ELSEVIER

CrossMark

Progress in Planning 94 (2014) 1–53

PROGRESS IN PLANNING

www.elsevier.com/locate/pplann

Constructing ordinary places: Place-making in urban informal settlements in Mexico

Melanie Lombard *

Global Urban Research Centre, University of Manchester, Humanities Bridgeford Street, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK

Abstract

Observers from a variety of disciplines agree that informal settlements account for the majority of housing in many cities of the global South. Urban informal settlements, usually defined by certain criteria such as self-build housing, sub-standard services, and residents' low incomes, are often seen as problematic, due to associations with poverty, irregularity and marginalisation. In particular, despite years of research and policy, gaps in urban theory and limited understandings of urban informal settlements mean that they are often treated as outside 'normal' urban considerations, with material effects for residents including discrimination, eviction and displacement. In response to these considerations, this article uses a place-making approach to explore the spatial, social and cultural construction of place in this context, in order to unsettle some of the assumptions underlying discursive constructions of informal settlements, and how these relate to spatial and social marginalisation. Research was carried out using a qualitative, ethnographic methodology in two case study neighbourhoods in Xalapa, Mexico.

Mexico offers fertile ground to explore these issues. Despite an extensive land tenure regularisation programme, at least 60 per cent of urban dwellers live in *colonias populares*, neighbourhoods with informal characteristics. The research found that local discourses reveal complex and ambivalent views of *colonias populares*, which both reproduce and undermine marginalising tendencies relating to 'informality'. A focus on residents' own place-making activities hints at prospects for rethinking urban informal settlements. By capturing the messy, dynamic and contextualised processes that construct urban informal settlements as *places*, the analytical lens of place-making offers a view of the multiple influences which frame them. Informed by perspectives from critical social geography which seek to capture the 'ordinary' nature of cities, this article suggests imagining urban informal settlements differently, in order to re-evaluate their potential contribution to the city as a whole.
© 2014 The Author. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

Keywords: Urban informal settlements; Place-making; Marginalisation; Place identity; Mexico

Contents

1. Introduction: Urban informal settlements and marginalisation . . . 3
   1.1. Limits of knowledge and the idea of place . . . 3
   1.2. Research setting, methodology and structure . . . 5
2. Constructing informality and ordinary places . . . 7
   2.1. Approaches to urban informality . . . 7
      2.1.1. Urban ethnography, poverty and informality . . . 9
      2.1.2. Ordinary cities and the everyday . . . 11

* Tel.: +44 0161 275 0804; fax: +44 0161 275 6893.
E-mail address: melanie.lombard@manchester.ac.uk.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.progress.2013.05.003
0305-9006/© 2014 The Author. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

2.2. Urban informal settlements: ordinary places? . . . 11
2.2.1. Place and lived experience . . . 12
2.2.2. Place and power . . . 12
2.2.3. Place as process . . . 13
2.3. A place-making approach to urban informal settlements . . . 14
2.3.1. Place-making and place meaning . . . 15
2.3.2. Place-making, planning and the state . . . 16
2.4. Conclusion . . . 17
3. Urban informal settlements in Mexico: *Colonias populares* . . . 18
3.1. Mexico's changing urban context . . . 18
3.1.1. The role of the *ejidos* . . . 20
3.1.2. Planning and spatial policies . . . 20
3.2. Colonias populares in Xalapa . . . 21
3.3. Case study I: Colonia Loma Bonita . . . 22
3.3.1. Location and appearance . . . 23
3.3.2. Origins and settlement . . . 23
3.3.3. Infrastructure and services . . . 26
3.3.4. Social and economic aspects . . . 27
3.4. Case study II: Colonia Moctezuma . . . 27
3.4.1. Location and appearance . . . 28
3.4.2. Origins and settlement . . . 29
3.4.3. Infrastructure and services . . . 30
3.4.4. Social and economic aspects . . . 31
3.5. Conclusion . . . 32
4. Making ordinary places: discursive constructions of *colonias populares* in Xalapa . . . 32
4.1. Dysfunctional urban development . . . 33
4.1.1. Anarchic growth . . . 33
4.1.2. Nothingness . . . 34
4.1.3. Unwanted responsibility . . . 34
4.2. Another world . . . 35
4.2.1. Crime and insecurity . . . 35
4.2.2. Distance and discrimination . . . 35
4.2.3. Ordinary places . . . 36
4.3. Disorderly culture . . . 37
4.3.1. Autonomy . . . 37
4.3.2. Order and cleanliness . . . 37
4.3.3. Rurality . . . 38
4.4. Conclusion . . . 39
5. A Place in the City: resident place-making in *colonias populares* . . . 40
5.1. Spatial place-making . . . 40
5.1.1. Acquiring the land . . . 40
5.1.2. Building . . . 41
5.2. Social place-making . . . 42
5.2.1. Religious practices . . . 42
5.2.2. Schooling . . . 43
5.3. Cultural place-making . . . 44
5.3.1. Vernacular architecture . . . 45
5.3.2. Place naming . . . 45
5.4. Conclusion . . . 46
6. Conclusion: the potential of place-making . . . 47
6.1. The production of knowledge and ordinary places . . . 47
6.2. Gaps in urban theory and urban dwellers' agency . . . 48
6.3. Future research directions . . . 48
Acknowledgements . . . 49
References . . . 49

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7461981

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/7461981

Daneshyari.com