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Neo-liberalism and the Architecture of the Post Professional Era

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Preface

In 2014, I was the organizer and the co-chair of the conference of Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The term "post-professionalism" for the first time was introduced in the call for papers of this conference. The idea was to attract attention to the changes in the role and responsibilities of architects and urban designers, professional organizations and schools of architecture parallel to the neo-liberalization and globalization of states; to assert the end of the professionalism in architecture and urbanism; and to declare the new period as the "era of post-professionalism" (Sadri 2014).

Valuable discussions during the conference and especially in the evaluation session motivated me to continue working on this idea and initiate a collaborative book, as a new project. Springer accepted my proposal, and I published the call for chapters in 2015. This call began with the interrelations between the changes in political economy and the profession of architecture. It was stated that "globalization and neo-liberalization of the political economy in different nations has transformed the organization of labour power, instruments of production and their relations in recent decades. The industrial period's institutionalization of the state as modern, centralized, socialized and with a national identity is being replaced by the post-modern, glocal (global+local), multinational and privatized state". And parallel to all these changes, "the professions of architecture and urban planning have been faced with big transformations […] and have passed from the era of professionalism and entered to the 'post professional' era" (Sadri 2015).

Emphasizing on the recent boom of market-led motivations, it was argued in the call for chapters that "architecture […] is losing its public, national and social role". "The main motivation of architectural and urban practices in the post professional era has shifted from designers' personal attempts at creating spaces with high 'use value', in the public interest, towards image-oriented, high 'exchange value' productions of specialists for private interests".

In continuation of the call for chapters, in addition to the behaviour of the professionals, I tried to call attention to the effects of this transition in the structure of the profession, its institutional operations and education/research activities related to the profession. In this part, I shared my observations on the disappearance

of the sharp borders of the profession and the attempts to diversify services as part of the survival struggles of the profession and also as an indivisible characteristic of neo-liberal policies. In line with this purpose, "professional organizations changed their shells and became more independent institutes with more activities and visions beyond their traditional professional parameters. The intended technical and professional mono-type curricula of architecture and planning education changed to more diverse, theoretical and experimental educational programmes worldwide".

Manifesting the end of the profession of architecture and its crush under the neo-liberal and global capitalist order, I tried to remark the alternative movements of our era as the only hope for reclaiming and redefining architecture not as a close sectionist and elitist profession which it has always been in the service of power but as an open, ethical, responsive, humanitarian and even non-anthropocentric field of knowledge and skills. I noted that on the other side of the transition to this new era, "architecture and planning have created architectural and urban activism and remade the political agenda for architecture and urbanism by establishing diverse initiatives against war, natural disasters, environmental degradation, inequalities and violations of human rights".

As a result of all these changes, contrarily to the architectural profession of the era of professionalism, the post-professional architecture is not and cannot claim to be a public practice, because it appears either as a private, profit-oriented business or as an activist action. "While the first one derives from neo-liberalization of professionalism in architecture and urbanism, the second one is the reaction against [this] neo-liberalization".

Not only in the professional environment but also in the academy I was expecting a big resistance against this dissident call. Basically because it was challenging the attempts of the architecture society to persuade everyone that "the profession of architecture still has an important public role and actually nothing has been changed" and was openly inviting us to accept the reality and bury the profession and shut down the professional organizations and schools and look forward to establish a better order. However, this heterodoxal call surprisingly received significant number of proposals from all around the world, well-known schools, organizations and individuals. These proposals in different stages received comments, and the authors were encouraged to complete their texts in line with the general philosophy of the book. Almost half of these proposals, 18 chapters came to the final stage and have been ordered under the following five parts according to their topics:

1. The Rise and Fall of Professionalism in Architecture
2. Neo-Liberal Urban Policies and the Collapse of Architectural Profession
3. Size, Image and Architecture of Neo-Liberal Era
4. Resistance Against Neo-Liberal Architecture and Urbanism
5. Post-Professional Architecture and Academia

I invited Dr. Bilge İmamoğlu, Prof. Dr. Murat Soygeniş, Prof. Mehrdad Hadighi, Dr. Nishat Awan and Prof. Dr. Ashraf Salama, the co-chairs and invited speakers of the CAUMME II-2014 conference, to write forewords to these five chapters. After almost two years of work, the thoughts of the 31 authors came together and shaped this book. The 24 texts in this book from diverse points of view are shedding light on the transition of architecture and urban planning in different geographies or fields. Each text has its own originality and not necessarily or completely is corresponded to my own ideas. For this reason, I hope these texts can open variant further studies on the conception of the transition of the profession of architecture parallel to the other movements of our time, and of course I desire we can lead this transition to make changes that will bring peace, freedom and better quality of life for all inhabitants of this universe.

Kyrenia, Cyprus/New York, USA Hossein Sadri

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Chapter 16
Alternatives for Contested Mega-projects: An Academic Venture into Activist Space

Nelson Carofilis, Olga Peek and Viviana d'Auria

Abstract The following chapter is centred on the endeavour of a small number of researchers and lecturers who joined forces with urban residents of consolidated riverbank settlements in Guayaquil (Ecuador) threatened of eviction due to the implementation of an 'ecological' mega-project. This large-scale ministry-led intervention over Guayaquil's urban waterfronts fits within a series of recent transformations heralding the notion of *Buen Vivir* ('Good Living') that over the last decade nuanced the professional environment nationwide by opening new opportunities for local urban professionals, however, straddling them right between traditional top-down urban planning and community-led city-making practices. In the context of contested waterfront renewal projects along the Estero Salado estuary in Guayaquil, a design workshop titled *Designing Inclusion* (2015) provided for the development of alternative urban design visions by bringing together diverse local voices and expertise with foreign academics and practitioners therefore transcending customary boundaries of social engagement between architects, activists, communities and government bodies. Building on the experience of this summer school and ongoing research-by-design activities in Guayaquil, the chapter scrutinizes the recent twist in the professional environment that Ecuadorian architects have been involved with and vis-a-vis examines how the condition of being 'socially engaged' swings the conventional notion of architects and design professionals involved in teaching and research.

Keywords Mega-project · Social engagement · Design · Academic activism Live projects

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16.1 Introduction

Neoliberal urban transformations have left little space for threatened citizens but to self-organize, or so we hear (Holston 2009). This process occurs more or less successfully against mega-projects dooming over urban areas that have become palatable to the flows of global venture capital. While this situation has often been discussed in cities accommodating mega-events such as the World Cup, many other sites have become the terrain for 'expulsions' to take place (Sassen 2014). In such a contested situation, and hand in hand with a post-professional condition, it has become more than arduous for design academics and professionals alike to situate their role as critical spatial practitioners. When professionals do meddle with the mess engendered by neoliberal regimes, scholarship on the topic reflects upon this involvement as one generated mainly in the name of realism. Architecture is considered as socially engaged because of the conventional expediency rooted in the design disciplines and triggered in response to cities made unequal by current economic processes. Nonetheless, this engagement calls for more in-depth scrutiny by considering socio-cultural particularities, economic conjunctures and global political dynamics that frame practice. Relatedly, the widespread culture of mega-projects that are developed in the name of climate change and ecological improvement, nuances depictions of rampant neoliberalism and invite us to look beyond oppositional depictions of urban change (Parnell and Oldfield 2014). This chapter pursues such solicitation by focusing on a particular case study where the distinctions between academia, activism and resistance are made hazy by the contested implementation of a government-driven waterfront transformation. The chapter is centred on the endeavour of a small number of researchers and lecturers involved in the documentation of auto-constructed settlements under the menace of forced resettlement in a seemingly politically innovative context, where therefore the boundary conditions of socially engaged design become muddled and are subject to specific challenges.

Indeed, in Ecuador, the *Buen Vivir* concept has bred many promises to promote alternative forms of development and spread well-being across the country's human settlements. In line with this agenda, Ecuador's largest city and port has been subject to significant transformations, out of which the most prominent is the *Guayaquil Ecológico*. This large-scale intervention is expected to provide a significant amount of new recreational and environmental areas proportioned to the number of Guayaquil's inhabitants in order to enduringly safeguard and re-introduce nature in the city. In the context of a fragile estuarine landscape, it aspires to recover over 40 km of waterfront along the Estero Salado estuary, leading to the eviction of communities who partly depend on water for their livelihoods but are also subject to the threats of climate change and pollution. Unsurprisingly, urban residents threatened by evictions are struggling to keep the homes they built for themselves during the past 40 years. Besides organized resistance, a summer

workshop[1] realized in July 2015 helped set the momentum to develop alternative visions to this capital-intensive intervention that does little to prevent real environmental threats in Guayaquil. The initiative was funded by the VLIR-UOS and held in collaboration with local communities, the University of Guayaquil and the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), where a handful of researchers had joined forces with the urban residents in the claim for their actual well-being. Participatory urban design was expected to help solve the conflict between the scale of the ecological mega-project (and the development pressure it is generating) and the scale of the affordable housing needs of vulnerable urban dwellers. It additionally generated a revised agenda for the local institution involved, posing questions of academic engagement and positionality. As it adhered to the model of many North-South collaborations, it most importantly opened up interrogations on trans-cultural engagements and challenges.

Based on the dilemmas of local academics vis-à-vis the experience of the summer school and its larger setting, this chapter will examine how the condition of being 'socially engaged' swings the conventional notion of architects and design professionals involved in teaching and research. Relatedly, the chapter will touch upon two other intertwined topics: (1) the growing emphasis of architectural schools on community-based knowledge, action-learning 'live projects' and participatory transformations and the trans-cultural setups that enable these to occur (or not); (2) the epistemological shift engendered in urban analysis by considering the city as 'home-made', namely self-built from the home outwards, and the necessity to visualize this process of city-making with tailored techniques that may voice claims on space and rights to claim (Jenkins 2013; Sáez et al. 2010; d'Auria 2012). The chapter will reflect on the challenges and opportunities created by having transcended the boundary of conventional 'academia' and 'activism', inviting to reconsider these categories in less antithetical terms as occurs, by contrast, in a context such as that of Guayaquil.

16.2 Looking Beyond the Humanitarian Dimension from the Junction of Academia and Activist Space

When addressing difficult social conditions, academics and activists may enter a significant area of overlap where the distinction between academic work and activism can become blurred. Be it due to the genuine desire of effecting changes through the use and generation of knowledge, or out of discontent with the status quo, both academics and activists find themselves confronted with political, social,

[1]'Designing Inclusion' is a VLIR-UOS funded international summer school held in July 2015 in Guayaquil. Alternative design proposals were developed in dialogue with local actors and communities supporting already ongoing negotiation between residents under eviction and local authorities implementing *Guayaquil Ecológico*. Website: https://designinginclusion.wordpress.com/.

cultural or environmental issues whereby engaging with diverse social groups becomes crucial. Even if under the strong influence of the global media, the work of professionals and academics alike attending to crushing issues may be seen as a conscientious action stepping into a void left by the state, this engagement involves other pressing concerns.

Besides furthering social exclusion and poverty, urban development in many countries is characterized by uncontrolled sprawl, pollution and unnecessary consumption of land, water and other resources (Tuts 2010). It has been abundantly argued that a major challenge facing the reversal of these trends in most cities lies in the complete or partial absence of the competence and capacities required for carefully balancing the conflicting interests of powerful global and local actors with those of disadvantaged ones (Satterthwaite 2006). Capacity gaps need to be filled, linking developmental concerns with local and global environmental concerns, and integrating considerations of space as a hardly renewable and extremely valuable resource (Loeckx and Shannon 2004). Especially for architects, urbanists and planners concerned with urban development, attempting to effect change over the status quo often also means facing established traditional professional structures that contribute to the disciplines' lack of responsiveness and through which so much of the neoliberal urban development takes place. These issues have led to the recognition of architecture, planning and design schools as important constituencies for pursuing less damaging practices (Tuts 2010), but most importantly to the need of doing so through a 'real world' understanding of what the latter may be (Satterthwaite 2006). Regardless of the above, in doing away with customary professional practices, activism in the field of the design disciplines has meant pushing the conventional frame of design activities. The idea of 'other' ways of doing architecture (and design) translated in the notion of *spatial agency* (Awan et al. 2011) reflects back on a second (under covered) history of architecture where the ability and power of individuals to act and engage with societal structures in transformative ways is enacted. Thereby, it presents a much more collaborative approach which disrupts the boundaries of professionalism (Ibid.).

So what is academic activism about in the first place in the disciplines of architecture and urbanism? For the design disciplines, the attentiveness and proximity to these problematics and the exploration of process-based urban transformations have a longer history. Over the last 50 or more years, several positions emerged in architecture forming their roots in variegated waves of political activism in which the discontent with conservative, repressive regimes (1960s–1980s) and later with issues such as massive evictions linked to rapid urbanization and economic upheaval (Luasang et al. 2012) overlapped with paradigmatic disciplinary shifts. Common to the many currents of thought that became predominant since, were the goals of searching for a coherent framework for redefining the roles of the architect, re-structuring the design decision-making process and bringing a transformation of the profession sensitive to steadily growing social issues. However, at the early stage movements such as the radical, populist and community architecture had little success. Their relative marginalization was first associated to a lack of consideration for historical conditions and socio-economic particularities of social

groups in shaping the organization of power in society, leading to a falsely optimistic view of the role of design (Tzonis and Lefaivre 1976). In the late 1990s, the critiques to the oppositional genesis and binary structure of the discussion about the architect and the user led to questions of power relations and the possibilities of their re-configuration. Knowledge mediated by common experience and space as the product of social practice and the potential container and producer of social activities became central to the reformulation of practices with potential to empower users (Till 1998). Empowerment through a critical engagement of both users and architects remained an important concept for subsequent generations of practitioners and provided the grounds for the cultivation of transformative kinds of practice.

Within the same period of time (1950–2000), the phenomenon of rapid urbanization had major implications for urban professions worldwide. In the time span of 50 years, Latin America turned into the most urbanized place on earth and served as an inspiring breeding ground for the development of new methods of action research and practice-based approaches. Studies from various disciplines and fields on the Latin American region became instrumental for the realignment of architecture, urbanism and planning towards the challenges of settlements in the so-called developing world under the human settlements paradigm (d'Auria et al. 2010). Based on year-long extensive field observations the work of John Turner, William Mangin and Robert Fichter were among the first to demonstrate convincingly that under certain conditions informal settlements represented a potential solution and suggested that housing should be understood as a 'process' rather than a finished design product (Mangin 1967; Turner 1968; Turner and Fichter 1972). The paradigmatic shift engendered by their ideas reached its way into broader urban agendas echoing in evolving housing policies through which widely disseminated practices of slum eradication turned into actions of tolerance and support (Ward 2012; Zanetta 2001). At the project level, the world-known experimental housing competitions of PREVI (Perú) and later ELEMENTAL (Chile) both heralding the notion of incrementality have provided perhaps some of the most valuable experiences for the study of incremental housing processes in the region. Numerous professionals from different Latin American countries have continued to work extensively on the topic,[2] and more recently, researchers have developed guidelines for 'coordinating the efforts of all stakeholders involved in the process of constant transformation and improvement of settlements' (De Pirro et al. 2013) and emphasizing on the social aspects of the production of space. In such studies, a people-centred approach to architecture is a common theme that focuses on the roles of all non-architects in creating and interpreting the built environment. Given the complexity of the situations explored, research projects have turned from

[2]We refer to the work of (among many others): Gustavo Riofrío and DESCO in Lima, Perú, Peter Ward, Edith Jimenez Huerta and Mercedes di Virgilio and the Latin American Housing Network (www.lahn.utexas.org); Reinhard Goethert and the Special Interest Group in Urban Settlement (SIGUS) at MIT, Enrique Ortiz at Habitat International Coalition (HIC) in México and Germán Samper in Colombia.

offering 'solutions' to focusing on how public dialogue could be cultivated for the benefit of improved urban places and on how to use innovative research methods to better understand what people need from their cities and buildings (Kaufman 2013). Also, groups and networks such as the Habitat International Coalition—HIC (created in 1976) have been active in protecting and promoting the fulfilment of human rights and the right to dignified housing internationally. Working as a pressure group in defence of the people who struggle for shelter and now with consultive status at the ONU, HIC and its regional office in Latin America are devoted to documenting well-structured experiences of 'social production of habitat'[3] from which effective strategies can be distilled. The Shack/Slum Dwellers International (a movement born in 1975 and today constituted as a transnational network) continues to support slum dwellers globally through developing mobilization, advocacy and problem-solving strategies that counter exclusion from development.[4] Since 1989 SDI has developed community-based tools and techniques for empowering communities and engaging effectively with city authorities. The historic profiling of data on informal settlements, enumeration (house-to-house surveys) techniques and mapping have additionally proved of chief importance for understanding problems of settlements at city scale and comparing conditions between cities and across national borders (Beukes 2015).

As the emphasis on the social aspects of the production of urban space and the attempts to effect change through 'action' blended in the design disciplines, designers also shifted their focus away from spatial approaches and space as a resource itself. This iterative, shifting relationship expands well over research and education.

Non-disregarding earlier radical pedagogies, around year 2000 in the UK, the discussion about architectural education's disregard for social responsibility was also part of the debate that led to the establishment of 'live' innovation projects in a series of education programs (De Carli and Kinnear 2015). Surfacing over the last decade also in several other contexts,[5] the most recent wave of 'live' projects and notion of 'liveliness' has sparked critical debate from a number of educators working 'in context'.[6] The considerable advantages of situated and socially constructed learning and reflexive practice exercised in contexts of criticality should take seriously into account the risk of the widespread adoption of these novel pedagogical methods without longer-term engagement with local communities.

[3]HIC refers to the social production of habitat as the experiences in which the components of habitat are auto-produced by their inhabitants, forced by their socio-economic conditions and without adequate instruments to support their efforts. http://www.hic-al.org/psh.cfm.

[4]http://sdinet.org/.

[5]Austria, Switzerland, France, Germany, USA among others.

[6]See, for example, the Association of Architectural Educators Conference, Living and Learning at The University of Sheffield, 3rd to 5th September 2014. https://aaeconference2014.wordpress.com/.

16.3 Latin America's Interface of Pedagogy and Change

Looking at the Latin American architectural schools in relation to these developments, it is noteworthy that both transformation and stagnancy are simultaneously deployed. For many scholars, it is clear that a majority of architecture schools have continued to forge professionals oriented by market motivations (Gazzoli 2003) and many continue to integrate latest architectural trends from Europe and the US or turn to mid-twentieth century Latin America's modernist works of architecture for reference. Thus, for many architects and urbanists, there has been little reflection about the strong social and spatial inequalities that characterize the continents' cities and for the ways in which practitioners might contribute to ameliorate them (Leguía 2011a). On the other hand, various exceptional cases show how 'radical' pedagogies have challenged conventions, as in the case of the Valparaíso School (Colomina et al. 2012), or how a more targeted advocacy can be provided as illustrated by the University of Buenos Aires in the famous case of Villa 31 (Perten 2011). Similar examples can be found in Sao Paolo, México and Lima in which universities have played a key role in the development of their regions by performing as 'mediators' between government, private developers, NGOs and community (Leguía 2011b). Correspondingly, many necessary conditions enabling these reinterpretations of pedagogy have been highlighted. Building-up the intellectual and political courage and gaining greater exposure to precedent studies is fundamental. With regards to the setting-up of a sustainable and socially engaged practice in general, research and rigorous analysis and development of the methods, approaches and processes that practitioners need to be involved with are important considerations (Wilkins 2015; Leguía 2011b).

This is particularly relevant for the Ecuadorian context where the culture of mega-projects is placing strains on local communities and development pressures on institutional actors including higher education institutions. At present, the latter have undertaken demanding qualification and accreditation processes under the Higher Education Law of 2010, in line with the National Constitution of 2008. In this process architecture, planning and design schools are finding the need to switch from a teaching-only, solution-oriented education centred on technology, to a research-based education that tackles crucial problems. While the backlog and pressing issues of neglected urban sectors have started to be recognized, the institutional and qualitative transformation of local universities and their key role in achieving more inclusive urban transformations in the neoliberal context remains to be seen. Evidently, the extremely challenging problems of Latin American urbanization call for insightful knowledge of complex situations, where an approach that meddles with reality is necessary. Nevertheless, educators, students and practitioners working at this interface have to be well prepared to recognize and value other forms of practice-based knowledge, as to recognize non-architect agents as equivalent partners in the making of the built environment (De Carli and Kinnear 2015; d'Auria 2015). For practitioners coming from more conservative professional environments, a considerable deal of unlearning needs to take place especially when

addressing contested situations in the South. For this, self-critical reflection and a key shift of the responsibility for the learning process is implied (Ibid.). Considering the long dating influence from northern academia on mainstream architectural education in Latin America, the production of knowledge in and for the region opens questions on the adequacy of epistemological paradigms inviting us to reconsider and even challenge prevailing academic paradigms dominating the validation of knowledge (Jenkins and Smith 2010). This consideration comes at a moment when 'global' studios are rising across academia, which do not necessarily imply that long-term engagement between local universities and communities is actually happening. Last but not least, awareness of the traps of 'do-good' humanitarian design will help academics and practitioners alike to prevent sustaining the expansion of humanitarian-corporate complexes in becoming the principal means of social service delivery in the South (Johnson 2011).

16.4 Social Practices and Post-professionalism

The way in which architects are involved in the exercise of city-making is increasingly stepping aside from socially engaged practices, clearly marking the turn to a post-professional setting. In the Latin American region during the 1970s, many examples can be found of architects who promoted a form of design that would support self-organization and collective action. While clearly inspired by earlier progressive ideas on the city (Turner and Fichter 1972), professional engagement this time went beyond just recognizing the vigour of transformative and incremental building processes, now truly acting 'at the service of' such forward thinking.

The settlement CUAVES (*Comunidad Urbana Autogestionaria Villa El Salvador*), a planned city extension of a large-scale sites-and-services programme in southern Lima, is a world-known example in which design closely interacted with bottom-up initiatives of self-managed communities (Chávez 2009–2010).[7] In 1971 —the same year in which the plan for *Villa El Salvador* was launched—citizens in Quito, Ecuador, in search for land and housing created the popular movement *Comité del Pueblo*. Likewise, architects interacted in drafting the blueprint prior to the formation of the neighbourhood *Comité del Pueblo*. In this case, an academic body named TISDYC (Taller de Investigación Social, Diseño y Comunicación) part of the Central University of Ecuador (UCE) supported the neighbourhood organization in the elaboration of design proposals (Godard 1988: 59).

The engagement of public universities in community-based design also occurred on smaller scale in Guayaquil. When in 1976 local and national police forces

[7]The layout of Villa El Salvador proposed by architect Miguel Romero Sotelo is based on a large-scale grid structure in which 400 × 400 m 'superblocks' or 'urban cells' with smaller residential blocks, open spaces and facilities are embedded (UN-Habitat 2015).

forcefully evicted the community of *Casitas del Guasmo* from residents in southern Guayaquil, the *Frente de Lucha Popular* association that had emerged from this incident was assisted in their negotiation with local authorities by the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Guayaquil who designed a layout for the site (Salmen 1987).[8]

Yet, this circumstance of professional practitioners being socially engaged and working to support the urban poor in their claims to the city has become increasingly exceptional. Peculiarly, the architect of the famous Villa El Salvador who up to the 1990s continued to be actively involved in the neighbourhood's consolidation process as technical assessor for CUAVES, currently leads Lima's major private design and construction company involved in the city's prime mega-project developments of *micro-viviendas* in Lima's remote urban periphery (Córdova 2014; Strauch et al. 2015). Similarly, Ecuadorian public universities as UCE in Quito and UG in Guayaquil have become advocators of business-oriented post-professional education that very rarely involves projects assisting the urban poor nowadays. This delineates a loss of community-based architectural practices in which reforms under neoliberalism have set the stage for Latin America's post-professional condition.

16.5 Waterfront Transformation Under Post-professional Conditions in Guayaquil

Unequivocally, a paradigm shift in critical pedagogy in the professions of architecture and urbanism is required emerging from a profound understanding of urban life and radical changes under way in the neoliberal city. Under neoliberal reforms in rapidly transforming Latin American cities, private actors have returned more prominently on the stage. This basic fact has deeply impacted on the city's spatial justice and political transparency (Strauch et al. 2015), as well as limiting the professional environment for practitioners involved in making the city. In this setting and under the condition of environmental crisis, space as a non-renewable resource continues to be used in exceedingly unsustainable ways. This is particularly the case in Ecuador's largest city Guayaquil, where the consolidating city is threatened by 'ecological' mega-projects that go hand in hand with forced displacement of vulnerable communities who have inhabited urban waterfronts for various decades, to mass housing projects in the remote urban periphery. The way in which radical urban transformations in highly contested territories unfold in a shifting setting from professionalism to post-professionalism is particularly

[8]The plan involved a block structure comprised of 9 × 22 m plots, a variety of open spaces and a main road structure complemented with pedestrian walkways. A group of academics from the University of Guayaquil and undergraduate (thesis) architecture students provided spatial designs that reserved space for future equipment and open spaces. This collaboration was corroborated during interviews with actual members of the staff and community leaders who were involved in this movement at the time.

important in relation to political innovation and climate change that call the design disciplines to the fore.[9,10,11]

Guayaquil's rapid urbanization process occurred in a complex water-based landscape as part of the largest estuarine ecosystem of Latin America's Pacific Coast, exposing the coastal city to extreme vulnerability for climate change.[12] In the early processes of city-making (1950s–1980s), the in-migrants were major actors in shaping the city through self-build housing that was a basic asset enabling them to accumulate other assets over time (Moser 2009). Currently, major parts of Guayaquil's urban population continue to live in these 'first suburbs' that have transformed into highly dense and consolidated low-income settlements: an occurrence consistent with urban consolidation trends in the broader Latin American region (Ward et al. 2015).

In latest processes of urban (re)-development in Guayaquil, a renewed attention has been given to the presence of water in the city. Since the late 1990s, local authorities have introduced various large-scale projects for waterfront transformation (Malecón 2000, Malecón del Salado, La Playita del Guasmo), aiming at the recovery of city-river relations that has marked the history and identity of the port city (Delgado 2013). However, such large-scale capital-intensive urban renewal projects have primarily been used as strategy for city beautification. Its implementation radically transformed not only the landscape of the city; they similarly caused profound changes in employment, local economies and social interactions that are built within and with space (Allán 2011). As a result, urban waterfronts have evolved into ambivalent spaces where citizens have contested the forms of access to and exclusion from them (Andrade 2007).

Very recent practices related to city and waterfront transformation are adopted under the nationwide well-being approach of *Buen Vivir*,[13] with the project *Guayaquil Ecológico* being the most emblematic feature. This *Buen Vivir* ecological mega-project prospects for ecological restoration to guarantee environmental sustainability and improve people's quality of life (SENPLADES 2013), quantitatively increasing green spaces for the city through the construction of a 40-kilometre-long linear park. While the notion of *Buen Vivir* hypothetically

[9]http://sdinet.org/.

[10]Austria, Switzerland, France, Germany, USA among others.

[11]See, for example, the Association of Architectural Educators Conference, *Living and Learning* at The University of Sheffield, 3rd to 5th September 2014. https://aaeconference2014.wordpress.com/.

[12]A study led by the World Bank suggests Guayaquil is the third most vulnerable city in the world considering its location in a flood prone region, low income neighborhoods in low lying areas and waterways, and flood-related costs as percentage of GDP (Hallegate et al. 2013).

[13]The term *Buen Vivir* (collective well-being), referring to the indigenous notion of *sumak kawsay*, has been actively used by social movements and has reached its way into the new Constitutions in Ecuador and Bolivia. With the ambition to gradually achieve the socialist reconstruction of Ecuadorian society, President Rafael Correa (2007-2017) introduced *La Revolución Urbana* (Urban Revolution) under the heading of the national plan of *Buen Vivir* (SENPLADES 2013).

emerged as a paradigmatic shift offering an alternative 'to' development within neoliberal administrations, in its adoption into the political realm, the term has been largely (mis)-understood as inter-changeable 'with' development in which the voice of citizens is exceedingly disregarded (Walsh 2010).

In *Guayaquil Ecológico,* vulnerability and risk for natural hazards are used as pretext for dislocating urban poor without truly engaging with local dynamics and specific issues related to climate change.[14] The project is instigated by a variety of governmental institutions, with the Ministry of Environment (MAE) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MIDUVI) taking the lead supported by a number of other state institutions (MIES, MSP, MINEDUC, DIRNEA and the Guayas Gobernación). Following a sectorial approach, the implementation relies largely on public-private partnerships in which private consulters and construction companies are contracted with large capital to carry out very specific tasks in a short time frame. In the absence of a democratic process and the lack of public information, local communities were deliberately kept out of the decision-making process, illustrating how mainstream neoliberal practice withdraws from used-based design (Peek et al. 2017).

Relatedly, dormant community organizations where instantly re-activated and new communal leaders stood up to collectively contest the top-down implementation of *Guayaquil Ecológico.* Neighbourhood committees even developed their own alternative design proposals for which they sometimes had asked assistance from acquainted architects. These counterproposals were presented to the local municipality and used in negotiation with MIDUVI and MAE as the officials of the *Guayaquil Ecológico* project (Figs. 16.1 and 16.2).

16.6 Academic Ventures into Activist Space

As for local institutions, the *Constitución 2008* introducing national well-being principles for political innovation has strongly influenced the re-structuring of public and private academic institutions, exerting development pressures on academics as well (El Universo 2012). On account of the overarching *Buen Vivir* ideologies that underscore the participatory nature of planning in all levels, a positive note is that linkages between academia and society have been re-conceptualized and put forward as main criteria for evaluating education. Yet a large gap between formalized frameworks, academic education and local practices persists. In main public universities and major urban planning schools in particular, a seemingly social engagement in professional practice still follows single-sided approaches leaving little room for true social innovation.

[14]Across various cities in the South, environmental vulnerability is very often used as an excuse to dislocate the urban poor and unlock land values (Davy and Pellissery 2013; Rolnik 2013; Amoako 2015).

Fig. 16.1 Ruptures in space and appropriations after eviction. Photograph by Olga Peek

Fig. 16.2 Linear park of *Guayaquil Ecológico*. Photograph by Nelson Carofilis

Until recently, 'social engagement' in Ecuadorian academic environments has been commonly understood as capacity building courses for professionals, specialized and consultancy services (CONEA 2009). In 2010, the Law of Higher Education re-conceptualized the terms focusing on real societal demands at local, regional and national levels (LOES 2010). In the specific context of the University of Guayaquil, which is the largest public institution with influence over the entire coastal region, the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism recently established a department for *vinculación con la sociedad*.[15]

[15]Spanish for 'linkage with society'.

Although the expressed mission of the department is to promote and implement technological innovations applied to training, socially engaged practices are understood more broadly and comprise more activities linked to other departments. These range from participation of academics and students in ongoing or scheduled public projects, individual thesis projects, internships or research. Pitifully, the potential of such activities for developing productive relationships with the community is narrowly limited by the way private or government agendas are favoured by the academic environment. Thesis projects are discouraged when they do not link to municipal projects which generally are run by public–private partnerships. Students are repeatedly required to present endorsements demonstrating their involvement in listed municipal projects[16] often including urban (waterfront) renewal, cutting-edge transportation systems, theme parks or major infrastructure fashionable to local authorities. These restrictions do not always persuade students who many times resist and develop topics originated in their own everyday realities. However, the learning environment undoubtedly confronts them with little flexibility and biased ideas about socially engaged practices, discouraging the development of individual initiatives or participation in other non-governmental ones.

In the midst of this climate, the resistance and community-led contestation that evolved in 2014 in the *Suburbios*, a group of academics from the University of Guayaquil and the KU Leuven, prepared a short training initiative. The training was meant to enhance critical thinking in the local academic and professional setting, by training a number of mid-career professional, while supporting the community-led development of design alternatives to the mega-project. Furthermore, it aimed to promote the formation of a 'community of practice' among participants, strengthening inter-university relationships and the role of the local university as a host of multi-actor exchanges. The initiative was awarded by funding from the Flemish Interuniversity Council institution for development cooperation VLIR-UOS and was realized in July 2015 under the title of 'Designing Inclusion'. As a two-week intensive action-learning event, the programme was built-into accommodate the promotion of theoretical inquiry with on-ground experiences and spaces for critical reflection and design. Three work packages were delivered to motivate critical reflections towards the notion of 'sustainability' and ecological mega-projects and introduce water urbanism design methods with community-based tools used to represent the voice of neglected city makers. Integration activities comprised field visits, on-site fieldwork, stakeholder workshops and integrated design *charretes*[17] in which participants were able to 'reflect in action'. Forty-eight participants selected through an open call formed a diverse team comprising 16 nationalities. Groups were organized according to four strategic sites where specific situations where evolving.

[16]A common practice in many provinces of Ecuador consists of municipal governments presenting approved projects or plans that are tailored in the studios.

[17]Intense periods of design activity in teams.

On-site fieldwork was mostly organized among participants with local community leaders, who were fully aware of the momentum the summer school was creating and how the media was reflecting it to a broader audience (El Comercio 2015). This particularly made the task of documenting living environments and livehoods very productive. Community leaders not only eased the entrance but accompanied and many times steered the fieldwork. Fishermen from the neighbourhoods offered boat rides for accessing the backsides of the housing from the water.

Fieldwork findings, visions and scenarios were presented and discussed with significant response from residents and neighbourhood leaders in two stakeholder workshops. Leaders shared their minds on proposals for in situ relocation, waterfront transformations and ecological recovery. For all, this was their very first time in the arena of a public university, participating as partners and sharing their thoughts in a discussion centred on how to ecologically re-image the urban landscape without displacements. Among many expressions, at the final workshop, a leader took the floor to state that 'finally their dignity and basic respect had been considered'.

Participants faced significant obstacles when attempting to tailor socially acceptable solutions. Since analysing contested spaces concerns the unfolding of complex layers, which add to the multidimensional issues experienced by vulnerable communities (d'Auria 2015), designing was evidently the most challenging activity for both participants and trainers. Confronted with the impossibility of arriving at clear-cut designs and rather the necessity of re-imagining long-term visions, participants were compelled to constantly oscillate between the spatial re-configuration of sites and the bottom-up planning approaches entailed by it.

The outputs of the workshop combined numerous of findings and re-articulations: micro-stories that inform us about broader patterns of past and present urban life; spatial re-configurations that take advantage of opportunities found on-site; scenarios of the gradual ecological recovery of the estuary and the spatial transformation of housing; and visions of a possible (future) urban landscape that represent the social commitments of multiple actors.

Immediately after the closure of the workshop, the abundant materials produced by the initiative were delivered to the local communities for their use in the discussion of inclusive design alternatives to the mega-project with leading institutions and local municipal authorities. Additionally, CUBE leaders led further fieldwork for the preparation of selected materials used in press conferences with high government representatives from Quito. At this last follow-up meetings, some leaders commented that MIDUVI officers had been visiting the neighbourhood asking residents about how much space from their backyards they were willing to yield for creating a green edge (Figs. 16.3 and 16.4).

Fig. 16.3 Fieldwork: documenting dwelling environments and estuarine living spaces. Photographs by Ana Sabrina Martínez, Designing Inclusion, 2015

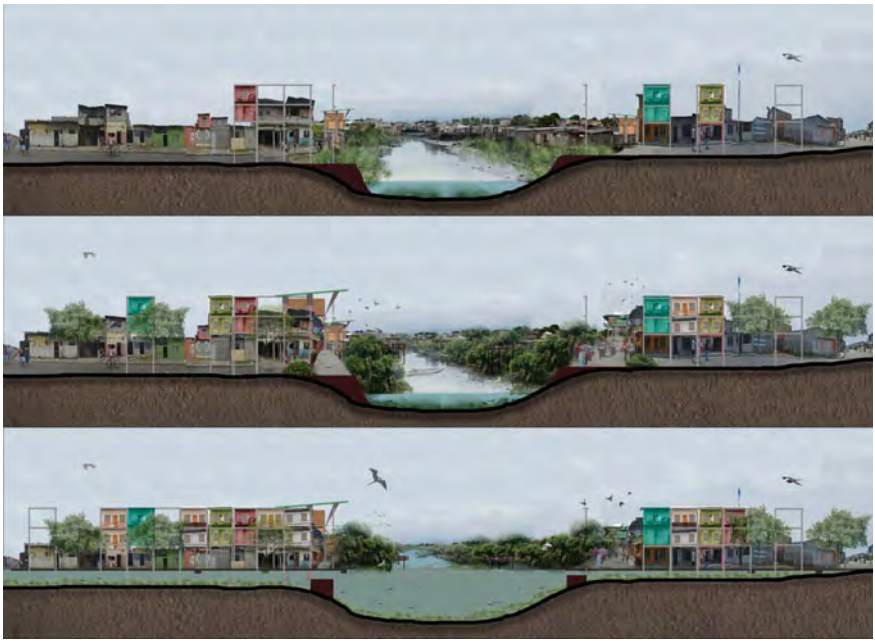

Fig. 16.4 Alternative imaginations for short-, medium- and long-term adaptation: incremental housing transformation and ecological infrastructures. Image by Ana Sabrina Martínez, Astrid van Kerckhoven, Designing Inclusion, 2015

16.7 Conclusion

Against the backdrop of neoliberal development in Latin American cities, the case of Guayaquil is exemplary of challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for academic institutions in becoming key actors for the development of their cities and regions. Reflecting on the circumstances, the local and national institutional set-up of Ecuador in which the experience of the summer school *Designing Inclusion* (2015) was introduced, the case throws light over unexplored possibilities within an uncharted territory for most professionals and academics in Guayaquil and Ecuador.

The action-learning approach considered relevant for the Ecuadorian context was effective in pushing unspoken barriers that actually hamper innovation in the learning environment of the academia. In the case of Guayaquil, it made possible to re-connect a more coherent idea of social engagement, which in Ecuadorian policy for higher education remains open to wide interpretation. The 'action' implied in the whole exercise was successful in suspending stereotypical perceptions and attitudes towards people, places and problems of urban settlements. The exchange of knowledge between external and local actors enabled participants to discuss and re-frame such categories in a socially constructed way and to critically question why in the first place neglected communities often need to challenge the state. The initiative also provided the opportunity to reflect on the important role and specific contribution of professionals and academics in balancing contested urban development. From the other side of the equation, the recognition of communities as equal partners in the dialogue about their environment, present and future well-being, helped remove some of the stigma of tense relationships of struggle that popular sectors commonly have to bear with. While this achievement is essential in preparing the stage for future productive collaborations, it points at the fact that this kind of exchanges has been long expected by the community and the university is not used to having them; therefore, its public mandate should be questioned. The discovered convening capacity of the university is vital for staging a broad-based stakeholder setting where the voices of powerful and neglected city makers are equalized and therefore should be potentiated. By integrating and generating new knowledge relevant for reducing capacity gaps in ecological design, climate change-responsive urban planning and participatory housing-focused urban development, the experience of the summer school suggested to local academics, a more precise focus of architectural education in a timely moment of the curriculum development at the University of Guayaquil. It does not come as a surprise that in an academic environment which is been thoroughly evaluated, authorities will take advantage of opportunities to score higher in the ranking. However, for purposes of revising the curriculum, it remains as equally important to reflect critically on the emerging trend of 'mega-projects in the name of ecology' in Ecuador, in Latin America and the South more generally. For students and practitioners alike, becoming aware of the mechanisms through which unprecedented amounts of capital (public funds) are re-directed to private actors is crucial. Even if communities can mobilize and are known to be able to do so, academics should question

why techniques to fragment their social practices are built-into mega-projects and why basic conditions linked to environmental crisis are used to support speculative ventures. Re-considering and bringing back the idea of a pro-poor city is a core task of urban professionals that needs to be cultivated through a critical pedagogy. From this perspective, the social engagement of academia should be posited well beyond humanitarian or clientelist standpoints, in the light of its value for achieving more inclusive, just and innovative forms of urban planning where space and design are key.

As the contemporary setting is evidently making it harder for university graduates to carve their own alternative practices, universities are called to reconfigure their role as key actors in contesting unequal city-making. A main challenge to reflect upon, which surfaces in the case of Guayaquil, is the polarity of attitudes and postures among academics and lack of stimulating dialogues on positionality. Institutional resistance to progressive forms of teaching and learning falling out of conventional-normative controls is a known trend (Archipovitae 2015), as postures that stand in strict antagonist 'activism' towards other actors. Both such postures are not only doomed to fail, but constitute a problem for education and governance in general.

Looking forward to a change of paradigms, the discussion of academic activism in the design disciplines offers an interesting perspective as an approach to architecture which allows us to raise questions and reflect on new ways of thinking about what we do and how we do it, within and with a wide spectrum of non-architect agents. On the other hand, it compels us to look at academia as a productive site for activism, whose power relations may be challenged and reassembled (Flood et al. 2013). More generally, academic activism should be more about intervening in your locality than travelling around the world with a different 'cause' every semester. Rather than being understood as ´failed cities´ as has been the prevalent view among planners and governments, our students and practitioners can be encouraged to start looking at cities in the global South as examples of everyday resistance against misplaced urban and development plans (Simone 2004).

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