

Urban conflicts, private actors and organized citizens: what can we learn from a movement against a highway project in Santiago, Chile ?

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Mobilizing the Simmel theory about conflicts, I consider them not as a problem or a dysfunction, but rather a way in which different groups relate to each other, seeking to understand its spatial effects. The conflicts that arise from the use of space play an essential role in the mechanisms of territorial governance, constituting the following manifestations: platforms for forgotten or unconsidered actors to speak out in the structures of governance; indicators of social, technical, and economic evolutions in territories; and factors of innovation.

The paper will focus on the role of urban conflicts in the territorial governance in Santiago. The capital of Chile faces a series of challenges in relation with transport, environment and planning. In this context, more socio-environmental conflicts emerge at the local level and the affected communities are more and more organized to defend their environments. The opposition to the construction of urban highways is an emblematic case of citizen movements in the post-dictatorship Chile. The proposal will discuss the specific example of the citizen opposition to the Costanera Central urban highway project in Santiago. The peculiarity of the project lie in the fact that it is a private initiative project (proyecto de iniciativa privada) meaning that the project emerged from a private company and then the Ministry of Public Works declared its public interest. The company have started a long study process and at the end of it, the Ministry will approve it or not and fund it.

This specific conflict interrogates first of all the role of private actors in city production and governance, and the complexity for citizen movements to oppose to infrastructure projects without governmental authorities really involved in it. It also reveals the strategies and claims of the inhabitants to revindicate their vision of the city and transport system and their participation in the urban processes. At the end, urban conflicts allow to see the dynamics of power between public actors at different levels, private companies and organized citizens and bring out new mechanisms of

territorial governance.

My methodology is qualitative and, although I work with written sources, I privilege field work through observation, interviews, and mental maps.

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