



Mixed-use spaces and mixed social responses: Popular resistance to a megaproject in Central Lima, Peru



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ABSTRACT

Much in contrast to the city John Turner (1967) once described as progressive in terms of housing approaches for the urban poor, today in Lima, the capital of Peru, private enterprises have assumed unprecedented planning powers. The city that for a substantial part has been produced 'from below' through collective action is increasingly transformed 'from above' through large-scale urban development projects. The article discusses how Lima's urban poor collectively resist the intervention of a megaproject in their neighbourhoods, the 'Via Parque Rímac' expressway. This mixed-use project combines conventional road infrastructure with urban redevelopment, including public green spaces in the city centre. It is concluded that this emblematic project has significant implications for issues of spatial justice, political transparency and accountability.

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Introduction

No city in the developing world is as famous for its approach towards housing the urban poor as Lima, the capital of Peru. The city was considered an emblematic example for researchers and policy makers interested in self-help forms of urban development because of its early acceptance of squatter settlements as a low cost housing policy – known in Peru as *barriadas*. Since the 1950s Peruvian governments permitted the massive occupation of public desert land and promoted incremental home building by the urban poor as a way to cope with the huge housing deficit that resulted from rapid urban growth (Fernández-Maldonado & Bredenoord, 2010). As early as 1961 the Peruvian government adopted the famous '*ley de barriadas*', which legalized existing *barriadas* and promised the provision of services. This provision of services has never been realized to the extent envisioned, and given the fact that in Lima most invasions took place on peripheral, low value desert land, this was an easy and cheap 'solution' to the housing problem of the urban poor. The progressive housing approach hence quickly disintegrated into a permissive, or *laissez faire*, approach towards informal settlement formation. This has resulted in a city of which

large parts have been produced from 'below' with very limited support from government authorities.

At the same time the 'formal' development of the city's higher income areas has been produced from 'above': important decisions on large scale infrastructure were taken without residents having a voice, and planning of these investments often took place behind closed doors. Additionally, market driven forces have gained special prominence under president Fujimori (1990–2000). Pro-growth, top-down policies were implemented with a greater reliance on market practices and the privatisation of urban planning.

These two different spatial logics – the production of the city from 'below' through *barriada* formation and from 'above' through top-down, market led interventions – have resulted in a city with stark contrasts between the 'informal' and 'formal' spaces, reflecting Lima's deep socio-spatial inequalities. While these two logics, though spatially segregated, have always co-existed, the subtle balance has increasingly gravitated in favour of the latter, entailing major implications for urban spatial justice.

Within the current context of neoliberalism and globalisation, key actors aspire to transform the informal 'mega city' into a well-connected competitive city. Or in the words of a major proponent, a former councillor at Lima Metropolitana: "Growth through investment, not through invasion" (Romero Sotelo, 2006). To materialise this urban vision, the rapid transformation of the urban landscape through large-scale development projects, or megaprojects (Kennedy et al., 2011), has shifted to the core of

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contemporary city planning. Increasingly Lima is experiencing an important restructuring through top-down megaprojects under private concession schemes, transforming multinational business actors into critical city decision makers.

This article analyses the interplay between new governance patterns where market forces driven by international capital have a prominent voice, and the urban poor, who have to bear the consequences of the consolidation of neoliberalism in Peru. It does so by analysing the spatial injustices – such as displacement – created by a megaproject currently under construction in some of Lima's oldest *barriadas* along the river Rímac in the city centre. It further investigates the opportunities and challenges for the collective contestation of such injustices from the affected communities. The article is based on an in-depth case study documenting both the history of collective action in the settlements affected, and their current resistance mobilisation against the megaproject. It is based on ninety open interviews with residents and their leaders and ten with government officials, representatives from the company executing the megaproject and civil society activists, carried out in 2012–2013.

The production of the city from above

The growing influence of neoliberalism in most Latin American countries has produced profound urban transformations, especially since the early 1990s (Portes & Roberts, 2005). With the increasing importance of market led development and the decentralisation of political functions to local governments, cities have been put at the forefront of neo-liberalisation and increasingly made responsible for realizing international competitiveness (Leitner, Sheppard, Sziarto, & Maringanti, 2007: 2). Not only key urban sectors have been privatised and liberalised, urban governing institutions have been restructured so as to respond more to the need of securing private investment and creating business friendly environments (Brenner & Theodore, 2003; Peck & Tickell, 2002).

The most recent chapter of this story, especially in so-called 'megacities' in the global South, is an emphasis on restructuring urban space to be able to join the race to position the city on the map of the competitive global economy (Barthel, 2010; Deboulet, 2010; Dupont, 2011; Shatkin, 2008). Large-scale urban development projects such as specialised infrastructure, gentrification programmes and urban renewal projects have become an integral part of this process.

However, most of these efforts to promote a marketable, modern city through megaprojects reinforce urban spatial and social inequalities. They give expression to contradictions between the aspirations of planning elites and the rights of urban dwellers as they often entail the displacement of local populations and livelihoods (Gellert & Lynch, 2003). This has led to increased conflict over urban space when communities contest urban redevelopment and its destructive impacts on their livelihoods (Fernandes, 2004; Newman & Wyly, 2006; Skuse & Cousins, 2007). However, the capacity of affected communities to mobilise effective resistance is often seriously hampered by the fact that they are commonly deliberately excluded from decision-making about megaprojects (Oliver-Smith, 2002: 16). Information tends to be strategically hidden from them as their interests and concerns go against powerful interests.

Moreover, it has been contended that megaprojects commonly disenfranchise communities and inhibit contestation, especially the so-called 'new' generation (Lehrer & Laidley, 2009). In contrast to 'old' megaprojects that are singular in their purpose, new megaprojects are mixed-use, and appear to advance a multitude of urban development goals (i.e. integrating the development of infrastructure with the construction of social housing and urban

green spaces). Because of this plethora of land uses "these megaprojects inhibit the growth of oppositional and contestational practices" as they appear to offer something to everybody and please the various interests of an imagined 'everyone' (Lehrer & Laidley, 2009: 787).

Additionally, megaprojects have a tendency to deepen spatial fragmentation as they constitute project-based urban interventions that spatially target specific places in the city – detached from the integrated development of the city as a whole (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Rodriguez, 2002: 569). The emblematic *project* replaces the regulatory *plan* at city scale. This downscaling of urban policies to project-based city interventions results in new institutional configurations characterized by power geometries that differ from those of the traditional arenas of government (Swyngedouw et al., 2002: 567).

In relation to 'ordinary' government practices, the literature frequently describes megaprojects as resulting from 'exceptionalist' planning policies that comprise significant democratic deficits with respect to accountability, representation or participation. Citizens are commonly kept at substantial distance from megaproject decision-making (Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, & Rothengatter, 2003: 5) and accountability channels are often non-transparent, circumventing traditional democratic channels of decision-making and participation (Swyngedouw et al., 2002: 561).

Megaprojects frequently promote narrow-minded pro-growth visions of the city that are removed from the realities of urban problems and challenges (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003: 67; Garrido, 2013; Sami, 2013). They are accompanied by governance structures that involve a redistribution of decision power away from public to the interests of corporate growth coalitions, which tend to result in the perpetuation of spatial injustices in the city.

Lima's production of the city from above

In Lima large-scale urban development projects have become a central element in contemporary city planning.¹ Recent megaprojects have primarily aimed to tackle existing agglomeration problems that have resulted from rapid urban growth – such as huge infrastructure backlogs and transportation diseconomies.² Despite the huge socio-spatial inequalities prevailing in the city, municipal decisions on transport infrastructure investments privilege private over public transport, mainly connecting wealthier districts to the city-centre and important hubs in the city. Most recently the international sea- and airports have been expanded, the first line of a metro system has been constructed and a number of new urban highways are in the process of being built or enhanced. In this process the private sector has come to play an indispensable role. Considering the limited budget of the municipality, the inclusion of the private sector through the development of public-private partnerships (PPPs) (particularly through the granting of road infrastructure concessions) and the easing of existing bureaucratic rules and regulations are an important part of the urban agenda. Since the financing of this infrastructure comes from toll-concessions, the resulting privatised infrastructure is often inaccessible for the poor, increasing spatial segregation in the city.

¹ Over the last 10 years 2 megaprojects for public transport (1,25 billion USD), 3 megaprojects for private transport (1,3 billion USD); 3 projects on international connectivity (1,4 billion USD) and four megaprojects to improve water and sanitation infrastructure (4 billion USD) were tendered in Lima. Of these 12 projects nine are either already delivered, or are currently under construction (Takano, 2013: 4).

² Raw calculations of Peru's infrastructure backlog for 2012–2021 are estimated at almost 88,000M USD (El Comercio, 2012).

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