Urban commons as a non-institutional urban regeneration mechanism: the case of Urrunaga in the José Leonardo Ortiz district, Chiclayo (Peru)

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Abstract

The implementation of urban plans in Peru is poor at a provincial level, and it is also insufficient at the district level. Likewise, only a few cities have comprehensive plans, and other do not have any urban register at all. Even though the management would have accomplished the urban plans, the public politics made to solve the urban vulnerability have not been taken into account until the last urban plans published in the present year. Starting from this institutional absence, the informality, which is a typical characterization for the social production of space in this country, leads to the emergence of the community action as a way to face the urban vulnerability. The main goal of this research was to understand if the urban commons emerged in vulnerable urban areas from America Latina can drive to an urban regeneration process that is not institutional. To accomplish this, a study case of the urbanization Urrunaga, in the Jose Leonardo Ortiz district in the city of Chiclayo, has been developed. Through the project "Urrunaga Te Cuida" (Urrunaga takes care of you). developed between 2021 and 2022 by the team conformed by ARUP (a multinational constructor), Ocupa Tu Calle (Occupy your street, a national consultant) and Peatón Cix (Pederastian from Chiclayo, a local civil organization), various dynamics have been shaped around an urban common that completely transformed a public area in the neighborhood. The case has been contextualized to demonstrate the vulnerable condition in addition to the current activity of the citizens; this, in order to analyze it through a qualitative methodology. This way, the first step was to analyze the situation how the regulatory framework in the 2018-2022 period attended the urban vulnerability through the literature revision, in addition to different interviews. The second step consisted of showing the reasons for the emergence of that urban common through the survey applied to neighbors, as well as the participant observation. As a third step, the functioning of the urban common was explained. Finally, an evaluation was necessary to understand if the contribution of this urban common has taken a step towards a "process" of urban regeneration, operationalized through the identification of several criteria that define it. Therefore, it is necessary to gather the knowledge from the informal mechanisms to let the conclusions lead to the introduction of social innovation in institutional actions.

Keywords: Urban commons, vulnerable population, social production, urban public politics, public space.

Introduction

Cities in Peru have grown without planning through informal growth and the lack of plans to guide urban development. According to the open data portal of the Ministry of Housing (Secretaría de Gobierno Digital 2021), in the country, only 47 % of its provinces have a territorial conditioning plan and only 15 % of the districts have a current urban development plan, while the rural area of populated centers does not have any urban development instrument (Requena Calderón and Unidad LR Data 2021).

Metropolises and cities of great relevance in the country, such as Chiclayo (the fifth most populous city, with 609 400 inhabitants, according to an INEI estimate for 2022), did not have an approved urban development plan until 2016 (Guado and Balcázar 2022). Prior to this, urban growth master plans had only been proposed as a palliative measure in the face of the imminent growth that was overwhelming the city. In fact, the Ministry of Housing indicated in its summary published in 2021 that there is a great shortage of urban instruments in the country.

Thus, cities like Chiclayo have grown spontaneously and basic needs have not been met throughout the city. This situation is added to other factors of poverty, inequality, lack of infrastructure and sanitation and consolidates a degraded physical environment, as well as vital situations of vulnerability for a significant part of the population. In fact, the region in which the city is located ranks second nationwide in terms of urban dwellings exposed to garbage dumps or stagnant water, with almost 40 % of dwellings exposed to deplorable living conditions (Ministry of Housing et al., 2021). This vulnerable urban population requires attention, while urban public policies do not directly address their needs. The urgency of a transformation and consolidation in these urban areas through urban regeneration instruments is evident.

The social production of public space in Peru is informal and the regulations encourage acting outside the framework of the law. This is because public policies aimed at reducing informality often end up deepening inequalities and urban segregation (Álvarez de Andrés, 2013). This problem is encountered by the communities in their neighborhoods and moves them to self-organize and take action. In this way, community action is presented as a way to deal with different situations that affect the city and the well-being of its citizens, such as urban vulnerability.

This is manifested as an urban common, it is sustained, configured and expanded according to: the needs of the community, agreements and collaborations between various public/private actors, and care dynamics. Waliuzzaman and Alam (2022) affirm that the urban commons are about complex agreements carried out daily by various communities that transform urban spaces in adverse situations that belong to either a public or private entity, towards common spaces. This way, urban commons end up revealing practices and ways of producing space through organization, care and interdependence dynamics. These actions, although they take place within the framework of informality without an urban plan or strategy that directs them, have an effectiveness that can often be even greater than if they had been planned. Community action emerges as a way to deal with the specific problems found in the neighborhood and as a way to make up for the institutional absence.

One of the public policies that addresses urban vulnerability is urban regeneration. These are processes and strategies that occur in their regulated form from public intervention in collaboration with citizens who live in vulnerable places. Furthermore, it has an integrated and intersectional approach with various aspects including sustainability and site-specific conditions. These processes consider it necessary to focus on the current context in the face of the obviously necessary action for climate change, and prioritize the gender perspective. Finally, it is necessary to go through adequate planning to ensure a lasting improvement with benefits in the short, medium and long terms.

To carry out a process of urban regeneration, De Gregorio Hurtado (2021) proposes a set of methodological elements that must be present in order to design an adequate strategy. Prior to this, he indicated that the existence of technical and administrative capacity is necessary, along with collaboration between actors. Also, in the same way as the urban commons, it draws on existing social capital and requires local capacity among communities. In this way, it seeks to complement both the political commitment and the actors involved. On this basis, the methodological elements would be the following: integrated vision, rooted in the local community; leverage effect, to transform these neighborhoods from political, economic and technical attention in a given time; coordination of strategies, at different scales, that is, in the city and the sector; integrated diagnosis, for the holistic understanding of the local reality; and private public financing, among other elements.

According to the criteria that define urban regeneration, in reality, in Latin America, this is already happening through bottom-up processes of citizen urbanism. In a self-managed way, they influence and put pressure on the authorities to demand necessary public policies. Regardless of the adequate compliance with the law in terms of urban planning, the impetus of existing citizen urbanism in Latin America and its power to transform cities can be observed, carrying out processes similar to urban regeneration through informal processes.

Given the lack of urban regeneration instruments, informal neighborhood improvement processes will inevitably continue to develop in Peru. We can collect these lessons and have a basis for future social innovation. Investigating these questions allows for the generation of relevant knowledge to advance in the "urban regeneration" of neighborhoods through the commons. In addition, it makes it possible to identify mechanisms to make a potential institutional action more effective.

Methodology

Peru is a country in which informality and urban inequality accompany as a side effect the fact that the implementation of urban plans is deficient. In this panorama, various urban commons arise to cooperate with various institutions and actors, both public and private, to carry out actions that improve their quality of urban life. For this reason, one of the most recent processes with great impact in the most disadvantaged district of the city was chosen as a case study: Urrunaga Te Cuida, in the Urrunaga Urbanization of the José Leonardo Ortiz district, in Chiclayo, Peru. The author has participated in the initial research of the project, forming alliances between the institutions and actors involved. This facilitated access to the data necessary for the contextualization of the case and the interviews with the actors involved.

A descriptive and analytical look is presented on how the urban commons that arise in vulnerable populations can be characterized as non-institutional urban regeneration processes and at what level. The methodological design is a case study, since the research addresses social issues; and, according to Creswell and Creswell (2014), this method is the most appropriate if one seeks to deeply explore a specific process, such as Urrunaga Te Cuida. Finally, a mixed approach, which includes quantitative and, mainly, qualitative techniques, was used.

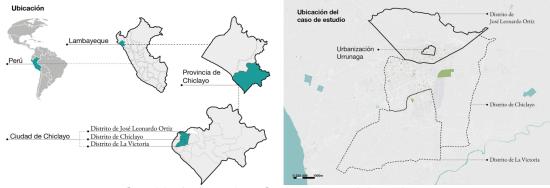
The starting hypothesis is the following: the urban commons emerged in vulnerable urban areas of Latin America, such as the Urrunaga Urbanization from the José Leonardo Ortiz district. This can lead to processes of non-institutional urban regeneration. The emergence of these commons can be attributed to the absence of institutional action, replaced by community action to address vulnerability. The general objective of the research is the following: to understand if the urban commons that have arisen in vulnerable urban areas of Latin America can lead to non-institutional urban regeneration processes and, from there, generate ways of doing things and relevant knowledge in relation to coping with urban vulnerability in those places. To carry it out, a case study in the Urrunaga Urbanization, from the José Leonardo Ortiz district, in Chiclayo, Peru, is carried out.

To guide the case study, the following steps were proposed:

- 1. Understand how the proposed urban public policies and regulations have addressed the urban vulnerability of the José Leonardo Ortiz district during the period from 2018 to 2021.
- 2. To clarify the reasons for the emergence of the urban community found in the Urrunaga Urb.
- 3. Explain the operation of the urban common found in the Urrunaga Urbanization from 2021 to 2022.
- 4. Evaluate whether the contribution of the urban common found has given rise to a "process" of urban regeneration.

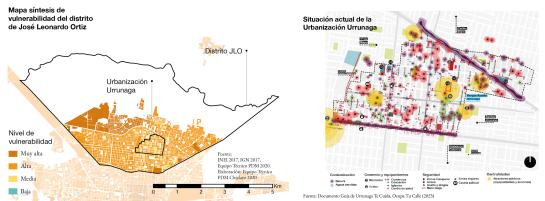
Context of the case study: Urrunaga

Peru, a country in the south of the American continent, is divided into 24 departments and a constitutional province (Callao). These departments are divided into provinces and these into districts, each one has its own regional and municipal government and different authorities. Lambayeque is the ninth most populous department in the country, with 1 197 260 inhabitants according to the 2017 census (Ministry of Housing, Construction and Sanitation, Provincial Municipality of Chiclayo, and Provincial Municipality of Lambayeque, 2023). This department, located in the north of the country, is made up of its homonymous province and the provinces of Ferreñafe and Chiclayo.



Graphic 1: Location. Source: own elaboration.

The José Leonardo Ortiz district is one of the three that make up the city of Chiclayo, it is made up of the urban area that is closest to the Chiclayo district, and a rural area that would include the entire northern periphery of the city. It has 156 498 inhabitants, according to the 2017 census, being the second most populous district in the province of Chiclayo. The study area of this research is located in the center of the urban area of the José Leonardo Ortiz district: the Urrunaga Urbanization.



Graphic 2: Urrunaga Urbanization in the José Leonardo Ortiz district and its current situation. Source: own elaboration.

As can be seen on the vulnerability synthesis map, the José Leonardo Ortiz district shows almost a high and very high vulnerability. The Urrunaga Urbanization presents a balanced variety between these two levels of vulnerability, very similar to what happens in the rest of the district.

To approach the specific location of the case study, the diagnosis made by the urban team, made up of Peatón Cix, Ocupa Tu Calle and Arup, is used. Urrunaga is located in the José Leonardo Ortiz district, in the north of the city of Chiclayo, a 10-minute walk from the largest food market in northern Peru: Mercado Moshoqueque. This urbanization is delimited to the northeast by a road-canal that was proposed as an alternative for the evacuation of rainwater resulting from the El Niño phenomenon. However, due to the low quality of the work, it has become one of the main sources of contamination, segregation and insecurity in the district neighborhood (Arup et al., 2023). The map shown is the synthesis of the current dynamics of the study area. The neighborhood has a low quality of public space, which translates into parks in a state of abandonment, unpaved streets, little green area, and accumulation of waste.

In conclusion, the conditions shown in this neighborhood in its context at the national, district and local levels demonstrate the situation of vulnerability in which people find themselves. Citizenship demonstrates a series of aspects that urgently need to be addressed. Therefore, in the following section we will study how the regulatory framework is responding to it.

Analysis of the regulatory framework

These plans have various fields of study and proposals, and the scales of the area they cover also differ greatly. This is because both the PAT (Provincial Municipality of Chiclayo, 2011) and the PDLC (Provincial Municipality of Chiclayo, 2016a) have a territorial scale at the level of the province of Chiclayo; the PDUA (Provincial Municipality of Chiclayo, 2016b) includes the city of Chiclayo and its metropolitan area; and the PDC in José Leonardo Ortiz (District Municipality of José Leonardo Ortiz, 2012) only includes the district mentioned.

The study period of this research covers the years 2018 to 2021, this regulation is the only one that was approved and published in this period, although, due to the time elapsed, a large part of the content and the document itself are no longer considered current. However, they are the only documents that have been able to guide urban actions up to the year 2021. To evaluate each of the plans, a table based on the UN-Habitat criteria studied in the second section of the theoretical framework was used in the document *A practical guide to designing, planning and executing citywide slum*

upgrading programs, published by the UN in 2015 (Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo [GRADE], Espinoza and Fort 2017).

Studied criteria*	Existing plans				
	PAT CHICLAYO 2011-2021 Territorial conditioning plan	ORTIZ 2012-2021 Concerted	PDLC CHICLAYO 2016-2021 Concerted local development plan	PDUA CHICLAYO 2011-2016 Environmenta urban development plan	
Scale	Province of Chiclayo	José Leonardo Ortiz district	Province of Chiclayo	City of Chiclayo and its metropolitan area	
Publication date	2011	2012	2016	2016	
Basic infrastructure (physical axis): sanitation, electricity, public space and solid waste management	x	x	x	x	
Community: community premises, strengthening of local institutions, citizen security services	x	x	x		
Housing: home improvement, resettlement of households living in high-risk confinements, property formalization.		x			
Economy: improvement of economic opportunities and training.		x	x		

Table 1: Summary of the review of urban plans according to UN-Habitat criteria. Source: own elaboration.

PDUA 2016, the most relevant of all due to its scale and its urban approach, which differentiates from the rest of the plans that have been carried out at the territorial level throughout the province or from strategic planning approaches, is the plan that has the most deficiencies regarding attention to urban vulnerability. This is because it is not studied in the diagnosis either. There is a gap in public policies that manage to address this problem. It is not possible to analyze how urban vulnerability is addressed because there are no direct solutions aimed at it. The interviews carried out provided a greater vision of the reasons why there is a gap in these urban instruments in terms of urban vulnerability. Among these, we can find the limiting political aspect, the ambiguity of the norms or legal gaps, and the ignorance of urban vulnerability as a priority axis in the urban scenario.

Urban common: Urrunaga Te Cuida (Urrunaga takes care of you)

It is about a physical urban common found, a series of community actions, and how, through the actions of various urban consultants, this common is configured and reconfigured in different ways to carry out more community actions for the benefit of the community and even beyond. Through this participatory and creative process, they work together and take responsibility for their neighborhood and their park, to later take care of it. There is a presence of a diversity of both public and private actors, citizen associations and neighbors, all these people work in the transformation of a tangible public good for the benefit not only of people in charge of carrying it out, but for the entire community.

Through this section of the urban common Urrunaga Te Cuida, the process that this initiative went through will be narrated and analyzed through the following parts: precommon, common configuration, reconfiguration of the common and, finally, the discussion from the results. Each of these phases will be accompanied by the perspective of different actors who participated in the process to which access was obtained through the different interviews carried out.

Analysis of criteria to identify an urban common applied to the stages of Urrunaga Te Cuida						
Criteria to identify a common	Stages of the urban common Urrunaga Te Cuida					
	Pre-common	Common configuration	Reconfiguration of the common			
Access	Legally it is public, but it is restricted to the residents of the area.	The community opens the space to the urban team and various allied associations.	Public, open to the community and other neighbors.			
Use	Restricted by the community only for its participants in the zone that they have imposed.	For the community, the urban team and allied associations.	Open to the entire community.			
Benefit	For the owners of each zone of the place.	For the community.	For the same community, and it is shared with the people who arrive at the space.			
Careful	Each owner of the park area.	For the community, the urban team and allied associations.	Made by the community.			
Responsibility	Each owner of the park area.	For the community, the urban team and allied associations.	Performed by the community throughout the common area.			
Property	Public, but it has been partially appropriated by the neighbors.	Public, the community is open to sharing the space.	Public, shared among the community as a whole.			

Table 2: Analysis of criteria to identify an urban common applied to the stages of Urrunaga Te Cuida. Source: own elaboration.

Pre-common: this project arises from the presence of the construction company ARUP, a member of the United Kingdom Delivery Team (UKDT) consortium as part of the national public program Reconstruction with Changes in Peru. Among various actions, this program is responsible for the construction of various educational institutions and health centers. This situation leads to the formation of a collaboration between various actors and urban consultancies, such as Arup, Ocupa Tu Calle, and Peatón Cix (hereinafter referred to as "urban team"), in order to carry out urban interventions close to the areas where they are build due to their commitment to the public. In this stage, two simultaneous processes occur, such as the collaboration between the actors of the urban consulting sector and the citizen governance of Urrunaga. There is a physical commonality and the self-governance of the citizenry regarding this space. In addition, there is a collaborative work and an active citizenship network. However, a perception of distrust was observed from the citizens towards the urban team.

Common configuration: the starting point was the methodological approach brought by Arup that is directed precisely at vulnerable urban environments, the Proximity of Care (PoC) (Arup, Newton and Candiracci, 2021) which includes the axes: health, support, protection and stimulation. As the Arup participants affirm in their interview, this approach is one of the most outstanding points of the project,

because it provides a narrative, a theoretical validation of the urban intervention. It is a different and conscious way of approaching space. The PoC methodology is a project financed by the Bernard van Deer Foundation, and it has been developed by Arup in vulnerable urban environments similar to that of Urrunaga in communities in Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. There was a mixture between this methodology and the participatory methodology for the process developed by Ocupa Tu Calle, which gave way to the mapping of actors, several participatory workshops to prepare a diagnosis, participatory workshops for design, and activities such as muralization sessions.

Reconfiguration of the common: occurs between the implementation stage and the incidence. It is observed that a sense of belonging and care for the physical space has been achieved through citizen collaboration. It was possible to generate the bond of trust through participatory activities. In addition to generating a social impact through the development of local capacities.

From what was previously narrated, it is assumable that this process presents similarities with an urban regeneration strategy. Thus, in this section an analysis that is operationalized through the identification of a set of criteria that define a process of urban regeneration is carried out. It is analyzed if the process of the urban common Urrunaga Te Cuida could be considered the starting point of a process of urban regeneration. This process begins with a focus on the physical axis, prioritizing public spaces; but, as it has been seen throughout the third section, it requires to focus on the social axis as well. Although the dynamics that occurred do not cover an urban plan in its entirety, it provides a perspective of what an integral improvement of the neighborhood could be.

Analysis of urban regeneration criteria in the urban common Urrunaga Te Cuida						
Criteria to identify an urban regeneration process	Implementation levels					
	Low	Medium	High			
Area based			Х			
Vulnerability			Х			
Local benefit			Х			
Sustainability/integrated approach	х					
Stake			Х			
Mix of actors		х				
Gender perspective		x				
Local identity			Х			
Local socioeconomic capital		x				
Long term	х					
Joint vision	х					

Table 3: Analysis of urban regeneration criteria in the urban common Urrunaga TeCuida. Source: own elaboration.

The actions carried out by citizens arise because, in these contexts, as it has been observed from the first sections, there is a limited regulatory framework in terms of urban vulnerability. For this reason, it is difficult to implement public policies related to this aspect. However, in response to this need, citizens organize themselves to carry out these urban interventions, which, as seen in the analysis carried out in this section, fail to provide a holistic improvement, but provide a starting point as a transforming seed. Ideally, these processes would shed light on how to introduce other possibilities to institutions and achieve joint improvement by working collaboratively.

Among the lessons learned in this process, the following aspects necessary for future social innovation from the institutions can be highlighted:

- 1. Form a network of actors and have a local connection.
- 2. Achieve a sense of belonging.
- 3. Generate a link of trust with governance.
- 4. Prepare an in-depth and collaborative diagnosis.
- 5. Social and physical transformation.
- 6. Capacity development (local capacity).
- 7. Promote volunteer programs.
- 8. Climate action.

For example, one of the most important is the bond of trust. The link between municipalities and citizens through local associations manage to provide that trust factor that enables relationships between them. In environments in which the public sector has not met the needs of the place, governance relies on citizen and does not allow the entry of external agents. For this reason, the network of actors will be key in this type of process to enter into the dynamics and learn about them before acting. In addition, this link will also be achieved through citizen participation, transparency, being clear with the objectives of the project and submitting everything possible to public consultation.

These processes occurred simultaneously in various places with similar contexts, and they provide a series of lessons about local work and how to achieve a true neighborhood improvement in a collaborative way. All this knowledge generated can be used in institutional processes, using these informal mechanisms at the service of other types of logic that seek a common good.

Conclusions

The methodology has allowed the case to be studied consecutively, starting with a general review of the regulatory framework that gave rise to the case, its in-depth study and, finally, the evaluation of possible futures. A gap has been found in the literature in which the lessons learned from informal processes are collected and valued to develop new and better participatory methodologies for urban regeneration that address urban vulnerability and ultimately provide political agency to citizens, finally recognizing their rights. Therefore, through research, it has been possible to meet the objective of understanding these processes as a transforming seed towards urban regeneration and recognizing learning, as well as affirming the hypothesis presented.

Also, there is an absence of public policies for urban regeneration or urban poverty. The desperate need of the inhabitants to improve their living conditions favors urban interventions made with their own hands, through informality. There is a total disconnection with the municipalities. In this type of context, governance occurs among citizens, who reappropriate their space and administer it as in Urrunaga, which fosters the formation of various urban commons. In this way, community actions arise, as well as the collaboration between different public and private actors, as it is the case of Urrunaga Te Cuida, which allows working for a common good together with citizens who put "the neighborhood on their shoulders".

The case study of Urrunaga Te Cuida allows us to rescue lessons of vital importance to achieve a neighborhood improvement along with the citizens. Among them, the most outstanding goal of this process would be identifying leading neighbors or generating the bond of trust and capacity development. This will make it possible to strengthen ties, carry out solid processes and provide a care dynamic for the future.

This case study was developed using a "proximity of care" methodology that focused on children and their caregivers. Although the urban commons originate and are supported by a dynamic of collective care, it is necessary that, when developing this type of process, it is urban commons or urban regeneration policies where the focus is placed, in order to relieve caregivers of their tasks and not relying entirely on them. If the urban common is not fully inclusive, it risks reinforcing inequality.

It is necessary to assess the different ways of doing urban planning and especially those that come from a bottom-up system. Only then will it be possible to work collaboratively to improve our neighborhoods for the common good.

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