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Improvising a market, making a model: social housing policy in Chile

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Abstract

This paper explores processes of market creation in Chile, firstly, in the 1980s as a market for social housing was initially introduced and, 30 years later, as existing market arrangements were adapted to organize housing reconstruction after the 2010 earthquake. Looking in detail at these two cases, this paper describes a type of relationship between economics and economic processes which deviates significantly from the currently widely discussed performativity of economics. Instead, a process of economic improvisation is identified that involves the composition of market arrangements without a pre-existing economic theory or model of the economic processes at stake. Improvisation, as this paper shows, is a key under-theorized element of neoliberal transformation processes in Chile and elsewhere, and crucial to understanding neoliberal action in critical moments. The paper also proposes distinguishing different modes of economic improvisation and how these become economic models.

Keywords:

- marketization
- improvisation
- performativity
- governmentality
- housing
- disasters

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Notes

1 This study is part of a larger research project focusing on different policy instruments, governmental arrangements and urban projects introduced in the context of the reconstruction process, for which more than 80 state officials, expert professionals and citizen representatives have been interviewed. Research has been carried out in 2010, 2012 and 2013 with the help of three assistants, William Osorio, Sabine Biedermann and Patricio Flores.

Additional information

Funding

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Notes on contributors

Ignacio Farías is a senior research fellow at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center and research associate of ICSO, Universidad Diego Portales, Chile. He has been a visiting scholar at Harvard University (2013), Goldsmiths College, University of London (2010) and New York University (2007). His main research interests are in the fields of urban studies, science and technology studies and cultural sociology. He has done extensive research on urban disasters and reconstruction processes, urban consumption and tourism, as well as the creative sectors of urban economies. He is co-editor of *Urban assemblages: How actor-network theory changes urban studies* (Routledge, 2008) and author of papers in journals, including *Sociological Review*, *European Journal of Social Theory*, *Space and Culture*, *CITY* and *Mobilities*.

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