

Modelling the dynamics of Latin American Cities: from polarisation to fragmentation

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The structure of Latin American cities has been seriously affected by spatial and social fragmentation processes taking place chiefly in the last two decades. Application of neoliberal economic policies and the absence of state intervention in urban planning processes led to the development of private and at the same time, excluding urban forms: The proliferation of suburban gated communities and subsequent appearance of shopping-centres, hypermarkets or urban entertainment centres in their vicinity. As a result, a new, car-based lifestyle flourished, involving a greater degree of fragmentation and spatial segregation observable in Latin American city regions.

From a theoretical point of view, this phenomenon is a new mode of spatial production which breaks with the polarized city expansion described in the traditional models of Latin American cities. This paper aims at covering three basic aspects, namely: First of all developing an analysis of recent theoretical and empirical discussion about Latin American city models in urban geography. Criticism leads to the development of a new model which will be introduced on a second place. Within a chronological frame from the 16th century up to now, four different stages ranging from the compact colonial city to the actual fragmented city-region are described in the model. Finally its applicability is shown via the empirical analysis of the central transformation processes in Buenos Aires; The massive sprawl of gated communities and subsequent transformation of lifestyles are evaluated through the case of Nordelta, the biggest current real estate development in Latin America: a private and enclosed city for 80.000 inhabitants.