

I Sección: Historia

## ELECTRIC-POWER INDUSTRY NATIONALIZATION DISCOURSES in Costa Rica (1928-1930)

Recibido: 23 de enero de 2023

Aceptado: 20 de febrero de 2022

Priscilla Villegas Arce

Universidad de Costa Rica

San Pedro, San José, Costa Rica

[priscilla.villegas@ucr.ac.cr](mailto:priscilla.villegas@ucr.ac.cr)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9894-0479>

### ABSTRACT

In 1928, the US capital company Electric Bond and Share absorbed three of the most solid companies in the electrical industry in Costa Rica, operating as a Holding Company and monopolizing the shares and concessions over the country's water resources. This situation opened up a space for debate on the political scene about the need to nationalize this growing economic sector. The main interest of the current research is to identify the speeches used in defense of nationalization of the electric-power industry using articles printed in the national press of the period to analyze the way in which the importance of the nationalization was arised as well as the administrative model that it should adopt according to its defenders.

**Keywords:** History of infrastructures; Costa Rica; Electric-Power Industry; 20th century; Holding Company.

### Discursos de nacionalización de la industria eléctrica en Costa Rica (1928-1930)

### RESUMEN

En 1928 la empresa de capital estadounidense Electric Bond and Share absorbió a tres de las empresas más sólidas de la industria eléctrica en Costa Rica, operando como una Holding Company y monopolizando las acciones y concesiones sobre los recursos hídricos del país. Esta situación abrió un espacio de debate en el escenario político sobre la necesidad de nacionalizar este creciente sector económico. El principal interés de la presente investigación es identificar los discursos utilizados en defensa de la nacionalización de la industria eléctrica a partir de artículos impresos en la prensa nacional de la época, y analizar la forma en que se planteó la importancia de la nacionalización; así como el modelo administrativo que debería adoptar según sus defensores.

**Palabras clave:** Historia de las infraestructuras; Costa Rica; Industria eléctrica; siglo XX; Holding Company.

## INTRODUCTION

The infrastructure systems that provide cities with energy and potable water, as well as the sewage treatment, have become symbols of stability and civility since they have been historically used as legitimizing elements of the idea of progress. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the modernization discourse placed energy consumption as a benchmark of development of urban spaces and State's modernization. Energy consumption was considered as directly proportional to the level of modernization; this meant that the greater the development the greater the energy consumption (Notten, 2006). The efforts in the implementation of electricity and the extension of the service initially were on private hands due to the inability of the States to invest in this economic activity.

The Energy-Power industry composes an infrastructure that has different layers of analysis: Investment and technological innovation; economic dynamic and financial structure; and regulation, the creation of public policies on waterfalls, and company investments under a Modern State model. From this position, it is necessary to comprehend infrastructure as a structure based on flow—term emphasized by Paul N. Edwards (2003) —, which refers not only to the transit of objects —pre-existing or foreign— but also to the exchange between those who digest material novelties and who normalize and transmit the knowledge of its use. The impulse of urban cities was tied to the hopes of spacial transformation and the way in which its citizens relate to the environment in space and time. Electricity allowed changes in transport, housing, work and use of resources, which is why it became a key economic sector for the development of the dreamed urban centers.

The electrical structure was promoted as part of a larger project founded in the ideals of modernity and progress. Susan Leigh (1999) said that infrastructures are not the object of analysis, but rather the relationships that emerge from the implementation of these: the evidence of social organization. From this perspective, one's approach to infrastructures as socially created institutions, which coexist with previous social structures or in transformation with them. In other words, infrastructures are part of the relations and connections that emerge from a delimited community.

It is with this same premise of the coexistence between the environment, society and infrastructure, that the access or flow of the elements diffused or given by the infrastructure —as well as the capacity to supply demand— allows an analysis to the study of the social inequalities of access to infrastructures, but also a political reading on the priority in the debates of this reality and its potential change. As evidenced by Kathryn Frulong (2014), human groups exposed to and socialized with infrastructures that do not present failures or present them intermittently, tend to generate a relationship with the environment that takes granted the provision of that service and daily life unfold around that access. In cases where the services have inefficient access or tend to present failures frequently, the relationship with the technology or structure should not be seen as a "failed

attempt" or "failure" of the relationship but as a driving force of other techniques and infrastructural solutions that minimize the impact of the deficiency of the collapsing infrastructure. This vision positions the importance of these studies not as a description of existing material object but as a social process of adoption and adaptation of systems that can function as evidence of the inequality interaction given by the social structure and the role of private capital.

The theoretical positions reviewed above concatenate analytical perspectives for the approach to infrastructures, positioning an analysis that gives priority to the discussion created over infrastructures as a process of imagination of new or better projects of administration and distribution of its services, as well as the existing structures of marginalization in the same process. This investigation starts from the comprehension that the execution of infrastructure projects has an exclusionary nature towards certain social groups through access to information, services and quality of life. In a context of State modernization towards the 20th century, there is the dichotomy of the public and the private as well as the confrontation of the defenders of both models of resource management, which is why the approach to the nationalization of the electricity industry in Costa Rica intends to bring to the table the public policy discussions developed over the electrical infrastructure and the objectives of prioritizing it between 1928 and 1930.

### **ELECTRIC-POWER INDUSTRY AND THE INFRASTRUCTURES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

The electric capacity of the cities formed a fundamental part of the discourses of the modern transformation and the impulse of the industries of the rising states throughout western countries. Visions over modernization dialogued between private initiatives and the expectations of the States roll as a centralizer of the power forces of the country. Under the modern vision, electricity marked a new way to perceive space and time as well as it became a new source of enrichment, a new investment market and a new negotiation network in the industrialized world.

The technological change allowed the development of a new economic scenario. In Costa Rica's case the electric industry became one of the few economic activities in the country that was not linked to an agricultural product but to the exploitation of water resources. The necessity of private investment and the exploration of new industry forms resulted in monopolistic practices and the generation of new resource management models from the incipient idea of the Modern State.

By the end of the 19th century a new business model started to emerge in the new Northern American economic life, the Holding Companies. This business model is characterized for the promotion of purchase business subsidiaries, under the target of generate a power centralization of different business industries (Flores, 1993). The structure of these companies allow them to exist as individual service competing in the market, but in the reality all belong to the same small group of shareholders. The Holding company usually does not produce goods or services itself. Its purpose is to own shares of other companies to form a corporate group.

The American capital company Electric Bond and Share, worked under the holding company model and purchased electric-power industries all over America the continent: México, Guatemala, Panamá, Chile, Brasil, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Argentina. This company worked through the centralization of the capital funds of many investors under the control and administration of a small group of shareholders who redirected these funds to develop companies on a large scale. By this model, the number of investors multiplied but power continued to be concentrated in the same small group of shareholders, giving the Holding's organizers control over the subsidiaries with a minimum of their own investment (Flores, 1993). The limited local private investment capacity on hydroelectric projects was taken advantage of by the Electric Bond and Share to establish itself in Costa Rica in 1927.

Historiography has explored the transition to the 20th century from the economic changes, the ideal of a new social dynamics configuration through the spacial transformation, and from the discussions over the conceptualization and participation of the modern state. The electoral processes, agroforestry exploitation industries, the introduction of the railway as a part of the building of a nation, economic policies, and business relationships are well-known in History. However, there are a lot of infrastructural subjects that form part of the development of cities and History has yet to delve into them.

The building of new cities was a scenario of growth, planning, and invention discussions, but, mainly, they were a space for material projection of the circulating ideas about civility, progress, and the new direction of man after the industrial revolution. The necessity of understanding the ideological, administrative, and mentality changes, redirects us to analyze material vestiges as discourses of a specific period.

For this reason, this article presents an electrical infrastructure administration approach as a scenario for public policy generation, mediated or disputed by different economic models for resources administration in the context of the emerging Reformative State.

### **THE NEW URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE INSERTION IN SAN JOSÉ CITY**

Since the mid-19th century, as a result of the economic growth produced by the agro-export model, there was a concentration of capital in the country's large merchants, exporters, and importers. Their relationship with the new economic activities and their interest in the modernization of the country led them to take part in a series of infrastructure construction projects in the capital city. Costa Rica experienced, like the rest of Latin America, the growth of its urban centers. San José, the capital of this country, began a process of change, responding to the new demands of the economic and commercial environment. The new model favored the concentration of businesses and services in the city, generating a professionalization of the spaces of the modern world.

Between 1890 and 1920, San José underwent a process of urbanization called "ensanche". The objective of the ensanche was "the opening and construction of streets and sidewalks, the installation of public services such as drinking water, sewage and electricity, the subdivision of the land and the sale of lots for the construction of houses" (Quesada, 2007, p.88). Due to the lack of municipal resources and as a consequence of the State's inability to invest —due to its limited power of centralization— the process of urban construction was delegated to private hands, granting great liberties for the coordination and construction of a new urban environment, mainly from 1915 onwards. This process of investment in infrastructure was mediated by the interests of urban capitalists (land owners, farms, or construction entrepreneurs) who undertook construction based on the interests of their economic, commercial, and residential projects, and therefore, the urbanization process occurred in a selective manner (geographically and socially), thus promoting a segregated city.

The spatial transformation projects of the capital centers involved industrialized urban culture adoption, as a symbol of distinction in a period of commercial modernization. As mentioned above, the urbanization process in San José was led by landowners or construction entrepreneurs, which conditioned the areas in which construction processes were undertaken and the services scope in the capital area. The residential areas that were built in downtown San José for the privileged class had concentrations of public lighting (1884), electrification in the houses (1892), as well as plumbing and piping (Fumero, 2015). While the popular housing areas could not afford the expenses of private services with a high payment costs.

The disagreements about the urbanization process that dominated San José city were expressed after the construction of the conspicuous National Theater and other architectural investments, since the population alleged the lack of drinking water service, and reproached the existence of "a coliseum for bourgeois entertainment" (Quesada, 2007, p.116). Florencia Quesada shows how this situation generated dissatisfaction, which was reported in the newspapers of the time, where it was expressed that the urban project of San José should not only be expanded but also reformed, alluding to the fact that it had started at the end without having begun by a sanitary process.

The sanitation process meant the expansion of plumbing and sewage projects that would allow the control of urban epidemics and, therefore, mortality rates, thus achieving symbolic proximity to the metropolis. The proposals took on a great force at the beginning of the 20th century, directed mainly under the capital of Minor Keith, who had undertaken the same process in the commercial routes of the banana-growing area of Limón (Quesada, 2007).

The processes of growth of the urban space, its mediators, its implications, and its uses show a panorama in which the direction of the space-forming plan (geographic and social) was promoted by the interests of the dominant classes, under a private capital (coming

from the same commercial-importing sector), crossed by individual interests. This investment characteristic was the cause of unequal and uncoordinated growth of the city, characterized by a non-existent universalization of services and a slow development of the material conditions for the country industrialization.

This is the context in which the development of the electric industry, a project of spatial transformation, and the rise of new infrastructures to achieve the goal of modernization.

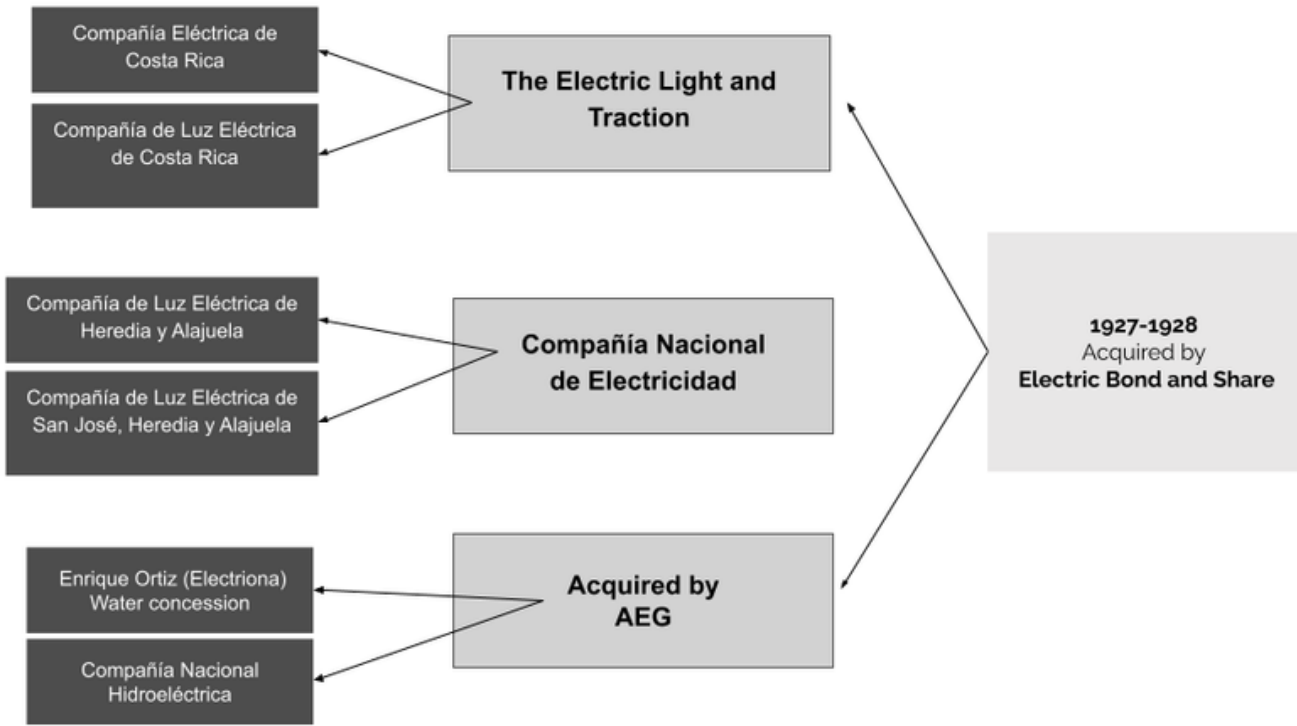
### **ELECTRIC-POWER INDUSTRY TRAJECTORY: ITS LINKS WITH BIG CAPITAL AND THE MOST DYNAMIC ELITES IN THE COSTA RICAN SCENARIO**

Parallel to the spatial transformations of urban centers, the development of the electrical industry in the country began under the management of Manuel Víctor Dengo and his partner Luis Batres, who 1883 founded the Compañía Eléctrica de Costa Rica. The former had, since 1882, the exclusive privilege for fifteen years to develop electric lighting in the area, and the latter contributed the investment capital. By the middle of the same year, they already had a contract with the municipality of San José, a contract with which the first electrical installation lines of the city materialized on August 9, 1884.

Thus began the electric power industry in the country, and from that moment on a series of new companies emerged "eager to exploit the watercourses as a source of illumination and motive power" (Notten, 2006, p.186). However, the actual implementation of the infrastructure was limited, and the claims of various companies for waterfalls generally culminated without any construction.

Between 1917 and 1928 the number of power plants installed increased. There were modest efforts of between 300kw and 950kw, responding to localized needs and with a short scope of coverage (Flores, 1993). The evolution of this new commercial sector, in the light of the ideals of modernity, resulted in two phenomena: first, in the concentration of water concessions that had given life to small companies, which would later be absorbed by larger national capital companies; the latter would later be absorbed by foreign capital. Secondly, the transfer of accumulated capital from the incursion into agro-export activities, financial activities and commercial activities (Flores, 1993). The latter generated a smaller and more economically dynamic sector for the Costa Rican elites; these elites were not only the representative face of the hydroelectric companies with greater energy capacity and coverage in the country, but they were also the main defenders of the interests of the Electric Bond and Share.

Figure 1: Concentration process of electric companies



Source: Diagram taken from the thesis *History of the nationalization of the electrical industry in Costa Rica (1883-1956)*. (Flores, 1993).

The above diagram shows the process of concentration of the electric companies. From left to right, the gradual process of absorption of the companies up to the monopolization of the Electric Bond and Share.

The Costa Rica Electric Light and Traction was founded in London in 1898, and registered in Costa Rica the same year. The company was popularly known as the Compañía del tranvía, since it operated this service. The Compañía Nacional de Electricidad was incorporated in 1924 as an industrial corporation, which would be dedicated to the exploitation of the hydroelectric plants and telephones that it acquired with the purchase of shares of the electric light companies; in addition, it came to own the water concessions, substations and properties of Felipe J. Alvarado and Roberto Jiménez. The third company was founded in 1922, date on which Enrique Ortiz Rivera's request for hydraulic power on the Torres, Tiribí and Virilla rivers was approved, generating the union of their beds. This company was known as Electriona plant, which started with national investors. However by 1924, due to financial problems, Ortiz was forced to cede his concession to the Compañía Nacional Hidroeléctrica S.A., represented by Thomas James of English nationality. Capital shortages continued to be visible, so, in 1927, shares were sold to AEG, a German company that produced electrical equipment and had a subsidiary in Latin America (Flores, 1993).

The capital vacuums were taken advantage of by Electric Bond and Share, which by 1928 had already added shares of the three previous companies. This purchase of the different companies of the electric industry led to a series of discussions about the need for nationalization of the electric industry in Costa Rica starting in the middle of 1928.

## **ELECTRIC-POWER INDUSTRY NATIONALIZATION DISCOURSES**

The threat of monopolization by foreign capital forces gave way to a civic movement that would be represented by the National Electricity Service (NES) in 1928, intending to regulate energy costs (León, Arroyo, Montero 2016). Its performance was mediated by different actors who positioned in the press a series of discussions on the need for nationalization of the electricity industry.

On July 8, 1928, *La Tribuna* newspaper took space in the discussion between the members of the Road Commission, the managers of the electric companies, and the members of the Civic League on the issues of subway electric extension in the city of San José. The issue that summoned them was the report on the work and the reminder of the need to comply with the contracts in this extension of the service, but the space took other routes and revealed a series of underlying tensions between the actors.

Representatives of the Tranvía and Nacional companies refused to accept the prices set by the Electriona plant, which at the time held the shares of the AEG company. They claimed that they were too low for the investment expenditure to be made by the other two companies, so they denied the subway pipeline. However, the disputes turned to the commitment of the service to provide consumers with an affordable price since funds had already been assessed for paving and electric service throughout the city (“Ayer se inició la discusión pública sobre los asuntos eléctricos”, July 08, 1928). The quarrels reveal that there was a side that defended the lowering of costs since there was an alternative tax collection to cover urbanization expenses, a project that the representative of the Tramway Company, Mr. Moseley, and that of the National Company, Mr. Zimmermann, denied because of the loss of profits. The second proposed lower costs in exchange for a project not extended to the entire city, but only to certain sectors of San José. The latter model was frowned upon, as it hindered the urbanization project for the entire downtown area.

Meanwhile, and as a continuing part of the discussions on this occasion, the representative of Compañía del Tranvía, Mr. Monseley, hinted at his interest in absorbing Compañía Nacional and having held talks with AEG about the shares of the Electronia plant.



**Image 1:** Graphic representation of the attempt to monopolize the electric industry



Source: "Ayer se inició la discusión pública sobre los asuntos eléctricos". (July 08, 1928). *La Tribuna*.1

The caricature portrays how the attempt of electric monopoly that these scenarios implied, fell directly on the consumers, who are represented as part of the popular classes, which are caricatured in the barefoot and chonete character. However, it is well known that the main consumers of these services were the commercial and residential areas of economic opulence and not the working class, much less the peasantry, so the criticism raises other sectors or other ways of self-perception of the subjected sectors.

The elephant, in addition to symbolizing a large size and the ability to crush, presents large tusks, along with the legend "and what a tusk", as the popular expression refers to the ability of a person to take advantage of situations, in this case, to take over all the electric companies under a financial system.

These circulating criticisms about the uncertainty of the Holding Company lurking in the electric companies triggered debates in the newspapers about this business' system and its repercussions on the economy of the countries it inhabited. These debates were the main arena of discussion on the need to nationalize as part of a defense of services.

In terms of nationalization discourses, one's find three fundamental actors. First, former President Alfredo González Flores, who during his term of office between 1914-1917 had won the opposition of the most dynamic sector of the elites due to his reformist positions on the role of the State. His positions on nationalization revolved around the struggle against the Holding Company, and the need for the control of services either by the municipalities or by the State. On this, he added in a note for the newspaper *La Tribuna*:

Ante el hecho de que la fuerza eléctrica está reemplazando toda forma de energía en el mundo industrial, el movimiento para su coordinada distribución conduce al aspecto más importante de su nacionalización por el Estado. El control del poder eléctrico en el desarrollo futuro del mundo industrial indudablemente llevará consigo el control de las industrias de la nación, el control del transporte, de las minas y de la agricultura. ("Las formas sucesivas del monopolio", July 14, 1928).<sup>1</sup>

For the former president, nationalization would be inevitable for the expansionist objective of the Modern States, he pointed out that the arrival of electricity in commerce and domestic life would make it necessary to contain industry in the hands of the State since private interests would ensure the private perpetuity of these indispensable goods of modern life. His position recognized electricity as a necessary good for the development of State projects with greater capacity for action and without negotiation delays from large monopolists. It is for this reason that after the creation of the NES and with the issue of the nationalization of the electricity industry on the table, he pointed out in the *Diario de Costa Rica* a year later:

Ahora más que nunca se abre el campo para que las personas previsoras y económicas [...] y los rentistas, adquieran bonos del Servicio Nacional de Electricidad [...] para realizar el anhelo patriótico nacionalista de los accionistas [minoritarios] de Electriona, de liberar, para beneficio de los costarricenses, la fuerza sin cuyo servicio la civilización actual no podría subsistir: la energía eléctrica. ("El ex-presidente de la República Lic. Don Alfredo González Flores dice que el trust eléctrico al tomar el nombre de empresa costarricense de electricidad no tiene escrúpulos en hacer pública la violación a los contratos", October 06, 1929)<sup>2</sup>

His plan, closely linked to his participation in La Liga Cívica, was to gradually eliminate the monopoly through the purchase of shares through the NES, generating in the long term the concentration of shares under the control of the State.

His perception of the State's tax needs has been considered by historiography as a transition to a fair public policy, however, after reviewing his speeches on the need for nationalization of the electric industry, it seems that although he is indeed facing the monopoly of economic activities of the elites, his main interest was a better and more just public policy. He tried to promote better and more widespread fundraising to create a competitive State in terms of investment in services, which in turn focuses on access to the possibility of promoting progress and modernization as a unified project and with greater strength to encourage industrialization. This vision of the needs of the State, as one sees, does not refer to an awareness of inequalities or a struggle for their eradication, but is simply a change of focus on new models of the State.

The Juan Mora Porras Civic League, for its part, was founded under nationalist and anti-imperialist ideals, so from its discourse, it encouraged a series of conferences and dialogues to inform about the dangers of this business model. It also emphasized the need to control the prices of services. This group emphasized its commitment to protecting Costa Rican investors and encouraging them to defend the national economy.

- Desde el punto de vista de la economía privada, claro es que es conveniente tomar acciones; pero desde el punto de vista de economía nacional, no. Porque esto como el empréstito contratado en Estados Unidos es un nuevo instrumento de conquista. ("Reunión de la Liga Cívica", July 18, 1928) <sup>3</sup>

This grouping, from the generation of a group identity, was based on the struggle for the integrity of Costa Rican sovereignty and homeland. The discourse that had been endowed with symbolism through the defense of the land was transferred to the resources and the electricity industry, in which national businessmen were the new patriotic heroes by defending the interests of the State and not those of the large transnationals that devoured energy sources, knowing the need for this resource for the evolution of modern societies. This discourse not only aimed at the generalized rejection of the Electric Bond and Share but also the incentive of local private capitals to generate the necessary investment base to create a competitive State in terms of services and to unify the common project of modernization of the national space.

Finally, the commission of public roads. Although this entity does not generate direct speeches on the importance of nationalization, it is noticeable in the press of the time a continuous citation and presence of the existing tensions between the commission and the management of the electric companies. There is a constant need to pressure these companies to comply with the contracts in favor of the generalization of services in the public roads of the growing center of San José.

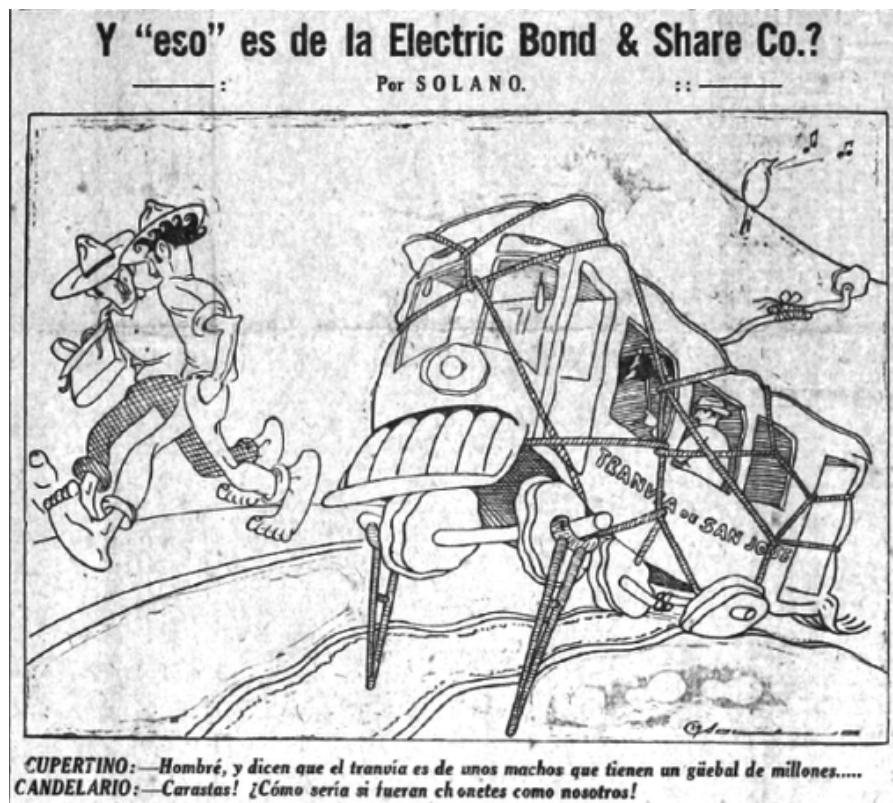
In this regard, Mr. Enrique Ortiz, representative of the National Hydroelectric Company (Electriona) pointed out before the Road Commission:

[...] las empresas eléctricas que actualmente prestan servicios en esta capital necesitan introducir serias reformas para corresponder bien a las necesidades del público, eso explica por qué no pueden ser hoy tan liberales como deberían en el suministro de los servicios a que es llamada. Sus instalaciones, por lo que denuncia sus exterioridades visibles son en extremo deficientes y hasta peligrosas [...]. (“Electriona ante la Comisión de Vías Públicas”, July 08, 1928)<sup>4</sup>

What is sought with nationalization, then, is an improvement in services under the principle of homologation with industrialized countries. In this way, and as one has been able to observe through the transformations in the infrastructures demanded by urban modernization, energy, mobility, and services were directly connected and, if necessary, affected according to the inconsistencies of the administrations of each company.

Expressed tensions with the electric companies and inconsistencies with the development of energy projects had repercussions on other infrastructures. The electric companies maintained discussions with the public roads commission due to the inoperability in the fulfillment of the contracts established for the continuity of the urbanization programs of the josefino center. This situation fed the speeches in favor of nationalization and evidenced the priority of the personal interests of the major foreign capital investors over the agreements for common urban development.

**Image 2:** Graphic representation of the conditions of the tram service in the city of San José



Source: (“La Comisión de vías públicas deseando mantener sus actividades a favor de los intereses de la comunidad pedirá a La Compañía del Travía el fiel cumplimiento del contrario”, October 06, 1929).

The above cartoon criticizes the conditions of the tramway service by Electric Bond and Share, the same company that had absorbed the electric companies in 1928, and refers to the shareholders who had to respond to the deplorable conditions of the service. However, it is possible to identify that the commentators are not users of the tramway. This is evident in the contrasts between the person aboard the tramway and the two passers-by, who are depicted, once again, without shoes and oblivious to the modern services of the urban center. These caricatures in the newspapers, which follow up on the rough edges of the electricity nationalization issue, seem to respond to a criticism of the very structure of foreign capital companies, which ultimately generates distrust and greater speculation about commercial investment in the country.

The expression "imagine if they were chonetes like us" seems to be a criticism from the "simple peasants" —far from the formation and technological knowledge of the big investors— to these models that should be modern and have improved the civilized conditions of the environment, but being in reprehensible conditions, they are worthy of criticism even from that social sector.

By 1930, the discussions did not cease, the inconsistencies between the administrative changes and the redistribution of shares from the companies continued to be the point of criticism from the pro-nationalization sides. *El Diario de Costa Rica*, under the headline "The electrical issue at its peak", published an article on June 14, 1930, stating that Compañía Nacional de Electricidad had announced the expiration of its water concession contract and that the Tranvía company would take over the other company's electric services. This news came as a surprise to the commissions and NES, as they were unaware of the statements. This situation created an environment of speculation on electricity, where industries and businesses created an attempt to raise their prices, and consumers, amid uncertainty, generated an alarm about the consumption of other means of internal lighting in their homes. These discussions remain open for the period, returning again and again to the need for nationalization to control speculation, especially in times of crisis in the face of the depression of 1929.

## CONCLUSIONS. THE NATIONALIZATION MODEL AND INFRASTRUCTURES IN A MODERN STATE

FIRST, the main rationale for electricity nationalization refers to the defense of state sovereignty and border control. The main interest is not only the spatial control of the States but also to limit the capacity of foreign forces to access the resources of this territory. There is thus a tension between the formative idea of the liberal state and foreign and monopolizing private capital. Furthermore, the advocates of nationalization emphasize the need to look after the interests of the minority investors, who were Costa Rican, absorbed by the purchase of the electric companies. This position is purely nationalist in the sense that it does not seek reform on the ownership of the industry, but the importance of the origin of the capital.

SECOND, the participation of the Civic League in the nationalization process has been considered as a group in defense of consumers and favor of the universalization of electric service, however, although true to some extent, their interests in nationalization did not respond to a search for the democratization of access to infrastructure, but only the containment of foreign forces and price control to continue with the advance of industrialization, modernization and progress of the country. This indicates that the model of administration and distribution of the electric service did not vary in the conception of this as a means of generating investments, but emphasized the need for "friendlier" investors with greater State regulation to reduce speculation by investors, which, needless to say, had to be Costa Rican. This group even labeled as unpatriotic those national businessmen who defended the interests of the Electric Bond and Share.

FINALLY, it is concluded that nationalization is discussed because the objective of the State is to provide the material conditions to create a real development in the context of modernization, however, the model, even under the administration of the State, is projected to industrialization and not to the universalization of services. They are based on anti-imperialist but not anti-capitalist discourses. What is prioritized is a common project of electricity infrastructures and not a business with sub-circles, but the issues of inequality in access to electricity and the services that derive from this infrastructure are not addressed.

The infrastructures, as it is possible to notice through this exploration, generated a series of discussions between the public and the private, about the modes of operation of the industry within the economic model it inhabited and the need for regulation and unification of objectives for growth of the necessary conditions for the stimulation of the industry in a homogeneous way.

The exploration demonstrates how infrastructures generate a series of political tensions that do not strictly mean abrupt breaks with previous models. It is possible to observe how the questioning of the electricity industry under a foreign capital company generated the impulse to organize another form of control and regulation over this infrastructure but did not create a change in the investment structure so that the industry would foster a certain model of national capital elites, distancing those elites who defended a more open market model and less State intervention. It cannot be ignored that the dominance of political forces with a liberal model of the State limited these structural transformations on infrastructure, but the emphasis is placed on how the reformist transformations shared the vision of progress with a difference in the means proposed to achieve it, in this case under a unified project, which does not mean, in practice, the universalization of services or equitable access to them.

## NOTAS

1. "In view of the fact that electric power is replacing all forms of energy in the industrial world, the movement for its coordinated distribution leads to the most important aspect of its nationalization by the State. Control of electric power in the future development of the industrial world will undoubtedly bring with it control of the nation's industries, control of transportation, mines and agriculture". The translation belongs to the author.
2. "Now more than ever, the field is open for far-sighted and economical people [...] and rentiers to acquire bonds of the National Electricity Service [...] to realize the patriotic nationalist desire of the [minority] shareholders of Electriona, to liberate, for the benefit of Costa Ricans, the force without whose service the current civilization could not subsist: electric energy". The translation belongs to the author.
3. "From the point of view of the private economy, of course it is convenient to take action; but from the point of view of the national economy, no. This, like the loan contracted in the United States, is a new instrument of conquest". The translation belongs to the author.
4. "[...] the electric companies that currently provide services in this capital need to introduce serious reforms to correspond well to the needs of the public, which explains why they cannot be as liberal as they should be today in the supply of the services to which they are called. Their installations, as far as their visible exterior is concerned, are extremely deficient and even dangerous [...]". The translation belongs to the author.

## REFERENCES

Ayer se inició la discusión pública sobre los asuntos eléctricos. (08 de julio de 1928).

*La Tribuna*. 1 y 5

Edwards, P. (2003). "Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems". In *Modernity and Technology*. Edited by Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey and Andrew Feenberg, 185-225. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

El ex-presidente de la República Lic. Don Alfredo González Flores dice que el trust eléctrico al tomar el nombre de empresa costarricense de electricidad no tiene escrúpulos en hacer pública la violación a los contratos. (06 octubre de 1929). *Diario de Costa Rica*, 1 y 4.

Electronia ante la Comisión de Vías Públicas. (08 de julio de 1928). *La Tribuna*. 4.

Flores Montes, O. (1993) *Historia de la nacionalización de la industria eléctrica en Costa Rica, (1883-1968)*, Tesis de licenciatura. Universidad de Costa Rica.

Fumero, P. (2015). *Cultura y sociedad en Costa Rica: 1914-1950*. EUCR.

Furlong, K. (2014) "STS Beyond the 'Modern Infrastructure Ideal': Extending Theory by Engaging with Infrastructure Challenges in the South." *Technology in Society* 38: 139-47.

La Comisión de vías públicas deseando mantener sus actividades de a favor de los intereses de la comunidad pedirá a La Compañía del Travía el fiel cumplimiento del contrato. (October 06, 1929). *Diario de Costa Rica*. 1

Las formas sucesivas del monopolio. (14 de julio de 1928). *La Tribuna*. 1.

Leigh Star, S. (1999). "The Ethnography of Infrastructure" *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 3. 377-91.

León, J., Arroyo, N. y Montero, A., (2016) *La industria en Costa Rica en el siglo XX*. Costa Rica: EUCR

Notten, F. (2016). "La transición energética en Costa Rica y sus consecuencias, 1911-1929", *Revista de Historia*. 169-188

Quesada, F. (2007) *La modernización entre cafetales, 1880-1930*, Tesis doctoral. Universidad de Helsinki.

Reunión de la Liga Cívica. (14 de julio de 1928). *La Tribuna*. 5.