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► **To cite this version:**

Camila van Diest. Conflicting representations around Valparaiso's former prison.: Considerations on culture and politics. 7th conference of the Research Network Sociology of the Arts , Institute for Music Sociology - University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Sep 2012, Vienna, Austria. halshs-01476564

HAL Id: halshs-01476564

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01476564>

Submitted on 3 Mar 2017

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Conflicting representations around Valparaiso's former prison

Considerations on culture and politics

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Abstract

In 2007, the city of Valparaiso (Chile) received a “donation” from the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. It was a blueprint for a cultural centre, planned to be built on the grounds of an old prison. This project was never implemented and caused serious discussions in the Chilean public sphere. The conversion of this prison into the "Former prison cultural park” coincides with the last phase of government of the centre-left political coalition created to defeat Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1989).

This paper will focus on how the conflict set off by the Niemeyer project reveals an official representation for the country in which "cultural infrastructure" plays a crucial and symbolic role. This process starts as an implicit cultural policy, set forth by institutions without any relation to "explicitly" cultural issues. This project provides an analytical opportunity to gain insight into the articulations between cultural policies and the economic model that has been operating in Chile since the dictatorship¹.

¹ This paper was presented at the 7th conference of the Research Network of Sociology of the Arts (5-12 septembre 2012, Vienna).

Spanish Abstract

El año 2007, la ciudad de Valparaíso (Chile), recibe una donación del arquitecto brasileño Oscar Niemeyer. Se trataba del boceto de un centro cultural, previsto para ser construido en los terrenos de una antigua cárcel. Este proyecto, que finalmente no fue implementado, suscitó fuertes controversias en la esfera pública chilena. La transformación de este recinto en el “parque cultural ex cárcel” coincide con la última fase de los gobiernos de centro izquierda de la “Concertación de partidos por la democracia”, creada para hacer frente a la dictadura de Augusto Pinochet.

Este trabajo se enfocará en cómo el conflicto desencadenado por el proyecto Niemeyer moviliza una representación oficial de este país, en la cual la “infraestructura cultural” juega un importante rol simbólico. Este proceso se inicia como una política cultural implícita, aplicada por instituciones que no guardan relación formal con asuntos culturales. Consideraremos este proyecto como analizador de las articulaciones entre las políticas culturales y el modelo económico vigente en Chile desde la dictadura.

Keywords: cultural policy, Oscar Niemeyer, Valparaiso former prison, cultural infrastructure, representations.

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Considerations on culture and politics

Introduction

The project created for the city of Valparaiso by the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, who designed the city of Brasilia as well as monumental architectural works all around the world, offers valuable insight into the public debate and the tensions related to cultural issues in the Chilean context of the beginning of the 21st century. Even though the project failed to be implemented, it is part of a broader process that sheds light on some of the often overlooked aspects of the approach of culture by the governments of the centre-left coalition in power from 1990 to 2010, the *Concertación*: the transformation of Valparaiso's former prison into a cultural infrastructure, starting in the year 2000.

This paper will focus on three interrelated points. First of all, I will analyze how the case of the former prison, and more specifically the "Niemeyer incident", manifest a representation of the country set forth by the *Concertación* governments in which "cultural infrastructure" plays a key role. Secondly, I will examine the underlying ideological dimension in the promotion of this project, based on the "artistic quality" attributed to Niemeyer's work and the project's advertisement as part of a cultural branding process for the city of Valparaiso. This process takes place through an implicit cultural policy launched by institutions that are not explicitly related to cultural policymaking. In this perspective, the Niemeyer project fits into a web of "events" and "inaugurations" that make up a much broader urban branding policy.

My third point will present some interesting preliminary findings from the fieldwork I carried out in Chile between March and May 2012, for my doctoral dissertation in Sociology at the University of Paris 3. These findings are interesting inasmuch as they highlight challenging issues for my research. This fieldwork, and namely the difficulties it met, thus raise new questions for some of the most commonly used models in cultural analysis and the sociology of culture.

This paper is based on the analysis of press articles published between 2007 and 2010, of documents (letters and statements) produced by cultural players struggling to defend the infrastructure, and more generally on the fieldwork I have just finished.

A. Historical Context and Political Stakes of the Former Prison Cultural Park

Understanding the Context

This space begins to exist as a "cultural centre" as a new century starts and some major symbolic events are taking place for the centre-left governments of the *Concertación*, in power from 1990 to 2010. All of these elements are crucial for understanding this process. In 2000, Ricardo Lagos becomes President, after Eduardo Frei, and steps up the "consensus-oriented politics" (Drake & Jaksic, 1999, 16) based on agreements with major private corporations and the army. This policy is continued by the following administration, under Michelle Bachelet. Lagos as a political figure plays a particularly decisive role in this matter, since "one of his greatest endeavors was investing in infrastructure (...), which he presents in his speeches as one of his greatest achievements" (Fazio, 2006, 26).

The same year Lagos was elected President he created the Bicentenary Committee, in charge of preparing the celebrations of the bicentenary of Chile's independence in 2010. The Committee could also carry out smaller projects or high-profile and high-budget projects, framed as initiatives to "build the country we dream of for Chile's 200th birthday"². Among these bicentenary projects, some were labeled "Country projects", i.e. they were granted top priority. Among these, the most important cultural projects were the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Centre (*Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral – GAM*)³, the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (*Museo de la Memoria y Derechos Humanos*)⁴ and Valparaiso's Former Prison Cultural Park.

² Quoted from www.revistatac.com/?p=34 on February 20th, 2011. Emphasis added.

³ Cultural centre located in the centre of Santiago, created on the premises of the Diego Portales building which was destroyed by a fire in 2006 and had been inaugurated by Salvador Allende in 1972 as the headquarters for the Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

⁴ Inaugurated on January 11th, 2010.

Parallel to this, in 2003, after a series of debates and preliminary discussions led by the former government of President Eduardo Frei, Valparaiso is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage site and is nominated as Chile's "cultural capital", an unprecedented title. The same year, the Ministry of Culture (*Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes – CNCA*) is created, to consolidate the policies and discussions carried out by the previous democratic governments aiming at creating a cultural policy⁵. To match this series of symbolic investitures, it is to be located in the city of Valparaiso, in a building that used to be the main post office. The city is thus submerged in a prolific web of discourses on development, decentralization and cultural infrastructure, urban renewal projects and the true extent of citizens' participation. In this web, the institutional discourses explicitly concerning culture are repeatedly interwoven with other discourses, circulating on the fringes of its formal channels.

The Niemeyer Project and Valparaiso's Prison

To understand the stakes of cultural infrastructure in the period we are studying, as well as the political intricacies it is part of, it is necessary to briefly go into the details of the Niemeyer project and the controversy surrounding it. To do so, we must go back to the time when the jail of Valparaiso was no longer used as such and was converted into a cultural centre.

The prison belonged to the City until 1998, when the prisoners were evacuated and transported to a new correctional facility built outside the city. The building of the former prison was then sold by the City of Valparaiso to the state, represented by the Ministry of National Assets (*Bienes Nacionales*). Between 2000 and 2002, this Ministry worked on turning the former prison into a facility for cultural events and activities open to all citizens. Under this Ministry's management, the program was called "Prison [*Cárcel*], a hill for culture"⁶, and it mobilized artists, cultural groups and different grassroots organizations to

⁵ Cf. Vidal Valenzuela, Sebastian André. (2003). 'Políticas culturales de los gobiernos de la Concertación de partidos por la democracia en el campo de las Artes Visuales, 1990-2002'. Dissertation presented for the Bachelor in Arts in Art Theory and History. Santiago, Chile.

⁶ Translator's note : Valparaiso is a port sitting in a bay surrounded by many hills. One of these hills was named after the jail, *Cerro Cárcel*.

occupy and restore the prison's facilities which had been seriously damaged during the time they were deserted.

In these early years, government plans already intended to give this space a cultural use, though local factors gradually led to an occupation process which was constantly framed as temporary and not viewed as a clearly defined cultural policy.

After this brief initial phase, a great commotion among the occupants and grassroots organizations was caused in 2002 when the government unexpectedly decided to sell the land of the ex prison to a real estate developer, whose blueprints only included small spaces for cultural activities. The opponents to the “Cultural campus” project were successful in defending a cultural and artistic use for the premises, as a cultural park with self-managed activities⁷. They are also able to obtain a formal commitment that these facilities will, from now on, be used for “culture” and will not be used for other purposes like real estate projects. This controversy also led to many declarations of principles by institutional players, as well as profuse mentions of an idealized possibility of building a new cultural centre, even presented as “the biggest in Chile”(Emol, May 2nd, 2004), on the grounds.

In 2007, during the Iber American Mayors Meeting, the Democrat Christian mayor Aldo Cornejo presented the Niemeyer project. It was a blueprint for a cultural centre to be built on the grounds of the ex jail, a “gift” from the Brazilian architect to Valparaíso. The striking contrast between the project’s architectural style and the city's architectural characteristics, the lack of any consultation of local communities or discussions with the occupying organizations, as well as urban planning issues and the buildings being national heritage, were denounced from the start by all the actors and the grassroots organizations involved. By November 2008 the project had been cancelled.

It was only then that the former prison was officially included in the realm of institutional cultural policy and that the Ministry of Culture (CNCA) started having a role to play. In this context, in 2009 a national architectural call for projects is held to choose a

⁷ An article in the press explained: “A triumph for the 35 citizens’ organizations opposed to a project presented in 2002 by the developer Novaterra (...).It included leasing grounds for a private university, building facilities for stores and an exclusive condominium of 40 single-person units based on a Dutch style”. “Valparaíso: Dos mil metros cuadrados para la creación” *Emol*, May 2nd, 2004.

blueprint for a major cultural centre called "Valparaiso's cultural park". Presently, this project has been fully implemented and the cultural centre is open and running.

As a counterpart, it should be mentioned that in 2007 the Ministry of Culture (CNCA) created a program called "Cultural Centers", coordinated by its Office for Infrastructure and Management (*Unidad de Infraestructura y Gestión*). However, the case of the former prison was outside this program's scope of action and discussion for a long time.

The Foundational Spirit

To show how important infrastructures were at that time, in a critical perspective, it is important to highlight the "foundational spirit" they recurrently expressed. In his first-hand account of cultural policy under the Lagos government, the presidential advisor Agustín Squella wrote that "the progress made in terms of cultural institutions was truly foundational" (Squella, 2005, 133). Undoubtedly, this makes sense considering that the country's cultural machinery had to be recreated after the authoritarian fiasco. In the following phase, under President Michelle Bachelet, many of the official cultural policy's inaugural speeches focused on the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Centre (GAM), which was created in a symbolic building in the centre of Santiago. The director of the Centre thus stated: "it will be national not only because of the relevance of its contents, but also because it will head a network created throughout the country, which is something completely unprecedented in our 200 years of republican life" (Navarro, 2009, 38).

The centre that was supposed to be built on the grounds of the former prison, according to the Niemeyer project, was also mentioned in epic terms. In 2005, an article in the local press warned, on one of his greatest endeavors, the city of Brasilia, that "in 42 months, in a *desolated moor*, he built *the Brazilian dream* of the 21st century" . A few years later, in the midst of the controversy set off when the project was announced locally, the Regional Director of Architecture at the Ministry of Public Works defended the project, describing it as "a space to be *colonized*" (*El Mercurio de Valparaíso*, March 28th, 2008). The question here is whether the former prison could actually be reduced to such an empty space. Or beyond that, the question is whether the official representations of this desired space of effervescent creativity, founded *ex nihilo* on a desert land, may be a metaphor of the

“American dream”, of sudden individual success starting from scratch. It is particularly interesting to note that these mentions completely overlook the activities that have been taking place on the premises since the beginning of the decade, and the fact that its occupants were evicted at the beginning of 2008, when the project was launched⁸.

In this sense, it should be highlighted that the existing initiatives in the Park are framed as a *collective* achievement – including official governmental initiatives and other grassroots and self-managed initiatives -, whereas the rhetoric used to promote the Niemeyer project emphasized *individuality*, a single inspired figure, the classical image of creative genius. Furthermore, at this point the foundational rhetoric was even more powerful, since the eagerness to build a large scale project on these grounds had been put on hold for several years. Over these years, references to other “successful”⁹ cultural facilities built since the return to democracy were constantly made, which this park in Valparaiso would have to live up to.

B- The Niemeyer Brand: an Autonomous Artist

The Consecratory Work of Art

About thirty years ago, the philosopher and sociologist H. Lefebvre wondered “how could hegemony neglect space?” (Lefebvre, 1986, 18). It may seem strange to associate Niemeyer and his project with this statement, since he is a well known and self proclaimed communist, an old school anti-capitalist. Despite these declarations of principles, a brief – though piecemeal - overview of the quite paradoxical “world presence of the Niemeyer

⁸ Many articles in the press dealt with the events that took place in March 2008. For instance, one article stated that “It had been decided that to carry out the different activities that are planned for the facilities, and are related to this new project, it was necessary to empty the premises of its equipments and people” (El Mercurio de Valparaiso, March 22nd, 2008).

⁹ The other facilities used as references were mostly the Estación Mapocho, a cultural centre that has been functioning since 1994 in a historical building which used to be the capital’s main train station, and Matucana 100, which exists as a cultural centre since 2001. Located in the western area of Santiago, it was created in the former warehouses of the State Supplies Division (*Dirección de Abastecimiento del Estado* – DAE), which had been previously handed over to the actor Andrés Pérez and his company “Gran Circo Teatro”. They are both still open and functioning presently.

brand” (*El Mercurio de Valparaiso*, November 7th, 2008) is necessary here. In an interview published in France in 2007, the architect expressed some of the creative guidelines of his work: “I believe that an architect should do as he wants, and not what other people want him to do” (Niemeyer, 2007, 39)¹⁰, “the act of creation, according to me, cannot follow rules and completely relies on surprises and imagination” (Niemeyer, 2007, 44)¹¹.

The donation of this controversial blueprint to the port city was justified by his friendship with Neruda and Allende: all three won the International Lenin Peace Prize, awarded by the Soviet Union, which made them part of the common left-wing representations. More specifically, the Brazilian architect was closely linked to the developmentist ideas developed during the mid-20th century¹². This was certainly a figure who could bring credit to a coalition which, since its first years in government¹³, had diagnosed that the country “had a debt with culture” and proposed to create “incentives, regulations and control mechanisms to avoid abuses and decrease inequalities in the access to cultural creation and entertainment” (Foxley Rioseco, 1999, 35). The coalition also communicated regularly on its progress in laying the foundations for a national “cultural model”.

In this perspective, though the Niemeyer *brand* can be used to capitalize on, as a political *resource* (Yúdice, 2002), his discourse and his work also reveal the specific manifestations of artistic autonomy, of a work of art that is deemed pure and independent from any negotiations with the social sphere. In Bourdieuan terms, the project is grounded in a conception of autonomy that assumes a difference between shape and function, with the former being the basis for any aesthetic judgment. In this sense, in an article a journalist asks Jair Valera “Is Niemeyer’s architecture *shape and just shape?*”, to which the he

¹⁰ My translation from French.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² “Eternally skeptical people did not understand that Brasilia was going to drive the development of the “*hinterland*”, which we observed right away: roads, towns, schools, medical centers, were built, intercity bus lines were multiplied, unused land was put to work, etc.” Niemeyer, 1993, 87. My translation. Adrian Gorelik speaks of Brasilia as “a city which is quintessentially the product of a cultural representation of Latin American modernity”, Gorelik, Adrian.1, summer 2004. World Wide Web document, URL: www.bifurcaciones.cl/001/Gorelik.htm. ISSN 0718-1132.

¹³ Cf. in particular: “Chile está en deuda con la cultura”. Comisión asesora presidencial en Materia Artístico-culturales. Santiago, October 1997.

answers “No, it is technology connected to nature (...) We like to calculate Oscar's sensual shapes and turn them into buildings" (*La Nación*, December 16th, 2007).

On the other hand, this concern for style and autonomy seem to entail a *power of consecration* on behalf of the city itself, giving it an artistic stamp that would legitimize it:

Niemeyer is a famous architect, and his work would be magnificent and transcendent. Transcendent works have an extremely positive impact on cities undergoing renewal processes, it can make them internationally recognized (like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, for instance). Niemeyer's work will probably create added value around the ex jail.¹⁴

It is particularly interesting to note that this potential for “consecration” stems from a *belief*, which, as such, had to be created (Bourdieu, 2003)¹⁵. Since Niemeyer wasn't a very well known figure at the time in Chile – except for in academic circles or among professional architects – there were official tactics to communicate and symbolically promote his work as *consecrated art*, therefore containing a strong consecration potential for the places it intervenes in. Significantly, two retrospective exhibitions of the architect's work were held at the same time, at the Fine Arts Museum (*Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes* - MNBA) and at the Itaú Foundation. The former exhibit was called “The Poetry of Shapes”. Showcasing Niemeyer's work in the museum-institution directly attributes an artistic quality to all of his work and seeks to increase its local appraisal.

On the other hand, the question of how this fits into the main lines of the Chilean cultural policies of this period should be raised. The connections between this project and Chilean cultural policies are closer to echoes than to direct links, since, as it was mentioned previously, this project's promotion was performed outside the traditional channels of official cultural policy.

¹⁴ Quotation from <http://www.plataformaurbana.cl/archive/2007/10/08/el-proyecto-de-niemeyer-para-la-ex-carcel-de-valparaiso/>, February 20th, 2011.

¹⁵ Bourdieu is referring to a *consecration capital*, “which implies a power to consecrate objects (the brand or signature effect) or people (through publishing, exhibiting, etc.)”. Bourdieu, Pierre. *Creencia artística y bienes simbólicos. Elementos para una sociología de la cultura* (2003). Buenos Aires, Argentina : Aurelia Rivera, p. 156.

A first analysis reveals a common logic behind this project and the one promoted by the government organization in charge of financing arts and culture in Chile, the Fondart, which is under the supervisory authority of the Ministry of Culture (CNCA). This fund was created in 1992 by the Minister of Education at that moment, Ricardo Lagos. As revealed by a series of controversies on art and politics caused by projects funded by this organization, this body reacted by stressing the recently recovered freedom of expression and also by insisting on the “neutrality” and “technicality” of its proceedings. As it was pointed out at that time, one of the fundamental elements guaranteeing this neutrality was the projects’ assessment by “specialists”, based on criteria of “excellence”. (Palma, 1999)

The possibility of referring to a "Fondart ideology" could thus be set forth, a vision of cultural policy that "far from cultural interventionism, defends a logic of technicality, of neutral proceedings, to respect the “autonomous” aspects of art (the work of art, as an artifact, the sublimed freedom of the creator), which seems to be construed as a sphere standing outside everyday life (Carvajal & van Diest, 2009, 114)”¹⁶. This autonomous disposition seems to match Niemeyer’s own representation of his architecture, as it was mentioned above – a straightforward expression of his own taste and feelings – as well as the way it was locally advertised.

Furthermore, this raises the question of the different aesthetics of these realms – reality, imaginary –. Their comparison seems to suggest that there is an official and dominant conception of cultural spaces as aseptic, linked with a "rhetoric of *hyper* and *mega* emphases which is typical of the circulation of signs in the era of global capital" (Cárcamo-Huechante, 2007, 248), the complete opposite of the historical significance and the unavoidable idea of “ruins” characterizing places such as the old prison. But beyond this definition of diverging aesthetics, the system of power relations they entail must be explored. The Niemeyer project is rooted in a distinction based on cultural legitimacy:

Great art is not democratic or governed by consensuses. Take it or leave it. Valparaiso will be part of history if it gives Niemeyer absolute freedom. We would be one of the 21st century’s legends. On the other hand, if this project were to fail it would confirm the

¹⁶ The hidden side of this neutrality was that the Fondart became, because of its technical proceedings, a tool for artists' legitimacy, a kind of "quality label", wielding a power mechanism in and of itself.

historical curse condemning us to mediocrity, to the lack of culture and civilization (*El Mercurio de Valparaíso*, December 9th, 2007).

These words were spoken by a professor at the Universidad Federico Santa Maria regarding the gift from Niemeyer to the city, when the disputes about the project hadn't arisen yet. It shows how tightly interwoven the references to a consecrated artistic quality, to the autonomy of art with regard to politics and society, and to international projections are.

Global Positioning and Mega-Events

Up until now our analysis has focused mostly on “explicit” cultural policies. Nonetheless, we believe that at this point of our analysis this concept must be broadened.

As Jim Mc Guigan posits, there is a narrow definition of cultural policies that links them to the administration of “the arts”. In the previous section, this is the definition our analysis was based on. However, in a broader perspective, cultural policies are related to the politics of culture in a general sense: “*it is about the clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations in the production and the circulation of symbolic meanings. Such a perspective on cultural policy is inclusive, not exclusive...*” (Mc Guigan, 1996, 1)¹⁷. George Yúdice argues that cultural policies are a “privileged ground for hegemony” (Yúdice, 2002, 20) and could be considered in the perspective of *governmentality*, a concept developed by Michel Foucault to explain how the state stalks individuals, making cultural policy a means to normalize and exclude a range of alternative knowledge and practices. In this perspective, cultural policies include a performative discourse, capable of causing real effects that would contribute to strengthening a symbolic order, a hierarchy of values. The sociologist Howard Becker has already illustrated this position, by suggesting that the relationship between artistic production and the state is also governed by the idea of

¹⁷ Indeed, Mc Guigan points out the significance of « controversies » as an entry point for cultural analysis, based on the case of the Millennium Dome, in Great Britain : “Such topical analysis, then, aims to make sense of a particular case in its significant detail at a specific moment- in effect, representing a flashpoint that is quite possibly symptomatic of deep seated and longer-term processes of cultural and social change. In that sense, it is an exercise in critical-realist analysis” Mc Guigan, Jim. 2010. *Cultural Analysis*. London: Sage

art as a “resource”. Therefore, art gathers support from government organizations provided it expresses the “cultural development and the level of progress of a nation, just like a highway grid or a national airline” (Becker, 2006, 178). This performative function, clearly exposed in the quote, can be aimed at building an image that will be exported, or at performatively occupying a place. In a complementary way, Jeremy Ahearne suggests that the implementation of cultural policies should not be considered as the exclusive work of formally identified organizations, but rather that it can be the result of a “soft power” (Ahearne, 2009) thanks to players or institutions that are not formally expected to do so, with equally concrete results.

These interpretations shed light on two concrete situations at the beginning of this process. First of all, the trip the recently elected President Ricardo Lagos made to Brazil in 2000, to decorate three figures of Brazilian culture, is significant. One of these three figures was Oscar Niemeyer. During this trip, of course, the president also met with businessmen and professors from both countries. We can therefore suppose that the cultural policy that was planned from then on was directly related to the increase of the trade relations between both countries.

Secondly, another highly symbolic situation should be kept in mind: the Second Universal Forum of Cultures was held in 2007 in Monterrey, Mexico, under UNESCO sponsorship. The first version had been held three years before that in Barcelona, and triggered numerous discussions on globalization, multiculturalism and, as it was then regretted, “the identification of capitalism with reality” (Delgado, 2004, 18). As a matter of fact, the idea of this mega-event, from the beginning, was to position a city's *brand*, thanks to “public funding but managed as and in favor of private capital” (Delgado, 30). Culture was therefore the correlate of a macro political and economic event and used as a tool of institutional propaganda, as any reference to “cultural policy” was clearly absent as well as any relation with a cultural program.

In this context, and during the Monterrey Forum, political commitments were made which were crucial in regard of the local support later given to this event: “Valparaiso is a city that is destined to become an *international metropolis* thanks to the prestige of its universities and its cultural industry” (*El Mercurio de Valparaíso*, Dec. 9th, 2007), stated

the Governor of the state of Nuevo León (of which Monterrey is the capital) as the mayor of Valparaiso, Aldo Cornejo, committed to hosting the Forum's next edition in 2010. At this point, the Niemeyer project was present in political representations as the dreamt location, immaculate and ultra modern, to host this event.

Two significant events are thus closely intertwined here: the speeches celebrating the Bicentenary, on the one hand, and on the other hand the Forum of Cultures, both planned for 2010, the same year the centre was supposed to be inaugurated. This appeared clearly in the declarations made by the Executive Secretary of the Forum in Chile, for whom: “not only will it change the image of Valparaiso, but it will reassert the city’s commitment with UNESCO as part of the World Heritage program, and it will coincide with our country’s Bicentenary celebrations”¹⁸. This statement presents two superposed narratives: On the one hand, Niemeyer is the flourishing touch for a historical-temporal event that will make the country face its own representations as being developed, technological and capable of great infrastructural achievements. On the other hand, a spatial narrative presents this project as a setting for global ambitions, thus giving the complexity of transnational networks¹⁹ a spatial location- even if it’s just for a moment.

The importance given to this project, which goes beyond its actual presence on the public agenda, is therefore closely related to its "stage"-like quality: in short, it is validated by its capacity to *stage* global ambitions. Once the Niemeyer project had been abandoned and a new architectural blueprint was under way, mayor Aldo Cornejo thus stated: “this is a Bicentenary project and (...) it is now more important than it used to be, since it will be one of the obvious stages for the 2010 Forum of Cultures” (*El Mercurio de Valparaíso*, 12/12/2010).

This phenomenon raises the question of the complex interplay between transience and permanence in the field of political-cultural administration, in which "events" and "infrastructures" seemed at first sight to be at opposite poles. At the same time, it questions

¹⁸ Quote from the official website of the Forum in Chile, http://forum2010valparaiso.org/?page_id=614, March 20th 2011.

¹⁹ For a better understanding of the model of administration of the city of Valparaiso, and more specifically how it expresses the tensions between local and global stakes, cf.: González Carrasco, Félix Omar (2010). “Reconstrucción del espacio social-urbano: Dissertation for the Bachelors Degree in Sociology and the professional degree as a Sociologist. Viña del Mar, Chile.

the true weight that global stakes can have in the course of local cultural conflicts, which enter into negotiations with marketing or *urban branding* mechanisms deployed through a far-reaching machinery of power. In this deployment, mega-events operate as a tool for short-lived and uncertain economic stimuli and to position cities in a competitive international sphere (Richards and Wilson, 1994).

Conclusion

The Niemeyer case, which is only one episode in the bigger picture of a broader controversial process, set off a complex and intertwined set of discourses and events, in which historical memories, urban showcasing and the predominance of global processes and flows were combined into a series of representations which provide a glance into the representations of cultural policies in Chile under the *Concertación*. This research shows how the promotion of the Brazilian architect's project is recurrently made to fit within the boundaries of the recent cultural institutions in Chile, taking the shape of an implicit cultural policy.

Reciprocally, the limitless opening to globalization – as shown by the importance of the Universal Forum of Cultures, by the bombastic official references to the World Heritage label, the potential for consecration placed in Niemeyer regarding a series of symbolic cities spread over different continents – should be understood as a logical correlate of the neoliberal economic model. The *Concertación* government policies upheld the free market system established under the dictatorship, which was fully consolidated during this period. This once again highlights the ambiguity of discourses on citizens' participation and the strengthening of civil society in the context of what could be called, following Canclini, an "imagined globalization" (Canclini, in Cárcamo-Huechante, 2007, 22). Understanding how implicit cultural policies can be implemented through unusual channels, which don't seem to be formal "cultural policies" in and of themselves, appears as a relevant line of research. It allows for a critical approach of their content in national images, representations and principles, different than what is publically displayed.

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