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Dipartimento Interateneo di Scienze, Progetto e Politiche del Territorio  
Eccellenza MIUR 2018-2022

Doctoral Dissertation  
Doctoral Program in Urban & Regional Development (34<sup>th</sup> Cycle)

# **Addressing dynamic spatial governance landscapes in Latin America**

## **An inquiry into spatial governance and planning systems in six Latin American countries**

By

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation aims at broadening the ongoing comparative Spatial Governance and Planning Systems (SGPSs) studies to the global South by addressing the dynamic spatial governance landscapes in Latin America. Stemming from six selected Latin American case studies –namely Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay– this dissertation broadens both theoretically and methodologically the ongoing SGPSs comparative studies by framing the concept of the ‘other institutionality’ and by showing the mutual interaction between SGPSs and the global urban policy.

The current existing SGPSs literature mainly focused on global North countries may prove ill-equipped when *tested* to contexts that are characterised by a different institutionality. In several global South low- and middle-income countries characterised by an incremental plot-by-plot urbanism, spatial planning frequently occurs as the final stage of the urban development process, when the land occupation and the building activities have already taken place. This ‘inverse planning’ is related to ‘a form of selective spatial regulation and governance’, which further complicates the ‘dynamic landscapes of spatial governance’ hardly addressed by the SGPSs comparative studies. In a number of Latin American countries, the existing legal frameworks often do not correspond to consequent spatial planning practices, by leading to several tensions symptomatic of an ungluing between the SGPSs and the planning reality they are supposed to address. Furthermore, the recently introduced global urban policy documents (e.g. the New Urban Agenda) have settled a common ground within which national and local governments are acting and tailoring their urban policy discourses and tools, which are part of the SGPSs themselves.



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This dissertation firstly explores the functioning of six Latin American SGPSs in terms of legal frameworks affecting spatial governance, spatial planning tools, discourses and current practices. Among the six cases, two of them –namely Bolivia and Ecuador– have been chosen for inquiring about the mutual interaction between SGPSs and the global urban policy. The research methods include literature survey and document analysis, expert interviews, participant observation and consultancy activities.

The heterogeneity of the six selected cases and their peculiarities highlights that, even if spatial planning tools exist, they are often outdated and do not respond to the current societal needs, and the lack of participatory planning stands out as a common feature. When the state is not able to steer spatial transformations, the non-bureaucratised practices emerge from outside the official SGPS and conform the ‘other institutionality’ framed within this dissertation. In terms of theoretical contribution, this dissertation firstly shows that the concept of the ‘other institutionality’ can be useful to broaden the comparative SGPSs studies to the global South. Secondly, the research findings show that the mutual interaction between peculiar SGPSs characteristics (i.e. legislation, instruments, discourses and practices) and the global urban policy –based on the ‘comfortable landscape of the SGDs’– determines how the latter is localised. In terms of methodological contribution, this dissertation argues about the usefulness of adopting a policy mobilities ‘lens’ focused on the interplay between relationality and territoriality and the use of the ‘*a posteriori* comparison’ for bringing a ‘fresh viewpoint’ to the ongoing SGPSs studies.

Overall, rooted on the concept of the ‘other institutionality’ and by considering the interaction between the global urban policy and the local governance, this dissertation opens to a more fluid and broader understanding of SGPSs themselves for addressing their global comparability in Latin America and beyond.