

CASE STUDY 9

FROM LEFTOVERS TO TAKEOVER: LATENT INSURGENCY AMIDST THE SYSTEM'S REMNANTS

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Saladillo stream is one of the two urban streams that gave the city the original name of Rosario city: *Pago de los Arroyos* – in English, *site of the streams*. During the first 50 years after Rosario's virtual foundation in 1835, the stream gave place to multiple productive and recreational activities located on the peripheries of the city. Meat production, fishing, and the port attracted local people and foreign immigrants, affirming the identity of what is known as “The South of Rosario.” However, in the past 20 years, the stream has been increasingly polluted and abandoned by official policies, turning a blind eye to the spill of glyphosate and other agricultural chemicals, the leak of industrial waste, the location of dumps and landfills, and the illegal production of bricks on its banks. This process of intoxication has been accompanied by rapid growth and overcrowding of informal settlements. Nowadays, around 1,000 families are settled in flood-prone areas, without any physical, social or environmental infrastructure. Besides, 30% of the people who live on the basins collect, classify and recycle waste inside their homes or in the immediate surroundings. This generation and everyday contact with toxicities in the stream basins could spread and have irreversible negative effects on the health of human and non-human entities (Figure 1).

The *Matéricos Periféricos*' production on Saladillo Stream began with the research project called “Architecture of the Periphery” that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the consequent reappearance of neoliberal policies in Latin America and the dissolution of the Welfare State in Argentina. At the end of 1999, the housing deficit in Rosario had reached 20.000 units, and peripheries began to transform into a fabric of polluted green infrastructures, dumps, landfills, encroached informal settlements, and new hybrid uses. The group decided to abandon the formal city and propose possible futures for Rosario's peripheries through architectural and urban projects.



FIGURE 1 Ana Valderrama, *Las Flores (flowers) Neighborhood*, 2005. Digital photograph.

The *Great Argentinian Crisis*¹ – which reached its peak in 2001 with the resignation of the president – anticipated a future of accumulative poverty and toxicity and of definitive abandonment of the periphery by the Government. After 2001, the research turned into a platform to monitor the evolution of the social production of habitat and the intersections with material mobilizations. The periphery’s materials, that is, the waste, and the leftovers of the system were the main sources for research and design. *Matéricos Periféricos* developed interpretative tools such as maps and diagrams to record those processes, as well as participatory methodologies to work with communities. From then until now, those recording and participatory tools contributed to producing land-based and situated proposals related to social and environmental justice.

Between 2005 and 2008, the “soy boom” provoked new displacements of the poor towards the peripheries. The group signed an agreement with the Rosario Government to explore alternatives on the banks of Saladillo Stream where informal settlements, dumps, landfills and illegal production of bricks increased and interwoven dramatically while glyphosate and industrial pollutants circulated through them. The group led a series of workshops that proposed a chain of green spaces that would recover 131 hectares of land for public use along with social housing, garbage separation plants, health, educational, religious, and sportive facilities, clean brick production plants, and community gardens. Those projects constituted the official Master

Plan of Saladillo Stream, although none of them ever materialised. The Plan became the very fetish of local urban planning.

Around the year 2008, with a certain pessimism about the capacity of the Government and urban planning to resolve the issues, *Matéricos Periféricos* appealed to the culture of “doing with our hands, and doing with what it is at hand.” The group decided to actively participate in the transformation of territories in social or environmental emergencies and created design-build workshops. During the workshops, professors, students, social organisations and local communities co-produced community infrastructures made of recycled, donated and discarded materials collected from the place. The workshops were a highly effective instrument with which to reinforce awareness of environmental pollution and risks, underpin local institutions in their community activities, challenge state agency, and activate cooperative processes. Over time, some of the artefacts have forced public interventions otherwise unimagined. In addition, the processes involved in the workshops helped to build community bonds and to unveil insurgent features latent in the ground.

The extraordinary foreign debt acquired by the Argentinian government in 2018 and the Global Pandemic increased the number of people below the poverty line to 45% of the Argentinian population and the housing deficit in Rosario had reached 50.000 units. In 2019, the Rosario government (Municipalidad de Rosario 2002) officially recognized that they were burying 800 tons of Solid Urban Waste (SUW) per day in landfills. Of the 800 tons of that SUW, 58% were organic material, 32% were reusable material (plastic, paper, glass, metals, cartons and wood), and 10% were non-recyclable metals. This meant that 250 tons per day of material were “missed” in the cycle of circulation. Nevertheless, as Lecitra (2010) pointed out, there was a parallel informal circuit of SUW that mobilised 100 tons of SUW per day. This parallel informal circuit is carried out by *Cartoneros, Carreros y Recicladores*—in English, *cardboard collectors, cart collectors and recyclers*. In 2019, there were approximately 3000 in Rosario, and a third of them lived on the banks of Saladillo Stream.

At the end of 2019, *Matéricos Periféricos* started a new project called “Map of industrial solid waste. Towards a circular model of re-insertion of urban waste into the productive system.” The project (in progress) consists of a georeferenced survey, a catalogue, a digital application for the management of solid waste located in the peripheries, and a series of technological developments to contribute to shifting the traditional *cradle to grave* as defined by McDonough and Braungart (2002). It is expected to contribute to a continuous industrial cycle in Rosario by providing precise information about the materials available in the periphery and innovative technologies for the construction and design industry. Equally important, the project plans participatory engagement and collaboration with *Cartoneros, Carreros y Recicladores* to ensure articulation of knowledge, mutual access to scientific results and the generation of safe conditions for their work.

But *Cartoneros, Carreros y Recicladores* are not only individual collectors and recyclers. During the Argentinian crisis in 2001, they had an important political role:

through demonstrations in the streets and solidarity activities, they were one of the main organised groups who contributed to the end of Neoliberal project of the nineties in Argentina, along with *Piqueteros* and other social and political organisations.² Since 2011, they have been part of the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP).³ CTEP is nowadays one of the main organised forces of resistance to the violence that the colonial-imperial system exerts through the practices of accumulation by dispossession combined with the environmental pollution in our country.

Notes

- 1 For more information about the *Great Argentinian Crisis* see Brenta, Noemí and Mario Rapoport. (2003). “El FMI y la Argentina en los años 90: de la hiperinflación a la hiperdesocupación.” In *Los guardianes del dinero. Las políticas del FMI en la Argentina*, 67–100. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Editorial Norma.
- 2 For more information about the role of *Piqueteros* see Retamozo, Martín. (2006). “El movimiento de los trabajadores desocupados en Argentina: cambios estructurales, subjetividad y acción colectiva en el orden social neoliberal.” *Argumentos* 19 (50): 145–166, https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0187-57952006000100007
- 3 For more information about CTEP see <https://ctepargentina.org/nacio-la-utep/>

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