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Neoliberalization and Conflicted Sustainability in Argentina: Overlain Landscapes of Buenos Aires Urban Environmental Plan

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# Neoliberalization and conflicted sustainability in Argentina: *Overlain landscapes of the Buenos Aires Urban Environmental Plan*

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## ABSTRACT

The keywords of *competitiveness*, *participation*, and *sustainability* encapsulate the neoliberal logics for economic, sociopolitical, and environmental models of the city, with all ostensibly forming part of *sustainable development*. Can they form a coherent, singular urban terrain, as simplistic as the discourses they invoke? What kinds of conflicts emerge when neoliberal logics not only run up against the messy details of real urban life, but also quarrel with each other? This chapter takes up these questions as they emerged in practice within the Urban Environmental Plan mandated by the 1996 Constitution of the newly autonomous state in the City of Buenos Aires. The Plan represents the coalescence of these distinct aims at sustainable development in the capital of Argentina – one of the most prominent cases of neoliberalization. Data from the vast publications of the Plan, as well as interviews and ethnographic fieldwork with city bureaucrats, urban design professionals, neighborhood residents, and social movement participants, allow for an analysis of how actors conceptualized and weighed the multiple and competing faces of sustainable development within the Plan, and how each neoliberal logic created particular kinds of projections for intervening in spaces and practices of the urban landscape. I show how each projection stacks clumsily atop the others, rendering layered visions and partial enactments of policy. To illustrate, I focus on three sites deeply affected by the Plan and riven by incompatible agendas: Puerto Madero, La Boca, and Balvanera. To explain these results, I compare expectations from the urban regime, growth machine, and regulation theoretical traditions, arguing that the latter is most useful for grasping the dynamics of sustainable development enacted within a state-led, neoliberal, urban context. Nonetheless, modifications rooted in the work of Bourdieu and Lefebvre are necessary to help regulation theory speak fully to the situation in contemporary Buenos Aires, where I argue there is *conflicted sustainability* that results in *overlain landscapes* which are the projections of different logics asphyxiating each other within the city.

## INTRODUCTION

When the city of Buenos Aires became an autonomous urban state in 1996, signaled especially by the implementation of direct elections for the powerful Executive branch instead of appointment by the national President, one of the central concerns among its founders was how to manage processes of place-building and for the city to “decide its future.” In particular, framers of the new *porteño*<sup>1</sup> state sought

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<sup>1</sup> In local Spanish usage, the word for something or someone of the City of Buenos Aires is “*porteño*,” as both an adjective and noun (not to be confused with “*bonaerense*,” pertaining to the Province of the same name). This referred originally to the port around which the Argentine capital first formed its identity as an

planning approaches and ways of building or rebuilding urban sites that would break from a long history of failures and corruptions since the city's *belle époque* of development in the image of Paris a century prior. One discourse emerged as paradigmatic in the efforts to intervene in the urban landscape, one which had gained a global currency in policymaking circles at the time – *sustainable development*, based largely on the environmentalist interests of Agenda 21.<sup>2</sup> The concept advanced to prominence in the reformed bureaucratic structure of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires (GCBA) and took its most concrete form in the Urban Environmental Plan (UEP, also “the Plan”) that the new city constitution mandated as a key for directing future growth. To formulate and implement sustainability through the Plan was the duty of a core Council headed by the City’s new Chief of Government (*jefe de gobierno*; the elected Executive leader of the urban state) and further composed of planners, architects, city functionaries, and social scientists, whose mission stipulated public transparency in its proceedings, plus the collaboration and “consulting” (*asesoramiento*) of a corpus of nonprofit organizations as well as community leaders (including minor elected officials [especially city legislators] and major business interests). However, sustainable development, as a concept plagued by multiple meanings and contested usage, does not cohere as a singular policy goal. Moreover, as part of a larger repertoire of neoliberal reform principles, sustainability and its more environmentally oriented aspects face competition in the projection and realization of state action within the context of restructuring that has deeply characterized Argentina since 1989.

The formers of the UEP couched their entire project as an effort to institute sustainable development in Buenos Aires. However, in the prolific documents generated as part of the Plan (with more than 2,000 pages since 1998 in publications by the Council of the UEP alone), the notion of sustainability in the environmentalist sense becomes but one of several axes for sustainable development in neoliberal Buenos Aires. Additional economic and sociopolitical concerns figure alongside environmental ones at least as significantly. If sustainability is only one aspect of a sustainable development within the codifications of neoliberalism that a document such as the UEP represents, a question then arises: to what ends does the neoliberal urban state use sustainable development as a framework for change in the city? If the Plan is, at its core, a project inseparable from the neoliberal reform context, then what kind of interaction does sustainability have with the other reform trajectories at work within neoliberalization in terms of material effects in urban terrain? This chapter examines the institutional and practical experience of sustainability as a frame of state action in place-building processes, focusing particularly on the UEP and its

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important urban center. As there is no sensible English translation of this word (e.g., “Buenosairean”), I maintain the Spanish denomination and preserve its uncapitalized spelling from that language.

<sup>2</sup> Explanation of Agenda 21 and the Rio de Janeiro 1992 conference.

projections for shaping urban places. It shows that while unmarked principles of “just sustainability” (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans, 2003) may exist in urban policy conceptualization, there must be, at the stages of codification and implementation, an autonomous and vigilant arbiter of interests that maintain the priorities of sustainability as originally formulated. Otherwise, as *conflicted sustainability*, the newly opened political space is – particularly in a context of pervasive neoliberalization – highly susceptible to derailment or capture.

To conduct this analysis, I draw on the vast array of publications by the UEP, strategic interviews with actors (both inside and outside of the GCBA) involved in the formulation or evaluation of the Plan, as well as ethnographic data from over one year of fieldwork in three neighborhoods of the city, all affected in some way by the UEP.<sup>3</sup> I argue that, through the Plan, a model of sustainability in its strictest sense – following Agenda 21 – projects certain kinds of landscapes, while other neoliberal logics (particularly competitiveness and participation) engender rather different and often conflicting landscape projections, including even counterclaims on sustainability. We have a case, then, of a neoliberal state with ambitious intentions but a messy set of overlain landscapes being projected due to competing logics within the simplistic neoliberalization model.

I consider the kinds of places that emerge in three emblematic points of layered projections, evaluating how well current theories of urban political economy explain the conditions presented in these sites. Although theories in line with *urban regime* (Evans, 2002a; Evans, 2002b; Savitch and Kantor, 2002) and *urban growth machine* (Molotch, 1999; Warner and Negrete, 2005) traditions do provide helpful analytic lenses in certain circumstances, I show how new theories of *urban regulation* (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002) deliver superior interpretive tools for addressing the politics of place-building in a context where neoliberalization is prevalent and sustainability is an explicit concern. Nonetheless, I offer some important critiques of this theoretical line that revolve around the geopolitical particularities of situations outside the global North and also the internal heterogeneity of which neoliberalism is comprised, even in a single instantiation such as Buenos Aires and its UEP.

#### BUENOS AIRES: ONE CENTURY OF URBAN GOVERNANCE

The metropolitan area of Buenos Aires forms one of largest cities in the world: its total population approaches 13 million, with no clear topographical endpoints to its urbanization but extending at least 50km in every direction (except over the River Plate) from the central business district (see Map 1). However, the City of Buenos Aires, also labeled the *Capital Federal*, has very clear territorial limits

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<sup>3</sup> Methodological explanation. Biblioteca Alejandro Christophersen of the Sociedad Central de Arquitectos. Archivo General de la Nación. Instituto Histórico de la Ciudad.

(including 203 km<sup>2</sup>) and only 2,776,138 residents as of 2001 (see Map 2). Municipal government has existed there since becoming national capital in the 1880s, with the most recent significant change to the urban political structure – before the 1996 establishment of urban autonomy – occurring with the Sáenz Peña Law that universalized suffrage in the city in 1912 (Walter 1993: 15-16).

*The evolution of the Capital Federal as a governed space*

Over the last century of most cohesive governmental structure in Buenos Aires, the population grew dramatically until 1950, followed by only minor growth or rough stability, while the population of the rest of the metropolitan area continued to expand at very high rates until around 1980 (Pírez, 1994; see Figure 1). The ethnic and economic composition of the *porteño* populace has changed over the last hundred years, beginning with very high levels of foreign-born residents (due heavy immigration primarily from Italy and Spain, as well as the weakening Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires) and a wide range of economic standings from poor to elite (Rock, 1987). Through the mid-1900s, foreign residents dropped dramatically and the middle class grew to be the largest in Latin America, but influxes of peasants from the Argentine interior were also on the increase as urban industrialization expanded (Germani, 1962). By the end of the twentieth century, however, industry had dramatically waned while high- and low-end services grew significantly (Keeling, 1996; also see Figure 2); economic polarization had become extreme (Torres, 1993; Pírez, 1994), with a shrinking middle class (Minujin and Kessler, 1995), more deeply entrenched poverty (Svampa, 2000), and unprecedented levels of wealth concentrated in more spatially isolated groups (Svampa, 2001; Ciccolella and Mignaqui, 2002). Immigration was increasing again, but flowed mostly from poorer South American countries, especially Peru (Cerrutti, 2005), although also including important minorities from Asia and Eastern Europe (Sana, 1999). Moreover, emigration became an important trend, with the chief destinations being Israel, Italy, Spain, and the United States (Melamed, 2002; Novick and Murias, 2005). In sum, the city governed by the municipal state had significantly transformed since its last major structural reform.

The full story of the emergence of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires in 1996 is too complex to detail here, but it is noteworthy that it occurred as part of a general project to decentralize government in Argentina (Herzer, 1996; García Delgado 1997), as had become the neoliberal policy prescription throughout Latin America (Willis, Garman, and Haggard, 1999; Escolar, Badía, and Frederic, 2000; Campbell, 2003). A compromise between major political parties in the formulation of a new national Constitution, ratified in 1994, scheduled the creation of an autonomous government in *Capital Federal* in 1996 with direct elections for the Chief of Government (akin to mayor, but more like a governor given the city's quasi-

province status), and based on a new urban Constitution negotiated by a wide range of parties (Cersósimo 1995; de Giovanni 1995). Although neoliberalism is generally associated with shrinking state activities in Latin America (Babb 2005), the decentralization trend brought to many of the region's capital cities a more democratic, responsive, and interventionist state at the local level (Myers and Dietz 2002) – a condition highly contingent on the relatively large size and economic output of these sites compared to smaller provincial centers to which governing responsibilities have devolved with only meager resources for performing their new duties. It was in this context that the UEP became a policy priority – and an urban constitutional requirement – viewed as a tool of the nascent GCBA for exercising its new powers, directing its funds and energies more efficiently, and providing a unifying vision for the development and redevelopment of sites within its densely populated territory. “Sustainable development” comprised the rhetoric of the Plan from its inception in the constitutional conventions of the mid-1990s. This marked a major paradigm shift in place-building schema from earlier interventions in *porteño* planning history.

#### *Planning precursors in Buenos Aires*

The last period of tightly integrated place-building in Buenos Aires occurred in preparation for the national centennial celebrations in 1910. That era also represented the height of Argentine wealth, which was grounded in agriculture and livestock, and also yielded large reserves with which the federal and municipal governments could work on bold urbanistic projects. The unifying thread was the ambition to create a regal and orderly center befitting a great capital in the neoclassical European tradition, with particular reference to Paris, and direct influence from that city's architects and designers who drafted many of the projects for remaking the core of Buenos Aires (Gutiérrez 2002). Although interventions in the urban landscape had certainly been the objective of powerful political players in Buenos Aires at earlier points (Gorelik 1998), it was not until 1910 that a more encompassing transformative goal emerged (Gutman and Reese 1999). In the decades following that zenith of clear purpose and implementation in *porteño* urbanism, there were various plans forwarded by both foreign and Argentine architects that aimed toward systemic planning. Juan Molina y Vedia (1999) reviews the most prominent ones formulated between 1925 and 1970 – the Plans Noël, Le Corbusier, Bonet I, Bonet II, Regulator, and CONADE. Código de Planeamiento 1977. Also, *Buenos Aires: Una Estrategia Urbana Alternativa* from the 1980s. Menemist urbanism before the new urban state and with no plan (other than a discourse of restoring the grandeur of fin-de-siècle Buenos Aires, not elaborated in any particular academic article/book, but visible in many of his statements, such as before the

Merval or in the jurying of Puerto Madero designs) – highly personalized, veiled, and corrupt (Reato 1996). Plan Urbano Ambiental. Código de Zonificación 2003.

#### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CITIES

The precise moment in which the Plan was conceived – but not yet drafted – was the euphoric heyday of sustainable development when many observers lauded it as a breakthrough in environmental awareness and political commitment immediately following the much watched United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The report of *Agenda 21* (UNCED 1993), which invokes the idea of setting an environmental agenda for the twenty-first century, actually relies heavily on the definition of sustainable development formulated in the Brundtland Commission's (1988) *Our Common Future*: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” But such a definition, while foundational, entails no explicitly environmental or urban concerns.

Diana Mitlin (1992) underlined very early amid the post-Rio excitement that sustainable development need have very little to do sustainability in a strictly environmental sense. William Rees (1992), in developing the notion of the ecological footprint, was one of the pioneers in delineating how the notion of sustainability needed to be differentiated from existing conceptions of development due to ecological conditions that *status quo* arrangements could not sustain without undermining systemic features of the environment. His argument brought attention directly to the environmental impact of cities, with their massive ecological footprints. Those who had so sanguinely taken up the mantle of sustainable development were then faced with what to do in practice to meet the demands that many ecological experts, especially Rees (1995), considered to be not reformative but transformative. One common move by business interests and development agencies in the mid-1990s was to reinterpret sustainable development as development that could simply keep moving forward without derailing itself – denuding the issue of any concerns explicitly tied to ecology, let alone justice, as noted by David Satterthwaite (1999).

#### *Insufficiencies of urban sustainability*

“Sustainability” and “sustainable development,” while not literally synonymous, have been used as such in all but the most careful (perhaps even hairsplitting) academic treatments. Since the burst of popularization experienced by “sustainable development” as a discourse after the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the concept has received much criticism but also has achieved vast incorporation into explicit policy objectives around the world. Criticism has been diverse, but centered on the vague or even absent definition of the term. Some might even call it

schizophrenic for its many different possible incarnations – usually but not always either environmental or economic – depending on meanings attached to its weak definition. Others have criticized its inability to address social concerns, particularly the issue of poverty, which is clearly a sustained condition but not one that should be allowed to sustain. As a response to the first criticisms, there have been efforts to specify what exactly sustainability means, mostly by separating it from discourses on market sustenance and explicitly marking it as ecologically concerned foremost, and to identify and accept its multiple faces, particularly focusing on sustainability in terms of the three features of jobs, environment, and quality of life, which has also been called “the triple bottom line.” Building off of that scholarship and attempting to respond to the second set of critiques above, the newest literature on sustainable development focus on concepts such as “just sustainability,” bringing an emphasis on justice to all three features of sustainability just noted. Although not entirely, this literature has focused much more on the development of ideas rather than the implementation of policies up until this point.

While the work on “just sustainability” is only recently coming into academic circulation, there is evidence of practitioners having interpreted sustainable development in precisely this way (even if inexplicitly) several years before any publication on the topic, and also continuing after its emergence without recognition by practitioners. This is particularly true, at least in rhetoric, in many of the post-authoritarian states of the global South, and especially in Latin America, where discourses – if seldom practices – of social justice have been far more common than in much of the North. This is even the case in the middle of neoliberalization projects which have created some of the worst conditions of social exclusion and injustice ever witnessed in these Southern societies.

#### *Theories of place-building and sustainability*

Although there is an extensive literature on sustainable development and cities, there is rather less that looks at the politics of place-building specifically as it relates to questions of sustainability. In terms of scholarship on the politics of place-building in general, within the lineage of political economy, there are three general streams of work currently in use. I briefly review these chronologically and in general, then shift to their much rarer use in situations where sustainability is a specific concern.

Harvey Molotch (1976) first developed *urban growth machine* theory to argue that local governments in the US were dominated by land-owning elites seeking to increase the value of their property through intensified land use and greater growth, which they accomplished through city boosterism that competed with other cities,



and by lobbying for a political prioritization of real estate's exchange value over its use value – both understood in the Marxian sense – in government decision-making. The perspective evolved to explain how capital was an important force in shaping urban places, but that social movements could also use place to their advantage in protecting use values through ordinances and other policies (Logan and Molotch 1987). And while one of the major criticisms of the perspective had always been its reliance on the peculiarities of US government structures and land-specific laws, scholars have shown the applicability of the growth machine concept to various other contexts through careful modification of certain geopolitically and culturally particular precepts (e.g., Vicari and Molotch, 1990; Kirby and Abu-Rass, 1999; Zhang and Fang, 2004; Kulcsar and Domokos, 2005; Warner and Negrete, 2005).

In contrast, *urban regime* theory developed as a way of showing the different ways cities could be governed by variously composed coalitions – with members of the elite both in and out of government – which created overall orientations in local state action and set the stage for certain possibilities (and impossibilities) at various junctures. Norman and Susan Fainstein (1983) first forwarded the idea in their critical analysis of the American urban renewal program as a way of physically restructuring cities, putting its era into historical perspective. They thereby differentiated regime orientations over time and delineated how urban renewal was the result of unique regime configurations in the postwar period. Clarence Stone (1991) later concretized the model in his study of Atlanta politics, examining how the White economic elite compromised with the political elite representing the majority Black population in order to smooth over potential conflict with various compromises over education, employment, and the location and nature of new physical developments. This school of thought has received much attention but with different kinds of application, from the highly quantitative and rational-choice oriented (e.g., Imbroscio, 1997) to the more comparative, historical-institutionalist bent (e.g., DiGaetano and Klemanski, 1999); its primary criticisms, however, come from quarters insisting that anything can be understood as a regime of some kind (Dowding, 2001) and that its understandings of political dynamics within capitalist urban dynamic are rather thin (Lauria, 1997). Nonetheless, its general lessons have been put to extensive use in a breadth of locations – although primarily in North America and Western Europe – examining how and why cities follow certain paths of place development, but always underlining the interplay between economic and political determinations of urban outcomes (e.g., Fainstein, 2001; Savitch and Kantor, 2002).

Most recently, theories of *urban regulation* have grown out of broader economic theories of the regulation school (Aglietta, 1976; Boyer, 1990) and spatial analyses inspired by Henri Lefebvre's (1974) *Production of Space*, especially via David Harvey (1989) who wed the two perspectives. Dissatisfied with neoclassical and

Marxian economics, the first regulationists argued that any production system represents a specific *regime of economic accumulation* which is always prone to instabilities and periodic crises – but we find that things fall apart much less than they should given the enormous amount of tensions or contradictions that nearly all modes of production but especially capitalism have set in motion. They posited that stability tended to obtain because of a corresponding *mode of social regulation* that enabled accumulation to continue. Regulation, they found, worked through five institutional forms that, together, constituted a *fix* or pact that buttressed accumulation; these are (1) the *monetary regime*, (2) the form of *intercapitalist competition*, (3) the *wage-labor nexus*, (4) the *nature of the state*, and (5) the *international configuration*. In comparative-historical terms, and first writing during the economic crises of the mid-1970s, the regulationists delineated the postwar “golden age” of capitalism as *fordist-keynesian*, referring to the tendency – at least in the global North – toward national-level compromises between the state, labor, and capital that assured nearly full employment, protected profit margins, and relative civil tranquility. The overall idea of regulation theory was to explain why regimes of accumulation persist for as long as they do, but emphasis also fell on explanations of change as the whole theory revolved around crisis and the inability of any particular regulatory fix to endure indefinitely. Lefebvre, also a disenfranchised Marxian, sought to spatialize critical theory and to situate capitalism’s reliance on particular uses and relations of space to perpetuate itself. He proposed that material space was the result of a production process, as were capitalist commodities, and that the capitalist imperative was to constantly renew itself by producing new kinds of spaces – which, of course, required destroying old ones (Lefebvre, 1974). He also postulated a spatial triad, comprised of conceived, perceived, and lived space. [...further develop this...]<sup>4</sup> Harvey (1989) brought these two visions together in order to develop his thesis on uneven spatial development and the idea of the spatiotemporal fix.

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In my analysis of the UEP, I am interested in how its mandate created a new political space at a time when the state was ostensibly shrinking, and how that new source power was viewed and treated by various actors either invested or potentially interested in it. I am further interested in how its framers understood sustainable development, which appears to be some version of “just sustainability,” and how they envisioned creating or recreating places in line with that understanding. Lastly I am interested in how sustainability came not only to mean different things or have different interpretations (which has been widely researched), and to show a gap

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<sup>4</sup> Explain that, originally, these were *representations of space*, *representational spaces*, and *spatial practices*.

between discourse and practice (also generally acknowledged), but particularly in how those different meanings (especially competitiveness/participation/sustainability or, more crudely, economic/social/environmental) at the level of plan formulation, and inside that new field of power, led to the projection of multiple kinds of landscapes. Those new landscapes not only replaced old ones, or attempted to (whether finally implemented or not), but have also overlain each other. This is the materialization of conflicted sustainability, which I analyze in three sites within Buenos Aires, all deeply affected by the UEP.

On the theoretical level, I am interested in showing how urban regulation theory is able to explain this better than either urban regime or growth machine theories. The regime lineage is primarily concerned with political sustainability, but can incorporate concerns with livability, as signaled by Peter Evans. It does not cope well with the idea that neoliberalization is in any way special, or that different concerns may exist and conflict in cultivating the urban development agenda. Their idea is one of consensus. On the other hand, the urban growth machine scholars who are concerned with the South and sustainability – essentially only Kee Warner and Jorge Negrete – do create helpful tools for thinking about how sustainability might be built into place-building political arenas, but it is mostly a situation of rather depressing analysis of current conditions rather than why those conditions are as they are and, thus, how they might be overcome. And while it extends Harvey Molotch's original idea that local politics are all about growth, allowing for some other driving factors, it does still place the profit/economic imperative as central. Other important factors exist in their schema as rather static and do not hang together tightly. Sustainability is univocal and uncontroversial, but, again, only comes into the picture as something that is very far away from being achieved due to current conditions in Chile and the US according to their five-part index. Neoliberalism, in the various visions of urban growth machine theory, is not anything worth particular analysis because capitalism is always capitalism at its core. Warner and Negrete do successfully bring in geopolitical considerations, however, with the index that they construct.

Quite differently, urban regulation theory focuses centrally on the particularities of neoliberalism (as well as its varieties) and is concerned at its very core with questions of sustainability, while also noting that sustainability can take very different forms and institute quite distinct priorities in different instances. Their key concepts of actually existing neoliberalism, creative destruction, institutional forms of regulation including an insistence on the inevitability of uneven spatial development, help explain much better how urban development occurs and is contested. They concentrate on the struggles between old and new spaces in the city and the effort to establish new spatiotemporal fixes. Importantly, they are also concerned with scalar

fix, noting the salience of cities in neoliberalization, as well as the struggles for power that occur between different scales of government.

But regulation theory also needs some refining. I bring in Bourdieu to do this at the level of creating new political spaces (which are inherently conflictual), and explicitly excavate Lefebvre from within urban regulation theory to discuss conceived space – but instead make this about conceived spaces and their multiple projected landscapes (although this is a minor side point, this is due in part to the fact that Lefebvre does not allow for, or is not clear about, how people inhabit and produce different kinds of space [conceived-perceived-lived] at the same time, which is clearly happening in the case of planners who are also private common citizens). This then speaks to the multiplicity of new spaces that urban regulation theory overlooks in its insistence on dialectical relations between old/new space, singular. It also speaks to the internal heterogeneity and incongruousness of neoliberalism. While regulationists due note its inconsistencies or contradictions, they do assume that neoliberalism in every instance does have some kind of fix which is, by definition, coherent even if ultimately unstable or crisis-prone.

Back to the empirical side: I look at the competing priorities, which take shape as distinct landscapes then overlain, in three different sites. Those are Puerto Madero, La Boca, and Abasto/El Once (or Balvanera more properly).

In Puerto Madero there is:

- the exclusive business and residential district, the symbol of porteño excellence and cosmopolitanism
- the public festival scene now in place along the Costanera Sur and with the transplanted Feria de Retiro
- the integrity of the Reserva Ecológica
- the new villa with services being provided by the city at the same time as threats of removal
- the inaccessibility of the whole area, yet so close to the Microcentro
- the willful lack of participation of the local population (a planner said, “it’s like dealing with another country”)
- the intention to bring an elevated highway into the run of Avenida Eduardo Madero

Inside the offices of the Subsecretary of Urban Planning, which had recently been “demoted” to be within Production, Tourism, and Sustainable Development (Iliana’s complaint, and how this is a reflection of the particular, bizarre moment of politics

and the economy). Meeting with the CoPUA reps for the Area Central who are frustrated with the lack of passage of the Plan after all their hard work (but other planners outside the process have ridiculed it as the architects' "Happy Meal"). They say the NGOs want to have more input, and yet, when I ask if they have alternative proposals, "well, that's a very good question. No. Or at least they're not telling us." The planners then proceed to tell me about the outcome of their work over the last three years, and how the vision they produced sits vis-à-vis both the city they knew in their youth and the height of crisis at the end of 2001. They wanted to reclaim some of that old sense of the city, but not to be so exclusive. The crisis was the antithesis of that, but it really felt fleeting – terrifying in its moment, the first time they felt like packing the car and fleeing the Capital – but largely already gone, aside from lingering cartoneros, who did not figure into their analysis. In their view, the most important aspect of planning intervention for Puerto Madero was the question of access and integration. It was the Autopista Ribereña.

But there is also the question of how to connect the Microcentro with Puerto Madero, the proximity of which is so highly advertised. Indeed, there is only one city block separating the Casa Rosada or the Merval and los Docks of Puerto Madero. This seems clear on a map, aerially. But it appeared like much more in practice to me, so I went back with the intention to enumerate the distance – 27 lanes of traffic must be crossed by a pedestrian to traverse the one block separating the two social and economic magnets, not to mention the number of *porteño* drivers one must cross in this adventure. So with that sort of integration, how might it be with an elevated freeway topping it all? Very inviting and accessible...

One must consider, however, the sociopolitical question here – the issue of participation. What do the people of Puerto Madero want? And who are these people? All the residents I interviewed noted the reason they chose to be there in first place – its separateness. "It's a bubble," noted a student at the Universidad Católica de Argentina, with a smile. An interior decorator living in the tallest operating apartment towers in the area told me, when I asked what she would do if she could control development in Puerto Madero, "Have it stay as it is. No more development. There's almost nobody here now." She was pleased with the distance she had achieved between her new home and bustling *porteño* core. That could be reached by car when she really wanted it. But the separation

In La Boca there is:

- highest rates of heavy contamination in perhaps all of the city
- highest rates of cancer and AIDS
- lack of green space

- abandoned industrial buildings, some being recycled (with benefit) of rezoning for high-skilled and non-labor-intensive production
- increase in precarious (villa-like) housing
- worsening of security concerns shutting down some tourist areas which they have tried to restore (Necochea) while others are very heavily guarded, but only during the day (El Caminito)
- efforts to seek participation, but only through certain NGOs, and not through the more popular agrupaciones – but even the “accepted” NGOs face having their concerns/arguments shut down by technocratic veto (and immaturity) – “Lies! Lies!”
- basic concern with employment and safety not being met, but theaters being rehabilitated
- housing is being helped, but either in reduced numbers (rectification of conventillos), at greater expense (towers in Parque de la Casa Amarilla/Almirante Brown), or in worse conditions (some of the Instituto de Vivienda constructions or also the renovated conventillos – “villa en hormigón”)
- accessibility (traffic) is not being improved in any safe way – kids being run over, trucks rediverted through residential neighborhoods
- the Riachuelo and flooding, fixed, but not cleaned up, and helping the economic/industrial question does not ameliorate this

In Abasto/Once (Balvanera) there is:

- substandard housing being eradicated or “upgraded”
- improvement of railways/railyards with Corredor Verde Oeste
- work and living conditions not being well monitored (e.g., Cromañón), and yet the state then clamps down on businesses inside the Estación Once, for example.
- Extension of subway line H
- Stalled improvement of Estación Once because it was given to a “competitive” company with no responsibilities
- Need for jobs and security – if we want some attention, let’s make our own circuito turístico!
- Coordination/streamlining of transit
- Regulation and ordering of commerce
- Transversal integration of the city

I realize what I've done above is only list current and projected conditions. I need to be showing the different projected landscapes in a coherently categorized (economic, sociopolitical, environmental) manner that also can clearly point to conflicts.

#### INSTITUTIONALIZING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE PLAN

Although the architects of the Plan could not have cited Agyeman on “just sustainability” at the beginning of their labor because he had not yet written about it, by the drafting of their final reports, when it was in circulation, they still did not incorporate any formal mention of it or similar advancements in debates on sustainable development. Nonetheless, I argue, their particular institutionalization of sustainability demonstrates an inclination toward something like “just sustainability” without the intellectual legwork to make it sturdy. Furthermore, the specific high-stakes neoliberal climate of policymaking in Buenos Aires at the time made the slipshod theorization of sustainability more susceptible to being conquered by other priorities. This shows, perhaps, how just sustainability can go awry when, as is often the case, there is little influential/powerful vigilance over the organization of sustainability in contexts of its institutionalization.

The organization of the Plan – process, actors, priorities, ideas, actions

#### OVERLAIN LANDSCAPES

Plan priority 1: Improving the infrastructure and accessibility of the city (Puerto Madero)

Plan priority 2: Balancing the geography of city development (La Boca)

Plan priority 3: Creating transversal integration of the city beyond linkages to the center (Abasto/Once)

#### CONCLUSIONS

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