

Roles and profiles of planners in Australia and Argentina

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The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the different characteristics of the roles of urban planners in Australia and Argentina and the historical conformation of their profiles.¹ These reflections arise out of a journey undertaken in March 2013, in the context of the Planning Connections Program of the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), which was sponsored by the Council on Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR) and the Professional Council of Architecture and Urbanism of Buenos Aires, Argentina (CPAU).

Many, or nearly all, of the meetings that we had in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra used to begin by the observation that we Argentine planners/urbanists – like in most of Latin America – are specialized architects, unlike in Australia and the Anglo world in general, where architects and planners have different trainings from their undergraduate degrees, and their working areas and methods are very different. Although this has been the case for quite some time, in other periods the role and profile of planners in English-speaking countries was not so different from ours. In general, they used to be also architects by training. On the other hand, the changing trajectories that defined both planning traditions – despite some evident differences – share more similarities than what is usually presumed from a current point of view.

The years in which the first formal planning programmes in higher education were founded in Australia and Argentina almost coincide exactly. Both were created in the late 1940s, at a time of great expansion of the ideas of French *urbanisme* and English *town planning*.

In the case of Australia, the initial year was 1949 with the opening of postgraduate courses in the South Australian School of Mines and Industries in Adelaide, and in the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne (Hamnett, 1999, p. 303). The course of Sydney University in particular was especially instrumental in shaping the local disciplinary field. It was a two-year postgraduate course based in the School of Architecture and its first director, Denis Winston – hired in Britain by the University of Sydney in 1948 – is a key figure for understanding the paths of circulation of ideas in this period. Winston was an English architect-planner, educated at the School of Architecture of the University of Liverpool (B.Arch., 1931) and at Harvard University (A.M., 1933) where he studied city and landscape planning.² Winston acted as a direct liaison with some of the most prominent British urban planners of its time, such as Patrick Abercrombie and Raymond Unwin, and maintained a frequent correspondence with renowned American urban thinkers, such as Lewis Mumford (Freestone, 2002).

¹ The historical and disciplinary characterizations presented here are not intended to be exhaustive, but aim to review in particular some key moments in the trajectories of the urban planning field in both countries. The profiles revised are not the only ones that could be identified. Furthermore, the emergence of new roles in most cases did not result in the complete disappearance of the preexisting ones. Although in every period there exist some prevailing profiles, the usual norm is that they tend to overlap with previous models for long periods.

² It is worth mentioning that the universities of Liverpool and Harvard were the first two higher education institutions in which planning courses were opened, both in 1909 (Hall, 2002, pp. 353-354).

In Argentina, the first postgraduate course in urbanism was created in 1948 in the newly autonomous School of Architecture of the University of Buenos Aires.³ Its director, and also founder of the Institute of Urbanism two years earlier, was the engineer-planner Carlos Maria Della Paolera. An heir of a family of illustrious architects and builders,⁴ Della Paolera completed his undergraduate diploma at the School of Engineering of the University of Buenos Aires, and continued his postgraduate studies at the Institute of Urbanism of Paris. His thesis supervisor at Paris was the historian-planner Marcel Poète, and among his teachers were, for example, Jacques Greber and Leon Jaussely (Novick, 2004, p. 192). Like Winston in Australia, Della Paolera's passage through public administration and the local academy was decisive in establishing the tradition of planning in Argentina. In addition, his training in Paris is illustrative of an initial orientation in our country towards continental European urban culture, with preeminence of French urbanism and its *beaux arts* tradition.

According to Nigel Taylor (1998, pp. 159-160), even until the early 1960s, the predominant view in Britain – and we might add, in most English-speaking countries including Australia – was the understanding of urban planning as a physical-spatial design exercise, basically as a form of "architecture writ large". Consequently, planners and urban specialists were, mostly, architects in the first place.⁵ For Taylor, the first point of departure came after the emergence of the "systems theory" in planning. This led to a shift of planning from a form of applied art to "scientific planning". A primarily morphological vision of the cities was replaced by an idea of cities as "systems of inter-related activities in a constant state of flux." For urban specialists trained before the 1960s, this change was disconcerting. Suddenly, the new common sense expressed that their training in design and composition and their working methods were inappropriate. They were informed by a new generation of urban theorists that they should not consider themselves artists but "scientific systems analysts". Accordingly, engineers on the one hand and sociologists, economists and geographers on the other, seemed to be better equipped for understanding urban phenomena and planning the future of cities. The contents of the new classes in undergraduate planning courses were oriented towards the world of statistics, mathematical modelling and above all road engineering. For Peter Hall (2002, pp. 353-377) also, the "Systems Revolution" was decisive in the new orientation of planning in the Anglo world. That is the time when, according to Hall, ends the "Prehistory of Academic City Planning", a specific theory is created, and an academic side of the discipline separated from practice solidifies. Gradually, in the second half of the twentieth century, most planning schools in English-speaking countries, with their new undergraduate and postgraduate planning courses, began to break away from Architecture.

³ Prior to this postgraduate course, Della Paolera also created the first chair of urbanism of Argentina in 1929, at the National University of Rosario (Novick, 2004, p. 192).

⁴ Carlos María Della Paolera was a nephew of the architect-planner Juan Antonio Buschiazzi – author of the project of the first boulevard of Buenos Aires, Avenida de Mayo, among many others – and son of the Italian builder Cayetano della Paolera (ibid.).

⁵ With notable exceptions such as the case of Patrick Geddes, whose original training was as a biologist. Abercrombie's case –perhaps the most emblematic planner during the founding period of the field in Britain– represents well the archetype of the first British architect-planners.

Even though this separation between the faculties of planning and architecture did not occur in Argentina,⁶ the "scientific planning" trend was no stranger to the origins of the planning field in our country. Quite the contrary, the engineering orientation of Della Paolera and its imprint on the first specialized courses, illustrate the important weight of this current in the local tradition. The methodologies with their "diagnoses" and the jargon of the discipline in the local sphere in general – as in the global mainstream planning discourse of its time – was not shy to borrow scientific terms and concepts, especially from Biology and Medicine.⁷ However, the main partners and counterpart peers of Della Paolera were generally architects. In the School of Architecture of the University of Buenos Aires was where he founded his research centre and postgraduate courses and where he retired after his departure from public administration as a result of political and ideological conflicts (Novick, 2004, p. 193). The tension between urbanism as a form of Art or Science in the local debate, it seems that was somehow resolved according to the principle established by Alfred Agache in 1916: "planning should be both an Art and a Science" (quoted in Novick and Piccioni, 2004, p. 134). Under this premise, architects appeared to be the most suitable professionals to ensure the delicate balance.

In the 1950s and 1960s, scientific urban planning in Latin America also played a central role through the application of *developmentalist theories*. This was not only the case within the urban discussion but also with regards to all types of state policies. Economic development models promoted by leading institutions in the production of Latin American urban thinking in that period, such as the American Society of Planning (SIAP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL), used to include detailed urban and regional plans made by technical bodies that were led in most cases by architect-planners with knowledge in economics and sociology acquired in postgraduate courses.

Going back to Taylor (1998, p. 161), the next large transformation in planning in the Anglo world, after the passage from the "architect-planner" to the "planner-scientist", took place in the last two decades of the twentieth century, and to some extent it is the prevailing model until today: that is the "planner-communicator". In this new turn in the field, the role of the urban planner is presented, modestly, not as an expert who has the solutions to build, transform and solve the problems of cities, but as someone who can mediate between communities and the mechanisms of public decision making and implementation. The argument that supports this approach – which began in the 1960s anticipating the postmodern debate – questions the objectivity and authority of planning decisions and their implications on a particular community, which may or may not share the same values and criteria for determining what is a good urban environment. This redefinition of the profile and role of the planner implies a realignment of its duties, knowledge and

⁶ The first – and so far the only – undergraduate course of urbanism in Argentina that is separated from architecture courses, is the Bachelor in Urbanism at the University of General Sarmiento, which was only opened in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In Australia, there are currently 22 undergraduate courses and 27 postgraduate courses in planning (as of June 2012, March, *et al.*, 2012, p. 2).

⁷ The scientific side of urban sociology, and in particular the theoretical framework provided by the Chicago School of Urban Ecology in the 1920s, was also a major source which supplied the theory of urban planning in this period.

application in a move closer to the fields of the Social Sciences. Thus, the main interests of the "planner-communicator" lie in the identification and interpretation of social conflicts and actors and in the practice of participatory planning methodologies.

In Argentina as well, in the course of the last few decades, planning and urban studies have come closer to the world of the Social Sciences. Although the theory and application of participatory planning here have not had a development equivalent to that of the Anglo world, other means and conditions have also led to this approach. The beginning of this move closer to the fundamental problems of the Social Sciences in Argentina, and Latin America in general, took place in a passage that bears some similarities to the one described by Taylor, immersed in the successive crises of Western modernity in the early 1970s. In this case, the context was given by the disenchantment from the developmentalist project and the modernizing capacity of planning, in parallel to the rise of the *Latin American dependency theory* (Gorelik, 2002, p. 20). This ideological shift put on hold the confidence on the ability to transform reality that encouraged architects and planners in the 1950s and 1960s, placing them in a new critical role, primarily as denouncers of the social injustices of the subcontinent. On the other hand, an "anti-spatialist" current in Latin American urban studies in this period focused on the social processes and political-economic structures that run cities, avoiding any morphological or spatial reading. Paradoxically, it was also mostly architects who engaged in this line of thought. The return of the centrality of "spatial planning" in local urban discourse and practice, only occurred in the late 1980s with the renewal of planning thinking in Barcelona first, and also in Italy, which included the revaluation of the traditional role of the architect in the construction of the city.

In the context of the English-speaking world, the reappearance of the spatial and design dimension as important issues in the urban debate in the last quarter of the twentieth century – through emblematic texts such as *Collage City* (Rowe and Koetter, 1978) and *Responsive Environments* (Bentley *et al.*, 1985) – promoted a new division in the field and the foundation of a new specific discipline presented as a bridge between Planning and Architecture: Urban Design. The new specialty also led to the opening of specific departments in universities, research centres, undergraduate and postgraduate courses and an *ethos* of its own.

Finally, at the current period "strategic planning" seems to provide a common language to urban planning internationally, and to bring closer the aims of urban plans around the world and the profiles of the planners who produce them. However, it is also productive here to note that the term "strategic planning" is usually understood and applied in different ways in Argentina and Australia. In Latin America, this term is directly associated with the "Barcelona model" and the "planning of large-scale urban projects" (Aguilar, 2005; Novick, 2012). Especially since the 1990s, when this model was actively promoted in our region, the term is also related to *urban marketing* and has been deeply questioned from different perspectives (Fiori Arantes, 2000). In planning in the English-speaking world, the strategic dimension refers primarily to a differentiation between two distinct levels of intervention. The division between

"strategic" and "local" began to be used in Britain in the 1960s in the context of the criticisms of postwar planning. The report "The Future of Development Plans" – also known as the "PAG Report" and considered a landmark in British urban thought – proposed in 1965 for the first time a system of two levels in which the detailed "local plans" would "nest" in general and flexible "strategic plans". On the other hand, certain tools associated with strategic planning, such as SWOT analyses, are common tools in both planning traditions and are already part of the common language of the discipline.

What is the most suitable training to work in the complexity of current cities? The answer does not seem to reside in a single profile, but in the sum of complemented knowledge that can only be gathered in multidisciplinary teams. It is therefore positive that planning schools and specialized courses in urban studies provide different approaches, and that the range and scope of the new programs offered by universities is increased. The aim appears to be to encourage diversity in planning education, so a greater plurality of perspectives is promoted in one of the broadest, most diverse and most complex fields of action that exist by definition: the contemporary cities and urban regions.

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