

## “Huixquilucan the challenge of growth”

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### Abstract

Located west of Mexico City, Huixquilucan is one of the fastest growing municipalities. The area presents high contrasts, high income housing in an area with a complex topography where slopes have been invaded by informal settlements of low income population, generating a fragmented and non functional urban tissue. Insecurity that prevails in the Metropolitan Area also contributes in this breakup, promoting gated communities. Polarization and social stratification is visible. The area is potentially equipped to overcome poverty, and the urban complex situation including the recuperation of pedestrian streets, public spaces, improvement of informal settlements starting with basic infrastructure and actions such as betterment of the houses. The approach to recuperate this split condition is to address the population to act as key groups to restructure the area with a bottom-up process, with the support of the authorities in the normative process.

### Overview

The development of Mexico's city has been influenced by several factors that have determined its actual urban condition. Population growth, low land costs in the periphery, the continuous development of informal settlements in the outskirts due to the lack of housing policies and opportunities among others. Today the city has become a metropolis where the boundaries between states and municipalities have disappeared, becoming a whole. The State of Mexico has been the provider of land, work and opportunity for many people- developing in a very fast pace during the last two decades presenting a negative outcome in its urban development strategy.

Huixquilucan is one of the Municipalities of the State of Mexico, a significant example, it's privileged location west of the metropolitan area has attracted formal and informal housing saturating its territory emphasizing the polarization that exists in the city. This municipality is going through a construction boom where high income housing is being developed making stratification more evident.

### Background

To fully understand the actual conditions of the Municipality of Huixquilucan a deeper analysis is needed; its location and topographic characteristics are determinant factors contributing significantly to its social and urban polarization.

### Location

The municipality of Huixquilucan is located strategically in the limits of Mexico City and four municipalities of the State of Mexico. Its geographic location has contributed to its growth for two main reasons:

- In its eastern fraction it has continuity with consolidated residential areas Lomas de Chapultepec, Bosque de las Lomas, Tecamachalco, La Herradura, Bosques de la Herradura to mention some, generating a high income land sector along the Municipality;

- In its northern and southern fractions it limits with areas containing low income housing and informal settlements forming low quality zones poorly developed contributing to the deterioration of ecological protected areas.

## **Land**

- The topography is very abrupt throughout the territory, presenting challenging conditions for its development. Formed by a series of ravines, river streams, mountains with steep slopes which demand a complicated and costly urbanization: the composition of its roads is basically longitudinal due to the narrow valleys, the introduction of infrastructure is expensive and most of the time the residential zone is the only one that can afford the related costs. The lack of an efficient infrastructure in the popular areas has increased pollution of rivers and valleys since the swage is canalized by the population not being aware of the impact to the environment. Construction therefore is complicated in the popular zone, due to the irregular conditions in which it was established.
- Huixquilucan has an extension of approximately 14,000 acres were 23.23% is urban area, 2.07% is adequate for urbanization, 6.46% is adequate but not programmed for urbanization and 68.24% is an ecological preservation area called Parque Otomi-Mexica.
- The urban area is composed of 22 residential fractions, 9 urban developments, 3 Golf fields and 20 popular areas.

## **Development**

Huixquilucan has a prime location due to its nearness to the corporative zone of Santa Fe this has promoted the construction of residential housing. During the last decade the number of residential apartment buildings built in the area of Interlomas, which is the nucleus of activity, has increased. High rise buildings are a common prototype in the area. This consequently has emphasized the differences between social sectors which are visible around the municipality. (consequences, type of growth formal and informal.)

## **Informal Housing** (segregation, urge for improvement)

There are 63 informal settlements distributed along the municipality. 33 of these are included in the Urban Development Plan of the municipality, covering a total surface area of 173.35 acres with 2023 sites (lots) in risk zones steep slopes and underground cavities. 2925 sites are in safe areas. The inclusion of informal settlements in the Urban Development Plan is considered according to its development conditions. Since 30 of them haven't acquired the conditions of a settlement they are not being considered. These have an area of 25.89 acres with 608 sites.

The increasing number of residential settlements during the past years has contributed to the segregation of these popular areas. Developers seek the betterment of their context, which pressures authorities to take action with programs that will improve the actual conditions of these areas.

## **Polarization** - how these two very different social groups will converge

CONAPO (Consejo Nacional de Población) statistics show an increasing growth rate for the next 10 years (2000-2010) were extreme poverty will continue to grow even though development is turning Huixquilucan into a residential area. Most of the houses in the area belong to low income population whose income ranks between 0-5 minimum wages. Statistics show that the homes built in the period of 1995-2000, 47% lack water services, and 32% electricity, as a result of the high costs of introducing infrastructure we mentioned previously.

There has been a poor urban planning, were the omission of pedestrian amenities and inaccessible or insufficient public transportation obstruct the use of important services which only wealthy residents can reach. The use of automobile is a priority in the area and in order to reach public transportation workers have to walk long distances to the peripheral streets have access.

The lack of primary and secondary roads is an issue that needs to be solved. The continuous growth of the area has increased the number of cars provoking serious traffic problems. As we already mentioned, the sinuous topography of the area makes road infrastructure very difficult to fulfill.

## **Proposal /Conclusion**

To overcome segregation the incorporation of informal settlements to the urban tissue is imperative to create urban continuity and discourage segregation.

Since our organization is not able to be the leader of the project, we are giving a series of recommendations in relation to group participation. The priority is social work and community participation in order to achieve the goals that will reduce segregation. This can be achieved by integrating low income groups and promoting the support of builders and developers with the coordination of the authorities. (As of January 15<sup>th</sup> we will have the opportunity to be influential with the municipal authorities).

The idea of overcoming the existing boundaries between formal and informal areas of Mexico City's Metropolitan Area is a utopia. Violence and insecurity resulting from drugdealing and crime organization has contributed to reinforce these boundaries, walls that protect the rich class and consequently increase marginality within the poor population, that are responsible of providing the rich with all types of services for their comfortable way of life like cleaning, cooks, chauffeurs, nannies, gardeners or electro domestic repairs. The mixing pot can be conceived in the creation of public spaces, parks, plazas and sports activities.

The area is potentially equipped to overcome poverty through incentives that include the recuperation of pedestrian safe communication and public spaces; the improvement of informal settlements should include access to basic infrastructure, water, sewage and electricity; this sloped structures allow actions to integer their fifth facades as open spaces and the betterment of the houses and facades.

The approach to recuperate this split condition is to address the population to act as key groups in the restructuring and betterment of the area with a bottom-up process, and search the support of the municipality in the normative process.

Neighbor associations are actively participating with municipal authorities in decisions that concern their communities' issues of needed infrastructure, equipment and renovations. However these associations are also segregated by sectors: high and low income. Group integration is necessary in order to achieve the concept of the area as a whole.

The support of all the institutions and authorities as well as civil organizations, developers, constructors is fundamental to conceive an integral plan that establishes a priority process with the available assets that may be obtained through different sources including institution like Habitat or the World Bank that constantly support these type of actions.

An evident problem that requires urgent awareness concerns the deficient urban structures that work throughout the municipality. According to the Urban Development Plan the lack of public spaces and service equipment prevails, mainly recreational areas such as parks, plazas, social and sports centers and libraries. Authorities must emphasize in the creation of public spaces and an efficient urban structure. All these areas will contribute potentially in the task of integrating both sectors- formal and informal in a single urban tissue. Other equipment requirements include schools and social medical units. The integration of service areas such as supermarkets, malls, restaurants also promotes the interaction of these two gaps.

Recent information of the Urban Development Department states that 134 new buildings containing 1453 apartments have been authorized to be completed in the next two years. During 2005, 1797 apartments were authorized and are now in the process of construction. Investment will continue in the municipality, almost no provision for social or assisted housing has been adopted and the number of

informal settlements has not changed for the last two years nevertheless the regularization process or the integration of informal communities to the formal urban tissue is very slow. Authorities accept there is no continuity in the projects; therefore a new administration means a new program which can not be achieved in a three year period.

High rise buildings are developed to attend middle and high income population. This is a result of raising land costs in the area, due to its location and the complex topography that requires foundation systems and costly excavations. High rise buildings for high income population include all services integrating gardens, social areas, gymnasiums, swimming pools, spas and recreation centers for children and teenagers; they become a shelter to the dwellers.

The challenge includes the adoption of a long term plan to be followed by the coming administrations; a plan that includes legal support at a local and state level and the participation of the whole community.

Regarding Urban infrastructure, the development and integration of an efficient public transportation system is urgent with the approval of the neighbors and authorities in order to allow their access to the main roads for general use. There is also a lack of main roads, causing serious traffic problems in peak hours, therefore we strongly recommend the analysis of new alternatives that help to the fluidity of traffic and to decongest the area.

## Bibliography

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Contrast



Informal Commerce



Informal Settlement

