

Committee III

Human Beings and

The Urban Environment

THE LATIN AMERICAN METROPOLIS

Discussion Paper

by

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The quality of the papers presented in this Committee confirm the great job of our chairman Mr. Ervin Galantay and the adequate or almost perfect organization of the seminar and the selection of paper writers. I had a hard time trying to add something to Kunckel's paper since he has a wide knowledge of Latin American cities, and a clear perspective of their future.

With this in mind I decided to discuss four topics that seem basic to me in any attempt to shape the future of our main cities.

1. Why the future Latin American Metropoli (LAM) important.

Let us take for granted the aspects that we all recongnize as meaningful in the life of a metropolis, and turn to more obvious but decisive ones: 90% of the population growth in the next 20 year will take place in the developing countries, and 60% of this increase (2 out of 3) will be urban dwellers and then again many of these will be concentrated in enormous cities. According to a recent article (1) in the National Geographic Magazine in the year 2025, 80 of the 93 cities bigger that 5 million inhabitants will be in the Third World.

In Latin America (LA) the urbanization process began earlier and nowadays 6 out of 10 persons live in urban areas; the population of their capital cities together accounts for almost one third of the urban dwellers and 17% of the total population of the region.

In the next 20 years the rural population (170 million) will remain stable while the population increase (200 million) will be translated into urban growth. Thus their capital cities will reach about 130 million, more than 20% of the total population.

In spite of the figures, I think rather than merely a population problem, there is a problem of uneven resource allocation and development; a lack of attention to regional development and therefore a population distribution that contributes to make things difficult.

(1) Robert W. Fox. The World's Urban Explosion, National Geographic Magazine, U.S.A August 1984.

The real challenge in the metropoli of LA is not exactly size or rate of growth but the nature and characteristics of this growth and the living conditions that allows. With different sizes, according to the country, each city is striving to offer sophisticated goods and services that other capitals offer to their countries and shows similar evolution or bottlenecks, be it Santiago or Quito or Sao Paolo or Mexico City.

That brings me to my second point.

2. Are the LAM to be dealt with as in the developed countries? Are these cities to be analysed or planned like metropolis?

There is no doubt a lot of research has been done on the subject and many definitions have been intended. Nevertheless, most of them with what a Mexican author has called an ethnocentric perspective; that is departing from the Metropoli from Europe and the U.S. Obviously from this view point not many LA cities are to be contemplated and dealt with as such.

We need another analysis framework; not a simple dicotomy developed-underdeveloped, as puts it in his paper, but the incorporation of the abyss between North and South as the Brandt's Commission Report (2) makes it clear. Only the review of the historical evolution (origins and logics) of Latinoamerican development and under development can give us the adequate background with two high-lights: colonialism and dependance (the use of a given country's resources in the benefit of a foreign one).

These two characteristics explain the origin and structure of regional economies and their urban systems. They explain also the generation of power structures closely related to the North (the North of the South) and the cuasi-colonial internal relationship among the metropolis and the other cities in each country.

There is therefore not and homogeneous system of cities, nor a "logical" relationship (by European standards) among the primate city and the next ranks. Mexico i.e. has 33% of its urban population in Mexico City. Most of its population centers, specially the main ones, are located in the high plateau, far from the coasts. Brasil with a different colonial economy has most of its population and its urban centers in the coast line. Both cases, but specially the Mexican one, show that not always the metropoli are following a pattern of developmental stages (3)

(2) Commission Brandt. Dialogo Norte-Sur. Editorial Nueva Imagen.

(3) Kunckel points to Richard Meier model on the maturation of urban settlements not necessarily in agreement with it.

where Europe is at the top, and also show that even though disponibility of resources tend to level-off city growth (4), there are many other forces, some of them of unknown magnitud, that shape LA Metropolli.

These forces underlie a common latin origin (with catholic and even moorish fundaments) and common his torical evolution of their societies. The basic cul tural differences of their peoples were partially leveled-off and even shared after 300 years of iberic domination. For instance the physical structure of Tenochtitlan with a grid and a main plaza combining the Mayor Temple and the residence of the heads of that society, blended with a similar spanish scheme flourishing in all LA countries until nowadays. The mexican urbanization trend (every one settling at least in the edge of urban areas and not many conmuters) has also its roots in the values of colonial society.

All this point I ask myself wether Tenochtitlan, with 300,000 inhabitants at the term of the 15th Century -when no other European or American city had such a population-, and the most sofisticated services in this continent was a metropolis?

.3. How does the present situation looks like?

I agree with Kunckel's perception on the formal and informal sectors in LA Metropolli, and his description of the duality of attitudes towards urban processes. However it is important to stress the origins of the informal sector integrated by recent rural migrants, their low educational level and their slow integration into the urban economy due to the employment problem. The role this factors play in urban marginality is as important as the lack of housing, urban services or infrastructure.

In this context we must accept that if physical planning has not succeeded in reshaping the cities of the industrial world, where thighter controls exist in every aspect of growth; in LA has had only a marginal role in the shapeing of our cities, except in such cases as Brasilia, where an "artificial" master plan was completed before the first settler was there.

Kunckel's case of Ciudad Guayana had, on top of the informal attitudes of the informal sector, the existance of a settlement in the opposite side of the river before the city's infrastructure was finished. In trying to find strategies to guide development in LA, we need to design alternatives different to that of expensive urbanized land or inaccessible housing programs.

(4) See the article of Kingsley Davis in "cities". Scientific American, September 1965.

As an actual case I will focus on the main problems confronting Mexico City.

Increasing social desintegration. Social solidarity is being substituted by social antagonism among classes, and gathering momentum through the financial crisis. This is reflected in spatial desarticulation and in growing problems related with physical and social movility.

Pollution and enviromental decay. A social mass with a density of 160 inhab/hectare, 50% of the gross domestic product, 25% of the active population, 28% of the federal budget, and 45% of the national energy consumption, can not avoid the ecological consequences of 17.5 million people, 130,000 industries and 3 million vehicles mingling together in the largest urban agglomeration in the world.

These generates daily 12,000 Tons of garbage and 11,000 Ton of dust and humes, turning it in one of the most polluted areas in the world, without hopes for the next feature due to a weak environmental policy. Combine it with the urban marginality and you have a dramatic environmental decay, that compites and rapidly swallows in a vicious circle, the capital investment in urban support systems.

Mass transportation. The old story of priority to the individual car was confirmed until 1977, when enormous investment were poured in to mass transportation. Nevertheless, 97% of the vehicles share only 15% of the trips. The problem complicates because of financial reasons and fare policies. The subway (less than one cent a 20 km ride) is now carrying 4 million passangers a day from a total of 25 million trips. Growth previsions according to demand can not be financed, except with fares that would take about 18% of the minimal daily wage. (More than 50% of the employed population makes their living on minimal wages).

Water + Sewage. Water demand requires to pump 7,000 feet high, 30% of the actual consumption from places 100 miles away, thus depriving that regions from their "own" water and consumming enormous amounts of energy and other resour ces, aside of the economic ones.

Supply and solidwaste-feeding 17.5 million people reach figures hard to believe: 10,000 cattle heads a day, 4 million pounds of fruits and vegetables, 6 million eggs, 1.5 million of gallons of milk, 1 billion gallons of water. Garbage collection, including industrial and office diss-posal, present a serious logistic, administrative and fi-nancial challange that has yet to be solved.

This cannot be tackled with planning and regulative measures for the informal sector, nor even with massive investments which, due to the structure of regional income, enhance migration flows to the metropolis. The only alternative is the decentralization of power structures (not only of politicians as insists) and the strengthening and reorganization of regional development with imaginative measures.

In our scheme every peso that "financed" regional programs meant increasing capital returns to the metropolitan banking system where 60 % of the movements occur (the same is happening in the international arena). After the nationalization of the system in 1982, it was structured on the basis of regional promotion, with sectorial financing areas, beginning a decentralization of financial flows and their multiplier effects.

4. What can we expect of the future Latin American Metropoli? (2000 A.D.)

Unless a radical change in international trade and finance occurs and a new economic order becomes the base of global development, LAM will depict fashionable islands of "beautiful" people with updated infrastructure, the most sophisticated services and "international glamour", and increasingly growing areas of urban decay and misery, some kind of urban-desert where people will struggle daily to survive (even the famous movie "Soylent green" will not be far from reality).

To depict it more graphically, continuing with Mexico City we will have:

- A concentration of 25 million people in the urban area and 15 to 20 million more 80 miles around it, with a nearly exponential increase of many of the given figures.
- An increasing migration out of the city from the well-to do with higher educational and income levels, and the immigration of the less trained skilled, and entrepreneurial persons, since these last ones will move into other cities.
- A low income population surrounding reach ghettos isolated by walls and even armored surveillance, from the rest of the city; increasing social violence and the eventual loss of political direction.

- The environmental decay of the informal sector (approximately 3/4 of the total extension) will continue and consequently worsen levels of pollution.
- An enormous gap in urban services and infrastructure, specially in Mass transportation, sewage and waste dissposal.

For this not that improbable eventuality, there should be a set of strategies, what we could call TERATOPLAN (from the Greek THERATOS - mounstruosity), defining alternatives to cope with the problem and try to rationalize it.

If we do well, there will still be an impressive physical sprawl of 25 million people in the metropolitan area of Mexico City combined with other 25 million in 14 cities undergoing the metropolization process, 35 million in middle and small size cities and 20 million in the country side.

The possibility of 14 regional metropoli seem to me the cue to rescue the function of a metropolis as the center of cultural life, specialized services and social change.

Finally I would like to emphasize that it is not exactly population that lies at the origin of the problem, but our internal economic structure, our role in the international division of labour and the burden of foreign debt, almost impossible to pay. Population and physical aspects of metropolitan growth are only its concrete expression. At this point in history, there is people who mantain - that not even future is what it used to be.