



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Place-Making through the Creation of Common Spaces in Lima's Self-Built Settlements: El Ermitaño and Pampa de Cueva as Case Studies for a Regional Urbanization Strategy

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### ABSTRACT

Lima has become the first Peruvian megacity with more than 10 million people, resulting from the migration waves from the countryside throughout the 20th century, which have also contributed to the diverse ethnic background of today's city. The paper analyzes two neighborhoods located in the inter-district area of Northern Lima: Pampa de Cueva and El Ermitaño as paradigmatic cases of the city's expansion through non-formal settlements during the 1960s. They represent a relevant case study because of their complex urbanization process, the presence of pre-Hispanic heritage, their location in vulnerable hillside areas in the fringe with a protected natural landscape, and their potential for sustainable local economic development. The article traces back the consolidation process of these self-built neighborhoods or *barriadas* within the context of Northern Lima as a new centrality for the metropolitan area. The analysis of urban form and mobility, heritage and environmental challenges, governance, and social integration leads to a proposal for neighborhood upgrading, capacity building with participatory processes, and a vision for future local development to decentralize the traditional metropolitan centers, which can be scaled to other peripheral neighborhoods.

**Keywords:** Latin American cities; Peru; Lima; *barriadas*; self-built urbanism; non-formal settlements; neighborhood upgrading; regional development.

## 1. Introduction

The city of Lima is the capital of the Republic of Peru, Latin American emerging economy. Its history traces back to pre-Hispanic times, but it was its official foundation in 1535 by the Spanish colonizers that transformed it into the principal political, economic, and cultural center of the country. Today, with

10.3 million inhabitants<sup>[1-3]</sup>, Lima has become the country's first megacity and houses one-third of the country's population. Such growth relies greatly on the population explosion throughout the 20th century, with migration waves primarily from internal rural areas, but also transnational ones, which have shaped the history of Lima and engendered fast urban formal and informal expansion processes, and clashes between historically extremely differentiated social

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strata amongst its citizens with diverse ethnic backgrounds. The metropolitan area is formed by two autonomous urban agglomerations, which are the Province of Lima and the Constitutional Province of Callao. The first is divided into four inter-district areas: Central Lima, as the traditional city center with the largest portions of middle and upper-class neighborhoods, jobs and services, and the periphery, as the result of the consolidation of the non-formal settlements that today form Northern, Eastern, and Southern Limas. These peripheral inter-district areas house more than two-thirds of the population of the metropolitan area, and eleven of their districts report densities above 100 people per hectare.

This paper will analyze two neighborhoods located in the inter-district area of Northern Lima—El Ermitaño and Pampa de Cueva—as case studies that represent an essential part of the history of the expansion of Lima through non-formal settlements during the 1960s. They represent a relevant case study because of the complexity of their urbanization process, their grade of self-organization and community organization within the consolidation process, the presence of pre-Hispanic heritage, their location in vulnerable areas on hillsides and in the fringe with natural protected landscape areas and their potential for locally gestured economic developments.

In order to present this analysis, this research is structured to answer the following four questions: (1) What has been studied about informal settlements and specifically in Peru? (2) What is the context of the neighborhoods of El Ermitaño and Pampa de Cueva as part of the district of Independencia? (3) What are the current conditions of El Ermitaño and Pampa de Cueva, and what kind of challenges need to be addressed? (4) What strategies for neighborhood upgrading can be applied to both neighborhoods?

In order to answer these questions, the paper will first provide a very brief literature review on the urban phenomenon of self-built neighborhoods and their relation to spatial justice, with a special focus on the Peruvian settlements, which are defined

as *barriadas*. After this, a brief historical snapshot of how these two neighborhoods were created will follow to provide historical background and link the research to an overview of the district of Independencia within the context of Northern Lima as a new centrality for the city. This will lead to an analysis of the case study in terms of form and mobility, heritage and environmental challenges, governance, and social integration. This analysis is the result of a workshop carried out in Lima in 2018 (in a collaboration between the faculties of architecture of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) in Lima and the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences) to gain first-hand experiences of the current situation of Pampa de Cueva and El Ermitaño, meet municipal authorities, experts in the field and local leaders, and learn from bottom-up initiatives occurring in the surroundings.

With a diagnostic of these neighborhoods, the final section will develop a proposal for neighborhood upgrading, capacity building, and a vision for this area. This proposal follows the guidelines set up by noteworthy regional cases of self-built settlements upgrading in Latin America, such as in Medellín and Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, the former municipal program Barrio Mío serves as an important local methodological referent for integral urban projects in vulnerable areas that engage the community throughout the entire process.

With the diagnostic of the case study and further proposal, this paper aims to provide a methodology with defined stages that can be applied in other neighborhoods with similar characteristics. Furthermore, this research represents an opportunity to discuss regional issues within the context of informal settlements with potential for local economic development.

## **2. What Has Been Studied about Informal Settlements and Specifically in Peru?**

According to UN-Habitat[4], informal settlements are highly dense neighborhoods with low-

standard housing that are characterized by the sense of 'squalor' (which also refers to the external perspective towards these housing areas). Informal settlements represent a phenomena proper from Global South cities with 94% of the world's slum dwellers<sup>[4-11]</sup>, and although these vary from city to city, they share the following characteristics: Inadequate or lack of access to water, sanitation and basic services and urban infrastructure, poor structural housing quality, overcrowding, and insecure residential status and tenure. This paper will focus on the type of settlements that were self-built by squatters and are under an ongoing process of developing and consolidation.

This type of informal settlement increased the population during the 1960s in most fast-growing urban areas in the wor. These are primarily located in the peripheries of the cities, in the fringe between urban and rural land. However, these limits are under ongoing evolution as urban peripheral areas are constantly expanding and densifying, while consequently creating new peripheries. This peripheral condition is due to the high cost of the land within the traditional, central urban areas. In contrast, the low-value periphery offered an unlimited amount of parcels and the opportunity for the urbanization by family organizations. This expansion occurs regardless of the physical and administrative characteristics of the peripheral lan.

Because of their informal settling without any previous formal planning, the provision of urban infrastructure is neglected at the moment of the building of the dwellings. Moreover, the lack of planning and the peripheral condition of these neighborhoods also affect the preservation of the surrounding environment, resulting in a notorious impact on the ecology of these area. As these settlements are constantly creating new dense peripheries farther and farther from the city cente, they result in an unequal socio-economic distribution of the population in the city. While these peripheral, low-income, non-formal settlements house low-skilled workers who live on the daily profit, the traditional center still concentrates the employment offer. Accordingly, this creates

mobility problems for peripheral citizens who need to travel long distances to get to their job centers, despite the fact that these informal neighborhoods do not count with the adequate urban infrastructure to support mass-transit systems to transport their dwellers, and therefore, informal transit and paratransit transport systems of reduced passenger capacity fulfill this deficiency.

Informal settlements can also be approached from a spatial justice perspective, which is understood as the aim of achieving social and economic justice for people affected by uneven structures due to unequal geography effects in urban areas<sup>[5,10]</sup>. Henri Lefebvre introduced this concept with his 'Right to the city' adds the geographical aspect to spatial injustice, as exogenous geographies of power are top-down produced to create geographies of injustice, as marginalized citizens are disconnected from urban resources and opportunities. This unequal condition of exclusion is not accidental, but politically shaped in order to achieve spatial justice, Soja suggests that these citizens need to have equal access to public services and welfare, but also be able to take part in progressive and participatory actions, such as open urban processe.

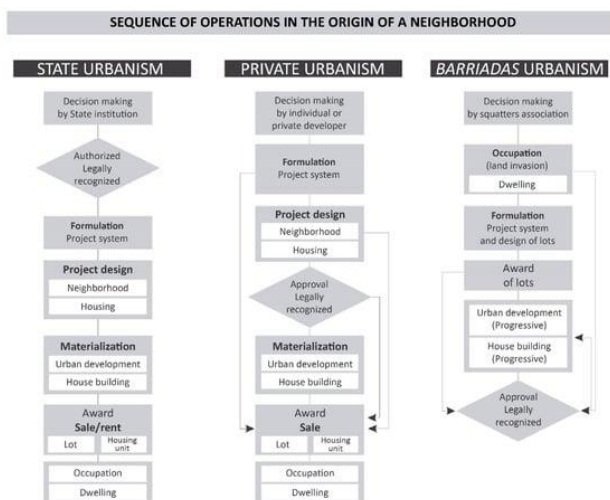


Figure 1: Periods of barrios.

### 3. What Is the Context of the Neighborhoods of El Ermitaño and Pampa de Cueva as Part of the District of Independencia?

Unlike traditional urbanization processes, there is a difference between the creation of the studied neighborhoods and their official founding. While the first refers to the date of occupation of the land, the latter refers to the promulgation of the law that officially recognized the district of Independencia. As will be explained, the level of organization of the families was essential to achieve the creation of the neighborhoods and the future of the district.

On the night of 17 November, 1960, in an organized manner, more than 1800 families occupied the area which is today known as Pampa de Cueva neighborhood. This action was led by delegates from other districts of Lima. The owner of this land, Mrs. Adela Iglesias de Nicolini, requested their eviction with an attack by the National Police on the settlers, resulting in the death of children. The people were forced to retreat to Kilómetro 4 (now Túpac Amaru Avenue), where they stayed for thirty-seven day. Later, the leaders discovered that Adela Iglesias de Nicolini was not the true owner of the land, but the community of Jicamarca, which was willing to reach an agreement with the settlers. On 23 December of that year, an extendible lease was signed for ten years for an amount equivalent to 61,659 USD at that time.

A deposit of 7474 USD was then paid, with a commitment to pay a monthly amount of 2616 USD until the total sum was completely paid back. Thanks to this contract, the families could return to Pampa de Cueva on the morning of the same.

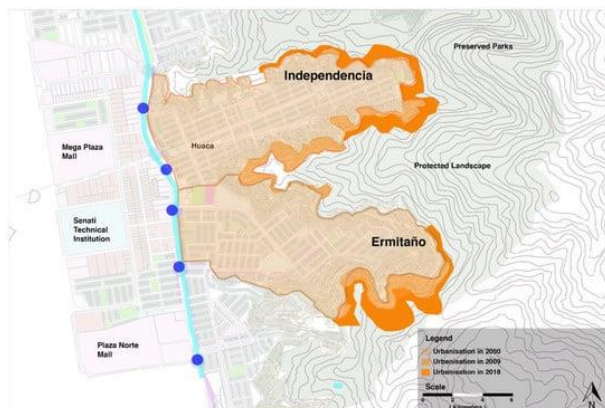


Figure 2: Urban expansion of El Ermitaño and Pampa de Cueva in 2000, 2009, and 2018.

On 28 March, 1962, 600 families created El Ermitaño Pro Housing Association. On 7 June of the same year at 01:00, a group of 200 families occupied what today is known as El Ermitaño neighborhood on the land that was owned by the state but used by the Nicolini family. The leaders of the association chose that date because the presidential elections would take place on 10 June of that year and draw the attention of the National Police, thus lowering their chances of being repressed. However, at 09:00 of the next day, the police arrived to evict the settlers and take back control of the Pampa. Although the settlers, including women, resisted, they were eventually evicted violently, and several people were injured. In this struggle, the solidarity of the Association of Villagers of Pampa de Cueva mediated with the police to stop the repression and initiate a dialogue between El Ermitaño Association and the authorities.

### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Informal settlements are highly dense neighborhoods with low-standard housing located in the periphery of urban areas in many Global South cities

and share the same characteristics as initial inadequate access to water and basic services, as well as insecure residential status and tenure. Moreover, these areas are under ongoing growth, creating new urban peripheries located every time farther from the traditional city centers and regardless of the physical characteristics of the occupied territory. These features link to problems of lack of services and provision of urban infrastructure, as well as a threat to the preservation of the surrounding environment. Moreover, because of the concentration of employment in the traditional wealthy urban areas, peripheral citizens are obliged to travel long distances to access job opportunities without adequate mass-transit systems. This can lead to questioning the condition of the spatial injustice of these neighborhoods and whether their citizens are granted the right to the city. These concepts were introduced by Lefebvre, Harvey and Soja, being the latter one who suggested that these citizens need to have equal access to public services and welfare, to overcome their condition of spatial injustice, but also through the access to participative open urban processes.

Lima is a representative case study of a city that expanded through the consolidation of its non-formal settlements. Like other Latin American cities, these neighborhoods were created by migrants from the countryside in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families. These developed due to the hard work of family organizations, without any initial actions from the state. In this way, unlike traditional urbanization processes, *barriada* urbanism starts in reverse order with the occupation of the land, the self-construction of houses, and the later provision of public facilities and urban infrastructure. These areas have evolved into the three inter-district areas that form the periphery of Metropolitan Lima: Northern, Eastern, and Southern Limas. As proof of their consolidation, new economic centralities have appeared in these areas with the creation of mega-scale retail centers and new commercial areas over former industrial lots.

This economic transformation has occurred mainly in Northern Lima, where these new economic

centralities have the potential to have an influence on the metropolitan scale. One of these areas is found in the district of Independencia, which was created after the communities of El Ermitaño and Pampa de Cueva settled on this land during the 1960s. Both these self-built neighborhoods played a key role during the period in which *barriadas* settled beyond the limits of the urbanized areas of that time, with nothing but the efforts of the community, achieving official recognition, technical aid in the building process, and access to water. This is why they are examples of the organizational power of migrant communities, despite the fact that their history is often not well understood or appreciated.

Although the original settlements have consolidated throughout the years, their requests for better conditions and formalization have remained urgent, especially as they are still under ongoing growth. These neighborhoods suffer from continuous and persistent illegal urbanization processes through powerful land traffickers and the descendants of the settlers, providing evidence of today's unsolved housing deficit within Metropolitan Lima. Further challenges in these neighborhoods related to social, environmental, economic, governmental, and other urban problems were specifically identified, carefully analyzed, and addressed from different perspectives in this paper.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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