

DEAL-MAKING CITIES IN LATIN AMERICA: WHY SHOULD WE PAY LESS ATTENTION TO MASTER PLANS?

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Abstract

This paper challenges traditional planning paradigms by examining the tensions that exist between planning as a public process and the plan as an instrument. We explore the concept of conformorality, whereby individuals adhere to specific moral values to gain social acceptance within their groups, and influence urban conflicts and policy outcomes. Through this framework, we analyse the complex interactions that exist between planning, public interest, and moral considerations. By using the Urban Intervention Projects (UIPs) case in São Paulo, we demonstrate how moral factors influence negotiations and policy implementation in urban governance. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the moral dimension within planning studies, and advocates for interdisciplinary approaches to the field, as well as new attitudes toward necessary changes.

Keywords

Conformorality, Planning, Governance, Master Plan, Brazilian cities

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1. Introduction

The distinction between planning as a public process and the plan as an instrument has been historically blurred, and has often treated physical infrastructure planning and regulatory action as inseparable entities. The prevailing notion suggests that a skilled-planner crafts plans and translates intentions into legal instruments; a process that results in hard-to-understand planning codes. This prevailing notion within the planning domain, largely unchallenged, has assumed a quasi-dogmatic status, and has received minimal critical scrutiny (Moroni, 2023, Moroni, 2019b, Totry-Fakhoury and Alfasi, 2017).

The conventional technical-rational approach to planning, often synonymous with the plan itself, presupposes a linear and straightforward process which commences with data collection (frequently descriptive), and concludes with the creation of a blueprint (Davoudi, 2015). Public interest emerges as the primary criterion for justification and is its legitimising basis; implying that the planner can identify public interest and formulate proposals on its behalf (Moroni, 2017, Moroni, 2019a, Alexander, 2002). This planning tradition, entrenched across various paradigms (Alexander, 2022), tends to shape an inert or dormant field of forces towards conformity to standards and narrow conceptual interpretations under new forms of technocracy (Raco and Savini, 2019).

In Latin America – a continent that has historically adhered to idealised urban plans – this discussion intersects with the evolving dynamics of political conflicts, which are currently shifting from traditional arenas to the judicial realm. Against a backdrop of uneven urbanisation characterised by informality (Roy, 2005, Roy, 2009, Roy, 2011), and blurred boundaries between the state and real estate stakeholders (Abers, 2000, Marques, 2016), courts are increasingly relied upon to safeguard the fundamental rights of vulnerable populations (Pimentel Walker et al., 2024), and especially with regards to promoting the social function of property (Svoboda, 2021). Judicialisation, has appeared to assume an increasingly defining role in contemporary urban planning in the region (Rios-Figueroa and Taylor, 2006, Sieder et al., 2005, Sotomayor et al., 2023).

The democratic transition experienced across the continent in the 1980s and 1990s accompanied normative advancements in national urban policies. These policies have established legal mandates for plans with binding roles which have ranged from city development guidelines to urban codes and operational parameters (Fernandes, 2010, Ortiz, 2023). However, this transition coincided with the neoliberalisation and financialisation processes of the 1990s, which introduced market-oriented logics, instruments, and lexicons into urban policy frameworks, and exerted significant influence on planning practices (Nascimento Neto and Salinas Arreortua, 2020, Phelps and Miao, 2020, Aalbers, 2019, Ward, 2021, Nascimento Neto et al., 2023, Aalbers, 2017).

Planning systems have embraced more flexible forms of regulation to accommodate the imperatives of capital reproduction necessary for urban transformation. These systems are characterised by negotiation and project-oriented approaches. In this context, the distinction between deal-making and plan-making cities illuminates tensions by differentiating the prevalence of the rule of law and zoning in the former, while the latter is characterised by state discretion for land use decisions, and establishes land use regulations after rounds of negotiation and agreements with developers (Friendly, 2020, Gielen and Tasan-Kok, 2010). These power relations between design, regulation and negotiation confirm their non-harmonious coexistence, and thus reject “the idea that they can ideally interact in perfect balance with no negative impact on each other” (Ultramari et al., 2023).

In Brazil, the regulatory framework – as stated by the federal law known as the City Statute - stands out for its emphasis on participatory planning rooted in conflicts (Holston, 1998) as in the Lefebvrian conception of the right to the city (Svoboda, 2021). However, emerging instruments developed by local governments have challenged this paradigm by introducing the possibility of negotiating urban codes favouring entrepreneurs in exchange for urban amenities and infrastructure works. One such instrument is the Urban Intervention Project (UIP) in São Paulo. It has sparked debates regarding its impact on urban development and the relationship between the Stat and the real estate market.

The prominence of UIPs in São Paulo underscores the distinction between the planning process and the instrumental plan, and presents new avenues for addressing the historical challenge of social housing in well-located urban areas while also raising questions about state-market collusion. This paper analyses one ongoing UIP in São Paulo, and examines the advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1999) created to tailor its proposal and guarantee subsequent approval. By mapping these conflicts, we elucidate patterns of conformorality (Lisciandra et al., 2013), explore how social groups coalesced around specific moral positions, and through so doing also reflect on the epistemological implications of analysing urban conflicts through this lens.

2. Learning from conformorality

The concept of conformorality, introduced by Lisciandra et al. (2013), originates from psychological studies and extends the well-known Asch paradigm (1955). It delves into how groups and communities tend to conform to normative judgments under peer pressure, and particularly when it comes to moral norms. As demonstrated by these authors, individuals tend to conform to the common behaviours and shared opinions within a group, and emphasise the perception that violations of moral norms are typically considered to be non-negotiable. Bourdieu's concept of social fields (1984) may offer further insights into this intricate process. Once an individual becomes part of a field, they desire to maintain the position and status acquired, and are predisposed to act according to its patterns and rules without question.

In social sciences, morality is a concept employed by scholars such as Durkheim (1929/1961) and Weber (1975) to elucidate upon social order concerning individual behaviour, that is grounded in shared values and cultural codes that delineate socially accepted or rejected conduct (Stets and Turner, 2006, Herman and Pogarsky, 2022). While traditionally discussed in psychology, criminology, and behavioural economics, the debate on morality has increasingly influenced public policy and planning. Various theoretical frameworks, from the concept of advocacy coalitions within public policy subsystems (Sabatier, 1986, Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018, Weible et al., 2009) to the role of beliefs and ideas from an institutionalist perspective (Béland, 2010, Carstensen and Schmidt, 2015, Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), have explored the individual value spectrum and its correlation with subjective social norms, as Cialdini et al. (1990) argues. In practical terms, there is a belief that such a correlation would justify and explain the contemporary ideal of a 'city for all', which exists in naive urban proposals and is strategically defended in political discourses. In the 2000s, urban plans heavily promoted and supported by the Brazilian government under inclusiveness guidelines serve as an example of these efforts. The expectation was that a master plan, developed through democratic processes, would ensure the collective well-being and satisfaction of the entire population.

This debate on morality holds significance for planning; a field often perceived to prioritise technical expertise (Hoch, 2017, Raco and Savini, 2019, Davoudi, 2015), even though "planners do not uncover facts like geologists do, but rather, like lawyers, they organise facts as evidence within different arguments" (Hoch, 1994). Narratives play a central role in planning (Ortiz, 2022), and mobilise values and ideas to establish the legitimacy of public actions at the local level (Campbell, 2002, Taylor, 2013). Often, they do so more effectively than rational arguments.

In contexts where urban governance arrangements entail a limited degree of autonomy for the State and require political acumen due to the diverse number of social agents and activities involved in collective action (Healey, 2006), combining analytical knowledge and moral considerations becomes imperative (Healey, 2009). It is not about ignoring the technical-rational foundation of planning, but understanding it for what it is – just one facet of planning.

Despite its significance, many planners overlook the role of emotions in planning as well as the persuasive power of rhetoric in legitimising plans and decisions (Baum, 2015, Davoudi et al., 2020), often influenced by their ideological legacies of planning (Shepherd, 2018). Therefore, the concept of conformorality directly

engages with debates concerning the less 'rational' aspects of planning objectives. Shifting the focus from viewing the plan as a supposed solution to wicked problems to understanding advocacy coalitions and their role in planning emphasises the relational dimension and underscores the importance of cooperation and coordination.

3. Framing the case: Urban Intervention Projects in São Paulo

In Brazil, Master Plans are the cornerstone of local policies. They guide urban development and prescribe the planning instruments to be employed (Cunha et al., 2019, Samora, 2012). Their national regulation in 2001, under the City Statute, arose within a particular political-democratic context characterized by the principles of the right to the city and participatory planning. This normative framework addressed longstanding challenges inherent in an opaque and classist planning system, historically perpetuating socio-spatial inequalities (Friendly, 2013, Fernandes, 2010).

Formally institutionalised, this framework reinforced a long-engendered and specific culture of spatial planning in Brazil (Rocco et al., 2019). It was expected that the normative dimension would be sufficiently robust to curb discretion by local governments and reduce favouritism towards an agenda driven by the reproduction of real estate capital. However, the results suggest limited efficacy (Santos Jr. and Montandon, 2011, Bueno and Lima, 2020) and point to tensions between "the normative and practical dimensions of planning in Brazil. [...] Although ideals like justice and equality are in the letter of the law, their application and ensuing effects often conflict with those values" (Rocco et al., 2019). Despite many interpretations, common sense generally finds the explanation for the meagre results achieved by this national legislation either in the historical dualism of Brazilian cities which resist forcefully, or in the resistance of capital to undergo necessary changes. Less attention is given to the underlying beliefs, practices, and historical technical references that shape urban plans.

This discrepancy between normative intent and practical outcomes underscores a prevailing assumption that the plan itself is equated with the planning process, and its implementation is viewed merely as an independent and executive phase. Additionally, spatial planning is imbued with an underlying moral imperative to foster socio-spatial justice; burdening planning instruments with lofty expectations. As Shepherd (2018) argued, "while planning is not a political ideology per se, it gains its form and structure by virtue of the fact that it is structured by concepts which are of key concern to political ideologies. [...] political ideologies struggle to impose control over the terms by which these concepts are understood and, therefore, control the limits of what is thinkable in planning practice".

In this context, São Paulo has historically pioneered urban transformations within Brazil's planning frameworks. Innovative initiatives such as the introduction of development charges for projects exceeding land use limits in the 1980s (Rezende et al., 2009, Martins and Magami, 2023) and the establishment of urban operations coupled with a financialised instrument for trading development rights in the 1990s (Nascimento Neto and Moreira, 2013, Nobre, 2023) have left indelible marks on urban policy nationwide (Bernardini and Sato, 2021). However, this prominence is not devoid of contradictions, as evidenced by the continued existence of an elitist model that perpetuates inequality and marginalises poverty (Holston, 2009, Kowarick, 2000).

This paper focuses on the Urban Intervention Project (UIP), an instrument that was introduced in the 2014 São Paulo's Master Plan. Under this provision, private developers can propose urban projects in designated city zones. This, in turn, allows them to propose alterations to planning regulations and the urban fabric, including displacing informal settlements. Diverging from conventionally regulated instruments in Brazil, the UIP represents a critical juncture in the institutionalisation of city planning; and demands a recalibration of advocacy coalitions as well as a reconfiguration of interests, agendas, and concerns. Our subsequent analysis will delve into this political juncture in the next section.

4. UIP Vila Leopoldina: conformorality in conflictual planning

Among the ongoing UIPs in São Paulo, the Vila Leopoldina is a focal point in our discussion. Launched in 2016 by a consortium of private developers, this proposal aims to transform a 300,000-square-metre area formerly occupied by industrial activities into a new hub for real estate development. Situated in São Paulo's prime Real Estate location, with high land value and access to urban amenities, the site is partially home to two long-established informal settlements and also exhibits various contingent issues that have hindered its development priority over the years (Figure 1).



Figure 1. UIP Vila Leopoldina, São Paulo
Source: the authors.

In essence, the area holds significant potential for construction which makes it an attractive prospect for the newly regulated planning instrument. The original proposal, unveiled in 2016, sought to increase building rights in exchange for infrastructure investments and social housing development. According to the initial plan, a portion of the social housing would be constructed on-site, with additional demand being addressed via provision in a public area approximately 1 km away.

The pivotal question concerns the viability of the solution proposed by the private developers. The designated public area identified in the original proposal was intended to accommodate approximately 75% of the informal settlement dwellers and had already been earmarked for social housing in the 2014 Master Plan; thereby aligning with established spatial directives. However, the surrounding areas, characterised by high-income neighbourhoods, launched vehement opposition to the proposal.

Manifesting a NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) sentiment, a coalition of residents from the adjacent luxury condominiums mobilised, utilising online platforms, petitions, and legal consultation to voice their dissent. As succinctly summarised by a local newspaper, "on Imperatriz Leopoldina Avenue, 4-bedroom apartments with gourmet balcony are advertised for prices starting at US\$ 505,000. On the other side of the street, less than 100 meters away, a plot of land owned by the City of São Paulo could offer homes to more than 500 families living in the neighbouring favelas" (Paulo, 2018, author's translation).

This specific controversy serves as a focal point for examining pivotal aspects that encapsulates the empirical implications of conformality. Our analysis relies on official proposal documents, meeting transcripts, public hearing recordings, and media interviews with key stakeholders (São Paulo City Hall, 2018, São Paulo City Hall, 2024, IUSM, 2024, Paulo, 2018, among other sources, Hall, 2023). By juxtaposing narratives from the three main interest groups, we elucidate the potential of conformality as an analytical framework for planning studies.

Scrutiny of meeting reports and public hearing recordings reveals a concerted resistance from luxury condominium residents which was counterbalanced by an equally robust countermovement from informal settlement residents. Concurrently, private developers sought to garner support for their proposal, aligning with the local government interest in promoting urban development. These advocacy coalitions are delineated into the Luxury Condominiums Group (LC-G), the Informal Settlements Group (IS-G), and the Private Developers Group (PD-G).

The primary legitimising argument of the LC-G revolves around the disclosed contamination discovered on the social housing public plot, which lies outside the UIP's area and is directly in front of their buildings, as reported by Paulo (2018). This contamination, theoretically, poses an obstacle to urban occupation in the vicinity. Criticisms have also focused on the project's impact, as well as the maintenance costs for low-income residents and the insufficient parking provisions contained within the plan. Further discussions also addressed the need for additional green spaces nearby, notwithstanding a park approximately 2 km away.

In turn, the IS-G argued that the LC-G's arguments merely demonstrated their prejudice and desire to distance themselves from poor people. The IS-G advocated for the right to housing and stressed the importance of persons being allowed to reside close to their current dwellings. While concerns about contamination were acknowledged, they were downplayed, with the IS-G suggesting that a solution could eventually be reached. However, the strength of the PD-G's position became evident, as the IS-G appeared to concede to the developers' proposal of relocation 1.5 km away, primarily due to concerns over their own financial sustainability.

The public consultation process for the Vila Leopoldina UIP spanned over three years, and entailed more than twenty meetings across various councils and forums as well as three public hearings. One such public hearing involved over 450 people. Within this antagonistic environment, dwellers from the informal settlements and the high-end condominiums engaged in heated debates. The quotations presented demonstrate the multifaceted dynamics and contentious nature of the process.

Individual 1, from the Luxury Condominiums group (LC-G):

I don't understand why they are granting additional building rights to the developer. They are already obligated by the Master Plan to meet the so-called solidarity quota. They are requesting a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 4.0 instead of 2.0. Let's tear up the Master Plan since it's easy to come and say, "I want to increase the building rights on my property." The UIP regulation stipulates that social housing construction should be within the intervention perimeter and not in a nearby area. Yet you are trying to relocate this population 1.5 km away from where they live. You're saying it's in their interest to build the development. [...] Instead of building on their own land, next to where you are, they are turning that area into a square. Why not put more social housing on their own land? [...]

Individual 2, Informal Settlements group (IS-G):

The project is in our best interest; it's not the Viva Leopoldina association or any dweller of Vila Leopoldina being displaced. It's our communities themselves that will be relocated. [...] The project looks promising. If executed transparently and meets our needs, [...] we don't want another area. [...] They said they want parks; there are already two. But they don't want to give us housing. They only want parks for their children to play in; they want two, three, or four of those. [...] Leopoldina people, bourgeois, rich, first knock on our door and ask if we need anything before saying pretty words, trying to buy us.

(São Paulo City Hall, 2018, our transcription and translation)

The discussions revolved around a particular morality summarised in the social conflict between the poor and the rich. The proposal to relocate residents of informal settlements to an area outside the project zone - a suggestion that, of itself, conflicted with the guidelines of the planning instrument itself - was advocated for the beneficiaries, who perceived it as a chance to enhance their living conditions. For private developers (PD-G), this would mean increasing building rights and transferring social housing responsibility onto public land; a favourable factor to their economic modelling. Holding sway in these negotiations was the implicit threat of withdrawing the proposal should conditions prove unfavourable; an approach that intertwined public interest with the success of the private developers.

Table 1 systematises the manifestation of conformorality across different dimensions of the conflict in Vila Leopoldina. It reveals the dynamics that existed between the groups and how each one, through their respective struggles and negotiations, conformed to challenged established norms. The LC-G emphasised arguments to maintain social distances and preserve the status quo, while the IS-G advocated for adapting norms that ensure social justice and fundamental rights. The PD-G aimed to reconcile economic development with social responsibility. Furthermore, negotiations between the State and developers illustrate how land use decisions often prioritise corporation interests, potentially compromising social housing and justice in land use.

Table 1 - Analysis of Confororality in the Urban Conflict of Vila Leopoldina

Focus	Group	Description	Application of Confororality
Normative Conformity	LC-G	Utilises arguments emphasising contamination and costs to maintain distance from low-income populations and seeks to support existing norms.	Practices of social exclusion and maintenance of the status quo.
	IS-G	Fights for compliance with norms of social justice and the right to the city and seeks to adopt new norms.	Defence of fundamental rights and access to urban services.
	PD-G	Seeks to align economic development with compliance with regulatory and social expectations.	Alignment of economic development with social responsibility.
Impacts on Land Use Decisions	State and PD-G	Ongoing negotiations with developers under the relaxation of norms to favour business interests in exchange for urban amenities and infrastructure.	Negotiations that define urban codes in favour of corporate interests.
	State and LC-G	Discussions on how the proposed development impacts existing urban norms, with LC-G emphasising environmental and aesthetic concerns of the city.	Resistance to integrating informal settlements to preserve a particular image of the city and its intrinsic land value
	State and IS-G	Involvement in negotiations about relocation and housing provision, with IS-G advocating for the right to nearby and affordable housing within the city.	Struggle for housing equity and spatial justice in the allocation of urban resources.
Urban Policies	Urban Governance	Questions about the collusion between the State and the market with UIPs raise concerns about the transparency and equity of urban policy decisions.	Analysis of power dynamics affecting transparency and equity in urban planning policies.
Theoretical Implications	Urban Studies	Future review and analysis of how norms are applied or challenged are needed, highlighting the importance of normative compliance in urban policy.	Continuous reflection on the application and impact of urban norms on planning practices is needed.

With regards urban governance, Table 1 demonstrates how the urban intervention projects (UIPs) are critical junctures in which conformorality faces challenges as a consequence of the interplay between public interest and market forces. The negotiations reveal the existence of potential collusion between the State and the private developers, which raises concerns about the transparency of planning decisions. This collusion frequently manifested as covert manoeuvres which sought to circumvent legal regulations. Such a scenario reflects more of a “managerialisation of law than a legalisation of organisations,” as Edelman (2016) discussed. The epistemological implications of these conflicts pose a challenge to identifying the limits of practices under

conformality, as they constantly constitute and reconstitute new planning paradigms. A plausible hypothesis is that as these processes evolve, they gradually blur the lines between established norms and principles of legality. Consequently, the solutions to these conflicts shift away from political relations between social groups and lean towards the judicialisation of urban policies.

4.1 Practical Implications of Conformality in the Vila Leopoldina Case

The dilemma appears to pivot on the dichotomy of wealth (rich versus poor), and engenders corresponding advocacy coalitions rooted in this narrative. Both groups' voices played decisive roles in galvanising support for their respective causes. Notably, the project underwent a rigorous three-year analysis and consultation process overseen by local authorities (2016 - 2019). Subsequently, planners from the local government authority had to translate the negotiated agreements into normative guidelines, subjected to the City Council's analysis; a process which extended the advocacy arena between LC and IS groups for another five years (2019–2023). Throughout this process, the PD-G safeguarded its interests by emphasising the imperative of attaining a minimum level of profitability if it was to maintain its involvement in the project.

A critical juncture arose with the entry of local councillors into the fray. This, in turn, reshuffled the dynamics of influence between the stakeholders, with the IS-G agenda becoming increasingly prominent. A cohort of political actors emerged, who positioned themselves as defenders of "social demands" and also exerted influence over the private developers. Additionally, the intervention of the public prosecutor's office, in seeking to halt the project's analysis due to its overlap with the master plan revision timeline (MPSP, 2022), underscored the role of judicialisation in enforcing the normative mandates outlined in the City Statute onto local urban policies (Coslovsky, 2015).

While conducting an exhaustive analysis of underlying motivations fell beyond the scope of this paper, it is plausible to consider the moral appeal of aligning with the concerns of IS-G as a strategic manoeuvre for local councillors seeking to garner popular support for their re-election endeavours. Concurrently, the PD-G, confronted with mounting resistance in the legislative arena, proposed revisions (previously deemed unfeasible to the project's economic viability) under the guise of moral righteousness (benevolence). This power rebalance culminated in project approval, and established the construction of social housing exclusively within the project area, a concession that had not been entertained in the prior negotiations. As stated by a member of the PD-G,

The process was long, laborious, and tortuous. It involved intense discussions with municipal technicians, countless hearings, workshops with neighbourhood residents, and clashes with condominiums that, opposed to a new spatial order, fought against the construction of apartments for residents of the nearby favelas. The halting situation was resolved with a generous gesture from Votorantim [a private group], which - in addition to pay in advance the funds for the construction of more than 800 units of social housing intended for the resettlement of families from the two favelas, decided to accommodate 100% of these dwellings on its own land. It is important to note that the project results from the convergence of three factors: good regulation, a beautiful location, and a benevolent owner. [...] It is not every day that such an alignment of factors occurs. At a time when resentment is growing in cities and liberal democracies are being questioned for their poor performance, the example of UIPs and PPPs in general, and UIP Vila Leopoldina in particular, should be sought as a formula for the generation and distribution of collective goods (IUSM, 2024, our translation).

Table 2 elucidates how the agents involved in the Vila Leopoldina case employed conformality to navigate the complex landscape of urban policy negotiations concerning land use. Each group, driven by their own distinct interests and objectives, strategically manipulated social, moral, and decency norms to shape public policies and community responses. For instance, local councillors appeared to leverage their legislative authority to align with pressure groups, while the Public Prosecutor's Office discursively upheld normative standards to bolster its social legitimacy by advocating for strict adherence to legally established norms and guidelines.

Simultaneously, the PD-G utilised its influence to cultivate an image of benevolence, and employed this strategy to improve its market position and influence political decisions impacting urban development. These elements underscore the intricate interplay that can exist between normative conformity and strategic interests, with economic resources and time serving as pressures on the weaker group (maintaining a constant need). Time, in this context, functions as a form of capital, as described by Pierre Bourdieu, providing different types of advantageous returns for those seeking political gains (councillors), social legitimacy (Public Prosecutor's Office), and contemporary urban aesthetics (the wealthier classes) in the city.

Table 2: Analysis of Conformality on Urban Development in Vila Leopoldina

Stakeholders	Actions and Influence	Implications and Outcomes	Social, Moral, and Decency Norms Applied
Local Councillors	Engagement in drafting and approving laws that impact urban development, aiming to align with influential pressure groups to ensure electoral support.	Decisions often reflect pressure groups' interests more than the community's general welfare.	Use governance and political ethics norms to maintain or gain power and influence.
Interest Groups (LC-G, IS-G, PD-G)	LC-G: Resists the integration of social housing to protect property values. IS-G: Fights for housing rights and social justice. PD-G: Maximises profits under the guise of social responsibility.	LC-G: Maintains high socioeconomic status quo. IS-G: Faces ongoing challenges in voice and negotiations. PD-G: Secures public concessions contracts and projects.	LC-G: Preservation of social and economic status. IS-G: Advocacy for equity and justice. PD-G: Strategic compliance with norms for self-benefit.
Public Prosecutor's Office	Acts as a defender of community rights, questioning adherence to normative instruments and the ethical values of urban planning decisions.	Serves as a bulwark against unfair or illegal practices, often holding merely veto power and limited by the complexity of negotiations.	Defence of normative foundations and institutionalised social rights as bases for justice and equity.
Private developer	It positions itself as a benefactor through funding social housing, which it uses to influence policies and public perceptions.	Improves corporate image while subtly favouring its commercial interests through political concessions.	Use of corporate philanthropy as a moral norm for manipulating policies and public opinion.

This case demonstrates the analytical potential of conformality. It illustrates the sway wielded by social groups over political actors who swiftly aligned themselves with 'the cause of the underprivileged'. Despite grappling with the weighty burdens of technical and financial modelling, the PD group adeptly navigated the moral dimension to bolster its legitimacy. While addressing procedural requisites, this process paradoxically exerted minimal influence on the intricate legitimacies that were expected to be achieved. Ultimately, the Master Plan exerted scant influence, and mainly portrayed rites that needed to be respected.

An examination of the PD-G's role within the Vila Leopoldina context reveals that it exercised considerable influence through a complex, temporally-dependent relational strategy. While the PD-G set initial parameters for the project, the process involved substantial revision to these parameters which suggests that the group's involvement was neither passive nor superficial. Indeed, the strategy of the PD-G appears to have been calculated on two fronts: they proposed guidelines that favoured their economic interests under the guise of social responsibility; they adjusted flexibly to the demands of the negotiation process, and in so doing ensured that their proposals remained aligned with changes in legal requirements and community expectations at the time. This behaviour indicates that, although it might seem that the project used the PD-G's name merely as a strategic facilitator, their actual influence was intricately interwoven with the project's development and approval. It follows, that the PD-G's contribution extended beyond mere instrumentalization; illustrating their capacity to subtly influence and adapt urban policies so that they concurrently satisfied their corporation interests as well as emerging normative and social pressures.

The managerialisation of law and the legalisation of organisations also emerge as significant processes within conformality. While adhering to social norms under the guise of corporate responsibility, the PD-G may have contributed to this managerialisation by altering the law's interpretation and application to align with particular interests rather than promoting social rights. The subtle erosion of state apparatuses through conformality-

driven mechanisms blurred the lines between social, moral, and decency norms. It suggests that, despite the existence of norms and statutes designed to protect vulnerable groups, organisations permeated by private interests, whether within the State or in the market itself, possess sophisticated instruments to decouple this statutory base from their initial purposes. This detachment allows such organisations to make laws more instrumental to prevailing power structures. In the case of Vila Leopoldina, this dynamic favoured entities and groups with greater resources and influence.

The roles of councillors and the Public Prosecutor's Office in the Brazilian state reveal a complex and problematic scenario. Councillors hold elective positions, representing society in the municipal legislative power, while members of the Public Prosecutor's Office, though lifelong appointees within the state structure, are paradoxically tasked with representing collective social interests before the judiciary. This institutional framework, which is meant to ensure the legalisation of organisations, appears weakened in fulfilling its mission. The dynamic reflects a broader tension between adherence to the law and its manipulation to serve managerial, class-based, and corporate interests. As Edelman (2016) argues, this delicate balance is central to the interactions between law and organisations, shaping legal consciousness

5. Conclusion

This paper examined an ongoing Urban Intervention Project (UIP) in São Paulo, and delved into the advocacy coalitions that were formed to shape the proposal and promote its approval. By mapping these conflicts, we delineated patterns of conformorality, and explored how social groups united around specific moral stances. This process revealed the epistemological implications of analysing urban conflicts through this lens, and the paper elucidated upon how the dynamics of moral conformity influence planning decisions and underpin the foundations of urban policies. Notably, the study of advocacy coalitions provided a deep understanding of how interactions between different agents – from planners to ordinary citizens – are permeated by moral and social norms that define the courses of urban interventions. This underscores the importance of the intricate interplay that exists between morality, power, and politics in urban development.

More specifically, the case confirms that conformorality provides novel avenues to unveil the dynamics of collective behaviour and decision-making processes within the planning realm. The UIP Vila Leopoldina offered an opportunity to explore this conceptual framework and better understand the nuances of planning practices which have diverged from the statutory ideals contained in the plans and the letter of the law. This expanded approach holds promise for deepening the comprehension of how such mechanisms shape legal consciousness across different societies. Despite the conventional emphasis on technical aspects, planning grapples with intricate challenges stemming from cognitive constraints, resource limitations, and impassioned engagements. These advancements point to a more comprehensive approach which stresses the dynamic interactions that occur between moral conformity, the legalisation of organisations, and the managerialisation of law in urban policies and planning processes; all possess implications for their manifestation in master plans.

Integrating conformorality into planning studies appears to significantly broaden epistemological perspectives, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the evolutionary trajectories in plan development and their interface with instruments influenced by a financialised agenda. This study has shown the importance of values and beliefs over purely rational decision-making criteria, accentuating the role of the moral domain in legitimising public actions in urban policies. As Baum (2015) and Forester (2013) argued, emotions can be understood as specific actions and modes of acting, including ways of thinking, underscoring the critical role of conformorality. It serves as a decisive factor in shaping the design and implementation of urban policies that are more (un)just and (in)effective, depending on their alignment with the economic demands or the social and moral expectations of the affected communities. This approach engenders a critical analysis of existing practices and encourages the search for methods that integrate human and emotional aspects into urban management.

Furthermore, conformality contributes to neo-institutionalist perspectives on urban studies by recognising that institutional structures and norms are influenced by social, moral, and decency norms. These norms influence the institutionalisation of strategic human actions and interactions over time, through a continuous process of adaptation and reconfiguration. This approach broadens the understanding of how planning policies and practices can be oriented to influence urban policies which seek to foster social inclusion and spatial justice. The implementation of these policies, however, demands a thorough analysis of the forces that perpetuate power structures and inequalities. This challenge will not be overcome without understanding the institutional mechanisms that govern cities' socio-political relationships. In conclusion, our study underscores the need for planning perspectives to acknowledge and integrate the complexity of moral and institutional dynamics, and positions urban transformation as both a technical challenge and a deeply entrenched issue within social and moral contexts.

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