Urbanism for people: Innovative public responses to urban conflicts in Santiago, Chile

Pablo Fuentes Flores
Escuela de Arquitectura,
Facultad de Ciencias de la Construcción
y Ordenamiento Territorial,
Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana
Santiago, Chile
pcfuente@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT
State actions on Chilean cities are characterized for addressing large scale issues such as traffic congestion, air pollution, and socio-residential segregation. Nonetheless, in recent years the State has also participated in initiatives that face small scale but highly significant issues. This kind of public action will be understood as urban planning for people, a definition coined by Danish planner Jan Gehl (2006), author of a methodology that studies in detail people´s behavior in public spaces. The aim of this paper is to describe four interventions in which the State has directly or indirectly participated, to identify the conflicts involved and the achievements accomplished or errors made during the implementation to obtain hints aimed to the creation or improvement of new territorial planning politics. The article concludes that in order to transform the public space of Chilean cities it is necessary to implement a new model of urban governance that allows cross-sector coordination and implementation, with effective community participation and public servants prepared in projects' management, effective communication and team work.

Chilean architecture stands out at international level. However, the quality of the public space of its cities – with exceptions – is no cause for recognition. The difficulty to move about riding a bicycle, the proliferation of empty sites, the lack of neighbourhood identity, the deterioration of pavements or the lack of green and recreation areas are manifestations of the shortage of spaces for citizens to encounter one another, especially in places away from the city centre.

The State is mainly responsible for recovering the public space and its interventions usually respond to big urban problems. Motorways to solve congestion, regulatory plans to set up new urban land or metropolitan parks in segregated areas are the responses that are usually addressed by public administration. However, in recent years, the State has been concerned with solving minor urban conflicts by promoting innovative and sensitive solutions regarding the needs of communities where these arise, that is, it has also promoted an urban development oriented to people´s wellbeing. A system of public bicycles, temporary 'pocket' squares, graffiti festivals, art installations on road infrastructures, and traffic pacification in residential areas, are some of the responses that emerged from public initiative which, in the words of Danish urban planner Jan Gehl, 'humanize' our cities (2006).

For some time now there have appeared several citizens' organizations of pedestrians, cyclists, elderly citizens, and handicapped people who want to regain the public space lost to drivers in the last century. Groups like Movimiento Furiosos Ciclistas, Muévete Santiago, Caminable, Fundación Mi Parque, Urbanismo Social, Fundación Junto al Barrio, Ciudad Emergente, Corporación Ciudad Accesible, to name a few, are well known in Santiago. Although these organizations have made a substantial contribution to the improvement of public spaces in Chilean cities, the State has more resources and tools to revert deterioration and transform public space into dynamic, safe, and democratic places. Thus, this article analyses four examples of public policies that solve different problems in Santiago in an innovative way.

MOVING ABOUT IN HIGH DENSITY AREAS

Public bicycles are an idea present in large cities of the world. Velib *in Paris,* Citi Bike *in New York, and* Eco bicis *in Buenos Aires, are similar to the public bicycle system* BikeSantiago. *The purpose of the system is to offer an economic alternative to public transport, designed for short rides, in areas of high density and flow of people, avoiding unnecessary trips which cause congestion in central zones.*

The main challenge to implement BikeSantiago *was to come to an*

agreement with 14 Mayors of different political parties to call only one public tender for all the municipalities so that the system could work in an integrated way. The difficulty to reach an agreement was expressed in the negative of the Municipality of Las Condes to participate in the system, which prevented sufficient continuity in the eastern sector of the city.

Although BikeSantiago emerges from the private sector and is funded by monthly payment from the user and the publicity printed on bicycles and stations, it required action and leadership from the Town Hall of the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, as well as the good will of local governments to authorise the occupation of national properties of public use and thus operate as an inter-municipalities transport network. It is, at present, an example of public-private collaboration where a new public good is created providing collective benefits to society.

EMPTY LOTS IN CENTRAL AREAS

Pocket public squares are an expression of tactical urbanism (Lyndon, Bartman, Woudstra, & Khawarzad, 2011), also called pop up urbanism (Pfeifer, 2013), a strategy that emerges in Europe and the United States to use underused public space temporarily. Pop up corresponds to those urban interventions that are transitory, with a specific objective, similar to windows appearing on the Internet. Lydon refers to tactical urbanism as "a deliberate approach to making a city, an offer of local ideas to challenges of local planning with short term commitments and realistic expectations, suggesting low risk interventions with highly rewarding possibilities" (as cited in Rodríguez, 2015). On the other hand, Stickells, designer and urban planner,

defines tactical urbanism as "a series of micro-spatial urban practices that re-direct space use in the city with the purpose of inverting the dynamics of determined urban environments" (as cited in Rodríguez, 2015). Both definitions highlight the experimental character of the intervention over the design or strength of its materialization. Summarising, their purpose is to test community behaviour according to the type of activity and programmes that cause those ephemeral interventions. The name 'pocket' comes from México, where pocket parks were created; they have different typologies depending on their location, form, and size[1].

In the case of Chile, the Municipality of Santiago, through its Corporación de Desarrollo (Development Corporation), began in 2014 implementing the so-called 'transitory squares', with the initial aim to occupy empty sites, mainly of private property. With the incentive of reduced taxes on the property, the municipality wanted to use these sites which were dark and unsafe and, in some cases, informal rubbish and debris dumps. These projects had little chance of being implemented due to the lack of interest from private owners to lend their land at the potential risk of not being able to get them back afterwards.

Nevertheless, the first pocket public square will be located on 83 Morandé Street from January 2016, between the buildings of the Ministry of Public Works (Ministerio de Obras Públicas, MOP) and the Town Hall of Santiago, across the emblematic door of the Moneda Palace on 80 Morandé Street. An empty site where the future building of Concessions of the MOP will be located, which would be empty for at least a year, will become a great opportunity to materialise a transitory public space, of contemporary

image and citizen character. The idea came from the Intendencia de Santiago and is beeing implemented through the Dirección de Arquitectura (Architecture Department) of MOP.

The pocket square tries to give a transitory occupation to pieces of land belonging to the State on which there are projects but for various reasons these will not be implemented in the short term. This situation produces empty sites that remain in that condition for a long time while the various stages of a public investment initiative are developed: prefactibility study, design and execution. According to Atisba data (2015), in the Greater Santiago there are 484 hectares of State owned empty sites without a project for the near future.

At the same time, 'La Dominical' is announced in the municipality of Providencia (Santiago), a transitory market and concerts place, while the Nanoplaza was proposed in Concepción, to use residual spaces in the town center.

The public square of Morandé Street will mark the first time the State lends one of its sites, extraordinarily well located, to start a pilot intervention that brings together the principles of tactical urbanism, the incipient foodtrucks market, the Street Art expressions, and the traditional Chilean muralism. Alongside this, four new pocket squares are in progress in the municipalities of Santiago, Independencia, Lo Prado and Providencia.

PREDOMINANCE OF MOTORIZED TRANSPORT

Public space in Chile is all space located outside the official limits of private property. According to Jordi Borja, "without the public space of everybody and for everybody, there is no citizenship

and without citizenship there is no city, without the city there is no democracy" (2014, p. 17). While Rueda (personal communication, November, 2015) indicates that it is in the public space where the basic rights of free expression, economic exchange, recreation, leisure, and circulation are guaranteed.

At present, there are many cities in the world that have restricted the potential of public space to only one of the human rights, that of circulation (Rueda, 2008). This is expressed in the fact that in cities like Barcelona, sixty percent of public space has been given to motor vehicles when on average, private vehicles do not exceed thirty percent of daily travelling; this favours free movement of motor vehicle users over the other rights (Asensio Martínez, 2013).

One way of improving the relationship between the private vehicle and life in the neighbourhood is implementing the so-called '30 km/h zones', which restrict the speed of circulation in specific areas of the city to reduce the severity of traffic accidents and prioritizes the occupation of the street with other type of activities such as walks, children´s games areas or town fairs.

Even if 30 km/h zones are a first way to calm neighbourhoods, signage and pavement painting are not enough to transform driving habits. New strategies are needed for the street to be used in ways other than the simple fact of moving in motorized vehicles.

In Barcelona, for example, the Agencia de Ecología Urbana has implemented the idea of the so-called Supermanzanas *(Superblocks), which have an approximate size of four hundred by four hundred meters and establish a perimeter of primary roadways that allow traffic of private vehicles*

moving at a metropolitan scale and a secondary roadway of restricted speed of ten kilometres per hour where the car enters a predominantly pedestrian zone. Only visitors and vehicles with a specific purpose can enter the superblocks. Access is authorized by an office coordinated by the municipality itself, which lowers the barriers by remote control. These measures are complemented by signage, levelling of the street and pavement, traffic lights, and collective parking, among other resources.

URBAN SPACE AND SECTORALISM

Urban rivers are generally a point of encounter in the cities they flow through. The Seine in Paris or the Thames in London are protagonists that concentrate activities and places tourists must visit. Nevertheless, the Mapocho River in Santiago is a barrier that divides the city and has the stigma of being dirty. Homeless people live under its bridges and towards the West there are informal settlements and accumulation of rubbish.

One of the most significant projects aiming at the appropriation of the riverbed by the people is Mapocho Pedaleable. This initiative that arises as an academic project, later promoted by cycling organizations, has been implemented as a transitory event in which ramps are installed to go down to the river in the municipalities of Providencia and Santiago[2]*.*

*This attractive project led the Metropolitan Regional Government (*Gobierno Regional Metropolitano, GORE*) to assume a bigger participation in the construction of two ramps, four flights of steps, and a bicycle track of 5,5 kilometres, a task that was carried out by the Transport Planning Secretariat (*Secretaría de Planificación de

Transporte, SECTRA*), which began the engineering and special features design in 2014.*

In spite of the effort made by the SECTRA, it has not been possible to achieve the end result that will allow calling the work to tender. The main problem is that there is no institution with the necessary competence to design and implement an inter-municipalities bicycle way in a riverbed connecting to a system of parks by means of ramps and steps. For instance, a cycle lane may be built by a municipality or by SERVIU, but neither have authorisation to intervene the riverbed. On the other hand, the MOP may carry out hydraulic work in the river, but does not have the necessary knowledge of urban design or traffic intervention in urban areas.

For Mapocho Pedaleable to become real, the State will have to propose a new work structure in which all the institutions that have some competence related to the project can meet regularly, coordinated by one of them, with representatives who have the ability to do team work and manage contracts, managerial abilities and effective communication with the citizens. This would mean a strong tension among the legal sections of each institution, because public right states that you can do only what is explicitly indicated in the regulations framework. In all probability, there will be multiple reasons explaining why the Mapocho Pedaleable project cannot be implemented. However, with an adjustment of the present urban governance and an important share of political leadership it will be possible to point the action of the State towards the materialization of participative urban projects among the sectors.

INNOVATIVE URBAN GOVERNANCE

CONNECTED TO THE COMMUNITIES

The nature of contemporary urban conflicts makes the traditional State structures to be adapted in the area of city and territory. If one thinks in a sectoral way, it would be impossible to carry out projects that are intersectoral by definition as is the case of Mapocho Pedaleable.

Facing part of the conflicts identified requires good ideas only. It is often not even a matter of resources but of innovative management and public-private collaboration. Successful projects are subject to forming strong alliances between the State and the communities where they are inserted. The type of intervention will have to respond exactly to the needs of the people and organizations that will use them.

It is also essential for communities to get involved in the operation of the work they implement. There is a long list of works that, because of functioning problems end up underutilised or, even worse, rapidly deteriorated. More participation of local agents in public management will increase ideas of collaboration. Therefore, this will demand from public servants the capacity to propose new forms of cooperation and permanent dialogue with citizens, private companies and social organisations. At the same time, decision makers will have to fulfil their promise and be accountable for commitments assumed.

Innovation within the State often causes a strong resistance to change from workers of the institution. It forces people to leave the comfort zone where those who specialise in carrying out a procedure or fulfilling a task traditionally move. However, when facing the request to interpret the current norm

or create new ways of making things, opposite reactions arise that immobilise and inhibit the innovative initiative. In order to get round this resistance, new public servants devoted to recovering the public space for the people, will have to work their relational skills, project the advantages of doing things in a different way and make the future beneficiaries of new public policies aware of the contribution of these new ideas.

On the other hand, architects are called to lead State innovation processes, especially by means of formulation – and not only execution – of new public policies of territorial nature. The ability to build realities from an objective image or to make diagnosis and proposals that acknowledge the differences between various zones in the city, allows 'fine tuning' local intervention. The advantage of architecture is that it facilitates thinking and dreaming the new public policies that Chile needs, while, at the same time, the way in which those policies are materialised and implemented is being designed, together with the communities, timely and with pertinent responses.

NOTES

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