

Artemio Pedro Abba, David Kullock, Alicia Novick, Nilda Rosa Pierro and Mariana Schweitzer (2011)

Horacio Torres y los mapas sociales. La construcción teórica del caso Buenos Aires

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When discussing the process of urbanization in Buenos Aires, one will inevitably encounter the contributions made by Horacio Torres. Architect and urban planner, Torres' "social maps" of Buenos Aires powerfully contributed to the understanding of the stages, continuities, and breakdowns that took place in the city's process of restructuring and socio-territorial configuration. His tool is based on the construction of analytical and synthesized thematic maps that allow their users to display population distributions according to various characteristics, over different periods of time. To produce the maps, Torres processed large amounts of published and unpublished information at a time when electronic data processing had not yet emerged.

Recently, a group of researchers (Abba, Kullock, Novick, Pierro and Schweitzer 2011) paid tribute to Torres by gathering and commenting on some of his main contributions – produced between 1959 and 2001 – in the book *Horacio Torres y los mapas sociales. La construcción teórica del caso Buenos Aires* ("Horacio Torres and Social Maps: The Theoretical Construction of

the Case of Buenos Aires"). The publication – organized around the two sections *Miradas* (Outlooks) and *Antología* (Anthology) – is the result of a research process aiming to reconstruct and process the author's intellectual and academic legacy.

The first section, *Miradas*, follows Torres' intellectual journey: it studies his career, the subjects and problems he inquired into, the former's socio-historical contexts, as well as the methodological contributions of his body of work as a whole. The section places special emphasis on the construction of *social maps*.

Within this framework, Nilda Pierro reconstructs the author's academic development in the context of national and international investigation in and practice of urban development. Pierro highlights Torres' outstanding contributions to his field of study: these include the construction of the social map of Buenos Aires using the tools of Quantitative Geography and its application to the analysis of local cases, the understanding of the historical socio-territorial evolution of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area

(AMBA), as well as the logics that molded its metropolization process, and the spatially-detailed description of the socio-economic stratification of AMBA.

David Kullock reviews Torres' academic output. Taking a comparative and integrated perspective, the author re-examines 60 writings (articles, book chapters, and books). Within this body of literature, Torres' conceptual and instrumental works, as well as his case studies are particularly noteworthy. Based on the analysis of the historical and epistemological context of his works, Alicia Novick points out the explicit and implicit dialogues the author held with other colleagues in his writings. Mariana Schweitzer treats Torres' socio-spatial models and their importance to some stages of his academic career. Schweitzer shows how, in the view of Torres, "the models were methodological instruments serving a central objective: to reveal and to interpret the transformation processes of the metropolitan structure of the Buenos Aires agglomeration" (78).

Artemio Abba concludes the section with two thought-provoking chapters on the methodological and instrumental aspects of Torres' work. The author takes a close look at the description and analysis of the research tools related to the construction of the *social maps* and their contribution to both the understanding and the socio-territorial analysis of the case of Buenos Aires. Abba points out that to understand Torres' use of the *social maps*, one must bear in mind how he conceptualized the urbanization process. For Torres, the territorial changes

"are neither the direct consequence of the capability of physical planning to unilaterally modify human and social behaviors, nor the mere final reflection of social and economic determinants. On the contrary, [...] he considered that the configuration of the urban space appeared as a product of the mutual interaction between the territory, as the support of the natural modified by the action of man, and the social organization of production and use" (96).¹ Within this conceptual framework, writes Abba, *social maps* constitute an approach to and a reconnaissance of the urban spatial structure. *Antología*, the second section of the book, compiles three of Torres' major articles. The first one is "La aglomeración Gran Buenos Aires. Sus patrones de expansión física y los cambios recientes de su mapa social" (1999) ("The Agglomeration of Greater Buenos Aires: Its Patterns of Physical Expansion and Recent Changes in its Social Map"). It is followed by an excerpt of the work entitled "El origen interdisciplinario de los estudios urbanos" (1996) ("The Interdisciplinary Genesis of Urban Studies"). The section ends with an article by Torres on his conception of socio-spatial phenomena: "La relación entre espacio y sociedad. Un tema conflictivo. La investigación urbana vista desde esta perspectiva" (1993) ("The Relation of Space and Society: A Conflictual Subject. Urban Investigation Viewed from this Perspective").

¹ "no son la consecuencia directa de la capacidad del planeamiento físico para modificar unilateralmente los comportamientos humanos y sociales, ni el mero reflejo final de las determinantes sociales y económicas. Por el contrario, [...] consideraba que la configuración del espacio urbano surgía como producto de la mutua interacción del territorio, como soporte del natural modificado por la acción del hombre, y la organización social de la producción y el consumo" (96).

The authors' reading of Torres' work highlights his essential contribution to the analysis of the socio-urban structure of Buenos Aires. Those interested in learning about the city's socio-territorial structuring process will find important clues for its understanding in this book. It will provide the reader with a perspective for thinking about the evolution and the historical course taken by the processes of metropolization in Buenos Aires. Torres' approach highlights that any description and analysis of those processes must be attuned to their inherent subtleties and complexities. The events underlined in their reconstruction, the way in which they are linked, the explanatory value they are assigned, etc. depend on the analyst's assumptions about socio-urban phenomena in general, and of the urbanization process in particular.

In addition, the publication provides a neat introduction to Torres' key works and their main contributions for those specifically interested in the case of Buenos Aires. As his work evidences, this case constitutes a particular phenomenon of early metropolization, quite different from other processes that developed in Latin American cities. Studying Torres' work, audiences interested in comparative studies will be able to appreciate these distinctive features, as well as their similarities and differences to such processes in European or Anglo-Saxon cities.

The book also enhances the reader's understanding of the present-day characteristics of the metropolitan structure of Buenos Aires, though other contemporary

texts should be added for a complete picture. Although Torres first formulated the hypothesis that shows the fragmentation the structure of the Buenos Aires metropolitan area is currently undergoing, he can only empirically prove its evolution until the end of the 20th century.

Finally, the book leaves the reader with a greater appreciation of Torres' methodological legacy. His social maps undoubtedly constitute a key component thereof. Those with a special interest in them will find Abba's detailed account of the methodology to produce these maps helpful. It is important to point out that at present, the use of social maps as a tool can be expanded to the analysis of multiple contexts, as well as to other more complex situations thanks to multivariate analysis techniques. Nevertheless, Torres reminds us that visually appealing maps, as well as figures are not enough to understand the city and its dynamics. Instead, the theoretical clues that enable us to interpret them are what really matters.

Overall, the book by Abba et al. entices us to read more about Torres. Perhaps the analysis of his work could have been facilitated by adding cross-references among the chapters. Furthermore, the anthology would have benefitted from the inclusion of the complete series of Torres' writings about the social map of Buenos Aires. It is also odd that the compilation does not include a contribution by Gustavo Buzai, who worked with Torres on the production of the social map of Buenos Aires. Nevertheless, the rare publication of tributes to the likes of Torres

– who have bequeathed so much and such valuable knowledge – undoubtedly turns this book into a much-appreciated find.