

Living in the Boundaries. A Comparative View of Livability Conditions in the Mexico City Periphery

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The Metropolitan Area of Mexico City is one of the largest metropolises in Latin America, and it has faced persistent problems of urban sprawl since the middle of the last century. The metropolitan area has a population of 19,000,000 inhabitants, the majority of whom live in peripheral neighborhoods, far from work places and urban services. The aim of the panel is to discuss livability at the boundaries of urban expansion in Mexico [Mega] City, considering in particular two different kinds of peripheral neighborhood: so-called “colonias populares”, which have been the most common type of settlement since the 1950s, self-built and self-managed by the community; and so-called “conjuntos urbanos”, a more recent kind of settlement, the product of massive serial building by the private construction industry. Both are characterized by single-family housing and peripheral location, but they present VERY different characteristics in relation to the property regime and organization of the neighborhood. Together, they represent the most common forms of urban environment and urban life in Mexico City’s periphery. Our purpose is to use case studies as a basis on which to discuss and compare these two different kinds of popular (working-class) housing.

The second class city: urban experiences from the periphery of Mexico City.

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Poverty has spaces and places, a particular geography that not only contributes to deprivation, but also shapes the way it is experienced. The spatial concentration of disadvantage in certain areas of the city is of key importance in generating processes of social exclusion, linked both to the lack of income and to the forms assumed by social participation, opportunity structures and citizenship rights. Taking as its point of departure the neighborhood understood both as community and context, and based on ethnographic research, this paper analyzes the urban experience of the residents of an area with a high concentration of disadvantage on the east side of Mexico City. Context and community overlap and influence each other in the daily life of its residents; its analytical distinction highlights the relevance of the structural, relational and symbolic dimensions of space. The study area, Chimalhuacán, is a municipality developed largely via informal settlement and self-built housing, with more than 60% of the population

living in poverty, and deep and persistent disadvantages in the provision of services and urban infrastructure. Access to lots and to public services is often linked to clientelism and to local political bosses who have “control” of the area. It is against this context that the experience of the city is analyzed.

“The logic of necessity”: increasing use-value in low-income housing (colonias populares)

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A large sector of urban poor residents in Mexico construct their own housing in land that lacks basic services and infrastructure, and lacks legal security over property. The dwelling is the greatest possession that these families have. Our hypothesis is that residents access these particular forms of housing under these precarious conditions because they need refuge and not because they operate under the logic of economic rationality. In other words, they are not interested in inserting themselves in a housing market to accumulate wealth through the commercialization of the unit (exchange-value); however, they invest to increase the use-value of such unit. The objective of this paper is to present the results of a research project, which captures the increasing use-value of low-income housing in Mexico Megacity. While the use-value of housing in general facilitates the realization of basic biological and reproductive needs of those living within the dwellings, in low-income housing, it also enables families to generate occupation and therefore increase the households' income within a precarious labor market. In this presentation, we provide the results of a household survey conducted in the Mexico megacity in April 2013. The paper explores housing effects on labor market participation and occupational conditions of low-income dwellers. In particular, we ask whether housing characteristics shape labor force participation, as well as the kind of activities that increase use-value of low-income housing.

Borders and boundaries in Ixtapaluca: differing ways to use and make sense of the territory

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More than a decade after the adoption of Social Interest Urban Housing Projects as a mode of peripheral expansion, this mass production of housing has changed the socio-spatial morphology of a territory previously characterized by the dominance of agricultural activities. The new Social Interest Urban Housing Projects do not provide a full complement of

infrastructure and services, and they are developed as independent units (“conjuntos”), breaking the continuity of the urban fabric and generating strong conflicts between settlements. Alongside Social Interest Urban Housing Projects, the irregular housing market continues to grow unchecked, while municipal government does not have the budgetary and administrative capacities to address the backlog and to regulate urban growth. The case study is the municipality of Ixtapaluca in the State of Mexico. In this territory, it is possible to identify two types of settlement: on the one hand, the traditional localities composed of towns and popular neighborhoods and, on the other, the Social Interest Urban Housing Projects. Both spaces result in a territory in which sectors of the population converge with different social and cultural systems, and where they generate various and conflicting ways to use the territory. We ask ourselves how local people have incorporated this periphery in to their daily lives both socially and spatially. How do they share the territory with other forms of settlement? How do people make a living? What connections do they have with the metropolis?

Social Interest Urban Housing Projects and social integration: an approach from the subjective standpoint

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This paper aims to explore, from the perspective of the actors, the meanings (with their tensions and contradictions) for inhabitants of new Social Interest Urban Housing Projects of the nature of their social integration and their position in the social structure since they came to live in these spaces. To do this, firstly, I shall examine the aspirations and expectations associated with obtaining access to owner occupation in the context of the particular spatial morphology and location of these settlements. Secondly, I shall describe how the creation of a living space, as well as modifications of the physical spaces, have led to mounting tensions surrounding the “social” meaning given to a place by its inhabitants. Finally, I shall explore how the symbolic construction of an “ourselves” by the dwellers is related to the construction of various “others”. These “others” are not distant city dwellers (according to the characteristics of the social division of metropolitan space), but extremely close “others”, with whom not only everyday life but also the same residential space is shared.

Belonging at the margins: building a local sense of belonging in Mexico City’s periphery

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The starting point is the idea that the social construction of a sense of local belonging in a huge

metropolis like Mexico City is a very complex phenomenon. The production of a local dimension (in the sense of belonging to a specific neighborhood) is related to the wider dimension of the metropolis and with a relational construction of ourselves vis-à-vis others. In particular, I shall focus on the relationship between the inhabitants of the new Social Interest Urban Housing Projects and the local urban context. My purpose is first, to underline the difficulties and contradictions experienced in adapting to the new house and the new neighborhood. By contrast with the self-built houses of “colonias populares”, the new housing in these projects is intended to provide complete individual houses ready for occupation. Nevertheless, the size and interior design of these houses are not very comfortable or suitable for family life. The urban context is supposed to be a fully-serviced neighborhood but in fact it is very common to find deficiencies in services and basic infrastructure in the initial years of these new settlements, in particular in relation to public transportation. Second, to investigate how it is possible to build a sense of local belonging starting from these circumstances, in which everyday life is full of difficulties and disillusion. In particular, I shall focus on the relationship between home ownership and the construction of a social commitment to shaping local reality on the basis of collective organization to obtain local services and public spaces.