



## GOVERNING THE MEGA CITY

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Is it possible to govern the Mexican mega-metropolis? The initial response is yes, since it is obvious that this occurs on a daily basis. However, this process involves 79 executive bodies in 3 areas of government; they legislate for 63 legislative zones and at least 80 territorial plans and programmes exist, for “planning”. It is clear that fragmented and sectorised action prevails, and it is proving enormously difficult to define and execute a long-term metropolitan vision. And yet it is working! But how is it working? Does it offer reasonable conditions for competitive economic development, in order to improve quality of life and security in a community, so that its organisation and environment are sustainable? The answer is no, because it is offering fewer positive conditions and the feeling is growing that basic problems are increasing disproportionately.

One in five Mexicans live in the metropolis, and in 2005, the population reached 19.5 million: 56% live in the 59 suburban districts of the State of Mexico (EM) the remaining 44% in the 16 neighbourhoods of the Federal District (FD). Although the annual rates of growth are falling (4.37% 1970-1980, and 0.9% 2000-2005) and the FD is not growing, the districts in the EM are demonstrating a process of extensive expansion rising to 1.6% (higher than the national average). However, in terms of super-cities (Central Region of Mexico or RCM), a circle of cities surrounds the Metropolitan Zone of the Valley of Mexico (ZMVM). These cities are growing at rates of around 1.9% per year and the RCM comprises a macro-regional space which has 26.1 million residents, 11 metropolitan zones, 6 Federal entities and 158 districts. Even in the most enclosed area of the ZMVM, and notwithstanding the huge number of activities shared by the two main jurisdictions that govern it (EM and FD), there is a lack of effective co-ordination dealing with the needs of the metropolis. Hence, legislation, planning and urban taxation (tax on property), barely have any common ground, since neither body considers the other in its own institutional, governing and public policy decisions.

This metropolis also presents serious environmental problems. Can it keep consuming 62 m<sup>3</sup> of water per second, drying out the Valley of Mexico and the river

basins that export water to the city, without a plan for collecting water and for water processing and reuse? Can it keep adding to the number of cars at the rate of 280,000 per year until rush hours lasts five or ten hours, without a metropolitan public transport project that deals with the 4.5 million plus cars already on the road? Is it possible to continue producing nearly 23,000 tons of waste per day, when the sites where it is dumped are almost at the end of their useful life?

Do the capacities of existing governments contain the power to resolve these mega-problems, as they have already assured the citizens they can? Once again, the answer is no. Many problems are irreversible, the limits have been reached. It is clear that a new paradigm is required, for raising questions not raised up until now, courses of action not attempted in the past. The citizens, some intuitively, others in a more structured fashion, are wondering what should be proposed in order to govern and run this metropolis? It would seem clear that it is only possible to take positive steps within a jointly responsible action by the government and democratic stakeholders. Which brings us to governance. This means firstly defining what “metropolitan” is and what it is not, in terms of the existing policies and services required for the functioning of the metropolis. It is also obvious that inter-governmental metropolitan coordination needs to be made compulsory (both between authorities as well as between sectors of government). To this end, it is clear that we need a greater political will than exists now. There are three alternatives: (1) to govern and run the metropolis as has been done until now, but with improvements – this in reality is happening; (2) to explore new forms of co-operation and community involvement through non-profit organisations, particularly municipal, since this aspect of government has been lacking in metropolitan co-ordination decisions; (3) the best option, but one that involves exchanges of funds, is to turn towards a metropolitan government, via assemblies or parliaments that legislate strictly on metropolitan matters, and via executive and citizen Metropolitan Councils that take decisions concerning public policies of metropolitan interest along with the authorities.

It would seem that the current multitude of public institutions and their reduced capacity to deal with the requirements of the metropolis have reached a historic limit and that we need to think about new structures, so that the stakeholders become jointly responsible with the state when it comes to decisions concerning the development of the metropolis. In order to do things differently and with better prospects of success, it is necessary to plan the metropolis from a long-term, integrated point of view perhaps with a Metropolitan Planning Institute. It would also be vital to “observe” the evolution of the phenomena, via, for example, a Metropolitan Supervisory Body. In order to expand the overall economic space of the ZMVM, it would be necessary to focus investment policies and promote economic development using models such as economic development corporations. It is clear that it is also necessary to have appropriate resources for metropolitan projects and to institutionalise the existing Metropolitan Fund. Mexico City would benefit from the creation of public/mixed companies that guarantee the public interest and involve private actors. These structures would raise investment in services of metropolitan interests, in order to meet, on an integrated basis, requirements in terms of water, transport, solid waste, etc. This is but a bare outline of the main themes that need to be tackled. All these problems have now gone beyond public action and require a new vision, structured within a strategy of urban reform for Mexico.

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