

housing (Cuenya, 1999).

The privatization of public infrastructure had been accompanied by privatization of the maintenance of public services in terms of a plan launched in 1989. These include inter alia the maintenance of parks, squares and streets and the technical control of vehicles and parking lots. Privatization has resulted in high costs for the city government, and it is not (yet) clear how effective it had been since it has focused on the most profitable areas, and very little or no attention had been paid to the less profitable but essential services. Promises for more technological innovation have not been met, and the public sector did not invest in underdeveloped areas (Finquelievich, 1995).

The process of sale and concession of public land had been carried out in a climate of irregularities. Local residents have demonstrated to defend public spaces as in the case of the irregularities in the Northern Shore Road and the Botanical Garden Concession. The Urban Planning Code had been modified to allow exceptions that favour owners of lots larger than 2,500 m² (Clichevsky, 1996). Changes in zoning and building standards, and exceptions in regulations, have allowed private enterprises to undertake large profitable investments, and have encouraged price-fixing between building companies.

Taking advantage of the suspension of urban regulations, peripheral municipalities have multiplied the construction of residential developments for high-income groups. This had been bolstered by the building of new road and railway infrastructures in the North, South, East and West-access. So far some 1,500 ha had been developed to this end, serving more than 100,000 high-income inhabitants. Conjointly with this goes the provision of sophisticated services such as universities, primary and secondary schools, shopping malls and sports fields (Nordelta Argentina, 2000). Secondary cities such as Pilar, have almost doubled their population from 133,000 to 250,000 inhabitants, in the process coalescing with the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires. In the central-area, global locations such as the Puerto Madero, are threatening to spill-over into the neighbouring areas. The shopping mall has replaced the street as the place of retail activities, offices have moved to the latest technology tower-blocks, and residential developments have become gated and equipped as self-sufficient entities, restricting access to their residents. The economic crisis of 2001 came to a head in the city. In the periphery the excluded people took over the highways, demanding their right to a decent life and work. Luxurious settlements and shopping malls felt themselves threatened by the events and were obliged to distribute provisions to avoid looting.

This combination of actions at urban and metropolitan scale affected the urban structure in general, transforming urban space into a juxtaposition of socially differentiated sectors regarding services and urban infrastructure. In retrospect, and after assessing the experiences gained from the crisis, the proper solution to the problems in hand appears to lie in a return to structural planning approaches and the use of large urban projects as merely a complementary tool in the urban restructuring process.

Strategic planning

The reform of the National Constitution in 1994 and the Local Constitution of Buenos Aires in 1996, gave the city a considerable degree of autonomy, leaving it with an elected mayor and a council. A program for the decentralization and modernization of the city administration has since being carried out and the population had been given a greater role in making urban management more effective. The program contains two sub-programs, viz. the "Urban and Environmental City Plan", and the "Plan for Decentralisation and Modernization". Also under discussion is a 'Strategic City Plan.' Greater local responsibilities have been conceded for urban revitalization, which integrates urban development actions with economic, social and cultural development programs. Participation had been



Figure 8. Nordelta Argentina. Master Plan. Sprawl, and mobility in the metropolitan region of Buenos Aires.

Source: Internet



Figure 9. The city is now taking advantage of the riverside. View from Puerto Maderos to the city. Source: A. Arrese



Figure 10. The recovery of the waterfront. A view to the South. Source: A. Arrese



Figure 11. The corporate towers in Puerto Maderos and the Micaela Park under construction. Source: A. Arrese, 2007



Figure 12. The Santa Catalina Towers with the Boston Bank at the end: view from the river. Source: Martin Evans

enhanced through improvements in information channels, increased attention to local initiatives and through mechanisms to resolve problems quickly and effectively. The principle of decentralisation has been further developed through the creation of boroughs (Comunas).

The Strategic Planning Council had been created in December 1999 and constituted formally in 2002 as a consultative body made up of both private and public organizations. The express aim with the Council is to submit consensual plans/proposals which could serve as a basis for state policy.

In the first eight years after its inception, participation in the Council grew to 159 organizations and 354 NGOs. In 2003, the first basic document was approved and with this as a basis, the "Strategic Plan for Buenos Aires (2010)" was elaborated and published in July 2004. The plan defines five strategic lines which have been agreed on by the Strategic Planning Council, which are as follows:

- An autonomous, decentralized, democratic, participative, balanced and solidarity city;
- An active and efficient state, providing health care, education, justice and security to all the members of the community;
- An equity-based economy with full employment, and a city which is efficient, competitive, innovative and sustainable with high environmental quality;
- A habitat of excellence which is conducive to human development, fostering culture, preserving heritage and promoting recreation and tourism; and
- A city triggering a metropolitan region integrated into the rest of the country, MERCOSUR and the world. (see COPE, 2004).

The Strategic Plan for Buenos Aires defines guidelines to realize specific objectives regarding institutional, physical and economic issues highlighting critical areas and suggesting actions to be taken. These actions can, owing to prevailing circumstances, be developed to become concrete urban projects. Concerning the metropolitan region as such, the plan carries recommendations as to how to institutionalize inter-jurisdictional coordination in order to enhance equity between the different regions and localities.

Strategic planning and co-ordination in general has to overcome a number of impediments which include the need to subordinate individual projects to a common goal; the fragmented nature of the different executive areas, each saddled with its own strategic goals and objectives and the low degree of professionalism and political influence in the preparation of technical reports in the public administration (Borthagaray, 1999). Buenos Aires has a budget of US\$ 3 billion and more than 110,000 public servants, but suffers from the burden of a diversity of objectives and out-dated organizational principles.

From an urban point of view, and after long and heated discussion, a law was passed on the "Urban Planning Code Reform" in April 1999. The new regulations tend to favour construction activities (basically increasing the limit for maximum authorized building-heights between mid-walls) and investments in the city. Measures to increase green areas are also being reviewed. Its new version, embedded in a more rational organization, involves the definition of new priorities and programs.

The Retiro Project was reformulated and the Western Green Corridor defined as a priority strategic project. The latter is an old aspiration to overcome the urban barriers segregating the city, integrating the northern and southern sectors along the Sarmiento railway line. Notwithstanding the plan, there exist many contradictions, namely the options for the extension of the airport and the real estate development projects in the highly compact central-area (Tandanor, Santa Maria del Buen Ayre and the Antepuerto). Although six years had already gone by since the elaboration of the plan, Parliament has not yet deliberated the issue. The President has hence been petitioned to treat the issue as a priority for the region and an essential framework for the urban development policies in the area.

Many observers note that notwithstanding the social discourse, the latest urban policies

of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires are profoundly contradictory in nature and are expressed more in the style of urban management than urban planning. Whereas the particular policies are intended as a response to the demands of competitiveness and to improve the quality of life and governance, they have in fact exacerbated social exclusion (Cuenya, 1999). The severe economic crisis of 2001 has halted for a while discussions on the possible impact of such contradictory planning policies. Economic recovery has since brought the issue back onto centre-stage for discussion. The unprecedented increase in residential construction in Palermo, Belgrano and Caballito, put the existing urban infrastructure under great pressure. This led to massive demonstrations against this sort of real estate development by residents who claim their rights with regards to clean air, sun and green open space. In response, the city government has recently temporarily put on hold the approval of new residential projects until such time that their positive impact on urban development as such, have been proved.

Strategic projects

Puerto Madero

The revitalization of the central-area in the 90s, and its pressure for expansion demanded new specialized services, all of which resulted in the configuration developing a new centrality. Large areas of obsolete transport infrastructure by itself developed location opportunities which enhanced its location between the city-centre and the river-bank, thus creating space/opportunities to establish new activities. In 1989 a national and local government corporation was created to develop vacant and derelict public land and to build along the waterfront. This proved to be a very lucrative business opportunity for real estate capital, but not so conducive to social goals. A master plan, the result of a national competition, was drawn up for the (re)development of the area and work started in 1993. At the end of 1997, almost 400,000 m² of derelict land was recycled by private investors as the first step of the operation. New buildings, parks and pedestrian areas are still under construction.

Private investment of US\$ 1.8 billion was anticipated for the period 1998-2004. The Puerto Madero's real estate operation started with building activities in front of the river embankments. Different municipal projects have so far been implemented for inter alia a museum, offices and housing purposes and a bridge had been designed by Santiago de Calatrava. Moreover, the Puerto Madero Corporation has started the revitalization of the Costanera Sur, which had been recouped as public space for the city, thus reconstructing the park designed by Carrasco and Forestier in 1925. In the process new green open spaces have been incorporated into the city in accordance with the guidelines of the National Competition of Projects (Concurso Nacional de Anteproyectos). The projects also include purification of the water between the Costanera Sur Walls and the Ecological Reserve, as well as improving the leisure and public space in the city. The 2001 economic crisis set back the progress of the Puerto Madero project for some years though. However, with the economic recovery since then, building dynamics have followed suit. Various real estate developments are once more under construction, reinforcing the impact of the Puerto Madera project in/on the city.



Figure 13. **Opportunities for foreign direct investments: Puerto Maderos location close to the centre and the riverbank.** Aerial photos of Puerto Maderos. Source: A. Arrese



Figures 14, 15 and 16. **The initial phase of Puerto Madero development.** The impact on the surroundings. Source: A. Arrese, 2005

Retiro project

This project represents one of the most contradictory urban projects, because for decades this very valuable piece of land, and important site for urban interventions, had been the site of a squatter settlement. The project involves the recouping of the train and bus terminal zone and involves the use of the city's railway-shunting yard of 75 ha. The project has in view the pedestrianization of the link between Plaza San Martin and Plaza Britanica, a concatenation of green spaces, the creation of a centralized square as a node for passenger interchange, and includes commerce, hotels, new parks and housing (Lopez Rangel and Maur, 1997). The project which will be adjudicated best for the particular area in the National Competition of Projects, stands to be adapted in order to accommodate adjustments to the port development referred to above. Emphasis is to be placed on the modal transfer of public transport in the area. The new program incorporates the existing villa miseria with a definitive program for the squatter dwellers as such. The final results of the transit study are being awaited before plans for the project are finalized (Plan Urbano Ambiental, Sintesis, 2001). Some of the issues under (re)consideration have to do with the rationalization of existing port installations in order to improve port productivity, and to incorporate the port into the "Intermodal Node Retiro-Puerto – Aeroparque Ordering". This ordering node comprises railway terminals, road transport, the coastal-highway and the airport (Plan Urbano Ambiental, Sintesis, 2001). In the light of the economic recovery going on, the Retiro Project is bound to again take priority position on the agenda of current transformations.

Buenos Aires-La Plata Highway

The project involves the central-area section of the Buenos Aires - La Plata Highway and the design of the Ecological Reserve as a public park. Both projects are still pending though. Delays have been caused because of contradictions that arose and the large number of alternative proposals on the table - for the Highway alone more than 18 different variations were submitted. The highway constitutes an important part of the AMBA and of the regional port-corridor Rosario – Buenos Aires – La Plata, where most of the country's population, and 75% of the country GNP are concentrated. The coastal-corridor is the eastern border of the central-area of the city. It represents an important regional and urban connection serving the port of Buenos Aires. Currently this corridor is grid-locked and the main transit is through the centre of the city (Arrese, 2001). The key goal is to alleviate the saturation of the metropolitan urban-corridor. This demands urban traffic to be carried as far as possible on local surface avenues and regional traffic, including the transport of goods to the port, be channelled onto the Riverside Highway. A prerequisite condition is that the latter must cross the city-centre without causing interruptions. Instead, it must create a "dialogue" with the existing urban fabric and with the new developments located to the east. It should also not create new barriers between the city and the river, nor should it affect the surface drainage of the city. This of course poses a great challenge to urban architecture as can be gathered from the numerous alternative proposals that were submitted. The latter involved proposals for surface, underground and elevated solutions, none of which really met the strict prescriptions laid down in the rules for the submission of proposals (Arrese, 2001). Debate on the project flared up again in 2006, by which time national government selected the alternative plead for an underground highway.

Revitalization of urban avenues

An ongoing program of renewal aims at the recovery of the city axis as Corrientes, Cordoba, North and South Diagonals and 9 de Julio Avenues that has a highly symbolic meaning in the popular imagination. It will be carried out through a system of public-private partnerships in deprived areas and aims to recover urban space through the creation of urban and architectural landmarks. The program's objective in Corrientes Avenue is to cre-

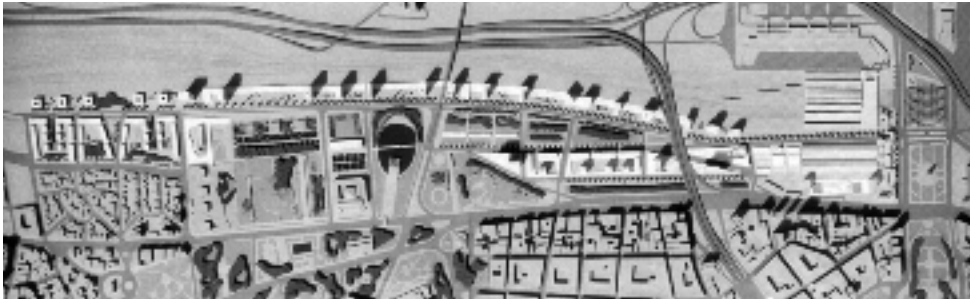


Figure 17. **National Competition for the El Retiro Area, August 1996.** Architects Baudizzone, Lestard and Varas. Source: Varas

ate an impact along an 11 km long urban corridor that passes through different neighbourhoods as La Paternal, Villa Crespo, Almagro, Abasto and the city-core. Called "the street that never sleeps", Corrientes Avenue is in a process of rapid decay with theatres, night-clubs, and bookstores closing down. Work to convert the historical Mercado de Abasto to a shopping centre and housing area started at the beginning of 1997. All in all, some 185,000 m² of new and rehabilitated floor space, and an investment of around US\$ 70 million are involved. At the same time, the first international hotel with 120 rooms was built with a US\$ 7 million investment. The surrounding areas have experienced significant increases in land value and about 100 lots, including several heritage buildings of symbolic significance to city inhabitants, became threatened with demolition to make room for the construction of high-rise housing (Villasuso, 1999). The 2001 crisis of the Argentinean economy helped to reduce the speculative pressure on properties, strengthened the cultural properties of individual neighbourhoods, and helped to redefine new cultural equipment such as the Home-Museum Carlos Gardel, the relocation of the Music Conservatory from the GCBA and the ambitious real estate development "Konex Cultural City" which comprises events rooms and large areas for exhibition and gastronomy.

Program for urban organization and connectivity

This programme incorporates new connections between the railway system, the Metro (underground), buses and cargo movement. It adds hierarchy to the road system and the ordering of traffic, the revalorization of public space, the revalorization of large green areas, including the Integrated Sanitation System, and the extension of the underground network (Pre-metros and trams). The latter is an ambitious project aimed at doubling the length of the current underground network within a decade. The extensions to the radial lines B and D have already been built to also cover Belgrano neighbourhood. The extension of Line A up to Flores, and the construction of the new transversal Line H connecting the railway stations of Retiro and Sáenz, have commenced. The latter station is to become an important transfer node to access the centre from the south and south-east. A new plan for the extension of the network was approved by law in 2005. At the same time a private concession was approved for the construction and operation of three new lines (F, G and T), as well as the completion of line H. Line F will run from Plaza Italia to Constitución with a length of 7.6 km, line G from Retiro to Cid Campeador (7.6 km) and line I from Parque Chacabuco to Plaza Italia (7.3 km).

Urban social projects: a myth

The Menem administration outlined projects to alleviate housing problems and poverty and to foster social cohesion. These included programs to regulate land-ownership in illegal settlements; mortgage loans to solve eviction problems in La Boca and other neighbourhoods; projects to revitalize the southern area of the city; and programs to rebuild and improve old housing units built with state assistance, which fell into disrepair. Despite their social importance, these projects were, however, not regarded as being of high priority by the Menem political administration. Also, finding funds to get the projects off the ground



Figure 18. **Aerial photo of El Retiro.** Source: Bifronte S. R. L.



Figure 19. **Puerto Maderos under construction, view towards Santa Catalinas.** The highway La Plata- Buenos Aires along the river-side isolates Puerto Maderos. Source: A. Arrese, 2007



Figure 20. **Diagonal Avenue Saenz Pena from the Mayo Square. The Influence of Haussmann in the 20s.** Source: A. Arrese, 2004



Figure 21. "The street that never sleeps" Corrientes Avenue.
Source: Bifronte, SRL



Figure 22. The mouth of the Riachuelo.
Source: A. Arrese, 2007

proved difficult. Their feasibility depended to a large extent on the actions taken by neighbourhood associations and other community-based groups. The large residential areas inhabited by middle-income households, remained largely unaware of these revitalization programs. For the users of these parts of the city, a key problem proved to be the protection of green areas threatened by the advance of (new) functional requirements and uses within the context of a scarcity of free land and real estate speculation. There is of course also the (important) question as to the monitoring and control of privatized services. Some neighbours have taken action on this issue, and there had also been a significant increase in the number of civic organizations involved locally. Different actions have also been proposed. In the urban prolongation of the Northern-access, it is proposed that middle and higher-income residential developments should finance the execution of social housing in the same sector. In the Retiro Project, a program of technical assistance had been incorporated into the social housing program (Plan Urbano Ambiental, Synthesis, 2001). In the south, multiple cooperative-based developments have been financed by the city government since 2004, targeted at the population in the most deprived sectors of the population who have actively participated in the development and construction of the projects.

Large urban projects

The city and the Rio de la Plata

A contradictory relationship had always existed between the city of Buenos Aires and the Rio de la Plata. The river today is affected by increasing contamination of its waters by effluents. The shoreline urgently requires conservation policies to preserve its role as an environmental asset. The city government program "Buenos Aires and the River" wants to use the riverfront for public leisure. The riverside was planned in three sectors: North, Centre and South.

Northern sector

It contains the revalorization of the Costanera Norte Avenue, the Northern Parks in the so-called "Triangulo" and the University Campus (Ciudad Universitaria) riverfront areas. It includes the construction of new recreation areas as the Parque de los Niños (Park of the Children) and the Parque de la Memoria y el Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado (Park in Commemoration and Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism). Competitions were organized inviting ideas/proposals for the parks and monuments. Currently, building works are partially completed. The "Works" are closely associated with drainage infrastructure to solve flooding problems in the residential districts of Núñez, Belgrano and Saavedra.

Central sector

The Ecologic Reserve is to be improved through the annexation to the park of the old installation used for the building of highways on the one hand, and restricting access on the other. In this way the area will be enlarged, offering new facilities and services to visitors.

Southern sector

It has in view the recovery of the Pedro de Mendoza Rivershore Boulevard, connecting in a continuous tourist circuit La Boca with Puerto Madero. After the construction of the dikes in La Boca and Barracas, and the redefinition of the border of Riachuelo as a public boulevard, the recovery of the adjacent land has started. In Barracas the old Fish Market was rebuilt as a design centre and the first phase of the project has already been completed. The Buenos Aires Auditorium will be installed in an old factory of significant heritage