

Innovation through Institutional Design:
Mexico City's Autoridad del Espacio Público

May 15, 2012

Jaclyn L. Sachs

Candidate for Master in Urban Planning, 2012

Graduate School of Design, Harvard University

Abstract

During the past several decades, Mexico City has been expanding in land area and population at the same time that it has been losing population in the central areas of the city. Paradoxically, within the Mexico City Metropolitan Area (MCMA), there are now more people living in the surrounding State of Mexico than there are within the Federal District – home to the oldest parts of the city, and with the services and infrastructure to support a residential population. A phenomenon sometimes called the “center-periphery” problem, this presents serious environmental, social, and fiscal challenges for the Federal District, and has contributed to physical and economic decline, as well as crime, in areas that have experienced population loss. This problem has been aided by: the lack of adequate land use planning regulations at the metropolitan and DF-levels; the development of new planning tools and institutions toward initiatives that have only exacerbated the problem; and bureaucratic constraints which have prevented municipal agencies and policymakers from being able to introduce more effective, innovative tools. One method of overcoming these constraints in recent years has been the establishment of new, independent, “decentralized” agencies of the mayor’s office, insulated from the politics of other agencies, and capable of introducing new metrics, methodologies, and financing schemes to promote new forms of planning practice. One such example of this to emerge in the past few years is the *Autoridad del Espacio Público*, or Public Space Authority, which, through particular institutional design strategies, has been successful at implementing a series of “public space rescue” projects combining both simple urban design interventions and public consultation. Unlike other recent planning practices, these strategies have enabled the AEP to more aggressively respond to the consequences of the “center-periphery” problem, through improving security and pedestrian accessibility, as well as encouraging economic development, in the “urban voids” that have been left behind in the past few decades of urban development.

Acknowledgements

I have been lucky to have benefited from the help of many people in conducting the research for this thesis. Thank you to:

- Prof. Diane Davis, for her feedback, guidance, and interest, and for her efforts to cultivate a community of thoughtful urban thinkers wherever she goes;
- The David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University for providing funding to conduct research in Mexico City, without which this would not have been possible;
- The many people – government officials, architects, planners, professors – in Mexico City and Cambridge who were kind enough to meet with me to share their thoughts;
- Jose Castillo, for the opportunity to participate in a studio on Mexico City, which encouraged me to want to learn more about this challenging and fascinating city;
- The GSD, for exposing me to the world of design and “creative possibilities”;
- My friends at the GSD and elsewhere, for their support and laughter during the past two years;
- And finally, my family, for being a constant source of love and encouragement.

Table of Contents

	Introduction	4
1.	Contemporary Planning Challenges in Mexico City	8
	Mexico City Metropolitan Area	9
	The “Center-Periphery” Problem	12
	“A Planning Void”	15
	Representative Democracy	18
	Ebrard and a “New Urban Order”	27
2.	<i>La Autoridad del Espacio Público (AEP)</i>	31
	Creating a New Agency	31
	Focus on Public Space	36
	Institutional Structure	38
	Financing	40
	Project-Based, Architectural Approach	43
	Projects	45
3.	Analysis of Findings	85
	Conclusion	89
	Bibliography	91
	Appendix	93

Introduction

Over the past several decades, the greater Mexico City Metropolitan Area has expanded in both population and land area, extending beyond the *Distrito Federal* (DF) into the surrounding States of Mexico and Hidalgo, at the same time that the central areas of the DF have experienced population loss and physical decline. This is associated with an uneven population density: both a greater proportion of the metropolitan population now lives in the State of Mexico than in the DF, and all of the metropolitan population growth is expected to occur there in the coming years. Sometimes called the “center-periphery problem,” this has been identified by policymakers, planners, activists, and academics in the DF as a problematic development pattern for its negative environmental, social, and fiscal consequences. As a result both of the 1985 earthquake and of the shift in population and industry out of the DF, many central areas of the DF have been abandoned, left to decline physically and economically. The oldest built-up areas of Mexico City, it is precisely these areas which feature the densest networks of existing infrastructure and services, and can best accommodate a residential population; and yet, most residential development during the past two decades has occurred in un-serviced areas in the State of Mexico, as well in conservation zones of the DF, posing environmental and social challenges for all.

During the past few decades, weak planning controls have both facilitated this unfettered expansion and failed to address its consequences within the *Distrito Federal*. With the first land use planning law for the DF instituted in the 1970s, for most of Mexico City’s history, there has been a dearth of regulatory mechanisms in place to guide land use planning. In the 1980s, however, new planning tools were introduced amidst this weak regulatory context, albeit were directed at promoting a type of development that many argue only exacerbated this condition. The *Regente* (or mayor) at the time, Manuel Camacho Solís, developed new “strategic planning” mechanisms in

order to incentivize the creation of a new business node in the DF, aligned with national development goals. This node, Santa Fe, was, in essence, planned as a “satellite city” – cut off from the central areas of the city and public transport infrastructure – and has been widely criticized for using public tools merely to intensify the very urban trend that Mexico City needed to combat.

Part of this may relate to the fact that Camacho, the *Regente del Distrito Federal*, was not elected, but appointed by the President, and thus was perhaps more accountable to the President and his own national development agenda than the residents of Mexico City. After years of demands for a representative government, however, in 1997, residents of the DF were granted voting powers for a new mayor, or *Jefe del Gobierno del Distrito Federal*, as well as borough (*delegación*) representatives, and the creation of a new Legislative Assembly (*Asamblea Legislativa del DF*, or *ALDF*). With the first election in seventy years for a mayor for the DF, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, in 1997, and from a leftist opposition party, there was now a mayor accountable to the voting residents of the city. Accordingly, there occurred a shift in urban policy toward the urban scale, as well as an effort to direct existing, and develop new, planning tools to combat the so-called “center-periphery problem.” As Cárdenas only served for two years, this became even more apparent, however, and was acted on, under his longer-serving successor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Under López Obrador, there was the first concerted effort to create new public institutions and mechanisms for promoting a more socially and environmentally sustainable development pattern for Mexico City, and yet, López Obrador also experienced tension over how to reconcile this with the need to appease different interest groups, including, notably, real estate construction and development firms.

Marcelo Ebrard, the current mayor, elected in 2006, learned from the constraints that López Obrador experienced and has been more successful at reconciling this tension, directing public tools toward projects that both address residents’, activists’, and academics’ demands for a safer, more environmentally-sound city, and which encourage private investment. Part of this success

can be seen with the creation of a new institution, the *Autoridad del Espacio Público del Distrito Federal*, or “Public Space Authority of the Federal District,” in 2008, modeled on the earlier *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*. Two years into Ebrard’s term, after not being able to get any “projects” done under the then-head of the DF city planning agency, SEDUVI, Ebrard contacted an architect who had been very successful at instituting, in a short amount of time, dramatic changes on the UNAM campus in the south of the city – Felipe Leal Fernández. Skilled at project design and implementation, Leal knew it would be challenging to accomplish anything – or at least anything meaningful – within the DF’s urban planning agency, SEDUVI, which was mired in corrupt and challenging work. Leal, instead, suggested the creation of a new agency, the *Autoridad del Espacio Público*, which, as a financially and administratively autonomous entity of the mayor’s office, would be able to pursue its own agenda.

Indeed, this thesis argues that it is this autonomy which has allowed the AEP to introduce new metrics and methodologies for planning in Mexico City which have been sensitive both to Ebrard’s time constraints for project delivery and need to encourage private investment in the city, while, at the same time, responsive to the effects of the so-called “center-periphery problem” discussed above. Inspired by government urban design agency models from Barcelona and elsewhere, the AEP operates like an independent architectural office. Designing, developing, and implementing public space renovation projects in the DF, the AEP considers “anything between the buildings” – including streets, plazas, and squares – as “public space.” This wide programmatic scope, in combination with its financial autonomy, has allowed the AEP to pursue a diverse array of projects aimed at both combating the impacts of population and physical decline in central areas, and at encouraging a shift toward more responsible behaviors and development patterns in Mexico City. These projects have ranged from more conventional “plaza renovation” projects to the pedestrianization of vehicular streets, the “rescue” of freeway underpasses for neighborhood recreational use, and the installation of parking meters in parking-intensive, affluent areas. With

the need to produce things quickly, and with limited financial resources at its disposal, the projects the AEP has done have been fairly simple in terms of interventions. This need for simplicity, however, has forced the AEP to be strategic in its design strategies, considering what small changes might make the most impact for both the current users of the space and city-at-large. These strategies have typically involved promoting security and pedestrian accessibility, which have enabled the AEP's projects to be very successful at curbing crime in former "urban voids"; at promoting their renewed use by the surrounding communities; and in encouraging renewed commercial activity and investment in these areas. As a public agency, additionally, the AEP has combined these strategies with significant public consultation, the results of which have been incorporated into the projects, but more importantly, which have led to the formation of new neighborhood institutions that have continued to live on past the completion date of the original AEP "design project."

The institutional autonomy and design of the AEP has allowed it to pursue this strategy, which combines the spatial sensitivity and specificity of urban design methodologies with the socioeconomic awareness of planning strategies. Through its particular institutional model and the use of these design and planning methodologies, the AEP suggests that it is through new institutional models and a more aggressive, publicly-directed model of "citymaking" that the effects of sprawl and depopulation can be combated, and more socioeconomically- and environmentally-sensitive spaces be created.

Contemporary Planning Challenges in Mexico City

1.1 *The Mexico City Metropolitan Area*

Mexico City, a so-called megalopolis, is massive in terms of both land area and population. While the urban area of Mexico City consisted of only one administrative entity, the DF, or *Distrito Federal*, in 1950,¹ since then, the city has grown to involve three different state-level jurisdictions: the *Distrito Federal* (technically, a quasi-state, and hereafter known as the *DF*), the State of Mexico, and the State of Hidalgo. While originally simply consisting of the DF, Mexico City now includes 59 *municipios* or towns within the State of Mexico, and one *municipio* in the State of Hidalgo, to form the greater Mexico City Metropolitan Area, or *Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México*. This expansion in administrative boundaries reflects a growth in both population and land area, increasing from a citywide population of 3 million in 1950 to 18 million in 1985, and from a 1940 land size area of 11,750 hectares to 125,000 hectares in 1985. The DF itself is further divided into 16 *delegaciones*, whose representatives, up until the 1997 constitutional reforms, which established legislative democracy in the DF, were appointed by the President of the Republic. Featuring an incredibly complex and fragmented administrative and political geography, the opportunities for barriers to coordination around metropolitan planning are seemingly endless.

¹ Alejandro Suárez-Pareyón, "Mexico City, Mexico," in *Planning Through Projects: Moving From Master Planning to Strategic Planning*, ed. Marisa Carmona. Netherlands: Techne Press (2009): 273.

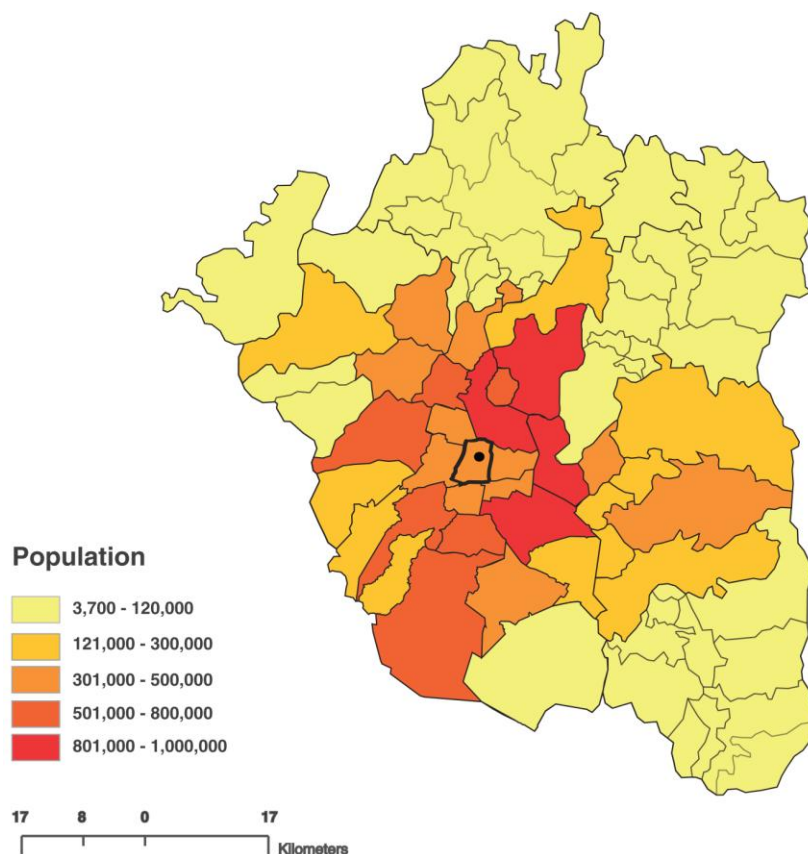
The Mexico City Metropolitan Zone (Source: Wikicommons)



The population of the MCMA is not spread evenly throughout, however: Mexico City features what might be called an “uneven” or decentralized metropolitan population density. As of the 2010 census, 8,851,080 million people lived in the DF, while a greater proportion – 11,168,301 people – lived in the State of Mexico, and another 97,461 in the one conurban *municipio* of the State of Hidalgo (Tizayuca), for a combined MCMA population of 20,116,842 people.² This decentralized population density applies to the DF, as well: it is not only that a greater proportion of Mexico City residents are living outside of the DF than within it, but that within the DF, the most populous areas are the peripheral *delegaciones*, and not those which are most centrally-located. As Mexico City

² *Censo Población 2010*, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI).

Distribution of Population throughout MCMA, 2005. Historic Center highlighted. (Data source: INEGI)



historically grew outward from the original settlement of Teotihuacan on Lake Texcoco, these central areas that have experienced population loss are some of the oldest, most historic areas of the city, with the greatest concentration of services and public transportation infrastructure. This poses serious environmental and social consequences for the MCMA-at-large, but also, fiscal consequences for the DF, which does not receive property tax revenues (its main source of local tax revenues³) from the large proportion of the MCMA population that now lives in the State of Mexico but works in the DF.

³ Uri Raich, *Unequal Development: Decentralization and Metropolitan Finance in Mexico City*, Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag (2008): 71.

1.2 The “Center-Periphery Problem”

While this population loss in the central areas has occurred since the 1950s and 1960s, it was intensified after 1985 earthquake, which, in terms of human loss and building damage, affected the central *delegaciones*, and in particular, the Historic Center, the hardest. The earthquake wreaked the most damage on those areas located on the seismically-vulnerable lakebed of historic Lake Texcoco (from which the city grew outward), and thus most severely impacted the oldest *delegación* of Cuauhtémoc – home to the Historic Center – but also impacted, as well, the *delegaciones* of Venustiano Carranza, Benito Juárez, and Gustavo A. Madero. While, again, population loss in these areas had occurred before 1985, the earthquake left an estimated 250,000 people homeless. Moreover, it incited fear among residents in many central areas of the city, including those not seriously damaged by the earthquake, like the middle-class *colonia* of Condesa, inspiring an outward migration to outlying suburbs within the DF and into the State of Mexico. Over the past several decades, this shift in population has been aided by the in-migration of largely lower-income rural migrants, who have settled on former *ejido* lands in both the State of Mexico, and, to a large extent, the southern *delegaciones* of the DF, including Xochimilco. [As Xochimilco serves as the aquifer recharge zone for the DF, settlement in this area presents particularly serious environmental consequences for all residents.] In short, at the same time that the central areas of the MCMA have lost population, the outer *delegaciones* and *municipios* of the State of Mexico have gained population (see Appendix), presenting both serious social and environmental consequences.

As indicated above, this population loss in the central areas of Mexico City is paradoxical and inefficient in a land use planning sense in that these central areas (the oldest areas – and the historic commercial and cultural heart of Mexico City) are precisely those which feature the highest density of services and infrastructure – in terms of both skilled and informal labor opportunities, hospitals, schools, public transportation infrastructure, and cultural amenities. As new residential

developments are created in outlying suburbs of the DF and the State of Mexico, water, electricity, and other services need to be extended, which reduces the amount of these already-dwindling resources available in the MCMA at-large, including the DF.⁴ (Mexico City already is in a precarious, chronic water shortage situation owing to its particularly challenging location far from the nearest freshwater source, and yet, strangely, located on a series of lakes.) Additionally, the metro (and new Metrobús) system, implemented in the 1960s, does not reflect current demographic patterns and extend beyond the DF into the State of Mexico. This means that the greater proportion of the MCMA population residing outside of the DF is dependent on private automobiles, and to a greater extent, collective transport, or *microbuses*, with this latter mode occupying 55% of all trips in the MCMA, as of 2005.⁵ Both of these modes generate considerable pollution – of particular concern because Mexico City is located at a high altitude, in a pollutant sink. They also, additionally, both rely on road infrastructure, and thus further clog the road and freeway network throughout the MCMA and increase congestion and travel times for all. For those lowest-income residents who may live in informal settlements in the northern reaches of the MCMA in the State of Mexico and make a living by vending in the DF, this can correspond to a commuting time of 2-3 hours each way. Not only has dependency on cars and *microbuses* increased travel times, but it has made traffic accidents into a major concern among residents, with the most common cause of death among children nationwide being traffic-related injuries.⁶

As population and industry has shifted outward into the State of Mexico (and in the case of industry, in many instances, north to the so-called “Maquiladora Zone”), many pockets of the city, and in particular, within the most central *delegación*, Cuauhtémoc, have been abandoned. This has produced what some have identified as “urban voids,” or spaces left to deteriorate, increasingly not

⁴Jorge Legorreta, ed., *Ciudad de México: A Debate*, Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (2008):14.

⁵ Ricky Burdett and Dejan Sudjic, eds., *The Endless City*. London: Phaidon Press (2008).

⁶ Nancy Kete, Lee Schipper, et al, “A Case Study in Real Time: Mexico City BRT Metrobus,” unpublished.

under the watchful eye of either residents or public officials.⁷ A car-dependent development pattern has further worsened this condition, causing a decrease in street activity in some parts of Mexico City as walking has become a less-viable transportation option. Many have argued that this presence of “urban voids” and lack of “eyes on the street,” in the Jane Jacobs sense, has exacerbated already-existing crime in the city, and contributed to feelings of fear which have further fed into a desire on the part of many residents to live in gated, secluded, and otherwise-protected communities located increasingly farther out. Additionally, this presence of “voids” has left typically lower-income residents in many parts of the DF living in increasingly deteriorating areas in which they feel it is unsafe to spend time on the street and recreate in nearby parks and plazas.

Historic Center, Mexico City



⁷ Angela Giglia, “Privatización del espacio, auto segregación y participación ciudadana en la ciudad de México: el caso de las calles cerradas en la zona de Coapa (Tlalpan, Distrito Federal),” accessed at <http://uam-antropologia.info/web/articulos/giglia_art02.pdf>

1.3 “A Planning Void”

These problems have intensified over the past two decades, aided by both weak existing land use planning controls, and the direction of new planning tools toward uses which, in many cases, have only made these problems worse. Mechanisms to control land use and growth historically have been weak or nonexistent in Mexico City, with no law in place to guide urban development in the DF until 1976, and one which was not substantially modified until 1997. While coordination around air quality and environmental issues at the metropolitan level has been successful, metropolitan coordination around land use and transportation, in order to both curb sprawl and extend sorely-needed public transportation networks into the State of Mexico, has achieved far less success. [There is a long history, over the past few decades, of failed attempts to try to establish a regulatory process or regional governance body for coordinating metropolitan planning in the MCMA, which unfortunately, has become even more complicated since 1997. Since that time, the State of Mexico, DF, and federal government (based in Mexico City) have been governed by the three main opposing political parties (PRI, PRD, and PAN, respectively), which has made the state-level partnership required for establishing common planning frameworks difficult, though some progress has been made in recent years.]

In the late 1980s, in a climate of fiscal decentralization and need for new revenue sources for the government of the DF (GDF), new planning mechanisms were developed to incentivize private development in the city, but unfortunately, many argue only exacerbated the “center-periphery” problem. As the mayor at this time, Camacho Solís, was appointed by the President, planning was directed toward development patterns and uses in line with national development goals.⁸ With an interest in developing a new economic node in Mexico City that would bring in

⁸ Diane E. Davis, “Conflict, Cooperation, Convergence: Globalization and the Politics of Downtown Development in Mexico City,” *Research in Political Sociology* 15: 147.

foreign capital and hurl Mexico into the global economy, Salinas encouraged Camacho and his chief city planner, Jorge Gamboa de Buen, to develop a new CBD in Mexico City that would become a major finance node for the whole country. Such a node also carried the potential for generating considerable property tax revenues for the fiscally-constrained DF. Camacho and Gamboa de Buen focused efforts on incentivizing private investment in an area of 850 hectares known as Santa Fe, west of Chapultepec Park, in the *delegaciones* of Álvaro Obregón and Cuajimalpa. In 1987, through the Department of the DF (*Departimiento del Distrito Federal*, or *DDF*) and *Servicios Metropolitanos*, or SERVIMET, Camacho and Gamboa established a “Special Zone of Controlled Development,” or ZEDEC, within the *delegación* plans for Álvaro Obregón y Cuajimalpa, aimed at promoting the “improvement and rescue” of the area.

Location of Santa Fe within the DF



The plan for this new “satellite city” called for an area comprised entirely of commercial uses, with no accommodation for residential uses or public space. To be built on a landfill, it required vast amounts of investment in remediation and infrastructure expansion, as well as the eviction and relocation of existing informal settlements in the area. In 1989, Camacho established a Master Plan for Santa Fe, aiming to “revalorize” this area of poor environmental quality and low land values through the assignment of “the highest and best use,” or the land use capable of generating the most property tax revenue: Class A commercial office space. Due to the economic crisis of 1994, after which no major construction activity occurred in Mexico City, much of the development of Santa Fe did not occur until after 2000, after the construction industry had picked up again. Since the 1990s, Santa Fe has been widely criticized for merely creating another form of sprawl – encouraging private investment in an entirely new area, which itself required major public investment, instead of encouraging investment in areas sorely needing it. Such areas include the historic financial corridor of the City, *Paseo de la Reforma*, located next to the Historic Center, which suffered major damage in the 1985 earthquake and had lost a large proportion of its tenants afterward. While Santa Fe has become an extremely profitable center of finance capital in Mexico City, and Mexico at-large, many have questioned the wisdom in using public planning tools to encourage the development of a *new*, mono-use corporate CBD in a completely cut-off location, representing a lack of urban and metropolitan consciousness.

Santa Fe



1.4 *Representative Democracy*

With the establishment of representative democracy, and the 1997 election of the first mayor, or *Jefe de Gobierno del Distrito Federal*, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (1997-1998) – from the opposition PRD party – a shift away from national development concerns toward addressing city-scale matters occurred within urban policy. Now accountable to a voting citizenry, Cárdenas promised a more democratic government, and transferred attention away from the elite business node of Santa Fe, toward the Center of the city, the historic heart, and an area experiencing ever-increasing population loss, physical decay, and crime.⁹ He called for a reorganization of the entities

⁹ Diane E. Davis, “Conflict, Cooperation, Convergence,” 159.

coordinating planning efforts in the Historic Center¹⁰ and led a revision of the same “strategic planning” instruments used by Camacho and Gamboa – the “ZEDEC” tool, now called the “*Programa Parcial*” – but for the Historic Center. The Historic Center was, at this time, an area with a low-income resident population, high crime levels, a high concentration of commercial activity – and in particular, high concentration of street vending activity –, and an area, as has been mentioned before, in poor physical shape. Since the 1940s, a rent freeze law had been in effect in the Historic Center, which had kept rents at the same low 1940s levels for the previous 30 years, and as such, landlords were not incentivized to maintain their properties in good condition. This law was repealed in 1997, and new *Programas Parciales* were redrawn for the area. Cárdenas, however, left office after two years to pursue the presidential nomination; however, in his short amount of time in office, he had directed attention toward the Historic Center as an important “strategic” node of planning activity and investment for the “democratic city,” in contrast to Santa Fe.

As Cárdenas only served for two years, and was followed by an interim mayor who only served one year, it could be said that the impact of electoral democracy on urban policy really truly only became apparent under Cárdenas’ longer-serving successor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2000-2005). Upon López Obrador’s election, he also expressed the need to direct existing, and develop new, public instruments toward encouraging a more “democratic city,” with even more specific attention to combating the “center-periphery” problem and promoting a more environmentally and socially sustainable development pattern for the DF. Throughout López Obrador’s term, however, he experienced tensions over how to encourage this thoughtfully, while at the same time, appeasing different interest groups, such as low-income voters and private real estate development and construction firms. Pressure from real estate development and construction firms caused Obrador to sign off on certain initiatives, such as the “*segundo piso*” highway expansion project, which seemingly contradicted his interests in social and environmental

¹⁰ Alejandro Suárez-Pareyón, “Mexico City, Mexico,” in Marisa Carmona and Rod Burgess, eds., *Planning Through Projects: Moving from Master Planning to Strategic Planning*, Amsterdam: Techne Press (2009): 278.

sustainability and were seen by many as only intensifying the “center-periphery” problem. Accordingly, his most successful initiatives involved the creation of new decentralized agencies, designed to be insulated from the “business-as-usual” politics and developer handouts of many existing municipal agencies, which made innovation in planning and urban service delivery difficult.

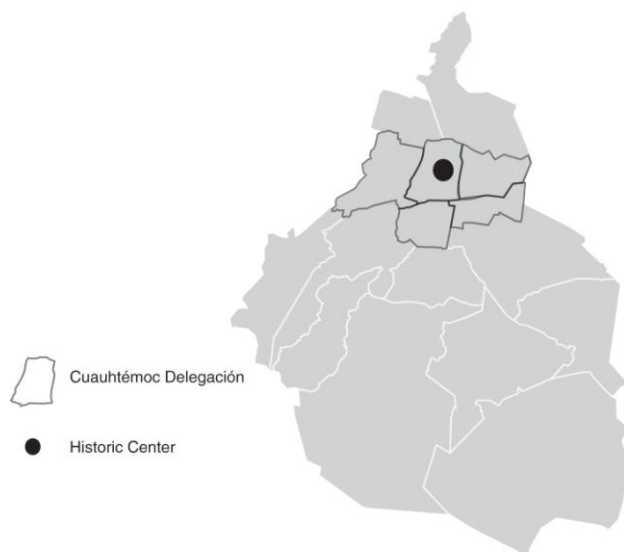
Indeed, with López Obrador, there was a strong effort to develop new planning guidelines and public instruments to combat the so-called “center-periphery” phenomenon described above. He not only continued Cárdenas’ focus on the Historic Center as an area of priority attention, he intensified it as a locus of priority planning and investment attention. Soon after entering office, López Obrador launched several major initiatives aimed at not only organizing an intensive ‘revitalization’ effort in the Historic Center, but encouraging reinvestment and population growth in the central areas of the DF in general.

To this end, one of the first major initiatives launched under López Obrador, a few days after entering office, was the so-called “Bando Dos” or “Edict 2”. A set of guidelines aimed at encouraging residential development in the center of the city, and in curbing residential development in water catchment areas in southern *delegaciones*, the Bando Dos aimed to encourage residential development in the designated *delegaciones* through developer incentives, such as an expedited building review and approvals process. The areas designated for these incentives were the four central *delegaciones* which had been experiencing the most population loss over the previous three decades: Benito Juárez, Cuauhtémoc, Miguel Hidalgo, and Venustiano Carranza [see Appendix]. From 2001 to 2003, applications for over 60,000 housing units were received by SEDUVI for construction in these areas, and it is believed that 80% of these units have already been completed or are in the process of completion. Some have argued that this surge in residential

Population Loss in “Bando Dos” Delegaciones, 1970-2000 (top); Affected delegaciones (bottom)

	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	1970-2000
Benito Juárez		576,475	528,608	480,741	444,276	407,811	369,956	360,478	-215,997
Cuauhtémoc		923,182	28,730	734,277	665,119	595,960	540,382	516,255	-406,927
Miguel Hidalgo		605,560	553,447	501,334	454,101	406,868	364,398	352,640	-252,920
Venustiano Carranza		749,483	691,912	634,340	576,984	519,628	485,623	462,806	-286,677
Total	2,913,417	2,854,700	2,602,696	2,350,695	2,140,480	1,930,267	1,760,359	1,692,179	-1,162,521

Source: DeMet¹¹



construction activity has less to do with the particular incentives offered under the “Bando Dos” and more to do with macroeconomic indicators which facilitated developer-led housing construction, such as low inflation and stable interest rates (for the first time since the 1980s, and after the construction freeze which occurred in Mexico City in the mid-1990s due to the economic

¹¹ as printed in Jorge Legorreta, ed., *Ciudad de México: A Debate*, 69.

crisis and devaluation of the peso).¹² While these economic conditions certainly enabled this construction activity to take place, it is likely that the incentives offered through the “Bando Dos” concentrated this construction in the particular earmarked *delegaciones* listed above. The “Bando Dos” has been met with controversy, with many studies demonstrating that the guidelines, and upswing in private construction, has raised land prices in these parts of the city, causing some sort of gentrification effect.¹³ Others have argued, however, that an increase in land prices may not be counterproductive, and that these guidelines have been useful for, indeed, “repopulating” several areas that had been abandoned, putting people back on the streets in these areas, and successfully encouraging investment and settlement in precisely the areas of the city that have the existing services and infrastructure to support a resident population. Most agree, however, that, in order to not disincentivize low-income housing construction in these areas – the predominant form of sprawl in the State of Mexico – and thus address the “center-periphery” problem, more public control over the development process should have been exercised. The surge in construction activity, though, highly benefited the real estate development and construction industries, and López Obrador was likely under pressure to maintain these guidelines that were in their favor, especially to make up for the 1990s construction freeze, during which these industries had suffered.

At the same time, and also part of this “redensification” strategy, were launched several “strategic planning” initiatives, including the establishment of a new institution, all directed at the revitalization of the Historic Center and surrounding context, in continuation of some of the work Cárdenas had initiated. First, in light of wanting to “revitalize” this area, and needing to generate tax revenues for the city,¹⁴ López Obrador offered fiscal stimuli to developers and business owners interested in developing housing and/or opening businesses in the Historic Center. Much of this was coordinated as part of a larger “*Programa del Rescate*” or “Rescue Program” for the Historic

¹² Interview with Prof. Priscilla Connolly, UNAM-Azcapotzalco, Mexico City, 1/12.

¹³ Interview with Alfonso Iracheta, Colegio Mexiquense, Mexico City, 1/12.

¹⁴ Diane E. Davis, “Conflict, Cooperation, Convergence,” 147.

Center that was launched by the federal government in August 2001.¹⁵ This initiative, organized by a PAN coalition of federal authorities, though including López Obrador, was aimed at “rescuing” the Historic Center from high levels of deterioration and crime in order to “reactivate the area’s economy and generate new real estate investment and employment...[and] to revitalize residential conditions, strengthen the embeddedness of families who reside in the area, and solve the problem of street vending, insecurity, poverty and human deterioration.”¹⁶ It was believed that the removal of street vendors was particularly important, seen to be contributing to crime and insecurity in the area, decreasing the business of local brick-and-mortar establishments, and creating major impediments to pedestrian and vehicular circulation. The impression of street vendors as contributing to crime was discussed as a major factor negatively impacting the willingness of private firms to invest in the area, and thus counter to the *Rescate’s* goals.

The *Rescate*, which ran the length of López Obrador’s term (2001-2005), consisted of three stages. The first stage involved the development of a commercial corridor to link the Zócalo to the business corridor of *Paseo de la Reforma*, along which developer incentives had been offered, beginning in the late 1990s, to encourage several large hotel, office, and residential developments, including the Torre Mayor, the largest office and residential tower in Mexico City. The second stage involved the renovation of the Alameda Central park, which, in turn, involved the removal of the hundreds of street vendors working in the park, as well as the construction of a new *Plaza Bicentenario* across the street. Finally, the third stage consisted of the “revitalization” and “repopulation” of the Historic Center, which consisted of “renewing all underground infrastructures and cabling, refurbishing the façades of buildings, improving and increasing street lighting and standardizing street infrastructure such as garbage cans, newspaper stands and shoe shiners’

¹⁵ *Programa del Rescate* (2002), requoted in Veronica Crossa, “Resisting the Entrepreneurial City: Street Vendors’ Struggle in Mexico City’s Historic Center,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33:1 (March 2009): 44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

chairs.”¹⁷ This stage also sought to increase safety and security of the area through intensifying police presence.

López Obrador could be seen as directing a full-scale “gentrification plan” for the Historic Center with these efforts; however, he also simultaneously created a new, independent public institution, the *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*, whose autonomy as an organization allowed it to coordinate “revitalization” efforts in collaboration with local residents and business owners. In line with Cárdenas’ belief that the organizations coordinating renovation activity in the Historic Center needed to be reorganized, and with López Obrador’s own interest in streamlining inefficient bureaucracy, a new entity, intended to coordinate all of the different revitalization activities, was created soon after López Obrador came into office. This “*Autoridad del Centro Histórico*” aimed to “recuperate” the Historic Center through a variety of government-led efforts related to physical renovation, community participation, economic development, and safety. The autonomy and design of the agency both allowed it to coordinate this multifaceted work, and to do so without being mired in the politics and potential handout obligations of an existing host agency. As a decentralized, independent agency, the *Autoridad* was enabled to pursue a wide variety of mayor-directed revitalization efforts, limited neither by the programmatic scope of a host agency, its bureaucratic politics, nor its particular funding sources (and will be a precedent for the *Autoridad del Espacio Público*, as demonstrated later). This, in combination with the fact that the *Autoridad* was a public agency and needed to coordinate programs with local input and consensus, has helped the *Autoridad*, since its establishment, to do everything from replacing building façades and sewerage to leading research efforts on the history of the area and coordinating community development programs – with local input, and in the interest of preserving the local residential population and businesses. These efforts also have increased investor confidence in the area,

¹⁷ *Programa del Rescate* in Veronica Crossa, “Resisting.”

promoting the private investment that López Obrador sought in order to generate needed revenues for the city.

Further creation of new, independent public institutions to help revitalize the central areas of the DF was seen with the implementation of the first line of Mexico's BRT system, *Metrobús*, along *Avenida de los Insurgentes*, the longest street in the DF. Introduced to increase public transportation capacity and decrease congestion in the DF, Metrobús was modeled on Bogotá's *Transmilenio* system and launched in 2005 by a new entity, the Metrobús Management Organization. With an interest in introducing a new, high-quality system that would be able to operate efficiently, the actors behind the development of *Metrobús*, including several consulting NGOs and private organizations, determined that a new entity would be needed, insulated from the corruption and handouts plaguing SETRAVI, the DF's Ministry for Transport and Roads. Accordingly, a new agency, the "Metrobús Management Organization," was created in 2005 to implement and operate the system, which, through its administrative and financial autonomy, was able to incorporate a unique management structure absorbing former operators of *microbuses* which had traveled along *Insurgentes*.¹⁸ Financial and administrative autonomy also allowed Metrobús to introduce a very high-quality public transportation option that has expanded to four lines (including a just-opened line in the Historic Center), features high ridership rates, and serves mostly lower- and middle-income people, with the average monthly household income being 9,471 pesos, or around US\$720.¹⁹

¹⁸ Kete, Schipper, et al, "A Case Study in Real Time: Mexico City BRT Metrobus."

¹⁹ Ibid.

Metrobús



At the same time that the Metrobús was launched, however, López Obrador, under pressure to give contracts to construction firms, signed off on a massive roadworks project, the “*segundo piso*,” or “second floor,” which contradicted the social and environmental values he had laid out earlier with the Bando Dos and implementation of the *Metrobús*. An extremely costly project that also involved the eviction of many people, the “*segundo piso*” entailed adding a second story to the massive *Anillo Periférico* ring road in order to increase road capacity. López Obrador held surveys and a plebiscite regarding the project, in which many residents had expressed doubts that it was a worthwhile endeavor, yet in order to appease construction and development firms desiring the highly-lucrative contract for the project, López Obrador signed off on it, anyway. It became both one of the things he was best known for accomplishing during his term and a subject of intense criticism from both residents who were evicted due to its construction, and environmental advocates who saw investing in increasing road capacity as retrogressive.

“Segundo piso”



1.5 *Current Era: Ebrard and a “New Urban Order”*

It might be said that the third elected mayor of the DF, Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon (2006-present), having learned from López Obrador’s successes and controversies, has led a more successful effort to promote a healthier development pattern for Mexico City while trying to appease different interest groups. Ebrard won the mayoral election in 2006 by a wide margin as part of a PRD-led “Good of All” campaign. [It is important to note that this PRD coalition also won 14 of the 16 *delegación* elections, as well as the majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the DF (ALDF), which, as will be noted, has been helpful in obtaining project financing for the AEP.] In many ways, Ebrard’s urban policy initiatives, and the projects he has instituted, have been a continuation of initiatives begun under López Obrador – a friend of Ebrard, and under whom Ebrard served as the Minister of Public Security. That said, Ebrard also has learned from both the

successes and constraints experienced by López Obrador – with *Metrobús* and the *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*, for the former, and with the “*Bando Dos*” and “*segundo piso*” projects, for the latter. Accordingly, his urban policy has involved the development of new public entities and partnerships that, insulated from the bureaucratic politics afflicting municipal planning and service agencies, can introduce planning initiatives in line with his campaign platform of a “New Urban Order” for Mexico City, organized around “equity” and “sustainability.” These initiatives include the establishment of *Ecobici*, a new bicycle-sharing system in the DF; expansion of *Metrobús*; and notably, the “rescue” and “return” of public spaces to pedestrians through the establishment of the *Autoridad del Espacio Público*. The “rescue” of public spaces had been identified by Ebrard, working with consultants, as a strategic way to both respond to residents’ demands for safe public spaces throughout the city, and to encourage economic development and increase investor confidence in declining, crime-ridden neighborhoods. To this end, Ebrard intended to continue to support the revitalization efforts in the Center, not only for the reasons just mentioned, but also in preparation for two important events set to take place in 2010: the bicentennial celebrations of the Mexican War of Independence and the centennial celebrations of the Mexican Revolution. Both events were expected to bring throngs of Mexican tourists to the Historic Center.

Ebrard’s General Program for Development, 2007-2012, was based on the concepts of “equity and sustainability,” as indicated earlier, and his urban policy called for a “New Urban Order: efficient services and quality of life, for everyone.”²⁰ The *Programa General* describes the concept in the following way:

“In order to address, in the best possible way, the needs of the population, the GDF assumes the obligation of establishing a new urban order, in accordance with the needs of modernity and growth. Through urban planning, governments provide residents with services and infrastructure, critical for residents’ development and the realization of their aspirations. For the government of Mexico City, urban renewal does not only establish the conditions for economic growth; it also is an instrument for improving life conditions and promoting equality. Urban planning will be a priority tool that the government will use in its effort to

²⁰ Gobierno del Distrito Federal, “Programa General de Desarrollo,” (2007): 67 <http://www.icyt.df.gob.mx/documents/varios/ProgGralDesarrollo_0712.pdf>.

guarantee the right of all to a decent life with opportunities. It is also essential to return public space accessibility to Mexico City and its inhabitants. The urban order is an indispensable tool for making cities spaces of integration and collective identity.”²¹

He further indicates that the Historic Center will be an area of “priority,” to continue with the work of prior administrations, and that promoting better metropolitan planning will be a focus, but that, overall, his policy will be driven by “equity”:

The government seeks to build a city of people, that residents enjoy and feel is theirs. Thus, urban development will focus on the ‘revalorization’ of public spaces, so that the *Distrito Federal* is a source of pride and identity for its inhabitants. In order for Mexico City to become an authentic space of social integration and personal development, equity will be the guiding principle in urban development policies. Ensuring equity in access to services requires an emphasis on, in particular, improving the geographic distribution of services and infrastructure, in order to overcome the inequalities that exist among different areas and groups that live in Mexico City. Through a holistic perspective of urban development, the cityscape can be transformed into an element capable of improving quality of life, social integration, and the growth and advancement of equity. That is, we will follow a model that, at the same time that it aims for economic growth and social progress, will also attempt to address the demands, and collective and personal needs, of city residents, giving priority to the needs of disadvantaged groups, particularly women.

We will focus on measures to make sure that Mexico City residents can move quickly, safely, and efficiently throughout the city, as a strategy to make the city into a space for personal development and social integration. Urban planning should be oriented around making sure that city residents can move freely throughout the city, in a culture of coexistence and respect that recognizes that the priority lies with people, and not automobiles.²²

One of the principal ways in which Ebrard set out to do this was, as mentioned above, through the “rescue” of public spaces. He indicated in the *Programa General* that the GDF would “undertake the rescue of public spaces and design structures for participation and social “coresponsibility” for the realization of cultural, artistic, and recreational activity that activate their use.” Ebrard has noted that, during his campaign, “When we reviewed the concept of an equitable and sustainable city, we discussed the idea with both Mexican and international specialists, as well as analyzed the major demands made by city residents during the campaign, and finally, arrived at a fundamental element: the public space of the city. As such, the policy axis around which the urban

²¹ GDF, “*Programa General del Desarrollo.*”

²² Ibid.

development of the city will be organized will be the rescue of public space.”²³ Influenced by former mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñalosa, the “rescue of public spaces” was seen as a way to respond to residents’ demands, while addressing the complex series of social and environmental externalities associated with the type of development pattern described above (and increasing investor confidence in suffering areas). Put another way, it was determined to be a strategic policy that could both secure voter approval through improving urban spaces and safety, but also, introduce concepts around pedestrian accessibility and encourage the more efficient use of existing infrastructure. The challenge Ebrard faced was: How could he do this? How could he produce projects that would reflect these principles in a weak planning context with significant time, financial, and bureaucratic constraints?

²³ “Megacities Commission 4 Report,” *Metropolis*
<http://metropolis.org/sites/default/files/publications/2011/c4_metropolis_megacities.pdf>.

2. *La Autoridad del Espacio Público (AEP)*

It is this problematic to which the AEP responds. Conceived by architect Felipe Leal Hernández, the Public Space Authority, or *Autoridad del Espacio Público*, was created a little over two years ago, on September 26, 2008, when published in the Official Gazette of the DF (*Gaceta Oficial del Distrito Federal*). In the *Gaceta*, it is framed as part of Ebrard's *Programa General de Desarrollo del Distrito Federal 2007-2012*, and the announcement in the *Gaceta* names the AEP as a “decentralized body” of the Mayor's Office (*Jefatura de Gobierno*), with financial and administrative autonomy – key for understanding its success at design and implementation, or “rescuing” of public spaces.

2.1 *Creating a New Agency*

As mentioned above, Ebrard had sought to deliver projects to voters that would demonstrate a commitment to his “New Urban Order” principles of “equity and sustainability.” During his first two years of office, however, he became increasingly dismayed with the Head of the city planning agency, SEDUVI, architect Arturo Aispuro Coronel, under whom no projects had been generated. While a “Strategic Projects” office had been created within SEDUVI under Aispuro, there was no money within SEDUVI for project development and the agency was mired in complicated, corrupt, and politically challenging work involving administering approvals to development and construction firms for building projects. Aside from some preliminary studies for projects (including a finance “*corridor integral*” along Paseo de la Reforma), the “Strategic Projects Division”

lacked financial resources within SEDUVI, and nothing had been developed under Aispuro.²⁴ This frustrated Ebrard, who needed to demonstrate to the city, if he hoped for any success in the 2012 presidential election, that he was accomplishing something – namely, programs and projects in line with his campaign platform of “equity and sustainability,” or representing “efficient services and quality of life, for everyone.”

While growing frustrated with Aispuro, Ebrard began to take note of transformations occurring on the UNAM campus in the south of the city, led by architect Felipe Leal Fernández. A professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the UNAM for over thirty years, Leal had begun to institute changes on the campus while serving two terms as the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture. With no cafeterias on the UNAM campus, Leal worked with other architects to design and develop a cafeteria for the Faculty of Architecture. After his second term as Dean ended, Leal spoke with university administrators about the possibility of creating and leading a “Special Projects Division” (*Coordinación de Proyectos Especiales*), through which he could design and develop other, larger initiatives to improve the greater campus. (Routine campus improvement projects were coordinated by the campus’ Office of Public Works and Conservation, or *Dirección General de Obras y Conservación*.) University administrators agreed, and Leal established a Special Projects Division (*Coordinación de Proyectos Especiales*), where he designed and developed more than 50 projects on the sprawling main UNAM campus, Ciudad Universitaria, situated in the south of the city in the delegación of Coyoacán.

These interventions, in line with Leal’s interest in improved accessibility and mobility, consisted mostly of “public space rescue” and “design of alternative transport systems.”²⁵ To address both the intense congestion plaguing the sprawling campus, which receives over 100,000 visits daily, and the challenges involved in moving around the campus without a car, Leal both removed on-street parking, as well as directed the development of a new intra-campus bus

²⁴ Interview with Elena Tudela, architect, Cambridge, MA, 4/12.

²⁵ “Nuestro Titular,” *Autoridad del Espacio Público* <<http://189.212.139.117/aep/index.html#ancla>>.

network, PumaBús. Initiated in 2000, PumaBús travels along a designated lane throughout the campus and is free to students and the public. Now featuring 11 routes, it has high ridership rates and has been received as a success. In order to improve pedestrian accessibility and improve cultural amenities on campus, he also designed a new network of pedestrian pathways and coordinated the development of the University Museum of Contemporary Art (*Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo*), the MuAC. In addition to these physical interventions, he successfully secured the inscription of Ciudad Universitaria as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007 – a designation not only symbolic, but which brought economic development potential, as well, through possible increases in tourist activity.

Ebrard saw what Leal was doing at UNAM and was impressed; here was someone successful at bringing out large, complex transformations in a short amount of time, which were receiving positive reactions from the campus community, and were very much in line with the principles behind his “New Urban Order” platform – improving infrastructure and services, in order to improve “quality of life.” Two years into his term, increasingly dismayed with his lack of success under Aispuro, and needing some ‘projects’ both to show residents he was acting on his campaign promises, and for the upcoming bicentennial celebrations, Ebrard offered Leal Aispuro’s position. SEDUVI, however, as noted before, was known for being one of the more corrupt agencies within the government, and Leal, not an active member of a political party, did not want to get involved in the complex politics and hand-outs plaguing the agency and its administration of building permits. Leal instead suggested, as he had done before with the Special Projects Division, establishing and heading a new entity – an agency focused on public space, in line with both his and Ebrard’s interests, and what he felt was needed in order to address the issues plaguing Mexico City. This agency – the “*Autoridad del Espacio Público*” (Public Space Authority) – would be a “decentralized,” independent body of the GDF, modeled on the *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*, discussed earlier, and created under López Obrador. It was established as an “autoridad” instead of a “secretaría”

(ministry) because establishing a new ministry of the government requires a constitutional amendment; creating a new “autoridad” is much easier, and can be done through the mayor issuing a public decree in the *Gaceta Oficial*, as Ebrard did in 2008 to establish the AEP. Just as with the *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*, its design as a “decentralized agency” would insulate Leal’s activities from the bureaucratic constraints of SEDUVI and other agencies, and best enable him and Ebrard to pursue their own agenda. As such, it was designed with administrative and financial autonomy, like the *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*, and Metrobús Management Organization, to minimize the influence of the politics of a host agency can play in determining priorities, strategies, and metrics, and in obtaining necessary financing for projects. In short, this institutional autonomy would allow Leal to do what he wanted, without going to SEDUVI, and would free his endeavors from the financing and administrative challenges which had plagued the “Strategic Projects” Division under Aispuro.

For this, Leal and Ebrard used as an institutional precedent the *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*, described earlier. A small agency, the Historic Center Authority has 33 employees and since its establishment, has spearheaded a diverse array of initiatives – involving everything from replacing sewerage to developing economic development programs for local residents and businesses to installing security cameras to reduce crime – all in the Historic Center. For Ebrard and Leal, the ability with which the *Autoridad* has been able to pursue and realize a wide variety of neighborhood improvement initiatives and projects, directed by the mayor, and without being limited by the particular “focus” or politics of a host agency, served as a useful precedent. Another precedent for new agency creation – also under López Obrador, and also mentioned earlier – concerns the establishment of *Metrobús*, Mexico City’s first Bus-Rapid Transit (BRT) system, in 2005. Also functioning as a decentralized body of the GDF, and created in March 2005, the Metrobús Management Organization had been successful at implementing a unique management

structure involving former microbus operators and introducing an efficient and extremely popular transit option which is now introducing its 4th line of service, in the Historic Center.

While still administratively and financially autonomous, two years into its creation, in 2010, the AEP was incorporated into SEDUVI, upon Leal's appointment as head of SEDUVI by Ebrard. During the first two years of the AEP, the agency was working toward completion of three major projects – the renovation of Plaza de la República and Plaza Garibaldi, and the pedestrianization of Calle Madero – all in the Historic Center, and all part of a larger set of projects (including the proposed *Torre Bicentenario*) to commemorate the bicentennial anniversary of the Mexican War of Independence. Ebrard was pleased with this progress, and asked Leal again to replace current SEDUVI chief Aispuro, with whom Ebrard was still experiencing conflict; Aispuro was not achieving success on Ebrard's policy aims, and Ebrard reasserted that he needed Leal to take over SEDUVI.²⁶ Leal agreed, aware that it was an agency mired in corrupt and challenging work, and that heading it would be no easy task. To take his place at the AEP, however, Leal asked Daniel Escotto, with whom he had worked in the Special Projects Division at the UNAM in 2005-2008, and through whom he could still be heavily involved in the AEP. As Leal had close ties with Escotto, putting him at the helm at AEP would allow Leal to continue to maintain leadership over the AEP while being involved with SEDUVI. To further coordinate the work between the two agencies, the AEP was incorporated into SEDUVI, in order to, according to the AEP website, “consolidate in one coordinating body, the various urban improvement initiatives going on in the City,”²⁷ while “providing guidance on public space-related matters, so that SEDUVI can incorporate that perspective in the formulation of programs and other urban planning instruments.”²⁸

²⁶ Interview with Elena Tudela, architect, Cambridge, MA, 4/12.

²⁷ AEP website.

²⁸ Ibid.

2.2 Focus on Public Space

As indicated earlier, Ebrard had determined that the primary concept around which to organize urban policy during his term, in line with the criteria of “equity and sustainability,” was “the rescue of public space.”²⁹ Importantly, Ebrard believed that this required physical intervention on the part of public authorities – the physical recuperation and “rescue” of public space, as called for in his “General Program for Development.” The AEP writes that “Planning is reflected in concrete actions. The recuperation of the city through the creation of new public spaces promotes new possibilities of coexistence, collective life, social organization, and civic life. This involves a wide-ranging view of the phenomena that inform and shape local, regional, and metropolitan initiatives.”³⁰ The AEP has further said that “There isn’t social integration without public space. Structuring the community and producing its physical space are inseparable aspects of the same approach. Expanding physical spaces for gathering, creating adjacencies, and stimulating participation, are the new objectives and the success of the democratic city. Today, as we are building the city and its public spaces, sociability increases and democracy is strengthened.”³¹

As an architect and designer, engaged for some time in research and projects on how to improve urban spaces, and residents’ quality of life in Mexico City, it is likely that Leal was influential in determining this spatial, design-oriented interpretation of how to promote equity and sustainability in Mexico City. A government “public space” agency had been established in Barcelona two decades before, and the so-called “Barcelona model” for “strategic urban interventions” through public space renovation has enjoyed wide reception within Latin America,

²⁹ “Megacities Commission 4 Report,” *Metropolis*
<http://metropolis.org/sites/default/files/publications/2011/c4_metropolis_megacities.pdf>.

³⁰ SEDUVI, “Capítulo 4: Espacio Público,”
<<http://www.seduvi.df.gob.mx/portal/files/pdf/informes/4to/6%20capitulo%204.pdf>>.

³¹ Ibid.

inspiring more recent, wide-ranging public space initiatives in Bogotá and Medellín, Colombia. In line with associated concepts around “social urbanism” and “compact cities,” this design-oriented public space strategy is also a politically savvy one in the Mexico City context, allowing for great flexibility in projects and programming. One definition of urban design holds that it covers “everything between buildings,” which would mean that urban design *is* public space. Indeed, the AEP defines “public space” this way, or as: “areas designated for public recreation and public thoroughfares, such as plazas, streets, avenues, viaducts, *paseos*, gardens, urban forests, and public parks, among other similar spaces.”³² This, in theory, gives the AEP incredible freedom and creativity in determining locations of intervention and programming, and with streets included, implies a traffic and transportation strategy as well. This complements the agency’s financial and administrative autonomy, helping to provide the AEP with increased latitude in interpreting what constitutes “public space” and “public space rescue,” useful for designing programming and projects that can assume a multifaceted planning-like role in a weak land use planning context, and which can realize Ebrard’s various priorities. With strategies to promote non-motorized transit, in particular, often being politically contentious in auto-oriented Mexico City, being able to incorporate such strategies within a less politically-contentious agency focused on “public space” is useful. As will be highlighted later, this broad conception of “public space” has allowed the AEP to pursue everything ranging from pedestrianization projects and the installation of parking meters to the renovation of cultural institutions and innovative lighting and landscaping designs to improve safety. In short, to explain why an *Autoridad* focused on public space was established, the AEP wrote that: “Public space is the principal support of the renewal of the city, even more so than other major urban policy areas such as housing, services, and transportation, even more so than land use. Public space is the conduit through which it is possible to promote the transformation of the city...It

³² SEDUVI <<http://www.seduvi.df.gob.mx/portal/files/pdf/informes/4to/6%20capitulo%204.pdf>>.

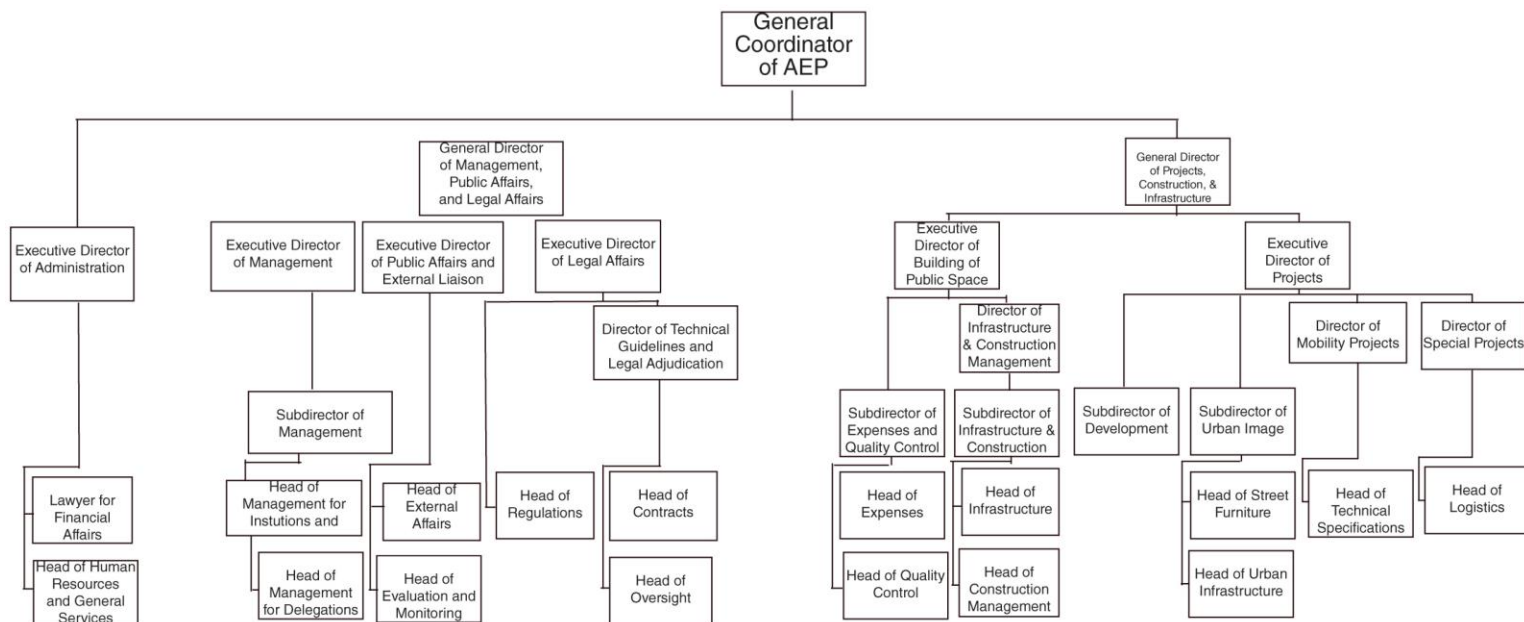
has spatial, geographic, and programmatic elements, and therefore, urban planning was used as the appropriate tool to address public space.”³³

2.3 Institutional Structure

The institutional structure of the AEP supports this broad, design-oriented conception of “public space” and includes sections focused on mobility, urban design, and public outreach. As indicated above, the AEP was designed as an independent institution, so that Leal and Ebrard could pursue the strategies and methods necessary in order to produce a wide variety of, often mayorally-driven, “strategic” projects in a short amount of time. The institutional structure of the AEP supports this [see following page for institutional diagram]. Like the *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*, the AEP is a small agency, featuring 32 current employees, 19 of whom are architects. Within the “Projects” arm, there is a Director of Mobility Projects and one of Special Projects, in addition to a Subdirector of Development and one of “Urban Image.” The inclusion of an arm focused on “Mobility Projects” reflects the broad conception of “public space” discussed earlier, and enables the agency to carry out projects in line with Ebrard’s and Leal’s interests in promoting non-motorized transit. As indicated before, the inclusion of a section on “mobility” within a non-offensive-sounding “Public Space Authority,” has probably made it easier to secure political and financial partnerships for those projects. Additionally, the branding strategies undertaken by the AEP (and SEDUVI), including their logo designs, websites, and “Todos Somos Peatones” ad campaigns – conveying the impression of a fresh, neutral, and “creative” agency – has likely further helped to win support from other institutions and the public-at-large.

³³ SEDUVI, “Espacio Público.”

Institutional Structure of AEP (top); homepage of AEP website and AEP logo (bottom) (Source; AEP website).



Poster for AEP-SEDUVI-sponsored “Día del Peatón” (“Day of the Pedestrian”) (Source: VERDF).

TODOS SOMOS PEATONES

El Gobierno del Distrito Federal a través de la Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda, así como la Autoridad del Espacio Público se complacen en invitarlos a las actividades en torno al

DÍA DEL PEATÓN

Domingo 16 agosto de 2009
 9:00 hrs Inauguración con el Jefe de Gobierno + 
 10:00 hrs Mesa redonda "Todos somos peatones"
 Lugar: Explanada del Palacio de Bellas Artes

Domingo 30 de agosto de 2009
 Clausura en Ciclotón
 11:00 hrs y 13.00 hrs Performance
 Lugar: Paseo de la Reforma-Florencia (col. Juárez), Francisco del Paso y Troncoso-Viaducto Río de la Piedad (col. Tlaxintla), Río Mixcoac-Insurgentes (col. San José Insurgentes), Patriotismo-Benjamín Franklin (col. Escandón)



VERDE ...por la vía verde. VERDF con el apoyo de los Ameritlink y de varias empresas, ilumina de nuevo la Torre Latino. Sábado 15 de agosto 2009. 17:30 hrs 

2.5 Financing

As a financially independent entity, even after its incorporation into SEDUVI (in keeping with the initial mayoral decree in the *Gaceta Oficial*), the AEP receives the majority of its financing from the GDF, or specifically, the Ministry of Finance of the DF. The AEP relies mostly on Ebrard to help court funding from the GDF for specific projects, which has worked to its benefit, and is not limited by a host agency's budget. Indeed, the table below demonstrates that, for fiscal year 2012,

the AEP received more in GDF funding than the *Autoridad del Centro Histórico*, or its semi-host agency, SEDUVI. It can be assumed that Aispuro, and the “Strategic Projects” division of SEDUVI under him, had been working within a similarly tight budget. This table suggests that the establishment of the AEP as an independent entity has allowed it to obtain more funding, and thus, design and implement more projects, than if it were simply an arm within SEDUVI.

GDF Forecasted Funding of Agencies, FY 2012³⁴

Government Entity	Amount (in pesos)
Ministries	
Office of the Mayor of the D.F.	155,682,310
Ministry of Government	2,279,081,822
<i>Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (SEDUVI)</i>	<i>215,180,144</i>
Ministry of Economic Development	148,366,979
Ministry of Tourism	56,292,917
Ministry of the Environment	970,721,634
Ministry of Construction and Services	5,634,579,240
Ministry of Social Development	1,535,927,550
Ministry of Finance	1,813,358,687
Ministry of Transport and Roads	1,080,601,808
Ministry of Public Security	11,682,980,763
Ministry of Health	5,648,125,830
Ministry of Culture	458,411,341
Ministry of Labor and Labor Promotion	835,386,380
Ministry of Civil Protection	132,832,434

³⁴ <http://www.autoridadcentrohistorico.df.gob.mx/noticias/articulos/decretoEgresos2012.pdf>

Ministry of Rural Development and Community	194,776,2816
Equity	
Ministry of Education	324,891,046
Administrative Office of the DF	881,757,462
Comptroller's Office of the DF	336,881,466
Office of the Attorney General of the DF	4,416,170,783
Judicial Counsel and Legal Services	895,990,738
Total	39,697,997,615
Special Decentralized Agencies	
Auxiliary Police Force of the DF	4,403,802,192
Banking and Industrial Police of the DF	3,001,250,651
<i>Autoridad del Espacio Público of the DF</i>	<i>459,321,297</i>
Autoridad del Centro Histórico	149,299,489
Total	8,013,673,629

For courting funding for particularly costly projects, the fact that the Legislative Assembly is also PRD-dominated is likely helpful; even though costly AEP projects such as the “*Viaducto Verde*,” or “Green Viaduct” have not been developed, the fact that most representatives in the ALDF are sensitive to Ebrard’s agenda meant, in that case, that the high budget for that project was approved, even if the tender process has delayed that particular project from being implemented. The financial autonomy of the AEP frees it to partner with different public and private entities for different projects, depending on the circumstances. This can have potentially negative consequences, limiting the AEP to take on projects with an associated financing source, such as the renovation of Plaza Garibaldi, which was backed partially by the federal Ministry of Tourism. All in all, the AEP has limited finances at its disposal, which necessitates a resourceful design approach, and it could be said that this has worked to the AEP’s benefit in forcing it to be fairly simple,

strategic, and utilitarian in its design strategies, investing the most money in those interventions which will make the most needed and deeply-felt impact among users of the space.

2.4 *Project-Based, Architectural Approach*

The AEP uses a project-based, architectural approach – that is, its objective is to coordinate and manage public space renovation projects through architectural design, development, and maintenance of such projects. Operating as an architectural office, with all design and development work done in-house, the AEP operates just like Leal’s “Special Projects Division” at the UNAM; in fact, most of the original (and current) employees of the AEP were architects from the UNAM who had worked with Leal in his Special Projects Division there. While architects and engineers typically have been employed in planning and public works agencies in Mexico City, like SEDUVI, SEDUVI’s work mostly consists of drafting and revising zoning regulations and issuing building permits. The use of urban design techniques in the building of public parks networks and plazas can be seen in earlier periods of planning history in Mexico City, notably under Mayor Ernesto Uruchurto Peralta in the 1950s and 1960s, but it lacked the same ‘autonomous design office’ institutionality of the AEP. From a design office perspective, the AEP is unusual in that, differently from Leal’s Strategic Projects Office, as a municipal public agency, it has to abide by laws regarding public consultation for projects. This is not necessarily simply a requirement, however, but something Ebrard and the AEP had set out to do – public space “rescue” is only meaningful if it creates a space that residents will use. Indeed, the AEP has noted that an “inclusive, supportive, and sustainable” approach has been necessary in order to allow for the realization of “viable social projects.”³⁵

³⁵ SEDUVI, “Espacio público.”

Architectural Rendering of proposed plan for renovation of Plaza de la República (Source: SEDUVI).



Fuente: Autoridad del Espacio Público

Architectural rendering of proposed "Ferrocarril de Cuernavaca" corridor (Source: AEP).



2.6 Projects

The projects done by AEP have been very similar in content to the projects Leal spearheaded at the UNAM – largely projects focused on public space renovation, the development of cultural infrastructure, and pedestrianization, as well as two projects involving the removal or mitigation of on-street parking. These projects are all in line with a larger “compact city” and “quality of life” improvement framework promoted by Ebrard and Leal. The AEP has written that its “fundamental objective is the recuperation of public spaces for recreation, walking, and sports, through low-maintenance design that provides a comprehensive, familiar, and welcoming area. This type of construction is realized with the intention of providing quality facilities that can promote the coexistence of families and healthy recreation of young people in order to promote higher quality of life for the city’s population.”³⁶

The particular projects done by the AEP have come from a variety of sources, but mainly can be seen as a mixture of Ebrard’s ideas, often due to political pressure, and ideas from Leal. Soon after the AEP was established, Ebrard told Leal that he needed “parks” for residents – to demonstrate that he was acting on his campaign promises.³⁷ So, one of the initial projects undertaken by the AEP was to identify spaces, under the *Circuito* highway and other freeways, that could accommodate play areas, and to design a program for rehabilitating them – what became the “Bajo Puentes” or “Underpasses program,” described later.

Within a short amount of time – the first two years of its existence – the AEP executed three large-scale physical planning and design projects, while also coordinating and consulting projects managed by other public and private entities and non-profit organizations. In terms of time, that the AEP does everything itself (while contracting out for construction work) has likely streamlined

³⁶ AEP website.

³⁷ Interview with Elena Tudela, architect, Cambridge, MA, 4/12.

its operation, and that they obtain financing principally through Ebrard and not as part of another agency, they have likely avoided obstacles. These projects include: the pedestrianization of Calle Madero; the renovation of Plaza Garibaldi; and the renovation of Plaza de la República. All were initiated, and mostly finished, while the AEP was a “decentralized” entity of the Mayor’s Office, before incorporation into SEDUVI, in order to be completed by, or around, the time of the Bicentennial celebrations. Since the AEP’s incorporation 1.5 years ago, it has worked on several projects currently in-progress, such as the renovation of the Basilica de Guadalupe and the Alameda Central; a number of smaller initiatives, described below; as well as a few projects that have stalled, such as the “*Viaducto Verde*” highway project.

Since its establishment, the AEP has been engaged in a number of ongoing initiatives, as well, such as the development of “Green Roofs” (“*Azoteas Verdes*”) (including on the roof of the *Palacio de Ayuntamiento* in the Zócalo), the installation of EcoParq parking meters (*parquímetros*), the “bajo puentes” initiative, as mentioned earlier, and the “public parks rescue project” (PREP). Additionally, the AEP has consulted on a number of other projects and initiatives developed by private and non-profit entities, including consulting on series of “Multi-Modal Transit Centers” (CETRAM), located in Azcapotzalco and Ciudad Azteca, and on a transit-oriented development guide with the Center for Sustainable Transport (*CTS-México*).

Examples of projects from PREP (left) and “Bajo Puente” (right) initiatives

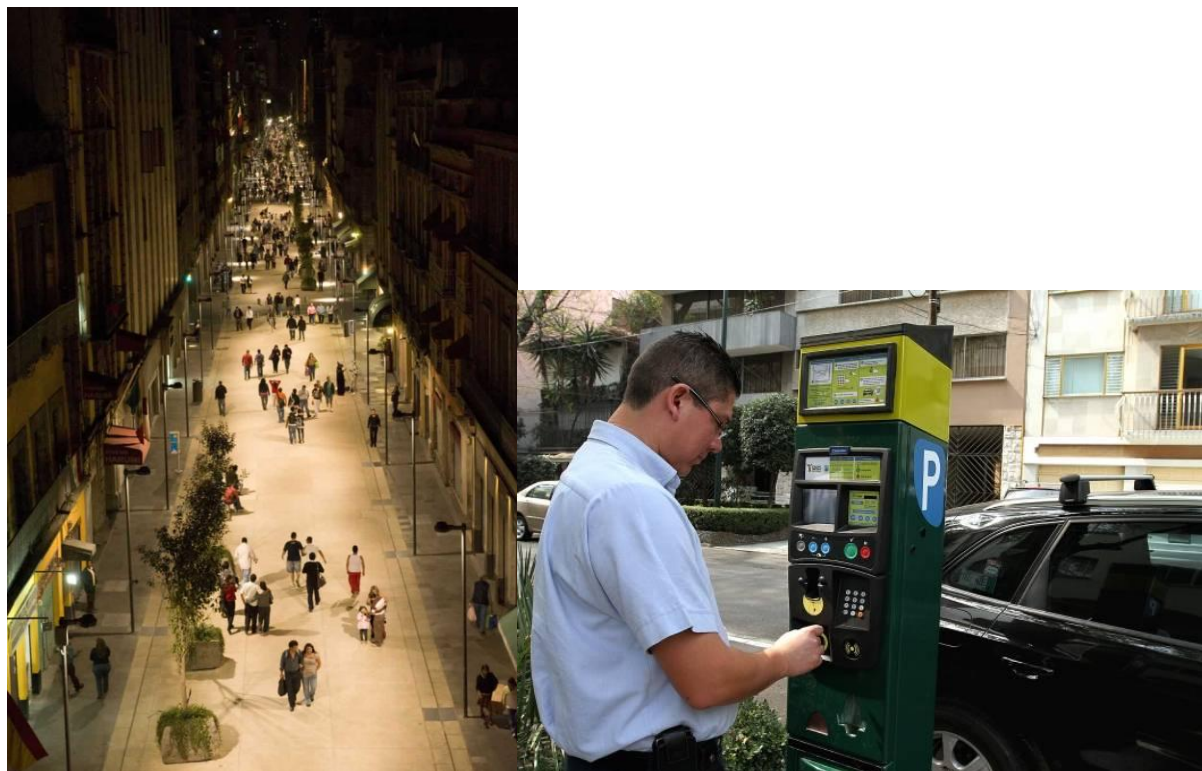


Módulo Deportivo, Rio Pinto y Cañada, Álvaro Obregón



Área bajo puente, Col. Minas de Cristo, Álvaro Obregón

Corredor peatonal Madero (left) (Source: AEP); parquímetro (right) (Source: Ciudadanos en Red).



Renovation of Plaza Garibaldi (below)(Source: AEP).



Renovation of Plaza de la República (below)



Location of Projects

The majority of the large projects the AEP has both proposed and completed have been in the Historic Center and its surroundings, though they have led smaller projects and initiatives in other areas of the DF, as well, as indicated above. As the “Autoridad del Espacio Público del Distrito Federal,” the AEP only has jurisdiction to work within the DF, however, and cannot undertake projects in the greater ZMVM, in the State of Mexico (or Hidalgo).



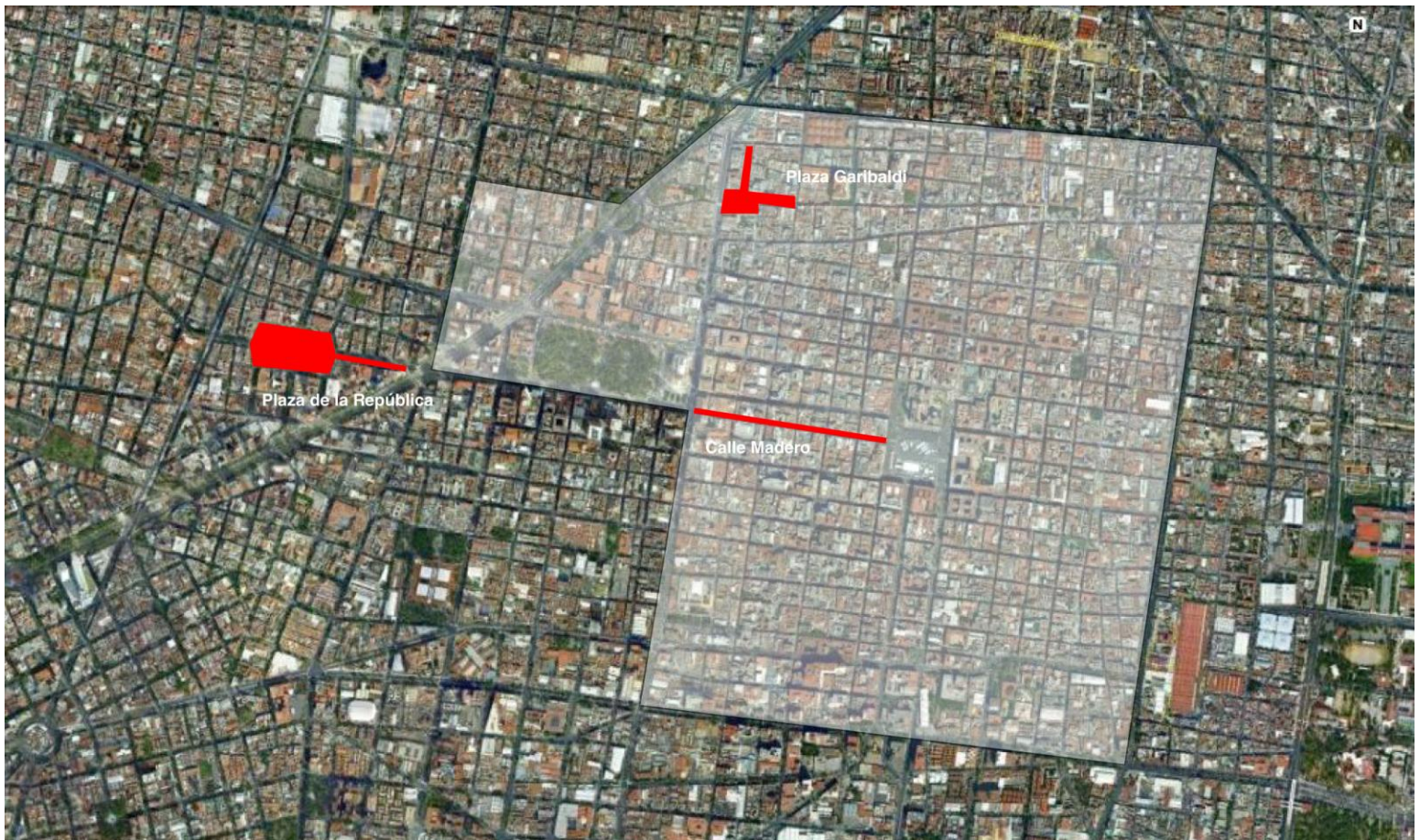
DF-wide: In order to identify future “public space rescue” projects, a group of Harvard GSD students created an “Atlas de Espacio Público” or “Public Space Atlas,” consisting of a digital inventory of all of the public spaces in the *Distrito Federal*. The “bajo puentes” or “underpasses” project has involved “rescuing” underpasses of freeways throughout the DF, including the Circuito Interior, a highway which roughly encircles the *delegación* of Cuauhtémoc. Projects have been undertaken in other *delegaciones*, as well, however, including Álvaro Obregon.

Specific Delegaciones: The AEP has been involved, through EcoParq, in the installation of *parquímetros*, or parking meters, in the affluent neighborhood of Polanco in the *delegación* of Miguel Hidalgo. There are plans to install parking meters in other areas of the DF, however, including in areas like Santa Fe (Álvaro Obregon), Colonia del Valle (Benito Juárez) and Coyoacán (Coyoacán).

Centro Histórico and immediate surroundings: The majority of the projects the AEP has done have been in this area, and several match up to “Tourist Corridors” established by the Ministry of Tourism, including those of “Centro Historico-Guadalupe” and “Reforma-Santa Maria La Ribera.”

Projects in the Historic Center in particular include: the pedestrianization of Calle Madero; the renovation of Plaza Garibaldi; the installation of an “Azotea Verde,” or “Green Roof” on the roof of the *Palacio de Ayuntamiento* in the Zócalo; and the current, ongoing renovation of the Alameda Central. Projects in the surrounding area include: the renovation of Plaza de la República, sandwiched between Reforma and Insurgentes; and improvements to the Kiosko Morisco in the nearby *colonia* of Santa Maria La Ribera.

Locations of projects within the Historic Center



Current projects in Historic Center (white) along with completed (red)



There are several reasons for why the majority of projects done by the AEP have been in the Historic Center. One important one is that, with both the centennial anniversary of the Mexican Revolution, and the bicentennial anniversary of the Mexican War of Independence, in 2010, there was a concerted effort and need on the part of Ebrard to coordinate projects in the area in celebration of these events and in preparation for the masses of Mexican tourists who would flock to the capital in commemoration. The three major projects that the AEP has completed – the Madero Pedestrian Corridor, Plaza Garibaldi, and Plaza de la República – were intended as part of this effort, and the desire to complete them by the bicentennial anniversary likely sped up the project development and implementation process. Another important reason is that, as indicated

earlier, there has been intense “revitalization” activity occurring in the Historic Center since 2000. For one, the AEP needed to continue the work that had been initiated under both López Obrador and under Ebrard (under Aispuro). Additionally, and importantly, the renovation efforts that had been conducted thus far were orchestrated by a network of public and private entities, some of which were described above, and which, in turn, represent political alliances, and both public (local and federal) and private financial resources, which the AEP could tap. Also importantly, from a participatory planning perspective, the fact that there were already organizations operating in the Historic Center with participatory apparatuses set up meant that, working within a short time-frame, the AEP could use those apparatuses to incorporate resident input into project development and try mitigate any potentially harmful impacts projects could cause. Finally, in light of the map above and earlier discussion regarding development in the center in general, Leal (and Ebrard) is a big “believer in the center” as an important node for the health of the city and greater metropolitan region. Leal, in particular, believes that development should be encouraged in the center as a metropolitan centrality, to counteract Santa Fe.³⁸ Finally, the fact that development had already been occurring there makes it a less-surprising and more politically and socially palatable location in which not only implement projects, but also to implement projects which may introduce new (for Mexico City) design strategies and concepts, particularly around mobility and pedestrianization. That the AEP could work its projects into a larger development goal, involving other projects, such as the extension of the Metrobús into the Historic Center in 2012, was also an advantage.

³⁸ Interview with Elena Tudela, architect, Cambridge, MA.

New Line 4 of the Metrobús, running from the Historic Center to the Airport (Source: TheCityFix)



Project Listing (Projects in bold will be discussed)

Completed Projects

1. **Corredor Peatonal Madero** (2009-2010)
2. **Plaza Garibaldi** (2009-2010)
 - a. Museum of Tequila and Mezcal
 - b. San Camilito Market
 - c. Mariachi Academy
3. **Plaza de la República** (2009-2010)
 - a. Monument to the Revolution
 - b. Museum of the Revolution
4. Basílica de Guadalupe and its surroundings
5. Zero emissions corridor
6. Azotea verde

Current Projects

1. **Alameda Central** (began March 5, 2012)
2. **El Zócalo**
3. Ferrocarril Cuernavaca

On-Going Projects

1. **Bajo Puentes**
2. **Parks Rescue Project**
3. **Parquímetros**

Stalled and/or Cancelled Projects

1. Viaducto Verde
2. "Highline" (not clear if simply a concept or an actual proposal)

Completed Projects

1. *Madero Pedestrian Corridor (Corredor Peatonal Madero)(2009-2010)*

The first project the AEP undertook, in 2009, was the pedestrianization of one of the busiest streets in the Historic Center – Calle Madero. Calle Madero, around 1km in length, was seen as a strategic artery and “connecting axis,” since it links the main cultural and tourist sites of Palacio Bellas Artes, the Alameda, and the Zócalo, and accordingly, whose renovation would be appropriate in honor of the Bicentennial celebrations in 2010. As one of the principal access routes to the Zócalo, one of the largest squares in the world and the common site of popular protest, Calle Madero is a symbolic and heavily-traversed street. It had been open to car traffic, however, and at one time, was crowded with street vendors (removed under López Obrador and Ebrard) to an extent that made pedestrian circulation almost impossible. Indeed, SEDUVI notes that “The government of the DF (GDF) decided that one of the main initial activities to undertake in the Centro Histórico was to free it from car traffic in order to allow for the movement of people.”³⁹ The fact that large numbers of Mexican tourists were expected for the 2010 celebrations further necessitated this. There were already several pedestrian corridors that existed in the Historic Center, however, and it was hoped that, “with the pedestrianization of Madero, the street would become part of an already-existing network of pedestrian corridors in the Historic Center, including Motolinía and Gante.”⁴⁰ Some of these smaller streets had been pedestrianized before the establishment of the AEP, through the DF’s Department of Construction and Services (*Coordinación Urbana de la Secretaría de Obras y Servicios*); all of these efforts came only after the eviction of street vendors under López Obrador and Ebrard, which made this possible.

³⁹ SEDUVI, “Espacio público.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Calle Madero, after the removal of street vendors, and before pedestrianization.



While commemorating the “Day of the Pedestrian” (or “*Día del Peatón*”) in 2009 – itself an initiative launched by Ebrard, the AEP, and SEDUVI – Ebrard said projects such as the Madero pedestrianization “attempt to encourage equity, since currently, the urban infrastructure is oriented toward automobiles.” He further indicated that “walking in certain parts of the city is ‘a mortal danger’ for pedestrians, with crosswalks and pedestrian signage completely lacking,” adding that “the objective of this corridor is to construct a public space that will give priority to equality, since it does not matter how much you have, where you come from, or where you are going, here

we are all equal.”⁴¹ [This quote is a near-direct citation of Enrique Peñalosa, former mayor of Bogotá, who has explained the inspiration behind the bicycle-paths (“*Ciclorutas*”) and BRT (*Transmilenio*) systems that he implemented as giving pedestrians and bicyclists (typically those unable to afford a car) “the same dignity” as the motorist.] Ebrard indicated that with the pedestrianization of Madero, the street would become not a street for cars, but a “street for people” – and the leveling of the street and addition of street furniture would allow the handicapped and elderly to “enjoy the street.”

The upgrading to the street was fairly simple and strategic, given limited finances and the simple goal of the renovation: to create a safe, pleasant street along which to walk. The AEP removed the sidewalks; repaved and made level the street; replaced the street lamps with higher capacity ones; replaced some building facades; installed three newspaper kiosks; added traffic lights and street signage at road intersections; and added trees and street furniture to create public shaded areas. There was particular emphasis on developing a comprehensive lighting strategy – through the lighting of facades, and the installation of strong street lamps – to reduce crime and allow for people to congregate there safely, as well as to highlight the beautiful architecture of many of the historic buildings located along the street. The project cost 29.3 million pesos, with the main expense being making the vehicular road level with the sidewalks. Of that amount, the local government (Ministry of Finance of the DF) provided 22.7 million pesos (US\$1.72 million), and the federal Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL) provided 6.6 million pesos (roughly US\$501,000) through their “Programa Hábitat” (Habitat Program).⁴² Recently, SEDESOL awarded the project their “*Vivir Mejor en La Ciudad 2011*” (“Live Better in the City 2011”) prize, in the category “Historic Centers.” With “public space reclamation” now a common policy priority among

⁴¹Staff, “Inaugura Ebrard corredor peatonal en calle Madero” *Terra*, 18 October 2010, <<http://www.terra.com.mx/noticias/articulo/979041/Inaugura+Ebrard+corredor+peatonal+en+calle+Madero.htm>>.

⁴²Bertha Teresa Ramírez, “Reabren la calle Francisco I. Madero como corredor peatonal,” *La Jornada*, 19 October 2010 <<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/10/19/index.php?section=capital&article=037n1cap>>.

many government agencies, this prize “seeks to recognize local government projects which, under the rubric of Habitat and Rescue of Public Spaces programs, have designed and implemented innovative projects oriented at the reduction of problems related to urban poverty, insecurity, and the deterioration and abandonment of public spaces.”⁴³

New streetlamps, as part of lighting strategy



With celebrations for the Bicentennial set to take place in the Zócalo in September 2010, it was hoped the project would be finished before the celebrations on September 15th and 16th, however, it was finished shortly after, in October, due to the difficulties that arose in obtaining

⁴³“Premio Vivir Mejor en la Ciudad” SEDESOL, <http://www.sedesol2009.sedesol.gob.mx/archivos/1/file/Convocatoria_Premio_Vivir_Mejor_en_la_Ciudad_2010.pdf>.

approval from local business owners.⁴⁴ There is a wide diversity of businesses represented on the street (including food, entertainment, jewelry, optical stores, clothing, discos, banks, ice cream stores, cafés, hotels, museums, and fruit stores and stalls), and local shopowners were concerned they were going to lose business when the street was pedestrianized. AEP staffmembers surveyed business owners on Calle Madero regarding their concerns,⁴⁵ held meetings, and worked with local organizations to demonstrate to shopowners that streets that are pedestrianized often experience increases in business activity, rather than decreases, due to the increase in foot traffic. Additionally, Leal met with representatives of the National Chamber of Commerce of Mexico City to ensure that business establishments participated in the revitalization. Due both to resistance and the need to see how pedestrianization would impact vehicular traffic on other streets in the Historic Center, the AEP used a temporary, phased approach, testing out pedestrianizing the street initially for one day per week through using cones. Business owners had no complaints, and so they increased it to another day, and then another day, and after three months, eventually won approval for a permanent change.⁴⁶ This phased approach also allowed them to mitigate negative impacts to vehicular traffic on surrounding streets.

The AEP listed the positive outcomes of the pedestrianization of the street as: “creating space for creating community; a 30% increase in commercial activity”; and a reduction in the number of crimes reported on the street. Presently, after the conversion, 250,000 people travel through Calle Madero daily, and up to 500,000 on weekends and holidays⁴⁷ – an increase in foot traffic which has benefited local shopowners. Additionally, as residents, businessowners, and visitors had cited crime as a major issue on the street, and in the area-at-large, locals have been

⁴⁴ Noah Kazis, “How Mexico City Fought and Cajoled to Reclaim Streets for Pedestrians,” *Streetsblog* <<http://www.streetsblog.org/2012/03/19/how-mexico-city-fought-and-cajoled-to-reclaim-streets-for-pedestrians/>>.

⁴⁵ Interview with Elena Tudela, architect, Cambridge, MA.

⁴⁶ Kazis, <<http://www.streetsblog.org/2012/03/19/how-mexico-city-fought-and-cajoled-to-reclaim-streets-for-pedestrians/>>.

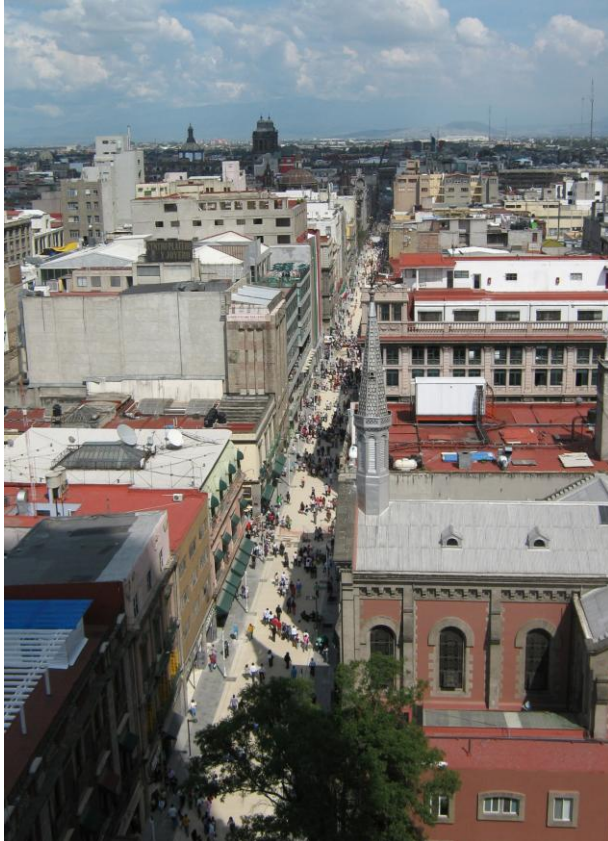
⁴⁷ “Corredor Peatonal Madero, ícono del espacio público” <<http://www.noticiasetucidad.df.gob.mx/?p=23467>>.

pleased with the marked decrease in crimes reported on Madero since its pedestrianization and new lighting scheme. During the construction process, *El Universal* newspaper interviewed street business owners and passersby, most of whom viewed the pedestrianization of the corridor as a beneficial move for encouraging business and pedestrian safety, with most negative comments regarding being inconvenienced and losing business during the construction process. Some local businessowners complained that the impacts on business would be negligible after the pedestrianization, so the loss to business incurred due to construction was “unnecessary.” Juan Carlos Zepeda, however, a resident of Xochimilco, told *El Universal* that he found “the project to pedestrianize the Historic Center interesting; it seems like a new opportunity to rescue the streets. All of the First Quadrant should be pedestrianized.”⁴⁸ Martín Martínez, who works in a restaurant on Calle Madero, agreed that they should close more streets around the Zócalo in order to increase tourism in the area, but also to increase safety for residents and workers. He said, “For me, it’s much better, because there was a lot of trouble with car drivers. I believe it’s better for residents [this way].” Rocio Martinez, a resident of Azcapotzalco, also considered these efforts necessary, in that they would allow for more security and better access. One person interviewed said that “This project will encourage pedestrians and business. Madero will become a very lucrative commercial corridor.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Phenélope Aldaz, “Obras en calle Madero dividen a capitalinos,” *El Universal*, 27 June 2010 <<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/ciudad/102269.html>>.

⁴⁹ <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/ciudad/97001.html>

Calle Madero, after pedestrianization (Source: AEP).



2. Plaza Garibaldi (2009-2010)

Museum of Tequila and Mezcal

San Camilito Market

Mariachi Academy

The second project initiated by the AEP, running concurrently with the pedestrianization of Calle Madero, was the renovation of Plaza Garibaldi, also in the Historic Center, and part of the GDF's "Comprehensive Program for Renovation of Plaza Garibaldi," as well as a larger "Bellas Artes Tourist Corridor-Garibaldi" initiative administered by the federal Ministry of Tourism. The historic center for mariachi performance, Plaza Garibaldi has been a tourist attraction for visitors to Mexico City, as well as a place where residents have come to serenade their loved ones, for decades. Located in the far northwestern corner of the Historic Center, Plaza Garibaldi is situated not far from Tepito, an area infamous for its decades-long clashes with the government. Plaza Garibaldi and its surroundings had become particularly crime-ridden over the years, and the GDF's "Partial Program of Urban Development for the Historic Center" (*"Programa Parcial de Desarrollo Urbano – Centro Histórico"*) had identified the so-called "Garibaldi-Lagunilla" zone as a "priority area of attention" due to the area's high level of both physical deterioration and "social deterioration." It was also part of a new "Lagunilla-Bellas Artes security zone" that was created between La Lagunilla (just east of Plaza Garibaldi), and Palacio Bellas Artes, which consists of heightened police presence and improved street lighting.⁵⁰ SEDUVI states that Ebrard and the GDF had determined that "planning" would be the appropriate strategy for driving "urban recuperation" projects like that of Plaza Garibaldi, which were aimed specifically at promoting social integration, as well as

⁵⁰ Laura Gómez Flores, "Anuncia Turismo capitalino el rescate de Plaza Garibaldi, Zona Rosa y Xochimilco," *La Jornada*, 4 March 2008, <<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/03/04/index.php?section=capital&article=036n1cap>>.

development and investment in what were seen as under-invested areas.⁵¹ The driving ideas behind the program were: “functional innovation; physical recuperation of the plaza; and the reaffirmation of its cultural identity.”⁵² The project was done, as noted by the AEP, out of a desire to reverse a trend of “deteriorating life conditions of the residents and users of the area, as well as of deterioration of buildings, many of which are of historic value” – a situation which not only “impacts the urban image of the historic area,” but also “facilitates antisocial conduct and urban violence.”⁵³ The project would consist of the renovation of the plaza, taking into account security issues in the area; and various improvements to tourist infrastructure, including the renovation of the nearby San Camilito Market, relocation of the Mariachi Academy from a nearby silk factory to the Plaza, and the establishment of a new Tequila and Mezcal Museum. These tourism promotion components were influenced by one of the major funders of the project – the Ministry of Tourism, and as noted above, part of a larger “Tourist Corridor” planned for the greater Historic Center.

Plaza Garibaldi had become a site for the selling of hard drugs and prostitution, and had received press due to a few sensationalized crimes, including the death of two *lucha libre* wrestlers by prostitutes.⁵⁴ The Plaza had already undergone several renovations, including the addition of underground parking and the sealing off of one of the side-streets to pedestrianize the plaza. The lack of major daytime traffic, however, made it a place where only the homeless or drunkards would congregate, and the dead-end streets around the plaza were being used as public toilets, and were places where people went to buy hard drugs, but where they could also get robbed.⁵⁵ Many of the buildings facing the plaza had “fake façades” and functioned as bars where people had reported

⁵¹ SEDUVI, “Espacio público.”

⁵² SEDUVI, “Espacio público.”

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Daniel Broid and Iris Marlene de la O, “Mexico City Case Studies,” unpublished.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

being drugged and robbed by prostitutes. Residents and workers in the area would avoid spending time there at night.⁵⁶

These issues inspired AEP's design for the Plaza, which focused mainly on encouraging a safer area, with better lighting, increased daytime pedestrian traffic, and improved accessibility, in general, to prevent "dead-ends" and inaccessible pockets. On the plaza front, the project involved the replacement of the plaza's pavement, new street furniture and street lighting, and a new landscape design scheme. The water mains and sewerage were also replaced in the Plaza, and the telephone and electrical systems were moved underground. New flooring was installed in Plaza Garibaldi as well as in the various streets and annexes which radiate off of the plaza, including: Plaza San Camilito, Cerrada Garibaldi, and Callejón de la Amargura, among others. The objective was to create a continuous plane, eliminating changes in floor level and staircases that may interrupt the continuity of the paved surface, in order to make the area more accessible to disabled persons and better unify it as a contiguous space. The AEP also replaced and/or installed new benches, trashcans, newspaper racks, information and bulletin racks, stair handrails, and wheelchair-accessible ramps – all in accordance with criteria established by the Authority of the Historic Center of the DF.⁵⁷ Plaza Garibaldi is an area known for its nighttime activity, and in hopes of creating a more pleasant environment in which people would want to spend time during the day, the AEP also designed a low-maintenance, non-water-intensive landscape plan, which included an agave garden in the center. The objective of this plan was to "organize the paths and utilization of the space of Plaza Garibaldi and Rinconadas," thereby creating "comfortable, agreeable, and attractive spaces," which maximize shade and "seasonal color variation."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Broid and de la O, "Mexico City Case Studies."

⁵⁷ SEDUVI, "Espacio público."

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Plaza Garibaldi, post-AEP renovation (Source: AEP).



While business owners were initially opposed to a total redesign of the Plaza, they eventually accepted it, recognizing that “something had to be done before the area got out of control.”⁵⁹ While the AEP designed and conceived the project before presenting it to residents, they incorporated and acted on some of their comments, particularly suggestions around maximizing lighting, replacing façades, and installing a playground. Notably, this engagement with local stakeholders, including residents, restaurant owners, mariachis, police officers, and local and federal government representatives, led to the establishment of a still-existing institution, the “*Consejo Ciudadano*,” or Citizens’ Council. This collaboration, involving the DF’s Ministry of Public Security (SSP-DF), SEDUVI, the Cuauhtémoc Delegación, and residents’, business, and mariachi representative organizations, continues to hold regular meetings regarding the security, economic development, and overall health of the neighborhood.

The major complaint of residents and visitors to the area was lack of safety; improving security in the crime-ridden area was a priority, and based on residents’ comments, various lighting

⁵⁹ SEDUVI, “Espacio Público.”

and architectural techniques were used to further discourage crime and promote a feeling of safety among users of the space. The AEP designed a lighting scheme based on maximum energy-efficiency and yet using the different functionalities of floor lamps, wall lighting, and pole lighting in order to create a uniformly well-lit space that would discourage crime. The building for the new *Museo del Tequila y el Mezcal* (Tequila and Mezcal Museum) in the Plaza was situated and designed in such a way as to also promote safety. Designed by Adriana Sepúlveda Vildósola, Technical Executive Director and then Executive Director of Management for AEP (now at SEDUVI),⁶⁰ it features a transparent façade, which transmits light and further serves to illuminate the space. While raised above ground to allow for pedestrian circulation, it was placed on the side of the Plaza facing the main road *Eje Central* specifically in order to create a barrier preventing criminals from running out of Plaza Garibaldi before being caught by police. It was also determined that the Museum and Mariachi Academy should be located in the plaza in order to encourage more daytime activity, and influenced also by the funding of the project by the Ministry of Tourism.

“Lit” façade of Museum of Tequila and Mezcal, as seen from Eje Central



⁶⁰ <http://201.134.137.8/transparencia/transparencia/ver.php?puesto=2011#3>

Museo del Tequila y de Mezcal during the day (Source: Mexico Desconocido).



Due to conversations from the *Consejo Ciudadano*, the Ministry of Public Security agreed to install two Public Security kiosks – one on *Eje Central*, the street which borders Plaza Garibaldi on its west side, and the other in the center of the Plaza – as well as to increase police presence in the area and install more surveillance cameras. Additionally, as part of a stepped-up public security program, the Office of the Attorney of the DF installed a Public Ministry phone kiosk in the Plaza, and increased police presence in the area.

The project was jointly funded by the AEP and (federal) Ministry of Tourism, which drove the inclusion of both the new Tequila and Mezcal Museum and Mariachi Academy. The Ministry of Tourism was involved owing to Garibaldi’s role as a tourist destination within Mexico City and the sense that its renovation would not only increase the number of tourist visits to the area, but, as part of a larger effort, visits to Mexico City, in general, as well. Indeed, the project was considered a priority for the government of the DF, as stated before, not only for “social improvement” reasons, but because the “physical and social rescue” of the area presented tourism and economic

development potential, and the GDF “considers tourist activity one of the most important activities for the ‘recuperation’ of the capital.” There was concern at one point that federal funding for the project would run out, but it did not, in the end, since the federal government was liable to meet funding obligations secured in a signed agreement between the federal Ministry of Tourism and the AEP. The AEP invested \$90.6 million pesos in the project, as part of its “Bellas Artes Tourist Corridor-Garibaldi” initiative, which came out of the AEP’s 2009-10 budget of 120 million pesos (around US\$9.5 million), half of which came from the federal government, and half of which from the GDF (Ministry of Finance). The remainder of the project cost (28.5 million pesos) came from the Ministry of Tourism. With the project costing \$90.6 million pesos out of the total \$120 million-peso-budget for the year, this consumed the majority of the AEP’s funding for that fiscal year.

Mercado San Camilito, post-renovation (left); interior



The Ministry of Tourism not only partially funded the project and directed some of its programming, but coordinated various economic development activities as well, including: “coordinating relations with established business-owners in the area; promoting new private investment; installing a tourist information kiosk in the Plaza; leading workforce-training courses to benefit the highest number possible of workers in the area; promoting the creation of a trust

responsible for coordinating the renovation of Plaza Garibaldi; and rebranding the Plaza as a “Barrio Mágico” or “Magical Quarter of the DF” (declared in 2011) and as a Sustainable Tourism Development Zone.

Also due to conversations from the *Consejo Ciudadano*, the project additionally involved the participation of many other local and federal agencies. To address the “social development” of the area, the DF’s Legal Counsel put “plant staff” in the kiosks to facilitate the movement of homeless people in the area to shelters. They also worked to integrate them into new shelters opening up in the area and to increase the capacity of institutions already providing assistance in the neighborhood. The Cuauhtémoc Delegation additionally initiated an “Economic Revitalization” Program, which offers support and credit to local mariachi groups for the purchase of instruments and clothing; they also supervised the construction process to mitigate impacts on local businesses. The Ministries of Law and Legal Services further coordinated efforts to secure the tenure of established stores in the area, while checking the status of various establishments operating illegally despite being officially closed. Locatel, the local government telephone hotline, also installed a kiosk in the Plaza; the Historic Center Authority helped with the renovation of the street furniture and plants in the access streets/annexes of the plaza and planned the operation of the Mariachi Academy with CONACULTA (National Council for Culture and the Arts). It was hoped that these combined efforts would help remove “anti-social” elements and allow businesses and private investment to return.

Since the AEP’s renovation of Plaza Garibaldi, crime has visibly reduced in the area, which has pleased local residents and business owners, who continue to be involved through the *Consejo Ciudadano*.⁶¹ There is also daytime activity in the plaza (author’s observations), due to the new cultural institutions, such as the Museum of Tequila and Mezcal, but also due to increased police presence in general, which has been monitoring public drunkenness. Additionally, business owners

⁶¹ Broid and de la O, “Mexico City Case Studies.”

who had left the area have returned to open up restaurants, and there is a noticeable increase in the number of residents and tourists who, instead of waving for mariachis to come to their cars, are now spending time in the Plaza and frequenting its establishments.⁶²

Plaza Garibaldi, post-renovation, at night (top) and day



⁶² Broid and de la O, "Mexico City Case Studies."

3. Plaza de la República (2009-2010)

A major question concerned what Ebrard would plan to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution in 2010; it was determined that the renovation of Plaza de la República, a major symbol of the Revolution and birth of the Mexican Republic, would be a timely and powerful project. As such, it was important that the project would be completed in time to host the centennial celebrations, and indeed, the newly-renovated square was inaugurated on November 20, 2010, on the 100th anniversary of the day the Revolution began.⁶³ The renovation of such a site packs a big punch – not only because the Monument of the Revolution contains the remains of many early leaders of México (Francisco I. Madero, Venustiano Carranza, Francisco Villa, Plutarco Elías Callas, and Lázaro Cárdenas), but also because, plainly speaking, the Plaza de la República is a very large space, and located between two main traffic and commercial corridors – *Reforma* and *Insurgentes*. The Monument to the Revolution (with its first stone laid by Porfirio Diaz in 1910), at the head of the plaza, was originally intended to be part of a large Beaux-Arts building which never got built, and of which the plaza remains testament. The AEP explained that “The importance of the commemoration of the Centennial Celebrations of the Revolution and the Bicentennial of Independence necessitates intervention in one of the most significant projects to come out of these historic events – this Monument, its museum, and the plaza in which they are located.”⁶⁴ During the past few decades, the Plaza had been surrounded by parked cars, cutting it off from the surrounding neighborhood, and the Monument, and Museum of the Revolution inside, was in poor condition. As such, it was determined that the space should be “rescued” for the pedestrian and local resident, and the important historic institutions on the site be renovated. AEP and SEDUVI further stated

⁶³“Boletín,” SEDUVI <<http://www.seduvi.df.gob.mx/portal/index.php/comunicacion-social/boletines/239-el-gobierno-del-distrito-federal-inaugura-plaza-de-la-republica-html>>.

⁶⁴ SEDUVI, “Espacio Público.”

that the renovation of Plaza de la República was “chosen as a project not only due to its emblematic nature as the site of the Monument of the Revolution, but also due to the positive economic benefits the renovation of the site could pose for the area in which it is situated.” Through improving pedestrian accessibility to the Plaza and investing in its renovation, the AEP hoped to encourage the reopening of local businesses which had closed in the preceding decades due to population loss and general economic decline.

The project consisted of renovation of the Plaza; replacement of some building facades around the Plaza; restoration of the Monument; the installation of an elevator and lookout gallery within the Monument; renovation and expansion of the National Museum of the Revolution; and the moving of on-site parking underground. The Plaza component of the project consisted of: the rehabilitation of the plaza; replacement of pavement in nearby streets (including on *Avenida Hidalgo*, the street leading up to the Plaza, which extends toward the *Alameda* and Historic Center); replacement of street furniture and lighting; landscaping and planting of palm trees; and the construction of a dry fountain with 100 jets at one of the water sources in the Plaza. The restoration of the Monument included the cleaning of the Monument and the addition of a lookout gallery in the upper part, as well as the construction of an elevator to reach that area. Additionally, the Museum of the Revolution was completely renovated and enlarged, with the addition of a new cafeteria. The total investment in the project was \$368 million pesos (around US\$29 million) of public funds, provided by the GDF and the Ministry of Culture. Maintenance was anticipated to cost \$10 million pesos annually, to be paid jointly by the AEP and Cuauhtémoc Delegation.⁶⁵ The total area of renovation is 72,000,700 square meters, of which the majority is pedestrian areas and gardens, or as the AEP puts it “42 million square meters were *rescued for the pedestrian*.”⁶⁶ AEP has argued that this was an even more dramatic pedestrianization project than Madero, in that the

⁶⁵ “Mantener el esplendor de la Plaza de la República costará Ebrard \$10 millones de pesos anuales,” *Tlalpan.info* <<http://tlalpan.info/mantener-el-esplendor-de-la-plaza-de-la-repub#more>>.

⁶⁶ “Boletín,” *SEDUVI*, <<http://www.seduvi.df.gob.mx/portal/index.php/comunicacion-social/boletines/239-el-gobierno-del-distrito-federal-inaugura-plaza-de-la-republica-html>>.

edges of the Plaza had been occupied by parked cars; after the monument was built, the streets around it, and the Plaza itself, were gradually turned over to cars and parking, with the Plaza becoming an island within a parking lot. The AEP “reclaimed” the space formerly occupied by parking in order to create new features like the fountain mentioned above. Parking was absorbed underground, in a new underground parking lot (scheme seen on the following page). As indicated above, this plan to pedestrianize Plaza de la República extends beyond the actual plaza, and included a plan to renovate Avenida Hidalgo, the street that connects the Plaza to Calle Madero, in order to form a pedestrian corridor that links to Calle Madero.

Top: Plaza de la República, before renovation (Source: Imagenes Aereas de México)



Avenida Hidalgo (Source: Noah Katzis, Streetsblog)

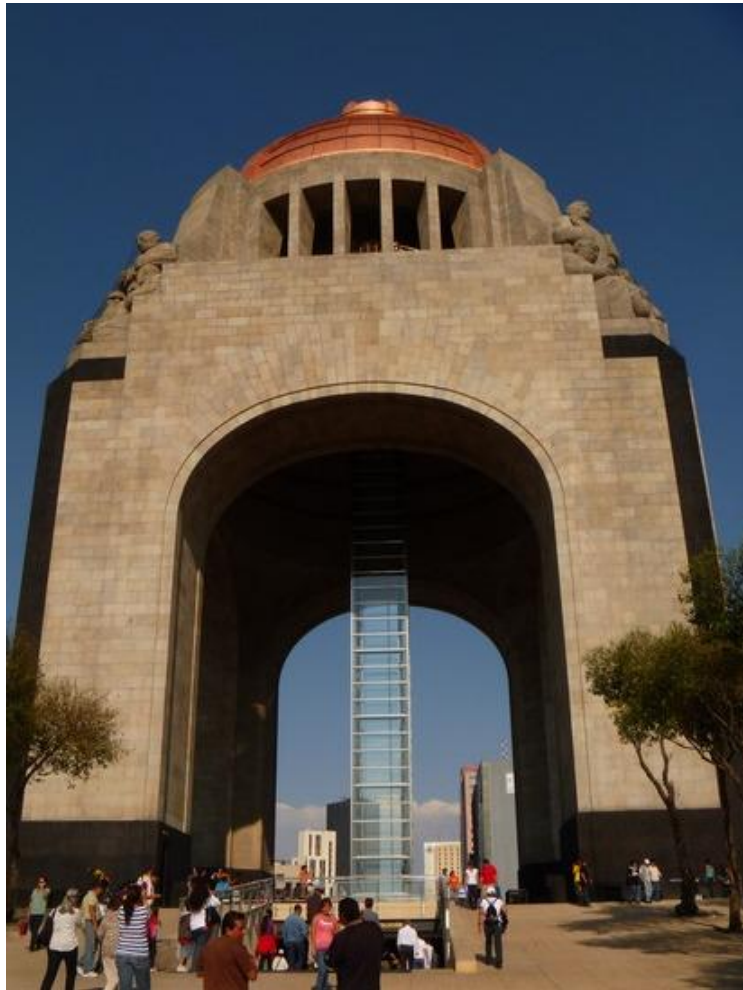


Original project rendering, with underground parking shown (Source: AEP)



Fuente: Autoridad del Espacio Público

Monument, with new elevator installed



Lookout gallery in Monument



Renovated Museo Nacional de Revolución

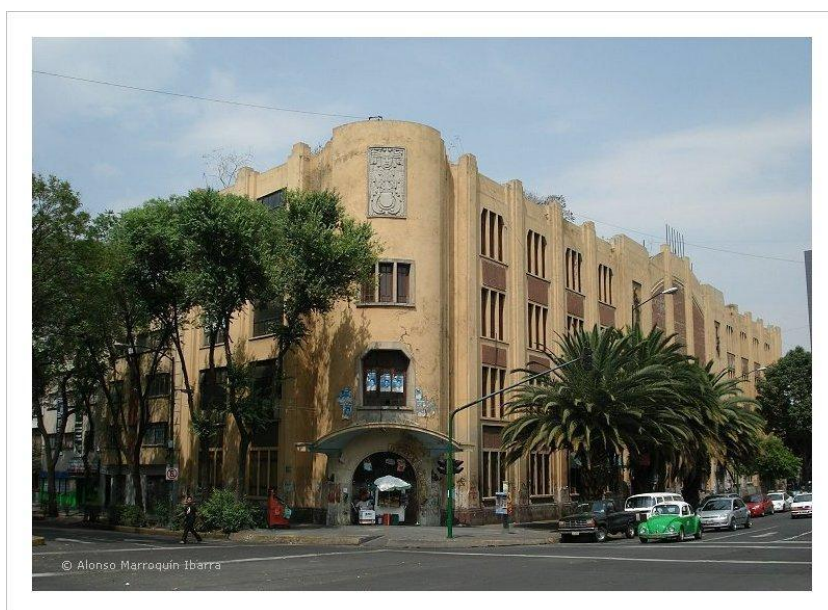


While one of the main instigators for the project was the celebration of the *Centenario*, Leal and the AEP hoped that it would increase business confidence in the area and allow institutions which lay dormant due to decline, such as the *Frontón México*, located across the street, to reopen. In November 2010, after fourteen years of closure, the *Frontón México*, a historic Art Deco building and set of *frontón*, or jai alai athletic courts, reopened. Juan Pablo Valdez, project manager for the reconstruction of the *Frontón*, indicated, “We never would have been able to have done this if Marcelo Ebrard’s project hadn’t been done.”⁶⁷ The initial phase of reconstruction, completed thus far, includes the renovation of the *frontón* court and the addition of a restaurant-bar, as well as a reserved-seating box and a cafeteria. A bar, casino, and small hotel were expected to be incorporated into the building in the second and third phases of construction, intended to be completed by November 2011, but it is unclear if that has happened or not. Leal said that the

⁶⁷ Mónica Archundia and Johana Robles, “Frontón Mexico ‘renace’ para la fiesta de Centenario,” *El Universal*, 9 April 2010 <<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/ciudad/101120.html>>.

challenge involved in reopening the Frontón was an indicator of the lack of investor confidence in the reactivation in the area. The important thing, he emphasized, was to “reactivate the economy and business in the area, which for years has been abandoned and in decline. We have to remember that this is one of the most important public spaces not only in the Distrito Federal, but in the country.” He continued “We are confident that once we inaugurate the monument, investors will come and the neighborhood will rise. Soon more buildings will be restored, others renovated, but above all, we will eliminate the vacancies that exist in the area today...What we want is that the city grows, and is regenerated, not only physically, but also, economically, socially, and culturally.”

El Frontón, before AEP project.



El Frontón, after AEP project



When asked what was successful about the project, the AEP said that: it was “100% accessible, provided cultural infrastructure, and involved the rescue of the historic and architectural heritage of the city, rehabilitation of the public space, and strengthening of the city’s identity.”⁶⁸ The furthered explained the success of the project as follows: “The project of rehabilitating Plaza de la República is a comprehensive intervention in Mexico City, in which the work not only involves the plaza, but also the restoration of the Monument of the Revolution and the adaptation of the lookout gallery in the upper part of the Monument, as well as in the renovation of the Museum of the Revolution. Plaza de la República is, as of today, a successful example of the rescue of public space, providing a space for recreation and gathering, as well as highlighting and celebrating the historical memory of the site. This rehabilitation has provided an injection of investment in Colonia Tabacalera in general, incentivizing groundfloor commercial use and the staging of multiple activities throughout the day. It is today a meeting space, a space for exchange and coexistence in the heart of the city.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Mexico DesignNet Ficha Base Case Study Proyecto: “Plaza de la República”, México.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Current Projects

The AEP is currently working on the renovation of the Alameda Central, which involves landscaping improvements, repaving, new furniture, and new lighting. The removal of hundreds of street vendors under López Obrador certainly “paved the way” for this project, however, there are still around 600 street vendors who operate in the Alameda, and who have been relocated during construction. Leal has said that vending will be prohibited, but has also said that SEDUVI and the GDF are trying to come to an agreement with vendors. It is expected to take six months, during which time a resolution hopefully will be reached. There already was an earlier initiative to renovate the Alameda Central, which involved the demolition of severely damaged buildings on nearby *Avenida Juárez* to make room for a new “Plaza Juárez” across the street,⁷⁰ where the federal government’s Exterior Ministry constructed new offices.

The AEP is also currently working on a plan to pedestrianize the Zócalo,⁷¹ Plaza de la Constitución, by the end of the year, which would be Ebrard’s final “big project,” in marked contrast to López Obrador’s final ‘big project’ – the “*segundo piso*.” Pedestrianizing the Zócalo would involve removing the four lanes of vehicular traffic that currently travel through the square, and rerouting that traffic elsewhere. It is no small endeavor, and it is not clear if it will be achieved before Ebrard leaves office or not.

⁷⁰ I2UD, 18.

⁷¹ <http://www.streetsblog.org/2012/03/19/how-mexico-city-fought-and-cajoled-to-reclaim-streets-for-pedestrians/>

Existing car traffic in the Zócalo (Plaza de la Constitución).



Ongoing Projects

The AEP also has coordinated a number of smaller on-going projects and initiatives, many of which have been located outside of the Historic Center and *delegación* of Cuauhtémoc.

1. EcoParq Parquímetros (Parking Meters)

More recently, the AEP and SEDUVI have gotten involved in something completely different from earlier initiatives – the installation of parking meters, through a program called “*EcoParq*.”

The first stage of this involved the installation of 900 parking meters in Polanco last fall. Leal has stated that the reason for beginning the program in Polanco was the high concentration of (free) on-street parking spaces there, though the fact that Polanco is also one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the DF, and residents and visitors could be expected to have payment capacity, probably was an additional factor. As part of an effort to disincentivize auto use, generate revenue for the city, and regulate the informal “parking attendant” industry, *EcoParq* parking meters will be installed in other areas of the city, as well. Leal indicated other possible locations include Santa Fe, Colonia del Valle, Colonia Florida, and Coyoacán. Two things to note here are the naming of the parking meter company as “*EcoParq*,” indicating an environmental justification for installing parking meters, with hopes it will make it more socially and politically palatable, and also, the redistributive aspect of installing parking meters in one of the most affluent areas of Mexico City – Polanco – first. Leal and others have met with residents in Polanco many times to discuss the parking meters and address concerns, but ultimately, said that residents felt entitled to “free parking” regardless, and would not support it. There have also been protests staged in Polanco and other areas against the parking meters by associations of informal workers who control parking in these areas and are now without work with the installation of the *EcoParq* meters. Ultimately, however, the AEP and SEDUVI have felt this is the necessary move for regulating this industry; generating needed revenue for the GDF; and for discouraging the large amount of space, through roads and highways, automobile use currently takes up in Mexico City.

New parquímetro (left); protest against parquímetros (right)



2. Bajo Puentes (“Underpasses”) (2009-present)

One of the first projects the AEP led was the “*Bajo puentes*” or “Underpasses” project mentioned above, which has consisted of the identification of large freeway underpasses in the City able to accommodate children’s play equipment and other community infrastructure. The AEP describes it as a “project to reverse the deterioration afflicting many underpasses and ‘rescue’ them for public benefit, transforming them into parks, fountains, and recreational areas, with community services, such as 24-hour pharmacies, convenience stores, bookstores, and café-terraces.”⁷² It has involved the installation of standardized service modules that are designed to be low-maintenance so that community members can maintain them. The goal is to create new recreational areas and community services where they are currently lacking, but also to create safe spaces, combating the crime and illegal activities that often occur in these areas. By September 2010, seven projects had been completed, and they had completed the paperwork for projects in 22 underpasses in

⁷² SEDUVI, “Espacio público.”

Periférico Sur Oriente, Eje 3 Oriente, Insurgentes Norte and Calzada de Tlalpan. With that, they hoped to have completed, by September 2011, 42 “rescued” underpasses. The funding for this has come entirely from private sources, amounting to 670 million pesos (around US\$49 million) for 67 underpasses. The AEP notes this has generated 7,500 jobs in the construction phase and 4,000 jobs in the operation phase.⁷³

Examples of bajo puentes (Source: <http://cantarranas-out.blogspot.com/2011/01/bajo-puentes.html>)



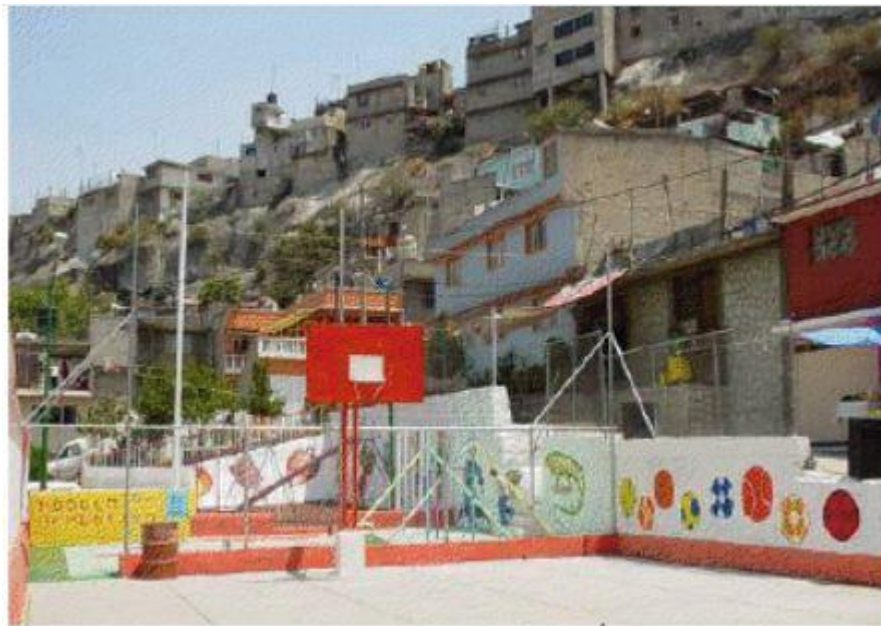
Área bajo puente, Col. Minas de Cristo, Álvaro Obregón

⁷³ SEDUVI, “Espacio público.”

“Rescue of Public Spaces” Program (PREP) (2009-present)

Similar to the “bajo puentes” program, the AEP has also worked with the GDF and federal government to recuperate small parks and public spaces in residential neighborhoods in other parts of the city. Examples include two parks in Álvaro Obregon, where a green area, children’s play areas, and lighting were installed; and a sports kiosk in Azcapotzalco, which consisted of a gymnasium, children’s recreational areas, and gardens.

Example of PREP project, Álvaro Obregon.



Módulo Deportivo, Rio Pinto y Cañada, Álvaro Obregón

3. Analysis of Findings

The above projects demonstrate that the AEP's institutional model has allowed it to negotiate significant time, financial, and political constraints in order to produce a different kind of "project" – one which uses "improving the lives of city and neighborhood residents" as a measure of success, and which is capable of encouraging renewed use of spaces and economic development. Most of the projects the AEP has done are fairly simple in terms of design strategy and programming, and that is where its achievement lies – in understanding how to best make use of existing financial and political resources in order to bring about small changes that will count for residents and visitors, and count for the city in terms of both promoting a healthier development pattern and generating needed revenue. With the major centerpiece of most of their projects being simple transformations – "pedestrianizing" a space and installing new lighting to make it safer, for instance – the AEP is making a statement that a modest approach to urban development, privileging small infrastructure improvements, can sometimes make a large impact for local residents and business owners . By considering "public space" as essential infrastructure needing to be "rescued," both Ebrard and the AEP make an argument for an increased government role, which goes beyond conventional land use planning, in the shaping of urban spaces. More specifically, the AEP's use of urban design strategies implies that a more aggressive government urban planning strategy than simply zoning and administering building permits may be needed in order to combat insecurity and promote equitable and sustainable urban spaces in Mexico City. The end goal for these projects is not necessarily flashy, upscale development, but something simple that is still capable of promoting economic development and private investment in the area. Indeed, the fact that many of these projects have improved both the look and security of the spaces also has promoted private

investment in these areas through increasing investor confidence; this is the case in all of major project examples.

Much of the AEP's success in the design of these projects comes from an awareness of local context and local stakeholders' opinions. This has allowed the AEP to design and implement projects that have produced beneficial changes for local residents, businessowners, and visitors – through decreases in crime, increases in local commercial activity, and physical improvement and expansion of spaces in which people may recreate and gather. This can be seen particularly with the Plaza Garibaldi renovation project, in which not only were certain design features, such as the lighting scheme, changed after consultation with residents, but even more, in the way in which the project sparked the creation of a neighborhood organization that has outlived the 'project' itself. As indicated earlier, the informal dialogue group that the AEP had established in order to win consensus for the project ended up becoming a neighborhood institution, the *Consejo Ciudadano*, which now meets regularly, and which involves the participation of several local stakeholders and government entities. Thus, the project sparked new partnerships among the various actors of the area, including residents, local business owners, mariachi groups, the Ministry of Public Security, the Cuauhtémoc delegation, and SEDUVI, who are now engaging with each other regularly to ensure that any 'renovation' efforts work for, and benefit, local residents and business owners. So, even though the AEP's plan suffered from time constraints, it has lived on, to some extent, in the particular partnerships it helped to promote; in particular, the involvement of both residents, businessowners and the Ministry of Public Security in the *Consejo* has helped to allow residents to inform the character and scope of policing practices for the Lagunilla-Bellas Artes "security zone." Additionally, the design strategies the AEP has used in many cases, including in the renovation of Plaza Garibaldi and in the "*bajo puentes*" projects, were intentionally simple in order to create low-maintenance spaces that community members could help take care of themselves, further

encouraging a longer-lasting impact or transformation that extends beyond the limited time horizon of the project itself.

One criticism of the AEP, however, might hold that the projects in the Historic Center are simply part of one larger “gentrification strategy,” orchestrated by government authorities in partnership with corporate bigwigs like Carlos Slim; for the above reasons and others, though, that does not seem to be the case. During the past decade, Slim, through his conglomerate Grupo Carso, has been purchasing buildings in the Historic Center, renovating, and selling them at higher prices as commercial and residential development; in short, he has been performing some sort of land speculation in the Historic Center. That is not to say that he has not also contributed to important programs for current residents through his *Fundación del Centro Histórico*, but most agree that his greater “revitalization” plan for the Historic Center involves realizing its full market potential, which will eventually have the effect of displacing current low-income tenants and business owners. This does not mean, however, that all efforts to repair existing buildings and infrastructure, including public spaces, in the Historic Center, are part of this gentrification strategy and have the intention of displacing current tenants. Through the AEP’s involvement with local actors in the pedestrianization of Calle Madero, and the renovation of Plazas Garibaldi and de la República, as well as the simple design and programming strategies used, it seems that the AEP is making an effort, rather, to create spaces that can better serve the existing population. Whenever the physical infrastructure of a lower-income neighborhood is improved, property values, in theory, increase, and thus, gentrification is a risk. Improvements to low-income neighborhoods should not be avoided due to this concern; rather, legal and regulatory measures to ensure current tenants can remain (through provisions in the *Programa Parcial*, for instance) should be instituted. An effort to do this for local business owners was begun with Plaza Garibaldi. For housing, this goes beyond the purview of the AEP, but is in line with Ebrard’s broader urban policy, and hopefully, therefore, will

be in line with the policies of his likely successor, Miguel Ángel Mancera – a friend and also a member of the PRD – as well.

Another criticism of the AEP is that these sort of small initiatives are not where urban policymaking should be directed; there is a need for policymaking to be directed at much larger issues of metropolitan and regional coordination, and these projects do not necessarily help in that regard. It seems, however, that there is a recognition here of the challenges involved in achieving coordination around those larger issues, and that the AEP was designed in order to allow it pursue changes on a smaller level that might contribute to a “sea change” on a larger level. Part of the success of the AEP is its savviness in couching more politically contentious endeavors, such as pedestrianization strategies or the installation of parking meters, within a more politically palatable “public space” framework. Whether or not this has emerged from the design perspective of Felipe Leal, it has worked to Ebrard’s, and the city’s, advantage.

Conclusion

Philipp Rode, the Executive Director of the London School of Economics' Urban Age Project published a discussion paper a few years ago entitled "City Design – A New Planning Paradigm?" in which he argued that a new method of "citymaking" was needed – one situated somewhere between the stereotypically abstract and spatially-removed plans made by urban planners, and the socially- and economically-removed designs of urban designers.⁷⁴ This is what he, and the LSE Urban Age Project, called "city design." Without precisely defining what "city design" consists of, he provided some sort of indication by suggesting that it could be operationalized through "city design boards" in urban areas. These would include "urban experts from a variety of different disciplines" who operate as "the think tank for spatial strategies, assisting the mayors and regional governors with key decisions, will prepare key planning decisions and supervise their implementation."⁷⁵

With its removal from government institutions, Rode seems to miss an opportunity for the sincere integration of an improved planning approach in cities. It is through looking at the institutional model of the AEP in Mexico City, or similar institutions in Barcelona and Medellín, that a perhaps more useful operational representation of "city design" emerges. While the particular independent "public design office" that AEP represents can be read as an outcome of Leal trying to avoid particular political and financial hurdles to project development, its combination of "public" measures of success and urban design strategies has helped the AEP to pursue initiatives that are sensitive to both spatial and socioeconomic context, and bridge planning and design in useful ways. There is a lesson here about the utility of establishing new, independent agencies and institutions in cities where existing institutions may be prevented from effectively meeting planning challenges due to bureaucratic, financial, and political constraints. Opportunities to develop independent

⁷⁴ Philipp Rode, "City Design – A New Planning Paradigm?" *Urban Age Discussion Paper*. London: London School of Economics (2006).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

agencies, capable of introducing new financing mechanisms and partnerships, and of introducing new metrics and methodologies for planning and service delivery, should be investigated, even if much of the success of these institutions relies on the quality of leadership.

It is not surprising perhaps that this model of both institutional autonomy and direct public involvement in “placemaking” has been applied and met with success in many cities throughout Latin America. In many ways, the AEP is a response to particular socio-environmental conditions in Mexico City which seem to necessitate a more aggressive approach to urban planning and management, on the part of government actors, than the conventional tools of land use planning (e.g., zoning and developer incentives) typically involve. In Mexico City, these conditions refer mainly to residential and industrial sprawl, and the uneven patterns of population density and investment it has generated, as well as crime. Many of the cities which have been most aggressive and innovative in their use of urban design-based planning approaches in the past decade have been cities in Latin America which have experienced these two phenomena, and in particular, crime. The mayors of cities like Medellín and Bogotá, Colombia, in recent years, have championed the use of urban design strategies in order to “rescue” or “take back” neglected and underserved spaces of the city that are felt not be capable of being “rescued” through conventional land use planning practices, or by the agencies which typically perform those duties.

While these practices of institutional autonomy and “social urbanism” might originate in particular urban contexts with characteristics not shared by other cities in the Americas and elsewhere, it seems that these practices can have useful ramifications in many contexts. Beyond the use of urban design strategies by public agencies, however, it is the establishment of new agencies, capable of rethinking both the metrics and methodologies that might allow for more equitable, environmentally sustainable, and creative urban development, that bears important and interesting consequences for the way we shape cities today.

Bibliography

Burdett, Ricky, and Deyan Sudjic, eds. *Living in the Endless City*. London: Phaidon Press, 2011.

----. *The Endless City*. London: Phaidon Press, 2008.

Cuthbert, Alexander R. *Designing Cities: Critical Readings in Urban Design*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003.

Davis, Diane E. "Conflict, Cooperation, Convergence: Globalization and the Politics of Downtown Development in Mexico City." *Research in Political Sociology* 15 (2007): 139-174.

----- and Arturo Alvarado. "Participación democrática y gobernabilidad en la Ciudad de México: el reto del PRD en la transición política." *Estudios Sociológicos*. Vol. XXI, No. 61 (January-April): 135-166.

-----, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

-----, "Urban Violence, Quality of Life, and the Future of Latin American Cities: The Dismal Record So Far, and the Search for New Analytical Frameworks to Sustain a Bias Towards Hope." In Jo Beall, Ravi Kanbur and Dennis Rodgers, eds., *Latin American Urban Development into the 21st Century: Towards a renewed perspective on the city*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Jenks, Mike, and Rod Burgess, eds. *Compact Cities: Sustainable Urban Forms for Developing Countries*. London: Spon Press, 2000.

Kaminer, Tahl, Miguel Robles-Durán, and Heidi Sohn, eds. *Urban Asymmetries: Studies and Projects on Neoliberal Urbanization*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2011.

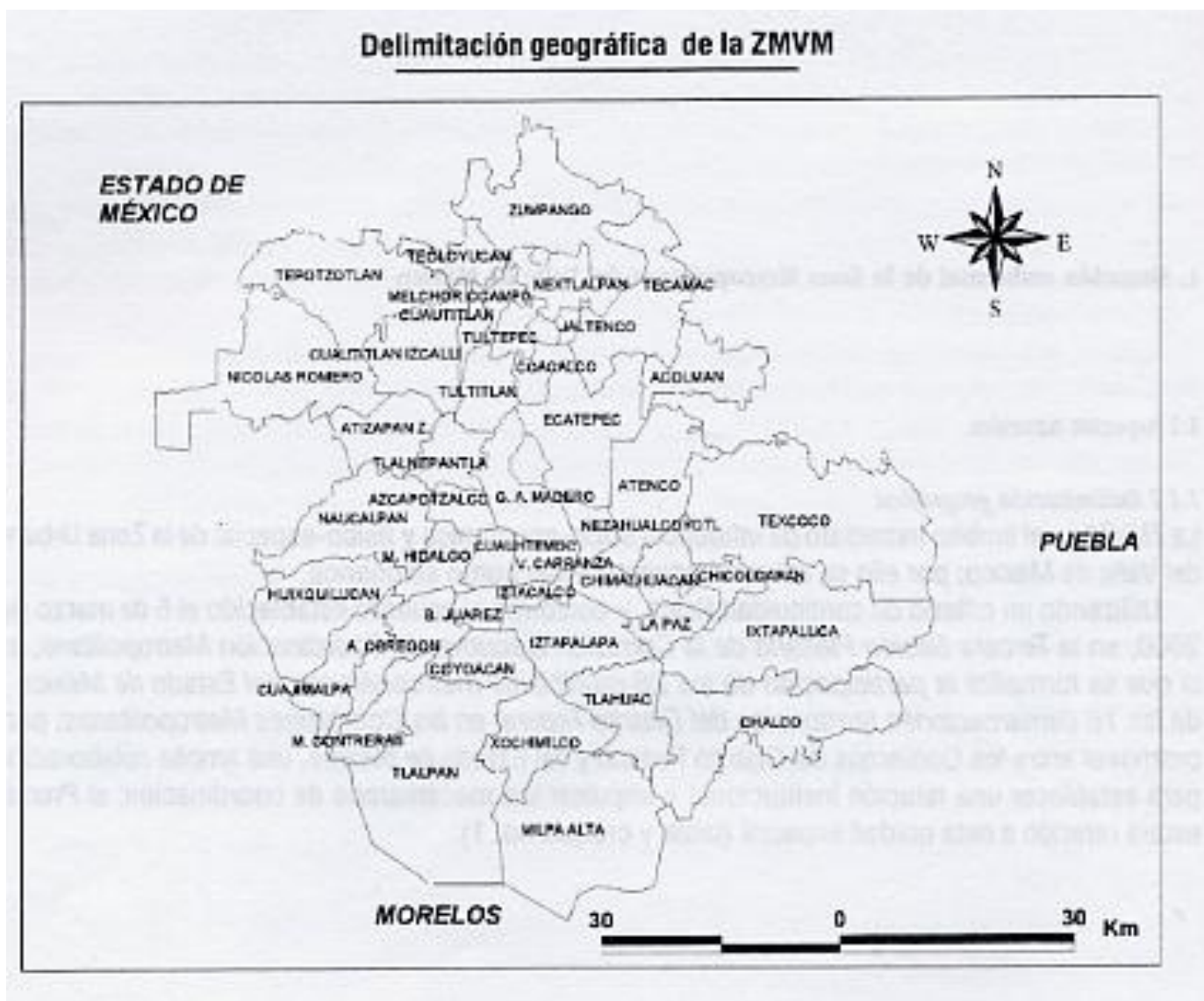
Krieger, Peter, ed. *Megalópolis: La modernización de la Ciudad de México en el siglo XX*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006.

Valenzuela-Aguilera, Alfonso. "Mexico City: Power, Equity, and Sustainable Development." In *Megacities: Urban Form, Governance, and Sustainability*, edited by A. Sorensen and J. Okata, 291-309. Tokyo: Springer, 2011.

Ward, Peter. *Mexico City: The production and reproduction of an urban environment*. London: Belhaven Press, 1990.

Appendix

Administrative and geographic divisions of the Mexico City Metropolitan Area (ZMVM) (Source: Instituto Nacional de Ecología).



Changes in Population, 1995-2010

Source: Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda, CONAPO-INEGI, 2000.

DISTRITO FEDERAL						
Delegaciones	1995	1998	2000	2010	% change 1995-2010	% change 2000-2010
Álvaro Obregón	676,434	678,024	678,227	668,992	-1.1%	-1.4%
Azcapotzalco	456,145	447,477	440,613	389,486	-14.6%	-11.6%
Benito Juárez	370,874	362,648	355,948	302,414	-18.5%	-15.0%
Coyoacán	652,651	660,838	665,735	685,187	5.0%	2.9%
Cuajimalpa de Morelos	135,778	143,892	149,529	181,865	33.9%	21.6%
Cuauhtémoc	539,992	536,452	531,723	465,352	-13.8%	-12.5%
Gustavo A. Madero	1,259,034	1,226,888	1,204,018	1,074,034	-14.7%	-10.8%
Iztacalco	422,205	394,428	376,575	298,066	-29.4%	-20.8%
Iztapalapa	1,691,566	1,738,891	1,771,382	1,972,460	16.6%	11.4%
Magdalena Contreras	210,800	219,972	226,136	257,956	22.4%	14.1%
Miguel Hidalgo	364,821	356,611	349,831	294,179	-19.4%	-15.9%
Milpa Alta	80,531	85,639	89,074	105,316	30.8%	18.2%
Tláhuac	253,753	273,755	287,881	371,075	46.2%	28.9%
Tlalpan	548,457	584,241	609,384	759,363	38.5%	24.6%
Venustiano Carranza 486,686	486,686	477,138	469,284	405,613	-16.7%	-13.6%
Xochimilco	329,987	350,886	365,151	438,671	32.9%	20.1%
TOTAL	8,479,714	8,537,780	8,570,491	8,670,029	2.2%	1.2%
ESTADO DE MÉXICO						
Metropolitan municipalities	1995	1998	2000	2010		
Acolman	53,861	58,330	60,900	67,827	25.9%	11.4%
Atenco	27,658	30,101 3	1,501	35,294	27.6%	2251.4%

Atizapán de Zaragoza	422,318	467,735	498,109	680,776	61.2%	36.7%
Coacalco de Berriozábal	201,504	229,199	247,683	363,695	80.5%	46.8%
Cuautitlán	56,917	61,030	63,407	69,515	22.1%	9.6%
Cuautitlán Izcalli	411,259	467,614	504,022	706,193	71.7%	40.1%
Chalco	172,241	200,114	217,885	312,790	81.6%	43.6%
Chicoloapan	70,050	81,386	88,613	127,211	81.6%	43.6%
Chimalhuacán	401,282	495,843	561,032	1,038,596	158.8%	85.1%
Ecatepec	1,441,741	1,574,696	1,660,496	2,094,836	45.3%	26.2%
Huixquilucan	165,935	186,120	198,542	253,660	52.9%	27.8%
Ixtapaluca	184,183	213,988	232,991	334,477	81.6%	#VALUE!
Jaltenco	25,753	30,014	32,667	45,428	76.4%	39.1%
Melchor Ocampo	33,034	33,034	33,034	33,034	0.0%	0.0%
Naucalpan de Juárez	840,502	840,571	843,213	843,213	0.3%	0.0%
Nextlalpan	14,848	16,569	17,583	21,166	42.6%	20.4%
Nezahualcóyotl	1,244,025	1,166,256	1,153,975	1,153,975	-7.2%	0.0%
Nicolás Romero	233,626	262,872	280,723	357,284	52.9%	27.3%
La Paz	175,328	203,700	221,789	318,396	81.6%	43.6%
Tecámac	146,334	164,017	175,031	226,591	54.8%	29.5%
Teoloyucan	53,800	59,401	62,718	74,453	38.4%	18.7%
Tepotzotlan	53,673	59,679	63,364	79,224	47.6%	25.0%
Texcoco	172,159	181,005	186,411	201,520	17.1%	8.1%
Tlalnepantla de Baz	715,950	701,711	695,777	630,537	-11.9%	-9.4%
Tultepec	74,351	87,114	95,174	136,488	83.6%	43.4%
Tultitlán	355,341	408,211	442,394	634,654	78.6%	43.5%
Valle de Chalco Solidaridad	281,691	327,275	356,338	511,551	81.6%	43.6%

Zumpango	90,701	98,736	103,348	116,030	27.9%	12.3%
TOTAL	8,120,065	8,709,505	9,133,772	11,479,569		
	TOTAL ZONA METROPOLITANA					
	PROJECTIONS					
	1995	1998	2000	2010		
	16,599,779	17,247,285	17,704,263	17,792,785		