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# **Governing the city for pedestrians and cyclists: How national institutions shape urban governance**

The case of non-motorized mobility in Mexico City  
and Guadalajara, Mexico

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Abstract:

In Mexico, recent processes of democratization and decentralization have opened up new avenues for the participation of diverse actors in the making of urban politics and policies. Nonetheless, these actors remain subject to the structural influence of the nation state. Drawing on the concept of the national infrastructure of urban governance (Sellers, 2002, 2005), this paper offers a multilevel account of Mexican urban governance applied to the case of Non-Motorized Mobility (NMM) policies in Mexico City and Guadalajara. It argues that Mexico's national infrastructure is shaped by two pillars – the centralized national fiscal system and the multi-party system – which produce inadequate mobility planning, patterns of partisanship in local politics, and weak local governments in both cities. Within such a framework, the agency of local stakeholders often differs depending on the specificities of each city, including its political-administrative characteristics and degree of civil society organization, resulting in vastly different policy-making processes. In Mexico City, coalitions arose between its strong local government and civil society groups specialized in sustainable urban mobility, although results have been inconsistent due to the changing interests of local political administrations. In Guadalajara, local conditions were more favorable to processes of policy learning between civil society groups and the local governments, which created more opportunities for sustained collaboration and continuity in NMM policies.



**Swan, J. (Photographer). Cyclist on Reforma Avenue, Mexico City, February 2015 [digital image].**

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## **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In metropolises across the world, the negative externalities of automobile dependence such as congestion and air pollution have hampered economic competitiveness and public health, highlighting the necessity of shifting the paradigm away from a car-centric model of urban mobility. Beyond environmental and economic difficulties, this raises social equity concerns, especially in Mexico where road building and expansion capture the majority of resources available for investment in urban mobility, despite the fact that 60% of households do not own or use an automobile<sup>2</sup>. Thus, mobility is an urban public policy issue which crystallizes multiple and sometimes contradictory interests from different segments of society, and which transforms the financing of transportation systems and infrastructure into a delicate political endeavor for authorities. In the metropolises of Mexico, diverse actors have recently triggered a shift away from the automobile paradigm and have instead participated in the production of spaces and infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists instead.

### **1.1. An incipient paradigm shift of urban mobility in Mexico**

This shift of paradigm would not have taken place without a profound change in the urban forms of the country. In the twentieth century, Latin America underwent an intense process of urbanization coupled with the concentration of large shares of investment in its largest cities (Gilbert, 2004). In Mexico, the era of import-substitution industrialization (1930s-1980s) and the subsequent neoliberal restructuring favored the concentration of capital in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey, and therefore the construction of modern urban infrastructure. In particular, the motorization of the middle-class and the development of large residential complexes at the peripheries led authorities to prioritize road infrastructure. Hence, Mexican metropolises evolved into large polycentric urban regions, shaped by and for the automobile. As public space has historically been considered a place of social encounters in urban Latin America, as shown by Caldeira (cited in Vivanco, 2013, p. 63), being in the street conveys a sign of social distinction - particularly for the rich who can afford to circulate in private automobiles, while the rest travel on foot, bicycle or public transportation (Berney, 2010). Thus the status of car ownership as a sign of success in the common imagination has contributed to the stigmatization of walking and cycling as daily modes of transportation (Kreuzer and Wilmsmeier, 2014). This has, in turn, led to the scarcity of NMM infrastructure and the worsening of the quality of life of the majority, benefiting only a privileged minority and of a small-but-growing middle-class.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a Master's professional dissertation submitted in June 2015. The research was conducted while the author was interning with the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, in Mexico City, and as she was still a student at Sciences Po in Paris (Master program Governing the large metropolis).

<sup>2</sup> 2010 Census of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI).

Yet, throughout cities of the region, changes are being observed that favor sustainable transportation. Aside from the significant improvements in public transportation (Mosquera et al., 2013), perhaps best reflected by the proliferation of Bus Rapid Transit systems, walking and cycling are increasingly being valorized as modes of transportation. The initiatives to promote NMM are numerous, and include recreational cycle tracks, bicycle-share systems, specialized infrastructure, or car-restraint measures in cities such as Bogotá, Curitiba, Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro among many others. The logics and processes behind the underpinning of NMM as an urban public policy are associated with specific sources of implementation, which we identify as: (1) the promotion of "right to the city" visions by strong local leaders empowered by processes of political decentralization (Vivanco, 2013) and (2) the pressure exerted by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Lámbarry et al., 2010), able to articulate information, financial resources and political endorsement with the aim of fostering social interaction and equity through the reclaiming of an urban space free of cars (Pryde, 2012).

Overall, the shift in the paradigm of urban transportation is only incipient in Latin America, due to the persistence of a car-based urban form, "divided city" patterns and the fact that cycling and walking remain associated with means of mobility for the poor, in contrast to the automobile. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that a NMM policy is making its way to local political agendas. In this sense, non-governmental actors have real influence in the transnational promotion and diffusion of the idea and ideal of sustainable urban transportation. Hence, it seems that a policy of NMM crystallizes the action of diverse actors, whose interplay can be accounted for through an analysis of urban governance, as discussed in the next section.

## **1.2. Multilevel urban governance and the national dimension**

In Mexico and Latin America in general, the concept of urban governance has increasingly been used in light of the transformative impact of three main processes on urban policies and politics: (1) democratization and decentralization of the administrative and political system; (2) the neoliberal economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s and push towards privatization; (3) the subsequent implementation of institutional reforms in the public sphere (Vásquez, 2013). In Mexico in particular, urban governance crystallizes both the rise of these three processes, and the legacies of its former and specific modes of governance. According to Guarneros-Meza (2009), the 70-year long authoritarian regime contributed to a hierarchical mode of governance that generated important legacies of corporatism, social segmentation and organizational fragmentation, or what the author calls "old institutions". On the other hand, the three above-mentioned recent processes introduced other segments of society into the realm of public policy-making, constituting "new institutions". The combination of both types of institutions has fostered the creation of cross-sector networks alliances, formal and informal, leading to the co-production of urban policy outputs by complex networks of recently included actors, but always evolving within a framework specific to the trajectory of the country. In this sense, the multilevel approach to urban governance may not only take into account local and/or global processes, but also pay a great deal of attention to the role of the *nation-state*.

For that purpose, the present paper appeals to Sellers (2002), who argues that there exists a national infrastructure made up of institutions, societies and cultures, which influences urban governance but whose effects also depend on the uses that actors and coalitions subsequently make of it. Hence,

Sellers (2005) advocates for a de-centered, comparative analysis of urban politics that “departs from traditional nation-centered comparisons as well as from those centered solely on urban actors and institutions” (p. 419). Likewise, our concern in this paper is to take into account the role of the nation-state, characterized by certain historical developments, institutional relations and forms of policy-making, in the multilevel analysis of urban governance as well as the relevance of interest groups in political processes (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003) and the networks that stakeholders build to translate their interests into public policies. Sabatier and Weible (2007) remind us that policy participants build alliances with people holding similar beliefs among different groups at multiple levels, in order to build advocacy coalitions and pursue similar objectives. This paper adopts the view that interest groups interact to coproduce policies of NMM in different ways in Guadalajara and Mexico City, depending on the opportunities and constraints that the local conditions created. *However*, our main assumption is that interest groups do so within a national framework of urban governance that sets the terms of interaction between them and the state.

Hence, this research is grounded on the following set of questions. To what extent does the national infrastructure of governance shape and orient local agency in the governance processes related to NMM policies in Mexican metropolises? What type of policy effects does it produce locally? Are there differences in the policies produced in the two cities and if so, how can we account for them? Why is the national infrastructure of urban governance relevant in the case of Mexican urban politics and policies?

### **1.3. Methods and approach**

In this research, the multilevel analysis advocated by Sellers is applied to take into account the structural effect that nationally-defined patterns have on the governance of cities at multiple levels, and the specific interplay of diverse actors in the coproduction of urban politics and policies. In order to separate local agency from the national infrastructure of urban governance, this paper takes a comparative approach by emphasizing local differences in Mexico City and Guadalajara, both of which operate in the same national infrastructure. In this fashion, it is possible to “illustrate both the avenues by which national infrastructures can influence urban governance and the degree to which this influence can alter the goals as well as the accomplishments of urban governance” (Sellers, 2002, p. 635). As to the choice of case studies, Mexico City and Guadalajara are large metropolitan areas where NMM has grown as an important trend of urban mobility, promoted by several groups of actors and taken over in local policy agendas. Further, both cities are particularly fit for comparison, as they occupy prominent positions within the national urban system and the global network of metropolises. At the same time, they are significantly different in their functions: Mexico City as the political and economic capital of the country with a unique administrative structure, and Guadalajara as the second largest Mexican city, which is seen as a model of how local communities and public policy can transform public space.

This research is based on five months of fieldwork carried out in Mexico City, which included a visit to Guadalajara, during the first semester of 2015. In addition to the use of secondary sources, qualitative interviews were carried out with civil society stakeholders involved in the promotion of NMM and key local planning and urban mobility officials at the state, metropolitan and municipal levels for Guadalajara and the delegation and Federal District levels for Mexico City. The input gathered was corroborated by information

collected from additional secondary sources. The research originated from an internship in the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) and a great part of the data used for this research is derived from the work conducted in this organization.

To answer our research questions, the paper first focuses on the study of the national infrastructure of urban governance in Mexico. After analyzing the composition and process of consolidation of this infrastructure, I turn to the most relevant structural effects that it has for NMM policies in Mexican cities. The subsequent part of the paper rests upon the analysis of the qualitative data collected in the interviews, and aims to show the concrete dynamics that arise when cities are governed for pedestrians and cyclists in a multilevel framework. While impacted by similar processes derived from national patterns, local stakeholders often respond in differing ways in each city, leading to different processes of policy-making in the sector of NMM. The paper concludes by generalizing the results of the two case studies and discussing the effects of the national infrastructure of urban governance.

## 2. The national infrastructure of urban governance in Mexico

The premise of this paper is that the nation-state is fundamental in the shaping of multilevel urban governance in Mexico, which itself relates to the difficulty of a diversity of actors to govern the city for pedestrians and cyclists. As shown in this section, this national infrastructure of urban governance is derived from historical processes, and has in turn specific effects for actors co-producing NMM policies<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.1. The pillars of the national infrastructure

The current form of policy-making in Mexico is linked to peculiar political, economic and social processes that have given rise to what the paper argues are the two pillars of the national infrastructure of urban governance: (1) the multi-party system characterized by acute competition logics; (2) the centralized fiscal system. The first pillar requires a brief explanation of Mexican political life and its implications for the current form of policy-making. Parties have had a central role since the independence and the subsequent authoritarian period, as argued by Lehoucq et al. (2008) who identify two main historical phases for public policy in the aftermath of the 1910 Revolution.

Under the "one-party regime" period which lasted from the 1930s until the mid-1990s, the centralization of the political system produced stable and coordinated, but low-quality, public policies that ensured the continuity of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) across presidencies. Mexican political life was characterized by *presidencialismo*, a narrow clientelistic system centered on the president, his cabinet and corporatist leaders, and PRI-dominated local and national legislative chambers adopting

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<sup>3</sup> Mexico is a federal Republic, with a representative democratic system and administratively divided in three levels: (1) the central government, or federation; (2) 32 federal entities, which include 31 states and the Federal District; (3) about 2,500 municipalities.

congruent laws. However, the system began to erode in the 1980s after a series of unfavorable conditions. Progressively, the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) and smaller left-wing parties were voted by a more educated and urban population, forcing the regime to make policy more public-regarding. Eventually, the Left institutionalized more solidly in 1989 into the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) which played a central role in the destabilization of the PRI and the democratization of the political system. The transitional phase of the early 1990s was then characterized by growing influence of opposition parties at the local scale through municipal and state-level elections. In particular, state governors grew more autonomous from the federal government, and the state Congresses became more active in initiating legislation thanks to greater resources they were receiving from decentralization reforms. The Federal District deserves special attention in the process of political party structuring, starting with the constitutional amendment of 1928 that dissolved its municipal status, divided it in territorial units named delegations, and placed its administration under a regent appointed by the federal president (Espinosa, 2004). The quasi-absence of citizen participation in a federative entity without legislative institution was strongly questioned in the 1980s by a growingly-dissenting population. In response to it, the government of the Federal District (GDF) initiated a series of reforms which increased its independence from the national Congress and peaked in 1997 with the election of the first Legislative Assembly of the Federal District (ALDF) and subsequently the right to elect the chief of the GDF and the delegates. That same year, the GDF leadership passed from the PRI to the PRD, and in 2000 when the first elections at the delegation level were held, all delegations were led either by the PRD or the PAN.

The second period identified by Lehoucq et al. (2008) as “divided government” also started in 1997, held as a turning point towards a more open and transparent policymaking process. As a result of the new electoral laws that favored a multiparty system, the PRI federal government lost the majority in the national Congress for the first time this year, and the PAN won the national presidency in the 2000 and 2006 elections without obtaining a congressional majority either. Altogether, the beginning of the “divided government” constitutes the effective transition from a hegemonic party regime to the current multiparty system dominated by three consolidated parties –PRI, PAN and PRD- and in which independent and smaller political parties are to get a share of public action, especially at the local level.

Beside the system of political parties, the other pillar of the national infrastructure of urban governance is the centralization of the fiscal system, a determining factor of inter-governmental relations in Mexico. Cabrero (2008) highlights it as a national peculiarity partly due to the trend of decentralization embraced by the PRI in the 1970s, which increased responsibilities and spending shares for its states and municipalities, as well as their financial dependence upon the federation. As evidenced by Cabrero (2010), the one-party regime began to assign to local authorities greater responsibilities in regional planning and local participation as a measure of compensation against the first signs of economic and political weakness. Nevertheless, at the same time, the federal government centralized tax collection which, in fact, translated into local politicians surrendering their tax authority to the federal government in exchange for fiscal

compensation. This trend eventually institutionalized with the creation of the National System of Fiscal Coordination (SNCF) in 1979, which almost every state joined at the time<sup>4</sup>. Even when in 1994 president Zedillo launched the “renewed federalism” agenda which attributed states and municipalities new functions and greater fiscal resources, these were given through a modified system of transfers earmarked to specific policy areas. In the realm of infrastructure in particular, federal funds were created for the states, but allocation criteria remained under the discretion of the federal government, thereby leaving to municipal governments the sole responsibilities of prioritizing investments and supervising the use of funds.

Therefore, despite the transition to a multiparty democratic system, *presidencialismo* left profound traces on the current political organization and inter-governmental relationships, leading to a system stuck in what Cabrero (2008) calls the Mexican “trap of fiscal federalism”. To him, all resulted into an opaque and dissolved governmental responsibility, as well as an inefficient and discretionary public expenditure; further, the different levels of government appear unable to coordinate with one another so as to elaborate the comprehensive strategies that would be necessary to solve public problems. This is concretely reflected in the difficulties of local actors to foster a given public policy – and in our case, a policy of NMM in large Mexican cities.

## **2.2. The effects of the national infrastructure of urban governance**

Both the consolidation of the system of political parties and the centralization of the fiscal system sustain the national infrastructure of urban governance in Mexico; this infrastructure in turn has profound effects on urban politics and policies at the local level. In the case of NMM policies and the groups of actors promoting them, three types of effects are analyzed hereafter.

First, the infrastructure has created weak local governments in financial, technical and organizational terms. While being in charge of vital functions of urban life such as public service provision and urban planning, which encompass the implementation of NMM policies, the municipality -and the delegation in the Federal District- is commonly held as “an institution designed for failure” (IMCO, 2012). In the financial realm, municipalities have limited access to resources since, even though they theoretically can use four financial instruments (intergovernmental transfers, own-source revenues, credits and investment funds), none of them can or is effectively taken advantage from to finance spaces for pedestrians and cyclists. This is because local governments are heavily dependent on federal transfers, crucially lack fiscal control, and are unable to self-finance their spending<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, municipal governments have confronted the lack of financial resources in two ways: on the one hand, they have lowered the quality of goods and services produced; on the other hand, they have gotten into debt to fulfill their responsibilities of service provision. The growing indebtedness of local governments in Mexico is all the more worrisome that municipal administrations commonly lack transparency and accountability, and have a short-term vision of

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<sup>4</sup> The entry in the SNCF guaranteed states the shares of the national valued added tax, and an access to the federal oil revenues, both of which were growing at that time.

<sup>5</sup> In 2012, transfers from higher levels of government represented around 67% of municipal income.



governance<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, they have a weak technical capacity derived from internal organizations' deficiencies, a lower mean level of education of civil servants, and insufficient knowledge and experience of municipal management *per se* (IMCO, 2012). The latter phenomenon is itself linked to the drastic change of municipal personnel each time a new administration is elected and the dissolution of the learning curve in the process, which is especially detrimental for technical departments in charge of urban planning. In the realm of mobility, a central planning instrument available to municipal governments is the Integral Plan of Sustainable Urban Mobility (PIMUS); a planning document that comprehensively analyzes systems of parking, road networks, as well as freight, public and non-motorized transportation of a given urban area, in order to define strategies prioritizing and promoting sustainable transportation. However, the PIMUS is little used as it is not embedded in any state or municipal planning system but simply tied to financial resources for the elaboration of specific mass transportation projects (Medina et al., 2012). More generally, when a plan is established in urban mobility and other areas, little is done at the level of the municipality to measure and evaluate progress. This is symptomatic of the tendency to construct and inaugurate infrastructural projects, but being unable or unwilling to maintain them on the long run.

A second effect of the national infrastructure of urban governance is the shaping of urban politics and policies by party-competition at every level of government. At the level of the state, the National Conference of Governors created in the 2000s is a platform for the state executives to have a direct voice in national politics; at the same time, state legislatures are no longer systematically from the same political party as the governor anymore and counterbalance the state executive. This is exemplar in the case of the Federal District, which is a stronghold of the PRD and a point of resistance to the PRI<sup>7</sup>. Altogether, the multi-party features of the capital draw a cleavage with the provinces (Raich, 2006) and open the way for other states in the country towards this tendency given its prominence in national political debates and innovative policies. The very position and role of the PRD in local politics is informative on the way party competition plays out for the governance of Mexican cities. Because its ideological position proves contrary to the neoliberal logic of the PAN and PRI, the latter two parties have preferred to work together, insulating the PRD and other smaller opposition parties in local and federal legislation since the democratic transition. This is particularly difficult in a political system that grants little *de facto* autonomy to local governments as a result of its fiscal centralization and the importance of personal political capital derived from a not-so-remote past where states were better off if their governor was granted the favors of the federal government (Bruhn, 2012). Further, Bruhn argues that legislators are typically limited in their capacity to balance the executive by their inadequate human and financial resources, and by short incumbencies which prevent them from developing solid expertise in selected legislative topics; the budget in particular is given to the legislature late in the year, leaving deputies little time to thoroughly study and revise it.

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<sup>6</sup> The Constitution puts forward a "principle of no reelection" that used to limit municipal government mandates to three years, which favored a short-term vision of governability by local authorities. It is only in December 2013 that a reform approved by Congress amended this principle.

<sup>7</sup> Since the beginning of democratic representation in the Federal District, the executive has continually been held by the PRD and the ALDF passed to be more politically plural, as none of the political parties won a majority after 2000.

Now, party affiliation has effects of a similar nature at the level of the metropolitan area. In his study of the management of Mexican metropolitan areas, Baños (2013) concludes that these entities cruelly lack efficient inter-governmental mechanisms of association and coordination. He interestingly highlights that, despite the will to reinforce regional development through reforms of decentralization and democratization since the 1980s, structural weaknesses have persisted. In particular, Baños observes that sub-national politicians still consider municipalities as morsels of power and instrumentalize such weaknesses, in a context barely favorable to the establishment of shared goals among local governments. Difficulties are further magnified when municipalities of a same metropolitan area are of different political parties, each one standing firm on its position. Hence, in the absence of an institutional framework favoring inter-municipal and inter-sector cooperation and coordination, the effect of party competition is a major barrier to efficient metropolitan management and service provision; among which sustainable transportation stands prominently.

The third and final effect of the national infrastructure of urban governance is the inadequate planning of mobility, in legal and financial terms. Statutes referring to urban transportation and road construction have not been updated to adapt to a paradigm of mobility, and perpetuate a blurred framework for action in which responsibilities are scattered across the three levels of government. Further, while most concrete responsibilities such as urban road-building fall upon the municipality, these are not matched by an adequate fiscal system; instead, the SNCF multiplies the channels of resources with complex allocation criteria, none of which targets sustainable mobility in particular. Overall, the mismatch between financial resources and legal responsibilities hinders rather than facilitates the formulation of a comprehensive and long-term vision of sustainable mobility by local governments under pressure. In that sense, the inertia that characterizes public action in local government administrations is an additional, not to say determining, element in the deficiency of NMM urban policies.

Despite these numerous structural barriers, NMM has gained much ground in Mexican cities, raising questions about which local interest groups and processes create the favorable conditions for it. In order to distinguish the effects of the national infrastructure from those of local agency, it is now necessary to analyze how NMM policies are concretely managed in a multilevel framework at the level of the city, in two case studies chosen for that purpose.

### **3. Multilevel management of NMM policies in Mexico City and Guadalajara**

The previous section evidenced the making and composition of the Mexican infrastructure of urban governance, and the similar effects it had for cities nationally by structurally shaping governmental action. Now, it is necessary to analyze in concrete case studies the dynamics and processes that arise when diverse actors coproduce policies for pedestrians and cyclists in a multilevel framework. Therefore, the paper now focuses on the cases of Mexico City and Guadalajara in order to highlight the local agency processes that have led to different results of NMM policies, and separate them out from the national infrastructure they share. It is also important to bear in mind the characteristics that define each case

study. Mexico City and Guadalajara occupy the first two positions in the national urban system, but differ significantly both in their political-administrative structure and in their functions and scope for the country. As the present analysis will reveal, the specific status of the Federal District presents opportunities *and* barriers for policy actors to seek alliances and deploy a comprehensive NMM policy locally, both at the city-government level and the delegations. In Guadalajara, the lesser involvement of the state government, the greater autonomy of municipalities and the more consistent inclusion of non-governmental actors in policy-making provide yet another context for urban governance and the co-creation of spaces for pedestrians and cyclists.

### **3.1. Mexico City: a politically-profitable public policy for the capital city**

In Mexico City where the social context is acutely geared towards private motorization, projects of sustainable mobility that involve infrastructure for buses, pedestrians or bicycles are sources of controversy as they are seen as taking away space occupied by the automobile. In the past decade though, the rise of specific coalitions among civil, public and private actors have achieved to transform the marginal theme of sustainable transportation into a central topic in the discourse and agenda of local politicians of sustainable transportation in the capital city (Sosa Lopez, 2013).

#### **3.1.1. Civil society: creating opportunities for policy learning**

The advocacy of civil society groups was central in creating opportunities for policy learning with local authorities and particularly so with the GDF. *Movimiento ciclista del Parque Hundido* was the organization which, in the 1990s, first promoted NMM by pressuring local authorities to build bicycle parking facilities and cycle lanes in the city. This group was later replaced by *Bicitekas*, a now-renowned citizen organization considered as the catalyst for the proliferation of cyclist groups in the capital city, and with some influence on local public policy. These were highly critical of the local government's lack of consideration for NMM and environmental sustainability, as embodied by the fact that the functions of the Ministry of the Environment of the Federal District (SEDEMA) include the supervision of public works such as urban highway. And while some collaboration initiated between the GDF and grassroots cyclist advocates under the government of PRD mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2000-2005), this relationship consolidated more solidly with organizations such as CTS-Embarq, which we refer to as "consultant hybrids" (Sosa Lopez, 2013). CTS-Embarq, an NGO specialized in clean transportation technologies and member of the World Resource Institute, had been indeed specifically created in Mexico City for the purpose of assisting the government in the construction of the first BRT (Flores Dewey, 2013).

The coalition between civil society and the GDF strengthened further under the administration of Marcelo Ebrard (2006-2012). As a PRD candidate, Ebrard was sensitive to issues of social equity and saw in sustainable transportation a highly attractive policy. Despite his lack of experience in environmental issues, he became a strong advocate of "urban mobility", which he presented as an

ideal way of moving in the city: clean, efficient, safe and affordable (Sosa Lopez, 2013). Once in office, Ebrard gave to his minister of Environment and former activist Martha Delgado, a mandate to elaborate a cross-sector strategy to improve the city's sustainability in numerous areas including transportation, later named the Green Plan. Civil society organizations (CSOs) at large saw in this important shift a window of opportunity to promote a policy of NMM from within the administration, namely an opportunity to start a process of policy learning with the GDF. In particular, the "consultant hybrid" ITDP Mexico had specialized in NMM early on as it had already approached the political actors able to push forward the agenda, and was identified by SEDEMA as a key partner and technical assistant for the elaboration and implementation of a NMM policy in the city. For instance, this was made evident in the implementation of the bicycle-share system Ecobici, the success of which was largely due to the collaboration between SEDEMA and ITDP. From then on, and despite the existence of conflicts between civil society and the local government, collaboration on punctual projects has continued.

### **3.1.2. The empowerment of GDF agencies**

As the GDF was elaborating and consolidating its sustainable mobility policy, it built up its institutional capacity in the matter through SEDEMA in particular. Under the administration of López Obrador, SEDEMA succeeded in securing international funding for introducing clean public transportation in the city: the afore-mentioned BRT. Its minister, Claudia Sheinbaum, was also the one who convinced the mayor to capitalize on this visible and innovative project. Besides being a counterweight to the ecological crisis that had produced extremely high levels of air contamination in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the project also implied little risk of negatively impacting the administration's image, as BRTs had already been successfully implemented in cities such as Curitiba and Bogotá, and the technical expertise of organizations would ensure similar success. In the end, if successful, the project could significantly boost the image of López Obrador as a potential presidential candidate<sup>10</sup> and, even though he and his administration were not necessarily ready to break with the automobile paradigm yet, the arrival of the *Metrobús* constituted a milestone in the environmental policy agenda.

Later, the emphasis given to local environmental policy by Ebrard translated into a new "eco-friendly" discourse that endorsed and empowered SEDEMA in comparison with other public agencies, and confirmed the shift of agenda that had initiated from the coalition with consultant hybrids. Indeed, the chief of government made the clear decision to put the strategy of transportation sustainability in the hands of SEDEMA instead of the Ministry of Transport and Roads (SETRAVI), whose administrators showed little interest for the theme and could have jeopardized the policy. Hence, it was SEDEMA which launched, within the Green Plan, the Strategy of Mobility in Bicycle (EMB) relying upon three pillars: (1) the fostering of the NMM culture with the closing of the iconic *Paseo de la Reforma* Avenue to automobiles on Sundays as a way to promote cycling and physical exercise; (2) the construction of cycling infrastructure and, in particular, of

cycle lanes and cycle tracks throughout the city; (3) the implementation of the bicycle-share system Ecobici. This was a relatively difficult agenda to implement. For instance, cycling infrastructure implied a considerable effort of adaptation for technical teams that were not acquainted with this type of infrastructure, but also much coordination given that as many as four different Federal District ministries have to work under the supervision of SEDEMA. To a certain extent, the facts that as many as 14.3 kilometers of cycling infrastructure were built in the three last years of Ebrard's mandate and that the government was able to implement similar visible projects with the support of civil society, evidence the increase in the institutional capacity of the GDF and SEDEMA in the realm of NMM. Nonetheless, this relative empowerment also came at the cost of conflicts among policy entrepreneurs, as the GDF proved to be inconstantly involved in the promotion of a NMM policy for Mexico City.



Ríos, H. ITDP México (Photographer). Paseo de la Reforma on Sunday, Mexico City, December 2015 [digital image].

### **3.1.3. Conflicts and implementation difficulties: the unbalance between a powerful city government and constrained local actors**

Numerous conflicts rose among policy entrepreneurs and other interested parties during phases of policy implementation by the GDF, and particularly so with civil society. Indeed, the coalition between them proved to be fragile as episodes of disagreement periodically arose among them, often resulting in the government dismissing NMM projects. A clear example was seen when Ebrard's administration constructed an elevated urban highway that entered in overt contradiction with the Green Plan, and to which ITDP openly voiced its disagreement, causing a temporary stop in the collaboration with SEDEMA. The source of the conflict was -and remains- that the NMM policy of Mexico City was never integral and that the GDF was inconstantly involved in its promotion. Rather, the effort of the GDF to promote NMM is generally effective given that it constitutes a politically-rewarding objective for the administration in terms of public opinion approval, but it is rather discursive in the sense that it has not yet been attached to a

constant source financing and accompanied by substantial legal reform. Moreover, the GDF never secured durable financing for NMM; for this reason, additional infrastructure depends on the annual budget that SEDEMA receives for that purpose and that also has to be matched by a clear vision of how to spend it. In the past years and especially since the administration of Miguel Ángel Mancera (2012-present), funding and projects were scarce. Financial instability is an important factor in explaining the inexistent planning of a cycling network throughout the city, especially considering that no legal instrument makes such planning documents mandatory. Because there is no such thing as a Master Plan of Mobility, projects arise in isolation of one another, as if “[the government] improvised everything, by occurrence” as one of the interviewees stated it. Therefore, relatively large infrastructural projects for the bicycle rest upon the actions of each GDF administration and the subsequent impulse that the ministries may give to it. Currently, the alleged goal of SEDEMA is to consolidate the skeleton of the existing cycling network by connecting the lanes already built, nonetheless made difficult by the lack of financial resources for it.

The inconstant involvement of the GDF in promoting a NMM policy led some delegations to do so themselves. However, the inherent institutional weakness of these administrative units in three domains also led to a difficult phase of policy implementation. First, there is a difficulty to finance public works which is directly related to the centralization of budget allocation in the hands of the ALDF, who has a key role in authorizing -not always in a transparent way- the passing of public funds to the delegations. Second, delegations encounter technical difficulties in leading public works and cycling infrastructure construction, as they have to go through a series of demanding steps defined by the GDF; one of them being giving a proof of technical capacity to the GDF that they are able to lead the project, in order to get the GDF's Treasury to approve funding. This requirement is inherently contradictory, given that delegations have very little own financial resources to give this proof, and legally unnecessary given that delegations have exclusive authority over their secondary roads. The last barrier encountered by the delegations is the fact that the local promotion of NMM heavily depends on the leadership taken by the delegate in it and his or her capacity to confront the GDF unduly asking for proofs of technical capacity or the dissent of neighbor communities defending space for the automobile.

These three barriers are so important that very few delegations have actually constructed their own cycling infrastructure, as illustrated in the cases of Miguel Hidalgo and Benito Juárez in the 2012-2015 administration. While Miguel Hidalgo took the lead in the construction of segregated cycle tracks and lanes<sup>8</sup>, complete streets, the early attraction of an Ecobici polygon and the operation of a social and educational cycling program, Benito Juárez has significantly lagged behind after a timid attempt to build cycling infrastructure. In the case of Miguel Hidalgo, the leadership taken by the PRD delegate Víctor Hugo Romo in having an integral NMM policy and even attracting an Ecobici polygon to the delegation was central. According to interviewees, the implementation and financing of it was essentially due

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<sup>8</sup> The cycle lane is an on-road infrastructure delimited by paint, contrarily to the cycle track which is an on-road track separated from regular traffic with some kind of infrastructure (buffers, parking spaces, etc.). The former is in general less costly and intrusive of the automobile space, while the latter reveals a greater concern for cyclists and/or a greater financial and technical capacity in the realization of public works.

to Romo's sound will, already during his political campaign, to place sustainable mobility on his agenda and bet on this public policy as a vitrine for the delegation. The breach of technical capacity was partially accounted for by the delegate who created a position of "director of mobility" in his administration, and whose incumbent, well aware of the legislation, went past the formal disapprovals of the GDF to build cycle lanes and tracks on the secondary roads. In Benito Juárez on the contrary, nor the technical, financial or political gap was addressed. As a result, only one important cycle track project was undertaken and, in light of the opposition generated by neighbors and businesses to it, the delegation's administration backed down after the construction. In the end, there are few incentives and factors for the promotion of NMM at the level of the delegation; and if the GDF and its ministries have more capacity to do so, other variables from different interest groups interfere and make the NMM policy of Mexico City quite unstable. Hence, despite the improvements observed, NMM has not been constituted as an integral policy independent of the GDF's support, and civil society and the delegations remain relatively powerless in the matter.

### **3.2. Guadalajara: capitalizing on metropolitan development and civil society organization**

In comparing the cases of Mexico City with Guadalajara, we seek to contrast the local agency that played out in both cities and separate more clearly the specificities of each case from the structuring effects of the national infrastructure of urban governance on both cities. In this sense, it is noteworthy that in comparison to the capital, Guadalajara is a smaller but more consolidated metropolitan area, where non-governmental actors were integrated in processes of policy-making earlier on, and which is recognized as an exemplary case of urban planning and political participation (Arellano, 2013). Furthermore, the state of Jalisco was instrumental in fostering coordination among the metropolitan municipalities for a better provision of services<sup>9</sup>, a process that culminated in 2011 with the adoption of the Law of Metropolitan Coordination by the state congress and that had resulted from great collaboration between civil society, private sector representatives, and state and municipal authorities (Sánchez, 2015). Guadalajara and Jalisco hence represent a specific local setting for processes of policy learning among public, private and civil society actors in urban policies, and NMM in particular.

#### **3.2.1. CSOs: setting the agenda through policy learning**

Like in Mexico City, the empowerment of civil society as an interest group and its participation in policy-making in the Guadalajara metropolitan area were key in initiating processes of policy learning with local governments and in setting an agenda of sustainable mobility. In studying the cases of niche cities promoting urban cycling, Pryde (2012) shows that the transnational network of urban cycling has been animated across Latin American cities by international figures such as Peñalosa -iconic mayor of Bogota,

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<sup>9</sup> This is made possible by the article 115 of the Constitution, which establishes the possibility for municipalities to associate themselves with one another for a better provision of public services. Nonetheless, no legal provision recognizes inter-municipal entities as a formal level of government.

Colombia- and social movement activists whose relational ties enabled the flow of information, financial resources and political endorsement, like in Guadalajara.

Since the early 2000s, different groups of the city joined efforts in a series of events to promote the use of public space by pedestrians and cyclists, where they progressively began to identify and know each other. As their idea of a "human city" was gaining ground, citizens and local real estate and business entrepreneurs constituted themselves in the "Guadalajara 2020" group, with the aim to improve the image of the city by 2020 and to generate more tourism and business opportunities (Sánchez, 2015). In particular, this coalition of civic and private actors wanted to implement a *Vía Recreativa*<sup>10</sup> as part of a "Guadalajara brand" for which they also needed public involvement. Hence, the stakeholders put forward the politically-attractive topics of public space recovery, sustainable development and clean transportation; moreover, they invited Peñalosa to share his experience on the *Vía Recreativa*, a possible strategy to back their project with greater legitimacy and international endorsement before authorities. This consolidated coalition eventually succeeded in 2004 to convince one out of eight mayors to subscribe to and implement the program. This PAN-affiliated mayor of Guadalajara, Emilio González Márquez (2003-2005), understood that the *Vía* was attached to very low financial costs and bore potentially great social and political benefits. As a matter of fact, the *Vía* is currently considered a success and is widely accepted by citizens.

To strengthen their agenda at the metropolitan level, CSOs had to consolidate further, which they did by integrating national and international movements such as the *BiciRed* or the *CarFree* networks, and by elaborating a wide strategy of sustainability and social inclusion for the metropolitan area. In the wake of this process of organization, CSOs started to look for opportunities of alliances with local governments, which they eventually found in the municipality of Guadalajara, as the latter accepted to open spaces of dialogue like the "Citizen Council for Non-Motorized Mobility". These platforms effectively enabled civil society to continue the process of policy learning in which local public actors were growing sensitive to their vision of the city, and eventually translated into concrete achievements. In this sense, after instilling the idea of sustainable mobility as a means for citizens to appropriate themselves public space regardless of socioeconomic barriers through the *Vía*, the coalitions organized around civil society actors primarily witnessed local politicians gradually including these ideas in their discourse and recognizing NMM as a potentially-rewarding policy.

### **3.2.2. The necessary support of the state**

As already mentioned, the state of Jalisco has traditionally played a key role in fostering metropolitan coordination and in having policies adopted by municipalities –especially so in a quasi-uniform partisan setting. Therefore, to transform NMM into a coherent policy in metropolitan Guadalajara, civil society had to collaborate with the state too.

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<sup>10</sup> The *vías recreativas* are programs of recreational cycling in which a long stretch of streets is closed to regular traffic for several hours once a week, in order to provide citizens with an outdoors space free of cars.



In unstable phases of opposition and collaboration between authorities and CSOs, a few members of which were integrated in public bodies so as to shape a mobility policy "from within"<sup>11</sup>, the Jalisco Ministry of Transport and Roads elaborated the Master Plan of NMM (PMUMNM), a sound planning document meant to help municipalities to identify the locations where and the standards with which to build cycling lanes and universally-accessible pedestrian zones. Later, and despite the change in its administration, the state government fostered an integral MNM policy in three areas: (1) legislative, through the Law of Mobility and Transportation approved by congress in 2013 to establish state-wide norms and regulations for circulation and with a special attention to users of NMM; (2) institutional, with the creation of a technical and specialized body in that area: the Institute of Mobility and Transport of Jalisco (IMTJ); (3) financial, with the dedication of 30% of the amount of the federal Metropolitan Fund (FM) that is attributed to metropolitan Guadalajara, to NMM specifically. In particular, the IMTH took the leadership in the implementation of the PMUMNM, meaning in the construction of cycling infrastructure, the bicycle-share system "MiBici" and the "Zonas 30".



Ríos, H. ITDP México (Photographer). *Vía Recreativa, Guadalajara, December 2015* [digital image].

However, the support of the state is not self-sufficient, as municipalities also have the constitutional obligation to provide services. Even though the state may have the technical capacity to lead thorough NMM projects, it has no legal authority to effectively impose a uniform framework of mobility across municipal boundaries. Therefore, like in Mexico City with the delegations, difficulties and divergences appeared at the moment of applying this state-wide policy across the municipalities of the metropolitan area, in three main aspects: financial, technical and political.

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<sup>11</sup> This theme is controversial within civil society groups, since many believe that the integration of activists into public bodies is part of a cooptation strategy of the current PRI state and municipal governments.

### **3.2.3. Implementation difficulties and the shortcomings of municipalities**

Because of the nature of the intergovernmental financial relations, municipalities have tended to rely upon the above-mentioned FM to finance NMM projects. However, the process of allocation of the fund gives much weight to the municipal governments' ability to negotiate and defend their projects and in the end, it is the state that has the greatest influence on the prioritization of projects. Moreover, the FM is not naturally fit to NMM financing either, but simply has rules of operation flexible enough so as to be interpreted by municipal governments in a way that applies to this type of public works. Even when this is the case, interpretation remains difficult and only the most willing municipal administrations accept the challenge. Other federal earmarked funds have been used to finance NMM projects, but with varying degrees of success and coverage. Thus, the municipalities with enough liquidity such as Zapopan -known for receiving more local taxes from its high-income population- decided to complement federal funds with their own resources, generating in turn differences in levels of infrastructure across the metropolitan area.

Municipalities also encountered technical barriers to implementation, especially considering that human resources are key in the realization of public works as specific as cycling lanes or accessible public spaces, which moreover may not be a priority of investment for a given municipality. Let us take the Guadalajara and Zapopan municipalities as an illustration: the former has no single body dedicated to the ordering of urban transportation in general and much less in NMM, which is why the municipality tends to rely upon the IMTJ instead; in the latter, own resources were used to create the office of Strategic Projects (PEZ) to implement and supervise urban development projects in the municipality, including those linked to mobility. In other and more financially-dependent municipalities, the technical capacity is even lower.

Finally, there are political impediments to the implementation of NMM policies across the metropolitan area. It is here important to bear in mind the political party setting of the metropolitan area. Solís (2012) underlines that the state of Jalisco traditionally is a bastion of the PRI, currently led by governor Jorge Aristóteles Sandoval. Similarly, the vast majority of municipal administrations have been held by the PRI. In light of the growing appeal that public transportation and NMM generate within the population, politicians at both levels of government have identified the electoral potential of sustainable mobility and tried to position themselves on the matter. Sustainable mobility is even an inherent part of politicians' strategies to run for different offices and be propelled at higher positions. Governor Aristóteles himself used to be the Guadalajara mayor (2009-2012), where he began to formulate a NMM public policy. At the time of his political transition from mayor to governor, many projects including those of public space recovery and cycling promotion and that had been planned by technicians in the municipality of Guadalajara ended up being implemented by state agencies. In 2015, another PRI candidate to the municipality of Guadalajara, Ricardo Villanueva, took the leadership in the MiBici project, sometimes bypassing the IMTJ, so as to promote it in his mayoral campaign. Such intervention of party politics in the implementation of a NMM policy for the metropolitan area can jeopardize as much as it can facilitate coordination between levels of government and among metropolitan

municipalities. Several interviewees agreed upon the fact that having a unique party governing the municipalities and the state during the same period does facilitate the implementation of mobility projects<sup>12</sup>. On the one hand, the alignment of mayors and of the governor along the same ideology has helped the state to implement important projects almost on its own, with an implicit endorsement of the municipal executive, and bypassing the technical agencies of the municipality that should have been involved. On the other hand, the party homogenization of local politics significantly eroded the legitimacy of many actions led by the PRI governments. Overall, urban development projects in Guadalajara have evidenced that the legal framework and the existing municipal, state and metropolitan institutions are not strong enough to give continuity to a technically-sound and financially-sustainable NMM policy from planning to implementation; instead, the critical phase of implementation can be facilitated or on the contrary jeopardized by the interests tied to it at the multiple levels involved in policy-making.

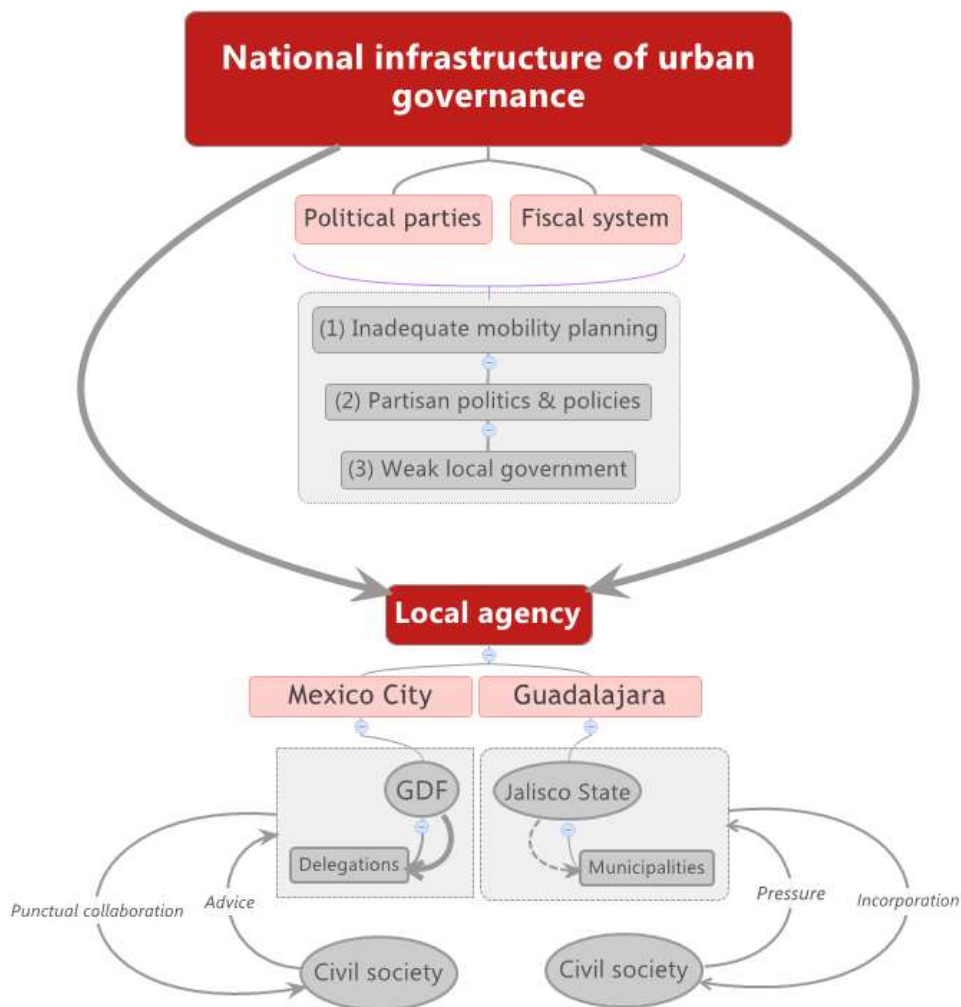
## **4. Discussion and conclusion**

Through the centralized fiscal system and a system of political parties characterized by competing logics, the national infrastructure of urban governance acts as a wide framework that sets the terms of interaction between interest groups in Mexican cities. This infrastructure generates inadequate instruments of mobility planning, partisanship in urban politics and policies, and weak local governments, which together shape opportunities and constraints for local actors promoting NMM policies. Furthermore, an analysis of the two largest Mexican metropolises has shown the importance of local agency in the governance of the city for pedestrians and cyclists. In both cases, coalitions have consolidated and alliances between interest groups have been formed. Similarly, policy entrepreneurs have initiated processes of policy learning with governmental actors, whose participation was needed for the promotion and implementation of a NMM policy. In both cities, stakeholders acted in ways which enabled them to overcome the numerous structural barriers derived from the national context of governance seen in the first part of the paper. The main findings of the research are summarized in the following figure, and commented below.

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<sup>12</sup> This was the case at the moment of the research, since the state and seven out of the eight metropolitan municipalities were led by members of the PRI, which is moreover characterized by a strong party discipline.

**Figure 1. The multilevel framework of urban governance in Mexico City and Guadalajara in the case of NMM policies**



In a great Latin American metropolis such as Mexico City, the international visibility of green and mobility policies - starting with the Green Plan and the Metrobús - and the springboard to national politics that the GDF constitutes, encouraged local government leaders to develop flagship projects like Ecobici or the *Paseo de la Reforma* cycle lane. The significant financial and political capacity of the **GDF** explains why policy-making and project-execution are quite straightforward for the federal entity within its administrative boundaries, and particularly so in the areas it has the greatest interest to promote. This is reflected by the concentration of decision-making in a few institutional actors such as SEDEMA and, more importantly, the chief of the GDF. However, this also means that the power of other actors, such as civil society actors and delegations' administrations, is more constrained. **Delegations** are indeed financially and politically dependent on the GDF for the successful implementation of NMM, and the division of **civil society** groups – between consultant hybrids and grassroots organizations - has resulted in a more *punctual* collaboration where their inputs are considered as *advice* by the government during unstable phases of policy learning and implementation. In Guadalajara, the promotion of NMM follows a more bottom-up scheme, in which the coalitions of CSOs organized in local and international networks gave continuity to an incipient public-

private alliance to improve the image of the city. With regards to the institutional and actor setting, there is greater municipal autonomy by law and practice, as well as significant civil society capacity, while the **Jalisco state** government has a constitutional and traditional responsibility to coordinate and dialogue within processes of policy-making. Consequently, the resources and leadership that characterize each metropolitan **municipality** determines their ability to overcome the vicious circle of a lack of resources and insufficient technical capacity. This is also key in determining the success or failure of NMM projects local leaders might foster. Overall, authorities have been more responsive to an empowered and **pressure**-exerting **civil society** that forced processes of policy learning in a context of multi-actor collaboration; yet, it is increasingly being **incorporated** in governmental spheres.

Altogether, local agency plays out within a framework shaped by a national infrastructure of urban governance, which rests upon the structure of **political parties** and the centralization of the **fiscal system**. At their core, Mexican cities are marked by : (1) the **inadequate planning of mobility**, fueled by a mismatch between financial resources and legal responsibilities which hinders the formulation of a comprehensive and long-term vision of sustainable mobility by local governments; (2) local **partisan politics and policies**, reflected by the importance of the support of mayors, delegates and state governors to ally and foster NMM projects that have grown more appealing to the electorate; (3) **weak local governments**, trapped in a vicious circle of financial dependence and insufficient technical capacity which makes local administration more inclined towards claiming federal funds than consolidating own-resource revenues.

Therefore, beyond the specificities of the alliances and processes which take place at the local level and differ from one city to the other, the present research questions and points at the wider system that sets the terms of authority and agency in a multilevel setting. Indeed, the NMM projects and policies analyzed throughout the paper reveal, in a way or another, a process, system or norm that is a by-product of the nation-state. Hence, the main result of this research is that the national infrastructure plays a central role in the governance of Mexican cities for pedestrians and cyclists, independently of the uses that local actors and coalitions subsequently make of it. In this sense, as stated in the introduction, we may wonder why the national infrastructure is so relevant in the case of Mexican urban governance. Certainly, the recent evolutions of the political system are part of the answer. The democratic transition of the 1990s was not accompanied by a full-fledged amendment of the rules governing public action. Rather, the PRI engaged in a complex process of reform mixing “old” and “new institutions”, which enabled it to keep a central position in the governance of the country, despite a more open and pluralistic political system. The “trap of fiscal federalism” and the stronghold of political parties point to the existence of a wider national infrastructure of urban governance, inherited from a not-so-remote authoritarian past which shape actions and interactions in cities of the country.

But then, how could local actors free themselves from the constraints of the national infrastructure, and foster public policies that benefit citizens the most? There is no doubt that a reform of the nation-state itself and of its relationships with local governments will be needed to modify these structural effects. Yet, a more refined analysis of the dynamics of Mexican urban governance is needed to establish a detailed reform agenda. Indeed, the conclusions of the present research are the result of a comparison of two cities

within a single national framework of urban governance. Nonetheless, this comparison also shows the importance of local agency in the determination of a specific urban policy, and suggests that contextual factors do play a role in such determination. In particular, Mexico City and Guadalajara have different sizes, degrees of centralization in decision-making and partisan structures across local governments, which altogether multiply or on the contrary constrain the channels of participation for actors and interest groups other than the state. We may hence wonder: to what extent do the specific characteristics of a given city really determine local agency in comparison with other urban centers having a different position and function within the national urban system? This opens the way for further research in the multilevel analysis of urban governance. Using the concept of national infrastructure applied to a single nation-state and a variety of urban centers within it, it would be possible to reach a better understanding of the elements contributing to the differentiation of local agency in the making of urban policies, while keeping in mind the effects derived from a wider structural framework. In the case of Mexico, this would undoubtedly cast light on the reforms necessary to the improvement of urban public policies and, ultimately, to the building of more human cities.

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