

PUBLIC OPEN SPACES: FLEXIBILITY OF THEIR USES IN HISTORIC AND VERNACULAR ENVIRONMENTS

This paper examines the role of public open spaces within historic and vernacular environments in a developing country with a large cultural heritage like Mexico. A critical approach to the overspecialized spaces in modern towns is sought, as well as an apology of the multipurpose quality of public areas in pre-Columbian and colonial Mexican settlements. Several conclusions are proposed, related to recent Mexican examples in the field of urban planning and design.

Public open spaces and their specialization over history

Open urban spaces, like human activities, have become more and more specialized. A higher productivity and a better organization capability are important reasons for such a trend.

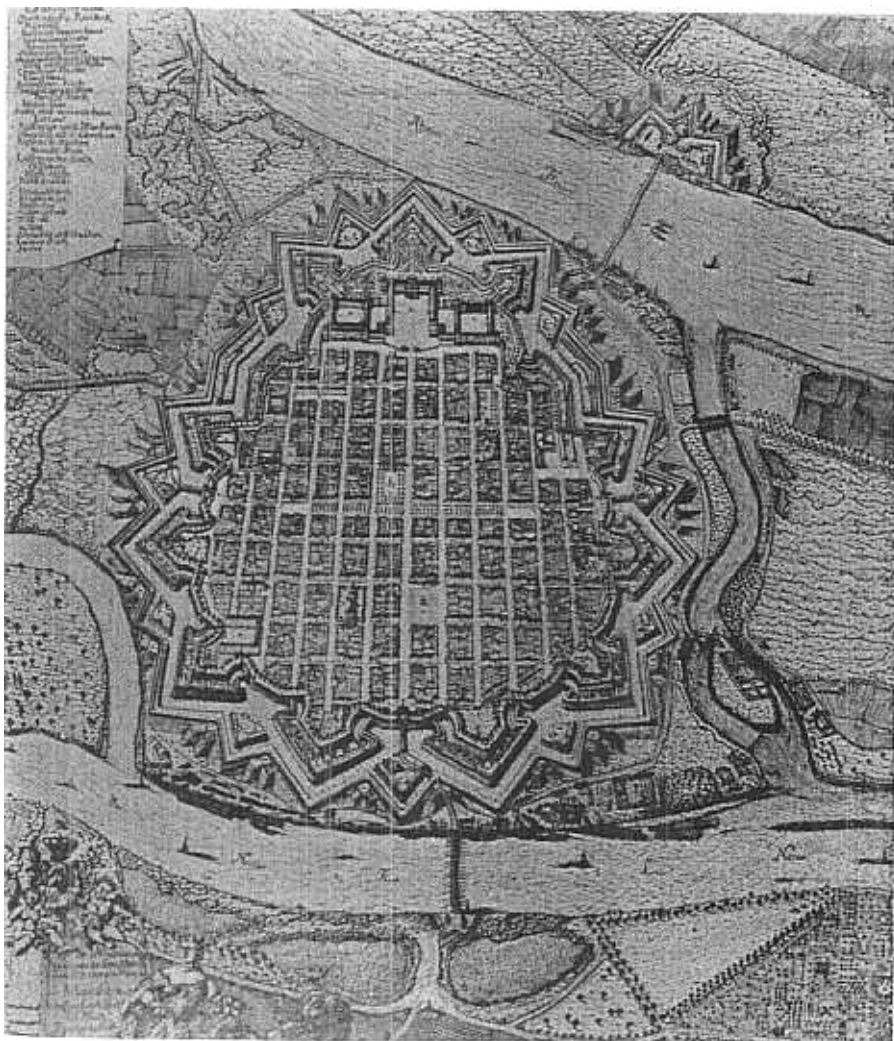
History provides many examples of how such specialization evolved: in Greece and the Middle Ages, for example, there was already a clear distinction between religious and civic urban

spaces. Something similar happens in Teotihuacan, the great middle-American metropolis, where a civic-and-market square identified by archaeologists as "Great Compound", was functionally and visually separated from the ceremonial centre with the main pyramids¹.

On the other hand, Roman city-planning introduced in small- and medium-sized cities the concept of the Forum as a space that blended both religious and civic activities. The Renaissance too, promoted this concept, specially in its New World sequels.

Multipurpose central open spaces played an important role not only in the main colonial centres like Mexico, Puebla, Guadalajara, Oaxaca and Merida, but also in secondary evangelization towns. The missionaries and architects of this period understood very well the function of open spaces in the Indian culture they were trying to convert. These clear-sighted men developed a dual program where the architecture of covered spaces (the monastery and its church) finds its counterpart in the architecture of open spaces (open chapels, "posa" chapels and atrium) where religious, ceremonial, processional, educational, recreational, even justice activities for large groups of Indians could be held².

A "functional" approach favouring specialization started in Europe after the late Baroque. The existence of several kinds of public open spaces with different functions and symbolism may be seen in 18th-century Mannheim: Schloss "cour d'honneur", Paradeplatz, Marktplatz³. The same can be said of an interesting Mexican example: the new town of Guadalupe, the first consciously planned satellite-town of Mexico City. In the original urban layout of 1779, its authors Ildefonso de Iñiesta and Francisco Guerrero y Torres stated clearly in terms of urban design not only the equilibrium between different functions, but also between different values in the late colonial society. The town was structured along a processional axis that linked three different public squares: the market square at the entrance, the viceregal square (Plaza de Armas) and the great atrium of the Basilica⁴.



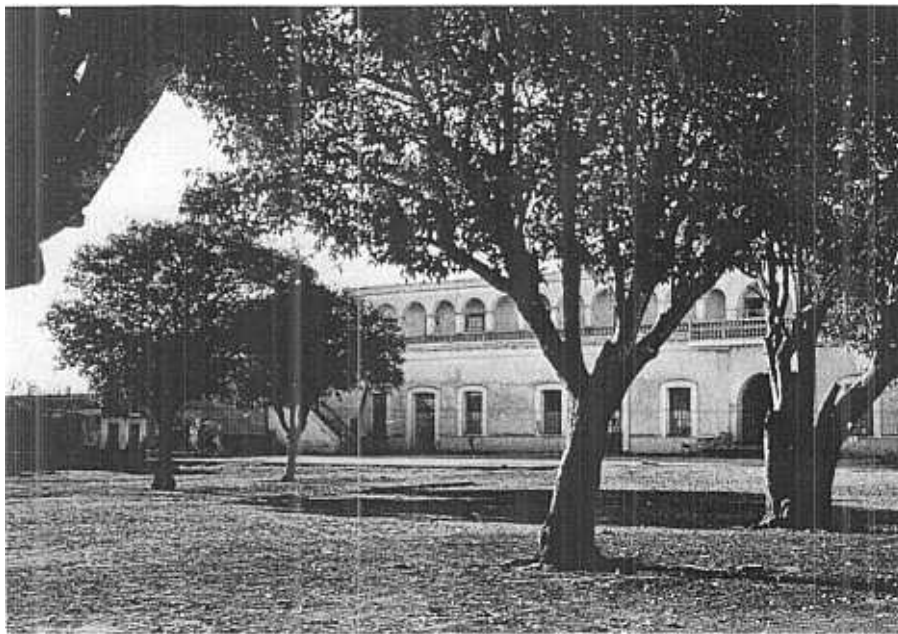
1. - Plan for the town of Guadalupe, Mexico, 18th century. a) Market, b) Plaza de armas, c) Square of the basilica.

¹ MILLON René. "The Teotihuacan Map". University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1973.

² McANDREW John. "The open-air churches of sixteenth-century Mexico". Harvard University Press. Cambridge Massachusetts, 1965.

³ GRUBER Karl. "Die Gestalt der Deutschen Stadt". Verlag Georg D.W. Callwey, München, 1952.

⁴ LOPEZ SARRELANGUE Delfina E. "Una villa mexicana en el siglo XVIII". Imprenta Universitaria. Mexico, 1957.



2. - Main square. San Andrés Cholula. Indian towns need central spaces without special arrangement.

These and many other examples in the 18th and 19th centuries support the thesis that the specialization of public open spaces characteristic of the first half of our century is only a consequence of a long trend in the Western Hemisphere. The functional designs of Tony Garnier for his *Cité Industrielle*, of Le Corbusier for his *Ville Radieuse*, even of Frank Lloyd Wright for *Broadacres City*, may be seen as logical consequences of a tradition established long ago. Different as they may be from their predecessors, those designs share with them a common feature: the highly specialized land use pattern and its consequences.

Causes influencing specialization of purposes in open public spaces

Among the causes that have influenced this trend towards specialization in open public spaces one can point out the following:

The size of the settlement. Larger cities tend to specialize more their public central spaces. Rome itself was the antithesis in these aspects compared with smaller Roman towns. Economies of scale play an important role in this phenomenon.

Social contrasts. The impossibility for certain societies to have common spaces shared by all their social groups also leads to specialization. Specialization and discrimination are closely related.

Productivity. The importance of economic activities in our cities puts an emphasis on specialization of public open spaces towards an economic goal, for instance: more visitors in places of touristic interest, more prospective clients in commercial malls, and so on.

Politics. Efficiency may be sought with other goals in mind. For instance, a political one. Politicians very much like public open spaces because of their capacity for gathering vast audiences. In most cases, they just adapt temporary elements to large, already existing open spaces. But sometimes they can't resist the temptation of a specialized, permanent setting.

Traffic. Throughout history, streets have been public open spaces not only for circulation of people, goods and services, but also as an extension of the homes they serve, a space suited for interactions between family and neighbours, between neighbourhood and the rest of the community. Car traffic and its experts have over-specialized this space more in the sense of a duct, leaving few opportunities for social and recreational activities.

Flexible open spaces in historic towns and vernacular settlements

Actual land uses in historic towns do not correspond any more to original uses. With few exceptions, there has been a shift towards modern, efficient and productive land uses; towards activities that generate a high amount of car traffic. Much has been done to make compatible the preservation of these towns with the pulse of modern life. However, designers of public open spaces do not pay enough attention to the alternatives between specialized and flexible spaces. In fact, influenced by the functional attitude of our century, designers tend to specialize, even overspecialize these spaces.

In developing countries this is more noticeable since most of them still enjoy the heritage of flexible, multipurpose public open spaces. In

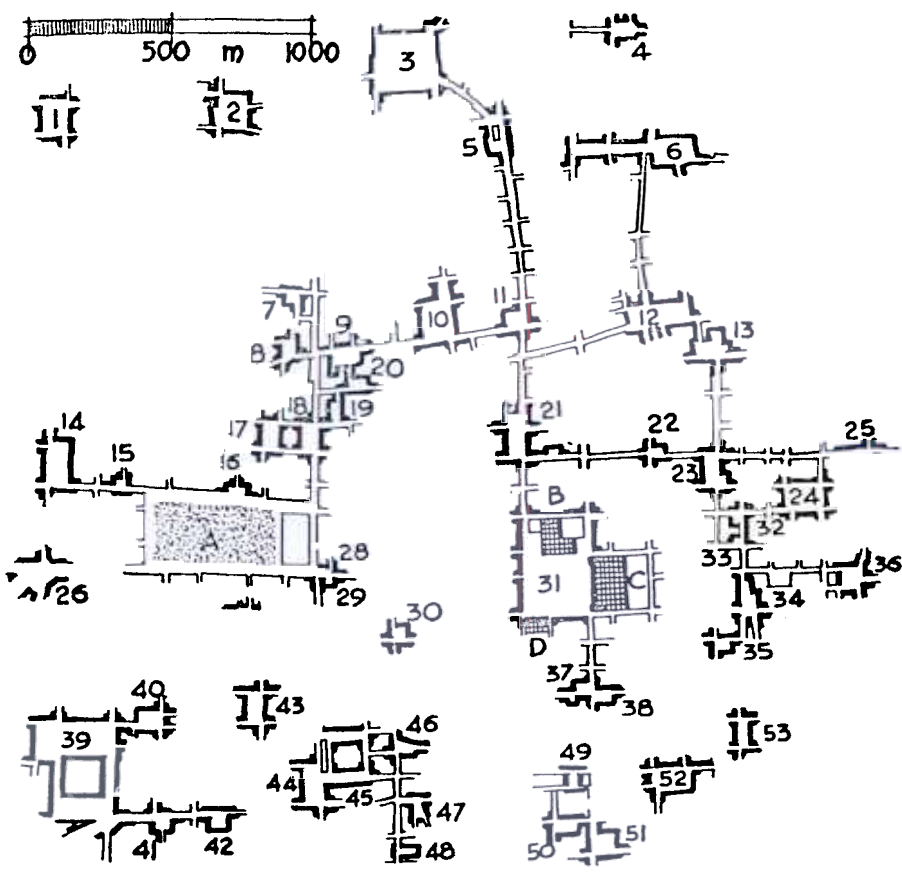
Mexico (as in other Latin American countries with living ancient cultures) there are the following patterns:

In rural or semi-rural small towns, where most of our vernacular architecture still flourishes, there are vast central spaces without any definite purpose, even without traces of what we now call "landscape architecture". Walking, playing or ornamental areas are undifferentiated, and this gives perhaps an impression of carelessness and abandonment on working days. But on the other hand, it allows for a great variety of activities on market days, Sundays and holidays. These spaces may be used by the community as temporary markets, temporary playing grounds, temporary ceremonial areas, occasional political meetings and, of course, as permanent gathering places. Not only the social, religious, or civic life of the community is thus served, but also its meagre economic life. The existence of many farmers that act as half-time merchants, artisans, barbers, musicians, photographers and firework experts depends heavily on the flexibility of these spaces.

In certain places of southeast Mexico, and in many towns in Guatemala, there are also semi-flexible spaces, mostly covered, dealing with practical and ceremonial uses of water: springs, communal baths, and covered fountains for washing clothes and talking to the neighbours.

In medium-sized cities, where an important amount of our architectural heritage still survives, there is a trend towards rehabilitation of streets and public open spaces. There is a growing group of good professionals in the field of restoration work, and there are several good examples of how these kinds of problems can be adequately solved. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to flexible solutions that can make several purposes compatible in such areas. Moreover, under the influence of politicians, there are cases in which central spaces are overdesigned and overspecialized, let's say, for political meeting purposes. In other cases, the impulse towards modernization has opened the way to cars and parking places. Only in Guanajuato, where a former river-bed crossing the town was transformed into a main traffic street, could this problem be solved.

In the main urbanized centres (Ciudad de Mexico, Guadalajara, Monterrey, and perhaps also Leon) where the devastation of historical central areas has been the worst, there is also a trend towards rehabilitation of public open spaces. The demographic dimensions of these settlements, and the huge flow of cars, both favour the specialization of land uses. The case of Mexico City's downtown is more critical: recent excavations in the ancient area where the main Aztec pyramid once stood (now covered by colonial buildings and some modern buildings) already have determined the shape of its basement. The possibility of discovering partially or totally such vestiges and incorporating them into the already vast main square ("Zocalo") raises many questions about the future



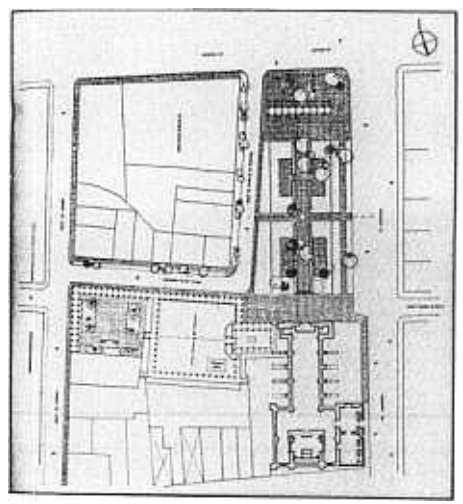
SUCESION DE PLAZAS EN EL CENTRO DE LA CIUDAD DE MÉXICO, AL FINALIZAR EL SIGLO XIX

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| A. alameda | 14. de San Fernando | 34. de la alhóndiga |
| B. catedral | 15. de San Hipólito | 35. de la Merced |
| C. Palacio Nacional | 16. de San Juan de Dios | 36. de la Soledad |
| D. ayuntamiento | 17. del 2 de abril | 37. de Jesús |
- Plazas:
- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. de la luna | 19. de la Concepción Cuicpocan | 38. del parque del Conde |
| 2. de los Angeles | 20. de Montero | 39. de la Ciudadela |
| 3. de Santiago Tlatelolco | 21. de Santo Domingo | 40. de la Candelaria (Pacheco) |
| 4. de la Concepción Tequixpeuhcan | 22. de San Pedro y San Pablo | 41. de Belen |
| 5. de Santa Ana | 23. de Loreto | 42. del parque de ingenieros |
| 6. de San José Tepito | 24. de Mixcalco | 43. de San Juan (Iturbide) |
| 7. de Santa Paula | 25. de San Antonio Tomatlán | 44. del salto del agua |
| 8. de Santa María la Redonda | 26. del caballito | 45. de las vizcaínas (San Ignacio) |
| 9. de Garibaldi | 27. de Santos Degollado | 46. de Regina |
| 10. de Comonfort (la lagunilla) | 28. de Guardiola | 47. de don Toribio |
| 11. de Santa Catarina | 29. de San Francisco | 48. de San Salvador el seco |
| 12. del Carmen | 30. del colegio de niñas | 49. de San Miguel |
| 13. de San Sebastián | 31. Plaza de la Constitución (zócalo) | 50. de Netzahualcóyotl |
| | 32. de Leona Vicario | 51. de San Lucas |
| | 33. de la Santísima | 52. de San Pablo |
| | | 53. de Juan José Baz (el aguilita) |

3. Square in Mexico City, late 19th cent.

purposes of such an open space. The antecedent of the "Three Cultures Square" in Tlatelolco (a great open space with Aztec ruins and a colonial church surrounded by modern high-rise buildings) points towards something similar, and has already given rise to opposite points of view on that matter. On the other hand, in Ciudad de Mexico, as well as in other provincial

capitals, there still exist some remnants of a whole system of interconnected open public spaces. Such a system constituted a most valuable support for purposes of urban structuring, and its preservation is of great importance because it gives a clear sense of urban orientation and landscaping.



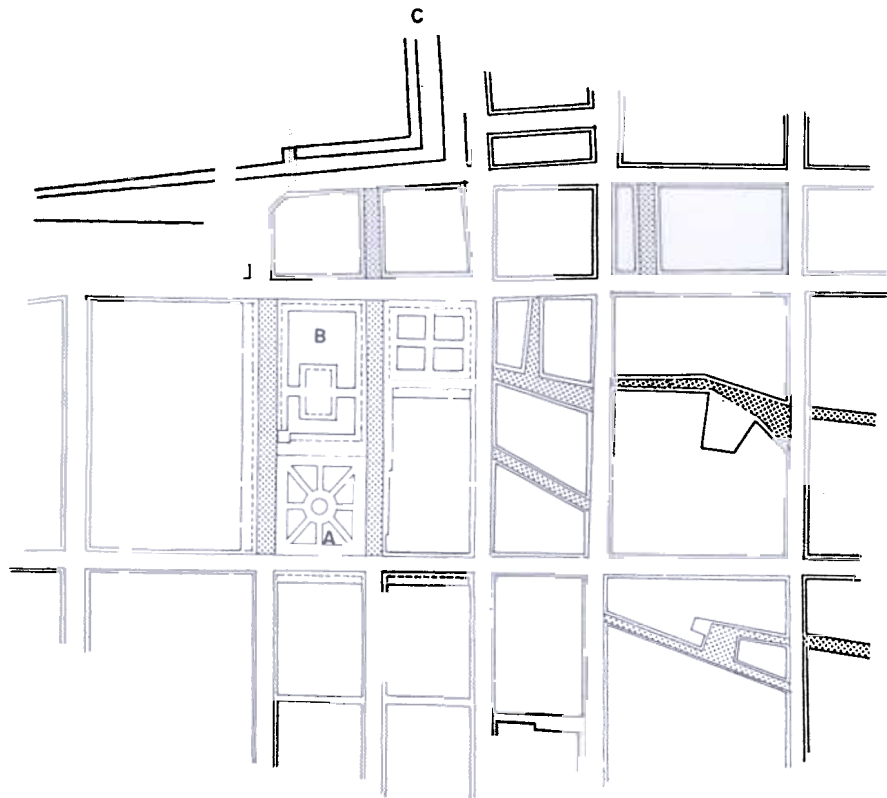
4. - Rehabilitation of the square San Fernando, Mexico. Jorge L. Medellín, Luis Ortiz Macedo, Martín Gadena, architects. 1969.

*A case study: planning open multipurpose spaces in Veracruz*⁵

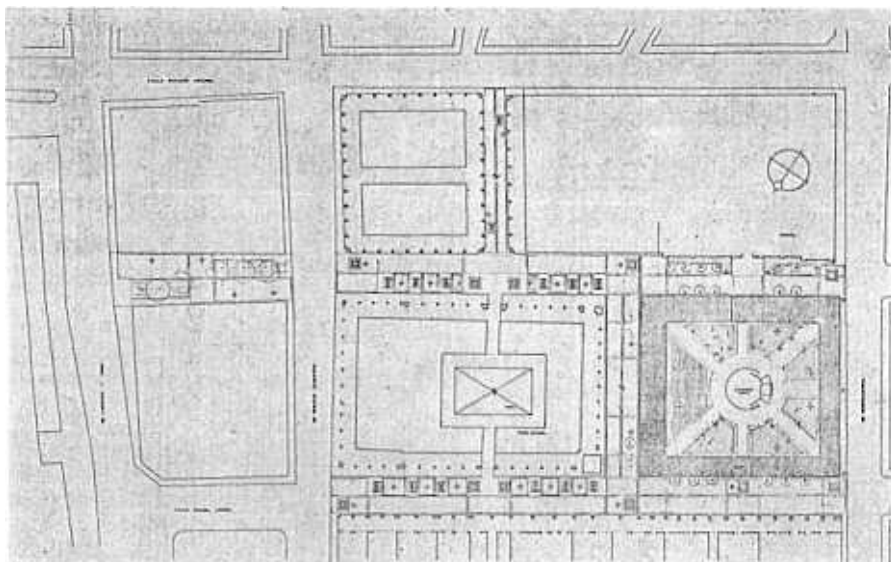
Mexico has two important seaports. One is Acapulco, a world-famous 99 percent modern tourist settlement on the Pacific Ocean. The other is Veracruz on the Gulf coast, the first city founded by the Spaniards, and for centuries the entrance door to our country when coming from Europe.

Veracruz has not specialized in touristic activity as much as Acapulco, and therefore is also a commercial regional centre, has healthy industrial activities (copper, aluminum and shipyards) and its port is busy enough. People of Veracruz are specially friendly and like to meet each other and gossip. Even a foreigner feels himself in a few days belonging to the community of coffee-drinkers, music-listeners, and people-watchers that gathers daily around its Plaza Mayor. The Municipal Palace, the Cathedral and the principal hotels, restaurants and bars are there. From there, one can easily go on foot to the commercial zone of the city, or just walk to the port and the waterfront.

⁵ Acknowledgement is made to the intervention of the following persons during the planning and realization process:
 H. AYUNTAMIENTO DE VERACRUZ (1972 - 76)
 Presidente Municipal: Lic. Juan Maldonado Pereda,
 Director de Obras Públicas: Arq. Ricardo Arenas L.
 INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGIA E HISTORIA (1970 - 76)
 Director General: Dr. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla.
 Director de Monumentos Históricos: Arq. Sergio Zaldivar.
 Unidad de Estudios de Zonas de Monumentos:
 Arq. Salvador Díaz Berrio.
 Arq. Olga Orive Bellinger.



5. - Veracruz. Plan of down-town. In grey, the alleys proposed to be closed to car traffic. a) Main square, b) Municipal Palace, c) To seafont.



1975

In 1975, the Municipal Authority decided to undertake works of rehabilitation of the historical centre, with technical support of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). The author of this paper participated with the staff of INAH as external consultant, in charge of urban design.

Preliminary studies were made to determine the extent of the zone of buildings of historic interest. In the survey, an interesting pattern of streets, *small squares*, and alleys was identified, and a general scheme of walking alleys converging to the Plaza was proposed. Two of the streets surrounding the main square were closed to vehicular traffic, thus allowing the square to function as a converging point to the alleys.

The square itself was rehabilitated taking into account its flexibility to perform several functions:

Civic. Place had to be made to accommodate large numbers of people in certain meetings in front of the main loggia of the Municipal Palace.

Recreational: Vast audiences attend Sunday and holiday music performances in the square, organized by the Municipal Authority itself, or by recognized citizens' groups.

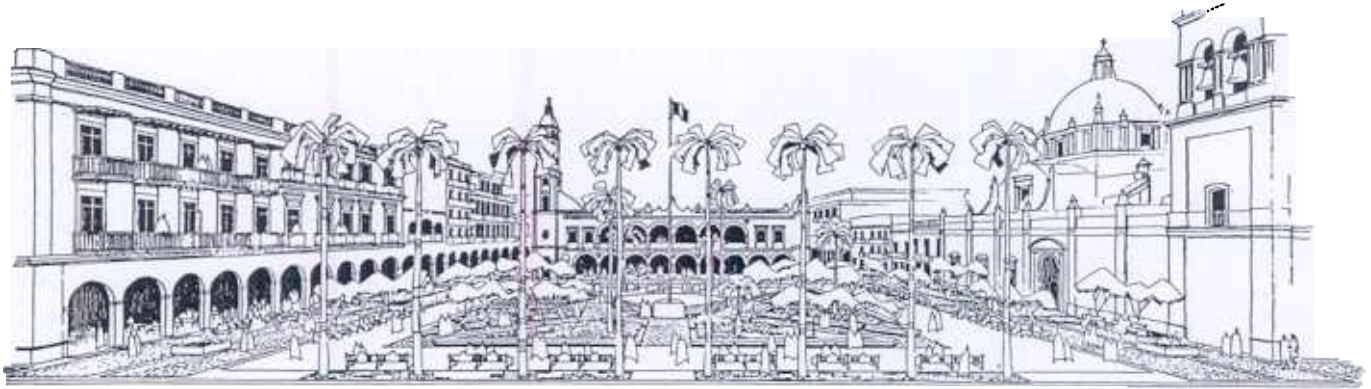
Social. Every day, specially in the late afternoon and early in the night, people of all ages and social conditions come to the square, just to rest, to meet with friends and chat. The old tradition of walking around the square ("paseo") is also observed.

Touristic and commercial activities. The life under the porticoes is an extension of the activities in the hotels, bars and stores around the Plaza.

Microclimate and ornamental. Veracruz has a basic tropical climate, with occasional hurricanes and strong winds ("Nortes") throughout the year. One of the reasons for the people to come is the relatively cool climate under the porticoes surrounding the plaza and the shade of the trees, as well as the relative protection of the area from strong wind. The presence of water is also an important component of the microclimate, and has a great ornamental value.

The solution provided had to cope with several contradictions between different purposes. Once identified, they were made compatible through design:

At first sight, an area for meetings or audiences is incompatible with ornament and vegetation. In earlier schemes presented by others to the municipal authority, a vast, desolate plaza with only 10% vegetation areas was envisaged. The fountain in the centre of the square was to be suppressed. The final design, however, respected the original symmetrical landscaping pattern, with the square divided in eight parts by medians and diagonals. Compromise with the possibility of occasional audiences was reached giving two of the "eighths" (in front of the loggia of the municipal palace) a special treatment by which they count visually as green areas, but have enough pavement surface to



7. Veracruz. View of the proposed square.

support standing people or chairs. The same area can function in the opposite direction towards the platform-fountain, another flexible element of the design.

The *marble* platform replaces a former concrete bowl that acted as fountain since the fifties. It was designed with several purposes in mind: it normally functions as a fountain, with a high central jet and a dozen minor perimetral converging jets. The water splashes over the platform, and runs into a perimetral channel (where the smaller jets are) in the shape of a ring. If needed, a small marble lid may cover the central jet, and the platform is ready for a performing event, or civic ceremony (a flagpole completes the equipment).

On the other hand, as the walking area had increased due to the incorporation of the former side streets, a certain definition in the traditional movements was desirable. Therefore, the original marble path around the square was preserved, emphasizing the function of "paseo".

Finally, it was observed that the old iron benches that were preserved in the square were insufficient for the larger amount of visitors expected. Therefore, broad precast concrete borders were designed to limit the gardening within the "eighths". They are high enough and broad enough to serve also as extra benches and do not compete visually with the old urban furniture.

The case study presented shows only some of the many possibilities of dealing with multipurpose spaces in historical zones. It only tries to point out that there is a working field that is awaiting historians, restoration experts, planners, urban designers and architects. In many aspects, our civilization is trying to come back from overspecialization. In developing countries, this attitude has deep cultural roots that *can enable us to find and lead us* towards finding simpler answers to simpler questions.

Alberto Gonzales Pozo



8. - Veracruz. Square with fountain platform.

LES ESPACES COLLECTIFS URBAINS : FLEXIBILITE DE LEUR UTILISATION EN MILIEU ANCIEN

Ce document étudie le rôle des espaces collectifs urbains au sein d'environnements historiques et vernaculaires dans un pays en voie de développement ayant un vaste patrimoine culturel tel que le Mexique. Je tenterai une approche critique du problème des espaces hyperspécialisés des villes modernes, ainsi qu'une mise en relief de la qualité que représentait la vocation à des usages multiples des espaces collectifs dans les agglomérations mexicaines précolombiennes et coloniales. Plusieurs conclusions se dessinent, relatives à des exemples mexicains récents dans le domaine de la planification urbaine et du design. Au Mexique, les espaces publics ouverts pluri-fonctionnels jouaient un rôle important dans les grandes villes coloniales comme Mexico, Guadalajara, Oaxaca, et Merida, mais aussi dans les petites villes indiennes christianisées. Les missionnaires intelligents avaient créé une architecture qui à côté des bâtiments couverts, laissait place à des grands espaces (chapelles de plein air, forums) où toutes sortes d'activités pouvaient se dérouler, cérémonies religieuses ou laïques, processions, enseignement, jeux. Mais en Europe, dès l'époque baroque, on peut assister à une spécialisation fonctionnelle des espaces. Et cette tendance s'est retrouvée plus tard au Mexique par exemple à Guadalupe, la première ville satellite de Mexico consciemment planifiée à la fin du XVIII^e siècle.

Un certain nombre de facteurs concourent aujourd'hui à la spécialisation des fonctions des espaces collectifs urbains : l'extension excessive des agglomérations, la discrimination sociale, le souci de rentabilité économique, ou de contrôle du politique et l'emprise toujours plus grande de la circulation automobile.

Dans les pays en voie de développement par contre, au Mexique notamment, on rencontre encore des espaces collectifs souples et pluri-fonctionnels, vastes lieux sans fonction précise qui permettent une grande variété d'activités les dimanches et jours de marché et favorisent la vie sociale de la communauté.

(Là, par exemple, les agriculteurs exercent à temps partiel des activités d'artisans, musiciens, barbiers, etc.)

D'autres espaces semi-couverts dans le sud du Mexique, et le Guatemala sont liés à l'utilisation rituelle et pratique de l'eau. Malheureusement dans les villes importantes où un effort de restauration est entrepris on a tendance à hyperspécialiser et hyperspécialiser ces espaces leur faisant perdre leur souplesse ancienne. Par ailleurs l'importance grandissante de la circulation automobile hypothèque une grande partie des espaces autrefois réservés aux piétons.

La planification d'espaces collectifs pluri-fonctionnels à Vera Cruz peut servir d'exemple : la réhabilitation du centre historique du port de Vera Cruz a été décidée en 1975 et étudiée notamment du point de vue des circulations pié-

tonnes, la plaza Mayor centrale devant fonctionner comme point de convergence des voies latérales. On a élaboré un plan d'aménagement permettant de conserver une pluralité de fonctions maximale, la place étant utilisée avant tout comme lieu de promenade, et de rencontre, (selon la tradition ancienne du «paseo»), accessoirement comme théâtre de plein air, lieu de rassemblement devant le palais municipal, et bien sûr centre d'activités touristiques et commerciales. On a réussi à concilier toutes ces fonctions en maintenant un maximum d'espaces verts, une fontaine centrale, un lieu de cheminement piétonnier et des possibilités de s'asseoir, qui redonnent à cette place son rôle vital de centre en accord avec la tradition culturelle de la civilisation mexicaine.

1. Plan de la ville de Guadalupe. Mexico, 18^e siècle. a) marché, b) place d'armes, c) place de la Basilique.

2. Place Principale. San Andrés Cholula. Les villes indiennes ont besoin d'espaces centraux sans aménagement particulier.

3. Place de la Cité de Mexico. Fin du 19^e siècle.

4. Réhabilitation de la Place San Fernando, Mexico. Architectes : Jorge, L. Medellín, Luis Ortiz Macedo, Martín Gadena, 1969.

5. Veracruz. Plan du centre ville. En gris, les voies qu'il est proposé de fermer à la circulation automobile. a) Place principale, b) Palais Municipal, c) Vers la mer.

6. Veracruz. Plan de réhabilitation de la Place principale. Architectes : Gonzalez Pozo, Diaz Berrio, Orive, 1975.

7. Veracruz. Proposition d'aménagement de la place.

8. Veracruz. La place avec la plateforme construite sur la fontaine.

LOS ESPACIOS COLECTIVOS URBANOS : LA FLEXIBILIDAD QUE DEBEN TENER EN ÁMBITO ANTIGUO

Este documento estudia el papel que tienen los espacios colectivos urbanos en el seno de los ámbitos históricos y vernaculares en un país en desarrollo que tiene un patrimonio cultural importante como Méjico. Intentare un examen crítico del problema de los espacios colmados de especialización de las ciudades modernas, al mismo tiempo que pondre en relieve la cualidad que tenían en su vocación de uso múltiple de los espacios colectivos en las aglomeraciones méxicanas precolombianas y coloniales. Varias conclusiones aparecen relativas a ejemplos méxicanos recientes en el dominio de la planificación urbana y el de la concepción.

En Méjico, los espacios públicos abiertos pluri-disciplinarios hacían un papel importante en las

grandes ciudades coloniales como México, Guadalajara, Oaxaca, Merida, pero también en las pequeñas aglomeraciones indias cristianizadas. Los misioneros, inteligentes, crearon una arquitectura que, al lado de los edificios cerrados, dejaba sitio para amplios espacios (capillas al aire libre, foros) donde toda clase de actividades podían realizarse, ceremonias religiosas o civiles, procesiones, actividades docentes, juegos, etc. A partir de la época del barroco, en Europa, se puede ver una especialización funcional de los espacios colectivos. Esa tendencia se encuentra más tarde en Méjico y, como ejemplo, hay Guadalupe que fue la primera aglomeración satélite de Mexico que fue planificada de manera consciente a los fines del Siglo 18.

Cierto número de factores concurren ahora en la especialización de los espacios colectivos urbanos : la excesiva extensión de las aglomeraciones, la discriminación social, la necesidad de obtener la rentabilidad económica o el control de lo político y el dominio de más en más grande de la circulación automóvil.

En los países en desarrollo, como Méjico, hay todavía espacios colectivos flexibles y plurifuncionales, amplios lugares sin función precisa que permiten que se realicen una gran variedad de actividades los domingos y días de mercado lo que favorece la vida social comunitaria (ahí, por ejemplo, los agricultores ejercen, en tiempo parcial, actividades artesanales, de música de barbería, etc.). Otros espacios semicubiertos, en el sur de Méjico y en Guatemala sirven para la utilización ritual y práctica del agua. Desgraciadamente, en las ciudades importantes en las cuales hay esfuerzos de restauración se tiene la tendencia a llegar a colmos de concevidad y de especialización de esos espacios lo que tiene por resultado la pérdida de la flexibilidad que tenían. Por otra parte, la importancia cada día más grande de la circulación automóvil hace que gran parte de los espacios reservados a los peatones son ocupados por los vehículos.

Hay un ejemplo : la planificación de los espacios colectivos de manera plurifuncional en la rehabilitación del centro histórico de Veracruz. Fue decidido en 1975 y estudiado particularmente del punto de vista de la circulación de peatones, la plaza Mayor del centro debería funcionar como punto de convergencia de las vías y se ha elaborado un plan de organización que permita conservar un plurifuncionamiento maximal ; la plaza es utilizada ante todo como lugar de paseo, y de reunión (según la antigua tradición del «paseo») acesoriamente como teatro al aire libre, como lugar de reunión delante la alcaldía y, también, como centro turístico y comercial. Se llego a conciliar todas estas funciones manteniendo en lo máximo los espacios verdes, una fuente central, un lugar de paseo para los peatone y, para estos, la posibilidad de tomar asiento, todo esto devuelve a esta plaza su papel vital de centro en conformidad con la tradición cultural de la civilización méxicana.