

## **Spatial planning systems in Latin America: towards an international comparative perspective**

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Spatial planning systems refer to the set of administrative, technical and juridical processes to manage urban and territorial dynamics within specific national contexts (Mazza, 1996; Healey, 1997). As such, spatial planning systems and policies influence spatial development through land-use planning and other regulatory means (CEC, 1997; Newman & Thornley, 1996). Their character is often described in relation to legally established objectives, tools and procedures that form part of national planning systems (Alterman, 2001; Nadin & Stead, 2008), which vary widely across national, sub-national and urban scales. Besides their technical, administrative and juridical dimensions within the public domain [i.e. planning as an institutional technology (Mazza, 1996)], spatial planning systems should also be addressed from their institutional dimension (Janin Rivolin, 2012). For the purposes of analysing and comparing planning systems from an international perspective, aspects such as the interaction between public and private spheres, economic development, social complexity and the diversity of stakeholder interests and values turn out essential. In other words, the diversity of spatial planning systems and policies that influence spatial development processes is not only shaped by the plurality of legal-administrative and technical arrangements, but also by an array of internal and external driving forces such as social models (Nadin & Stead, 2008), planning cultures (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009) and governance traditions, amongst other dimensions.

While there is widespread recognition about the evolution and diversity of spatial planning systems and policies across Europe, less attention has been devoted to the character of spatial planning and their implications for spatial development in other continents. In contributing to establish a renovated discussion on this matter, this paper aims at shedding light on the evolution of spatial planning systems in Latin America as regards the interrelationship between social aspects and their influence on the reproduction of spatial planning systems. This interrelationship has been a topic of significant scrutiny in Europe over the past two decades and has been developed from at least three standpoints. Firstly, the classification of planning traditions (CEC, 1997; Healey, 1997; Nadin & Stead, 2008) and the comparison between planning systems and policies (CEC, 1997; ESPON, 2006). Secondly, the means by which social contexts shape spatial planning systems (Vigar et al., 2000; Albrechts et al., 2001) as evidenced by: (i) discourses and ideologies (e.g. Servillo, 2010; Hajer, 2003); (ii) legal frameworks (e.g. van Dijk & Beunen, 2009); (iii) political power (e.g. Yiftachel et al., 2001; Flyvbjerg, 2004); and (iv) regulations and governance (e.g. Peters & van Nispen, 1998). Lastly, the role of institutions “in and for” planning, namely (i) the role of formal institutions (organisations, laws and procedures); (ii) informal institutions (values, conventions and codes of conduct); (iii) the actions that structure social contexts (e.g. Healey, 1997; Hajer, 2003; González & Healey, 2005; Moulaert, 2005, 2013) and (iv) the role of planning as a potential stimulus (or obstacle) to foster economic development, to protect private and public property, and to improve democratic decision making processes (Healey, 2007).

The above perspectives and categories encompass a wide-ranging overview as regards the particular evolution of spatial planning systems in Europe, but might not be adequate enough to generate a comprehensive understanding pertained to the ways by which planning systems and policies have originated and evolved in Latin America. Although partly self-evident, the reasoning behind this argument deserves further typification: the complexity of Latin American spatial planning systems, the specificity of planning instruments, the idiosyncrasy of actor configurations, the distinctiveness of evolutionary stages and the peculiarity of social models and planning cultures are all indicative of a multifaceted region whereby individual planning contexts

tend to emerge from the combination of a plurality of planning modes, planning tools and political directions of spatial change. Moreover, the oftentimes-uncritical implementation of imported planning models and methodologies (normally decoupled or detached from institutional reforms capable of providing suitable legislative frameworks) from more developed countries by local planners and policymakers and the usage of the individual countries within this macro-region as “testing grounds” for planning policies and practices at different levels of planning administration further underscores the distinctive and also pioneering nature of Latin American planning. This situation evidently calls for advancing *ad hoc* analytical frameworks and methodologies aimed at developing a comprehensive understanding of the evolution and performance of planning systems, policies and tools in this region.

In consideration of the social, economic and political changes affecting the institutional configuration of spatial planning in Latin America, the paper delves into the evolution of planning systems and policies focusing in two countries within the region, namely Argentina and Mexico. In doing so, the paper attempts to discuss whether the accumulated experiences in these particular settings can contribute to steer the possibility for new planning reforms geared towards the potential ‘ordering’ of the largely fertile yet also highly fragmented condition of spatial planning systems in Latin America. At the same time, the paper seeks to build a framework of multiple variables grouped in an array of analytical clusters aimed at examining how and why spatial planning systems and policies within the region tend to converge and diverge.

In doing so, the paper explores the character of spatial planning systems and policy-making from theoretical, methodological and empirical approaches. Theoretically, the paper begins by paying attention to the *ad hoc* interrelationships between spatial planning systems and social contexts, and between the former and the role of institutions “in and for” planning as adapted to Latin American settings. Methodologically, the paper attempts to combine institutionalist and strategic-relational approaches (Servillo & van den Broeck, 2012)(Servillo & Lingua, 2014) to identify interpretive categories that shed light on the evolutionary processes of planning systems within the region. Both the theoretical and methodological objectives are evidently informed by a combination of primary and secondary sources. The former

include the examination of planning policies and strategies generated at different levels of administration, and the analysis and interpretation of structured and semi-structured interviews conducted with key policymakers and planning actors who have been involved in more recent plan and strategy-making processes. The latter encompass technical reports, outreach and scientific articles and, foremost, literature concerning the development of relevant political, economic and socio-spatial themes in connection to and since the emergence of modern planning thought in both countries, namely a timeframe spanning over one-hundred years.

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