



Tomorrow's CITIES

Urban Risk in Transition

The Emergence of Covid-19 in Ecuador

Jonathan Menoscal and Marco Córdova, Flasco Ecuador

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The emergence of Covid-19 in Ecuador: An approach from disaster risk management and its relation with the Tomorrow's Cities Hub

In Ecuador different actions have been seen in relation to the health emergency caused by Covid-19. The State has been improvising its decisions without a clear horizon. Meanwhile, although the majority of the urban citizenry has complied with the provisions of staying at home, a large part of the population has neglected this request, either out of necessity or simply ignoring the provisions. The results are obvious. The State has passed economic measures focused on attracting resources, mostly from the salary of public servants and the acquisition of more debt, while the capacities to contain the expansion of the virus have been overwhelmed, with a collapsed health system and a national risk and emergency management service that improvises its actions day by day. As expected, those most affected by all this are the poorest population: those who do not have the resources to access private health services, who expose themselves to risk day by day to obtain resources to support their families and the population with low educational levels that dismiss the problem and its possible repercussions.

The mismanagement of the crisis, in a very preliminary analysis, may result from the deinstitutionalization of the State in recent years, where, apart from the reduction of resources in the health sector, the way in which the territory is managed and manages risks has changed. Until 2018 Ecuador had a Risk Management Secretariat with the rank of ministry, which was strengthened following the 2016 earthquake, taking into account its organizational structure and institutional objectives to manage disaster risk in all its phases, with emphasis on preparation. With the change to the National Risk and Emergency Management Service, not only was the institution's resources and competencies taken away, but its focus became on attending emergencies, not preparing for an event. The National Disaster Response Plan and the manual of the COE Emergency Operations Committee, which are activated in times of emergency and disaster like the current one, has not been able to contain the magnitude of Covid-19 and has become practically inapplicable.

For its part, the planning of the territory and the provision of services has also changed in recent years. Planning has been, in recent years, the basis on which the country's development model is based, led by the National Secretariat of Planning and Development Senplades, the institution in charge (among other things) of generating

instruments and guidelines where they are proposed and prioritizing the policies, objectives, goals and indicators for this purpose. Senplades was where the presence of public services in the territories was managed, for example, hospitals, schools, the reduction of economic and social gaps, among others. With the disappearance of Senplades and the creation of Planifica Ecuador, a technical management office rather than planning for development, the focus and strength that was being given to planning that includes risk management has decreased.



The cityscape of Quito

Thus, this crisis has made visible several problems that the country has at all levels, from the central State and local governments in risk management (in this case biological risk), the management of their territories, the provision of assets and services and the

crisis in general, where serious cases of corruption have been seen in the acquisition of personal protection material, etc., up to structural problems in society, such as poverty, poor access to education, health, decent and quality housing, among others.

The challenges for the post-emergency period are big for all actors, but mainly for the vulnerable population, primarily in terms of access to basic services and the generation of capacities that strengthen their resilience. Based on the aforementioned, the Tomorrow's Cities Hub can exercise a role of interest both in research and in the generation of proposals for decision makers, as well as for the general population.

An objective of academics, decision makers and society in general should be focusing on making an analysis of public policy, governance and institutions, not only of disaster risk management, but also of territorial planning and public health in order to propose a new agenda for the formulation of inclusive policies that are effective and sustainable. At the same time, a geographical analysis of the impact of Covid-19 should be made, identifying the most affected areas, what type of damage was generated and what was the response of the population and local governments to the emergency. This socio-spatial analysis can configure a participatory exercise for the development of inclusive plans and projects, which allow the vulnerable population to access services and public spaces, generating conditions of resilience not only in the face of negative effects of environmental or anthropic phenomena, but also in the face of biological risks such as Covid-19. This can help us to understand risk from another perspective and reformulate its conceptualization and management. Some questions about the role of the State, health policies and public investment, for example, could be clarified and better supported, highlighting the potential of approaching the Covid-19 crisis from a risk perspective.