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Territorial planning and metropolitan development in Mexico

María Eugenia Negrete Salas*

Introduction

World's metropolis are becoming more important for various reasons: territorial extension, demographic concentration, economic performance and political relevance, as well as the role they play in the global scenario. Nonetheless, governments will have to turn them into privileged areas for development, provide them with services and provide decent living conditions to its inhabitants and face its limited capacities.

Challenges derived from the metropolitan condition of cities are complex, they not only represent a change in the size of needs that need to be addressed, but also represent the coordinated involvement of different authorities whose powers overlap in different areas; spaces where these powers are manifested do not necessarily correspond to the political-administrative units in charge of managing them.

The national context shows that planning and action instruments used by administrative authorities to face metropolitan challenges' characteristics and size are clearly insufficient. This essay states the importance of developing regulations to allow organized occupation and sustainable land use in the medium and long term thanks to a "Territorial Planning" process. And even though this is a national task, it becomes more important in the so-called Metropolitan Areas. The most used example will be the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City,¹ which cannot go unmentioned due to its national, regional and even international importance.

The first section of this essay describes the current situation of the country's metropolitan spaces, its characteristics and efforts intended to find an

* PhD in Geography, Université de Toulouse - Le Mirail. Coordinates the postgraduate Urbanism Program in Colegio de Mexico and is also a member of the National Researchers System.

¹ Also called Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico.

appropriate form of government which can be effectively implemented. The second section criticizes instruments used in territorial planning systems which are the basis for the urgent need to carry out a serious process and long-term metropolitan vision to regulate Territorial Organization in a natural and articulate manner

I. Metropolitan challenges

Territorial dis-order in Mexico:

The Mexican Republic takes up a very big surface (almost 2 million square kilometers) and is full of riches, natural and social diversity which weave a rich mosaic of regions and ecosystems which need to be completely acknowledged and exploited. However, the current scenario is nothing like this and the future is uncertain: loss of biodiversity, badly distributed water resources, immoderate felling of forests and jungles, underdeveloped fishing, food insecurity, etc.

On the other hand, the human settlement system is characterized by a wide range of localities, from a highly concentrated locality –one of the world's biggest cities- Mexico City to a hundred thousand very small localities with dispersed spatial distribution which makes provision of infrastructure and services to the population very difficult (Garza, 2003).

Mexico's physical and human characteristics justify the existence of different political institutions focused on solving territory-related problems. Even though there are a lot of government territory-related policies and programs; *urban*, *environmental* and *agricultural* areas have influenced the unbalanced result of national territorial development in the last couple of years.² Land occupation dynamics have been very alarming in almost every region and city in the country since the year 2000. These are acutely manifested in urban peripheries which have received an uncontrollable expansion of urbanized areas; frequently on their productive agricultural lands. It is an unclear transition towards sparse and fragmented urbanization which means drifting from sustainability goals. In only ten years, 2000-2010, the average urban density in metropolitan areas went from 124.0 to 111.5 inhabitants per hectare (Conapo, 2000 y 2010).

Similarly, environmental concerns have increased, strengthened by the growing vulnerability caused by the possibility of natural disasters and the effects of Climatic Change in national and local areas. This change represents a worldwide red alert which has been there since the creation and strengthening of institutions such as the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT; Spanish: Secretaría del Medio Ambiente

² To address metropolitan issues let's leave behind the agricultural area and speak only of it from an environmental point of view.

y Recursos Naturales) in the year 2000; in disaster attention and prevention programs and most recently the issuing of the 2012 Climatic Change Law.

The speed of these and other disorganized processes has resulted in obsolete territorial planning instruments. It is worthy to mention that there is not an updated version of the National Urban Development and Territorial Planning Program which includes important and high impact territorial elements such as social housing or infrastructure investment programs launched in 2006 and renewed in 2013.³ Even though environmental policies have been consolidated and diversified in Mexico, the environmental-city relationship has not been addressed appropriately.

Complex urban and environmental dynamics require the State to have a body to regulate territorial development and establish roads to address territorial occupation according to their use and based on goals put forward by the "Territory Project" in local, regional and national levels.

Territorial public policies are developed under an institutional framework and we must recognize that there is no **explicit territorial policy** or the support of comprehensive consensual approach on this key dimension for development. We have a set of institutions which affect territorial development with an endless number of normative instruments which are born from their operational needs but unfortunately have serious problems which will be discussed later.

A new opportunity can be born from the recently created Ministry of Agrarian, Territorial and Urban Development (SEDATU); however, its goals are strictly legal land certainty-oriented (including the Sub-ministry of Territorial Organization) although it seems it will go to waste.

Traditional and emerging problems in metropolitan areas

The evolution of the urbanization process in Mexico has importance areas like the metropolitan ones, their numeric importance has grown from 26 in 1980 to 59 in 2010. This last year 56.8% of the country's population lived in some locality classified as metropolitan. There is also a positive relation between the metropolis' size and its economic performance; these have greater GDP per capita than other smaller cities (See Map 1).

The metropolis' demographic and economic evolution goes hand in hand with the effervescence of new and renewed problems in these big concentrations. The traditional topics in metropolitan agenda are the

³ The last program was the 2001-2006 National Urban Development and Regional Planning Programme (PNDUOT; Spanish: Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano y Ordenación Territorial) published in 2001 at the same time massive production of social housing began.

provision of public services which require multimillion resources due to the size of the population and territorial extension of these settlements and the adoption of more efficient and innovative technologies. We can also mention the exponential difficulty to provide drinking water, sanitation, distribution of energy and management of residues, etc.

Mapa 1 Zonas Metropolitanas 2010



Source: Delimitación de las Zonas Metropolitanas de México, CONAPO, SEDESOL e INEGI

The population's need to have decent housing is bigger in metropolitan areas which requires strategic approaches which take into account land reserves for urban growth and different situations and family budgets to handle alternatives, especially for poor people. It is equally important to develop financing schemes to buy or rent and allow effective access to decent housing conditions for every segment of this market.

Relative location of homes, workplaces, basic services like education and health are key aspects in the population's quality of life and a topic which has been ignored by our country's housing policies (Eibenschutz R. & C. Goya, 2010).

Population's mobility is understood as the real capacity they have to go to places they want, it is an intra-metropolitan need and the right of every citizen.⁴ The latter allows citizens to access opportunities (employment,

⁴ Everyday more second-generation human rights are known; these include city and mobility rights (Institut de Drets Humans de Catalunya, 2011 in CDH DF, 2013).

education, health, entertainment, etc.) offered by the city and inadequate mobility prevents them from accessing these development possibilities and alternatives.

Sustainable mobility⁵ includes means of transportation and in metropolis this means massive public transportation which needs infrastructure and bountiful investments like the metro system, electric trains or systems known as BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) that are buses circulating in confined lanes. The latter have been well-received in Latin American cities and currently operate in Mexican cities such as Leon, Guadalajara, Puebla, Monterrey and Mexico City (Federal District and State of Mexico).

Transportation, mobility and housing topics have an important place in public policies' agendas in the Federal District and other states, although we will not mention them here. The aforementioned metropolitan topics can be solved using a comprehensive approach and not fragmented ones which are related to political limits.

A wide range of emerging problems –environmental, security and regional infrastructure–, not only metropolitan but also regional ones, are becoming more important in metropolis. The first ones worth mentioning are related to land, underground water reserves and especially air pollution and “natural disasters” caused by or accentuated by human activity, although geographical and meteorological conditions are also important factors. The creation of these problems which are more and more frequent, happen in specific places that do not obey to administrative limits like state and municipalities.

The wave of insecurity in Mexico in the last couple of years and occurrences in urban and rural areas of the country happen in areas ruled by different authorities which makes it difficult to prosecute crimes and offenders; thus, there is a need for territorial and government competence's flexibility.

New communications infrastructure -ground and telecommunications- are more and more important for the operation of metropolis and their interconnection to worldwide networks; we have to remember that the new configuration of space accumulation -the essence of globalization- is based on global network node connection of cities Taylor (2004) & Castells (2000). The most important nodes of these networks are established in world metropolis, this is why it is strategically important to switch to globalization.

⁵ Sustainable mobility is an approach focused on less polluting means, it also considers social and comprehensive urban planning elements (Schiller, P.L., 2010).

Metropolitan Areas' Government, a major challenge

The common denominator in the search for better metropolitan performance is the way of governing these spaces. A continuous concern is to find ways of efficiently administering and managing metropolitan issues with small administrative units with urban and territorial development powers. Concerns related to the best way of governing metropolis is born from the lack of correspondence between the different geometry of problems –that is, forms and limits, consequences and impacts and possible solutions of the latter- and the geometry of state and municipal limits in charge of them.

Air pollution derived from industrial processes or vehicles continuously moves throughout the city or the topic of population's movement between municipalities and states to go to work; those are good examples which reflect inefficient intervention when implemented in small locations which fragment space.

The range of possibilities to rule the metropolis is very wide and each of these possibilities have been rehearsed in some parts of the world with different levels of success. There are several alternatives: metropolitan centralized government with specific or multiple competences and totally divided governments derived from decentralization processes based on the idea that it is best to have governments which are close to their citizens like municipal ones.

Our renewed concern, since the 1970s, is the construction of appropriate government agreements. This election will depend on the way of government we Mexicans have chosen; at first glance, it seems inappropriate to move closer metropolitan central authorities with one or more functions to the Constitution. State authorities with regional powers can make decisions which affect areas outside municipalities. Intermunicipal coordination and collaboration schemes have been replicated in different places and times and have been efficient in solving urban and environmental problems.

Replicating successful intergovernmental relationship (RIG; Spanish: relaciones intergubernamentales) experiences using partnership and collaboration bodies seems like a promising way to solve a lot of metropolitan challenges. The advantages of this alternative which has the flexibility to adapt itself to spaces of different geometries depending on the aspect it wants to address (Ugalde, 2010).

Because of the limited achievements of metropolitan management, some proposals based on Mexico's reality and limitations have been promoted to face the normative framework act efficiently. The most important ones are the implementation of the *Metropolitan Development Councils*

and Commissions, which are government coordination bodies that actively participate in metropolis; the creation of *Planning Institutes* or technical professional groups in charge of metropolitan long-term comprehensive planning,⁶ the creation of *Metropolitan Development Agencies* and service businesses which are in charge of incorporating new management, public management forms in metropolitan economic development under different contracts or schemes.

The creation of *Observatories* to integrate and operate information systems on the evolution of metropolitan processes has been equally important, as well as the creation of *Funds* to finance metropolitan projects. In the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City these have allowed the implementation of different projects regarding common issues of the Federal District and the State of Mexico. All of this management instruments include coordination between municipal, state and federal authorities to consolidate medium-term actions, projects and programs related to population and territories of different political-administrative units in metropolis.

II. Territorial Organization as a matter of urgency

Territorial organization and metropolitan planning.

The previous outlines of some of the most important metropolitan aspects would not be complete without speaking of metropolitan territory's planning and organization topics. The goal of this essay is to suggest spatial and functional organization of metropolis to ensure medium and long-term optimum and long-lasting conditions for everyday life and economic activities.

Brief summary of metropolitan planning

TABLE 1. PLANNING STAGES IN MEXICO

| PERIOD | GOAL | RELEVANT EVENTS | LEGAL STRUCTURE | CREATION OF INSTITUTIONS |
|-----------|---|---|--|--------------------------|
| 1930-1940 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organize physical growth of cities whose population had exceeded traditional urban centers. -Promote urban structure so as to organize cities in a functional way by designing infrastructural, transportation, water, sanitary and electricity networks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Disappearance of autonomous municipalities. -Creation of the Department of the Federal District in 1929. -Launch of city's centralized management. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -National Planning Act (1930). -Zoning and Planning Law of the Federal District and Baja California (1933). -Six-year Plan (1934-1940). -Mexico City's Regulator Plan (1940). | |

⁶ One of these experiences is municipal institutes created since 2000, some of its predecessors were born in the 1980s and 1990s.

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|-------------------|---|---|--|---|
| 1950-1980 | <p>Focused on organizing the effects of growth thanks to different measures, including the coordination of important infrastructure and equipment. Investments.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Construction of Mexico City's Subway System, its first line started operating in 1968. -Demographic and urban explosion. -Irregular urban periphery started to grow without planning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creation of the first Human Settlement Law (1976). The term "conurbation" is used for the first time. - Articles 27, 73 and 115 of the Constitution were amended to breathe new life into urban development planning and territorial organization. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Human Settlement and Public Works Ministry (SAHOP) was created. |
| 1980-2000 | <p>The neoliberal school of thought made it possible to adopt a more flexible approach, reducing spatial emphasis and favoring the address of social conditions and economic effectiveness.</p> | <p>Constant updating and creation of urban and metropolitan development plans.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Planning Law to substitute the one from 1930 is issued. -The General Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection Law was issued. - Legal framework is amended by issuing the new General Human Settlement Law (1993). - Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico Planning Programme (1998). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creation of the Development Planning Committees (COPLADES). -SAHOP becomes the Ministry of Urban Development and Ecology (SEDUE) and is later transformed into the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL). - The Ministry of the Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries (SEMARNAP) is created. -Creation of Metropolitan Commissions; particularly the Metropolitan Commission for Human Settlements (COMETAH). |
| From 2000 to date | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include economic problems, environmental issues and social cohesion goals to urban and metropolitan planning. - Include transportation, housing and economic development topics. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weakening of urban planning and strengthening of environmental topics. -Promotion of the construction of social interest housing. -Infrastructure investment housing programs 2006-2013. -Creation of metropolitan funds (2006). | <p>Climatic Change General Law (2012).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creation of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), previously known as SEMARNAP, on November 30th 2000. - In 2013 the Ministry of Agrarian, Territorial and Urban Development (SEDATU) is created. |

Source: updated version of Salas, M. E. (2010). "Las metrópolis mexicanas: conceptualización, gestión y agenda de políticas", in Garza, G. and Schteingart, M. (coords.), Los grandes problemas de México. Volumen II Desarrollo Urbano y Regional. Mexico: El Colegio de México. p.p. 173-212

Table 1 shows the stages of territorial planning since the 1930s, emphasizing the 1976 reforms when conurbation and metropolization processes were recognized in the country and the Human Settlement and Public Works

Ministry (SAHOP; Spanish: Secretaría de Asentamientos Humanos y Obras Públicas) was created. This was the beginning of territorial planning's boom in every single state. This activity was carried out with ups and downs and new territorial challenges were acknowledged by creating and redesigning new institutions. In 1993 the legislative framework was amended when the new Human Settlement General Law was issued; nonetheless, the new (in force) metropolitan law has not been enough because Federal and municipal influence on the "planning and regulation of conurbated areas" has been very weak and the only possibilities left are collaboration mechanisms. Article 12 states:

"The Federation and states can agree on regional planning mechanisms to coordinate actions to promote territorial organization on human settlements located on two or more states, even if they are metropolitan areas or population center systems that require it (Official Journal of the Federation, July 21st, 1993).

Different metropolis work on constantly creating and updating metropolitan development plans based on these legal regulations. These efforts have been moderately successful.⁷

Since 2000, honoring the change of the ruling party, there have been contradictory processes: weakening of urban planning and launching of social interest housing construction and strengthening of environmental aspects. The introduction of environmental topics has also come to a halt. However, the environment is the result of man-nature interaction and it should be considered as a social cohesion and economic attractiveness territorial factor due to its ability to affect local development and not as a factor which limits human activities.

If we compare planning in its previous stages, we can see that recent plans went from spatial organization based on infrastructure and functional zoning to a more complex metropolitan development which now includes economic problems, environmental dimensions and the search of social cohesion goals. These plans' goals have changed and new topics have sprung: purely spatial approaches became sectorial ones (transportation, housing, economic activity) which started to focus more and more on unlinked programs with specific goals (mobility, equity competitiveness)

⁷ The Metropolitan Area of Mexico City has had paradoxical experiences. In 1995 the Federal Executive, SEDESOL, the State of Mexico and the Federal District signed the Coordination Agreement to plan and execute actions related to metropolitan human settlements. This gave birth to the Metropolitan Commission for Human Settlements (COMETAH; Spanish: Comisión Metropolitana de Asentamientos Humanos) its work bore fruits in 1998 with the approval of the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico Planning Programme (POZMVM; Spanish: Programa de Ordenación de la Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México). Nonetheless, this program was never put into action due to the interaction of various actors with different and usually opposite interests.

with closer temporal horizons; however, they make it easier to implement and speed up monitoring and evaluation processes.

Metropolitan planning specific instruments: a critical evaluation

The instruments which are currently used in the country's territorial planning system, with their good and bad things, are correlated and some of them have greater visibility in the metropolitan planning context.

A thorough review carried out by Paquette (2013) states that besides the wide coverage of territorial public policies resulting from decade-long efforts, a very obvious problem is **excessive sectorization** which disperses, multiplies and sometimes duplicated programs and actions implemented in the same populations, inhibiting positive synergies and wasting efforts and resources. This excessive sectorization can be seen, but not exclusively between urban and environmental areas.⁸

This problem also includes a **lack of transversality** which can be seen in the lack of coordinated actions between public administration institutions resulting from the weak and confusing hierarchical structuring of them. The topic of subordinating and articulating existing territorial planning instruments is another relevant element of any planning system; however, it is still undefined in Mexico. This aspect becomes strategically important because it can achieve compatibility among the great number of existing plans and programs. Superposition of zoning areas and division of authorities have caused a lot of disappointments and weak results in the implementation of different programs.

However, the most important defect of our territorial planning system is the **multiplication of Territorial Regulations** within Urban Development crises.⁹ Developing the National Territorial Regulations will allow long-term organized occupation and land use, establishing **coherent** medium and long-term territorial development guides, as well as criteria, parameters and conditions for all of the territory. Every territorial plan (state, municipal, local and metropolitan) and sectorial program must adhere to only one regulation.

Nonetheless, Mexico's task is in the hands of the Urban Development, the Environmental and Tourism sectors; which reflects excessive sectorization which became more severe in the year 2000. As a result, there is an inclination to multiply territorial regulations which do not follow clear logics or a hierarchical structuring of them.

⁸ It is worth mentioning Mexico City's exceptional situation where there have been remarkable efforts to link urban and environmental issues into a comprehensive strategy through the Green Plan elaborated by Federal District's authorities; however, these efforts never reached the metropolitan level.

⁹ A crisis is that the country's capital, one of the most important megalopolis in the world, does not have an updated Urban Development Program, the same happened to the 2006-2012 Urban Development and Territorial Planning National Plan which is a huge regulation void.

Taking into account this evolution of metropolitan planning, plans are still indispensable. The existence of a valid metropolitan development plan will become an element to evaluate the metropolis thanks to its flexibility features and its consultative character –and not coercive and restrictive one- where **clear goals, programs and scenarios are included** to reflect environmental and social concerns. Despite its consultative character, the distance between them should not be so great as to forget general goals and approaches as a strategy to make good medium and long-term sustainable use of resources.

Nowadays the real transformation strategies of metropolitan space is not an acceptable plan, but specific projects known as “Great Urban Projects” which are negotiated between public, private and local actors and includes civil society’s participation. We are facing crisis of comprehensive plans which are being substituted by projects, the main urban intervention. Comprehensive plans are being forgotten for the following reasons, their size, urgency, for being emblematic, efficient, etc. The main goal of said projects are “places” and not the population; thus, social planning goals are becoming social rhetoric.

These large scale urban projects and their management represent governance plans which support market-managed development, looking for economic benefit in high profitability projects. Thus, strategies of urban renovation translates into “international events” and “large scale projects”, which are linked to the latter and not social restructuring as framework to provide employment and income for all, the inevitable result is inequality and exclusion.

The characteristics of these Great Projects would not be appropriate if they contradict the logic and guidance of Territorial Organization.

Final thoughts

The design and implementation of a Comprehensive Territorial Organization strategy is a *sine qua non* condition to achieve goals to reduce the country’s existing spatial disparities, promote development and the integration of territories with backwardness and consolidate regions’ and cities’ competitiveness. We do not need an inflexible normative framework; but to build one to allow the incorporation of new topics to enrich and renew it. The viability of this task within the current territorial policy framework is questionable, due to the existence of important voids and the multiplicity of elements of different nature and status which lack articulation and hierarchical structure.

The metropolitan arena’s government can be improved by strengthening coordination instruments and the “Metropolitan Organization Plan” which was born from agreements among actors and long-term approaches. The intermunicipal level will play a more important role in territorial planning and

management topics to face growing social and environmental challenges of the country and its metropolitan areas.

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