



A New Scale of Intervention: From the City to the Metropolis The Portales Neighborhood Unit in Santiago (Chile)

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Institutional, political and architectural transformations within the realm of housing during the 1950s played a key role in the process of social and cultural modernization of Chile. This paper attempts to illustrate these changes by examining a particular case: the Unidad Vecinal Portales - UVP (Portales Neighborhood Unit), built in Santiago de Chile between 1955 and 1967.

The UVP represents, through its peculiar characteristics, a case that condenses the introduction of new architectural and urban ideas regarding housing, and also the development of policies that have led to the rise in Chile of this and other large neighborhood units.

Studies of the UVP have been published in relevant books, such as *The new brutalism - Ethic or Esthetic?* Written by Rayner Banham, and also in architectural journals, both Chilean and international, such as *Architectural Design*, *Architecture D'aujourd'hui* or the *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*.

The UVP constituted a radical attempt to take a leap and refocus the scale of the problem on housing, at a time when the city of Santiago was facing the process of transforming from a city into a metropolis. This case reflects the efforts for relating to its surrounding context, in an attempt to respond to each one of its scales: ranging from the landscape and geography to the urban and domestic realm; the shift of scale between city and dwelling, forces a path from the block to the single family housing. This change of scale in UVP results in a new order within levels, with the possibility of raising the street above the ground level and building a system of elevated pathways. This new level order is both physical and conceptual: the new city proposes urban elements that are interrelated, with converging and diverging points, with the traditional city.

The blocks vary in size and dimension according to their function. Some of them subdivide the space of macro-blocks and others enclose it, delivering directionality and forming a peculiar urban space. This is how the links established from the residential structures to its location is accurate. The building provides an opportunity to show the elements belonging to the territory, those of the city itself and the building site.

Another part of the contextual logic is that of the length of the blocks and the separation between them, that corresponds to the dimensions of the traditional Santiago city blocks. In the UVP, these blocks are built within the void; it is the air in between two blocks which allows to perceive and to recognize the distances and the traditional patterns of the city. Therefore, the new city is the evolution of the traditional city, except that the built surfaces are opposed by voids and the paved surfaces are opposed by the green and pedestrian areas.

Meanwhile, the inclusion of new elements such as elevated circulations, car ramps, and the use of unusual materials such as lattice or siding tiles -in an attempt to articulate a certain aesthetic to the buildings- reflect a radical will for experimentation. However, this experimentation and radicalism in the UVP is also measured and controlled. This allows us to discuss and eventually to remove the oversimplified versions and opinions of what these modern works meant for the cities of the twentieth century.

KEY WORDS: Housing, planning, neighborhood unit.