

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

CITIES OF THE SOUTH: SUSTAINABLE FOR WHOM ?

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URBAN SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF INSTITUTIONAL VACUUMS ?

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The evolutionary patterns of metropolitan organizations in the context of underdevelopment constitute in most cases neat examples of lack of sustainability, both social and environmental. Each of those (intersectoral) notions is related, respectively, with the prospective maintenance and/or enhancement of the conditions of social, family and individual life, and of the natural and man-made organizations which make out the scenarios and material bodies of regional and urban settings. Furthermore, the two mentioned notions –social and environmental- are mutually related in diverse patterns, under continuous feed-back conditions, which have to do essentially with the style and level of development, and the relative positions of the implicated social sectors. While, as regards lower standing ones, the existing correlations between social and environmental conditions implicating them are systematically of a negative character (i.e., lower social sectors become associated with environmental scenarios, both local and, to a degree, global, in which the level of degradation tends to maximize itself). In the case of affluent sectors, the situation becomes skewed in a twofold manner in relation with the physical dimension, taking place locally within ‘appropriate’ spatial settings, while at the same time contributing, through their behavior and consumption patterns, to the maximization of global unsustainability.

In the current situation of fast and all-embracing globalization to which also that type of metropolises of lower development levels are subject –either actively or, in most cases, passively, and in less or more socially inclusive terms in one and the other of those conditions, respectively-, their age-old processes of *differentiation and fragmentation* –of both a social, economic, environmental and institutional character- deepen themselves and become transcendental. That is: the conditions of their *external articulation* become progressively more significant in terms of their repercussions in relation with the *internal patterns of organization*.

Among other elements, but contributing very substantially, the conditions of their institutional set-up and the related patterns of operation become crucial as vehicles of the overall determination of the types of planning and control –and the selective lack of them- to which these metropolises become subject. At its time, each of those structural and operative terms of organization will result in singular settings, in which the conditions of urban efficacy, efficiency and equity will adopt particular and significant relative configurations.

Furthermore, one of the singular and transcendental responsibilities of the governmental sector in the different scales, branches and modes in which it operates in each institutional situation, the one referring to the redistribution of total income, essentially in terms of the absolute and relative conditions of access to services and facilities of the different social groups, is progressively brought into a growing crisis situation within the prevalent scenario of metropolitan inarticulation.

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In terms of the determination of the relative responsibilities of the public and private sectors, of the degree of incidence of each of the levels of the former, and of their aggregate consequences, *privatization*, *deregulation* and, particularly, *decentralization*, are normally considered as the key features associated with global efficacy and efficiency, as well as the promotion of both social participation and democratization, and, thus, of social –and eventually overall-, sustainability.

In fact, those traits should be considered, in and for themselves, functional towards further social and environmental disintegration, and, consequently, of the present and prospective lack of both mentioned types of sustainability.

Instead, the ***simultaneous implementation*** of small / local thematically integrated public administrative units, taking care of day-to-day management, and concentrated upon the implementation stage of measures benefitting their restricted areas of operation, in which face to face interaction between citizens and public officers becomes feasible, and as a consequence, prone to community participation, **and metropolitan-scale governments**, responsible of medium-term, thematically and jurisdictionally integrative of the planning operations developed by higher and lower standing public (predominantly sectoral) areas of administration, should be promoted as means of achieving both genuine social participation **and** the capacity to master the huge problems characterizing the evolution of metropolitan agglomerations in terms of global efficacy, efficiency and equity, and thus conducive to their social and environmental sustainability.

The Buenos Aires Metropolitan Agglomerate, one of the largest mega-cities worldwide, makes out a significant example to consider with respect to the above mentioned types of conditions, including its recent political and administrative experiences, and the related planning policies and strategies.

With around 12 million inhabitants –the result of a 400 year-long period of development in very much ‘globalized’ conditions in the diverse patterns which became specific during each of the different periods of that long time span-, its recent evolution, involving the two most recent intercensus periods -1970 / 1991- is particularly worth mentioning.

In demographic terms, although the aggregate increase of population was of slightly over two and a half million people, or about 30% of the (initial)1970 value, the relative level of implication of the then existing twenty local jurisdictions was widely differing: while the ‘central city’ –Buenos Aires itself, the Federal District-, despite its privileged position in terms of the relative conditions of access to employment, facilities and equipments was stable at three million inhabitants –an unaltered number since 1947-, some of the outer lying most peripheral municipalities grew at rates as high as 160%, mostly through residential areas of individual housing which, although physically continuous, are mostly of low density levels. See Table I.

**Table I. Population dynamics. Unfulfilled Basic Needs.
Buenos Aires Metropolitan Agglomerate. 1970. 1991.**

Jurisdiction	Population (1970) Rounded to 1000 (Inhabitants)	Population (1991) Rounded to 1000 (Inhabitants)	Rate of population growth (1970/1991) (%)	Rate of Unfulfilled Basic Needs (1991) (%)
Capital Federal	2.972.000	2.961.000	- 0,4	Some very restricted areas: up to 26,3
Avellaneda	338.000	339.000	0,3	13,3
Lanús	450.000	465.000	3,3	14,2
Lomas de Zamora	411.000	572.000	39,2	19,8
La Matanza	659.000	1.120.000	69,9	21,4
Tres de Febrero	313.000	349.000	11,5	10,3
General San Martín	361.000	404.000	11,9	14,9
Vicente López	285.000	289.000	1,4	6,1
Quilmes	355.000	509.000	43,4	21,2
Almirante Brown	245.000	443.000	80,8	20,7
Esteban Echeverría	111.000	274.000	146,8	26,4
Morón	486.000	641.000	31,9	12
General Sarmiento	315.000	650.000	106,3	26,3
San Isidro	250.000	299.000	19,6	9,8
Berazategui	128.000	245.000	91,4	21,7
Florencio Varela	98.000	255.000	160,2	32
Merlo	189.000	386.000	104,2	25,9
Moreno	114.000	287.000	151,7	28,5
San Fernando	120.000	143.000	19,2	22,3
Tigre	152.000	255.000	67,8	25,9
Buenos Aires Urban Agglomerate	8.352.000	10.886.000	30,3	--

Sources: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses / Ministry of Economics and Public Works and Services.
Author's elaboration.

But, most important, in terms of *Quality of Life* (as measured by a multidimensional index of Unfulfilled Basic Needs, which takes into consideration physical traits of the housing unit, the conditions of its sanitary equipment, school-attendance by children, and the potential capacity of the home head to sustain family life), **a set of five of the seven municipalities which concentrated the poorest levels of behavior** -as more than 20, and up to 32%, of their population bases were implicated in that condition-, **were part of the group of seven in which demographic growth became maximized. As a matter of fact, the mentioned set of five municipalities explained by themselves slightly more than 40 % of total metropolitan growth during the considered period, even though they participated in only 10% of its initial population threshold.** See Table I.

To make things even more complicated in terms of social stratification, each one of the implicated municipal jurisdictions is strongly diverse in itself. Among them, the most stringent case is that of Buenos Aires City, within which, as signalled, also exist restricted social and territorial sectors heavily affected by the index of Unfulfilled Basic Needs.

The situation regarding the levels of access by different social groups to sanitation services, due to its structural high significance –in terms of at least sanitary, functional, environmental and symbolic contents-, merits particular comments. See Table II.

**Table II. Access to water and sanitation.
Buenos Aires Metropolitan Agglomerate. 1991**

Jurisdiction	Population with access to piped water. 1991. (%)	Population with access to centralized sewage. 1991. (%)
Buenos Aires City	98,7	98,6
Avellaneda	95	41,2
Lanús	94,1	39,3
Lomas de Zamora	68,2	18,9
La Matanza	44,2	36,3
Tres de Febrero	76,7	60,3
General San Martín	70,1	36,2
Vicente López	97,4	91,2
Quilmes	89,7	38,3
Almirante Brown	27	15,6
Esteban Echeverría	7,6	4,7
Morón	26,8	21,3
General Sarmiento	7,3	5,9
San Isidro	83,4	35,5
Berazategui	87,5	31,3
Florencio Varela	10,9	12,7
Merlo	9,3	9,9
Moreno	13	11,5
San Fernando	60,7	24,8
Tigre	29	7
TOTAL	64,1	47,5

Source: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses.
Author's elaboration.

As can be seen, the relative situation regarding both types of services is structural, rather than incidental: in five out of six of the worse implicated communities in relation with population coverage of each of both services, the situation is coincidental. Furthermore, and most important, the five implicated communities –E.Echeverría, G.Sarmiento, F.Varela, Merlo and Moreno-, **are the same than previously signalled as those in which the relative intensity of demographic dynamics and the level of implication of population with Unfilled Basic Needs also coincide.** See Tables I and II.

As regards *employment*, the situation has been undergoing a substantive transformation in terms of:

- i. its sectoral composition. Considering the whole metropolitan agglomerate, employment in the tertiary sector has seen its level of participation grow from 57% in 1980, to 70% in 1990, centered mostly on parasitic components having to do with the exercise of informal commercial activities;
- ii. a very significant increase of efficiency of employment in the secondary sector, one of the consequences of globalization, related with modernization and international competition, and of the elements to explain the restraints of its labor demand;
- iii. the growth undergone by female job demand, encompassing the change of both the family structure, and the employment crisis affecting male family heads;
- iv. the increasingly precarious labor relations and the diminishing and / or vanishing of historical social benefits;
- v. a very negative evolution in relation with the level of un-and-underemployment : during 1980. At that time, the values of the corresponding rates was of 2,3 and 4,8 % respectively; while during 1990, immediately after a couple of hyperinflationary periods, the mentioned indices jumped to 8,6 and 8,4%. Thus, besides the increasing levels of both indices, the worsening of the relative participation of unemployment took hold.

After having reached a 20,2% rate of unemployment during 1995, the present value stays at around the 15% level.

However, it has to be pointed out that at the mentioned year, there existed significant differences between the levels of affectation of the Central District and that of its conurbated area, as the former stood at 14,3 , and the latter, at 22,6%.

Regarding the *structure of the gross-product* of the diverse subsectors of the metropolitan economy, rather little can be said, given the relative lack of disaggregated information. However, it should be noted that:

- i. during 1989, Buenos Aires City, with a participation level of about 10% relative to the national population, contributed with 24% of its Gross Product;
- ii. its secondary sector amounted to almost 15, and the tertiary one, to 33% of the national economy;
- iii. the tertiary sector is the subject of a continuous expansion. During 1980, it reached a relative level of participation of 81%, while the equivalent figures relative to the conurbated area was of 34, and that of the national economy, 58%;
- iv. as a consequence, the internal profile of the economy of the two considered subareas –the City of Buenos Aires and its conurbated area- were the following:

	Secondary (%)	Tertiary (%)
Buenos Aires City	19	81
Rest of the Metropolitan Area	65	34

In relation with *income distribution*, both the prevailing structure and its patterns of evolution are far from encouraging. See Table III.

**Table III. Personal income distribution.
Buenos Aires Metropolitan Agglomerate. 1984. 1989.**

Income decile	1984 (%)	1984 / 1989 variation (%)	1989
1	2,64	- 31	1,82
2	3,91	- 25,3	2,92
3	4,71	- 32,5	3,18
4	5,99	- 31,2	4,12
5	7,37	- 29,7	5,18
6	8,64	- 25,9	6,40
7	10,56	- 23,7	8,06
8	12,66	- 16,2	10,61
9	16,52	- 2,7	16,08
10	27	54,2	41,63
TOTAL	100	--	100

Source: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses.
Author's elaboration

As can be seen, even though the levels of participation of each of the income deciles were far apart already during 1984 –a point in time practically coinciding with the end of the most recent military regime-, its evolutionary pattern has been witness of the deepening of the prevailing differences: in the five years between 1984 and 1989, at which a couple of hyperinflationary incidents took place, only the highest standing income bracket –Nr.10- has seen its level of participation grow in over 50%, at the expense of each of the other, although affecting relatively less (its adjacent) brackets 9

and 8, in the first case by almost nothing –a mere 3%-, and in the other by close to half the average rate of diminution. As from then, the general picture has been going on following the same type of standards, reaching at the present time a relative value of 24 between the two extreme income brackets (in 1984, slightly over 10; in 1989, close to 23).

In terms of the *spatial and functional structures* which characterize the Agglomerate, a number of traits merit particular comment, as follows:

- i. although, when considered globally, the metropolis was still during 1991 a rather compact urban entity in most of its component areas, with an average relation of slightly over 2.800 inhabitants to the Sq.Km., the sectoral density differentials were quite significant. Thus, for example, the most densely populated jurisdiction of the metropolis, that of the central city, with close to 15.000 inh/Sq.Km., compared with one of the most outer-lying metropolitan municipalities, where the equivalent rate was of 155, or one hundred times smaller;
- ii. in this respect, the current evolution is traversing a neatly particular stage, consisting in the acceleration of the historically installed sprawl effect, although following now, besides the traditional patterns of a rather continuous expansion in all directions, newly emerging traits, which are characteristic, however, of the dynamics of most of other metropolitan agglomerates, particularly those of the USA, like being *physically discontinuous, of extremely low density, accesible almost only through the private automobile, and deeply socially segregative*. It is the physical spread out and spatial and social isolation of the upper and middle-upper social strata of younger families. It has been found that in an area of around 200 sq.Km. located well outside the metropolitan continuum, and involving all of its corners, –physically equivalent to that of the central district, housing three million people and a huge proportion of the overall systems of production, consumption and administration- live only about 150.000 inhabitants, or twenty times less;
- iii. the metropolitan continuum, which by now involves around 4.000 sq.Km., responds in its physical and functional set up to a radio-concentric pattern, established progressively through the addition of hierarchical roads, railroads and subway lines to the original regional organization, conceived to gain access to all corners of the country, and still further out, from what still is the most important national port located at the Buenos Aires downtown area. This unit used to be, and probably still is, the largest single economic complex in existence in the nation;
- iv. the metropolitan passenger railroad network amounts to 765 Km and 259 stations. The services that it rendered, which came up to close to 478.000.000 journeys/yr during 1998, representing about a 6 % of the total of metropolitan trips by all transportation means, are well below the equivalent 555.000.000 figure of 1958, which surely represented, besides, much higher levels of per capita and modal split participations. Thus, there is an immense railroad idle capacity –at least as regards fixed infrastructure-, being replaced by road transportation, and particularly, by journeys utilizing the private automobile;
- v. the signalled facts are closely related with a number of traits of a diverse character, like, for example, the very high level of concentration of tertiary employment in the central sector of the metropolitan organization. Even though there has been taking place progressively a process of decentralization of the location of production, and, more emphatically, of consumption activities, associated with the progressive sprawling process of the location of the metropolitan residential sectors, the core of the tertiary employment of the metropolitan area, which, as has been signalled, makes out the prevalent sector of its economy, is located within the boundaries of the central city, and

- particularly of its downtown area, and gives rise to around one million daily commuter journeys from the rest of the agglomeration;
- vi. at the same time, the level of regional accesibility through infrastructural resources aimed at the private automobile grew very significantly both in quali and quantitative terms during the last decade, providing much more fluid access to the outer lying and, partially, interstitial sectors of the metropolis. During a period in which the level of car ownership rose from 13 persons / automobile in 1970 to 4,4 p / a in 1995, the modal split of transportation means changed equivalently from 15,4 in the first mentioned year to 36,6% during 1997 in the level of participation of the private car. The mentioned facts have at its time emphasized the levels of environmental perturbation, essentially the quality of air and the street noise levels, both of which are well above the internationally recommended thresholds;
 - vii. from a socio–spatial point of view, and in a very gross characterization, a *‘three-tier’ process of segregation of population characterized the mentioned period, and is still underway*: as the Buenos Aires core jurisdiction is retaining mostly medium-level social sectors, the lower ones are migrating to the ‘second and third peripheral belts’, and the higher standing still further out, setting in motion a renewed quali and quantitative process of urban sprawl of the conurbation;
 - viii. the resulting environmental scenario is one in which both global inefficiency and inequity tend to maximize themselves. A few examples of a diverse character confirm this assertion: a. fully inappropriate areas for urbanization –including even river overflow beds-, get *‘urbanized without urban services’*, and their inabitants exposed to limitless strains and risks; b. local acquifers, even though historically plentiful, are under depletion, and polluted, affecting directly (1991) the close to 36% of the total metropolitan population which is not connected neither to water nor sewage mains;

The signalled traits take place within a very particular type of *political, institutional and administrative framework*, which is characteristic, however, of most metropolitan settings worldwide-, consisting in:

- i. a quasi fully inarticulate set of units pertaining the three governmental levels –federal, provincial and municipal-, and their respective executive and legislative branches;
- ii. the said inarticulation affects each of them both in themselves as well as in their mutual potential relations;
- iii. the full array of implicated governments have privatized all sorts of infrastructural services, thus increasing the number of implicated organizations in charge of essential urban duties, as well as setting growing significance and strains to the relations between the public and private sectors;
- iv. the incumbencies, duties and jurisdictions of the diverse governmental organizations are very fuzzily determined;
- v. the set of governmental organizations operate in mutually competitive terms,
- vi. through mostly only short-term programming,
- vii. of a sectoral character,
- viii. and have undergone progressive waves of (mostly) economically un-compensated decentralization processes.

To make things worse, the process of administrative decentralization has reached its climax through the policy of subdividing metropolitan municipal jurisdictions, of which several have already taken place, and more are expected, with the appearance of only hints regarding the setup of even some sort of sectoral coordination units to articulate the growing number of institutional nodes.

The metropolitan administrative sector has experienced during the '80s, a period in which, for the first time in many years, the three most important governmental sectors involved in the area –the Federal and Buenos Aires Province executive branches, and the then Municipality of the City of Buenos Aires–, were governed by members of one single political party, the setup of a (merely) 'consulting and coordinating' organization (*AMBA / Area Metropolitana de Buenos Aires – Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area*). Even within those restricted terms, the said entity was put into (functional) crisis shortly after its inception through two locally well experienced mechanisms: on one side, the 'passive strategy', implemented through the mere lack of establishing functional links between the existing political and public administration entities and the newly created one, and thus sterilizing any positive potential outcome; on the other, the 'active strategy', consisting in the creation of a second institutional body (*CONAMBA – Comisión Nacional para el Area Metropolitana de Buenos Aires – National Commission for the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area*) with about the same responsibilities of the formerly mentioned one, thus blurring any remaining identity that there might have existed, and, again, sterilizing both of them.

To this day, the two still exist, but only in nominal terms, while other of a similar character keep sprawling up. Among them, the most recent to appear consists of an '*Agreement between Legislatures*', involving those of the Buenos Aires City and the Buenos Aires Province, aimed at coordinating some of their respective planning and management operations.

At the same time, and quite paradoxically, all along the last decades, there has been in existence a restricted number of interjurisdictional governmental organizations with the commitment to deal with extremely significant sectoral issues affecting the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Agglomerate. They include, among few others, organizations aimed at the duties of collecting, processing and give final disposition to solid wastes, and the concomitant creation of urban land; the supply of fresh food items; and the management of very problematic river basins.

One can safely postulate that all of them have performed their assigned duties to standards generally higher than those prevalent among local uni-jurisdictional entities, offering, besides, the considerable differential surplus arising from their jurisdictionally integrated operation.

The diverse elements and tendencies that make out the present and prospective scenarios of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Agglomerate in the terms in which they have been presented, can be globally and synthetically characterized in the following way:

- i. growing heavily in the degrees of diversity affecting different kinds of thematic and spatial sectors, tending to maximize the level of inequity, and thus putting into serious question their level of global social sustainability;
- ii. becoming more globally inefficient, even within a framework in which some types of sectoral efficiency grow in very significant terms, like those of the communication and information-processing sectors;
- iii. deepening the lack of long term environmental sustainability, affecting both renewable and non-renewable resources.

As can be clearly seen, the active implication of the public and private sectors

–necessarily including among the latter Third Sector Organizations- in setting up coordinated patterns of production and distribution, going beyond the merely indicative level, and involving the whole metropolitan phenomenon, become imperative. Among the types of instruments which need to be adopted can be mentioned:

- i. the set up of a comprehensive information system, dealing with a wide diversity of pertinent traits, upon which informed and responsible planning and management decisions could be developed;
- ii. the determination of the physical conditions of expansion and of internal structuring of the whole metropolitan territory, which has to do essentially with *functional efficacy* and *efficiency*, and thus, with at least *economic* and *environmental sustainability*;
- iii. the regulation of the relative conditions of access of all social groups to the processes of production and consumption, and very particularly to the basic urban facilities and services, with intensive community participation, beyond mere political representation, which has to do with *equity*, and thus, with *social* and *cultural sustainability*;
- iv. and finally, as the operative key to access the above mentioned types of commitments and procedures, the structural reconfiguration of the political, institutional and administrative patterns of organization and operation of the governmental sector, and of the conditions of articulation between it and society, thus leading to a status of *institutional sustainability*.

As a fully different situation, one can only admire the functioning conditions, and their virtuous consequences, of the two more highly structured metropolitan organizations worldwide, those of Paris –through the IAURIF/Region of Ile-de-France-, and of Tokyo –through the Tokyo Metropolitan Government-, as well as some of the (by now disappeared) positive characteristics of the postwar period Toronto Metropolis. The former two have become attractive examples of terms in which efficiency, equity, and social and environmental sustainability come to grips with each other, for the profit of their present and future populations.

The mentioned elements point towards recognizing that the field of Metropolitan Institutionalization has become an extremely sensitive field in terms of any possibility of sensible planning to arise in relation with that type of complex entities, conducive to social and environmental sustainability, of increasing relative significance particularly in the less developed areas of the world.

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