

Writing the Latin American city: Trajectories of urban scholarship

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Abstract

Scholarship on urban Latin America is prolific and multifaceted. The region not only is the most urbanised in the world but also the most unequal. This distinctive feature makes it rich and relevant for urban theory-making. This essay introduces a Virtual Special Issue (VSI) on urban studies in Latin America that showcases a selection of articles from the journal's archives from the mid-1970s to the present. It aims to locate urban studies scholarship in/about the region in the context of democratisation struggles and their urban implications. On the one hand, it traces the intellectual trajectories of some key urban debates bringing attention to their disciplinary, methodological and theoretical underpinnings. The VSI identifies four well-established strands: (1) Disputes around local governance; (2) Anatomy of uneven urbanisation; (3) Housing provision landscapes and infrastructural assemblages; and (4) Economic geographies and variegated gentrifications. On the other hand, it delineates a broad picture of the emergent debates and thematic, methodological and geographical absences in the pages of this journal. Through this analysis, the editorial concludes by identifying some potentially productive future directions for research.

Keywords

Latin America, urban governance, urbanisation, urban planning, urban theory

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摘要

关于拉丁美洲城市的学术研究丰富多样。该地区不仅是世界上城市化程度最高的地区,也是最不平等的地区。这一显著特点使得拉丁美洲在城市理论制定方面具有丰富的内容和意义。本文介绍了关于拉丁美洲城市研究的一份虚拟特刊 (VSI), 并展示了从1970年代中期至今的该期刊档案中精选的文章。该特刊旨在将拉丁美洲地区的城市研究学术放在民主化斗争及其城市影响的背景之下。一方面, 它追溯了一些关键城市辩论的知识轨迹, 使人们注意到其学科、方法论和理论基础。该虚拟特刊指出了四个已经确立的研究领域: (1) 地方治理纷争; (2) 不均衡城市化的剖析; (3) 住房供应图景和基础设施组合; 及 (4) 经济地理和多种多样的绅士化。另一方面, 它勾勒出该期刊中新兴辩论的广泛图景, 并指出了期刊内容上存在的主题、方法论和地理学上的空白。通过这一分析, 论文最后指出了一些潜在的富有成效的未来研究方向。

关键词

拉丁美洲、城市治理、城市化、城市规划、城市理论

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Introduction

Urban scholarship on Latin America is characterised by its abundance and complexity, encompassing a wide range of perspectives, topics and approaches. Since the mid-1970s, some of this work has featured in the pages of this journal, with a mushrooming of contributions in the last decade. This Special Virtual Issue (SVI) aims to locate urban studies scholarship in/about the region in the context of democratisation struggles and their urban implications. On the one hand, it traces the intellectual trajectories of some key urban debates bringing attention to their disciplinary, methodological and theoretical underpinnings. On the other hand, it delineates a broad picture of the emergent debates and thematic and geographical absences. It is important to notice that when we refer to Latin American cities, we use a 'Euro-American' idea of 'area studies' born in the Cold War era (Roy, 2009). The notion of a 'Latin American city' itself was part of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) and UNESCO agendas for the region. This agenda was

underlined by the constitution of the Inter-American Society of Planning (SIAP) and the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) (Ortiz, 2012). We need to acknowledge this baggage and overcome the conception of world regions as bounded by immutable geographical traits. Instead, I consider Latin American Urbanisms as an epistemic space derived from colonial legacies and ongoing intercontinental trajectories of urban theories, policies, people and capital that enact singular territorial and ethnic configurations.

Writing about Latin American Urbanisms captures diverse scholars' spatial imaginations and is determined by the political economy of higher education and research. Urban scholarship in the region moves between creating '*conocimiento propio*' (our own knowledge) and expanding and contesting 'global' urban debates. Most of the urban scholarship is written in Spanish and Portuguese and occurs in transnational networks of knowledge circulation.¹ These networks, and periodic events, have served as platforms for self-critical assessments on considering 'the urban' as a theoretical object and as an object

of empirical practices. For instance, Coraggio (1989) explained in a paradigmatic piece the dilemmas of urban research, questioning the role of theory, the researchers' ontology, the relationship with their social reality and more importantly, the proposed pathways to transform reality. Other scholars have also criticised the vicissitudes of 'imported' paradigms² as universal explanations of the urban, the commoditisation and privatisation of research, and the limitations of institutional structures to support research that mainly has been produced by public universities (Carrión, 1991; Carrión and Dammert, 2016; González Reynoso, 2003; Ramírez and Pradilla, 2013; Schteingart, 2000). Some of the most distinctive contributions of Latin American scholars to the field of urban studies have been in dependency theory, approaches to marginality and informality and the historical study of colonial urban systems. Thus, writing about the Latin American city crystallises the mobility and mutation of ideas, practices and policies and becomes an assemblage of diverse identities and spatial imaginations.

This introductory article to the VSI on Latin American Urbanisms provides a contextualisation to the urbanisation dynamics and the broader debates to which the selected articles contribute. I characterise how in the pages of the journal different strands of urban thought have been framed. The article is structured in three parts. The first provides a brief context of the historical sedimentations, the territorial unevenness and the pendular politics that influence urbanisation trends and the wider scope of urban scholarship in/about the region. The second illustrates the trajectories of the main academic debates depicted in the pages of this journal clustered on four strands: (1) Disputes around local governance; (2) Anatomy of uneven urbanisation; (3) Housing provision landscapes and infrastructural assemblages; and (4) Economic geographies and

variegated gentrifications. The third addresses the emergent debates and persistent absences in the pages of the journal and calls for some potentially productive future directions of urban research in/about Latin American cities.

Situating urban scholarship in/about Latin-American cities

Urban scholarship in/about Latin America is marked by territorial unevenness, historical sedimentation and pendular politics. In this section, I provide a brief context of how these three aspects unfurl through time and space.

Historical sedimentations

Urban scholarship is deeply influenced by the zeitgeist, the nature of urbanisation processes and the pulse of theoretical debates. The region was shaped by the brutal conquest led by the Spanish and Portuguese crowns in which the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas defined how both authorities divided up the territory for governing. In the Spaniard territories, indigenous settlements were targeted to 'create' new cities following the spatial pattern contained in the 'Leyes de Indias' (Indian Laws) enacted by Felipe II in 1519. The city itself was the main instrument of domination in colonial times where the grid became a possession mark, a sign of the creation of a 'new world'. As Corbun (2021: 39) puts it 'Spanish colonialists used the Law of the Indies to design cities that denied indigenous people access to their resources and to protect settler colonists from the "natives"'. After the conquest, nearly 12 million enslaved people were shipped across the Atlantic impacting both the existing territorial configuration and institutional systems of oppression while also shaping current urbanities. Subsequently, over two centuries of

independentism and the constitution of new republics has marked the different trajectories and multi-dimensional inequalities in each city. A seminal book that captures these historical sedimentations is *Latinoamérica: Las Ciudades y las Ideas* (1976) by José Luis Romero, who eloquently explains the changing modalities of historical consciousness embedded in the cities of the region.

The region experienced an early urbanisation stage of intensified concentration involving both foreign and rural-to-urban immigration between 1920 and 1950 with urbanisation rates close to those experienced in North American and European metropolises (e.g. Buenos Aires, Santiago, Mexico City) (Almandoz, 2010). The fast-paced urbanisation was concomitant with the emergence of the discipline of Urbanism and an increase of political populism. These factors framed the need for 'expert' knowledge to 'solve' the problems of cities. The first *urbanismo* course was introduced in 1928 at the School of Architecture in Chile, strongly influenced by Camillo Sitte's ideas, with the work of the Viennese writer, Karl Brunner, providing conceptual foundations for the book *Manual de urbanismo* (1939–40), aimed at addressing the challenges arising from Latin America's fast-growing cities (Almandoz, 2010). Urbanism was institutionalised in a piecemeal fashion after 1920, not through legislation as in Europe, but through plans for the major cities. These plans addressed the urgent need for hygienic and housing reform of historic centres as well as the emerging demand for suburban residencies for a 'cosmopolitan bourgeoisie' (Almandoz, 2006: 86). This period was marked by an emphasis on technical modernity, imported from Europe and the United States, where Latin America transitioned from *urbanismo* into *planificación* with territorial scope of the

plans going from the scope of the city to the region (Almandoz, 2010).

'Developmentalism' guided national agendas between the 1950s and 1970s. The driving force was implementation of a modernisation process boosted by economic nationalism and policies of import substitution industrialisation (ISI), especially in larger countries like Brazil and Mexico. The Alliance for Progress also promoted ISI in the Kennedy administration as a way to counteract 'leftist revolutions'. In this context, USA and United Nations showed their interest in the growing region in terms of industrial exploitation. They backed the creation of international agencies such as the OAS (Organization of American States) and ECLA (Economic Commission for Latin America) fostering economic policies that generated 'corporate states' (Almandoz, 2006) with a focus on urban policies to the neglect of the countryside, increasing rural–urban migration while enhancing the modern legacy of master planning through the visits of the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM). As Almandoz (2006) notes, urbanisation almost doubled industrial participation in the economies of several Latin American countries. In this stage, theories referring to 'hyper urbanisation', modernisation and 'marginality' prevailed (Scheingart, 2000). The theory of marginality attempted to explain urban poverty by taking as its starting point the non-integration of migrants into the modern sector of the economy (Valladares and Prates, 1995).

The 'lost decades', between 1970 and 1990, were marked by dictatorships and massive economic restructuring. During the Cold War, Operation Condor – a series of CIA-backed coup d'états – took place in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Haiti and Paraguay. Simultaneously, the ISI (import substitution and industrialisation) processes failed due to a lack of consolidation

and diversification. This failure resulted in the rise of urban unemployment and the highest peak in rural–urban migration. Consequently, cities suffered a proliferation of squatter settlements and an increase in the informal ‘sector’, which exposed the limits of centralised systems of planning and planning agencies. The inability of Latin American countries to deal with growing socio-economic unrest and rising levels of foreign debt would pave the way for subsequent neoliberal-inspired IMF and World Bank interventions. In this context, the Dependence School emerged as a Marxist theoretical response seeking to ‘re-interpret the center/periphery antinomy as a structural hindrance that could only be overcome on the basis of the state’s public intervention’ (Almandoz, 2006: 105). In the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s, the French Marxist school of urban sociology was a dominant influence on critical urbanism in Latin America (Scheingart, 2000). It influenced work on urban land, housing and the construction sector, on urban social movements and, to a certain extent, on urbanisation processes in the context of capitalist industrial development. At the same time local management, urban services and the environment emerged as prominent themes in the 1980s (Scheingart, 2000).

The intensification of globalisation and neo-liberalisation marked urban studies from the 1990s onwards. In this period, international agencies further defined a set of rules that embedded Latin American cities within broader networks of global finance; a ‘domination without colonies’ (Jessop, 2002). Milton Friedman and the Chicago school’s ideas spread at a fast pace. However, this period also represented a process of re-democratisation supported by vast social movements that elected social democratic and left-wing governments. In these contexts, nations have struggled to develop national urban policies that go beyond fragmented accounts of urbanisation processes (such as

housing, infrastructure, environment, etc.). In addition, local governments have been confronted with the contradiction of decentralisation processes amid retrenched clientelism. This contradiction resides in the collision of having more deregulated markets while needing to regulate urban land markets to increase local revenues. Theories around neoliberal urbanism, and gentrification and its resistance, now predominate in urban scholarship debates.

Territorial unevenness

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the generational, racialised, gender and territorial dimensions of social inequalities are kaleidoscopic. Each country has a differential ‘point of departure’ in their urbanisation process but still has a shared legacy of pervasive colonial, capitalist, patriarchal and racist systems. The region is one of the most multi-ethnic and multicultural regions of the world. Afro-descendants represent a quarter of the total population and indigenous groups represent about 8% of the population with between 772 and 826 distinct groups according to different sources (Busso and Messina, 2020). According to Busso and Messina ‘despite the massive inequality reductions in other areas during the 2000s, the wage penalty of Afro-descendants and indigenous groups has remained stable. Adjusting for education, Afro-descendants earn on average 17% less than the rest of the population, while indigenous people earn 27% less’ (Busso and Messina, 2020: 1). Racial injustices prevail, even in countries where the indigenous population is the majority such as Bolivia and Ecuador or in countries where Afro-descendants are the majority such as Brazil or the Dominican Republic.

Latin-America and the Caribbean operate as highly uneven territories in 33 countries. The region registers close to 650 million

inhabitants making it one of the most urbanised on the planet with over 82% of the population living in cities (UN-Habitat, 2020). The stark inequality of the region is expressed in the fact that the top 10% captures 54% of national income and the richest 1% takes in 21% of the (before taxes and transfers) income of the entire economy (World Inequality Data Base, 2020). The region has been characterised by SEDLAC as having 30% of the population living in poverty and 53% of the economically active population linked to the informal economy. These measurements are also dynamic, and perceptions change over time; while inequality declined between 2000 and 2013, almost 25% felt income distribution to be more just; in contrast, during the economic slowdown between 2013 and 2019, only 15% considered the income distribution to be fair (Busso and Messina, 2020). This unevenness was severely deepened by the COVID pandemic. According to the World Bank (2023), Latin America is the region hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and poverty rates increased from 24% to 26.5% between 2019 and 2021, while NU. CEPAL (2020) has estimated that the number of people living in extreme poverty will have increased from 67.5 million to 90.8 million. Such socio-economic inequity directly affects access to adequate housing and territorial vulnerabilities. The housing deficit in the region varies from 18% to 78% across countries, revealing great intra-regional disparities overall, while around 110 million inhabitants (21%) are living in self-built neighbourhoods (UN-Habitat, 2020; IADB, 2012).

Pendular politics

Democratisation processes in Latin America are shaped through pendular political power moves. As Kapiszewski et al. (2021: 3) suggest, 'historically in Latin America, efforts to mobilise the poor, elect leftist, or populist

governments, or redistribute wealth under democracy, frequently triggered conservative reactions and, in many cases, military coups'. The region has moved from dictatorships to liberalisation, from a left turn to a rise of regressive conservatism and an emerging turn to the 'left' with an intense cross-national variation. A pivotal legal aspect of democratisation processes at the national level has involved constitutional changes, where citizen participation became a mandate and where the role of property, the status of planning as well as citizen engagement are outlined. In Central America, most of the new Constitutions are from the 1980s (i. e. El Salvador (1983), Guatemala (1985), Honduras (1982), Nicaragua (1987)), with the exception of Panama (1972). An important exception in Central America is Mexico whose 1917 constitution dates to the revolution (Dannemann, 2020). Brazil also created a new constitution in 1988, while Bolivia (2009) stands out for incorporating the demand for a pluri-national state; Venezuela (1999) and Ecuador (2008) sought to respond to the Bolivarian aspiration and to popular demand. Colombia adopted a new constitution in 1991, despite not experiencing dictatorship, to set a new social contract to overcome endemic violence. In contrast, Chile has not proclaimed a new constitution despite the recent elections of a parity constitutional assembly in 2021 and a failed referendum in 2022.

The democratisation processes noted have a Janus-like quality. On the one hand, democratisation operates as a process of inclusion in the priorities of public policy and formal institutionalised deliberative spaces; on the other hand, democratisation operates as a struggle for dignity and the ability to reshape the social contract itself. While the key dimensions of inclusion involve recognition, access and resources (Kapiszewski et al., 2021), the dispute for dignity tests the frontiers of citizenship and promotes a constant

questioning of representative and direct democratic mechanisms. After the 1990s, when all the dictatorships formally ended, Latin America experienced an inclusionary turn and an ‘explosion of participation’ (Cameron and Sharpe, 2012: 231). This ‘explosion’ was also fuelled by decentralisation processes and the emergence of non-government organisations (NGOs) in the public sphere. The principal impetus behind the region’s inclusionary turn has been sustained interaction between inequality and enduring democracy (Kapiszewski et al., 2021). In this regard, the uneven introduction of participatory governance in Latin America is rooted in the growing importance of municipalities, a quest for legitimacy on the part of political leaders, and ambitious innovations on the ground (Irazábal, 2009). In this dynamic, decentralisation is influenced by partisan competition, planning practices and protest repertoires.

Partisan politics and ideological agendas have greatly influenced democratising pathways. The social discontent against neoliberal market reforms led to a wave of left-of-centre governments. Between 1998 and 2014, leftist candidates won over 30 presidential elections in 11 different Latin American countries including Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela. The media called this phenomenon the ‘pink tide’, pointing to their shared slogan from the World Social Forum (WSF): ‘Another world is possible’ (Selfa, 2018). Although the inclusionary turn of the region is not explained by this alone, as it predates it, this turn, along with the boom of commodities in the early 2000s, helped to account for intra-regional variation in the intensity of inclusionary reform. In ‘pink tide’ countries, there were more intense state efforts to include previously excluded popular sectors (Kapiszewski et al., 2021). Nonetheless, in Mexico, Colombia, Panama and elsewhere, important inclusionary reforms have also

been undertaken under right-of-centre governments (Fairfield and Garay, 2017; Garay, 2016). For instance, both Colombia and Brazil adopted a very progressive legal framework (i.e. Colombia’s Law 388/1998 of Territorial Development and Brazil’s 2001 Federal law of the City Statute) that pushes for a greater role of planning in municipalities to favour the social and ecological functions of property and key measures for participatory planning.

Beyond its fluctuations, the pink tide fell short in critical ways. The ‘leftist movement parties have struggled to navigate the new context, while the right-wing backlash has been fierce and unforgiving’ (Baiocchi and Gies, 2019: 314). The pink tide-induced inclusionary changes were not enough to overcome enduring inequalities, neoliberal premises and corruption legacies. Since 2015, former strongholds – Argentina, Chile and Brazil – have moved to a ‘right-wing’ president as well as Colombia, Guatemala, Paraguay, Honduras, Panama and Peru (Anria and Roberts, 2019). This new shift to an ‘authoritarian corporate populism’ (Alonso-Fradejas, 2021) relies on intimate links between big businesses, the state and racialised class hegemony of the elites, involving violence and institution manipulation. More recently, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Honduras and Bolivia have moved towards presidents with left-leaning agendas, but still without very distinctive urban national policies from their predecessors. Despite unevenly installed formal mechanisms of inclusion, the deepening processes of privatisation, militarisation, precarisation and indebtedness have fuelled deep social discontent. The region has moved from an ‘explosion of participation’ (Cameron and Sharpe, 2012: 231) to its erosion and recently to an ‘*estallido social*’ (i.e. social explosion) where the effervescence of protests has signalled the need to overcome deeply entrenched inequalities.

Still, the implications of social rage for the field of urban studies remain elusive.

Tracing the trajectory of core urban debates: The VSI

Urban Studies Journal's inventory of contributions around Latin American cities is composed of 150 articles, spanning the period from 1976 to early 2023. This collection depicts almost half a century of scholarly work in urban studies, revealing the transformation of the field itself. Most of the articles refer to urban dynamics in Brazil,³ Mexico and Chile, signalling the powerhouses of funded research. As with all selections, determining what to include is a daunting task, always imperfect and partial. I have identified four strands of consolidated debates and some emergent themes. My selection criteria favoured the pieces that capture the trajectory of those debates. In this selection process, I also weighted the theoretical contributions, a plurality of methodological approaches and, when possible, myriad urban geographies and temporalities of the pieces. Importantly I tried to balance the gender and number of authors that work from and about Latin American cities. As a result, I have selected 20 articles to be part of this VSI. The selected articles exemplify the trajectories of the following core strands of urban studies debates.

Disputes around local governance

The journal's scholarship around local governance reckons with the impacts of the processes of democratisation, financial crises and market liberalisation from the 1980s onwards. It captures the making and unmaking of the neoliberal urban state. During the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, the World Bank actively promoted decentralisation, setting the stage for the making of the neoliberal local state, growth of pro-

entrepreneurial urbanism (López et al., 2012) and city branding (Dinardi, 2016). Pro-entrepreneurial urbanism refers to the logic within municipal practices and speculative state actions at the local level that privileges elites and pursues market-driven agendas of capital accumulation through ad hoc regulation of the use and intensity of land exploitation involving public-private partnerships (López et al., 2012). In the case of Santiago (Chile), Zunino (2006) explores urban governance arrangements (i.e. policy-making, co-ordination and operation) and the role of 'techno-politicians' in the enactment of authoritarian redevelopment for middle classes to show the ways in which power operates and the non-influential role of local governments in a paradigmatic neoliberal regime. In a different light, Guarneros-Meza (2008) illustrates a political economy approach to 'governance as partnerships' in the context of historic-centre regeneration in Querétaro and San Luis Potosí (Mexico) highlighting the focus on managerial efficiency as well as the legacies of a strong interventionist and protectionist government. Conversely, important innovations in different realms of public policy have served as the basis for policy transfer across southern and northern cities alike. For instance, the circulation across geographies of Curitiba's Bus Rapid Transit system (Mercier et al., 2015), Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting (Postigo, 2011), Bogotá's bicycle lanes and civic pedagogy (Montero, 2020) or Medellín's Social Urbanism policy (Duque and Ortiz, 2020). These cases have offered a renewed interest in the power of local state-led urban transformations as well as their discontents.

Land (de)regulation is a crucial mechanism in the configuration of local neoliberal states. By no means is the panorama around land regulation homogeneous. Latin America presents three overarching trends in land management: the prevalence of private property

rights (Chile, Argentina and El Salvador), the prevalence of informality despite reforms (Peru and Mexico) and reforms that seek to balance private and collective interests (Colombia, Brazil and Cuba) (Morales, 2003). Peri-urban growth (de)regulation and the interplay with informalities have garnered a lot of attention. For example, Monkkonen and Ronconi (2013) found for the three major metropolitan areas of Argentina that ‘municipalities with higher levels of regulation have lower rates of compliance with property laws, and lots selling legally in these municipalities have lower land prices’ (p. 1951), while Wigle (2010) and Lombard (2016) have explained the effects of land reform in informal settlements in Mexico, outlining the nature of the in-situ social relations and land conflict in these areas. Similarly, Horn (2022) illustrates how the hyper-regulation of peri-urban growth in La Paz (Bolivia) results in ordinary citizens’ permanent uncertainty and promotes a ‘calculated informality which uncovers how states deliberately create legally ambiguous systems to facilitate speculative urban developments’ (p. 2489). These examples provide nuanced ways of conceptualising land conflicts, informality and the regulatory powers of the local state.

The unmaking of the local neoliberal state has emerged through several local experimentations. The uneven decentralisation process in the region (Kapiszewski et al., 2021) and the expansion of local-level participatory institutions have supported much variation in this regard. In the 2000s, the region experienced a re-politicisation of long-standing inequalities expressed in the rise of several movements against free-market capitalism and the emergence of new political issues and demands where more relevance was given to the ‘community’ as a powerful locus for organising and using new forms of transgressive direct action (Arce and Bellinger, 2007; Silva, 2009). Several concepts have been developed to capture

progressive local experiments to expand democratic avenues: municipal socialism (Goldfrank and Schrank, 2009), radical cities (Baiocchi and Gies, 2019) and new municipalism (Arpini et al., 2022). Whatever the label, grassroots organisations’ power plays a key role in forging democratic pathways locally (Baiocchi and Gies, 2019; Gilbert, 2015). The crisis of the neoliberal regime also opened opportunities to subvert the local state or foster non-statist and/or anti-state modes of local governance. Geddes (2014) reflects on the “territorial rootedness” of contemporary anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist movements in Latin America’ (p. 3150) by portraying the potentials and shortcomings of struggles for autonomy and solidarity networks as integral to the occupation of (local) state institutions by radical social movements like MST and Via Campesina in Brazil or the Zapatistas in Mexico. Several local experimentations took place in both capital cities such as Caracas under the Radical Cause Party and Bogotá under the independent government of Antanas Mockus, and intermediate cities like Rosario in Argentina under the Socialist Party (Baiocchi and Gies, 2019; Irazábal, 2009). Most recently, Valparaiso and Recoleta in Santiago (Chile) have experimented with the re-municipalisation of public services and introduction of broad-based citizen platforms (Toro and Orozco, 2023), and Rosario has witnessed the production of popular infrastructures during the pandemic (Minuchin and Maino, 2022). Thus, the making and unmaking of the local neoliberal state keep unfolding while the scholarship on the region provides key insights to conceptualise local governance.

Urban governance implies non-state actors working together sometimes with the state, despite the state and against the state (Lopes de Souza, 2006). The contributions in the journal around the role of civil society in the region discuss the complexities of

putting participatory urban governance in motion and the disputes around territorial control with non-state armed actors. While the implementation of neoliberal reforms appeared to depoliticise citizens, atomising and demobilising class-based popular sectors in the 1990s (Oxhorn and Ducatenzeiler, 1998; Roberts, 1998), in the 2000s local governance innovations prompted an ‘explosion of participation’ (Cameron and Sharpe, 2012: 231). Brazil, especially the case of Porto Alegre, has been an exemplar of urban and social participatory governance (Novy and Leubolt, 2005). For instance, Caldeira and Holston (2015) have reflected on the early promises of the new paradigm of urban policy that reinvents master planning based on a constitutional mandate of popular participation. Friendly and Stiphany (2019) go further, assessing the ‘misalignment between the reform movement’s paradigmatic goals and its paradoxical failures’ (p. 271) harnessing the intersection between right to the city claims, insurgent planning and the practices of *autogestão* – self-management. In this vein, tackling resistance is also crucial to examining citizen engagement. Carrieri et al. (2021) explain the ontological resistance tactics and symbolic power in the contested destruction and reconstruction of the Vila Rubim market in Vitoria. This case allows us to understand ‘everyday political practices that, rather than focusing solely on traditional representational politics, engage directly in the remaking of the material fabric of urban environments’ (Carrieri et al., 2021: 1616). In contrast, Postigo (2011) explores Porto Alegre’s participatory budgeting as a spatial model state–society synergy and how it has been implemented in Montevideo and Mexico City, proposing a spatial conceptualisation of participation. These contributions address the challenges of authoritarian legacies and distrust of institutionalised participation.

Latin American cities’ local governance and inhabitants are confronted with urban violence and the active role of non-state armed actors. Inhabiting urban margins requires everyday interaction with coercive systems of rule. This experience is illustrated by Pope (2023) who explains the experiences of negotiating urban spaces with militias in Rio de Janeiro’s West Zone through the lenses of political settlements and brokerage. Similarly, Abello-Colak and Guarneros-Meza (2014) call for including armed actors in our understanding of urban governance. Using the case of Medellín, they explain ‘the existence of different strategies that have allowed criminals to benefit from governance arrangements, originally created to promote participatory democracy and urban development’ (Abello-Colak and Guarneros-Meza, 2014: 3268). In a different light, Gutiérrez et al. (2013) have explained how city-level coalition building has been key in Medellín and Bogotá’s attempts to reduce homicide rates. The other side of these security policies is the rising and problematic role of private security companies. Using the case of São Paulo, Garmany and Galdeano (2018) illustrate how private security companies operate in complicated networks between the state, private capital and organised crime, problematising assumptions about the state’s monopoly on violence. Non-state armed actors, as Martén and Boano (2022) illustrate in Ciudad Juárez, shape border-crossing practices, enacting violent entrepreneurship. These contributions shed light on the inadequacy of the binaries of legality–illegality to depict the complexities of disputes around territorial control involving non-state armed actors in the city.

Anatomy of uneven urbanisation

The anatomy of Latin American cities has been depicted through the lenses of models

of urban growth and the socio-political impacts of urban forms as well as the mosaic of social identity and the trajectories of migration influxes. The materiality of cities shapes also the challenges to theorise and govern historic centres, the dispersion of gated communities, peripheral mass housing, retrenched informal settlements and large-scale redevelopment projects. The journal has presented explanatory models of the spatial patterns of urban growth and polycentric megacities. For instance, Morris (1978) introduced the longstanding debate around the determinants of urban growth, challenging the Hoyt scheme (1939) developed to explain the residential expansion and the central place in cities of the US. He attempted to create a general theory of the form of cities in developing countries using the case of Caracas (Venezuela), going beyond economic variables and including determinants such as land ownership, skewed income distribution and buying power, topography, political or institutional controls, or group decision-making to inform urban planning strategies. Almost two decades later, Dehghan and Vargas Uribe (1999) focused on Mexico City to define the economic determinants of population concentration, finding that their empirical data was 'consistent with central-place theory and suggest that as development proceeds, agglomeration benefits of large cities are exhausted and the optimum level of production is exceeded' (p. 1272); central government expenditure was found to be the variable that plays the most important role in shaping the city-size distribution in Mexico. In a similar vein, Suárez and Delgado (2009) and Escamilla et al. (2016) have expanded explanatory models to understand to what extent Mexico City is (or is not) a polycentric metropolis; while Suárez and Delgado (2009) explore a predominantly monocentric hybrid model of urban form with inner nodes and corridor-

like structures, Escamilla et al. (2016) use a composite index and a network data set to explain the relatively weak polycentric urban condition. Monkkonen et al. (2019) inquire into the nexus between agglomeration economies of the manufacturing sector and urban compactness measures. They found that measures of urban compactness are negatively associated with economic productivity, requiring policy agendas focused on compact urbanisation to take account of the needs of the manufacturing sector. The modalities of the spatial structures of Latin American cities remain a central element of analysis in the field.

Scholarship on the anatomy of the Latin American city has also focused on the rapid change in peri-urban areas of small and middle-size cities as well as the role of interstitial areas and gated communities. Romein (1995) discusses the often-ignored production structures of small urban centres in peripheral rural regions using the case of Ciudad Quesada (Costa Rica). His work analysed the internal segmentation structure as well as the external determinants of the town's economic linkages with its regional hinterland, its functional integration within the national hierarchy of settlements, and elements of national development policy. Similarly Lerner et al. (2014), based on empirical data from Toluca Metropolitan Area (Mexico), found the persistence of maize in peri-urban areas alongside rapid urban and industrial growth around the small towns providing some insights for planning peri-urban areas. In a similar vein, Phelps and Silva (2018) propose an analytical framework to explain the multiple scales of interstitial spaces of urban sprawl based on empirical data from the metropolitan area of Santiago de Chile. Finally, the analysis of urban anatomy from the 1990s onwards focuses on the enclaves generated by the proliferation of gated communities, displaying growing interest in the grounded

impacts of urban form. Kostenwein (2021), taking Bogotá (Colombia) as the case study, proposes gated community typologies based on their tridimensionality – the volumetric nature of urban space – and in relation to how they shape their surrounding public spaces to inform spatial planning. Roitman and Phelps (2011), based on research in Pilar (Argentina), have discussed the implications for the ‘public city’ in the wider suburban municipality with an agglomeration of gated communities. They argue that Pilar has become a dual suburb where the ‘private city’ has directly impacted the municipality’s economy, processes of community-building and social cohesion, and where ‘poverty and exclusion have increased at the same time as wealth and social distinction’ (Roitman and Phelps, 2011: 3505). Therefore, this strand of scholarship has moved from an emphasis on urban morphology to an exploration of the socio-spatial impacts of singular urban forms.

Urban forms crystallise different urban inequalities distributed differentially across class, gender, generation and ethnicity (Ortiz, 2022a). Scholarship on how identity affects the way we use and experience the city in Latin America has been portrayed from the lenses of class-based segregation to more recent accounts of gendered and racial approaches to place-based stories. For instance, Bastia (2015) argues that ethnicity plays a crucial role in the ways in which informality is regulated. Using qualitative analysis of the experience of Bolivian migrants in informal settlements in Buenos Aires, she unravels the exclusionary mechanism used with migrants that reproduces ethnic divisions. In contrast, Friendly and Pimentel Walker (2022) explore the erasure of racial histories of the transatlantic slave trade inscribed in the transformation of Porto Maravilha in the context of changes in Rio de Janeiro in preparation for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. The

debates around urban segregation in the pages of this journal have focused mainly on Santiago (Chile). From an ethnographic approach, Márquez and Pérez (2008) argue that a ‘new’ urban segregation model has emerged and has paved the way for the practice of neo-communitarian lifestyles based on the production of ‘gated’ spaces in *condominios* – middle-class housing complexes – and *villas* – ‘housing projects’ for poor residents – alike, contributing to the breakdown of social cohesion. Conversely, Méndez et al. (2021), using surveys and spatial analysis, argue that neighbourhood cohesion for people who reside in affluent areas can be considered a form of privilege and that urban policies around social cohesion require first attempting to reduce socio-spatial rifts. Focusing on middle-class social representations, Fuentes and Mac-Clure (2020), argue that social stratification within the city is maintained through the symbolic representations of social-spatial differences and the spatial delimitation of frontiers between territories. These accounts of urban space appropriation privilege class and ethnicity as explanatory factors for segregation and social exclusion.

Exposure to urban violence and territorial stigma is gendered and varies in domestic and public spaces. In the context of rapid transit infrastructures in São Paulo, Moreira and Ceccato (2021) suggest that mobility and the level of victimisation are gender dependent. Using statistical analysis, they found that ‘women are at higher risk of victimisation than men in São Paulo’s central metro station, while men run a higher risk of violence at end stations – notably during late night periods’ (Moreira and Ceccato, 2021: 203). Similarly, Hume and Wilding (2020), in the context of the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador, argue that in the context of extreme urban violence it is important to understand the situated politics of women’s agency in enduring intimate

partner violence. They call for interrogating agency as ‘dynamic and lived practice facilitates an acknowledgement of the multi-scalar entanglements of violence across urban spaces’ (Hume and Wilding, 2020: 249). Tracing the trajectories of a man and a woman living in the periphery of metropolitan Lima, Allen (2022) argues that the ‘everyday city-making practices of the “unsheltered” are inextricably linked to the politics of bare citizenship’ (p. 490). She asserts that ‘stigma traps’ influence their ability to reclaim their agency as entitled citizens and, in consequence, their possibilities to achieve tenure security, access to services and infrastructure, livelihood opportunities and psychological and physical well-being. Along similar lines, Gamlin (2022) argues that territorial stigma in Juárez (US–Mexico border) operates through gendered and racialised frictions underpinned by colonial power dynamics. In doing so, she claims that ‘edgework’ entails the negotiation of ‘damaged’ identities and violence where shame has become attached to male identities in locations of urban marginality. These contributions bring new angles to understanding how identity politics operates in urban space and the multi-faceted social agency of marginalised and intersectional identities.

Migration flows continue to shape Latin American cities. The pages of the journal bring evidence about the trajectories of urban migration from fast urban growth due to rural–urban migration to the trans-continental arrivals from and towards the region. Based on the case of La Paz (Bolivia), van Lindert (1991) analysed the geographical distribution of the city-born poor and the migrant poor and found that ‘the city-born poor remain in non-owned accommodation for rather prolonged periods, whereas the migrant poor attain self-help ownership much more quickly’ (p. 433). Metropolises that have become economic hubs and/or have a long history of migrant

reception, as expected, have attracted new waves of migrants from the continent and across continents. For instance, in São Paulo (Brazil), Amrith (2018) discusses how despite the precarious conditions and the scant institutional support, labour migrants from Bolivia, Peru, China, Pakistan and Nepal co-exist alongside existing working-class groups operating as tailors and garment vendors, developing friendships and networks of support and sociability in central commercial neighbourhoods. Similarly, Santiago (Chile) has witnessed an unprecedented increase in migratory flows in the last decades and more recently has received migrants from Venezuela. Using an ethnographic approach, Sheehan (2022) explains the production of vertical enclaves where migrants share high-rise apartments and engage with building common areas, public spaces and neighbourhoods despite the challenges of overcrowding.

The scholarship on urban influxes has also focused on the trans-frontier metropolis and trans-local receiving communities. For instance, Herzog (1991) has analysed how international borders and urban space interact, focusing on the US–Mexico border in ‘twin cities’ like San Diego–Tijuana or El Paso–Ciudad Juárez. His research has shown the multiple challenges for urban planning where global forces – immigration and transnational manufacturing – shape transnational urban growth. In a similar line, Durst (2019) traces the US federal government’s designation of *colonias* to communities of low-income and Hispanic immigrants living on the US–Mexican border. Her research found that the configuration of ‘exploitative land sales practices, poor-quality or non-existent infrastructure and poor-quality housing’ (Durst, 2019: 722) is not exclusive to the border region but that informal subdivisions exist in large numbers across Southern and Western states and are home to diverse populations. In contrast, Main

and Sandoval (2015) illustrate the placemaking practices of trans-local receiving communities of Mexican and Central American immigrant communities in Los Angeles, California. They found that the generation of new 'place identities' and the emotional significance of MacArthur Park is influenced by the park's specific physical, social and cultural elements, leading to an agency in everyday and political practices. This strand of scholarship has moved from depicting rural-urban migration to the impacts of trans-continental immigration.

Housing provision landscapes and infrastructural assemblages

Studies on the social production of housing have been central to the writing on Latin American cities with the journal's archive bringing insights into debates around housing self-provision, residential mobility, state responses to informality and the financial housing system. Residential mobility studies have focused on the interplay between housing consumption, residential location and labour supply decisions. Early debates on residential mobility among low-income households were set by Turner's (1968) seminal work in Lima (Peru). However, Edwards (1983), questioning Turner's approach and based on research in Bucaramanga (Colombia), demonstrated that residential mobility among poor families is 'as much a reaction to changing conditions in the housing market as a response to variations in household demand' (p. 131). Later on, Assadian and Ondrich (1993) documented that residential location, using the case of Bogotá (Colombia), varies according to gender and type of household (i.e. one-earner and two-earner households). They found that in two-earner households, women had longer commutes to work than men, as well as earning a smaller salary and having more household responsibilities. Gilbert and

Varley (1990) provided a comprehensive understanding of the role of the rental housing market and the features of 'landlordism' in Guadalajara and Puebla (Mexico) to define tenants' selection mechanisms. More recently, Stokenberga (2019), also drawing on research about residential location choices of low-to-middle-income households in Bogotá found that surveyed individuals preferred living near their extended family and, on average, prioritise it more than accessibility to the central business district. These works portray the complex systems of variables that determine residential socio-spatial patterns.

The depiction of state intervention in self-built neighbourhoods has varied and the vocabulary has expanded. For instance, Ward and Melligan (1985) refer to the measures of 'shantytowns eradication' in the 1970s and 'urban renovation' in the 1980s in Mexico City, while Monkkonen (2012) focuses on a longitudinal analysis of 'land regularisation programmes' in Tijuana (Mexico) since the 1950s, where he found that 'the land regularisation system is not well structured to encourage land market efficiency or the upgrading of low-income neighbourhoods' (p. 271). Atuesta and Soares (2018) explain the distributional and locational effects of the paradigmatic 'urban upgrading programme' called Favela-Bairro in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), which includes not only land regularisation but also infrastructure upgrading. In contrast with the Tijuana case, they found that 'the programme was successful in decreasing inequality among slum dwellers and reducing economic and spatial segregation within treated neighbourhoods' (Atuesta and Soares, 2018: 53). From a comparative perspective between São Paulo and eThekweni, Saraiva (2022: 1622) argues that 'the consolidation of democracy was followed by the development of more technocratic approaches to the detriment of earlier slum

upgrading initiatives focusing on community empowerment'. Nonetheless, based on its historical development in Buenos Aires (Argentina), Van Gelder et al. (2015) showed how informality in the city is bound to persist and even increase, despite government expenditure on social housing.

Journal contributions have also reflected upon the crisis-prone housing financialised system since the early 1990s. For instance, Valença (1992, 1999) documented how the closure of the Brazilian National Housing Bank in 1986 impacted social housing production and the institutional manufacturing of crisis. Adopting a supply-side account, Sanfelici and Halbert (2016) inquired into the rising role of financial markets 'as a source of funding for a consolidating development industry and its influence on the geography of housing in Brazilian cities' (p. 1465). They traced how in the mid-2000s the narratives of quick capital gains associated with the removal of a land banking bottleneck faced by developers involved discrepancies between the promises of returns for shareholders and actual financial results, impacting the forms, scales and locations of housing projects. In the context of Mexico, Monkkonen (2019) traces the role of government mortgage lending in housing vacancy rates, across and within cities at country level since the housing market crash in the United States in the late-2000s. His research revealed that federal housing finance can be held partially responsible for higher vacancy rates and the hollowing out of central cities. This strand of debate has moved from informality persistence to housing financialisation.

Shifts in the management and governance of infrastructures have shaped Latin American cities. The scholarship in this journal has portrayed processes of urban financialisation, changes around urban infrastructures and the evolving theoretical lenses used to frame them. The trajectories of urban thought covered in the journal span

from public utility provision to multiscale digital entanglements. The main emphasis in the pages of the journal has revolved around water and mobility infrastructures while recording emerging debates on the role of digital infrastructures and smart city initiatives. The pandemic reminded us that water access is crucial for public health. Despite the region having 30% of the world's freshwater resources (Rosales et al., 2021), 150 million people – a quarter of the region's population – live in water-scarce areas and more than 400 million lack safe sanitation (Wallenstein and Makino, 2022). Research about water management in the region is critical. It first appeared in this journal in the late 1990s. Marvin and Laurie (1999) problematised the dualist systems approach – formal/informal – to water management in Cochabamba (Bolivia) revealing the intricate mesh of water provision, and opportunities for more socially inclusionary water provision practices, while Gilbert (2007) discussed political threats to the 'effectiveness' of Bogotá's (Colombia) publicly owned water company – Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado de Bogotá EAAB. He argues that EAAB is an exemplar for the region as it has adopted some elements of neo-liberal economic thought – such as efficiency and pricing policy – and has maintained independence from political pressure in contrast to the wide privatisation process of public water companies in the region. In contrast, more recently, Klink et al. (2020) have drawn attention to processes of water financialisation by examining the accumulation of inter-governmental debt, pricing and valuation practices in São Paulo (Brazil). This examination allows an understanding of how shareholder water governance operates in the Brazilian metropolis.

Scholarship around urban mobility infrastructure in the pages of the journal has focussed on the interplay between social fragmentation and travel patterns and the

governance and impacts of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems. The development of innovative BRT systems in Bogotá and Curitiba has become one of the most emulated ‘best practices’ in ‘southern’ cities. Over five decades, Curitiba has served as an exemplary case of the integration between land use and transport policy. Mercier et al. (2015) argue that much of the continuity of the ‘success’ of the planning model relies on the proactive and interventionist processes of a planning autonomous agency. Yet increasing processes of metropolitanisation, with multi-stakeholder and multi-scalar governance environments, and civil society contestation of top-down planning processes, have challenged the ‘success’ of the strategies around the BRT (Mercier et al., 2015). In the case of Bogotá, Bocarejo et al. (2016), found that the implementation of the BRT system has led to increases in social fragmentation around the trunk lines in central areas while the areas of the BRT feeder service in peripheral zones expanded the action radius of low-income groups. Conversely, in Mexico City, the spatial mismatch between formal jobs and affordable housing would suggest higher travel times for low-income workers. However, Suárez et al. (2015) found that low-income workers had the shortest commutes given the location of informal work activities. In Rio de Janeiro, Motte-Baumvol et al. (2016) found high levels (46%) of immobility in the poor districts given the proportion of the population that is not in the labour force. This research expands on the type of barriers to commuting to encompass not only the physical but also the symbolic and perceptive ones by giving prominence to the needs of housewives, the elderly, the unemployed and poor workers.

Local governments in Latin American cities have gradually increased the focus on the promises of information and communication technologies to make infrastructural governance ‘efficient’. Yet, only four out of 10

households have access to broadband and only 45% have access to digital services such as telemedicine, online government, online banking, or e-education (CAF, 2019). Irazábal and Jirón (2021) have depicted different formats for smart city programme design, implementation, and management in Rio de Janeiro, Santiago and Medellín. Tracing the forms of provincialising and informalising smart city templates, they found that most interventions locate in or benefit higher-income areas and actors and that a way to counteract this trend via public–private–people partnerships should be mobilised. Similarly, Jirón et al. (2021) coined the term ‘placebo interventions’ to describe how smart city agendas crystallise in Santiago. Using an ethnographic approach, they argue that a placebo intervention ‘works through the fictions of effective interventions and urban image improvement that seek to participate in worlding practices whilst, in reality, very little is being improved or effectively addressed in the city’ (Jirón et al., 2021: 601). Another facet of embracing ‘smart technologies’ revolves around the risks of using them to expand securitisation and surveillance regimes. Pilo’s (2021) research in Kingston and Rio de Janeiro focused on the use of smart electric grid metering as a security device in ‘insecure’ areas. Her findings suggest that the use of smart grids relies on globally circulating devices that embed the promise of protecting infrastructure and revenue while deepening problematic configurations of territorial control between state and non-state (criminal) actors. This strand of scholarship has moved its focus from public service supply to multiscale digital entanglements.

Economic geographies and variegated gentrification

Scholarship on urban economic geography in Latin American cities has examined the

governance responses to restructuring and financial crises as well as the myriad dynamics of productive spaces. The predominant framework of analysis in the 1990s and early-2000s was the nexus between globalisation and inequality. Gilbert (1997) introduced the discussion on the impact of economic restructuring on employment and poverty to the journal, arguing that Bogotá (Colombia) was a positive example of what restructuring and 'sensible macroeconomic policy' can bring to the region. Although economic inequality remained, he argued that economic policy measures did lead to a decrease in poverty through a huge rise in labour participation and that by the mid-1990s fewer people were hungry. In contrast, Rodriguez-Pose and Tomaney (1999) analysed planning strategy (i.e. Real Plan) for the economic stabilisation and internationalisation of the industrial heartland of the Greater ABC region in São Paulo (Brazil) and found that although plan implementation 'made of Brazil an emerging market with a stable currency' (p. 480), it occurred through a process of industrial decline of locally own firms and industrial job losses. In a different light, Fuchs (2001) explored the impact of the economic crisis in Mexico in the mid-1990s on employment and the household economy in Puebla. She explored the 'micro regulation' of conditions of human labour and the strategies of survival of people point towards the state's lack of support for the poorer segments of society during the crisis.

Scholars interested in the economic geographies of Latin American cities have explored the spatial distribution and dynamics of street vending, retail and home-based enterprises. These explorations have been embedded in an important debate, born in the region, around what constitutes the 'informal sector'. According to the International Labour Organization (2018), the informality rate in Latin America and

the Caribbean is 53%, which means that nearly 140 million workers operate under informal conditions. Strassmann (1986), using the case of Lima (Peru), highlights the role of home-based enterprises in urban productivity. The level of productivity of this type of livelihood strategy – mainly located in self-built neighbourhoods – relies on access, cost of space, population density and neighbourhood improvement or deterioration level. Using Quito (Ecuador) as a case study, Bromley (1998) explored the role of markets in the transformation of consumption patterns and the proliferation of supermarkets and planned shopping centres. This research found that government intervention to support trading in market buildings, open spaces and streets has enabled a continued flourishing of these retail spaces despite the rise of other retail forms. The debate on how informality is conceptualised and operates remains very active. For instance, Canclini (2019), based on ethnographic work in Mexico City, argues that the complicity between the formal sector and the informal economy configures a sort of non-hegemonic globalisation where the diverse world of informal practices is 'entrenched in the workings of formal institutions, which draw on under-the-counter agreements and exchanges with the illegal economy' (p. 488). In a different light, also based on research in Mexico City, Crossa (2016) calls for de-homogenising so-called informal activities, particularly street vending and vendors to understand their resistance strategies to neoliberal urban policies that take the streets, plazas and other public spaces for their urban interventions projects. Along similar lines, Donovan (2008) contextualises the tension between public space reclamation and informality, providing a detailed case study of Bogotá (Colombia) while Bromley and Mackie (2009) found a changing pattern of informal trading in Cusco (Peru) where 'lower-class traders were displaced from

city-centre streets for the benefit of middle-class tourists and local people' (p. 1485). Debates on urban economic geographies are therefore defined by the different analytical approaches to crisis management and the 'informal sector'.

Meanwhile, the scholarship around the regional specificities of gentrification processes has focused on state-led initiatives to 'revitalise' inner cities, the new modalities of short-term rentals, and the new forms of consumption and tourism occurring on a transnational scale. Inzulza-Contardo (2012) coined the term 'Latino gentrification' to designate the specific processes found in the Latin American context by explaining the specific urban regeneration strategies that promote gentrification and have modified the urban morphology and the social capital of Santiago's inner city. Elsewhere, McDermott (2019) uses the notion of 'iconicity' to explain the mechanisms of punitive policing in the creation, commercialisation and maintenance of iconic architectural and cultural spaces in Mexico City fuelled by transnational investment and the worsening of displacement. The attraction of short-term residents or renters has also changed the urban dynamics of several cities. For instance, Prada (2019) illustrates the 'studentification' of low-income neighbourhoods in Concepción (Chile) where the arrival of students has triggered the 'improving' of the image of the place while contributing to the deterioration of neighbourhood links. In contrast, del Castillo and Klaufus (2020) traced the 'touristification' process in Lima's central districts, where an intense real estate boom of high-rise condominiums occurred between 2007 and 2017. They found that touristification was driven by a 'rent-seeking middle class, keen to invest in real estate as an alternative means to increase their income' (del Castillo and Klaufus, 2020: 2547). These studies provide insights into

the myriad agents of gentrification processes at city level.

Lifestyle-driven migration has led to processes of transnational gentrification. Based on their research in Panama's Casco Antiguo, Sigler and Wachsmuth (2016) introduced the concept of transnational gentrification to refer to a 'transnational "gentry" whose locational mobility creates new possibilities for profitable housing reinvestment in geographically disparate markets where such possibilities would not have otherwise existed' (p. 705). Further on this approach, Sigler and Wachsmuth (2020) argue that transnational gentrification constitutes a new global residential imaginary that is not only fuelled by a globalised 'rent gap' but also by state-led efforts to extract new forms of rent from neighbourhoods and the use of digital platforms to support transnational mobility. Lifestyle-driven migrants seek the singularity of heritage sites and real estate offers the products to satisfy this demand. Navarrete Escobedo (2020) and Hayes (2020) illustrate how heritage-led transnationalisation of real estate operates. Exploring San Miguel de Allende in Mexico, Navarrete Escobedo (2020) explains how transnational middle classes of migrants and tourists consume luxury housing, boutique hotels, art galleries and other high-culture spaces and the impacts on lower-income groups in the city. Hayes (2020) analyses the implications of the UNESCO designation of Cuenca (Ecuador) as World Heritage site, highlighting the role of the Inter-American Development Bank and successive municipal governments in increasing property values in the historic El Centro neighbourhood, while also acting to 'reproduce colonial social relations and marginalise the popular economic activities of informal vendors' (p. 3060). These papers

add theoretical contributions to explain different elements of gentrification processes across various locations.

Emerging areas and research gaps

Despite the evident breadth of research on Latin American cities displayed in this journal, new themes are emerging and there remain some problematic gaps. New approaches to comparative urbanism and debates on 'alternative' urban methodologies have appeared in the last few years. For instance, Sweet and Ortiz Escalante (2010, 2015) have introduced feminist methodologies with the use of visceral methods including body-map storytelling and shared sensory spatial experiences. Streule (2020) has proposed the use of mobile ethnography to historicise and ground comparative methods while producing knowledge in a situated fashion. In a similar vein, Carpenter et al. (2021) have advocated reframing co-creation methodologies from an agonistic perspective to engage with 'communities carrying vernacular knowledges previously invalidated by dominant epistemologies' (p. 1906). The new approaches to comparative urbanism that have been championed by Montero and Baiocchi (2022) propose to frame comparisons '*a posteriori*' when analysing the multi-site legacies of 'best practices' such as those of Bogotá and Porto Alegre, while Silvestre and Jajamovich (2021) offer an approach to urban policy mobility framing the use of the Barcelona Model in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro to build 'coalition magnets', an approach that challenges the North–South directionality of policy mobility and demonstrates how local policies are relationally produced by cosmopolitan policy actors on the 'demand side'. These examples point towards more expansive and transcontinental framings of how the urban is constituted as well as inviting researchers to centre the

lived body and collaborative methods in knowledge production.

The most critical absences in the pages of the journal are geographical, methodological and thematic. Most of the sites that inform the generation of urban knowledge are from Chile, Mexico and Brazil – the powerhouses of funded research. The Caribbean and Central America are particularly neglected areas, I found only six articles that reference urban realities from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Panama, Costa Rica and El Salvador. This fact reinforces the disjuncture between the myriad territorial conditions of the region and what gets portrayed in published scholarship.

Methodologically, long-term established socio-political committed scholarship using Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda, 1970, 1979, 2001) is not depicted in the journal. This fact obscures the work of an important and vigorous group of scholars and practitioners that use the sites of social struggles as departing points for the generation of urban knowledge in informing theory and social policy, and popular education and critical pedagogies (e.g. Habitat International Coalition, Grupo de Trabajo CLACSO: Red Sentipensante Procesos y metodologías participativas). These groups focus on the link between academia, territories and communities and the lessons learned from participatory methodologies for social change. Overlooking these aspects reinforces an asymmetrical perspective on urban learning and reproduces technocratic perspectives of city making and authoritative knowledge (Ortiz and Millán, 2022).

Thematically, the vibrant debates in Latin America around anti-racist and intersectional feminist activism and the '*estallido social*' (Arias-Loyola, 2021; Fernández and Rojas Sotelo, 2022; Montero and Peñaranda, 2020; Perry and Sotero, 2021; Zaragocin, 2021) are not yet addressed in

the contributions to the journal. Feminists have had a crucial role in bringing networks of solidarity and resistance to the streets because feminist critique destabilises the institutions that perpetuate various systems of privileges and oppressions. The intersectional gaze and debates on the urban facets of care are still very incipient, while in Latin America these debates are flourishing (Batthyany, 2020; Helene et al., 2021; Molina et al., 2022). This implies not only that the urban impacts of social rage are not yet considered but also that contemporary social movements' emerging mobilisation strategies are not fully understood in terms of the right to the city agenda for the readers of the journal.

In a similar fashion, a critical absence refers to the pressing urban issues stemming from the climate emergency. The pages of the journal are yet to see much in relation to the proposals that have, for some time, been evident in urban political ecology (e.g. Grupo de Trabajo CLACSO Ecología(s) política(s) desde el Sur/Abya-Yala or Coates and Nygren, 2020; Mancilla and Scarpacci, 2022). These espouse an interdisciplinary approach that intersects with Latin American indigenism and Southern environmental thought to contest hegemonic development models and design alternatives. Ignoring this strand of work prevents us from learning from energy transitions, eco-feminisms and movements for environmental justice.

Lastly, scant attention is given to the influence of the longstanding Latin American modernity/coloniality research programme (Escobar, 2007; Mignolo, 2005 [1995]), which emerged from the cultural studies literature. This results in overlooking the potent debates around shaping a decolonial urban critique approach that is mushrooming in the region and among the southern urbanists (Escobar, 2019; Ortiz, 2022b; Vainer, 2014; Zaragocin and Caretta,

2021). Decolonisation is about changing the way we think, act and inhabit the world. In this sense, planning and urban studies play a crucial role in unlearning historically embedded patterns of domination of the Western canons of city-making. This VSI aims to invite those scholars engaged with these emerging areas and gaps through submission to the journal to keep strengthening, with a renewed impetus, the fertile ground of writing the Latin American city.


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Notes

1. Such as the Red Latinoamericana de Investigadores sobre Teoría Urbana (Latin American Network of Researchers on Urban Theory) or the Red Iberoamericana de Investigadores sobre Globalización y Territorio (Iberoamerican Network of Researchers on Globalization and Territory) and in the national networks of urban and regional researchers such as ACIUR in Colombia or ANPUR in Brazil. Key journals present the results of urban research clustered in a few countries: *EURE* and *INVI* in Chile; *Bitacora Urbano Territorial and Territorios* in Colombia; *RBEUR* and *Urbe: Revista Brasileira de Gestao Urbana* in Brazil or *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos* in Mexico, to name the most salient.

2. The most invoked paradigms have been American human ecology and anthropology, neoclassical spatial economic theory, French planning models and urban sociology.
3. See the work 'On urban studies in Brazil' by Fix and Arantes (2022).

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