

EDITORIAL CROLAR 4

Frank Müller and Anke Schwarz

Lo Urbano: Current Urban Research in and from Latin America

The editorial team of CROLAR – Critical Reviews on Latin American Research – is pleased to present its fourth volume, “Lo Urbano”. As the title indicates, “the urban” and urban phenomena in and from Latin America are in the focus of this volume. As a place of anonymous cohabitation and social diversity (Simmel 1903), as a sphere of capitalist reproduction and collective consumption (Castells 1974), from the *imaginarios urbanos* (García Canclini 1996) to the “Rebel Cities” (Harvey 2012) the city has inspired systematic analysis of the tight linkages between public space and collective culture, between space and capital accumulation, and of social discontent.

Today, Latin America is at once the most urbanized continent and home to the most striking social inequalities. Since the 1960s, private and public research on these topics has increased and regional governments have reacted by installing urban planning authorities. The long interdisciplinary tradition of Urban Studies in Latin America has predominantly focused on issues such as (extreme) poverty, segregation, insecurity, and violence. And yet, a questioning of the

specificity of Latin American cities has only recently begun and with it a debate on the universality of urbanization processes, theories, and methodologies. What is more, beyond the dystopic image that generalizes peripheral “slums” to be an essential characteristic of the continent’s major cities, Urban Studies in and from Latin America increasingly access the potential and plurality of urbanization processes and approaches for their analyses.

Hence the question that drives the **Focus** section of CROLAR’s current volume: With respect to “the urban”, what can and has been learned from Latin America? We found several overlapping topics and lines of inquiry in current research in and from Latin America: (1) an interest in the translatability and mobility of concepts and methods and, connected to this, the question of hierarchies in knowledge production, which undermine global horizontal exchanges; (2) a persistent focus on how urban space is appropriated not only materially, but also on a symbolic level; (3) an opening-up towards the study of fragmented political sovereignties in the management and

distribution of resources; (4) new methods for the analysis of urban segregation; (5) promising critical approaches to the long-lasting debate on urban informality; and (6) how commodification of cultural diversity and cultural expressions transform the space of America's cities.

CROLAR 4 traces these topics from Tim Edensor's and Mark Jayne's *Urban Theories Beyond the West*; to Anne Hufschmid's and Kathrin Wilder's translation of Latin American approaches and concepts such as territories, public space, and *imaginarios*; and Gisela Heffes' *Utopías urbanas. Geopolíticas del deseo en América Latina*. Paola Alfaro d'Alençon et al.'s anthology *Lateinamerikanische Städte im Wandel* also addresses the question of the geography of knowledge production.

The production of (urban) space is conceptualized from various angles in several publications reviewed in this journal: the (literal) writing of space in Vivane Mahieux' *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*, its making through policing in Markus-Michael Müller's *Public Security in the Negotiated State*, and the spatial embeddedness of urban (and rural) movements of social resistance in Raúl Zibechi's *Territorien des Widerstands*. Using the example of a public university in Rio de Janeiro, André Cicalo's *Urban Encounters* examines how differentiation along categories such as "race" is inscribed in and reproduced through urban space – and how it can be altered by affirmative action. *Horacio Torres y los mapas sociales* by Artemio Pedro Abba et al. presents the

work of one of the key urban thinkers on socio-spatial structuring in Buenos Aires and his theoretical conceptualization of urban space.

Undoubtedly, urban fragmentation, residential segregation, and socio-spatial differentiation are "classic" topics in Urban Studies in and from Latin America. The current state of research is represented in compilations edited by Emilio Pradilla Cobos, Thomas Maloutas and Kuniko Fujita, and by Eduardo Cesar Leão Marques' study of São Paulo. Taking a more general perspective, *Desarrollo Urbano y Regional* [Series: Los grandes problemas de México] by Gustavo Garza and Martha Schteingart compiles a variety of studies on contemporary processes of inter- and intra-urban development.

Urban informality – a concept "born" in Kenya, which traveled via the urban South and North back to Latin America – has been a major concern for planning authorities and researchers for more than four decades. The publications by Felipe Hernández et al. and Janice Perlman are re-reading urban informalities in Latin America by broadening the concept's scope from its tight link to marginality to questions of empowerment and post-structural explanations. Partially related to these debates, metroZones' anthology *Urban Prayers* centers on the rarely-studied relation between politics, religion and urban space, covering religious urban movements in the peripheries of Latin American, African, Asian, and European cities.

How cultural diversity and ethnicity work in urban politics, regeneration policies, and imaginaries motivates the volume *Selling EthniCity* edited by Olaf Kaltmeier, as well as John T. Way's *The Mayan in the Mall*. Here, the commodification of cultural expressions, as well as a strategic essentialization of ethnicity deployed by movements of resistance to urban displacement are discussed. Arlene Dávila's *Culture Works* broadly discusses the concept of "neoliberalism". Despite the pitfalls of an excessive and imprecise analytic use of the term, the author successfully demonstrates its usefulness in criticizing uneven effects of cultural and urban policies reshaped by neoliberal economic logics. Treating similar uneven effects, an omnibus review of three publications by Rebecca E. Biron, Richard Young and Amanda Holmes, and Helmut Anheier and Yudhishtir Raj Isar deals with the links between art, culture and the urban in Latin America.

Anne Hufschmid dedicates the **Classics Revisited** section to the eponymous concept of "Lo Urbano", which stems from the work of Manuel Delgado. In his conceptualization of Street Anthropology, the urban is defined through public actions, as "city in practice" – not to be confused with "the city". Delgado proposes a set of particular empirical methods to grasp these urban practices: first and foremost through direct observation. Similar to the Lefebvrian tradition, urban space is thus produced through its use and appropriation. Delgado's reading of the Right to the City as a Right to Indifference – to be treated as common, as same, as equal – also seems rather refreshing in a

world of identity politics and is reminiscent of Simmel's notion of the "*blasé attitude*".

With a review of Pedro Moctezuma's *La Chispa* the section **Interventions** is devoted to an account of the "city as practice". The grassroots activist and researcher provides a most detailed insight into the surge and achievements of Mexico City's *Movimiento Urbano Popular* over the last three decades. Recounting local experiences, practices, and strategies of political activism and organization, this book is less of a hands-on manual for social movements, but highly recommended for all who are susceptible to the spark of confidence in social struggle.

In **Current Debates** the present volume of CROLAR assembles three publications, which make important contributions to their respective fields, even though they are not directly linked to the urban: using the examples of Ecuador and Peru, *Mobilizing Ethnic Identity in the Andes* by Lisa M. Glidden elaborates how the construction of ethnic identities is employed as a strategy of collective representation within and beyond national constraints. In another contribution to Political Science, Edward Gibson's *Boundary Control* provides a comparative historical analysis of the way subnational autocratic regimes operate within federal states in the Americas.

Literary production in post-dictatorship Argentina – the so-called "New Argentine Narrative" – is the subject of Elsa Drucaroff's widely received *Los prisioneros de la torre*. The book is both an overview and criticism of young Argentine literature, and a political

statement on the role of literature, writers, and critics in processes of social change.

All in all, the anthologies and monographs reviewed in CROLAR 4 contribute to a broad field of knowledge production, which is not only transdisciplinary, but also transnational. An analysis of “Lo Urbano” in particular cannot be reduced to cities in Latin America. Beyond the geographic essentialism of a “Latin American” specificity, the contributions to the present volume provide critical perspectives on related processes in cities all over the Americas and the urban South. In doing so, they strive to overcome hierarchies of knowledge production. As this volume demonstrates, the very production of the urban – be it through everyday practices, chronicles, policing, or social resistance – provides the focal point for many of these works.

In this sense, Urban Studies bear the potential to transcend the boundaries of Area Studies and to focus on the social, political, and economic processes that produce and connect (urban) spaces around the globe. We hope to inspire further attempts to relocate and translate concepts and methods between and within geographical regions.

We wish you a pleasant and inspiring read.