

Urban Green Space in Buenos Aires: At the Micro-historical Crossing of Regional, National, and Global Aspirations (1870s–1880s)

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ABSTRACTS

The park of Palermo – officially named *Parque 3 de Febrero* – embodied the desires of the ruling elites more than any other place in Buenos Aires and promised to provide health and progress. Through a new concept of “civilized” nature, the park of Palermo was meant to reinforce Buenos Aires’ hegemony in the Argentine nation, while also fostering a connection to cities on the American and European continents, where similar parks were being inaugurated. Through the analysis of the discussion about the park the article reconstructs the park founders’ aspirations in positioning the city in the regional, national, and global context, on the one hand. On the other hand, it underlines the conflicts and shortcomings that were inherent to the project and its implementation.

Der Park von Palermo – offiziell *Parque 3 de Febrero* genannt – verkörperte mehr als jeder andere Ort in Buenos Aires die Wünsche der herrschenden Eliten und versprach Gesundheit und Fortschritt. Durch ein neues Konzept der „zivilisierten“ Natur sollte der Park von Palermo die Hegemonie von Buenos Aires in der argentinischen Nation stärken und gleichzeitig eine Verbindung zu Städten auf dem amerikanischen und europäischen Kontinent herstellen, wo ähnliche Parks eröffnet wurden. Durch die Analyse der Diskussion über den Park rekonstruiert der Artikel zum einen die Bestrebungen der Parkgründer, die Stadt im regionalen, nationalen und globalen Kontext zu positionieren. Andererseits werden die Konflikte und Unzulänglichkeiten aufgezeigt, die mit dem Projekt und seiner Umsetzung einhergingen.

1. Introduction

This article looks at the intersection of global, national, and regional discourses, imaginations, and aspirations in the production of a specific urban green space in Buenos Aires, the Parque Tres de Febrero.¹ The analysis of the case of this park, designed and built starting in 1874 and also known as Park of Palermo, allows one to trace the intricate intersections between different spatial scales at a micro-historical level. Through the analysis of the discussion regarding the design of the park, the article aims to reconstruct the complex web of aspirations regarding the positioning of Buenos Aires within imagined regional, national, and global orders. Argentine President Domingo Sarmiento (1868–1874) as well as further members of the national and urban elites participated in this debate, which took place in the national congress as well as in several newspapers. By also reconstructing some salient episodes related to the early stages of the park's construction, the article shows how these aspirations clashed with a series of contingent difficulties and the existence of competing imaginaries regarding the Argentine capital's position in the regional, national, and global context. Following some fundamental critiques that have been made of the global historical approach and its tendency to deal primarily with connections and the derivative image of the world as governed by the omnipresence of transnational entanglements,² the article focuses on some examples of disconnections and contestations.

In the years between 1867 and 1871, Buenos Aires was hit by a series of dramatic epidemics that many contemporaries interpreted as a crisis of urban space. In the case of the Argentine capital there were two particular types of spaces that attracted the critical attention of the ruling elites: the *saladeros* (slaughterhouses), where cattle from the Pampas were processed and turned into export products for the Atlantic market, and the *conventillos* (tenement houses) which housed a large proportion of the migrant workers, who made up a large part of the city's population. During the years of the epidemics, the removal of the alleged causes of cholera and yellow fever had mainly focused on various projects to control and reform these two types of space. According to contemporaries, the *saladeros* embodied the system of relations between Buenos Aires and the rest of the country; the *conventillos*, on the other hand, came to represent the city's relations mainly with Europe, from which many of the migrants came. Regarding the city's relations with the rest of the country, since the end of the Spanish colonial era, Argentina had been shaken by a series of political and military contrasts. In their most general lines, these pitted the advocates of a centralized nation state under the strict control of Buenos Aires against the supporters of a federal state in which the main city's economic hegemony could find political counterbalances. Immediately after the end of the epidemics, the

1 This article further develops and elaborates on a text partially published in A. Carbone, *Park, Tenement, Slaughterhouse: Elite Imaginaries of Buenos Aires, 1852–1880*, Frankfurt am Main 2022.

2 For some examples of this debate, see J. Adelman, *What is Global History Now?* in: *Aeon*, 2 March 2017, <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment> (accessed 1 August 2022); S. Gänger and J. Osterhammel, *Denkpause für die Globalgeschichte*, in: *Merkur* 879 (2022), pp. 79–86.

liberal elites who ruled Buenos Aires and mainly supported Buenos Aires' hegemony vis-à-vis the rest of the country had also devoted themselves to an additional project, that of building a park. The park was intended to be both a means to improve the urban landscape of Buenos Aires, preventing epidemic diseases, and – as the article shows – to inaugurate and implement a new trajectory for the Argentine nation. This new trajectory would also imply a new definition of that system of relations between Buenos Aires, the rest of the country and Europe, which the *saladeros* and *conventillos* had embodied.³ The green space became a projection surface for the aspirations of a specific political elite, whose heyday was quickly over after the end of the presidency of Domingo Sarmiento, who had been one of its most prominent representatives. Reconstructing the discussion on the construction of the park allows to outline some key features of the ways in which these elites imagined the city of Buenos Aires, its relationship with the rest of the Argentine nation, and the world. In discussing these imagined positionings, elites situated themselves, their city, and their nation within a complex web of discourses concerning progress and its opposite: backwardness. The Park of Palermo is thus configured as a space in which imaginations related to different scales, namely the urban, the national, and the global, intersected problematically, giving rise to what Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann have called “critical junctures of globalization”.⁴

The article analyses the parliamentary and media discussion that preceded the park's construction and focuses on some salient moments of the park's early years of existence after its inauguration. The first part of the article analyses how the construction of the park was linked to a specific interpretation of Argentine history that saw it develop from what Sarmiento called a struggle between “barbarism” and “civilization”.⁵ This philosophy of history was also linked to a specific aesthetic image of Argentine landscape and the park of Palermo, which was supposed to contribute to its reform. Especially the aesthetics of the picturesque allowed the revival of what was perceived as the problematic Argentine Pampa landscape in a new framework and connect it to other parks and landscapes in Europe and throughout the American continent. The second part proceeds to analyse the discussion on the naming of the park that links Sarmiento's interpretation of Argentine history with a specific idea of the positioning of the city and nations within imagined global orders. The section highlights the imagined relationship with different parts of Europe, on the one hand, and with the whole American continent and the United States especially, on the other. The third part then shifts the analysis from the level of discourse to that of the attempted implementation of the projects and the difficulties that were encountered.

3 For more details on the epidemics and on slaughterhouses and tenement houses, see Carbone, Park, Tenement, Slaughterhouse.

4 See M. Middell and K. Naumann, Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization, in: *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010) 1, pp. 149–170.

5 D. Sarmiento, *Facundo, or, Civilization and Barbarism*, New York 1998.

2. Away from the Pampas and Towards a “Civilized” Nature

During the yellow fever epidemic of 1871, important voices had advocated for the construction of a park. For instance, the Anglophone newspaper *The Standard*, popular among the city’s wealthy and powerful merchants of British origin, had published a manifesto for the “people’s park”. The author imagined that a public park that could show the “rich simplicity of nature” would provide a healthy source of fresh and clean air as opposed to what were perceived as the foul miasmas coming from many of the city’s *saladeros*, which the manifesto’s author considered to be among the causes of the epidemic.⁶ The manifesto of *The Standard* was one of numerous voices that imagined the “simplicity of nature” as an alternative to the kind of relationship with nature that the presence of the *saladeros* in the city engendered.

At least from the beginning of the 1860s, the idea of a healing nature as opposed to the relationship with the environment implied by the slaughterhouses gained momentum in Buenos Aires. This healing nature had features opposed both to the urban environment and to the kind of cattle husbandry-centred Pampa nature that *saladeros* implied. Concerning the opposition between the urban environment and an allegedly healing nature, an article published in the newspaper *La Tribuna* in 1861 affirmed that “all those who leave the miasmas of cities and move to the countryside gain new strength and fill their spirit with the freshness and greenness of the vegetal kingdom [...]” However, the author explained that only a specific kind of countryside with “trees, plants”, and especially “woods” heightened the “moral as well as material” health of humans.⁷ In contrast to the sickness-inducing city, the healthy countryside that the author envisioned was a specific type of wooded landscape with trees.

What the writer of the article, as well as others,⁸ considered to be hygienic and healing forms of nature were not only at odds with the city, which they clearly conceived as sickening, but also with the prairie environment surrounding Buenos Aires. In fact, in the Pampa prairies there were virtually no woods, which the journalist saw as the main natural factor that improved the health of humans. These considerations show that when imagining a specific form of healing nature this differed from the most common features of the Pampas. In fact, in the 1871 manifesto for the park, which proposed bringing nature into the city to solve the hygienic problems that had caused the epidemics, the anonymous journalist insisted on describing the nature he envisioned for the park as being opposed to the Pampa environment. In his fantasy, the park would have had “avenues of tall trees”, and, instead of the flat prairie, there would have been “terraces commanding views of the Plate and of the valley of Quilmes, glass houses, aviaries, boweries, lakes, ponds, flower beds, grass plots, glades, slopes [...]”⁹ The nature that these authors had in

6 Anonymous, A People’s Park, in: *The Standard*, 5 March 1871.

7 A., Influencia de los bosques, in: *La Tribuna*, 24 November 1861.

8 See for instance Lucio Del Castillo, *Enfermedades reinantes en la campaña del Paraguay*, Buenos Aires 1870.

9 Anonymous, A People’s Park.

mind needed to be “constructed” and was apparently at odds with the kind of environment that the countryside surrounding Buenos Aires could offer at the time.

This kind of desire towards a new kind of nature clearly intersected with the conception of philosophy of history concerning the Argentine nation, which can be discerned in some of the most influential works of Domingo F. Sarmiento, who was president of Argentina from 1868 to 1874.¹⁰ In 1874, three years after the publication of the park manifesto and the end of the yellow fever epidemic, President Sarmiento presented a law in congress that proposed the construction of a public park in Buenos Aires. Sarmiento’s choice for the park’s location centred on an area a few kilometres north of Buenos Aires that used to be the private estate of Juan Manuel de Rosas, who was the authoritarian ruler of Buenos Aires until 1852 and sworn enemy of Sarmiento and his liberal political allies. Sarmiento’s idea of the park, which in his last months of presidency was meant to become his political legacy, was intimately connected with a specific concern with nature that had characterized his thinking since the 1840s. In fact, in *Facundo or Civilization and Barbarism* – published three decades before the park proposal – Sarmiento had interpreted Argentine history as a struggle between Pampas and cities, in which the Pampa plains stood for barbarism as well as backwardness whereas cities – and especially Buenos Aires – stood for civilization and progress.¹¹ Contrary to an idea of nature as a healing force, Sarmiento imagined Pampa nature and its vast emptiness as the root of the violence and backwardness that had tormented Argentina and even filtered into its cities, and Juan Manuel de Rosas as the personification of the barbaric tyranny of the Pampas over the cities.¹²

Even though Sarmiento’s proposal of constructing the new park on the site of his political enemy’s estate might seem surprising, his position on the matter was exceptionally clear. He wanted to build his park on Rosas’ estate in Palermo de San Benito, a suburban plot of land on the shores of the La Plata River, to give a new symbolical interpretation and thus overthrow Rosas’s political, aesthetic, and even environmental heritage. In Palermo, Rosas had created a garden, which had been one of his life’s main projects, where he willingly celebrated the Argentine estancia and Pampa prairie as a landscape standard. The estate boasted fruit trees, grazing land, and even a small *saladero*; all of these were elements that were meant to propose the Pampa ranch as aesthetic reference for Buenos Aires. In order to spread this landscape repertoire among the urban upper classes, Rosas left his garden unfenced, allowing and inviting the urban high society to use the park as a venue for their social encounters.¹³

10 In addition to Sarmiento, *Facundo*, see for instance D. Sarmiento, *Obras completas XXXVI: Conflicto y armónías de las razas en América*, vol. 1, Buenos Aires 2001; D. Sarmiento, *Obras completas XXXVII: Conflicto y armónías de las razas en América*, vol. 2, Buenos Aires 2001.

11 See Sarmiento, *Facundo*.

12 Generally on Sarmiento and questions related to landscape, see F. Aliata, *Contemplant y recordar: Sarmiento frente a la arquitectura, el paisaje y la ciudad*, in: A. Amante (ed.), Sarmiento, Buenos Aires 2012, pp. 133–158; G. Silvestri, *El lugar común: Una historia de las figuras de paisaje en el Río de la Plata*, Buenos Aires 2011.

13 See S. Berjman and D. Schávelzon, *Palermo: El Parque 3 de Febrero de Buenos Aires*, Buenos Aires 2010; E. Casella de Calderón, *El Parque 3 de Febrero*, in: *Buenos Aires nos cuenta* 20 (1991), pp. 2–111; D. Schávelzon, *El*

If Rosas's estate's main features had been its celebration of the Pampas and its function as a venue for the upper classes, Sarmiento intended to transform both these elements. He envisioned a park accessible for all classes of society and in a message sent to the congress to promote the park, he argued that the park should "not only be open for the wealthy and foreigners but also for the thousands of artisans and their families [...]." Furthermore, in the same message he added that the park should provide a new "spectacle of natural beauty that, magnified through art", would allow also lower classes "to rest from their daily tasks and enjoy innocent and healthy leisure."¹⁴ Sarmiento associated a hygienic preoccupation for the health of the lower classes, who in his opinion needed rest and regeneration through nature, with the construction of a specific typology of "natural beauty" that had to revolutionize what he conceived as the anti-aesthetic and anti-hygienic nature of the Pampas.

Sarmiento's project concerning Rosas's landscape standard was based on a new way of aesthetically constructing and framing the Pampa environment. Sarmiento did not intend for this aesthetic transformation to be a total refurbishment and a cancellation of Rosas's garden; he wanted to "tame" it through its inclusion in an overarching frame of picturesque aesthetic. The natural beauty that Sarmiento proposed as an alternative to Rosas' allegedly barbaric Pampa rested on the model of the picturesque landscape parks that cities both on the European and throughout the American continent were building at that time.¹⁵ The picturesque promised to construct an aesthetic framework in which the irregular, sublime, and threatening elements of nature could be circumscribed in safe environments and therefore made available for the consumption of city dwellers. In other words, the central idea of the picturesque aesthetic in the planning of urban green spaces was that of staging wilderness: rocks and waterfalls were inscribed into a "civilized" and pleasant frame that made them accessible without exposure to the real perils of wilderness. The picturesque allowed experiencing the sublime, the fearful romantic impression of the overwhelming power of nature and its forces, in a controlled

caserón de Rosas: Historia y arqueología del paisaje de Palermo, Buenos Aires 2009. A standpoint differing from D. Schávelzon's interpretation on the basis of excavations on the site of the ancient residence of Rosas can be found in F. Aliata, *Lo privado como público. Palermo de San Benito: un ejercicio de interpretación*, in: *Revista de la Sociedad Central de Arquitectos* 144 (1989), pp. 44–53.

14 Congreso Nacional, *Cámara de Senadores: Sesiones de 1874*, Buenos Aires 1896, at p. 123.

15 On the construction of parks in nineteenth-century Atlantic cities, see for instance, D. Brantz, *Metropolitan Natural Histories: Inventing Science, Building Cities, and Displaying the World*, in: M. G. Ash (ed.), *Science in the Metropolis: Vienna in Transnational Context, 1848–1918*, New York 2020, pp. 35–42; S. Dümpelmann, *Layered Landscape: Parks and Gardens in the Metropolis*, in: D. Brantz, S. Disko, and G. Wagner-Kyora (eds.), *Thick Space: Approaches to Metropolitanism*, Bielefeld 2012; R. S. Hopkins, *Planning the Greenspaces of Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Baton Rouge 2015, pp. 213–235; D. A. Reeder, *The Social Construction of Green Space in London prior to the Second World War*, in: P. Clark (ed.), *The European City and Green Space: London, Stockholm, Helsinki and St Petersburg, 1850–2000*, Farnham 2006, pp. 41–67; H. Massey Schenker, *Melodramatic Landscapes: Urban Parks in the Nineteenth Century*, Charlottesville 2009. Chicago, another prairie metropolis, provides an example of how park planners used the idea of picturesque nature to neutralize what they perceived as the disappointing aesthetic of the prairie environment, see D. Bluestone, *Constructing Chicago*, New Haven 1991, pp. 37–39; C. Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago*, Chapel Hill 2015, p. 12.

and designed form that eliminated its threatening features.¹⁶ Graciela Silvestri argues that Sarmiento's picturesque aesthetic aimed to include idiosyncratic elements of the Pampa environment into a "civilized" aesthetic frame that allowed one to experience them without any kind of confrontation with the dangerous features of the Pampas, such as its allegedly threatening gaucho inhabitants of whom Rosas was, in Sarmiento's eyes, the main representative.¹⁷

For the park of Palermo, Sarmiento insisted that remains of Rosas' estate should be incorporated as local elements and references to wilderness into an overarching layout that inspired healthy and "civilized" practices, such as promenading and sport. Sarmiento's insistence on the presence of local idiosyncrasies emerged in the conflict he had with Nicolás Avellaneda, for instance, who was president at the time of the inauguration of the park in 1875. This conflict is well exemplified by the discussion over the tree that the President should plant as a symbolic act for the park's opening. Sarmiento contested Avellaneda's choice of a magnolia, lamenting that the plant was not a local species. The newspaper *La Nación* reported that Sarmiento complained that the magnolia was "typical of India" and therefore inappropriate. Sarmiento had proposed a mayten as an alternative; the mayten is a tree found mainly in Argentina and Chile.¹⁸ Furthermore, even before congress approved the park project in 1874, Sarmiento entrusted the engineer of the national military academy (*Colegio Militar de la Nación*), Jordan Czeslaw Wysockij, with the elaboration of a plan that he personally followed in detail. Wysockij's project comprised windy paths, meadows, groups of trees, various lakes, two main artificial hills, a field for target practice, horse riding grounds, fountains, a geometric garden, a maze, a suspension bridge, an artificial grotto with waterfalls, and a zoological garden.¹⁹ Following the principles of the picturesque, single landscape elements, such as the grotto and the waterfall, aimed at staging wilderness but were placed in a wider frame that was characterized by windy paths and sports grounds that inspired "civilized" experiences of safe consumption of the "spectacle of natural beauty", as Sarmiento himself called it.²⁰ The kind of natural beauty that Sarmiento and Wysockij proposed was meant to function as a hygienic and aesthetic system that partially included, yet at the same time overhauled, Rosas' canon. Their version of natural beauty was to transform and undermine Rosas' heritage by including it as mere idiosyncrasy within a wider aesthetic that Sarmiento and the supporters of his project conceived as universal and unquestionable.

16 On the picturesque, see M. Andrews, *The Metropolitan Picturesque*, in: S. Copley and P. Garside, *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape, and Aesthetics since 1770*, Cambridge, UK 1994, pp. 282–298; N. Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France*, Manchester 1990, pp. 95–100; P. K. Nayar, *English Writing and India, 1600–1920: Colonizing Aesthetics*, New York 2008; P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*, London 2003; R. Rotenberg, *Landscape and Power in Vienna*, Baltimore 1995, p. 185.

17 See Silvestri, *El lugar común*, pp. 144–153.

18 Anonymous, *Incidente curioso*, in: *La Nación*, 13 November 1875. On the choice of the mayten, see Anonymous, *El Parque 3 de Febrero*, in: *La Tribuna*, 3 October 1874.

19 See Berjman and Schávelzon, *Palermo*, pp. 97–98.

20 Congreso Nacional, *Cámara de Senadores: Sesiones de 1874*, p. 123.

In the debate that followed Sarmiento's proposal in 1874, the supporters of the project declared the park to be an absolute and unquestionable necessity.

A common way to highlight this unquestionability was connecting the project to other picturesque parks in other big cities in Europe and throughout the American continent as well as affirming his hygienic and therefore objective value. Luis Warcalde, a leading physician and supporter of Sarmiento's project, underlined, for instance, that the advantages that the park would provide for the city were so obvious they did not need to be explained. He declared, "the example of other big cities which have parks like the one planned, and the benefits that these have brought about, are well acknowledged by everybody. Therefore, I will not insist on presenting arguments that I believe to be superfluous".²¹ As Sarmiento clarified, the parks referenced by Warcalde were mainly the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, Hyde Park in London, and Central Park in New York City.²² The prestige of these cities and their parks was, in the eyes of the park proponents, so great that both Warcalde and Sarmiento considered their very presence in the debate as a sufficient argument for the national congress to approve the financing of the project.

In addition, the idea of the absolute and unquestionable necessity of the park was also reinforced by hygienic considerations. Only the specific typology of nature that the project proposed bore the possibility to sanitize the city, providing it not only with a beautiful, but also with a healthy natural space. In fact, even though Rosas' estate was abandoned and unfenced in 1874 and therefore de facto publicly accessible, supporters of the park argued that what Buenos Aires needed was a park with a specific kind of nature. In the congress, a commission assigned to examine the park project stated, "this beautiful city lacks the lungs to breathe".²³ To convey a sense of vital urgency, the commission used a city-body metaphor, one of the most popular hygienic tropes of the time. The metaphor of the park as lungs providing air to the city aimed to naturalize its necessity; the alternative to the specific kind of picturesque landscape park was – in their eyes – asphyxia.²⁴

3. References to Hygiene and Other European and American Parks

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of universalism and absolute necessity that park proponents used to make the project appear to be an inevitable choice, the discussion in congress proved rather controversial. On the one hand, fewer congress members than expected considered the proposed aesthetic and hygienic principles and references as being universal. On the other hand, President Sarmiento was personally invested in the project, which in turn distorted the status of the park's future into becoming a referendum on his

21 Congreso Nacional, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* 1874, p. 77.

22 Congreso Nacional, *Cámara de Senadores: Sesiones de* 1874, p. 123.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

24 On metaphor of the park as lungs, see D. Armus, *The Ailing City: Health, Tuberculosis, and Culture in Buenos Aires, 1870–1950*, Durham, USA 2011, pp. 322–334; D. Armus, *La idea del verde en la ciudad moderna: Buenos Aires 1870–1940*, in: *Entrepasados: Revista de Historia* 10 (1996), pp. 9–22.

person and presidency. Former Minister of the Interior and leading hygienist Guillermo Rawson was the most prominent opponent of the project; he contested Sarmiento and his remarks on the parks in London, Paris, and New York City. He affirmed that in his opinion there was

*something degrading for the city of Buenos Aires in the way the President of the Republic [Sarmiento] argues: "this is what Buenos Aires needs and you have no idea. I know this because I have seen the Central Park in New York and those in England and France [...]."*²⁵

With this remark Rawson refused a central element of the park proponents' argumentative style, namely that these specific parks should serve as examples just because they had been built in major cities in Europe and in the United States. While Minister under the presidency of Bartolomé Mitre (1862–1868), Rawson had also been involved in a personal quarrel with Sarmiento, who was governor of the province of San Juan at the time, and had a longstanding personal animosity towards the president.²⁶

However, apart from the possible personal background of Rawson's contestations and his general scepticism concerning the references to Europe and the United States, he added three main critiques against the park project. As a hygienist, and while not disputing the assertion that Buenos Aires needed "lungs", he was persuaded that the proposed park would not be able to provide the air that the city needed. He mainly contested the position of the park. In his opinion, the terrain of Palermo, on lower ground than the rest of the city, would be doomed to regular flooding, and would therefore become a source of the miasmas that it was supposed to be curing. He stated furthermore that the Palermo estate, to the north of the city, was easily accessible only for a small proportion of *porteños* (inhabitants of Buenos Aires). In his opinion, the direction of urban growth was instead shifting westwards and argued that a park in a western location of the city would therefore facilitate greater accessibility and occupy a more central position in the city's future. What is more, his third criticism revolved around the idea that establishing a public park at Rosas' former estate would affirm a troubling continuity of what he considered to be Rosas' "barbaric" heritage. While he shared Sarmiento's opinion of Rosa and that his garden provided a certain continuity of this "barbarism", he argued that it would be more appropriate to rid the city of his gardens completely.²⁷

The promoters of the park bill passionately refuted Rawson's critiques. Responding to the critiques concerning the potential unhealthiness of the ground in Palermo and its location in the city, future president Nicolás Avellaneda, a supporter of the park project, also replied to Rawson's doubts concerning Rosas' political heritage. Underlining Sarmiento's philosophy of history, which saw the rise to power of the liberals as an overhaul of prec-

25 Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores: Sesiones de 1874, p. 177.

26 See G. Rawson, *Polémicas con Sarmiento: Discursos y escritos políticos*, Buenos Aires 1928.

27 The debate in the federal Senate took place between 20 and 25 June, see Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores: Sesiones de 1874, pp. 121–181.

edent governments and a step forward on the path toward civilization, he argued that choosing Palermo as the location for the park represented the opportunity to demonstrate the liberal governments' superiority vis-à-vis Rosas. Avellaneda imagined that the "improved and embellished Palermo" would have inspired envy even in Rosas, showing him "through all those marvellous enchantments of the arts, of science, of elegance, and of good taste everything that the tyrant could not learn in all his doings in the southern Pampa."²⁸ Thus, Avellaneda envisioned the new Palermo as a space that would embody a government whose vision was based on progress, "civilization", scientific reasoning, and urbane refinement, as opposed to Rosas's preference for the rural Pampas and their alleged backwardness.

Apart from Rawson's criticisms, pivotal in the discussion on the construction of the park were the references to London, New York City, and Paris that park proponents had presented as an uncontested basis on which the necessity of constructing a picturesque landscape park rested. Debating these references, those involved in the discussion also proposed different positions that the Argentine nation and its capital city should have within an imagined network of cities of the European and American continents.²⁹ For instance, project opponent Deputy Figueroa imagined that the picturesque landscape park prioritized beautification over economic wealth and therefore positioned Buenos Aires among other "Latin" cities, which in his eyes had a negative connotation. He argued that a park was rather "an establishment of pure luxury" and therefore could not be a priority, especially when the nation still needed more urgently required infrastructure. Figueroa calculated that the funds required by the national government to invest in trees, artificial ponds, and hills would be sufficient "to colonize a fourth of the Chaco", a sparsely inhabited region whose colonization and cultivation he thought should be prioritized over the frivolous desires of the *porteños*. In contrast with the relative insignificance of the park if compared with the economic necessity of farming land, Figueroa argued: "I do not see any advantage in a park with lush trees and hills that are not farmed. First of all, we need to make our uncultivated grounds productive [...]." He furthermore added that money he considered wasted in the park project could also be spent on more useful infrastructural projects, such as the development of the railway.³⁰

28 Ibid., p. 146. In A. Gorelik, *La grilla y el parque: Espacio público y cultura urbana en Buenos Aires, 1887–1936*, Buenos Aires 1998. The author argues that Sarmiento's choice for the location of the park was the expression of his will to inaugurate an alternative to central Buenos Aires. Even though Gorelik's thesis surely catches one of the main aspects of Sarmiento's vision, it underestimates two relevant aspects that Nicolás Avellaneda summarizes. Firstly, the park of Palermo had already existed since the 1840s and had been continuously used, albeit only by the upper classes. Secondly, the public property of Palermo was surely a pivotal and pragmatic element, which could allow a quick solution to the park problem. Sarmiento had followed the endless discussion about Central Park in New York and was therefore likely to be aware that avoiding such a discussion would have helped to resolve the issue quickly.

29 See A. Carbone, *Provincialising Industry: Hyperreal Urban Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires*, in: N. K. Ha and G. Picker (eds.), *European Cities: Modernity, Race and Colonialism*, Manchester 2022, pp. 77–96.

30 Congreso Nacional, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* 1874, pp. 80–82.

Explaining more clearly his negative reference to an alleged “Latin” heritage, Figueroa evaluated the frivolousness of the park as a whimsical aspect of the despised Spanish tradition. In response to the laughter his comment received in the congressional assembly, he argued, “We do not want to stop being descendants of Spaniards, friends of poetry and of lyricism; we always want to sit under lush trees, inhaling the perfumes of flowers so that we can sing ugly laments.” Apart from mocking the “Spanish spirit” for its alleged taste for frivolousness and complaining, he also associated this with the “French spirit”. He added,

Sincerely, I am not content with the Spanish nor with the French spirit that sacrifices the importance of its nation for the beautification of Paris. I do not believe in the convenience of these planned works [the park in Palermo]; I believe that it is necessary to become rich before we spend money on luxury and ornament.³¹

While anti-Spanish sentiment was commonly expressed by Argentine elites during this period, Figueroa’s hateful “anti-Latin” rhetoric, in this case aimed at opposing the construction of the park, infuriated Warcalde, who then proceeded to clarify his own references.

Warcalde rebutted Figueroa’s standpoint and explained what he considered to be a central differentiation between references to Spain and other European examples, which he expressed in the terms of differences between different European races. Taking a clear stand against the Spanish tradition and referring to Argentina’s colonial past, he argued that “the Spanish race has much to answer to history and to posterity”. He furthermore added that “the idea of the necessity of these parks and lush woods does not come from the Spaniards, in fact there are examples [of parks] in countries founded by the German or the Anglo-Saxon race”. In his opinion, the most beautiful parks in the world were “Hyde Park in London, the Bois de Boulogne in Paris”, and, referring to Central Park in New York City, he argued that “another can be found in the United States”. Elaborating on a distinction between France and Spain as examples for Argentina, he clarified that “despite being part of the Latin race, [the French] are not Spanish”, and that the Bois de Boulogne should be included in the models for Buenos Aires’ park. Warcalde also reaffirmed that the love for “lush woods” was not a question of luxury and certainly not a Spanish “flaw or fault”, but that the woods were objectively beneficial for health and hygiene. Introducing the idea of a ranking between different classes of cities, he maintained that the function of parks in tackling sanitation problems was so universally accepted that “even second-class cities, such as Munich”, had engaged in the construction of public parks.³²

The imaginaries concerning Buenos Aires’ position among an imagined network of big cities in Europe and throughout the American continent proved to be pivotal in the entire debate about the park. As Sarmiento himself had stated in his report to congress, the

31 Ibid., p. 81.

32 Ibid., p. 83.

main references were initially to Central Park, Hyde Park, the Bois de Boulogne, and the new landscape park built in Santiago de Chile.³³ This system of references went beyond the function of providing practical models for the park; it also underpinned the legitimacy of the project and repositioned Buenos Aires within a global hierarchical network of cities. For instance, an article published in *La Tribuna* repeated the argument that

*there is not even a second-class capital in Europe that does not provide its population with a respiratory valve, and there are some in South America that are able to compete with the best in the old world in this sense. Only Buenos Aires does not provide such an attractive location [...].*³⁴

In these few sentences, the journalist used – as seen previously – the hygienic metaphor of the city-body to naturalize the park's necessity, and connected this natural and therefore universal need with the measures other cities had already taken, proposing the hierarchical idea of “second-class” capital cities. This implied the production of a seemingly natural teleology of urban progress: if Buenos Aires did not want to fall behind in the competition between civilized cities, it needed to become active and build a picturesque landscape park. Thus, the park could be positively viewed as a necessary step to climb up the imagined city ranking, or conversely as a necessary reaction to the danger of trailing the city's rivals.

However, over the course of the discussion about the park, Sarmiento specified more clearly the kind of reference he had in mind, especially concerning the park's name; the reference was purportedly not to big European cities. In fact, the name he initially proposed, *Parque Central de Palermo*, clearly showed the allusion to New York City's Central Park, which had been opened to the public just one year previously, in 1873. Sarmiento, who had served as Argentine Ambassador to the United States from 1865 to 1868 and had partially resided in New York City during his term, had personally witnessed the construction works of Frederick Law Olmsted's Central Park. Olmsted's project fused bourgeois taste for the picturesque with a hygienic and paternalistic preoccupation for the health and morality of the working classes.³⁵ Sarmiento shared Olmsted's belief that specific typologies of natural environments were a key element in educating workers and having a positive influence on their lives. The Central Park project combined two of

33 On the construction of Cerro de Santa Lucía and Parque Cousiño in Santiago, see G. Hidalgo Hermosilla, *Panoramic View and National Identity: Santiago de Chile's Public Spaces in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, in: *Planning Perspectives* 24 (2009) 3, pp. 319–347.

34 Anonymous, *Parque Central en Palermo*, in: *La Tribuna*, 23 May 1874.

35 On Central Park and Frederick Law Olmsted, see P. Marcuse, *The Grid as City Plan: New York City and Laissez-Faire Planning in the Nineteenth Century*, in: *Planning Perspectives* 2 (1987) 3, pp. 287–310; M. Schenker, *Melodramatic Landscapes*; R. Rosenzweig and E. Blackmar, *The Park and the People: a History of Central Park*, Ithaca 1998; A. Schwarz, *Ein ‚Volkspark‘ für die Demokratie: New York und die Ideen Frederick Law Olmsteds*, in: A. Schwarz (ed.), *Der Park in der Metropole: Urbanes Wachstum und städtische Parks im 19. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2005, pp. 107–160; A. Whiston Spurr, *Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted*, in: W. Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, New York 1995, pp. 91–113.

Sarmiento's main political preoccupations: the issue of public education and the question of the relationship between the city and countryside.³⁶

What is more, the deliberate reference to Central Park and to New York City and the United States facilitated the vision of a new position for Buenos Aires within those urban hierarchies and rankings that were highly significant for the urban imaginaries of *porteño* elites. In congress, the Deputy Echagüe argued that the name Palermo aroused disturbing associations with the despotic legacy of Rosas and that the name *Parque Central* seemed awkward due to Palermo's location in the north of the city. He therefore proposed as an alternative "the name Washington, which stands for freedom, independence, democracy, republicanism, and true Americanism". In his view, these values were part of an Americanism that was inherently opposed to Europe and its tradition of parks as royal grants. The parks of America were people's parks, republican and democratic. Significantly, he added that by dedicating the park to Washington, the park itself "would embody the fraternity of these big countries; the people of the American Union and the people of the Argentine Union; one Republic in the north of the continent and another in the south."

The fraternity with New York proposed a new interpretation of Argentine relations with Europe and simultaneously affirmed Buenos Aires and Argentina's hegemonic aspirations over the southern half of the American continent. In fact, Echagüe added that both the US and Argentine nations

*are the two great people that are increasingly coming closer through ties of fraternity and are going to create, in a time not so distant, the true union of all American people [...].*³⁷

Thus, following the arguments of Echagüe and other deputies who supported the proposal, Washington Park would align Buenos Aires with New York City, the other big port city of the Western Atlantic. Based on republicanism, liberalism, and democracy, this US-American-Argentine fraternity shifted the notion of European superiority and fortified Buenos Aires' hegemonic claims on the South American subcontinent. Even though the proposal of naming the park after George Washington was not successful in the end, and the park was named *Parque 3 de Febrero* to commemorate the day of Rosas' defeat in 1852, the Americanist discourse lasted as the prevailing system of references in the case of the park of Palermo.

At the inauguration of the park, which eventually occurred on 11 November 1875, Sarmiento gave a speech that added a further aspect of his Americanist discourse that

36 In a public speech held in Montevideo in 1887, Sarmiento also mentioned his visit to the cemetery of Greenwood in Brooklyn while he was ambassador in New York. D. Sarmiento, *Obras completas XXII: Discursos populares*, vol. 2, Buenos Aires 2001. See also Silvestri, *El lugar común*, p. 153. There is a wealth of literature on the centrality of education in Sarmiento's political thinking and policies; for a more recent contribution, see J. Myers, *La contendencia ambivalente: Sarmiento, republicano, liberal y conservador, en la disputa por la construcción de la nación*, in: R. J. de Titto (ed.), *El pensamiento de Domingo Faustino Sarmiento*, Buenos Aires 2010, pp. 11–35.

37 Congreso Nacional, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1874*, pp. 89–90.

clearly pointed at locating Argentina together with the United States within the frame of the settler nations. The first part of Sarmiento's speech elaborated on the new relationship that the park would initiate between Buenos Aires, Paris, London, and New York City. He argued that, thanks to the park, "from now on, the Argentine people can consider themselves initiated into all of the splendours of the most ancient civilizations of their fathers". The Argentines – as descendants of Europeans in Sarmiento's vision – were no longer required to look to Europe in search of "splendour". As he argued, the Argentine people could "stroll contentedly, without leaving their own country, through their *Bois de Boulogne*, their *Hyde Park*, or their *Central Park*".³⁸ The park thus enabled Buenos Aires to consider itself a worthy member of the club of major metropolises. Nonetheless, the park had to do more than merely grant *porteños* an equally pleasant experience to those of the most prestigious parks in London, Paris, and New York City. Sarmiento presented the inauguration of the park as a nation founding act: in his view, it enabled Argentina to set out on a journey among the settler nations. In fact, he added,

*those visiting this blessed region, or those who come to join the army of the pioneers [pioneers: English and italics in the original], who fight the desert to make of this country a happy homeland and a comfortable cradle for their children, will weep no longer under the shade of the willows of the Euphrates. On the contrary, going through these soft paths, wandering in the shade of the plants of all the flowers in the world, they will feel by association of ideas and sweet nostalgia as though they were in their own homeland.*³⁹

By explicitly using the English word pioneers in this speech, Sarmiento clearly referred to the American settler-colonial *topos* of the European pioneers transforming with their civilizing force a wilderness – described by Sarmiento as a "desert" – into a garden, a "homeland", and a "cradle for their children". In Sarmiento's narrative, the park itself was an example and a celebration of the transformative power of the pioneer spirit that could convert what he considered to be a barbaric Pampa environment into a picturesque garden.⁴⁰

Sarmiento surmised that the strength of the civilizing project that he envisioned lay in its ability to bring disparate individuals together by supplying them with a common civilizing purpose. By mentioning the "weeping under the shade of the willows of the Euphrates" in his speech, Sarmiento referred to Psalm 137 and the longing of the exiled people of Israel for Zion during the Babylonian captivity. The biblical image conveyed the sacred value that Sarmiento wanted to give to the park, as a foundational act of a nation in which nobody would be a stranger or be forced into exile any longer, as he

38 Sarmiento, *Obras completas* XXII, p. 11.

39 Ibid.

40 For a discussion on the appropriateness of the paradigm of settler colonialism in the Argentine case, see M. Goebel, *Settler Colonialism in Postcolonial Latin America*, in: E. Cavanagh and L. Veracini (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, New York 2017, pp. 139–151. For a general discussion on the role of parks and gardens in colonial projects, see S. Dümpelmann, Introduction, in S. Dümpelmann (ed.), *A Cultural History of Gardens in the Age of Empire*, London 2013, pp. 1–36.

himself had been several times during the period of Rosas' government. Furthermore, the park expressed the promise of prosperity that the New World could offer to Europeans. A deputy had argued one year earlier in congress,

*Buenos Aires' beautification is the beautification with whom the Argentine Nation has to present itself to those foreigners who come to our shores, looking for greater prosperity than the beautiful cities of the Old World offer.*⁴¹

In a pragmatic sense, the park was designed to become the prestigious aesthetic materialization that inspired hope for prosperity and thus attracted immigrants to Buenos Aires. Sarmiento proposed the settler-colonial narrative as the glue that could unify European migrants, who, in his imagination, should be transformed into pioneers.

Sarmiento's imaginary of constructing a settler nation and Buenos Aires' prominent global position were mutually intertwined. On the one hand, through the project of creating a settler nation, Buenos Aires could enter the global stage as a prosperous representative of the New World, as opposed to continental Europe. In fact, after his travels to Europe, Sarmiento had partially changed his original position, which had equated Europe with progress and civilization. Since then he began seeing Europe as an Old World which was sinking into the turmoil of class struggle.⁴² The image of the envisioned pioneer citizens promenading under "the shade of the plants of all the flowers in the world", conveyed the idea that the entire world was being brought to Buenos Aires and laid at the feet of its inhabitants. In turn, it was the city's prestigious position on the world stage that attracted the immigrants from the Old World who could enable the realization of Sarmiento's project of constructing a nation of European settlers.

As part of Sarmiento's imaginary for the nation, Palermo would be the major gateway connecting the city to the countryside. During the epidemics, Buenos Aires' urban slaughterhouses had been the contested gateway through which thousands of animals from the Pampas passed to be transformed into commodities, leaving behind a stream of infectious blood. Palermo, on the other hand, signified a striking change of direction as part of Sarmiento's vision of a new form of spatial gateway with aesthetic qualities, healing properties, and transformative capacities. Besides representing the nation, the city's global ambitions, and its aesthetic and scientific refinement, the *Parque 3 de Febrero* would also be able to contribute to materially produce the envisioned settler-colonial nation of the New World.

This also implied a clear hierarchy within the Argentine nation, in which Buenos Aires functioned as the avant-garde of progress. As Sarmiento argued in the inauguration speech, "the park will be a model [...] of what the entire country can become". He imagined Palermo as a model for transforming the nation into a park and, underlining that his Americanist reference to the United States also implied a reference to British

41 Congreso Nacional, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* 1874, p. 80.

42 See R. Errázuriz Cruz, *Viaje y deseo de modernidad: Los viajes de Domingo Faustino Sarmiento*, Santiago de Chile 2014.

settler colonialism, he concluded by stating that – with the park as inception – Argentina should become as “*Merry England* [English and italics in the original]”, thus “a vast park”. What is more, he added, “in the Pampa and on the shores of our immense rivers we have places with such rural beauty, where several ‘Englands’ [...] could be built.”⁴³ Sarmiento’s model of aesthetics was indeed the English countryside and this model served as the basis for the alignment of Argentina with the settler-colonial Anglo-world.⁴⁴ However, the vast dimensions of Argentina’s geography gave rise to the view that more than one single England could arise within its borders, thus enabling the American pupil to not only equal the master, but in fact to supersede him.

The stress on England mainly revolved around an aesthetic dimension and a project of “beautification”. Sarmiento’s conception of aesthetics was radically holistic: as Graciela Silvestri has maintained, beauty “articulates with social values (morality, customs, and conventions) that are evaluated in the public sphere.”⁴⁵ Within this framework, Sarmiento perceived politics and the social as articulations of the overarching dimension of aesthetics, which not only represented society, but also produced it. In Sarmiento’s vision, a beautiful city was therefore a virtuous, just, and healthy city: promoting beauty meant promoting health as well as moral and civic virtues.⁴⁶ This all-encompassing idea of political aesthetics envisioned the park as a place that displayed the relations between city, world, and nation, while also serving as the ideal laboratory in which these new relations could be created. Therefore, the park of Palermo was the centrepiece of his reform project and the coronation of his political career.

An article published one year before its opening provides a pragmatic exemplification of the park’s function as both a representation and producer of a new network of global relations. The article reports that, while seated in his office as Chair of the Park Commission, Sarmiento was sending communications announcing the forthcoming opening to his personal contacts and to those “who are sympathetic to the Argentine Republic” around the world, notably in “Chile, France, England, Italy, [and] Brazil”. In these messages, Sarmiento asked “friends of Argentina” to send “plants and artistic objects”.⁴⁷ Additionally, he explicitly appointed two agents in France and England to organize the collection and delivery of these plants and objects. Once allocated in the park, the statues, vases, and plants had to display Argentina’s far-reaching contacts and global prestige. Moreover, Sarmiento also asked for specimens that could be used to begin cultivation and industrial crop production in the countryside. For instance, the article reported

43 Sarmiento, *Obras completas* XXII, p. 13.

44 On questions concerning environment and settler colonialism, see for instance, A. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*, Cambridge, UK 2015; A. Sluyter, *Black Ranching Frontiers: African Cattle Herders of the Atlantic World, 1500–1900*, New Haven 2012. The Anglo-world concept derives from J. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-world, 1783–1939*, Oxford 2009.

45 Silvestri, *El lugar común*, p. 147. See also A. Gorelik, *Notas críticas. La metáfora y el prototipo: Figuras de lo urbano en el imaginario sarmientino*, in: *Estudios Sociales* 42 (2012) 1, pp. 157–170.

46 See Armus, *The Ailing City*, p. 316.

47 Anonymous, *Comisiones del Parque en Europa*, in: *La Tribuna*, 11 November 1874.

that “a tree nurseryman [had] just arrived from France and [had] brought four thousand plants of *moras alba* [white mulberry] and enough silkworms to immediately start with silk cultivation”. The journalist added that “another gardener [had] brought vines and samples of the wine they produced”. In his words, “even though the [wine] industry does not seem to be fit for the soil of Buenos Aires, [places such as] Patagones, Córdoba, Santa Fé would be remarkably suitable”.⁴⁸ In Sarmiento’s vision, the park would in fact display a wealth of flora and fauna and function simultaneously as a laboratory to explore the possibility of introducing plants or animals into the agriculture and husbandry of the entire nation.

The idea of creating an agricultural laboratory for the nation had occupied Sarmiento since the 1850s. Following the model of the *Quinta Normal* in Santiago de Chile, an establishment with the dual role of providing public education and experimenting and studying agricultural reforms, Sarmiento had supported the initial founding of a similar institution in Mendoza and later in his home province of San Juan, where he had served as governor.⁴⁹ In Sarmiento’s imagination, the park of Palermo was meant to represent on the national scale what the *Quinta Normal* had represented on a smaller scale for San Juan, an institution that married two of his main political preoccupations: education and the reform of the environment of the Pampa. There also had been a similar proposal presented in 1858, when the Province of Buenos Aires had decided to organize its first agricultural and livestock show in the former house of Rosas in the estate of Palermo. The exhibition’s goal was to gather, present, and promote possible innovations in livestock breeds and agricultural machines. In an article published in *El Nacional* in January 1858, Sarmiento had enthusiastically commented that through the exhibition “Palermo will be transformed into an object of public interest, relieving it from this sort of spell [Rosas’ heritage] that haunts it [...]”. Showing that his political agenda concerning the park of Palermo had been among his preoccupations for more than a decade, he added: “the monuments of the savage tyranny will thus be converted [...] into means of civilization and progress [...]”.⁵⁰

Furthermore, by affirming that the exposition could serve as the occasion to provide Rosas’ house with a “crystal roof”, Sarmiento revealed his source of inspiration as the Crystal Palace of London’s Great Exhibition held in Hyde Park in 1851.⁵¹ Buenos Aires’ exposition of 1858 was indeed the *porteño* response to the global exposition mania that the Great Exhibition had initiated. The success of Buenos Aires’ first exposition was somewhat exiguous in terms of the objects on display, but its effects were long lasting. It inaugurated both the use of Palermo as a venue for expositions and introduced ideas synonymous with world fairs, namely the marrying of aesthetic display, mass consumption, ambitions for reform, and a positioning in a competition of cities, nations, and

48 Ibid.

49 See, Gorelik, *La grilla y el parque*, pp. 67–70.

50 D. Sarmiento, *Obras Completas XXVI: El camino del Lacio*, Buenos Aires 2001, p. 228.

51 Ibid. On the connection between green space, urban expansion, and world fairs, see S. Dümpelmann, *Layered Landscape*.

empires.⁵² Furthermore, the world fairs' aesthetic, praised by Sarmiento, was deeply connected to that of the picturesque beauty that was pivotal for the development of those landscape parks that the founders of Palermo so readily referenced.

Palermo, however, differed from the traditional idea of world fairs in that it was a permanent exhibition that was intended to work as both laboratory and educational institution, as stated above. This educational purpose was also underlined by the permanent transformation of Rosas' house into a national military academy (*Colegio Militar de la Nación*), a development backed by Sarmiento in 1870. The strong link that Sarmiento envisaged between the military academy, the education of the nation's military elites, and the park project was aptly illustrated by the fact that he entrusted the academy's military engineer, Jordan Czeslaw Wysockij, and his cadets with the plan for the park in 1874.⁵³

4. From the Park Project to its Construction

Wysockij's ambitious master plan was completed through the elaboration of a detailed plan developed by the military cadets, which added further pavilions and architectural elements in one of the park's sections.⁵⁴ These projects were prepared before the congress had approved the funding for the park and were never fully implemented. After congress's approval, the park commission organized a new public call for projects with a relevantly smaller budget. With the collaboration of Wysockij as chief engineer, the commission eventually decided to build the park based on a less costly project presented by the Belgian émigré architect Julio Dormal.⁵⁵ Led by Sarmiento, the commission decided to leave the trees that had been planted by Rosas, to concentrate solely on one section and to focus mainly on the construction of paths, a provisional zoological garden, and the terracing of the main avenues, especially the new palm tree-lined *Avenida Sarmiento*.⁵⁶ A lack of funds and Sarmiento's haste were among the reasons for such a drastic reduction in scale. In fact, after the end of his presidency in 1874, Sarmiento had lost much of his political influence and wanted to see his legacy project built as soon as pos-

52 On the agricultural and livestock exposition in Palermo, see Berjman and Schávelzon, Palermo, 71–75. For recent scholarship on world fairs in the nineteenth century, see G. Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra: Esposizioni etniche e invenzioni esotiche in Italia (1880–1940)*, Trieste 2013; G. Cantor, *Emotional Reactions to the Great Exhibition of 1851*, in: *Journal of Victorian Studies* 20 (2015), pp. 230–245; A. C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, Basingstoke 2010; D. Hedinger, *Im Wettstreit mit dem Westen: Japans Zeitalter der Ausstellungen 1854–1941*, Frankfurt am Main 2011; F. Lenger, *Metropolenkonkurrenz: Die Weltausstellungen in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 11 (2013), pp. 329–350; S. Schuster, *Die Inszenierung der Nation: Das Kaiserreich Brasilien im Zeitalter der Weltausstellungen*, Berlin 2015.

53 See Berjman and Schávelzon, Palermo, pp. 81–82.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.

55 On Julio Dormal and the artistic and architectural milieu of the 1870s, see L. Malosetti Costa, *Las artes plásticas entre el Ochenta y el Centenario*, in: J. E. Burucúa (ed.), *Nueva Historia Argentina: Arte, sociedad y política*, Tomo I, Buenos Aires 1999, pp. 161–216.

56 See, Berjman and Schávelzon, Palermo, pp. 104–105.

sible. The park was opened to the public in November 1875, just one and a half years after its approval in the national congress.

However, it was not only a question of urgency and a lack of financial resources that made the execution of the original idea so challenging: the conception of the park as a means to realize the elites' aspirations for Buenos Aires on the national and global stage were thwarted by a series of shortcomings. Firstly, Sarmiento's vision of creating a showcase and model for the nation in Palermo did not necessarily meet the enthusiasm of the other Argentine provinces. For instance, the approved law prescribed that the park, "in addition to exotic plants and trees of ornament or utility, will contain specimens of the part of our flora that is for its peculiarity, application to industry, or beauty, worthy of study, propagation, and cultivation."⁵⁷

If the park was to give an impression of the world at a glance, in keeping with the spirit of world fairs, it was also required to provide a similar impression of the nation. For this purpose, other Argentine provinces had to send specimens to Buenos Aires. In October 1874, a report on the state of the construction works commented on plants travelling to Buenos Aires. Though the report maintained a celebratory tone, it mentioned that only four provinces – Tucumán, Córdoba, Santiago del Estero, and San Juan – had sent specimens, showing that Sarmiento's expectation of building the park quickly through the engaged involvement of the entire nation seemed to face the inertia of many Argentine provinces. In addition, the transport of the plants proved challenging: for instance, the "trees, plants, bromeliads, ferns, and orchids" sent from Tucumán were forced to endure a terrible trip that "because of the distance and the salty waters" had almost killed the whole shipment.⁵⁸

Therefore, the project of Palermo as a national exhibit and model not only faced the indifference of many Argentine provinces, but also the logistical problems of moving delicate plants and trees across a vast country. In fact, Juan de Cominges, a leading agronomist, engineer, and former director of the Spanish royal gardens of San Ildefonso in Segovia, commented that, although it had been inaugurated in 1875, in 1882 the park remained a construction site. Despite offering praise for the founders of the park, he added that the hasty construction works undertaken in 1874–75 had caused lasting damage. For instance, instead of using the materials extracted from the dredging of lakes and canals to fill the embankments of the avenues, the constructors had dug new holes, thus destroying pre-existing meadows.⁵⁹

The story of the construction of Palermo's zoological garden exemplifies the kind of challenges that Sarmiento's imaginary for Buenos Aires' position in the global context implied. He imagined Buenos Aires as a metropolis that disposed of a subjugated hinterland and that had relations on equal footing with the major cities of Europe and America.

57 Congreso Nacional, *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* 1874, p. 76.

58 Anonymous, *El Parque* 3 de Febrero.

59 See J. de Cominges, *Una visita al parque de Palermo: Artículos publicados en 'La Tribuna Nacional' de Buenos Aires*, Buenos Aires 1882, p. 27.

The park law approved in 1874 stated that the zoo would display both Argentine fauna and “animals from other countries”.⁶⁰ Juan de Cominges, commenting on the zoo in Palermo, which he ironically defined as “the park’s main beauty, being its only completed one”, highlighted the lack of “foreign specimens” as one of the most pressing problems.⁶¹ According to Cominges, several factors explained this situation. In his opinion, the quality of the display and the treatment of the animals were very poor. For instance, he described the main attraction, the *casa de fieras* (house of the beasts) as “half a dozen small square and symmetrically equal rooms [...] with three walls and a grate as a fourth partition”.⁶² He was ironic about the poor layout, declaring that it would not be surprising to find an “Andean armadillo in a bird’s nest” at the zoo.⁶³ According to him, the poor treatment of the animals discouraged donors from other Argentine provinces from sending their local specimens and this, in turn, influenced the zoo’s chances of obtaining foreign animals. Although the park commission stated in 1874 that many among “border military personnel in contact with the desert, captains of ports, and some governors of the Provinces” had agreed to donate animals, de Cominges lamented that at the beginning of the 1880s, the number of animals sent from other Argentine provinces was very limited.⁶⁴ In Cominges’ opinion, because of this lack of donations, the zoo in Buenos Aires struggled to gain access to the global wildlife market. He explained that if the rest of the nation collaborated, the zoo could become “a breeding ground that could supply all zoological gardens across the globe, consequently facilitating the acquisition of all possible exotic specimens through exchange”.⁶⁵ He imagined that the zoo of Buenos Aires could become an intermediary of “exoticism” and could exchange “exotic” American animals from the provinces of the Argentine interior with “exotic” animals from zoos across the globe.

The kind of animals and the display, which Cominges considered ideal, implied an aesthetic reference to a system of hierarchies between humans and animals, and as scholarship on nineteenth-century zoological gardens widely shows, between colonizers and colonized that was relevant to the contemporary development of zoos in European and American big cities.⁶⁶ De Cominges provided a detailed description of what he saw as

60 Congreso Nacional, Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados 1874, p. 76.

61 Cominges, Una visita al parque de Palermo, p. 32.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 From the Primer informe de la Comisión del Parque 3 de Febrero, Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (Legajo 1. Parque 3 de Febrero). See also S. Pedernera and Instituto Histórico de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, (eds.), Sarmiento, espacio y política: el Parque 3 de Febrero, Buenos Aires 2010, p. 47.

65 Cominges, Una visita al parque de Palermo, p. 33.

66 On this aspect, see I. J. Miller, *The Nature of the Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo*, Berkeley 2013; H. Ritvo, *The Order of Nature: Constructing the Collections of Victorian Zoos*, in: R. Hoage and W. Deiss, *New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century*, Baltimore 1996, pp. 43–50; C. Wessely, *Künstliche Tiere: Zoologische Gärten und urbane Moderne*, Berlin 2008; N. Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*, Baltimore 2002. See also O. Hochadel, *A Global Player from the South. The Jardín Zoológico de Buenos Aires and the Transnational Network of Zoos in the Early Twentieth Century*, in: *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 29 (2022) 3, pp. 789–812.

the most appropriate way of keeping and displaying animals that would make the zoo popular. For example, after describing enclosures for vicuñas in a reconstructed Andean environment and a tiger in scrubland close to a lake, he affirmed that he would have liked “to see camels on red sand, [...] in an oasis, where fig trees and date palms grow, close to the white tent of a Bedouin”, to give the impression of the Sahara habitat. He imagined “a pagoda under the shade of white mulberry trees to be the home of the elephant”, and added that this would have enabled “including the buildings, flora, religion, and the favourite animal of most of Asia at a single glance”.⁶⁷ Faithful to Sarmiento’s idea, he viewed this kind of display as an improvement to both the didactic content of the zoo and its entertaining character.

The kind of display that Cominges imagined closely resembled the form of picturesque display of world fairs that incorporated the variety of the world in a single place “at a single glance”.⁶⁸ Cominges imagined the zoo as a place where *porteños*, being on the aesthetic side of the colonizers, could consume a safe and enjoyable display of Africa, Asia, and parts of America. However, Buenos Aires had no colonies and the other Argentine provinces had limited interest in collaborating on the project and risking the possibility of becoming, as Cominges had formulated it, for the capital city “the breeding ground to supply all zoological gardens around the globe”. The urban imaginary of Buenos Aires as metropolis controlling its American hinterland was challenged both by the relative indifference of the other provinces and by the logistical difficulties, for instance, of deliveries between Buenos Aires and distant national territories.

The story of the construction of a collection of exotic animals also gives an idea of how the relations among major cities functioned. The correspondence exchanged between Torcuato Alvear, mayor of Buenos Aires, and Carlos Pellegrini,⁶⁹ future president and prominent member of the park commission, in 1883 gives some clarification on Buenos Aires’ position in the supply network of African and Asian wildlife.⁷⁰ Pellegrini was a founding member of the zoo committee and also argued that the lack of “exotic” animals was responsible for the limited interest that *porteños* had shown in the park. In 1883, during a journey to Europe, he wrote to Alvear about providing “exotic” animals for the zoo after having contacted the German wildlife merchant Carl Hagenbeck, whom he defined as the “only individual dealing with wild animals”.⁷¹ Pellegrini hoped to facilitate an exchange between Argentine animals and African and Asian animals through Hagenbeck. After paying a visit to Hagenbeck in Hamburg, Carlos Pellegrini sent Alvear a list of animals that he considered appropriate to draw large numbers of visitors to the zoo. The list comprised

67 Cominges, *Una visita al parque de Palermo*, p. 34.

68 See W. J. T. Mitchell, Preface to the Second Edition of *Landscape and Power*, in: W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power: Space, Place, and Landscape*, Chicago 2002, pp. 35–42.

69 Carlos Pellegrini (1846–1906), later Vice President (1886–1890) and shortly President of Argentina (1890–1892).

70 Part of this correspondence has been published in H. Schiavo, *Palermo de San Benito*, Buenos Aires 1969, 27–36; D. A. del Pino, *Historia del jardín zoológico municipal*, Buenos Aires 1979, pp. 39–43.

71 Quoted after del Pino, *Historia del jardín zoológico municipal*, p. 41.

*a female [...] and a male elephant from Ceylon [...], two hippopotamuses [...], twenty camels 'with two humps' [...], two big zebras [...], two tigers of Bengala [...], two lions from Nubia [...], two leopards from Africa and India [...], several bears [...].*⁷²

Pellegrini also reported that Hagenbeck was the main deliverer of animals for the Philadelphia Zoo in the United States, explaining that other countries without direct colonies were also increasing their wildlife collections through the intermediation of the German merchant.⁷³ Alvear eventually entrusted Pellegrini with the acquisition of certain “exotic” animals that arrived in Buenos Aires starting in the mid-1880s. Zoos in London and Paris could rely on their position at the centre of vast colonial networks to provide the wildlife they displayed. Just as zoos in the United States, Buenos Aires had to pass through the intermediation of a German merchant such as Hagenbeck to gain access to the market of African and Asian wildlife. In this sense, the construction of wild animal collections shows that, in the case of Buenos Aires, the metropolitan claim that zoos implied required access to colonial networks via Europe.⁷⁴ In the following decades and through “exotic” African and Asian animals, the zoo of Buenos Aires became one of the most popular attractions in the city, especially after its relocation in 1888. Despite a delay of over ten years, it fulfilled Sarmiento’s project of providing Buenos Aires with a world showcase that demonstrated the city’s stance on the global scene.

5. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the park of Palermo allowed an interpretive window to be opened on some of the central tenets concerning urban elites’ hopes of constructing new relations between the city and the countryside as well as between the city, the nation, and the world. In relation to the countryside, the discussion concerning the park showed a desire to incorporate into the city a specific kind of nature that was different from the prairie environment and understood as a healing and civilizing force. Moreover, in the eyes of its supporters, the park was championed as an opportunity to allow Buenos Aires a new positioning within a hierarchy of cities in Europe and throughout the American continent. Despite the presence of an important group of opponents to the park project, its supporters were essentially unanimous in their belief that Buenos Aires should repudiate its ties to Spain and the colonial past and rather turn to other cities and countries of the European and American continents. Specifically, Domingo Sarmiento supported the idea that Buenos Aires and Argentina should reorient themselves toward the United States, especially toward New York City. In this context, the park of Palermo was the model for

⁷² Quoted after *ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷³ See R. W. Flint, *American showmen and European dealers: The commerce in wild animals in nineteenth-century America*, in: Hoage and Deiss (eds.), *New Worlds, New Animals*, pp. 97–108; E. Hanson, *Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos*, Princeton 2002, pp. 75–84; Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*.

⁷⁴ On the idea of a claim of ‘metropolitanity’ through zoos, see Brantz, *Metropolitan natural histories*.

a process of urbanization and civilization that was meant to integrate Argentina into the circle of settler-colonial nations alongside the United States. Considering the experience of Buenos Aires as a centre for the processing of livestock from the surrounding Pampas, which – in the eyes of Sarmiento – represented an invasion of the countryside within the capital, the park of Palermo allowed one to imagine an inversion of this relationship. The city was to become the centre of diffusion to the entire Argentine nation of new forms of pleasant and picturesque nature.

The analysis of the first moments of implementation of these projects and aspirations showed a number of problems that Sarmiento's project faced. The idea of the Argentine nation proposed by Sarmiento, which had to find its inception in the park, was certainly a powerful and long-lasting idea. It remained, however, within the realm of aspirations and was partially detached from the economic, social, and political conditions of the country. In the specific case of the park, it is possible to clearly observe the gap that was opened between an imagined space and its actual construction. For instance, the park's plans were partly challenged by the sometimes difficult relations between the capital and the rest of the country. Both the difficulties in obtaining plants and animals for the park illustrate these kinds of problems in an exemplary way. Sarmiento's image of Buenos Aires as the gateway connecting a subdued hinterland, represented by the other Argentine provinces, with a wide network of Atlantic cities was not necessarily shared by representatives from the rest of the country. This also led to difficulties the Buenos Aires zoological garden had in acquiring "exotic" animals. Buenos Aires' position as a post-colonial metropolis in a network of mainly colonial metropolises made its ability to access those aesthetic resources – the "exotic" animals – that would make its metropolitan claim visible rather problematic. More than any other place, the park of Palermo was the one that embodied the idea of Buenos Aires as a metropolis that through its culture and sophistication participated in a certain type of urban modernity of the American and European continents. Palermo's supporters imagined that the construction of the park would allow Buenos Aires, also through the construction of a new relationship with the rest of the country, to claim its place alongside the metropolises of the Atlantic world. The difficulties in implementing this project show that it was not only limited by a few contingencies, but also by some inconsistencies in assessing the city's position vis-à-vis the Argentine nation and the Atlantic world.