

## A BRIEF REVIEW ON SPATIAL PLANNING AND ITS CURRENT RELATION WITH FUTURE STUDIES

### GUEST ARTICLE

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#### Abstract

**Purpose** – The main objective of the review is to present a short text that serves as a brief introduction point for starters in the study of spatial planning, some of its main topics studied, and the association it has with future studies.

**Methodology/approach** – This review analyzed several high-impact articles about spatial planning. To achieve this, an in-depth review of the literature that involves the issues of spatial planning and future studies was carried out.

**Originality/value** – There is a lack of introductory information in the study of spatial planning and futures studies. This text aims to create a summary that may help future researchers to be introduced in these areas of knowledge. The texts also address different perspectives regarding these two topics.

**Findings** – The concept of planning is analyzed. The relationship that maintains future planning and studies is then established. Subsequently, the main discussions from the academy regarding these two topics are presented.

**Theoretical/methodological contributions** – Planning and spatial planning are systematic processes focused on solving a problem. Spatial planning aims to improve the physical conditions of a certain location. Planning and future studies have been closely related, with ups and downs; in contemporary times these ties have been strengthened, helping to solve complex and turbulent problems. Different points are presented from which spatial planning can be approached, depending on the diversity of contexts.

**Keywords:** Planning. Spatial planning. Future studies. Urban planning.

#### How to cite the article:

Cisneros Corrales, E. (2021). Brief review on spatial planning and its current relation with future studies. *Future Studies Research Journal: Trends and Strategies [FSRJ]*, 13(2), 170-178. doi: <https://doi.org/10.24023/FutureJournal/2175-5825/2021.v13i2.470>

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## Resumo

**Objetivo** - O objetivo principal da revisão é apresentar um breve texto que sirva como uma breve introdução para iniciantes no estudo do ordenamento do território, alguns dos seus principais temas estudados e a associação que tem com estudos futuros.

**Metodologia/abordagem** - Esta revisão analisou vários artigos de alto impacto sobre o planejamento espacial. Para tanto, foi realizada uma revisão aprofundada da literatura que envolve as questões de ordenamento do território e estudos futuros.

**Originalidade/Relevância** - Faltam informações introdutórias no estudo do ordenamento do território e estudos futuros. O objetivo deste texto é criar um resumo que possa auxiliar futuros pesquisadores a se inserirem nessas áreas do conhecimento. Os textos também abordam diferentes perspectivas sobre esses dois tópicos.

Principais resultados - O conceito de planejamento é analisado. A relação que mantém o planejamento e os estudos futuros é então estabelecida. A seguir, são apresentadas as principais discussões da academia a respeito desses dois tópicos.

**Contribuições teóricas-metodológicas** - O planejamento e o ordenamento do território são processos sistemáticos voltados para a resolução de um problema. O planejamento espacial visa melhorar as condições físicas de um determinado local. O planejamento e os estudos futuros têm estado intimamente relacionados, com altos e baixos; na contemporaneidade, esses laços foram fortalecidos, ajudando a resolver problemas complexos e turbulentos. Diferentes pontos são apresentados a partir dos quais o ordenamento do território pode ser abordado, dependendo da diversidade de contextos.

**Palavras-chave:** Planejamento. Planejamento espacial. Estudos futuros. Planejamento urbano.

## Introduction

The present work focuses on spatial planning, its current association with future studies, and a review of some of the topics studied in this field. This review will contain an analysis of selected high-impact articles. The main objective is to create a summary that may help future researchers to be introduced in these areas of knowledge. This review will focus on presenting the current state of the art involving this subject. To achieve this the review will follow this structure. First, it will define the concept of planning. Second, the concept of future studies will be introduced to later relate it with spatial planning. Third, it will address the main discussion regarding spatial planning in academia. In the final section, some brief conclusions about this review will be given.

## Development

### The concept of planning

First of all, planning has been described as a process for delineating suitable future actions through a selection process. Another definition states that planning is a set of efforts to define systematically a path that solves a problem (Couclelis, 2005). From this concept, spatial planning was developed. Spatial planning is basically to improve place-making in a specific territory. It is a process that involves a diversity of actors and activities toward ensuring them all, a development that adjusts to all their expectations. This development aims to create diverse recreational spaces that are: efficient and equitable, respectful of privacy and individuality, and environmentally friendly (Haughton, Allmendinger, Counsell, & Vigar, 2009). Spatial planning focuses on working centered mainly in the people, by ensuring them access to good housing, accessibility to goods and services, schools, hospitals, roads, recreational facilities, power supplies, water supplies, etc. (Field, 2018).

Planning has many different variables and subareas of study. In spatial planning, the terms strategy and strategic planning have been used throughout history. We can see that it was first developed and used in the 60s in Europe when planners promoted processes or strategies that wanted to develop a long-term vision paired with inter-institutional interaction. In the 70s and 80s, with the interruption of economic growth in society, planning needed to develop new theories and methods for action, coming with new solutions that had to face the problems such as quick urbanizations and a changing environment where the market was considered as a key variable. During the 90s, another change came, a conflict of interest involved the planning actors -the state and the market-. Consequently, both lost importance and efficiency in the process. This crisis opened the

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path in which strategic planning included civil society as the main actor (Albrechts, 2015; Sartorio, 2005).

### **Planning and its relation with future studies.**

As it was mentioned before, spatial planning is related to different subareas of study. If we combine the concept with the area of future studies, we must say that strategic planning will basically be, to look into the future in order to imagine the development needed for society (Haughton et al., 2009). In general, future studies are a response to uncertainty and work to reduce it, by presenting realistic approaches about the future. Futures studies have their origin in fields such as business management and the military, where predicting future scenarios is vital to survival (Usafa, 2018). Nevertheless, future studies were included in other areas such as spatial planning.

In future studies, there are two relevant strands: the voluntarist strand and the deterministic strand. The deterministic strand establishes a one-way reading of reality. It states that the future is unique and cannot be changed. Its study methodology is based on generating forecasting situations. On the other hand, the volunteer school establishes that the future is multidirectional, therefore there are several possible scenarios, from which the most convenient one can be chosen to be build or implemented (Hernández & Cisneros, 2020; Indacochea, 2014). Both approaches seek a close approximation to future reality through specific methodologies.

The deterministic current encompasses two schools, the first one is forecasting. This school proposes a vision that establishes that the future is unique and inevitable. The school bases its claims on trend analysis and validates them by reading statistics and their evolution. The second school is foresight, considered as the evolution of forecasting, it establishes that the future is unique and must be studied from trends, but at the same time, it contributes the idea that studies must include the criteria of experts as a vital part in the predictive process (Cisneros, 2020).

Regarding what this article concerns, we have said that planning as a concept involves the analysis of actions that can improve the future. Under this context Field (2018) declares that it is important to talk about forecasting, as an outstanding tool in spatial planning, since it enables to predict scenarios and work toward fulfilling them, overcoming any trouble generated through that path.

On the other hand, foresight as a tool also presents a great opportunity if included in urban planning or spatial planning procedures. Fernández Güell & Redondo (2012) state that it helps, first, by providing an anticipatory alert about future events that may affect the environment or the socio-economic dynamics in a territory; second, by contributing to

anticipate changes; third, by promoting civil participation and fourth, by building a network.

Future studies involving space planning were used by many practitioners and researchers; nevertheless, in recent years this tool has been displaced because of some historical reasons. In the second half of the twentieth century, urban planning opted for quantitative forecasts methods based on algorithms and mathematical models. Nevertheless, these models couldn't predict the socio-economic changes experienced in many cities in the '60s and '70s and this produced mistakes in urban planning decisions. By the end of the twentieth century, this situation became worse. Socio-demographic, economic and technological changes went faster and did not follow a linear pattern, forcing planners to use short-term and contingency planning as a way to avoid uncertainty (Fernández Güell & Redondo, 2012).

Nowadays, the use of future studies in spatial planning is considered a priority under three main arguments. First, the high level of complexity and turbulence that characterizes the cities in the twenty-first Century. Second, the need to strengthen stakeholder collaboration. And third the need to formulate long-term development visions. The potential benefits of including future studies will be a model that: allows debate to promote socio-economic development in future visions, formulate a viable territorial strategy that includes all the stakeholders and finally, the creation of a network of people who can share good and bad experiences (Fernández Güell & Redondo, 2012).

In summary, the integration of future studies methods with urban planning processes will contribute to achieving a more sustainable development model, providing policymakers and stakeholders with a powerful tool to respond to future challenges (Fernández Güell & Redondo, 2012). Some of the results of the inclusion of future studies in spatial planning is that prospectively it will include big approaches to guarantee a massive investment in public transport infrastructure, renewable energy systems and new programmed towns (Haughton et al., 2009)

### **Space planning in the academia**

After studying some main concepts and history regarding space planning, we have to introduce some of the subjects that academia has focused on. This next part is a compendium of different articles that establish their concerns and talk about potential solutions in the field.

First of all, a big part of the bibliography debates about who is in charge of spatial planning and how have they done their job. Historically, the main actors, who guaranteed development through an efficient spatial planning were the state sector and the market sector, nevertheless, both of them haven't met the expectations (Planning Officers Society,

2005). Some of the mistakes committed were the short-sighted vision toward the long term and giving privilege to private profit over public good. In order to solve this problem, the idea of modern spatial planning is to first, democratize the processes by including people from different sectors and second, help them set aspirational goals that will reach a unified goal and will contribute with regional and national aspiration (Haughton et al., 2009).

Another subject studied in space planning is the impact of phenomena like globalization and technological advances. Globalization and the called third technological revolution are two social phenomena that have influenced the study of urban spaces. A new trend is being studied regarding the called rural urbanization. The term refers to the movement of people from the center of cities and central regions into the periphery; showing a new path that goes in the opposite to the migration into cities that has occurred in the last decades. This phenomenon establishes a decentralization of the concentrated urban areas, destroying the barriers that divide urban and rural regions and instead establishes connected populated areas. These new tendencies are fulfilled through two processes, counter-urbanization<sup>2</sup> and suburbanization<sup>3</sup>. This new structure of cities challenges authorities to create new policies that can influence positively economic development, ordered population growth in the rural areas, and human development for the individuals who opt for this *avant-garde* option (Salvati, 2020; Ferrás Sexto, 2000).

Likewise, studying the benefits that technology has brought to space planning, there are contributions to the processes of monitoring and evaluating changes in urban territories. In these two essential activities of urban planning and management, technology has played a key role, since it has expanded the capabilities. Recent advances in computers and geographic information systems allow richer urban models that can predict future behaviors and also models more responsive to land use and travel demand policies. Sustainable models can also suit and contribute to solving disorganized land use, air pollution, traffic noise problems, slow economic development, improper land, and housing market, deficient plant and facility location, migration problems, and deficiency in transport and urban land-use (Gomes, 2020; Wegener, 2001).

In academia, spatial planning also establishes critical theories that state the necessary involvement of interdisciplinary to plan urban and rural areas. Therefore, it is compulsory to create and propose new ideas that can contribute to the spatial theory. Today, cities are complex central spaces where many systems interact and live together; therefore, it is important to study and address them from a variety of disciplines in order to help us overcome the limited and biased idea about cities we have today. To achieve this it is imperative to understand all the different social, economic, political, cultural and

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<sup>2</sup> people move outside of cities and start settlements in remote rural areas (Ferrás Sexto, 2000)

<sup>3</sup> people leave for the rural areas close to the city (Ferrás Sexto, 2000)

technological processes; comprehend urban phenomena (climate change, migration, etc.); develop better responses for those phenomena; and empower citizens to become active, critic and participative actors in the current situation and the future projections of the city (García-Cervantes & Lamy, 2019).

Another approach to spatial planning goes to solve the problems that surround policy development. Therefore, the search for methods that can prove themselves more efficient than the current methods is crucial. One of the alternatives that have been tested is to include more actors than just the local authorities in the spatial planning process. Cooperation between, individuals, public institutions and private institutions guarantees an asserted process in the planning process (Virtudes, 2016).

Another transcendent subject in spatial planning goes to integration, understanding this concept as the removal of existing barriers that separate clusters within cities or spaces. This subject includes the study of multiculturalism and cohabitation because it seeks to guarantee social stability and to avoid conflict. These kinds of studies consider that it is essential to avoid rejection and promote recognition of social and cultural differences within the social interaction in the urban society. Further, approaches to city planning that grant urban development and a suitable environment for different cultural groups will help to create a sense of belonging for everyone (Aboutorabi, 2018).

Finally, since this review comes from the Latin America region it is important to analyze what are some important matters in the region concerning urban planning and spatial planning. This article will mention two trends.

In Latin America, the tendency is quite different, space planning programs consider as one of their main goals to recover, revitalize and preserve their historic centers, from many different edges (economic, cultural, identity and social). Dureau, Contreras, Lulle & Souchaud (2015) and Paquette (2004) explain that this tendency has taken form since the 90s when many countries in the sub-region set the props for a new urban policy. This consensual policy was based on the principles of a "coherent urbanism", which includes the interests of different actors in the restoring process in many different criteria.

Another matter in the region, which specifically comes from South America, is that new cosmo-visions have appeared, and they have been used to contribute to spatial planning. One of them is the notion of including *Buen Vivir* or the good living ideas, which expose a native vision from the Andes. This vision promotes policy that contributes to the preservation of the environment and the improvement of citizens' lives conditions under the principle of a shared public space or appropriation of the city (Burgos-Vigna, 2016).

## Conclusion

In general, this review has contributed to deepening the knowledge about spatial (urban) planning and the association it holds with future studies. Additionally, it has

presented many of the main topics studied in this field by academia. The review presented itself as a tool to be seen as a start point for people who are interested in researching in this field. It also establishes ideas of study that are often engaged in papers, articles and, books in higher education, and can be deepened or developed in the future. The text addressed several sections from which the following conclusions can be obtained:

First, planning is a process that systematically works toward solving issues. Likewise, spatial planning follows the principles of planning and focuses on the constant improvement of the diverse conditions in a specific physical location, taking into consideration people, as the main beneficiary of these improvements.

Second, spatial planning is related to different subareas of study such as strategic planning. Spatial planning has held a long-term connection with future studies. This link started in the 60s when urban planners looked for tools that can reduce the uncertainty in the territories. However, this correspondence eventually went decreased because it could predict some big changes that came in later years. Nowadays, the use of future studies in spatial planning has resurfaced since it contributes to solving the complex and turbulent contemporary problems, works as a medium to strengthen the bond between stakeholders, promotes the formulation of long-term visions that seek to solve future challenges.

Third, there are a variety of topics discussed at an academic level regarding spatial planning. Some of the work focuses on: who takes the main role in this process of spatial planning, how the impact of globalization and technological advances has changed the dynamics in territories, what are some potential solutions to traditional problems in more social contexts (political, social, and cultural) and which are the alternatives trends followed in the Latin American region.

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