



Public Life and Urban Space

MORE HOUSING OR A BETTER CITY

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How do we recover the loss of housing in central areas without increasing segregation in the city? How do we respond to the housing needs of the low income population? If building is forbidden in outlying neighbourhoods and a significant segment of the population cannot access housing in the centre, then where exactly do people live? The answers are increasingly complex, largely due to the lack of any co-ordination between the Federal District (FD) and the State of Mexico, patently clear in the housing sector. In addition to working with different town-planning programmes and norms, in the FD, measures have been adopted to regulate housing production and promote a more balanced urban development, without considering that the FD forms part of the metropolitan area, that the actions have repercussions outside its limits and that, at the same time, these actions have an effect thereupon. An example of these measures: the ban on the development of housing estates in the 1950s, and from the mid-sixties onwards, the delimitation of conservation areas, the definition of land-uses, densities and volumes in subsequent neighbourhood town-planning development programmes, and restrictions on building housing in special controlled development zones.

And lastly, in 2000, the FD Government defined its urban policy around “Bando Dos”: an order aimed at “reversing the loss of population from the four central neighbourhoods, making good use of its existing infrastructure and facilities for the benefit of poor residents, and regulating disproportionate growth in the neighbourhoods to the south and east. In order to protect conservation land and prevent spread of the urban sprawl in aquifer recharge zones where a significant proportion of the city’s oxygen is produced”. At the same time, for the working-class districts of the outlying neighbourhoods, it is implementing an improvement programme which, in addition to expansion and rehabilitation, includes two kinds of new housing: replacement of damaged housing or building on already inhabited family plots. Since the 1950s, the urban area of the FD has exceeded the limits, accelerating the development of middle-class housing estates to the west, in districts bordering the State of

Mexico. At the same time, the industrial zone to the north has been consolidated, and with this, the construction of public housing developments concentrated to the north and east of the city.

Whilst there is increasing deterioration and loss of housing in the working-class districts in the centre, where the capacity for more profitable uses of the land is growing, the low-income population is increasing significantly, a population that is turning to the unofficial market in order to meet its housing needs. Thus, there has been a proliferation of clandestine estates and encroachment on neighbourhoods and districts to the east and south-east. Middle-class housing developments are located in the central band of the FD and the residential areas to the west and south; they make up the “city of the upper classes”, which extends to neighbouring districts. It has been possible to generate new housing in areas where housing had been lost. However, as DeMet indicates, production was concentrated in the four central neighbourhoods: in 2000, only 30% of the private supply was in this area; in the second quarter of 2005, the percentage rose to 66%, 72% if only new housing is included. As the land prices are rising, the private supply of housing of social and working-class interest has fallen in relation to the middleclass supply, supply of the former being transferred to the adjacent districts. Thus, in five years, just over 60,000 new units in central neighbourhoods were built, whilst a property boom was recorded in the districts, involving around 150,000 housing units, according to data from the Urban Development Department of the State of Mexico. The low income population has only been able to obtain housing in the city centre, thanks to programmes of the Housing Institute (INVIDF), with its high subsidy levels.

To cope with rising land prices, private developers have increased density in housing developments of social and working-class interest, which according to DeMet, rose from 350 housing units/hectare in 2000 to over 650 housing units/hectare in 2005. They have also reduced living space from 57 to 51m². The INVI-DF has used up its reserve of land in the area; it does not have the resources to buy land and depends on expropriation by

the local government in order to continue working in this part of the city. With the new housing produced in the city centre between 2000 and 2005, just over 200,000 people stayed or returned; a positive balance for recycling of the area, which should be recorded with the results of the 2005 Housing Count. The scenario today is very different: the supply of free land in the city centre has been reduced and has become more expensive; there is growing pressure on working-class housing due to its development potential for the construction of middle-class housing, and the FD does not have any reserves. According to Bando Dos, there will be no alternative for the development of working-class and social housing other than the metropolitan districts. The solution put forward by developments in the districts raises new problems for the population: outlying locations that mean long, expensive travel and a lack of basic services and facilities. As for the city, it will continue losing its population, and the floating population will rise, along with the requirement for public transport on already saturated highways. Bando Dos needs to be revised in light of its impacts both within and outside the limits of the FD, and on the living conditions of the average and low-income population. Tools need to be designed so that the FD can recover the added value that generates public investment in housing, in order to carry on producing it. Expanding, gradually, permission to build working-class and social housing in outlying neighbourhoods of the FD; in order to grow from within, densifying and exploiting the city's services and facilities, and reducing the crowding out of its population to dormitory zones of the city.

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