

URBAN SPRAWL AND URBANIZATION COMPANIES: THE WORK OF THE COMPAÑÍA MADRILEÑA DE URBANIZACIÓN, THE GARDEN CITY PIONEER COMPANY, THE FIRST GARDEN CITY LTD AND THE CIA. CITY

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Abstract

This article problematizes the contemporary phenomenon of urban sprawl within the field of Urbanism history through a historiography of the performance of urbanization companies with recognized importance in the history of Urbanism: the Compañía Madrileña de Urbanización, an urbanization company founded by Arturo Soria y Mata in order to implement his idea of a Linear City; the Garden City Pioneer Company and the First Garden City Ltd, founded, respectively, to raise funds and manage the construction of Letchworth, in England, the first built city garden, whose theoretical scheme Ebenezer Howard conceived in 1889; and the City of São Paulo Improvements and Freehold Company Ltd, which implemented the first garden suburbs in São Paulo. The narrative on each company highlights two aspects: how the urban concepts propagated by these companies relate to the idea of urban sprawl and which business strategies were developed to enable dispersion-related ventures.

Keywords

Urban sprawl; Urbanism history; Urbanization companies; Compañía Madrileña de Urbanización; Garden City Pioneer Company; First Garden City Ltd; Cia. City.

DISPERSÃO URBANA E EMPRESAS URBANIZADORAS: A ATUAÇÃO DA COMPAÑÍA MADRILEÑA DE URBANIZACIÓN, DA GARDEN CITY PIONEER COMPANY, DA FIRST GARDEN CITY LTD E DA CIA. CITY

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Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo problematizar o fenômeno contemporâneo da dispersão urbana dentro do campo da história do Urbanismo. Este exercício historiográfico foi construído com base em uma análise crítica da atuação de empresas urbanizadoras de reconhecida importância na historiografia do Urbanismo: a Companhia Madrileña de Urbanización, empresa urbanizadora fundada pelo madrileno Arturo Soria y Mata para implementar sua ideia de ciudad lineal; as empresas Garden City Pioneer Company e First Garden City Ltd, fundadas, respectivamente, para levantar fundos e gerenciar a construção de Letchworth, na Inglaterra, primeira cidade-jardim construída, cujo esquema teórico Ebenezer Howard havia concebido em 1898; e a empresa City of São Paulo Improvements and Freehold Company Ltd, que implementou os primeiros bairros-jardim de São Paulo. Na narrativa sobre cada empresa, destacam-se os dois conceitos urbanísticos propagados por essas empresas, relacionados com a ideia de urbanização dispersa e com as estratégias empresariais desenvolvidas para viabilizar empreendimentos ligados à dispersão.

Palavras-chave

Dispersão; História do urbanismo; Empresas urbanizadoras; Companhia Madrileña de Urbanización; Garden City Pioneer Company; First Garden City Ltd; Cia. City.

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Introduction

This article problematizes the contemporary phenomenon of *urban sprawl* within the history of urbanism. The term in question designates the “extension of urban fabrics over vast territories, separated in space, while maintaining close links with one another, as parts of a single system” (REIS FILHO, 2006, p. 12). It has transpired with a predominance of low-density housing supported by a wide-ranging system of highway infrastructure (MONCLÚS, 1998; DEMATTEIS, 1998; REIS FILHO, 2006). As one important phenomenon for the configuration of a contemporary city, dispersed spaces are the locus of extremely lucrative actions by real estate capital and its reproduction mechanisms, where the “emerging urban patterns” materialize, such as horizontal gated communities and subdivisions.

The thematic cross-section established by the research is the work of urbanization companies in urban expansion through proposals with an ongoing process of urban sprawl. This historiographic investigation has identified a fundamental relationship between the phenomena of decentralization and urban sprawl. Decentralization is a strategy that relocates productive activities agglomerated within a certain area (the center), with the aim of reducing demands for infrastructure, balancing population and labor distribution and redistributing the resources generated by productive activities in a more equitable manner. Although decentralization does not necessarily imply dispersion, when it occurs in areas of urban expansion, it is consistent with the process of dispersion, configuring fragmented

occupations across the territory. Thus, urban proposals that articulate decentralization using the occupation and creation of new centers at a distance from existing cities may be understood as catalysts for urban sprawl.

This interpretation constructs yet another view of urban sprawl, no longer as a “novel” characteristic of the twentieth century, but as part of a historical process of thought and practice in urbanism. This is a key argument, since it goes against contemporary literature on urban planning and design, which considers urban sprawl as a rupture in the historical process of urbanization, a completely new phenomenon, the forms of which represent the death of the city or even anticity (CHOAY, 2004 ; REIS FILHO, 2006; MONTE MÓR, 2007; SPOSITO, 2007). At odds with this idea, it should be mentioned that sprawl, however disconcerting and transformative it may be, does not signify the end of the city, but just one of its (several) historical transformations, with antecedents in urban practice and thought.

Thus, we relate urban sprawl to urban proposals of decentralization established from the second half of the nineteenth century, when the pace of city expansion changed completely, and the disciplinary field of urbanism began to take shape (CHOAY, 2005; CALABI, 2012). During this period, urbanistic proposals were developed that incorporated dispersion into the design repertoire of cities, in accordance with a vast diversity of intentions, interpretations and dimensions. Some were significantly radical, such as the proposals of socialist disurbanism in the 1920s and 1930s, and of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City during the 1930s. However, the proposals that are of interest to this study are those that suggested theoretical and practical schemata for urban expansion and that hold similarities, or at least proximity, with configurations of dispersion, and that acted in a specific, significant context in order to understand the contemporary process of urban sprawl, i.e., that of urbanization companies.

By taking these relationships into consideration, we present a historiographical narrative of the ideation of sprawl transmitted through the actions of well-recognized companies of importance in the historiography of urbanism: the Compañía Madrileña de Urbanización (CMU), an urbanization company founded by the Madrilenian, Arturo Soria y Mata, to implement his idea of the *ciudad lineal*, first proposed in 1882; the Garden City Pioneer Company and First Garden City Ltd, founded, respectively, to raise funds and manage the construction of Letchworth, the first ever constructed garden city, the theoretical schema of which was designed in 1898 by Ebenezer Howard; and the City of São Paulo Improvements and Freehold Land Company Ltd, known as Cia. City, responsible for implementing São Paulo’s first garden neighborhoods, starting in 1915.

In analyzing the performance of these companies, it is essential to emphasize the manner in which their urban proposals are related to the process of urban sprawl, due to their theoretical principles and their modes of business performance. These urbanization companies were selected because they were (and are) of great importance in forming ideas in the field of urbanism, and have remained relevant as design references throughout the western world (MACEDO, 2011; ROHE, 2009; SALAS, 2009; TREVISAN, 2014). The selection of these pertinent, influential cases offers strength to the interpretation of urban sprawl as a historical phenomenon constructed within this text. For this purpose, the research has in the main, been based on primary documents, including original texts by Ebenezer Howard, and by Soria y Mata and others published in the journal *La Ciudad Lineal*, in addition to official texts and advertisements for Cia. City. Based on these documents, and the bibliography, we weave a narrative plot, which is, as stated by Paul Veyne (2014 [1971], p. 42), “a very human and slightly scientific mixture of material causes, of finalities and randomness; a slice of life that the historian has isolated at his convenience (...)”.¹

1. The Compañía Madrileña de Urbanización and the Linear City

Arturo Soria y Mata was the first to develop a proposal for urban dispersion - the linear city (ESTEVE, 1948) -, first described on March 6, 1882 (COLLINS, 1968; SAMBRICIO, 1996). The urban order of the linear city defined functions distributed along a linear axis with a controlled, pre-established width, through which people and products would circulate in a modern and fast-moving manner, by means of public transport with electric trams (COLLINS, 1968, p. 13).

Soria y Mata considered that Madrid needed both an urban and a management transformation in order to solve its severe urban and social problems: population growth, urban diseases, lack of sanitation, real estate speculation, the high cost of living in the city, an excessive concentration of goods and people, a housing shortage, irregular alignment of the buildings and tortuous streets. For the Spanish urbanist, these were “the worst evils of the city”, the factors that caused inefficiencies in the traffic and transportation. For Soria y Mata, there were two possibilities to be considered: either “to retouch” the Madrid ground plan, which was defective, or create a new one. The costs related to the first option were not viable due to the high cost of expropriations; this argument was used to justify a completely fresh alternative, the ideal, almost perfect, type of city as we conceived it. It was therefore, in the geometry of the straight line that he based his proposal for a new city (SORIA Y MATA, 1968 [1882-1883], p. 153-178).

1. This, and all non-English citations hereafter, have been translated by the authors.

In Soria y Mata's linear city, the fusion between city and countryside was the answer to urban problems, along the same lines drawn years before, in 1867, by yet another Spaniard, Ildefons Cerdà, when he published *Teoría General de la Urbanización y aplicación de sus principios y doctrinas a la reforma y ensanche de Barcelona*, a wide-ranging, extensive work in which he offered a deeper analysis of the history of urbanization, seeking, in the author's words, "to fully understand the causes of this deep malaise that modern societies feel" and to study "the demands of the new civilization whose distinctive character is movement and communication" (CERDÀ, 1867, p. 12). In the *Teoría* text, Cerdà addressed "rururbanization", a rural urbanization that sought to merge countryside and city in a less densified configuration, although unexploited by him in the *Ensanche* project:

To give each family a field, sufficient for their needs, to build their house on the spot, in the form and manner that best suits them, was to offer in the urbe what there was in the *rure* (allow us these terms, which serve in passing to help understand the etymology of a new word that we find the need to use), i.e., it was to create an *urbe rus*, or a ruralized city, which is what we will call the works of this class of urbanization (CERDÀ, 1867, p. 122).

Collins (1968, p. 25) stated that Cerdà was a model for Soria y Mata, and that it was from the *Teoría General de Urbanización* that he drew his inspiration "to ruralize urban life, to urbanize the countryside". Like Cerdà, Soria y Mata developed a proposal that merged countryside and city, in order to resolve the "inconveniences" and boost the "benefits of each way of life" (SORIA Y MATA, 1968 [April 10, 1882], p 158).

However, the dispersion proposed by Soria y Mata differed profoundly from that of Cerdà, as well as from the (later) idea of Ebenezer Howard, criticized by the former on a number of occasions. Although they all embraced the principles of ruralizing the city, the *Ensanche* of Barcelona maintained a centrality and a sense of continuous radial growth, and the garden city proposed a polynuclear regional organization. Soria y Mata, in turn, defended uninterrupted linear growth, an intention made explicit in his statement that cities would be diluted in potentially infinite "rururbanized" lines, linking distant cities and countries by a single street, "which may have as their respective ends Candace and Petersburg, Peking and Brussels" (SORIA Y MATA, 1968 [March 6, 1882], p. 153-154). The diagram reproduced below illustrates the organization of the linearly-arranged blocks, thereby reinforcing the connection and proximity to Madrid (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Plano General de la primera barriada de la Ciudad Lineal y sus inmediaciones.

Source: Revista La Ciudad Lineal, 1903. Cover of May 10, 1903. The Hemeroteca of the National Library of Spain.

Despite the radical proposal of infinite growth, the distinction between city and countryside was maintained, as in Howard's garden city, similarly limited, defined spatially and demographically, forming a composition of scattered, interdependent cities. However, for Soria y Mata, Howard's proposal was insufficient because it only spread "(across) the surface of the planet certain or agglomerated cities that when compared with those of today only have more gardens, more flowers, more trees" (SORIA Y MATA, 1968 [October 30, 1908], p. 258-259). This criticism of polynucleation as a strategy for territorial organization reinforces the interpretation that the linear city deepens the sprawl as an organizing structure for an efficient and equitable urbanization process. These two principles - efficiency and equity - would be the foundation of the linear city: "Good land prices and fast, frequent and economical communication" (SORIA Y MATA, 1968 [March 5, 1883], p. 176).

Efficiency was derived from the technology related to public transport, the train, which Soria y Mata also sought to disseminate as a result of other interests: he developed a project for implementing a railway line around Madrid, the Red Ferroviaria de la Compañía de Urbanización. For many years, the Spanish urban planner attempted to obtain a license to build it, but was unsuccessful (SORIA Y PUIG, 1968, p. 116-117). Although he failed to obtain a license for the complete railway, CMU built a railway line connecting Madrid to the built-up part of the linear city. The principle of equity would take effect, in the view of Soria y Mata, due to the

possibility of the infinite expansion of the linear city, which would tend to reduce real estate speculation by expanding the offer of urbanized plots and a diversity of housing typologies (PALACIO, 1969 , p. 54).

However, it is impossible to escape the fact that Soria y Mata was an entrepreneur looking for profit by urbanizing peripheral areas. Donatella Calabi (2012, p. 39) stated that he “was a businessman, whose field of work is the territory”. For the historian Carlos Sambricio (1996, p. 44), Soria proposed “the first known private city” with the aim of facing the serious urban problems, “through the interests of the entrepreneur, and for this, he submitted the form of the city to the interests of his company”. Hence, attracting more shareholders and investors was not about creating the project of the linear city, but rather about obtaining more resources for the company, in order to expand its capital, its performance and its construction capacity, as well as the profits of its shareholders.

In order to guarantee publications that were of interest to CMU, it created journals, its main advertising strategy. First, *La Dictadura*, in 1895. Later, in 1897, *La Ciudad Lineal*, which incorporated discussions of an urban nature beyond the linear city, and which became the first journal on urbanism (CALABI, 2012). The CMU also participated in several congresses and exhibitions, a somewhat rare attitude in the real estate sector (SAMBRICIO, 1996, p. 40). In the journals, the company disclosed the stability of the enterprise, the growing valorization of its land, assets and shares, as well as all its financial statements, including the costs of works and constructions. However, the main objective was to publicize its products, such as plots of land and buildings of various types and sizes. The journal’s front page often featured illustrated advertisements: models of houses and other buildings, with varying patterns and prices, always with the option to pay in installments, in addition to perspectives, cross-sections, plans and photographs of the linear city.

Indeed, the work of CMU is outstanding for its business seal. Such characteristics, raised in the numerous texts by Soria y Mata, and analyzed in CMU advertisements, helped to question and to establish in other terms the idea that the *ciudad lineal* was an equitable utopia propagated in the official discourse of the company. This argument is further strengthened when the changes are perceived that the CMU urban proposal underwent throughout time to adapt to the demands of the market and potential customers. The most significant came after the CMU associate Hillarión González del Castillo took over the company in 1908, in the midst of a serious financial crisis. Initially, Castillo modified the architectural references of the buildings, which, in his view, were “historicist” and “out of fashion”, and introduced references that were considered more current and attractive to the Madrid elite, including “the American schemes of country houses and English

concepts regarding the garden-house, thus seeking to ‘modernize’ the image of the model disseminated by Soria” (SAMBRICIO, 2004, p. 23).

Subsequently, due to harsh criticism at international congresses of Soria’s proposal, Castillo modified the urban principles of the linear city: the city was no longer unlimited; spatial organization was no longer restricted to blocks; the streets began to show a more curvilinear design, with a more complex hierarchy, including cul-de-sacs; the city was not intended to be autonomous, but rather, a suburb of Madrid. Finally, Castillo embraced the principles of the garden city and merged them with those of the linear city, and this resulted in a proposal that possessed very few similarities with the original idea (SAMBRICIO, 2004, p. 28-48).

Many changes were also brought in after the death of Soria y Mata, in 1920, when his children took over various duties within the company, which was then facing many financial difficulties following the First World War (RODRÍGUEZ, 2017, p.331-332).

The failure of the CMU does not invalidate two important readings. The first is that its actions were guided, albeit with greater emphasis during the management of Soria y Mata, by an urban proposal based on dispersion. This promoted both a spatial spread of urbanization across extensive territories, and, with a certain level of dependence, an urban expansion far from the existing nucleus onto rural lands, which were cheaper and more liable to enable greater profits. The second concerns the objective of CMU to survive within the real estate market, producing profit for its shareholders and attracting as many buyers and investors as possible, much like any other urbanization company. What emerges from this analysis are the rich and diversified CMU business strategies for disseminating an urban proposal, for commercial advertising, for using public service concessions for its own benefit, and for adapting to changes demanded by the consumer market, including with regard to “architectural style” and the most “fundamental” premises of the idea of the linear city.

2. The *Garden Cities Association* and controlled sprawl

One of the most influential decentralization proposals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the garden city proposed by the English stenographer, Ebenezer Howard, described in detail in his books *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898) and *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902), in which the author strongly defended low-density urbanization as a solution to the problems of the city at that time.

a few (although not the end of private property), an aspect considered by Howard as “the key to the problem”, which brought the garden city closer to the proposed utopian cities (FISHMAN, 1982, p. 40-51).

In the garden city, dispersion is configured as an urban plan and as a solution for territorial organization, presenting itself in the definition of low population densities, through the defense of single-family homes as the most adequate typology to offer ample quality of life, by aligning the desired privacy of home and family life to an open relationship with free, wooded spaces.

In addition to the definitions of typologies and densities, the physical and demographic limits of the city appeared as a response to the huge growth of the city during the nineteenth century. However, this limitation had regional implications. According to Fishman (1982, p. 50), Howard understood that a town of 30 thousand inhabitants would not be able to generate sufficient dynamics to guarantee autonomy in relation to other urban nuclei, as indeed it did not. The solution was to propose a polynuclear territorial organization, in which a garden city could be connected to others, and these, in turn, linked to a larger central city, as demonstrated in the diagram presented in *To-morrow* (1898). In the second edition of the book, in 1902, Howard produced another less complex diagram, however still illustrating the polynucleated organization forming a network of cities.

Thus, placed on the same level of importance as the lower density of urban fabric, was the proposal for dispersed territorial development, which is still used today as a principle for efficient territorial organization, in contrast to the continuous growth of the city. Integrated polynucleation, i.e., a composition of physically separated urban nuclei, although economically, socially and culturally interconnected, is in essence, dispersed organization, based on the notion that the city should not grow in an infinite manner; it should be limited and, according to necessity, another nucleus should be built. Although Howard’s proposal was much more concerned with detailing the urban and social configuration of the nuclei and limiting their physical and population growth, urban dispersion is, in fact, a direct result of this contained organization, a maneuver through which the idea of the city garden is inserted into this narrative.

Despite all the richness of Howard’s proposal, his first book received little public attention. Thus, he engaged in a strong campaign to disseminate his ideas, approaching people who could help him to propagate and finance them. The dissemination work was intense and very fruitful: as early as 1899, the Garden City Association (renamed Town and Country Planning Association, in 1909, active until today in the UK) was founded, and, just five years after *To-morrow*, construction of the first garden city was initiated, designed by the British urban planners Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker: Letchworth, 40 kilometers from London.

There are, however, for this research, more important details than just the success that Howard achieved. From the utopian ideas of the stenographer through to creating the first garden city, there is a seamless wealth of social relations, interests and business, the analysis of which enables the *garden city* to be interpreted as a proposal that, as discussed above, goes beyond urban sprawl, but which also has a facet of urban development, developed from a business perspective.

It is known that the theoretical bases that influenced Howard were anarchist and linked to social-radicalism (FISHMAN, 1982; ANDRADE, 1998), which, however, were gradually abandoned so that he could gather the necessary financial resources, convincing wealthy entrepreneurs to invest in building a new town. Between 1892 and 1898, Howard approached a radical group called the Land Nationalization Society, founded in 1881 by Alfred Russel Wallace, aimed at promoting land reform. Wallace took up the garden-city proposal since, although he favored agrarian reform, he did not advocate social revolution. This was the point to which the garden city was best suited: a better division of land within a capitalist system, protecting private property (FISHMAN, 1982, p. 55–56).

On June 10, 1899, the Garden City Association was founded, operating within the offices of the Land Nationalization Society. In spite of this advance and Howard's publicity effort, there were still no patrons willing to finance the venture. This lasted until 1901, when he received the support of Ralph Neville, a leading English barrister who became responsible for raising funds for the project, while Howard "refined" the garden city proposal, purging it of its communitarian principles and adapting it to a more liberal vision of enterprise. Thus, it became more palatable to the wealthy philanthropists and their desire for a solution that was capable of calming city spirits (FISHMAN, 1982, p. 62).

In December 1901, the Garden City Association approved the formation of the Garden City Pioneer Company, a company organized to raise funds for the construction and for the acquisition of the gleba for Letchworth. In June 1903, First Garden City Ltd was registered, with the task of managing the works and implementing the city (FISHMAN, 1982). The First Garden City Ltd. was a for-profit company, and its shares were sold promising investors a return of up to 5% per annum. As the sale of shares was very slow and the expected government subsidies did not take effect, it was therefore not possible to implement the construction of popular houses for the poorer workers, as Howard had hoped. Many workers at the Letchworth factories "(...) who could not find housing in the Garden City bicycled each day from their jobs to apartments in the older towns beyond the Agrarian Belt, where cheap but substandard accommodations could be found." (FISHMAN, 1982, p. 73-75).

NOTHING GAINED BY OVERCROWDING!

How the Garden City type of development
may benefit both owner and occupier.

By RAYMOND UNWIN, F.R.I.B.A.

Published by
P. S. KING & SON,
Orchard House, Westminster,
for the
Garden Cities & Town Planning Association
3, Gray's Inn Place, W.C.

3d.



Figure 3. Cover of the pamphlet *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding! How the Garden City Type May Benefit Both Owner and Occupier*.

Source: Unwin, 1912.

The utopia of the *garden city* was reduced, with Howard's own endorsement, to an urban experience controlled by an urbanization company and, later, reproduced in other urban and business contexts. The British architects Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker played a fundamental role in propagating and defending the morphological principles of the garden city through their projects and writings, the latter being developed more profusely by Unwin. In addition to his well-known book *Town Planning in Practice* in 1909, Unwin also wrote an interesting pamphlet in 1912, entitled *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding! How the Garden City Type May Benefit Both Owner and Occupier*, which illustrates the principles of a dispersed but controlled urban network (Figure 3). In the pamphlet, the relationship is reinforced between the population limit and the notion of "community organization", based on the principle that "Effective individual co-operation is limited to the comparatively small number who can have immediate personal knowledge of each other and can come into immediate and constant personal relation." (UNWIN, 1912, p. 2). This British urban planner set the foundations for the population limit of a city as a paramount parameter for resuming a notion of community diluted by

urban hypergrowth and the consequent impersonality of modern social relations. With this viewpoint, the dispersion of urban society into smaller garden cities was also an attempt to maintain a pre-industrial scale of sociability.

The garden city and the garden suburbs established a model of enthusiastic urbanization to control urban growth and low density for the standards of its time. However, the garden city initially proposed by Howard was imbued with a profound social character, an aspect that should not be overlooked in its interpretation and that marks a crucial difference between the two. For Dácio Ottoni (1996, p. 82), the garden suburb was a partial, unilateral interpretation of Howard's thoughts and achievements, reduced "basically to the use of green and to the sinuous design of the roads", in addition to being restricted to a residential use, disregarding the minimum self-sufficiency necessary for a garden city to function. One central issue that this author does not consider in his study of the garden city is that Howard himself was responsible for stripping his urban proposal of any utopian collectivist content, by becoming linked with the major patrons of his ideas, and by agreeing to build Letchworth through profit-seeking urbanization companies.

The notions of a garden-city also molded the thoughts and practices of urban expansion in Brazil, where the action of urbanization companies was fundamental for constructing the idea (and spatial configuration) of dispersion. An emblematic case of this confluence appears in the history of the City of São Paulo Improvements and Freehold Land Company Ltd, the Cia. City, whose work we will revisit in order to highlight it as an urbanization company that helped spread the idea of urban sprawl.

3. The City of São Paulo Improvements and Freehold Land Company Ltd and the diffusion of the garden suburb in Brazil

The urbanization action of CMU, Garden City Pioneer Company, First Garden City Ltd. and the City of São Paulo Improvements and Freehold Land Company Ltd is related to the dispersed configuration of its proposals and achievements. However, while CMU envisaged the *linear city* detached from Madrid as an autonomous city, and that Letchworth went even further, with its autonomy and independence in relation to other large established urban centers in the UK at the time, the urbanization experience of the Cia. City was neither as broad nor as independent. Its performance was mostly restricted to constructing residential neighborhoods, which always depended on the urban, social and economic issues of São Paulo, to which they also answered. Thus, unlike the analysis undertaken on the Spanish company and the UK companies, analyzing the work of Cia. City depends on understanding São Paulo's urbanization process at the turn of the twentieth century,

when the context that led to the construction of Jardim América and the subsequent subdivisions was organized.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, São Paulo became the most industrialized and fastest growing city in Brazil, mainly due to the economic policy of Getúlio Vargas. The first urban interventions to take place were part of what Maria Cristina Leme defined as the first period of the formation of urban thought in Brazil, when “improvements were proposed and carried out in parts of the cities” (LEME, 1999, p. 22). The improvement plans were important because they initiated a debate on the urban theme in São Paulo, that included professionals and legislators, but also combined the interests of foreign companies, most notably the British, such as Light and Cia. City, and their private investors, with those of the major landowners, “under the mediation of the Works Directorate at the city hall” (ANDRADE, 1998, p. 180).

The proximity of the interests of Cia. City with those of the São Paulo Works Directorate is extremely relevant for this study. First, because the urban performance of Cia. City is presented as the strand of an idea for urban dispersion, which emerged through criticism of the compact, dense city. Second, because Cia. City established an intricate *modus operandi*, developing business strategies based on direct relations of influence with the public authorities in order to benefit, to accommodate their interests and increase profits (ANDRADE, 1998). The proximity between Cia. City and City Hall employees was essential for the valorization of the company’s land, since it ensured that it benefited from the improvement projects planned by the municipal government and that its interests were protected and accommodated, even through local urban legislation.

Cia. City was founded on September 5, 1911 with a very heterogeneous board of directors, including several politicians and entrepreneurs (SOUZA, 1988, p. 165-166). This diversified composition determined a solid sphere of influence between the company and the São Paulo City Government, which was fundamental for its successful action in the field of urban development, highlighting the work of the French architect Joseph-Antoine Bouvard, first vice President of the Company.

On his arrival in Brazil, in March 1911, a few months before Cia. City was created, Bouvard acted as a consultant, analyzing the proposals for improvements to the city center and interventions in the Vale do Anhangabaú and its surroundings (ACKEL; CAMPOS FILHO, 2002b, p. 41). During the same period, he was in contact with foreign businessmen, including the Belgian banker Édouard Fontaine de Laveleye, for whom he had provided real estate business consultancy, and had recommended areas, which would become valorized as a result of implementing the improvement plan. According to Maria Claudia Pereira de Souza (1988, p. 36),

it was this consultancy that had generated interest in creating an urbanization company to operate in São Paulo. Laveleye sought the São Paulo urbanist Victor da Silva Freire, so that he could introduce him to the landowners he was interested in. Freire introduced him to the congressman Cincinato Braga, who was acquainted with several investors who were planning to acquire the same plots of land, with the same intentions. This resulted in a propitious situation for all the interested stakeholders to become associated as a single urbanization company, which maintained close relations with public service concessionaires, with financial capital and with the State and its agents.

One element that draws attention within the composition of the company was the participation of the ex-president of Brazil, Campos Sales, the ex-president of a number of provinces, Sancho de Barros Pimentel, and the congressman Cincinato Braga, “closely linked to the city hall through Victor da Silva Freire” (SOUZA, 1988, p. 62). The relationship between Cia. City and Freire was long-lasting; he even appeared amongst its directors years later, in 1940 (LEME, 1999, p. 456; SOUZA, 1988, p. 62; COSTA, 2011, p. 11). Andrade (1998, p. 156) addressed the relationship between Freire and Cia. City, thus:

Although Cia. City had recently been created, in the schema of the Works Directorate we already encountered indications for a “Main avenue designed by S. Paulo City Improvements”, with a continuation of Avenida Paulista. In another print of its report we observe the sinuous outline of what was to be the first project for Pacaembu, probably produced by Bouvard, who, on that occasion was in the service of Cia. City. Such a link between Cia. City, and the plan of the Works Directorate, does not seem to us to have been by chance. We would risk putting forward the hypothesis of a collusion of interests between Freire and this promising real estate company, which [...] to a large extent, determined the direction of the metropolitan expansion, reinforcing sectors of the city in which Cia. City, on the recommendation of Freire himself and with Bouvard’s advice, had acquired huge glebas. It is not by chance that these gentlemen became, at different times, directors of the City, with Bouvard, as well as Freire, having acted, since the creation of the company, as technical consultants.

In other words, Bouvard developed a solution for the dispute amongst the projects for the Vale do Anhangabaú, and a few months later he was appointed vice-president of Cia. City, the same year in which he suggested to the investor Laveleye that he should purchase land in the city - more than 12 million square meters (PEIXOTO-MEHRTEENS, 2010, p. 33). The glebas that Cia. City acquired were outstanding with regard to the extremely privileged location of the land in relation to the

Cia. City project for the Vale do Pacaembu. The initial proposal had not been approved because it did not meet the minimum dimensions of street width and length of blocks and because of its sinuous outlines, which diverged from the obligatory straight streets (SOUZA, 1988, p. 67; ANDRADE, 1998, p. 229-230). We do not question herein whether or not such changes in urban legislation were positive, but rather the fact that they were implemented due to the direct influence of an urbanization company, which took advantage of the personal relationships between its service providers and directors and public officials in order to guide legislation and thus accommodate their interests.

Moreover, for Cia. City, Parker was responsible for revising and adapting Raymond Unwin's project for Jardim América, between April and May 1917, in addition to conducting studies and commenting on projects in the Anhangabaú neighborhood in 1918 and developing the Alto da Lapa and Bela Aliança projects, in 1918 (ANDRADE, 1998). As garden neighborhoods, these subdivisions did not express a dispersion process as such, but were part of a low-density urban expansion process, with "isolated residences in large garden plots" (FELDMAN, 2005, p. 17), and which would nourish the suburban housing ideal of the São Paulo elite, to be realized decades later.

Although Parker only stayed in Brazil until the beginning of 1919, his experience incorporated "the most genuine knowledge" of the garden-city and, more specifically, the garden-neighborhood ideas, when "the *garden city* type penetrated the urbanism that was being undertaken in São Paulo and that would fructify there, spreading throughout innumerable proposals and conceptions until the 1950s" (ANDRADE, 1998, p. 5-6). The work of Cia. City was fruitful in addition to the production by Barry Parker, with an extensive list of projects between 1915 and 1980, which maintained, for a certain time, a reference to the neighborhood-garden for its projects (COMPANHIA CITY DE DEENVOLVIMENTO, 1980, p. 19-20).

Since 1950, projects have varied widely in scope, target audience and size. The company launched low-cost housing complexes, with few free spaces, smaller lots and simple, small houses, such as in Jardim Brasília, launched in São Paulo in 1955. In the 1970s, after an eight-year gap of nothing was launched, Cia. City accompanied the movement of the upper and upper middle classes with regards to distancing themselves from the center, and thus began to undertake horizontal residential condominiums and country home condominiums in municipalities throughout the state of São Paulo. Examples of this would be Jardim Bussocaba, in Osasco, for which the 1971 advertisement portrayed a bucolic lake in the center of the project, with plots of 400 square meters, and Chácaras City Castelo, a condominium of country homes located in the town of Itu, for which the 1974 advertising highlighted the

networks of pre-installed infrastructure and recreational amenities, including a clubhouse with swimming pools and tennis and volleyball courts (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Advertising for Jardim Brasília (a) and Jardim Bussocaba (b).
Source: Folha, May 26, 1961 and August 29, 1971.

The performance of Cia. City at the beginning of the twentieth century produced a very characteristic urban expansion, aimed at the São Paulo elites, reinterpreting the garden-city idea for the Brazilian reality. The company was definitive in spreading this idea as a proposal for urbanization, although restricted to a neighborhood scale. And, even on this scale, it managed to present principles of urban dispersion, especially with regards to the patterns of single-family residential urbanization, of low density and of urban fabric expansion.

4. Conclusions

This journey through the work of Compañía Madrileña de Urbanización, Garden City Pioneer Company, First Garden City Ltd. and Cia. City was structured by the guiding thread of urban sprawl by private production, with characteristics that brought them closer to a dispersed spatial organization, in accordance with contemporary debate on urban sprawl. However, the occupation of land through dispersion lost all and any hallmark of social transformation, which characterized its first movements and conceptualizations. Indeed, the characteristics of the

proposals in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in no way resemble those of urban sprawl in the twenty-first century; they foreshadow it. However, they proclaimed the possibilities of other forms of urbanization, maintaining similarities that should not be overlooked when comprehending urbanization and urban thought from a long-term historiographical perspective. The ideas that informed the projects of these companies, the linear city and the garden city, were characterized by a dispersion of the urban network, both in a linear and multinucleated manner, at low densities, occupying extensive areas, while their parts maintained a close economic and social link with one another, thereby determining a territorial expansion of daily life.

On the one hand, the urban practices proposed by Soria y Mata, Howard, Unwin and Parker all originated from criticism aimed towards the precariousness of the hypercompact cities of the nineteenth century, for which they proposed, albeit in different manners, forms of urbanization linked to urban dispersion, and established them within urban thought and in the history of the city. The linear city, the garden city and garden neighborhoods were alternatives that, at a certain point, aimed at social transformation and a better quality of life. Nevertheless, a historical perspective has enabled a critical reading on how these avant-garde ideas became materialized by urbanization companies, which they accomplished through practices and strategies that remain effective and in force.

With regard to the performance of the *Compañía Madrileña de Urbanización*, we reiterate the understanding that the linear city was a real estate enterprise in search of profits by transforming rural (cheap) land into urban (valorized) land, using the systematic publication of a proprietary magazine to propagate the urbanistic principles of linear urbanization, but mainly to advertise their products and, thus, gather investors.

Similarly, the first effective realization of Ebenezer Howard's proposal for a *garden city* was only lifted from the books and presentation sheets when it was decanted from its communitarian intentions, after becoming transformed into a marketable urban development by an urbanization company with the aim of obtaining a profit. Outstanding amongst the companies formed to construct Letchworth, in the UK, is the manner in which the collectivist and egalitarian contents were distilled from Howard's initial idea in order to materialize as a city.

With regards to the performance of *Cia. City*, particularly in its initial phase, attention is drawn to the way in which the company directly influenced important decisions on urban management, infrastructure distribution and the definition of urban parameters in São Paulo through personal relationships between its directors and civil servants. There was a striking organization of interests between the

company's board members and technicians and City Hall employees, who used their positions and functions to provide them with benefits, either through changing legislation to accommodate urban projects and valorize lands belonging to the company, or by ensuring the expansion of infrastructure and service networks within the subdivisions of Cia. City.

These experiences of the urbanization companies are repeatedly applied in contemporary private urbanization, whether in real estate speculation of rural lands, or in using the means of communication to consolidate a product, or in links with the government so as to benefit and enable plans and projects.

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