

Zone 19

Revitalization of public space in La Florida, Guatemala City
Lina Olsson

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Diploma Work and Minor Field Study

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Before Martin and I arrived in Guatemala City, the planning department at the Municipality of Guatemala City had decided to initiate projects for revitalization and regeneration - to develop "*Planes Integrales*" for five chosen zones within the capital. For our thesis project we were suggested to develop a "*Plan Integral*" for zone 19, La Florida. A "Plan Integral" refers to an overall analysis and development of strategy proposals for improvement and revitalization. Together, Martin and I did the work of collecting materials, making inventories and interviews, as well as discussing ideas for proposals.

As the project work succeeded we recognised and defined tasks in which we decided to focus our studies on. Our idea was to revitalize public space with focus on the streets and the centre in our study area, La Florida. Out from this Martin and I developed individual development concepts and areas to focus on. My focus was to study the possibilities of developing the centre area, while Martin focused on revitalization of streets. Our studies should be seen as two parts that complement each other.

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to *Metrópolis 2,010*, especially to Susana Asensio, Aletta Koster, Rodolfo Federico Azpuru and all the people at the digitalisation department, for gladly welcoming us and helping us in our project work. I would also like to thank all our interviewees and "*los Floridianos*" who came to our meetings. A special thanks is dedicated to Carlos Humberto Roldán González, whom we had long and interesting talks to and who helped us to arrange the meetings.

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Lina Olsson

Preface

Minor Field Studies are carried out within the framework of the Minor Field Studies (MFS) Scholarship Programme, which is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida/Asdi.

The MFS Scholarship Programme offers Swedish university students an opportunity to carry out two months' field work in a Third World country resulting in a Master's dissertation, or a similar in-depth study. These studies are primarily conducted within subject areas that are important for development and in a country supported by the Swedish programme for international development assistance.

The main purpose of the MFS programme is to increase interest in developing countries and to enhance Swedish university students' knowledge and understanding of these countries and their problems. An MFS should provide the student with initial experience of conditions in such a country. A further purpose is to widen the Swedish personnel resources for recruitment into international development cooperation.

The External Relations Office, ERO, at the Royal Institute of Technology, KTH, Stockholm, administers the MFS programme for all faculties of engineering and natural sciences in Sweden.

Sigrun Santesson
Programme Officer
MFS Programme

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Abstract

This diploma work concerns revitalization of public space in zone 19, La Florida, in Guatemala City. The main objective of the study was to develop planning and design proposals as well as implementation strategies that aim at gaining more public open space and revitalizing existing public open space, in a way that will define and emphasize La Florida's identity.

Although the development of the project - the diploma work - was a process of going back and forth between different phases of analysis and proposal development, as to describe the succession of the project, there are three main parts or phases. The first phase was the field study, which was conducted in Guatemala City from May through July in 2000. The field study included studies on Guatemala City and La Florida based on interviews, literature reviews, site visits, site inventories and regular contact and meetings with professional planners, architects and representatives from different municipal departments as well as locals in La Florida. The intention was to get to know Guatemala City and La Florida and define the task, which was to develop a "*Plan Integral*" - a plan for improvement of zone 19, La Florida. On the base of the studies, especially the numerous site visits in La Florida, I chose to focus on development and improvement of public space.

The following phase included definition of a theoretical base on planning and design of public space through reviews on literature related to the topic. This theoretical base together with the studies on Guatemala City and La Florida, was used as a base from which the proposals were developed.

The third and final phase was the actual development of the ideas and proposals. Although many ideas and proposals were initiated during the previous phases, especially during the first, they were not fully developed and illustrated until this phase. The second phase together with the third phase was mainly conducted in Sweden during 2000 and 2001.

Both the country Guatemala and its capital, Guatemala City, present many contrasts and characteristics. The polarization between wealthy groups and impoverished people is wide. The rapid growth of the capital, which mainly is caused by migration to the city, together with the suburbanization during the last decades has brought problems like insufficient and poor infrastructure, disordered traffic and insufficient public transportation systems, housing shortage, spread of informal settlements and environmental problems. Added to these, is also its problematic geographical location in a region with constantly recurring natural disasters, as the history can prove.

In order to fight these problems, the capital municipality initiated a development process by establishing a department for urban planning - *Metrópolis 2,010* - in 1994. In 1995 the *Development Plan*, by *Metrópolis 2,010*, was approved as the official document for future development

strategies concerning development within the capital. The overall vision for the capital is to strive for a polycentric urban structure.

La Florida, or zone 19, is one of the numerous low-income areas in the periphery of Guatemala City. The physical condition of buildings and public spaces in La Florida are poor, as maintenance and investment have been very moderate ever since its establishment in the 1950s. La Florida is nevertheless a diverse area with a mixture of lively commerce, small private businesses and housing. Public spaces are populated throughout most times of the day, although there are few public spaces, except from the streets, to meet and gather in. The streets are used as children's playground, sport grounds, spaces for markets, workshops, public celebrations and other communal activities. There is no open space that has a clear status as focal or gathering point, such as a square or a plaza.

Planning and design of urban public space include many different issues and factors that need to be taken into consideration. Such factors are function, context, space form, human needs, cultural aspects and identity. My intention has been to develop goals for development and revitalization of public space in La Florida, by using known planning and design tools that are discussed in the theoretical part. This means that the defined goals could be achieved by proposing actions or strategies that are known to bring certain effects.

The planning and design proposals for revitalizing public space in La Florida aim at gaining more public open space as well as organizing existing public open spaces in order to create arenas for public activities and social life. The idea is that revitalization and development of public space also could be used as a mean to constitute and strengthen the identity of space and by so, also strengthen the identity of the community. The intention is to develop proposals that refer to the local and regional urban typology, space system, architecture and culture in La Florida and the region.

The proposals are based on a development concept. This concept aims at developing an open space system that focuses on the centre area and the area around the ravine La Guacamaya that borders to La Florida in the north-east, together with the connection in between these areas and the shopping area that borders to La Florida in the south-west. In order to gain public open space, the proposal is to redevelop the two municipal sites in the centre of La Florida and the area around the ravine as public open spaces.

The two new public open spaces in the centre will be formed and designed as plazas. In the regional context plazas are common types of public open spaces. The two new plazas, Plaza Floridiana and Plaza del Mercado, will have different characters and serve different purposes. Plaza Floridiana will have more of a civic function and character, such as of a plaza that houses different kinds of public "get togethers". In contrast, Plaza del Mercado is

proposed to have a character of a casual public space. Plaza del Mercado is to partly serve as an outdoor market space during daytime.

Due to the risk for erosion and landslides in the ravine La Guacamaya, the area around it is classified as a high-risk area. The proposal is to relocate the informal settlement that is situated on the site today, as intended in the *Plan of Emergency* developed by the municipality. Since the site is too hazardous for being grounds for housing, the proposal is to instead develop a public green park on the site. In parks people stay only temporary, which means that the risks for people's life and health are reduced. As to further reduce risks for, fillings will be added into the ravine as to prevent erosion and landslides.

The development concept also includes proposals for new public services and functions within the community. Along with development of new public services, such as a community centre, a new school adjacent to Plaza Floridiana and a police sub-station in connection to Plaza del Mercado, the revitalization of public space in La Florida is attempted to generate a positive evolution and improvement of the quality of life of "*los floridianos*".

Resumen

Este trabajo del diploma involucra revitalización de espacio público en zona 19, La Florida, en Ciudad de Guatemala. El objetivo principal del estudio era desarrollar propuestas de planificación y diseño así como estrategias de aplicación que apuntan a ganar espacio abierto público y hacer revivir espacio abierto público existiendo, en una manera que definirá y dará énfasis a la identidad de La Florida.

Aunque el desarrollo del proyecto - el trabajo del diploma - consistuye un proceso de ida entre las fases diferentes de análisis y desarrollo de la propuesta, hay tres partes principales o fases. La primera fase era el estudio del campo que se dirigió en Ciudad de Guatemala de mayo hasta julio y en 2000. El estudio del campo incluyó estudios en La Ciudad de Guatemala y La Florida y se basó en entrevistas, la literatura repasa, los sitios visitados, y reuniones regulares con los proyectistas profesionales, arquitectos y representantes de las secciones municipales diferentes así como los habitantes de La Florida. La intención era conseguir conocer Ciudad de Guatemala y La Florida y definir la tarea que era desarrollar un "*Plan Integral*" - un plan para mejorar la zona 19 - La Florida. En la base de los estudios, sobre todo los numerosos sitios visitados en La Florida, escogí enfocar en el desarrollo y ampliación del espacio público. La fase siguiente incluyó la definición de una base teórica en planear y diseñar del espacio público a través de las revisiones en literatura relacionada al tema. Esta base teórica junto a los estudios de La Ciudad de Guatemala y La Florida, se usó como una base de la que las propuestas fueron desarrolladas.

La tercera fase, la fase final, eran el desarrollo real de las ideas y propuestas. Aunque se comenzaron muchas ideas y propuestas durante las fases anteriores, sobre todo durante el primer fase, esos no fueron desarrollados totalmente y se ilustraron hasta la tercera fase. La segunda fase junto con la tercera fase era principalmente realizada en Suecia durante 2000 y 2001.

La nación Guatemala y su capital, La Ciudad de Guatemala, tienen muchos contrastes y características. La polarización entre los grupos adinerados y las personas empobrecidos es ancha. El rápido crecimiento de la capital, principalmente causada por la migración urbana, junto con el suburbanización de las últimas décadas ha traído a los problemas como una infraestructura insuficiente, el tráfico desordenado, las sistemas de transporte públicos insuficientes, escasez de vivienda, la dispersión de los asentamientos y los problemas medioambientales. Agregado a éstos, también es su situación geográfica problemática en una región donde se constantemente repite desastres naturales, como la historia muestra.

Para luchar estos problemas, la municipalidad de la capital comenzó un proceso de desarrollo a través de estableciendo un departamento para la planificación urbana - *Metrópolis 2,010* - en 1994. En 1995, el *Plan de Desarrollo*, por *Metrópolis 2,010*, era aceptado como el documento

oficial para las estrategias de desarrollo futuras acerca de desarrollo en la capital. La visión del *Metrópolis 2,010* es de esforzarse para una estructura polycentrica urbana.

La Florida, la zona 19, es una de las numerosas áreas del bajo-ingreso en la periferia de Ciudad de Guatemala. La condición física de espacios públicos y edificios en La Florida es pobre, como el mantenimiento y las inversiones han sido muy modestos desde su establecimiento en los años cincuenta. La Florida es no obstante una área diversa con una mezcla de comercio vivo, los negocios privados pequeños y viviendas. Aunque hay pocos espacios públicos mucha gente se mueva para encontrarse y recoger la mayoría del día. Las calles se usan como patios de recreo para niños, tierras de los deportes, espacios para mercados y talleres, celebración pública y otras actividades comunales. En La Florida hay ningún espacio abierto que tiene una posición de punto focal o recogiendo, como una plaza.

Planificación y diseño de espacio público urbano incluya muchas problemas y factores que necesitan ser tenido en cuenta. Los tales factores son función, contexto, forma espacial, necesidades humanas, aspectos culturales y identidad. Mi intención ha sido desarrollar metas para el desarrollo y revitalización de espacio público en La Florida, usando las herramientas conocida del planificación y diseño que se discuten en la parte teórica. Esto significa que las metas definidas pudieran ser logradas a través de proponiendo acciones o estrategias que se conocen para traer ciertos efectos.

Las propuestas de planificación y desena para revitalizar el espacio público en La Florida apuntan a ganar espacio abierto público así como organizando existiendo espacios abiertos públicos para crear arenas para las actividades públicas y la vida social. También la idea es que ese revitalización y desarrollo de espacio público podrían usarse como un malo de constituir y fortalecer la identidad de espacio y también la identidad de la comunidad. La intención es desarrollar propuestas que se refieren a la tipología urbana local y regional, sistema espacial, la arquitectura y la cultura en La Florida y en la región.

Las propuestas de desarrollo son basado en un concepto de desarrollo. Este concepto apunta a desarrollar una sistema espacial abierto que enfoca en el área del centro y el área alrededor del barranco La Guacamaya que orilla a La Florida en el norte-este, junto con la conexión entre estas áreas y el área de comercio que orillan a La Florida en el sur-oeste. La propuesta es desarrollar los dos sitios municipales en el centro de La Florida y el área alrededor del barranco para ganar espacio abierto público.

Los dos nuevos espacios abiertos públicos en el centro se formarán y se diseñarán como plazas. En el contexto regionales entre espacios abiertos plazas son los tipos de espacios públicos abiertos. Las dos nuevas plazas, Plaza Floridiana y Plaza Mercado, tendrá caracteres diferentes y servirá

para los propósitos diferentes. Plaza Floridiana tendrá más de una función y carácter cívica, como de una plaza que aloja diferentes tipos de reuniones públicas. Entretanto, del de la Plaza Mercado se propone tener un carácter de un espacio público casual. Plaza Mercado servirá en parte como un espacio del mercado al aire libre durante día.

Debido al riesgo para la eroción y derrumbamientos en el barranco La Guacamaya, el área alrededor de él es clasificada como una área de alto-riesgo. La propuesta es relocalizar el asuntamiento que se sitúa en el sitio hoy, como pensó en el Plan de Emergencia desarrollado por la municipalidad. Puesto que el sitio es demasiado arriesgado para ser tierras por alojar, la propuesta es desarrollar un parque verde público en cambio en el sitio. La gente pasa por un parque y así los riesgos para la vida y salud están reducidos. Además para reducir el riesgo se agregarán rellenos en el barranco para prevenir eroción y derrumbamientos.

El concepto de desarrollo también incluye desarrollo de nuevos servicios públicos y funciones en el area. Junto con el desarrollo de nuevos servicios públicos, como un centro de la comunidad y una nueva escuela adyacente a la Plaza Floridiana y un subalterno-estación policíaco en conexión a la Plaza Mercado, el revitalización del espacio público en La Florida se intenta generar una evolución positiva y mejorar la calidad de la vida para “los floridianos”.

Introduction

Guatemala City is a rapidly expanding city. For the visitor it may give a first impression of total chaos. Cars, buses, trucks, pedestrians and street vendors all share the same space, in a seemingly disordered way. The traffic is intense. From early morning when the city wakes up, through noon and to the evening it vibrates from the sounds and movement of vehicles, goods and people. Some go to their office jobs in the civic centre, others come in trucks with heavy loads of fruits and vegetables to sell in the markets. Many go by car, but far more travel with the frequent and fast-moving buses. They come from different parts of the periphery to go to or through the city centre.

In Guatemala City space is crucial. The population growth and the densification of the city during the last decades have put a pressure on space, public open space in particular. The access to public open spaces is sparse. A large amount of the public open spaces are streets dominated by vehicle traffic. Public spaces for human activities are often limited to the small spaces of sidewalks, pedestrian bridges, traffic islands and parking lots. In comparison to other Guatemalan cities and towns, public parks and squares are few, as are spaces for recreation, leisure and quietness.

Many times public spaces serve as spaces in where to seek for privacy, when this cannot be provided for elsewhere. People with no access to private land, the urban poor and majority in Guatemala City, are obliged to the spaces of streets, sidewalks and the few parks, squares and plazas. The public space has an important role to play in low-income areas. In these areas, with their high population and building densities, the public space is used as a refuge.

The public space is the scene on which public life and public activities take place. Public spaces are places for social interaction and movement. Public spaces are channels for communication and transmission of public messages among people. In public spaces people are enabled to voice their common and individual needs. The nature of urban public spaces, their character, physical structure, spatial setting and connections to other spaces influence and sometimes strongly affect the nature of public life within it. Life in a city, its everyday activities and their certain demands on the environment put a demand on planning and design of the public space. Therefore conscious planning and design of public space can determine the grounds for the public life within a city or community.

With this perspective, I chose to focus on the planning and design of public space for my study in La Florida. In La Florida, public space is mainly restricted to the streets. Besides the streets there are few public open spaces. At the same time, the high population density put high pressure on private open space as well as private indoor space.

The aim with my work was to develop an overall strategy for revitalization of public space with consideration to the spatial layout, connections, functions and people's use of public space in La Florida in order to create opportunities for a favourable and enriched urban environment. In this, the challenge was to explore the possibility of gaining more public space and also how public space could be used more efficiently - how to make it multi-functional. Today there are two sites owned by the municipality in La Florida. They are not used to their full potentials. The possibilities of using these sites and the streets for multiple functions and activities, I saw as potential means for gaining and revitalising public space in La Florida.

I believe that public space has an important role to play for the public identity of a community and that revitalization of public space can bring positive impacts on the public image of a community. My attempt was therefore also to call upon the meaning that public space has for the community identity, its spirit, well-being and development.

What is public space?

To answer the question, I first had to question what space is. The term space is used in a variety of contexts. Concepts of space are developed out from different disciplines that concern space, such as geography, planning, sociology and architecture. These all have different, but interrelating perspectives on space and in between them there are gaps and conflicts in the understanding and interpretation of it.

In the perspective of the social sciences there are several concepts and interpretations of the definition of space. Space is discussed as absolute and relational, mental and real, abstract and differential space, to mention some. I will not develop these discussions further, as they are extensive scientific and philosophic theories within themselves. Sociologists, geographers and tradition bound urban planners, also discuss space in two other senses; social space and built or physical space. The social space is the "social implications of social institutions"¹, and the built space is the physical space, its morphology, use and meanings, which is seen to be the concern of architects. In the architectural disciplines, the view on space focuses on the distinction of space in solids and voids and the boundaries that define them.²

Then what is the difference between space and place? There is no simple, deterministic definition of either space or place. Many philosophers "conceptualise place as timeless and bounded, with a singular, fixed and unproblematic, authentic identity".³ "The particularity of a place is constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and connections to that 'beyond'".⁴ The definition of space and place often merge to similar meanings, although, clearly, there is a distinction between them. In my interpretation the definition of space shifts towards the physical space, meanwhile the definition of place shifts towards a social and more abstract sense of space.

Concerning space, I have recognised the complex and sometimes contradictory definitions and issues around it. In my study I will, when discussing space, refer to the physical space to which can be defined by boundaries. The public space is hence referred to the physical public space. In this definition not only outdoors public space is included, but also indoors spaces, such as community centres, public schools and libraries. In the definition of space there are also spaces that are private in a juridical sense, but act as public or semi-public ground such as shopping centres. As these kinds of spaces are few in La Florida, I primarily deal with public space owned by the public, in this case, the Municipality of Guatemala.

Method and approach

The project started with a Minor Field Study in Guatemala, which I did together with my friend Martin Heidesjö. Martin and I came to Guatemala with the same intention; to explore a culture new to us and make a study for our diploma work in Spatial Planning. Together we made inventories, interviews, investigations both on Guatemala City and our study area La Florida. Together we also discussed ideas for development strategies and planning proposals. From the start our intention was to develop one study together, but as the exploration of La Florida continued and as we discovered complex issues, we decided to focus on different aspects. While my study concentrates on development of public space and public services, with a particular focus on the centre area in La Florida, Martin's study concentrates around the streets as public spaces as well as traffic organization. As a result chapter "*Guatemala and Guatemala City*" and "*La Florida*" are based on material that Martin and I collected together during our stay in Guatemala. As a result of our teamwork also some of the development strategies and proposals in this study are based in our initial development discussions.

During our period of three months in Guatemala, Martin and I followed news on television and in newspapers. Although three months is a short time, we got the opportunity to meet different people, travel and see different parts of Guatemala. This gave us a small but important insight to the Guatemalan society of today, which came to be very useful in our perceptions of its culture, country and people.

After returning to Sweden we continued our individual works with the development of a theory framework and final planning and design proposals. In order to carry out the work, I needed to explore and gain insight in the necessity and meaning of planning and design of public urban space. This I did through a literature review on the topic, which is summarized in the chapter "*Planning and design of public space*". Many issues discussed in the chapter are based on basic human needs and basic human behavioural patterns that, in my opinion, to a large extent cross cultures.

The development of a project seldom goes on a straight line from survey, to planning, to design. During the field study and the studies after, the work alternated between different process stages; between data collecting,

site investigations, arrangement of interviews and meetings, as well as development of proposals.

Investigations

During the nine weeks that Martin and I spent in Guatemala City we made frequent site visits in La Florida. Some days we just walked around, observing the people, activities and the environment. During other days we made inventories and investigations on land use, condition of buildings and streets, green structure and other aspects of the environment of the whole area. The inventories gave us an image of La Florida and helped us to learn about life within the community. They also enabled us to observe and note things that we otherwise probably would have passed without notation.

Meetings and interviews

During the field study we had the opportunity to work in collaboration with several professional planners at *Metrópolis 2,010*, the urban planning department at the Municipality of Guatemala. Our official tutor was Susana Asensio, architect and urban planner at *Metrópolis 2,010*. She helped us to find information, which was spread out at different municipal sectors and departments, and to meet other professionals at the office and around the city. Susana and the other professionals, who we met, gave us essential feedback on our work.

One intention we had with the field study was to have representatives from La Florida participating in the development of planning and design proposals. We got in contact with several residents from La Florida, whom we interviewed and had informal talks to. One of them was Carlos Humberto Roldán González, a resident of La Florida with great engagement in his own neighbourhood. We had talks with Carlos at several occasions and through Carlos we arranged two informal meetings with a group of residents. The meetings were held in one of the classrooms in the Catholic Church in the centre of La Florida. Carlos also helped us to hand out a questionnaire to locals in La Florida.

Analysis and proposal development

Naturally, out from the investigations and inventories, ideas and analysis began to develop. The proposal and idea development was partly made in Guatemala and partly in Sweden. The development and argumentation of the proposals are based on the analysis of La Florida and a review on literature and theories on and around public space within the urban context.

Limitations

My understanding of La Florida is based on the investigations, observations and interviews that were made during a period of nine weeks. The limited period of time and sources I used reasonably limited my perception of La Florida. The studies were made primarily at daytime as we were recommended to avoid the area at night-time due to the high crime rate.

A large part of my analysis of La Florida is based on descriptions made by local residents and professionals with knowledge in the area. Since all communications were made in English or Spanish, with none of them being my first language, there are reasons to believe that this could have caused misinterpretations during discussions and interviews.

Main components of the study

The first chapter, *Guatemala and Guatemala City*, is an introduction of Guatemala and its capital. This part contains a review of the urban structure, problems and development in Guatemala City.

Chapter two, *Planning and design of public space*, summarizes a review of writings on the subject. Factors that determine the use and function of public space are discussed. The intention is to constitute a concept frame for the analysis and proposal of public space revitalization in La Florida. The review is mainly based upon a limited span of literature that principally anchors in the context of the Western world.

The third chapter, *La Florida*, is an analysis and description of La Florida regarding several aspects. This part contains a discussion on public space in La Florida, based upon my own observations and the interviews with locals and professionals that Martin and I made in Guatemala.

The fourth chapter, *Revitalizing La Florida*, presents the strategy and proposals for revitalization and development of public space in La Florida. This chapter bases on my theory framework summarized in chapter two, together with my development ideas and the initial discussions that Martin and I during the field study in Guatemala and in Sweden.

Chapter four also contains an epilogue, which is a summary of reflections on the result of the study and future development of La Florida.



**Guatemala &
Guatemala City**



mexico

belize city

belize

• flores

gulfo de honduras

puerto barrios

guatemala

• cobán

• huehuetenango

• chichicastenango

ca 9

quetzaltenango

• solola

mazatenango

antigua

guatemala city

escuintla

puerto san josé

honduras

el salvador

san salvador

pacific ocean



Guatemala in figures

Population

11.4 million (2000)

Urban/rural population rate

40/60 (2000)

Annual population growth

2.6% (1995-2000)

Total area

109,000 km²

Capital, population, annual population growth

Guatemala City ~2.0 million
2.7% per year

Other major cities, population

Quetzaltenango ~148,000
Escuintla ~100,000
Mazatenango ~57,000

Languages

Spanish (official), quiche, mam, kekchi and cakchiquel, together with 60-70 other Mayan languages

Ethnic groups

Indigenous ~50%
Ladino 40-45%
European descendants 3-5%
African descendants ~2%

Religions

Catholics 65%
Protestants 35%

Day average temperature

Guatemala City: 21° C July
17° C January

Average mitigation

Guatemala City: 1.316 mm/year

Seasons

Dry season (October - May)
Rainy season (June - September)

Sources:

Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)
United Nations, UN Statistics Division
Utrikespolitiska Institutet (1998)

Guatemala

Guatemala has 163 years as a nation. Before 1838, Guatemala was a province of the Central American Union. The Central American Union was a union of five former Central American colonial provinces. Before the Spaniards came to conquer Central America, the Maya people and their kingdoms that built the great cities Tikal, Palenque and Uxmal ruled the area. Today the relics of these cities and others Maya sites attract tourists, researchers and locals with their art, construction works, history and mysticism.

Guatemala is a country of great contrasts and many characteristics. The dramatic topography, the volcanoes, the colourful textiles, the lush and greenery, the rural areas and the indigenous history, cultures and people along with the colonial heritage often figure as icons to Guatemala's outward image and tourism. Though its beauty it stands in contrast to its latter history and to the political turmoil that has taken place since the independence from Spanish rule was stated in 1821. Since that year Guatemala has had few periods of peace. The initial acts towards civil war began in the 1950s with the land reform that made expropriation of land possible. Among the big landowners, from who land was expropriated, was the American-owned United Fruit Company, which later was involved when a coup, supported by the United States, replaced the government with a dictator. As a response, a civil war started and continued for thirty-six years. Peace was declared in 1996, with the so-called "*Peace Accords*".

In Guatemala the span between the small and wealthy elite group and the large and impoverished low-income group is wide. During the twentieth century the inequities has worsened as the population has increased and more resources has been devoted to production of products for export. Although a significant middle class has developed in urban areas, some 70 per cent of Guatemalans live in poverty.

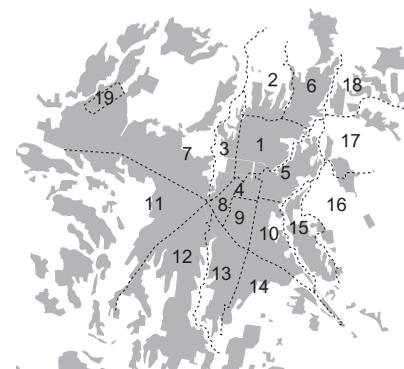
Although the colonial and modern cultures have influenced and brought changes and evolutions in cultures, the Maya people strongly characterize Guatemala's outward image. The Maya people correspond to about half of the country's population. Despite the fact, the Mayas are not even near to have the corresponding rate of political or financial power. The political and financial power mainly belong to the elite, which to a large extent is the 3-5% per cent population group - the European descendants.

Guatemala City

Guatemala City is the largest urban agglomeration and most populated city in Central America and also the political, social, cultural and economic centre of Guatemala. The city is the country's node of communications, where all major transportation lines meet. It handles almost half of the capital invested in the country and accounts for more than half of the industrial establishments and production of Guatemala.⁵

Guatemala City largely represents the modern Guatemala as supposed to the rural areas, which are more tradition bound. As common in urban Latin America, cultures and fashions in Guatemala City have long received influences from North America and Europe, which is evident in commercial development, advertisement and styles in cinema, music, politics, business and commerce with fast-food franchises, shopping malls and chain stores.

During the last decades Guatemala City has grown more than ever, mainly due to the high degree of rural-to-urban migration, but also due to natural population growth. Although sixty per cent of the population in Guatemala still live in rural areas, during the twentieth century, as in large parts of the world, an increasing number have migrated to the capital, searching for opportunities in the city. The annual population growth is around three percent per year.⁶ In 1950 the capital municipality, Municipality of Guatemala, had around 294,000 inhabitants.⁷ Today it is estimated that about two million people, or a sixth of the national population, live in the metropolitan area, AMG⁸, which includes the capital municipality, the Municipality of Guatemala, and the surrounding municipalities Mixco, Villa Nueva, Santa Catarina Pinula and Chinautla.⁹ Of these, Mixco in the west and Villa Nueva in the south, are the two largest and most expansive neighbouring municipalities.

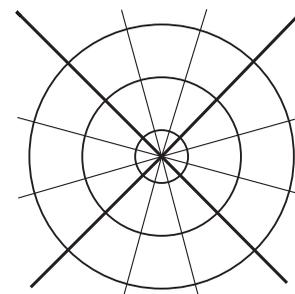


Zones, Municipality of Guatemala

Urban structure

As the city has grown it has emerged with the surrounding villages. Therefore, Guatemala City is constituted by several municipalities, with Municipality of Guatemala as the central municipality. The Municipality of Guatemala has twenty-one zones. The street and road system in the city is a juxtaposition of two street and road systems; the Spanish-style street grid system and the concentric arterial roads. Spanish-style street grid system has *Avenidas* as north-south extensions, while *Calles* are east-west extensions. The arterial roads were built in the latter part of the city's history.

The city centre includes Zone 1, 4, 9 and 10. Despite the sub-urbanization of the city, the city centre is still the most populated area, with a density four times higher than of other areas. Zone 1 is a retail commercial district and the historic centre. In Zone 1 most of the building heritage can be found. Otherwise there are few colonial buildings in the city due to destruction caused by natural disasters and replacement with modern buildings. As in most large Latin American cities, steel and concrete multi-storey modern buildings have been added to the urban typology.



Scheme of concentric and diagonal roads

Zone 4, is an administrative and civic centre, with city and national government buildings, mainly built during the 1960s. As areas of high-rise office buildings and exclusive commerce, Zone 9 and 10 are contrasts to Zone 1 and Zone 4. Especially Zone 10 is and area of luxury stores, shopping centres, exclusive condominium buildings and hotels.

Beside the centre Guatemala City consists of low-rise and dense sub-urban development and areas of informal development. The great social gaps and

Guatemala City





contrasts in standard of living among its inhabitants in Guatemala City are reflected in the spatial segregation in between different social groups, as common in Latin America. Those that can afford, live in closed residential areas guarded by armed security guards. Zones are often associated with a certain social status and also how safe it is considered to be. The most exclusive areas are in the south inner urban areas and the east suburban areas, while the poor areas can be found in the old city centre and northeast, west and southwest quadrants of the city. They extend out far beyond the inner urban areas.

The sub-urbanization and modern development has not only caused social segregation but also functional segregation with the development of mono-functional areas such as pure residential neighbourhoods and large commercial areas with shopping malls and park-and-ride facilities. In some zones, especially the high-income zones, functions are divided, with separate areas dedicated for housing, shopping and working. Large modern and commercial areas has been developed along the major city entrance roads such as along CA 1 or Calzada Roosevelt.

Urban problems

As a cause of the urban growth and development, the city drags with several serious problems. Poverty, housing shortage, bad living conditions, lack of employment opportunities, high crime rates and pollution of air and water are less flattering merits that the city has come to associate with. In Guatemala City one third of the population, or more than 800,000 people, live in squatter settlements.¹⁰ Generally the lack of regulation and planning together with the high speed of population growth has caused a high pressure on land, which has forced people to squatter ravines and other high risk areas. The governmental and municipal authorities have not been able to stop the squatter of land. Instead, the policy has been a process



of legalization of land and formalization of the settlements, which means that the land is given to the settlers. The policy has been criticized as it makes little to change the situation and as the city gets denser and thereby minimizing undeveloped areas.

The squatter settlements are usually very dense, with few spaces that can be considered as public spaces. The families that live there are often big. The houses are usually very small and built of all sort of collected materials. The informal areas often lack electricity, water supply, drainage, public light and proper streets. The many informal settlements are often located in the canyon and ravine areas, some of them on risky soil and in danger of being destroyed by landslides.

As a part of the high population growth and high pressure on land the city also faces critical environmental problems. The ravines are most of what is left over as green open spaces in the city. In Guatemala City the ravines have determined the layout of the urban growth. The city is situated on top of a plateau area within a wide valley. Ravines that in many places reach the central zones score the plateau. They are often used as waste dumps and drainages of wastewater from industries.

Other environmental problems that the city has to face are air pollution, water pollution, ground pollution, sinking ground water table and natural disasters. The unstable ground conditions combined with seasonal rain and periodical earthquakes constitute a major risk for natural disasters. In 1917-18 and 1976 the city was stroke by major and disastrous earthquakes. Air pollution is mainly caused by traffic, although the rate of car ownership is 0.25 vehicles/inhabitant, a low number compared with many Western cities. The warm climate, bad maintenance, sulphurous fuel and degeneration and development of green areas, are factors that worsen the situation.

Guatemala City 1800 - 2000



1800



1821



1890



1900

The unemployment rate in Guatemala City is high, which makes the informal business sector important, especially in the urban poor areas. The poverty and high unemployment rate has resulted in a high crime rate. In recent years, street crime and violence have become a growing problem and safety has become an issue. Many fear to use public transportation and also to travel by car alone.

Another problematic issue that the urban planners need to deal with is the traffic situation in the city. The development of infrastructure has not kept the pace of the urban growth and the traffic organisation and road system are poorly maintained and organized. Traffic congestions are common due to under-dimensioned streets and roads, poor intersection layouts and lack of traffic control. Infrastructure for pedestrian and bicycle traffic is largely undeveloped. Traffic rules, street and road design and lack of continuous sidewalks make biking and walking uncomfortable and unsafe. Also the growth of car ownership contributes to the traffic congestions. The traffic congestion is an extensive problem especially along the main axis roads, that connect the periphery with the city centre. The width of the roads is not designed for the traffic loads and roadside parking inevitably reduces the driving lane width.

Public transportation in Guatemala City has long been a delicate issue with safety problems and low operation efficiency and service level. Subsidises to bus operation have been a burden on the municipality's finances and the issue of fares and subsidises has long been controversial for passengers, bus operators and the municipality. In April 2000 the municipality made an attempt to raise the bus fare, but which failed and resulted in forceful demonstrations.

The municipality manage their own bus company, but the main part of the bus services is contracted to private companies. Generally, private bus companies run their routes with old American school buses¹¹, which in most cases are in very bad condition due to their high age and lack of maintenance. The old buses constitute a serious environmental problem in the city. They do not only emit a large amount of exhausts, but they are also the largest source of traffic noise.



Calzada San Juan Sacatepépez



1940



1945



1970



2000

Urban development

Guatemala City is the fourth capital of Guatemala. It was founded in 1776, replacing the old capital, Antigua Guatemala, which had been destroyed by an earthquake in 1773. The site for the new capital was chosen for its access to water, healthful conditions and security from earthquakes, which later proved to not be as high as first assumed.

The original plan for the city included two hundred blocks, organized around Plaza Mejor, the central and ceremonial square. During the first hundred years the city grew slowly, but when the liberal period of Guatemala government started in 1871, a new period for Guatemala City was marked. The urban structure began to transform from colonial to modern as a result of the expanding economy, which allowed investments in infrastructure and social programs. New public schools and new public open spaces were developed. Streetlights, horse-drawn streetcars, railroads and electricity were introduced. The period of development lasted until 1917-18 when a series of earthquakes caused the death of a large amount of people and the loss of much of the city's colonial and nineteenth-century building heritage.

The following decades after the earthquakes was a period of reconstruction. Many of the pre-existing buildings were replaced and many large public projects, mostly infrastructure projects, like road constructions and public buildings, were undertaken. The image of Guatemala City changed.

During the 1940s, in the beginning of the modern period in the country's history, the growth of the capital began to accelerate rapidly. Allowed by bridges across the canyons the city started sprawling in all directions in an unregulated and irregular manner. The city entrance roads worked as axis of an autonomous spatial development. The process of urbanisation and sub-urbanisation, marked by a spatial segregation of classes, started. A great amount of migrants, mainly poor people, came in to the old city centre, while the wealthier group left the centre for the new suburban areas, which led to a deterioration of the central area. In the west the city grew along Calzada San Juan Sacapéquez, the road towards Mixco, with La Florida as one of the pioneer projects in the area. The migration to the capital consequently led to lack of housing, resulting in land invasions of yet undeveloped land.

In 1976 a major earthquake shook the city causing the destruction of around 60,000 households, which more than doubled the amount of households lacking a home. The disaster caused most destruction in the precarious areas, where adobe, the cheapest and most fragile material, was a common construction material. Due to the acute shortage of housing, people had to move into informal settlements. As a consequence, there was an increase of development of social housing projects, which otherwise was more rare than common. The projects were largely financed with international support.

Despite the efforts, the housing deficit of social housing was far from eliminated in the 1980s, when the country entered an economical and social crisis. Clearly it was the economical crisis and lack of housing policies with attention to the shortage of housing that further accelerated invasion of land. When land suitable for development became scarce, land invasions spread into the riskier areas of the ravines. The authorities answered with evicting invaders and transferring them to the city periphery and outside the metropolitan area. The authorities soon came to realise that the invasion movement was out of control when previously invaded land was invaded again and the number of squatter settlements only grew. Instead, in an attempt to find solutions for the situation, invaded areas were consolidated and legalized.

Today the city still continues to grow. The expansion has even lead to development of some of the slopes around the valley in which it is situated. The situation is critical due to the returning climate phenomenon that causes natural disasters. In 1998 the hurricane Mitch hit the region, but caused only minor destruction in Guatemala City. The environmental situation within the city has made the municipal authorities to initiate an ambitious work towards sustainable development. A part of this was the establishment of a department for urban planning, *Metrópolis 2,010*.

Urban planning

In 1994 the first formal institution for urban planning and development in Guatemala City was founded. Before that development of land was mainly made by the private sector, with little control from the public sector, which also is evident in the small amount of public land in the city. Before 1994, during different time periods, there was a struggle between the municipality and the central government concerning urban development. The government disposes an ability to intervene at all administrative levels, which many times has made planning complicated and caused the failures of several attempts of developing plans and strategies for urban development. Along with the accelerated process of urbanisation, managing the urban development required a more complete and efficient administrative system, than existed in the capital. Therefore, during the mid-1980s, an administrative restructuring began, as a process of modernizing the municipality. This process of modernization, led to the founding of a department for metropolitan planning and development, *Metrópolis 2,010*, together with *DHV*, a Dutch consultant company.

In Guatemala municipalities are responsible for the territorial ordering of land within their boundaries. Today there is no department for planning of the whole *AMG*, although the Municipality of Guatemala City has, with their *Development Plan*, also named *Metrópolis 2,010*¹³, taken a responsibility for the whole *AMG*. Cooperation between the municipalities is weak and a consistent spatial definition of *AMG* does not exist. The *Development Plan* has not been approved by the other municipalities. With the absence of an applicable development plan, there is a lack of consistent building code and norms, which regulate the land use and development in *AMG*. Each municipality manages its own development and puts up own criteria and regulations for development.

Although the municipalities are responsible for planning and development, they are not concerned with housing. Housing issues are principally handled by autonomous governmental department *FOGUAVI*¹⁴, the private sector and non-governmental organisations that play an important role for development, upgrading and improvement of low-income housing.

The polycentric city

The overall vision of the department for planning and development, *Metrópolis 2,010*, for Guatemala City is to strive for a polycentric urban structure, with high-density development in the centre and the sub-centres. A road system of ring roads, with bridges over the ravines and existing diagonal roads, are to connect new and existing sub-centres. Today a semi-circular ring road, called *Periferico*, surrounds the city centre on the west side. The aim is to develop an enclosed circle. Another ring road, the *Metropolitan Ring*, is planned at 15 km distance from the centre, surrounding the whole *AMG*¹⁵. The idea is to connect the surrounding municipalities Mixco, Villa Nueva, Santa Catarina Pinula and Chinautla, as four major sub-centres and create a more diverse *AMG* as a whole.

Metrópolis 2,010 - Development Plan

The formal development plan, has been given the same name as the Department of Planning and Development; *Metrópolis 2,010*. The municipal council approved the development plan in 1995 as the official document indicating policies and strategies for development and management of *AMG*.

The development plan contains two parts; the *Metropolitan Plan* for development of the whole *AMG* and the *Zoning Plan*, the land use zoning for the Municipality of Guatemala.

Summary

Guatemala and Guatemala City presents many contrasts and characteristics. The polarization between wealthy groups and the impoverished in both the country and its capital is wide. The rapid growth of the capital, mainly caused by migration, and sub-urbanization during the last decades has brought problems like insufficient and poor infrastructure, disordered

traffic and public transportation systems, housing shortage, spread of informal settlements and environmental problems. Added to these, is also its problematic geographical location in a region with constantly recurring natural disasters, as history can prove.

In order to fight these problems and manage the city, the capital municipality initiated a development process by implementing a department for urban planning - *Metrópolis 2,010*. In 1995 the *Development Plan*, developed by the municipality, was appointed as the official document of future development strategies for development within the capital. The overall vision for the capital is to strive for a polycentric urban structure.