

Landscapes of Megacities in the South

The following material, adapted from Angotti (1995), provides some background information on the landscapes of modern megacities in the South. Angotti suggests that although there is a common perception that LDC cities are unmanageable and unplanned, there has been considerable planning by both government agencies and the private sectors:

- During the colonial times, cities were planned to benefit the wealthy and powerful colonists. A central plaza was built as the symbol of political and economic power. Representatives of the Crown, the Church, and civil authorities were located around its perimeter (Mexico City's *Zocalo* and Cathedral are great examples). Urbanization by other colonists near the plaza was regulated, but areas occupied by the indigenous masses were unaffected by any formal planning and were subsequently left on their own and often neglected.
- By the twentieth century, imitation of North American cities had the greatest impact on the appearance of cities. City planning and a capitalist approach to real estate development drove the changes in at least three ways: (1) the high cost of land in the CBD and renewal/modernization efforts helped create monumental business districts; (2) only the wealthy could afford residential enclaves near the CBD; and (3) the poor continued to live in neighborhoods with unplanned streets, and no potable water, sewage, etc.
- Thus *despite* planning, and perhaps even *because* of it, inequalities were reinforced. Cities planned in the image of the North often lack the resources and unique conditions of the North. As a result, cities have grown unevenly. As a result of "planning," for example, many poor slum dwellers face displacement from eviction campaigns led by land developers wanting to build luxury condos, offices, and stores for professionals. Entire neighborhoods are often uprooted, resulting in sprawling development as the displaced look for new homes.
- Following the lead of North America, many Latin American cities destroyed their trolley lines to make more room for cars, trucks, and buses. This has created congestion and long commutes for dwellers in the periphery. As cars are embraced as a symbol of progress and modernity, LDC cities see the effects of automobile-based sprawl.
- As reliance on cars increases, air pollution caused by emissions from cars also rises. Mexico City is notorious for its air pollution; its levels of carbon monoxide far exceed those in New York City or Los Angeles. Furthermore "according to environmentalists, every child born in Santiago de Chile breathes the equivalent of seven cigarettes daily, and one out of every four children suffers from some form of bronchitis" (Galeano 1995, 26).
- Finally, private investment is often attracted to Latin American cities by incentives such as low taxes and relaxed (or non-existent) environmental standards, but the environment often suffers as the soils, rivers, and air in these cities are contaminated by industrial pollution.