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To cite this article: Daniel Galland & Pablo Elinbaum (2018) A “Field” Under Construction: The State of Planning in Latin America and the Southern Turn in Planning, *disP - The Planning Review*, 54:1, 18-24, DOI: [10.1080/02513625.2018.1454665](https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2018.1454665)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2018.1454665>



Published online: 26 Mar 2018.



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# A “Field” Under Construction: The State of Planning in Latin America and the Southern Turn in Planning

*Introduction to the Special Issue on Latin America*

Daniel Galland and Pablo Elinbaum



Abstract: This special issue takes a point of departure on the “southern turn in planning” with an emphasis on Latin America and seeks to contribute to the current wave of debates around international comparative planning. Its objective is to target the “state of the art” of planning interventions as well as contemporary forms of planning knowledge and academic scholarship across the region. In doing so, a number of key themes are identified through rationales ranging from the emergence of planning policies, practices and discourses to gaps between theory and practice, and then moving on to the state of planning education and the exchange of planning knowledge across different countries within the region. Based on these themes, the substance of the issue embraces inputs by academics with planning knowledge and expertise from Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay, Brazil and Peru. The conclusion to the issue presents a cross-comparative analysis and synthesises a series of research axes aimed at designing a research agenda concerning planning in Latin America.

## *Introduction*

In recent years, scholars from a wide range of disciplines within the social sciences have engaged in developing knowledge projects challenging “the world economy of knowledge structured by the history of colonialism and current north-south global inequalities” (Connell 2014: 210). In the academic field of planning, several theorists have contributed to this shift through a range of new ideas that partly draw on and are found at the intersection of other closely related (spatial) disciplines such as urban studies, development studies and geography (ibid. 2014: 216–17; Watson 2016: 36). In this respect, southern planning theorists converge insofar as their approaches challenge the universalising assumptions of theory generated in the Global North as well as the limitations of such “universalized theory” in terms of its use of “situated knowledge” (Watson 2008, 2009, 2016). Southern theorists thereby agree on the need to foster alternative conceptual approaches that acknowledge deeper social and economic differences via the development of new planning and policy epistemologies to better understand current planning practices (Miraftab 2009; Roy 2001, 2009; Watson 2006).

The term “Global South” as now used in planning is moving away from ad hoc geographical and development connotations towards underscoring geopolitical power relations (Dados, Connell 2012: 12). A Global South perspective on planning necessarily implies an understanding of the processes of colonialism, post-colonialism, imperialism and capitalism (Watson 2009), and thereby also a recognition of the notion that planning holds conflicting rationalities driven by divergent logics (Watson 2003, 2006). The works of Roy (2005) on urban informality as a planning epistemology, and Miraftab (2009) on citizenship insurgency as a reaction to neoliberal inclusion are not only illustrative of counter-hegemonic understandings of urban planning in the 21st century, but also a contribution to the more

general project aimed at decolonising social thought (Connell 2007, 2014).

Extensive research in and around planning in Latin America has been undertaken over the course of the past two or three decades. Universities and research institutions with an interest in researching this region have embarked on efforts that delve into political, technical and socio-spatial aspects associated with evolving planning practices. The introduction to this special edition outlines the motivation behind a number of key planning themes, which enabled academics with planning knowledge from Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay and Peru to provide reflections and wider perspectives concerning their current state of planning – an approach that we have opted to label a “field” under construction following the concept coined by Pierre Bourdieu (2002).

A field is hereby conceived as a social space of action and influence in which particular social relationships converge. These relations are defined by the possession or production of a specific form of capital, proper to the field in question. Each field is – to a greater or lesser extent – autonomous, and the dominant or dominated position of the participants within the field depends to some degree on its specific rules. The structured set of fields, which includes their reciprocal influences and the relations of domination between them, defines the social structure. Moreover, each field forms a system of objective relations between actors and groups depending on their own laws and principles of legitimacy (Bourdieu 1971). Such actors and groups alternately converge and are confronted by the distribution of specific symbolic capital. This capital (in this case, the recognised capacity to speak and act legitimately in relation to a complex product as such urbanisation) will be the result of previous struggles ending in dispositions and rules, methods and theories that will tend to be preserved, but also subverted by the new generational groups (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992).

Bourdieu (1971) argues that a field consolidates and gains autonomy and cohesion when it reaches a high self-consciousness. A particular field becomes independent of what is produced in other fields, and grows its indifference to external economic and political powers. Internal homogeneity increases only when resources have grown markedly and the demarcation and entry mechanism have hardened, with conservation efforts predominating, circumscribing conflict to succession strategies. In this light, Rigotti (2005) argues that in an “urban field”

this process is usually suspended, both by the temptation to be diluted in the technocratic methodology of planning, and by the attempts of engineers and architects to occupy a place in practice without renouncing the specificities of their respective professions.

The relevance of defining the field of planning in Latin America is twofold. We analyse the idea of field in terms of how the planning profession is being shaped in order to understand the contradictions in the processes of institutionalisation between administrative lightness and the rise of academic programmes, and between a protectionist attitude against international theory and the continuous translation of foreign models. We also intend to analyse the idea of field as the territory in which planning practice has an influence, to understand the coexistence between the political parties that form parallel planning systems and the international organisations that define the problems and execute the solutions, or the specificity of the process of urbanisation between the international division of the different roles of capitalist production and the specificity of local cultural representations.

### *1 Present status of planning in politics and in society*

The genesis of modern planning in Latin America is generally attributed to specific efforts to promote economic development, which were advanced by some national governments in the region during the early post-WWII era. While these underpinnings marked the transition of a century-old planning tradition associated with urbanism into one of regional planning fostered by US governments in attempts to articulate neo-colonial relations, it was not until the 1970s when the idea of planning as such became more widely diffused – albeit more semantically rather than in practical terms (De Mattos 2012). The motivation to embark upon the planning endeavour came from two distinctive approaches: first, the notion about indicative planning promoted by the Latin American Economic Commission (*Comisión Económica para América Latina*, CEPAL); and second, the experiences with Soviet centralised planning that partly influenced policy coordination, land reform and financial stability in some countries in South America (ibid.) – what Hirschmann (1963) referred to as a policy style of “reform-mongering” in his study of adaptive forms of policy planning (Friedmann, Hudson 1974).

While several decades have gone by since the advent of these planning interventions, it can be argued that the institutionalisation of planning continues in developmental stages. From inception, planning rationalities in Latin America were generally influenced by rational conceptions that link planning to regulatory instruments. However, the “fragile” institutional frameworks for planning throughout the region have evolved in fragmented ways, which, coupled with the standard issues of sectorial integration, institutional coordination and misuse of scarce resources questioned the efficacy of regulatory planning tools and mechanisms (Irazábal 2009: 60–63). At the same time, most Latin American countries have been exposed for decades to neoliberal regimes as well as neoliberal reforms as depicted by the rollout of policies that foster the expansion of free trade and the privatisation of public companies (Ciccolella 2012). These interventions have essentially led to a widespread impression that neoliberal policies dominate the urban and regional development landscape across the region, and that planning, largely characterised by its inefficacy, has done little to orchestrate spatial change (Pírez 2000). In this light, what are the core planning, development and governance-related challenges currently being faced by key countries in Latin America? Has planning adopted alternative roles throughout the 2010s? Are new planning conceptions emerging?

Beyond establishing an attempt to understand the scope and content associated with planning instruments drafted at different levels of government administration, it is also important to determine the array of legal dimensions of planning and thereby also to delve into the actual degree of institutionalisation of planning in each country. In this sense, how is the principle of subsidiarity regarded in terms of public policies in countries with still developing institutional frameworks? How do state models that alternate between centralism and federalism influence plan-making and participatory planning processes? All in all, these sub-questions address the current status of planning as regards the state of the domain’s evolving institutional contexts, instrumental contents and planning processes (Elinbaum, Galland 2016; Galland, Elinbaum 2015).

## 2 *Discourses about planning*

Key planning challenges in Latin America relate to acute socio-spatial inequalities, urban

informality, urban sprawl, housing deficits, transport inadequacy and inaccessibility, environmental degradation as well as regional disparities, amongst several other themes. While media coverage differs widely from country to country with emphases oftentimes ranging from environmental issues (i.e. air and water pollution) to the visible impact of large infrastructure projects, discourses about planning typically reproduce existing socio-economic conditions as well as the state of legislative frameworks. Discourses also tend to reflect the concerns and values of citizens and their satisfaction with standing political systems.

Dominant planning themes and discourses are similarly “filtered” by a series of interrelated dimensions such as political party programmes (mostly elucidated during electoral campaigns); urban and environmental themes and issues selected by and disseminated through national and local media; the professional profiles of planners and the problems associated with their own disciplines (i.e. engineering, architecture, geography); and the academic context through different lines of research and teaching. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that recent planning and development in Latin America has also been considerably influenced by international financial organisations such as the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank, which not only play a key role in setting planning agendas but also in sponsoring planning activities in several Latin American countries.

In light of the above, how is the media reacting to key socio-spatial issues such as urban and regional inequality? How are matters related to urban informality currently being dealt with by national and sub-national authorities? Does the media support consultative initiatives to inform the populace about critical planning issues? Moreover, how are planning themes selected and how are they moved onto government agendas? What is the overall awareness about planning themes at different administrative levels?

## 3 *Linkage between planning theory and practice*

This question takes point of departure on the long-term awareness about the limited linkages between planning theory and practice, a problem made manifest by the hiatus between planning academia and professional planning practice. This gap is inherent in planning given the character of a domain constantly interceded

by “wicked” issues (Rittel, Webber 1973). Despite the apparent impossibility of articulating theory and practice, the nature of such a gap in Latin American contexts differs partly from that of the Global North in the sense that both planning research as well as public administration respond to and are the product of distinctive cultural, political and socio-economic foci (Hardoy 1972). In terms of research, what emerging strands hold potential for shaping theory in dialogue with current planning practices? With respect to public administration, how does innovation arise in planning and to what extent does policy transfer take place? To what extent are national and international scientific research outputs incorporated into the working protocols of planning agencies? Are planners regarded as agents of knowledge transfer between academia and public administration? What are the actual competences of planners in Latin America, some of whom are oftentimes not professionalised?

Furthermore, the question of language is highly significant insofar as Latin America, unlike Europe, does not use English as the *lingua franca*. English is unquestionably established as the bridge language of the international planning community (Pennycook 2014), but Latin American planning circles seem to primarily publish and rely on outlets (e.g. academic journals of planning, geography and environment) issued in either Spanish or Portuguese while there is extensive accessibility to planning literature in English. In this light, to what extent do planning academics in Latin America rely on locally produced knowledge? What share of Latin American planning academics is being educated in North America and Europe? And to what extent has this share of academics influenced the transfer of ideas from the Global North?

Finally, what is the role of Latin American scientific citation indexing services (e.g. Lat-index, Capes, Redalyc and others), which altogether comprise an indexing system parallel to the Anglo-Saxon ISI's Web of Science? To what extent is there an imposition of planning problems from the Global North? To what degree does the theory produced in English have transnational validity or concern?

#### 4 *Social, economic and spatial disparities*

Socio-spatial disparities are evidently the product of unequal development policies and practices that originally became entrenched in the

whole region during three centuries of Spanish and Portuguese colonisation. From a historical perspective, planning in Latin America can be traced back to pre-Columbian civilisations, some of which advanced highly organised urban settlements during the 14th and 15th centuries within territories of the Aztec and Inca empires in present-day Mexico and Peru. With the advent of Spanish colonisation, the Laws of the Indies introduced by the Spanish crown over the course of the 16th century sought to regulate the large-scale colonisation of the “New World” through settlement control (Crouch, Mundigo 1977; Mundigo, Crouch 1977). Comprised of a series of standards of “good city planning” inspired by treatises of architecture, engineering and urban design as well as contemporary experience in such domains, these rational ordinances attempted to deal with various political, social and physical aspects of city-building. The urban form characterised by the gridiron system of squared blocks surrounding a central plaza facilitated centralised control as well as measured allotment of property (Stanilawsky 1947, in Mundigo, Crouch 1977). The inner cores of these new cities became settled by affluent merchants and foreign inhabitants, while indigenous people were pushed outwards towards the peripheries (Godfrey 1991, in Irazábal 2009). Standing amongst the oldest known regulations associated with city design, the Laws of the Indies evidently marked the initiation of socio-spatial inequality in Latin America.

As a region rooted in large socio-spatial and economic disparities, Latin America is unsurprisingly confronted by highly complex and ever-increasing challenges of the sort. We perceive this complexity in two main scales of segregation that characterise Latin American cities and regions: the local scale based on urbanisation models that promote fragmentation and informality (Clichevsky 2000; Janoschka 2002; Sabatini 2006) and the global scale evident in the persistence of post-colonial relationships, not only articulated in cultural terms, but also in relation to unavoidable socio-economic determinants (De Alva 1992). The extent to which planners contribute to (or not) – or whether they are conscious of or not – lessening socio-spatial and economic inequalities is largely determined by their alignment with forms of production of capitalist urbanisation, i.e. how politics and planning in different countries fluctuate between more or less progressive or conservative positions facilitating such modes of urbanisation.

As a discipline that emerged in the Global North product of the industrial revolution and the concomitant societal and environmental misfortunes imposed by evolving industrialisation processes, modern planning was originally founded on scientific objectivity claims that concealed – from inception – value judgments and ideologies. Instrumentally, thus, planning has historically played two contradictory roles. While seeking to promote a particular kind of urbanisation, namely capitalist, planning also adopted the mandate of solving the socio-spatial disparities as well as the environmental issues generated by such capitalist urbanisation (Choay 1969). The inherent ambiguities that emerge from this double mandate alongside political fluctuations facilitating capitalist urbanisation processes entail that planners all over adopt different – and oftentimes conflicting – roles, namely technical, political, deliberative, advocacy, entrepreneurial and so forth (Schön 1982). Hence, what roles do planners in Latin America embrace when addressing socio-spatial disparities and how do such roles compare and contrast with their counterparts in the Global North? What policy instruments (formal or informal) do planners use when embarking on issues as a product of socio-spatial disparities? To what degree have such instruments been effective over time?

### 5 *Planning education*

Planning is interdisciplinary in practice but multidisciplinary in terms of the diverse modes through which planning education is taught and delivered within different faculties at universities all over the world. As Schön (1982: 353) reminds us: “The institutional context of practice is notoriously unstable, and there are many contending views of the profession, each of which carries a different image of the planning role and a different picture of the body of useful knowledge”. Relying traditionally on “experienced practice” (Schön 1992), planning knowledge also draws on and is embedded in professional knowledge ascribed to the so-called “major” professions (Glazer 1974). In Europe, professional planning degrees constitute specialisations oftentimes subordinated to schools of architecture or geography, and with connections to degrees in law, economics or sociology. In North America, planning degrees either have a standalone character (they are delivered in ad hoc schools of planning) and/or are subordinated to schools of architecture,

engineering or geography. Hence, this leads us to ask under which “major disciplines” is planning being taught throughout Latin America? Are different planning curricula being taught at either Bachelor’s or Master’s levels? Who debates, determines and examines the substance of planning programmes and are such programmes fit for purpose, i.e. tailored to suit the urban and regional realities that depict the problems associated with the discipline in each country?

Both the scope and content associated with planning programmes allow investigation into the ways through which “experienced practice” is retrieved and reincorporated thereafter as an input to academic teaching. In this respect, it is also worth asking how processes of knowledge socialisation take place as regards the particular know-how related to the array of planning traditions in the region. Hence, how does academic teaching in and around planning prioritise the sense of opportunity and specific problems manifested in each country? What are the trade-offs between technical knowledge and critical thinking, and how relevant is the professionalisation of practicing planners in relation to those educated within planning institutions?

### 6 *Planning knowledge exchange*

The travel of ideas is a topic that has attracted research attention in Europe over the past two decades, particularly within the academic disciplines of management and organisation studies. Czarniawska and Joerges place emphasis on the travel of ideas as “a process of translation – not one of reception, rejection, resistance or acceptance” (Latour 1992: 116, in Czarniawska, Joerges 1996). The flow of planning ideas and planning practices from the Global North to the Global South was notorious throughout the “modernization period” where imported practices of land-use zoning, master planning or spatial form were implanted by the US and some Western European countries in Latin America (Healey, Upton 2010; Roy 2009). In terms of modern urban planning per se, Latin America has been influenced by the transfer of ideas from both Europe and the United States since the mid-19th century (Almandoz 2002). In this respect, planning as a technology towards achieving modernisation has been conceived in opposite ways: as a general or universal means towards attaining development in its many forms (Healey 2012), and as a means employed for hegemonic domination purposes – hence

as an exploitive technology in diverse Global South contexts (Roy 2010; Watson 2009).

With the increasing awareness concerning complexity and contingency of development pathways so has come a rejection of planning as a universal and, alongside it, the need to question and limit its travelling capacity (Healey 2012). In this respect, there has been increasing recognition that the travelling of planning ideas, as far as their selection, adaptation or rejection are concerned, is highly conditioned by political processes that are targeted to benefit or undermine particular interests and social groups (Watson 2012). Regional planning, mediated by international organisations (see theme 1 above), represented an important means of promoting national spatial equilibrium in Latin America, albeit these initiatives did not always prove successful.

Beyond the effect of former post-colonial and imperialist legacies, recent evidence suggests that the transfer of planning knowledge between Latin American countries takes place both at national and sub-national levels, often-times fostered by international financial institutions and think-tanks. How do planning ideas travel within the region and how are such ideas translated in particular policy contexts? What substantial and/or procedural aspects related to planning manage to reach policy agendas and to influence policy shifts? Which specific ideas tend to be translated and which local practices remain uninfluenced? Finally, how and why do specific planning narratives prevail?

### *Surveying the state of the art of planning in Latin America*

Latin America comprises a total of 20 countries and only seven of them are represented in this survey. The criteria behind our selection are evidently neither systematic nor balanced, although the choice of countries mostly reflects – with the exception of Uruguay – the most significant countries in terms of land surface area, population and economy size, and those displaying higher rates of urbanisation while encompassing the largest metropolitan areas in the region.

The answers to the thematic questions that comprise this survey are meant to establish the underpinnings towards motivating wider debates regarding the state of the art of planning interventions, policies and practices, as well as contemporary forms of planning knowledge and academic teaching across the region. In

this respect, the aim of this special edition is to identify a number of research axes that contribute to illuminating the design of a planning research agenda in Latin America. The conclusions of the issue attempt to take on this task through a cross-comparative analysis that synthesises the seven contributions that all together constitute this thematic survey.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the present Latin American appraisal of planning is inspired by an analogous survey concerning the state of the art of planning and planning education in Europe published by *disP – The Planning Review* (Kunzmann, Koll-Schretzenmayr 2015). Amidst a widespread political climate of scepticism concerning planning, where growth-oriented agendas are increasingly being prioritised by national governments over key societal development issues, such a European survey exposed the views of planning professionals and academics concerning contemporary economic and political dimensions of urban and regional planning and development. In essence, this Latin American survey follows a similar scheme although the rationales behind the questions and planning themes evidently differ as already noted explicitly in the above six points.

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