

GPN Self Diagnostic Tool Briefing Note
Some Perceptions of Latin America Planning Priorities
An analysis of responses to the Self-Diagnostic Assessment of the
Capacity for Planning Worldwide

Introduction

This brief note looks at responses from Latin America to the Self Diagnostic tool (SDT) for assessing the capacity of planning world wide. Developed by the RTPi and CAP in association with the Global Planners Network, the SDT has been in operation for a year. During this year, the tool has attracted 1500 responses from over 100 countries. Taken together these provide a very rich account of the way that planners say they plan in different countries and what their priorities are for enhancing their capacity to do the job.

It is important to say that respondents to the tool are self-selecting and do not in any sense represent a statistical sample. Such precision could only be achieved by creating a sampling frame made up of everyone who works in planning around the world from which a random sample would be taken. This is clearly not feasible.

But this should not undervalue the insights that respondents offer into the realities of planning at the grass roots in the countries where they work. The self-diagnostic tool gives planners a chance to paint a picture of how they perceive planning. To begin with, it is inevitably a partial picture, but it is one that gains definition as more responses are received. What emerges is the staggering variety of physical, economic, cultural, legal and political environments in which planners work. There has been no previous attempt to grapple with this diversity or to understand its implications. The value of the exercise is well illustrated by analysing the responses from Latin America.

Responses from Latin America

With a total of 338 responses received, the response from planners in Latin America to the SDT has been extremely encouraging. After a slow start this was made possible by a major 'snowballing' initiative facilitated through the contacts in Latin America of the APA and the Lincoln Institute.

Current responses for individual Latin America countries are as follows Argentina (43) , Bolivia (10), Brazil (70), Colombia (63), Costa Rica (10), Ecuador (15), El Salvador (7), Guatemala (6), Honduras (2) , Mexico (65), Nicaragua (3), Panama (6), Paraguay (3), Peru (17), Uruguay (12), Venezuela (6)

The Challenges that confront planners in Latin America

In our analysis of the responses to the self diagnostic tool in 2008ⁱ we explained how we had analysed responses to the question '**In your country/territory what are the main challenges confronting planners?**'

This was an open question and so, after examination of the responses, we identified five broad areas of concern and recorded reference to each of these areas. In many instances the open-ended nature of the replies meant that more than one area is

referred to. Codification of responses this way inevitably involves a significant level of interpretation and judgement, but key words (listed below) are used to aid consistency.

1. The Natural Environment

- biodiversity
- climate change
- environmental sustainability
- natural disasters
- soils
- water

3. Accommodating socio/econ pressures

- crime
- economic growth
- equity
- migration
- poverty
- regeneration
- social cohesion

5. Increasing planning capacity

- attitudinal
- community engagement
- legal
- political
- resourcing planning
- site assembly procedures
- skills

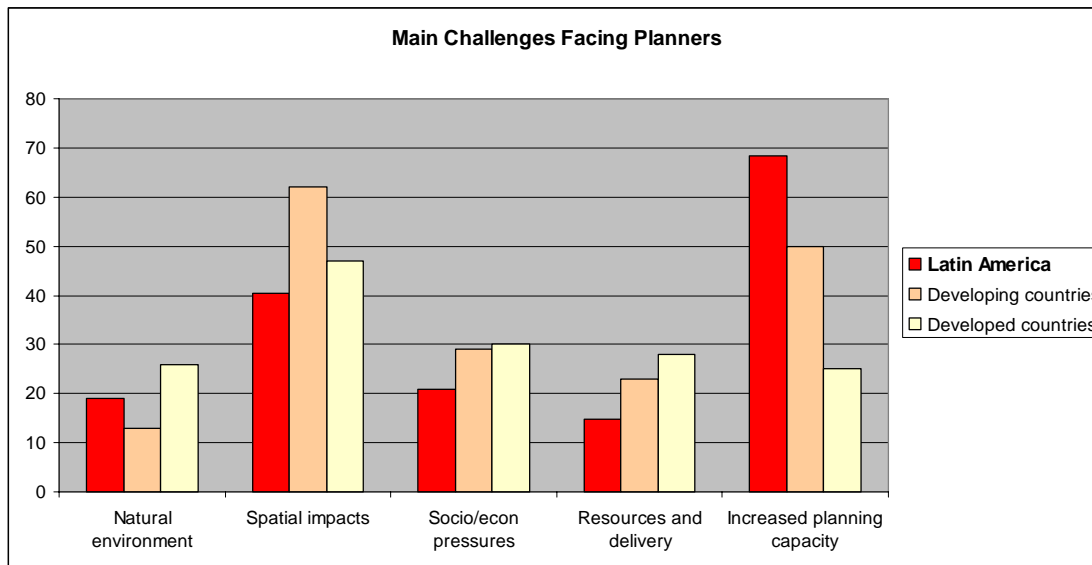
2. Spatial Impacts of development

- balance
- congestion
- cooperation
- development densities
- heritage
- integration
- land use planning
- urban design
- urban sprawl

4. Resourcing & delivering development

- energy
- Infrastructure
- shelter/housing
- waste

In our earlier report we remarked on the different pattern of responses that planners in developing countries say they confront compared with their colleagues in developed countries. The former gave much greater emphasis to the need to establish or improve the capacity of their planning systems. 50% of respondents in developing countries see this to be one of their major challenges – twice the number in developed countries.



Examination of responses from Latin America reveal this perception exists even more strongly there than in developing countries as a whole. Chart 1 shows that over two thirds of respondents to the self diagnostic tool from Latin America refer to their perception of the priority that should be given to developing better planning systems.

The following are very typical of the challenges that respondents describe:

- When regulatory legislation on land use exists, it is skipped Argentina
- Awareness of the population towards active participation in the processes of planning, oversight and monitoring, and reformulation of the proposals. Bolivia
- regulation of the private real estate market, Brazil
- Keeping geo-reference data up-to-date & relevant. Brazil
- qualification of the technicians in the use of the tools available. Colombia
- Absence of a body responsible for carrying nationally broad lines of planning Costa Rica
- the respect of development plans and their constant updates Ecuador
- There are no plans, neither masterful or similar laws nor regulations of territorial ordering plans. Guatemala
- currently there is no urban planning although in theory, laws and regulations do indicate. Mexico
- "plans" that are never carried out (unwillingness of local governments, lack of resources, realities of our own culture and economic Nicaragua
- lack of a practical implementation of urban plans Paraguay
- One challenge is to have a guiding document for growth of the city avoiding disorderly expansion. Peru
- Strategies and measures to control town-planning according to the pre-defined land usage Venezuela
- management tools (legal, fiscal or management) have been neglected, Uruguay

Messages Planners from Latin America want to send to the Global Planning Community

A very similar picture emerges from an analysis of answers to the question **‘what is the most important planning issue in your country/territory that you want to bring to the attention of the global planning community?’**

As evidenced by the examples below, planners in Latin America want their colleagues to understand how weak the roots of planning are in their country and that the consequences are potentially very serious. They appear to want to use the opportunity of the Self Diagnostic tool as a means to seek more international support for their vocation.

- The lack of a planning institute. The lack of appropriate legislation. Argentina
- No Spatial Development Plan is implemented in Bolivia because the land is mostly privately owned, and then the state has no power to impose decisions made in the plans. Bolivia
- the local authorities didn't understand yet the importance of planning. They still think that it disturbs the development. Brazil
- Local capacities in times of decentralization. Costa Rica

- Prevention and handling of risks, Ecuador.
- The culture of planning and local investigations Mexico
- the consequences of lack of planning on the environment, the contamination of water reserve and lakes, the pollution associated with lack of management of solid waste Nicaragua
- The lack of management of what is planned. Yes, rightly or wrongly, but we do plan, the problem is that we do not give the next steps, monitoring, control and re-planning review Panama
- That urban planning generally does not exist Paraguay
- The lack of a specialized school in Urban Planning in Lima separated from the faculties of Architecture Peru
- The lack of national-scale planning for the medium/long term. The limitation of the actions to the political times Uruguay

How might the International Planning Community help?

Finally we asked respondents '**What priority areas should international organizations and global planning networks concentrate on to support planning in your country/territory?**'

Respondents call on the international planning community to make its voice heard more clearly by advocating the purpose and value of planning:

- There is a need for greater training of the ruling class.
- International organizations can ask about the cities
- Technical training of professionals of the civil service.
- To exert international pressure to advance city-planning and territory planning, like a policy of State.
- Prompt and disseminate on the need for planning to reverse the damaging trends that lead to a "future without a future".

Training of planners is another priority ...

- International organizations and global networks of urban planning should concentrate on training and professional updating in order to support urban planning.
- Support and scholarships for specialist postgraduate training

... so also is the need for better networking and dialogue between planners:

- share of difficulties, systems of planning, exchange of methodologies
- interchange of the knowledge areas,
- interchange of professionals is a factor for interpreting new questions and for looking at the reality.
- I would say that learning from successful experiences and joint ventures where negotiation skills were used and opposing sides came to an understanding.
- Creation of networks of cities with interchange of experiences
- To support working with professional networks
- Support and scholarships for meetings and exchanges of experience

- Exchange of information,
- Promote networks for exchanging experiences in seeking planning mechanisms spread the experiences of local exchange.

And there is a plea for greater speedier transfer of information technologies. in verifying a platform accessible to GIS

- Manuals and tools to identify services and spaces needed for sustainable social, economic and ecological development. Linking together diagnostic processes, and the expected impacts.
- Analysis and cartographic and statistical data processing.

Conclusions: Implications of these challenges

This brief review of responses from the tool highlights the sense amongst Latin America planners of the generally low level of development of their profession within their societies. Planning's unique role in promoting better places is not well accepted and the role of planning is felt at best to be marginal.

Like most other parts of the world the main consequences of this is seen to lie in the way that it compromises opportunities for achieving balanced development. But the fact that planning appears to be so much far less developed in Latin America than in other parts of the world suggests a clear set of priorities for the global planning community to support their colleagues there.

ⁱ Analyses of responses to the GPN Self Diagnostic Tool.

The following analyses have been prepared by Will French and Lucy Natarajan of the Royal Town Planning Institute and are available on request from globalplanning@rtpi.org.uk

- Self-Diagnostic Tool for an Assessment of the Capacity of Planning Worldwide. Midway Report: Midway Report. Vol 1 and 2. July 2008
- Addressing Questions of Poverty & Inequality in Human Settlements
- Practitioners views as expressed to the GPN: paper delivered to the GPN Congress in Zhenjiang. November 2008
- Self-Diagnostic Assessment of the Capacity for Planning Worldwide Key Findings Report November 2008.
- GPN Self Diagnostic Tool, Analysis of Responses: Priority Action Areas for Planning Training and Research. January 2009.
- Proposal for a Permanent Active Online GPN Presence