Of dreams and deeds: the role of local initiatives for community based environmental management in Lima, Peru

Hordijk, M.A.

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It was during one of our numerous trips in a cab, driving back home from ‘the field’ in Pampas de San Juan. We were chatting with the driver. He told us about his wonderful city of origin, the precious historical city of Cajamarca, in the Northern Andes. The nature impressive, the air unpolluted, life more quiet and peaceful. His father still owned fields there, which yielded good harvests. Oh yes, it was possible to make a living there. The more he spoke, the more he was moved. ‘So why are you here, in this monster of 7 million people in a desert Metropolis, in this daily struggle of survival?’ He fell silent for a while. And then, carefully searching for words, he told us, ‘Yes, you know, that is something I often ask myself as well. I really don’t know. It is, you know, as if I have to be here. As if it will happen here’.

This book would never have become this book if Warmolt Lameris had not shared this and so many other experiences with me. During every fieldwork period he came over and we worked together. We shared innumerable workshops in Pampas de San Juan, and we shared thorough conversations and carefully made discoveries together. We shared the same fascination, the same questions about the real impulses, ideals and struggles of the people that ‘spontaneously’ built the city.

In 1998 Veronica Rondon Rodriguez joined the team we had formed. Veronica, thanks for your friendship and companionship. And thanks especially for your courage to continue working in Pampas de San Juan, when I had to go back to Holland ‘to write the book’. Fortunately you were not alone. You could count on the continuous support of Roberto Durand. Roberto started as my field assistant. He gave me advice, helped me to understand the stories people were telling me, and took his responsibility for my safety as seriously as if I was his second daughter. He gradually developed into an invaluable co-worker in our work in Pampas de San Juan. We sealed our special relationship by becoming compadres.

Both Veronica and I can always count on the support and care of Genoveva. Geno, thanks for all the love and care for me, for Vero and for ‘our house’. It is good to have a ‘mother’ in Lima as well. You have no idea how much I miss you when I am in Holland.

I had a group of four supervisors to guide this thesis. Isa Baud, Ad de Bruijne, David Edelman and Annelies Zoomers. Isa, thanks for your dedication to this project. I do not know of other PhD students handing in chapters on Friday at five o’clock, and then receiving a phone call on Saturday morning with detailed comments. I have always felt that you deployed your capabilities to help me realise what I wanted to achieve with this project, bringing in your own knowledge and ideas to strengthen my objectives. That is a special virtue for a supervisor. I have greatly enjoyed working together and hope to be able to continue to do so.
Ad, although we did not speak often about it, I have always highly appreciated that I had a supervisor with whom I could speak about the questions behind my PhD. To have a supervisor that could understand my interest in the city and in the social processes taking shape there, not only from a scientific perspective, but also from the perspective of the image of the New Jerusalem. I furthermore want to thank you for your warm care, and for the few but crucial moments you convinced me to stay when I was considering giving up.

David, I would like to thank you for your confidence in me, and the way you guided me in my first somewhat unsure steps as young professional. From you I learned what ‘being a boss’ is all about. Giving trust and space that allows someone to develop, but being there when backstopping is needed.

Annelies, thanks for all your serious comments and criticisms. We both know that in the end the book has improved thanks to your way of looking at it.

And although he was not one of the official ‘supervisors’, Sjoerd de Vos looked as seriously at my statistical struggles as if he was. Thanks Sjoerd, for all the extra hours, and your patience in explaining to me over and over again - without losing your good humour - all those details that I should have known and understood a long time ago.

I express my gratitude to the four institutions that enabled this research: Amsterdam Research Institute for Global Issues and Development Studies (AGIDS) of the University of Amsterdam, the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) in Rotterdam, and the Centre for Latin American Studies and Documentation (CEDLA) in Amsterdam. Additional funding has been awarded by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO).

I received very useful comments on earlier drafts from Harry Mengers (IHS) and Johan Post (AGIDS). The editors Anne Hodgkinson and Miriam Ros-Tonen contributed considerably to making this a more readable book. José Barredas did not only make the maps, but also trained me in the basic skills for Mapinfo and Corel Draw.

I would not have been able to accomplish this work without the help and support of my friends. Jelle van der Meulen, you know what your friendship means to me, I don’t have to express that here. Your challenging questions in our e-mail discussions on what I was actually experiencing in Lima brought new insights. It was a great joy to have you in Peru last year, and to be able to share the experience of working with the youth group in Pampas de San Juan together.

Paul Mackay, thanks for being there, and for your continuous interest in how the work was developing. You were the spiritual yardstick whenever I needed one. And in a miraculous way your small faxes always arrived just when they were most needed. You enabled me to place this journey of discovery within the Social Section of the School of Spiritual Science of the Anthroposophical Society. This initiated the involvement of Marien Faasse, Warmolt Lameris and Hans Peter van Manen in this project. I am happy that there are now possibilities arising for me to make my work fruitful in this circle as well.
And Hans Peter van Manen, thanks for the evenings we could talk about the deeper questions behind this book, and for the wonderful exile you and Friederike offered me in Greece. Sonja Copijn, it was a gift that you came to Peru and fell in love with the country as much as I did. You were literally there to share joy and difficulties. Thanks to 'the Limagruppe' from Adventura, that was started by Jelle van der Meulen: Marien Faasse, Heinrich Speckenwirth, Sophie Pannitschka, Babs Kruisdijk and Heike Paesler. You helped me to endure the split between my life in Holland and Peru, and your support for the work in Pampas is decisive.

David Satterthwaite, you know that a lot of the original inspiration for this book came from the work you have been doing with Jorge Hardoy and many others. I highly enjoyed my visits to the International Institute for Environment and Development in London, and to be able to skim your rich library. You drew my attention to many inspiring publications, and enlightened me on all the pitfalls in the concept of urban sustainable development. Thanks for your sharing, encouragement and friendship. I am honoured that you accepted the invitation to be part of the review committee.

Over the years nine Master’s students came to Lima. Some investigated themes directly related to my study. I happily made use of the valuable materials of Eva Baron and Danielle Castricum, Ilona Walraven, Marian van der Zee and Christa de Bruin.

I want to dedicate this book to three special women. First of all to my grandmother, who has been an important mental and spiritual guide to me throughout my life. She considered it a good choice to undertake this PhD; it would do me good to work my way through science, she thought.

Secondly my mother, who enabled my life physically, emotionally and mentally, not only bringing me up despite difficult circumstances, but doing so with an everlasting support, regardless of what strange route I was taking. You were always there when I got stuck or lost.

And to Ana Sophia Micaela, my precious godchild, who is growing up in one of the most contaminated cities of Peru. Your joy and trust in life, and the joy of my other godchildren, always remind me of the future. That’s why I want to dedicate this book to you, and to all the children in Pampas de San Juan.

It is impossible to name all the Peruvians that contributed to this book. Of the wonderful circle of friends in Lima I would like to mention Liliana Miranda Sara. Working together on the Cities for Life Forum is a great joy and endeavour. It gave me a direct ingress to many other Peruvian cities and their actors, and to come to know the environmental problems as well as the innovative forms of urban environmental management developed to tackle them. It has been a privilege to be able to work so closely with so many interesting cases and people. But much of my understanding of it I owe to you. And I couldn’t have done it without you as a friend. One of the inspirers and guides of the Forum, Julio Diaz Palacios, I consider as one of my most important teachers in conceptualising urban environmental management. Thanks Julio, for everything I could learn from you.
Thanks to you, Gustavo Riofrío. I once described you as ‘the urban sociologist that knows the history of every cornerstone in Lima’. This might be somewhat exaggerated, but you never got tired of sharing all you know about the city and the literature. Your influence can be found in many more pages in this book than the references suggest. I am honoured that you could come to be one of the opponents in the public defence. Thanks Andrés Alencastre, for all our wonderful discussions and fights. Thanks to all the people at the NGO Ecociudad for enabling me to become a member and to know the NGO-life from the inside. Thanks Martha Barreto and Gina Gaete for being such wonderful (secretarial) support. And thanks Lucho Cortez. First of all for finding me Roberto Durand as a field assistant, and for introducing me to the people of Pampas. But also for all you taught us at the beginning of the workshops, and your involvement in the project now.

For most of the people in Pampas: I would like to express my thanks to you by continuing to work with you. Yet I want to direct a special word of thanks to Luz and Alfredo, who offered my colleagues and me whatever we needed. When we needed a place to sleep, you offered it. When we needed a quiet corner to rest, it was there. When we needed some emotional comfort, you gave it. And an equal word of thanks to Nora Jesusí and her family in 20 de Mayo, who always received us with a similar hospitality. I have learned a lot from you about neighbourhood dynamics.

For all the other people in Pampas: there are many questions this book still leaves unsolved. We are in search of a dream. This enchanting, rebellious dream that, as Silvio Rodríguez sings, ‘kills and that cures’. How can we manage to close the gap between ‘dreams’ and ‘deeds’?

The PhD project is over now, but there is still plenty to be done and to be discovered in your neighbourhoods.

*Michaela Hordijk, October 2000*