

Chapter 19

The City and the Abandonment of Public Space. Between Neoliberal and Citizen Urbanism



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*...a basic distinction: one thing is the built environment and another is how people live in it.
...the way people want to live should be expressed in the way cities are built...
Sennett, R. (2019)*

Abstract This text reflects on the city and the influence of urban neoliberalism in the destruction of historical and cultural elements causing social damage. The focus is related to public space because it is the active scene of citizen expression, where the social-cultural, environmental and political effects of this model of development converge. In this context, the crisis of the city imagined as a social and symbolic space where links can be created between different people, forms of urban articulation and creative solutions to conflicts over citizen rights, is emphasized. In the debate on this crisis, which is visible in public space, the concept of “urbicide” is useful, because alludes to the deprivation, ruin, or abandonment of ideas and of social and spatial foundations that make the city a reference for urban identity and cultural heritage accessible to the different social groups that they use and live. It is interesting to reflect: in what sense do we speak of urbicide? How do we understand and distinguish that condition? In an actual city, what is left of what is common for the reconstruction of the public?

Keywords Public space · Town planning · Neoliberalism

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19.1 Urbicide. Destruction and Reinvention of the Real and Imaginary City

... experience in a city...is full of contradictions..

Sennett, R. (2019).

The ideal city seems to be dying in the face of the destruction of elements that have made it possible to desire and experience it as a reference for identity, as a place shared between different people, where plural forms of citizenship are constructed. Although the word “city” has not had a single meaning before or now, it has been conceived as “a living heritage with its own identity defined by the social and urban fabric, it is par excellence the place where shared values are learned,” so “inhabiting the city is both an imaginary act and a political act” (Barré 1999: 382). Nowadays, the idea of a city open to cultural diversity, to political plurality, to spatial justice, to the care of people, nature, common goods, historical and environmental heritage, is in tension with the real city. This real city is experiencing the fragmentation of public space, the degradation of nature, the privatization of collective resources, the deepening of inequalities, and the displacement of people and social groups in disadvantaged conditions and poverty toward the peripheries.

Historically, cities have suffered damage for different reasons, ranging from aggressive actions for the appropriation and control of space and social resources, because of traffic on borders and boundaries, through forms of urban development that alter the social fabric; to war and political-cultural conflicts, socio-environmental disasters such as earthquakes and tremors, health crises such as epidemics and pandemics, attacks and forms of violence, which can cause the death of hundreds, thousands, and even millions of people. These urban realities that destroy hopes fracture identities and solidarity based on places that disappear with the inhabitants that gave them meaning; they produce suffering that accompanies diasporic migrations and violate human rights. Cities in ruins and the ruins of cities are testimony to public dramas that cause the loss of references of belonging, while these scenarios open up the possibilities of physical and symbolic reconstruction of the place, the collective, the memory, and the historical and cultural heritage.

Historical crises in cities have had heterogeneous, contradictory, creative, and destructive effects on communities, people, cultures, social, and environmental resources that leave visible and hidden traces on the built environment and on nature, in the places we use and inhabit. Faced with the social, material, and environmental effects that jeopardize the survival of civilization, cities try to reconstruct themselves with the impetus of different social and urban actors, resist oblivion, revalue the traces of memory embedded in devastated landscapes that underlie fragments and coexist with the built city and inhabited on the vestiges of the pre-existing one. The ruins of cities, with the voices and words of those who inhabit them in very different social contexts, tell us about ideas, dreams, desires and social relations of power and lack of power, of strategies of government, of forms of domination and colonization, as well as of human misery. They set up testimonies of what happened and bring us closer to

understanding how it happened. The cases of Berlin (1939–1945), London (1940–1941), Stalingrad (1942–1943), Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945), Saigon (1965), New York (2001), Damascus (2011), Beirut (2006) and Kiev (2022) among many others reveal how some cities that in the twentieth century faced attacks, bombings and military combat that have devastated an important part of their physical, social and environmental space, while breaking subjectivities and affecting generations of people. In Latin America, among others, the city of Santiago de Chile (1972), Guatemala (1954), Port-au-Prince (2010), Bogotá (1985).

Without diminishing the magnitude of the damage to these cities, it is interesting to reflect on the damage caused to the city and on the damage that the city causes to urban society and nature due to the logics of urban space production that subject and segregate social groups, fragment public spaces, exhaust and privatize common goods and environmental resources. These are processes of “creative destruction” (Harvey 2007) that threaten historical memory, weaken social ties and collective identities. In the critique of the form of predatory development that has driven the economic order of flexible capitalism in cities, regions and countries over the past three decades, Sassen (2015) states that they face an “... escalation of the destruction of the biosphere around the globe, the resurgence of extreme forms of poverty and brutalization where we thought that had been eliminated or were in the process of disappearing.” Faced with this situation, he explains that what happens in cities are forms of “expulsion from a living space... for those who are in the lowest part or in the poor center... -while-, for those who are above it apparently meant getting rid of the responsibilities of being a member of society through self-separation, the extreme concentration of the wealth available in a society and the total lack of inclination to redistribute that wealth” (Sassen 2015: 23–26).

In this line of thought, the concept of “urbicide” is useful for thinking about and understanding urban processes and phenomena that damage the city and erode social life in circumstances of neoliberal globalization. The word “urbicide” appeared in science fiction literature in the 1960s when it was used by the English writer Moorcock (1963) and was transferred to the social sciences and urban movements in the following two decades. It is used in the critical discourse and in denouncing the actions of urban restructuring plans and programs in districts of New York City that revealed the reasoned elimination of some identity traits and elements. Berman (1987) talks about the ruins of the city and the victims of destruction, of expulsion. Since the second half of the twentieth century, they have appeared as nameless crimes caused by what he names as urbicides that eliminate, disintegrate, devour and displace hundreds or thousands of people. When referring to the period of destruction and loss of homes in the Bronx in the seventies due to violent actions, this author points out that in order to understand what was happening, he began by discovering and unraveling the networks that link seemingly disconnected groups, but which are involved in the process that led to the expulsion of people and communities leaving defeated victims.

Recovering this discussion, Carrión (2014) explains that talking about urbicide does not refer to the death or end of cities, but rather to “violence against the city for urban reasons,” eliminating a particular city or elements that are inherent to it by military, economic, cultural or political interventions. From this approach, which considers that urbicide is substantially related to the urban economy, he proposes that cities are scenarios of social production of ruins, destruction and oblivion due to urban violence, climate change, the logic of urbanization and innovation that prioritize economic and market criteria. This situation, affirms this author, “leads to the erosion of institutionality and self-government (*polis*) through privatization or corruption, as well as the deterioration of the material base of a city (*urbs*), for the sake of a supposed urban development based on the logic of the neoliberal city” (Ibid. 2014: 127–128). The transformations inspired by this logic have had an impact on ways of life and on spatial divisions that show urban realities where new physical, social and cultural frontiers appear.

The notion of urbicide, from this perspective, alludes to the decline of the city understood as *urbis*, *civites* and *polis*. It is useful to understand what is happening in the urban experience of the twenty-first century and the way in which certain processes, phenomena and actions break the social fabric, damage cultural and natural heritage, violate aspirations of childhood and youth, and damage the living conditions of generations. In the context of the health crisis of recent years caused by COVID-19, which has disrupted social and urban life in the world, capital cities and metropolises capture the effects of illness and death in very different societies, dramatically evidencing the contradiction between the city imagined as a living space, that is open, diverse and inclusive, and the city lived through poverty, uncertainty, risk, violence and fear.

The experience of loss caused by the pandemic is intertwined with the crisis of institutional, employment, environmental, economic and habitability legitimacy, with forms of violence and crime that sow fear in daily life, with war conflicts and migratory exoduses, among others. These are manifested in contemporary cities, expanding into regions and communities that inhabit them, unfolding realities that seem to exhaust their attributes. This experience converges problematically in public space, where the ruins and shortcomings of the city are exhibited, as well as the fragmentation that distinguishes it as a common place for different members of urban society, as a space for politics, communication, encounter and participation in matters of general interest. For this reason, real public space allows us to think about what is absent and must be created in order to reconstruct the city, based on an inclusive and consistent idea of the urban environment as a living space.

19.2 The Neoliberal City and the Abandonment of the Public

The planners' obligation is to serve the community rather than impose an alien set of values...the rough edges between what has been lived and what has been built are not resolved by the simple display of ethical rectitude by the planner...it can provoke anger in some...

Sennett, R. (2019).

Although cities are explained in a relational way, as fulfilling strategic functions in social, regional, national and international processes, the globalization that occurred since the 1980s has imposed a neoliberal current of thought with a model of urban development and government converges that reduces the public spending, commodifies services and leads to the weakening of collective rights (Subirats and Martí-Costa 2014). In the capital cities of Latin America, these urban processes associated with interventions and disputes over social space have been taking place for almost half a century, as a result of capital investments in the built environment. These occur in circumstances of neoliberal globalization and the restructuring of capitalism, promoting a new economic order that has manifested itself since the eighties of the twentieth century and during the first decades of the twenty-first century, producing profound transformations in the urban landscape, in public space and in social life. One of the lines of action of these processes is the creation of urban real estate markets with headquarters in global cities (Sassen 2001). This trend intensifies in times of capital overaccumulation, which is driven toward productive uses through real estate and financial investment (Harvey 2015). Cities concentrate the social, spatial and environmental effects of these processes, perhaps unprecedented in the last century, which transform structure, form and functions through real estate investments in strategic locations, mechanisms for the privatization of public goods, as well as commercialization and financialization of the urban economy.

Large urban projects are one of the most visible expressions of these processes, which occur through direct capital interventions in the built space of cities for construction. These macro-interventions have an influence by emphasizing forms of segregation on a micro-geographical scale and moving local communities to peripheral places where the lack of infrastructure and services is greatest. Two emblematic cases showing the relationship between the State and civil society are emblematic. On the one hand, the case of Brasilia in 2014 due to the construction of the Mané Garrincha stadium, then considered the most expensive in the world, made with part of the budget for services such as health and education and which displaced hundreds of families. On the other hand, the case of the Mitikah project (2022) in Mexico City is emblematic of the implementation in a historic town of a megaproject that brings together a group of high-rise buildings at the cost of displacing original members of the community, causing property damage and weakening the social fabric.

In this line of reflection, talking about a neoliberal city alludes to these processes that name the problematic configuration of social space, resulting from profound changes in the very conception of the urban, expressed in the absence of a city project

that takes into account the different dimensions of social life, the ways of inhabiting, collective and nature rights. This reasoning acts in favor of capital through business and strategic urban planning, supported by government strategies as well as urban policies, instruments and actions that favor the domination of private over public in the production of social space. The latter also moves away from the democratic planning that permeates the social and urban fabric, and that coexist and overlaps with different, heterogeneous and subaltern ways of inhabiting, working, consuming, such as popular urbanization, housing cooperatives, alternative and supportive economies, such as bartering and other forms of non-monetary exchange of goods and services.

In the discussion of the category of neoliberal city, Hidalgo and Janoschka recover, on the one hand, the argument that it is the capitalist city in the current phase of accumulation, which makes it possible to recognize the changes that have occurred and the government that drives them.¹ On the other hand, they claim the idea that it is a city where business and speculation predominate, without a clear social counterweight that challenges the mercantilist approach to decision-making.² They state, in the discussion about urban neoliberalism, that it is a process “geographically variable and unequal, with multiple scales, and interconnected.” It is manifested through a diversity of selective urban policies, which are adjusted to socio-territorial and political urban contexts in different cities, for example, through property markets and urban land, which are key elements in speculative dynamics (Hidalgo and Janoschka 2014: 12–16).³

Following this discussion, talking about the neoliberal city is not limited only to enclaves where large financial, real estate, commercial and closed housing projects materialize in cutting-edge architecture, multifunctional high-rise buildings, with new technologies that favor the development of tertiary activities, and introduce significant changes in land use and in the urban landscape. It refers above all to the discordant social and symbolic relationship between these macro-urban projects with the local environment where they are implemented and with the entire inhabited space of the city, as well as to the urban policies, instruments and actions that make them possible by favoring the flow of large local and global capital invested in the environment and the private appropriation of collective resources. The socio-spatial consequences of neoliberal urbanism in public, domestic and private spaces are expressed in the privatization of collective resources—such as water and air, and in the social segregation evident in the displacement of social groups outside the places they inhabit and in the damage to nature. Faced with this situation, disputes over the city are growing, socio-environmental and political-cultural conflicts as forms of resistance by communities and social organizations in defense of collective rights.⁴

In Mexico City, this model promotes the centrality of the market and impacts the local and metropolitan dimension, producing new and greater spatial inequalities, enclaves of wealth and poverty, real and symbolic boundaries between strategic

¹ Ornelas (2000).

² Rodríguez and Rodríguez (2009: 7).

³ Along the lines of Brenner and Theodore (2002).

⁴ Ramírez (2021).

places for investment, separating places and social groups that have been left out of benefits of this form of urban development that weakens urban rights. Neoliberal urban planning is implemented with very different socio-territorial effects in the towns and municipalities that comprise it. These are expressed in the access of citizens to the system of social and urban resources; in the emergence of new gender inequalities that are added to those existing in the socio-economic structure; and in the growing tension between the aspirations and struggles of social organizations and the limitations to achieve better living conditions and of habitability in matters such as employment, housing, education, public space, health, care, security, territorial, social and environmental justice.

These problematic issues are manifested in public space as representations of profound urban inequalities and as demands for collective rights in a capital city such as Mexico, where 7.6% of the population is located in the highest strata, while more than half (58.8%) are social groups in different conditions of poverty. Between one strata and the other, there are 35% of the inhabitants, made up of middle classes (20.8%) and popular middle classes (14.3%) people who are not poor but who are on the verge of poverty (EVALÚA 2021).

The most visible representation of the neoliberal city in its hegemonic form is urban macro-projects. These are representations of power resulting from large investments of local and global real estate, financial and commercial capital in urban land, favoring the private appropriation of collective resources such as water and building space. These large enclaves show different types, scales and designs, both in terms of infrastructure and services and in terms of multifunctional corporate, housing, recreational and commercial complexes. They are implemented in urban space with peculiarities according to the context of the city where they are built defined by economic criteria and interests; they transform the form, structure and functions of the places where they are developed, deploying in urban space, the hegemony of private over public. The way of building and the risks involved were visible in the earthquake of September 2017, the urban policies that favored the real estate were developed with omissions and irregularities that did not comply with building regulations; the granting of permits and authorization of works in some housing buildings resulted in collapsed; thus the impact of this physical and social phenomenon, evinced forms of corruption that were far from being eradicated. Due to the earthquakes, around three hundred and twenty people lost their lives and one and a half million lost their homes, revealing the absence, until then, of an articulated institutional policy for local and regional reconstruction, all of which challenged the newly elected government in the capital city and at the federal level as of 2018. Currently, this reconstruction process in Mexico City has advanced by 57.5% in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of adequate housing for those who suffered total or partial loss.⁵

⁵ See the website for the reconstruction of the Commission for the Reconstruction of the Government of Mexico City.

19.3 Urban Macro-Projects and the Power of Private Over Public

Neoliberalism, as a doctrine assumed by institutions and the State, and developed as a political project of class domination, favors power elites as opposed to policies of social and economic redistributive and welfare resources because they would jeopardize the accumulation of capital. Anti-collectivism and the supremacy of the private sector are justified by the argument that the public sector is ineffective, prone to corruption, to particularist agreements and not very transparent, which is why a continuous process of privatization is promoted, supported by technical evidence of efficiency through structural reforms that point to a “new society, marked by a systematic prejudice against the public” distributing public goods as merchandise and not as rights (Escalante 2015: 199–202). This logic considers a strong State that favors the centrality of the market as an expression of freedom and as a key device for efficiently resolving economic obstacles by generating information on consumption and production, and on competition, prices and the use of resources (Ibid. 2015). The social effects of this development model that besieges common goods are expressed in the urban, economic, political and environmental crises that arise in the places where people live and that converge in the public spaces of the city.

In this context of neoliberal globalization involving changes in the relationship between the State, society and the economy, Mexico City has experienced an unprecedented real estate boom evident since the 1980s of the twentieth century. The shift that occurred then in the direction of urban planning and policies favored changes and actions toward privatization, market liberalization and deregulation.⁶ With this logic, the idea of a world capital, open to trade and consumption, prevailed and ranked Mexico City among global cities. The incorporation of new urban policies facilitated this boom whose representation on a large scale were urban megaprojects as powerful symbols of the development model imposed on the city, new social, urban and cultural realities that emphasize inequality and segregation. Explaining the meaning of these megaprojects, Negrete (2017: 108) points out that there are great works made and exhibited in the urban space that link capital and power, transforming the landscape with an impact on the “... social and environmental order, on the prevailing forms of life.” This impact on the one part is expressed in the subsequent emergence of a set of physical and social elements, including commercial, residential, educational, corporate, cultural, leisure and mobility features, which expand over time in connection with detonating buildings. The effectiveness of this cluster of buildings, which this author calls the “assembly of megaprojects,” is defined by the vocation of capital accumulation (Ibid. 2017: 111).

On the other hand, megaprojects result in the social production of self-segregated and segregated local environments, demaging to the environment, and fragmenting urban structure. The latter affects generations of inhabitants by imposing a model

⁶ See Pradilla (2018) and Carlos De Mattos (2007).

of segregation that corresponds to “fortified enclaves... privatized, closed and monitored for residence, consumption, recreation and work...” which, with the argument of fear of violence and crime, motivate the abandonment of everyday and popular public space, such as streets that are delegated to the use of the popular classes, the urban poor, the marginalized and those who have no place to live (Caldeira 2007: 257). These spaces draw physical, social and symbolic boundaries that separate residents and users from other different groups because of their class status, origin and economic stratum, which are expressed in cultural practices linked to forms of consumption, purchasing power, tastes and preferences, bodily and social behaviors that they are enrolled in different ways of life.

The spaces of neoliberalization are characterized by important institutional changes in urban policy, by original forms of inter-institutional coordination, by the creation of new institutions on a regional scale that promote intergovernmental ties and the commercialization of the city. These spaces range from the creation of business networks led by public–private agreements and partnerships, to original models of local economic development policy that promote collaboration between private companies (Hidalgo and Janoshcka 2014: 9). In these places, the social and cultural practices of citizens respond to the codes and living conditions of groups with high- and very high-income levels, to new forms of regulation, security and private control of public functions, users, users and consumers. This is the case—among others—of the most exclusive shopping centers, linked to local and global consumption, of closed residential subdivisions, or of high-rise buildings that mix luxury housing, office and retail spaces, sports, entertainment and health services spaces within the complex. In contrast, particularly city streets, in central and peripheral localities, are reduced, with notable exceptions, to places of pedestrian crossing, mass use, sales and unpaid work, insecurity, risk and fear of violence for groups and social classes that are predominantly middle class and urban poor. Motorized mobility, through the prevalence of private cars in dispute with public transport, predominates in urban structures and prevails in the urban experience of public space.

19.4 Public Space: Closure and Abandonment

The city is flawed because of its diversity, because of its inequalities, because of its tensions...

Sennett, R. (2019)

In Mexico City, the development of the Santa Fe urban and corporate macro-project sets the tone both for the development and reproduction of these walled environments and for the major transformations of the capital inspired by the dominant neoliberal ideas and policies at the turn of the twentieth century to the twenty-first century, as well as for notable change in the meaning of the public, which makes greater emphasis on the private meaning, as a place, as a political sphere and as a state sphere. This change is expressed in the fact that the public domain, as a common good, is degraded as a space for encounter, communication and relationship, open

and accessible to different people and social groups, and moves to closed, semi-public, selective places, guarded in person and through video surveillance systems. The Santa Fe project highlights multifunctional interventions that are designed with a mix of corporate, housing and service uses for upper-middle and high-income users, for economically prosperous social classes, with purchasing power and high purchasing and consumption capacity (Ramírez 2021).

Public space is transformed toward greater fragmentation based on a logic of that audiences and social groups segmented according to tastes, class, interests and purchasing power. In this line and following Caldeira, the street as a “space of public life has been annihilated and with this the possibility of the coexistence of diversity and difference, whereas the type of space that is created promotes not equality - as intended-, but only more explicit inequality” (Caldeira 2007: 376). The Santa Fe complex is representative of this logic that produces a particular form of urban enclave that is distinguished by rigid land uses, small areas for “mixed uses,” favoring dependence on cars (Moreno 2011).

It should be emphasized that in the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, the real estate market is more intensely attracting global investors who consider Mexico City a strategic location for capital investments in Latin America (Panreiter 2011). In Mexico City, large urban projects are not new, nor are private stocks, public-private agreements, and speculative real estate and financial investments in urban, semi-urban or rural land for more than a century. But the macro-urban projects that emerged in the last three decades name interventions of a monumental scale, promoted by considerable investments of global and regional financial capital in urban land, in places identified as strategic, where the initial real estate potential generates large and even excessive amounts of capital gains. The Santa Fe complex started in the second half of the 1980s (1987). It is the display of an assembly of mega-projects in ten residential neighborhoods, configuring an enclave of fortified sites developed in different stages, which continued until recent years with the opening of La Mexicana Park (2017), corporate projects and vertical housing units projected around this. It is an enclave of enclaves, surrounded by native peoples and by a group of neighboring popular colonies that emerged mainly during the second half of the twentieth century and with which there is no urban articulation or social integration.⁷ These localities are geographically close; while they are socially and economically distant from the macro-project, they are predominantly inhabited by popular classes and urban poor people. These traits underline the obvious and latent conflict making the project since its inception under a problematic urban development model that distinguishes the neoliberal city.

The real estate boom linked to financial and commercial investments, which began at the end of the twentieth century, particularly the implementation of macro-projects, continued in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, with the development of grand buildings in strategic locations in the capital, mostly in central municipalities. On the one hand, what is happening on Paseo de la Reforma Avenue stands

⁷ The towns surrounding the corporate complex are San Mateo Tlaltenango, San Bartolo Ameyalco and Santa Fe de los Altos.

out schematically, where the construction of the building called Torre Mayor (1999–2003) whose producers and users, as mentioned above, are neither Mexican nor do they have a clear or defined national identity, has resulted in a transnational consortium with control and coordination functions of operations in different countries on a cross-border scale (Parnreiter 2011: 17). This tower is the forerunner of the subsequent emergence of an ensemble of skyscrapers that currently compete for height and transform the urban landscape by deploying a coupled set of projects along the Reforma Avenue, which since the nineteenth century has been a leading public place in the capital, connecting the Historic Center with the Bosque de Chapultepec and currently extending to the roads that lead to the Santa Fe corporate complex.⁸

Among these, the Reforma Tower (2008–2016) stands out, with an unprecedented height of 246 m until 2021, deploying a monumental vertical complex with a multiplicity of corporate and service functions, chosen as the best skyscraper in the world two years after its opening.⁹ At the same time, the BBVA Tower (2008–2016) emerged, and almost during the same period, the Diana Tower (2013–2016); the Reforma Latino Tower (2012–2015); and the Chapultepec Uno Tower emerged as well (2014–2019). These include Fibra Uno (FUNO), the largest real estate investment trust in Latin America, founded in 2011. This expansion of buildings emerged in the same period with the participation of the real estate company Pulso Inmobiliario, the New York Life tower (2009–2012); the Mapfre tower (2011–2013); and the Impera Reforma tower (2016, still under construction). This process is aimed at mixing corporate functions with the creation of this Reforma-Centro Histórico corridor, one of the most exclusive residential spaces in the country that currently hosts the development of fourteen projects that are under construction.¹⁰

On the other hand, in the logic of urban neoliberalism, promoting competition for height and innovation based on author's architecture and design, and of private appropriation of the public and of the city's building space, conceived in 2008 the construction of the urban project represented by the Mitikah Tower, the tallest in a group of buildings outside the central nucleus but still in the space within the inner city.¹¹ Located in the old town of Xoco, with 267.3 m from the ground to the

⁸ Through Av. Reform-Lomas, Constituyentes and the Mexico-Toluca highway.

⁹ This complex, which includes a restaurant, a shopping center and entertainment areas, was managed by the construction company of the Capital Vertical Grupo Inmobiliario building, while "LBR y Arquitectos" was responsible for the planning. In 2018, it was chosen as the best skyscraper in the world by the International Highrise Award. It was included in the list of the "50 most influential skyscrapers in the world in the last 50 years" by the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat. See Infobae (2022) which are the three tallest buildings in Mexico City.

¹⁰ These works amount to an investment of 10 billion pesos and are being built on the stretch from Hidalgo Avenue to the Fuente de Petróleos, and their construction will result in an investment of 600 million pesos as a result of mitigation measures, which will be provided to a private trust whose main destination will be mobility projects and improvement of public space in Reforma and surrounding areas. See Zamarrón (2022). The new real estate boom in Reforma will provide 600 million pesos to Mexico City. Forbes Mexico.

¹¹ Located in the Benito Juárez area on the border with the Coyoacán area. The authorization included the construction of 1 million 28 thousand 71.96 m²; however, the volume almost doubled, despite insisting complaints from affected neighbors (Proceso Magazine: 2019).

sky and sixty-five levels, it is considered the tallest in Latin America and becomes the tallest building in the capital after the Reforma Tower. From the beginning, this project generated dissatisfaction among residents, who organized themselves by expressing their rejection of a construction that would cause mobility problems, water shortages and pollution. The lack of information from developers and authorities to the community emphasized the discomfort that increased when excavation work caused cracks in the seventeenth-century temple of San Sebastián and fractures in the walls of neighboring homes (Cruz 2012).¹²

The Mitikah case (2022) is emblematic of conflicts over urban and human rights that have not been resolved in a just and creative way. This is an ensemble of projects that incorporate nine buildings: six towers, the highest of 65 levels and which bears the name of the mega-project; three with 35 levels each; another with 23 levels and another with more than 10 levels. A shopping center of 5 levels, an 11-level hospital and the Bancomer Center are added, both with five floors each (Seduvi, 07/2019). The Mitikah Tower is representative of the building complex, consisting of six hundred and sixty-seven luxury apartments, mostly sold.¹³ The construction of the real estate complex, published as the largest in Latin America, was authorized in 2008, located on two buildings in the town of Xoco, in the Benito Juárez area in Mexico City. The authorization included the construction of 1 million 28 thousand 71.96 m²; however, it has been reported that the volume almost doubled, despite persistent complaints from affected neighbors. Urban developers did not face any obstacles from the capital or federal authorities (Proceso Magazine: 2019).

After fourteen years of construction, developed by FUNO, one of the largest real estate companies in México, and an estimated cost of 22 thousand and 500 million pesos, the first two phases have come to an end.¹⁴ With the opening of the huge shopping center, **with** 120 thousand meters of leasing area, five levels and 280 commercial spaces,¹⁵ this powerful enclave is exhibited, which breaks the local social and urban fabric, taking over the emblematic Real Mayorazgo street, hence, showing the lack of planning, spatial justice, environmental damage and urban ethics, resulting in environmental damage which stands before an aggrieved and segregated community.¹⁶ Mitikah in Mexico City is considered the most recent

¹² Listed as a historic monument by the National Institute of Anthropology and History.

¹³ There are 14 types of apartments with dimensions ranging from 68 to 314 m², with an approximate price of 70,000 pesos per m², meaning that the smallest apartment is worth approximately 4.7 million pesos, while the largest one costs between 22 and 28 million pesos. In addition, it has a profitable office area of 64 thousand 649 m², distributed in 25 commercial spaces; its main tenants are: Loreal, Sanofi, WeWork and Total Play. Within the complex, there are different amenities such as cinema, swimming pool, toy library, children's games, event room and guest rooms, games room, sauna, spa, steam room and a gym.

¹⁴ ¿Quién es dueño de Mitikah?, la polémica obra de la CDMX. La Silla Rota, 24/09/2022.

¹⁵ Mitikah, El cartel inmobiliario y los sismos, Alejandro de la Garza, Sin Embargo, 24 de septiembre, 2022.

¹⁶ The company Fibra Uno bought the construction from Ideurban and Prudential in 2015 for 185 million dollars. See Emilio Gómez, Mitikah: Neoliberal Emblem, The Mayan Day, opinion, September 24, 2022.

example of irregularities and arbitrariness, of temporary suspensions of the work, of resistance and neighborhood mobilizations, of complaints and conflicts with the community and with the organization of neighbors.¹⁷ This experience of symbolic and real violence caused by the power of the private over the public, despite the fact that the residents of the town of Xoco resisted to prevent the privatization of Real de Mayorazgo Street, as proposed in phase II of the Mitikah Tower real estate project, and they reported the felling of more than eighty species of trees on that street, which caused a fine imposed on the real estate company by the Ministry of the Environment of Mexico City (Contreras: 2021).¹⁸

Today, most of these high-rise multifunctional enclaves—housing, offices, entertainment, health, technology—and the fifty large shopping centers anchored by large department stores are located in the west, center and south of Mexico City. Taken together, these globally linked mega-works represent highly profitable urban interventions, which have diversified the type, design and housing, corporate and commercial offerings according to the consumer profile.¹⁹ In the expansion of real estate and financial capital investment in urban land, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the high concentration of business headquarters stands out on the one hand. By the end of 2021, they accounted for 58.6% of the top five hundred companies, equivalent to 293, and 64.6% of the commercial sales of these companies.²⁰ This, despite the fact that the configuration of this corporate geography shows a decrease of 10.9% compared to the number of companies existing in 2006, which, as explained by Panreiter (2011), shows the relationship between the division of office space, that of foreign-owned business headquarters and that of producer services.²¹ In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the enormous increase, especially in the west by the Santa Fe complex, but also in the south and even in the Historic Center-Reforma corridor, of “the supply of high-quality office properties is accompanied by a change in the spatial structure of the market,” forming a Central District of Business.

In this formation, it is notable that, during the second quarter of 2022, Mexico City reported a total of 7.4 million m² of class A and A + office space, which means an increase of 246% in a decade, from 3 million m² in 2008 to 7.4 million m² in 2022. The main office corridors in Mexico City are: Santa Fe with 1.4 million m², Polanco

¹⁷ The developer of the FIBRA UNO project is analyzing the second phase of construction of the project, so far they have land use authorization for the entire comprehensive project, but private licenses for this stage have not yet been granted. See Noguez (2022). After 14 years of construction, Mitikah Shopping Center will open at the end of the year. Forbes Mexico.

¹⁸ A fine of 40 million pesos was imposed, but the lack of clarity in payment persists until the time of writing this article. Residents fear that an attempt will be made to continue with the work of the overpass that would privatize the street and the fine could be resolved by creating mitigation works in the area.

¹⁹ The real estate boom in the period 2013–2018 is expressed in the support and authorization of 292 real estate projects, most of which are considered to have high impact, which represent housing developments, offices, centers and shopping malls, to a lesser extent hotels and hospitals (Cruz 2018). Most of it is concentrated in the municipalities of Álvaro Obregón, Miguel Hidalgo, Benito Juárez, Cuauhtémoc and Cuajimalpa.

²⁰ See Expansion (2022) “The Naked 500”.

²¹ Panreiter (2011), cites the existence of 329 companies in 2006.

with 1.3 million m², Insurgentes with 1.1 million m² and Reforma with 942,000 m². Currently, 26 new office buildings equivalent to 685,631 m² are under construction in the Insurgentes, Reforma and Polanco corridors, which will be the fastest growing: Insurgentes will concentrate 33% (226 thousand m²), Reforma 29% (198 thousand m²) and Polanco 18% (123 thousand m²). In these strategic and central corridors, the capital that flows through real estate and financial development drives a series of exclusive corporate, commercial and residential projects with a high impact on the urban environment in which they are implemented.

The predominant strategic urbanization, presented in a non-exhaustive way, was carried out on the basis of an innovative, bold and effective discourse, aimed at responding to the aspirations and ways of life of middle and upper classes and social groups in convergence with legal and institutional devices, in order to implement the centrality of the market, the privatization of collective resources, common goods and public services. Constitutional articles were amended, new laws and regulatory instruments were introduced, new policies and programs were designed that facilitated selective and differentiated, lucrative interventions and actions for local, regional and global financial, commercial and real estate investment. The idea of hegemonically consolidating the global city of services, by making it a place of consumption which positions it on a global scale, largely guides the development of these major urban interventions, the result of public–private agreements. In this process, the sprawl and contradiction of territorial planning regulations and programs, the discretionary use of code and the irregularities in procedures became the rule. This situation is expressed in the significant proportion of buildings that exceed the number of floors and height allowed by regulations.²²

Large physical and social formations tend to increasingly dominate the urban landscape, silently and visibly causing bodies to behave with reverence, respect and distance, acting as central mechanisms of “the symbolic of power and of the totally real effects of symbolic power” (Bourdieu 1999: 120–122). In this relationship between the body and the city, the street on a human scale is diminished not only as a computing element and an articulating element of pedestrian trajectories, but also as a public space for placemaking, with different people and social groups. In a city with metropolitan dimensions such as Mexico City, these conditions are intertwined on the one hand, distancing public space from its integrating and articulating attributes, reducing it to a place of passage and circulation, of contingency, risk and violence. On the other hand, making visible both the concentration of power and wealth in a minority and discriminating conditions of poverty in the majority. The resurgence of urban movements and citizen resistance voiced in public space transformed it into a communal place to the expression of conflict and advocate for urban rights.

The crisis of public space and domain is perhaps expressed above all in the fragmentation experienced by different people and social groups as a common place, as a political space, as a space for communication and for the construction of democratic forms of participation in the urban experience. Public spaces and green areas,

²² The highest proportion of violations of the law occurred in two central municipalities in the capital: Benito Juárez and Cuauhtémoc (PAOT 2017–2018).

indispensable in a city with a good quality of life and options for coexistence, are insufficient; they are mostly deteriorated and are also an expression of Mexico City's marked socio-territorial inequality. Improving and expanding these spaces, based on territorial justice, is a key priority, along with the protection of the valuable historical and cultural heritage that characterizes the city. The tensions and disputes, as well as social and gender inequality that converge in public space, reveal the political and urban contradictions of the city, the polarization between social groups and the fragmentation of public life. This situation, which is expressed with greater emphasis in localities on the outskirts of the capital, is contrary to the idea of the city as an urban, civic and political space, a common reference, open and accessible to the whole society.

19.5 Final Note, ¿Toward the Open City?

In the neoliberal city, and facing the abandonment of public space, we ask ourselves what is left of what is common for the reconstruction of the city? Under the current circumstances of privatization of the public realm and the weakening of the collective space, it is relevant to discuss what remains of "the common" and how to govern it, in order to articulate a firm, effective political proposal contrary to the current period of active dispossession typical of neoliberal capitalism, from the point of view of urban movements and not just of them.²³ Does the idea of the city remain as a form of sociability and as a possible space for the construction of utopian dreams of the social order? The profound transformation of urban society and of the living space of the city hinges on the daily experience of what flexible capitalism economic order means, supported by urban ideas, policies and actions promoted by different social, political and economic actors, local and global, that make possible its materialization in very different cities and societies.

By reflecting on the destructive effects of neoliberalization processes on people, on the social fabric, on urban life, on culture and on nature, it is possible to debate and understand more and in greater depth what is happening and how its taking place. Researching problematic realities not yet considered, finding and deciphering the hidden or inconspicuous networks of apparently unrelated actors that nonetheless are involved in processes that result in the expulsion of individuals and communities, leaving victims broken, would lead to greater social justice. This situation confronts society with the challenge of reconstructing the common space as a public good, creating forms of collective organization, social ties that open spaces of resistance and participation to influence decisions that affect and damage the living conditions of all people. On the other hand, this line of discussion raises the need for a paradigm shift in the policies that support urban interventions, as well as the recovery of the common references that exist and that can provide elements for planning and co-creating cities in a democratic way based on social and collaborative urban planning.

²³ Di Masso et al. (2017).

The city lived as a complex, heterogeneous and unequal social space is transformed through individual and collective actions driven by different and even conflicting ideas about urban life and life in common between different groups in society. These ideas influence government policies and actions, ways of living, organizational and participatory forms in matters of general interest that together shape public, domestic and private experience. Sociable relations between culturally diverse social groups and classes, with different needs and interests, even irreconcilable in specific space–time contexts define urban experience and introduce it to the inescapable debate about the city and public space, about realities we don't see, about violence in urban areas and violence against women and girls. It seems like a utopian dream to realize the demand for a socially and spatially just city based on a paradigm shift from neoliberal urban planning to citizen urbanism, which recognizes the social function of land, human rights, urban rights, nature, cultural diversity and different sexualities. The events of uricide experienced by twenty-first century cities lead to the demand for the right to the city and the rights of the city that converge in public space, and the scene of the battles that must be fought to rebuild a city with peace and justice.

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