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Urban Problems and Policies in Latin America: Truths and Fallacies

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Introduction

I will attempt to summarize, in this presentation, some of the research I have carried out during different periods of my academic career, and to reframe some of its conclusions in the context of the conditions that prevailed at the time. I will also explain why we began to explore new ways of reinterpreting data already analyzed. This review will be placed in the context of the field of Latin American urban studies and specifically within certain thematic and theoretical trends. Our research was part of a collective work which at the outset was linked to a group of investigators engaged in a continued process of theoretical discussions and presentation of research advances and results. Likewise, in order to be able to reflect on the veracity and relevance of the aforementioned conclusions, I will attempt to compare them with recent perspectives on the status of Latin American cities, dealing mainly with social and urban policies. Commenting on proposed solutions and programs, in light of certain studies undertaken, is a useful way of revealing the social influence of urban studies, even if they do not fall into the category of action-research.

With 8.5% of the world population, 14% of the urban population and four of the world's 20 mega cities in the year 2000 (Mexico City, São Paulo, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro), Latin America has a high level of urbanization, far exceeding that of other Third World regions. Nevertheless, the similarity of this level of urbanization with that of the world's more developed regions does not mean that it shares the same level of economic development. Whereas in 1970, 37% of the poor were urban residents, by 1999 this figure had risen to 62%, since nowadays the largest concentration of poor families is found precisely in cities. As for the differences between countries and their evolution in recent decades, in 1950, only three of the 22 countries included in the region (Uruguay, Argentina and Chile) had over 50% of their population in urban areas, whereas by 2000, this was the case in 18 countries (Lattes, Rodríguez and Villa, 2004).

Studies within the Context of Latin American Urban Research

Beginning in the 1960s urban research in Latin America has evolved at different rates according to the historical specificities of each country. Together with the definition of new research issues and various conceptual approaches, urban studies progressed from the search for explanations of hyper-urbanization and marginalization within the framework of the theory of modernization, particularly during the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, to theorizations based on political economy and Marxist urban sociology during the following period, until the mid 1980s, when there was a predominance of more local perspectives. These perspectives were less focused on dominant paradigms, and there was a clear emergence of new thematic concerns that led, particularly from the 1990s onwards, to the consideration of globalization as a useful resource for explaining several aspects of urbanization. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s differences were found among the topics researched in various groups of countries[1], the changes that took place during the 1980s led to a noticeable rapprochement among the topics. For a variety of reasons, these topics became critical cross sections of Latin American societies. They were related to urban poverty, social division of space, local government, social movements, environment and security[2].

1. In the early 1990s, I took part in an evaluation of Latin American urban research, which was part of a broader study on Third World countries, coordinated by Richard Stren and the Center for Urban and Community Studies of the University of Toronto, Canada. Latin America was divided into three sub-regions and the researchers in charge of each one submitted full reports on the issues and disciplines involved, as well as the institutional context of each case (Stren, 1995).

2. Although the issues dealt with are undoubtedly linked to the problems existing in each country, they have not all received the same amount of attention from the academic community, which also depends on the theoretical and methodological advances of the disciplines involved, researchers' access to information, training, skills and experience as well as institutional, financial and political factors. But research processes also have their own dynamics, linked to researchers' scientific priorities and academic evolution, their belonging to certain groups or trends within their area of study, not to mention the influence, particularly in our field, of scholars from large centers that produce new ideas and conceptual frameworks (Schteingart 1995 and 2000).

Within this context, I think it is essential to comment on the succession of issues selected, as well as their links with studies by other Latin American colleagues with similar analytical perspectives with whom I have worked for years, either by engaging in shared studies within the same research project, or independently, while exchanging points of view and interpretations of the changing reality through academic meetings that contributed to the consolidation of our field at both the national and the regional level.

Housing and Urban Land Issues in the 1970s and 1980s

This has been a recurrent topic within urban studies although, in recent years, the housing problem has been less important than it was in the 1970s and 1980s, due to the emergence, as I mentioned earlier, of new urban research issues.

From the mid 1970s onwards, in certain Latin American countries, particularly Mexico, a new approach to housing studies began to arise. This happened due to a certain degree of political openness that encouraged the development of new critical approaches in the social sciences, together with the creation of housing and land institutions and programs that produced a demand for studies and proposals together with a propitious climate for the development of research on these issues. During this period, our studies included housing policies in Mexico, at a time when different orientations began to change the approach that had predominated during the previous two decades. For example, it was thought at the time that defining the housing problem entailed describing the physical characteristics of housing and pointing out the discrepancies between them and what people actually needed. This, in turn, determined the actions to be taken. Such an orientation was based on the conception of the capitalist state and its limitations because of its class definition, the theoretical developments concerning the social agents who produced the city's built environment as well as the accumulation of capital in the promotional and construction sectors (which in turn were based on the cycle of capital and the economic logic of the real estate business). These categories were at the center of the analyses and emerged as new, attractive approaches for providing an explanatory framework that overcame the severe limitations of more traditional theories. A major change occurred between the

3. This did not happen in Southern Cone countries such as Chile, Argentina and to a certain extent Brazil, due to the presence of dictatorships that prevented the free development of the social sciences.

housing studies of the 1950s and 1960s and those that began to be developed from the mid-1970s onwards, which, with a few minor differences, have prevailed until the present days, at least among a considerable number of researchers.

In the first study we conducted in Mexico on public housing policy, we emphasized the processes of production, exchange and consumption that took place within a certain economic and political context. It occurred at a time when, instead of referring to the state's withdrawal, as we shall see below, we described the establishment of new institutions created to deal with different social groups, while pointing out their structural class limitations and their relations with the capitalist sector of construction (Garza and Schteingart, 1977). In this study, however, these relations were not very clear. Only later, as a result of our research on the promotional sector, were we able to determine the specific practices of other social actors who operated within the process of housing production[4] (Schteingart, 1989). It should be pointed out that studies on the capitalist agents that participate in the production process of the built environment were not very common, despite the fact that there was an awareness of their importance in explaining their influence on the high cost of a basic asset for families. The emphasis on other issues as well as the theoretical and empirical difficulties inherent in this type of analysis prevented further research.

Urban land is an intrinsic part of the housing problem, which has undergone a steep price increase particularly in large cities, with negative consequences on the organization of urban space. Although studies on land prices began to proliferate, it was difficult to prove their link with the increase in housing prices, the inability of large sectors of the population to gain access to the formal land market and to explain the issue of irregular settlements.

Conversely, we felt that the urbanization of land corresponding to agrarian nuclei (communal and "ejido" land)) was useful for describing the social processes involved in the expansion of cities, specifically in Mexico City, where the rapid growth of its periphery became a key issue for urban researchers. In the late 1970s, we showed how the capital city had spread over

4. Real estate promotion research that took some of the theoretical elements presented by French urban sociology, enabled us to discover the broad network of social relations and capitals invested in the housing production, supported by both private and public financing, since the 1970s, which underwent a series of transformations over the past two decades.

communal and "ejido" land through mechanisms that implied ambiguous links with the laws in force and had adverse social consequences for poor families (Schteingart, 1989). Many other studies on both Mexico City and other cities in the country helped explain the role of this type of land in urban development.

Irregular settlements

The issue of irregular settlements, which is partly linked to the preceding one, has undoubtedly played a key role in Latin American urban studies since they are extremely important in the spatial organization of cities in the region. This importance varies according to the social structure and historic development of each country but has also increased owing to the limitations of housing programs in the context of trade liberalization, adjustment programs and the development of neo-liberal policies.

Studies in the 1970s and 1980s, unlike previous ones on marginalization, were characterized by the fact that they analyzed illegal means of appropriating land, the processes of regularization and consolidation of neighborhoods and the urban struggles that led poor settlers to confront the state and other social agents. It became increasingly obvious that there was a need to examine their insertion in the labor force in order to disprove theory regarding the possible coincidence between "marginalization" at work and spatial "marginalization". Another important aspect of these settlements at that time was linked to popular housing production and self-construction, which enabled key elements to be compiled on the various forms of housing production, whether modern or backward, simple or combined, within the Latin American context. It is worth pointing out that research on these urban phenomena was carried out on the basis of case studies, which partly restricted the possibility of making broad generalizations, since it was not until very recently that the National Population and Housing Censuses included specific information on irregular settlements as *favelas* in Brazil and *villas miseria* in Argentina However, in other countries such vital information has yet to be included in these national survey instruments that can cover a country's entire urban environment.[5]

5. However, case studies provide more in-depth knowledge of certain urban social processes, even though there is a risk of choosing examples that may not be very representative of a more global reality.

One crucial aspect that partly defines and characterizes irregular settlements is precisely the question of access to urban land, but it is also important to point out that this irregularity may reveal differences in Latin American countries, since there are several legal situations and ways of violating the laws in force, as well as programs for regularizing land ownership in the various national and urban contexts (Azuela and Schteingart, 1991).[6]

During that period, using a case study to examine how illegality emerged in Mexico on land that was not privately owned, we analyzed the largest popular settlement in the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone (MCMZ), and probably in the country (Nezahualcóyotl, largely state-owned). We found out that illegality was partly a consequence of confusion regarding the history of land ownership, which was not in the interest of either the public sector or illegal property developers to clarify. We also studied the strategies used by real estate promoters in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to acquire land reserves that would enable them to produce large housing developments on the metropolitan periphery. In hindsight, these case studies certainly helped to explain how urban sprawl, the social division of space and the concentration of different social strata have taken place. We will return to these issues later (Schteingart, 1989).

Taking Stock of Social and Urban Policies in the 1990s and 2000s

The 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century witnessed the consolidation of socio-political reforms that had begun years earlier and that pointed to a significant changes in state intervention in general, and in urban issues in particular. This new scenario, which, albeit to varying degrees, emerged in several countries in the region, led us to incorporate new aspects that had not previously been included in urban studies, deal with other issues, and place more emphasis on the reduction of the state's role and the negative effects of this on the majority of the poor population.

Poverty had always been present to a significant degree. Irregular settlements, which largely provided shelter for the poor, had begun to emerge in the region in the 1950s and 1960s. Consequently, these phenomena could not be regarded as a conjunctural issue but rather as part of an ongoing, structural problem

6. These are conclusions included in a paper in which Azuela (2000) analyzes examples of access to land in irregular settlements in various Latin American countries (Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico).

of these cities, which was exacerbated by increasing unemployment, growing informal sector, declining real salaries, and changes in state policies.[7]

Habitat and Health

A wide-range study that included the relationship between habitat and health started in the 1990s (Schteingart, coordinator, 1997) and took into account the results of an in-depth survey that revealed, among other things, an alarming situation regarding the health status of the poor. Figures on the prevalence of certain diseases in these spaces were more than double the numbers of the National Health Survey for the entire Mexico City. This study allowed us to show that it is possible to establish the scope of the health problem in poor settlements. This goes beyond the scope of the most comprehensive surveys undertaken by government, casting doubt on the statements of certain researchers and government officials on the advantages of this kind of urbanization. The study also included undertaking certain actions with the communities involved in the cases selected and beginning to explore the possibilities of participatory action-research.

Ten years later, we analyzed the current social problems of the population that was settled in some of these neighborhoods for more than 30 years. On the basis of workshops with communities, mainly with women's groups, we have begun to prove that although these neighborhoods have progressed in terms of quality of housing, urbanization and certain services, partly encouraged by the regularization of land ownership and certain positive policies of local government, the situation has notoriously deteriorated in terms of employment, safety on the streets and education, because of the overall economic and social processes mentioned earlier, which barely depend on local management. In the first research project, undertaken on four settlements in the MCMZ, on the basis of a large scale survey, we noticed a predominance of industry workers and salaried employees, with a considerable number of workers belonging to the formal sector of the economy. Conversely, our current analyses suggest that there has been a significant increase in men's underemployment and the

7. Until the late 1970s, the prevailing view in Latin America was that the state should guarantee the population's social rights, that social policy should play a complementary role to economic policy and that universal social policies should be developed. Although this vision was only applied in a partial, stratified fashion, with differences in the various countries in the region, as a result of the reforms in the 1980s and the prevalence of neo-liberal ideas, frequent criticisms have emerged of programs targeting the poor, which proved highly insufficient and in some cases, implied significant regressions for large groups of the Latin American population (Schteingart, coordinator, 1999).

precarization of work, with a greater proportion of women in the labor force.[8] These comparative conclusions converge with other studies that show that a downward equalization of men and women's work appears to be taking place, whereas in the past gender studies revealed sharp differences in the quality of jobs and income between the two sexes (Damián, 2003). But since women lack childcare support from the government or the community, this situation leads to an increase in family disintegration, the creation of youth gangs, drug addiction, and a lack of safety in poor neighborhoods which we had not observed in our studies a decade earlier.

Regularization and Upgrading of Settlements

On the basis of the case studies, we can argue that the regularization of land ownership has not necessarily helped the poor to obtain loans for home improvement, which is usually achieved through enormous sacrifices and the use of self-construction processes. This study confirms the research conducted in other Latin American countries such as Peru and Colombia (Gilbert, 2002 and Calderón, 2003), which opposed Hernando de Soto's declarations that the regularization of land ownership or the possession of the legal title of a property enables the poor "to use their assets as collateral for a successful business and gain access to formal banking." In other words, land ownership would open up the possibility of using registered property to transform dead capital, through credit, into a basis for business development, thereby improving the living conditions of the poor. "His discourse, which encourages a sort of popular capitalism among the poor, could not be more attractive in the neo-liberal atmosphere that has dominated economic and social policies over the past 20 years" (Calderón, 2003).[9]

Indeed, part of the research I am commenting on (Duhau and Schteingart, 1997) showed that these neighborhoods gradually gained access to the regularization of land ownership and that this only appeared as a factor directly

8. A study undertaken in the 1990s (Ortega, 1997) showed that these settlements largely constituted the living framework of workers belonging to the formal sector of the economy, whose low salaries and difficulties in gaining access to the state's insufficient housing programs led them to participate in the processes of irregular urbanization. As for the women, they were mainly employed as domestic servants and street vendors.

9. Hernando de Soto, has achieved international notoriety due to the series of fallacies described in his books *The Other Path* and *The Mystery of Capital,* in which, among many other things, he states that "informality is the inability of law to adjust to the way people actually live, and that practical solutions are to be found in the sphere of law rather than economics or culture."

linked to their improvement when it depended primarily on the security of land ownership, but that possessing a legal title was not indispensable when land and home ownership was not threatened. One of the four neighborhoods we analyzed, with a more conflictive, violent history (due to its location in a middle-class area), was threatened with eviction for many years, with families only improving their homes after the regularization process begun.

In the case of Peru, under the enormous influence of Hernando de Soto, a native of that country, mass land regularization programs were implemented. However, Calderón overwhelmingly proved that access to mortgage loans continued to be very low, despite the enormous number of legal titles granted.[10]

It is true that at different times urban social movements have claimed the need to regularize illegal settlements, which in many cases has permitted the introduction of basic services, and enhanced safety for residents. This policy was a necessary but not sufficient requirement for improving popular settlements since although housing credits require land ownership to be regularized, those credits have been increasingly restricted for the poor, as we shall see when we comment on the new housing policies. Moreover, it is even less certain that regularization allows the poor to use their enterprising spirit to undertake successful businesses.

New Directions and Strategies

In a study produced a decade ago, in the wake of Habitat II (Schteingart 1996) we remarked that the change of attitude regarding state intervention in general and urban issues in particular was obvious in a comparison of the guidelines and definitions approved at the Habitat I meeting in 1976 with those that emerged from Habitat II twenty years later. During the first forum, there was a major discussion on the need for state intervention and planning whereas during the second, the warhorse was "enabling strategies" and the implementation of a series of principles related to "empowerment and equity." Although the importance of these concepts or principles cannot be denied, it is also true that they are insufficient for dealing with the needs of the poorest in a world in which access to basic resources is more and more inequitable and international relations are increasingly asymmetrical. Whereas Habitat I was

10. 17,068 mortgages as opposed to 1,049,134 titles granted according to information from the Urban Property Register made available to the author of the study show that there is no direct relationship between regularization, access to mortgage credit and the possibility of improving one's home.

held under the banner of the Charter of Rights and Duties of Nations, Habitat II took place at a time when these more general principles and discussions were overlooked in favor of the defense of individual, local and private initiatives, and the so-called "new ethics" reflecting the age-old idea that private is better than public, despite the fact that experience has often proved the contrary. These principles often encourage the redefinition of families' roles and responsibilities, grass-roots organizations, commercial firms, etc, in order to achieve a smaller, more efficient government. In this study, we also said that it was possible to identify two types of enabling strategies: those that emphasize the need to liberalize markets, deregulate, and privatize, which is at the center of neo-liberal reforms; and those that propose, for example, coping with the housing problems of the most impoverished groups through community organizations and the democratization of citizenry. These two trends can obviously include different points of view on state intervention. I would like to point out that in this study we noticed that many of the principles disseminated as a result of Habitat II had already been tested years earlier without positive results, since in many cases, the enabling strategies simply placed the burden of solving their problems on the poor, and made matters even worse by *raising expectations about "new strategies" that were neither new nor really positive for large sectors of the Latin American population.*

Revisiting these reflections inspired by the organization of the crucial Habitat II forum helps us to review the discussions and positions in force in local and international official media, as well as to take into account the reactions of certain specialists in the field of housing and urban studies (Cohen et al. 1996).

More recent analyses of housing policies and the improvement of irregular settlements, as borne out, for example, by the Economic Commission for Latin America documents (Arriagada, 2000), state that since the 1970s, policies have emerged in the region for the regularization of land ownership and service provision, but that more recently, more complete strategies for improving settlements have been added. Despite acknowledging the advantages of multi-purpose programs such as Chile Barrio, Primed, in Medellin, Colombia and Favela Bairro, in Brazil, which include contributions to the decentralization, targeting and coordination of sectoral policies (other common categories or solutions within the official repertoire of recent years on these issues), they are considered too costly. They involve the concentration of investment in

certain areas, while overlooking investment in smaller cities or zones where there is also a considerable concentration of poverty. In other words, the fact that these programs imply a high subsidy and low cost recovery (even with the participation of the beneficiaries in the program) places them in a somewhat contradictory situation vis-à-vis neo-liberal principles and the most hackneyed current proposals that appear in the general guidelines of international organizations regarding housing policy. This document also acknowledges the fact that programs for dealing with precarious settlements must complement housing subsidy systems, since the former may lead to the creation of more irregular neighborhoods instead of encouraging the development of other housing policies. These are confusing arguments since it is not true that policies for upgrading irregular settlements prevent the development of new housing programs for the poorest. Rather, the fact is that Latin American governments' general policy has tended to follow the trend of providing subsidies only exceptionally, and ensuring that investments are recoverable. On the other hand, (and this has been proved on several occasions, including in our recent studies on popular settlements) improving habitat without modifying access to employment and education or improving income makes it impossible for the poor to escape their condition.

In a recently published reader (Coulomb and Schteingart, coordinators, 2006) and after presenting a series of analyses on the new government programs, as well as other aspects of the housing problem and its various components, we concluded that in the case of Mexico, although unequal income distribution has not changed, housing policy with regards to the various social strata has implied significant retrogression for the neediest sectors of the population. For example, during the administration that ended late last year, significantly more credits were granted, although they were only made available to 23% of the population. This fact raises the following logical question: What good is state housing action if it fails to benefit those who are unable to obtain it through the market in a country where the majority of the population is poor?

A New Spatial Order for Latin American Cities? Social Division of Space and Globalization

The social division of urban space is not merely a reflection of the social structure; instead, both are mediated by a series of factors including the

production of the built environment, the logic of the real estate sector, state housing policies for different social groups[11], the development of irregular urbanization zones for the poor and, obviously, urban planning and major projects promoted by different levels of government. However, it is extremely important to bear in mind that spatial organization also reflects social structures and processes from different historical moments (Castells, 1975; Schteingart, 2001).[12]

However, I should point out that studies on the social division of space have been undertaken on the basis of an analytical orientation and framework that has hardly used research, general or case studies, that shows how access to land and the various forms of housing production influence the more global configuration of cities at different times. This reflection obviously contains a self-criticism of my own academic history, which can partly be explained by the lack of continuity in the issues explored, resulting from the dynamics of research processes pointed out at the beginning of this presentation[13].

Based on accurate data yielded by rigorous research carried out at different times in the recent history of cities, it is difficult to determine whether socio-spatial differences increased or decreased in Latin American cities and what this means above all for the largest, most disadvantaged social groups. Such difficulty is caused by several factors, such as the lack of information and appropriate analytical techniques, but above all, the absence of a means of explaining the changes that occurred and their connotations for different social strata. The scale of segregation and the living conditions that appear

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11. For example, it has been acknowledged that in the case of social housing, the tendency to locate it by primarily taking land prices into account means that the municipalities where the new housing developments are located are extremely peripheral, with very little infrastructure and facilities , which has increased segregation, leading in turn to greater problems for urban development and social integration (Arriagada, 2000). At the same time, as a result of urban social movements, housing programs have been designed to allow low-income groups to remain downtown (as in Mexico City after the earthquake of 1985).

12. Cities do not change as fast as socio-economic and political practices, and there is a continuity, partly maintained by the rigidity of the built environment. It is also important to recall, as we pointed out earlier, that the question of access to land and the increase in land prices constitute a crucial aspect in the creation of the various districts.

13. We made an initial attempt to link housing production (housing developments for the middle classes, expansion of irregular settlements, etc.,) with socio-spatial organization by rings and social strata, established on the basis of census data and multivariate statistical analyses (Schteingart, 1989) but this link was no longer present in the new studies on the social division of space carried out later.

in segregated homogeneous zones have been mentioned, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups in society, as the most negative factors of this phenomenon (Sabatini, 2003). However, although I agree with this statement, I think that there is an enormous gap in this type of analyses (even in those carried out by sociologists) which ignore the study and problematization of the changes that have occurred in the different social groups in cities (whom we refer to when we speak of middle and upper-middle sectors and whom we mean when we speak indiscriminately of the poor), a gap that leads one to make statements or use terms that often lack social content, which hampers the task of proposing new policies for coping with the often negative changes in cities.[14]

Our empirical studies for describing the social division of space on the basis of census data and the use of a statistical analysis technique such as factor analysis (Rubalcava and Schteingart, 2000a and 2000b) have shown: 1) where the various urban social strata defined on the basis of the analysis technique applied are located on the map of the cities; 2) the behavior of selected variables and the enormous differences in values; 3) the socio-urban conditions, within a comparative perspective, of the largest metropolises in Mexico; 4) the greater social homogeneity that is present in the lowest strata of the scale; and 5) the appropriateness of certain variables which, due to changes that have occurred in the social reality of cities, no longer discriminate between the different zones (by which I mean, for example, the indexes of tap water and income included in Censuses). [15]

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14. By this I mean the use of terms such as fragmentation, social mix, greater proximity between social groups, isolation, etc. which have not been properly explained and can sometimes constitute hollow terms rather than providing a precise description of the processes included in the socio-spatial division of cities.

15. In relation to Point 1, it showed the centrality of the higher strata and the sometimes acutely peripheral nature of those in worse conditions. As for Point 2, in the comparative study of the four largest Mexican metropolises, the proportion of inhabitants with post-elementary education was 80% in the higher stratum and only 30 to 40% in the lower one whereas the percentage of dwellings with tap water varied from 95% to 30% between those in the best and worst socio-urban conditions respectively, in both Mexico City and Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla. Point 3 refers to the fact that the capital of the country, which is also its main economic and political center, displayed worse social conditions than Guadalajara and above all, Monterrey (Rubalcava and Schteingart, 2000a). As for Point 4, we found that in a study of Mexico City alone (Rubalcava and Schteingart, 2000b), there is greater homogeneity in the poorest, most peripheral areas inhabited by the most disadvantaged sectors than in the central zones with a larger gradation of the upper and middle social groups.

In this context, the research carried out has revealed the possibilities and shortcomings of the Population and Housing Censuses for this type of research; the positive and negative aspects of works that have used the different units of analysis provided by this source of information, and have made us aware of the need to undertake a different type of study to find out more about social differences, particularly in poor segregated zones and the factors that have influenced the changes among different cross-sectional times. As we said earlier, the latter are largely concerned with the production of the built environment, although also, as some articles have indicated (Sabatini, 2003) and others have shown (Duhau, 2003), the relevance of intra-urban residential mobility (an issue that has barely been researched to date in Latin America) to help explain segregation within a more realistic, complex and dynamic perspective.

Nevertheless, Latin America has seen a significant increase in studies on the social division of space, the emergence of new housing developments and shopping centers, as well as facilities and edge cities. On the basis of scant evidence and making a mechanical transposition of observations drawn from cities in the north, however, certain authors have begun to speak of a new city model or urban order, as well as linking them to globalization processes. I feel these conclusions are sometimes hasty and that it is necessary to examine certain urban features more carefully, since they have sometimes existed for decades while others, although new, have not always been proved to be a more or less direct consequence of the various processes involved in the economic and political globalization of today's world. Again I think it is precisely the lack of links and continuity of the issues researched that is often responsible for these interpretations which are certainly in vogue.

The relationship between globalization and the internal organization of cities, currently at the center of certain discussions, has guided interesting studies in Latin America including case studies on Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Santiago de Chile and Mexico City (Aguilar, editor 2004). Despite the differences regarding the scope and type of changes observed in the metropolises mentioned and the descriptions or explanations that are not always sufficiently based on empirical studies, it is interesting to note that they refer to a series of fairly recent processes and constitute an essential starting point for finding out about the changes that the cities in the region are currently undergoing. However, despite the existence of numerous partial transformations, which include sharper spatial divisions, the emergence of specific new urban formations and gated communities, within larger structural

sections, it is difficult to speak of a new urban order that corresponds to globalization, due partly to a certain slowness of physical changes and to the fact that a city is the outcome of history, where the new and the old intertwine in a complex fashion (Marcuse and Kempen, 2000).

Environment, Violence and Lack of Safety in Cities

In recent years, our urban studies have incorporated the environmental dimension, since this is crucial to understand some of the new processes taking place in cities. One of the topics we have selected within urban-environmental studies (which are obviously becoming increasingly important in Latin America) is urban sprawl and its impact on natural resources and the environment. This issue may play a key role in the study of metropolitan peripheries, although that obviously depends on the location and hinterland of the urban center. In Mexico City, given the ecological diversity of the Valley of Mexico and the environmental policies implemented to protect it, this problem is of particular interest, mainly because urban sprawl began to cover zones containing a high proportion of areas designated as nature reserves (Schteingart and Salazar, 2005).[16] They are, however, threatened by urban growth, particularly through the formation or expansion of irregular settlements and despite some of the controls established, local policies are too limited to prevent this occupation. New norms, plans and programs have been approved in recent years, but if they fail to deal with the problem of poverty and social housing for low-income groups, then they can do little to protect the environment and promote a new type of sustainable urban development. The conclusions of this book provide some idea of the loss of protected zones on the urban periphery and how the issue of popular settlements is becoming increasingly linked to the search for appropriate solutions for environmental protection.

When we refer to violence and safety in cities, we must include a wide range of situations, problems and reflections. However, at this point, I will simply focus on some aspects pertinent to the 2007 Global Report on Human Settlements which focuses on urban safety and security, and try to relate them to topics presented herewith.

16. The creation of ecological conservation areas (Conservation Land and Nature Reserves) constitutes one of the most important policies included in the Federal District's General Ecological Planning Program, in order to maintain the water cycles of the Mexico basin and biological diversity.

It is only recently that more studies on the topic have emerged, particularly in Colombia, Brazil and Mexico. Although part of the violence in cities is due to the impoverishment of certain groups, attempts have been made (Arriagada and Godoy, 1999) to show that inequality, rather than poverty, generates increase in violence. Some examples of poorer countries and what, for example, happens in Brazil, confirm that there is no direct relationship between these two situations, since poor regions do not have the highest rates of homicide or violence in general.[17] But the existence of genuine crime machines that revolve around drug trafficking, smuggling, clandestine gambling, etc. supported by international mafias, constitute a major growing cause of urban violence (Kowarick and Ant, 1985).

Although crime does not affect all social groups in the same way (burglary in middle-class neighborhoods multiplied in various cities and at certain times), violence has also risen for poor people, due to the increase in robbery in popular settlements and in the public transport system used by these groups. One of the hypotheses regarding this issue is that the increase in violence among young people belonging to poor families is linked to the failure to satisfy the expectations created among second- and third-generation of city migrants.[18]

In a study currently being undertaken on certain poor neighborhoods in Mexico City, to which we referred in the section *Habitat and Health,* we concluded, on the basis of direct contact with the population, that although neighborhoods' built environment had improved, the social situation had obviously deteriorated. The testimonies collected show an enormous increase in violence and lack of safety, due to the emergence of youth gangs with no educational or economic perspectives. This is compounded by the lack of community programs or to provide support for mothers that have to work and leave their children and adolescents unattended, which brings

17. Poor Latin American countries, such as Haiti, Bolivia and Peru do not have the highest homicide rates while the greatest violence in Brazil occurs in wealthy cosmopolitan cities such as São Paolo and Río de Janeiro (Briceño-León, 2001). The issue of inequality in cities has to do with highly unequal income distribution, the increase in contrasts and poor areas with a growing degree of social disintegration.

18. The increased expectations of the second or third generation of people born in cities who no longer belong to the migrants of the 1940s, 1950s or 1960s, "occurred at the same time that economic growth and the possibilities of social improvement stopped and an abyss appeared between what they aspire to as regards quality of life and the actual possibilities of achieving this…" (Briceño-León, 2000).

them into contact with existing gangs, drugs and weapons. Local programs for controlling violence have proved totally insufficient, according to the testimonies we have gathered and as Alvarado points out on the basis of research undertaken on several popular neighborhoods in Mexico. Although there have been some interesting programs to create neighborhood police (which have lacked continuity), in general, the presence of police is even more damaging to young people as a result of their arbitrary practices, repression, blackmail and corruption (Alvarado, 2004).

The middle and upper classes have responded to insecurity and violence by creating gated communities and exclusive malls, closing streets and using private police. This response has exacerbated what some researchers call the fragmentation of the city, which is most evident in certain cases such as Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.[19]

As for the other issues pointed out in the 2007 Global Report on Human Settlements, it is clear that the *lack of security regarding land ownership* may trigger massive evictions of the poor population in squatter settlements; however, we have observed that in Latin America, this has mainly occurred during dictatorial or undemocratic governments, whereas in more recent periods, negotiation with the poor population has been more frequent. When irregular settlements are located near middle-class neighborhoods, and in areas that are attractive for speculation or real-estate development, the threat of eviction is much greater, even in cases such as Mexico City, where government has often turned a blind eye. Other cases where there has been a significant threat of eviction are those linked to environmental protection. Our research on the Ajusco Zone in Mexico City (Schteingart and Salazar, 2005) which we mentioned in previous paragraphs, detected very few evictions while attempts to relocate settlers that have occupied areas of environmental interest were unsuccessful in most cases, due to the unpopularity of measures that affect families with no other housing options.

19. A study on Río de Janeiro (López de Souza, 2004) mentions the fragmentation of the socio-political and spatial fabric as a consequence of the existence of *favelas* that are enclaves for drug trafficking and the self-segregation into closed communities for the upper classes, in a city where the quality of life has been severely damaged by violence and the lack of safety. At the same time, studies on gated communities have proliferated in many countries in the region, although their presence has been exaggerated and should be relativized through urban studies.

As we can see, the issue of security regarding land ownership is thereby linked to the environmental aspect of cities, which is also present in the lack of security in irregular neighborhoods as they are often located in areas that are unsuitable for settlement, which tend to be low-lying, prone to flooding, or on hill slopes where landslides may occur. These situations have claimed many lives in recent years, particularly when the public sector has failed to provide assistance for settlers or intervened too late, ineffectively and solely for political gain. The climate changes affecting Latin American countries and cities make the areas inhabited by the poor even more risky, a condition that is difficult to combat without radically attacking the problems of large population groups which are generally in an increasingly disadvantaged and difficult situation in the region.

Final Remarks

In an article in which we reflected on participatory-action-research (Schteingart, 1998) we concluded that it was necessary to establish a more functional link between the academic sector, poor communities and NGOs, and to overcome the apparent contradiction between academic and popular knowledge, regarded as unscientific. Within a critical view of the social sciences, studies should be oriented towards the search for knowledge that will provide guidelines for transforming society. Moreover, human knowledge is derived from interaction with the world, and "there is no epistemology that has not been derived from action and transformed into a new action (Palazón, 1993). On a more practical level, we also thought that it was essential for grass roots organizations and NGOs to systematize knowledge drawn from action, for which researchers should be in a position to provide proper collaboration.

These considerations are particularly relevant especially regarding the study of and support for the population living in irregular settlements or poor areas in cities, to which I have referred at various points of this document.

It is also important to mention the link between the academic sector and government action. As we noted in a collective document presented during the last session of the World Urban Forum in 2006 in Vancouver, Canada

(Schteingart et al., 2006) there are different interests, objectives and work dynamics in these two sectors, which often makes it difficult for them to cooperate, although this also depends on the government's political orientation, its level of action (federal, national or local), government officials' training and undoubtedly the administration's real interest in studies that will orient actions.[20] Researchers may have different degrees of involvement in public action, as generators of knowledge and ideas, by intervening in the decision-making process, or as consultants or advisers.[21] Yet, I think that although their work may not have been designed to orient actions, it may exert a significant influence by generating valid and accurate knowledge on particular situations. For example, for many years, those who were committed to a critical orientation of urban studies were convinced that understanding the causes of urban problems was crucial to preventing the implementation of policies or plans based on fallacious theories or principles that led to an increase in social inequality or to very different situations from those intended.

Taking stock of our research over several decades by highlighting its findings and shortcomings, while pointing out the need for new studies and explanations that are necessary during a stage of major changes in Latin American cities, reflects a conviction that this task is not only important for orienting knowledge production but also for ensuring that it exerts an increasing influence on the transformation of society. As I have tried to show throughout this presentation, the existing reality implies political and social retrogression for large sectors of the Latin American population. Such retrogression, although acknowledged in official documents, comes up against limited national or local policies in the context of general, inadequate proposals by international organizations which should undoubtedly be modified.

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20. In many cases, researchers have had to undertake studies that could only be explained by government's interest in lending credibility to certain actions, by presenting them as having been guaranteed by prestigious academic institutions, whereas in fact there was very little coincidence between these studies and policies.

21. A useful example of this sort of consultancy work undertaken by a researcher is the study by Antonio Azuela (2000) which provides a proposal for modifying the Law of Human Settlements in Mexico, based on an original, wide-ranging assessment of the planning actions undertaken in Mexico.

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