The Chilean Experience: Struggling for the Right to the City in the Neoliberal Era

Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha (MPL)
An organization of property-less residents, or pobladores, in various low-income urban areas throughout Chile, fighting to remain in their communities and produce habitat that allows them to live with dignity.

What makes MPL unique?

- Its commitment to construct “la vida digna,” or a life with dignity, employing a philosophy of “Struggle, Self-help and Popular Education.”
- Envisions an equitable city where all residents, especially the urban poor, have a right to the city, and to physical and political space.
- Employs a 3-pronged strategy to organizing and planning alternatives by and for MPL’s members; within, against, and beyond the governance structures of the state that facilitate and perpetuate exclusion of the urban poor.

Current Neoliberal Planning Paradigm
Policy driven by Market Forces

Financial Mechanisms
Affordable housing ownership subsidies for low-income residents offer relocation to marginal exurbs, where access to public transportation, economic opportunities & social capital are minimal. Partial subsidies also require the poor to seek loans from banks to secure housing, & thus incur long-term debts.

Spatial Regulatory Mechanisms
Localities take policy-making cues from the real estate industry. When development conglomerates indicate interests in condominium construction projects in working class communities, these areas are rezoned high-density residential, opening the door to gentrifying forces. Real estate companies are also profiting from contracts awarded for peripheral public housing projects.

MPL views this neoliberal framework as socially and morally destructive, the cause of further disempowerment of the city’s poor and their physical displacement.

3-Pronged Response
Community Organizing for A Life with Dignity

Mobilization & Advocacy for Institutional Reform
"Against"

Increase Access & Participation
"Within"

Autonomy and Production of Habitat
"Beyond"

Tools for Change
Street Politics & Mobilization
Occupying/Reclaiming Spaces
Direct Action and Protest
Referendums on Government Plans
Negotiating Public Housing Sites and No-Debt Subsidies

Pedagogy
Self-Help
Mutual Aid
Leadership Development
Political Formation

Alternative Paradigm
A Model to Recover the Poor’s Right to the City

Epistemological Transformation
The “New Poblador,” a Citizen Planner, who actively works for moral & community renewal; moving from a passive recipient of neoliberal planning, she/he chooses & articulates her/his claims, organizing & acting collectively with neighbors to challenge unjust policy while producing spaces of justice within the community.

Alternative Institutions
Conditions for sustainable (re)production of a dignified habitat, and permanent shift of urban development paradigm

- Local Assembly Structure
- Construction Cooperative
- Non-Profit Housing Development Corporation
- School of Popular Education
- Community Garden
- Independent Radio Station
- Igualdad People’s Party