EDITOR'S NOTE

Co-producing the Public: (Un)Learning Public Space in the Global South

This eighteenth issue of *Limaq* brings together the second group of articles selected through our thematic call, "Co-producing the Public: (Un)Learning Public Space in the Global South," and continues to pursue the aim we set out from the beginning: to collectively redefine the meaning of the public and public space through situated learning across different countries of the Global South. We seek to explore the conditions under which public space becomes a site of collective learning and the forms of knowledge co-produced within it. It is precisely these forms of knowledge and experience that can guide us toward a renewed understanding of the phenomenon. In issue 17, we concluded that public spaces and the public are produced not only through physical interventions but also through social networks within our communities, the urban planning tools we employ, and the narratives we advance as architects, urban planners, and designers—including what and whom we choose to make visible, or leave invisible, in our projects and discourse. We learned that transforming the public requires change at multiple levels: from the theoretical frameworks we draw on and the research methods we use to the forms of knowledge rooted in particular territories that we recognize as valid.

In this issue, we present a selection of research articles that reveal the many ways in which communities across the Global South are exploring and discovering new approaches to co-producing public spaces and, with them, the very meaning of the public. Although learning to see and understand is necessarily a gradual process, the large number of submissions we received underscores the urgent need for scholarly debate on this subject, bringing fresh perspectives and critical reflections to bear on practice. We also wish to highlight the geographical diversity represented in this issue—including Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba, Ecuador, and even Namibia—as well as the range of spatial typologies and territorial contexts under investigation: public

spaces in urban centers, peripheral areas, border zones, housing estates, informal settlements, and beyond. Taken together, these contributions show that the co-production of public space—and of the public—takes different forms in every country and context. It responds to local social and environmental dynamics, confronts distinct power relations and political interests, and is often driven by local communities through their everyday practices of insurgency and resilience.

Although the selected articles encompass a rich variety of contexts, forms of learning, and methodological approaches, they also reveal common threads that suggest a way of reading the contributions that follow, organized around what prompts people to act. Several articles show how the co-production of the public is advanced, consciously or otherwise, by communities and civil society, often in response to the absence of local government. This is a movement "from below," associated by various authors with "insurgent urbanism" (Holston, 2008). Other contributions examine the co-production of the public initiated by local governments or global programs, critically assessing the tools employed and the impacts of these processes. Still others explore how the public is co-produced through public and neighborhood infrastructure, such as schools in peripheral areas and self-managed urban gardens.

With this in mind, we begin with articles that analyze and discuss civil society initiatives and the dynamics through which public space and the public are co-produced.

Fabio Andre Sanson Castro explores the role of "urban voids" in the co-production of public places in two neighborhoods of Caracas, Venezuela. Drawing on Heidegger and Norberg-Schulz, he emphasizes that the distinction between space and place lies in the personal bond people establish with space through the act of "dwelling." He identifies several urban voids that have been appropriated by the community, demonstrating how these sites have acquired new meanings. The author invites us to reconsider urban voids not simply as "economic assets" but as resources capable of fostering local identity and meeting the need for public spaces in many cities across the Global South.

Vanessa Forneck and Manoel Rodrigues Alves extend this discussion through their examination of the symbolic (re)signification and co-production of the public, focusing particularly on public spaces at edges and borders, whether along rivers or between countries. They analyze a series of public spaces in two cities on the border between Uruguay and Argentina, highlighting the potential of these spatial configurations to open up possibilities for collectively building a sense of community—and of the public—across different ways of life, cultures, and values. The distinctive character of these spaces is examined through the method of sensitive cartography, an especially valuable approach for making visible situated knowledge embedded in the local territory.

Addressing similar dynamics, Elsa Yepez Westreicher and her colleagues investigate how the public and public spaces are co-produced by residents of Peter Nanyemba, an informal settlement in Windhoek, Namibia's capital, that is affected by flash floods. Their article, "Forming the Public Realm Through Spatial and Non-Spatial Measures: Public Space and Community Organization," examines how exposure to environmental risk prompts community members to continually re-establish public areas. As the authors observe, in this changing context the settlement's public spaces are co-produced simultaneously at different levels, through physical interventions, social networks, spatial practices, and collective learning. Their work demonstrates how environmental risk dynamically reshapes the co-production of the public, revealing new approaches guided by community needs and social dynamics.

Diego Martín Fiscarelli and Santiago Palero demonstrate how the public is constructed over time through residents' own appropriation of space. They examine the everyday co-production of public–community space in the Justo Suárez neighborhood, part of Villa 7 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Their historical-ethnographic study compares the planning of this housing development in the 1970s with its present-day condition, as expressed in neighborhood dynamics and public spaces. The authors stress the processual nature of co-production in planning: spaces must be continually reassessed, rethought, and re-established

over time. In this context, they reaffirm the role of local public institutions in keeping the co-production of the public an active and ongoing process.

The next two articles explore how this can take place through neighborhood institutions, examining initiatives for the co-production of both public space and the public.

Franklin Roberto Ferreira de Paula and Maria Isabel Imbrunito assess how public schools can contribute to the co-production of public spaces in peripheral urban areas. They identify a range of open spaces—including sports courts, courtyards, and other outdoor areas—that become sites of interaction between schools and the surrounding city. On this basis, they conclude that "the co-production of the public emerges from the interaction between architecture, school management, community ties, and informal teaching practices, positioning the school as a regenerative platform for urbanity" (p. 117). They emphasize that the school becomes a key actor and an active part of its neighborhood. Its influence extends beyond the classroom, helping to shape the public realm.

Adriana Sansão Fontes and her colleagues, meanwhile, examine three community gardens in Havana, Cuba; Quito, Ecuador; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, considering both their historical development and their current role in the co-production of the public. They show how community gardens emerged in response to crises, including food insecurity in low-income neighborhoods. The authors also demonstrate the potential of actively integrating urban gardens as an urban typology into local public policy, thereby encouraging new ways of co-producing the public in Latin American cities. In their words, "by mobilizing local and collective knowledge, gardens create territories of learning, food production, and social interaction, strengthening social ties and forms of insurgent citizenship" (p. 135).

Finally, we turn to articles that critically examine the co-production of public space and the public through public policy.

Fernando Barona Garduño examines the role of citizen participation within two urban development policy instruments promoted by Mexico City's public

authorities: the General Development Plan (Plan General de Desarrollo) and the General Territorial Planning Program (Programa General de Ordenamiento Territorial). He presents them "as a critical case of the gap between democratic mandate and actual impact" (p. 157). The author underscores the importance of traceability as a mechanism for fostering meaningful citizen participation beyond its merely symbolic dimension. The study proposes strategies for ensuring collaboration between public institutions and civil society in the co-production of the public, showing how such processes can also originate within the state.

Jorge Bassani and his colleagues offer a critical discussion of the role of state planning instruments in the co-production of our cities, focusing on the relationship between capital and citizen participation. Drawing on a public park developed in collaboration with the local community in São Paulo, Brazil, the authors consider the right to the city and the negotiation of competing interests within co-production processes. They highlight the ambiguity faced by public-space initiatives, caught between demands for citizen participation and the long-term dependence on government that can result. Nevertheless, they emphasize the potential of a step-by-step, co-produced approach to urbanism capable of accommodating the complexity of different territories.

Lastly, in their article "From International Recognition to Local Appropriation: The Meaning of João Pessoa's Designation as a UNESCO Creative City and Its Implications for Public Space," Kelly Da Silva Santos and Eliane Superti examine UNESCO's Creative Cities program and its impact on city-making in João Pessoa, Brazil. Among other findings, the study identifies a knowledge gap and a paradoxical situation: while the city is internationally recognized through its UNESCO Creative City designation, local residents are largely unaware of the program's existence. These findings draw attention to the public image constructed by programs associated with a globalized world, but also to their limited integration into local society. The case illustrates how the construction of the public can prove misleading or remain largely hypothetical.

We close issue 18—and *Limaq*'s first exploration of the co-production of the public in the Global South—with reflections on the questions raised by our thematic call. We recognize and emphasize the diversity of ways in which people work to influence the co-production of our public spaces—and of the public—across different spheres of action, institutional structures, spatial configurations, and social groups. We acknowledge the continued importance of state-led programs that incorporate citizen participation as a planning tool, while also recognizing that they require critical scrutiny and constant adjustment to the changing realities of our cities. We value the many initiatives and struggles led by civil society and local communities as they explore new ways of co-producing public spaces—and the public—through social networks, adaptation to territorial conditions, and the appropriation and activation of public space, thereby generating symbolic value for their communities. Finally, we underscore the importance of the narratives constructed around the production of public spaces in our cities and communities, through which we can continue to develop a shared understanding of the public.

The number of submissions we received demonstrates both the interest in this subject and the urgent need to make visible the many struggles to design and create high-quality public spaces, in which the meaning of the public is shaped by a commitment to welcoming different inhabitants and responding to their diverse needs and visions. We thank everyone who submitted their work and hope that they will have further opportunities to share it with the scholarly community. Although we recognize that this topic calls for a discussion extending well beyond two issues, our aim is to contribute to a much broader debate on new approaches to co-producing public spaces and the public in our cities and neighborhoods.

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REFERENCE

Holston, J. (2008). *Insurgent citizenship: Disjunctions of democracy and modernity in Brazil*. Princeton University Press.