

## **The evolution of Latin American metropolitan planning: institutions, instruments, processes and cultural traditions**

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Metropolitan plans often converge in their general themes despite the fact that, ultimately, they cannot be typified. In terms of spatial planning scales, several European cases show that metropolitan planning holds a fluctuating institutional status that oscillates between local, regional and national levels. It is precisely this “administrative lightness” that allows metropolitan areas to constitute schemes of significant technological innovation yet also of major socio-political conflict (Elinbaum & Galland, 2015). Unlike the European casuistry, which has been widely investigated and debated over the past two decades, the specificity of metropolitan planning in Latin America remains largely unexplored. Such deficiency is relevant to the extent that the Latin American context has historically been a region where diverse directions of spatial change as well as combinations of spatial models and planning tools have been developed and experienced. The fertility of these changes, however, tends to take place deprived of institutional reforms capable of providing a consistent and steady legislative and cultural framework. In this light, the current Latin American metropolitan planning (or non-planning) situation could also be interpreted as a “testing” framework of innovation through which some actors benefit while others end up being excluded.

In consideration of the series of socio-spatial, economic and political changes affecting the institutional configuration associated with metropolitan planning in Latin America, this paper delves into the evolution of metropolitan planning in the region while focusing on experiences that could contribute to endorse a potential reform aimed at ordering the fertile yet also fragmented metropolitan planning and governance

situation. In a similar vein, the paper seeks to identify planning aspects and qualities whereby metropolitan planning cases convergence and divergence. On the basis of instrumental specificity and innovative aspects at this scale of planning practice, the paper will finally establish a discussion concerning the feasibility of ultimately conferring “Latin American metropolitan planning” *per se*. In doing so, the purpose of this paper is threefold. First, by drawing from recent planning experience associated with some of the world’s greatest metropolis, the paper seeks to add to the development of comprehensive theoretical frameworks dealing with metropolitan planning. Second, the paper is aimed at conducting an international comparative planning study that analyses: (i) institutional and instrumental contexts, plan-making processes and cultural values (traditions, attitudes, habits, etc.) influencing planning structures, processes and outcomes (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009) and (ii) the interests (and benefits) of key actors and decisions that influence and condition the institutional structure of planning. Based on this analysis, the paper is finally intended to discuss how the series of convergences and divergences withdrawn from the cases studies can illuminate a potential theory concerning the evolution of metropolitan planning in Latin America while also reflecting on potential means to improve current toolkit of planning instruments in the region.

In pursuit of the above objectives and in order to identify the key interpretive categories associated with the evolutionary process of metropolitan planning in Latin America, the paper attempts to combine a triple methodological approach (instrumental, institutionalist and strategic-relational). To this end the paper builds on the comparison of two metropolitan case studies, namely Buenos Aires and Mexico City. The selection of cases is based on the criterion of “most similar cases” (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), which is founded on three typological conditions that make them coincide: (i) socio-economic conditions as both metropolitan areas have similar economic indicators such as GDP (in terms of the top-five Latin American metropolises), (ii) the demographic condition, as both cases have a similar population (again, in terms of the top-five Latin American metropolises) and a noticeable influence as metropolitan capitals nationwide. However, both cases differ in terms of (iii) the socio-political status, which is highly significant when it comes to assessing the

evolution of metropolitan planning. In this sense, both metropolises have different socio-political and institutional models partly due to the contrast exhibited by their extreme geopolitical locations in the northern and southern parts of the continent.

The paper is informed by a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the examination of planning policies and strategies, laws and regulations, and the analysis and interpretation of semi-structured interviews conducted with key policymakers and planning actors. Secondary sources include technical reports, scientific articles and books, newspaper articles, institutional websites and additional literature concerning relevant political, economic and cultural issues related to both cases.

## References

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