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Changes in new and old informal urban settlements in Bogota: logic of need and logic of the market: two case studies

Autor

Maria Elena Botero



ALIANZA EFI
Economía Formal e Inclusiva

Maria Elena BOTERO OSPINA

Universidad del Rosario, Bogotá Colombia

e-mail: maria.botero@urosario.edu.co

ORCID: 0000-0001-8004-1264

CHANGES IN NEW AND OLD INFORMAL URBAN SETTLEMENTS IN BOGOTA: LOGIC OF NEED AND LOGIC OF THE MARKET: TWO CASE STUDIES

Zmiany w nowych i starych nieformalnych osiedlach miejskich w Bogocie: logika potrzeb i logika rynku: dwa studia przypadku

Abstract: Urban policies conceive informal urbanization as a phenomenon to be eliminated or regularized. However, the “informal city” does not exist separately from formality, so it is necessary to understand how its actors, institutions and social arrangements function. This article, resulting from research¹, shows the changes produced in the motivations for the formation and destiny of old and new informal neighborhoods in Bogota in the light of a comparison between the Potosi neighborhood and the El Eden neighborhood.

The objective is to show that the way in which the State assumes urban informality, far from meeting the needs of access to land and housing for the poorest people in the cities, generates a vicious circle where, on one hand, illegal economies win, from the illegal appropriation of land and its subsequent commercialization by “*Tierreros*”² and “*Urbanizadores Piratas*”³; and on the other hand, the logics of need and the logics of the market overlap in access to land and housing in informal conditions.

Key words: Urban Informality, Dual City, Territorialities, Temporalities, Public Policy

INTRODUCTION

This article works on the changes that have occurred in informal urban settlements, based in two cases in Bogotá city. The research questions are: ¿What are the changes that have taken place in informal urban settlements in the last 30 years? ¿What do these changes correspond to? and ¿What

¹ This article is the result of research from the project “Cities as scenarios for social inclusion”, which is part of the scientific program of Inclusive Formal Economy made up of nineteen institutions from the academic, social and economic sectors in Colombia; that “seeks to investigate causes and consequences of informality, in order to improve understanding of the phenomenon, formulate, design and implement programs that help improve policy recommendations aimed at addressing it” (Alianza EFI, 2018).

² “*Tierrero*” is a person or group of people who appropriate public or private property in order to divide it into lots for sale to people looking for land to build housing.

³ “*Urbanizadores Piratas*” are people or groups, who are owners of a private property, but for environmental reasons, physical risk or because they are outside the level of home public services, they cannot use or sell these lands for housing projects. However, they subdivide the land into lots and later sell them at prices below the formal market price of the land, to individuals or families looking for options to build homes at lower prices.

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perspective and understanding of the situation of urban informality has the authorities of Bogotá to face the changes in the informal land occupation in the neighborhoods?

To carry out the research, depth interviews were used with current inhabitants, people who acted as founders of the neighborhoods and still live in them, and other actors who have come to the neighborhoods looking for profitable investment options in homes or commercial lots. Non-participant observation sessions and participation in community activities were also held on various days and times. This information was complemented with documentary information from the city about Ciudad Bolívar, where the two neighborhoods under study are located, and the analysis of the legislation on informal construction in Bogotá.

The working hypothesis is that the logic of informal occupation of the land for housing construction has changed from the logic of necessity to the logic of the market, although without completely replacing it. These changes are reflected in the social organization, the social dynamics in the neighborhoods, the value of the properties and the present and future destiny of these neighborhoods as habitat options.

It was also found that despite than many years passed, the authorities of the city have not been able to overcome the dualism of the city, and their lack of recognition of informality as a way of life are promotes market logic in informal urban settlements.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

Urban Informality and Dual City

Urban informality has been associated with unfavorable conditions, loaded with prejudice (Gouverneur 2016). The terms to name this informality are not only pejorative, but also generate the imaginary of exclusion that has been socially attributed to its inhabitants and all the social dynamics they host (Gouverneur 2016; Perlman 1976).

However, informal neighborhoods not only have these characteristics, but also build progressive changes in physical and social transformations derived from individual and collective efforts, accompanied by the emergence of entrepreneurial dynamics, cultural expressions and complex social structures, which enrich the dynamics of the broader urban context (Gouverneur 2016; Roy 2005; Roy 2005).

This research assumes the concept of urban informality from two complementary perspectives: that of Al Sayyad (2003) for whom informality is a “new way of life” and organization that makes sense in the neoliberal paradigm, as a key piece to track market liberalization; and, that of Goldstein (2016) who assumes it as “absent presence of the State” making allegory to the imperfect regulations from which informality arises and that shape the rules within it as part of a need for order of its members.

The study of informal neighborhoods involves the analysis of territory from Saquet (2015) and Dematteis (1964, 1967, 1969 and 1970), as a product of social relations crystallized in economic, political and cultural territorialities, in a historico-critical and relational conception. In the same line, Raffestin (1977, 1980 and 1993) approaches the territory as a historical material product of society-nature relations carried out by semiological, technical and technological mediators, allowing to account for the territorial transformations resulting from the territorialization process and the territorialities experienced by each social group in their space-time relationships.

All these relationships, appropriations and practices are constructed and redefined by the actors over time, since they are lived concomitantly and differently with different rhythms and intensities depending on the moment in which they arrived at the settlement, the status with which they arrived (invader, buyer, tenant, etc.), the resources they had at their arrival, and the possibilities or degrees of freedom they had to choose that location. These elements are clear when contrasting the origins and developments of the two neighborhoods.