

INTERVIEW WITH FERNANDO CARRIÓN MENA
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Carlos Andrés Díaz MOSQUERA¹

Context of the interview

Due to the pandemic, the interview with Carrión Mena took place by email.

Presentation of the interviewee

Fernando Carrión Mena is an academic in the Department of Political Studies of the Latin American College of Social Sciences (FLACSO-Ecuador), President of the Latin American and Caribbean Organization of Historic Centers (OLACCHI). He was Councilor for the Metropolitan District of Quito, Editor for *Diario Hoy* and Director of FLACSO-Ecuador. His areas of expertise and publications have revolved around research on the socio-spatial transformations of historic centers in Latin America, globalization, gentrification, "butiquization", urban policies, local and urban development, planning policies, new technologies and urban transformations, security citizen, drug trafficking and football studies.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: First, after years of studying the dynamics of historic centers in Latin America, what would be the most emblematic logics of interventions and urban reforms carried out in these centers in the context of Globalization?

Fernando Carrión: It would be necessary to raise from the beginning the need to understand that in Latin American cities there are several types of Historic Centers, and that they are not just those considered as such: the founding centers. These begin precisely with colonial times; then, after the war, a new centrality emerges that will be called the business centrality or Central Business District, in another totally different space; and now we are experiencing the

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centralities of globalization, which take two forms: the first, as urban corridors, such as the cases of Avenida Paulista in São Paulo, or Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico; and a second, with specific centralities such as Berini in São Paulo, or in the case of Santiago with the so-called Sanhattan or the Cidade Empresarial Huechuraba. All these centralities are historical and not just the first ones, as they were produced historically. And it is essential to understand that now they all compete with each other, the foundation being the most affected, as they add new components of degradation that were previously unknown.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: In your article *Centro histórico: relación social, globalización y mitos*, it is pointed out that in times of globalization we are experiencing a reform of the State, a significant increase in the weight of the municipality in municipal management and, on the other hand, a greater participation of the private sector in urban heritage management. What would be the characteristics of urban management where the public and private sectors are responsible for the execution of projects carried out in the historic centers of Latin America?

Fernando Carrión: What we are experiencing from the turn of the century until now are three major processes that are transforming historic centers. First, decentralization processes, local governments or municipal governments acquire more power. Second, the relationship between public and private, State and economy changes with the introduction of neoliberal logic in our cities. And thirdly, the advancement of new communication technologies within the framework of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which strengthens the globalization process. These changes lead, on the one hand, to a substantial modification of traditional management models, insofar as today practically the historic centers are managed by their own free will, that is, according to the market and with a substantial reduction in public presence. On the other hand, the presence of new technological platforms – such as Uber, Airbnb, Amazon, Google – modifies the logic of centrality, with foundational centrality being the most affected.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: You pointed out two processes that occur in some historic centers in Latin America, which are called Gentrification and Butiquization. Both processes aim at revaluation of urban land through new uses. In the first, there is a population change so that the low-income population gives up their space to the higher-income population, and in the second, there is a change from residential land use to another, such as commercial and administrative. The objective is to create and take advantage of the economic advantages of being located in the center of several enterprises and businesses. Do gentrification processes occur in Latin



America as well as in the Global North? Are these two processes complementary or is one more preponderant than the other?

Fernando Carrión: I believe that they are part of the history of the founding historic centers, because basically after the Second World War there was a very strong acceleration of the urbanization process in Latin America, which produced two situations: on the one hand, the emergence of neighborhoods on the outskirts of cities with names of favelas, slums, youth villages, pirate neighborhoods, according to each country and each city.

And on the other hand, the displacement of high-income sectors from foundational centralities to other places, producing what I called aporofization in a publication. This concept explains the theme of the favela. Why? The favela is nothing more than the payment among many for a very high cost of location. That is, a process of population change, from those with high economic resources to those with low resources; and it achieves this thanks to the only possible way: increasing density and overcrowding. And that's what happened, with which a process of aporification in the form of the favela was experienced; It is a process of population change, from those who come from the elites to the low-income. In other words, it is the reverse phenomenon of gentrification.

So what happened are the attempts of the elites to recover the lost area under the principles of REhabilitation, REform, REclaim all architecture and urbanism words that use the prefix Re to expel the low-income population from this area of high heritage value. However, these strategies did not achieve this extirpation, for which they had to resort to prioritizing the most profitable activities, with which the residential ones are displaced by commerce and tourism, leading to boutiqueization; that is, not to the rotation of the population but to that of residential activities for those of commerce, tourism and real estate. What has been happening in these foundational centers is a process of replacing the population – poor and popular – with a more profitable type of economic activity, which in addition to reducing the time of use of the historic center – takes on a business agenda – produces an emptying of the space and local society, as they are displaced from the location.

The constant in the founding historic centers of Latin America is the loss of population, with perhaps two different exceptions, such as the cases of: Cartagena in Colombia, where gentrification occurs with the arrival of people from outside the city, basically high-income people sectors of Bogotá, Cali, Medellín and the largest cities in Colombia. This is the case of the second residence phenomenon, now strengthened by new information technologies. Something similar occurs in Cusco, Peru, but more linked to the population that arrives from outside Colombia, such as tourists, from the United States, Latin America and Europe. With



this there is also the displacement of the low-income population, thanks to the heritage exploitation that is carried out for the benefit of foreigners linked to tourist practices.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: This makes me think about the following question: In Latin America, has there been any case of intervention or reform in the Historic Centers where these displacement policies were not given and managed to gestate with the population?

Fernando Carrión: There were short moments, like the cases of Mexico City or Old Havana, but then the trend was tourism, commerce, inscribed in what he defined as boutiqueization, which is no longer the exchange of one population for another, but the change of land use. The population goes out and uses the entrances that are much more economically profitable: the boutique hotel, the coworking space, the boutique cafeteria or restaurant or the boutique-boutique with selected products and services.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: There is an extremely relevant aspect in urban renewal policies that have been taking place since the 1990s, which has to do with financing and obtaining economic resources for urban projects. In your article *Dime quien financia el centro historico y te diré que centro historico es*, you state that funding defines the type of centrality that is aspired to and that in most urban reforms it is private capital that has allocated resources. What role has the Public (public institutions) played in these processes?

Fernando Carrión: Unfortunately, the public sector is underfunded and, in addition, it has been losing strength due to what I have been saying for some time: the weight of the market is becoming more relevant. Additionally, it can be said with knowledge of the facts that there is no budget for the set of founding historic centers (income, expenses). In general, the logic of isolated projects prevails, despite always calling them integral. A restoration project is carried out in a house, church or neighbourhood, and resources are sought, usually from the private sector or international cooperation, which also follows the logic of the private sector.

In Quito, my city, the well-known Master Plan for the Historic Center was prepared in 1982, which at the time was advanced, but financing from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) arrived, causing some problems. The most complex, its financing logic focused mainly on projects that could economically recover the investment. What happened is that from the set of projects that the Plan had, it only financed those that interested them, thus dismantling the plan, both because of the imbalance it introduced in relation to other interventions and because of the logic of privatization. Over time, it is observed that not even the investments that were made were profitable because, for example, Shopping malls, cultural centers and tourist



centers were not consolidated, that is, not even in the investment places they worked, due to the nature of the proposed private logic.

On the other hand, there is the emblematic case of the historic center of Mexico City, where a single person, Mr. Carlos Slim, decided to buy several buildings, remodel them and place them at the service of his logic. The result was not entirely beneficial to Mr. Slim, nor to Mexico City. This shows that this perspective is not the best for foundational centralities.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: In these times of globalization, we live in socio-spatial logics where a purely economic and commercial vision and management of places are prioritized. This produced a concept you quote from Jordi Borja, “the Agoraphobia of central public space” in his article *Regeneración y Revitalización Urbana en las Américas*. Can you expand a little more on this aspect of how urban intervention policies in the Historic Centers produced a kind of homogenization of historic spaces?

Fernando Carrión: Perhaps two things here: one, I consider that historic centers are public spaces and that is why I am anchored in the thesis of Agoraphobia by Jordi Borja – that is, the phobia of public space –, just as this public space is the city. From this perspective, the phobia and stigma in relation to the public space of the founding historic centers end up in significant erosion and deterioration. It is clear that cutting edge capital is not present, that small capital loses competitiveness and that the mass of existing assets (shares) does not generate economic returns.

And second, something that confirms the condition of centrality of the founding centers is that, on the one hand, it is a place of supply, consumption and administrative procedures, which explains its gravitational condition of influence, which is expressed in the fact that a very strong of people arrives every day. And on the other hand, that many of the interventions that are made outside the historic centers affect them directly. So, for example, I cite the case of Quito again. In the southern part of the city, a large shopping center was built to move people who went to the historic center to get supplies.

These two entries show us that a historic center is defined by its relationships with the city as a whole and not closed in on itself. That is, when interventions are carried out outside the historic center, it is very likely – as in fact happens – that it will be directly affected, positively or negatively. Therefore, it is not just about intervening in the demarcated area, but also in the external areas of immediate influence. Here arises the need to establish a system of centralities, in such a way that there is no competition between them, but cooperation. It is that historical centrality is not a sum of monuments or attributes, but a network of relationships.



Andrés Díaz Mosquera: In your article *Los centros históricos en la Era Digital*, you bet on the management and management of Historic Centers based on a Public/Private relationship. What kind of public policies and forms of intervention should be carried out so that urban reforms in historic centers do not generate problems arising from processes in which private interest is given priority?

Fernando Carrión: I believe that here we must continue in the line of deepening the decentralization process that Latin America has been experiencing since the end of the last century. A proposal of this type is in line with the creation of a public institution close to the management of the specific area, that is, the national public institution has to get closer to the patrimony, because with the distance it has from the patrimony, it becomes very difficult to act in a according to the particular problems of the central area. What could be sustained nationally is a certain stewardship that would come from ministries, commissions or heritage institutes, depending on the case of each country.

This means that the responsibility for its management must lie with the city and, in this context, have its own institutionality that manages the foundational centrality. Because, for example, in Latin America no historical center has its own budget; That is, budgets are made on a project-by-project basis, with no relationship between them, due, among other things, to the fact that funding has different and closed logics within each intervention. Having a local institutionality of its own would make it possible to collect its own tax resources, such as: service fees, urban taxes, income and consumption taxes, among others, which would strengthen institutionality.

A proposal of this type requires the construction of forms of representation of the different existing patrimonial subjects, since the great problem that exists in public policies in the historical centrality - which I define as "productive inheritance" - is that they are made by the elites linked to the Condition. Thus, the patrimonialization processes do not recognize the heritage assets located on the periphery, as the popular sectors live there, when it is known that more than 25% of the city is located in Latin America; which denies much of the city's history. This is because patrimonialization is carried out by heritage subjects linked to the official history of each city, which leads to the exclusive recognition of heritage values coming from the elites or the States, leaving out the others, as it is not recognized that the entire city is historical, as well as the site with the highest heritage density.



Andrés Díaz Mosquera: Are there specific examples and cases of interventions in historic centers that are part of a set of transfers of theories and circulation of European or North American ideas for the processes of urban intervention in the historic centers of Latin America?

Fernando Carrión: I believe that we have here three historical moments of strong influence on the intervention of the Historic Centers of Latin America. The first, coming from the second post-war period, when UNESCO was born with an interesting proposal of respect for the Historic Centers that were destroyed precisely by the conflagration of the war. Later, at the turn of this century, it seems to me that UNESCO's weight has collapsed, because it has failed to renew its initial theoretical and methodological starting points. There is, for example, the focus on monuments and conservation, which led to the end or freezing of history, which prevents the understanding of the meaning of what I call “productive heritage”; which is nothing more than adding the value of history to the value of use and the value of change. This concept is based on the sense that history does not end nor exhausts itself at the beginning of the heritage asset, but is projected over time, even into the future. Historical value that is nothing more than the permanent sum of the time of the past (chrono-urbanism). This presupposes building an institutional framework that is more representative of heritage subjects and that multilateral organizations also do so, in the sense that they themselves decentralize, that they modify their financing and technical assistance practices (BID, WB, CAF, UNESCO) and that they are more responsive to local demands.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: In the same way as the Heritage Charters, which influenced the management of the centers...

Fernando Carrión: Exactly. Heritage charters are part of modern urban planning, even before the second post-World War II period. They are world recipes that do not recognize heritage diversity, which were written from the architectural perspective and without representation of heritage subjects. That's why I consider them a cookbook that alienated and expropriated reality, in the form of what I explicitly call “Charterism”; in other words, a form of expropriation of the wealth of each of our Historic Centers. The Letters were initially written in Europe and were named after the city where the meeting took place: Athens, Venice, Florence, among others. In these meetings of architects, there was practically no Latin American representation, so the presence of regional problems was never there. The proposal has always been broadcast as if it were an absolutely homogeneous world, when the heritage reality is exactly the opposite: highly heterogeneous.



Andrés Díaz Mosquera: For some decades, migrations have taken place in Latin America, especially from Venezuelans and Colombians to neighboring countries in the context of globalization. In *Los centros históricos en la era digital en América Latina*, you point out that migrations at the national level, that is, from the countryside to the city, which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, had a notable influence on population processes, especially in the expansion of peripheries and increase in the number of poor in cities. Have these recent migratory waves influenced new forms of socio-spatial occupation in Latin American city centers?

Fernando Carrión: We had two moments of migratory processes, the first from the countryside to the city, precisely after the second post-war period, producing the contradiction between the urbanization process and the production of the city. This migrant population was mainly located on the outskirts of cities where there were no urban conditions and, in the centralities, which were abandoned by the elites. But this process, in my view, is already over in Latin America, because for some time now we have had 83% of the population living in cities, which means that only 17% of the population would still have to migrate. If we understand that this phenomenon is finite, we can say that there is no longer enough population volume to continue along this line of city growth.

But what is happening today? We are experiencing an inverse process of migration: from the big city to areas close to the urban region. From Lima 300,000 people left due to COVID, from Mexico City for the past 4 years between 150,000 or 200,000 people left per year.

Now, what we are experiencing is the closing of migration from the countryside to the city while the cycle of urban-urban migration of an international nature opens, in which various modalities appear. Migration to places within national states that did not exist before, such as border areas. Today Mexico has more than 12% of its population living on the border with the United States. Something similar happens on the southern border of Brazil, on the Triple Border of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay or on the Trifinio of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

Then there are the most important migratory flows that come from 3 countries: the case of Venezuela that expelled around 6 million people due to the economic and political crisis, the case of Haiti due to the natural problems they experienced and the poverty, that of Cuba, which also expelled the population, and that of Colombia due to the problems of the internal conflict. This entire population has urban origins and destinations, somehow following the migratory patterns of the past, in the sense that this international migration is located in the peripheries, but also in the centralities, where they can have access to services and work. In Santiago de Chile there are many problems with Peruvian migrants, but also with Venezuelans. In Buenos



Aires you have Haitians and Venezuelans. In the case of Colombia, the main problem revolves around Venezuelan migration, where around 1,800,000 people have already arrived.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: Professor, talking about migrations and entering the context of the Pandemic. In his June 2021 article entitled *¿La ciudad se licúa?* Together with Paulina Cepeda, she analyzes that in the context of the global pandemic of COVID-19, socio-spatial processes such as "urbicide" have intensified and in some cities the processes of de-urbanization have accelerated, such as the cases of Lima, which reduced its population by about than 200,000 people in 2020 due to lack of work and Mexico City, which according to the 2020 census, more than 500,000 inhabitants emigrated to other areas of the country or suburban municipalities, in both cases, as well as in other Latin countries. In the cities some sectors of the population migrated to reduce location costs, the possibilities of contagion, generated greater demand in cheaper areas close to the city, but with the ability to telework and better supply of vital (natural) products. What reflections are the multiple socio-spatial effects of the Pandemic and the types of cities that have developed in Latin America? What kind of cities, urban models and governments have increased and potentiated the virus?

Fernando Carrión: Yes, I believe there are two phenomena that we are experiencing as a result of the COVID Pandemic. Undoubtedly the central one, which comes from the new meaning that density takes on, as the coronavirus is a disease that spreads through social interaction. Thus, the densest cities were the ones that became epicenters of the pandemic. Testimony to this are Mexico City, Bogotá, São Paulo and Santiago, in each of their countries. The discussion about density also brought up the debate about the compact city. It was always thought that the correct model was the compact city, which has now come into question, as it is the most important place in the real estate market and where gentrification processes take place..

COVID has also accelerated the trend towards the use of technologies – within the framework of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is estimated that in this year and a half there has been a technological leap of no less than 10 or 15 years, both in supply and demand. Clearly, this phenomenon promoted the remote condition of work, services and consumption, so much so that today three phenomena linked to the territory have accelerated: the displacement of work from the factory, university and office locations; that is, a shift from material physical working space to virtual space. The second is relocation, which basically translates into a change of location in the residential world, from the central city to its outskirts or to other small towns close to these large agglomerations. From New York, for example, almost 900,000 people left, from London the same, as well as from Mexico, Lima and almost every city. This phenomenon



can be understood as de-urbanization; that is, a concept composed of the prefix *des*, which refers to something of lesser importance, scarcity, in this case a city; that is, less than city. And the third way is relocation, which expresses the spatial loss of the workplace, which leads to the hiring of labor to and from anywhere in the world, as the activity can be done virtually.

These processes are profoundly affecting the founding historical centralities as well as the general functioning of physical cities. For example, convention centers will have to change you, as will tourism, because people who come to visit a city already know about it thanks to "google". Works are relocated, central areas begin to distance themselves and create voids, shopping centers are Amazon or Alibaba, the smart city that passes for "telecity". So, these are substantial changes, and the historic centers are also going through these transcendental changes right now.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: A few years ago we have seen that in different cities in Latin America, amid protests and social and cultural mobilizations, groups of people, sometimes belonging or not to indigenous groups and black movements, decided to undertake a struggle for memory, focusing on monuments and preserved cultural heritage that represent Colonial Power in Latin America. These patrimonies are the busts or bodies of the conquerors, colonizers, pioneers, enslavers, etc. which played a leading role in the history of the Invasion, Conquest and Colonialism in the Americas. These patrimonies were preserved in the public squares of the Historic Centers. Many of these monuments were destroyed, burned, scratched, toppled, executed and the object of various symbolic acts. What does this mean for heritage conservation policies? Is there a struggle to claim the historical memory of indigenous and Afro-Latin American peoples?

Fernando Carrión: I think there is a very strong tension between memory and history, so much so that both are being rewritten. For example, monuments to the founders of cities disappear, Christopher Columbus lost world position for being located in Genoa. Iconoclasm has been located from the perspective of decolonizing movements.

This is mainly because history is written by the winners, but the winners of one moment may not be winners in another juncture. And what is happening with the monuments is also expressed in the nomenclature of our cities, which was originally *costumbrist*, that is, the street was named after what happened there: the butchers or the silver shops. But, in a second moment, the commemorative nomenclature appears, and it does so from the perspective of official history, which tends to control everything. That's why street names basically become dates of battles, of places where wars take place, or of soldiers who fought. Sculptures of soldiers on



horseback appear. But all this history begins to be written again, not only by the native peoples, but also by the popular world, by the youth, as well as by women.

The nomenclature and monuments have generally been by men, who have denied the presence of the popular world, as well as women. But today, with the weight of the gender claim, the feminist claim and the need to change the way cities work so that they are no longer patriarchal, there is the tearing down of statues, the painting of great monuments, the change of names of spaces public. The symbolic spaces of freedom begin to be re-symbolized, rewriting history as a whole. I believe that this is a very strong process that has entered Latin America recently, in the popular rebellions in Chile, Ecuador and Colombia.

Andrés Díaz Mosquera: Finally, in the context of the Pandemic, several urban and rural mobilizations and conflicts (involving indigenous populations such as in Colombia, Bolivia and Brazil) were experienced and are still being experienced in Ecuador, Chile, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela around socioeconomic conditions that the neoliberal model produced in Latin America and how these worsened in the Pandemic. What lessons will the Pandemic leave in the types of cities, urban models and government actions?

Fernando Carrión: Well, since the emergence of very backward social groups that historically did not have an important weight, it seems that they are beginning to have an increasingly strong presence. In Chile, the Constituent Convention is chaired by a woman of Mapuche origin. In Ecuador, the National Assembly is led by a woman from CONAIE (an organization of indigenous peoples and from the Amazon), which in electoral terms represents only 4% of the electorate, that is, a minority sector in political terms. This is a new phenomenon that is growing strongly, an emergency that brings explicit demands and the appropriation of explicit political spaces.

On the other hand, the Pandemic leaves us with important changes in cities such as: the discussion of the housing problem, with the famous "stay at home" policy, which highlighted the crisis it is going through. Furthermore, it led to the disappearance of public space and now, with the gradual opening, its profound redefinition begins to be experienced. Initially it was the starting point of the city, then it became itself and now, in the neoliberal sense, it is a residual and marginal space that prevents accumulation. It went from being a structuring space to being structured. Now with COVID, it tends to position itself in a different way, thanks to the entry of technologies. City infrastructures are changing rapidly and today platforms are the central element, characterized by being private, global and virtual. Mobility, for example, is transformed; If before the distance measurement unit was physical, today it is temporary



(Waze). Work relations are also transformed towards the remote and with that the workplace loses its spatialization, because now the place of production is the same place of reproduction. As a result, capital no longer pays for electricity, telephone, drinking water and internet services, to be assumed directly by the worker. Likewise, Uber does not have a single taxi, just as Airbnb does not have a single apartment, and Amazon doesn't make a pin. This is what is now cynically known as the collaborative economy. That's why, as soon as we get out of COVID, we'll start to perceive a totally different city, born in this short space of a year and a half, which is a very short time.

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