

Informal Green Infrastructure as Mobility Enabler in Informal Settlements of Quito

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Abstract : In the context of informal settlements in Quito, this paper provides evidence that slopes and deep ravines typical of Andean cities, around which marginalized urban communities sit, constitute a platform for green infrastructure that supports mobility for pedestrians in an incremental fashion. This is informally shaped green infrastructure that provides connectivity to other mobility infrastructures such as roads and public transport, which permits relegated dwellers reach their daily destinations and reclaim their rights to the city. This is relevant in that walking has been increasingly neglected as a viable mean of transport in Latin American cities, in favor of rather motorized means, for which the mobility benefits of green infrastructure have remained invisible to policymakers, contributing to the progressive isolation of informal settlements. This research leverages greatly on an ecological rejuvenation programme led by the municipality of Quito and the Andean Corporation for Development (CAN) intended for rehabilitating the ecological functionalities of ravines. Accordingly, four ravines in different stages of rejuvenation were chosen, in order to through ethnographic methods, capture the practices they support to dwellers of informal settlements across different stages, particularly in terms of issues of mobility. Then, by presenting fragments of interviews, description of observed phenomena, photographs and narratives published in institutional reports and media, the production process of mobility infrastructure over unoccupied slopes and ravines, and the roles that this infrastructure plays in the mobility of dwellers and their quotidian practices are explained. For informal settlements, which normally feature scant urban infrastructure, mobility embodies an unfavourable driver for the possibilities of dwellers to actively participate in the social, economic and political dimensions of the city, for which their rights to the city are widely neglected. Nevertheless, informal green infrastructure for mobility provides some alleviation. This infrastructure is incremental, since its features and usability gradually evolves as users put into it knowledge, labour, devices, and connectivity to other infrastructures in different dimensions which increment its dependability. This is evidenced in the diffusion of knowledge of trails and routes of footpaths among users, the implementation of linking stairs and bridges, the improved access by producing public spaces adjacent to the ravines, the illuminating of surrounding roads, and ultimately, the restoring of ecological functions of ravines. However, the perpetuity of this type of infrastructure is also fragile and vulnerable to the course of urbanisation, densification, and expansion of gated privatised spaces.

Keywords : green infrastructure, informal settlements, urban mobility, walkability

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