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# **Identity and urban image between developmentalism and neoliberal policies.**

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## **Abstract**

The paper aims to show the mutations of the urban image and identity between the consolidation of cities during the ideas of the developmentalism of the fifties and sixties, and the subsequent transformations arising from the neoliberal policies applied since the eighties. It is inquired about how the transformations of the urban image proposed new forms of identity for the city as a whole and for its inhabitants.

Arica, in the north of Chile, in the middle of the desert, between the high plateaus of the Andes and the Pacific Ocean, is an exceptional study case to show the ways how urban expansion fostered by development according to a diffuse city, changed the image and the identity of the city. Between 1958 and 1976, the city was a laboratory to put a political test, plans and projects that specified an unusual population growth and an urban growth marked by a dialectic between the compact center and the diffuse expansion. Since 1980 become one of the most interesting cases of application of the policies of expansion of the urban limits and liberalization of the land market. During the sixties a developmental local agency, the "Arica Board of Progress", implemented advanced policies in economic growth and social equipment policies, an unprecedented political entity in the Latin American sphere. It was a regional institution complete autonomous of the central power, with planned and financial capacity, which promoted the industrialization, and the welfare of the population. Thus a particular urban identity was configured, which proposed the city as one of the most socially and economically advanced in the country. Since the change of political orientation of the economy with the military dictatorship, the institution was canceled and the city suffered the absence of promotion policies. The urban sprawl caused by free market policies came into contradiction with the image and identity that the city had sustained for decades.

**Key Words:** urban image; developmentalism, modern architecture; generic city; Arica, Chile.

## Introduction

Twenty years ago, Edward Soja introduced his six discourses on Postmetropolis, highlighting the vision that cultural criticism had to construct anticipatory representations about “the new urban processes that have restructured the modern metropolis in the last thirty years” (Soja, 2001:218). He insisted to affirm that not even the new urban processes were completely new and most of them could be understood as particular variations of a historically uneven development that “has been modeling (and remodeling) urban spaces since the origins of industrial and urban capitalism” (Soja, 2001:218). But, at the same time, he warned that these phenomena were considerably new and different:

“it is the result of an era of intense and extensive restructuring, with a deeper impact on each angle of our lives, than in any other period of time in the last two centuries, that is, since the beginning of the industrial capitalist city” (Soja, 2001:218).

Can the image of a city show the dimension of this phenomenon? At least this one appears definitely related to the construction of the metropolis, evident in the size of it. It has also permeated the images and identity of intermediate and small cities, and it is in these ones where it shows more evidently how the process of restructuring the economy and society happened in the last decades of the twentieth century.

There have been several ways from where the issues of urban identity and image have been approached, from the most traditional studies linked to the understanding images in their relation to history to those of cultural criticism or urban imaginary. The Latin American city has been a privileged field of study to establish links between the material dimension of the image and culture. With the few exceptions of some historic centers, Latin American cities have been subject of discontinuous and altered configuration processes that are shown, with evidence, in the urban image; the characteristic could be the absence of the urban homogeneity that characterizes other western cities. The interruption of the different development processes has been marked in the urban image and has shaped a multi-factor identity.

In the eighties, Oriol Bohigas (2000) clearly established an association between image and urban identity, based on the idea of legibility. Lynch assigned this characteristic a decisive importance in the construction of the urban image. He understood for legibility those “specific qualities, namely, the clarity of the urban landscape, the ease with which its parts can be recognized and organized in a coherent pattern” (Lynch, 1974). This paper<sup>1</sup> aims to show, through an isolated case study, how the urban image and identity, and even its legibility or rather the lack of it, have been associated with processes of political and economic definition that deserve to be studied in a particular way.

The city of Arica has a very particular localization, geographically as well as historically. It is a port city on the Pacific Ocean, surrounded by the Atacama Desert a few degrees north of the Tropic of Capricorn, with a benign and stable climate provided by the presence of water that descends from the altiplano. The city is defined by its extreme geography, the lack of vegetation and the predominance of ochre and sand colors dominating the landscape, characteristics of the desert.

Arica was founded during the Spanish colonial period in 1536, with an urban structure based on a checkboard but adapted to the inclinations of the geography. It was one of the port cities of the Viceroyalty of Perú, but nothing is left from the original city, earthquakes and tsunamis have changed dramatically its physiognomy. Because of its strategic position, it was a disputed territory in the Pacific War (1879-1884) that faced Perú and Bolivia against Chile. It was finally incorporated to Chilean territory on the Treaty of 1929, and from there and for two decades the city suffered the abandonment from the central administration. The long distances that separate Arica from another cities in the north of the country, and especially the 1700 km. long separation with Santiago established its isolated condition. Only in 1953 this situation was reverted, when the city began a development process that would particularly characterize it for the next 25 years, displaying an urban image clearly associated with the expectations and aspirations of progress that the development ideology proposed in America Latina. This image was shattered because of the sudden change in the economic system, based on neoliberal politics, which were applied in the country in the early 80's. This caused a total dislocation not only in the urban image, but it also prompted the dissolution of the imaginary associated with the territorial role of the city and would assign it instead a condition of a *generic city*. Because of these characteristics, Arica constitutes an exceptional example to show the ways in which urban expansion, facilitated by developmentalism, transformed a *modern city* in a *diffuse city* and how now, neoliberalism has favored the transformation into a *generic city*.

## City and developmentalism

The development process started with the declaration of Arica as a Free Port city in 1953, establishing a regime of tax exemptions that gradually activated the economy and guided an incipient industrialization. The law created a region liberated from its tax obligations to help stimulate the depressed economy of the area, counteracting as well the growing

loss of population generated by the economic development of Tacna, Perú, the closest urban area to Arica (Lang, 1962). The benefits of the Free Port regime apparently were not as those expected, and were focused in commercial activity because the permanence of industries was less than that speculated. Nonetheless, the generated possibilities and the informal economic activities stimulated a small growth that was registered mainly in an increase of the population that arrived to the city looking for jobs. The idea of the Free Port was instituted from the central power, recognizing a specific territorial area that corresponded to a geographically extensive zone, but were the city had the preponderant role.

The process of economic regeneration was accelerated in 1958 with the creation of the Junta de Adelanto (Ruz et al., 2015), a public law institution responsible for promoting the production and development of the department. It required the participation of the most productive sectors of the community to administrate the economic resources produced by the port and invest these resources to improve the conditions of the city and region. Its main objective was to:

“study, arrange, coordinate and put into plan all the works deemed necessary for the rural and urban development of the city and department of Arica; to promote all its sources of production; to increase its commerce and to the welfare of all its inhabitants” (LEY N° 13039, 1958).

The Junta had, for almost 20 years, a fundamental role in the economic development of the department as well as a more concrete one, transforming the city through the construction of infrastructure and buildings that transformed the city, from beaches to educational buildings and public spaces (Torrent, Ruz, Morán, 2018).

The promotion of economic activity was initially oriented to the establishment of industries and the generation of a touristic infrastructure that would complement the industrial activity. The tourism affirmation strategy largely recognized the ideas already installed about the climate benefits of Arica, as well as some specific experiences of international travelers. The first years fundamental in terms of equipment of the beaches, the construction of a casino and a racecourse, as well as the promotion of the hotel industry both in the center and in relation to the beaches. It is well known as well that Arica was one of the hosting cities of the Football World Cup of 1962, and for this event large public infrastructures were built, as the Carlos Dittborn Stadium and the Olympic Pool, which would host the South American swimming, diving and water polo games ten years later, asserting the strategy of touristic attraction through sports.

For almost three decades the aspiration of the urban policies was to establish Arica as a development pole that would assign it a regional role of some importance. The idea of the growth poles had been proposed by Perroux in the fifties and was based on the acknowledgment of the polarization as an effect produced by the growth of economic activities above other ones, though the relation with outside economies. The idea of the intended centrality of the city and its border location promoted the integration as a vast international region that gathered the mayor cities of the north of Chile and the south of Perú and Bolivia. However, the conditions of international politics kept the city isolated and the constitution of its economic options had the partial industrialization and tourism as its axes.

## **Urban image, touristic image and opportunity**

During the fifties, a series of characteristics were gradually affirmed in relation to the possibilities Arica had to offer as public enjoyment. Those were mainly the sun and the tropical weather, its condition of oasis in the middle of the desert, generous beaches and the possibilities of tranquility offered by the city and its environment. There were also some ideas in relation to the consumption of goods that, because of the city's condition as a Free Port, were considered luxury items that had to go through Arica first and then could go to the rest of the country. In the sixties, the idea of a thriving city was affirmed its material transformation proposed a very different environment, one very suitable for rest, consumption and full of attractions given by the new urban structure.

The construction of a system of representations that was configurated in a vast imaginary, not only for the inhabitants but also for the tourists, worked simultaneously to the configuration of the expectations of tourism and also the landscapes as cultural images of the whole country.

The graphic and photographic representations and the stories of travelers are imposed on the experience and are established over the material layers of cultural interpretation, thus creating imaginaries (García Canclini, 2005), which create a value that can be transformed into symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1997), that makes a difference with the other urban phenomena and creates an expectation of a different experience, enabled by the aspirations of having it. This is often referred as touristic experience and can constitute a group of dynamic values which can be cumulative and be appropriated by different sectors of the population.

The *Guía del Veraneante* (Traveler's Guide), set up the touristic imaginary of the country in the years that was published (Booth, 2008). Arica was incorporated gradually into the appreciation of the territorial condition, mainly because it was built in relation to the provinces, highlighting the city in the context of the north of the country as a tourist destination.

However, the presence of the city in the 1951 and 1955 guides, to give just two examples, was restricted and focused on the infrastructure and communications conditions. The emphasis was on the international role of the city, its maritime, land and rail transport networks. However, beyond the presence of the *Morro* in the city, the picture of the patrimonial complex of Pachama, with the tower of the Church, the long whitewashed walls and the arch of the portal, geographically cut against the hill, showed the existence of a different landscape than those of the rest of the country. That single presence made appear an image different from the one of the urban progress and put a counterpoint showing the past of the region.

The guide published in 1960 highlighted the characteristics of Arica in relation to the north of the country as a touristic destination: the benign weather conditions with almost no rain during the year and an average annual temperature of 17°, the sea as a place of recreation, sport fishing and amateur sailing; the warm water and the beaches shielded from strong winds and waves; the hot springs; the mineral treatment centers and specially the kindness of the people of the region. With this started the integration of the city into the territorial area by referring to its geographic conditions as a touristic resource, complemented by the cultural, historic and landscape values. Thus, the recognition of the “Andean highlands where there are still remains of the aboriginal stage” and the “scenarios of historical resonance in contemporary life” (Guía, 1960:33) were remarkable. The *Morro* appeared as the most obvious landmark to be shown: far from its historic, military and politic connotations, its peculiar form and its location by the sea were the highlighted conditions. Alongside the *morro*, the Lluta and Azapa valleys were also recognized as some of the populated areas in the altiplano.

The Guide recognized Arica as a center of convergence, where “new sources of economic nature and a law to boost industrial and tourism development” (Guía, 1960:34), had proposed a new way of life. The increase in the resident population, and above this, the existence of a significant number of people during the summer that came from the nearby Peruvian city of Tacna, and from the Bolivian cities, preferably from La Paz; to those one must add the habitual Chilean tourists, and especially the ones that came from of the south during the winter.

The magazine *En Viaje* was central in the generation of ideas and representations of the landscape oriented to the tourism in all the country. It also shaped the change in the conception of the landscape of the north of the country (González, 2013). Since the mid-fifties, it proposed an image of Arica based mainly on the benefits of its climate, even as an alternative to the winter in the south of the country, and the opportunities that the thriving commercial environment proposed as a destination. Among the most prominent places was, as always, the *Morro*, sometimes compared to the hills of Rio de Janeiro, but also to the Rock of Gibraltar, for its presence and urban relations.

Since 1960, the magazine began referring to the city as an international tourist center (En Viaje, 1960) highlighting the works of the *Junta de Adelanto* (Arica’s Advancement Board) such as the transformation of the beaches, parks and gardens, the airport, racecourse, cultural centers, and the creation of historical and archeological museums among other points to develop. It also referred to the plans for the promotion of the city and the region as a tourist destination both in Chile and internationally. Images of the regional geography increased their presence in the magazine during the decade. Initially the magazine promoted the landscapes of the valleys of Azapa and Lluta, in keeping with the already consolidated references of agricultural production, but it also extended the consideration to the other valleys, such as Lauca, as well as to the Chungará lake. The magnificent views of the Nevados de Payachata (both over 6000 meters high) from the Cotacotani lake sublimated the local landscape. Among the outstanding buildings represented were the Church and town of Parinacota, being shown as protagonists of the colonial tradition.

The pictures and stories from travelers were intended to provoke the curiosity of the tourists, and they were assumed as well as a way to generate knowledge and to help to construct, by means of similarities and differences, proximity and distance, the different geographic and cultural areas that could be recognized for touristic, and therefore, economic and social purposes. The accumulation of representations both textual and in images, affirmed the conformation of a territorial conscience, a regional self-knowledge that could be promoted in economic as well as cultural terms.

## **The urban image of the developmentalism: Modern architecture as urban identity**

The Junta de Adelanto de Arica (Arica’s Advancement Board) can be considered a paradigm of the developmentalism conception of the city and the architecture, implemented through successive planning figures and with the realization of a large number of public and private works. The Board promoted the economic growth by means of the impulse for the establishment of industries, and the generation of a touristic offer that complemented the industrial activity; it expanded the policies of development at regional level through tourism and infrastructures; it carried out the studies for the regulatory plan of the city, as well as the construction of equipment, buildings and public boulevards. It also faced an unprecedented population growth, from 23,033 inhabitants in 1952 to 46,686 in 1960 and 87,726 in 1970, doubling in size in each decade. The demand for housing grew at the same rate as population, where the need for equipment, and above all,

for the configuration of an urban environment, adapted to the conditions of the desert constituting a challenge for architecture.

The demand for housing grew at the same rate as population, especially in a city that had a lot of available land, but very few possibilities of making large investments in housing; at the same time as it did not have a real estate market, and the prospects of self-construction were very limited due to its location in the desert. This accelerated process put the city and the public administrations on alert, making them repeatedly draw attention to the problem. During the 50's, housing construction was carried out by the Housing Corporation - at national level - and the Arica's Modernizing Society, created by the National Investment Corporation as a decentralized entity that could outline some definitions of its own, regarding the way to operate towards housing. Since 1958, the effort was carried out by the Board of Advancement, in coordination with corporations and state entities, such as the EMPART, (Private Employee Fund), the CORVI (Housing Corporation), the CORMU, (Urban Improvement Corporation) among others.

The enormous population growth induced a consequential demand for housing without distinction of social sectors. The availability of fiscal land caused the expansion of the urban floor in a fabric that was initially quite uniform; where the different housing complexes and populations were generated as unitary projects, determining differences in the layout of huge clusters of land, which only assumed the primary roadway system provided in the urban plans.

Modern architecture displayed all of its possibilities, to configure an urban environment in a tropical desert setting. The instruments of the modern project, such as the free floor plan, the pure form, the opening of the architectural box, the spatial relationship between interior and exterior, the porosity of the volume, and the freedom of the compositional and structural matrices, were put into action in multiple situations.

The Board promoted buildings of remarkable architectural quality, such as the Casino, the Stadium for the 1962 World Cup, the Saucache Campus of the Universidad del Norte, the Velázquez Campus of the Universidad de Chile, the Lisera bathing establishment, and the Olympic pool, among many others (Torrent, Ruz, Morán, 2018).

The formal and spatial experimentation proved to be appropriate for the climatic condition, establishing a record of novelty capable of giving legibility to the economic and social project proposed by the political institutions. Thus, modern architecture became an expressive system able of identifying the new actions undertaken by the JAA, where the virtuosity displayed in the works, proposed them as a unique experience. The progressive and developmentalism approach of the organization was clearly associated with the possibilities that represented modern life, configuring a great architectural laboratory.

This architectural laboratory left its imprint on a city and that while it was growing by extension, it was renewing much of its built environment. The architectural projects made use of the characteristics of modern architecture, its possibilities and dimensions, from the conditions of its own structure to its materialization. The climate allowed an interaction between interior and exterior in both residential and public facilities projects.

The architectures of the urban equipment were located in key places of the city plan, in direct relation with parks and avenues, giving exceptional qualities to the public space in housing complexes, and configuring a structure of significance in which the image of modern architecture was definitive. Already by the mid-sixties, the Advancement Board had transformed the urban image, and consolidated a modern city.

## **Expanded city and deregulation:**

During the second half of the seventies, the transformation by the state and society in Chile was total: most of the agencies and institutions in charge of promoting development with protection policies were eliminated. In December 1976, the Junta de Adelanto de Arica (Arica's Advancement Board) was dissolved, and nearly all of its projects expired almost immediately. By 1979, it only remained the traces of the impulse that the Board had assumed.

The foundation of a new national order based on a neoliberal model, was the driving force behind the transformations, involving a relatively complete reformulation of the political and administrative system. In this way, a new regionalization was established, where the agencies and corporations that precisely promoted development through direct action from the state, were eliminated.

In the following 10 years, the radical transformation in the urban image took place when urban development policies were characterized by the deregulation of the urban land market. The implementation of a neoliberal regime in the country's economy implied the consideration of the urban land as a non-limited good, where land prices could be negotiated in the market, and with flexible urban regulations to enable the optimal conditions for the free competition towards urban development. In the practice, this meant in the elimination of the foreseen limits for the cities by the regulatory plans, allowing an indiscriminate urban growth. Therefore, the expansive growth of the city was imposed as a model, and it required the reformulation of the urban instruments established in the planning systems. The incorporation of the rural land

was imposed as a growth criterion about density in urban centers. The same policy promoted social housing through a system of credits and subsidies, which also operated in urban expansion with processes of strong spatial segregation.

The dimension of the expansion phenomenon can be verified by comparing population growth and urban floor growth: between 1980 and 2000 the population grew 32% more, while the urbanized surface area grew 61% more than the existing one. The physical image of the expansion refers directly to the repetition of urban fabrics consisting in relatively homogeneous lots, occupied by small, lightly built houses. The urban image unfolds in multiple objects with repeated base patterns and differentiations in appearance, assuming a condition of structural monotony in the face of the diversity of their materializations. Being the most definitive appearance, that of a disorganization and lack of congruence between the urban space and the forms of social organization. It is challenging to build an urban identity in places that are characterized by the difficulty of recognizing or remembering them. The generated city shows its own incapacity to structure the space and the signs of the image.

## **Generic city: image and politics**

Since the beginning of the fifties, the city configured an identity associated with its climate and the presence of the sea and the desert, mainly recognizable by its orientation as a tourist place, there was also a relative recognition of a territorial identity associated with the landscapes of the highlands. The implementation of development policies, for at least two decades, involved the association of the urban identity to a territorial role associated with the port and an industrialist destination, which was not fully verified. However, the city began a development process promoted by the *Junta de Adelanto* through the production of buildings, infrastructure and urban expansion for which modern architecture was the model. The works of the *Junta* associated urban identity to a modern city in which modern architecture was the protagonist, strongly characterizing the urban image.

A careful reading of the current urban image suggests that the process of urban land liberalization, and the flexibility of the instruments of control of the urban form, promoted a peripheral expansion configuring a dispersed urban image, composed of low-rise fabrics with high homogeneity in its characteristics, mainly composed of small houses, from both state and private promotion and where urban equipment assumed in the same characteristics, creating very little differentiation from one another. The traditional city center has assumed a process of gradual replacement and degradation of the buildings, although it preserves and concentrates the main signs of the previous urban images, both historical of the nineteenth century, as the one of the mid-twentieth. Both the center and the areas around it, were part of the expansion process dominated by the developmentalism in which the *Junta de Adelanto* promoted a structuring of the urban image by means of large buildings whose position on the urban fabric was to give meaning and legibility to the modern city.

The lack of legibility in the expansion of the city, promoted by the deregulation, has dislocated the traditional urban image, leaving it without a clear image and identity. In 1995, Rem Koolhaas proposed the generic city as the:

“apotheosis of the multiple choice concept: all the boxes checked, an anthology of all the options. Usually, the Generic City has been “planned” not in the usual sense that a certain bureaucratic organization controls its development, but as if various echoes, spores, tropes and seeds had fallen randomly into the earth as in nature, had taken root - taking advantage of the natural fertility of the land - and now they form a set: a gene pool that sometimes produces amazing results” (Koolhaas, 2006:27).

The urban image of developmentalism has been swallowed by the multiplicity generated by neoliberal deregulation; the urban identity assumes now only the generic condition of the phenomena that model and remodel the urban spaces, which restructure the modern city.

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