

**Joaquín Alvaro Bañón (ed.)**

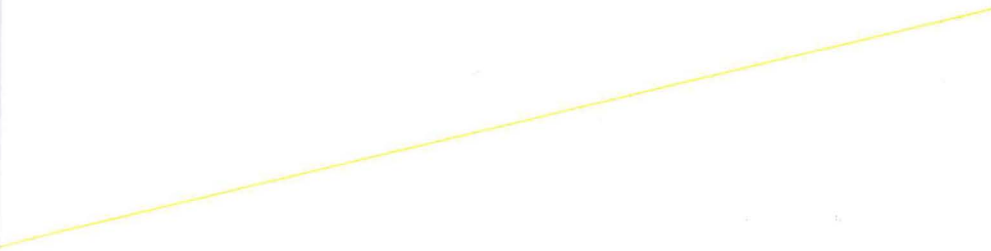
# **Dynamic Cities**

15th Venice Architecture Biennale

**University of Alicante**

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**University of Alicante**

Universidad de Alicante  
03690 San Vicente del Raspeig  
publicaciones@ua.es  
http://publicaciones.ua.es  
Teléfono: 965 903 480

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**Contact** joaquin.alvado4@gmail.com



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# Dynamic Lima: four levels, two views, one city... experienced and shared

María-Elia Gutiérrez-Mozo [eliagmozo@ua.es](mailto:eliagmozo@ua.es)

David Fontcuberta [davidfontcuberta@gmail.com](mailto:davidfontcuberta@gmail.com)

Paula Villar [paula\\_v\\_p@msn.com](mailto:paula_v_p@msn.com)

*We approach and portray Lima as a dynamic city by immersing ourselves on four different spatial levels: the city, the local neighbourhood, the street and the home, which all engender their own particular dynamics in their make-up, their use and what they mean to people, dynamic people intervene in all of these spaces bringing forth transformations on them with results which transcend both the sum of these interventions and the limits of the discipline of architecture itself.*



## 1. Introduction

The Spanish Royal Academy Dictionary of the Spanish language (Dle) defines “dynamic” in its first entry as an adjective for that which refers to force *related to the production of motion*. And, in its third entry, as related to people, it adds that “dynamic” people are *notable for their energy and activity*. In this text, we refer to a dynamic city, Lima, whose force provokes movement (attracting population), and to a group of dynamic people (the inhabitants of and those who contribute to its local neighbourhoods). They are, amongst others, and within the context of a University Cooperation Development Project funded by the University of Alicante in 2015, two Final Year Thesis Architecture students, a surveyor from the Technical Bureau and two teachers, a man and a woman (the Coordinator of the project), in the field of Architectural Composition Studies. They have all been part of, and experienced at first hand, the process of transformation of their urban environment, using the tools of their discipline: a process which, in fact, has given rise to the recognition and consequent change in definition from “squatter settlements” to “cultural neighbourhoods”.

In an attempt to explain these dynamics accurately and systematically (the Dle says when the word is used as a noun it refers to *systems of forces directed towards an outcome* and to the level of intensity of an activity), we will set out our discourse on four levels, which are now classic in their use, since the first challenges to functional urban planning made by the Modern Movement (TEAM X) brought their importance to light, with reference to their mutual relations, that is to say, taking their complexity into account, in order to understand and transform the city from the point of view of the life experience of the people who inhabit it. These spatial levels are: the city, the neighbourhood, the street and the home. What is more, in each of these, we combine two perspectives: the objective which we understand as that which is presented by the object of study itself, and the subjective, that is to say, that which is contributed by the subjects who act on and intervene in them. We are conscious of the fact that, by way of this series of successive approaches, we hit upon a reality which is complex, plural, fragmented and random, just like the city of Lima.

## 2. The city

Lima, the capital of Peru, is a city which, at present, is home to 31.6% of the country's population (30,814,175 inhabitants in 2014). 70% of its urban structure is informal and 60% of its dwellings are self-built, of which 20% are below housing quality levels established by the UN-HABITAT as substandard housing. And 28% of the population live below the poverty line. Its principal characteristics are a strongly centralised State and its organisation into 43 municipal districts, with some self-government, which impedes equality of opportunity amongst the citizens, with its consequent urban and social fragmentation; an appropriation of public space, without urban planning; and segregation between rich and poor, separated by the increasingly numerous "walls of shame". Lima is a city which is full of inequalities and contrasts, where diverse ways of life and occupations live together just metres apart from each other without any mutual relations. The informal urban structure of the city is due to enormous growth in the population which, in scarcely 40 years, went from 2 million inhabitants to today's 10 million (growth in 60 years has been 1100%). This invasion, obviously, overran urban planning. And it is precisely in one of these unplanned areas, so complex, but at the same time so interesting, where we are involved and where we develop our cooperation project.

Faced with the inevitable perplexity which this situation produces, we decided to make our approach from the standpoint of the city as a giant testing ground, a laboratory of experimentation where other people, mainly in the form of architecture collectives, were working towards the same objectives that inspired us and using methodologies which we wanted to learn about and put into practice. Under their guidance, then, we carried out several different projects in Lima which we will briefly describe below.

We met with eight multidisciplinary collectives that research and work in the areas of public space and construction, participation methodologies and the introduction of new tools of community design. These collectives develop internal processes which vary from confrontation and repudiation to the academic opportunity to research and get involved in the Peruvian architectural system. What they all have in common is a commitment to work in the peripheral areas of the city, those districts which have been



forgotten and neglected by both politicians and architects with an academic concept of the discipline. The urban problems of Lima are bereft of a development plan for the future, due to lack of action by managers of the public sector and to the power exercised by the Peruvian architectural *lobby*. Thus, the role of the previously described new architectural collectives is increasingly important.

We were introduced to the neighbourhood of La Balanza by *CITIO [Ciudad Transdisciplinary City]* who, along with *InFomal* and *Urko Itinerante*, work on the Integral Cultural Neighbourhoods Project. Manchay, in the district of Pachacamac, to the southwest of Lima, through *IntuyLab*, who were taking part as volunteers in the process of construction and implementation of pergolas to create shade around children's play areas, also collaborating here were members of *Pasaje140*. Through this experience we came into contact with *Mi Barrios Artes*, with whom we entered into the colonial era neighbourhoods of the Historical Centre of Lima, into the patios and passageways of areas which are in the present day "slum" neighbourhoods, attending art and architecture workshops. We gained access to the district of Villa El Salvador through *InFormal*, who collaborate in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan by way of participatory workshops, and in one of which, a children's workshop, we took part. At the University of Lima, we came into contact with the *Círculo de Estudios de Urbanismo* with whom we organised the City and Participation Forum, which served as a theoretical platform for projects, methodologies and management. The only collective which we came into direct contact with in the forum was *El Cartón*, a platform for consultancy and promotion of individual projects.

### **3. The neighbourhood**

La Balanza is an informal neighbourhood on the first stepped terrace of the Comas District, to the North of Lima, which is in the foothills of the Andes. It has around 52.000 inhabitants who come from different parts of the country (the mountains, the jungle, the coast) and who keep coming escaping from misery and violence. Since its creation in the 50s, poverty, delinquency and malnutrition, along with land trafficking, has hindered, and sometimes impeded, the development of the neighbourhood with

any sense of equality, creating a spatial fissure between the consolidated area and the top of the hill which leads to social tension.

However, this concentration of people with very diverse cultures, took the step in the 90s of forming an association of theatrical arts, *La Gran Marcha de los Muñecocones*, (the Great March of the Puppets) a company which later set up the *International Open Street Theatre Festival*, FITECA, in 2001 and which has transformed La Balanza into a paradigm of the Cultural Neighbourhood. Thus, the self-built housing and the absence of basic infrastructures is combined with the active cultural and urban potential of the people who live there. Collectives of different disciplines have approached the neighbourhood, answering the call of the Cerro del Elefante (Elephant Hill), and have set up a complete set of methodologies of collective works, led by the FITECA Community: a strategy to which more and more community and cultural agents sign up each year.

There are three projects in process in the neighbourhood. The first of these, works towards changing the denomination of Squatter Settlement, with its negative connotations, to the more suggestive and attractive name of Cultural Neighbourhood. The FITECA community puts into practice four different methods of action: transformative, led by architecture collectives; cultural, led by artists and mural painters; communication, led by audio-visual collectives and sociologists, monitors and local neighbours; and educational, which includes all the above as an interdisciplinary whole for the collective development of the neighbourhood. Their strategies involve: events, presentations and exhibitions; training programmes; public space and collective facilities projects; management and research on housing and citizen participation.

The second project, the Integral Plan, seeks to promote strategic locations in the neighbourhood as a lever for the general development of the whole neighbourhood. It is conceived on the basis of a circuit which passes through all the neighbourhoods of the higher part of the hill and is centred on the Tahuantinsuyo Park. It has been designed by all the agents implicated in the project by way of informal workshops, which are based on urban recognition and the creation of imaginative collectives, taking *situationist* urban proposals as an example.

In this regard, in October 2015, the CITIO collective's *Fitekantropus* project, was awarded the 2nd prize in the Latin American Development Bank Urban Development and Social Inclusion Awards together with collectives from the neighbourhood of La Balanza, for "effectivity in responding to an important present day problem, reducing conflict by way of activities which bring people together".

#### 4. The street

The Street is the home of culture: the public space for urban research and action, participation, appropriation, reuse, and cooperative intervention. It is the mission of the collectives through the acts of the neighbours to carry out the proposals that, together, they put forward, discuss and design. Methodologies which speak of outcomes, of the street as the stage for the manifestation of *homo ludens* and the deployment of energy and opportunities which give rise to the idea of well-being. The community establishes itself as the promoter of its own social and urban development, and the defender of the residents of the neighbourhood that, thanks to the FITECA Community, enjoy the delights of art and culture and participate in making the decisions which affect them.

The *International Open Street Theatre Festival* is held in the Tahuantinsuyo Park with no cost to the participants, in the interest of giving an incentive to universal access to art. The *Great March of the Puppets* association has their headquarters next to the park. At the same location is the San Martín del Once dining room, which is run by women in the neighbourhood and is where more than 180 people come every day to have lunch.

Between 2012 and 2014, CITIO, the Madrid Higher Technical School of Architecture Cooperation Group for the Development of Basic Living Conditions together with the local neighbourhood collectives carried out the reconstruction of this dining room. The ground floor of the building was built, increasing its useable space, which now houses a kitchen, dining room, store room, patio and sanitary services. This intervention meant a substantial improvement in the quality of the service, given that it went from having no space for storing food on the premises, to providing a

spacious meeting place for the community. As a result, the women who run the dining room have received recognition and support from different associations, who promote healthy menus, specific diets and a better knowledge of urban agriculture.

For 2016, we have set ourselves the objective, in the hope that the cooperation project and our presence in Lima continues, of the community construction of a second floor for the San Martín del Once dining room, as a strategic catalyst for development in the neighbourhood of Balanza, which will be a model of participation and intervention for its ongoing social and urban regeneration.

In order to do this, not only will the building be done in collaboration with the local residents but also the creation of the project itself, in the belief that, in these cases, the process is more important than the results. Consequently, we have carried out the following activities: the organisation of community assemblies (AC) to inform and discuss the initial ideas of the project; participative design workshops *Talleres de Diseño Participativo* (TDP) which seek to encourage the initiative of every resident; Community Sundays *Domingos comunitarios* (DC), in which the collective work capacity of the community is tested and awareness is raised of the appropriation of public space as a culmination of this event; meetings entitled Cultural Neighbourhoods *Barrios Culturales* (RBC), with the objective of reconsidering what has been done and look at what needs to be done; the meetings are characterised by a critical spirit and one of review of every type of commitment which has been made; and, finally, maintenance days, *Jornadas de Mantenimiento* (JM), in which work is done as a community on the value of looking after and repairing what we have, as a key concept of physical and social sustainability.

Methodologically speaking, it must also be taken into account that it is important to alternate the activities, in such a way that the plurality of their effects is what pushes the process of constructing the desired changes and that architecture and urban planning are not so much their objective as their pretext. Thus, the RBC are held every Thursday afternoon, as a permanent support group; The DC have been scheduled for the beginning, the middle and the end of the process; the AC have been placed

between them, as have the TDP; and the JM has been scheduled as the penultimate activity. Thus the chronological sequence is planned for one theoretical activity with debate and reflexion for every two practical activities: DC and TDP (action), 03/05 and 13/06; AC (reflexion), 20/06; DC and TDP (action), 28/06 and 20/08; AC (reflexion), 23/08; JM and DC (action), 05 and 26/09, 2015.

## 5. The home

Self-built housing is a socioeconomic phenomenon which reflects, at any given time, the situation of the families living in the said houses. In this informal urban fabric, the inhabitants build their dwellings with help from the community, without being able to count on , in the majority of cases, the minimum necessary technical knowledge for the correct carrying out of a building process on difficult ground. The homes, then, have been growing in stages, dependent on the family's purchasing power and the number of family members.

The first step consists of the construction of a single space divided by matting, over minimum foundations , in which the whole family live together. Later the covering of the dwelling is undertaken using prefabricated wooden boards; then the home is consolidated and divided into different living areas with bricks and reinforced concrete, which reflect the hopeful anticipation and desire for expansion in a near future and to consolidate the family, steel rods ready for the reinforced concrete stick out of the dwelling's coverings awaiting and invoking a better future.

In the same way, the dwelling, on occasion, becomes a place for production, where space is set aside, almost always as near as possible to the street, for a small shop or business which supplies the neighbourhood. The home expands and invades public space, with private appropriation of the available land in front of each dwelling, generating a heterogeneous design of lanes, flowerbeds and amphibious trees.

The proliferation of these private spaces depletes available space for public facilities, green spaces, and leisure spaces, making the streets the residual

spaces which must assume the leading role as far as common public space is concerned. They are usually places with which the collective memory identifies and which, despite its shrinking attraction, its primal nature is recognised, sustained by human relations and the dynamics of the daily life of its inhabitants. Such spaces, without any sense of urban order or harmony, on occasion function as the focus of urban infrastructure, from where people are supplied with drinking water and sanitation networks, and where businesses are set up, fostering interaction created by the very history of the place, from the lives and life experiences of each migrant, that one day decided to lead their lives in this place, feeding the collective memory and the identity of the neighbourhood.

We have sought to comprehend these processes from the point of view of the tool which characterises the knowledge of the architect: the drawing. For this reason we have drawn up plans of various different dwellings in the neighbourhood, such as the home of Señora María, laying down in drawings its different stages of construction which mirror point by point, the story of her life.

## **6. Lima experienced and shared**

All these experiences are just a few examples of our exposure to the enormous potential for work and research which every neighbourhood in Lima offers. Every neighbourhood, each with its own idiosyncrasies, encourages the impulse for creativity and survival which has propelled the history of the human being, who by nature is a social animal, to seek in the urban landscape a place to build a habitat for a better life.

These realities have little by little left their mark on us, stimulated by the network of spaces we have been involved with all around Lima and by the links we have forged with their inhabitants, in this city which now is part of us, and we are part of it.

Professor Laborda Yneva in issue 17 of the *Feminismo/s* magazine says: "Surely our best option is founded on sharing, sharing the city, sharing our lives and trying to make our surroundings an essential fundamental part

of cohabitation". And, in the same issue of the same magazine Professor Ruiz Sánchez "defends the complex city, in all its imperfection and dynamism, against any projection on urban land of an ideal project. The just egalitarian city will be complex or it will not be at all".

In conclusion we take the liberty of paraphrasing these two ideas: life is lived together with others, or it is not life. And this life takes place in the city: complex, imperfect and dynamic. This city, just and egalitarian, will be shared or will not be at all.

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Image 1 (Page 91): Neighbourhood La Balanza

Image 2 (Page 101): Workshop





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# Dynamic Cities

Joaquín Alvado

Alicante

Baku

Barcelona

Dubai

Düsseldorf

No Where Cities

Lima

Madrid

M'Hamid Oasis

Tokyo

What do we refer to when we talk about Architecture?

This is the question that our architectural research at the University of Alicante revolves around. We want to talk from scratch about innovation, social behaviour, nature, growth, time, change, sustainability, weather, citizenship, atmosphere, water, adaptability, welfare and environment.

Conforming to the aim of the title, the book features Dynamic Cities in a broad variety of practices. There are several approaches from very diverse cultures and different backgrounds. In the layout, it is represented cities all over the world. The approaches are highlighted from unusual and very personal points of view. In this edition, it is expressed the possibility of uniting the dynamic processes and the architecture in a single image.

What would had happened if we had thought the city as a dynamic structure, nor as static one?

We need to educate the next generations to stay true to the initial conditions and to project the cities as dynamic structures to reload the architectural discussion.

