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Document Version

Final published version

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Citation (APA)

Rocco, R., & Silvestre, G. (2024). Conclusion: insurgent planning practice in comparative perspective. In R. Rocco, & G. Silvestre (Eds.), *Insurgent Planning Practice* (pp. 227-234). Edinburgh University Press.

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CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSION: INSURGENT PLANNING PRACTICE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Roberto Rocco and Gabriel Silvestre

The contributors to this volume have extensively explored our initial enquiries regarding the practical manifestations of insurgent planning in a myriad of contexts. They have explored the strategies employed by insurgent planners to navigate the many ways by which planning regimes manifest around the world, in both the so-called Global North and Global South; in places where the rule of law is robust and in places where it is weak; and in places where implementation happens vigorously and where it does not – where planning is more a promise in the imagination of bureaucrats than a fact. In all cases, contributors have described insurgent planners' endeavours towards advancing a democratic agenda and promoting the right to the city, even if some of their victories are pyrrhic and may not last. Although those issues have been addressed, they have also given rise to numerous additional questions. Therefore, this concluding reflection is structured around four overarching themes that engage with these emerging questions and that permeate all chapters to varying extents.

The first topic concerns insurgent planners' engagement with existing institutions and legal frameworks, and the way by which planners may transit between Miraftab's definition of "invited" and "invented" spaces. These issues are connected to the planners' identities, to the way they conceive their relationships with power and to the context in which they are acting. In summary, these relationships are intricate, malleable, adaptive and extremely fluid, allowing actors to often transition between invited and invented spaces, at times eager to comply with the law and at other times challenging established institutions.

The second topic revolves around finding a balance between technocratic expertise and what can be described as "popular" or "vernacular" knowledge, for lack of better expressions. Around this topic, we find practices that adopt a "Freirean" attitude towards knowledge and power distribution, as cited by Hellmer, Lin and Lu in their chapter on Taipei. A "Freirean" attitude refers

to an approach inspired by the teachings and philosophy of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, who advocated for a transformative and emancipatory approach to education, particularly in the context of addressing social inequality and oppression. A Freirean attitude emphasizes the importance of critical consciousness, dialogue and praxis (the integration of reflection and action). It encourages citizens to engage in critical thinking, reflection and active participation, rather than being passive learners into whom knowledge is “deposited”. This approach recognizes the importance of citizens’ experiences and knowledge, valuing their perspectives and fostering a collaborative and democratic environment.

The third topic addresses the various possible conceptions of insurgency that are place-bound and contextual, but also actor-dependent and identity-forming. The collective struggle for positive change gives identity to social movements and shapes their own conceptions of the world, their place in it and their relationships with the authorities and the existing institutions. This topic also speaks to a subjective perception of insurgency: an action may sound trivial in some places but might shape collective efforts that give meaning and cohesion to a social movement in other places.

The fourth topic highlights the formidable challenges associated with sustaining the struggle and preserving gains. Achievements, no matter how substantial, can be swiftly undone. This vulnerability arises both from a temporal aspect, whereby gains obtained may be lost in the next election round, for example, and from a lack of integration within established institutions and practices. Examples in this volume seem to suggest that it is crucial to firmly embed gains within existing structures, practices and institutions, such as the law or the practices of specific departments in a municipality. Paradoxically, this institutionalization risks neutralizing the struggle, bringing practices into the realm of neoliberal governance. Here, again, the temporal dimension is significant: although there are plenty of examples of insurgent practices being neutralized by institutionalization, some of the gains are preserved for the next generation of insurgent planners to pick up the struggle from a different standpoint, as was the case with the feminist collective of the “Gabinetona” in Belo Horizonte.

BOUNDARIES AND POTENTIALITIES OF INSURGENT PLANNING PRACTICE

The first section of this book explores political and citizenship practices of insurgency in planning. It opens with a chapter on Antwerp, in which the authors depict their own relationship with the government as a private firm, but one that is not always seeking profit when engaging with the popular demands of citizens. It is possible to assert that their professional practice

supports and stabilizes their relationships with citizens and with the state, as it gives them a platform from which they may speak as experts (but also, conceivably, from which they may derive financial stability to support citizens' initiatives without aiming for profit). This is similar to the role that universities may play in supporting citizens in their struggles, as cases in Makassar, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro suggest, without prejudice to the insurgent nature of the practice.

Again, their practice may not be deemed revolutionary everywhere. What is insurgent and transgressive is determined by the context. These are not fixed categories but, rather, transient states in which planners engage in deliberative democracy at times and agonistic public action at others, transitioning from invited to invented spaces seamlessly. As the authors argue, "When questioning dominant planning practices, radical planners sometimes work with collaborative strategies, having a mainly deliberative form of democratic politics in mind. On other occasions, they will need more agonistic or disruptive strategies to achieve their insurgent ambitions" (De Blust, Van Wymeersch & Oosterlynck, this volume).

Chapter 3 (Taipei) offers a classic example of fluidity between invented and invited spaces, with actors simultaneously eager to "follow the rules" but also ready to call out the authorities on their lack of action, adding a new layer of participation to the robust planning culture of Taiwan. In this sense, the authors claim for a different understanding of the movement's relationship with the authorities and existing institutions.

Despite being founded on this ideal of fluidity, many (or most) critical approaches to participation framed in terms of "insurgency" argue that the neoliberalization of urban development has turned civil engagement in planning processes into a post-political endeavour, or yet a closure of democratic opportunities that marks the "demise of dissent", and thus depict any form of institutional participation as inimical to insurgent planning. ... In other words, the ability to "transgress" has, paradoxically, fallen victim to a sort of generating consensus that seems to exclude the potential for transformative politics within invited spaces of participation. To transgress, in the sense we understand it, means to pursue "planning" not only outside legal, institutionalized forms but also outside what appears to be an increasingly narrow set of actors and actions being considered as "insurgent".

(Hellmer, Lin & Lu, this volume)

The authors seek to describe "the spaces/sites wherein such acts take place, how civil society is engaged in such process spaces and, ultimately, the extent

to which these embody principles of counter-hegemony, imagination and, most importantly, transgression". These movements are antithetical to the anti-politics of neoliberal governance, in which social struggles are neutralized in favour of a false consensus or the demobilization of social movements. However, "transformative politics" also entails strengthening the political sphere by establishing new institutions and practices, or reforming old ones with the potential to endure and ensure the continuation of the transformative process in the future. In this sense, invited spaces are not only depoliticizing but may also be the vehicles for change. The Taipei case is similar, in this sense, to the case of Belo Horizonte, where social movements have (re)occupied established institutional spaces and successfully transformed them.

Chapter 4 (Jakarta) starts by recognizing the potential for an agonistic planning approach that embraces conflict as a springboard for change. "[T]he conflicts brought up productive tensions too, following the riots and mass demonstrations against the state violence. Collective action crystallized around the defence of *kampung*s, or the so-called vernacular, informal settlements" (Putri, this volume), which speaks to the idea that social struggles are collective-identity-forming and sense-giving. It emphasizes two additional key points. First, it highlights the role of insurgent planners as educators in the Freirean perspective, and how the education of oppressed citizens may constitute what the author calls "covert urbanism" (for example, creating a library in a *kampung* in Indonesia can be seen as a type of "covert urbanism", aiming to enable citizens to take their own decisions in connection with their living environment). "I have shown and argued elsewhere ... how Freirean traditions in social movements that emerged during the New Order era have transgressed across political regimes in Indonesia. The traditions helped transform covert or underground planning during the authoritarian regime" (Putri, this volume). The author firmly positions insurgent planners as "reflexive practitioners" who engage with social movements to educate citizens so as to empower them for the struggle for change. The concept of the "reflexive practitioner", a practitioner who actively and thoughtfully engages with social movements, is explored in multiple chapters of this book.

Chapter 5 introduces us to the case of Beirut and the domain of anti-politics manifested by an almost failed state that has nonetheless pursued an ultra-liberal agenda of privatization and market-led urban development. In this exceptional setting, a seemingly ordinary citizen movement to restore a historic park assumes remarkable significance. The emphasis on this endeavour provides participants with a shared identity that transcends the immediate action, even if it might appear trivial at first glance. However, this extreme scenario raises a fundamental question: can social movements effectively reshape the realm of politics (or reconstitute it), or are their actions destined to be temporary and eventually fade away? Is there a necessity for invented

spaces to fill invited spaces? What if the latter do not exist or, as seems to be the case in Lebanon, are in a shambles? Institutionalized spaces seem to allow gains to crystallize.

Part II introduces academic action in planning. This section contains three remarkably consistent chapters that explore how academia interacts with social movements, buttressing and stabilizing their action.

Chapter 6 (Rio de Janeiro) brings the harsh reality of a peripheral capitalist society to the fore and conceptualizes “conflict planning” as fundamentally different from the idea of agonistic planning, in which conflict may lead to mutual understandings and agreements:

We understand that the construction of a theoretical framework that starts from a shared legitimacy under an environment of “plural democracy” ignores the violence perpetrated against subalternized populations everywhere, even in the Global North, where those conditions exist. In this respect, and based on years of dialogue with concrete cases, we conceptualize conflictual planning as characterized by power asymmetries between the parties in conflict, which are operationalized to impose, on the part of state and corporate agents, decisions taken without the knowledge of affected people and communities. The legitimacy of threatened populations as parties to a conflict, under a “plural democratic” environment, is not necessarily recognized.

(Tanaka *et al.*, this volume)

This conceptualization of conflict planning seems to give up existing structures and governance as irresistibly oppressive, and accepts that conflicts at the fringes of capitalism are almost irreconcilable. Only resistance seems to remain as an alternative. The authors of this chapter have great confidence in the ability of communities to resist through collective organization, with the support of reflexive academics and practitioners, but with little effect on the larger structures and institutions. Again, this begs the question as to whether the absence of invited spaces may inhibit the endurance of gains and the appearance of true transformative politics.

Chapters 7 (Buenos Aires) and **8** (Makassar) share similarities with the preceding chapter in that they underline the involvement of academia as an additional actor within the relationships between capital, the state and its citizens. The university, possessing legitimacy, resources and a strong institutional framework, can potentially act as a stabilizing force in social struggles. The university has the potential to promote action to empower communities in the Freirean tradition, which the Makassar chapter illustrates through the idea of citizen science and the valorization of traditional knowledge, through

which citizens can occupy invited spaces, all the while carving out new roles for themselves as “field workers”: “[B]y bringing greater legitimacy to community knowledge, the project has triggered an opportunity to bring flood knowledge and evidence to support community advocacy in government-led participatory planning processes” (Wolff, Prescott & Ramirez-Lovering, this volume). Through community engagement, the authors have discovered that flood management, typically employed to justify evidence-based evictions, should undergo a transformative shift towards an approach that integrates local knowledge and community perspectives.

Part III of the book encompasses first-hand accounts of planning practice, which introduces a notable paradox. This section gathers together four chapters that address the question: how can professional planners, firmly entrenched within institutional frameworks, embody insurgent qualities? In the context of occupying invited spaces within planning practice, how do they challenge and transform these spaces to accommodate the demands and perspectives of social movements?

Chapter 9 recounts the experience of Belo Horizonte, in Brazil. Here, again, we see actors who occupy multiple spaces, often simultaneously; some planners are simultaneously activists and “local authorities”. This chapter illustrates how the depoliticization and neutralization of social movements by neoliberal governance is real but can be reversed by a “reappropriation” of invited spaces by a new generation of activists and planners. This reappropriation allowed the demands of social movements to be met, but also allowed the creation of a critical alliance between the most progressive planners and social movements and permitted the approval of progressive urban management instruments in the city’s master plan. The chapter introduces very important nuances to the idea of invited spaces.

The chapter demonstrates the effective transformation of invited spaces from within. But, most importantly, it reminds us that the creation of these spaces in Brazilian politics stemmed from a grassroots-driven agenda. Grassroots movements organized around urban struggles strongly influenced the drafting of the 1988 Brazilian constitution during the process of redemocratization. These movements also influenced the establishment of the City Statute, which introduced many of the progressive urban management instruments. Although the growing neoliberalization of urban governance in Brazil gradually diminished the potency of these created/invited spaces, new social movements refused to relinquish them and, instead, chose to reoccupy and reinterpret their significance. This underlines the significance of invited spaces as stable platforms for social struggles when they are occupied and redefined, ensuring the permanence of gains.

Chapter 10 focuses on the same case of Belo Horizonte but brings in a new dimension. Here, identity and intersectionality are central in the fight

for a just city, with a group of women of colour occupying political spaces that used to belong traditionally to white men. They become political actors within the institution, championing a progressive agenda highlighting the focus on urban struggles that were previously “invisible” or were overlooked by planners and decision-makers. Their focus on practical demands helps the passing of a progressive participatory city plan that addresses some of those struggles. This movement can be characterized as insurgent because it effectively transforms the existing order by granting access to new actors to previously inaccessible positions.

This is consistent with the following accounts. [Chapter 11](#) (Istanbul) also features the occupation of traditional institutional spaces by actors who bring about new demands and perspectives. The institution featured in this chapter is a professional planning organization, the pinnacle of institutionalism, but the occupation of this space in a broader political environment hostile to popular demands demonstrates the importance of sustaining stable institutions that can be occupied by progressive forces. Their institutional nature gives strength, visibility and legitimacy to popular demands. From the occupation of these institutional structures, insurgent action emerges. As with several other cases in this book (Belo Horizonte, Makassar, Antwerp), experts identified with social struggles occupy institutional spaces and resignify them. This begs the question as to why this may happen in some cases, while other institutions continue to perpetuate the status quo unchallenged. We speculate that this highlights the importance of a progressive planning and design education that is able to spawn new insurgent planners.

The case of Istanbul serves as a paradigmatic counter-example, as the individual central to the article ultimately finds himself imprisoned, heralding the destruction of the once created/ invited space. This represents the profound tragedy of Turkish politics, wherein President Erdoğan’s conservative/ultra-neoliberal movement effectively occupies all political spaces, leaving little room for progressive political movements to flourish.

The book concludes, in [Chapter 12](#), with the fascinating example of a revered Irish planner in Belfast occupying prominent institutional positions and actively supporting progressive social movements. This case gains exceptional significance within its context and imparts a fresh interpretation of “insurgency-from-within”. Despite the long-standing contested nature of urban space in Northern Ireland, an institutional actor emerges who catalyses discussions that were historically marginalized. “Sterrett is one of those ‘insurgent planners’ who sheds light on the process of neoliberalization of cities, gives a voice to civic society and inspires a resistance against the homogenization, privatization and erosion of the human aspects of cities” (Martire & Quigley, this volume). In essence, this instance showcases how a deeply traditional planner creates spaces to accommodate new demands

and voices. It is worth highlighting that Northern Ireland upholds the rule of law strongly, resulting in the swift institutionalization of positive changes once achieved.

We aimed to proactively engage with the concern regarding the potential loose interpretation of insurgency within this book. We acknowledge that, if everyone is labelled as an insurgent planner, the true essence of insurgency loses its potency. Our foremost key insight is that insurgent planning practice has a fluid and adaptable nature, and elements of insurgency can manifest in diverse contexts in which seemingly trivial actions may acquire new meanings. Insurgency can take on various forms, even by actors who may not self-identify as “insurgent” or consistently embody insurgent qualities.

As Hellmer, Lin and Lu observe (Chapter 3, Taipei), rather than focusing on the hostility of insurgents towards authority, insurgent planning “might be more accurately positioned in opposition to” what the authors call “the planning regime”, which they define as the “entire constellation of public and private actors and institutions (including laws and norms) across local, national and international scales that are complicit in the professional, technical, legal or generally institutionalizing processes of defining what counts as ‘planning’”.

The depiction of insurgent planning practice in this book showcases its inherent diversity, mirroring the wide array of tactics and strategies employed by insurgent planners. Such diversity emerges as a consequence of the multifaceted nature of the struggles encountered by the individuals and groups portrayed here. Insurgency, being contingent upon contextual factors, is also reliant on the actors involved. It arises from the dynamic interplay between those who recognize the need for change and inclusion, the existing formal and informal institutions, the robustness of the rule of law, the accessibility of invited spaces and the potential for creating new spaces for participation. Actors fluidly occupy various realms of struggle, seamlessly transitioning between invited and created spaces, which forms the essence of insurgent planning. This dynamic underlines the significance of multiple identities in the process, as actors adapt and shift between identities to occupy invited spaces or forge their own domains in pursuit of their objectives.