



PERSUASIVE PRACTITIONERS AND THE ART OF SIMPLIFICATION

Mobilizing the “Bogotá Model” through Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how Bogotá’s transport programs TransMilenio BRT and Ciclovía were learned and adopted in Guadalajara, Mexico. It proposes that the construction and mobilization of simplified “narratives of progress” and the persuasive capacities of the actors that tell these stories, what I here call “persuasive practitioners”, are largely influential in driving policy learning and adoption of other cities’ policies.

KEYWORDS: *storytelling; policy learning; policy transfer; policy mobilities; Bogotá.*

Profissionais persuasivos e a arte da simplificação: mobilizando o “modelo de Bogotá” através da contação de histórias

RESUMO

O artigo analisa a maneira como os programas de transporte de Bogotá TransMilenio BRT e Ciclovía foram aprendidos e adotados em Guadalajara, México. O trabalho propõe que a construção e mobilização de “narrativas do progresso” simplificadas e as capacidades persuasivas dos atores que contam essas histórias, que eu denomino “profissionais persuasivos”, influenciaram amplamente o aprendizado das políticas e a sua adoção em outras cidades.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *contação de histórias; aprendizado de políticas públicas; transferência de políticas; mobilidades de políticas públicas; Bogotá.*

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[1] Literally a “citizenship culture”. This concept was introduced by Bogotá mayor Antanas Mockus and guided his interventions in the city during his two administrations (1995-1997 and 2000-2003). For a contextualization of Mockus framework see Mockus, 2001a (in Spanish).

INTRODUCTION

A new urban imaginary of Bogotá, Colombia emerged in the last decade. Traditionally portrayed as an urban dystopia and a city of fear during the 1980s and early 1990s, Bogotá became a world policy model of sustainable urban transport in less than a decade. The transformation of Bogotá during the 1990s and early 2000s, based on the promotion of public space, non-car transportation alternatives and teaching citizens “*cultura ciudadana*”,¹ has been nationally and internationally celebrated and, most recently, referenced by hundreds

of cities, both in the global North and the South.² From all programs experimented in Bogotá, two have been particularly referenced and adopted in other cities: 1) TransMilenio, Bogotá's now famous bus rapid transit (BRT), a system of high-frequency rapid buses with dedicated lanes and stations that carries over one million passengers per day; and 2) Ciclovía, a 70-mile weekly street closure program to promote urban biking and physical activity that gathers one million Bogotanos every Sunday in streets normally reserved for car traffic. Both programs have been replicated in more than 100 cities in the last decade.³

In this paper, I show that the adoption of these two Bogotá's transport policies in Guadalajara, Mexico, was not the outcome of a rational process of technical evaluation but it is rather related to the construction and global circulation of a simplified narrative of urban transformation that links a small set of public space and transport programs executed in Bogotá as the reasons of Bogotá's urban transformation during the 1990s. Based on participant observation, archival work and more than thirty interviews conducted between 2012 and 2014 in Guadalajara, I highlight two key elements in this process of policy transfer through storytelling. First, the role of a particular type of expert that I call here "persuasive practitioners". Bogotá's persuasive practitioners do not rely on the mobilization of technical or scientific knowledge. Rather their legitimacy lies on a narrative that puts them at the center of Bogotá's urban transformation success. This is a story that emphasizes transportation and public space interventions as the cause of Bogotá's "urban renaissance" while silencing important political economy reforms and the contradictions and failures of public space and transportation policies in the city. Yet, it is precisely this simplification of the causes of Bogotá's urban success what helps these experts inspire the creation of urban alliances that will push for the adoption of Bogotá policies in other cities. Second, I highlight the role of conferences and policy forums as key spaces where this persuasive narrative process often takes place. Moving influential urban actors from policy knowledge to action requires not only exchanges of knowledge and stories but active processes of inspiration, persuasion and trust building that, despite the increasing availability of online policy repositories, are still best mobilized through face-to-face contact. Based on an analysis of the practices and spaces that facilitated the creation of a multi-actor coalition that resulted in the adoption of Bogotá's policies in Guadalajara, this paper reveals how simplistic stories of urban transformation lubricate the global circulation of urban policies by facilitating new urban governance arrangements. In doing so, I show that narratives surrounding particular policies are crucial for understanding urban policy transfer. In opposition to rational choice, path dependency, and other theoretical frameworks aimed at

[2] Hidalgo; Gutiérrez, 2013; Wood, 2014.

[3] Montero, 2017a.

explaining policy decision-making, the article proposes that the simplification of stories surrounding urban change and the persuasive capacities of the actors that tell these stories are largely influential in driving policy decisions in other cities.

I begin this article discussing theories of policy transfer, learning and mobilities and show that while the importance of learning to promote policy change has been highlighted in various debates,⁴ little attention has been given so far to the ways in which policy actors actually learn as well as to the “politics of learning”.⁵ Here, debates on storytelling and urban planning can help us analyze the important role that narratives, emotional dispositions and persuasive messengers play in urban planning decisions and urban policy change.⁶ Recent research on the geographies of policy mobilities show that these practices of inspiration and persuasion are best mobilized through face-to-face contact and are particularly effective in conferences and urban policy forums thanks to their capacity to create trust and facilitate policy coalitions.⁷ After the review of relevant debates in the literature, I analyze how the organization and celebration of a conference in Guadalajara in 2003 — in which Bogotá mayor Enrique Peñalosa was keynote speaker — was crucial to create a local coalition of businessmen in the jewelry industry and local media elites that pushed for the Bogotá model in Guadalajara. I pay particular attention to the practices of story making and simplification through which Bogotá policies were mobilized in this forum, the physical and spatial characteristics of the forum where these practices took place and the ways in which these practices inspired the creation of a local alliance that pushed for the eventual adoption of Bogotá’s BRT and Ciclovía in Guadalajara. The paper concludes with a reflection on the art of constructing and mobilizing international policy models and the dangers of narrative simplification.

LEARNING IS NOT RATIONAL:

NARRATIVE AND EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF POLICY LEARNING

In a recent article, Laura Lieto⁸ has argued that when policies travel from one city to another what travels is not the policy itself but a socially constructed “mythical narrative” about the success of that policy in the city where it was implemented. In the case of Bogotá, this myth was a simplistic story of urban transformation success, moving from a chaotic Third World city into a sustainable transportation model thanks to a set of public space and transportation planning interventions. Good stories, as good myths, have powerful morals that emotionally move and influence the listener. If Bogotá, this chaotic city in the Third World, has become a sustainable city in a matter of years,

[4] Rose, 1993; Dolowitz; Marsh, 2000; McCann; Ward 2011.

[5] Stone, 2001; Meseguer; Gilardi, 2009; Peck; Theodore, 2010.

[6] Sandercock, 2003; Throgmorton, 1996; Hoch, 2006; Lieto, 2015.

[7] McCann, 2011; Cook; Ward, 2012.

[8] Lieto, 2015.

why can't your city do it? This was the powerful moral of the Bogotá story that has been told over and over in conferences, study tours and digital platforms worldwide.⁹ To characterize policy learning beyond assumptions of policy actors as rational learning individuals and to better understand the power of narratives in policy learning and adoption, I draw in the next section from a rich tradition in urban planning scholarship that has highlighted the importance of narratives and storytelling in planning¹⁰ as well as more recent debates that seek to conceptualize the role of emotions in planning practice.¹¹

As noted by Leonie Sandercock,¹² stories can act as a catalyzer of policy change “partly by inspirational example, and partly by shaping a new imagination of alternatives”. Storytelling is different from other ways of transmitting knowledge: a story has a setting, a chronological logic (a beginning and an end), a clear plot with protagonists (heroes, villains, innocent people) and a moral tension that normally points to a potential solution.¹³ However, to act as a catalyzer of change, a good story needs to have a “potential for generalizability”¹⁴ and be persuasively told by legitimate and credible storytellers.¹⁵ Similarly, recent debates that seek to conceptualize the role of emotions in planning practice have noted that what makes policy actors pay attention and get inspired by a particular policy does not only reside in the outcomes of that policy through some standardized or rational evaluation mechanism. It is also about the capacity of the policy — and, more specifically, the expert presenting the policy — to emotionally move actors and show them the effects of that particular policy in their well-being as well as in the well-being of those they care about.¹⁶ As noted by Hoch:

attention, perception and reflection used in planning judgment also rely upon emotional dispositions and sensitivity. The practical activity people engage in when learning and adopting a belief involves more than cognitive judgment about the value of the belief (its truthfulness or goodness). The activity draws upon emotions and feelings (its meaning and significance).¹⁷

He further argues that persuasive planners are not necessarily those that present the best scientific evidence available but rather those that “shape the emotional response of relevant stakeholders”, in other words, those that can “organize the objects of persuasion in ways that actively subvert emotional intelligence, manipulating images and text to project beliefs that will provoke a predictable emotional response”.¹⁸

To better conceptualize the role that emotions play in policy transfer and adoption, it is necessary to understand the practices behind the circulation. In another article,¹⁹ I analyzed the important role of study tours to Bogotá as a key practice that facilitated the adoption of

[9] Montero, 2017a.

[10] Throgmorton, 1996; Sandercock, 2003; Lieto, 2015.

[11] Hoch, 2006; Gunder, 2011.

[12] Sandercock, 2003, p. 18.

[13] Sandercock, 2003; Jones; McBeth, 2010.

[14] Sandercock, 2003.

[15] Throgmorton, 1996; Jones; McBeth, 2010.

[16] Hoch, 2006; Gunder, 2011.

[17] Hoch, 2006, p. 368.

[18] Hoch, 2006, p. 378.

[19] Montero, 2017a.

BRT and Ciclovía in Guadalajara. Using qualitative and ethnographic methods, I showed that study tours were powerful instruments to promote policy change thanks to their capacity to educate the attention of influential local policy actors through hands-on “experiential learning”, expand local coalitions through the building of trust and consensus around a policy model, and mobilize public opinion through references to already existing policies. In this article, however, I focus my analytical lens on an earlier stage: the policy inspiration and persuasion process that often precedes the celebration of a study tour to another city and that often takes place during conferences and talks of what I here call “persuasive practitioners”. Despite their central role in the introduction and circulation of new policy ideas, the role of conferences and policy forums is undertheorized in the literature on policy transfer and learning. Conferences, forums and workshops are often considered a “black-box” in which exchanges of knowledge and face-to-face contacts lead to a change in beliefs among participants,²⁰ and yet, less is known about the actual practices through which policy-makers and advocates learn about new policies. Reflecting on the recent literature on policy learning, Gilardi and Radaelli²¹ have noted that “we still do not know much about how communities of social actors — especially policy-makers — learn”.

[20] Sabatier, 1988; Dolowitz; Marsh, 2000.

[21] Gilardi; Radaelli, 2012, p. 162.

POLICY LEARNING, POLICY FORUMS AND FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

Even though email, social media and Skype have made information exchange easier, there are features of face-to-face contact that cannot be matched by technology-mediated encounters. It is precisely these spatial features of face-to-face encounters that forums and conferences seek to mobilize. Economic geographers Storper and Venables²² have distinguished four key aspects of face-to-face (F2F) contacts. First, they argue that thanks to its high frequency, possibility of rapid feedback and visual and body cues, F2F is an efficient communication technology that allows for the exchange of information and knowledge that is not easily codifiable and transmitted through other means. Second, F2F contacts provide a way to build trust, relationships and collaborations between actors. While the later stages of a collaborative project often involve the exchange of codifiable information, which is easier to do through technology-mediated communications, it is in the early stages where F2F contacts prove essential to build the trust that lubricates multi-actor collaborations and their intermittent exchanges. Third, F2F help create social and professional networks: “[it] gives them the means to become members of a structured milieu, to get ‘in the loop’”.²³ Finally, they argue that F2F communication is, above all, a performance that serves not just to transmit

[22] Storper; Venables, 2004.

[23] Storper; Venables, 2004, p. 357.

knowledge but also to produce inspiration through stimulating imitation and competition. The combined effects of these four features create what they call “buzz”: “Individuals in a buzz environment interact and cooperate with other high-ability people, are well placed to communicate complex ideas with them, and are highly motivated”.²⁴

[24] Storper; Venables, 2004, p. 365.

Face-to-face contacts, however, are not limited to conference scheduled activities, they also include informal activities outside the event such as the logistical preparations to participate, sharing a hotel room or going dancing together. As Faulconbridge²⁵ has shown, these social activities are important trust-building elements that, while often not advertised as part of the official programs, are essential parts of the trust-building environment and buzz that a conference creates. Conversations in hallways, card exchanges over coffee breaks, informal meetings during meals or closed-door meetings are essential not only to learn implementation details of the new policies proposed in sessions but also to build trust between the different actors involved in urban policymaking and planning, particularly when the policies being discussed are new or still peripheral to the mainstream of the planning profession. However, this is never a rational learning exercise in which all policy alternatives are considered. As noted by Grabher, practitioners do not deliberately “scan” their environment in search of a specific policy or piece of information. Rather, they are “surrounded by a concoction of rumours, impressions, recommendations, trade folklore and strategic misinformation”.²⁶

[25] Faulconbridge, 2006.

In previous paragraphs I showed how recent debates in economic geography suggest that the availability of formal and informal spaces for face-to-face (F2F) communication are an essential characteristic of conferences and policy learning forums that facilitate the transmission of policy knowledge and the creation of networks.²⁷ Economic geography debates on F2F and buzz are not however interested in power and politics and therefore little is said in those debates about how the transmission of knowledge, trust building and motivation generated by F2F is used for the purposes of agenda setting or to reshape urban governance structures. Recent work in urban geography and planning, however, has started to reveal more details about the ways in which the learning dynamics, expertise mobilization and face-to-face practices that take place in conferences are linked to power dynamics in cities.²⁸ For example, McCann²⁹ and Cook and Ward³⁰ have analyzed the role of conferences as *key informational infrastructures* that facilitate the movement of urban policies and inter-city policy learning. Cook and Ward³¹ have conceptualized conferences as “temporary (i.e. time-limited) events that bring together people from particular epistemic communities for face-to-face interaction and the exchange of verbal, visual and symbolic information”. Conferences are also therefore

[26] Grabher, 2002, p. 209.

[27] Storper; Venables, 2004; Faulconbridge, 2006; Grabher, 2002.

[28] McCann, 2011; McFarlane, 2011; Campbell, 2012; Cook; Ward, 2012.

[29] McCann, 2011.

[30] Cook; Ward, 2012.

[31] Cook; Ward, 2012, p. 138.

[32] Cook; Ward, 2012.

[33] Temenos, 2015.

key not only for learning but also to create epistemic communities through the formation of relationships between policy elites, experts and practitioners over distance, what they call *transurban policy pipelines*.³² Temenos³³ has also shown the important role of the kind of F2F communication that takes place in conferences for the collaboration and creation of advocacy networks. Therefore, the mobilization of local and transnational experts as well as the trust creation possibilities derived from formal and informal face-to-face communications make conferences and policy forums key sites for policy learning and the creation of policy networks. However, to better conceptualize the role of conferences in policy adoption and circulation, it is also important to understand power-related variables such as who organizes the forum and whether the organization of spaces for F2F simply reflects existing power relations among urban actors or is deliberately organized to try to change those urban governance structures.

When looking at the practices through which Bogotá ideas arrived in Guadalajara, it becomes clear that as much as international organizations can mobilize extensive funding and expert networks to promote the policy problems they want to prioritize, they can also not just impose their models and interpretations on cities. Local actors have their own agendas, beliefs and aspirations and are embedded in particular urban politics and governance dynamics. In other words, rather than through coercion “from above”, Bogotá’s TransMilenio and Ciclovía have circulated when influential local leaders — which include mayors and high ranking officials but also coalitions of local advocates, business leaders or journalists — have persuasively learned them and formed local coalitions to implement them. Moving influential policy actors from knowledge to action requires not only exchanges of information or technical knowledge but the creation of coalitions of powerful actors that will push for a particular policy. The politics behind the global circulation of Bogotá policies is therefore not about coercion “from above” but it is rather a politics of inspiration, persuasion and local coalition-building that take place through the organization of face-to-face meetings and study tours where the telling and retelling of a simplified story of urban transformation due to the implementation of a policy — or a small set of policies — plays a fundamental role.

BOGOTÁ EXPERTS: THE PEÑALOSA BROTHERS AS “PERSUASIVE PRACTITIONERS”

In the last two decades, different types of experts have used Bogotá references in conferences, workshops and forums around the world. They include university professors, transportation consultants, urban planners, or bicycle advocates. However, there is a

type of expert that has been particularly important in the spread of the Bogotá model. After analyzing — and participating in — many conferences and forums where Bogotá policies were presented to an audience, I found that often the most successful events that have resulted mobilization of Bogotá policies in other cities have used a particular type of expert, what I call here “persuasive practitioners”. The main representatives of this type of expert are two Bogotá’s public figures who claim expertise based on their local knowledge and their participation in the transformation of Bogotá during the 1990s: Enrique Peñalosa, Bogotá mayor from 1998 until 2000 and a key person behind the design and implementation of TransMilenio BRT; and his brother Gil Peñalosa, Bogotá Commissioner of Parks, Sports and Recreation from 1995 until 1998 and a key person in the expansion of Ciclovía from 24 kilometers in 1994 to 121 kilometers in 1999. Even though their expertise resides in their local knowledge, Bogotá “persuasive practitioners” are constantly on the move. They became ambassadors³⁴ of the “Bogotá model” while receiving substantial benefits for their participation in the many conferences, workshops and forums organized by actors as different as multilateral development banks, global think tanks, sustainable transport advocates or bus manufacturers have hired them to mobilize their charismatic and persuasive capacities to spread the adoption of BRT and bicycle policies around the world.³⁵

[34] Porto de Oliveira, 2016.

[35] Montero, 2017b.

These experts do not rely on technical knowledge or scientific expertise to legitimate themselves. Instead, their legitimacy relies on their participation in the implementation of these policies — hence their identification as practitioners — and in a narrative that puts these policies at the center of the Bogotá’s urban transformation success. To produce inspiration and move conference participants to action, Bogotá’s “persuasive practitioners” use two strategies. First, they make extensive use of narrative and visual artifacts to convey a simplistic story that links urban transformation — in Bogotá and other cities — with specific small public space and transportation interventions so that participants can identify with the heroes of these narratives and think that it can be easily replicated in their cities. Second, they use different emotional artifacts, such as repeated quotes on the need to protect children from cars, to connect with their audiences and create urgency to move them to action. Finally, spaces for formal and informal face-to-face communication during conferences policy forums are essential for the creation of multi-actor coalitions that will be necessary to eventually move Bogotá policies from ideas to adopted items in another city’s agenda. In the following section I show how this process worked in the case of Guadalajara, Mexico.

[36] *Empresario* is a difficult word to translate into English; it could be translated as both entrepreneur and business owner. Therefore, I kept the Spanish original.

In 2003, Enrique Peñalosa visited Guadalajara for the first time to give a talk titled “Una infinidad de pequeñas cosas” (An Infinity of Small Things). Peñalosa’s talk in Guadalajara in 2003 was the triggering event that resulted in fifteen study tours of local politicians, planners, *empresarios*,³⁶ bus company owners, NGOs and journalists to learn from Bogotá. In 2004, inspired by Bogotá’s *Ciclovía*, the mayor of Guadalajara inaugurated *Vía Recreativa* in Guadalajara, Latin America’s second largest car-free street program which draws about 250,000 participants to walk and bike in the city streets every Sunday. A couple of years after, the governor of the state of Jalisco inaugurated *Macrobus*, a BRT line that moves about 125,000 people per day in Guadalajara. *Macrobus* not only looked shockingly similar to Bogotá’s *TransMilenio* BRT, it had, indeed, a Colombian as head of the system.

But what exactly is the connection between the mobilization of Bogotá’s policy ideas by Peñalosa in 2003 in Guadalajara and those policy outcomes? And how can we analyze that connection? An analysis that assume this relationship to be a linear policy knowledge transfer between Bogotá and Guadalajara’s mayors will fail to illuminate the different actors, practices and spaces that needed to be assembled and mobilized for a policy idea to actually be learned and adopted in another city. There are, after all, plenty of examples of great ideas that never leave conference rooms. Indeed, BRT has been happening already in Curitiba or Quito since the 1970s. Why adopt them now in Guadalajara? Why was the Bogotá example so appealing? Similarly, an analysis that hurries to assume that this policy transfer is happening because of an all-encompassing global force that is moving all cities towards a particular way of organizing urban space and transportation systems will also fail to understand the different local and transnational actors that need to collaborate in order to introduce a new urban planning policy in a city’s agenda. In the following sections, I pay particular attention to the practices through which Bogotá policies were mobilized and learned in this forum, the physical and spatial characteristics where these practices took place as well as who benefitted from the urban governance re-arrangement that the learning and face-to-face communication that took place during the forum facilitated. To do so I rely on a combination of research methods between 2011 and 2014 that include: 1) in-depth interviews with more than thirty policy actors involved in the mobilization of the Bogotá model in Guadalajara; 2) archival research and content analysis of documents, conference proceedings and newspaper articles about Bogotá policies produced by Guadalajara journalists and the organizations Guadalajara 2020 and *Colectivo Ecologista Jalisco*; and 3) participant observation in

Guadalajara (during five months I interned with the environmental NGO Colectivo Ecologista Jalisco where I observed their strategies to influence urban policy and governance structures).

Enrique Peñalosa's talk in Guadalajara was, in reality, a fund-raising event of Ciudades Públicas, a non-governmental organization that would eventually become Guadalajara 2020 (GDL 2020 from now on) in 2004. Despite its name, Ciudades Públicas was a private-led organization whose roots can be traced back to a small group of *empresarios* from the local jewelry industry that started to organize in the mid 1990s to "clean up" Plaza Tapatía — a central public square where their jewelry showrooms were located — from prostitutes, drug addicts and informal street vendors. Initially the *empresarios* thought about hiring a music band or an opera singer to raise funds for their cause but an urban planner they knew recommended that they invite Enrique Peñalosa, "who was a world recognized expert in urbanism and has given talks in many cities around the world" (GDL 2020 leader 1, personal interview, 2013). While in this case it was this group of local *empresarios* rather than an international organization who funded Peñalosa's trip, it was the "world recognition" he had cultivated thanks to his conferences around the world what elevated him to the category of "world expert" in urbanism: "We didn't even know who he was, or his ideas, we just wanted to have a recognized expert in urban issues that would be able to attract many people" (GDL 2020 leader 1, personal interview, 2013). And although the *empresarios* were initially more interested in the fund-raising possibilities of the event than in Peñalosa's ideas, Peñalosa's visit resulted in two important outcomes: 1) it started shifting the beliefs of the members of Ciudades Públicas and the objective of their organization from their narrow and conservative emphasis on "cleaning up" Plaza Tapatía to the goal of transforming the city through transportation and public space interventions; and 2) it helped forge a local alliance of representatives of the private sector and media elites decided to influence the government to translate those beliefs into public policy. This rearrangement of urban governance in Guadalajara started with a particular event: Peñalosa's 2003 visit to Guadalajara and his narration of Bogotá as a simplified story of urban transformation.

**AN INFINITY OF SMALL THINGS: THE BOGOTÁ MODEL AS A
SIMPLISTIC STORY OF URBAN TRANSFORMATION LINKED TO
PUBLIC SPACE AND TRANSPORTATION POLICIES**

About two thousand *tapatíos* — Guadalajara inhabitants — attended Peñalosa's talk at the Instituto Cultural Cabañas, a historical building located at the heart of Plaza Tapatía. The auditorium was packed with representatives of Guadalajara's local and state govern-

[37] Martin; Ceballos, 2004; Gilbert, 2006.

[38] Galvis, 2014.

ment, the local business community, journalists, architects, environmental advocates, university students and citizens with a general curiosity in urbanism and urban politics. His talk was a dramatic narrative of urban transformation; a powerful — yet simplistic — story in which he claimed to have radically transformed Bogotá thanks to a series of small urban interventions and policies focused on improving public space, public transportation and bicycle infrastructure. While anyone familiar with Bogotá and Colombian politics would know that decentralization and democratization processes in Colombia as well as the role of previous Bogotá mayors played a crucial role in the transformation of the city,³⁷ Peñalosa's talk was a story that put him and the policies he implemented at the center of Bogotá's transformation. Similarly, the contradictions and exclusions behind Bogotá's new public spaces, such as the displacement of thousands of poor inhabitants, homeless and street vendors,³⁸ were also silenced under a superficial layer of before and after photographs and narrative devices that told a story of urban transformation from a dystopian dangerous and disorganized city to one in which the middle classes were, finally, able to walk and move through the city without having to rely on the enclosed security of their cars. His was a story of heroes (his administration), villains (those that promoted car-oriented infrastructure) and innocents (children that cannot play in the streets anymore and households without cars). If Bogotá, this urban backwater in the Third World has done it, why can't Guadalajara do it? This was the powerful moral of the Bogotá story told by Peñalosa. Images of the then new and flashy TransMilenio BRT as well as bicyclists taking over the city during Ciclovía prominently featured in his PowerPoint presentation.

As a leader from GDL 2020 noted, when they brought experiences from European and North American cities to Guadalajara, politicians and other city leaders considered them "dreaming exercises", but in the case of Bogotá "this was a Latin American city, it was poorer and had more violence problems than Guadalajara... and they were doing it!" (GDL 2020 leader 2, personal interview, 2013). During his talk, Peñalosa used different artifacts to shape the audience emotions and capture their attention, particularly quotes that directed participants to identify themselves with the victims of car-oriented urbanization: the children and the poor. In his presentations throughout Latin America and the global South, Peñalosa is not shy to talk about class and how car-oriented urbanization benefits the rich, i.e., those capable to owning a car. However, it is through the figure of the child that he attempted to emotionally move his often car-owning middle and upper class audiences. In his talk in Guadalajara, children and low-income populations were often invoked: "The absence of low-cost and high-frequency public transport and, in many places, the total absence of

public transport leave children, young people without cars, the old and low-income populations that cannot drive stranded. It is an environment that engenders exclusion”.³⁹

[39] Peñalosa, 2003.

The narratives, images and emotional quotes mobilized during the forum helped Peñalosa explain participants the new policies implemented in Bogotá but, perhaps more importantly, it inspired the core group of GDL 2020 leaders to become involved in the more comprehensive goal of transforming Guadalajara through transportation and public space interventions. As noted by a GDL 2020 member:

People used to go and look at Curitiba. However, as a Brazilian friend of mine told me one time: the Curitiba model is very difficult to imitate because the city is full of Germans, it's very different from other Latin American cities, even different from other cities in Brazil. Then Bogotá made its appearance. Bogotá had its origins in Curitiba but Bogotá had an absolutely Latin American context and it is a city with apparent misfortune, drug trafficking... More than specific programs... I think what Bogotá gave us was the aspiration of a better city that, you know... yes, we can... that transformation was possible in Guadalajara too. (GDL 2020 leader 3, personal interview, 2014)

In this quote, we see how the Bogotá story of urban transformation functions as a key element to mobilize the aspirations of influential policy actors in Guadalajara, even more so than a rational assessment of the quality or effectiveness of the policies and programs themselves. Through narratives, images and a persuasive and charismatic storyteller, this Bogotá story provided GDL 2020 and other local leaders not only exposure to new policies but also “the aspiration of a better city... that urban transformation was possible in Guadalajara too” (GDL 2020 member interview, 2014). Peñalosa’s eloquent use and mobilization of this story — and his constructed centrality to this transformation by having participated in it as mayor — is what makes him not just a charismatic expert talking about a policy model or “best practice” but what I have called a “persuasive practitioner”, that is, someone who is perceived to have had a central and active role in the story of urban transformation he tells, and, therefore, a more persuasive source of authority for politicians and other urban actors interested in changing the city than a mere technical expert.

INFORMAL FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS:

ALIGNING EMPRESARIOS AND PUBLIC OPINION LEADERS

Peñalosa’s public talk at Instituto Cultural Cabañas was not the only event members of GDL 2020 organized for him. During his three-day visit, he gave two talks, several press conferences and other

events that provided opportunities for face-to-face communication, not only between Peñalosa and Guadalajara actors but also between Guadalajara policy elites themselves. He had breakfast with fifty local *empresarios*, lunch with University of Guadalajara faculty members and other local public opinion leaders, and dinner with the owners and directors of the main local media companies. As noted by a GDL 2020 leader, “we heard the Bogotá story seven times in three days” (GDL 2020 leader 2, personal interview, 2013). If Peñalosa’s time in Guadalajara was limited to three days, why this emphasis on promoting face-to-face encounters with other *empresarios*, the media and public opinion leaders? To answer this question we need to understand GDL 2020 own interpretation of their sources of power to influence local policy agendas. As noted by one of their leaders, their power to influence policy and government agendas in Guadalajara derives from three main sources: 1) their social and political networks of relationships; 2) their capacity to maintain a low profile as an organization by giving political trophies of their achievements to local politicians; and 3) their capacity of emphasizing the need of the government to act on particular urban problems by influencing three types of actors: a) key politicians and public officials; b) individuals that directly impact the urbanization process (including real estate developers, bus company owners etc.); and c) people with “de facto” power, who, they clarify, are “individuals with the capacity to have an impact in the media and form public opinion, such as some university professors or people with a column in a newspaper” (GDL 2020 leader 2, personal interview, 2013). GDL 2020 interpretation of their sources of power suggests a particular network of actors that goes beyond the public and private spheres and that they perceive as crucial to introduce new policy agendas in the city. It is by understanding these beliefs and vectors of power that one understands the ways in which the talk as well as the formal and informal meetings of Enrique Peñalosa in Guadalajara were strategically organized by GDL 2020 to place their shifting beliefs of how the city should be transformed in the local government agenda.

As noted above, GDL 2020 considered those individuals with the power to influence local public opinion as the third most powerful actors in the city. In fact, during Peñalosa’s visit, Carlos Álvarez del Castillo, director of *El Informador*, Guadalajara’s main newspaper, and a personal friend of one of GDL 2020 leaders, hosted a dinner in his house where he gathered the owners and directors of the main local media companies, a committee that normally meets once a month as Fundación Extra. As noted by a local columnist, “there is no urban agenda and no political candidate in Guadalajara that does not go through Fundación Extra first” (GDL 2020 member interview, 2014). Yet, this association of the local media elites is not just a forum where

policy agendas promoted by other local actors are discussed. Members of Fundación Extra are powerful families in Guadalajara that pride themselves of having traditionally participated and influence local and state politics. In other words, local media owners have their own shifting beliefs about the city future and, therefore, a preference for promoting particular urban policies. Indeed, several members of Fundación Extra together with the *empresarios* of Ciudades Públicas and promoters of business tourism in the city (including the owners of ExpoGuadalajara, the city main convention center) came together in 2005 to found GDL 2020. Their objective, however, was not just promoting local growth agendas.⁴⁰ What brought them together was an agreement over a particular city model that they wanted to promote and translate into local public policy: “By 2005... we thought we had found the right city model that Guadalajara needed to follow... that brought us together... this model was one based on densification, sustainable urban mobility, public space, and cultural policies” (GDL 2020 member interview, 2014).

[40] Logan; Molotch, 1987.

The origins of this 2005 agreement between local *empresarios* and media elites on how the city should be transformed can be traced back to Peñalosa’s visit in 2003 and it was later reinforced through study tours to Bogotá and by other speakers that GDL 2020 invited to Guadalajara, including other Bogotá mayors as well as Barcelona urbanists. Therefore, this local alliance between *empresarios* and media elites came together through an intercity policy learning process in which practices such as hearing stories about the achievements of other cities became powerful mechanisms to align their members around the need of implementing BRT and bicycle transportation policies as a way to transform their city as Bogotá had apparently done it. Indeed, the Bogotá story helped create a later alliance between GDL 2020 and local politicians in the mid 2000s that facilitated the eventual launching of Vía Recreativa (Guadalajara’s Ciclovía) in 2004 and the construction of a BRT line in 2009. As Stone has noted: “Causal theories, thus, can be both a stimulus to political organizations and a resource for political leaders seeking to create alliances.”⁴¹ Having the local media elites aligned in GDL 2020 helped also mobilize public opinion around Bogotá’s policies in Guadalajara and put pressure on the local and state governments to implement them.

[41] Stone, 1989, p. 299.

CONCLUSIONS

Using the terms policy diffusion,⁴² policy transfer⁴³ and policy mobilities,⁴⁴ several authors in the social sciences have shed light on how policy models and “best practices” are produced, circulated and contested and the different ways in which they influence policy

[42] Simmons et al., 2008.

[43] Dolowitz; Marsh, 2000.

[44] Peck; Theodore, 2010.

adoption in other places. Little is known, however, about the situated practices and spaces through which policy actors learn and are eventually persuaded to adopt globally circulating policy models. In this article, I highlighted two key elements in the process of policy learning between Bogotá and Guadalajara. First, the role of a particular type of expert that I called “persuasive practitioners”. I showed that the spread of Bogotá’s policies in Guadalajara can be traced back to the visit of Enrique Peñalosa in 2003. Peñalosa is an example of a “persuasive practitioner” because his legitimacy and capacity to inspire policy actors in other cities relies not on their technical or scientific expertise but rather on a narrative that puts him at the center of Bogotá’s urban transformation success. This is a story that glorifies small public space and transportation interventions as the cause of Bogotá’s “urban renaissance”, what Peñalosa called “an infinity of small things” in his Guadalajara talk. In this universe of “small things”, the decentralization and democratization processes that took place in Bogotá and Colombia in the late 1980s and early 1990s or the increased tax collection achieved by previous Bogotá mayors such as Jaime Castro or Antanas Mockus in the early and mid 1990s are not included. Similarly, the contradictions and exclusions created by Bogotá’s new public spaces are also silenced to create a simple and straightforward narrative that gives agency to the policies themselves. It is this powerful yet simplistic story of urban transformation linked to public space and transportation policies what has spread worldwide as the “Bogotá model”. The second element that I highlighted in this article is the role that conferences and policy forums play in this intercity policy learning process. The policies that this story glorifies could have never spread globally without the face-to-face communication opportunities to tell this story that conference and policy forums offer. Moving influential urban actors from policy knowledge to action requires not only exchanges of knowledge and stories but active processes of inspiration, persuasion and trust building that, despite the increasing availability of online policy repositories, are still best mobilized through face-to-face contact.

This article brought together discussions about policy diffusion, transfer and mobilities with the narrative sensibilities of debates on urban planning and storytelling and emotions as a productive effort to disentangle the actual practices that explain how and why certain policy models are adopted in other places. In telling the story of the adoption of Bogotá’s policies in Guadalajara, this article has also a moral: learning, and therefore policy learning, is never a rational process but rather one influenced by emotions and aspirations of transformation and progress. In order for a particular policy to circulate and be adopted technical experts or objective data about the merits

of a policy are never enough. It is in this context where stories from elsewhere are important as they facilitate the adoption of new policy models through processes of inspiration, persuasion and local coalition-building that are always rational and emotional. Often the most effective stories in terms of policy learning and change are those that have a clear and simple moral and are told by credible and legitimate storytellers. However, as much as stories will make certain actors or policies the heroes or the villains, they will also silence many others actors and institutional processes for the sake of simplification.

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