle/upper-middle¹² class neighborhoods¹³ in the region. Its project was elaborated in the melting pot of criticism to modernist urbanism and adopted as technical solutions principles that aimed to retake logics that were different. Despite that, Águas Claras faces problems typical of other Brazilian cities, such as jams and heavy traffic, the presence of interstices, the lack of connectivity between sections of the urban mesh and the presence of closed condominiums, with their walls, fences and a wide range of security apparatus installed in buildings and streets, fueled by the insecurity of being in the public space and which, in turn, promote uninteresting, uncomfortable and, ironically, unsafe spaces.

Today, the neighborhood is commonly associated by the local population with other high-density urban contexts and famous for high-rise buildings,

such as when being called “Manhattan candanga”, “Manhattan of Brasília” or “Brazilian Manhattan”¹⁴. The establishment of this relationship is not only due to the vague similarity perceived in the skyline, which draws attention when contrasting with the low height of the other buildings in the urban area and the constant presence of the horizon in the Central Plateau. It also passes through symbolic circuits for building a distinction in the midst of the metropolitan complex. In the same way, its characterization as a neighborhood full of walls and bars, filled with closed condominiums, is also notorious.

Is there an urbanism project that survives its own materialization? This question is recurrent and the answers tend to be controversial, but the question it raises is pertinent as it puts in check the tool and the process that characterize the role of architects and urban planners in their main contribution to urban production. What is most evident throughout the discussion so far is the permeability of the urban planning project.

One way or another, the Federal District embraced modernity projects that are now printed in its territory and were erected in the midst of conflicts and contingencies that, independently, extrapolate and end up subverting the supposed capacity for modeling the reality delegated to urbanism. It becomes evident, on the other hand, how urban legislation is, much more than the project, capable of submitting intentions and conditioning urban experiences. At the end of the day, this article intends to modestly contribute to the discussions that aim to understand the relationship between urbanism projects and the tortuous journey to its materialization as streets, buildings and inhabited reality, dialoguing with situated circumstances with a legal, social and economic basis.

¹² As a reference, while the national average income was R \$ 928 in 2018 – when the minimum wage corresponded to R \$ 954 –, in Águas Claras (vertical) more than 84% of the population had a minimum income of R \$ 4,770, with 17% of the total population having a household income above R \$ 19,000 (CODEPLAN 2018).

¹³ The CODEPLAN (CODEPLAN (Federal District Planning Company) considers that the RA Águas Claras is composed of three subdivisions with distinct morphological and demographic characteristics: Areal, Arniqueiras and Águas Claras Vertical. This last subdivision is the one on which this work is focused.

¹⁴ News from the websites: Agenda Capital; Huffpost Brasil; Águas Claras News.

Based on a situated case like Águas Claras, the project that advocated the resumption of the block as an interface between the public and private, a landscape of everyday life and collective appropriation, this research model gains meaning. Regardless of its original project, there was a profound relationship between urban configuration, legislation and public management as mediators in the construction of the public and private character of living spaces. It discusses how the urban planning project influences and receives influence by positioning itself as a driving element in structuring and urban planning. These are problems that bring to light the relevance of exogenous pressures to the urban project itself and that promote materialities that were not initially foreseen and that follow, in a very dynamic way, adding to the built space the wishes of the population, real estate agents and government officials who negotiate in the public sphere and in the symbolic economy and local power - or beyond. This allows us to explore valuable ambiguities that exist in the heart of the term “project”, extrapolating not only the meaning that has anchored within the specific field of architecture and urbanism, but also problematizing its role as a dimension of dispute and conflict in the conformation of projects of city, lifestyle projects, region projects, future projects.

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