



A Historical Approach to Avenida Presidente Vargas Project in Rio de Janeiro: Challenges and Controversies towards a Responsive Future

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Six decades after Avenue's President Vargas drastic urban surgery (1940-1944) this main urban artery of the central area of Rio de Janeiro city, the Avenue still seems an unfinished project sprinkled with notable examples of pre-modern, modern and ordinary architecture and multiple urban voids. Diversity, emptiness, discontinuity and permanence summarize, nowadays, this monumental project conceived during the nationalist context of the Estado Novo Dictatorial regime (1937-1945) imposed by President Getúlio Vargas. Recent attempts - projects, new buildings, urban legislation review - to manage this unfinished project were in vain. What controversies and challenges these attempts point out towards a responsive future for the Avenue President Vargas?

The Avenue's project underlines significant controversies of the urban planning historical in the first half of the 20th century. A leap to the future that had began with a step behind. In 1940 the City Management Plan retook the Agache Plan (1929), abandoned by the new government in 1930, and proposed a Management Plan (1940), in which this Avenue is one of its main guidelines.

Yet conceived by Agache as an extension of an existing avenue towards the seashore, the Avenue President Vargas was finally implemented as a materialization of an axis towards the "interior of Brazil" more close to the emergent political approach. It would settle the expansion of central business district, and give place to institutional buildings, whose monumentality would symbolize the magnificence of Estado Novo regime. The premise was an avenue with opened doors for the future and closed windows to city's colonial past. By denying colonial past, there were demolished notable ancient churches, besides an extensive traditional urban tissue, few years later from the creation of the National Heritage Authority (SPHAN) in 1937. Implemented during the 2nd World War, the expected investments on the Avenue have failed and were displaced to new housing investments in Copacabana, leaving great extensions of urban voids among the new CBD's buildings until today.

Searching to identify the main controversies and challenges towards a responsive future of this important Rio de Janeiro central area avenue, this paper proposes a historical review of the planning dimension of this avenue based on the analyses of (i) specific aspects concerning to the project and its (ii) contemporary spatial configuration. The first one contemplates the analysis of the project guidelines; its motivations and failures; and the analysis of the attempts conceived to manage the urban tissue merged by this drastic urban surgery and the subsequent projects. The second one, analyses mainly the Avenue's urban structure; its built environment and urban legislation. This comprehensive historical approach emphasizes the morphological aspects of the planning process looking forward to understand the roots, permanencies and transformations that mark the Avenue's tissue since the beginning.

The methodology of research tackled with dynamical interpretation of empirical, bibliographical and iconographic data, articulating urban planning history and urban voids generation since the 20th century in Rio de Janeiro city. This research is being developed in two Federal Universities of Rio de Janeiro State.

KEY WORDS: Urban project; avenues; Rio de Janeiro