Author
Victor Hugo Perales
Coordination
Sarah Botton

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Corporate citizenship and water urbanization on the outskirts of El Alto

Victor Hugo Perales
CIDES - UMSA

Abstract
In this paper we analyze the process of water urbanization in the periphery of El Alto, in the context of the urban sprawl growth; thus, the administration of the public drinking water company puts into practice and tension multiple paths, ranging from the requirement of certain administrative conditions, the dispute over political loyalties, the reaction to local pressures and mobilizations, to even the provision of water based on the economic efforts and community work of the residents themselves through the Obras con Participación Vecinal (OPV, Works with Neighborhood Participation) program. As a whole, these elements promote expressions and exercises of a particular corporate citizenship that materializes the access to water.

Keywords
Corporate citizenship, urbanization of water, urban periphery, city of El Alto, access to water

Classification JEL
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Résumé
Dans cet article, nous analysons le processus d'urbanisation de l'eau dans la périphérie d'El Alto, dans le contexte de la croissance de l'étalement urbain ; ainsi, l'administration de la compagnie publique d'eau potable met en pratique et met en tension de multiples voies, allant de l'exigence de certaines conditions administratives, du différend sur les loyautés politiques, de la réaction aux pressions et mobilisations locales, jusqu'à l'approvisionnement en eau basé sur les efforts économiques et le travail communautaire des résidents eux-mêmes à travers le programme Obras con Participación Vecinal (OPV, Travaux avec la participation des voisins). Dans l'ensemble, ces éléments favorisent l'expression et l'exercice d'une citoyenneté d'entreprise particulière qui matérialise l'accès à l'eau.

Mot clés
Entreprise citoyenne, urbanisation de l'eau, périphérie urbaine, El Alto, accès à l'eau

Introduction

The urbanization of water in the periphery of El Alto is a continuous, elastic and permanently unfinished process, just like the urbanization process itself. The urban sprawl spreads intensively towards rural areas; thus, the administration of the public drinking water company puts into practice and tension multiple factors, from the imposition of certain administrative requirements, the dispute over political loyalties, the reaction to local mobilizations and pressure, the securing of public funds from the National Treasury or those occasionally provided by the international donor community, and even the provision of water through the financial efforts and community work of the residents themselves through the Obras con Participación Vecinal (OPV, Works with Neighborhood Participation) program. All these elements together show expressions and exercises of a particular corporate citizenship that materializes the access to water.

The problem of access to water in peripheral areas of the city of El Alto is an expression of what Swyngedouw (2004) calls water urbanization. In other words, the urbanization process causes as a side effect the explosion of demands for multiple urban services, including the demand for water collection, conveyance and distribution in these new urban areas; hence, this common good will be collected and transported through kilometers of hydraulic infrastructure networks. In other words, technical, economic, political, ecological and social elements are mobilized (Swyngedouw and Bovarnick, 1994; Swyngedouw, 2004; Calderón, 2016 [2005]; Poupeau, 2010; Achi and Delgado, 2007; Hastrup, 2013) that lead to the forced assumption of water management as a total social fact (Orlove and Caton, 2010).

Furthermore, the model for responding to water demands of peri-urban areas requires that in everyday dynamics the residents become organizationally cohesive. In general terms, this phenomenon related to citizen development and exercise in subaltern, marginalized or secluded settlements has been conceived by Partha Chaterjee (2008) as the organization of political society. This organization entails that citizens, collectively, make their demands known to state bodies, which, through the leaders, connects with the exercise of corporate democracy (García Linera, 2000), an appropriate definition to account for the dialogue between the State and local residents from peri-urban areas.

However, García Linera understands this citizen exercise in a way that celebrates forms of collective organization, since it focuses only on some of its aspects. This author fundamentally values democratic deliberations and social control mechanisms of local residents to control the actions of their leaders, but does not take into account other aspects of these organizational practices such as cronyism and prebendalism that also exist in these spaces as observable ways in which corporate democracy tends to be subordinated, a situation that is evident when access to water in these peri-urban neighborhoods is at stake.

The definition of mediated citizenship (Lazar, 2013) arises precisely from a conceptualization that reflects the pragmatic development of these organizations, with its lights and shadows.

On the other hand, the *criollo Leviathan* referred to by Tapia (2014) analyzes how leaders conceive social organizations as a springboard to accumulate social and political capital; that is, they aim to achieve personal interests through the establishment of mechanisms of cronyistic and prebendal mediation (Makaran, 2016; Quisbert, 2003; Suntura, 2014; Zavaleta, 2009).

Although these forms of conceptually labeling this phenomenon of mediation between society and the State may be excluding at the theoretical level -and even conceptually contradictory- they can also coexist paradoxically in practical and everyday life. They are facets of how corporate democracy develops, either as an expression of cronyistic submission, negotiation for access to water services, or of struggle, resistance and confrontation with the state administrative fabric through which water is accessed.

In recent decades, some of these organizational features have been observed in peripheral neighborhoods of Central American and South American countries, manifesting tensions between citizen exercise, organizational autonomy and social democratization versus state cronyistic cooptation and the relegation of participation, under criteria of exclusion that are presented as technocratic (Castro, 2017). On the one hand, this situation shows a certain degree of recurrence of the physical absence of the State in peri-urban areas, with episodic appearances; at the same time, it points to some influence of the logic of the State in the organizational dynamics channeling the access to water, infrastructure and other basic services according to the state's purposes.

Therefore, this portrays a sort of so-called autonomous government of peri-urban neighborhoods highly influenced by the intents of the State and the market, which form a governmentality (Foucault, 1999). This turns the neighborhood organization of peripheral neighborhoods, specifically the neighborhood leaders, into a body of parastatal authorities performing an administrative and technical management function for access to water, as well as other services. Nonetheless, in the process of obtaining water, the administrative characteristics of the neighborhood organization become blurred and gradually acquire a political tone, under forms of cronyistic submission.

In order to account for the connections between the exercise of corporate citizenship and water urbanization in peri-urban areas of district 7 of El Alto, this article links three problems, analyzed in two sections : (i) water urbanization in El Alto; (ii) corporate citizenship and access to water; and (iii) self-managed forms of access to water.

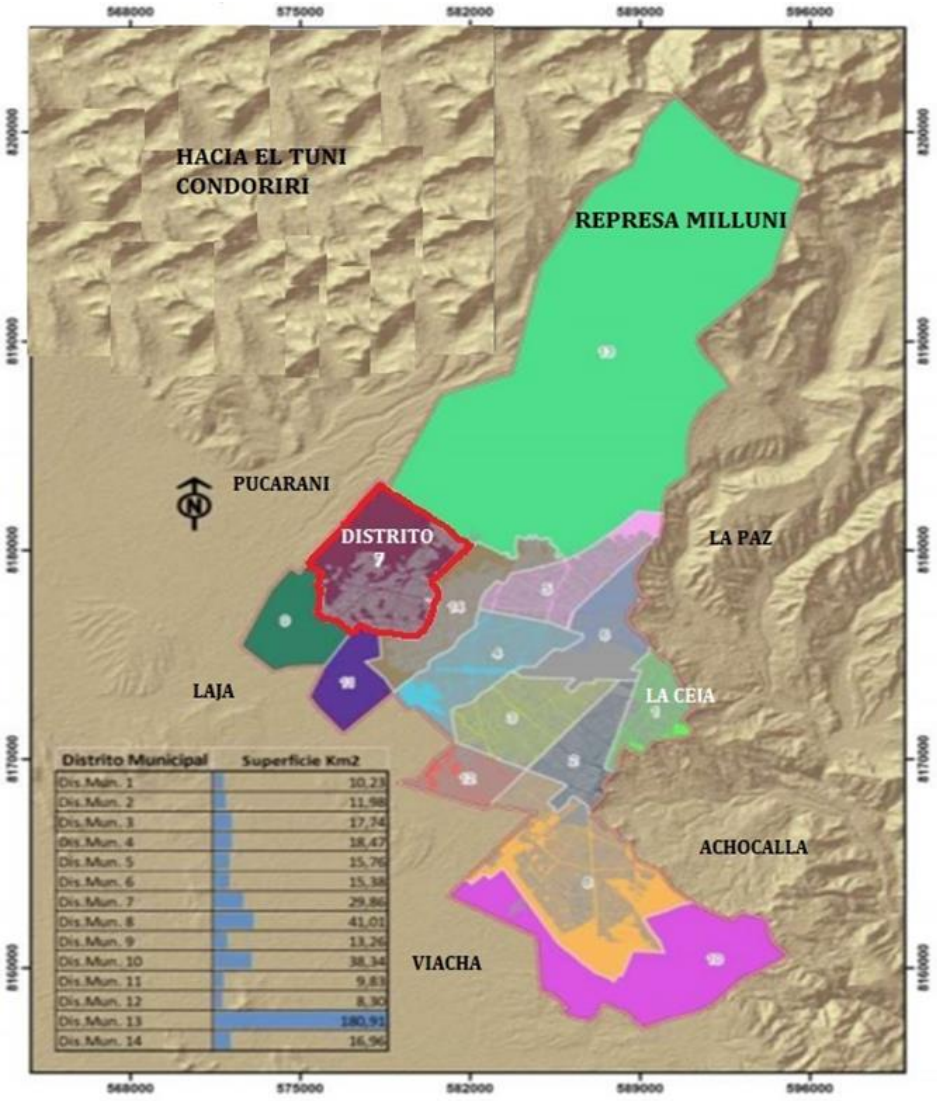
Particular attention is paid to the case of the Works with Neighborhood Participation (OPV), as a result of the fieldwork carried out in this district during three different periods[1] in which dozens of interviews were conducted, field diaries were prepared, tours were carried out in several neighborhoods of the district and, in addition, the author participated in neighborhood assemblies and meetings of neighborhood leaders.

[1] The first entry took place in 2014, in the context of self-funded research that sought to analyze how basic sanitation was solved in these peri-urban areas. The second moment was the work carried out between March and November 2015, with the support of students Weimar Montes Aliaga and René Quispe Quispe from the Sociology department of the Public University of El Alto, UPEA, within the framework of research coordinated by the author and commissioned by the "Pablo Zárate Willka" Social Research Institute of the UPEA to study the peri-urban configuration of some neighborhoods. The third moment was between July 2018 and June 2019, within the framework of the research project on inequalities in urban water services in the cities of La Paz and El Alto, carried out by CIDES-UMSA with the support of the French Development Agency, within which the research commissioned specifically sought to investigate the role of corporate citizenship in the urbanization of water in peripheral areas of the city of El Alto. In this last phase, the gathering of information was supported by students of the subject Social Research Workshop III of the third year of Sociology Studies of the UPEA, among whom Javier Gosálvez, Mariela Calani, Juan Carlos Mamani, Andrés Orta, Lourdes Suri, Adela Huanca, Oscar Limachi, Agustín Sanga, Paola Espinoza, Alina Córdova and research assistant Ruth Colque.

1. Water urbanization in the periphery of El Alto

The elasticity of urban boundaries constantly and endlessly widens the range of action of urban metabolism (Swyngedouw, 2004) that requires water to be supplied to residential units of La Paz and El Alto. The logical consequence of this elasticity is a permanent lag in the hydraulic infrastructure, since the construction of this type of infrastructure to provide drinking water to homes cannot keep up with the pace of urban growth, and to respond to the demand the works are usually carried out under the mantle of improvisation.

Map 1. El Alto. District 7
Source: own elaboration with data from GAMEA, 2017



Elastic urban boundaries

The boundaries of peri-urban areas change permanently for multiple reasons, one of the most recurrent ones being the low land prices (Swyngedouw, 2004; Poupeau, 2010), which is often what attracts many inhabitants of El Alto. The real estate speculation that produces these low land prices makes the plots attractive to people who do not need housing but who buy them by way of savings. In the case of El Alto, this occurs in a context where land prices, and therefore rents in central areas of the city, converted into nodes of great commercial flow, can be exorbitant.

Another characteristic of peri-urban areas in general is the informality of the real estate market, which is not controlled either by large real estate capitalists or by the State. This is the reality of El Alto and other cities in Bolivia -with the exception of Santa Cruz, where there is widespread development of capital-intensive real estate projects- just like in many other Latin American cities such as Lima (Calderón, 2013) and Colombia (Jaramillo, 2008).

As Poupeau (2010) shows, the city of El Alto began to experience an intense process of residential segregation since the beginning of the 21st century, when there was also a change in migration flows. The demographic growth and the configuration of the different urban areas that had been encouraged mainly by rural-city migration in the 1980s (Sandoval & Sostres, 1989), was rather encouraged by an internal mobilization process (Poupeau, 2010). In fact, as mentioned above, there is a mass of tenants and people with antichresis contracts whose low incomes have not allowed them to live in the central areas of El Alto, such as La Ceja (areas 12 de Octubre, 16 de Julio and Villa Dolores) so they have sought housing to rent or land to buy in peri-urban areas where the land value is much lower.

Another trigger for the elasticity of peri-urban boundaries is the families who own homes in the central areas of El Alto, but who buy land in the urban periphery as a savings mechanism. The gradual formalization of land ownership, the provision of urban equipment and the provision of basic services that will eventually reach these areas will inexorably lead to an increase in the real estate value. Of course, for this to happen, these types of property owners will have to abide by the decisions and guidelines of the neighborhood councils.

Thus, the peri-urban areas of district 7 of El Alto expand rapidly within the framework of the dynamism of an informal real estate market, a phenomenon studied in countries with similar realities such as Peru and Colombia (Calderón, 2013, 2016 [2005]; Jaramillo, 2008). This market is controlled by small real estate groups that move between the formal and informal extremes, former peasants who promote land-use changes by selling their agricultural land, as well as owners of agricultural medium-sized estates near the confines of the urban sprawl.

Table 1. El Alto. Municipal districts and territorial extension, 2017
Source: GAMEA, 2017: 5

Carácter del distrito	Distrito	Extensión territorial en Km²	
Urbano	Distrito 14	16,96	
Rural	Distrito 13	180,91	1
Urbano	Distrito 12	8,3	
Rural	Distrito 11	9,83	
Rural	Distrito 10	38,34	3
Rural	Distrito 9	13,26	
Urbano	Distrito 8	41,01	2
Urbano	Distrito 7	29,86	4
Urbano	Distrito 6	15,38	
Urbano	Distrito 5	15,76	
Urbano	Distrito 4	18,47	
Urbano	Distrito 3	17,74	
Urbano	Distrito 2	11,98	
Urbano	Distrito 1	10,23	

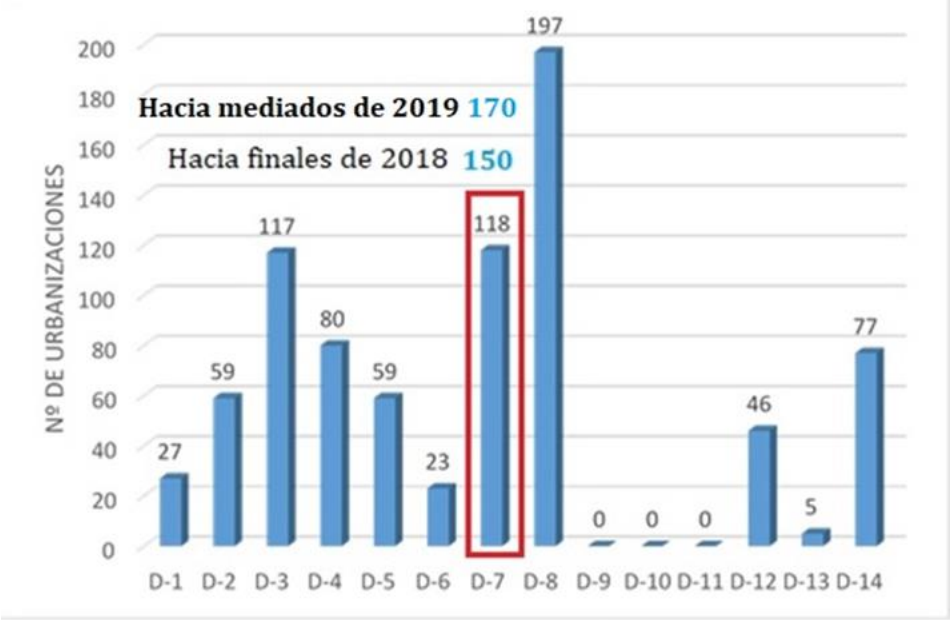
To illustrate this process, it is sufficient to point out that district 7 of El Alto is the fourth of fourteen in terms territorial extension (see table 1), while in terms of its population density it is one of the least populated districts, ranking ninth (see table 2). Another striking feature of district 7 is that despite its low population density it has an intense energy in terms of neighborhood organization. Already in 2017 the Five-Year Development Plan or PTDI of the Autonomous Municipal Government of El Alto, GAMEA, indicated that there were 118 neighborhood councils, and at that time district 7 was the second district of El Alto with most neighborhood organizations.

Table 2. El Alto. Population by municipal district, 2017
Source: GAMEA, 2017: 219

Distrito Municipal	Población	
1	87.997	6
2	73.939	7
3	144.828	1
4	107.147	3
5	104.226	4
6	90.538	5
7	44.402	9
8	121.843	2
9	19.816	
10	47.912	8
11	1.853	
12	785	
13	1.081	
14	2.085	

In 2018 the number of neighborhood councils increased to 150, while until mid-2019 this number continued to grow to approximately 170 neighborhood councils (see figure 1).

Figure 1. El Alto. Housing developments and neighborhood councils by district, 2017
Source: own production with data from GAMEA, 2017: 171
(*) Data from this case study



Although the increasing number of neighborhood councils in district 7 of El Alto points to a significant increase in the population, there are also other factors that lead to the growth of neighborhood councils. For example, the fragmentation - which at times is rather atomization - of the neighborhood councils, due to conflicts between the grassroots residents and the leaders of the neighborhood councils for a myriad of reasons that we will detail below, as well as the need to readjust and intensify the social control which the local grassroots levels exercise over the leaders.

Urban growth and water distribution

Bolivia has the constitutional principle of guaranteeing the human right to water, so the State has drawn up the strategy of reaching 100% of water access for all Bolivians until 2025, i.e. the year when the 200th anniversary of the country's independence is celebrated, as indicated in the Patriotic Agenda (Bolivia, 2013) drafted by the government of Evo Morales. However, not all built or semi-built dwellings are inhabited in the peri-urban neighborhoods of El Alto; therefore, one of the objectives pursued by the Public Enterprise for Water and Sanitation under intervention (EPSAS S.A.) is to put in place hydraulic infrastructure and guarantee the provision of drinking water in those urban and peri-urban areas where most dwellings are inhabited.

The so-called "Water War" in Cochabamba in 2000 and the so-called "Second Water War" in the city of El Alto in 2005 were part of a series of mobilizations against transnational capital that managed water in those cities. The sudden increase in tariffs and the inability of these transnational corporations to expand water distribution infrastructure were seen as environmental discrimination and racism (Crespo, 2009). The actions of the inhabitants in both contexts partly explain the shifts in the governmental imprint of the Bolivian State, from 2006 to the present day. Consequently, the Bolivian State spared no effort to put in place its manifest commitment to the human right to water, to the point that it led an international campaign to declare the Human Right to Water as such (United Nations, 2010)[2].

The government of the Movement towards Socialism[3] carried out multiple programs to provide drinking water. In 2013, it announced the provision of basic services, including water, as a pillar of the Patriotic Agenda. This situation was endorsed in 2016 when this line of action was integrated into the Economic and Social Development Plan 2016-2020 (Bolivia, 2016). However, the elasticity of peri-urban boundaries jeopardizes the fulfilment of the goal of providing water to 100% of citizens by 2025, as the dynamic process of urbanization leads to a constant expansion. This is the case of district 7 of El Alto, where water distribution is always insufficient despite multiple projects for water infrastructure and drinking water distribution.

Picture 1. El Alto. Municipal district 7. San Roque neighborhood. Announcement by the Ministry of Environment and Water regarding hydraulic infrastructure works
Photo: V. H. Perales, 2018

[2] Encyclical Letter Laudato si, "On care for our common home" states that: "Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights." (Papa Francisco, 2015).

[3] Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement towards Socialism), MAS: a political party led by Evo Morales, president of Bolivia from 2006 to the present day.

2. Lag in water infrastructure

In the new housing developments in the urban periphery of El Alto, many neighborhoods do not have basic services infrastructure or the infrastructure is precarious. In fact, as mentioned above, the urbanization of the outskirts of El Alto is characterized by a lack of planning; the model they follow is that first, the urban settlement occurs and later, only as a result of neighborhood action, the need for basic services is met.

In a meeting held in April 2019 of the general manager of EPSAS, Humberto Claure, the leaders of the neighborhood councils of El Alto and the organic Federation of Neighborhood Councils of El Alto (cfr. below), the manager emphatically told them: "EPSAS's work is not to urbanize, we are not housing developers". He also stressed that EPSAS has an obligation to bring water to urban areas that are populated. This reinforces the idea that EPSAS's work is at odds with urban planning and is at the antipodes of joint planning with real estate investors and members of the Autonomous Municipal Government of El Alto. Everything indicates, rather, that EPSAS acts reactively in the face of the urbanization processes led by the informal real estate market in the urban periphery of this district, as well as by the insistent demand for access to water from the inhabitants of housing developments that pop up suddenly and uncontrollably in El Alto. In other words, if there is no population that is systematically and massively occupying the dwellings, in theory there is no need to bring water to new urban expansion zones.

The work dynamics of EPSAS are closely linked to the neighborhood councils that exert pressure on the institution and coordinate the details regarding the execution of works and solutions for everyday problems. These relationships are established with many neighborhood councils that have the competence to manage access to water. Therefore, greater interactive empathy with public water managers, effective pressure or other affinities may result in breaking the unwritten rule that states that an unpopulated housing development should not receive water; there have been cases of housing developments that were provided with drinking water with half of the dwellings actually being empty.

Picture 2: El Alto, Municipal district 7. Nueva Florida housing development. Installation of water and sewerage (Photo: V. H. Perales, 2018)

3. Corporate citizenship and access to water

In the peripheral areas of the city of El Alto "those who are not organized, simply do not exist" (García Linera, 2000; 2009; 2019). The most widespread way in which residents become visible in the eyes of the State is through their organization, that is, through the neighborhood leaders that are the visible face of the neighborhood councils of El Alto.

In fact, the formal procedures for access to water are usually carried out in block; it is unusual for such requests to be made or dealt with individually. In this context, the action of these neighborhood organizations can lead to two phenomena. The first is cronyism as a pragmatic way to access water, given that in a context of urban growth in which water claimants compete with each other, the advantages of professing a certain political loyalty emerge as a possibility of shortening formal procedures and finding a shortcut in the tedious bureaucratic paths. The second phenomenon is the attitude of preparation, the express manifestation of dissatisfaction through protests, blockades, mobilization, or the occupation of the places of work of the administrative staff that define who is given water and who is not.

As can be seen, the role of neighborhood leaders is crucial to the achievement of drinking water services[4]. However, this role of articulation between society and the State also implies that the leaders play a role of parastatal authorities, forming a kind of governmentality, which ensures that the purposes and ends of the State are achieved, that is, without these organizations and without these leaders, the State presence would simply be null or unnoticed.

Mediation between the State and society

The model for responding to water demands in the peri-urban areas of district 7 of El Alto is through the leaders, which implies the exercise of "corporate citizenship" (García Linera, 2000), "mediated citizenship" (Lazar, 2013) or the appearance of a sort of "criollo Leviathan" (Tapia, 2014). Each of these forms of conceptually labeling this phenomenon of mediation between society and the State in peripheral neighborhoods is, despite being excluding, in debate and conceptual tension. In the actual facts, they appear as different facets with which the flows of power are expressed in the water urbanization, in which it is possible to observe certain assembly and deliberative practices among the residents of the different peripheral neighborhoods that agree on the need to organize and delegate functions to a resident to take on roles of dialogue with the State apparatus and the public water company, with the final aim of accessing the basic service.

[4] When pointing out that the role of the local leader is crucial in this instance, it must be understood that this concerns both obtaining the drinking water service and the opposition to such access. In fact, along the path for access to water, the neighborhood councils may be opposed to certain residents accessing the water, as we can corroborate with the content of the ruling issued by the Plenary Chamber of the Supreme Court of the Plurinational State of Bolivia No. 364/2015 of 21 July 2015. I am grateful to Vladimir Ameller for the point made in this sense.

Along the journey for access to water, there are political struggles, pulling and pushing as the expression of the pragmatism with which this tortuous path for accessing water is followed. Moreover, at times, the cronyistic submission of the residents to the State is evident, given that water also conveys power flows that run vertically from the State to the local grassroots levels. This situation may end up highlighting the accumulation of power by one or several neighborhood leaders vis-à-vis the residents, as mentioned in many testimonials.

While the human right to water is a condition for the exercise of other human rights, as Pope Francis points out in the Encyclical Letter Laudato si, the practical ways of accessing water do not always coincide with the institutionally provided forms for exercising citizen rights. Obviously, in the neighborhoods of the urban periphery of El Alto, the individual exercise of citizen rights is practically impossible if an individual is not organized; the claim can only succeed insofar as it is multiple, expressed in a collective form; otherwise, the risk of not being able to exercise the human right of access to water is very high.

The corporatization of citizen practice has existed for a long time in Bolivia. Zavaleta (2009) indicates that, since the Revolution of 1952, the Bolivian State established strong links with social organizations, constituting what he called prebendal mediation. At that time, the links were put in place through the leaders of the nearly 12,000 emerging peasant unions, whose leaders had to carry out cumbersome administrative procedures to secure the allocation of land when the servitude or pongueaje system collapsed (Paz, 1983).

With the multiplication and growth of urban areas, these mediations between the State and social organizations shifted towards neighborhood organizations. In the context of the execution of urban improvement projects, among which water and sanitation projects, the Directorate of Communal Action took on a leading role during the 1960s. This directorate is a kind of state agency coordinating with neighborhood organizations that carried out works in which the population contributed labor. In order to execute these projects, the State did not invest funds from the public treasury but from international donors, within the framework of the North American plan for Latin American countries, known as the Alliance for Progress (Calderón and Szmukler, 2000).

Later, the development model with neighborhood participation, also known in recent decades as a pro-poor approach[5], was relaunched with the enactment of the People's Participation Law (1994) that reconfigured the role of municipalities in the country by providing them with a budget with funds from the Treasury to regulate the mandatory planning and introduce the peremptory nature of citizen participation by promoting the organization of Territorial Grassroots Organizations (OTBs, in Spanish).

This participation was also characterized by its corporate character, given that the representativeness of multiple and different social organizations was made effective through their leaders. This led to the beginning of a process across Bolivia of political and social accumulation of neighborhood leaders who, in the political dynamics and with greater intensity in El Alto from the beginning of the 21st century, exceeded the initial purposes of the People's Participation Law, since the leaders of the OTBs, peasant unions,

[5] A set of measures aimed at improving the quality of life of people, income redistribution, as well as reducing statistical figures related to poverty from a pro-poor growth approach. Although the definition was formulated in the 1990s, it dates back to the 1930s of the 20th century. There have been multiple approaches, but those proposed by the World Bank and the United Nations stand out (Medina and Galván, 2014).

ayllus, neighborhood councils and other social organizations, in principle, accompanied the central government or the sub-national governments in the framework of citizen participation so that citizen proposals would be reflected in public planning and participation processes.

However, at present, that accompanying dynamic has been outgrown by greater political participation in the public administration, mainly at the level of municipal governments, and the greater role of leaders as liaisons in the relations between society and the State. In addition, the status of neighborhood leaders has been consolidated as a step towards eventual political posts, as will be explained below.

At present, the MAS government conceives itself as a coordinator of social organizations; it is a sui generis political party whose party structure intersects with that of social organizations, blurring or fading the differences between both. Thus, a complex organizational arrangement is configured where the leaders play a role, at times, of conveyor belts between the governing party or the State and the grassroots levels, including the grassroots residents. In this context, coordination is not only around the political party interests, but also on the basis of the needs of citizens' access to public utility services.

Cronyism and access to water

The framework of mediation between society and the State can lead to different paths, depending on the degree of autonomy or dependence in the relationship of the neighborhood councils with the various levels of government, either at the central or subnational level. Residents in water-deprived areas of district 7 enter into competition for being served first. Given that the water tariff is frozen, largely due to local pressure, it is not a means for negotiating economic resources, but, through the State, unlike the case of Guayaquil in Ecuador (Swyngedouw, 2004; Swyngedouw and Bovarnick, 1994), the capital at stake is the accumulation of political power based on the agglutination of the largest number of neighbors as a social foundation.

Before an audience made up of leaders of the different neighborhood councils of district 7 of El Alto, in a meeting held in April 2018, the General Manager of EPSAS said that water has no political party color and that the work of EPSAS aims to satisfy access to water for all residents of El Alto. He concluded his comments by indicating that, in order to execute the new phase of expansion of water coverage, the leaders of neighborhood councils had to hand over their drinking water and basic sanitation project folders to the leaders of the Federation of Neighborhood Councils of El Alto, FEJUVE El Alto.

However, months before, FEJUVE El Alto had suffered a split into two blocks: the “organic block” and the “protest block”. Thus, the manager of EPSAS demanded that the formalities for accessing water be complied with only through the organic block, allied to the central government. Considering that the central government also controls water company EPSAS, it is clear that the EPSAS manager set the limits on which groups of neighborhood leaders to work with on extension of the water coverage, thereby diluting the democratic rhetoric.

Picture 3. El Alto, Neighborhood Councils of district 7
in the proclamation of Evo Morales as presidential candidate
Photo: V. H. Perales, 2018

In fact, the same neighborhood organizations that mobilize to access drinking water and other unsatisfied basic services claimed in peri-urban territories, in many cases become members of the cronyistic mass of the ruling political party, at the central or subnational level, in order to achieve their objectives. They must show political loyalty which they hope to collect through the reciprocity of the party they supported, whereby the latter is expected to facilitate the steps they follow to access drinking water or improve the hydraulic infrastructure.

Some presidents of the neighborhood councils attend rallies or mobilizations organized by the ruling party at the central government level because they expect this show of political support to be translated into works for the neighborhood they represent (see picture 3). At the same time, the vice-president of the same neighborhood council attends the assemblies convened by the municipal government, which is controlled by the opposition to the central government, also seeking to benefit the people (s)he represents with works in the municipal sphere of competence. The cronyistic behavior of the neighborhood councils is evident, although it is a particular type of cronyism, i.e. “active cronyism” (Lazar, 2013).

Effectively, our fieldwork has showed that the leader who was president of FEJUVE El Alto at that meeting in April 2018, ceased to be so in 2019 and appeared in the first lists of candidates for MAS representatives and senators for the general elections of October 2019, specifically as a candidate for deputy representative in a district of El Alto. This points to mechanisms for a relationship between the central government, the ruling party and certain neighborhood leaders to solve neighborhood problems such as access to water.

These contacts or close ties dilute the differences - in some very specific cases, because all the neighborhood leaders are also in competition - between who is part of the government, who is part of the ruling party and who represents the residents of neighborhoods in El Alto.

Although there are opposed political interests between the MAS as the ruling party and the municipal government of El Alto, the mode of interaction with the grassroots levels is the same, with variations in terms of the resource mobilization power of each of these autonomous territorial entities.

In itself, the status of neighborhood leader can catapult the neighborhood representative into becoming a national congressional representative or a municipal councilor of El Alto, provided that (s)he displays neighborhood leadership and popular support, which entails the accumulation of social and political capital. The water issue in the case of district 7 of El Alto, where more than 50% of the neighborhoods lack access to drinking water[6], is therefore an important trigger in the political sphere. The evidence of this accumulation of social and political power, before the residents, national and municipal authorities, and EPSAS, plays a prevailing role in this political framework in which dozens of neighborhood leaders are in tough competition to demonstrate who holds the greatest social and political capital.

Pressure for access to water

Protests and blockades are pressure measures that must be carried out to gain access to water in district 7 of El Alto. On 22 July 2019, around 50 people blocking Avenida 16 de Julio said they were protesting against leaders of different neighborhood councils in the district. The protest was led by leaders of the organic FEJUVE, allied to the ruling party. These furious protesters demanded two points insistently: the dismissal of the EPSAS General Manager, and the decentralization of EPSAS to speed up compliance with the demands for access to water.

Despite the fact that these neighborhood councils are allied to the ruling party and respond to the leaders of the organic FEJUVE, the residents and neighborhood leaders organize protests and mobilizations, street blockades and attacks on the EPSAS building if they do not obtain access to water. On the other hand, the electoral political environment also impacts mobilizations for water. The blockade of 22 July 2019 to demand water was also related to the discontent of the leaders with the lists of candidates for representatives and senators of the ruling party. Accordingly, the political dynamics in the city of El Alto do not only reflect classical (or passive) cronyism, but also what Sian Lazar (2013) calls active cronyism, through which local residents and neighborhood leaders can exercise pressure to gain not only access to water but also spaces of power, such as the candidacy for representative or other spaces of representation in the political structure.

Therefore, the demands for access to water, which are recurring in the neighborhoods of district 7 of El Alto, can also act as a rapid trigger for local mobilization around the water demand, even if that is not necessarily the objective of the protest.

Thus, demands for access to water are also effective in encouraging protest mobilizations that in some cases have reached belligerent edges, as has happened on multiple occasions with the attack on the EPSAS building in El Alto. This was attested to by an EPSAS construction contractor and another person working in administrative tasks, who have often been trapped in the aforementioned building, while it was surrounded by residents of housing

[6] Arch. Juan Carlos Choque of the district government of district 7, in personal communication.

developments in district 7 demanding the execution of works to expand drinking water coverage in their neighborhoods. The testimonials of these officials, who for obvious reasons prefer to remain anonymous, explain perfectly why today the EPSAS building in El Alto resembles a bunker, with its glass windows protected by metal mesh or steel shutters (see picture 4).

Picture 4. El Alto. Av. 16 de Julio opposite the headquarters of EPSAS
Photo: V. H. Perales, 2018

Governmentality: parastatal authorities

The production of the peripheral spaces of district 7 reveals the feverish construction of these new urban areas; in fact, the dynamics of daily life make it possible to observe construction of the city by hand, that is, a construction process led by the residents, using their own hands, a situation that characterizes the notion of perceived space, in terms of Lefebvre (2013 [1974]). The lived space -as defined by Lefebvre- is expressed in the tensions, encounters and disagreements between the State, whether in its role as central or municipal government, with the neighborhood councils to face the complex task of providing basic services, of full transformation of rurality into the new urban spaces and the energies invested in the self-construction of homes.

In addition, obtaining water entails a struggle among the residents to attract state public investment in tough competition with the residents of other new housing developments due to the always limited financial resources. Following the case of water access in district 7 of El Alto, what Lefebvre (2013 [1974]) calls the conceived space can be seen, on the one hand,

in the work carried out by social technocrats who adjust their interventions to the libretto of community-based water development, with the limits imposed by a company such as EPSAS, relying on local energies for this purpose. And on the other hand, in the different state expressions that conceive the space of the periphery as the place of their potential cronies.

In this way, the neighborhood councils cover the organization of the population in the absence of the State, coordinate with the various state bodies to achieve the gradual formalization of the areas and the arrival of urban equipment and basic services. While these tasks are carried out with wide margins of autonomy vis-à-vis the State, they are not detached from public policies, plans, programs and projects. In a sense, the neighborhood leaders constitute conveyor belts of the state authorities in the peri-urban space; forming what Foucault (1999) calls governmentality.

Indeed, in the preceding paragraphs, reference has been made to the complex fabric of political ties in which the neighborhood leaders move and where their position between neighborhood leaders, State representatives or members of the ruling party becomes blurred at times. The protagonist role of the neighborhood leaders plays out in the political party sphere, especially visible in electoral times, since the exercise of certain leadership functions and ties with the government can be of a daily nature (Auyero and Benzecry, 2016), expressed in a kind of assumption of political functions and inevitable collaboration with the public administration.

Beyond the recurring associations of the neighborhood leader's role with corruption and prebendalism, the daily role performed by neighborhood leaders -and which can be called parastatal- also seems essential for the realization of projects to expand urban drinking water coverage, works monitoring and delivery. In these actions, the leaders appear not only as mere neighborhood representatives but as non-State public administrators who fulfill a function of linking with the State and EPSAS and which makes it possible, on the one hand, to ensure access to drinking water for the population and, on the other hand, for the company and the State to reach the objective of providing drinking water to more neighborhoods thanks to the channel of the leaderships.

4. Self-managed forms of access to water in the exercise of corporate citizenship

On the other hand, in view of the impossibility of obtaining resources either from the public treasury or from international donors, for both the public company EPSAS and the residents of the urban peripheries one feasible way to reach the desired drinking water coverage is through the realization of hydraulic works financed with money contributed by the residents themselves. In this model, officially called Obras con Participation Vecinal, OPV, the residents who demand drinking water carry out community actions, labor or workdays. Bolivia has a long track record with this model, dating back to the 1960s (Calderón and Szmukler, 2000), which later became visible also during implementation of the structural economic adjustment measures of 1980 and which reappeared in the 1990s as a pro-poor approach through the so-called community action. It must be acknowledged, however, that this pragmatic solution is not exempt from corruption either.

Water works with local money

This system called Obras con Participación Vecinal, OPV, has been used extensively given the difficulties of EPSAS to access financing to meet its planned investments in hydraulic infrastructure and thus increase water distribution coverage in the municipalities of the metropolitan area of La Paz it serves.

Works financed by local residents have existed since the beginning of the 1990s, in accordance with the National Regulation on the Provision of Water and Sewerage Services, approved through Administrative Decision No. 510 of 29 October 1992. In March 2016, Regulatory Administrative Resolution AAP/AJ/AR/21/2016 was issued, which provides for the obligation of any financing provided by local residents to be analyzed by the Authority for Oversight and Social Control of Drinking Water and Basic Sanitation. Finally, on 28 June 2017, Regulatory Administrative Resolution AAP/AJ/AR/363/2017 was issued to pass the regulation for Works with Neighborhood Participation, not only for EPSAS La Paz, but nationwide.

The difficulty of expanding water coverage in the urban periphery due to the multiple factors analyzed -a lack of funding from EPSAS, the phenomenon of expanding urbanization expressed in the elastic boundaries of the peri-urban area and the clamor of multiple neighborhoods seeking access to drinking water- points to the State's inability to provide water to all peri-urban neighborhoods of district 7 and consolidates the Works with Neighborhood Participation as a self-managed effort to expand water coverage.

The existence of the Works with Neighborhood Participation shows that the formal procedures followed by the peri-urban neighborhoods are in the heat of the exercise of corporate citizenship, associated with protest, mobilization, pressure on central and subnational government authorities, and cronyistic and prebendal submission to these authorities. Parastatal functions, which we associate with governmentality, are also related to coordination and efforts so that peri-urban neighborhoods achieve their goals, proposed and financed by themselves, as a self-management exercise.

Community action or reemergence of the pro-poor approach

As pointed out by Davis (2014 [2006]), the development programs under self-construction modalities proposed by the World Bank derive from research carried out in popular neighborhoods of Peru with population groups that also dealt with the construction of their homes (Turner, 1976). Similarly, the Alliance for Progress promoted neighborhood improvement in Bolivian cities under the leadership of the Directorate of Communal Action (Calderón and Szmukler, 2000).

Thus, Works with Neighborhood Participation, as a community action program in which local residents contribute their time, tools and labor for the construction of hydraulic infrastructure works, are part of the "management of hardship" carried out by residents of peri-urban areas to access water (Poupeau, 2007).

Although Works with Neighborhood Participation provide some autonomy to the neighborhoods, the model based on the use of self-managed energies to meet basic needs of peripheral and self-built neighborhoods takes many decades. At the beginning of the 21st century, this gave rise to the so-called pro-poor approach to development -proposed by multilateral development aid agencies within the framework of the Millennium Goals. Under this approach, the beneficiaries contribute labor and money, although the increase in the statistics of expanded drinking water coverage through these self-managed mechanisms is usually credited to EPSAS and the State bodies involved in the sector.

Works with Neighborhood Participation and corruption

Although efforts have been made for the State to regulate the procedures for the execution of works with financing from neighbors, there are some problems in enforcing the legislation. According to the law, these works will be subject to technical reviews by the companies providing the drinking water service. This technical review should analyze the characteristics of the hydraulic infrastructure, the design of the expansion and the materials used, as well as the monitoring and analysis of the companies awarded the Works with Neighborhood Participation by the supervisors of drinking water service providers.

However, in some cases this law has resulted in the conditioning of the approval of plans for the expansion of the hydraulic infrastructure to the funding from residents; that is, there is a condition of approval of the contractor, benefiting some company favored by the supervisors.

Conclusions

Addressing water demands is a priority of organizations and is mediated through neighborhood leaders. Individual demands for access to water are not met in contexts of urban expansion to the peripheries. The efforts made by EPSAS for the provision of water and expanded coverage are based on mediation with leaders, in the context of pressures or agreements with housing developments that are willing to bear the costs of expanding water coverage. The local leaders and neighborhood councils serve as a channel or mediator with the State, taking on the role of local parastatal authorities that guarantee governmentality, that is, they project the State presence in local neighborhood spaces.

While leaders often enter into political alliances with parties or entities at the central or subnational level of the State, this is done in the midst of strong social control and accountability towards the grassroots levels. Given the suspicion of corruption or distrust of leaders, the trend is towards the fragmentation of housing developments; thus, when the neighborhood organization is smaller, the grassroots levels can exercise more direct and effective control over their leaders.

Works with Neighborhood Participation is a recycled modality of pro-poor development measures framed in contexts of self-construction and self-financing of the expansion of water coverage. Through these works, in district 7 of El Alto there are some acts of corruption by the leaders; moreover, they deepen and reproduce inequalities regarding access to water. On the other hand, despite the fact that the financing comes from the residents, these resources are used by EPSAS to raise its performance statistics concerning the expansion of water coverage.

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Agence française
de développement
5, rue Roland Barthes
75012 Paris I France
www.afd.fr

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