

Pathways of Co-Production: Negotiations and contextual insights into Quito's peripheral urbanisation

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a detailed examination of urban habitat co-production in a semi-peripheral community of Quito, Ecuador, spotlighting a dynamic interplay of dialogue and negotiation between the Municipality and local communities. The stakeholders endeavour to preserve and evolve their ancestral territories in the absence of state support and amidst the challenges of formal urban development. Our research uncovers a rich tapestry of community collaboration, territorial disputes with the Municipality, and strategic partnerships with unconventional actors. Within this framework, our analysis seeks to provide nuanced, empirical, and theoretical insight into the mechanisms and impacts of co-producing urban habitat, against the backdrop of formal urban governance and community self-management practices. A comprehensive combination of desk research and field studies in a representative sector of Quito has delineated four distinct scenarios of urban habitat creation. This characterisation illustrates co-production's pivotal role in the nuanced processes of peripheral urbanisation, re-evaluating the virtues and constraints of participatory urban management and development policies. While aiming to foster state-community collaboration, these policies often lead to disjointed pathways, underscoring a multifaceted pattern of cooperative and contentious interactions that shape the evolution of peripheral urban landscapes.

1. Introduction

The prominence of urban habitat co-production is intensifying (Bevir et al., 2019; Durose et al., 2018; Ngo et al., 2019), particularly in the Global South (Castán Broto et al., 2022; Goodwin, 2019; Rosaldo, 2022), marked by a shift from static institutional norms to dynamic governance models and collaborative spatial transformations within local communities in Latin America. This shift, aiming at boosting urban equity (Desmaison et al., 2023) and reducing vulnerability (Aguilar-Barajas et al., 2019), underscores a significant departure from traditional urban planning approaches. Initiatives thriving in peripheral areas (Testori, 2020) are driven by infrastructural shortfalls and the absence of state intervention (Ogas-Mendez & Isoda, 2022), catalysing the *autoconstruction* of informal habitats (Zapata Campos et al., 2022) and fostering enhanced collaborations between state and citizens (Salcedo, 2010). These negotiation and cooperation form the cornerstone of 'peripheral urbanisation' (Caldeira, 2017), where territories in Latin America, frequently disfigured by gentrification, displacement, and dispossession (Janoschka, 2016), witness community-led initiatives that embrace both

collaboration and contention in reaction to the pressures of formal urban development (Horn et al., 2021). The complex interplay of governance, state absence, and co-production highlights the crucial role of common spaces. This intersection of common property rights (Hammond, 2014) and community formation (Micciarelli, 2021, p. 54) illuminates nuanced terrains of state-community negotiation. Each component contributes to a detailed mosaic, shaping the landscape of urban development amidst challenges and opportunities, depicting a vivid tableau of societal and spatial transformations within urban peripheries.

This research explores the dynamics of co-production within the contested spaces of formal urban governance and community self-management, using Quito as a prime example. The city presents a complex blend of formal urban development and community governance (Testori & d'Auria, 2018), deeply rooted in ancestral and pre-capitalist traditions (Rayner & Mérida Conde, 2019). These enduring traditions fuel community collaboration and territorial contestation, fostering partnerships with unconventional actors to co-produce urban spaces. The enquiry concentrates on unpacking the operational dynamics of co-production within these contrasting

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paradigms, aiming to characterise four scenarios of urban habitat production. The insights provide a critical lens for evaluating participatory policies that both empower and fragment state-community collaborations, thereby sparking a deeper examination of the normative imprints of co-production in the multifaceted landscape of urban transformation (Mitlin, 2018).

The case study of Quito is set to significantly contribute to the current discourse. Over the past century, the city's liberal and neoliberal trajectory (Salazar et al., 2021) has been marked by ongoing negotiations over the governance of 'comunas' – ancestral territories integral to the Andean region and Latin America (Rayner & Mérida Conde, 2019). Since 1911, the *Comuna of Santa Clara de San Millán*, henceforth Santa Clara, has embraced a self-management ethos, fostering habitats that mirror its communal property principles. This process, grounded in the mutualism and solidarity typical of indigenous cultures (Nahoum, 2015), such as Brazil's 'mutirão' and the Andean 'minga' (Testori & d'Auria, 2018), is characterised by unique spatial management practices (Zibechi, 2011). However, neoliberal urban expansion has pushed Santa Clara into marginalised and vulnerable territorial situations (Rayner & Mérida Conde, 2019). The municipality's unilateral construction of an urban ring road, without consulting residents, led to displacement and solidified a symbolic divide between 'Comuna baja' and 'Comuna alta', the latter now carrying negative connotations (Hopfgartner, 2016). These developments have sown discord, leading to complications with the public-private property paradigm and causing jurisdictional uncertainties with the Municipality. In this environment, community governance oscillates between supporting self-built communal spaces and seeking municipal assistance for infrastructure and services. A detailed analysis of Santa Clara unveils four paradigmatic scenarios of peripheral habitat production, each demonstrating the complex interactions at the intersection of formal and informal, communal and municipal urban development (see Fig. 1). This case highlights critical vulnerabilities faced by many urban communities in Quito. The insights from this study can enhance sustainable urban development strategies and significantly strengthen the resilience of the involved communities.

Our argument progresses through five distinct stages. Initially, we elaborate on the methodological approach, followed by a review of co-production in the context of peripheral urbanisation in Latin America. Subsequently, a desktop analysis examines the governance in Quito's self-managed areas. The focus then shifts to an in-depth analysis of co-

production practices in Santa Clara, employing qualitative analysis, ethnographic observations, and interviews with local stakeholders. Insights gained from these stages culminate in a comprehensive discussion on the implications of co-production for urban restructuring in the Global South.

2. Materials and methods

This article aims at providing detailed insights into the co-production of common spaces in Santa Clara, focusing on identifying key negotiation arenas related to ancestral territories. Community actors, crucial in leading internal co-production efforts or engaging with external partners, are at the heart of these processes. The research primarily seeks to uncover and highlight urban habitat co-production practices rooted in pre-capitalist ancestral cultures. To this end, it examines the interaction between municipal and community governance, drawing on insights from public databases that include census, regulatory, and cartographic data, supplemented by qualitative fieldwork.

The desk analysis focuses on the public structures that support the *comuna's* territorial management, highlighting Santa Clara's ambivalent situation as a self-governing body within the Metropolitan District of Quito (DMQ). This analysis delineates the key communal mechanisms used to create common spaces, contrasting them with the DMQ's framework for citizen engagement, which is regularly engaged by Santa Clara. Furthermore, documentation from Santa Clara's self-management governance provides valuable insight into the nuances of community-led co-production efforts.

The qualitative research approach was designed to unravel complex governance landscape. A total of 28 in-depth interviews were conducted, including community leaders (5), *comuneros*¹ (12), public officials (2), academics (3), and alternative territorial actors (6). These interviews focused on key themes such as governance, planning, the roles of urban actors, sustainability, and resilience, yielding nuanced insights into co-production practices. To further enrich these perspectives, an extended period of ethnographic observation from March to June 2023 was undertaken. This observation aimed to reveal actions and dynamics not captured in official documents, thereby providing a detailed portrayal of the community's daily life and operational mechanisms.

The analysis examines practices within four key areas: governance, planning and design, urban actors, and resource management. These practices are evaluated in both public (top-down) and community contexts to illustrate initiatives in Santa Clara. An additional 'alternative sphere' is also considered, including academics and on-site organisations. An analytical matrix is employed to categorise actions as top-down, bottom-up, or co-production-oriented. From this analysis, 50 practices were identified and further distilled into four distinct scenarios: traditional, internal, and external co-production, as well as municipal intervention. Each scenario is thoroughly analysed according to relevant categories (as detailed in Table 1).

3. Unravelling common space: a dissection of Co-production in Latin America

The discourse on urban habitat co-production is deeply interwoven with the wider narrative of citizen engagement in urban transformation within the Global South (Castán Broto et al., 2022). This dialogue reveals a range of collaborative practices reshaping urban environments, emphasising the importance of in-depth studies in specific neighbourhoods. Co-production, a multifaceted concept (Mitlin & Bartlett, 2018; Voorberg et al., 2014), involves the collaborative creation of goods, services (Khine et al., 2021; Ostrom, 1996), and knowledge (Jananoff, 2004; Visconti, 2023), signifying varied scenarios of solution identification (Bevir et al., 2019; Castán Broto and Neves Alves, 2018; Durose

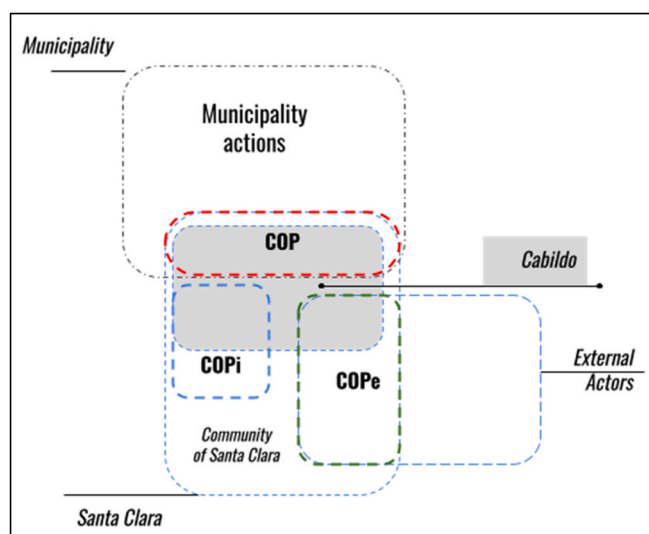


Fig. 1. Visual representation of governance and co-production mechanisms in Santa Clara.

Source: Own design, 2024. Abbreviations as follows: 'Traditional' co-production (COP), 'internal' co-production (COPi) and 'external' co-production (COPe).

¹ The *comunero/a* is a citizen registered as an inhabitant of Santa Clara.

Table 1
Transformation of urban habitat in Santa Clara – a Systematization.

Scenario	Issue	Governance	Planning and design	Urban actors	Resources used
Municipal Intervention (IM)	Environmental engineering; recreational infrastructure; public space (green areas);	Bylaw	Executive project by public actors.	Technical Secretariats, Public companies.	Financial, technological and skilled manpower resources by the public sector.
Traditional Co-production (COP)	Urbanisation of infrastructural connectors; extraordinary maintenance of natural resources (canyons); mud removal (extraordinary post-disaster clean-up); Urbanization of <i>pasajes</i> ; extraordinary maintenance and construction of recreational facilities; structural maintenance of health facilities; water catchment and distribution network in the underprivileged areas.	The General Assembly of <i>Comuneros</i> ; Participatory Budget; <i>megamingas</i> .	Preliminary technical project by the Cabildo; executive project by the public enterprises and municipal government.	Cabildo, community; Technical Secretariat; Public enterprises;	Human resources from the community; economic, technological and skilled manpower resources by the municipal government.
Internal Co-production (COPI)	Urbanization of <i>pasajes</i> ; extraordinary maintenance and construction of recreational facilities; structural maintenance of health facilities; water catchment and distribution network in the underprivileged areas.	General Assembly of <i>Comuneros</i>	50/50 model; preliminary projects;	Cabildo; community; community groups (sport, culture).	Internal resources of the community coming from the annuities; own resources of the neighbours.
External Co-production (COPE)	Architectural design; Urban design; Reforestation; Academic studies for infrastructure; Construction of recreational equipment;	General Assembly of <i>Comuneros</i> ; Technical roundtables between the Cabildo and alternative actors.	Free technical consultancies for community members; Preliminary and executive project by the alternative actors; reactive planning in dialogue with the Cabildo; 50/50 model.	Academies; Foundations, cooperatives, private companies.	Human and material resources by the community (partly); Economic, technological and skilled manpower resources by alternative actors.

Source: Own design, 2024.

et al., 2018) and the application knowledge in practice (Mach et al., 2020). Additionally, co-production signifies the rise of a dynamic network of collaborative actors (Miller & Wyborn, 2020).

While co-production is often praised as a transformative tool (Matyushkina et al., 2023), there is also a wealth of critiques focusing on its limitations and constraints (Oliver et al., 2019; Rosaldo, 2022). In the Latin American context, the discourse on co-production is particularly prominent in peripheral areas (Aguilar-Barajas et al., 2019; Desmaison et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2022). These places and neighbourhoods, typically characterised by a lack of infrastructure and services (Ogas-Mendez & Isoda, 2022), nonetheless showcase the constructive involvement of their residents. These spaces, while not entirely separate from formal urban frameworks (Caldeira, 2017), echo an ongoing, albeit intermittent, dialogue with governmental structures.

Peripheral transformations in Latin America are intrinsically tied to the dominant influence of neoliberal development, characterised by the proliferation of grey infrastructure and housing programmes (Janoschka & Salinas Arreortua, 2017). This paradigm fuels urban sprawl, paradoxically occurring alongside modest population growth (Carrión & Erazo Espinosa, 2012). Consequently, a complex and multi-layered urban landscape emerges. 'Extended urbanisation' (Brenner & Schmid, 2015) unfolds as it encroaches upon remote territories, driven by the relentless appetite of metropolitan expansion. This process casts a pervasive shadow over extensive marginal and peripheral areas (Porreca et al., 2023). A significant proportion of this growth stems from *auto-construction*, arising through complex and creative processes (Holston, 1991), yet often overlooked by social housing initiatives and state-supported self-construction schemes (Chiodelli, 2015). In this vein, the narrative of informality has evolved, and "is now seen as a generalised mode of metropolitan urbanisation" (Roy, 2005, p. 147). These

informal settlements represent adaptable solutions to real urban pressures (Dovey et al., 2020), highlighting the ongoing housing challenges in Latin America.

The co-production of peripheral habitat is deeply embedded in the principles of urban equality-oriented co-production (Castán Broto et al., 2022; Desmaison et al., 2023). This link is most apparent in the management of urban commons, where collective efforts are focused on sustainability and urban equality (Chatterton, 2016; Ergenç & Çelik, 2021; Uwayezu & de Vries, 2019). Numerous scholars advocate that peripheral urban habitat, often confronting significant vulnerability risks, requires a dedicated co-production approach to foster sustainable and resilient environments (Brugnach et al., 2017; Fraser, 2017; Smith et al., 2022). The importance of this approach is heightened in contexts where roles in spatial management are unclear, leading to negative impacts on marginal areas suffering from fragmented and exclusionary developmental strategies (Anane & Cobbinah, 2022).

The volatile landscape highlights a duality of presence and absence, triggering emerging practices in peripheral urbanisation (Goodwin, 2019; Murphy, 2014). It is important to recognise, however, that these practices may lean towards more conventional, formalised urban models and regulations, potentially becoming unattainable for the poorest residents. Such practices may also replicate in places where land is cheaper due to its precarious nature or limited accessibility (Caldeira, 2017). Displacement mechanisms, instigated by various forms of dispossession, adopt different strategies based on the specific context (Janoschka, 2016). The complex urban landscape is thus marked by a dialectic process between normalising the urban environment and undergoing an urban metamorphosis that preserves local identities (Stavrides, 2015, 2022). Peripheral transformation mechanisms, driven by inherent rationale, evoke a wide range of conflicts (Horn et al., 2021), with

responses varying from reactive acts of struggle and resistance to organised approaches (Zibechi, 2011). The reactive responses often involve grassroots and extra-legal space appropriation in reaction to capitalist pressures, aiming to “build what citizens want” (Castán Broto et al., 2022, p. 1). On the other hand, organised responses reveal a rich heritage of pre-capitalist Latin American traditions, epitomised by practices like the *ayllus*, *comunidades*, *chinampas*, and other ancestral space production paradigms. Despite their persistence, these traditions are often contrasted with neoliberal urbanistic visions (Nahoum, 2015; Rayner & Mérida Conde, 2019). In both cases, creating material and symbolic common spaces crafts distinctive place identities, characterised by unique way of living.

The co-production of urban habitat within ancestral territories is deeply rooted in the discourse of community identity. This identity, emerging from either solidarity, affective and traditional ties, or a civic and normative dimension, is closely intertwined with the concept of creating common space (Hammond, 2014). The commons, conceptualised as an expression of mutual and reciprocal practices, lie at the core of community life (Esposito, 2009). This evolving notion triggers a dynamic system marked by internal conflicts over identities and behaviours (Rancière, 2006), yet it retains a capacity for inclusivity, welcoming newcomers and innovative initiatives (Stavrides, 2015). Consequently, the act of sharing space becomes a tangible representation of the commons. In the Latin American context, this epitomises by the establishment of community institutions (Rayner & Mérida Conde, 2019; Zibechi, 2011) dedicated to fostering community cohesion and co-producing common spaces.

The formation and negotiation of community inherently involves the assumption of duties and obligations (Esposito, 2009), laying the groundwork for the creation of common spaces. These spaces arise from processes of communalisation; namely, a series of actions, strategies, and tactics -whether deliberate or incidental- aimed at nurturing communities and cultivating common space. Communities and their shared spaces then engage in a dialectical relationship with the public-private ownership paradigms of the formal city, positioning themselves as counterbalances to the prevalent drives for standardisation and normalisation within the urban landscape. This ongoing negotiation is in line with Brenner and Schmid's perspective, which sees the urban environment as a collective endeavour characterised by appropriation and contestation (Brenner & Schmid, 2015), a view that echoes contemporary Latin American discourses (Horn et al., 2021).

Using Quito as a paradigmatic example, we identify particular conditions that foster co-production and negotiations within territories characterised by complexity and contention. This analysis enables a re-evaluation of co-production, especially in contexts dominated by informality and peripheral urbanisation, yet imbued with rich ancestral communal traditions.

4. Spatial management policies in the ancestral territories of the DMQ

The DMQ is divided into nine administrative zones, encompassing both urban *'barrios'* and rural *'comunidades'* situated within ancestral territories, hence subject to specific regulations. Each *comuna* manages its territory through established community practices, supporting decision-making and transformative projects. Local regulation endorses self-management and warrants the democratic constitution of the community governance body, the *'Cabildo'*, which is annually renewed. Although under the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), this entity is tasked with safeguarding their rights and providing resources for their development (see Fig. 2). The territories are legally defined as “indivisible and inalienable” (Constitución de La, 2008), symbolising communal ownership. Consequently, *comunidades* do not hold private ownership titles and are exempt from property taxes.

Within the boundaries of Quito, there are 73 *comunidades*, yet only 48 are active, a situation directly linked to the city's urbanisation processes

(Rayner & Mérida Conde, 2019). Notably, three *comunidades* are classified as urban due to their location within the consolidated city limits, despite primarily falling under the MAG jurisdiction. These *comunidades* regularly negotiate with the Municipality regarding urban planning and vulnerability issues, with Santa Clara serving as a key example. Founded in 1537 and officially recognised by the state in 1911, it has experienced significant disputes over territorial governance. These conflicts have nudged the area towards a path of normalisation. Reflecting on this, a community member mentioned that “it may seem more favourable to reside in *La Floresta* [a middle-class neighbourhood in Quito] and settle all dues with the municipality” (Community member, male, interview n° 20). Conversely, a community leader expressed a desire to preserve their heritage, stating “we want to continue with our ancestry because we'd lose absolutely everything” (Community leader, female, interview n° 01).

Disputes over jurisdiction have resulted in outdated census data, gaps in urban planning information, and a significant lack of investment in infrastructure, services, and facilities. Scholars highlight a notable state neglect towards Santa Clara, a sentiment echoed in the Land Use and Management Plan,² where “the *comuna* is absent” (Academic, male, interview n° 7). This oversight exacerbates the community's ongoing battle for basic amenities. As pointed out by this interviewee, “whenever they demand services, they are met with claims to their autonomy, suggesting that the state bears no responsibility”. In Santa Clara, the engagement with the MAG is described as minimal, with its institutions being, “in essence, scarcely involved” (ebd.).

Consequently, the community shifts towards co-producing its habitat, engaging with the municipal government's participatory framework (see Fig. 2), and collaborating with the Cabildo to utilise the *'Quito Participa'*³ scheme. This scheme, offering participatory budgets, serves as a means to secure infrastructural improvements and resources, as highlighted by a community leader, “to access benefits and execute works” (Community leader, female, interview n° 2). Additionally, the *'megamingas'* programme represents a modern embodiment of the traditional Andean *'mingas'*, symbolising community-driven efforts towards producing goods, services, and common spaces. This initiative provides a platform for maintaining urban and natural heritage, evolving into a form of organic co-production that yields public labour savings. Therefore, the regulatory landscape is characterised by a remarkable contrast between static ministerial processes and a dynamic municipal system, which becomes a critical platform for dialogue and negotiation. This setting fosters collaborative governance and transformative projects, as observed in field research.

5. Production of urban habitat: four contested scenarios of collaboration and municipal interventionism

Our analysis revealed a range of transformative activities, leading to a classification into four distinct scenarios: one is clearly unilateral, avoiding collaborative approaches, whereas the remaining three involve deliberate collaborative efforts, each defined by different levels of competencies and alliances (See Fig. 1).

5.1. Scenario 1. Municipal intervention

In this scenario, transformations within communal territories often result from unilateral actions initiated by the Municipality, bypassing participatory processes. These actions, typically not anticipated in official planning documents, significantly alter the urban habitat. Yet,

² Land Use and Management Plan, an urban planning tool of the DMQ.

³ “Quito Participa”, translation by the authors. More information on the official website: https://gobiernoabierto.quito.gob.ec/quito-participa/?page_id=7775.

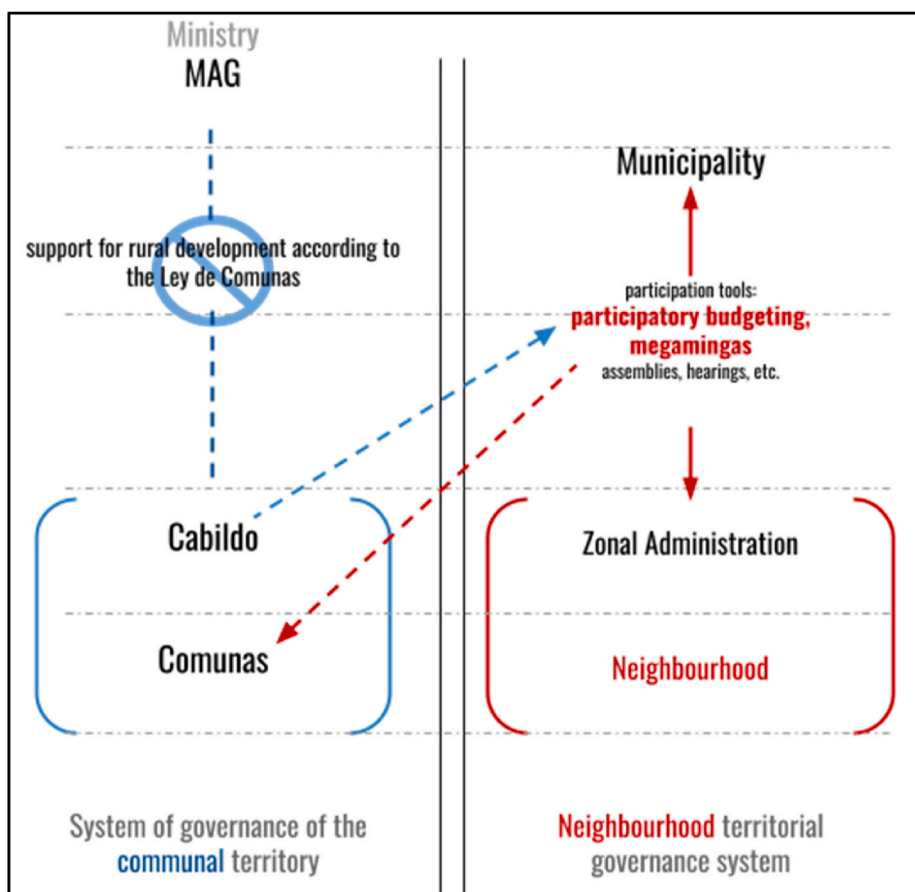


Fig. 2. Scheme of competing governance schemes in Santa Clara, Quito.
Source: Own design, 2024.

official municipal records⁴ elucidate considerable ambiguity regarding governance competencies, a sentiment reinforced by community leaders. They argue the Municipality's jurisdiction is unclear, with one leader asserting, "the municipality does not tread here [...] it simply cannot" (Community leader, female, interview n° 2).

Typically, municipal efforts are only reactive, initiated after disasters to restore the status quo, without implementing preventive measures or encouraging participatory dialogues. A public official (female, interview n° 6 b) highlights a significant gap, noting: "we cannot adhere to *comuna*-specific planning, given the absence of clear *comuna* delineation". Echoing this, another official emphasised the urgent need for "crafting a comprehensive risk management plan" (Public official, male, interview n° 6a), illustrating the complex interaction with the Municipality. To date, only a single environmental engineering project –designed to direct rainwater and mitigate hazards– has been completed. Our ethnographic observations demonstrated that the Public Water Company (EPMAPS) undertook this intervention without previous community consultation or notification. This lack of communication between municipal and communal entities highlights the crucial importance of vulnerability management in shaping local co-production efforts. Although deeply transformative in territorial terms, this project sidesteps self-governance processes, excluding the community and depriving them of any opportunity to participate.

5.2. Scenario 2. Traditional Co-production

In Santa Clara, traditional co-production predominantly involves enhancing road and natural infrastructure through collaborative efforts between the Municipality and the Cabildo, typically initiated proactively by the community: "if we don't knock on doors, we don't accomplish anything" (Community leader, male, interview n° 03). The procedure is clear-cut: (i) The General Assembly of *Comuneros* identifies a priority for intervention; (ii) The *Cabildo*, after consulting with the Assembly, drafts an initial project plan; (iii) This plan is then submitted to the Municipality, with the aim of obtaining funding from the participatory budget. Although this budget acts as an adjunct to traditional urban planning, its financial resources are limited. Consequently, these funds are not only in competition with requests from other neighbourhoods but also depend on the municipal administration's political inclination and budgetary allocations. A community leader (female, interview n° 2) expressed this uncertainty: "Only if fortune favours, we may qualify for these projects".

The scope and nature of initiatives under this model can vary significantly. For instance, participatory budgets have partially funded the urbanisation of *Humberto Albornoz* and *Santa Clara* streets, crucial infrastructural links in the community. This effort entailed the community's involvement in several key areas: (i) Making self-governance decisions through the General Assembly; (ii) Creating preliminary plans for grey infrastructure; and (iii) Engaging in joint efforts with urban stakeholders, including the *Cabildo* and the General Assembly. Although the community did not contribute technical or financial resources directly, their active engagement in other pivotal aspects of transformation was evident. In contrast, the Municipality played a role across all analytical dimensions (see Table 1).

⁴ Amongst others, the document "Oficio Nro. GADDMQ-AMC-DMIP-2023-3090-O" shows the complex governance system.

Another illustrative example is the ‘*megamingas*’ initiative, aimed at the maintenance of a canyon traversing the community. Santa Clara initiated this by engaging with the municipal online portal and seeking support from public companies, which then supplied vital equipment and experts. The community’s contribution through volunteer labour effectively resulted in cost savings for the municipal government. Nonetheless, municipal regulations dictate that the stewardship of natural resources should be predominantly the remit of governmental agencies like the cadastre or the environmental secretariat. Consequently, while this co-production approach facilitates direct dialogues with the municipality, it also draws attention to the unclear division of roles and responsibilities in managing vulnerability. As articulated by a community leader: “the *minga* becomes a political issue, but it shouldn’t be the fundamental aspect of organising a territory” (Community leader, male, interview n° 03). This situation reflects a delicate equilibrium between municipal benefits and the risk of exploitation. Despite the lack of comprehensive planning and design, the mutual collaboration between the community and public entities is evident.

5.3. Scenario 3. Internal Co-production

In Santa Clara, the urban landscape is primarily transformed through “internal co-production” (COPI), where residents themselves are the drivers of change, building housing and shaping the urban environment within their capabilities. This process involves two main community actors: the *Comuneros* and the *Cabildo*. The procedure unfolds as follows: *Comuneros* submit proposals for urban transformation to the General Assembly, which then holds a vote on these initiatives. Should the *Cabildo* concur, it endorses these decisions and undertakes the mobilisation of necessary resources. This approach, akin to *autoconstruction*, positions the community at the forefront of urban development. It represents a model of ‘internal’ co-production that prioritises active participation from citizens in decision-making processes, in close collaboration with their immediate governance structures.

Projects within COPI typically encompass micro-interventions, such as paving, providing untreated water to disadvantaged areas, and maintaining communal spaces, with activities usually confined to particular blocks or sectors of the *comuna*. Examination of the 24 ‘*pasajes*’ (narrow paths facilitating access to homes) within the community unveils a sequence where (i) community members propose actions during the General Assembly; (ii) these proposals receive *Cabildo* approval; followed by (iii) implementation via a ‘50/50’ funding model. As elucidated by a community leader, “50% [of the costs are borne] by the residents of the passage and 50% by the *Cabildo*. Typically, the *Cabildo* supplies cobblestones, whereas residents contribute kerbs, cement, and sand” (Community leader, male, interview n° 17). To cover their share, community members utilise annual fees, which frequently fall short for extensive projects. The community’s financial input stems from annuities, defined as economic contributions collected annually by each community government. Yet, as highlighted by a community leader, the accumulated amount is “insufficient for commissioning these tasks as paid work” (Community leader, female, interview n° 01). In summary, these practices encompass a comprehensive community approach, yet it is significant to note the Municipality’s absence, refraining from participation in these self-management projects.

5.4. Scenario 4. External Co-production

In this scenario, Santa Clara engages in “external co-production” by collaborating with entities beyond the community. These include credit cooperatives “offering loans at rates more favourable than traditional banks” (Academic, male, interview n° 7), foundations supporting infrastructure projects like the “construction of a synthetic grass pitch” (Community leader, female, interview n° 1), and academic institutions and civil society representatives “assisting in refining design strategies, planning, and achieving the community’s future aspirations”

(Community leader, female, interview n° 1). Distinguished by their ongoing collaborative efforts to enhance local identity, these partnerships focus on architectural design, basic amenities provision, cartography, and community micro-financing for *autoconstruction*. A prime example is the *Pasaje 12 de Agosto-Santa Clara*, a joint effort between the *Cabildo*, community members, and the *Centro de Arquitectura de Comunas* (CAC) at the *Universidad Central del Ecuador*, explored in our ethnographic research. The initiative aims to transform an unpaved, steeply inclined street into a stairway system, linking two areas of Santa Clara currently connected by a dilapidated road. In this instance, the CAC contributes technical design and engineering expertise, whereas the *Cabildo* facilitates the participatory process and coordinates shared resources following the 50/50 model.

This initiative embodies the collective ambition to co-plan, co-design, and co-construct “this idea of territory with social vision” (Community leader, male, interview n° 03), through a stakeholder network that encompasses social groups, the local government, and external contributors in self-management. Occasionally, these external participants assume the role traditionally associated to the Municipality, particularly in aspects of planning and design, by bringing in technical expertise, and facilitating access to technological and financial resources. Therefore, this collaboration is identified as external co-production. In conclusion, the process of urban habitat creation in Santa Clara exemplifies a versatile system capable of adapting to existing conditions while simultaneously maintaining its core principles. This enhances the discourse on the importance of co-production in ancestral and peripheral territories.

6. Co-production of urban habitat in quito: discussion and conceptual reflections

This study has closely examined the processes and implications of urban habitat co-production amid peripheral urbanisation, highlighting the complex interplays and tensions between ancestral territories and formal urbanisation processes. Santa Clara’s case study reveals four distinct scenarios of co-production, with three prominently embedded in collaborative frameworks. The distinction between internal and external co-production accentuates a cultural inclination towards establishing connections with non-traditional stakeholders, united by shared goals that fuel their collaborative spirit. Moreover, the established co-production model involving the Municipality and residents, particularly through the participatory budgeting scheme, demonstrates a dynamic adaptability to participatory opportunities. This reflects Santa Clara’s commitment to redefining its approach to not only encompass self-governance, but also to champion community well-being and wider equity.

In each scenario, Santa Clara exemplifies the combination of collaborative production with the foundational values of its ancestral territories and indigenous cultures, characterised by mutual respect and solidarity. Co-production serves as a catalyst for engagement and dialogue in spaces otherwise overlooked by central or local authorities, employing tools such as participatory budgets and *megamingas*. These initiatives, focused on infrastructure development and of natural heritage conservation, illustrate that extending collaboration can be a more effective strategy than engaging in conflict to navigate rigid or absent institutional structures. The analysis demonstrates that conventional development regulations concerning Santa Clara are frequently bypassed, leading to the community government functioning similarly to a neighbourhood association. This setup enables intermittent cooperation with the municipal government for co-producing essential infrastructure, despite the usual absence of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (*MAG*).

Conversely, internal co-production, even when faced with resource constraints, exemplifies the ability of ancestral territories and their communities to integrate local knowledge and mechanisms (e.g., the General Community Assembly and the “50/50” model) in

transformative projects. This approach generates ‘actionable knowledge’ (Mach et al., 2020) that is also evident in external co-production efforts, characterised by the participation of novel actors who bring fresh expertise while attaining to community norms. This echoes scholarly recommendations to broaden the spectrum of co-production participants (Castán Broto et al., 2022; Granata, 2021).

In all co-production scenarios, citizen engagement -whether through the General Community Assembly, *mingas*, or direct contributions in human, technical, or financial resources- demonstrates a communalisation structure (Stavrídes, 2022). This structure amalgamates horizontal governance, planning-design and collaboration between actors, whether internal or external. Yet, while Santa Clara is firmly anchored in its ancestral heritage, it also validates criticisms of an overly idealistic view of community life (Stavrídes, 2015), presenting a community-shaped urban fabric that is inherently contentious, with evident stakeholder tensions as identified in interviews. Furthermore, these narratives reinforce concerns over excessive dependence on co-production (Matyushkina et al., 2023): three scenarios depict collaboration as largely driven by community initiative, challenging the notable absence of national and municipal governance. Traditional co-production is often a response to urgent needs, offering limited scope for improving peripheral conditions and effecting changes in a fragmented and incremental manner. Thus, Santa Clara provides critical insights into the limitations of participatory urban management and development approaches, which tend to result in fragmented state-community collaborations, resulting in ephemeral, often reactive, and extra-planning actions.

Quito’s experience suggests that co-production operates as a dialogic or negotiated process, transcending internal contexts to include traditional forms and extending to collaborations with unconventional stakeholders, leveraging community solidarity against a backdrop of rigid institutional structures. The symbolic resonance with ancestral and indigenous cultures, as demonstrated by practices like the *megaminga*, alongside a natural inclination for negotiation, suggests a capacity for improved collaboration between methods grounded in ancestral knowledge and practice, and a Municipality typically characterised by top-down governance approaches. Consequently, Santa Clara emerges as a vanguard urban experiment for cities across Latin America. It epitomises the significance of local urban values in the face of the formal city’s homogenisation and unveils the potential for a stable co-production model that, while embracing the inherent challenges of equitable planning, fosters a constructive partnership with the state.

In conclusion, there remains uncertainty about the normative capacity of co-production (Mitlin, 2018) to effect significant governance changes or material transformations within urban peripheries. However, the evidence of our research underscores that co-production is closely linked to the socio-spatial dynamics, representing a “complex, long and continuous process of change” (Castán Broto et al., 2022, p. 10). The case of Santa Clara exemplifies, in this vein, how a dedicated and active community, adhering to values of mutual respect, solidarity, and the common good -reminiscent of those in ancestral territories- can integrate diverse actors into co-governance, co-design and co-construction processes. This enhances socio-spatial capital, establishing co-production not merely as a sporadic tactic but as a consistent and integral mechanism of urban development.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Riccardo Porreca: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Writing – original draft, empirical research. **Michael Janoschka:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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