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journals.sagepub.com/home/epn**Sergio Montero**

Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

Abstract

While modern urban planning has traditionally been shaped by policies and instruments from European and North American cities, in recent decades there has been an increase in South-South policy learning and a number of cities of the global South have emerged as alternative urban planning models. Yet, less is known about the practices through which urban policy actors in cities of the South learn from other Southern cities' policies. This paper examines the case of Guadalajara, Mexico, where different local public and private actors introduced a new policy issue—sustainable transportation—in the local and state government agenda making extensive references to Bogotá, Colombia. Study tours are identified as key practices that facilitated the adoption of Bogotá's transportation policies in Guadalajara. Using qualitative and ethnographic methods, I show that study tours were powerful instruments to promote policy change thanks to their capacity to: (1) educate the attention of influential local policy actors through hands-on “experiential learning”; (2) expand local coalitions through the building of trust and consensus around a policy model; and (3) mobilize public opinion through references to already existing policies. In doing so, I suggest that study tours should be conceptualized as both learning and governance instruments that a variety of actors can use to translate their shifting beliefs of how the city should be organized into public policy. The analysis of the actors that organized these tours also reveals the friction between local and transnational agendas shaping the apparent South-South circulations of Bogotá's transportation policies.

Keywords

Policy learning, policy mobilities, study tours, South-South, Bogotá, Bus Rapid Transit

Corresponding author:

Sergio Montero, Centro Interdisciplinario de Estudios sobre Desarrollo (Cider), Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia.

Email: s.montero@uniandes.edu.co

Introduction

So far, almost all cities in the developing world have been implicitly copying the city model of advanced countries...if our reality is different then we also need a different model. (Peñalosa, 2003)

In 2003, Enrique Peñalosa, mayor of Bogotá during 1998–2000, visited Guadalajara, Mexico to give a talk that started with the words above. The auditorium was packed with 2,000 people, including representatives of Guadalajara's local and state government, the local business community, journalists, architects, environmental advocates, university students, and people with a curiosity in urbanism and urban politics. While he started with a broad reflection on the need of cities of the South to change their role models and learn from each other, his talk, titled "An Infinity of Small Things," was a dramatic narrative of urban transformation in which he claimed to have transformed Bogotá thanks to a series of urban interventions focused on improving public space, public transportation, and bicycle infrastructure. Bogotá's *Transmilenio* Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), a system of rapid buses with dedicated lanes and stations inaugurated in 1999, and *Ciclovía*, a weekly car-free program that brings one million *Bogotanos* to bike and run in streets otherwise reserved for car traffic, were prominently featured in his presentation.

Enrique Peñalosa's talk was the triggering event that resulted in more than 10 study tours of local business leaders, politicians, bus company owners, NGOs, and journalists from Guadalajara to learn from Bogotá. Many of these study tours were initially organized and paid by the business-led group *Guadalajara 2020*. Some years later, the local and state government as well as the local environmental NGO *Colectivo Ecologista Jalisco*, with funds from Hewlett Foundation, also organized and funded tours to Bogotá. While BRT was often misspelt in Guadalajara's newspapers in the early 2000s, a couple of years after words like BRT, sustainable mobility or *Ciclovía* became common language in Guadalajara. In 2004, inspired by Bogotá's *Ciclovía*, the mayor of Guadalajara inaugurated *Vía Recreativa*, Latin America's second largest car-free street program, which draws about 300,000 participants to walk and bike in the streets of Guadalajara every Sunday. Some years after, the governor of the state of Jalisco inaugurated *Macrobús*, a BRT line that moves about 125,000 people per day in Guadalajara. *Macrobús* not only looked shockingly similar to Bogotá's *Transmilenio*, it had, indeed, a Colombian as head of the system.

This could be seen as an exercise of South-South urban policy learning, an example of a Latin American city, Guadalajara, which learned innovative transportation policies from another Southern peer. Yet, in this article, I am more interested in showing how practices of inter-city policy learning take place in a field of local and transnational power and politics (McCann and Ward, 2011; McFarlane, 2011a). I am, however, less interested in the question of "who governs/who rules?" that has traditionally characterized Anglo-American debates on urban politics (Dahl, 1961; Hunter, 1953; Stone, 1989). Instead, I use the process of policy learning from Bogotá in Guadalajara to understand *how* local decision-makers actually learn about other cities' policies and, perhaps more importantly, *how* these learning practices result in policy change. In shifting from "who" towards "how" questions, I follow an analysis of power that focuses on the ways in which power is operationalized through everyday practices rather than starting with particular people or institutions (Foucault, 1977; Le Galès, 2011). Here, the role of knowledge—and therefore learning—is key and, inevitably, related with power (Foucault, 1977). It is then that it becomes clear that while *inter-city policy learning*, the process of making changes in urban policies, programs or planning mechanisms based on

the experience of another city, might be a “voluntary act” (Meseguer, 2005)—as opposed to, for example, a policy imposition from a higher level of government or an international organization—it is also a process shaped by the political agendas of different local and transnational actors (McCann and Ward, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2015).

In this paper I highlight a particular mechanism in processes of inter-city policy learning: study tours. If the Bogotá story of urban transformation told by Enrique Peñalosa in Guadalajara in 2003 was key to inspire a group of local business owners about the possibilities of transforming their city through sustainable transport interventions, it was through study tours to Bogotá that a core group of influential public and private policy actors became educated in the Bogotá model; trust and public-private alliances between business leaders, public officials, and bus company owners solidified; and public opinion was mobilized in favor of building a BRT in Guadalajara. The following sections will analyze how the alignments of these influential urban governance actors were facilitated through study tours to Bogotá. To do so, I relied on a combination of multi-sited research methods that include: (a) in-depth interviews with more than 30 policy actors involved in transportation policy in Guadalajara, five of which participated in study tours to Bogotá; (b) archival research and content analysis of reports, conference proceedings and newspaper articles about Bogotá transportation policies produced by Guadalajara journalists, public opinion leaders and the organizations *Guadalajara 2020* (GDL 2020 from now on) and *Colectivo Ecologista Jalisco* (CEJ from now on); (c) participant observation; during 11 months I lived in Guadalajara and interned with the environmental NGO CEJ where I observed their strategies to influence urban policy and government agendas; (d) interviews in Washington DC and the San Francisco Bay Area with representatives of the main think tanks, development banks, and philanthropic organizations that have funded Bogotá study tours (ITDP, EMBARQ and the Hewlett Foundation); and (e) data from Transmilenio S.A. archives, which includes a database of all city delegations that visited Transmilenio BRT system from 2001 until 2011. Finally, I also draw from my participation in several international conferences and study tours in which Bogotá transportation policies were invoked and/or mobilized as a model between 2011 and 2014. This combination of methods resonates with the methodological shift to study policy transfer suggested by policy mobilities authors, who have called for multi-sited qualitative and ethnographic methods that stay close to the everyday practices of policy actors without losing sight of political economy analysis (Peck and Theodore, 2015; Roy, 2012). This multi-sited methodology also helps illuminate how South-South urban policy learning is not only becoming an important arena for urban politics in cities of the South but also an increasingly important field of intervention for international development banks, global philanthropy, and global think tanks.

The article is divided in two parts. In the first part, I discuss theories of policy learning and show that while the importance of learning to promote policy change has been highlighted in various debates, little attention has been given so far to the ways in which policy actors actually learn as well as to the “politics of learning” (Meseguer and Gilardi, 2009; Peck and Theodore, 2010; Stone, 2001). Debates on study tours are brought into the conversation to set up a conceptual framework that is attentive to both the political economy of study tours and the learning, trust building, and governance practices that take place during them. In the second part, I analyze a series of study tours that took more than 100 local decision-makers from Guadalajara to learn from Bogotá. The analysis shows that study tours were a key practice in the adoption of Bogotá’s policies in Guadalajara thanks to their capacity to: (1) educate the attention of influential local policy actors through “experiential learning;” (2) expand local coalitions through the building of trust

and consensus around a policy model; and (3) mobilize public opinion through references to already existing policy solutions in Bogotá. I conclude with some reflections on why the relationship between study tours and policy learning is important for researchers interested in critical approaches to urban policy and policy learning, media studies, and development studies.

The politics and practices of policy learning

“Latin America is today the epicentre of the global BRT movement . . .

Bogotá’s 110 km *Transmilenio* is recognised as the Gold Standard of BRT. Delegations of officials and dignitaries from around the world visit Bogotá to marvel at the system.”

Suzuki et al. (2013: 110)

Study tours to Bogotá have been a key practice behind the adoption of BRT systems and bicycle policies around the world and, especially, in cities of the global South. Since 2001, cities as diverse as Guadalajara (Arriaga and Silva, 2012), Johannesburg (Wood, 2014), or Jakarta (Matsumoto, 2007), among more than one hundred others (Hidalgo and Gutiérrez, 2012), have implemented a BRT system drawing inspiration from Bogotá’s *Transmilenio*. According to *Transmilenio SA* archives, about 10,000 decision-makers visited Bogotá on a study tour from 2000 until 2011: an average of one delegation every four days.¹ Of those visitors, 76% came from other cities in Latin America, 10% from Asia, and 5% from Africa.²

The fast travels of Bogotá’s transport policies and their wide adoption in other cities of the global South are not an isolated event but part of the increasing phenomenon of inter-city policy transfer. Using theoretical frameworks such as policy diffusion (Shipan and Volden, 2008; Simmons et al., 2008), policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Stone, 2001), and lesson-drawing (Radaelli, 2004; Rose, 1993) several authors in political science and sociology have sought to conceptualize the role of external policy ideas in shaping the policymaking process. In these debates the emphasis has been on why, what, and by whom policy diffusion/transfer happens, and four mechanisms have often been distinguished to explain why policies diffuse: learning, competition, imitation, and coercion (Shipan and Volden, 2008; Simmons et al., 2008). For example, Shipan and Volden (2008) analyzed antismoking policy choices in 675 US cities and distinguished between four policy diffusion mechanisms: learning from earlier adopters, economic competition among proximate cities, imitation of larger cities, and coercion by state governments. In these debates, learning is often defined as a horizontal and rational diffusion mechanism, a “voluntary act” (Meseguer, 2005) whereby policymakers change their beliefs about the cause and effects of policies (Dobbin et al. 2007). Related with policy transfer debates is the lesson-drawing framework, which favors an analytical approach in which learning from evidence-based actions, rather than just copying “best practices,” is a preferred form of policy transfer and considered key to successful policy change (Radaelli, 2004; Rose, 2002).

A common complaint about policy learning debates is that while much ink has been spent in theorizing definitions of learning and typologies of learning actors, little is known about the actual practices through which learning happens (Gilardi and Radaelli, 2012; McFarlane, 2011a). For example, reflecting on the recent literature on policy learning and lesson-drawing, Gilardi and Radaelli (2012: 162) have noted that “we still do not know much about how communities of social actors—especially policy-makers—learn.” This is particularly true for the case of South-South policy learning, which remains an unexplored area in urban studies despite its increasing frequency (Ganuza and Baiocchi,

2012; Kumar, 2008; Roy and Ong, 2011). Policy diffusion/transfer approaches have also been criticized for their rationalistic interpretations of learning and their silence about “the politics of learning” or how learning from abroad is shaped by politics (Meseguer and Gilardi, 2009; Peck and Theodore, 2010; Stone, 2001).

Here, recent debates on urban policy mobilities can help us conceptualize the practices that facilitate policy learning between cities while situating them in a field of local and transnational power (Cook et al., 2014; McCann and Ward, 2011; McFarlane, 2011a; Temenos and McCann, 2012). Moving beyond a focus on transfer agents, modalities of learning and the rationalistic assumptions of policy diffusion/transfer debates, policy mobilities authors have sought to analyze the mobilization of urban policies as a socially constructed, politicized, and power-laden process where power and politics come to the forefront (Peck and Theodore, 2010). They have argued that a critical analysis of policy circulations should take a *relational-territorial approach* (McCann and Ward, 2010), that is, as much as policymaking is shaped by situated economic and socio-political struggles, it is also shaped by globally circulating ideas, models, and agendas. Policy learning is “understood in terms of power and politics, particularly regarding how expertise and truth claims are deployed” (Temenos and McCann, 2012: 1394). However, it would also be a mistake to reduce policy learning to mere political battles. McFarlane’s (2011b) definition of learning as translation, coordination, and dwelling (or “the education of attention”) is helpful here. For the purposes of this article, I find particularly interesting the notion of learning as the “education of attention,” an idea that has also been extensively used and explored in the work of James Gibson (1979) and Tim Ingold (2001). This understanding of learning emphasizes the important role of practice, experience, and visual perception in learning processes:

“The growth of knowledge in the life history of a person is a result not of information transmission but of guided rediscovery...The process of learning by guided rediscovery is most aptly conveyed by the notion of *showing*. To show something to someone is to cause it to be made present for the person, so that he or she can apprehend it directly, whether by looking, listening, or feeling.” (Ingold, 2001: 272)

This is precisely the role that study tours play in processes of inter-city policy learning: as a practice that seeks to focus the attention of key urban policy actors and decision-makers in one particular policy problem by showing them in practice how another city dealt with it.

To fill these two gaps in the policy learning literature—the lack of research on the “politics of learning” and on the actual practices of policy learning, especially when learning happens South-South—the following section reviews debates on a policy learning practice that has been key in the adoption of Bogotá’s transportation policies in other cities of the global South: study tours.

What is a study tour

Study tours are short visits in which a delegation of people travels to another place to experience something with potential to improve their organizations or places of origin. An expectation of learning from people, programs or organizations in the visited place is often the main justification of these tours. In the field of education, study tours have often been conceptualized as powerful forms of “experiential learning,” as participants learn something new by experiencing it directly in another setting (Axford et al., 2010). A commonly cited theorist behind these conceptualizations of study tours is David Kolb. Drawing from the epistemological bases of pragmatist philosophers and experiential educators such as Dewey,

Piaget, and Freire, Kolb argued that learning is a process in which “ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience” (Kolb, 1984: 26). In Kolb and Fry’s (1975) learning model, four elements combine, in no particular order, to form a learning spiral: concrete experience; observation, and reflection; the formation of abstract concepts; and testing in new situations. Under this interpretation of learning, study tours are important elements of this spiral, even if “concrete experience” is only one among the four elements at work in a learning process.

However, study tours are not just learning instruments; tour participants are often selected because of their capacity to influence policy back home. For example, in December 2006, the Jalisco state government sponsored a study tour in which Guadalajara bus company owners and several state bureaucrats were brought to Bogotá. As noted by Diego Monraz, head of the state transportation agency at the time, “the idea was to convince bus company owners and the novice transport bureaucrats [at Jalisco State government]... to learn [about BRT]” (Monraz, personal interview, 2013). The words *convince* and *learn* are used by Monraz in the same sentence to describe the objective of the tour. This suggests that study tours are not just learning devices; they can—and are often used to—change urban governance structures and policy agendas. In the following paragraphs I analyze two strands of literature that can help us conceptualize study tours as both learning and governance instruments. The first strand analyzes study tours from a political economy perspective seeking to reveal how the spread of urban planning ideas through these short visits has historically served to sustain systems of domination such as colonialism or US intellectual hegemony in the Third World. A second strand of debates focuses on the actual practices involved in study tours seeking to understand what kind of learning dynamics take place during them and the ways in which these dynamics contribute to policy change when study tours participants are back.

The political economy of study tours: From North-South to South-South

Study tours are not by any means new mechanisms to circulate ideas about how urban space should be organized. Urban and planning historians have documented the ways in which the transfer of the British idea of the “garden city” in the early twentieth century was as a clear example of how the transfer of urban planning knowledge was part of the broader British colonial system of intellectual domination (Home, 1997). For example, Freestone (1998) has shown how study tours of Australian and New Zealand high-ranking officials to Letchworth, the English mecca of garden cities, sponsored by the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association were key not only to the transfer of “garden city” ideas but to the very development of modern planning in Australia. Similarly, during the Cold War, international development institutions and US foundations—particularly Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford—used academic exchanges and study tours to avoid the spread of communism and consolidate US intellectual hegemony in the Third World (Parmar, 2002). For example, Escobar (1989) has shown how community development and economic development planning policies first penetrated Colombia during the 1950s–60s through the numerous missions of US economists and planners sent by the World Bank and the training of Colombian politicians and academics in US universities.

If North-South exchanges of people have been important instruments behind the transfer of urban planning and development policy knowledge during the late nineteenth and twentieth century, the twenty-first century seems to bring a growing momentum to South-South exchanges (Quadir, 2013). In a context of shrinking North-originating aid, Abdenur and Da Fonseca (2013) have argued that Northern donors, including development banks

and philanthropic organizations, have found in the language of South-South cooperation a new way to legitimize and expand their power and interventions in the project of development. For example, since the 2008 Accra Agenda for Change, the World Bank has become increasingly interested in organizing and funding South-South study tours as a way to intervene in global development problems (World Bank Institute, 2010). Indeed, in 2008, the World Bank established the *South-South Experience Exchange Facility* as “a strategic instrument to leverage greater development impact from results-oriented [South-South] knowledge exchanges.”³ While learning is often invoked as the main objective of these South-South study tours, it is the consensus built, coalitions fostered, and networks expanded that take place during them what the World Bank see as key outcomes (World Bank Institute, 2010). While the World Bank and philanthropic foundations are increasingly using South-South study tours to intervene in global development problems, urban scholars have only recently started to critically analyze what actually happens during these tours and the ways in which they can result in policy change.

In the following section I review a second set of debates that are more focused on the actual practices that take place during study tours. I show that there are two different takes in this more practice-centered debate: one that emphasizes their role as a learning and trust building mechanisms and another more critical strand that analyzes study tours as legitimacy and lobbying instruments in the hands of elite public and private actors.

Practicing study tours: Learning, trust building, and elite control

Organizational theorists, economic geographers and urban planners are becoming increasingly interested in the relationship between study tours and institutional change, both in private and public organizations. Two elements have been highlighted in this relationship: learning and trust-building. For instance, Faulconbridge (2010) has shown how short visits between architectural offices located in different cities enable local communities of practice to engage in conversations to start a learning process. In a similar analysis of study tours between advertising companies, Faulconbridge (2006: 536) argued that these short visits are important mechanisms that “lead to the type of trust-based relationships that are vital for learning.” In the economic geography literature, trust is defined as a bond that allows a social actor to rely on the actions of another and is best constructed by repeated face-to-face interactions (Storper and Venables, 2004). Trust facilitates collaboration, communication, and the transmission of tacit knowledge and is increasingly “seen as pre-requisite for learning” (Faulconbridge, 2006: 522). Studying the relationship between learning, study tours, and urban policy change, Campbell (2012) and Wood (2014) reached a similar conclusion by arguing that study tours are important not just because of the exposure of local actors to new policy ideas but also because of the “clouds of trust” (Campbell, 2012) created among participants, trust relations that are later key for the adoption of the policies they experienced together.

Critical urban geographers have been more skeptical of the learning possibilities of study tours and have emphasized instead their role as legitimacy and lobbying instruments in the hands of elite local actors. For example, in her study of how Barcelona and Bilbao have been mobilized as global models, González (2011) has highlighted the important role played by what she calls “policy tourism” or the visits of hundreds of delegations to these cities on study tours. Her ethnographic study of the participants in these tours reveals that, beyond learning new policy ideas, it is the legitimacy, reassurance, and comfort that what they are planning to do at home is not at odds with international “best practices” that are the key dimensions behind the organization of study tours. They create “a sense of being ‘in tune’

with what is happening elsewhere” among tour participants (González, 2011: 1412). In their analysis of the study tours to former Olympic cities undertaken by public and private elites in Manchester in preparation for the city Olympics bid, Cook and Ward (2011) concluded that many of these trips had the objective of lobbying the International Olympic Committee rather than learning. Comparing our current era of *fast policy* (Peck and Theodore, 2015) with Russian and British planning exchanges in the 1950s, Cook et al. (2014) have suggested that consultancies and think tanks have taken a larger role in organizing study tours and are therefore becoming the main “knowledge intermediaries” of urban planning policies, a role traditionally played by government branches and professional bodies.

The analysis of Bogotá study tours that I undertake in the following sections engages and expands these literature debates in several ways. First, I argue that while learning does occur in study tours, these are never politically neutral devices. In other words, I suggest that study tours should be conceptualized as both learning and governance instruments. Study tours are powerful learning mechanisms because they can “educate the attention” of influential local leaders by exposing them to particular policy solutions in other cities. However, it is their capacity to expand and strength local coalitions through the creation of trust and the mobilization of public opinion what make study tours important mechanisms to create policy change. Second, by highlighting study tours as instruments to mobilize public opinion, this paper contributes to the lack of research on the role of the media in recent debates on study tours and, more generally, on policy mobilities. Public officials (Cook et al., 2014; Cook and Ward, 2011), consultants (Prince, 2012), engineers (Larner and Laurie, 2010), members of business associations (Cook, 2008), and policy advocates (McCann, 2008) are not the only actors increasingly travelling and mobilizing other cities’ policies but so are journalists and public opinion leaders. The role of the media has not only been neglected in recent policy mobilities research but it has also been traditionally under-theorized in studies of urban politics (see for instance McCann, 2004; Ward, 2009) and limited to analysis of the role of the owners of local newspapers in local coalitions and local “growth machines” (Rodgers et al., 2014) despite the strong existing evidence that the increasing mediatization of politics can alter political agendas and change power relations among urban governance actors (Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008).

Finally, my analysis illustrates the ways in which study tours are becoming an important practice of global philanthropy to intervene in global development problems through South-South policy learning. By organizing and funding a study tour that brought journalists and reporters from Guadalajara to Bogotá, Hewlett Foundation played an important role in mediating the apparently South-South transfer of policy knowledge between Bogotá and Guadalajara. Yet, this was only one among the more than 10 study tours to Bogotá that different local actors in Guadalajara strategically organized according to their own interests. The politics behind the South-South circulations of the Bogotá model is therefore neither a horizontal learning exercise nor a story of coercion from “above” (or from the North). Rather, it is a politics of learning and local coalition-building that takes place at the intersection of local and transnational agendas. In that sense, South-South urban policy learning is not only an important political and agenda-setting arena in cities of the South but also an increasingly field of intervention for international development banks and global philanthropy.

In the following sections, I analyze a series of study tours that took more than 100 local decision-makers from Guadalajara to learn from Bogotá. The analysis shows that study tours were a key practice in the adoption of Bogotá’s policies in Guadalajara thanks to their capacity to: (1) educate the attention of influential local policy actors through “experiential learning;” (2) expand local coalitions through the building of trust and

consensus around a policy model; and (3) mobilize public opinion through references to already existing policy solutions in Bogotá.

Educating the attention of influential local policy actors through study tours

Urban learning requires not only translation and coordination of different knowledges but also the “education of attention” on a particular topic or policy field (McFarlane, 2011a). In this section, I show how study tours played an important role in educating the attention of influential local policy actors in Guadalajara in transportation and mobility issues through their hands-on experience in Bogotá. The first Guadalajara study tour to Bogotá was organized by the business-led organization GDL 2020 a couple of months after the 2003 Enrique Peñalosa’s conference that I described in the introduction. Peñalosa’s talk in Guadalajara was, in reality, a fund-raising event of *Ciudades Públicas*, a non-governmental organization that eventually became GDL 2020 in 2004. *Ciudades Públicas*’ roots can be traced back to a small group of *empresarios*⁴ from the local jewelry industry that started to organize in the mid-1990s to “clean up” Plaza Tapatía—a central public square where their jewellery showrooms were located—from prostitutes, drug addicts, and informal street vendors. Although the *empresarios* were initially more interested in the fund-raising possibilities of the event than in Peñalosa’s ideas, his visit started to shift 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. This shifting of beliefs was strengthened through several study tours to Bogotá. From 28 January until 7 February 2004, eight local *empresarios* paid for their travel and hotel expenses to visit the capital of Colombia. While Peñalosa and his Bogotá story of urban transformation had certainly inspired them, they needed to see it to believe it and convince themselves to push for the implementation of those policies in Guadalajara:

“We thought it would be a good idea to go to Bogotá to see if it was true all that [Peñalosa] told us about the city: how in a city which had 50% of Guadalajara’s per capita income, 40 years of guerrilla, and with rampant drug trafficking... how could he do that? We didn’t really believe him, we thought he was probably lying... We needed to see it ourselves to believe it” (GDL 2020 leader 1, personal interview, 2013)

To guide the tour, they hired Lucy Barriga, former director of Bogotá’s *Ciclovía* program. During 11 days, they visited different urban transport and public space improvements in Bogotá as well as new libraries, schools, and social housing units built in the peripheries. As it is usual in delegation visits to Bogotá, they rode *Transmilenio* and rented bicycles for the Sunday *Ciclovía*. They also met with different representatives of Bogotá local government and the Sports and Recreation Department (IDRD). The tour served to consolidate a core group of three GDL 2020 *empresarios* who became determined to replicate the Bogotá model in Guadalajara. While Lucy Barriga exposed them to a variety of programs and policies beyond urban transport and public space interventions, they decided to focus first on what they thought was the easiest program to replicate, the Sunday *Ciclovía* program:

“we were drooling over what we saw... wow... the libraries, the compensation houses, the *Ciclovía*, the *Transmilenio*... The last day of the visit was on a Sunday and we went to the *Ciclovía*... [one of GDL 2020 leaders] had not ridden a bicycle in 25 years, and he loved it!... and right there bicycling on Bogotá’s 7th Avenue we decided that this would be the first

thing we would copy from the Colombians...since it also seemed the easiest and cheapest program to do” (GDL 2020 leader 1, personal interview, 2013)

When they came back, this core group of three *empresarios* used their social and political connections to push for the adoption of Bogotá’s *Ciclovía* in Guadalajara. Interestingly, they also resorted to the same practices through which they became educated in the Bogotá model: the organization of conferences in Guadalajara for which they invited Colombian and international sustainable transport experts as well as the organization and funding of more than 10 study tours to Bogotá between 2004 and 2011. In September 2004, after having participated in a Bogotá study tour and pressed by GDL 2020 *empresarios*, the mayor of Guadalajara, Emilio González, inaugurated *Vía Recreativa*, an 11-kilometer weekly car-free program inspired by Bogotá’s *Ciclovía*. While *Vía Recreativa* is a recreational rather than a transportation program, its inauguration pointed towards an embryonic, even if rather experimental, policy shift in the local government agenda towards promoting non-car forms of urban transport.

After *Vía Recreativa* was implemented and institutionalized, the next challenge for GDL 2020 members became pushing for the replication of Bogotá’s *Transmilenio* in Guadalajara. However, building a BRT network posed not only more technical, planning, and financial difficulties than closing some streets on a Sunday, it also required aligning powerful actors that could oppose and block the project. GDL 2020 leaders were not politically naïve and they knew very well that to introduce a new policy such as BRT in the local and state government agenda they needed not only technical arguments but also to put pressure and persuade influential policy actors such as high-ranking politicians, bus company owners, and people with media and public opinion power (GDL 2020 leader 2, personal interview, 2013). Again, forums and study tours to Bogotá became two favorite strategies for GDL 2020 members to persuade key local policy actors of adopting a BRT in Guadalajara.

In 2007, Guadalajara mayor Emilio González became governor of the state of Jalisco. Through his participation in a Bogotá study tour and the collaborations that preceded the launching of *Vía Recreativa*, he had already established a trust relationship with GDL 2020 core members. Furthermore, given the popular acceptance of the program, which had grown from 10,000 participants in 2004 to around 100,000 participants by 2007, he had also become convinced of the potential electoral benefit of promoting the sustainable transport agenda demanded by GDL 2020 and a new generation of bicycle and public space advocacy groups that had emerged in the city since the mid-2000s (Díaz, 2011). While González had been involved in several corruption scandals, such as the diversion of public funds to Catholic organizations and the wasteful spending of public resources in the organization of Guadalajara’s 2011 Pan-American Games, he had, as noted by one of my informants, “a good political instinct,” and saw in *Vía Recreativa* and BRT two programs that could help him clean up his corrupt image as well as become a political platform for the National Action Party (PAN) party to win the following elections.

However, although BRT was included in the state government agenda in 2007 and had the firm support and leadership of the governor, it still required a “policy champion” inside the government to push the policy through the many bureaucracy (or bureaucratic procedures) required for its implementation. In Mexico, states are in charge of mass transit planning but mayors need to approve the implementation of any new project that lies within their borders. Because Guadalajara is a 4.5 million metropolitan region comprised of eight different municipal governments, building a BRT network required the political support of several mayors in the region. As we will see in the next sections, study tours to Bogotá played an important role in forming a political champion within the state

government—Diego Monraz—and in facilitating trust and consensus around BRT among different *panista* (members of the PAN party) mayors in Guadalajara’s metropolitan region. Indeed, when Emilio González was putting together his cabinet during the fall of 2006, he sent Diego Monraz on a Bogotá study tour funded by GDL 2020. As noted by Monraz, after that trip: “I came back indoctrinated in BRT and the Bogotá model” (Monraz, personal interview, 2013). Monraz would later become chief of Jalisco’s transportation department and, during his tenure, he went nine times to Bogotá. These visits proved critical for him to take ownership of the project and to build a trust network of PAN party members, government bureaucrats, and bus company owners that allowed him to implement a full-fledged BRT line in Guadalajara in less than two years. Study tours to Bogotá therefore became powerful instruments in the hands of GDL 2020 to educate the attention of high-ranking government officials on a policy problem—metropolitan mobility—and a particular policy solution: BRT.

Expanding coalitions: Study tours as facilitators of trust and public–private alliances

A key study tour that helped Monraz persuade and align key government officials and mayors around BRT took place in 2006. Funded again by GDL 2020 although led this time by Monraz, two high-ranking representatives of the State of Jalisco and six mayors of Guadalajara’s metropolitan region went to Bogotá on a study tour. Besides experiencing *Transmilenio* firsthand, two things made this tour important. First, meeting with Víctor Raúl Martínez, a former Bogotá bus company owner and now director of one of *Transmilenio*’s most successful concessionary company, helped government officials and mayors “click:”

“Víctor Raúl was very clear in his presentation, he was a great salesman and infected everybody with his enthusiasm . . . One needs that human touch, from human to human . . . Do you know when someone tells you about his experience and that helps you click things? Víctor Raúl was the person that helped us click . . . He touched our head and our heart and all the mayors came back convinced to do something about it”. (Monraz, personal interview, 2013)

As BRT was becoming Monraz’s main political mission within the PAN party, his interest in going to Bogotá and learning from Víctor Raúl and others about what worked well and what caused delays in the implementation of *Transmilenio* was understandable, but what motivated all the other high-ranking officials and busy mayors to take a week off to go to Bogotá? Ethnographic analysis has shown that the motivations to participate in study tours are often associated with the tourism and leisure aspects of the visit or to the fact that colleagues or acquaintances are going too (González, 2011). In addition to the leisure aspects of going to Bogotá together with other party members and colleagues, there was also an important political motivation that brought all these mayors together. After the local elections that took place in 2006, six out of the eight elected mayors of Guadalajara’s metropolitan region were members of the PAN party. It was those six *panista* mayors who went together to Bogotá. This was the first time in decades that the PAN party had achieved control of all of the largest local governments in the metropolis so “there was a momentum [among PAN mayors] about doing something together” [Monraz, personal interview, 2013], even if it was less clear what this could be. With funds from GDL 2020, this tour was, in reality, Monraz’s attempt to persuade them that a BRT system could be the kind of metropolitan project they could collaborate around: “this trip helped create an alliance between the mayors and made it easier to build something metropolitan in a city

without a metropolitan mayor” (Monraz, personal interview, 2013). Whether “learning from Bogotá” might or not have been the main motivation of the participants to attend this study tour, the “education of attention” and networks of trust between high-ranking public officials and mayors created during this study tour had important consequences for urban governance in Guadalajara, particularly the alignment of PAN mayors and high ranking government officials under the leadership of Monraz to build a BRT system. As government officials took ownership of building a BRT in Guadalajara, more study tours followed, this time funded also by the state government.

Even if study tours contributed to build trust between GDL 2020 business leaders, high-ranking state government officials and six mayors around the objective of implementing a BRT in Guadalajara, the alignment of non-government actors that could block the program was also needed. In December 2006, the Jalisco state government sponsored an important study tour led by Monraz in which bus company owners and government bureaucrats were brought to Bogotá. In order to implement Bogotá policies, lower-rank officials and bureaucrats, or what Lipsky (1979) called *street-level bureaucracy*, had to be brought into this group of insiders. But while street-level bureaucrats were not likely to confront plans coming from the top of the *panista* hierarchy, associations of bus company owners could very well do so. While in US cities, local merchant associations are often the main opponents of new urban mass transit projects given their fear that losing on-street parking would result in losing customers (Henderson, 2013), in Guadalajara, as in most Latin American cities, it is bus company owners, and their associations, who are often the strongest enemies of BRT projects as they see them as a declaration of war on their traditional business model. Examples of blockages and disruptive protests organized by traditional bus company leaders against new BRT projects abound in Latin America (Flores, 2013). Incorporating bus companies as concessionaries of a BRT agency controlled by the state is a drastic change to the transportation model that has become entrenched in most Latin American cities since the 1950s in which competing private companies with multi-year bus route permits provide their services with minimal state supervision or accountability (Lindau et al., 2014). In Guadalajara, this assemblage of old buses, overworked drivers, unaccountable bus company owners and corrupt transport bureaucrats, popularly known as the *pulpo camionero* (bus octopus), results not only in very low public transport standards but also in frequent fatal accidents that kill around 60 people every year, including public transport users, pedestrians, and bicyclists (Unión Jalisco, 2014). BRT is not, however, necessarily a threat to this entrenched system. Newly created BRT agencies do not become in charge of the whole public transport system but only of new BRT corridors. The rest of bus routes are, often, untouched.

The December 2006 study tour led by Monraz brought to Bogotá some of the most important transportation leaders in Guadalajara, including representatives of the two main bus company owner associations: the *Alianza de Camioneros* and *Sistecozome*. Together, they attended several workshops on public transport at Bogotá’s Tequendama Hotel and rode bikes together during Ciclovía. But as noted by one study tour participant, “we were mostly taken to Bogotá to talk to Víctor Raúl Martínez” (Guadalajara bus company owner, personal interview, 2013). All the participants met with Víctor Raúl Martínez at *Transmilenio* garages and toured not only the stations but also the offices of Martínez’s BRT concessionary company SI99. A tour of SI99 headquarters has become a common part of Bogotá study tours, which often involves visiting SI99’s clean and shiny headquarters, its modern-looking cantina and gym facilities for workers. As noted by a GDL 2020 leader, bringing Guadalajara *transportistas* to Bogotá to talk with Víctor Raúl and showing them around SI99 offices aimed at persuading them to become government partners in Guadalajara’s BRT:

“[Guadalajara transportistas] were brought to Bogotá and there the leader of Bogotá’s transportistas told them about how their old business did not have any future based on their incomes. This was very powerful, that someone from ‘peer to peer’ tells you this. They were going to listen to him more than to someone that does not belong to the guild” (GDL 2020 leader 2, personal interview, 2013)

Interviews with Guadalajara *transportistas* reveal that while the visit to SI99 headquarters did impress them, they never fully trusted Víctor Raúl because they thought he was going to get the concession of Guadalajara’s first BRT line. In that sense, study tours became a mechanism in the hands of Monraz not only to build trust with bus company leaders in Guadalajara but also to diminish their future negotiation power. Unlike the many bus company strikes that often precede the introduction of BRT in Latin American cities, the fear of Guadalajara *transportistas* that the concession would be given to Víctor Raúl if they did not collaborate helped Monraz implement his plan to build a BRT line in less than two years with very little opposition.

Study tours as mobilizers of public opinion

So far, I have analyzed examples of South-South exchanges of urban policy knowledge in which funding came mostly from local organizations. In the following sections I show the ways in which transnational actors also participated in the process of inter-city policy learning between Guadalajara and Bogotá through the funding of study tours. To do so I analyze the role of Guadalajara’s local environmental NGO CEJ, which organized a study tour in 2007 that brought six local journalists to Bogotá, Curitiba, and Sao Paulo with funds from Hewlett Foundation to help mobilize the local public opinion in favor of building a BRT system. In doing that, I show the important role of the media in promoting policy circulation as well as the “soft” ways in which US foundations intervene in South-South policy learning processes through the funding of study tours.

CEJ is a non-partisan environmental NGO founded in 1986. Since its creation, CEJ has been involved in different campaigns in the city including air pollution, toxics, environmental health, and waste management. CEJ’s first involvement in urban transportation dates back from 1994, when they covered with a gas mask the statue of goddess Minerva, located in one of the most iconic plazas of Guadalajara, to denounce the city’s air pollution due to increased car use. While the image was highly visible in local newspapers, the campaign did not have the desired results in terms of changing Guadalajara’s policies towards favoring public transportation and bicycles as the local media and the government perceived the organization as a group of reactionary activists rather than a “legitimate” policy actor (Silva, personal interview, 2013). This, however, would change in the mid-2000s when CEJ took up again urban transportation issues after receiving a grant from Hewlett Foundation. Hewlett provided CEJ not only with funds to influence urban policy but also with valuable intangible resources such as their international reputation and their network of international experts in sustainable urban mobility. Hewlett also trained CEJ members in sophisticated media strategies to influence urban policy, which included funding for a study tour of local reporters to Bogotá and Curitiba that was key to change CEJ perception in the local media:

“By 2008, CEJ had already about 200 newspaper articles published in mobility issues. The production of press briefs started in 2006 but what really catapulted them was the [Hewlett-funded] study tour to Curitiba and Bogotá”. (Silva, personal interview, 2014)

Nine people participated in the CEJ-Hewlett study tour that took place from 30 June until 7 July 2007: three reporters from the main local newspapers (El Informador, Mural and Público), two radio reporters (Notisistema and Radio Universidad de Guadalajara), the communication director of Jalisco's Department of Transportation, two CEJ leaders, and one representative from Hewlett Foundation. One of the main objectives of the tour was that local reporters would learn about the kind of sustainable mobility policies that Hewlett and CEJ wanted to promote in Guadalajara by experiencing them in other Latin American peer cities. These included learning new concepts such as BRT, *Ciclovía* or "non-motorized mobility," which at the time were not only unknown for the average citizen in Guadalajara but also for their journalists. Thanks to Hewlett's contacts, they were also able to interview important personalities in the world of sustainable transportation such as Jaime Lerner, former mayor of Curitiba, Edgar Sandoval, first head of Bogotá's *Transmilenio* BRT and Víctor Raúl Martínez. These meetings provided material that reporters used to write articles for weeks. Very importantly, the study tour to Bogotá, Sao Paulo, and Curitiba was able to educate journalists in the sustainable transportation paradigm (Banister, 2008). After the study tour, "reporters themselves became activists of sustainable urban mobility in Guadalajara" (Silva, personal interview, 2014).

The six-day study tour resulted in a large number of articles, reports, and radio shows that helped position sustainable urban mobility issues in the local public opinion. But there was another important outcome of the study tour: it helped to build trust relationships between the person in charge of urban mobility programs at CEJ—Mario Silva—and local reporters. As noted by two journalists that participated in this study tour:

"During this trip the two of us developed a good relationship with Mario Silva, which made it easier to communicate with him later when we were back in Guadalajara . . . when we came back and we needed information about mobility issues for an article we would give him a call or just ask him quickly via whatsapp . . . he was very solid in his arguments and always available for our calls and messages." (local reporter 2, personal interview, 2013)

After the tour, CEJ was better positioned as an expert in sustainable mobility in the city and Silva became a favorite source of information for many local reporters due to his easy accessibility and solid arguments. As reporters kept writing about BRT and bicycle policies in Guadalajara and Bogotá and editors and directors—some of whom were part of GDL 2020—gave these articles priority, journalists helped mobilize public opinion in favor of sustainable urban mobility policies in Guadalajara and put pressure on the government to do something about it. Whereas in the 2006 local and state elections in Guadalajara urban mobility was not an important issue in the government agenda, only a year after the topic had become highly visible and politicized thanks to the local media (local reporter 2, personal interview, 2013). By 2007, new civil society groups such as *Ciudad para Todos* and *GDL en Bici* had emerged to protest the top-down construction of car-oriented infrastructure and the lack of car alternatives to move around the city (Díaz, 2011; Soto, 2012) while the implementation of Guadalajara's second BRT line became an electoral battleground that confronted Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and PAN political leaders in the 2009 local elections (Arriaga and Silva, 2012).

Hewlett's international reputation and its perception as an apolitical agency also helped mobilize public opinion in favor of BRT in Guadalajara. Many of the journalists I interviewed agreed that the fact that Hewlett organized the tour made it sound more prestigious and respectable, especially "because it was not organized by the government, as that could have been read like they were buying us" (local reporter 2, personal interview, 2013). Because government officials and politicians often attempt to "buy out" journalists in

Mexico, some local newspapers in Guadalajara have explicit policies that ban their employees from accepting any kind of gifts that come from the government. For example, a reporter from the local newspaper *Mural* mentioned that they were not even allowed to eat or drink coffee in press conferences organized by the government. However, because Hewlett is perceived as a prestigious international foundation and somehow apolitical these conflicts of interest did not emerge for journalists even if, with the organization of study tours, Hewlett had a clear political agenda of promoting BRT systems in cities of the global South as a way to intervene in global climate change.

Conclusions

A common source of new ideas in urban planning is the experience and policy ideas applied in other cities. Policy ideas are not, however, floating around waiting to be learned by rational policymakers on the lookout for the most appropriate solution to their cities' problems. Policies circulate to another city when a coalition of influential local leaders—which not only include mayors and high-ranking officials but also coalitions of local advocates, business leaders or journalists—is persuaded about the appropriateness of that policy. It is in this context where study tours play a key role, acting not only as instruments of learning and knowledge exchange but also as instruments of governance able to create and expand local coalitions that would push for particular policy solutions.

In this article, I analyzed study tours as a key practice through which Bogotá's policies, and more specifically *Ciclovía* and *Transmilenio* BRT, were learned and eventually adopted in Guadalajara. Study tours to Bogotá were powerful learning mechanisms to educate the attention of influential public and private local leaders in Guadalajara. However, it was their capacity to expand and strength local coalitions through the creation of trust and the mobilization of public opinion what made study tours eventually able to create policy change in Guadalajara. By analyzing the ways in which study tours helped mobilize Bogotá's transportation policies in Guadalajara, this article engaged with recent debates on the politics and practices of inter-city policy learning. It shows that studying the actual practices through which cities learn from other cities is a productive way to move beyond traditional linear and rationalistic approaches to policy learning and opens up new ways to think critically about how apparently mundane practices such as study tours can promote important urban policy changes in cities.

The article confirms the findings of recent research in critical urban policy studies that show that study tours are not just neutral learning devices but also important political mechanisms that create the legitimacy (González, 2011) and trust networks (Wood, 2014) needed to promote policy change. But the findings of this article also open up new research paths and possibilities of collaboration with other disciplines and academic debates, particularly with media studies and development studies. By highlighting the ways in which study tours were used to mobilize public opinion in Guadalajara in favor of Bogotá's policies, this paper revealed the important role that the media plays in processes of inter-city policy learning and agenda formation, something that has been under-theorized in contemporary debates on urban politics and policy mobilities. Traditionally, approaches that link media and urban studies have focused on the role of owners of local newspapers play in local coalitions and local "growth machines". This article however points at alternative research findings when the relationship between media and urban politics is studied through everyday practices such as how journalists learn about new urban policies or who do they choose to trust as credible sources. It is important to understand these learning and trust building dynamics among journalists because they also allow or limit

possibilities for urban political alliances and for the introduction and legitimation of certain urban policy agendas.

Finally, another finding is that the apparently South-South policy learning practices between Bogotá and Guadalajara are embedded in a complex arena of local and transnational politics. Bogotá study tours have often been mediated, even if not always, by a set of actors, organizations and agendas based in the global North. In the case of Guadalajara, Hewlett Foundation was particularly active in using the example of Bogotá's *Transmilenio* to promote BRT in the city. However, as the example of Guadalajara illustrates too, local organizations and politicians have also used study tours to learn and pursue their own policy and political objectives. The politics behind the South-South mobilization of Bogotá's transportation policies in Guadalajara is therefore neither a horizontal learning exercise nor a story of coercion from "above" (or from the North). Rather, it is a politics of learning and local coalition-building that takes place at the intersection of local and transnational agendas. The increasing interest of international development banks and global philanthropy in intervening in inter-city and South-South policy knowledge flows points also at the need to better articulate critical debates on urban policy with those in international development studies.

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Notes

1. Transmilenio SA archival data (accessed 3 April 2012).
2. Transmilenio SA archival data (accessed 3 April 2012).
3. <http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/resource-library/vietnam-urban-transportation> (accessed 23 March 2015).
4. *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.

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