

Urban expansion and urban policies in Rosario Metropolitan Area

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the growth trends in the Rosario conurbation are presented, addressing the growth of urbanized areas in the last two decades. This was a process that is characterized by:

- fast growth of the new urbanized areas,
- dispersion of new urban areas in all the region,
- formation of new gated communities,
- low density of new urban areas and
- lack of adequate urban regulations to control the process in the small towns of the conurbation.

The expansive process of urbanized areas took place at a time of recovery of the country's economy and in a city that is the epicenter of a large agricultural region that produces extraordinary surplus capital. That capital surplus found in the real estate market a place where can continues to reproduce itself. To this is added the possibility of accessing mortgage credit for the construction of individual housing that generated a great demand for urbanized land. This demand did not get an answer in the city of Rosario due to the restrictive municipal urban regulation. The result: extension, dispersion and low density, the antithesis of sustainable urban development. Precisely, the article begins by exposing the main features of urban regulation in Rosario.

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1. Introduction

Related to urban regulation in the city of Rosario, in particular those norms referring to the creation of new urbanized land, it will be explained what has happened in these last two decades in the metropolitan region of which Rosario is head.

Urban planning is a conjunction of political, project and technical definitions. Therefore, it is not a simple instrumental question, to build adequate tools. In Rosario, emphasis has been placed on the instrumental question that, since it is defined from a technical knowledge, it is supposed to respond efficiently to the demands of the city. That is, the discussion of the issues and problems of the city and the proposals to address them and offer a possible solution is a technical discussion,

and not a discussion of policies.

The article then focuses on the effects that, since the formulation of new procedures for the creation of new urbanized land in the city of Rosario, can be registered in the expansive process of the towns of the Rosario conurbation.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Urban regulation in the periphery of Rosario

The new municipal administration that began in 2004 started with the implementation of various city planning and management instruments, many of which were applied for the first time in the city: special and detailed plans, urban planning agreements, integrated housing parks, industrial estates, among others. The interest is focused on those that refer particularly to the

creation of new urban land for housing: the integrated housing parks (IHP).

The figure of the "integrated housing park" was presented in the "Urban Plan Rosario 2007 - 2017". This document states that "in the recent years a new concept has been introduced in the development of urbanization projects, that of the "Integrated Housing Parks" (IHP) that became emblematic icons for the progress of the city". (Part III, Chapter 3 - The great transformations, page 184) The features of these large scale projects were presented in the same document:

- they are planned by the same planning office of the municipality, while its
- development is in hands of the private sector or public sector agencies (national or provincial).

Up to now, nine projects of this kind (integrated housing parks) have been approved. Six of these housing parks were driven by real estate developers. The remaining three are of exclusive participation of the public sector.

In the process of urban growth, the projects are developed with different "speeds". In general, the "speed" is referenced in the medium and long term, according to the magnitude of the projects, the availability of capital and financing and the management strategies adopted, among other issues. The results achieved show that there is still a deep gap between the letter of the plan and of the ordinances and the real situation in the periphery of Rosario.

If the question is "how is an integrated housing park developed?" the answer will be that there is not only one answer. Although in the urban plan it is stated that the integrated housing park (IHP) is planned by the public sector and executed by the private sector (or another public agency), this has not been done in that way. Concentrating only on the first three approved IHP in which the leading actor has been the private sector, there are three different

situations; always responding to initiatives of developers, to start a project or to give a regulation framework to ongoing developers initiatives:

- two IHP, the first to be approved ("Ludueña" and "Wilde & Newbery") present a special plan with definition of the main features of the project (roads, public spaces, housing types, among the basic issues for its development);
- one IHP, the third to be approved (Bouchard) presents only the location of the planning units in which is divided. Later, detailed plans will develop the project for each one of these units.

Ludueña IHP (2005) and Newbery and Wilde IHP (2009)

The first two integrated housing parks to be approved are defined from a preliminary draft presented by developers without any previous guidelines established by the Municipality. From the discussion with the Planning Authority, the original blueprint presented by the developers was modified until both parts reach an agreement that is recorded in the special plan (the urbanization project) and in the signing of an urban agreement in which the obligations assumed by the developer are established. All this documentation was then sent to the Municipal Council for its approval.

Bouchard IHP (2011)

The special plan of the third IHP approved only indicates the five large planning units defined in the sector. In these planning units, the development of new residential, recreational and sports developments is planned. For each planning unit, a detail plan will be developed and sent to the Municipal Council for its approval. The development of the detail plan demands that the landowners involved in a planning unit agree in advance to create a legal figure that represents them, in order to be in charge of the urbanization and the obligations contracted for that purpose. Once the detailed plan is approved, the urbanization of the involved sector will be

carried out. The first step is to change land use condition, from rural to urban area.



Figure 1: Rosario West Side. Three Integrated Housing Parks

There are few indications to develop the project to be presented as a detailed plan: only references to land uses (housing, recreation, sports) and building types (family housing and multifamily housing). There is no indication of the minimum and / or maximum percentages of land allocated to each type of building, nor any indication of land use densities.

In the area of this IHP, a closed neighborhood ("Palos Verdes", later approved as a detailed plan) was being developed. Simultaneously, other developers were buying plots with the intention to start with a real estate development (even this area of the city was classified as not developable. For the delimitation of the planning units presented by the Bouchard IHP, the location of these ongoing projects and activities was taken into account.

In summary, the planning of the IHP does not seem to have had very clear procedures for

their development; all the action refers to the discussion of the urbanization project presented by the real estate developers with the Planning Authority until an agreement is reached that satisfies both. There is no, at least this is clear from the approved ordinances, any guidelines or reference indicators that guide the development of the project. This was a procedure where opacity was the main feature. And this opacity enable to absolute discretion in the discussion process until the IHP project is sent to the City Council for its final approval.

3. Results and Discussion

Results 01: the urbanization process

In mid-2016, we have the following situation regarding these first three integrated housing parks (IHP) that had arisen as a result of developers initiatives:

- Ludueña IHP (12 years after of its approval): a closed neighborhood in execution. It has only been built on 10 % of its surface. The sector assigned to the construction of collective houses remains still vacant. In one of the closed neighborhood, the land use density was modify by ordinance, thus responding to an express request from the real estate developer to be able to sell that fraction and allocate the amounts of the sale to the fulfillment of the obligations acquired in the urban development agreement that should have already been executed.
- Wilde and Newbery IHP (eight years after of its approval): there is not yet any kind of activity to start the urbanization project. The irregular settlement found on one of its edges was densified and extended.
- Bouchard IHP (six years after of tis approval): the location of a sport club was approved and it corresponds to one of the five management units that represent 21% of the total area of the whole sector.

These delays in the developing of the projects shows that the agreed terms for the development of the enterprises seem to be too generous and scarce are the resources that the same ordinances offer to the Municipality to act in case of non-compliance by the developers with the agreed deadlines.

Results 02: the metropolitan region

a- the economic context

After the deep economic, political and social crisis suffered by the country in 2001-2002, in 2003 started a process of economic recovery and reindustrialization of the country. This process was accompanied by high prices that commodities acquired in world trade. This was particularly reflected in the provinces of Santa Fe, Córdoba and Buenos Aires where soybean production is the main activity in their rural areas. Rosario is the epicenter of a very extensive region devoted to this crop and, besides that, it integrates a ports system along Paraná River where also oil industries are located.

Due to the value of commodities, the rural area began to produce an extraordinary capital surplus; capital surplus that demanded special conditions to continue with its own reproduction. The real estate market appears as the optimal way to invest in. Real estate property, especially buildings, becomes a financial asset, while Rosario and the entire metropolitan region became the special site for the development of real estate projects.

b- the expansion of urbanized areas

The suburban expansion of Rosario began in the sixties, in the west surrounding towns (Funes and Roldán); and increased in the seventies until the eighties with the incorporation of other small towns. It was a process that could be distinguished particularly by the oversizing of the offer, which is verified in many urbanization projects that did not materialize, and by the promotion of a low-

density urbanization model without a complete provision of services. [1]

The second moment of suburban expansion starts in the nineties with particular figures for the promotion of a new way of life in the suburb: gated communities (closed neighborhoods and country clubs). Funes was the place chosen for this new modality of real estate ventures. Victoria, in the province of Entre Ríos, was also chosen for these projects, before the announcement of construction of Rosario - Victoria Bridge through Paraná River. In this process, new projects required of new urban regulations. The period of simple urbanizations with limited availability of services that were concentrated in Funes and Roldán was thus closed.

c- urban expansion since the beginning of the 21st century

The 21st Century started with the deep crisis described above and the subsequent economic recovery. This last one made possible the accelerated development of the gated communities that were appearing particularly in the city of Funes giving answer to the demand of high-income sectors of the population of Rosario. They were looking for a new place to live with better conditions of availability of green spaces and personal security than in Rosario. They also appeared to respond to the investment demand of this capital surplus of the agricultural sector.

This process continued with the rowing of new urbanizations (not gated communities) that appear in almost all the towns of the extensive metropolitan region. These new projects incorporated some of the amenities offered by closed neighborhoods, particularly sports facilities for the use of new owners. A process that has slowed down at present and whose result is the incorporation of a new 2,576 urbanized hectares (2000 - 2015) that are largely concentrated towards the west of the

city of Rosario (77% of the new urbanized areas).

This process of suburbanization, up to 2015, is particularly characterized by the following features:

- high percentage of urbanized areas under the modality of gated communities that represents 48% of the total new urban and suburban areas;
- low level of occupancy of new real estate developments in general (39% of the new neighborhoods are in an initial stage of development with a very low number of houses built);
- low density, which is accentuated by the promotion of the closed neighborhood modality (50% of the new urbanized area corresponds to very low density neighborhoods);
- high percentage of new urbanized areas those are located far from the towns where they are located.

Extension, dispersion, low density; these features seem to be the attributes that describes a process that continues today.

d- the causes of this process, an attempt to explain the development of urban areas in the metropolitan region

In June 2012, the national government launched the Pro.Cre.Ar program (Argentine Bicentennial Credit Program for Single Family Housing). The mortgage credit for the construction of the family house had come back and in accessible conditions for the people with middle and lower middle incomes. There was a condition to access the loan: to have the plot to build the house. This condition generated a fast high demand for urbanized land, as it had not been registered before.

As it has been seen, the procedures established by the Municipality of Rosario to develop new urbanization projects -that is, for the creation of new urbanized land- were oriented to satisfy

requirements of the big real estate developers who, as we have seen, decided where and when to urbanize. The implementation of the integrated housing parks (IHP) has frozen the land that was ready for urbanization.

Faced with this impossibility to meet the demand for urbanized land for the middle sectors in the city of Rosario, the offer begins to emerge in almost all towns in the metropolitan region, particularly in all those located west of Rosario. In this way, different policies of the national and municipal governments are combined to give rise to an accelerated, disorganized and dispersed sprawl in the region and its towns.

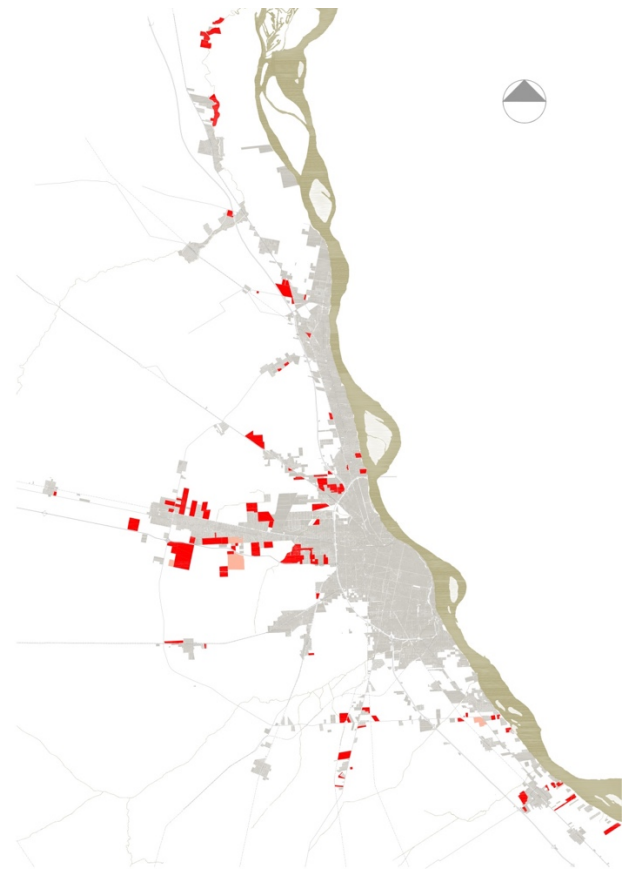


Figure 2: New urban areas in the Rosario Metropolitan Region. 2000 – 2015 [2]

4. Conclusion

Economic growth, municipal urban policies, planning regulations, housing policies, were giving rise to a new configuration of the metropolitan region. From the analysis carried out, it is clear that the lack of articulation between the public policies generated from the different spheres of the state does not produce a good result.

This result is no other than a territory that has been configured in a particular way; a territory in whose cities and towns are like a constellation of "islands" of different character, as proposed by M. Janoschka [3] in his work on the fragmentation that takes place in Latin American cities:

- Islands of wealth, which correspond to the new gated communities.
- Islands of production, which are found in the large industrial enclaves (not considered in this article).
- Islands of consumption, which correspond to the new shopping centers (not considered in this study either).
- Islands of precariousness, which are the new neighborhoods that have been appearing in this expansive process with serious limitations in the provision of infrastructures. (It would be necessary to incorporate the islands of marginality or vulnerability as the so called irregular settlements, which are not part of this article either).

This "archipelago" that can be seen in the metropolitan region and in Rosario the city, is a product of urban policies put into practice, is the result of a process of social fragmentation of the territory in general and of the urban environment in particular. And this can also be read in the way of dichotomous pairs, as Oriol Nel.lo proposes: the compact city versus urban dispersion, the monofunctionality versus the complexity of functions, the inclusion and social integration versus the segregation of the groups social. [4]

- Different ways of reading what is happening in the current city, the most recent trends in urban development, but that, ultimately, allude to the same situation: dispersion, expansion, monofunctionality, segregation (in some cases, fragmentation). This is what can be read in the metropolitan region of Rosario. And it is this urbanization model that has been imposed for decades which has the greatest negative impacts on the regional organization: high consumption (or waste) of the soil resource and high consumption (or waste) of energy resources. And along with it, high costs to provide an efficient public transport service and to extend infrastructure networks. [5]
- From the perspective of a sustainable urban development, Salvador Rueda [6] also had warned about those problems caused by the dispersion of urbanization:
 - High consumption of land.
 - High consumption of materials and energy caused by both the planning of land uses and the means of transport.

The results obtained by the urban regulation of Rosario, in terms of the area of new urbanized land for the construction of housing, show that there is little that has been achieved and that, the established deadlines, may delay even more the creation of urbanized land if such deadlines are not met. For this reason, it seems that it would be advisable to review the established procedures for the creation of urban land for housing, also contemplating a more active participation of the public sector in this task.

A more active participation means that the creation of urbanized land is not just a task that is solved by adjusting the conditions to be met by the big developers and waiting for their willingness to urbanize. It means defining areas to be urbanized, not in response to the interests of the concentrated real estate sector but rather to the needs of the city and the different sectors of its population. In this way, an urbanization project will be evaluated according to its contribution to the construction of a fairer and

more equitable city and not only for the greater number of infrastructures, public spaces and community facilities that the developer has to do. That is to say, a city that is approaching the conditions of a sustainable development, which avoids the waste of land and that, guarantees its inhabitants the right to continue living in their city.

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