

From horizontal city to vertical city: rent of land as a perspective to understand changes in spatial forms in Vitória, Brazil

Da cidade horizontal à cidade vertical: renda da terra como perspectiva para compreender as mudanças nas formas espaciais em Vitória, Brasil

De la ciudad horizontal a la ciudad vertical: la renta de la tierra como perspectiva para comprender los cambios en las formas espaciales en Vitória, Brasil

De la ville horizontale à la ville verticale : les revenus fonciers comme perspective pour comprendre les évolutions des formes spatiales à Vitória, Brésil

Carlos Teixeira de Campos Junior 

Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo
Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil
ctcampos@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is Vitória (ES), which, in the 1940s, was still characterized as a horizontal city. However, the following decade saw an intensification of verticalization, initially concentrated in the central area and subsequently expanding into the coastal neighborhoods. During this time, land ownership was predominantly public, with transfers granted by the State upon payment of an annual fee. Government policies facilitated land occupation, including initiatives such as donating construction materials. A correlation can be observed between the transition from public to private land ownership and the methods of construction, which influenced the city's spatial organization: Vitória transitioned from a horizontal layout to a vertical one as buildings were increasingly designed for rent or sale. The underlying hypothesis is that the privatization and instrumentalization of land, shaped by how space was constructed—whether for personal use, rental, or sale—provide key theoretical insights into understanding the city's spatial transformation.

KEYWORDS: rent of land; real estate production; space configuration; Vitória; Brazil.

RESUMO

O objeto desta investigação é Vitória (ES), que nos anos 1940 ainda era uma cidade horizontal. No entanto, na década seguinte, intensifica-se o processo de verticalização, inicialmente na área central e depois estende-se aos bairros praianos. Nesse período a propriedade da terra era predominantemente pública e foi sendo transferida a quem a requeresse ao Estado mediante o pagamento de um foro anual. O poder público editava leis para facilitar a ocupação dessas terras, inclusive doando material de construção. Há uma relação entre a transferência da propriedade pública para privada da terra e entre a forma de construção das edificações com a configuração espacial da cidade: de horizontal, Vitória torna-se vertical quando as edificações se destinam ao aluguel e à venda. A suposição é de que a apropriação privada da terra e a sua instrumentalização, condicionada pela forma de construção do espaço para o consumo próprio, para o aluguel ou para venda, reúnem elementos teóricos para compreender a configuração espacial da cidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: renda dos terrenos para construção; produção imobiliária; configuração do espaço; Vitória; Brasil.

RESUMEN

El objeto de investigación del presente estudio es la ciudad de Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brasil, que en los años 1940 tenía como rasgo principal la producción horizontal del espacio. Sin embargo, en la década siguiente se intensificó el proceso de verticalización, que empieza en la zona central y luego se extiende hacia los barrios ubicados alrededor de las playas. Durante este período, la propiedad del suelo era predominantemente pública y transferida a quienes la solicitaban al Estado mediante el pago de una renta anual. El poder público promulgaba leyes que permitían la ocupación de las tierras y también les donaba materiales para construcción. Se nota una estrecha conexión entre la transferencia de la propiedad pública de la tierra para privada y la configuración espacial de la ciudad de Vitória, pues se disminuye la producción horizontal del espacio en favor de la forma vertical con departamentos destinados al alquiler o venta. La hipótesis es que la apropiación privada del suelo urbano y su instrumentalización, condicionada por la forma en que se construye el espacio para consumo propio, para alquiler o para venta, reúne elementos teóricos para comprender la configuración espacial de la ciudad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: renta del suelo urbano; producción inmobiliaria; configuración del espacio; Vitória; Brasil.

RÉSUMÉ

L'objet de cette enquête est Vitória (ES), qui, dans les années 1940, était encore une ville horizontale. Cependant, au cours de la décennie suivante, le processus de verticalisation s'est intensifié, d'abord dans la zone centrale, puis s'est étendu aux quartiers balnéaires. Durant cette période, la propriété foncière était majoritairement publique et était transférée à celui qui en faisait la demande à l'État moyennant le paiement d'une redevance annuelle. Les pouvoirs publics ont promulgué des lois pour faciliter l'occupation de ces terres, notamment en faisant don de matériaux de construction. Il existe une relation entre le transfert de la propriété publique à la propriété privée du sol et entre la manière dont les bâtiments sont construits et la configuration spatiale de la ville : d'horizontale, Vitória devient verticale lorsque les bâtiments sont destinés à la location et à la vente. L'hypothèse est que l'appropriation privée du foncier et son instrumentalisation, conditionnées par la manière dont l'espace est construit pour la consommation personnelle, la location ou la vente, rassemblent des éléments théoriques pour comprendre la configuration spatiale de la ville.

MOTS-CLÉS : revenus provenant de terrains à bâtir ; production immobilière ; configuration de l'espace ; Vitória ; Brésil.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to demonstrate that the material production of space by the construction industry is predominantly achieved through the instrumentalization of land ownership, which is intrinsically linked to changes in the spatial forms of cities.

Industrial control over the production of space aligns with urbanization processes, which, in turn, depend on the broader productive structure concretely manifested in the area under study. Understanding the role of the city within the context of the productive structure in which it operates is essential, as material conditions are required for the establishment of this structure in the territory—production cannot occur in a vacuum (HARVEY, 2018) The general conditions of production, as Harvey suggests, create “new geographies” within the territory. The physical materiality necessary for production and the reproduction of labor, as forms of urbanization, facilitate the expansion of the construction industry in its role of producing market-driven spaces.

Lefebvre (1969) addresses this duality when discussing the interrelation of industrialization and urbanization, asserting that urbanization is both a consequence of industrialization and a stage in its development.

Urbanization is generally presented as a mere consequence of industrialization, a dominant phenomenon; the city and the agglomeration (megapolis) are thus incorporated into the analysis of the industrialization process, and space into the space of the general order. The inversion lies in considering industrialization as a stage of urbanization, as a moment, an intermediary, an instrument. In the dual process (industrialization-urbanization), the second term tends to dominate after a period during which the first drove it forward (LEFEBVRE, 1969, p. 21).

Urbanization, once induced, becomes inductive, driven by the new material realities created by industrialization. The inductive nature of urbanization signifies its autonomy, leading capital to transition from merely producing within space (goods manufactured by industry) to actively producing space itself (via civil construction). In this context, Lefebvre (2016) emphasizes the centrality of real estate, which shifts from a peripheral sector to a core one, as it dominates space by instrumentalizing land ownership.

Then, how does the construction industry use these historical conditions to sustain and transform itself, reshaping the city? The answer lies in the interplay between urbanization and the modes of construction production.

Since urbanization is historically contingent, each city is shaped by its unique circumstances, requiring an investigation into the regional particularities that

influence the development of civil construction and the transformation of urban space.

For this article, the focus is on Vitória, the capital of Espírito Santo. The first section explores its origins as a coffee-driven city, where urbanization was tied to the mercantile-commercial nature of the coffee economy, which imposed constraints on the development of civil construction, resulting in the city's horizontal expansion. The second section examines Vitória as an industrial metropolis, analyzing the conditions that enabled the real estate sector to evolve, claim space, and drive the city's verticalization.

COFFEE CITY

Until the 1940s, Vitória was a horizontally developed city with a population of only 42,246.¹ Its economy revolved around coffee trade activities and the state bureaucracy. However, as the hub of commercial capital (OLIVEIRA, n.d.) for small-scale coffee production, which was transported through the capital's port for export, Vitória faced limits to its accumulation processes driven by commerce.

Production remained modest, as only part of the state's coffee output flowed through Vitória. Coffee from the southern region of Espírito Santo was exported via the port of Rio de Janeiro. Efforts to centralize the state's coffee trade in Vitória—also including portions of coffee from neighboring Minas Gerais—were part of an old project dating back to the late 19th century but only partially materialized in the late 1940s (CAMPOS JUNIOR, 1996).

At that time, most of the state's revenue came from coffee, which accounted for up to 97% of Espírito Santo's exports, alongside the burgeoning iron ore trade that began in the same decade. Coffee exported through Vitória represented 40% of the state's total production. Despite its importance to the state's revenue, Espírito Santo's coffee exports never exceeded 5% of the national total, whereas São Paulo consistently accounted for around 56% of this volume (ROCHA and COSSETTI, 1983).

The port and railway infrastructure that supported Vitória's commercial function within the regional context began construction in the early 20th century. However, due to frequent interruptions, the first port warehouses were not inaugurated until the mid-1930s, and the railway branch only reached

¹ Source: FJSN. PDU de Vitória, 1979.

Vitória in the 1940s. During this period, the city was characterized by abundant natural landscapes and limited built environments (SIQUEIRA, 1980).

Private attempts to incorporate Vitória into broader markets were unsuccessful. One notable example was the failed subdivision of the Balneário Camburi in 1928. Similarly, efforts by the electric power and tramway companies to increase profits without integrating the land market also floundered. These developments underscore that space was not being produced for the market in Vitória.

The Balneário Camburi project was an initiative by merchant Ostílio Ximenes to develop a residential subdivision in the northern part of Vitória, near Camburi Beach, aiming to create a vacation neighborhood for the city's residents. To promote the venture, Ximenes hired the respected lawyer and journalist Thiers Veloso and launched a small newspaper to advertise the project. The outcome: the real estate venture failed, but the newspaper evolved into the state's largest circulating daily, a position it still holds today.²

While the partnership between Cia City and Light (the energy concessionaire) in São Paulo resulted in the development of numerous real estate ventures—where profits were generated both from lot sales and from energy consumption in the neighborhoods these companies constructed—the energy concessionaire in Vitória, CCBFE, a subsidiary of General Electric, did not engage in the real estate sector. Surprisingly, CCBFE in Vitória sought to increase profits by hosting costume balls and sports tournaments in the beach area, promoting tram usage to boost energy consumption.³

These contrasting experiences highlight that a real estate market had not yet taken shape in Vitória during this period and that attempts to stimulate its formation were largely unsuccessful.

In contrast, Vitória saw a significant role played by the state in promoting access to housing. At least three state-led initiatives to construct housing for public employees were identified. During Jerônimo Monteiro's administration (1908–1912), houses were built for civil servants near the newly inaugurated Parque Moscoso, on Henrique Coutinho Street. Similarly, under Florentino Avidos' government (1924–1928), homes were constructed on Gama Rosa Street, in the city center, and in the Jucutuquara neighborhood, located slightly farther from the urban core (CAMPOS JUNIOR, 1996).

2 Overview of the Newspaper *A Gazeta*. Research Editorial September 11, 1974.

3 According to Escelsa (Electricity concessionaire in the state) in *História da Energia Elétrica no Espírito Santo*. Gabriel Augusto de Mello Bittencourt et al. Iberia, s/d.

In Vitória, state-owned lands were available to anyone who requested them, subject to the payment of an annual land tax and the condition that the applicant build on the land within two years. Civil servants enjoyed additional benefits, including a 50% discount on the land tax, deducted directly from their payroll, and free access to⁴ stones from the state quarry in Vitória for constructing their homes.

Housing Construction

Housing construction during this period was primarily commissioned for the use of the contracting parties. There was no practice of building homes for sale, and it was rare to construct properties for rent, as no real estate market existed at the time. Builders of that era asserted that anyone attempting otherwise was destined for failure.⁵

So, where did the profit for builders come from?

The commissioned construction process involved the contractor, the builder, the workers, and the landowner—in this case, the state—which transferred public land at minimal cost to the contractor for personal use. Contractors would then commission the construction of their homes.

No profit was derived from land transactions, as the state made abundant land available to applicants. Depending on the financial resources of the contractors, homes were built to be more or less luxurious.

In Vitória, unlike São Paulo⁶, there were relatively few notable immigrant-descended builders. Among those who stood out were a few descendants of Italians and Portuguese, such as Camilo Gianordoli, Vitorino Teixeira, Bruno and Antônio Becacici, and André Carloni—the latter specializing primarily in public works. Each builder had a trained team, honed over years of apprenticeship on construction sites under the guidance of a master. These were artisan works, with constructions featuring elaborate details such as ornate roofs, eaves, interior murals, frames, glass, chandeliers, walls, and gates. Social distinction was not determined by location but rather by the opulence of the homes.

4 State Government Decree No. 43, March 10, 1910, Chapter VIII, Articles 148 to 159, and State Law No. 1053, December 17, 1915, which regulated the state's land service, Articles 55 and 56.

5 Interviews conducted with builders active in Vitória during the 1940s and 1950s (CAMPOS JUNIOR, 2002).

6 On immigrant labor in construction, see Pereira (2004), which examines the construction of São Paulo between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Since construction was commissioned, those commissioning the homes could define every aspect of the design, within the limits of their financial capacity. The absolute nature of property ownership enabled this dynamic. Consequently, a degree of heterogeneity emerged in the style of homes, reflecting the preferences of individual clients. This heterogeneity, in turn, manifested in the urban fabric. The pursuit of luxury, which demanded finer details and superior ornamentation, allowed builders and their workers to establish more advantageous compensation parameters. Pereira (2004) observed that construction workers in São Paulo in the early 20th century were better paid than those in the manufacturing industry.

The extended apprenticeship period fostered a sense of differentiation among these workers, many of whom were immigrants. This encouraged efforts to safeguard their trade, allowing them to secure favorable construction contracts, which temporarily translated into improved working conditions.

The builder's profit in this model came from labor-based gains. Since homes were built for personal use, they were typically horizontal and exhibited individual variation, leaving a distinct imprint on the city's form.

INDUSTRIAL METROPOLIS

Vitória's Centrality

The economic transformations in Espírito Santo in the late 1940s and early 1950s created a new reality, driving changes in urban development.

In the early 20th century, Italian-descended migrants from the central region of the state reached Colatina. With the railway extension of the Vitória-Minas Railroad to this municipality in 1906 and the construction of the Florentino Avidos Bridge over the Doce River in 1928, Colatina became the gateway to a vast region previously excluded from mercantile production. Initially, timber, and later coffee, flowed through Colatina for export via Vitória's port. This regional centralization made Colatina the 13th-largest coffee-producing municipality in Brazil by the 1950s. These developments reverberated in Vitória, through which these goods were exported (CAMPOS JUNIOR, 2004; PETRONE, 1962).

In addition to coffee production from northern Espírito Santo, an increasing share of the state's southern coffee was traded and exported through Vitória. The establishment of a coffee exchange in Vitória in the early 1930s and the local exporters' adoption of pricing comparable to Rio de Janeiro's coffee market solidified Vitória's position as the central hub for this commodity in the state.

The 1940s were further marked by the establishment of the headquarters of the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (now Vale) in Vitória. In 1945, the company inaugurated the Eumenes Guimarães Pier in Vila Velha, a neighboring municipality, for iron ore exports.

Urban improvements initiated during Florentino Avidos' administration (1924–1928) and further advanced by Jones dos Santos Neves' government (1951–1954) laid the groundwork for broader production and labor reproduction in the capital. These changes also provided the conditions for a transformed construction industry to compete for space by creating new products for the market.

Real estate production for rent

The competition for space in Vitória began with the construction of buildings specifically intended for rent. Around 1950, four buildings were commissioned in the central area of the city for rental purposes. By the same decade, buildings with units for sale began to appear on the market. However, the most significant changes emerged in the coastal areas starting in the second half of the 1970s. However, the most significant changes emerged in the coastal areas starting in the second half of the 1970s⁷.

How can we understand these changes in the city's spatial configuration?

The socio-economic context was shaped by coffee trade activities, Vale installations, and initiatives by the government and a few manufacturing companies in neighboring municipalities. These activities required basic operating conditions—defined as the “general conditions of production”—and created favorable circumstances for the development of the construction industry. However, the industry itself needed to transform to take advantage of this new context.

This transformation resulted from housing, produced by the construction industry, becoming a business expressed through rental income. The first verticalized buildings for rent were commissioned by clients seeking to preserve and increase the value of their assets. Without a developed financial market that could serve as an investment alternative, real estate emerged as a promising option for those with some wealth. As one commentator noted: “Real estate became a sanctuary capable of housing savings”.⁸

⁷ On commissioned constructions for rental purposes (CAMPOS JUNIOR, 2002).

⁸ The lecture by Professor Gabriel Bolaffi is recorded in my notes.

Choosing to allocate their surplus funds to real estate, several merchants in Vitória invested in rental properties. Land availability was not an issue, as the four clients who built these rental properties already owned the land.

What changed in the form of construction and the gains for those involved in the production process?

The product itself transformed: instead of serving the personal needs of families commissioning construction, the buildings were designed to generate income. Consequently, multiple housing units were produced to yield multiple revenue streams, intensively utilizing land and shifting construction towards verticality. This shift was facilitated by the legal framework of condominium property, which had been in place since the 1920s, effectively nullifying the absolute nature of land ownership.

In addition to the vertical form, the product underwent simplification, adopting a new aesthetic. Decorative details and ornate craftsmanship were abandoned because profits were no longer derived solely from construction labor but primarily from the land's rental value.

The artisan builder and master craftsman disappeared, as simplified and rectilinear designs no longer required their specialized skills. Workers became de-skilled, as the new tasks did not demand the years of training once provided on construction sites. This shift increased labor turnover in the market, which was already emerging by this period.

The builder's role was taken over by engineers and their firms. Technical responsibility for construction could no longer be assumed by traditional builders and was instead assigned to engineers. Between the workers and the engineers, the role of the construction foreman emerged to mediate.

The engineers' remuneration was derived from an "administrative fee." Once the cost of materials and labor was budgeted, a percentage—around 15% at the time—was agreed upon. Workers received industry-standard wages, while profits from the business went to the client through rental income, which can be understood in light of Marx's observation:

It is not possible to reduce rent, which represents interest and capital amortization for construction, to the income corresponding solely to the land, especially when the landowner and the speculator in construction are distinct individuals, as in England (MARX, n.d., p. 888).

Here, Marx illustrates that rent encompasses not just the interest and amortization of the capital invested in construction but also the land rent, derived not only from the soil but also from the space. He elaborates:

[...] The growth of population, the resulting increased demand for housing, and the development of fixed capital—which is incorporated into or laid upon the land, such as industrial buildings, railways, warehouses, factories, docks, etc.—necessarily elevate land rent related to construction (MARX, n.d., p. 888).

Based on these references, it can be concluded that the form of real estate production is driven by the pursuit of maximum revenue. This explains the shift to vertical construction, which intensifies land use to accommodate as many rentable units as possible on a single plot. Simplified, rectilinear designs further reduce production costs, thereby increasing the land rent component within the total rental value.

As rent is defined by tenants' capability to pay and that real estate possesses a monopoly price—socially accepted and historically determined within a specific socio-economic context—the lower the production cost, the greater the share of rent appropriated by the client. This situation was evident in the buildings commissioned for rent in Vitória during the early 1950s.

Consolidation of vertical space production

By the late 1950s, Espírito Santo underwent significant changes to its productive structure. The collapse of international coffee prices dealt a severe blow to the state, which relied almost exclusively on this commodity for revenue.

Simultaneously, the Brazilian federal government created conditions for capital from major urban centers to expand into all regions of the national territory. The so-called “conservative modernization” reached Espírito Santo's rural areas at a particularly unfavorable time, offering no benefits to small agricultural producers who could not compete under the new standards of modernization and market integration.

Federal policies for coffee eradication, the establishment of the National Rural Credit System to facilitate mechanization and agricultural inputs, and initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s to strengthen livestock farming and reforestation further consolidate land ownership and displace rural workers. These policies contributed to migration toward regional centers, particularly the state capital and neighboring municipalities, fostering peripheral urbanization around the developing metropolitan area.

Amid economic crisis, state leadership sought solutions through industrialization. Initially, they secured federal and state incentives to retain local savings and encourage investment in industrial activities. Later, the attraction of large-scale projects—backed by the federal government and foreign

capital under the guidelines of the Second National Development Plan—spurred industrial investment.

By the 1980s, industry had become a key component of Espírito Santo's economic restructuring, marking a significant departure from its prior agricultural dependency. Vitória's spatial dynamics evolved in response to economic changes. The city, once centered around commercial capital, emerged as an industrial production hub.

The central area, shaped by coffee trade dynamics, extended towards the coastal region, driven by industrialization and real estate production. The new wage patterns established by large industries circulated significant amounts of capital, stimulating economic activity and reshaping urban development. Concurrently, credit policies—particularly through the National Housing Bank—supported the construction industry's expansion.

What changes in the spatial configuration of the beach areas, and what explains the shift of real estate development from the city center to the beachfront?

In Praia do Canto, a coastal neighborhood, single-family homes were almost entirely replaced by apartment buildings within a decade.

Originally part of Saturnino de Brito's 1896 Novo Arrabalde expansion plan, Praia do Canto was gradually occupied in the 1930s. The state's extraordinary economic growth, which had initially inspired the project, dwindled to the point where the state government requested a moratorium on its debts in 1900 (CAMPOS JUNIOR, 1996).

The challenges faced in the following decades prompted the state government to allocate these state-owned lands to individuals requesting them for housing purposes. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1940 cadastral map of the State Heritage Service⁹. Once public lands were transferred to private ownership, the Praia do Canto neighborhood became home to single-family residences, which remained until the mid-1970s, when they were replaced by multi-story buildings (CAMPOS JUNIOR, 1996).

The transformation of housing into a revenue-generating asset in Vitória began gradually, with rental housing as the initial socially accepted product, later followed by housing for sale. Originally conceived as shelter, housing was redefined as a vehicle for capital appreciation, enabled by urban growth, rising purchasing power, credit policies, and institutional mechanisms that instrumentalized land ownership to reproduce capital through the production of space.

⁹ See a copy of this map in Campos Junior (1996, p. 213).

The moment housing becomes a vehicle for capital reproduction, it is re-configured to fulfill this purpose. Like any commodity, housing is a product of labor and thus subject to the process of value creation. However, in the construction of housing, land emerges as a fundamental element—simultaneously a condition, a medium, and a product of production—whose price surpasses the cost of construction. According to Oliveira (1979), the price of land is not a mere *faux frais* accepted by speculators but rather capitalized rent. Consequently, like all commodities sold above their production cost and intrinsic value, housing is transacted at a monopoly price.

We define monopoly price as one determined solely by the buyer's willingness and capacity to pay, independent of general production costs or the product's intrinsic value. A vineyard yielding exceptional quality wine in limited quantities exemplifies this: the surplus of its price over its value stems purely from the wealth and refined preferences of discerning consumers. This surplus transforms into substantial supplementary profit for the vintner, which, as monopoly rent, accrues to the landowner under their claim over this uniquely endowed piece of the earth (MARX, n.d., p. 890).

What other elements are necessary to understand the pricing and form of housing?

To comprehend the pricing and form of housing, it is crucial to recognize that the cost of production combines with the price of land to determine the overall price of housing. The price of land reflects its capitalization—a capitalization of rent derived from real productive activity. This price is speculative in nature, at times grounded in the value of commodities produced using the land and at other times dictated by the rent required to utilize it. Since construction land rents are based on a dual monopoly—exploitation and spatial control—the¹⁰ instrumentalization of land ownership by the construction industry transforms both housing and the urban landscape. In Vitória, this process of instrumentalization replaced absolute property with condominium property, enabling the transition from single-family homes to multi-unit buildings.

The diversity in housing forms, once shaped by the individual desires of each contractor, was supplanted by the standardized designs of modern buildings, altering the city's spatial configuration. Distinction in real estate products became a tool to elevate monopoly prices, and early buildings in Vitória displayed greater uniformity. Their differentiation stemmed from their location, with urbanization converting select areas into exclusive spaces. This dynamic explains why the first buildings in Vitória were concentra-

¹⁰ Regarding the dual monopoly of land rent, refer to Chapter XLVI of *Volume III of Capital* by Marx.

ted around Parque Moscoso, the city's largest and most pleasant urbanized area. The same rationale underpins the shift in spatial production during the 1970s toward beach areas, where houses were replaced by high-rises. The beach regions offered unique amenities, such as proximity to the sea, swimmable waters, and a natural environment. Combined with the area's residential planning, these features set it apart from others, enabling higher monopoly prices. In the limited beachfront plots, which markets and society viewed as symbols of distinction, exorbitant housing prices were primarily driven by the cost of land. To justify such costs, developers introduced new elements of differentiation in their projects. In this context, land rents shaped the monopoly prices of housing. These transformations were facilitated by credit programs from the National Housing Bank and the higher purchasing power of residents, supported by large corporations operating in Greater Vitória. ●

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