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**Towards Participatory Planning in the IMPLAN Ahome, Mexico:
Practices and Discourses of Participation.**

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Abstract

Towards Participatory Planning in the IMPLAN Ahome, Mexico: Practices and Discourses of Participation.

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Local public planning in Mexico, mainly represented by the Municipal Planning Institutes (IMPLANs in the Spanish acronym) has been unable to confront all the challenges of the cities in the new millennium. These institutes adopted a predominantly strategic planning model heavily influenced by the traditional rational planning, highly focusing on technicalities and physical interventions. IMPLANs now struggle to adopt new progressive tendencies in planning that highlight the social, political, and ethical aspects of the profession. Deep citizen participation is a key element in achieving a more democratic, just, and inclusive planning. In this thesis I draw on the *Instituto Municipal de Planeación de Ahome* (IMPLAN Ahome) as my case study, to understand the characteristics of the strategic planning model applied to the Ahome context, explain how participation is being integrated in their practices and their discourses, and uncover the predominant ideas driving these practices, all with the intention to answer if it is possible to achieve truly meaningful and inclusive participatory planning through the IMPLAN Ahome. I analyze the citizen participation approach of this institute in a holistic way,

looking at six categories: the institution's general view about participation; the methods used; the outreach and communication strategies; the intended and usual subjects; the approach to conflict; and the values surrounding participation. In addition, I address the perception of IMPLAN planners about their role in participatory planning and examine the main barriers and limitations to more meaningful participatory processes. For this, I apply a discourse analysis to three official planning documents elaborated by IMPLAN Ahome and to semi structured interviews with its planning personnel. IMPLAN's Ahome approximation to participation is closer to consensus planning, however, I identify a regression since now citizen participation has been mostly reduced to soliciting feedback. Nevertheless, there is a latent possibility for change through the deep reflection of the planners about their role.

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Introduction

Rapid urban growth and sprawl, segregation and poverty, housing crisis, privatization of public spaces, long daily travel times, and degradation of the natural environment are only some of the current problems facing Mexican and Latin American cities. Neoliberal privatization and decentralization have pushed responsibility for urban planning and management onto local governments, which are now left to deal with the challenges facing their cities. While Latin American countries have been struggling to achieve the modernity of the first world, the traditional rational planning models have favored the elite and contributed to the exacerbation of our urban problems. The historical problems facing the region derive from ideologies and practices of accumulation and dispossession that favor for the hegemonic elites. In addition, the state apparatus has played a key role in maintaining elites in power by keeping political structures and institutions intact without deep change, including of course, the structures of urban planning.

The search is now on for planning models to confront the challenges facing cities today. Following the tradition of importing models from other countries, some municipalities in Mexico have adopted *Institutos de Planeación Municipales* (Municipal Planning Institutes; IMPLANs in the Spanish acronym) as a new approach to face the urban crisis. Planning Institutes began to emerge at the end of the 20th century but became more prevalent at the beginning of the new century (Gómez, 2015). These institutes were tasked with creating order from the “chaos” of cities while leading them towards modernization and development. Due to high levels of autonomy afforded municipalities in Mexico, local governments have the authority to create planning institutes according to their specific needs. Even though IMPLANs are similar in their

structures, they differ from one another depending on the main problems they focus on, the ways in which they are organized, their levels of impact, and even in the ways they conceive of planning practice.

Today, according to the *Asociación Mexicana de Institutos de Planeación* (Mexican Association of Municipal Planning Institutes; AMIMP in the Spanish acronym), there are 71 planning institutes in Mexico. Most of the IMPLANs are separate from the municipal governments, allowing them to manage their own resources and make their own decisions. This structure is intended to provide continuity to planning projects since local governments change every three years. In practice, institutional autonomy is not always possible due to political pressure from the central government and other powerful groups.

The original urban management model adopted by the IMPLANs was strongly influenced by the rational planning approach promoted by Brunner and Le Corbusier in the 1930s (Almandoz, 2014, Staines-Díaz, 2020). This was the traditionally accepted form of planning that many of the professionals at the time had been taught, especially through their education in foreign countries. When the rational planning paradigm began to wane because of the urban crisis it produced, some planners emphasized the need to shift planning towards a communicative or collaborative model. However, the strong influence of neoliberalism in Mexico prevented this from happening. Instead, a compromise between the rational and communicative planning trends emerged in the form of strategic planning. This hybrid model was adopted by the planning institutes and now constitutes the current planning paradigm in Mexico. This model tries to improve efficiency and competitiveness while combining technical elements with market-based economic policies, but at the same time, holds up participation as a pillar to ensure the legitimacy of local governments and further representative democracy.

Participation is embedded in the legal, organizational, and institutional frameworks of the planning institutes and framed as a means to create consensus between different stakeholders to guide action (González, 2001). To achieve such consensus in planning processes, planning institutes rely on citizen-led councils that are intended to promote permanent dialogue and foster agreement between the government, citizens, and the private sector. However, solely relying on this mechanism limits participation by preventing real representation and inclusion of the citizen sector. Ziccardi (2004) argues that despite the intent to foster civil society representation via the planning institutes, there is a tendency to favor the economic and professional sectors, leaving historically marginalized groups out of the decision-making process.

In this thesis I examine the emergence of the planning institute model in Mexico, focusing on the institutes' approach to citizen participation in planning by drawing on the case of the *Instituto Municipal de Planeación de Ahome* (IMPLAN Ahome) as my case study. In my analysis, I seek to situate the practices of the IMPLAN Ahome within the broader planning context of Mexico while focusing on planning action on the local level. The IMPLAN Ahome is located in the municipality of Ahome in the State of Sinaloa in northwestern Mexico. The main city in Ahome is Los Mochis, but there are also other important urban settlements including Topolobampo, Ahome, and Higuera de Zaragoza. In other words, the IMPLAN Ahome must attend to the planning needs of several cities, making it an interesting case study. Established in 2008, the IMPLAN Ahome is one of the oldest institutes in the north of the country (AMIMP, 2016), making it a consolidated entity that has produced a great number of plans and programs.

Despite the new strategic planning trends in Mexico, making the change from top-down to a more bottom-up model has proven difficult. Much of the debate surrounding the IMPLANs centers on how to achieve this bottom-up planning without affecting the

efficiency of the institutions. While there are structural and pressing problems to tackle, I think we must aim to make positive changes given the resources and opportunities, however limited, that are available to us. If we pay attention to the possibility of a shift in the perspectives and attitudes of the planning practitioners working at IMPLANs, we may see opportunities for greater moral and professional commitment to deep participation in planning. Campbell (2012) argues that “planning is about intervening and taking action in the hope of realizing better place-based outcomes than would be achieved otherwise” (p. 135). In short, while the goal of planning is to make things “better,” in the case of Mexico, the attempts to include citizen participation via planning institutes have failed to make things better for everyone. Although Mexican planners have paid attention to environmental issues, transportation, or even public spaces, not much progress has been made in terms of social justice, inequality, or segregation.

Therefore, my research objectives are to describe the characteristics of the strategic planning model applied to the Ahome context, explain how participation is being integrated in their practices and their discourses, and uncover the predominant ideas driving these practices. I do not seek to make a critique of the IMPLAN’s planning practices or ideas; instead, my overarching goal is to find within them the potentials for change towards a more inclusive and meaningful planning model. Based on its practices and discourse, is it possible to achieve truly meaningful and inclusive participatory planning through the IMPLAN Ahome? To answer that question, I first ask: What are the participatory/engagement practices in the IMPLAN Ahome? What is the discourse about citizen participation/engagement in the IMPLAN Ahome? And what are the barriers or limits to achieve a more meaningful citizen participation in the IMPLAN Ahome?

To support my argument and research questions, I draw on different but interconnected bodies of literature within what Watson (2003) describes as “normative

theories” in planning, including communicative planning and progressive planning. These theories critique the traditional planning paradigms and instead promote a more social and humanistic approach to planning. Communicative planning highlights the importance of social context, recognizing heterogeneity and validating other forms of knowledge aside from the scientific and technical ones. Progressive planning focuses on concerns traditionally associated with anthropology and sociology, including culture, identity, or power differentials, in order to imagine planning processes that foreground social values like justice, equality, dignity, or inclusion. I argue that only by using these normative theories can we foster deep and meaningful participation in planning.

In addition, I draw on literature that connects politics with planning. Graham and Healey (1999, p. 625) suggest that “Planning must explicitly recognize the normative, innovative, political, transactive and social learning foundations of planning.” My interest in public planning agencies required me to conduct research about public administration and the government’s and the state’s role in planning. Eraydin and Frey’s book (2018) allowed me to connect the political aspect of participation with planning practice and highlight the transformative potential of meaningful participation through changing institutional structures and cultures.

Ethics in planning is the last main body of literature that I use for this thesis. While ethics is a subjective topic because it deals with morality and values, the planning profession should abide by ethical rules to frame planning practice and define the goals of the discipline. By drawing on this literature, my intention is to retrieve the sometimes-forgotten notion of our professional responsibility as planners. However, I also aim to redefine the planning practitioner’s role within professional practice. In this regard, I draw on Wilson’s (2019: 2) idea of inner practice, referring to the ways in which planners “manage the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that shape their presence”, transforming the

planning practitioner into a change agent by developing this awareness of our presence and role in the social field.

In order to understand if it is possible to change the planning institute model as exemplified by the IMPLAN Ahome to one that is more inclusive and participatory, I apply a discourse analysis to official planning documents produced by IMPLAN Ahome and semi structured interviews with IMPLAN Ahome planning personnel. My analysis of planning documents required me to review the extensive planning products the institute has published online. Since the institute began operating in 2009, IMPLAN Ahome planners have created 13 documents. In my analysis, I focus on three of these documents to assess if the institute's discourse changes depending on planning area and type of document. In addition, I wanted to compare documents over time to uncover whether the institute's discourse has changed from its start in 2009 via the midpoint in 2015 to the most recent document in 2023.

For the interviews, I contacted planners with IMPLAN Ahome through email and set suitable dates to conduct them online in accordance with the planners' schedules. I interviewed all the five planners who comprised the planning team of the institute at the time. The interviews focused on the planning practitioners' view of participation developed through their experiences in public planning, how they have approached participation in their work with the IMPLAN Ahome, the limitations and challenges they have encountered, and their view on the role and responsibility of public planners to foster citizen participation.

Discourse analysis is a research approach that pays attention to language, in my case written and spoken, to reveal underlying meanings and rationales that inform practices. However, in order to identify those meanings, the analysis needs to be appropriate for the given social and institutional contexts. Throughout this document, I

delve into key aspects of these contexts, including the legal framework that determines the structure of the institute. It is my intention to analyze the citizen participation approach of the IMPLAN Ahome in a holistic way. I therefore focus on six aspects of participation that serve to shed light on their overall approach: the institution's general view about participation; participatory methods that have been used; the relevance of communication and communicative strategies used; the intended and usual subjects for participatory processes; conceptualization of conflict in participatory activities; and the values surrounding the participation approach. In addition, I address the perception of IMPLAN planners of their role in participatory planning and examine the main barriers and limitations to more meaningful participatory processes.

My research interest derives from my professional background and personal experiences, touching on all the major areas of my academic life, including sociology, public management, and planning. Although centered on planning, my thesis therefore has a multidisciplinary outlook. I conceive planning as a field constituted by both technical and social dimensions where functional or efficient outcomes should be secondary to the social goals of wellbeing and prosperity with justice, dignity and care. Considering social life and interactions, including the values and meanings behind them, is a must when planning a city. At the same time, I believe in the positive role of the state in regulating social life in order to reduce inequalities. Public planning is, in my eyes, essential to achieving those means.

My professional experiences in the IMPLAN Torreón got me interested in pursuing a master's degree in community and regional planning and defined my research since the beginning. I have experienced first-hand how it is to work for a public agency, the amount of responsibility and work confronting planning institutes, and the challenges and limitations to fostering real and meaningful citizen participation. In my work at the

IMPLAN Torreón, I oversaw the “socialization” and integration of citizen perspectives into planning documents. While dealing with all the institutional and professional constraints facing planners at the institute, I noted how change can be fostered from within through the daily practice of the planners, who are often receptive to new trends of inclusive democratic participatory planning. To some extent, this thesis emerges from a personal desire to decipher the role of the planners and the planning institutes in my country, and of finding the seed of change from within them.

I was born and raised in Lerdo, Durango, a small city in northern Mexico known for its close-knit community and strong social relationships. I come from a middle-class family where all immediate members hold professional degrees, and my education was rooted in the social sciences, activism, and leftist ideology. I was the first in my family to study abroad thanks to the support of a FONCA-CONACYT scholarship from the Mexican government. I was able to conduct my research with ease because of the academic prestige that the University of Texas holds worldwide, including in Mexico. Presenting myself as part of this university played a key role in gaining access to the IMPLAN Ahome and its personnel.

Establishing contact with the IMPLAN Ahome was also facilitated because of my connections with the IMPLAN Torreón, since I received the personal email of its director from one of my former colleagues. Public officials in Mexico are typically slow to respond to emails from outsiders because of their heavy workload, but the director of the IMPLAN Ahome and all the personnel demonstrated their utmost willingness to collaborate with me. As I previously mentioned, I conducted all my research remotely. While this was more convenient for me considering my schedule and resources, the fact that I have never visited Ahome or Los Mochis presents a limitation to my research. Visiting in person might have provided additional insights to deepen my analysis. Also,

since all the documents reviewed and the interviews were originally in Spanish, translating some technical terms or interpreting the meanings of interview transcripts proved to be a challenge.

I have structured this document in four main sections. The first corresponds with the contextual framework of my research, describing the Latin American and Mexican urban context, the link between governance/politics and planning in the region, and the history of planning practice in our countries, including the general history of planning institutes in Mexico. In the second section, I present my theoretical framework and the methodology I used. I begin by reviewing theoretical conceptualizations of participation in planning before examining how planning serves to maintain hegemonic structures under the structures of neoliberal governance. I then discuss emerging ideas about fostering participation via government agencies before concluding with a discussion of the normative and ethical aspects of planning and participation. At the end of that chapter, I include an explanation of the methodology I used for my analysis.

For my third chapter, I delve into the local planning context of Ahome, providing a brief description of the municipality, sharing its urban history including the development of Los Mochis (the primary city), and describing the municipal planning process and the emergence of the IMPLAN structure. Finally, I discuss how the IMPLAN urban management model is based on precepts of strategic planning.

The fourth section presents the results of my research and my analysis, showing how ideological rationales and pragmatic reasons have increasingly led the IMPLAN Ahome to restrict the inclusion of the general public in planning processes. I also show how IMPLAN planners have adjusted their discourse about participation based on the institutional constraints they face in their everyday practice. Finally, after summarizing the principal findings, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of my findings for

public planning in Ahome and in Mexico more broadly, as well as the lessons for planning research about public participation in Mexico and Latin America.

Chapter 1. Contextual Framework

LATIN AMERICAN AND MEXICAN URBAN CONTEXT

The relevance of cities in the world is unquestionable, even more so in places like Latin America where the percentage of urbanization was almost at 80% by 2012 (ONU-Hábitat, 2012). However, the process these countries have followed has its own tones and shades. In contrast to other parts of the world like Europe or even the United States, where urbanization proceeded more slowly, in Latin America, urban formation was slow in the 19th century but sped up greatly during the 20th century. Currently, cities in the region continue growing, but the speed of growth has decreased. As it is well known by now, urban growth and sprawl often leads to environmental and social problems, ranging from severe environmental issues like pollution, species extinction, or depletion of natural resources, to problems like poverty, segregation, violence, or even wasted time due to long queues and traffic.

Latin America's tumultuous urbanization process over the past century contributed significantly to creating some of the most important problems in the region. However, each stage of development has come with its own characteristics. As such, in the next pages I will try to summarize the key points of our urban history and explain how they are influencing current planning practice.

Latin American countries have been tied together since long before the “discovering” of the “New World” by the European powers of the 15th century. However, this event undoubtedly shaped the region's growth and development for the hundreds of years to come and continues to do so today. The colonization of the Americas required the erasure of past local cultures through violence, either by deliberately destroying their symbols and infrastructure, building over them, or using/transforming them for

assimilation and ideologization. Through these methods and others, the Spanish urban model was established and became the foundation of our cities. The configuration of colonial cities had a differentiative component at their core, with a clear division between urban and rural, but more importantly, between people's hierarchies in the social system, by limiting access to the best/closest places for the Spanish and *Criollos* and leaving Indigenous people as well as other 'lower' social *castas* (like imported African slaves) outside of the urban space. It is not a stretch to say this exclusionary configuration is embedded into our conception of what a city is, and who it is for.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the new one, the country remained predominantly rural, but the urban model that started to emerge kept the European tradition as an inspiration. Almandoz (2014) characterizes this period as the Belle Époque and explains that "Following the positivistic trend [...] the new century's modernization mainly materialized in the embellishment of central areas, with magnificent edifices and parks, boulevards and promenades modelled according to the taste of 1900s elites" (p.55). While some people believe this embellishment and modernization was positive, it came at a great social cost, traduced in: marginalization, poverty, sprawl, and the reinforcement of the idea that the perfect city is clean, structured, and only for a select group of people.

After World War I, Almandoz (2014) notes what he refers to as an "Americanization" of our countries, commenting: "Latin America moved to follow the United States and not Europe as its guiding light" (p. 63), and "the United States had thus become the symbol of democracy, modernity, and good citizenship" (p.65), all this while "the Old World's prestige and seductive powers started to fade for positivistic intellectuals" (p.64). Starting here, then, the ideological conquest hand in hand with

constant political and economic interventions solidified Latin American countries' dependence on the United States.

Mexico's urbanization level started to grow after 1940, and in the following 20 years it became one of the most urbanized countries in the region (Unikel, 1978). This was very much related to the change in the economic model after the Great Depression (with the introduction of the welfare state), but also to the introduction of an intensive process of industrialization. In that regard, capitalist development in Latin America was different from those in European countries and the United States: while Mexico strived to keep up with the global economic tendencies of the time, there was a significant gap in our production model since the industrial revolution had only begun by the mid-20th century, decades and even centuries after some other countries. Industrialization led to a mass migration from the rural areas to the cities in search of job opportunities.

The mass migration during this time was also promoted by the policies of the welfare state, including more investment in the social sector, health services, education, communication, roads, electricity, water supply, drainage, and other infrastructure that attracted people to urban areas with the promise of better life conditions. Nonetheless, the economic growth and wellness that the industrialization was supposed to achieve did not become a reality, and instead, just contributed to the urban crisis. Portes and Roberts (2008) explain that one of the main reasons for this failure was that the pattern of industrialization implemented in Latin America relied on intensive capital use. Additionally, they argue that the multinational corporations imposed hegemony over the local market, thus affecting employment creation. As consequence, there were more people than jobs, which in turn led to a thriving informal sector. The land and housing market also skyrocketed, forcing economically disadvantaged people to live in undesirable places and create their own developments on the outskirts of the city. At the

same time, the elites started abandoning the urban centers to get away from the problems in the city. Still, despite all these issues and the presence of social movements that fought for labor rights or housing rights, Portes and Roberts (2008) stress that the cities were in the main orderly and that violence and organized crime were primarily limited to the *barrios*.

By the 1980s, the economic crisis and outside pressure forced Latin America countries to apply the neoliberal model and accept the conditions of international agencies like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. This new model had “transcendental effects over the society, political system, and class structure of the region” (Portes and Roberts, 2008: 14, citing Robinson, 1996; Sunkel, 2005; Portes and Hoffman, 2003), affecting the whole character of urban life. Some of the key programmatic elements applied to Latin America included the reduction of state participation in the economy, one-sided openness of commercial borders, extensive privatization of public goods and services, as well as tightening of social/public budgets and programs for social aid (p. 17).

Latin American governments were sold on the idea that these policies, which clearly favored the private sector and elites, would be positive for the country because the economy would grow and wealth would trickle down from the top to the bottom, favoring everyone in the end. However, in reality, only the rich became richer, and the social divide grew wider. Despite all the economic indicators and statistics trying to demonstrate growth in Mexico, the reality showed that this growth was an illusion since poverty in the urban area grew from 28% in 1980, to 52.9% in 1995 (Portes and Roberts, 2008, p. 37). Even when poverty stayed static (for example in Chile), the inequality grew as never before (p. 38) while unemployment in the formal sector reduced, leading to an increase in urban crime and insecurity. Portes and Roberts (2008) say that although it is

difficult to prove that neoliberalism directly caused an increase in violence, since neoliberal development tends to neglect the needs of vulnerable people, it is predictable that some marginalized groups would look for solutions in crime.

As for cities during this tumultuous time, Latin American governments wanted to reduce the dominance of the central regions of the country to reduce regional inequalities. To do so, they created new zones oriented towards production that became secondary cities and started to attract migration. However, this also meant urban expansion and led to a need for more infrastructure and connectivity between cities. Eventually, some of these new urban areas started to clump together, forming megaregions or metropolitan regions that have great organizational, environmental, and social challenges, especially when considered from an urban planning perspective.

Today, it is not possible to talk about cities in isolation, because they are tied together through regional, national, and global productive processes as well as through cultural homogenization (for example through products consumed, goals, tastes, and even values). As I summarized in the previous pages, the development of Latin American countries has centered on the production of raw or semi-elaborated goods. Even in the period of intensive industrialization, Latin American countries became known for a cheap workforce and tax advantages, and thus primarily attracted assembly or components production (for example cars parts) companies. As a result of attracting these types of industries, which are not highly profitable, the wealth gap between Latin American countries and other countries remains.

The effects of globalization on society and cities in Latin America have been studied extensively, but many of the most renowned scholars who describe the current state of our region, including Manuel Castells or Jordi Borja, are from Spain. This has to do with the fact that most of the urbanist or planners in Mexico studied abroad, regularly

choosing Spain. Castells suggests that coming of the “information society” led to an increase in inequalities within cities. In addition, Latin American cities have been forced to deal with traditions and local culture while trying to insert themselves in the global context (Segovia and Jordán, 2005).

To close this section, the most important problems in Latin American cities of our time fall in 3 overarching categories: 1) social and spatial segregation, 2) the environment and management of natural resources within modernity, and 3) cultural/ideological homogenization towards individualism and consumption. Social and spatial segregation is a recurring topic in different studies about cities, and it is broad enough to include many more issues, for example how segregation relates to increased vulnerability, crime, transportation issues, separation between communities, informality, and so on. The environment/natural resource management category has undoubtedly been one of the main areas of interest everywhere in the last few decades, but here in Latin America, aside from the discussions about how urbanization and human activities are affecting the environment, or how consumption patterns and economic activities are deploying natural resources, the central concern is the unequal control of those resources. Typically, these resources are controlled by a small group of people who, frequently, are located in developed countries outside of Latin America. And lastly, I highlight the cultural or ideological homogenization promoted through social and digital media. While traditions and local culture are being affected or erased, the importation of ideas from places with a completely different context places us at risk of continuing to blindly adopt ideas about urban development from elsewhere.

URBAN MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING IN LATIN AMERICA

Urban management in Mexico is seen as imperative for governments to face the challenges of the new millennium, especially the issue of development within the local realm (with all its historical problems) while being immersed in a globalized world. I understand local urban management as all the decisions taken within municipalities that, in a direct or indirect way, transform local spaces and impact the quality of life of residents (Orellana et al, 2012). One of the structural changes promoted by neoliberalism in Latin America was to deconcentrate and decentralize politics in order to make the federal and state governments less powerful. This shifted federal attention from the local/regional arena and placed urban management responsibility on municipalities. However, this shift proved to be problematic, as local governments did not have the means or resources to suddenly take care of all the issues in their territories.

Seen from the perspective of public management and politics in Mexico, urban management is divided into 4 paths (Lugo, 1998, cited in Gomez, 2015): urban planning, urban regulation, urban administration, and urban investment (infrastructure projects). Faced with limited capacity, and under the influence of the neoliberal goals towards competition and efficiency, local governments have been concentrating on the last 2 paths.

Balbo (2003) argues that in this system, large-scale interventions are considered the best strategy to promote urban development and gain competitive advantages. However, as this is expensive to do, the local urban management is forced to rely on the private sector. Hence, the tasks and services previously provided by the government progressively become subjugated to a privatization process, leading to partial or total appropriation of public spaces and resources by the private sector. Placing more power in private hands also means that the collective good is harder to achieve, since the private

sector will promote their own interests. In addition, as Staines-Díaz (2020) suggests, drawing on Bayat and Biekart (2009), the transferring of important public responsibilities to “non-state and private agents and corporations” may cause less accountability to the public.

These changes blur the original government’s function of being the guardian of the public good and transform it into a manager of public affairs. In the Latin American urban and political context, this shift has been advantageous for local governments because their scope got reduced to technical and administrative tasks, leaving aside complicated social aspects. At the same time, centering on material projects and enabling privatization opens the possibility for corruption. There have been countless cases of government officials selling contracts to people close to them or establishing their own family companies to become government providers.

The disastrous results in terms of justice, inclusion, or even the continuous sprawl due to this neoliberal paradigm has begun to force changes in the urban management model. As Eraydin and Tasan-Kok (2018) write, “Planning had become increasingly market and project-oriented, focusing especially on large-scale urban development and infrastructure projects (Allmendinger, 2011; Healey et al., 1997; Taşan-Kok and Baeten, 2011)” (p.24), but later, in the 90s, it became softer, and it was “...redefined as ‘roll-out neoliberalism’ (Peck, 2010), in which the state plays an active role in supporting market logic by putting policy objectives of economic growth and competitiveness at the center of spatial policies (Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 1997, 2007)” (p. 25).

The new ways to conceive the role of the state and the government can be encompassed in two, closely aligned concepts: The New Public Management (NPM) and a redefinition of Governance. The first emerged from public administration science as an attempt to create a modern practice inserted within the “logic of economics” while

retaining “core public values” (Kalimullah et al, 2012: 2). Under NPM, its proponents wanted to put forward “a different relationship between governments, the public service and the public” (p. 18), while calling for the transformation of government institutions into something closer to a private agency focused on customer satisfaction, accountability, and results. NPM thus merged corporatist elements with ideas about community and citizen empowerment, which leads to contradictions as articulated by Kalimullah et al (2012). According to them, the second principle of NPM says that “government ought to be “community-owned” and that the role of government is to empower citizens and communities to exercise self-governance”, but at the same time, NPM maintains “the notion that citizens are merely recipients of public services and do not have to be actively engaged in the process of deciding what those services would look like” (p.13).

Similarly, by redefining governance, the objective was to highlight how to achieve local development and growth and to redefine the role of the state institutions in this process. Following the already accepted NPM, it was seen as the government’s responsibility to bring together the stakeholders of each project and policy to collaboratively take decisions. However, in reality, this meant to coordinate decisions. In 2005 the OECD in their “Local Governance and the Drivers of Growth” publication, wrote that:

To escape from these crisis situations, networking through “weak ties” is essential (Granovetter, 2000). People who are linked by a specific category share common objectives and forge among themselves “strong ties”, such as through professional organisations or unions. When they engage in bilateral dealings clearly circumscribed by the market, they have a real chance of achieving their objectives. What is needed is a minimum of co-ordination, adaptable case by case, that allows people to advance their interests and to respect the objective bonds of solidarity that link them. (p. 44)

Ultimately, this attempt to consolidate the political and social aspects of planning through principles of NPM and new theories of governance has led to a return of “strategic spatial planning practices...aimed increasingly at positioning cities and city regions within a global market (Albrechts et al., 2003; Healey et al., 1997, in Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2018: 25)”. Strategic planning “became a joint platform upon which the aspirations of the market actors and state could come together” (Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2018: 25). The basis of this new strategic planning was to create consensus between different actors with different interests and make them co-responsible in order to guarantee the good design and execution of urban projects (González, 2001).

HISTORY OF PLANNING AND PREVALENT MODELS IN LATIN AMERICA

As this review of the history and context of cities in Latin America and Mexico has suggested, while urban planning is an intensely political practice, Latin American has been dominated by a technocratic planning process until recent times. Accordingly, León Staines writes in the first lines of his PhD dissertation, “Technocratic planning approaches have been the rule in Latin America through the course of the 20th century. This approach assumes that the only valid planning practice is that done by experts” (p.8). In the next pages I will give a brief history of planning in Latin America and Mexico, the different planning models available, and the more recent evolution of public planning in Mexico in the form of Municipal Planning Institutes (IMPLANs).

If planning as an established discipline in developed countries is fairly young (emerging at the beginning of the past century), it is even younger in Latin America. In fact, I would claim we are at least a couple of decades behind developed countries. However, this does not mean that some sort of planning did not exist before, even if only as efforts from governments to control their territorial space. Almandoz (2014: 80)

mentions that “Latin America’s planning administration did not take shape until the second half of the 1920s, when urban problems came to the fore in the emerging welfare states.”. Although at first planning was considered as part of urbanism, some countries started to create plans and planning agendas using theories and techniques imported from other countries in Europe and North America, following the same pattern as our urban development tradition.

Almandoz also mentions that many of the first planners, either local government officials, teachers, or local professionals, “were still sent to study or train in Europe or the United States [but] some had graduated from the architectural faculties recently founded in local universities that [...] had started to offer their first courses on urban planning and design” (2014: p.78). In fact, he says, after its revolution, Mexico was “early to mature in academic terms”, since the first course in planning was inaugurated in 1926, but we also were a pioneer country in terms of “development of a professional and legal groundwork”, because we also had the *Asociación Nacional para la Planificación de la República Mexicana* (National Association for the Planning of the Mexican Republic; ANPRM in the Spanish acronym) led by Carlos Contreras, and we celebrated the first national planning conference in 1930 (Almandoz, 2014: p. 78).

Although this sounds positive, it does not eliminate the external influence over national planning. Those courses, plans, and conferences were still led by foreign famous urbanists or planners like Karl Brunner, who wrote one of the most important manuals for planning in Latin America, and worked to make plans in Chile, Colombia, and Perú (Almandoz, 2014); or Le Corbusier, who also had a large influence in Latin America (Staines-Díaz, 2020). Both promoted “modern” planning, which ideas “were driven by the conception of the ‘planner as an applied scientist’” (p. 63). Based on this, Staines-Díaz proposes that this “heavy influence by foreign values” in planning was and

continues to be part of the expansion of the colonial project, and that by disseminating decontextualized ideas of modernity to “catch up with the North”, planners were actually a tool of colonialism, serving only the elites and contributing to social and spatial marginalization (Staines-Díaz, 2020, based on Roy, 2006, and Watson, 2009).

Rational planning can be considered as the classic approach to planning, as it has its origins in the industrialism and modernism of the past century and is premised on values of efficiency, science, and objectivity. In this model, the planner acts as an expert technician whose goal is to transform the physical space to solve urban problems. This model can be considered the most relevant in planning, not only because it was broadly applied world-wide but also because its dominance continues despite all the critiques it has received throughout the years by communicative planners, and more recently by radical and critical planners.

The communicative and/or collaborative planners pay attention to the social and political aspects of planning. They recognize that a city is integrated by people with multiple interests and backgrounds. Therefore, to achieve the public good, there is a need for consensus through open and undistorted dialog. I have yet to identify a purely communicative model applied in the public planning context in Mexico, but the strategic planning model can be considered an attempt to mix the rational model with a more communicative or collaborative approach.

Peña (2015) describes strategic planning as a paradigm compatible with the emergence of neoliberalism and explains that it intends to merge different elements of other planning paradigms in order to adapt them to specific contexts, like the Mexican one. It takes an administrative approach with the use of a SWOT analysis to identify paths for action, and it has the goal of increasing efficiency and competitiveness while considering the participation of the citizens in the planning process as something

fundamental. This is the model that most of the municipal planning institutes in Mexico follow today, which I will explain further in the next section.

Finally, there is one last planning model that is also present in the Latin American context, at least in the academy. Peña (2015) refers to it as the “radical” model, and it is based on critical theory and Marxist approaches to planning. Authors like Jordi Borja, Manuel Castells, David Harvey, or Saskia Sassen can be considered under this category. Although their areas of interest vary, all of them critique modernist and rational planning while pointing out the urban problems produced by these models under neoliberalism and globalization. The role of critical theory is to make visible the social problems that the dominant discourse and capitalist productive relations try to maintain hidden (Peña, 2015:56, citing Marcuse, 2009). In that regard, critical theory makes us aware of power differentials, segregation, privatization, poverty, and injustice, and incite us to discuss them. The planner here is not only conceptualized as an observer but as a social actor with moral and professional responsibility to act and promote change to existing power structures.

THE MUNICIPAL PLANNING INSTITUTES IN MEXICO

Planning institutes started to emerge in Mexico in 1994, with the first one in the city of León in the State of Guanajuato (Peña, 2012). The impetus for planning institutes can be traced to the period after the fiscal crisis of the 1980s following the impact of the neoliberal policies. While this is the socioeconomic context for the origins of the planning institutes, Peña (2012) explains that the political context was important too. He argues that by the end of the 20th Century, Mexico’s one-party government led by the PRI (Institutional Revolution Party), which had been established at the beginning of Mexican revolution and which still remained in power, had begun to be identified with

the urban crisis and the inefficient and corrupt governance. During the first years of neoliberalism, the PRI had implemented the most damaging programs, including the privatization of important national resources. Due to the discontent with the PRI, by the onset of the new millennium, the control of the presidency shifted to the conservative party PAN (National Action Party). With this change in the government, the decentralization process was consolidated, and municipalities gained more independence, leading them to pursue policies to make their cities more competitive by attracting local and foreign private investments. By this time, “The central focus of planning [was] no longer to develop a formal model of the physical and environmental image of the city, but rather to define the way in which the local authorities and civil society will participate in the generation of initiatives and the governance of their own space” (Peña, 2012:424).

At that point, municipalities saw the need to create agencies to deal with the new socioeconomic environment in the city, because even though they were given authority over local planning, there was a “lack of local planning expertise” (p. 425). By the time Peña wrote his article in 2012, he identified 32 municipal planning institutes across the country that belonged to the Mexican Association of Municipal Planning Institutes (AMIMP in Spanish), most of which were located in the country’s northern states. Through his analysis, Peña also found that:

The 32 municipalities that have adopted an imip [IMPLANs now] alternative represent a very important set of municipalities in the urban system of Mexico. I can say that they are a very important second tier in the urban hierarchy behind the main urban agglomerations such as Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey.” (Peña, 2012: 432)

As of the date of this thesis, there are 71 IMPLANs affiliated with the AMIMP. Some of them are new and others have a longer history, like the IMPLAN of Ahome which I will be discussing later. While each IMPLAN has different characteristics and

level of influence in their respective cities, one shared trait across all IMPLANs is that structurally they are a decentralized or independent local government agency. This means while they rely on public funds, the staff does not need to change every time there is an election, which helps with the continuity of projects and plans.

Peña (2012) did a remarkable job summarizing the characteristics or orientations of the “IMIPS” by doing a content analysis of their mission and vision, the areas of planning they emphasize, their services, and the products or outputs they are supposed to generate. He found 5 key elements in their missions and vision: 1) high value placed on technical knowledge; 2) half of them include the “strategic planning” concept; 3) they focus on continuity because most projects are middle term to long term; 4) they include the concept of sustainability; and 5) there is a “pledge by imips to incorporate public participation; words such as “inclusive”, “citizen participation” and “different actors” are present in their mission and vision too (Peña, 2012: 433). The author also finds the IMIPS share a focus on seven planning areas: 1) transportation and mobility; 2) urban design; 3) capital facilities planning; 4) geographic information systems; 5) infrastructure planning; 6) regional planning; and 7) urban planning. As for the services IMIPS intend to provide, they “are consistent with the idea of producing technical knowledge to drive the planning process. Cartographic and statistical information are the most important services offered or being marketed to the public” (p. 434). And finally, as for the outputs, IMIPS not only develop the plans that are required by the Constitution for every local government (for example/such as the Urban Development Plan, and the Comprehensive Land Use Plan), but they also produce smaller area and sector plans.

While IMPLANs were created to satisfy the local need for a planning agency that would ensure continuity, since their conception they were also a tool for technocratic and strategic planning. In 2015, Gómez produced a master thesis in which she corroborates

Peña's notion of every agency having different characteristics, but they also share a concern for competitiveness, efficiency, and linking together different sectors of society and economy. She also adds that they are focused on citizen participation but under a strategic model. They have a council where people representing private interests, NGOs, and other government departments have a meeting regularly to discuss the work of the institution. Additionally, during these meetings they look for a multidisciplinary approach, although in practice, most of the collaborators are architects, engineers, or architects who focus on urbanism. While this is not inherently bad, when teams have this lack of diversity, they tend to focus more on technical aspects and have a hard time establishing a connection with the population.

As I have mentioned before, this is the model that most of the IMPLANs have been following, but as each is independent, the way in which they apply the principle of citizen participation differs from one to another. In some, participation is restricted to a council of sectorial representatives, but in others, it includes surveys, workshops, and even constant dialogue with stakeholders. Still, most tend to fall under tokenism on Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation. Either way, Staines-Díaz (2020: 32, 33) alerts us about participation which only includes NGOs, because "NGOs do not represent communities," instead, they "play the role of contracted State agents" (citing Bayat & Biekart, 2009: 819), and he adds that "This argument aligns with Mirafteb's (2009) discussion of democratic discourse being used as a vehicle to legitimize neoliberal goals through a perception of inclusion, all in the pursuit of hegemonic power" (p. 33).

I share Arnstein's ladder of participation for visual purposes.

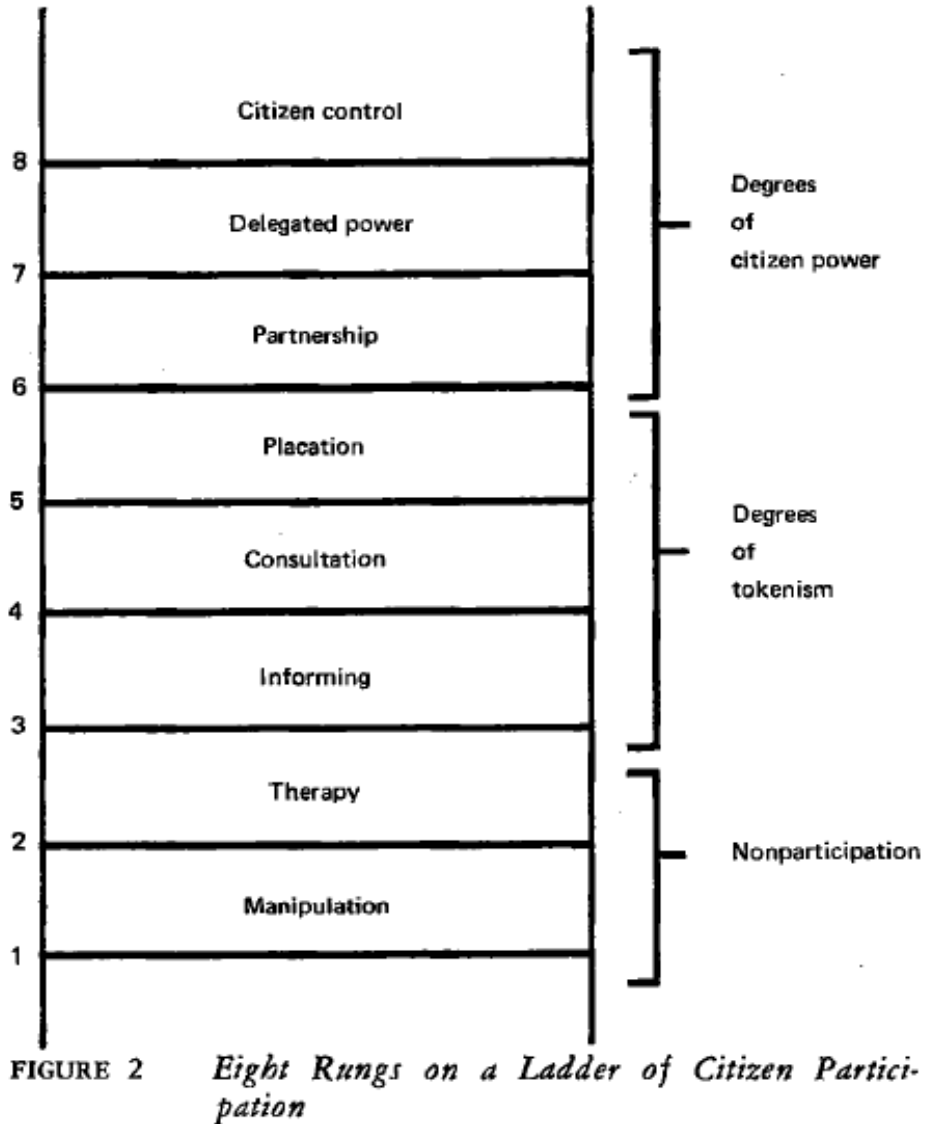


Figure 1. Arnstein's ladder of participation. Source: Arnstein, S. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. AIP Journal. P. 217

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING EXPERIENCES IN MEXICO

With the exception of the purely rational approaches, citizen participation has been a constant topic of interest in the Mexican planning practice. Nevertheless, as I showed above in the case of the IMPLANS, there are different ways to promote

participation and different interpretations of what participation entails. In this section, I will talk about some efforts in practice to include participation in a more meaningful way. However, I would like to begin with some thoughts about citizenship. Tamayo (2006) highlights two ways of understanding this concept: either by seeing citizenship in a formal way or in a substantive way. The first perspective is associated with liberal thought, and it considers citizenship as the association of individuals with equal rights and obligations. In contrast, the second perspective recognizes differences between the relationship and distribution of resources and power, and thus assumes diverse ways to practice and live as citizens. What I want to emphasize is that just as Tamayo proposes, there are different projects of citizenship that are sustained in the diverse social practices of groups, and frequently these projects oppose each other, especially between elites and social movements. To elaborate, while the social movements emerging from the historically marginalized and lower classes are looking to increase their presence and to open up the institutions for debate or discussion, elite social movements prefer an individualist concept of citizenship that protects their privileges. This is important because those projects of citizenship are in constant dispute for control of the public agenda. Public agencies in Mexico have been promoting the formal citizenship in part to keep the status quo, to reduce their workload, and to avoid conflicts with the great powers of the city. In so doing, they blame the apathy of individuals of the lower classes, even though this apparent lack of interest stems precisely from their sense of powerlessness as individuals.

With the internet and the proliferation of social networks, even if it is against the interest of some groups, the concept and ways of practicing citizenship have started to change. As people gain more information, a broader range of people are commenting and debating topics of public interest and taking action through different methods, such as

signing petitions or even holding in-person protests. These new forms of participation also involve planning and public agencies, which are now looking for innovative ways to include citizen participation.

Still, such attempts to achieve a more meaningful and inclusive participatory planning are rare in Mexican public planning. In my experience working for a planning institute, I would say that trying to change the way these planning institutions view participation is difficult without changing the structure or the institutional framework, because they impose restrictions to action. In addition, political leaders do not always value participation but rather favor efficiency and seek to finish plans as fast as possible. In a personal example, the planning institute where I worked was under pressure because we were behind in publishing several plans that had already been announced by the general director. Due to my background as a sociologist, I was ordered to lead the ‘socialization’, or integration of citizen perspectives, in those plans. Contradictorily, my job was labeled as important but nobody else was appointed to it, nor wanted to take an active role in it. In the end, half of the decisions were taken by my superiors regardless of the strategy for participation that I devised.

The IMPLAN I worked at also had a strategic planning model, but as it was flexible, I decided to attempt to have a participatory inclusive approach and extend the scope to include more people than the usual representatives of businessmen, private universities, or some NGOs. I wanted to integrate the ideas of all the people who would be affected by the planning process, but who usually do not participate. But when I looked for other experiences with participatory planning in Mexico, I found very little information. Perhaps others had made similar attempts to foster more participation in municipal planning process, but these had not been published. In the end, I based my methodology in what I could read about communicative planning but also included

elements of radical planning, and of course, strategic planning too, since that was the formal way of doing things.

One of the barriers I faced in trying to develop a more participatory, inclusive approach was that those people who usually were not included were not organized and it was hard to reach all of them, especially since it was during the Covid 19 pandemic. In response to this challenge, I started to use social media and the internet to invite people to participate in a survey. In addition to obtaining general information through a questionnaire, my main goal was to invite new people to public engagement activities by including an option to share their contact information in the survey. The activities I designed were *mesas de discusión* or discussion groups, which had as their purpose to create a space for dialogue between various groups. However, this was difficult to implement due to time, financial, and other constraints, like the pandemic.

I was aware that only conducting these discussion groups was not enough, so I tried to add other ways for people to get informed, share their opinions, and take action if they wanted. I also established a plan for constant direct communication with them, trying to be open and transparent throughout the process. Still, I knew that by implementing virtual activities, I was excluding an important portion of the population. While my plan included in-person meetings with those groups that I hoped to implement once the pandemic ended, this ultimately did not happen during my time at the IMPLAN. Looking back, my attempt was full of flaws, and it can be subject to many critiques. For example, my methodology was too influenced by the rational-strategic environment of public planning (which was the context that I knew at that time). Still aside from my personal frustration with this attempt, it can be considered as a precedent for action that can be further improved in the future.

Other efforts to include meaningful citizen participation in the planning institutes, beyond the already common practice of relying mostly on consultative councils, are difficult to identify. This because the information about IMPLANs approach to citizen participation is (if available) inside each of their planning documents or products. However, there are some cases that stand out, like the IMPLAN in the municipality of León, in the State of Guanajuato. In 2015, for the creation of the *Plan Municipal de Desarrollo León hacia el futuro, Visión 2040* (Municipal Plan of Development for León towards the future, Vision 2040), this IMPLAN made 34 workshops and had the participation of 1,500 people. These workshops favored the participation of neighborhood organizations, representatives of rural communities, and poor populations. They were held in public spaces close to rural communities and in deprived areas of the municipality. In addition, it conducted public consultations targeted at vulnerable groups, like infancies, young people, and seniors (IMPLAN León, 2015: 1-2).

On a smaller scale, the planning institute of Ciudad Juárez (IMIP Juárez), in the State of Chihuahua, conducted a participatory planning program in informal settlements during the 2000s. Pogrebinschi (2017) in her dataset, explains this program included citizen participation in all the stages of planning, and had the goal of creating a *Plan Estratégico de Desarrollo Comunitario* (Strategic Plan for Community Development). However, the information about this program is almost non-existent. The planning institute of Juárez mentions it briefly on its website just to refer to an award in local management that it obtained in 2004 for this program (IMIP Juárez, 2004). And there is a presentation made in 2005 by the IMIP Juárez that shows how it created *Centros de Barrio* (Neighborhood Centers) in vulnerable communities and pushed for community organizations that would lead their own projects with the assistance of the IMPLAN (García, 2005).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

PLANNING MODELS AND PARTICIPATION

The type and level of participation in planning depends on the predominant planning paradigm each agency follows. In the first chapter I showed that Mexican planning is still grounded in principles of rational planning, a positivist approach premised on the superiority of scientific knowledge over any other form of knowledge. Therefore, rational planners try to adapt the scientific method to solve urban problems by predicting public policy outcomes (Brooks, 2002). Following this vision, the planner assumes the position of an expert technocrat who knows best what the community and the city need to achieve development and modernity. Under this premise, asking or discussing urban issues with non-professionals citizens is considered inefficient and a waste of resources.

Graham and Healey (1999), known for their critiques of rational planning, explain that in essence, this model conceives of the city as a static object with a “physically integrated” structure. The city is considered a surface that contains all the economic and social activities, and the role of the planner is to manage the structure, discover the connections between problems, and solve them. This notion of Euclidean space is important because it assumes that socioeconomic and political processes depend on the territory and spatial structure of the city (Graham and Healey, 1999, citing Weber, 1964). Following this logic, the planner only needs to focus on transforming space to solve all the problems of the cities. Ducci (2001) mentions that in Mexico, until right before the start of the new millennium, most of the urbanists were architects. These architects used to consider urbanism as only a change of scale from architecture, which reinforces the privileging of physical/territorial transformation for urban development.

The continuing primacy of the rational model can be attributed to the fact that it allows planners to avoid intervening in cities' socio-economic concerns. Under the rational model, planners' scope is limited to physical and highly visible projects that are considered 'too technical' for the ordinary citizen. By thus eliminating the need for community engagement due to the supposed complexity of projects, project decisions are easier to make, and the process is faster, providing a sense of efficiency. This model ultimately concentrates "control in the hands of planners and a select group of others" (Staines-Díaz, 2020: 64, citing Allmendinger, 2009: 66). As Eraydin and Frey (2018: 5) claim:

Several studies [have] argued that planning itself has contributed to the neoliberalisation of society and blamed planner's reticence to act vigorously against the new order that led to increasing inequalities, democratic deficits and the exclusion of disadvantaged groups from decision-making processes for the benefit of the hegemonic power elite.

Rational planning is oblivious to the fact that cities are complex and diverse entities in constant change, and that they consist of humans who think, feel, want, or need things. Rational planning also separates the planner from any other obligation besides creating technical documents, thus allowing planners to evade responsibility for promoting inclusive and just spaces. As applied during the first half of the 20th Century, the rational planning model ended up creating an urban crisis, which led critics in the 1960s and 1970s to advocate for a more humane form of planning.

By the beginning of the 1990s, another planning theory had started to gain popularity: Communicative and/or Collaborative Planning. The theory that supports this model is relevant for my study for several reasons: for many years it was the main model in opposition to rational planning. In Mexico and other parts of the world, it is still considered by many practitioners as one of the best possible alternatives to achieve

democratic principles under neoliberalism, and communicative planning has come to serve as inspiration for new, more critical models that are currently mainstream in the academy.

The communicative model based on Habermas' ideas of communicative rationality and "emphasised the role of language and undistorted communication in order to reach consensus and action" (Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2018: 22). It claimed that the vision and understanding of the world is not universal but contextual (Peña, 2015), meaning that there is diversity and heterogeneity in opinions. This assumption also implies that all forms of knowledge are valid, since a position that might be considered completely irrational by one person could be seen as totally reasonable by another person, depending on their life experiences within a specific context (p. 41).

In order to achieve undistorted communication, Habermasian communicative action looks for "the ideal speech situation" "which allows participants to forge decisions fairly and honestly without domination or coercion (1985b: 96)" (Purcell, 2009: 149). The communicative planning model also recognizes the relational aspect of planning and the need for the government to restructure planning processes in order to allow all stakeholders to participate (Eraydin and Frey, 2018). Graham and Healey (1999: 642) further add:

[Under this model] planning practice should recognize how the relations within and between the layers of the power geometries of place are actively negotiated by the power of agency through communication and interpretation. This focuses attention in part on the development of skills in the kind of conflict mediation and consensus-building which leaves behind mutual understanding of different points of view, rather than increasing the more entrenched divisions between winners and losers.

Based on these premises, proponents of communicative planning redefined the field as an “interactive process and an arena of struggle in which problems and strategies are discussed, and conflicts are mediated” (Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2018:23), thus transforming the role of the planner into a facilitator or mediator for the dialog between groups.

Since its origins, there have been several critiques of the communicative model. The main critiques are related to the ideal of reaching consensus between dissimilar groups, because it does not fully consider how the power differentials influence the participation processes and the decisions taken. However, it is not like communicative planning forgets about power relations; after all, Habermas’ ideas are derived from neo-Marxism. The issue, as Purcell (2009:51) explains, is that “it seeks actively to neutralize [power relations] for the purposes of deliberation”. This neutralization of power differentials is not only unrealistic but also detrimental for democratic approaches to planning and socio-economic development.

Power will always shape planning processes, because even language reflects different political stances and relations of power (Purcell, 2009). As Conquergood (2002:146, cited in Kocsis, 2023: 274) suggests, “[s]ubordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted”. Therefore, the quest for consensus without considering power relations can contribute to maintaining the status quo, because some people or groups are not able to express themselves in the same way as others. Communicative planning could thus come to serve as “alibi for elitist, private-sector driven decisions, or as cheap compensation for state withdrawal from public and social services” (Miraftab, 2018: p. 277, cited in Randolph and Frey, 2018: 42).

Here it is useful to consider Chantal Mouffe's agonistic perspective on planning. Mouffe's theory accepts conflict as inherent in a pluralistic society because it is not possible for everyone to hold the same values. Therefore, a "struggle for hegemony" (Randolph and Frey, 2018:39) will always be present. In an agonistic debate, the goal is to "accept the legitimacy of an opposing view" rather than attempting to "dissolve differences" (Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2018: 30). Under the agonistic model, then, the role of the planner is to "allow that this struggle can occur and minority positions be heard and effectively considered" (Randolph and Frey, 2018:39). This view, in my perspective, is more accurate to what it is possible within the public sector in Latin American countries.

Based on the critiques of communicative planning, new models have now emerged. It can be said that especially in the academy, we are now in a "post-collaborative phase" (Brownill & Parker, 2010, cited in Watson, 2014: 63). Current progressive and critical planning approaches are known for taking a solid normative approach, thus redefining the role of the planner and the profession towards achieving more than the social good. Instead, these new theories and models press for a practice that challenges power structures and inequalities in society. That is the case, for example, of the theory of co-production (Watson, 2014; Rosen & Painter, 2019), which is a model that "builds upon the collaborative model, sharing an emphasis on planning for marginalized communities by incrementally advancing social change under democratic participation and engagement frameworks" (Rosen & Painter, 2019: 340).

Watson (2014: 69) argues that both the communicative planning and co-production models share "an incremental, evolutionary and social learning approach to shifting actions of the state in particular directions and securing gains for particular groups or places". However, a fundamental difference is the emphasis on challenging

power structures to achieve “truly inclusive community development” in the co-productive model (Rosen & Painter, 2019: 335). If power and hegemony are to be challenged through planning, participatory processes require building capacity in marginalized communities. Likewise, participation needs to be inclusive both in terms of process and of outcome (Rosen & Painter, 2019: 335). Co-production theorists believe this model can also be applied by planners working in the public sector because it does not call for fundamental changes in structures of power and therefore does not pose a threat to the current governance system.

In the first chapter I described in detail the characteristics of strategic planning, and I argued that this model used by the planning institutes in Mexico is a hybrid of the rational and communicative models. To close this section, it is necessary to further discuss the model of participation promoted by strategic planning and how this compares with perspectives on participation in the co-productive model. To do so, I rely on the work of Purcell (2009), a critic on Habermasian communicative planning and the consensus approach to participation that derives from it.

The main representative of consensus planning is Judith Innes. She believes that people are motivated to participate in a decision-making process only because they look for their individual interests and benefits, so “Her model becomes one in which various stakeholders work together to produce a creative new solution that is perceived by each group to benefit its self-interest” (Purcell, 2009:156). Everyone is able to participate on an equal footing, which means the powerful groups have an advantage to see their interests come to fruition, but this is not considered a problem if all the other groups’ concerns are discussed.

Purcell (2009) argues that the consensus-building model serves as a legitimation tool for the state and powerful groups, like land developers. He suggests that the term

“stakeholders” implies participation should only include people who have a stake on the issue, and those who have more stakes will be given priority. In Purcell’s own words,

The move from citizens to stakeholders greatly changes the consideration afforded to property owners (Huxley, 2000). Property owners, as owners, are formally excluded from deliberations among citizens. However, they are virtually always formally included in deliberations among stakeholders. Thus a large corporation that owns property in a city’s downtown cannot participate as a citizen in a downtown revisioning process, but it would be considered a major stakeholder and so have considerable standing under that rubric (see, for example, McGuirk, 2001) (Purcell, 2009: 157).

THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF PLANNING AND PARTICIPATION

While I previously discussed neoliberalism as an economic model, this is also a philosophic framework integrated by meanings and understandings that permeate all parts of life. One of its main ideological characteristics is the fragmentation or separation of key social aspects in order to prevent mutual influence between them. The most recognized characteristic is the separation of the economy and the market from the State, but what interests me most here is the separation of politics from ‘technical’ sciences, like planning, in neoliberal thought. Here I build on Mouffe’s (cited in Purcell, 2009: 151) understanding of the political and politics: “The political refers to the antagonistic relations that are always present in human society [and] Politics [...] is not the search for intersubjective understanding and agreement; it is necessarily a struggle for hegemony”.

I share Eraydin and Frey’s (2018) concern about the “de-politicization” techniques used in neoliberalism and the need for implementing new strategies to “re-politicize” planning. Moreover, the authors stress that “there is a need for a better understanding [of] how the political is manifested in the planning contents, shaped by institutional arrangements, and played out in the planning processes” (Eraydin and Frey, 2018: 1). This is especially important in the Latin American context because planning is

still very much concentrated in public institutions, and politization is vital for participation.

For this discussion, I also retrieve Castells' idea about how the city is organized through three interrelated elements: the economic system, the political/institutional system, and the ideological system. Through my historical review of the urbanization process in Mexico and Latin America, I argued that in a capitalist society, the market rules over the spatial and social configuration of cities. Here, however, I will focus on the political and institutional system in order to demonstrate how governing ideologies influence how cities have managed urban affairs, and thus shaped planning practices.

Castells (in González, 1998) explains that Western cities were conceived as autonomous units of production, consumption, interchange, social relations, and political governance which put the interests of their citizens over domination by superior government interests. Based on this, the local government's role became to control and manage the city for the sake of this public interest/good, but this raised the question of who is included in this public, and who determines this collective good. Traditional theories of the state in Latin American democracies have privileged the representative model, meaning that those who meet the requirements to be a citizen can choose a selected few to represent them, speak for them, and decide for them. For Castells (in González, 1998) then, the city can be understood as a living system where the state moderates the interaction between space and society. Ultimately, the way the state intervenes in urban politics is through urban planning, which means that to Castells, planning a political practice.

Under neoliberalism, participation is used to claim adherence to democratic values while obscuring the fact that real decisions are ultimately made by the economic and political elites. In that sense, Rahnema (1997, cited in Williams, 2004) finds the

interest that governments and development institutions have towards participation “as an indication that [participation has] already been politically ‘tamed’, and [is] serving important economic, institutional and legitimating functions for a mainstream vision of development” (p. 558). That is why participatory processes need to be analyzed in their entirety, looking at the context, as well as asking who is promoting it and with what intentions.

Contrary to Rahnema’s negative vision of participation promoted by the government, Williams (2004) believes that the contradictions of participation under neoliberalism can be used to find new opportunities and possibilities to lead political action and further “re-politicisation” (p. 566). These ideas are pertinent for my research because they open the possibility for change within public institutions even under strategic planning and new public management. Understanding the wide institutional context in which participation takes place and paying attention to its influence over the configuration of participation can be the first step to imagining a new model emerging from within the public sector (Williams, 2004). This ultimately points to the need to consider what are the best “times and spaces in which participation can reformulate current developmental discourses and practices” (Williams, 2004: 571).

GOVERNMENT DRIVEN PARTICIPATION

In every participatory process, the question of who promotes it is important to understand its scope and intentionality. Participation promoted by the government face barriers to implementing meaningful and inclusive processes. At an institutional level, the organizational culture, the limited budget and personnel, the regulatory framework, or even the politic climate can act as significant contextual constraints.

When the planning professional undertakes a job in the public sector, they arrive at an already defined institutional structure. These structures are frequently static, and in most cases, the planner does not have influence over administrative or organizational elements. This happens because under the traditional form of government, each public servant has a clearly defined function in which they are believed to be experts. Participatory strategies regularly imply the allocation of significant resources, like personnel, budget, and time. If the institutional structures are already defined to allow a certain model of participation, trying to push for a change in the model might prove to be difficult, involving at least several discussions with people from other areas and hierarchies. Watson (2014: 63) retrieves Fung and Wright's (2003) suggestion about the need to focus our efforts on changing the "specific design of institutions" in the face of the "formal systems of democracy [being] increasingly ineffective in accomplishing the ideals of democratic politics".

While deliberative democracy promoted by communicative planning is more open and inclusive than the rational planning- representative democracy (Purcell, 2009), it is still not enough to advance society towards a more just and inclusive future. If the current form of democracy is becoming increasingly ineffective and its structures constrain the new participatory models, then the answer is to generate a new form of democracy with an "alternative form of governmentality" (Watson, 2014: 71). The alternative can be what Fung and Wright (2003, cited in Watson 2014: 63) calls "empowered participatory governance". This new governance is suitable for co-production models, Watson (2014: 74) describes how:

Of their three principles of such governance, the first, practical orientation and addressing immediate needs, is centrally important for co-production. Their second principle, "bottom-up participation" of ordinary citizens rather than a reliance on external experts, also fits well with co-production principles. Their

third principle, “deliberative solution generation” which involves participants listening to each other and generating group choices, is the arena in which new co-production processes have largely found important but not sufficient and often difficult to achieve situations of deep conflict.

Watson (2014: 63) suggests that most of the tendencies towards participation and social engagement in planning have been informed by the analytical and normative thinking of the Northern and Western regions of the world. Therefore, the author suggests that looking at the Global South and East can provide new insights. The concept of co-production originated from initiatives by marginalized people in the South who were alienated from formal ways of participation, and in response, created their own planning processes that later had to be recognized by the public administration. While this model is essentially bottom-up, public sector-led co-production is possible if there is “a fundamental shift in the balance of power” (Albrechts, 2013, cited in Watson, 2014:72), although the government may not agree on this unless it recognizes a deep need for change. Watson (2014) explains that co-production promoted by the government might not challenge the whole economic system, but it can challenge “the distribution of political power which supports [...] marginalization, at least at the local level” (p. 73).

THE NORMATIVE AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF PLANNING PRACTICE AND PARTICIPATION.

New tendencies in planning are focusing on the normative and ethical aspects of the discipline. While these aspects have been discussed across planning history, the interest in revisiting them responds to an evaluation of planning outcomes and how, under the traditional theoretical and practical frameworks, we have been unable to produce better communities and positive changes for our societies. Even more so, planning has contributed to pervasive or disastrous events in society, especially against minorities or vulnerable communities. I pay attention here to what the planning practice

should entail in terms of participation for the present and for the future, as well as the role of the practitioner in achieving this.

In his work on participatory governance, Fung (2006, 2015) identifies three democratic values that government-led participation must serve: legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness of public action. An action is legitimate when the citizen has “good reasons to support or obey it”. Justice refers to the political inequality resulting from groups being powerless to influence the public agenda, gain information, or affect the decision-making process. And effectiveness has to do with how citizen knowledge can contribute to innovative strategies or approaches to improve public action (2006). However, he clarifies that not all participatory designs are “suited to serving all three values simultaneously” (2006: 74), and furthermore, governments tend to “enhance legitimacy or efficacy rather than rectify injustice” (2015, p. 520).

Of course, participation does not always serve a democratic purpose. As participation gained popularity and became mandatory for public planning agencies in Mexico, there are instances where agencies increase citizen participation simply to check the box. This is what Fung (2015: 521) describes as trivializing participation:

When a city grants residents the power to decide which color that their park benches should be painted, this increases citizen participation, but not in a meaningful way. There are many different ways to restrict participation so that, at the limit, it is trivial...

He adds that in some places, this is the only participation that community members know because “empowered, nontrivial forms of participation exceed the horizons of their political imagination” (Fung, 2015: 21). Meaningful participation should therefore aim to empower people to influence planning projects in such a way that hegemonic structures are challenged and changed.

There are two main characteristics that I consider constituent of such meaningful participation in planning: inclusion, and justice. Participation does not necessarily mean inclusion. Quick & Feldman (2011) delve into which characterizes inclusive processes in public engagement, arguing that inclusion should go beyond simply the engagement of socioeconomically diverse groups. Instead, they use the concept of inclusion to “describe connections made not only among individuals’ and groups’ points of view but connections across issues, sectors, and engagement efforts” (Quick & Feldman, 2011: 275). This broader understanding of inclusion “requires shifting the regional structure of representation and dismantling the complex and enduring participation and barriers to power sharing” (Rosen & Painter, 2019: 344). Inclusion in participation should bring together “different sectors or types of expertise—and creating together a moving, changing combination of them. Engaging multiple ways of knowing, coproducing the content and process, and sustaining temporal openness” (Quick & Feldman, 2011: 286). That is why inclusive participation should contribute to building communities of knowledge and practice.

In normative planning, justice is frequently considered as a goal of planning, a final value we need to achieve through our practice. However, Lake (2017) finds this notion problematic because it can lead to the conclusion that a group of technicians can achieve justice by including information or considerations about marginalized communities. Although this approach is better than not incorporating disadvantaged groups at all, it creates partial or incomplete justice because only the actors of their own lives can fully express their reality. Lake (2017) therefore suggests that justice should be the subject of planning, not only its object. This change is quite relevant because it forces the planner to think about how justice is being incorporated in their projects from the beginning and during all the stages of the process. By asking “What are we doing and is it

just for us to do so?” (Lake, 2017: 1208), we are also shifting our conception of planning “as the practice of justice rather than the justice of planning practice” (2017:1206).

The concept of participation in planning as a transformative, inclusive, and just continuous process, where participants are integrated in a meaningful way to foster changes on a given reality, necessarily requires a redefinition of the planners’ role. Instead of being just advocates or facilitators of dialogue, under co-production, planners become agents of systemic transformation. While the rational planning model requires value-neutral practitioners, the co-production model necessarily involves intention and desire on the part of the planner to conduct their work based on moral values like justice and inclusion. Here the concept of morality directs our attention “not to accomplished reality but to a desired future which our desires, when translated into articulate conviction, may help bring into existence” (Dewey, 1919: 43, cited in Lake, 2017: 1208). In co-productive participatory processes, the planners should not impose their own definitions of values, because the aim is to create a shared moral principle between participants to guide the action. It is important to note that, when talking about moral values, we need to leave aside the misconception of them responding only to subjective interests and not to rationality, because in reality, they are the basis to reach rational arguments (Gébert et al, 2023).

Working for the government and being part of the state apparatus puts pressure on the planners’ allegiance to their role and values as professionals. On top of this, public planners face institutional constraints and adverse professional contexts, while also dealing with the population’s negative perception of the government’s work and their consequent skepticism over their processes and products. Sager (2009) notes the existence of a conflict between the values that planners are learning in school, which are more related to the communicative planning model, and the reality of working in the

public field, where the rule is to work under the New Public Management (NPM) model. The role of the planner then goes in “opposite directions” (p. 78): while in school they learn to be facilitators of communicative dialogue, in practice they are hired as experts that need to make quick decisions to protect economic interests. This insight is especially valuable for countries in a stage of development like Mexico, where NPM is still the norm.

Accordingly, Penpecioğlu and Taşan-Kok (2016) claim this contradiction in values is causing young planners to feel alienated from their work, and even more so in the presence of authoritarian governments forcing top-down decisions. This alienation produces a feeling of powerlessness as well as frustration, and even irritation. In their research of young planners’ attitudes, they found three types of young planners: 1) the lost planner, who is totally dissatisfied with planning practice and wants to change paths if possible; 2) the profiteer planner, who tries to take advantage of the system and adopts a capitalist mentality; and 3) the struggling planner, who tends to be more politicized to the left and tries to resist market domination while looking for alternatives to achieve planning values towards public good. They also point out that the responses from the planners:

Differed according to graduation years, indicating that planners started to observe the dominant profit-oriented motives of the stakeholders, the authoritarian impositions of politicians and the unethical practices of some planning practitioners as they gained more experience in practice (p. 1044).

Ultimately, public sector planners’ alternatives within the institutional context are limited. As they face the imperative of needing to immediately solve everyday situations, they gradually lose their perspective on the wider goals of planning.

Not only are they literally captives of the everyday world, but the social-technical complexity of most public problems is such that it discounts any general problem-

solving strategy, and demands from the actors immersion in the rich, diffuse detail of concrete situations (Beck, 1999; Sabel & Fung et al., 2001, cited in Wagenaar, 2002: 238).

At the same time, the “bureaucratic artefacts” (Wagenaar, 2002: 245) like procedures, rules, buildings, or even the professional jargon, that “enable [the public administrator] to define situations and reach solutions in an efficient, routine manner” (p.245), act like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, these artefacts are useful to their daily tasks, but on the other, they can become an obstacle for planners to look for other possibilities to achieve their goals. Wagenaar (2002) explains that removing those bureaucratic artefacts is not an easy task because they are engraved in the self-image and identity of the public administrator.

Nevertheless, facing these institutional structures, as well as the “unpredictability and complexity” (Wagenaar 2002: 238) of public planning practice, can also offer “an opportunity for learning about the world, about others, and about oneself”. However, this opportunity can only be identified by the planner through “active engagement with the situation at hand” and deep reflection on the implications of acting in the world (2002: 238). This deep reflection is aligned with Wilson’s concept of “inner practice,” which is “the rigor with which [the practitioners] stay aligned with purpose and monitor their own thoughts, intentions, and actions in the moment as they engage with others” (2019:1). Inner practice then starts by recognizing “their own blind spots and reconsider[ing] their unexamined assumptions, value judgments, and mental models” (p.1). Inner practice is a process of “self-transformation” because our self-awareness allows us to make adjustments to our practice. However, as Wagenaar (2002: 236) argues, “intensive interaction with others” is a requisite for this transformation, as it is a practice that must be learned in the field.

METHODOLOGY

For my analysis, I draw on IMPLAN planning documents as well as interviews with its planning staff. To understand IMPLAN's participation approach in a holistic way, I look at six aspects in both the planning documents and the interviews: IMPLAN's general view about participation; the methods used; the communication strategy; the intended and usual subjects for participation; the approach towards conflict; and the values surrounding the participation strategy. I also consider the self-perceptions of IMPLAN planners about their role towards participation, and the institution's barriers and limitations to promote meaningful participatory planning.

I reviewed three planning documents out of the 13 that IMPLAN Ahome has created since it began operations in 2009. The first document is the *Plan Director de Desarrollo Urbano* (Director Plan of Urban Development) for the city of Topolobampo. I will refer to this document as 'PDDU of Topolobampo' from now on. This document was released the same year the institute started to function, and thus is the first planning document it produced. The PDDU of Topolobampo (2009: 4) explains that Topolobampo is a port city undergoing continuous growth due to its centrality for Mexican commerce and tourism. Therefore, IMPLAN considered it imperative to create a land-use zoning plan to regulate the city's growth and the challenges this can cause, like sprawl, deterioration of natural resources, a deficit in public services and urban infrastructure, and the lack of legal security of land for reservation areas.

The second planning document is the *Programa Municipal de Desarrollo Urbano* (Municipal Program of Urban Development), created in 2015. I will refer to this document as 'PMDU of Ahome'. As this program was created for the whole municipality of Ahome, this document is significantly longer than the other two planning documents I reviewed (298 pages compared to 122 for the PDDU of Topolobampo and 78 for the

PPDU of Los Mochis). In the words of IMPLAN, the PMDU of Ahome was developed to respond to requirements articulated in the federal government's program for tourism development. This planning program therefore only addresses the "most relevant and urgent" (2015:3) problems such as urban growth and declining, economic development, the protection of the environment, transportation, and irregular settlements.

The third document is the most recent, released this year (2023). This is the 'PPDU of Los Mochis', corresponding to the *Plan Parcial de Desarrollo Urbano de Los Mochis* (Partial Plan of Urban Development of Los Mochis). The plan outlines policies to encourage the occupation of urban land that was unused or underdeveloped within a specific urban zone (IMPLAN, 2023:1).

Although it is decentralized from the local government, the IMPLAN Ahome still needs to follow local, State and federal regulations. All the planning documents start by pointing this out and explaining how the document in question follows the objectives and goals of higher-level development plans. It is not within the scope of this thesis to fully dive into the legal or regulatory context governing plan-making, but I recognize that some of the ideas about participation in the planning documents I reviewed echo positions presented in documents issued at a higher level in the Mexican governance hierarchy.

I started my analysis of the planning documents with the selection of key words in each of the six aspects/categories of participation that I previously mentioned (Table 1). These are words closely related to these aspects, especially in the Mexican context, and served to evaluate the strategies, visions, and positions articulated in each planning document. I reviewed how each of these words were used in each category, focusing specifically on passages in the plans related to participation. I then conducted a comprehensive assessment of each participation category in the documents.

Categories	Key Words
Engagement	<i>Participación</i> (Participation)
	<i>Socialización</i> (Socialization)
Subjects	<i>Ciudadano/Ciudadana/Ciudadanía</i> (Citizen/Citizenship)
	<i>Sectorial/ Sector</i> (Sector/Sectoral)
	<i>Participantes</i> (Participant)
	<i>Actor</i> (Actor)
	<i>Comunidad</i> (Community)
Method	<i>Consulta</i> (Consultation)
	<i>Mesa</i> (Workshop)
	<i>Foro</i> (Forum)
	<i>Encuesta</i> (Survey)
	<i>Entrevista</i> (Interview)
	<i>Grupo Focal</i> (Focus Group)
Communication	<i>Difusión</i> (Public Outreach/Dissemination of Information)
	<i>Página/sitio de internet</i> (Webpage/Internet site/Official page)
	<i>Oficinas</i> (Office)
Approach	<i>Acuerdos</i> (Agreements)
	<i>Consenso</i> (Consensus)
	<i>Conflictos</i> (Conflicts)
Values	<i>Colaboración/Colaborar</i> (Collaboration/Collaborate)
	<i>Cooperación</i> (Cooperation)
	<i>Justicia/Justo</i> (Justice/Just)
	<i>Inclusión/incluyente/inclusivo</i> (Inclusion/Inclusive)
	<i>Equidad</i> (Equity)
	<i>Cargas y Beneficios</i> (Benefits and Burdens)
*All the key words were searched for in their singular and plural forms.	

Table 1. Key Words Related to Participation in IMPLAN Ahome's Planning Documents.
Source: Elaborated by author.

I also interviewed all of the five staff members who do planning-related activities in the IMPLAN Ahome. The semi-structured interviews were scheduled according to the planner's availability and were totally online using a videoconferencing application. I received permission to audio record, which allowed me to go back and transcribe each interview. This process is essential to preserve the exact words and understand the meaning behind them. After concluding the transcriptions, I organized the comments

according to the six aspects of participation that I used to analyze the planning documents. The staff members provided me with valuable insight into details of their planning practice and shared their perception of planning participation. Although it would have been interesting to examine the comments in relation to the power structures and roles inside the IMPLAN, all the interview quotes are anonymous, and I refrain from using any reference that may give an idea of the participants' identity.

By using the same aspects of participation for both the interviews and my analysis of the planning documents, I was able to conduct a comparative analysis and thus reveal the general discourse about participation in the IMPLAN Ahome. Even if some of the members of the current planning team may have not contributed to the reviewed planning documents, some of them did, and certainly most of them participated in the development of the 2023 document.

Chapter 3: Planning in Ahome

THE MUNICIPALITY OF AHOME, KEY POINTS.

Ahome is a municipality (the 3rd level of government in Mexico) within the State of Sinaloa, located in the northwest part of the country. It borders the Gulf of California to the west, the State of Durango in the east, the States of Sonora and Chihuahua to the north, and the State of Nayarit to the south. Ahome is one of 18 municipalities in Sinaloa (although the local legislation recently approved two more municipalities, meaning that in 2024 there will be 20). It is located in the extreme northwest of the State with a large portion bordering the sea, and the vegetation is primarily prairie. The climate is dry with annual temperatures up to 48° Celsius (around 118 ° Fahrenheit), and a minimum of 18° Celsius (64 ° Fahrenheit), so it can be considered hot or very hot (IMPLAN Ahome, 2015).



Figure 2. Geographic location of Ahome. Source: Created by the author with information from (INEGI, 2015).

The center of the municipality and the main city is “Los Mochis”, and the local government is located in this core urban area. However, Ahome is one of the three most urbanized municipalities in Sinaloa since it includes 18 urban localities with over 2,500 inhabitants. The most important neighborhoods within the municipality of Ahome in terms of population are Los Mochis, Villa Ahome, Higuera de Zaragoza, Topolobampo, and San Miguel Zapotitlán (IMPLAN Ahome, 2015, using information from the National Census of 2010).

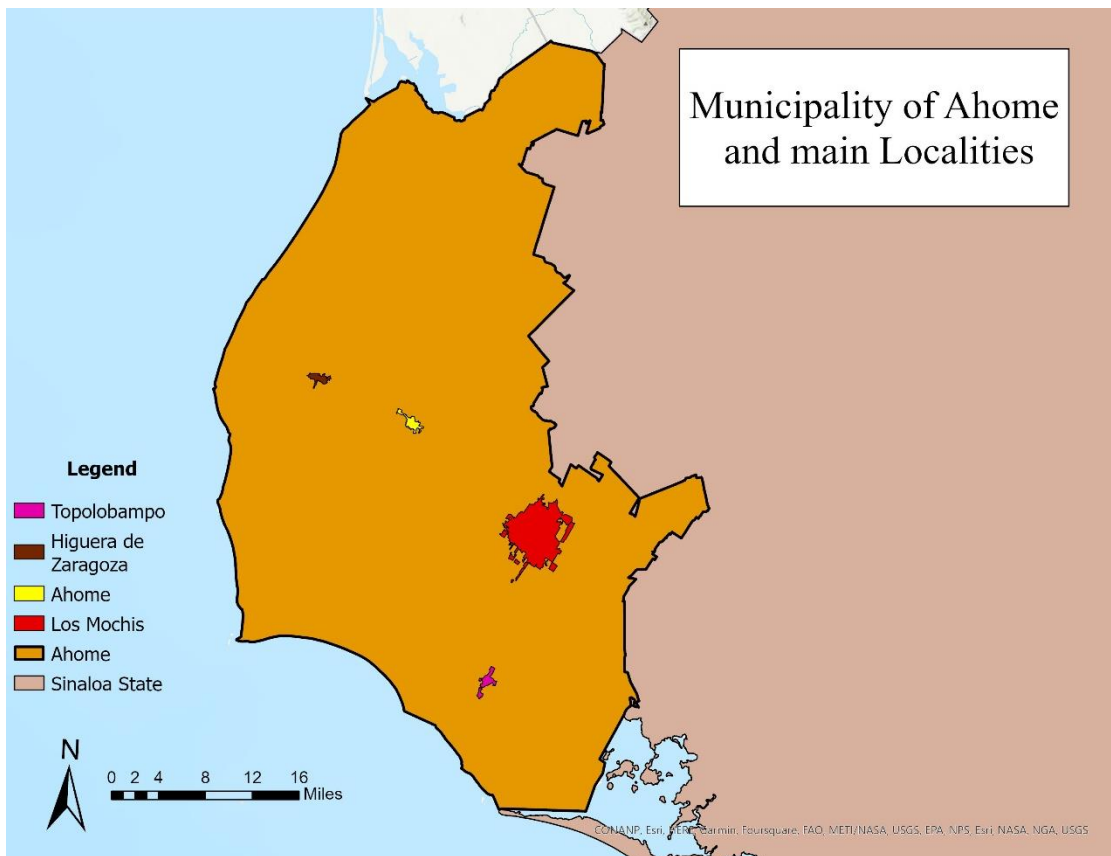


Figure 3. Ahome's main urban localities. Source: Created by the author with information from (INEGI, 2015)

IMPLAN Ahome (2015) recognizes four classes of urban areas in the municipality: 1) The city of Los Mochis, which by 2010 contained 61.4% of the total population in Ahome; 2) a second level constituted by Ahome, Higuera de Zaragoza and Topolobampo, since they represented 6.5% of the population; 3) a third level consisting of San Miguel Zapotitlán and El Carrizo, with 2.7% of the population of Ahome; and 4) the rest of the urban localities, accounting for 9% of the population of Ahome. For reference, in 2010 the total population of Ahome was 416,299 inhabitants (Sedesol, n.d.) but by the next census (2020), the population had grown to 459,310, which represents a 10.3% population growth in 10 years according to the Secretaría de Economía (n.d.). IMPLAN Ahome (2015) explained that the population pyramid reflected the characteristics of the state and the country, with higher percentages of young people. At the same time, it showed a pattern of growth for the oldest segments of the pyramid, which means the municipality has seen a progressively higher presence of seniors. The indigenous population, considered as those over 3 years old who spoke an indigenous language, was almost 1% in 2020, but in 2010, this percentage was higher (1.26%). Also, there are more people who consider themselves indigenous but who do not speak a native language anymore.

In terms of the economy, agriculture and agroindustry are important due to their high productivity, and the municipality specializes in the exportation of fruits, vegetables, and sea products (Secretaría de Economía, n.d.). In that regard, I retrieved socioeconomical indicators for the municipality to assess levels of inequality, poverty, and access to basic services like education or technology. First, IMPLAN Ahome (2015) claimed that the marginality grade was considered very low, and more recently (in 2020),

this trend continued. The Ahome municipality ranks 4th in the State for income inequality (0.33 Gini in 2020), which is positive, although 25.3% of the population is considered to be living in moderate poverty and 2.44% in extreme poverty (Secretaría de Economía, n.d.). In terms of access to education, 18% of people over 15 years old only have an elementary school level education or less, and 2.35% of the population is completely illiterate (Secretaría de Economía, n.d.). Finally, in 2020 the access to technology in the municipality was fairly positive, since 54.7% of the homes had internet access, 40% owned a computer, and 93.7% owned a cellphone.

AHOME AND LOS MOCHIS URBAN HISTORY AND GROWTH.

The history of the municipality of Ahome is linked with economic projects led by foreign investors and settlers, specifically from the U.S. In 1881, Albert Kimsey Owen “received a concession [...] approving construction of the transmountain railroad and the establishment of a colony” (Moore, 1975:1). This colony of over 200 people (primarily made up of Owen’s U.S. colleagues) established themselves in Topolobampo, and continued until there was a great confrontation over land and water rights, and Benjamin Johnston, a private U.S. accountant, took possession of their land.

Going back to the foundational enterprises, in 1890, the Kansas Sinaloa Investment Company started to build the Canal Tastes, a great hydraulic infrastructure project that carried the water from the *Fuentes* River to Los Mochis, contributing to the emergence of two other settlements named *El Público* and *El Plat* (Secretaría de Turismo, 2020:7). In addition, in 1892 the *Águila Sugar and Refining Company* began as a partnership between Johnston and Zacarías Ochoa, an old *Hacienda* (ranch/farm) owner who began the sugar industry in the region. Eventually, Ochoa could not uphold his terms of the contract and Johnston took complete control of it, becoming the only owner of the

sugar industry and the land that used to belong to Ochoa (Gill, 1995). Johnston kept expanding his land and became so powerful that in 1898 he ordered the development of an urban framework of a modern city with big and straight streets in the same style of the U.S. cities of the time (Secretaría de Turismo, 2020). The Águila Sugar and Refining Company attracted workers that started to build their houses nearby. In 1903 the settlement was officially named Los Mochis, but it was not until 1916 that local legislation created the municipality of Ahome and defined its territorial limits (Secretaría de Turismo, 2020).

The level of influence Benjamin Johnston had in Los Mochis for decades is impressive without a doubt. But ultimately, the concentration of capital in the sugar industry that was completely under his control, led to the emergence of an industrial proletariat, which fought him until in 1938 they achieved their goal of taking back all the land that he exploited for almost half a century (Gill, 1995). It is important to remember that in 1938, the president of Mexico was General Lázaro Cárdenas, who expropriated most of the land that was concentrated in the hands of foreign and national elites and gave them to the campesinos in what we now know as the *Reparto agrario*, or the ‘agrarian distribution’.

In 1930, Ahome’s population was 30,394 inhabitants. At the time, this represented 7.7% of the state’s entire population, but this proportion grew in the next decades. By 1970, Ahome represented 13% of the state’s population, and 15% in 2010 with 416,299 inhabitants in the municipality (IMPLAN, 2015). The welfare state period in the 1970s represented a period of great population growth, mainly because of the hydraulic projects (such as the Miguel Hidalgo Dam, and the development of irrigation systems) which helped strengthen the agriculture and hence the economy of the region. The growth continued after this, but at lower rates. In the early 2010s, the State of

Sinaloa was facing economic difficulties, affecting mainly the mountainous zone, which led to the displacement of many rural residents to the closest urban settlements (IMPLAN, 2015).

The following figure is a table of median annual population growth in Sinaloa State and the municipality of Ahome. The X axis represents the decades from the national census, while the Y axis represents the growth rate, illustrating that Ahome grew faster than the State until reaching its peak in the 70s, then dropping dramatically in the subsequent two decades. Compared to the State of Sinaloa, the graph shows a similar growth in Ahome in the 90s, and an almost symmetrical oppositional growth from the 2000s to 2010.

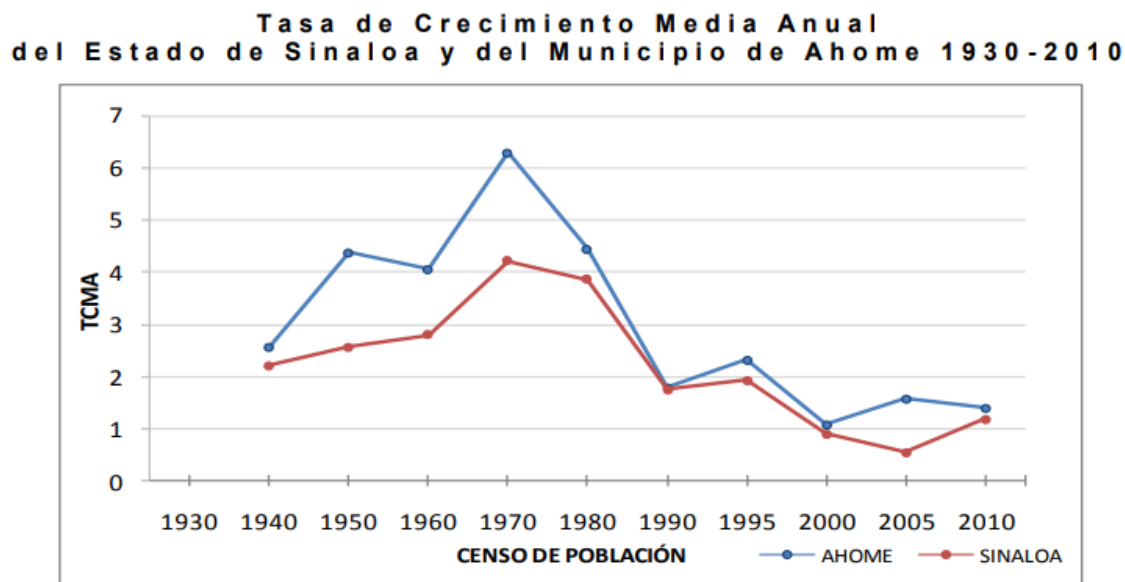


Figure 4. Graph of median population growth, Ahome in comparison with the State.
Source: IMPLAN (2015)

By 2015, 2% of Ahome territory was considered urban while 55% was used for highly industrial agriculture. The rest of the land was considered unsuitable for both agriculture and urbanization. The proximity to intensive agriculture is dangerous for

humans due to the high pollution of the air, water, and soil due to the extensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. IMPLAN considers such use of agricultural chemicals the most important vulnerability facing Ahome, which is why municipal officials recommend developing new investment strategies in order to move away from this industry.

The IMPLAN study (2015) also explained how the urban structure of Los Mochis is very “schematic”, as the urban center remains the main space for commercial activity and services which has contributed to maintaining a compact city. However, while some families with higher incomes remain living in the downtown area, others are moving to the periphery because the housing market has expanded to new areas. There is a ring of working-class formal housing around the city center but beyond that, there is another ring comprised of mass-built housing targeted to low-income workers, and in the southern and western areas of the city land speculation was promoting urban sprawl. The high growth of new housing due to speculation has also contributed to low occupancy rates in some areas. IMPLAN calculated a vacancy rate of 10% in all the city, pointing out that in some areas with new developments, 1/3 of the houses, and even up to 1/2 in some places, are vacant. This phenomenon is not due to all the people having their housing needs covered but instead responds to the characteristics and locations of the new housing options.

In conclusion, the growth of the Ahome municipality, as well as its main urban localities, has been strongly subordinated to the agricultural economy and the land market. At first, this was because land was an object of appropriation by a foreign capitalist man, who exploited the land and the natural resources to create wealth for himself, rarely thinking about the city or the people living in the city. Afterwards, the area’s growth was dictated by the development of the agroindustry sector and all the infrastructure created to support that industry. Now, we can observe how the land market

is dictating the growth by urbanizing new areas just to satisfy the needs of real estate developers or the wish of the elites to create new exclusive spaces to physically separate themselves from the lower classes.

PLANNING IN AHOME AND THE CREATION OF THE IMPLAN

Urbanization is always accompanied by changes on multiple levels, and the public administration and local government needs to organize itself to keep up and maintain its control over public life. As I described in the last sections, the development of Ahome was slow and driven by specific figures and industries until almost the 1950s. After that, the city became subject to the national policies of industrialization under the welfare state, which is when the growth started to accelerate only to decline afterwards. Until the crisis of the welfare state, the government functions were more centralized and the federal and State governments had more control over municipalities and their cities. However, neoliberalism changed this, and government decentralization started. This shift left the local governments with more responsibility, and at the same time, required them to separate politics and government from the natural flow of economy, but also contradictorily asking them to act as enablers of the private sector.

The result was sprawl. The local governments had the ability to order their territory, but by asking them to favor the market and forcing the concept of competitiveness on them, local planners were forced to satisfy the need for land of powerful interests under the pretense of fostering development. Before the IMPLAN Ahome was created, the local government had a structure to direct urban development under the secretariat of public infrastructure, and, while this department continues to operate, it has changed names depending on changes in political leadership. The current name of the department is *Dirección de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo Urbano*, or in

English, the “department of the environment and urban development.” In terms of urbanism or planning, its area of work is mostly administrative, applying different regulations (for example building codes, roads, housing, etc.) and enforcing them. To fulfill this obligation, it has a unit for building control and construction licenses and another unit in charge of analysis and urban projects. The unit in charge of analysis and urban projects focuses on checking viability of subdivisions, zoning, private mass housing projects, and so on (Secretaría de Obras Públicas, Urbanismo, y Ecología, 2023).

Besides the department of the environment and urban development, another local government agency, the *Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo Urbano*, or the municipal council of urban development, works with urban management issues. The council’s job is to act as a consultant and give their opinion about urban matters, though they don’t have operative functions nor fixed personnel. This council is made up of a vice-president who is representing the municipal president as well as other members who are representatives of different interests groups, like universities, chambers of commerce, or related professionals groups, for example the college of architects. They do not work for the municipality or the government and thus they do not receive any payment for their job, but the council holds closed meetings every two weeks where they usually just give their opinion about requests for zoning changes (IMPLAN, 2015).

The last urban public agency engaged with planning issues in Ahome is the IMPLAN. It was approved by the local government council in 2004, but it was not until February 2005 that it was legalized through the publication of the *Decreto Municipal N° 59 de Ahome*, or the document of creation in the State’s official paper of record. IMPLAN was constituted as a decentralized institute of the local government with authority throughout the municipality. The IMPLAN would have freedom to manage its own personnel and finances and have ownership over all the material and equipment it

bought to complete its work (IMPLAN, n.d.). The Mexican Association of IMPLANs, states the IMPLAN Ahome was one of the first planning institutes in northern Mexico. In fact, only three of the 21 IMPLANS in 2016 were older, including the ones in Ciudad Juárez, Ensenada, and Hermosillo (AMIMP, 2016).

It is important to note that one year prior to the creation of the IMPLAN Ahome, the IMPLAN of Culiacán in the State of Sinaloa was also approved (IMPLAN Culiacán, n.d., AMIMP, 2016), so the political context was favorable since there was already a legal and institutional precedent. The justification for the creation of planning institutes, specifically for the one in Ahome, was that the urban settlements in the municipality had started to grow uncontrollably, creating all sort of problems and challenges that needed to be addressed properly. At the same time, the local governments started to recognize that cities were vibrant entities undergoing constant change and the governance structures that existed at the time were not capable of keeping pace, especially since every four years following elections the staff of all municipal departments would turn over. In the words of the Mario López Valdez, the mayor who approved the creation of the IMPLAN Ahome (translated from Spanish):

The honorable city hall of Ahome has observed the imperative to create a public entity specialized in urban development planning, which can anticipate the uncontrollable and irregular growth of the human settlements in the municipality, and that in addition, is capable of setting out the best direction for development of new land with better public service and proposing zoning and pertinent land uses (Ahome City Hall, 2005).

Either way, despite the “imperative” for the IMPLAN, the institute did not officially begin to operate until 2008, with real, tangible planning work starting at the beginning of 2009 (IMPLAN, 2015). In the official documents establishing the IMPLAN Ahome (n.d.), it is stated that the institute became a reality due to the action of a group of

recognized regional businessmen. In 2007, these elite businessmen saw the urgency of putting the planning institute into function, so they established contact with public officials and started writing the internal operation rules of the institute, which was published in the State official paper in July 2007. By January 2008, the same elite group presented the project to the interim municipal president Esteban Valenzuela, who gave the final approval. Afterwards they started to hold meetings to get everything in place.

Since the IMPLAN started functioning, it has created 13 planning documents (plans or programs) for different localities in Ahome.

Year	Quantity and Planning Document Type	Targeted Localities/Territory
2009	2 Director Plans of Urban Development	Topolobampo and San Miguel
2014	1 Integral Plan of Sustainable Urban Mobility	Los Mochis
2015	2 Director Plans of Urban Development	Los Mochis and Las Lajitas
	1 Municipal Urban Development Program	Ahome
2016	4 Director Plans of Urban Development	Villa Ahome, Heriberto Valdez, Higuera de Zaragoza, and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz
2018	2 Partial Plans	Corridor Mochis-Topolobampo, and a Transit focused plan for Los Cocos
2023	1 Partial Program of Urban Development	Los Mochis – Special Zone “Ingenios”

Table 2. Planning Documents Created by the IMPLAN Ahome since their creation.

Source: Elaborated by author with information from the official page of the IMPLAN, in “*Sistema de Planeación*”.

THE URBAN MANAGEMENT MODEL IN THE IMPLAN AHOME.

As I previously argued, the municipal planning institute model is based on principles of strategic planning, which in turn are adapted to the neoliberal economic system. In this last section, I will draw on an analysis of *the Decreto Municipal N° 59 de Ahome* (Ayuntamiento de Ahome, 2005) as well as available information on its official website to demonstrate this is also the case for the IMPLAN Ahome. In addition, I will draw on discourse of the national association of planning institutes (AMIMP), because not only is IMPLAN a member of that organization, but its current director, Luis Carlos Lara Damken has been the president of AMIMP since 2019, before which he was a member of its council. It is safe to assume that Lara's visions and values as AMIMP's president would be reflected in his work as IMPLAN Ahome's director, considering the amount of time he has been in office and that he has remained consistent in his position.

I begin my analysis with the justification for the IMPLAN as articulated in the *Decreto Municipal N° 59 de Ahome*. The second paragraph of *Considering* (Considerations) says that municipalities are responsible for the “modernization, innovation and development of urban settlements, through the responsible and effective practices of the public function” (Ayuntamiento de Ahome, 2005:6, translated from Spanish). Here I highlight the use of several words that echo the language of private sector industries: innovation, effective, modernization, and development. The word “innovation” usually implies the introduction of new ideas, or to be in a state of constantly looking for improvement, but it can also be associated with the ability of companies to innovate or with the work of a great mind or a great group. “Effective” is also an imported concept from the private sector to the public sector that is oriented towards achieving results in the best way possible. This concept became engraved in the collective Mexican mind at the onset of neoliberalism when its proponents were

criticizing the slow and bureaucratic modes of local and state governance. The concept of “modernization” has a long history in rational planning and is prominent in strategic planning, typically referring to technical or technological improvements. And as for the word “development”, this suggests improvement but also progression and is associated with economic growth.

In the same document (*Decreto Municipal N° 59 de Ahome*), there is a section specifying the characteristics required of planning practice (Ayuntamiento de Ahome, 2005:8). It states that planning should be continuous (in the sense of transcending local government periods) which I personally think is positive, because some medium- or long-term projects need more time than the 3- or 4-years government cycle. What piqued my attention was the authors deliberately added a clause to transcend political ideologies. This can be beneficial because usually when a different political party takes leadership, they will stop all projects and agendas initiated by the previous administration simply because the new leadership does not like the previous government party.

Another desired characteristic for planning practice articulated in the *Decreto Municipal N° 59 de Ahome* is “for a long time” (p.8); i.e. to ensure the longevity of planning interventions. To achieve this, the institute needs to use “a strategic project focused on the social, environmental, and urban scales and guided by the vision for the city, and its vocation.” (Ayuntamiento de Ahome, 2005:8, translated from Spanish). The concept of a vision (commonly used in private companies in Mexico), and the concept of the city’s vocation reflects the focus on the economy in the IMPLAN document. The last characteristic indicated in the *Decreto Municipal N° 59 de Ahome* is that planning should be participative, “including the society and helping the public administration” (p. 8, translated from Spanish). Although the concept participative suggests the IMPLAN

prioritizes participation, the phrase does not hold much weight, as it is unclear what is meant by inclusion, who is supposed to be included, and how they should be included.

In its structure, the IMPLAN Ahome consists of three entities: the *Junta de Gobierno* (the Governing Council), the *Consejo Consultivo* (Consultative Council), and the *órgano operativo* (operative entity). The operative entity is supposed to be the technical arm of the IMPLAN and includes all the planning personnel, while the other two do not involve more than two people from inside the institute. The Consultative Council consists of a group of 25 people serving six-year terms who conduct analyses and reviews all the proposals and products developed by the institute. The representatives include four government members who work in planning or urbanism, four citizen representatives who work in professional colleges, four representatives of chambers of commerce and agriculture, three representatives of the main universities in the municipality, two representatives of NGOs that work on economic municipal development, six elected citizen representatives, and two employees of the IMPLAN (the director and the vice-director).

On the other hand, the Governing Council, which is the superior entity with ultimate decision-making authority in the IMPLAN, is made up of 10 people. The municipal president of Ahome serves as the head of the council, and the IMPLAN director serves as the technical secretary, four council members represent municipal units, and four citizens from the consultative council: the president, a citizen representative, a representative of the NGOs working on economic development, and a representative of professional colleges.

These councils intended to democratize the planning and decision-making process in Ahome in ways that include citizens, making the institute closer to society and better able to serve its needs. As innovative as this structure is, it still corresponds with strategic

planning because it brings together the most important stakeholders and sectors in the municipality, including the public administration, in order to create a diverse group of experts. This can look inclusive and controlled at the same time. By choosing who is worthy of giving their opinion based on their relevance to planning and their expert knowledge, these representatives start to become an elite group inside the planning field. They become the group that always participates in everything and whose opinions are valued most highly. Ultimately, most of the general public are left outside these entities.

The information displayed on the IMPLAN website (<https://www.implanahome.gob.mx/home.html>) is also illustrative of its strategic disposition. To begin, the “About” section of the website includes their Goal, Mission, Vision, and Guiding Values, mimicking the page design and page contents of a private company. In terms of the IMPLAN’s goal, the page states that besides of being an entity that does research and future oriented analyses related to urban development, it is an agency focused on social participation and inquiry, thus foregrounding participation as a central element of the organization’s work. This is reflected in their mission statement, as it starts with the phrase, “being an entity with a broad citizen representation that will guarantee through urban planning, the necessary proposals to promote modernization, innovation, and development of human settlements...” (IMPLAN, n.d., translated from Spanish). Here it is worth noting that the term “broad representation” limits participation to the concept of democratic representationality. Choosing a representative of each group does not guarantee that the group is indeed included. Additionally, which groups are represented is also a relevant question.

IMPLAN’s vision focuses, again, on becoming an entity that makes proposals to improve the life quality of the citizens it serves. As such, the website highlights the need for a sustainable urban development where economic development, urban development,

and the environment are equally valued. Here I point out the forgotten social dimension of sustainable development, which is essential for improving the life quality of people. In that same vein, I argue we need to overcome our obsession with the equal treatment of aspects and go for a substantive treatment.

IMPLAN's web page also shows great commitment to transparency, which is a value that was promoted by the neoliberal reforms to create accountability and improve the efficiency of public agencies. In fact, in Mexico, all public entities on all the levels of government are required to have a Transparency section. On websites, the transparency section normally takes the user to the *Plataforma Nacional de Transparencia* (national platform of transparency), where the federal government has standardized the information that needs to become public. In addition, the IMPLAN Ahome is constantly using its page to share their products, documentation, and maps in a friendly format to download. On top of that, on its page it displays invitations to participate in planning processes that are about to start. I have been visiting its page frequently for this project, and it normally always starts with the "Home" page, but at the beginning of the month of July, the first thing to appear on the page was a flyer informing the users of the beginning of the process for creating the "Ahome Municipal Program for Land use, Urban Development, and the Environment", and giving users details of how to participate should they want to.

Furthermore, the home page includes a banner that directs people to the *Guía Informativa* (informative guide) of the municipal program. This 'guide' is a presentation with basic information, including a slide named "How can I participate in the planning process?" (text originally in spanish). The guide states that participation is open for all citizens, and that ways to participate include contacting the planning institute directly (via email, phone, or going to the office), being mindful of project updates and the events on

the webpage or participating through official channels by getting in touch with a representative if they belong to a group that has representation on the IMPLAN's Consultative Council. This shows openness and flexibility to inform the public and to receive comments, which is essential for democratic participation. But this is just the beginning. If the participation process is left like it is now, IMPLAN is putting all the responsibility of participation and information on the citizens, which means that participation will remain at the level of tokenism.

The figure below (Fig. 5) is a screen capture from the IMPLAN's webpage. At the top, it states that this is a "Public Notice" dated June 30th of 2023. The text then continues, stating that "The IMPLAN notifies the general public of the start of the planning process to elaborate the Ahome Municipal Program for Land use, Urban Development, and the Environment." After a brief explanation of what the program entails, the notice includes the webpage and office addresses where the public can get in contact with IMPLAN staff in case they want more information.

AVISO PÚBLICO

30 de junio de 2023

EI H. AYUNTAMIENTO DE AHOME
de manera conjunta con el

**CONSEJO DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL,
DESARROLLO URBANO Y VIVIENDA DEL MUNICIPIO DE AHOME**
a través del

INSTITUTO MUNICIPAL DE PLANEACIÓN DE AHOME,
de acuerdo a las facultades y atribuciones conferidas
en el artículo 125 de la Constitución Política del Estado de Sinaloa,
y los artículos: 12, 22, 38, 42, 45, 71, 96, 97, 98, 117, 287, 288 y 289
de la Ley de Ordenamiento Territorial y Desarrollo Urbano del Estado de Sinaloa,

AVISA AL PÚBLICO EN GENERAL

DEL INICIO DEL PROCESO DE PLANEACIÓN DEL

PROGRAMA MUNICIPAL DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL, DESARROLLO URBANO Y MEDIO AMBIENTE DE AHOME;

documento rector que integra el conjunto de políticas, lineamientos, estrategias, reglas técnicas y disposiciones encaminadas a ordenar y regular los sistemas de relaciones territoriales que se establecen entre los asentamientos humanos del municipio, así como los recursos aprovechables para las funciones urbanas, para los próximos 20 años. Y que a la vez corresponde a la actualización del Programa Municipal de Desarrollo Urbano de Ahome vigente; el cual fue aprobado por el H. Ayuntamiento y publicado como Decreto Municipal el 15 de mayo del 2015 en el Periódico Oficial el Estado de Sinaloa

Para mayor información sobre los objetivos, justificación, alcances y recursos metodológicos para este proceso de planeación podrá consultar detalles a través del sitio web:

www.implanahome.gob.mx

o dirigirse a los siguientes domicilio o buzones:

En oficina: Instituto Municipal de Planeación de Ahome,
Niños Héroes 615 sur, plaza real, L-12 Altos, Colonia centro, C.P. 81200.
En horario de atención de Lunes a Viernes de 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Teléfonos: 66 88 12 59 90 / 99.
Correo electrónico: contacto@implanahome.gob.mx

Figure 5. Informative Flyer for the Municipal Program for Land use, Urban Development, and the Environment. Source: IMPLAN Ahome, home page (<https://implanahome.gob.mx/home.html>)

In addition to the IMPLAN discourse, AMIMP also promotes a preference for strategic planning. On its website, this organization claims that “strategic planning with an integral focus is a trend in the world that is gaining force in Mexico” (n.d.). It continues, saying that the most important cities in the world have specialized planning entities, limited waste of public resources, and stay true to long-range visions. In promoting strategic planning, AMIMP links this planning model to practices followed by the big cities of the world, as if saying that in order to keep up with the globalization and in order to be up to date, this is the strategy that Mexico needs to follow. By focusing on “limiting waste of public resources” on its website, AMIMP also shows its commitment to efficiency in the public sector. The AMIMP website argues that in Mexico, planning is becoming a public interest concern, as more cities and citizens are initiating new relationships and communication channels to reflect on the world around them and make proposals. This idea is consistent with scholarly discussions about how globalization and technology is leading to new forms of participation in planning, illustrating how planners and planning agencies are now subject to more public discussion and greater scrutiny.

Finally, the AMIMP website statement regarding the role of IMPLANs in Mexico is worth highlighting. AMIMP defines IMPLANs as a:

Decentralized public entity, municipal consulting agency for planning. It is autonomous in decision-making: it has its own property and legal personality, and it is led by a council with majoritarian citizen participation. They are a space designed for permanent strategic thinking in order to achieve long-term public policies. It is a center for thinking and research with a scientific orientation, that makes studies and prepares projects mainly on municipal topics. (AMIMP, n.d.) (Translated from Spanish by author)

The mention of the citizen led councils in the third line illustrated how participation is viewed under strategic planning, but it also prompts the question as to what this organization understands as citizenship. This definition of IMPLAN’s reveals

how citizenship is understood as a formal concept, as I discussed in the first chapter. Finally, the inclusion of “scientific orientation” in the definition of IMPLANs also alludes to the rational planning heritage of the current strategic planning in Mexico, revealing how strategic planning relies on technical rationality while also seeking legitimacy through limited forms of public participation.

Chapter 4: Citizen Participation in the IMPLAN Ahome

Participation in public planning is a complex process. In the following sections, I will discuss the vision and assumptions guiding citizen participation in the IMPLAN Ahome. I organize the chapter starting with the six aspects of participation I mentioned in Chapter 2: IMPLAN's general view about participation; the methods used; the communication strategy; the intended and usual subjects for participation; the approach towards conflict; and the values surrounding the participation approach. Following this analysis, I will review the self-perceptions of IMPLAN planners about the role of the institution and the planning practices used to facilitate participation. I will conclude this chapter by analyzing the IMPLAN's barriers and limitations in promoting participation.

I start every subsequent section by first stating guiding questions for the analysis, then I examine the discourse in the planning documents, and the comments made by the planners I interviewed. It is important to note that the planning documents and the interviews are originally in Spanish, so all the following quotes are translations.

ENGAGEMENT/PARTICIPATION IN THE IMPLAN AHOME

The guiding questions for this section are: What is the general view about participation in the IMPLAN? What is the perceived relevance of participation and the main ideas surrounding it?

The PDDU of Topolobampo (2009) and the PMDU of Ahome (2015) make a clearer reference to participation than the PPDU of Los Mochis (2023). In the first two documents it is possible to see the relevance of participation in their creation as well as the role of participation in their proposed strategies and actions. Starting with the PDDU, citizen participation is presented as fundamental to determining the activities of government (p. 107). This statement leads one to think that participation is present in the

entirety of the document, even more so when it says that all the planning actions presented “are not the result of isolated proposals, but the reflection of citizen’s concerns to resolve their problems, taken from public consultation forums” (p.107). Indeed, the document continuously refers to information obtained from the citizenry.

In the PMDU of Ahome, there is no specific paragraph talking about its understanding of participation for the program. However, the PMDU does mention that the success of modern public management lies in the establishment of mechanisms and spaces for responsible citizen participation. Consequently, the document integrates participation in its different stages: diagnosis, strategies, monitoring, and evaluation. In addition, the PMDU states that several future plans will be developed by integrating academic institutions and other non-governmental organizations. The discussions of future planning imperatives include suggestions to consult citizens before defining and publishing the planning projects.

In contrast, although including an entire page to explain the process of citizen participation, the PPDU of Los Mochis (2023) scarcely mentions it again in the rest of the plan document. The document does take into consideration the input of those interested citizens that reached out to IMPLAN for comments, but the writing mostly focuses on how it published and distributed the document to a diversity of groups. This difference between the PPDU of Los Mochis and the other two can be attributed to the highly technical characteristics of this plan, but it is also indicative of a new approach towards participation in the IMPLAN.

Participation in planning is a topic frequently discussed in the IMPLAN Ahome (Interviewee # 2), so what do the planners think of it? There is an overall agreement in considering participation as a must when planning a city, but interviewees differ in their perspective on the value of participation. Some planners focus this relevance on the

citizen and citizenry, highlighting that “in the first place, nobody else knows their city, nobody else knows their territory as them [the citizens]” (Interviewee # 1); or “All the things that we do in the institute are for the citizens, so taking them into consideration, their needs, their diversity, is fundamental to create everything that we make here” (Interviewee # 2).

Others are more pragmatic in the sense that they see citizen participation as relevant to help their work as public planners: “I do believe [participation] is a necessary input to orient maybe not your technical work, but what to select to develop your technical work” (Interviewee # 3). And

The importance [of participation] lies in complementing our technicism with experience, right? [...] being participative takes you to improve, to try to improve your performance in what you do, and to have an urban planning product truly suitable to your land’s needs, I mean of the people, the city, etcetera” (Interviewee # 4).

The planners agree that the first step to achieve citizen participation is to provide the public with all the necessary information about the project or plan in question. Only by receiving clear, transparent, and sufficient information can people express themselves better and give more meaningful opinions. Accordingly, the planners recognize their obligation to inform society in the best way possible given the availability of resources provided by the institution.

The institute’s obligation is rooted in the citizen participation practice, its main task is to generate information for that decision making, obviously [...] the social actors [...] will participate from different perspectives, from different interests, and with different possibilities regarding the information they possess, and the information they have, totally (Interviewee # 5).

This planner’s statement is thus reminiscent of the communicative planning approach, but the other notions of participation articulated by planners reveal that the IMPLAN’s planning approach is strategic rather than communicative. At the beginning

of this section, I mentioned how the PPDU of Los Mochis, which was just published this year, reflects a new approach to participation in the IMPLAN Ahome. All of the planners interviewed commented that they rely on their consultative council to promote participation. In the second chapter of this thesis, I described that this consultative council is composed of citizens who belong mostly to the private sector, the academy, or some civil society organizations. As Interviewee five reflected “The topic of citizen participation also refers to a process of co-responsibility from the chambers, the professional organizations, [...] and all, all the organized citizens in those groups [...]”

The same interviewee explained that this focus on co-responsibility is not intended to evade responsibility on the part of the IMPLAN, but rather to generate a collaborative process to develop the municipality (Interviewee #5). As Gonzalez (2001) explains, co-responsibility is a term associated with strategic planning. Furthermore, while strategic planning might pass as democratic because it really does include citizens, the fact that only a select few can have real impact means the elites hold most of the power over planning in Ahome. Reducing participation to this process is not desirable if we want just and inclusive cities.

The interviews also revealed other ideas that indicate the presence of strategic thought, some of them deeply rooted in rational planning. Participation in the IMPLAN Ahome for the general people has been mostly reduced to giving feedback. In the most recent planning document (PPDU of Los Mochis), citizen participation was limited to publishing the draft plan and opening different options for people to give feedback. In the interviews, two planners made comments that allowed me to enlighten the reasoning behind this change. They discussed the need to be careful when talking about participation, mostly because they believe the mainstream ideas are superfluous and even absurd. They also claimed planners do not usually have a good reason for implementing

participation mainstream strategies; instead, public planners tend to do workshops and surveys just because they want to justify projects or need to fulfill a requirement.

One of those planners strongly argued against the direct involvement of citizens in decision-making process. They mentioned that there is really no need to ask each person in a neighborhood if they want or like something that the professional has already identified as good for society. I believe it is important to share the words of this thinking, because this shows the deeper reasoning behind the new approach to participation in IMPLAN.

This citizen participation's concept I believe it is obsolete but also unethical, where they say 'oh we are going to make a citizen participation exercise where we are going to ask, in this low-income neighborhood where there is no drinkable water [...] ask the people if they would like to have drinkable water' man! Everybody said yes, man that is, that is... in addition to being unethical it is little professional [...] I believe that can even come as grotesque, right? [...] I mean it is sadder, that you have not identified what they need, that is, that is worrisome, alright? [...] Then I believe the topic of decision-making in the territory also refers to an exercise where you as a technic should not approach with the question of 'would you like this?' [...] (Interviewee #5).

Another thing that stands out in those comments is the view of the public planner's job. While the wording points to a strongly rational planner mindset because the planner defines themselves as technicians and experts who should be able to unilaterally decide things based on their expertise, the subtext of this statement reveals to the premises of a strategic planning approach. This planner sees opening participation as inefficient and a waste of resources, especially time. But the examples they give to prove this only describe trivial ways of participation, and it looks like they do not conceive of other ways of doing planning. In this case, Fung's (2015:21) quote fits well, as he describes that for some planners, "empowered, nontrivial forms of participation exceed the horizons of their political imagination". At the same time, during the interview the

planner mentioned that even though IMPLAN has experts, this does not automatically translate to only requiring expert opinions from the people; nor do people need to have a PhD or a masters' degree to participate. However, they do emphasize the need to thoroughly inform citizens so they can give a more pertinent opinion.

Even though everything indicates that IMPLAN is now primarily reducing participation to solicitation of citizen feedback, the planners suggest that participation is not a one-way street. The institute also has the responsibility to properly respond to citizen inquiries or commentaries. In this sense, following Arnstein's ladder, the IMPLAN is in a state of tokenism, corresponding to the category of consultation with the general citizenry and placation towards the select members of their consultative council and the groups they represent.

Citizen [...] participation is not only about, giving us the information so to speak, it is not only 'citizen consultation' [...] but for us to also provide the citizenry with an answer, being able to tell them 'Oh, with the information that you gave me, I integrated it like this or like that' ah... 'I created this project, look, here it is' [...] thus from my point of view this is the exchange [...] also having that communication, that interest in [...] in keeping track (...) or if they weren't integrated [the citizen's comments] to explain why" (Interviewee # 1)

I will close this section with the IMPLAN planners' notion of the need of having participation in all the planning-related projects. Most interviewees agreed participation in planning is contextual, and that not all planning projects need the same levels and forms of participation. There was only one planner that considered participation as always needed. However, they clarified this applied to their specific area of practice.

Yes, because [...] you can consult the statistics, and then you grab those statistics and you go to the field, isn't it? You compare what they say to you with what really happens and, with your research you create a statement, you create your projects, your strategies, and you take those strategies again to the field and ask 'look here misters, we brought this, what do you think? Is this alright? Is it wrong? What do we need to add? Then you need for people to take a seat" (Interviewee # 3).

When the projects are labeled as more technical, the planners tend to think participation is less necessary than when the focus is more policy-related. “I do believe [the need for participation] depends on the project (...) it depends on a lot about how technical or not is your project” (Interviewee #2). “There are some other [projects] like the risk assessment Atlas, that is already very technical, and so it would be really hard [to include the general citizen]” (Interviewee #1). In the case of physical planning interventions, the planners argued that the process is much more efficient and faster if participation is limited to only knowledgeable citizens.

Furthermore, the planners reasoned that participation is less necessary when the planning related issue is not important enough to have impact on society:

Because there can be a development project...exclusively private and that does not interfere significantly for the citizens, then I don't believe [participation] is that relevant but [...] it can also be private and have an impact over daily life of the citizens, or over the environment, then yes, you would need consultation” (Interviewee # 2).

Lastly, when the projects are broader in scope and covering a larger geographic area, IMPLAN needs to adjust participation based on logistical limitations. Conversely, participation might be more feasible in a small community:

Depending on the size they could need a smaller approach, for example for the [...] rural localities [...] going to the area was more feasible [...] we sit with them to talk, to make conversation, for them to give us their opinions, etcetera. But when we talk about a city like Los Mochis, or even Topolobampo it is a little bit more because we are speaking about a whole lot of people, so there we try to focus our approach towards professionals, because otherwise we would end with a sea of opinions and we would never really finish (Interviewee # 1)

In this section, I provided a general overview of participation in the IMPLAN Ahome. In the following sub sections, I will go deeper into the remaining aspects of participation (Methods; Communication; Subjects; Approach; and Values) in both the three planning documents and the interviews with planners.

Participation Methods

The guiding questions for this subsection are: What is the general strategy and methods the IMPLAN uses to include participation in planning? And what is the rationale behind it?

I already mentioned how the PDDU of Topolobampo (2009) and the PMDU of Ahome (2015) integrate citizen participation in a more defined way than the PPDU of Los Mochis (2023). However, while the PDDU mentions doing public consultation forums and summarize the results in the document, there is not a description of how the IMPLAN conducted the forums, how many it did, or any other details about the methodology. The PMDU provides more information on the methods used, but the reader needs to go deep into the body of the document to understand how it included participation. On the contrary, the PPDU of Los Mochis, despite including the least level of participation in the overall creation of the plan, does contain a specific section to explain in detail how it approached the citizen participation requirement. This is interesting because in more recent times, the IMPLAN has been paying serious attention to how it communicates with the public (due to its new approach to participation, I will talk more about it in the next sub section), so it makes sense to have this improvement in the document.

The general strategy for the PMDU of Ahome was to share diverse ways for citizens and groups to reach the IMPLAN and provide comments or proposals, like via email, telephone, in-person, or through their website. Once staff members had this information, they incorporated the input and presented the plan in workshops. After their presentation, they divided the participants into tables with specific topics. They did this for the problem diagnosis and for development of planning strategies (two workshops in total). The plan also mentions doing focus groups and interviews during the workshop

oriented towards diagnosing the planning problem, but it is unclear how or when. This matches with what Interviewee #1 shared:

We opened different ways for [people] to give us that information [...] one time we created a form in the webpage, specifically so one could write, look ‘I’m *fulanito de tal* [X person]’, or just leave it anonymously, my email *perenganito* [X name] in case you want to answer to my participation, and [the person] introduced their written participation in something like a form

This same informant (Interviewee # 1) shares other types of citizen engagement the IMPLAN conducted in prior years. There was a time when IMPLAN was updating director plans in the localities of the municipality, and this planner remembers doing several workshops “sitting with local people” and receiving an “overflowing amount of information”. They emphasize the hard work these workshops represented, but also mention that “at the end of it, you can see the results, well not with all of them, but there is, there is this closeness, this communication with, with the people [...] it was really, really nice (laughs)” (Interviewee # 1).

This quote reveals planners’ willingness to communicate with people despite the hard work this represents. However, the IMPLAN decided to change its approach, as the planners realized that “yes there were a lot of opinions, but there were also a lot of opinions that... it is going to sound bad but there were a lot of *little straws* [filler/non relevant information]” (Interviewee # 1). However, one-time events like these workshops cannot immediately provide all the information required to develop the plan, for several reasons. To mention a few, many citizens are wary of government officials. It is unlikely that citizens will engage and openly share their lives and thoughts with someone they only just met. The role of the planner is important for facilitating the discussions, being mindful of power differentials and contextual elements that might affect the participation.

And the session must be organized in such a way that participants are not burdened by the process.

Another planner I interviewed contributed an interesting critique of mainstream methods by reflecting on the need to find new ways to conduct citizen participation.

I believe sometimes that, the formality of those spaces, are a little condescending, I mean sometimes we create like forums and these spaces as...as if saying 'I want to get this answer, I'm going to do a workshop' right? But I do believe society's participation is very important in... in planning channels, but I do believe we have a really big challenge as technicians, diversify the way in which we catch that participation (Interviewee # 4).

In the last few years, the IMPLAN decided to make changes to their approach towards citizen participation. Citizens are invited to get involved only after there is a draft of the planning document, since the technical team is [legally] obliged to produce a proposal for the IMPLAN consultative council. After this, the IMPLAN begins the participation process with a public announcement on the official IMPLAN website, a local newspaper, and via the consultative council (Interviewee # 1).

The PPDU of Los Mochis (2023) follows a similar process. First, IMPLAN created a proposal and shared it broadly via the municipality's official website and the IMPLAN official page, and through its consultative council and other governmental councils that include representation from the main economic sectors, professionals related to the construction industry (like architects or civil engineers), universities, and citizen groups. The plan gave the public 45 natural days to submit inquiries, comments, information, or suggestions. And the institute opened all channels (phone, email, physical office) for direct contact and received 4 suggestions, held four meetings with landowners, and did two meetings with one citizen group.

The most significant change in its participatory approach started with the reconfiguration of the relationship between the institute and its consultative council,

creating a new role of the council as a promoter to boost participation in planning processes, instead of just monitoring the work of the IMPLAN. The council's new role as promoters distributes the responsibility for fostering participation to the private sector, the academy, and other professional and civil society organizations. That way, some of the burden of encouraging participation was lifted from the IMPLAN:

[Now] you [the council] are going to share it [the plan], you are going to explain it, I mean inside [...] the organization that you represent or the institutions, but also, I will give you the materials in case you want to upload it to your social media, in case you want to organize a workshop, in case you want to develop a specific topic with your group (Interviewee # 5).

The IMPLAN does more in practice than what is referred to in the PPDU of Los Mochis. Aside from relying on its council, staff members continue to implement other participation strategies. They present the planning program in different places, like universities, professional organizations, or any other organizations that ask for clarification. Some planners mentioned conducting surveys or organizing focus groups, but it was unclear if that was recent or not. One planner described a workshop with citizens and expressed how important it was for people to be open and participate in the conversation. However, the interviewee argued that successful participation requires the planners to show how they care about the opinions of the public, and to demonstrate how the planning outcome will be positive for them (Interviewee # 3).

While IMPLAN staff members have an increasingly positive attitude towards participation, the change in their participation strategies indicates a shift towards more rational strategic planning. What can this regression away from communicative planning strategies be attributed to? One factor is the number of planners working for the IMPLAN. Originally, the institute had 14 members, but it is now reduced to half, which significantly impacts the institute's scope. While the institute's director explains this

downsizing was not due to budgetary constraints, but this decision could still be attributed to a neoliberal drive to reduce the size of official bureaucracy.

This change in approach can be understood through the neoliberalization of government, because by constraining participation, it is separating planning from politics. On one hand, it is limiting planners' ability to reflect on their real impact on everyday lives and their responsibility to foster deep changes in society. And on the other hand, it is also limiting citizens' ability to influence public decisions. In other words, by reducing participation to feedback via controlled channels, it is defusing the political aspect of participation.

Communication

The questions for this subsection are: How relevant is communication for the IMPLAN Ahome? What communication strategies is it implementing and what is the reasoning behind them?

Communication, including citizen outreach and sharing of information, are essential in the IMPLAN Ahome, especially in the last few years. This is related to the government's responsibility towards transparency and openness, which are key values emphasized by the New Public Management (NPM) framework. The IMPLAN planners seem to have a deep commitment to improving transparency and communication to inform the citizens, indicating that IMPLAN has an "obligation to open communication channels [and] innovate in the communication processes" (Interviewee # 5). All the planners interviewed firmly believe in the importance of effective communication to foster citizen participation, because "you are not going to ask [the citizens] without this process of, of information and context" (Interviewee # 5). As Interviewee number 2 suggested "I believe that for an effective citizen participation, it is yes or yes, being

informed, the access to information, the sharing of information and [...] having spaces to discuss and exchange a little about these opinions” (Interviewee # 2).

Although IMPLAN has focused its efforts on improving information sharing, the planners mention that communicating with citizens is one of the biggest challenges they face. Communication takes place between two or more people, entities, or groups, it includes not only sending a message but being able to receive and understand it, and thus producing an exchange between the involved parties. As Interviewee number 1 said “I could say that the main challenge would be communication, because one as a technician can think it is so simple, this is like this [...] but ultimately, conveying that to the citizens could not be so simple (Interviewee #1). This means that planners who have a more technical background struggle to translate their technical knowledge for communication with the public, even though they have been training to do this.

We technicians tend to be really pompous with terms, [we need] a more colloquial level [...] in fact there have been times when we say ‘look, this instrument, read it to your mom, to your sister, or to someone else to check if it is still understandable’ (Interviewee # 1).

Besides improving the way they are presenting the information to the public, the channels to share and made available that information are of utmost importance, because by opening or closing those channels, they can limit the outreach to certain populations. Today, the planners in IMPLAN are proud of the openness of the institution to provide information to the public and receive comments from anyone without restriction. “We accept [the citizens’ proposals] as they are, in that case we are very open regarding to, to gathering (...) they can also send a ‘whatsapp’ message to the architect [the director]” (Interviewee # 1).

Right now, IMPLAN makes use of its official website to share information and allow for input from the public. However, it does not have online social networks. One

planner mentioned that some years ago, the institute tried to use social media channels, but this required a great time commitment. Also, these communication channels did not generate the interaction they wanted or expected. While I agree that managing social networks is a job for a communication professional, today a lot of people spend hours of their lives on social media, and they also receive information through them. It might be worthwhile considering this channel again, as the institute would reach a broader audience. As of now, its audience is limited to those who already have some interest in planning because only those people are checking the official websites of governmental agencies.

Lastly, all the planning documents I reviewed include the need to distribute the plan. However, the outreach approaches articulated in the plans differ. Out of the three documents, the PDDU of Topolobampo (2009) only makes a brief call for creating a solid outreach strategy to disseminate the plan, while the PMDU of Ahome (2015) places more emphasis on sharing information about the planning program and the different stages of its implementation. This PMDU reaches the citizens to receive comments for program development, but their communication strategies focus more on outreach once the projects are operational, stating that the evaluation and monitoring of the results need to be shared periodically through public and citizen organizations and published on the official websites. On another hand, the PDDU of Los Mochis develops its whole citizen participation strategy around the dissemination of the preliminary plan and the opening of diverse ways for the public to give input.

Subjects

In this subsection I look at: who is IMPLAN and its planners referring to when talking about participation? And who is actually included in the IMPLAN participatory processes?

To tackle this, I consider relevant the distinctions between the terms used for members of the public. Especially in the planning documents, I looked for the use of the terms: citizen/citizenry, sector, actor/actors, participant, and community, within the context of discussions about participation. The most used words were citizen and actor, while community or participants were only briefly mentioned or not mentioned at all. The PDDU of Topolobampo (2009) uses the word citizen only to refer to the citizen council, which they specifically propose be included in the participatory process. Citizenry, on the other hand, is used in a broader sense, referring to an aggregate of citizens that provide raw or unorganized information in the early stages of the plan. The PMDU of Ahome uses the term similarly, although the stages for citizen input are different. In the PMDU Ahome case, the word citizenry in the context of participation is mainly used for those instances where people are restricted to just giving their opinions on an almost finished project, and this input is frequently also limited in time and scope.

In the PMDU of Ahome we can see that citizens and citizenry are used as umbrella terms in reference to the general public, but also as containers to encompass all non-governmental groups in society. For example, it mentions that “The citizens developed proposals in the workshops” (IMPLAN Ahome, 2015:72). However, the participants of those workshops are specific actors, predominantly businesspeople, academics, or “related and interested” citizens to/in urban development. This insistence on interested citizens (it is mentioned several times in the document) indicates an intentionality to focus more on those people with a “legitimate” stake on the issue, but it

can also be understood to say that the absence of certain people is due to them not being interested in participating. This takes the responsibility away from the institution to invite a diversity of citizens. In the words of Interviewee number 4, “I do believe that yes, sometimes we are waiting more for the initiative of certain groups”.

In the case of the PPDU of Los Mochis (2023), citizens are seen in two ways: as the general population that has the right to give input if they abide by the terms and conditions set by the institute, and as the members of IMPLAN’s councils representing different sectors of society. The term ‘Sectors’ is always associated with productive sectors, and it is frequently used to describe economic interests. In the rare cases when the term features within a participation context, it is used to call for coordination between different groups based on their responsibility to co-develop economic development strategies. Meanwhile, the term ‘Actors’ is used to refer to specific groups that hold a stake in the development processes of the municipality, including government officials, businesspeople, academics, neighbors, and even members of the public with an interest in the program and projects. In the plan documents, actors are accorded status that is higher than citizens or the citizenry, suggesting that their participation is deemed more important and requires focused attention.

The PMDU of Ahome specifies strategies for urban and economic development, and the first step is to identify and reach out to all the potential actors. The main proposed projects in this planning program consist of the development of delimited urban areas. In this case, the program states that the government must minimally promote the participation of all the landowners, occupants, and owners of rights in that specific area. The PMDU also looks for the government to foster these actors’ organization, and recognizes they hold a collective knowledge that is not inferior to technical knowledge. However, it is worth noting how these considerations are only mentioned in the context

of these elite actors, not in other projects within the plan that involve other members of the public.

As I mentioned in the previous subsections, IMPLAN has been implementing a new approach towards participation, where they rely on strategic collaborators.

We said, hey, well if we want this to happen let's make allies [...] strategic ones, and let's involve them, to the people of the city that makes things happen, right? Then we grabbed the project and gave it to all the people who sometimes whisper in the ears of the municipal presidents, of the majors, the governors [...] and that's when we made a 'click' and said, hey, look, this framework is really good (Interviewee # 4).

This change to partnerships with strategic collaborators came in response to increasing pressure to produce positive results with less effort and less resources, and it has ensured that more people are now involved in the planning process. In addition to revealing the IMPLAN's strategic planning approach, these changes are bringing them closer to how a business operates. As one of the interviewed planners remarked "I believe that can be a business-like approach that we have been adopting, because precisely for the topic of participation, we look to create those networks with institutions, with specific groups" (Interviewee # 4).

Once they decided to implement this strategy, and considering the planners observe more participation now compared to the past, who is being included? Is there a diversity of actors? Is the IMPLAN reaching the general citizenry? While specific groups should be given a space to express their concerns, it becomes a problem of inclusion and justice when only elite groups are getting a voice. When I asked about who participates in the planning processes of the IMPLAN, planners agreed that the private sector is getting more involved, followed by the professional organizations of architects and engineers, and the academy. They mention that "we also work a lot with [...] occasionally with the

people who are developing land in the city [...] with very specific people who develops the city” (Interviewee # 4).

Nevertheless, there have been times and projects when the IMPLAN has included a broader spectrum of participants, and times when they have reached marginalized groups to listen to them. One planner shared how the citizen workshops and forums are not a great option for the IMPLAN and that they have been trying to change the approach. They said:

In the end we always called for the same actors, I mean, as much as we say that we want to do [the process] super democratic, we already know who is going to come (...) we know that people will come from the ‘*canacintra*’ [private sector organism], the professional organizations, and 2 or 3 enthusiastic men that always come to the forums we hold (Interviewee # 4).

And as Interviewee number three explained:

Generally, the people who come here are people who have a little bit of a specialized knowledge (...) or a specific interest [like] from universities, people like you who are doing research, or like people who want to know what is happening because they have a parcel (Interviewee # 3)

Ultimately, if IMPLAN does not develop a more effective strategy to diversify participation in the planning process, only those groups referenced in the quotes above will respond to the public notices for consultation. This is something that a planner interviewed mentioned, but which was a concern to other planners as well: “ If you go to the economic sector, well obviously [they] have a focus towards a specific issue, but if you go to the neighborhoods, to the housewives, to retired seniors [...] that is another information, very different to create a planning strategy” (Interviewee #1).

Approach

According to the literature, the approach of a participatory process towards conflict determines the possibility of fostering deep change. So, what is the general

approach for conflict in the IMPLAN's participatory experiences? What is the attitude of the IMPLAN's planners about conflict with groups and between them?

Only the PMDU of Ahome (2015) has considerations about conflict or consensus/agreements. This program aims to build a responsible and participatory democracy, which means planners see a need to reach agreements and evaluate the implementation of such agreements. This conceptualization of planning reveals a tendency towards classic communicative planning ideas, but the IMPLAN's actual approach is more closely related to Innes' consensus planning and strategic planning. The PMDU looks for consensus in all their participatory activities, either to identify problems or to decide on a strategy and its operationalization. One of the main goals of the program is to build agreements between actors in order to implement the proposed projects for the collective benefit. With this, the IMPLAN hopes that the actors become co-responsible in doing their part and monitoring the outcomes.

The PMDU claims that in order to make a strategy or project work, the participating actors need to reach agreements and maintain them. It is a must to identify all the actors with a stake in the issue and recognize their legitimate and particular interests. The actors' participation needs to be totally transparent and informed, and they all should obtain just benefits. This reminds me of Purcell's (2009: 156) reference to Innes' model as "one in which various stakeholders work together to produce a creative new solution that is perceived by each group to benefit its self-interest".

So, what does the program say about conflicts? The program begins by recognizing there is always a risk of problems being present whenever there is a discussion between stakeholders. That is why the program proposes inviting an objective external mediator with no interest in the project. This external party should have some technical authority, and look for the achievement of collective interests, conflict

resolution, and enforcement of sanctions in case of going against the agreements. However, we should remember that the IMPLAN's conception of participation privileges specific elite groups, so in this case, it is possible that it sees all the participants on a similar footing and the authority's role is to just mediate the discussions to reach a collective agreement. But even when a participatory exercise only integrates people with power, this does not mean power differentials will not ultimately shape the agreements. While the distancing from traditional rational planning is positive, the privileging of the voices of those who are already privileged does not change anything in society, quite to the contrary.

In practice, when the IMPLAN planning team has conducted participatory exercises, they have acted as moderators and mediators. One planner shared that in the case of workshops, there were always people who participated more and wanted to lead the discussion, causing rivalries in the group:

It was common these [...] rivalries, I mean 'I don't agree with this, I don't agree with that' and it ended with a discussion and debate between them [...] and it was our job as moderators to keep redirecting the topics back to the focus of the workshop, I do remember that it was, it was kind of difficult, there was a time when someone shouted at me (laughs), some misters would get really passionate (Interviewee # 1).

Based on this, what is the vision of the planners towards conflict? The comments I received indicate that, if possible, they try to avoid conflicts. On the other hand, they are used to conflicts, so if they arise in the planning process, they face them straight on. "There can be different points of view, there are, there will be, and there must continue to be, that's part of the city making construction, eh... to dissent, to be in disagreement, to build over different points of view" (Interviewee #5). And whenever there is a complaint during a consultation process, "it is as simple as providing us with their reasons [and] we correct it, no issues" (Interviewee # 1). This matches the comments from another planner

when referring to groups or individuals that have been questioning the projects: “We attend to them directly with an interview here in the office, or we go somewhere to a meeting, or we prepare a presentation, but we are really, really direct in that respect” (Interviewee # 4).

However, planning can potentially affect many interests, and bigger issues are sure to occur. In that case, the planners explain they follow two methods that begin with dialogue. The first method just involves continuing to meet with them and provide further information. They also rely on the citizen members of their consultative council to intervene and support the planning projects. The other method is to simply dismiss their complaints if the planners deem there are not good enough reasons to support the complaints.

Finally, conflicts can also arise between the planning team and the members of the consultative council. Yet in this case, these disagreements are more welcomed as they engage in discussions.

It comes in handy that, that they make use of their voice, that is really the most important because if we don’t have those, those confrontations eh, we don’t have nothing then, and the importance of having those clashes so to say [...] is also useful to us to allow us to explain the topics that we know (Interviewee # 1)

Values

The last category for participation in planning I will discuss in this chapter is ‘values’. Although not always evident, every action is based on a web of interrelated values. So, what are the ground values of the IMPLAN Ahome? How is participation related to them?

I am especially interested in the values needed for a co-productive, participatory model, so I paid particular attention to the terms inclusion and justice when these

appeared in the documents. However, there are other values revealed in the planning documents and in the discourse of the planners, like equity and respect. While neither the PDDU of Topolobampo (2009) nor the PPDU of Los Mochis (2023) make any reference to values for participation (probably because they are more technical in nature), the PMDU of Ahome (2015) contains several references to them, starting with this statement:

[The program] looks to impose a new institutional order that determines a different urban nature, characterized by certainty for the citizens, efficient processes, effective transportation, sustainable use of natural resources, and a more just society [this new order] must be understood as a regulatory system with clear, transparent, equitable, and evaluable norms to guarantee the achievement of the plan's proposals (p. 100).

One of my first impressions about that statement was that it contained references to several planning models. Indeed, the plan later states that planning must be flexible and that the new legislation should implement new ways of doing planning based on concepts of strategic planning, participatory planning, and the just city. This mix of planning theories is interesting because it indicates that IMPLAN has been paying attention to the different trends in the field. It also suggests that they are not abiding by one specific model but instead are creating one that better fits their needs.

The PMDU intends to privilege the collective interest and guarantee equity for all the social actors. The value of equity in this program is closely linked to the distribution of benefits and burdens. The projects derived from this program, including the creation of new development areas and the changes in land-use, need to consider the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens as a fundamental element, where the municipal government will act as the guarantor and protector of the collective interests. The use of the concepts of benefits and burdens suggest that IMPLAN planners recognize that planning actions have consequences in the form of costs and benefits, and they should be assigned equitably to not represent social costs. However, this also suggests an awareness

that planners should avoid allowing small, privileged groups to benefit from public actions and investments without any compensation to society as a whole. While the IMPLAN approach in theory calls for reducing inequalities and promoting justice for the most vulnerable groups, fair compensation is not enough if they did not have a voice in the planning process.

In the past sections I explained that IMPLAN is implementing a new approach to participation based on co-responsibility and that this is a recognized strategic planning value. Some other related values are expressed by one planner when giving their definition or how participation must be conducted: “I believe that [participation] must be free, informed [...] enthusiastic... without discrimination, totally transparent [...], in a two-way road [...] responsible” (Interviewee #5). As this statement reveals, the shift to strategic planning is based on a strong critique of trivial participation, but such a critique does not necessarily lead to meaningful participation.

Social inclusion is a fundamental element in the implementation of the strategies in the PMDU of Ahome (2023). This program considers that inclusion can only be achieved through the building of social agreements with clear, transparent, and equitable rules for everyone. While this understanding of inclusion is better than not addressing it at all, it is still limited because some groups are most surely going to experience their voices being overpowered by the elites. Some planners in the IMPLAN are wary of inclusion due to bad past experiences with workshops. One of them said that “when [...] you open participation too much and you want to include everyone, you can generate like [...] a lot of information [...] but less [useful] data” (Interviewee # 4).

At the same time, IMPLAN planners are always looking for new ways to include groups that are not represented in the consultative council. “Their absence also sets a guide for us to say, let’s include them, we need to include this topic, eh, that does not

mean that we are closed to the possibility of participating with them” (Interviewee # 4). This planner’s reticence to directly approach those absent groups is more a pragmatic matter than an ideological one, because usually those groups are not organized and thus the IMPLAN would need to organize them first, which is complicated by the lack of available resources. In addition, in order to effectively include marginalized groups, planners need to convince powerful actor groups that such expanded participation is valuable and necessary:

It is important for those actors that are powerful, to have the ability to recognize and break those discourses heavily centered on themselves [...] every time we hold those exercises we talk a lot about how we need to create that ‘click’ in those powerful groups, of saying ‘look, your opinion as a group, as a sector, or as developer is very valid, but it is important that you consider these other discourses from these other sectors that are not being considered’ (Interviewee # 4).

Again, while this approach is better than not considering these disadvantaged groups at all, inclusion goes beyond having a diversity of participants giving their opinions: it is about integrating different forms of expertise and shaking the power structures of participation processes. Justice in this case would also involve recognizing the dignity of these groups and their right to decide their own future. There are indeed instances where the IMPLAN planners refer to social justice, and I would like to highlight the reflections of a planner who recognizes the dignity of marginalized groups and the need for them to organize to make their voice heard. Their insight starts by explaining how the land developers bought cheap land and started to develop the peripheries, without caring about the people who had to live there, far away from everything and lacking public services:

Then you say, who listened to those people? Nobody, or who listens to those people? No one, their needs, who listens to them? Nobody, then we need to do something about it, but also, you as a public server need to go out to them, and

you also need to participate with them, I mean, both citizen participation as well as the public server participation of going out [to the field] (Interviewee # 3).

In another moment of the interview, they added:

Because sometimes people feel really forgotten, and when they start to see data, then they feel more confident, right? And mostly they say ‘hey, it’s true, if we speak and raise our voices, then yes’, in a good way, not raising the voice to discord, or in protest [but] to come to speak, and that my opinion is taken into consideration (Interviewee # 3).

THE PUBLIC PLANNER IN THE IMPLAN AHOME

Throughout this document, I have been emphasizing the role of the public planner to foster changes in the participatory approach. Therefore, in this section I will try to answer the question, why should IMPLAN consider participation? And what is the role of the institute and the planner towards participation?

I devised the first question because I considered it the starting point to understand the role of the institute and the planners working there. Planners in general work for the city and its citizens, but public planners have a deeper obligation towards them. The interviewed planners seem to have clarity on this, as one states that “Everything we do in the institute is for the citizens” (Interviewee #2). And another one shares “That is what our job is at the end [...] our product is for the citizen, then if it is not for the citizen whatever you are doing is of no use” (Interviewee # 3).

Based on this, the IMPLAN planners assume different approaches to fulfill their responsibility of better serving the citizens. In the first place, the planners recognized their obligation to provide citizens with accurate and complete information, especially to foster participation. Likewise, some of the planners interviewed focused on transparency and accountability, arguing that “the best we can do is to provide access [...] something more accurate, more manageable [...] understandable by any person” (Interviewee # 1).

If the role of the planner is only to provide information, then they would fit the category of the ‘expert technician’ of rational planning. However, the planners’ desire to generate dialogue indicates a moral commitment to a desired future of involvement, and thus goes beyond rational planning.

Nonetheless, other planners’ comments revealed a penchant for rational planning, as they constantly emphasized their role as technicians and how they should abide by that. At the same time, while every planner interviewed saw themselves as technicians, this does not mean that all of them think they are absolute experts. “Yes, we are technicians [...] but sitting here we can’t solve everything, or if we do, what make us think or what make us say, that is really what we must do, you must go out there” (Interviewee # 3). This planner considers two sides for citizen participation: those people who are not interested in participating, and those who have an interest but can lose interest if the planners do not guide or support their participation.

After speaking with the team of planners at IMPLAN, I realized the positions they assume regarding citizen participation are ideological, but that on an everyday basis they must respond to the practical aspects of their jobs. Through their everyday practice, they have come to learn what is possible to do under the given circumstances. This usually leads to a privileging of solving immediate problems: “Yes, sometimes we say, man we would love for more groups to participate, we would like to have the time and the resources to organize them, but we do understand our scale and our field of work” (Interviewee # 1).

Their positions are also framed by what Wagenaar (2002: 245) calls the “bureaucratic artefacts”. I explained this concept in more detail in Chapter 2, but these artefacts can be institutional norms or professional jargon that planners assume are intrinsic to their identity as public planners, thus they cannot let them go. As Interviewee

number five said, “a lot of the knowledge we generate and give to the municipal government depends on static questions, I mean, it is the law or not, it is the norm or not” (Interviewee #5).

OTHER BARRIERS AND LIMITATIONS

The possibilities for expanding participation in planning and the type of strategies applied are also determined by external barriers and internal institutional limitations. So, what are those barriers/limitations in the IMPLAN Ahome and how have the planners faced them? In the words of Interviewee number two, integrating participation in every planning project “is possible [but] it heavily depends on the institution’s capacities [...] more than us being capable, [it is about] having enough technical and humanistic resources” (Interviewee #2).

I have already mentioned how IMPLAN suffered a significant downsizing in personnel, as the team is only half of what it used to be. Consequently, the remaining team had to choose what activities to keep pursuing based on practical limitations.

In the end we are 7 people in the institute, right? And to generate participatory processes can be exhausting for the institute, I mean, either we create all the design for a workshop, or we dedicate ourselves to generate useful products for the municipality (Interviewee #4).

Besides the limitation on human resources, the IMPLAN’s planners mentioned two other limitations: the norms or legislation, and time. The first of those affect the meaningful integration of participation because usually, the normative framework asks for very specific technical criteria in the planning projects, and then asks to include citizen participation on every stage of the project. When the planner applies the citizen participation manual that contains mainstream strategies for participation like workshops, the outcomes from such workshops are not useful in terms of addressing the technical

aspects of the planning process (*Interviewee #4*). Furthermore, the normative requirements for participation do not consider the real situation of the institute. As Interviewee number one said: “A lot of the current normative is modernizing us in the sense of ‘you go and do a neighborhood level analysis’ and it is like ‘honey, I’ve got like 350 neighborhoods’, if I do a neighborhood analysis [everywhere]... it is absurd” (*Interviewee #1*).

This quote alludes to a limitation most mentioned by the planners: time. Public planners in general need to adjust to the schedules set by the central government administration. For every officially published plan, there is extensive prior work of revisions and numerous approvals required by several councils and agencies.

Sometimes [...] this hurried state [...] also forces us to generate these hurried participatory processes that in the end does not contribute at all [...] because you say, I have just two months to publish the public consultation, because if I don’t send it to the municipal council then it won’t pass, and you say, well [do] a workshop, o well, we had a meeting, just pass it and label it as participation (*Interviewee #4*).

Having to use such strategies to check the box is discouraging to planners and contributes to trivializing participation, which in turn increases the skepticism of the citizens to participate.

In fact, the most significant external barrier to the planning work of the IMPLAN is the negative perception of citizens towards the government. Specially in Mexico, the discourse of neoliberalism has cemented a perception of inefficiency and corruption in government. Public planners face negative comments, wariness, dismissals, or plain rejection every time they conduct a participatory exercise. The next comment shows how planners have experienced skepticism towards the government’s intentions to help: “You find people really blocked, ‘and...what is that for?’, ‘and how will that help me?’ [...]”

there's still that mistrust 'these people surely came with the intention to charge us with more taxes'" (Interviewee #3).

This mistrust on the part of citizens can also be due to bad past experiences where they may have participated in the planning process, but the outcomes did not reflect their comments or ideas. This can happen when there is a history of trivial participation exercises. "When they hear you come from the municipality, from the government, 'oh no, no, no, no, I'm not interested because in the end you do whatever you want'" (Interviewee # 3).

Given these constraints, the IMPLAN planners have been trying to adjust both their personal and institutional strategies to increase citizen participation. Institutionally, they have been trying to find ways to balance the structures and processes of public administration with the development of citizen participation. That has led to a pragmatic approach, focusing on the immediate challenges they face at the expense of contributing towards real and deep social change:

I believe we have been really practical and efficient when saying, there are frameworks of participation that we won't explore because it would be really hard for the institute, and we wouldn't have the desired impact (...) and we say, well, let's start looking for how under what is inside our scope (Interviewee # 4).

However, drawing on each planner's sense of ethical obligation, to the interviewees suggested there are opportunities to reflect on their work and develop strategies to actively foster change.

When I was invited to work here, I started and, bang! (...) it is another world (...) especially how they see you outside, I said, I used to see things like that [...] how do you convince the people that your work is an honest work, that it is a work to benefit the citizens, and that is when you start to make your own materials, right? You start to make your own strategies, your own movements, how to work with people, that people engage (Interviewee # 3).

To close this section, I would like to add a reflection from a planner that touches on an essential element for participation in Mexican public planning. The topic of limitations and barriers for citizen participation is well known and have been pointed out by several critiques and studies. However, a change in the type of democracy and the type of government we have is rarely considered, maybe because it would necessarily imply a deep change in the power structures. Despite this, for some planner practitioners who work at this crossroad every day, it is clear that the institutional frameworks we have now are insufficient to really include citizens in the decision-making processes.

I believe the type of government we have is not the most appropriate for participation, even more, I dare say we have forced participation to the frameworks of the government instead of doing it the other way, to modeling government through citizen participation [...] I believe that is a debate we need to have, I mean, why must the government be so static, right? I mean the institutional structure must be static right? And we have been trying to fit participation [...] because in the end [...] in absolutely all the areas there are citizen councils, in all of them [...] and from that point you would say, well citizen participation is there (...) it would be impossible for it to not happen, right? [...] but when you check in detail then you say, well, it could not happen, there can be a thousand ways for citizen participation, but at the end it is consultative (Interviewee #4).

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have analyzed approaches to and perspectives on public participation in the IMPLAN Ahome, drawing on the strategies and discourses present in three of their planning documents and interviews with its planning team. While practices are straightforward and reflect a defined state of doing things, discourses “reflect the multi-scalar political way in which a society selects, organizes, and controls what counts as rational (Foucault, 1969, 1980, in Margalit, 2022: 352).

The practices and discourses of the IMPLAN Ahome is guided by principles of strategic planning. This was evident from its legal constitutive document as well as its vision and objectives articulated in its publications. However, it is also possible to recognize the presence of consensus planning, especially in their participation strategies. Consensus planning and even some elements of traditional communicative planning were present in the first years of the institute through the implementation of forums, workshops, and other participatory methods that sought to generate dialogue with regular citizens. However, IMPLAN has recently changed its approach towards participation. While ideals of consensus planning are present, strategic planning has emerged as the main strategy.

Under premises of strategic planning, IMPLAN now relies on its consultative council to promote citizen participation, but only within the prominent and politically influential actor groups represented in the council. This already limits the scope of people who are directly invited to participate. In addition, the public is only informed after a plan has already been developed in draft form. At this point, members of the public are given a limited timeframe to contact the IMPLAN in case they want clarification, have a

comment, or want to register a complaint. In their attempt to be more effective and focused, the IMPLAN thus has reduced participation to consultation/feedback, placing it on the second degree of tokenism in Arnstein's ladder. In the past, the scope for participation was larger and there was more opportunity for members of the public to involve themselves in a deeper way. But now, only a selected few have a voice in the planning process. While the public convocation is open to all the citizens, if the institute does not create a new strategy to reach vulnerable communities, then the only ones who are going to participate are those who already have an interest in the project, most likely landowners, developers, and the private sector.

By implementing this new approach, IMPLAN is placing the responsibility for participating in planning processes onto others. For the members of its council, this process of co-responsibility leads to more work but also to more power, because these groups of citizens now influence who gets heard and taken into consideration. On the other hand, the commitment of IMPLAN towards transparency and openness, which are values promoted by the neoliberal government, can be positively interpreted as empowering the citizens to participate more actively and effectively by now having complete, trustful information on matters that were previously hidden. However, as democratic as this appears, if IMPLAN only emphasizes transparency and limits itself to opening communication channels for interested citizens to participate, they are shifting all the responsibility to the citizens for their own participation. This could only work if we lived in a society where everyone has access to the same level of resources and is on equal footing.

Since it is mostly consultative and only allows the involvement of a select group of citizens, IMPLAN's new approach is thus based on a limited conception of citizen participation. IMPLAN planners understand the concept of 'citizen' and 'citizenship' in a

formal way, i.e. as an aggregate of individuals with equal rights and obligations. The concept of citizen is thus devalued by using it to refer to all social groups except for the government. Therefore, IMPLAN can refer to its participatory approach as ‘citizen’ engagement as long as the participants do not hold an official position in government. This gives the impression of inclusion and openness when in reality, IMPLAN planners are reproducing existing power relations. Even when citizens are included in the planning process through NGO representation, these organizations do not necessarily represent the community and instead act more like “contracted State agents” (Bayat & Biekart, 2009: 819).

Based on this, I have found a regression in terms of meaningful citizen participation in the IMPLAN Ahome. In the interviews, most planners expressed being discouraged by the traditional or mainstream methodologies for participation. Based on their experiences, forums or workshops produced a great deal of information, but after long hours of processing this data generated from such participatory processes, only a small percentage related to the project in question. Moreover, planners had to face citizens’ negative perceptions of their work and try to develop strategies to convince them and gain their trust.

But the main reasons for the decline in participatory approaches to planning are institutional limitations, as the amount of work necessary for such participatory exercises exceeded institutional capacities. The obstacles imposed by procedural requirements outlined in official planning norms and legislation, time constraints, and insufficient personnel, forced the emergence of a new and more constrained approach to community participation. Thus, the downsizing of the planning team to ‘eliminate unnecessary activities’ and enhance efficiency in government led IMPLAN to focus on the immediate and more technical aspects of planning.

IMPLAN planners use two discursive strategies to justify the change in their approach to participation. The first one is their strong critique of mainstream participatory methods such as workshops and forums. They label them as absurd, inefficient, condescending, and even unethical, because agencies adopt them without considering when they are appropriate or needed. In most cases, they are only used to check the box of participation in planning. While this is true for trivial participation that do not allow deep reflection, labeling them as unethical is intended to portray their current strategies as more moral.

The second discursive strategy used by IMPLAN planners is appealing to the institute's technical orientation. During the interviews, the planners emphasized being technicians and holding technical knowledge. They also mentioned that participation was difficult to integrate in projects that were highly technical. Neoliberalism promotes technocratic planning, and thus aims to separate planning from its political and social aspects. By highlighting the technical aspects of planning, IMPLAN planners are justifying their lack of involvement in citizen participation. At the same time, they choose not to deeply reflect on their role in reproducing the hegemonic structures that dominate Mexican cities.

The planners' discourse reveals a sense of resignation that has led them to opt to be pragmatic in order to do their job. They argue that their current approach to participation is more efficient and less messy, that it involves more participants, and that the comments and information provided is more focused and useful. However, their comments suggest that under different circumstances, they would like for participation in planning to be different.

The planners also demonstrated positive attitudes and values towards participation in the interviews. One of them, although remembering the physical fatigue and the

adverse working conditions, expressed enthusiasm when talking about the past participatory exercises they conducted. They looked forward to meeting with people and listen to them, and they considered conflict as natural in participatory processes and was unfaced by them. Another planner made important statements about justice in planning and about considering the most vulnerable sectors first in planning processes. This person also discussed how to reach people without internet access when sharing planning documents, and pointed out that participatory processes and outreach should not generalize people but should instead account for diversity. In other words, planners should create strategies to reach groups who do not typically participate in planning, such as youth and indigenous people.

A third planner shared insightful thoughts and personal strategies to truly involve the citizens. They expressed the need to complement the technical knowledge of planners with the experiential knowledge of residents. They also discussed social classes and the influence of economic power in defining a city, arguing that planners must personally meet with and listen to the most vulnerable people. Although consistently supporting the most restrictive participation in planning, another planner reflected that current governance structures do not allow for other participation options, arguing there is a need to reconceive government to foster a different type of participation in planning.

While “IMPLANs are a citizen participation exercise, and a tool for citizen participation, and a channel of this process of citizen participation” (Interviewee #5), the participatory approaches pursued by IMPLAN Ahome have become increasingly limited, despite the commitment to participation articulated in their statutes and vision statements. While IMPLAN’s institutional vision highlights the need for sustainable urban development where the economic development, urban development, and the environment

are equally valued, the failure to addressing existing relations of power has led it to privilege economic development.

Mexico has been experiencing rapid urban growth. Local authorities in charge of planning now need to expand their work to more areas that were previously undeveloped, making the urban dynamics increasingly complex. This complexity is not only physical and administrative but also social, and addressing it requires a planning practice that recognizes and seeks to remedy the social problems affecting our cities. Through this thesis it is possible to see the great influence of neoliberal thought in Mexican planning. Just as when local planning started in Mexico, we are still prioritizing landowners and economic elites over minorities and vulnerable communities. We are still focusing on physical planning and forgetting the social and political aspects of the profession. And we are mainly serving the hegemonic powers and economic interests by favoring a form of economic development devoid of social justice considerations. Economic development is essential, but its benefits need to be equally distributed. Planning therefore needs to adopt justice as a metric for every project, program, and plan.

We have a history of copying our planning models from the developed western world, but planning never seems to help solve the most imperative urban problems. In order to move forward we must look for alternatives derived from our contexts and our culture. These alternatives should be developed within our academy in order to foster a new generation of planners guided by normative aspects towards an inclusive and just society. Likewise, public planners should devise new alternatives and appropriate strategies to foster progressive institutional change.

Institutional limitations are a severe burden for public planners. Current institutional and normative frameworks are designed to maintain social and economic relations of power. Even when planning agencies seek to foster citizen participation and

incorporate values like social justice or inclusion, these attempts are limited by these institutional and normative frameworks. The inflexible determination of dates and times, the obligation to make plans following certain fixed steps, or the bureaucracy and involvement of multiple actors for approval, are making discourses about participation meaningless. Instead, they are forcing planners to design trivial forms of participation that are a waste of public resources.

The planners in IMPLAN Ahome are currently adjusting their ideals to the conditions imposed on them. This has led them to support a restrictive participation model because they are powerless to foster deep changes. So, what is the alternative? In the first place, planners need to deeply reflect on the role they are playing in supporting unjust social structures. Only through such reflection will they be equipped to pursue a different approach to participation in the face of institutional restrictions. For example, they can establish a partnership with universities, or even assign a budget to hire an external agency, in order to reach vulnerable communities and incorporate them into the planning process. This can be a first step towards organizing those groups, respecting their dignity, and thus moving towards co-production planning.

In this thesis, I have tried to unveil the complexities of citizen participation in public planning, focusing specifically on the IMPLAN Ahome. While this analysis sheds some light on the national reality, each planning institute is different and similar analyses must be applied to other IMPLANs. Further studies to better understand current discourse and approaches to participation in public planning in Mexico would need to include an in-depth analysis of the normative and procedural framework. This would serve to illuminate the existing legal and procedural limitations that complicate attempts to change the planning model and foster meaningful citizen engagement. The role of individual planners in the current planning system in Mexico needs to be more deeply

explored, especially the work of public planners, including the roles of directors in influencing the configuration and work of the IMPLANs. Furthermore, I recommend conducting an analysis of the curricula in universities that offer planning related programs to reveal the ethical conceptions of planning and how these are taught. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is necessary to study power in planning and how economic actors are defining the public agenda.

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