

The fencing of a heritage: approaching a landscape from its controversies

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Abstract

The landscape is a departure point to undercover the relations between a society and its environment, with its inherent controversies and conflicts. Considering that, researchers from the PAGUS Landscape Laboratory (in Porto Alegre, Brazil) have organized a seminar to experiment different theoretical and methodological tools focusing on a specific urban landscape. The group expected to stimulate public debate on the polemic proposal of fencing Porto Alegre's main urban park, and a protected heritage, Parque da Redenção. Based on security issues that idea has been raised by the city's legislative and by local media since the 1990s. In a green 37 ha. area with different settings, the park is an important attribute of Porto Alegre's landscape, as a provider of ecological services and historical landmark. Supposing the park was bounded, which landscape's aspects and correlated features would be modified? How to raise the population's awareness on the park's fencing, or not fencing, and on its different outcomes? These questions driven an ephemeral site intervention performed on November 8th 2014. Beyond its goals, the experience resulted in a prolific dialogue among researchers from fields such as architecture, arts, biology, geography, social sciences and tourism studies.

Keywords: *Landscape, Urban parks, Site intervention, Pragmatics of space, Parque da Redenção, Porto Alegre (Brazil).*

Introduction

This paper reports the experience of a multidisciplinary research group that operates in the city of Porto Alegre, a regional metropolis in southern Brazil with 1.4 million inhabitants in 2010. The Landscape Laboratory – PAGUS¹ is hosted at the Geography Department on the

¹ More information can be found at <https://pagusufrgs.wordpress.com>

Geosciences Institute (IGEO) of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Professionals from different backgrounds such as Architecture and Urbanism, Arts, Biology, Social Sciences, Geography and Tourism have as purpose to experiment the application of different theoretical and methodological references towards urban and/or rural landscapes' issues.

The group held the '*Ateliê da Paisagem*' seminar, or landscape workshop, where twenty-five researchers² have met during ten sessions between October and December 2014. The purpose was to create a multidisciplinary educational experience and an opportunity to explore, develop and discuss new methodological tools on landscape study. In Brazil the landscape protection is linked to the National Institute for Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) and its concept and research practices are peripheral to urban space and spatial planning discussions if compared to some EU countries agenda on the issue.

PAGUS pursued to take an existing problematic in Porto Alegre as basis for experimentation and as a way to raise the city's population awareness on the subject of landscape, stimulating its public debate. The chosen topic was the proposal to fence the city's main urban park: Parque da Redenção, a 37 ha. green open area in middle of its urbanized core. The fencing has been discussed at the city's legislative and at the local media at least since the 1990s. It is a current and polemical proposal that affords a deeper understanding of this society since its landscape study, and that dialogues with multiple issues such as: heritage, topophilia, topophobia (TUAN, 2005) and the use of public spaces. Emphasizing a pragmatic dimension of spatiality, the group performed an ephemeral site intervention as an approach to understand this controversy on the change of a city's heritage landscape.

The research problem: fencing of public urban parks and the Parque da Redenção

Urban public parks gained prominence at cities space in the 19th century, with the existence of new patterns of working, the emergence of a 'free time' and a leisure class willing to enjoy it in public spaces (CORBIN, 1995). In a hygienist discourse the parks also were perceived as an opportunity for urban populations to have contact with nature, element that was until then largely absent of the cities and that became object to a new valuation. The

² In their acknowledge: Alexandra Fachinello, Carine Raquel Heck, Carmem Lucas Vieira, Caroline Maria Cadore Borges, Cristiano Quaresma De Paula, Daniele Caron, Dilton De Castro, Geovane Aparecida Puntel, Helena Bonetto, Janice Martins Sitya Appel, João Luis Maciel Linck, João Paulo Schwerz, Keli Siqueira Ruas, Laura Rudzewicz, Lucas Manassi Panitz, Lucas Porfirio Schneider, Luciana de Castro Neves Costa, Lucile Lopes Bier, Lucimar de Fatima dos Santos Vieira, Luis Alberto Pires da Silva, Marina Cañas Martins, Mauricio Ragagnin Pimentel, Ricardo Hiroyuki Okido, Roberto Verdum.

use of public parks was seen as a healthy alternative to alcohol drinking, as so they provided an opportunity of reuniting families, to practice sports and to have contact with the outdoors. The existence of a public park as a place of public display is a requirement of modernity, and for the cities that have such an equipment it is a sign of alignment to urban ideals. As a place of public life, parks are a showcase that gives access to the society that is there displayed, and also symbolizes its identity.

However, one might wonder why the fencing of an urban park is the object of controversy, since this practice is adopted and accepted in different times and places around the globe. It's enough to mention the cases of St. James park in London, Luxembourg Gardens in Paris and Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo. Even in Porto Alegre, that has eleven urban parks, four of them are fenced and the barrier does not generate controversies.

Although just as there are examples of fenced parks, there are cases of open areas. In addition to Porto Alegre, other cities present examples such as those of Parque del Oeste in Madrid or Parque da Cidade in Brasília. There are also cases where intermediate solutions were proposed, such as the Central Park in New York. The permeability of these spaces seems to be more related to each park's design and to how it is placed in the urban context and in the daily life of its users. Nonetheless, the controversy over the fencing of urban parks is not exclusive to Porto Alegre. There are open parks whose fencing has been asked, as shows the discussions in Valencia, Spain (PARRILLA, 2013). There are also cases in which the population has battled to keep these spaces open, such as Huntington Park in San Francisco, USA (SABATINI, 2014). Those demands express changes in the relation between urban space and the society that produces it, and is embodied in landscape interventions.

This text is not an apology to the fencing or not fencing of urban parks. What the group aimed was a collective action to elucidate the implications of such a landscape intervention. In Parque da Redenção's case the fencing legitimacy by the government rests on the statements that this "uncontrolled" public space constitutes a threat to the population's safety; or that this park represents a city's important environmental and cultural heritage that needs to be protected and ensured by access regulation. The fence represents a physical barrier between what should or should not be conserved, and eventually ensured. Are the uses of a bound free space being considered? Do they constitute a heritage?

Over this controversy the *PAGUS* seminar's participants sought to collaborate in two axes. Axis A concerned: which intervention strategies on that landscape could be done to raise the population's awareness on the issue? How to stimulate and record the debate brought by that theme? Axis B, to reflect upon the hypothetical situation: if the fencing proposal was effected, which landscape's correlated aspects would change? If the fence was to be installed, how it would change the society's relationship with that heritage?

Parque da Redenção, a landscape of diversity

To understand the fencing's controversy, one must understand how the urban park named Parque da Redenção, officially Parque Farroupilha, became an identity landmark of Porto Alegre. It is placed in dense and consolidated urban fabric next to the city's historic district and to lake Guaíba. The park carries the materialization of the successive social interventions throughout its history, as well as the immateriality of social representations and symbolisms at Porto Alegre's inhabitants and visitors' imaginary.

The park's landscape carries traces of the city's urbanization process. The changes in its toponym witness these different spatial configurations. Porto Alegre was founded in 1752. In 1807 that swampy area outside its limits was donated by the governor to be used as cattle paddock. There it is the first denomination 'Campos da Várzea do Portão' (MACEDO, 1968), or city gate floodplain fields. Between 1835 and 1845 the area hosted a civil war between the Brazilian empire and the 'Farrapos', a rebel group that proclaimed the province's independence. The celebration of this uprising's centenary in 1935 gave the official name Parque Farroupilha (SMAM, 2016), or 'Farrapos' park. However, before that, the 1867 designation 'Campos do Bom Fim', refers to a nearby church reporting the city's urbanization towards that area. The Military School installed in the end of the 19th century used the fields for its exercises, which kept the area undeveloped. In 1884 the counsellors at Porto Alegre's legislative chamber suggest the name 'Campos da Redenção', or redemption fields, referring the slavery abolition date in the municipality. The very toponymy of this space points to freedom and to the assertion of multiple identities expressions. Even nowadays it is by this name that the population refers to the park, despite its another official name.



Figure 1: three moments of the Parque da Redenção area 1901, 1935 and 2015.

Porto Alegre grew relatively concentrated in a core where the park was included (figure 1 to the right in 2015). In the late 19th century there was a significant population growth due to immigration, especially from Germany and Italy. In 1890s, as Pesavento (1990) suggests, the floodplains use as a recreational area started (figure 1 to the left in 1901). The first interventions to the park's infrastructure and landscaping were made to fulfill the needs of two exhibitions in 1901 and 1935. In the latter, there was the French architect Alfred Agache proposition that conceived the area as a park (figure 1 in the centre in 1935). The

park has a central alley around which there were installed thematic gardens in 1941. There is also an artificial lake with paddle boats, as well as kids' yards, sports courts, an athletic track, and an auditorium for concerts and events. In 1978, the park's traditional Sunday's cultural fair and flea market, Brique da Redenção started. In 1997 the Parque Farroupilha is listed as Porto Alegre's historical, cultural, natural and landscape heritage (SMAM, 2016).

To consider Parque da Redenção different uses we have to account for the multiple territorialities asserted there that affirm the park's status as public space. Other than its aesthetics, air renewal provider and a place for leisure, parks are a field for creation and for the reproduction of domination mechanisms. The park's large open space is used for expressions such as the 'Parada Livre', a gender proud parade; the city's anniversary bowl; marketing, health and social issues awareness campaigns; strikes and demonstrations of different organizations' agendas (CACCIA, 2011). The park's landscape is meant as a 'stage' for Porto Alegre's social life expression, specially to the surrounding neighbourhoods whose residents perceive it as their 'home garden'. Parque da Redenção is a public space that the population envisions as free, democratic and open to diversity. This landscape imprint and matrix, to use Berque's (1998) terms, is evident when compared to other city parks, such as Marinha, characterized as a place to practice sports, or Moinhos de Vento, regarded as charming and frequented by the city's bourgeoisie.

Despite being an important landmark, the recurring social concern about public security and the successive media reports on vandalism, robbery and drug dealing in the park and its surroundings made Porto Alegre inhabitants question: should this green area be fenced or not?

It is interesting to note that since the 1980s a new urban context emerges in Porto Alegre. With the outsourcing of its industries in an urban sprawl, the city has remained a service hub. There is the emergence of new centralities and poles of attraction throughout Porto Alegre's territory. The result was a reorganization of the city's historic and also central business district area, where some places have maintained its importance, and others have gone through a certain obsolescence, which is visible when compared to these new centres of attraction. Part of the urban sociability that previously occupied primarily open public spaces such as parks, squares and streets was transferred to these semiprivate or semi-public spaces, such as shopping malls and condominiums, signs of a new urbanity. Souza (2008) points out a discourse about Brazilian cities reality that has been prominent in recent decades: it is the 'phobopolis', the cities of fear, where the search for security and safety has implications on public spaces' uses and on the urban landscape. To him there is an ongoing urban fragmentation phenomenon, which undermines the idea of the city as 'unity in diversity'.

Both the formation of criminal territorial enclaves [...] and the proliferation of "exclusive condominiums" are weakening the everyday public life, either by direct access and mobility interdiction, or by the fear of attending certain places at certain times under certain circumstances [...]. Due to fear public spaces are being or 'abandoned' (how often they are visited decreases dramatically), or 'enclosed' and 'monitored', neither those favours a free, dense and spontaneous public life. Public spaces increasingly become victims of what one might call the 'guarded city syndrome'. (SOUZA, 2008, p. 84, translated by the authors)

Given this process, Souza realizes that a public space's 'anemia' is undertaking Brazilian metropolises. These arenas become depleted of its role as society's expressing and meeting place. In an unequal society like Brazil's, much of this 'anemia' is justified by the violence increase and a self-segregation yearning, which is embodied at the landscape on the shape of gated communities, walls, surveillance cameras and watchtowers. These elements state a landscape of fear (TUAN, 2005), or a phobopolis (SOUZA, 2008). Another city park in Porto Alegre that expresses this new context is Germania. Built in 2005, in a city's new expansion area, east to the central business district and close to a number of recent shopping malls, this fenced park kept by a private corporation can be seen as the Parque da Redenção, or Redemption Park, antithesis.

PAGUS and the site temporary intervention as a methodological tool for landscape study

PAGUS understands the landscape as an interesting starting point to unveil the relations between a society and its environment, with its inherent controversies and conflicts. In an intuitive sense, landscape is the expression of a specific spatial ensemble. However, the term has a double connotation. In a way, it refers to the materiality of geographical spaces' elements. In another, it can be understood as a reference to the representation of a spatial ensemble. A unity is formed through a multifaceted composition, an ensemble that is named landscape. In this mosaic are impressions about shapes, colours, rhythms, but also sounds, smells, kinesthesia whose composition into landscape is a collective and personal expression of being in the world. Landscape is also key to geographical space structures and functions understanding. It is the expression of multiple temporalities cohabitation, as it brings traces of past interventions, expresses present trends and supports future's manifestations. The implication of these contrasting temporalities and the crossing of distinguished aspects and dynamics makes the landscape a unifying theme that raises interest to various knowledge areas and brings together arts and sciences. Considering the space aesthetics, but not restricted to that, the landscape is a spatial analysis category that stimulates the search for a multidisciplinary comprehension and cooperation.

Through a site ephemeral intervention performed at Parque da Redenção the research group aimed to acknowledge the arguments, opinions and feelings of park users about that public space fencing, or not fencing. It was an attempt to stimulate the debate by creating a situation that would enable them to personally experience access deprivation, as the real fence would, even if only temporarily and in a small part of the park.

The concept of intervention used here is from the field of arts: "the intervention can be considered an aspect of urban, environmental or public art, aimed to intervene in a given situation in order to promote some transformation or reaction, in a physical, intellectual or sensory realm" (ITAU CULTURAL, 2012, translated by the authors). Nevertheless it also relates with Lussault and Stock (2010) proposal of a pragmatics of space, in the sense that the group created a situation that changed an elements' assemblage at the aim to see how people 'dealt' with this 'new' spatial configuration. That approach differs from the traditional data gathering through structured interviews as it addresses more to people's (re)actions and feelings raised by actually being in a situation, rather than to their representations or preconceived opinions.

The intervention was discussed and organized at the seminar to be carried out in three stages. First, there was the conceiving of posters to be exhibited simulating a real estate development in the park, a reference to the private leisure areas in gated condos, which is a trend in expansion (figure 2). Another step was to organize how to proceed a temporarily isolation of an area, in which passers-by could not access. People would not be able to go through that alley, only accessible to the *PAGUS* seminar's group who, as if in a private area, performed sports and leisure activities. The third step was group choice to video record as a way to approach and get to know people's impressions on the ephemeral change to that public space dynamics, as well as on the municipality's intent to actually fence that area. The video can be seen as a relational device (APPEL, 2010) that provided a way to relate with the passers-by, but also a database for the research group discussions and it resulted in a short film³.

³ The short film is available at <https://pagusufgrs.wordpress.com/2015/07/19/parque-farroupilha-redencao-ou-prisao>



Figure 2 :signage proposing to fence the park.

The intervention began at two p.m. on November 8th 2014. First step was to simulate the launch of a new private enterprise proposing to isolate certain areas within the park. Colourful balloons displayed the fictional ads posters at the park's main alley, where the greatest public flow is located. The group watched the passers-by reactions. Some people were approached and asked to leave a video testimonial. The guiding question they should answer was: "are you against, or for, the fencing of Parque da Redenção?"

The second stage of the intervention was to restrict the mobility of pedestrians on the park's central alley by using a yellow ribbon (figure 3) to sign the unauthorized access. The area's isolation caused strangeness and perplexity, and the reactions were mixed. Some people lifted and trespassed the tape, never minding its existence. Other sought an alternative path to follow to their destinations. A third group was outraged about that blockade, some even searching the park's authority to complain and know what was that about. At this stage people's statements about the park's enclosure were also recorded. Particularly questioning their experience of going through a blockage on their mobility. At the end of the day there were 19 interviews, four of these testimonies recorded in writing, and 15 with audio-visual recording, properly authorized by the informants.



Figure 3: on the left hearing the opinions about the fencing, on the right reactions to the area's isolation.

The group assembled the audio-visual testimonials, with photographic records and written reports about the people's reactions to discuss on the seminar. Some emerging themes appearing in the speeches were categorized. The outstanding ones among respondents were: the fence's influence on the park connectivity to its surrounding neighbourhoods; the issue of unsafety in the park; the possible effects of fencing in their daily lives; as well as alternatives to physical enclosure that could address the current problems on the park.

Dealing with the 'new' landscape

When faced with the experience of a fenced scenario most interviewed park users felt uncomfortable. Overall, 16 respondents showed aversion to the fencing, while the three favourable to its installation agreed under certain conditions. The answers can be summarized on the following arguments: upon the intervention they felt that the park's fencing reduces their sense of freedom, that it breaks their natural relation with that heritage. The fence could lead to a gradual extinction of the diversity of people and of uses that makes the park a landmark. Some respondents understand that in the popular imagery there are no boundaries on Parque da Redenção, and thus the park should be free for its uses and for the surrounding neighbourhoods' mobility. Another issue if the fence were to be installed is its aesthetics. Some understood it as an obstacle that makes the landscape looks ugly. They suggest that the cost of installing the barrier would be better used if invested in public lighting, policing and other improvements.

Those favourable to the fence, agreed to the installation if the costs would be entirely public, with no private concessions, no admission fees or access restriction to certain groups, which could lead to segregation. Some people also told they did not have an opinion yet because the fencing lacks a detailed project showing where it would go through, how many gates it would have, which materials would be used and who would pay for its installation and upkeep. There was also a tourist from Rio de Janeiro who referred the well-kept fenced parks in her city, referring to its cleaning and security, but that she did not feel any danger that justified a fence around the Parque da Redenção.

The feeling in a landscape dominated by a physical barrier like a fence is also ambiguous. For some people, it is an element of protection that gives them a sense of safety. For others, its presence refers to a violent space, to the impossibility of moving freely, and to the suffocation of their contact with nature at green areas such as Parque da Redenção. The interviewees' statements also showed the intimate experiences that each person has with the place. When reporting about the fencing respondents started to give meaning, to evoke memories and to attach values to the park. The perceptions range from those topophilic, highlighting the pleasure to be there and how the park is part of their personal identities, to

those topophobics, reporting its security and safety concerns and the feeling of fear, especially at night.

Although safety and security were a frequent subject in the interviews, the fence did not appear to be a solution. Most respondents argue that the fence does not act at the problem's source, and so it is not enough to ensure security. The current violent events in the park are perceived as a lack of police personnel effect. The park constitutes itself on the interaction with its surroundings, the violence that exists inside the park is also in the city. Thus, respondents consider that the fence would only displace the violence elsewhere, perhaps to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Some even believe that fencing could worsen the problem, as it could lead to a decrease in the parks use, creating a sense of vulnerability. The boundary is also an element that confines users and criminals into the same territory, making it easier for organized plunders to happen there. Finally, respondents indicated that like other park's equipment the fence, after installed, could also be vandalized, leaving it pointless in its intention.

The improvement of lighting and the installation of surveillance cameras are suggested as some of the alternatives to physical barrier. The respondents did not feel the cameras to be as invasive to landscape as the fence is, since it does not affect the users' mobility and is less harming for the park's aesthetics.

Summary

The landscape alteration suggested by Parque da Redenção fencing proposal materializes a broader controversy. The park's condition as a cherished public space should be consider to understand the desire, or repeal, towards this new landscape element: the fence. As peripheral area which was gradually incorporated in the city's urban space the park became a historical reference, a tourist attraction, a host to different activities (fairs, markets, concerts, plays, etc.) and a place where the city reveals itself and its conflicts, which surely overpass the Redenção's limits. It is a landscape-imprint and a landscape-matrix (BERQUE, 1998). Through an ephemeral site intervention, *PAGUS* wanted to emphasize the role that a park, placed in dense and consolidated urban environment, plays in the city's landscape, as well as the issues that affect the population's relation with that ordinary and living heritage.

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