

## **COPING WITH INFORMALITY AND ILLEGALITY IN HUMAN SETTLEMENTS IN DEVELOPING CITIES**

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### **INFORMAL SETTLERS IN LIMA**

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This exposition is the result of the questioning, discussion and analysis of the situation observed in the peripheral settlement areas of the city of Lima, where the most extents invasion movements of Perú are taking place. Marcela Corrales, Carlos Cassaretto, Guisella Odiaga and Rossana Poblet comprise part of the small sector of professionals concerned about the problems in these spontaneous informal settlements. Their experiences and shared ideas structure this presentation.

#### INTRODUCTION

Informal settlements in Perú can be called mainly *barriadas* (*groups of neighbourhoods*), *pueblos jóvenes* (*young towns*), or *asentamientos humanos* (*human settlements*). They originate from an extreme lack of affordable places to live in adverse economic situation. The original founders of the biggest manifestation of informal settlements in Lima came from the different provinces of the country more than a half century ago. The third generation of this marginalized people is continuing the process of informality, without solutions at the governmental level. The reduced attention

oriented to the provinces of the country is increasing this migration problem, and its consequences are more and more serious.

The first groups of migrants chose their living place by proximity to employment opportunities. Nowadays the living places for young families in informal settlements are in their parents' or close relatives' house, or alternately by means of new invasions in remote, inadequate sites, such as dangerous ravines or sanitary filings where services can hardly be supplied. The high cost of providing services, as the cost of transport, and the sensation of distance and aggressiveness in these sites, mostly desert or steep areas, make the living situation more difficult for the population. In these settlements even the houses in the most precarious conditions represent the main property of the families. As the economic situation remains adverse for most of the population in the country and the main working alternatives are located in the big cities, informality becomes an increasingly viable concrete alternative.

In their 1990 study, Norma Adams, and Jürgen Golte outline another important consequence resulting from migration: the

depopulation of rural areas as young people in between fifteen and forty years old migrate to bigger cities looking for employment opportunities. Also the political, and administrative systems, as well as the traditional religious organisations are affected, and the remaining population in the village must dedicate their time to cover those activities, leading to a transformation in the economic system. The most important consequence of the changes in the productive structure can be the abandonment of the less productive areas of land. The alternative to this lack of manual labour is the hiring of migrants from the surrounding areas payed with the money sent by the relatives in the city. The group living in the city receive part of the production and utilise or commercialise it, eliminating the chains of intermediaries. This inverse situation happens with the products elaborated in the city, which are sold in the communities of origin. Also the new generations of families growing in the city maintain their relationships by forming small scale family industries where all the relatives participate. These relationships explain the importance of family economies in the migration process.

### THE MEANING OF INFORMALITY

The first invasions started in the Forties. Before long the urban popular organisations leading them started an autonomy movement at the State and dominant class which peaked in 1979-80 with the formation of the Federation of Young Towns and Popular Urbanisation of Lima and Callao. The first major group of spontaneous settlements in Lima were originally characterised as “urbanizaciones clandestinas” (*clandestine urbanisations*), and in 1953 they were officially designated “barriadas” by the National Bureau of Planning and Urbanism. As Ludeña indicates, the criteria to define this qualification were related to the materials of the constructions (brick, adobe, cane or waste materials), the level

of advance of the building construction and the supply of services and equipment (stable or slow development, moderated advance, violent development), and mainly the ownership of invaded lands (State land, private property or rented plots). As a basis for the recent studies of the *barriadas* situation, the following new proposals were developed to redefine the qualifications and to better understand the *barriadas*:

- José Matos Mar (1955) - geographic location related to natural elements or urban areas, urban configuration in regular or irregular grids, and degree of isolation, integration and relations between the *barriadas* and to the city.
- National Fund of Health and Social Welfare (1959) - besides location and some social and economic aspects, it considered the reason of formation, way of inhabitation, land tenure at general and individual level, location related to topography, and previous use of lands.
- PLANDEMET – Carlos Delgado (1967) – understanding the *barriadas* as a phenomenon of multiple urban realities, considering geographic, morphologic and social criteria along with the interests of an operative intervention of transformation in each *barriada* under an operational typology consisting of 8 types of *barriadas* and *barrios* in internal or peripheral locations and with different consolidation levels.
- Alfredo Rodríguez, Helan Jaworski (1969) – adds the time and number of plots to the previous proposals. Time was referred to the period of invasion and the strength of the movement and its legal situation, the number of plots referred to the size of the *barriadas*, by that time between 770 and 3735 plots. This proposal also establishes a housing classification considering the level of permanence of the physical structure from provisional to permanent, by the intensity of use of interior spaces defined by the

number of users in each room, and according to the whole surrounding area the physical consolidation of infrastructure and services, and the housing density considered from 200 to 400 inhabitants per square meter.

As the manifestations of spontaneous settling became stronger and more organised as a movement, the terms and field of study have changed from a formal and physical appreciation to a more complex social and economic one. The result is an inability to classify and understand the logic and the formal alternative solutions to this type of development which is undertaken to satisfy peoples' necessities and accomplish personal challenges under extreme conditions

#### INVASION PROCESS: SPATIAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the city, the urban development is about technical and material conditions but also about social movement dynamics. The pattern of settlement establishment by invasion begins with the organisation of a group of people who might have a previous relationship or who share the same necessity of a living place. This group is always organised by some leader experienced in organisation, such as the general secretary of a communal organisation. In this relation, people involved should also trust the leaders as much as they accept the conditions of dwelling in a specific location.

The existence of barren lands owned by the state and a consolidated organisational level of local groups are the conditioning elements that allowed these actions to take place. The moment of invasion occurs when the situation is propitious, as when the government loses popularity or credibility or during special dates as Holy days (Christmas, Labour Day) because if the

invaders manage to stay for more than 24 hours without being removed, they can apply for tenure through a legal process. For that reason there is a lot of violence on the first day of an invasion.

As it has been studied by Frias (1989), during the Eighties, the activities of these groups evolved from urban concerns to economic and political interests. The existing situation and conditions were different and more difficult for each successive group. As the invasions became a more difficult to carry out, the relations inside the groups became stronger, so as to encourage the group to maintain the objective of integrating the city. The dynamics of these organisations started to modify the physical structure of the city, the Urban Popular Organisations produced new habitats and urbanised the city; they nurtured new water and transport networks without planning or consciousness of the long-term effects. Later they created new economic alternatives within a huge illegal/informal structure, and the widely-dispersed power they managed became strong enough to be considered by the government as an important and active part of the society. The existing conditions that became the starting point of this transformations and recognition were:

1. The end of an urban development cycle. Lack of nearby lands made clear the necessity of State participation in planning. The differentiation in the supply of services created different living conditions and different organisational frameworks and goals.
2. The economic crisis created new conditions for organisation and daily life in popular districts. The need for survival generated the expansion of organisations that provided food and health care, defining the collective and organised participation of women. Informal work proliferated, and independent artisanal labour increased, achieving important levels of organisation.

3. There was a new prominence of popular movements in the political arena of the city. Settlers were actually recognised as operating actors with interests and individual force in political life. Settlers provided a datum-line for social and political actors of the city. The State consideration of these organisations was possible when they were subordinated.
4. There was an increase in violence where settlers and some polemical organisations were developed. Structural violence became a daily occurrence, produced by a great differentiation in social relations. Also some of the government sectors refused to differentiate between defense of rights and subversion, which had mainly negative consequences for popular leaders.
5. The municipality recovered use and became determinant in city life. It acquired new functions in relation to the development of Lima. The complex and changing relationship between the district municipality and popular organisations created the necessity of producing particular alternatives. The strengthening of local government during the Sixties and from time to time afterward, was oriented to address local demands of the population all around the country, but as these local governments were formed by the elite groups who refused to resign their patrimonial interests, the actions in favour of the poorest communities were not effective and the migration process continued as it had before.

Inhabitants in these spontaneous settlements define the characteristics of their living environments over the base of their cultural traditions. As many of them have external origins, their family composition, family structure and use of spaces in the house is different, as is their idea about house building technology and way of managing it, like when they make use of the organisational capacity of the population.

There is also a widespread rejection of “alternative” materials as their use is considered a step behind in the process of acceptance in the urban society, where high-rise building and two story concrete or brick houses are the most common type of constructions. For the new constructions in brick and concrete, or in wood, cane or some other temporary materials the lack of constructional knowledge increases the problem of precarious buildings which make poor use of materials. At the first moment of invasion and during the initial period the materials used in construction are usually collected from different places or represent a minimal investment to the families, this situation lasts until the security of the plot is ensured. As for the family roles, men’s functions are oriented to the physical aspects, and women’s to the administrative aspects and to the care of the family, so in some cases the physical improvements of the dwelling depend on the men’s interest alone. Recently there is a tendency to involve women in broader aspects of the settlement dynamics as their qualifications in constructional matters become apparent and because their receptivity to change is greater than the men’s.

## POLITICS

The first attempt to regulate the spontaneous settlement in the city was made in 1961 with a law of sanitation and legalisation of existing *barriadas*. This action was attractive to the settlers as it offered legality and promoted self-construction for housing and technical assistance for the supply of services. This technical aspect was easily neglected as it was considered unnecessary. Later, the informality problem was avoided by the government as they did not prepare any program for very low income housing, and the latest attempts to arrange legal aspects of housing and land property have been mainly oriented by political interests with terrible consequences for the long term growth of the city.

At the bigger scale, the Development Plans are mostly assumed by local governments following this process: they propose a project that is presented to the community which has studied and discussed it previously. The confidence level between the government and the population is the most important starting point for a good relationship and it is only possible to develop concerted plans where the community strengthens its own authority and shares the leadership. With the current situation in Perú, while the central government is incapable of assuming all of its responsibilities, the capability of these local organisations is the most practical and effective instrument for improving living conditions.

All these processes of informal settlement are supported by different types of organisations. The Neighbourhood Organisations take charge of providing for the initial collective necessities such as the consolidation of the settlement, the legal aspects and the supply of basic services. The organisations that remain permanently active are the Popular Surviving Organisations which solve the basic ongoing needs of the group, such as food and health. As the Community-based Organisations discuss the legal aspects and have a clearly defined activity, their actions can be seen as oriented by some specific political tendency, which is the main cause of internal fights and problems that delay the provision of services. Their methods for achieving their objectives can be: a) demanding actions when the group confronts the state or a private institution to compromise in an specific problem solution, or b) self-made actions when solutions are achieved by their own means in a quiet process – which is the next step after the demanding actions used to solve an specific problem have positive results (Frias 1989).

Until now, there have been very few proposals for housing projects, land planning or relocation of settlements for the lowest income groups. In most cases political interests have controlled these actions, and the result is the permanence of the temporary invasions or, in recent times, emergency proposals for alternate living sites for people invading private property. On the other hand, these massive movements of population rapidly outgrow official projections. Planning under these conditions is extremely difficult, even more so when there is no effective and conscious action by the government.

Th lack of clear objectives and long term vision for their activities develops into partial and individual actions where problems are not related into a whole. The main consequences of these narrow visions are the partial representation of the settlers interests, and the difficult relations between the different organisations in the neighbourhood.

## ECONOMY

Developing countries take part of globalised economy, and their actions are directed from the main cities, as Lima does in the case of Perú. Lima has been an economical centre since colonial times. The accumulated wealth generated in all of the country appeared “*as base of consumption and richness accumulation in the capital, generating a vast market on imported and craftsman goods*” (Adams and Golte 1990:34). Actually Lima concentrates economical, legal, and political powers as all the institutions and production centres related to them, which generates most of the rents of the country, the greatest employment opportunities and the possibility to offer production in the market. In addition, the

most important and oversized market and the big mass of consumers are located in this city, and for that reason it is supposed to be the most important place to look for working opportunities.

In order to take part of this centralised structure, the “marginal” population generates an artisanal development of the same industries considered successful as it represents at least the 42 percent of Gross National Product; they create a parallel market with the same kind of products offered in the legal market, at optimal quality and with much lower prices. Their small industries generate less pollution, utilise local raw materials and employ an important part of the population; but they need to be settled close to this place of dynamics, where they can access specialised knowledge that they adapt to their specific state. As Adams and Golte explain, (1990:43) *“the supply of cheap manual labour, in front of expensive machinery... makes that the organisation of the production in less technological ways can result competitive although is less productive”*, this tendency allows the emergence of many intermediate forms of production. This background of employment opportunities was originated “as capitalist industrialism was not able to welcome the manual labour of the migrants. They began to generate one economical category based on their own rules, partly reproducing early capitalism forms apparently archaic in their organisation of production and in their

This huge number of people has been able to grow illegally without being brought within law; because the government has had no way of knowing about their activities. Also the law itself

## SOCIETY

technical procedures, but improving the dynamics of urban growing. (Adams and Golte 1990:74)

The precarious situation in the numerous newer *barriadas* presents the same characteristics as the previous ones, but the economic conditions and new physical and social issues derived from this superficial way of solving problems present a bigger challenge to the popular organisations which have to strengthen their action capacity. Depending on the characteristics of the place where they settle, people find out different solutions to develop economic activities to subsist, such as informal commerce or small industry. In some cases their progress is successful enough to fulfill most of their ambitions; the same that will prove their triumph in the community they come from, to which they remain close for different reasons, such as economic or familial engagements.

Migrants apply all their knowledge and imagination to survive in these adverse conditions, as Adams and Golte indicate (1990:86), the fundamental fact to confront familiar survival in precarious conditions is the use of the domestic working time available, in diverse activities that can allow for income generation or the improvement of housing conditions. These complementary activities might also be turned into familiar business around which revolves the economic activity of the domestic unit. This cultural tradition of the rural Andean families' economy can end in the creation of urban self-employment.

was extremely costly for them, so the easiest alternative is to get rid of all law and regulations and move to a situation of total liberty to start to produce.

The economic situation from recent years has been negative for most of the population in the country. In the informal settlements, where the sense of community is still strong, the survival of the population is based on mutual help. The main organisations that

push the community during the first stages of invasion, legalisation of the settlement, and supply of services and infrastructure often lose strength and diminish their activities after this period and become mainly political organisations. The small base groups that attend the basic needs of the community, such as food and health fill the need for organisation labour. Mainly the women that stay in the settlement to take care of their families or to work in home develop these communal activities; in some cases they receive support on small local projects by organised groups, such as the church or some NGOs. All the profits acquired by means of the work and social organisation of the population, are usually associated with some institution, not necessarily related to the government (Adams and Golte 1990:42)

When the prospect of individual solutions to problems seems impossible, people join to unite efforts and look for solutions in a communal way. The actual formation and diversification of small organisations within the settlements shows this. These groups are giving collective answers to necessities that had before been solved at the individual or family level, such as food. Their labour also goes beyond merely attending the ones in the most difficult situations by the co-operation of all the group, as they do with sick people, kids or single mothers. But the fact of being part of this surviving organisations is not a source of pride in the community, as it reveals a precarious situation to the neighbourhood.

The migration of younger generations requires a preparation based on the relationship the old migrants keep with the community, which gives them an ideological knowledge about the insertion models and the detail of the necessary elements for a successful experience. Also the established migrants might require the continuation of this migration process to count on manual labour for their companies or household help. (Adams and Golte 1990:54)

There is a whole social structure of discrimination between the different groups related to the social mobility they sustain as its main objectives. The territory starts a redefinition process where as a matter of fear and nostalgia to the past, the present inhabitants, traditional *limeños*, are displaced to peripheral *suburban* districts where services, facilities and new infrastructure is accommodated; the growing population in the urban territory take possession of the place they fight for and adjust it to their necessities. As most of these people come from diverse places and have different habits some friction is generated between the different groups; also the time of permanence in the city is considered as a condition of superiority. For native *limeños* the invaders in the city destroy it, make it uglier, and take possession of public spaces. As for the old settlers of this *barriadas*, the newer invaders represent a lower category group as most of the times they have already improved their life conditions and this new settlers are at the starting point of a new independent life. These changes which originate in the city are not major considerations in the social structure and become a normal situation even when they represent a great conflict of people sharing the same spaces, stimulating urban violence. These differences and conflicts are taken also to the political groups in power, mainly composed of urban people who maintain a segregationist point of view of this situation and do not propose actions to avoid or stop it.

At the beginning the native urban inhabitants felt uncomfortable and afraid of this new group seizing the city, while the migrants felt very proud of themselves, emphasising their mutual help attitude and their spirit of work and overcoming obstacles. They also considered the locals as lazy people satisfied with the status quo who didn't care about their living situation (Adams and Golte 1990:88-89). This long period of forced cultural interchange in the city has created a new fused cultural strengthening process, as it

has been accepted in the different social groups, but is not still considered in the same way for the population. People with Andean roots have a special admiration for urban culture and urban people admire the freedom of popular culture, but in both cases there is not real appreciation of equality, but hostility, between the population.

In order to obtain the success in their insertion in the urban society, migrants consider education as an important instrument of ascension; but only if it goes together with hard work and dedication. This process of education can include university,

## CONCLUSION

The city of Lima is continuously confronting contradictory situations: it is chaos and contrast. The residential neighbourhoods have quiet places and some nice public spaces for the neighbours contrasting with the chaotic main streets that link these oases to the rest of the city. This chaos is accentuated in the historical centre of the city and in the peripheral areas, until it reaches a level that is barely acceptable. In these areas where the living conditions are very hard, human violence is permanent, the environment is aggressively hot or cold, community life is lacking, and where there are no spaces for distraction the informality is developed in a very natural and free way.

Viewed from the spatial and organisational perspective, this situation of marginality should not be accepted because of the consequences of this uncontrollable growth of the city. There are great problems emerging over weak bases that will explode in the course of the time, such as urban violence, unsafe buildings and sites, sanitary problems, pollution, etc. The existing local organisational structure should be considered as a possible way of

technical, or specialised studies in artisan offices that will be exercised in the future. This improvement educational attainment will allow them to obtain social control and self confidence about their situation. Most of the time migrants coming from provinces create organisations to maintain their links. These organisations provide the context for socialisation, serve as a psychic shock absorber by means of an oriented group conduct, help to maintain the system of affiliation, and postpone the total cultural integration and assimilation to the life of the city. (Adams and Golte 1990:69)

accessing the population and as a government strategy to enable them to participate in the effective solution of their many problems.

Shelter improvements are actually less important for the population than development planning. Individual efforts of different communities can be found to create better conditions for public life, but it depends mainly on their own interest in improving living conditions. Municipalities are compromised in these affairs as soon as they don't recognise other function besides urban education and health. Even though there is an increasing recognition of the rural and marginal areas of their jurisdiction, they are commonly left aside or, at best, the intervention in them is the minimal possible as to obtain popularity during elections.

In the other hand, there is a very big and powerful movement of people changing established structures to accommodate themselves in society and survive. The population living in informality have a big awareness of the changing the face of the city, they have big expectations and there are lots of successful experiences of improving the settlements into better places for living and having access to credit for development. Sometimes this decision of leaving their place of origin goes against their expectations, but it is also the only possible effective alternative

with the potential to be a very useful support. They are creating alternatives to solve amazing problems in totally adverse situations, and manage to make them work, improve and develop.

As long as these people lack the basic tools for development, and the central government avoids its responsibility to create strategies and alternatives for all the population without political interests behind them this problem will continue. One should not underestimate the power of the so-called minority groups, such as women, and children, if the latter will construct the new society and the former are the ones rescuing it.

In the present situation of the country, the informal development is supported mainly by personal ambitions rather than by needs. Living conditions in informal residential areas such as *barriadas* or slums is as hard as in rural areas, and in both cases people manage to succeed in very different and creative ways. It is possible for these people to live in precarious conditions as soon as they can count on food, health and shelter. The authentic needs are related to satisfying their personal aspirations of social ascent and adequate way of living, considering the resources and possibilities that can only be obtained in the big cities.

The physical aspects of the houses are not considered the most important quality for the people in the settlements. Physical quality

becomes an important objective as soon as the people feel confident on the security of their plot. At this stage the improvement of living conditions depends exclusively in an individual interest, so, conditional to the priorities of the family, the dwelling building will remain as a very basic hut or a three-story house made of concrete and brick. A big concrete house is the ideal model for most of the population, and sometimes the obvious impossibility to finance one discourages the head of the family who may reject small progressive improvements to the house.

On the other hand, this spontaneous process can complicate some governmental planning strategies as the land keeps on being occupied by spontaneous settlements in an indiscriminate way. The lack of plans and programs oriented to these marginal groups, or their justified fear and real risk of being disfavoured in a formal process or traditional situation, without the priority and maybe not even the opportunity to occupy these lands as they represent an investment assumed by the government, is a major problem. The solutions are seemingly distant because of the economic situation in the country, meaning most of the plans and actions are concentrated in the biggest cities, preserving their attraction to rural people who have no other alternatives to improve their living conditions.

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