



DIE ERDE

Journal of the  
Geographical Society  
of Berlin

# Peripheral urbanization and the UNCTAD III building in Santiago, Chile: continuity and disruption in grassroots engagement

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Manuscript submitted: 25 January 2018 / Accepted for publication: 05 June 2019 / Published online: 19 July 2019

## Abstract

Research has found that contestation has gained more attention in the urban development of Santiago de Chile. This contestation is seen by some scholars as the reaction to the predominant technocratic way in which consensus has been reached in the spatial planning of Santiago in the last decades. This article wants to show the potentials for rekindling collaborative city-building experiences in a setting of governance and political democratic processes. Therefore, this study reviews specific experiences of production of urban space from the 1960's 70's in Santiago, noted for complex interactions and presence of organized resident, workers and grassroots actors. An emblematic public building – icon of the socialist regime – and peripheral housing estates – that represent the model of 'self-organization' – are shown to reveal the diversity of actors that were involved, the context of their formation and the interdependence they perform to reach consensus in urban development.

## Zusammenfassung

Bisherige Studien haben bezeugt, dass in der Stadtentwicklung von Santiago de Chile Protestbewegungen mehr an Bedeutung gewinnen. Einige Autoren und Autorinnen deuten diesen Aufmerksamkeitsgewinn urbaner Protestbewegungen als eine natürliche Reaktion auf die technokratische Weise, wie in Santiago die räumliche Planung in den letzten Jahrzehnten umgesetzt wurde. In der Governance Debatte werden solche Bewegungen als Bestandteil politischer Prozesse der Demokratie anerkannt. Vor diesem Hintergrund möchte dieser Artikel über die Potenziale vergangener kollaborativer Stadtentwicklungserfahrungen reflektieren. Es werden spezifische Erfahrungen der Herstellung von Stadträumen in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren in Santiago beschrieben, bei denen komplexe Interdependenzen zustandekamen und das Bestehen von organisierten Bürgern, Arbeitern und Grassroot-Akteuren nachgewiesen werden konnte. Ein exemplarischer öffentlicher Bau – Ikone des sozialistischen Regimes – und benachteiligte Wohnungssiedlungen, die das Modell der Selbst-Organisation darstellen, zeigen heute die Vielfalt an Akteuren, die sich in der vergangenen Stadtentwicklung Santiagos engagiert haben. Bei der Darstellung der Entstehungsgeschichte dieser Projekte wird klar, dass damals eine komplexere Interdependenz zwischen Akteuren bestand und der Konsens, im Vergleich zur heutigen chilenischen Stadtentwicklung, viel eher in kooperativen Prozessen gesucht wurde.

Elke Schlack, Paulina Varas 2019: Peripheral urbanization and the UNCTAD III building in Santiago, Chile: continuity and disruption in grassroots engagement. – DIE ERDE 150 (2): 86-100



DOI:10.12854/erde-2019-400

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**Keywords** neoliberal urban development, governance, Santiago de Chile, 'national modernization', self-organization, peripheral urbanization

### 1. Introduction

Demands for the right to the city in peripheral urbanization<sup>1</sup> and organized grassroots opposition to megaprojects in Santiago are increasingly prominent concerns in scholarly debate. Recent developments hark back to a 1999 land invasion<sup>2</sup> spearheaded by the *Movement of Residents in Struggle*, a squatters' committee that occupied land in a central area of town. The squatters achieved their goals after grueling negotiations with local and central governments (Guzmán et al. 2009; Pulgar and Mathivet 2010). As often described for peripheral urbanization in the global south, the actions of these self-organized squatters were both transversal and complementary to public policy (Caldeira 2017).

Social actors in Santiago have also recently rallied against the threatened razing of public housing on a coveted site first zoned for a civic center in the sixties and for a public housing project in the seventies (Díaz 2015, 2017).<sup>3</sup> This intended development project, part of the gutting of socially-inclusive policies in favor of pro-business urban development, has sparked strong debate (Cáceres and De la Cerda 2017; Fajardo 2017; Ramírez 2017).

These events have prompted extensive debate on the role of social movements in a neo-liberal city (Aliste 2014: 35) and current conflicts are described as a consequence of the city's transformation, noting that during the national modernization period similar issues were addressed with a concern for the common good that is now in retreat (Interview Miguel Lawner, 23 July 2018). Neo-liberalism construes the dismantlement of "[E]xisting forms of organizing the state, society, cities, modes of coexistence, and use of urban space" as the price of development (Rodríguez and Rodríguez 2009: 12). From the standpoint of history, however, current demands for the right to the city should force us to "[R]ethink and critique an economic model that is both out of sync with citizen needs and especially hostile to those who fail to meet the required levels of competitiveness" (Aliste 2014: 37).

As noted, this study intends to identify relevant experiences of collaboration between vulnerable residents and grassroots groups and the public and private

sectors. This discussion is based on the governance approach in urban research (Healey 2012: 333; Selle 2010: 34) and the notion of consensus between interests posed by Hoelzl that analyze urban contestation as meaning of political processes (Hoelzl 2015: 30-41). Usual accounts of the transformation of governance in Santiago have state and market forces as the key actors of city building (De Mattos 2015: 141-144). We argue that interdependence between residents, grassroots groups and state and market stakeholders was, and should again be, just as relevant, even if subject to change over time. This is an important variable to understand urban development in recent decades and the rise of grassroots pushback against urban space development (Aliste 2014: 38).

This article illustrates actor interdependence through production of vulnerable housing and public buildings dating back to the national modernization period preceding neo-liberalism. This is followed by a description of the transformation of resident action and collaboration among unions, associations and other social stakeholders during the neo-liberal period, both before and after the 1990 return to democracy. As mentioned, in this article, the analysis of the interdependence of actors, especially vulnerable residents and grassroots groups, draws from Healey's and Selle's notion of governance (Selle 2010: 34, 37; Selle 2013; Healey 2012: 333), with emphasis on informal agreements, construction of (professional) networks, forms of association (unions), and community-building mechanisms. This methodology therefore omits an analysis of normative mechanisms and formal policy.

The presented survey is based on documentary sources (i.e., print media), interviews with key actors, and a review of the literature documenting and describing resident and grassroots action, in reference to both, specific events or accounts of forms of actor interaction. Thus, it endorses the view that current social demands are part and parcel of a rich track record of experiences in the production of urban space in Santiago. It reviews grassroots resistance to neo-liberal urban development, reflects on the continuity and evanescence of these experiences, and identifies the devices that enabled strong partnerships between grassroots groups, the state, and property develop-

ers. To these effects, this brief reviews public housing production in the sixties and public building production in the early seventies.

## 2. State of the art and research approach

Many descriptions of urban transformation in Santiago have focused on the alternating roles of the state and market forces as drivers of development (*De Mattos* 2015). *De Mattos*, for example, sees in the radical change Chile underwent after 1973 the transition from industrial development in the mold of Keynesian state theory and ideology to a commodified paradigm wherein the state, in a supplementary or subsidiary role, merely promotes public-private partnerships (*De Mattos* 2015: 17-18). These transformations, however, can also be viewed from the emergence of social organizations. There are relevant reviews about Chilean urban-social movements, reflecting about the role that contestation play in newly urban politics in Santiago and how this could oppose the trend to solve consensus by technocratic approaches (*Aliste* 2014: 37; *Hoelzl* 2015: 13, 19, 42; *Zunino* 2002: 114).

Retracing the experiences of the urban development of Santiago in the past may contribute to understand recent contestation regarding to a fight that was held in the past as part of injustice that increased then and repeatedly in present times (see *Rodríguez and Rodríguez* 2009: 11, 18; *Aliste* 2014: 35). To understand the principles that drove urban development in the past, this article shows a wide range of actors that coin the production of urban space and the circumstances they developed from.

As noted, in current conceptual terms, this study links to the notion of governance to *Healey*, who uses the term governance “to refer to all forms of collective action, of which formal government activity is one” (*Healey* 2012: 333). Also *Selle’s* approach to urban processes applies to this kind of phenomena: “[G]overnance is first a specific form of analysis and description that helps recognize social models in sufficiently differentiated ways while perceiving the mechanisms that inform interdependencies.” (*Selle* 2015: 271). This definition takes us beyond a two-tiered taxonomy of actors, i.e., the public sphere based on planning and the private sphere beholden to the laws of the market (*Selle* 2015: 265). It also enables a focus on the “[F]ull spectrum of possible relations and influences among actors, i.e., hierarchical pursuits and networks, legal

regulations and informal partnerships, formal cooperation and flexible agreements, interactions within a market-based logic and mechanisms of community-building, etc.” (*Selle* 2010: 37, 2015: 270). This approach permits a view to a wider spectrum of actors and detach from the idea of governance as planning strategy performed predominantly by the state, while this has hampered the ability to lead open, complex, democratic systems, to the detriment of the role of social actors in city- and state-building (*De Mattos* 2015: 152-153, 155).

Thus, what we examine in these past experiences ought to be a contribution to the debate on civil society involvement in the urban development of Santiago. Therefore, precisely the mechanisms and informal partnerships that joined and worked with state and market players are relevant. This is the sphere in which the deterioration driven by exacerbated neoliberal urban development seems greatest (*Harvey* 2005; *Hidalgo and Janoschka* 2014).

As such, we focus here on two cases that show one and the same phenomenon: a strongly fragmented city where residents sought to fulfill their right to the city and social actors sought to contribute to public building production (*Lukas and Wehrhahn* 2013). These two cases attest to spheres of urban development in Santiago, that were described by scholars as highly developed areas, and areas bereft of urban services, respectively (*Aliste* 2014: 36; *Hidalgo and Janoschka* 2014: 21-26; *Lukas and Wehrhahn* 2013: 36-37).

The first type of cases under review are the vast tracts of public housing built in the national modernization period in the context of land invasions and the state’s disposition to include them into peripheral urbanization policy (Interview *Miguel Lawner*, 23 July 2018). At present, this is a domain shaped by the social housing policies of the *subsidiary* state construct ushered in through the eighties (*Rodríguez and Sugranyes* 2009: 303-305; *Castillo et al.* 2008: 20-21).

The second type of cases involves buildings of urban relevance. Unlike the national modernization period, when most such construction was undertaken by the state, nowadays most of it has been handed over to the private sector. As *De Mattos* (2015) notes, the last decade has seen an unprecedented proliferation of megaprojects in coveted business districts, built on a global-city logic and scale. *De Mattos* (2007) labels these projects *archipelago urbanism*: the concentra-

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tion of capital in desirable areas, driven by neo-liberal policies and alliances between corporations and mayor's offices, as cities jockey for position within the context of globalization and international competition (*De Mattos* 2007; 2015: 289-299).

Illustrating our stand on the paucity of grassroots involvement in city building, as well as our intended contribution to the issue, necessitates describing the state of the art on peripheral urbanization and public buildings of urban relevance. On the question of vulnerable housing, the literature describes a constant, evolving history of interactions between squatters and the state (addressed in more detail in section 3 below). From 1957 onwards, for example, many of Santiago's homeless people addressed their housing plight by launching wholesale land occupations (*Espinoza* 1988; *Garcés* 2002; *Chateau* et al. 1987). There is a vast literature on what followed in the sixties as *assisted land takeovers* became a sanctioned option through the so-called 'Operation Plot of Land' (Operación Sitio) (*Garcés* 2002; *Quintana* 2014a). Cooperation between the state and vulnerable residents, all but dismantled following the 1973 coup d'état, took on alternative forms as the ensuing dictatorship proceeded to phase in a neo-liberal regime (*Espinoza* 1988; *Garcés* 2002; *Chateau* et al. 1987). Current debate notes that although initial demands involved a modest right to land within the city, harsh repressive policies had a strong impact on both daily life and city building, notably through class segregation practices that help explain today's demands for improved siting of public housing projects (*Castillo* 2008; *Pulgar* and *Mathivet* 2010; *Renna* 2015).

This article also describes specific evidence on relationships among residents, their networks, and the community-building that ultimately accounted for their successful interactions with public and private actors. On the matter of the production of public buildings of urban relevance, several writers present evidence that national modernization in Chile was a period when public building construction became both a substantive component of a new modernizing awareness and an expression of collective pride in nation-building (*Raposo* and *Valencia* 2004a; *Gámez Bastén* 2006; *Castillo* and *Forray* 2014). This is complemented by evidence that repression during the dictatorship strongly impacted public spaces, the city itself, and its architecture. Indeed, as is common knowledge, many public sites in Santiago, including landmark buildings, public squares, and stadiums, bore silent witness to

brutal crimes. As such, under democratic rule some were rededicated as memorials to the victims of state terrorism and violence (*Cáceres* 2012; *Piper* 2014).

These days, most buildings of public relevance are megaprojects built with no civil society participation whatsoever and relatively low pushback, even as they drive locals out, supplant original uses, or encroach on the city's cultural or political heritage (*Ramírez* 2017; *Fajardo* 2017; *Cáceres* and *De la Cerda* 2017). As such, objecting to megaprojects such as corporate buildings, convention centers, hotels, upscale subdivisions, etc., is often limited to symbolic or heritage conservation grounds. And as elsewhere, and described by diverse scholars (*Swyngedouw* et al. 2002; *Simons* 2003; *Peters* and *Huning* 2003), these megaprojects often stem from deals made by mayor's offices and transnational corporations, with community involvement in decision-making a rare occurrence. Thus, this article presents specific evidence on connections between public and private actors and organized civil society, its formation history, its networks, and their forms of interdependence during the period of national modernization.

As the particular evolution of grassroots groups (residents, workers, professionals) in the urban development of Santiago de Chile has been described by several scholars, it seems necessary to characterize this continuity and disruption in the last 60 years. Thus, the history of collaboration between social organizations and state was described as particularly effective, due to a kit of non-formal mechanisms and circumstances that are described in the following text and shown in an overview in *Figure 1*.

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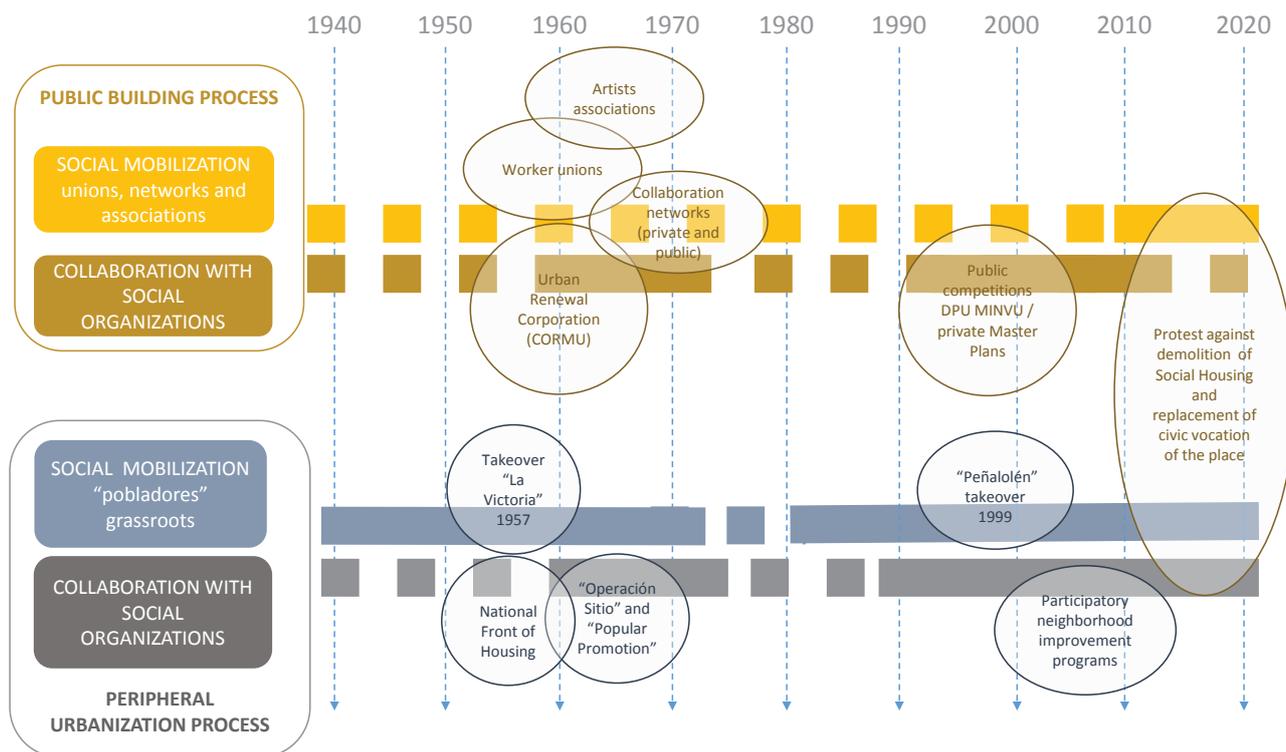


Fig. 1 Timetable – continuity and disruption in grassroots engagement. Source: Own elaboration 2018

### 3. Experiences of greater complexity: land occupations and public buildings

Through experiences of two projects implemented in Santiago during the national modernization period this article shows, how interdependence between state, private and civil society actors was structured around a wide range of stakeholders, networks and community-building processes.

#### 3.1 Land occupations, *Operation Plot of Land* and assisted land takeovers

Land occupations in Santiago were part of a wider social and political process that sought to address the housing crisis triggered by large-scale urban migration starting in the thirties (Salazar 2012). The precarious labor and housing conditions facing the new arrivals led to new forms of urban exclusion. Most became squatters who self-built makeshift homes without benefit of permits or title. While some did hold title to such a home, they remained among the neediest (De Ramón 2007; Castillo and Forray 2014).

In a desperate bid to secure access to urban land, the homeless often turned to land invasions. This device

involved a particular way of collaborating with the government, municipalities, the Catholic Church and other actors. In time, this particular form of inhabiting and collaborating spawned a specific social substrate across many now-consolidated peripheral urbanizations (Castillo and Forray 2014). A vast literature on the evolution of land occupations describes both resident action and government policy at the time (Espinoza 1988; Hidalgo 2004; Palma and Sanfuentes 1979; Sepúlveda 1998; Quintana 2014b; Castillo and Forray 2014; Salazar 2012). We seek for transversal resident action and engagement with government policy as described by Teresa Caldeira (2017).

Initially headed by individuals and family members, land invasions soon became a collective phenomenon requiring a degree of planning, especially in order to successfully negotiate with officialdom, as was the case in the events reviewed here.<sup>4</sup> Three discrete moments in time illustrate different forms of resident action, self-organization, and interdependence with state and other actors. The insights yielded by these occasions, helped residents to self-learn the ways of both actual takeovers and the political tactics required to legalize the land, a process that demanded complex social action (Salazar 2012).

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The first moment in time involved takeovers driven by dire need (*Castillo and Forray 2014*). These were led by homeless people facing an emergency situation and attracted the solidarity of various actors who helped them mediate with the state. Illustrative of this type of takeover is *La Victoria*, a tent city that became an urbanized housing project through the steadfast collective action of its residents. State officials agreed to allow the settlement to stay only after significant prodding from the Catholic Church, universities, the local mayor and other key actors (*Espinoza 1988*) (see *Photo 1*: the general commissioner visiting an informal settlement in the 1940's).

Prior experiences with state responses to housing demands had been disappointing. Government policy on releasing urban land for housing was vague, and practices on locating and evicting squatter camps were erratic at best (*Espinoza 1988*). *Espinoza*, based on press accounts at the time, recounts the significant experience gained by local residents who successfully acquired technical skills, organized initiatives, and ably dealt with the authorities. They put forward thoughtful demands that included collective resettlement to more centrally-located areas and an emphasis on self-building (*Espinoza 1988*). Land occupation as a device quickly caught on. Squatters formed social and neighborhood committees, then founded a National Housing Front to negotiate with authorities (*Garcés 2002: 340-41*) that had remained largely unable to provide a proper response. Given the state's failure to address demand for housing and land, and as it proposed joint action by private institutions, residents, and the state, this mechanism eventually grew into an option the government could live with (*Espinoza 1988*).



*Photo 1* The general commissioner of subsistence and prices visiting informal settlements, 1948. Photo credit: M. Rubio Feliz, 1948. Source: Museo Histórico Nacional, Archive [National Historical Museum], n.d., Picture N-3455

In a second moment in time, land takeovers became a resettlement phenomenon. From 1966 to 1970, the population of Santiago living in squatter camps grew from 12 to 16 %. As they became more systematically organized, growing numbers negotiated with property owners to sell the invaded land and with the state to buy it. Politicians eager to expand their voter base became involved, playing an important role as mediators between squatters, property owners, and the state (*Espinoza 1988; Castillo and Forray 2014*). In 1967, the government of President Eduardo Frei launched the *Operation Plot of Land* (*Operación Sitio*), a program intended to deal with the new phenomenon. It contemplated the provision of legally subdivided, semi-urbanized tracts of land to squatters who agreed to self-build their own homes (*Castillo 2013; Castillo and Forray 2014; Quintana 2014a; 2014b*) (see *Photo 2*: view over the settlement 'La Faena' in 2016, an 'Operation Plot of Land' settlement that populated the periphery of Santiago since the end of the 1960's).

Unlike his predecessors, Frei's housing policy set the specific goal of lifting people from poverty and relied strongly on existing organized groups (*Palma and Sanfuentes 1979*). As a complement, the Frei government launched the *National Council for the Advancement of the People* (*Consejería Nacional de Promoción Popular*), an institution intended to help reduce the fragmentation of grassroots groups and include them in decision-making. The Council encouraged and supported the creation of new community organizations, notably mothers' clubs, sports clubs, co-operatives and similar groups, under a new Neighborhood Committees and Community Groups Act (*Sepúlveda 1998; Garcés 2002: 341; De Ramón 2007*).

Despite these efforts and the emergence of new venues for participation, *Operation Plot of Land* was unable to satisfactorily meet demand for land and housing (*Espinoza 1988; Castillo and Forray 2014*). The program was criticized for segregating the poor into out-of-the-way areas and for its emphasis on self-building, considered demeaning to poor people (*Castells 1971; Quintana 2014a, 2014b*).

A third moment in time was marked by *assisted land invasions*, a collaborative settlement and social integration effort that engaged both squatters and the government in the creation of Villa La Reina, a single settlement that could not be replicated for historical reasons. This involved an organized group of 7,500

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squatters who lived on vacant lots or on the banks of a large canal subject to flash flooding. Having learned the lessons of the land takeover movement and realizing the policy limitations of *Operation Plot of Land*, these squatters stood their ground and refused to be evicted from their makeshift homes. In this scenario, in 1964 they accepted a proposal from Fernando Castillo Velasco, a distinguished architect and then-mayor of the middle-class district of La Reina, to join a housing project he sought to build as part of a plan to foster a more socially inclusive, multifunctional community (Castillo 2013). A site adjacent to an industrial park that could provide sources of employment was selected and purchased for the project. The site was also close to a sub-center equipped with cultural, sports, health, and educational facilities (San Martín 1990; Quintana 2014b; Márquez 2008). Project highlights included adaptation to community needs and the extent of collaboration between the mayor's office and local residents, with help from academia. This helped infuse the project with a sense of belonging and commitment. The plan featured public spaces adjusted to the use and security needs of residents, training in building trades, and locally-managed construction micro-enterprises (Quintana 2014a, 2014b; San Martín 1990; Márquez 2009).

At Villa La Reina, the assistance of architecture professors and students enabled urban design innovations such as reserving land for future community equipment, an open layout ensuring integration with the surrounding community, and readily-accessible

public spaces designed for easy maintenance at scales matching intended use (Quintana 2014a, 2014b). Even the rotated lot layout, meant to keep homes from abutting each other, was suggested by residents (Quintana 2014a, 2014b).

The common thread in all three experiences were municipalities and governments willing to support squatter or resident initiatives. Subsequent institutional arrangements intended to help formally address housing demand (i.e., the National Council for the Advancement of the People) led to more centralized planning, away from the purview of municipalities (Garcés 2002: 351) and assisted land takeovers as a policy instrument for integrating residents into city development.

At Villa La Reina, the need to self-build became a foundational experience, a protracted process that left behind enduring memories of "...entire families working full shifts on Saturday and Sunday" (Márquez 2008: 357) (see *Photo 3* where the image shows, that even women worked in construction trades). As Márquez notes (2008: 366), "[I]dentity is not just narrative. It is also the ability to take action and rally the troops". "This condition of identity is known as territoriality, a trait shared by all social actors and thus a basic component of identity" (Márquez 2008: 366). As Garcés notes, "the wisdom of the people" has been around forever; to feed into scholarly debate, it just requires that "social identity experiences and signs" be accorded a higher profile (Garcés 2002: 24).



Photo 2 View on the peripheral urbanization 'La Faena', an 'Operation Plot of Land' in 2016. Source: Google Earth, 05/10/2018

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Photo 3 *Villa La Reina: Women working in construction trades and the creation of construction of micro businesses managed by the neighbours themselves. Source: Alvarado 1967: 40*

### 3.2 The UNCTAD building: the dynamics of a public megaproject

On fostering more complex, interdependent forms of state engagement with other actors, a significant case in point is the 1971-1972 construction of a major public building during the administration of President Salvador Allende. In this highly significant period in its social and political history, Chile was led by a government whose policy agenda was based on the motto 'From the people, for the people'. This mindset provided the blueprint for policy initiatives that attracted a wide range of actors to discrete city-building initiatives.

The process surrounding construction of what became the emblematic building that housed the 1972 Third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD III) is a clear example of the experiences reviewed here. It involved interdisciplinary, broad-based, productive dialogue between the state and architects, engineers, construction workers, visual artists and building firms. The result was construction of a building that stands as a symbol of the political, social, and cultural context of an era.

The handling of all public-private aspects of construction was in the hands of the Urban Renewal Corporation (CORMU), a government agency set up in 1966 to revitalize run-down parts of the city through large-scale urban renewal projects. This culture of architecture- and city-building, with its potential of

truly utopian proportions, vanished from Chile in the mid-seventies, where aspects as diverse as economy, technology, political institutions and the social structure itself were considered (Valencia 2011: 75). Among plans left unrealized were large-scale interventions of the city center and environs designed to attract low- and middle-income groups. Before that, high expectations of a brighter future for Santiago in academic, professional, and technical circles led to a wide-ranging public debate on the scope and impact of planned projects. In 1968 this prompted the revival of the journal of the College of Architects and a flurry of conferences and events that hashed out in much detail the planned urban projects and related issues facing the city (Raposo and Valencia 2004b). Modernization for CORMU implied a process of technical but also social revolution that interrelated public and private agents. The role of this entity will be vital, because it had a free disposition on the properties of the city, in addition to specific budgets when the objective was the common benefit, then the private property was subject to the national interest (Covacevic 2011: 31). These collaborations of CORMU with private companies and social organizations will have as a great landmark the building for UNCTAD III.

Dedicated in April 1972, UNCTAD III was a megaproject whose public-private dynamics helped bring together social actors possessed of a singular work ethic. This major complex was completed in a record 275 days by an accomplished team that made highly efficient use of technology. The actors involved in the construction were the government together with the CORMU and various services and productive enterprises dependent on the State, organized workers in unions and artists, who worked in three shifts self-organized by a 'committee of workers' that allowed to maintain coordination among the workers, technicians, and professionals in order to quickly solve any difficulty or problem that may arise in the development of all design, procurement and construction activities (Wong 2011: 67). Protagonist accounts (Varas and Llano 2011: 16; Gaggero 2018: 30; Interview Miguel Lawner, 23 July 2018) bear out that achieving this feat owed as much to the political will of the government as to the solidarity and communal spirit of the architects, engineers, artists, artisans, construction workers and volunteers who made it happen. Many a first-hand account explains the determination to involve a wide range of actors. In a newspaper article entitled "UNCTAD Brought About a New Way of Working", senior technical office architect Sergio González writes that

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this involved teamwork and “...mutual support among technicians and workers in terms of taking stock of the importance of the challenge and of the responsibility facing Chile as the host of this major international conference” (Wong 2011: 65). In what became a project highlight and a mark of continuity with prior experiences in public architecture, UNCTAD III succeeded in galvanizing a well-coordinated, star team of artists and architects who had worked together on previous projects (Gaggero 2018: 31).

The new way of working and the involvement of people, both directly connected to the construction effort and not, took many forms. These included the use of participatory technology to try out innovative labor relations and decision-making methods (Maulén 2016: 73), the integration of works of art into building tectonics, the solidarity of worker-run companies, and the muralist brigades and students who helped showcase the new way of working and participating through brightly-colored street murals and press articles tracking construction progress.

The complex consisted of two distinct components: a skyscraper and a podium. Podium builder DESCO adopted a joint committee approach (Maulén 2016: 74) where management and labor would hold general meetings to discuss the project and make joint decisions. This empowering model was prevalent at the time, especially in connection with the adoption of new participatory technologies. All told, some 1,300 people, including architects, engineers, and technicians plus 930 construction workers, managed to complete 16,000 square meters of space in nine months. To guarantee proper working conditions, the CORMU technical office had specified union labor (Interview Miguel Lawner, 23 July 2018). At the time, membership in trade unions affiliated with the Central Union of Workers (CUT), Chile’s largest, best-organized union federation and labor rights advocate, was mandatory for all trades employed by private firms engaged in building or urban project construction. This made collective bargaining a highly efficient tool and in the same cases, notably the UNCTAD III project, enabled extraordinary forms of participation, such as collective decision-making in general management-labor meetings (Interview Miguel Lawner, 23 July 2018). A clear example of worker commitment to socially-relevant urban projects was a project-end celebration where CUT presented diplomas to workers and technicians voted the best by their own coworkers, noting that they had helped complete the project seven days ahead of schedule (*El Siglo* 29/03/1972). Complet-

ed in record time, the monumental complex became a source of pride for those who built it and a source of admiration for the public at large (Photo 4).



Photo 4 Image of the construction of the UNCTAD III building, 1972. Source: Private collection Miguel Lawner

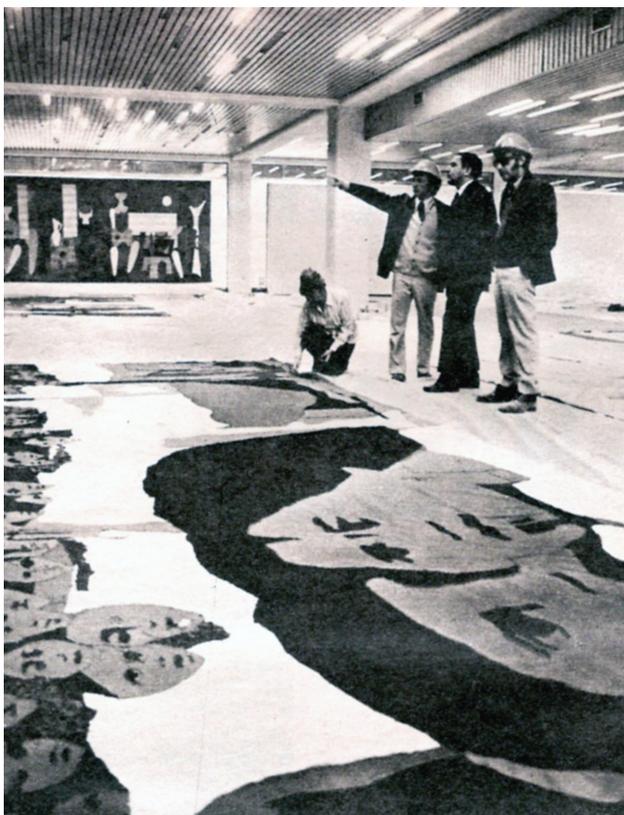
As esteemed painter Eduardo Martínez Bonati said “(...) Under the premise that buildings are built by workers rather than architects, the artists who created the embedded art were designated as ‘art workers’” (Varas 2011: 43). He was tasked in 1971 with commissioning works of art for UNCTAD III:

“This was a first, so I had to look for the right attitude about integrating art into a building. Although we had integrated objects into buildings and urban spaces for years, I had to make a strong case for involving scores of artists. Also, we didn’t want them working in isolation; we wanted them to overrun the building with the will to connect with events taking place in the country. That was the start.” (Varas 2011: 43, translated by the authors.)

Integration involved more than concrete objects. It was also a way of relating and dovetailing each piece with the social function demanded by the times. Above all, it required a logic of proximity between the art and its audience. Weaving together the architectural project and the works contributed by the visual artists, who had been invited to perform a veritable art intervention, became a milestone in the understanding of processes. In addition to a material and formal dialogue between the works of art and the building tectonics, the artists were asserting forms of collec-

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tive work with architects and construction workers. A transversal approach was evident in assigning each work both a tectonic and a public art role, thus ensuring a dialogue between building use and the functionality of the pieces as objects with a social role, in a project whose very nature was public and common. The search for the common good was determined by a project of political articulation that involved the demands of the different groups involved. The only ones opposed to projects such as UNCTAD III were the political opponents, because this type of projects sought to benefit society (*Photo 5*).



*Photo 5* Eduardo Martinez Bonati and artist Gracia Barrios with one artwork in UNCTAD III, 1972. Source: Private collection Miguel Lawner.

Following UNCTAD III, the building was renamed Gabriela Mistral Metropolitan Cultural Center and its facilities were converted to a range of cultural and community uses. It became a valued venue for social actors to express their shared interests and understanding of what a social and cultural center should be. Programming was led by a director and her team, with significant input from general meetings involving social actors and unionized building workers (*Troncoso* 2011: 60). But this was not to last. During the coup d'état of September 1973, aerial bombardment reduced the presidential palace to rubble, rendering it unusable as

the seat of government. This prompted the military Junta to seize the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center, the only major public building available at the time. Repurposed for a use far removed from the intent and plans of two years prior, it was renamed the Diego Portales Building and pressed into service as the seat of government, and later as Defense Headquarters through 2006.<sup>5</sup> As such, in the context of the city, returning the building to its rightful use and name is highly symbolic of social and urban transformations (*Errázuriz and Leiva* 2012). There was no continuity of this participatory model of construction of public buildings in Chile due to the implementation of a dictatorial repressive model that affected all aspects of daily and institutional life.

### 4. Comments on the transformation through the neo-liberal period

Perhaps the most significant difference between the conflicts currently facing neo-liberal Santiago and the national modernization experience is the complexity and diversity of the social actors involved in city building. As such, their forms of organization and interactions with the state and property developers can help determine which conditions have had continuity and which have become disrupted during the transformation undergone in the past five decades.

As distinct from today's contestation by social actors, past experiences were a singular housing rights process that persisted through the military dictatorship and the ensuing transition to democracy. In the early years of the dictatorship, housing struggles took a back seat to wretched living conditions and grievous human rights violations (*Chateau et al.* 1987). Grassroots efforts were rekindled in the mid-seventies as housing demands began to resurface as a rallying cry. The late seventies and early eighties were a time when existing land invasions were being evicted to the outskirts, with housing subsidies that prioritized individual over collective rights (*Márquez* 2008: 253) further compounding urban segregation (*Sabatini et al.* 2001; *Morales and Rojas* 1986). These events help explain why today's housing groups are seen as fragmented identities (*Márquez* 2008: 253) marked by nostalgia and abandonment and defined by the current commodification of the city, or alternatively, as signs of social disintegration (*Morales and Rojas* 1986) arising from the urban segregation endured since the eighties. That said, new groups are emerging that tran-

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scend the existing demand-and-supply mechanisms and call for moving beyond traditional participation structures (Renna 2015) and toward greater complexity, demands that today's *subsidiary* state remains unwilling to fully allow.

The strong social conscience evident in the housing struggles of decades past was an integral part of a historical process (see the resulting settlements produced by land occupations in relation to the urban area of Santiago in *Figure 2* below.) The re-emergence

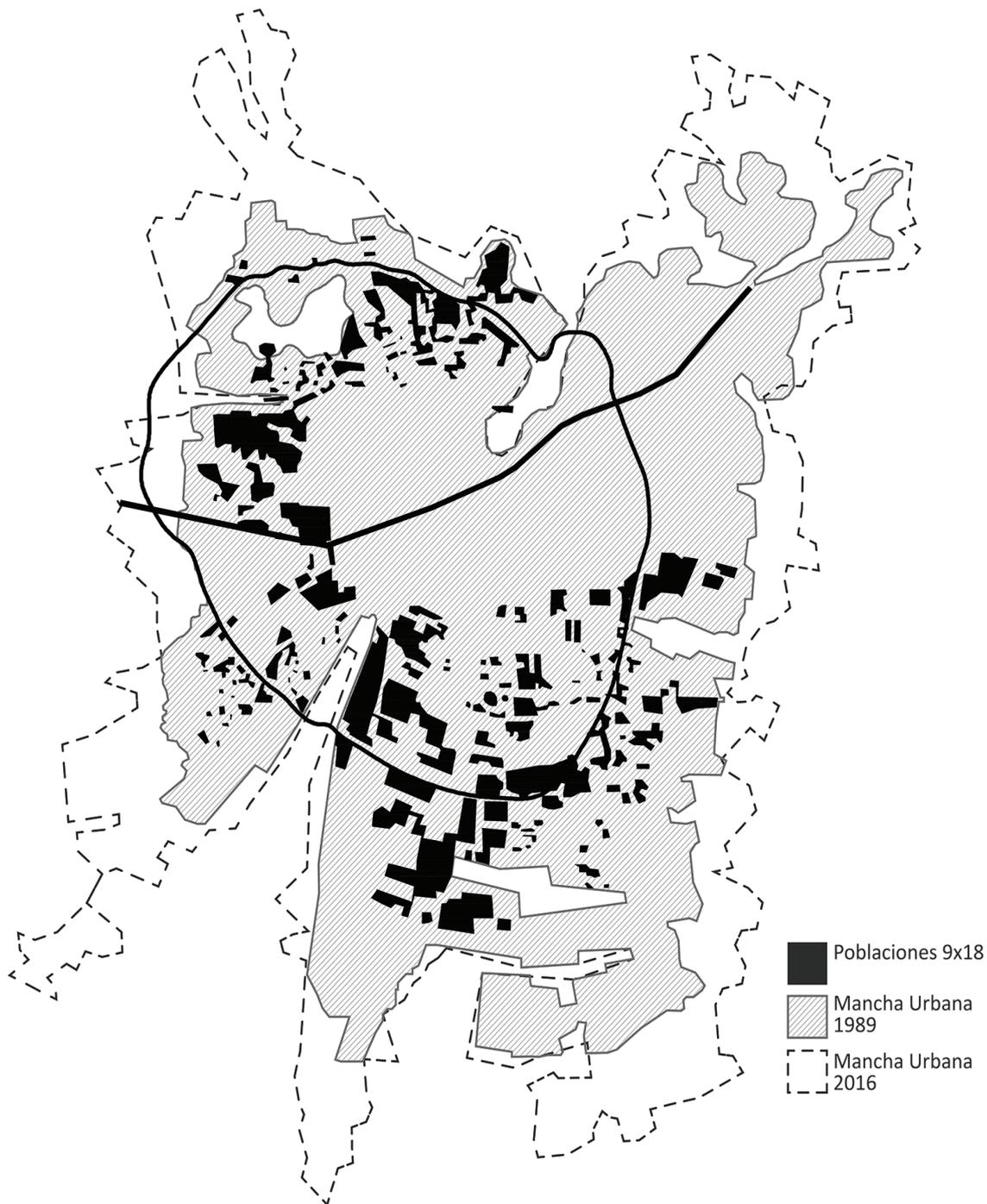


Fig. 2 Location of 466 peripheral settlement of 9x18 m lots, comprising 'Operacion Sitio'-settlements. Source: Laboratorio 9x18 Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, S. Muñoz and F. Walker, 2016, unpublished

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of such contestation seems unthinkable today, not least because, in a process of deactivation, it has been resignified by current forms of governance (*De Mattos* 2015). On the other hand, in the contestation of some current movements a range of strategies for dealing with the state can be recognized from the past: exert pressure to improve living conditions, stand fast in frontal confrontation with the state in a bid to become a direct counterweight, use underground and lateral positions to sidestep the state's offensive, and upset the foundations and limits of the hegemonic system from below (*Renna* 2015).

Before the dictatorship, public building experiences were shaped by a community of local architects who rose to the challenge in a tradition still evident in many public buildings, both in Santiago and across the country (*Gaggero* 2018; *Castillo et al.* 2008; *Gómez Bastén* 2006; *Raposo and Valencia* 2004a). Later, however, the mechanism used by the state to collaborate with private actors and social organizations, was cast aside, as were the binding nature of the decisions of many professional groups, notably the College of Architects, and competitive selection. Moreover, a trend toward cooperative work that had spontaneously emerged among smaller construction companies and in discrete experiences such as that of Villa La Reina eventually faded away (*Quintana* 2014a; *Gaggero* 2018).

During the post-dictatorship neo-liberal period, the effort on fostering more complex, interdependent forms of state engagement with other actors in the construction of emblematic buildings had diminished. A new period has started, where connections between architects, artists and construction workers and their professional associations and trade unions have decayed, to the detriment of interactions as architects, artists or construction workers employed by corporations (*Jara* 2015; *Liernur* 2009).

### 5. Conclusions and remarks

Similar to many other publications about the recent urban development in Chile, this study was motivated by the demands of vulnerable residents and ongoing opposition to production of urban space based merely on corporate buildings. In response to the question of how best to find appropriate methodologies and perspectives to understand the transformation of Santiago that explains such demands (*Aliste* 2014: 35),

this article shows experiences of significantly greater interdependence among grassroots groups, self-organized worker associations, the state, and property developers. Despite the fact that there are arguments to state that the weak interdependence and conspicuously absent civil society involvement is our today's state of art, it is possible to go further in this reflection. It is possible to understand both – the production of public buildings in the setting of the CORMU-formula and the land seizures as result of the right to the city struggles of 'pobladores' – as an expression of a political process and a specific "democratic moment" (*Hoelzl* 2015: 34, 351). Thus, these political processes are pertinent as a persuasive precedent and their different formation histories are relevant.

Not only today, but also in the past, the social affiliation seems to distinguish the way the social movements influence the political agenda by their demands (see *Hoelzl* 2015: 366). The process of UNCTAD III building follows a tradition of left-wing intellectuals connected to the Chilean elites that had the power to install the government of Welfare State in the 1960's Chile. Instead, the land seizure process shows that their form of organization stands through different regimes. Nonetheless, there is the challenge to break out of the circle of housing as a commodity and reenter into a logic of collaboration.

Today, the construction of the UNCTAD III building and its particular collaborative process seems unthinkable. Not only professional associations and forms of collective, cooperative work and self-organization have been gutted, but also the limitation of private rights in favor of public privilege has been abolished and public budgets for public buildings have been shortened. Compared to this process, land seizures could stand despite the lack of external structures and are gaining on with successive support by public financing of neighbourhood renewal and improvement.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A notion *Teresa Caldeira* uses to refer to a specific mode of making cities "...largely constructed by residents who build not only their own houses, but also frequently their neighborhoods. They do not necessarily do so in clandestine ways and certainly not in isolation. Throughout the process, they interact with the state and its institutions, but usually in transversal ways" (*Caldeira* 2017: 3).

- <sup>2</sup> An occupation led by 400 families who took over some 23 hectares near better-off, better-equipped areas in the municipality of Peñalolén.
- <sup>3</sup> The threatened demolition of the Villa San Luis public housing project prompted civil society groups to open an extensive debate on intended land use. Originally designated for inclusive social housing, the land now sits next to the affluent business district of Nueva Las Condes and is eagerly sought by developer intent on erecting new corporate buildings, with full city approval.
- <sup>4</sup> *Salazar* writes that the first invasion was an 'assault' by a group of 1,200 families that evolved from clashes with police to rallying politicians to assist in legalizing the land takeover. This way of creating a new settlement, i.e., the organized storming of a vast tract of land, spearheaded the so-called 'squatters' movement' and led to residents no longer being referred to as shantytown dwellers (*Salazar* 2012).
- <sup>5</sup> Its current use was enabled by a devastating 2006 fire which forced the authorities to call an architectural design competition to restore the building. The building was later renamed the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center and re-dedicated as an arts and culture venue with a focus on the performing arts.

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to Architect and Professor Jose Llano Loyola with critical lecture in parts of the UNCTAD III experience, and students of Campus Creativo, Universidad Andrés Bello Camila Hernández, Viviana Vega, Paulina Raby and Sofía Romo, collaborators in newspapers research. Thanks to "Laboratorio 9x18", Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile for archival images.

This article was supported by the funding of Research Funds Universidad Andrés Bello (Fondo J. Millas), the Faculty Arquitectura, Arte, Diseño y Comunicaciones (Campus Creativo), Universidad Andrés Bello and also was financially supported by the Millennium Scientific Initiative of the Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism of Chile, grant "Millennium Nucleus Center Authority and Power Asymmetries".

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## Interviews

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