



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Panamanian Protests against Casco Viejo Development Projects, 2010-2014

Time period notes: *The Cinta Costera had just finished in Colon and was now moving to Casco Viejo*

January 9th

2010

to: February 2nd

2015

Country: Panama

Location City/State/Province: *Casco Viejo (Old Town)*

Location Description: *Historic cultural destination, also known as Casco Antigua*

Goals:

To stop Phase III of "Cinta Costera", a plan that would create changes to Casco Viejo such as highways and a landfill

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 4th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 026. Paint as protest › Graffiti

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Panamanian citizens and foreigners against the proposal

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Patrizia Pinzon (Association of Friends and Neighbors of Casco Viejo)

Partners:

Orgullo: Panama Pro Patrimonio Historico ("No a La Construcción De La Cinta Costera Alrededor De Casco Viejo" Facebook page), Fundacion Calicanto (globalgiving.org page)

External allies:

The International Council on Monuments and Sites Panama, Panamanian Association of Business Executives (APEDE), National Business Council (Conep), National Council of Organized Workers (Conato), Citizens' Alliance for Justice and the Foundation for Due Process

Involvement of social elites:

Donald Trump (side of opposition, potential investor), Justine Pasek, Raisa Banfield, Karen Chalmers, Rosa Maria Britton, Alex Medela

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Association of Friends and Neighbors of Casco Viejo

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Fundacion Calicanto
- Orgullo: Panama Pro Patrimonio Historico

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 308 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President Ricardo Martinelli, the Panamanian government, Norberto Odebrecht (Brazilian company), The Ministry of Public Works (MOP) and Minister Federico Suárez, the governmental Office for Casco Antiguo (OCA), the National Assembly and Sergio Gálvez

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

CC3 counter-protests, stopping contributions to organizations that opposed CC3

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Casco Viejo, a historic district of Panama, was designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site in 1997. The popular cultural destination had long sustained a modest infrastructure, until the Panamanian government proposed to extend a national revitalizing plan known as “Cinta Costera” to the district in 2010. Originally presented to the public as a plan for a tunnel, President Ricardo Martinelli and the Brazilian company that was commissioned for the project, Norberto Odebrecht, abruptly changed the arrangement to a modern oceanside bridge or landfill. Either large scale change would threaten Casco Viejo’s official World Heritage status and “compromise the historic integrity of the neighborhood.” Citizens quickly began to advocate against the change.

In March of 2010, UNESCO representatives travelled to Panama to discuss this third phase of the Cinta Costera (CC3). The previous two phases consisted of construction works projects largely in Panama City. Patrizia Pinzon, President of the Association of Friends and Neighbors of Casco Viejo (AVACA), helped use this opportunity to mobilize citizens in speaking out against the project. In what came to be called “Balconies That Talk”, residents hung banners from their balconies with messages such as “THE CASCO NEEDS: Continuity – Respect – Commitment” for the UNESCO members to see. However, despite being hung on private property, Mayor Jario Moran classified the banners as “publicity” and issued subpoenas to residents including Pinzon on 17 March. The balcony protests extended into street protests as Casco Viejo citizens joined together. By 13 April, President Martinelli approved a law that would criminalize protests that closed off streets, threatening up to two years of prison time for participants. Horrified by the denial of freedom of speech, figures such as Ruben Castillo (president of the Panamanian Association of Business Executives), Gaspar Garcia de Paredes (president of the National Business Council), and members of the American organization Citizens’ Alliance for Justice and the Foundation for Due Process expressed their disappointment in the government’s intolerance.

On social media, the campaign organizers began to reach out to young citizens, calling on them to advocate against the CC3. AVACA released a series of public service announcement videos of celebrities speaking out against change on 17 May, 2011. Orgullo, an organization dedicated to preserving Panamanian culture, launched the Facebook page “No a La Construcción De La

Cinta Costera Alrededor De Casco Viejo” (“No to the Construction of the Cinta Costera Around Casco Viejo” in English), and began to organize, share photos, and spread information concerning the ongoing protests. On 10 October, 2011, the “I Love Casco Viejo” photo campaign began on the page, where individual protesters used their hands to form a heart with a caption expressing support of an unchanged district. Fundacion Calicanto set up an anti-CC3 page on globalgiving.org to track progress and collect donations to support the campaign.

Counter-protests and groups supporting CC3 began to form, but many citizens quickly became suspicious of government manipulation as the crowds were overwhelmingly composed of poorer citizens from neighboring ghettos. On one particular counter-protest on 3 March, 2011, Sergio Galvez of the National Assembly allegedly “had to pay \$10 a head instead of the previous \$6” and gave each participant a blue shirt and balloon. Few expressed surprise at the exploitation of citizens for government propaganda. The Ministry of Public Works announced on May 25th that the government and Odebrecht were still unsure about exactly how to implement the third phase of Cinta Costera, for which they had a \$776.9 million contract. Most protesters believed that the government still intended to construct a landfill and a bridge of highways circumventing the district and connecting Avenida Balboa with the Avenida de las Poetas. Several days later, a survey of 3,500 panamanian participants concluded that over 70% of people were opposed to risking the status of the World Heritage Site by creating infrastructures that would obstruct the natural oceanside views, and lower property values, all predicted side-effects of such a project.

In June of 2011, graphic artists created popular humorous campaign posters which superimposed images of obstructive modern technology over images of famous historical sites, such as a massive highway running through Stonehenge. “Save our Heritage!” protests occurred beachside on 14 June and 25 June, with Pinzon and protesters waving white flags and lying on the ground to form the words “SOS UNESCO” with their bodies. On 24 June in the pouring rain, Fundacion Calicanto (an organization of Orgullo) organized a peaceful march with environmentalists that closed Avenida Balboa for two hours and drew mainstream media and over 500 participants. By 7 July, UNESCO advised the government to discontinue construction for six months to truly consider the conservation of Casco Viejo, but government officials insisted that “everything would work out fine” and secretly planned to start the project.

On 21 November of 2011, activists organized an improvised information center inside a hotel, where an event was being held to honor Odebrecht for their excellence in “Sustainable Development”. They handed out anti-CC3 leaflets and disrupted speakers at the ceremony until they were removed by national police. Marches and other forms of protest continued into the new year, and in January of 2012 many small business owners and their employees were told that they would have to close for the season in order to allow the construction process to begin efficiently. The construction infuriated many protesters because the government had lied to UNESCO about a construction start date, and a lot of construction seemed unsupervised. Orgullo wrote a letter to the Director of UNESCO to alert them of the crime against World Heritage. On 15 August, 2012, protesters symbolically dressed up as pirates and posed for pictures with police officers, to express that the government was finishing the destruction of Casco Viejo (the historical significance is that the district was once destroyed by pirates in the 17th century and then rebuilt). On 20 September, a petition to deconstruct the beginnings of the CC3 was launched online and a beach surfing event in favor of such a petition was organized by the Facebook group. The next week, the government held a press conference to make an announcement regarding the project, and the organizers were allegedly caught on footage by local news stations paying citizens to appear as a supportive crowd. Despite this sustained campaign against the CC3, it became clearer to many that the campaign efforts were slowly losing ground.

Construction continued into 2013, and on 28 January the Ministry of Public Works released a slightly new design proposal for the remaining construction. Odebrecht and President Martinelli now seemed to only be focused on constructing a highway system to act as a roundabout over the ocean, which would distribute traffic, implement pedestrian walkways, and create 500 new parking spaces. This construction was completed by April, and on 9 April an opening ceremony was accompanied by fireworks and speeches, with little visible opposition present. Campaigners generally seemed to accept the finale of the CC3 as a half-win; though they failed in reaching their objectives, ultimately the plans to build a landfill were canceled, and the district they loved remained as an official World Heritage Site. “No a La Construcción De La Cinta Costera Alrededor De Casco Viejo” had reached 30,000 followers. On 3 February, 2015, those who were involved in the campaign attended a family beach day

organized by AVACA. The participants acknowledged the disappointment, but also celebrated this new beginning in Casco Viejo.

Research Notes

Influences:

(1) Protests of Phase II building expansion, where citizens first began to hang banners denouncing Cinta Costera

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