



**Politecnico
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ScuDo
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Doctoral Dissertation
Doctoral Program in Architecture, History and Design (37th Cycle)

Public Agency

The encounter between Architecture and the
Welfare State in the City Center.
London, México, Santiago

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Summary

The dissertation studies the “public agency,” understood both as a State entity and as the capability of the public apparatus. The subtitle, “The Encounter between Architecture and the Welfare State in the City Center,” fixes in time the fleeting moment when the two subjects of this research – Architecture and the Welfare State – establish a conversation. Furthermore, for the present dissertation, the Welfare State also sets the temporal framework since architecture preceded it and survived it. This research focuses on the city center because the encounter took place there. The level of destruction left by the war, which the Welfare States had to face, implied the reconstruction of urban fabrics. Since city centers were a shared concern for both subjects back then, it was likely that they would meet up there. Together, they undertook the complex task of rebuilding the city while projecting it towards the future. By exploring the relationship between political context, land regimes, state institutions, and architectural debates, this dissertation aims to understand the urban-scale architectural materializations under Welfare State regimes as multilayered research objects that exist due to all these conditions but are more than the mere result of them.

In order to arrive at such an understanding, this dissertation reviews three case studies that share certain characteristics despite being located in different geographies and contexts: the Barbican Centre in London, the Tlatelolco Urban Complex in México City, and the San Borja Remodeling in Santiago. The existence of these cases makes us wonder how, in a not-so-distant past, interventions that now seem impossible were made. Since the question is not technical but rather political and cultural, these case studies will be interrogated in terms of the political and cultural context in which they appeared, as well as the architectural and urban ideas they put forward. Thus, the research questions are: Why did these urban complexes appear almost simultaneously in different contexts? Why did they come to be materialized? What historical conditions allowed them? Why were they needed? What were the legal tools, frameworks, debates, and horizons of possibility that set the stage for them to appear?

The goal is to demonstrate that the encounter of architecture and the Welfare State in the city center was mutually beneficial: the former helped legitimize the latter and vice versa. The hypothesis is that not only did architecture approach the Welfare State to secure larger commissions, but the Welfare State also needed architecture to provide a tangible image of what this mode of government could achieve. As an architectural theory and history research, these cases have been studied by resorting to archival and bibliographical sources. Although comparisons are inevitable when analyzing different cases under the same lens, the focus is not necessarily comparative. Instead, the bet is that a deep historical analysis of the three cases could help delineate the research object, much like finding the least common multiple among them. In sum, Public Agency examines public architectures that have transformed significant parts of the cities in which they are located. It attempts to understand the political and cultural context that allowed them to be built, focusing on the land management strategies that the Welfare States devised to make urban land public and make room for these examples. These were the dreams of an age that, unlike ours, still looked to the future with hope.