



Argentina

Pablo Elinbaum

To cite this article: Pablo Elinbaum (2018) Argentina, *disP - The Planning Review*, 54:1, 25-27, DOI: [10.1080/02513625.2018.1454668](https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2018.1454668)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2018.1454668>



Published online: 26 Mar 2018.



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1 Present status of planning

Argentina is a federal state with three territorial levels (national, provincial and municipal), with a special authority for the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, which has had special administrative status since 1994. Regarding land-use policies, provinces preserve all political power, allowing them to decree their own constitution, ensuring municipal autonomy and regulating its institutional scope and content in political, administrative, economic and financial terms (National Constitution Art. 123). Although Argentina does not have a planning system, plans have been implemented at all administrative levels (Maldonado 2010).

At the national level, in 2004, the federal government implemented the National Strategic Plan – Vision 2016 as a process of federal consensus building for productive development, supported by the participation of all provincial governments and their technical departments. The plan proposes two main guidelines: to ensure optimal conditions for living and developing productive activities, and to anticipate the demands of investment in the national territory. At the provincial level, only the province of Mendoza approved its own territorial spatial plan in 2017, although it has had serious difficulties in its implementation. At the regional level, it is worth mentioning the experience of pluri-municipal plans for sustainable development implemented through ad hoc strategic planning delimitations called “micro-regions” (Lemoine, Sarabia 2001; Elinbaum 2014). However, the most common instruments are the municipal urban plans. Local planning management is carried out through binding policies that regulate building licenses, and a zoning that sets land classification (rural-urban) and land qualification in terms of permitted activities and maximum densities.

It is also worth mentioning expropriations as the most common state instrument for acquiring land, and the private-public planning agreements (*convenios urbanísticos*) implemented for recovering urban development capital gains. As for the mechanisms of participation in planning, the popular consultations and referendums (National Constitution Art. 40), public hearings (which are not included in the constitution), and the “participatory budget”,

which is a consensus building tool for distributing public resources and increasing equality in their allocation, should be mentioned. The effect of local plans is established on an ad hoc basis, until another plan or code is approved. Except for the mandatory minimum provincial planning requirements, there is no regulation requiring municipal governments to draft their local plans.

2 Discourses about planning

The themes that dominate the discourse of planning in Argentina can be classified in three areas: practice, academia, and credit agencies and the media. Discussion topics of planning practice arise from the professional context of architects, dominant among planners. Similar to the tradition of urbanism in southern Europe (Nadin, Stead 2008), these themes focus on functional and formal aspects, often reduced to purely compositional discussions of urban design contests. Issues of planning practice have little in common with the academic approach since it is not a central topic in local urban studies and there is virtually no applied research agenda for improving planning practice. In Argentina, basic research on planning has focused on five main themes: global dynamics, management of public policies, social housing, cultural history and processes of urbanisation, although in recent years there has been a boom in research topics such as land market, and formal and informal habitat (Novick, Vecslir 2015). Thirdly, the dominant issues of planning are predetermined by the entities that finance planning such as the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). In order to simplify the feasibility of future public works to fix a possible loan, the IDB sets standardised indicators and urban problems in its plans for local development. The national government is responsible for managing the funding of all planning levels, showing how political agenda determines the selective localisation of the public budget and the link with the construction companies. The above-mentioned planning themes generally have little relevance in the press. Within the panorama of urban conflicts, tabloid media focuses primarily on the problem of insecurity, selecting information

Dr Pablo Elinbaum is Assistant Researcher at the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CEUR-CONICET) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He holds a Master's degree in Urban Design and a PhD in Urban Planning, both from the School of Architecture of Barcelona at the Technical University of Catalonia (UPC). His main research topics are the instrumental and socio-political innovation of supra-local planning and the processes of rescaling of the urban. Regarding teaching activities, he has been Assistant Professor of Urban Planning at UPC and at the International University of Catalonia. Besides his work at CEUR, he is currently Assistant Professor of Urbanism at the University Torcuato Di Tella, a consultant in urban planning issues and editor of RIURB (Ibero-American Journal of Urbanism).

according to the political bias of each corporative media group. For example, one of the most recurrent themes in the press is the “threat” of shantytowns (*villas miseria*) and land intrusions (*tomas de tierra*). Media coverage insistence on exposing the contrast between the wealthiest neighbourhoods of the Capital Federal District, such as Recoleta or Puerto Madero, and Villa 31 (a shantytown of nearly 25000 inhabitants, located next to the downtown area) eventually becomes the classic postcard of Buenos Aires.

3 Theory and practice

Problems in planning practice in Argentina have not been yet addressed through an established or recognisable research agenda. On the one hand, the production of knowledge from professional experience in planning is scarce or has a historicist approach. However, on the other hand, applied research is also undeveloped since most planners are trained “in practice” within public offices and planning secretariats. For example, the technicians of the Planning Department of the Municipality of Rosario are renowned for their “urbanistic” approach exported from southern Europe, in line with the progressive principles of the Italian *Tendenza* (cf. Rossi 1977) and the Catalan Urban Project (*Proyecto Urbano*, cf. De Solà Morales 1991). As for the graduate education of planners, there are two trends. Some graduate programmes try to build academic curricula aligned to the latest international theoretical trends (with an emphasis on Spanish legal instrumentality), while others focus on more local frames of Latin American experiences. However, due to the dispersion of planning instruments and the absence of a comprehensive legal framework or planning system (see section 1), recent graduates face serious difficulties in terms of deploying the skills acquired in their academic training in practice.

4 Social, economic and spatial disparities

Argentinean planners generally adopt a technocratic perspective for addressing social, economic and spatial disparities (Pérez 2011), the “confident objectivity” of specialists prevail, since many of them were trained “in” planning institutions. However, despite the positivist character of professional practice, it is worth mentioning that the institutionalisation of planning through so-called “urban reform”

was initiated in 2005 and stopped with the entry of a new conservative government in 2016. The process of urban reform was driven by a broad sector of grassroots organisations, promoted as a collective and pluralistic space for addressing conflictive issues such as legal protection of the right to the city, urban development without discrimination, tax reform, repeal of the crime of usurpation, promotion of redistributive housing policies, and democratic access to urban land, among other urgent demands (Maldonado 2010). With this aim, the Secretariat for Public Investment and the Federal Council of Spatial Planning were created in 2004 for the implementation of a development policy and a national spatial plan through consensual and operative means.

5 Planning education

Planning education in Argentina has always been a subject within the faculties of architecture. Although the National Commission for Assessment and Evaluation of Universities (CONEAU) defines the content and scope of planning education, each school determines its own approach. For example, at the National University of Rosario, the urban planning course lasts six semesters, while at the University of Buenos Aires and Cordoba, it only lasts two semesters. In private schools, planning courses are often reduced to a single semester. The average annual course is 200–250 hours per year. As for postgraduate education, in the last ten years universities have implemented different Master’s courses (Buenos Aires, La Plata and Cordoba), a professional specialisation course (Rosario), an inter-university doctoral programme in architecture (including issues of urban planning), and a doctorate in urban studies held at the University of General Sarmiento. Moreover, in 2010, the latter institution initiated a graduate degree in urban planning based on panoramic theoretical and professional content. To date, there have only been two graduating classes and therefore it is impossible to assess the performance of graduates in practice.

It is worth mentioning the training course in spatial planning conducted between 2012 and 2015 by the National Secretary of Spatial Planning. The main objective of the course was to “socialize knowledge” from the synergy between 700 civil servants who exchanged their particular know-how on the territory. Thus, teaching planning prioritised timing and the

specificity of the problems to be addressed (Aguilar et al. 2015). In 2015, representatives from ten public schools within the Association of Mercosur Public Schools of Architecture (ARQUISUR) developed a diagnosis of planning teaching in Argentina. In the final report, Bragos (2015) poses the main education challenges such as: increasing the number of teaching courses in relation to the academic goals; systematising the methods of teaching and contents; and compensating the theoretical and formal aspects of planning through a profound reflection on the current restructuring process of urbanisation in different scales – a reflection also pending outside the classroom.

6 Planning knowledge exchange

The transfer of knowledge and technical extension between Argentina and other Latin American countries is still very weak. The lack of an institutionalised planning system does not allow for a clear common understanding on what the tools are and how they have been used in different national contexts. Although planning practice in Latin America does not have massive disclosure, journals such as those specialising in the field of architecture mean that more and more information on “best practices” is transferred, especially from Brazil and Colombia – the planning innovators of the region. The reception of these practices, however, is done without criticism as local governments subscribe to the fixed images of official versions, bypassing the specificity of the planning process in its real context.

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Dr Pablo Elinbaum
Centre for Urban and Regional
Studies
CEUR-CONICET
Saavedra 15
C1083ACA CABA
Buenos Aires
Argentina
pabloelinbaum@conicet.gov.ar