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Yanet Lezama-López

Puede solicitar el texto
completo a:
yanetlezama@gmail.com

You can request the full text
document to:
yanetlezama@gmail.com

Santiago de Querétaro, a Fragmented and Sprawl City. A Sustainable Future?

Yanet Lezama-López*

Abstract

Through a critical assessment of theory and practice in the mainstream urban planning in Mexico, which has been based on the modernist, or *lecorbusian* paradigm, since the 20th C, this paper addresses the case study of Santiago de Querétaro. It shows how this paradigm, added to the unilateral and authoritarian decision-making of local authorities, responsible of its urban planning, have transformed it into a city where the public interest has become subordinated to the interests of private agents. This is evident in the sprawl and fragmented city model of low densities, where the land uses are modified with no other requirement than the approval of the Municipal *Cabildo*. This results on vacant spaces, subject to high levels of real estate speculation, thus making urban planning inefficient and disassociated from reality. In other words, planning is subjected to an uncontrolled market. Moreover, the weaknesses of the Mexican urban planning system have driven the selected case study into a non sustainable city. These weaknesses are, among others: the lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for urban development plans; the persistency of three planning levels that may be scarcely related between them (economic, urban, environmental); the absence of governability mechanisms and the appropriate legislation for a city located in different municipalities; and the low levels of citizens' participation on the different stages of planning and design processes. Participation in Mexico is mainly constrained to a simple "public consultation" (highly manipulative) on the final stage, previous to the authorization of the plans. The paper concludes with some recommendations, oriented to build up the sustainable future of the city in a participatory manner.

Key words: Sustainability, sprawl, fragmented city, Santiago de Querétaro, historic centre, modernist paradigm, urban planning

* Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia
Centro INAH Querétaro