INTERPLAN

APA
American Planning Association
International Division
Making Great Communities Happen

Latin American Special Report

A Publication of the International Division of the American Planning Association

American Planning Association

International Division

Creating Great Communities for All

Interplan Team

Managing Editor Jing Zhang

Editors Lynn M Abdouni, Andy Cross, Jay Skardis, Michelle Tullo, Antonella Salmerón

APA International Division
205 N Michigan Ave
Suite 1200
Chicago, IL 60601
Phone: 2096042406

international.planning.org

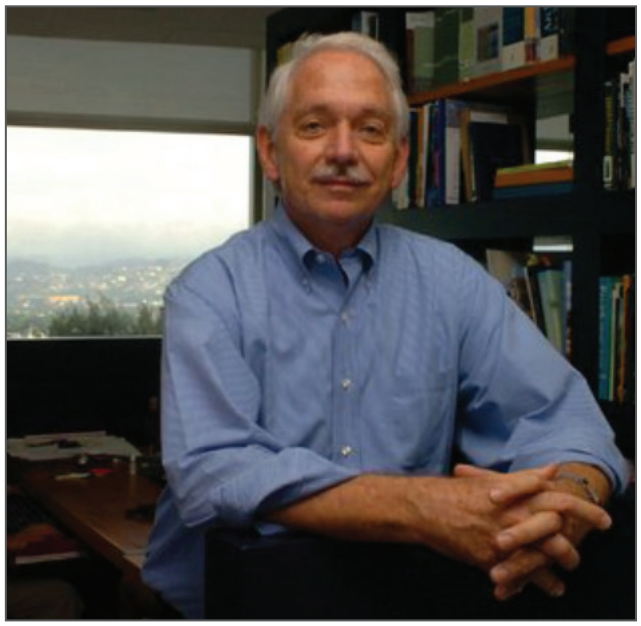
Cover photo: San Salvador, El Salvador. By Manuel Miranda on Pixabay

INTERPLAN
A PUBLICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION
OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

Latin American Special Report

Alberto Harth Deneke

El Salvador



InterPlan: What is unique about El Salvador in terms of planning?

Alberto: I would say there are two important elements to highlight. First, the unique institutional structure for the San Salvador Metropolitan Area, which has 14 cities comprising a contiguous urban area of 610 square kilometers or 235 square miles, similar to the Chicago area (234 sq mi). About 30 years ago, the region delegated its planning functions to a unified San Salvador Metropolitan Planning Agency (OPAMSS for its acronym in Spanish) and a governing council (COAMSS). To my knowledge, this model is still quite innovative in Latin America. Secondly, the National Territorial Development Law (LODT) and the National Council for Territorial Development (CNODT) were established in 2011. These two events shaped the core framework for urban planning in El Salvador.

Our consulting firm, CIVITAS, has had the privilege to help the OPAMSS in developing policies on urban development, public spaces, environmental protection, as well as motorized and non-motorized transportation network development. We also prepared the Plan El Ángel for an area of 1,800 hectares and the San Marcos 2030 Municipal Development Plan, which was awarded the Planning Excellence Award for Social Equity by the American Planning

Alberto Harth Deneke founded CIVITAS, a planning and architecture firm in 2001. He holds a B.Arch. from USC, an MCP and a Ph.D.in Urban Studies from MIT. The firm's portfolio includes the first LEED Gold building in El Salvador, comprehensive development plans and ordinances, urban designs (San Salvador Placemaking Strategy), private and public master plans, landscape projects (Balboa National Park), policy papers (public space, mobility, environment, and urban development) as well as studies (Housing Sector Profile for UN-Habitat).

At the World Bank (1980-98) he covered housing, urban development, transport, water supply and sanitation sectors. His last position was Infrastructure Division Chief, West Africa Region. In the 1970s he was General Manager of the Salvadoran Housing Foundation and in the 1960s consultant for the development plans for the San Salvador Metropolitan Area and Ciudad Guayana.

Association International Division in 2020. At the national level, CIVITAS expertise was crucial to prepare planning instruments, technical regulations, and a toolbox to serve as a planning guide for cities around the country.

InterPlan: What are the major planning challenges?

Alberto: I would venture to say that there are two challenges. The most critical one is the constraint of municipal resources. Unlike the U.S, we do not have property taxes or generalized special assessment taxes. Besides user fees for municipal services such as street lighting and cleaning, our cities rely on the central government's funding, equivalent to 10% of the national budget. A large percentage of the funds go to operating expenditures, severely constraining municipal investment on infrastructures and implementation capacity. The second challenge is staffing constraints, especially for the smaller cities. I suspect many small cities in other Latin American countries face the same problem.

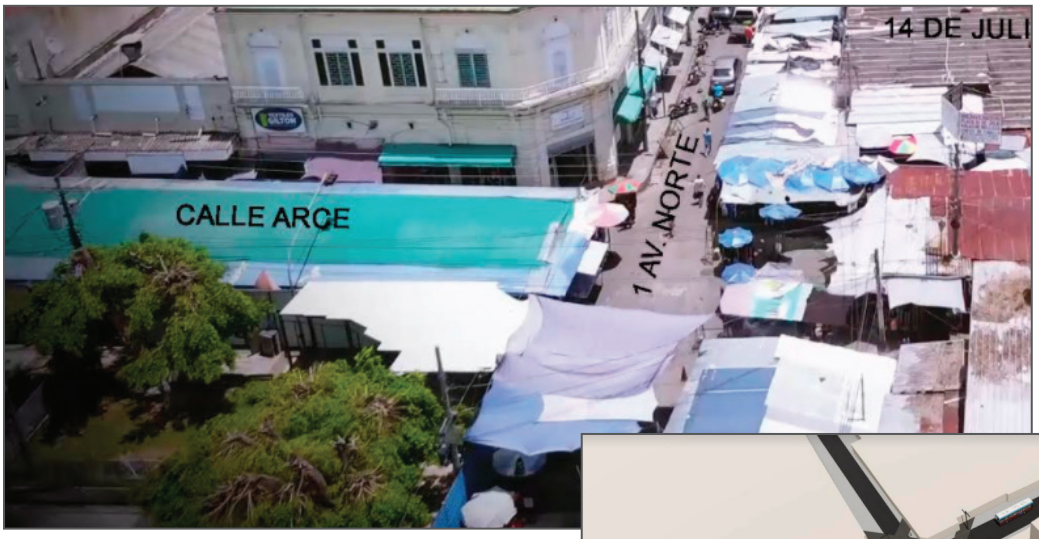
InterPlan: Could you talk about a planning project that you are most proud of?

Alberto: Considering my fifty years of professional practice, it's not an easy question, perhaps I would single out the first and last projects in my career. The first was the San Salvador Metropolitan Plan in 1969. Shortly after receiving a planning degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a friend and colleague, Alberto Zúniga, offered me a job in a consulting team. We developed the METROPLAN '80, which had a decades-long impact on the area. One of the consultants on the team was Kevin Lynch, who had been my professor. He wrote a section on San Salvador's regional landscape form, now published in "City Sense and City Design".

The most recent project is the one that I was involved in last year, the "Placemaking Strategy for the San Salvador Central City Corridor". The San Salvador Historic Center Corridor comprises 88 city blocks that have been deteriorating for decades. The central objective was to promote social inclusion and encourage citizen coexistence (convivencia ciudadana, in Spanish) through meaningful citizen participation. Fifty stakeholders vetted fifteen urban design proposals. The projects include four important but deteriorated public spaces and their accesses, two streets that are the epitome of deterioration, and three art projects (large format murals; street and ephemeral art, and an urban museum).

The most innovative part, I believe, was the creation of seven thematic routes that require minimal investments. The routes identify the city's and the nation's historical events, culture, fine arts, architecture, religious traditions, gastronomy, and rooftop views.(The Architectural Heritage Route is illustrated in the plan) This project received the APA International Division's Urban Design Award in 2020.

Placemaking Strategy for the San Salvador Central City Corridor



Aerial view of Plaza 14 Julio and Pasaje Montalvo

Proposal for Plaza 14 Julio and Pasaje Montalvo

InterPlan: What are the planning tools that you find most effective in the context of El Salvador?

Alberto: The San Salvador Metropolitan Planning Agency, which regulates land use through clear guidelines established in the "Esquema Director" and its urban development policy. Secondly, the National Territorial Development Law and its toolkit for preparing planning regulations according to population size.

InterPlan: Do you think in any way that the U.S. planners help with urban development in El Salvador? What is your advice to them?

Alberto: Good question. I would think of a couple of ways. Be aware of the bilateral (USAID) and multilateral agencies (such as European Union, InterAmerican Development Bank, and World Bank Group) that finance urban projects in the area. Many recent projects have been done through consulting firms like WSP or NGOs like Glasswing International. As mentioned earlier, the focus of these more recent projects has been the promotion of equity, social inclusion, and citizen coexistence. Secondly, I would recommend U.S. planners contacting consulting firms like CIVITAS, and looking for opportunities on LinkedIn, APA's website, and international agencies mentioned earlier. ■ *Edited by Antonella Salmerón*

Carlos Ferrufino

El Salvador

Carlos is partner at CIVITAS. He is an architect, planner, and holds a PhD in social sciences. He is a professor at Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas" in El Salvador. Carlos does research in Urban and Regional Planning, housing, planning history and land policies in El Salvador and Central America.

InterPlan: How do you envision the practice of planning in Central America?

Carlos: Urban planning practice in Central America has a history of more than 50 years since developing the first urban plans in Guatemala, San Salvador, and San José. This history connects to recurring disasters: earthquakes and hurricanes, and to critical issues such as housing access, urban expansion, provision of services, and infrastructure.

Historically, urban planning practice concentrated in capital cities. However, since the '90s, it emerged in secondary cities like León, San Pedro Sula, and Puerto Cortés. In general, the municipal governments have gained prominence in regulating land uses and managing urban infrastructure and services, sometimes in dispute with the more traditional planning apparatuses in national/central government.

In the last two decades, the region adopted many innovative approaches to manage urban development, including the establishment of the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador and its Planning Office (OPAMSS); the implementation of the Guatemala metropolitan transportation system (Transmetro); the municipal infrastructure financing system in Honduras; and the management of historical heritage and land banks in León (Nicaragua).

Traditionally, architecture and engineering professionals conducted these processes. It is only until recently that local universities created graduate programs related to city planning and urban studies.

In this context, international agencies like multilateral financial organizations InterAmerican Development Bank, World Bank) and global corporations have had a major influence on regional planning practices. These organizations have contributed to transfer planning models and ideas from the United States, Germany, Spain, Chile, Colombia, and Brazil.

At the same time, new strategies also came from the local level, such as cooperation among urban development professionals in Guatemala and the partnership between planners and social groups in Costa Rica.

Many Central American countries, like the rest of Latin America, face major challenges, including precarious settlements, inequality, risk management, adaptation for climate change, insecurity, and lack of public spaces.

■ *Edited by Antonella Salmerón*

Valeria Leyva Reyes

Mexico

Valeria Leyva Reyes is an Architect and Urban Planner. She holds a Master's degree in Urban Management and Development and a specialisation in Sustainability and Climate Change at the Institute For Housing And Urban Development Studies (IHS) in Rotterdam. She had her own architecture firm in Mexico and afterward worked for different NGOs in India and the Netherlands. Nowadays, she is an entrepreneur with a company called Leyva Reyes – Social & Urban Design based in Rotterdam and focuses on projects related to water from a gender perspective and in inclusive urban design. Valeria is passionate about sustainability, social inclusiveness, and human-scale development.

InterPlan: What is special about Mexico culture? What is human-scale development in Mexico, relating to land use and urban design?

Rocio: I guess what makes Mexican culture special is its people. From the very beginning they have shown signs of very strong unity and resilience. To explain a bit more, Mexico City was built on an island in what was then Lake Texcoco. The city was the capital of the Aztec Empire. This means that the entire city (13.5 km2) was floating and connected to the mainland by bridges. Nowadays, this may sound very easy to construct. But in 1325, however, this represented a great advance in engineering and water management.

The unfavorable terrain was never considered as something negative; they used this to their advantage and designed the 'chinampa system' (also known as 'floating gardens). The city's plans showed that the city was divided into four areas. Each area of them was very well connected to the mainland and each has a marketplace.

The connection between the early foundation of Mexico City and the present shows two important aspects. The first is the profound connection between water and the people. Mexican people are resilient. They have been building since ancient times. In the beginning, they adapted and learned how to 'build with the water' to avoid flooding, and now, in some areas, Mexican society is learning how to deal with the total opposite- water scarcity.

The second aspect is the importance Mexicans give to the public space. This can be seen when they created a marketplace in each city zone. We, as planners, know that a sense of community and unity had been embedded there. Public space plays an important role when it comes to creating inclusive cities. When you bring people together to a common space you allow connections to happen. When we integrate different aspects of life into place-making, we create a human-scale development.

InterPlan: How can foreign planners be helpful in Mexico?

Rocio: Foreign planners can bring new visions and perspectives to challenge current modes of planning. They can also help to discover certain aspects of urbanization that would otherwise go unnoticed. For example, when you arrive in a new context you are capable of distinguishing the details of what you observe; you often can notice problems or issues that can no longer be seen by the people that live there their whole life. This creates opportunities for improvement and I think we should use this strategy wisely.

When Mexican planners and non-Mexican planners work together, they can create a unified vision from different perspectives, placing them in a better position to tackle current issues with more innovative approaches for a better outcome.

InterPlan: In general, what are issues of equity challenging Mexico? What do you think are effective strategies to improve inequities?

Rocio: Unfortunately, social inequality is quite visible in Mexico and it is caused by the huge income gap. The traditional model has made it almost impossible to climb up the social ladder in the established social classes and has serious impacts on the quality of life. This inequality can limit access to education, drinking water, adequate housing, healthcare services, or it can create restricted job opportunities, segregation, and marginalization. Although inequality was developed within a large context of social economics, we as urban planners can contribute to the reduction of this gap and help to improve the current situation. From my personal point of view, we need to do projects to promote inclusive cities.

Inclusive cities are those that value all the people living in them, including their residents' values and needs. They

Participatory planning workshop. Photo by Beccan Davila Urbanismo

assure that all the residents have a voice in governance and planning. Inclusive cities assure dignified livelihoods, adequate and affordable housing, and access to basic services such as water and sanitation.

Multiple factors need to be considered in effective strategies. The most effective strategies that come to my mind are some adopted by the World Bank. These strategies include:

- *Implement of multi-sector solutions: This implies a holistic approach that combines spatial, social, and economic interventions.*
- *Combine preventive and upgrading approaches.*
- *Strengthen capacity at local level: ensure that local institutions/governments have the necessary tools, resources, and the power to make decisions towards an inclusive city*
- *Involve the citizens in the planning processes: listen to their needs and improve community participation.*

InterPlan: Do you have any advice for foreigner planners who are interested in working in Mexico or other Latin American countries, or ways for students interested in working in the region to prepare?

Rocio: I think the best advice I can give is that before applying for a job in Latin America, planners have the responsibility to get to know the area's context, living conditions and learn what is really needed.

Our work must be focused on the population's needs. To achieve that goal, it is important to go into the field to speak and interact with the people there. At the same time, I recommend looking into government institutions to get to know their plans and/or projects. To me, planners should act as intermediaries between the community and the government- they need to make sure that both sides are heard and then translate the input into an inclusive design.

Another piece of advice for both students and professionals is to have some knowledge of Spanish if you want to make an impact and achieve results with your project. In Mexico, not everybody can speak English. If you want to overcome the language barriers, I highly recommend taking some language lessons in advance.

InterPlan: You mentioned that planners have the responsibility to learn what an area really needs. What kind of skills or qualities are really needed from foreign planners?

Rocio: For me, there are four basic skills that foreign planners must have, regardless of the project context or duration. I like to organize them into a sequence, because from my point of view, one leads to the next one and so on. For instance, the first one could be considered as the most important in order to move on to the next ones. These skills are:

- *Cultural sensibility: acknowledge, understand, and accept that there are different lifestyles*
- *Be open-minded, flexible, and respectful. Respecting customs, beliefs, and cultural values are essential to adapt to multicultural environments and to have a good work atmosphere.*
- *Learn customs and values: If the urban planner is not just designing the project but also living in the project context for a period of time, it is essential to adapt to the new surroundings. This can be*

I think the best advice I can give is that before applying for a job in Latin America, planners have the responsibility to get to know the area's context, living conditions and what is really needed.

Participatory planning workshop. Photo by Beccan Davila Urbanismo

done through incorporating local customs and values into their daily life. This will increase the learning curve and would make it possible to offer more human and tangible designs.

- *Strong communication: The above three steps will help a planner to know how to relate and communicate with the people living there, local urban planners, the local government, and others.*

InterPlan: What can U.S. planners can learn from the urbanization and/or community engagement practices in Mexico?

Rocio: To give a bit of a background, it is important to know that socioeconomic inequality in Mexico City is reflected in the spatial structure: what makes a neighborhood wealthy is the quality of its public services. In the last few years, in order to achieve spatial justice, the government developed many programs focusing on infrastructure, neighborhood image, and public space. Some projects even adopted more progressive approaches so that neighborhood residents decide what to do, how to do it, and how it will operate. This practice requires original plans flexibility to change. Without flexibility, it is very hard for a plan to actually get executed.

A way to avoid implementation delays and to make sure the population needs are being addressed is to engage with the local community from the beginning. Design with them, instead of trying to impose a prefabricated model. A participatory process helps to build strong relationships with the residents. This can be done by knowing the context: the neighborhood, the community leaders, and the willingness of the people to solve the urban issues. ■ *Edited by Michelle Tullo*

Adrián Puentes

Argentina

Experienced Architect with a demonstrated history of working on urban strategies. Adrián is skilled in Participatory Urban Planning, Sustainable Design, Water Management, and Design Research. Strong arts and design professional with a Master of Arts in Architecture from Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten (NL). Adrian is currently Partner at Beccan Davila Urbanismo, working internationally to design and develop participatory urban-landscape strategies, applying the "Building with Nature" approach and with special interest for water in urban and rural space and historical heritage.

InterPlan: What is special about Argentina in community engagement in urban design?

Adrián: Argentina is a large country of varied landscape and cultures located at the southern end of the world. Historically, urban design in city centers has followed the European model driven by government initiatives deployed in the nineteenth century right after the country took independence from Spain. This can be found in the capital city of Buenos Aires, which was designed under the Parisian neoclassical style. In general, the Government involvement has been strong in the urbanization process and in establishing an adequate education system for planners and architects. Yet, it is only recently that planners have begun to understand the importance of the local perspective and the territorial approach to incorporate new concepts such as resilience in urban planning.

Having lived and studied in the Netherlands, I had the chance to include the philosophy of working with nature-based solutions (NbS) in my projects, and it is my mission to bring this knowledge to Latin America and my motherland Argentina.

Through academia, workshops, seminars, and projects we have started to engage with the local community in urban design projects and integrate the objectives of the multicultural society of Argentina.

> In LATAM, the term - development - can still be understood as having very wide highways and city skylines full of high-rise buildings. Perhaps new generations can bring a radical shift to this vision. With the help and collaboration of local and international institutions we might be able to see cities which are more green, inclusive, and peaceful.

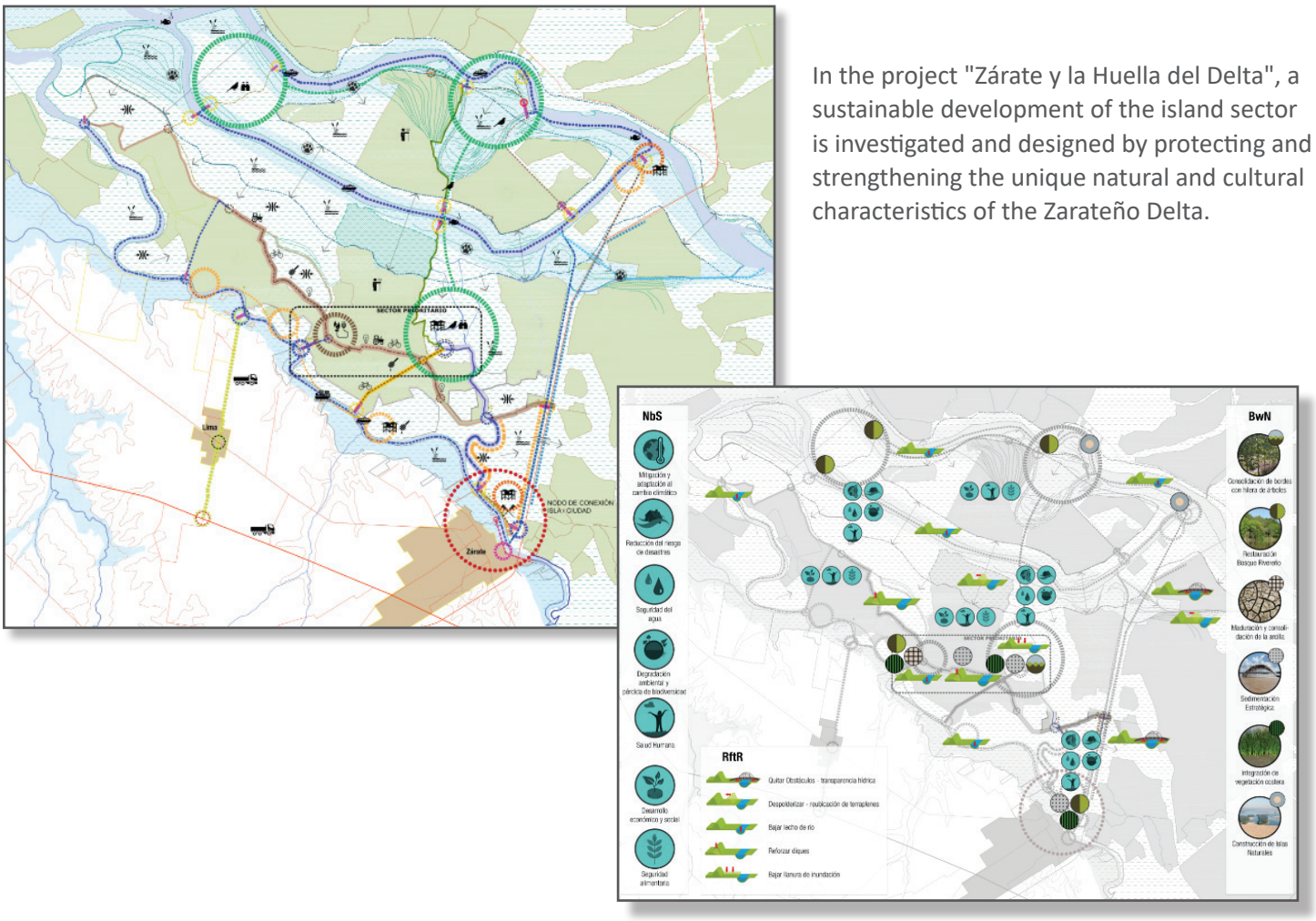
InterPlan: Any examples (stories) of participatory urban-landscape strategies that you used?

Adrián: We have carried out and led dozens of participatory processes in LATAM and I always highlight the importance of respect when approaching different communities and interest groups at all levels. I have seen colleagues for whom interacting with the community has been a real challenge, either due to a lack of understanding of the local culture or simply due to their own limitations in reaching out with empathy. Over the years, we've built a collection of amazing stories about how, by being thoughtful and inclusive, one can gain key information from stakeholders that we might not have imagined could be so knowledgeable and helpful.

I remember a workshop in Lima, Peru, where a local fisherman was the only person capable of pointing out the specific location of certain sediments and explaining in great detail the dynamics of the currents produced by that soil. In the Paraná delta in Argentina, to give another example, an archeology enthusiast pointed out several places of great importance to local history that none of the team members have heard of before. I would say that, in addition to generating ideas, strategies and designs, these processes are very useful for connecting neighborhoods and creating a sense of ownership for local communities.

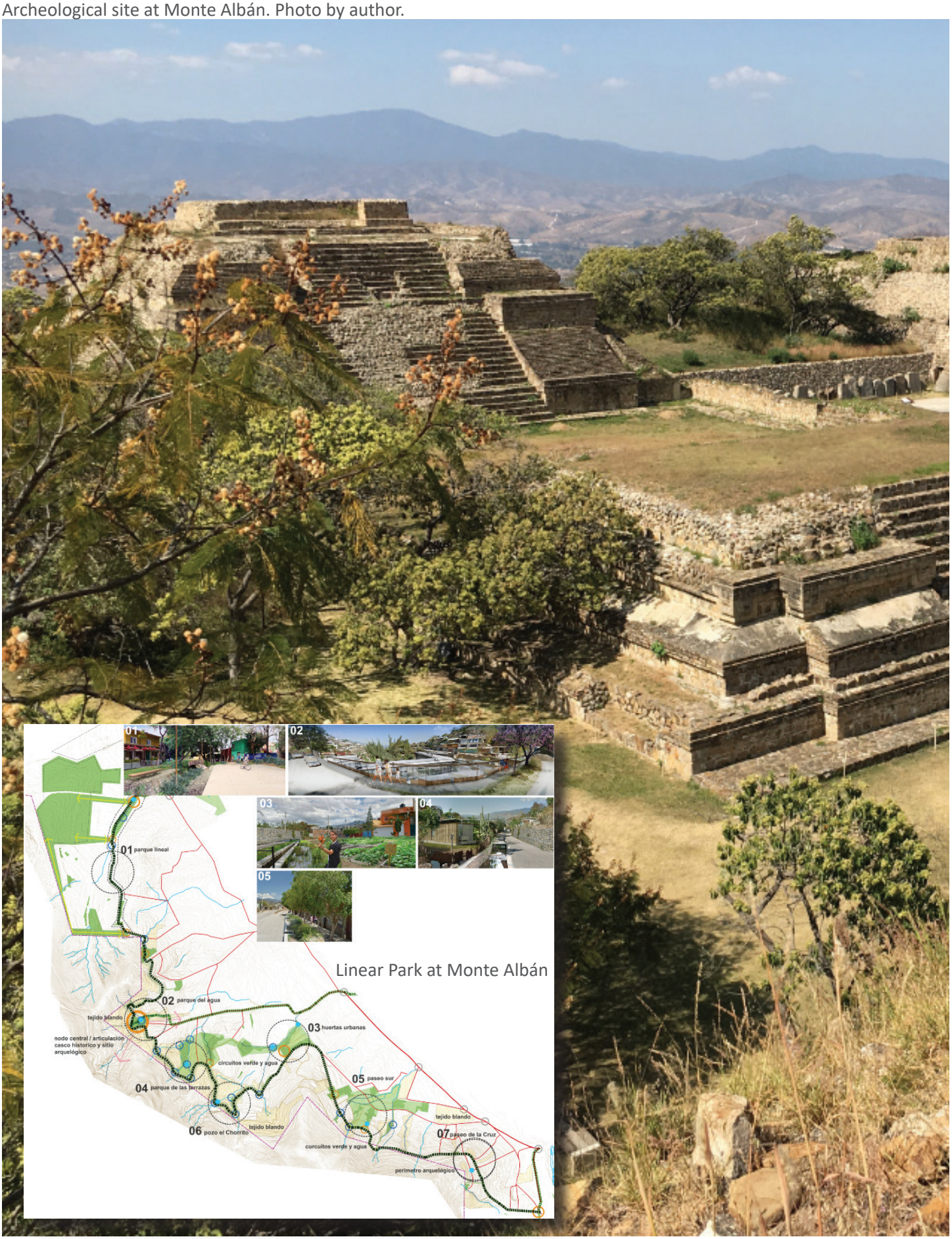
InterPlan: If there is any, what do you think are common misunderstandings about urban development and design in Latin American countries (or Argentina in specific)?

Adrián: Great question. The first and most common misunderstanding is probably to define the very meaning of development. In LATAM this term is still understood as building very wide highways and city skylines full of high-rise buildings. Perhaps new generations can bring a radical shift to this vision. With the help and collaboration of local and international institutions we might be able to see cities which are greener, more inclusive, and peaceful. ■ *Edited by Jay Skardis*



In the project "Zárate y la Huella del Delta", a sustainable development of the island sector is investigated and designed by protecting and strengthening the unique natural and cultural characteristics of the Zarateño Delta.

Archeological site at Monte Albán. Photo by author.



Antonella Salmerón

Ecuador

Antonella Salmerón is a Program Assistant at the Appalachian Regional Commission. Originally born in Ecuador, she attended Universidad de las Américas in Quito. After acquiring a B.A degree in Political Science and International Relations and working in public policy research, Antonella moved to the US and is now pursuing an MPS in Sustainable Urban Planning at GWU.

InterPlan: Could you tell us about your background relating to Latin America?

Antonella: Academically, the topic of Inter-Governmental policy-making is recurrent in the projects I take on. I have extensively researched and written about subnational governments in Latin America. For instance, my undergraduate paper was about implementation gaps on housing policy between the national government and decentralized governments in Ecuador. I am particularly interested in informal human settlements across the region, and I plan to write my thesis about this issue.

InterPlan: What U.S. planners should know about the politics and international relations in Latin American countries?

Antonella: I notice that when speaking about urban planning in Latin American countries, it is often the case that there is no proper contextualization of the politics and international relations policies that shape Latin American cities. For example, I think there's a lot to be said about how geopolitics impact fiscal policy and how political clientelism perpetuates cycles of irregular practices and corruption. U.S. planners and U.S.-based urban planning programs should be more informed about the history

Most of the things I have said so far have some negative connotation; I would like to say this does not entirely reflect my view of the region. I think there are development opportunities and endless creativity all over Latin America.

and institutional frameworks in which Latin American economics and politics work. Additionally, further emphasis on environmental and racial justice issues in the region is necessary in future urban research.

InterPlan: I learned from my previous interviews that Latin America is a large concept, which is more diversified than it appears, and it would be difficult to categorize Latin America in one way or the other. Do you agree? Why? In other words, could you be more specific, at the same time in a general tone, on how one region is politically different from the other?

Antonella: I agree! **Latin America's characterization should be viewed from more than a geographic standpoint; it needs to reflect the common historical context without erasing unique national features.** I subscribe to the following description and division of the region:

Latin America comprises 21 countries, at least four colonial languages, and over 500 indigenous/native tongues and idioms.

Mexico in North America.- Mexico's history and geographic proximity to the U.S. make it a crucial point in the region. It creates obvious challenges for the administration of land.

Central America.- The available transportation between Mexico and Central America adds a layer of complexity to this area's migrational trends. It also adds a myriad of opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation.

Nonetheless, international relations among these countries are currently undergoing re-evaluation after all the violence taking place across borders.

South America.- The 'South cone' is a common generalization. Still, there is more to it than a group of countries disconnected from the rest of the continent (road-wise) since the Panamerican highway stops in Panama and resumes in Colombia.

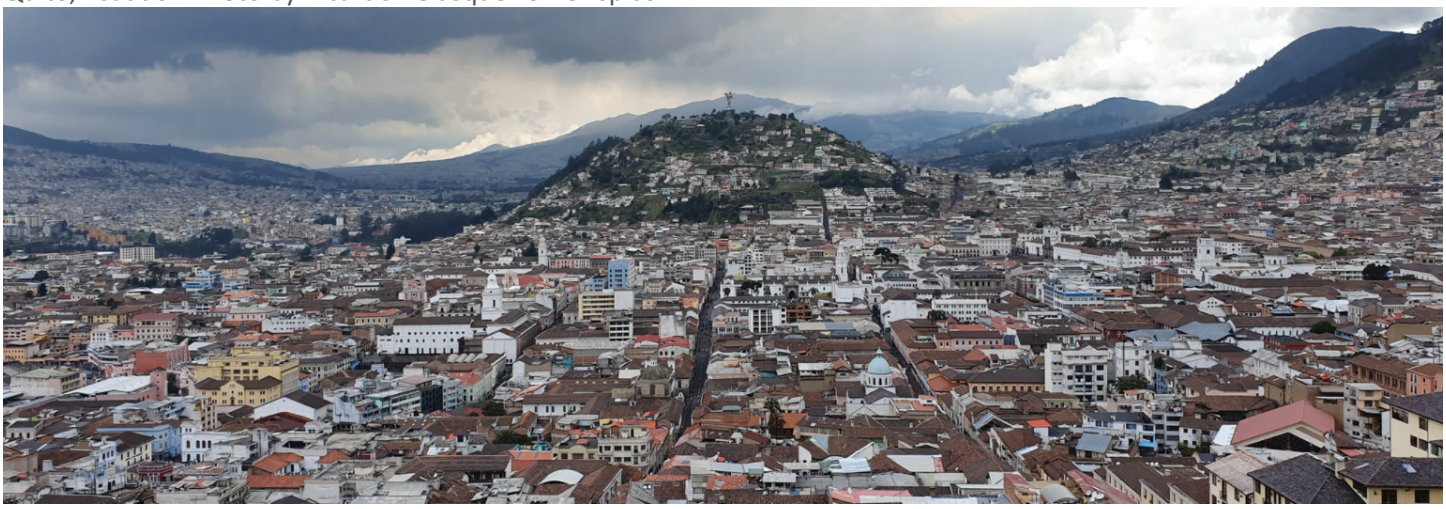
Andean countries.- These countries constitute an independent subcategory. Water dependence on glaciers, topography challenges for transportation, and indigenous heritage are a couple of things that come to mind when talking about cities in Andean countries.

Brazil.- As part of the BRICS economic group, as the Amazon forest gatekeeper, as host country to the favelas, etc., I consider Brazil a category of its own.

Venezuela.- given the current political environment, international cooperation or implementation of development programs is virtually impossible. Infrastructure challenges await solutions while a government transition occurs.

The Guyanas.- these three territories are often ignored or dismissed when talking about Latin America. However, development challenges are very much the same as those faced by the rest of the region.

Quito, Ecuador. Photo by Ricardo Velasquez on Unsplash



The Caribbean island nations.- With 13 countries of different levels of sovereignty, the proximity of these island nations to the Gulf of Mexico and the North American mainland underscores this area's geopolitical value. At the forefront of climate change adaptation, mitigation, and soon-to-be-managed retreats, the Caribbean is a complex region of its own.

InterPlan: Could you please list 5 things that U.S planners should know about the political environment/geopolitics/ clientelism in Latin American countries?

Antonella:

1. Governability limitations are a challenge for urban planning. Cities often develop rapidly, and local governments have no capacity to match the full and sustained delivery of basic services.

2. Taxation or fiscal codes are often unclear and limit local government's capability to generate revenues for themselves. Generally speaking, some countries in the region rank lower in legal security/doing business indexes; this affects urban development.

3. Racial and gender inequality are disproportionately pronounced in low-income areas located on the city outskirts. Economic centers are often too far from communities that need these opportunities the most. Transportation and land use techniques need to bridge this spatial gap. This also applies to environmental degradation, which underlines the urgent need for waste management reform.

4. Political or criminal clientelism feeds into lack or regularization of land or public services provision in previously/transitioning/currently informal areas. There can be a partisan culture around election cycles that limits community organizations, or criminal groups that take over areas in which the State lacks control.

5. Geopolitically speaking, migration trends in the region follow multiple processes involving countries' geographic location and access to resources. The type of relationship a country has with international organizations determines available funding opportunities for urban development projects.

InterPlan: In specific, what do you like best in Ecuador in terms of its culture, city, way of life, etc.? What can planners in the U.S. learn from Ecuador?

AAntonella: What I like best about Ecuador is its diversity. Without having a massive geographical extension like the U.S., you can go from a city on the coast (say Manta) to the capital (Quito) in the highlands in a matter of 5 hours. Each region in my country is a paradise in its own right, and our indigenous heritage adds such richness to the mix. Secondary cities are increasingly growing in economic importance, as they are the central nodes connecting the main cities to our vast rural areas. We have a surprisingly good highway system. I think this transportation feature accelerated urban growth. Moving people and goods has never been so easy and cheap (partially due to our gas subsidies).

In terms of urban planning practice, I think my country faces the challenge of informality and the lack of government reach to inspect the ongoing building of makeshift houses or commercial spaces. However, I firmly believe that U.S. planners can learn about our innovative ways to build earthquake-resilient infrastructure with eco-friendly materials. This is a trend that needs to transcend its extended experimental phase.

InterPlan: How do you think about democracy vs authorican in the context of planning? What's your thought about the increasing influence of China to Latin American countries?

Antonella: I do believe it is easier to bypass the public feedback part of planning when there is a government with authority and reach to implement projects despite public disagreement. I wouldn't be fully able to comment on whether this applies to China or not, but it certainly raises questions about the legitimacy of several Chinese public policies. Ecuador's relationship with the Chinese government is not exempt from criticism. As per Chinese diplomacy of investment on emblematic infrastructure projects, its influence has reached unprecedented prominence levels. This is true for Africa, Central Asia, and some parts of Latin America. Uzbekistan's case is especially interesting (as a former soviet enclave).

In the case of my country, it was through China-Ecuador bilateral loans that gigantic hydropower plants, highways, oil refineries, etc. took place. This money has revitalized many areas, but there have also been issues related to the legality of contracts and other corruption allegations.

During the Correa administration, there was a radical change in foreign policy. Ecuador's relationship with the U.S. and the International Monetary Fund reached strong impasses that impacted available funding. With the latest change of administration, our dependence on Chinese loans has decreased. I have to admit that this is relieving, as there were a lot of terms of contracts and requirements that were never released to the public. This doesn't mean that our relationship with the U.S currently isn't or hasn't been questionable in the past either. I think all of this occurs via colonialist culture and expansionist geopolitics. ■ *Edited by Jay Skardis*

(We demand a fair price for our property)
This was a storefront in San Vicente, Ecuador. It used to lay right next to a small port and a highly transited area. After the 2016 earthquake, this property was deemed unsafe by the Ministry of Public Works, but the buyout prices were considered unfair to owners.

(Don't be an ass, throw the trash here)
Waste management challenges and curbside pickup irregularity have resulted in some creative ways in which local people keep their neighborhoods clean. San Clemente, Ecuador.

Antonella Salmerón

Latin America's characterization should be viewed from more than a geographic standpoint; it needs to reflect the common historical context without erasing unique national features.

Photo by David Torres on Unsplash

Juan Felipe Pinilla

Colombia

Juan Felipe is a lawyer from the Universidad de los Andes with a master's degree in Territorial and Urban Policy from the Carlos III University of Madrid. His 15 years of professional experience has been focused on urban law issues. He has been a consultant in structuring land management instruments for urban projects for various agencies and public and private entities, such as: the University of the Andes, the National University of Colombia, the World Bank, the District Department of Planning of Bogotá, the Urban Renewal Company of Bogotá, Metrovivienda, the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory among others. He is currently a researcher and consultant on land policy, property, and urban law issues. He has published several articles in specialized publications on urban property issues, land management instruments and transformation of the Colombian urban system. He is professor of the Specialization in Urban Law, Property and Soil Policies of the Faculty of Law of the Universidad de los Andes.

InterPlan: In the big picture, what are the major opportunities for urban development in Bogotá? and what are the major challenges?

Juan: During the 20th century, Colombia had one of the highest urbanization rates of any Latin American country. There has been a rapid urbanization process, the proportion of the population living in urban areas increased from 31% to nearly 60% from 1938 to 1973. Since the late 1930s, massive rural-urban migration was the main cause of urban growth. The transition caused the increase of the urban population from less than one-third to almost two-thirds in 1982.

Between 1951 and 1973, this expansion mainly benefited the four largest cities: Barranquilla, Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín, all of which were already large metropolitan areas of more than 500,000 people in 1951. Fast forward to 1973, their population nearly quintupled, increasing from 5% of the national population in 1951 to 25% in 1973.

This urban growth found its way through informal channels. More than 50% of the current urban areas of Bogotá were developed informally, which means there is a great lack of urban infrastructure: roads, parks, and social infrastructure. Because of that, one of the

main challenges during the last decades has been the upgrading and integration of informal settlements to the formal urban fabric.

Recently, Bogotá is facing a great governance challenge. It is a vast metropolitan area of around 10 million inhabitants. However, there are 10 independent cities and each of them has its own land-use regulations and land taxation schemes. The challenge is to coordinate government efforts to effectively address urban issues such as pollution, environmental protection, transportation, and housing.

It is encouraging that, in the past few years, there have been great political actions to overcome the barrier of lack of coordinated governance. Recently, the nation adopted a constitutional amendment that allows the creation of regional governance. Currently, specific laws in this regard are under discussion in the national congress.

InterPlan: What is special about law and planning in Colombia?

Juan: Colombia has had a long tradition of implementing land value capture mechanisms. Betterment contributions or special assessments are tools frequently used by cities in Colombia to finance their public infrastructure since 1921.

There is yet another tool that is also widely used by local administrations in Colombia to finance the public infrastructure, but which has not been very well analyzed in the academic literature. That tool is known as developer obligations (exactions). Said exactions are charges that landowners and developers must pay either in land or money as part of the procedure for obtaining approval for a specific development. Such obligations have a long tradition in city extension processes and they have been legally recognized since 1989. After many judicial reviews of their implementation in different cities, court rulings have clarified the nature of these obligations as urban charges (not taxes) to landowners in order to compensate local governments for the increased land value generated by government authorization to develop the land.

Regimes of negotiated developer obligations (NDO) and non-negotiated developer obligations (N-NDO) currently coexist in many cities of Colombia. Recently several Colombian cities have expanded the regulation of N-NDO to any building project for increased densities, as a result of the transformation of the existing urban space. Due to the long tradition of land value capture and progressive legal frameworks for urban management, Colombia is recognized in the Latin American context for having one of the most complete and comprehensive legal systems to deal with the planning and management challenges for local authorities.

InterPlan: How urban planners are trained in schools in Colombia?

Juan: The great evolution of urban planning in Colombia has to do with the enactment of law 388 in 1997 (Territorial Development Act). This law established a mandatory planning system for every municipality in Colombia. Since the enactment of this law, there has been a rapid development of training programs for city planners in the country. The academic offer ranges from undergraduate to postgraduate programs focusing on a variety of related topics such as planning, urban management, urban design, transportation, and others. The advancement in training is clear evidence of the evolution of the profession and a recognition of the importance of urban planning in the local development agenda. ■ *Edited by Antonella Salmerón*

This urban growth found its way through informal channels. More than 50% of the current urban areas of Bogotá were developed informally, which means there is a great lack of urban infrastructure: roads, parks, and social infrastructure.

Evan Todtz

Colombia | Dominican Republic

Evan Todtz, AICP is employed as an urban planner and designer at Ayers Saint Gross Architects in Baltimore, Maryland. His work engages clients in higher education and cultural arts both domestically and abroad. His other planning research interests include social equity and neighborhood planning, infrastructure and public space design, and Latin American urbanism and architecture. Evan holds a Bachelor of Science in Community and Regional Planning and Spanish-Hispanic Studies from Iowa State University and received several design awards, research grants, and a Graduate Fellowship from the University of Texas at Austin during the pursuit of his Master of Science in Community and Regional Planning and Urban Design.

Tensions arise around hegemonic notions of nationalism and cultural conservatism, and the sense of ownership of public spaces varies and often conflicts between different social classes.

InterPlan: What is your impression of urban development in Colombia and in other Latin American countries?

Evan: Persistent intrusion by the United States has impacted the socio-cultural character of many Latin American countries. For example, in Colombia and the Dominican Republic, physical interventions by the U.S. have influenced policy stances to urban development strategies and goals.

Many Latin American nations have only begun to expand the regulatory authority of their municipal governments and planning agencies in recent decades. Because of that, development has taken place under the influence of private developers, or in an informal dynamic way

Escalators, San Javier, Medellin, Colombia. Photo by author.

without regulatory oversight.

Contemporary planning has focused on re-integrating fragmented communities by reframing 20th-century urban development strategies, such as incorporating sustainable and multimodal transportation strategies and moving away from automobile-oriented development.

While planning for traditionally marginalized populations has gained some attention in many nations, such as the social urbanism movement of Colombia, this practice has not been embraced universally across Latin America.

InterPlan: What did you learn about public space in Colombia and the Dominican Republic from your past research?

Evan: My academic and professional work in Latin America has largely focused on self-built, informal communities at the edges of major urban areas. These communities were significantly impacted by the historic absence of state regulations, recent national policies, and the lack of community engagement and investment.

My experience in the Dominican Republic was a one-year planning practice as part of a broad, multi-year community planning effort under the direction of Dr. Bjorn Sletto at the University of Texas at Austin. We

Viaduct, San Javier, Medellin, Colombia. Photo by author.

worked in Los Platanitos, an informally settled, self-built community on the northern periphery of the Santo Domingo metropolitan area.

My planning experience in Colombia was a series of public space investigations. They included a typological study for the International Division of the APA and a mobility and quasi-ethnographic design study for my Master's thesis research at the University of Texas in Austin. I worked in the self-built neighborhood of Las Independencias for these studies, which is in San Javier, one of Medellin's most historically violent sectors.

Key takeaways are:

Given that Santo Domingo is one of the earliest colonial settlements in the Americas, the public space culture of the Dominican Republic reflects a well-established set of historic cultural practices and traditions. As such, the public plaza has become a prominent spatial typology and social scene for interaction. Conversely, Colombia's historical trends of violence diminished the influence and cultural viability of public spaces for many decades. More recently, however, Colombia re-envisioned public space as a means of advancing more democratic spaces of civic life and cohesive national identity.

Parque Berrío, Medellin, Colombia. Photo by author.

More progressive planning practices harnessed this perspective and created world-renowned public spaces that coordinated with other social and urban policy reforms. They have also increased effectiveness of local governance to enhance mobility, recreation, and other quality of life factors.

While both nations today enjoy a robust public space culture, challenges remain. Tensions arise around hegemonic notions of nationalism and cultural conservatism, and the sense of ownership of public spaces varies and often conflicts between different social classes.

It will be interesting to see how these nations use public space to reflect and support their policies in the future as their populations become increasingly ethnically diverse as well as economically stratified. ■ *Edited by Andy Cross*

Aline Faiwichow Estefam

Brazil

Aline (Ali) is a multilingual urban planner community strategist. She worked for a decade with diverse, multicultural populations in Latin America, Spain, African, and the US, including several years working in the municipality of Sao Paulo, Brazil. She currently conducts and strategizes community engagement for large scale urban, resiliency, and transportation projects in New York City at Melissa Johnson Associates; is a Fellow and Director of the NYC Chapter of the Center for Conscious Design, where she investigates the intersections between design, equity, and culture; and is a fellow at Lemman Foundation, where she was recognized among the Brazilian talents for social development. Ali holds a Master in Urban Planning from Columbia University, a professional degree in Architecture and Urbanism from the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil), and is a Specialist in City Management and Revitalization from the University of Castilla La Mancha (Spain).

InterPlan: What is special about community engagement in Latin American countries, compared to in the U.S.?

Ali: Community engagement in the U.S., specifically in New York City, is more embedded in a process administered by the public sector. It is common for projects to go through a community board approval process, and to include a variety of engagement activities. Community leaders are often challenged by community members who feel that they are underrepresented or that the leadership does not present the voice of the community. That is something that we don't usually have in Latin America.

In many Latin American countries, community participation comes from the bottom and is not so integrated into the public

Groups usually have to invent their own space of participation to be able to have a voice and influence in decisions.

system. It usually comes from informal community groups that have to break system barriers in order to participate. Referring to Faranak Miraftab's articles, groups usually have to invent their own space of participation to be able to have a voice and influence in decisions. That said, community participation tends to be accompanied by protests or by social movements. This usually brings a community together, creating unity and coherence and generating a very solid sense of community.

After working in community participation in the public sector of São Paulo, Brazil, for almost a decade, I have to say there were very few times when I saw communities' voices integrated into the government decisions. I remember one time: some land-use changes were being proposed near a landmark, so a community group organized themselves to protest against the changes. Only after their protest did the public sector decide to include community concerns into their decisions.

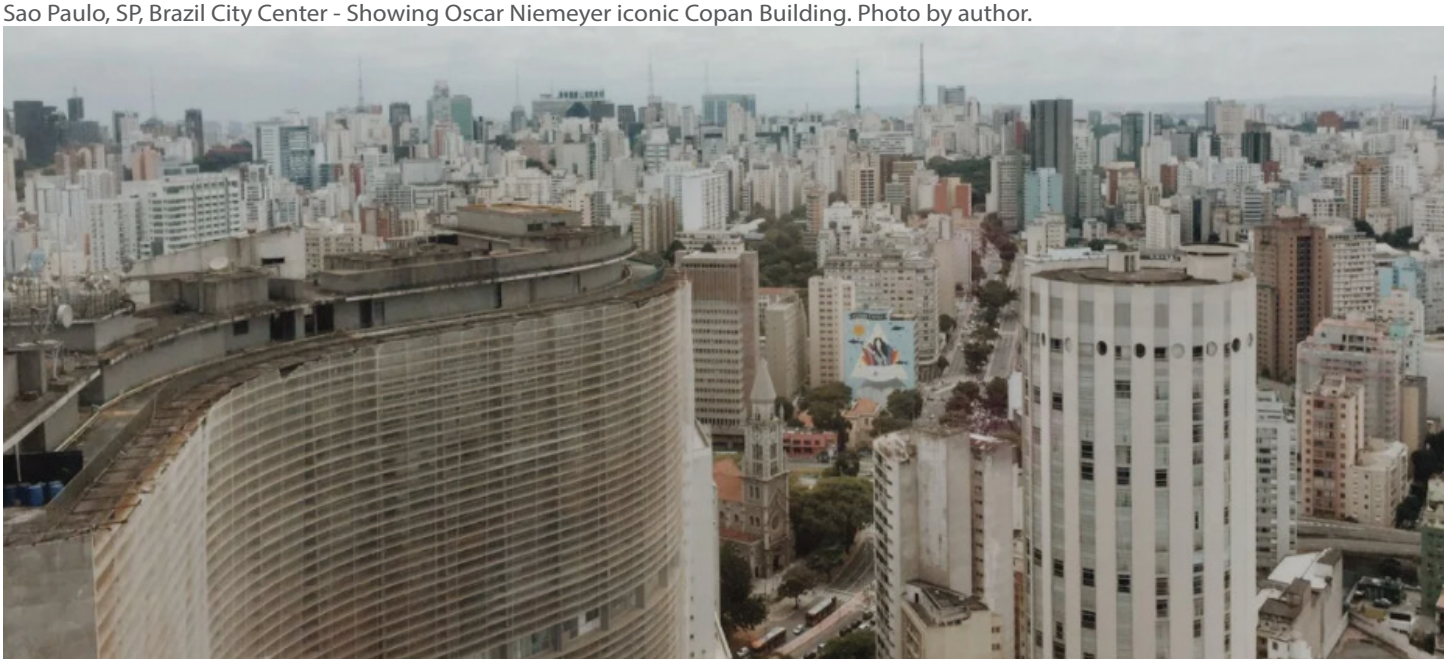
I was participating in some groups to discuss how to improve community engagement in the Brazilian public system. I know it is something that the government is willing to do. They have been trying to implement participatory planning and are doing that in three low-income areas of São Paulo. However, participatory planning is something unprecedented in the country, and I believe it still has a long way to maturity while also adapting to the country's socio-economic realities.

InterPlan: What is your advice to students in planning schools who are interested in working in Latin American countries?

Ali: My main advice would be to be aware of socio-economic and cultural aspects. There are a lot of good things that the U.S. does that can be implemented in Latin American countries, but most of these practices have to be adapted to fit the society and the culture. For example, planners need to be familiar with a country's main issues. Depending on the country, the main issues could be informal settlements, government structure, or lack of basic services, etc. In terms of culture, it is important to understand the symbols and values of a society (which the built environment can imprint through landmarks), and how these symbols and values influence urban planning approaches.

I would say that it would be good to study the history of the Latin American country in which the planner wants to work. The history of colonization (and the model used by the colonizer) influenced the shape of the lots and streets. In other areas, modern architecture in Brazil shaped buildings and public spaces, influencing the ways of everyday life.

Sao Paulo, SP, Brazil City Center - Showing Oscar Niemeyer iconic Copan Building. Photo by author.



Interview with Street Vendor in Santiago de Los Caballeros - Dominican Republic to gather inputs for a urban project in the area. Photo by author.

InterPlan: Do you think planners or urban designers in the U.S. have any common misunderstanding about Latin American culture?

Ali: I believe there is a tendency of generalizing Latin American culture into only one. However, it is a region with more than 20 countries. Each country has its own culture, values, and norms. Another common misunderstanding is about language: people tend to think that all the countries in Latin America speak Spanish, which is not true. Although Spanish is spoken in most of the countries, there are countries that speak Portuguese, French, English or Dutch.

InterPlan: What are your favorite strategies in communicating with the public in Latin American countries for urban planning projects?

Ali: I believe tactical urbanism is my favorite way of engaging with communities in Latin America, and it is something that is widely used and accepted by many communities. Sometimes simple things like painting a mural or creating chalkboard art in the street can be so powerful in creating a sense of community and involving the public in urban planning projects!

InterPlan: How do you adjust to the U.S. from a Brazilian planner background?

Ali: I would say that when I first came to the U.S. it was really challenging for me to understand the segregation between urban planning, urban policy, and urban design. In Brazil (and in some other countries of Latin America) to become an urban planner, you have to go through the Architecture and Urban Planning school, and you study those three aspects of urbanism together. So as an architect and urbanist, I was trained not only in zoning, but also in policy development and urban design with architecture skills. It has been, and continues to be, a challenge for me to think of one aspect of urban planning without thinking about the other.

■ *Edited by* Michelle Tullo

One of the cultural and commercial hubs of Sao Paulo, SP, the Paulista Avenue. Photo by author.

Unknown areas of Sao Paulo, SP, Brazil - Sitio do Periquito - Remnant of 19th Century rammed earth construction. Photo by author.

Thiago Gomes

Brazil

Architect and urban planner at Universidade Mackenzie. Bachelor in Public Policy Management at University of São Paulo and Master in Territory Management and Planning at Federal University of ABC. Thiago founded Polo Planning in 2015, an urban and regional planning company focused on infrastructure, urban mobility and smart cities. He has been a consultant in this area for over 10 years. He worked in the development of strategic planning and decision-making activities, based on institutional redesign and economic modeling for public and private clients. Worked on the elaboration and rationalization of transport networks. Elaboration of functional plans for medium and high capacity systems (BRT, VLT and Metro). Worked on the structuring of Concessions and PPPs in the road sector, public lighting and real estate. He currently coordinates several urban and regional planning processes such as Urban Mobility Plans, Master Plans, among others.

InterPlan: What are the trends in planning and urbanism in Brazil? What are the main challenges?

Thiago: Brazil is a very large country with many regional differences. That is why there are many opportunities and challenges in urban planning. However, social inequality and access to the city are key issues that must be addressed by urban planners.

The biggest challenge in Brazil is how to solve the polarization of income distribution. A certified Brazilian database (IBGE) indicates that a half of the population in Brazil is living under minimum wage, which is the monthly minimum income established by national legislation. Another database (PNAD) indicates that the money owned by the wealthiest segment (approximately 10%

To face these inequalities, we must create projects that enable more equal access to the city's services and opportunities for study and work.

of the total population) is enough to triple the minimum wage.

There are other challenges, especially in large cities. Among them are minority rights and public safety, including the rights of women, human rights, and inclusive policies for the LGBT community. We have also interwoven issues that need to be addressed by planners and policymakers, such as environmental and sanitation problems, the lack of affordable housing, and inadequate access to public transportation, to schools, hospitals, cultural facilities and public service.

Nowadays, with the COVID-19 pandemic, inequalities have become more evident and poorer populations and minorities have been very exposed to the disease. The poverty in several regions is linked to precarious urban infrastructure in these places.

To face these inequalities, we must create projects that enable more equal access to the city's services and opportunities for study and work. This is how urban planning can provide intelligent responses to social inequalities in Brazil.

InterPlan: Is there anything special about urban planning or urban culture in Brazil?

Thiago: It is important to highlight the heterogeneity of Brazilian cities. Of the 5,570 municipalities in Brazil, only 1% have populations over 500,000. So, cities like São Paulo (22 million) and Rio de Janeiro (12 million) are outliers. Only 5% have a population between 100,000 and 500,000 and 94% of municipalities in Brazil have less than 100,000 residents. For a city planner, it is important to keep in mind that we are more likely to face small municipalities with local problems.

The largest urban centers have unique characteristics: São Paulo is a great city marked by multiculturalism, Rio de Janeiro has many natural beauties, Brasília is the capital focused on the administration of the country with many business travelers from all over the country, and Manaus is a big city in the Amazon jungle. While they are all different in culture, climate, and topography, each is marked by great inequality and immense dependence on the car and motorcycle as a primary mode of transportation.

InterPlan: What can American planners learn from urban development in Brazil?

Thiago: Brazil has made progress and become a reference in urban development policies over the past 30 years. Federal policies provide guidance for the development of integrated urban planning processes, with emphasis on social participation, equality, and inclusiveness. The policies also outline urban strategies in a very clear and practical way, with a realistic reading of the challenges faced by Brazilian cities.

Large cities often carry out experimental urban plans

City Of Carapicuiba. Photo by Luiz Gonzaga.

An important lesson, therefore, is what we call "subversive" strategies seeking to achieve a central objective: reduce inequalities and expand access to the city for the poorest and minority populations.

and urban projects. The experiences can be inspiring. For instance, a plan financed infrastructure projects and housing in poorer downtown areas through contribution from a more affluent population. The practice is directly related to municipal budget planning and local laws that support urban planning initiatives. An important lesson, therefore, is what we call "subversive" strategies seeking to achieve a central objective: reduce inequalities and expand access to the city for the poorest and minority populations.

Brazilian authors such as Ermínia Maricato and Flávio Villaça are important for understanding urban policies and development in Brazilian cities, as well as best practices in local urban planning. On the other hand, authors like Jaime Lerner stand out for their practical activity and implementation of several urban projects in Brazil and abroad.

InterPlan: What is your advice for American planners interested in working in Brazil or Latin America in general? How can they contribute?

Thiago: I do not know much about urban planning in other Latin American countries. For Brazil, I believe that American planners could help a lot with their expertise in the development of urban indicators and metrics. It will help us to develop comprehensive socio-economic diagnoses, such as territorial and historical evaluation and the evaluation of plans and projects. The insufficiency of integrated databases and technical capacity to process and manage the data cause a lot of difficulties in developing solid public policies.

It is not uncommon for plans to be reformulated after only a few years because of a lack of mechanisms to monitor and evaluate their effectiveness. It is difficult to make decisions for the future without evaluating the policies and plans that we have today.

InterPlan: How is the typical life of an urban planner in São Paulo?

Thiago: The life of an urban planner in São Paulo is very similar to any urban planner in another great city the world. For professionals who are passionate about what they do, planning projects occupy many hours of the day. Before the pandemic, São Paulo was a city that offered many cultural opportunities, with several exhibitions, many gastronomy options and varied leisure. I believe that after the pandemic is under control, we will have such a dynamic city again. São Paulo also has important universities and research centers, such as the University of São Paulo or Federal University of ABC. São Paulo is an important hub in South America. It is very easy to create social networks and opportunities for interesting projects with people from different parts of the world. In a nutshell, life in São Paulo is very busy but it offers ample opportunities for work, study and entertainment.

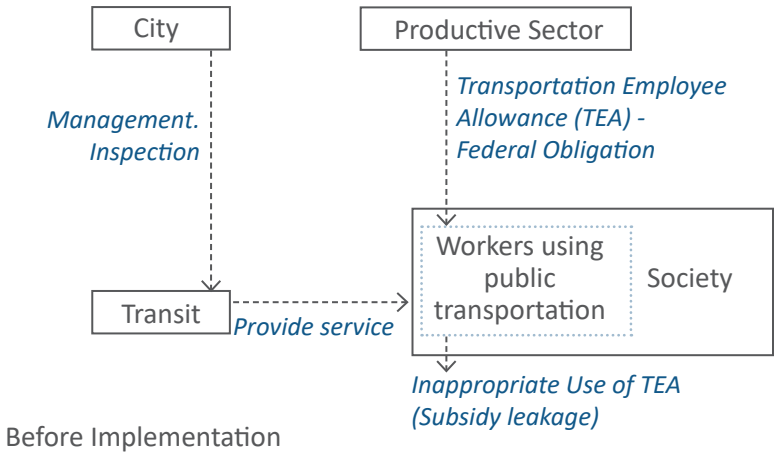
■ *Edited by Andy Cross*

Transit, Sao Paulo, SP, Brazil. Photo by author.

The two transit photos in São Paulo were taken a week before the start of the new transport system in November 2019. It provides the residents of Vargem Grande Paulista with free transport, something unprecedented in the city and in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo. **It is important to pay attention to the two phrases on the side of the bus: "TARIFA ZERO" and "TRANSPORTE PARA TODOS". Translating the first into English "Free Fare" and the second "Transport for all".**

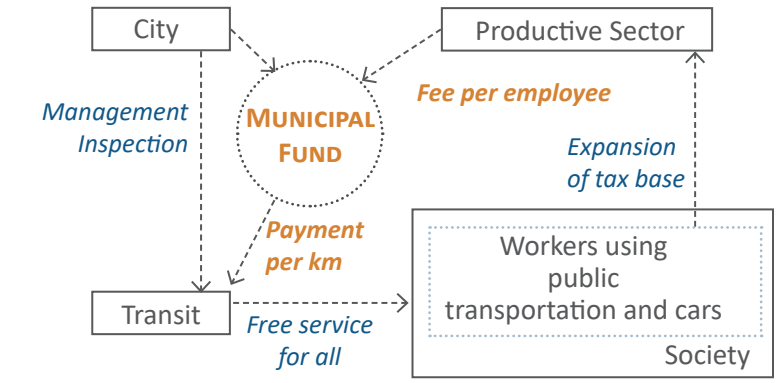
In Brazil, the high cost of transit fare is a barrier for many people to access the service and opportunities offered by the city. Free public transport can ensure that everyone has access to transportation and the city, reducing socio-spatial inequality and creating other opportunities, such as getting work elsewhere in the city or even in neighboring cities.

- Paulo Silva, associate consultant at Polo Planejamento



Before Implementation

After Implementation



Transit, Sao Paulo, SP, Brazil. Photo by author.

We Are the World
We Are the Children

international.planning.org

American Planning Association
International Division

Creating Great Communities for All