ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the relationship between emerging social and spatial urbanization patterns and urban politics, in a context of changing planning paradigms. It revisits historical processes of production of urban space in which state intervention associated with private investments plays a major role in producing abstract space in Lefebvre’s terms. At the spatial level, such process reinforces urban patterns associated with disperse, extended and diffuse urbanization, depending on the concept used. State investments attempt to provide the general conditions of production to attract and fix capital: economic infrastructure, credit and fiscal incentives, developed land, urban and environmental regulations, labor and technological requirements of the knowledge economy. The articulation between public and private capital invested in land and property provides key elements to discuss conflicts over land use, and social/environmental pressures over metropolitan expansion. There is growing awareness that contemporary planning requires new methodological approaches, leading to social learning and empowerment. Also contemporary planning increasingly refers to more complex territorial arrangements – supra-municipal, watershed, metropolitan – leading to new social and political representation forms. At political and institutional levels, since the late 1980s governance arrangements have reinforced the role and power of municipalities as far as urban issues are concerned. At the same time the metropolitan governance debate needs to assume newer and more progressive terms. These elements came together in a recent planning experience, developed in our university, leading to a plan for the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte in Southeast Brazil, a region composed by almost 5 million inhabitants and 34 municipalities. The development of studies, fieldwork and public debates that constituted the process leading to the metropolitan plan is discussed, emphasizing whenever possible, who were the social agents involved, and the forces they represent. Public debates established by the plan’s methodological approach constituted important arenas to explicit convergences and conflicts related to local or metropolitan planning views. The participatory process involved seminars and regional workshops which turned into rich and lively moments of discussion, when new proposals and alternative approaches emerged. Some of them eventually evolved into the plan’s policies, and offered alternative views to established perceptions of social reality. The whole process brought about existing disperse concerns about planning and its ability to produce responses to social demands. It materialized into social movements organized by and around existing and new forms of representation (e.g. a movement within the state legislative, Frente pela Cidadania Metropolitana), contributing to social learning and to the recognition of everyday traditional knowledge. In B. de Sousa Santos terms, the paper seeks to discuss the extent to which a double epistemological turning point between established (academic, planning) and social/popular knowledge could be achieved.
INTRODUCTION

The paper discusses emerging social and spatial urbanization patterns and urban politics, in a context of changing planning paradigms at metropolitan level. The empirical evidence comes from the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, a thirty-four municipality’s urban agglomeration of around five million inhabitants in the State of Minas Gerais in Southeast Brazil. The central municipality of Belo Horizonte, capital of the State, accounts for half of that population, and so far concentrates most of the investments in the region. It is also the most structured municipality in political and institutional terms, with a longstanding planning experience in several policy areas. With few exceptions, the surrounding municipalities of the Metropolitan Region are very fragile in terms of their economic, institutional and financial performances. Figure 1 below shows the location of the area of study.

As the spatial and demographic metropolitan growth dynamics reaches most municipalities, metropolitan planning and the articulation of social, economic or spatial policies become increasingly important and should be a government priority. Although there is widespread recognition of the need for metropolitan governance, expressed in terms of achievement of common goals and joint interventions in many areas, there is also an equally strong movement to reinforce local autonomy and to maintain political power at the municipal level, as part of a process of democratic consolidation after decades of political authoritarianism and centralization.

Parallel to that, planning conceptions and practices have changed considerably during the last decades, both internationally and within Brazil, as new ideas emerged and new social actors entered the scene. Brazilian metropolitan planning, however, was trapped by the conflict between an old centralized-authoritarian structure conceived when comprehensive functionalist planning was in force, and the emergence of new forms of local power.

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2 A first draft of this paper was presented at the 3rd World Planning Schools Conference, Perth, Australia, July 2011, under the title of “Urban politics and planning in the periphery: the challenges of reinventing metropolitan planning in Belo Horizonte, Brazil”.

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reassertion, including new possibilities of participation and representation, and different territorial arrangements.

Within this context, in 2006, a new legal governance structure was established for the metropolitan regions within Minas Gerais territory. It included a metropolitan development plan carried out during 2010 by a team of professors, researchers and students within our university. This paper is an attempt to discuss some aspects of our experience, and is organized as follows: next section provides a brief overview of the process of production of metropolitan space in Belo Horizonte, highlighting the roles played by the state and by private capital in it. Following that, the next section discusses the trajectory of planning ideas and practices in general terms, and particularly the extent to which metropolitan policies are able to establish forms of dialogue with contemporary planning tendencies. The following section examines some aspects of the recent experience of metropolitan planning, with emphasis on the participation mechanisms established and the responses of civil society on the one hand, and the constant tension between competition and solidarity, between local and metropolitan aims and goals.

THE PRODUCTION OF METROPOLITAN SPACE

In the historical processes of production of urban space in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte state intervention associated to private investments plays a major role in producing abstract space, to use Lefebvre’s terms (1991). Since the turn of the 19th to the 20th century when the city of Belo Horizonte was built, the provincial state has been very active in the production of space. State investments were an attempt to provide the general conditions of production to attract and fix capital: during the first decades strong emphasis was placed on physical infrastructure to attract industrial capital and to occupy the new capital of the state. But despite those initial efforts, it was only during the 1940s that Belo Horizonte would acquire some economic importance within the state and the country, as major investments in the roads system, electricity network, and industrial estates took place.

In spatial terms those investments occurred mainly in the north and west of the city, going beyond its borders and influencing later metropolitan expansion, with different characteristics: industrial concentration in the western direction, and a more complex set of investments in the northern expansion. This includes a leisure-cultural and high income housing development in the immediate northern frontier – The Pampulha Lake Complex built in the 1940s – followed by several not very well succeeded attempts to establish industrial estates in the 1970s and large scale social housing estates during the 1970s and 1980s.

The early option for a market oriented process of access to land and housing resulted in clear separation between formal urban growth in the city center and fragile urbanization pattern in low value peripheral areas. The articulation between public and private capital invested in land and property, particularly popular housing, was an important element in the production of the built environment: state intervention provided access and infrastructure to new areas, and private capital and landowners would produce developments for different household income levels.

Such process resulted in a center-periphery spatial configuration with concentration of investments in infrastructure and services in the central area; where most economic activities, jobs and formal housing are located; where land and property values are higher, and where housing and other buildings were mostly (although not always, as there are also many central informal areas) produced through formal processes.
In the last two decades other elements were added to such territorial structure. State investments in other types of economic infrastructure required by economic restructuring became more intense, such as credit and fiscal incentives, developed land, renewed urban and environmental regulations, trained labor, and technological requirements of the knowledge economy. Residential developments became more complex, associating housing to shopping malls, convention and leisure centers, environmental preservation areas, and a number of other activities, characterizing disperse forms of urbanization around Brazilian cities, in tune with worldwide tendencies.

In Belo Horizonte the traditional process of production of the periphery was very intense during the seventies reaching several neighboring municipalities of the metropolitan region (Costa, 1994). During the eighties the process slowed down, and from the nineties a new wave of dispersion began to take place as mentioned above. As a result, peripheral municipalities present much higher rates of growth than the central ones, as shown above.

CONTEMPORARY PLANNING – NEW APPROACHES AND TERRITORIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Urban planning in Brazil, as in many other places in the world, evolved from an hegemonic modernist/functionalist tradition, still very strong, towards multiple contemporary approaches, ranging from strong emphasis on popular participation to market-oriented strategies.

Until the seventies, urban intervention was deeply influenced by modernist urbanism and hygienistic ideas, associated with modern architecture and the design of new cities – mainly state capitals (and the country’s capital, Brasília) but also industrial and corporate
cities related to the location of large productive projects – and popular housing sites projects. It was during the period of military dictatorship from mid-1960s to mid-1980s that planning actually acquired the status of a national policy, and as such was conceived within the ideas of centralization of financial resources and political power. Policies were formulated and financed at the central government level to be implemented at the provincial and local levels, where the chances of participation in decision-making were very weak.

The main characteristics of the Brazilian planning experience of the period can be summarized as follows:

- emphasis on technical knowledge and power – professional expertise is seen as the sole source of ideas to orient private and public intervention. Technocracy and authoritarianism were widespread, particularly during the seventies. Planning was seen as an state imposition, and even today most criticisms associate comprehensive planning with the military regime;
- the plan is seen as the main product, usually a Master Plan, and not a long term planning process;
- centralization of decisions and resources particularly at the national level, the state at the local and regional levels;
- lacked financial resources and autonomy of decision;
- uniformity of methodology established as urban policy in the 1970’s;
- lack of means of implementation of proposals – plans produced ideal proposals very far away from the financial, economic and political reality of local governments, the level responsible for implementation;
- idealized urban “order” and design – the model was based on an ideal city and its functionality;
- broad evaluation of urban problems – during the seventies, a vast array of plans produced substantial knowledge of urban problems in many areas;
- geared to state intervention, most propositions in the plan based solely on state action and policies, with little participation of other social agents;
- lack of popular participation – the authoritarian regime particularly during the mid sixties to mid-eighties avoided all forms of participation in the planning process;
- no place for “informal” or “disorganized” aspects of urban dynamics, that is, the majority of the population was not reached by planning; the dichotomies legal-illegal, formal-informal, planned-spontaneous were reinforced. The existence of informal areas is usually seen as a result of lack of planning and not linked to more structural origins (Costa, 2005).

Brazilian planning practices as inherited from the international experience and transformed by the authoritarian political context were related only to the formal parts of the urban areas, and as such remained very distant from everyday life and from the problems experienced by the majority of the population. Maricato (2000) referred to such

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3 There was a fierce internal dispute within the government regarding the actual content of planning activities: either economic planning or urban (i.e. territorial/land use) planning. For an assessment of the period see Monte-Mór (2008).

4 The SERFHAU, Serviço Federal de Habitação e Urbanismo, a part of Home Ministry, became responsible for the diffusion of a methodology for Local Development Plans, a precondition for local administrations to have access to urban financing schemes.
disconnection as “the ideas out of place and the place outside the ideas”.5 A similar approach at world level can be found in the work of Davis (2007).

Reviewing the trajectory of planning in the international literature Watson (2007) 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 whereby existing regulatory state structures were originated from European or North American planning instruments of the mid-twentieth century.

The 1980s saw the re-emergence of social movements and the struggle to return to democratic principles and values. Land and urban reform movements, very active in the pre-military government period and subsequently silenced, returned transformed, and played an important role in the intense debates that would lead to propositions for the 1988 Federal Constitution (CF88), which represented a turning point in the relations between state and civil society. As far as urban policies and planning are concerned two funding principles passed: the notion of social function of landed property, and the adoption of participation in public policies and intervention.

The need to enlarge the political support-base of planning and urban policies, pressed by citizen’s demands, brought about many forms of participation in the design of policies and/or in the decision-making processes (Costa; Costa, 2007).

Since the mid-1980s, therefore a wide range of interesting and creative urban experiences started all over the country, reaching particularly the local and grassroots levels. At the same time urban regulation was re-written in order to adopt participatory levels of discussion and decision-making. Participatory budgeting, slum upgrading and land regularization programs, self-help and self-administered housing schemes are some well-known practices from that period that managed to incorporate informality into planning concerns. The widespread adoption of participatory committees in the design of public policies is also very well documented and assessed.

From the optimism of the early post CF88 period to a critique of a certain bureaucratization and institutionalization of participation prevailing nowadays, there is an enormous amount of literature scrutinizing the experiences of the last quarter of century6. The state, initially seen as the enemy, gradually became a partner, as far as urban social policies were concerned. Planning and popular participation discourses became amalgamated nationally and internationally, with a substantial help from most international financing agencies who adopted a similar discourse and began to consider participation a precondition for financing projects. The language of stakeholder’s involvement and consensus building became globalized. (Linch, 2001).

Planning ideas, however, have changed substantially since bureaucratic functionalist planning suffered widespread criticism. Participatory schemes and strategies have appeared as a reaction to conventional planning and have systematically denied it. With the worldwide crisis of comprehensive planning, associated to the deeper crisis of capitalist modernity, new alternatives were pursued. Some of them attempt to add the practice of collective action to the accumulated knowledge of planning (Friedmann, 1992;

5 She referred to both the uncritical import of planning models, values and designs from the advanced societies, and to the widespread pattern of production of urban peripheries, resulting in incomplete urbanization, not necessarily illegal, but outside the formalities of urban regulation. The cote was a free translation of the article’s title: “as idéias fora do lugar e o lugar fora das idéias”.
6 The papers published in the proceedings of ANPUR Conferences and in its journal – Revista Brasileira de Estudos Urbanos e Regionais – provide a broad overview of such experience.
Nowadays most urban and environmental policies adopt participation as a methodological and political criterion. The creation of a Ministry of Cities, backed up by social movements, is an evidence of the recently acquired, although rather fragile, importance of urban politics. Planning is re-emerging as a public (and private) activity in newer and less dogmatic basis (Costa, 2005).

There are also very strong market-oriented planning initiatives that emerged as a reaction to comprehensive planning. Within the Brazilian debate they are usually referred to as strategic planning, both by their supporters (Castells, Borja, 1996) and by their critics (Vainer, 2000). The appropriation of such discourse by local governments and planning professionals has produced a very powerful argument in favour of cities as actors deciding their destinies in a global competitive arena. Big urban projects and design take place of planning as a routine activity. Urban marketing and urban renewal of central areas are the most visible face of strategic planning, giving rise to criticism due to their social effects in terms of promoting increase in land values and gentrification, just to mention some of the questions. The logic of promoting competition between places (and their governments) in their struggle to attract investments and revenues is an important and distressing argument to be considered by any supra-local planning experience, including metropolitan planning.

**METROPOLITAN PLANNING**

Metropolitan planning and nine Brazilian Metropolitan Regions were created in the seventies (Federal Supplementary Law 14 of 1974) around the most important provincial state capitals, Belo Horizonte included. They did not constitute an independent government level, but were under provincial state jurisdiction and federal financing (Souza, 2005, p. 341). Until the CF88 all nine Metropolitan Regions had a common structure: a Deliberative Committee, a Consultation Committee and a planning agency.

Metropolitan planning studies and projects were carried out in Belo Horizonte by Plambel and constitute important reference studies up to today. A metropolitan territorial and land use structure was then proposed, and some municipalities adopted the guidelines in their plans and policies. However as urban policies and financial resources were centralized at federal level, local governments were usually unable to implement metropolitan planning even if they were willing to do so, which was not always the case.

The 1988 Constitution was not concerned with metropolitan issues, as they were seen as a hindrance to the achievement of the newly conquered local autonomy principles. Therefore the CF88 transferred to the provincial states the attribution of creating and regulating metropolitan regions. In 1989, the Minas Gerais State Constitution established a new metropolitan structure: a Metropolitan Assembly and a Metropolitan Development Fund. Plambel remained the planning institution, although weakened in its coordinating functions and eventually abolished in 1996. Such structure was not actually put to work in

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7 Deliberative Committee - the decision-making instance, composed by five state governor appointees, one of which chosen from a three persons list indicated by the capital mayor, and a second name chosen from a similar list made by the remaining metropolitan mayors. Consultation Committee – the advisory instance, composed by representatives for all metropolitan municipalities. The State Governor was the President of both committees. PLAMBEL was the planning agency for the MRBH.

8 Formed by all metropolitan mayors, all Municipal Council representatives, one representative for the State Legislative, and one representative for the State Government. The power structure of the assembly – more regulatory than executive - did not favour the provincial state government who was responsible for channelling resources to the fund and implementing policies, but had no control over decision-making.
terms of planning and metropolitan issues were not a priority during the 1990s. There were power imbalance problems within the Assembly, as the most economically and demographically important municipalities had the same political power (i.e. votes) than small municipalities, and state government institutions were quite underrepresented.

In 2004 the State Constitution was amended a revised metropolitan structure was proposed. State Government’s position became strengthened in the Metropolitan Assembly as it now holds half of the votes. Also a Metropolitan Development Deliberative Committee and a Metropolitan Development Agency were created as intergovernmental entities, but for the first time civil society is represented in the Committee. There were changes within the government secretaries to deal directly with metropolitan issues. Two instruments were created within such arrangement: the Metropolitan Development Fund and the Integrated Development Metropolitan Plan (PDDI), discussed in the next section.

It is interesting to note that progressive urban politics in Brazil in recent decades have made a “positive association between political-administrative decentralization and democracy” (Coelho, 1996, p.41). However, in a metropolitan context, decentralization can also mean fragmentation and competition, as there are many issues that might be better dealt with collectively, such as infrastructure, transit, social housing, or environmental conservation, just to mention a few. Combining local democracy/decentralization with a certain degree of metropolitan coordination is major challenge. On the other hand localities and local governments are increasingly important considering the worldwide process of productive restructuring (Mendonça, 2008). Such change of approach is related, on the one hand to the fact that local governments are “closer to the population”, therefore presenting greater accountability than national governments, and, on the other hand to the fact that local governments are “more adaptable in responding to the needs of the new international system” (Stren, 1993, p. 130). However, as mentioned, local governments are simultaneously competing for public and private investments. As far as metropolitan planning is concerned there is a constant imbalance between competition and solidarity.

THE EXPERIENCE OF PDDI - THE METROPOLITAN PLAN FOR INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT

From October 2009 to December 2010, the Metropolitan Plan for Integrated Development was carried out by the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais - UFMG, the major public university of the State, in association two other institutions – the Faculty of Design of the Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais and the Urban Policies Observatory of the catholic university – Pucminas. Several UFMG Departments and Graduate Programs were involved: Economics, Demography, Geography, Architecture and Urbanism, Education, Water Resources and Sanitation Engineering, Sociology, among others. The task

9 The Deliberative Committee is composed of 15 representative members: 5 for the State Government, 2 for the Legislative Assembly, 3 for the largest cities (one each), 3 for the other municipalities, and 2 for civil society. The composition of the Metropolitan Assembly and the responsibilities of the Development Agency were later defined by specific laws (Supplementary Law n. 89 of January 2006).

10 There is no Planning Course at UFMG. Planning and Regional/Urban Studies are scattered among the departments and courses of Geography, Architecture and Urbanism, and Demography and Economics which form Cedeplar – Development and Regional Planning Center – where the plan was
involved around 180 people, among faculty, researchers, graduate and undergraduate students. It had also the support of staff and officials from the State Sub-secretary of Metropolitan Development, and of civil society representatives from the Metropolitan Development Deliberative Committee.

The methodology adopted involved a participatory process, formed by 15 regional or thematic workshops, and 3 seminars as shown in Figure 3. As the process evolved, 3000 participations were registered, involving approximately 600 institutions, representing 61 from the state government, 241 form the local governments and 308 from the civil society – NGOs, firms, trade unions, committees, community associations, etc (UFMG/Pucminas/UEMG, 2011). Mobilized by several months of metropolitan discussion in the workshops and seminars, other structures were formed, such as the Frente pela Cidadania Metropolitana (Metropolitan Citizenship Front) an articulation of local councilors from metropolitan municipalities who supported the plan and the discussion process.

Figure 3: UFMG/Pucminas/UEMG (2011) PDDI participatory process

Since traditional planning was widely criticized, several attempts were made to develop new methodological approaches, most of them including society participation. There was growing awareness that contemporary planning required more complex territorial arrangements, as they refer to increasingly complex forms of production of space. That may lead to less conventional forms of social and political representation. However the traditional political and administrative forms of political power and representation co-exist with the new forms, posing real challenges to the planning process. Belo Horizonte provides good example of that.

Besides the participatory process, the conceptual departing point was that the plan was organized around three main Development Thematic Nuclei – social, economic and environmental – that should be taken into account by all areas of study and proposal. The territorial and institutional dimensions were central elements of the plan, to be adopted by all analyses and policies.

The work structure was organized around 10 Thematic Areas, conceived so that associated issues and problems could be looked at in integrated ways, as an attempt to
avoid reproducing governmental policy structures, or usual disciplinary academic approaches. A group of faculty and students became responsible for each thematic area, producing a state-of-the-art study to be discussed in the workshops and in the first seminar. The thematic areas were:

- Urban mobility, public transportation & roads system;
- Land use, real state 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; and
- Productive structure, knowledge, technology & energy alternatives (UFMG/Pucminas/UEMG, 2011)

In the second stage of the process, the thematic areas were dissolved, and propositions of policies and programs were discussed in workshops organized around four Integrating Thematic Axes: urbanity, sustainability, security and accessibility. Urbanity is related to the right to the city and encompasses all policies related to citizenship, and several forms of acquiring a place in the metropolitan space. Sustainability refers to policies related to the environment, emphasizing natural aspects, but also to economic growth with environmental concerns. Security deals with issues related to everyday urban violence, but also related to policies oriented towards food security, access to housing and land, work and income security. Accessibility is present in policies related to transportation and mobility, access to information and qualification, access to basic urban and social services.

The discussion process in the workshops and seminars was quite rich, and many propositions and policy issues were raised by the people that participated in them, therefore definitely contributing with the analyses carried out by the university group. Summing up there were 28 policies divided among the four axes and organized around the central idea of a territorial restructuring of the Metropolitan Region.

Our main aim was to use the process of the plan, not necessarily the plan itself, to develop an emancipatory approach to planning, that is planning for social, environmental, territorial, and political transformation (UFMG/Pucminas/UEMG, 2011). It intended to contribute to the idea of metropolitan citizenship that might be able to change the prevailing notion of competition between localities. The ideas of socio-environmental inclusion and justice, together with the strengthening of economic integration of the municipalities, would perhaps allow the metropolitan region to occupy a stronger place within the cities network at national level. Territorial restructuring aims at discussing urban-rural land uses, and particularly reinforcing a network of urban centralities that would provide economic and cultural infrastructure and services to the peripheral areas, in articulation with more integrated transportation and mobility systems.
Most of the policies and programs tend to change the prevailing center-periphery pattern of distribution of services, investments and amenities. The extent to which they will reach those objectives is yet unknown. To what extent civil society, that was so active during the plan discussion process, will be able to maintain pressure over the state government so that the plan may be implemented is also unknown. But if a conclusion can be taken from such experience, it reinforces the idea that metropolitan planning gained society’s interests and, as such, contributed to spread the notions of cooperation and solidarity among metropolitan municipalities. The process brought together existing concerns that were quite dispersed over the metropolitan territory about planning and its ability to produce responses to social demands. It materialized into social movements organized by and around existing and new forms of representation (e.g. the metropolitan articulation between state legislative members, the Frente pela Cidadania Metropolitana), contributing to social learning and to the recognition of everyday traditional knowledge as experienced by the workshops discussions. The process contributed to the exercise towards a double epistemological turning point (Santos, 1989) between established academic and professional planning knowledge, and social, popular, or traditional knowledge, whereby both sides learn from each other.

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