

Book Review

– *Neoliberalism and urban development in Latin America. The case of Santiago*, edited by Camillo Boano and Francisco Vergara-Perucich. Routledge, 2018.

This edited volume provides a detailed analysis of Santiago and its socio-spatial development. It reflects on long-standing problems present in Latin American and Caribbean cities, such as segregation, housing inequality, gentrification, or the transformation of spaces for retail consumption, while also addressing other features of cities like urban activism, arts and resistance, urban social movements, among others. The book assesses the pervasiveness of the neoliberal ideology, showing how Santiago’s spatial form results from its long engagement with free market policies. As such, the book can be read as a cautionary tale against neoliberal policies (e.g. land markets liberalisation or governance through inter-city competition), warning other cities in the region of how neoliberalism materialises in space, as well as how to resist the negative and exclusionary urban processes of this political project and to aim for alternatives.

According to editors Boano and Vergara-Perucich, this work is “conceived as a series of imperfect and unfinished conversations” exploring “the complex existing urbanisms of Santiago” (2). It brings voices from a “young generation of urban scholars, architects, activists and artists” (2), many working beyond academic circles. Less than a cohesive reflection on Santiago’s neoliberal urbanism, the editors bring a “cacophony of voices, visions and thoughts” (2) with chapters that will interest Latin American researchers and practitioners from disciplines like architecture, sociology, history, geography, or planning. The work comprises twelve chapters, plus a general introduction and an afterword where the editors interview Miguel Lawner, a key historical figure of social urbanism during Salvador Allende’s government, recently awarded the Chilean National Architecture Prize.

The book’s general line of argument is that Santiago provides the perfect case study for studying how neoliberalism’s laissez-faire policies can be visible in key areas of urban development. Vergara-Perucich analyses Santiago’s neoliberal governance, tracing it to the neoliberal city sketched incipiently

decades ago by Milton Friedman himself. Friedman, who educated some of Pinochet's economic advisors – known as the Chicago Boys – had free market approaches to solve critical urban problems related to housing provision, delivering transport systems, and the management of public spaces and parks. Many of these tenets still hold in Santiago because of Pinochet's legacy and the still-ruling 1980 Constitution.

Some socio-spatial outcomes of the neoliberal project in Santiago are described by Matias Garreton, Ernesto Lopez-Morales, and Liliana De Simone's chapters on segregation, gentrification, and retail urbanism, respectively. Garreton, following David Harvey, explains Santiago's segregation as a historical process of accumulation by dispossession, where pro-market and exclusionary urban policies are the cause of both the marginalization of low-income groups and the wealth hoarding and reproduction of privileged ones. Lopez-Morales analyses Santiago's gentrification to argue that any effort to reduce its socio-spatial segregation will fail if the process of ground rent accumulation on the part of private largest-scale real estate firms remains untouched. De Simone's chapter traces a genealogy of the shopping mall, from the first project supported by the Military *Junta* in 1982 to the current dense web of retail infrastructure spanning all across the city, where consumers perceive the private production of space as a public one, as these places provide health, recreation, financial, and even educational services.

The book also includes critical propositions and speculative essays that reflect on the political dimension of space and how to construct egalitarian futures for Santiago. For example, Camila Cociña explores how housing provision can move towards more universalist principles, in order to avoid the logic of targeting policies where services are developed “‘for the poor’ and ‘for the rich’ as two separate systems” (73). Instead, she argues for the need of “Urban Universalism” (78), based on recognising rights for all, and describes two principles to advance in that direction: the participation of the State in the economy of land and the understanding of housing as a dynamic process. The chapter by Fundación Decide reflects on the role of social movements in a context where both real estate and public policies maintain and defend the status quo. They describe how recent mobilizations have developed many critiques of the dictatorship's heritage, involving struggles for the right to the city, and widely using the public spaces of Santiago. In their chapter, the architectural collective ariztiaLAB analyses the emblematic case of the Ochagavia Hospital, initially a product of Allende's health policy but later privatised and rendered into a “white elephant” for decades. For that case, they introduce different “devices for interaction” (130) developed along with the community that work as counter-narratives of the ongoing contestation and stakes involved in this project.

The relation between art, politics and activism is addressed in the pieces by Francisco J. Díaz, Fernando Portal, and Grupo TOMA. Díaz presents a critical

reflection on the post-2011 political context describing how massive social mobilizations opened up the opportunity for architects and artists to “activate” (116) urban space while demobilising political discourse. For that, he argues, cultural professionals follow certain tactics, such as using political concepts in a way that makes them ambiguous or mixing them with others from managerial discourses (‘social innovation’, ‘cultural management’ or ‘collective production’), that ultimately subvert social struggles and work towards “softening (...) urban conflicts” (122). Portal on his part ponders on how cultural producers can help to catalyse alternative and more critical urban visions, assuming a self-reflection on the role of artists in gentrification processes. Finally, Grupo TOMA’s chapter takes the form of a theatre play of seven acts, deployed in different emblematic urban spaces of Santiago where they represent their personal experiences and contemplate the role of architects for (de)politicizing urban space.

The downside of an otherwise very good edited work, is that I missed discussions on some critical problems in neoliberal urbanism debates. Given Santiago’s geography and its political-economic institutions, a particularly important absence relates to urban environmental politics, and I would have enjoyed a critical elaboration on issues such as water provision, air pollution, or flood management. Regardless of this, the book is overall an important contribution to those interested in Latin American urbanism and I would recommend it especially for those working from a critical perspective. The book makes clear that Santiago is perhaps a one-of-a-kind city, even a utopian case of the neoliberal city; but again, researchers and practitioners from other Latin American and Caribbean countries will find here an array of reflections on the negative urban development processes arising from neoliberalism, along with thoughtful comments for constructing viable alternatives.

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