

DRAFT

**CONFLICTED SUSTAINABILITY AND
CRUSHING LANDSCAPES: THE QUAGMIRE
OF NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE
NEW URBAN STATE IN BUENOS AIRES**

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ABSTRACT This article examines a local, state-led attempt in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to conceptualize and implement a program resembling priorities in recent scholarship on sustainable development that integrates a justice imperative, which encompasses environmental, sociopolitical, and economic concerns. In a context of transnationally circulating paradigms where the discourse on sustainable development has become hegemonic *and* coupled with neoliberal orientations in policy, the effort to enact the Urban Environmental Plan in Buenos Aires faces challenges of prioritization among conflicting goals. The focus is on how planning revolves around three neoliberal keywords implicated in sustainable development – *sustainability*, *participation*, and *competitiveness* – and the way these lead to the projection of incompatible landscapes, as examined in the single research site of Puerto Madero. Different theories of politics and sustainable urban place-building are compared, with the conclusion that the regulation school, after important revisions, is most helpful in understanding the limits of neoliberal logics in projects of urban sustainable development.

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Introduction

Among the many critiques leveled against sustainable development over the last 15 years, one of the most reverberant for observers concerned specifically with urban policy has been the argument that the concept grapples poorly, if at all, with questions of equity and justice (Campbell, 1996; McGranahan, Songso, and Kjellén, 1996; Marcuse, 1998; Satterthwaite, 1999). Scholars have responded by formulating “just sustainabilities” (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans 2003) as a way of integrating sociopolitical with economic and environmental priorities. However, I argue that even under some of the most auspicious conditions, with these goals embraced in a state-led push for urban sustainable development, there are other limitations that emerge in the practice of conceptualizing and implementing interventions to city space, particularly in a context of intense neoliberal restructuring. A primary obstacle is the multiple and conflicting incarnations of sustainability, including priorities of a more narrow *environmental sustainability* alongside *sociopolitical participation* and *economic competitiveness*, which lead to the fragmented projection of numerous landscapes that crush each other’s possibilities for success in practice.

I use the case of Buenos Aires, Argentina and its Urban Environmental Plan (PUA; *Plan Urbano Ambiental*, or “the Plan”), born in the last decade under a newly autonomous municipal government, as the empirical basis to examine limits to sustainable development in its neoliberal formulation. Following recent critical scholarship (e.g., Harvey, 2005), we can understand *neoliberalism* as an ideology of economic organization that presumes all other aspects of life – political, social, cultural, environmental, etc. – can be best coordinated through market-based paradigms, with anything more than a minimalist state ostensibly encumbering optimization. This general, flexible ideology has swept policymaking circles since the end of the Cold War, taking on particular vigor in the global South through both official endorsement and external financial pressures (Veltmeyer, Petras, and Vieux, 1997; Mohan, Brown, Milward, and Zack-Williams, 2000; Babb, 2005). Argentine neoliberalizing reforms were some of the most aggressive in all of Latin America during the 1990s, constituting a comprehensive project to overhaul the relationship between state and economy (Grimson and Kessler, 2005), with Buenos Aires as the locus of many restructuring efforts that greatly affected patterns of place-building on the ground (Mignaqui and Elguezabal, 1997; Ciccolella, 1999; Torres, 2001; Ciccolella, 2002; Gorelik, 2004). The PUA and other planning innovations emerged in this neoliberal context, which also coincided with the transnational proliferation of Local Agenda 21 initiatives. In Buenos Aires, these promised to enact an assertive citywide program of broad-minded sustainable development with the solid backing of the state. In this way, the Argentine capital serves as an ideal case for evaluating current theories that schematize how something like just sustainabilities could be achieved.

Through my analysis, I critique three frameworks of urban politics, place-building, and sustainable development, mainly finding fault in their inattention to the political specificities of neoliberalization and the manifold, dissonant priorities it encompasses. Whereas the *urban regime* perspective seeks an “ecology of agents for livability” (Evans, 2002a), and *urban growth machine* theorists look for “capacities for sustainable place-building” (Warner and Negrete, 2005), both delineating ideal situations, the *urban regulation* perspective takes a very different tack. Regulationists note that sustainability,

of a certain sort, is already a priority for all political-economic configurations due to the interests of powerful stakeholders in ensuring continuity, and that in situations of neoliberalization especially, the stabilization of accumulation at the local level involves the institutionalization of overarching goals of improvement that make negative conditions – whether for environmental quality or human happiness – palatable (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Within neoliberalization efforts, the regulationists thus anticipate the susceptibility of progressive discourses such as *sustainability* to application toward rather antithetical ends. This cautionary insight is useful but falls short of explaining how such discourses work with each other in the neoliberal pantheon of keywords. It also fails to show what these look like when implemented on the ground, especially in the particular geopolitical context of the global South.

Some of the environmental studies literature addresses the specific challenges of achieving sustainable development in cities across Latin America, Africa, and Asia by focusing on dimensions of extensive poverty, administrative weakness, regulatory incoherence, and substandard housing (e.g., Burgess, Carmona, and Kolstee, 1997; Fernandes, 1998; *Environment and Urbanization*, 1998, 1999, 2000; Pugh, 2000; Jordán and Simioni, 2003), but few consider the conflicts plaguing the conceptualization process and subsequent implementation as imposed by neoliberal restructuring itself. By examining the pro-sustainability planning apparatus, elaborated under the aegis of the neoliberal-born, newly decentralized urban government of Buenos Aires, I aim to intervene in the debates from a different angle. I ask: What priorities comprise the neoliberal model for sustainable development in the city? Can they form a coherent, singular urban terrain, as simplistic as the discourses they invoke? What kinds of conflicts emerge when neoliberal logics not only run up against the messy details of real urban life, but also quarrel with each other?

In order to think about language which cuts across neoliberal contexts from Argentina to the United States to South Africa and yet further afield, I turn to the work of Raymond Williams on *keywords*, which helps illuminate what ideologies and contests specific vocabularies can signal beyond their momentary usage in single places. Nonetheless, taking up these queries in Buenos Aires means examining what particular challenges face an ostensible project of just sustainability advocated within a local neoliberal state. Although the urban regulation perspective provides especially helpful theoretical resources for this analysis, I advance some important modifications grounded in ideas of *political fields* by Pierre Bourdieu and *conceived space* by Henri Lefebvre. From these, I develop the notions of *conflicted sustainability* and *crushing landscapes* to explain the *porteño*¹ situation and make more sense of specific aspects either missed or misconstrued by other paradigms.

The keywords of sustainable development

Throughout the literature that problematizes sustainable development, there are three main visions in conflict, which are also important on the ground in practical terms. These are central in Scott Campbell's (1996) quandary about how planners should negotiate ecological, economic, and equitable goals for cities in the quest for sustainable development, as well as in the work of others who emphasize the importance of the "triple bottom line" (e.g., Rogers and Ryan, 2001) with these same three considerations in mind. These are recurring points of conflict in sustainable development, each –

environmental, sociopolitical, and economic anxieties – a set of irresolvable questions which nonetheless demand answers from any governing body and its model for development. In neoliberal contexts, the concepts of *sustainability*, *participation*, and *competitiveness*, respectively encapsulate these different interests.

Williams (1985) would call these *keywords*: terms that surface at specific historical moments with particular intensity, maintaining older etymologies but carrying new ideological cargo brought by heated debates in culture and society. But what freight do these particular keywords bear? The neoliberal-era planning literature worldwide is replete with this terminology, with each keyword coming from Latin roots but gaining new currency within the rubric of sustainable development. Among them, the updated edition of Raymond's classic statements on keywords (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris, 2005) defines only *participation*. Its entry in that new text notes its recent surge in political discourses emphasizing notions of sharing, equity, and common presence of different parties – an evolution from an original idea about obligatory duty as captured in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Patton, 2005). As *participación*, the similarly positioned *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* details a similar shift toward indicating common ground and active engagement.² *Sustainability* demonstrates the most dramatic transformation in both English and Spanish, as *sostenibilidad*. Both reference texts show early denotations relating to economic projects and legal arguments – endeavors which need to be supported in different ways. But the latest editions of each, from the early 2000s, offer separate ecological definitions and, again in both, mention of the specific and novel composite of *sustainable development* (*desarrollo sostenible*) from which the current environmental sense of *sustainability* springs. *Competitiveness* (*competitividad*) shows the least change over time in its meaning, but its application to cities as a whole is the main development, as in entire cities vying against each other in a global competition for investment in order to foster local economic success (Buck, Gordon, Harding, and Turok, 2005).

In Buenos Aires, the literature of the Plan and discourses common throughout the GCBA (Government of the City of Buenos Aires), as well as among the design professions, emphasize these three keywords as the organizing concepts for a broad vision of sustainable development that promises to foster a just and coherent city with environment, sociopolitical, and economic priorities fitting together seamlessly. In practice, the results of the neoliberal state have been rather different. Ideas and outcomes, of course, seldom match perfectly, but the way particular way these diverge in this test case of state-led sustainable development is the important issue at stake here.

Methodology

The positions I take in this article draw from long-term fieldwork in Argentina, where I was conducting research during 2003-2005 for a larger dissertation project on urban redevelopment and structural adjustment in three sites across Buenos Aires. Due to limitations of space, here I strategically focus my empirical discussion of outcomes in only one area of the city profoundly touched by the recent planning endeavors: Puerto Madero, debatably the most symbolically important site of physical transformation in Buenos Aires during neoliberal times. My methodology consisted of ethnographic presence in three neighborhoods over 18 months. However, for this article I focus mostly on the PUA as conceptualized and implemented in Puerto Madero from the perspective

of politicians and professional urbanists. To gain that view, I interviewed a total of 20 bureaucrats in city government across departments related to urban infrastructure, development, and governance. In addition, I interviewed 15 design professionals, both in and out of the GCBA. This involved ethnographic presence in the numerous urban planning conferences and events sponsored by the Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo of the Universidad de Buenos Aires (FADU-UBA) and the Sociedad Central de Arquitectos (SCA) during the final year of fieldwork. Lastly, I conducted in-depth interviews with representatives of two major development firms operating in the area. The article concentrates on some of the most fully detailed and compelling data which other interviews confirmed. As a result, only a handful of informants appear by name (pseudonyms) in the text: Federico, an architect and planner formerly employed by the GCBA (four personal interviews, 2004); Sebastián and Soledad, planners and members of the Council of the Urban Environmental Plan's (CoPUA) Technical Team (two group interviews, 2004); and Luz, a former assistant to the head executive (mayor, or *jefe de gobierno*) of the GCBA (personal interview, 2004).

In the course of observation and interviewing, I collected vast amounts of documentary evidence. The PUA itself has more than 2,000 pages of official publications. Combined with the literature of the SCA and FADU-UBA about planning issues related to the PUA, as well as the archives of the GCBA and the publications of the development firms, I collected well over 3,000 pages of maps, organizational diagrams, statistical tables, editorials, factual histories, blueprints, and research papers about the PUA and Puerto Madero.

Analysis of such a massive and varied amount of mostly qualitative information always presents challenges. My approach was to systematize data around the axes presented within the PUA itself in order to evaluate it on its own terms. I also searched for recurrent themes in the documents as well as the interview material and my fieldnotes. In a first sweep of the evidence, I found the three keywords of *competitiveness*, *participation*, and *sustainability* were prevalent in all data sources that dealt with sustainable development as an explicit topic. I then combed through the data a second time, coding for these three keywords even in material where sustainable development was not a key concern. This coding enabled me to discern patterns in responses and documents that diverged from the official rhetoric of the PUA but nonetheless remained tied to the contents of the plan and the actions and aims of planners. That margin became my principal explanandum for this article.

The research site of Puerto Madero provides an important locus for showing these patterns in action. As a new neighborhood, redeveloped from an abandoned waterfront district since 1989, some of the dynamics shaping Puerto Madero are more pronounced than elsewhere in the city during the neoliberal era. However, this makes certain conflicts and problems more legible for exposition in research rather than representing a qualitative divergence in the kinds of issues at stake.

In brief, the history of Puerto Madero reflects much of the city's broad experience with neoliberal policy orientations and planning interventions since 1989. In that year, the decaying port was identified by President Carlos Menem as "apt for privatization" along with scores of other state resources. Menem created a new private development firm, the Corporación Antiguo Puerto Madero (CAPM), and gifted the state property to it on the conditions, first, that the national and municipal governments serve as sole and equal

stockholders in the company, and second, that it be responsible for installing all infrastructure and guiding all renovation of existing buildings in the area with no access to public funds. After some important controversy over the design of the recycled territory, the neighborhood proceeded with strong influence from the designers of the redeveloped Barcelona seafront.

The total area of 2.1km² does not include both restored structures, new development, and a large protected wetland on the Río de la Plata. By the late 1990s, the old brick customs houses, protected by historic preservation standards, had been converted to luxury residences, offices, and restaurants. In the rest of the space zoned for development, a few towers but mostly low-rise (less than five stories) buildings had been completed or were under construction. Public park land opened in the area between high-end residential blocks and the wetland preserve. Alongside the park and wetlands a new informal settlement has developed with a population over 100 residents. The current population in the rest of Puerto Madero is currently estimated at 8902 people (<http://www.puertomadero.com/proyec2.cfm>, 2006), but as of the 2001 census it was tallied at 406 (Dirección de Estadística y Censos, 2002: 50).³ New construction and further renovation continues, concentrating especially on high-end hotels and apartments.

The visions propounded in the PUA have played an important part in directing this development. Although certainly not the sole drive for in shaping these changes to Puerto Madero, and even though it currently faces legislative challenges for full implementation, the Plan represents the culmination and codification of several powerful interests. It is important for this article as the articulation of visions of sustainable development, many of which have materialized outside the Plan, in myriad separate initiatives, due to the battles of approval it has faced in its entirety. Some authors take this as a reason *not* to focus on the Plan as an analytic object (e.g., Crot, forthcoming), but it is an empirical mistake to consider legislative limbo in Buenos Aires equivalent to the non-realization of policy. Furthermore, the PUA as a document itself, with or without the force of law behind it, retains full validity as an archive of different ideas for how to conceptualize sustainable development in neoliberal Buenos Aires.

The neoliberal urban state and planning innovations

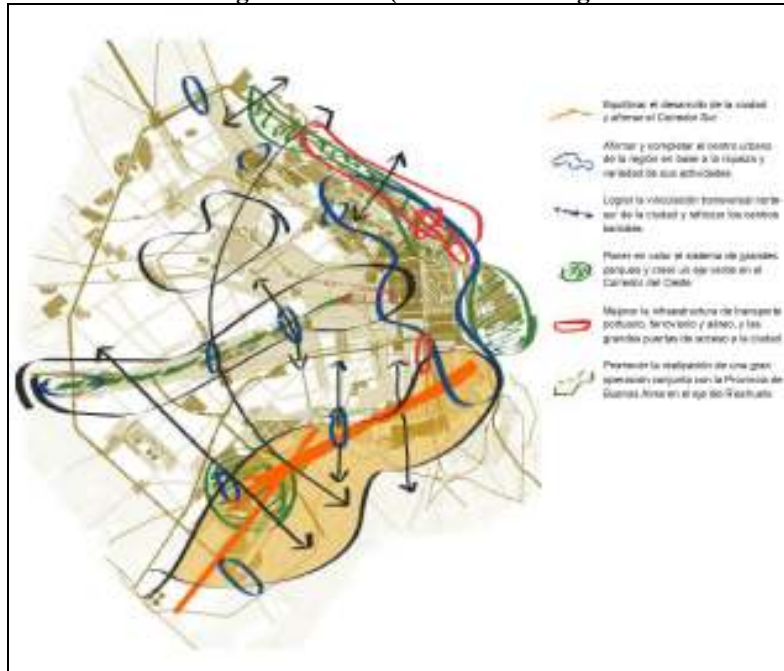
Holding up the volumes published as part of the Plan, each book-length report with a different colored binding and bundled in a boxed set, the recently unemployed architect settled back in his office chair with a wry smile and told me, “this is what we call the Happy Meal (*Caja Feliz*) for architects here in Buenos Aires.” Surprised by Federico’s mocking commentary, I raised an eyebrow and half-smiled to hear more about what I already knew was the culmination of a major effort by the new urban government over the last five years to shape a visionary program for the management and improvement of place building and service provision within its jurisdiction. In 1996, just eight years earlier, the City of Buenos Aires had gained greater autonomy from the national state, and the formulation of the Plan was one of the key missions that has threaded through the two elected administrations since then. Federico continued, with a slightly disgusted but almost laughing tone: “It’s all very pretty. See the colors?” At that point he opened one of the publications to display its elaborate maps and models, leafing through dozens of similar pages. “And all these graphic depictions of the city, all these representations for more green space and better traffic flow and revitalization – it’s all meaningless. Look at

the text. It's all the vocabulary of architects who have a ton of desires for changing the city but no way of accomplishing them – so many different kinds of strategic projects but no coordination. Plus the Legislature didn't endorse it, and the time limit for its approval has expired. What now? For all these crossed priorities, there is no progress in this city.”

Federico was clearly frustrated, edging on cheeky, but his words also held real concern. He had not been a core member of the large team of design professionals, city politicians, and social scientists that elaborated the PUA, but Federico used to work for the young GCBA and had invested much time over the last decade in several of its projects to enact hopeful transformations, from advising on urban issues during drafting of the city's new Constitution, to a consulting role in certain aspects of the PUA, to a more influential position in broader state efforts to renovate neighborhoods identified as dilapidated and undervalued. With the future of the PUA in doubt, he felt exhausted and disillusioned, defeated in his travails for the GCBA to effect meaningful urban change by other demands that claimed to work together in some kind of synergy but seemed to be crushing each other into paralysis instead. The ideals embraced by Federico were not limited to his own personal commitments; nor were the problems he noted merely isolated to the PUA, but many of the goals of the GCBA and its territorial policies looped back to it.

After more than a century of federally controlled leadership, the local state in Buenos Aires gained the right to direct democratic elections for its mayor (*jefe de gobierno*) in 1996 as guaranteed in the new national Constitution enacted two years earlier (*Constitución de la República Argentina*, 1994: Artículo 129). Whereas there was no absence of a state in Buenos Aires before the reform – with a highly interventionist and authoritarian municipal structure that set the standard in planning and regulation for much of Argentina (Walter, 1993; Pérez, 1994) – the new urban state showed marked differences in orientation from its predecessor. Governing nearly 3 million residents across 200km² of territory, the framers of the new *porteño* state articulated the more judicious shaping of the city itself as an unequivocal priority, making the cultivation of the PUA and other planning improvements into constitutional obligations to be realized by the turn of the millennium (*Constitución de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires*, 1996: Ley 71). They sought planning approaches and ways of building or rebuilding urban sites that would break from a long history of failures and corruptions since the city's *belle époque* of development in the image of Paris a century prior.⁴ One discourse emerged as paradigmatic in the efforts to intervene in the urban landscape, one which had gained a global currency in policymaking circles at the time – *sustainable development*, based largely on the environmentalist interests of Agenda 21.⁵

Figure 1: Buenos Aires according to the PUA (translation of legend enumerated in text below)



Source: CoPUA (2001: 2).

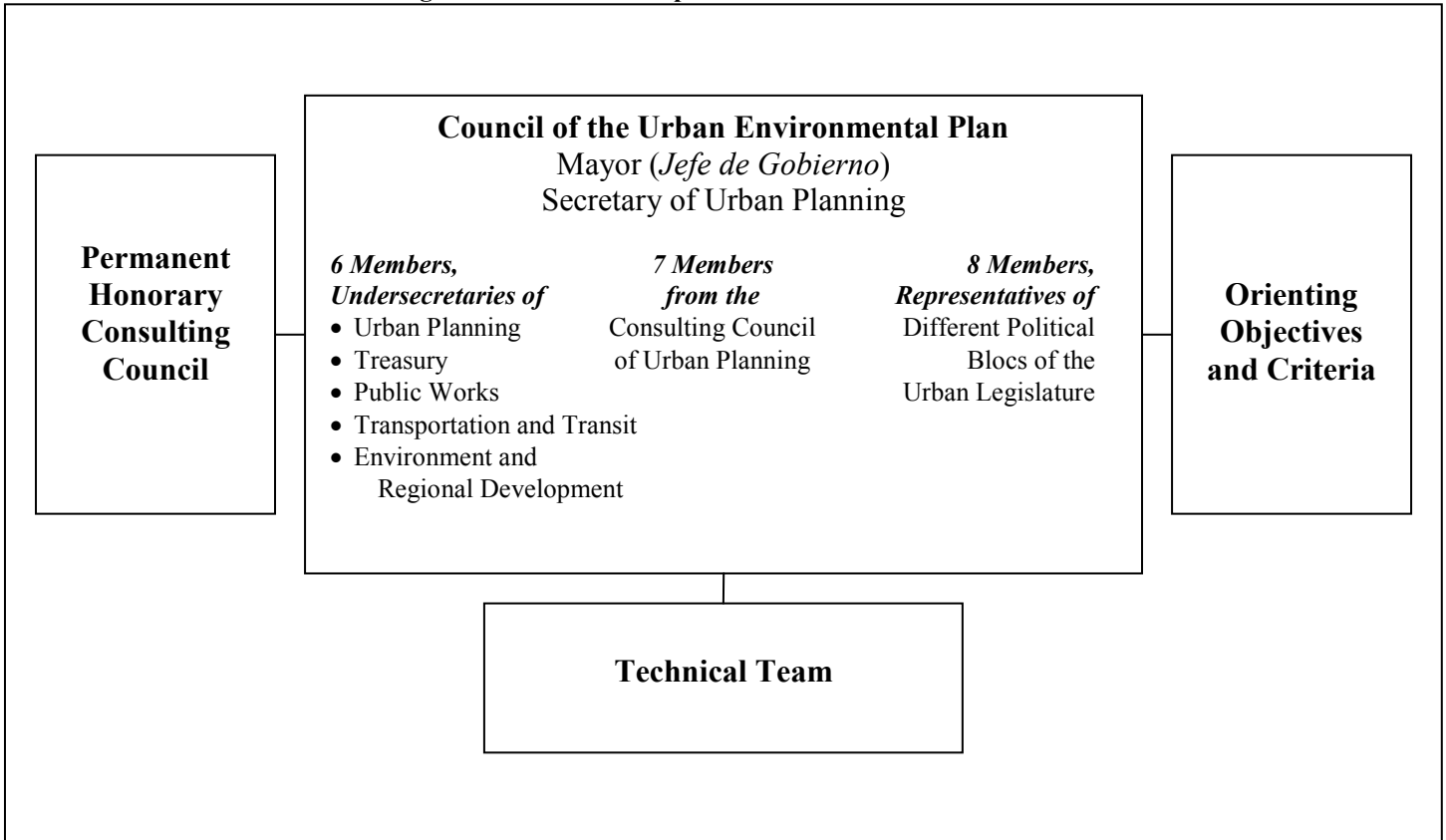
The PUA defines sustainable development as a “participatory process that integrates urban-design transformation, economic growth, social equity, the preservation of cultural diversity, and the rational use of environmental resources, with the objective of improving the living conditions of the population and minimizing the degradation or destruction of its own ecological base of production and habitability, without putting at risk the satisfaction of the needs of future generations (CoPUA, 2000: 12).” In order to achieve this goal, it has five main priorities in its overall organization, which it depicts graphically in one of the maps Federico singled out as characteristic of the overly sanguine plan (see Figure 1). These organizing “fundamentals and proposals” of the Plan are:

1. To balance the development of the city and affirm the Southern Corridor.
2. To affirm and complete the urban center of the region, based in the richness and variety of its activities.
3. To achieve the transversal north-south linkage of the city and reinforce neighborhood centers.
4. To upgrade the system of large parks and create a green axis in the Western Corridor.
5. To improve the infrastructure of water, rail, and air transportation, and the major access portals to the city.
6. To promote the realization of a large conjoint operation with the Province of Buenos Aires in the axis of the Riachuelo.⁶

Such characteristics make the Plan appear imminently holistic in its approach: far more than merely environmentalist, it is also broader-minded than the one-sided, pro-

growth visions of sustainable development that many critics lambast (e.g., Rees, 1992; 1995). Beyond these priorities, the structure of inputs going into the design of the Plan includes an array of interests, indicating a more decentralized structure than earlier planning initiatives in *porteño* history (see Figure 2), which were instead very tightly controlled, unilateral blueprints for change (Suárez, 1986). The formulation of the PUA, moreover, involved public consultation in a series of thematic meetings at numerous junctures throughout the process of constructing strategies for intervention, again signaling a much greater degree of public openness than precedent would warrant.

Figure 2: Structure of inputs into the Council of the PUA



Source: Translated and adapted from CoPUA (2000: 15).

The language of the Plan and its major proponents speak of its ambit as all-encompassing, its mission of sustainability as paramount and multifaceted, and its assembly as the work of all *porteños* – and specifically ordinary people, not politicians or experts – who make use of the city on a daily basis. Aníbal Ibarra (2001: 43), mayor of the Capital at the time and official chief of the PUA, proclaimed that “[t]he Plan constitutes the best platform for thinking a common future for all the inhabitants of our city. It is about a project in which all of us are included and in which we all ought to be protagonists.” Under the Plan’s slogan of “Buenos Aires decides its future,” Carlos Lebrero (2001: 41), then president of the influential SCA, endorsed it as a “key” for moving into new realms of cross-cutting democratic realization. With the greatest degree of detail, Enrique García Espil (2001: 46-47), who helped lead the PUA’s development as Secretary of Urban Planning in the Cabinet of the GCBA, outlined how the Plan enabled

the fulfillment of “the city we want” by fortifying five types in one: “the equitable city,” “the competitive city,” “the sustainable city,” “the balanced city,” and “the governable city.”

Emphasis on the inclusion of all the people of Buenos Aires – as residents rather than as formalized political subjects – in the planning process very closely echoes the radical critique of urban policymaking enunciated by Henri Lefebvre (1996: Chapter 14) in his excursus on “the right to the city,” or what Mark Purcell (2002) calls a “politics of the inhabitant.” But it also anticipates scholarly visions of sustainable development deeply integrated with principles of justice, that is “just sustainability.” Such approximations of revolutionary academic visions in state-led practice are rare indeed. The empirical question to answer is how the operationalization of these kinds of ideas plays out on the ground in a place like neoliberal Buenos Aires. For that, we must consider in more detail precisely what major perspectives on justice and sustainable urban development expect to find, as well as what they fail to expect.

Visions of sustainable development, justice, and place-building

The most thorough treatment of just sustainabilities as a conceptual innovation can be found in the work of Julian Agyeman and his collaborators (with Bullard and Evans, 2003; with Evans, 2003). In their response to charges such as Peter Marcuse’s (1998) that “sustainability is not enough,” they infuse earlier delineations of sustainable development with an imperative for justice, arriving at a new definition: “The need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now, and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, while living within the limits of supporting ecosystems (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans, 2003: 2).”

Yet this inventive vision of just sustainabilities, while attendant to the specificities of urban dilemmas, does not engage with the long line of scholarship on politics and place-building in cities. That literature, and of particular interest here is the writing unified under urban political economy, has likewise failed to take up questions of the environment or sustainability as central issues of concern. While there is much discussion of what would comprise “the just city” today (e.g., Fainstein, 2006), few researchers link both sustainability and justice to existing frameworks in urban theory that grapple with the politics of place-building. Two critical perspectives tied to *urban regime* and *urban growth machine* lineages examine under what conditions justice and sustainability might emerge together within contemporary cities, and what actors and relationships among them would foster that emergence. To consider the push for just sustainability in Buenos Aires, I review these authors’ expectations in turn before taking a more radical view of urban sustainability – regulation theory.

Urban just sustainabilities

Peter Evans (2002a) envisions justice and sustainability coming together in urban sites through his concept of *livable cities*. In order to realize any true sustainability in cities through local politics, Evans (2002b) believes we must take into equal account struggles for livelihood, with these two objectives combining as the single goal of livability. Through a synthesis of case studies spanning poorer cities of third world and post-communist countries, Evans (2002c) argues that only by fostering pro-sustainable-development linkages across different interests classically examined in studies of urban

politics – i.e., the state, capital, and labor – that cities can become livable for all groups, including the most vulnerable and commonly excluded. The alliances in the Evans schema form “an ecology of agents for livability,” which harkens consciously to the political ecology paradigm (Peet and Watts 1996), but bears much more resemblance to the work on *urban regimes*,⁷ as it expects urban development can take different paths through variously composed coalitions – with members of the elite both in and out of government.

Early regime theorists argued that these coalitions create overall orientations in local state action and set the stage for certain possibilities, and impossibilities, at particular historical junctures (Fainstein and Fainstein, 1983; Stone and Sanders, 1987; Stone, 1989). Regime theory explains development outcomes as the result of interplay between structural constraints and localized group interests as they vary over time (Stone, 1993; Fainstein, 2001; Savitch and Kantor, 2002; Stone, 2006).⁸ Following this kind of logic, Evans posits that if livability does not eventuate in cities, it is because no ecology of agents has emerged to nourish it, no favorable set of relationships has been fostered to maximize positive outcomes for all groups. Livability would then emerge in Buenos Aires, for example, if business interests, local government, environmentalists, and neighborhood social movements came together to create synergistic relationships for improvements to both livelihood and sustainability.

Kee Warner and Jorge Negrete (2005) find the broader effort by Evans (2002a) to be helpful but insufficiently specified, and instead advocate an analytic emphasis on local capacities for sustainable place-building. In their approach, they turn to *urban growth machine* theory, which generally argues that local governments are dominated by land-owning elites seeking to increase the value of their property through intensified land use and greater urban growth. Elites accomplish this through local boosterism that competes with other cities for mobile investment, and by lobbying for the political prioritization of real estate’s exchange value over its use value – both understood in the Marxian sense – in government decision-making on development (Molotch, 1976). Profitability is thus a foremost force in shaping urban places, but social movements can also use place to their advantage in protecting use values through ordinances and other municipal policies (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Ferman, 1996; Molotch, 1999; Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen, 2000).

While one of the major criticisms of the growth machine perspective has always been its reliance on the peculiarities of US government structures and land-specific laws, scholars have shown the applicability of the growth machine concept to various other contexts through careful modification of certain geopolitically and culturally particular precepts.⁹ Warner and Negrete (2005), with their specific interest capacities for sustainable place-building in the global South, which they assert must always automatically be concerned with questions of justice in order to be truly sustainable, analyze how the current political and economic conditions for urban development in Chile undercut these goals. They argue that the priorities of growth machines vary by the nature of local institutions, and that the internal reworking of institutional orientations is the only way to achieve place-building practices compatible with sustainable development. Therefore, Warner and Negrete (2005) argue that if urban just sustainability does not crystallize, it is because conditions for place-building were not oriented toward the optimization of sustainability capacities; in Buenos Aires, this means

that only if economic and political conditions promoted capacities for sustainability would it emerge on the ground.¹⁰

Both of these theories introduce key innovations on established frameworks in urban analysis, managing the double feat of making them environmentally sensitive as well as more attuned to the third world. However, they exhibit three shortcomings important for this analysis. First, neither considers the specificity of neoliberalism as the political-economic ideology dominating all the contexts they investigate. This is likely due to a common drawback of growth machine and regime theories which always see capitalism as simply nothing more nor less than capitalism, with similar effects across both time and place on politics. Second, they give no consideration to the conditions in which the state attempts to lead a project of urban just sustainability. Third, and most deeply, they do not consider the potential contestedness of sustainability; rather, it is a univocal and consistent set of goals in their view. To consider a perspective that scores better on at least the first two of these accounts, I turn to regulation theory.

Making 'actually existing neoliberalism' sustainable

Neil Brenner and Nikolas Theodore (2002) formulate the most updated version of *urban regulation* theory in their conceptualization of “actually existing neoliberalism,” a term meant to capture two features that unqualified usages miss: the stark difference between neoliberalism in practice and ideology, and its different formations across contexts worldwide. This emphasis on neoliberal capitalism meets the general regulationist imperative of understanding how economic systems vary both geographically and historically, comprising a set of ever-changing modes of regulation that uphold a particular regime of accumulation, such as localized “actually existing neoliberalism.” In this view, the state is not the sole player involved in regulating accumulation, but it is a major one. Institutional arrangements allowing for an encompassing kind of sustainability are thus essential for the state. There are three analytic angles taken by Brenner and Theodore (2002) in their theorization of how a tenuous neoliberal regime of accumulation manifests: first, the implementation of new policies and state ideologies is path-dependent, with historical contingencies of political structures and constellations of actors weighing greatly in determining how the same neoliberal principle will manifest practically in Argentina versus Germany; second, rather than taking shape as a clean break, any advance of neoliberal principles proceeds through creative-destructive moves that incite recombinant patterns of inherited situations, or hybrids of “new” and “old” interests and institutions; and third, the unevenly developed terrain of cities becomes crucial testing ground of neoliberal ideologies and policy innovations that regulate, or sustain, the accumulation model. Therefore, new scholarship on “actually existing neoliberalism,” and regulationists in general (e.g., Aglietta, 1979; Lipietz, 1987; Boyer, 1990; Goodwin, Duncan, and Halford, 1993), are concerned with analyzing efforts at sustainability – unlike regime and growth machine theories before the Evans and Warner-Negrete interventions. However, in an important twist, regulation theory posits there is no need whatsoever for sustainability to be just. It need be just palatable, in the sense of a temporary regulatory fix – the concept for which this perspective is famous (e.g., Jessop and Sum, 2000; While, Jonas, and Gibbs, 2004).

Unlike the numerous criticisms of sustainability as “not enough” – already mentioned above – regulationists view sustainability as plenty so long as it palatable. There is an

element of hegemony, as theorized Antonio Gramsci (1971), in the idea of a palatable sustainability, a cultural aspect which involves discourses underpinning particular regimes of accumulation that elicit its acceptance by affected social groups (Jessop, 1997; Jessop, Peck, and Tickell, 1999). For any regulatory fix, there are assuaging ideas that make, for example, “actually existing neoliberalism” sustainable. One of those key ideas in Buenos Aires and throughout the world in era following Agenda 21 is sustainable development. As a general discourse, it presents a win-win situation to which few can object on its own terms. Certainly it can be faulted as incomplete or insufficient, but by prizing both growth and the environment it is impossible to assail as unpalatable. Alan Prior (2005) suggests that any such idea in a regulatory fix must have some kind of codification in planning practice, and in Buenos Aires that formulation in policy is the PUA. The Plan and its sustainable development agenda are fundamental in the new framework for the state that has emanated from “actually existing neoliberalism” in Argentina.

Conflicted sustainability

Even as an essential discourse of “actually existing neoliberalism,” sustainable development does not straightforwardly capture its manifold priorities in Argentina. In the new political terrains opened up by neoliberal shifts, particularly in Buenos Aires, the agenda for change is more internally complicated, involving divergent interests and considerable room for conflict over the definition of what neoliberal transformations should occur. Plagued by multiple meanings and contested usage, sustainable development does not cohere as a singular policy goal. The Plan illustrates this conflictedness within the new neoliberal agenda particularly well.

Here we can see that the regulationists miss a crucial facet of social relations even in their most sophisticated analyses of emergent neoliberalism: in any newly created site of power (or “new space”), such as the post-1996 urban state in Buenos Aires and its new planning initiatives, there is always fractiousness accompanied by contests over definition and control. Bourdieu (with Wacquant, 1992: 97-102) calls this kind of space a *field*, “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions,” and asserts that parties “who dominate a given field are in a position to make it function to their advantage but they must always contend with the resistance, the claims, the contention, ‘political’ or otherwise, of the dominated.” Several scholars have contributed to the general notion of fields as meso-level zones of social conflict (Martin, 2003), but Bourdieu’s (1989; 1998: 35-63) formulations have been most specific to rethinking the state, allowing analysts to expand their ambit beyond formalized bureaucratic structures to understand how actors outside these bounds as well as other kinds of influences, such as powerful discourses, can be important in shaping the state and its actions.

The inauguration of *porteño* autonomy, like the decentralization that has occurred throughout Latin America under neoliberal initiatives (Willis, Garman, and Haggard, 1999; Meyers and Dietz, 2002), represents the creation of a new, local political field. The state it replaced was doubtless formidable and nationally influential (Herzer, 1996; De Luca, Jones, and Tula, 2002), but its close control by the federal government and frequent domination by military intervention made it much less of a field open to the jockeying of different interests aiming to set the agenda for local development. Whereas the regulationists underline the incremental consolidation of “actually existing neoliberalism”

via the dialectic clash of “old” and “new,” thereby giving an image of the new urban state and its policy innovations – such as the PUA – as a unified “new” front against entrenched interests, an understanding of the *porteño* state as a political field draws attention to the conflict inherent, and, unending in a space with much power at stake. Fields are always sites of disputed control and membership, but new fields especially leave much room for the formation of and battles between differently positioned interests.

Taking this conceptualization inside the Plan itself, we can see different visions of sustainable development staking claims of legitimacy. An emphasis on environmental concerns typically suffuses connotations of sustainable development, and indeed it is the Urban *Environmental* Plan, but it is clear in the documents of the PUA that sustainability in an ecological sense becomes but one axis of sustainable development within neoliberal Buenos Aires.¹¹ Economic and sociopolitical concerns figure alongside environmental ones at least as significantly. Despite a holistic definition of sustainable development, people at work in the Plan’s conceptualization recount a very different story, one of clashing goals and mismatched vocabularies.

Sebastián and Soledad, both planners working for GCBA, described a Technical Team rent by the demands of a divided CoPUA (see Figure 2), where different Secretariats within the new urban government had competing priorities based on their area of expertise, and then legislators bringing partisan lines to the table. Sebastián explained how, for example, some groups supported the rehabilitation of plazas and streets in order to accommodate greater public usage while the priority for others was insuring the expansion of major commercial corridors in the city center, to the detriment of greater pedestrian traffic and leisurely enjoyment of public assets. Soledad noted the importance of protecting green spaces and reducing emissions, but was able to detail the different factions that discounted these objectives because they did not generate direct economic benefits. In a professional seminar on new techniques and policies for governing the Capital region, one of the Plan’s councilwomen expressed to an audience of architects and urban designers the great importance of clearing the largest informal settlement in Buenos Aires, jutting up against the city center, as both an environmental and an economic necessity (Bricchetto, 2003). In contrast, another consultant for the Plan described in the same seminar the quandaries of providing housing for the same shantytown residents that would follow the guidelines of the Plan, which included market competitiveness and social inclusion (Murillo, 2003; see also Murillo, 2001; Equipo Mejores Prácticas, 2003).

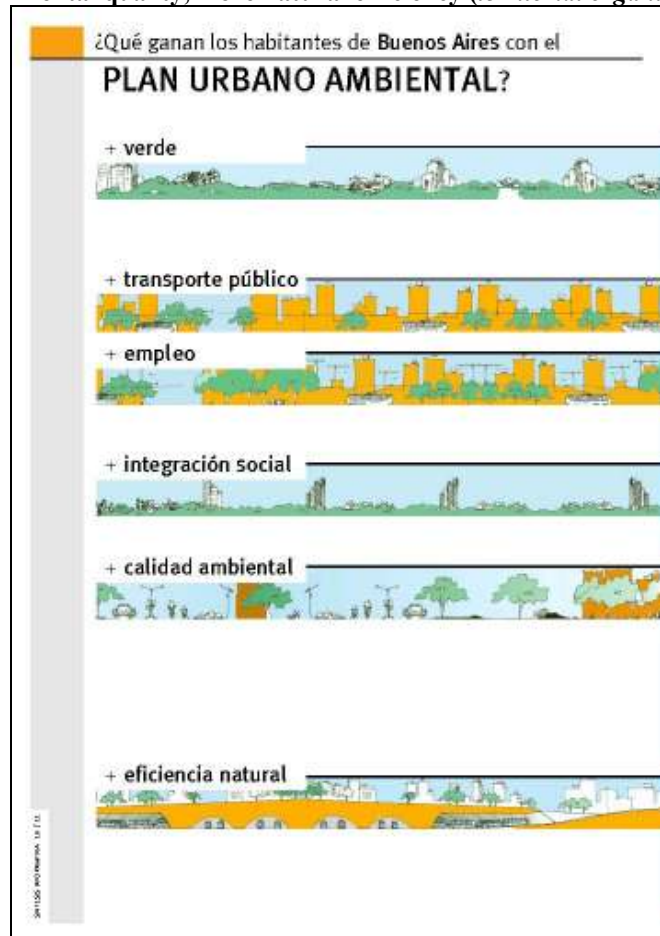
These kinds of conflicts are exactly what political fields are about. But some fields are more tumultuous and pitched in conflict than others. Luz, a close former consultant to the mayor of Buenos Aires who most championed the PUA, Aníbal Ibarra, described to me the conditions within his Cabinet in terms of attention to the Plan and myriad other interventions: “Ibarra’s government is extremely involved in the city, working on so many projects. But there is no one legacy. Instead, attention is everywhere and nowhere (personal interview, 2004).” As noted above, the GCBA’s Secretary of Urban Planning at the time of PUA formulation outlines *the sustainable city* as but one of the five kinds of cities he and the CoPUA aim to create (García Espil, 2001: 47). Focused on “minimizing the degradation or destruction of the ecological base of production and inhabitability,” this vision seeks to ensure the quality air, water, and land for future generations. *The competitive city* is no less important. Rather, it is necessary “in order to consolidate a

growing, dynamic city, positioned in the world and the center of Mercosur ... as an active center of investment, cultural production, tourism, and educational excellence.” Meanwhile, *the equitable, balanced, and governable cities* fade together in their definitions along the unifying lexicon of commonality and *participation*: “tending toward a greater equity and equality for all” (*equitable*), “eliminating inequalities that exist between neighborhoods” (*balanced*), and bolstering “efficiency, legitimacy, and social support through articulation with different sectors of society” (*governable*).

Sustainability thus comprises no clear set of principles for the new agenda, whether under the Plan specifically, or the orientation of the young GCBA more broadly. Rather, sustainability is conflicted, pitted against other priorities within the neoliberal agenda: competitiveness and participation. Although these three visions tend to recognize each other to some extent, they are minimal acknowledgements (e.g., the PUA’s numerous indices of competitiveness for Buenos Aires included some figures on air quality) which do not figure in the agendas for change each vision promotes. Different interests in political fields cluster around unifying ideas that vie to establish the *doxa* of social relations as their foundational and unquestionable logics, what Bourdieu (1998: 57) describes as the elements that can be taken for granted in a social space. But before achieving the status of *doxa*, these divergent logics clash, especially in moments of field formation, as in the new *porteño* state and the battle to define the sustainable development project according to different stakes. *Sustainability, participation, and competitiveness* are *keywords* with charged usage that stand in for larger logics.

But in practice, what do these keywords mean in Buenos Aires? They may have more complicated significance and deeper importance, but the Plan sums up their exact meaning in rather simplistic terms. *Sustainability* transforms from a broader environmental idea about non-degradation to the promotion of green spaces and general safeguarding of health indicators, which can lead into some concerns with air and water pollution. The thrust, however, is the creation and protection of parks as natural spaces of where the environment, as a specifically delimited entity, can flourish and *porteños* can enjoy its benefits, primarily for their health. *Participation* becomes a conglomerate of physical and political integration that promotes social accessibility, across spaces and into institutions. Most importantly, *participation* elides specific references to *justice (justicia)* and the act of being there becomes the same as being fair. *Competitiveness* emerges, repeatedly, as *key (clave)*, as profitability and attractiveness specifically for investment in a globally circulating flows of capitals. In a summary of the Plan’s benefits, responding to the question “*What do the inhabitants of Buenos Aires win with the Urban Environmental Plan?*,” the CoPUA (2001: 10-11) details precisely these kinds of meanings of the three keywords in the specific actions planned for different areas of the city (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: “What do they inhabitants of Buenos Aires win with the Urban Environmental Plan?: more greenery, more public transportation, more employment, more social integration, more environmental quality, more natural efficiency (*territorial organization*)”



Source: CoPUA (2001: 10).

These keywords, as charged logics of social action, set the stage for the “new space” of regulationists, albeit more complicated than they envision it. In order to consider their manifestations in the city itself, we must turn to another aspect of regulation theory – the production of space – and examine how it works in “actually existing neoliberalism” with these conflicting logics of sustainable development.

Crushing landscapes

The urban branch of the regulation school takes as the foundation for much of its thought the scholarship of Henri Lefebvre, whose centerpiece in a sprawling *oeuvre* is *The Production of Space* (1991). Although a very complex work, the book’s central conceptual apparatus is Lefebvre’s *spatial triad*, the components of which have suffered translational calamities from the original French, so I employ the more straightforward designations found elsewhere in his text: *conceived space*, *perceived space*, and *lived space* (*espace conçu*, *perçu*, and *vécu* [Lefebvre, 1974]).¹² To summarize enormously, these represent, respectively, (1) the projections for material space generated by design professionals but also policymakers and politicians with the ability to attain a detached, almost aerial view of spaces and have the power to mold them; (2) the material spaces we detect and experience all around us; and (3) the uses of space that the non-powerful enact

in their everyday lives, the vernacular and quotidian functions of space. The “new space” of the regulationists is largely a *conceived space* in the Lefebvrian sense. But like the factions within the new space of neoliberalism’s sustainable development, so the projection of its conceived space, its extensions into the material world, cannot be seen as unitary but instead constitute a multiplicity of projections for urban terrain in Buenos Aires.

Lefebvre asserts that conceived space takes its cue from specific ideologies. As outlined above, there are three strong, and strongly distinct, logics operating in the Plan. In the case of Puerto Madero, it is possible to see how each of them generates a different kind of new conceived space in the same territory. Each one projects a separate *landscape* which must then coincide with the others in one place. Before demonstrating exactly how this occurs, it is important to underline that *landscape*, as Sharon Zukin (1991) has theorized it, is not simply the topography around us. For example, two landscapes are not mutually exclusive as two topographies such as desert and jungle would be. Rather, landscapes are the material-symbolic configurations that result from particular visions of space (Zukin, 1991: 16), or conceived new spaces. Thus landscapes that may be utterly incompatible from a logical or functional perspective can – and often do – nonetheless cohabit single plots of material space.

What, then, are the landscapes of the Plan? In Puerto Madero (for area map, see Figure 4), we can return to the discussion with Sebastián and Soledad, two planners on the CoPUA’s Technical Team, for some answers. They describe very separate lines of action. First, they see Puerto Madero as an ecological triumph. Salvaged from generations of shipping refuse, the recycled waterfront has become a gem of *porteño* planning achievement. However, the conversion of the port itself had begun before the formation of PUA and was, in fact, out of their jurisdictional bounds because its development was the mission of a privatized state authority, the CAPM. However, the other environmental marvel for Sebastián and Soledad, which makes up more than half of the space now officially defined as the Puerto Madero neighborhood, is the Ecological Reserve (*Reserva Ecológica*), which represents the *landscape of sustainability* generated by the Plan. This large wetland and park area juts into the heavily silt-laden Río de la Plata, situated in front of what had been the public bathing areas of the Southern Coastline (*Costanera Sur*) at Puerto Madero until the 1940s. The Reserve formed by accident after the military government dumped large amounts of rubble from urban demolition and freeway construction into the abandoned riverfront in the 1970s, leaving sufficient mounds of concrete and asphalt waste to gather thick sediment and waterborne seeds that, by the 1980s, spurred a spontaneous island with indigenous grasses and growing populations of marsh animals. Currently the use of the Reserve enjoys protection as a national park, open to the public during daylight hours and with access limited to three pathways among the tall hedges and along some stretches of the waterline.

Picture 1: The Ecological Reserve viewed from the Southern Coastline



Source: Photograph by author

Sebastián calls the Reserve “the lung of the city” for the oxygen it provides Buenos Aires, and Soledad remarks on the natural beauty of the Reserve as a public environmental resource. Along the green paths of the Reserve, a view of the towering central Buenos Aires skyline to one side and the boundless expanse of the Plata’s characteristically brown waters on the other provides a sharp contrast, but it also serves as a reminder of the very real potential threats to the Reserve in its current status. There is clear pressure to expand the *porteño* central business district toward the river, and private development firms have purchased land that verges on the Reserve, expressing their intentions to erect gated communities and shopping malls (CAPM, personal communication, 2004; IRSA, personal communication, 2005). More clandestinely, anti-Reserve sentiment is also obvious in the hundreds of cases of arson occurring inside its bounds annually, some with devastating results. The Plan acknowledges this menacing context (Kullock and Vicente, 2001: 60), but generates a lucid conception of its sustainable landscape for the Reserve – a strictly protected marshland environment with somewhat restricted, largely educational use of its territory and the stewardship of its emergent habitats for plant and animal wildlife. In addition to the Ecological Reserve, other projected landscapes rooted in ideas of sustainability are shown in Figure 4 as dotted circles; these represent much smaller brownfield sites where cleanup of industrial contamination or “car cemeteries,” followed by conversion to green space, has been a priority of the Plan.

A second projection that Soledad and Sebastián describe is the set of integrative space for greater public use in Puerto Madero. The *landscape of participation* includes both the enhancement of “transversal connections” linking the neighborhood to the city as well as the enlargement and refurbishment of older public gathering spaces along the Southern Coastline, or the border with the Ecological Reserve. Although the entrances to Puerto Madero are only one block away from the presidential palace (*Casa Rosada*) and the Central Business District (CBD), including the Buenos Aires stock exchange (*Merval*), pedestrians must traverse 27 lanes of traffic – that is, more than two dozen confrontations, on foot, with oncoming *porteño* drivers, which is no minor adventure. Only one of the hundreds of bus lines serving Buenos Aires extends into Puerto Madero

and all subway lines stop short of that mass of traffic lanes. There is a commuter train that serves the edge of Puerto Madero, but it only connects to the nearby Retiro train station, terminus for the many lines servicing the wealthier northern suburbs. Despite these obstacles to access, Soledad describes the initiatives to foster greater public use of the Southern Coastline as a festival space and open market for self-employed vendors.

Picture 2: The bustling Southern Coastline during a typical weekend day



Source: Photograph by author

Any visit to the area on the weekend, year-round, shows the successfulness of the Plan and other GCBA efforts in this regard, as every patch of sidewalk is covered by stalls with all manner of small-scale merchandise, families and young lovers strolling between street performers along the waterside, and various organized activities from folkdance to pickup volleyball games fill the wider spaces of parking lots, lawns, and walkways that were, until recently, far off the map of *porteño* public space after an initial period, nearly a century prior as hub of summertime revelry (this area is indicated in Figure 4 by solid-line circles). The celebratory atmosphere has its downside, however, in the standstill motor traffic winding through the few streets of Puerto Madero trying to reach the Southern Coastline and the enormous piles of garbage that gather by each Saturday and Sunday evening. Furthermore, although this activity is controversial with residents of the new, highly expensive apartments in Puerto Madero, and the CoPUA has expressed security concerns due to the presence of an also new and growing shantytown along the edge of the Reserve, opening onto the street where these weekend festivals occur, Sebastián describes this as only the inception of augmented public usage of Puerto Madero, with a series of connective pedestrian esplanades planned between major points of public interest – such as parks and museums – across those 27 lanes of traffic and the port neighborhood (these and other axes of “transversal connection” are indicated in Figure 4 by small double-arrow lines).

The last element that Sebastián and Soledad describe is what they consider the most important objective for Puerto Madero, its highest priority. In a part of the world prone to financial instability, the *landscape of competitiveness* is a projection to make Buenos Aires more attractive to global investment, to make economic activity more profitable within its territory, and in Puerto Madero it is a multilane elevated freeway running above that snarl of traffic adjacent to the port and forming the last link for the Panamerican

Highway in Argentina. As an old project, unrealized for reasons of both cost and controversy over the last half-century, the Riverbank Highway (*Autopista Ribereña*) is the hallmark of the sustainable development agenda in Puerto Madero. Along with it, there is an expected expansion of high-end office space, luxury residences, and international tourist development all occurring within Puerto Madero, to some extent through negotiation with CAPM, despite that resembling relations “almost like between two different countries” according to Sebastián. Competitiveness, however, makes the hurdles worthwhile.

Picture 3: The elevated Riverbank Highway to extend alongside Puerto Madero



Source: Photograph by author

Despite a lull in commercial and residential construction within Puerto Madero following the Argentine economic and political crisis of late 2001, growth has rebounded with new expansion in vacant lots and denser filling of parcels already in use (poles of growth are indicated in Figure 4 by solid-lined squares). With the addition of the Riverbank Highway (indicated in Figure 4 by a thick, double-headed long line), the concerns for competitiveness in the development of Puerto Madero come together in a seamlessly pro-investment landscape.

Picture 4: New construction in Puerto Madero along the Southern Coastline



Source: Photograph by author

The material-symbolic manifestation of *sustainability* is thus a vaunted Ecological Reserve with sensitive and protected marshlands. *Participation* takes shape as the intensification of the usage of public space verging on that guarded territory, and the increase of foot and transit traffic between that area and the central business district of Buenos Aires. *Competitiveness*, finally, manifests as one of the largest overhead freeways in the country.

These multiple projected landscapes of the PUA, when placed altogether in Puerto Madero (see Figure 4), do not coalesce as what most people, of any viewpoint, would call sustainable development. Rather, they are the crushing landscapes of an “actually existing neoliberalism,” the multiple “new spaces” of disparate but equally neoliberal logics that conflict with each other in discourse but outright thwart each other in their physical manifestations in urban terrain. There is no doubt that they can coexist, in the sense of merely existing at the same time and place, but they crush the spirit of each other’s intentions, with only competitiveness coming out on top. That economic ends would dominate in a neoliberal project is, of course, little surprise. After all, neoliberalism as a political rationality prizes economic achievement above all else, and expects other goods to flow from the optimization of the economy – it assumes, like regulation theory, that different neoliberal logics will cooperate, not conflict with or crush each other. Only by understanding that neither the neoliberal vision of sustainable development nor its projections of new spaces according is uniform or cohesive can we grasp how conflicted sustainability and crushing landscapes occur within a state-led effort to create just sustainability in a city like Buenos Aires.

Conclusion: The quagmire of neoliberal logics against themselves

The multiple landscapes projected by the Plan in Puerto Madero represent three conflicting neoliberal logics that all claim to further sustainable development – even just sustainability – but, together, they crush it. The result is a quagmire of neoliberal logics tangled and quarreling, which creates an environment quite unlike what the local state originally aimed to foster through its visionary Plan. In this context, if the situation in Buenos Aires can be considered analogous in any way to similar political-economic conditions in the large cities across the neoliberal South, then it might make sense that scholars such as Evans (2002a) and Warner and Negrete (2005) avoid conceptualizing urban just sustainabilities as potentially state-led phenomena. But their frameworks are concerned with attempts, not only outcomes. They must, therefore, consider what entities are most likely to push for just sustainability with the greatest amount of resources and legitimacy, and that is the neoliberal state. The reliance of urban regime and growth machine frameworks on multiparty synergies and crosscutting capacities, while useful aims in practice, cannot capture this sort of state-led action, thereby cutting the analysis far too short.

Although it has become commonplace to argue that states in the South are doing less in neoliberal times than they once did (Babb 2005), if we look deeper to analyze what the neoliberal state is still – or newly – doing, we find much productive activity, guided by certain keywords that encompass larger logics of action. In the specific, important ambit of sustainable development, there are three different logics at work within the *porteño* neoliberal state. Brenner and Theodore (2002) do anticipate this state productivity with their theory of a creative neoliberal moment and the genesis of “new space” by neoliberal

interests, but they do not consider the possibility that neoliberalism is an incoherent force on the ground, that it institutes new political fields where different visions jockey to instill their own logics. Because they miss this conflictedness within neoliberalism, they thus cannot foresee something like the project of multiple new spaces that lead to crushing landscapes in this case.

These findings can seem merely depressing and demobilizing, of little use in suggesting practical action, as quagmires seldom expedite such things. But in reflecting on the utility of this case for the case itself, for the quest for just sustainability elsewhere, and our theories of sustainable development and city-building in a neoliberal era, it is helpful to keep in mind that even among the destructiveness shown here, there is also promise and opportunity. In an important recent article, Ananya Roy (2006) points out that times and places of destruction – and she refers to cases far worse than Buenos Aires – hold the simultaneous possibility for “creation, beauty, and renewal.” Hers is not a simple optimism but a critical acknowledgement of difficult conditions, hegemonic players, and the thorny positioning of both practitioners and theorists implicated in larger projects that can effect great devastation. In order to critique but also improve an artifice such as the Plan, we must have theories such as the extension of the regulation perspective outlined here, which recognize unlikely actors propelling change, such as the neoliberal state, and the multiple logics that both drive it and manifest in its projections. Rather than theorize how to circumvent the neoliberal state in efforts toward just sustainability, or assume that the state must take a subordinate role in its truly successful realization, it is crucial that we comprehend, empirically, the limits of the neoliberal state’s efforts due to conflicting logics. If we grapple with what exactly the different neoliberal logics within the state take as their priorities, what they seek to instill in the projects as common sense, then we have a critical opportunity. From that position, we can begin to implement mechanisms of translation, coordination, and mediation among these different logics in order to influence what they manifest, together, in practice in the city.

However, we must accept that this is not a matter of straightforward arbitration. We cannot fall prey to the neoliberal fantasy, or the theoretical fallacy in the critical approaches outlined here, that all efforts to create neoliberal change are created equal. Although it is arguable that all three neoliberal logics of sustainable development crush each other in the case of Puerto Madero, no one could reject the fact that, in the end, it is the landscape of competitiveness – as a massive elevated freeway – that comes out quite literally on top. As a result, it is imperative that in both theory and practice we understand the deep bias of neoliberalism, in its numerous formulations, toward economic interests even in the most progressive of discourses, as Roger Keil and Gene Desfor (2001) underline in other situations of ostensibly environmentalist urban intervention. Only then can we work toward analysis and praxis that intervene effectively in the power relations of large projects, such as the Plan, that have the unfortunate potential to make sustainable development into a conflicted, crushing endeavor. Bourdieu (2000: Chapter 5) suggests that it is the struggle against symbolic violences that seek to make their visions into unquestioned truths – such as the effort to make the Riverbank Highway in Buenos Aires not only stand in for the keyword of competitiveness, but represent the broader *doxa* of just sustainability – where we can locate out critical practice. There, it is incumbent upon

us to enact impertinent but invaluable counterefforts that question these powerful assertions and articulate alternative conceptualizations for the sake of our cities.

Figure 4: Puerto Madero and adjacent Central Business District, with different landscapes projected by the PUA



Source: Drawings by author, superimposed on satellite image from <http://earth.google.com>

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Acronyms

CAPM.....	Old Puerto Madero Corporation (<i>Corporación Antiguo Puerto Madero</i> ; a development firm operating in the research neighborhood)
CoPUA.....	Council of the Urban Environmental Plan (<i>Consejo del Plan Urbano Ambiental</i>)
FADU-UBA.....	Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urban Planning – University of Buenos Aires (<i>Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo – Universidad de Buenos Aires</i> ; the oldest and most influential architectural research and degree-granting program in Argentina)
GCBA.....	Government of the City of Buenos Aires (<i>Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires</i> ; the post-autonomy urban government)
IRSA.....	<i>Inversiones y Representaciones, S.A.</i> ; a development firm operating in the research neighborhood
PUA.....	Urban Environmental Plan (<i>Plan Urbano Ambiental</i> ; also referred to as “the Plan”)
SCA.....	Central Society of Architects (<i>Sociedad Central de Arquitectos</i> ; primary professional association for architects and urban planners in Argentina)

¹ In local Spanish usage, the word for something or someone of the City of Buenos Aires is “*porteño*,” as both an adjective and noun (not to be confused with “*bonaerense*,” pertaining to the Province of the same name). This referred originally to the port around which the Argentine capital first formed its identity as an important urban center. As there is no sensible English translation of this word (e.g., “Buenosairean”), I maintain the Spanish denomination and preserve its uncapitalized spelling from that language.

² For these reference texts, I have used their online versions, accessible at <http://www.oed.com> and <http://www.rae.es>.

³ This enormous discrepancy is not the result of explosive growth in Puerto Madero over the last five years. Rather, it can be attributed in large part to the measurement methods of the CAPM and the 2001 Census, which have over- and undercounted population, respectively. The CAPM (personal communication, 2004) adds four residents to its official population roster for every residential unit sold, regardless of how many people live in the purchased unit, and whether or not it is a full-time or even part-time residence. On the other hand, the 2001 Census is famously marred by undercounting in wealthier areas of Buenos Aires because it was conducted on a summertime Sunday, a time when many higher-paid *porteños* are vacationing on the Atlantic coast, or spending the weekend at second homes in the interior, or just passing the afternoon at popular *clubes atléticos* or *quintas* in the greater metropolitan area.

⁴ Ramón Gutiérrez (2002) provides a concise summary of the contested efforts to remake Buenos Aires in a Parisian guise one century ago, while Juan Molina y Vedia (1999) gives an exhaustive review of the numerous plans prepared and sometimes implemented since that era.

⁵ Agenda 21 is the common name for the statement on sustainable development produced from the 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (see UNCED, 1993), which has been followed by a series of efforts to customize its implementation on smaller scales, called Local Agenda 21.

⁶ The Riachuelo is the small river which forms the southern border of the Capital along the edge of the Province of Buenos Aires.

⁷ This is especially true if we consider Evans’s recent work on local states as having some connection to his earlier work with Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (1983) on “bringing the [national] state back in.”

⁸ Authors criticizing regime theory generally have noted that its portrayal of capitalist pressures on local government suggest rather more malleability or inertness than actually exists (Lauria, 1997). Others observe that nearly any sort of force in politics could be construed as an ostensible regime, regardless of its dynamics or effects (Dowding 2001; Mossberger and Stoker 2001).

⁹ The literature includes examples of the growth machine concept adapted appropriately and then used successfully in sites as diverse as Italy (Vicari and Molotch, 1990), Israel (Kirby and Abu-Rass, 1999), China (Zhang and Fang, 2004), Hungary (Kulcsar and Domokos, 2005), and Chile (Warner and Negrete, 2005).

¹⁰ The application of these theories to Buenos Aires – and Latin America more generally – is very rare. In the Argentine capital, only Beatriz Cuenya (2003) has attempted to deploy these theories, but without consideration for questions of sustainable development.

¹¹ In academic circles, Diana Mitlin (1992) differentiated the ideal-typic notion of sustainability from sustainable development some time ago.

¹² The translation of Lefebvre's concepts are *representations of space*, *spaces of representation*, and *spatial practices*, which never fail to confuse anyone, at least partly because they offer little explanatory value as titles on their own, but also because they connect poorly to the definitions that Lefebvre actually provides for them.