CURRENT HOUSING TYPOLOGY IN TLALNEPANTLA AND IDEAS FOR HOUSING POLICY IN THE CITY CENTRE.

About common housing practises and new city life in Tlalnepantla’s city centre.
Contribution to ISOCARP’s UTAP 11-19th of May 2013

Jan Bredenoord,
in cooperation with Berenice Felix and Daniel Brito

Tlalnepantla, May 25th, 2013
Introduction
During the past decades, housing in Mexico has been a matter of promoting housing production for low- and middle-income groups. Public support for that was huge. In Tlanepantla, a main regional suburban centre in the north of metropolitan Mexico City, there is a chance for the development of a new urban housing environment, because one expects that the housing function can be expanded there significantly. Higher densities and a better housing quality than usual (in Mexico) might be combined in the Centre of Tlanepantla, that gives good opportunities for a variety of high quality urban functions, and new urban housing will be part of that.

Housing in Mexico
In general, house building in Mexico is a matter of families or households; preferably they build the house on an own plot and in the course of time, depending on their financial possibilities. This phenomenon – that still applies for 50 per cent of Mexican families- is called incremental housing. It is being done because a large part of the Mexican families have only limited financial resources. The quality of homes built through self-management is sometimes bad, but it can also be good, as is the case in a part of Tlanepantla’s centre (see ‘Existing housing typology’/‘La Romana’).

Besides the self-managed housing, one can find in Mexico a huge practice of social housing, where the government influence was great. In the 1970s, a first stimulus to social housing was given by the establishment of housing institutes for workers in a certain sector (e.g. INFONAVIT and FOVISSSTE). These organizations took care of planned housing for hundreds of thousands of single family homes in many cities in the country, which was very good at that time, but stimulated the vast low-dense development of Mexico-City and to a lesser extent also of other cities in the country.

Since the 1980s, multi-storey housing projects were realized, with the help of government organizations, while nowadays there is an extensive system of public mixed housing finance. The housing products that are being realized by means of public intervention vary strongly: it can be single family housing, duplex housing, multi-storey housing in 3-5 layers or even in the form of higher apartment buildings. The federal government works with a system of financial incentives for the support of certain social target groups. Currently, the execution of housing projects is mostly in the hands of private construction companies. Besides the two mentioned housing production systems there is a increasing market for private high quality and expensive residential and condominium housing. But this part must be investigated for every new housing project or location.

The housing situation in Tlanepantla
The housing situation in Tlanepantla is not fundamentally different from the situation in other parts of Mexico. The municipality of Tlanepantla has a population of about 650,000 while 173,340 homes are there; an average of 3.2 per house, which is actually quite low. However, we have to consider that the average dwelling size is limited and the average housing quality is relatively low. So, many homes are very small, some of the properties are from 40-50 m2. The municipality of Tlanepantla has estimated that 65 per cent of the houses (112,000 units) is in one way or another in a constructive way in a bad condition.
These homes can be found in the many ‘fraccionamientos’, often still non-regulated neighbourhoods that are built through self-management. Self-built homes in a better condition can be found in consolidated residential areas, the so-called ‘colonias’.

In addition, there are residential areas to be classified as ‘residenciales’: good quality single family homes in a green setting. Increasingly, homes are being built in multi-storey buildings, with and without subsidies. The construction of multi-storey housing is needed to reach a higher density that often is required due to the high land costs and the land being ‘available’ for housing. In Tlalnepantla’s Centre one must search for future home construction that goes with a high-quality urban setting and contributes to an attractive urban living environment.

**Existing housing typology in and around the city centre.**
One can find in Tlalnepantla a variety of housing types that is described shortly hereafter:

**The housing area ‘La Romana’**.
In this housing area adjacent to the central of this vast City one finds mainly single family housing; houses at own plots of 250-300 m². In general, the housing quality is quite well there and the public space is predominantly green, especially on the main routes. The streets are sufficiently wide. There are some parking problems which are caused by the visitors of commercial services alongside the Avenida Toltecas. Some landowners have built apartments at their plots in 4-5 layers, for renting out. One can find varying construction heights, which is not a problem. Theoretically, the area can be further densified further by the individual private owners, which should be stimulated by government policy. Municipal policy for the area should be focused on that, and furthermore mainly on the consolidation and preservation of the area. Regulation of the parking problems could be a first phase in the finding of solutions.

**The mixed area of San Javier**
The zone is mainly a commercial area with retail activities and work places. Originally, housing was mostly combined with commercial activities, but currently there is a conflict between housing and commercial functions. In the area adjacent to the Plaza Gustavo Baz, the situation is still mixed: with commercial functions and housing. There are some nice green public spaces, but to the East, green spaces are hardly present. However, due to the concentration of commercial activities in a certain
part of the section, the residential function is repressed to the margin; the situation of the environment there is quite bad, due to the busy traffic with cars, vans, busses, trucks and parked vehicles. Noise - and air pollution are present almost everywhere. However, during the evening and night the area is abandoned, and people experience it as a deserted area which is very unsafe. This is the reason why the residential function not flourishes. Housing above shops are still available, but limited, but many are no longer used as such. In some places are apartments built in 4 layers; some of them are empty. In the future, it could be attractive for the residential function of the area, to combine it (again) with commercial activities, but that requires a sweeping urban reconstruction, including the traffic problems to be solved. One might think of controlling the traffic circulation and the parking and moreover on the planting of trees.

_Tlalnepantla Centre_

In Tlalnepantla Centre –an area west of the Plaza Gustavo Baz, the central square with the church and the municipality building, one can find mainly mixed urban functions like in any other city centre and housing is part of that. Noteworthy are some multi-storey residential complexes, one at the Avenida Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a residential area that was established with public involvement and some other multi-storey housing complexes that were developed privately. There is a lack of green spaces.

_Housing complexes just outside the city centre_

*Housing complex in Tabla Honda ‘El Tenayo’*
‘Tabla Honda’ is a huge housing area -established in the 1970s- in a nice green urban landscape. Most houses were built as compact multi-storey apartments in 5 layers. The living space of the apartments is 40-50 m². The original urban design did not provide sufficient parking spaces, but many were realized later.

**Housing complex ‘El Cortijo’, adjacent to the city centre in the South.**
This urban housing complex exists of single family houses, and apartments in 3 and 5 layers. One can speak of a mixed housing typology. Average living space is approximately 50 m² (between 40 and 70 m²). One can find 3-4 different housing types. This complex is functioning quite well.

**Housing complex ‘Tejabanes’ (in the vicinity of El Cortijo)**
Here one can find a huge housing area in 5 layers, built in the 1970s. The living space of the houses is approximately 50 m². One find here only one housing type. This housing complex seems to be out of date.

**General problems of existing multi-storey housing complexes.**
Most described multi-storey apartment complexes have some features to be mentioned:

- The housing size is generally seen relatively small. As one might expect, more prosperity in the future of the growing middle-class will increase the demand for larger dwellings and more quality.
Assumably, it is not wise building new very small apartments in Tlalnepantla Centre. This is why we aim at an average housing surface of 80-120 m².

- The described housing complexes are generally seen dated, because they already exist several decades. We think that new housing in Tlalnepantla might contain elements of modern architecture and sustainable housing. Developing green housing is an issue promoted by the government (see also: Points of departure for new urban housing).
- The parking problems are increasing through growing private car possession, while the original urban designs were not prepared for that. Nonetheless, finding adequate solutions for acceptable parking spaces in existing situations must be considered. One can find shortages of parking space in all described existing housing complexes. While developing new housing for Tlalnepantla Centre, one should consider resolving the parking demand in built parking buildings in or under the buildings to be developed.
- The public safety is an issue in all cases, seen the fences and walls around all housing complexes. Finding solutions for adequate safety measures in a new urban ambiance will be a challenge.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE for new urban housing in Tlalnepantla’s Centre

Here we will try to give some starting points for the development of a vision for future housing policy.

First of all, it is stipulated that a focus on housing density is crucial, in order use the space of the centre effectively, which benefits eventually the whole community. High density generates support for urban services, commercial and cultural activities and so on, and for the development of high service public transport in the municipality.

Second: the housing typology needs attention. As single family housing is space consuming and does not support sufficiently a wanted high level urban ‘atmosphere’ in the Centre, so, this housing type will not be promoted in the Centre. The focus will be on high density housing, from duplex to condominiums in 4-5 layers and multi storey apartment buildings. We do not think of very high rise housing complexes, although in the new part an exception could be made with some iconic architectonic design (see below: new urban housing).

Third: in sociological terms we suggest that a mixed community should be developed, for a variety of social groups, starting with middle income groups to middle-higher income groups. Future residents should have different ages and different life styles and contribute to the whole community. A variety of housing types and floor plans should be realized, with different levels of costs of housing.

Fourth: the mixing of housing with other urban functions should be promoted, such as with commercial functions, culture, leisure, education, etc., -well connected to the street- with apartments on top of it. The idea is that all new housing projects with the other mentioned functions contribute to an attractive street life and attractive green spaces.

Fifth: focus should be on future sustainable housing in Tlalnepantla’s Centre. This can mean that a level of ambition must be determined for new housing development, to be worked out with the stakeholders in the housing sector. Most probably one might work out the greening of walls and the capture of solar energy for the heating of water and electricity generation. Sustainable development would be a main target for the development of the Centre of Tlalnepantla. Sustainable development should be an issue for the whole City Centre.
Market research on housing typology in Tlalnepantla necessary

Since April 2010, the housing sector in Mexico has worked with the ‘Classification Approved Housing Value’. Furthermore there is the “Classification of housing by average price” based on the housing building code (Federal Government, 2010). Currently, the sector is using also the terms: Economic, Popular, Traditional, Medium, Residential and Residential Plus. Table 1 gives price ranges of current housing types, necessary incomes, construction areas of dwellings. The housing building code (CEV 2010) pointed out a new typology: One family house, Duplex or double house; Multi-family housing; Horizontal Condominium; Vertical condominium, Mixed Condominium. We suggest to make use of a combination of two typologies for housing in Tlalnepantla Centre, which gives the following results:

Table 1  Housing types of the Mexican subsidized housing market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing types</th>
<th>VSMMD* Necessary incomes in minimum wages (per month)</th>
<th>Income ranges in US$ per month, calculated from column left.</th>
<th>Price range in Mexican Pesos in 2012</th>
<th>Price ranges in US$ in 2012 (Converted)</th>
<th>Average construction Area in m².</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economical</td>
<td>Up to 118</td>
<td>Up to US$560</td>
<td>Up to 223,590</td>
<td>Up to US$17,042</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>118 - 200</td>
<td>560 - 950</td>
<td>223,591 - 378,966</td>
<td>17,042 - 28,885</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional/Multi-storey</td>
<td>200 - 350</td>
<td>950 - 1662</td>
<td>378,967 - 663,191</td>
<td>29,885 - 50,548</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium/Multi-storey</td>
<td>350 - 750</td>
<td>1662 - 3562</td>
<td>663,192 - 1,421,124</td>
<td>50,548 - 108,317</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential/Condominium</td>
<td>750 - 1500</td>
<td>3562 - 7125</td>
<td>1,421,125 - 2,842,248</td>
<td>108,317 - 216,635</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Plus? Condos.</td>
<td>&gt;1500</td>
<td>&gt; 7125</td>
<td>More than 2,842,248</td>
<td>&gt;216,635</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* VSMMD: Minimum salary (daily) for the Federal District of Mexico (January 2012: Pesos ($) 62.33 =US$4.75)
Sources: Classification Approved Housing Value; Clasificación de la vivienda por precio promedio; G.o.M. (2010), Código de Edificación de Vivienda (CONAVI 2010). Bredenoord and Cabrera (forthcoming publication)

For the time being, we have assumed that the average income level of households in Tlalnepantla is low. For example: 60.24 per cent of population earns less than US$285 per month and 26.51 per cent between US$285 and US$721. Only 6.72 per cent of populations earns between US$721 and 1442 per month and 3.56 percent earns more than US$1442. This means that around 10 per cent of population of Tlalnepantla might be able to buy a house between US$50,000 and US$200,000. However, this calculation does not give any indication about the actual housing demand from the middle and higher income groups.

Only market research may reveal how the market for more expensive homes is, especially concerning new housing in the Centre of Tlalnepantla. Such a market study can link the average income of households with the target of achieving high-quality housing, which is crucial for the determination of the main objectives concerning the development of Tlalnepantla’s Centre. It is clear that the wish to realize affordable housing for the social housing target groups, cannot be combined with the desire to develop a high-quality housing area in Tlalnepantla’s Centre.
REFERENCE IMAGES FOR RELATION OF HOUSING, ETC, WITH PUBLIC SPACE.

Rio de Janeiro street life
La Condesa DF, street life
Bicycle promotion in Mexico City.

REFERENCE IMAGES FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN THE CENTRE OF TLALNEPANTLA

Conjunto urbano Natura, Tlalnepantla (left and right). Example for housing development in Tlalnepantla’s Centre.

Nantes, France. Design: aLTA Architectcs. Modern architecture with sustainable applications.

Solar energy production for housing, Freiburg, Germany.
REFERENCE IMAGES FOR HOUSING COMBINED WITH STREETLIFE (STUDENT HOUSING, BICYCLE TRACKS, TERRACES, COMBINATION OF SHOPS WITH HOUSING ON TOP)

Copenhagen student housing

Biking in La Condesa, Mexico, DF.

Terraces at street in La Condeza, DF

Shops with housing on top, Vathorst, Amersfoort, Netherlands