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THE URBAN RENOVATION IN PUEBLA, MEXICO. THE HISTORICAL CENTER AS EXPERIMENTAL SPACE. THIRTY YEARS OF CITY TRANSFORMATION

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Summary: The historical center of the city of Puebla, (Mexico) has undergone several transformations, being the urban renewal a present phenomenon in a context of constant changes of the city in the last thirty years, which has grown in its expansion of the urban spot, and in their needs for public services in line with the 21st century.

This process of transformation, rehabilitation and urban renewal of the city is not only preserved or restored, but also to enhance the productive capacities of the city and its inhabitants, being an urban space that reflects the constant contradictions of Latin American cities, which are sometimes found between the modernity of the city and the conservation of the glorious past. However, beyond this simple vision, the city is defined in terms of the role or role played by the central space and its constant architectural, urban and territorial contradictions.

Keywords: Historical Center, Urban renewal, Space, Puebla, Rehabilitation.

Introduction

To date, the space called Centro Histórico has had several connotations, not only from a conceptual perspective, but also from a study. Urban Renewal is not merely the aesthetic exercise of civil engineering; is the concrete interpretation of the solutions demanded by the citizen, the inhabitant of the metropolis. In the city of Puebla, in the last thirty years' complex processes of transformation and urban renewal have been experienced, with the purpose of preserving or restoring, and also with the desire to enhance the productive capacities of the city and its inhabitants.

Nevertheless, it is an urban space that reflects the constant contradictions of the Latin American cities, which are between the modernity of the city and the conservation of the glorious past. However, beyond this vision, the city is defined in terms of the role of central space and its constant architectural, urban and territorial contradictions. This paper aims to clarify the interest in studying the urban renewal of the historic center of Puebla, showing different models applied and their own contradictions.

1. Approach to the problem: Urban Renewal and historic center (Centro Histórico)

Urbanism and architecture have made profound reflections on this phenomenon that occurs in a certain space, triggering new studies. In this sense, the relationship between urban renewal and the center of the city shows, through different manifestations, the constant contradictions between them, as well as the false presence of a "historical center".

1.1. Urban renewal: starting point

Our research focuses specifically on the instruments and actions of government that are related to Urban Renewal applied in the historic center. Some of the instruments developed were applied totally or partially in an area with a process of urban deterioration; the physical structures of the buildings have been distorted as a result of the abandonment of their owners, thus causing a loss of commercial value and a deterioration in the economic activity of that area, as well as the decrease in the standard of living of its inhabitants. This deterioration in the urban space is more noticeable in the popular neighborhoods, since they are characterized by their historical value, but also by their deep isolation in relation to economic activity.



Fig. 1. Old image of the Paseo de San Francisco of the city of Puebla. Google-INEGI. 2017

In this context, during the last thirty years, the State Executive and the city council of the capital have implemented important processes of transformation and expansion of the city, in the early 1990s (since 1993) a series of government actions whose purpose was to incorporate various areas of the historic center into the economic activity and to improve the urban image of the neighborhoods.

Our interest in studying this space lines in the implications of this action on spatial dimensions (land use, urban image, modification of activities in the area, among others) and socio-economic aspects of the historical center of Puebla (changes in level and quality of life of the inhabitants, public and private investments, political conflicts, among others) as well as the impact on the social actors that surround it.

In this regard, it should be noted that the magnitude of the urban phenomenon and the fast pace of growth of the city of Puebla have led to an expansion of the urban spot, occupying new spaces for urbanization. However, in old cities such as this one (with the existence of large deteriorated and unoccupied spaces in the central areas) and with a demographic dynamic concentrated in the youth strata, large-scale Urban Renewal projects can be allowed, future new urban spaces in central areas, which can become a viable option depending on the efficient implementation of a program. However, such interventions always generate conflict.



Fig. 2. Map of the city of Puebla. Google-INEGI. 2017

1.2. Puebla and its historic center: state of the urban question

From its founding to the present day, the city of Puebla has been characterized as one of the most important entities in the national context. During the Prehispanic, Colonial and Independent Mexico periods, it has contributed significantly from the economic, social, cultural and political aspects to the changing environments that represent the different historical stages of the country.

With the arrival of the Spaniards, at that time it was necessary to create a city between the coast and Mexico, in order to protect the arrival of the merchandise, to allow to the travelers some scale and to reinforce the security of the way. The city was created with the aim of being a center of Spanish settlement, and not only of administration or exploitation of some particular resource. However, there were already small levels of native population located east of the valley, specifically on the east bank of the river called San Francisco. Thus, it was decided to plan and found a city on the other side of the river, which would mark the boundaries between both populations.

In contemporary history, the relative importance of the entity has been maintained: from the economic point of view, in the last two decades it has occupied the seventh place in the formation of the national GDP with an average contribution of the order of 3.14 percent. The importance of the entity is relative in the formation of GDP, however, has not been reflected in a substantial improvement in the living conditions of the majority of the population.

An indicator of this situation is the place it occupies in per capita GDP that has practically remained unchanged in the last two decades representing the twenty-fourth place. It is precisely the eastern part of the city where the population with the lowest socioeconomic status is concentrated.

On the other hand, almost forty percent of the historical center requires intervention for various reasons; some neighborhoods are within small old industrial corridors of beginning of century whose production concentrated in the branch of the textile industry.

Unfortunately, in the middle of that century, the boom that the textile industry had in Puebla was overtaken by the technological capacity of other states, causing the bankruptcy of most of the industries located in the area. It was not until the nineties, in the twentieth century, that it was decided what to do with these buildings through Revitalization Projects in 1993.



Fig. 3. Map of the Historic Center of the city of Puebla. Google-INEGI. 2017

2. The city and its affected area: delimitation of the study area

One of the most affected areas by the constant growth of the city of Puebla has undoubtedly been the historic center. This space covers an area of 690 hectares, 391 blocks and has 2,619 buildings of historical value built between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, and a permanent population of 97,000 inhabitants.

A decree promulgated by the federal government proposed the protection of this area, which represents 5.5 percent of the current urban spot. Ten years later, the historic center of the city was declared Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). At the same time, urban transformation processes have taken place in other areas of the city, including popular neighborhoods, among others.

This process expanded with the artificial division of the city center by the casing of the San Francisco River, in addition to the construction of the rapid road linking the North to the South part of the city (Boulevard Heroes del 5 de Mayo) giving that part an intense vehicular dynamic. Taking some urban effects of this work, the innumerable scars that left in the property expropriated in both banks of the river stand out.

Pedestrian flows through the various bridges connecting the neighborhoods with the Spanish settlement were severely affected by the current traffic capacity of approximately 4,500 units per hour at the intersection of Boulevard Heroes del 5 de Mayo and 14th Street East at peak times.

This change in the use of residential land by commercial and services, created changes in the urban image of the city, at the same time brought with it the concentration in the area of tertiary economic activities that underutilized and deteriorated urban infrastructure, equipment and furniture.

At the same time, the economic capacity of the owners was also lost. Loss that, according to some studies, did not allow them to preserve the built heritage. This context generated phenomena such as social segregation of the community and a physical deterioration of real estate. However, these phenomena not only respond to the application of the Urban Renewal project, but to the constant transformation of the city, this being a fundamental part of the research.



Fig. 4. Old image of the Paseo de San Francisco of the city of Puebla. Puebla dos 22.

3. Dimensional analysis of the program of the River Walk in Puebla

In this part, we try to present an approximation to a greater analysis of the local space of the city Puebla, from historical, sociodemographic, spatial to economic aspects, such as the municipal public account of Puebla.

3.1. The city of Puebla

This municipality is the capital of the state of Puebla; in this city, the economic, political, social and cultural activities of the region are concentrated; the municipality is part of a network of cities in the area, presenting a greater cultural than economic dynamism.

According to some studies carried out on the population dynamics of the state of Puebla (specifically its capital), it is affirmed that it belongs to the system of cities directly influenced by Mexico City, with attributes of functional complementarity to it, constituting an intermediate point of integration and articulation between the capital of the country and the states of Veracruz, Tabasco, Chiapas, and Oaxaca.



Fig. 5. Map of the city of Tlaxcala. Google-INEGI. 2017

3.2. The Puebla-Tlaxcala subsystem

The city of Puebla is the motor of the city subsystem Puebla-Tlaxcala, which is constituted by the totality of both states.

According to the results of the population census, carried out in 1990, in the subsystem defined by CONAPO, there are 4,887,378 inhabitants, representing a population increase of 25.19% with respect

to the 1980 census. density to 129 inhabitants / km2. The state of Puebla concentrates around 4 million 625 thousand inhabitants that imply 84.4% of the total population of the proposed subsystem. The previous population census shows that more than 60% of the inhabitants of the state live in urban localities. Of the ten municipalities with more than fifty thousand inhabitants, in just five the economically active population in the secondary sector is greater than that occupied in the primary, concentrating in them more than 50% of industrial employment.

The municipality of Puebla alone accounts for 31% of state employment. As for the municipality of Puebla, the concentration of the population is a relevant factor for the formation of various productive activities. In 1960, the municipality of Puebla was integrated by 65 localities in an extension of 132.6 Km2. By 1970 there were one hundred and nine towns inhabited by 532,774 people. For 1980 a population of 835 thousand 759 people was registered in 136 localities distributed in 524.31 Km2. As for 1990, the population was already of 1 million 57 thousand 454 inhabitants located in 49 localities. According to available information, we can affirm that the concentration of the population in the city of Puebla is more than 95% of the total population that resides in the municipality; that is to say, it is an urban municipality. For this reason, the city of Puebla possesses capacity of concentration industrial, population and economic.

On the other hand, immigration has remained almost constant during the last three decades. On average, during the three decades, the city of Puebla has been receiving inhabitants in a constant way: seventeen of every one hundred inhabitants who live in Puebla come from other states; this has caused a deterioration of the local infrastructure since it demands an extra effort for the provision of services.

However, with the implementation of the project of Urban Renewal in the central area of the city, a phenomenon was generated contrary to the above; that is, in the last five years, the number of fixed (non-floating) inhabitants in the central zone has decreased dramatically compared to other areas. This means that after the implementation of the Urban Renewal project, it has not achieved one of its main objectives, which is to keep alive the area with a fixed population that inhabits the area.



Fig. 6. Image of the Historic Center of the city of Puebla. Puebla dos 22.

4. Conclusion

In short, we can say that the origin that gave life to the Urban Renewal was the constant preoccupation of some thinkers with the spatial variable, which is materialized in the urban. In this sense, the urban is located in cities, that is, any urban phenomenon necessarily refers to the city. The city as an economic, social, political, historical, urbanistic or architectural agent, via its patrimony, social actors, functions in production, productive factors, suppliers, applicants, etc.

All of them make up the city and are, together or individually, the object of analysis of the various disciplines that observe the phenomenon of the urban. Thus, within the heritage of the city we can find monuments, buildings and urban infrastructure, if these are subject to a physical change, then it will imply that the phenomenon of urban renewal becomes a case of interest to urban economics and sociology.

If, on the basis of the above evidence, it appears that only a few economists, sociologists and urban planners have included the spatial variable in their projections and models as promoters of urban planning, it is to be understood that, for many decision makers, they become a fountain of urban phenomena. Thus the expansion of cities will not only depend on the production of goods, but also on the agglomeration and the characteristics of the space where it is located.

In essence, the economic perspective that addresses the Urban Renewal, gives important elements to comment that the inclusion of the spatial variable to the analysis of these authors contributes significantly to the understanding of some urban phenomena such as the concentration of economic activities, urbanization, the location of industries and the growth of cities.

The characteristics of the process decide the urban, architectural or economic fate of the different urban areas, in such a way that certain processes of invasion can cause an economic boom and others can cause stagnation. The conditions in which an invasion occurs are not the same, in this line circulates the logic of Urban Renewal of the center of the city of Puebla within a complex process of globalization.

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