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TERRITORIAL PLANNING AND SDGs

Territorial planning instruments and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: The case of Medellín

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Highlights

1.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be linked to existing territorial planning instruments to guide development plans and connect them to global sustainability agendas.

2.

For cities like Medellin, the most important planning instrument is the Master Plan (POT, in Spanish). This first-level instrument defines, in a general way, the guidelines the city must follow to pursue its physical and spatial development.

3.

The connection among SDGs and first, second and third-level instruments must be made already since their formulation and diagnosis phases. Municipal Development Plans and Local Development Plans must consider the SDG framework and local strategies for its implementation.

4.

Territorial planning instruments are mechanisms that facilitate the identification of the actions needed to achieve goals such as ending poverty, protecting nature, and guaranteeing sustainable human settlements.

This article discusses how SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) can be linked to existing territorial planning instruments and how this connection can orient development plans and define local and national administrations' political priorities.

Although the greatest sustainability challenges are manifestations of unsustainable practices, most of these practices take place in cities. This is why local governments are some of the most important institutions for the implementation of SDGs.

City administrations are the main facilitators of the adaptation of global objectives to local contexts. A large share of the problems addressed by SDGs is concentrated in cities and many of them have already implemented successful governance mechanisms that are contextually appropriate. Cities are also responsible for designing and applying territorial planning instruments at the micro level, such as *comunas* (districts) and neighborhoods. These instruments have a direct impact on wellbeing and sustainable urban development.

Some cities of the Global South, belonging to low- and middle-income

economies, face a great number of problems such as excessive bureaucracy, institutional inertia, ineffective governance and poverty. These problems hinder their ability to achieve local sustainability goals. Despite these obstacles, many cities have managed to address problems that are common in the Global South. This is why it is crucial to strengthen local initiatives that have shown positive results.

The UN's New Urban Agenda highlights the important role played by territorial planning mechanisms to achieve SDGs. This document promotes the joint work among national and international city networks, academia, and NGOs to contribute to citizens' wellbeing and quality of life.

Although these initiatives are in place, it is not always clear how the achievements of cities like Medellin can be strengthened to pursuit the SDGs.

Planning instruments are effective vehicles to "land" SDGs, from the global, to the local level. However, these must

be supported by development tools that allocate resources and define political priorities, such as Municipal Development Plans.

The development instruments available in the legislation serve different, but complementary functions. This is why it is important that they are coordinated among them, and with SDGs, from their first phases (diagnosis, in the case of planning instruments), to their final phases (formulation, issuing of the administrative act and application, in the case of planning instruments).

The most important planning instruments for a city like Medellin is the Master Plan (POT, in Spanish). It is through this instrument that the city defines its occupancy model (i.e., how the city will grow and develop). In addition, the POT defines complementary (second and third-level) instruments that will help the city materialize this model, and their normative and geographic scope.

Cities like Medellin have a cascade type of planning. In this system, the Master Plan (a first-level instrument) defines in a general way the guidelines the city must follow to pursue its physical and spatial development. Second-level instruments address strategic areas to assess the actions that are required, in line with the Master Plan. Finally, third-level instruments materialize change by acting on smaller areas that share characteristics related to their morphology, architecture, urbanism, population density and socioeconomic conditions.

However, Master Plans do not allocate economic resources. The Municipal Development Plan is the instrument through which each incoming administration allocates its budget and defines its priorities. This plan must follow the Master Plan's guidelines for the city's physical and spatial development.

During the first decade of the 21st Century, Medellin started to implement, noticeably, territorial planning tools, with the intention to provide an alternative approach to manage self-built settlements. This period, 2004-2012, was called Social Urbanism. One of the main

physical-spatial development tools that resulted was the Integrated Urban Project (PUI, in Spanish).

This urban intervention tool sought to improve the architectural standards of public works related to housing, mobility and the environment, promoting sense of belonging and pride for the built environment among the inhabitants of the intervened self-built neighborhoods.

The PUI included also improvements on the network of libraries, educational parks, entrepreneurship support centers and facilities for education, health and justice. Finally, the PUI strengthened the effective presence of the government, weakening obstacles to development

The first area selected for the execution of the PUI were Medellín's North-Eastern hills. This was where the first gondola lift was built. One of the most significant impacts of this process was the drastic reduction of travel times and the improvement of security and the local economy.

such as violence, poverty and social-spatial segregation.

According to Cerdá et al. (2012), the construction of the gondola lift can be linked to a 66% drop in the homicide rate and a 75% drop in local violence reports in comparison to control neighborhoods.

Finally, one of the goals the PUI had was the replicability of its model, i.e., when developing this tool, the idea was that the interventions could be replicated in other areas of the city, or even in cities with similar characteristics.

A good example of a recent missed opportunity to connect SDGs with planning instruments in Medellín is the Macroproyecto Río Centro, a second-level instrument with an impact on numerous goals and targets (see Box 1).

The Municipality has invested significant resources to promote changes that can guide the definition of indicators and targets for the localization and implementation of the SDGs. COMPES N°1 and Agenda Medellín 2020 are evidence of these efforts. However, the implementation mechanisms to act on the different areas are not clear and explicit enough.

Box 1: focus on 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 15 through second- and third-level planning instruments.

The Medellin river is a natural corridor that divides the city. In addition, industrial and mobility systems were designed parallel to it, reinforcing this division. As a result of having given this space to automobiles and industry, the area lacks public space, has high levels of chemical and auditive pollution, and has an inefficient use of valuable urban land.

A Macroproyecto (a second-level instrument) analyzed these problems and proposed a series of public amenities related to education, culture and community life, among other aspects, and the densification of the area to curb urban sprawl. The project included the construction of the first phase of a large metropolitan park that addresses many of these problems by increasing the availability of public space, mitigating auditive pollution (it proposes to bury part of the highway) and connecting the riversides to promote connectivity in the city.

For example, SDGs are not articulated enough with existing second- and third-level territorial planning instruments which, as it was discussed above, are a powerful vehicle to influence in a positive way the city and the quality of life of its inhabitants. It is though these instruments, together with Municipal and Local Development Plans, that citizen participation is promoted, data are obtained, samples are analyzed, censuses are performed and

achievements are verified. All of this is a contribution to the construction of governance systems based on evidence, and strengthens the interaction between science and decision-making, both indispensable for the achievement of SDGs.

Keywords

SGD / Sustainable Development Goals/ Territorial planning instruments
Master Plan / Municipal Development Plans/ Physical-spatial development
Integrated Urban Project/ PUI/ First-level instrument/ Second-level instruments
Third-level instruments/ Medellin/ Juan Bobo

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