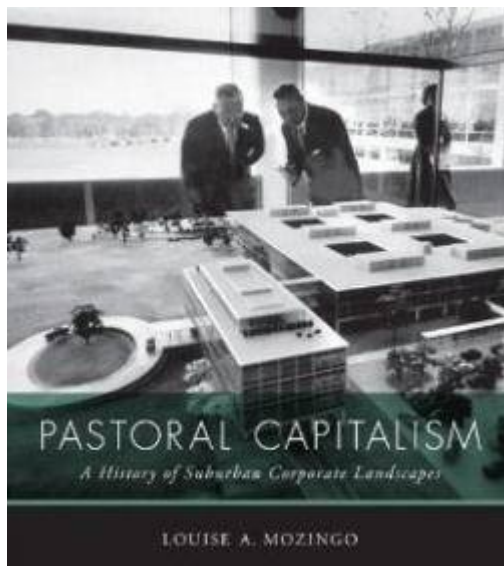


# **PASTORAL CAPITALISM. THE BIRTH OF TECHNOLOGY PARKS**

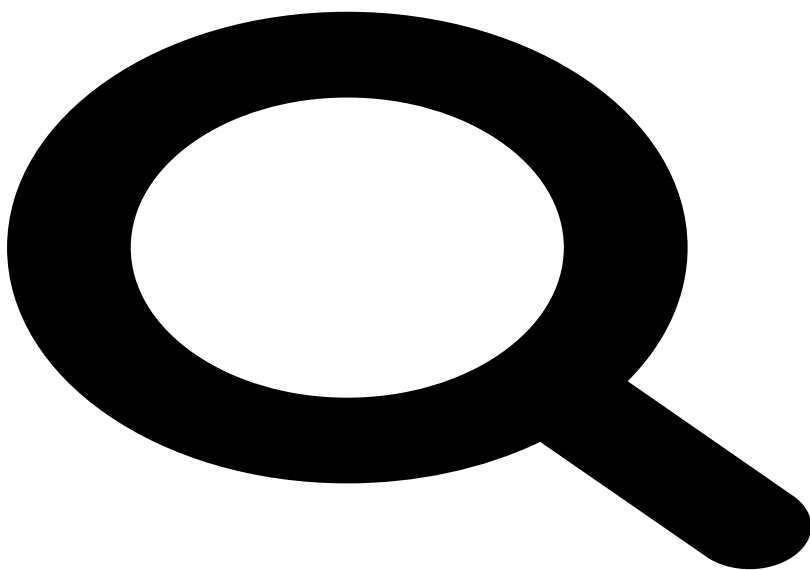
*Posted on 29/02/2012 by Naider*



Things, most of the time, are not just because. But when they have been there, it is always difficult to stop and think about where they come from, why they are like that and how we got there. The same thing happens in urban functioning and the morphology of cities. The city, after all, is an inherited construction, built on ideas, historical processes and, perhaps, small coincidences. And so you find them, as if the accumulation of history had been completely random. The density, the zoning, the distribution of uses, the height of the buildings,...any element that spatially organizes the city has, however, a history in which, to a large extent, the urban process responds to interests, balances and social conflicts, shaped by the great forces of power.

This is the case of **technology parks, industrial parks** and, in general, **peripheral spaces for economic uses**. We have become accustomed to seeing them on the **peripheries** of cities. We assume that this is their place and that is where you expect to find them. The book [Pastoral capitalism. A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes](#), by [Louise A. Mazingo](#), proposes to make a historical reading of this particular and characteristic form of the territorial organization of industrial production today. After all, how did we come to the conclusion that suburban spaces were the best suited to host the R&D activities of large corporations, the headquarters of these companies or the developments for offices of tertiary activity? When did this dynamic start? **Who promoted it and what reasons were used?**

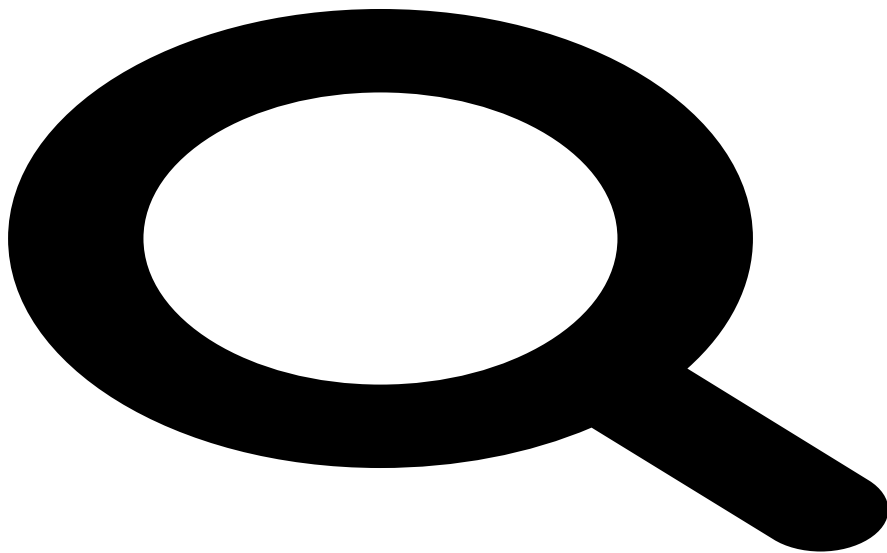
Answering these questions is the objective of this book, which is worth reading for both **interested in economic geography and business management as well as architecture, urban planning and landscaping**, since the book delves into a **a particular economic context** (the end of World War II in the United States) and in a particular **business context** (the rise of the large professionalized, hierarchical, and functional corporation) to explain the reasons for the birth and proliferation of this key typology to understand the **American city model** which has also been the dominant model of territorial expansion throughout the developed world in the last fifty years.



Following the author, we can distinguish three typologies that developed successively, from **corporate campuses** (centralization and suburbanization of the first business R&D centers or units), **corporate estates** (centralization and suburbanization of administrative buildings and corporate headquarters) and **office parks** (specialized developments on the periphery intended for occupation by activities of advanced scientific-technological services). The former began to see the light of day in the mid-1940s and soon, at the beginning of the '50s, the latter emerged while the large parks of rental offices did not

see the light of day until the end of that same decade, in a cumulative process that was learning from previous experiences. In all of them we find **design patterns** that have practically remained immobile to this day: 2-4-story buildings with large windows, with an avant-garde but discreet aesthetic, diluted among an extensive and bucolic green paradise of trees, undulating lines of the land, artificial lakes, silence, large parking areas, entrance gates, immediate access to the highway, etc. And it is that this naturally artificial scenario is what the author refers to as one of the first claims of this type of development: to offer a workplace in a **pastoral and bucolic environment** ideal for groups of researchers and highly-qualified workers that the largest companies in the country were beginning to incorporate and whom the companies wanted to get out of the saturated, conflictive and disorderly urban centers in which they had operated until then. The aestheticized field as a claim to complete the true suburban life.

It is the spatial and urban reflection of the birth of the **post-industrial work model**, at a time when large corporations (Bell, At&T, General Motors, General Foods,...), driven by the public investment by the United States government at that time (you can read something about it at [The Great Reset](#) we talked about a long time ago) expand their staff of researchers and doctors to develop a huge technological development activity thanks to the success of functional corporate management perfected in those years.



A particular **spatial resolution** - following David Harvey, surprisingly forgotten by the author- in which the company adapts to the new economic phase, providing solutions to their needs, reconfiguring the territory and cities along the way. The story of the book delves brilliantly into the ins and outs of the decisions of the big business names of the time, their negotiations with the authorities, their huge advertising expenses to sell the wonders of these developments, the hiring of architectural firms, etc. For this reason, the book is much more than the history of landscaping, but brilliantly relates aspects that we normally consider in isolation or fail to put all together in context. In fact, the author acknowledges that, among others, the book [Technopoles of the World: The Making of Twenty-First-Century Industrial Complexes](#) (Manuel Castells and Peter Hall) has already advanced the relationship between capital, politics, education and these centers of technological power, to which she adds a spatial, architectural and urban concern that completes the entire map.

The enormous **marketing effort** is one of the most significant aspects highlighted in the book. After all, the **American dream** of suburban life and "your little piece of paradise in the country" was in full swing at that time and it was necessary to embed it in the collective imagination based on advertisements, brochures and cathode rays. And pastoral green always looks good in real estate brochures. It is still the general rule today. But even this **escapist strategy of cities** had its selling point as a consequence of the Cold War, rescuing the book as national security arguments were also used by companies appealing to **nuclear fear** strong> as a justification for the need to leave the cities and disperse the productive and business centers of the urban centers. Large industrial

factories already left urban centers in the '20s and '30s and now was the time for R&D units and administrative management centers of corporations, offering skilled workers the same aesthetics of residential suburbs for their work environments, the only way to **attract these workers** and to avoid conflicts with the inhabitants and politicians of the residential neighborhoods (and, incidentally, also, move industries away from the < strong>popular and union conflicts). And they do so by uniting **values** such as bucolic life, technology, progress and family in an architectural form and a concrete imaginary.

These are also the times when the **first technological concentrations in the form of clusters** that have survived to this day began to take shape. These are the early days of what we now know as Boston's **Route 128** or San Francisco's **Silicon Valley**. These are the ideas that are still in the imagination today and that show that nothing is new, not even the celebrated one [new Apple headquarters](#) that is shown as revolutionary and that responds, step by step, to a business logic and an architectural form and urban planning that we can find in the headquarters that companies such as General Foods or Deere & Company built in the '50s. These are the days when the **Stanford Research Park** (central in the narrative about Silicon Valley) or the **Research Triangle Park** in North Carolina, a historical reference of great parks, was born. technologies that we continue to imitate today. These are the times when all these spaces are created with the impulse of large corporations (in some cases, condemned for their monopolistic practices) but with extensive government assistance. And, let's not forget, [Margaret O'Mara](http://press.princeton.edu/titles/7859.html), already pointed out in < a href="http://press.princeton.edu/titles/7859.html" target="\_blank" rel="noopener">Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley that the legend of Silicon Valley cannot be interpreted without considering the decisive role of public investment in the generation of these knowledge spaces.

The **regional and urban economy** cannot be understood today without considering the role of technology and industrial parks as spaces for the concentration of economic activity. The majority dynamic has tended to replicate the American model. Just as the residential suburbanization model has had much more difficulty establishing itself in Europe due to the predominance of historic centers -although it is true that in recent decades there has been a considerable urban sprawl effect-, **the outsourcing model economy (and its urban reflection) has followed the North American pattern**. In recent times, almost **each municipality has developed its own industrial or office park on the outskirts and the supra-municipal authorities have ordered science and technology parks on the outskirts. And only recently, and in an almost insignificant manner, have attempts been made to attract these R&D activities to urban centers, either in a planned manner through innovation centers or islands, or through through decentralized networks of spaces. Today we see how cities like London and New York draw their own map of emerging technology spaces that respond to the needs of the digital economy and startups. And in all cities, emerging spaces for collaboration and coworking arise as a previous alternative to concentrating these spaces on the outskirts. And, not only, some large corporations are beginning to go the other way and relocate their headquarters in city centers.**

I said at the beginning that things seem to be the way they are without us being clear about whether there is a special reason for it to be so. We now know that this pattern of spatial organization of work in the post-industrial economy has had a pattern and an explanation. It is not just a historical explanation. It helps us to understand that this type of space may **not make sense in the not so distant future**. If at the time they responded to a certain conception of work and of the capitalist company, today we know that both elements are being radically transformed. The company and work are not what they used to be, for better or worse. Will these concentrations of specialized spaces continue to make sense? Do we really need that much space to work? With the digital society advancing as it advanced and with the walls of the company falling little by little, what will be the new spatial resolution of the next phase?

*Note. The book has so much crumb that I leave detailing each of the three typologies for another time.*

*Image 1 taken from [Saarinen's last experiment](#).*

*Image 2 corresponding to the research laboratories of the [Bell Telephone Company](#).*

**There are no comments yet.**