

Hector Vigliecca and social housing proposals: building urban landscape

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the construction of urban landscape through housing, more specifically, social housing in the work of architect Hector Vigliecca, and aims to analyze the architect's social housing projects, seeking to understand the design strategies used to establish a very consistent relationship between architecture and the city, that is, the strategies used to "build the city".

KEY WORDS: Social Housing. Architecture and City. Hector Vigliecca.

1 INTRODUCTION

Usually, when one approaches housing shortage in Brazil, they refer to the need to build a large number of dwellings. Indeed, it is part of the problem, however, in the work herein, we consider that issue not as a matter of building housing units, but of building the space and the landscape of the city.

This has been the position of Uruguayan architect based in Brazil Hector Vigliecca, who has contributed a lot to the debate about the construction of a more friendly city for its inhabitants.

The architect has been basing his proposals on an interpretation of the city, indicates that when one builds "a public, legible, connected structure, recognizable as a structured urban system, people who are in contact with it feel like citizens and invest in their place of residence. That means, they build the city too." (VIGLIECCA, 2014 [our translation]).

Hence, the first question that comes up is: what is city?

According to the architect, it is a place to inhabit and not occupied, for it is in full inhabiting that citizenship is constituted. It is a place where there is no social or economic exclusion, neither another type of exclusion that is hard to be measured: the one related to the "urban environment", to this essentially urban condition, that must be adequate, through a city that "makes sense", with areas that communicate and are integrated. As Vigliecca insists, the lack of legibility of the **urban structure**, which is a fundamental condition of citizenship, also indicates a kind of exclusion.

Another topic that comes up in this work is the role of the project in the context of habitation and of the city – often fragile and marked by critical areas.

Vigliecca also addresses that matter. According to him, the project is a scientific research instrument to invent proposals, thus, each project is constituted as a reflection. For the architect, this is how the art of planning is organized: first, there is an interpretation of reality; then, the construction of a hypothesis; and finally, diagnoses are used to verify the hypothesis.

The above-mentioned subject matters are the base of this investigation, and it is from them that the reflections exposed herein are organized.

In this scenario, the goal of this work is to analyze the social housing projects by architect Hector Vigliecca, to understand the project strategies used to establish a consistent relationship between architecture and city, that means, the strategies used to "build a city". The architect brings this look at the city since his first years of work, still in Uruguay.

This article is structured in two parts. The first one approaches the reflections developed in Uruguay and their development in the context of his work in Brazil. As for the second one, it seeks to synthesize his fundamental principles, identifying reflective thought through the analysis of two specific projects.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory research and, to achieve its goals, it will be carried out according to the following stages: studying the architect's context and academic background, his early work experience in Uruguay, the European criticism context; analyzing the Brazilian context when Hector Vigliecca arrived in Brazil and the contemporary context; always aiming to identify the influence of all these scenarios on his projects, through elaborating literature reviews.

In order to analyze the architecture and urban projects of social housing, aiming to assess the confluence of all the factors mentioned above, a few projects will be chosen to make a detailed architectural and urbanistic analysis (both textual and graphic), using analysis instruments of script and redesign.

For these analyses, procedures will be: 1) Collecting data: documental and bibliographic, through the access to images of parts of the projects, such as implementation, blueprints, cuts etc., from the Vigliecca & Associados office and from books by the architect; 2) Literature research: to complement the information related to the studied and analyzed housing projects; 3) Construction of an analysis script for the studied situation; and 4) redesign and graphic schemes.

3 ACADEMIC EDUCATION / EARLY YEARS AND DISCIPLINARY REALITY - CONSOLIDATION ELEMENTS OF VIGLIECCA'S THOUGHT ON ARCHITECTURE AND THE CITY

Hector Vigliecca studied in Uruguay, at the former FARQ – School of Architecture –, now FADU – School of Architecture, Design and Urbanism – at the Udelar (*Universidad de la Republica*). After graduating, he spent three years in Italy, for postgraduate studies in Urbanism at the *Università Degli studi Di Roma La Sapienza* in Rome, and after that, he travelled around Europe. The architect refers to that period as a very important one for his growth, for it was a time of questioning the modernist structures for the city and of valuing the pre-existences and the communities of which the inhabitants were part, such as Aldo Rossi, Alison and Peter Smithson, Aldo Van Eyck, among others.

Still in his academic years, Vigliecca participated of a study group named *Nucleo del Sol*, which questioned the principles of the Charter of Athens and investigated the potentials of proposals of groups like Team 10, that incorporated a new posture regarding architecture and the city. From that, the group invested in projects that were more related to the suburbs and to those socially disadvantaged groups. (SERAPIÃO, 2013).

His academic career in Uruguay was marked by the debate promoted by Team 10 and by the works by James Stirling and the Archigram Group, which he accessed – both discussions and works – through Argentinian magazine *Summa* (VIGLIECCA, 2019, online).

In 1956, at CIAM X, that took place in Dubrovnick, a crisis started for the CIAM model, due to the rise of the group of architects that had organized the congress, formed by modern architects of the then new generation, such as Jacob Bakena, Aldo Van Eyck, Giancarlo De Carlo, Alison and Peter Smithson.

Their group mainly questioned the fundamentals of modern urbanism, like the excessive dogmatism that resulted into a uniform urban environment and a standardization of dwellings, that established a poor relation with the real needs of residents. They incorporated concepts like community and identity, which should translate into a relationship between houses and collective spaces of the city, mediate by cultural issues.

Thereby, these architects were concerned with the creation of a new spatial order for the cities, from a structure that promoted meanings and provided citizens with an understanding of their habitats, rejection universal space and the organization from the 4 functions of the Charter of Athens (RITTER, 2019). Altogether, their base subject matter was the comprehension about the relations between public and private, aiming to qualify public spaces. That was how the idea of “belonging” came up, meaning a “reidentification” of people with their habitat (MUMFORD, 2002).

Other voices joined this search to overcome the limitations of orthodox modernism initiatives. In the book *Death and Life of Great American cities* (1961), American journalist and intellectual Jane Jacobs defended diversity, mixed use, and the importance of the streets for the cities, for she argued that these were means that could ensure vitality for urban spaces and potentialize community life and social relationships (JACOBS, 2000).

The fundamental principles to criticize the late 1950s modern movement, that means, the search for an architecture that functions with the several levels of the act of inhabiting the city and their connections, the recovery of the streets as diverse places, ultimately, a greater integration between the architectural object and the city, were strongly absorbed by Hector Vigliecca and adapted to his architecture.

The beginning of his career happened in the context of Uruguayan housing cooperatives and constitutes a fundamental opportunity to practice the theoretical proposals that were debated throughout his academic years.

In 1975, he moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil, where he worked with Joaquim Guedes and as Head of the Architecture Department of the National Consortium of Builder Engineers. Later on, he was partners with Bruno Padovano at Padovano & Vigliecca Architects, for seven years. Nowadays, he is the director, together with Luciane Quel, Ruben Otero and Ronald Werner Fiedler, of the Vigliecca & Associados bureau (VIGLIECCA, 2012).

In Brazil, Vigliecca has been developing a vast production, from projects for social interest housing, sports arenas, cultural, educational and institutional buildings, to great urban interventions (VIGLIECCA, 2012), and has been standing out for an approach that is very wide and committed to architecture in its relationship with the city.

Regarding the housing sector, the architect has been working in different urban conditions, both in areas he describes as “critical” and in central and consolidate areas, always with an attentive look to the environment, with deep respect and acknowledgement for preexisting characteristics and human experiences.

His proposals may be understood from the classification used by Vigliecca himself in one of his books, “The Third Territory”: projects in central consolidated areas; in critical areas; and in places that are clearly marked by the use of blocks as a “reference urban unit” (VIGLIECCA, 2014). The first type addresses the work in voids amid preexisting urban structures, usually in historical areas. This way, the architect works with insertions that acknowledge significant

preexistences and consolidated urban systems, aiming to recover central areas for genuine residential use. Critical urban areas present informal occupation, lack of basic infrastructure and disconnection with the city structure. The project approach to these areas starts from acknowledging structures that point out project possibilities, inserting a new structure over an existing one and creating what Vigliecca called a “third territory”. It is possible to identify a vast production concerning critical urban areas in his career, which has been boosted from the 2000s on, due to the participation in many contests promoted by public power. Finally, he refers to areas in which the block is used as “reference urban unit” and the project structures arrangements that are complimentary to occupation, so that it articulates and creates new conditions, through an existing city scale (VIGLIECCA, 2014). The project of the Casarao do Carmo, for example, is an intervention in a central consolidated area, and in the Rio das Pedras – Vila Mara Housing Complex, located in Sao Miguel Paulista, Sao Paulo, the “block” is the reference element, that articulates the public and private uses and scales. Lastly, the project of the Novo Santo Amaro V Park is a proposal for a critical area in which a structuring connecting element is inserted as a space of urbanity in an extremely precarious environment.

As Lizete Maria Rubano (2014) points out, currently, the greatest challenge for Hector and his team has been, considering the territory and the human work, to elaborate theoretical and coping strategies regarding a mostly precarious urban condition. This challenge approaches processes of appropriation, legibility, and legitimation, that means, the way people use the territory and identify and legitimate its public use.

In what concerns the strategies to work in these very precarious territories, Vigliecca (2019, online [our translation]) comments: “It is not only about stitching together, yet about stitching together and extracting from preexisting values that you do not see in this moment because they are not very clear in the processes of construction of the city.”

In the quote below, the architect explains a strategy used in his projects, that became known as “infiltration wedges”:

How do we transform these places called *favelas*? We call that infiltration. To work in these places, we infiltrate urbanity.

We call it *infiltration wedges*: the introduction of urbanity in small insertions that spread all over the area. These infiltrations have a possibility to contaminate everything. It is the introduction of something that is necessary and legible and values the existing structure. [...] If we want residents to feel like citizens, to feel like they are part of the city, we must insert some legible urban infrastructure that connects them to the space of the city. It is a simple and efficient operating mode. In short, it is necessary to bring a more formal city (infrastructure, sidewalks, equipment) into the informal city, but without making it *tabula rasa*. (VIGLIECCA 2019, online [our translation]).

This article works with the hypothesis that the context of criticism in which he spent his first professional years in Uruguay was crucial for the architect’s thoughts and his ideas of the role of urbanists and of projects for the city.

4 VIGLIECCA HOUSING PROJECTS - “CITY BUILDING”

Hector Vigliecca is an architect that stands out for developing, through his projects, an accurate theoretical reflection about architecture and urbanism. According to him, in projects there is always a precious and precise care for interventions to be solidary with what already exists, for the city around to form a unity ensemble with the new intervention (VIGLIECCA, 2014).

Vigliecca (2017, online) states that there are five “basic rules” that synthesize the criteria for reasoning on urban design:

- 1) Restructuring urban fabric: evidence, redefinition, and hierarchy of the road network leads to the integration of the intervention area with the existing form city, so that it is no longer an urban barrier nor a space of exclusion.
- 2) Removals for urban need: removals are not only for areas of risk but may also be considered necessary to determine a representative urban condition.
- 3) Legibility as a condition for citizenship: the appropriation and understanding of geography and connectivity generate a sense of identity for the place.
- 4) Integration of the hydrographic body to urban structure: rediscovering the hydrographic body and reading this hydrography are the main determinants of the design of micro drainage and also provide the structure for public spaces of mobility.
- 5) Connections of new buildings: the new buildings must be solidary with the environment, thus constituting grouping (rather than isolation) and transforming the connections between public and private into qualified spaces.

Another concept, mentioned above, that bases the urban interventions adopted by the Vigliecca and his team, is what they call “urbanity infiltration wedges”, that means, elements that, when introduced in the working area, may expand the condition of urban quality. These wedges may be considered as “contamination” factors, in a way that they transform and establish a new urban condition for the area. This form of intervention is somehow found in almost every housing project by the architect.

On the other hand, Hector Vigliecca often explains his project strategies from concepts of two types of historical “monuments”: the triliths and the cromlechs. The architect indicates (VIGLIECCA, 2014) that, in his way of addressing the architecture or city “problem”, two hypotheses are established: the project resolution through an object – trilith – or through a space that is conformed of several objects – cromlech –, with a possibility of combining both procedures. The use of a concept or another depends on the interpretation of the reality one is working with (VIGLIECCA, 2014).

As one addresses the bibliography about Vigliecca’s works in the areas of architecture and urbanism, it is possible to verify that many of his projects, the ones that mark his works on housing, have already been studied. In this scenario, we have chosen to approach the ones that

have not been addressed yet, in order to know them and discover their role in the timeline of Vigliecca's projects.

As mentioned above, triliths are characterized as objects that are loose in space and their strength comes from their form, while cromlechs come from the groupings of several triliths, defining and conforming a space. For our analysis, two projects were chosen, to represent each one of those types of work.

In the triliths group, we will analyze the Reurbanization of the Paraisópolis Complex; and in the cromlechs group, the project of Jardim Vicentina. The analysis script was built from the theoretical references from the context of architecture and urbanism criticism during the latter half of the 20th century by the architects of Team 10, the Situationists, and Jane Jacobs, among others.

The structuring aspects of the script – for its reach, application viability and contemporaneity – are the association scales – house, street, neighborhood, and city –, as indicated by British architects Alison and Peter Smithson (MUNFORD, 2002) and adapted to the studied situations. Another concept that bases the entire analysis is the idea of cluster, which can be translated as a grouping with plastically perceptible spatiality and clearly connected to other groups through intermediate spaces (SMITHSON; SMITHSON, 1953 and 1957).

4.1 TRILITHS: REURBANIZATION OF THE PARAISÓPOLIS COMPLEX (2004)

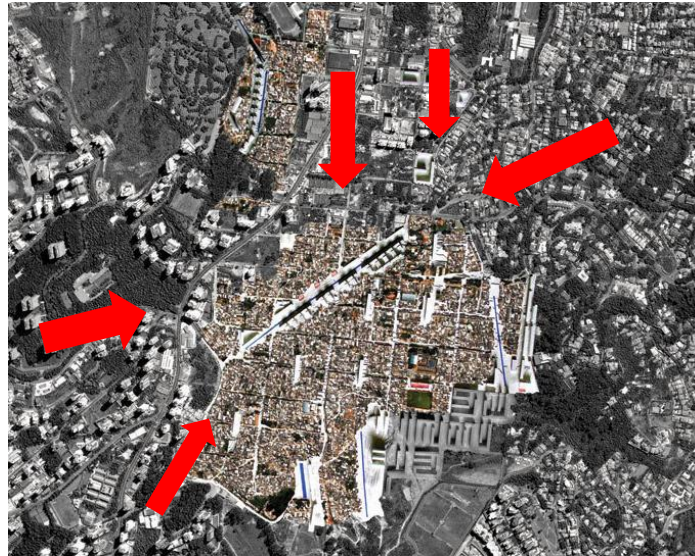
Paraisópolis is one of the biggest *favelas* in São Paulo, with a population of about 80,000 to 100,000 inhabitants and implemented in a very downhill area with presence of many open streams. It is a quite consolidated area, with single-family houses of masonry without plaster and two to three floors. The intervention area is of approximately 1,051,504.9m².

The project proposes complete removal of the dwellings that are located at the bottom of the valleys, in risk areas, thus facilitating the reading of the geography and transforming those into visible axes of the complex, with leisure areas and equipment.

The work in the central and most consolidated area of the *favela* consisted in intervening in the blocks, creating new public spaces and urban fronts. As for the downhill areas, which are disposed in an axis, new habitation blocks were proposed, perpendicular to level curves (VIGLIECCA & ASSOCIADOS, online).

As we analyze the implementation proposal, the connection between the complex and the existing roads around it is clear (Figure 1). In this project, we identified an idea of integrating the existing road network to the complex – maintaining some connections and creating others –, making the “city” to penetrate the intervention area, which searches to potentialize the sense of belonging and promote spaces for encounters and circulation. In this sense, a highlight is the new avenue created along the channeled Antonico stream, a diagonal traced in the middle of the *favela* that constitutes a shortcut for the passage traffic between two existing important streets, Flavio Americo Street and Gronchi Avenue, creates centrality.

Figure 1: Implementation of the complex. Scheme highlighting connections.



Source: Author's edition, from image available at: <http://www.vigliecca.com.br>, 2021.

From that, come up three types of different typologies, that vary according to the form of implementation: buildings downhill; inside blocks; and at the bottom of the valley, as seen in the images below. In the central areas, inside blocks, collective public spaces were created, conforming more internal and closed spaces; while along Antonico stream we identify a linear park. As for the most downhill areas, on the slopes of the hills, green areas for collective use are predicted through stairs and patios that divide the blocks proposed and act as restrainers for the slopes in these occupation sectors. The new habitation blocks present accesses at different levels, with up to eight floors and two accesses at different levels, with no need for elevators (Figures 3).

Figure 2: on the left, collective space in downhill areas. In the center, collective space inside the block. On the right, linear park.



Source: <http://www.vigliecca.com.br>, 2021.

Figure 3: blocks proposed for downhill areas.



Source: <http://www.vigliecca.com.br>, 2021.

4.2. CROMLECHS: JARDIM VICENTINA COMPLEX (2008)

The Jardim Vicentina Complex consist of a proposal of urbanization and social housing at Jardim Vicentina, at the outskirts of the city of Osasco, in greater Sao Paulo. The terrain presents an irregular shape, with an area of approximately 95,000 m². The immediate surrounding area is characterized by single-family houses made of wood or masonry, with one or two floors.

The project proposes to remove and relocate residents of most critical areas beside a stream and develops in two distinct parts: a linear and longer zone that follows this stream, which was channeled, and another also linear, but not so elongated, perpendicular to the first one.

Implementation predicts to use three types of buildings – linear isolated buildings, and linear buildings connected to the square blocks located alongside the stream, defining two new urban fronts at each side of the road axis of services proposed (VIGLIECCA & ASSOCIADOS, ONLINE); and buildings in L, conforming internal patios – more “closed” collective use spaces – in the smaller part of the area. All buildings have four floors and are built with exposed structural masonry.

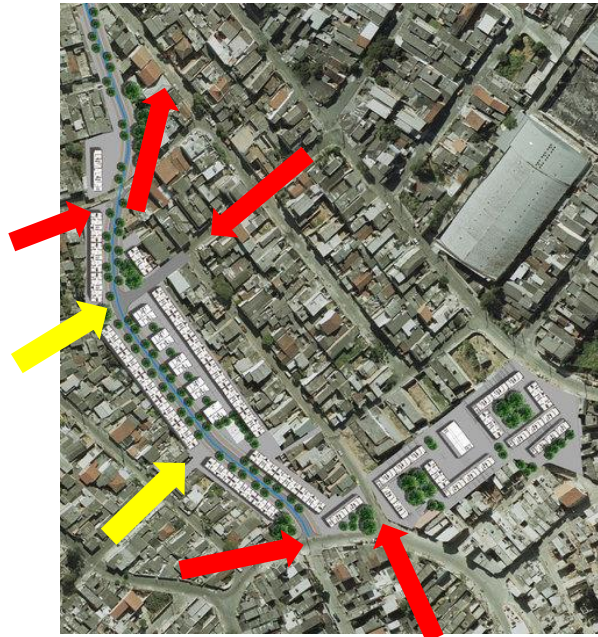
The architect shows concern with social and cultural aspects of the population, as well as with effective promotion of the use of free public spaces. Social coexistence is encouraged in different ways, through spaces that allow encounters and visual contact, like the “internal street”, the small squares and the sports courts, which stimulates neighbors living in the same building and in the same neighborhood to spend time together.

The implementation of the buildings favors the urban dimension in a way that the structure of the urban fabric and the blocks themselves indicate the limits between public and private (RAPPL, 2019).

As we observe the implementation of the complex in relation with its immediate surroundings, we identify an integration with the existing roads and accesses. Some connections were kept, to facilitate the connection between residents of the complex and the dwellings next to it. The proposal included a renewal of the region’s stairways, that interconnect streets with very different levels (Figure 4).



The conformation of the blocks of the area is not uniform and the part in which the complex was implemented is even more irregular so, to avoid having too much space between blocks, they were distributed in a way to facilitate some permeability for pedestrians.

Figure 4: Implementation of the Complex. Scheme detailing connections.



Source: Author's edition, from image available at: <https://www.archdaily.com.br/br/804477/urbanizacao-do-jardim-vicentina-vigliecca-and-associados>

Legend

-  Connections with stairways
-  Connections with existing streets

The design of flows and connections end up generating spaces of transition between the complex and the surroundings, potentializing their use, both by residents of the complex and of the neighboring areas (Figure 5).

With the removal of the most precarious dwellings, especially the wooden ones, the houses that configure the surroundings are mostly self-built single-family ones, with up to three floors, most in masonry with exposed bricks. All the blocks of the complex were built with exposed ceramic blocks that, besides requiring little maintenance, are a way to keep an approximation with preexistences.

Figure 5: Transition spaces of the complex



Source: <https://www.archdaily.com.br/br/804477/urbanizacao-do-jardim-vicentina-vigliecca-and-associados>, 2021.

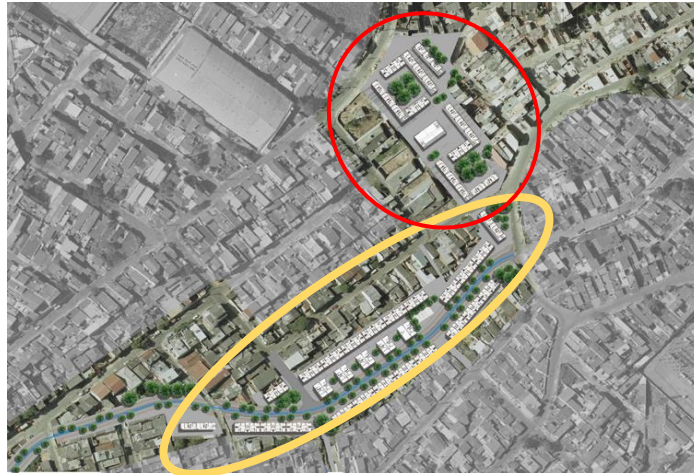
In the Jardim Vicentina complex, we basically identify two forms of implementing blocks

(Figure 6).

In the first one, with less accentuated topography, a central road axis was created, where then the existing stream was channeled. This way, linear buildings were implemented along this axis, in two urban tracks, one at each side of the road. In the second zone, with more slope, constructions were distributed in two existing routes, where two grouped typologies were implemented in a sequence, creating “Ls” and patios, with scaled blocks that follow the topography.

The form of distribution of buildings creates collective public spaces that are bigger than the existing ones, increasing free areas and creating places for being together.

Figure 6 : Implementation of the complex. Scheme highlighting zones.



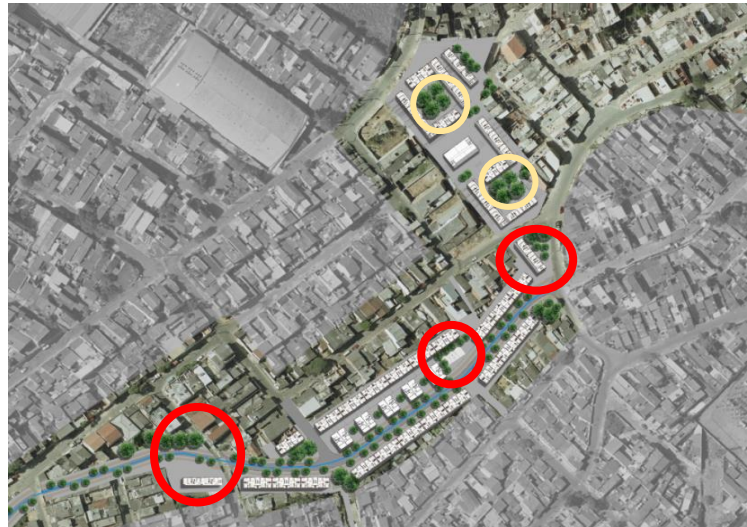
Source: Author's edition, from image available at: <https://www.archdaily.com.br/br/804477/urbanizacao-do-jardim-vicentina-vigliecca-and-associados,2021>.

Legend

- Zone 1
- Zone 2

In Zone 1, on one of the sides, these buildings are isolated and on the other, they are connected to other blocks, each portion forming some kind of “T”. Among blocks, we identify spaces that are small leisure places. As for Zone 2, it has a more compact shape, with buildings in “L” conforming blocks with internal patios and spaces of transition between buildings. The Complex presents open collective use spaces with more generous dimensions in three points alongside the road. There are two green areas, one in the beginning and one in the end of the road, and a central leisure area, with a sports court. In the part with blocks distributed in “L”, there are internal patios that were conformed through the implementation, but with low visibility and less integrated to the environment (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Implementation of the complex. Scheme highlighting collective spaces.



Source: Author's edition, from image available at: <https://www.archdaily.com.br/br/804477/urbanizacao-do-jardim-vicentina-vigliecca-and-associados,2021>.

Linear open spaces, both beside the stream and the buildings in “L” configure a space that is similar to the urban street, since they are spatially defined.

It is possible to identify that two of the three types of the complex present frontal corridors and footbridges (Figure 8). These corridors end up being characterized as elevated streets, increasing connections and creating common spaces.

Figure 8: Circulation between buildings – footbridges.



Source: <https://www.archdaily.com.br/br/804477/urbanizacao-do-jardim-vicentina-vigliecca-and-associados,2021>.

As for the type with central corridor, when grouped with another block through a footbridge, it goes into the same category, also having an elevated street.

Elevated streets create and establish new relations among building, interconnect places and individual and collective activities, at the ground level and on upper floors, in a very dynamic relationship.

The complex has three variations of blueprints. The first type has centralized access and vertical circulation on one of the sides, to distribute the access to each apartment on the sides. The second one has vertical access and circulation on one of the sides, with open-covered circulation on the frontside of the block of apartments, that distributes direct access to units. The third type is a combination of the two: the first and a block with a square blueprint and using

footbridges for circulation, then using a volume with vertical access for both buildings, optimizing distribution (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Distribution of the two types of buildings.



Source: The autho, 2021.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is possible to note, through the analyzed projects, the architect's concern with the scales object and city, always aiming at a better form of connection with the city, in a way that the "new" is solidary with the existing. The attention to the place and its residents is the guiding principle of his projects.

On the other hand, it is possible to identify that the transition between public and private spaces of the housing units, passing by the semi-public collective spaces of the complex – elevated streets and patios –, and getting to the city's public space, create a positive transition of the scales complex and city. The relationships between public and private aim to qualify public spaces, thus bringing up an idea of "identity", of "belonging", that means, of "reidentification" of people with their habitat.

This way, in every project there are ideas of connection between the city's elements and scales, of appropriation, of an existence of qualified spaces to transform cities into something more livable, more connected with itself and its inhabitants. It somehow confirms the hypothesis of this article that the context of criticism in which Vigliecca spent the first years of his career in Uruguay, was crucial for the construction of the architect's thoughts and his view on the role of urbanists and projects for the city. In the proposal presented herein, architecture is not configured as an object itself, but as phenomenon that conforms the city, searching for a close relationship between these two scales.

Finally, it was verified, through bibliographic research and preliminary analysis of the projects, that Hector Vigliecca has a vast production of housing complexes that can be considered great examples in architect and urbanism, especially because they are thought of as structuring elements that transform the space and the urban landscape.

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