

Eduardo Reese



An architect who specializes in urban and regional planning, Eduardo Reese is the deputy administrator of the Institute for Housing of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. In previous professional positions he provided technical advice for the master plans of more than 20 cities in Argentina; was secretary of socioeconomic policies at the Ministry of Human Development and Labor of the Province of Buenos Aires; adviser for the Urban Planning Counsel of the City of Buenos Aires; and planning secretary in the City of Avellaneda.

Reese also teaches at the Conurbano Institute at the National University General Sarmiento in Buenos Aires. Currently he is a professor of urban management in the Institute's B.A. program in urbanism. He also teaches urban development at master's programs at the School of Architecture, Urbanism and Design of the University of La Plata, as well as at universities in Mar del Plata and Córdoba. In addition, he directs the master planning of the Matanza-Riachuelo watershed in Buenos Aires. Contact: ereese31@gmail.com

LAND LINES: *How long have you been involved with the Institute's Latin America Program?*

EDUARDO REESE: My relationship dates back to 1997 when we were drafting the plan for the City of Córdoba, which included several large-scale urban projects. We worked to expand the debate about the impacts of these projects on the land market and, consequently, on shaping the city. I continued to participate in various activities, and four years ago I took over coordination of the annual lectures of the Land Management in Large Urban Projects series, following the death of Mario Lungo, who had led that program for many years.

In 2004, in conjunction with the Conurbano Institute of the National University of General Sarmiento, we conducted a course on Land Markets: Theory and Tools for Policy Management, which was the first one involving a seven-month training program for 50 Argentine students. That educational experience helped create a critical mass of technicians and professionals with an innovative vision toward the management of land policies. The program's impact has been reflected in urban policy decisions in different municipalities (such as San Fernando and Morón in Greater Buenos Aires); in the Argentine Constitution; in the Urban Reform Movement in 2005; and in academic changes at the Conurbano Institute itself.

LAND LINES: *What role can large urban projects play in the quality of life of Latin American cities?*

EDUARDO REESE: Large-scale projects in defined sectors of the city (both central and peripheral areas) have been great protagonists of contemporary urbanism in the past quarter century. Today in Latin America there are many types and sizes of projects, even though more rigorous theoretical thinking is still needed. Important examples are the Bicentennial Portal (*Portal del Bicentenario*) projects in Santiago de Chile; the Integral Urban Projects (*Proyectos Urbanos Integrales*) in Medellín, Colombia; urban operations in different cities of Brazil; and the restructuring project in the northwestern sector of San Fernando (Argentina).

Large-scale urban operations as instruments of intervention in the city have been implemented for many decades. In Buenos Aires, for instance, the Avenida de Mayo and the Diagonals, which were planned about 1880, had important impacts on physical space as well as in social, economic, and symbolic aspects. This approach of multiple impacts undoubtedly allowed better assimilation of the Avenida de Mayo, but it also generated a huge debate over who should finance the operation and who would appropriate the land rents generated. Ultimately the Supreme Court ruled that the municipality could not finance the work with the surplus created, because the rents belonged entirely to the landowners. For many years this case set a judicial precedent regarding the state's intervention in the process of valuing land generated by a large-scale public project.

LAND LINES: *You have a critical view on the widely acclaimed Puerto Madero urban regeneration project in Buenos Aires. What would you do differently in other large redevelopment areas?*

EDUARDO REESE: Puerto Madero is emblematic of urban projects that promote a model of segregated urban planning and are now being "exported" to other countries as a basic tool to compete for international investment. In this project the state submitted to the market and allowed the construction of an exclusive neighborhood for very high-income sectors. It is a notorious example of public policy explicitly designed to favor the wealthy without any recovery of the huge land valuations that were the product of public policy.

Moreover, to guarantee investors an overvaluation of the properties they purchased, the venture has a number of features that cut it off (physically and socially) from the rest of the city, creating even greater value because of its segregation. Puerto Madero has no external wall, as gated condominiums have, but rather multiple implicit, explicit, and symbolic signals that clearly indicate this place is off limits to most of society.

- It is the only neighborhood managed by a state corporation that for 19 years has paid the salaries of public servants and managers to build and maintain a few square meters of park accessible only to that wealthy neighborhood.
- The project has a highly designed urban landscape that contrasts sharply with the brutal poverty in the rest of the city. The parks and amenities are on land already privatized to

- ensure that the investments, although made using public funds, benefit only the elite owners of the housing and office high-rise buildings nearby.
- A sophisticated system of cameras and security forces defines and controls access to the overprotected zone.
 - All these mechanisms serve to ensure the overvaluation of the properties so that only upper social classes can afford to purchase homes in the area.

In the end, Puerto Madero is a clear demonstration of the regressive distribution of urban planning and public policy: a trouble-free ghetto for the rich.

LAND LINES: *As municipalities continue to compete for outside investments, is it possible to reconcile alternative objectives such as social and environmental priorities?*

EDUARDO REESE: The problem in our cities is not the lack of planning, but the current exclusionary pattern of planning policies. There cannot be one law for the formal city and exceptions for the rest. It is necessary to create a new urban and legal order in Latin America based on the right to the city, the equitable sharing of the benefits of urbanization, and the social function of land ownership.

LAND LINES: *How does the municipality of San Fernando in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area offer an alternative to this approach?*

EDUARDO REESE: San Fernando is located some 30 kilometers (km) north of Buenos Aires, with a land area of 23 square km and a population of 156,000 inhabitants. A 5 km long riverside faces the Río Luján and another part of the city faces the mouth of Río de la Plata, where productive nautical activities are concentrated. This privileged location has high property values and all urban services.

The plan and model of urban land management in the city began in 2003 through an agreement between the municipality and the Conurbano Institute. In 2005, a Lincoln Institute training seminar helped broaden the local debate on land management, which led to a series of major decisions:

- to generate sustainable resources to redirect urban development;
- to recover the culture of public works financed by a tax for improvements;
- to recover land for social housing, urban facilities, and road networks;
- to strengthen the city and municipal administration as innovative actors in implementing public policies; and
- to limit the overvaluation of land by intervening in the market through mechanisms such as new urban planning legislation, instruments to collect the surplus, and a large supply of land for the poor.

The urban policy focused on a set of action strategies including (1) ensuring accessibility to new public spaces for recreational, sports, and commercial purposes on the riverside, especially for the use and enjoyment of the poor; and (2) the comprehensive regularization of the western sector of the municipality, where most poverty is concentrated.

To implement these strategies it was necessary to increase fiscal resources for public investment in two ways: appropriation of the profitability of land use or municipal land on the riverside through the creation of the Consortium San Fernando Marina Park Company (PNSFSA), and participation of the municipality in the surplus generated from municipal tax reform. (PNSFSA is a company created by the municipality of San Fernando to manage the riverside of the northwest sector of the city, defined as Marina Park.)

The experience of San Fernando is based on a set of management tools focused on the redistribution of income to build a more equitable city. Land is considered a key asset within a wider strategy of local development and, therefore, management relies on a broad mix of planning, administrative, economic, fiscal, and legal instruments aimed at strengthening the role of the public sector. The core axis of policies is the search for equity in the distribution of the costs and benefits of urbanization, within the challenging context of growing pressure on land throughout metropolitan Buenos Aires.

LAND LINES: *What could or should be changed in the educational system that trains urban planners?*

EDUARDO REESE: First, it is necessary to incorporate a greater understanding of the functioning of land markets in the present context of developing and shaping cities. Second, a more critical analysis is needed of theoretical, methodological, and technical instruments to undertake the diagnosis and intervention in urban land issues. The 2004 course on Land Markets that I described earlier attempted to develop these kinds of materials to enable students to cover the different scales and dimensions of the problem.

LAND LINES: *What tensions exist between private and public interests in urban planning?*

EDUARDO REESE: This is a critical question because the whole history of urban land management has had a common thread: the rights of private ownership of land and the structure of ownership have always come into conflict with urban planning activity, which is a public responsibility. In that sense, there will always be tension between public and private interests in building the city.

In my view, urban projects in Latin America have the responsibility to contribute not only to the creation of new spaces for public use and enjoyment, employment generation, and environmental sustainability, but also social inclusion, equity in the access to services, and the redistribution of urban rents generated by the project. The four cases mentioned earlier in Chile, Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina show that these benefits are possible in many contexts.

However, many urban projects have been justified as necessary to attract investment and/or consumers and to ensure or reinforce the dynamic competitive advantages of the city. These undoubtedly positive goals are sometimes used as a mechanism to legitimize interventions that deepen the serious socio-spatial segregation of cities. Such adverse effects of the market are not fatal to the city, but are the outcome of perverse political choices. **L**