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Evaluation of public policies for the use and preservation of the cultural heritage of the city of Atlixco, Puebla

Evaluación de políticas públicas para el aprovechamiento y subsistencia del patrimonio cultural de la ciudad de Atlixco, Puebla

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ABSTRACT

The use of built cultural heritage as an economic resource generates inequalities among local communities due to its appropriation and forms of access. That is why the analysis of this aspect requires a unique methodological approach. Based on the displacement of local residents to the periphery and the reconfiguration of urban-architectural space, both in the imagination and territorially, a methodology is proposed that includes an approach from the micro territory of housing (everyday space) to the macro territory (public space), with a focus on local development and the current configuration of the city. This involves considering a quantitative aspect based on censuses and other statistical sources that analyze growth, demands, and land dynamics, as well as a qualitative approach with descriptive data from the user's spatial experience and observable behaviors. This analysis ultimately leads to the development and design of useful indicators for evaluating existing public policies on tourism and their impact on the preservation of contemporary built and urban heritage. As well as on the quality of life of its inhabitants, thereby promoting a territory of equity and good planning that involves community participation to respond to their needs through an objective and symbolic perspective.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage; Housing; Public Policies.

RESUMEN

El uso del patrimonio cultural edificado como recurso económico genera desigualdades entre las comunidades locales por su apropiación y formas de acceso. Es por ello que el análisis de este aspecto requiere de una aproximación metodológica singular, por lo cual a partir del desplazamiento de residentes locales a la periferia y de la reconfiguración del espacio urbano-arquitectónico, tanto en el imaginario como territorialmente, se propone una metodología que incluya un abordaje desde el micro territorio de la vivienda (espacio cotidiano) hacia el macro territorio (espacio público), con un enfoque al desarrollo local y a la configuración actual de la ciudad, lo que implica considerar una parte de aspecto cuantitativo sustentado por censos y otras fuentes estadísticas que analicen el crecimiento, las demandas y dinámicas del suelo, así como un enfoque cualitativo con datos descriptivos desde la experiencia espacial del usuario y conductas observables. Análisis que finalmente, recae en la elaboración y diseño de indicadores de utilidad para evaluar las políticas públicas existentes en materia turística y su impacto sobre la salvaguarda del patrimonio edificado y urbano contemporáneos. Tal como en la calidad de vida de sus habitantes; promoviendo con ello un territorio de equidad y buena planificación que involucre la participación de la comunidad para responder a sus necesidades a través de una

perspectiva objetivada y simbólica.

Palabras clave: Patrimonio Cultural; Vivienda; Políticas Públicas.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses one of the current problems facing many of our Mexican cities due to the management of tourism, with the main function of attracting visitors to a specific area, to the detriment of the buildings, landscapes, and imagery created for their consumption. This view goes beyond identifying the aspects of consumption that make a city tourist friendly in the eyes of visitors; rather, it is a vision of the ways in which a city's cultural heritage is used as an economic resource for tourist entertainment, creating inequalities among the local community owing to its appropriation and forms of access, limited by a distinction applied by public policies on tourism and the economy in an egalitarian manner without considering the context of each of these cities, leading to the homogenization of actions on the heritage that converge in their territory.

This study is part of a research project initially aimed at addressing the issue of the abandonment of heritage housing in the center of the city of Atlixco. However, in addressing this issue, this research led us to identify points where the tools used through the implementation of public policies had implications for the current problem.

The research was therefore directed toward conducting a study that would generate indicators to evaluate, with data, the effectiveness of the implementation of these actions, which were proposed through programs or plans within the city and which undoubtedly not only contributed to attracting tourists in a positive sense but also demerited other local spaces and properties, ignoring local originality and the population.

For this reason, this work has been developed in four sections, the first of which addresses the issue of governance in accordance with the development of public policies and those processes that have to do with the social order, all within this context to address the involvement of the various actors in the way of governing and creating proposals that respond to the needs of society. The second section addresses the issue of policies with interference in the social sciences and, in turn, the political sciences, using tools from both disciplines to form a formal language between society and government, their way of acting, and how policies and their instruments are created.

The following section analyzes the role of tourism in terms of the pros and cons it generates in a place on the basis of the actions that are implemented to attract visitors to an area on the basis of its resources.

Finally, the context of the study area is addressed, describing its characteristics and qualities to highlight some changes and reconfigurations resulting from various actions promoted under a program that has to do with the implementation of a public policy focused at the national level and which, in the final analysis, is homogenizing the originality that towns or cities considered "magical towns" should have. This analyzes one of the problems in the city that has to do with housing.

Governance and public policies

With respect to the central idea developed, this paper addresses the analysis of public policies that directly impact a state of territorial balance where different scenarios and actors converge, whose purpose is to be able to act without privileging some over others, that is, to provide the same opportunities for all who inhabit the territory. Henceforth, the focus is on how the government carries out certain processes, which are directly related to a new social order preceded by changes from globalization and the dynamics of life in society. Soon thereafter, actors outside the government began to notice and demand solutions to issues that were previously only concerned with the government.

This led to the consideration that the study of such processes not only starts from politics itself and its forms of implementation but also from what lies behind them, how decisions are made, and what factors intervene in resolutions as part of the design of collective action in society.

Considering these aspects, we start from an approach based on the analysis of our form of government and its scope, involving the opinions of the government and society in its development. This does not mean that the issue of policies is left aside but rather that it is integrated into an overall vision from the state of governance that is implemented locally.

This leads us to understand the relationships and differences between general concepts such as governability and governance, and which of them applies to the implementation of policies, since both concepts arise from the attention given to the effects of governing in today's societies, owing in part to their development and the various behaviors that this has brought about within them. Therefore, both issues are key in politics and public management, and for this reason, we often use them as if they were the same, but in reality, they have significant differences. Understanding them now will help us clarify the topic at hand.

Governance

Initially, governance and its emergence were linked to causes such as those mentioned by Jean Leca in González (2012):

- The crisis of the Keynesian model of the interventionist state.
- Effects of globalization.
- The crisis of the nation-state.
- Crosscutting and territorial social imbalances.
- Social, ethnic, and religious pluralism.
- The crisis of philosophical and political values.

Thus, governance is considered to be a set of factors and conditions that determine a state's ability to exercise its power effectively by responding with decisions to social demands related to public, economic, and social life. In other words, in this way, a government guarantees order and stability, generating trust and legitimacy through quality public services to meet the needs and expectations of citizens.

This type of governance simply evaluates the ability of a political system to implement effective public policies, lead society, respond to its conflicts, and promote citizen participation and accountability mechanisms so that society can control and supervise government action. Promoting participation directly involves human rights, with transparency and integrity in public management.

Camou in Mayorga, F. & Córdova, E. (2007) highlighted the multidimensionality and relational nature of governance; proposed a balance between the level of social demands and the capacity of the political system to respond legitimately and effectively; and analyzed the levels of governance among leaders in terms of political culture, rules and institutions, the state, and public policies.

All of the above implies a new vision, orientation, and way of acting for governments, generated from the causes mentioned as a turning point toward the current form of government and its ability to govern.

Good governance

In the case of governance, we can point to an emergence after the crisis of the 1970s when the state retreated, privatization and liberal reforms emerged, which would result in the loss of governments' ability to lead society. After that, states and governments faced a process of globalization in which the public sector was privatized and international institutions had a greater presence (González, 2012).

In response to this inability, governance emerged in the 1990s, a process that involved actors from society in defining social direction and its capacity for leadership, creating an order in which social direction is provided by society itself. This creates a space in which decision-making arises from the exchange of knowledge, resources, ideas, and norms, with the joint participation of society to solve its collective problems in an efficient and transparent manner, where multiple interests and perspectives are considered.

Governance works through processes of territorial decentralization of political power, distributing power among different levels of government by applying cooperativism in decision-making and the implementation of programs and policies, making it clear that the state is not the only or main actor in development. As a new order of application at various levels, from local to international, it is capable of covering different areas, such as politics, the environment, and the social order. Provided that there is participation and exchange of ideas by various actors in decision-making and the implementation of programs and policies, such governance will exist.

When it was proposed to analyze public policies, decision-making regarding people's quality of life, their needs, and human rights, which are necessary to guarantee a full life, was inherently questioned. This means that when we talk about governance now, we make direct reference to rights on a par with the development objectives of a society. By this, I mean an important part of what makes governance "good governance," emphasizing the processes by which issues in a society are regulated and decided, accompanied by a normative and evaluative dimension of the form of government.

In this sense, good governance must unquestionably cover issues such as effective participation, respect for human rights, transparent processes and institutions, information and education, equity, responsibility, tolerance, and many other attitudes and values that promote collective solidarity through participation. In addition to these characteristics, good governance is evaluated directly by the political or institutional results implemented to achieve the objectives set out in the development of a community. Furthermore, it takes into account the degree to which its promise of respect for human rights has been achieved, whether civil, cultural, economic, political, or social, as these are mutually reinforcing.

Good governance makes it possible to protect and respect human rights while responding to the needs of the population.

Correspondence between governability and governance

Both concepts complement each other in such a way that governability is a condition for promoting democratic governance and, in turn, these forms of democratic governance promote the strengthening of governability. This relationship arises in the face of present and future scenarios facing societies, which leads to diverse processes of governability and governance.

The construction of democratic governance and government from the local to the global level necessarily requires a recovery of awareness and confidence in politics, and although this often seems distant and complicated, it is necessary if we want to change our expectations of quality of life and stability.

While they complement each other, they also have a marked difference, as while governance focuses on the results and effectiveness of the government in processing demands, governance focuses on collaboration among actors, which is a broader approach that therefore includes governance as one of its actors.

Social construction of public policies

The starting point for studying this issue is to understand the concept of public policy and its direct influence on social, economic, political, and cultural development within a society, as well as the role it plays within that society as an instrument of regulation in the face of a problem. This concept has led me to begin the analysis from a field that falls within the social sciences as part of the study of human phenomena that guides their knowledge, produced in research, to the well-being of human relations and, therefore, to solving their problems. This allows us to address the issue of policies in the field of political science, thus managing to articulate both disciplines around the same topic, which is concerned with human well-being at the social level.

In the absence of relevant methodological tools within the social sciences, political science complements its analysis, addressing the detection of problems and possible solutions through what Laswell (1992), cited by Valenti & Flores (2009), would call policy knowledge related to the policy-making process and the incorporation of a scientific method to increase rationality in the construction, examination, selection, and development of policies.

It is at this point that it becomes essential to analyze the initial wording proposed by the compound sentence consisting of “politics” and “public,” understanding the former as actions designed to achieve certain objectives and the latter as inherent to the social sphere, which involves decision-making on the basis of the articulation of ideas or practices expressed by the different groups that make up that society. By articulating both meanings, it can be deduced that public policy activity is focused on responding to a situation or problem that has arisen in society and, as such, involves the participation of the state as a determining agent in decision-making.

In this sense, the scientific knowledge applied to public policy falls on the decision-making process itself when resolving a public problem and involves a thorough analysis of the context to achieve the necessary coherence between the problem and the proposed solution. Therefore, the contribution of a discipline such as political science is not to provide an understanding of

how policies are made.

In this approach to intellectuals in the field, our first reference is Vargas (2007), who distinguishes it as the set of objectives, decisions, and actions carried out by a government to solve problems that, at a given moment, citizens and the government itself consider priorities when detecting the existence of an issue that deserves attention to be resolved or at least given an alternative for transformation or modification.

However, although a community problem or need is certainly detected, the inhabitants or political-administrative actors do not always agree on the identification of the pressing priorities on which a program or public policy has an impact. In other words, it seems to me that the focus falls directly on interests of various kinds rather than on problems that directly concern social groups.

This is why I consider it necessary to determine from what point of view these policies are constructed. Do they truly originate from and for society, from the state, or from different political positions? Or are there even mixed approaches, where policies are oriented toward society according to its needs and, in turn, the state participates in this initiative? It will be valuable to identify and analyze this in the present discourse, which analyzes the case study.

However, beyond these frequent considerations in this context, it is necessary to thoroughly understand how the concept of public policy has been treated and what its function is in the field in which it will be studied. In this sense, political scientist Graglia (2012), cited in Wilson, 2018, complements the above definition by saying that public policies refer to those projects and activities that a state designs and manages through a government and public administration with the purpose of satisfying the needs of a society. This seems to clearly convey the idea that it involves decision-making at the level of an entity endowed with power, which is mainly political, but it leaves aside the role of participation by society itself or other actors interested in the implementation of these projects as a response to their problems.

To this end, I complement Graglia's definition with those who consider that at the state level, public policy is used as a set of actions or omissions that manifest a certain form of state intervention in relation to a situation that attracts the attention or interest of other actors belonging to civil society (O, Oszlak, and G, O'Donnell, 1981). This allows us, so to speak, to highlight what could already be called a flaw in public policy, when it has been stated that it leaves aside the participation of society, merely stating that the actions carried out by public policy remain within a specific governance process that decides and acts within it but that continues to resist the incorporation of citizen contributions (Aguilar, 2019).

Throughout this conceptualization, as in most of those cited, there is a marked dialog between government and society primarily, where power relations permeate this connection and where the former acts as the executor of the actions promoted by a policy and, consequently, society is the one that requests the solution to a problem, which leads to the implementation of actions to counteract that problem. Policies, then, in this correspondence, become comprehensive tools for action, as they encompass various aspects of society: political, economic, social, and cultural. At a given moment, they are aimed at improving situations that benefit the community in general and that, as a rule, reflect its aspirations and ideals, expressing the common good (Torres Melo, J., & Santander, J., 2013).

While it is true that policies focus on solving problems that require attention in society, which is their main function since the discipline emerged as such, it is also true that they have maintained a particularist neoliberal discourse of analysis and design and, as already mentioned, remain reluctant to involve citizens. Similarly, it appears static in that it does not consciously address the complexity of current problems and the continuous dynamism that should be debated in order to address them. Reference can even be made to its attachment to national and international policies that only establish similar models for reproducing content and structures that do not always fit the diversity of problems present in a territory.

Tourism versus political activity

The purpose of this section is to describe tourism as a mechanism for regulating economic, political, and social aspects that converge in a space, whose manifestations mainly reconfigure the field of culture, as a marketing of experiences for tourist consumption is established through products or services that are sold beyond what they actually are and are priced according to the value they represent. To this end, it explains how tourism becomes a pattern of consumption on the basis of its positioning as a social practice, state policy, and market policy implemented to attract capital.

From this point of view, tourism has become a unifying element for development as an economic catalyst. On the other hand, there is a discrepancy regarding its relationship with the preexisting local practices of a city and their current disappearance, which gives rise to the culture of tourism. This activity is accompanied by a system of representations and practices that are disconnected from their original context and mediated by interests unrelated to it, causing these representations and practices to become disconnected from their local history and processes, fragmented, discriminated against, and selected by each other until they become tourist-oriented merchandise.

This, in turn, forces people to accept the types of staging and folklorization imposed on them as part of the reproduction of their heritage and culture, viewed from a showcase created for the enjoyment of visitors. All of this forces us to ask how this process impacts social relations, practices, daily life, and the experience of culture by the local population, making it necessary to recognize the identity and meaning present in the community against the unnecessary correspondence that exists with the purposes of a public policy that promotes cultural tourism.

Touristification and gentrification versus cultural heritage

In this context, both concepts contribute to the role of culture as a promoter of actions for the construction of these processes. In the case of the first term, it makes use of the available cultural heritage as a product to be commercialized, extracting its economic benefit over the traditional aspect inherited from the past generations that has allowed for its historical and symbolic value today.

In contrast to what many do, it is necessary to distinguish that this heritage should serve as a mark to achieve better living conditions, enriching and qualifying it for future generations. However, it is important to note that the real responsibility in this case lies with state authorities and tourism industries, whose sole purpose is to profit from cultural heritage and the people of a territory to satisfy their monetary goals through the damage and lack of ethics they employ. Therefore, as the first point of reference in this situation, the general population must contribute a sense of belonging to their culture that is shared by these entities, thus transcending society's relationship with the conservation of its cultural assets and influencing their regulation and

safeguarding in an appropriate manner.

Otherwise, these actions, which stem from what we recognize as touristification, are transformed into so-called gentrification. Since the cultural aspect is considered capital, dynamics are created around spaces of renovation with cultural aims from which economic profit can be made, which in turn generates direct and indirect consumption of the services and products offered in the cultural sphere. In addition, agents interested in art and culture can appropriate space in various ways, with a view to transforming it to beautify it and include a social class capable of supporting the economic mechanisms that allude to a status of rich cultural capital (Checa Artasu, 2011).

All of the above contributes to a transformation of the space where cultural production and consumption emerge, which gradually breaks with the original commercial fabric, replacing businesses with others derived from the new cultural industry, converting former convents into galleries or art galleries, homes into bars, or estates into factories of new consumption, to name a few. In addition, we find that, despite this increase in consumption, there is also a sector that is being left behind, neglecting other spaces and even making them invisible owing to the enormous production load of some spaces compared with others.

Even if we think about the real estate sector, we can see the presence of confrontations between cultural agents and real estate initiatives, mainly due to the commercial shift offered by both, taking away cultural spaces from some and commercial spaces from others, thereby creating a mixture of triggers for gentrification between public, private, collective, and owner powers. All of these factors translate into changes in land use costs, the renovations of spaces and services, the expulsion of the original population by those who can afford the new lifestyle, and the abandonment of areas and properties in the city that are not integrated into the center.

It is important to preserve and respect cultural expressions in these processes of change so that traditional knowledge is not lost because of poorly planned or conditioned tourist activity. This can only be achieved by respecting and considering the local population when establishing a tourist activity that involves them and prioritizes their needs over those of visitors, thereby reaping the benefits of such activity while preserving the cultural expressions and identities that define them.

Case study

The city of Atlixco is located in the Mexican Republic in the state of Puebla, as part of Region V, which was once part of the Puebla-Tlaxcala territory, with a population of 141,793 inhabitants and an area of 293,01 square kilometers, according to the latest 2020 census by INEGI (National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information). It accounts for 0,85 % of the state, ranking 51st among the other municipalities.

The name Atlixco means “Atl = water, Ixtla = plain or valley (from Ixtli = face or surface), and Co = above or on top, so its name means “water on the surface of the valley” (Reyes, 2014, p. 23). In ancient times, approximately 1100, the territory was occupied by the Chichimecas, a Mesoamerican culture that came from northern China. They settled in the valley and created the town of Quauhquechollan, which means “the eagle that flees,” as these settlers were nomads and did not stay long in the places they visited. However, upon finding fertile land, abundant water, and an optimal climate, they decided to settle in the Atlixco region. Over time, there were wars over land against the neighboring settlers established in Huejotzingo and

Calpan (Díaz, 1987). Thus, the combined power of the two towns managed to disperse the new settlement of the Chichimecas, and around the year 1400, some settlers from Quauhquechollan, who managed to survive, asked the authorities of Huejotzingo for permission to settle in the valley. They agreed, on the condition that they reported to them, and this is how Acapetlahuacan came into being: a place where they had cane mats (Díaz, 1987).

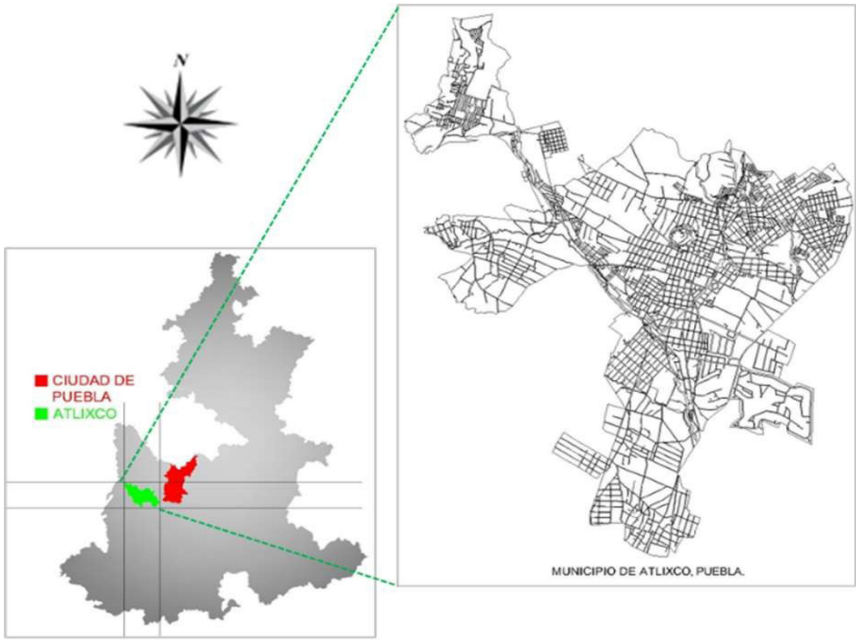

Figure 9.1. Macrolocation of the study area
Source: Prepared by the author on the basis of INEGI data, 2022.

Owing to other texts consulted, we know that during the colonial period, the power of the population was based on agricultural activities, as it was the first place in New Spain where Spaniards engaged in agriculture enriched by the production of European crops and products. As a result, flour was produced and sent to Puebla and Mexico City, as well as internationally to Spain and the Philippines, and approximately 1567, sites were granted for mills. In 1775, there was great activity in the wheat trade, "which gave it fame as the granary of New Spain" (Cordoba, D.A. and Mauleón, R.G., 2007).

In 1574, owing to the pride of Alonso Díaz de Carrión and its inhabitants in the exceptional climate, great views of the landscape, fertile fields, and traditional atmosphere, they requested the title of Villa from the Viceroy, which was granted, naming it "Villa de Carrión," with a royal decree issued in Barcelona authorizing the villa and the construction of the church on September 29, 1579 (Díaz, 1987). With this, it separated from the city of Puebla, and a few years later, its wealth would be reflected in the construction of temples and convents, hospitals, and schools that would beautify the city as we know it today.

During the following century, i.e., the 17th century, the town's foundation was consolidated, reaping the fruits of wheat cultivation and boasting the largest number of wheat mills in the country. At the same time, the main civil and ecclesiastical institutions of New Spain were

established, with stately homes and religious temples that were examples of the Puebla Baroque style. The following century saw an economic crisis, which was not as severe as that in Puebla, but there was progress with the inauguration of the Royal Gunpowder Monopoly Factory, which took advantage of the volcanic area, the growth of agricultural exploitation of haciendas, and the expansion of sheep farming (Córdoba, D.A. and Mauleón, R.G., 2007).

After the period of independence, there were upheavals in the life of the region, as civil strife led to vandalism, insecurity, and a decline in agriculture. However, with the triumph of the war, the colonial economic logic continued, and the acquisition and leasing of haciendas and ranches increased. After the services of the "Regimiento de Leales de Atlixco" (regiment of Loyalists of Atlixco) in the independence struggle, the town was granted city status on February 14, 1843. A few years later, it rendered services again during the American invasion of 1847 and the French invasion of 1862, earning the title of heroic, issued by the Congress of the State of Puebla on November 28, 1998.

At the end of the 19th century, the city became one of the most important industrial centers, home to major factories such as the last textile hub of the Porfirian era at the national level (Cordoba, D.A. and Mauleón, R.G., 2007). As mentioned above, the importance of the local climate conditions had such an influence that the abundance of water initially allowed wheat mills to be installed on estates, which would serve to establish the most important factories in the region.

Owing to foreign investment, Atlixco added five factories to the two existing factories, integrating the manufacturing sector with La Concepción, La Carolina, El Volcán, and El Carmen with hydraulic mechanisms and later electric power; El León, by the Lions brothers; San Agustín; and Metepec. The latter would expand beyond the local Puebla-Atlixco market in the 20th century and would have to build surrounding villages to house their workers. Thus, the haciendas would be absorbed by the factories and later forgotten and disappear.

By the end of the 20th century, with most of its factories in disuse, and at the beginning of the 21st century, the landscape had changed, with modern buildings using new materials such as concrete and, in other cases, existing buildings being converted into museums, hotels, and shops in general. Convents and temples were converted into offices, and the streets and squares lost their original appearance.

Notably, as Atlixco is an example of a Spanish city, it was laid out around a main square in the center of the city, with space allocated in this area for public spaces, royal houses, public figures, churches, and portals, at which point the four main streets converged at right angles, streets that would guide the expansion of the city through the division of regular blocks and orientation to the four cardinal points, taking advantage of the region's sunshine and winds (Obregón, 1981).

Nor was it overlooked that it was a city laid out on flat land uninhabited by indigenous people, with plenty of pastures and trees, abundant good water, and nearby indigenous villages to preach to and engage in agricultural activities in the region. The city's first government building was erected on the same side where the parish church was built, as seen in Made's plan. Today, it is located and modified at Portal Morelos No. 7, known as the "Casa de la Audiencia" (House of the Audience).

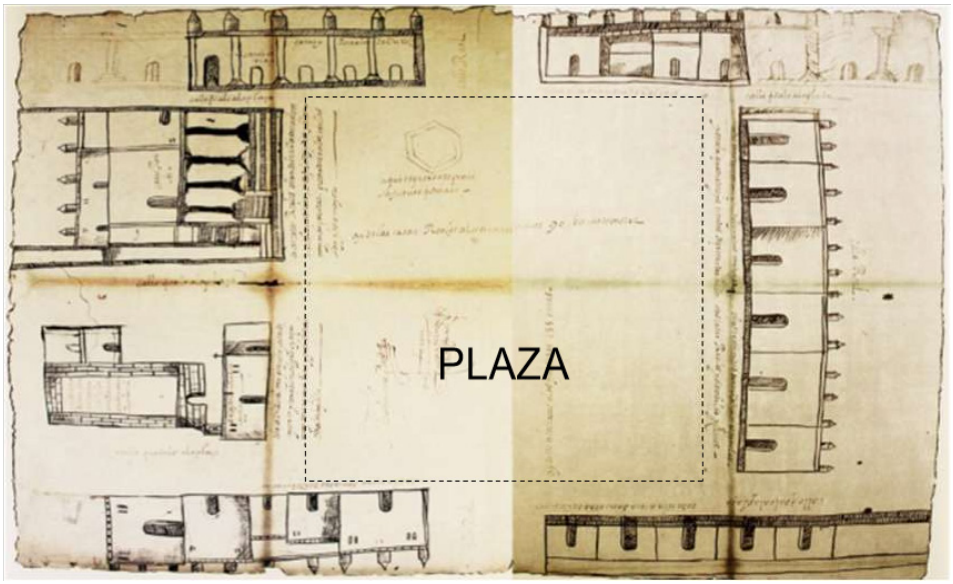

Figure 9.2. Map of the Plaza de la Villa de Carrión (Made de Angulo, 1988)

Such conditions allowed, and continue to allow, the growth of the city and its surroundings to maintain an order and hierarchy in accordance with the productive and commercial activities that have been adopted in the city, aspects that impact the way of life in the city and relate its daily and social aspects to the buildings and space they inhabit. This urban diversity in the territory has been achieved through a long and continuous historical process in which the city has developed a characteristic geographical conformation and architectural morphology (Licona, 2007).

This conformation has now managed to bring together urban and architectural features in a harmonious set of landscapes and views that allow inhabitants to carry out cultural events in spaces steeped throughout history, which various social groups ensure are not lost. Rather, in the face of this and the new generations, who lack knowledge, they try to exalt the symbolic forms that give meaning to the space they appropriate.

Shaping of its heritage

The formation of this territory arose from the needs of two established groups: on the one hand, the indigenous people, Acapetlahuacan, convent in the upper part, with streets that avoid the protuberances of the ground; on the other hand, the Spanish, Villa de Carrión, in the lower, flat part of the terrain. This gave rise to intense construction activity, especially during the colonial period, in which religious orders and congregations that had arrived in the territory participated.

Thus, we have the first hermitage conceived as the first material testimony of devotion dedicated to Saint Felix the Pope, who would be chosen as the protector of crops. It was first built approximately 1580, and by 1614, it had become a formal chapel. Later, the congregations that arrived had the idea of spreading the Catholic religion and therefore establishing provinces. This is how the first Franciscan missionaries arrived in Acapetlahuacan in the mid-16th century, building the Franciscan convent, which was the first Spanish building in the valley. Its custodian, Fray Toribio de Motolinía, gave the region the name “Val de Cristo” (Valley of Christ) because he considered it a paradise due to its attributes.

This Franciscan order was also responsible for building a chapel of the Third Order on the slopes of the same convent, a work that was followed by the emergence of the chapel of San Miguel as a hermitage, a space consecrated to the devotion of the archangel Saint Michael at the hill of the same name during the 16th century. By the mid-18th century, it had become the chapel we know today, belonging to the regular clergy.

The Carmelite friars began as hermits and settled in the city as the second regular order approximately 1589, leaving their mark on the convent and temple that we still see today. Later, the Augustinian order founded its convent in 1590, followed by the Mercedarians, who founded a convent in 1612, making use of an area with dilapidated houses that was allocated to them (Cordoba, D.A. and Mauleón, R.G., 2007). On the other hand, the hospitaller order of the Juaninos was established due to the social and economic importance of the region, which is caring for travelers and the native population during epidemics; however, the dates of their arrival and settlement are unknown. In contrast, it is known that in 1731, they were granted the city hospital, which would later be moved to its current location, where they built their convent, completing it in the mid-18th century.

The last to arrive in the region was the female order of the Franciscans, named the Poor Ladies or Poor Clares, who founded a temple and monastery in 1618, completing their work in 1634. Specifically, we consider the main parish church, which is dedicated to the Nativity of Our Lady (Divina Infantita), as the site where it has been intended for this purpose since the city's initial layout. Its consolidation took place between 1606 and 1650, but it is one of the buildings that underwent several stages of construction, culminating in the 19th century with the eight side chapels, evidence of the social stages that have left their mark on its construction.

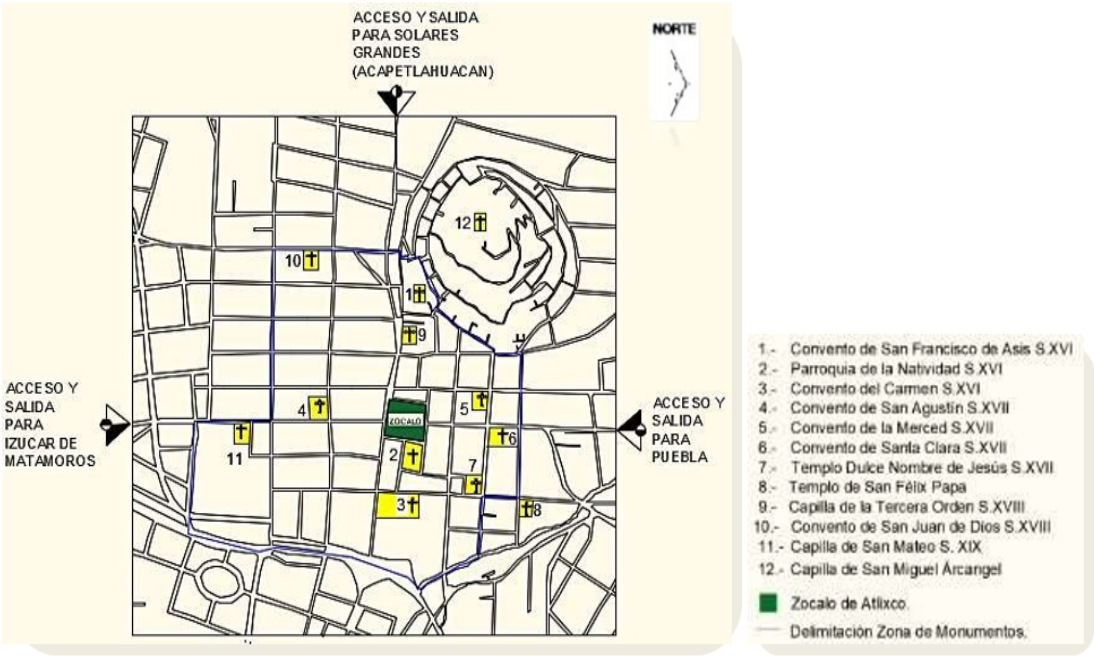

Figure 9.3. Religious heritage in the city center
Source: Prepared by the author based on field data, 2024.

Over time, the relationships between the different orders that arrived would contribute to mutual benefit, within which they would have to adapt to new construction models to create spaces suitable for the life and duties of the community. Similarly, the friars were responsible for acting as architects and builders, even without training, but with the ability to direct the indigenous workforce (Cordoba, D.A. and Mauleón, R.G., 2007).

In civil terms, the buildings are diverse and varied, as there are examples from the 16th century, most of which have been lost, to the 20th century, which show symbolic elements of each period and, at the same time, differ from the elements that were added or modified at various stages of construction. However, we can observe that the material that remained constant over time, at least between the 16th and 19th centuries, was adobe combined with other materials, such as stone and brick, to strengthen the walls and slabs in the buildings. This characteristic is not observed even in areas surrounding the region under study.

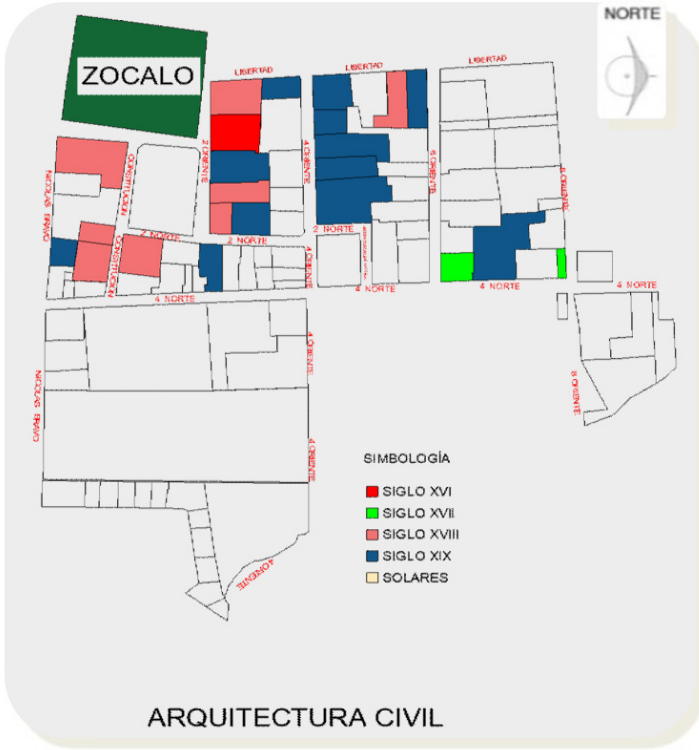

Figure 9.4. Civil Architecture

Civil constructions by century in a sector of the city of Atlixco (Own elaboration on field data, 2024)

The built heritage that has been preserved to this day, both religiously and civilly, is unique and unrepeatable. Despite having been conceived in different stages of development, it has maintained homogeneity in its construction, bearing witness to the construction systems, materials, design, and social, cultural, and economic conditions of each era that gave rise to them and that were transformed over time. The transformations were noticeable in the late 20th century, as the construction system and materials changed considerably with the use of concrete and steel, which meant that previous constructions were poorly altered by mixing

these materials with the original ones. As this has been combined with natural factors such as earthquakes, buildings do not function properly, and as a result, much of civil heritage has been irretrievably lost.

Currently, few actors are concerned with preserving these historically valuable buildings. In regard to political agents, the concern falls on religious buildings, but in regard to civil buildings, their conservation becomes more difficult. In response, part of the population remains committed to preserving not only their buildings but also their landscapes and customs, which, in addition to creating a harmonious whole, leads to an emphasis on recognizing their intangible heritage as a tool to support local knowledge and the economy.

Figure 9.5. Urban-architectural landscape of the city from Cerro de San Miguel
Source: Ruiz, 2017.

Identified gentrification processes

Over the years, changes have taken place in the urban structure and morphology of cities, impacting public and private actions and decision-making, as well as the ways in which the city is produced and consumed.

These changes have led to the emergence and consolidation of new centers beyond the traditional recognized center, increasing gated communities and housing developments on the outskirts, driven by financial strategies that seek to obtain capital in the real estate sector.

Sociospatial polarization and segregation are accentuated, with a city fragmented toward the periphery and a central space tending toward touristification and gentrification.

Over the last decade, the historic center of Atlixco and certain areas of the city have been recognized once again as centers of culture, history, architecture, and landscape, regaining importance through the decree declaring the city of Atlixco, Puebla, a historic monument zone (Decree, 1988). This has served as a tool for promoting the public sector focused on tourism, as well as for the reproduction of capital by real estate investors. This has not only changed the shape of the city but also generated speculation, latent gentrification, and changes in social and economic dynamics. It has also led to public projects and investments to cater to visitors, the privatization of spaces that were previously for common enjoyment, the transformation of commerce and services, and changes in the housing supply in the historic center. This has

benefited the increase in urban rents, causing the exclusion of locals from remaining in the area as low-income residents and small businesses to fail and ultimately bankrupt.

On the other hand, businesses such as hotels and restaurants have multiplied; large houses have been modified for services, being enlarged or subdivided for commerce or lodging. All of this has altered the identity of the local community and its traditional ways of life, leading to the expulsion of the population, which cannot afford the cost of living.

In addition, for decades, the city had already lost the legitimacy of its original commercial activities. Changes such as the shift from wheat-based agriculture to the current cultivation of flowers have not only sidelined its vocation but also led to the loss of knowledge about how to work with this resource; therefore, this specialty no longer exists in the locality. Moreover, the use of spaces in the city center has been altered, negatively impacting the quality of life of residents and users. In addition, and as a result of local economic conditions, historic buildings are deteriorating because of neglect and low or no maintenance.

Overall, it is worth analyzing how the city is being made visible and built in terms of public space and how the adoption of appropriately applied public policies could encourage citizen participation, land use planning, and the promotion of affordable housing, providing an opportunity to engage in transformation processes to ensure equitable development and the preservation of its identity.

Land use

Through the analysis of the survey of facilities and infrastructure, it is possible to consider that one of the implications in the area that has contributed to the abandonment of housing is the urban processes related to somewhat accelerated population growth, representing 60 % between 1970 and 2005 alone. This has had an impact on the increasing demand for housing and, therefore, on the interest in obtaining loans that allow citizens to access their own homes. This has triggered interest and social awareness among authorities to allow their inhabitants to have decent housing and to invest in support and financing programs that enable these conditions. This has been reflected since 2017, when real estate growth was marked by the construction of more than 5 000 social housing units, the convenience of construction companies, and problems due to a lack of public services. Therefore, with the creation and development of new urban areas, the population is attracted to modern and “well-equipped” areas. In addition to the aging of equipment and infrastructure, which impacts the deterioration of housing and the lack of maintenance in historic areas, residents are more easily dissuaded from living in new developments and units.

Heritage housing

This ancient valley has important sites and buildings that make up the cultural heritage of the region, from a pre-Hispanic past, with so-called “small and large estates” located in the vicinity, to colonial buildings located in the city. Its heritage also includes 19th-century buildings, houses, and agricultural estates, some of which have disappeared and others modified, such as La Blanca, San Lorenzo, and Santo Cristo, as well as large industrial projects such as El Carmen, La Concha, La Carolina, Los Volcanes, El León, and Metepec (Castellanos Arenas, 2012, p. 229).

We thus have examples that have developed in all four senses owing to the periods of development and growth that have shaped the city. However, there are also others that have been modified or disappeared due to various problems, such as a lack of maintenance,

abandonment, natural disasters, or radical changes in their architectural constitution, which has led to a decrease in the number of buildings throughout the city.

Social housing

This type of housing is a type of construction generated from the different needs of the population to access better conditions and even better status and is found only in homes located in high-end or well-located areas.

Notably, it has proliferated in suburbs for economic reasons, urban planning, and public policies that influence a city's development. There is awareness of the availability of low-cost land on the outskirts and therefore the possibility of large-scale construction with less regulation, making it more viable for developers to build. However, this situation also has negative consequences for the inhabitants who arrive in these areas because of the lack of access to or scarcity of basic services and greater distance from employment centers and opportunities.

Finally, the construction of social housing on the outskirts contributes to increased residential segregation, separating low-income groups from urban centers and the opportunities they have for growth.

On the other hand, this proliferation of housing on the outskirts also implies that there are policy reasons that contribute to the situation, one of which is that governments often offer subsidies and bonuses for its construction, which encourages developers to build where costs, as already mentioned, are lower. In addition, public policies tend to prioritize the construction of social housing over comprehensive urban planning, which contributes to uncontrolled expansion without a properly formulated order or plan.

To summarize all of the above, it is important to recognize that social housing in suburbs is a complex reality involving interrelated economic, urban planning, and public policy causes. While the construction of social housing in suburbs reduces costs, it also has negative consequences for their inhabitants. These consequences are so numerous that many claim that they often spend more than those who have decided to continue living in a house in the city center.

CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals that inequality exists within a city because of the way in which certain actions have been implemented. By exploiting its resources for tourism, other aspects have been neglected, including not only physical ones but also imaginary and intangible ones, leaving aside the interests and needs of local residents.

It is necessary to recognize that, through the study of the policies applied to the city, problems have been identified that originate from poor implementation or execution of public policy instruments, which not only have to do with those who formulate them but also with those who execute them and how they do so. At the same time, those who participate in their development must also be considered, since if we take this aspect into account in a relevant way, the needs of the population would be better addressed.

Evaluating these policies implies not only analyzing the problems but also the instruments implemented to solve them and assessing whether the actions are in line with their initial objectives.

Ultimately, policy development involves or should involve various actors to be effective, as well as continuous monitoring to help improve the effectiveness of the response and, above all, uniqueness to address the specific local issues of each locality.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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