

**Brazilian gardens in historical perspective:
Notes on the origins, functions, and design of Recife's squares¹**

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Abstract: This text investigates Brazilian public gardens, considering their origins, functions, and design in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In particular, it examines the garden squares built in the city of Recife, taking into account their relationship with pre-existing urban spaces and surrounding buildings, as well as the role of vegetation, walkways, water features, sculptures, and other ornaments and equipment. Thus, the text is divided into four parts. First, it presents the context of the development of public gardens in Brazilian cities, which included promenades, squares, and parks. Second, it discusses the origins of the concept of “squares” and its dissemination abroad. Third, it analyzes Recife's garden squares drawing analogies between them and their European counterparts. In conclusion, it is our intention to cast light on Brazil's garden culture, as well as on the importance of preserving public gardens today, due to their historic, cultural, social, and ecological significance, especially considering the high level of urbanization of post-industrial cities.

Keywords: Gardens. Landscape architecture. History. Nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Brazil.

**Jardins brasileiros em perspectiva histórica:
Notas sobre as origens, as funções e o projeto das praças do Recife**

Resumo: Este texto investiga os jardins públicos brasileiros considerando suas origens, funções e projeto no final do século XIX e início do XX. Examina, em particular, as praças ajardinadas construídas na cidade do Recife, levando em consideração sua relação com os espaços urbanos preexistentes e construções adjacentes, bem como o papel da vegetação, traçado, elementos aquáticos, esculturas e outros ornamentos e equipamentos. Desse modo, o texto divide-se em quatro partes. Primeiro, apresenta o contexto do

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desenvolvimento dos jardins públicos nas cidades brasileiras, os quais abrangiam passeios, praças e parques. Segundo, discute as origens do conceito de “square” e sua disseminação em países estrangeiros. Terceiro, analisa as praças ajardinadas do Recife, traçando analogias entre elas e suas congêneres europeias. Por fim, é nossa intenção lançar luz sobre a cultura “jardinística” brasileira bem como sobre a importância da preservação dos jardins públicos em razão de seus significados históricos, culturais, sociais e ecológicos, especialmente considerando o alto grau de urbanização das cidades pós-industriais.

Palavras-chave: Jardins. Arquitetura da paisagem. História. Séculos XIX e XX. Brasil.

1 Accessing greenery: the cultivation of public gardens in Brazil

Gardens are notable examples of man’s interaction with his environment in order to respond to diverse individual or collective needs. Gardens have historically been conceived for growing food and improving people’s well-being, as well as for aesthetic pleasure, botanical instruction, and private or public recreation.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the creation of green spaces, ranging from small-scale urban gardens to large public parks was nourished by industrial society as a way to embellish and redesign growing cities and to provide their populations with healthful spaces and recreational facilities. Once laid out in the urban fabric of many western cities, public gardens contributed to balance the level of urbanization with access to greenery.

In Brazil, from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, public gardens have played an important role in the urbanization of cities. After the colonial period², local governments conducted public works, such as promenades, garden squares³, and parks, benefitting from the end of Portugal’s commercial monopoly and the opening up of Brazilian ports to other nations in 1808.

Such political changes stimulated the immigration of European professionals, the importation of manufactured goods as well as cultural, artistic, and scientific improvements in the late Empire and in the course of the First Republic.

Many foreigners were commissioned to carry out infrastructure, building and garden projects, including French engineers and garden designers who were active in the Southeast⁴ region, while English professionals provided train and tram services, as well as water and energy supply companies, in many Brazilian cities.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the construction of railroads and economic growth brought about by coffee and tea production, as well as rubber exploitation in the Southeast, South and North regions respectively fostered major urban improvements in different cities of the country, including the creation of public gardens.

In Rio de Janeiro, the seat of the Empire, the Court garden designer, Auguste François Marie Glaziou, was responsible for the renovation of the *Passeio Público* (the city's public walk or promenade) in 1862, and for the design of the garden of the *Campo de Santana* from 1873 to 1880 and for the garden of the *Quinta da Boa Vista*, where the imperial family's residence was located.

However, the authorship of many garden projects in other Brazilian cities remains unknown, having frequently been associated with public administration rather than with the professionals who conceived them.

Inheritors of their foreign counterparts, late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Brazilian gardens were equipped with decorative and utilitarian products purchased via catalogue from countries such as France, England, Scotland, Belgium, and Germany.

These manufactured products encompassed bandstands, pavilions, railings, and the *fontes d'art*, i.e., a wide range of metallic ornamental objects, such as fountains, sculptures, and flowerpots, mostly imported from French foundries.

Thus, the insufficiency of Brazilian production, the technical progress of the industrialized countries, the expansion of the European market, and the pressure of British capital favored the widespread entry of iron articles into Brazil.

Nevertheless, the commercialization of industrialized products saw a drop as a result of World War I, and as early as the twentieth century, the construction of bandstands, pavilions, pergolas, and benches in masonry and reinforced cement started.

Within this context, public gardens multiplied in the principal cities of Brazil through the redesign of pre-existing open spaces based on the concept of "squares", in addition to early promenades and then public parks from the 1920s.

2 Merging nature and cities: origins and dissemination of squares

The square was cultivated in London starting in the 1630s, but truly developed during the city's reconstruction after the fire of 1666 (GIEDION, 1967). It was later introduced in the United States, France and Latin American countries, such as Brazil.

According to Longstaffe-Gowan (2012, p. 65), "By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, streets, squares and their conterminous buildings were, indeed, the unmistakable defining features of urban London [...]".

The squares were undertaken by builders and developers on implanting new residential neighborhoods. Separated from the traffic of public thoroughfares, they were surrounded by railings and gates, whose keys belonged to the residents, who held the right of ownership and use, and were responsible for their maintenance.

Therefore, for Panzini (1993), the square was an intervention of land and real-estate transformation, that encompassed a sequence of wealthy homes and a space connected to them, containing a garden owned by the inhabitants of the adjoining dwellings.

This idea is summarized in an architectural dictionary definition from 1887, cited by Giedion (1967). The author recorded that a London square “[...] is a piece of land in which is an enclosed garden, surrounded by a public roadway, giving access to the houses on each side of it.” (GIEDION, 1967, p. 718).

Introduced in the U.S. East Coast cities – Philadelphia (1682), Savannah (1733), Boston (1793), New York (1803), and Baltimore (1827) – the squares “[...] were recognized as an effective urban planning tool for accommodating a growing population.” (GOODMAN, 2003, p. xi). In Boston, they were attributed to the architect Charles Bulfinch, after his visit to London in 1785, as pointed out by Goodman (2003).

The author stressed that in Philadelphia and Savannah, the squares were laid out in the original grid of both cities “[...] as public amenities or common lands for the entire community.” and were meant to be “[...] public gathering spaces.” (GOODMAN, 2003, p. 10; 14). Therefore, “[...] the municipal government, rather than the house owners, bore the responsibility for enhancing and caring for the open spaces.” (GOODMAN, 2003, p. 14).

In Boston and New York there were both private and public examples, while in Baltimore squares were built on lots donated to the city by private real-estate agents “[...] who were confident that the value of their abutting property would increase [...]” once the garden was enhanced (GOODMAN, 2003, p. 10; 14).

The U.S. squares were either established as a constituent part of the urban fabric of planned cities or represented a strategy by developers and builders to increase residential enterprises in growing cities.

Parisian squares were included in the works undertaken by Napoleon III and Haussmann. After his stay in England, the emperor decided to endow the French capital with garden spaces inspired by London squares (GIEDION, 1967). In Paris, however, they were laid out in the middle of traffic and open to the public and were not restricted to new residential neighborhoods.

Dictionaries of the French language from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century defined the square as a “Garden surrounded by a railing located in the middle of a public space; etymology English, square [...]” (LITTRÉ, 1876, p. 2038) and “English word meaning public space, garden surrounded by a railing established in a public space.” (LAROUSSE, 1898-1904, p. 795).

Descriptions presented by William Robinson (1869) indicated that Paris squares were enjoyed by working classes, men, women, and children who desired to appreciate the scene, listen to concerts, play or simply spend time reading and relaxing.

In Brazil, although recorded in several documents from 1872, concerning the city of Recife, as well as registered several times by Brazilian authors relative to other cities of the country, the word “square” was not incorporated into the Portuguese vocabulary, unlike in Paris’ case.

It is not registered in dictionaries of the Portuguese language between the end of the eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century (SILVA, 1789; VIEIRA 1874; SILVA, 1878) nor in architecture or art dictionaries published in Brazil and Portugal (CORONA AND LEMOS, 1972; TEIXEIRA, 1985).

In Recife, as in other Brazilian cities, the juxtaposition of Portuguese terms⁵ – “*jardim*” and “*praça*”, “*jardim*” and “*campo*”, “*jardim*” and “*pátio*”, “*jardim*” and “*largo*” – were frequently used to refer to the gardens recently built, combining access to greenery with traditional toponyms and with urban models inherited from Portugal.

3 Crossing boundaries, reshaping concepts: Recife’s garden squares

Recife’s first garden square dates from 1872, when the former *Campo das Princesas* was landscaped with the aim of providing residents with a place for “[...] gathering and recreation [...]” and “[...] beautifying the city [...]”, according to the Government of the Province of Pernambuco (JUNQUEIRA, 1872, p. 44). It included iron railings imported from England (ANDRADE, 1978, p. 199), four gates, an iron bandstand, statues imported from France and four small ponds (Figure 1).

The sculptures (from 1863 to 1864), depicting gods from Greco-Roman mythology, were produced by the French foundry *JJ Ducl et Fils*, and signed by the sculptor Eugène Louis Lequesne, according to inscriptions still visible on some of them (Figure 2).

The *Jardim do Campo das Princesas* was illuminated, decorated with streamers and pennants and remained “[...] full of visitors who went to admire [...] the beautiful statues [...]” and enjoy the band concerts on the day it was officially open to the public (DIÁRIO DE PERNAMBUCO, 1872/10/21, p. 2).

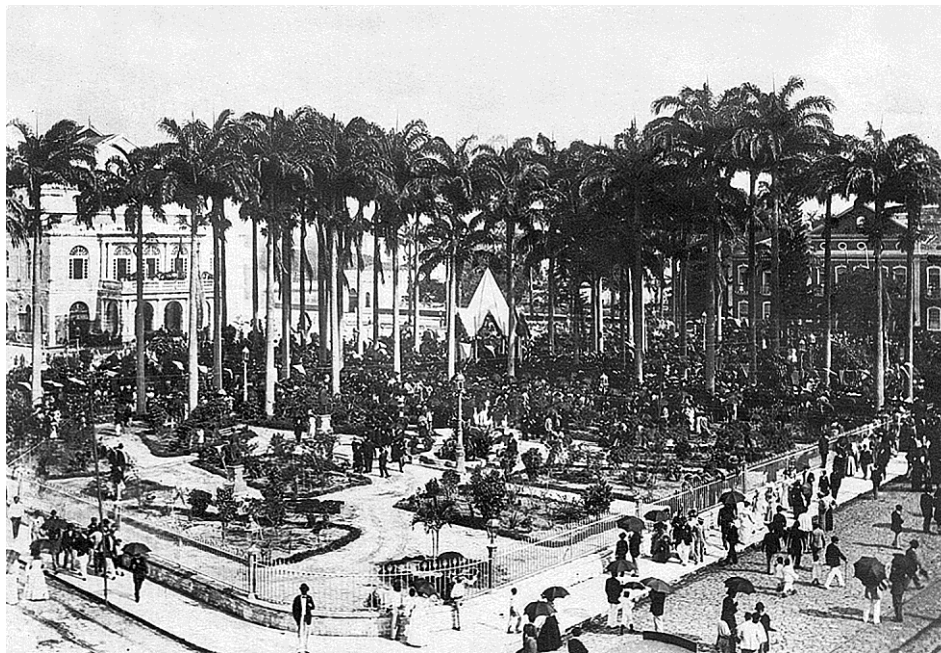


Figure 1: *Jardim do Campo das Princesas*, currently Praça da República, in Recife. Note the open walkway around the edges of the square, the imperial palms, a pine tree, beds, the iron bandstand in the center, and the railings. The garden was inaugurated in 1872. In the background, the Pernambuco Government Palace. On the left, the Santa Isabel Theater.

Source: Image owned by the Library of the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute, Section of Pernambuco, ceded to the author (SILVA, 2010).



Figure 2: *Jardim do Campo das Princesas*, currently Praça da República, in Recife. Note the open walkway around the edges of the square, beds and shrubs, an iron sculpture, and the railings. The garden was inaugurated in 1872. On the right, the Santa Isabel Theater.

Source: Recife City Museum collection [Museu da Cidade do Recife].

In 1875, the *Jardim da Praça do Conde d'EU* was inaugurated, becoming the city's second garden square (Figure 3). A marble fountain imported from Portugal, carved in Lisbon, was set up in the center of the garden (Figure 4). The fountain enhanced the space through its multiple sensory effects, such as its visual appeal, the sound of the moving water and the latter's refreshing function, appropriate for such a tropical city as Recife. In addition, the garden was equipped with an iron bandstand, iron railings, and three gates (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

In order to construct it, the Councilman and doctor Pedro de Athayde Lobo Moscoso, a local resident, carried out a vaccination campaign to raise funds for the project, as reported

in the press (DIARIO DE PERNAMBUCO, 1871/08/24, p. 4). Its inauguration was marked by a good turnout: the public went to enjoy the national anthem performed by three musical bands and a fireworks display (DIARIO DE PERNAMBUCO, 1875/10/16, p. 1).



Figure 3: *Jardim da Praça do Conde d'EU*, currently *Praça Maciel Pinheiro*, in Recife. Note the open walkway around the edges of the square, beds, shrubs, and the railings. The garden was inaugurated in 1875. In the background, the Mother Church of Boa Vista.

Source: Recife City Museum collection [Museu da Cidade do Recife].



Figure 4: *Jardim da Praça do Conde d'EU*, currently *Praça Maciel Pinheiro*, in Recife. Note a pine tree and a palm tree, the fountain, and the iron bandstand in the center. In the background, the Mother Church of Boa Vista.

Source: Postcard from the author's collection.

Several years later, in 1877, the Government of the Province of Pernambuco began the construction of the *Jardim da Praça D. Pedro II*, also called *Jardim da Praça do Espírito*

Santo. The garden was equipped with an iron bandstand, iron railings, and four gates (Figure 5). An ancient fountain made in Genoa, formerly used to supply the population with water and later deactivated, was preserved as part of the garden's decoration.

At the beginning of the century, the place was, according to the chronicler Mario Sette (1981, p. 227), occupied by students from the School of Law, from the neighboring Jesuit School building that had been closed. The young people “[...] filled the garden [...]” and converted it into a place of conversations, speeches, laughter, boeing, and mischief of all sorts (SETTE, 1981, p. 227).

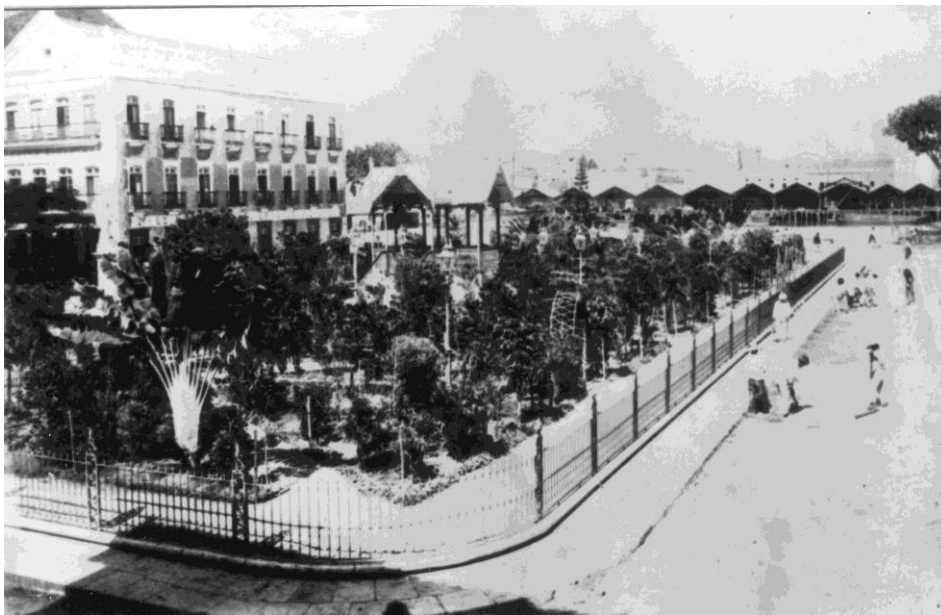


Figure 5: *Jardim da Praça do Espírito Santo* or *Jardim da Praça D. Pedro II*, currently *Praça Dezessete*, in Recife. Note the open walkway around the edges of the square, a traveler's palm tree, the iron bandstand in the center, and the railings. The garden was begun in 1877.

Source: Recife City Museum collection [Museu da Cidade do Recife].

Similar to these garden squares, the *Praça Visconde de Mauá* was later inaugurated, but its opening date is unknown. The garden was furnished with a central bandstand, iron railings, two gates, and a pathway connecting it to the central railway station, inaugurated in 1888, and to the public thoroughfares (Figure 6). It is likely that the garden has been built in that period, enhancing the train station as a gathering place.



Figure 6: *Jardim Sete de Setembro* or *Praça Visconde de Mauá*, in Recife. Note the beds, the iron bandstand in the center, the railings, and a gate. In the background, the central railway station.
Source: Image published in the Album of Pernambuco of 1913, owned by the Library of the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute, Section of Pernambuco, ceded to the author (SILVA, 2010).

Recife's garden squares possessed a pathway parallel to the railings, conducive to promenading, which permitted strollers to see and be seen (Figure 1 to Figure. 3, and Figure 5). After this outer walkway, beds of herbaceous plants and shrubs traced sinuous paths that permitted circulation within the space. The four gardens built in that period were unprovided with central lawns in their interior area. These lawns were suitable for sunbathing in London squares, but unsuited to Recife's tropical climate.

A means of relaxation and social display, the habit of walking along streets and in gardens was designated by the English word "*footing*", used in the writings of Brazilian chroniclers, memorialists, and historians. The sociologist, anthropologist and writer Gilberto Freyre (1977, p. 30) affirmed that the word *footing* was supposed to be a neologism created at the time, since "[...] through the English influence, Brazilians developed the taste for the English habit of going about on foot.". Nevertheless, in English, the word means "The act of walking, pacing, or stepping [...] now rare." (MURRAY, 1971, p. 406; SIMPSON AND WEINER, 1989, p. 19).

In London squares, on the contrary, the sense of privacy expressed by the railings was emphasized by a hedge surrounding the space, concealing what happened inside it. In the center, open areas facilitated visual control of children by their parents from the windows of the neighboring dwellings, while treeless lawns could be used for sunbathing.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the hedge was indicated in Humphrey Repton's *Russell Square* project (1806) and was the object of John Loudon's attention (1812; 1824) in publications he dealt with design and planting in squares.

This is one of the remarkable aspects of English squares, as observed in the nineteenth century by William Robinson (1869). For him "In Paris, the squares are open to every one; in England they are locked up, surrounded by a railing [...] and planted with bushes so as to impede the view of all that is going on inside." (ROBINSON, 1869, p. 89).

On this issue, according to Longstaffe-Gowan (2012, p. 89), early-nineteenth-century pedestrian point-of-view images illustrated the green foliage and the everyday "[...] activities on the public carriageways surrounding squares, and not in their enclosed central areas.". The open space in the middle of the squares was "[...] concealed behind the dense screens of verdure [...]" emphasizing "[...] the exclusivity of the central gardens and their physical separation from the street: the gardens were reserved for private residents [...]" (LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN, 2012, p. 89).

In Paris squares, on the other hand, one of the functions of the vegetation was to create a "[...] formal and conceptual link [...]" between the interior space and the outside (LIMIDO, 2002, p. 113). In analyzing eleven of them created between 1856 and 1867, Limido (2002) highlighted the relationship between nature and the enhancement of historical elements located in their internal or external space.

In the *Square de la Tour-Saint-Jacques* (1856) and in the *Square Louis XVI* (1865), for example, the vegetation surrounding the historical monuments, the *Tour Saint-Jacques-la-Boucherie* and the *Chappelle Expiatoire*, respectively, were considered the distinctive features of the garden (LIMIDO, 2002). In the *Square de Laborde* (1867), currently called *Square Marcel Pagnol*, an uneven central lawn enhanced the view in the direction of the neighboring *Église de Saint-Augustin* (LIMIDO, 2002).

In Recife, four rows of imperial palms (*Roystonea oleracea*) creating two cross-shaped alleys established the visual and conceptual connection between the *Jardim do Campo das Princesas* and the contiguous buildings (Figure 1). The space was framed by public cultural, educational and administrative buildings, such as the Santa Isabel Theater, the Pernambuco Government Palace, the Public Library and the School of Engineering (occupied by the State Treasury), and enhanced by the vegetation (Figure 1). Thus, the imperial palms (*Roystonea oleracea*), introduced and widely used during the Empire – from which their popular name derives – created a tropical atmosphere and a *sui generis* effect between the garden and the urban environment.

Other species planted in the gardens were the pine tree (*Araucaria sp.*), the traveler's palm, also known as *ravenala* (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) in Brazil, and the areca palm or

butterfly palm (*Dypsis lutescens*). These species used to be planted in isolated spots of gardens that permitted them to be contemplated, as if they were natural sculptures, as can be seen in historical photos and postcards (Figure 5).

Lastly, another significant element present in Recife's garden squares was the iron bandstand, a music kiosk generally located in the center of the space, so as to offer the best possible positioning of the people around it. Richly worked, the bandstands served as stage and shelter for the musicians during the concerts, guaranteeing them a prominent position above the crowd and protecting them from sun or rain (Figure 1, Figure 4 to Figure 6).

Bandstands are present in the narrative of the chronicler Mario Sette (1981, p. 159), who evoked the weekly musical presentations given by the city's two main bands. The author related that if one of them played in the *Praça da República* (formerly called *Jardim do Campo das Princesas*) on Sundays, one could see “[...] Recife's fine society, among the park's palm trees, on the small wooden benches, passing through the garden gates, going around the bandstand.” (SETTE, 1981, p. 159). He himself remembered the “Disputed, elegant and famous concerts [...]” of yesterday's Recife, which he used to attend in 1903 (SETTE, 1981, p. 202).

The author further stated that around 1901 “[...] there was a musical tournament between the two rival bands in the *Praça Maciel Pinheiro*.” (formerly called *Jardim da Praça do Conde d'EU*), during the celebration of the Proclamation of the Republic of Brazil (SETTE, 1981, p. 159). At the party, the musicians played the national anthem and the tournament went on so long that at midnight “[...] none of the bands wanted to get down from the bandstand?!” (SETTE, 1981, p. 160).

According to the historian Raimundo Arrais (1998), as early as the twentieth century, newspapers were announcing the *Praça da República* concerts, publishing the musical program, in addition to highlighting the brilliance of the spectacle as well as the affluence of the audience. The author further affirmed that in 1908, the concerts held in the “*Praça da República* had acquired a social connotation above all else [...]” (ARRAIS, 1998, p. 21), indicating the importance of the public gardens among urban recreational spaces.

In summary, Recife's garden squares were places for gathering and leisure, for pastimes such as the *footing*, meetings, the contemplation of ponds and ornaments and the musical presentations held on a regular basis or on festive occasions. As a form of public improvements, they promoted access to greenery and contributed to the city's beautification.

4 Conclusions

At the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century, the creation of public gardens in Brazil related to the physical and populational expansion of cities, as well as to the provision of urban services and infrastructure, in response to society's needs.

The public works, among them garden squares and their constituent elements, notably bandstands and vegetation, gradually contributed to modifying the cities' features as well as to increasing the public recreational spaces.

Within this context, in Recife, a port city, and thus in contact with national and foreign ports, garden squares were based on foreign gardens, especially European ones. On the one hand, they preserved similarities with their counterparts, regarding their built and manufactured elements, and on the other hand, expressed differences regarding their terminology, the surrounding constructions, and ways of enhancing these through the general plan and planting scheme.

Thus, through an in-depth study of the gardens of one particular city, methodological and historiographical frameworks for analyzing other cities are established, shedding light on Brazil's garden culture. The text also contributes to the understanding of the relationships between nature and urbanization from the development of public gardens in post-industrial society.

Finally, we draw attention to the living, historic, and cultural heritage that public squares potentially represent, either because their design features and built elements refer to a specific time and place, or because they play a social and ecological role, at present, in Brazilian cities, which have been increasingly growing, in terms of area as well as population.

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NOTES

¹ This text is based on the author's PhD dissertation entitled "Entre a implantação e a aclimação: o cultivo de jardins públicos no Brasil nos séculos XIX e XX" (SILVA, 2016), on the author's book "Jardins do Recife: uma história do paisagismo no Brasil (1872-1937)" (SILVA, 2010), and on the author's journal article "El square y la difusión de los jardines públicos brasileños" (SILVA, 2016). The author's doctoral research was supported by the São Paulo Research Foundation [Fapesp], Brazil, and Dumbarton Oaks Research Library Collection/Harvard University, United States.

² Considering the period ranging from early colonization of Brazil by Portugal to 1930, Brazilian political chronology is divided into three stages: Colony (1500-1822), Empire (1822-1889), and First Republic (1889-1930).

³ In Brazil, public gardens comprised such spaces known as *passeios* (promenades), *praças ajardinadas* (squares), and *parques* (parks) in Portuguese. In the period addressed in this study, in England the word “square” implied an enclosed garden set up in a plot of land mainly for the use by the residents of the surrounding houses. Usually, the word “square” stands for the word *praça* in contemporary Portuguese. The word *praça*, however, which derives from the Latin *platea*, i.e., “public”, traditionally refers to an urban space open to the public, regardless of the existence of a garden in its midst. When transformed into green spaces, the Brazilian *praças* used to be called *praças ajardinadas*, combining the idea of public with the idea of greenery. Likewise, the words *place*, *plaza*, and *piazza* all derived from the Latin *platea*, also meaning “public” in French, Spanish, and Italian respectively. With respect to these linguistic and cultural differences, in this text we adopted the expression “garden square” that best designates the Brazilian public gardens laid out in pre-existing open spaces, in order to draw the readers’ attention to both the green constituents and the public character of such places. On the other hand, we used the word “square” relative to the British, American and French contexts.

⁴ Brazil is currently divided into five regions: North, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast and South. This official division dates back to the 1940s, having been established after the period covered in the study. However, the Brazilian cities mentioned in this text already existed.

⁵ In Brazil, the spaces known as *campo*, *praça*, *pátio* and *largo* could be differentiated by their main functions, size or adjacent buildings, however, on the whole, they were called *praças*. They also had in common the fact of being open spaces, traditionally lacking expressive vegetation, permanent utilitarian, decorative, and recreational equipment, such as benches, sculptures, and bandstands. At times they were equipped with fountains for water supply, temporary liturgical elements or historical monuments, before being converted into gardens.

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