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**Living in Uncertainty: Challenging the Planning Practice In and
Around Informal Settlements in Monterrey, Mexico**

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**Living in Uncertainty: Challenging the Planning Practice In and
Around Informal Settlements in Monterrey, Mexico**

by

León Guillermo Staines-Díaz

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Dedication

To Marysol and Bruno, my team. Amamos.

To the powerful women of La Campana.

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Abstract

Living in Uncertainty: Challenging the Planning Practice In and Around Informal Settlements in Monterrey, Mexico

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Supervisor: Patricia Wilson

Technocratic planning approaches have been the rule in Latin America through the course of the 20th century. This approach assumes that the only valid planning practice is that done by experts. This top-down planning practice has been particularly harmful in contexts of informality, since this approach has failed to capture and enhance informal communities' agency, skills, and resources. Residents in La Campana, like most informal settlements, rely on community organization and deliberation to deal with threats and challenges. On the other hand, planners need to engage in mutual learning processes that allows to build on informal communities' positive aspects, as opposed to imposing technocratic knowledge. This dissertation contributes to informality and critical planning studies thorough the lens of communicative and participatory action research methodologies. As action research methodologies have a transformational component, my dissertation aims at finding creative paths to improve the relationship between the municipalities and their precarious communities to maximize well-being, understanding, and mutual working relationship, beyond a traditionally vertical governmental power. This dissertation's unique contribution is the development of an action research process that

fosters and enables a new relationship to emerge between the La Campana community members and planners, articulating the diverse knowledge(s) in place. Action research is often used in community-based knowledge generation and change efforts. On the other hand, it is also used as a tool for organizational change efforts within local government. However, less articulated is how to bridge the two. To test the contributions of this dissertation, I analyze planning documents and compare them with the updates in current discussion in Monterrey in regards to participatory approaches in informal settlements.

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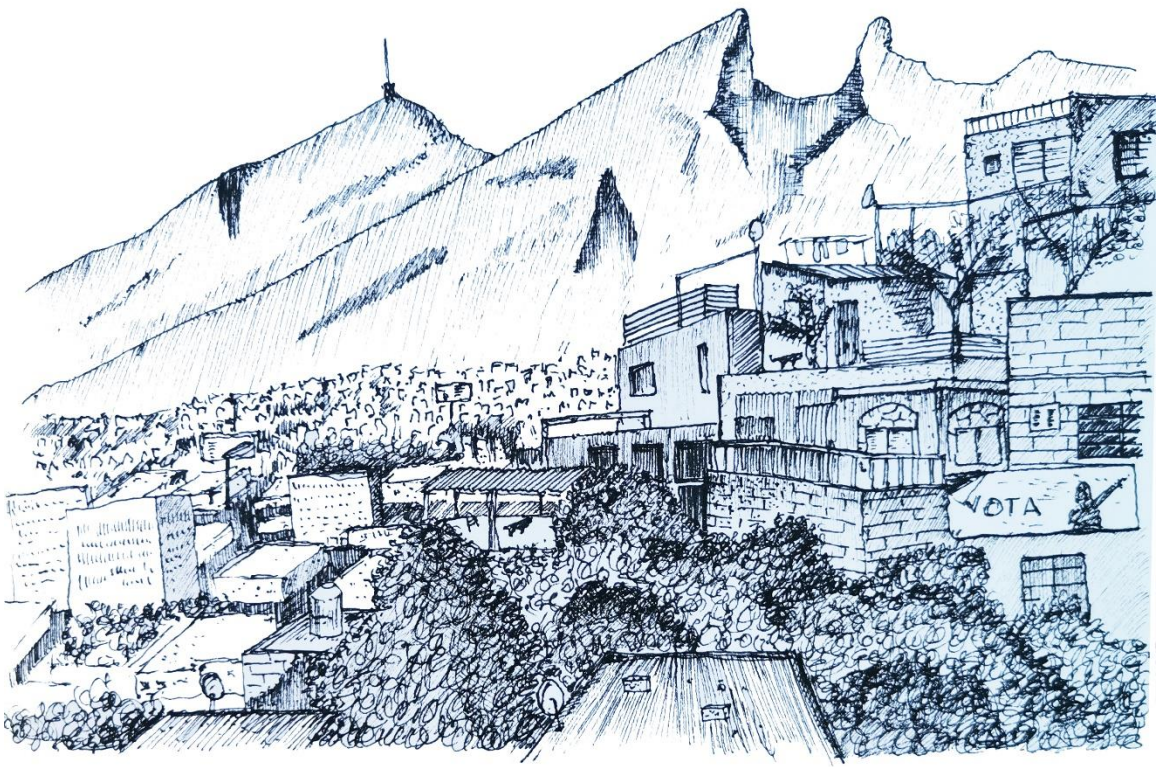
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Chapter 1. Introduction



In the Global South, both governments and urban planners follow design and discursive models inspired by the Global North. Governments, regardless of their political orientation, pursue such long-awaited development, incorporating in their normative framework technocratic values and concepts associated with functionality, efficiency, and a very specific idea of order. Meanwhile, urban planners are charged with shaping a city that enables the efficiency of its inhabitants' activities. This vision of city and urban planning has meant both obliviousness and oppression of a range of ways of living outside this idea of order established by the economic and social powers.

The hegemonic power involved in traditional urban planning has produced and reproduced a homogeneous image of the city corresponding to bourgeois aesthetics and functionality. Since the Industrial Revolution, when the figure of the worker gained academic attention, architecture and urban planning of working-class neighborhoods responded to a reinterpretation, on a smaller scale, of the bourgeois model. This contrasts with the image of informal neighborhoods, where the production of the built environment does not come from an aesthetic idea or rules established in texts, treatises or academic reflection. Urban informality is born out of the enormous need for shelter and is regulated based on the constant interaction with the elements and resources within the reach of the residents, in addition to the endless community deliberation. This dissertation argues that values behind informal settlements have gained an unquestionable validity, and should be seen as an important teacher in the processes of urbanization.

This dissertation explores the role of urban planners in Monterrey, Mexico, in the exclusion of vulnerable populations by top-down practices. I argue that this top-down approach has been particularly harmful in contexts of urban informality, as it has failed to support these communities' agency, skills, and resources. This story of neglect has left many residents hesitant to work with planners or authorities. However, this dissertation

also explores possible avenues for fostering an emerging relationship between community members in an informal settlement and planners, articulating the diverse knowledge available.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

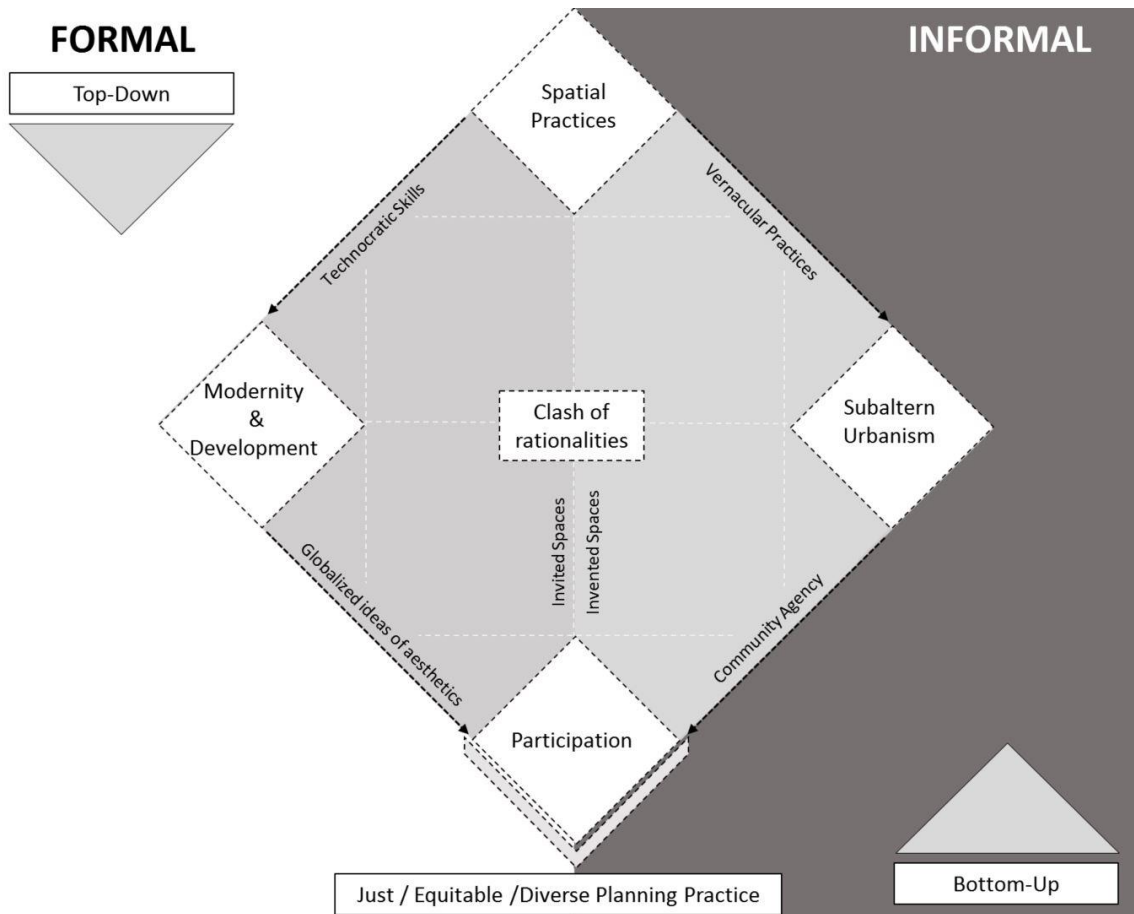


Figure 1. Scholarship Diagram of this dissertation. It navigates the topics, tensions, intersections, and objectives of my research.

Planning Practice Used as a Tool for the Powerful.

For decades, elites in Monterrey have used urban planning as a tool for capitalist accumulation. Monterrey has a long tradition of industrial activities that have permeated many layers of society (Staines-Díaz, 2020a), even the city's identity, which can be traced in the government's political discourses. While not exclusive of industrial cities, in the case of Monterrey, this industrial elite has historically been behind the public policies that have shaped the city image. Consequently, it is this "mainstream" group that has mainly contributed with its "affect, emotion, and bodily relationship" to the city planning initiatives (Crang, Tolia-Kelly, 2010: 2315), to the exclusion of all else with different values, resources, and lifestyles.

In the urban planning sphere of Monterrey, this representational disparity is exemplified by the dichotomy between formal and informal. Formal planning is embodied by technocratic agencies such as city planning departments and planning firms. This kind of planning practice relies on technical knowledge and urban theories discussed in academia and professional circles. Informal planning, on the other hand, is present in the everyday living practices of informal settlements, and is characterized by vernacular knowledge reflecting residents' necessities, inventiveness, and capacities.

Since the late 19th century, the city of Monterrey has incentivized an urban distribution that favors the wealthy individuals' image of a good city (Staines-Díaz, 2020a). This includes the way the city incentivizes a car-oriented mobility instead of public transportation or decent sidewalks, the lack of public spaces, and the large-scale disregard for the environment that has led Monterrey to be the most polluted city in Mexico (Maldonado, 2019). As repeatedly happens in cities around the world, vulnerable populations are pushed to the parts of the city with more environmental risks.

Informal communities have struggled to find their place in the city. The impoverished have migrated to urban settings for opportunity and a more hopeful life, but instead have been met with a housing crisis resulting from insufficient space and a rising population. Neither the market nor the government have provided enough shelter, which in turn, has forced people to informality outside the established urbanity. Ironically, even as urban planning necessitates the growth of informal living, governments have seen urban informality as a disease that needs to be eradicated. However, the isolation of informal communities, regarding governmental control, has incentivized a unique way to manage the land, organizing, and resisting multiple pressures for displacement.

Planners share responsibility for these negative outcomes, as their participation and contributions are instrumental to the current living situation in Monterrey. The planners' academic training in Monterrey is shaped by theories that have favored powerful elites, as they influence great aspects of public and private spheres of society, including college education and planning.

The mainstream traditions in planning theory have largely influenced the way humans live; theory has shaped planning practice, which in turn configures human settlements at different scales; communities, cities, and regions. Hence, the epistemology and knowledge informing planning theory are relevant for the understanding of human habitats. As defined by Allmendinger, theory is used to illuminate past and future human processes. Theory is dependent on its context (Allmendinger, 2009: 2, See also Beauregard, 2012): "theory in the social sciences is not immune from the influence of power and its wider social context" (Allmendinger, 2009: 2). Similarly, Forester (1982), who discusses the role of power in planning practice, states that power is in the form of information, and it is mainly held by populations in the upper part of society. It is the planner's responsibility to empower citizens and communities by influencing the conditions of participation,

managing and distributing relevant information on the one hand, and limiting misinformation on the other.

Informal Communities: Outside the Idea of Order.

Development practices have become hegemonic in many parts of the Global South, and indeed this is evident in cities and urban areas. These ideas reflect and shape how society values what is good and desirable, or bad and undesirable. Many governments have opted to make invisible the subaltern populations; that is, all populations which are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hierarchy of power (Green, 2002).

In urban settings, one of the categories that fell into this concept of subaltern are informal settlements. This refers to areas of the city in which shelters are built on land the occupants cannot legally claim, and/or when the developed shelter does not comply with planning and building regulations. Informal settlements are perceived as “underdeveloped because of a lack of technological designs and interventions” (Cirolia, 2017: 445). These discourses are shaped by four explanatory categories of underdevelopment: technological and design, institutional, rights-based, and structural. The technological approach assumes that problems in informality rely on lacking technological designs and interventions. The institutional framework describes its inappropriateness due to missing regulations and constrained public investments. The rights-based approach assumes that the problem of informality results from lack of housing and rights associated with that. Last, the dominant debate depicts informal settlements as a symptom of capitalism crises. Cirolia (2017) argues that while these discourses offer valuable contributions to understanding informal settlements, each has blind spots without considering the holistic complexities of how informal settlements are organized. Cirolia then proposes to move beyond these fragmented discourses and to overcome the disjuncture by considering that “each discourse

is useful but not sufficient” in itself (2017: 454). She proposes to move between scales, linking micro and macro structures and institutions, connecting the pieces of the fragmented discursive puzzle and allowing more clarity in the interpretation of informal settlements.

These discourses have not only served to interpret and understand informal settlements, but have shaped the planning practices of informal residences. Arguably, the most common approach of Monterrey practitioners is technological, as it is ubiquitous in local news, in local planning debates, along with the assumption that informality is inadequate for living conditions. This discourse, taught in schools of architecture, urban planning, and public policy, has encouraged a condescending attitude towards informality.

The Validity of Informal Settlements.

When ruling groups configure an image of what is “ideal”, there is also an image of what is “undesirable”. In the pursuit of such ideals, when anything does not fit in, a systematized exclusion begins. The implementation of ‘ideal’ concepts, in the context of development, excludes vulnerable groups from participating in the construction of the objectives and images pursued in the city. Planning practice modifies spaces where subaltern populations can express themselves and their livelihoods.

It is not surprising that in this context, informal settlements were seen as undesirable, and in need of elimination. Informality represented ‘pathological spaces’ (Kamete, 2012) outside of a coherent order by those who plan. Planning initiatives are designed to substitute instead of incorporate the community’s will. In this context, local urban planning departments replicates and reproduces these structural differences by falling short in incorporating methods involving substantial public participation. Failing to

incorporate local voices causes serious damage to the way the spaces have been created, also altering the activities they house.

The importance of place-making has been largely discussed in urban studies. In this context of exclusion, it is a priority to analyze the complexity of how some subaltern groups enhance their agency to plan their own spaces of resistance. Oranratmanee and Sachakul (2014) state that pedestrian streets and public markets are indispensable public spaces in a society, and particularly necessary for marginal groups, like street vendors. Young (2003) has explored how street children in Uganda capture marginal sites to convert them into subaltern spaces by a sense of belonging and place attachment (See also Sletto and Díaz, 2015); spaces considered not mainstream or desirable, have offered a sense of belonging, attachment, and identity.

A fundamental point for urban researchers is to understand how planning interventions have the potential to change power relationships. Planning, in its attempt to create open, safe, and legible places, usually addresses the elimination of the hidden, illegible spaces that serve as safe spaces for the oppressed. Planning, therefore, takes away those spaces and the agency subaltern groups have created. If planners continue with the traditional practice where everything that is not desired, is dismissed, not only the physical spaces will be transformed, but agency and political power from subaltern populations will be affected.

The social value of living spaces is reflected by DeCerteau (1998). He explains that a neighborhood is a space located in the juncture of public and private spaces, in which the social life organization depends on behavior; that is, codes and rhythms, and the benefit of consuming the space in a certain way, namely, the compromise of renouncing to personal impulse, to behave in a social way. The compensation of such behavior is to be recognized in a community level. Urban renewals and master plans in the Global South rarely consider

local behaviors. If planners are not aware of these effects, the consequences could potentially be disastrous for a community's identity.

The Transformation of Planning Practice.

On the one hand, I have argued the way in which urban planning has practiced oppression against informal communities. On the other hand, I discussed why informal settlements are a valid, interesting, and worthy element of study. This dissertation seeks understanding between these two spheres to pursue, foster and enable a new working relationship to emerge between the informal settlement of La Campana community members and planning departments, articulating the diverse knowledge(s) in place. This dissertation navigates a unique opportunity for the planning system to change, as there is alignment between both political forces and planning actors, to explore for democratic approaches in governance and planning. This dissertation seeks to learn and contribute to informality and critical planning studies through the lens of communicative and action research methodologies.

GOAL OF THE STUDY

While displacement and gentrification have been studied in the Global North since the 1960s, in Mexico –and many Latin American countries, this is a relatively new topic, particularly as land for development becomes sparser. In Mexico, the *ejidos* acted as green belts that controlled, since the decade of the 1930, the sprawl of cities. The *ejido* was a system of land tenure and distribution institutionalized a decade after the Mexican Revolution. It granted land to peasants for their usufruct with the condition that this land could not change its land use nor sold but could be inherited to the next generation. The

administrative rules of the *ejidos* changed in 1992, when Constitutional Article 27 was modified to allow the *ejidos* owners to sell their land in accordance with the neoliberal political climate (Salazar, 2016). As a result, there was a huge amount of cheap land that delayed large-scale land speculation. As cities in Mexico have exponentially grown since the 1990s, land scarcity for real estate development is becoming a real and tangible issue.

In Monterrey, Mexico, real estate pressure is evident as the landscape of the city is continually changing. Moreover, the public-private alliances to modify the built environment with beautification projects are becoming more frequent, to the point that the private sector is now financing urban plans at a city level. The works of Janoschka and Salinas (2014) and Delgadillo (2016) suggest the pressure of low-income communities to resist processes of gentrification due to urban policies and beautification projects located close to informal communities. This dissertation will explore how to handle this topic innovatively, understanding constraints and opportunities within the planning department.

This dissertation goes further than a critique of municipal government initiatives, or analysis of the benefits and advantages of informal planning processes. This is an action research (AR) dissertation that seeks to understand options for change with consideration of the constraints, barriers, and opportunities important to practical implementation and establishing productive, co-creative, and purposeful working relationships between local governments and informal communities. The use of AR methods on both sides of the relationship, the community and the municipal planning department, facilitates detecting the current relationship, the conflict, and consensus areas between both parties. This research aims to become a methodological guidance for planners and governments to maximize a working relationship between the municipalities and the informal communities. This dissertation builds on the critique that urban planning practices reproduce and intensify social inequalities in low-income areas.

RESEARCH POSITIONALITY

My interest in this topic originated at the juncture of my master's studies and my work as an urban planner in Monterrey. At this position, I became aware of the extensive work carried out by government institutions. Nevertheless, I also noticed a gap between academia and practice. The municipality developed urban initiatives to close this gap; however, many of these initiatives were implemented without consulting locals. As a result, urban interventions were at times not well received or even openly opposed.

As a result of my previous employment in both the public and academic sectors, I had access to a wide range of sources throughout my research. This included people both in the formal planning agencies and informal residents and leaders. It is important to note that my background in a leftist family has informed my perspective, and my context as a white-passing, heterosexual man studying at a renowned university in the U.S. has likely granted me more access to interviews and decision-making spaces. In this section, I describe both theoretical and personal stances for this dissertation.

Importance and Challenge of Participation.

A society produces their own spaces in a process known as spatial practice consisting in a degree of cohesion, competence, and performance from the specific groups that participates in the creation of such spaces. After a certain spatial practice has been developed, a social space exists with certain features and cohesiveness (Lefebvre, 1974).

Informal settlements, as a result of their own self-production without governmental regulation, are each original and unique, responding to specific, local stimuli. These unique characteristics of spaces in urban informality cannot be imitated by planners as the originality lies in these spaces are self-produced.

Thus, it is very important for urban planners and public officials to understand the coherence of spaces as they represent and form people's behaviors, livelihoods, agency, and political power. Moreover, it is important that the planner understand the critical significance of the participation of the society that produces their spaces, since its production cannot be replicated for others. As mentioned by Lefebvre:

Any social existence aspiring or claiming to be real, but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very particular kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the cultural real- It would fall to the level of folklore and sooner or later disappear altogether, thereby immediately losing its identity, its denomination and its feeble degree of reality (Lefebvre, 1974: 53).

Considering this, comprehensive plans or beautification projects that disregard public participation tend to be rejected by residents. Hence, it is critical that people from diverse backgrounds are included in the planning process, especially if they live in the area that the plan or project comprehend. The importance of their participation rests on the future well-being of a particular place.

The topic of participation has been largely explored in the planning literature. For Sandercock (2000; 2004), the incorporation of new actors is crucial to overcoming planning challenges. However, in the neoliberal context, participation can be manipulated, especially in spaces of poverty like informal settlements or other undesirable places from the capitalist point of view. Caution about participatory processes has its origin in the 1960s, as is reflected in Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969), in which she distinguishes public participation as an 'empty ritual', and one with real power to affect the outcome. More recently, both Bayat and Biekart (2009), and Miraftab (2009), warn us about public participation in the neoliberal era. For Bayat and Biekart, concepts such as decentralization, citizen participation, and the anti-corruption, are operative concepts and vehicles used by imperialist domination. They go further by asserting that NGOs do not

represent communities, instead, they “play the role of contracted State agents” (Bayat & Biekart, 2009: 819). This argument aligns with Miraftab’s (2009) discussion of democratic discourse being used as a vehicle to legitimize neoliberal goals through a perception of inclusion, all in the pursuit of hegemonic power (Miraftab, 2009: 33; see also Mehta, 2016; and Novoa, 2018). Miraftab (2009) makes a distinction between ‘invented’ and ‘invited’ spaces of citizenship; the former are real counter-hegemonic spaces of change, whereas the latter is designed to maintain the status quo. Nevertheless, this idea has been challenged by Sletto and Nygren (2015), as they argue that even in these contradictory spaces regulated by the State, researchers can act as change agents by reshaping the conceptualization of dominant structures (p.980).

As Roy (2005) states, a new epistemology of urban informality is requisite for planners committed to social justice as the rule and not the exception. This epistemology must be informed by the livelihoods, wages, and political capacities of the community, without the compulsion to upgrade. This epistemology should portray informality to the audiences as a fertile ground from which to learn, opposite to the common perception of informality as spaces drowned in problems. Planning should not romanticize the idea of informality as “heroic entrepreneurship” (see de Soto, 1986; Gilbert, 2009) but acknowledge urban informality as a “valid organizing logic, [and] a system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself” (Roy, 2005: 148). More recently, Roy (2011) introduced the concept of subaltern urbanism, in which she presents a more polished definition of informal settlements “as terrain of habitation, livelihood, self-organizing, and politics.” Thus, conferring and acknowledging the agency of these places.

Research requires acknowledgement of our positionality, reflecting on how it can guide the research. For an action researcher, the positionality has to also contain a co-creation component to achieve the transformation of a given system. Acknowledging

constraints and difficulties to meaningful and full participation is an important first step to overcoming such challenges.

Contacting the Local Planning Ecosystem.

Finding and developing relationships with key actors at the beginning of a research is one of the most challenging steps in the researcher's work. Who to talk to? How to contact them? What to say? How should I introduce myself? These are some of the many questions researchers ask themselves at this point. Gaining leverage at this early stage of an investigation is critical to unfolding new avenues of access and information.

My experience as the Social Urbanism Coordinator at IMPLANc (*Instituto Municipal de Planeación Urbana y Convivencia*) in 2013, and as a Urban Planning Coordinator at UANL (*Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León*) have given me access to a high-level professional planning circle at a city and state level; I frequently received invitations to forums and meetings to discuss local urban issues. These experiences allowed me two things; I got in contact with the local actors' planning ecosystem where I met key actors that have been of great assistance to facilitate interviews or planning documents, and I gained insight on the challenges of the planning ecosystem.

Due to my experience at IMPLANc, I was able to re-connect with colleagues and other planners in Monterrey. In this dissertation, I conducted research to understand the local planners motivations, attitudes, and narratives towards citizen participation through the revision of their planning documents, exploration of their processes, interviews with their officials, and assistance to meetings and public forums specific of La Campana. I also contacted relevant researchers from the UANL and Tec de Monterrey, the latter are involved in the process and elaboration of the *Plan Integral para el Desarrollo del Polígono Campana-Altamira*.

Contacting the Community of La Campana.

The counterpart of this research are the organized residents of La Campana. In 2013, while working at the IMPLANc, I met Celina Fernández, an outside sociologist. She was hired by the Tec de Monterrey to work on an assessment at La Campana (Fernández, 2018). Once that project ended, she was invited by organized neighbors to be part of their group. They named this organization *Barrio Esperanza*, or *Hope Neighborhood*, as a symbol of what they wanted to incentivize in La Campana. Celina has been part of this association since 2014. She was my gatekeeper to La Campana and has connected me with other valuable community actors.

I have been in contact with the La Campana community since June 2018, when I started research for a graduate class at The University of Texas at Austin, exploring urban informality. This relationship has strengthened through periodical visits since then, also with the development of award-winning bi-national research in 2019 headed by my advisor, Dr. Patricia Wilson and my master's advisor Dr. Carlos Aparicio. This experience has provided me with knowledge about La Campana, which was deepened during my fieldwork in 2020.

My relationship with La Campana, through the NGO Barrio Esperanza, has consisted of attending gatherings with community members and participating in meetings with NGO members, allowing me experience and competence about the local participatory processes. Additionally, I have assisted in the maintenance of the public spaces, volunteering in summer camps or *Día de los Muertos* fairs, and advising with design recommendations of the spaces where the NGO intervenes. The volunteer work and regular attendance at meetings has given me the opportunity to gain the trust of the residents and the NGO itself. While my contact with La Campana has been mostly associated with Barrio Esperanza, my relationship and knowledge about the neighborhood has also been

strengthened by contact with other local community-based NGOs connected with La Campana.

In parallel with fieldwork in La Campana, I have navigated the local planning department to listen, understand, and explore where effective citizen participation can strengthen the planning processes. On this collaborative relationship with the local planning department, I acted as a researcher/consultant identifying areas for improvement in their participatory processes by immersing myself in their work, attending meetings, and interviewing them to help the municipality public officials observe themselves. The consulting role is justified by the two-way flow of information between the planning department and me. This process is described in detail in Chapter 6.

Research Questions.

To operationalize this research, my overarching research question is:

How can the relationship between planners in Monterrey and informal communities be enhanced to build a planning practice more sensitive to local communities' planning ideas?

In this research, I want to look critically at the municipal and private interests in subaltern urbanism and self-organizing efforts in La Campana. While governance and planning practices are recently experiencing the inclusion of participatory approaches, the planning practice is still heavily influenced by top-down approaches, and planning in informal settlements is not the exception, even though these communities have historically shown initiatives of plan their communities. This study explores the role of community-led participatory processes in mediating and managing community and external actors' interests, from the inside perspective of a technician-planner from Monterrey.

Specific Questions:

1. What is the planning logic prevalent in documents and how do they conceive urban informality?
2. What is the planning logic prevalent in the informal settlement of La Campana?
3. What are the city, state, and private sector initiatives fostering infrastructural projects in La Campana?
4. How did violence trigger the desire for resident-led urban organization and new planning initiatives in La Campana?
5. What are the unplanned strategies and everyday practices used in La Campana that challenge State and private sector planning and development practices?
6. How has communication worked between local planning departments and informal communities?

RESEARCH APPROACH-PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Communication between different groups can be challenging as it entails the interpretation of cultural backgrounds. Similarly, spaces are loaded with signs and symbols that can be perceived differently depending on the recipient. There are specific ways in which territories are read and interpreted by the people interacting with them. Arguably, spaces shape how people communicate with each other; thus, the planner's consciousness of this phenomena is critical to proper research. The facilitation of participatory processes that include the diversity of interested actors is important for maintaining the spirit and identity of informal places.

After a wave of violence from 2009 to 2012 affected the lives of *regiomontanos* (people from Monterrey), especially in poverty, the informal settlement of La Campana, is

contested by unprecedented attention by universities, NGOs, activists, and the three governmental levels. The Monterrey city planning department is developing an urban plan for this neighborhood with the private sector. I argue this attention needs to be managed by a novel planning approach, as the top-down planning practice in Mexico has not met the challenges present in informality. Governmental approaches have failed to reflect on people's needs, communities' agency, tools, and skills. There has been no mutual learning process that incorporates people and communities as fore and center of the planning initiatives nor enabled the role of the urban planner to become the catalyst for community action.

As my approach includes a deep understanding of the community-led planning efforts of La Campana, the importance of inclusion in my research's process lies in recognizing the identity embedded in the territory, which has been broadly studied in cultural landscape studies. This is critical as the "landscape denotes the interaction of people and place: a social group and its spaces, particularly the spaces to which the group belongs and which its members derive some part of their shared identity and meaning" (Groth, 1997:1). Cultural landscapes study the everyday space and its relation to establishing people's identity; also the way it articulates the users' social relationships, and derives cultural meaning. Herod (2011) states that the landscape's form can enhance or limit activities. Social actors shape the landscape through 'negotiations' with consequences on social behavior; in other words, landscape shapes relationships; thus, changing the landscape's spatial form changes societies' social structures. This is well-known in capitalist societies, as they frequently modify spaces to increase productivity (Herod, 2012). In other words, they change the spatial structures to facilitate the exercise of power through the inclusion of surveillance strategies or real estate markets.

Similarly, Setha Low (2016) defines the concept of ‘spatializing culture’ as “a dialogic process that links the social production of space and nature and the social development of the built environment” (p.7). Low reflects that by using this concept, it is possible to bring “together social, economic, ideological and technological aspects of the creation of the material setting with phenomenological and symbolic experience as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict and control” (p.7). Low’s emphasis on ethnography to access the myriad of knowledge hidden in the study of territories mirrors my interest in applying action research in that it highlights information gathering in cooperation with subjects. Action research adapts organically to the study of territory, space, and place, which is critical to understanding people's everyday lives.

Participatory Action Research.

The primary inquiry method of this research is participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart, 2007; Wilson, 2019) to conduct co-generative research. Additionally, I analyzed documents such as municipal plans for low-income and informal settlement areas. Additional data was collected from ethnography, collaboration in La Campana, and interviews with planning actors in informality and government.

This research develops and proposes an action research approach that fosters and enables a new relationship between the La Campana community members and planners. Action research is often used in community-based knowledge generation and change efforts. It is also used as a tool for organizational change efforts within local government. However, less articulated is how to bridge the two. This dissertation explores the literature and cases in these two areas in Monterrey—i.e., an action research methodology that can bridge, enhance, and articulate the diverse knowledge(s) currently in place.

The data of this research draws on similar experiences of action research in Latin America, especially those located in the intersection between municipal power and community. Based on those experiences, I proposed a route for action researchers in the Monterrey context; hence, this research serves as a guide for researcher fieldwork addressed to bridge the myriad of knowledge(s) in urban informality. The literature review of my dissertation draws on theoretical streams from the field of process-oriented community planning such as: communicative and deliberative planning tradition (Forester, 1982, 1993, 1999; Innes and Booher, 2010); collaborative planning (Healey, 2007); decolonizing theories (Escobar, 1995); and empowerment planning theorists (Friedmann, 1992; Sandercock, 2003; Reardon, 2003; Streck, 2016; Wilson, 2019). Opposite to Monterrey's current top-down planning practices, a transformative community-based, bottom-up approach is possible if knowledge and practices are met in safe spaces for deliberation and cooperation.

Defining action research poses several theoretical challenges, as it is fueled by a myriad of voices in diverse situations. AR is inherently participatory, as it is an approach to learning "about human systems by engaging with others in the process of change... it emphasizes group process, relationship, collaborative action, and learning from action" (Wilson, 2019: 5). Therefore, AR is a concept that evolves and adapts to the context where the research is conducted. Nevertheless, there are certain conditions that need to be fulfilled to consider a study AR. AR is a context-based line of inquiry. It is also a practice for the systematic development of knowing and knowledge. In short, for the effect of this essay, action research is a:

[p]articipatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview...it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of

pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:1).

The multi-dimensionality of AR contrasts with conventional social science. Action researchers act within complex social change settings from a stance of reflexivity, inter-subjectivity, and pragmatism. The action researcher's work is not to describe reality; the purpose in AR is to make something meaningful happen after the deliberation of the group (or groups), bringing reflexivity to the process triggering transformation (Bradbury, 2015). Thus, AR is only possible when working with people and communities (Wilson, 2019). Consequently, it is a democratic process to develop practical knowledge in pursuing human purposes, which brings action, reflection, theory, and practice.

The Transformational Component of Action Research.

I consider action research an effective methodology to link top-down planning and horizontal planning practices for the future. Action research is appropriate as its objective is not just to analyze reality but to transform it (Nicholas y Hathcoat, 2014); it also has a transformative pedagogic dimension (Streck, 2014) that provides acknowledgment to the underrepresented groups' agency. Action research creates spaces for collective reflection in which actors are encourage to share experiences (Canto and Estensoro, 2020). This dissertation aims to transform the complex system of traditional planning practices in Monterrey neither giving into it nor battling it, but with openness and negotiation.

I contend that planners should be conscious of the interconnectivity of social relationships embedded in territories and the particular identity of a place. Ultimately, I contend that given the complexity of territories, cities, and communities, and considering the inherent and inextricable nature of social relationships, identity, and space, the best methodological approach in planning processes is to encompass action research (and its different traditions).

First, Second, and Third-Person Action Research.

First-person action research responds to the forms of inquiry-practice by individuals into their own research process. The goal is to help individuals develop an inquiring attitude toward their own lives and act in an informed, aware, and purposeful manner (Gearty and Coghlan, 2018). First-person AR is a method of benefiting from the researcher self-awareness in the research context to understand how they observe their own thinking, process data, come to negotiations, judgments, decisions and actions (Costamagna and Larrea, 2018).

In addition to first-person AR, there are collaborative actions between the different actors involved in this dissertation that exemplify second-person AR and collective learning from doing. Second-person AR entails the researcher's ability to engage in face-to-face communication with others in a context of authentic mutual concern. It is a collaborative practice involving multiple stakeholders, which involves participants learning from each other (Coghlan, 2007). This dissertation prompts this engagement by encouraging others to take action and evaluate others' actions.

Third-person AR stems from the work at the first and second person levels and represents the contribution of the study to an impersonal audience through dissemination of the knowledge produced in this research. Third-person action research aims at creating communities of inquiry, involving people beyond second-person AR. Third-person is impersonal and is reached through dissemination by reporting, publishing, and extrapolating from the concrete to the general (Coghlan, 2005).

THE PROCESS OF INFORMAL URBANIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND MEXICO

Research on informal urbanization are shared by several Latin American countries due to the influence of the U.S. politics, and international development agencies such as the World Bank (WB), the International Development Bank (IDB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In this section, I discuss the origins of informal settlements as a result of policies that incentivized urbanization.

Origins of Urban Informality.

In the 1940s, many Latin American countries applied policies intended to achieve economic growth, socio-economic modernization, and self-sufficiency by creating an internal industrial market. The policies, known as Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), were facilitated by the destruction of Europe during WWII, which allowed other markets to emerge in ideal economic conditions for trade. In the meantime, many countries in the Global South began to emulate the values and lifestyles of the North.

In Mexico, ISI prompted massive migration from the rural regions to populated urban areas, beginning in the 1940s and continually increasing into the 1970s (Davis, 2006). The ISI regime led to a reorientation of social stratification patterns. Portes and Hoffman (2003), studying the impact of ISI policies on class structures in Latin America, found that the “rise of informal self-employment and micro-entrepreneurialism throughout the region can be interpreted as a direct result of the new adjustment policies” (p. 42).

Rural Disinvestment: Push Factors.

Economic liberalization policies encouraged de-agrarianization, pushing agricultural producers into unequal global markets and rural abandonment for urban environments. Agricultural deregulation and financial discipline policies prompted by international financial institutions like the IMF and WB led to a mass exodus of people

from rural towns to informal settlements in urban areas, as cities and housing markets could not accommodate such population growth (Davis, 2006). In Latin America, most of the poor no longer live in rural environments. Poverty has become an urban phenomenon. Between 1950 and 2014, Latin America's urban population increased from around 69 to 496 million (Gilbert, 2017). According to the Mexican census of 2020, 79% of Mexico's population lives in urban localities, representing 99,551,078 urban inhabitants. 28% of the total national population lives in only four metropolitan areas: the Mexico valley, Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Puebla-Tlaxcala (INEGI, 2020).

Migration to Cities and Informal Urbanization.

ISI fueled the in-migration of the labor force of mainly young people to cities, generating city growth rates of 3 to 5 percent per annum. As new companies were established, the necessity for labor force expanded. Nevertheless, this urban life did not mean a dramatic improvement in the quality of life of the new urban settlers, as the "complicity between the State and private capital necessary for sustaining the rate of profit in this industrialization strategy meant keeping wage levels low" (Ward, 2005: 271).

Housing production in Latin American cities increased during the ISI phase in Latin America. However, as governments in Latin America realized the impossibility of housing provision due to the massive demand and lack of economic resources, governments tolerated the installation of squatter settlements in the urban periphery (Ducci, 2010).

Gilbert and Ward (1985), in their study of Mexican urban informality, pose that access to informal housing depends on the availability of land; "where there is land accessible to the poor and tenure is guaranteed in law or practice, home improvements will usually take place" (p. 61). This land, though, tends to be highly segregated as a consequence of capitalist land distribution. The land available for the poor is stricken with

the pollution, lack services, and poor transportation. They are most liable to flooding, subject to subsidence, and deficient soil.

Once the land is invaded and sold, it is gradually incorporated into the formal city through service provisions, such as freshwater, sewage, electricity, and even land titles for the most consolidated settlements. As soon as the land tenure is secured, the lots start to change hands. In other words, it becomes part of the housing market (Gilbert and Ward, 1985).

Land and Housing Access in Informal Sectors.

According to Mayra Lazcano (2005), one of the common features among developing countries is the limited supply of land suitable for low-income housing. This is especially true in countries with a political economy oriented to free land market. In Mexico, since the 1980s, the urbanization process has sped up, and now, a vast majority of the population lives in cities. At the same time, there has been a drop in average income, jeopardizing people's opportunity to access urban land.

Informal settlement's growth has surpassed the authorities' capacity to provide the right of housing stated by the Mexican Constitution. Since the market and lax public housing policies have resulted in the rise of urban land costs, most families are unable to afford it. Thus, governments have tolerated, and in some cases, sponsored, the irregular subdivision of land aiming to reduce the pressure (Lazcano, 2005). However, the spaces available for informal urbanization denote a huge spatial injustice with poorer residents settling in hazardous and polluted land. In particular, the land is located in flood hazard zones or in contaminated areas —near brick kilns and clandestine garbage dumps. They also lack infrastructure with little to no access to public transport or employment,

education, and health care. Moreover, most of this land is extremely dense, causing health and safety hazards (Clichevsky, 2003).

Gilbert and Ward (1985) posit that the lack of infrastructure and the undesirability of these neighborhoods, makes it unsuitable for housing for the housing market, so the construction of homes is self-built by the occupants.

The common feature of informal settlements is that land is acquired illegally. Nevertheless, there are multiple ways to acquire land, depending on the country or region. The two most common are land invasion and land purchase outside of the formalized market. Land invasions have often emerged through accretion “when individual families have occupied the area through time, with no apparent organization and in the absence of any real opposition from the State” (p. 77). Both options are present in Mexico; land invasions are often linked with political groups, although they have become less common in recent years. Illegal subdivisions or *fraccionamientos clandestinos* have been a common form of land acquisition.

INTRODUCTION TO MONTERREY

Brief History of Monterrey.

Monterrey development is deeply entangled with its industrialization. It was founded in 1596 by Diego de Montemayor (after two failed attempts in 1577 by Alberto del Canto and 1582 by Luis Carvajal y de la Cueva), yet Monterrey would not become the metropolis it is now until several centuries later. The foundation of the city was related to its placement in a valley surrounded by mountains, which was associated with mineral deposits, like in other colonial cities such as Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas.

Once the early settlers realized mining was not an option, they concentrated the economic activities to livestock and agriculture.

Almost three centuries later, a fortune came to Monterrey. The first economic boost in Monterrey came during the United States Civil War from 1861 to 1885. When the Southern states focused their efforts to the military apparatus, leaving production activities, the commercial relationship between the Southern states and the North of Mexico intensified, benefiting Monterrey.



Figure 2. Geographical context of study site. Source: Courtesy of Jorge Zapata.

It was not until the Governor of Nuevo León in 1885, General Bernardo Reyes, when the political and economic conditions settled the foundations of Monterrey in present time. It is then, when Monterrey started abandoning the clear rural features still inserted in the middle of the city, to give way to the most known capitalist face of Monterrey (Casas and Murillo, 2010).

Bernardo Reyes embodied, in the local context, the figure of the Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz, including a fragile peaceful situation by the use of force to suppress any kind of insurrections or critics to power. The social stability plus the economic reforms Reyes implemented at state level, such as tax exemption to new companies, attracted attention of entrepreneurs to invest in the city. Reyes gave enough concessions to keep the capitalists in Monterrey.

There are three companies that set the tone for Monterrey's late industrialization; *Cervecería Cuauhtémoc* in 1890, *Compañía Fundidora de Acero de Monterrey* in 1900, and *Vidriera de Monterrey* in 1909. These three companies defined not only the economic structure of Monterrey but also the social dynamics. Even now, these companies have great influence in politics in the region.

At the end of the 19th century these companies originated an unprecedented economic growth that significantly increased the size of the city and prompted significant urban reforms. Monterrey rapidly became nationally relevant, displacing the influence and political power mining towns traditionally held. As mining activities decreased due to overexploitation, the population in colonial cities migrated looking for new labor sources. Since 1910, Monterrey's population has been growing exponentially.

The *regiomontanos* gave industry almost a supernatural aura. Anything related to industries was good, and anything industries needed was justified. After all, companies were seen as a source of jobs and a motor for development and well-being. Monterrey started experiencing significant changes. As the new companies grew, the city built special infrastructure to facilitate commerce; railway tracks were woven into the city and connected Monterrey to important cities, ports, and the border to the United States. These companies also hired foreign technicians who brought customs and ways of socializing which needed new buildings to host such activities. The new bourgeois class created social clubs and other amenities that set the standard for good taste (Cerutti, Ortega, Palacios, 2000).

Both elites and working class consolidated in Monterrey. Interestingly, the elites granted working benefits to the companies' blue-collar employees. For instance, businessman Eugenio Garza Sada, offered favorable labor conditions in his companies with health care to their employees years before the creation of IMSS (*Instituto Mexicano del*

Seguro Social) in 1943. He also created a housing program in 1957, creating workers neighborhoods from scratch 15 years before the creation of the Mexican housing authority INFONAVIT (*Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores*) in 1972. Garza Sada also granted scholarships to worker's children. While the initiatives are considered corporate paternalism (Prieto, Arias, 2020), they set the standard of companies during a time of uncertainty for workers. These initiatives left a positive mark on the population.

Industrial development played a decisive role in the creation of a collective mindset of what it meant to be a *regiomontano*, as the industrial regime transcended the merely economic plane, influencing the rhythms and ways to socially relate in Monterrey.

The Influence of the Private Sector in Monterrey Urban Growth.

Monterrey is located in Northeastern Mexico and is connected nationally and internationally with strategic commercial routes. This makes it the most economically important city in the North of Mexico. Monterrey metropolitan zone, is acknowledged by its industrial and educative dynamics. While the city has been qualified as an example of perseverance against the climatological adversity of the semi-desert environment, this liberal discourse (Zúñiga y Ribeiro, 1990) covers that its process of economic expansion has generated social segregation (Aparicio, Ortega, Sandoval, 2011).

In the last section, I discussed how the history of Monterrey's economic and urban growth is entangled with the history and necessities of the private sector since the 19th century. The influence of the private sector lies in the consolidated elite bourgeois networks cemented at a metropolitan and regional level. For Cerutti, Ortega, Palacios (2000), the Monterrey's political development intertwined with the level of influence of the private sector counts as an example of an oligarchic State.

The private sector has shaped the narrative of the urban development and segregation in Monterrey. Arguably, Monterrey industrialization process generated economic and social development, prompting an inexhaustible migratory flow into the metropolitan area. However, labor supply did not keep up with the industrial labor demand, stimulating incipient marginalization and poverty phenomena (Prieto, Arias, 2020).

For generations, poverty was seen as an imported problem as the private sector successfully created an artificial imaginary of greatness and superiority compared to other regions in Mexico. Thus, poverty, inequality and marginalization were not acknowledged as part of the Monterrey's reality (Sandoval, 2008). José Manuel Prieto (2012) tracks critical studies of "poverty, misery, and inequality" in Monterrey until 1980s. These studies questioned the well-spread idea of the homogeneously prosperous city.

Spatial Segregation.

There is a marked socio-spatial divide in the story of Monterrey's urban expansion. Segregation in Monterrey intensified in the 20th century with the city's industrialization; however, urban socio-spatial segregation dates since its foundation with the laws of the Indies of Phillip II. This plan from 1573 ordered that the Spanish population lived in a designed urban layout, while the local Indigenous people had to establish outside that space (Lara, 2010). The residential sector's separation between the low-income classes and Monterrey's elites is constant throughout its history (Aparicio, Ortega, Sandoval, 2011), at first, the aim for segregation was ethnic, as the Tlaxcalan Indigenous workers used for constructing the Spanish city were confined to the South of the Santa Catarina River. This river crosses the city from East to West. As the city industrialized by the end of the XIX century, segregation was linked to the immigration phenomenon. Simultaneously, the elites began to move from downtown areas to the West and South of the city.

First signs of occupation of La Loma Larga, which is part of the hill system of La Campana, can be traced back to 1895, when Bernardo Reyes began the construction of the Government Palace (Casas and Murillo, 2010). This building is covered by pink quarry stone from San Luis Potosi. Stonemasons from San Luis Potosi were brought to Monterrey with their families, who, like the Tlaxcalan Indigenous workers, were also placed south of the Santa Catarina River, on the slopes of the Loma Larga hill, where they founded the neighborhood of San Luisito, renamed in 1910 to Colonia Independencia. Again, the labor force was isolated but available. This area of the city, from 1917 onwards, became the destination for waves of peasant migration in search of opportunities (Aparicio, Ortega, Sandoval, 2011). The Independencia neighborhood and Monterrey Downtown are two contrasting ways of life divided by the Santa Catarina River.

Monterrey's segregation has become notorious since 1940, yet it continues to worsen. It has spread to neighboring municipalities like Santa Catarina, San Nicolás de los Garza, Guadalupe, new wealthy suburbs to the West, and San Pedro Garza García, one of the wealthiest municipalities of Latin America. The working-class neighborhoods were established close to industries in the North and East of the periphery. However, Loma Larga would remain a recipient of migrants encouraged by the first waves and family or affective ties.

INTRODUCTION TO LA CAMPANA

Brief History of La Campana.

The community of La Campana is located in what once was agricultural land. In an interview on June 28th, 2018, Mrs. Blanca, a local resident, shared that people used to sow oranges, corn, and *nopales* (cactus) in La Campana. Few people lived there when Mrs.

Blanca moved there in the 1970s, but it rapidly populated as people searched for opportunities. Most of the original settlers moved in from other Mexican states such as San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, and Hidalgo (Cedillo, 2018). Many of them believed Monterrey was a temporary stop on their way to the United States of America, but stayed when they found industrial work in Monterrey.

For five decades, the people of La Campana organized their own land and mediate internal problems. Services such as water, sewage, and electricity that the community managed to get (in some areas of La Campana) took years of struggle and negotiations with the municipal and state governments. Being widely ignored by the authorities changed in 2012 as a result of drug violence. In the last decade, La Campana has had the attention of local media, government, and the private sector. A new Integral Development Plan for La Campana-Altamira polygon (2019) is currently under discussion in circles outside La Campana. Local authorities, the private sector, and a private university joined this effort.

I argue that planners in Monterrey have fallen short regarding the understanding of informal settlements and conducting planning processes and projects that include local communities. This often leads to problems such as manipulative processes (Arnstein, 1969), expulsions (Sassen, 2014), gentrification (Clark, 2005; Janoschka et al., 2014), and power imbalances (Forester, 1982). This research will explore the extent of one or more of these possible effects, as the vulnerability that urban practices in Monterrey infringe in the area covered by urban plans in La Campana.

La Campana: A Story of Urban and Political Inequalities.

When informal settlements begin, the lack of governments' surveillance and recognition, leads to an original and unique way to organize the territory in which the community is settled. This description suits this study's context, the informal community

of La Campana in Monterrey, México. La Campana was for many decades a forgotten community. That changed after a period of severe violence from 2009 to 2012 due to the Mexican war on drugs. Drug dealers took advantage of the inaccessibility of La Campana, ascribable to the hill's topography, to establish there, using the community as a hiding place. Aggressive police operatives freed La Campana of most of the cartel presence (although they are still discretely present), leaving behind deep scars in the territory and community.

The war on drugs reached a peak in Monterrey from 2009 to 2012 (Villarreal, 2015). During this period, criminals used informal urban settlements for two purposes: first, as a hiding place and second, as a source of workers. This city represents a lucrative spot for drug trafficking due to its strategic geographical location for distribution to the border cities of Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa (Excelsior, 2011). The community lacked police surveillance, making it an ideal location for successful criminal networking. Second, as a source of workers, due to the unequal opportunities in these settlements (VICE, 2017), it was not difficult to find who was willing to join the criminal gangs, especially the vulnerable youth (Enamorado, et al. 2016). The consequences of this forced interaction were tangible; the drug traffickers left deep scars in the community: fear supported by heart-breaking testimonies, houses taken, and a torn social fabric.

In 2012, the state founded a new police force with the purpose of defeating the drug traffickers who had seized the neighborhood (Expansión, 2011a). For years, this became a bloody war, with innocent civilians too often endangered and brutalized. Residents of La Campana still remember the fear they had to both the cartels and local authorities.

In addition to the fear, anger, and pain derived from violence, for the community of La Campana, this traumatic four-year' experience catalyzed a new way in which the community started relating to their environment and the local government. After having a

curfew declared by the cartel and constant violence, the relationship that the inhabitants had with the public space was defined by fear and avoidance (Fernández, 2018).

Celina Fernández (2018) explains that by 2015, once the “open and visible violence” (p. 18) had settled, a group of female neighbors, conscious of La Campana’s violent past, started organizing to change the future for their children and community. The *vecinas* (female neighbors) founded Barrio Esperanza, a group of neighbors organizing to find solutions to some of the issues they detected in their community. When the NGO started, they relied solely on community organizing, resident’s contributions, and the networks of some *lideresas* (female community leaders). As Barrio Esperanza met expectations, a period of consolidation began when they started receiving small but constant donations from outside actors, which allow the NGO to expand their operating radius.

Community members started working in small urban projects to improve their public spaces in an effort to create encounter spaces. The community organized themselves and defined a mechanism to change their environment, counting only with their resources, such as the available materials from the neighborhood and local labor donated by individuals. As the community actions became relevant, they could also access donations of playgrounds and paint.

This initiative of modifying the built environment qualifies as subaltern urbanism (Roy, 2011), as these practices show agency, livelihood, and self-organization. La Campana has become a fascinating, yet understudied example of community-led participatory processes in informal settlements, offering broader lessons for Latin America. The elements to state that are evident in the modest but meaningful experiments in the public space, such as summer camps for children and pocket parks; to an entirely new way

of social organization; community meetings, psychological attention to vulnerable women, day-care; and a new way to relate with local authorities.

This research explores subaltern urbanism in two layers. First, the informal settlement of La Campana as a subaltern space, since it is a form of urbanization in a context of poverty that has been neglected from urban theory (Roy, 2011). Second, the community-invented spaces that represent a material space in transformation replete with expressions of the community's identity, skill, values, and history.

Along with the community's fresh approach to the built environment came attention from the public and private sector. Local universities, the governmental planning department, and local companies, have started to approach the community with projects and plans. The theory, history, and political economy have shown that this novel attention, while sometimes expected and appreciated by the community, can result in a misunderstanding, disrupting the community's rhythms and flows. Plans made by the government in the Global South usually fall under what Watson (2003) defines as a 'clash of rationalities,' between communities logics and political ideals, and the objectives pushed by the middle and high-classes (Mehta, 2016; Roy & Ong, 2011), and their 'globalized' ideas of 'esthetics' (Oguyankin, 2019). By implementing these rationalities in La Campana, the government dilutes the 'invented' spaces of citizen participation in informal settlements (Miraftab, 2009). Evidence shows that local communities are at significant risk of losing the agency and power they currently have if local authorities pursue this type of planning approach.

This research acknowledges the validity of the contributions to community-led planning efforts of La Campana and aims to find a novel planning approach to make possible united efforts to identify shared issues and find solutions together.

INFORMAL VS. FORMAL

I have given context about the structural differences between the types of formal planning done at planning departments and the planning initiatives conducted in informal settlements. Top-down planning approaches applied in Monterrey and most cities in the Global South, is against to the intuition of local knowledge and experience developed through generations in informal communities.

However, as argued by Escobar (2000), the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ division was invented by planners, as city’s natural condition is the inextricably connection of both worlds. Moreover, this division has been used to aggravate a discourse of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ to facilitate territorial control strategies. The conflict of this division lies in the fact that planning has historically been oriented to meeting the needs of the dominant economic sectors (Bennett, 1992), leaving non-hegemonic populations defenseless.

Recently, more enlightened planners have attempted to abandon this approach by recognizing that territories are created by “complex spatial, political, administrative, and cultural processes” (Escobar, 2000: 184) shaped by the informal populations. Theorists recognize the necessity of community control of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 2001) since knowledge can empower us to transform the world around us (Friedmann, 1987). Knowledge ownership is a prerequisite to transformation. The same powerful groups that control the production of material goods also control the production of knowledge. Critical consciousness can only be raised when historically marginalized groups become part of the production of knowledge. It is a liberating process (Rahman, 1991). Radical planning paradigms such as empowerment planning, which draws from critical theory and theories of justice planning, recognize that knowledge is created through the interactions of those possessing technical knowledge, like that of a planner, and the local knowledge of community members (Friedman, 1987).

Acknowledging the poor social power can significantly shorten the route to improved democratic urban planning. According to Friedmann (2011), the dis-empowerment theory of poverty, posits that the poor have access to some power, which, if widely recognized, has the potential to create just planning models.

This dissertation explores a way to overcome this formal/informal dichotomy as it has proven to be insufficient to respond to the reality of today's cities. Formal and informal realities are linked socially, geographically, economically and historically, yet to think that a single urban policy and practice can be applied in both contexts is unrealistic. The search for sensitive and democratic ways of dealing with and deliberating across differences should be the compass that directs the activity of the 21st century social researcher. The current historic political juncture makes this vision of fair and collaborative urban planning possible.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, I provide the research problem regarding the profound disconnection between planning/planners and informal communities in Monterrey, Mexico. For decades, elites partnered with local governments, having used planning as a tool for capital accumulation in Monterrey. However, there is an opportunity to change the planning approach to build on community strengths and agency, contributing to a more just and equitable planning practice. This chapter explores the relevance of La Campana, as a clear example of the planning practices in informality, and in tensions with real estate interests and other powerful actors.

In Chapter 2 and 3, I discuss the theories and empirical findings behind planning approaches to informality in Monterrey divided by two different set of drivers. In Chapter

2, I explore the historical planning approaches to informality in Mexico through the analysis of local literature and planning documents at the three levels of government: federal, state, and municipal. I contend these approaches to planning in informal settings are driven ideas or models associated with “development” and “modernity,” and are opposed to the local practices of informality. I contend this kind of planning practice has made residents in informality hesitant to work with planners and public officials, constituting a challenge for new researchers to achieve meaningful participation in informal communities.

In Chapter 3, I present the second part of theories and empirical findings responding to new approaches to governance and planning, as a result of a new wave of political forces elected in 2018 and 2021 that partially displaced conservative governments and brought emerging participatory approaches. I focus on the current political and social juncture opening doors to new possibilities in democratic urban planning practice based on ‘community agency’ and ‘citizen participation’. This chapter illustrates the unfolding possibilities for a more human-centered planning practice based upon current government documents, plans, and narratives of the new public official.

In Chapter 4, I describe the nuances of the consolidation of the informal settlement of La Campana. This chapter highlights how the community members are thinking in a better future for their children through community participation and provision of public spaces. It also analyzes the long struggle to consolidate La Campana and the facts that situate it in the current center of scholarly and practical discussions. This chapter explores the contested planning ecosystem, illustrating tensions with private real estate interests around La Campana that endanger community well-being. I further examine how violence acted as a catalyst for community participation with tangible benefits in the built environment. This active participation attracted the attention of planners and the private

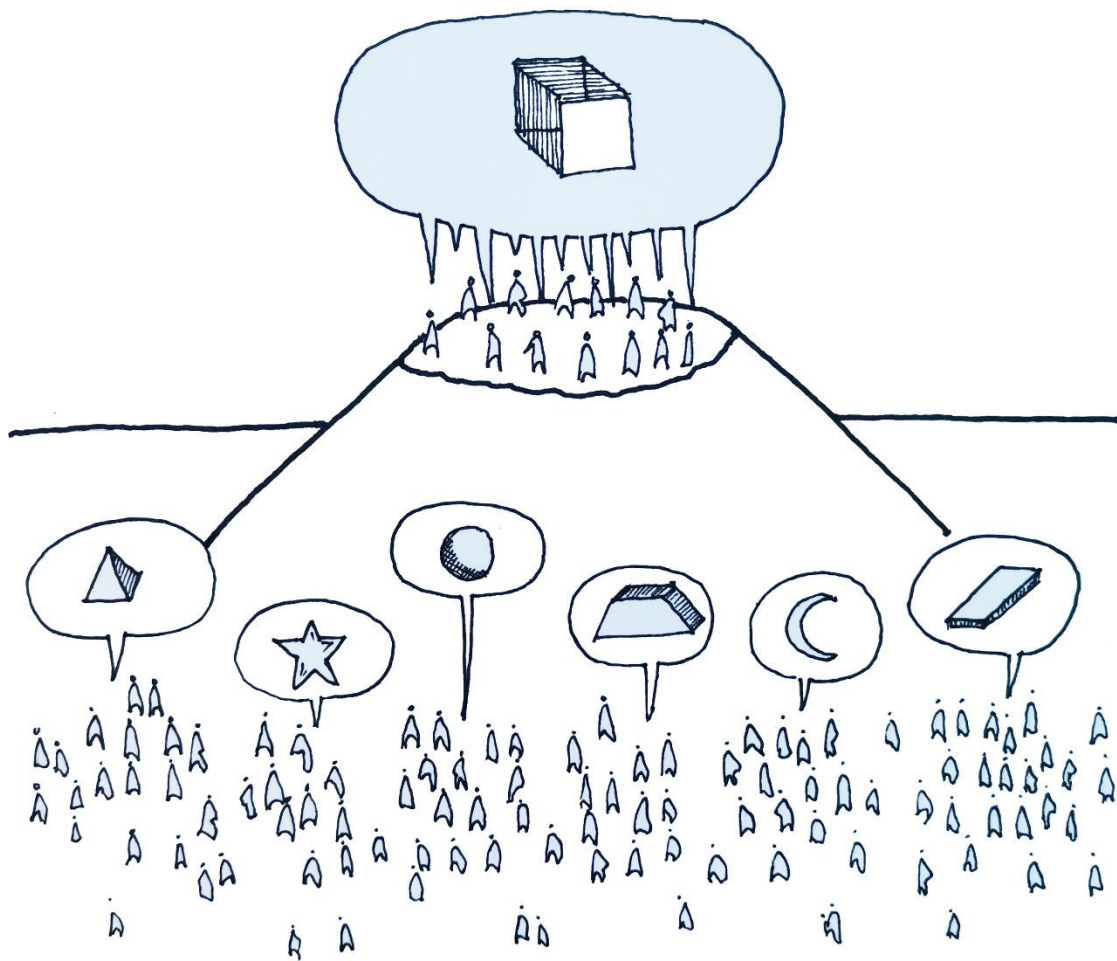
sector. Due to neoliberal urban governance, the private sector is entangled with public planning departments in Monterrey, which disproportionally incorporates the commercial interests in the planning practice.

In Chapter 5, I explain the research strategy of this dissertation. I position my study as a participatory action research that provided me the tools to engage in long-lasting relationships with both planners and community members. This approach proved to be appropriate in a Latin American context as it stresses the complexity of co-production of knowledge that results from the fieldwork interaction among diverse participants and that has the potential for new ways of reasoning and acting in the territory.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings. This approach allowed me to understand, from inside, the constraints of the planning practice in Monterrey regarding informal settlements, while engaging with them in professional conversations that allowed me to contribute to new planning documents in the Monterrey Metropolitan Zone and at the state level. These documents include express and clear recommendations to incorporate not only informal residents but vulnerable populations to the planning practice.

In Chapter 7, I discuss the challenges of my research process, summarize its findings, and present suggestions for future research. There are broad bodies of literature in Latin America that illustrate how urban planning has been, and still is, used by the powerful as a tool for capital accumulation. Therein lies the importance of planners being facilitators of just processes in the planning realm. This dissertation shows that an approach seeking understanding, rather than judgments, can contribute to the transformation of the planning practice.

Chapter 2. Traditional Planning Approaches to Informality in Mexico



The purpose of this and the proceeding chapter is to trace how the Mexican planning structure of politics and policy came to be and how it has developed from the 20th century to present times. Chapter 2 covers this history from WWII to the 2010s, focusing on modernization, while Chapter 3 examines how urban planning changed as a result of a wave of new political forces at the three governmental levels. These chapters analyzes both the theoretical approaches and the empirical evidence in plans and planning documents.

When planners and urban researchers approach informal communities, the way they are perceived and treated is entangled with a long history of unfair and abusive treatment by authorities. This chapter explores the reasons why residents of informal settlements are hesitant to work with external actors.

City planners entering contexts of urban informality usually experience distrust and hostility from residents. This attitude responds to a historical tradition of top-down planning approaches, in which residents have had to act defensively to protect their homes and avoid eviction or relocation. When planners walk into an informal community, they are walking into a long history of abuse and neglect. Informal residents live with the trauma of their experiences as well as the generations before whom have struggled with authorities trying to rebuild their neighborhood while using residents for electoral purposes. The defensive mode that activates in residents when they encounter authorities finds historical explanation by the planning efforts carried out in informal settlements by governments in Latin America.

INTRODUCTION

Discussions around land invasions in Latin America reached a peak in political and academic conversations in the 1960s. Radical groups and populist national governments

often supported land invasions (Davis, 2006). Land invasion was incentivized by shared phenomena of many countries of the Global South. The lack of opportunities in rural communities caused large migration to cities. In parallel, inadequate housing provisions by local and national governments and low-paying jobs created the necessity for informal urbanization. This trend was no exception in Mexico. Since the 1960s, many informal communities, initially established in the outskirts of cities, have grown and consolidated in central urban areas.

The conceptualizations around informal settlements have radically changed over time. Academic and political thought around self-help housing has evolved from its perception as a problem to be eliminated and replaced, to a solution to the problem of housing provision. However, the planners, architects, and governments that fuel public policies in countries and territories continue to change the way they think about informality.

The ongoing conceptual change towards informal housing has left its residents in a political limbo with a lack of certainty towards their legal status and civic role. This chapter covers an overview of the history of informality in Latin America with an emphasis on Mexico. The chapter also focuses on the driving concepts of development and modernization for planners in Mexico. Later, this chapter analyzes planning postures present in documents and articles that contribute to understanding the way informal settlements were viewed until recently.

Origins of a Rational Approach in Planning.

The origins of modern conceptions of planning are rooted in the negative externalities from the Industrial Revolution. Ebenezer Howard (1898) proposed his famous *Garden Cities of To-morrow* as a way to escape from the overwhelming pollution of cities.

However, Jane Jacobs criticized Howard's city model stating that "his prescription for saving the people" was to eliminate cities (Jacobs, 1961: 17). She adds that Howard's idea of a city proved to have an enormous influence in Le Corbusier's ideas, who largely influenced urban planning in Latin America. For groups supporting Howard's ideas, "the planned community must be islanded off as a self-contained unit, that it must resist future change, and that every significant detail must be controlled by the planners" (20).

All these modern ideas were driven by the conception of the "planner as an applied scientist" (Brooks, 2002: 80), which mentions that the best course of action is to let experts function as guides to social and urban progress. To Le Corbusier, the idea of modernity was tied to improve sanitary conditions. Indeed, having well-ventilated buildings, one of the fundamentals of modern architecture, helped prevent respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis. The aim for hygienic facilities was why health architectonical typology was the first to adopt modern architecture.

Brooks (2002) argues that "the rational model is still invoked in the world of planning practice." He adds that planning schools "display a split personality on this matter - trashing rationality in the planning theory class while continuing to teach it in all its glory in the methods and studio classes." Brooks traces the origins of rational education back to the University of Chicago's graduate program during the Roosevelt administration. Later, both teachers and students dispersed to other schools throughout the U.S. But these ideas traveled to other countries in the region as well. Many professionals in Mexico received their education in universities in the U.S. and Europe. In Monterrey, urban planning courses are still heavily oriented towards rationalistic notions. These notions, based on modern concepts, have shaped urban planners for generations.

It is important to realize that rationality-based planning continues to be potentially useful. These procedures include cost-benefit analysis, programming budgeting systems,

management, re-engineering, and statistical decision-making. In other words, it is appropriate in quantitative operations.

In a technocratic setting, such as most of Latin America in the 20th century, the planning practice "concentrated control in the hands of planners and a select group of others" (Allmendinger, 2009: 66). Planners functioned as agents of norms, and anyone without such expertise were excluded. In retrospect, it is clear how this stream of thought, while appealing to political ambitions of development and modernity, was limited to most of the population whose decisions, aims, and preferences were widely ignored in the name of technocratic expertise.

City planning under modernist conceptions is dominated by planners' knowledge. These ideas are fueled by concepts efficiency, logic, and rational order. Modernists' cities rigorously encapsulate land uses that seemed incompatible in paper. However, human activities in cities are enriched with diverse land uses intertwined with each other that create situations for encounter and flexibility to adapt spaces to ever changing societies. Jacobs (1961) criticism of the modern city is grounded on her observations of the parts of the city that planners considered chaotic, but were, in reality, vibrant urban and social spaces regulated by residents.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES: DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION

This chapter is grounded by the idea that the concepts of development and modernization have served as the theoretical guides for urban planning in the Global South. While after the Mexican Revolution there was a desire to position native cultures in art and culture as part of the national identity in governance and urbanism, the desire to emulate great international powers continued the same. The accelerated country's urbanization due

to great economic growth from 1940s to 1960s was developed following guiding development and modernization concepts. In this section, I discuss the way these ruling concepts and associated externalities have influenced the planning practice in Mexico.

Development and Modernization.

According to Bayat and Biekart (2009), the development theories identify urbanization as an essential element of modernization. The “global cities” operate under a production, trade, and governance of global value chain logic in pursuing wealth and opportunities. In this neoliberal logic,

[t]he city is shaped more by the logic of the market than the needs of its inhabitants. It is characterized by greater privatization, deregulation and commodification. In this urban form, important responsibilities of public authorities in responding to the needs of the urbanites are transferred to non-state and private agents and corporations, which may hold little accountability to the public (Bayat and Biekart, 2009: 817).

This pattern has greatly affected Latin America and Mexico, where the abandonment of social policies rendered millions of poor settlers as outsiders, splitting cities into two areas that respond to the logic of the neoliberal economies, and another depicted as in-civil societies, namely, informal settlements (Bayat and Biekart, 2009). This process has led to a series of expulsions on many levels. According to Sassen (2014), people are being spelled from social and economic spheres through instruments of expulsion, such as policies, institutions, systems, techniques, and the imposition of specialized knowledge.

Similarly, Roy (2006) provides a mighty description of how the planning realm has been not only a witness, but is partly responsible for expanding colonialism in the world, especially if it is considered the vehicle to achieve territorial domination through spatial re-organization. Although Roy’s ideas on colonialism are first explained in a war invasion domain, she later describes how colonial ideas on planning are tolerated and often

encouraged by neoliberal governments in the South because, along with it, comes the concept of development and modernization. As mentioned by Kamete (2013), authorities in the Global South have “a fetish about formality... largely inspired by Western notions of modernity” (p. 17)

This obsession with modernity has come hand in hand with industrialization processes in the Global South – and the powers behind the industry, this is especially relevant in Monterrey, that as noted in Chapter 1, industrial expansion has played a relevant role in the city. International agendas and sense of aesthetics have little to do with the needs, realities, and desires of those who live in informality. Kamete, citing García Canclini (2008: 81-83), posits “that the imagined city is imagined by people who... view the city from the heights of power.” Under these conceptions, people behind the governments operated under the idea of “good” cities and “bad” cities; good cities are those that represent a foreign order, are homogeneous, clean, and standardized; bad cities, representing those alienated from the public life, are heterogeneous, complex, and strange. However, these ideas are not only imported, as the conception of a proper city has even been regionalized in the Global South with local names. Oguyankin (2019) refers to Nigeria, this way of planning is called Owambe Urbanism. In this, only the local elites participate in the creation of the modern city imagining, leaving the poor, their views and livelihoods, outside the planning process.

Roy (2006) discusses the relevant role of planners disseminating decontextualized urban settings, as they are fundamental to carrying out the “liberal ruse” regarding the values on aesthetics from the global North. Watson (2009a) has argued about the use of formal planning and its application to exclude the poor through the motor of urban modernization. This has been seen as a way to catch up with the North. Conversely, it has contributed to social and spatial marginalization. Liberals all over tout social justice, but

when it comes down to it, the urban planning decisions usually are not interested enough in healing the difficulties of poverty, but instead moving it to the side so that they can have wealthier tax payers in their cities.

Watson (2009a) posits that the use of the technical skills and tools used by planners, such as Master Plans and Models, are incompatible with poor and informal populations. Master plans, for example, are made to shape an idea of what is “proper” and “normal”, leaving informal settlements in the margins of law. Models, on the other hand, conceive spaces as independent from their contexts. She concludes that, as a way to counteract the negative effects of planning imposition, planning needs a pro-poor approach, away from Euro-centric ideas of aesthetics.

In this context, where urban planning functions have been heavily influenced by foreign values, why is there not enough resistance in the cities of the Global South? Watson (2009a; 2009b) proposes that powerful entities use planning as a tool to achieve modernity, which is attractive to local elites as middle and high classes have fully adopted the ideals of development and modernity. For instance, Mehta (2016) describes that in Ahmedabad, India, middle classes are tracing urban renewals, re-shaping the city. As the middle and high classes are incorporated into neoliberal cities, we begin to see more frequently private companies arranging the transformations of its visions into an official planning document (Koch, 2015). This point is discussed in extend in Chapter 4 in relation to planning in La Campana.

Development and Modernization: the Guiding Axes for Traditional Planning in Latin America and Mexico.

Arturo Escobar (1996) views the emergence of concepts associated with ‘development’ as a series of economic and social values imposed by powerful nations after

World War II. In his influential and lucid study, Escobar traces how nations realized that they were underdeveloped, and describes the different measures governments took to overcome such a pitiful state of affairs. Escobar expands on how the hope for development has been implemented since Harry Truman's policy of the "fair deal" for the underdeveloped areas on the globe. These ideas replicated notions of ideality of political institutions and ways of living from the North; as a consequence, cities considered underdeveloped re-shaped their urban form. When countries "started to see themselves as underdeveloped in the early post-World War II [period]... they embarked upon the task of 'un-underdeveloping' themselves by subjecting their societies (p.6)" to the values and processes of the North.

Seven decades of applying specific ways of production and reproduction of economic and physical growth to achieve a "developed" society, have shaped nearly all governmental institutions in Latin America. Contrary to the original intentions of this set of policies and politics, Escobar mentions that the "strategy of development produced its opposite: massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression" (p.4).

Regardless of the failure of "development," as Escobar considers it, many "underdeveloped" countries have subordinated their functions to trading and businesses mirroring their Northern counterparts. More importantly, country and city governments have also adopted an "aesthetics of empire" (Roy, 2006). In Roy's words, that is "the most seductive liberal ruse, securing hegemonic consent through the strategies of renewal, beauty, and freedom" (p. 15-16). Accordingly, Ranganathan (2018) argues that in planning, under the banner of "liberalism," these "empire" strategies are applied as urban improvement projects, but merely serve states' capital and spatial accumulation strategies. Contrary to the promises of betterment and inclusion, improvement projects beget cycles

of inequality and exclusion, as they are designed to correct behaviors related to property and propriety. Importantly, Ranganathan points out the responsibility planners have by calling them “colonial planners,” echoing Roy’s (2006) idea that there is no such thing as an “innocent professional.”

The image of modernity and development, in this context, has acted as the antithesis of pluralism, as it expels and excludes anyone who does not respond to the logic of the market, multiplicity, or divergent visions. It is also important to realize that re-shaping a city under these concepts excludes populations that do not fit into hegemonic views of societies, bringing disruptions to preset social and livelihood dynamics.

Aesthetics Outside Development and Modernization is Seeing as Undesirable.

For Holston (1999), modernity is an instrument of colonization that depends on a strong State desire to create conditions for the imposition of a new order of urban life. Within this frame of reference, modernism assumes a homologized future in which differences are erased by imposing a predictable order. Thus, the central agent of modernist planning is a powerful State. For Holston, modernist planning requires a counteragent, a mode of planning that takes account of the formations of insurgent citizenship.

The dichotomy between modernity and insurgency in planning is represented by a State-directed project versus the insurgent forms of the society that builds on heterogeneous visions outside the State. Insurgency is “found both in organized grassroots mobilizations and in everyday practices that, in different ways, empower, parody, derail, or subvert State agendas” (p. 167). Struggles over what it means to belong to a modern State breed insurgent responses.

For Holston, modernity is driven by the ideal to shape a society by imposing an alternative future embodied in plans that are completely decontextualized of a society’s

norms. In light of this, modernist planning is designed by government agencies to forge new forms of collective relationships and habits as the basis of pushing their societies into a proclaimed future, transforming the ‘undesired’ present. Therefore, urban informality is seen as the undesired urbanizations that needs to be changed. In that regard, Chapter 4 shows that informal settlements can become the source of insurgent inspiration where the hegemonic order is challenged, and new imagery is born, offering flexible, non-definitive answers, more in tune with the needs of a diverse society.

Urban Planning and the Normalization of “Pathological” Spaces.

The obsession with modernity seems to be what fuels the desire for the ‘normalization’ of spaces of difference, in which we can find informal settlements. Holston (2011) argues that paradoxically, the search for an ideal of citizenship develops both formulations of equality and inequality by the idealization of a monolithic system and rules of social organization that do not consider people who are that are outside these positions. This has consequences on the “determination means for the distribution of rights and resources” (p. 338) available for that part of the population.

Holston (2011) building on Young’s (1989) concept of ‘differentiated citizenship’ analyzes inclusion and participation of all population groups to achieve full citizenship. Differentiated citizenship relates to the formulation of special rights for group of difference, instead of consider all groups in a society the same, which is the most common approach in modern societies. For Young (1989), the key problem is the definition of equality, in which equal treatment homogenizes and disappears the differences of minority and marginalized groups into the common denominators from a dominant culture. To put it differently, equal treatment constitutes the goal of oppressive groups to undermine groups of differences to achieve domination. Young argues that by enforcing equal

treatment for all, the State ignores the salient differences of the many people and cultures within modern nation-States, particularly oppressed groups (Holston, 2011).

The relevance of Holton's approach for planning is that the planning practice, in the form of plans, urban regulation, and land-use zoning, is the vehicle to achieve the constraints of what later will shape the new wanted society in which differences are blurred.

In that regard, Holston (1999) advocates for developing a different social imagination in the planning theory and practice that confronts the modernist imaginary. The sources of this new social thought should consider the spaces of insurgent citizenship, understanding 'insurgent' as the opposition of these spaces of citizenship of the modernist spaces that physically dominate many cities today. This insurgent space also opposes the modernist political project that constrains citizenship into a plan of State building within a positivist doctrine. Chapter 3 explores pathways to building an inviting and inclusive vision for all voices.

TRADITIONAL GOVERNMENT PLANNING RESPONSES TO INFORMALITY

While the concepts of modernity and development have been the driving force behind the visions of urban planning in Mexico, the vehicle through which they have traveled into the region are institutions of the Global North that operate transnationally. Mexican governments' responses to urban informality throughout the 20th century have been influenced by governments of the North and their institutions.

International Financial Institutions like the World Bank fueled this movement in Latin American policies. International development agencies prompted economic liberalization policies that generated de-agrarianization, pushing agricultural producers into global markets in unequal conditions, which produced rural abandonment and later

migration to urban environments (Davis, 2006). For Zanetta (2001), no country in the region could have escaped the influence of development agencies like the World Bank.

While irregular settlements in Latin America appeared by the end of the 19th century, it was by the middle of the 20th century they were broadly distributed, corresponding with the full adoption of economic development models in the region that promoted the modernization of society (Aboy, 2017).

This section discusses the different approaches to informality that Latin American and Mexican governments have followed over time. Broadly speaking, governments' first response to urban informality included to ignore, criminalize, and destroy informal settlements. A further reaction was to tolerate informal communities as necessary labor force for the mushrooming service sector needed to support cities' industrialization. Later, governments started providing education and job training, support for self-help housing construction, and provision of some public services. The later response has included gradual formalization of informal communities, recognition of property ownership, and provisions of running water, electricity, garbage pick-up, schools, and health centers. However, while literature reports on these stages, the responses in the territory have not been linear as it has operated at different paces depending on the government's political affiliation or clientelar relationship with some community leaders.

Informal Settlements' Clearance.

In Latin America, the first World Bank (WB) lending program began in the 1950s, and mainly addressed raising industrial and agricultural production. In the 1960s, significant lending was addressed to improve agricultural practices. It was not until the 1970s when the WB experienced a substantial shift in policy, expanding its focus to cities.

In this period, the WB identified excessive population growth in cities as an obstacle for economic and social growth (Zanetta, 2010).

During the 1960s and 1970s, concerns with urban growth led to new lending policies addressed to urban development. Cities adopted these policies to deal with the massive growth caused by rural-urban migration. The first WB policies were directed to eliminate informal settlements and its further substitution with high-standard public housing (Zanetta, 2010). These policies proved to be counter-productive; Herbert Werlin (1999) estimates that, according to United Nations data, Latin American governments were destroying annually more self-help settlements than they were building. Consequently, governments' capacity to meet the needs of the informal city residents decreased.

According to Álvarez and Bocarejo (2014), early planning interventions saw urban informality as a problem that had to be eradicated. Eradication policies had a boom during dictatorships, especially in the South of the continent, in the 1960s and 1970s in a way to achieve ordered, developed, and modern societies.

The first approach of the Mexican government was to reject informal housing improvements or provision of basic services, arguing that by doing so, the government would encourage the formation of new informal settlements (Gilbert and Ward, 1985).

Policies regarding urban informality have fluxed from repressive to inviting, according to the political intentions in Mexico. Self-help neighborhoods were generally unauthorized and always self-managed; however, in the 1970s, with the so-called self-construction policies, these settlements became authorized in some cases, including the subdivision, urbanization, and provision of minimal services by the State. Such is the case of Monterrey, Mexico, where public developments like La Fama started from a very basic subdivision and urbanization. Future inhabitants in this settlement were given substantial assistance build the house for themselves. Over the years, this approach generated a

neighborhood with certain urban quality, diversity, and integrating small businesses and trees planted on the sidewalks by the residents themselves (Montaner y Muxi, 2011).

For Davis (2006), Mexico City is an essential case in point. Despite a model law of the *colonias proletarias*, which sought to ban speculation in low-income housing, the Lopez Portillo government (1976-82) allowed informal settlers to sell their property at market rates, having as a result of this reform, the middle-class gentrification of some formerly poor *colonias* in good locations as the city grew.

The informal settlements' size and growth exceed the capacities of the State, international organizations, the market, and civil society. This is not due only to the State's incapacity, but also a deliberate policy to obtain the support of the popular sector (Álvarez, 2021: 4). In other words, while the general rule was to reject informal settlements, there are exceptions in which the State allowed such informal processes in order to later gain political profit.

The State desire to create build political loyalty served to expand and allow land invasions. During the 1970s, in Mexico, the invasion attempts increased close to elections actively promoted by radical parties whose aim was to embarrass the PRI¹ by forcing the government to eject squatters (Gilbert and Ward, 1985: 92). In this regard, land invasions were used for both political ends.

A similar approach was used in Mexico City. Politicians have used informal settlements to serve their purposes. In 1976, President Echeverria promoted an invasion of land owned by the national newspaper Excelsior. This action was used to oust the editorial staff, one of the most prominent government critics (Gilbert and Ward 1985: 92).

¹ PRI is the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* which held majority political control in Mexico for most of the 20th century.

In the Mexican context, as well as other parts of Latin America and the Global South, it is impossible to separate politics from informality, as politicians have historically used people living in informality in exchange for political favors.

Clearing informal settlements was the main focus of governments for a brief time in the 1960s and 1970s. Soon it gave way to upgrades and beautification projects. However, clearance is still present in a lesser or greater degree using discrete instruments such as market control creating displacement.

Informal Settlements' Upgrading.

In the decades of 1980s and 1990s, policies reflected the spreading neoliberal agenda. Policies designed to eliminate informal settlements and replace them with formal settlements ended by the 1980s. Latin American governments started programs of informal settlements' upgrading, as it was the least expensive approach to deal with housing provision (Werlin, 1999; Zanetta, 2000). This focus intended to develop low-cost solutions for low-income housing shortages in rapidly urbanizing cities drawing on Turner's self-help model in which the settlers were the ones who improved their houses. Simultaneously, the government provided basic infrastructures such as sewage, freshwater provision, and, critically, the recognition of property ownership and granting of land-titles, which brought certainty to residents in informality.

In the first stage of informal settlement expansion, the governmental policy was to ignore or eliminate such settlements. However, as research on the potential for self-built improvement emerged and the social and political capital entrenched in these communities became apparent, policy interventions sought to 'regularize' and upgrade the physical status of these illegal settlements (Gilbert & Ward, 1985). This involved two main spheres of intervention: first, to gradually provide essential infrastructure (water, electricity,

drainage, street paving, schools, etc.). Second, although not in all cities, the extralegal land apportionment was addressed by transferring full title to residents who were, in effect, the de facto owners who had either squatted or purchased un-serviced land at low cost. The “regularization policies became widely accepted and were actively promoted by multi-lateral agencies and by governments” (Ward et al., 2011: 467).

Today’s politics on informality are much more varied. The postmodern era has allowed informality to become a central topic in urban studies, validating and affirming its alternative, non-hierarchical methods. Since the 1990s, Latin American governments have sprouted large-scale initiatives for integrating and improving informal settlements, including: Favela-Bairro in Rio de Janeiro, programs of land tenure, service provision, the national program of Barrios improvement in Uruguay, the integration program of irregular settlements in Bolivia, the program Chile-Barrio, and the famous and well-documented Modelo Medellín (Ducci, 2010: 497). Instead of aiming for displacement or elimination, these strategies improve living conditions. Nevertheless, these initiatives have been criticized for the long-term consequences for the communities, such as the rising cost of land.

In many cases, the State’s provision of public services, such as electricity and water, is a driver of consolidation in informal settlements. Electricity is usually the first service installed in informal settlements, usually replacing illegal connections that allow the residents to freeload electricity (Eibenschutz and Benlliure, 2009). After the provision of electricity, and depending on the community’s capacity to organize and negotiate public service delivery, the government typically installs freshwater networks. (Gilbert and Ward, 1985; Eibenschutz and Benlliure, 2009). Tenure certainty has provide residents incentives to improve their housing units.

Neoliberal Urban Planning.

This section discusses the nuances and the impacts of capitalist expansion and gentrification in areas of the city where vulnerable populations live as well as informal urbanization areas.

As city planning in the Global South increasingly incorporates the private sector, cities are seeing how the neoliberal priorities of profit and private property are transforming urban lifestyles. Liberalization of markets in urban settings makes high quality of life a “commodity for those with money” (Harvey, 2012: 14). The territories of the poor, on the other hand, are real estate experiments.

In the 1990s, the role of the public sector was to enable markets to work. This was the beginning of a global agenda aligned with neoliberalism. The WB policies in the 1980s were addressed to demonstrate affordable and replicable housing solutions; in contrast, in the 1990s, the emphasis was the improvement of urban management with a focus on developing financial intermediaries (Zanetta, 2000).

During the 1990s, decentralization and privatization emerged as new development paradigms. Increasing poverty and urban informality, along with the State's inability to provide enough housing for low-income populations, prompted the need to legalize and regulate the illegal and informal city. New generations of urban environmental improvement projects emerged in the city as well as new legalization programs (Clichevsky, 2003).

Land regularization in Latin America started after the governments realized that housing projects for low-income populations would be an impossible enterprise. Most informal settlements receive land regularization after a period of consolidation, conferring in that way, self-responsibilization, whereby “residents are rendered responsible for the

provision of basic environmental services previously seen as the responsibility of government authorities” (Sletto and Nygren, 2015).

Regularization programs, especially those implemented in recent years, have as explicit objectives the definitive integration of the irregular habitat into the formal city, the alleviation of poverty, the reduction of violence, and urban social inclusion (Clichevsky, 2003: 31). For those participating in the process, regularization should mean permanence, recognition of their property and investment, and the possibility of joining the formal market for land and housing. However, for Sabatini (2003), most of the programs have achieved very partial and, in some cases, negative results due to macroeconomic restrictions. Policies have been formulated without considering the complex reality to which they apply.

In Mexico, neoliberal land and housing policies became more evident in the 1990s. These policy and law shifts have incentivized the expansion of cities, putting pressure on consolidated informal settlements in prime locations. The massive shift of policies intensified during president Salinas de Gortari's government (1988-1994). In 1992, the reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution and the Agrarian Law removed the restrictions for the *ejidatarios* to sell their land, which allowed a huge increase in the supply of cheap land in the formalized urban real estate market. Moreover, since 2000, President Vicente Fox's housing policies have supported privatized urban expansion. As a result, there has been an increase in uninhabited and abandoned homes due to the terrible conditions of the housing projects, both in design and location (Marosi, 2017). These circumstances converge in exacerbating the conditions and housing crisis of the urban periphery, increasing land prices and social tensions, the consequences of which we do not yet know fully (Salazar, 2016).

For Yunda and Sletto (2020), the logic of neoliberalism and profit comes in the form of densification projects, as these strategies are influenced by the private sector pressures for new plans. This has proven to hold true in Nuevo León, where real-estate developers and private companies have financed and implementing plans and ordinances, articulating the convergence of sustainable objectives and the market drivers. For Yunda and Sletto (2017), this policy shift is inspired by “neoliberal policies that favor private market development” (p. 601) and designed to expand the reproduction of capital. The market and the real estate investments have successfully captured these attractive concepts of densification and sustainability to multiply their gains by reaching novel markets in the city. In many cases, real estate companies influence planning processes by using their power to modify city zoning or by making urban plans in a process called arranged urbanism.

In the state of Nuevo León, Mexico, under the guise of sustainability initiatives, governments are implementing densification policies in new urban plans. The objectives of these plans are to promote policy for housing dignity, densification of the consolidated central areas of the city, and environmentally-conscious legal land tenure (Cabrera and Veloquio, 2017: 84). However, this is expanding real estate territory, threatening informal settlements or low-income neighborhoods with future displacement. Once more, the use of attractive concepts such as sustainability, densification, and ecology, attempt to hide inequity.

Arranged Urbanism.

To understand the influence of the private sector in public planning decisions, Koch (2015) explains the neoliberal logic of profit in the context of Barranquilla, Colombia. He realized about the coherence between land-owners interests, land-use plans, and

implemented projects. Koch poses this coherence was due to the massive influence of private interests in public planning. By doing this, the private sector designs the transformation of the city. The implications of this are that companies are incentivizing an exclusive urban development. Public participation is only used artificially to communicate convenient abstract ideas elaborated on the plans, with no mention of specific policies. In Koch's words: "The methods used were completely outside of the officially foreseen steps of public participation. The strategy not only was to influence the content of an existing land-use plan, but also to elaborate an own land-use plan and then formalize it with the help of the public planning department" (2015: 419).

Powerful private companies in neoliberal settings are shaping cities in a way that excludes and includes demographics according to profit. In contrast, informal settlements have a parallel market for the purchase and sale of land and housing units (Clichevsky, 2003: 24). Forcing the informal and low-income market to compete against global investment forms, such as the real estate firms, puts poor communities at a disadvantage.

Nuances of Planning Approaches in Monterrey.

While the origin of informal settlements share many common features in Latin America, there are particular regional strategies adapted to the political objectives of a specific time and space. In Mexico, there were mixed ideas around urban interventions around informality. These policies have shifted from banning "absentee ownership, poaching, and speculation in low-income housing" (Davis, 2006: 43) to allow informal settlers to sell their property, resulting in an emerging gentrification process in some formerly poor informal settlements now located in centric locations.

It is important to mention that while informality in the metropolitan area of Monterrey is still an urgent topic, statistics suggest that the city is managing these inequities

relatively better than Latin America and Mexico City. In Latin America, it is estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of low-income settlements are the product of illegal appropriation of land. In Mexico City, 53 percent of the population has accessed urban land through illegal possession of land (Duhau y Giglia, 2008). In the Monterrey metropolitan area, in 2010, approximately 21 percent of the population lived in neighborhoods of informal origin, and 15 percent remained informal. In 2012, 403 irregular settlements were identified in the Monterrey metropolitan area, of which 95 were in the process of regularization (Valles and Infante, 2015: 66). Additionally, new local governments at the three levels (municipal, state, and national) are currently addressing extensive regularizations programs.

During the 1970s, the Mexican government established institutional responses to handling informal settlements, creating national housing institutions. In 1972, the national government created the Institute of the Workers' Housing Fund (*Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores* - INFONAVIT), which substantially increased the number of low-income housing projects. The state of Nuevo León joined the institutional effort by creating the Metropolitan Development of Monterrey (*Fomento Metropolitano de Monterrey* - FOMERREY) in 1973 to respond to the proliferation of land invasions to private properties. The institutional functions were addressed to offer viable alternative to lower-income groups in the Monterrey Metropolitan Area (Valles and Infante, 2015), or relocation of informal settlements' residents. Another responsibility of FOMERREY is to apply urban development laws to regularize informal lots owned by groups or families (Montiel, 2017). The legalization of informal settlements has been in process in other parts of Latin America as well. While low-income areas begin illegally, such areas are gradually incorporated both functionally and legally into the urban fabric (Gilbert and Ward 1985).

While these institutions did not stop informality, during the 1980s, the housing supply in Nuevo León multiplied due to FOMERREY's progressive urbanization policy and the success of social housing programs. Since 1974, the *Tierra y Libertad*² movement stopped invading properties; however, the invasions continued by groups affiliated with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) satellite organizations, such as the Confederations of Mexican Workers (CTM), *Nacional de Organizaciones Populares* (CNOP) and *Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos* (CROC) (Villarreal, 1992: 22).

In Mexico and Nuevo León, the policy shift from elimination to improvement of informal settlements is visible in the INFONAVIT and FOMERREY policies. While the fourth article in the Mexican Constitution establishes the right to housing, the programs, laws, and institutions responsible for urban development do not assure the provision of urban soil for people with limited resources, resulting in the proliferation of informal settlements generally located in unsuitable places (Cabrera and Veloquio, 2017). In other words, these institutions are not designed to prevent housing informality but to respond in some extent to their inevitable development. Nevertheless, these institutions determined building criteria, housing regulations, and housing projects for the low-income population. By the end of the 1980s, in alignment with neoliberal thought, they turned into institutions that granted mortgage loans; consequently, private developers benefited from weak regulations and huge capital for housing projects (Eibenschutz and Benlliure, 2009).

While the State still serves to provide technical assistance, building materials, and service provision in informal settlements in Monterrey, that role co-exists with the neoliberal policies that now strongly influence urban policies in the region. The most

² *Tierra y Libertad* is the most salient social movement that addressed the lack of housing options for the poor. It is an originally communist group that organized land invasions to later distribute to peasants and workers who had recently arrived to Monterrey.

salient example of this happens in Monterrey, where cement companies and private universities fund the municipal and state plans modifying the land use of such zones. These plans are supported by cultural and sports projects, such as the painting of macro-murals in informal settlements and the organization of soccer tournaments.

To conclude, it is important to note that while the policies implemented by the national and state level offered housing opportunity for some informal residents, the beneficiaries of these interventions were subject to clientelistic conditions established by officialdom. In other words, these governmental programs were not open to the population but attached to the co-option of community leaders.

Discussion.

For Clara Salazar (2016), neoliberal policies have failed in Mexico, as the market forces alone cannot produce a socially optimal output benefiting all. From 2000 to 2010, INFONAVIT alone granted around 500,000 mortgage loans nationwide each year, reaching unprecedented economic dynamism in the construction sector (Salazar, 2016). However, the 2010 census indicates that there are around five million uninhabited homes nationwide and two million more homes for temporary use. In addition, studies of the Federal Mortgage Society (*Sociedad Hipotecaria Federal*) indicate that 25% of the housing financed by State institutions and produced by the real estate sector for commercial purposes is abandoned as a result of the low quality of the construction and their far distance from cities. Many residents of this formal housing developments were former informal squatters, who, realizing that the formal projects do not meet their expectations, returned to the informal settlements.

The increasing developers' lack of restrictions, combined with the thinning of the State functions, led to a housing disaster in Mexico, broadly described by the Los Angeles

Times (Marosi, 2017) article *Mexico's Housing Debacle*, where it is evidenced the poor housing infrastructure, abandonment, corruption, and expansion of cities led to unbearable and unfit housing projects.

Other problems have increased due to private sector-led urban development, including the polarization and fragmentation of the urban layout. In Monterrey, private actors have begun to zone the city in the new Partial Plan of Urban Development (*Programa Parcial de Desarrollo Urbano* - PPDU). While historically there was one comprehensive plan for the metropolitan area of Monterrey, and another for the municipality; the new PPDU identifies polygons, or strategic zones. The partial plans of these areas involves the competent municipal authority and "academic, neighborhood, non-governmental organizations, among others, to promote the development of a territory, delimited by a polygon" (PDUMM, 2013: 6). These polygons are called "districts," in which the main partner is usually, but not exclusively, a local university, where it is common to find private sector involvement. There are currently five districts and eleven sub-centers in Monterrey.

As the government developed the urban strategies with the private sector, these plans include many spaces where they can act. Generally, the new planning documents include changes to accommodate more density, related to the construction of apartment buildings, renewal projects, and land-uses changes. These kinds of urban strategies are discussed by Keisha-Khan (2004) in the Brazilian context, who argues that "discourses and practices of urban renewal are prime examples of anti-black racism" (p. 813). In the context of informal settlements, these practices are not only anti-black but also anti-poor and anti-informal, as they have as a possible outcome the expulsion of local practices, livelihoods, and social relationships.

On the surface, these plans might seem appealing since they often include terms like green spaces, public transportation, and cultural spaces. However, upon closer examination, the new commercial areas and high density methods work perfectly for private businesses but can negatively impact poor communities.

Before the intensification of segregation in the neoliberal era, socio-spatial segregation dates back in 1573. Philip II's plan ordered the Spanish to live in a designated urban layout, while the Indigenous people had to establish residence outside that space (Lara, 2010). The separation of low-income residents and elites is constant throughout Monterrey's history (Aparicio, 2011: 200). At first, the aim for segregation was ethnic, as the Indigenous workers used for constructing the Spanish city were confined to the South of the Santa Catarina River. This river crosses the city from East to West. As the city industrialized by the end of the XIX century, segregation was linked to immigration. The working-class neighborhoods were established close to the industries in the North and East of the periphery. Simultaneously, the elites began to move from downtown to the West and South of the city. Since 1940, segregation is notorious with the creation of housing complexes for the working class in the North and East of Monterrey. This includes the expansion to neighboring municipalities of Santa Catarina, San Nicolás de los Garza, Guadalupe, and new residential areas for the elites to the West and in San Pedro Garza García, one of the wealthiest municipalities of Latin America.

ANALYSIS OF LOCAL PLANNING DOCUMENTS

In most Mexican cities, despite the unquestionable impact of the actions developed by public housing agencies, the massive housing provision available to the low-income sectors in the 20th century consists of access to land through the processes of irregular

urbanization and self-production of housing units. For this reason, public policies related to handling informal settlements, regulation of land use, control of urban development, and the limited access to land for low-income citizens, constitute a central strategy in Mexican development goals.

The position and attitude of the State towards informal settlements are reflected in diverse official documents. In the following section, I analyze planning documents that show a top-down approach to planning and informality since the 1980s and up to 2018, when the new federal government, led by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, openly declared against the neoliberal regime.

Federal Planning Documents.

In this section, I analyze and discuss the position and attitude of the State towards informal settlements based upon diverse official documents and articles made by scholars and planners that have participated in the government prior to the economic discourse shift in 2018. My research shows that the positionality of government officials has been traditionally a top-down approach to planning and informality. This section is divided into three sub-sections; national, state, and municipal levels. In Mexico, there is a matrix of institutional congruence among the three levels of government. This compels the municipality to align its initiatives to those of the state and the state to align with the federal government. However, as shown below, there have also been incongruent responses to informal settlements at the three levels.

While there have been outstanding urban researchers who have explored informality from a sensible and just approach, like urban theorists Emilio Duhau, Angela Giglia, or Alicia Ziccardi, the generality of the official approach to urban informality, has been marked by a negative typecasting.

In 1998, the book *Normatividad Urbanística de las Principales Ciudades de México* (Garza and Rodríguez, 1998) captures many planning researchers' postures towards Mexican urban regulations. The subject of informality is treated repeatedly in several chapters, illustrating the author's classist overtones. For instance, Enrique Estrada (1998) mentions that "as long as the process of irregular growth continues along with the non-compliance with the plans of urban development programs, government functions will become more difficult to meet, and urban planning will be hindered" (Estrada, 1998: 170). His opinion to informality shows that for him, there is a disconnection between urban order and irregular settlements, and that there is no way for these two spheres to dialogue. In other words, for this author, informality does not constitute a legitimate form of planning.

This positionality has remained in the planning imaginary with various nuances in the region. For instance, even in the most progressive planning documents in 2013 from the Enrique Peña Nieto presidential administration, the approach remains punitive. One of the strategies to deal with informality is to define rules for the regulation, control and sanctioning of irregular land occupation processes (invasions, subdivisions other than those established in the plans, atypical subdivisions, etc.), establishing a regime of responsibilities and a system of sanctions applicable to both public officials and private individuals who allow, encourage, or benefit from the action (Gobierno de México, 2013: 34). However, a strategy to regularize informal land lots is mentioned, but with an approach that favors land speculation. In an effort to consolidate the city, the policy mentions that authorities should support land regularization programs, since legal certainty of land ownership allows for the promotion of housing markets, in addition to opening the doors of formality to their owners (Gobierno de México, 2013: 18). In other words, the language used in the document favors the land tenure for its future commercialization.

As recently as 2016, the *Ley General de Asentamientos Humanos, Ordenamiento Territorial y Desarrollo Urbano* (Gobierno de México, 2016), mentions as one of its objectives, in Article 52 section IX, the “Prevention, monitoring and control of irregular land occupation processes” (2016: 27), later adding, “Reduce and eliminate the processes of irregular occupation of land, through the supply of land with infrastructure and services, finished or progressive, that preferably meets the needs of low-income groups.” (p. 38). However, the text does not specify who would be responsible for implementing those initiatives, their budgets, or detailed strategies for those policies to be implemented. While it is expected that governments pursue a formal city, in these documents, there are no clear legal options for informal residents.

In 2017, it was published the last official planning document from the federal administration 2012-2018. The *Guía Metodológica Elaboración y Actualización de Programas Municipales de Desarrollo Urbano* (Gobierno de México, 2017) written by the Secretary of Urban Development of Mexico (SEDATU). In it, one can find a more welcoming approach of informal settlements, as it states that governments should work in “determining the conditions of irregular settlements to make possible the design of specific interventions aimed at their possible reincorporation into urban development (regularization), relocation and/or urban improvement” (p. 151). However, throughout the document, informal settlements are described as responsible for many of the urban ills of the city. For instance, the neighborhood relocation due to environmental risks seems to be applicable only for informal settlements, when there is plenty of evidence in Mexican cities about formal neighborhoods that are located in areas with high environmental risks that have been flooded because of poor location; however, only residents of informality are subject to relocation.

State of Nuevo León Planning Documents.

It is noteworthy that in the Metropolitan Plan for Monterrey 2000-2021 (Gobierno del Estado, 2003), elaborated by state and municipal authorities in 2003, informal settlements are listed as part of the causes of environmental decline:

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing awareness of the negative impact of human activity on the environment and the increase in soil, air and water pollution. In the case of the Monterrey metropolitan area, environmental hazards are present as follows: contamination of rivers and streams; irregular settlements; clandestine dumping of industrial waste; industries that use contaminating processes or products, which are close to housing developments (Gobierno del Estado, 2003: 151).

In the same way as national documents, this description of the human causes of environmental hazards excludes the formal neighborhoods designed or approved by local authorities.

This attitude towards informality mirrors master's thesis in graduate programs in universities in Monterrey. In 2012, a master thesis from the architecture program at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León, elaborates on the need to create a strategy for orderly urban growth in the Monterrey metropolitan area, praising housing projects: "a point in favor of the construction of housing complexes is that they combat irregular settlements" (Pérez, 2012: 101). Yet the Los Angeles Times (Marosi, 2017) published a thorough article describing the vastly negative effects of the same housing projects the master's thesis complimented. The article labels the formal developments as an unsustainable urban sprawl, lacking public space, and totally disconnected from labor, education, and health centers. Also, Marosi (2017) mentions the poor quality of constructions as well as the lack of provision of sufficient provision of fresh water, drainage, and public transportation. All of these problems of formal settlements made by

the private sector under the tutelage of the state led to up to 22% of abandoned housing units in the last decade (Navarrete, 2021).

One explanation for this refusal to consider informal environments as an equally valid part of the city may be the prioritization of knowledge generated in academic and/or elite environments. According to Prieto and Arias (2021), governance in Monterrey is driven by academic-expertise knowledge, which is seen by local authorities as “responsible and serious.” Prieto and Arias (2021), using Chomsky (1967) argument from *The Responsibility of Intellectuals*, criticize scholar-expert or technicians intellectuals in Monterrey, who once they have attained power and wealth through research contracts or government positions, begin to reproduce and accept the *status quo*. The mission of these technicians is clearly to serve the local authority and its established order without questioning them. In this context, studies of informality or anything outside of the academic order are not considered by the government nor scholars.

The aforementioned is sustained by Sandoval (Sandoval, 2008), whose study on poverty in Monterrey shows that both poverty and inequity began to be studied in the 1960s, but only towards the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, studies were conducted from the perspective of the economic survival strategies of households living in poverty and extreme poverty. This vision is shared by Prieto and Arias (2021), who argues that the discomfort in talking about poverty corresponds with the entrepreneurial and wealthy identity of Monterrey. Consequently, the lack of discussion of the poor and their ways of living has resulted in a lack of theorization on informal settlements and their modes of production (Staines-Díaz, 2020).

Zúñiga and Contreras (1998), explore the dimension of poverty localized to Monterrey. They understand poverty as a "statistical, economic or political category is inextricably linked to poverty as a social category, that is, to the way a society tends to

conceive it" (p. 62). In this sense, the social idea of poverty may appear as "a problem, an embarrassment, a paradox or an evil systematically produced by a society that, does not work well at all" (p. 66). These authors state that in Monterrey predominate beliefs of the liberal type, according to which social issues are caused by individuals and not by a systemic problem. As a result, poverty is perceived as a product of individual decisions, vices or defects, and not as the result of an unjust social order, or the limits of economic structures. Simultaneously, wealth is defined by individual virtues: "the fruit of tenacity, virtue and personal qualities" (Zúñiga and Contreras, 1998: 69). On the contrary, poverty is a matter of shame in Nuevo León; in a study about poverty in 2007, half of the participants stated that the poor are poor because they are lazy and lack the desire to stop being poor (Sandoval, 2008). While this conception of poverty is not exclusive to Monterrey, it is remarkable how this narrowed vision has permeated government stance.

In the last two decades, the state of Nuevo León began to incorporate a more inclusive narrative towards the poor and informal settlements. However, the considerations and inclusion of the knowledge of the poor have had ups and downs. For instance, in the Nuevo León State Development Plan 2016-2021, the concept of 'citizen participation' is mentioned 72 times, a significant increase if we consider that in the previous six-year term 2010-2015, 'citizen participation' was mentioned only 19 times. On the other hand, the 2010-2015 State Development Plan mentions strategies to combat social problems in informal settlements through urban improvement and provision of specific programs for vulnerable populations, it also includes issues related to legalizing property in irregular settlements while discouraging land invasions through supervision, surveillance and adequate housing supply, although it does not clarify how the housing supply would be accessible to the most vulnerable population. On the issue of water provision, it includes the topic of promoting participatory planning and social support programs, which allow the

access of the entire population to water and sanitation services, by encouraging the legalization of irregular human settlements, in order to allow them access to public water, drainage and sanitation services, in coordination with the corresponding levels of government. In the 2016-2021 State Development Plan, irregular settlements are not mentioned even once. It is worth mentioning that the last six-year term in the state of Nuevo León was won by an independent candidate who won under the brand of the proud, enterprising *regiomontano*, or the idea of the working citizen of Monterrey who does not accept gifts in the form of social support.

The diagnosis made in the 2016-2021 State Development Plan on social policies is focused only on promoting the training of inhabitants to learn skills in order to participate in the labor market. In this Plan, there is no distinction between the origin of poverty or how there are groups that start from other realities full of disadvantages. The Plan does not include any social integration strategy other than the economic one.

City of Monterrey Planning Documents.

In major Mexican cities, the role of municipalities in regulating and planning urban development is characterized by two conflicting demands of the urban space: expansion versus consolidation and regulated construction versus unregulated construction. Each of these tendencies is realized with unequal intensity in different municipalities as a reflection of the city's wealth. This situation, combined with tendencies derived from the effects of decentralization, configures a situation much more prone to unequal competition between municipalities than to inter-municipal coordination (Duhau, 1998).

The assignment and division of municipal and state responsibilities lacked definition until two decades ago. Before the appearance of the Urban Development Law, the municipal authorities had little participation and almost no control over the problem of

informal settlements in the Monterrey metropolitan area. Urban informality was handled by the state through FOMERREY, an institution managed by the state of Nuevo León, with which each municipality coordinates to try to find options for people in informality. This law, first published in 1999 and now called the Law of Territorial Ordering of Human Settlements and Urban Development of the State of Nuevo León, granted the municipal authorities constitutional powers to handle urban development. Thus, among other capacities, article 12 establishes that the municipality will have the power to prepare and execute programs for the regularization of urban land tenure (Ortega, 2001). However, the state still shares wide responsibility with the municipal governments as there are some municipalities that lack the budget and staff.

The position of discrediting informality described in this section under modernist or development arguments, is maintained at the municipal level. For instance, a planner from Monterrey stated that most citizens are unaware of their rights and obligations in terms of urban development, “this assertion is evidenced, in part, by the number of buildings or urbanizations that are carried out irregularly or illegally” (Ortiz-Durán, 1998:251). This even borders on the ridiculous, since the author infers that irregular urbanization is linked to knowing or not knowing citizen rights, rather than as a response to a human need. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that the author was the Secretary of Urban Development of San Pedro from 1994 to 2000. San Pedro is one of the nine municipalities that make up the Monterrey Metropolitan Zone. For generations, key spaces in the urban development of Monterrey were occupied by actors with similar opinions.

Sousa (2006), a researcher at the Nuevo León Autonomous University, argues that informal dwellers were pawns of unions and political parties. However, some informal settlements have certainly been coopted by those external actors, this reductionist approach

not only minimizes the struggle of self-made urbanism, but takes away the agency of informal dwellers.

For decades, urban informality was attributed to political powers that ‘controlled’ the poor and vulnerable population. Villarreal and Carrillo (1998) mentions that during the 1970s and 1980s, the city of Monterrey was ‘assaulted’ by the informality phenomenon, and informal settlements were encouraged by pseudo-leaders of unions who granted land to low-income people to occupy lots adjacent to the railroad tracks. In light of this situation, and in an attempt to find a conciliatory solution that avoids the use of forced evictions, municipal authorities turned to the state government to ask for their assistance. However, “in the state agency there were officials who endorse the assignments and promote irregular settlements that go against the purposes and *raison d'être* of the entire urban development legislation” (Villarreal and Carrillo, 1998: 282-283). That is to say, the phenomenon of urban informality was attributed to the manipulation of the poor, rather than seeing populations that were authentically seeking shelter.

The negative views towards urban informality, and the lack of measurements that include people living in informality, were common in the 1990s. Salinas, et al (1998) described urban informality as a disease “that has been dragging on for a long time, [and that] will not be tolerated in the future” (1998: 293). These examples reflected the animosity common among urban planners. A point often overlooked is that while in there are more favorable views of informality, the planners that had a place in the planning sphere in the 1990s are still practicing in Monterrey as part of the municipal and state governments.

As recently as 2010, the Urban Development Plan for the Municipality of Monterrey 2010-2020 (Gobierno de Monterrey, 2010), does not mention a plan for informality; at most, it mentions with vague language and non-binding terms that work

should be done on the regularization of land in one of the most traditional neighborhoods of Monterrey, Colonia Independencia. Informal settlements are mentioned only three times in the 111 page document. In terms of citizen participation, it only includes references for "professionals, specialized technicians and citizens who may present at any time a request to modify the document at the Secretary of Urban Development and Ecology" (p. 109). However, the document does not mention the strategies for professional participation, nor the actors involved in the elaboration of the plan.

A very similar municipal document was released in 2013, the Urban Development Plan for the Municipality of Monterrey 2013-2025 (Gobierno de Monterrey, 2013), when describing the harmful effects of flooding, one of the strategies deployed is to "recover riverbanks and slopes by relocating irregular human settlements" (p. 176). Those blamed for the floods are the settlers of the irregular zones, who, consequently, are the only ones considered for possible relocation. There is a long history of floods in Monterrey, cyclical hurricanes affect the city in periods ranging from 10 to 20 years. These hurricanes are particularly harmful in rich neighborhoods, which shows that there has been an unequal and unjust treatment to informal settlements.

Discussion on Government Planning Documents.

Given the inability of the state to provide housing spaces, local government has tended to consent irregular access to land, as long as the invasion of the land does not imply a flagrant violation of that principle (Duhau, 1998). In 1973, faced with rising slums and the social pressures caused by the frequent invasions of properties related to the housing and urban land crisis for low-income people, the state government implemented FOMERREY, an initiative to develop low-income urban neighborhoods en masse (Ortega, 2001).

State strategies have historically been directed not only to co-opt informal settlers to manipulate votes, but also to gain taxpayers and customers. At some point, left-wing groups such as *Tierra y Libertad* came to question their incorporation to the formal system, but they end up doing it for the symbolic meaning of leaving a patrimonial legacy for the next generation.

Equally important are the classification of informality. Local governments classify urban informality in two ways: first, as areas that, due to their characteristics, can accommodate residents that cannot access the formal market, and secondly, settlements located in environmental hazard zones (Ortega, 2001). Ways to manage informality vary depending on these factors.

Incorporating formerly informal settlements into legality is decided with political and not social lens, in other words discretionary decisions, will leave a large population outside the spheres of legality. This context of legal uncertainty discourages residents in informality to improve the material conditions of their home and their neighborhood. Such a situation constitutes a vicious circle of poverty that, along with other factors, leads to social and urban stagnation. In spite of the legal precariousness of informal settlements, private investors have pushed for the legalization of those areas in an attempt to acquire them.

CONCLUSION

The aims of modernity and development that have historically dominated governance and planning spheres in Mexico, caused to see residents in informality as objects of political power, and not as subjects of interesting and valid forms of production of space. While Latin American countries have had more respectful approaches to

informality since the 1990s, in Monterrey, these approaches are as recent as the 2010s, and have only been reflected in official documents in the last five years. This may be attributable to the long epistemological domination of the very influential and powerful industrial groups in the region.

The quest for a modern and developed society has encouraged the creation of a built environment that reflects these values. The image and ideas associated with proper urbanization have shaped architecture, neighborhoods, cities, and regions. Groups that do not fit with this modern image are relegated from public decisions. The normalization of urban spaces comes along with plans to 'correct' the spaces of difference. Governments and the private sector involved in planning use the discourse of 'security' to justify their entrance and disruption in spaces of difference, including informal settlements. These are not new actions, as modernist architects and planners also used efficiency and hygiene discourse to modify urban settlements in a way that disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable groups. The discourse changes, but the goals remain the same: the control of spaces of difference.

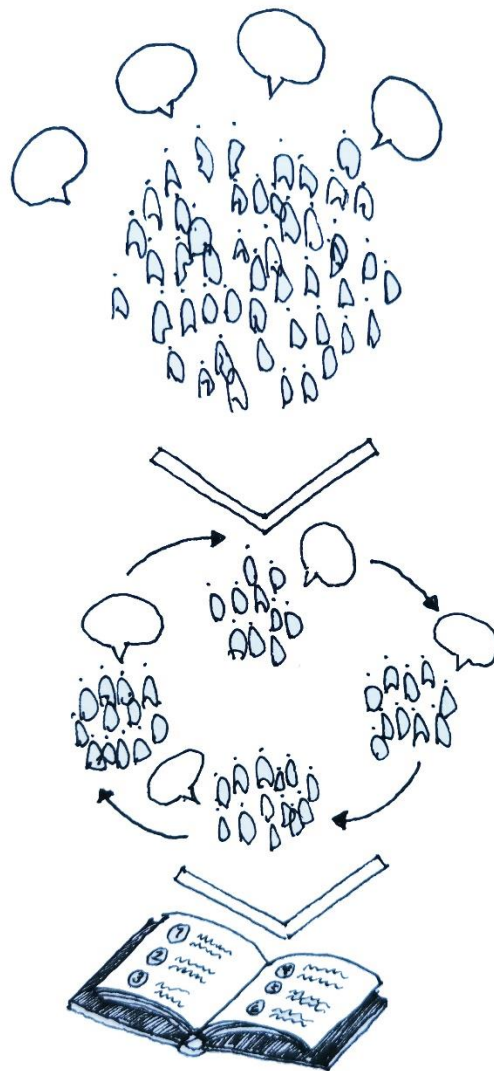
Communities in Monterrey that do not conform to the ideals and objectives of 'modern' societies are left outside of the plans and programs devised by the State. The State that has failed to recognize their value, capabilities, and agency. Moreover, when these peripheral groups are included is with the goal of adapting them to the hegemonic system controlled by the powers of the State. The design and implementation of urban plans in informal contexts, has consisted in relegation of these communities and the constant attempt to "normalize" them into the rules and norms of the modernist goals.

Planners that operate under modernist objectives, to a large extent, have been the actors who have exerted the actions that 'correct' the local practices of informality, thus ignoring the informal ways of production of space developed through a long and legitimate

process of struggle to survive in the face of adversity. However, new visions towards informality in the region that are becoming a reality, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

In terms of urban research, the historical approach to planning in contexts of informality has been challenging for the new generation of urban scholars. Urban planners and researchers face difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships in spaces of urban informality. The precedents of urban planning in informal communities have created an environment of extreme distrust towards external actors, especially if they come from government and urban planning spheres. The approaches of these stakeholders have been extractive, leaving the local population feeling abandoned after these interactions. Researchers should take this as a challenge to build a productive relationship that goes beyond the clientelist model (Álvarez-Rivadulla, 2012).

Chapter 3. New Approaches to Governance and Planning in Mexico



Chapter 2 conceptualizes, historicizes, and analyzes how the concepts of “modernity” and “development” fueled traditional procedures of government offices, urban planning departments, urban plans and projects, initiatives, and a general imaginary among planners in the region, making residents of informal settlements reluctant to work with planners. In Chapter 3, I focus on the political and social juncture that is creating a conceptual atmosphere with the possibility of engendering a new planning practice based on community agency and citizen participation beyond the traditional top-down approaches in governance and planning.

In this chapter, I examine how planning politics changed as a result of a wave of new governments at the three levels. I analyze the concepts of ‘citizen participation’ and ‘community agency’ in light of both the theoretical approaches and the empirical evidence in plans and planning documents.

Citizen participation, community agency, and inclusion of the outcast’s vision are being integrated into local governance processes. A new wave of governments, who are actively trying to distance themselves from the PRI-dominated past, have incorporated narratives of inclusion of the poor and vulnerable groups by the adoption of participatory methods in public decisions which I will describe later in this chapter.

It was not until the presidential election of 2018 that new experiments of participatory democracy became the rule rather than the exception. From the very beginning, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador implemented participatory methods for public decisions. His famous *consultas populares*, or referendums, are instruments used since his time as governor of Mexico City. He used referendums to decide the future of contested infrastructure projects, such as an international airport in Mexico City, the dismantling of a brewery in Mexicali (an area known for its lack of water), or the revocation of the presidential mandate in 2022, in the middle of his presidential term. In the state of

Nuevo León and the city of Monterrey, young leadership won in 2021, both state and city governments run under the banner of a youthful approach and citizen participation. The state and municipal administration created addressing new channels of citizen participation. Notably, the ideology behind these governance approaches are located in different places of the political spectrum; while the federal government is a traditional rather socially conservative leftist wing, the state and municipal government are center-right. This novel approach to participation and inclusion of oppressed epistemologies, while in expansion in the current administration, is contested by conservative political forces.

INTRODUCTION

Mexico has implemented neoliberal policies since the 1980s. The promises of the Mexican Revolution in 1921 of providing a welfare State through the exploitation of natural resources, strengthening of State-run enterprises, land distribution to peasants, and provision of educative and health services, began to fade with the consolidation of the neoliberal narrative that permeated the broadest sectors of government resulting in “economic stagnation, inequality, and poverty” (Tello, 2012). But probably the most dramatic result of the State’s shrinking is how the narrative shifted from a State responsible for the provision of well-being to one that regulated the market expecting wealth would be formed through competition. After more than three decades of applying specific policies to dismantle the State, there was very limited room for authorities to maneuver and meet the growing needs of the population, especially the poorest.

In 2018, for the first time in more than 30 years of applying neoliberal policies, a leftist government was elected. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s (AMLO) long-

lasting promise³ was to put an end to the neoliberal system in Mexico. His political campaign was marked by a recognition of the capacities of the most vulnerable population, especially those who had been stigmatized as lazy or incapable⁴. Indeed, his campaign promises and first governmental actions were addressed to create a system of scholarships for students, indigenous populations, and the elderly.

The support of the poor is not only shown by the scaffolding of a new welfare State but by a new institutionalized narrative that recognizes the knowledge of great groups of the population that do not necessarily answer to scholarly knowledge. AMLO's speeches are full of references to the native cultures, the cooperation that takes place in the poorest communities, and the value of non-academic knowledge found in ancestral practices.

Repeatedly, AMLO has advocated for people's customs and traditions. AMLO's positive attitude and narrative towards indigenous Mexicans and the impoverished, have been contested by the right-wing as signs of backwardness. As is common in these cases, the criticisms against the president's positionality are accompanied by racist and classist comments by the right-wing, which uses negative stereotypes associated with indigenous people and the poor, such as rurality, backwardness, ignorance, and underdevelopment (Oehmichen-Bazán, 2021).

At the state and municipal levels, there were notable changes in the political *status quo*. In context, in the neoliberal period from 1982 to 2018, two political parties, the Revolutionary Institutionalized Party (PRI) and the National Action Party (PAN), dominated the large scope of the political scene in Mexico, particularly in the highly conservative Northern Mexico. In the state of Nuevo León and its capital, Monterrey, PRI and PAN were the only two political forces that exchanged state and municipal power until

³ Andrés Manuel López Obrador participated in three presidential elections in 2006, 2012, and 2018.

⁴ In Mexico, racists and classist people often labels indigenous populations or the poor as lazy.

2021. While in 2015 an independent candidate won the state government, he was a member of PRI up until a few days before running for governor. His proposals and political ideas were aligned in every sense with his former political party.

However, in 2021, two figures captured public attention. Two young politicians, Samuel García and Luis Donaldo Colosio, from a relatively new political party with marginal relevance won the election at the state and municipal elections. They have stood out in the local context because of their apparent fight against the established political system and its corruption. Samuel García has been very active and skillful to control the agenda on social media. Also, Samuel is an aspirational figure for many young people in Monterrey as he presents himself as a wealthy entrepreneur who enjoys traveling and enjoying the high life. Luis Donaldo Colosio, on the other hand, is the heir of his seat and fame because of his father's tragic assassination, who was the PRI presidential candidate in 1994. Otherwise, he was an outsider to politics, only becoming a politician in 2018 when he was elected a state congressman. Three years later he won the municipal election.

Both politicians are candidates of the political party, Citizen Movement (MC), a party that was born in the 1990s as a center-left force, but that has gradually moved to the center-right in the last decade. While MC nominated AMLO as its presidential candidate in 2006 and 2012, in 2018 they allied with the right-wing party PAN. Currently, MC has identified itself as a third option beyond the left, represented by AMLO, and the right represented by the new political alliance between PRI and PAN.

Interestingly, one of the strategies of MC has been to nominate some candidates that are not involved with the political environment. It navigates under the banner of citizen participation, and the inclusion of other stakeholders in political spaces. Certainly, in the case of Monterrey and Nuevo León, interesting profiles have been invited to occupy key positions in the government. Also, the new administrations are opening new spaces of

participation that are shaping interesting venues for citizens to interact with the government, and while it is too early to evaluate if these mechanisms are challenging the current political system, is providing opportunities to position different political stands under discussion.

This chapter will illustrate how the current alignment of political factors may be leading Monterrey to fairer planning practices. The end of an ill-narrative that hurt historically stigmatized populations at a federal level, in addition to a young local leadership eager to distance themselves from past governments through inclusion and participation of different actors aiming to formulate original responses to traditional problems. The current political juncture, as well as the authentic platforms of participation that are becoming more welcoming in the current political spheres, provide the opportunity to transform the local planning culture.

In this chapter, I explore how traditional planning paradigms are being contested by a new wave of political actors after the federal elections of 2018 and the local elections of 2021. This chapter also illustrates the unfolding possibilities for a more human-centered planning practice based upon government positionality and current plans.

A WAVE OF NEW GOVERNMENTS

There are positive advances pointing to new practices in governance and local urban planning practices, these should not be understood as definitive changes, but rather a wave of progressivism. In the case of Latin America, we have witnessed the resurgence of a strong political conservative current after years of progressive governments – in Argentina with Macri, Brazil with Bolsonaro, Chile with Piñera, and even the brief

appearance of Añez in Bolivia – reminds us that progressive political ground can be quickly lost.

However, we have also seen responses that seem hopeful from compassionate, inclusive leaders. The election of a promising government in Chile in 2021 brought Boric's fresh ideas in the context of a new relationship with vulnerable groups and their historical grievances, in sharp contrast with his conservative predecessor. The Mapuche claims regarding the restitution of their land and water resources, or the full inclusion of sexual diversity groups with full access to their human rights, keep the eyes of the Americas on the southern cone, expectant of how the well-established commercial and business interests will resist the ambition of a young leftist movement led by Boric, but accompanied by generations of student movement resistances from the most diverse leftist currents.

In Mexico, while we did not witness such a radical break in comparison to other young leftist leaders in Latin America, especially regarding their openness to sexual diversity or their understanding of the feminist movement, the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) has undoubtedly institutionalized a new relationship with the impoverished grassroots of Mexico. In addition, citizens' opinions are better included since all major proposals are subject to public vote through referendums or public forums, breaking the tradition of top-down government making unilateral decisions.

As soon as AMLO became president, he took advantage of his party's majority in the Chamber of Deputies and Senators and began to do something that set him apart from his predecessors – fulfilling electoral promises in record time. Before taking office, since in Mexico congresspersons and senators occupy their seats one month before the president, the President's party passed into law the universal pension for senior citizens, an initiative he implemented when he was head of government in Mexico City 20 years ago. Later on, he also made scholarships available to all students up to high school, began the construction

of 100 new universities throughout the country in places where professional education was unthinkable in the past, and appointed the first cabinet with at least 50% of women, as he did 20 years before as a governor of Mexico City.

AMLO calls his government 'the 4th transformation of Mexico,' in reference to the fact that his government is the continuation of the first three great defining stages of Mexican political life: the 1st transformation (1T), that is, the Independence from Spain in 1821; the 2nd transformation (2T), or the Reform Laws in 1858, in which the separation of church and state became effective; and the 3rd transformation (3T), or the Mexican Revolution in 1910, which marked profound changes in political thinking. AMLO's government promises to be a 4th transformation (4T), pledging to put an end to the 33 years of neoliberal policies implemented in Mexico since the 1980s.

Interesting initiatives were also generated in the field of urban planning. In response to the idea that political thinking uses architecture as a tool of power (Sudjic, 2007), the architecture and urban projects in Mexico made by the current government can be analyzed in that light. In the 1T and 2T, the Independence and the Reform respectively, the governmental architecture was aimed at replicating republican symbols based on the democratic values of Greco-Roman cultures embodied by the neoclassical architectonic style. The 3T brought, after a brief search for an native identity based on the Mexican Revolution promises, the construction of modern architecture buildings to pay, with massive, public infrastructure, the enormous debt to the poorest populations: innovative hospitals with architects such as Enrique Yañez, Obregón Santacilia, and the Landa Verdugo brothers, educational models designed by Juan O'Gorman, or the famous multifamily buildings designed by Mario Pani, in addition to the world-famous plastic integration that brought together artists and architects in a common project of social communication. In the 4T, the representative architecture is being made by the Secretary

of Agrarian, Territorial and Urban Development (SEDATU), headed by architect Román Meyer Falcón (Staines-Díaz, 2020b). The projects are based on providing quality public spaces in areas of the country with major social problems.

SEDATU has taken a 180-degree turn under Román Meyer. A governmental agency that has gone from a normative authority to one that coordinates planning actions and strategic projects throughout the country. Notably, these public infrastructure projects are not in places that could translate into spotlights for the government. Most of the projects are made under the Urban Improvement Program (PMU), which aims to bring quality infrastructure to the poorest parts of the city.

This urban approach engineered to serve historically segregated areas is not new in the region. Favela-Bairro in Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s marks the beginning of social urban-architectural projects in Latin America. Also, the famous and widespread Colombian public approach, starting in Bogotá with mayors Antanas Mockus and Enrique Peñalosa, and later with Sergio Fajardo's Medellín Model between 2003 and 2007, whose most relevant projects, the park-libraries, were placed in the poorest neighborhoods, resulting in a decrease in both violence and the perception of violence (Cerdá, et al, 2012). Medellín's success was widely disseminated by the Inter-American Development Bank and UN-Habitat and its example was replicated in other Latin American cities. It is important to mention that these political proposals that bet on urban improvements were born from the Colombian Constitution of 1991, which changed the way of doing politics and influencing the territory. In other words, the Colombian initiatives did not originate from the genius of an individual but from a collective reflection of the situation of the country, exhausted by traditional politics (Staines-Díaz and Aparicio, 2016). Interestingly, as noted in Chapter 2, international agencies have continued to be key in the propagation of urban models around the world, specifically in the Global South.

The late arrival of these projects in Mexico also provides the country with an opportunity for SEDATU to learn from the mistakes of other regions. In the case of Medellín, grassroots organizations have protested that these large infrastructure projects have had the effect of attracting real estate investment, gradually displacing the original inhabitants (Staines-Díaz, 2015). In Rio de Janeiro, criticism is frequently leveled that the final decision on the projects rested with the architects, and that neighbors were optional to participate, and when they did, it was superficial. (Lara, 2010). Similarly, the SEDATU is hiring renowned architects to design these projects in the poorest areas of the city. So, while the intentions are noble and unprecedented in the country, the issue of including other voices in the design process could undoubtedly be improved.

Planning discussions at the Federal level are full of references to community agency. Furthermore, national projects and plans in areas of poverty seek to repair the exclusion of the poor and disadvantaged from governmental debates for the last 30 years due to neoliberal policies that benefited mostly the middle class and the wealthy.

State and municipal governments have also experienced a power shift. In Nuevo León, governors emanating from traditional right-wing political parties, PRI and PAN, were anchored in local power structures⁵ aimed at maintaining the status quo. However, in 2021, a young candidate was elected by a center-right party called Citizen Movement, guided by the platform of the importance of citizen inclusion in public decisions. Samuel García, the governor of the state of Nuevo León, is identified by his critics as a '*fresa*' and a '*junior*' disconnected from the reality of the poor population of the state. There have been recurring examples that demonstrate his lack of awareness and sensibility to the reality of

⁵ While PRI largely relied on their connections with unions and some peasants groups, PAN support structures are based largely on conservative groups and chambers of commerce.

vulnerable populations. However, he maintains a promising decision for the inclusion of diverse voices in the political agenda and public policies.

In Nuevo León's capital, Monterrey, the candidate also from Citizen Movement, won as well, Luis Donaldo Colosio's campaign had the slogan "Let's make Monterrey reborn." His proposals were largely focused on the industrial tradition of Monterrey, and some other more common places around entrepreneurship, health, security, and sustainability. However, his political lineage provided him with a significant advantage. His father was Luis Donaldo Colosio Senior, a presidential candidate in 1994, was murdered in the middle of his political campaign. Those around him mention this has impacted his life and his inclination toward politics, which is why he is trying to make a real change.

At the three levels of government, there is momentum that serves as an indication of a new form of relating to informal communities. The federal government is now operating under the logic of respecting the community agency. And on the state and municipal levels, the incorporation of participatory approaches in two different levels; first, by electing promising profiles to occupy key governmental agencies. These people believe in citizen organization as well as in participation as a principle. Until very recently, they were unrelated to any political party and fully committed to their work facilitating participatory processes to access the community agency. If the state is acknowledging the right of people's participation, there is an inherent recognition of what a community has to say. Until very recently, the right to express an opinion or to directly affect results was highly contested under the assumption that politicians are elected to express political objectives and take action. Fortunately, the weariness of a government disconnected from communities in Northern Mexico can be translated into new opportunities to respond in

original ways to the same old problems. While is too soon to attest to the success of the results, open participatory processes are currently in place to be qualified by researchers.

Discussion.

I chose to call this stage of governments a 'wave' because history shows that democracy goes through cycles. In Latin America, we have seen countries change from one style of government to another over the last decade, while in Mexico there were more left-leaning governments until the first part of the 20th century, the trend was broken in the 1980s when the country joined the neoliberal current led by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. At this stage, the country sold hundreds of parastatal companies to the private sector, and the functions of the State began to shrink (Sacristán, 2006). As mentioned above, this trend has just been halted until 2018.

It should be noted that within the country, there are also regions where the political ideologies are more prevalent than others. For instance, Mexico City has historically been a leftist city, while Monterrey has had a proliferation of right-wing movements. The political change at the national level is now particular because it is largely due to a social movement initiated primarily by AMLO since his government in Mexico City. Although his political party is now strong, as there are few figures who can succeed him with his political ability to speak to the masses, it is likely that there may be political changes back to traditional regimes. The same happens in the case of the government of Nuevo León and the municipality of Monterrey, where right-wing groups have more presence. I note that the current 'wave' at the three levels of government that constitutes the conditions to access governance and urban planning practices integrating citizen participation is fragile, as another election could be enough to reverse its effects. As long as these changes do not

permeate other social layers, such as culture and education, it will be very difficult to think of permanent changes.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES: COMMUNITY AGENCY AND PARTICIPATION

Despite being novel in Northern Mexico, the emerging notions of community agency and participation that fuel these new governments' governance and planning ideas have been well studied in the social sciences and planning fields. This section examines the theoretical framework that supports this novel approach to planning in the region.

The intellectual reflection on the decade of the 1960s was particularly critical in favor of the idea of broader audiences participating in the government decision-making process. Jacobs (1961), and Arnstein (1969), were influential in the public involvement movement. Also, Davidoff's theory on *Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning* (1965), was broadly adopted as a theory of change in the planning practice.

Discussions around ideas of inclusion and citizen participation are not new. Since the 1990s, governments around the world began to address issues related to the inclusion of the population in public decisions, inspired by ideas of the de-centralization of power. Although this may be true, ideas of traditional governance and planning have been solidified in conservative societies, including most of Mexico, and especially Northern Mexico.

In Chapter 2, I described the extensive literature about how the planning practice is shaped by the desires, needs, and ideals of a middle-class who tend to be aligned with traditional developmental approaches and global plans that represent different values than those of poor communities or minorities (see Roy, 2006, 2009, 2011; Ong, 2011; Shrestha and Aranya, 2015; Ranganathan, 2018; Oguyankin, 2019).

However, authors that seek counter-hegemonic societies have explored the topic of broader inclusion innovatively. Escobar (1996), for instance, argues that there is considerable work that has enlightened the role of “grassroots movements, local knowledge, and popular power” that could address “alternatives to development (p.215).” Similarly, in the agriculture realm, Altieri & Toledo (2011) describe local practices in Latin America that bring possibilities for a more just food system, by sharing information practices and knowledge, on a farmer-to-farmer horizontal basis. In addition, and building on Escobar’s text, Gudynas (2011) presents an alternative for development based on indigenous cultures’ beliefs in South America. Because of its culture, this region lacks concepts like ‘development’ and ‘progress’, so Gudynas introduces the concept of “Buen Vivir [that] embraces the notion of well-being and cohabitation with others and Nature” (p. 441). The origin of this term is a reaction to the Western notion of development. By implementing the conceptions of well-being, two Latin American Constitutions; Bolivia and Ecuador, re-shaped their nation’s objectives to align with their racial and cultural origin.

In order to influence a novel planning praxis, new epistemologies will require structural changes within the institutions that determine the knowledge used and their policies. While there must be a critical public eye, planning practitioners, educators, and governments must be open to transforming their planning practices.

An alternative to development recognizes that the current political system cannot be customized to the specific contexts and cultures of vulnerable populations. Identifying new solutions based on the local conditions becomes a means for different approaches to reach a more democratic and pluralistic decision-making process that is reflective of the community's best interests, no matter how limited the conditions seem from the outside. As Escobar quoted, the Zapatistas at the School of Architecture at UT in 2019, “one no,

and many yeses;” the “no” being a hegemonic idea of a single goal for a society, the “yeses” referring to the diverse realities, cultures, and cosmovisions.

This section discusses the concepts of community agency and participation that according to my research, are the ways to access to community knowledge and ultimately co-create new knowledge. According to my study, these concepts, which have been broadly studied in the context of planning and informal settlements, are fueling the new local governmental practices. However, it is important to realize that while the applicability of these concepts has been extensively studied in planning literature since the 1960s, these concepts went unnoticed until very recently in Monterrey. Given that many of the same political officials still hold power local political sphere, it cannot be assumed that the planning sphere has changed and that participatory processes will be institutionalized. Rather, I assert this is an important moment in which urban researchers who are eager to transform the practice should identify spaces in which we can.

Community Agency and Participation.

In the 1960s, Turner wrote about informality with a fresh approach contrasting with the planners, architects, and public officials of his time, who did not feel compelled to include citizen participation, as the common perspective was that housing is only a problem of cost and productivity (Turner, 1976). Turner's main contribution was the idea that housing policies do not need to be dictated by central governments but can instead be put under control of informal communities. Turner advocated for local communities to determine their growth as they are the main judges to assess their conditions. By doing so, Turner acknowledged informal communities' agency, skills, and knowledge to modify their built environment without external intervention. In this case, the government's role would be providing access to critical resources.

Turner's approach to self-help housing addresses the economic impossibility of centralized housing provision for everybody. In these centrally administered ways, only the wealthy minority could be supplied at the expense of the impoverished majority. (Turner, 1976). Self-help building, on the other hand, begets various advantages both for governments and their residents. In the case of the settlers, it allows a variable program, to negotiate with money and abilities with other residents and powerful entities, group organization and independence to build their houses. In other words, it allows people to utilize and apply skills they have gained over time without having to adapt and rely on outside knowledge and methodologies.

From his experience in Peru between 1957 and 1975, he concluded that urban squatters in the developing world are the best judges of their own needs and are better able than anyone else, including governments, to address them. Although these settlements may appear disorganized and inadequate in their early years of development, they express their own logic and will be improved over time if family finances allow (Harris, 2003: 248).

Governments rejected Turner's ideas as it contradicted their deeply held denial of the capacity of the poor. Even so, Turner opened a new theoretical path to understand urban informality. Nevertheless, the idea of considering participation has been broadly explored by its negative implications.

In early stages of irregular settlement expansion, the government's primary policy was to ignore them, but as research on the possibility of self-built improvement gained traction and social and political capital in these communities became evident, steps were taken to regularize and upgrade the physical status of these illegal settlements. (Gilbert & Ward, 1985). The new approach to urban informality included the provision of crucial infrastructure to ensure their full integration to the city as working-class neighborhoods.

Moreover, illegal land invasions were addressed by transferring land titles to the residents by allowing the purchase of the land at low cost (Ward et al., 2011).

Communicative Action Planning.

The inclusion of participatory efforts in local governance and planning practices are based on communicative theories. This section describes the main aims and ideas of Communicative Action Planning (CAP) as the main influence on inclusive planning practices. Afterward, I will discuss the tensions or open confrontations with other theorists.

CAP is based on the importance of communication. Communication is power, or the power of communication is the CAP's traditional starting point. Built upon Habermasian communication theory, Forester (1982) states that planners have a crucial role in achieving a deliberate democratic planning process by influencing the conditions in which citizens can participate, act, and organize effectively (p.67). In this setting, the public debate is the heart of democratic politics (Forester, 1994:155). The responsibility of the planner goes beyond shaping documents to shaping the quality of participation. In this context, the planner acts as a facilitator of a process that distributes information, thus, balancing the power differentials.

Planners can control who is contacted, who is participating, and can detect if someone is trying to persuade another actor, thus, creating spaces for effective deliberation (Forester, 1984:68). By adopting this role, the progressive planner can distribute information fairly to inform the actor's decision-making. Under this role, the correct information distribution is as important as preventing misinformation from circulating. For Forester, misinformation is not accidental but systematic, structural, and institutional (p. 70, 77). For this approach, the planner should acquire relational skills to make effective deliberations that allow them to listen, acknowledge, negotiate, mediate, invent, reconcile,

and organize (Forester, 1994:155). Unfortunately, according to Forester (2006), there is a lack of training in planning schools, including the ability to speak the local language and not in the dominant epistemological traditions (p.32). This lack of training may explain why it is so difficult to apply meaningful participatory methods even in spaces where there is willingness.

Critics to Communication Action Planning Theories.

Other critics of CAP address the dilemmas around power, and the dichotomy of process vs. outcome. In this section, I will address these critics as to some CAP theorists' responses. Later, I will cover more contested reactions to CAP. Finally, I will connect a more conciliatory narrative of the divergences and convergences of planning theories.

Dilemmas around Power.

Perhaps the most common criticism of CAP theories and related processes is that they have a naïve belief that substantial inequalities of interests and power can be ameliorated through engagement and discourse procedures. In Fainstein's (2009) theory of Just City, in clear contrast with CAP theories, advocates for planners to hold their own desired outcome. In her critique, she argues that the Habermasian approach does not deal with issues of power. According to her, "the ideal speech situation and concepts of deliberative democracy... would endorse exposing falsity, but it would not point to how, in a field of power, this could be accomplished nor to what a just plan would involve" (p.27). Flyvbjerg (2001) makes a similar critique, aligned with Foucault, indicating that Habermas's weakness is its lack of agreement between ideal and reality. In addition, he argues that it takes too much time and effort to get the right people in the room, and that people will act strategically to fulfill their objectives by pretending to have a conciliatory

positionality. In short, under this critique, Habermasian theories lack a concrete understanding of relations of power as well as practicality, which are needed for political change (p. 92-93).

Innes and Booher (2015) answer the critique on power by drawing on Castells' theory of communication power. First, the collaborative process is not about altruism, "because Habermas seemed to be talking about participants who would be needed, though in practice successful collaboration depends on participants working to achieve their interests" (p. 199), that is, participants need to be open about their motivations as they enter into the process. Second, according to Castell, communication is powerful "because it shapes shared meaning and accordingly influences action" (p.199). Power, in this context, is not located in a particular institution but distributed throughout the entire territory of human action. While power can be exerted through coercion, "it is also exercised through the construction of meaning on the basis of discourses through which social actors guide their actions" (p.200). Under this view, it "is not something possessed by institutions or individuals; rather, it lies in specific relationships in specific times and places" (p.200). Dialogue builds new meanings of the problems creating recognition of shared purposes. Thus, communication is a form of action that changes the social world's realities, including power relations.

Process vs. Outcome.

To address the dispute over the dichotomy of process versus outcome, let's begin by establishing that planning in the 19th century was dominated by practices concerned primarily with outcomes. These visions embodied in the Paris re-design by Haussmann and Chicago re-design by Burnham pictured modernity through transportation systems, public

buildings, and impressive buildings. This city developer's vision was put forth by expert architects and engineers (Fainstein and Campbell, 1996).

According to Fainstein and Campbell (1996) and Fainstein and DeFilippis (2016), the response to top-down approaches to planning came in the 20th century, when planners started focusing on procedures. Reaction to the depredations caused by top-down decision-making justified by a scientific methodology led to developing the communicative model where planners would no longer prescribe either ends or means. Instead, they would act as negotiators or mediators among the various stakeholders, working out a consensus on what to do. However, for Fainstein (2009), CAP does not address questions of inequalities in the decision-making, as the people with more power can control the process even though opinions on both sides are heard. Fainstein later accuses the Habermassian approach of not having a metric for evaluating outcomes. While the discourse around the CAP process would endorse exposing false claims, it does not point to how this could be accomplished in a field of power. Ultimately, Fainstein states that a process defined by false claims can be as unjust as a practice focused on the ends.

Innes and Booher (2015) answer this assertion by acknowledging that most CAP theorists do not identify specific outcomes as goals, as their commitment to a good process includes inclusion, empowerment, equity, and information. For them, the only path to achieving justice is through a fair process. A collaborative process enhances community capacity; hence, process versus outcome is a false dichotomy, "as stakeholders engage in a process because they care about the outcome" (206-207). Healey (2003) responds to the critique as well. While Healey agrees with Fainstein's claim that planners should give more emphasis to normative concepts to get the Just City, Healey argues that concepts such as 'good' and 'just' are socially constructed. Therefore, the process is the vehicle in which those terms can be discussed and articulated.

Other authors criticize Fainstein's theory of Good City. For instance, Song (2015) shows the process (pragmatist planner's perspective) vs. outcome (just city) differentiation by describing each approach's focus. For the pragmatist planner (Forester, Healey, Innes, Schön), the emphasis is set on the provisional and contextual inquiry, practice, and contingency of human creativity to overcome challenges through instruments such as participation, communication, and collaboration. On the other hand, for Fainstein's Just City, the focus is a theory of justice, centered on core principles of equity, democracy, and diversity for evaluating outcomes of policies and institutions. Song (2015) considers Fainstein's position to be insufficient in addressing racial inequalities, as her approach neglects social diversity instead of fostering "inclusive participation, open discussion, and public decision making by force of argument and informed consensus rather than individual power or status" (p.159).

Ultimately, for Song (2015), a pragmatic practice of rejecting process-outcome binaries can provide human self-realization and bring awareness to emancipatory struggles. Song argues that to achieve the transformative potential of planning, it is more important to incorporate minorities in an inclusive and transparent process of collective problem solving equipped with mechanisms for continued learning, coalition, building, and adaptive response. In other words, Song leans toward a more process-oriented approach as it allows the inclusion of many voices in the process rather than keeping the decision-making to a few 'illuminated' people.

Establishing a fair participatory process entails constantly evaluating the distribution of responsibilities. While there are projects designed to pursue a more egalitarian objective, there is an essential distinction between public participation that addresses power differentials and that which does not. Mitlin and Thompson (1995) state that, on the one hand, some participatory approaches "recognize the depth and validity of

local people's experiences and knowledge" (p. 231). Conversely, participation in developing contexts can be used as a "cost-cutting strategy aimed at placing greater responsibilities onto local communities while reducing external support" (p. 233).

Another CAP issue is the planner's ability to detect, translate, and negotiate power in a communicative event. Difficulties arise to distinguish legitimate planning needs and preferences of a specific community versus the community's needs and preferences of the city's democratically elected local officials. This critic, addressed by Forester (2006), states that the planner should acquire relational skills to make significant deliberations by listening, acknowledging, negotiating, mediating, inventing, reconciling, and organizing deliberative processes (Forester, 1994). Nevertheless, he argues there is a lack of training in planning schools to train for these skills that complicates the planner's role as a mediator. Even if there were academic training of these skills, as the work basis is with human subjects, it should be assumed that these abilities are developed over time; therefore, the facilitation accompaniment of participatory processes must be a long-term, ongoing process. In Chapter 6, I describe the challenges of achieving a meaningful relationship with the community of La Campana from first-hand experience.

Finally, the planner has the difficult task of assessing and acting if a community engagement process led to bad or unjust results for people in a community or other communities in other parts of the city. Therefore, a good planning process should address the voice differentials towards a shared region in which several communities and public officials have interests. About these conflicting needs and preferences in a community (Innes and Booher, 2015; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000).

Regardless of the complexity of addressing all voices, one possible avenue could prioritize the uncommon and contested information. Innes (1998) posits that information with a shared meaning does not need to be invoked; therefore, more attention should be

put on the contested information that has not been discussed enough to become a shared value in a community or region.

Conciliating postures.

Ultimately, the works of Habermas and Foucault highlight the tensions in thinking about power. Habermas is oriented to a philosophy of morality that seeks consensus, whereas Foucault is the philosopher of history explained by conflict and power (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Alexander (2001) proposes 'interdependence' as the integrating concept, "providing a framework that resolves the apparently contradictory prescriptions" (p.314) by bridging Habermasian communicative practice and Foucauldian power analyses. Likewise, Innes and Booher (2015) label the 'process versus outcome' as a false dichotomy by stating that stakeholders engage in a process because they care about the outcome.

In the CAP line, the post-modernist communicative action planners generally reject what Habermas calls "ideal discourse," a necessary condition for communicative action that presumes universal rationality in favor of a process-based learning model with no rational position. Sandercock (1998, 2003) encapsulates to a greater or lesser degree the ideals of this group. She argues that the stories of the individuals are the stories of history, and history shapes the present; thus, planning processes should be more inclusive of stories from diverse groups, especially those that have been excluded based on race, sex, gender, and nationality. Sandercock (1999) also argues that planners are not the only ones who plan; therefore, their specialized knowledge should not be considered alone in the planning practice. For her, differences and rivalry among opposed groups can be negotiated through dialogue and negotiation (Sandercock, 2000). The resulting plurality should be appreciated when designing for the cities of the XXI century (Sandercock, 2004).

ANALYSIS OF NEW RESPONSES TO PLANNING

In this section, I analyze how new governance strategies are leading to novel planning approaches designed to include participatory methods in low-income areas of cities, including those in informality.

Federal Planning Documents.

With respect to the lack of housing opportunities for the most needed population, the 4T government responds with a radical shift of narrative. Over the past three decades, housing projects in Mexico were designed under neoliberal policies, leaving the location and design of the housing projects to the market. During this period, the government incentivized terrible living conditions in the formal housing projects because of the poor location, lack of public infrastructure, and low-quality materials. On the other hand, the government continued to have a punitive and judgmental attitude towards informal housing (Marosi, 2017; Reyes, 2020).

Recently, federal agencies like INFONAVIT and SEDATU (Gobierno de Mexico, 2019, 2021) published planning documents establishing a critical perspective of past governmental initiatives and policies. The National Housing Program 2021-2024 (Gobierno de Mexico, 2021) mentions that towards the last decade of the twentieth century, large-scale privatization and dismantling of the State began. Under this paradigm, it was assumed that market forces alone would cover the deficiencies in the provision of goods and services demanded by the population, including housing. This implied the adoption of an expansive, horizontal, and low-cost housing development model, which was carried out without considering criteria to ensure housing quality and a location close to urban services and work centers. A model that, between 1980 and 2010, caused the surface covered by

cities to increase between five to eight times while the population has only increased two or three times (INEGI, 2020).

This housing model, which was highly profitable to the private sector in the first decade of the 21st century, left out the social production of housing, and communities organized in traditional construction methods, among others. It left out almost any large-scale public policy aimed at the needs of the most socially marginalized and poorest populations.

Ultimately, this model had serious consequences on the social and built environment; since there was no adequate coordination between the different levels of government for urban development, housing did not always respond to the cultural and climatic needs of each geographic area and was developed without public services, far from workplaces and satisfactory services such as public transportation and schools. Among other consequences of this model is the abandonment of approximately 650,000 housing units at present. The supply of houses served the private sector interests and not what the people needed (Gobierno de Mexico, 2021). Notably, this failed housing strategy reinforced the validity of informal settlements, as many of the people that abandoned the formal housing projects returned to their former informal settlements.

The National Housing Program 2021-2024 states that the Mexican government is responsible for regaining control over housing with a balanced development model. It also concedes that the government program acknowledges the validity of alternative housing production, that is, informal housing, as it responds to the needs, resources, and skills of specific communities (Gobierno de Mexico, 2021).

In this context, the Mexican government acknowledges that the issue of informality is not fully measured. The National Housing Program 2021-2024 (Gobierno de Mexico, 2021), mentions that while the National Institute for Sustainable Soil (ISUS) estimates

about 7.5 million plots of land lacking land tenure, there is not a precise official measurement. This is probably because urban informality is not an issue that has stopped, but is constantly increasing. One of the proposed strategies in the National Housing Program is to make an accurate quantification of informal settlements and residents of informality, provision of land tenure, and improvement of such settlements to fully integrate them into the city's urban fabric.

For the first time in history, an official document acknowledges the value of self-construction and its financing; for instance, in 2015, just three out of 10 households received any kind of public or private credit, the other seventy percent were made by self-financing. The origin of the problem lies in the fact that people cannot access housing credits because of the low wages. One strategy to tackle the issue of the provision of accessing housing opportunities is to increase the minimum wage. In fact, the minimum wage in Mexico has increased from \$88.36 in 2018 to \$172.87 in 2022 (Gobierno de Mexico, 2022). Considering inflation, this represents a 70% increase in purchasing power.

The narrative towards informal housing has radically changed and urban informality is now seen through a more understanding lens by many actors. For instance, one of the National Housing Program 2021-2024 priority strategies establishes that the government will design solutions that help prevent and, if necessary, provide fair conditions for the population in conditions of vulnerability in irregular settlements, based on studies that allow for progressiveness in the self-production of housing and urbanization (Gobierno de Mexico, 2021). Interestingly, a parallel strategy followed by the federal government has been offering housing credits to the poorest population without intermediaries, addressed to construction, remodeling, or expansion of houses in informal settlements. More than 1.5 million credits were granted by INFONAVIT in 2021 (Expansión, 2022). Moreover, AMLO presented this to the public in his traditional daily

conference on April 23, 2020. Given that people have been building their own houses for centuries, he mandated that residents would receive this credit without approval of intermediaries⁶. The excuse of people needing architects or engineers to build their houses should not apply when people are capable of modifying their own environment. While this statement can be understood as populist or politically-motivated, it is ground-breaking that the highest ranking official of a country finally recognized the agency of communities to build their houses themselves, accompanied by one of the largest land regularization programs in history.

In 2019, the government released its policy plans in *Mapping Cities: A Guide for Integrating People into Urban Planning*, (Gobierno de México, 2020), a guide to inclusion and progressive urban planning. It notes that it is critical to leave behind biased visions and worn-out narratives linked to the idea that people do not have enough knowledge or that the professional's vision is more important than the residents.

This guide includes definitions of collectives and communities participation, detailed descriptions of participatory methodologies designed for urban planning, and precise instructions on how to implement them in practical terms. Its instructions include using WhatsApp and Facebook, as well as online interviews for contexts with less accessibility or in social distancing.

It is important to mention that in Mexico, states must consider the regulations of national plans. Thus, in theory, the contents of *A Guide for Integrating People into Urban Planning* can influence local regulations. The congruence of the documents issued by the different levels of government is tested when the state or municipality requests resources

⁶ In the past, in order to access to these credits, applicants needed to get an approval from an architect or engineer. People giving this approval to credits, are pejoratively called 'coyotes,' which is applicable to the middleman who is well-versed to government bureaucracy, and who often charge fees to expedite procedures.

from the federal government, a situation in which they have to prove that they are complying with the requirements of the highest authority.

State of Nuevo León Approach to Participation.

As soon as Samuel García was elected, he integrated a cabinet of experts, among them Dr. Ximena Peredo, a local columnist and activist who distinguished herself by criticizing political decisions in the state. She even confronted, along with other local activists, one of the most powerful companies in the state, FEMSA, when the owner, who owns the local soccer team, Rayados de Monterrey, decided to build a new stadium over a nature reserve.

Ximena Peredo presides as the new Secretariat of Citizen Participation. She is responsible for establishing and implementing direct participation mechanisms that promote transparency, collaboration in a governance model, and accountability for the solution of public problems.

In an interview with Ximena Peredo in October 2021, she was optimistic about this new opportunity for the state of Nuevo León but recognized that this is the first time a state government has had such an approach. In her words, the Secretary of Citizen Participation aims for the involvement of most of the population: “We want everyone to participate! But as each problem involves different people, the approach to participation differs according to the situation.” The role of this position is to channel population disagreements or suggestions to the government department responsible for the issue under discussion. After that, the Secretary has the responsibility of “pressing” the department to address the issue. According to Ximena, her biggest challenge is the struggle of making “the government feel pressured”.

The ultimate objective of the Secretariat position is to encourage participation and mediate between the public and the government. There are several ways in which citizens approach the Secretariat of Citizen Participation, from requesting an appointment, filling out a form, or arriving to make a walk-in appointment. The strategies that have been followed to channel citizen demands that have consisted of, on the one hand, documenting and following up on the status of the demands, and generating public hearings that bring together civil society and the authorities in question. Additionally, it is also under the authority of the Secretary to conduct the participatory processes to apply participatory budgets, the tools consist of meetings with neighbors to determine the budget's destiny. However, the Secretary is constrained by the inner-municipal processes.

Another key point is that the Secretary has not designed yet specific approaches to informal settlements. In the interview, Ximena mentioned that the Secretary is operating by certain operative rules that which yet do not provide for specific approaches to particular contexts. It would not be realistic to expect that an informal community operates under the same social and political framework. The places in which interactions take place, affect the level of comfort and the desire to share. In other words, the methods and venues of participation need to consider power relationships.

From January to April 2022, the Secretary of Citizen Participation organized forums for the State Development Plan. This plan guides the projects and priorities of the state government's integral development, and it is divided into several sections corresponding to the state government's responsibilities. This document is usually presented within the first six months of a new government. It is common practice for state governments to organize workshops of experts to help them elaborate the document. Novelty, the Secretary of Citizen Participation elaborate forums including non-traditional participants, like people from marginalized groups. As a result of my research inquiries, I

was invited to participate in the workshop on Urban Development. I described the findings of this participatory process in detail in Chapter 6.

The City of Monterrey Approach to Participation.

In Monterrey, one of the things his administration is doing is a very close approach to the communities; on Wednesdays, he attends to the citizens at the municipal palace, and he also visits a different neighborhoods on Saturdays to meet the neighbor's committees and take walks with them through their neighborhood. Another interesting addition to his programmatic governmental platform is the Direction of Citizen Participation, a plan and committee led by Laura de los Santos, who previously worked on the initiative Distrito Tec, the urban project next to *Distrito Campana-Altamira*, the “brother project” of Distrito Tec. In an interview in November 2022, Laura had a fresh approach to participatory processes. She was critical of past administrations and the way they used participation and projects in spaces of poverty for electoral purposes.

The Direction of Citizen Participation is currently part of the Secretary of City Council, but it will belong to the Secretary of Innovation and Open Government as its components are strongly focused on innovation to link citizenship, the private sector, and the government. It aims at enabling spaces for citizen participation through several initiatives such as committees, neighborhood boards, workgroups, and neighborhood judges⁷. They are devoted to finding the best way to enable these local workspaces in each community while working with other secretaries.

Normally, a citizen aiming to discuss an issue in the Municipality is conducted by this Department. The Citizen Participation Department then channels them to the

⁷ The neighborhood judges is an honorary administrative figure, defined as an elected citizen who serves as a link between the municipal authority and the citizens, in order to carry out community benefit activities and to provide services of social interest to the residents of a section.

Neighbors Group so that other people with similar problems can join the request. The purpose is to generate a better-organized citizenry that can be co-responsible with the government, not only in a unilateral request, explains Laura.

According to Laura de los Santos, the Direction of Citizen Participation outlines three main activities. The first is the Participatory Budget, which consists of allocating public funds to be used in projects elected by the communities through a process of deliberation. It is the first time this mechanism has been implemented in the state capital. Second, the Open Government, an initiative that seeks the involvement of citizens to influence public policies, consists of creating tools, such as work and discussions forums that include diverse actors and government offices to discuss public policies. The third activity of the committee, and most relevant to the objectives of this dissertation, is the formation of Neighbors Groups, led by majority-elected local leaders. The Direction of Citizen Participation detected that only 170 out of 1070 *colonias*, or neighborhoods, had an organized neighbors' group. The municipality considers these groups important as they are the ones who deeply know the local problematic. Another key point is that these organized Neighbors Groups go through municipal administrations, that is the organization or authority does not answer to the current municipal government.

The municipality relies on the Neighbors Groups to inform them of community needs. For its conformation, the Direction of Citizen Participation attends to the Saturday mayor visit to a *colonia* where they identify 'positive leadership' beyond the "clientelar groups" previously identified for past administrations, says Laura in the interview. Once the community has their elected leader, the municipality approaches them to begin discussing challenges faced by the community. The plan relies on methods provided by *Placemaking Mexico*, and *El Poder de Los 10* (The Power of 10), local organizations whose methods fall under gorilla urbanism.

Every Saturday, the municipality leads participatory instruments where the community offers feedback on their neighborhood, including unsafe spaces, drainage problems, lack of public spaces, and more. Based on these maps, both the municipality and the community establish priorities in order to have a list of actions to follow up throughout the municipal administration. The participatory mapping activity repeats every Saturday in different communities, the Direction of Citizen Participation systematizes the information on Mondays and from there, the problems are channeled to the appropriate government office, either with Public Services, Public Works, or any other department that is responsible for the work to be done.

In contrast to the State Secretary of Citizen Participation, at the municipal level, the Direction of Citizen Participation is directly involved with initiatives around La Campana. Laura de los Santos' former job was in the Distrito Tec urban plan. In an interview, Santos considered the La Campana-Altamira urban plan to be the "brother" plan of the Distrito Tec urban plan, as it operates under similar parameters. In effect, both projects are being led by the Tec de Monterrey, big companies such as CEMEX, in addition to the state and municipal government. In Santos' words, La Campana-Altamira plan is a partial development plan that has to be validated by the community. She also mentions that CEMEX supported the formation of the Neighbors Group at La Campana.

Traditionally, in any other neighborhood in Monterrey, the neighbor groups are formed by residents inside political divisions— but not in La Campana. The "neighbor groups promoted by CEMEX that are already working and interacting with each other were formed considering the pre-existing social networks and not the political divisions" says Laura. In La Campana, CEMEX organized the neighbor groups according to the territorial self-identification of the participants. The municipality is conscious of the necessity to adapt the ways the authorities approach certain communities.

Laura de los Santos is critical of the way authorities used to approach marginalized communities in the past, as they seemed to be designed to coopt communities by designating *lideresas* (female leaders) and neighborhood judges, a figure that was institutionalized by the political party PRI, by creating an honorary authority to settle differences at the neighborhood level. However, this neighborhood judge had other tasks, such as serving as outreach for political events. In that regard, she mentions the municipality aims for a more authentic approach to the communities.

As of November 2021, the municipality approached the community to introduce the new mayor and some local municipal authorities to the Neighbor Groups. They had a walking tour through the community in which they held more meetings with other residents.

“The Citizen Participation Department’s work builds on CEMEX community organization efforts. We are currently following the process to talk with neighbors at La Campana to detect if there are issues on the urban plan” mentions Laura. She adds that in case of detecting disagreements, the committee’s role would be to address these differences by building bridges with IMPLAN and the community to mediate the process of collaboration. The Direction of Citizen Participation would be the facilitator of the process, but since IMPLAN was responsible for the Plan Campana-Altamira, they would be responsible to work on possible modifications to the document.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR A NEW PLANNING SYSTEM

From my fieldwork research, I can identify welcoming approaches to encourage participation. I was able to observe that new leaders are occupying positions of power at the three levels of government. Without idealizing, and accepting that there are areas where

these processes can be improved (which are discussed in Chapter 6), the political situation of the country, the state, and the municipality are creating conditions that favor and facilitate a more human-led planning approach, and away from the technocratic thinking fueled by desires of modernity and development.

It is important to mention that the country, the state of Nuevo León, and the city of Monterrey still have important challenges to solve. While federal crimes have been reduced by 28.4% at the federal level, in the state of Nuevo León, crimes in 2020 and 2021 have increased 15% and the trend continues to rise in extortion, homicide and home robbery⁸. Additionally, the Monterrey metropolitan area is experiencing the worst water crisis in 40 years – water is currently only available six hours a day⁹. Clearly, there are local urgent issues requiring immediate attention that place the priorities of the city and its citizens in the proper perspective.

However, this chapter emphasizes that there is an unprecedented political will at the three levels of government that is aligned for a fairer and more participatory urban planning, supported by the generation of innovative models of public resource management and social inclusion. However, as I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, if these changes do not occur in other layers of society, mainly education, the progress of these models, which encourage participation, will return to its original state as soon as the next election.

⁸ Data from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, 2022.

⁹ As August 2022.

CONCLUSION

There is a historical juncture at the three governmental levels in Mexico. For the first time in more than 30 years, there is a federal government affirming the end of neoliberal governance and the resurgence of their role to fulfill the responsibility of a welfare state. This governance approach translates into the planning practice by the recognition and validation of subaltern practices and ways of living. Multiple plans, guides, but overall, the narratives of the federal government regarding spaces of poverty reflect the change of narrative. By March 2022, more than 100 municipalities with identified problems of violence, poverty, and lack of land tenure, have been intervened by the federal government. These interventions translate into 751 urban projects, providing infrastructure such as public space, sports, health clinics, and public markets. Additionally, 27,858 land titles have been granted to formerly informal houses and new plans and programs have been elaborated by the federal government following the consideration of the historically segregated population, while incentivizing the inclusion of participatory methods into planning processes. The guiding idea behind all these interventions, in words by the SEDATU Secretary, Román Meyer, is to address violence and poverty through non-punitive methods.

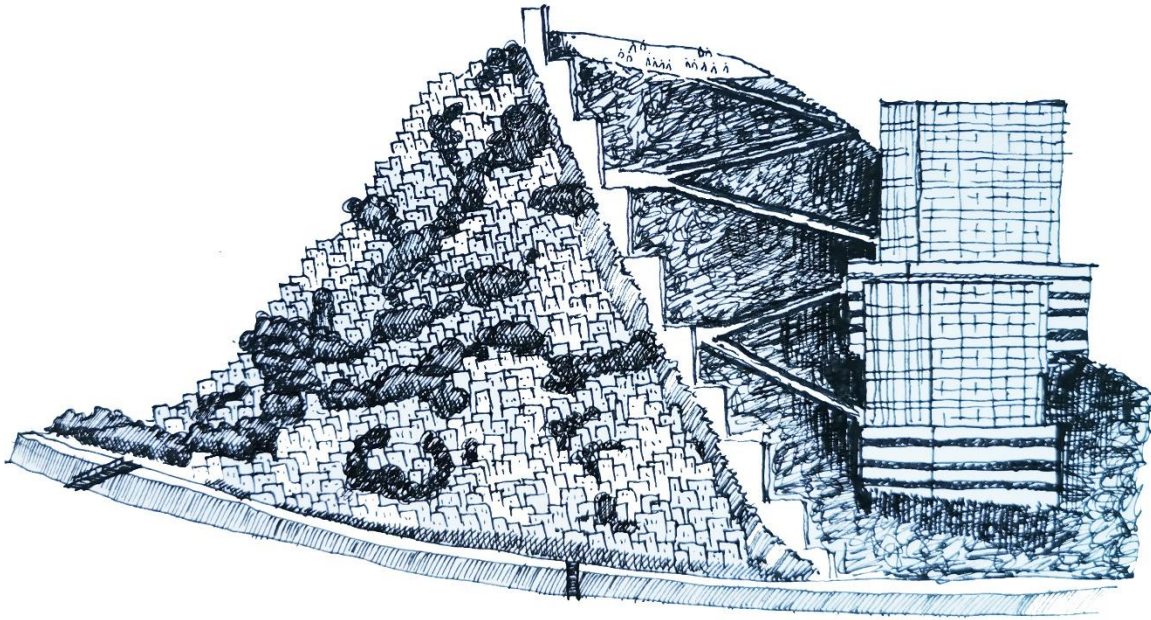
At the state and municipal level, the open invitation to citizens is positively modifying the processes of inclusion of diverse actors. At the state level, the Secretary of Citizen Participation is creating a structure designed to create accountability of the state government by bridging the community, advocates, and NGOs to the different Secretaries at the state level. In addition, the actions of the Secretary are aimed not only at channeling the inclusion of groups that have historically participated, but at forming new participation platforms targeting groups that did not usually participate in the past. In sum, their work

aims at creating opportunities for a broad array of citizens to effectively participate in state governance.

The Municipality Direction of Citizen Participation, on the other hand, is creating broad networks of community organizations at a neighborhood level. These Neighbors Groups are formed by organizing meetings in the community and electing a leader. The creation of these groups intends to jointly identify issues in the neighborhood, as well as prioritize the actions to be taken during the municipal administration. This Direction has the responsibility to connect with other municipal authorities to manage the identified issue.

This chapter illustrated the integration of citizen participation and community agency into local governance and urban planning. Political forces seeking to move away from top-down technocratic approaches have embraced narratives of inclusion for the poor and vulnerable through democratic participation. This constitutes an unprecedented political and social juncture with possibilities for a new and inclusive planning practice.

Chapter 4. The Story of the Informal Settlements of La Campana



This chapter describes the history and current practices of self-help consolidation in La Campana, including the tensions between top-down urban planning exerted by State agents and community efforts based on cooperation and grassroots organization. This chapter also analyzes the long struggle of La Campana, dealing with the State's exclusion, criminalization, and political exploitation, the violence of organized crime, and the community's resilience in overcoming these challenges. La Campana is currently situated at the center of scholarly and practical discussions in informal urban settings in Northern Mexico. Finally, this chapter illustrates the pressures of real estate interests surrounding La Campana, which endangers the community's permanence on the site.

This chapter also explores how the trauma stemming from the violence between the cartels and the community triggered new ways to interact with public space. For example, to overcome the shock of the curfew imposed by organized crime which limited their contact with public spaces, a group of female residents created an NGO that focused on modifying the built environment to transform residual spaces into pocket parks for children. The notable benefits of these imaginative, community-based planning actions garnered the attention of local authorities, which have now designed a partial comprehensive Plan for the La Campana area and its surroundings jointly with their allies in the private sector.

In this chapter, I examine the three stages of community-led planning action in La Campana, beginning with violence as a trigger of community participation, followed by community reflection about the role of the public space for social relations, and culminating in new efforts by the State to initiate a traditional planning approach and infrastructure provision in the community.

INTRODUCTION

For many decades since its foundation, La Campana was a forgotten place by local authorities, only remembered before every election. That relationship changed after the war on drugs reached a peak in Monterrey from 2009 to 2012 (Villarreal, 2015; Rios, 2012). This city represents a lucrative spot for drug trafficking due to its strategic geographical location for distribution to the Northern border cities of Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa (Expansión, 2011a). During this period, criminals used informal urban settlements for two purposes: first, as a hiding place, since these settlements lacked police surveillance as they were not initially recognized by the State, which resulted in poor physical conditions and lack of connection to the city. Second, as a source of labor, due to the unequal job opportunities in these settlements (VICE, 2017), it was not difficult to find who was willing to join the criminal gangs, especially the vulnerable youth (Enamorado et al. 2016). The consequences of this forced interaction were tangible; the drug traffickers left a torn social fabric.

It was not until 2012 that the state government created a new police force trained and purposed to enter informal urban settlements and dismantle the drug traffickers who had seized the neighborhood (Expansión, 2011b). However, this fight was rife with violence, experienced and witnessed by the perpetrators and the public. Residents of La Campana still remember their fear not only of the cartels but the police.

Simultaneous to fear, anger, and pain derived from violence, for the community of La Campana, this traumatic experience generated a reflection by the community members. After having a curfew declared by the cartel and constant violence expressed on various layers, the residents' relationship with the public space was null or very limited (Fernández, 2018). This background originated an original and fresh way to organize in the pursuit of more spaces for socializing. With little to no help from authorities, the community

transformed its own environment, born out of need for healing and safety. The government soon took notice.

There is a contested relationship between the community and the local planners. Violence in the community triggered the community's desire to re-shape their public space, and these actions attracted the attention of the local planning department and the private sector. However, while the community desires governmental attention, their allies in the private sector can jeopardize the community's momentum. My research shows that without a different approach from the city's authorities, La Campana's community organization is threatened by real estate company interests.

URBANIZATION OF LA CAMPANA



Illustration 1. Panoramic view of La Campana from Altamira, 2021. Source: Author.

La Campana is a consolidated informal settlement located in a vibrant urban area in Monterrey. It borders San Pedro, one of the wealthiest municipalities in Latin America, and "Distrito Tec," an urban district with significant real estate interests due to a mega-urban project made by the government and the private sector. The community settled in 1950-1960 on what once was a lonely hill surrounded by agricultural land. Migrants from different parts of the country came to work in Monterrey, searching for better living conditions. These waves of migrants began occupying the area in 1917, installed first at the Cerro de la Loma Larga (See Illustration 2), starting in what is now Independencia, and slowly advancing over the long hill system until reaching what is now Altamira and further ahead to the isolated hill of La Campana in the 1960s (Aparicio, Ortega, Sandoval, 2011).

According to the historical and sociocultural profile prepared by the UANL (2015), the lower parts of La Campana and Altamira were first populated. Most of the first settlers bought land to build their houses from the municipality, which bought the land from a brick company LAMOSA installed in the lower part of La Campana after moving their location (UANL, 2015).

In La Campana, there is a great diversity of people, from third or fourth generation in the area to families that recently arrived from Central or Southern Mexico, including some who barely speak Spanish as their native language is Nahuatl. The spatial distribution of the hill of La Campana is also important; first-comers were given space in the lower area, whereas most recent residents concentrated in the higher areas of the hill. This illustrates not only social cohesion but also rivalry and hierarchies in the community.



Illustration 2. Map of La Campana in relation to its context. Source: Author based on Google Earth.

Interestingly, there is a culture and identity of effort and hardworking values with which the families have built their houses and urbanized the area. There is also a sense of belonging and rootedness in the population, especially the elderly born there or arrived as children. The reasons behind the attachment to land are because they were in charge of collectively managing the provision of basic services and streets with the government. These efforts were directed through the *Junta de Mejoras*, in which the majority of the participants were mothers who elaborated requests to the municipal government (UANL, 2015).

The study area has a privileged location within the context of the Monterrey Metropolitan Zone. It is located on the municipal boundary between Monterrey and San Pedro Garza Garcia. As shown in Illustration 2, within a 5 km radius is the metropolitan center is the Distrito Tec and Valle Oriente, a high-end commercial zone. The area is

connected by important main roads, such as Lázaro Cárdenas Avenue to the west, Eugenio Garza Sada Avenue to the east, and Alfonso Reyes Avenue to the south. While La Campana seems to have easy access to other areas of the city, the neighborhood's internal spatial configuration is restricting the residents' contact with these main roads, thus reducing access to employment centers and other services provided by the city (Illustration 3).



Illustration 3. Accessibility map of La Campana. In Orange, the spaces of La Campana only accessible to pedestrians. Source: INEGI, 2022.

The area of La Campana-Altamira is part of a network of informal settlements along the Loma Larga, characterized by social exclusion and lack of opportunities due to the negligence of the authorities. This phenomenon is not unique to La Campana. In the municipality of Monterrey alone, according to initial estimates, 5.86% of the municipal population lives in urban conditions similar to the study area, with deficits in basic infrastructure such as drinking water, electricity, drainage, safe public space, education, and access to employment and health (C Lab, 2020).

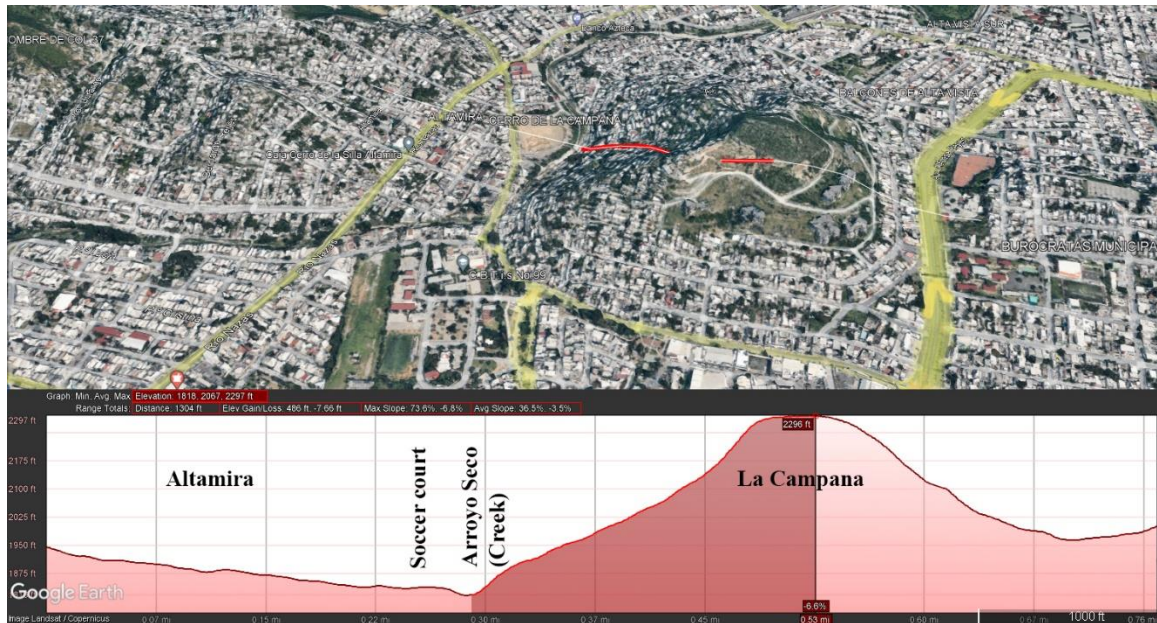


Illustration 4. Section of La Campana. Highest point 146 meters (480 ft). Average slope 36.5%. Source: Author based on Google Earth.

The complicated topography and informal urbanization determine the configuration of public spaces in the Campana-Altamira. Streets, parks, and squares are very limited or deteriorated due to the precariousness of adequate public spaces. The situation gets more difficult as you move up the hill. However, at the top of La Campana, there is an empty area that could be converted into a public space. Most mobility in La Campana is on foot, with limited spaces for cars, ambulances or fire trucks.

The lack of accessibility of La Campana has had repercussions on economic and social aspects. Due to the difficulty of distributing products in the area, basic food products are up to 35% more expensive than other parts of the city (C Lab, 2020). On the one hand, this situation is caused by the cost and difficulty of transporting goods, and on the other hand by the absence of distribution centers nearby.



Illustration 5. View from the top of La Campana. From left to right: San Pedro financial center, the neighborhood of Altamira, and Monterrey downtown. 2018. Source: Author.

The following description is based on documentation (UANL, 2015; C Lab, 2020; González, 2020; CEMEX-Tec, 2020) and personal observations:

La Campana-Altamira is part of a very attractive landscape with beautiful views of the city. This space's great value consists of its natural systems, interesting topography, native vegetation, and a variety of endemic animals, especially birds and insects. Furthermore, it is strategically located at a central location in the city and close to the Tec de Monterrey and other institutions.

Some issues in the area are related to the lack of continuity of the Arroyo Seco and its high pollution levels. There is a general deficient network of walkways, stairways, and streets, and in some areas, these are nonexistent, forcing residents to transit the area with a high degree of risk. During the visits and interviews with community members, it was

common to hear of injuries, or of elderly residents not leaving La Campana for years, prompting them to depend entirely on family and social networks.

Residents and visitors have also identified infrastructure problems, such as the lack of public lighting in walkways, streets, and parks. In addition, higher areas are deprived of basic services and health services. For visitors, there are evident problems in traversing through the streets and corridors, although, not so much for residents. It is remarkable to witness the conversations among neighbors, as many of the pedestrian corridors in La Campana are not named; people use neighbors as a geographical reference; “*nos vemos anca Doña Marta*,” which translates as “see you at Mrs. Marta’s house.” Two things stand out from that sentence. First, the word *anca* does not exist in Spanish language in that context. It is used in little towns in Mexico in the same terms as in La Campana. Secondly, the use of Don or Doña, which is a sign of respect that is rarely used in Monterrey but is widely and commonly used in contexts of urban informality. These are indicators that the culture brought through immigration from rural parts of the country to Monterrey is still present. One can witness this in the way residents have close contact with decorative, medicinal, and edible plants, as well as chickens for food.

Garbage on the streets is another issue in the area; due to poor accessibility, many residual spaces are used as garbage dumps. Although the municipality has put forth some efforts to establish garbage-pick-up points, there are still many points in the upper part that lack appropriate spaces to deposit household trash.



Illustration 6. The community has a high degree of identity associated with Colombian cumbia. The mural is a tribute to Celso Piña, 2019. Photo: Courtesy of Eric Nava-Pérez.

On the positive side, this is a community that has developed a unique culture around music. The high pride residents feel about their neighborhood is a relevant aspect of La Campana-Altamira area. In the area, 90.6% of the population mentioned they feel proud of their neighborhood (Cemex-Tec, 2020). By working in the area for over four years, I have noticed the high level of community cohesion and interaction between neighbors and the strong community identity. For instance, the love of Colombian cumbia music has become an identifying trait of the community, and a uniting force for the residents. Cumbia music arrived in Monterrey in the 1970s and is now irretrievably embedded in the area of Loma

Larga, which concentrates mainly on informal settlements. In La Campana, they are especially proud of Mexican cumbia music, as founded by the Monterrey artist Celso Piña, who became globally renowned.

The neighborhood also unites in their love for their most beloved soccer team in La Campana, los *Rayados* (although there are two soccer teams in Monterrey, *Tigres* and *Rayados*). When the subject comes up, the residents repeat their phrase *Aquí todos somos Rayados* or “here, we are all fans of Rayados.” Until 2015, Rayados used the Tec of Monterrey Stadium, located less than one kilometer from La Campana.

Statistical Information.

The study area considered for the analysis of this dissertation encompasses what the residents consider part of the neighborhood of La Campana. It is important to mention that La Campana is divided into official *colonias* (neighborhoods): the Colonia Cerro de la Campana, Balcones de Alta Vista, Burócratas Municipales, and one more area designated as Colonia Sin Nombre 65. However, the internal network of corridors is not consistent with the limits of each of those neighborhoods. For that reason, and in accordance with the information collected in fieldwork, I am considering the area from Illustration 7 as the analysis site.

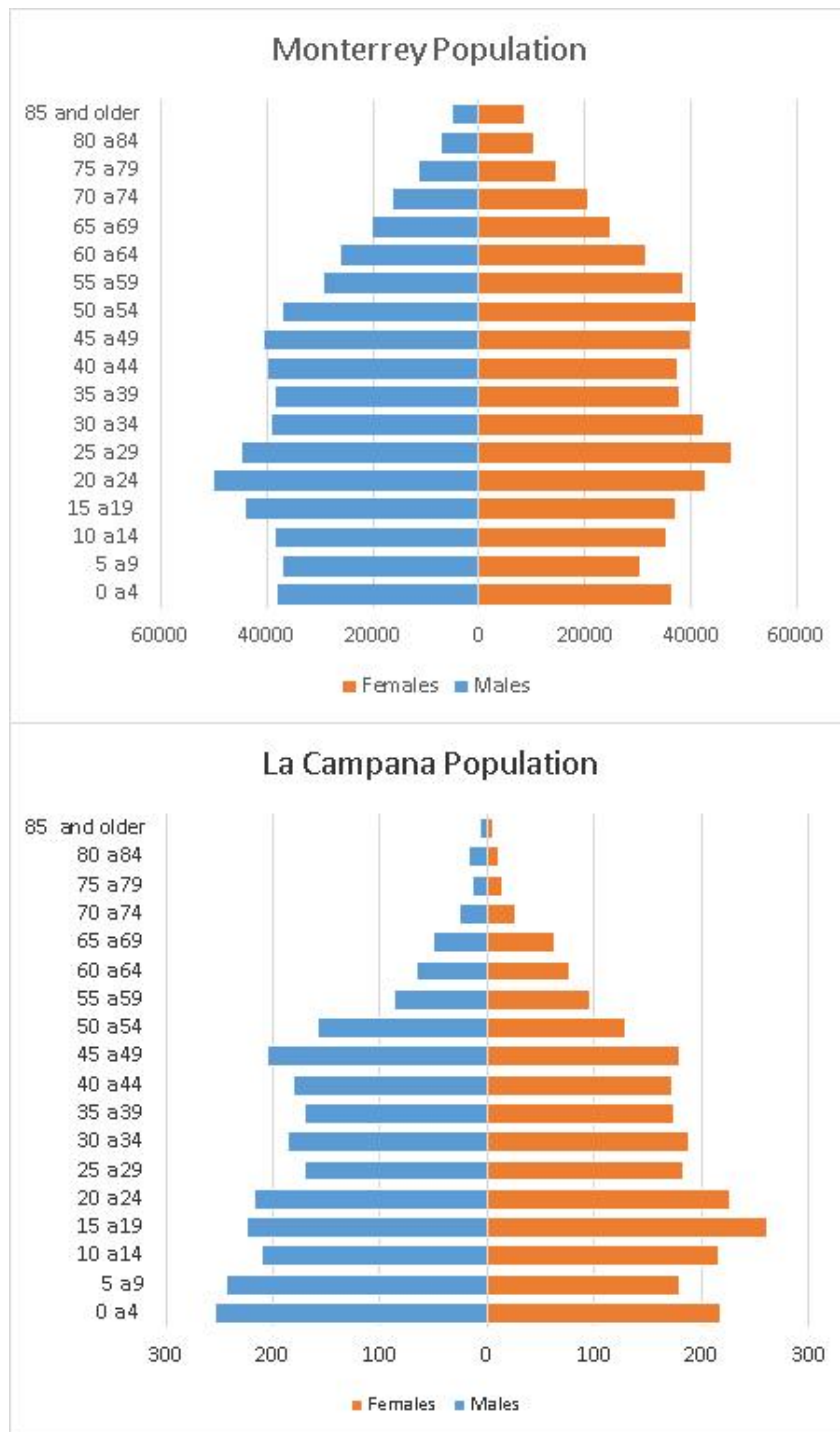


Figure 3. Population pyramids City of Monterrey and La Campana. Source: Author with information from INEGI Census 2020.

The 2020 census (INEGI, 2020) shows that 12% of the 3,049 houses in the study zone are inhabited. According to interviews, the abandonment of houses occurred due to high levels of violence in 2009-2012, when many residents fled the community, fearing for their safety. Still, some new residents have been established there in the last decade.

One of the most salient inequalities in place is represented by the high levels of unemployment. When the first residents moved to La Campana, they found themselves far from work centers, but almost 70 years later, the formal city grew around it, providing physical closeness to job opportunities. However, high levels of unemployment reached 10% of the population in the community, contrasting with the 5% at the state and national levels (CEMEX-Tec, 2020). Interviewing residents in La Campana, the reasons behind unemployment are explained due to low wages and long pay periods forcing workers to wait longer for pay¹⁰. In other words, community members prefer a high rotation of jobs or resort to the informal job market, expecting to get paid sooner.

Another issue disproportionately impacting La Campana is the high levels of school dropouts. Up to 31.78% of children under 15 years old are not attending school, in contrast to 11.62% at a national level and 10.29% at the state level. It should be noted that COVID-19 increased the already high levels of social inequalities worldwide, significantly affecting the poorer populations. Beyond that, Mexico instituted remote learning for longer than other countries. Anticipating internet in rural areas is only accessible to 52% of the population in Mexico (INEGI, 2021), part of the Mexican strategy was to use TV and radio stations to spread school lessons. As a result, although the school levels lessons were distributed throughout the day, many families with one TV but more than one child were not able to access education the same as others. While 85% of La Campana inhabitants

¹⁰ In Mexico, payday comes every 15 days.

have internet access (INEGI, 2020), most of it is through smartphones, getting the internet from pre-paid data, making internet access limited for long-term connections and not very usable for remote classes. The difficulty of remote learning led to high levels of school dropouts.

Schools are back to in-person classes and children are slowly returning to normality. However, what happened in La Campana and other informal settlements show the vulnerability of these communities in many aspects of their lives.

VIOLENCE AND ITS REPERCUSSION ON PLANNING

This section explores the first of three stages I consider key to understanding the contested attention and planning discussions around La Campana. The city of Monterrey went through a painful period of violence from 2009 to 2012. Ana Villarreal (2015) describes this time as a "wave of gruesome, spectacular drug violence" (Villarreal, 2015: 135) that affected every layer of activities and social relationships in *regiomontanos'* (people from Monterrey) daily life. While it affected the whole city, the most noticeable effects of the violence were evident in the poorest parts of the city.

This violence created social disturbances and fear that drove people away from many of their routine activities. Areas of the city with bars and nightclubs ceased to exist due to the impossibility of paying quotas from organized crime groups. Young people began to socialize differently; houses substituted bars, public spaces were empty after a certain hour, and even universities modified their schedules to prevent exposing students to unnecessary hazards.

Violence had the most significant impact on informal communities, taking advantage of their historical lack of surveillance and physical inaccessibility due to the

building and pathway structures and topography. In La Campana, the effects were even more tragic since the cartel recruited young people, even adolescents, exploiting the pre-existing lack of education and job opportunities in the community. There were few interactions with community members during my fieldwork that did not conjure tragic memories of cartels and violence.

Violence and Planning.

Debates over the negative spillovers of violent effects tend to dominate discussions in planning. Nevertheless, these debates obscure the far more relevant issue of how violence has been used as an element of control in urban environments. Moser and McIlwaine (1999) argue that violence and fear are "the primary motivating factor[s], either conscious or unconscious, for gaining or maintaining political, economic or social power through force" (p.205). Similarly, Skurski and Coronil (2006) see violence as a tool of power and social order.

Violence in communities tends to undermine various sources of community capital; it erodes physical, social, human, and natural capital from communities (Moser and McIlwaine, 1999). Nevertheless, Villarreal (2016) argues that while there are losses of rights, new spaces of citizenship arise. For this reason, it is important to consider the multi-dimensional consequences of violence and the concepts associated with it.

In the context of low-income communities in Latin America, violence is best understood in relation to other multi-dimensional concepts such as: poverty, which undermines security, well-being, and self-respect; exclusion, referring to unequal access to economic, social, political, and cultural opportunities; and social capital, which relates to the "rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity and trust embedded in social relations, social structures and societies' institutional arrangements which enable its members to achieve

their individual and community objectives" (Moser and McIlwaine, 1999: 206). Understanding this interrelated conceptual nexus provides the grounds for urban studies researchers to build upon the complexities of each case study.

Skurski and Coronil (2006) expand on the relevance of violence as a determinant for social, personal, and cultural life; they recognize that violence "resides in different realms of social life and individual experience, shaping contexts, moving among subjects, and altering meanings" (p.5). Aligned with Walter Benjamin, they argue that the State refers "to the central node of institutions and ideologies from which territorial rule is exercised and the right to control the administration of violence is claimed" (p.9). They add that once power is consolidated, it is maintained by exerting violence in sophisticated ways. To command obedience, the State invokes a moral range that goes from benevolent to the punitive, while it builds affective relationships that go from love to fear, it presents the use of violence as a moral necessity.

In La Campana, there is a contested perception of police surveillance. People coming from rural areas looking for a place to live developed an organized and collective housing strategy due to their inability to afford the options provided by the formal market. In this neighborhood, the construction of houses was accompanied by the construction of ways to negotiate common spaces through community deliberation. Their relation with authorities is framed by stories of abuse and mistrust over generations.

Policing in Latin America originally emerged from a historical context of repressing and abusing poor populations (Arias, Tocornal, 2018). As a result, many of these informal settlements experienced a lack of effective and legitimate policing services. As in much of Latin America, in La Campana, the relationship with the police is full of challenges. Police are often woefully underpaid, making the temptation to engage in corruption very difficult to resist, making bribery and abuse common. Even when this is

not the case, inadequate resources still restrict their ability to control criminal activity. This is important for our understanding of how violence becomes rampant in certain neighborhoods. (Arias, Tocornal, 2018).

Violence has been used as a tool to shift the power relations in La Campana. First, like most informal communities in the Global South, the government neglected the community, caused that the leadership role in informal communities fell back on local leaders (Alsayyad, 1993). Later, there was a shift of power due to the organized crime presence in the area exerting violence on the settlers. Finally, when the crime rate decreased, the community started re-organizing in the territory. The attention the government is currently paying to La Campana jeopardizes the community's future due to zoning changes and the growing real estate interests in the area that could modify the local power structures.

Anti-Violence Initiatives in Governance.

Arias and Tocornal (2018) work around the idea of violence in Latin America. They argue that interpersonal violence cannot be explained by lack of money alone but by inequality and social exclusion. In fact, in both formal and informal deals with crime prevention; in formal settings, control is represented by the public authorities; in informal, it is regulated by social moves, customs, and practices (see also De Certau, 1998). The degree of social organization is related to the quality of the relations between residents and public authorities; unfortunately, the quality of this relationship tends to be aligned with capital accumulation, and wealthy neighborhoods have a better relationship with authorities than poorer neighborhoods.

Escobar (2012, in Arias and Tocornal, 2018) showed neighborhoods with higher police presence in Bogotá correlate with more homicides. Hence, cities explore other

possibilities to tackle crime; this focus targets neighborhoods, not individuals. Cerdá (2012) describes an impressive decrease in violence and perception of violence in poor Colombian neighborhoods where the government built public spaces and infrastructure. Cerdá's analysis shows how attractive it is for authorities and governments to shift from an authoritarian approach to a more invisible control. Modifying the urban form of low-income settlements has changed the Latin American approach to spaces of difference and violence, while hiding other manifestations of state violence (Skurski and Coronil, 2006), such as expulsions and gentrification.

Thus, urban and architectonic strategies of reducing social problems are becoming more frequent, especially after the wide diffusion of the Medellín model promoted by international institutions such as UN-Habitat or the Inter-American Development Bank. In Monterrey, there has been a higher presence of former public officials from Medellín advising different social and urban initiatives since 2011 due to the high allocation of funds from the private sector to bring the public officials to Monterrey (Staines-Díaz, 2015; 2016).

Clark (2005) explains how these infrastructure provision projects are designed to displace the population peacefully. According to Clark, a horizontal political engagement avoids resistance to gentrification, since the contexts in which gentrification takes over are in places with a high degree of social polarization. By contrast, gentrification is usually a non-violent process in places with more social equality. According to Clark, the roots of gentrification are political and epistemological, as there is a commodification of space, polarized power relationships, and a dominance of vision oversight. It is ultimately a question of sovereignty.

Regardless of the critical voices of mega infrastructure projects in informal urban settlements, the popularity of these models has spread in Latin America. Franco and Ortiz

(2019) say that the popularity of the Medellín Model is possibly due to the role of media in its massive dissemination as inspiration for other cities with issues of violence. Storytelling, changing the narratives of violence, international validations from the UN-Habitat, BID, and the World Bank have legitimized urban interventions as a necessary line of work; the success of this dissemination is such that even people living in informal settlements see megaprojects, such as cable cars, as engines for social change (Álvarez and Bocarejo, 2014). This, according to Mehta (2016) and Oguyankin (2019), is a way in which the powerful use the printed media to position their interests and shape their narratives to enhance capital expansion in the peripheries.

The Use of Fear to Justify Exclusion in Planning.

Violence has been used to justify strategies of urban exclusion. In this section, I will provide context about how this idea has gained traction in the last decade as a result of fear tactics. Caldeira (2000) discusses the interesting relationship between violence, segregation, and urban transformation. According to Caldeira, the “talk of crime” or the “everyday narratives, commentaries, conversations, and jokes” that “make fear circulate and proliferate” (p. 2). This talk of crime justifies techniques of exclusion, exacerbates prejudices, and naturalizes some groups as dangerous. In parallel, it promotes spatial reorganization of the city based on exclusion of those considered dangerous and inclusion of those identified as equals, thus, the creation of enclaves that distance – symbolically and materially, their inhabitants from the “dangerous population.” The “strategies operate by marking differences, imposing partitions and distances, building walls, multiplying rules of avoidance and exclusion, and restricting movement” (p.2). Similarly, Yunda and Sletto (2020) argue that the subordination of planning to the logic of private property is increasing fragmentation and polarization in cities of the Global South.

In short, Caldeira, argues that fear of violence can lead to urban transformations, which in turn, can provoke urban segregation. Koch (2015), on the other hand, provides a valuable complementation to Caldeira by exploring the interest of the wealthy to intervene in the planning practice in the Colombian context. The influence of the private sector is such that comprehensive plan are made by private companies.

This private sector influence is not exclusive to Colombia. In Monterrey, private actors have begun to actively participate in making plans through the creation of the *Programa Parcial de Desarrollo Urbano* (PPDU), or the Partial Plan of Urban Development, through which the private sector partners with local governments to transform areas of the city under the banner of efficiency, density, and security.

The informal settlement of La Campana, has not escaped from this planning logic; The *Plan Integral para el Desarrollo del Polígono Campana-Altamira* (Integral development plan Campana-Altamira) has been put forth by the three levels of government, Monterrey Tec, and CEMEX, one of the biggest cement companies in the world. This plan includes land use modifications and infrastructural projects that undoubtedly will have consequences in how the residents relate to each other and the city.

Discussion.

The different forms of violence experienced in La Campana eroded the community. The cartel's violence pushed people into the private sphere, limiting interpersonal contacts. In addition, the violence exercised by the authorities in their attempts to control the territory was accompanied by the community's displacement of decision-making spaces. Suddenly, the community was no longer the main agent of change in the territory. However, this modification of roles, as well as the addition of new actors in determining the built

environment, also led to the creation of new spaces for exercising citizenship. The next section discusses where and how these actions took place.

REFLECTION AND INTERVENTION IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

After the traumatic cartel violence in La Campana, the community began to reflect on its relationship with the public space. Groups around the neighborhood came together to reflect on how they could improve their community. I met with three neighborhood groups that found ways to bring about changes in their community. Each of them was driven by a fervent desire to overcome the fear of past years.

My work focuses on the efforts of Barrio Esperanza, an NGO working in the community since 2015. The incredible resilience of this neighborhood is perfectly portrayed by the actions of Barrio Esperanza. In this section, I will describe the community's strengths associated with their strong social ties, a condition *sine qua non* to overcome adversities.

My findings from this fieldwork are nuanced. While I was able to observe the valuable work done for and by the community, relationships in the neighborhood were stagnant or in disrepair. This section aims to highlight how shared trauma activated a new way of relating to the public space.

Strong Social Ties.

The key to understanding the incredible resilience of La Campana can be ascribed to their strong social ties. The importance and academic value of informal settlements lies in the strong social ties established by the settlers of these communities. For Alsayyad (1993), unplanned and illegally built communities in the developing world often become

well-established communities through long processes of cooperation, inventiveness, and social structures.

In informal settlements, the construction of space and social networks are almost simultaneous. From the beginning, residents unite to prevent their expulsion, establishing ties that make the harsh challenges less difficult (Aparicio, 2009). For consolidating communities, the challenges accompanying informal settlements are considered vehicles of social change. During the construction and consolidation of informal settlements, the ties established create local unity and therefore identity (Aparicio, 2009). Through this, residents have more opportunities for success. In some cases, the model of organization is such that they manage to establish a system of rules and provisions to maintain order and security for the residents. For example, in *Tierra y Libertad* community in Monterrey, the residents try to maintain a peaceful environment through participatory methods such as public meetings to determine strategies for resistance. These social ties allow them to establish a stronger and rooted organization, raising the living conditions through improvements in housing and public spaces.

Residential organizing is a determining factor in achieving the community's consolidation as they negotiate with authorities on the legalization of their properties, and, subsequently, the installation of basic services and infrastructure. Individual negotiation to obtain some benefit does not reap the same results as an organized community.

Leaders of an informal settlement play an important role in mobilizing the residents, managing, and, to some extent, exerting pressure on the authorities to see that their requests for housing and services are being fulfilled. In this regard, the struggles for urban demands are significant only to the extent that they allow people to unite, organize and become politically aware since, according to these leaders, that political force is the only genuine guarantee of the success of the community's demands (Castells, 1981).

Community Response in the Built Environment.

According to her research during the peak of violence in Monterrey, Ana Villarreal (2015) argues that public space was one of the first to suffer the consequences of fear. Stories of violence and kidnapping from family, friends, and acquaintances made people fearful of their daily activities. Along with the negative spillover of violence in the city, there were also new ways the population organized their social activities. Villarreal (2015) describes these efforts as “regrouping”. The first groups to respond were family members of the victims of violence, often caravanning for peace, and embroidering groups in plazas to occupy public space.

In La Campana, the Mexican War on Drugs shifted the way residents felt and related to their neighborhood and public spaces. After living under the mercy of the cartel with constant violence, inhabitants no longer felt full freedom in their public spaces (Fernández, 2018). To respond this problem, female neighbors formalized their organization by forming Barrio Esperanza, an NGO that groups neighbors with the support of a local sociologist who was invited to participate (Fernández, 2018). The focus of this group is to improve the physical conditions of La Campana to incentivize encounter spaces.

Almost intuitively, the first improvements were related to the re-integration of the social fabric damaged by periods of violence. Through bottom-up community work, they started to detect problems in the community that could be solved by creating public spaces. The guiding idea was to create meeting spaces between neighbors, those that the violence took from them.

Since inhabitants plan their informal settlements, the lots and corridors are made intuitively and negotiated with the residents. Informal neighborhoods are created to satisfy the need for housing that the State could not provide. For that reason, these neighborhoods

rarely leave spaces specifically designed to serve as outdoor public spaces, such as parks, squares, courts, and alike.

It is not a coincidence that the first spaces that received attention from the neighbors and the recently created NGO, Barrio Esperanza, were the public spaces. Due to the limited interaction in public spaces during the period of violence, the community begins a reflection that leads to understanding the exterior areas not only as transition spaces but also as spaces of coexistence. One of the first spaces to be intervened was a slope where was built a comfortable staircase with wide platforms. Notably, it was used for social gatherings. Itzel, a neighbor from the upper part of the project, comments that "this place is used for children's parties. It's very nice because before we had nowhere to gather and now we even celebrate baptisms here."

For *Doña Licha*, a resident of La Campana, the creation of new spaces for conviviality means the opportunity for their children and grandchildren to have a better future. In her words: "Crime took a lot from us, but now we, *las vecinas*, are organizing to get it back." I heard similar responses from other *vecinas*, who are motivated by knowing that they are leaving a better space for the new generations. It is important to say that the actors who carry out the main organizational tasks are women. Once the tasks are established, they are in charge of passing on tasks to their partners or male family members.

Barrio Esperanza gathers with groups of neighbors, and together they determine the space to be intervened. After that, Barrio Esperanza's task is to obtain donations in the form of money or materials. Once funds are secured, labor and support tasks are jointly distributed among the neighbors; each neighbor commits contributing what is within his or her abilities and possibilities. Barrio Esperanza acts as an actor that keeps participants accountable until the project is completed.

The first barrier to tear down was how residents related to the authorities. Residents had been conditioned for generations into having two kinds of relationships with local governments; one of absence, in which the State only represented a constant threat of expulsion, and another of paternalism (Deuskar, 2019). Residents expressed how the most common contact with government officials happened every three years, coinciding with election years for mayors or governors every six years. Once the NGO community members reflected on the government's responsibility going beyond the election year, small but meaningful demands started to be made. This was key to igniting the transformation of spaces.

The results have been so good that through word of mouth, other groups of neighbors have approached Barrio Esperanza to participate. Children have been an important part of this process. Berta, a local leader, mentioned that "the children are the ones who get their parents' interest in these projects, because when they see that their friends have a pocket park near their house, they want another one near theirs."

Community members started working in what Mirafteb (2009) calls 'invented spaces of citizenship,' defined as the "collective actions by the poor that directly confront the authorities and challenge the status quo" (p. 39). This definition mirrors what happened in La Campana. The community organized themselves and defined mechanisms to change their environment, counting only on their resources, such as the available materials from the space and local labor donated by individuals. As the community actions became relevant, they could also access donations for playgrounds and paint.



Illustration 8. “En este lugar ya no se deja basura.” The first physical intervention made by Barrio Esperanza, 2018. Source: Author.



Illustration 9. Widening of the corridor and installation of playground equipment, 2019. Source: Author.

For María, a resident who contributed with labor in the renovation of one of these spaces: “if we don’t do it, no one else will. People in government make promises over and over, but rarely deliver”. The community, using their agency, transformed spaces themselves with minimal or no help from local authorities. For example, spaces used as dumps were transformed into pocket parks, narrow corridors were widened to fit children’s playgrounds, and local artists painted house facades with a motif chosen by the community.

Discussion.

I have mentioned that the strong social ties that develops in informal settlements helped enormously to recover both decision-making spaces and physical spaces. It should be noted that this came from the deep reflection and initiative of female neighbors. In an interview, some neighbors expressed concern that the younger generations does not seem to be involved or interested in community organization. For that reason, the social ties now present should not be taken for granted.

Furthermore, La Campana cannot be thought of as a monolith, since even today, after a long historical communitarian journey, there is still rivalry between some areas of the community, mainly between the lower and upper areas.

OVERWHELMING ATTENTION IN AND AROUND LA CAMPANA

Finally, I have identified a third stage of study relevant for La Campana. The violent period, and the community responses in the built environment, attracted attention from authorities. This attention was not limited to safety issues. Soon, there was a proliferation of planning efforts of different scales, from art projects (macro murals) to comprehensive plans. However, while the municipality intend to incorporate local skills and abilities, the

processes carried out so far lack significant participatory approaches. In this section, I expand on the importance of community organizing skills in negotiating with political actors, and I discuss how La Campana-Altamira Plan could benefit from these skills.

Community Organizing and Political Negotiation.

The skills that informal communities have acquired overtime to cope with day-to-day challenges and external pressures of displacement has brought them academic attention worldwide. Due to the poor living conditions, informal settlers share uncertain land tenure and lifestyles. However, through this, these neighborhoods manifest solidarity, participation, and support (Cabrera and Veloquio, 2017).

For Alsayyad (1993), squatter inhabitants established outside the formal legal and economic structures typically develop a complex network of relationships with the formal sector. To face the formal sector, informal settlers group in traditional forms of social organization that “play a significant role in the formation of leadership in squatter communities and the handling of community problems” (p. 38).

However, the community agency described by Alsayyad faces government influence and control. Gilbert and Ward (1985) describe five mechanisms by which this occurs. First, governmental agencies and secretaries control large areas of the cities in Mexico; therefore, the State acts as a landowner. Second, the government has the authority to incentivize building activity. This directly affects the land market in that it stimulates and depresses the general price of urban land. Similarly, land taxation can also affect land prices and infrastructure and services distribution. Third, the construction of public buildings or infrastructural projects, such as roads, avenues, and railways in particular areas close to informal settlements, raises the land value that eventually can pressure informal communities. Fourth, the State acts as a land-use planner whose decisions will exert control

in an area affecting land price. Fifth, the government can allow or displace informal settlements using its authority.

In this context, Cabrera and Veloquio (2017) warn that while social organization is a key leverage point for negotiation with authorities, informal settlers are vulnerable groups that can become participants in political clientelism of the political force in power. Gilbert and Ward (1985) share this concern while recognizing the dichotomy of community participation. On the one hand, they identify the desirability of social participation as it increases the community's role in decision-making, reducing the dependence on the State, and potentially improving an area's physical condition; on the other hand, they see participation as a way in which the State can achieve social control by coopting relevant actors. Gilbert and Ward warn that co-opting relevant actors and controlled spaces for participation are common in Latin American cities, where State power has used social participation to achieve social control. Latin American governments have used three basic mechanisms. The first, is co-opting community leaders by incorporating them into political parties, they extend their influence over local constituencies, hence manipulating public decisions. A second mechanism is to institutionalize the channels of political mobilization, social control, and neighborhood improvement. In this case, communities can only act by constrained channels, discouraging diverse participation and the new political actors. Third is plain clientelism, a patron-client relationship in which resources are exchanged between actors of unequal status with the obligation for votes, in this case, between government and communities. These strategies have been used to “undermine and suppress community autonomy and reduce active participation” (p. 181).



Illustration 10. On the left, the stairs made by the municipality. On the right, the stairs made by the community. Source: Author.

My research in La Campana identifies these mechanisms to coopt the community agency. Large infrastructure projects and plans for the area are currently in place. Novel administration of the territory can result in incentives for real estate projects, thus impacting local social relationships, creating new physical and imaginary barriers, and, importantly, raising land prices, which can ultimately displace residents. In parallel, for over three years, the private sector, supported and authorized by local authorities, has implemented intimate mentoring with various community groups. These interaction range from inviting working groups to funding small projects to modify public spaces. Tec de Monterrey, FEMSA, and CEMEX have been stakeholders with a solid local presence in

the area for over seven years. NGO interventions became relevant not just in the community but on a regional scale. The community efforts attracted attention from the local authorities, which has been both appreciated and criticized.

The municipality began to build stairs on one of the many slopes of La Campana, and contrary to the government's expectations, the project was not well received. The community members, who already had experience organizing and working on their own to carry out projects with their own hands and skills, were upset for two reasons. For one, the community was already carrying out this work on their own terms in other parts of the neighborhood. Even more important was that community interventions have a specific aesthetic that the municipal administration could not imitate. The community's project cost around \$50,000 pesos (US\$ 2 500) (Illustration 10). The community itself donated their labor because many work in the construction business. On the other hand, the project on the left, carried out by the municipal government, cost \$ 2,000,000 pesos (US\$ 100 000), carried out by an external construction company commissioned by the government that did not employ people from the community. In a community where 70% of the population has construction skills, it was a matter of time before the residents rejected the project.

Beto, a community leader, mentioned that “if they had given us that money [the cost of the project], we would have done much more. But they come, make the project more expensive and take the picture to show it off on TV”.

Urban Development Plan District Campana-Altamira 2020-2040.

One of the more significant concerns from the recent attention of the Government/Private sector towards La Campana is the elaboration of a Partial Urban Plan. The plan includes land use modifications and infrastructural projects that undoubtedly affect how the residents relate to each other and the city. However, on the other hand, there

is a latent possibility of causing displacement through gentrification since the area will become highly attractive for investment after the plan's implementation.

In 2014, three Secretaries of the Federal government, SEDATU, SEDESOL, and SEGOB, decided to coordinate programs in the area due to violence. La Campana was identified as one of the three polygons (or districts) that needed priority attention in Nuevo León. These Secretaries asked a diagnostic to Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL). The School of Architecture carried out the study. Being a Faculty member at that time, I attended meetings related to the diagnostic and discussion on the project scope. It was decided that most of the diagnostic would be based on quantitative information, although some interviews and qualitative methods were applied to a lesser extent. The document was submitted in mid-2015.

Due to administrative and institutional shifts at the state level in 2015, the inter-institutional alliance did not thrive. However, by the end of 2015, the new state administration, the municipality, and SEDATU, allied to promote coordination among stakeholders and generate an integrated program (SEDATU, 2016). In September 2016, SEDATU Secretary, the governor of Nuevo León, the Mayor of Monterrey, the Director of CEMEX Social Responsibility Department, and the Dean of the Tec of Monterrey, symbolically inaugurated this cooperation initiative.

The Integral Development Plan for La Campana Altamira Polygon (Campana-Altamira Plan) was developed in 2016, and is intended to serve as a guide to coordinate urban planning efforts from different government levels and institutions in the area (González, 2020).

As the government developed this plan with the private sector, it is important to question its motivations. Koch (2015), for example, explores the blurring of the border between the 'formal' and the 'informal,' arguing that private sector actors pursue their

'massive interests' by controlling the planning processes. The private sector has many spaces to act in this plan; it contains land use for a cluster of entrepreneurship and areas designated to accommodate more density related to the construction of apartment buildings.

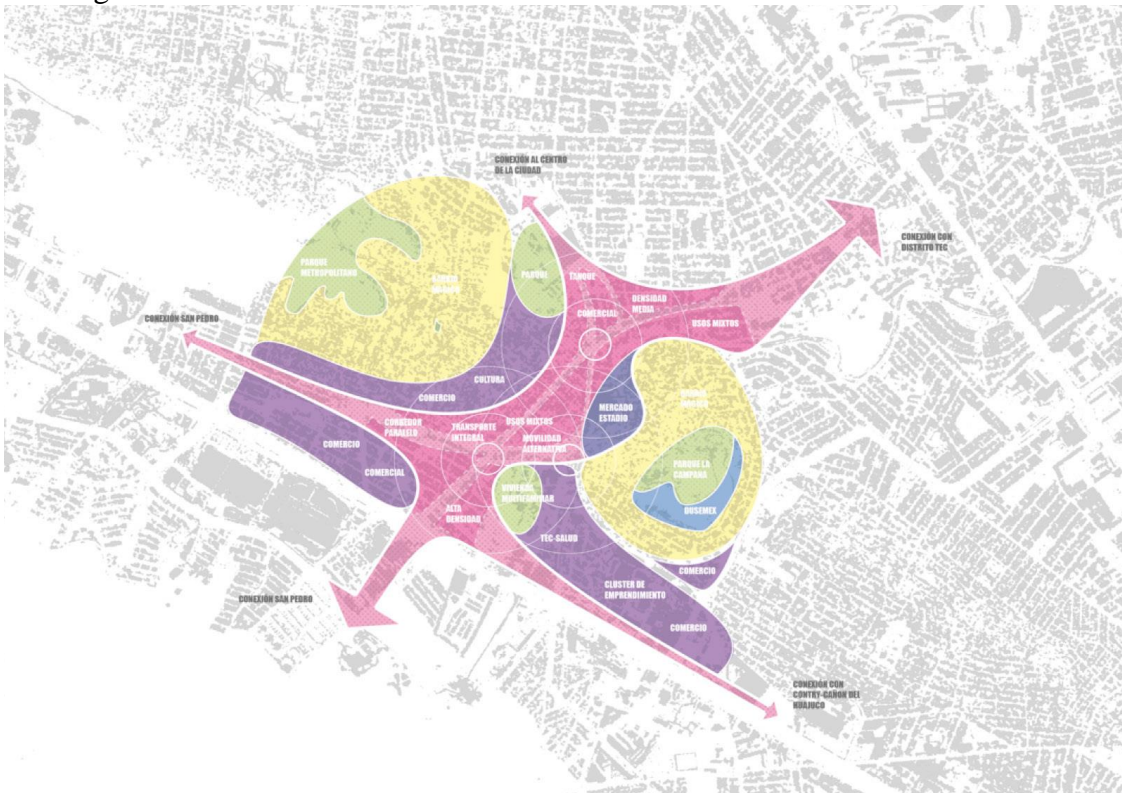


Illustration 11. Conceptual land use of La Campana-Altamira. Source: Urban Development Plan District Campana-Altamira 2020-2040.

The plan presents topics that, at first glance, could seem favorable to a community. Concepts such as green areas, public transport, and cultural spaces have an obviously positive connotation. However, if one looks closely, they will find threatening words such as “commercial”, “high density”, “entrepreneurship cluster”, and the most conflicting of all, it defines informal communities with the label of *barrios mágicos* (magic neighborhoods), a term that does not exist in the urban vocabulary, but which makes

explicit reference to the *pueblos mágicos* (magic towns) that exist in Mexico. The term *pueblos mágicos* has been broadly criticized because, far from consolidating the local culture of each town, they tend to homogenize the built environment and the economic activities of little towns in Mexico. As imported practices generally come supported by power structures, if the same thing happened in settlements like La Campana, the sense of identity could be eroded and local practices endangered. Another questionable element of the plan is the giant pink arrows that seem to connect what are now two areas of the wealthiest areas in the city; the municipality of San Pedro Garza García, one of the richest in Latin America, and the Tecnológico de Monterrey, which contributed to this plan.

There is also the issue of shifting control. Many authors have discussed the implications of megaprojects and urban plans to achieve control as a non-violent approach. Büscher (2012) argues that when there is a vacuum of State power to perform State functions in low-income settlements, these functions are rapidly occupied by non-State actors. That is undoubtedly the case with informal settlements in Latin America. Due to a history of State neglect, informal settlements such as La Campana had long been controlled by non-State actors that had taken over core functions of the neighborhood, which, to some levels, has generated agency in the community. The plans and governmental actions in La Campana could potentially dilute this agency and local power, as they are designed to claim power for the State. Quinchía (2013: 126) argues that the *Proyectos Urbanos Integrales* (PUI, Integral Urban Projects) in Medellín reproduce a discourse of control to support State power domination in informal areas, exemplified by the ways in which the built environment is reorganized to facilitate police and panoptical surveillance. I argue these are the same motivations for the recent governmental actions in La Campana. As Rankin (2009) explains, urban planning is the vehicle by which the logic of capitalist accumulation travels into the "non-capitalist periphery." The plan in La Campana reproduces the

aesthetics of formality and attempt to assimilate residents to an unfamiliar way of acting, working, and relating. In the same vein, Watson (2009) sees a 'conflict of rationalities' in which informality constitutes zones of resistance where the poor exercise power, as formal urban plans serve to dilute such informal spaces of their power.

DISCUSSION OF INTERVENTIONS IN LA CAMPANA-ALTAMIRA

To understand La Campana-Altamira Plan, it is necessary to include the structure that holds it together. In 2010, two graduate students from Tec de Monterrey were shot by the military when they were mistaken for assailants. To cover up their mistake, the military argued that they were armed to the teeth, planting high-caliber weapons on their bodies (BBC, 2019). Both the government and Tec de Monterrey initially stated that no students were involved. However, five months after this terrible event, it was revealed that both Jorge and Javier were students and were murdered by the military¹¹.

Having students from wealthy families, and pressured by their parents, Tec de Monterrey's first response to violence near their main campus was to limit campus access and alienate themselves from the surroundings. However, in 2013, after reflecting on more proactive approaches, Tec de Monterrey assumed a leadership role to meet the challenges of the area's built environment with the urban renewal project Distrito Tec. One year later, they released their master plan for their campus and surroundings (Distrito Tec, 2022).

In 2016, Distrito Tec was instrumental in expanding the analysis to the urban polygon that comprises the informal neighbors of Campana-Altamira. Usually referred to as the "little brother district," the Distrito Campana-Altamira aims to improve the area's

¹¹ In 2019, Olga Sánchez Cordero, Mexican Secretary of State, officially apologized on behalf of the Mexican State to the family of Jorge and Javier.

conditions and increase quality of life through the communities' empowerment. The actors involved are the State and Municipal level, CEMEX, Tec de Monterrey, and in a lesser degree, Fundación FEMSA. These actors have been promoting governance for horizontal decision-making through the Inter-institutional Council of the Campana-Altamira Initiative.

The Campana-Altamira Initiative organizes the work currently in the area. They describe their organization as a model of integrated urban governance; that is, a transversal, integrated, and coordinated management that generates programs and projects for the sustainable development of the polygon with the participation of the three levels of government, the inhabitants of the polygon, civil organizations and private and academic institutions in the polygon (Campana Altamira, 2022 website). Notably, those in charge of Distrito Tec are organizing the efforts in La Campana.

The vision for La Campana-Altamira polygon is peaceful and harmonious. It includes eradicating extreme poverty; achieving 100% regularized land tenure; fostering local identity, recognition, and pride; achieving inclusive social, urban and economic integration with the Monterrey metropolis; encouraging an organized, participatory and self-managing community; becoming an icon of transformation and social and urban regeneration; building sustainable and replicable transformation through private and public cooperation (Plan Campana-Altamira, 2015).

The Campana-Altamira Initiative is paving the plan's implementation. This initiative is an intersectional and community co-responsibility initiative that seeks to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the Campana-Altamira polygon in a sustainable way.

In its work plan, the responsibilities are divided among the several stakeholders. The Campana-Altamira initiative is carrying out different projects in the area based on the

objectives in the Campana-Altamira Plan. Both the initiative and the plan are based on seven strategic axes: 1) Security and Social Peace, 2) Social Inclusion, 3) Urban Inclusion, 4) Housing, 5) Economic Inclusion, 6) Education, and 7) Health. The state government is in charge of topics 1, 2, and 4; CEMEX is in charge of 3 and 4; the municipal government of 5, and Tec de Monterrey of 6 and 7. However, as previously mentioned, Tec de Monterrey's presence functions as a stakeholder that monitors progress and manages the pace of the intervention.

In total, the La Campana-Altamira initiative has implemented 170 interventions in the area. Of those, 64% correspond to projects needing some kind of budget, and the rest are conducted in La Campana but do not need an additional budget, such as government programs that are targeted in the area. From the interventions that have used labeled budgets, the municipal and state government have allocated 36.85% and 34.99%, respectively, while CEMEX and Tec de Monterrey have contributed with 7.3% and 20.86% (CEMEX-Tec, 2020). Another important aspect of this initiative is that it intends to be a holistic approach, not only focusing on the built environment, but contributing to other issues that are affecting the area.

Many critiques come to mind when reading about these intentions for La Campana. For one, the community did not formulate the objectives, which raises questions about its sustainability over time. Additionally, considering the stakeholders currently considered for the diagnosis, one of the most controversial criticisms about the La Campana-Altamira Plan is the lack of community involvement. During my fieldwork, when I questioned the lack of participation from community members, the initiative leaders expressed that the community has chosen not to be involved with the necessary degree of cohesion at this point with the intention is to avoid raising expectations and then not being able to meet them. However, for these kinds of urban projects, considering the repercussions they might

have on many layers of the society, the process of identifying the necessities is as important as the future work with community members. In a certain way, with the evidence currently available, it seems that the inclusion of the community will serve only to legitimize the broad array of issues, proposals, and decisions that have already been decided. The fact that Plan Campana-Altamira already presents a diagnosis of the area without a complete community involvement says a lot about the lack of understanding of true participation.

The Governance Plan Campana-Altamira describes the methodology to organize working groups with the community and stakeholders, establishing that the leader of each group will be one of the actors from the government or private sector, and lists the responsibilities of such leader according to the topic of the working group (Gobernanza Campana-Altamira, 2020). From the way the document has been drafted, an authentic inclusion of the community has been left out of the process. However, the initiative has open opportunities to discuss ways in which the process can be modified. From my experience in the fieldwork, I could identify a genuine desire to include a participatory approach, but there is a lack of trained professionals in positions of power that could incorporate a more democratic approach.

For instance, the initiative Campana-Altamira hired Giancarlo Mazzanti's architect studio to organize the efforts of the Campana-Altamira plan, with the intention of replicating the Colombian Medellín's *Proyectos Urbanos Integrales* (Integrated Urban Projects). In Monterrey, there is significant influence from the Medellín Model, as it is seen as a promising way to decrease urban violence in informal settlements through infrastructure (Staines-Díaz, 2015). My master's thesis studied how the Medellín model had been referenced for a project in the Independencia neighborhood. For La Campana-Altamira, Giancarlo Mazzanti's team is shaping future intervention. Naturally, as this

model serves as the reference for intervention, the weaknesses of the Medellín Model are not being addressed.

Another problematic aspect of the La Campana-Altamira initiative is the high level of influence of Tec de Monterrey. While Distrito Tec has become a very unique and interesting example in Mexico of how a university can provide walkable infrastructure, parks, and overall comfortable and safe spaces in a city, some neighbors in the area have protested because they do not feel heard in the decisions and projects of Distrito Tec polygon. My research indicates the same methodological practices are marking the processes in La Campana; therefore, if not corrected, there will be similar negative perceptions once the projects in La Campana intensify.

One of the most problematic aspects of the interventions planned in and around La Campana is related to the beautification projects. Roy (2011) warns that urban informality is subject to a policy narrative and urban projects that can modify and harm the way people organize in informality. She particularly criticizes the romanticization of slums and slum tourism as happens in Rio de Janeiro's favelas.

In La Campana, the initiative Campana-Altamira has promoted projects oriented toward tourism. Illustration 12 shows the Celso Piña Museum, a project managed by the family of the late musician Celso Piña. The typography is the same used in Distrito Tec since the creation of the Celso Piña Museum was part of an overarching project called *Turismo Paseo por la Campana* (Tourism Walk in La Campana). This project started in 2019, led mainly by CEMEX and the state of Nuevo León Secretary of Economic Development. The main actions described in the website are: 1) project design, 2) approval by public security department, 3) approval from tour operators, 4) association with international embassies to strengthen the project, 5) socialization of the project (video and meetings with neighbors), 6) detection of entrepreneurs of the route and training, 7) actions

to improve the neighborhood (murals) to strengthen the sense of belonging, 8) equipment of the route, and 9) linking with external actors to strengthen the project (Campana-Altamira, 2022).

Like many of the projects in the area, this *Paseo por la Campana* lacked a participatory approach, and was created almost exclusively to improve the local economy. However, under critical planning theories, this project can be seen as an extractivist project seeking to substitute local practices.



Illustration 12. Mural in front of the recently inaugurated Celso Piña Museum. Source: Author.

These initiatives are fueled by a legitimate desire to improve the conditions in this area. My fieldwork offered me the opportunity to see the earnest efforts of these

stakeholders. Even when we engaged in conversation about problematic aspects of the intervention, they were open to criticism. This is how I was invited, on behalf of IMPLAN Monterrey, as part of the group of advisors for this project, a process that I will discuss in Chapter 6.

While my research remains critical about some aspects of the plans due to literature on the topic that reflects on experiences in other spaces of the Global South, I acknowledge there is a general willingness to improve from each of the actors I interacted with. There is one notable promising initiative in particular, led by one planning department of Tec de Monterrey. The C+LAB is a national initiative of the School of Architecture, Art and Design of the Tec de Monterrey that recognizes the commitment of universities to the needs of their environment and their role as a catalytic agent for the transformation of cities through the practical application of knowledge. They have four sites in Mexico. In La Campana, they have concentrated their efforts on working with children, understanding and operationalizing the ways in which they relate to urban spaces, according to Nélida Escobedo, the program coordinator at the Monterrey office.

Understanding the way children look at the city has allowed this plan to integrate powerful elements that otherwise would have been left aside, such as the things they perceive or the positive aspects of their neighborhood that adults overlook.

Real Estate Interest in La Campana.

There are currently real estate pressures as close as the hill of La Campana. At the back of the community, where there is an abandoned apartment building construction, there is a new apartment project approved by the previous municipal government. This project is targeted for the upper-middle class. The pre-sale marketing of this building has been so successful that the smallest apartment of 43 square meters (462 square feet) began at

\$2,000,000 Mexican pesos (\$100,000 USD) in December 2021, and by April 2022, the same apartment cost \$2,700,000 (\$135,000 USD) – a 35% increase in only four months.



Illustration 13. Commercial pre-sale images released on April 2022. Source: <https://montevo.com/>

The most problematic issue about this apartment building is that they lie about the context of the project. As it can be seen in Illustration 14, in the project render, they completely erase the community of La Campana. There is not a single trace of the existing community. Even worse, this development's so-called features" are its exclusivity and security, boasting about the controlled access and the concrete wall that runs along the entire perimeter of the project.

The importance of community inclusion and the facilitation of participatory spaces lies principally in the fact that predatory real estate projects like Montevo already exist in the region, and with the incentive of the Campana-Altamira plan, more projects will surely appear. One way to deal with interests in the site is by encouraging effective deliberation

processes in which the community can secure not only its property rights, but keep property taxes affordable and prevent physical barriers that will ensure social exclusion.



Illustration 14. Render of the final project. Source: <https://montevo.com/>

CONCLUSION

The informal settlement of La Campana has developed, over generations, specific measures, processes, and communication skills to overcome the abandonment of the State. Difficult times resulted in a proficient community capable of dealing with their necessities. That is not to say the community does not need or deserve a more just approach or attention from authorities, but to understand the delicate equilibrium taking place in La Campana.

Recently, the community once again proved its remarkable resiliency. No matter how cruel cartel violence in Monterrey was, far from annihilating people's spirit, the

community found inventive and resourceful ways to respond to their negative experiences, including reflecting on their public spaces and modifying their built environment.

These subaltern initiatives on a micro-scale were met with macro urban projects and plans from by the government and the private sector. However, such a response has a long way to become accessible to the community's ongoing processes. Additionally, there are many aspects of the plan, like urban renewal and zoning, in which the community will have minimal opportunity to intervene in the outcome.

The settlement of La Campana is an example of a global problem. The Campana-Altamira Initiative and *Plan Integral para el Desarrollo del Polígono Campana-Altamira* (Integral Campana-Altamira Development Plan) contain problematic issues related to their potential to erode the communities' capacities. These plan includes land-use zoning modifications and infrastructural projects that undoubtedly will have consequences on how the residents relate to each other and to the city. On the other hand, there is a latent possibility of generating population displacement through gentrification when the area becomes highly attractive for investment after the plan's changes.

As the government developed this plan with the private sector, the latter has much space to act in this plan; it contains land use for a cluster of entrepreneurship and areas designated to accommodate more density, related to the construction of apartment buildings and more renewal projects.

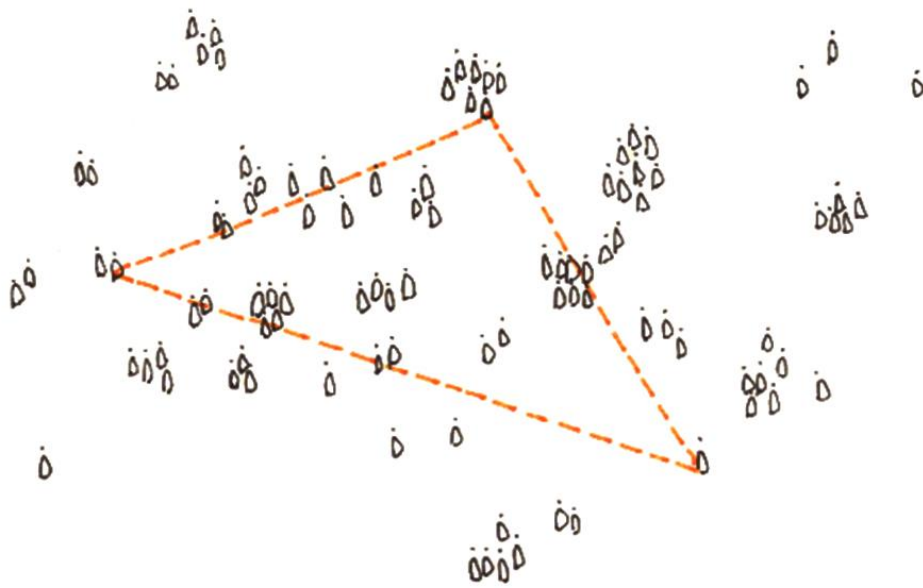
Seeing it all together, I contend the State uses urban planning as an instrument of power. Many authors mention the way planning is used as an integral arm of the capitalist State (Yiftachel, 1989); Rankin (2009) says that "planning is instrumental to the logic of capitalist accumulation insofar as it furnishes the technologies for investments in the secondary and tertiary circuits of capital" (p.221).

Urban planners, sometimes even with good intentions, participate in creating the plans or urban projects that, in the long run, have adverse effects on the settlers. Although many actors involved in the process of planning in La Campana are aware of the vices from the past, they know that planning practice has inadvertently produced injustices, even in processes in which it was intended to contribute to improvements in a legitimate way.

My reading on the planning efforts in La Campana is that exists a desire to incorporate the local expertise in the planning process. This aligns with the policy administration at the three government levels, which share a commitment to authentic community participation. However, as this is a rather new approach and the planning sphere is still dominated by traditional approaches, there is not sufficient knowledge in place to conduct such processes. Yet, the municipality of Monterrey invited actors who could contribute to such approaches to share their expertise on the topic. Chapter 6 will describe these efforts.

The cycle of this chapter begins and ends at the same point— violence. First, physical violence exerted by criminal groups, and later a more discrete violence exerted by planners who neglect to affirm the communities' capacities and dignity. Urban planning practices in the Global South fail to find effective mechanisms to include community efforts, knowledge, and processes in governing the informal sphere. It is the responsibility of today's politicians, planners, and activists to break this cycle.

Chapter 5. Participatory Action Research Approach in Monterrey



Chapters 5 and 6 integrate the methods and fieldwork. Chapter 5 discusses why an action research tradition was the most appropriate method for the Monterrey planning context and research problem. I then describe my preparation for the fieldwork in La Campana and with the local planning sphere. Finally, I conclude by presenting the limitations of this study.

Participatory action research (PAR) is community-led instead of researcher-led, committed to a democratic and collaborative approach to change or improve existing conditions (Reardon et al., 1993). It offers an alternative to the mainstream ‘expert’-driven, quantitative, extractive approaches by introducing a process that challenges existing power structures, inequalities, and knowledge, placing the decision-making power in the hands of the most vulnerable stakeholders. It has been disruptively used for community development in the Global South, and it is the leading method for planners that want to address social issues innovatively (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2007). However, there are some places where this kind of research method encounters more resistance, like in Northern Mexico, where planners rarely work collaboratively with communities and even less with informal settlements. I am framing my research process within two key concepts of PAR tradition, “fitting in” (Bartels, 2020), and “connectivity” (Karlsen and Larrea, 2014; Canto and Larrea, 2020). Fitting in refers to the complexity to work in contested contexts, whereas connectivity discusses the ability of communicating our research in PAR processes.

PAR is based on a practitioner’s deep listening to a community. It includes continual self-reflection, by both the practitioner and the community, on attitudes, actions, and progress in the field (Wilson, 2019). Once the practitioner is invited and welcomed to a community, this research approach requires constantly maintaining an open heart and mind, facilitating a safe and creative space for the participants to express and develop their

ideas. The practitioner does not control the process by projecting their opinions as a ‘specialist’ onto the community or assuming to know more about local conditions, practices, and dynamics. This approach inevitably makes the practitioner feel vulnerable, without a plan and with more questions than answers, but it is essential for true community-led participatory processes. Despite the fear it provokes, recognizing this vulnerability and seeing it as an asset increases the potential of what can be achieved.

The complexity of this approach lies in the fact that fieldwork preparation operates in two radically different spheres. On the one hand, in the context of urban planning in informality and, on the other, urban planning developed in urban planning departments, with the ultimate intention of building bridges between them.

INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Mexican War on Drugs, which has had the greatest impact on informal settlements, is triggering new interactions between the government and informal communities. New approaches are based on new ways of managing community issues, such as services instead of police oversight. Nevertheless, their approach remains top-down, with limited participation for community members. Proposals and projects in informality tend to exclude settlers’ opinions, and the projects tend to reproduce the order of the formal city with no regard for peoples’ activities.

As a result of this dissertation, my approach to planning is process-oriented and aligned to Forester’s (1982) deliberative planning processes, where planners have a crucial role in achieving a democratic planning practice by influencing the conditions in which citizens can participate, act, and organize effectively. I am also drawing on Healey’s (2003) collaborative planning, inspired by the perception of planning as an interactive process

occurring in complex and dynamic environments shaped by economic and social forces that structure but do not determine specific interactions. Therefore, maintaining qualities of places and territories while conducting just processes motivated by social justice.

The approach to inquiry for this dissertation is participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart, 2007; Wilson, 2019). I analyzed documents such as the governmental urban plans regarding low-income and informal settlement areas. Data was collected from official documents, interviews, ethnography, interactions in La Campana, and actors related to Monterrey's informality and planning practices.

This study contributes to critical research and practice to contest the highly technical, top-down approaches that currently dominate the planning practice in Northern Mexico. Planners seeking examples of co-production of knowledge between planners and communities in Latin America will find a novel approach to planning in this research.

Issues about the complexity of achieving meaningful and honest participation, especially in contexts of bureaucracy, have been depicted by authors like Flyvbjerg (2001) and Fanstein (2009), who are particularly skeptical of the difficulty of mediating in environments of power differentials. However, my research shows that a communicative approach is possible and needed in historically neglected settings, like La Campana. The community has organized demand or negotiate the little they have.

The long history of Monterrey's technocratic planning practices has not been sufficient to fulfill many communities' needs. Simultaneously, this lack of governmental attention has incentivized creative responses from communities where they have to provide for their necessities. Therefore, I consider a communicative approach the most appropriate approach to provide justice and plural responses in such contested spaces.

In this chapter, I explain the research strategy of this dissertation. I position my study as a participatory action research that provided me the tools to engage in long-lasting

relationship with both planners and community members. This approach proved to be appropriate in a Latin American context as it stresses the complexity of co-production of knowledge that results from the fieldwork interaction among diverse participants and has the potential for new ways of reasoning and acting in the territory. Also, this approach has proven its effectiveness in contexts of urban informality and violence.

PAR IN CONTEXTS OF INFORMALITY AND VIOLENCE

PAR helps to create an environment for self-discovery and self-emancipation. In Chapter 4, I described how violence, while spawning terror and limiting the traditional activities of La Campana, triggered renewed community interest in improving their built environment. Their community processes were a creative and healing process. Now, the community agency is endangered by potential gentrification process. My research shows that a participatory and democratic planning approach will contribute to strengthening the communities' capacities.

Participatory action research is a research approach that addresses violent situations; in fact, it was born as a response to epistemological violence toward vulnerable populations; our role as action researchers is to understand and facilitate spaces of long-term citizen participation instead of creating unilateral fixed policies. In the AR process, participants are not only motivated by practical reasons but by sentiments, traumas, and affections.

In Latin America, since the re-democratization that followed the authoritarian phase of military regimes, the anxieties and expectations of historically marginalized social groups have been mostly expressed in the idea of citizenship, especially citizenship rights. "Social movements, the constituent processes that took place in most countries in the 1980s

and 1990s, and even the dominant groups have assumed as legitimate the existence of a very broad set of rights” (Sobottka, 2018: 143). Like many social movements in Latin America, participatory action research was a response to oppression. Its roots are inherently emancipatory as it reflects on local epistemological violence and repression.

Orlando Fals Borda describes the social challenges happening in the 1970s that led him to develop the idea of PAR. Fals Borda (2001) considers 1970 a crucial year in a series of turning points for the study of academia. Capitalism and modernization were destroying the cultural and biological diversity in social structures. In response, researchers began to articulate a radical critique and reorientation of social theory and practice. Contrary to the previously fixed conception of knowledge that prevailed in the social sciences, these researchers started to appreciate science as a socially constructed process subject to interpretation, revision, and enrichment. Fals Borda called participatory action research the convergence between popular knowledge and academic science.

Arguably, the more prominent names in AR from the South are Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda. Their influential work has shaped the practice of participatory research in contexts of social inequality. Their work's significance stems from the reflection on Latin American social movements and broad experiences of repression in the region, such as the development of grassroots movements in the Latin American context resulting from authoritarian governments (Hellman, 2018). These social movements spring up in settings hurt by repressive governance.

For both Freire and Fals Borda, times of crisis became the onus of their work. Freire (1968) wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* while exiled in Chile, reflecting on the problems resulting from the Brazilian military dictatorship, sentencing millions of Brazilians to hunger, human misery, and despair, which in turn, contributed to the widening of the economic and educational inequality gap (Holst, 2006; Macedo in Freire, 1968). Freire's

work operates under a framework of horizontality far from positivist approaches. He speaks on the importance of the oppressed designing their instruments of liberation: "the pedagogy of the oppressed... must be forged with, not for, the oppressed... This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for liberation" (Freire, 1968: 48). Freire's work relates to action research in contexts of poverty, informality, violence, and underrepresented populations. In his work with *campesinos*, Freire engaged differently than conventional efforts. When he initially approached the group, the *campesinos* felt inferior to the professor. That led Freire to guide a novel educative process using local language instead of academic, given its irrelevance to the local cultural context of *campesinos* and *obreros*. Instead, Freire became familiar with the peasants' existential conditions by asking the facilitators to conduct the process driven by understanding, humility, and faith in human potential. For Freire, this pedagogy had to lead their liberation ignited by the participants' self-realization and not like an imposed idea.

Never-ending critical reflection and action are needed to begin a liberation project through praxis. The vulnerable need their knowledge, creativity, and constant reflective to comprehend and demystify the power relations that are accountable for oppressing and marginalizing them. Liberation is not a promised gift by the revolutionary leaders, but it has to be gained through dialogue, a result of their own *conscientização*; or awareness of social, political, and economic contradictions. Freire makes an important point by arguing that this radical, committed process to human liberation,

does not become the prisoner of a circle of certainty within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all

people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side (Freire: 1968: 39).

In this description, Freire reaffirms the idea that this process should not expect a definitive end but is a constant never-ending process that provides new challenges.

Fals Borda, on the other hand, after researching rural areas in Colombia, saw the connections of inequalities with land tenure. His first book on the necessity of agrarian reform, in which he included reflections on the relationship between violence and land tenure. His research interests concerned rural poverty, offensive land tenure systems, and, most importantly, rural communities' value systems. The subjacent ideology, which serves as an umbrella for his early research, was economic and social justice (Fals Borda, 2001; 2015).

Fals Borda acknowledges the work of many researchers from diverse backgrounds that decided to abandon the university routines and dedicate themselves to alternative research; the work of Paulo Freire's *conscientização*, in Brazil; and Rodolfo Stavenhagen's article "decolonizing the social sciences"; and many other thinkers in the Global South, found in participatory action research (PAR) technical complementation. Fals Borda adds that besides the convergence mentioned, "the idea of 'participation' was also assimilated to replace that of 'development,' which had been failing, since it began in 1949," as demonstrated in Arturo Escobar's (1995) outstanding study (Fals Borda, 2015). According to Fals Borda, learning from the convergence of worldviews is necessary, scientific humility and local realism are significant to successful PAR.

It is important to note that PAR cannot be cataloged as a monolithic field of inquiry merged in a single school. On the contrary, in the Latin American context, it has evolved over a long time, and it is commonly used as a tool for liberation from poverty and domination (Sobottka, 2018).

Fals Borda talks about three main topics present in participatory research since its origin in Latin America, principally, the change of perspective regarding development to achieve more just and equitable participation in culture and economy. This is closely related to autonomy, or the liberation from subjugation and exploitation, instead replaced with the possibility of choosing one's own life path. The full expression of a person's skills, potential, passions, and curiosities comes not only from the release of subjugation, but from recovering and instilling self-confidence (Sobottka, 2006).

One of the main challenges with planning in Northern Mexico is its inability to respond accordingly to the basic needs and complex social relationships of informal communities. Watson (2003) suggests that there is a 'clash of rationalities' in the planning sphere between the State-market (formal planning) and "survival efforts of the poor and marginalized" (informal planning). She adds that planning is usually framed by a master plan, "carried with a particular vision of the 'good city'" (2009: 2261), promoting urban modernist ideas that dismiss and prevent practices from lower-income residents and ethnic minorities.

Umemoto (2001) works around the challenges of a "new planner" capable of handling complex cultural settings. The new, progressive planner requires interpreting frames in culture, history, and collective memory, being aware of cultural values and social identities, language, social relationships, and recognizing the role of power in cultural transitions. The progressive planner should be capable of amalgamating the complexities of a world that have not been covered enough in the Global South, a professional competent in transferring power and responsibility by facilitating horizontal processes.

Sandercock's emphasis on seeking spaces for plural participation is critical to acknowledging power imbalances. The frontal recognition of power structures is proposed by Forester (1982), who states that information is a source of power in the planning process.

Recognizing power imbalances is a more realistic way to face the planning process with diverse audiences. As Forester states:

despite the fact that planners have little influence on the structure of ownership and power in the society, they can influence the conditions that render citizens able (or unable) to participate, act, and organize effectively regarding issues that affect their lives (Forester, 1982: 28).

To Forester, a planning process that acknowledges the political power inequalities is the one that allows planners to develop a democratic planning process. In sum, my research shows that respecting and understanding the knowledge developed in informality can open novel paths for planners to work collaboratively with their residents, drawing on local traditions, skills, and resources that shape the local culture.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

While the origins of action research (AR) are broad, several authors acknowledge Kurt Lewin and John Dewey as founders. Both contributed to the theoretical ground in different ways. On the one hand, Kurt Lewin conducted socio-technical experiments in the 1940s at the Tavistock Institute, with applications to social democracy and organizational change practices (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). His investigation aimed to transform social inquiry from conducting research transforming research objects to subjects “in which researchers became participant-observers to research in which participants in social life conducted research for themselves” (Kemmis, McTaggart, Nixon, 2013: 8). On the other hand, John Dewey contributed with a pragmatist approach in his ‘theory of inquiry,’ suggesting “that knowledge is acquired through responding to a real need in life” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:18). For Dewey, the learning process is carried out by a constant evolutionary cycle of action and reflection.

Altogether, Dewey's pragmatist epistemology and Lewin's researcher/researched subject shift constitute AR's theoretical ground. Olav Eikland (2006) summarized the birth of AR in 1946 when research subjects were invited to interpret the findings. This practical overturn of the controlled and manipulative experiment changed the relationship between the "knower" and the "known," both principally and practically. AR origin is rooted in the shortening of the researcher-researched labor division gap.

First Person Action Research: Embodying a new planning approach as a scholar and practitioner.

First-person action research responds to the forms of inquiry-practice by individuals into their own research process. It is designed to foster individuals' ability to develop an inquiring approach to their own life and act in an informed, aware, and purposeful way (Gearty and Coghlan, 2018). First-person AR is a way to relate the researcher's actions and behavior to notice how they think, process data, come to an understanding, form judgments, make decisions and take action (Costamagna and Larrea, 2018).

Pablo Costamanga and Miren Larrea (2018) indicate that first-person action research is a method that can help the facilitator remain continuously open to the self-reflection process. These authors mention two basic tools that allow first-person researchers to conduct their process. The first tool is keeping a journal, useful to reflect on three different levels; first, keeping a record of the events that link together to form the process; second, understanding the relationship between the different events and put down in writing the reflections of the facilitator on the cause and effect relationships; and third, noting the evolution of our own perceptions. The second tool is debriefing, an exercise that takes place following a meeting or process with actors, "the team of facilitators answers

four questions: What happened? How did I feel? How do I think the others felt? What would I change for the next time?" (Costamanga and Larrea, 2018: 86). This technique makes it possible to build the habit of associating events with emotions, providing continuous improvement exercises based on the process's rational and emotional responses.

First-person AR has been used in Spain to mediate between different positions on territorial development practices. Miren Larrea (2018) describes the personal and institutional transformational process of the Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness (OBIC) in the Basque Country of Spain, founded to study territorial development (TD). In her article, she mentions how the OBIC changed their role of social researchers from a position primarily restricted to TD observers to the self-realization of territorial transformation actors/agents.

This personal and group focus shifted, influenced by Freirian thought. They realized their work was limited to provide recommendations due to fear of completely entering the ideological debate. As a result of Freire's proposal of radical interaction between action and reflection, OBIC changed their approach from making recommendations to the government as external actors to recognizing themselves as agents with perspectives towards territorial development.

To make the change in their internal process, they first took the decision to influence concrete changes but with the ultimate objective of a paradigm shift. This methodological shift must always be incorporated into the process of questioning/reflecting on the paradigm. Second, Orkestra implemented educational processes that allowed collaboration with other territorial actors while providing a platform for open discussion on territorial development models. In June 2017, Orkestra took a fundamental step towards institutionalizing the new relationship model, now the new governance model for territorial

development. Orkestra as an actor in the territory and a strategic ally, and facilitator of the process (Larrea, 2018). This model serves as an inspiration model to this dissertation.

While self-awareness is more evident as an integral part of first-person action research, it is part of any AR project. The reflexivity on the researcher's own reactions, responses, judgments, prejudices, and assumptions plays an essential part in every action research project. As mention in Larrea (2018), the researcher changes and is affected as the inquiry evolves. In Chapter 6, I will describe the first-person action research process I went through during this research.

Second and Third-Person AR approaches.

While first-person action research is central to this dissertation, there are collaborative actions between the different actors involved in this dissertation that exemplify second-person AR and collective learning from doing. Second-person AR addresses the researcher's ability to inquire and work with others in a context of mutual concern through face-to-face dialogue and conversation. It is a collaborative practice with multiple stakeholders, which involves participants working with others. The quality of second-person inquiry is paramount as AR is inherently collaborative (Coghlan, 2007). Its relevance is evident when we engage others to construct taking action, planning action, and evaluating others' actions, which is the kind of engagement with planning actors prompted by this dissertation.

Finally, third-person AR constitutes an important part in this research, as it stems from the work at the first and second person and represents the contribution of the study to an impersonal audience through dissemination of the knowledge produced in this research. In other words, those planners aiming for guidance that I eventually hope to reach. Third-person action research aims at creating communities of inquiry, involving people beyond

second-person AR. Third-person is impersonal and is reached through dissemination by reporting, publishing, and extrapolating from the concrete to the general (Coghlan, 2005).

The Action Researcher: roles, mindset, and their influence on the results.

Probably, the most salient challenge of AR is the complexity of achieving authentic actor involvement. Participation can be a double-edged sword. As Sherry Arnstein stated:

[p]articipation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power-holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo (Arnstein, 1969: 216).

Thus, powerful stakeholders can manipulate the process to legitimize their interests to the detriment of those who have less. Similarly, participation can be used by governments and non-governmental organizations to justify inequitable social relations of power (Mitlin and Thompson, 1995). To prevent this, Arnstein (1969) proposes a classification in a ladder style distribution identifying the extent to which power is being effectively distributed; the levels go from 1 to 8; 1 being lack of participation, and 8 being citizen control. Levels 1 and 2 constitute non-participation, levels 3 to 5 have some "degrees of tokenism," and levels 6, 7, and 8 have some degrees of citizen power. Considering where our research took place, it would help to know the level in which the "have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits are parceled out" (p. 216). In short, a significant portion of an exemplary AR process lies in the facilitator's skill in enabling vulnerable populations to share benefits with the rest of the actors involved.

In action research, people are the protagonists of their reality; they are co-responsible in their path to emancipation. Sletto and Nygren (2015) demonstrated challenging aspects of achieving significant underrepresented groups' participation in their

research in the Dominican Republic and Mexico, respectively. They reflected on the importance and relevance of the researcher's role. Taking advantage of their privileged positionality, they need to be capable of overcoming the contradiction of working in spaces of participation controlled by the State to allow forms of participation that were authentic and emancipatory. Their reflections on the practitioner's role provides powerful insights into AR challenges navigating governments and other powerful actors and underserved communities.

However, achieving broad participation is not enough to pursue the transformation of a system. Neoliberal rationality of participation uses techniques such as responsabilization, in which people are responsible for improving their own situation. This condition creates a dichotomy of participation "by encouraging individual actors and collectives to participate actively in urban infrastructure management and service provision, the prevailing forms of co-governance provide more space for action to individuals and community groups," but simultaneously "such individualization of responsibility places more blame on civil-society actors in the case of failure" (Sletto and Nygren, 2015: 968).

Thus, participation can cease being an instrument for emancipation. Used by neoliberal settings, participation can become an element of control, making residents self-survey themselves. To respond to this issue, researchers in these contexts can create appropriate spaces for the residents to argue in favor of their interests; "through our uneasy interlocations we also (unwittingly) reinterpret or complicate residents' meaning making and become active co-producers of neoliberal subjectivities through our [the researchers] contradictory collaboration with government authorities" (p. 966). In this article, the authors deal with this situation by reshaping the concept of dominant structures; in the case of Sletto, facilitating "connections between residents and community organizations from

other neighborhoods, which led to new forms of thinking and speaking about responsibility" (p. 980). Nygren was expected to serve as a facilitator and representative of the government interests; but in addition, "she also facilitated critical reflections among residents of their rights and responsibilities in terms of flood control and solid waste management" (p.980). In this example, the authors demonstrated that even in spaces of contested participation incentivized by the State, in which participants involved were "invited" (see Miraftab, 2009), practitioners were able to shape a safe space of participation that led to emancipation, using ethics and reflexivity of their privileged position between both, the community and State agencies.

Critically analyzing the researcher's involvement in contested neoliberal settings can create the conditions for a more inclusive and just planning practice. As Sletto and Nygren (2015) "conceptualized [their] ethnographic engagement as structured through 'knowledge encounters' that have facilitated reflective co-production of alternative knowledges," and add that to "facilitate such generative and alternative forms of knowledge production requires a reflective attitude towards research and a radical rethinking of the traditional dichotomy between the researcher and the researched" (p. 980). This reading provides a powerful example of how the researcher can influence research results by balancing in favor of the 'have-nots.'

Researchers seeking participatory planning practices face epistemological challenges in multicultural settings (Umemoto, 2001). Despite planners having good intentions, vulnerable groups of people have been excluded from participating because there is a mismatch of cultural norms and values. To overcome this challenge, Umemoto suggests planners could code-switch, altering "one's interpretive as well as vernacular framework in communication with others who share the same language and cultural sensibilities" (2001: 27).

Fals Borda (2013; 2015), on the other hand, argues that to create a new type of research in the convergence of disciplines, the researcher has to abandon the subject-object relation to make way for a subject-subject correlation. In this case, people are trusted to produce and reproduce their *saberes* and knowledge, recognizing the *cuerpos sentipensantes*, people who use their heart and mind to understand and acknowledge people and their differences. This approach was used in Latin America, first through *educación popular* (people's education), destined to re-direct the aims of education, not by the practice of traditional top-down education reproduced by class and hegemonic elites, but to create a type of education for the service of the people.

A soft skill an action researcher could appeal to is 'empathy,' which is a socially developed condition that implies the possibility of assuming the other's perspective. According to Olav Eykeland (2006), empathy allows the researcher to join the community to some degree. This contradicts the quantitative advocates' criticism of qualitative inquiry about becoming native, as it can contribute to a biased way of thinking (Borman et al., 1986). Conversely, Eikeland (2006) suggests that to understand a situation, one must become almost native through empathy to embrace the knowledge generated within and from the circumstances, not just by pretending to be one of the participants involved.

In this regard, Wilson (2019) contributes to the discussion by providing a central characteristic that encapsulates the spirit of the action researcher:

[Ensemble Awareness] is the term I use to describe the ability of the community engagement practitioner to sense the invisible web of relationships in which he or she is engaged. Upon identifying the community's patterns and rhythms, and sensing with the residents the emergent possibility for the community, the practitioner joins in harmony to realize that potential. This living web of relationships cannot be controlled. But it can be engaged—if the practitioner attunes to it (Wilson, 2019: 1).

Similar to the inclusion of ‘mind and heart’ (Wilson, 2019) and ‘thinking and feeling’ (Fals Borda, 2015), Peter Westoby (2015) includes the ‘soul perspective’ in collaborative research. For him, a soul perspective "is concerned with seeing, feeling, intuiting, discerning, deploying, and accompanying the energies within community workers, such that the vitality, quality, and ethical compass is maintained" (p.7). He adds that achieving this kind of work requires the researcher's critical reflexivity and ethics.

This emphasis on the quality of the practitioner's work echoes Otto Scharmer's concept of ‘presencing.’ According to Scharmer, a presencing workshop can result in a heartfelt experience in which the self and the collective can appreciate the whole being resonating by the deep changes that this process ignites, of the mentioned changes the facilitators must ultimately be alert. Therefore, they ought to keep and organize such workshops with the community, aspiring to achieve the highest aims possible for them (Scharmer, 2009).

The transformational component of PAR.

PAR is a process in which the practitioner seeks not only to understand the system but to transform it. This line of research was born in the decade of the 1960s, when several transformative books questioned dominant paradigms. For example, Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* explores the changing role of practitioners in the postmodern era. Practitioners should be prepared for unpredictability and constant learning (Fischler, 2012). Schön's ideas would be considered contradictory to the ideal of the planner as a technocratic owner of all solutions.

Transformative practices theory abandons the usual boundaries of reasonability, refusing the current way of doing things. Instead, it seeks discontinuity by changing concepts and structures. It conceives of futures that transcend mere feasibility and are

inspired by aspiration, betterment, and good social practice (Albrechts, Barbanente, Monno, 2020).

This process is fallibilistic, as opposed to dogmatic. In other words, “it refers to an attitude of humility and openness toward beliefs stemming from the provisional, inexact, and error-prone nature of knowledge” (p. 57). This recognition of ‘ignorance’ becomes a stimulus to learning from a particular subject, as every situation is new and unique. This is aligned with a metaphysical understanding of urban planning. They see the world as malleable and replete with possibility, where a desirable future be realized (p.58). In *The Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Schön develops this model of professional practice influenced by pragmatism.

The main difference between the rational and the pragmatic practitioner is best described by the influential and broadly cited work of Argyris and Schön. They termed these practices as Model I and Model II. The former is characterized by control and evasion, in which the participants act defensively, discussions are private, and the strategies used are those of mystery and mastery, seeking to have control. Practitioners presume that they are dealing with win/lose situations, an unemotional stance as a condition of effectiveness, and testing assumptions openly, which are considered too risky (Blanco, 1994: 65, and Fischler, 2012: 321, see also Wilson, 2019: 6). Whereas in Model II, the dialogue is primordial. To maximize validity, information should be transparent, including values, interests, and objectives. By doing so, the possibility of making good, free, and informed decisions is maximized (Fischler, 2012).

Schön’s ideas spread widely, and informed and inspired several fields, including urban planning. The leading figure of Schön’s school of thought is Forester, who worked with Schön, and who started his Deliberative tradition in planning, also influenced by Habermas’ Communicative Action Theory.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This section explored the concepts of “connectivity” and “fitting in”. The term “connectivity” is described by Karlsen and Larrea (2014) and Canto and Larrea (2020) as an interactive approach to communicating research results from action research processes. This concept provides an opportunity to enhance the learning processes of action researchers to create new workable knowledge and strengthen communities in practice. Bartels (2020) uses the term “fitting in,” to denote the double-sided work of intermediating between informal, creative, and subversive practices and the existing institutional order. Social innovations seek to address unmet local needs in ways that local government organizations do not have the capacities or resources for, and, more fundamentally, strive to transform hegemonic relationships and values.

I applied these two concepts in this research by navigating between informal and formal planning practices and their leading actors. This research’s unique contribution is that most AR work with one end, a community organization or a government organization, but there are fewer examples of work bridging both the community and government.

I predict that this research process will bring change to the municipal planning department, constituting the basis for a more collaborative and fruitful relationship with informal communities.

In this section, I first describe my involvement with both the community of La Campana and the Monterrey urban planning sphere. I will begin by introducing the actors in the informal sector and their relevance to this research. Next, I will describe how the stakeholder ecosystem map involved key actors for this dissertation. Finally, I will share my research approach and positionality.

Actors/Agencies in the Planning Formal and Informal Sector.

The table below introduces the actors involved in my fieldwork. The actors and agencies involved in the planning sector are distributed at the three governmental levels. I also included relevant private actors, universities, and NGOs.

	Organization	Approach	Relevance
National	Presidency	Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2019-2024	In Mexico, when a local government makes an official document describing specific policies, it has to be aligned with the superior government's institution. This document is relevant as the current center-left government in Mexico has as a center of the governmental strategy to help the poor through their inclusion in participatory processes.
	SEDATU (Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario, Territorial y Urbano)	Programa Nacional de Vivienda 2021-2024 (2021)	The SEDATU is the national secretary of agrarian, territorial, and urban development. This secretary has several documents and guides to make the urban municipal development plans. Its relevance lies in that it encourages public involvement and active participation, especially in contexts of poverty.
		La transformación de México desde sus ciudades. Programa de Mejoramiento Urbano (2019)	
		Manual de Autoconstrucción (2020)	
		2 Informe de Labores 2019-2020 (2020)	
		Lineamientos Simplificados. Elaboración de Planes o Programas Municipales de Desarrollo Urbano (2020)	
		Trazando Ciudades. Guía para integrar a las personas en la Planeación Urbana (2020)	
		Interview to a coordinator at SEDATU	The first interview with SEDATU coordinator was in 2019; in 2021, he integrated to IMPLANc Monterrey, where we re-established contact. In addition, this person participated in projects around informality in Monterrey at the Federal and Municipal levels.
State of Nuevo León	Gobernación	Plan Estatal de Desarrollo 2016-2021	This document describes the state's intentions for development in the State. It includes special considerations for low-income areas and the objective of including participatory processes.
	Secretaría de Participación Ciudadana	Interview with Secretary Ximena Peredo	This interview sheds light on the new participatory process launched by the State of Nuevo León in an attempt to democratize public decisions. As a result of this interview, I was invited to participate in the Plan Estatal de Desarrollo 2016-2021 process.
Metropolitan	Metropolitan Planning Authority ¹²	Member of the board that was organizing the creation of this future Secretary.	As a member of this board, I was able to contribute to organizing meetings with planning actors and suggest the elaboration of additional workshops with neighbors of La Campana-Altamira.
Municipality of Monterrey	IMPLANc (Instituto Municipal de	Plan Municipal de Desarrollo Urbano 2013-2025	The municipal planning department of Monterrey makes the Municipal Urban Development Plan, which includes special

¹² The Metropolitan Planning Authority is undergoing a conformation process. Source: Author.

	Planeación Urbana y Convivencia)	Plan Integral para el Desarrollo del Polígono Campana-Altamira	attention to what they call “poverty rings” La Campana is one of those.
		Interview and AR approach with Director and Coordinators	These interviews/conversations served to get information on the municipality's involvement with the Plan in La Campana. Also, I shared my research. As a result of this encounter, I was invited to be an advisor for the municipality.
	Dirección de Participación Ciudadana	Interview with the Director of Citizen Participation at Municipal level.	The new municipal government has established participatory approaches, including participatory budgets and the organization of neighbors' groups in every neighborhood to follow up on local needs. This Direction is part of the planning process in La Campana-Altamira.
Private Sector	Fundación FEMSA	Interview	FEMSA is a big company in Monterrey that has programs of “social responsibility.” They identify necessities in some low-income areas of Monterrey and conduct community programs. They have funded projects in Campana Altamira.
	CEMEX	Plan Integral para el Desarrollo del Polígono Campana-Altamira	CEMEX is a private cement company with programs of “social responsibility.” This is a relevant actor in the area and a referent for neighbor's groups; for instance, three out of three of the different neighbor's associations I met during this research process had received assistance (organizational or monetary) from CEMEX. While I was able to interview CEMEX representatives in 2019, during the fieldwork in 2021, I was not approved for a new interview.
Private University	Distrito TEC	1. Plan de Desarrollo La Campana-Altamira 2. Plan parcial del Distrito TEC	The Tec de Monterrey currently has several economic and urban interests on its campus, only one kilometer away from La Campana. They directly elaborated the Partial Plan of Distrito Tec; this urban initiative seeks to remodel the area in a more pedestrian-friendly style with particular attention to public space. This plan borders La Campana neighborhood. They also lead the monitoring of La Campana-Altamira Development Plan, coordinating the different actors and logistics, and contributing with experts from Distrito Tec.
Community	Barrio Esperanza	AR / Interviews	This NGO has worked in La Campana since 2015. Community members integrate Barrio Esperanza. I continued engagement with this NGO.
	Neighbor's committee ‘Mision Real’	Interviews	This local neighbor's group works in the lower part of La Campana, close to Parque Los Pinos. They have received assistance from Tec and CEMEX.
	Neighbor's group 2	Interviews	This is a local neighbor's group located on the other side of Barrio Esperanza have worked to improve public spaces with support from Tec and CEMEX.
Public University	UANL (Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León)	Interviews	The UANL is the most prominent public university in the North of Mexico. It has conducted research in low-income areas of the city.

Table 1. Actors and Agencies in the Planning Formal and Informal Sector.

The Ecosystem Map.

It is an important step for social researchers to start their inquiry to establish a comprehensive starting point, which contributes to guiding future research. An ecosystem map is a research tool that helps establish an initial stance about the research issue by a synthetic representation capturing all the key roles that influence an organization or an environment.

This is an iterative and non-linear process in which the information is continuously tested without preconceived answers. Although this work engage differing stances and points of view, the main intention was to find common ground to initiate a collaborative process with relevant actors.

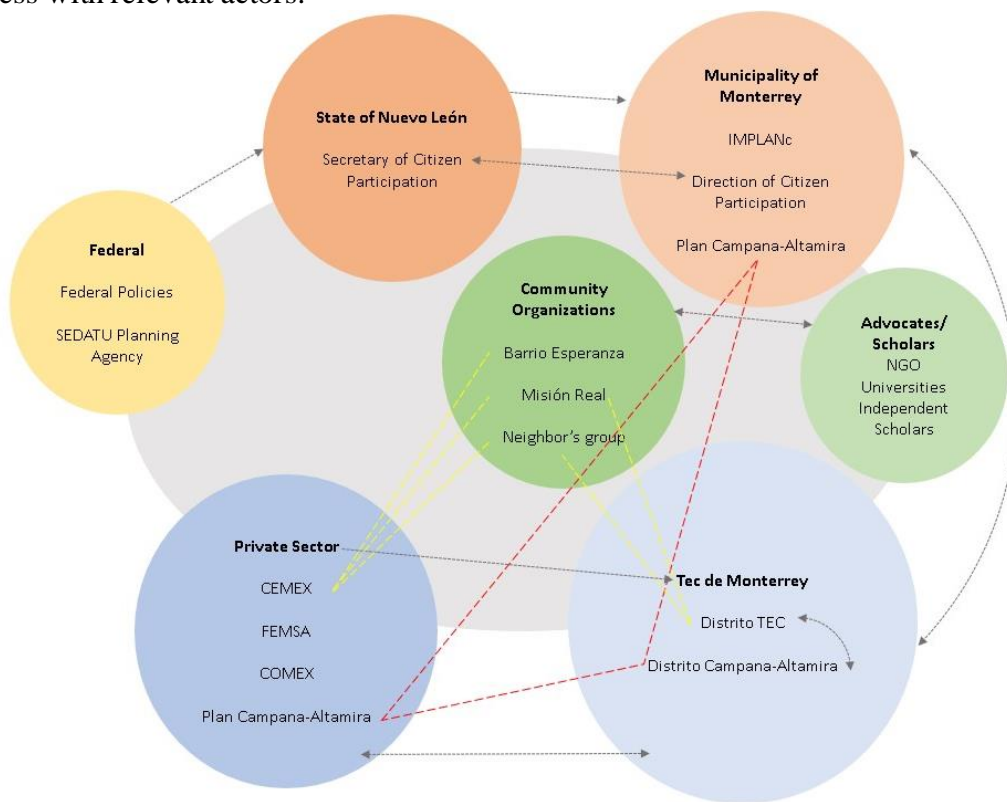


Figure 4. Ecosystem Map of Planning in Monterrey. Source: Author.

It is important to point out that the actors guide the direction of involvement at the early stages. From the information gathered, actors and shared concepts are added to the ecosystem map, but also points of conflict are further probed for validity in the field.

The starting point of the Ecosystem Map comes from very different points of view and approaches. However, through the dialogic interviews, the process begins to be humanized. The humanization of the process gives us a broad spectrum of concepts to address the problem and adds nuance to the process. The work in the field is not to guide the conversation but to observe the existing conditions that will guide the research process. It also provides hints of where the different actors can generate agreements. At this point, researchers do not formulate conclusions; on the contrary, they test the current time.

The stakeholder mapping, the first stage of the PAR process, was formed from several existing spheres; first, scholars and researchers who have worked on the issue of informality and are interested in participating in the formulation of new processes; second, by residents, advocates, and non-governmental organization members, who work in informal communities and serve as a bridge with local authorities; the third is government officials; and fourth, both the private sector and Tec de Monterrey are financing small projects in the community and organizing the efforts for the ongoing process¹³ of Distrito La Campana-Altamira. The stakeholder map was not a static structure but grew due to the interactions with the actors.

The intention was to generate a fluid process starting from a common ground and not from the conflicting spaces that may exist. It is necessary to emphasize that in this part of the process, the research is done with some prior knowledge and experience on the part of the researcher, although it was strengthened and enriched during the investigation.

¹³ As of July 2022, deliberation with most actors was still in process.

The dialogic interviews with the ecosystem stakeholders helped me first learn different perspectives about the same issue and then understand how, from those perspectives, people have different ways to approach similar issues, sometimes from radically different positions.

As a result of this process, I became more aware of the complexity of the ecosystem surrounding the issue of informality in Monterrey, Mexico, and the opportunities it offered. It also showed how dialogic interviewing could build understanding and relationship with the 'other,' thus setting the stage for collaborating across political, cultural, and philosophical differences to focus on practical solutions. But more than that, this first-person action research revealed the transformational impact on the researcher in becoming comfortable with uncertainty and not knowing and instead trusting the unfolding process.

My positionality as a planner and scholar in the Monterrey planning ecosystem.

Having as a background being a professor of architecture and urbanism, my research approach was driven by the modification of the physical space and always as an "educated" response through urban design projects and community issues. This process taught me how to get rid of these structural limitations (Case, 2017; Martin, 2011; Kur, DePorres, Westrup, 2008; Wilson, 2015; 2019), be aware of them, and what I must do to replace them with openness.

Trusting the process is trusting the outcome. The interview process started with my critical self-giving way to my curious self – from the self that has the solution to the self that has the genuine interest in listening. At first, this seemed challenging to understand; I put up resistance to it because my background and training forced me to seek something that must be tangible and measurable. I now know that what is required to discover is the Ecosystem itself and identify all the elements around it.

Another significant finding was understanding the thin line between work and socialization. On one occasion, I interviewed Beto, a community leader of La Campana. The site where the interview took place was impressive by itself: the edge of a cliff with a view of a contrasting landscape, where the low-income settlements and wealthy neighborhoods merged on the horizon. In this place, Beto answered all the questions on my semi-structured script. From the most basic information, such as when his family moved into this settlement, to interesting information about his intentions to organize a semi-vigilante neighborhood group specializing in talking with young people. We talked for about an hour. However, as soon as I closed my notebook and considered the interview over, Beto and I started chatting about topics unrelated to the research. For instance, when I mentioned some aspects of my life in Austin, Beto told me about the almost 15 years he lived and worked in San Antonio. Later, when we briefly talked about soccer (we are both fans of the same club), Beto slowly started changing his facial expressions, his voice tone became solemn, and his eyes locked in an imaginary spot in front of him. I did not know how important that instant was at that moment, but I knew I was witnessing something significant. He then talked about how one of the first activities he and others organized with kids and teenagers was a soccer tournament on an improvised soccer field at the base of the hill. He told me that tournament was very important to the community because it was a historic weekend activity suspended in the period of violence in Monterrey in 2010 (Villarreal, 2015). As soon as he remembered the violence in his neighborhood, he started crying with his eyes still locked on that same imaginary spot. He kept talking about his reasons for organizing community work, the kidnapping and assassination of his brother, the traumatizing time for his mother, and ultimately, his intentions to participate in the healing of the neighborhood through community organization. As soon as we dropped our interviewer-interviewee caps, a new kind of conversation was possible.

This process changed my perspective on how to approach an issue. I have always considered myself someone open to facing complex topics, so I figured that the process would reaffirm such openness. In contrast, I learned to be immersed in the issue, especially to be engaged with the community, embedded within the group, and knowing that the process involves me as much as the group. This translates into co-producing with the community as opposed to just extracting information; the process is about creating new information together.

The dilemma lies in the fact that despite one being part of the group and deeply engaging with the issue, our role is not to be a decision-maker but a facilitator for dialogue to occur. To accomplish such a role, it is essential to be immersed in a reflecting process on ourselves and be capable of identifying our attitudes towards a specific topic.

Adding value to the ecosystem is iterative and interactive. When I started doing the interviews, the ecosystem began to grow and build bridges. As the research continued, issues, actors, and problems repeated. Some more participants joined after being recommended by another. I interpreted this as a learned skill to allow the conversation to flow organically; letting the discussion grow until it is possible to understand the whole perspective of the interviewee.

One of the most important lessons I obtained from this interview process is that I tested my endurance on this topic. I was able to not interrupt, judge, nor try to give my opinion on these issues. Instead, I listened carefully to what they offered, making an effort to understand their position fully. That positionality contributed to further invitations to continue the conversation in subsequent meetings, which was my intention in the first place. Interestingly, I learned that some interviews are just to get to know someone and establish a lasting relationship.

Given my personality and academic background, I've often had a critical positionality, even confrontational. If I had continued like this in my study, my research would have been descriptive; interviewed people in the government would have been cautious of me and limited my contact with other public officials. A key element of this research was to secure a leverage position for the PAR process to unfold.

Discussion.

Navigating the planning ecosystem required a certain degree of proficiency to know which doors to knock on and which ones to avoid. In addition, this dissertation faced double complexity as I related to two very different spheres; informal settlements and the government.

In the case of informal spaces, a key part of conducting research of this kind entails gaining access to the field sites and, above all, establishing a rapport with and gaining the confidence of potential respondents. According to Zetter and de Souza (2010: 154), "This can be especially problematic where residents are highly suspicious of outsiders and the potential threat they may constitute." This animosity towards outsiders could result from previously conducted research experiences by the community.

Similarly, in contexts of government agencies and other formal institutions, they become suspicious of academics, thinking that they may be exposed in front of their peers, superiors, or the public.

This section illustrated the action researcher's own process of self-awareness in conducting the interviews and building relationships of mutual understanding with multiple stakeholders, using first-person action research at the intersection of urban informality and local government. My involvement in this research process resulted in immersion with

community members of La Campana, notably at three different governmental, which was crucial for changing Monterrey's planning system.

CONCLUSION

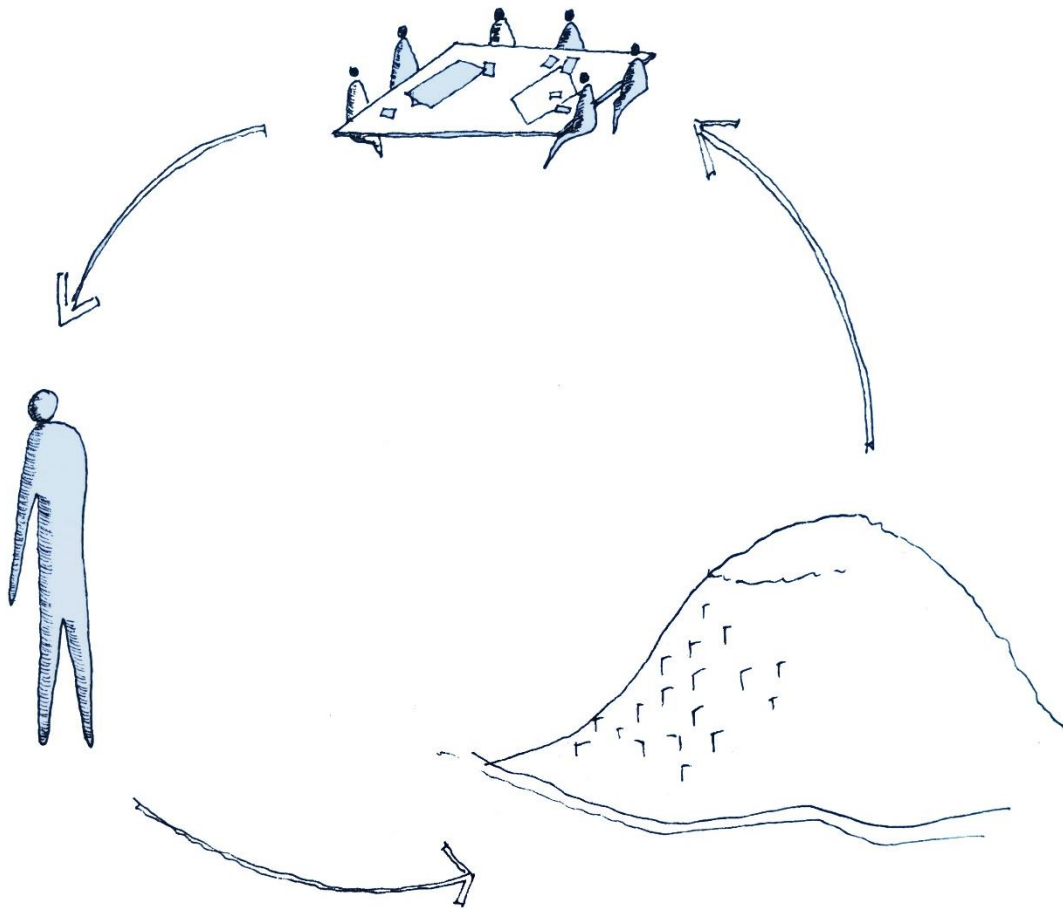
In this chapter, I started by mentioning the planner's necessity to shift the role and mindset in traditional planning practices. The action researcher's role is an agent of transformation. Nevertheless, meaningful participation entails the complexity of dealing with power dynamics in contexts of neoliberal development with highly contested interests in place. In such settings, participation is often used to legitimize and reproduce injustices. As a result, many authors have questioned the urban planner's role as an accomplice of inequality (Reece, 2018), as a tool of capitalist accumulation (Yifchatel, 1989), arrogant (Fischler, 2012), imperialistic (Rankin, 2010), or colonialist (Roy, 2006). Therefore, the complexity of the action researcher planner lies in accepting these complexities as given facts, dealing with and navigating within different voices on-site, and focusing their efforts on conducting just and plural participatory processes that do not reproduce social inequalities.

The action researcher needs to aim for increasing access and control over resources and decision-making processes to those local groups, cutting away bureaucratic and institutional constraints (Mitlin and Thompson, 1995). This constitutes a challenge for the researcher in neoliberal political contexts, in which due to de-centralized policies, the private sector has a higher degree of influence. However, it is possible and potentially transcendental that the researcher creates appropriate spaces for the residents and minority groups to argue in favor of their interests (Sletto and Nygren, 2015). Planners' goal should be to incorporate in their practice the most diverse public participation that can lead to

democratic choices on a local scale, as opposed to operating at macro scales that tend to treat territories as homogeneous.

Planning should recognize subaltern social groups as a source of political orientation and normative criteria. The generation of knowledge is made in the shared pains and struggles. It is in this sense that Fals Borda speaks about both the breakup of asymmetry between researchers and the researched and the incorporation of “people as individuals and thinkers in research efforts” as well as about enabling them to conduct their own research.

Chapter 6. Fieldwork



Using participatory action research as the main method on this dissertation provided me the tools to engage in a long-lasting relationship with planners and community members. It also allowed me to understand, from the inside, the constraints of the planning practice in Monterrey regarding informal settlements while engaging with them allowing me to contribute to new planning documents at the Monterrey Metropolitan and state level. These documents include clear recommendations to incorporate not only informal residents but vulnerable populations into the planning practice.

This approach allowed me to combine critical action research and relational action research, making explicit the power dynamic between the informal settlement of La Campana and the municipal government. This positionality also allowed me to grasp the constraints of Monterrey's planning practice while building relationships and contributing to the development of new planning documents in the Monterrey Metropolitan Zone.

In the research process of this dissertation, I first engaged with community members of La Campana to understand their internal procedures, how they negotiate within the community and with external actors, and their stories, expectations, necessities, and desires for their neighborhood. The second stage of my research consisted of working with local government actors, observing, studying, conducting interviews, and assisting with planning decision-making processes regarding the issues that government actors identify as challenging, controversial, or problematic.

INTRODUCTION

My engagement in the planning ecosystem enabled me to have a defined role as an advisor of the Monterrey Planning Department. Part of my role consisted of making explicit the organizational struggles and identifying assumptions about La Campana that

need to be challenged. It also allowed me to make recommendations to improve the participation of different groups from vulnerable groups, including residents of informal settlements.

In this chapter, I describe the fieldwork process, my involvement with La Campana community, and planning actors in Monterrey. I discuss the ways in which my fieldwork unfolded and the areas I consider key to the beginning of a new respectful relationship.

Research Plan.

The research plan consisted of working on three fronts. First, community work in La Campana was essential. With the community, the work consisted of contacting neighborhood associations in La Campana. During this research, I was able to contact three neighbor's groups located at different parts of the neighborhood, although it was with Barrio Esperanza with which I forged closest ties. This first approach became a key piece for my own research path.

Second, I utilized and grew my relationships with Monterrey's urban planning and formal planning departments. In this involvement I was able to find exceptionally relevant actors that constitute the opportunity for the transformation of the planning system. As a result of interviewing old acquaintances, the snowball rapidly grew, connecting with important allies.

And third, the work with academia. Unfortunately, it was the least fruitful of the collaborations during this research. Although there were invitations to university events and forums to discuss urban issues, the results were marginal. The COVID-19 pandemic limited many of the interactions that would have been beneficial to this research and especially to follow up for long-term changes. In Chapter 7, I describe precisely the issue

of connecting with the educational sphere as one of the pressuring topics for future researchers.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

PAR allowed me the opportunity to build a long-lasting relationship with participants. Since the first visit I visited La Campana in 2018, I have continued having meetings with community members and planning scholars and practitioners. By the time of my fieldwork in 2021, I had the elements to secure influential participation with planning actors in Monterrey.

In this section, I analyze how my positionality influenced the research process. I first discussed the process of engagement with community members from La Campana. Then I describe the Monterrey planning sphere, a small community I've been a part of not only as a scholar but as an urban planning professional. This allowed me to have contact with various actors at a local level to discuss my research topic with relevant actors in Monterrey in a relatively short time. Finally, I discuss how meaningful engagement with local actors ultimately enabled me to provide input about the actors invited to participate in discussing and elaborating official documents that directly affect La Campana.

In the community.

My dissertation seeks to understand the constraints, barriers, and opportunities for democratic urban planning in order to establish productive, co-creative, and purposeful working relationships between local planning departments and informal communities. As an Urbanism Coordinator in the School of Architecture at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL), and a professional planning at the Monterrey Planning Department,

I was frequently invited to urbanism and planning events where several local urban planners met regularly. However, I was significantly less familiar with informal communities. While my professional work brought me in contact with some urban informality, at that point, my role as a governmental representative prevented any significant relationship or understanding, as regularly happens in situations of power differentials and high levels of distrust.

From the early stages of my Ph.D. program, I prioritized establishing contacts with community members of an informal settlement. I avoided having my first contact be someone who might arouse distrust, such as acquaintances in the government. Also, a figure of power could affect expectations; if politicians or officials operate as gatekeepers, residents in the community “would associate, too closely, the researcher’s role with the gatekeepers... and this would bias the research findings” (Zetter and de Souza, 2010: 154).

I opted to contact the director of Barrio Esperanza, who introduced me to their community efforts described in Chapter 4. However, my relationship with the community became stronger starting in 2019.

The first stage of work in La Campana began thanks to a bi-national collaborative research grant whose intentions are to contribute to the “economic development and welfare of Texas and Mexico” (CONTEX, 2022). The University of Texas at Austin, led by Dr. Patricia Wilson, partnered with the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León in Monterrey, Mexico. The grant fostered an interdisciplinary student team of eight to spend a semester learning from and working with community members and the local NGO Barrio Esperanza (literally “Hope neighborhood”). The relationship with Barrio Esperanza had been initiated a year prior as part of the activities for a course in the program. The project’s premise was to further that relationship, learn more about their work and objectives, and provide assistance when needed and solicited. The goal was not to simply extract

information from the community but to come with open hearts and minds, questioning the students' preconceived notions and engaging fully in the participatory action research.

Historically, planning has been modeled after the work of “planning pioneers,” who focused on the “spatial dimensions of urbanization” (Sies, Silver, 1996). The result is a field that prioritizes and values concrete, tangible answers in the form of drawings, renderings, charts, and explanations. For many years, planning history was explained from the perspective of the planning pioneers, focusing on the spatial dimensions of urbanization. However, it is not until recently that there has been a shift toward incorporating more qualitative, democratic, and grassroots methods. The University of Texas at Austin did not require qualitative methods as part of their urban planning core curriculum until 2010.

This late inclusion of such approaches has consequences that resonate into the present, which is why the work by UT-Austin students in La Campana is so significant. While planning is still thought of as a “hard-skills” discipline, this research allowed for the necessary inclusion of not only PAR theory but sustained hands-on PAR work in the field. Such an opportunity allowed students the “privilege” of entering a community without a definitive plan and incorporating themselves into an unfamiliar system but equipped with the tools to establish new personal relationships.

The group's preparation for the fieldwork required learning about La Campana, its history, its residents, Barrio Esperanza and their work, and the relevant actors in the ecosystem as well as their approaches to community engagement. The pre-fieldwork preparations included meeting with various local stakeholders, Skype calls, and research into the past and present of Monterrey and La Campana. This ‘deep dive’ stakeholder analysis gradually shaped the class's ideas about how they could best contribute to the community and their already existing processes. The process was iterative, constantly

changing based on new discoveries and constant feedback from their partners. For example, one of the first proposals made to Celina Fernández, director of Barrio Esperanza, was to create a plan to broaden the action area that Barrio Esperanza has for resident participation in their projects. Their answer was a resounding “no.” They explained their negative reaction by saying that their methodology was not designed to encompass big areas but to work instead with small groups of residents who live in the immediate surroundings of the proposed project location. In the past, when they had tried to work with more people, the diversity of opinions only served to make the work more complicated and difficult, the common “too many cooks in the kitchen” issue. These experiences were invaluable as the UT-team prepared to be onsite, highlighting the importance of letting the community lead.

Before going to Monterrey as a class, they created a list of “mindful action rules,” as suggested in Wilson (2019). Mindful Action Rules exemplify the necessary self-observation and reflection as well as the idea of “letting go” of assumptions in order to “letting come” new ways of perceiving the world. We generated a list of rules as individuals then as a group. The idea was to “create a space for social transformation” (Wilson, 2019: 98). It was interesting how overlapping and aligned the responses were. This made the process of combining them to create a “master list” pleasantly easy; it was a critical moment in their development as a team as they saw that together they had arrived at a state of open hearts and minds.

The mindful action rules became the guiding principles throughout the research fieldwork starting in January 2019. They were used individually and as a group whenever difficult situations arose that challenged engagement, skills, or personal or professional sensitivities and insecurities. These rules were ever-present not only during fieldwork but as part of nightly team debriefs. The team’s Mindful Action Rules were as follows:

1. If there is something I do not agree with or I dislike, I will be aware of my body language.
2. If I find myself worried about the outcome or final product, remember that the process and growth experience along the way are important.
3. Pay attention to when and how to add value.
4. Remember that your role is to help the community achieve its goals, not your own.
5. Connect with body knowledge frequently.
6. When group energy is low or unmotivated, I will take a moment to reenergize the group and its creativity.
7. When I/we realize I/we are doing something the community does not feel comfortable with, ask them what they would do differently, and reframe the activity.
8. Recognize that success has different forms and that change is slow; small victories are still victories.

Equipped with the necessary tools, the student team was prepared to enter a new system, not as service providers, but as community facilitators.

¿Qué Nos Van a Dar?

Before arriving in La Campana, the student team was informed by the Barrio Esperanza team that their work was to focus on the transformation of a garbage-filled lot into a community park. The following narrative details the transformational moments from the process, which highlight the importance of being attuned to and appropriately reacting to the ever-changing qualities of the social field.



Illustration 15. The state of the abandoned lot when the student team arrived in La Campana in March 2019. Photo: Courtesy of Ricardo Venegas.

The week started with a *junta de vecinos* (neighborhood meeting) across from the abandoned lot called by Barrio Esperanza, our local NGO partner. Seeing the lot for the first time was intense, it was layer upon layer of debris, making the prospect of transforming it appear especially daunting. Yet the meeting was both inspiring and helpful. It was a chance for the students to meet the people they would be working with and for the residents to show them around their homes. It was also a chance for Celina to introduce herself to this part of the neighborhood for the first time, and she did it with clarity and humility. Celina ran it, and the students were merely participants, which was an important exercise in listening and accompanying, not ordering and leading. There was an excellent turnout; ten women, two men, and two children; unsurprisingly, it was very woman-dominated.

Celina was an excellent facilitator; she very humbly and honestly led the meeting, managing the residents' expectations and listening to their concerns, never wasting time or letting tangential conversations go on too long. She possessed a very special *mística*; that is, "the ability to engender a shared sense of purpose, create a sense of belonging and safety, and foster creativity" (Wilson, 2019: 2). She acknowledged that it was the first time that Barrio Esperanza would be working with the lower part of La Campana, and she stressed

her organization's excitement for this new development. The meeting proceeded, guided by the residents' concerns. They had decided that something had to be done about the lot. It was an eyesore, and they were tired of watching it gradually fill with garbage year after year.



Illustration 16. Our first meeting with the community was led by our NGO partner, Barrio Esperanza, 2019. Photo: Courtesy of Ricardo Venegas.

Berta, one of the neighborhood leaders, took advantage of the meeting to get to the bottom of the student team's role in La Campana. She frankly asked mid-meeting, “*¿Pero, qué nos van a dar?*” (But what are you going to give us?). It became clear that they were just as unsure as the students were about what the fieldwork would look like. But it was a perfect question and a definite turning point. It allowed the expectations and tone of the visit to be clearly set. The UT-team was not there to throw money behind their projects; instead, we came with practically no budget but ready to facilitate existing community processes.

At the meeting's close, Celina took advantage of the students' presence to invite the residents to go on a tour of the upper part of La Campana, to the Barrio Esperanza office and a network of pocket parks that has slowly been constructed by Barrio Esperanza and the residents. This was a profound moment. It allowed the lower residents, most of whom had never ventured to the upper part of the hill, to see real-life examples of the power of neighborhood organizing. The walk itself was a chance to speak informally one on one with the neighbors and get to know them. It was noticeable how the warmth and acceptance toward the UT-team increased during this field walk.

The tour also showed the students "what not to do" during their time there. The neighbors showed them a park the government had constructed the previous year. It consisted of a basketball court with a tall chain-link fence around it, cement benches, and some exercise equipment. It was in lousy condition and was empty on the weekend. When asked about it, the neighbors admitted they hated the park. This walk had become what Sweet and Ortiz (2015) call a "shared sensory spatial experience," where neighbors are able to communicate a lot more than would have been possible to express verbally (p. 1828). Despite being asked by the government what they had wanted, the municipal planners had followed their own plan in the end. The basketball court looked like a large cage, and no one wanted to use the benches because they were always in the blazing sun. This was a strong and important lesson in how not to conduct participatory engagement.

The lower hill residents were notably impressed and excited by the successes of Barrio Esperanza. They saw their dreams of creating a clean, safe, community space as a reality. One could feel the energy as they returned to their homes, ready for the work necessary for transforming the lot into a positive, communal space.

Given that the park would have a playground for children, the UT-team prioritized getting their input from the very beginning. They led a *taller de imaginarios* (visioning

workshop) outside at the park site. According to Sletto and Díaz (2015), through this technique, it is possible to identify the “transformative potential of children's agency for radical forms” (p. 2). The outside location was ideal, particularly given the density of residents in La Campana, because it allowed for the attraction of more participants as children saw the commotion and came over to see what was happening. The children were instructed to draw what they like to do and see in a park. Their drawings were creative and insightful. They knew exactly what they wanted and clearly expressed it. They drew swings, slides, and see-saws, but they also had a particular focus on nature. In a neighborhood very much lacking green spaces, the children were acutely aware of the positive impacts of trees, flowers, and grass would have on the park. They expressed a thoughtfulness toward others by drawing swings for their *hermanitas* (baby sisters) and benches for their *abuelas* (grandmothers). Other than their playgrounds at school, the kids could not come up with other examples of parks they had been to. Their worlds are small, which makes the need for a play space close to their homes that much more pressing. Kids crave open spaces to play and be imaginative.

After the *taller*, the children and many of their parents gathered for a brainstorming session to name their future park. The kids generated a long list of names and then voted for their top three choices by placing a sticker next to the names written on the whiteboard. The most creative name won: *El Parque de los Niños* (The Children's Park). Their excitement was palpable; by naming the park it became theirs. This exercise was significant because of how it allowed all voices to be heard; it was a space for them and by them. The parents voted to endorse the children's chosen park name.



Illustration 17. The involvement of the children was paramount; their energy and motivation inspired the adults and drove the project forward, 2019.
Photo: Author.

For the rest of the week, the children continued to be engaged in designing and painting the park's sign, painting the top of a park table, carrying a donation of playground equipment to the site, and covering a park pillar with their colorful handprints. Their continued involvement kept the community moving and excited.

However, not everyone was on board with the project from its inception. There was one neighbor who, from the very beginning, was quite a naysayer. It would not work; it was too difficult; things could not be changed. It had to do specifically with parking spots: where he parked his cars was space that the park would potentially occupy. The UT-team decided not to confront him, but rather to meet him where he was, respecting his parking spaces and his input in the project. But after observing the student work over the first couple

days and the energy generated by the project, he commented “*si necesitan algo, aquí estamos*” (if you need anything, we are here for you). Things were beginning to take off.



Illustration 18. Poster showing the gradual changes to the built environment based on the built environment based on the community’s expert knowledge of their space. Source: Author.

The next morning when the UT-team arrived, they noticed that he had moved one of his cars and put some rocks down to delineate one side of the park. The following day, a major turning point came when he, along with other neighbors, had taken the initiative to find and install a drainage pipe that would prevent flooding at the park. It was a participatory tube! This complete change in attitude towards the community work and the public space was revelatory. He had been convinced that a space he had previously considered “his” would be even better shared. Without any forced persuasion, he had

become convinced of the importance of the park for the neighborhood, but also of the power of the participatory processes that his neighbors were engaging in.

One day the student team went to the community's *taller de carpintería* (carpentry workshop) to look for materials for the park sign and a table the children would eventually paint and design. The UT-team received helpful advice from a community leader and Barrio Esperanza member on the most effective construction techniques to employ. They were able to find everything they needed, which was an invaluable lesson for the community: they already had all the resources and knowledge they needed within their own community. There is no need for outside "experts" to do or provide what they already have. By utilizing local materials and techniques, an increased sense of ownership is created; the project becomes wholly theirs.

The students talked a lot during their fieldwork about how to adapt to the community's rhythm. They were acutely aware of the fact that they were visitors inserting ourselves temporarily into the residents' lives, and they tried to be sensitive to this, but it was challenging. As students, they were available from 9am-6pm every day, when community members were working, at school, cooking, cleaning, doing errands, and living their normal lives. The UT-team was an interruption, inserting themselves into the community's lives and asking them to work around their schedule. Despite this being hard to change, they did make small adjustments, acknowledged the issue, and made an effort to be as accommodating as possible. For example, they realized that by having the kids' activities exclusively in the afternoons, they were missing an entire group of kids who attended school from 1-5:30pm. The team decided to plan activities in both the mornings and afternoons to involve more children. These small demonstrations of flexibility go a long way for creating trust and confidence with a community.

Throughout the fieldwork, the UT-team had constant check-ins with the community. These “feedback loops” served as a way for them to check-in to see how things were going, and they also provided an invaluable platform for group-reflection. They presented short slide shows of what they had been doing, constantly reiterating that all their actions were the result of things the community had wanted. They demonstrated that they were committed to supporting the community’s processes, ideas, and needs, and were not going to make decisions for them. They also explicitly mentioned what they were learning from the community, not the other way around. When, at La Campana’s request, the students created a render of the park space, they carefully described it as a “*futuro posible*” (possible future), one that was preliminary, adaptable, and, above all, in need of the residents’ input of local knowledge. This approach resulted in immediate feedback, community members making suggestions as to how to make steps more accessible to older resident and ways to construct the road effectively and economically. For everyone present, it was obvious how much commitment the community had for the project, and that they were very comfortable giving input and redirecting students’ ideas. The UT-team was not in charge. They were facilitators providing a springboard for more participatory and inclusive ideas. As the work continued, it gathered momentum, attracted new neighborhood participants, and made physical changes to La Campana’s built environment. The park was gradually taking shape, a direct result of the community’s ownership and commitment.

At the last meeting, the community leaders made sure that all the involved residents were present, including all the children. After the UT-team made a short closing presentation, the community immediately began to brainstorm next steps. They collectively decided to create a WhatsApp group to keep in touch about fundraising, materials, construction work, and overall progress. They wanted to keep the students informed! They

understood the value of having community catalysts to keep energy high and processes in motion.

Flying solo: Following fieldwork in the community.

After this project, I was able to continue my rapport with the community organically. The research led by Dr. Wilson ensured a relationship of trust up to the moment of writing this dissertation. Since this research began in 2019, I have gone to La Campana at least twice a year¹⁴. My presence in the area intensified from May 2021 to January 2022, when I conducted my official dissertation fieldwork.

During this time in La Campana, I had the opportunity to engage with Barrio Esperanza in different roles. I also got in touch with two other neighborhood groups that had organized to improve their built environment.

In my interactions with Barrio Esperanza, I always emphasized that my role was not as an expert, but as a learner. With that positionality, I was able to be present, listen, and become aware of their skills and how they organized their community work. My role would swing according to what was asked of me, always taking care that my opinion was given only when requested and said in such a way that it would not hinder the energy of the room.

In one meeting with Barrio Esperanza, when they talked about a request they wanted to make to the government to clean the Arroyo Seco canal, it came out how time-consuming it is to make the formats requesting government support. As the government departments ask for their requests in writing, Barrio Esperanza would like this to be a more straightforward process. In this meeting, we discussed ways to simplify the process. I asked them what basic information had to be included when they made written requests and asked

¹⁴ Except 2020, where I was only able to go once due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

them if it would be beneficial if I explored options to standardize the format. Based on that, two days later, I presented a PDF format to Barrio Esperanza to see if they found it helpful. This editable format contained pre-determined spaces to fill in with the information they usually have to submit. The form was well-received, but not before they requested modifications, which I completed. I ultimately made four rounds of modifications before the final version (Appendix 1).

On another occasion, a professor in the School of Architecture at the UANL, knowing I was in contact with people in La Campana, asked me if their students could participate in a beautification project in the area. Being familiar with how architects often have a superficial approach to the community as well as the challenges Barrio Esperanza has had in the past with these approaches, I was reluctant to encourage this. However, after asking the permission of Barrio Esperanza, it was decided that this could be a pedagogical opportunity for the undergraduate students as well as their professor.

The student group committed to not only providing the typical design deliverables, but to engaging in a deeper conversation about urban informality. First, they conducted in-depth research on informal settlements. This theoretical research reduced preconceptions that are usually attached to informal spaces. The students were required to conduct interviews with local residents and contacts in the area; for example, one student had an acquaintance who worked at a nearby high school, which allowed her first-hand input from the student stakeholders.

Another activity with the UANL students was to visit La Campana to meet the programs and projects of Barrio Esperanza. In this visit, the students asked if there were any projects they could join. One of the community members suggested helping with a prospective pocket park. Both the students and the teacher agreed that the group's contribution could not be to impose a typical design and leave afterward, as has happened

so many times in the past with other universities, but to get involved in a more meaningful and service-oriented way. Instead, the group agreed to go to clean up the space to make a tangible contribution to the territory.

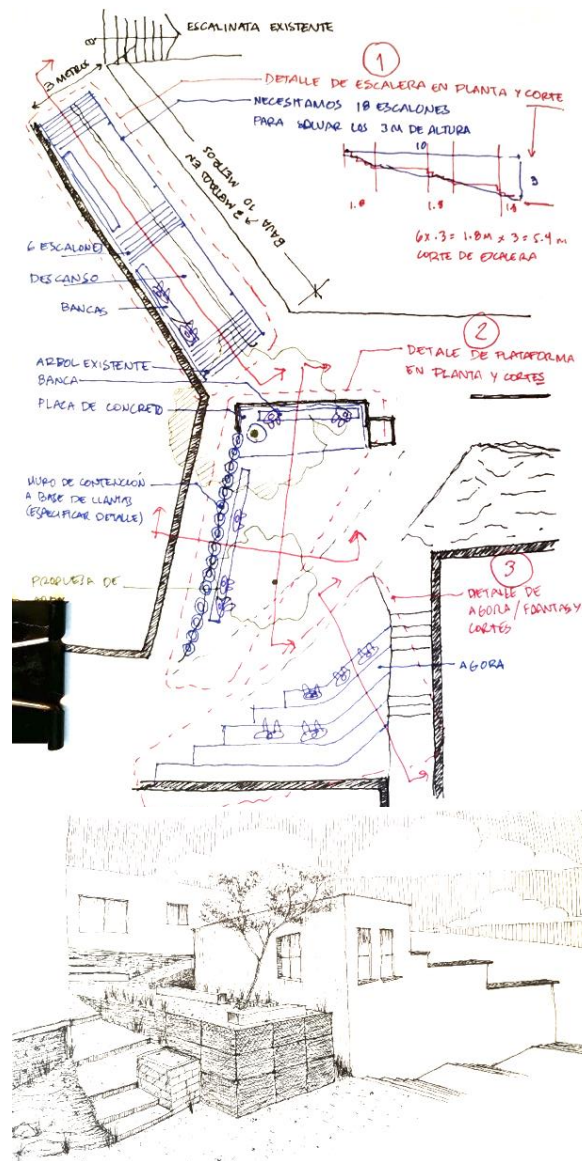


Illustration 19. Area of intervention, 2021. Sketch made by author.

The architecture students learned that far from what is traditionally taught in architecture schools, a design will be poorly received if it does not start with local skills, materials, and needs. Moreover, while it was impossible to engage in a more profound process due to the limitations of COVID-19, students were pleasantly surprised by the importance of the research process in design. They stated that it was something that they had not been taught in any subject in architecture school but that it would be a lesson for them from now on.

To be the one who serves the fruit punch.

If it were not for the many interactions I have had with the community through Barrio Esperanza, my rapport with the community would have been very limited. On some occasions, my role was to seek answers from the contacts I had in the municipality. On other occasions, my role as an architect required, only when asked, that I contribute with technical knowledge. Often, though, my role was only to be there accompanying, from behind the scenes, what was carried out by the community.

I particularly remember one Thursday night, I was catching up with a friend in town when I received a call from an unknown number. When I answered, a familiar voice told me it was Paloma from Barrio Esperanza. After greeting her, she asked me if I was free the following Saturday to help with an activity they were having to commemorate the *Día de los Muertos*. I was punctually on the agreed date, and my role that day was to help move some material and, during the event, to serve the punch that was given to the children during the social gathering.



Illustration 20. Pouring beverages at the Día de los Muertos event, 2021. Photo: Courtesy of Celina Fernández.

Later that day, when I was writing in my fieldwork journal, I realized the relevance of what had just happened. After all, a neighbor first felt comfortable asking someone else in the group for my cell phone; after that, she called me after "working" hours, then, I received an invitation to join them for a social gathering unrelated to our work. I had earned her trust.

Community engagement is a challenging and complicated task. Its difficulty lies in not everybody having the soft skills to connect with people, or as Dr. Wilson (2019) puts it, the *mística* to read the room and connect with others. The input of the architecture students shed light on this topic when they said, "no one taught us how to approach communities in this way." This research process taught me that the mystery of the process involves being flexible and open-minded. It is important to know how and when to contribute with our professional knowledge. Most of the time, however, we are the person serving the fruit punch.

At a governmental level.

Due to my professional background, I could reconnect relatively quickly with the planning actors and private sector stakeholders in Monterrey. However, I was very fortunate to have participated in the *Parque de los niños* research with my advisor and talented peers. The positive results of that research facilitated the process with the community but also with planning actors who learned about it. In addition, this research secured a long-lasting relationship with the community. Also, it gave more credibility to public officials in Monterrey.

The involvement of governmental urban planning agencies was essential to this dissertation as this research aims to become methodological guidance for planners and governments seeking to improve the relationship between the municipalities and the precarious communities to maximize well-being, understanding, and working relationships with each other beyond the traditional governmental vertical power.

Thus, my involvement with different governmental levels had to go further than informational interviews. I began reweaving a relationship with governmental agencies in 2018 when I conducted the first round of interviews with officials at the three governmental levels. After that, I kept surveying the perceptions around informality periodically through assistance to forums and informal conversations. The COVID-19 pandemic became an opportunity for numerous online forums, conversations, podcasts, debates, and conferences, where I contributed to discussions on co-creative processes with vulnerable populations of low-income or informal communities. Three years of this practice helped me reinsert myself in the urban sphere, but from a much wiser perspective including citizen participation processes.

Furthermore, in the fieldwork for this dissertation, and coincidentally with the new local government administrations coming into power, I focused my involvement with the

planning sphere serving as an advisor, along with other peers, for the elaboration of planning documents, expecting normative implications at the state, metropolitan, and city level. In this section, I describe the extent of my involvement and participation as a result of this dissertation.

State Level.

In 2021, the elected state government created the new Secretary of Citizen Participation and appointed the activist Ximena Peredo as its Secretary. She was locally known as an advocate for urban ecology and citizen participation. When I interviewed her at the state of Nuevo León government building, I was interested in knowing how she envisioned the participation process in Nuevo León, a state that is historically characterized by a low level of civic engagement. She mentioned that this was a primary challenge, but they were especially preoccupied with making the other state governmental institutions pressured by them. Additionally, considering this is the first time an agency like this has existed in Nuevo León, they were interested in sustainable participation for future administrations.

At the time of the interview, on November 1st, 2021, the Secretary did not have any process involving communities yet. However, there are plans to implement participatory budgets in which they will have to coordinate with the different municipalities, which in turn will have their *juntas de vecinos* (neighbor's councils) in every neighborhood.

During an interview with the Secretary of Citizen Participation, we talked extensively about the topic of citizen involvement in urban development and the informal settlements in particular. The Secretary invited me to be part of the expert committee working on the new government plan for the next six years of state government. I was part

of the committee articulating the *Plan Estatal de Desarrollo 2022-2027* (Appendix 2 and 3). This has allowed me to promote more participatory processes, and also initiate discussions on the importance of the quality and diversity of participation.

The participation process for this development plan was ambitious; however, there were issues identified during the sessions. For instance, the location and time for the sessions was questioned by participants, as the meetings take place in the state's capital on a weekday, from 9:30 to 13:30, making it very difficult for the general public to participate, as not everyone can afford to miss a day of work or even pay for public transportation fares. It is clear that we were not the only table that mentioned this since the Secretary, when she went from table to table, told us that it was a recurring theme at other work tables. A subsequent meeting was organized via Zoom due to a rise of COVID-19 cases. Again, comments about how such channels of communication limit low-income populations' participation were expressed, as a reliable and stable internet connection are not guaranteed in Mexico. The events' coordinators were always open to hearing suggestions, however, they expressed that the time constraints and understaffing are limiting the possibilities for broader participation.

At our discussion table, *Mesa de Trabajo de Desarrollo Urbano y Movilidad* (Worktable of Urban Development and Mobility), there were fixed topics many of us considered anachronistic in the context of a 21st-century urban agenda. The proposed discussion topics they presented were linked to the past generation's ideals but obsolete in a city with a very high pollution and increasing travel times. Instead, we proposed discuss from an environmental perspective.

The discussion table was composed of a diverse group of professionals and activists who advocate for minority or underrepresented groups. The discussion began with a citizen who works on a *maquiladora* (factory) describing her two-and-a-half-hour daily odyssey

commuting from home to work. Her description illustrated the different layers of inequalities; from gender inequalities, as she was the cook for the family, to income inequalities shown by the difficult housing options far from jobs and with very inefficient public transportation. Having a person relating their perspective as a day-to-day user helped set the tone for the rest of the conversation, not as technicians or experts, but as people.

In a follow-up conversation in March 2022, Dr. Peredo mentioned another innovation in their procedures. She described a roundtable with neighbors who opposed the proposal of an elevated subway line designed to run close to an upper-middle-class neighborhood. When they opened up the event to people in favor of the project who live in lower middle class or low-income neighborhoods nearby, their inclusion, of both positive and negative views towards the project, started a process of deliberation. Those in favor mentioned that this project was important to them because it would mean spending more time with their families as they would spend less time commuting.

In Chapter 3, I described how I see the State of Nuevo León's new governmental initiatives as an opportunity to change the approach to participation. I have seen some innovations that will provide leverage to broader groups. While right now there are no state programs addressed specifically for informal settlers, participatory processes have opened up possible areas for future action.

The Nuevo León government needs specific strategies for involving residents of urban informality. The state needs to comprehensively acknowledge and address the disadvantages these residents face in participation, including: lack of travel money, lack of travel time, and the psychological barrier of going to physical spaces of government power.

Metropolitan level.

The Nuevo León state government is concerting efforts to build a new metropolitan planning agency for the Monterrey Metropolitan Zone (MMZ). The governor, himself an alumni, is conferring Tec de Monterrey a lot of influence in metropolitan development. Even so, this effort has incorporated people from other educational institutions into the core team, myself included.

The MMZ is composed of 18 municipalities (INEGI, 2020) with mayors who plan their areas independently, resulting in significant urban problems and a lack of proper connectivity between municipalities.

The necessity of a Metropolitan planning authority has been discussed for at least three decades and is finally becoming a reality. In the summer of 2021, during my fieldwork in Monterrey, I was invited to be part of a research group that is collecting relevant data for the future metropolitan planning authority.

My role in the Metropolitan planning authority is to lead the organization of conversations with planning actors. As a facilitator of this role, I was able to invite not only planners but also feminist groups, LGTBQ+ organizations, young students, children, and residents of informal communities. While the first intention was to include planners, developers, and stakeholders related to urban growth, the proposal to include historically segregated groups was warmly welcomed. One participant, who was also interested in broader inclusion, made a statement that stuck with me: "sometimes in these processes, only experts are invited, which gives way to a 'dictatorship of the experts,' it is important to include neighborhood groups and consider them in the same way as the people who are commonly invited."



Illustration 21. Children workshop facilitated by Lab C with children from La Campana-Altamira. Photo: Author.

The inclusion of the historically underrepresented groups provided clarity on the social problems triggered by top-down urban approaches. Simple, but profound thoughts led to original proposals rarely seen in this type of event in Northern Mexico, as they are dominated by a technical perspective. For instance, the children's workshops facilitated by Lab C provided varied insights from children from various municipalities. It was apparent that children are aware of their surrounding environment and how it affects them. They express issues related to air pollution, waste management, and tree planting. In a visioning workshop where children drew their way from their house to school, those from La Campana-Altamira made very detailed drawings, while those from more affluent areas did not. The presumed reason is that kids from La Campana walk to school, while the others

are driven to school. While the former dream of a city where they can spend more time with their family, the latter mentioned they would like more trees. The disparate access to the city's assets showed how spaces of informality have more than the preconceived problems, being perceived by children as social spaces where they feel attached and secure with their friends.



Illustration 22. In-person workshop with community members of La Campana-Altamira. Facilitated by a professor from Tec de Monterrey. Photo: Courtesy of Carlos Placencia.

Another contribution to this process is that we could arrange in-person sessions with people from La Campana–Altamira. Most of the sessions were conducted by Zoom, as the COVID-19 pandemic was still limiting large group gatherings. Tec de Monterrey’s involvement was crucial in organizing and conducting this workshop. Most of the workshops took place in Zoom using the online app “Miro” which allows several users to work on an online board simultaneously. However, using technological tools constituted a significant limitation to various groups of people, including residents of La Campana. For that reason, there were three in-person meetings. Tec de Monterrey provided a conference room to accommodate the meeting and considering the high price of public transport in

Monterrey, they also arranged transportation to take the 16 neighbors to the Tec facilities and back.

The main objective of this process was to identify the agenda for the metropolitan planning agency in the future counting with input from different stakeholders through workshops. The systematized information highlights issues that present specific challenges to be addressed through coordination among the municipalities of the metropolitan area. This is a valuable starting point as it will clarify the main challenges for this planning agency.

The objective of including people from La Campana-Altamira was to capture the non-traditional approach from underrepresented populations who may differ in their views about the city. This first meeting was intended as the beginning of an ongoing process. The idea was to get a general overview of the priorities that several groups visualize in the city concerning their neighborhood or organization. It was important to the process to capture that the city is formed by contrasting views, and that all should be considered for future urban strategies.

Residents were contacted by the Tec of Monterrey network in Altamira, and I was able to suggest contacting two other groups of neighbors from La Campana. The workshop was conducted by a Tec of Monterrey facilitation expert. After a brief ice-breaking activity, the participants were invited to identify the needs of their community. Next, they shared the reasons behind the elements identified, finding common ground with the group of participants. They also identified what they thought were challenges in solving those issues. Finally, to secure further participation, the group was asked to explore ideas and commitments to help solve those issues in the future.

While it was a process that intended to be a starting point for future collaborations with the participants, the significant fact of extending the invitation to residents of La

Campana and neighborhood groups from other parts of the city, widely opened the panorama due to their particular and often unexplored point of view on the needs of the city and communities.

Residents of La Campana provided a city narrative that many people in power are usually reluctant to see. While other groups contribute to the city's lack of infrastructure, neighbors of La Campana covered topics of mental health, lack of doctors and medicine available in the neighborhood, lack of food security, lack of water provision, lack of sufficient garbage collection system, and police abuse of authority. Equally exciting and contrasting are the contributions they suggest as a group on the problems detected. While other participants indicated the responsibility of the State to address their neighborhood problems, residents of La Campana based the possible solutions to their issues mentioning the importance of community support (*Apoyándonos entre todos*), working together (*Trabajar de la mano*), involving children (*Involucrar a los niños*), strengthening dialogue (*Todos ya estamos colaborando, necesitamos más diálogo*), and alike.

In these workshops, it was possible to identify the coincidences and contrasts between visions of different interest groups: academia, business chambers, civil society, and residents of Nuevo León. Additionally, the cross-cutting integration of perspectives from gender, sexual diversity and children's lenses in Nuevo León provided richness as a result of the problems identified by each group.

In total, we were able to organize 16 workshops; three in-person and 13 by Zoom. More than 200 people participated from more than 70 associations, including social or business associations, NGOs, government agencies, scholars, neighborhood groups, and even children.

In this initiative, I am part of an amazing team¹⁵ of reflective professionals from different backgrounds who are very knowledgeable about the planning and political sphere. This ongoing process has shown me that the complexities linked to political subtleties are as important as the process itself, especially when we consider times of change or political polarity, which is rather frequent in Latin America.

In the debrief sessions with the organizing team, everyone agreed on the importance of these kinds of meetings and workshops, and the necessity of further reach these communities. Therefore, the next step will be to conduct sessions joining participants with contrasting views of the city to enrich the deliberative process. Importantly, following meetings will be held in neutral spaces close to the neighborhoods.

Despite time and financial constraints, this process helped me engage with peers about the importance of participatory and deliberative conversations in the future metropolitan planning authority process. Most importantly, participatory approaches are included in the internal regulation of the metropolitan planning authority as a *sine qua non* of decisions.

City Level.

I was also able to participate at a city level. In early 2021, I had three phone conversations with the future Director of the Monterrey Planning Department. I knew him from my time at the Planning Department when he was the federal delegate of SEDATU for Nuevo León. At that time, he was kind enough to write me a letter of recommendation to apply for a Ph.D. scholarship. When the conversations took place, I was interested in knowing about his stance on the federal planning administration as part of my research for

¹⁵ As May 2022, the process of deliberation to set the ground rules for the establishment of the future Metropolitan Agency is paused while political arrangements involving the 15 municipalities are in process.

this dissertation. In this conversation, I had the opportunity to talk about my research on informal urbanizations and the need for deeper engagement between governments and informal residents. After the local election in June 2021, he was appointed Director of the Monterrey Planning Department. We met again, when I had the opportunity to share in-depth the work I was doing in informal settlements. I also mentioned my suggestions for improved planning practices in La Campana. We spoke at-length and in-depth about our ideas for Monterrey.

After that meeting, still excited about the conversations and the possibilities, I went home to write the “Planning Procedure Proposals in Self-help Neighborhoods.” This short paper describes the importance of informal settlements as entities representing great agency and capacity in neighborhood organizing, community management, and volunteer contributions of time, skills, and resources. Next, I described how traditional planning approaches tend to operate as an imposition. Finally, the third part of the text describes simplified steps to be considered in an urban planning approach in informal spaces. This information was mainly based on my experience with mentors such as Dr. Wilson in Mexico and Dr. Sletto in the Dominican Republic.

After sharing this paper, the Director invited me to be an advisor for the Monterrey Planning Department and join the deliberations for the La Campan-Altamira Plan.

An action research process allowed me to be part of the planning system. Due to interviews and conversations with the Monterrey Planning Director, I was able to exchange my thoughts about meaningful participation with informal communities. The Director was enthusiastic about this kind topic, and consequently gave me a position of *ad honorem*¹⁶, or consultant in the La Campana-Altamira Plan. As a result, I have been attending meetings

¹⁶ I considered it important to proceed in this research process without payment in order to remain as impartial as possible.

as a Monterrey Planning Department advisor, acting not only as an outside facilitator but as a professional with influence in the planning process.

Changing planning processes in Monterrey seems insurmountable, there are too many interests and actors to balance. But the objective of this fieldwork was to secure the participation of the community. Fortunately, many stakeholders from the formal planning sphere in Monterrey believe in the importance of community inclusion.

These sessions are being held at the Tec de Monterrey, and the actors involved are from CEMEX and FOMERREY, that is, the municipality of Monterrey with representatives from the Secretary of Economy office, Secretary of Urban Development office, the Secretary of Public Security office, and the Planning Department. Interestingly, I met half of the participants in these sessions as a result of previous interviews for the fieldwork, making my positionality in this process very clear from the beginning.

During this process, I have attended three rounds of sessions consisting of three/four working days that include visits to the area Campana-Altamira, and hybrid discussion sessions in-person and online. As the opportunity to participate as an advisor for the planning department occurred towards the end of my fieldwork, I was able to attend the online sessions alone; at these meetings, the different teams in which the main responsibilities were distributed presented their updates, and the attendees have the opportunity to provide feedback. After these sessions, there is a legit desire for improvement and well-being for the residents of La Campana.

Giancarlo Mazzanti heads Equipo Mazzanti, a studio for experimental architecture and urban design that was a key player in the development of projects in informal settlements under the world-famous Medellín Model. They are in charge of articulating the master plan for La Campana with materials and information from others. At every moment

of their interventions, they have emphasized the importance of co-creating with the community and their importance as the primary designers, strategists, and decision-makers.

Equipo Mazzanti has been in charge of shaping an important part of the new face of Medellín to the world. They have designed a broad array of architectonic typologies, such as public libraries, educational and sports infrastructure, parks and squares, botanical gardens, and more. All of these public projects are done under the umbrella of social urbanism and social architecture, a design category created under Sergio Fajardo's administration in Medellín from 2004 to 2007. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the positive results of these policies were widely shared, becoming a template for cities with problems similar to those of Medellín, mainly because governments want quick results without replicating the lengthy processes involved in these types of projects.

However, Equipo Mazzanti's discourse is sometimes challenged by some of the pre-visualizations they have shown as part of their process. For instance, in one of the presentations, they showed a before and after render of a street. This conceptual proposal corresponded to generic aesthetic ideas about how spaces of poverty should look; a typical folkloric street, where magically every building on the street becomes little charming coffee shops or local bistros. These expectations assume everyone from the community will change their profession, their practices, and their plans to fit a pre-conceived idea of what is appropriate for informal spaces. We also emphasized that any kind of intervention should result in community participation. Otherwise, any proposal, regardless of how good it looks, could be seen as an imposition by community members or simply fail as it is not practical.

Equipo Mazzanti acknowledged that these preliminary visualizations are example developments that residents may or may not pursue.

In the framework of this process, there have been interesting community workshops to get a sense of residents' perceptions on different aspects of La Campana. Through *talleres de imaginarios* (visioning workshops) with children, adolescents, and adults, the team has identified key elements in the design process, such as spaces considered dangerous, places they like, and unifying symbols of the community (cumbia music, soccer, and the characteristic bell shape of the hill). The resulting information has served to map some areas adequate for future interventions. However, as note earlier, there has not been clarity with the community about the motivations behind these workshops. Understandably, the stakeholders do not want to create expectations in the community, as there are still many unclear aspects of the plan, such as a defined budget.

Even as this initiative is filled with good intentions, there can be negative consequences. The process is based on the Medellín Model, and people rely on it for similar. Since some of the same actors are leading it, there are practically no critical voices to acknowledge the negative consequences these projects have had in Medellín. For instance, Zapata (2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b), argues that the policies implemented in Medellín are based in capitalist accumulation that can eventually cause displacement. He adds that these kinds of interventions encourage real estate investments privileging the market and the consumers, at the time that facilitates control as these interventions are designed to shape a 'disciplined' individual, as these spaces do not always correspond to the local dynamics. In other words, the author argues that these infrastructure projects in areas of poverty are implemented under the assumption that the activities of informality are wrong.

While, in my experience, these assumptions are not present, or at least none of the participants have thought of sharing them, the participatory process has to be aware of the power dynamics of all actors and that may affect vulnerable groups.

Discussion.

At first sight, community engagement and the kind of relationship with planning agencies are disconnected and operate within logic so far apart that it is difficult to create links between them. It is a fact the formal and informal planning practices have developed at very different paces fueled by opposed motivations. Positivistic, highly technical ideas have dominated the planning practice in Mexico for decades, resulting in disregarding everything outside the formal world. Urban informality has been seen as built cacophony that begets social problems. However, in the last 30 years, we have seen examples in Latin America of a more inclusive view towards urban informality. Urban theorists possess planning strategies in informality that are fueled by a desire of normalization of urban 'pathologies' (Kamete, 2013), in which planning is used as a tool of capitalism to erase spaces of difference (Roy, 2005; Watson, 2009). However, other authors contend that even in unequal spaces, planners have the opportunity to balance the participation of the underrepresented groups regardless of their access to power (Forester, 1982).

The threats of not understanding and interpreting a community can cause judgments and categorization with deep social consequences. These consequences can be observed through failed or decontextualized public policies, infrastructure projects that do not respond to the site's needs, and a shift in community identity, reshaping social relationships and values (Herod, 2012).

However, my research shows that planners working with communities have higher possibility of success if they work under the umbrella of action research traditions. Given the complexity of territories, cities, and communities, and considering the inherent and inextricable nature of social relationships, identity, and space, the best way to fully understand a territory is by "going native" (Eikeland, 2006, and Borman et al. 1986).

Action research flexibility allows the planner to access extensive methodological options as long as it is pertinent to the research. Additionally, in the often content Latin American context, action research proves to be adequate. Fals Borda and Freire's work reflected on problems of crisis, violence, inequalities, poverty, and domination, which are recurrent struggles in most of Latin America.

In this dissertation, my efforts were incentivized by two things. First, my genuine interest in understanding the informal urbanization process in La Campana, and inquiring about its legitimacy in the wide array of urban settings. Second, to understand how planners can relate, imaginatively, respectfully, and productively to what is being done in contexts of informality, building on their skills, customs, and resources.

While my engagement with the informal and formal spheres allowed me to be an agent of change advocating for vulnerable groups and informal communities, it would be naïve to say the system has definitively changed. What I can say is that this research process changed me, and that I have found others who believe it is possible to transform the structure into a more humane and flexible planning system. I can also say my modes of participation in public forums is contributing to position this topic in the public agenda, not without resistance. In this process, I discovered others believe the planning sphere lacks of input from minority groups. I have found support and allies from people that belong to or advocate for LGTBQ+ issues, feminism, cyclers, pedestrians, and other groups that have seen their rights limited by the State. These groups have been particularly receptive to and supportive of more inclusive ways of planning.

Although privileged perspectives (largely white, elder, straight, and male) still dominate the planning sphere and positions of power, the visibility and awareness of minorities and vulnerable groups have grown even in conservative Monterrey.

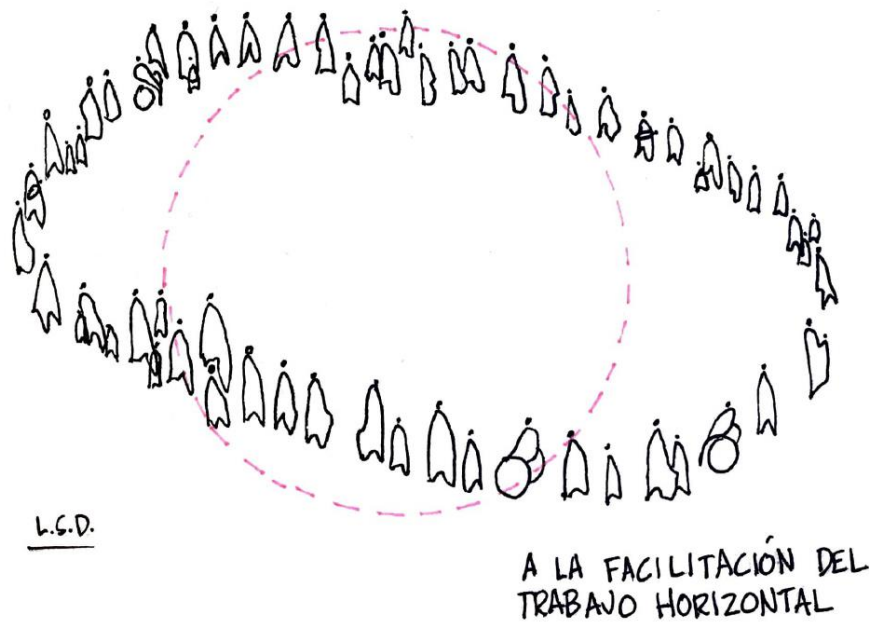
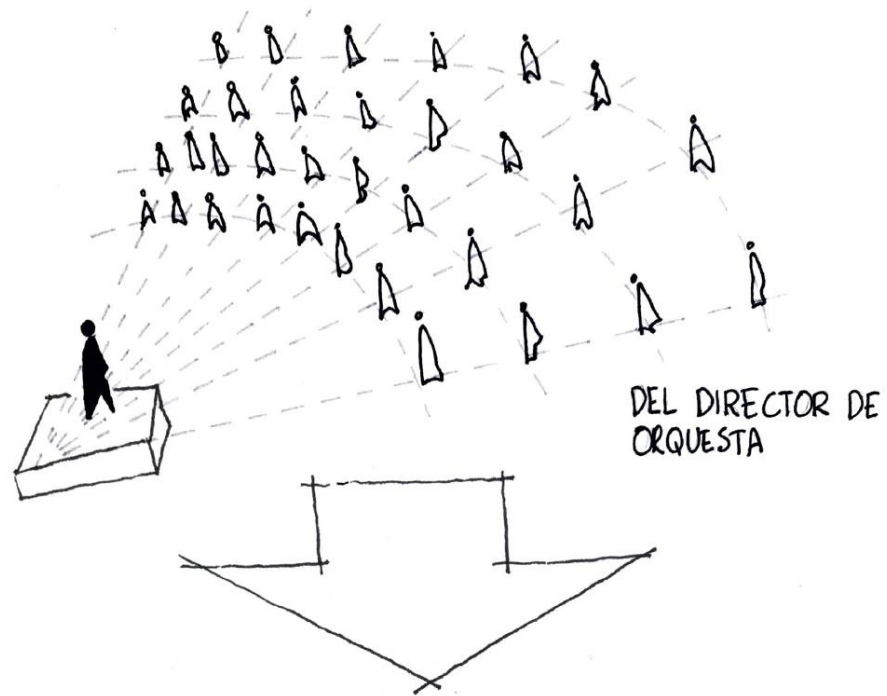
CONCLUSION

In this research, I was able to engage with community members and organizations in La Campana significantly. From this relationship, I could see the harsh reality that the inhabitants of this emblematic community live in. At the same time, I witnessed the network of support, skills, resources and organizational capacity. On the other hand, by engaging with government urban planning actors, I was able to overcome biases and prejudices that were born out of my own time as an urban planner in Monterrey. I could also see that while there is a long positivist tradition in the region that has permeated into our times, new generations of activists, sociologists, architects, urban planners, and other groups have become aware of the negative impacts of urban planning, especially with vulnerable groups.

The methodology applied in this dissertation allowed me to build bridges between these two groups that, at first sight, are opposed to each other. Starting from common grounds and appealing to the value of diversity, it was possible to find spaces for inclusion and participation of historically segregated groups. Being sensitive and respectful, in the context of fraternal dialogue, I was able to express my impressions on the risks of urban planning in La Campana. I was able to access decision-making spaces and join others who believe in changing the urban system toward inclusion and equity.

While there are possibilities for change, it is not yet possible to ascertain whether there is definitive progress. Innovations in public processes are thanks to leadership that does not yet represent the majority of the current urban planning network in Monterrey. Although I see that there are possibilities for a fair planning in La Campana, the progress made is fragile and should not be taken for granted.

Chapter 7. Conclusions



Ayn Rand (1943), in her novel *The Fountainhead*, personified the figure of individualism, man's ego, and the cult of originality as through an architect, Howard Roark. She characterizes tradition and collectivism as symbols of stagnation and contradictory to the architect's nature¹⁷.

This portrayal of an architect has left its mark on many generations that aspire to be part of *starchitecture*¹⁸ as the governing axis of the profession. Undoubtedly, there have been brilliant contributions from this perspective; buildings admired and studied for the way they encapsulate experiences, techniques, and particular ways of life bound to a region. I was trained under this tradition when I studied architecture in the early 2000s. At that time, the architect was thought to be a creative genius, like Le Corbusier (considered little less than a God), Mies Van Der Rohe, and Oscar Niemeyer. While it is true that modern architecture sought the well-being of the users through functional and healthy spaces, the initiatives relied on the individual reflection of the architect, rather than those who will be occupying the space.

In Latin America, urban planning was seen as a branch of architecture and engineering for much of the 20th century¹⁹. The design of new cities and the extension of others, were usually undertaken by architects and engineers, portraying the problem-solving personality described above. When I started working in the municipal planning department in Monterrey, most of my coworkers were architects and sometimes engineers. While open to interdisciplinary knowledge, many of us were relying heavily on the architects' skills to solve city issues.

¹⁷ Howard Roark is the architect main character of the *The Fountainhead*.

¹⁸ Concept related to the architects consider stars, usually these architects work on a global scale.

¹⁹ This condition was not unique of the Latin American region. Southeast Asian countries had similarities.

However, the role of the creative genius falls short when faced with the demands of contemporary times, where it is clearly insufficient in certain contexts, such as places that operate with and from scarcity. This criticism is not new. In the 1960s, Jane Jacobs observed how cities and modern precepts were incompatible with human activities. Jacobs paid particular attention to how the built environment benefited or impaired human relationships. Another critical precedent is John Turner (1974), who, in his classic study of the value of self-construction placed in Peru, *Vivienda Por La Gente*, mentions that the residents of self-constructed settlements are the best judges of their own needs; thus, more capable than anyone to address them.

For decades, the formal and informal worlds developed physically independently from each other in Monterrey. This distant relationship was interrupted sporadically by an array of interventions, such as clearance or service provision programs in informal settlements, always under a top-down approach. However, as Mexican cities have been in unsustainable growth since the 1990s, these separate worlds are intersecting at an accelerated rate. While well-known in other Latin American capitals like Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Medellín, and Mexico City, this phenomenon is relatively recent in Monterrey. New developing plans, urban renewal projects, and real estate investments near urban informality are in the process of re-shaping social and urban relations. This dissertation explores a planning approach to relate proactively, fairly, and equitably between residents of informal settlements and powerful actors, namely governments and developers.

This chapter discusses the tensions and findings of this dissertation, adding notes for future researchers aiming to relate proactively with residents of informality. Finally, one of the conclusions of this study is that even though there are well-intended policies and

planning actors promoting inclusive planning practices, if planners' training does not change, it will be difficult to sustain the change in local practices.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

The research journey for this dissertation registers two research trajectories that, while independent, frequently intersect through self-reflection. On the one hand, I analyzed mechanisms to foster collaboration at the intersection of urban informality and government. On the other hand, I underwent process of professional and personal transformation, in which I had to learn and unlearn, or, *let go and let come*. The results of this dissertation are linked to the constant awareness process to be alert of positionality and attitudes towards this topic.

My Role as a Former Planner in Monterrey.

The main motivation for initiating this research is that I detected an excess of confidence in the work of architects and urban planners, specially exerted in informal spaces, in which planners feel equipped to direct the needs of the population. I also sensed that even though there were mechanisms to incorporate citizen participation, in most processes, the participation of communities fell under tokenism at best; the relationship between academic and local experts is vertical and defined by the authority. Most of the time, governments end up encouraging this leading role of the urban planner to legitimize a process of infrastructure provision or neighborhood beautification that has already been launched and defined by government officials. In other words, I detected there was no genuine desire to learn from the community and make the most of their strengths. Instead, participation was used to check the box in an urban-architectural project process. Being part of the planning sphere at that time, the characterization of this role applied to me as

well. I saw I lacked the knowledge, theory, and skills to engage significantly with communities in co-creation.

There is copious criticism of this perspective in urban planning. For instance, Rankin (2009) views urban planning as instrumental to capitalist accumulation. From that lens, the planner's role in Monterrey has historically been to reproduce the values of globalization by using labels such as 'creative' or 'green' cities. In doing so, urban planning legitimizes the silence and violence through which populations with scarcity are routinely displaced from urban spaces— and decision-making spaces considered desirable for capitalist enrichment.

The disconnection between the planner's toolkit and the informal community's knowledge is tangible in Northern Mexico. My intention in this dissertation was to understand this gap and propose guidance for researchers aiming to gain experience at the intersection of this topic. As I later discovered, many urban planners are looking for better practices in the planning realm, one that reaches the desires of diverse groups in a society, an approach capable of capturing the different elements, features, and intentions from the most varied groups in the population. My research shows how even when many places in cities are designed to exclude 'undesired' groups systematically, these 'peripheral' populations find and create their own spaces that match their values and unique livelihoods. In such situations, how should the planner plan without interrupting or displacing forms of identity, livelihoods, and agency that, in some cases, have been developed through generations?

My Role as a Researcher in This Dissertation.

The incompatibility between the collective thought in precarious environments and the kind of thought encouraged in architecture and planning schools in Northern Mexico

has had a considerable impact. I have seen how, in spaces with few resources, residents can respond with collaboration and inventiveness. However, these elements work if the delicate balance of the environment that triggered this collaborative richness is preserved. The natural and built environments are a crucial part of it. When an architect or urban planner is introduced to this delicate equation, if the rhythms of the community are not understood, they can threaten or dilute the strength and agency that communities have created as a self-defense mechanism.

In this context, this dissertation analyzes the complexity of how some subaltern groups have developed their agency to plan their own spaces of resistance (Young, 2003; Simone, 2004; Milgram, 2011; Prasetyo, 2017). The main issue is understanding how planning interventions can and probably will change power relations, also affecting the balance in the area. In its attempt to create open, safe, and legible places, planning usually addresses the elimination of the hidden, illegible spaces that were created as safe spaces by the oppressed, in which they can be themselves²⁰. Therefore, the traditional approach to planning takes away those spaces along with the agency that subaltern groups have created. However, considering the above-mentioned, should planners intervene at all? Or should planners leave those spaces to regulate themselves?

As urban researchers, these questions force us to explore how to navigate the realm of diverse, complex, and often contested settings in the planning realm. As a result of my research, I have found that the sole inclusion of excluded populations is not enough since expecting them to participate with the same frequency and intensity as a population that has never been excluded is unrealistic. Thus, one of the main challenges for novel planning approaches is to face our convenient illusions of effective participation. This is not only

²⁰ This is not to romanticize spaces of poverty, but to indicate how the production of space varies depending of the society that makes it.

relevant to the Global South. In the appendix of the Austin Comprehensive Plan, although there was broad public participation, most of the participants were disproportionately white, rich, and elderly persons (Imagine Austin, A-7). Minorities in Austin were not participating proportionately to their population. Things such as time constraints and accessibility to the places in which the meetings took place are factors that prevent more diverse participation. Something else to consider is the level of interest in participating in processes designed by what the oppressed identify as former oppressors.

Another challenge for a more inclusive planning practice is to overcome governments' tendency to import models that endow architecture and urban models with almost supernatural powers. In architecture and urban planning, preconceived models are often imposed in different contexts from which they were initially conceived. Rarely are the results of these models as good as their results in their places of origin. In some cases, the application of out-of-context models is adverse, generating more problems, seeding distrust, and obstructing future collaborations with a community. The problem stems from how good results are exported and copied instead of the processes that gave birth to them.

The main personal lesson from this dissertation for my future practice and research is to articulate the necessity of the process vs. outcome in urban planning and urban design projects. In Monterrey, like many cities with governments aspiring to be recognized as global cities, there is a desire to import buildings, customs, images, and urban models from the North. However, this research gave me the opportunity me connect with critical practitioners eager to transform the planning practice. The challenges are daunting; social structures that sustain inequity, a highly hierarchical society, private interests with significant influence in the city, and importantly, the lack of training of the next generation of urban planners.

LESSONS OF THIS DISSERTATION

Chapter 1.

In Chapter 1, I describe the research problem. Ever since the foundation of Monterrey, hegemonic power involved in traditional urban planning has produced and reproduced a homogeneous image of the city corresponding to bourgeois aesthetics and functionality. For decades, elites have used planning as a tool for accumulation in Monterrey. The city image produced by planners contradicts the image of informal neighborhoods, where the production of the built environment does not come from an aesthetic idea or rules established in texts, treatises, or academic reflection. This research maintains that values behind informal settlements have gained an unquestionable validity, which requires urban planners to search for processes that can authentically integrate these sources of knowledge. There is an opportunity to change the planning/planners' approach to build on the community's strengths and agency, contributing to a more just and equitable planning practice. A wave of new governments is creating innovative spaces for citizen participation that can interfere with planning practice. This research is developed in La Campana, an informal settlement that shares many features with informal urban communities that serves as a clear example of contested planning practices, both traditional and novel, between the community and the Monterrey planning department.

Chapter 2.

In Chapter 2, I introduced the challenges many planners face in deeply engaging residents. As a result of a history of oppressive planning practices, city planners entering informal contexts are usually met with distrust and hostility. This attitude responds to a tradition of top-down planning approaches in which residents have had to act defensively to protect their homes and avoid eviction or relocation. When we walk into an informal

community, we walk into a story of abuse and neglect. Notably, this history has also resulted in community cooperation and self-sufficiency. Yet, in Mexico's government planning departments, communities that do not fit the ideals and objectives of 'modernity' are left outside of much-needed benefits. When these peripheral groups are included, it is done with the goal of adapting them to the hegemonic system controlled by the powers of the State. Consequently, the design and implementation of urban plans in informal contexts have consisted of the relegation of these communities and the constant attempt to normalize them into the rules and norms of the modernist goals. For this reason, urban planners and researchers face difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships in spaces of urban informality, which has to be overcome through long processes with the communities.

Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3, I discuss a new hope for participatory planning approaches. While the position of a new generation of planners and those professionals from social sciences broadly acknowledges the necessity of a participatory approach in planning, one of the challenges of engaging with residents of informal settlements has been the lack of a normative framework that allows and incentives community participation with meaningful results. However, despite past policies in Monterrey, the current political and social juncture has the potential of birthing new planning paradigms around community agency and citizen participation, and beyond the traditional top-down approach to governance and planning. A new wave of government leadership is trying to progress from past practices of neoliberal governance by including vulnerable populations in public decisions. Citizen participation, community agency, and inclusion of the outcast vision are being integrated into local governance processes. The political situation of the country, the state, and the municipality are creating conditions that favor and facilitate a more human-led planning

approach, away from the technocratic thinking fueled by desires for modernity and development. However, as is the case with the implementation of new policies, there are still opportunities to improve such practices, in addition to the fact that there are still many urban planners working in the traditional sphere with influence in government.

Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I cover the relevance to study the neighborhood of La Campana, describing the community organizing efforts in a time of neglect and oblivion from authorities, the historic resilience after a period of profound violence in the area, and the novel attention by private and public stakeholders. Years of violence and fear-mongering hardened into collective trauma. Inspired to bring life, hope, and safety back to La Campana, a group of female residents created an NGO that initially focused on modifying the built environment to transform residual spaces into pocket parks for children. The notable benefits of these imaginative, community-based planning actions garnered the attention of local authorities, universities, and the private sector, which have allied to design a partial comprehensive Plan for the La Campana area and its surroundings. The problem with the planning strategy is that it does not address the underlying negative externalities such plans usually have on a territory, as is evident in the extensive literature on the subject. This chapter describes the value and legitimacy of the community subaltern practices while discussing the profound complexities of contested spaces where different stakeholders exert power.

Chapter 5.

In Chapter 5, I elaborate on the research process and the achievements of my involvement with both the community and planning actors in Monterrey. Utilizing

participatory action research methods provided me with the tools to engage in a long-lasting relationship with planners and community members. It also allowed me to understand, from the inside, the constraints of planning practices in Monterrey regarding informal settlements while contributing to a new urban planning agenda for La Campana, the Monterrey Metropolitan Zone and the state level. This chapter describes the planner's necessity to shift the role and mindset in traditional planning practices. The action researcher's role is as an agent of transformation, not through imposition, but by facilitation.

Chapter 6.

In Chapter 6, I described my profound interactions with community members and organizations in La Campana. From these relationship, I could see the harsh reality of living in La Campana. At the same time, I witnessed the network of support, skills, and resources and the organizational capacity that the residents of La Campana can put into practice in precarious spaces. On the other hand, by engaging with government urban planning actors, I overcame prejudices that were born out of my own time as an urban planner in Monterrey. I was able to see that while there is a long tradition of positivism, new generations of activists, sociologists, architects, urban planners, and other groups of people have become aware of the negative impacts of urban planning, especially with vulnerable groups. However, I noticed that the transformation of the planning system is not a stage that can be suddenly overcome, but rather a process of constant self and collective self-reflection.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

La Campana's intrinsic participatory nature in shaping its built environment.

In La Campana, many issues need to be addressed by authorities; there is an evident lack of services, unequal access to goods, and disadvantages evidenced by the population's educational and health deficits. Yet, La Campana also represents a plethora of positive aspects of a society; high levels of participation, neighbors that know each other, a vibrant and proud community where you can hear the '*¡Buenos días!*' that has gone missing from the rest of the city.

Informal communities, like La Campana, were initially able to grow and develop because they passed under the radar of local governments; their agency was determined by their isolation. However, as efforts to integrate this neighborhood into the logic of the 'formal' city continue to increase, it represents a considerable threat to the life, customs, and culture of the community.

This dissertation showed the conflicts that state imposition can provoke, not only by diluting the progress the residents have made in their neighborhoods but, worst, by creating conditions for real estate investments and therefore the gentrification of the neighborhood and the displacement of its people. This research finds that community efforts should be the starting point of any development projects.

Planners/planning being traditionally technical-oriented.

Colonial practices from the North are present in several human processes in the South, and planning is not the exception; in fact, most of the time, it is the vehicle to implement colonial practices in a region. In an attempt to achieve modernity, governments in the Global South mirror ideas from the Global North (Kamete, 2013), missing the

opportunity to access local epistemologies more relevant to the local historical and social realities.

Roy's (2006) *Praxis in the Time of Empire* provided a mighty description of how urban planning has been a Trojan horse for colonialism, especially since it facilitates territorial domination through spatial re-organization. Although Roy's ideas on colonialism are first explained in the realm of a war invasion, she later describes how colonial ideas on planning are tolerated and often encouraged by neoliberal governments in the South because along with it comes the concept of development and modernization.

For Escobar (1996), the idea of development as we understand it now, was implemented by replicating institutions and re-shaping the urban form of the places considered underdeveloped. Later on, Escobar mentions how the "strategy of development produced its opposite: massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression (p.4)." He also mentions that these adverse effects can be balanced by the role of "grassroots movements, local knowledge, and popular power" (p.215). His perspective sheds light on other actors with the agency to challenge the praxis of empire posed by Roy, as the inclusion of the local knowledge can serve to counteract international decontextualized international teds.

Gudynas (2011) presents an alternative for development based on the indigenous cultures of the region embracing the notion of well-being and cohabitation with others and nature. This has implications for all of Latin America, but especially Bolivia and Ecuador that reacted to Western notions of development by resorting to their indigenous knowledge. This could be an opportunity to re-shape a nation's objectives in connection with its racial and contextual origin. In other words, this has already been done in other Latin American countries with similar contexts to Mexico.

Alternative development strategies recognize a system that does not work for certain contexts and offer a sustainable, plural decision-making process as a solution. As Escobar quoting the Zapatistas, said, "one no, and many yeses," the "no" is the hegemonic idea of a single goal; the "yeses" are to the diverse realities, cultures, and cosmovisions."

De Souza's (2006) argues the necessity of including social justice activists as 'critical urban planning' actors. In the context of top-down approaches, incorporating people from social activism is vital as it includes critical positions that do not often participate in the planning process.

I argue that the obstacle to a new planning praxis in Latin America lies in the generations rooted in the traditions of development for economic gain. As an urban planner in Mexico, colonialist planning strategies are fueled by a desire to erase differences and to create adequate contexts for what Roy (2006) calls "aesthetics of empire," "the most seductive liberal ruse, securing hegemonic consent through the strategies of renewal, beauty, and freedom (15-16)."

Re-education of planners becomes a fundamental tool to free planning in the Global South from the oppression of a decontextualized order. Through this work, future generations will be able to accept other legitimate ways of achieving well-being, adapted to their possibilities, such as the local economy, culture, social relations, and customs. In contrast to development, which acts as a force to homogenize, *Buen Vivir* or *Bienestar* is a fluid concept with unique expression in every context.

To generate new epistemologies impacting the planning praxis, there has to be a structural change of the entities that determine knowledge and policies; there has to be a critical society, but overall, planning practitioners, educators, and governments open and trained to incorporate new praxis.

The planning practice opening up to participation.

In Chapters 3, 5, and 6, I discussed what I identified as signs of the planning ecosystem opening up to broader participation; for one, my inclusion in the government planning department as a critical voice. With that said, my demographics as a white-passing, heterosexual, male, from a well-positioned university abroad, likely make me more likely to be considered. However, planning in Monterrey is far from reformed; seemingly progressive steps are sometimes motivated by the desire to co-opt votes, gain time, or just simulate openness.

In Chapter 4, I report on the clash of rationalities (Watson, 2003) between private business/government and the residents in La Campana. My research suggests that this clash can be overcome by including a broader range of actors in the planning process, especially those systematically marginalized. Ideally, two sets of participants should contribute to this inclusion: first, those who have contested the status quo should move beyond protests and begin developing proposals; and second, planners with different racial and cultural backgrounds, as they can contribute with a substantially different perspective (Song, 2015). De Souza (2006) argues that these groups, considered as critical urban agents, can provide powerful insights capable of implementing radically alternative socio-spatial strategies. Second,

Mitlin (1995) argues that this approach can enhance understanding of local people's experiences, bringing their knowledge to the forefront. Thus, participation should give voice to those less powerful, challenging the hegemonic views. In strengthening participatory decision-making, people will gain awareness and respect for their collective knowledge, they will be able to negotiate as equals with governments and other influential players, they will be able to initiate strategies to improve their circumstances with their own means, and they will be able to resolve conflicts within the community.

The opportunities and elements are already in place to conduct processes led by the subaltern. The convergence of drug violence, while profoundly harmful and traumatic, created new ways in which people related with each other and with their public space (Villarreal, 2015; 2016). At the same time, in the last few years, there have been citizens protesting against the consequences of the traditional development approach in Monterrey, arguing that urban projects are only going to favor the real estate business (Carrizales, 2018), and that these initiatives will impose a lifestyle communities never agreed to (Rodriguez, 2019), while others claim residents are not being justly informed on projects (Cruz, 2019). This social momentum could lead to a generation of more critical urban planners (de Souza, 2006).

In this context, the role of the planner conducting research is to create the conditions in which more people are included in the process. Based on that, I was able to establish contact with spheres to significantly be part of the planning process of La Campana in order to influence the process. While there is still much to be done, my research shows that a significant engagement is possible even in conservative cities. One significant challenge to overcome for this theoretical to become reality is the lack of training that exists in urban planning schools to train future urban planners in this subject.

Next steps in the Monterrey planning practice.

In this section, I explore ideas around a more appropriate way to enter and plan in an informal community in Monterrey. In the Global South, the planning practice has fallen short in attending to and understanding the social complexities of informal settlements. Additionally, huge economic interests represent new challenges for many informal communities in the area. Therefore, new planning approaches are becoming more necessary in current affairs.

According to my research, the main issue with the planning practice in Monterrey, which is also the case for most of the Global South, is that it does not respond to the needs of the poor, as one can see by the limited access to income, housing, educational services, health services, basic utilities, Wi-Fi, and more. Planning is usually framed by a master plan “carried with a particular vision of the ‘good city’” (Watson, 2009: 2261), promoting urban modernist ideas that avoid practices from lower-income residents and ethnic minorities. Unfortunately, these concepts of modernity have been internalized in the government practices of Global South countries and their institutions.

My research shows these global agendas are applicable in Mexican cities; in Monterrey, such attempts to operate on a global scale have been repetitive by strategies seeking to position the city as a technological development pole by hosting the “Cultures International Forum” (Armendáriz, 2004) described by the governor at the time as an event that would position Nuevo León in a global scale (Cardenás, 2008). As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, a long history of industrialization has exposed Monterrey to international agendas and aesthetic ideals that have little to do with the needs, realities, and desires of those who live in informality. As mentioned by Kamete (2013), authorities in the Global South have “a fetish about formality... largely inspired by Western notions of modernity” (2013: 17). Kamete, drawing on philosopher García Canclini²¹ (2008: 81-83), posits “that the imagined city is imagined by people who... view the city from the heights of power.” It is natural that under these imaginaries, there will be “good” cities and “bad” cities; the “good” city meaning assimilated to a foreign order, homogeneous, clean, and standardized; the “bad”, on the other hand, hiding those alienated from the public life, the heterogeneous, different, and strange.

²¹ Néstor García Canclini is an Argentinian-born philosopher that has lived in Mexico since 1976.

One important challenge for planners is to move beyond the idea that informal settlements need to be eliminated or adapted to a coherent idea of order. It appears that the government's initiatives in La Campana are designed to impose a new image on the area, rather than to contemplate multiple views from different actors. Although a new wave of governments has laid the groundwork for a new, more inviting approach, it has been difficult to break top-down tradition in local governance practices.

However, planners are not innocent professionals with no say in the process (Roy, 2006). They play a crucial role in revolutionizing the field. Planning paths for a more inclusive praxis in informal settlements should be based on the meaningful involvement of a myriad of knowledge, skills, understandings, and rules of places. This constitutes another considerable challenge.

The challenge then is about how to plan in such diverse and complex settings. Roy (2005) might shed light on the matter by discussing that planning needs a new epistemology in contexts of urban informality, an epistemology capable of conducting processes not only for the physical upgrading of a community but focused on working on the livelihoods, wages, and political capacities. This epistemology should show the audience that informality can teach us something. Planning should not romanticize the idea of informality as "heroic entrepreneurship" but acknowledge it as a "valid organizing logic, [and] a system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself" (Roy, 2005: 148). Six years later, Roy (2011) introduces the concept of subaltern urbanism, where she presents a more polished idea of informal settlements "as terrain of habitation, livelihood, self-organizing and politics." My research shows that this new epistemology can be explored by participatory approaches described in Chapter 6.

However, the traditionally-trained planner will encounter challenges in incorporating these practices. Umemoto (2001) works around those challenges of the "new

planner." Some of the factors she mentions are interpretive frames in collective memory, cultural values, social identities, language, social relationships, and power dynamics in imposed development. The new planner should be capable of understanding the complexities of a world that has not been represented enough, a professional capable of transferring the power and responsibility of urban planning, and of taking on the role of facilitator.

These challenges can be tackled from two angles. First, by incorporating new planners from diverse backgrounds in the planning ecosystem, not only from other disciplines but also from underserved communities. Second, by incorporating in planning schools adequate training to explore participatory approaches respecting local practices. This is probably more challenging, since many schools in Northern Mexico are highly quantitatively-oriented, and therefore profit-oriented.

SCHOLARLY AND PRAXIS CONTRIBUTIONS

"...existing cartographic rules unjustly organize human hierarchies in place and reify uneven geographies in familiar, seemingly natural ways." (McKittrick, 2006)

As McKittrick (2006) posits, current geographical rules have reinforced inequities by privileging dominant voices. This dissertation showed the possibility of building bridges of collaboration to introduce new knowledge to urban planning.

This study will contribute to critical research and practice that contests the highly technical, top-down approaches that currently dominate the planning practice in Northern Mexico. Planners, students, and practitioners seeking examples of co-production of knowledge between the planning sphere and communities in Latin America will find a novel approach to planning in this research.

Beyond a description of the current planning practice.

My study illustrates how even the most seemingly monolithic planning system can be transformed by a deep engagement with communities and the system in dispute.

In planning, the need for community engagement is repeatedly mentioned, but the reality is that most engagement is in-genuine and incomplete. This dissertation intended to develop relationships with a community, not to help or produce for them, but to immerse in and learn from existent community-based planning. Using PAR as the base for this research, I was prepared to integrate, catalyze, learn, and bridge the community knowledge to other planning actors.

This work exemplifies “systems awareness”. I successfully entered a planning system gradually sensing the invisible web of relationships in and around La Campana. I identified patterns and rhythms to incorporate to the planning sphere seamlessly, earning the trust and buy-in that traditional engagement methods frequently fail to obtain.

PAR in Planning.

This dissertation presents a compelling case study of meaningful engagement possibilities not only in informal settlements but in any project that involves interacting with community members, their livelihoods, and environments. Developing trust is paramount to be effective community-based planners. Only with trust can planners genuinely learn the concerns and values of residents.

This research demonstrates that qualitative elements are key to understanding mobilizing communities. This kind of engagement does not require sophisticated tools ready to extract data and teach residents what is best for them but instead, patience, active listening, and constant group and individual reflection allow them to be both flexible and approachable. Such qualities, when making any planning decision, move projects forward

without isolating or marginalizing groups who are already at a disadvantage in such spaces. These so-called "powerless" communities are actually full of agency, life, and initiative. As planners, we should take our role as advocates seriously. These lessons are transferable to all locations, projects, and areas of planning.

For instance, in Chapter 6, I described the immeasurable qualitative gains territorialized in the *Parque de los Niños*, previously a garbage-filled eyesore, transformed into a small park for children. This project did not end when the UT team left La Campana. Once the conditions had been created for continuity and the project was off the ground there was no stopping it. The community was excited, invested, and saw the park as their own; planners acted as catalysts. Through a WhatsApp group that was created by the community, we have been able to follow and comment on the project from afar. They send updates about fundraising bingo nights, donations of playground equipment, and construction that has been performed by community members. Also, we were able to see the park's multi-function, used for children, summer camps, *lotería*²² games, and neighborhood meetings.

This lasting relationship incentivizes communities to be accountable for the determination of their own growth under the communities' terms. This is not to take away the State's responsibility but to respect local practices by ensuring the permanence of the community, which is especially critical in environments with high real estate speculation, such as in the La Campana area.

Insights into the new participatory approach to informality.

The importance of establishing a participatory planning process is particularly evident in Northern Mexico. Monterrey planners do not have a history of working

²² Lotería is a similar game than bingo.

collaboratively with communities, specifically informal settlements. Interventions in informal settlements have the potential to repair a damaged social fabric and spark connectivity among residents who, for years have seen each other as strangers. By contrast, planners designing local interventions without local participation can exacerbate internal struggles.

The importance of seeing planning projects within a larger ecosystem is critical for issues of social justice without romanticizing local practices and acknowledging limitations present in informal communities, such as deep social inequities. Nevertheless, participatory approaches provide a first step towards the unity and community-oriented mindset that is needed to face larger injustices. The leadership, camaraderie, and sense of community that result are not easily defeated; it will undoubtedly serve La Campana going forward.

Lastly, embracing a participatory approach does not invalidate the use of quantitative information or traditional training. A major part of planning still involves using GIS software, managing technical information, and navigating normative information. However, the incorporation of knowledge produced with the communities will contribute to true co-generative practices.

The transformation of the planning practice.

In Northern Mexico, it is common to compare the role of the urban planner and the architect to that of an orchestra conductor²³, someone who coordinates a team of different specialists in projects. In some contexts, this might work, but in others where the people have replaced not only architects and planners but many other specialists, the planning

²³ In 2007, Matthew Frederick published 101 Things I Learned in Architecture School. In point 21, he compares the architect with an orchestra director, comparison that it is used also with planners in Monterrey.

practice is used to build –literally and metaphorically, over a complex network of preexisting social relationships.

In these contexts, planning schools must create a new breed of planners able to understand the existing value in non-traditional contexts. The idea that planners possess supernatural abilities can determine what is 'best' for a community has been exposed as weak. There has been some questioning of the profession in Monterrey, but the guild has made pathetic displays defending the nobility of the profession from a positivistic standpoint without remotely addressing planners' responsibility for the results of the many-times-deficient 'planned' city we live in.

Urban planners lose an unbeatable opportunity to contribute to the strengthening of the cooperative work that informal communities are already doing. This is why it is necessary to have this new breed of planners that facilitates articulating processes of the community's agency, local abilities, resources, and techniques of its inhabitants and bolstering the existing support networks. This is not an insignificant task, as planners would have to adopt new skills of mediation and social organization, which are currently underexplored in Northern Mexico planning schools. This approach goes further than the extractive idea so prevalent in planning interactions, where planners, equipped with questionnaires, pretend to quantitatively measure something that can only be experienced through long deliberative processes.

Urban planners-practitioners can make a significant contribution to just planning practices, but the permanent transformation of planning practices requires triggering the curriculum in urban planning schools. While northern Mexicans are increasingly interested and motivated in incorporating participatory approaches, a lack of training poses a significant obstacle.

NOTES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future researchers should be aware of the fluctuations of the planning ecosystem and provide evidenced-based tools for the transformation of the urban planning sector. The benefits of such practices not only guarantee the rich cultural vibrancy of a heterogeneous city but encourage a city where its residents live in peace.

This research can also serve as a point of departure for urbanists seeking for comparative research in other parts of the Global South. The unique response to violence of La Campana igniting transformation of residual spaces, can become important lessons not only for urban researchers but for people living in similar situations.

An interesting follow-up to this research may be to track how planning schools are adapting their curricula to what I called a new wave of governance. The only way we can strengthen the transformative quality of urban planning is by training new actors under the values of participation and inclusion.

Finally, researchers interested in the future of La Campana should measure the impact that current urban planning actions will have on the future of the community.

CONCLUSION

"Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed. How could they be the initiators, if they themselves are the result of violence?... Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons" (Freire, 1968: 55)


In recent years, Latin America has been bursting with social movements calling for more just and equitable societies. Chile undoubtedly set the tone when high school girls, who initially sought to stop the increase in subway fares, triggered a social movement that resulted in a new constitution. In Colombia, the appearance of an unfair tax law led to protests by young people demanding free university education for the poorest and the

improvement of public education at basic levels. In Mexico, a public security crisis has exposed systemic violence against women and triggered one of the region's strongest feminist movements, reflecting on how social and urban structures leave women defenseless. In the US, the Black Lives Matter protests have raised awareness about how the legal system can be rigged to disproportionately affect groups because of their race. What lessons can we learn from the protests in Chile, Colombia, or Mexico? What can urban planners learn from how urban spaces serve, to some extent, to shape or limit contact between people? Future research should seek alternatives to traditional, colonized development approached; instead, planners should pursue co-production of knowledge within the local context, embracing a de-colonized practice that places groups that are typically excluded in the center of the discussion.

La Campana, like so many other informal settlements around the world, will continue to face challenges such as eviction, displacement, and gentrification. The economic systems present in most of the world almost guarantee this. The good news is that it is also not something that urban planners must face alone. Informal communities have developed the tools for resilience and hope. Urban planners have the opportunity to utilize this abundant strength and reaching enormous potential.

Appendix

Appendix 1. PDF Format.



FORMATO DE SOLICITUD VECINOS CERRO DE LA CAMPANA

Solicitante:

Tel. Solicitante:

Correo Electrónico:

Dependencia de Gobierno:

Con atención a:

Fecha:

Folio Interno:

Folio Dependencia:

Dirección del lugar donde se solicita apoyo:

Descripción del problema del que se solicita apoyo:

Esta solicitud es apoyada por los siguientes vecinos:

NOMBRE:	FIRMA:
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Recuerde llevar una copia de la solicitud y que le pongan sello de recibido por la dependencia correspondiente.

Se anexa INE de los vecinos / Se anexan croquis de ubicación y fotografías.

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Recuerde llevar una copia de la solicitud y que le pongan sello de recibido por la dependencia correspondiente.
Se anexa INE de los vecinos / Se anexan croquis de ubicación y fotografías.

Appendix 2. State of Nuevo León invitation to first session on December 13, 2021.



LEON STAINES DÍAZ

En las pasadas elecciones Nuevo León pidió, mediante su voto, una nueva forma de hacer política y un modo distinto de gobernar; **autoridades defensoras de la Ley que no toleren actos de corrupción y gobiernos abiertos** en los que todos y todas participemos en el diseño del destino común.


Por ello hoy tenemos la **oportunidad histórica de definir los problemas, diseñar los objetivos, definir las prioridades y trazar la ruta que habrá de llevarnos a las transformaciones anheladas.** Llegó el momento de convertir esa oportunidad en un Plan Estatal que nos incluya a todas y todos.

Conociendo tu trayectoria y, muy especialmente, la aportación que tu trabajo le ha dado a nuestro Estado, tenemos el honor de invitarte a participar en los **Foros Metropolitanos** que definirán los problemas a los que queremos responder en el **Plan Estatal de Desarrollo 2022-2027** que en esta ocasión será en **materia de movilidad** y se realizará el día **13 de diciembre de 2021** en un horario de **9:30 a 13:30 horas** en el **LABNL Lab Cultural Ciudadano** (Antiguo Palacio Federal) con Dirección en C. Washington, entre Zaragoza y Zuazua S/N, Centro de Monterrey, N.L. Si tu agenda te lo permite, te queremos invitar a que formes parte de la **mesa "Desarrollo orientado al transporte"**.


El talento, aptitudes y compromiso que te distinguen serán fundamentales para la construcción del nuevo Nuevo León que todas y todos deseamos. Será un privilegio que te sumes para construir la visión de la nueva política.

Ingresar como invitado/a en el siguiente enlace o QR, para generar tu pase de acceso y agilizar el ingreso.

Foro Regional de Consulta



<https://bit.ly/3o78d1f>



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Appendix 3. State of Nuevo León invitation to first session on February 2, 2022.

Plan Estatal de Desarrollo 2022-2027



LEÓN STAINES

Es un gusto saludarle, esperando que se encuentre con salud.

Como usted sabe, en diciembre pasado en el Gobierno del Estado de Nuevo León arrancamos el proceso de elaboración del **Plan Estatal de Desarrollo 2022-2027** con foros de diálogo regionales y metropolitanos.

Un siguiente paso es la realización de las **mesas de trabajo con especialistas**, en las que se buscará **definir objetivos y estrategias de acción** para 13 temas clave que serán plasmadas en el documento del Plan Estatal de Desarrollo.

Conociendo su trayectoria y experiencia, tenemos el honor de invitarle a participar en la MESA DE TRABAJO DE DESARROLLO URBANO Y MOVILIDAD.

Debido a los recientes anuncios de prevención COVID-19, **dicha mesa se llevará a cabo, de manera virtual, el miércoles 2 de febrero de 2022 en un horario de 9:00 a 13:00 horas.**

La mesa de trabajo estará conformada por 30 especialistas y autoridades y tendrá una duración de 4 horas. Dicha sesión se dividirá en tres momentos:

1. Bienvenida y presentación de árboles de problemas
2. Elaboración de objetivos y estrategias
3. Teoría del cambio

Consideramos que su participación es fundamental para trazar las rutas que habrán de llevarnos a las transformaciones anheladas y a tener un Plan Estatal de Desarrollo que nos incluya a todas y todos.

Esta invitación es personal e intransferible. Le sugerimos tener una conexión estable para garantizar una buena calidad en la videollamada. Al final del evento, se le enviará un reconocimiento digital por su participación en la mesa.

Le envío un afectuoso saludo.

Atentamente,
Dra. Ximena Peredo Rodríguez



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