

WATER AS CATALYST

Int

Interventions

AR

Adaptive Reuse

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Interventions | Adaptive Reuse

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ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

THE SÃO PAULO RIVERS CASE

by ANNE SCHRAIBER

The presence of water bodies in the city of São Paulo has been nearly eradicated over its history of periods of massive modernization and urban intervention. Even though some historical moments have seen the waterways assume a more important role in the organization of the urban space, as well as an identity factor, the city's development thwarted the citizens' environmental perception. The history of the city of São Paulo runs, however, in parallel with the history of its rivers, which, unfortunately, are invisible to us nowadays. The acknowledgement of the city's development, in tandem with its relationship to the water bodies, is a path to the recovery and preservation of its memory. Many proposals for urban solutions, as well as some interventions, have been put forward over the last few years. Having the narrative of history at hand is indispensable for the understanding of the proposals and interventions that attempt to recover this fundamental asset. It is important to point out that the resurgence of water bodies is seen as one of the major factors in the transformation of the city of São Paulo into a sustainable environment once again.

Knowledge of the history of a city, of its natural landscape as an environmental identity, indicates that, in spite of its many transformations and layers, each territory retains unchangeable features that may still be recovered. (CARVALHO, 2010)

At the time of the Portuguese colonization in the early 17th century, the main rivers of São Paulo were navigable. The local bands of settlers known as *bandeirantes* used the rivers for their reconnaissance expeditions at the hinterlands, to search for natural riches and to conquer lands. During the Imperial period, the water bodies were also valued as an indispensable means of survival, so the city eventually grew in between the rivers

Anhangabaú, Tietê and Tamanduateí: the former was a source of food and water while the latter two provided a means of transportation. At that time, the city encompassed an area comprised of 3,000 waterways, among rivers, streams and creeks.

In 1870, immigrants realized the river's potential as a medium for sports and leisure, having established the first yacht clubs, and enjoying swimming and fishing activities in a completely non-polluted environment. After 1880, however, São Paulo witnessed the industrialization and modernization of urban services, with political forces driven toward the creation of the necessary infrastructure for the economic expansion of the city. This resulted in the canalization of several rivers and streams, harshly interfering with the natural environment.

As a result of the transposition and canalization of its main waterways, the rivers Tietê and Pinheiros, as large avenues built in the valley riverbeds, the city is now facing serious environmental consequences. The rivers have become a problem for the city, which must now deal with the stench and the pollution everyday, as well as the inundations that their silted-up margins cause from time to time. The pollution and stench of the Tietê and Pinheiros rivers are the result of urban sewage being unloaded in their waters, whether by the rains that wash away garbage from the streets or by clandestine and legal sewage that still fail to undergo treatment before getting ejected into the rivers, affecting their ecosystems. In the summer, when rainfall levels are higher, the rivers overflow, causing large-scale floods.

Some isolated projects for de-polluting the river and containing inundations were implemented since the 1990s; however, they are long-term solutions and not entirely successful. Nor were they integrated efforts to recover the rivers and highlight their



caiaques, Eduardo Srur



importance as an environmental identity for the city. Traffic flow solutions overtook the rivers in the scale of priorities, rendering them invisible, and efforts to solve the physical problems resulting from bad planning, one by one, became the greater goal.

Some architects, however, have elaborated and proposed some integrated urban proposals. Oscar Niemeyer was a pioneer, in 1986, putting forward a project that recovered one of the margins of the Tietê River, in an attempt to promote reconciliation between the river and the city. He proposed the creation of a park with the construction of a cultural complex, leisure and sports clubs, residences and office buildings integrated with the landscape.

In 1998, the Institute of Architects of Brazil opened a public competition for solutions for the urban and landscape re-structuring of the highways at the margins of the rivers Pinheiros and Tietê. The competition sought ideas, with the goal of discussing the subject, but did not necessarily include the commissioning of the project. Architect Bruno Padovano, the winner, proposed the recovery of the vegetation and the improvement of the margins with the construction of a touristic leisure and entertainment complex as well as the creation of harbors for river-borne transportation,

suggesting a public-private partnership for its execution. In total, 21 projects were presented.

In 2007, professor and architect Pérola Brocanello, in her doctoral thesis, established guidelines for the ecological recovery of the city. She proposed the creation of linear parks and the resurgence of the waters, which would make up a cooling system, increase the permeability of the soil and contain the existing major inundations.

All the projects include the tentative recovery of identity between city and rivers, whether through the creation of Niemeyer's clubs, Padovano's fluvial transportation or Pérola's extensive linear greenery. By proposing the resurgence of the waters in the city's environmental landscape, they all revive their historical importance in our collective minds.

It is important to highlight that all those large-scale urban projects have been elaborated without the involvement of the population; they were discussed among professionals, holders of prizes and/or notoriety in their field. However, it is a peculiar situation, that the existence of projects including expropriation and demolition at this scale would not be based in a more participatory planning process. The invitation of the population, hearing them before making strategic decisions in city planning, not only avoids future conflict but also creates a veritable



mobilizing force for such projects to be effectively implemented in the future. In order for this to become a reality, the citizens must have complete social and environmental awareness, while, at present, most of them are disconnected from the problems of the metropolis.

The work of Brazilian artist Eduardo Srur, that puts the driving force of art to work, was the only one of various proposals that was realized, however ephemeral, at the margins of the river. Srur found the motivation for his work in the contrast between the natural environment of the coast, his usual weekend retreat, and the pollution of the Pinheiros River, which can be seen from the window of his studio. Famous for his ephemeral urban installations, Srur creates conceptual and critical art by breaking away from the institutional boundaries of galleries and museums. His work appropriates the city as an experimental laboratory and calls the public's attention to environmental issues in the metropolis while improving the daily lives of the citizens through art.

His first installation using the river as platform in 2006 was driven by the behavior of millions of people crossing the bridges everyday between the branches of the highway along the banks of the Pinheiros River. This highway is one of the most important structural elements in the city's road system and is chronically the

location of traffic jams at rush hour. The public seems to be completely anaesthetized, though, as they go on their way, too caught up on their own affairs to notice the presence of the river and its deplorable condition, except for the awful stench that emanates from it. This situation underscores the lack of memory, identity and ecological awareness of the citizens of São Paulo. Eduardo Srur, then, sought to cause a disturbance that causes one to notice and question one's surroundings, thus transforming one's perception of space. The situation of the city's bodies of water is, after all, a result of society's foibles and government neglect.

With his work entitled *caiaques* (kayaks), Srur makes an attempt to re-establish the connection between the citizens and the river by reviving the memory of the sport, which was practiced until the 1920s, when the pollution of the river began. The art piece consists of 150 colorful plastic sculptures representing kayakers, manned by mannequin dolls, floating on the dirty river. An interesting development was that the solid garbage deposit on the waters began to organically re-arrange the sculptures, which lost their original form. The artist seeks to awaken people's imagination about the nature of that water and the ways it can enhance our quality of life.

Perhaps, with the acknowledgement of the features of the water bodies on small spaces, and later on larger public areas, water could make a resurgence on the city's landscape so that the population, by recognizing its value and the need for it, would demand the "urban structuring of bodies of water". (BROCANELLO, 2007)

For a second installation called PETS, in 2008, Srur came up with twenty gigantic inflatable sculptures shaped as soda bottles, distributed along the concrete shores of the Tietê River. It was commissioned by the Itaú Cultural Institute, a foundation owned by a major Brazilian bank. Those PET bottles, lit in the evenings, were not just symbolic of the issue of environmental degradation of one of the main landmarks of urban pollution in São Paulo, but also represented recycling in two different ways. It proposed a recycling process that takes place through the citizen's gaze, by which they stop to look at the river that was once invisible, day or night. The other aspect is that the installation itself was recyclable. At the end of the exhibition cycle of the installation, the materials used for the inflatable bottles were upcycled into backpacks designed by artist Jum Nakao and given out to public school students.

The students visited the installation by sailing down the river and participating in an environmental education program led by an NGO. This intervention demonstrates a case of the public and private sectors of society joining forces to raise environmental awareness, which is fundamental for the requalification of the area.

Environmental education is an important instrument in the construction of an environmentally pleasant city, where everyone is aware of their responsibilities and able to collaborate toward a better city. (BROCANELLO, 2007)

The integration of man and the natural environment is the preservation of water resources as well as the acknowledgement of their inherent value as such. Srur's ephemeral intervention alludes to the importance of the role of culture in promoting the re-signification of the urban space. Major urban plans can only be accomplished with the full support and awareness of its citizens. When the population realizes the importance of that environment, the collective spirit will prevail and urban change will be considered a substantial matter.

Water is essential for human life and a healthy environment. Recovering an environmental identification of the citizens of São Paulo with their rivers becomes, then, a pressing measure so that the next generations may enjoy the benefits of a more sustainable city resulting from a balanced ecosystem in which water is appreciated as an indispensable factor for their quality of life.



PETS project, Eduardo Srur

PROJECT CREDITS, INFORMATION AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES

EDITORIAL

Project Name_ Projecting Change

Image Credits: Neethi Abraham, Angelica Carvahales, Udeeta Jain, Mengran Jiang, Vinoti Kabara, Krishna Lingutla, Sneha Mathreja, Hana Mehta, Gloria Ramirez, Eshank Rishi, Eder Romero, Yinghua Tan, Rohit Vantaram, Ananya Vij, Plub Warnitchai, Mengyue Zhou

BREATHE, LOOK, STAND UP

Project Name 01_ DC ExchangeProject_Site_ McMillan Slow Sand Filtration site_ Location_ Washington DC_ New use 01_ Community center, marketplace, performance_ Project Name 02_ People's Liberation Army No. 1102_ Location_ Shenyang China_ Original architect_ Communist Party China_ Rehabilitation architect_ META-Project_ New use 02_ Exhibition space, mini theatre

Image Credits_ Figure 01,02, 08_ McMillan slow sand filtration site, Washington, DC, Lewis Francis; Figure 03 –07_ Public Folly, Shenyang, China, META-Project; Figure 09_ Courtesy of Lindsay Winstead

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THE TEARS OF THE U.S.S. ARIZONA

Project Name_ A tomb that lives; Location_ Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

Image Credits_ Figure 01_ View of USS ARIZONA taken from Manhattan Bridge on the East River in New York City on its way back from sea trials. December 25, 1916, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print;photographer_EnriqueMuller,Jr./E.Muller;1916;Wikimedia; Figure 02_ A TOMB THAT LIVES Monument proposal, illustration by author; Figure 03_ An aerial view of the USS Arizona Memorial, U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 3rd Class Jayme Pastoric, Wikimedia

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THE EDGE OF CONDITION

Project Name 01_ Three Mills_ Bromley-by-Bow_ River Lee_ London, England_ Project Name 02_ The White Building_ Lee Navigation Canal_ Hackney Wick_ Stratford, England_ Project Name 03_ The Marine Engine House_ Walthamstow Reservoirs

Image Credits_ All images courtesy of the authors; Figure 01, 02_ Three Mills Island, London_ Figure 03_ White Building_ Hackney Centre Wick_ Stratford_ Figure 04_ The Sinking Future Post Apocalyptic Flood Survival Centre.

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

Image Credits_ Figure 01_ The Big U, Courtesy of Bjarke Ingels Group; Figure 02, 03, 05) by Julia Casol; Figure 04_ Courtesy of H+N+S Landscape Architects; Figure 06_ Dijkdoorbraak bij Bemmel, 1799, Christiaan Josi, naar Jacob Cats (1741 – 1799), 1802, source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

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THE OYSTER BLOCKS PROJECT

Project Name_ The Oyster Blocks Project

Image Credits_ Figure 01 – 07_ courtesy of the author

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THE HAMMAM OF ERBIL CITADEL

Project Name_ Hammam of Erbil; Location_ Erbil, Iraq

Image Credits_ Figure 01 – 04_ courtesy of the authors

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(re)MADE BY WATER

Project Name_ New World Mall, Bangkok, Thailand

Image Credits_ All images courtesy of the author; Figure 01_ Mall; central court, Photograph by Perfect Lazybones; Figure 02_ Floating market in Bangkok, Photograph by Georgie Pauwels; Figure 03_ Mall, escalators, Photograph by Olga Saliy; Figure 04_ Mall, koi, Photograph by Olga Saliy; Figure 05_ Mall, escalators, Photograph by Olga Saliy.

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T-HOUSE

Project Name_ T-HOUSE, theoretical project; Location_ Hains Point, Washington, D.C.

Image Credits_ Figure 01 – 08_ courtesy of the authors

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THE BLUE LINE

Project Name_ blue developments; Location_ Battir, Palestine; Qeparo, Albania

Image Credits_ Figure 01- illustration by author

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ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

Project Name 01_ Caiaques kayaks; Location_ Pinheiros River, São Paulo, Brazil; Artist_ Eduardo Srur; Project Name 02_ Pets; Location_ Tietê River in São Paulo, Brazil; Artist_ Eduardo Srur

Image Credits_ All photos courtesy of Eduardo Srur; Figure 01_ Caiaques, kayaks, Pinheiros River, photo_ Eduardo Nicolau; Figure 02_ Caiaques, kayaks, Pinheiros River, photo_ Alexandre Schneider; Figure 03_ Pets, Tietê River, photo_ Eduardo Srur; Figure 04_ Pets, Tietê River, photo_ Almeida Rocha

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A METROPOLITAN PARK OF WATER

Project Name_ Metropolitan Water Park project, Location_ Saragossa, Spain

Image Credits_ Figure 01_ Bridge Pavilion & Third Millennium Bridge, Río Ebro, Zaragoza, España, Source_Pabellón Puente y Puente del Tercer Milenio, Author_ Juan E De Cristofaro from Zaragoza, España, CC-BY-SA-2.0; Figure 02_Google Earth aerial view of Zaragoza, Spain; Figure 03_ Plano topográfico de la ciudad de Zaragoza del siglo XVIII, Wikimedia;

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BETWEEN RESILIENCY AND ADAPTATION

Image Credits_ All images courtesy of the author; Figure 01_ by author, background_ by Aleks Dahlberg at www.unsplash.com; Figure 02_ by author; Figure 03, 04_ graphic by author, background_ by Frantzou Fleurine; www.unsplash.com

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WATER AS MEDIUM

Project Name 01_ Water tower in Delft, Architect_ Rocha Tombal; Location_ Delft, NL; Project name 02_ Water tower in Brasschaat, Architect_ Crepain-Binst Architects; Location_ Brasschaat, Belgium; Project name 3_ Water tower Sint-Jans convent, Overijssel; Architect_ Zecc Architects; Location_ Overijssel, NL

Image Credits_ All images courtesy of the authors_ Figure 01_ typological evolution of the water tower, Source: Ingeonné; Figure 02_ Water tower in Delft (NL), photo by Christiaan Richters; Figure 03, 04, 05_ Water tower in Brasschaat (BE), Crepain-Binst Architects, photo_ Crepain Binst; Figure 06, 07_ Water tower Sint-Jans convent, Overijssel (NL), Zecc Architects, photo_ Stijn Poelstra, <http://www.stijnstijl.nl/>;

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