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THE MULTI-SCALAR PRODUCTION OF THE URBAN PERIPHERY IN THE REGIONS OF VALPARAÍSO AND SANTIAGO, CHILE. CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL ELEMENTS

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The primary end of this paper is to understand the rapid horizontal extension of the Metropolitan Area of Santiago, Chile (MAS) and of Valparaíso, Chile (MAV) from and innovative theoretical perspective. This urban process is triggered, in part, by the social housing policies implemented by the Chilean capitalistic state. In our construct we place special attention on the power relations that are established amongst a variety of public and private stakeholders operating on different geographic scales: from public official working for the national state apparatus to neighborhood leaders and residents of newly constructed social housing projects.

The theoretical and methodological framework here proposed is based on number of theoretical developments, like: the multi-scalar deployment of power, the circular nature of power, the idea that every power arrangement is sustained only if a capillarity between the «powerful» and the «powerless» is at work. Our theoretical turn, then, puts power at the core for understanding urban development and its effects on the social and spatial realms. This theoretical movement allowed us to complement ideas put forward by such researchers as Capel, Castells, Harvey and Santos.

In more specific term, and following theoretical ideas derived from the work of Clegg (1989), Foucault (1979, 1980) González & Healey (2005) and others, we understand power as omnipresent and productive force that creates discourses of thrust, relations of dominance and/or control, and a specific power arrangement. From our point of view, power is at the core of any project. Each individual or institution involved in the social production of housing projects for poor families —in particular— hold specific interests that they try to move forward through strategies and tactics. From our perspective, even poor families dwelling in

peripheral social housing complexes retain the possibility of choice, although they appear at a first glance subdued to structural constraints. The local residents, for example, can deploy a series of strategies (resisting, mobilizing, and pressuring other actors) to advance specific interests. It follows that the structural scenario not only imposes limits, but it also open avenues to challenge those that hold more resources to exert power. Human beings represent, then, «structured or situated actor»; that is actors are influence but not determine by the existing social system (Giddens, 1984).

Power is understand here as an omnipresent relations circulating in different geographical scales, namely: the social system (the more general level), the social structure (a mediator between the local and the national/global) and the level of the episode (the more immediate environment where people perform their daily activities). Is this circulation that allows capillarity to «stick» in a given socio-territorial scenario. If capillarity is disrupted it will necessarily lead to conflict and the rearrangement of power relations. Following this idea, the questions that take precedence are: in what ways are the local residents —as structured agents— influenced by the structural scenario? ¿Have they counter-discourses developed and/or deployed strategies to challenge those individuals and institutions operating at more general levels (regional, national)? Here we touch a long-lasting discussions between those who conceptualize social structure as coercing individual and those researchers that place considerable attentions to the local sphere and its possibility to affect broader structures that attempt to normalize them (the so called «structure-agency debate»).

Acknowledging that any theoretical construct needs to be operationalized in concrete empirical settings, the second main sections of the paper deals with methodological issues: How can power relations be analyzed from a multi-scalar perspective? To advance along these lines we make use of Ostrom's categorization of social rules (formal or written and informal or unwritten). Social rules operate across levels and they define how power is exerted in empirical scenarios. The categorization of social rules that we used in this communication are the following: (a) position rules: define the place from where actors operate and the recourses at hand steaming from this position; (b) border rules: define the ways each actor leaves or enter a position; (c) information rules: frame the way information for decision making is generated, framed and distributed; (d) authority rules: specify what action or decision each position is required/authorized to make; (e) aggregation rules: specify the way decisions are taken (imposition, election, council meeting, etc); (f) scope rules: defines what area/topic of decision making each position is able to affect; (g) distribution rules: represent the result of the operation of the aforementioned rules; the way cost and benefit of a specific urban intervention or plan are distributed among stakeholders.

In accordance with the theoretical standpoint described above, the methodological strategy was specifically aimed at disentangling the power relations involved in the extension of the Metropolitan Areas of Santiago and Valparaíso. Our particular focus was the state policies at work in contemporary Chile to provide affordable housing to low income families. After reviewing of the main scholarly articles published in the last years and gathering primary and secondary data concerning the allocation/size of the main social housing projects constructed in the last year in the study area, we concentrated in the main methodological corpus.

The methodological strategy deployed consisted in three main phases. First. The attention was placed at the system level (the macro-structural scenario). The set of possibilities and

constraints was read through the formal rules operating at this level - which limit (but not determine) the actions performed by actors operating at lower levels. The information gathered was systematized using the set of rules mentioned above. The main conclusion of this section is that in contemporary Chile the economic and cultural changes promoted by the authoritarian government that ruled the country between 1973 and 1990 still reign in Chile. A strong and vertically-structured national government, the supremacy of technocracy and positivist science in decision making, and the lack of channels for effective public participation are the principal elements that set the framework for action and decision making at lower levels. Second. We place the attention on the structural level – that defines the concrete channels through which individuals and institutions attempt to dominate space and society via a variety of planning instruments. In each of the 15 municipality (local governmental units) involved in the study, we conducted at least one in-depth interview with key public actors, holding the necessary capacity to exert power and affect planning and policies results. Additionally, 8 interviews with renowned community leaders were conducted. All interviews were conducted following the Ostrom's categorization of social rules. The main objective of this phase was to elucidate the way planning instruments were discussed and approved. We conclude that this level is dominated by a strong authoritarianism and planning instruments are approved by institutionalized decision-making bodies that respond directly to the national authority. Few far-reaching social movements have articulated to challenge the negative effects of housing policies, as a number of studies have shown. Contemporary Chile, then, can be conceptualized as a society dominated by economic and technocratic elite, with little or no respond from individuals and institutions operating at lower levels. However, there a few instances in which social movements are attempting to articulate a reaction, but only to solve particular problems. At the level of the episode 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with the official operating at the local government and a number of informal interviews with neighbors of the main social housing complexes proof useful for a more grounded approach. At this level, in terms of aggregation rules, there are no effective channels to influence the elaboration and approval of such planning instruments as land use plans. Although at the discursive level there are instance of participations, these are reduced to consultation procedure with no concrete influence on urban policy. It was quite remarkable the lack of a strong civic organization, factor that relates to the technocratic mentality that has penetrated deeply into Chile´s social body.

In sum, the analytical and conceptual framework here developed was able to identify the channels through which forms of power emanating from the central state apparatus operates to control society and space. However, our reading of the situation is non-deterministic, reason way we cannot dismiss the potential of the individual agency to provoke changes at a wider sphere of social life. From the social movement perspective, the point is to analyze the structural scenario and strategically make use of the possibilities that appear within the system due to the need of validating itself socially. Indeed, to naturalize and validate the system, pseudo-democratic procedures are at work that can serve as tactic points where alternative projects can, eventually, flourish.

It is important to stress that we do not conceive the local community as a passive entity: as structured agents they are part of the system and makes capillarity possible. It follows that their passivity is a key element that permits the system to work. The local community -

dwelling in housing complex that present deficits in terms of community infrastructure and that are localized in isolated places - remain trapped in an abstract space, with little sense of belonging. Years of repression and political exclusion have naturalized a culture that encourages passivity and a disregard for public affairs. The local agents are as responsible as the agents operating at broader levels in the operation of power in urban decision making. They permit the functioning of the system. The local community is a strategic device to maintain the control over space and the asymmetrical power relations.

Finally, a note about the limits of this research. Societies are organized through a complex web of formal and informal socially-constructed rules and appears unfeasible to systematize each one of it, let aside understanding their mutual interaction. It is necessary, therefore, to work with the notion of social rule in an economic way. In large-scale programs involving a variety of actors and interests, researches should decipher the basic rules governing the situation. In more case-specific project a detailed analysis of the social rules at work seems plausible. Researchers must bear in mind that we are working with social rules, not natural ones. Attempts to generalize are problematic given that subjectivity is always present in interpreting the functioning of the social body. This works represents an initial attempt to apply a methodology to disclose the most basic rules giving form to a particular power arrangement in a given socio-territorial process. Then, our work is context-specific and its result is scale dependent.