

## The everyday of the popular periphery: Between oblivion and constant intervention

### La cotidianidad de la periferia popular: Entre el olvido y la constante intervención

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#### Background

Chilean social housing policy of the eighties and nineties built massive projects of small and low-quality houses. The territories in which those housing projects were built became a segregated periphery, poor in both urban services and accessibility. At the time of their arrival, the inhabitants of these housing projects experienced a complete abandonment of the State: they lack basic public services such as health, education, or transportation. This abandonment triggers important social problems in these territories. Over time, many social programs have been created to solve the housing and urban problems of these territories, with alternatives ranging from beautification to demolition. Life in these housing projects has gone from the absence of the State to its constant presence through several interventions (such as renewals, demolitions, redevelopment, and all kinds of social programs).

Urban scholars have widely addressed the effects of the initial public abandonment. Research first focused on the consequences of segregation on both wellbeing and social cohesion; later, academic research addressed the impact of segregation and urban decay in terms of identities and stigma. Finally, research on segregated periphery included the mobility experience of inhabitants from these areas, as well as the debate on citizenship and power.

On the contrary, the State's current continuous presence in these neighborhoods' everyday life has been less observed.

#### Aims

In this framework, the aim of this work is to analyze how constant intervention in the popular periphery generates (i) specific ways of understanding space and (ii) relationship practices between its inhabitants and with the State.

#### Method & procedures

To accomplish this aim, the study conducted 18 in-depth interviews with inhabitants of social housing projects in Santiago, Concepción, and Talca (Chile). The projects selected (i) were built during the eighties and nineties, (ii) were part of the segregated periphery, and (iii) had been subject to several urban and social intervention programs.

The inhabitants selected had lived at least 10 years in the area and represent diverse situations in terms of age, gender, and leadership inside the neighborhood.

Interviews were analyzed throughout open codes and creating inductive categories, following the principles of the grounded theory methodology.

#### Results & discussion

(i) The State's original absence generates processes of both community organization and problems exceeding inhabitants' capacities.

(ii) The arrival of the State -although expected- ignores the organization and practices already in place. On the one hand, the interventions improve both public and private spaces. On the other, interventions didn't consider local organizations and/or the neighbors' opinions nor the previous improvements they had done in their houses and public spaces.

(iii) Neighbors are always "in display": first, the characteristics of their houses make intimacy difficult; second, because of the presence of both drug-dealing and public intervention in public spaces, neighbors have to be careful about what they do or say in public space; and third, they know the problems of the neighborhood will be periodically shown on tv. The experience in these neighborhoods is, in consequence, an experience of extreme visibility.

(iv) Stigma spontaneously emerges in every interview. These neighborhoods' names are strongly associated with violence and crime, and neighbors resent this in their personal experience.

### Conclusion

The effects of the original State abandonment coexist with those of its current constant intervention. Both stigmatization processes and daily space reproduction practices overruns public efforts to overcome these problems. Every new program or policy recalls the former absence of policies; every new problem reminds the original abandonment situation.

State initiatives have assumed there is little or nothing to save in these neighborhoods. This ignores that, over decades, dwellers have developed multiple and productive practices, both individual and collective, to overcome the problems that came with the abandonment.

Additionally, that assumption has a performative consequence. Neighborhoods are what policies and/or programs say they are: critical or red zones. In this sense, the State has responsibility in the stigmatization processes in these places. Mass media have played an important role in the built of this stigma too.

Dwellers are aware and reflective of these processes. Through their everyday practices, they resist their situation. They blame the State for their problems through their discourses, pushing the problem to a political and citizenship realm.

In this context, urban intervention needs to recognize and value the role of neighbors in the production of the urban space. Following this path, urban intervention would overcome these problems and advance in promoting equity and citizenship in the popular periphery.

**Keywords:** daily life, periphery, segregation, stigma, urban decay

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