

Institutionalizing progressive planning: evidence from Bogota and Medellin, Colombia

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State and non-state agents continually intervene in the social and built environments of cities to bring about changes in social relations and the urban form that can help address socio-spatial problems. Of particular importance in the Global South are progressive planning and the change agents that pursue it: state and non-state agents, acting within the confines of existing law, who create and manage urban spaces in ways that improve the material wellbeing and the exercise of substantive citizenship of low-income individuals. In recent decades many Latin American cities have become important referents of progressive planning. From participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre to social urbanism in Medellin, change agents in Latin American cities have challenged embedded governance structures and evidenced – at least for some time – that alternative approaches to planning and managing the city are possible. Despite significant achievements, scholars have shown that even paradigmatic cases of progressive planning can see their continuity challenged (e.g. Gilbert 2015, Melgar 2014). Concerns over the durability of progressive practices are not lost to the change agents engaged in collaboration, contestation, and negotiation over the knowledges, values and interests that should shape the city. Using Bogota and Medellin as case studies, this paper analyses the actions being taken by state planners, civil society leaders, and business elites, in an effort to formally and informally institutionalize progressive planning practices in order to achieve their continuity even if the factors that gave origin to the practices subside. These two cities were purposive selected given the presence of active state and non-state planners and the exemplary progressive planning outcomes over the past twenty years in mobility and public transportation, access to water and sanitation, and provision of public space and urban amenities such as public libraries. In-depth semi-structured interviews,

direct observation, and document analysis were employed to understand how change agents interpret the experiences, actions and situations they are involved in, and how this understanding influences their behavior. The research reveals attempts to give continuity, through formal and informal institutions, at both local and national levels, to progressive practices that address socio-spatial inequality, improve the material well-being of low-income individuals, and expand the exercise of substantive citizenship. Findings on the strategic actions employed by change agents in Bogota and Medellin contribute towards refining our understanding of institutionalization at the local level in light of competing theories that explain it as the product of rational, sociological, or historical factors. From a practitioner's perspective, this research offers the possibility of identifying a set of strategies and actions used in a particular context that could serve as guidance for state and non-state planners in similar settings.

References

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- Melgar, T. R. (2014). A Time of Closure? Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, after the Workers' Party Era. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 46(1), 121-149.