CHAPTER 9

Urban Design, Planning, and the Politics of Development in Curitiba

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Over the past several decades, Curitiba, Brazil, has been referred to as an environmentally sustainable “model city” and as a remarkable example of both a successful urban planning process and a large array of urban design projects that are attractive, innovative, functional, cost-effective, and replicable. This chapter examines urban design and planning projects and processes in Curitiba since the 1960s, and shows many reasons why the city deserves praise: an effective and continuous planning process has guaranteed efficiency in public transit, historic and cultural preservation, a revitalized and pedestrian-friendly downtown, effective environmental programs, and a series of urban design and architectural catalyst projects.

This chapter also discusses some political and institutional factors that have facilitated the development of Curitiba’s planning process, and some current urban governance and planning problems the city is facing. Curitiba’s planning process has been shaped by the accommodation of diverse interests around a political project, the media dissemination of a particular city image, and the permeation of material gains to the lower income classes. Conversely, some factors that are challenging the city’s governance model and threaten to subvert the future of planning processes include increases in urban problems and inequalities across the municipalities of the metropolitan region, deficiencies of institutional structure and coordination at the level of metropolitan planning and governance, and inadequate responses to the increasing challenges to government and planning institutions from citizens demanding greater accountability and participation. I argue that the institution of more effective citizen involvement in Curitiba’s decision making is the way to relegitimize and continue the

processes of urban design and planning that had such a brilliant start in the 1960s and a commendable implementation record from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

Planning and Urban Design in Curitiba

Curitiba has a six-decade-long history of formal urban design and planning.¹ It started with the Agache Plan in 1943, designed by the French urbanist Alfred Agache, when Curitiba had 120,000 inhabitants.² Through the restructuring of the street network, this plan established guidelines for concentric growth of the city and provisions for land-use zoning, sanitation measures, distribution of open spaces, and allocation of areas for urban expansion. The plan also proposed the construction of cultural and government buildings and centers, one of which—the Civic Center, housing local, state, and federal public agencies—was constructed beginning in 1952 and was designed according to the tenets of modern architecture.

Curitiba's population reached 180,000 inhabitants at an annual growth rate of more than 7 percent in 1950—more than what the Agache Plan had anticipated. To address this massive growth, Curitiba's first zoning act was passed in 1953 and the first mass-transit system plan in 1955. By 1960, the population had doubled to 361,309 inhabitants, and the rapidity of urban growth increased the need for its management. This growth, together with the planning and building of Brasília as the new capital city of Brazil in the late 1950s and early 1960s, created a renewed impetus for the fields of urban design and physical planning in Curitiba as means to direct growth and achieve progress and modernization. Curitiba continued a process of significant growth through the 1960s, maintaining one of the highest growth rates in Brazil—an average of 5.36 percent a year—demanding more urban planning.³ In the 1960s, the Agache Plan remained only partially implemented and required updates and adjustments.

In 1965, the municipality of Curitiba opened a public competition for a new *plano diretor* (master plan) and selected a planning firm from São Paulo led by architect-planner Jorge Wilhelm.⁴ Developed in conjunction with city officials and elite groups, the plan was approved in 1966. By this time, Curitiba had almost 470,000 inhabitants and an annual growth rate of 5.6 percent. Unlike the Agache Plan, which was based on concentric circles, the *plano diretor* envisioned urban growth occurring in radiating axes outward from the city center and employed integrated public transportation and mixed land-use principles (fig. 9.1). Other pillars of the plan were management of growth, promotion of industry, and improvement of the environment and quality of life in the city.

The *plano diretor* called for major physical interventions in the city, including a

Figure 9.1. Diagram of growth alternatives for Curitiba.
(Illustration by Vicente del Rio based on Curitiba's master plan)

number of significant urban design projects. The greatest of these was the creation of five “structural axes” of public transportation radiating from the center of the city to guide the direction and concentration of growth. The structural axes plan combined massive public transportation infrastructure with zoning that allowed mixed uses and significant density. Although zoning had begun under the old plan in the 1950s, the new plan instituted creative approaches to shaping the urban fabric; channeling growth; and defining the establishment of specific zones such as the Central Zone, Structural Sectors for business and other services, and Residential Zones. Residential growth was encouraged near streets with concentrations of public transportation infrastructure and other services. In addition, Special Interest Preservation Units were established to restore buildings of historical significance.

The need for economic support for a city that was growing at rates higher than 5 percent a year in the 1960s led to the creation of Cidade Industrial de Curitiba (CIC, Curitiba Industrial District), and Special Connecting Sectors were designated to effectively integrate the Industrial District into the rest of the city. The CIC was designed with suitable urban infrastructure, providing basic services, housing, preservation areas, and integration to the urban transit system. The municipality also passed legislation restricting the establishment of polluting industrial plants.

The epitome of Curitiba’s urban policy—achieving great benefits for a small investment—has been the transportation system (Cervero 1995; Rabinovitch and Leitman 1993). The main structural mass-transit axes began to operate in 1974, in 1980 the Rede Integrada de Transporte (RIT, Integrated Transportation Network) started providing an efficient bus rapid system with different types of bus lines integrating all parts of the city. (figs. 9.2 and 9.3). There have also been further improvements in bus boarding and vehicle characteristics.⁵ Significantly, the transportation system has been used to promote development along the structural axes.

In 1974, a new street system created Priority Avenues and redirected vehicular traffic away from downtown by establishing connector streets between neighborhoods and major avenues. Also at this time new streets were built to connect established avenues, and new traffic circulation patterns were established. The Trinary System was also established, composed of an exclusive bus lane dedicated to mass transit bordered by two lanes for slow-moving and local traffic, a solution that provides ac-

cess to businesses and homes, while two additional fast lanes in each direction into and out of the downtown area allow through traffic to flow.

The transit network has evolved since 1974, and today the RIT extends to other cities in the metropolitan area. Thanks to the RIT, the government estimated that gasoline consumption in Curitiba was 30 percent lower than in eight comparable Brazilian cities in 2004.

One of the institutional proposals derived from the new *plano diretor* was the creation of the Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano de Curitiba (IPPUC; Institute of Urban Research and Planning of Curitiba) in 1966 to implement the plan and to develop all complementary projects. IPPUC established a team of planners

Figure 9.2. This aerial view of Curitiba clearly shows the structural axes and the higher densities along them. (Courtesy of IPPUC)

Figure 9.3. A bi-articulated bus and a tubular shelter on one of Curitiba's structural axes. (Courtesy of IPPUC)

Figure 9.4. Rua XV de Novembro, the first pedestrian street in Curitiba, showing the old streetcar used for child care and special events. (Courtesy of IPPUC)

working outside the city's established institutional framework, so that they were able to respond quickly to development pressures. Since its founding, IPPUC has efficiently led the planning process and the transformation of Curitiba's physical structures, designing projects and overseeing their implementation.

IPPUC is also dedicated to the preservation of the city's history and the enhancement of its identity. Its first Revitalization Plan for the Historic District dates back to 1970. In 1971, the Heritage Sites Preservation policy was also established, resulting in the creation of cultural facilities as well as the rehabilitation of historic buildings. Old, abandoned, or underutilized buildings became homes to orchestras, art workshops, theaters, and museums—for example, a former army headquarters facility was transformed into the Curitiba Cultural Foundation; a historic gunpowder depot became the Paiol Theater; and a former glue factory became the Creativity Center. In 1972, the city's main street—Rua XV de Novembro—became Brazil's first pedestrian mall.⁶ Its popularity made it a model emulated in other cities. Furthermore, its success in attracting more people to shop in the downtown changed the minds of shop owners, who originally had opposed the idea, and they requested expansion of the pedestrian precinct (fig. 9.4).

Zoning for specific purposes and occupation parameters guided public and private investments and projects. A 1975 law further defined land use in the city, creating areas for residential, service, manufacturing, and rural activities. The law also defined structural sectors, pedestrian areas, natural and riverside preservation areas, parks, and the Historic District. To address environmental problems in fragile areas, special land-use and occupation sectors were created through specific legislation. These laws contributed to the preservation of green areas and protection of floodplains along rivers, transforming them into recreational sites. A system of parks was implemented that simultaneously addressed recreation, flooding, and sanitation

issues. The Municipal Decree for Riverside Areas Preservation in 1976 became a pioneer intervention and land-use control instrument, providing an environmentally sensitive and cost-effective alternative to the engineering works that were customary elsewhere at the time. According to IPPUC estimates, today there are more than twenty-six parks and woods in Curitiba, which together with plazas, gardens, and pocket parks make for thirty-six square meters of public green area per inhabitant.

Curitiba's accelerated growth also demanded new housing solutions as the city entered the 1970s with 609,000 inhabitants and a population growth rate of 5.36 percent per year. By 1980, Curitiba's population was above one million inhabitants, and its growth rate remained high at 5.34 percent. The growth was even more significant in the surrounding municipalities, where annual rates were as high as 14 percent. In 1976, the Slum Relocation Plan was developed to assist families living in squatter settlements in risk areas. Discarding the notion of building large housing complexes far from the city, the Companhia de Habitação Popular de Curitiba (COHAB-CT, Public Housing Company of Curitiba) began diversifying the types of housing it provided (from single-family houses to walk-up apartment buildings) and the number of housing units available in each complex, aiming at full neighborhood integration and conurbation. Some of these areas also received public health and day-care centers, as well as educational, sports, and recreational facilities. By 1989, the Bairro Novo integrated development project was built in one of the city's remaining vacant areas, providing housing for approximately twenty thousand families.

Expansion and improvement of the RIT continued in the early 1990s. IPPUC-designed and -manufactured high capacity, bi-articulated express buses that carry up to 270 passengers went into operation (fig. 9.5). The capacity of these buses is comparable to light rail systems for a minor fraction of the cost, and they circulate along the dedicated lanes of the transportation axes, encouraging higher-density development along them. Presently, the RIT includes more than six different types of buses and bus routes in the city: express links along the transportation axes connect neighborhoods to one another, to the downtown and to nearby towns; provide direct connections between specific places; circulate within the downtown; serve students with special needs; connect to city hospitals; and connect tourist attractions and parks. It was also during this period that Curitiba's Trade Bus Line was established: retired buses were recycled as mobile units to reach out to communities, offering education and training in traditional trades and service jobs.

In the 1980s, specific legislation facilitated the creation of preservation areas through incentives and land-use controls. The mapping of preservation areas began undergoing regular updating, serving as a land-use instrument and as a way of monitoring preservation activities. Several new parks and wooded areas were created, to-

Figure 9.5. Aerial view of a structural axis, showing the dedicated bus lanes, express buses, and tubular bus shelters. (Courtesy of IPPUC)

taling more than eight million square meters of public preservation areas, and IPPUC dubbed the city the “Ecological Capital of Brazil.” One of the most important incentive instruments for growth management—the Transfer of Building Rights Act—was created in 1982. This law gave impetus to the process of preservation of the city’s historic, cultural, architectural, and natural assets, by allowing development rights of culturally significant buildings or natural/open spaces to be transferred to other areas of the city. Also, new transportation alternatives were created with the implementation of bike paths. The Bike Path Network now has approximately 120 kilometers of bike paths integrated into the urban system along certain streets, railway lines, and rivers.

Curitiba entered the 1990s with 1.3 million inhabitants. During that decade, the population growth rate was approximately 2.29 percent per year, significantly lower

than in previous decades. The city had grown to occupy most of the available land in the municipality, and growth spilled over into other municipalities in the metropolitan area. During those years, Curitiba hosted several national and international planning events, and the city began winning awards for its urban projects. Innovative solutions to issues of environment, transportation, housing, health, education, job creation, and generation of income were continually pursued and acknowledged.

In 1990, the Fundo Municipal de Habitação (FMH, Municipal Housing Fund) was created, with the purpose of providing financial support to housing programs for low-income populations. Since then, the FMH has been a source of financial support for implementing land-tenure regulation and low-income housing construction. The fund's resources come from the transfer of municipally owned real estate, budget appropriations, and income from development incentives (for example, the transfer of development rights). Job creation and the linkage of jobs to housing were also important goals of specific programs in Curitiba in this decade. For example, the city sought to ensure the vitality and continuance of traditional trades through the creation of the Vila dos Ofícios (Village of Trades) Program, implemented in 1995, creating live-work units where people can both reside and work. In addition, a concerted effort among all municipal government agencies coordinated by IPPUC in 1997 created the Linhão do Emprego (Jobs Line)—a program aimed at providing the necessary structure for creating jobs and generating income for fifteen peripheral neighborhoods.

In the 1990s the city concentrated on facilities to help revitalize local culture and leisure. Two important structures were the Ópera de Arame (Steel-Frame Opera House; fig. 9.6), built on the site of an abandoned and inundated quarry, and the Rua 24 Horas (24-Hour Street) shopping arcade, where forty-two stores, eateries, and a restaurant are open around the clock (fig. 9.7). The Universidade Livre do Meio Ambiente (Unilivre, Open University of the Environment) was created in 1993 as a

Figure 9.6. In a new park replacing an old quarry, the steel-framed Ópera de Arame was built on stilts over an artificial lake (Photo by Vicente del Rio)

Figure 9.7. The Rua 24 Horas is an arcaded row of shops, eateries, and bars; built on a public right-of-way, it stays open around the clock. (Courtesy of IPPUC)

research, educational, and consulting center for environmental and sustainable practices. Since its inception it has served as a model for similar institutions in Brazil and elsewhere, and has demonstrated the potential of partnerships to promote urban sustainability among public, private, nonprofit, and community organizations, and through national and international collaboration.

In 1995, the historic downtown area was further revitalized through the restoration of the original façades of historic buildings, and the Cores da Cidade (City Colors) project returned them to their original colors. In the same year, public access to learning was extended with the inauguration of the first of forty *Farois do Saber* (Lighthouses of Knowledge)—small neighborhood libraries built near public schools, open to students and the community (fig. 9.8).

Also in 1995, the first of five *Ruas da Cidadania* (Citizens' Streets) was inaugurated. Functioning as a mix of community center, transit hub, and headquarters for the city's regional administrative centers, these complexes concentrate public social service, retail, cultural spaces, and sports and arts facilities (fig. 9.9). In 1996, the Curitiba Memorial Cultural Center was inaugurated, and one year later the Rua XV

de Novembro pedestrian mall was remodeled. In the late 1990s the city also witnessed the opening of the Brazilian Popular Music Conservatory; the Novelas Curitiba Theater, the Dadá Theater, the Casa Vermelha; and the Casa dos 300 Anos—all in celebration of Curitiba's three hundredth anniversary. Parks, thematic wooded areas, and ethnic memorials were also created that decade throughout the city to pay homage to the numerous ethnic groups that contributed to Curitiba's demographic history and current makeup—such as the Ukrainian, Arab, German, and Japanese memorials, and the Portuguese and Italian parks.⁷

Another area in which Curitiba has won recognition is the management of solid waste. Curitiba deals with solid waste without expensive mechanical garbage-separation facilities. According to government estimates, Curitibaanos recycle nearly two-thirds of their garbage through programs that make the city cleaner and provide jobs, income for farmers, and food and transportation benefits for the poor. The Garbage That Is Not Garbage and Garbage Exchange programs involve curbside pick-up and disposal of recyclables sorted by households. In less accessible areas, such as *favelas*, the program gives out food stamps or transit tickets for low-income families that col-

Figure 9.8. One of the Lighthouse of Knowledge public libraries. These small libraries have become neighborhood social and physical landmarks. (Photo by Vicente del Rio)

Figure 9.9. One of the Citizens' Streets that serve Curitiba's low-income outlying districts; it integrates a bus terminal, public social services, and educational and sports facilities. (Courtesy of IPPUC)

lect and sort their garbage. Trash is taken to a plant built of recycled materials, where it is sorted by retired or unemployed persons and recovered materials are sold to local industries. Curitiba's selective garbage collection system now extends to twenty-four surrounding municipalities.

The *plano diretor* has guided development in Curitiba ever since its inception, and it was not revised at all until 1998. At the end of 2000, after a two-year period of technical studies and public input, a zoning law was approved that aimed to address the new metropolitan conditions of Curitiba. This new law formulated metropolitan growth management policies, created an axis of metropolitan integration and development (BR-116), designated new axes of urban density and areas of environmental preservation, and promoted economic development and job creation.

During the 2001–2004 mayoral term, the following projects were part of the government agenda:

Nossa Vila (Our Village), aimed at upgrading and securing land tenure of squatter settlements, promoting community development, and preventing new land invasions;

Viver Junto (Live Together), aimed at expanding and upgrading public schools with facilities for sports, recreation, the arts, and cultural activities open to the community;

Aprender (Learn), which sought the creation of new physical and virtual educational spaces throughout the city for lifelong educational opportunities;

2000 Plan, aimed at developing—in partnership with communities—new sidewalks, road paving, landscaping, and lighting in selected areas;

Nova Rebouças, aimed at implementing new recreational and cultural uses in a neighborhood as sources of income and jobs;

Linha Turística (Tourist Line), which sought to consolidate a tourist axis through a combination of environmental conservation and economic and cultural development;

Curitiba Tecnológica, which emphasized innovation of urban and ecological technologies

Ambiente (Environment), aimed at enhancing the city's environmental conditions, emphasizing waste management and watershed protection; and

Cidadãos em Movimento (Citizens in Movement), which implements and enhances engineering, management, control, regulation, and education programs related to transportation systems to improve efficiency, safety, and quality.

The current administration, led by Mayor Beto Richa (2004–2007), has continued these programs and added a few others. These projects are at different stages of imple-

mentation and their degrees of success remain to be seen. The breadth of planning objectives that they manifest are however indicative of the robustness of planning activity in the city.

In 2007, Curitiba had approximately 1.8 million inhabitants, and its metropolitan area had 3.5 million. The city has done much in the last four decades to maintain and improve its urban quality and address issues of urban transportation, land use, and sustainability in innovative, efficient, and cost-effective ways, to the extent that it has achieved worldwide recognition, and is held up by many as a model of urban planning and management.

Elements Shaping the Urban Development Process

The development of Curitiba's planning project since the mid-1960s has been mainly shaped by the conjunction of three elements: (a) the accommodation of diverse dominant interests around a single political project; (b) the massive media dissemination of a particular city image; and (c) the permeation of some material gains to the lower income classes.

Accommodation of Diverse Interests

First, the consensus and convergence of the interests of the business, planning, and government elites around a single political project constitutes the very origin of the planning transformation in Curitiba since the 1960s, and has become the basis for successive design and planning decisions to this date. The cohesion and survival of the planning process have been strategically supported by the political continuity that the government and planning elites of Curitiba have enjoyed since the beginning. The administrative continuity in Curitiba's government is unique in Brazil and rare in Latin America, and was made possible by at least three concurrent factors: (a) the role played by the economic elites of the city in the definition and implementation of the plan; (b) a series of mayors and governors who were supportive of the plan; and (c) institutional mechanisms that forged and maintained the political project within the government (D. Oliveira 1995, 1998).

First, the *plano diretor* and its subsequent reforms were at all times exceptionally compatible with the interests of the business elite of the city, particularly those in the industrial, real estate, construction, and mass-transit sectors. These sectors influenced formally, through their professional organizations and political representatives, and informally, through personal relations and lobbying, the definition of the *plano diretor* and its process of implementation and change.

The second factor was the succession of mayors and governors committed to the realization of the plan. There cannot be a better example of the unity of political and planning leadership backing the *plano diretor* than Jaime Lerner,⁸ who has emblematically personified those roles continuously since the 1960s. Lerner, the first president of IPPUC, was appointed mayor of Curitiba by the military regime for the first time in 1971, when he was able to launch the implementation of the *plano diretor* (Rabinovitch and Leitman 1993). Since then, Lerner has thrice been mayor of Curitiba and twice governor of the state of Paraná. Even during his terms as governor, members of his inner circle, who had a compatible party affiliation and planning philosophies, served as mayor of Curitiba: Rafael Greca and Cassio Taniguchi, the latter serving two mayoral terms (1997–2004). The current mayor was also endorsed by Lerner, but is not professionally associated with him.

The last key factor supporting the continuity of the planning process in Curitiba was the creation of an ingenious institutional structure to support the implementation of the plan. This key element made it possible to avoid the political entanglements that complicated or completely stalled planning processes of other Brazilian cities.⁹ Of particular importance was the creation of IPPUC in 1965, which provided a political means for injecting flexibility and dynamism into the planning process. IPPUC was able to bypass the bureaucracy of city departments in order to enhance the city's appearance and prepare it for the future through a functional technocratic planning under the watchful eye of the military regime (del Rio 1992).

With the creation of IPPUC, planners came to dominate the municipal government. Because the framework of the military dictatorship was still in place and was backing IPPUC, they could make decisions with relative autonomy. The success of the initial transportation and land-use plans implemented by Lerner and IPPUC gave them leverage to continue making innovations. The IPPUC Administrative Council included representatives of all the government bureaucracy, thus establishing functional links with all other agencies. When IPPUC was created, all its members shared the same political inclination, had participated in the development of the *plano diretor*, and were appointed by Lerner. IPPUC was further vested with authority over all other government agencies. Having survived political changes and transformations since its founding in 1966, IPPUC continues to be the major planning agency in Curitiba.

Image Making and City-Marketing Processes

City-marketing strategies are used to select and edit urban images, and to direct citizens' perceptions of their city and the way they view their relationship with it and, to a certain degree, their own identity (del Rio 1992; Sánchez 1996, 1997). Curitiba is an

example of resourceful use of the media to enhance the city's image and the citizens' sense of belonging. The media have been used to disseminate a particular city image and create a hegemonic urban imaginary. Sharing a unidimensional, uncontested image of their city as a place that has already solved its problems, many Curitibaños have not become active in the city development process. They have limited themselves to the role of passive recipients of city-provided services or commodities.¹⁰

The rhetoric of political and planning discourses has constantly renewed the locally, nationally, and internationally positive assessment of the city through three main strategies: (a) inserting its discourse into the major thematic planning debates of the time—for example, promoting the “Ecological Capital of Brazil” as a theme of the 1990s (Sánchez 1997); (b) mystifying the role of planners; and (c) promoting a hegemonic, homogeneous reading of the city through media messages and the suppression of dissent.

The privileged means for deploying these image-making strategies have been architectural and urban interventions. These visible works are easily charged with constructed meanings. The marketing strategy for each new urban product—building or space—is meticulously designed to distinguish it from its predecessors, and to maintain momentum and public excitement regarding the continuous process of architectural and urban interventions.¹¹

These buildings were planned to have such strong iconic power that they started to be part of the urban imaginary of the citizens and together constructed a strong image of Curitiba—an image that differentiated the city from the rest of Brazil. Citizens have been portrayed by the media as happy contributors to the well-being of the city, and thus pressured to show approval for the design interventions. Curitibaños have responded positively to these campaigns, turning out in large numbers to appropriate and enjoy the public spaces of the city. With its rise to international fame, Curitiba has also become a destination for planners, politicians, and environmentalists from around the world. Curitiba's image of high quality of life and “environmental correctness” is a factor in attracting investments, new industries and services, and a quality workforce. However, the insistence on discourses that promote “a city of and for the people” hides the social contradictions existing in that contested terrain, homogenizing the city and its social fabric through manipulations of the urban image (Sánchez 1996; M. Santos 1987).

Provision of Material Gains to Lower Income Classes

If the popular sectors were not allowed to have direct or even represented participation in the definition of the *plano diretor* in Curitiba, they certainly gained from its

implementation. In Curitiba, the planning model has percolated enough material benefits to the population at large to guarantee that residents have an overwhelmingly positive assessment of the city and the planning process. Examples of these benefits are the RIT and the programs for the purchase or exchange of recyclable garbage for material goods such as food and transit tickets (D. Oliveira 1995).

Indeed, programs such as the RIT make large sectors of low-income groups feel that they are participants in a commonly implemented city project, and grant substantive relief to their budgets and improvements to their quality of life. An example is the integration of bus terminals in 1980, when a single fare was implemented. The short-distance trips—which mostly served the middle and upper classes—subsidized the longer routes. Users can transfer between buses in many of the stations without paying an extra fare. Besides time savings and accessibility, this transit system brings economic benefits for the citizens, given that according to a 1992 report, they spent only about 10 percent of their income on transportation, one of the lowest rates in Brazil (Margolis 1992). This transit system has reached capacity, however, and the city is exploring the creation of a complementary light rail system. Meanwhile, bus ridership is decreasing and private automobile usage is increasing.

Factors Undermining the Governance Model and Planning Practices

At least three factors are causing stress in the governance model of Curitiba, threatening to undermine some of the successful urban programs enacted or otherwise to subvert the future progress of planning processes. These include (a) exacerbation of urban problems and inequalities; (b) deficiencies in institutional structure and coordination at the level of metropolitan planning and governance; and (c) inadequate responses to the increasing challenges to government and planning institutions from citizens demanding greater political accountability and democratic participation.

Exacerbation of Urban Problems and Social Inequalities

The first factor undermining the governance model and planning practices in Curitiba is increasing urban problems and social inequalities. Probably the major problem is the great disparity in resources that exists between the municipality of Curitiba and the other twenty-five municipalities within the legal boundaries of the Curitiba Metropolitan Region (CMR).¹² These disparities are starting to cause dysfunctions in the central city, such as increases in unemployment and crime rates, a collapse of infrastructure, and environmental degradation. In order to preserve the urban quality within Curitiba, the broader metropolitan region has to be brought within the scope

of planning. Recently, under the leads of Curitiba mayors Cassio Taniguchi and Beto Richa, planning and government officials at the metropolitan level have started to address the problems of the discrepancies between center and periphery with several plans addressing the entire metropolitan region.

Deficiencies in Institutional Structure

The second factor that is critically impeding the effectiveness of planning and governance in Curitiba is deficiencies of institutional structure and coordination for planning and governance at the level of the CMR. A recent city government plan has defined three basic guidelines, two of which prioritize metropolitan issues; namely, shared management and metropolitan integration.¹³ However, despite recent attempts by IPPUC, COMEC,¹⁴ and ASSOMECE¹⁵ to pursue such goals, there has been little progress.

Additional institutional constraints make metropolitan planning difficult in Curitiba. Only municipal and state governments in Brazil hold legal decision-making authority. The state legislature is the organ that governs legally defined metropolitan regions.¹⁶ Therefore, metropolitan-level entities such as COMEC and ASSOMECE have only advisory but no legal authority. A proposal was presented for the creation of a metropolitan council with political authority where municipal councilors could meet and deliberate upon metropolitan issues, but vested political interests resisted it. There has not been the political will to confront the power structures of the neighboring municipalities in order to accomplish some sort of metropolitan government or effective inter-government coordination. Instead, fragmentation of the CMR into more municipalities and incorporation of new municipalities into the metropolitan region have happened frequently in recent years, making attempts to coordinate across city governments ever more difficult.

In the current state of affairs, the only other institution capable of taking over metropolitan leadership is IPPUC. Yet today, IPPUC's actions do not have the same all-encompassing impact they had during the first periods of the design and implementation of the *plano diretor*. This is mainly due to the fact that the major planning actions called for in the *plano* have already been implemented. There has been a clear shift in the role of IPPUC since Lerner's last term as mayor of Curitiba, from an emphasis on structural urban planning to keeping architectural and landscaping projects on schedule.¹⁷

IPPUC has been recovering its leadership during the last two mayoral administrations, which have emphasized urban planning at the level of the metropolitan region. In effect, ASSOMECE is respecting IPPUC's own goals, and some IPPUC personnel

are devoted to metropolitan projects and are addressing the integration of neighboring municipalities with Curitiba. Since IPPUC is a municipal agency, however, there are some institutional constraints on what it can do in the area of regional planning beyond Curitiba city limits. These institutional problems are somewhat ameliorated by the fact that some municipalities, lacking technical capacity, are contracting with IPPUC or with professionals from this institution to provide consulting services as they develop their municipal *planos diretores*. Municipal-level decision making remains in the hands of individual mayors, however, who may or may not comply with metropolitan-region plans.

The effect of these conditions is that nowadays planning at the level of the Curitiba Metropolitan Region is occurring reactively rather than proactively—that is, it is not structuring the growth of the city as it once did, but is attempting to remedy some of the functional deficiencies resulting from unplanned growth. The fact that the government and planning officials have chosen until recently to shelve the problems of the metropolitan region, and in particular the demands of the low-income sectors of the population, has made it even more difficult for them to deal with and provide solutions to those problems now. Social problems such as lack of affordable housing; substandard education and health services; and increases in crime, violence, homelessness, and unemployment have sprouted in both urban and suburban areas, and have become critical signs of a deteriorating urban environment.¹⁸

Demands for Democracy and Citizen Participation

The third factor causing strains in the technocratic governance and planning model of Curitiba is the increase in planning and political consciousness among the citizenry in the last decade. This has led to growing challenges to what are perceived as unresponsive government and planning institutions from citizens and groups demanding greater political accountability and democratic participation.

Since the reestablishment of democracy in Brazil in 1986, local governments have been incrementally forced to turn to their constituencies for legitimacy and support. Curitiba's government, however, has been slow in adjusting its urban planning and management models to accommodate truly democratic participation. Thus, public participation in Curitiba today is still largely hampered by the hegemony of government power and the burden of the popular myths that the planning elite has "made everything all right" and has already planned a wonderful city that should not be interfered with. The national political context has changed, however, and citizen awareness and involvement in planning and management are growing in many Brazilian cities. Therefore, an autocratic corporate government in Curitiba can no longer sus-

tain the relatively smooth and efficient urban planning and implementation process that has occurred in the city since the 1960s.

My claim that there currently is a wave of citizen participation which could provoke changes in the model of planning and governance in Curitiba is supported by empirical observation of concerned citizens and groups lobbying ceaselessly for discussion of alternative views of the city's future. Sectors of the population are becoming better organized, coordinated, and outspoken, seizing opportunities to propose alternative visions for city development.¹⁹ Heightened citizen consciousness and participation is focused on several areas: the growing dimension and complexity of urban problems; the contradictions between the actual and promised performance of government and planning representatives; the increasing recognition and testing of popular influence in the planning process; and the greater disclosure, diffusion, and discussion of knowledge about alternative political projects that have created more socially equitable urban transformations in other cities in Brazil and around the world.

In the political arena, several Brazilian cities have implemented participatory budgeting programs that allow citizens to give input into and make decisions about the distribution and administration of their metropolitan budgets. In contrast, Curitiba's city council rejected a proposal to create such a mechanism put forth by the political opposition, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Labor Party).²⁰ In 1999, the PT promoted through the city council a set of seminars in which the master plan of Curitiba, adopted in 1966, was publicly discussed and challenged for the first time in more than three decades; this series of major metropolitan events took place over a period of two months.²¹ Despite broad public interest in the seminars and the fact that, prompted by both law and public pressure, IPPUC did indeed begin revising the plan, the revision process was mostly carried out behind closed doors. Finally, in early 2000, the revised *plano* was declared law and made public, and since then professionals and scholars have been critically examining its implications.²²

In summary, civil society in Curitiba has shown a much greater capacity to change, adapt, and take advantage of a new age of democratic governance than has the city government bureaucracy, which has for the most part entrenched itself in the old top-down technocratic mode. This model was effective in the past but is being increasingly contested in the present and shows signs of rapidly losing legitimacy. A number of intellectuals and activists have committed themselves to promoting analyses and discussions of the current state of affairs in the city, and are pressing for changes. They are acting within academia, planning and government institutions, grassroots movements, and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, low-income and middle-class communities in the metropolitan region are reacting, albeit slowly, to the prob-

lems they face and their lack of opportunities for inclusion in the decision-making processes at the city level.

Conclusion

Curitiba can justifiably be considered a model of urban design, planning, and management within Brazil, and even internationally, because of the creative, effective, and cost-effective ways the city has dealt with the creation and enhancement of public spaces, urban transportation, land use, and sustainability. In effect, attractive urban design projects and creative land-use or transportation strategies have facilitated the creation of cultural, social, recreational, and educational facilities; the preservation of natural areas and buildings of historic or cultural significance; and the promotion of housing and employment for all income classes. In combination, these projects and policies have positively transformed the physical realm of Curitiba and garnered national and international recognition for the city.

The top-down politics involved in Curitiba's urban design and planning processes and some of the paradoxical results on the spatial and social fabric of the city, however, have not received adequate attention and are yet to be critically assessed (Irazábal 2005). Notwithstanding Curitiba's fine accomplishments in the areas of urban design and planning, an analysis of the politics of development in Curitiba provides some evidence that insufficient and low-quality opportunities for public participation are starting to delegitimize the planning process. Indeed, in current local governance practices, the interaction between government leaders and citizen groups has not yet generated a creative, respectful, and productive dialogue. Curitiba's government must involve citizens in the planning process in a more thorough way before the city's development dynamics lose momentum. Arguably, those dynamics have already begun a process of decline and delegitimization. Thus, Curitiba could rapidly become an example of a brilliant planning process that ran out of steam and prestige if the current local practices of poor interaction between government leaders and citizens persist and if more attention is not paid to social and spatial inequalities.

Hence, at the dawn of the new millennium, Curitiba is at a crossroads. The city could rest on its laurels, complimenting itself on the successes of its *plano diretor* and other urban design and planning initiatives implemented between the 1960s and the 1990s. But it would do so at the risk of losing vitality and becoming outmoded. Or, conversely, the city could try to maintain the innovative profile and dynamism that has characterized it so far, searching for new ways to develop a competitive advantage and strategically position itself within the regional, national, and international networks of the new global economy, while addressing the growing challenges of

democratization, regional urbanization, and social and spatial justice at the local and metropolitan-region levels. A new set of participatory and economic premises and development paradigms is needed in order for the government, planning agencies, and citizenry in Curitiba to reevaluate and renegotiate their governance and urban development priorities. Open discussion should be fostered among the entire population so that they can explore together the real potentialities of the city and construct new, more sustainable and equitable development paths for the future.

Interviews

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Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of planning and development in Curitiba, see Irazábal 2005; for the history of planning in Curitiba and a description of particular projects see IPPUC (2003).
2. There had been many city plans and projects in Brazil before the Agache Plan for Curitiba—for example, in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Porto Alegre—and even the design of two new state capitals—Belo Horizonte and Goiânia. The Agache Plan for Curitiba however was one of the first comprehensive master plans in the modern sense.
3. Population growth at this time was mainly a result of migration from the hinterland following the mechanization of agriculture, which displaced many workers.
4. The military regime that came to power in 1964 created the National Housing Bank (BNH) and the Serviço Federal de Habitação e Urbanismo (SERFHAU), a national agency charged with overseeing urban policies and master planning. Municipalities were mandated to have a master plan in order to receive federal funds for capital improvements, for which SERFHAU and the BNH would offer loans. See the introduction to this volume for a brief account of these institutions.

5. When it was inaugurated, the bus system carried only 54,000 passengers daily, whereas by 2006 it was carrying 2.3 million. The system has inspired many cities around the world, including Bogotá, Colombia; and Los Angeles, California.
6. The pedestrian mall was built on a weekend to prevent shop owners who opposed it from taking any legal action to halt it until it was too late. Then, children were invited for a painting fair in the middle of the street, further preventing any action against the work. Curitiba's mayor convinced opposing groups to give the project a try, while the children's fair became a successful weekly event that helped to consolidate the pedestrian activities.
7. Although city officials decided what ethnic memorials to build and where to locate them with no community participation, the ethnic groups have generally been receptive to the products, have appropriated them for cultural events, and have created partnerships with the city for their maintenance. For a detailed discussion of the ethnic memorials see Irazábal (2004).
8. Jaime Lerner is an architect, urban planner, and savvy politician who has led Curitiba's planning through all its important modern stages. In addition to his skills, Lerner enjoyed good fortune in his political career. He was the president of IPPUC when appointed mayor by the then military government to a term (1971–1975) that coincided with the prosperous phase of national development known as the “Brazilian miracle”; thus, he could count on abundant resources and no opposition to his mandate. After the return to democracy he was Curitiba's first elected mayor (1979–84) and was reelected in 1989–92, when he enjoyed the broadening of municipal resources and power granted by the new 1988 National Constitution. (He administered a city budget of \$R850 million, \$R600 million more than his predecessor's.) He went on to be elected governor of Paraná in 1994 and re-elected in 1998.
9. The cases of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are paramount examples of these political entanglements in Brazil (see D. Oliveira 1995).
10. It is relevant to mention that at the time of the creation of the *plano diretor* and until recently, a significant portion of Curitiba's population—and the most politically powerful one—was middle class and composed of descendents of European immigrants. These conditions made the city a relatively homogenous and conservative market socially, economically, and culturally. These factors led the planning and political processes to be conservative, to create consensus, and to promote the myth of the “good planner.”
11. For example, before it was actually built, the Rua 24 Horas project was the object of an intense marketing campaign in which Curitibaños were depicted as active agents who demanded the project and, consequently, received it with great anticipation. Meanwhile, before this project was complete, the city started marketing another project, the Ópera de Arame, positioning Curitiba once again in the national and international news. Because of its impressive landscaping and architectural style—a light transparent steel-frame building with ample glass panels (see fig. 9.6)—this building became an obligatory tourist stop, despite its limited usefulness due to bad acoustics.
12. One comparative datum suffices to demonstrate the degree of this polarization: in 1998, the municipal budget of Curitiba was R\$1,000 per person, whereas the budget of the neighboring municipality of Campo Magro, within the CMR, was only R\$15 per person (interview with Elton Barz, 1998). Hence, there are strong disparities in almost all urban services between the central municipality of Curitiba and its surrounding metropolitan area.

13. The first objective is job generation.
14. COMEC (Coordenação da Região Metropolitana de Curitiba, or Coordination of the Metropolitan Region of Curitiba) is a technical planning agency for the metropolitan region created in 1974, restructured in 1994, and regulated in 1995. It has no lawmaking powers.
15. ASSOMECA (Associação dos Municípios da Região Metropolitana de Curitiba, or Association of Municipalities of the Metropolitan Region of Curitiba) is a political council composed of the mayors of all the municipalities within the CMR, with the mayor of Curitiba as president. It was created in 1997 and has no lawmaking powers.
16. There were nine such legally defined metropolitan regions in Brazil, one of which is Curitiba, currently composed of twenty-six municipalities. The other metropolitan regions are São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, Recife, Salvador, Belém, and Fortaleza (see the introduction to this book).
17. During Lerner's last administration, several architectural icons were created—for example, the Rua 24 Horas, the Ópera de Arame, and the Botanical Garden, among others. During the Rafael Greca administration that followed, architectural works such as the Faróis do Saber, the ethnic monuments, and the Ruas da Cidadania were built. Under Mayor Taniguchi, IPPUC embarked on the enlargement or creation of new parks, such as Parque Tangüa, and the revitalization of some streets and boulevards, such as the Rua Comendador Araújo.
18. In 1998, unemployment was 12 percent in Curitiba and its metropolitan region, only 5 points lower than in the troubled metropolis of São Paulo (interview with Lafaiete Santos Neves 1998).
19. The variety and growing number of neighborhood associations, religious, environmental, professional, political, and academic groups in Curitiba is evidence of the increasing sophistication and organization of civil society, and the types of bottom-up pressures from citizens striving for a more inclusive urban planning and management process, and consequently, a more inclusive city.
20. The *orçamento participativo* (participatory budget) has been successfully implemented by Labor Party-led local governments in several cities such as Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Santos, Londrina, and more recently, Brasília (see Abers 1998, 2000; also see Lineu Castello's essay in chapter 8 for a discussion of participatory in Porto Alegre).
21. "Plano Diretor de Curitiba: Uma Abordagem Metropolitana," municipal seminars, May–June 1999.
22. For a discussion and critique of the new plano diretor, see Moura (2000) and Firkowski (2000).