Neoliberalism and the emptying of the State in public transportation in Araraquara, state of São Paulo, Brazil

Neoliberalismo e o esvaziamento do Estado no transporte público de Araraquara–SP

Tatiane Borchers [I]
Victor Garcia Figueirôa-Ferreira [II]

Abstract

The present article seeks to investigate, based on studies carried out in the city of Araraquara, state of São Paulo, Brazil, the relationship between public transportation systems and urban development, analyzing the role of the State and of neoliberal policies in this context. To this end, a bibliographic review about Araraquara was performed, aiming to characterize and delineate the historical evolution of its public transportation systems. The analyses were supported by Geographic Information System (GIS) tools. It can be stated that there is a deep connection between public transportation systems and urban development, and that the government plays the role of an instrument in a neoliberal process of real estate speculation that affects the urban environment negatively.

Keywords: urban sprawl; neoliberalism; privatization; public transportation; neoliberal urbanism.

Resumo

O presente artigo procura investigar, a partir de levantamentos realizados no município de Araraquara – SP, a relação entre sistemas de transporte público e o desenvolvimento urbano, assim como também analisar o papel do Estado e da política neoliberal nesse contexto. Para isto, foi realizado um extenso levantamento bibliográfico sobre Araraquara, buscando caracterizar e delinear a evolução histórica dos sistemas de transporte público. Essas análises foram realizadas com o apoio de ferramentas de Sistemas de Informação Geográfica (SIG). Pode-se afirmar que existe uma profunda conexão entre os sistemas de transporte público e o desenvolvimento urbano, bem como o papel do poder público como um instrumento de um processo neoliberal de especulação imobiliária que impacta o ambiente urbano de forma negativa.

Palavras-chave*: espraiamento urbano; neoliberalismo; privatização; transporte público; urbanismo neoliberal.*

Introduction

From the 1970s, there was an intense process of territorial reorganization in Brazil, in which medium-sized cities became more dynamic. The process known as concentrated deconcentration, in addition to a rapid urbanization, caused a deepening of the market logic in the management and planning of urban space (Santos, 2018). This logic is underpinned by the production and exploitation of this space for the production of capital. In essence, the production of the city operates for speculative purposes and on a large scale, since the "main profit comes from raising the ground-rent, from careful selection and skilled utilization of the building terrain" (Marx, 2014, p. 325). The State and its legislative apparatus play a key role in this context, since they are responsible for the control – at the local level – of public investments, regulation and control over land use and occupation (Maricato, 2015).

It is no coincidence that one of the central aspects of neoliberalism is the emptying of the State, which occurs through ideological and political-economic instruments and results in the reduction of the governing capacity. It is justified by an alleged inability of governments to meet the needs and desires of the governed, and it is then proposed to reduce the governmental function of the State. The term governance, used in this context, emerges to crystalize the reduction of the capacities and incumbencies of the State to that of a simple manager or regulator (Grossi and Pianezzi, 2017; Kooiman, 2008; Marinetto, 2003; Rhodes, 1997 and 2007).

To better understand the emptying of the State, the historical process involved, as well as its ramifications of profound impact on the urban environment, this study makes a historical reconstruction of public transportation in Araraquara – SP. This city was chosen because the public power, through the Companhia Troleibus Araraquara known as CTA (Araraquara Trollybus Company), had the monopoly of mobility through the trolleybus system (electric buses), which was considered a reference at national level and had high approval among the population. In this specific case, private enterprise could not operate the system, both because of the lack of control over the necessary infrastructure, and because of the inexistence of similar vehicles in their fleets. A neoliberal process of urban management dismantled the public operation, with the scrapping of the trolleybus company and the change of energy matrix for diesel vehicles, allowing the private initiative to insert itself in the dynamics of urban mobility. There is, in this process, a unique entanglement of the evolution of transportation systems, the change of the energy matrix and the cycle of real estate speculation in the city, culminating in the privatization of public transportation services after 57 years of the CTA's creation.

The methodology of this article is composed of an exploratory research on the evolution of public transportation systems in Araraquara – SP, aiming to identify neoliberal strategies in such process. Maps of the city, which allow the visualization of the historical process of the territory development, were used in the data presentation (QGIS..., 2021). The data survey occurred in 5 stages that compose

the structure of the article: 1) bibliographical survey about neoliberal urbanism with a focus on the transportation sector; 2) characterization of Araraquara as the study object, mainly regarding the city's urban evolution; 3) history of the evolution of the city's public transport system; 4) analysis of the relations between urban development processes and changes in transportation; and 5) analysis of the emptying of the State as a neoliberal policy to enable the privatization of the public transport system. At the end, some considerations are made about the points presented and specifically about the crisis resulting and accentuated by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Neoliberal urbanism and its consequences for the transportation sector

Without exhausting the complex discussions on the subject, the capitalist expression of neoliberalism can be understood as an economic-political and philosophical-cultural doctrine that instrumentalizes in a coercive and cohesive way the forces of accumulation by dispossession through the State apparatus, the control of the means of production – of goods, services, spaces and the human being itself – and the domination or subjugation of all those whose existence serves only for the production of surplus value (Gramsci, 1999; Marcuse, 1973). Neoliberal urbanism, on the other hand, is the specific application of this doctrine of creative destruction to the planning and management of the urban space, its inhabitants and economic aspects, in order to reconfigure the territorial organization and thus give rise to new forms of unequal production of the urban space and capital accumulation (Farmer, 2011; Matela, 2014; Santos, 2018; Theodore, Peck and Brenner, 2009).

Contemporary neoliberal urbanization processes advocate a set of policies aimed at strengthening market discipline and competition, as well as dismantling and hollowing out the State, making it a regulatory agent (Farmer, 2011; Theodore, Peck and Brenner, 2009). The intention is “to 'liberate' both public services from so-called 'State inefficiencies' and capital 'squandered' by taxation that could be more profitability deployed by private actors" (Farmer, 2011, p. 1155). Thus, the regulatory State appropriated and seized by neoliberalism promotes market discipline over society and itself through various political-economic mechanisms, such as reducing taxes on businesses and capitalists, dismantling public services, and subjecting them to the market will through concessions, permissions, public-private partnerships, or outright privatization (Farmer, 2011; Theodore, Peck and Brenner, 2009).

Neoliberal ideology was used as a justification to support several projects: 1) the deregulation of State control in industry; 2) the offensive against organized labor; 3) the reduction of corporate taxes; 4) the contraction and/or privatization of public resources and services; 5) the dismantling of social welfare programs; 6) the expansion of international capital mobility; and 7) the intensification of competition between localities (ibid.). Specifically in Brazil, business elites have incorporated their interests into local development policies, with the privatization of the public sector and collective infrastructure, eliminating State monopolies

for the provision of public services such as education, health, security, transportation, etc. (Souza, 2018).

A clear example of neoliberal ideological propaganda is presented by Aragão (1998). The author advocates for a proposal called "competitive bidding", pointing out that among the arguments justifying this institutional reform would be the rigidity of the public machinery, as well as the widespread fiscal crisis. He states that:

> Worldwide, institutional monopolies in public transportation, as a rule operated by public companies, are ebbing, to be maintained as a last alternative. The introduction of competition is being considered as an imperative in the search for greater efficiency and effectiveness of services. On the other hand, deregulation of services pure and simple does not seem to have succeeded, at least in urban public transportation, so introducing private initiative through competitive contracting is being chosen as the ideal intermediate solution. (Ibid., p. 115)

Published in a political period marked by privatization and the rise of neoliberalism in Brazil, the publication shows contempt for what is public and that only the insertion of private initiative could ensure efficiency and increased use of public transportation (ibid.). In a market in which free competition presents inefficiencies, pure deregulation is overlooked in favor of a regulatory role of the State, justifying that the market structure itself imposes such a condition (Ipea, 2016 and 2021). The neoliberal idea, still in vogue, does not admit that the State can provide such services, restricting it to a single possible role: that of Guarantor-regulator (Carcanholo, 2017). In a recent publication by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea, 2021), it is argued that "freedom should be given to the creativity of the entrepreneur", in this case the concessionaire of public transport services, to develop services desired by society. It is pointed out that, for example, if the service provider can have other sources of income and these are considerable, he may eventually lower the fare, in view of the parallel revenues. It is almost touchingly naïve to believe in the entrepreneur's benevolence, since his aim in operating the public transportation systems is profit, not necessarily social welfare. There is no guarantee that fares will be reduced because of parallel revenues. On the contrary, a new profit margin is opened to the entrepreneur. Care is needed, even with proposals for subsidies, since they can also be absorbed as an increase in the profit margin of the companies in the sector (Gomide and Galindo, 2013).

For the neoliberal hegemony to be confirmed, it is necessary to pass on the image that the State-owned companies have worse conditions to offer a service and, therefore, bankruptcy appears as an inevitable result and privatization as a necessary solution towards a supposed progress and modernization of the State. The premise for this movement is the disinvestment in public services and enterprises, so that these have, in fact, difficulties in meeting the needs and desires of the population, generating a political atmosphere in which the commercialization of the State appears as the only way out. One perceives, therefore, a hegemonic and one-dimensional process of coercion through

objective and subjective instruments of control, in which the neoliberal way out is presented and defended as the only one that has any reason or logic (Gramsci, 1999; Marcuse, 1973; Matela, 2014; Theodore, Peck and Brenner, 2009).

The advance in recent decades of the paradigms guiding neoliberalism has strengthened business and entrepreneurial action in Brazilian cities via local, state, and federal governments. The presence of the State is essential for the proper functioning of these governance formats, acting as an equilibrium link in the regulation of resources and the provision of infrastructures that encourage the presence of big capital in the production of urban space (Leal, 2017; Rhodes, 1997 and 2007). In this sense, corporate public transportation policies reshape the contours of social exclusion and aggravate the center-periphery dependency. As real estate developers mobilize their political and financial power to win over low-income groups for rights to the (central) city, they push working-class and minority residents to the margins of the city, where affordable housing can be found but public transportation service is insufficient and the historical maintenance of a commuter nature (work related mobility) keeps them segregated (Farmer, 2011).

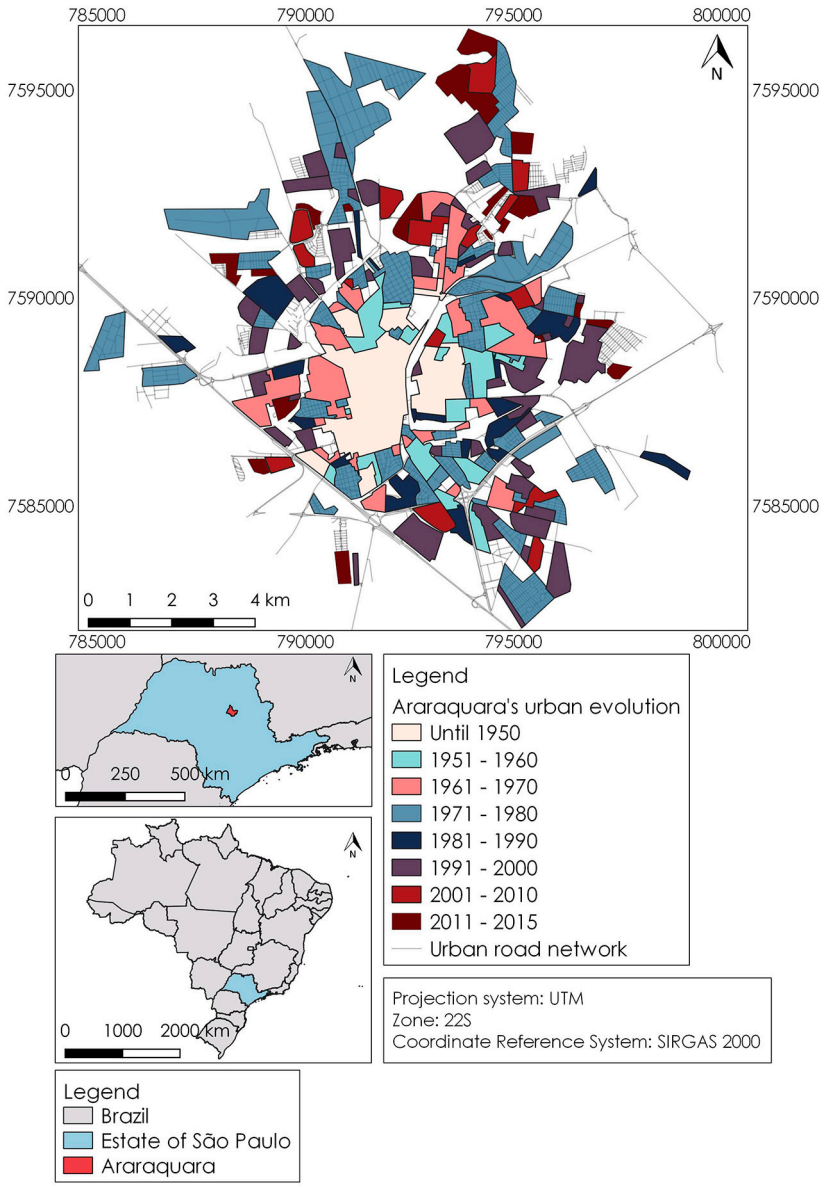
Araraquara as a study object

Araraquara is located in the central region of the state of São Paulo, Brazil, about 270 km from the state capital; it has an estimated population of 238,339 inhabitants and is considered a medium-sized city (IBGE, 2021). The urban core of the municipality had its territory deeply marked by large rural properties and the construction of a railroad in the late nineteenth century. In the last decades of the 20th century, with the approval of subdivisions far from the consolidated urban center, there was a considerable spreading of the urban perimeter, leading the poorer classes to live in remote locations and with a deficit in infrastructure (Balestrini, 2016; Donato, 2014; Pierini, 2020).

Until the 1950s, the implementation of new subdivisions occurred relatively contiguously to the existing urban area. The change in the urban evolution – and consequent sprawl of the city – occurs from the 1970s on, with the implementation of several subdivisions beyond the existing road network, in an urbanization process that registers discontinuities and extensive voids. Even today, several of these settlements configure the limits of the urban perimeter. The landowners' strategy was to generate urbanized areas to serve as capital reserves, that is, the expansion was not guided by the demand for lots, but by the logic of accumulating urban land as a safe investment with a high return in the medium or long term (Cintrão, 2004).

It was in this context that the Master Plan (law n. 1.794/1971) was implemented, delegating to land developers the obligation to implement infrastructure in the construction of new subdivisions (law n. 2.467/1979), in an attempt to contain public spending generated by urban sprawl. Contrary to the reality of several Brazilian cities, whose urban expansion and dispersion happened mainly informally, in Araraquara, the subdivisions were regularized

Figure 1 – Urban evolution of Araraquara – SP



Source: created by the authors, adapted from Cintrão (2004), Donato (2014) and Pierini (2020).

and followed the requirements of the local city hall. This formality, however, did not guarantee access to housing for the low-income population nor addressed the inequalities derived from urban expansion (ibid.).

In the 1980s, the occupation of intermediate urban voids began. To serve the most peripheral areas, it was necessary to provide infrastructure in the intermediate areas, increasing the land value in these places. Also, in the period of 1985 to 2000, there is an increase in vertical constructions – mainly residential – in the central and pericentral region, also representing an increase in the value of central lands because of transportation facilities and proximity to urban equipment (ibid.). There is, therefore, the concretization of the real estate valorization and speculation cycle started in the 1970s.

After the City Statute, there is the elaboration of a new Master Plan (Araraquara, 2005) that caused a decrease in the pace of opening new urban areas within the urban perimeter (Pierini, 2020). However, with legislative changes in the Master Plan (MP) and the emergence of the Minha Casa Minha Vida Program (My House My Life), there was a new process of peripheral occupation, as well as in environmentally fragile areas, with emphasis on the northern region of the city (Balestrini, 2016). It is worth pointing out that, there is a relation between these distinct moments in the municipality's urban expansion to the operation of public transportation within the city, as will be presented in the next topic. Figure 1 presents the urban evolution, as well as the location of the city.

Evolution of the public transportation system in Araraquara – SP

Brazil's rapid urbanization – which began in the 1940s – showed commuting growth rates twice as high as urban growth itself (Gomide and Galindo, 2013). Bus systems were consolidated in Brazilian cities throughout the 1960s and 1970s, with the transport sector marked by the informality of the operation, with the planning and route definition being carried out by the operators themselves. This consolidation occurred through preliminary State interventions, which limited the number of operating companies, restricted competition in the sector and ensured the priority of buses over streetcars, trains and informal buses (Lima, Carvalho and Figueiredo, 2020; Matela, 2014). When there were legal instruments of regulation, they were precarious and without defined contracts (Matela, 2014). In the 1970s, the oil crisis and the popular uprisings pressured the military dictatorship government to implement – in an authoritarian way – funds for urban development and transportation and to create the Brazilian Company of Urban Transportation (EBTU), responsible for planning, financing and technologically developing the sector. There were also, in this decade, active strategies of business concentration through policies of professionalization of private operators' business management models through the granting of subsidies and financing for the sector (Gomide and Galindo, 2013).

During the re-democratization process, the 1988 Federal Constitution established that the organization and provision of public transport would become the exclusive competence of municipalities (art. 30, item V), except for the competence to institute national guidelines for the sector, which remained with the Union. The Constitution also defines that all public services must be provided by public agencies or delegated to the private sector through public bidding (ibid.; Lima, Carvalho and Figueiredo, 2020). Then, in the 1990s, a transformation in the structure of Brazilian capitalism takes place, mainly by the liberalization of the economy and the dismantling of the federal transportation structures of planning and financing (Gomide and Galindo, 2013; Matela, 2014). Some public companies in the sector were privatized, as is the case of Santo André and Companhia Municipal de Transportes Coletivos known as CMTC (Municipal Collective Transportation Company) in São Paulo (Gomide and Galindo, 2013). In the following, the development of Araraquara's public transportation system is presented, also guided by the time frames mentioned.

The municipality of Araraquara, in a pioneering way in the state of São Paulo, instituted a public transportation system by electric buses known as trolleybuses. Among the several advantages presented by this system are the possibility of prioritizing public transportation, the effective physical, fare and operational integration, the appropriate frequency and regularity, the economic balance, energy saving and the reduction of oil consumption, thus contributing to improve the environmental conditions, as well as to provide comfort to users (Ferreira, 1995). Besides Araraquara, the system was also installed in Belo Horizonte – MG, Campos – RJ, Fortaleza – CE, Niterói – RJ, Porto Alegre – RS, Recife – PE, Rio Claro – SP, Rio de Janeiro – RJ, Salvador – BA, Santos – SP and São Paulo – SP (and in the metropolitan region) (Cintrão et al., 2017; Ferreira, 1995). Currently, the systems of Santos – SP and São Paulo – SP and the metropolitan region of São Paulo are still in operation.

Founded in 1959, the Companhia Troleibus Araraquara (CTA) began operations with seven vehicles, a bifilar network (overhead electrical installation with two parallel wire cables) of 18 kilometers, maintenance workshop and an electric current rectifying substation. The first two lines were Vila Xavier–Carmo and Estação–Fonte (CTA, 2021b; Ferreira, 1995). Over the decades, the network of public transport by trolleybus was expanded, with the following operational milestones: 1) 1960s: the expansion of the network to about 29 kilometers and 14 vehicles; 2) 1970s: period of great expansion, including its own manufacture of vehicles, reaching about 61 kilometers and 28 vehicles; 3) 1980s: through investments in the Revitalization Program of the Trolleybus Systems in Brazil of EBTU, it was possible to expand the system, which reached 79.1 kilometers of installed two-wire network. Eight new lines started operating, and the fleet reached a total of 39 cars, but, for several reasons, the system growth did not match the demand. One of the main difficulties was to serve the population in the new neighborhoods that arose in the city, where the streets were not paved and the installation of trolleybuses would be costly. From this, diesel vehicles and private transport

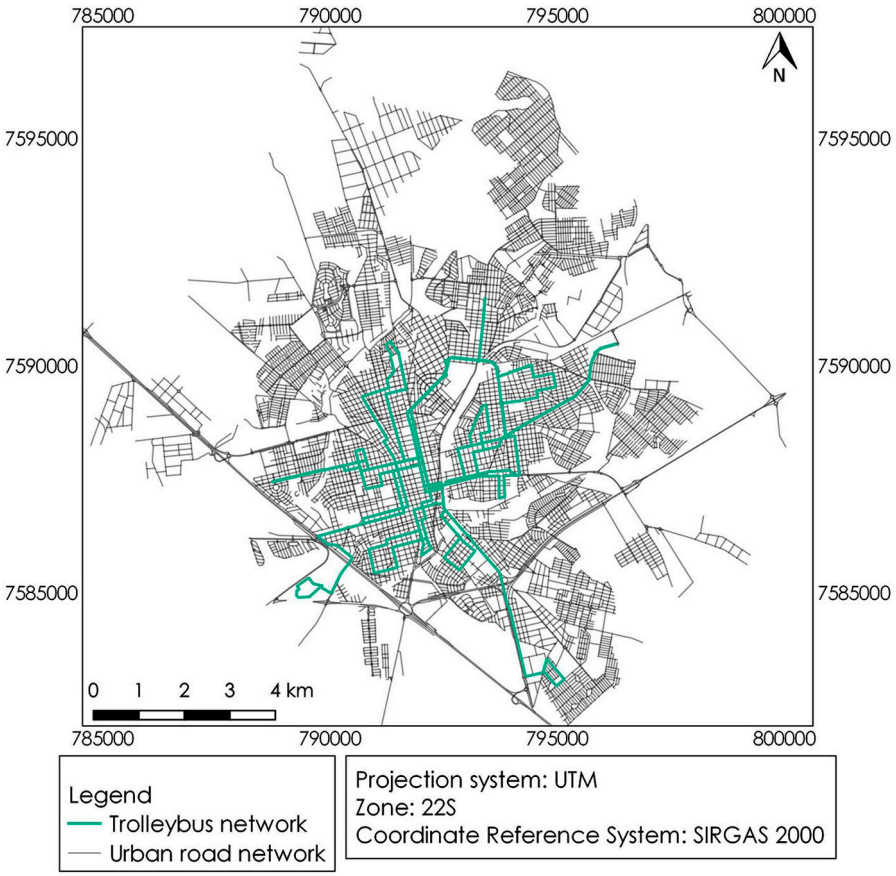
companies began to operate in the city; 4) 1990s: in 1992 the fleet reaches the peak of 46 vehicles, but from this moment on, the CTA itself began to invest in diesel vehicles (CTA, 2021b; Ferreira, 1995).

Until 1994, even with the high cost of electricity, trolleybuses still accounted for 43% of the fleet, and the main reasons for their maintenance were the absence of air pollution and the comfort provided to passengers, since these vehicles did not produce noise and vibration (Cintrão, 2004; Cintrão et al., 2017). The trolleybuses were in operation in the city until 1999, and the high cost of the vehicles, the electric power itself, added to investments in power lines and substations, were pointed out as reasons for the economic unfeasibility of this system. In reality, due to the urban sprawl, the route flexibility provided by diesel vehicles had become more attractive (Cintrão, 2004; CTA, 2021b; Ferreira, 1995).

A CTA employee (Fray, maintenance supervisor), in an account presented by Cintrão et al. (2017), states that the company's drivers were well-paid, employees had artist status, and that everyone wanted to work at CTA. Fray states that "at the time everyone rode the trolleybus, for example, doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers, etc." (ibid., p. 28). The deactivation of the trolleybuses, which benefited the diesel bus companies, caused a revolt in the population that was used to the system. It can be seen, therefore, that the trolleybuses were not only the city's transport system, but that the innovative character and quality of the electric buses were perceived as a cultural element of the city and configured part of its heritage. With the deactivation, the trolleybuses, as well as the infrastructure that supported them, were scrapped, dismantled, and auctioned. Currently, only the number 1 trolleybus remains, which was restored and installed in the historical museum of the CTA (ibid.). The trolleybus network can be seen in Figure 2.

An observation should be made about the financing model of the system. The company was created as a joint-stock company, and the capital composition was made through an additional charge in the Urban Land and Property Tax (IPTU), i.e., the financing was attained through the population, even those who lived in lots that were not served by the system. In this way, the biggest shareholders were those who owned the most properties. The shares had no market value, because all the profit should be reverted to investments in the company itself, and did not bring direct benefits to its holders. This factor generated a lack of interest in the shares by their rightful owners, leading to the non-claiming of shares or even the sale of them for negligible amounts, resulting in the accumulation of shares by a few people who managed the company. The increase in decision-making power meant that, in 2004, many of the CTA's board members were precisely landowners and real estate speculators, who could continue to guide the investments destinations in the city's public transportation (Cintrão, 2004; Cintrão et al., 2017; Ferreira, 1995). A large percentage of shares (80%) remained with unknown ownership, being acquired by the City Hall in 2006 – when the company became a mixed economy company – and the remaining 20% belonged to the other shareholders (Araraquara, 2016c; Cintrão et al., 2017).

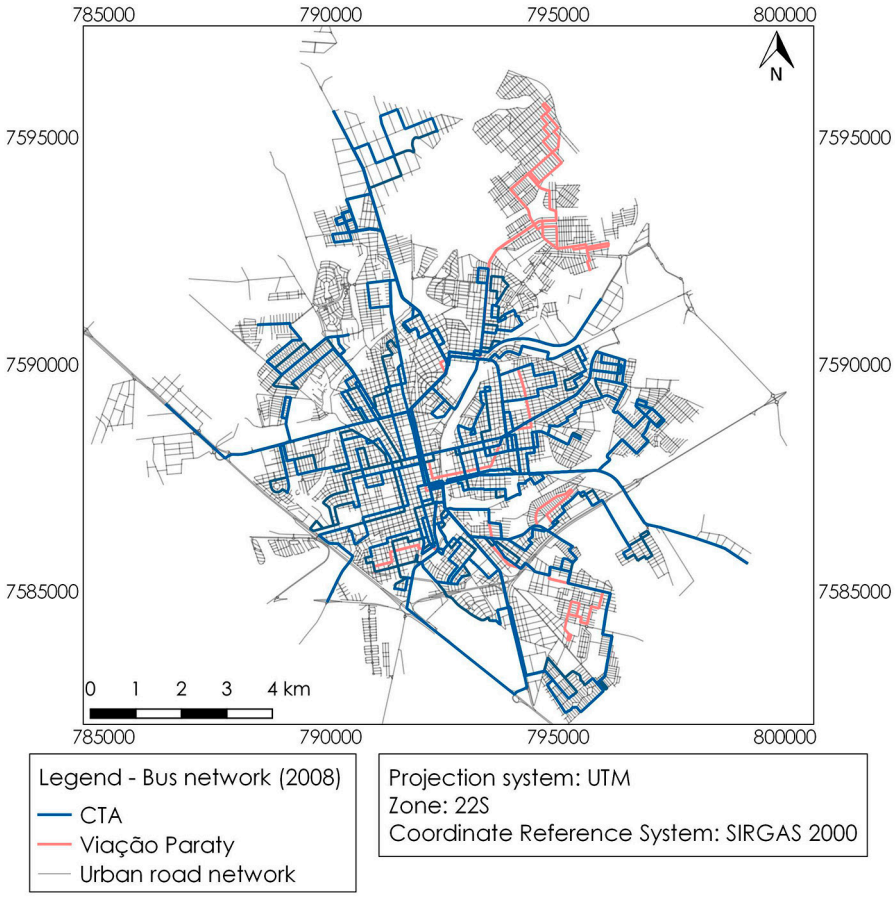
Figure 2 – Trolleybus network in operation in Araraquara – SP – 1990



Source: created by the authors, adapted from Ferreira (1995) and Pierini (2020).

In 2008, Araraquara's public bus transport service consisted of a network of 31 lines, 26 operated by the CTA and 5 lines operated by Viação Paraty, which was already operating in the city's public transport before the 2008 permission process (Araraquara, 2008a), from which it started operating 7 lines (Araraquara, 2008b). The lines that were in operation in 2008 can be seen in Figure 3. It should be noted that some bus lines currently in operation are based on the old trolleybus routes, such as Campus / Vila Xavier, Fonte / Altos da Vila Xavier / Jardim das Estações, Melhado / Imperador, Rodoviária / Santa Cruz, Santana / Pinheirinho, São José / Santa Angelina and Universal / Cecap (Cintrão et al., 2017; Pierini, 2020).

Figure 3 – Bus network in operation in Araraquara – SP – 2008



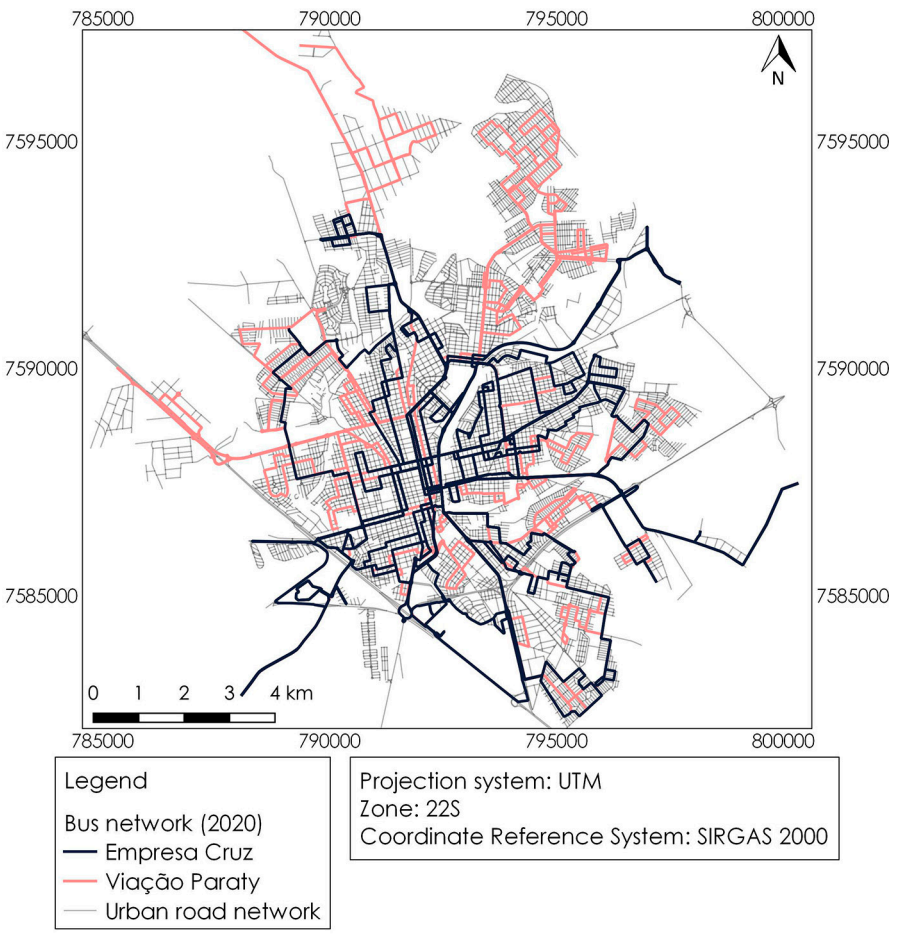
Source: created by the authors, adapted from Araraquara (2008a).

The Companhia Troleibus Araraquara continued as the operator and planner of the public transportation system until 2016, when the system was privatized and granted, for a period of 20 years, to the Consórcio Araraquara de Transportes – CAT (Araraquara Transport Consortium). The Consortium is composed of two companies, Empresa Cruz, responsible for 18 lines, and Viação Paraty, responsible for 20 lines (9 of which are from the concession contract signed in 2008). Figure 4 shows the bus lines in operation in 2020.[1] It is possible to see that Viação Paraty gained a new share of the city lines' operation. The State – in this case represented by the municipality of Araraquara – went through an emptying process, in which

it ceased to be a provider and operator of the urban public transport system and assumed the role of a service regulator with the creation of the (new) Controladoria de Transporte de Araraquara (Transport Controllership of Araraquara),[2] through ordinary law n. 8.680/2016 (Araraquara, 2016d). The Controllership is linked to the Traffic and Transport Secretariat and is responsible for the management, planning, supervision, control and inspection of the city's public transport and its concession (ibid.; CTA, 2021a).

Most of the lines provide "atendimento" services at certain times of the day. "Atendimentos" are route variations that pass through different streets or make a longer turn to cover another neighborhood, usually related to commuting movements in the morning and

Figure 4 – Bus network in operation in Araraquara – SP – 2020



Source: created by the authors, adapted from CAT – Consórcio Araraquara de Transportes (2020).

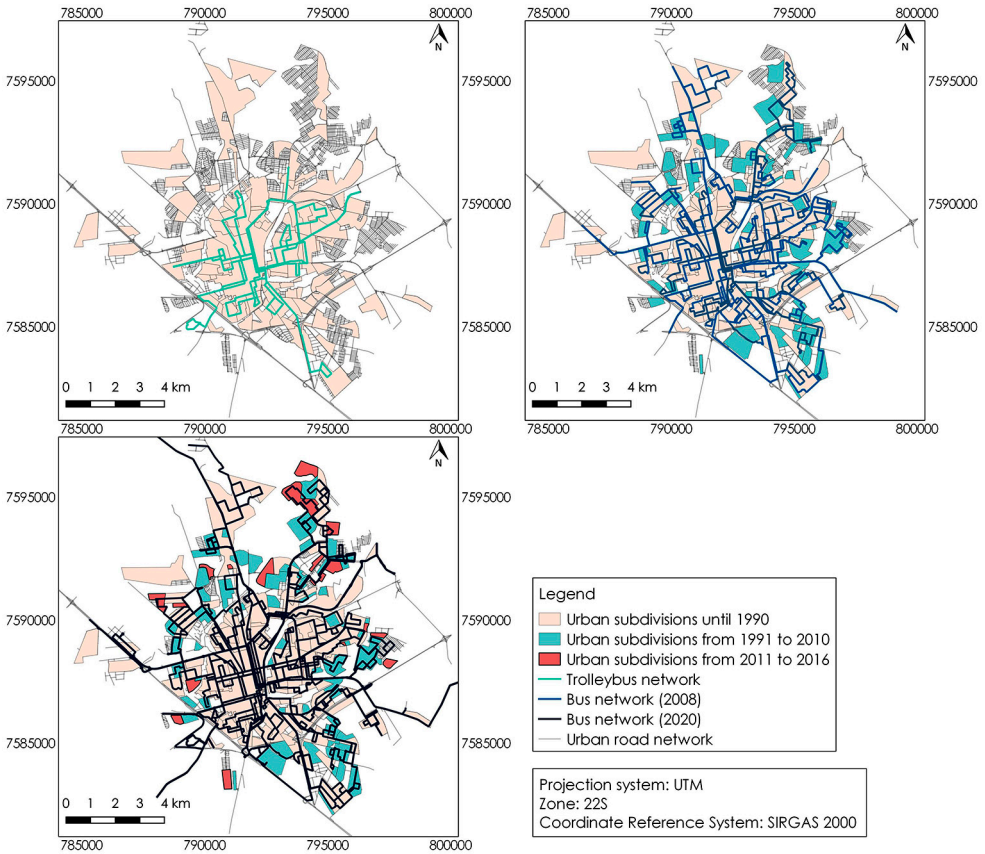
afternoon peaks. It should be noted that the operation through "atendimentos" can cause confusion for users, since they may not be aware of the changes in the timetable or route, and also limits the access that certain regions of the city have to public transportation, creating a mobility deficit.

The intersection of transportation systems with urban development

The urban evolution and the public transport system of Araraquara showed that the urban sprawl, caused mainly by the approval of subdivisions beyond the existing road network in the 1970s, drove the change in the energy matrix of the transport system, with the exchange of electric for diesel vehicles (Cintrão, 2004; CTA, 2021b; Ferreira, 1995; Pierini, 2020). If, for the operation of trolleybuses, it was necessary to plan the network expansion because of the intrinsic high costs, with diesel vehicles this planning does not need to be so strict. This need for trolleybus planning associated with the high cost of implementation tends to contain urbanization within the urban limits, while diesel vehicles, whose route can be changed without major complications or costs of infrastructure deployment, allow the existence of a more dispersed and less compact city model (Pierini, 2020). In summary, there is a vicious retro feeding cycle: urban sprawl forges changes in the transportation system, which, in turn, consolidates the process of real estate speculation and land valorization, which is the initial aim of the sprawl. The justification presented by Viação Paraty for the request for an amendment to the 2008 contract corroborates this analysis, since it points precisely to the emergence of subdivisions in the northern part of the city as responsible for adjustments in routes, timetables and increasing of the company's fleet. The government granted the amendment, increasing from 7 to 9 lines operated by the company at the time (Araraquara, 2016a). In Figure 5, it is possible to observe the overlap between the urban configuration and the transport system in operation. Three periods are shown: the subdivisions approved until 1990 together with the trolleybus system; the subdivisions approved until 2010 with the bus lines in operation in 2008; and the subdivisions approved from 2011 to 2016, with the bus lines in operation in 2020.

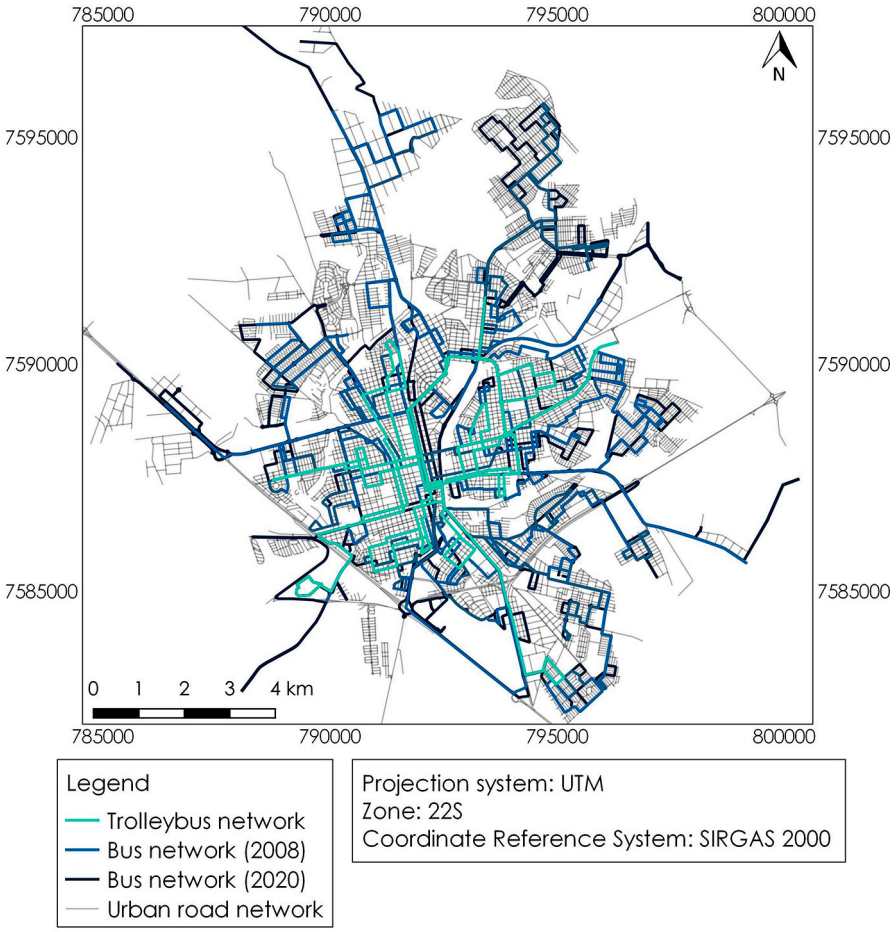
Figure 6 presents a map with the overlay of all systems, showing the evolution of the public transportation system from the 1960s to 2020. It can clearly be seen that the network has undergone a major expansion over the years, following the implementation of housing developments in areas far from the city center. The implementation of infrastructure – in this case related to mobility and public transportation – is a trump card for speculation. In the case of Araraquara, the trolleybus routes – selected by the city hall – signaled the areas of real estate interest, which explains that, even with their replacement, the existing routes were maintained (Cintrão, 2004), and the "flexibilization" of the routes through diesel vehicles represented only an expansion of the routes. Thus, the local public power assumes a role of an instrument of private initiative, being (1) responsible for driving the actions of other urban agents; and (2) used to consolidate projects and valorize lots and specific areas of the city.

Figure 5 – Overlay of transport systems and urban evolution of Araraquara – SP



Source: created by the authors, adapted from Araraquara (2008a), CAT – Consórcio Araraquara de Transportes (2020), Cintrão (2004), Donato (2014), Ferreira (1995) and Pierini (2020).

Figure 6 – Evolution of the public transportation system in Araraquara – SP, from 1960 to 2020



Source: created by the authors, adapted from Araraquara (2008a), CAT – Consórcio Araraquara de Transportes (2020), Ferreira (1995), and Pierini (2020).

Even if the developer is responsible for the implementation of infrastructure, it is the municipality or, more specifically in the case of Araraquara, the concessionaires who bear the costs of public transport operation. These costs are transmitted to passengers through the fare, which, in practice, means that all public transportation users in the city pay the costs of the urban sprawl. Through this model of urbanization, landowners not only profit from speculation and real estate appreciation but also do not pay for the "losses", transferring them to the general population.

This does not mean that investments in public transportation should not be made. The sprawl of the city creates a demand for mobility at the urban edges that often depends on public transportation. Providing this service in the peripheries, as well as guaranteeing access to opportunities and public services, is an obligation of the State. An integration with land use policies is necessary, so that public transportation and active modes are the focus of urban mobility, thus, directing urban development to a less sprawled form, with dynamism of activities within the peripheries, facing the historical maintenance of exclusively work related commuting and contributing to the reduction of socio-spatial segregation with broad accessibility to the city (Cervero and Dai, 2014; Santos, Behrendt and Teytelboym, 2010).

Sustainable transport policies should start with the assumption that public transport systems play a central role in the construction of an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable mobility model, and the needs of different social groups should be considered. Such a role is stressed in the current context of climate emergency, and the benefits of these systems can be observed in positive impacts on health and the environment, reduction of accidents, increase in the population's mobility indexes, besides being an important factor in income generation and family budgets (Cervero and Dai, 2014; Haddad et al., 2015; Santos, Behrendt and Teytelboym, 2010). Furthermore, a high-quality public transportation system can reduce the use of individual motorized modes, which, besides noise, air pollution, congestion, and accidents, perpetuate social inequalities (Davison and Knowles, 2006). Finally, it is emphasized that, precisely because public transportation is a system that generates benefits (positive externalities), and these benefits are not only appropriated by the users of the system, subsidies and public investment policies in public transportation are justified, i.e., economic and environmental benefits, such as the reduction of accidents and air pollution, are appropriated by the entire population, and therefore, public investments should focus at improving these systems and the quality of life of the general population (Ipea, 2016).

Moura (2014) points out that the dominant agents of this city model cause the distribution of space to become an event linked to the logic of capital, in which space and urban infrastructures are no longer provided according to a logic of serving the public good and become a product of capital investments. By establishing – or not – priorities and intervention options, the public power ends up producing locational advantages and valorization of real estate, maintaining or deepening the precariousness that reinforces the dynamics of inequality (Bittencourt and Faria, 2021). It is precisely

this model of neoliberal urbanization that is criticized here. This model induces the poorest people to live in the most distant places and, at the same time, to pay the costs of real estate speculation. Investments in public transportation are fundamental, but they must be oriented to achieve the best possible service to the population, and not intending to enhance the value of certain land corridors. Furthermore, housing should not be only the occupation of a space, but something that ensures a living condition, with infrastructure and access to collective equipment, contrary to the segregation pattern imposed (Moura, 2014), which resembles a prison with invisible cells and walls, whose oversight is given by access or lack thereof to the rest of the city and to urban equipment and services.

The public transport operation concession in Araraquara – SP

As presented above, the emptying of the State process regarding the public transportation in Araraquara went through several stages. The first was the permission, from the 1980s, of private companies – Viação Paraty – to operate with diesel vehicles, driven by the justification of urban sprawl, concomitant with the operation of trolleybuses. Then, it was the change in the energy matrix of the CTA itself, which was once a company of national reference and whose scrapping process dragged on for years; followed by greater permissions to the Paraty company to operate in the city. A company whose contractual relations with the CTA have already been investigated by the Araraquara District Attorney's Office. One of the possible irregularities investigated was the control of ticket sales passed on to Paraty, a transaction that until 2012 was performed exclusively by Companhia Troleibus Araraquara, which paid to Paraty the due value corresponding to the volume of passengers carried. There was also the suspicion that the most profitable lines were under the responsibility of the private company (*Folha de S.Paulo,* 2013).

CTA's balance sheet of expenses and revenues shows profits ranging from about BRL 950,000 in 2006 to about BRL 1.66 million in 2010. As of 2011, however, the company incurred losses, reaching almost BRL 18 million in 2016 (CTA, 2021b). In a regular session of the City Council, the Movimento Transporte Justo (Fair Transport Movement) questioned the sharp drop in profits and pointed out that the CTA's main problems were the coexistence with Paraty, a company that holds a monopoly in the northern part of the city and which was allowed to operate some of the most profitable lines of the CTA; political decisions that favored the private company, such as the chartering of school transportation, responsible for a monthly budget of about BRL 1 million, which could be carried out by the CTA; and the amendment in the contract with Paraty, which transfers to the private concessionaire the monopoly that the CTA had to sell transportation tickets. According to the movement, in order to recover the CTA it would be necessary to review the distribution contracts of the lines between CTA and Paraty, transfer the school transport chartering to the CTA, and create a Municipal Transportation

Fund to subsidize the CTA, ensuring that the public company would emerge from the financial crisis and could fulfill the goal of safeguarding citizens' rights to the city (Câmara Municipal de Araraquara, 2014).

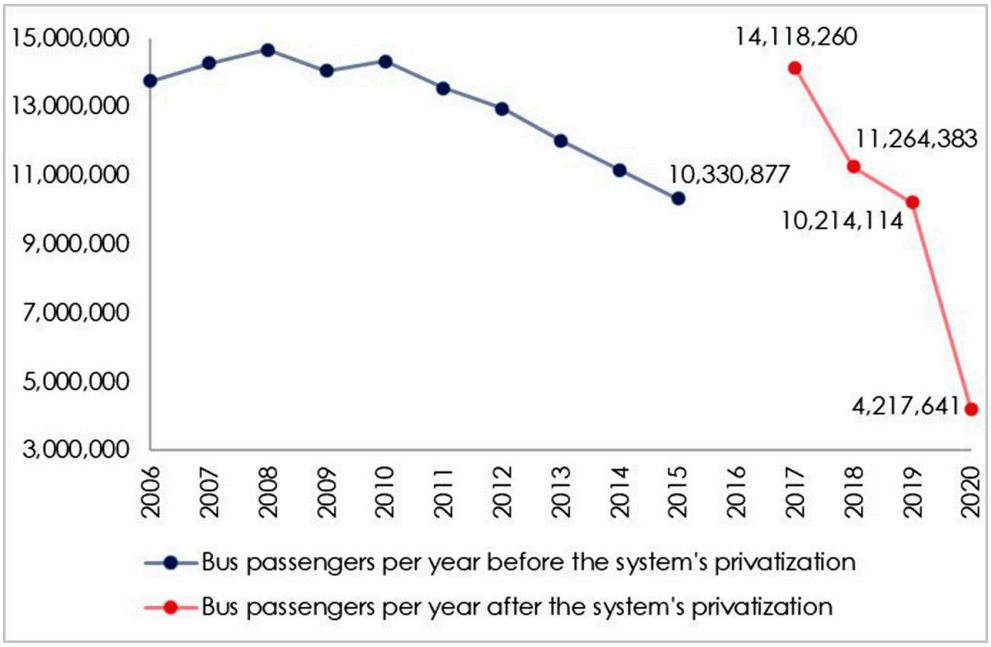
Note, therefore, that the extinction of the CTA and the subsequent privatization of the public transportation system did not happen amidst a lack of alternatives. Nor was it a process without social repercussion. Several demonstrations by employees, students, and social movements occurred against the extinction of the company and the privatization of the system (G1 São Carlos and Araraquara, 2013 and 2014). However, despite the resistance, in 2016, the concession was signed for a term of 20 years – extendable for an equal period, provided that in agreement with the concessionaire – of the provision and operation of urban public transport services (Araraquara, 2016b).

Following the signing of the concession contract, the extinction of the Companhia Troleibus Araraquara is materialized by municipal law n. 8.667, of March 2, 2016. After the company's liquidation, all movable and immovable assets will belong to the Araraquara City Hall, which will also take over any existing CTA contracts, including public transportation concessions (the concession is regulated by the new CTA – Transport Controllership of Araraquara). It is foreseen that, at the end of the liquidation, the municipality will pay the shareholders the capital each one is entitled to for the shares they own, delivering for this payment municipal public debt bonds plus interest of 12% (twelve percent) per year. If negative equity is determined, the municipality will bear the loss (Araraquara, 2016c). It is worth remembering that the largest percentage of shares remained with unknown ownership and were incorporated by the city government in 2006 and the rest was under the control of large landowners and councilors who accumulated them by acquisition at derisory prices. In 2017, the company had accumulated a debt of BRL 38.9 million (Araraquara City Council, 2017) and is currently still in liquidation (CTA, 2021b).

The data of passengers carried (Figure 7) shows the downward trend, which is considered a pattern in Brazilian cities. With the privatization of the services, there is an increase in the number of passengers in 2017. However, already in 2018, the numbers sharply fall, possibly because of the beginning of ridesourcing services operation in the city. In 2019, the volume of passengers carried was the lowest since 2006, except for the year 2020, which, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, had an even greater reduction. Data for 2016 is not fully available, possibly because it is the transition year of the operation of the services.

Finally, some points should be emphasized regarding the concession contract itself. First, it is stipulated that the provision of services should be carried out at the risk of the concessionaire, upon remuneration that includes all investments, inputs and expenses necessary to fulfill the expected operating obligations, such as materials, labor, services, fees, taxes, labor and social charges, electric power, water supply, fuel consumption, consumption of other materials and services and administrative expenses. This remuneration is called fair if it meets, among others, the following costs: 1) operation costs;

Figure 7 – Bus passengers carried in Araraquara – SP from 2006 to 2020



Source: adapted from CTA – Controladoria do Transporte de Araraquara (2020a, 2021c).

2) depreciation costs on all assets involved in providing the services; 3) remuneration for all capital employed for the execution of the services, directly or indirectly, such as, for example: garages and their improvements, fleet, machines, installations, tools, equipment and warehouse.

Finally, it is pointed out that all assets necessary for the provision of services, as well as those incorporated during contractual execution, are not linked to the concession. Therefore, there will be no reversible assets deriving from the concession. The contract also clarifies that neither the grantor[3] nor the municipality of Araraquara have any intention of granting subsidies. The remuneration, therefore, occurs only from the collection of public fare (Araraquara, 2016b).

The ideological imposition may make this form of service provision seems logical, but, at the root, the population of a city is paying for all the capital invested via fares, without ultimately owning the goods acquired at their expense. In the case of the citizens of Araraquara, this is the second time this happens: the population financed the trolleybus system, which was scrapped so that a new and more aggressive

process of spoliation could take place, this time via privatization and concession of transportation services.

The return to the State in times of crisis

The failure of the liberal and neoliberal model occurs mainly in times of crisis. It is in this situation that companies – including public transportation ones – whose common discourse is competitiveness and free-market, turn to the State for help (Carcanholo, 2017). In 2020, the world was ravaged by the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 and, among the main health control measures, was social distancing, a measure that goes against the concept of public transport. The continuity of the state of sanitary calamity provoked an unprecedented fall in the demand for this mode of transportation. Borchers, Ferreira and Ribeiro (2021), in a study of Brazilian capitals, show that besides the discontinuity of bus and subway use during the pandemic, there is the possibility of this behavior extending to the post-pandemic, without the demand returning to pre-Covid-19 levels.

The neoliberal model of public transport operation in vogue in Brazil has presented two major lines of collapse: operational and financial. Different from the worldwide recommendation, instead of increasing fleets and decreasing the amount of passengers carried, the opposite occurred in Brazil. The recommendations were not followed, and there were agglomerations in terminals, bus stops and in the vehicles. It was actively chosen to crowd people in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic to reduce the loss of revenue (ibid.). Also, from January/2020 to March/2021, 76,757 jobs were lost in the entire urban public passenger transportation sector, besides the delay of salaries and benefits, suspension of labor contracts and reduction of working hours (Lima, Carvalho and Figueiredo, 2020; NTU, 2021b).

In addition, several companies and consortia interrupted the provision of services, due to: 1) suspension of activities because of the inability to comply with the payment of salaries or the purchase of fuel, for example; 2) definitive closure of activities; 3) intervention in the operation, with the public authority assuming the responsibilities of administration and operation of the company; or 4) contract suspension (NTU, 2021b). Finally, we present two cases in which there was intervention by public authorities for the maintenance of public transportation services. In Rio de Janeiro, Detro-RJ (department that regulates transportation in the state) intervened in the services of the bus company Alto Minho Ltda., which operated intercity lines from Nova Iguaçu – RJ. In Salvador – BA, the Salvador Norte Concessionaire (CSN) sued the Salvador city hall and requested intervention in the operation, alleging that the city hall had not been complying with the obligations of economic and financial rebalancing of the contract. The municipality took over the operation until September 2021, when CSN's lines were transferred to other concessionaires operating in the city (NTU, 2021b; Salvador, 2021).

Given the scenario of accumulated losses of about BRL 14.2 billion in the bus systems, the solution found by the companies was to resort to the government to reduce the losses. Until then disesteemed, subsidies

started to be accepted by several operators. They also welcomed tax exemptions (NTU, 2021a). Among the proposals advocated by the companies are the aid and emergency relief and also "a new financing model for public transportation systems, to ensure the quality that society demands" (NTU, 2021d). The requested emergency aid was of BRL 5 billion per year to subsidize the system's gratuities. Felicio Ramuth, vice-president of Urban Mobility of the Frente Nacional de Prefeitos (FNP) (National Front of Mayors), said that "the aid is not for the companies, but for the people who need it most (the passengers). It is of great social importance" (ibid.). Curiously, people will be "benefited" via companies, the same ones that reduced operations and caused crowding during a pandemic. The restructuring of the service, not only from the financial point of view but also in the regulation of contracts and the creation of a new regulatory framework, was also discussed. There was also the bill n. 3.364/2020, which provided aid of BRL 4 billion for this segment, but it was vetoed (NTU, 2021c and 2021d).

Besides federal funding attempts, the operators also sought the municipalities, in order to minimize the losses faced. Among the main measures offered were the transfer of subsidies to operators, tax exemptions, and early purchases of ticket credits. In relation to subsidies, the cities of São Paulo – SP, Curitiba – PR and Brasília – DF stand out, but the measure was adopted in about 26 municipalities. Tax exemptions were applied in Joinville – SC, Pelotas – RS and Natal – RN. In addition, the Rio Grande do Norte (RN) state government reduced by 50% the ICMS (Tax on Circulation of Goods and Services) tax rate on diesel and biodiesel for bus companies. Nine cities, among which Belo Horizonte – MG, Curitiba – PR and Salvador – BA carried out the advance purchase of tickets (Lima, Carvalho and Figueiredo, 2020; NTU, 2021a).

In Araraquara, there was a reduction in the fleet and lines in operation from 38, in 2019, to 30 in 2020 and 2021. According to what was pointed out, the change was possible with the logistical realignment of the lines (Câmara Municipal de Araraquara, 2021). Public transport users, however, complained about crowding at the Central Integration Terminal (TCI) and the delay of buses in some lines (G1 São Carlos and Araraquara, 2021).

The public transportation crisis, aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, is facing an impasse: while the importance of public transportation is perceived, a structural flaw of the neoliberal model is exposed. There is not a way to keep the systems operating in this model during a crisis. Otávio Cunha, president of the National Association of Urban Transportation Companies – NTU, states that "the service is on the verge of collapse all over the country" and, further, that "our expectation is that the Federal Government takes a proactive role in this process and actually assumes the role of guardian of the National Policy of Urban Mobility" (NTU, 2021c and 2021d). After all, if the State is the guarantor-regulator of private initiative in the neoliberal development model, nothing more logical than resorting to it in times of crisis (Carcanholo, 2017), that is, appropriation of profit, socialization of losses. As long as there is profit, free-market; when there is loss, State intervention and division of losses with society.

At no point in time is the privatized operating model questioned. When talks occurs about restructuring, it is only about

the way of financing it, so that in the event of a new crisis, revenues are guaranteed. The model does not offer any security: neither for the population, nor for the jobs in the sector. If there will be public financing for public transportation and there is a need for restructuring, as the business owners claim, we must go beyond what the neoliberal ideology would have us believe. It is necessary to establish new alternatives. In this context, some questions must be raised. Is it possible to rebuild public systems? Is it possible, in a scenario where this alternative is impossible, to have less predatory models for financing public transport?

One possible way for the municipal government to take control over private providers is the "municipalization" model instituted in São Paulo – SP, in which fare revenue was collected by the government and the companies were paid based on the service provided, measured by the number of kilometers provided (and not by the fares collected from users).[4] In the case of São Paulo – SP, once meeting the scheduled mileage, the companies received 80% of the amount agreed with the municipality, with the payment of the remaining 20% linked to the number of passengers carried, a strategy designed to prevent operators from making trips with empty vehicles (Gregori et al., 2020; Gomide and Galindo, 2013). At the current technological level, the monitoring of the trips made, the timetable and the number of passengers carried could be done through GPS and electronic ticketing systems (Gregori et al., 2020). In cities such as Munich, Germany, the existence of a single municipal services company allows profits from electricity, gas, and water systems to be transferred to public transport (Ipea, 2016). It is possible to go further, as shown by the cities of Tallinn in Estonia, Maricá – RJ, and Caucaia – CE, and institute free pass policies to ensure the right to transportation for all citizens of the municipality (Caucaia, 2021; Santini, 2019).

Final considerations

This study sought to make an analysis of the evolution of public transportation systems in the city of Araraquara – SP, pointing out the relationships between urban development and changes in the city's public transport system, in addition to the role of local government in the process of speculation and real estate valorization in the context of a neoliberal logic of urban development.

For many years, the trolleybuses contained the expansion of the city. However, the sprawling urban development guided the operation of the public transportation system by buses, resulting in the incorporation of diesel vehicles. Therefore, comes to fruition, an urban model that "makes it unfeasible" to maintain public transportation services, given the constant need for expansion to serve the most peripheral areas. It is this argument, belonging to the fallacies of neoliberal logic, which leads to the extinction of the Companhia Troleibus Araraquara (Araraquara Trolleybus Company) in 2016 – after a long period of dismantling – and the concession of the public transport system. The promised improvement appears only in the first year after the bidding, when the number of passengers carried had a large increase. However, already in 2018, this number drops, possibly because of the

insertion of ridesourcing services in the city. The Covid-19 pandemic appears to bury this promise, since the safety requirements necessary to prevent contamination were not met, with crowds at stations and inside vehicles. In addition, the number of lines in operation was reduced, and meaningful delays in the timetable registered.

"It is never too much to repeat that it is not for lack of plans or urban legislation that Brazilian cities grow in a predatory way" (Maricato, 2000, p. 147). In the case of Araraquara, it is observed that the local government, even within the legality, served as an instrument for real estate speculation and land valorization to take place. Furthermore, the privatization of public transportation permitted the deepening of neoliberal processes of exploitation of urban space and citizens. The answers to the complexity of urban problems are not easy, given that numerous actors seek to exert their forces and that the problems generated are complex in themselves. The solution for the cities must go through effective popular participation, with urban planning committed to social inclusion, in the construction of a land reform in which there is in fact public control over land ownership (Maricato, 2000 and 2015). The city needs to be built by the people for the people, and public transportation should serve the people and not use them to generate capital.

[I] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0186-6661
Universidade Federal de São Carlos, Centro de Ciências Exatas e de Tecnologia, Departamento de Engenharia Civil, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Engenharia Urbana. São Carlos, SP/Brasil.
tati.borchers@protonmail.com

[II] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7834-7675
Universidade Federal de São Carlos, Centro de Ciências Exatas e de Tecnologia, Departamento de Engenharia Civil, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Engenharia Urbana. São Carlos, SP/Brasil.
figueiroa@protonmail.com

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Notes

(1) The survey of bus routes took place in January 2020 and therefore presents the configuration of the transportation system in the pre-Covid-19 pandemic period.

(2) Attention is drawn here to the fact that the agency created in 2016 to oversee public transportation services – CTA (Controladoria do Transporte de Araraquara) – keeps the same acronym as CTA (Companhia Tróleibus Araraquara), which is currently in the process of liquidation.

(3) Companhia Troleibus Araraquara – CTA is the grantor of the contract. With the extinction of the company, the current contracts were taken over by the Araraquara City Hall through the Controladoria do Transporte de Araraquara – CTA.

(4) The kilometers-based payment system was instituted in 1992, under Luiza Erundina's administration. After the change in administration, in 1993, the privatization process of the CMTC (Municipal Collective Transportation Company) was initiated, and the logic of remuneration of the bus companies was changed over the years until it returned to payment per passenger carried in 2003.

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