

ICOA1604: RECONQUERING DEMOCRACY THROUGH CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE IN CHILE

Subtheme 01: Integrating Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development by engaging diverse Communities for Heritage Management

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Abstracts: During Pinochet's dictatorship, most of civil society and community organisations were restricted or banned, causing disaffection of citizens from public life and limiting social relations among neighbours. In addition, after the restoration of the democratic system, deepen neoliberal policies continued to promote individualism and lack of participation. However, during the last decades, and particularly after the earthquake and tsunami occurred in 2010 in Chile, several community organisations emerged to promote, recover and protect their local cultural heritage as an essential component of their identity. Beside the recognition of the risk faced by cultural and natural heritage due to its exposure to natural hazards, people have become aware about other hazards – even more dangerous-, including bureaucracy, gentrification, real estate speculation, lack of modern regulations, lack of incentives to protect heritage buildings, energy generation or mining projects, etc.

Some communities have organised themselves to rebuild traditional adobe houses, some others to protect their neighbourhoods from the construction of high buildings -forcing changes in urban regulations-, and others are managing to promote traditional knowledge, the recovery of traditional construction techniques and intangible heritage, as well as to protect threatened natural heritage. Communities and other civil society organisations are not only safeguarding their own heritage but also making others in society aware about the importance of heritage for sustainable development, and for protecting and strengthening local identities. At the same time, people in different rural and urban areas have recovered previously lost social ties and have rebuilt their sense of space and belonging, creating and strengthening social capital, thus increasing their resilience and promoting sustainable development.

Key words: *participation, social capital, community, empowerment*

Community participation after dictatorship

After the 1973 *coup d'état*, Pinochet banned political parties, restricted the right to assembly and weakened social organisations at all levels, controlling from neighbourhood boards to municipalities, university authorities, etc. Although the recovery of the democratic rule in 1990 opened some political space, procedures in a series of institutional and social spheres remained <<elitist and exclusionary>>¹. Heritage definition and construction is one of these spheres. Academic and cultural “authorities” were recognised as the main and only authorised voices to determine what properties and places should be legally protected although the state apparatus does not have enough resources or mechanisms to assure heritage management and reconstruction (Conget 2017).

Although most experts agree that heritage is a “social construction”, little or nothing was done during the first years of the return of democracy in order to “democratize heritage” and its management, and even less in stimulating participation of the various social actors in the definition of the objectives and limits of actions on heritage (Carrera 2017:124).

Heritage at risk

Chile is a country highly exposed to natural hazards. Only from 1810 onwards, at least 97 earthquakes of magnitude 7 or more affected the country, 18 of them considered highly destructive (magnitude 8 or higher). In addition, according to EM-DAT data, in the same period Chile has been affected by at least 19 floods, ten major fires, nine volcanic eruptions, four landslides, and two droughts (CNID 2016: 23).

Earthquakes have been particularly important in the deterioration and loss of built cultural heritage. The earthquake of February 2010 (Mw8.8) affected 187 of 348 properties protected by law as Historical Monuments (Delegación Presidencial para la Reconstrucción, Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública 2014:254). The reconstruction process has been slow and bureaucratic, being a “critical knot” <<the recovery of privately owned properties>>². In addition, buildings in older traditional neighbourhoods in central areas as well as adobe houses in rural sectors without official protection also had damages. Many of them are owned by people with no resources to rebuild or restore their properties.

Additionally, buildings in these neighbourhoods are also threatened by obsolescence, real estate speculation, gentrification, lack of incentives to protect and manage protected buildings, etc., some of them directly related to the neoliberal context on which Chile is immerse.

The emergence of community organisations for heritage protection

In 2008, the hydroelectric generation project *HidroAysén* was presented for environmental evaluation. The project consisted of five hydroelectric power plants in the Aysén region in southern Chile and 3,000 km of power lines, which would alter areas of high environmental value. A group of more than 80 organisations and numerous people formed in the so-called *Consejo de Defensa de la Patagonia*³, with the support of international NGOs such as Greenpeace. Through the campaign *Patagonia sin Represas*⁴, they presented a fierce opposition to the *HidroAysén* project. The campaign argued such initiative was not necessary to reverse the energy crisis that, according to official data, the country would face in the

¹Carruthers, 2001

²Delegación Presidencial para la Reconstrucción, Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública, 2014.

³Defence Council of Patagonia.

⁴Patagonia without Dams.

following years, and that its environmental impact would be immense. Although the project was environmentally approved in 2011, the numerous legal arguments but above all the massive scope of the campaign which included citizen marches nationwide, ended up preventing its implementation. The movement was also accompanied by proposals to incorporate non-conventional renewable energies (NCRE) to the national energy matrix (www.patagoniasinrepresas.cl). As of March 2014, 7% of the Chilean energy matrix corresponded to NCRE, while in March 2017 NCREs comprised 17% of the matrix (Espinoza 2017).

The involvement of the “common citizen” in a campaign against a mega project for protecting natural heritage was unprecedented. More recently, the mining and port project *Dominga* was rejected environmentally due to its possible environmental impacts on marine protected areas, also generating the massive repudiation of the population. Here also, public dissemination of environmental and social values of the area as well as the involvement of organised communities, were crucial.

In urban areas, many movements organised by citizens have emerged, several of them after the earthquake of 2010, although others before it, in order to protect the built heritage and their “neighbourhood life”, from threats such as densification and real estate speculation, on the one hand, and the lack of policies for appropriate reconstruction and/or restoration of heritage buildings damaged due to the occurrence of disasters or physical obsolescence, on the other.

Numerous neighbourhoods have seen their survival endangered due to these factors, especially since the introduction of the neoliberal model from the end of the 1970s, during the dictatorship, and the subsequent policies of urban regeneration or deregulation, maintained and deepened even today. Moreover, after the recent earthquakes various actions from the state and particularly from the private sector could be qualified as disaster capitalism measures (as proposed by Klein 2008. See Sandoval and González-Muzzio 2015, González-Muzzio and Sandoval 2015), increasing the risk of heritage loss and other substantial changes in traditional vicinities.

Among the organizations arisen stands out *Vecinospor la Defensa del Barrio Yungay*⁵, which aimed to protect an area threatened by various hazards from the second half of the twentieth century onwards: first, the abandonment and deterioration of which was object since wealthiest population moved to the eastern sector of Santiago, then by the earthquake of 1985, and after that, by repopulation policies driven by the municipality from the 1990s, allowing the construction of multi-storey buildings.

Those threats triggered a process of heritage valuation and cultural appropriation, initiated from civil society, where the idea of preserving the territory for future generations would be legitimated through its official declaration as protected heritage (Roigé and Frigolé 2010). Although at the beginning the group emerged to solve a problem of garbage accumulation and deficient municipal management, then other hazards arose, such as possible changes in urban regulation that would allow the demolition of properties previously declared for “historical conservation” by the municipality. The demonstrations and protests of the organised neighbours impeded normative modifications, so they started moving<<from protest to proposal>>⁶. Through public meetings, they began to associate the concepts of heritage and identity to the “need” to nominate the areas as *Zona Típica* (“Typical Zone”, a category defined by the Law of National Monuments), thus granting official protection at the national level. This endeavour gradually increased the feeling of attachment to place among local inhabitants, strengthened social ties between neighbours participating in the process, allowed them to reconstruct their history, and to define their values and those of their territory.

⁵Neighbours for the Defence of Barrio Yungay.

⁶Conget, 2016:146.

The organisation partially achieved its mission, when 113.53 of the 170 hectares initially proposed to be protected were declared *Zona Típica*. Currently, *Barrio Yungay* is a focus for cultural development and for dissemination of heritage significance in Santiago, through numerous activities carried out every year (see Fig.1 for an example).



Fig.1– Spring fest promoted by community organisations at Barrio Yungay since 2014⁷

However, the partial “failure” led the organisation of *Barrio Yungay* to question <<what and who defines what is heritage>>⁸. As a consequence, community leaders have “technified” their speech and also have been advised and trained in a way they have become an authoritative voice to speak of the social claim for heritage safeguarding, later supporting other groups that feel threatened their “quality of life” or that seek to legally protect their vicinity. This happened, for example, with the *Barrio Matta Sur*, designated *Zona Típica* in 2016 by initiative of the organised community, in a process that took nine years (www.barriomattasur.cl).

More recently, neighbourhood associations in other sectors of Santiago, have taken the path of protecting their vicinities. The *Villa Olímpica*⁹ -built for the 1962 Football World Cup- and a residential neighbourhood representative of the 1940s and 1950s, influenced by the modern movement (*Barrio Suárez Mujica*), are other examples. *Villa Olímpica*, severely damaged after the 2010 earthquake, was declared *Zona Típica* in 2017, preventing demolition. And people from *Barrio Suárez Mujica*, are currently going through the last stage of their campaign to protect the area, seeking support from other citizens. By October 29, more than 4,800 signatures had been collected through the Change.org platform, while local leaders and volunteers are informing residents about the potential consequences of heritage nomination, a mandatory step in the process for official protection (Fig.2, Fig.3).

⁷Retrieved from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/PrimaveraYungay/status/924699049697120257?s=03> and <https://twitter.com/pedalealoco/status/923994982494752773?s=03> [accessed October 29, 2017].

⁸Conget, 2016: 157.

⁹Olympic Village

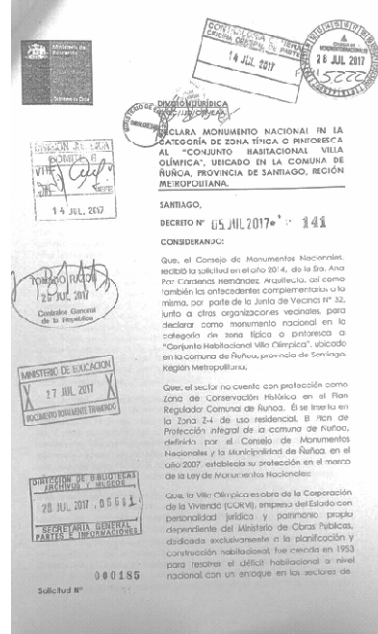


Fig.2– Celebrations due to nomination of Villa Olímpica as Zona Típica (2016, left image) and its official decree (2017).¹⁰



Fig.3– Material for citizen consultation on the declaration of Zona Típica (Barrio Suárez Mujica).¹¹

Another example is the *Escuela Taller Fermín Vivaceta*, <<a community initiative that aims to train skilled labour for the restoration of heritage buildings, through the rescue of traditional crafts such as woodworking, plasterwork, the recovery of traditional techniques such as adobe, *quincha* and mud, and

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/PaulaMendoza/status/781243004183076864?s=03> and <https://twitter.com/rcvillaoлимпica/status/892556019682955268?s=03> [Accessed October 29, 2017]

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/amoraleszambra/status/921716773724016656?s=03> [Accessed October 29, 2017]

training for the implementation of electrical installations>>¹². It also emerged in *Barrio Yungay*, in response to the earthquake of February 27, 2010, and it has been replicated in several cities of the country. This organisation has supported the reconstruction of heritage homes damaged by various events such as the aforementioned 2010 earthquake and the 2015 mudslides that affected some cities in the north of Chile. This group had also a fundamental part in the creation of the *Red de Escuelas Taller de Latinoamérica y el Caribe*¹³, which today brings together associations from fifth-teen countries of the region.

Likewise, the *Asociación Chilena de Barrios y Zonas Patrimoniales*¹⁴ has formed a network of more than 150 community organisations from all along the country. This association is also part of the *Movimiento Nacional para la Reconstrucción Justa*¹⁵, formed to support vulnerable populations whose home was destroyed after the 2010 earthquake and a group of movements named *Democracia para Chile*, created in 2011, linked to the Patagonia without Dams campaign. Within the period of legislative discussion for the recently created Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, the association presented a proposal for the Heritage Law to the National Congress, and organised several marches for promoting heritage safeguarding, with the motto <<heritage is communities>>¹⁶.

Discussion: heritage as political issue in a democratic context

García-Canclini (1999) points out that in the definition and uses of heritage, the state, the private sector, and social movements as spheres of power, are in tension. <<In certain cases, heritage has been used by the working classes or minority groups, to generate social, cultural and political change>>¹⁷. In the exposed cases, such changes have been produced to promote official protection of diverse sectors of the city threatened by neoliberal urban policies, or to rebuild areas damaged by disasters.

The leadership of some social coordinators and their immersion into the technical and political discourse regarding heritage, together with their capacity to form and direct social organisations, have allowed them to generate political pressure in various fields related not only to heritage but with the protection of the “quality of life” in different urban and rural areas along with the vindication of the “right to the city”. The reintegration of neighbourhood organisations into local government structures (municipalities, civil society councils, etc.) has strengthened social ties among neighbours, lost in the decades that followed the military coup of 1973.

However, the production of locality and common identity that can be recognised due to living in a given neighbourhood comprises also the risk of “stagnation”, and the desire of “freezing” some areas so they remain as they are now. This issue has implied that struggles of people living in a particular district are no longer associated with heritage but with “the image of a quiet neighbourhood”, of one or two-story houses, where there are no tall buildings and no new “alien” inhabitants. In the long run, this has also led to real estate speculation and has induced gentrification processes that especially affect older populations that do not have enough resources to maintain or repair their houses, being prevented from selling due to the strictness of the rule imposed by those who want to keep their “quiet life”. Normally, affected neighbours do not feel able to give their opinion or discuss, being oppressed by the most organised.

It is necessary that the processes of citizen participation and community organisation that have resurged in recent years, and that have had significant results regarding the protection of local heritage from bottom to top, also have mechanisms of accountability and processes of democratic elections, openness to

¹²Red de Escuelas Taller, 2017.

¹³Network of “Workshop Schools” in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹⁴Chilean Association of Neighbourhoods and Heritage Zones.

¹⁵National Movement for Just Reconstruction.

¹⁶Conget, 2016.

¹⁷Conget, 2016: 140.

diverse opinions and aimed to search for agreements that focus not only on their own needs but on the common good.

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List of Figures

- Fig.1– Spring fest promoted by community organisations at Barrio Yungay since 2014 4
- Fig.2– Celebrations due to nomination of Villa Olímpica as Zona Típica (2016, left image) and its official decree (2017). 5
- Fig.3– Material for citizen consultation on the declaration of Zona Típica (Barrio Suárez Mujica). 5