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# Adaptive strategic spatial planning:

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## Re-conceptualization of the emergent metropolisation model in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico.

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### Abstract

*Under a globalised world, the phenomenon of metropolisation in Mexico has been strongly influenced by market driven neoliberalism policies, where political, social and economic asymmetries seem to be growing non-stop affecting urban development. As many Latin American countries, Mexico and its emergent metropolisation characterised by uncontrolled growth has been influenced by outdated planning methods (land use planning/zoning, master plans and strategic plans) in a clear top down operability with a non-clear planning vision and reinforced by the private actors investment. This had affected the urban metropolitan structure reinforcing spatial fragmentation and social segregation.*

*As a case study the MAVM (metropolitan area of the valley of Mexico) reflects and depicts the weakness of current planning strategies in Mexico which have not significantly changed since its first implementation. Moreover the paper discusses the lessons learned from master planning and strategic planning to later elaborate in what has been defined as an alternative for adaptive strategic spatial planning (Friedmann, 2004; Albrechts, 2009; Sepulveda, 2019) as a paradigm shift that can be implemented in Mexican urban planning. Furthermore, it is argued in the paper that current urban projects under development, regardless of their top-down nature, can be strategic opportunities for the adaptive approach if then considered a broader set of actors and their diverse demands. The aim of the paper is not to impose a new planning method but to embrace the possibility of change and inclusion towards a cohesive transition, capable of dealing with the complexity of contemporary developing metropolis such as the MAVM.*

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*Key words: Urban planning, Metropolisation, Globalization, Master planning, Strategic planning.*

## Introduction: Globalization and Neoliberalism in Latin America

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In an era of fast globalization and capitalism, cities have been caught up under significant changes in urbanization processes, positioning them as powerful engines of growth (Cohen, 2001). Although for Latin American countries still under “development status” growth has not been only economic, but assimilated and translated into increase levels of poverty, social inequalities, fragmentation, segregation, decentralization and unemployment, all of which were effects of globalization practices and continuous municipal competition and investment attraction. Furthermore, unable to cope with global trends and subjugated by economic growth and strong competition, Latin American countries still under debt crisis (intensified by globalization trends) followed structural reforms in form of readjustment policies as a recommended strategy by global institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF in order to get further loans (Carmona, Burgess, and Badenhorst, 2009, and de Mattos, 2002). This reforms initiated an economic trend characterised by the liberation of the market through subsidies, privatization and international participation, currently what we know as Neoliberalism (de Mattos, 2002). Soon, Neoliberalism started to modify urbanization processes, organization, structure and functionality within Latin American countries. Moreover planning overall changed drastically to cope with neoliberal ideals, fundamentally planning policies were adapted to improve the conditions and productivity of cities enabling the development of markets, privatization, investment, and the decentralization of political administrations (Carmona, Burgess, and Badenhorst, 2009).

The structural transformation of the global economy accelerated the globalization process affecting developing countries. Fast urbanization and expansion, speculation with land value and tenure, unequal development, segregated societies, informal human settlements due to unaffordability of land, and asymmetries between government institutions are some of the radical changes result of this new economic liberation in the developing world. Although changes may seem similar across countries (in Latin America) it is important to mention that there is an undeniable contextualization of the neoliberal movement that revealed endogenous and unique responses on urban developments in each one of them. Hence, beyond globalization, identity and idiosyncrasy within inhabitants of cities triggered different manifestations of urban morphology, urban landscapes, and architecture trends (de Mattos, 2002). Until today a holistic strategy capable of dealing with urban asymmetries due to neoliberal and globalization processes has not been reached and probably will never be accomplished. The complexity behind each context makes it impossible to be handled the same way across boundaries, flexibility and adaptability must be critical goals for future urban planning strategies.

As many countries in Latin America, Mexico has been heavily affected by globalization, manifesting new economic, social and political configurations that have been transforming the territory at different dimensions and scales. The complexity of the territory was then challenged and increased by the introduction of neoliberalism, ‘the central guiding principle of economic thought and management’ (Harvey, 2005) which had an important impact in the urbanization process in the 80’s, leaving behind industrialization as the main economic driver of development towards a new post-industrial era dominated by a market driven economy focused on services, and characterised by international investment and municipal competition, privatization of space, stronger migration and decentralization, and inadequate land management. These processes soon started changing the urban development of the country, shaping Mexican cities (and many others) to what we know today (2019), strongly social-segated and spatial fragmented.

Under this context the following paragraphs will tackle Mexico as case study, particularly the conditions reflected in the main metropolitan area in the country; MAVM (Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico). Firstly by introducing a brief history of urban planning evolution in Mexico until today to understand its process and limitations. Secondly the paper will describe

the emergent metropolisation process in the MAVM from its growth and consolidation, its current segregated condition, and the current planning challenges faced by the metropolis due to its top-down planning approach. Thirdly the paper will argue the possibility of change regarding the planning approach by depicting the lessons learned from master planning (the modernist approach), land use planning and strategic planning (the neoliberal approach) and elaborating an argument towards an adaptive strategic planning as the next step for the inherited metropolis. Finally some recommendations will be suggested in order to achieve the adaptive strategic planning.

## Urban planning in Mexico

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Urban planning in Mexico has been a process of constant evolution since the beginning of prehispanic civilization. However, under the influence of the Spanish conquest similar patterns of urbanization with other Latin American cities are recognised by the XVI century. According to several studies a historic uniformity is identified in the urban centers in Latin America during the colony after the Spanish conquest (Chaparro, 2009). During this time the European influence in the design of the emergent settlements is clear, most of the patterns recognised are known from its response to Felipe II ‘ordenanzas’, an ordering system similar to zoning from characterised by having all the streets joint to a center plaza (with the most important buildings such as churches or royalty and other civil buildings) in a grid system of order (Chaparro, 2009). In this regard ‘ordenanzas’ shaped the centers of the Spanish cities in America which were growing and slowly urbanizing following a specific architectural and urbanistic style incorporated in Europe during the first half of XIX century and the beginning of XX century (Chaparro, 2009). During this period urbanism in Latin America followed specific French tendencies initiated by Housmann as the brain behind the urbanization process in Paris, better known for its long and wide avenues that created perspectives with an icon building at the end.

However, modern urbanism starts in Mexico since the introduction of “Plano Regulador de México” (Regulation plan of Mexico) at the end of the XVIII century with Ignacio Castera (See figure 1) as the author influenced by neoclassic urbanism characterised by symmetry and order (McMichael, 2002).

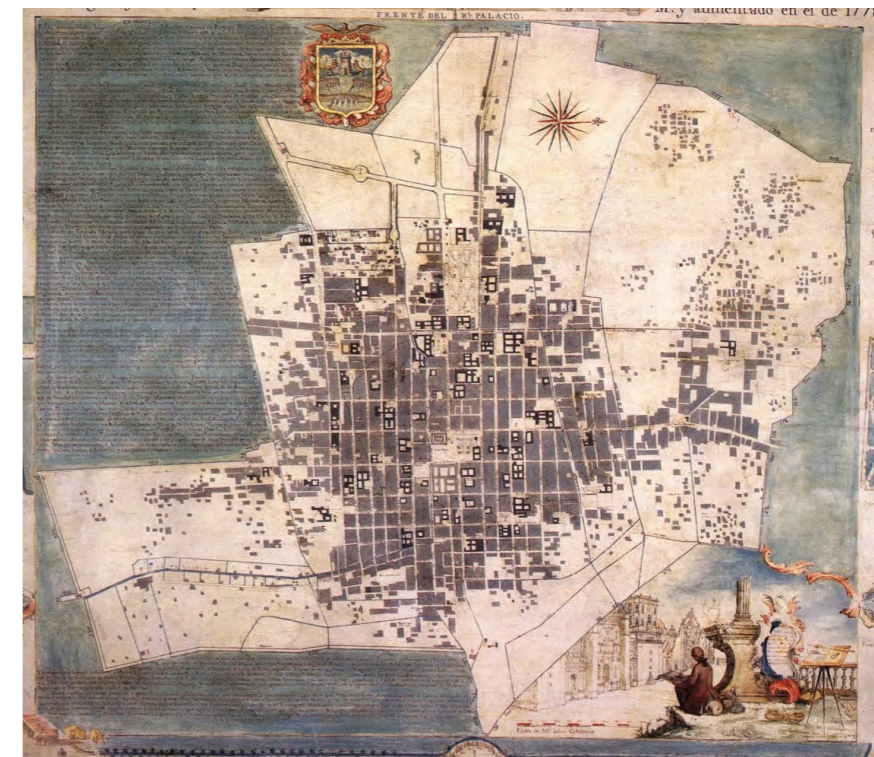


Figure 1. Source: Castera, Ignacio (1776). Plano iconografico de la nobilissima Ciudad de Mexico. Sociedad Mexicana de Geografia y Estadística (SMGE).

During the last two decades of the XIX century and under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, Mexico experienced the first steps towards globalization (Suarez, 2009). Mexico was open for investment and with the railway system underway, industrialization was slowly settling as the main economic activity, influencing not only the economy but the growth of its cities as well. It is in this period of time and the first decade of the XX century when modernity was on the rise. Large-scale public buildings, public transport infrastructure, basic urban services and social equipment were built. The city was growing at a fast rate. Nevertheless, this tendency of new buildings and constant urbanization stopped suddenly after 1910 and between 1920 due to the Mexican Revolution. But it was the post-revolutionary period the one triggering a substantial change for urban planning in Mexico. The reason is because of the process of national reconstruction helped developing a theoretical framework based on modernism practices for urban planning, giving it the impulse in a later state to act as an institutional tool for urban interventions (Chaparro, 2009).

Moreover, urbanism influenced by the ideas of the last century had led to the formulation of a large number of urban plans and masterplans/blue prints based on zoning regulations and the control of the urban expansion and building density (Chaparro, 2009). The first regulatory plan used as tool and graphic instrument that illustrated social and economic activities and its spatial manifestation was introduced by architect Carlos Contreras in the 1920's (Chaparro, 2009, Sanchez, 2002 and Gortary and Hernandez, 1988). This regulatory plan used 'zoning' as the control measure and guide for the ordered development and growth of the city based in their specific activities (Sanchez, 2002). From this regulatory plan that was based in functional principles the evolution of planning in Mexico has not changed drastically. The approach is still similar, with new complexity due to the expansion of the city, but the improvements have been methodologically speaking; 'poor'.

The first national plan for urban development (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano) was made in 1978, as an attempt to cope with the rapid urbanization in the country due to industrialization processes, which modified the approach of urban planning towards improving the territorial conditions for better and more effective industrialization processes. The focus was merely economic. Investments and development of infrastructure was only focused to make industries as effective as possible, as a result the evident concentration of population and resources was focalised in a few places within the national territory (Chaparro, 2009). It is because of the conquest that the tradition of urban planning in Mexico and other Latin American cities act as mirror effect of European urbanization processes. The evolution of the urbanization specifically in Mexico has been that of a constant try and error imitation of several trends of urban theory. The garden city by E. Howard, Le Corbousier and its gigantic lifeless buildings (implemented by Alberto J. Pani in Mexico City), the suburban movement in the USA not to mention architectural specific trends that shaped Mexico's urban image. Mexico is a half-blood country with a half blood urbanization process. Thus, the tradition of urban planning in Mexico has been focusing in land use and zoning solely denoting its spatial-functional approach, a method proven to be unsuccessful in the contemporary urbanizing-globalizing world due to the fact that it encourage competition fostering economic investment through hard infrastructure projects that cause a segregated condition in the city as will be explained in the next section. Its rigid and prohibitive modernist nature are the reason why Mexican urbanistic plans for development have failed to cope with the challenges and the reality faced until today (Chaparro, 2009).

Challenges in Mexico as in other parts of the world have changed and became more complex than a century ago. Economic and social conditions in a developing country like Mexico are radically different than those in the developed world, it is not feasible to base urban planning principles of countries that faced other realities (Carmona, M., Burgess, R. and Badenhorst, M., 2009). What the administrations, organizations and the government in general has yet to understand is that with a growing complexity there is an urgent need for improvement regarding planning methods and an approach that deals with an inter and intra municipal

perspective. The country cannot continue growing with the same planning background which as mention earlier was developed under other circumstances. The clearest example of this complexity and lack of successful planning is the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico (MAVM), the biggest and most influential metropolis in the country, a metropolitan system that has grown unpredictably at a fast speed under globalization and neoliberalism policies.

## The Emergent Urban Metropolisation Process in Mexico

*The metropolisation developing model is a process whereby certain cities adapt to the emerging post-industrial economy by concentrating locally interacting high-order- information-using activities that both enable and structure global interactions (Bourdeau-Lepage and Huriot, 2005 p6).*

### Urban Growth and the formation of the MAVM

Urban growth in Mexico has been influenced firstly by industrialization, a process that dates since the beginning of the 1940's where conditions favored the main cities; Mexico City, Monterrey and Guadalajara to develop as industrialised urban systems. At that time 40% of the national population lived in Mexico City, 5% in Monterrey and 6% in Guadalajara (Eibenschutz, Carrillo, 2011). Government action during these periods was focused on two priorities; first to complete the distribution of land and regulate production in the Mexican countryside, pending from the Mexican revolution, and the second was industrial development (Eibenschutz, Carrillo, 2011).

During the 1950 and 1960 population in Mexico City grew at a fast rate as the effect of massive migration from rural countryside to urban and industrialised cities where job opportunities were on the rise. It is in the 1960 when a deconcentration phenomenon started in the capital city passing the population growth "torch" to its nearest neighbor Estado de Mexico, originating the first conurbation between them, hence initiating the process of metropolisation in Mexico City (Unikel et al. 1978). This central urbanization dynamic led to the formation of the MAVM or Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico (See figure 2), a massive expansion of the urban fabric from a central point (Mexico City and its 16 municipalities) towards its periphery, influencing 2 other political-administrative entities; Estado de Mexico and Hidalgo, affecting 58 municipalities and 1 municipality respectively. Together they have a population of more than 20 million inhabitants (INEGI, 2015).

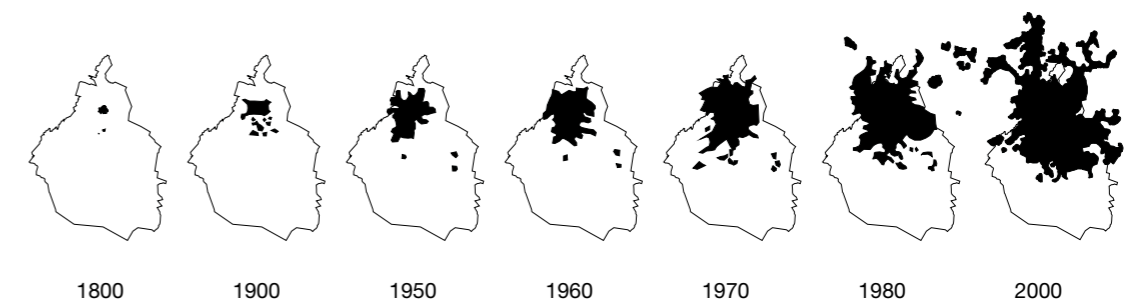


Figure 2. Source: Own elaboration. the drawing shows the expansion of the metropolitan area through time.

But before achieving such huge population numbers, growth accompanied with a high concentration of services in the center and the rise of land affordability, obligated the poorest population generally the working class to settle in the periphery; a growth pattern soon to be recognised as a 'ring growth model' of development (Unikel et al. 1978). A typical relation center-periphery was then enhanced by lack of land management from government

institutions impotent to control the massive overpopulation and growth towards the periphery, an expansion mostly made without regulating tools or appropriate adaptive models, meaning that people settled in land illegally (see figure 3) and land was sold to developers focused on building housing for the low income, gated communities fragmented from the urban tissue. In short, a new informal urbanization contrasted from the regulated formality in the center. Therefore two processes of settlement on urban soil were then recognised in Mexico: the 'formal' although arguably characterised for compiling with regulations established by the government, and the 'informal' which did not followed the regulatory framework of planning regulations (Eibenschutz, Carrillo, 2011).



Figure 3. Source: Photography by Pablo López Luz. The image shows informal settlements at the periphery in Mexico City.

### Social segregation and spatial fragmentation

The conditions of social segregation and spatial fragmentation in the metropolis were enhanced due to globalization influence regarding urban planning strategies and methods applied to the metropolis (Kozak, 2018). Neoliberal policies and the liberation of the market intensified the competition among municipalities which were mostly interested in finding investments. Responsibilities were not clearly defined across them and the dominating planning approach normative regarding land uses was not flexible to the expansion and competitive conditions that the metropolis was facing. Municipalities began losing power regarding decision making, even when the autonomy of decisions was at their disposal. Developers played an important role in decisions due to the fact that without them, municipalities alone did not have enough resources to cope with expansion needs, finding the answer in the privatization of spatial developments. As such, the metropolis was growing with privatised spatial services, transport infrastructure and other public facilities which were following a project-based planning approach where responsibilities concerning local immediate surroundings were overlooked not having an appropriate response towards a functional cohesion in the metropolis.

Globalization intensified the fragmented and segregated urban condition of the metropolis, the dynamics of the market increased competition between municipalities across regions that at the same time worsened the space consumption in the territory where municipalities lack of successful instruments to regulate it. Informal settlements were developed in protected areas, and protected communal land was sold to the highest bidder in a competitive market often ruled by developers looking for the cheapest land price to build-in (Eibenschutz, Carrillo, 2011), an economy where demand surpassed offer potentials; the perfect scenario for development and investment. Because of that reason urban planning shifted to that of only project-led rather than process-led approach. Developers had a strong influence in the development of projects, which were strategic for economic goals, mostly attracting investment, new businesses and most recently tourist attractions and an increase housing stock completely segregated from basic services, decent quality of life, transport facilities, and work centralities to name a few (Garcia, 2011).

In this regard, the unbalanced conditions of planning in the MAVM focalised projects concerned in the enhancement of infrastructure and spatial conditions in privilege areas (e.g business districts) that belong to the strongest municipalities (Mexico City). The MAVM has been growing with this ideology of stronger powerful players that has only worsen the segregated condition of the metropolis were vulnerable areas with weak power-municipalities are not taken into consideration, completely subjugated to decisions taken above them.

### The effects of Housing

Regardless of economic prosperity cities were not prepared for the massive population growth, increasing the demand for urban land, basic urban services, infrastructure and housing (Garcia, 2011). Moreover housing in informal human settlements (HIS) took place in places far from the aforementioned services and main centralities, increasing the risk to vulnerabilities such as hazards and health concern issues. As a response to the increase in housing demand, complementary programmes for finance were put in motion, the housing finance programme (PFV) and the Housing Fond (Fovi) in 1963, and with them 'the emergence of a new agent for housing production: the real estate promotion sector' (Garcia, 2011), thus the beginning of the social housing market.

Social Housing was later controlled and managed by public institutions whose funds were taken from solidary savings made by obligated workers contributions. Of this institutions the largest financing agency was Infonavit; the national funding institute for workers' housing, which intentionally would've taken contributions from the high income workers to facilitate credit to the lower income workers. Nevertheless it failed due to internal mechanisms of corruption, enabling the private sector who was in control of the distribution of housing loans to develop their own construction companies, thus taking the commissions of housing development projects. Furthermore in addition to the conditions relating housing construction, the free land market economic model that took place in the 80's led to the intensification in the speculation of the housing value. The open market allowed investors to buy land at lower prices at the outskirts of the city, fostering periphery developments segregated from basic services and commodities located at the centre. Planning mechanisms at the time were unable to control and regulate the expansion phenomenon due to the new economic model, transforming the aim of Social Housing; from being a political concern towards a mere business strategy able to profit the big winners; the housing developers (See Figure 4). The city was then under high pressure and massive expansion, a fragmented structure was dominating housing developments, which were walled gated communities of thousands of houses one after the other as an homogeneous organism alienated from the general city structure; openness and livability were contested by insecurity, and insecurity was aggravated by the segregation of such developments.

A segregated model of long commutes to job centralities, high costs of infrastructure and living expenses due to long distances and loss of protected land against informality. These are only part of the problem in an asymmetric urban metropolis recognised by a small high income west with a massive poverty east incapable of affording a different lifestyle under a neoliberal high competitive regime. The housing market has shown that the challenge is to build houses, rather than creating suitable environments with the necessary networks for promoting productive inclusion (Hausmann, 2016), it has become the most successful business in developing countries.



Figure 4. Source: Photography by Jorge Tabaoda. The image depicts the current models of urbanization, repetitive low cost housing.

### Current Urban Challenges

The emergent metropolisation process through which the MAVM has been developed is that of a segregated society in a fragmented space. The current situation in the country lacks of planning instruments and mechanisms capable of dealing with the different asymmetries that are constantly shaping the urban life of its citizens (See figure 5 and 6). Moreover, the constant competition among municipalities, private companies creates an unjust market that favors those with the highest incomes and worsens the possibilities of the low income society to enter the formal economy; residents are unable to migrate to areas close to job centralities nor areas close to efficient public transport and public space facilities. This results in an uneven growth that has dominated over the past century.

One of the main causes of this unhealthy urbanization is attributed to neoliberal policies that enabled the territory to be used speculatively where the only actors involved are developers and community land owners whom dictate conditions and terms - the game is simple, as long as the future outcome fills their pockets following their private interests and benefits, the city can continue growing non-stop-, leaving the state powerless to control the situation acting as a mere expectator besides, in some cases it also acts as a player due to its own interest in attracting investment.

Mexico City has been the main attractor for economic development and investment for large urban projects under the last decades in the country, most of which are attributed to its radical expansion, mainly focusing on regional-logistic infrastructures and the urgency to find solutions for its condition, a known practice of re-action rather than action. This projects however, are developed under a top-down approach with no consideration of local vulnerable actors for a fair decision-making process. They are indeed strategic for economic development; some will argue that they are even necessary for the better good of the economy international investment and better positioning of the country globally. But what all of this projects lack of



Figure 5. Source: UNEQUAL SCENES, 2019. The image depicts Spatial Fragmentation, high income and low income developments in the same place



Figure 6. Source: UNEQUAL SCENES, 2019. The image shows Santa Fe business district close to housing developments of vulnerable groups

is a strategic approach that not only focuses on the evident economic benefits but rather in the people that will be locally affected by their further development and implementation - the losers-. A society that has grown socially segregated and spatially fragmented under a weak democracy.

Some of the urban projects and attractors of investment are housing developments, new public transport infrastructure, a new international airport, metropolitan open spaces (See figure 6), business areas, and some renovation projects of vulnerable places and city center. Projects that without a doubt have an impact at a multidimensional and multi-scalar levels but have not been appropriately formulated since municipalities despite their power and autonomy regarding their own planning-future lack of collaboration and coordination among them (inter-municipal level), thus, they are unable to develop a vision(s) that frame adaptive strategies.

## An adaptive strategic planning in the MAVM

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Until this point the paper has covered the evolution of urban planning in Mexico to what it is today and addressed the emergent metropolitan model which portraits the biggest challenges of the metropolis. Departing from them as an initial statement of the current metropolitan condition in the MAMV this section of the paper will address a necessary paradigm shift, in order to change the current urban planning system that has been stagnated for a long time with a traditional planning can only be described as an old and outdated process that instrumentalise land use through zoning and masterplans through rigid blueprints. It has also been pointed out that no essential improvements towards a just decision making process have been made. This is because until now the power of decision in Mexico belongs to the developers and municipalities which have specific uncoordinated goals, moreover, the general public (especially vulnerable actors) is not involve in decision-making processes because it would mean giving up some of the control in the process, and those who have it are not ready to share it (Friedmann, 1992; Albrechts, 2009).

### Master planning

Modernism guided architecture and planning professionals towards urban growth and redevelopment and Mexico is not an exception. Under this interpretation the urban function and form (structure and the built environment) needed to be adjusted to pursuit the economic, social and demographic demands fostering industrialization. In this regard, modernism influenced urban planning principles towards this goal, putting it up front and guiding it with a functional rational, characteristic of the movement.

In developing countries functional urbanism and planning fostered the introduction of a new urban order which socio-economic goals were to increase the efficiency of the city through strict, functional segregation of land uses, improvements to transport systems and the subsidization of services (Carmona, Burgess, and Badenhorst, 2009). Moreover urban policies under the functional regime had the goal to transform developing countries into modern cities using zoning and masterplans as the main instruments for implementation and control of land use (Carmona, Burgess, and Badenhorst, 2009).

Regardless of its ideals, master plans required strong state power of intervention, regulation and control (Carmona, Burgess, and Badenhorst, 2009), but it was noticed that this rigid plans were in charge of inflexible governments with weak institutions and lack of co-ordination among them and across municipalities. In this regard planning had a predominant top-down approach that excluded local interests from decision making processes, thus a more flexible planning was needed in order to make a change that enable competition and the development of markets in fast globalizing world (Carmona, Burgess, and Badenhorst, 2009).

### Strategic planning

After the modernization and industrialization period, Neoliberal thinking and policies changed urban planning conditions enabling markets and privatization for a more productive and efficient development. As a response to search global competitiveness the private sector implemented strategic planning, a strategy used firstly by companies to plan their futures effectively while dealing with uncertainty (Albrechts, 2009; Carmona, Burgess, and Badenhorst, 2009; Kaufman and Jacobs 1987).

*"The strategic plan aims to improve traditional planning by being closer to reality, resources and social actors. It recognises the need to define urban objectives in terms of the existing economy, social and cultural dynamic. It develops a permanent relationship between objectives, strategies projects and impacts. It recognises the need for the convergence of interests between public and private actors in all the phases of plan making and implementation" (Burgess and Carmona, 2009, p25).*

Objectives regarding strategic planning may vary but according to Albrechts (2009) constructing coordinated visions, framing an integrated long-term strategic logic capable of enhancing action-orientation beyond control and multi-level governance were among them. Although it seemed to be implemented mainly for economic development a strategic planning approach was implemented by some governments like USA (Albrechts, 2009).

### Towards an Adaptive Strategic Spatial Planning in the MAVM

But what can be learned from a masterplan land use based approach and a strategic plan based on economic improvement? And is either one enough for a metropolis such as the MAVM?

Master plans are oriented towards results instrumentalised by rigid blueprints and inflexible land uses, while the strategic plans are instrumentalised through objectives towards economic interests to cope with globalization. Both limit urban growth in contexts similar to the one developed in Mexico (developing countries) where the dynamics of urbanization and the processes of development are complex by nature responding to inequalities, social segregation and spatial fragmentation. Moreover both still have a dominant top-down approach, not flexible to further adaptation regarding urban planning.

It has been clear that top-down planning is not working in the MAVM, which suffers the constant competition between municipalities and robust influence of governmental institutions, the power belongs to investors and politicians; the current condition of the emergent metropolis shows serious social segregation and lack of interest from power positions to share it with its citizens. A change that seeks for a balance between top-down and bottom-up initiatives is needed, brought from negotiation collaboration and constant participation towards a better and sustainable future. In short, there is a need for an adaptive strategic approach that takes into account the intra-municipal development through inter-municipal collaboration and coordination that facilitate local endogenous developments for the most vulnerable actors which are heavily influenced by planning actions.

In Mexico transparency and accountability regarding political actions has recently manifested some achievements -baby-steps yet for a massively asymmetric metropolis- but nevertheless the possibility of substantial change. There are many examples in the metropolis to illustrate top-down approaches and the lack of interest regarding decision-making (between developers and local communities), but the most relevant due to its impact and consequent response of society was the "Corredor Verde Chapultepec" (green corridor of Chapultepec); a large strategic urban project, formulated as a second floor (portrayed as public space) in one of the most important avenues in Mexico City (Chapultepec, 10 lines of vehicule-traffic). The project got a complete rejection from the society and professionals all over the metropolis (see figure 7 and 8). The main reasons were; lack of accountability, the negative impacts regarding local economies and the enhancement of segregation in an area which already suffers from it. The project was revealed as a finished design ready for implementation. Later on, the project was submitted to "public consultation", and as expected the very nature of the project (private investment for commercial purposes) turn the citizens against it, making use of public media to organise themselves in a public manifestation that later put a definite end to the project.



Figure 7 and 8. Source: above, render by FREE 2015, magis.iteso.mx; below, maspormas.com 2015. The image shows a render of the proposal (above) and the resulting protest (below)

Such an event reflects a society tired of not been taken into consideration when important decisions are to be made. As an alternative, an adaptive strategic planning is needed and some efforts to formulate it have been done in European contexts (see Healey, 1997; Albrechts, 2004; 2006; Albrechts et al, 2001, Albrechts et al, 2003; Motte, 2006; Healey, 2007), relevant and important inputs that nevertheless need to be taken into consideration in a contextualised way (Latin America and developing countries). Louis Albrechts describes strategic spatial planning as follows:

*“spatial strategic planning is a transformative and integrative, public sector led socio-spatial process through which visions/frames of reference, justification for coherent actions and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and what it might become (Albrechts, 2001; 2004; 2006; Motte, 2006)”*

From his own definition it can be understood the need for integration in a continuous process of collaboration and coordination are a strong asset of this new way of planning because it allows a multilevel-governance, involving a diverse series of actors, from public to private into the decision-making and implementation process, creating long term visions with strategies at different levels of power structures rather than rigid unilateral blueprints (Albrechts, 2009). In this regard the MAVM and Mexico as a Nation needs urgently to formalise and put in motion an adaptive strategic planning, formulated and fitted to its own challenges with the implementation of a new governance system that takes public in consideration regarding decision-making processes. Thus, stressing collaboration and coordination among public and private actors (See figure 9). The goal is to achieve better results in a long-term basis finding an appropriate balance between top-down and bottom-down approaches, a vision that considers existing issues, problems and future opportunities (Albrechts, 2009).

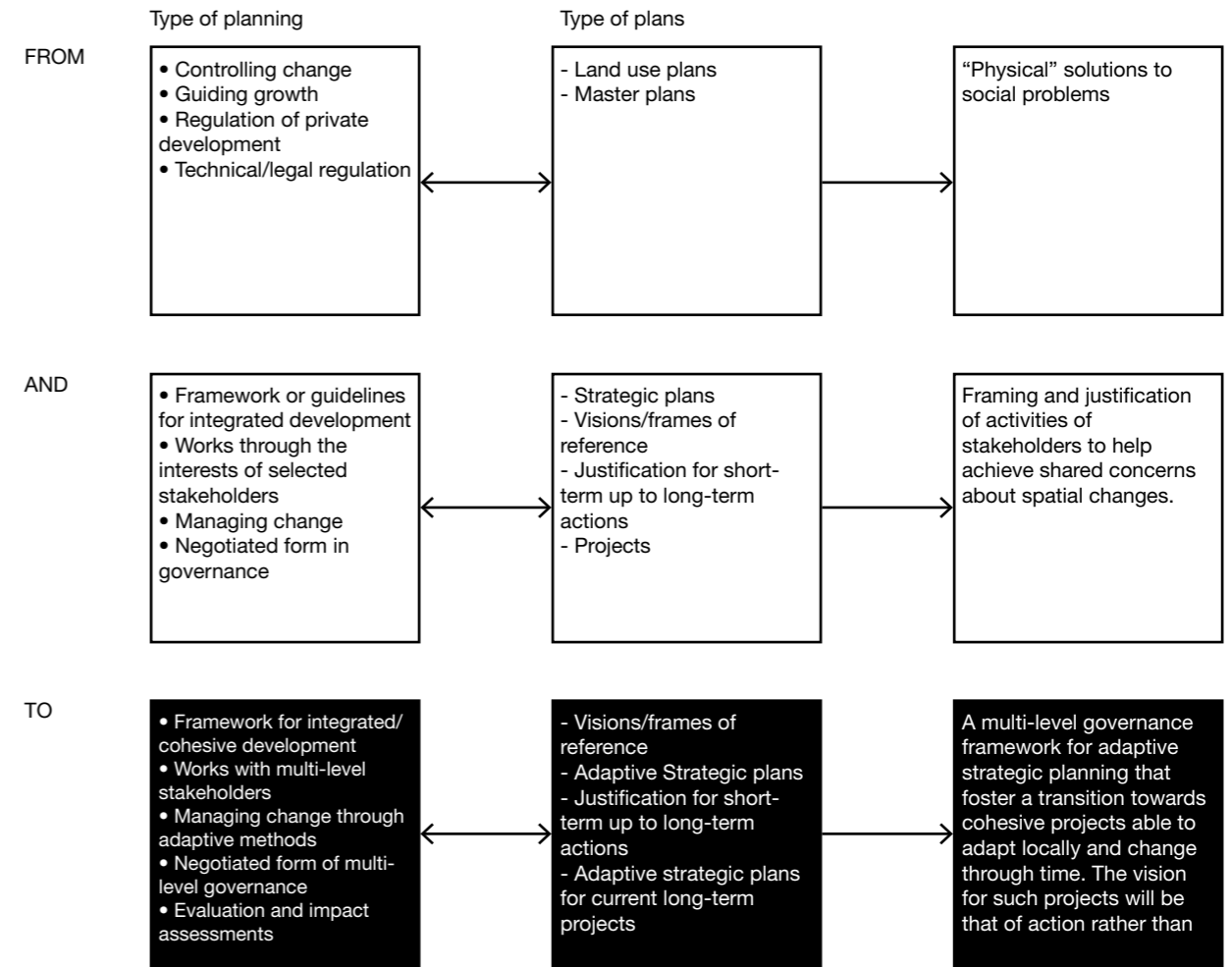


Figure 9. Modified diagram based in Louis Albrechts (2009). From traditional land use planning and strategic planning to an adaptive spatial strategic planning

### The role of current large urban projects and municipal power

Current projects that originated in a top-down approach and are difficult to change at this stage of development are some of the challenges faced the Metropolis, but that can be opportunities to startup the adaptive change due to its large scale of impact and multidimensional levels of interest and actors. Ongoing projects are:

- The development of the expansion of the international airport AISL (a project 50km away from the original airport which will include further transport development to connect them)
- The metropolitan eco-park in the former lake of Texcoco (the biggest void in the metropolis)
- Infrastructure projects regarding transportation, e.g. the expansion of Metro lines
- Reconstruction of vulnerable areas after the 2017 Earthquake (an area known as “Zona Cero” highly vulnerable to seismic events)

These projects are strategic and respond to specific metropolitan needs, nevertheless, the power of decision-making process is still unbalanced. Current municipal urban plans (PDU’s) are not coordinated reflecting the lack of interests in this regard with the planned projects. It is important to mention that each municipality has its own interests and stress the fact that such interests are competing with each other weakening the possibility to reach agreements with the current planning framework. For this reason municipalities must engage a different approach, one that recognises their own interests and common ones, economically and functionally enabling the development of shared visions for a better inclusive and cohesive metropolis, thus reducing the asymmetries that characterise it until now.

Moreover, if local areas are taken into consideration (primarily vulnerable low-power communities), new developments can be planned regarding the interests of local people combined with those of developers and the own municipalities from a cohesive and inclusive approach. In order to make this possible a multilevel-governance must be implemented, approaching the main actors that want to get benefited from the project, those that will take most of the responsibilities and the negatively affected ones that are always diverted by the process, lifting most of the burdens (in current planning strategies). The possibilities could benefit all levels of power, from local and municipal to state level. Moreover, endogenous developments which people relate with, are important to start with the reduction of social segregation and the spatial fragmentation, characteristics and challenges of the MAVM.

Strengthening local actors will benefit the metropolis system, because of several factors:

- With endogenous development, identity regarding the locality might rise, thus reducing segregation
- Stressing endogenous developments will enable new economic manifestations, enhancing local sub-centralities
- The endogenous development will make possible innovations at a local level, giving vulnerable places the ability/opportunity to adapt and react to outside challenges (Garofolio, 1993)
- New sub-centralities specific to the needs of local residents will help to mitigate the monocentric functions towards the center (Mexico City), by decentralizing them but acknowledging that the network cannot be overlooked.
- By reducing the monocentric functions, more sustainable goals and practices regarding transport (reducing excessive transport commutes) and health-issues (less pollution, more walkable distances) can be achieved locally.

## Conclusions

Planning in Mexico has been contextualised in this paper as a technical instrument without flexibility; an administrative tool dedicated to “control” urban expansion, mobility and land use, inadequate to answer to contemporary conflicts just as socio-spatial fragmentation, leaving vulnerable communities behind, increasing their precarious living standards. Moreover planning has a Top-Down approach in the country, municipal and federal authorities have shown a serious inefficiency when approaching towards a more just planning process excluding the communities, influenced by historical traditions and competitiveness in a neoliberal, globalised reality. It has a lot of discrepancies regarding decision making processes where political interests and corruption are part of the daily system. As such, governance in Mexico seems to be out of the question in current urban plans, an approach has not been appropriately implemented. Furthermore, most of the decision making that has taken place under the neoliberal umbrella protects and improves the quality of life of high-income societies, leaving the low income wet and vulnerable, segregating them not only from the process but from basic urban benefits.

The recommendation for a change regarding urban planning in Mexico is that of an adaptive model of strategic planning, through which tasks and burdens are shared in a balanced way and where large urban projects consider their local immediate surroundings before landing, searching for potentialities within the area in order to facilitate their integration thus reducing the fragmented condition, currently increasing do to the lack of a defined and clear perspective towards their response to the overall metropolitan functionality.

It also has been stressed that Mexico and the MAVM are continuously growing, facing big procedural and morphological challenges such as the current metropolitan strategic projects that regardless of their nature (top-down), there is an important opportunity for change by adapting the proposals to answer local-vulnerable needs, responding to new visions that integrate them in the development rather than exclude them.

In order to develop those visions, intra-municipal goals need to be re-defined and enhance through inter-municipal collaboration and coordination by defining new instruments for adaptive planning such as policies and specific projects in determined time frames for implementation (from short-term to long-term) defining priorities among them, thus recognizing the actors involved in a multi-level governance approach (from strong powers of interest and action to vulnerable local communities with low power) in a co-participatory process able to foster not only new developments but to actually guarantee that the metropolitan interests and functions (e.g. connectivity, accessibility, job concentration, housing etc) will enable rather than block local actions (from the bottom to the whole) and the possibility for endogenous developments particular to the needs of localities.

## Future steps for research and implementation

Finally it is relevant to take into consideration other successful cases for urban planning, practices that have been proven successful in other (similar) contexts but that nevertheless can be evaluated for further implementation in the MAVM such as Surplus Value Capture (Colombia) The Urban Operation and Interlinked Operation (Brazil), Transferable Development Rights (Tokyo, Toronto), or Zoning incentives which have been practiced in Mexico to maintain the Historic city center. Policies and initiatives capable of changing developing countries urban planning history towards more adaptive models of strategic planning.

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Figure 6: Santa Fe business district, [Online image]. (2019). Retrieved November 25, 2019 from <https://unequalscenes.com/>

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Figure 9: Modified diagram based in Albrechts, L. (2009). *Strategic spatial planning revisited experiences from Europe*. 3. BÖLGESEL KALKINMA VE YÖNETİM SEMPOZYUMU, 61.