

## **The Disintegration of Large Agglomerates and the Conditions of their Institutional Organization. The Case of Buenos Aires.**

### **1. The prevailing conditions of the ongoing urban dynamics *Sustained urbanization / deconcentrated decentralization of activities / growing stratification / global urban differentiation / sub-regional urban concentration / diffuse urbanization***

The nature of the process of globalization in the latest decades, which consequences have become essential also as structural references of the patterns of configuration of the urban sub-sector, have determined the deepening and generalization of the secular process of urbanization on a global scale. Similar to previous historical opportunities -particularly those related to the period of massive international migrations at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries-, although nowadays at a still hastier tempo and with greater compulsion, such process has selectively involved in recent times both factors of attraction for the urban sub-sector and expulsion from rural environments. The issue is that such factors tend to behave according to colliding patterns and give rise to severe consequences: people emigrating from rural areas tend to find it much harder to gain a genuine urban inclusion and remain in such negative conditions for long-lasting periods, if not their whole lifetimes, while becoming merely forced residents within such type of settings.

The two mentioned circumstances, i.e. *attraction* and *expulsion*, both associated with migration processes, tend to be processed within urban areas in very different ways. The first one, if effectively accompanied by sustained and formal labour relations, turns into a more or less proper structural urban insertion, i.e. of an integrated urban character, hand in hand with urban formal counterparts and to the prevailing territorial expansion of pre-existing urban structures, which normally involve, in physical terms, processes of progressive densification and/or suburbanization. The second case, originated in the expulsion of rural population, involves social sectors with extremely low labour qualifications, limited to subsistence agriculture, who are forced to leave their traditional habitats due to the transformed and massive demand of foodstuffs and production inputs as well as the processes of land tenure concentration, and the introduction of technified rural production practices with minimum highly qualified labour force requirements. In their urban destinations, these population sectors are likely to expand the usually large un-and-underemployed sectors, and to settle in areas of an equivalent level of marginality and environmental decay. Given the structural nature of their restricted employment potential and the difficulties in accessing urban services, they tend to prefer settling in central urban sectors, or at least in those with some significant potential in terms of accessibility to public transportation, thus contributing to the decline of central and sub-central districts. When such conditions are unfeasible, they evolve into the degraded components of peri-urban developments.

As a whole, the uncertainties, difficulties and instabilities associated with the possibility of getting involved in genuine social engagements, including access to essential urban services, and with the maximization potential -either real or perceived- of the latter in larger urban contexts, explain the tendencies towards the concentration of population in Large Agglomerations (L.A).

Central urban areas, favoured by their generally high relative functional standing as well as the concomitant levels of participation in the performance of roles which they have historically displayed -which they tend to retain, although hardly to expand in qualitative terms-, while suffering the general tendencies towards deconcentration, also become burdened by chronic levels of traffic congestion and generalized environmental disruption. Furthermore, the high significance of the relative levels of accessibility through public transportation along with the importance of their building intensities contributes to the high levels of valuation of their capital resources.

The huge levels of stratification of the fixed property sector, and very especially of land resources, take effect in the aggregate level of urban settings, involving both intra, suburban and peri-urban sectors.

On explaining the general tendencies towards spatial deconcentration of urban activities in terms of their functional contents, the sustained levels of development of the sectors of information, communication and transportation appear in the scene. As a consequence, a large number of central activities are in general prone to devalue their sensitivity to internal and external economies. That is, the relative conditions of scale in which activities are developed, their mutual spatial articulation and their urban accessibility in general have retained only a partial and subsidiary location significance; or they have rather become incentives towards urban deconcentration around patterns of very slight locational selectivity: a large proportion of urban activities have become, or are on their way to becoming relaxed or indifferent vis-à-vis their location patterns. The general consequence of such tendencies is inducing generalized processes of deconcentration of urban activities, which result in at least two main consequences: i. the increase in the level of diversity of the activities located in each urban sector; ii. the significant increase in the level of differentiation of the set of sectors which make out L.A.

Furthermore, a generalization in the deepening of the conditions of social urban stratification has evolved. Such situation articulates a growing number of types of traits in systemic terms: at a hegemonic level, the issues related to socioeconomic structuring, articulated with those inherent to ethnic, cultural, age and gender characteristics, etc. Moreover, and precisely as a consequence of the mentioned circumstances, there is a deepened tendency to verify equivalent processes of socio-ecological segregation. One of the patterns through which such segregation is being implemented consists in the processes of gentrification, through which low and middle-low sectors are displaced from their places of residence by others with higher economic and political standing .

Another one, increasingly widespread, is connected with the construction of self-confined urban units, at least in what concerns the relative status of their inhabitants and their immediate neighbours, on the one hand, as well as with the nature of their relationships with their more extended surroundings, on the other. When such units -the so-called 'gated communities'- are located within central or quasi-central urban sectors, they consist mainly in residential units, with some few common complementary services. As a consequence, their impact is more of a psychological nature, arising from the social differences between their inhabitants and those of their immediate surroundings. In the case of suburban locations, on the contrary, such kind of arrangements -country clubs, which were started decades ago, essentially as week-end residences only- nowadays show a tendency to being turned into permanent settings of habitation; as a consequence of being rather self-operative, at least dealing with everyday needs, they seclude themselves more intensively, both socially and functionally, from their surroundings. Finally, those of a peri-urban character -'agrarian premises'-, or an even more noticeable sub-regionally segregated location -'edge cities'- (Garreau, J. 1991), are manifestly 'incomplete' in their urban character; thus, they consequently depend on the pre-existing urban units of a more conventional nature which their inhabitants take advantage of, without participating in their sustenance, at least directly. Very ostensibly, the last mentioned type of configuration constitutes the most extreme level of social and symbolic segregation, as a consequence of their highly homogeneous character, defined and implemented according to a set of quite tight exclusion criteria, which include but far exceed economic categories.

As a consequence of the articulation of this whole set of circumstances and factors, the patterns of internal structuring of urban settings in the international scenario have undergone very intensive patterns of transformation during the latest decades, particularly in what concerns L.A..

The general 'tone' characterizing such transformations is related to the sustained deepening of the processes of 'urban diffusion'. Diffusion in the sense of the loss of continuity of urban

tissues, at least at an aggregate level, as well as with reference to the rank of global extension, which is related to the formerly mentioned nature as well as the diminishing average building intensities. Diffusion too, in what concerns urban physical mobility, by becoming progressively less guided and massive and more car-oriented and private instead. And finally *institutional diffusion*, which becomes extremely transcendental in its causal potential regarding every single one of the mentioned factors, through the deepening level of disintegration of the management systems in charge of planning such agglomerations on a global scale.

That is, we are dealing with the *regionalization*, as opposed to *metropolitanization* of urban agglomerations.

As a matter of fact, the notion of urban agglomeration itself is evidencing a loss of meaning, at least in local terms, only to retain sense in regional terms.

More specifically, the notion of *city* as the dominant pattern of urban configurations becomes progressively a merely historical reference.

Finally, we are faced with the progressive weakness, or rupture, of the operation of urban networks in conventional Christaller-like terms, in favour of the increasing autonomy of every single sector which make out L.A. as it relates with the global relations established by every one of them individually.

On the contrary, the prevailing situation prior to the mentioned circumstances exhibited very different traits: urban growth consisted essentially in the expansion of the outer borders -i.e., the widening of urban frontiers through processes of suburbanization-, in the rather clear stratification patterns of the networks of central places, as well as the development of very significant levels of building intensities. From the institutional point of view, on its part, at least during the first stages of the expansion processes, such widening of the jurisdictional frontiers of the original 'central cities' became customary at the expense of the outright incorporation of the outer lying urbanizing administrations to them.

Even though such circumstances neither necessarily warranted that urban management followed patterns of an *integrated* and *global* character, nor limited extreme levels of physical expansion of urban agglomerations, they were indeed able to open up the potentiality of such desirable events to effectively happen.

Even if we accept that the most extensive among the L.A. during the last decades have lost their leadership in the field not only of *relative* demographic increase -which presently, with respect to those agglomerations, arises from the prevailing migration processes-, but also of the *relative* levels of economic development, in both cases in favour of those following them in the national and regional ranking of urban networks, it is still normally the case that they accumulate the largest *absolute* increases of both types of dynamics. However, and as a consequence of the expressed increase of the processes of urban diffusion, it has become increasingly customary for census procedures concerning the delimitation of urban places to include, as complementary indicators, those of 1) continuity of physical tissues, and 2) commuting patterns. As a matter of fact, it has become increasingly usual to effectively detect that, as already mentioned, the dominant patterns of expansion of L.A. involve both deepening levels of *sub-regional concentration of population* -measured through commuting patterns-, and the disintegration -loss of continuity of the physical tissues- of the originating urban agglomerations. Thus, this implies the confirmation of conditions of diffuse urbanization that involves the whole set of urban places as regards their hierarchies and sizes, including the formerly existing largest agglomerates.

However, the said dominant pattern of configuration does not completely exclude the existence of cases well adjusted to the historical patterns of suburbanization, with expanding urban frontiers, in line with the notion of 'compact cities'. However, to this day, this involves only agglomerates of smaller sizes and lower levels of hierarchy.

**2. The prevalent patterns of institutional organization of Large Agglomerations and the dominant characteristics of their planning and management**  
***Decentralization / privatisation / deregulation / institutional segmentation of L.A.***

Simultaneously with the ongoing processes mentioned in 1 above, and although faced with the growing complexities and difficulties associated with them, the operation patterns of the governmental organizations responsible for urban planning and management have evidenced their shortcomings in dealing with the nature and magnitude of the emerging challenges.

As a matter of fact, it may be posited that the set of public policies synthesizing such operating patterns have proved to be insufficient to promote access to *integrated* and *global* appropriate scenarios in terms of urban efficacy, efficiency, equity and sustainability. Attention must also be drawn to the fact that the general purpose to which public policies have been directed is that of deconstructing the Welfare States, adopted with respect to the processes of reconstruction and development during the post-World War II period. Three are the main axes around which the instruments of government performance have been articulated at present: *decentralisation*, *privatisation* and *deregulation*.

As regards *decentralisation*, a huge number of policies of such nature have been implemented, involving national as well as regional and local governments. In general, such local governments are intended to become responsible for a number of the administrative responsibilities formerly attached to the other two.

The essential object of these interventions has been the main urban social services, involving at least the ones of publicly subsidized social housing, education and health. At a rhetorical level, the target of such policies have been, on the one hand, to stimulate and make a more intensively direct community participation feasible, as far as the existence of closer ties between local administrative duties and local circumstances are concerned; on the other, to offer the possibility of the existence of a higher degree of adjustment between management practices and the needs and demands valued by local residents. Also, what is at stake is a better quality of articulation between the diverse thematic sectors involved in public administration. Finally, and of no lesser significance, it has been deemed that the administrative and economic levels of efficiency tend to maximize within decentralised settings of a smaller scale. In relation to this last item, this might be the reasons for the too frequent partial or total lack of transfer of financial resources simultaneously with the processes of decentralisation.

Regarding such circumstances, some critical comments must be put forward: i in the case of L.A., the patterns of local community participation involve population groups of a massive character, and, consequently, they are not substantially different, neither in terms of their representation capacity nor their operation, from those involving larger population groups; ii. although the local specificities must be considered pertinent and valuable, they should be taken into consideration within the perspective of their identity or equivalence with respect to those which characterize the more extended reference audiences, that is, the *local* within the *global* framework. It should be clearly emphasised that optimising local commitments as different from global ones are neither necessarily nor usually convergent; even worse, neither mutually compatible in terms of global policy instruments. Thus, since this affects larger groups, those related to the latter should be valued as more paramount than the ones pertaining to the former; iii. in what concerns the quality of adjustment among the local policies related to the different thematic sectors, it should be stated that a troublesome factor which becomes maximised in smaller administrative units -i.e. of a local character-, is the lack of more professionally qualified human resources able to operate appropriately within complex pluri-disciplinary settings. Furthermore, it is customary that those government units in charge of planning and management duties within the different levels of public administration have not usually gained access to hierarchical levels of administrative identity, but are regularly restricted to operate within the scope of the Public Works' units; also, at all government levels the prevailing tradition shows that inter-sectorial articulation and

coordination among the different scopes of operation are in general rather absent; iv. with reference to the relative levels of efficiency of local governments, there is no reason whatsoever to believe that they presently guarantee better performance results than higher standing ones, to a great extent related to iii. above, or that they will do so in the near future.

With respect to the processes of *privatisation* of roles traditionally within the urban sphere, it should be pointed out that they have acquired a general character, particularly in countries with a lower relative level of development.

In this case, the objects of intervention are all the types of infrastructures and related services connected with utilities, circulation and transportation, and communication. Most of these entities, at least in what concerns the denser components of their networks, are of urban location and particularly involve the L.A. The general trait of these services within urban settings is that they become *essential*. Further to their very heavy impact on the quality of life of every single social sector in which they are involved, their inexistence -or factual inaccessibility- gives rise to very heavy negative externalities on both social and environmental spheres.

Again, it deals with the disengagement of national governments, within which such services used to be rendered. The most notorious consequences of such policies have to do with the transformation of the essential nature of these kinds of services, which have been gone from an at least tentatively universal nature of the services rendered, characterized by operating at cost, to an openly entrepreneurial nature aimed at maximizing their own benefits. Within contexts of lower relative level of development, usually associated with higher degrees of instability and unpredictability, these benefits are intended to be drawn in very short periods of time. As a consequence, the set of mentioned services become increasingly inaccessible for large portions of the communities involved. As regards the nature of the relationship between enterprises and their customers, the fact is that the latter operate in terms of captive groups served by single suppliers, which consequently operate under conditions of monopolistic markets. Thus, it becomes imperative for government organisations to oversee the supply conditions. However, as a consequence of the prevalent neo-conservative tendency of such organisations at present, open social conflicts over these conditions of service have become customary, leading to the reversion of privatisation processes, and even to overthrown governments. Furthermore, as a consequence of the sheer size of the intervening enterprises, predominantly foreign, acting within globalised scenarios, they tend to exercise huge negotiation and pressure capacities upon the government organisations with which they interact. On account of the origin of the contractual relations - in most cases involving national governments- and of the fact that the control bodies of the enterprises' behaviour are also within the scope of government action, there is an inclination towards a lack of relationship between the former and the local governments concerned, or its nature is only subsidiary. In such circumstances, as we shall see, the deregulation policies, articulated with those of privatisation, constitute an extremely critical association with regard to the local needs and interests. Consequently, a number of highly problematic circumstances arise, which particularly affect L.A., as follows: i. the patterns of operation of each enterprise concerned are of an autonomous character, in both operating terms and the utmost relevant urban implications of their behaviour; ii. within the relative valuation of entrepreneurial policies it is not the relative levels characterizing each social sector of the demand what is essential, but their effective paying capacity; iii. both the conditions of preserving the implied natural resources and the environmental impacts which rendering their service entails -as well as those arising from *not* providing such services- become highly devalued; iv. the inexistence of cross-subsidies benefiting the lower standing social sectors predominates.

Finally, as regards *deregulation* policies, they are significant not only with respect to providing urban utilities, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, but, more generally, as to how they affect the existing relations among government bodies, civil society and the entrepreneurial sectors, as well as the global patterns of their mutual interaction.

In general, it should be posited that the prevailing trait during the last decades -heavily in line with the comprehensively neo-conservative trend of world politics- has been in general to value paramount entrepreneurial interests, particularly those involving globalised operations, with either local or foreign players, idealised as having the power to drive forward a generally positive local dynamics. To this end, it has become usual to establish 'friendly business environments', with which the pertinent governmental sectors become involved only in the merely instrumental capacity of administering, legalizing and legitimating their conditions of operation, while pushing civil society to the background, particularly its more needy sectors, as forced recipients of the inefficiencies arising from the global conditions of operation. In urban terms, and particularly with respect to L.A., the clearest expressions of how such types of roles are implemented encompass the following instruments: the new nature of land use regulation; the stimulation of the processes of gentrification; the promotion of sub-and peri-urbanization.

As to the first issue, the prevailing trend is to prefer rather relaxed conditions of physical regulation. The Chart of Athens has become the centre of the very much criticized conditions of spatial regulation typical of the first decades of the post World War II period, deemed as unnecessarily selective. On the opposite end, to this day, it has become usual to either allow or stimulate very hybrid urban tissues as regards the activities they may be integrated with, including intensive residence, not only in central places of very high hierarchies but also in industrial ones. But as a consequence of the generalized tendencies towards urban de-centralisation and deconcentration mentioned in 1 above, the described patterns of regulation become fully functional towards unilateral interests -much more than what their operational requirements might be- of the entrepreneurial sector operating within the building field, turning the way they perform their operations into less demanding. But in such a circumstance, it is of utmost importance how are the terms in which each social segment 'selects' its residential location, being fully conditioned not by the specific portions of habitat as determined by urban regulations, but by the margins of their economic capacity, as determined by the market with respect to every single portion of the urban territories. With regard to the economic prices assigned to each of those physical sectors, the differential conditions of such sets of values are related to physical, functional and environmental qualities as well as to symbolic traits. Accordingly, 'appropriate' conditions of correlation between the structural qualities of the physical portions and the social sectors inhabiting them are present. 'Appropriate' should be understood in terms of coherence, but very far away from terms of the least minimal levels of global equity.

The processes of gentrification constitute a clear cut evidence of the differential power held by the diverse social sectors in order to determine the capacities of each and every one of them when choosing their residential location, as well as the inactivity of the government sectors responsible for correcting or limiting such processes. This has to do with the residential displacement of social sectors of lower economic capacity by those enjoying higher standards, through, once again, rising land and building values through market mechanisms. Government sectors would not regularly intervene in any way whatsoever to preserve the rights, of at least a historical nature, of the deprived social sectors, nor cash in the differential rents thus generated. As a matter of fact, the high land development potentials related with the relaxed conditions of land use regulations, as mentioned above, become factors tending to heighten land values, generating fertile land for gentrification processes. So naturally, the displaced social sectors become forced emigrants towards the peripheries or peri-urban portions of L.A., fuelling the general process of spatial deconcentration, hand in hand with the deepening of the global conditions of inefficiency and inequity.

As to the processes of suburban and peri-urban expansion, they become the result of the set of mentioned factors, plus other clearly political ones. In fact, the almost complete lack of urban settings articulated by inter-jurisdictional coordinating instruments, not to talk about integrated governments binding together L.A., prevail not only in countries with a lower

relative level of development, but also in more affluent ones. In such conditions, the interests in giving rise to new urbanization processes involve jurisdictions of an increasingly peripheral nature, far apart from historically central or consolidated areas. Concerning entrepreneurial sectors, new business areas arise, offering the opportunity of internalising almost completely the differential rents originated in the emerging urban multipliers, while configuring one of the areas which maximize land-development associated rents. From the point of view of local politicians, also, urbanizing such jurisdictions is coupled with the parallel increase of the political and economic capitals at stake, representing larger communities and rents generated per unit of land. Given this state of affairs, these politicians of the peripheries turn into privileged members within the political scenarios of the intermediate levels of government -provinces, prefectures or departments-, and even at a national level. In such framework, the character of the inter-jurisdictional relations, particularly those involving the same governmental level -in this case, local units- are the arena of mutual competition, with disputes over the issues involving the instances and contents of the patterns of urban development that all one of them intend to attract and materialize.

One of the major conditions enabling these events is, as strange as it may sound, the lack of articulation between the jurisdictional universe that constitute the L.A., in which not only the entrepreneurial sectors become significant, but very centrally, the whole universe of bodies at all government levels and branches.

The circumstances characterizing the 'genetics' and the administrative operation of L.A, should be understood within this scenario as marked by institutional segmentation and operative lack of coordination. The obvious consequences are the maximization of inefficiencies, ineffecticiencies, inequities and of lack of sustainability of an integrated and global character, jeopardising the possibility of accessing reasonable conditions of prospective operation.

### **3. The case of Buenos Aires**

The Buenos Aires Agglomerate constitutes a clear and meaningful example of the combination of circumstances mentioned in 1 and 2 above.

After the end of the 15th century, when Buenos Aires was founded for the second time, it was established as the seat of the Viceroyalty of the River Plate. Shortly after, it became the head of the urban network of the Spanish front of the Atlantic.

By the end of the 19th century it was chosen national capital, starting a frantic process of population growth, nourished by massive ultramarine immigrations at first, and regional and national, later on. The level of primacy of the agglomerate has grown deeper ever since, being ten times greater than the following agglomerates in the national ranking. At present, with a population of almost 13 million inhabitants, it represents about one third of the national total.

Upon a scenario without significant physical barriers in terms of its urbanisation potential, its development during the first stages as Federal District exceeded only slightly, and within limited directions, the territorial jurisdiction assigned to it. Very soon, however, the process of physical expansion involved dozens of conurbated jurisdictions, constituting an extensively urbanized continuum with restricted average densities.

In general terms, the dominant trait of its physical configuration is that of a semi radio-concentric structure, given its original position at the shores of the River Plate. Such configuration involves a set of 'corridors' which include, in terms of connectivity, the main components of the road and railroad networks. Both networks are polarized upon the area which since the origins of the city was and still is the most highly hierarchical central place of the Agglomerate. This area becomes as well the central hub of the subway network.

Connecting roads on a global scale and transversal direction are rather infrequent, particularly within the conurbated sector; on their part, transversal railroads are close to non-

existent. The subway network has only one of such type of connection, which is presently being replicated.

As a consequence, at least partially, of the mentioned circumstances, the internal relative hierarchy of the original central place of the Agglomerate also exhibits a nature of 'primacy' with respect to the other members of the extensive network of areas of a similar function which have been developing throughout time. The fact is, however, that even those of an extensive size include only components related to massive consumption, while they have shown themselves unable to include any significant elements dealing with production activities.

As to the conditions of physical mobility, and within the framework of sustained patterns of growth of car ownership rates, the modal split of transportation has witnessed an absolute increase in the participation of private cars, which has doubled in a forty-year-period, now reaching a level of 50% of the aggregate values of personal trips.

Consistently with such evolutionary patterns, a very important expansion of the levels of regional accessibility by means of the main road network has taken place. Also, during the last decades some formerly unknown levels of social stratification have been experienced, centred upon soaring levels of un-and-under employment (Ainstein, L.1996). At the same time, a sustained process of urban deconcentration has taken place, centred upon residential and manufacturing activities, although also including those of a central character.

Further to a set of instances of progressive suburbanization, extending the radial corridors, although concentrating on the infilling of their mutual dividing spaces, the processes of peri-urbanization, which involve at least the two ends of the socio-economic pyramid, have prevailed.

Such processes are connected with a deepening of the global conditions of differentiation of the functional, environmental and social qualities characterizing the Agglomerate, and an equivalent level of stratification of the Quality of Life of its different population sectors (Ainstein, L. et alii.2005. Chapter 2, 2.2.1., p.88).

The absolutely archaic institutional system of the Agglomerate includes the following entities:

i. the National Government, which has retained its exclusive roles of a series of large regional service units -e.g. port, airports, etc.-, as well as a number of Regulation Bodies of the privatised public utilities; ii. the Government of Buenos Aires City with respect to the original 'central jurisdiction', which has become autonomous only less than ten years ago from the National Government, which it depended on up to then. Although in implicit and incomplete terms, it has been granted the status of a province, not a municipality, due to its meaningful population level of 3 million inhabitants, the hierarchy of the functions it performs, and for being the seat of the latter; iii. the Government of Buenos Aires Province, in which the 24 conurbated municipalities are located; iv. the set of 24 local governments, which benefit from only restricted levels of autonomy; v. a number of peri-urban jurisdictions; vi. an extremely restricted number of inter-jurisdictional administrative bodies, with narrowly specified incumbencies -e.g. the management of solid wastes, river basins, etc-, which in most cases do not involve all the necessary jurisdictions concerned, nor within balanced patterns of institutional interaction.

Even though the paramount national documents of juridical regulation of each of the government levels involved -constitutions in the case of the national and provincial tiers, and municipal charts as regards local governments- expressly establish the convenience of coordinated operation, the mutual articulation of their government operation has very seldom been fulfilled, and when they did, they did so only in relation to thematically restricted issues, and ephemerally. As a matter of fact, the mentioned group of governmental entities related to the Agglomerate neither now or before have they recognized any kind of systematic and global pattern of mutual association in terms of management consultation or coordination. Several have been, however, the opportunities when establishing such conditions has been considered. (Ainstein L. et alii. 2005. Ch. 4, 4.1.1., p.211). Two of them become particularly



relevant given, on the one hand, the prevailing circumstances in which each of them have happened, and on the other, the recent time framework in which they have taken place. The first of them dates back to the mid 1980s, when the National Government adopted the decision to move the site of the national capital to a new setting in Patagonia. Collaterally, the issue of the convenience of setting up an integrated organisation to deal, under several alternative patterns, the administration of the Agglomerate were considered. A very outstanding scenario -the coincidence of the political party governing each one of the participating highest-ranking government administrations, those of the national, provincial and Buenos Aires City governments- encouraged such possibility. None of the alternatives considered were centred upon setting up unified *government* integration at the global scale of the Agglomerate, but did so instead upon establishing *coordination* instances encompassing the whole set of jurisdictions concerned. However, and even within the mentioned scenario of credible political feasibility, the lack of success of the plan regarding the New Capital also implied the failure of pursuing new formats regarding the Agglomerate's institutional organization.

The second one of the mentioned particular settings took place by the end of the 1990s, when the institutional format of the government of Buenos Aires City was modified, incorporating into its denomination the suggestive reference of 'Autonomous', referring to the change of status in the relationship associating the national and local governments. However, this meaning has been generalised, involving within the same operating criteria, once again, the complete set of government units at every level of public administration, without any will of mutual coordination.

On the contrary, a number of jurisdictional *segmentations* of existing government units have been instrumented: in the case of those of the conurbated area, several have become subdivided, more with the aim of accessing to higher levels of structural homogeneity in the resulting units than fulfilling the objective of their enhanced administrative capacities; meanwhile, in the case of Buenos Aires City, a so-called process of decentralisation -really a mere administrative *deconcentration*- is under way.

In the face of such circumstances, an academic exploration of the present and prospective institutional conditions of the Buenos Aires Agglomerate (Ainstein, L. et alii. 2005. Ch.5,5.3., p.529) has allowed to identify, characterize and appraise a set of ten alternatives to reconfigure its prevailing patterns of configuration and operation (see Figure 1).

As it may be seen, a first level of differentiation refers to the existence, or not, of a *government* organisation comprising the whole Agglomerate.

Secondly, the first case considers options related to the existence, or not, of *coordination* organisations of a global scope, and in the second one, the alternatives refer to whether the existing set of jurisdictions is maintained or transformed.

Thirdly, the issue addressed with respect to each of the considered options is related to alternative patterns of transformation of the universe of existing jurisdictions.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The consequences of the current process of globalization developed as from the 1970s, hand in hand with the increasing generalization of neo-conservative policies, have been set as the foundations of substantial transformations related to the patterns of reconfiguration of the urban sub-sector. Simultaneously with the deepening of the processes of urbanization, the levels of concentration of population around L.A. have also increased. Historically, the secular patterns of urban configuration used to take place through the expansion of the external borders of urban agglomerates, connected with the processes of sub-urbanization, setting the origin of metropolitan agglomerates of a rather compact character. At present, instead, under circumstances characterized by the deepening of the conditions of social differentiation, the growing autonomy in the conditions of location of all kinds of urban activities, and automotive transportation, the patterns of 'diffuse urbanization', characterized

by the discontinuity of urban tissues, prevalently low average densities, segmented centralities, and private car-centred personal mobility have begun to generalize. This means that *urban configurations of a regional character* become increasingly generalized; thus, the historical *city* notion becomes merely referential. Meanwhile, the patterns of configuration and of operation of the government organizations involved in L.A. are as well centred upon equivalent processes of diffusion, and offer a great chance to explain the mentioned set of urban circumstances. Such institutional diffusion is also closely linked with the ongoing patterns of increasing segmentation and the loss of roles of the government sectors, favouring the legalized and legitimated participation of concentrated and globalised entrepreneurial sectors. Although the mentioned types of situations encompass more intensively countries of a lesser relative level of development, they also increasingly comprise all types of urban contexts. The Buenos Aires Agglomerate, of a growing globalised nature, constitutes a meaningful case in the world scenario where the set of alleged circumstances may be verified.

## 5. Bibliographical references

Ainstein, Luis (1996) "Buenos Aires: a case of deepening social polarization" in *The Mega-City in Latin America*. Edited by Alan Gilbert. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.

Ainstein, Luis, Jorge Karol, Ernesto Pastrana and Beatriz Rajland (2005) *Estructuración Institucional para la Planificación y Gestión Integradas del Aglomerado Urbano de Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo de la Universidad de Buenos Aires. CD Editon [www.fadu.uba.ar/isu](http://www.fadu.uba.ar/isu)

Garreau, Joel (1991) *Edge City. Life on the New Frontier*. New York: Doubleday.

<b>1.</b> Lack of existence of any specific governmental organization involving the whole of the Metropolitan Agglomerate	<b>1.1.</b> Lack of existence of any coordinating entity of all the jurisdictions concerned	<b>1.1.1.</b> Lack of existence of incipient entities devoted to sectorial or local coordination	
	<b>1.2.</b> Existence of some coordinating entity of all the jurisdictions concerned	<b>1.1.2.</b> Existence of incipient entities devoted to sectorial or local coordination <b>[current situation]</b>	
		<b>1.2.1.</b> Preserving the existing jurisdictional configuration	
		<b>1.2.2.</b> Modifying the existing jurisdictional configuration	<b>1.2.2.a</b> Concentrating the transformations on the integration of jurisdictions
		<b>1.2.2.b</b> Concentrating the transformations on the segmentation of jurisdictions	
		<b>1.2.2.c</b> Operating simultaneously on the integration and segmentation of jurisdictions	
<b>2.</b> Existence of some specific governmental organization involving the whole Metropolitan Agglomerate	<b>2.1.</b> Generally preserving the existing jurisdictions		
	<b>2.2.</b> Structurally transforming the existing jurisdictions	<b>2.2.1.</b> Concentrating the transformations on the integration of jurisdictions	
		<b>2.2.2.</b> Concentrating the transformations on the segmentation of jurisdictions	
		<b>2.2.3.</b> Operating simultaneously on the integration and segmentation of jurisdictions	

Figure 1. Main Options regarding the Institutional Configuration or Reconfiguration of the Buenos Aires Agglomerate  
 Source: Ainstein, Luis et alii. 2005. Chapter .5, 5.3., page 529