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Bridging the gap between Do-It-Yourself urban practices and urban systems

Insights from Bolivia and Lebanon

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Abstract. *In contemporary fragmented cities, DIY urbanism is seen as a way to insure inclusiveness and cohesion by mobilizing citizens and improving urban space. However, the capacity of DIY to go beyond local epiphenomena and contribute to a systemized way of city making is still an open question that is gaining increasing interest in literature and practice. In this article, we differ from answers provided in the literature to this question in that we are interested in the ways DIY practices could contribute to build from the bottom-up large-scale territories. We rely on Lévy-Strauss oppositions of the bricoleur vs. the engineer and the “savage” vs. the scientist to stress that DIY is instrumental and political. This leads us to consider DIY as a process of problem-solving and domos building where the operational and socio-spatial aspects of DIY are intrinsically linked and evolving together. It is by understanding both these aspects that we can understand the possibilities of, and limitations facing, the development of DIY on a larger territorial scale. We build on case studies in Cochabamba, Bolivia and Beirut, Lebanon. We argue that though it is possible to succeed to build on DIY to develop local territories and rely on these experiences to trace larger ones, the operational and political modes would invariably move towards more top-down comprehensive engineer-like approaches.*

Keywords. DIY urbanism; urban systems; governability; OTB; Hezbollah.

Introduction

Urban fragmentation is today an urban condition affecting the spatial, social, economic and political evolution of cities (Navez-Bouchanine, 2002; Marcuse and Van Kempen, 2000; Graham and Marvin, 2001; Bénit et al, 2007; Mangin, 2004; Burgess, 2005; Michelutti, 2010; Deffner and Hoerning, 2011). Rupture and closure are increasingly marking the spatiality of the city (Davis, 1990; Brand and Fregonese, 2013; Baillif and Derosière, 2009; Topalov, 2002; Boal, 2002; Dorier-Apprill et al, 2008). More importantly, socio-spatial entities are emerging and developing independently from their surroundings (Dear and Flusty, 1998; Sassen, 2002;

Charmes, 2009). Sometimes these entities might hold closer relations and interactions with other socio-spatial entities in other cities on the other side of the globe than with their neighbors. This has deep impacts on the historically dominant conception of the city as a holistic and integrated urban system.

On the political level, the emergence of the governance paradigm aimed at emphasizing the importance of opening up the decision-making process to other actors beyond government and build compromises in order to insure governability in a fragmented world. However, this governance approach to governability seems to face serious limitations. On one hand, urban fragmentation is leading to the continuous rise of new actors who based on strong local anchorage claim representativeness and challenge city governance stability. On the other, in the age of urban fragmentation, city government has seen its hold on one of the major instruments of urban integration and control, urban technical systems, heavily weakened. Privatization, competition and technical evolution encourage logics of bypass, the unbundling of urban technical systems and their fragmentation (Graham and Marvin, 2001). This situation is affecting all cities, North and South. However, the relative weakness of the State and its lacks in terms of human and financial resources render urban fragmentation more visible and more strongly felt, in terms of governability and services' provision, in developing countries.

The retreat of public administration – or its incapacity to act – has created a void that is filled on the local level by a large diversity of actors and through different mechanisms. Forms of “private government” to produce and manage urban services and spaces has known wide success in wealthy enclaves (gated communities, corporate citadels...) (Davis, 1990; McKinzie, 1994). This “government” by private companies or homeowners' associations builds on secession from the city, the creation of private services and a regulation based on legal covenants (AlSayad and Roy, 2006). It replicates the mechanisms of the public government in an exclusive sphere. This “privatization of the city” has been criticized as a major source of social polarization while increasing challenges to produce sustained governability.

In the last few years, we saw a new literature develop around what could be labelled as Do-It-Yourself (DIY) urbanism. It describes a multi-facet phenomenon where certain actors mobilize new modes of organization and action to provide services and produce spaces at the local level. Though, like the “private government”, it builds on direct intervention and a certain indifference to public authority, it does not choose secession. On the contrary, it is presented as a way to counter the marginalization of communities and spaces and to give the latter an open public dimension. DIY urbanism groups a diversity of practices that stem of movements that hold divergent political views. However, all defend more inclusiveness and cohesion.

In this article we are interested in this mode of city production and in particular its ability to exist beyond the local scale contributing to the constitution of large-scale urban systems. Despite its aspiration for inclusiveness, DIY urbanism experiences paradoxically cannot develop beyond the local scale but in closed political spaces and after losing many of its operational characteristics. What we call here closed political spaces are those either based on “sectarian” commons or controlled by a powerful actor. In fact, at the political level, the informality and instability that characterizes the political space of DIY distances it from the formalized understandings needed to secure large-scale governability. It is only by sharing a particular sectarian (religious, political, socioeconomic, gendered...) culture or through subjection to a leading powerful actor that this is possible. At the operational level, in attempts of local DIY urbanism experiences to develop on larger spatial scales, we see the mobilization of

some of the proven local modes of organization and action however deeply transformed through formalization, planning and hierarchic control.

The article is divided in three sections and a conclusion. In the first section we discuss the DIY notion and literature, its applications in urban studies and planning and the way we understand it in this article. The second section explains our methodological choices and presents two case studies, one focusing on Bolivian “basic territorial organizations” (OTB) and the other on a municipality in the suburbs of Beirut Lebanon. It also describes the systematization of DIY practices on large spatial scales in the two case studies and their consequences on the political, operational and learning levels. The conclusion will go back on the main findings of the article.

DIY literature

Though not necessarily addressing DIY as an object of study, urban sociology literature has always been interested in DIY-related phenomena. This is especially the case with the notion of Everyday Life and its interpretations in Lefebvre’s (1991/1947) “*Critique of Everyday Life*” and in De Certeau’s (1984/1980) “*Invention of Everyday Life*”. These authors describe, at this micro scale, particular practices of building culture and space that, far from being irrelevant and marginal, are seen as central for understanding alienation and resistance to it. While Lefebvre builds on the deconstruction of alienation in everyday life and the creation of systemic alternatives starting from the micro level to face it, De Certeau examines DIY, tactics and poaching practices “ordinary” people mobilize to adapt top-down culture to their own dispositions and needs.

Despite these authors’ influence in urban studies, allowing better understanding of politics of dominion, informality and social movements in urban space, it is only in the last few years that we see the emergence of a specific literature that revolves around DIY. In fact, the rise of certain practices of urban action is leading authors to consider them as a particular novelty that raises new questions to urban planning and urban design. These practices are not necessarily new but different and more present in the production of city space. They include practices of street art and graffiti, parklets and urban furniture creation, guerrilla and community gardening, squatting empty lots and building for events and social activities, housing and retail cooperatives, improvised makeshift infrastructure networks, facilities and urban services, hackathons... (Deslandes, 2013; Iveson, 2013; Douglas, 2013; Rosa et al, 2012; Lydon et al, 2012; Sijurjonsson, 2014; Kramer, 2013; Barber, 2013; Walter, 2013; Liu, 2013) They develop in different areas of the city: revamped, revived and gentrified urban areas (Deslandes, 2013; Iveson, 2013; Douglas, 2013), more popular neighbourhoods and informal settlements (Rosa et al, 2012) and even in middle class neighbourhoods (Lydon et al, 2012). They may be the result of individual initiative, of a number of individual strangers that come together for an activity, neighbours, NGOs, cooperatives and, more rarely, public actors.

They have been interpreted in the literature from different angles: the precarisation of cultural and immaterial labour and the reorganization and critique of “creative class” theories, urban regeneration, social and cultural capital, liveability and city branding (Deslandes, 2013). Most notably, in the line of Lefebvre’s analyses and his conceptions of “lived space”, “heterotopia” and of “right to the city”, DIY urbanism is seen as lever for contesting alienation, marginalization and bringing in spatial justice by improving the quality of certain urban areas (Douglas, 2013; Iveson, 2013; Deslandes, 2013; Sigurjonsson, 2014). Harvey (2012) building on the idea of

“irruption” in Lefebvre’s work and recent movements of “Occupy” goes as far as speaking of the revolutionary potential of this dynamic.

Our concern in this article is about the ways these experiences could systemize and become an organized mode of city production that goes beyond the micro and local scales. This has been dealt with in the literature in mainly three ways.

The first, in the line of Lefebvre and Harvey, sees the possibility of a systemic revolutionary change and a new urban order emerging from DIY irruptions in heterotopias. This however is contested by Deslandes (2013) for whom DIY cannot represent a levier for a viable systemic political project of spatial justice. In fact there is the risk that this spatial justice may only be “partial and piecemeal”, focused on hipster neighbourhoods and acting as a catalyser of gentrification.

The second would be in the line of Hamdi’s (2004) approach that sees the possibility of articulating DIY and strategic planning by bringing together the “elite of city authorities and the pluralism of grassroots”¹. This might take the form of participatory strategic planning including punctual localized grassroots’ initiatives². It might also take a more radical turn like in the case of the MVRDV’s project for Almere Oosterwold³. Here no masterplan exists, but rather a patchwork of individual or group initiatives developing next to each other and creating housing, urban agriculture, facilities, green spaces (Jansma et al, 2013). The role of the developer (Almere’s municipality) would be to set simple and flexible rules that would adapt to the needs of future inhabitants and users. Critiques to this approach are mainly its underestimation of the weight of dominant economic and political actors that frame the strategic aspect of the project rendering citizen’s contribution aesthetical or marginal⁴.

The third way would be in the line of what Farias and Binder (2009, 2011) and MacFarlane (2009) call urban assemblages. The authors identify situations (e.g. the development of a new musical scene in Santiago de Chile) where different kinds of actors, dispersed spaces and diverse objects – at the local, metropolitan, national and even international levels – come together in a network, an assemblage, around a way of being and doing. Here no new radical urban order emerges and no new consensus is built on the way to develop the city. It is only the enactment of certain dynamics that come to form a layer of socio-spatial urban organization, temporarily joining certain pieces of today’s fragmented cities.

The three approaches have their value for understanding different facets of the emergent DIY urbanism phenomenon. However, we believe that they do not necessarily help understanding other types of bottom-up DIY experiences that are territorially bounded. We are talking of situations where DIY becomes central for the development of territorial organization at one scale (say a neighbourhood or a particular municipality) and gets even to be mobilized for territorial organization at a larger scale (say a district or a whole suburb). Without being very common, this situation nevertheless is present in a lot of cities around the world. It has to it also a certain radical political tonality with important consequences on the question of emergent urban systems: these territorial constructions are usually set in competition if not in opposition to dominant metropolitan governance’s projects.

¹ As suggested by Sigurjonsson (2014) this echoes De Certeau’s distinction between the strategic and the tactical.

² This is the Case of the Groene Sporen green infrastructure project in the West Flanders region in Belgium

³ For a presentation of the project see <http://www.mrvd.nl/projects/oosterwold/#>

⁴ For a critique of the project see <http://www.shareable.net/blog/almere-oosterwold-a-vision-of-collaborative-diy-urban-design>

To analyse this form of DIY, we would like to go back on the central elements of this notion by referring to probably its first conceptualization: Claude Lévy-Strauss's (1962) opposition in "The Savage Mind" between the *bricoleur*'s and the engineer's ways of operating and of conceiving the world:

*"The 'bricoleur' is apt to perform a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with whatever is at hand, that is to say with a set of tools and material which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all occasions that have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the residues of anterior constructions and destructions"*⁵

In this perspective DIY is reactive, contingent and instrumental. The quote also suggests that DIY is fundamentally apolitical: in a situation of radical individuality, absence of defined projects and constant reactivity, DIY does not seem appropriate for the development of any consistent political space. In the line of De Certaeu's later interpretation of DIY, this quote leads to understanding it as tactics lacking any strategic dimension⁶.

However, building on the larger framework of Lévy-Strauss's book, we believe that this is somehow misleading. In fact, the book deals with the "savage" 's interpretation of the world as opposed to that of the modern scientist. The *bricoleur* vs. engineer opposition comes to stress the "savage" vs. scientist opposition on one particular level, that of their operational modes. In fact, the "savage"/*bricoleur* lives in a certain cosmos – a universe of representations – and a particular domos – his home and by extension his territory, including the spaces and resources he shares with his "people". The introduction of these cultural and territorial dimensions suggests that, though the *bricoleur* is pragmatic and instrumental in answering challenges, the resources he uses, the design he mobilize, the places where he intervenes are marked by his cosmos and domos. The instrumental and political universes of the *bricoleur* are one and the same. It would be a mistake to depart his tools from their socio-spatial setting. They evolve together.

Of course, contemporary "amateur city-makers" – as Deslandes (2013) calls them – have larger and more complex cosmoses and domoses than Lévy-Strauss's "savage". Nevertheless, in today's fragmented cultural and socio-spatial urban landscapes, these amateur city-makers look onto their "people" (community, political group, neighbours, hobby-mates...) and what they conceive as their domos (building, street, neighbourhood, meeting places...) to act. This is the case with hipsters in gentrifying neighbourhoods, of neighbours and NGOs in informal settlements, in popular neighbourhoods or in "retrofitting" suburbs. This is why the convergence of different scattered places and "people" in a bottom-up humanist spatial justice project, in the line of Lefebvre, is difficult to sustain. However, bringing together contiguous fragments to build a larger common domos and cosmos might be possible.

⁵ Based on Rowe and Koetter's (1978) translation from French.

⁶ This is also the interpretation made by the contributors of Odin & Thuderoy's book (2010) on "DIY worlds" who studied DIY practices in different fields of art and science (theatre, literature, scientific research...). The notion of a "DIY world" is used to analyse organization and action in unstable contexts of creativity and innovation. However, in these DIY worlds, organization remains contingent and fragile and actions based on individual initiatives lacking any form of militant organization.

Insights of Cochabamba and Beirut

In the following we will present two cases where DIY practices articulate with political settings to make emerge particular bounded territorialities, first at the local scale, and later on a larger one. We will identify at each level the instrumental and political aspects and their interplay in these territorial constructions through DIY. We will also stress the elements that allowed learning and translation from one level to the other, as well as the consequences in terms of DIY and politics.

Of course the, focus on two case studies does not allow a comprehensive understanding of such a complex phenomenon. However, despite their particularities, the two case studies address differently central elements defining DIY practices; this helps us develop a better understanding of these elements and the way they affect DIY.

The two cases are representative of situations where cities are facing severe governability issues. In Cochabamba (Bolivia) and Beirut (Lebanon), top-down metropolitan governance has shown its limits and has proven incapable of providing sustained governability. In both cases, local actors have an important role in providing urban services, producing urban space and animating community life. They do so through DIY-like tactics and interventions. In Cochabamba as in Beirut, we can see situation where actors capitalized on their DIY experience to develop larger territories. Nevertheless the two cases also have important differences. In Cochabamba, DIY actors are mainly neighbourhood associations that were recently recognized by a new legislation as having a form of representativeness that allows them to get subsidies for some of their actions. Their action is clearly strictly bottom-up. In Beirut, the landscape of territorially grounded DIY initiatives is more diverse. It includes inhabitants and merchants of informal settlements and refugee camps but also large political and communitarian actors like the Hezbollah party and, above all, certain municipalities who are trying to bring together the pieces of their fragmented territories. Hence, The place of public actors, that of illegality and the politics behind DIY are different between these two case studies.

Cochabamba

Between 1985 and 1994, Bolivia saw the most important processes of national internal migration and expansion of major cities. This is mainly due to the historical weakness of the different levels of government in Bolivia, but also to deep transformation in the country's economic structure due to privatization of services and of major state enterprises. The immediate effect of this urban sprawl was the consolidation of large urban informal settlements. These informal settlements lacked basic services, infrastructure and facilities. In this context, and to respond to basic pressing needs the newcomers relied on local knowledge and self-help to create and manage improvised services and infrastructure. This mode of production of urban space and services represents today the dominant situation in many Bolivian cities. For example, in the seven municipalities of the metropolitan urban area of Cochabamba, the public municipal water network is connected to only 30% of the city's households.

In 1994, a new legislation was voted to strengthen popular participation and administrative decentralization. It reorganized the administrative organization of the country. It also created new municipalities and gave them autonomy in urban planning and management, mainly through the transfer of new responsibilities and financial resources. The municipalities were divided into districts, Districts are medium size administrative jurisdictions which perimeter include a (large) number of neighborhoods. They are a form of deconcentration of the municipal administration.

The legislation also recognized “territorial basic organizations” (OTB). Contrariwise to districts, OTB are local self-management organizations at the neighborhood level that could now benefit from state recognition and subsidiarity for some of their operations. OTB are also recognized as a partners for municipalities in the development of their urban planning and management strategies.

In this context, the most important local organizations that went into OTB recognition processes were what are known in Bolivia as OLPE, neighborhood-level water supply organizations. OLPE have different forms of organization however they are community-based organizations that control, manage, organize and distribute water at the local level outside any State control. In the absence of public water networks, people get together at the neighborhood level to mutualize efforts (volunteering working hours, paying local tax, putting private resources at OLPE disposal) and raise sufficient money to drill water wells and install water canalizations and valves. In a way, this mode of network creation is also a mode of “neighborhood” creation. In fact, in these informal settlements that are fast emerging as a consequence of migration and sprawl, the social interactions in setting the OLPE are a levier for creating social cohesion. In the same way, the materiality of these local networks and the perimeter of the houses they reach define cognitively the boundaries of neighborhoods.

OTB-OLPE are usually democratic bodies, with commissions and leaders elected in general assemblies. Their activity is very diverse and tackles economic, infrastructure, social, health, education, transport, safety and political issues. The political and operational capacities of OTB-OLPE capacity and their initial development around the management and development of a specific resource, water, reminds us of what Ostrom (1990) calls “Commons”: self-organized, self-managed local autonomous political structures. OLPE-OTB are not only, in fact, de facto independent of any municipal government’s control, the political weakness of the latter and its incapacity to answer the population’s needs have given the local OTB-OLPE a large say in the definition of the municipal government’s own projects and activities.

The power of OTB-OLPE comes from their local legitimacy as (democratically-elected) representatives of the neighborhoods, and also – and mainly – from their capacity to efficiently answer the population’s needs. OTB-OLPE have managed to quickly provide a central resource for subsistence in the urban environment, efficiently to the door of neighborhood households. It can be claimed that, in OTB-OLPE supplied neighborhoods, water is of better quality and services’ conditions than in the areas covered by municipal networks. In addition to that, OTB-OLPE have proven to be excellent DIY leviers for self-financing and managing of neighborhood urban development. They have multiplied urban projects (opening and furnishing streets, creating small facilities and infrastructures, etc.) complementing, competing or supplementing municipal government projects. Some OTB-OLPE have even engaged in the development of transport services (shared vans and cars).

It is interesting to see that the success of this DIY operational and political mode of city production has led, in some cases, to attempts of applying it at larger spatial scales. One of these most interesting cases is District 5 in Quillacollo, the second largest municipality in Cochabamba metropolitan area.. This district’s perimeter includes 35 OTB-OLPE neighborhoods of different sizes. These came together and tried to develop at the district level projects that were of common interest for all these OTB. Hence, in parallel to the existing deconcentrated municipal body, the OTB created a district-wide organization, made of OTB representatives and different commissions addressing distinct issues. One of the central incentives is to be capable,

through mutualizing local OTB resources and capitalizing State subsidies to OTB, of extracting sufficient resources to engage common large projects. It is to be noted however that this District-level organization has a particular mode of decision-making: consensus between OTB representatives is necessary for any decision. We could cite here two marking examples of District 5 projects: the development of a self-created, self-managed sewage system at the district level and the creation of a shared transport system. The latter is based on the pooling of private cars, the setting of a fee system, planning routes and defining schedules.

It is unquestionable that the OLPE-OTB experience has been essential for the development of the district-level organization. It has allowed a social process of trust-building, of emergence of leaderships and modes of socio-political regulation. It has also allowed a collective learning on urban issues in their technical and practical aspects. Finally, it has allowed the rise of an entrepreneurial culture: seeking niches in the political and economic systems, fund raising and flexible responsive management. However, with this change of scale come various challenges, not the least coordination problems, the need for larger administrative bodies and the relative loss of control of the process by the local population at the neighborhoods level. In fact, this change of scale implies deep transformation of the modes operation and political structures. While OTB are bricoleurs building on their local knowledge, resources, direct implication and social capital, the district level is clearly getting into a more engineer-like approach. The district-level organization is working as a conventional municipal administration would do: preparing projects, calling on consultants for design and on entrepreneurs for implementation. Though it could be said that a new Commons is emerging at this level, politics seem to move away from the direct democracy of the OTB into some kind of governance based on a consensual (however fragile) common vision of the district by OTB representatives. It is noteworthy to stress that the fact that District 5 is principally constituted of a population of ex-miners, who share a common history and syndical organization⁷, has an important role in allowing the development of the district-scale process.

Beirut

In recent years, we see in Beirut a rise of certain DIY activities related to artisanal – sometimes subversive – interventions on public space. However, this remains a marginal situation affecting one or two hipster neighbourhoods that have a strong anchorage of civic-minded NGOs and of alternative culture. What interests us in this article is another type of DIY city making that develops in areas in the suburbs of the city and aiming to the creation of territory out of a diversity of socio-spatial fragments.

Beirut is today a heavy fragmented city. Long years of civil war⁸, communitarian and socioeconomic polarisation and conquering neoliberal globalization have led to the rise of a wide diversity of areas developing independently of each other. In the after-war period, a new central government has launched a large reconstruction project aiming, on one hand, to break the communitarian enclaves and reconnect the city, on the other, to set Beirut as a regional economic hub for finance and business. This meant important investment in infrastructure and facilities and large urban project developments. Multi-facet oppositions to this neoliberal urban strategy and internal and regional political instability have led to its gradual dislocation. From all the expected large urban projects, only the one focusing on the city center, devolved

⁷ In State Bolivian mines before they had to migrate to the Cochabamba area after the privatization of the mines.

⁸ Lebanon has known a devastating civil war from 1975 till 1990.

to a private company, became a reality. With the crisis of the reconstruction project, the heavy fragmentation of the territorial administration of Beirut agglomeration⁹ and the absence of any form of metropolitan governance, the city is facing severe governability issues.

This is most felt in the close southern suburbs of Beirut where informal settlements, refugee camps, large facilities (an airport, a stadium, a university campus and a number of schools, hospitals and administrative buildings), malls and commercial centers, hotels, large leisure and sports centers, high-end developments, commercial strips, offices districts and popular neighborhoods stand side by side. In the civil war, this area became a stronghold of two Shiite communitarian parties, Amal and Hezbollah. With the retreat of the central State during the war and the important influx of displaced populations from South Lebanon fleeing the Israeli occupation, these parties and other communitarian actors (mainly religious and charity organizations) became to develop services in these areas. Hezbollah has shown to be the most influential and creative of these actors. The party's nebula of organizations provides today services in health, social assistance, education, housing, micro-credit, water supply, public works and even environment and planning. Hence, the party provides in these suburbs a particular form of governability similar to that characterized by AlSayyad and Roy (2006) for the "unregulated squatter settlement".

The absence of public governance does not mean necessarily the absence of governability. But it is a form of governability that, contrariwise to public governance, has to build its sovereignty from the bottom-up through the assemblage of multiple localized arrangements. This process involves perseverance, important resources but also tactics and learning. In the case of Hezbollah this has meant a long process spanning for nearly three decades now. Indeed, the party has made a long way from his first spatial public works and services interventions in the mid-eighties (opening makeshift roads in informal settlements and bringing water) to planning and organizing the post-2006 war reconstruction project¹⁰. The aura of resistance to Israel and the large amount of services the party has been capable of providing in those areas are surely behind the success of Hezbollah's endeavor in the southern suburbs. However, three other elements have been crucial in this regard: efficient DIY tactics, the performance of the municipalities he came to control in this area as of 1998 and the creation of the Union of Municipalities of the Southern Suburb (UMSS).

We present here the case of the municipality of Ghobeiri that expresses well the way these three elements have contributed to Hezbollah's territorialization in Beirut southern suburbs.

In 1998, were held the first municipal elections in Lebanon after more than thirty years of break. In these thirty years, the suburbs of Beirut have moved from being large villages to highly dense urban areas. The landscape has also entirely changed with the development of a large number of new neighborhoods and facilities. The actors' spectrum includes Hezbollah and Amal parties as predominant actors, but also diverse other actors including, religious and economic actors, minor parties, large family clans and old notabilities. The majority of these other actors are entrenched in particular areas and neighborhoods in the suburbs. Hence, when Hezbollah's municipal list won a sweeping election in the face of an Amal-backed list in Ghobeiri it had to deal with a heavily fragmented municipal territory.

⁹ With more than a hundred municipalities, seven departments and two regions concerned

¹⁰ After the 2006 war that opposed Hezbollah to the Israeli army and the immense damage the Israeli bombing has caused to different neighborhoods in the southern suburbs, the party – in opposition to the central government – has developed his own reconstruction project "Waed" (finished in 2012).

Though the municipality could count on important tax revenues from hotel, leisure and commercial centers, it had to face severe challenges regarding services and infrastructure, mainly in the area's numerous informal settlements. Contrariwise to other municipalities that sought problems' resolution through planned interventions and policies, this municipality's approach is close to DIY tactics. Hence, its interventions were mainly reactive, situated and sometimes illegal. In these precarious settlements, it answered threats, challenges and opportunities that came with (unexpected) events: the destruction by high waves of housings in a seaside settlement, severe drought in another one, the death of a kid in a large running water pound near a third settlement, problems of traffic in an informal market, the decoration of streets for a religious event in a refugee camps, a proposition of UNDP to test a waste sorting pilot project in a popular neighborhoods... It responded to these events by implementing artisanal infrastructure and services and organizing space: building a sandbags breakwater, drilling a well and setting a local water network, building running water canalizations to divert water it and connect it to sewages, organizing space use in the informal market through light design, setting public lighting... Each action was the occasion of negotiations, arrangements and partnerships that allowed the development of strong ties between the municipality and local actors. In this way the municipality succeeded to build trust and develop a particular form of governability based on informal regulation. They allowed the development of a common domos.

Though these actions may resemble informal neighborhoods' upgrading policies, they are largely different. Upgrading policies are top-down policies, set to legalize a certain informal situation, they are incorporated in a precise strategy and developing like a project in a precise timeframe. This is not the case of Ghobeiri municipality's actions. Its interventions in these areas are at the limits of legality, are not orchestrated in a general strategy and are mainly reactive.

However, different elements allowed the municipality and Hezbollah to move gradually to a more systemic process of space management and production. The most important element is the involvement of Hezbollah's public works and architectural and engineering organisms in these actions. They assisted the municipality's administration in preparing some of the technical studies and sometimes in supervising and organizing the operations. These organisms have a long experience going back to the civil war period and are used to intervene on small localized projects involving close interactions with local actors. Hence, a collective learning process developed in the municipality's administration regarding this type of interventions, its technical, social and procedural aspects. Though the actions remained mostly reactive, we can see the progressive development of an astute systematization. This includes the building of large databases on the population and its needs, the creation of stocks (including lands) and the development of relations with funding agencies that could contribute to the financing of projects. The municipal officials always maintain that the municipality has no clear strategy of territorial development, that they are overtaken by the weight of daily problem-solving. However, if no substantial strategic plan is announced, this mode of operation allows a systemization of interventions and an oversight of their implications on the larger territory.

In 2007, Hezbollah favored the creation of the Union of Municipalities of the Southern Suburb, grouping three municipalities he controls in the area. The experience of Ghobeiri has partly influenced the way this UMSS operates. However, the party is moving gradually to a more clearly top-down political and operational way of city production.

Since 1998, many factors have led to his today hegemonic position in these suburbs, not the least the political – and security – situation after 2005¹¹. In these times of polarization and troubles, the party is largely seen in his community as a defender and a leader, especially in the southern suburbs. Local arrangements, if still important, are no more essential for the incorporation of the community and its areas in the party's political dynamic. The southern suburbs are now more than anytime a consolidated stronghold for the party that looks at him for security and development.

On the operational level, the general practice of the party's nebula in matters of urban development, in these suburbs, is still dominated by incremental and mid-scale situated interventions, eluding strategic planning and large urban projects. But at the same time, these interventions are articulated to respond to the needs of large populations, at the level of the whole southern suburbs, as in the case of the large-scale facilities developed by the UMSS. The post-2006 war reconstruction project was also an occasion to develop this particular operational mode of planning: holding minimal strategic lines, focusing on improving the existing situation without resorting to grand urban planning gesture, efficiency, rapidity and limited participation.

Clearly we are far from the first DIY tactics of Ghobeiri municipality and its ambition to transcend fragmentation and restore a local cohesive territory.

Conclusions

In contemporary fragmented cities, DIY urbanism is seen as a way to insure inclusiveness and cohesion by mobilizing citizens and improving urban space. However, the capacity of DIY to go beyond local epiphenomena and contribute to a systemized way of city making is still an open question that is gaining increasing interest in literature and practice.

In this article, we differ from the three dominant answers provided in literature to this question in that we are interested in the ways DIY practices could contribute to build from the bottom-up large-scale territories. We rely on Lévy-Strauss oppositions of the bricoleur vs. the engineer and the "savage" vs. the scientist to stress that DIY is instrumental and political. This leads us to consider DIY as a process of problem-solving and domos building where the operational and socio-spatial aspects of DIY are intrinsically linked and evolving together. It is by understanding both these aspects that we can understand the possibilities of, and limitations facing, the development of DIY on a larger territorial scale.

The cases of Cochabamba and Beirut have shown that regarding DIY scale is important. The OTB of District 5 in Quillacollo in Cochabamba area and the Hezbollah nebula in the southern suburbs of Beirut have succeeded in mobilizing DIY in answering local problems and building local territorialities. In Cochabamba, this was done in the context of securing and managing a crucial common resource, water. It is the formation of this Commons that dictated the evolution of the political and instrumental aspects of local DIY tactics and consolidated these local territories. In Beirut, Hezbollah-controlled Ghobeiri municipality resorted to the creation and regulation of local arrangements, around technical infrastructure and services challenges to build trust and reconnect, technically and socially, its municipal territory.

In a trial and error learning process, they have both capitalized the necessary social and technical resources needed to engage in larger territorial constructions: District 5

¹¹ The assassination of former prime minister Rafic Hariri in 2005 has ushered a very tense political period in Lebanon, dividing the country, weakening the state and leading to important security instability, including the Israeli war of 2006, the armed confrontation between different Lebanese groups in 2008 and the consequences of the Syrian war – especially kamikaze bombings in the southern suburbs.

in Quillacollo and the whole southern suburbs in Beirut. They have succeeded in making emerge large consolidated territories. This has however meant important transformation of the political and operational modes of these actors. Increasingly they are embracing a top-down engineer mode of city production. They resort to expertise and planned organization of action. On the political level, these “alternative” modes of urban governability are surely evolving but it is too soon to say how will they stabilize. In Cochabamba, we see the formation of a larger Commons that is enlarged to include a large diversity of resources and issues in District 5. But at the same time, the complexification of the decision-making process is dispossessing the larger population and setting an “elite” political arena of OTB representatives. In Beirut, Hezbollah’s nebula is increasingly playing a central role in the government of the southern suburbs. But, with the increasing new issues that they will have to face at this territorial scale, especially territorial economic development issues, would not these actors in both cases have to open their decision making process in a form of urban governance to include economic actors in their territories and beyond?

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