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**GOBIERNO BARRIAL DE ATUCUCHO
AN URBAN ALTERNATIVE BASED ON
SELF-GOVERNANCE AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses Atucucho, a post-informal neighborhood of Quito outstanding for its self-management, social organization and cohesion.

Since the first land invasions in the late 80's, bound under strong housing need and a sense of cooperation and solidarity, its inhabitants have been fighting and actively shaping, incrementally, their territory and built environment. Atucucho's internal management is regulated, still nowadays, by committees and associations based on principles of direct democracy. Multiples have been the external actors, like NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, which have supported many aspects of its development.

This paper stresses the administrative and spatial ability of Atucucho's self-management through time: from its long period of illegality, up to the recent formulation of its own Neighborhood Government (*Gobierno Barrial*) and bank. Particular attention is paid to what perhaps is its greater merit: the latent proposition of an alternative to neoliberal urban regime, which has grown over time; an aspect not easily verifiable in other post-informal settlements in Quito.

Finally this neighborhood from the northwest of Quito, is seen as a desirable case to be reread under the light of the actual Ecuadorian socio-political situation. It will be by referring to some specific aspects of the Constitution of the *Buen Vivir*, such as the 'right to the city' (art.31) and the existence of 'Basic Participation Units' *Unidades basicas de participacion* (art. 248), that this contribution attempts to depict Atucucho as a reference to a desirable urban alternative.

KEYWORDS: self-management, *Buen Vivir*, *minga*, Ecuador

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The need to invade

In the absence of planning and/or poor management capacity by state institutions relative to urban growth and housing solutions for the entire population, popular sectors channel their search for solving the housing problem through various forms, such as: renting/sub-renting or forming new neighborhoods. (Huerta et al., 2012; Borja, 2011, Carrion, 1992) In the second case, land price is a major factor that prevents the poorest part of the society to access urban spaces; therefore they seek lower-priced land in suburbs or outside the city limits, in agricultural land, or vacant ones, in forests or hillsides, mostly illegally, and constantly under threat of eviction. Between the many difficulties that invaders face, there are: the building of their own house, the provision and access to basic services and the encounter of severe environmental risks. (Carrion, 1992) What is peculiar of most Ecuadorian cases, is that these multiple challenges have been faced by inhabitants mainly collectively, that is physically through a practice, called *minga*¹ and administratively mainly through committees, cooperatives and assemblies. Between the many examples findable during the 80's and 90's in Quito, Atucucho has been chosen as case to be deepened, due to its ability of having conserved, up to the current days, its self-management in a collective way.

In order to uncover details, criticalities and potentials of this neighborhood, it will be confronted from different angles. Initially the contribution will attempt to illustrate simultaneously its evolution in space and in management, passing from the first invasions looking to its various neighborhood organizations, its ability of co-producing space and society will be uncovered. On a second moment instead, emphasis will be given to its capacity of having dealt with multiple external actors, considering among these also the erratic interactions with the State. Finally the reflection will end looking on how this alternative model of urban self-governance, could be seen as a reference for more inclusive and equitable urban realities inside the *Buen Vivir* institutional framework.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE STUDY

2.1 The history of the occupation

The neighborhood of Atucucho has around 17.000 inhabitants and it is currently divided in 6 sectors. It was born on the 1st of April 1988 through a massive land occupation of 200 families and was organized by two strong and controversial leaders: Segundo Aguilar and Carlo Yacelga. More precisely, the right-wing president of Ecuador, Leon Febres Cordero, illegally supported the invasion, allowing secretly the leaders to take possession of the area. (Herrera, 2015) A strategy that was hiding two aspects: the strong need of political support

¹ *minga*. There is no English translation for the word *minga*, which derives from the Quechua language (Mink'a) and consists of collaborative free work characteristic of the Andean populations. A custom based on reciprocity, solidarity and redistribution, exercised since pre-colonial times and now, with more or less intensity, still actual all along this extended mountain region. The *minga*, more precisely, is an operation of self-management, where individuals act in a performative manner to construct their own environment collectively, but differently from any other Latin American practice of self-management in marginalized and generally low-income settlements, it has a very precise organizational structure, calendar and cultural meaning. (Guevara, 19., Klafus,)

for the imminent president's elections, and a sort of recognition of the inability of the State to help the poor on the housing front². (Carrion, 1992)

This land, located in the northwest of Quito, lies on the slopes of the Pichincha Mountain, between 3.100 and 3.300 meters above the sea level and it was property of the Ministry of Health.



Figure 1: Location of Atucucho in Quito **Source:** by the author on dwg DMQ 2011

Initially consisted of a dense eucalyptus forest, which between the 1st and 5th of April considerably reduced thanks to the tireless work of the first invaders. (Alvarado et al., 2011)



Photo 1,2,3: Atucucho's evolution **Source:** Secretary of Territory Habitat and Housing of Quito

Photo 3: Atucucho in 2015 **Source:** google maps

At the beginning the situation was extremely precarious. As soon as some available space was created, inhabitants started building their shelters with what they could, originally indeed was known as *Ciudad de los Palitos* (City of sticks), as it was made of wooden pillars coming from the deforestation of the eucalyptus. With time zinc started appearing and

²Outcome of the interview to Taylor Herrera, president of Atucucho's committee *Pro-mejoras*, 2nd of September 2016.

within some years concrete blocks were found as a common building material in the entire neighborhood.



Photo 4: Atacucho in the 90's **Source:** Alvarado 2011, 6

The urban structure of Atucucho was commissioned by the leaders to an engineer and was defined by the imposition of a grid of roads adapting on the steep topography³. (Herrera, 2015) Leaders were delivering the plots prior payment of a subscription and the enrollment to a monthly payment plan. A plot at the time had a price of 12 thousands sucres and the newcomers were mainly *mestizos* original from outside the Pichincha province, Esmeraldas, Carchi, Imbabura, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo and Loja. (MDMQ, 2002)

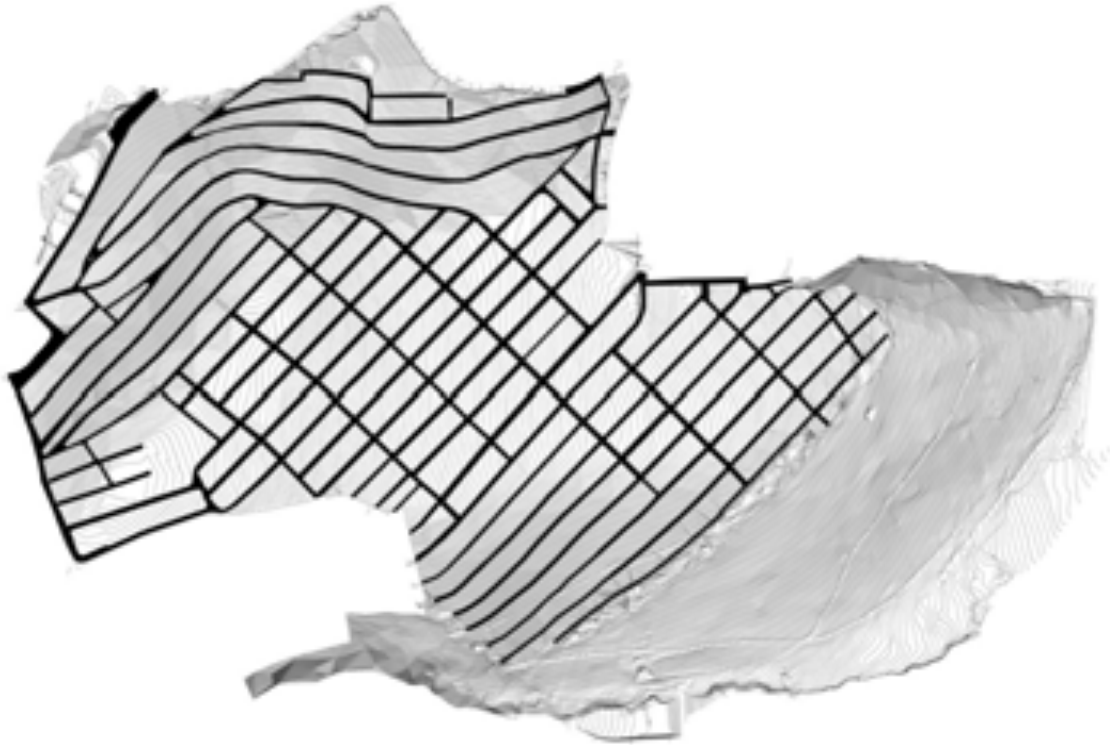


Figure 2: roads and topography **Source:** by the author with support of dwg DMQ 2011

2.2 *Comité Pro-mejoras, Junta del Agua* and CEMSI

While the first settlements were constructed, there was another existential need to be satisfied, the access to water. Initially was fetched from a mountain river, which, however, was inside the property of a hacienda owned by an old lady. Its provision wasn't easy and occurred always less and just consequentially the prayers of Atucucho's women to the rich owner⁴. Unable to reach any agreement, the inhabitants created a canal to bring the water to the neighborhood and consequently they constructed collective laundries, but sometimes some families were diverting the water to their sector in order to use it for building houses. This created contamination and conflict between the different sectors and being the situation unsustainable, something immediate had to be done (Carrion, 1992, Herrera, 2015).

It's from this need that a committee of citizens was created. Precisely called *Comité Pro-mejoras* (1991), was a parallel citizens' organization to the already existing Cooperative of

³Due to the geological composition of the soil and the strong water flows during rainy seasons, Atucucho is highly vulnerable to erosion and landslides. (Pirejevec, 2013)

⁴As recalled in the book *Quito Adentro*, women were asking "please, we have children, we have for whom to fight, do it for our creatures, they need it". (MDMQ, 2002, 29)

Inticucho⁵. While this one was mostly in charge to sell plots, *Comité Pro-mejoras* had a central role in the neighborhood self-development and empowerment. Elected by the entire population its representatives, were initially mainly men, the very first thing they did was collectively found the *Junta de Agua* (Water Board). (Carrion 1992, Alvarado et al., 2011)

Involving the entire population, they collectively built a water storage tank; the service was distributed to each family through hoses and collective faucets. Every faucet supplied water to 20 families, whom were recollecting it with a turn of some hours a week and as explained by Alvarado, could be also for two hours between three and five in the night⁶. (Alvarado et al., 2011) Seeing what was being achieved, this system lowered the internal conflicts, the absence of external providers and the necessity of finding immediate solutions, made the neighborhood's self-management rise and water in this sense became a stimulus for multiple collective action inside the community organization. (MDMQ, 2002)

The second main focus of the committee was concerning children under 5 years old, which were many and with no place were to stay while their parents were at work. The *Comité Pro-mejoras* founded hence the CEMSI (*Centro de Madres a Servicio de la Infancia*), a no profit association organized mainly by women. It had the task of distributing and taking care of children that at the beginning were disposed 25-40 per-house and that in time were sorted in 15 centers around all Atucucho. Now they reached to host around 500 kids.

The *Junta de Agua* and the CEMSI fought for long time in order to obtain a legal status, and after many manifestations they both attained the municipal support. This led the possibility to the ONU to contribute with a project against cholera, which brought a purification system to produce drinking water. While from the MIDUVI (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing) they receive a grant to partially financed the kindergartens proposed by the CEMSI. In the same way a *Junta de Electricidad* was founded to solve the energy connection and another one to realize the sewer system. (Herrera, 2015)



Photo 5: CEMSI manifesting **Source:** Alvarado 2011, 38 **Photo 6:** San Jacinto neighborhood asking for legalization **Source:** MDMQ 2002, 11

Having been an illegal neighborhood until 2010, all infrastructures and services were implemented by Atucucho's inhabitants through organizations. Just eventually, as will be

⁵ As described by Taylor Herrera and by the research institute CIUDAD (2011), the fight between the two groups lasted until 1991, year in which the National Council recognizes the *Comité* as the one with legal value. The Cooperative, initially called Inticucho (which means Corner of the Sun) and then Atucucho (corner of the wolf), was formed by some original invaders aligned with the right party, while the *Comité* was a detached group supporting mainly the left.

⁶ The corners in which the taps were located, as Juan Tendorio (named Chicho) remembers, while making the line to obtain the water were places of gathering and organization. (Tendroio, 2015)

explained onwards, were receiving little funds by the municipality or external actors as NGOs or international cooperatives.

2.3 The *mingas* and the decision making process

As mentioned initially, from the very first cut of the eucalypt forest, countless were the practices developed through *mingas*, such as the tracing of the plots, the creation of the roads, the sewer system, etc. “With pick and shovel we were creating the main road, it was very difficult for heavy machinery to pass through there, selfless work and sacrifice was required from all” the inhabitants recall. (MDMQ, 2002, 17) In the same way also collective buildings took shape. In the publication *Quito Adentro* we can read an unusual history of how the communal house of the sector Corazon de Jesus was built. A group of women, which were the ones always more involved in the collective work⁷, tells that during one night, in 80 they occupied a plot owned by *señor* Penza and started building the house under his revolver aiming at them to leave. A similar story can be described for the first school, were “everyone worked as little aunts”. (ibid., 22) It took 6 months to be realized, all Saturday and Sundays and also in this case, women, often pregnant, were who was climbing the canyon to collect the heavy stones. Some years later instead, the meanings to construct the artisan house were obtained through the collection from each family of the neighborhood of 25 sucres and three concrete block. The church likely was built in a similar way and the pavement of the roads, still nowadays not completed, was almost entirely done collectively.



Photo 7: A day of *minga* in Atucucho in the 90's **Source:** MDMQ 2002, 16

Photo 8: Atucucho, a *minga* nowadays **Source:** laHora, 11.01.2015

About the *minga*, must be recalled that many are also the disadvantages that this practice can bring, like for example the great physical effort mostly required and the fact of been still mandatory in many communities or neighborhoods⁸. As Ariruma Kowii says though, it is a way of working together that promotes integration, solidarity and responsibility, discipline and commitment; an act that allows families to benefit from the planned works⁹. (Ariruma, 2011)

On this last point, relevant is to know that decision-making processes are taken still now

⁷ because man during weekends were working or playing football. (MDMQ, 2002)

⁸ At the time though, as Isabel Muñoz says (expert who worked with HABITAT in Atucucho in women emancipation trainings), even if *mingas* weren't mandatory, the sanction for those who were not participating was social instead of monetary. (Muñoz, 2015)

⁹ Ariruma Kowii is the director of the faculty of literature of the Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar in Quito.

through a precise administrative structure. Not just in Atucucho but also in many Ecuadorian indigenous communities or communes, the neighborhood organization is a complex machine of dialogue and interconnection between sector's leader, block's representatives and the citizens. As was just described, committees and association rise and perish depending on needs, but a super-structure that always exists is the assembly.

Since the first occupations in Atucucho, settlers indeed started to meet in weekly and monthly assemblies addressing common issues such as collective work, security, public space, but also socio-cultural activities.¹⁰ The *Comité Pro-mejoras*, which now is legally inscribed in the MIES (Ministry of Economical and social Inclusion), is who manages the assemblies. A president, a Vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer, a pro-secretary, 5 principal spokesman and 5 supplementary ones coming from all the different sectors, form the committee. These representatives are elected by the General Assembly, which meets 3-4 times a year. (Alvarado, 2011) All assemblies are open to all citizens and the decisions are either taken by hand rise or by secret vote. Due to this capillary structure, this system of direct democracy has the potential to vastly involve the entire population; potential, because still, even if recognized by the committee itself, the entanglement with the black minorities of the population and the young generations is still an obstacle to be successfully crossed.



Photo 8: Atucucho's assembly in the 90's **Source:** Alvarado, 2011, 20 **Photo 9:** Atucucho's assembly 2013 **Source:** <http://informal-quito.tumblr.com/>

Finally on top of the general assembly there is another administrative body: the FBPNQ *Federacion de Barrios Populares de Noroccidente de Quito*. It is a federation of neighborhoods outcome of land-invasions that are located in the northwest of the capital. Founded in 1983, was a way of reuniting the various leaders to fight against the *Cinturon Verde* (green belt) project, promoted at the time by the government to impede fractioning and construction of settlement in this extended area in the periphery of Quito. (Unda, 1998) Through the federation and in collaboration of research institutes, like the NGO CIUDAD, many were the development project implemented to improve citizens' lifestyle conditions¹¹.

¹⁰They are currently divided in *Asamblea General, Asamblea semanal de coordinadores y promotores barriales, Asambleas sectoriales and Reuniones de Comités Vecinales*. (Alvarado, 2011)

¹¹ One is the *Plan de Desarrollo Vecinal* (1992); a plan that articulated the population's demand and canalized governmental and private aides for concrete improvement actions. Another important one, also promoted by CIUDAD was *Vida el las Laderas* (Life on Hillsides), which main objective was to raise the living conditions of the population from housing and

2.4 Organizations inside the neighborhood

As been seen previously, initially social movements and organizations inside Atucucho were claiming mainly for public services and infrastructures, with time though, they passed to culture, leisure, identity and participation fostering. This neighborhood indeed, as recalled by Carrión, is one of the few cases where a popular organization begins consciously to move from the simple claim, to the will of participating in its management. (Carrión, 1992)

A central role of socialization in the *barrio* was and still is covered by the sport leagues. Initially promoted by the Church to avoid kids to dedicate themselves to alcohol and drugs, the league now reunites 40 teams of all ages. The will of playing at the beginning was so strong, that as Herrera remembers, until the stadium wasn't created in the centre of Atucucho, volleyball and football teams were renting fields in the adjacent neighborhoods. (Herrera, 2015) For teenagers, since the beginning of the 90's there were also the *grupos juvenil*, normally composed by youths in search for affirming their own identity, with main interests based around music and culture, these organizations still nowadays cover a central role of cohesion and inclusion. (ibid., Alvarado 2011)

Aside from sports and youth groups, women and their associations are the third milestone of Atucucho's social gathering (Carrión, 1992). At the forefront with the *mingas* and leading actors for the childcare, are still the fulcrums of the communal life development. (Carrión, 1992) Their associations are generally little groups that gather normally for three main reasons: the pursuit of meeting sites and linkage to certain activities specific to women, training to self-empowerment concerning dressmaking or cooking to help their families financially and their meetings are a channel to discuss together how to solve everyday housing problems. (ibid.)



Photo 10: women doing a *minga* for the construction of the federation's Development Center
Source: Unda, 1998, 44

Still concerning gathering experiences, we can recall the elderly association *Amigos para siempre* (Friends forever), founded by one inhabitant, Señora Rosario Kinga in 2001, which hosts around 100 members. They meet twice a week and it offers medical support,

neighborhood improvement, environmental management, economic development initiatives and strengthening community organization. (Unda, 1998)

motivational training, gymnastic and art crafts. They also developed a micro enterprise, which is a little bakery whose funds go back into the association to finance their activities. (Pirejecvec et al., 2013)

For some years, Atucucho had also a magazine called *Veci-Notas* and a radio station labeled *Lobo Estereo 88.9*. Promoted by the United Nations through HABITAT, was a project that started in 1997. As a neighbor of Atucucho called Patricio recalls, it was a training process to start a magazine that involved 600 citizens for 6 months. The same inhabitants were the writers and editors and *Veci-Notas* contained chronicles of the neighborhood, testimonies and reports on sector institutions, such as schools and craft centers. It was promoted with the main objective of making inhabitant proud of living there. However, due to the high illiteracy between then, it had to stop after the publication of the 27th number, so HABITAT decided to propose another training but this time on radio. It consisted in speech and diction courses, knowing how to develop a script, radio programming and screenplays. The programs transmitted were really successful, but as obtaining a legal frequency from CONARTEL was impossible, since August 2004 the illegal broadcasting had to quit. As, Gabriela Ramox recalls, these two have been valuable options for achieving community development; a way to foster internal communication and sense of belonging. (Ramox, 2007)

A final association, but not the only one remained in the long list of Atucucho's collective initiatives, is the *Banco Comunitario de Atucucho*. Standing with honor, it is a novelty for a neighborhood that didn't have any tradition on economy and production. (MDMQ, 2002) Conceived during the beginning of Atucucho's legalization process, was thought to give loans under favorable conditions to people that had to buy the land titles. (Hoey, 2014) At the beginning the founding members were 28 and their deposit was of 100 US\$ each. At the end of 2015 the members were 460 and the collected found corresponded to 200.000 US\$. (Tendorio, 2015) Neighbors can access to rapid credit up to 3.000 US\$ and in order to open a bank account it's only necessary to be Atucucho's neighbor. In the collective bank they produce their own currency¹², which has the value of 1 US\$ and it is used inside the neighborhood during specific events. During Christmas time, for example, the banknote is given to the children, which can chose their own present inside the market set up by their parents. The revenues obtained by the loans are indeed reinvested in programs for children and adolescents. Their dream would be to start working with the shops of Atucucho for making it a permanent currency. (ibid.)



¹²They are the only one in Quito who produces their own currency

Photo 11-12: Juan Tendorio and the head office of the *Banco Comunitario de Atucucho*, and the Atucucho’s banknote, august 2015 **Source:** by the author and Nikolas Anastasopoulos

3 INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ATUCUCHO AND INSTITUTIONS

3.1 Interrelations with external actors

Looking at the emerging role of Atucucho in relation to external actors, numberless have been the agreements and interactions established with foreign partners. UNICEF for example, supported financially kindergartens and organized essays and drawing competitions for children (MDMQ, 2002). On water issues furthermore it supported the *Junta de Aguas* and donated to the neighborhood water tanks. (Alvarado et al., 2011) HABITAT instead provided grants to construct or expand houses; offered trainings as the one previously described of the magazine and the radio and developed projects for woman’s emancipation. (Muñoz, 2015) Central has been as well the role of the Investigation Center CIUDAD, which drew up multiple projects. From the 90’s, as previously seen (footnote 11), they promoted the *Plan de Desarrollo Vecinal* and *Vida en las Laderas*, and more recently, between 2010 and 2011 inside the program “*Paso a Paso* for strategic alliances and a worthy house” they developed the project “...a mejorar” for the improvement of housing and common paces. Finally, always CIUDAD, but in this case together with the Metropolitan Municipality of Quito, worked with the community to develop a Comprehensive Improvement Plan (*Plan de Mejoramiento Integral del Barrio*) which detects problems and envisions feasible strategies for the neighborhood general improvement on citizen’s participation, communal self-management and health. (Unda, 1992; Alvarado, 2011, 2014) Recently also universities endeavor themselves to support the neighborhood development. Two cases are: a workshop organized with Architecture Sans Frontier in 2013 with the aim of envisioning a neighborhood of the *Buen Vivir* (Pirejecvec et al., 2013) and another is the proposal from Lejandro Minuchin, from the University of Manchester together with a local group of architects called *Al Borde*, for the construction of a cultural center named *Fabrica Cultural de Atucucho*, a place where to recover artistic, ancestral and constructive traditions of the *barrio*.

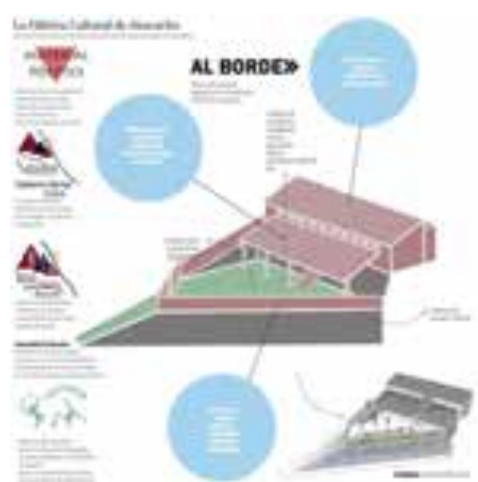


Photo 13: workshop organized by ASF, 2013 **Source:** <http://informal-quito.tumblr.com/> **Photo 14:** *Fabrica de Atucucho* project **Source:** <http://www.materialpolitics.com/>

Much fewer were instead the relations with governmental institutions. Before the legalization of Atucucho, state or municipal support was almost never arranged through a direct agreement with the *Comité Pro-mejoras*, but was always filtered by NGOs or international aid organizations. Like for example the involvement of the Ministry of Education for the Luis Borja school, the Health one for the medical center and Justice for what concerns the police department. (Alvarado et al., 2011) However more hidden agreements were taken with political parties or single politician in chance of political support; an example is the donation that a deputy made to Atucucho for the extension of the school's classrooms, from the 2 built by the inhabitants, to the 13 financed by the deputy. (Herrera, 2015) Singular was as well the project "50/50" implemented by Fernando Lara, administrator of the municipality of the *Zona Norte* of Quito, on the field of mobility. For the improvements of roads and their paving, municipality was financing 50% of the price of the materials and machinery needed for the work and the community, aside from paying the other 50%, commissioned itself in *mingas* for its physical realization. (Hernandez, 2010)

Atucucho is a neighborhood that has shown openness and adaptability to multiple external supports, demonstrating the ability of its leaders to interact with numerous actors and deal with multidisciplinary and mostly temporal conditions. But if from one side the different initiatives were bringing specific improvements, from the other, these many programs, overall during their first years of existence, according to the Instituto CIUDAD (1992), promoted a segmentation of the territorial management. Generally indeed, popular organizations of the northwest of Quito, like neighborhood committee, youth organizations, women groups, etc. claimed and/or implemented community development projects depending on their own capacity management, thanks to their organizational skills and ability to internally fundraising, but many other were implemented thanks to crony relations with state institutions, or finally based on the linkages and projects implemented with NGOs. (Carrion, 1992)

3.2 Relation with the State and the Municipality

3.2.1 the legalization process

Since the first invasions of the land owned by the Ministry of Health, many were the cases in which the police was commissioned to evict the newcomers with gases. In the publication *Quito Adentro* (2002), it is also related though, that evictions weren't always successful, as policeman were easily corruptible with the alcohol offered by the inhabitants. The first steps of Atucucho's legalization date July 1996, when the neighborhood was recognized urban instead then rural and denominated "possession without land title" instead of simply listed as illegal¹³. (MDMQ, 2002) In the same year the municipal cadastre office valued the land for 370 millions of sucres, and citizens started collecting a found to

¹³ This permitted indeed the collaborations above listed with NGOs and international aid associations.

buy it. With the dollarization in the year 2000 the amount collected reduced drastically its value and another evaluation had to be done. From this moment the internal collaborative cohesion started crashing and fights between neighbors boomed, while speculation and violence invaded the 6 sectors¹⁴. This history sees a turning point in 2010 when the mayor of Quito Augusto Barrera brought to the National Assembly a request for changing the law no90 of May 2003 in order to allow again the selling of the land without auction. Thanks to this the majority of the houses now have legal status. *Escrituras* (land titles) brought fresh air in the neighborhood, new leaders were elected, no more lynching had occurred and the lost collective spirit revived.



Photo 15-16: ex mayor Augusto Barrera and Atucucho’s neighbors in and outside the National Assembly **Source:** <http://www.noticiasquito.gob.ec/> 8 July 2010

3.2.2 *Atucucho’s Neighborhood Government*

In 2010 Atucucho declares itself *Gobierno Barrial*, a change in the neighborhood’s administration, which saw the incorporation of *Comité pro-mejoras* in a bigger structure that reminds the GAD *Gobiernos Autonomos Decentralizados*¹⁵. In this way what they envision is a major autonomy on decision-making from the municipality and the possibility of having their own executive, legislative and judiciary power. (Tendorio, 2015; Muñoz, 2015) It is still not clear which level they can reach, but for sure their project, as will be explained in the final chapter, can have high potentials vis à vis the innovative institutional setting introduced in Ecuador since 2008 with the *Buen Vivir* Constitution and National Plan.

3.2.3 *more recent Municipal and State projects*

After the legalization, small projects were implemented also by the municipality, like ‘*Yo, Mi Barrio, Mi Ciudad*’ (2015) to support the consolidation of houses in poorest conditions, but unluckily it was financed just for few months. Moreover few were the interactions

¹⁴ As Phelim Hoey recalls, these were 10 years in which in Atucucho the delinquency was extremely high and was the time in which thieves were burned, for this reason the sign in the neighborhood “*Barrio organizado. Ladrón cogido será quemado!*” (Organized neighborhood. Thief caught will be burned!). (Hoey, 2014)

¹⁵ In the Ecuadorian Constitution “decentralized autonomous governments encompass rural parish boards, municipal councils, metropolitan councils, provincial councils and regional councils” “GAD shall have political, administrative and financial autonomy and shall be governed by the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, inter-territorial equity, integration and public participation. Under no circumstances shall the exercise of autonomy allow for secession from the national territory” (art. 238)

between the state ‘Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control’ and Atucucho¹⁶, they actually led to some training on participation and not much than a joyful as fallacious HD video decanting the renewed interaction between government and the neighborhood¹⁷. This last, as explained by Juan Tendorio, was an attempt to introduce on top of the authentic already existing citizen’s organizational structure, the *Consejos Barriales*, a participation unit proposed by the government. This video was indeed probably an ‘illicit’ act of taking over by the state of an history of self-management and self-reliance in which governmental institutions didn’t really had much to do with. (Tendorio, 2015)



Photo 17: Alianza Pais (Ecuadorian president Correa’s party) meeting in Atucucho **Source:** <http://enlaceciudadano.gob.ec/> 31 August 2013 **Photo 18:** shot of the video **Source:** footnote 17

4 POTENTIAL OF THE CASE AS AN URBAN ALTERNATIVE

What has been traced up to now, is a clear example of what Plöger defines circles of “community mobilization to achieve common objectives of basic infrastructure and legal recognition”. (Plöger, 2012, 212) It is indeed a case where residents developed a range of approaches to cope with the inability of the state to adequately provide affordable housing and services. What is distinctive in Atucucho is that, differently from many other informal or post-informal settlements outcome of land occupation, its neighbors didn’t arrest their active cooperative involvement, even after strong internal disagreement, rise of insecurity or the obtainment of land titles. Depending on internal contingencies, as has been seen, different organizations sought the satisfaction of the neighbors, either autonomously or thanks to interactions with external initiatives and a sense of solidarity predominated on those who were sharing similar challenging conditions.

However not everything can be praised, must indeed be mentioned that, even if collectively, *mingas* produced an urban environment predominated by concrete and with heavy lacks of public spaces and green areas. This to say that, collective is not equivalent of high quality environments; same for autonomy and self-management are not the solution to all problems. For sure though, in cases in which institutions are absent or in contested commodified environments, a self-management like the one illustrated can be exemplary¹⁸. Atucucho in this sense, uniquely and maybe subconsciously, contrasts the urban socio-spatial relationships of inexistent solidarity so common to other ‘more-standard’ areas of the Ecuadorian capital. Thereby, it is here considered that its ability to draw up a latent proposition, which has grown over time, can be seen as a feasible alternative to the

¹⁶ A council introduced by the recent Ecuadorian Constitution to enhance participation and the citizens’ control on state institutions

¹⁷ Link to the video ‘Historia de participación: Atucucho’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMn0uPFWxRs>

¹⁸ *Mingas* now, that as Atucucho’s neighbors say “ya tenemos todo”, could be used not only for infrastructure and building works, but participating to it could be motivated for obtaining a better quality of life. (Alvarado et al., 2011, 27)

neoliberal urban regime. It is after all, as Logan would say, an urban example that has encouraged, with all the proper exceptions, collective, shared, use values and sentiments, against private, individual, and market based profit. (Logan, 1987; Harvey, 2012) Atucucho is seen therefore as a reference for more horizontal and alternative organization in contexts under strong capitalist pressure; an example of direct democracy and self-management that could inspire other contexts, like for example Quito's city centre, to contrast gentrification, oppressive private investments and a totalitarian control of the State.

Concluding it is thought that despite what Atucucho has been able to reach 'out of the system', governmental regulations on neighborhood management shouldn't be discarded, but rather considered, analyzed and interpreted. The Ecuadorian Constitution of the *Buen Vivir*, precisely with two of its many articles, the 31 and the 248, could be widely acknowledged as a renewed support for more inclusive and just urban environment. The 31 indeed, as Varela notes, is a direct outcome of half century of social movements claims, which finally recognizes the right to housing and the largely interpretable right to the city¹⁹. (Varela, 2013; Mayer, 2010) The 248 then regulates the possibility of some neighborhoods of been listed as 'basic units of participation'²⁰. COOTAD²¹ on these units, in the article 306, establishes their existence and gives the right to the neighborhood's council to be seen as community representation bodies mentioning that new neighborhood organizations should be promoted²².

Finally if laws are interpretable, this 'right to the city' of the article 31 could be interpreted to the extent that self-management and co-production of space are recognized as a right and hence supported as an alternative method of city making. Moreover the *gobierno barrial*, if seen maybe more than a GAD, but as a basic units of participation, could become the promoter of direct democracy and neighborhood empowerment, not just for Atucucho, but a potential expedient for the many social movements in Quito that deal with institutions in political transition.

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¹⁹ Art.31: "Persons have the right to fully enjoy the city and its public spaces, on the basis of principles of sustainability, social justice, respect for different urban cultures and a balance between the urban and rural sectors. Exercising the right to the city is based on the democratic management of the city, with respect to the social and environmental function of property and the city and with the full exercise of citizenship.

²⁰ Art.248: "Communities, communes, precincts, neighborhoods and urban parishes are recognized. The law shall regulate the existence thereof so that they may be considered basic units of participation in the decentralized autonomous governments and the national planning system." (Ecuadorian Constitution, 2008)

²¹ COOTAD = *Código Organico de Organización Territorial, Autonomías y Descentralización* = Organic Code of Territorial Organization, Autonomy and Decentralization

²² Which is the case, as aboved mentioned, in which the Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control tried to promote in Atucucho through the training courses and the video

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