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“We did it ourselves”: Citizenship through the Lens of Mobility Infrastructure in Lima’s Low-Income Peripheries

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This article discusses the concept of citizenship in Lima’s low-income peripheries through the lens of mobility infrastructure. In the second half of the 20th century, rapid urban growth in the Peruvian capital led to urban sprawl into remote areas with rugged topography, while most activities remained concentrated in central zones. This “popular overflow” (Matos Mar, 1984) overwhelmed the authorities’ urban planning capacities. Peripheral neighbourhoods of Latin American cities were (self-)built over the years through the struggles of social organisations and highly structured collectives (Castells, 1974; Zolezzi, Calderón, 1985; Bolívar, 1995). This history of informal urban production has been interpreted as a process of constructing a bottom-up citizenship, through which residents secure their place in the city by building their own housing (López, 1997). In contrast, the state is typically seen as either absent or merely accommodating toward this mode of urbanisation (Holland, 2017). For inhabitants of these self-built neighbourhoods—frequently stigmatised in official discourse as “invaders”—citizenship status is closely tied to the state’s recognition of their settlements (formalisation), which is then followed by the granting of individual property titles (Degregori, Blondet, Lynch, 1986). Maffitt (2014) describes this process of property regularisation and incorporation of urban masses as the social contract that governed urban production since the mid-20th century.

This particular social contract between residents of low-income neighbourhoods and the state reflects a form of

differentiated citizenship that reveals the inequalities of Latin American societies. Indeed, citizenship—understood as belonging to a political community, with equal rights and obligations and protection provided by the state—has never been a universal right in Latin American cities. Nevertheless, it remains a widely debated concept, often presented as a promise of equality in homogenising discourses (Gariboti, Girola, Borocconi, 2017). It is most often associated with popular demands for better access to essential services (water, electricity, transport, etc.) and urban resources (a goal that has yet to be achieved) (Borja, 2003). These struggles for citizenship have evolved over time as the state has changed, particularly through processes of decentralisation and the strengthening of local governments’ roles since the early 2000s.

In this article, we explore the conditions of citizenship in the peripheral neighbourhoods of Lima, Peru, through the lens of mobility infrastructure. Public transport services, roads, but also stairways, pavements and paths are all socio-technical systems that enable urbanisation and impact daily life. We draw on Lemanski’s (2022) perspective on “infrastructural citizenship” to explore how citizens’ experiences and interactions with these mobility infrastructures (re)produce civic identities. We are interested in the temporal dimension of relations between the state and society, emphasising their evolution over time to explain more contemporary manifestations and conflicts. The aim is to analyse both an ongoing process (Baptista, 2019)

and the history on which it is based. This temporal perspective allows us to analyse the construction of civic identity, understood as the way in which inhabitants refer to and represent themselves (in relation to) the state,¹ in discourse and in action, when the state is largely absent. In a context of differentiated citizenship, we ultimately ask whether the production of bottom-up citizenship is part of a dynamic of integration into the modernisation project desired by the state, or whether, on the contrary, it refers to a “counterpublic” of citizenship (Fraser, 1990)—a response and form of emancipation by residents in the face of their exclusion from dominant publics.

The analysis is based on material developed as part of the Modural² research programme (2020–2024) on daily mobility practices in Lima and Bogota, focusing on the Peruvian case. The article is structured in four parts: 1) we first interrogate the notion of citizenship based on the Latin American context and applied to the case of mobility infrastructure; 2) we then present the context and quality of mobility infrastructure in Lima from the perspective of residents; 3) we finally analyse the residents’ perceptions of the state; and 4) consider the processes of self-production of mobility infrastructure as indicators of a process of bottom-up citizenship building.

Considering infrastructure development alongside citizenship

Citizenship in Lima

The idea of modern, universal citizenship contrasts with the inequalities that characterise Latin American societies. Although the principles of citizenship were enshrined by the republics during their independence processes, in reality, the authorities’ efforts in this area have remained limited. For a large part of the historically marginalised population, citizenship has been built from the bottom up, through struggles and demands that (sometimes) lead to the attainment of rights (López, 1997).

Inequalities in citizenship are still strongly evident today in the low-income settlements of Lima. They result from specific relations between the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods and the state, which has endorsed and reinforced rather than combated inequalities between social groups. The Organic Law on Marginal Neighbourhoods (*Ley organica de los barrios marginales*—13517), enshrined in 1961 in Peru, recognises illegal occupations established before 1960, provided that residents fulfil a number of obligations (social organisation, urban fabric, etc.). These principles were reaffirmed by subsequent

laws (Álvarez, 2020). Urban development plans (such as the 1967 PLANDEMET) differentiated between areas for private urbanisation projects and those intended for the development of low-income neighbourhoods. State policies therefore promoted social housing projects for the middle class, while offering low-income classes bare land on the city outskirts to be urbanised by their own means. This allocation of land (rather than housing) legitimised self-build projects by residents at a time when the state withdrew from this responsibility (Calderón, 2005).

Beyond the issue of housing, these principles define the logic of how the “popular” city (Riofrio, 1991; Abramson, Rodriguez, Erazo, 2016) and the urban social contract (Abramson et al., 2022) are produced. The latter is marked by the failure to establish a welfare state model at a time of rapid urbanisation in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Instead, a non-universalist, segmented state logic that benefited the elites of urban society prevailed. In this context, popular and “informal” urbanisation emerged as a response by low-income families to their exclusion from the city and its resources. The 1990s saw the emergence of a new strategy based on neoliberal principles (the free market, privatisation and reduced public spending). For low-income neighbourhoods on the outskirts of cities, this meant the perpetuation of inequality-generating mechanisms.

We associate this urban production with a form of social contract, both symbolic and with concrete material and legal repercussions, from which two types of citizenship derive: one for the middle and upper classes with a welfare state associated with the formal city; and another for the working classes associated with the informal city. In the second case, the state recognises a specific form of urbanisation based on the opportunity for residents to occupy land and develop self-built housing on it, before approaching the authorities to obtain equipment and infrastructure, or building them themselves.

The informal nature of urbanisation, which develops outside official planning, leads to a differentiation in citizens’ status, associated with a debt from the state’s point of view, and perceived as a legitimacy to be obtained for the inhabitants. In this context, a whole section of the population has to tackle the challenges of a precarious daily life (Ziccardi, 1998).

While Lemanski emphasises the disconnect between perceptions of citizenship, where citizens and the state view the other party as failing in its rights and responsibilities

(Lemanski, 2022), in the Peruvian case, we also see a form of acceptance of this differentiated condition. Arrangements and negotiations of rules to improve and construct housing in low-income neighbourhoods (including access to water, sewage and electricity) are a part of this particular relationship between the state and citizens (Lambert, 2021; Criqui, 2020; Robert, Metzger, 2016).

Citizenship through the lens of infrastructure

To explore the contours of this differentiated citizenship in Lima, we draw on reflections on infrastructural citizenship (Lemanski, 2022). This approach questions the political nature of infrastructure (McFarlane, Rutherford, 2008) and explores the diversity of relationships between citizenship and infrastructure, without limiting itself to protests and conflicts. Citizenship refers to the identities, perceptions and actions of citizens, which are deeply rooted in their relationship with the state. Infrastructure, for its part, represents a materialisation of citizenship (Lemanski, 2020; Pilo', Jaffe, 2020). Citizens perceive and form a representation of the state through the infrastructure it produces, while at the same time the state represents itself (and ensures its presence) across the territory by providing infrastructure for citizens. In this sense, infrastructure plays a mediating role between citizens and the state in terms of expectations, perceptions and actions, and contributes to the construction of citizenship. This theoretical perspective raises two problems, one concerning the temporality of the construction of citizenship, and the other concerning the relational dimension of these processes.

Collective efforts for access to essential services, or against certain infrastructure policies promoted by the authorities, have highlighted the political capacity of the inhabitants. (Holston, 2008; Von Schnitzler, 2016). However, politics does not necessarily take the form of public deliberation or conflict, but can be part of everyday life. Because political debate remains inaccessible to a large part of the population, and protests are ultimately exceptional situations, the ordinary becomes a central object for understanding how problems are solved. This is demonstrated by the administrative and socio-technical arrangements between rulers and the ruled, particularly for the provision of essential services (Chatterjee, 2004; Pilo', 2019). Infrastructural citizenship thus operates across multiple temporal registers, from long-term processes to everyday practices. Its construction is marked by accelerations or more conjunctural manifestations that both result from and amplify accumulated

tensions. Infrastructure concentrates these temporal registers, representing both objects of everyday life and the result of long-term socio-technical creations.

It is an expression of state power, as it aims to generate social inclusion but also to secure spaces by deterring conflicts or the emergence of opposition. Lemanski (2022) invites us, however, to pay attention to the interdependencies between the actions of the state and its citizens from a relational perspective. The author considers both the state's objectives in producing infrastructure, and the residents' acts of citizenship as they then adapt this infrastructure. The differentiated nature of citizenship, in terms of access to services and the ability to claim rights, can therefore be considered through the lens of infrastructure. Access to essential services can be viewed as an element of enhanced citizenship (Castro, 2005). “Pro-poor” technical solutions, which aim to improve service coverage with a view to universality, have opened up the debate on degraded citizenship (Criqui, 2020). The state's difficulties in meeting citizen needs at different levels have led to collective efforts to demand the provision of infrastructure, but also to different forms of (co)production and self-management by residents of working-class neighbourhoods (Mitlin, 2008; Hardy, Robert, 2021). These relationships between residents and the state highlight a process of collective construction of bottom-up citizenship. Residents of working-class neighbourhoods earn (or assign to themselves) the status of citizen by building their neighbourhood collectively, with their own hands. They are also engaged in negotiations with the state, from which they expect (and demand) greater acknowledgement, initiating a process to request official recognition, support and better management.

Beyond protests: the ordinary political dimension of mobility infrastructure

We consider daily mobility and its infrastructure to be a key factor in analysing the processes of citizenship under construction in the working-class neighbourhoods of Latin American cities. Mobility infrastructure encompasses roads, streets, pavements and stairways, as well as urban equipment and furnishings such as lighting, benches and road signs. It also covers transport services, including vehicles, bus stops, garages and stations. It enables people to move around and is central to urbanisation processes, with a direct impact on residents' quality of life. Mobility infrastructure contributes to urban production and reflects political projects and social contracts (Addie, 2016; McCallum, Zunino, 2023; Vega Centeno, Robert, Roman, 2023).

In Latin America, urban mobility is a highly political issue, as illustrated by major citizen protests in Brazilian cities in 2013 (Domínguez, 2013; Verlinghieri, Venturini, 2018) and in Santiago, Chile, in 2019 (Jirón et al., 2021)—in both cases following an increase in public transport fares. Mobility is also one of the main sources of dissatisfaction among Latin American city dwellers, especially in Lima. Other conflicts highlight both spatial and socio-economic injustices, particularly in relation to major infrastructure projects (Sagaris, Landon, 2017; Vega Centeno, 2013).

However, mediated episodes of conflict are not the norm, and instead there is a sense of resignation among residents faced with the daily difficulties of getting around. This can be explained by the existence of a diverse range of mostly informal services, which function despite their many limitations. In the context of Lima, Avellaneda (2008) discusses the social efficiency of informal transport. A second explanatory factor is that, following the deregulation of the sector in the 1990s, numerous public and private mobility actors now exist, in contrast to other urban services such as water or electricity. The resulting fragmentation makes it difficult to identify the specific role of the state.

The involvement of residents in peripheral neighbourhoods in the provision of the service itself should also be highlighted; they work as drivers, organise bus routes, or map out roads, paths and stairways. The literature has highlighted how residents appropriate such mobility infrastructure, particularly public spaces (Páramo, Burbano, 2014; Velarde, 2017). The relational perspective introduced by the mobility turn enables a broader analysis of how everyday experiences connect to the production of space (Jirón, Imlán, 2018). The focus is on examining the relationship between the materiality of infrastructure and the practices, experiences and meanings associated with it. Accordingly, we approach citizenship both through the lived experience of mobility infrastructure and through the underlying logic that guides its production.

A lack of basic infrastructure in the low-income settlements of Lima

Mobility conditions in the peripheries complicate access to urban opportunities, negatively impact quality of life, and play a part in reproducing social disadvantages and urban poverty. Daily mobility is particularly difficult due to the length, cost and arduousness of journeys to access various urban resources

(for work, study, shopping, etc.) (Robert, Gouëset, Demoraes, 2022). The poor quality of urban infrastructure and the specific topographical conditions, with urbanisation extending over sometimes very steep terrain, add to the socio-economic precariousness of households (Figures 1 and 2). In this context, access to transport and mobility infrastructure appears to be pressing a necessity as other essential services such as water and electricity.

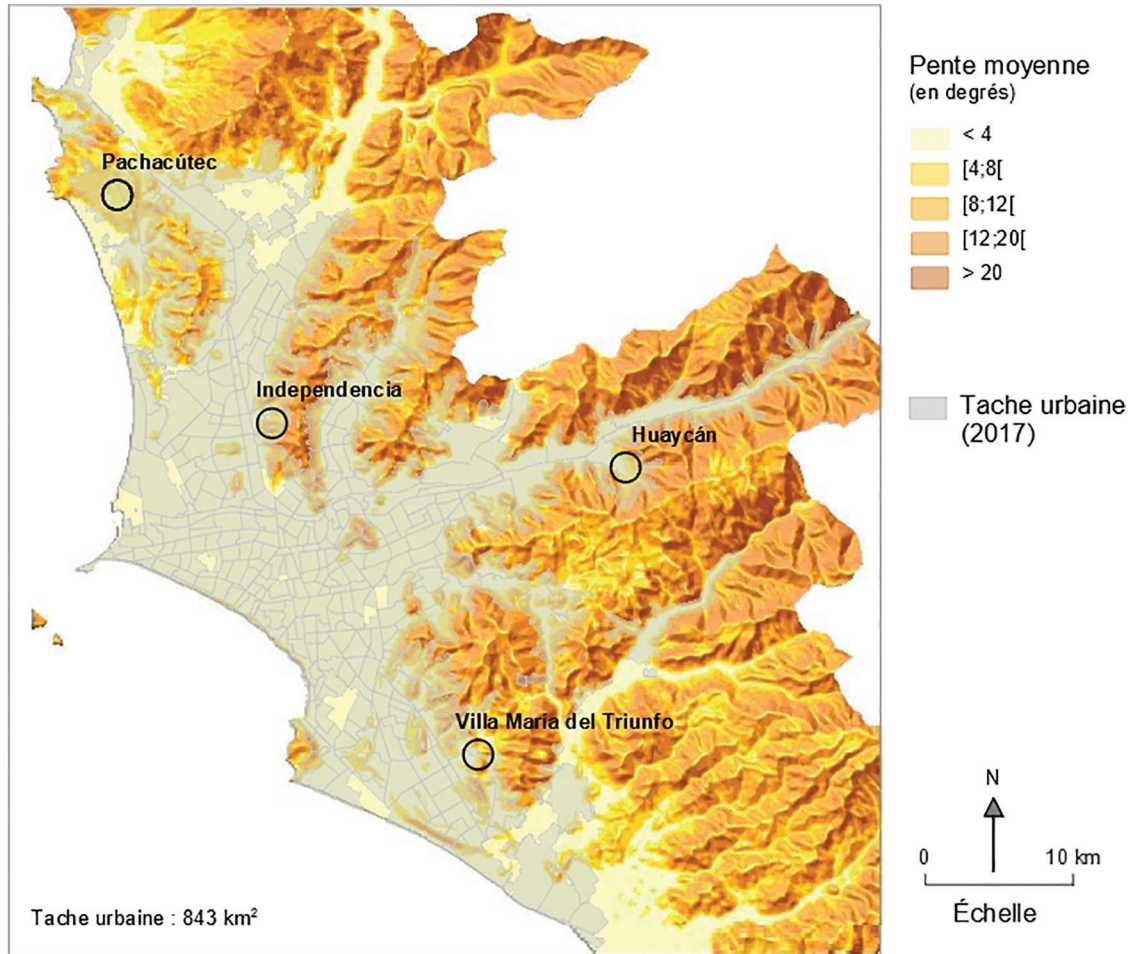
Fragmented and limited public action

Public action to improve mobility conditions mainly concerns three levels of government, with different responsibilities depending on whether it relates to transport management or urban planning (improvement of housing). The central (national) government plays a role in setting the framework and defining broad policy lines, intervening in major infrastructure projects such as the metro. Transport planning and supply management at the city level are handled by the metropolitan governments (of Lima and Callao, which share the conurbation) and by an urban transport authority (the ATU). District municipalities (the smallest level of government, of which there are 50) are responsible for managing local roads, often with limited budgets, as well as regulating light vehicles (mototaxis).

Despite the state's renewed focus on the issue of transport in Latin America and Peru in the 2000s (Paquette, 2018), investment in low-income settlements remains limited. The continued disengagement of the state is particularly visible in Lima, where mass public transport (notably the metro and bus rapid transit system) is in the minority compared to artisanal transport (often referred to as "informal") (Vega Centeno, Dextre, Alegre, 2011).

This situation is part of the social contract between the state and low-income settlements, where the problem of access to mobility is left to the working classes (thereby solving part of the employment problem) (Vega Centeno, 2005). In this context, and in response to growing needs, private collective transport initiatives are multiplying, some more formal than others. Despite the precarious nature of the vehicles, services and working conditions of the operators, this offer is often endorsed by the state through administrative operating licences. This strategy allows the system to function, year in, year out, filling the gaps in the public transport organised by the authorities. With regard to improving housing in low-income neighbourhoods, there has been a transfer of responsibilities

Figure 1. Expansion of urbanisation into the outlying heights of Lima



Source : SRTM (90 m de résolution spatiale)

Réalisation : ANR Modural – UMR ESO 6590 CNRS – Université Rennes 2 – IFEA – Octobre 2020

Sources: SRTM digital model, INEI – Prepared by: F. Demoraes

from the national level to local governments (municipalities), without the fiscal and financial resources to carry them out. Local governments have become the primary point of contact, but have only limited resources at their disposal.

While the central government advocates a universalist discourse that is difficult to achieve, public action at the metropolitan and local levels is proving to be more responsive to residents' demands, despite its limitations. Policies to integrate these areas into the “formal” city remain sporadic and timid, and public interventions are most often driven by populist and clientelist motives, particularly by local governments (Robert, Metzger, 2016).

Everyday (infra)structural problems

The testimonies and experiences of residents in low-income settlements, collected as part of the Modural research programme for Lima, give us an insight into the daily difficulties linked to mobility. This research focused on four peripheral areas of the city: Pachacútec, Huaycán, Independencia and Villa María del Triunfo (Figure 1). We based our findings primarily on interviews conducted with different types of individuals. In 2021, residents, neighbourhood organisation leaders and public transport operators were interviewed to produce case studies of the areas under research⁴ (20 interviews per

Figure 2. Informal urbanisation on the outlying heights of Lima, in Villa Maria el Triunfo



Source: J. Robert, 2022

area). Then, in 2022, as part of a mixed survey, twenty additional interviews were conducted in each area to complement a quantitative survey (using a questionnaire) on daily mobility practices. Participant observation and accompanied journeys complemented this research method.

Beyond complaints about public transport,⁵ residents' testimonies highlight their dissatisfaction with the local infrastructure. The condition of roads is one of the main problems identified, particularly the lack of surfacing, unevenness, potholes and subsidence. For users, this results in a lack of comfort and, at times, being jolted by the movement of the bus. A woman from the Villa Maria del Triunfo neighbourhood sighs as she comments on her journeys: "Ah, the roads (...) it's as if the bus is bouncing. And the worst is at the top, it gets muddy when it rains and the bus can't climb any further. [...] when the bus

starts to struggle, the driver works miracles to get it up the hill" (Woman, 40, teacher). A driver in the Independencia neighbourhood also describes the many obstacles he faces: "Ah, the roads, big holes, small holes, we live with that every day, we try to go slowly because people say their backs and hips hurt. So I take it slowly with the potholes. I try to provide a good service" (Man, 45, mototaxi driver).

The lack of infrastructure also affects pedestrians, as this woman from Villa Maria del Triunfo explains: "There are no pavements, it's all road. What am I supposed to dodge? Cars—I have no choice, it's the only thing I can do" (Young woman, beautician). Up in the steepest areas, stairs are the norm (Figure 3). Accidents are frequent, as a woman from Villa Maria del Triunfo recounts: "Yes, it's tiring [the stairs]. Once I fell and had to go to hospital. (...) They're dangerous, the railings

Figure 3. “La Solidaridad” staircase, in yellow (the colour of the Party) vs. stairs built by residents. In Villa María del Triunfo (two on the left) and Pachacutec (on the right)



Source: J. Robert, 2022

have been poorly installed” (Woman, 43, sales assistant). Significant physical effort is required, leaving some people in particularly difficult situations, such as this elderly resident of Independencia: “The stairs are hard. I can manage them now, can’t I? (...) but later (in a few years), it will be hard (...). I told my son that in five years, I’ll throw in the towel!” (Man, 72, carpenter). Poor spatial organisation—coupled with a lack of infrastructure maintenance—not only complicates traffic flow, but also leads to a heightened sense of insecurity due to road accidents and theft in congested areas.

These testimonies highlight how difficulties related to mobility infrastructure and precarious urbanisation conditions are closely intertwined. They are characteristic of low-income neighbourhoods and contrast with the rest of the city, as shown by the results of the perception survey conducted by the Lima Cómo Vamos Observatory (Lima Cómo Vamos, 2023).⁶ This survey notably asks residents about “the measures that people consider essential to enjoy better transport and mobility conditions”. The results show a convergence of demands for additional roads by the most affluent social groups (socio-economic

level A) and the poorest groups (socio-economic level E), which masks very different expectations. For the former (a measure cited by 42.7% of group A), it reflects a desire to be able to move around the city more quickly in their own vehicle; while for the latter (50.1% of group E), roads are an infrastructure synonymous with accessibility to the city’s resources, enabling better collective transport services. Residents of the poorest neighbourhoods would also like to see more bus stops (42.6%), as well as pavements and public spaces (43.5%)—desires that reflect the weak urbanisation in these areas, and which are not considered a priority in wealthier and well-equipped neighbourhoods (9.2% and 33.1% respectively). Conversely, we observe that cycling infrastructure is mostly requested by the wealthier classes, who are also more visible in the public and media spheres.⁷

These results illustrate the lack and/or precariousness of mobility infrastructure in peripheral areas resulting from historical neglect by the state, which we identify as a situation of degraded citizenship. They also show that this situation is reflected in specific demands made to public authorities, particularly local governments.

Citizens' relations with the state through the lens of infrastructure

Following Lemanski's (2020) work on the mediating role of infrastructure, we propose to study how the precariousness of mobility infrastructure experienced by citizens in peripheral low-income neighbourhoods relates to their relationship with the state. First, it should be noted that the majority of residents in the neighbourhoods studied refer to the state in a pluralistic manner, sometimes in general terms, sometimes through specific institutions: the Ministry of Transport, the city's urban transport authority (ATU), the police, but also local municipalities. The testimonies highlight two elements: the first concerning a (relatively common) perception of abandonment; and the second referring to a feeling of imposition (in the face of actions that affect residents but are undertaken by the authorities without consultation). The latter can also be interpreted as a type of fracture between residents and the state.

From a sense of abandonment...

The failures of the state are evident in residents' testimonies. They speak of "abandonment", "neglect" or "broken

promises". Residents believe that infrastructure problems result from the government's lack of interest, as it simply does not want to carry out work and invest in peripheral neighbourhoods. Similarly, informality and insecurity are attributed to a lack of intervention by the authorities, particularly the police, creating a situation conducive to road accidents, crime and the formation of criminal gangs. One of the points raised concerns broken promises and abandoned projects. While candidates make numerous promises during their campaigns (when visiting neighbourhoods), very few are ultimately kept once they come to power. One example is the cable car project planned for the Independencia area nine years previously (in 2013) and which was still on hold (Figure 4). In addition to generating a loss of confidence, these announcements are accompanied by land trafficking,⁸ which is also enabled by the absence of public authority.

The perception expressed by citizens is that the state is not fulfilling its responsibilities, reinforcing the idea of a degraded citizenship, not only from a material point of view, but also in terms of consideration.

Figure 4. Sign posted by the municipality of Lima announcing an urban cable car system in Lima.



The word "soon" (pronto in Spanish) can be made out under the dust, even though the project was still not approved in 2024.

Source: J. Robert, 2022

... to that of action deemed defective and negligent

While the prevailing sentiment is one of abandonment, there is also another set of criticisms levelled by residents at the actions of the authorities. These criticisms reflect discontent and a feeling that the authorities are not implementing adequate measures and fail to understand the mobility needs of residents in peripheral neighbourhoods.

Residents criticise the authorities' inability to enforce rules, whether in terms of urban planning, transport services or road traffic. This is particularly true with regard to reckless driving, both by drivers of private vehicles and public transport operators. One resident of the Independencia neighbourhood mentions poor traffic management: *“The work done by the police is not very effective. They can get a bus to move, get a car to move, but they don't have much control. There aren't enough police officers in this area. I don't know if it's up to them or the Ministry of Transport, but there's nothing forcing them to be stricter when it comes to traffic management”* (Man, around 25, mechanic).

The interviews regularly bring up coordination problems between different authorities (which are also reported in the press), denouncing acts of corruption. One resident thus comments on the relationship between the urban transport authority (ATU) and the police: *“There is no coordination. The ATU starts detaining vehicles (for inspections) in an area where there is already too much traffic, which creates congestion. And they even argue with the police”* (Man, 39, transport operator, Villa María del Triunfo). Criticism is also frequently directed at built infrastructure, particularly cycle lanes, which are impractical and often overtaken by street vendors or used for parking private vehicles. In other cases, the presence of the state is viewed with suspicion, rather than as being at the service of residents. *“The Urban Transport Authority was created as a way to generate revenue for municipalities, which is why they spend their time harassing transport operators.”* There is thus a certain solidarity or empathy with regard to informal transport.

Interviews also highlight the authorities' inability to establish an effective transport system and traffic regulations consistent with local realities. Residents are calling for the socio-economic reality of the population and local businesses to be considered and for the role of informal transport services to be recognised. Furthermore, government interventions are perceived as being imposed and even counterproductive—they can even worsen mobility conditions, leading to job

losses. State regulatory measures are seen as obstacles, and residents ask to be “left to work”. The modernisation of transport is therefore viewed as an attack on existing local forms of mobility and out of step with local realities. This resident of Villa María el Triunfo explains: *“When it comes to the public transport reform, what should be done? Not removing lines... for example, in my neighbourhood, we lost lines because the Metropolitano (high-level service bus) arrived (...). It would be good [the reform], but it doesn't suit us. They built the electric train, but what use is it to those who live near stops 10 and 11? (...) Not everything is always going to work out. If the authority changes how it provides buses, it should coordinate with the existing bus operators”* (Woman, 50, school assistant). The reorganisation of bus routes that accompanies the implementation of mass transport systems such as the BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) or the Metro can indeed result in a loss of connectivity for certain areas when traditional routes are removed and local transport needs are ignored.

The lack of consultation when such interventions are launched is perceived as a new form of neglect. A woman from Lima says: *“I wonder, if shared taxis and mototaxis [which the authorities are seeking to regulate or even eliminate] disappear, how would people get around? There are people who live at the top of the mountain. How will they get up there?”* (Woman, around 25, cleaner). Another interviewee declares: *“Make us fall in love with the Metropolitano, so that we can say it should come here, but don't remove any lines, because if those lines are removed, it will mess it up (malogra)”* (School assistant, 50, Villa María del Triunfo).

These testimonies reveal citizens' perceptions of the authorities, which combine a feeling of abandonment with numerous expectations. Citizenship is therefore expressed not only as a request to not be forgotten (any longer), but also to be taken into greater consideration (through high-quality interventions). It may therefore come as a surprise that this dissatisfaction does not translate into conflict with the authorities. We can hypothesise that this absence of conflict is due to a combination of factors: a certain resignation in the face of multiple difficulties and a loss of confidence in the state's ability to respond to these requests; institutional complexity, which makes it difficult to identify those responsible; and a system that functions despite everything, notably thanks to the informal transport sector. However, the absence of conflict does not mean that residents accept injustices. They assert their place as

citizens by criticising the public authorities for failing to assume their responsibilities.

When residents build their own infrastructure: bottom-up citizenship

Faced with daily difficulties and the limitations of public action, residents of low-income neighbourhoods develop urban self-production strategies. This responsibility stems from the social contract established between the state and low-income neighbourhoods since their creation. It responds to residents' need to improve their neighbourhoods, while also contributing to the construction of collective citizenship from the bottom up. This active citizenship takes place within the framework of a relationship with the state, particularly at the local level. Lambert (2021) and Criqui (2020), for example, show that land invasions in Lima comply with urban planning rules (plot size, open spaces for roads and networks, registers, etc.), allowing them to be recognised retrospectively by the authorities. The incorporation of these more or less explicit rules into residents' actions also reflects their hope to one day benefit from state support. The construction of bottom-up citizenship therefore refers to a form of collective participation by residents in the production of urbanisation, in constant negotiation with the state.

Staircases (and other infrastructure)

Residents organise collectively with the aim of improving their neighbourhoods. While formalising property ownership and access to essential water services have been a priority (and still are for the newest neighbourhoods), transport and mobility also play an important role.

Stairways are an iconic feature of Lima, where more than 2 million people live on hill slopes. The construction of stairways in these peripheral neighbourhoods was one of the main measures implemented by Mayor Luis Castañeda Lossio during his terms in office (2003–2010 and 2015–2018). The “revolution” or “miracle” of the stairways led to the construction of more than 5,000 structures in peripheral neighbourhoods, with the aim of improving the living conditions of residents (MML, 2018). The staircases were named “*Solidaridad*” after his political party and painted in the party's colour. This intervention responds to a populist logic of deploying particularly visible infrastructure, without redefining the social contract between the authorities and the citizens of peripheral neighbourhoods. The success of this policy (which greatly contributed to the mayor's re-election in 2015) highlights the importance of such infrastructure in the daily lives

of residents of peripheral neighbourhoods. In fact, most of the infrastructure is built by the residents themselves, sometimes with the support of the municipality or the ministry (notably through the provision of construction materials), or with help from NGOs.

The organisation of *faenas*⁹ illustrates such joint efforts (Figure 5). These collective actions may take place every Sunday, particularly in the most deprived neighbourhoods, to build stairways, but also roads and pavements. Such practices have accompanied the construction and consolidation of Lima's peripheral neighbourhoods. The result is a sense of ownership of the infrastructure and a certain pride, as highlighted by the testimony of a neighbourhood organisation leader in Independencia: “*Where I live, my stairs are right there. My neighbours, my cousins and I pooled our money, carried the materials ourselves, saved from our own pockets, and in two Sundays, we had done our faena*” (Woman, 42).

The pandemic was a particularly challenging period during which self-build projects became even more necessary since the authorities stopped construction work, as this same neighbourhood leader explains: “*We've had participatory [projects] since 2020, but with the pandemic they were put on hold, so the work was halted, and the workers' payment too. (...) Everything was cut off, everything came to a standstill. Several staircases remained, but they were in a disastrous state. So that's what we're asking for now. Thank God, an engineer, an architect and a notary came yesterday to assess the situation of the halted works.*”

Here, we find the idea of an infrastructure that is permanently under construction (Baptista, 2019), where support from public authorities is often long in coming, without ever being guaranteed.

Local transport operators also take part in infrastructure maintenance, especially on the sections they use daily, to prevent damage to their vehicles. A mototaxi driver from the Independencia neighbourhood says: “*Since there are people who fill in the potholes in the roads, I hired one, showed him the hole, and he charged me 60 soles (about 15 euros), up to 60-70 soles to fill the whole pothole. It was damaging my vehicles, wasn't it? It was like a shock absorber breaker, or even worse, and every time it rained, it got deeper and deeper. So I had the hole filled in myself, and now everyone can drive over it without problem, but it will keep deteriorating*” (Man, 40).

Figure 5. Community building of staircase in Independencia



Source: D. Román, 2021

These joint efforts can be interpreted as acts that contribute to the collective construction of a neighbourhood identity and bottom-up citizenship. Having done it “ourselves”, as a collective, is part of the process of gaining citizenship. However, it is important to note that the collective organisation of residents to meet the needs of the neighbourhood does not necessarily lead to greater social cohesion. Conflicts frequently erupt between neighbours, over giving up a space to build a staircase or due to a lack of participation in collective work.

Such self-build initiatives often complement other infrastructure management projects. They are coordinated by representatives of neighbourhood organisations and consist of seeking support from public authorities for projects of varying complexity. These range from the installation of speed bumps to the improvement of access roads, including asphaltting and building retaining walls, often in connection with the extension of water and sanitation networks and security. As the main interlocutors, neighbourhood leaders bring these collective demands to the authorities and act as driving forces in building bottom-up citizenship. While they consider their activity to be a civic duty, a commitment to their community (their neighbourhood) and to uphold the rule of law, they expect recognition from the state in return. Their actions reflect constant involvement, like a long-term battle, while state support has historically been uncertain and fluctuating.

“Popular” transport

Popular transport is defined as “transport by the people for the people”, i.e. operated by local residents for local residents (Klopp, 2021). Here again, the lack of state-run public transport services encourages the development of local private initiatives, some more formal than others. This is notably true in Lima, where artisanal transport plays a central role in mobility (Boose, 2024). The topographical conditions of low-income neighbourhoods, with their steep slopes and narrow, often unpaved roads, are also difficult to navigate for so-called modern transport, and only mototaxis (three-wheeled motorcycles) are able to serve certain areas. With the pandemic, the supply of informal transport increased, particularly mototaxis and shared taxis (taxi vehicles that follow defined routes and can take several customers at a time). This activity has historically been a refuge for employment in times of economic crisis.

Several arguments in favour of such transport emerge from the testimonies of residents who value their temporal and territorial coverage, flexibility, the possibility of travelling with luggage, etc. Users also consider these modes of transport as a way of coping with insecurity: they are the only transport available after a certain time of day, when it becomes dangerous to walk the streets. A mototaxi driver in Independencia comments: “You know that the danger you face on the way home is a real

Figure 6. Mototaxi in Villa Maria



Source: J Robert, 2022

danger. (...) Sometimes you see crime right outside your front door. So what do they do? They take a moto[taxi]. And what does it do? It drops them off at their doorstep” (Man, 40). Some users also develop specific strategies, such as this woman from Villa Maria del Triunfo:

“I always ride with people I know [in mototaxis and shared taxis], I don’t ride with strangers. I ride with people I know, people I see working every day and whom I know” (Woman, 53, cook). Mototaxi drivers are also local residents and are sometimes called upon for special services: for elderly or disabled people, to make home deliveries, or to take people to hospital in the event of an accident. Beyond being a public transport service, they “do favours” for their neighbours, in a context where public services are lacking.

These self-build initiatives and mobility services fall outside the scope of public action, but despite a number of limitations, they meet the daily needs of residents in low-income

settlements. They illustrate a way of operating and creating the material conditions to exercise certain rights. It is partly through these infrastructures that collective identity is created and, by the same token, a certain form of citizenship at the neighbourhood level. Here, we thus find the diverging perceptions of citizenship described by Lemanski (2022): on the one hand that of the state, which considers these initiatives problematic (a source of insecurity, lack of compliance with standards, etc.) on the other hand that of citizens, who are working to improve their housing in the face of government failures, and hoping for better support from the authorities in the future.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of perceptions of mobility infrastructure and the role of the state in the low-income settlements of Lima shows that current infrastructure challenges are the result of a specific, inherited social contract. What began with the issue of housing in the 1960s, in a context of high migration and urban expansion, has extended to the development of low-income neighbourhoods and encompasses mobility. In this context, the absence, inefficiency or negligence of public authorities has led to the organisation, joint efforts and work of grassroots organisations and residents to improve their mobility and living conditions. The authorities intervene on an ad hoc basis, in response to demands from organised groups that have already invested in infrastructure development.

The concept of infrastructural citizenship (Lemanski, 2020) therefore highlights the mediating role played by infrastructure between the state and residents of low-income neighbourhoods on the outskirts of cities. We emphasise the importance of analysing relations between the state and citizens from a long-term perspective. This temporal depth and its implications allow us to understand how residents see themselves as citizens and in relation to the state. It explains that compensating for the shortcomings of public authorities is part of the process of building bottom-up citizenship, understood as the collective legitimacy to live in the city, and only then to demand equal treatment. Examining mobility infrastructure through the lens of citizenship also makes it possible to go beyond simply observing inequalities and to understand its political role.

While Lemanski (2020) emphasises the differences in perception between the state and citizens, our analysis also shows that citizens’ perceptions and actions can be explained by a particular relationship with the state, with commonly accepted

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tensions. Mobility infrastructure allows us to illustrate this process of building bottom-up citizenship. This form of citizenship covers several registers of relations between citizens and the state: 1) discontent and resignation; 2) self-determination and “do-it-yourself”; and finally, 3) constant negotiation with the state in the hope of greater recognition.

As a number of services function and allow residents to get by, the limitations of the state’s presence are normalised. Due to such unequal access to services, the discontent and resignation expressed by residents in relation to the state reflect a form of degraded citizenship (first register). In contrast, the dynamics of the popular city are a source of legitimate pride for its residents, who have overcome many difficulties and built facilities on their own (second register). It is therefore the residents who set the rules of their citizenship when they become providers of public services by organising collective transport solutions, building stairways and criticising the projects proposed by the authorities. Finally (third register), this process also includes negotiations with the state, particularly with regard to access to land and housing ownership, which is synonymous with a transition from the status of invader to that of citizen (Degregori, Blondet, Lynch, 1986). The historical marginalisation of low-income neighbourhoods, stigmatised as “informal”, has also generated a sense of transgression among their inhabitants, delegitimising the possibility of claiming rights and services like everyone else.

Citizens’ actions are part of a drive to improve the neighbourhood, but are also done in the hope of receiving greater support from the state, and gradually being treated on an equal footing with other city dwellers. This is where we can see the full extent of the process of producing the popular city. However, the construction of this bottom-up citizenship can also be interpreted as constituting a “counterpublic” (Fraser, 1990), a process by which residents build a collective identity at the neighbourhood level in response to their exclusion from the dominant publics. In the case of transport system reforms, the state is seen as an external agent that comes to implement changes from above, some of which are perceived as harmful from below. In fact, the modernisation project promoted by the state, particularly at the national level, never seems to reach the city outskirts. Nor does the state appear legitimate in carrying out this project when it affects the hard-won living conditions of residents in low-income neighbourhoods. Relations are closer at the local level, but are marred by the limited capacity of the authorities to intervene.

Here, citizenship is described by residents as the result of collective struggles to remind local authorities of their responsibilities and to assert their right to live in the city.

It follows that if state actors aim to reclaim space in the face of the “informal” logic that has dominated the production of mobility infrastructure in low-income neighbourhoods, it must rebuild the historically unequal foundations of the social contract on which the idea of citizenship was built. While urban struggles have led to the conquest of urban space in cities such as Lima, the challenge facing state representatives at all levels today is to gain legitimacy in working-class neighbourhoods. Undertaking a reform of the transport system could present an opportunity to strengthen the integration of citizens, provided that existing bottom-up citizenship processes are taken into account, otherwise the exclusion experienced by the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods will be exacerbated.

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NOTES

(1) Here, we understand the state in a general sense as a public authority. Later in the text, we will specify different levels of public action for a more detailed analysis of the relationships between citizens and the various representatives of the state.

(2) <https://modural.hypotheses.org/le-projet> (accessed on 23/04/2025).

(3) This involves, for example, the implementation of alternative drinking water supply systems (condominium systems or autonomous and progressive mini-networks), which are more flexible and less costly, to enable better territorial coverage.

(4) The four monographs produced in Lima are available in Spanish: <https://modural.hypotheses.org/2329> (accessed on 23/04/2025).

(5) The percentage of dissatisfaction with public transport is 29.9% in Lima (Daude et al., 2017).

(6) This survey of citizens' perception of quality of life has been conducted annually (since 2010) with approximately 1,000 individuals, representative of five major areas of the Lima metropolitan area.

(7) It should be noted that, unlike other Latin American cities such as Bogota, cycling is not a significant means of transport for the low-income classes of Lima.

(8) Land trafficking is a practice whereby groups of criminals seize land considered by the authorities to be unbuildable and sell it.

(9) *Faena* is a term of Andean origin used to describe work carried out by the community (outside of working in the fields). With the arrival of migrants to the outskirts of cities, the term has been adopted in an urban context to refer to activities carried out by residents to improve their neighbourhoods (digging trenches for water pipes, levelling roads, building stairs, etc.).

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Abstract – Jérémy Robert, Pablo Vega-Centeno, Danae Roman – “We Made it by Ourselves”: Citizenship through the Lens of Mobility Infrastructure in Lima’s Low-Income Peripheries

This article examines the notion of citizenship in Lima’s peripheries through the lens of mobility infrastructure. Less studied than housing or essential services such as water and electricity, these infrastructures nevertheless represent a pressing necessity and reflect significant socio-spatial inequalities. We use the concept of infrastructural citizenship to analyse the relationships between residents and the state and their evolution over time. Rather than a universal achievement, we demonstrate the existence of differentiated citizenship and a process of construction of bottom-up citizenship, resulting from a specific social contract between the state and residents of the peripheries. The article highlights the temporalities in which citizenship is expressed or enacted in relation to infrastructure in terms of access, construction and maintenance. Beyond the legal definition of citizenship, it explains the multiple forms of the state (depending on the levels of action) and citizen involvement. Finally, it questions the place of the “informal”, particularly self-construction processes and “popular” transport, in urban production and as a form of building citizenship from the bottom up.

Keywords: citizenship, mobility infrastructures, popular city, social contract, Latin American cities, Lima

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Résumé – Jérémy Robert, Pablo Vega-Centeno, Danae Roman – « Nous l’avons fait nous-mêmes » : La citoyenneté au prisme des infrastructures de mobilité dans les quartiers populaires des périphéries de Lima

Cet article interroge la notion de citoyenneté dans les quartiers périphériques de Lima au prisme des infrastructures de mobilité. Moins étudiées que la question du logement ou des services essentiels comme l’eau et l’électricité, ces infrastructures représentent pourtant une nécessité prégnante et traduisent d’importantes des inégalités socio-spatiales. Nous mobilisons le concept de citoyenneté infrastructurale pour analyser les relations entre les habitants et l’État et leur évolution dans le temps. Plutôt qu’un acquis universel, nous montrons l’existence d’une citoyenneté différenciée et d’un processus de construction de la citoyenneté par le bas, qui résultent d’un certain contrat social entre l’État et les habitants des quartiers périphériques. L’article met alors en évidence les temporalités dans lesquelles s’exprime ou s’acte la citoyenneté en lien avec les infrastructures, en termes d’accès, de construction ou de maintenance. Au-delà du face-à-face citoyens/État sous-entendu par la définition juridique de la citoyenneté, il souligne aussi les formes multiples de l’État (selon les niveaux d’action) et des implications citoyennes. Nous interrogeons finalement la place de l’informel, notamment à travers les processus d’autoconstruction et le transport « populaire », dans la production urbaine et comme forme de construction d’une citoyenneté par le bas.

Mots-clés : citoyenneté, infrastructures de mobilité, ville populaire, contrat social, métropoles latino-américaines, Lima