"Gentrification, urban governance and (new) urban challenges before and after the COVID-19 pandemic: The cases of Lima and Amsterdam"

Mirtha Lorena Del Castillo Durand, University of Amsterdam (Cedla), Human Geography and Urban Studies

The purpose of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis of the discourses and strategies of the actors involved in gentrification processes before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. By developing multi-sited ethnographic research in Amsterdam and Lima, I am to analyse how different institutional frameworks and socio-political environments influence gentrification trajectories in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. I depart from the premise that the rationalities that emerged to reorganize urban space after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis resemble the ones unfolded after the 2008-crisis. Recalling the aftermath of the 2008-crisis, many cities experienced a new-round of neoliberal urban restructuring to overcome the disruption of capital flows at that time. The two cities were chosen because since 2008, they experienced the entrenchment of neoliberal urban policies, which resulted in an intense commodification of urban space. In the case of Amsterdam, urban policies were re-oriented to favour private investment and promote home-ownership to the detriment of the social rental stock. In the case of Lima, urban policies empowered real-estate developers, by allowing them to construct high-rise buildings of micro-apartments aimed at middle-income sectors. These cities, in contrast, have opposing urban governance models. While Amsterdam is considered a benchmark for urban planning and social housing, Lima has the highest levels of political and territorial fragmentation among the Latin American metropolises, resulting in a weak capacity of the local government to steer efficient urban and social housing policies. By comparing Amsterdam and Lima, I ask how a new round of urban restructuring is redirecting the pre-existing gentrification trajectories and what socio-spatial effects are being experienced by residents of both cities. The two cities are located in different positions in the epistemological production of urban theory, so their comparison contributes to recent debates around "the assemblages" between the centres of epistemological production in the Global North and the variegated urban geographies in the Global South. This research offers a transnational understanding of how subjectivities travel along with the neoliberal urban project from the Global North to the Global South. The contextualized responses to global crises are visualized in the specific gentrification processes, symbolic violence and stigmatization of less-privileged groups.