

Democratizing pathways for equality in Latin America

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 9 on 'Democratizing', which focuses on the challenges and opportunities for local and regional governments in implementing meaningful participatory processes, and democratizing decision-making, unpacking asymmetries of power and the underpinning trends affecting processes of democratization. Through the lens of 'democratizing', the chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote more egalitarian, participatory and democratic processes, giving voice to marginalized groups of society, minorities and other groups, and thus contribute to urban and territorial equality.

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DEMOCRATIZING

Introduction

Latin America is one of the most unequal regions on earth despite its reduction in the recent decades.¹ In the region, the democratization processes have a Janus face. On the one hand, democratization operates as a process of inclusion in the priorities of public policy and formal institutionalized deliberative spaces; on the other hand, democratization operates as a struggle for dignity and ability to reshape the social contract itself. **While the key dimensions of inclusion involve recognition, access, and resources,² the dispute for dignity tests the frontiers of citizenship and promotes a constant questioning of representative and direct democratic mechanisms.**

After the 90's, when formally all the dictatorships finished, Latin America experienced an inclusionary turn and a "explosion of participation".³ This 'explosion' was also fuelled by decentralization processes and the emergence of NGOs in the public sphere. The principal impetus behind the region's inclusionary turn is the sustained interaction between inequality and enduring democracy.⁴ In this line, the uneven introduction of participatory governance with deliberation in Latin America is rooted on the growing importance of municipalities, the political leaders' quest for legitimacy and the ambitious innovations on the ground.⁵ In this dynamic, decentralization is influenced by partisan competition, planning practices, and protest repertoires.

Democratization processes in Latin America are shaped through pendular political power moves. The region has moved from dictatorships to liberalization, from a left turn to a rise of regressive conservatism with an intense cross-national variation. In these moves, the region witnessed the establishment of new institutional channels to influence political decision-making or policymaking through consultative, participatory, deliberative and/or governing mechanisms and also expansion of redistributive social policies. Nonetheless, the inclusionary turn is multidirectional inasmuch as "inclusionary advances in some areas may coexist with exclusionary movements in other areas".⁶ That is why, is relevant "not conflate

the inclusionary turn with the Left turn. The former is substantively broader and temporally longer... and predates the region's post-2002 commodities boom".⁷ Despite installing unevenly formal mechanisms of inclusion, the deepening processes of the privatization, militarization, precarization and indebtedness have fuelled a deep social discontent.

The region has moved from an "explosion of participation" to its erosion and recently to an 'estallido social' (i.e. social explosion) where the effervescence of protests have signalled the need to overcome deeply entrenched inequalities. This paper argues that framing pathways to democratizing the region requires to build from the wealth of existing multiactor, multiscale and multimedia practices that seek to challenge the authoritarian legacies and distrust on institutionalized participation.

The key challenges for fostering democratizing pathways are inscribed in a broader civilizational crisis. The deep social rage, distrust in formal democratic institutions and highly fragmented civil society urges to re-imagine deliberative arenas across scales. Nonetheless, **the beacons of hope are in the new political subjects and subjectivities with renewed (aesthetic) narratives, a massive mobilization for the feminization of politics and the memory of the experimenting impetus of many local governments and the regional networks.** To illustrate the democratizing pathways for equality in Latin America, this contribution is structured in five sections. The first illustrates a brief summary of the intensity of the inequalities at regional scale as well as the features of the urbanization scope. The second explains the political trajectories and enabling conditions for democratization processes. The third describes the multifaceted challenges to foster democratic pathways for equality. The fourth analyses trends of transformative change. Finally, the fifth proposes some fruitful undergoing democratization pathways.

1. World Inequality Data Base, *Inequality in Latin America Revisited: Insights from Distributional National Accounts*

2. Kapiszewski, et. al, "Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America"

3. Cameron and Sharpe, "Institutionalized Voice in Latin American Democracies.", 231

4. Kapiszewski, et. al, "Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America"

5. Irazabal, *Revisiting Urban Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean*

6. Kapiszewski, et. al, "Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America", 4

7. Kapiszewski, et. al, "Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America", 12

1. Regional inequalities at glance

In Latin America the generational, racialized, gender and territorial dimensions of the social inequalities are kaleidoscopic. Each country has differential “point of departures” in their inclusionary measures and a shared legacy of pervasive colonial, capitalist, patriarchal and racist systems. The demographic changes have also been drastic, “under both the austerity of the 1980s and the neoliberal stability of the 1990s, urban services suffered as the population of the region’s cities doubled”.⁸ According to the World Bank, in 2019 Latin America registered 646,430,784 inhabitants. The region is one of the most urbanized in the planet where over 82% of the population live in town and cities. According to the latest UN Habitat population data, the Latin American and Caribbean region has 215 metropolises distributed as follows: 6 metropolises have more than 10 million inhabitants; 3 metropolises have between 5 and 10 million inhabitants; 65 metropolises have between 1 and 5 million inhabitants; 141 metropolises have between 300,000 and 1 million inhabitants.⁹ However, only 11 of the 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have urban development and land use laws in place.¹⁰

The stark inequality of the region is expressed in the fact that the top 10% captures 54% of national income and the richest 1% takes in 21% the (before taxes and transfers) income of the entire economy.¹¹ The region has been characterized by SEDLAC¹² for having 30% of poverty of and 53% of the economically active population linked to the informal economy. These measurements are also dynamic, and perceptions change over time, while inequality declined between 2000 and 2013, almost 25% felt income distribution to be more just; in contrast, the economic slowdown between 2013 and 2019 only 15% considered the income distribution to be fair¹³. In this context, the impact of the pandemic is massive, according to ECLAC¹⁴ the predictions for 2020 define that people living in poverty will grow from 186 million to 220 million and from the current 67.5 million living in extreme poverty to 90.8 million. The economic impact of the pandemic is



unequal in the ability to generate income between men and women, with a special impact on migrant workers. As a result, FAO estimates that four in ten people in the region -- 267 million -- experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020, 60 million more than in 2019.¹⁵

An intersectional perspective on inequality suggests that its impact is distributed differentially across gender, generation, and ethnicity. For instance, women dedicate daily to unpaid care and domestic work three times the time that men dedicate to the same tasks.¹⁶ With the pandemic, this time increased exponentially as well as the domestic violence, to the extent that the ECLAC has warned that one of the most important challenges facing the region is “the social reorganization of care to achieve full co-responsibility between the State, the market and families”.¹⁷ By the same token, women represent 69,8% of the workforce in the education sector and 72.8% of the total number of people employed in the health sector making them expose to greater risks during the pandemic. Similarly, one quarter of the population of the region is young (taking the age group between 15 and 29 years old), and almost two-thirds live in households considered poor, a percentage that increases among young women.¹⁸

The region is one of the most multi-ethnic and multicultural regions of the world. Afro-descendants represent a quarter of the total population and indigenous groups represent about 8% of the population with between 772 and 826 different groups. “Despite the massive inequality reductions

8. Kapiszewski, et. al, “Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America”, 14

9. UN-Habitat, Folleto de Datos Poblacionales 2020; ECLAC, La pandemia del COVID-19 profundiza la crisis de los cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe; CAF, Intermediate cities and development in Latin America

10. Cities Alliance, An overview of national urban laws in Latin America and the Caribbean: case studies from Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador

11. World Inequality Data Base, Inequality in Latin America Revisited: Insights from Distributional National Accounts

12. Socio-Economic Database for Latin America and the Caribbean

13. Busso, Messina, “Understanding Social Unrest in Latin America”

14. ECLAC, Panorama Social de América Latina

15. FAO, Panorama Regional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional 2021 - América Latina y el Caribe

16. ECLAC, La pandemia del COVID-19 profundiza la crisis de los cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe

17. ECLAC, La pandemia del COVID-19 profundiza la crisis de los cuidados en América Latina y el Caribe, 2

18. ECLAC, Panorama Social de América Latina

in other areas during the 2000s, the wage penalty of Afro-descendants and indigenous groups has remained fairly stable. Adjusting for education, Afro-descendants earn on average 17% less than the rest of the population, while indigenous people earn 27% less¹⁹. Racial injustices prevail, even in countries where indigenous population are the majority such as Bolivia and Ecuador or in countries where Afro-descendants are the majority such as Brazil or the Dominican Republic.

Socio-economic inequity directly affects access to adequate housing and territorial vulnerabilities. The housing deficit in the region varies from 18% to 78% in the different countries, revealing great intra-regional disparities overall with 110 million inhabitants (21%) living in self-built neighbourhoods.²⁰ The Inter-American Development Bank found in 2012 that more than half of the families in 41 cities of the region did not have the purchasing power to buy housing in the formal sector. In these neighbourhoods particularly, access to infrastructure is a major challenge. Despite the fact that 96% of the urban population had running water in their facilities in 2015, but only 77% had “safely managed” water (the WHO’s highest category). Only 27% had safely managed sanitation, although 72% had sewer connections, the difference being mainly

the lack of wastewater treatment. In the months of the pandemic, the digitization of the world has accelerated, but at the same time the great digital divide has become more evident, particularly in informal neighbourhoods. In Latin America, only 4 out of 10 households have access to broadband and only 45% have access to digital services such as telemedicine, online government, online banking, or e-education.²¹

Finally, the region represents less than 10% of global carbon emissions. Nonetheless, it is highly vulnerable to the impact of the climate crisis due to its climate, geography, demography, and socioeconomic conditions.²² “The values framing the pre-pandemic world have been responsible for centuries-long criminal social injustices, exploitation and environmental destruction, making our bodies, our communities and our planet more susceptible to all kinds of risks and disasters”.²³ Between 2000 and 2019 there were 1,205 disasters associated with natural hazards that affected 152 million people, making it the second most exposed region to this type of disaster globally according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Affairs Humanitarians.²⁴ In sum, the extent of the multidimensional inequalities and high social diversity poses important challenges to the democratization processes.

2. The trajectories of pendular politics

Latin American politics follow pendular moves. **The democratization processes are shaped differently when moving from dictatorship to neo-liberalization, to the rise and fall of the pink tide to the new rise of authoritarian corporate populism.** “Historically in Latin America, efforts to mobilize the poor, elect leftist, or populist governments, or redistribute wealth under democracy, frequently triggered conservative reactions and, in many cases, military coups”.²⁵ Democratization, financial crises, and market liberalization shaped the 1980s-90s.²⁶ While during the neoliberal reforms of the 90’s the World Bank actively promoted decentralization. Nonetheless, the implementation of the neoliberal reforms appeared to depoliticize citizens, atomizing and demobilizing class-based popular

sectors.²⁷ In the 2000s, the region experienced a re-politicization of the long-term inequalities expressed in the rise of several movements against free-market capitalism and also emerged new issues and demands in the political agendas where more relevance was given to the community as a powerful locus for organizing and using new forms of transgressive direct action.²⁸

A pivotal legal aspect for the democratization processes at national level rely on the Constitutional changes where citizen participation became a mandate. A critical aspect to ‘re-establish’ democracy after dictatorships was to bring about a new Constitution. In Central America, most of the new Constitutions are from the 1980s (i.e. El Salvador (1983), Guatemala (1985), Honduras (1982),

19. Busso, Messina, “Understanding Social Unrest in Latin America”, 1

20. UN-Habitat, Folleto de Datos Poblacionales 2020; IADB, Room for Development: Housing Markets in Latin America and the Caribbean

21. CAF, Intermediate cities and development in Latin America

22. Margulis, Unterstell, “Shaping up Brazil’s long-term development considering climate change impacts”

23. Zarate, “Pandemic lessons, progressive politics: Right to the city and new municipalism in times of COVID-19”, 1

24. OCHA, Natural Disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2000-2019

25. Kapiszewski et al., “Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America”, 3

26. Sella, “The rise and fall of the “pink tide” Review”

27. Oxhorn, Ducatzenzeiler, What Kind of Democracy? What Kind of Market? Latin America in the Age of Neoliberalism; Roberts, Deepening Democracy? The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru

28. Arce, Bellinger, “Low Intensity Democracy Revisited: The Effects of Economic Liberalization on Political Activity in Latin America”; Roberts, “The Mobilization of Opposition to Economic Liberalization”; Roberts, Changing Course in Latin America: Party Systems in the Neoliberal Era; Silva, Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America

Nicaragua (1987), with the exception of Panama (1972)). An important exception in Central America is Mexico that “continues with its more than centennial constitution of 1917, which has a lot of prestige, and was born after the 1910 revolution”.²⁹ In South America, Brazil created a new Constitution in 1988, Bolivia in 2009 stands out for incorporating the demand for a plurinational state, Venezuela (1999) and Ecuador (2008) sought to respond to popular demand of greater equity in a Bolivarian aspiration. In contrast, Colombia adopted in 1991 a new Constitution despite not coming from a dictatorship but as a way to set a new social contract to overcome endemic violence; in contrast, Chile did not proclaim a new Constitution until the recent elections of a parity constitutional assembly in 2021.

Partisan politics and ideological agendas influence greatly the democratizing pathways. The social discontent against neoliberal market reforms pushed for a wave of left-of-centre governments. Between 1998 and 2014, leftist candidates won over 30 presidential elections in 11 different Latin American countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. The media called this phenomenon the ‘pink tide’ pointing to their shared slogan from the World Social Forum (WSF): “another world is possible”.³⁰ Even though the inclusionary turn of the region is not explained only by this turn, as it predates it, this turns along with the boom of commodities in early 2000’s help to account for intra-regional variation in the intensity of inclusionary reform.

In countries of the pink tide were more intense the state efforts to include previously excluded popular sectors by enhancing recognition, increasing access to political power, and augmenting resource flows.³¹ Nonetheless, in Mexico, Colombia, Panama, and elsewhere, important inclusionary reforms have also been undertaken under right-of-centre governments.³² For instance, in Colombia and Brazil were adopted very progressive legal frameworks (i.e. Colombia’s Law 388/1998 of Territorial Development and Brazil’s 2001 Federal law of the City Statute) that push for a greater role of planning in municipalities to favour the social and ecological function of property and key measures for participatory planning.

The pink tide rose and fell as it fell short in critical ways. The “leftist movement-parties have struggled to navigate the new context, while the right-wing backlash has been fierce and unforgiving”.³³ The pink tide introduced inclusionary changes that were not enough to overcome the enduring inequalities, neoliberal premises, and corruption legacies. Some key explanations can be found for why each country under the ‘pink tide’ changed their political trajectory: a) these countries used the commodity boom to distribute ‘rents’ rather than challenging neoliberal capitalist lines; b) they deepened an economic role as supplier of primary goods relying on commodity exports during a boom that was predicted to end; c) the highly unequal class structure of most countries remained untouched despite the region experienced significant decreases in poverty; d) the increasing demobilization of many of the social movements whose leaders became part of the left-to-centre governments.³⁴ As a result, since 2015, former strongholds of the left -Argentina, Chile, and Brazil - moved to ‘right-wing’ presidents as well as Colombia, Guatemala, Paraguay, Honduras, Panama, and Peru.³⁵ This new shift has been defined as an ‘authoritarian corporate populism’. Similar to other regions this form of politics rely on intimate links between big businesses, the state and racialized class hegemony of the elites through violence and institution manipulation.³⁶

The uneven decentralization process has become an underlying logic of access to political decision-making.³⁷ **The expansion on local level participatory institutions made several relevant municipal experimentations to flourish.** Several concepts have been developed to capture progressive local experiments to expand democratic avenues: socialist municipalism, radical cities, or new municipalism. Whatever the label, grassroots organizations’ power plays a key role in forging democratic pathways locally³⁸ as well as different generation of charismatic majors. Several local experimentations took place from capital cities, from Caracas under the Radical Cause party to Bogota under the independent government of Antanas Mockus, or to intermediate cities like Rosario in Argentina under the Socialist Party, and to rural municipalities like Icapuí in Brazil under the PT or Quetzaltenango in Guatemala.³⁹

29. Dannemann, “Constituciones latinoamericanas: frecuente recambio y sello propio”

30. Selfa, “The rise and fall of the “pink tide” Review”

31. Kapiszewski et al., “Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America”

32. Garay, Including Outsiders: Social Mobilization, Electoral Competition, and Social Policy Expansion in Latin America; Fairfield, Garay, “Redistribution under the Right in Latin America: Electoral Competition and Organized Actors in Policymaking”

33. Baiocchi, Gies, “Radical Cities in Latin America: Past and Present”, 314

34. Weber, The Last Days of Oppression and the First Day of the Same: The Politics and Economics of the New Latin American Left

35. Anria, Roberts, “A Right Turn in Latin America?”

36. Alfonso-Fradejas, “The Rise of Authoritarian Corporate Populism”

37. Kapiszewski et al., “Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America”

38. Baiocchi, Gies, “Radical Cities in Latin America: Past and Present”

39. Irazabal, Revisiting Urban Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean; Baiocchi, Gies, “Radical Cities in Latin America: Past and Present”

Experimentation and innovation in local planning underpin the creative plurality of the “explosion of participation”⁴⁰ widening democratization alternatives. Since the 80’s activists have explored ambitious experiments in collective local self-governance. For example, “in Villa El Salvador in Peru, for example, self-organized land occupation transformed the ‘pueblo joven’ or shantytown on the outskirts of Lima into a legally recognized residential district by 1983”.⁴¹ Other relevant examples have been the housing cooperative movement in Montevideo, Uruguay or the communal councils in Venezuela and Ecuador during the socialist democracy period. Similarly, municipalities adopted laws in the state of Oaxaca in Mexico (1995, 1998) and in Guatemala (2002) institutionalized deliberative decision-making processes in some indigenous municipalities usually organized around community assemblies.⁴² In another way, important innovation in different realms of public policy have served as basis for policy transfer across southern and northern cities alike. For instance, the circulation across geographies of the Curitiba’s Bus Rapid Transit system, Porto Alegre’s participatory budgeting, Bogota’ bicycle lanes and civic pedagogy or Medellin’s Social Urbanism policy.

Massive demonstrations on the streets have marked another phase of the social discontent in the region. Argentina and Bolivia in the early 2000s and Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia most recently, and Colombia even during the pandemic. **The ‘estallido social’ (i.e. social explosion) consists of the effervescence of protests claiming equality, dignity and better opportunities for all.** Paradoxically,



Graffiti with national strike slogans in Pasto (Colombia).
Source: Catalina Ortiz

this social discontent erupted after two decades of remarkable reduction of income inequality.⁴³ The reasons for this might refer to the social dissatisfaction of unstable middle and popular classes and the distrust on state and party politics.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, substantial inclusionary reforms are most of the time prefaced by mobilized constituencies, but the timing, scope, and pace of reforms remain variable in each country. For instance, “some of the strongest inclusionary demands took place in countries that underwent the least neoliberal reform (e.g. Ecuador, Venezuela), while some of the most radical neoliberal reforms (e.g. Peru) triggered only minimal defensive demands”.⁴⁵ Therefore, societal demands for inclusion do not always lead to state responses as “an uneven enforcement of citizenship rights benefits elites and helps them endorse democratic continuity in contexts of high inequality”.⁴⁶

3. Enduring and emergent opportunities

The development and implementation of inclusive democratization measures are directly influenced by the strength of social movements, parties, and the coalitions of plural groups. **Democratization efforts face variegated challenges such as authoritarianism, militarization, migration, post-pandemic impoverishment, regressive social movements, social fragmentation**

and intensified polarization; yet the region has a wide mosaic of enduring practices that offer promising opportunities. This paper presents some salient initiatives of bringing together different actors to work jointly, across scales going beyond jurisdictions and experimenting with the interfaces of the digital, institutional and physical spaces.

40. Cameron and Sharpe, “Institutionalized Voice in Latin American Democracies”, 231

41. Baiocchi, Gies, “Radical Cities in Latin America: Past and Present”, 314

42. Irazabal, Revisiting Urban Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean

43. Busso, Messina, “Understanding Social Unrest in Latin America”

44. Busso, Messina, “Understanding Social Unrest in Latin America”; Sorj, Fausto, *Internet y movilizaciones sociales: transformaciones del espacio público y de la sociedad civil*; Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America, The Art of Organising Hope*; Asun et al., “¿Por qué surgen los estallidos sociales? Emociones, redes interpersonales, rituales y participación en protestas”

45. Kapiszewski et al., “Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America”, 12

46. Lopez, “State Segmentation and Democratic Survival in Latin America”, 1247

Colectivas Feministas

The global effervescence of feminist activism has an important anchor in Latin America. The emergence of myriad coalitions organizes around wide encompassing struggles, from the fight against femicide, the criminalization of abortion, racism and to have a more inclusive democracy. These intersectional feminist coalitions form a ‘policy community’⁴⁷ working across civil, political and grass-roots organizations. This is significant because, “the countries of the South contain some of the most dynamic movements... with an extensive organizational power and reach”.⁴⁸ **The feminist collectives have renewed the idea of internationalism and have re-signified the very nature of the strike as a tool for collective action.** Most of the young feminist movements describe themselves as “as anti-politics, feminist anarchists and anti-capitalists, rejecting organizations as manifestations of patriarchal power and seeking revolutionary social and cultural change”.⁴⁹ These ‘colectivas’ have expanded practices of social mobilization, types of alliances, methodologies for collective work and theories around violence from the domestic sphere to the state and the financial sphere.

Important examples of these activisms are spread across the region. In 2006, feminist lawyers in conservative Colombia succeeded in

decriminalizing abortion on human rights grounds.⁵⁰ Since 2013, in Puerto Rico, La Cole, a black feminist and anti-colonial feminist collective was pivotal “in the ouster of Ricardo Rosselló and remain[s] on the front lines demanding a more just economy”.⁵¹ In 2015, the campaign ‘Ni Una Menos’ (Not One Less) brought thousands of people to the streets protesting the lack of government response to violence against women. In Argentina, the struggle to legally stop the criminalization of abortion brought massive mobilization on the streets and positioned the green handkerchief as the symbol of this cause. In 2019, the artistic collective ‘Las tesis’ in Chile made viral across the world the choreography of the song ‘Un violador en tu camino’ (A rapist in your path), not only questioning sexual violence but also challenging the State and police forces as patriarchal violent institutions. This ‘feminist awakening’ also evolved in passing a constitutional assembly with gender parity in Chile and the election of a new feminist socialist mayor. These are some examples of the feminization of politics where “radicalizing democracy comes to gain a new meaning: not just addressing gender inequality and women’s institutional under-representation but implementing policies that dismantle patriarchy and focus on everyday life and well-being for all”.⁵²



Performance ‘Un violador en tu camino’ by Latin-American women in London (UK). Source: Catalina Ortiz

47. Macaulay, *Transforming State Responses to Femicide: Women’s Movements, Law and Criminal Justice Institutions in Brazil*

48. Molyneux et al., *New Feminist Activism, Waves And Generations*, 3

49. Molyneux et al., *New Feminist Activism, Waves And Generations*, 4

50. Molyneux et al., *New Feminist Activism, Waves And Generations*

51. Ortiz, “La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción are leading the Puerto Rican resistance”, 1

52. Zarate, “Pandemic lessons, progressive politics: Right to the city and new municipalism in times of COVID-19”, 1

The Right to the City and the New Municipalism constitute an umbrella of several advocacy efforts from social movements, communities, and activists. In early 2000's the peer-learning and alliance building around World Social Forum derived on collective documents such as the World Charter for the Right to the City that influenced the efforts of alliances across sectors and scales.⁵³ Some of the key principles that this agenda advocate for refers to "the fulfilment of the social function of land and property; the defence of the commons (natural, urban and cultural); the recognition and support of social, diverse and transformative economies; the radicalization of local democracy and the feminization of politics".⁵⁴ The joint work between of civil society and grassroots organizations (CSOs-GOs), in partnership with local governments and Academic and Training Institutions (ATIs) has a long tradition in the region.⁵⁵

The role of civil society organizations has been pivotal in influencing policy change and legal initiatives from a

right to the city and human rights perspective.⁵⁶ For instance, at national level, Habitar Argentina and the Forum of Land, Infrastructure and Housing Organizations of the Province of Buenos Aires (FOTIVBA) campaigned intensely for many years to finally pass the Fair Access to Habitat Law of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. At urban level, in Mexico city, the Popular Urban Movement (MUP-CND), the Latin American Office of the Habitat International Coalition (HIC-AL) and HIC members such as COPEVI among others promoted the recently adopted Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City (CCMDC). Linking national and city level efforts, in Brazil, the National Forum of Urban Reform (FNUR), the National Union for Popular Housing (UNMP) among others promoted successfully the Urban Development Fund (FUNDURB) of the Municipality of Sao Paulo. The incidence over national regulatory systems for democratizing not only housing rights but also urban planning practices becomes central for democratizing urban development.

The New Urban Agenda implementation platforms

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) promulgated in 2016 at the HABITAT III conference held in Quito, Ecuador explicitly included a Right to the City approach after a very contested process of negotiation. This move can be seen as a way to mainstream the right to the city inasmuch as the Regional Action Plan to implement the New Urban Agenda has concrete points for policy makers that operationalize some of the key aspects the right to the city encompass. This plan was requested to UN-Habitat and ECLAC by the Regional Assembly of Ministries of Housing and Urban Development (MINURVI).⁵⁷ This plan was validated in World Urban Forum in 2018. This regional plan of action proposed six strategic axes: a) national urban policies; b) urban legal frameworks; c) urban and territorial planning and integrated urban design; d) urban economy and municipal finances; e) local implementation; d) monitoring, reporting and examination mechanisms.⁵⁸ In order to implement the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, one of the newly formed regional coalitions is the Urban Housing Practitioners Hub (UHPH).⁵⁹ This hub operates since 2016 and is "an open platform for the exchange and dissemination of best practices and

knowledge where stakeholders and practitioners can convene around the housing and the urban habitat in Latin America and the Caribbean region". This hub brings together MINURVI, multilateral agencies (i.e. UN-Habitat, IDB, World Bank, ECLAC, CAF), civil society organizations (i.e. TECHO, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, GIZ, Alianza Smart Latam, Global Platform for the Right to the city, Caixa, Confederação Nacional de Municípios de Brasil) and research networks (i.e. RHIVA and REDEUS). Other platforms that have been created around the New Urban Agenda such as the Urban and Cities Platform to monitor implementation (ECLAC, UN Habitat, MINURVI), regional dialogue on New Urban Agenda and universal accessibility (World Enabled collective, GAATES), and platform of young people for the New Urban Agenda (Techo) shows a new trend and the strength of the regional networks. However, the interest in the right to the city as a framework to further democratizations processed in the region is by no means new. In fact, we can trace long term advocacy processes and alliances that have achieved concrete milestones towards achieving the right to the city.

53. Zarate, "Pandemic lessons, progressive politics: Right to the city and new municipalism in times of COVID-19"

54. Zarate, "Pandemic lessons, progressive politics: Right to the city and new municipalism in times of COVID-19", 1

55. Habitat International Coalition, Towards Adherence to Human Rights and the Right to the City: Understanding the Nature, Efficacy & Lessons of Civil Society Strategies for Influencing Policy

56. Habitat International Coalition, Towards Adherence to Human Rights and the Right to the City: Understanding the Nature, Efficacy & Lessons of Civil Society Strategies for Influencing Policy

57. Velázquez, "Implementación de la Nueva Agenda Urbana en Latinoamérica"

58. ECLAC, UN Habitat, MINURVI, Implementing the New Urban Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean

59. See: <https://www.uhph.org/en/uhph>

Network of networks in pandemic times

In the face of the pandemic, the initiative 'Synergies for Solidarity' was assembled as a network of networks. This alliance, through digital co-creation, aimed at collectively crafting a roadmap for the region and a call for action to prioritize neighbourhood upgrading as an essential territorial strategy for post pandemic recovery⁶⁰. This initiative was championed by the Bartlett Development Planning Unit in collaboration with the Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C), UN-Habitat Latin-America, Cities Alliance, Habitat for Humanity, TECHO, Habitat International Coalition (HIC), COINVITE project⁶¹, United

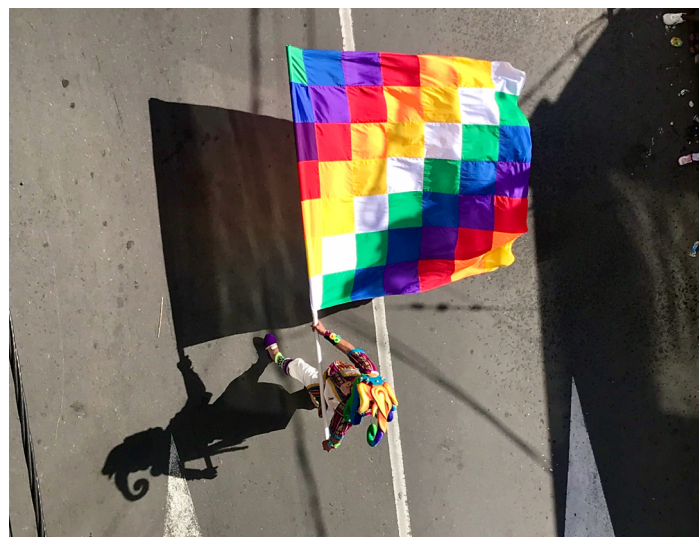
Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Red de Investigadores de Vivienda y Habitat de las Americas (RIVHA) and Urban Housing Practitioners Hub (UHPH). As a result of this alliance a joint Decalogue for Participatory Slum Upgrading in times of pandemic was developed and adopted by MINURVI and supported by several community based organizations.⁶² In sum, the region has been very active in mobilizing initiatives in favour of the most vulnerable groups, where issues of recognition, representation and parity in political participation in urban development have underpinned multi-actor alliances across scales.

MULTI-SCALE INITIATIVES

Anti-racist activisms

Latin America has longstanding racialized inequalities and sustained 'mestizaje'. Since colonial times indigenous and Black populations have been subjected to genocide and enslavement and nowadays persists an imaginary of being a subjugated and disenfranchisement population.⁶³ However, "racialized populations in Latin America are not only affected by, but actively contest, the racialization of space".⁶⁴ With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, it has been exposed more widely the systemic and transnational nature of anti-black racism though a deep-seated anti-indigenous racism is still rampant in the region with some territorial strongholds. **The repertoire of anti-racist mobilization is wide-ranging, from autonomous initiatives, protest, to the creation of civil society organisations to the consolidation of political parties.** In response, the contemporary inclusionary turn has been marked by a more pluralist logic.

Indigenous movements have been active and in the making for centuries. An important milestone is how in Mexico, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in 1994 brought to the public debate the visualization of anti-indigenous racism and the contradictions of *indigenismo* as state-directed Indianist policies.⁶⁵ In the 90's and early 2000's large-scale



Wiphala flag at the Black and White Carnival in Pasto (Colombia).
Source: Catalina Ortiz

indigenous mobilizations contributed to the recognition of indigenous communities in Bolivia (i.e. Evo Morales of the MAS in 2006 became Bolivia's first indigenous head of state) and Ecuador (i.e. National Indigenous Uprising) at the constitutional level and also in Peru where less mobilization occurred.⁶⁶ More recently, the *Mapuche* community in Chile or the *Minga indigena* in Colombia have been crucial in supporting the national strikes. Overall, these indigenous activisms have had regional scale impacts. On the one hand, they have inspired organizations in the region to learn from cosmovisions like the *buen vivir* as a way to challenge the visions of western development.⁶⁷ On the other hand, they have enacted across nations the Wiphala flag as a symbol that represents the interconnectedness of indigenous resistance.⁶⁸

60. Ortiz, "Decálogo para el Mejoramiento Integral de Barrios en Tiempos de Pandemia"

61. See: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/research-projects/2021/dec/coinvite-activating-learning-slum-upgrading-through-transmedia>

62. Ortiz, "Sinergias para la solidaridad: ¿de lo urgente a la imaginación post-pandémica estratégica?"

63. Irazabal, "Revisiting Urban Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean"

64. Mosquera, Davis, "Race, Activism and Space in Latin-American Theory and Practice", 1

65. See: <https://www.lapora.sociology.cam.ac.uk>

66. Van Cott, *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics*; Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge*

67. Zarate, "Pandemic lessons, progressive politics: Right to the city and new municipalism in times of COVID-19"

68. Bacigalupo, "In Bolivia, the National Flag and the Indigenous Wiphala Become Symbols of Division"

In a different fashion, activism to fight anti-black racism also has found multiscale strategies to activate solidarity and collective actions. In Brazil, despite the creation of a Secretary to promote racial equality (2003) and the national law of racial equality (2010), the violence against Black populations is disproportionately high (i.e. in 2017 according to the Atlas of Violence, out of every 100 people murdered in Brazil, 71 were Black).⁶⁹ In that context, the Network of Communities and Movements Against Violence has been created as an independent social movement that brings together “the struggles of communities and social movements against state violence, police arbitrariness and impunity”.⁷⁰ Inspired by four massacres of residents of favelas in Rio de Janeiro, mainly black women mothers of victims of violence organized and have partnered with the Public Defender of Rio, deputies, councillors and NGOs to position the topic in the public agenda as well as securing legal and psychological support to family members and incidence in judicial hearings.⁷¹

In Colombia, the 1991 Constitution not only defined as ‘indigenous reserves’ 30% of the national territory but also

defined collective titling for ‘black communities’ (i.e. Law 70/2003) with fiscal transfers of the national state. Nonetheless, ethnic communities have been disproportionately affected by the armed conflict and constitute a big percentage of the forcedly displaced population, now mostly living in the margin of the biggest cities of the country.⁷² In the 90’s, the Association of Afro-Colombian Women (Amafrocol) was created in the city of Cali by several displaced black women. This initiative seeks to support the livelihoods of women victims of violence by promoting self-stem, advocacy, capacity building and entrepreneurial skills. This initiative grew across the discussion forums and microenterprises held in different regions expanding the alliances with other young black women collectives located in Medellín, Buenaventura, Cartagena, Putumayo and Quibdó. Nowadays, Amafrocol is linked to national and international spaces such as the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women and the National Conference of Afro-Colombian Organizations.⁷³ These are only few examples of the different ways blackness is affirmed and the continuous struggles against violence and poverty are intertwined.

Anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination city networks

Working to foster democratizing pathways also entails to find allies in tackling common challenges for inclusionary purposes. Since urban governance cannot be understood only as a matter of municipal entities and their city-based allies; it is important to acknowledge we operate in a time of increasingly ‘networked urban policy’.⁷⁴

Global South cities are increasingly involved in city networking to access peers experience on similar challenges and in that way constitute themselves as communities of practice. There is an ‘ecosystem’ of city networks that “in themselves [operate] as institutions in the political geography of (international) urban development”.⁷⁵ Particularly, cities such as Buenos Aires, Quito or Medellín are showcased as one of the most ‘networked’ local governments in Latin America.⁷⁶ Even though, the city networks are rarely only a single issue.⁷⁷ The Red Latinoamericana de Ciudades Arcoiris becomes an important initiative

across regions and cities that is worth highlighting here to address politics of difference from the standpoint of LGBTIQ+ rights and participation on local governance.

Non-heteronormativity is still criminalized in several countries, cities and municipalities in Latin America. In the same line, the region has witnessed an increase in discrimination and hate crimes against the LGBTIQ+ population.⁷⁸ That is why, **local governments in the region have joined efforts for finding mechanisms for prevention, reduction and elimination of all related forms of LGBTIQ+ discrimination.** In a collaboration with the European Rainbow Cities Network, the Latin American Network of Rainbow Cities has been created. The network aims to become “an awareness tool for local governments that seek to direct their administrations towards equity and social inclusion through the exchange of experiences, collaborations

69. See: <https://www.lapora.sociology.cam.ac.uk>

70. See: <https://www.lapora.sociology.cam.ac.uk>

71. See: <https://www.lapora.sociology.cam.ac.uk>

72. Franco, The production of marginality. Paradoxes of urban planning and housing policies in Cali

73. See : <http://amafrocol.org>

74. Davidson et al., “Reconfiguring urban governance in an age of rising city networks: A research agenda”

75. Acuto, Leffel, “Understanding the global ecosystem of city networks”, 1758

76. Acuto, Leffel, “Understanding the global ecosystem of city networks”

77. Acuto, Leffel, “Understanding the global ecosystem of city networks”

78. RLCA, Declaratoria Red de Ciudades Arco Iris

in projects and the sum of wills and efforts in care and good practices towards the LGBTI community, with other governments in the region”.⁷⁹ The cities involved in this network are: Mexico City (Mexico), Buenos Aires and Rosario (Argentina), Medellín and Bogotá (Colombia), Montevideo (Uruguay) and Sao Paulo (Brazil). These cities have either passed new

local legislation or found new ways to implement regulatory frameworks that support the protection of human rights of LGBTIQ+ communities. The three main dimensions of public policy the cities exchange about refer to: quality of life and livelihoods, protection to identity expression and empowerment through de-stigmatization.⁸⁰

Grassroots politics form the neighbourhood to the nation

One of the impacts of the pink tide was the increasing avenues for local political participation and action such as the implementation of neighbourhood councils in Uruguay under the Frente Amplio party. However, the main criticism of many of these local councils have faced is that they remain under the control of the centralized government reinforcing a separation between the state and grassroots politics.⁸¹ In Rosario, a city with a long history of voting centre-left, the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party, PS) propelled an experimentation with grassroots politics. The Movimiento Giros, mainly formed by university students seeking out a new approach to politics, started out by connecting with families in the marginalized neighbourhood of Nuevo Olberdi Oeste on the outskirts of the city to discuss plans for addressing protecting settlements from displacement by real estate developers and generating new jobs.⁸²

The Movimiento Giros through assembly-style meetings opened up spaces for community members to voice their vision for their neighbourhoods. They implemented projects starting in one neighbourhood and afterwards

reaching six city districts with initiatives such as: popular education in informal settlements by the University of Doing (3-year degree); re-centering popular and indigenous medicine for public health; prevention of the eviction of 250 families that the city’s sale of the land would bring; and experimented with anti-inflation initiatives by cutting intermediaries between producers and consumers of food by ordering online and collecting from public warehouses.⁸³ It was precisely in Distrito Sie7e, a nightclub, the centre of the growing social movement that became a political party called Ciudad Futura in 2005. Ciudad Futura “has shown that it is possible to generate change through political engagement without relying on traditional establishment politics”.⁸⁴ This party holds four seats in Rosario’s municipal government, after a controversy for having all-female candidate list — the first in the history of Argentinian politics — a judge rule against it giving national attention.⁸⁵ In 2017 they expanded beyond Rosario, with nine candidates running to represent Santa Fe during the national general elections for deputies in October of that year with all the national disputes to be part of a centre-right coalition.⁸⁶

MULTI-MEDIA INITIATIVES

Red de Inovacion Politica de Lationamerica

In 2016 in Buenos Aires (Argentina) a group of young activists and politicians founded the Latin American Network of Political Innovation. This group gathers under the premise that politics need to be recovered given the disjuncture between the public institutions outdated architecture and the new channels that digital networks offer to convey the myriad and fragmented citizen demands. This network claims: “we are united by the dream of a democracy

of the commons, a democracy that redistributes power, expands political inclusion and promotes human rights”. The main strategy to achieve this aim is to integrate diverse, convergent, and complementary knowledge, through social, digital, and analogue technologies. It is in this context where the laboratories of innovation for public policy emerge as a response to the erosion of the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy, the

79. RLCA, Declaratoria Red de Ciudades Arco Iris , 4

80. RLCA, Declaratoria Red de Ciudades Arco Iris

81. Switzer, “Ciudad Futura: Reimagining the Left in Argentina”

82. Switzer, “Ciudad Futura: Reimagining the Left in Argentina”

83. La Comuna/Barcelona En Com, *Fearless cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement*

84. Switzer, “Ciudad Futura: Reimagining the Left in Argentina”

85. Switzer, “Ciudad Futura: Reimagining the Left in Argentina”

86. Switzer, “Ciudad Futura: Reimagining the Left in Argentina”

disappointment with participation and the loss of social legitimacy of public institutions. **The laboratory of innovation acts as a facilitating tool, making various techniques available to citizens to help them become co-creators of public policies.**⁸⁷ In sum, this network explores how the interplay between politics and technology could bring about new models of organization of territorial power.⁸⁸

Gobierno Abierto de Nariño (The Open Government of Nariño) (Colombia) is an example of the initiatives of the members of the network. This initiative was recognized by the Organization of United Regions, ORU FOGAR, and UNDP as one of the world's five good public management practices. In order to fight against corruption, this regional government proposed the first digital platform for open governance in the country and more than fifteen tools that make up a complete anti-corruption

kit. A salient part relates to the budget consultation and execution of public resources called GANA Control, a tool that allows citizens to know the entire departmental cabinet's Declaration of Patrimonial Assets and in real time how the budget of the Governorate of Nariño is executed.⁸⁹ Using a tool called GANA Pienso, the regional government activated a binding decision-making platform through which citizens can vote for projects of public interest to determine the execution of initiatives of common benefit.⁹⁰ Using this tool, they were able to "convene near to 80,000 citizens of 60 municipalities in Nariño, who made decisions in the face of more than 67 billion pesos in royalties and the government's own resources".⁹¹ This initiative showcased the possibilities of implementing ideas of transparency and citizenry communicational relationships even in the most peripheral rural areas of the region.

Citizen led tactical urbanism

Along with global north cities, Latin America has also experimented with placemaking, tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture ideas. This approach aims at combining citizen urban planning tools with long-term planning strategies. In doing so, tactical urbanism is framed as a tool for citizen participation and incidence in public policies and private practices. "Short-term urban prototypes help to envision the long-term effect that such transformations could have on our cities. They allow us to test (and fail) fast and cheap, so that we can adjust the strategy and scale it. This is how many of these small interventions they have been institutionalized within public policies and replicated in other contexts".⁹² In 2012, the collective Ciudad Emergente organized in Chile the first Saloon of tactical urbanism in Latin America showcasing a growing set of participatory design practices in the region and demonstrating that has become a new trend of citizen engagement.

The tactical urbanism is practiced very differently across the region. While in Santiago (Chile) a more dispersed pattern of initiatives is found; for instance, several bicycle centred events, spaces for bicycle use and temporary parking spaces for bicycles has been

enabled (i.e. Mapocho Pedaleable, Ciclorecreovía, Pedalea al Trabajo, Parkeatucleta, Al Estadio en Bicicleta, Bicipunto) or many citizen led urban gardens started to spread across the city (i.e. Red de Agricultura Urbana, Plantabanda, Proyecto Huerto).⁹³ In Lima (Peru) the initiative 'Ocupa tu calle' (Occupy your street) is a more centralized platform that propose "urban interventions focused, strategic, small-scale, collaborative and participatory actions, articulating efforts, flexible and with a low budget". This initiative is championed by an all women team that is promoted by the citizen observatory Lima como vamos and sponsored by the Avina Foundation and UN-Habitat. Their projects focus on the recovery of under-utilised public spaces, the improvement of existing spaces and the generation of new public areas. In doing these projects they also have made available a series of toolkits of how to intervene the different typologies of public spaces with potentials to be activated. Although, tactical urbanism advocates are perceived to come from a professional middle class background, their initiatives have found innovative ways to engage citizens simultaneously in the public digital and physical space through the consolidation of alliances that have strengthen citizen organization.

87. Pobes Gamarra et al., "Abordar problemas malditos con ayuda del diseño de servicios"

88. Bianchi, *Recuperar la política. Agendas de Innovación Política en América Latina*

89. Romero, "Open government and citizen engagement: From theory to action"

90. Romero, "Open government and citizen engagement: From theory to action"

91. Romero, "Open government and citizen engagement: From theory to action", 1

92. García, *Urbanismo tactico 3. Casos Lationamericanos*

93. García, *Urbanismo tactico 3. Casos Lationamericanos*

Data generation for the pandemic

During the pandemic place-based health data became an imperative. **The region has seen the critical importance of spatial data to manage the crisis and found an important data gap linking health and urban spaces.** Both civil society organizations and local governments have experiment with new mechanisms to make visible either impacts of the pandemic or avenues to prevent further spreads. From the civil society perspective, the initiative of the Civil Association for Equality and Justice in Buenos Aires has implemented 'Caminos de la Villa' to map the conditions of the informal settlements and has generated a follow-up of cases in informal neighbourhoods. In Rio de Janeiro, the organization Redes da Mare

has created mechanisms for tracking data on cases and mortality rates in the favelas, which are reported weekly in the Boletim de Olho Corona (i.e. analogue and community media based diffusion of the data) given the denial of the national level government. From the local government perspective, the analysis of open data with citizens on mobility was implemented by the Bogotá mayor's office, together with numerous civil society organizations, launched the *Hackatón # MOOVID19* contest for citizens to share data analysis proposals on how the organization of public transport can be improved in the city during the pandemic to serve those who need to use it and prevent infections.⁹⁴

Conclusion: possible democratization pathways

The Janus face of the democratization's struggles in the region show the constant dispute between changing the rules of the game or becoming part of the game.

While considerable efforts have been made to gain recognition, access, and resources distribution, the social discontent is severe, and the erosion of traditional citizen engagement mechanisms is palpable. Notwithstanding of this, the paper has argued that existing multiactor, multiscale and multimedia initiatives have shown the massive social energy, creativity and the impetus for collective action in the region. In sum, the deepening of democratization pathways requires at least:

- A)** Re-thinking how, despite power asymmetries, strategic alliances across scales can be generated to pursue systemic changes and at the same time address contextualized responses deepening the decentralization of territorial finances;
- B)** Harnessing the feminization of politics from an intersectional perspective thorough urban infrastructures of care and care redistribution;
- C)** Amplifying learning strategies between organizations as an imperative to promote strategic alliances based on existing city networks, and cross actor platforms;
- D)** Expanding the digital infrastructure and digital literacies to explore collaborative methods with the plurality of civil society to ensure better knowledge of the territories, support social mobilization and inform public policy;
- E)** Addressing seriously the chronic racial injustices and discriminatory practice against sexual diversity and dissidences;
- F)** Expanding grassroots politics and political innovation in order to find ways for the re-legitimization of public institutions and widening deliberation strategies;
- G)** Strengthening the connection with community leaders and grassroots territorial organizations as a precondition for an effective response and recovery;
- H)** And finally and most importantly, nurturing anti-fascist, anti-military, anti-regressive political coalitions for deepening socio-politic reforms.

The struggle for a democratic radicalization urges us to work simultaneously with, despite and against the state.⁹⁵ A paradigm shift is needed to imagine collectively new political horizons for a just urban future.

94. Ortiz, Di Virgilio, "Laboratorios de Vivienda [LAVs] Asentamientos Precarios y Vivienda Social: Impactos del Covid-19 y Respuestas"

95. Souza, "Together with the state, despite the state, against the state. Social Movements as 'Critical Urban Planning' Agents"

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