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The role of mobile policies in coalition building: The Barcelona model as coalition magnet in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro (1989–1996)

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Abstract

Research on policy mobility has tended to focus on what moves (e.g. policy models, templates) and who moves them (e.g. consultants, international organisations), with less attention paid to the relational politics of grounding dominant ideas in local policymaking. The ‘demand side’ at the end of the mobilisation process (e.g. local authorities and policy actors) is usually depicted as passive or as having stable interests. This assumption is problematic as it can reinforce taken-for-granted power asymmetries in the flow of urban policy ideas, particularly in cases where cities in the Global North are presented as ‘exporting sites’ for a Global South audience of ‘importing sites’. Drawing on the concept of policy ideas as ‘coalition magnets’ from policy studies, this article demonstrates how local policies are relationally produced by cosmopolitan policy actors on the ‘demand side’ who strategically mobilise circulating ideas as a tool for coalition building. We provide a relational comparative study of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro’s policy processes and urban outcomes in mobilising the Barcelona model of urban regeneration and strategic planning, drawing on evidence from interviews, document analysis and the biographies of key policy actors. We demonstrate the strategic importance of mobile policies for emerging political actors who employ them as a ‘coalition magnet’ to build support for their governments.

Keywords

Barcelona, coalition building, comparative urbanism, comparison, Latin America, policy mobilities, relational, urban politics

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摘要

关于政策流动性的研究往往侧重于哪些东西在流动（如政策模型、模板），以及哪些人在实现这种流动（如顾问、国际组织），但较少关注将主导思想根植于地方决策的关系政治。动员过程结束时的“需求方”（如地方当局和政策参与者）通常被描述为被动的或具有稳定的利益。这种假设是有问题的，因为它会强化城市政策思想流动中被视为理所当然的权力不对称，特别是在全球北方的城市被呈现为全球南方“进口站点”受众的“出口站点”的情况下。借鉴政策研究中政策理念作为“联盟磁铁”的概念，本文论证了地方政策是如何由“需求方”的世界性政策行为者以关系的方式产生的，他们从战略上动员通行的理念作为建立联盟的工具。我们提供了一个关系性比较研究，研究对象为布宜诺斯艾利斯和里约热内卢为实施“巴塞罗那式城市复兴和战略规划模式”而进行动员的政策过程和城市成果，其中，我们利用了访谈、文件分析和主要政策参与者传记所产生的证据。我们证明了流动政策对于新兴政治行为者的战略重要性，这些政治行为者利用流动政策作为“联盟磁铁”来建立对其政府的支持。

关键词

巴塞罗那、联盟建设、比较城市化、比较、拉丁美洲、政策流动性、关系性、城市政治

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Introduction

The website of the development corporation for Buenos Aires' Puerto Madero area proclaims that the organisation is 'internationally renowned for being responsible for one of the most successful urban projects in Latin America' (CAPM, 2011). The regeneration of the centrally located old port in the Argentinean capital started in 1989, with initial plans modelled after Barcelona's renewal of its waterfront. In nearby Brazil, consultants from Barcelona also advised the city of Rio de Janeiro in the elaboration of its first strategic plan in the early 1990s. The World Bank (1999: 5) praised the initiative as a 'laudable achievement' and the 'unprecedented success as an exercise in consensus-building and partnership'. Yet, in recounting his involvement in both experiences, the Catalan urban scholar/politician/consultant Borja (2010: 221–222) argued that 'in Latin America, the reception of the Barcelona model raises a big moral question' due to it being 'translated as one-off, scattered or

intermittent interventions ... in the prevailing neoliberal framework'.

What do these divergent accounts possibly tell us? Certainly, evaluations about the success or failure of policy transfer exercises are in the eye of the beholder. In this article, we examine this dynamic from the perspective of the local authorities and policy actors at the receiving end of mobilisation processes. We argue that the local politics of the 'demand side' have received insufficient attention from the policy mobility literature. This assumption is problematic as it can reinforce taken-for-granted power asymmetries in the direction of flow of urban policy ideas, particularly in cases where cities in the Global North are presented as 'exporting sites' for a Global South audience of 'importing sites'. Thus, we suggest an analytical framework seeing ideas as 'coalition magnets', a concept borrowed from policy studies, as a way to enable a relational comparative analysis of policy processes and urban outcomes (Robinson, 2011a; Ward, 2010).

Commentators in the policy mobilities literature routinely list the Barcelona model as a key example of an urban policy template that is globally circulated (Cochrane and Ward, 2012; McCann and Ward, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2010). It refers to a range of policies implemented in the city in the last three decades that significantly transformed the urban space and turned the city into a policy mecca (González, 2011). These references have circulated through political and professional networks with an important presence in Latin American cities. Such circulation has been structured through various networks including those of Latin American practitioners – as demonstrated in the cases of Medellín, Lima and Montevideo (Brand, 2013; Golda-Pongratz, 2007; Velut and Robin, 2005); through numerous inter-governmental cooperation programmes and bi-lateral agreements (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1994, 2004); via consulting services including on the regeneration of public spaces (e.g. Rosario), large-scale projects (e.g. Santo André) and mega-events (e.g. Rio, Monterrey; Jajamovich, 2012; Montaner et al., 2010; Silvestre, 2017); through institutional channels disseminating its planning methods like the Iberoamerican Centre of Strategic Urban Development (Steinberg, 2002); and under the tutelage of the World Bank and UN-Habitat through their institutional materials and training programmes in the region (Borja, 1996; Borja and Castells, 1997).

This is also the case of the cities of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, where a relationship with Catalan policymakers and professionals was articulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. We build upon debates in the policy mobilities literature to interrogate claims about policy actors on the ‘demand side’ using circulating templates to narrow policy debates along preferred ideological lines while furthering personal agendas (McCann, 2011; Peck and Theodore,

2010). We argue that with few exceptions there has been scarce empirical validation of such claims and critical examinations of mobilised policy models ‘on the ground’. The cases of the two South American cities are ideal for this as they present moments of change of urban policy paradigms facilitated by cosmopolitan policy actors seeking political support. These cases of political contingency and mobile local actors provide a theoretical contribution through a critique of the relative passivity and stability of interests often implicit in the literature. In order to capture the open-ended process of emerging political actors using circulating templates to build coalitions, we apply the concept of ‘coalition magnets’ to examine both support and resistance to policy agendas (Béland and Cox, 2016). We therefore combine elements of the literature on policy mobilities with policy studies to provide a more nuanced analytical framework of relational policymaking that accounts for the ‘particular, grounded, localised ways’ in which globalised policies find their expression (Cochrane, 2011: x).

This article proceeds with the following structure. In the next section, we review debates in the policy mobility literature with reference to the local politics of mobilised ideas. The following section presents the methods utilised in the two research projects supporting this article, and the relational comparative approach (Ward, 2010) adopted to bring them into dialogue. We then present our empirical material and focus on the strategic use of waterfront regeneration models and strategic planning with reference to Barcelona by policy actors in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro respectively. We confirm previous observations that the flow of policy models from one city to another is rarely linear, yet we underscore the importance of taking a relational approach in the analysis of local policymaking by examining ideas as ‘coalition magnets’. In conclusion, we argue

for a more nuanced analysis of the agency and situated practices of actors at the receiving end of the mobilisation process and suggest that a greater dialogue with policy studies could prove particularly helpful in this regard.

Grounding mobile policies as coalition magnets

The call to examine how ‘urban policies are produced in global-relational context’ (McCann and Ward, 2010: 176) has generated a productive line of research in the last decade, especially into the dynamics of circulation of urban expertise and in its translation into concrete local policies. Scholars have underscored the inherent politics present in the process of turning experiences into policy models, in their circulation and in their promotion (Cochrane and Ward, 2012; McCann, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2011; Sánchez, 2010). Despite the ‘fast policy’ quality of contemporary policymaking (Peck and Theodore, 2015), there is a need for caution to not fetishise the power of fast-moving ideas (McCann, 2011; Wood, 2015) and remain mindful that ‘policy is fundamentally territorial in that it is tied up with a whole set of locally dependent interests’ (McCann and Ward, 2010: 176). In reference to the ‘receiving end’ of the policy transfer process, three particular claims have been made about the relationship between mobilised ideas and the contingent processes of policymaking.

First, policies that work (Peck, 2011) are seen to ‘arrive with ready-made expert analysis, and/or moral authority’ (Sorensen, 2010: 135) that can preclude opposition while rendering the debate on technical terms (i.e. ‘how it works’). Second, mobilised ideas are rarely the result of a rational process of policymakers scanning the world (McCann, 2011) but are expressions of ideological alignments that pre-condition the transfer of

knowledge (Peck and Theodore, 2010). Third, circulating models are often used to support particular agendas and further local interests (Robinson, 2011b). Nevertheless, few studies have validated these claims and engaged in-depth with ‘how policy is localized’ (Temenos and Baker, 2015: 842), translated, interpreted, adapted (Healey, 2010) and also contested.

In particular, the demand side is more often than not displayed in relative passivity regarding the mobilisation process. The focus of agency has invariably been on powerful mobile actors actively promoting policy knowledge, such as ‘boosters’ and the ‘global consultocracy’ (McCann, 2011; Rapoport and Hult, 2017), with less attention paid to the ‘extrospective orientation’ (McCann, 2013) and practices of the actors on the demand side. Bunnell et al. (2018: 1067) have called for the need to pay greater attention to the ‘analysis of individual elected officials’ and to the ‘middling actors’ performing much of the translation tasks. Exceptions to this have been the analyses of Temenos and McCann (2012) and Wood (2014). In the former study, the authors demonstrated how local policymakers ‘imported’ a circulating sustainability framework as a ‘policy fix’ to narrow local planning debates to a direction that accommodated both economic growth and environmental concerns. In the latter study, the author examined how local intermediaries instrumentally connected international consultants with decision makers in the adoption of Bus Rapid Transit systems in South African cities (Wood, 2014). Both cases highlight ‘not only how policy is “made up” on the ground by drawing on circulating models’ (Temenos and McCann, 2012: 1394), but also the active role of local policy actors in preparing the ground for mobile policy templates in a way that is sensitive to the local political dynamics.

To a certain extent, both studies characterise local actors as stable interests and

uncontested forces. Our contribution to this discussion is to add another level of contingency in the mobilisation process, that of emerging policy actors seeking to position themselves in the political landscape by drawing on mobile ideas to build coalitions. In exploring the mobilisation of urban expertise from Barcelona, we analyse the 'ways in which apparently distant phenomena can be drawn in by political actors ... to develop political initiatives ... and to build political power and authority' (Cochrane, 2011: xi). Here, the Barcelona model is mobilised as a vaguely defined set of different policies implemented in that city that was decontextualised of its social, political and economic contexts in order to travel and appeal to different audiences. We examine the extent to which the model served what Béland and Cox (2016: 429) call 'coalition magnets'; policy ideas that are strategically used to 'frame interests, mobilize supporters and build coalitions'. The authors contend that highly ambiguous and polysemic ideas can better serve in the formation of a coalition than narrowly defined ideas, something that we argue to be particularly relevant for examining emerging political forces and their ability to gather support, as in the case of the new mayors of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Following Béland and Cox (2016), in the empirical section of this article three processes are examined in the roles of waterfront regeneration and strategic planning via Barcelona to serve as coalition magnets. First, it is analysed how these were presented as novel constructions that reframed existing policy problems in creative ways. Second, it is examined how these ideas were taken up and promoted by key actors in the policy process. Finally, it is evaluated how these new policy ideas served as coalition magnets to bring together actors who were not previously engaged by 'awakening' a 'policy preference in the[ir] minds ... [on a] particular

issue' (Béland and Cox, 2016: 429). The next section details the methods used in the research of the two case studies and in their consequent comparative analysis.

Methods

In this article, we offer a 'relational comparative approach' (Ward, 2010) to examine urban policy change in two cities. The relational aspect lies in underscoring how local policymaking mobilises knowledge through relations with other cities, and in examining how globally circulating practices are negotiated at the local level (McCann and Ward, 2010). We straddle between the 'spatio-historical specificities' of our two cases as well as the 'interconnections' they share (Hart, 2018: 373). The comparison is not, in a more traditional sense, a 'systematic study of similarity and difference among cities or urban processes' (Nijman, 2007: 1). Rather, our focus is on processes and relations, not things: 'the principle is that elements, things, and structures do not exist prior to the processes and relations that create, sustain, or undermine them' (Hart, 2018: 378). We are interested in comparing both the policy relations of the two cities with the same site of policy expertise and the ensuing situated and contingent processes of grounding such knowledge. Following Robinson (2016), we use tracing as a methodological tactic while employing a twofold comparative strategy: 'genetic' in following the shared policy connections in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro with Barcelona; and 'generative' in examining how these engagements presented similar features but also had different outcomes. In summary, tracing in a relational comparative approach 'involves outlining the connections and their influence on the comparable instance' (Wood, 2019: 8).

The analysis draws on two separate larger studies of mobile policies and relational local policymaking. Carried out independently,

both projects focused on the changing paradigms of urban planning policies in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro and their material expression through large-scale regeneration projects. In both cases, the presence of consultants from Barcelona and the articulation of policies with reference to that city were an important feature and provided a methodological entry point to think comparatively.

The first project focused on the Puerto Madero development from 1989 to 2017. The empirical material on which it is based included 25 interviews undertaken between June 2010 and January 2016. It also included documentary research of Puerto Madero Corporation's archives, policy documents and newspaper articles. The second project examined the urban politics in Rio de Janeiro from the advent of a conservative local government in 1993 until 2016. A total of 66 interviews were undertaken between June 2012 and January 2015, supplemented with the analysis of local newspapers and official documents related to the city's strategic plan. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. We identified individuals involved in drafting and implementing the two policies (e.g. names listed in official documents, proposals, committees) as well as those involved through consultations (listed in minutes) or who presented public objections (e.g. professional associations, political opposition). This was combined with snowball sampling, as some participants suggested other names and facilitated the recruitment of some of the elite actors. Altogether, the interviews included former mayors, heads of the planning office, Catalan consultants, senior civil servants and other actors involved in the production of the local policies.

In tracing policy connections, we 'probe the backstory' of processes rendering certain cities as models (Ward, 2013) from the perspective of Southern cities, while considering how such practices were first disseminated in the region. In order to avoid the presentism

sometimes articulated as a critique to the policy mobilities literature (Harris and Moore, 2013; Jacobs and Lees, 2013), we reconstitute historical events and trace policy exchanges through an analysis of key policy actors. Their career paths are historicised (Jajamovich, 2016) through biographies, publications and semi-structured interviews, while examining their circulation in international networks of policy and professional practice. This allows us to highlight the role of individuals in circulating urban policies and plans (Healey, 2010; Larner and Laurie, 2010), and to introduce a historical perspective in grappling with why and how local actors choose to 'learn' from the Barcelona experience in a context where other port redevelopment experiences, public-private partnerships and strategic planning strategies were available.

This, however, posed some methodological challenges. Official documents are designed to tell stories that smooth out contested histories and give linear accounts of success. In addition, 'public biographies' and interviews involve seamless post-facto rationalisations in which ambivalence, multiple motivations, dilemmas and failures are concealed (Chamberlain and Leydesdorft, 2004). Thus, it was necessary to combine and compare accessible materials with the more private stories that make up personal biographies and careers. We proceeded to draw together the interviews with multiple primary sources relating to the different stages and stakeholders involved (such as civil servants, elected officials, business leaders) and thus to reconstruct the relational character of the processes under analysis.

Policy change and the circulation of the Barcelona model in Latin America

The circulation of policy knowledge analysed here took place at a time of significant

change in the context of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. Starting in the 1970s and throughout the 1990s, Argentina and Brazil faced profound structural economic and political transformations that accompanied economic crises and that put an end to the previous 'expansive' and 'developmental' cycle. In both cases, the return to democracy was recent, with military dictatorships ending in Argentina in 1983 and in Brazil in 1985. The International Monetary Fund requested the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in condition to obtain loans with the ensuing neoliberal macroeconomic policies having a direct impact in worsening social inequality (Portes and Roberts, 2005). In 1989, both countries held general elections won by candidates committed to a free-market model that included economic liberalisation, the privatisation of state-owned companies and partnerships with the private sector.

The city of Buenos Aires, whose mayor Carlos Grosso was appointed by the president of the country – it was still not an autonomous government – was also implementing a privatisation programme. Grosso was the leader of the Peronist party in the city and declared his preference for 'a social democratic neoliberalism, like that of [Spanish President] Felipe González' over what he described as Menem's 'Thatcherite' policies' (quoted in Levitsky, 2003: 148). His mayoral term lasted until his resignation amid corruption charges in 1992. The Puerto Madero redevelopment project was the hallmark of his government, and contributed to boosting his reputation at the national level. Architect Alfredo Garay was recruited as Secretary of Urban Planning, having previously worked for other local governments during the 1980s. Garay maintained and reinforced previous relations with Spanish connections like Jordi Borja, and played an important role in the Puerto Madero redevelopment project, including

the mobilisation of Catalan expertise to Buenos Aires.

Elected in 1992, Rio de Janeiro's mayor Cesar Maia campaigned on the ticket of disciplining the 'urban disorder' – in reference to increasing economic informality and criminality – while extolling the virtues of new management instruments such as strategic planning as a way to modernise the public administration (Maia, 1998). Maia credited his knowledge about the instrument to his foreign training while a federal congressional representative in the 1980s in political programmes run by the Germany-based Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Lima Júnior, 2010; Maia, 2004). There, he learnt about European experiences in developing strategic plans and the need to work with actors directly involved with the production of the city. He then recruited Luiz Paulo Conde, a practising architect and an influential scholar who quickly became his right-hand person and was later elected as his successor. Conde, who was of Spanish descent and had professional links with Barcelona, became a key intermediary in establishing a connection with the Catalan consultants.

On the part of the consultants, Latin America was identified as 'a significant market as long as there is a generous offer to transfer technology, training of human capital and modern infrastructures' (Borja, 1992: 23–24). The years preceding and in the aftermath of the 1992 Olympic Games provided a conjunctural moment for the extra-municipal politics of Barcelona's City Hall, with numerous initiatives of international engagement taking place (McNeill, 2001). As head of the international relations office, Jordi Borja led many of these, particularly in Latin America where he had longstanding scholarly and personal connections (interview with Borja, November 2012). In 1989, he helped to create *Tecnologías Urbanas Barcelona SA (TUBSA)*, a holding of city-based public and private companies offering

consulting services in diverse areas such as traffic engineering, sanitation, geoprocessing and public management. It offered the ‘transfer of know-how’ to other governments and assistance in the preparation of loan applications to international development agencies. It was claimed that the initiative demonstrated that ‘Barcelona City Hall was the only European institution that, through its companies, ha[d] undertaken the adventure of opening foreign markets ... and through TUBSA, Barcelona export[ed] itself’ (Farreras, 1989: 47).

In the two cases that follow, the first interactions of the Barcelona model in the region are analysed within a particular period (1989–1996) marked by the hosting of the 1992 Olympic Games in that city, considered a turning point in ‘putting the city on the map’ (Borja, 1996: 22). In other words, at the time Barcelona was still considered ‘a secondary city and of limited international exposure’ (Borja, 1996: 22). The presence of the Catalan experts in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro was presented as an important sign of prestige in policy reports, while the local media reported how the model was starting to be ‘exported’ and how the work in the two cities would be important to the opening of new markets (Borja, 1993). We proceed to the cases by tracing the connections established between the cities that allowed knowledge to circulate (‘pathways of tracing’, as in Wood, 2019), by interrogating the consultants’ ‘traces’ in policy documents supported by accounts from policy actors, and analysing the effects of these engagements on urban outcomes.

Buenos Aires’ Puerto Madero waterfront redevelopment

Tracing the Buenos Aires–Barcelona connection

Urban proposals for Puerto Madero developed by foreign experts can be traced back

to the late 1920s with Le Corbusier’s ideas for Buenos Aires and its port. Also, and more related to the Buenos Aires–Barcelona connection, contacts between experts and politicians from both cities began many years before the redevelopment project started in the 1990s, albeit within different political contexts.

Architect Alfredo Garay’s career path is related to that of Jordi Borja. He went into exile after the 1976 coup d’état in Argentina, going first to Belgium and later moving to Mexico where he worked as an urban planner and met other experts such as Borja. After the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of the democratic transition, Garay returned to Argentina and started working in the public sector. During that period, he published articles in books edited by Borja and supported by the Argentine–Hispanic cooperation programme. In the 1990s, he headed the Secretariat of Urban Planning of the city of Buenos Aires, where he oversaw the Puerto Madero Project.

In a typical case of urban policy tourism (González, 2011), mayor Carlos Grosso travelled to Barcelona in 1989 before taking over the Intendancy of Buenos Aires. According to Borja (1990: 9), Grosso was ‘invited to participate in ... [a] seminar on international transfer of urban technologies. He then disclosed that one of his first initiatives would be to recover the old port (“Puerto Madero”) for the city and required an important international collaboration’.

Personal contacts played a role in this process. According to Borja, ‘Grosso was a friend of my [Argentinian] girlfriend – with whom I married. He came to the wedding as well. And besides, both my partner and I were friends of Fredy Garay’ (interview with Borja, October 2011). Garay, on the other hand, explained that ‘... Jordi [Borja] was a rare character in Barcelona because he worked as deputy mayor, that is, he was elected but he was dedicated to international

policy (...) Jordi was travelling around Latin America all the time' (interview with Garay, August 2010).

Cultural ties were also important. According to Jorge Moscato, a former member of the urban planning council during Grosso's government, 'Barcelona had and has a huge irradiation capacity. How many cities in Latin America have taken the Barcelona model? ... Barcelona is Paris but in Spanish; it has a faster and closer translation' (interview with Moscato, October 2011).

In summary, Barcelona–Buenos Aires connections had a history before the Puerto Madero redevelopment, juxtaposing experts and policy actors' personal contacts, cultural ties and urban knowledge networks. But, as we will see next, only under certain conjunctures would these connections be materialised as large-scale urban projects.

Restructuring Buenos Aires and the Catalan proposal

The mobilisation of favoured models and practices 'requires politically structured fields of ongoing "experimentation"... [and] ongoing and "grounded" forms of institutional ideological restructuring' (Peck, 2011: 21). It is thus necessary to analyse political and economic frameworks in which exchanges with Barcelona's consultants were situated and grounded, and to interrogate the problems they sought to solve. Following Béland and Cox's (2016) analytical framework, local politics of mobilised knowledge need to be analysed in order to show how the Barcelona model of waterfront regeneration was presented as a novel construction that reframed existing policy problems, how these ideas were taken up and promoted by key actors in the policy process and how they served – or not – as coalition magnets to bring together actors who were not previously engaged

The Historic Puerto Madero Corporation (CAPMSA) was created as a public entity,

tasked with developing a financial, regulatory and physical plan that would secure the development of the port, reflecting – and producing – wider changes in urban governance and management. In 1989, the federal government transferred ownership of this sector of the port to the new corporation which 'would receive no public resources besides the land transfer and would generate its own revenue to cover operating costs' (Garay et al., 2013: 3).

CAPMSA could mediate jurisdictional problems because it incorporated local and national government agents. It was integrated by a six-member board of directors – four representing the national government and two representing the city government – and a professional management body. Initially, the management structure was integrated by around 30 people who carried out the daily operation. Its presidency rotated yearly between the two levels of governments represented (Garay et al., 2013).

CAPMSA presented a public–private model of urban management reflexive of the neoliberal policies pursued under Menem's presidency. It was an active part of the emergence of entrepreneurial urban governance arrangements (Ward, 2006) in Buenos Aires. Although it is a public entity, it works autonomously from traditional local legislative powers in order to enhance the development of the area. That is, it is free from civil service rules and bureaucratic procedures.

The Catalan experience in the redevelopment of the port area and the strategic urban planning perspective helped Grosso and Garay to reframe existing policy problems: how to urbanise the port area in a context of economic and state crisis and beyond modernist urban planning; and how to engage the national government in this initiative. As Garay recounted:

What I learned with them [the Catalan experts] is to look at how the real estate market works. In an operation of this size, you need to

understand who are the ones who build the city and what products they make ... I learned that we didn't have to think about this as merely an architectural project, but what conditions you have to have for investors in large buildings to prefer to come here and not to another side. (Interview with Garay, August 2010)

Thus, CAMPSA also epitomised a change in urban planners' role as an investment promoter. According to Garay, urban planners should be 'capable not only of designing well, but of setting up businesses that mean work, economic movement, convincing others to take risks to get out of economic recession' (quoted in Gorelik and Silvestri, 1990: 22).

The Puerto Madero redevelopment project was also part of a wider strategy seeking to avoid Buenos Aires' urban sprawl (Garay, 2007). After the creation of CAPMSA, mayor Grosso with Garay's advice commissioned Catalan consultants to create a master plan for Puerto Madero, through a cooperation programme signed in 1985. This agreement involved the input of the European Associate Consultants (CEA) – formed by Catalan architect Joan Busquets and the economist Joan Alemany with the collaboration of Borja, as head of TUBSA.

In July 1990, they proposed the 'Strategic Plan for Historic Puerto Madero' (SPHPM) (CEA, 1990). Secretary Garay explained that the involvement of Catalan experts 'was a way to legitimize that policy' (interview with Garay, August 2010), and in this way it was expected to serve as a coalition magnet to bring together actors who were not previously engaged.

In the introduction to the plan, Borja positioned it as the first phase of a broader cooperation, which was intended to strengthen links between Buenos Aires and Barcelona and their respective enterprises and experts:

The development of the Strategic Plan can and should lead to a much closer

collaboration between Buenos Aires and Barcelona, between companies and professionals from Argentina and Spain ... a mixed partnership (or more than one) Hispanic-Argentinean can be an effective instrument to manage a cooperation that can cover the urbanization of the area and the management of projects, the execution of action programs and the selection of investors. (Borja, 1990: 10–11)

The SPHPM was a project-led planning proposal with an emphasis on urban management and urban design, while presenting strong critiques to regulatory modernist planning. This project offered a high density of residential and commercial land use as a means of attracting investments and ensuring the project's economic viability, thereby orientating the proposal to a specific and exclusive socioeconomic group. In a context of economic and state crisis, linkages to public–private partnerships were also developed within the proposed engineering management component; an administration system with public initiative and control (setting the priorities, timing and scale of operations) and private involvement and financing.

A coalition magnet? Contestations and outcomes

Despite being championed by key policy actors, international experts and consultants, the plan received strong public criticism. It generated resistance that led to changes within the local context, thereby establishing a series of discussions on the links between plans and projects, public and private actors and foreign and local actors. The Central Society of Architects (SCA) – the association of architects of the city of Buenos Aires – contested the legitimacy of the foreign experts, criticised the lack of involvement of local architects as well as the absence of a city-wide comprehensive plan that included the Puerto Madero project and proclaimed that the SPHPM was

dominated by real estate interests (Keselman and Del Franco, 1991). It recommended halting the process in order to review the programme, project and implementation strategies through consensus building and broader participation.

In defence of the local government perspective and attacking modernist urban planning perspectives, Garay argued that Puerto Madero implied a shift in state intervention:

Puerto Madero is not a single large-scale intervention ... it is basically a joint venture between a company that owns the land and one or several firms that make the investment in the infrastructure, sell the lots and others that buy a lot and build a building. (Garay, quoted in Summa, 1991: 10)

Due to the criticisms and conflicts generated, the original SPHPM was discarded. Local architects were subsequently involved, and in July 1991 the SCA organised a competition of ideas supported by the City Council of Buenos Aires. The abandonment of the SPHPM and the involvement of the SCA guaranteed wider political support and that a broader coalition would be established. The public contest brought together 'actors whose perceived interests or policy preferences had previously placed them at odds with one another' (Béland and Cox, 2016: 429). In other words, the contest worked 'to retool' the 'coalition magnet': while some original provisions were maintained, changes were made without detriment to the larger conceptual framing of the policy 'problem'. For instance, while the coverage of land use was reduced, the SCA no longer claimed that a wider comprehensive plan was needed. The combination of sale systems and land grants presented in the Catalan proposal was also left behind in favour of simply prioritising sale systems. Mayor Grosso and secretary Garay supported the involvement of the SCA in the project, retaining the main

suggestions of the Spanish consultancy: a management system with public initiative and private funding.

In summary, while the SPHPM was finally rejected and the international consultants were no longer involved, strategic urban planning and project-led planning remained. Political contingency was part of this process. Far away from passivity and the stability of interests, the emerging political actors tested and consequently altered it in order to enable a policy coalition to take hold.

Rio de Janeiro's strategic plan

Tracing the Rio–Barcelona connection

Rio's mayor Cesar Maia first came in contact with strategic plans after visiting Madrid in the early 1990s, when he was introduced to the work of consulting group Arthur Andersen in the development of the plan in the city (Maia, 1998). Keen to emulate the practice in his government, the reference would shift to Barcelona after Borja visited Rio in 1992 and was introduced to the secretary of urban planning, Luiz Paulo Conde (interview with Borja, November 2012). The two actors circulated in different networks, as the architect recounted: 'I knew [Barcelona's head of planning department, architect Oriol] Bohigas ... Jordi was more of a sociologist, like [Manuel] Castells. They were not architects' (Lima Júnior, 2010: 151). The two discussed opportunities to work together, including the experience of Barcelona with its first strategic plan.

Strategic planning was defined by the consultants as a management tool for 'conceiving a desirable future, and for defining the means to get there' (Forn and Pascual, 1995: 13). It consisted of a diagnosis of the current situation of the city, the setting of social/economic/environmental objectives to be reached and an identification of policy responses to achieve them. Promoted as a

response to global economic restructuring processes, it argued for a consensual vision to be defined by public and private actors and materialised through strategic urban projects to make the city more competitive (Borja and Castells, 1997). The increasing interest in the instrument led the consultants to draw on the method implemented in Barcelona and to offer it as part of their services.

After returning from a fact-finding trip to Barcelona, Conde pitched TUBSA services to the mayor (Maia, 1998). The relationship was sealed with the organisation of a seminar held in Rio in 1993 that presented Barcelona's urban policies to an audience of senior civil servants. Participants learned details about the transformation of Barcelona into 'a European city in the list of the great urban centres and present at all the comparative rankings, including investment and analysis on services and transports' (Forn, 1993: 12).

The selection of the policy model to follow in this case confirms the claim that objects of emulation are chosen by their 'representational power' and the policy imaginary of the demand side (Peck and Theodore, 2010). According to a senior planning officer who worked closely with Conde, the architect argued to the mayor: 'let's go with Barcelona because Rio looks more like Barcelona, I think the issue of public space has more to offer' (interview with senior planner, October 2013). Strategic planning *made in* Barcelona thus arrived in Rio as a ready-made policy template facilitated by the international activities of local policy actors. However, this was not an isolated episode. Maia credited to his administration a 'systematic approach to municipal diplomacy' that stimulated the travel of civil servants and information exchange (interview with Maia, December 2013). Citing examples taken from France, Italy and Spain, the mayor argued that these activities facilitated

a learning process from minor questions such as 'designing classrooms' to wider issues such as 'sustainability'. Nevertheless, none of these would rival the impact created by strategic planning.

Strategic planning as coalition magnet

The Rio de Janeiro of the early 1990s was a receptive ground for the 'polysemic idea' represented by strategic planning. Whilst the social agendas for housing and access to public services became dominant since the return to democracy, the 'rolling out' of neo-liberal policies coordinated at the national level emphasised the limited capacity of the state to address demands while championing the private sector as a partner. The ability of strategic planning to serve as a coalition magnet displayed three qualities. First, it framed existing policy problems through a narrative of positioning the city in relation to globalising processes. The rising levels of unemployment, violence, informality and deindustrialisation were framed as indicators of an 'urban crisis' that required a collective response. The loss of the federal capital status of Rio was articulated to resonate more strongly by arguing that the city presented 'a scenario of relative stagnation, low self-esteem and an undefined position in relation to its future and its role' (PCRJ, 1994: 1). This required a strategy to 'define a regional positioning conscious that at the end of this century cities will be even closer and integrated in a global network' (PCRJ, 1994: 1).

Normative claims about how cities should respond to the new economic orthodoxy dominated the consultancy reports. It argued for the need to change the 'conditions for attracting capital, investments and high skills', while asserting that '[i]n today's world the city has to be competitive' (PCRJ, 1996: 11). Cities such as Barcelona, Madrid and San Francisco were referenced for having accepted the 'challenge for change' and for

identifying projects that made them ‘more attractive for the branches of transnational companies’ (PCRJ, 1993: 5). The leadership of public and private actors and the mobilisation of society were also presented as necessary conditions, claiming that ‘[o]nly in this way is it possible to create channels and processes for participation that enable planning to deliver and to continue as it is done in the private sector’ (PCRJ, 1995: 8).

Second, key policy actors such as the mayor and the secretary of planning quickly embraced and promoted the instrument, adopting the idea, as Béland and Cox (2016: 441) suggest, ‘to advocate not only for specific proposals, but for conceptual understandings of policy issues and problems that legitimate and build support for their proposals’. Lima Júnior (2010) analysed how strategic planning appealed to Maia’s self-styled presentation as a pragmatic leader while enabling him to articulate support for his government. It afforded him to be seen as a cosmopolitan and modernising mayor. He was reported to have circulated copies of chapters of Borja and Castells’ book *Local and Global* to his cabinet staff (Menezes, 2000) which describe how cities had to reinvent themselves. In reference to Conde, local commentators described strategic planning as ‘heaven-sent’ for giving the secretary the legitimacy to confront (demoralised) traditional planning sectors within the municipality (interview with urban scholar, December 2011). The secretary made sweeping institutional reforms to facilitate project-led planning and to enable ‘architects to become responsible for the production of space in the city’ (interview with architect, November 2013).

Third, strategic planning enabled these two emerging political actors to engage with other relevant partners. Following the recommendation of the consultants, they sought the support of the local business associations. The chair of the Chamber of Commerce of Rio de Janeiro (ACRJ)

recounted that although having limited previous interactions with them, they invited him to work together, to which he responded: “‘That’s all I want!’”. That’s how the idea of the strategic plan was conceived’ (interview with business leader, November 2013). For the ACRJ, an institution representing the interests of local private companies, the participation opened a space of institutional engagement at a time when waves of violence were affecting businesses activities. The chair garnered the support from other groups to pay for TUBSA consulting fees, while the municipality facilitated the secondment of staff and contributions in kind (PCRJ, 1993).

Public participation was stressed as the main virtue of strategic planning, with objectives defined according to a consensus. However, some participants highlighted the tokenistic character of the process of consultation and how it legitimised pre-defined agendas:

It looked like a way for the government to try to do a plan that it believed was participatory. Actually, it wasn’t ... you didn’t have important debates. The city hall presented its projects saying, ‘I will do this, I will do that’, they were going ahead anyway. It was an attempt to leverage support for the projects of the city hall. (Interview with former head of municipal planning institute, November 2013)

The group responsible for steering Rio de Janeiro’s strategic plan brought together a range of actors with varied interests. The final strategic plan presented in 1996 conciliated the agendas of these groups that influenced and defined the debates. It outlined themes, objectives and aims, while listing projects already in progress as strategic for the future of the city (PCRJ, 1996).

Contestations and outcomes

The publication of Rio’s strategic plan coincided with increasing support for Maia’s

government. The media coverage highlighted the ‘truce for the future’ (Jornal do Brasil, 1995) while urging mayoral candidates running in the 1996 elections to pledge their commitment to abide by the plan. It was described as a turning point from turbulent times, as if the city was ‘awakening from a long and dark winter’ (O Globo, 1996: 6). The plan was instrumental for two outcomes: for facilitating a political coalition and for displacing instruments of a more participatory character.

The newly formed coalition successfully supported the mayoral election of Secretary Conde to succeed Maia in 1996. The relationship between the municipality and business groups became more straightforward with the creation of an urban development agency chaired by the head of the ACRJ. Maia returned to office in 2000 and was subsequently re-elected, although internal conflicts within his party led him to distance himself from Conde and the ACRJ.

Dissonant voices came from trade unions and academics, critical of the arbitrary frameworks dictated by the steering group (Azevedo, 1995; Vainer, 2000). Most importantly, the institutionalisation of strategic planning marginalised instruments like participatory master planning, enshrined in the 1988 federal constitution to make urban policy making processes more democratic. According to a leader of the opposition, it institutionalised a competing rationale that ‘served to dismantle the previous democratic interventions’ (interview with former councillor, December 2013). Key planning staff responsible for participatory planning processes were also directly affected:

When there are major changes – in this case above all a political orientation was pushed back and a new group came to power – it is natural for relocation to take place ... this happened to me, to my colleagues. We had to part in other ways. (Interview with planning official, October 2013)

In retrospect, TUBSA consultants evaluated the results as limited. Borja (2012: 170–171) claimed that the plan was ‘reduced to the complicity between the city government and business leaders’, with no ‘effective popular participation’. Another consultant complained that rather than becoming a key policy guidance, ‘what was left was a more ideological vision than a practical one’ (interview with consultant, June 2012). Nevertheless, as it was described, the gains in mobilising strategic planning to Rio by emerging political actors had less to do with the final product than with gathering support and establishing a coalition base. The following final section evaluates the comparative experiences of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro in mobilising the Barcelona model.

Conclusion

This article has used the analytical framework of ‘ideas as coalition magnets’ to examine how emerging policy actors mobilise circulating policies in an attempt to build support for their governments and for key political projects. It demonstrates how local policies are relationally produced by, on the one hand, mobilising knowledge through relations with other cities, and on the other hand, emphasising the contingent processes of gathering support but also of contestation. It thus helps provide a more nuanced lens to examine how mobile policies are grounded and crafted through the coming together of different interests claiming to replicate successful practices. The policy mobilities literature often depicts the demand side as consisting of pre-existing stable coalitions with relative passivity in the attempt to localise models. The article contributes by adding a level of contingency to the process when new policy actors mobilise policy ideas as an instrument for coalition building.

The analyses of policy change examined emphasise ‘both the territorial and the relational histories and geographies that are behind [the] production and (re)production’ of cities (Ward, 2010: 480). In the two cases, we put to work Robinson’s (2016) suggestion to use ‘tracing’ as a methodological tactic to allow a basis of comparison in two ways. First was by tracing the ‘genetic empirical connections’ of ‘related but distinctive, urban outcomes’ (Robinson, 2016: 22). Starting from the engagements of local policymakers in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro with experts from Barcelona – evidenced in the material ‘traces’ of policy and planning documents (see Wood, 2019) – we followed the career paths of key policy actors (mayors, heads of planning departments, consultants) to find that both policy ‘exporters’ as well as ‘importers’ were highly mobile, had entangled trajectories of political and professional practice and established strategic relations when opportunities arose. This attenuates assumed power asymmetries in the process of policy circulation.

Secondly, the cases also demonstrate how tracing can be used as ‘generative’ of conceptual insights through ‘theoretical conversations which enable global urban studies’ (Robinson, 2016: 23). The extra-municipal networks that Barcelona city hall established with other cities created what Wood (2019) calls ‘pathways of tracing’, through which circulated not only particular spatial strategies to restructure the urban space (such as strategic plans or waterfront regeneration) but also a lens to interpret globalising processes and how local authorities should respond to it. At the conjuncture of socio-political and economic changes in Argentina and Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s, the lessons resonated with dominant discourses of neoliberal globalisation at the time and helped to naturalise partnerships between the public and private sectors (stimulated by

SAPs and initiated at the central government level). We applied the analytical framework of ideas as coalition magnets to enable a processual approach capable of illuminating three moments in the strategic and contested grounding of the Barcelona model. The first was by examining how the consultants were able to skilfully ‘define, disseminate and establish the relevance of the idea for the policy prescriptions they advocate[d]’ (Béland and Cox, 2016: 441). The second was by analysing how key policy actors, such as the mayors and heads of planning offices, identified in such lessons elements to advance their political and professional projects. The third was by interrogating how this was employed to create new coalitions with some elite groups while strategically distancing from others. In Rio, this resulted in important political dividends as the making of the strategic plan helped a political group to come together and to give them an identity. In the Buenos Aires case this was more contested, as one vocal stakeholder opposed its exclusion and it was later incorporated with the model further appropriated. In both cases, the mobilisation of policies from elsewhere, rather than extending or reaffirming power, was used by new actors to develop their power base and to build coalitions. In this way, linking the literature of policy mobilities to that of policy studies furthers the way local policymaking can be examined through a relational perspective.

Further research is required into deliberate attempts to ground mobile policy models as a strategy to generate political support and set the policy agenda, especially in the Global South. More nuanced views of the power relations between sites characterised as ‘exporters’ and ‘importers’ can reveal the more levelled ground of interaction and historical entanglement that bring together not only politicians, practitioners and consultants but also activists and social movements

who are enrolled in the development and circulation of policy ideas. This is very timely given the current volatility in (but not restricted to) current Latin America politics, with political ‘outsiders’ challenging the status quo being elected. If uncertainty is a fundamental feature of contemporary politics, the mobilisation of circulating policy ideas offers the prospect for emerging political forces to question existing arrangements and create stability (Blyth, 2010), and thus requires researchers to unravel new forms of knowledge networks.

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