Rooting metropolitan planning in critical theory and participatory practices: A university planning experience in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

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The paper aims at contributing to the discussion about planning theory and participatory practices in the Global South by focusing on a planning experience for the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region, Minas Gerais State, Brazil, led by faculty, researchers and students at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, between 2009 and 2019. The initiative unveils the University autonomy in designing and carrying out the metropolitan analyses and planning proposals, in adopting theoretical principles and methodologies and, in developing an outreach programme tightly linked to education and research, resulting in significant improvements in planning education, innovations in planning methodology and the potential for rooting radical planning practices in the metropolitan context. First, objects and subjects of the experience are introduced, together with the three phases of the process: the drafting of a metropolitan plan known as the Integrated Development Master Plan for the RMBH; the Metropolitan Macro-Zoning; and the review of municipal Master Plans within RMBH. Secondly, the trajectory and influences of Brazilian urban and metropolitan planning are reviewed to the extent that they fed into the experience. The discussion of municipal planning processes leads to an assessment of the experience's main achievements. The concluding section offers some thoughts on rooting metropolitan and urban planning in critical theory and participatory practices, as a means to contribute to discussions of planning practices in the Global South.

Keywords: metropolitan planning, critical theory, participatory practices, Brazil

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion about planning theory and participatory practices in the Global South. We focus on a planning experience for the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region (RMBH), Minas Gerais State, Brazil, led by faculty, researchers and students at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), including the three authors, between 2009 and 2019. The initiative was unique in several respects due especially to the autonomy that the University team had in designing and carrying out the metropolitan analyses and planning proposals, including adopting theoretical principles and methodologies and, very importantly, developing the project as a university outreach programme tightly linked to education and research, rather than as a consultancy activity. More than 100 graduate and undergraduate students were involved in the planning process, resulting in significant improvements in planning education, innovations in planning methodology and the potential for rooting radical planning practices in the metropolitan context.

This discussion is organized in five sections. First, we introduce the objects and subjects of our experience, which comprised three phases: the drafting of a metropolitan plan known as the Integrated Development Master Plan for the RMBH *(Plano Diretor de Desenvolvimento Integrado da Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte−PDDI-RMBH)* (2009–2011); the Macro-Zoning (*Macro Zoneamento* – MZ) of the metropolitan region (2014–2016); and the review of municipal Master Plans (*Planos Diretores*) for 11 of the 34 RMBH municipalities (2017–2019). Secondly, we review the trajectory and influences of urban and metropolitan planning in Brazil, insofar as it fed into our experience, from its institutional origins in the 1960s until the early 2000s, when a new phase of metropolitan planning began. After a presentation of the review process for the 11 municipal master plans in the third section, the fourth section assesses the experience's main achievements. Finally, in the fifth section we reflect on rooting metropolitan and urban planning in critical theory and participatory practices, in the hope that it will contribute to discussions of planning in the Global South

Introducing objects and subjects

In 2009, the government of Minas Gerais became the first state government in Brazil to commission a federal university to draw up a metropolitan plan for its capital city's region, the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region. The State Sub-Secretary of Metropolitan Affairs and the Metropolitan Collegiate Body[1] contacted the authors of this paper to discuss the possibility of having a metropolitan plan drafted and conducted from within the UFMG. Coming from a common background in state and municipal urban planning and in teaching urban and regional issues in schools of architecture, geography and economics, the three of us, together with several colleagues who joined us, directed the process that led to coordinated efforts between the state and the university to develop a Metropolitan Plan. It should be mentioned that other studies by the authors about the metropolitan process in Belo Horizonte, focusing on both its southern and northern axes, as well as conceptual campaigns conducted by the State and

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[1]Metropolitan affairs in the RMBH are handled by a Metropolitan Assembly, a Metropolitan Deliberative Committee and a Metropolitan Development Agency. The Metropolitan Plan and the Metropolitan Development Fund are the primary institutional instruments for development planning. The Metropolitan Collegiate Body is an informal civil society organization with 30 members, which fills only two of the 16-seats on the Metropolitan Deliberative Committee (which has 7 seats for municipalities, 7 seats for state secretaries and legislators and 2 seats for organized civil society), but it makes up for its size through the participation of professionals, unions, NGOs, entrepreneurs and organized social movements. The Metropolitan Assembly is composed of state secretaries and legislators, who have 50% of the votes, while the other 50% are held by all the mayors and heads of municipal councils.

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professional associations attempted to set the tone of what that Plan should be[2].

However, commissioning the university was not a trivial matter, and a conflict within the State between supporters of such an innovative option and those who advocated hiring a foreign consulting company led to a series of difficulties in the early stages of the planning process. Perhaps the most damaging aspect was the fact that the newly created Metropolitan Agency (also 2009) initially leaned towards the foreign-firm group, and it therefore boycotted the cooperative efforts by the University and the Sub-Secretary to bring on board the multiple actors needed for the planning process[3].

Nevertheless, the University's planning team organized itself rapidly around the main objectives and methodology presented for discussion. Social participation, political commitment (or mobilization) and socio-ecological responsibility were the main principles. Several other principles were derived from these at different times and scales, but they always had living space and everyday life as priorities. In fact, the introduction to the metropolitan plan (PDDI-RMBH) reads as follows:

> (...) the critical approach supersedes the analytical and functional meaning of reformist planning, not disqualifying it, but limiting it to its immediate, operational character; it goes beyond that with the objective of apprehending totality in transformation and seeking to build processes aimed at a social, economic and environmental transformation, while searching for contemporary solutions for regulation, investment decisions, forms of social organization that favour diversity, and the construction of emancipatory social processes. (UFMG, PUCMinas & UEMG, 2011, p.5, authors' translation).

After all, we were all readers of Henri Lefebvre[4].

The University team included more than 50 faculty members from 14 departments at UFMG, plus faculty from PUCMinas and UEMG, the Minas Gerais Catholic and State universities, respectively. Graduate and undergraduate students, in addition to two dozen non-university professionals, made up the rest of the 180-strong team for the first part of the experience, drafting the Metropolitan Plan[5].

It was our concern from the beginning to use the metropolitan planning project as an educational process that would fulfil the three branches of academic work: teaching, research and outreach (addressing societal needs and actions). Accepting the social learning tradition as a methodological assumption, we believed that planning should have a horizontal perspective of mutual learning between planners (with our techno-scientific knowledge) and the people (with their knowledge rooted in everyday life). This Friedmannian[6] approach was enriched with Boaventura de Sousa Santos' post-modern scientific approach, which embraces

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[2] For other studies on the RMBH, see Costa et al. (2006) and Oliveira et al. (2012); for the *urbanicidade* campaign, see Monte-Mór (2009).

[3] It must be made clear that this boycott lasted only for the first two years of the planning process. Once the Macro-Zoning phase began in 2013, the Metropolitan Agency not only hired UFMG but also worked very closely with the University's planning team.

[4] In addition to his famous 'right to the city', Lefebvre's fierce criticism of urbanism and planning also calls for an *urban praxis* (Lefebvre, 2003), which sums up fairly well our main concerns and intentions.

[5] The UFMG team developed the metropolitan plan (PDDI/RMBH) in 2009–2011. It was then commissioned in 2013 to draft the Metropolitan Macro-Zoning proposal (MZ/RMBH) with a 90-person team and in 2016 to review the Master Plans for 11 of the 34 municipalities that form the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region, involving around 40 faculty and students.

[6] John Friedmann (1987) looks back 200 years in the history of planning thought to distinguish four traditions: social reform, social mobilization, social learning and policy analysis.

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common sense, in contrast to modern science, which sets itself up in opposition to common sense (Sousa Santos, 2003).

Therefore, in terms of planning education, this 10-year experience was especially active in training new planners, both through research and planning courses (which resulted in several Master's and PhD theses and numerous undergraduate monographs in the many disciplines involved) and through practical activities alongside the State, the municipalities and organized civil society. A series of new organizations came into being during the project, some not long-lived but active enough to involve people in many sectoral areas (housing, environment, transportation, etc.) and in different parts of the metropolitan region. The Front for Metropolitan Citizenship, the City Councillors' Front (*Frente de Vereadores Metropolitanos*–Frevem), the State Legislators' Front and other sectoral institutions or organizations were set up or strengthened during the planning process.

As part of its procedural methodology, the planning team included a social mobilization group to organize meetings and seminars and also, where necessary, to produce 'theatrical discussions' of concepts and proposals. An information group assembled data and helped with communications, both internally and externally. In order to proceed with mobilization efforts, the PDDI proposed a Policy for the Democratization of Public Spaces and a Programme for Places of Metropolitan Urbanity (LUMEs), a programme that today includes two practical courses (in Architecture and Economics) at UFMG.

At first, the planning team was organized into the following ten transverse thematic areas with a view to achieving a transdisciplinary reading of the metropolitan territory and social organization:

- Urban mobility, public transport& road systems;
- Land use, real estate dynamics & metropolitan centralities;
- Everyday life, housing & life quality;
- Culture, education, food security, work & income;
- Health, environment, sanitation & water resources;
- Cultural & environmental complexes;
- Institutional planning capacity & municipal administration;
- Socio-environmental risk, vulnerability & public security;
- Demographic & environmental aspects of social demand;
- Productive structure, knowledge, technology & energy alternatives.
(UFMG, PUCMinas & UEMG, 2011).

After the five-month diagnostic period, the thematic areas grew rather autonomous and were therefore dissolved so that the team members could discuss preliminary policies and programmes in workshops. The team was reorganized around four integrating thematic axes: Accessibility, Security, Sustainability and Urbanity. Accessibility encompasses policies related to transportation and mobility, access to information and qualifications, and access to basic urban and social services. Security deals with policies concerning everyday life issues, from urban violence to food security, land and housing, and work and income security. Sustainability refers to policies connected with all aspects of the environment and also economic growth mediated by environmental concerns. Urbanity relates to the 'right to the city' and includes policies around citizenship and the various ways of building a place and a being within a metropolitan space.

The workshop and seminar discussions were extremely fruitful, as participants raised several policy issues and propositions for the analyses carried out by the university group. From over

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300 proposals put forward in workshops and seminars[7]and by the planning team itself, the Plan ended up with 28 policies, 23 of them divided among the four thematic axes plus 2 on territorial structural dimensions and 3 on institutional restructuring.

Our main aim was to use the planning process, not necessarily the Plan itself, to develop what we called an emancipatory approach to planning, that is, planning for social, environmental, territorial and political transformation. It was intended to contribute to the building of a metropolitan citizenship identity, that is, a sense of belonging simultaneously to several territories, and thus change the prevailing notion of competition between localities. The ideas of socio-environmental inclusion and justice, together with the strengthening of the economic integration and complementary of municipalities, would perhaps allow the metropolitan region to occupy a stronger place within the national metropolitan network. Territorial restructuring aims at rediscussing urban-rural land uses, particularly reinforcing a network of urban centralities that would provide economic and cultural infrastructure and services to peripheral areas, hand in hand with more integrated transport and mobility systems (Costa, H.S.M., 2011).

Two years after completing the Plan, the Metropolitan Agency decided to commission the University again, this time to develop one of the Land Use and Control Policy programmes, the Metropolitan Macro-Zoning (MZ) Programme. Such a programme had never before been implemented in Brazil and the two main actors – the Agency and the University – had to decide on its scope. We opted to identify zones of metropolitan importance and restrict the MZ to them, and not include the whole metropolitan territory. By doing that, the MZ simultaneously reinforced proposals at the metropolitan scale and recognised the legitimacy of the local/municipal scale by taking the Master Plans into account in the macro-zoning process. In addition, there was no federal or state legislation establishing the terms of joint state and municipal governance of metropolitan territory, and the fact that Brazilian municipalities are federal entities gives them considerable autonomy in running their land use control and financial affairs (of which they are enormously proud)[8].

Zones and areas where metropolitan interests prevailed over local ones were identified through participatory cartography conducted in public workshops[9]. The methodology consisted of overlaying collaborative maps showing what participants considered areas of metropolitan interest, which were then confirmed in the technical territorial readings. This resulted in the delimitation of 19 Zones of Metropolitan Interest (ZIMs) with their corresponding

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[7] The PDDI-RMBH participatory process was developed in three cycles: Cycle A involved workshops held in 5 RMBH sub-regions followed by a general seminar, in which local demands, territorial readings and studies were presented and discussed; Cycle B followed the same regionalized workshops + general seminar format but to discuss preliminary proposals; and Cycle C involved 5 thematic workshops and a final seminar for the discussion of metropolitan policies, programmes and projects. Participation was open to all, and calls for the workshops were issued via several channels: radio, newspapers, websites, emails, institutional newsletters, social movement listings, etc. Over 3,000 participations were registered, involving 610 institutions and organizations (61 from the State government, 241 municipal officials and councillors and 308 from organized civil society) and the general public (UFMG, PUCMinas & UEMG, 2011). All workshop and seminar discussion materials and reports were made available throughout the project on the Plan website (http://www.rmbh.org.br) and were taken into account both in the drafting and content of the policies proposed and in their final discussion and approval in the seminars. They constitute a rich source of material for researchers, planners and social movements.

[8] In 2015, when the MZ was ending, the federal government issued the Metropolis Statute, laying down the legal terms for joint governance by states and municipalities throughout metropolitan territory.

[9] As far as participation was concerned, the MZ phase involved a Metropolitan Conference at which the process was launched, meetings in each of the 34 municipalities, 11 workshops and 10 seminars, with a total of over 3,600 participations (48% from civil society, 31% from municipal governments, 7% from municipal legislators, 5% from the State government and 9% from the university team).

urbanistic and environmental land use criteria. For the remaining metropolitan territory, municipal criteria would apply.

In addition to ZIMs, with their strictly defined boundaries, the university team proposed a looser approach for broader Areas of Metropolitan Interest (AIMs), where major policies and programmes should be implemented, including social housing, cultural environmental complexes, ruralities and a 'green and blue weave' of green and water related spaces (the TVA – *Trama Verde e Azul*). The LUMEs were also to play an important part in organizing participation and information in close association with the municipalities; in fact, this only happened in the next phase when we developed the local Master Plans, as described below.

The TVA, an idea originally borrowed from initiatives in Lille Metropolitan Area and the Nord Pas-de-Calais *Bassin Minier* (mining basin) in northern France[10], is an effort to restructure the territory on the basis of environmental issues, particularly by rescuing green areas and watercourses (rivers and canals) from the devastating impacts of former coal-mining activities. In the RMBH, public discussions during the MZ workshops and seminars took the original proposal much further, moving from general indications (in AIMs) to a central structuring element of the metropolitan region. We also stretched the TVA concept beyond its ecological origin to include cultural, historical, social and economic features, while also bringing a Lefebvrian influence to the environmental agenda. In fact, the whole metropolitan planning process emphasised diversity, difference, the politicization of social space, a critique of bureaucratic planning and an attempt at promoting the right to the city[11]. Thus, the adoption of the TVA proposal also involved bringing into 'naturalised space' other features connected with urban life, such as cultural heritage, public spaces, urban agriculture, agro-ecological zones, and scenic routes and trails. A concrete and experimental utopia, in Lefebvrian terms, guided the TVA proposal both at the metropolitan restructuring level and at the local municipal level, involving all the major design elements ranging from the environmental to the socio-cultural. The reworking of the municipal Master Plans in phase three allowed us to make more detailed proposals, including precise zoning definitions, the design of specific areas and local maps in which the TVA was actually 'set on the ground'.

The RMBH's TVA experiment led to several academic studies and research projects, from outstanding PhD theses at UFMG to adaptations in other universities and metropolitan areas in Brazil. It is seen today as one the most important contributions of the RMBH planning process and informs diverse outcomes, including courses offered in UFMG departments and the LUMEs themselves. The participatory and environmental dimensions of contemporary urban planning and the multiple-scale approaches, from the broad metropolitan level to local master plans, has repositioned the meaning of planning for the University team, opening up new perspectives for planning theories and practices and pointing to a planning praxis that unfolds into a process of planning education, leading to a myriad of possibilities and engagements. Cooperative work with municipalities and communities in the metropolitan space, from peripheral marginalized squatters and traditional populations to other forms of socio-economic organization – other economies – has been carried out in the form of academic research and direct involvement with local and regional groups of active citizens. This is certainly quite a transformation from the old days of urban planning in the last century, as we shall see in the following section.

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[10] Agreements between the state of Minas Gerais and Nord-Pas-de-Calais and between the UFMG and the University of Lille allowed for joint research and visits between the two research teams.
[11] The PDDI/RMBH has, for instance, a specific Policy on the Democratization of Public Spaces, broken down into several programmes and projects.

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Many of the older faculty members involved in this metropolitan planning experience, including the authors, had previous experience of urban and/or regional planning. Others, whose experience lay in different fields, had to learn the concepts, methods and ways of approaching objects from a necessarily interdisciplinary and action-oriented planning perspective, which was not a trivial task for some specialists. Brazil has a long tradition of urban and regional planning[12], although it does not recognise planning as a profession. Therefore, planning is very rarely taught in undergraduate courses and planning theory is not popular even in graduate programmes.

Those who had planning training, or who had worked with urban and regional planning within federal, state or municipal technocracies, had for reference a body of knowledge and practice in which decisions and ideas were derived from theories and methodologies of the tradition that John Friedmann (1987) termed 'social reform'. In this tradition, the State was the main and almost the only agent, and the technocracy, deriving historically from Auguste Comte's social physics, should know 'scientifically' what is best and, consequently, what should be planned for society. One could simply call it 'top-down planning'.

The 'social mobilization' tradition, in contrast, took the State to be an agent of oppression favouring the rich and powerful, and based its ideas and actions on the social mobilization of civil society, constructing propositions bottom-up, usually against the State. As a third tradition, Friedmann saw 'social learning' as an attempt at building horizontal relations between the state technocracy (planners in general) and society, based on the principle that planners' techno-scientific knowledge is matched by everyday-life knowledge, built on common sense and social practices deriving from daily life. In our case, the theoretical principle could be summed up as: 'empower society to turn what used to be objects of planning into subjects of planning'.

Our experience aimed to develop sound social learning within the metropolitan territory, but it certainly also benefited greatly from the intense social mobilization that has transformed planning and public policies in Brazil since the late 1980s. Known in the literature as the urban reform movement, as we argue below, it affected both planning education and planning theory, bringing other rationalities to planning, such as the recognition of informality, diversity and everyday popular practices as constituents of Brazilian urbanization – and, perhaps, of urbanization in the South.

Brazil's urban planning traditions: from practice to theory?[13]

Urban planning in Brazil, at least in the academic milieu and in the actions of social movements, has been considered a way of proposing structural socio-spatial changes ever since the 1950s, when urban problems resulted from rapid and very intense post-war urbanization concentrated in large cities, with persistent exclusion. The most evident face of that was informality, most clearly expressed in the proliferation of slums, a constitutive aspect of Brazilian urbanization. Nevertheless, for many years informality was (and in many spheres still is) seen as a deviation from the norm, something that could be repaired with intensive investment or else be removed from the urban landscape. It is not unusual to hear that informality is a result of lack of planning, and not due to structural social inequalities associated with a juridical order based on long-standing landed property rights. Maricato (2000) called this attitude 'ideas out of place, and place[s] out[side the realm] of ideas' (*As idéias fora do*

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[12]International recognition of ANPUR, the National Association of Urban and Regional Planning, a 30-year old institution assembling graduate programmes in planning-related fields, attests to the importance of the practice.
[13] This section combines extracts from two previous articles: Costa, H.S.M. (2011), and Monte-Mór et al. (2016).

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lugar e o lugar fora das idéias). A similar approach to informality at worldwide level is provided by Davis (2007).

The first phase of institutionalized urban planning coincides with the period of military rule from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. Under the military governments, modernizing territorial policies to provide general conditions of production in support of economic growth were deemed more relevant than dealing with socio-political urban and metropolitan problems. Besides adopting conventional modernist principles as the knowledge basis for most urbanistic proposals, state planning was also financially and politically centralized at the federal level[14]. This kind of traditional planning and the related urban and economic policies have been widely criticised in Brazil, as elsewhere in the world, both for their functionalist approach and for their association with an authoritarian state.

In 1973/74, nine metropolitan regions were created by the federal government, including the RMBH, all with similar governance structures. In the RMBH, Plambel, the metropolitan planning institution created in 1974, was very active in developing studies and plans, although very weak in terms of implementing them. The governance structure was complemented by deliberative and consultative committees but, given their composition and the way members were appointed, they were effectively controlled by the Minas Gerais State government. Civil society was not represented and the committees merely legitimized decisions already taken by technocrats and politicians.

Together with the planning apparatus, relevant graduate planning education programmes were created, resulting in a new generation of planners and planning institutions. In some of them there was some room for creativity and engagement despite the authoritarian political atmosphere. Plambel was able to develop several important analytical documents, methodological approaches and planning proposals for the RMBH, some of them still relevant today.

From the mid-1980s onwards, during the period of redemocratisation of the country, a different planning approach emerged guided by ideas of urban reform[15], which included the belief that a democratic state could direct a process of building a socially just city. Those who fought for urban reform (planners, academics and social and professional movements) redirected their mobilizing forces against the military regime and its centralized and authoritarian urban policies. Therefore, urban reform came back to the political scene together with the need to restore democracy.

The 1980s represented a period of political restructuring in Brazil after military rule, and the transition to civilian government was somewhat tragic and disappointing[16]. Economic crises beginning in the late 1970s caused uncertainty and the state became financially weaker.

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[14]Although it is not the object of analysis in this paper, it is worth pointing out that since the late 19th and early 20th century Brazil has had a tradition of implementing modernist urbanistic projects and city plans throughout the country, such as city centre renewals, industrial cities, housing estates, or even entire capitals such as Brasília (Monte-Mór, 2019). In terms of institutional planning, even in periods when policies and resources were strongly centralized at the federal level, as mentioned above, municipalities developed their local plans and policies, usually adopting modernist and functionalist principles.

[15] Before the period of military rule, urban and agrarian reform movements were very active and were basically organized around demands over land for housing and land for food production and subsistence, respectively. Those movements were discontinued during the military regime.

[16]The first (non-)elected civilian president, a liberal, died just before taking office. The vice-president was a representative of the Brazilian oligarchies, which led to difficulties in introducing political and social changes. Nevertheless, social mobilization ensured that a progressive new Constitution was drawn up.

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Despite that, all of the movements related to the urban question came together to propose popular amendments to the forthcoming 1988 Constitution. The urban reform amendment focused particularly on the construction of a legal system of land use and occupation and of controlling landed property surplus value, in accordance with the social function of urban property (land) and the city, and also on building a democratic governance structure based on participation in all spheres of action.

The 1988 Constitution incorporated some of the principles and proposals from the popular amendment. It restored local municipal autonomy, although this was still limited due to financial weakness, and emphasised municipal responsibility for several public policies, especially those related to land use and expansion control. New municipal committees (Costa, G.M., et al., 2009) and participatory budgeting initiatives are telling examples of this incorporation of new actors in the decision-making process, despite Brazil's political culture of patrimonialism and clientelism. Participatory conferences on a variety of subjects – housing, culture, health, urban policy, education – became important forums for discussion and evaluation of public policies at all government levels.

The culmination of the process of constructing a set of legal instruments to guarantee the social function of urban property and cities came 13 years later, in 2001, when the City Statute marked the beginning of a new phase for urban planning nationwide. This major piece of urban legislation was a lifesaver for social mobilization, and civil society participation became mandatory in all instances of urban planning and governance. Municipal master plans became the main instruments guiding the implementation of urban reform.

Brazil's experience over the last three decades shows that urban planning required new relations to be established between the state and society. Such relations are being transformed worldwide, sometimes induced by international agencies or by the more rapid circulation of ideas, but they are also influenced by trends in national and local policies and politics. In the planning field, urban policies in many countries have incorporated values and concepts related to neoliberalism and the adoption of structural adjustments, fuelling fierce competition between places, cities, regions or even countries for new economic investment (Costa, H.S.M., & Costa, G.M., 2007). However, since the late 1980s, the urban reform paradigm has been a strong influence on urban and planning theory and practice in Brazil, in spite of its competitive, market-oriented turn in the 1990s usually referred to as neoliberal urbanism.

Reviewing the trajectory of planning in the international literature, Watson (2009) points out that the comprehensive functionalist approach based on modernist ideas is still very strong in many countries, especially in the South. She mentions some African situations where existing regulatory state structures had their origins in European or North American planning instruments of the mid-20th century. Moreover, even when new ideas emerged, some of them very much influenced by international agencies, the shift was mainly from spatial land use planning towards local public administration approaches, which 'usually targeted just one aspect of the urban planning system, forward spatial planning, leaving the inherited land regulation systems to continue to protect the rights and perpetuate the inequalities inherent in them' (p.2269).

In Brazil, the urban reform movement that led to the City Statute was an attempt to move away from such an approach. On the one hand it recognised the totality of urbanization – formal and informal – and claimed the right to the city for all citizens. On the other, it reinvented planning and urban policies to deal with those issues, as new instruments were created and long-

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standing popular demands were reinterpreted. Participatory budgeting, upgrading of informal settlements, regulatory mechanisms for property development, the emergence of environmental concerns within planning, and the establishment of sectoral deliberative committees and conferences to discuss and define priorities within policies and plans are examples of urban policies that were implemented. The new watchword or principle guiding decision making was 'the inversion of priorities'[17].

However, despite democratic advances in political and financial decentralization towards local levels, and the creation of participation processes through which progressive local governments tried to build new and more democratic forms of urban governance, popular participation in the recently created deliberative or consultative committees fell well short of constituting genuine social control of planning, because in many cases it was merely a means of legitimizing decisions that had already been made. Edésio Fernandes (2013), in a critical review of ten years of the City Statute, points out that:

> The law has been internationally acclaimed, to the point that Brazil was enrolled in the Scroll of Honour Award (UN-HABITAT) in 2006 only for having approved it. Openly envied by public policy makers and urban managers from various countries, the City Statute has been repeatedly promoted by the important international initiative Cities Alliance as the most appropriate regulatory framework to provide sound legal bases for government and socio-political strategies committed to promoting urban reform (p. 214, authors' translation).

But he concludes by emphasising the need for social, and not just legal, control: 'The future of the City Statute requires mainly a broad renewal of socio-political mobilization around landed property, urban, housing and environmental questions' (Fernandes, 2013, p. 232, authors' translation).

Looking back, it seems clear now that most of those who were actively engaged in the urban reform movement, the authors included, believed that social transformation could be achieved by institutional means and that achieving new terms of urban and environmental regulation would be enough to change the terms of social production of space in urban areas. There was still a belief that the state could be transformed from within and that it would continue to reflect the imbalance of forces within society. Some of those beliefs are reflected in contemporary planning education, still very much oriented towards regulatory propositions, but increasingly exploring new paths towards the ideal of planning *with* social movements and residents, instead of planning *for* them.

Besides innovative practices, traditional tools were also reinforced as long-established planning practices are resistant to change. The Municipal Master Plan, a resurrected local planning instrument, was made mandatory by the constitution for all municipalities with 20,000 inhabitants or more, as well as those of special interest such as historical heritage sites, those belonging to metropolitan regions, and others. This was considered a 'market reserve' for consultants and planning professionals. It could be seen as just one more legal requirement of minor importance if it were not for the fact that urban reform instruments had to be established and defined in the Master Plan in order to be implemented. Such a requirement linked progressive policies to an already criticized planning instrument. In response, the City Statute adopted participation and urban reform instruments as mandatory elements in Master Plans. Many interesting experiments emerged from constructing local Master Plans, but several municipalities were unable to provide an alternative to conventional technical plans.

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[17]This expression was used by progressive local governments, especially those run by the Workers' Party (PT), referring to investment in poor urban peripheries as opposed to traditional investment in rich areas of the city.

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The fact that Master Plans became compulsory for municipalities within metropolitan regions suggests that the 1988 Constitution recognized the complexity and interdependence of urban questions at metropolitan level. However, since local (i.e. municipal) autonomy was a basic principle of the Constitution, metropolitan governance, including metropolitan planning, was seen as a return to the authoritarian centralization of the previous military period.

Neither the 1988 Constitution nor the City Statute legislated on the metropolitan issue. From the beginning of the redemocratisation process in the mid-1980s, metropolitan policies and planning slowly decayed, and Belo Horizonte's Plambel was officially closed down in 1996. For almost two decades, metropolitan planning was abandoned in the country.

By the early 2000s, the Minas Gerais Legislative Assembly – acting under the 1988 Constitution, which had transferred to the federated states the power to create and manage metropolitan regions – instituted two metropolitan regions in Minas Gerais, one of them the RMBH, and approved a new structure of metropolitan governance (see footnote 1). This time, it included social participation through a deliberative Metropolitan Development Committee, allowing for an informal, but very legitimate, Metropolitan Collegiate Body, which expanded participation throughout civil society. During the metropolitan planning process carried out within the University, besides the proposed channels of participation – including workshops, seminars, public hearings and online interactions – several other participatory groups emerged, as mentioned previously, which exercised some social control over metropolitan planning and governance in processes that went beyond formal participation.

Minas Gerais pioneered the reinstatement of the metropolitan planning and governance structure, and was followed some years later by other states in the country. The planning process, the methodology built as and when needed and the products and outcomes of this process have been discussed by us and the team in various academic and institutional forums since their early stages. The 2015 Metropolis Statute made metropolitan plans and their macro-zoning mandatory for all Brazilian metropolitan regions. In the RMBH, the PDDI and the Macro-Zoning programme were, after significant discussion and amendments by the municipalities, assembled by the Metropolitan Development Agency into a bill presented to the State Assembly in 2017. The bill is yet to be debated and voted on.

In short, our metropolitan planning experience has benefited from this trajectory from the urban reform movement, through the City Statute and the redefinition of Master Plans, to the resumption of planning at metropolitan level.

Master plans as metropolitan unfoldings

The third phase of our 10-year planning experience for and within the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte was an attempt to combine our findings in the metropolitan planning process with several decades-worth of struggles around the idea of the 'right to the city', as partially consolidated in the City Statute. Therefore, the redrafting of 11 municipal Master Plans[18], as mentioned above, was supported on the one hand by the principle of the social function of urban land and the city and the adoption of planning instruments to realize it, as required by the City Statute. On the other hand, it coupled municipal issues with metropolitan guidelines

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[18] Eleven out of the 34 metropolitan municipalities responded to a Metropolitan Agency call to establish a further partnership with UFMG to provide technical support for the redrafting of their Master Plans. As master plans have to be reviewed every ten years, the other metropolitan municipalities did so by other means.

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and proposals that had been established in conjunction with the municipalities through the participatory methodology of the previous phases. However, local politics had to balance a general drive for competition for projects and investment with the pursuit of metropolitan solidarity, deriving from a perception of shared problems and leading to the construction of joint projects and policies.

The PDDI/MZ provided broad drivers and guidelines open to permanent interconnections between the metropolitan and local scales. This was an innovation in metropolitan planning, since territorial planning – land use and expansion, zoning, environmental protection and financial incentives, among other aspects – usually happens at the local scale. The revision of the master plans also benefited from existing participatory initiatives at local municipal level, such as holding thematic conferences and compiling sectoral plans in fields such as sanitation, social housing, land regularization and previous master plans.

The process began with a broad reading of the municipal territory based on the existing plans, the projection of the metropolitan PDDI and MZ proposals on each municipal territory and, especially, collaborative mapping exercises to identify perceived problems, potentialities and proposals, which were conducted in workshops involving residents, social movements and municipal officials. The readings were discussed in seminars and public hearings organized along the four thematic axes derived from the PDDI policy structure – accessibility, security, sustainability and urbanity – in addition to the territorial and institutional structuring dimensions, as mentioned above.

Central to the methodology adopted was the constitution of a steering group (GA – *Grupo de Acompanhamento*) in each municipality, formed of 12 to 16 members, half of them municipal officials and legislators nominated by the mayor and the other half elected representatives of civil society, all of whom were approved in public hearings. The GA, housed in public rooms known as the Master Plan Space, was permanently assisted by UFMG students and faculty.

The groups were very active in linking local knowledge (and local politics), municipal institutional arrangements and the university team. They also played a central role in mobilization and communications. Ideally, the GAs would make up the future City Committee to be formed in each municipality. The Master Plan Spaces were also intended to become LUMEs, and therefore each local administration was expected to provide a suitable location for public access as well as the necessary equipment when setting up the Spaces.

In addition to their methodological approach, Master Plans were also innovative in the design of policies. Inspired by City Statute instruments, some innovations were mainly concerned with territorial restructuring to contain urban expansion[19] in agricultural or environmentally sensitive areas, so as to prioritize food security and small-scale economies, issues rarely considered in Brazilian master plans. The adoption of the TVA – the 'green and blue weave' – as a territorial restructuring element, as mentioned above, is perhaps the initiative's most innovative outcome, as it projected a vision of the future in which urbanization is intertwined with nature, culture and appropriation of the land through leisure, tourism and other public activities. With this in mind, the plans defined zones and subzones, parameters, instruments, areas, types of roads and new regulations[20], 'setting the TVA on the ground' in each municipality.

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[19] As an example, the urban perimeter was redesigned to encompass only already developed areas, leaving future urban expansion areas outside in a proposed Rural-to-Urban Transition Zone (ZDE-Trans), in which an urbanization tax (*Outorga Onerosa de Mudança de Uso*) to be paid by developers would apply. Brazilian law defines the urban perimeter as the formal boundary between urban and rural areas.
[20] The TVA is a special zoning network throughout the municipal area, comprising all the environmental Protection

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At the institutional level, an innovative structure of local governance was proposed, including the City Committee covering all urban policy-related areas, with deliberative powers, and *ad hoc* Special Interest Committees to be proposed by citizens for specific collective demands, lasting for up to two years. Existing committees would be maintained whenever required by particular area regulations, such as health and the environment. The Master Plan bill has yet to be approved by the Municipal Council[21].

The participatory process and the definition of zones, areas, limits and parameters raised many conflicting interests, some explicitly within the GAs, others coming from outside by various means, including the formal discussions of the Master Plan bill. Our belief is that this planning process may have contributed to some degree to socio-political learning, so as to enable social forces to face up to vested interests that do not coincide with the interests of the majority of the population.

This third phase involved approximately 40 faculty and students at UFMG, working under the same principles and methodologies as in the previous phases. The participatory and collective way in which the work was conducted resulted in sound, creative and progressive planning proposals. Our aim in encouraging participation was, in a primary political sense, to help produce citizens committed to their living space.

A quick assessment: major achievements

Our experience made significant advances in at least five main aspects. First, it produced quite powerful and innovative methodologies, as pointed out in the previous sections. Departing from principles, and not from pre-established frameworks of planning theory and methodologies, the planning team constructed and applied a John Dewey 'learning by doing' method (Friedmann, 1987). This resulted in real learning – planning education within the 'social learning' tradition – through a collective and reflexive process that involved not only faculty and students but also, by extension, several metropolitan and state personnel and community leaders who were involved throughout the participatory planning process. This effective approximation to the object of (urban) planning – socially produced space – meant that various metropolitan and local actors were potentially influenced by the planning process, moving thus towards one of the stated goals pursued by the planning team, to transform socio-political actors from objects into subjects of planning.

The second achievement was the relatively effective participatory process involving representative fractions of society from the very beginning of the analysis through to the discussion of the final products, including the territorial guidelines that make up the plan itself and proposals for institutional procedures and laws. Although the final products are comprehensive and cover highly diverse aspects of metropolitan life, as described above, the territorial and institutional dimensions were at the very core of our proposals from the outset. In the second phase of our project, Macro-Zoning, the focus was more specifically on the territorial dimension and on several new institutional aspects regarding metropolitan laws and codes, which were further developed and extended in phase three. For this purpose,

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Zones (ZPs); special overlapping zones such as TVA-Fluv (rivers, lakes, springs and creeks requiring protection), TVA-Agroeco (agroecological uses), TVA-Min (post-mining recovery) and TVA-Cult (cultural assets requiring protection); rural/tourist cycle and pedestrian routes and paths; and linear-parks, either existing or to be created. Each zone has its own land use and occupation criteria, instruments and parameters. The ensemble should produce local territorial restructuring interlinked with the metropolitan Macro-Zoning proposal.
[21]So far, 4 out of the 11Master Plans have been approved and others are under local discussion.

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participation took the form, as said above, of a steering group (GA) set up to discuss and approve the proposals.

Thirdly, collaborative maps were produced during the Macro-Zoning and subsequent phases. These maps went beyond traditional legal instruments for controlling land occupation and use in that they were the result of genuine social and participatory cartography, potentially[22] representing both a permanent channel of dialogue between social planning agents and an instrument to support actions for mutual social, political and territorial transformation (Acselrad, & Coli, 2008) and, consequently, for the social appropriation of both urban and rural municipal space.

Fourthly, our experience added important elements in planning education. Combining a learning-by-doing methodology with a trans-disciplinary approach and critical theory proved to be a powerful means of preparing professionals and faculty to deal even more effectively – either in practice or in theory, or hopefully both – with socially produced space, the complex object of urban and regional planning. This, however, is a matter to be more thoroughly addressed in the future.

The fifth achievement was the drafting of the Master Plan bill, comprising all the instruments, maps and public policies needed to support and guarantee the plans' implementation[23]. Some of those instruments are mandatory, as specified in the City Statute. Others are initiatives arising from the participatory process with the aim of strengthening the social control of planning, such as giving the City Committee a more central role and greater power to control the implementation of the plan. Also important is the collectively agreed proposal of creating *ad hoc* Participatory Local Interest Committees to address specific demands concerning inequalities, such as the provision of means of collective consumption, and other material and immaterial issues related to local differences and diversities. It will be a few years, however, before the effectiveness of such initiatives can be properly assessed.

Final remarks on rooting metropolitan and urban planning in critical theory and praxis

The proposal to set up Participatory Local Interest Committees put into effect the Lefebvrian concept of *autogestion* (self-management): 'The concept of *autogestion* does not provide a model, does not trace a line. It points to a way, and thus to a strategy. (.....) the strategy must concretize *autogestion* and extend it to all levels and sectors. This perpetual struggle for *autogestion* is class struggle' (Brenner, & Elden, 2009, p.135).

To feed such a strategy we proposed that these Committees should spring up as a way to help perpetuate the struggles for autogestion and extend them 'to all levels and sectors', aiming at the social, cultural and political appropriation of space. In other words, it is a struggle for *the right to the city*, which has been the main purpose of progressive planning theory and practice in Brazil and, we venture, in the peripheral capitalism of the Global South.

Our experience has also relied on a process of cross-pollination between theory and practice, pointing to what Watson (2003) says:

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[22]This potential was verified in the participatory process, when socially produced maps became essential tools for discussing demands and proposals.

[23] The Master Plan for the metropolitan municipality of Rio Manso is a good example, as it was approved by the Municipal Council exactly in the form decided during the participatory process. (https://www.riomanso.mg.gov.br/abrir_arquivo.aspx/Lei_Complementar_81_2019?cdLocal=5&arquivo={AB83BA 0C-E6DE-76AB-84CE-7ABA8D5E40BA}.pdf#search=plano%20diretor)

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> Planning research needs to return to the concrete, to the empirical and to case research, not as a mindless return to empiricism, but as a way of gaining a better understanding of the nature of difference, and generating ideas and propositions which can more adequately inform practice (p.396).

In view of the above and our planning experience itself, we can reflect on the meaning of planning theory in the South. First, as Santos (2000) emphasises, any theory that deserves the name must be critical, which also means it must be linked to practice. These are necessary conditions for the construction of alternatives that can bring about social transformation and emancipation. Our understanding of critical theory therefore relates to the following conceptualization by Nobre (2004):

> Critical theory does not fight either for blind action (without taking knowledge into consideration) or for empty knowledge (ignoring the fact that things could be different), but questions the meaning of 'theory' and 'practice' and the distinction between these two moments. The responsibility to perform this task is inherent in the very idea of 'critique' (p.9, authors' translation).

Again, we look to Lefebvre as he discusses the need to give concreteness to the utopian and theoretical concept of 'urban society':

> The expression 'urban society' meets a theoretical need. (...) A movement of thought toward a certain concrete, and perhaps toward the concrete assumes shape and detail. This movement, if it proves to be true, will lead to a practice, urban practice, that is finally or newly comprehended (Lefebvre, 2003, p.14).

Here remains a doubt: is it correct to conceive of our experience as a radical urban practice, in spite of the institutional character of urban planning? We believe it can be considered transformative, if not emancipatory, but only under certain conditions, as posited by Lefebvre in his fifth thesis on the *Right to the City* (Kofman & Lebas, 1996):

> The realization of urban society calls for a planning oriented towards social needs, those of urban society. It necessitates a science of the city (of relations and correlations in urban life). Although necessary, these conditions are not sufficient. A social and political force capable of putting these means into *oeuvres* is equally indispensable (p.178).

Setting this social and political force in motion was constantly in the minds of those struggling for urban reform in Brazil. That is, the notion of urban planning in Brazil has, since the 1960s at least, been equated with politics. Initially there was a belief in the possibility of social reform (Friedmann, 1987), which presupposes a democratic State's willingness to challenge hegemonic interests, especially those of the urban economy in general – through demands to create appropriate general conditions of production rather than the conditions for social reproduction – and in particular the interests of real estate agents, which were almost always favoured in State actions. These persistent economic, social and political struggles point to the importance of including an urban political economy approach as essential theoretical support for urban analyses and planning. Fainstein and Defilippis (2016) share a similar understanding in the introduction to the latest edition of *Readings in Planning Theory*: 'We place planning theory at the intersection of political economy, history and philosophy' (p. 4). We would add that socially produced space – the object of territorial planning in Brazil, and possibly in the Global South in general – requires a critique of political economy itself to include post-structuralist approaches and, most importantly, theories and empirical evidence about

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socio-spatial practices: occupations, insurgencies, informal economies, urban commons, urban agriculture and several other self-managed practices observed in contemporary urban Brazil.

Nowadays, democracy and social control, in addition to a democratic state, are the main drivers to be taken into account in strategies and planning methodology, as observed in the struggle for urban reform and in our 10-year experience of metropolitan planning. This is considered an essential condition for reversing the State's tendency to favour hegemonic interests in its actions. Hence the need for planning theory and practice to incorporate critical thought and a trans-disciplinary approach. Furthermore, planning theory and practice must consider not only urban socio-spatial inequality, the focus of the urban political economy (Fainstein, 1997), but equally those theoretical approaches, which emphasise culture, difference, diversity and other material and immaterial aspects of urban life. The theory of space production (Lefebvre, 1993) has much to say in this respect by suggesting that potentially revolutionary differential spaces should spring up to express diversity within the totality of social space, in contrast to the tendency of abstract space – the space of capitalist expropriation – to become and remain hegemonic. In another work, Lefebvre (1979) went beyond this question by stating: 'Insofar as we can conceive it, given certain current tendencies, socialist space will be a space of difference' (p.293).

It seems that there could be a contradiction in this idea of socialist space as a space of difference. However, it has to be understood in its dialectical dimension. Differential spaces mean that potentially counter-hegemonic social movements can arise to struggle for the recognition of cultural and social differences neglected by some theoretical approaches, particularly by urban political economy. That is, we are envisioning another kind of socialism –different from 20th-century 'real socialism'– a utopia that should be a guide for theories and practices in urban analysis and planning, aiming at a permanent search for emancipation. This is what Holston (2008) refers to with his notion of insurgent citizenship, to theorize about potential and continued emancipatory social practices.

These quests and actions may have limitations, as pointed out by Lefebvre (2015) in a short piece reflecting on his previous theory of urban revolution: 'The urban [utopian urban society] conceived and lived as a social practice is in the process of deteriorating and perhaps disappearing' (p.567). This sounds rather sad coming from an author who wrote seminal texts on the possibility of another society, the urban society, as a result of theory and praxis.

We choose to end this reflection, however, with Lefebvre's optimistic statement on his radical theory of the right to the city and a possible urban revolution, expressing his belief in the need for continued praxis: 'The right to the city implies nothing less than a revolutionary concept of citizenship' (Lefebvre, 2015, p.570). In our 10-year metropolitan and municipal planning experience, the construction and consolidation of metropolitan citizenship was a constant goal for the university team. In the Global South, such a revolutionary idea implies the need to root urban planning in social movements, particularly those that have been traditionally excluded from the bourgeois and oligarchic projects of modernity. They will form the basis for the construction of alternative planning theories and practices stemming from effective citizenship and radical democracy.

Acknowledgment

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