

## State-of-the-art of planning and planning education in Colombia<sup>1</sup>

### 1. What is the present status of planning (be it urban and regional or spatial and environmental) in politics and in the society of your country?

Planning is an active arena of techno-political negotiation and increasingly a recognized public affair. Planning practice and education in Colombia, as the country itself, is variegated and unevenly developed in each geographical region. The country is territorially rural and demographically urban, out of the 1122 municipalities, 1063 -95%- have less than 100,000 inhabitants and only 56 -5%- have more than 100,000 inhabitants. With the 1991 Political Constitution, the decentralization process was fueled and municipalities became the main politico-administrative and territorial unit. Notwithstanding of the National Development Plans, the few metropolitan planning initiatives created and the environmental regional authorities plans at river basin level, municipalities result in the scale where most of the 'formal' planning practice takes place.

The implementation of the constitutional principles shaped a dual planning system (Ortiz & Lieber, 2014). On the one hand, since the inception of the Law 152 of 1994, mayors are required to produce a participatory 'Development Plan' that translates their political program into a systematic framework that guide actions and set priorities for public expenditure for the four years of their mandate. On the other hand, since the inception of the Law 388 of 1997, municipalities generate long term 'Territorial Plans' to define the spatial strategies of intervention mainly through public works, and the regulation of buildings activities and land use for twelve years. While the former operates as the political tool to allocate the budget and channel the resources received from the nation; the latter, is perceived as a 'technical' tool to direct the real estate industry. However, these two simultaneous regulatory frameworks often times collide or the territorial plans lack implementation.

Nowadays, planning is conceived at national level as an essential tool to make viable the peace process. In 2011, the Law 1454 was enacted to promote territorial association models and rethink regional strategic spatial projects. This legal framework was long awaited for local authorities and currently some Departments –the agglomeration of municipalities- are exploring the tool of 'Contract Plan' to collaborate in specific regional initiatives around infrastructure, economic growth and environmental preservation. Nevertheless, the entrenched dispute over regional leaderships, national economic policies, rural land dispossession and the territorial control of non-state armed actors in some areas makes very complex to challenge existing governance arrangements. Despite these limitations, in the last two decades a growing critical mass is being educated in the planning making processes and citizens are more qualified to engage in participatory processes in the institutionalized bodies for it.

### 2. Which themes dominate the discourse about planning in your country? Do national media (newspapers, television) report on these planning challenges?

In Colombia land value capture, territorial autonomy, urban expansion, and mobility represent the intertwined topics that dominate the discourse about planning. Territorial autonomy constitutes a permanent topic of inter-scalar governance conflicts. Several disputes over municipal autonomy and national centralist projects have emerged in the last decade (Ortiz, 2014). Two sets of topics have spurred debate over the limits of municipal autonomy: a) in mainly rural municipalities, the approval of extensive agro industrial projects and mega -mining exploitation in environmental fragile areas; b) in mainly urban municipalities, the land designation for social housing provision through large-scale projects and the definition of densities and delimitation for suburbanization processes. As a consequence, the jurisdictions and competencies of the nation, the regional

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<sup>1</sup> Caveat: The answers to the questions provided are a rough summary of the state-of-the-art and I run into the risk to over generalize and over simplify a very complex and differentiated matter across the country.

environmental authorities and municipalities have collided and the leverage of the municipal planning authorities has been jeopardized.

National media –that disproportionately exposes more Bogota and Medellin- presents vigorously issues about public transit [or the lack thereof] and to a lesser extent themes related to risk mitigation and natural disasters. Many stories refer to the uncertain construction of the metro in Bogota, the innovation of the cable cars in Medellin or the challenges of implementing the national policy on integrated public transit systems introduced in 2003. This policy –CONPES 3260- championed the creation of several BRT systems mostly in secondary cities where this process found several hurdles. Thus, governance negligence and the absence of planning is the frequent story that is exposed.

Land value-capture mechanisms are at the core of the progressive spatial planning framework approved in 1997. Yet, the attempts to control land market speculations prove to be highly challenging. In spite the systematic erosion of the potential of this framework, some municipalities have explored the ways in which land management tools can be implemented. As a result, tools such as partial plans, land pooling, surplus value charges, in-kind infrastructure provision by developers, and so on are been implemented with some degree of efficacy. In sum, these processes demonstrate that the debate about the constitutional principles of the ‘social and ecological function of property’ and ‘the equitable distribution of cost and benefits’ are still central to the planning practice yet they are hardly mentioned in the mainstream media often times functional to particular political and economic interests.

### 3. Is the gap between theory and practice in planning growing in your country? Which role does English literature play in this discourse?

Planning practice is very diverse, fragmented and dispersed. That is why, beyond describing the gap between theory and practice, I believe critical practitioners ask to scholars a more grounded theorization of the practice. Even though, a well established network of researchers in urban and regional affairs -ACIUR- exists and some journals - *Bitacora Urbano-Territorial*, *Cuadernos de Geografia*, *Territorios*- trace theoretical debates and problematize territorial processes and planning practices still the myriad professional arenas are not guided by robust theorization. Furthermore, the lack of a planning professional body makes the systematic exchange among peers of experiences, theoretical frameworks and impacts assessment difficult to attain.

The predominant reference for spatial planning scholars comes from Spain, France and to a less degree Brazil. While scholars and master students –a minority- have access to a broad academic sources and journals in English, English literature has a marginal impact in the training of most of the practitioners; younger generations are more tuned with global debates in the field through widely spread sources in digital and social media. However, the long traditions in Latin America understanding peace building, informality and community led planning initiatives require the reframing and articulating to ‘professional’ views.

### 4. To which extent do planners in your country address growing social, economic and spatial disparities, and do they believe that spatial planning could contribute to reduce such disparities?

We need to distinguish between planners’ beliefs and their power leverage to deliver. Planners are convinced and motivated to contribute to reduce social, economic and spatial disparities but their ideologies, capabilities and means differ and some collide. While some operate in the technocratic rituals of public administration dealing directly with plan making and policy production; others advocate for a redistribution of power in other institutional settings and use different avenues of action such as popular education and social mobilization to influence the decision-making process. Still formal planning tools existing in Colombia have a great potential to direct State priorities and regulate private activities. However, the duality of the system tends to dislocate socio-economic

development from spatial development. Therefore, the different practitioners are aware of their social relevance but the ability to realize the potential of spatial planning for bringing about spatial justice is tied to a collective endeavor that requires shifts in the configuration of the institutional settings, the regulatory powers of localities and the strength of political coalitions who favor this deep changes.

5. Are planning students adequately prepared to pro-actively address future challenges in planning in your country? Should planning education return to schools of architecture or rather be offered in schools of geography?

Planning is already recognized as an interdisciplinary field. Mostly planning programs remain in the Faculties of Architecture where historically emerged and the very few Geography Schools are in a consolidation process of the discipline in the country. Although, not all the planning practitioners are trained, in the last decade proliferated the creation of undergraduate and graduate programs -2 graduate programs, 31 specialization programs, 24 master programs and one doctoral program- but only a minority of the programs with long trajectory are accredited. In this context, planning education is focusing more on the instrumental skills rather than in training critical thinking and research on the pressing issues of the country. Therefore, the majority of planning education lacks enough focus on deepening democratic planning processes, addressing the vast territorial inequality, elucidating measures to deal with climate change impacts and building a post conflict society.

6. To what extent is spatial planning knowledge transferred or exchanged between your country and other Latin American countries, (including planning instruments, policies, concepts, etc.)

Spatial planning knowledge is contextually situated and historically constructed. The Colombian spatial planning system results from a long trajectory of colonial legacies (Ortiz, 2012). Nonetheless, the planning knowledge exchanges with other Latin-American countries has intensified in the last decades. The adscription of some planning schools to Latin American research networks such as RELATEUR, RIDEAL, and RII enables a constant exchange in the scrutiny of planning policies at regional scale as well as critically engage with theories of urbanization and plan making. Likewise, the Lincoln Land Institute has promoted practitioners exchange where Colombia and Brazil have showcased their urban land reform tools focusing on land value capture mechanisms. The Porto Alegre' participatory budget and the Curitiba' BRT inspired many Colombian cities. In the same vein, the international spotlight of particular planning policies such as the BRT and ciclorutas in Bogota or Social Urbanism in Medellin inspired and attracted numerous delegations from several Latin-American cities. The best practices promoted by the Inter-American Development Bank have also contributed to give visibility to some specific projects. In sum, city to city of local governments exchange, supranational entities, research networks and private foundations shape the intensity and scope of knowledge exchange on spatial planning in Colombia.

Ortiz, C. (2012) 'Bargaining space: deal-making strategies for large-scale renewal projects in Colombian cities'. PhD Dissertation. Not Published. University of Illinois at Chicago.

Ortiz, C., Lieber, L. (2014) Medellín: Hacia la construcción de un modelo de estrategias para la equidad territorial? In: Equidad Territorial en Medellín: La Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano como motor de la transformación urbana. InterAmerican Development Bank. p.30 – 60