



Latin America's Large-Scale Urban Challenges: Development Failures and Public Service Inequalities in Lima, Peru

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Abstract

Beginning in the early 1990s, neoliberalizing reforms have significantly impacted the urban space of Lima in terms of an increase in business activities and the intensification of sociospatial asymmetries. Considering the modernization of urban political economy along neoliberal lines as an important dimension of contemporary disputes, this paper treats urban neoliberalism as a lived experience shaped by multiple sociospatial interactions, politico-ecological tensions and creative reactions. For instance, uneven performance of public water services across social groups and different urban zones seems to be consistent with the nature of neoliberal urbanization, in that the persistence of inequalities represents an active mechanism for the functioning of economy, politics and society according to market-friendly priorities. In that context, the marginalized, low-income urban periphery is the main space where promises, protests and dissatisfaction with neoliberalized public services occur, and actively contribute to the reconfiguration and contestation of the neoliberal megacity.



Introduction

Lima represents an emblematic case of the complex dilemmas associated with large-scale urbanization in Latin America, the region with the second highest level of urbanization (UN-Habitat, 2010) and the starkest inequalities in the world today (Roberts and Wilson, 2009). The Peruvian capital is an emerging megacity with a population of more than nine million people, projected to grow beyond ten million by 2030 (United Nations, 2014). The problems of metropolitan Lima have their origin in a long trend of violence and negligence perpetrated against nature and society since colonial times (Székely and Montes, 2006). Social and spatial inequalities in the capital city parallel long established disparities between groups living in coastal and inland areas of Peru. Those inequalities have increased in the last two decades, when the sociospatial configuration of Lima came increasingly under the influence of macroeconomic stabilization plans. Since 1990, national development and economic growth have been shaped by national and international neoliberalizing pressures in favour of deregulation, open markets and the unconstrained exploitation of natural resources (especially minerals and fossil fuels). These recent economic reforms have produced a perverse balance of gains and losses that is constantly hidden by aggressive ideological constructions around the lack of alternatives and the supposed universal benefits of market globalization. Lima's unfolding geography offers an illustrative example of a fast emerging megacity that has not resolved, or even addressed, intricate questions left from colonial, early independence and national-developmental periods (Jones, 2006); at the same time mainstream modernization approaches are uncritically adopted and aggressively promoted.

What follows is a critical discussion of the repercussions of recent economic adjustments and political trends on the organization and functioning of Lima. The aim of this article is to analyze the process of urban neoliberalization as reinforcing contrasts and inequalities between affluent, semi-periphery and periphery areas, and more importantly as a lived experience shaped by multiple sociospatial interactions, politico-ecological tensions, creative reactions and survival strategies. The limits of the ongoing reforms are particularly evident in the failure of public water services of metropolitan Lima, as the sector became a laboratory for market-friendly solutions (obviously mediated by the national state). Some international mass media may now give a more positive image of Lima than in previous decades², but water management troubles represent a critical moment of truth. Human-made water scarcity constitutes a biophysical and sociopolitical limit to the mainstream intention to convert Lima into a global megacity and a bastion of neoliberalism. The capital has increasingly to rely on degraded and meagre water reserves (i.e., groundwater, three small watercourses and tropical glaciers in the

² For instance, the CNN report "Wire the desert: The next generation of smart cities", published on 18 Dec 2014 at http://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/18/business/smart-cities-next-generation/index.html#top_of_page

Andes under the impact of global warming), which is a situation that has triggered a number of infrastructure expansion programmes with, at best, partial results.

Departing from the existing literature on Latin American megacities – which is currently focused on social fragmentation (the ‘city of walls’) and widespread violence without sufficient attention to idiosyncratic socioeconomic patterns and hidden reactions – the present text combines different spatial scales (national-metropolitan-local) with a sectoral experience (water) in order to question the overarching trends and mounting risks of the expansion of neoliberalising pressures. It will therefore provide an overview of the politicization of urban spaces through an assessment of public sector insufficiencies and renewed forms of social exclusion and uneven development. The metropolitan experience will be described as a function of broader neoliberalizing processes, the struggle for political hegemony and also group or interpersonal relationships. National and international trends have had a discernible impact on the daily lives of individuals and families trying to make sense of past and present urban changes. The marginalized periphery is the main space where promises, protests and dissatisfaction with neoliberalized water services come about and take an active part in the reconfiguration, and contestation, of Lima as an emerging megacity.

The empirical analysis of neoliberal urbanization and its impact on water services provided later in the paper is based on initial fieldwork carried out in 2009 (Mar-Jun) and a second fieldtrip in 2013 (Mar-Apr). The research included visits to low-income areas, attendance at public events and interviews with policy-makers, planners and managers of public utilities (21), NGO activists (12), representatives of multilateral development agencies (9) and local residents in three areas in the periphery of Lima (26 interviewees). The great majority of respondents were community leaders, people with many years of residence in the areas, and those involved in government plans and projects. Interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed in Spanish (with the extracts included in the text translated into English). Additional contacts with key informants (via email and telephone) and the assessment of policy documents and databases continued over a two year period. The research coincided with the election of the mayor of Lima in 2010 (Susana Villarán) and the new president of Peru in 2011 (Ollanta Humala).

The paper will first review the academic literature on Latin American urbanization and the appropriateness of the megacity concept. The discussion will then focus on the specific circumstances of Lima, particularly since 1990, which has been a period noticeably marked by neoliberalizing policies and novel mechanisms for the circulation and spatial accumulation of capital. For the purpose of the present analysis, neoliberal urbanization is considered a dynamic process that combines state-oriented and market-oriented approaches, as well as the deregulation and reregulation of public services and the labour market. Neoliberal urbanization is primarily managed by the state apparatus (despite ideological calls for the minimal state by the ideologues of neoliberalism) and is predicated on the interconnection between local, national and international scales. The paper’s third

main section considers the insertion of the public water services of Lima into the sphere of neoliberalized urbanization, despite the apparent contradiction caused by the failure to privatize the metropolitan water utility (SEDAPAL). The relationship between the reform of the water sector and Lima's transition into a megacity is demonstrated with reference to results from three peripheral urban settlements. The concluding section argues that the megacity's problems constitute a relevant chapter in the urban geography of Latin America, given the complexity of the interactions and magnitude of its recent political, economic and social initiatives.

Latin America's Challenging Urban Geography

The attributes and functions of large cities reflect the incessant, and profoundly dependent, interlinkages between local, national and international spheres of interaction. The 'urban' is a specific arena of dispute, creativity and confrontation, which are all sociospatial phenomena that require appropriate theorization (Saunders, 1981). In that sense, conventional interpretations typically fail to provide a coherent understanding of interrelated urban problems and potential solutions at different scales, from local to global. Scholars associated with urban planning and economic development policies, for example, concentrate their attention on operational, morphological and technological questions (e.g., the bureaucratic supply of housing, transport and other public services) as opposed to political, economic and ideological issues responsible for faulty services and poor quality of life. Suffice to note that such academic approaches have been the main source of inspiration for conventional policy-making, tax regimes and prevailing legislation which have proved incapable of responding to mounting socioeconomic and environmental demands. Alternative readings are offered by authors who emphasize the connection between urban questions and the capitalist logic of production and realization of social and cultural values, as a reaction to technocratic, market-driven and market-oriented forms of knowledge and intervention (Brenner, 2009). The spatialization of class struggle (Harvey, 2009) and the exercise of political hegemony through the production of urban spaces (Lefebvre, 2003) turn out to be important areas of critical scholarly research. This second group of scholars has underscored the politically and ideologically mediated evolution of urban space, as well as the links between environmental justice and urbanization (Schweitzer and Stephenson Jr, 2007).

Nonetheless, if critical authors do well in emphasizing the intricacies of the northern capitalist city, there is still limited understanding of the details of urbanization and metropolitan growth in the 'peripheries' of capitalism (Legg and McFarlane, 2008). The focus has been on Western processes of urbanization (particularly in North America), something that is unfortunately evident in the otherwise interesting collection organized by Lévy (2008). The sporadic attention given to Latin American cities exacerbates the unfortunate condition of social fragmentation and endemic violence. That is partly, but not only, due to language barriers and the academic biases of Anglo-American universities. More

importantly, it is commonly ignored by critical scholars that, notwithstanding the obvious differences between cultures and countries, the Latin American city is an analytical category with distinctive forms, functions and problems (Gilbert, 1998), which cannot be interpreted adequately with concepts and investigative approaches not directly related to the region's sociocultural and economic processes (Williams Montoya, 2009). To make matters worse, the modest, but often original work of Latin American academics has been undervalued or simply ignored in northern academic circles (Valladares and Coelho, 2003). The result is a lasting demand for conceptual and methodological approaches able to reconcile urban processes in Latin America with wider development pressures, sectoral demands and local, interpersonal relations. To a large extent the Latin American urban question has remained something like a Sphinx still waiting to have most of its riddles deciphered.

In that regard, the emergency of megacities is a question of great importance in Latin America and entails a particular challenge for geographers and other urban scholars. Many large-scale urban areas in the region are now turning into, and some have already become, megacities of global socioeconomic relevance, but also fraught with idiosyncratic complexities. The term 'megacity' has great interpretative significance here, because it should encapsulate the uniqueness of social relations and management challenges associated with massive urbanization.³ Megacities have typically been defined as conurbations with populations exceeding eight or ten million (Guest, 1994), but more important than the size of its population or the vastness of its spatial territories is the thickness of functions and networks (Buijs *et al.*, 2010) and the peculiar complementarities between formal and informal economies (Daniels, 2004). The megacity is a crucible for the supply of food, energy and resources to a diversified, internationally connected and demanding population. It is also a hotspot for business and investments, political disputes, cultural manifestations and collective learning. Although being the most important centres of industrial production and capital accumulation, these are also the first areas to suffer the consequences of recurrent economic crises (Portes, 1989). Therefore, further studies are certainly needed both to assess the fractures of Latin America megacities (Rodgers *et al.*, 2011) and to address the apparent dichotomy between an urban nucleus and a fragmented, sprawling periphery three times greater than central areas and largely self-produced by the poor (Rolnik, 2001). Among other causes, the multiple inequalities present in the Latin American megacity seem to have a long genesis in the slavery system, the brutal conquest of territorial resources and the unequal offering of social opportunities (Luco and Vignoli, 2003).

The prominence of regional megacities has coincided, not by chance, with the introduction and evolution of neoliberal ideologies and practices throughout

³ The concept of megacity was first proposed by the Scottish city planner Patrick Geddes as far back as 1915.

Latin America. That has happened through a 'contingent necessity' between the reform of national economic policies and the neoliberal restructuring of urban spaces (Ioris, 2012a). The sub-continent has been a testing ground for experimentation with neoliberalizing strategies typically associated with growing circulation of capital and tendencies towards a service economy (Sassen, 1991). The consequences of neoliberalism for the Latin American megacities are highly unique (Shatkin, 2007) with remarkable sociospatial and environmental impacts intersecting with the long tradition of socionatural exploitation (Jaffe and Aguiar, 2012). The expansion of privatization, the formation of public-private partnerships, the fragmentation of decision-making and the flexibilization of labour have aggravated both earlier and more recent problems. Even when neoliberal initiatives sometimes temporarily reduce the polarized tendencies between rich and poor settlements, segregation has risen on a micro-scale due to the production of enclosed landscapes, the loss of public spheres and changes in citizen habits (Janoschka, 2002). Despite its evident shortcomings, urban neoliberal governance regularly strives to hide its instabilities and fractures by posturing as strong, robust and logical manifestations of improved management, constantly trying to correct excesses and adjust itself to new situations (such as the post-2008 global financial crisis).⁴

It should be noted that the Latin American megacity is not merely the imprint of a nationwide or globalized socioeconomic order, but its own organization has also been predicated upon circumstantial patterns of inclusion and exclusion operating at both the neighbourhood and metropolitan level. If the concentration of activities and people in a few metropolitan areas has been the result of policies and tariffs informed by the neoliberal doctrine, the phenomenon has been metabolized according to local sociopolitical circumstances (van der Ploeg and Poelhekke, 2008). At any rate, the promises of globalized neoliberalism have been only marginally fulfilled in large Latin American urban centres, which never became truly 'global cities' (Roberts, 2005), but remained involved in long-lasting processes of foreign dependency and subordinate economic development (Córdoba Ordóñez and Gago García, 2010). Yet, most approaches to the Latin American megacity have failed to recognize that globally- and nationally-driven economic development are largely vested in the periphery of the large metropolises (Aguilar and Ward, 2003). It has been neglected that low-income populations living in the sociospatial periphery of large cities show surprising resilience, and respond with tremendous creativity to the available political, social and spatial opportunities (Arana, 2001). Whereas the marginalization of large contingents of the population has given rise to gang formation and drug cartels, it also produces a fertile ground for the amalgamation of cultures, values and experiences (Young, 2010). The creativity and energy of the urban poor certainly did not put an end to their

⁴ I am indebted to David Wilson for highlighting this important point.

exploitation, but have helped to mitigate some of the worst aspects of chaotic, unfair urban development (Kruijt and Degregori, 2007).

In order adequately to interpret the complexity of the Latin American megacity under neoliberalizing pressures, it is necessary simultaneously to tackle the entirety of processes that connect the local and personal with higher scales of interaction (Ioris, 2012b). Explanatory binaries (e.g., between formal and informal sectors of the urban society) need to be rejected in favour of more complex in-between social spaces and historical periods (Varley, 2013). The Latin American megacity requires the creative use of an explanatory 'matrix' formed by cross-scale and multi-thematic relationships. Lefebvre (1996) observes that the dialectical explanation of the city should be open and flexible, something that brings together the contradictory, as well as connects theory and practice. An investigation into the complexity of Latin American metropolises also needs to address the centrality of political demands and the failure to produce sustained and meaningful inclusion at the local, urban and national scales. The 'right to the Latin American city' (paraphrasing Lefebvre's celebrated thesis; see Lefebvre, 2003) depends primarily on the consolidation of democratic institutions and the construction of a more inclusive society, which has so far been systematically denied by the advance and revitalization of neoliberalizing experiences. The rapid expansion of Lima in recent decades has largely frustrated the prospects of sociospatial justice, which is examined below in relation to neoliberal policies and then changes in the water sector.

Neoliberal Pressures and the Reshaping of Lima

For several decades, between the 1930s and the 1980s, there was a steady influx of people from other coastal areas and from the Andean mountains in search of better socioeconomic opportunities in Lima. The absence of coherent planning and insufficient infrastructure investments forced migrant groups to find alternative forms of housing, and to develop multiple coping strategies, in the growing number of irregular settlements (initially called *barriadas* and, later, *asentamientos humanos* (human settlements)). Around 40% of Lima started as *barriadas*, which have always been spaces of both hope and despair (Chambers, 2005). Living conditions were notoriously difficult in the *barriadas* because of their location in hilly or sandy terrains, the low income of the families and the precariousness of transport and water services (Harris Jr., 1971). Towards the end of the 1980s, Peruvian society – particularly the working population and those in the *barriadas* – was noticeably tired of the unsatisfactory socioeconomic results of state-led development and the serious failures of macroeconomic policies. The exhaustion of developmentalism and import substitution industrialization championed by the national state during most of the 20th Century had major consequences for the organization and administration of Lima.

The decade was marred by economic stagnation, fiscal fragility, policy disorder and hyperinflation, which were magnified by the heterodox measures

adopted by the government of Alan García (1985-1990) as a last attempt to manage the worn out developmentalist agenda. The negative consequences of national economic instability were particularly evident in Lima, where 18% of the homes were without electricity and 36% with no piped water provision; 110,000 derelict dwellings were in danger of collapse due to poor maintenance (Riofrío, 1996). The level of poverty and social inequality reached a crisis proportions due to widespread violence, chaos and corruption (Figueroa, 1998), which only aggravated the poor state of impoverished buildings in the city centre and of the poverty-ridden *barriadas*. This period was also marked by terrorist acts of insurgent guerrillas, in particular the Maoist group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path), well known for indiscriminate murder, assassination of members of rival popular movements and attacks on the metropolitan infrastructure (e.g., destruction of electricity towers around Lima). In such a difficult context, the urban poor struggled to maintain class consciousness and sustain protests against the adverse social and economic condition, normally revealing a complex political attitude that combined patterns of conservatism, and occasionally, popular radicalism (Stokes, 1991).

Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), the unexpected winner of the 1990 presidential election, came to office without any coherent plan of action, but was quickly led to adopt a draconian programme of state reforms, privatization and economic adjustments. Although some hesitant neoliberal initiatives had been tried by President Fernando Belaúnde in the early 1980s, Fujimori was by far the primary champion of neoliberalism in Peru. Between 1991 and 1998, a comprehensive privatization strategy sold more than 200 state-owned companies, as well as companies' shares, that amounted to US\$ 8.86 billion (Contreras and Cueto, 2007). After the 1992 *autogolpe* (self-coup), the already precarious democratic regime became in practice semi-dictatorial, which allowed an easy approval of a new constitution in 1993 with strong incentives to private ownership of public assets (including landed property), and facilitated access to foreign investors. The role of the government was increasingly reduced to one of general management and business promotion, while the private sector was expected to operate more freely. The principles of the neoliberal adjustment programme were in effect as orthodox as the Chilean model introduced a few decades earlier by General Pinochet, but its implementation in Peru was negatively affected by the lack of sectoral policies and by the inflexible management of government agencies (Gonzales de Olarte, 1998). In addition, neoliberal policies produced huge contradictions and serious imbalances. For example, Lima was exposed to a deluge of foreign goods, including second-hand minibuses and cars shipped from the Far East, while the country continued to export mainly traditional, primary commodities. The capital city was launched into a trajectory of mass consumption and globalized cultural influences, which inevitably affected values, relationships and loyalties (Grampone, 1999). Wages fell to levels that made it difficult for families to sustain themselves and triggered the diversification of labour portfolios and even international migration (Massey and Capoferro, 2006).

In terms of the urban development of Lima, Fujimori's focus was on the expansion of the real estate market increasingly under the influence of private construction and management companies (Peters and Skop, 2007). The notion of household as a right was absent from the 1993 Constitution, and the new policies regarded houses basically as market assets. Fujimori dismantled the mutual system inherited from the previous administration (that operated under the management of the *Banco de la Vivienda* (Housing Bank) that, in any case, had primarily supported investments in the middle class areas of the city) and also removed other assistance mechanisms for low-income neighbourhoods and the *barriadas* (Calderón Cockburn, 2005). Key decisions about urban policies were progressively centralized in the hands of the national government at the exclusion of the 49 municipal authorities that form the metropolitan region of Lima (research interview, city council officer, May 06, 2009). A new national agency called COFOPRI was established in 1996 (with financial backing from the World Bank), with responsibility for granting land titles and regularizing urban settlements. COFOPRI's purpose was informed by the ideas of De Soto (1986), who claimed that the formalization of land tenure would energize commercial transactions in a city that had the largest informal sector in the world (in proportion to its population). De Soto basically theorized that the triumph of capitalism depended on people having property titles and being able to trade them freely. His approach has been criticized for ignoring the role of collectivist approaches based on common land, and also because property values rise after titling and cause housing again to be unaffordable for the poor (Bromley, 2004).

The ideological influence of De Soto nonetheless prevailed and, consequently, COFOPRI repeatedly attempted to stimulate the circulation of capital through the concession of loans for the acquisition of family properties. In practice, COFOPRI created opportunities for siphoning public funds to real estate barons and commercial banks, especially because of home loan foreclosures and the displacement of families from the more precarious and vulnerable *barriadas* (Leonard, 2000). Fujimori also systematically manipulated the granting of property titles according to his electoral ambitions, especially because it was easier for the president to secure votes in the crowded periphery of the capital than in the remote provinces (interview, planning officer of the metropolitan administration of Lima, April 29, 2009). In the second half of the 1990s, around half a million titles were granted by COFOPRI, but the number of invasions aimed to establish new *barriadas* in Lima was higher than ever. In the period between 1993 and 1998 alone, a total of 208 additional *barriadas* were established (Calderón Cockburn, 2005), the majority located on steep slopes prone to erosion and landslides (as in the upper parts of Comas, Chorrillos, Villa María del Triunfo and especially San Juan de Lurigancho) (see Figure 1). In 1998 Lima had 1,980 *barriadas* with more than 2.6 million inhabitants and around 38% of the metropolitan population (Calderón Cockburn, 2005).



Figure 1. Overview of the periphery of Lima (photo by A. Ioris)

Due to the growing connection to globalized markets, new spaces had to be created for the small, but highly influential, population elite (Chion, 2002). In the central areas of the city, neoliberal housing renovation was influenced by North American architecture styles, which resembled the previous experience at the turn of the 20th Century, when Lima had been remodelled according to French and English aesthetic preferences to satisfy the demands of the wealthier strata of the population (Ludeña, 2002). The most emblematic architectural project of the neoliberal phase is probably the shopping centre Larcomar, built in 1998 in the scarp of Miraflores, with investments of more than US\$ 40 million (see Figure 2). High-income residences and service offices were increasingly accommodated in multi-story buildings (e.g., international banks and companies in the affluent neighbourhood of San Isidro), while the low-income areas of the city continued to expand horizontally, up the hills and in ever more distant locations. In effect, the growing circulation of money, commodities and information that followed neoliberalizing policies did little to mitigate the stratification of social and political opportunities (Roberts and Portes, 2006), while inequality, unemployment and the informal economy increased significantly (Díaz Orreta, 1997). Because of escalating levels of crime, city enclaves in the form of gated communities became common features in high and medium income areas (Plöger, 2007) (see Figure 3). These were a clear indication of structural inequalities shaping the modernization of Lima.



Figure 2. Larcomar shopping centre in Miraflores (photo by A. Ioris)

Notwithstanding investments in the modernization of affluent areas, for those living in the *barriadas* and other peripheral neighbourhoods access to public services and a reasonable quality of life still remained a daily problem at the end of the Fujimori administration (Joseph, 2005). According to SASE (2002), only 11% of the settlements regularized by COFOPRI in 2001 had acceptable standards of public services (i.e., water, sanitation, telephone, streets and housing construction material). Parks and recreation areas were progressively privatized, in tandem with restrictions in the access of low-income people to shopping centres (essentially through ‘face-control’ and the exclusion of suspicious mestizos) (Plyushteva, 2009). Urban violence became an ever more serious issue; between 2000 and 2011 the rate of crimes increased by 80% in Lima, while kidnaps increased by 196% and homicides by 233% (according to the Observatory of Criminality of the Attorney General’s office.⁵ Instead of isolated problems, those circumstances were associated with the economy’s neoliberalization and deteriorating income levels of Lima’s workforce in Lima between 1987 and 2002, especially among non-unionized, informal workers (Verdera, 2007).

⁵ Database available at www.mpfm.gob.pe



Figure 3. Gated Communities in the municipality of Chorrillos, an increasingly common feature of Lima (photo by A. Ioris)

After the turbulent political transition that followed the unforeseen resignation of Fujimori (caused by devastating evidence of large-scale and systematic corruption), a new president – US trained economist Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006) – came to office promising to overcome the political and economic shortcomings of the previous governments, which had left the capital fraught with institutional uncertainties, poor policy coordination and deteriorating environmental conditions. In 2006, under Toledo's instructions, the public fund MiVivienda started to finance the purchase, improvement and construction of popular households. Other projects and plans were also launched with the purpose of alleviating the housing deficit (e.g., Techo Propio, Bono Familiar Habitacional). However, the perverse side of those initiatives was over reliance on the private sector for the construction of new housing units, while the state largely withdrew from direct construction interventions. Under free market competition, builders showed a preference for middle class residences instead of less profitable units for the low-income population (interview, national government policy-maker, May 17, 2009). In governance terms, decentralization and democratization only marginally improved in Lima, because national government authorities retained a firm control over decisions and resources (Dietz and Tanaka, 2002).

The manipulation of urban planning to assist primarily the interests of private investors and the political goals of the elite took an even more distinctive and somewhat surprising turn during the second term in office of President García (2006-2011). In clear contrast with the confusing policies of his first government in the 1980s, García reinforced the pro-market strategies of both Fujimori and Toledo, which in practice meant prolonging high levels of sub-employment, exploitation and poor quality of life for most of those living in the peripheries of Lima. Although the rate of absolute poverty among the population of Lima decreased from 30.9% to 14.1% during the García administration, the level of inequality (calculated as Genie coefficient) remained practically the same during Garcia's term of office (INEI, 2010). The prevailing argument of politicians and city planners was that persistent housing problems were the result of limited access to financial services (e.g., Gwinner, 2007), rather than an element of sustained political and social discrimination toward the low-income population. For instance, real estate investments continued to prioritize middle-class and upper-class neighbourhoods, whereas the majority of the population had to find its own means to finance the construction and augmentation of modest households (interview, community leader, April 05, 2009). The persistence of a very uneven urban landscape and the problematic attention to popular needs, despite the constant interventions of the central government in the housing sector and other municipal projects of questionable quality (typically without much coordination with local authorities), is considered by Riofrío (2010: 80) as an urban model of "housing without the city", which was transferred from Chile to Peru alongside the neoliberal project.

Other disturbing factors associated with the spread of neoliberalism in Lima were the entrenched racial divisions and the territorialized manifestations of racism by the European-descendant ruling elites. Racism remained a central feature of the social landscape of Lima, even if cleverly dissimulated by multiple discursive and figurative devices (Golash-Boza, 2010). It persisted in many forms even during the governments of the Japanese-descendant Fujimori and the Amerindian-descendant Toledo. Despite the apparent merging of cultures and the rhetoric of ethnic tolerance, prejudice against Indians, mestizos and Afro-Peruvians included subtle processes of discrimination based on personal characteristics and racial origin as well as economic, social and cultural attributes (de la Cadena, 1998). Either explicit or implicit, racism has obvious consequences in terms of asymmetrical access to public service, for example given the higher proportion of mestizos among the poor without access to mains water supply. The maintenance of class- and race-based discrimination has been helped by the decline of traditional forms of public organization and labour unionism.

On the whole, structural and diffuse urban inequalities, which had characterized the earlier phase of national development and urban growth in the middle of the 20th Century based on the export of primary goods and import substitution, were magnified under the market-friendly 'conservative

modernization' of the capital. During most of the 2000s decade, the Peruvian economy maintained rates of economic growth around 6% per year, but the levels of inequality remained significantly high, while state investments in poverty reduction were on average much below the Latin American average (CEPAL, 2010). If one of the main results of sustained neoliberal policies was to incorporate part of the city into the mass global society, large segments of the population continued to live in irregular settlements, depending on informal jobs and coping with high levels of uncertainty and socioeconomic risk. The (limited) industrial park of Lima lost economic importance and was partially dismantled in favour of the unrelenting commercialization of goods mostly imported from Asia. Even the election of President Ollanta Humala of a nominal left-wing party did not produce any significant change in neoliberal policies and their repercussions on urban trends. On the contrary, despite the circumstantial decline of poverty and social inequality, the pattern of uneven development (between urban and rural areas, and within metropolitan Lima) intensified, political institutions remained fragile and over-reliance on the export of primary commodities posed serious uncertainties about the future (Arana, 2014).

It can be concluded that sociospatial inequalities in Lima are the result of several decades of socioeconomic instability and national development subordinated to the narrow interests of the middle classes and the small governing elite. Neoliberal reforms introduced since 1990, primarily to address macroeconomic instability and restore investment and growth, significantly impacted the landscape and functioning of the capital city. Those changes followed market-friendly priorities and, in the end, exacerbated existing disparities and imbalances. Marked asymmetries in terms of socioeconomic opportunities and political influence were translated into a more-or-less explicit pattern of housing segregation, uneven public services and disguised forms of racism. Political changes, from the semi-authoritarianism of Fujimori to the formal rule of law after the year 2000, did not produce any significant alteration in neoliberal priorities. Quite the opposite, the hegemonic ideology of free market globalization continued to affect both the national economy (increasingly reliant on the unregulated exploitation of mineral resources) and the urban processes of interaction. The growing troubles, as well as the contestation, of the neoliberalized modernization of Lima discussed in the previous pages can be more specifically understood with reference to the water industry, as analyzed in the following section.

Water Problems in an Increasingly Neoliberalized Urban Context

One of the most evident demonstrations of the tensions associated with neoliberalizing policies in Peru is the contrast between burgeoning economic activity and the persistent shortage of water in many parts of the capital city. Lack of public water services continue to affect the more distant and marginalized areas (where around 5% of population live without any access to mains water supply), at the same time that 48% of the households, in different sections of the megacity, still receive treated water of substandard quality (according to the Association for

the Promotion of National Infrastructure mentioned in RPP, 2013). Water supply to an ever-growing population is further compromised by the degradation of small river courses, the lowering water table and the deterioration of the hydraulic infrastructure. Lima's water industry is, therefore, a privileged entry point into the achievements and limitations of neoliberalizing trends. On the one hand, it should be acknowledged that there is nothing new in the insufficiencies of public water supply in Lima, which became a particularly thorny issue with large-scale internal migration and fast urban expansion in the second half of the last century. On the other hand, widespread water shortage provided an important justification for government interventions, foreign loans and multilateral cooperation projects related to water treatment and distribution.

The poor performance of water supply and sanitation services during the economic turmoil of the 1980s offered the needed excuse for incoming Fujimori to include SEDAPAL (the water company of metropolitan Lima) in the list of public utilities to be privatized (in this case, the option was for a long-term concession to private operators). Preparation for the utility's privatization in the early 1990s initially attracted significant sums of public money to be used in the mitigation of the most urgent problems (which was helped by a World Bank loan of US\$ 600 million). Consumer tariffs skyrocketed due to the reduction of state subsidies, as in the case of water, telephone and other utility charges that increased by more than 1,000% (Webb and Fernández-Baca, 1993). However, water utility privatization is never a straightforward and consensual choice in any part of the world. Because of political faltering within the government (related to the complexity and the technological risks involved) and low-key but widespread resistance among the general population, privatization was postponed several times and eventually cancelled in 1997 (interview, activist and NGO manager, April 17, 2009).

In any case, after the rigged 're-election' of Fujimori authoritarian administration in 1995, SEDAPAL embarked on a large programme of operational recovery and closer association with the private sector. The water utility of Lima received US\$ 2.44 billion of public funding (14% of total public investment and 0.5% of GDP of the 1990s), mainly for pipeline replacement and leakage control carried out by private companies working for the national government (SEDAPAL, 2005). Even so, water provision was still concentrated in higher higher-income areas, where 40% of Lima's population consumes 88% of the city's total water (CENCA, 1998). With the turbulent end of the Fujimori administration and the gradual, but timid, return to democratic rule under President Toledo, SEDAPAL faced a deteriorating financial situation, in spite of tariff increases of 97.4% from 2001 to 2008 (interview, SUNASS manager, May 10, 2009).⁶

Upon his return to power as a converted neoliberal in 2006, President García launched the programme 'Water for All' (*Agua para Todos* or APT), which

⁶ SUNASS is the national regulator of water and sanitation services.

comprised an extensive portfolio of more than 1,500 engineering works in Lima with an announced budget of around US\$ 2.3 billion. Most of the implementation was carried out through contracts, concessions and partnerships with private companies, while construction works were funded by a combination of foreign loans, private sector investments, selling of shares in the stock market and sustained tariff increases. The fragile basis of service expansion under the APT programme was emphasized in several of my interviews with SUNASS regulators and SEDAPAL staff. For instance, many of the projects 'inaugurated' under the APT label had actually been completed under previous government initiatives (interview, former SUNASS regulator, May 22, 2009). In addition, the repeated increases in water tariffs since the early 1990s enhanced the cost-recovery capacity and financial health of the utility, but did not improve the relation between SEDAPAL and the population of Lima. As mentioned in an interview with a former utility's employee, the main channel of communication between the reformed SEDAPAL and the general public has really been the water bill.

A highly sensitive issue associated with the APT programme was the mounting evidence of corruption practiced at all levels of the García administration. Corruption is an important element of the politicization of urban development because of the amount of money involved and also the electoral relevance of utility investments. In that context, as had happened during the Fujimori years, the APT programme was a main locus for corruption and populist gestures by Alan García (cf. various interviews with community leaders and NGO members, April, 2013). It was certainly no coincidence that most of the corruption accusations against President García – which were investigated by a dedicated commission in the National Congress established in 2011 – were related to projects and investments in water services carried out under the APT programme. With massive construction works in a short period of time and careless control of targets and payments, APT created favourable conditions for mismanagement and large-scale corruption. The investigative commission was presented with incriminating testimony connecting corruption in the water sector with the fraudulent granting of pardon to convicted criminals and other serious offences. After long and contentious scrutiny, a final report was produced by the commission, which in June 2014 resulted in the National Congress accusing García and members of his administration of corruption (conviction is highly unlikely due to the political allegiances of the Peruvian judiciary system).

In order to uncover the impact of policies and large-scale investments on the daily life of those with problematic access to water services, I collected data in three study areas – Pachacútec, Huaycán and Villa El Salvador – in the so-called north, east and south 'cones' of Lima, respectively (see Figure 4). These three areas were selected because they constitute fast-growing settlements with relevant, representative experiences of organized protests and grassroots mobilization. Empirical results accumulated during several months of fieldwork vividly

demonstrate social transformations, collective reactions and growing tensions associated with the advance of urban neoliberalism.

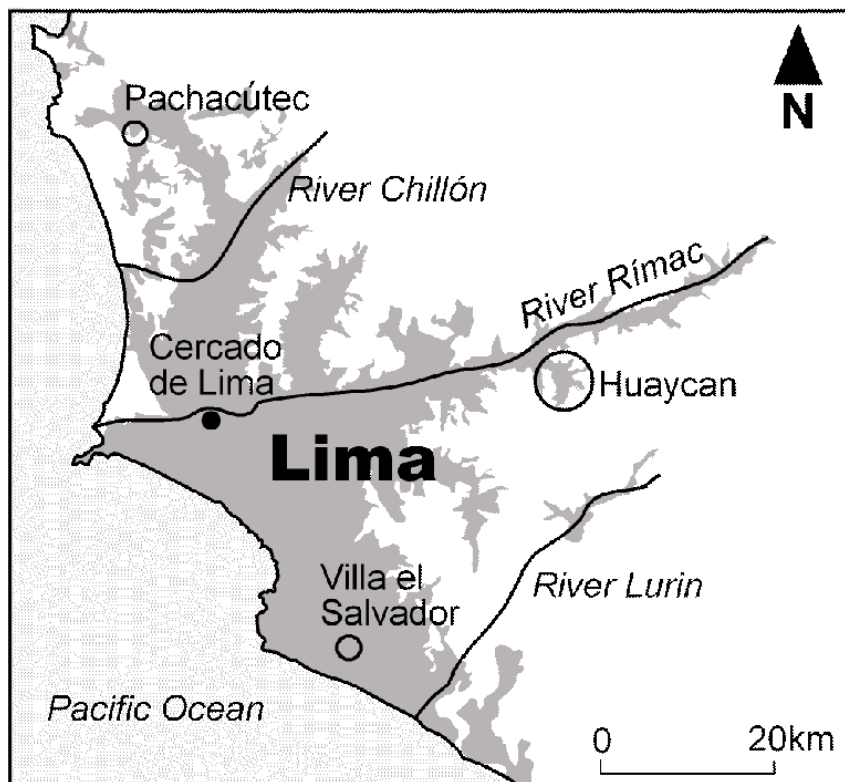


Figure 4. Lima and the case study areas

Villa El Salvador, a large municipality founded in 1971 in the south cone of Lima, has been an internationally-celebrated example of bottom-up mobilization that resulted in significant achievements. Early initiatives were inspired by a commitment to common ownership of land and community work (*faenas*), values residents associate with ancient Peruvian civilizations. During interviews in this area, many residents of Villa El Salvador described the initial importance of grassroots campaigns to secure and expand water and sanitation in the area. But the same residents expressed frustration with the electoral appropriation of community organizations and the decline of neighbourhood collaboration. Through the years, public participation became increasingly bureaucratized and fragmented, which inevitably affected the availability and the administration of public services. It was observed by a resident that:

There is a very clear reduction in community mobilization, we don't have the same willingness to protest and participate in meetings as before. (interview, community leader and former mayor, Villa El Salvador, April 24, 2009)

The now modest, fragmented reactions of the low-income inhabitants to the inconsistencies and injustices of neoliberal strategies suggest an erosion of political leadership and the difficulty, under the pervasiveness of market-friendly ideologies, to promote alternative responses to the long-lasting problems of neoliberalized metropolitan development. One main consequence is that it was still possible to see private water vendors circulating around the area in 2013, serving that part of the population that lacked access to public water supply.

Likewise in Huaycán, a large settlement that resulted from an ambitious project initiated in 1984 with the aim to give the lower social strata access to housing, the strength of grassroots mobilization has suffered from years of demagogic manipulation and misinformation used by politicians and policy-makers (particularly during the Fujimori years). In the initial phase of the settlement, water supply featured as a key element of the struggle for space in the emerging megacity. Some significant water works were built to store and distribute water to the growing number of houses, but in the 1990s the process was affected by changes in government policies and disorganization of community life under mounting political and economic pressures. Those problems were magnified by internal disagreements among community leaders and the difficulty to form more stable political alliances against the hegemonic pattern of urban development. The advance of neoliberalizing policies had considerable impacts on interpersonal relations and sociospatial interactions related to water allocation, use and conservation. There exists now a more formalist, distant connection between government and society (increasingly mediated by a commercial language of customer satisfaction and business administration techniques), which has contributed to growing demobilization of community strategies (according to various contacts with community leaders and NGO activists). In an interview it was stated that:

Previous community projects [in the past decades] were based on new technologies and required the organization of the community. The new projects may involve more visible interventions, but they don't help to develop other 'competencies' [capabilities] or change behaviour or the relationship between our people. (interview, local resident, Huaycán, May 04, 2009)

It is clear in this interview, and in other similar comments made by the locals, that the population is definitely not passive, but able to perceive the trends of change and, while benefiting from construction works and government programmes, the residents also express a sense of uneasiness about the manipulation of public services by politicians and business groups. In the end, there is a strange combination of criticism and submission to the pressures of urban neoliberalism. Neoliberalizing trends led to the disorganization of social movements due to an aggressive ideology of individualism and entrepreneurialism, the over-exploitation of the workforce (who has less time for community-based initiatives) and also the positive results of some plans and projects. In addition, the steady marketization of

water services has significantly affected grassroots understanding of water problems, given that the residents showed an acute resentment towards large sums of money being invested in the central areas that still left behind marginalized, low income areas. This suggests that the intensification of business transactions around water goes much further than infrastructure projects, but increasingly permeates public perception of the value of water. The values associated with water are the outcome of profound interrelations between individuals and social groups engaged in the concreteness of urban areas. Water values are qualified attributes that materialize at the interface between individual and collective preferences, market and non-market demands and local and higher scales of interaction.

Pachacútec, in the north cone of Lima, is a settlement created in 2000 with the national government-initiated transfer of a large contingent of the population from Villa El Salvador. It has experienced a similar process of community engagement to both Villa El Salvador and Huaycán, in the sense that strong activism was followed by a decline over several years due to political and economic pressures. Lack of public water supply was, since the first years, one of the main problems faced by the locals; consequently, Pachacútec became one of the priority areas for alternative water supply and sanitation schemes (such as the construction of community storage and distribution systems) supported by donations from foreign governments (e.g., Germany). However, there were serious problems with the management of these non-conventional schemes, particularly related to allegations of mismanagement of money or clashes with other forms of community organization (interview, NGO activist, April 13, 2009). Years later, at the time of the fieldwork for the present research, a micro-credit programme was again being tried in Pachacútec with the participation of a pool of national and international agencies (curiously, under the executive management of a religious American NGO). The rationale of this more recent initiative was to find solutions to water problems through the promotion of private business, especially the creation of a small sanitation market in Pachacútec. Local shops were therefore encouraged to sell sanitation equipment and toilet units, whilst project promoters try to persuade the residents to commit themselves to a loan that is paid back over two or three years. However, instead of facilitating the improvement of water and sanitation, the micro-credit project was fraught with operational difficulties and failed to reach the large majority of households due to their low credit rating (Ioris, 2012c). The experience of Pachacútec corresponds to wider neoliberal transformations in other parts of Latin America (Goldfrank and Schrank, 2009), where in order to contain potential grassroots revolts, many government policies involve cooptation and domestication of urban low-income groups via initiatives that aim to momentarily alleviate social exclusion but never address the underlying causes of social and economic inequalities (de Souza, 2009).

These three areas share commonalities with many other parts of Lima, where the announcement of government investments and the promotion of new programmes related to water and sanitation were used to undermine the fragile

resistance against hegemonic urban policies. Modernizing projects have largely failed to address essential demands of the majority of the low-income population, but rather exacerbated internal divisions and left behind sections of the settlements without access to public water supply. On the other hand, despite multiple, unfulfilled expectations in many parts of the megacity periphery, those who are negatively affected by recent urban trends cannot be considered as passive victims of social and economic changes. Without romanticizing the urban poor and ignoring their internal antagonisms, it can be held that individuals and social groups develop, in unpredictable and often highly creative ways, peculiar understandings of their situations and actively take on the limited opportunities available. Likewise, the election of a left-wing mayor in 2010 (Villarán), despite the limited power and resources at her disposal, served to highlight the narrowness of national policies informed by neoliberal tenets. In any case, Villarán was replaced by her predecessor Luis Castañeda, who ran a populist campaign, supported by powerful groups, and won the majority of votes in the October 2014 election. The future prospects of the Latin American megacity, Lima in particular, ultimately depend, on the outcome of the clashes between hegemonic policies and the daily struggle for recognition and sociospatial inclusion.

Conclusions: Reinforcing and Challenging the Neoliberalized Megacity

The previous pages examine some central elements of the conversion of Lima into an emerging megacity under the influence of neoliberalizing pressures. It proved to be a highly complex experience that connects, in contingent ways, past and present tendencies, as well as local, national and international spheres of interaction. The discussion initially centred around the impact of new urban policies on urban dynamics and on the organization of the different sectors of the metropolitan region. The capital of Peru constitutes a specific chapter of the urban geography of Latin America, especially because of a range of sociopolitical relationships that end up perpetuating and magnifying water scarcity and water management problems. If Lima, as an emerging megacity, has functioned as the catalyst of macroeconomic recovery and the insertion of Peru into globalized markets, it has also been the incubator of mounting tensions and the locus of multiple legitimating efforts by local and national elites. For instance, infrastructure investments and novel approaches to water services have been an integral element of an increasingly neoliberalized urban landscape where large sums of money circulate between state agencies and private companies, and the population is treated as utility customers.

The experience of water supply in Lima shows also that the neoliberalization of Latin American cities happens not only through the formal delegation of services and utilities to the private sector. On the contrary, one of the main lessons learned from the research is that success of neoliberalizing strategies depends much more on the intensification and manipulation of investments, contracts and revenues in a way that allows the flexible involvement of national and international companies. In that context, claims about the pursuit of higher

levels of operational efficiency have attempted to hide a business-friendly environment and techno-bureaucratic rationality that systematically denies the underlying political causes of water scarcity. The mainstream discourse ignores that the contrasts between water services and the environmental impacts of different urban zones and social groups are not a mere deficiency of neoliberal urbanization, but represent an active mechanism for the functioning of economy and society according to conservative modernization priorities. In other words, the marked imbalances that shape the landscape of Lima are actively reproduced and even exacerbated in order to prolong the shelf-life of current urban policies and businesses activities. The intention to convert Lima into a modern and globalized Latin American metropolis is founded in those asymmetric geometries of power disguised as the new society of a prosperous Peru.

Genuine alternatives to that long tendency of urban inequalities, reinforced by neoliberalizing adjustments since 1990, require not only a critical understanding of the connections between past and present, but also between personal and interpersonal attitudes with national and international scales of interaction. Consequently, there is a perennial need for conceptual and methodological approaches able to reconcile Latin American urban processes with wider development pressures, sectoral demands and sociospatial relations. Novel academic interpretations should deal with the failure of hegemonic urban policies anchored in mechanisms such as increased mass consumption, informal jobs and the influence of large corporations. The complexity of Lima calls for a nuanced analytical and methodological treatment able to identify the causes of persistent problems and alternatives for the future. In addition, the daily life in three studied communities of Lima indicates the weakening of community mobilization and widespread individualism as adjunct elements of the expansion of neoliberal urban transformations. Policy-making and investment programmes have been based on commercial-like relationships between public utilities and the general public, which end up reinforcing mechanisms of alienation and political disorganization. Critical scholars have, therefore, the responsibility to assess those complex, cross-scale phenomena in a way that helps to remove pre-established conceptions about the origin of problems and possible solutions (as in the case of the conventional emphasis on additional water supply while ignoring the long, politicized trajectory of water scarcity). As observed by Harvey (2008: 23), the “right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city”. Certainly the spatial and political disputes about the configuration of its large metropolises constitute one the most crucial debates concerning the present and the future of Latin America.

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