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Participatory planning in the global South: the case of Sacaba, Bolivia

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Abstract

This paper builds on the southern turn in planning theory and its attempt to make participatory planning more attuned to the realities of cities in the global South. It presents an in-depth case study accounting for the historical development of participatory planning in Sacaba, Bolivia; first induced by Northern-based ideas and later transformed and rooted in the local indigenous Quechua worldview of Sumac Kawsay. The paper concludes by arguing that regardless of whether participatory ideals are rooted in the North or South, their influence in practice is dependent on testing, critical reflection and learning at both institutional and practitioner levels.

Keywords: Participatory planning, Southern turn, Communicative planning theory, Global south, *Sumac Kawsay*

Introduction

The implementation of participatory planning ideals and approaches in contexts different from those where they were developed has long been a problem for communicative planning theory (CPT). CPT theorists, like most other scholars, often base their generalizations and approaches on evidence or concepts from their own sphere of knowledge. They rarely make explicit the geographical or conceptual 'boundaries' of these ideas and specify the contextual assumptions on which they are based (Watson, 2008). Despite this, the normative stances of

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CPT theories and associated participatory and collaborative approaches are commonly 'exported', via aid programs or global policies, to contexts that differ from their region of origin, e.g. Europe and the USA. This has been problematic in several countries of the global South where underlying assumptions of CPT, such as an advanced Western liberal democracy, mature planning institutions or an engaged and well-functioning civil society, may not hold (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Watson, 2008). Planners in the global South, exposed to social, political and economic conditions different from those in the North, face constant dilemmas between what they are expected to do, often based on 'imported' ideas, and what is feasible in their contexts (Calderon & Westin, 2019; Connelly, 2010).

Speaking from experiences in the global South, de Satgé and Watson (2018) recently asked "how different does planning theory and practice need to be when it happens in different parts of the world; and to what extent does planning require a deep understanding of the context in which it proposes to intervene?" (p. 10). In regard to this question, they call for a *southern turn in planning theory*, following a recent trend in scholarship (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Connell, 2007; Roy, 2005, 2016), in order to explore a closer articulation between theory (development) and situated context-based practice (also Calderon & Westin, 2019; de Satgé & Watson, 2018; 2003, 2008; Watson, 2009),

This paper contributes to the development of the southern turn in planning theory, and in particular to situating CPT and participatory practices in regions of the global South where planning and socio-political conditions significantly differ from those in the North. This is done by investigating, from a southern turn perspective, the historical development of participatory planning in Sacaba, a middle sized city in the metropolitan area of Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Like many other cities of the Global South, Sacaba experiences major challenges due to rapid urbanization, informal urban expansion, socio-economic difficulties and limited

planning capacity, among others. Nonetheless, there is a unique value in investigating the development of participatory planning in Sacaba. Firstly, it broadens the empirical focus that the (recently emerging) southern turn in planning has in the African continent. Secondly, it gives insights into the challenges of implementing Northern planning ideas in Southern realities (as done by Cooke & Kothari, 2001; de Satgé & Watson, 2018; Watson, 2003), but also local attempts to challenge imported knowledge by rooting participation in historical, indigenous principles of social and territorial organization. This is based on former Bolivian President Evo Morales' anti-colonial political agenda and his efforts to develop governance according to the ancient indigenous Quechua worldview of *Sumac Kawsay* or "Good Living" (Peres et al., 2009). Lastly, although planners in Sacaba still struggle and face significant challenges in their attempts to implement these situated participatory ideals, their planning processes have been among the most inclusive compared to other municipalities in the country.

In the following section, an overview of the southern turn in scholarship and planning is presented. This results in a theoretical framework for investigating participatory planning in the Global South focusing on 1) the situated analysis of the interaction between planning institutions and actors, and 2) the conflicting rationalities between the techno-managerial logic of government-based planning and the logic of survival and informality which prevails in significant parts of the global South. The methodological approach is then described, followed by the historical account of participatory planning in Sacaba in relation to three distinct periods in the development of Bolivia´s planning system. The concluding discussion focuses on the importance of testing, critical reflection and learning, at both institutional and practitioner levels, in order to implement participatory planning theories and ideals, regardless of whether they originate in the North or South. It also points towards how the southern turn in planning can potentially contribute to the democratization of planning globally.

The southern turn in planning

This article builds on what has recently become known as the southern turn in scholarship. Although still at an early stage, the turn can be seen in areas such as anthropology (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012), sociology (Connell, 2007), urban studies (Roy, 2005, 2016) and, more recently, planning (de Satgé & Watson, 2018). There is no full agreement over what is implied by this *turn*, with many scholars such as Rosa (2014), de Satgé and Watson (2018), preferring to call it "a project in the making". Still, inspired by postcolonial thought, one commonality is challenging the tendency to assume universality in theoretical and practical knowledge, claiming to be valid everywhere, yet, when unpacked, drawing from very specific and parochial global North experiences, ideas and contexts (Connell 2007).

The term *southern* thus refers to a critical perspective that aims to both deconstruct and reconstruct the production of knowledge and our understanding of the world everywhere (de Satgé & Watson, 2018). This, contrary to the commonly mistaken association of the southern turn as a geographically bounded approach to knowledge, concentrated in particular geographical parts of the globe (Connell, 2007). Criticizing this narrow view for potentially leading to unproductive binaries between global North and global South perspectives, Roy (2016) sees the turn as an approach to knowledge production that is not exclusive to a specific region, but rather a new relationality of theory development.

Investigating participatory planning in and from the South

As with other aspects of planning, participatory planning ideas and practices heavily draw on Northern philosophical positions such as Habermas' communicative rationality or Rawls' deliberative democracy (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2003). These ideas and practices are then, implicitly or explicitly, regarded as being valid for the rest of the world or exported to the global South, overlooking the global North-based socio-political and

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institutional assumptions under which they were developed (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; de Satgé & Watson, 2018; Watson, 2008, 2009). These assumptions, which are different from many countries in the global South, include relatively stable liberal democratic governments, inbuilt capacity of planning institutions and practitioners, and a relatively organized, engaged and actively consensus-seeking civil society (Connelly, 2009; Watson, 2003)

These generalized and overlooked assumptions relate to a long-lasting critique of CPT concerning its *neglect of context* (Calderon & Westin, 2019; Healey, 2003). Such critique is significantly relevant to the global South where the generalized normative ideals of CPT have failed to acknowledge the region's diverse socio-political trajectories and its different institutions, state-society relationships and norms of social interaction. This includes, in diverse forms and to different degrees, situations of deep and irresolvable conflict, weak and fractured civil society, circumvented regulatory frameworks or weak institutional capacity where decisions are often driven by political cultures of patronage, corruption and paternalism (Calderon & Westin, 2019; Connelly, 2009, 2010; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; de Satgé & Watson, 2018). It also includes situations of mass poverty, rapid and unpredictable urbanization and informalization, and inadequacy in the provision of urban services (AlSayyad & Roy, 2003; Calderon & Hernandez-García, 2019; Roy, 2005; Watson, 2009). All of which bring about different kinds of possibilities and limitations to planners in the South attempting to 'do participation' (Calderon & Westin, 2019; Connelly, 2009, 2010).

The neglect of context critique, has been highlighted by Vanessa Watson in her studies investigating the usefulness of planning theory, and in particular CPT, outside of the global North region from which it emerged (Watson, 2003, 2008, 2009). In her recent book with Satgé (2018), they claim that the northern dominance of planning theory is at best of little practical value and at worst has a directly negative impact on cities and regions in those parts of the world where there is little 'fit' between concepts and models and the 'on the ground'

reality mentioned above. Cooke and Kothari (2001) make a similar argument criticizing how northern development assistance programs pushing for more participation often underestimate the mentioned societal complexity of aid-recipient countries.

To address this critique, de Satgé and Watson (2018) call for research that explicitly recognises the importance of context. While this may sound obvious, given the broad recognition that (participatory) planning is always situated and shaped by context, there is rarely any clear reference to what is meant by context and what about it actually matters. Several studies have responded to this critique, attempting to make participatory and collaborative planning research more attuned to context (e.g. Calderon & Westin, 2019; Connelly, 2009). From these studies, and the Southern turn discussion above, we take two key ideas that need to be considered when doing context-based research of participatory planning in and from the global South.

Situated analysis: actors and institutions

When analyzing how context influences the way that participatory ideals are adopted, implemented or transformed in the global South, it is important to consider the influence of both the institutions and actors engaged in these practices (Calderon & Westin, 2019). Institutions are commonly associated with the context within which planning occurs and acquires meaning (Verma & Tiesdell, 2007). As socialized structures, institutions (e.g. formal regulations and procedures or informal norms and routines) shape how things are normally done or what is considered appropriate action within a particular government, organization or community (Moulaert et al., 2016). Accordingly, institutions provide opportunities for particular forms of 'doing' participatory planning (e.g. encouraging the involvement of certain actors or the selection of certain participatory procedures), while constraining others that do not comply with them (Raitio, 2012; Servillo & Van den Broeck, 2012).

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However, institutions do not fully determine actors' actions. Actors can act and use their agency, i.e. their ability to pursue and achieve their intentions, in ways that reproduce or differ from their context (Servillo & Van den Broeck, 2012). This gives actors and their agency an important role in the constitution of institutions and in determining the influence that context has on the way that participatory ideals are implemented (Calderon & Westin, 2019). Hence, even in hostile contexts for participation in the global South, planners' values, motivation, experience and strategic action play an important role in determining whether participation becomes tyrannous or transformative (Connelly, 2010).

Conflicting rationalities

It is necessary to pay analytical attention to the conflicting rationalities arising in most global South cities at the interface between, on one hand, the logic of government, often based on techno-managerial and market-based systems of governance and planning and, on the other, the logic of survival followed by marginalized and impoverished communities, largely operating under conditions of informality (de Satgé & Watson, 2018; Watson, 2009).

Operating in this interface, planners and policy-makers regularly find themselves confronted with informal socio-spatial processes that lie outside of the development logic of local governments, in which informality is often seen as disorderliness and a violation of rules and regulations which need to be controlled and addressed (de Satgé & Watson, 2018). This leads to significant clashes where contestation and resistance are more conflictual and visible than in the North (Watson, 2009).

Methodology

Analysis of context and conflicting rationalities requires focusing on the historical and contextual conditions under which planning ideas and practices develop (Calderon & Westin,

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2019; de Satgé & Watson, 2018). This paper accomplishes this through an in-depth qualitative case study conducted between 2017 and 2018. Access to and investigation of the case was based on the second author´s extensive knowledge of and experience with planning in Sacaba and Bolivia.

The case study was mainly based on three research workshops and a series of interviews with planning practitioners in Sacaba. Most of these practitioners do not have planning background. They are architects, engineers or land surveyors since local universities only began to offer planning education around 2009. The research workshops were designed with a soft systems methodology (Checkland & Scholes, 1990) and structured around three main themes: 1) creating a rich picture of the past and present of participatory planning practice in Sacaba and Bolivia; 2) identifying the ideals that have guided participatory processes; and 3) identifying the challenges and possibilities faced in the implementation of these ideals. 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with planning practitioners including: municipal *planning authorities* with political and administrative responsibilities in different areas related to planning; *planning technicians* ("tecnicos" as they are locally called in Spanish), who elaborate plans; and *researchers*, who investigate local planning processes and usually work as consultants for the municipality. The interviews focused on experiences and opinions about participatory planning in Sacaba within the context of national planning reforms in Bolivia, including its purpose, procedures and the roles of planners. The workshops and interviews were complemented with document analysis of Bolivian legislation and reports concerning participatory planning in Sacaba.

The data was triangulated and analyzed following the theoretical framework presented above. In doing so, a deep historical description of participatory planning in Sacaba was created, including local preconditions for failure or success. This is essential for the southern

turn project and its efforts to differentiate between knowledge and practices that are specific

to a place and those that can be shared across different contexts (de Satgé & Watson, 2018).

Participatory planning in Sacaba: the case

Case background

Sacaba is one of the seven municipalities forming the metropolitan area of Cochabamba,

Bolivia. Urban development in Sacaba, including its socio-spatial challenges, is similar to

many cities of the global South. Since the 1970s, urban growth has been exponential due to

Sacaba´s strategic location as a midpoint for transit and economic exchange between

Bolivia´s east and west regions (Figure 1). This attracted economic immigrants, mainly

peasants or *campesinos* from impoverished rural areas of the country. The population grew

from 29.995 in 1976 to 172.466 inhabitants in 2012. Of these, 39% are self-identified as

indigenous (INE, 2012) retaining mainly Quechua and Aymara traditions and languages; as is

the case through the rest of the country. An additional 36.400 inhabitants are projected by

2020 (GAMS, 2016).

[Figure 1 near here]

As with other cities in the global South, rapid population growth has been

synonymous with unplanned and informal urban expansion (Figure 2). Limited resources and

weak planning institutions hindered the municipality´s capacity to plan and regulate urban

development. By 2013, 46% of Sacaba's built environment had developed informally, mainly

in peri-urban areas (GAMS, 2016). This includes illegal occupation of agricultural land and

environmentally protected areas, poor housing conditions and limited public infrastructure

and services. In 2014, only 14% of households in the municipality, mainly those in the city

center, had access to public water, sewage and waste collection services (GAMS, 2014).

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Although Sacaba´s strategic location has made it into an economic growth hub, socio-economic conditions are challenging for most of the population. Levels of education are very low, with most of the urban population only finishing secondary school. Residents of peri-urban and informal areas are educated mostly until primary school. 55% of the municipal economy is based on informal activities with very low incomes and no social security (INE, 2012). For the majority of the population, life is based on day-to-day survival and self-help strategies.

[Figure 2 near here]

Currently the most critical problem for the municipality is drinking water, which is available to only 12% of households. In the rest of the municipality, and particularly in peri-urban areas, water is managed and distributed informally through self-organized community groups, making use of streams or wells (Figure 3). These solutions are not sustainable, safe nor environmentally friendly. Water is scarce and needed not just for human consumption but also for irrigation of crops in peri-urban areas (GAMS, 2016). This creates significant conflicts.

[Figure 3 near here]

Historical development of participatory planning in Sacaba

The following section is structured around three distinct periods of Bolivia´s planning system, key for understanding the development of participation planning in Sacaba. The three periods are: 1) 1940-1990 when planning was developed and conducted based on foreign ideas; 2) 1990-2006 when foreign-influenced legislative reforms aimed at decentralizing and democratizing planning practice where introduced; and 3) 2006-2019 when a second reform to the planning system was rooted in anti-colonial political agendas and the ancient indigenous Quechua worldview of *Sumac Kawsay* or 'Good living'. The section combines

general remarks about planning in Bolivia and specific accounts of planning and participation in Sacaba.

Importing planning ideals: the birth and early stages of planning (1940-1990)

As with many other countries in the global South, the Bolivian planning system had its origins following ideas that traveled from the North. As argued by a senior planner "historically all plans, a great majority of them, were done by foreigners". This started in the 1940s with the Bohan Plan, a report made by a group of U.S. government officials, who spent only a few months in the country. Advancing a positivist and instrumental rationale with a centralized technocratic planning system prioritizing national economic objectives, the Bohan Plan became a landmark for Bolivia´s planning for almost three decades. Efforts centered on the development of a few counties and cities in the country, including the metropolitan area of Cochabamba and the municipality of Sacaba (De la Fuente, 2001). Such technocratic and market-based ideas even continued throughout the 1980s when regional planning was introduced following recommendations from German and US aid agencies (Peres et al., 2009).

Throughout this period, planning in Sacaba paralleled de Satgé and Watson (2018) observations on the negative impacts of Northern ideas in Southern cities. Particularly the conflicting rationalities between techno-managerial and economic-based efforts and the logic of survival and informality of impoverished communities. As noted by Heilman (1982), planning approaches during this time embodied "a trickle-down" model typical of the US rather than meeting the needs of the Bolivian people. In Sacaba, this implied favoring investment in well-off and already consolidated areas of the city, at the expense of the majority of inhabitants who lived under impoverished conditions. Moreover, the fast-growing informal settlements were regarded as a problem that had to be abolished. This mismatch led

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to uneven development and socio-economical unrest in Sacaba, igniting, as in the rest of the country, social protests (Peres et al., 2009). This was later aggravated by the national crisis following the military coups between 1964 and 1982 (Kohl, 2016).

After the restoration of democracy in 1982 in Bolivia, socio-political instability remained in Sacaba leading to limited continuity in political leadership and planning. As in many other cities of the global South, each new administration spent its short term in office creating a plan, to later see it "shelved" by new politicians from an opposing political party. According to a planning authority, between 1960 and 1990 there were many plans developed for Sacaba through foreign aid agencies, however most were never executed: "almost 40 years have passed since certain plans were done; we are still trying to implement them".

Moreover plans became obsolete due to rapid changes in cities (López, 2016). For example, the urban area boundary for Sacaba was defined in the 1981 Master Plan of Cochabamba, yet it was quickly overpassed due to rapid urbanization and informal development. As mentioned by an interviewed researcher: "(Sacaba) spread like an oil stain instead of developing like cities in Europe or the US. There is an urbanization of poverty with consequences for the price of agricultural land and our water resources, seen in the informal occupation of the territory (...) Disorder has beaten us, improvisation has won us".

A foreign induced participatory turn in planning (1990-2006)

During the 1990s, ideas from the North kept influencing Latin American governments and their policies. In Bolivia, this came through the Washington Consensus; a standard reform package with policy prescriptions for undeveloped countries created by US aid agencies. A group of mainly foreign experts, were tasked to develop a proposal for a state reform in Bolivia where local governments and participatory decision-making had a central role (Kohl, 2016). Consequently, the Bolivian government established its first national planning system,

Sistema de Planificación Nacional (SISPLAN) and the Law of Popular Participation, *Ley de Participación Popular* (LPP) in the early 1990s.

Similar to the ideas of deliberative democracy and collaborative planning, which were gaining strength in Europe and US, the new planning system encouraged a "bottom-up participatory planning model" based on administrative decentralization and citizen participation to overcome the problems of previous technocratic planning models (NB-SISPLAN, 1996). This was one of the earliest and most advanced efforts to institutionalize public participation in Latin America (Ströbele-Gregor, 1997).

Among the most important changes of the reform, was to recognize and mandate municipalities as the main responsible for planning and participation. For the first time, municipalities received national resources with the condition that they involved the public in planning. This included 5-year Municipal Territorial Plans, *Plan Municipal de Ordenamiento Territorial* (PMOT) as well as yearly Implementation Plans, *Plan Operativo Anual* (POA) (NB-SISPLAN, 1996).

The new planning system established a mechanism for public participation, which partly adapted some of the ideas of the North to the socio-political conditions of the country. The mechanism gathered engaged residents in a particular territory or neighborhood who played key roles in (often self-managed) local development and formalized them into a type of community committee, called OTB - *Organizaciones Territoriales de Base* (Territorial based organizations). OTBs were meant to play a key role in planning; they were to identify and prioritize problems in their territory, and, through representatives, participate directly in the development of the 5 and 1 year plans (NB-SISPLAN, 1996). There were over 250 OTBs formed in Sacaba, divided almost equally between its six urban districts and six peri-urban districts. The population represented by an OTB varied in size. Given the small and scattered

qualities of peri-urban districts, there could be as few as sixty people. While OTBs in urban districts could represent as many as three thousand inhabitants (INE, 2012).

According to several of the interviewees, this new mechanism for public participation was positive in comparison to the planning models pre 1990s. In Sacaba, many planners embraced the participatory ideals of the new planning system. However, they often failed to apply them in practice due to a lack of experience with participation coupled with the limited planning capacity of the municipality (Kohl, 2016).

Similar to most municipalities in Bolivia, the elaboration of the annual plans, the POAs, became the main planning instrument in Sacaba. In comparison to the 5-year plans, the POAs were more concrete with direct links to public expenditure and implementation, making them easier to develop and more attractive to encourage public participation. The elaboration of the POAs ought to include consultations with the OTBs during different stages of the planning process. The specifics of how this ought to happen were, however, not stated in the new planning system. This ambiguity allowed for diverse participatory procedures, often shaped by a mismatch between the assumptions that informed the new planning system and the socio-political reality of planning in Sacaba. This reality included very short time frames to make plans, limited resources, insufficient staff and planning experience, as well as corrupt practices. These conditions reduced participation to activities like surveys or even a telephone call to an OTB leader. Broader consultation meetings with residents of an OTB area took place but were very few and dependent on the will and capacity of project leaders.

Sacabas´ "public" was neither fully prepared, nor had the experience to assume its new role as an engaged civil society (De la Fuente, 2001). Similar to de Satgé and Watson (2018) conflicting rationalities, this was mainly due to a mismatch between the techno-managerial logics of planning and the logic of survival of most residents in the municipality.

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Particularly, the immediate daily needs of people clashed with planners´ attempts to plan long-term, even if it was for one year. As mentioned by one authority:

> People didn't have a long-term vision. For them life is dealt on a day to day basis (...) The immediate is what counts (...), most communities wanted to build a football field, but their sewage system was collapsing.

Yet, in hindsight, another authority accepted the municipality´s responsibility in this:

> (...) there has been a great effort to promote public participation, but at the same time, not having clarity on what is being promoted makes participation become just loose ideas (...) if you don't have clear guidelines, if the authorities don't establish where the horizon is, what needs to be done to get to that horizon, then people end up prioritizing their immediate and very local needs. This represented a complete loss of the common interest at the municipal level, of the global problems and a loss of long-term visions.

Conflicting rationalities also emerged from a deeper cultural and organizational level. Based on its Northern influence, the new planning system framed planning around western market-managerial ideas of "development" and "progress". However, these ideas were foreign to indigenous worldviews where there are no equivalences to a sense of growth strongly linked to material goods (López, 2016). Moreover, OTBs were required to follow technocratic and bureaucratic forms of operation. This included electing representatives periodically; basing their input on technical and sectorialized frameworks e.g. infrastructure, housing or social development; filling out forms and making reports that required basic knowledge of public administration and accounting. These practices were incongruent with the capacity and routines of many OTBs, particularly in marginalized and peri-urban areas (Eguren, 2008). As argued by one of the interviewees: "The old SISPLAN had many problems; it was conceived for a different context".

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Although the government assisted some OTBs with capacity-building workshops, the techno-managerial requirements meant that not all OTBs had equal participation in decision-making. It also meant that plans considered and favored only a few OTBs with social and political capacity, leading to an unequal distribution of resources and development efforts among districts (Ströbele-Gregor, 1997).

Similar to de Satgé and Watson (2018) descriptions of conflicting rationalities, politics, struggles and power were significantly present and shaped participatory processes. Sacaba´s political dynamics reinforced the immediatist logic of marginalized communities. Political loyalties were easily bought with minor immediate projects e.g. a football field instead of the sewage. Planners mentioned that the 1-year POAs became a "wish list" of small and easily executable projects that pleased the immediate demands of citizens regardless of technical or economic feasibility, relevance for the OTB area, or contradiction to more pressing municipal needs. Participatory planning became a clientelism tool to distract citizens and gain political support (Ayo Saucedo, 2010). This was reinforced by corrupt practices and weak socio-political control. Even in OTB areas where broader consultations were done, decisions were later shaped by trade-offs between politicians and OTB leaders (Eguren, 2008).

Not everything was negative though. The foreign induced participatory turn was the first step in establishing a more recent and somewhat general belief in society that the right to define local development "belongs to all" (Ayo Saucedo, 2010). This included planners, who came to view the ideals of participation as an intrinsic quality of municipal governance. As argued by one technician:

> The LPP (Law of Popular Participation) is an important milestone for the institution of participatory planning (...). Despite the difficulties and the weaknesses, it helped instill in the Bolivian imagination the need for people to participate, at least at the municipal level

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(...) it settled the idea that municipalities have to make their plans participatory, and that without the consent of civil society, nothing is done, there is no planning.

With time, Sacaba´s communities also embraced the idea of participatory planning as the people's legitimate power to shape decisions and made efforts to build their capacity for participation. As explained by a member of a peri-urban OTB:

(...) we realized that it was important to learn how the plan was made (...) the technicians were very careful in giving us information, because information is power. So what did we do? We invited the planners directly to our OTB, we treated them very well and they showed us how to do it; but it was because we asked them, not on their own will. (...) that was how the campesinos didn't allow others to step on them; now they discuss, debate (...) this is how participation has developed, the money is of the people, we are the ones that have to decide what to do.

Participation in municipal planning became a strong incentive and opportunity for engaged and community-oriented civil society members to raise and exercise their democratic rights. In addition to social mobilization and protests, participatory ideals contributed to the fast emergence of local community and indigenous leaders into the political scene; as was the case of Evo Morales who later became president of the country (Kohl, 2016).

Adaptation of participatory planning to the indigenous worldview Sumac Kawsay (2006-2019)

With the installation of Evo Morales' presidency in 2006, began efforts to reverse the strong influence that the North had in the development of governance and planning in Bolivia throughout the second half of the 20th century. Morales rose to power and led *transformative actions* based on anti-colonialist ideals (Eguren, 2008). Actions included the *re-foundation* of Bolivia as a plurinational state, recognizing its multiple and diverse ethno-indigenous groups and cultures, including their different languages, norms and traditions. Also establishing a

new Constitution for the country and a new national development plan, where the Northern

inspired paradigms of *progress* and *development*, were replaced by the ancestral indigenous

philosophy: *Sumaj Kawsay* translated as "Good Living" (NCPE, 2008). Good Living sustains

an inseparable interconnection between the physical life and the social and spiritual life.

Emphasis is placed on establishing relations of reciprocity and solidarity, and the

cosmocentric conception of humans as one component of nature or the sacred living being

Mother Earth (NCPE, 2008). Under Morales' presidency, Good Living was adopted as the

main ideology behind all Bolivian legislation, including those related to planning.

Accordingly, a planner noted that: "since 2006, it can be said that for the first time, Bolivians

took sovereign control of planning processes*".*

Good Living laid the ideological foundations for planning reform meant to decolonize

and overcome the deficiencies of previous planning practices (LM-PTDI, 2016). This

included transformative action over municipal participatory planning. In 2013, a new law for

citizen participation was approved, the Law of Social Participation and Control (*Ley de

Participación y Control Social* - LPCS) in replacement of LPP. In 2016, a new planning

system was legislated, the Integral Planning System of the State (*Sistema Integral de

Planificación del Estado* - SPIE) substituting SISPLAN.

The new participatory law institutionalized the idea of "Community Democracy"

(*Democracia Comunitaria* in Spanish). This implied that all social organizations, including

indigenous communities and informal community groups, were to be involved in decision-

making processes instead of this being limited to OTBs and its representatives. The intention

was to include a more plural and legitimate representation of society which would take into

account society's diverse needs and interests (SPIE, 2016). Also, it would address the above

mentioned corrupt and excluding practices found in many OTBs. As noted by an authority:

Participation has a different conception now than before (...) it is now open for all public entities, and throughout all the phases of planning and it is not exclusively through the OTB mechanism (...) Hence, participation is much broader, more open and deeper than before.

Contrary to the Northern based technocratic forms of organization that were previously enforced to OTBs, Community Democracy also enabled and recognized indigenous norms and procedures for civic engagement and decision-making (NCPE, 2008). Based on this, Morales´ new planning system and participatory law suggested basic mechanisms for participation e.g. public assemblies and workshops at district and OTB/neighborhood levels and general municipal consultations (LM-PTDI, 2016). However, based on Community Democracy, municipal governments were granted provisions to develop their own mechanism of participatory planning tailored to the needs and practices of their communities (LPCS, 2013). This was significant for Sacaba as described below.

Changes were also made in the scope of the different municipal plans. Inspired by Good Living´s interconnection of all aspects of life with nature, plans were no longer based on sectoral approaches that conflicted with the worldviews of indigenous populations. Instead, plans were to focus on an "integral territorial development" combining "territorial, social, cultural, political, economic, ecological and emotional dimensions (SPIE, 2016). The five-year plans were reframed as Integrated Development Plans for the Territory (*Plan Territorial de Desarrollo Integral* - PTDI). The POA (*Plan Operativo Anual* - yearly operational plan) was kept but more as the execution instrument of the 5-year plans. To do this, and to avoid the short term "wish lists" of the past, municipalities were forced to develop the 5-year plans first.

Despite significant efforts to tailor the new planning regulations and procedures to local and indigenous worldviews and practices, the low capacity of Sacaba´s planning office and practitioners was not addressed. With regard to this, one of Sacabas´ planning authorities

who worked on the development of the new planning system said that such limitations, which applied to all Bolivian municipalities, were recognized in the initial drafts of the reform which included corrective measures. However, he regrets that these important components were later dismissed:

> Unfortunately, substantial variations have been made to the original proposal (...), for example, we suggested a training system for strategic planners, for (solving) the great weakness in public administration throughout the country.

Similarly, one researcher argued that: "the big problem (with the new planning system) is how it has been implemented, the whole process has been launched in a rush without preparing the ground (...) and they launched it with many deficiencies that now we will have to overcome on the fly". He recognized that in its attempt to achieve more participatory and integral plans, interconnected among different scales, the new planning system, if anything, placed more pressure on Sacaba´s planning institutions and practitioners.

Despite these limitations, planners in Sacaba took on the challenge to overcome these deficiencies "on the fly". This happened in 2016 when, obliged by the new planning system, they started to work on the 5-year Integrated development plan, PTDI. According to them, they were forced to reflect on, and try to solve, their institutional and individual weaknesses. As one technician noted:

> There is a before and after 2016 (...) Since January of 2016 the story changes, the new law gave us the opportunity to start a process of reflection with regard to how we make decisions, and in March it forced us to make the PTDI, from there onwards it is a different story (...) The PTDI made us open our eyes to the shortcomings we face not only in the municipality but in the country. We saw that we had been working in an improvised manner (...) this however is something that we are still struggling to solve.

The planning unit got the support of the Mayor of Sacaba, who adhered to the political ideas of President Morales. He hired new staff and focused on building internal capacity. The new staff included some of the first graduates from the recently established planning program of the local university. This added a planning perspective to the predominant architect and engineer views of the planning technicians. Staff members also attended capacity building workshops on participatory planning with a local research center from the same university. With its growing capacity, the planning office in Sacaba used the new legislative provisions to develop their own mechanism for participatory planning. New procedures for participation in the PTDI were defined "on the fly", in close compliance with SPIE regulations and on the basis of previous, and somewhat long and not always positive, experience with the POAs.

The new procedures were innovative for the planning unit. It consisted of a series of deliberative workshops. Due to limited resources, focus and participation were on the district level which did not make the process as inclusive as idealized in new planning reform and Community Democracy. It was mainly OTB and other district leaders who took part in the process. First there was a general *informative workshop* to present the new planning system and participatory law. According to the planners, the aim was to motivate participants to take active part in the development of the PTDI; as well as to resolve tensions or distrust from previous processes that "did not result in anything". The main message was that it was "a fresh start for all, and the purpose was to improve the planning process in coordination with the districts". All districts and OTB areas were represented with almost 270 people joining the workshop.

Then there was a series of workshops at the district level to identify and prioritize the different needs and problems of the population. Around 2 to 5 workshops were conducted, depending on the size of the districts. Community leaders from all OTB areas joined the workshops. Contrary to the transformative actions envisioned by President Morales, these

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workshops still used technical information as a base for discussions. They were also in Spanish, despite many inhabitants, particularly in informal and peri-urban areas, mainly speaking indigenous languages. Nonetheless, the workshops used different facilitation techniques like brainstorming, group discussions, multi-voting; sometimes even forcing everyone to speak, to avoid previous experiences where only a few would voice their ideas. Moreover, experiences from previous planning processes showed that participants and OTB leaders were mainly elderly men; often following indigenous traditions. Thus, expanding on the indigenous-based ideals of Community Democracy, workshops exclusively for women were conducted in seven of Sacaba´s twelve districts; mainly peri-urban and informal areas where planners realized that women's voices were not being represented. In doing so, planners aimed to obtain a more comprehensive diagnosis and identification of problems and solutions. Planners created reports for the workshops in each district and gave them to the district representatives and OTB leaders for their approval.

There was a final workshop in each district to prioritize the most important problems and projects. Representatives from all OTB areas of the district attended the workshop, including participants from the women only workshops. Decisions about prioritization were achieved through group-discussions and multi-voting. As mentioned by an interviewed planner, the result of these workshops showed a common priority for all districts, reflecting Good Living's interconnection of all aspects of life with nature. As he noted: *"The result of the entire process, almost 50 workshops, was (the use and management of) water (...) there were different issues (in different districts) but all related to water"*. Hence, water became the main focus and overarching issue for Sacaba´s 5-year PTDI. This resulted in half of the PTDI budget being allocated to municipal infrastructure projects and community-based programs for providing access to drinking water to all of Sacaba´s inhabitants and for the irrigation of crops in peri-urban areas.

Subsequent development of the PTDI was done by the planners without the involvement of the public. Planning authorities and technicians recognized that this was not ideal, but they claimed that the lack of institutional and personal capacities and resources prevented them from doing more. Despite these and other limitations mentioned above, technicians noted that the participatory workshops allowed them to make much more informed decisions than in any previous plan. They acknowledged their learning from this experience:

> …we saw how a participatory process improves decision-making. We have learned that every planning process has to be dynamic and flexible. A rigid planning process just leads to negative consequences, we have tried to be flexible in many aspects of our processes.

Authorities also recognized that the content of the PTDI did not reach the quality levels that they wished. They would have liked to include more participation from different units in the municipality and more residents of the OTB areas; provide participants with more robust and updated data for grounding decisions; and reach more detailed actions and small-scale plans. Nonetheless, they perceived that people in the districts, and especially those who participated in the process, realized that there had been a positive change in how planning decisions were made in Sacaba. As one technician mentioned: "I heard many people say: I participated and said that the problem was the water and they heard me". This was ratified in the subsequent elaboration of the district POAs, where, at the time when this study ended in 2019, most decision-making processes were following similar participatory strategies and building on the discussions and prioritization of water in the PTDI. It is worth mentioning, however, that, after concluding this study, some of the interviewed planners reported problems with subsequent participatory processes and plans in some OTB areas. According to

one planning authority, this was due to clashes between the new participatory approach for making decisions and the "old clientelist ways of doing planning".

The Mayor of Sacaba´s efforts to build the capacity of the municipal planning unit, plus planners' willingness to critically reflect and solve previous planning experiences, made the PTDI participatory process unique in the country. No other municipality has achieved such levels of inclusivity and deliberation. Planning technicians in Sacaba recognize and feel proud about this: *"We believe that we are on the right track ... of course we have not yet solved many problems, but we have made progress"*. Consequently, following the rules established in the new planning legislation, regarding, among others, Good Living and public participation, Sacaba is one of the few municipalities in the country that by 2019 had an approved PTDI, according to interviewed planning authorities.

Concluding discussion

This paper built on recent developments in the southern turn in planning theory and its attempt to make research and practice more attuned with the realities of cities in the global South (de Satgé & Watson, 2018; Watson, 2008, 2009). The paper also followed efforts to expand and search for alternative ways of thinking about participatory planning and its related practices globally (Calderon & Westin, 2019; Connelly, 2010; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Watson, 2003). To do so, the study set out to historically situate CPT-inspired and Northern-based ideas and practices of participatory planning in Sacaba, Bolivia; a municipality and context where, similar to many regions of the global South, planning and socio-political conditions are significantly different from those in the North.

The historical account of participatory planning in this context showed that, similar to other countries in the global South, participatory practices indeed originated or were induced by ideas that traveled from the North. The case confirmed the mismatch that such imported

ideas and practices can have with the realities of cities like Sacaba; and the negative

consequences of this mismatch. In particular, the two periods between 1940 and 2006 clearly

illustrated de Satgé and Watson (2018) conflicting rationalities; seen in Sacaba between

techno-bureaucratic planning practices and the short term and day-to-day logics of survival

held by many inhabitants, indigenous worldviews and the operative capacity community

organizations, the OTBs. This made it easy for political struggles and corrupt dynamics to

take over and exclude significant parts of the population from decision-making.

On the other hand, the period after 2006 transcends the (up to now) Southern turn´s

focus on highlighting the challenges of implementing Northern ideas in Southern realities. It

provides insights into what happens when, similar to the calls of Southern scholars (e.g. de

Satgé & Watson, 2018), these ideas are explicitly recognized as foreign, and significant

attempts are made to reformulate them. In Bolivia, this was done by adopting anti-colonial

political agendas and rooting new planning legislation in local indigenous worldviews and

practices of social and territorial organization.

However, the case showed that, contrary to the hopes of some Southern planning

scholars, the newly situated legislation did not directly correlate to better or more

participation. The planning process of Sacaba´s 5-year development plan (PTDI), was indeed

more inclusive and deliberative than previous processes. But the fact that Sacabas´ process

was outstanding in comparison to other municipalities shows that the situated planning

reforms and ideals following *Sumac Kawsay* or Good Living were not sufficient for making

planning more participatory. Notably, the achievements in Sacaba had to do more with efforts

to build the capacity of the planning unit and with the commitment of planners to reflect and

change how they had been doing participation.

This finding transcends the discussion of whether theories developed in the North or

the South are more useful for specific contexts. Rather, it shows a common challenge for

implementing theories and ideals of participation: that regardless of whether they are

Northern or Southern-based, theories and ideals have limited effect unless the capacity of

local planning institutions and practitioners are addressed; "preparing the ground" as one of

the interviewees mentioned. Hence, the southern-turn's critique to Northern theories, although

valid in terms of Northern concepts and models potentially having limited practical value and

negative impact on cities in the South, should be more nuanced and probably include some

caveats; at least in Bolivia. Three findings support this claim.

First, it is somewhat unrealistic to suggest that, during times of significant economic

unrest, political instability and the very limited capacity of planning institutions and

practitioners, Bolivia would have been able to develop a (participatory) planning system of its

own. Plausibly, this applies to many countries in the South that experience similar socio-

political conditions. Second, it can be argued that importing international support to

implement participatory ideals, allowed for testing, learning and identification of what was

wrong with them, while building capacity at both institutional and practitioner level. Notably,

this took significant time and brought along serious problems. Yet, these mistakes and

challenges were the source of important reflective and learning efforts among planning actors

in Sacaba. This study consistently encountered the results of such efforts, as seen in many of

the respondents' quotes. Such results were also significant in the recent attempts to develop

the 5-year PDTI in a more participatory manner. It was capacity building and reflecting on

what did not work before that allowed Sacaba's planners to innovate and make the PDTI

process more participatory. Lastly, even if the period between 1990 and 2006 showed

significant challenges from the Northern influenced participatory practices, it was then when

participation came to be viewed as an intrinsic quality of planning by both planners and the

public. This served as an important foundation for the planning reforms and participatory

efforts between 2006 and 2019.

Accordingly, one main conclusion of this paper is that regardless of whether theories or ideals are rooted in the North or South, their value and use in planning requires constant testing, critical reflection and learning. Building the capacity in planning practitioners and finding the institutional time and spaces for doing this, as occurred at the start of the PTDI in Sacaba, and in comparison to previous planning processes, becomes essential for helping offset the many and lengthy challenges identified in the case study. This requires education, training and experience. But as argued by Calderon (2020) it also needs theories that, instead of promoting normative ideals of participation, give planners knowledge to work critically and reflexively; rather than naively or unconsciously. From the experience of Sacaba, emphasis should be on fostering the capacity and motivation of planning practitioners, including politicians and policy-makers, to critically understand the specific context in which they operate, and to tailor participatory practices to the constraints and opportunities that such contexts entail (see also Connelly, 2010).

Efforts should also be made at the institutional level. Following Warren (2007), there is the need for institutional design and the development of regulations, procedures and norms that promote and protect participation. This was seen in the recent reforms of Bolivia's planning system and participatory law. However, the case also shows the benefit of providing flexible institutional spaces where planning practitioners have the time and space to test new ideas for developing participation. Particularly in the new legislation´s provision granting municipal governments the opportunity to develop their own, tailored mechanism of participatory planning. As the case shows, if combined with the above-mentioned capacity and motivation of practitioners, this can potentially lead to small steps, often made "on the fly", that could make a difference. Even if, as in Sacaba, shortcomings occur and processes do not reach what is idealized in policy or theory, these small steps help notably to build

institutional and individual capacity and experience for future participatory planning processes.

This paper is a further step in the southern turn in planning; a "project" which is considered here to be a key theoretical endeavor within planning theory in general and CPT in particular. The historical account of participatory planning in Sacaba contributes to this endeavor, not only by showing how participatory planning ideals travel from North to South, but also by providing insights into how they can be transformed and tailored to the realities of cities like Sacaba. As shown by Watson (2008, 2009), it is important for the southern turn in planning to explicitly call-out theories such as CPT and its associated normative ideals and practices originating from and shaped by assumptions that are typical of the North . It is also important that southern turn scholars scrutinize the use and value of such ideals when they travel to the South (e.g. de Satgé & Watson, 2018; Watson, 2003). But given the results of this study, it is also important for the southern turn project to acknowledge that such traveling ideas are most often transformed and tailored through local strategies and tactics in order to cope with the local social, economic and political situations of each context (see also Calderon & Westin, 2019; Connelly, 2010). This has potentially led to an amalgam of locally inflected participatory planning principles and practices around the global South, most of which are yet to be investigated. As this study has done, exploring the limitations and potentials of the transformation of CPT and participatory ideals can potentially be among the most important and exciting contributions of the southern turn in planning project. Doing so can contribute to Roy´s (2016) new relationality of theory development. Also, to find and develop alternative participatory planning ideals and theories for genuinely democratizing planning globally.

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