UNEQUAL URBANISM AND POST-URBANISM IN MEXICO CITY: Evolving throughout modernities

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Abstract

From the 19th century to this day, Mexico City has been subject to economic and urban policies operating from either isolated or coordinated plans driven by diverse interests. These have caused transformations which influence the form, structure, size, performance, milieu, and therefore the population's lifestyle. Although urban interventions have generated conditions of progress, these have been objectively expressed into an unequal series of development and modernity producing wealthy areas where the major city is enjoyed and depressed areas where the latter is suffered.

Keywords: City, Economic policies, Urbanism, Post-urbanism, Building, Inequity.

Introduction

Mexico City’s arrival to the 20th century was conducted through the ambition of inserting the country in the most important economic blocs worldwide. A permanent concentration of the population followed, as well as a transculturation that levelled out attitudes or made them very local. There were new day-to-day experiences due to the use of new technologies, lack of services, long and heavy commuting, insecurity, commerce on streets and avenues and poverty concentrated in the city’s outer boundaries. In such conditions, a boosted urbanism was witnessed at the end of the 19th century and at the turn of the 20th century which was guided by sanitation works, the impulse towards zoning, improvements on communications and an aesthetical and environmental managing. All of this, along with the search for spaces and for new men, worked out in specific zones. Nonetheless, leaving other spaces unattended, these trends have increased inequities, all of this with the consent of a mainly entrepreneurial state that has strong bonds to the exterior.

In order to analyse both phases of Mexico City’s transformation we have to consider economic revolutions as great determiners together with policy actions encouraged by groups that, with or without agreements, have generated the subsequent territorial and social conditions in that large period of time, where one of its highest expressions was the way in which the country’s capital city evolved and secured its place. Certainly, as with any other transformation process that defines certain ages, interest is today brought upon breakdowns and continuities, the same way a decadent time gives rise to another, and namely on how modernity ¹ gives rise to post-modernity ².

From this point of view, the following conditioning factors are taken into account: first, the establishment of the Republic and Mexico’s passage to liberalism thanks to the Reform Laws in 1855; the constitution of a Liberal State and an oligarchy whose city projects had their best expression in Porfirio Díaz’s Government (1877-80, 1884-1911). Second, the preparation and the development of the Revolution of 1910, and the installation of a state that intervened vigorously on economic and on territorial matters, supporting in such a way a national middle class, trying to regulate the city through planning but nevertheless inducing a strong expansion of the metropolis, with expressions that lasted until the decade of the 1970’s. As determiners of the Post-modern era remain the consolidation of neoliberalism in a world-wide context, as well as the development of a middle class that became relatively independent and that gained control of the Mexican state, followed by urban actions that have privileged profit no matter what the social effects are.

These political, economic and social determiners, through which Mexico moved for almost two centuries, gave way to a peculiar development by orientating productive fields in diverse manners, shifting the country’s agricultural exporting model to an industrial one that involved wide weakmesses.

¹ In Los hijos de Límite [1974], Octavio Paz points out: “modernity is a polemic tradition that displaces the prevailing tradition, whatever this one is. Modernity displaces though such tradition to give up its place to a new one, which becomes another momentary manifestation of the present. Modernity is never itself: it is always another one” (Paz, 1998).

² In this regard, Charles Jencks points out: “Post-modern is the continuation of modernity and its transcendence. In this sense, it is critical (...) Post-modernism is not Ant-modernism” (Jencks, 1996).
Despite such circumstances, Mexico City's conditions are still essential for its economic development. Moreover, this city is subject to high levels of concentration and particular forms of expansion which sometimes inhibit the progress needed.

The irruption of urbanism or modern city planning

Mexico City's claim to access the modernity running the world in the 19th century went through political and economic fluctuations, which were the result of agreements and disagreements amongst social groups and of the acting of a state that was also transformed during this period of time. Such development can be divided in two big moments: one where the farming industry worked as the country's productive basis, evolving from the voting of the Reform Laws and concluding with the revolutionary battles of 1910 and Porfirio Díaz's fall in 1911. During the second moment the industrial domain prevailed, making its way thanks to the Constitution of 1917 and, from that year until the 1970's, when the country was struck by a series of crisis that highlighted the breakdown of the accumulation model. The intervening state was severely questioned by an entrepreneurial sector bound to the exterior, which demanded less intervention in both political and economic activities.

The first moment followed an attempt to consolidate a country affected by the continuous conflicts between liberal and conservative groups that intended to impose a project of nation within such conditions: the Church continued to play a major role on policy; external aggressions such as the invasion and the wrenching of the national territory by the United States of America (1846-48), and the French Intervention and the subsequent imposition of Maximilian of Habsburg (1864-67).

When liberals, headed by Benito Juárez, were in the grip of power, they launched the construction of a new State settled on a series of juridical rules such as the “Ley Juárez” (1855), concerning justice administration and the “Ley Lerdo” (1856) related to the Church's confiscated properties and concluded with the so-called “Leyes de Reforma”, such as the “Law of Nationalization of Ecclesiastic Assets” (1859), the “Law of Civil Marriage” (1859), the “Organic Law of Civil Registration” (1859), and the “Law of Religious Freedom” (1860) (Salmerón, 2009). These laws were significant because they opened legal and political paths, in the first place, to divide the functions of the Church and the State, providing the latter with more liberty of decision, thus putting up opposition to the power held by the former. In the second place, often unproductive ecclesiastical properties were put on sale, activating the country’s economy and the urban market. And in the third place, a liberal system which was entering into alliances with economic sectors abroad was consolidated.

This process was interrupted by the French Invasion in 1862, as economic and human resources had to be directed to the defense of the country. However, once the Republic was restored in 1867, both the country and Mexico City slid in a very firm reconstruction process. This process had a remarkable period for about thirty years during Porfirio Díaz's government, in which the country's pacification was concreted. Such pacification was followed by an unequal progress, for important contracts were offered to nationals or foreigners (Roeder, 1996), who held strong bonds to the regime. Such unequal progress was caused as well by the oligarchy's benefit from that development, while abominable actions of exploitation took place in both the countryside and in the cities.

As a consequence of this new dynamics, Mexico City received the first residential developments, most of them located on the west side of the city, which was an area with a certain degree of consolidation, having extended on an area occupied in the past by lakes and rivers. In such a way were built the Colonia de los Arquitectos and the Santa María la Rivera neighborhood, founded by the end of the 1850's, giving place to large real-estate contracts (Jimenez, 1993), bringing along urbanization projects that concluded with the creation of neighborhoods such as Condesa, Juárez and Roma reserved to the Porfirian elite at the beginning of the 20th century.

Surrounded by such maelstrom, the Nation desired to be consolidated and shown to the world in a situation of progress, and even more since the Centenary of Independence was getting closer. Due to this situation, both the country and its capital were subject to interventions, which aim was to place them in a condition of development. In the case of Mexico City, those interventions operated through a series of factors such as the increase in population, rated in 200,000 inhabitants in 1870; in 329,774 inhabitants in 1895; which arose to 344,721 in 1900 (INEGI, 1994); and in the cities.

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**Picture 1.** Popular market on the street, c.a. 1910 (Courtesy of The Library of Congress).
Thus, with the impulse of medics, engineers, and architects—some of them self-called hygienists—a step was given towards a developing urbanism that generated a theoretical, legal, and administrative framework. Such urbanism promoted a meaningful renovation of the city, highlighting:

1. The construction of a basic infrastructure, where the introduction of the drain system stood out (1896-1903), conceived by engineer Roberto Gayol—interested in German engineer Reinhard Baumeister’s works, "the pioneer on modern city planning" (Koester, 1914). This system’s aim was to group waste water and to channel it to the area of San Lázaro. The construction of the Valley of México’s drain system (1886-1900), led by engineer Luis Espinoza, throughout which solid waste was conducted from San Lazaro many kilometres to the northern part of the city. The objective was to avoid floods that provoked diseases and epidemics. The water supply system, designed by engineer Manuel Marroquin, channelled water from southern Xochimilco (1905-13), and became the prime source of water provisioning for the city for more than three decades.

2. The embellishment of important spaces by the expansion of green areas was promoted by engineer Miguel Angel de Quevedo, who absorbed French Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier’s teachings. The effort to align the heights of buildings aimed to homogenize the city center, thanks to which both air and natural light would enter this area. This objective was achieved by widening 5 de Mayo street, connecting the city centre with La Alameda. This was succeeded by the paving or "macadamization" of streets and avenues already in use and, needless to say, of new roads such as Chapultepec Avenue, and La Piedad.

3. Constructions that hindered circulation were demolished in order to construct new roads and to render the central areas of the city functional. The construction and widening of roads gave way to the creation of new urban areas such as Los Arquitectos, Santa Maria la Ribera, Hidalgo, Del Valle, Roma, Cuauhtémoc, La Condesa and San Miguel Chapultepec, out of which the last four were destined to the porfirian elites.

4. The construction of administrative, educational and hospital infrastructure like The Post Office Building,
the Penitentiary, the General Asylum, the New Slaughterhouse, the new National Theatre, the Commerce and Administration School, the Communications Ministry, the Police Station, the teacher training Normal School, five modern Elementary Schools, the Orphanage for Children, the General Hospital, amongst others (Salguero, 1998).

There was no doubt that those works meant progress and constituted the support to the modernity developed beyond the first half of the 20th century. They were conceived as a support because the idea of modernity always demands its corresponding concrete side. Ideas of modernization may exist as long as they are objectified.

For instance, there is no modern hospital, such as the General Hospital, if there are no adequate sources of potable water or the possibility of evacuating liquid waste. Modernity was considered to have accomplished its objectives as new roads, such as the mentioned above 5 de Mayo, were accessible; or as elite neighborhoods, such as Juárez neighborhood, were inhabitable.

As a reflection of its own society, such modernity expressed itself unequally in Mexico City, becoming precarious in poor neighbourhoods such as Carrera Lardizabal, Romero Rubio, Violante or Tepito, La Vaquita, Valle Gomez, all of them located in the North and the East of the city (Jiménez, 1993).

These regions developed without basic services, which was followed by negative consequences for their inhabitants, such as outbreaks and diseases. Works like these, product of an emerging urbanism carried out under unequal conditions, would serve a population that had arisen to 471,066 inhabitants in 1910, and to 615,367 inhabitants in 1921 (INEGI, 1994).

**Revolution and consolidation of urbanism**

A second moment of this 19th century modernity occurred throughout the revolutionary battles initiated in 1910. By the end of the Revolutionary Movement, the founding of a welfare state intervened to guide both the economy and the social affairs. The State was sensitive to the social needs and thus propelled big urban projects such as dams, highways, dwelling places, amenities for health and education, among others. Indeed, these projects were necessary to bring the country’s agricultural tradition to an industrial model.

This objective was accomplished thanks to policies such as the import, substitution and industrialization introduced in Mexico in the 1930’s and programs such as the so-called “shared development”, implemented during the term of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976) (Tello, 2011).

This economic development was carried out through plans such as “the First Sexennial Plan” (Primer Plan Sexenal) that aimed to shape General Lázaro Cardenas’s government (1934-40), bonded to projects in fields such as hydrography, intended to develop certain regions of the nation’s territory at the end of the 1940’s (Secretaría, 1985).

Furthermore, the State supported entrepreneurs through direct and indirect investments and provided energy resources through companies such as Petróleos Mexicanos (Mexican Petroleum) or the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (Federal Electricity Commission). Nonetheless, the weak productive sector created by a fast obtained profit drove into a series of financial crisis, as a consequence of worldwide fluctuations, in 1948, 1954, 1965—this one caused by a farm crisis—, 1971 and 1976 (Rivera, 1986). On the long term, these crises were expressed by waves of immigration and by the development of metropolitan areas such as the ones around Mexico City.

After countless battles, this was an era of reconstruction in which the new society demanded for basic necessities and which came along with revolutionary expressions on architecture, urbanism, painting and music. Regarding urban matters, the attention was focused on the projects undertaken in cities of Germany, England and the United States of America, countries where progress was meaningful; ideas of architects José Luis Cuevas Pietrasanta—a expert on urbanism texts of his time—and Carlos Contreras Elizondo—educated at the University of Columbia, in New York, were dominant; and, in the case of Mexico City, a rupture with the old regime and its form of government allowed transformations to take place (Sánchez, 1908).

As urban planning developed, by taking advantage of the infrastructure inherited from the Porfrian era, from the private sector and from the damaged Mexico City’s government, neighborhoods inspired by architect Cuevas Pietrasanta’s idea of the Garden City, such as Lomas de Chapultepec (1922), Federal (1925), and Hipódromo Condesa (1926) were created.

Nonetheless, it was necessary to attend the necessities of a society weakened after ten years of social and political instability. Despite the few financial resources owned by the local government in Mexico City, such situation called for an intervention to be carried out in an organized way by effectively following city planning projects.

In a context of theorization, legislation, and of creation of government planning bodies, Mexico City decided to attend the claims that provoked the revolutionary battles in former times. Such disposition demanded for the support of attentive urban guidance.

Urban planning was promoted and divulged, legal channels and government offices, focused on the execution of urban projects, were established. The newly-created Departamento del Distrito Federal (1929) absorbed Mexico City’s municipalities, becoming a centralized planning body, through which architect Carlos Contreras’s project, known as the Plano Regulador 1933 del Distrito Federal (Contreras, 1933), could be applied and which gave way to important changes.

The Plano Regulador of 1933 focused on designing orthogonal road parks; on residential, industrial and commercial zoning, highlighting the central area. The emission of planning laws (1930-32), and the creation of the Planning Commission and the Executive Committees for construction (1932) opened new channels for the construction of streets and avenues such as 20 de Noviembre, San Juan de Letrán, República de Venezuela, Insurgentes, Glorieta de Peralvillo, and others (Sánchez, 2002).
In order to regulate Mexico City’s development by tracing streets and avenues and by promoting a zoning method favorable to other activities, modern equipment was generated, such as:

1. The construction of new elementary schools such as the Centro Escolar Benito Juárez in Roma neighborhood. In addition, other 25 new schools were constructed and 28 more were remodelled following a functionalist style (1932); the Instituto Técnico (1932) and the Centro Escolar Revolución (1933) were built within the area of the Ciudadela. Elementary and middle school establishments were built as part of the Primera Planeación, proyección y construcciones escolares de la República Mexicana (First Urban Planning and School Constructions in the Mexican Republic) (1944).

2. The one or two-story dwellings reserved for the working-class (1933) in Balbuena, San Jacinto and La Vaquita, and the so-called Miguel Alemán multi-dwelling units (1947), as well as the Modelo (1947) and the Benito Juárez (1951) units in the south of the city (De Anda, 2008). The idea of these constructions was to optimize land and resources, all of which led to high density levels and to large agglomerations.

3. Hospital centers such as the Instituto de Higiene y Granja Sanitaria (1925), the Sanatorio para Tuberculosis (1929), the Instituto de Cardiología (1937), the Hospital Infantil (1941), the Hospital Dr. Manuel Gea Gonzalez (1942), in the south of Mexico City, and the Centro Médico, initiated in 1943, and concluded in the 1960’s as part of the Plan Nacional de Hospitales (1943).

4. The equipment of services materialized in sports establishments such as the Centro Social y Deportivo para Trabajadores of Balbuena (1930); the unfinished Ciudad de los Deportes (1944) in the Venustiano Carranza borough, and the Ciudad Deportiva (1958) in eastern Mexico City. University campuses were created as well. For example, the National Autonomous University of Mexico’s University City (Ciudad Universitaria) (1949), and the National Polytechnic Institute’s Unidad Profesional Adolfo López Mateos (1958) located north and south of the city. There were also administrative buildings such as the headquarters of the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (1946), of the Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas (1953), and of the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (Salguero, 2009).

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These projects addressed social needs and their aim was to encourage progress. Despite the unequal conditions within which a school, a hospital, a dwelling or a space for recreation were built, such constructions represented an improvement on the quality of life of Mexico City’s inhabitants, as well as of those living in new zones of the city. Such works, fundamental constructions and infrastructure, preluded the establishment and development of a productive sector that, in the 1930’s, 1940’s and 1950’s reached the borders of the city, with a population of 1,029,068; 1,802,679 and 3,137,599 inhabitants respectively. Some important industrial areas were Azcapotzalco, Consulado, Ferrocarriles, San Antonio, Iztacalco, Naucalpan, among others (Sánchez, 1999). At the same time, this development gave way to constructions for private purposes such as commercial and recreational spaces, as well as for private services and housing.

This evolution was taking place not only in the capital, but also in other big cities like Puebla, Monterrey, and Guadalajara, and was conceived as an essential part of a process to be later known as the “Mexican miracle” (Huerta, 1986). Mexico City’s contribution was large as two different situations met: on the one hand, a large production of both public and private infrastructure and equipment and, on the other, the existence of both labor and consumer captive markets. In 1960, censuses totalled the existence of 5,251,755 consumers, which represented one fifth of Mexico’s Gross Domestic Product during the 1940’s, the 1950’s and the 1960’s.

This wave of changes in Mexico City concluded at the beginning of the 1960’s with subsequent implementations of the Plano Regulador, and the construction of new roads that linked new neighborhoods such as El Pedregal de San Angel, San José Insurgentes, Florida and Guadalupe Inn south of Mexico City; Lindavista, Guadalupe Tepeyac and Ciudad Satélite neighborhoods were linked in northern Mexico City; and Polanco neighborhood to the west. The constructions for the 1968 Olympic Games were not a proper ensemble of Olympic buildings. On the contrary, multiple venues were erected throughout Mexico City, which enhanced its infrastructure. Housing complexes such as Nonoscalo-Tlatelolco (1962) aimed to disappear poor hovels surrounding the city centre, and the ones promoted by the Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores in Iztacalco, Culhuacán and El Rosario (1972) diminished urban density but generated new difficulties, many of which were originated by inhabitants living there. There were also new spaces for universities and colleges such as the ones created for the National Autonomous University of Mexico in metropolitan municipalities like Nezahualcoyotl, Tlalnepantla, Cuautitlán, and Naucalpan, spaces once known as Escuelas Nacionales de Estudios Profesionales (1974-76), and called nowadays Facultades de Estudios Superiores. Similar examples are the three campuses of the Metropolitan Autonomous University in bordering boroughs like Azcapotzalco, Iztapalapa, and Xochimilco (1974).

The number and nature of works that constituted the urbanism promoted during those years collaborated in the development of a modernity that boosted a big part of commercial and industrial activities and that generated new lifestyles suitable for new and renewed spaces. All of this exposed the stunning side of the modernity comprised by the “Mexican Miracle”. However, the deplorable situation in the countryside was provoked, on the one hand, by a shortage of investment capital for agriculture and, on the other hand, by the privileged development of urban activities, which led to a number of migrations towards the city that caused the emergence of impoverished squatter settlements on the borders of big cities. In the case of Mexico City, these settlements were located in regions such as Iztacalco, Iztapalapa, Chimalhuacán, Ecatepec, Tlalnepantla, and Naucalpan, eastern and northern parts of the city. Most of these slums sprouted without basic services, which provoked a large demand to fulfill all kinds of needs.

The widening of the city as a result of the construction of these new areas marked not only the structural flaws contained in the development of the country, but also revealed a new condition: its metropolitan character. Such is evidenced from the mid-forties, when the Federal District reached different regions of the bordering State of Mexico (Estado de México), where big contrasts provoked the failure of a proper urban process, despite the efforts to arrange suitable environments and to forge new men and women for the city. There was also a new element to be found: The Zona Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México, housing around 8,799,937 inhabitants in 1970 (INEGI, 1994), was under control of two different entities, namely the Federal District and the State of Mexico, which have so far failed to conclude vital agreements.

Notes of an unequal and fragmented post-modern urbanism

The passage of the country to a post-modern “a dilemma that implies our insertion as individual subjects in a multi-dimensional set of radically discontinuous realities” (Jameson, 1998), occurred in a moment in which Mexican society, swayed by an international context, demanded for enhancements corresponding to new lifestyles, all of which gave way to economic, social, cultural and territorial changes. Thus, Mexico City has been affected by overproduction, neoliberalism, and globalization but has also developed in other fields, particularly in commercial and financial activities. All of this came along with territorial adjustments and with renewed contacts towards the city center as well as towards the periphery.

During this process, new models and ideas of progress have been created. Some of them derive from ideologies underlying free competition and social hierarchies; others plainly yearn for the fulfilment of basic needs. The actions of a state of a clear entrepreneurial nature were decisive as the new society moved on. On the one hand, this State has promoted changes in the economy of the country, benefiting a reduced number of business groups closely bound to the exterior. On the other, the fragmented urbanism applied to Mexico City served primarily privileged zones or areas with certain urgencies, where profits often prevailed over the needs of the population.

In such a context, the new process of modernization encouraged in the country in the 1960’s, and pursued well into the 21st century, has a double dimension, since it is supported by plans and well-defined projects, whereas it is positively accomplished in a fragmented way, giving way to
high profit projects in exclusive zones. Decisive factors of that urbanism are the need to compete against other cities, in Mexico or abroad, in order to attract investment and to improve spaces structurally. Other factors are the territorial extension and the population residing in that territory. Currently, the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico (Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México) covers localities in the Federal District, in the State of Mexico and in the State of Hidalgo. In 2010, this area was home to 21,329,745 inhabitants, out of a total population estimated in 112,336,538 inhabitants (INEGI, 2012).

Regulated by the State or not, and with limited agreements between territories, we can distinguish, on the one hand, plans such as the Plan Director de Desarrollo Urbano del Distrito Federal (1976) that opened the city to new kinds of capitals by promoting decentralization of activities to be relocated outside the city; the construction of arterial roads activated mobility in the city and helped develop commercial corridors as well as the real-estate market. On the other hand, the Programa de Ordenación de la Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México (1998), a program designed following a social perspective, tried to coordinate actions of the governments of both the Federal District and the State of Mexico in topics such as mobility, control of urban expansion, re-densification in central areas, protection of green areas among other concerns. Unfortunately, the deficient organization between administrative bodies could not gather the attention required by the metropolis, and most efforts continued to be focused in the Federal District.

Following such legal and political frameworks, a series of interventions took place since the late 1970’s, sometimes uncoordinated or isolated, such as the remodelling of the Historic Center, which, following post-modern aesthetical ideas, had an impact on fields such as economics, functionality, arts, and even history (Ellin, 1996), by setting out measures such as the relocation of La Merced food market towards the east part of the city in the 1960’s or the renovation projects during Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador’s administration (2000-05), which sought inclusion and requested the participation of diverse social sectors.

The process in which the Centro Histórico moves on, the presence of department stores, chain or fast-food restaurants and cultural activities has been permitted or recognized. Streets such as Regina, Madero and part of 16 de Septiembre have been reserved for pedestrian use; it is intended to give such a use to other streets in the future. Façades as part of valuable heritage have been remodelled; timeworn pipelines have been changed, out of which some were 100 years old; street vendors have been relocated; artistic and cultural activities have been promoted, which has attracted national and international tourists.

Rescuing old spaces has also implied reemploying old commercial or industrial spaces projected for other kind of activities. Proof of this is the gradual transformation of the old industrial zone of Ferrería, located north-west of the city and home to the “City of knowledge”, region that houses a public university from the 1960’s and that, nowadays —with the resistance of the inhabitants of this area— houses a private university as well, a complex with offices, services and stores called Tecnoparque, and a post-modern entertainment venue called Arena México, which has altered circulation in this area, rendering it slower.

Commercial and financial spaces are the best example of the irruption of this fragmented urbanism. In fact, the generalization of shopping centers has demanded for thorough functional and aesthetical projects to be carried out in covered spaces. Nonetheless, their isolation from the city has generated a transformation on the surrounding areas and on everyday life. Following different social nuances and diverse architectonical dimensions and expressions, and as a consequence of the impulse of arterial roads, a large number of shopping centers has been constructed, where services such as restaurants, banks and shops are concentrated, and which offer controlled and comfortable environments.

Starting with projects such as Plaza Universidad (1969), Satélite (1971) and Perisur (1979), which with impelling architecture create, however, isolated atmospheres, other big projects have been encouraged like Centro Coyoacán, Plaza World Trade Center, Plaza Galerías, Reforma 222, Parque Lindavista and Plaza Carso. Others have been constructed by recycling large spaces, like Parque Delta, which was built in a former baseball field; Antara Polanco, built in the terrains of the former General Motors factory; Plaza Las Américas, built on which once was a lye production
transportation have been combined with new roads, new of the State of Mexico. Such improvements in public connect Mexico City with municipalities located on the North Tren Suburbano

Conclusions

The passage of Mexico City from modernity to postmodernity is a questionable urban process for the population, if we consider that urbanism has ceased to move outwards and to unify different sectors and has taken instead a confining and segmenting character. As noted by architect Carlos Contreras Elizondo, this urbanism has moved on resorting to "patches", leaving comprehensive actions aside, which, joined to economic fluctuations and atypical political and social conditions, render a suitable process of urbanism difficult. Undoubtedly, people who enjoy or suffer this urbanism are responsible for not demanding the improvement of public spaces and this is largely a result of deficient forms of organization. However, government’s responsibility may not be omitted, let alone when such an entrepreneurial State has left big works in the hands of the private sector, along with the direct or indirect benefits that such works generate.

In this context, the ideal of urbanism, which sets collective interests over individual ones, has been unable to thrive because of political and economic limitations. Post-urbanism has also failed because its unequal and fragmenting nature has led to inadequate territorial and social differences.

Thus, in face of problems of governance, mobility, insecurity and inequality, it is still necessary to consider solutions not valued today by the promoters of this new urbanism. For instance, important entrepreneurial groups, who may not be able to realize that appropriate territorial arrangements may generate higher levels of welfare for inhabitants in the city and thus enabling higher and more stable profits for them.

All in all, as we follow these experiences, certain principles of urbanism are still valid i.e. privileging collective over individual interests, even when entrepreneurs get extensive benefits; creating independent planning bodies that transcend successive terms of government; executing joint actions by involving a number of regional governments; strengthening community participation in urban development by making citizenry aware of its achievements or failures; controlling land use that enable planning exercises; creating pleasant environments that give way to socialization.

Either way, those individuals involved in the planning process, whether they belong to technical or social fields, require an adequate expertise and an appropriate capacity to evaluate and to propose convenient planning programs. All of this is needed in order to crown the circles of knowledge attached to this discipline, not only for the benefit of this city, but for all the cities entwined to the urban network of Mexico City which suffer resembling situations from a long time now.

References