

## **Spatial inequities and differentiated citizenship in the ‘urbanization of water’: Historical insights from the metropolitan region of La Paz, Bolivia**

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Cities around the Global South are struggling to establish equitable access to water services (UN-HABITAT, 2016). Scholars outline historical patterns of strategies to extend the provision of potable water that range from total privatization to centralized control as explanations for the persistence of water inequities (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Hassam, 2011; von Schnitzler, 2016). While emphasizing limited institutional mechanisms and political will, and exclusionary ideologies to explain this persistence, they pay less attention to the historical residues that established the knowledge foundations of the institutional infrastructure. It is from these historical residues that we can analyze the construction of “a brutal distinction between ‘citizens’ who could lay claim to potable water and the ‘subjects’ who were left to make do as best they could” (Gandy, 2004: 368). Thus, in order to better understand the obstacles that cities face, we need to have a better grasp of how the understandings that led to particular water service solutions in the past become the problems of the present.

Harvey (1997) presents us with a general framework to analyze and discuss how cities “are not simply constituted by but are also constitutive of [historical] social processes” (Harvey, 1997: 23). His framework aims to capture how historical forces in different historical moments have material implications not only in the structure and organization of the city, but also in the conformation of actors in the city. Moreover, actors within the institutional infrastructure respond to challenges based on their situated knowledge about what is the city for and for whom, who fits within the imaginary of a modern city (Haraway, 1988; McFarlane, 2011). For cities of the Global South, the dialectic relation between historical forces and material outcomes is reflected in the divided nature of cities and the unequal access to basic services. These inequities are manifested not only in the stark spatial differences, but also in the citizenship formations that establish differentiation and hierarchies within the urban landscape. From this theoretical perspective, cities of the Global South can be understood as the material expression of the ways in which historical weaving of capital, coloniality and modernity (Quijano, 2007).

In the context of the urbanization of water, the production of spatial inequities and forms of differentiated citizenship are crucial lenses through which we can better grasp the persistence of water inequities. The fact that water needs to circulate through the fabric of the city in order to reach users represents but one layer of analysis. Authors like Swyngedouw suggest that this is not simply a hydrological process, but that the circulation of water is immersed in deeply political processes that underlie power relations in the production of urban space: “water circulation is part and parcel of the political economy of power that gives structure and coherence to the urban fabric. [...] the circulation of water –as a physical and social process—brings to light wider political economic, social, and ecological processes” (Swyngedouw, 2004: 2). It is in this context of water circulation and power relations that the use of the concept of

spatial inequities and forms of differentiated citizenship could shed some light in how we think about the urbanization of water. Spatial inequities are not simply a way to state that there are certain areas of the city that disproportionately enjoy services and other do not, but instead to ask the question of why and how certain areas (and certain bodies) are able to enjoy certain benefits. Thus, the concept starts by identifying those spatial differences, but aims to unpack the forces that explain the reasons for that difference (Davis, 2014). Concomitantly, the concept of ‘differentiated citizenship’ points to the mechanisms that –in principle– aim to integrate a population into a political community, but ends up integrating in unequal ways (Holston, 2009; Oxhorn, 2001; Rivera, 1993). Thus, these two conceptual frameworks aim to provide a nuanced understanding at the (re)production of inequalities, yet under the veil of urban integration.

The metropolitan region of La Paz currently houses almost 2 million residents that in their social imaginary includes the cities of La Paz and El Alto. La Paz expresses the 1573 planning ordinances that dictated how Spanish settlement should be organized and the type of relation should be established with the native population (Crouch, Garr, y Mundigo 1982); whereas El Alto is a city built by migrants from rural areas and mining centers expresses the material implications of the neoliberal project (Arbona, 2011). During the first decades of the city of La Paz, the Spanish and indigenous population were divided by the Choqueyapu River (Barragan, 1990; Saignes, 1992). This spatial division not only informed the production of spatial inequities, but also how these inequities reflected differentiated rights and responsibilities. As the city grew and city elites sought to build a modern city in tune with their knowledge of European modernity (civilized population, promise of equality, etc.) the indigenous population did not fit this image, even though their labor was crucial in the actual building of the city. The result has been a divided city in which large segments of the population had precarious access to water until relatively recently (Arbona & Kohl, 2004). As it will be shown in this paper, this tense and contradictory relation between unequal space and differentiated citizenship will be illustrated through the urbanization of water in the metropolitan region of La Paz.

This paper focuses on the historical production of water inequities (i.e. the urbanization of water). It relies on archival research (starting in 1900, when La Paz becomes the seat of the executive and legislative branches of government) in order to illustrate how social inequities —expressed through differentiated citizenship and spatial inequalities— has informed the urbanization of water in La Paz. The main argument that will be put forth is that the urbanization of water in the metropolitan region of La Paz is deeply tied to the history of the production of unequal spaces and the formations of differentiated citizens. In other words, to discuss inequities of water we need to interrogate the interactions between different actors within the institutional infrastructure of the state, the notions of citizenship at a particular period (i.e. how capital, coloniality and modernity informed those positions) and how different moments (with particular historical forces at play) informed how different social groups had access to water services.

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