

'Planning regimes' for climatic risk reduction in Mexico

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This presentation addresses the distance between national planning discourses and the actual 'planning regimes' of climatic risk reduction in selected Mexican cities.

Mexico has had a relevant participation on the design and of both climate change and risk reduction international agreements and frameworks of action for the last decades. The country has already enacted a General Law of Climate Change and the second version of a General Law of Civil Protection, together with their National Programs of Action. There are about 400 municipalities (out of 2,457) that have a Climate Action Plan (PACMUN) and a similar number of municipalities already with local Risk Atlases. All these resources are part of multiple initiatives of the Mexican national government to position climatic risk reduction as a legitimate issue in the strategies followed in several government sectors (energy resources, economic production, environmental conservation, urban planning).

However, to what extent have all these institutional efforts translated into effective urban planning and risk reduction measures in Mexican cities? We propose to explore this issue through the concept of 'planning regimes' proposed by Ananya Roy, which relates to the administration of public resources under informal decision-making processes. This view of the concept of informality implies that even State institutions might be part of idiosyncratic practices that define the legitimacy and the actual political logic of a given spatial intervention, which not necessarily corresponds to the formal discourses contained in the formal programs, mandates and strategies. Additionally, another conceptual basis is the notion of policy interplay (Young, 2002), which occurs when a specific action within a field influences the performance or outcome of another (Oberthür & Stokker, 2011). The interactions between actors can be synergistic or antagonistic, and they are defined by the extent to which a given institutional arrangement supports or undermines other policy efforts (Urwin & Jordan, 2008). Informal practices in policy implementation may represent both a synergistic or antagonistic force to achieve specific political objectives. The perspectives of climatic risk reduction as part of local urban and sectoral planning need to be understood in this context.

We compare climatic adaptation to other outstanding adaptation dilemmas that Mexican cities have not solved, including land use planning and risk reduction policies. Our objective is to outline the main elements of the planning regimes shared by all these issues that explain their implementation shortcomings and the actual conditions and forces that define how spatial interventions at a local scale are done. The methodology is based on a comparative design and a qualitative analysis of relevant adaptation provisions

in several scales together and interviews to policymakers and local bureaucrats in three Mexican cities (Toluca, Celaya and Puebla). These cities were selected due to the outstanding administrative and political resources of their municipal governments; under the principles of our research design, we assumed that they are paradigmatic cases in which climate policy actions have some of the most favorable conditions in the country to be successfully implemented.

Our findings suggest that formal discourses regarding climatic risk reduction and adaptation in municipal governments have partially permeated into local programs and planning instruments. However, the type of informal arrangements within actors involved (urban planners, environmental activists, transport unions, civil defence officers, among others), as well as the type of vertical interplay within institutions (including partisan affinity and the degree of political decentralization from the provincial government to municipal government) influence the extent to which climate-oriented actions actually take place within the multiple government organizations involved. We profile the distance between local climate-planning provisions and their related actions within key areas of local governments, and compare the conditions for policy actions (informal arrangements, types of interplay, and levels of synergy or antagonism).

This work includes an introduction of the political context in which formal climatic risk reduction efforts take place in several scales. A review of conceptual debates about planning regimes and their importance for understanding policymaking and implementation problems will take place. It will address the details of the methodological approach and discuss the empirical evidence derived from the analysis of the selected cases regarding decision making processes, organizational linkages, risk reduction knowledge and the influence of formal provision in the political practices of relevant agents. The presentation will conclude with a review of the findings, outstanding issues and further research questions.

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