

A Study on the Economic Development Shrinkage in Mexico

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Abstract

Within the historical processes, the dialectics between the rapid peripheral expansion enhanced by the translation of poor population and gradual of depopulation of central areas in large cities like Mexico and Guadalajara. The orientation and selectivity of this migration makes it a factor of spatial demographic and socioeconomic differentiation and creates socio-spatial and residential segregation.

This paper aims to study the process of economic development shrinkage in Mexico.

1. Introduction

Population is more concentrated in the states neighboring Mexico City, the states with important economic and industrial development: Estado de México, Distrito Federal, Veracruz, Jalisco y Puebla, These states account for 10.7% the national territory and have 41.2% of national population. In 1950, the population density was 13.1 inhabitants per square kilometer and 1995 was 46 inhabitants per square kilometer. In 1995 population density Mexico occupies the number 8 with 46.7 inhabitants per square kilometer. México is among the ten countries with higher population density (Banco Mundial, 1994). During 1940-1980, the birth rate grew achieving 3.4 percent. The last decades, Mexico has reduced its annual birth rate, expecting to achieve 1.19 percent by the year 2010 (INEGI, 2005).

To determine if the population of a city is growing or shrinking, should be calculated with data of natural growth rate of population and added or subtracted the net migration rate. Studies suggest that population redistribution is originated basically by the existence of positive and negative migration and not for the territorial differences of vegetative growth. Population displacements from México City to the suburban areas, was incremented from 9 percent between 1950-1960 to 22 percent in 1990-1995 (CONAPO, 1998). A large sector of the population which is unable both to afford rising prices in the center and to find housing in the rest of Mexico City, has been expelled to the neighboring State of Mexico, where commercial builders are developing massive subdivisions of low quality affordable housing. This migration influences the depopulation of the center of Mexico City (Tuirán, 2000; Sabatini, 1999; Jordán y Simioni, 1998; Gilbert, 1996; Paviani, 1985).

2. The evidence of the mining towns' shrinkage in México

Mining had a tremendous importance to Mexico's economy. The mining industry was an economic indicator during the colonial times in Mexico. Since the pre-hispanic times, mining has played an important role in political and economic history of Mexico. Spanish colonizers were attracted by the rich mines and with the discovery of new ones. The mining activity was the incentive for the foundation of new villages and towns far away from the large cities and with difficult access. Houses were built with adobes covered with tejamanil on the slopes of the mountains and between a dark and dense fog, without any order or sense of space according to the needs of the mines (Flores Clair, 1997). These new villages and towns were populated and had grown until reach the status of cities during the colonial times. Starting from the discovery of the first mine in the Nueva España in 1532 it followed a giddy exploitation of precious metals all over the territory. In 1546 in the Hill La Bufa, State of Zacatecas started the process of colonization centered in the indicator the location of gold and silver as the mineral resources to be exploited.

The precious metal oriented mentality of the Spanish conquerors was the main cause of population mobility in the exploration of new territories and the foundation of new towns and villages mainly in the highlands (Zacatecas, Chihuahua, San Luis Potosí, etc.) and lowlands (El Bajío, Guanajuato, etc.) around the mines of gold and silver. In 1564 the mines of Guanajuato initiated activities followed by a massive migration to populate Guanajuato and the Bajío. The productive schema of Guanajuato was linked to the mining production by providing the necessary goods and services to Zacatecas and further to the North. The scattered Haciendas (Ranchos), villages and towns founded in the El Bajío were the economic units that produced the goods and services supplied. Mining activities had a sustainable growth before 1600 when the towns and villages also grew and some achieved the status of cities, such as Zacatecas and Guanajuato. During the XVI Century, the populated areas were concentrated around the mining centers, congregations and haciendas, according to the economic activities restricted by the physical territory and oriented toward the agricultural production for self consumption and mining for the export of gold and silver to Spain not for commercial purposes but to accumulate and treasure.

The mining sector was the gravitational center of the colonial productive scheme. Villages, towns and cities founded followed this logic and also began to shrink when the mines lower or stopped production. The demographic catastrophe of the XVI and XVII Centuries caused a scarcity of manpower and the shrinking of mining cities and towns. The Crown protected the indigenous of what was considered inhuman works, such as mining, agricultural activities, and other industrial jobs. This protection to the indigenous people caused that goods and services were expensive, and thus spoliation had to be used. The indigenous population is substituted by Afro-Caribbean people who were introduced to México. The mining development established a sustainable demographic growth until the beginning of the years 1620-30 when the crisis started due to the insufficient supply of mercury necessary for the exploitation of silver. Mining cities, towns and villages also began to shrink. There were no regulations over the civil population in the mining cities and towns. At the middle of the XVI Century, exploitation of prolific seams was the main cause of the emergence of mining towns spread all over the New Spain territory. Most of these became cities of great economic and social importance, among them Pachuca, Hidalgo, Parral, etc.

The exploitation of precious metals had achieved an outstanding growth by the end of the XVI Century represented more than 80% of total exports from the Nueva España (Estrada, 2001). Around the activities of the mining industry were the motor of the economy around it had emerged other economic activities which provided employment, allowed commercial trade with the metropolis and gave rise to prosperity in the mining towns and cities. There are many issues regarding the economic history of México to explain. One of these issues is the debate on the decay of the Mexican economic in the XVII and XVIII Centuries. One of the arguments has been the mining production. There is not economic evidence to prove the hypothesis that mining in Mexico had a profound crisis during the XVIII Century and also the parameters used to sustain are not the right data (Ibarra, 1995). Production of silver was multiplied for four times through the XVIII Century. To understand and comprehend the meaning of the colonial mining activity, Galeano has said: "En Potosí the silver built temples and palaces, monasteries and gambling dens, offered motive to tragedy and the feast, spilled over blood and wine, inflamed greed and untied squandering and adventure" (Cited by Ibarra, 1995). Life in mining cities became harsh and troubled, all type of contrasts, ambitions, concupiscence and disorder are manifested with harshness.

The decline of the mining industry originated in 1810 although it is questionable the cause: The movement of the Mexican independence and the lack of stable political and social institutions. With the independence of Mexico in 1821, the colonial production scheme based on mining lost the relevant economic role. Mining cities, towns and villages shrunk. The mining activities lost their impulse avoiding to lead an industrial revolution in México. However, during the second half of the last Century, the decline of the mining activities brought also a shrinking process of the mining cities to the level of converting them in ghost towns. It was until the era of Porfirio Diaz (1880-1910) that the mining activities had a modest growth exploited by English and American mining companies, insufficient to provide work for the expansive growth of populated areas. Recent changes in Mexican legislation have liberalized the mining sector and after the opening of North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) foreign companies have increased investments. In Mexico, some early mining towns faded into obscurity while others became centers for ranching and commerce but were abandoned after the declining of mining activities. Mining towns, containing rich Baroque architecture, generally located in mountain areas, did not follow the geometric layout but were adapted to the topographic condition of the sites. The conquest of northwest Mexico lead to the establishment during colonial times of towns located on the Sierra Madre Occidental where mining was the main economic activity. The State of Sonora in the northwest of Mexico is wealthy in mineral resources. It is the first producer of gold and also produces silver, cooper, and other metals.

After the opening of NAFTA, more than 70 foreign mining companies have established offices in Hermosillo the capital of the State. During the XVI century, exploitation of mines located around Guadalupe de los Reyes, San José de las Bocas and Cosalá started. Cosalá was founded in 1562 and became in the XIX century the most important in this region, and in 1898 it produced 50% of the silver exported by the State of Sinaloa. Among the outstanding mining towns in the North of Mexico are La Bufa, Batopilas, Cerro Colorado, the Raramuri communities of Munérachi, La Yerbabuena, and the Jesuit mission of Satevó with important mining centers as Urique, Maguarichi, Uruachi and Ocampo, Batopilas and the veins of La Bufa reached renown of a world level. Batopilas has preserved, to a great extent, its architectural heritage from the richness of those times. In its greatest mining period at the end of the 19th century, Batopilas had up to 7,000 inhabitants. Today, the town is a community of 800 inhabitants. The mining towns Concepción del Oro y Mazapil were far away from Real de Minas Zacatecas. In 1569, Mazapil had around 150 Spanish settlers. Both mining towns achieved economic relevance in the Province of Nueva Vizcaya during the XVII y XVIII. However, today both cities are ignored by the maps of México. In the Northeast of México, the first foundations such as San Gregorio (1577) y La Trinidad (1577) were based on the discovery of silver mines. The mines of La Iguana were discovered in 1757 near Lampazos.

Mineral de Pozos (a rough translation might be Mineral Wells) is an old mining town in the State of Guanajuato, founded in 1576, when it was built a Fort to protect the silver route, from Zacatecas to México City. During the XIX Century, the town had large periods of abandonment due to the armed movements. It became one of the richest of the colonial mining towns, reaching its peak about 1890. As 20th-century revolution closed the town fell into poverty. Now, Pozos is gradually reawakening from a small village trapped in the abandonment after being a prosperous city during the mining exploitation. Everywhere in the paved streets can be seen semi destroyed large colonial adobed homes and dismantled buildings that once before were sumptuous. On 1982 was declared Historic Monument of the Nation. From a population of more than 70,000, it shrank to less than 4,000 10 years ago. Today, the 8 thousand remaining inhabitants lived in misery. At the turn of the XX Century, population started to growth reaching 80, 000 mainly immigrants from abroad and from the neighboring states who were attracted for the facilities to get wealthy. It was established important infrastructure, schools, commercial centers, hotels, restaurants, etc. However, the town was ignored and its buildings looted and ignored, until the fifties when had only 1,000 inhabitants, a ghost town in complete abandonment. Today it has around 5,000 people living there.

San Sebastian in the State of Jalisco is one of the oldest mining towns in Mexico founded in 1605 and reached the highest rate of growth and prosperity during the 17th and 18th Centuries when more than 20, 000 inhabitants populated the town. The population fluctuated in relation to the production of gold until 1930. Nowadays, it has only 600 inhabitants retaining the colonial heritage in public buildings and houses, as an extraordinary example of the traditional living forms of labor in a remote village. Real de Arriba in the State of Mexico is an enchanting mining town with a splendorous past. Today, some of the remaining walls and rocks within the forest are ruins that remind us of the great colonial miners' homes and infrastructure buildings which witness the past economic boom of the area. The city of el Oro de Hidalgo also in the State of Mexico were considered the second most rich just after Transvaal, in Africa and still now shows the wealthy architecture of its mining past. Its Museum shows mineral from the mines La Esperanza, Chihuahua, Tiro México, Tiro Skip, La Calera, La Providencia, San Patricio, El Nolan, El Consuelo, La Victoria, Santo Domingo y La Aurora. The mining district of Pachuca-Real del Monte and El Chico in the second half of the XVIII Century, the most prosperous period, has been studied by Navarrete (2004).

Real del Monte received its name in 1577. An anonymous source mentions that there were 1, 300 inhabitants at the end of the XVI Century. In 1610, were 1, 683 inhabitants. At the end of the XVII Century the traveler Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Carreri calculated 12, 000 inhabitants. Using parish church data of 1768, which only registered population in communion, he estimated that Real Del Monte achieved its largest population around the middle of the XVIII Century and it started a gradual drop until it reached its lowest point at the end of the first decade in the XIX Century. Real del Monte produced 10% of the silver of the Nueva Spain (Hausberger, 1995) and had a population of 7, 152 inhabitants. The military census of 1791 reported that the Jurisdiction of Pachuca had a population of 9 615 inhabitants out of which the 26.7% or 2567 persons forming 608 families belonged to Real del Monte, although the Census did not considered indigenous people, women and children under 16 years old. After 1824, Real del Monte changed its name to Mineral del Monte. In 1858 the population of Mineral del Monte was around 6000 inhabitants and in the Census of 1854 registered 5 310. In 1865 a Census of men older than 18 years registered 1 005 hombres integrated to 700 families. Comparing the data of the Censuses of 1791 and 1865, the number of inhabitants was almost similar, which lead us to conclude that for around 7 decades the growth of population was almost null.

Very good examples of these trends are Charcas, Real de Catorce, Guadalucazar y Cerro de San Pedro en San Luis Potosi, ghost towns that once were important mining cities. Nowhere in Mexico are the changing styles and fortunes of former gold and silver mining towns better displayed than in these four towns. Charcas was refounded in 1584 and had produced more than 3 million dollars worth of silver each year. Today only survive a few old buildings and large stoned houses. Real de Catorce had a grandeur past with gorgeous buildings, outstanding church and beautiful palenque. In Guadalucazar, the miners built two magnificent churches and a Casa de Moneda was founded. Cerro de San Pedro now is a ghost town where handful of old buildings has been restored reluctant to completely relinquish their hold over real estate. San Pedro, founded in 1592, was abandoned about fifty years ago.

3. An agenda for future research

The increasing flows of migration inter cities open new challenges for research on tendencies related to residential localization and displacement of population, intra urban segmentation, socioeconomic territorial segmentation, and contra-tendencies such as suburbanization of high income groups in rural areas, etc. Social and economic stagnation of rural areas can not continue being postponed as the main cause responsible of the accelerated urbanization process, despite the innumerable signals of exhaustion and overuse of absorption capacity of cities (Castells, 1977, p.58; 2002) and the emergent phenomena of local identity projects and dynamism should be recongnized. Research on rural labor market and urban labor market should be done to analyze the impact on spatial redistribution of population. This analysis should consider the effects of erosion that represents the best qualified people who move from rural communities settlements to large cities or to other country, leaving behind children an old people. Rehabilitation of inner areas in large cities may improve their living conditions and contribute greatly to social cohesion. Integrated preservation may have an impact on economic development and fosters employment through small scale business development.

Colonial cities, towns and villages spread all over Mexico that are starting to experience economic and demographic decline should begin programs of urban heritage preservation, urban revitalisation, urban rehabilitation, urban regeneration, urban renewal or urban preservation, as tools that can contribute to economic growth through job creation as they are labour intensive. Urban heritage is the built heritage, customs, traditions and identity. Urban heritage preserved in an integrated way in modern life and as part of the living environment, there are more far-reaching benefits. Preservation of urban heritage contributes to attractive and unique cities, with its own distinctive identity, which are more likely to attract tourism and other kinds of investment than cities with less pronounced identity. People can identify themselves to the place they live in, which contributes to sense of belonging and also has positive impact on the social development of a city.

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