



## INTA42 WORLD URBAN CONGRESS

### *Plenary 2 : Urban development in the context of medium-sized cities: international perspectives*

*Maria Duarte, 20 September 2018*

Understanding the dynamic of Ecuadorian cities requires a brief look at the global setting, and the socio economical reality of Latin America.

South América, just before being discovered, was a continent populated by indigenous people who worshiped the sun but had constructive knowledge so advanced they could raise pyramids with massive tongue and groove blocks, without mortar, so precisely assembled that walls appeared to be smooth, I am referring to Machu Pichu. A territory, who's possibility for potential development will forever remain a mystery, as it was interrupted by the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. A predatory and violent colonization that marked the origin of the first cities and the relations between its inhabitants.

Ecuador is a small country of two hundred and eighty tree thousand square meters, where all the climate strata come together, as if by magic; from warm coastlines, through sub-tropical rain forest, to rainy, to tempered, to mountain cold, to paramo, and finally to perpetual snow. The origin of its cities was defined by the climate preferences of colonizers. The first cities were developed in the valleys of the Andes, nested between big volcanoes. An unprecedented cultural miscegenation occurred, where a central square, like in Spain, surrounded by the town hall, the church and the most important commerce of the time, marked the central axis of new cities, with the peculiarity that the church, in its interior, was covered in the Incas' gold.

Hence, inequality marked the origin of cities in Latin America, and defined them for ever. To this day, it is still the most inequitable region of the world.

The least favoured cities by the Spanish, were inevitably left behind. They could not continue their natural development, nor could they partake of the mandatory miscegenation. In Ecuador, later migrations of Spanish and Italian merchants outlined the vocation of the coastal regions. Preferred for their closeness to the sea, the warm and rainy cities, not initially chosen by colonizers, later in time were developed around the same administrative demarcation inherited from Spain, like an unknown root that had to be preserved, but was not assimilated nor developed for growth.

With this background, Latin American countries generated somewhat developed capital cities, with well-defined investments and economical interests and little support or concern for outlying populations.

In Ecuador, it is the case that important oil deposits are available, whose crude exports represent a steady liquid income, that because the law destined the surplus to municipalities, it produced an administrative automatization that aimed to access those funds, making every population aspire to become a municipality, and with the irresponsible support of the politicians of turn, it drove the country to have, currently, 221 small, and some times miniature municipalities or “cities”.

The cities in Ecuador, considered to be big, because of their extension and population are Quito (three hundred and fifty two square kilometers, and two point seven million people) which is the Capital, and Guayaquil (three hundred and fifty five square kilometers, and three point eleven million people). These two cities, one with the great artistic, cultural, and religious heritage of colonization, today the Capital; and the other one, commercial, recursive, autonomous, in a permanent state of ebullition. Around the, the small neighboring municipalities copy the logic of their interactions, operations and growth, marking two clearly defined climate and socio-economical regions.

On this point, it is important to mention that, without solid foundations, from ancestral experience in organization and functionality, the growth of cities can be dangerously erratic, more so, if it is guided exclusively by the basic need to be located near production centers; as is the case of Guayaquil.

To differentiate the method of growth of the two biggest cities in Ecuador, it is necessary to know how they are established:

**Quito**, in the middle of two mountains, in the Guayllabamba basin, in Spanish “hoya”, meaning an orographic depression. Its terrain, allowed a lengthwise growth, and to spread in width only so far up the hillside; leaving the surrounding valleys for agriculture and cattle raising. Having been the political and cultural center of Ecuador during the Colony, guaranteed since the beginning of its life as a republic, the condition of cosmopolitan, international, administrative seat, touristic attraction, etc. Its authorities were also characterized by an elevated level of knowledge, which was reflected in the education of its people, the proper territorial organization, and the existence of a robust middle class, related to the Ministries and political seats. The ideal of a well of local was a town house, and a country house in the valleys for rest. There, in the valleys, next to the farmers. While expansion of the city caused spatial segregation to the north and south, it kept wide green areas, spaces for common enjoyment, and mandatory common use passages. The poncho wearing indigenous people, walked side by side with the big landowners, the heirs and heiresses, and the politicians. The other rural areas have been populated by luxury homes, areas where big and modern shopping malls meet the smaller neighborhood stores managed by the native locals. The culture of Quito’s inhabitants helps them understand that there is no spatial superiority; while homes may be more comfortable, incomes higher and consumer goods more accessible, the enjoyment of the city’s common spaces is equal.

**Guayaquil**, on the other hand, is at the end of a delta, and a navigable channel that connects it to the Pacific Ocean. A Port by nature, crossed by a wide river and smaller

sea ways. The city extended from its economical center, next to the river, with its central square, church and town hall, eccentrically. The influence that fed it through the years was economical and commercial. The big port in the city was the way in and out of products. If exporting cocoa beans was a prosperous business, then landowners of neighboring towns became rich; if exporting shrimp, aquaculturists exploited the natural delta to establish shrimp farms and make fortunes. It was as if the city had the master key to prosperity. Its uncontrolled expansion was due to this illusion. National Governments in Ecuador, benefited landowners with their agricultural policies, intensifying even more the inequality of the country, provoking migrations to the “big city”. With authorities less interested in the common Good than their political ascent, Guayaquil extended to the nearby hills, next to the highways, with no planning, no outline, no sanitary services, no roads, no green areas, and worst of all, to the unstoppable beat of land traffickers. Today, governing Guayaquil is extremely complex. The peripheric areas with no basic services, are breeding ground for crime and marginality. The Guayaquil of old, at the Edge of the river, was abandoned, leaving the beautiful river front buildings, and the buildings at the city centre for storage, warehouses, banking institutions, etc.; the saddest part, their facades have been covered. The wealthier suburbs, also at the edge of highways, became the hub for hundreds of gated communities and satellite cities, walled up to be protected from the other part of the city that suffers the worst of sentences: spatial segregation, and the resulting urban poverty. Currently, Guayaquil struggles with a great connectivity problem between its economic centre and satellite cities that were created at its edge, and even outside of its limits, in neighbouring municipalities. All these situations turned Guayaquil into a complicated model of a divided city, in which the daily goal is to avoid any intersection or mixing between rich and poor, once again, exacerbating inequality.

I can conclude that, the size of a city is basic when it comes to planning for its future growth. That, as a city expands, its original vices put it in a strait jacket for its future ordering, for example:

- Informal settlements on irregular terrains
- Lack of density, unnecessary extension of urban limits
- Erratic and complex road tracing, that hinders mass transport services

That, in cases like this, trying to convert a cornered city in a place for “good living” and enjoyment, of coexistence and common rights, turns into an almost artisanal labour.

During the 10 years of President Rafael Correa Delgado, I can say that we achieved a significant advancement when it comes to the development of cities, small, medium and large. The strategy was to work in various points at once:

**SPECIAL ATTENTION TO RURAL AREAS.- objective: to control the migration from country to city.**

- The elimination of barriers for kids to enter school (free education, breakfast, books and uniforms) mainly in the countryside

- Free healthcare and universal access, special attention in rural areas
- Significant upgrades in roads of first and second order, connectivity between production and consumer centres

**GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY TO LESSEN THE REGIONAL INEQUALITY. - Objective: to stop the migration from country to city**

- Creation of a system of subsidies with emphasis on reducing, in Spanish NBI or UNMET BASIC NEEDS, through credit institutions for local governments
- Incentives and sanctions involving resources from oil to municipalities, related to the reduction of UNMET BASIC NEEDS

**POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DESCONCENTRATION OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.- Objective: Better distribution of central state services within the national territory**

- Looking to remedy the ancestral imbalance, a decentralized system to manage resources was designed. Deconcentrating even the physical location of administrative institutions of central government.
- Creation of an supranational institution and superintendence of transit. National legislation for transit control. Focalization of resources to support mass transit, subway system, tram, etc.

**LEGISLATION: Objective: to control irrational growth of settlements.**

- Creation of a superintendence of territorial organization, whose objective is to design legislation in support of growing local governments
- Hardening of sentences for promoters of informal settlements and land traffickers

**CREDITS FOR ACCES TO SOCIAL HOUSING**

- One of the most dramatic barriers for the poorer part of the population to dignified housing has been the restrictions of bank loans. The solution was beneficial in two aspects: On one side, after a national referendum, it was deemed mandatory for patrons to affiliate workers to social security, which incremented contributions exponentially. And on the other side, with these resources, the “Affiliates Bank” was created, which has granted hundreds of thousands of employees making minimum wage, access to housing loans, based on their own contributions.

Sharing similar experiences, proposals and results obtained in forums like these, is an excellent way of confronting necessary transformations.

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Ecuador