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The Architecture of Expos and the Projection of Government Aspirations for the Host Cities: Brisbane ’88 and Lisbon ’98

Within the broader topic investigating the relationship between architecture and the institutions of power, expos offer a particular scenario for speculating about the use and role of architecture in projecting government aspirations for the host cities and their reputations internationally. This focus on expos is considered relevant in light of the current Expo 2015 in Milan, Italy. Taking into account the present as the initial stimulus, the paper explores two case studies: Expo ’88 in Brisbane, Australia, and Expo ’98 in Lisbon, Portugal. These examples have been selected to demonstrate the use of architecture to efficaciously project government aspirations. In addition, particular attention has been accorded to the legacy phase of these two expos. Although they are fundamentally different in their attitude towards legacy, it is considered important for two reasons. Firstly, the legacy is deemed as current evidence of the original government vision for the host city, and secondly as the most important factor in declaring the success or failure of such events. In the Lisbon case, the government’s aspiration regards the modernisation of the capital city to be comparable with the living standards of European metropolises. In addition, acknowledging Lisbon ’98 as an exemplar case in integrating the urban aspects of an expo and its legacy project, this paper identifies four urban criteria. These are considered guidelines for informing the legacy project, understood as the creation of an entire newly designed urban district that is able to function long after the six month period of the expo event. These criteria are then tested against the Brisbane case which is characterised by a different approach to legacy but able to achieve similar outcomes. In the Brisbane case the leisure-oriented atmosphere created during the expo, as an interpretation of the State government’s intention of promoting a livelier outdoor lifestyle for Queenslanders, has been perpetuated through the legacy plans proposed for South Bank Parklands. This leisure aspect has heavily influenced public opinion of post-expo development proposals.
Since their origin, expos have been highly characterised by a political dimension. National governments have used these events to “project and disseminate old and new hegemonic and ‘official’ ideologies to the ‘masses’.” Within the broader investigation of the relationship between power and architecture, expos offer a particular scenario for speculating about the use and the role of architecture in projecting government aspirations for the host city and its reputation internationally.

Upon these premises, this paper explores the role of the design of World Expositions as being a unique vehicle to represent and communicate government aspirations and ideological directions. At stake is not simply a discourse limited to individual buildings, but rather a reflection on the design of expos as a specific momentum within the process of the construction of cities. This broader perspective is adopted in light of the impact of expo events on host cities which outweighs the architectural scale in terms of mobilised funds, occupied lands and infrastructural changes. Expos “can be seen as laboratories or as privileged sites for the invention of special forms,” providing a “contribution to the engine of urban invention.”

In recent years, the material legacy of expos has been considered the most important factor in declaring the success or failure of such events. This trend reveals the urban nature of legacy projects as the real focus of expos. The significance of the legacy and its contribution to the urban texture of the host cities has acquired a growing importance, outdating the attention given to the ephemerality characterising expos prior to 1930. Acknowledging this specific attention to the role of legacy, this paper argues the relevance of four urban criteria informing expo master plans and their legacy. The intent behind these criteria is argued to concern the creation of entirely newly designed urban districts able to function long after the six month period of the expo events. These four criteria relate to architectural quality, a variety of functions, attractiveness for a wide range of users, and the articulation of transportation systems which assure accessibility on different scales.

The criteria have been drawn from the widely acclaimed Expo ’98 in Lisbon, Portugal. Lisbon ’98 has been chosen as the exemplar case because of its success in integrating the urban aspects of the expo and its legacy project, and in achieving the government’s aspiration in renewing the image of the nation in the European context. These criteria are further tested against Expo ’88 in Brisbane, Australia. The case of Brisbane has been selected for two reasons. Firstly, for its approach to the design of the legacy project, which is opposite, yet effectual, when compared to the Lisbon example. While in the case of Lisbon these have been simultaneously included in the definition of the project since the very beginning, in the Brisbane case the legacy design has been at the centre of a debate promoting various hypotheses and solutions which are currently still open to future transformations. Secondly, Brisbane is significant because of the government’s achievement in promoting a new lifestyle for the Queensland state implemented in the expo parks and in the legacy projects.
Legacy projects and government visions

From the 1851 London Exposition to the current Expo2015 in Milan, the passage from ephemeral to more permanent solutions has deeply marked expo events and influenced the relationship between governments and architecture. The systematic treatment of the story of expos is beyond the aims of this paper. However, a change in the type of legacy pursued shows an evolution in the use of expos as instruments of power. This change is observed through the importance that legacy projects have progressively acquired, from the proposition of iconic engineering structures, such as the Crystal Palace (1851) or the Tour Eiffel (1889), to more recent urban developments, which conversely do not limit their influence to a representative role, but instead allow the transformation of the host cities’ urban dimension. This shift marks the periodisation of expos into three distinct phases, the specifications for which may vary depending on the source. In this paper the time period specifications adopted will fit the classification established by Monclús and Roche.

The first period, labelled as ‘Historical’, groups the expositions from 1851 to 1930, held before the foundation of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE). Here, the focus of expo events was the display of technological and industrial development without a specific concern for legacy. Expos of the second period offered an occasion to promote urban developments designed around the theme of entertainment and leisure advocated as the symbols of a modern and appealing lifestyle. “What especially distinguished the century-of-progress expositions from the first generation of world’s fairs was growing emphasis placed on entertainment as central to the modernizing strategies of the exposition promoters.” This second period groups expos held between 1931 and 1988 with Brisbane ’88 representing the epitome of its ethos, with a leisure focused theme and the reinvention of the state lifestyle.

The third period, from 1989 onwards, has seen governments particularly interested in city-branding interventions able to promote the regeneration of conspicuous parts of a city and international visibility with the aim of attracting prestige and foreign investment. Similar to Brisbane ’88, Lisbon ’98 embraces the constituting ideology of this third period.

Resembling the significance of expos to be instruments of power for promoting a new image of the host cities and nations, the government aspirations for the two analysed cases are here presented. The theme of the Brisbane event was “Leisure in the Age of Technology.” The Queensland State Government adopted the theme of leisure to promote emphatically a livelier outdoor lifestyle for Queenslanders. This aspect, in accordance with a general leisure-oriented sentiment of expos belonging to the second period, represented in the State government’s eyes the marketable feature of Queensland. The architectural instruments adopted to promote such an image were the provision of a public space as a vital element of everyday life, and the facilitation of related activities. These activities portray a stereotypical Australian lifestyle based on outdoor living. Essentially the mission of this operation was to turn attention away from the rural dimension of Queensland to a more tourism-oriented destination with Brisbane cast as an aspiring cosmopolitan city. Therefore, the choice of locating the expo in the very heart of the cultural precinct on the south bank of the Brisbane River, facing Parliament House and the CBD, emphasises the government’s mission.
The theme for the Lisbon '98 event was “The Oceans, a Heritage for the Future”. Through the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Vasco de Gama's arrival in India, the Portuguese government aimed to promote a progressive image of Lisbon in the European panorama with the intent of attracting prestige, investment and population growth. The operation of city-branding characterising the Lisbon case aimed to create an ideal city for three specific objectives. Firstly, the image of the ideal city was promoted for Lisboners through an upgrading intervention involving a much larger area than the one contained in the expo boundaries. Secondly, it was promoted for Portugal as a whole through the improvement of infrastructure. Finally, it was offered to international investors through the image of a growing and progressive capital city. The architectural instrument adopted to convey the idea of a modern and vibrant European capital was the planning of a new city served by highly desirable facilities designed by internationally awarded architects and juxtaposed with the old city centre.

**Lisbon '98 and Nations' Park: the modernisation of the Portuguese capital city**

Expo '98 and its legacy have been instrumental in the aim to publicly promote the image of Lisbon as a progressive and modern city and to underpin the Portuguese government's aspirations of competitiveness in the European Union. The main goal of the Portuguese authorities was to redeem Lisbon and Portugal from a common perception which depicted the country as rural, conservative and retrograde. Such a stigma can be attributed to Antonio Salazar’s 40-year regime (1932-74) which slowed down the process of economic and industrial development in the post-World War II period common to many other European countries. The construction of a new centre for the capital city was intended to promote Lisbon as an ‘ideal city’ featuring an innovative urban design. Paraphrasing the “Parque Expo '98” official document, the project aspired to propose a “new design for living” and a “new urban concept” to make Lisbon favourably comparable with other European capitals. The Portuguese government had the objective of presenting the country as fully modernised and ready to be competitive in the European panorama considering the recent foundation and commercial consolidation of the European Union.

Having such an ambitious vision, the Portuguese government established Parque Expo '98, a private corporation with access to public funds. The duties of this corporation were quite onerous. In fact, together with planning, realising and dismantling the temporary part of the expo; the company had to manage sales, acquisitions and development of the surrounding ‘action zone’ (350 hectare) of the expo park. The aim of such a strategy was to assure the economic self-sufficiency of the operation. The expo park and its ‘action zone’ were, therefore, conceived as a single project. A clear plan for the mega-event as much as for its legacy was proposed; however, the completion of this very much articulated project was subdivided in distinct phases according to their priority and used as an instrument to propose ameliorations impacting on a city scale. Legacy-wise, Lisbon '98 has been largely acknowledged as one of the most paradigmatic cases where the capacity to catalyse a mega-event in a very successful urban regeneration has positively influenced the host city (Figure 1).
The concept of an ‘ideal city’ for the expo project aims to create a capital characterised by urban design strategies that foster innovative features founded on appealing ways of living. The architectural tactics which encompass the master plan of the ‘action zone’ and the expo precinct mirror the importance of the four urban criteria identified as leading guidelines in informing the expo master plan and its legacy.

From observing the structure of the ‘action zone’ master plan, it is notable that rather than proposing innovative approaches to the urban design configuration, the government strategy has been grounded in the deployment of simple, yet well articulated, urban planning rules. Therefore, the expo project tackles some specific issues of the city of Lisbon, while addressing the government’s aspiration for the nation to attain greater European visibility.

The choice of a run-down industrial area close to the mouth of the Tagus River was driven by the unique opportunity for urban regeneration, achieved through the reacquisition of five kilometres of riverside and the provision of new and advanced facilities to some of Lisbon’s underprivileged peripheral neighbourhoods. The involvement of prestigious figures within the international architectural scene, common practice in the history of expos, constitutes a further component with the dual objective of upgrading the selected area and renewing the image of Portugal. From this practice can be drawn the first urban criteria: the provision of architectural quality for the selected expo site.

Volumetrically, the master plan is organised by locating low-rise interventions close to the river front and high-rise buildings closer to the existing neighbourhoods. The functional distribution has been set to facilitate a mixed-use development. The facilities provided have a local and a citywide influence and are grouped in three types: housing, cultural and service-oriented, and commercial. The housing development, mainly destined for high-income residents, is located in the high-rise portion of the master plan assuring a river view and improving their marketability. The choice of favouring up-market properties could be read as one of the economic strategies for the entire operation to be self-sufficient.

The cultural facilities are mostly concentrated in the expo park boundaries. The main facilities
are the Oceanarium, the multi-purpose Utopia Pavilion, the landscaping of the five kilometre river bank and the Portuguese Pavilion (by the Portuguese Pritzker Laureate Álvaro Siza) which was originally destined to be the seat of government but is currently used as an exhibition space.\textsuperscript{13}

Services and commercial facilities have been divided into local and citywide functions. Local facilities include schools, supermarkets and shops. Citywide facilities comprise the largest shopping centre in the country, university facilities, a hospital, and the Lisbon Exhibition Centre.\textsuperscript{14} From this articulation of functions two other criteria have been identified: a variety of functions articulating a plurality of architectural forms and uses and attractiveness for a wide range of users.

The infrastructure most notably includes a 13 kilometre long bridge named after the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama and the Gare do Oriente transport hub (rail, subway, and bus lines), designed by Santiago Calatrava. While the design is a highlight, this infrastructure guarantees easy access to the Nations’ Park from the international airport, the region and the city. In facilitating the accessibility of the Nations’ Park, these two major pieces of infrastructure, together with a new grid of highways, have the long-term intent of improving the connections within the country and internationally. In the planning of the Nations’ Park and its ‘action zone’, the circulation system plays a strategic role in the definition of the spaces and their functions. The hierarchy of the road network facilitates the integration of the existing neighbourhoods with the new expo design, constituted by public spaces, the riverside promenade that culminates in an 84 hectare landscaped park, the Nations’ Park pavilions, and the roofed ceremonial piazza of the Portuguese Pavilion. From this highly hierarchised transportation system, the last criterion has been drawn: an articulated and functioning transportation system which assures accessibility to the site and facilitates circulation within the zone and its surroundings (Figure 2).

The government’s mission of designing a city for better-quality living has been achieved through the four previously listed urban-planning strategies, demonstrating the use and the
role of architecture in projecting the Portuguese government’s aspiration of an ideal capital city to the national public and to the international scene.

**Brisbane ’88 and South Bank Parklands: the promotion of the Queensland outdoor lifestyle**

This section focuses on South Bank Parklands, which is considered the design continuation of Expo ’88 and constitutes its legacy. South Bank Parklands implements two government aspirations: the promotion of an outdoor lifestyle for Queenslanders and an advancement of Brisbane as a tourism-oriented destination through an entirely new leisure district in the heart of the city. Through the design of South Bank Parklands, the legacy phase has been characterised by a series of projects designed and built after the expo event and over its dismantled site.

Similarities of intent between the expo, themed “Leisure in the Age of Technology”, and its legacy project were already expressed by the chairman of the Expo Authority. The local managing agent of Expo ’88 proposed the event “as an instrument in the cosmopolitanisation of Brisbane,”\(^{15}\) and predicted permanent changes in trading hours and in outdoor eating habits, and the elevation of landscape design in the future consideration of the city’s public spaces. The emergence of “the fashion for eating outdoors” which previously had been banned by licensing laws and health regulations (all lifted for the exposition),\(^{16}\) was, in fact, maintained as part of the expo legacy, and even adopted throughout all of Queensland. This legal shift demonstrates the willingness of the government to shape the lifestyle habits of the population.

One of the key aspects of the Brisbane expo and its legacy has been the creation of public spaces conceived as vital elements of everyday life. These spaces and their facilities include picnic and barbecue areas, cafes and restaurants with outdoor dining, and an artificial lagoon which has been progressively extended and modified. The origin of South Bank Parklands was already contained in the expo master plan. In fact, the expo provided an imaginary city with streets, cafes and outdoor public spaces, outweighing the pavilions in architectural quality and proportion (Figure 3).\(^{17}\)

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**Fig. 3** The artificial lagoon within South Bank Parklands. Wikimedia. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/33/Southbank_beach.jpg
Expo ‘88 was remembered more for the experience than for its presence within the urban environment. Due to the government’s propositions and the correlation with the Australian Bicentennial celebrations, it resulted in an event mostly experienced by Queenslanders. Consequently, the intention of the master plan of the Parklands was “to keep, for all time, some of the feeling of Expo for the people of Brisbane and to make some basic urban experiences like promenading a permanent part of the city’s life.”

It also provided an opportunity to transform an area containing a mixture of commercial, industrial and low income residential properties located next to the newly built Cultural Centre. Founded in 1989, South Bank Corporation initially aimed for the supervision of the redevelopment of the dismantled Expo Park. After the substantial completion of its master plan in 2013, it continues today to operate in the management of the precinct. It retains the responsibility of the management and the promotion of South Bank commercial assets, including tenancies and parking, and the completion of the initial master plan and the expansion of the area. Significant to demonstrating the tight relationship between power and architecture, the corporation is a state owned statutory body.

In the main, the expo site was planned to be dismantled at the end of the event. Only single elements such as the monorail, the 88 metre high sky-needle, the Expo Art Centre and John Simpson’s performance Piazza became the physical legacy of Expo ‘88, with only the latter remaining in its original location. The history of the various redevelopment projects for South Bank evidences the inner fragmentation of the site and its conscious detachment from its urban surroundings. These two aspects are here argued to be adopted in order to keep the Cultural Centre separated from “the collections of curiosities of popular zoos, menageries, circuses and commercial pleasure gardens.”

The three main proposals for the development of South Bank Parklands are here presented in order to demonstrate the driving leisure sentiment of the expo legacy. The first master plan proposal was developed by the local firm River City 2000 in 1988. Characterised by a high-density intervention, it was rejected by the local community, influenced by the ephemeral nature of Expo ‘88 and therefore hostile to an increase of construction density within the
expo site. The second proposal conceived by Media 5 Group in 1991, and partially built, promoted an idealised way of living. Everyday life experience was based on shopping in a beach towel and casual encounters with dolphins. The feasibility of those proposals clashed with realistic problems inherent to transportation and access and consequently with the profit prospect by retail developers and companies. Through the creation of Grey Street, a commercial boulevard functioning as a buffer between the public gardens of South Bank and the historic residential tissue, the current 1997-2007 Denton Corker Marshall plan attempts to solve the connectivity issues presented by the previous plan. The boulevard generates a continuing “gradual crescendo of structures” with functions deputed to leisure and shopping, including cafes and galleries. This effect was not limited to the boulevard itself but expanded into the surroundings. The recent creation of a covered arcade connecting Grey Street with the adjacent suburb of West End helped to overcome the barrier constituted by the Convention Centre and to liberate the boulevard’s civic dimension into the contiguous area.

Within the Parklands, the fragmented and episodic character of South Bank continues without threatening its popularity. New elements symbolic of an ephemeral theme-park such as the panoramic ‘Wheel of Brisbane’ have been well received. Conversely, permanent interventions such as the ABC Headquarters, designed by Richard Kirk, have been heavily criticised for using public space generated by Expo ’88 and otherwise destined to outdoor activities. The government’s vision for the expo has highly marked perception in regard to public opinion about the uses of South Bank. In this way, a permanent festive and ephemeral atmosphere has become the driving condition for the public’s acceptance of new development proposals. Thus, these latest developments demonstrate how the government’s vision promoted during the expo is still an influential element in shaping the architecture-scape of South Bank.

The lesson of the four criteria drawn from Lisbon is here tested against Brisbane, starting with the architectural quality of the expo buildings which reveals a discrepancy with the Lisbon case. In Lisbon the presence of world renowned architecture represented the intention to create an “ideal city”, in Brisbane an ephemeral landscape representing the image of a Queensland outdoor lifestyle is amplified by the contrast with the corporality of the award-winning Cultural Centre by Robin Gibson (1982), Queensland Conservatorium by BVN (1996) and the ABC Headquarters by Richard Kirk (2012). The architectural quality of Southbank Parklands is therefore provided by the blunt contrast between the image of an exotic forest against the severity of cultural and educational institutions.

In regard to the variety of functions articulating a plurality of architectural forms and attractiveness for a wide range of users, the Brisbane case includes outdoor leisure and sport facilities primarily dedicated to city users and located at the centre of the development. Other local functions include up-market housing, retail and food outlets, while citywide facilities include vocational and tertiary education, offices and cultural facilities. Similarities with the Lisbon case are evident. However, while in Lisbon these facilities have been provided as part of the legacy project and defined since the beginning of the operation, in
the case of Brisbane the facilities have been attracted to the area as a consequence of the urban polarisation generated by the expo event.

The transportation system followed a similar pattern to the previous criteria. Over the period of the expo, accessibility to the site was limited by city and regional bus and train services. A further integration of the site with its surrounding areas has been the subsequent development of Grey Street boulevard (which penetrates the site longitudinally) and the construction of an elevated bus line.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed, through the examples of Brisbane '88 and Lisbon '98, the role of the design of expos and their legacies in projecting government aspirations for the host city and its reputation internationally.

Brisbane '88 and Lisbon '98 have been selected as exemplars in demonstrating the role of architecture in promoting government visions, even though presenting a fundamental difference in the relationship between the two expo events and the design and construction of their legacy projects. In the Lisbon case these have been simultaneously designed and defined since the very beginning ensuring accessibility as much as integration between the parts. Conversely, in the Brisbane case the legacy design has been at the centre of a post-expo debate that still currently promotes various hypotheses and solutions open to future transformations. South Bank Parklands appears in its early stages disconnected from the adjacent suburbs and introverted in its plan. However, the opening of the Russell Arcade and the enlargement of the civic liveliness beyond the expo site boundaries are a symptom of an evolutionary attitude towards the seeking of a greater urban integration between the Parklands and the city.

In conclusion, the government’s mission in the Brisbane case regards the proposition of an outdoor lifestyle through the architectural provision of leisure-oriented functions linked to stereotypical images of the Australian outdoor living. By contrast, the government’s vision in the Lisbon case involves the creation of an ideal city which is practically built through the provision of diversified functions and infrastructures comparable to the standards of the modern life of European metropolises.
In the paper the term ‘expo’ will refer indistinctly to ‘International Expositions’, ‘World’s Fairs’, ‘Expositions Universelle’, etc.


5 In 1851 the first expo was held in London; in 1931 the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) became operative. The BIE represents the body in charge of organising and managing expos and assuring the quality of the event. “The BIE is the Intergovernmental Organization in charge of overseeing and regulating all international exhibitions that last more than three weeks and are of non-commercial nature”, “BIE Who we are,” Official site of the Bureau International des Expositions, www.bie-paris.org/site/en/bie/who-we-are (accessed January 29, 2015).


12 Parque Expo, SA, *Expo Urbe*.

13 Considering the government aspirations of projecting Lisbon as an ideal city, the choice of naming a pavilion Utopia is particularly significant because of the etymology of the Greek word which can equally refer to ou-topos, the place that does not exist anywhere, or to eu-topos, the place of happiness and perfection.

14 Expo ’98 did not allow the construction of country pavilions, the expositions of the singular countries were housed in four large structures which at the end of the event were re-used as the Lisbon Exhibition Centre.


17 In “The Brisbane Effect,” Janette Turner Hospital describes the core of the expo ground as a pavilion with no walls, constituting of an artificial pacific lagoon, in which artificial mists and rain keep alive real trees, ferns, orchids and living fauna within: “And I wonder if it would be possible anywhere else in the world for a tourist, in the very heart of a city of a million people, to lean against a giant fig and hear nothing but the movement of ferns and the calling of bellbirds.” Janette Turner Hospital, “The Brisbane Effect,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 11, 1988.

26 Lee Brien, “Celebration or Manufacturing Nostalgia?,” 84.