

# Selling EthniCity

Urban Cultural Politics in the Americas



EDITED BY

**OLAF KALTMEIER**

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Urban Cultural Politics in the Americas

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## Chapter 9

# Quito's Historic Center: Heritage of Humanity or of the Market?

Fernando Carrión Mena and Manuel Dammert Guardia

In 1978 UNESCO declared the historic center of Quito a World Cultural Heritage of Humanity, thus recognizing its cultural and historic value, in particular the fact that it represents the largest historic city center in Latin America. Since 1988 Quito's historic center has become the object of a politics of renovation, which both local and international heritage experts have praised as an outstanding example of successful urban management, especially for the participation of public and private, national and international actors. These characteristics regularly appear as paradigmatic in the academic reflection and public discourses on historic city centers in Latin America. As this condition has been taken for granted, there has been little critical analysis or evaluation of this development to date.

This positive view suits the municipality of Quito, as it thus achieves its goal of rendering visible its own activity in a favorable manner, and because this assessment from outside allows the municipality to pursue a discourse of city marketing that positions the municipality well in international circuits. This further enables the international development cooperation to justify its actions and presence in the city as well as—thanks to (albeit limited) economic support, indebted to institutional promotion—to present potential local and national clients with the successful results of its work here.

Nonetheless, certain issues remain topical, some of which are central to the orientation of this chapter. These include, for example, the questions, whether Quito really represents a successful case of urban intervention, and, if the answer is positive, for whom it is successful. Moreover, how do the politics of renovation fit in the broader panorama of managing and organizing the city? What are the major transformations and effects they have produced? What are the characteristics of the heritage discourse that informs the above-mentioned interventions? In other words: we seek to instigate a debate about the “model of the city” that the politics of renovation in the historic center promote.

The condition of this “successful case” has recently begun to be questioned. Critics point out that the intervention comes to fruition at the margin of the reflection on a project of the city based on the belief that historic centers are almost self-sufficient. Heritage experts and intellectuals in particular perceive the historic center as an ensemble of monuments that carries a memory they need to preserve. Here, history serves to construct a stereotyping spectacle, in



which heritage acts as scenario and political discourse for the legitimization of a specific type of hegemony. A further point of critique concerns the fact that parallel institutions have emerged which have imposed a political logic which sublimates the logics of tourism, the attraction of private capital, and the impact of the real estate sector, all of which taken together end up socially and economically "polluting" the urban discourses and imaginaries as well as have helped "clear" Quito of its lower social strata under the pretext of generating economic resources and restoring the city.

### Monuments or Social Relationships

In the theoretical definition of the historic center, one can clearly distinguish between two concepts. The first of these is a traditional one that understands the historic center from a reductionist, unilateral, and ideological perspective that is highly charged with a notion of the past as manifesting itself through monuments. The second view seeks to go beyond the first one, making a qualitative leap in its understanding of the historic center, insofar as it moves away from the meaning of monuments as emblems in favor of a perspective in which social relationships define the determinable quality of the historic center's existence (cf. Carrión 1987).

From the perspective of a politics of intervention, the first concept has a marked weight within the notion of conservation and the treatment of the object—the historic city center—as element in its own right that is congruent with the definition of the monument. This implies a specific understanding of renovation, which Dora Arízaga defines in the following terms: "The fundamental goal of conserving the quality of values and the responsibility to leave the object of conservation to the future generation in the same condition in which we received it" (2002)<sup>1</sup>. The operation thus consists of "freezing" history in a particular monument in order to hand it over to future generations exactly as one has received it. This leads to certain politics of intervention and investment, as Arízaga affirms: "The public investment in the initial conservation processes will demand strong subsidized investments to stimulate the callings of the site as cause of the urban synergies that generate employment, rent, and attractions for private investment" (2002). The Quito Cultural Heritage Rescue Fund (*Fondo de Salvamento del Patrimonio Cultural de Quito*, FONSAL)<sup>2</sup> shares this vision with results that we will assess later in this chapter.

1 All Spanish citations in this paper were translated by Luisa Ellermeier, Astrid Haas, and Olaf Kaltmeier.

2 FONSAL is an institution created in 1987, after the earthquake that affected the central zone of the city. Currently, in addition to funds coming from the international development cooperation, FONSAL receives six per cent of the income tax collected by the Municipality of the District of Quito (*Municipio del Distrito Metropolitano de Quito*,

A second critical point of view concerns the definition of “historic” city centers—as constitutive elements of the city—and the necessity to move away from a “monumentalist” conceptualization, which sees the city as ensemble of monuments that is constructed on features of architectural value, toward a conception that is principally based on social relationships. If one goes beyond the monumentalist<sup>3</sup> notion, the city as a whole can be understood as a historic product in each of its parts as well as in its entirety. Therefore, the entire city is historic, as are all centralities. It is from this understanding that the concept of the historic center may refer to a relationship that, in the first place, is born out of the center’s central position, because the concept of the center is precisely a relationship that is constructed—in urban terms—through the concentration of central functions and through their interaction with their respective surroundings. In the second place, this relationship concerns the notion of antiquity, that is, the sum of the values of the past, which is what allows one to understand the relationship between city and historic center in its development over time. In other words, going beyond the monumentalist conceptualization means to conceive of this relationship between center and surrounding city as historically emerging from its changing social conditions rather than from material conservation.

This second concept thus has generated a critical view toward these politics that have to regard the “early” incorporation of the historic center in the city as a problem of urban planning and of the “models” of public management (cf. Cifuentes 2008). These include, for example, the modalities of financing, based on the creation of institutions that intervene by means of their “own” public resources (FONSAL) or with the help of the international development cooperation (Inter-American Development Bank, Junta de Andalucía) (cf. Rojas 2004, Samaniego 2007), the process of relocating the informal sector (cf. Valdivieso 2007), or the heritage politics and discourses (cf. Kingman 2004, Kingman and Goetschel 2005, Salgado 2008), among other aspects.

Throughout its history, the debate on the character of historic city centers had its rising and falling tides, but, owing to the impact of the earthquake that hit Quito in 1987, a significant choice was made, when FONSAL assumed a central interventionist position and managed to pursue a hegemonic politics along various axes based on a monumentalist vision of the historic city center in Quito: Firstly, FONSAL established the relative autonomy of the historic center with regard to the city as a whole, as a result of which the center ceded to nurture the project of the city and began to lose its fundamental condition: functionality. In this way, the historic center tended to be seen as being on the margin of the city and its planning

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MDMQ). It is worth noting that, although a large part of its projects are related to Quito’s historic center, FONSAL’s activities are not limited to this area. (cf. FONSAL 2009).

3 The Diccionario de la Real Academia Española defines “monument” as “an established public work [of art] such as a statue, an inscription or a sepulchre put up in remembrance of a heroic action or any other singular event. A building that possesses artistic, archeological, historical, etc. value” (<http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/>).

proposal. Thereby, the centrality lost its urban condition and is now understood as being outside the relationships that constitute it, and to be perceived through the rigid frame of the “proper” attributes of monumentalism.

Secondly, FONSAL imposed the monumentalist interpretive concept and its conservationist notion of heritage politics, taking the condition of buildings as main point of reference and functionalizing historiography, stipulated by historians coming from the local elites, for that purpose.

Thirdly, FONSAL has established a model of managing the centrality with the support of national resources. Although these have an impact on real estate prices and certain economic sectors (trade, tourism, real estate), they have, in fact, not generated a principle of returning the investments made via local taxes (property tax, contributions to improvements) or national ones (VAT, income tax), which is to say that these investments have functioned as subsidies to private capital. Moreover, the international credits they command have generated project dynamics more profitable than those of urban planning, on the one hand, and the establishment of parallel administrative units that operate with the logics of the private sector, on the other hand.

In the fourth place, part of the central objectives that had been formulated was directed toward creating general conditions for attracting private capital. However, this has never happened but, instead, produced a significant depopulation, above all with regard to the lower social sectors.

This focus is to be the beginning of an erratic process that will finally result in the questioning of the condition of the “successful model.” Therefore we consider it necessary to ask questions with regard to the paradigmatic condition of the “Project Historic Center of Quito” that reach across the discourses, the vision of the city that is being promoted, and the actions unfolding from the effects the project has brought forth.

This debate is obviously not limited to Quito, as it is situated in the larger context of the renovation processes of historic city centers throughout Latin America. A key issue concerns the problem of housing, which includes a discussion on gentrification processes, changes in the profile of residents, and new conditions of using space (cf. Smith 2002, Slater 2006; for an example of the incorporation of the gentrification debate in Buenos Aires cf. Herzer 2008). Critical scholars in Latin America seek to establish the topic of housing as key element for supposedly repopulating the center—without success, though, as depopulation in renovated historic city centers continues to be high.

In this context one can witness conflicts about the uses of urban space that, in the case of Quito, express themselves in an ongoing process of hollowing out public uses of urban space and in the shift from a residential to a mixed use of the historic city center for tourism and trade that have profoundly spoiled the center and, therefore, its position as “living center.”

Moreover, the model of administration and management has come under scrutiny. In Quito, one has witnessed the emergence of parallel institutions that would establish themselves in private form in the Quito Historic Center Company

(*Empresa del Centro Histórico de Quito*). An increasing number of propositions demanding public rebuilding wherever results have not been satisfactory question this model. Hegemonic discourses about authenticity, memory, and the creation of meaning, among other issues recently interrogated, frame all of these interventions. This process of intervening in the historic center of Quito has been going on for more than three decades; yet to this day it has never been subjected to a real assessment that goes beyond the respective value judgments embedded in current ideologies rather than in the real processes.

### **The Historic Center and the City**

Quito, like many important cities in the world, turned its back on its historical origins in one of its oldest spaces, the historic center: the birthplace of the city in terms of the framework of its Spanish colonial foundation. This historical disregard was impelled by a larger process of denial that began in the midst of periods of hastened urbanization (cf. Kingman 2006), first at the beginning and later in the middle of the twentieth century. These changes spurred three unprecedented developments: a striking urban expansion, which serves to distinguish the sectors of the city, separating the downtown area from the outskirts; a correlative differentiation between the old city and the modern one; and, finally, the physical and symbolic abandonment of the historic center. As the Quito Urban Development Company (*Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano de Quito*) states:

The real estate dynamics Quito experienced during the oil period were absent from the historic center. There, contrary to the rest of the city, property deteriorated inexorably. The center began to house a sizable part of rural migrants. The crowded conditions, lack of basic services, and old age of buildings lowered their value and all forms of heritage began to erode. The quality of the environment also decreased remarkably. In those conditions, the historic center lost its functional significance, that is, it stopped being the link between the north and south of the city and became an obstacle. ... Its historic significance was also reduced: nobody identified any longer with this dirty, deteriorated, badly smelling historic center, which became a sort of example of bad urban practices and occupation of space. This situation lasted more than three decades. (INNOVAR 2008: 36–7).

This text demonstrates some of the elements of the so-called deterioration from the clearly elitist perspective of municipal policymakers: the indigenous peasant migration lowered the economic and heritage values of the site, whereby Quito's historic center lost its central functionality, and no one would identify with the center due to its supposed dirtiness, deterioration, and foul smell.

These unusual developments lead us to propose the need to identify the origin and development of Quito's historic center as part of the urbanization process.

The first point of concern is that this process began with the real and symbolic withdrawal of Quito's elite from the historic center, giving rise to the social replacement phenomenon caused by the influx of poorer inhabitants and to the territorial stigma of being a space belonging to the world of the popular classes.

Also of note is the opposition between modernity and antiquity, which comes from two historical shifts. First is a change of the city's pattern of urbanization. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the city shifted from a pattern of self-centered and low-growth development to one of high urban expansion (renovation-expansion), multi-centeredness, and it witnessed a significant population growth due to migration. The second shift concerns the establishment of the import substitution model during the 1970s that led to a metropolitan development of the city, to different kinds of centralities, and to an unparalleled growth of the outskirts, all of which resulted in the displacement of both the wealthy populations and of central functions from the city center.

For that reason, the emergence of the historic center as a real object occurred when this "crisis of centrality" arose, a predicament initially linked to the comparison between the new and the old city<sup>4</sup> and to the conflict between the traditional and the modern. According to this model, the "new, modern, progressive city" turns its back on the historical origin of the city by abandoning it politically, symbolically, and residentially, thus giving rise to a very powerful "urban imaginary:" the negation of the historical origin of the city or the so-called "urban parricide" (Sonenshein 1994: 142). In the case of Quito, this crisis of the historic center became so strong that the local elites considered its "rescue" or its "re-conquest" necessary.

However, since the inception of these developments and especially during the past twenty years, the opposite occurred: Quito's elites no longer deny the existence of the historic center but, in cooperation with the heritage technocrats who serve them, produce a separation of Quito's historic center from the rest of the city. Thus, the public policies in the historic center ignore the existence of the larger city in an attempt to turn the former into an enclave or a "bubble" independent from the latter. The central functions become "liquid," the population is forced out as a result of the high costs of this location, alleys are built exclusively for the purposes of luxury tourism, the historical center by day is totally different from the one by night, its accessibility is ever more restricted, and it is turning into a closed neighborhood rather than a functional city center.

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4 For that reason, many cities of the region became defined by this comparison between the new and the old with a name that addressed antiquity such as Old Havana, the Colonial Center of Quito, or the Old City in Montevideo, among others.

## The Historic Center Is the Public Space

Those urban policies that want to present alternatives in order to face the urban crisis have to deal with the character of space: Should space rather be public or private?

From our perspective, the historic center is the public space *par excellence*. As evidenced by its status of heritage of humanity, the particular and abundant legislation, the historical development of Quito evolving from its squares and streets to structure the location of population and urban activities, the whole of the historic center is greater than the sum of its parts. Additionally, the claim to public space is further supported by the confluence of the symbiotic (encounter), the symbolic (identity) and the polis (civic) at the site. It exemplifies the notion of “common place,” as Quito’s historic center exhibits a particular institutional framework with specific public policies, prominently including regulation and investment.

In keeping with these aspects, a project for the historic center of Quito should be socially collective, the more as the center is a heritage of humanity, engenders social identities in persons beyond the zone, and its condition of centrality is not its own, but that of the larger city. Hence, such a project should transcend time and space, while functioning within a clear framework of social confrontation, as public space is the principle milieu of the conflict between various projects, for example, the preservation that restores value to a good by returning it to its original state and the renovation that seeks to gain the value of history by stressing the past. As Françoise Choay (2007) argues, the antiquity value finally excludes the novelty value and thus threatens both the use value and the historic value. However, our proposal also encompasses the struggle about what constitutes the most desirable use of land in the historical center: Should it be residential or rather commercial? This implies considering the existence of specific interests that serve to define the economic character of the historic center.

A further important conflict about the “popular” character of Quito’s historic center exists. For example, certain sectors try to stay at this site by pursuing a politics of housing (material heritage).<sup>5</sup> This contrasts with an understanding of this space as the environment of “popular culture” (non-material heritage)—a dimension of what is subaltern in the symbolic economy of the city. These two positions are further opposed to the official discourses and practices of history, heritage, and use of space.

The conflicts surrounding Quito’s historic center also epitomize many of the symbolic elements from the various social groups in search of their “ideal” city and the construction of an “urban identity” based on it. Hence, the generation of an “urban image” is in accord with urbanization actions encompassed by a

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5 This statement is more clearly if one considers that housing—as in no other place in the city—is highly linked to labor activities, services, stores, and equipment to the point that, if one of them is modified, the entire network changes. Thus, for instance, the relocation of street merchants involves a change in housing.

heritage discourse acting as a dispositive of power that organizes public affairs (cf. Kingman and Goetschel 2005).

It is in this context that the urban imaginaries which precede the process of urban space reproduction reevaluate the importance of the historic center within the city of Quito (cf. Dammert 2009), as long as they are part of the spatial organization that occupies a prominent place in its function as “mobile frontier.” Regarding its morphology, Quito’s historic center functions as an urban centrality that concentrates central functions and as a geographic one that separates and integrates the northern and southern parts of the city. In this sense, it is the meeting point of several geographically distant realities: north/south and center/periphery. Regarding time, the historic center concentrates various urban myths and imaginaries that dispute past, present, and future. It is a space that symbolically represents the frontier between the past created through memory and the future created by desire. From the perspective of social space, Quito’s historic center operates as the privileged place of dispute between the public and the private.

Urban renewal, as an action that generates historical value, allows this triple frontier—characteristic of the historical center of Quito—to increase its meaning due to the contradictory process of producing inclusion and exclusion via the prioritization of certain uses of land over others (residential vs. commercial) and the promotion of narratives of (conflictual) identity. Likewise, this is not an attempt to deny the past and even less sublimate the existence of an “ideal past.” On the contrary, moving away from “romantic” or “nostalgic” visions assuming an ideal past, popular and even “democratic” policies have involved a transformation of public space that goes hand in hand with the construction of a representation of meanings of Quito from *quiteñidad* (“Quitoness”) in culture and the colonial character in history that, introduced by city marketing as an urban strategy and policy, assume the role of postcard narratives.<sup>6</sup>

### Heritage: Subjects, Discourses, and Market

The intervention in the historic center of Quito comes from an urban imagery that embodies some hegemonic discursive elements, settled in specific heritage subjects, such as Quito’s City Council, the international development cooperation, and the media. This discourse is based on three main components: the historical sense of what is or is not colonial, the cultural character of *mestizaje* (being *Quiteño* and being Spanish), and the social construction of a space where the popular elements can be found only as immaterial heritage. Thus, the “recovery” (of what has been lost) and the “re-conquest” (the return to the colony) become

6 According to a recent survey on the quality of living in Quito, 34 per cent of the interviewees indicated that “the historic center and the monuments” are what best represents the city, followed by the “tradition, art and culture” with 19 per cent (*Corporación Instituto de la Ciudad* 2008).

meaningful as ways to construct memory, but also to counter the need to create a symbolic economy of the memory that renders the real estate, tourist, and commercial interests profitable.

In order to understand the accounts of the heritage intervention in Quito's historic center, one has to consider three important elements. Firstly, the precept that heritage does not exist "inherently." It arises as the result of a complex interaction among agents who (arbitrarily) select natural and cultural guidelines employed in heritage discourses. The latter naturalize these guidelines, concealing their own production and selection process. This process, which Llorenc Prats calls "heritage activation" (1997), leads to the conceptualization of heritage as a social and historical construction and not as a "cultural tradition" (Mantecón 2005, Prats 1997) and "natural expression" of certain social groups. On the contrary, heritage, like discourses and politics, is produced and legitimized through certain agents by promoting a particular discourse about culture (identity), society (popular), and urban history (colonial).

Secondly, one must consider, the manner in which the highly political character of heritage works as a dispositive (cf. Kingman and Goetschel 2005) regulating both demographic arrangement and symbolic resignification within the exclusionary field of power. As Prats (2008) asks: To whom and what for could the activation of heritage be of interest? In principle, it is of interest to power, because without power there is no heritage (we mean the different kind of powers, but basically the political power at all its levels, and at the national level in the first place). For the case at hand, the heritage of the historic center of Quito does not rely upon a proposal "on the national level" but, on the contrary, pursues to uncover the particular features of the "local identity" in a manner similar to the regeneration policies carried out in the Ecuadorian city of Guayaquil (cf. Andrade 2006, 2007).

Thirdly, it is necessary to point out the relation between heritage and the globalization process, at least in two main contexts. The first of these is the concern and pressure exerted by international organizations and related to the recovery and preservation of the cultural heritage (tangible and intangible), all of which is expressed in the legislation, statements, and participation of certain external agents in the design of urban renovation and heritage policies (cf. Carrión 2001, Carrión and Dammert 2010, Carrión and Hanley 2005). The second context concerns the growing importance of tourism as the economic logic driving the heritage activation processes, namely, the explicit pursuit of turning social spaces into heritage sites in order to convert them into tourist attractions, which also influences the development of pro-heritage discourses (cf. Mezquita 2010). As Llorenc Prats and Agustín Santana assert (2005), we need to come to terms with the fact that tourism is not the only deciding factor in the logics of heritage politics, but it operates on the side of heritage activation (representation system), in which heritage can be "sold" and turned into a commodity. This implies:

the contradiction, the schizophrenia that seems to exist between the local and the global: the global space gets syncretically incorporated into the *lived experience*,



while the local spaces, perceived as *authentically* local, are represented in order to be sold (although in another sense, they could also be *lived* and correspond to diverse ways of use: economic, social and ideological. (Prats and Santana 2005: 17, emphasis in the original).

### The Three Axes of Intervention in the Historic City Center

In general terms, the renovation strategies for the historic city center in Quito have resulted in a broad range of policies and consequences for the area, which can be related to three principal areas: street trading, tourism, and the real estate sector.

#### *Street Trading*

The most visible restoration of the historic city center culminated in the formalization of street trading, which was taken as a demonstrative sign that the historic city center had been recovered (cf. Bromley 1998, Middleton 2003, 2009). Several social institutions and the Municipality of Quito participated in various aspects of this process, which spanned the years from 1998 until 2003. The endeavor ended with the relocation of about ten thousand street vendors to nearby shopping centers (6,000) or their dispersal to other sectors of the city (4,000).<sup>7</sup>

There is little information about the consequences of this process for the affected economic sector and for the historic city center. Nevertheless, Valdivieso (2007) demonstrates that in 2005 about 205 of the shops of the newly built low-priced shopping centers, where most of the merchants were concentrated, had been closed or were being used in other ways (for example as warehouses). This means that more than one thousand shops had closed. Thus the relocation of street vendors had led to a loss of the city center's commercial function.

Furthermore, the efficacy of the "restoration" of the public space has also been called into question. The premise that the public space had been "privatized" due to the use for and appropriation by informal commerce is tenuous at best. The logical outcome of a successful restoration effort would have been the full recovery of the area, marked by the respective zones' attainment of their former dimensions as public spaces after the commercial reorganization. Yet, the question remains as to whether this has been the result of the Quito project. In order to answer

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7 In 1998, there were about 8,000 merchants, who were organized in 96 associations. They were concentrated in 22 *manzanas* (street blocks), 80 per cent of which were located in the sector of Ipiales. Eighty-five percent of these vendors were located in the "public space" and 15 per cent in shopping centers. It was calculated that the clientele served by these merchants amounted to 320,000 people, 76 per cent of them from other sectors of the city (42.5 per cent from the southern parts of Quito, 30.6 per cent from the north, and 3.7 per cent from other districts). Generally speaking, the consumers came from the lower socio-economic strata (cf. Valdivieso 2007).

this question, one must examine the basis of the overarching historic city center project, a venture which seeks to generate a clean and ordered space, one without any conflicts. Its culmination should be a space that has been converted into a tourist attraction and that serves to convey a "particular" narrative about Quito. It was with these goals in mind that the "tourist walking routes" of the historic city center were constructed, conduits which lead to and connect the *plazas* and monuments with the highest patrimonial values.

Therefore, we propose to understand the question of the restoration of the public space in terms of a dispute between the street vendors, on the one hand, and the tourist enterprises and real estate agencies, on the other. The latter benefit from the reconstruction of the urban landscape in the historic city center and, especially, from the new tourist trails. These developments were made possible by a different use of the land, namely the relocation of street trading and the new location of prestigious shops, restaurants, and hotels. This clearance of the urban and social space was accompanied by a simultaneous surge of a postcard-like narrative of the city, a formalized scene of a spectacularization of history for tourist ends.

### *Tourism*

Boosting tourism is an explicit aim of the politics of renovation. Therefore, a heritage discourse emerged that was structured along the lines of strategic city marketing. This heritage discourse is sustained by the aforementioned trio: *quiteñidad* (identity), coloniality (historicity), and social clearance (socio-economy). From this perspective, a whole array of public interventions were developed which seek to construct an *ad-hoc* space that is delimited by the façades, the relocation of street trading, the design of exclusive walking routes, and the encouragement of investments in the tourist infrastructure.

The importance of the historic city center as a node of attraction is unquestionable. In the past decades, Ecuador has faced a constant growth of the tourist sector (both domestic and international), for which the historic city center of Quito is one of the most important attractions. According to the data of the Metropolitan Corporation for Tourism, of the recreational tourists (approximately 41 per cent of all tourists), 71 per cent have visited the historic center. Nevertheless, although the historic city center is one of the main tourist attractions of Quito, it is a zone where the tourists only stay about five hours a day on average, due to the low level of infrastructure.<sup>8</sup>

We can confirm the concentration of heritage-related interventions in specific areas such as the principal centers (*plazas*), certain city districts (*barrios*), determined

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8 According to the tourist survey (*Catastro turístico* 2008), the historic center consists of the following tourist infrastructure: 25 cafés (one of the first class), six apartment hotels, five hotels (one of the first class), 15 apartment hostels (two of the first class), four hostels (two of the first class), five bed and breakfast places (one of the first class), 65 restaurants (five of the first class), and nine bars, among others.

axes of transportation (*calles*), and specific sites (namely monuments) in Quito. In this context, we would like to propose the presence of a segregated politics of intervention, one which promotes “walking routes” through particular zones while disregarding other areas, which are then eliminated from the historic landscape.

Instead of an “integral” policy of the historic city center that considers the entire area to be the spatial scale of intervention, the interventions are guided by a principle of selection, focusing on isolated and aseptic “bubbles.” Obviously, this logic goes hand in hand with the hegemonic modalities of tourism, as these bubbles in the city center are designed for a specific niche in the tourist market that itself transforms the entire city center, driven by the impact of franchises and businesses, by cosmopolitan patterns of consumption, and by the flow of tourists who have no relation to the place. Tourists are given preference while local residents lose their right to the city.

### *The Real Estate Sector*

A further explicit aim of the Municipality of Quito is the rehabilitation of the historic city center from a monumentalist perspective. Here, the real estate sector is the principal beneficiary. The annual investment in the last eight years amounted to approximately 41 million US \$ on average. The overwhelming majority of funds was directed to the reconstruction of buildings (residences,<sup>9</sup> churches), infrastructural improvements (drains, transport), and the improvement of public spaces, all of them in some ways related to economic interests.

In the context of urban renewal, the residential question is especially important. The supply of available housing and the rehabilitation of existing houses have increased with the municipal residential projects, although this still cannot be considered as an integral housing policy. Instead, the municipality has regarded gentrification as a solution to the housing problem. On the one hand, several initiatives aimed to promote the “return” of persons of the middle- and upper-middle classes into this area. On the other hand, in the last twenty years, Quito has faced an estimated loss of 41 per cent of the total population of the historic center due to high rent and housing prices. In other words, the discourse of the “living historic center” resulted in an exodus of residents and a crisis of the promotion of the residential character of the historic city center. In 1974, the area of the historic city center was home to 90,000 inhabitants; in 2001 there were only 51,000 residents. If this trend continues at its current rate, we can estimate that the number of urban dwellers in this area will be reduced to 15,812 persons in 2025.

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9 One of the most important programs is *Pon a punto tu casa*, a credit program for the restoration of old houses. Between 2003 and 2007, 136 credits were granted, which financed the renovation of 88 pieces of property—including 352 apartments—with a public investment of more than two million US \$ and a private contribution by the owners of less than one million US \$.

Thus, the question arises as to what kind of historic city center is considered to be a "living center."

## Conclusion

In the following final reflections, we would like to highlight some ideas for the understanding of the recent dynamics of historic city centers. One important notion is related to the condition of historic city centers as public spaces. We argue that public spaces are spaces that cannot be conceived of without conflict, as discussions, negotiations, and tensions form part of public life. This approach implies moving beyond those technocratic, monumentalist, and conservationist visions that separate history from social and technical interventions and thus depoliticize heritage. In order to debunk these perspectives, we argue that with regard to heritage we are facing a multifaceted issue that encompasses debates between the past and present, on the one hand, and the desired future, on the other, between social actors and economic interests, between practices and imaginaries.

These processes can be conceived of in terms of a conflictive struggle of inclusion/exclusion in the historic city center, which begins with two dynamics. First, we must mention the prioritization of specific patterns of land use, the promotion of particular narratives, as well as the deployment of heritage dispositives which aim to reduce the ensuing tensions, producing an urban aesthetics and landscape supposedly free of conflicts. The latter thus represent a veritable identity politics that condenses the connotations and significations of the historic center. This results in a negation of the possibility of generating an inclusive space that encompasses the central node as well as its surroundings, the tourist circuits as well as the popular residential zones, the richness of the historic monuments as well as the social poverty around them.

In the historic city center of Quito, these developments have generated a high level of urban segregation. Upon closer inspection one can observe a specific pattern of segregation that does not merely divide the space according to its usage or the social stratification of its users. Instead, we face a multiple fragmentation of the historic center based on different patterns of land use (economy, tourism), activities and practices, and the location of those residents who do not belong to the postcard narrative. The areas where the latter tend to live and/or work are often represented as "problem" zones in the urban maps of the city planners,<sup>10</sup> including spaces declared as "no-go" areas for tourists.

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10 In the *Plan Especial para el Centro Histórico* (MDMQ 2003), the following "problem zones" are listed: a) the García Moreno prison and the neighborhood of San Roque; 2) *El Tejar*, *Ipiales*, and *La Merced*; 3) the "Terminal Terrestre" bus terminal; 4) Av. 24 de Mayo; 5) Av. Pichincha, La Marín. Apart from this recognition, the plan lists only a few measures that could be implemented in these areas. Therefore, these areas have maintained the status of "problem zones" over the last years.

The red light district in La Cantera in the neighborhood of San Roque, one of the most precarious and impoverished sectors of the historic center, may be one of the most representative examples of this phenomenon: the combination of civic fragmentation, the creation of an artificial image, and the lack of an integral policy. Furthermore, it is also a fragmented area in chronological terms, a space with multiple temporal landscapes. While there is a massive and never-ending movement of people and traffic in the morning, the same area at night seems to consist of an empty space, where the contrast of dark streets and bright lights form a desolate landscape, which is not easily reconcilable with the hoped-for “constructed heritage” of the area.<sup>11</sup>

The historic center of Quito is the stage of a strange conflict between a proposal of gentrification based on the construction of infrastructure and high-cost housing, thus aiming to generate a transformation of the socio-economic composition of the urban population, on the one hand, and the ongoing process of the *boutiquización* of the center, on the other. The latter entails little more than the changes in land use from housing to commercial purposes such as hotels, fashion and luxury goods stores, restaurants, and monuments used for personal memories (weddings) or cultural events.

A second conclusion derives from the necessity of rethinking the historic center of Quito in terms of a public space. This is especially the case *vis-à-vis* the state reforms initiated in the 1990s and the process of decentralization they have imposed. In the context of this process, competences and resources were directed to the municipalities, and many public services were privatized. One of the many consequences of this process was an ambivalent situation, whereby, on the one hand, the municipalities have been strengthened in relation to the national government, whereas, on the other hand, they have become weaker with regard to the city, as the urban government depends more on market forces than on public policies today (cf. Hiernaux and González 2008).

In this context, the administration of Quito's historic center has been decentralized, following an agreement between the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (*Instituto Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural*) and the municipality, which affirms the responsibility of the latter. On the basis of this agreement, the municipality established a private-public model of administration in which the Quito Historic Center Company—with resources from an international credit granted by the Inter-American Development Bank and FONSAL that provides national funding—generated a market-related, business-oriented logic of intervention.

The main symbol of public power, the Ecuadorian Presidential Palace, is still located at the *Plaza de la Independencia*. Nevertheless, rumors circulate in Quito

11 Ultimately, the situation at night changes due to the establishment of restaurants and bars in the recently restored street of La Ronda. Nonetheless, these features do not represent a transformation of the general use of the space of the historic center, but only a selective one.

of its relocation to the outskirts of the historic city center. In terms of identity politics, this could mean a devastating strike against the principal instance of democratic representation.

Indeed, Quito is facing a context in which the market appears as the object of desire for public politics, although public investment is nearly inexistent and private capital does not seem to take root in the historic center. This constellation recalls the typical contradictions of an expanding urban neoliberalism. The dismantling of the state, following the logics of privatization, leads to a deregulation that subordinates everything under the primacy of the market. While public investments are directed towards private interests, the need to create ideal conditions for attracting private capital arises. FONSA's investments can be ultimately considered as a public subsidization of private ones (cf. Arízaga 2002). Moreover, local business people are represented on the board of directors of the Quito Historic Center Company as well as involved in decisions about public investment. Under these conditions, it seems necessary to redefine and reinforce the symbiotic, symbolic, and public factors that qualify an urban space like the historic city center.

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