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PERIURBAN FOOD PRODUCTION SPACES IN CENTRAL MEXICO: POOR, MARGINALITY AND CONFLICTS.

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Abstract – Agricultural practices are widespread in the periurban zones of developing countries. For periurban poor population, agriculture represents a complement to family income and an alternative for food supplies. For these peoples, the role of UPA (Urban and Periurban Agriculture) is very important. In Latin America, operation of periurban spaces has differentiated functions and roles: most of their inhabitants face conditions of marginalization or at best, subsist through the food self-production. Periurban poors are facing a double situation: the degradation of their activity and the transformation of their peasant condition; at the time, a conflict by the dispute for the space with other social groups, with different interests and meanings. In this paper we discuss about diverse manifestations of territorial restructuring in a global context, specifically in periurban areas of Metropolitan Central Mexico. Above all, its interest lies in an analysis of these transformations within the context of the old rural spaces, those which have been affected by the advance of urbanization. The development of peri-urban agriculture in some cities of Central Mexico has established important patterns of territory transformation, either in changes of use of land or in the structure of production, or in social and cultural changes. Periurban agriculture is one of the several activities in this territory, that remains with another non-farming activities, mainly manufactures and tertiary, that are having a quick diffusion.

Key words: territorial changes, conflict, marginalization, periurbanization, urban and periurban agriculture

INTRODUCTION

In the central region of Mexico, around the central metropolitan nucleus – the agglomeration of Mexico Valley - we recognize the dilated periurban space denominated the *regional crown* of Mexico City (as this is at its centre). We are talking about a dense patchwork of urban networks where most of the region's cities converge (the metropolitan areas of Mexico, Toluca, Cuernavaca, Puebla, Pachuca, Querétaro, and other localities with more than 15 thousand inhabitants). This territorial scheme includes the development of rural industrialization districts.

The object of this paper is to present diverse manifestations of the restructuring of territories in a global context, specifically in Mexico, by the food production. Above all,

its interest lies in an analysis of these transformations within the context of the old rural spaces, those which have been affected by the advance of urbanization. The development of peri-urban agriculture in some cities of Central Mexico has established important patterns of territory transformation, either in changes of use of land or in the structure of production, or in social and cultural changes. Periurban agriculture is one of the several activities in this territory, that remains with another non-farming activities, mainly manufactures and tertiary, that are having an quick difussion.

The growth experienced by Mexico City and its periphery has taken place mainly on agricultural lands, 60% of which were at the time under the regimen of collective property, in *ejidos* and/or agricultural properties. In this way, deprivation and marginality are two phenomena which have accompanied urban expansion during the second half of the twentieth century. If these spaces still maintain a rural feel, the urbanization drive is slowly changing the image and functions of these lands, with some functions that could be identified with both urban and rural settings.

Agricultural practices are widespread in the periurban zones of developing countries. For periurban poor population, agriculture represents a complement to family income and an alternative for food supplies. For these peoples, the role of UPA (Urban and Periurban Agriculture) is very important. In Latin America, operation of periurban spaces has differentiated functions and roles: most of their inhabitants face conditions of marginalization or at best, subsist through the food self-production. The urban poor population face difficulties in acquiring sufficient and healthy food from traditional rural agriculture. Governmental policies either neglect or discourage the informal food systems on which the poor depend.

This research was conducted between 2003 and 2006 in five metropolitan areas of central Mexico (Cuernavaca, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Toluca and Cuautla) with analysis of statistical information (economically active population in peri-urban areas, percentage of land under agricultural use; labor mobility, migration of the workforce, etc.). Also interviewed leaders of agricultural unions in metropolitan peripheries, in order to meet precise causes of changes in land use and ownership of land.

The main features of agricultural practice on metropolitan peripheries of Mexico City Regional Crown are:

1. UPA it is a marginal, practiced by poor agricultural producers. But there are also any farmers who export and use high-tech
2. There is a permanent loss of agricultural lands due to urban expansion, up to 40% of the area, in the span of the last 20 years.
3. Urban employment it is increasing in periurban spaces.
4. A high percentage of rent of lands, overall from social property (*ejidos*).
5. There is a deficit in the regeneration of the youth labor in periurban areas.
6. Persistence of UPA as a peri-cultural identity.

At the time, periurban spaces are conflictive zones, which are under immense pressure from cities. There is uneven space occupation ways. For peasants, access to land is based on subsistence reasons, life-style and a clear culture and identity expressions. For those considered "newrurals", improving their comfort and standard of living is the main aim, to enjoy their free time, relax at the "second home" or make plans for retirement.

That way, periurban poors are facing a double situation: the degradation of their activity and the transformation of their peasant condition; at the time, a conflict by the dispute for the space with other social groups, with different interests and meanings. This is one face of New Rurality: the unequal access and use of urban-rural peripheral spaces, and redefinition and marginality increasing.

Transformation of rural spaces.

The organization and restructuring of regions within the globalization process and the debate and/or paradigm on the reestablishment of industrial districts in the post-Fordist model of flexible production (“winners” or “losers”, Benko and Lipietz, 1994), has been critically revised and redefined over the end of 90’s. For others positions in this debate, the notion of economic space as a category of analysis is reinforced, especially under the Spatial Economic Theory Approach. The central idea established here is the validity of the centre/periphery approach. So-called *geographical economics* is referred to in terms of “the localization of production in space” (Cfr. Krugman, 1996: 1-3). Other points of view, recognize the *Territory* as an expression of social relations in space. It is identified as a social construction in a spatial dimension, given meaning and life by a social group (Piolle, 1998; Di Meo, 1998). For example, in Latin-American agrarian societies, despite the productive and social restructuring processes imposed by economic liberalization, the relationship these social groups have with their territorial environment continues to be very complex with cultural processes still playing a central role.

The changes in the economy and society from second half of XXth century, have transformed the essence of rural spaces. Aspects such as productive restructuring, rurbanization or periurbanization, rural environmental questions, agricultural modernization, rural tourism, periurban agriculture, female agricultural work etc. constitute a fundamental core in researching rural themes.. Nowadays, the approach or idea of the *New Rurality* has permeated the analysis of rural spaces, in the distinct disciplines which are concerned with studying them.

Within the new centrality caused by globalization in local territories, rural spaces are made increasingly dependent on cities, but they continue to exist in new forms and with diverse operation strategies, adapting to new circumstances, whether in terms of production or of social and cultural aspects; in periurban territories, hybrid forms arise containing elements from both urban and rural settings.

A recent outcome of metropolitan expansion can be seen in the development of periurban zones. Even if urban growth rates have been modified over the last few decades, cities still keep on expanding. Latin-American capitals continue to exert a substantial influence and they establish norms in terms of the use and appropriation of urban-rural spaces in contact. Spaces which until recently maintained an important agricultural vocation, have now adapted to the cities’ functions and requirements

Urbanization is one of main phenomena in the contemporary society. In some countries, urbanization has been closely associated with economic growth and eventually poverty reduction. But in Latin American countries this not necessarily happens. In that countries, operation of periurban spaces has differentiated functions and roles: most of their inhabitants face conditions of marginalization or at best, subsist through the food self-production. The urban poor population face difficulties in acquiring sufficient and healthy food from traditional rural agriculture. Agricultural practices are widespread in the periurban zones of developing countries. For periurban poor

population, agriculture represents a complement to family income and an alternative for food supplies. For these peoples, the role of UPA (Urban and Periurban Agriculture) is very important.

Urbanization and Territorial Reorganization in Mexico.

Nowadays, territorial transformations, which have occurred as a consequence of the uncontrolled expansion of urban zones in Mexico, are evident; both large and medium-sized cities grew uncontrollably in the seventies. Although the tendency began to be reverted towards the eighties, progress did not come to a complete stop. Enormous expanses of agricultural land were incorporated into the hierarchy and organization of big cities. For example, in the east of Mexico City, one of the biggest conurbations in the country was set up. New urban sub-centres were consolidated and others of lesser standing experienced territorial transformations displaying a transition between rurality and urbanity, with no clear tendency towards either one.

After the high urbanization rates of the seventies, the eighties were fundamental in the formation of the urban system in Mexico; factors such as the acute economic crisis, the process of greater economic opening and the accompanying structural changes necessary for operational capacity, modified the pattern of population distribution in the territory. In this way, since the mid-eighties, Mexico has experienced a gradual incorporation into economic globalization processes, whose maximum expression up until now can be seen in the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994. In principle, this is a reflection of economic tendencies towards globalizing markets and transformations in Mexican economic geography.

Since the eighties, a *territorial reorganization* in Mexico has been witnessed, characterized by the emergence of a stratum of medium and small-sized towns around the principal metropolises: Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey (see map 1). This is the result of a redefinition of the international division of labour and the subsequent adjustments in the previous economic model; this process could modify the ambits of rurality (the social and productive polarization of agricultural producers), at the same time as it would affect socio-spatial restructuring and accentuate a *territorial concentrated structure*. In the central region of Mexico, around the central metropolitan nucleus – the agglomeration of Mexico Valley - the dilated periurban space is in formation. We are talking about a dense patchwork of urban networks where most of the region's cities converge (the metropolitan areas of Mexico City, Toluca, Cuernavaca, Cuautla, Puebla, Pachuca and other localities with more than 15 thousand inhabitants; (see maps 2 and 3). This territorial scheme includes the development of rural industrialization districts (Delgado 1999).

The growth experienced by Mexico City has taken place mainly on agricultural lands, 60% of which were at the time under the regimen of collective property, in *ejidos* and/or agricultural properties. In the fifties, substantial expanses of *ejidal* or communal¹ lands were incorporated into urban zones, generally in the form of expropriations; lands which were originally destined for agricultural uses became susceptible to urbanization, even when the changes were carried out by agricultural authorities. Towards the end of the seventies, deprived urban areas began to spread onto communal and *ejidal* lands in immense proportions. The growing migratory pressure caused illegal sales of social property. In this way, deprivation and marginality are two phenomena which have accompanied urban expansion during the second half of the twentieth century.

¹ Collective property of land.

Other rural spaces bordering Mexico City have suffered the onslaught of urbanization and have been transformed. Some examples are Chalco Valley and the South of the Federal District (Xochimilco, Tláhuac and Milpa Alta). If these spaces still maintain a rural feel, the urbanization drive is slowly changing the image and functions of these lands, with some functions that could be identified with both urban and rural settings. Currently, the agricultural plots are being abandoned, as contaminated water in Xochimilco Lake has reduced the productive capacity of the traditional crops, under the system of *chinampas* (man-made islands). Watering these crops with sewage water has caused a process of biological contamination and the salinization of the soil. In 1930, Xochimilco was situated outside of Mexico City and had 73 hectares of urban space; this increased to more of 2,500 hectares in 2000, and is now totally swallowed up by the urban stain of Mexico City. The lake, who in the beginnings of XX th century had an extension of 350 km², for the 2007 had reduced their surface to 170 km².

In 1992, a constitutional reform to article 27 took place. The possibility of privatizing *ejidos* was established, so *ejidatarios* are now free to do as they like with their property. In an urban context, the Agrarian Law anticipated that the *ejidal* lands situated in the growth area of a population centre should abide by the regulations and laws on human settlements: the Agrarian law no longer restricts developers and beneficiaries of expropriations of *ejidal* and common land, who can now carry out this action personally; in this way, agricultural expropriations, previously considered as social property, can now become incorporated into the land market where generally they are used for housing.

The persistence of agricultural activities, as an expression of the New Rurality, appears to be the clearest indicator of this type of relationship between cities and their immediate rural surroundings. Mexican urban economies display a high demand for agricultural products as well as for labour and land, the latter being for either productive or urban (housing or speculative) purposes. Since the nineteen-nineties, agricultural practices in several different Mexican cities have reformulated the different variables which affect economic growth (particularly employment and productive activities), the maintenance of sustainable development policies and the life and cultural practices of local communities (Torres, 2000: 9-15).

In Mexico, various research projects have already been drawn up, especially regarding the appearance of this phenomenon in the periphery of Mexico City (Torres, 2000). In the same manner, given the pattern of national urban growth, periurban agricultural practices have spread to many medium-sized cities in central Mexico, such as Cuernavaca and Cuautla (Avila, 1997), Querétaro (Ramírez, 2000) or Texcoco (Aguilar and Escalona, 2000), amongst others, with important territorial and productive implications.

Agriculture in Periurban Spaces in Mexico.

In the periphery of the cities and Mexican metropolis, the towns, *ejidos* and agrarian communities that have been absorbed by the expansion of the urban spot, practice farming and forest activities that adapt to circumstances different from the traditional agriculture of the countryside (Canabal, 2000:13 - 14). New forms about the use of the natural resources and as far as the relations of land property Earth are pronounced, where the pernicious effects of new agrarian dispositions related to processes of accelerated urbanization are conjugated. In reference to a major regional context of greater amplitude, Delgado (2003) had suggested towards principles of Nineties, it was possible to identify forms of urban and periurban agricultural explotations in the main metropolitan agglomerations that integrate to *Center of Mexico Regional Crown*. It wad

registered approximately 14 000 units of rural production, located mainly in the periphery of the urban metropolitan conglomerates of Puebla, Tlaxcala, Cuernavaca, Cuautla, Pachuca, Toluca and Querétaro (Ibid. : 106-109).

Urban and Periurban Agriculture (UAP) in the territorial transformations of Central Mexico.

Urban and periurban agriculture, like a systematic practice in the public policies of rural development, has acquired a paper of relative importance in some Latin American countries like Cuba, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, among others; in Mexico, his practices has a wide tradition, in places that were separated of the city, but with the advance of the urbanization has been absorbed and that they have maintained his activities farming; this situation persiste in two ways: by peasant tradition in the cities and peripherals, or like survival strategy and contribution of resources to the family economy.

In Mexico the territorial transformations have happened as a result of the uncontrolled expansion of the urban zones; the big cities was grewing without control in the Seventies; although the tendency began to revert itself towards the eighty, did not let progress. Enormous agricultural land extensions were incorporated in the hierarchy and the dynamics of the big cities. Linked processes like the economic concentration, agricultural crises, the growth of the population and the migration towards the urban centers, the increase and null access to the urban ground, the marginality and poverty among others, explain the existence and development of the periurban phenomenon in several big cities of Mexico (Avila, 2001:121 - 122).

From 2000, several studies about territorial transformations and mutations of the scopes of the agricultural production have been developed, over the Mexico's *megalopolis* (periurban zones and urban conglomerates surrounding the metropolitan zone of Mexico City).

For example in the metropolitan zone of Puebla (to southeast of Mexico City), the four biggest in the Mexican urban hierarchy, have happened important territorial reconstructions. Facts like the construction of a great commercial and habitacional complex in a zone of agrarian tradition (Angelópolis project), as well as the gradual transformation of the crops pattern on *ejidal* lands in the urban *continuum*, have modified the roll and the functions of the peripheral rural spaces (Perez, 2001; Perez and Silva, 2003). Nevertheless, its evolution fortified the regional concentration and the proliferation of the urban way of life in the rural peripheral surroundings. The regional strategy favoured the installation of industries outside the limits of the urban conglomerate (industry corridors) in expropriated *ejidal* lands; it impelled the urban infrastructure (construction of highways, a big airport, pipelines, residential areas, etcetera), with which it transformed the territorial structure. The rural territories considered not competitive were left out and projects of integration of "modern" agricultural productive chains were only impelled, leaving it go to but of 80% of regional agriculture (Bernal, 2005).

In Morelos state (at South of Mexico's metropolitan zone), the polarization of his territory and the neighboring regions, exclusively in the Cuernavaca-Cuautla corridor, has reinforced the process of accelerated urbanization on the peripheral agricultural areas, with strong incidences in the local crops pattern and an intense dispute by the use of hydric resources, originally for the agricultural irrigation and gradually transferred to the urban supply (Avila: 1997, 2006). It is recognized nevertheless, the existence of agricultural practices into the city like and his periphery, to attend to expectations of

local population, for economical subsistence or like established productive activity. In the same way, the implantation of industrial areas, has derived in important impacts in the culture and the daily life from the traditional agrarian communities, as it is the case of the creation of the Cuernavaca Valley Industrial City (Peimbert, 2003). The territorial changes that are expressed in Morelos cities are a new expression of the subsidiary character that historically they have had around the great national metropolis (Avila, 2001:11).

In Texcoco región (to East to Mexico City), it persists a big zone of agricultural and cattle production, that has resisted the attack of the urbanization, although has rebounded negatively as much as the quality of waters used in the process (Navarro: 2000, 2003); on the other hand, important processes happen in the Valley of Lerma-Toluca (at west of Mexico metropoles), where the policies of industrial development and construction of transportation infraestructure (mainly Toluca international airport), have changed the agricultural area and the ejidales properties in the zone. Nevertheless, the periurban agriculture practices continues, asked by the urban markets (Orozco, 2000, 2001, 2003).

In Hidalgo state (at north of Mexico City), the recent territorial transformations of greater importance, have happened in the cities of Pachuca and Tizayuca. Both cities developed quick processes of conurbation on lands of low agrolological capacity, where numerous sets of individual houses were created. The city of Tizayuca, due to his expansion tendencies, develops important functions within the urban system that governs the metropolitan zone of the City of Mexico (Fabre, 2003). The nexus will be fortified with the restoration of the international airport terminal that has projected in this place. In this space it express the existence of urban and periurbana agriculture like an alternative before the crisis of national agriculture. Independently of the aims, to produce for self-production or, for the provision of urban fresh vegetables to the market.

Future of rural-periurban spaces in Central Mexico.

In less developed countries like Mexico, rural spaces have experienced an intense process of development in capitalist relations production in agriculture. In this process farmers, have participated peasants and *ejidatarios*, generally in inequality situation about benefits and access to resources. The advance of the urbanization is at the moment a threat for the inhabitants and actors of the rural spaces, mainly the near ones the cities. The uncontrolled urban expansion, will deepen the changes in the use of lands, in addition to important transformations in the productive structure of the peripheral localities in the cities. The advance of urbanization on territories of social property (*ejidos*) would have incidence on the urban morphology and the structure of the rural space, besides in the use and management of natural resources and in other aspects of the cultural scope. The establishment of policies of sustainable rural development can face to advance of accelerated urbanization that absorbs at great speed the surrounding agricultural surfaces; public policies with top priority in local management and in the handling of the periurban territories.

A question of utmost importance in the analysis of periurban spaces relates to territorial transformations due to economic factors, especially those which are derived from structural adjustments in the economy (changes in the form of land tenancy, social policies and investments in urban and rural settings etc.). It is also important to know their significance and effects on the local economy, like the changes in land use (from agricultural to urban uses and vice versa, industrial etc.), the development of industrial, handcrafts and/or *maquila* activities, the practice of primary activities (agriculture,

livestock farming, forestry, aquaculture etc.) at the family level, or the gradual growth of the service sector, a phenomenon which has been widely developed in Mexico and in Latin America.

From the point of view of the construction of land identity by the periurban inhabitants, one must analyse the new roles and strategies which local actors adopt in urban-rural transition zones; the social-territorial networks which exist there; the new identities which the periurban inhabitants build. The social imaginary, the feeling of territorial belonging and the link between symbolism and territoriality regarding cultural patrimony.

In conclusion, the different manifestations witnessed in periurban spaces constitute an important area of study, as this is a phenomenon which we will see for some time to come under new forms and types of global economy.

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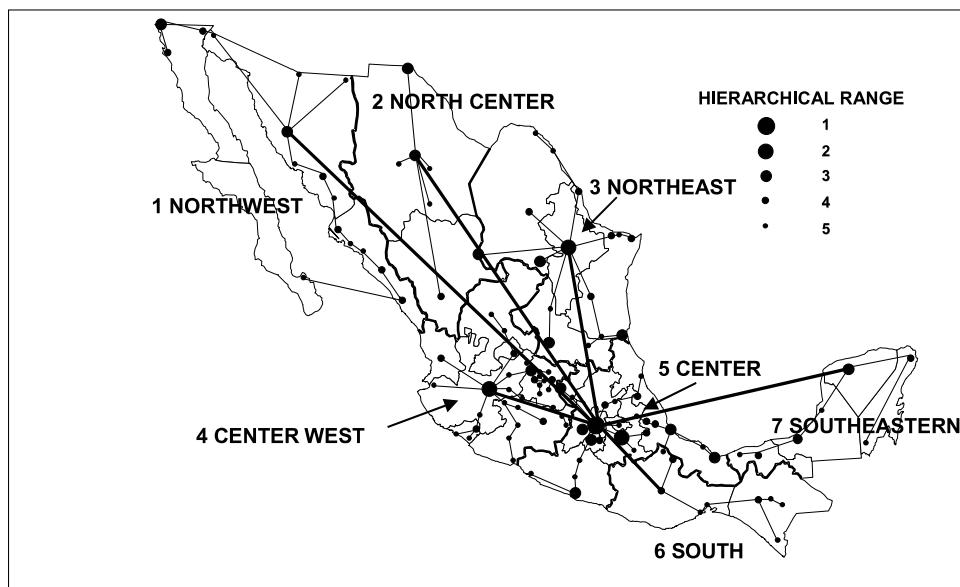
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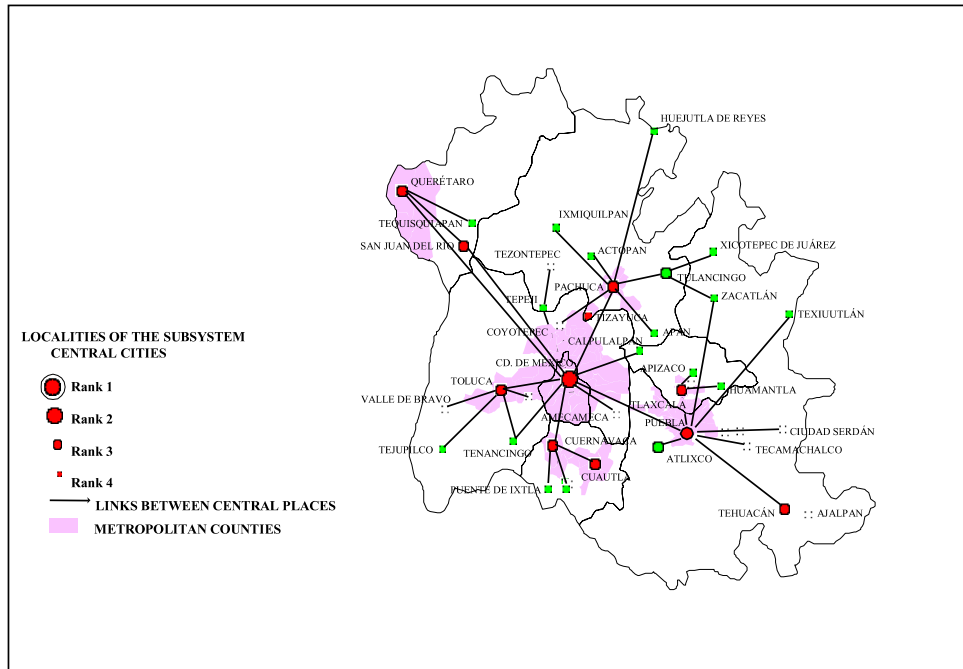
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Figure 1: National urban system and regions of Mexico.



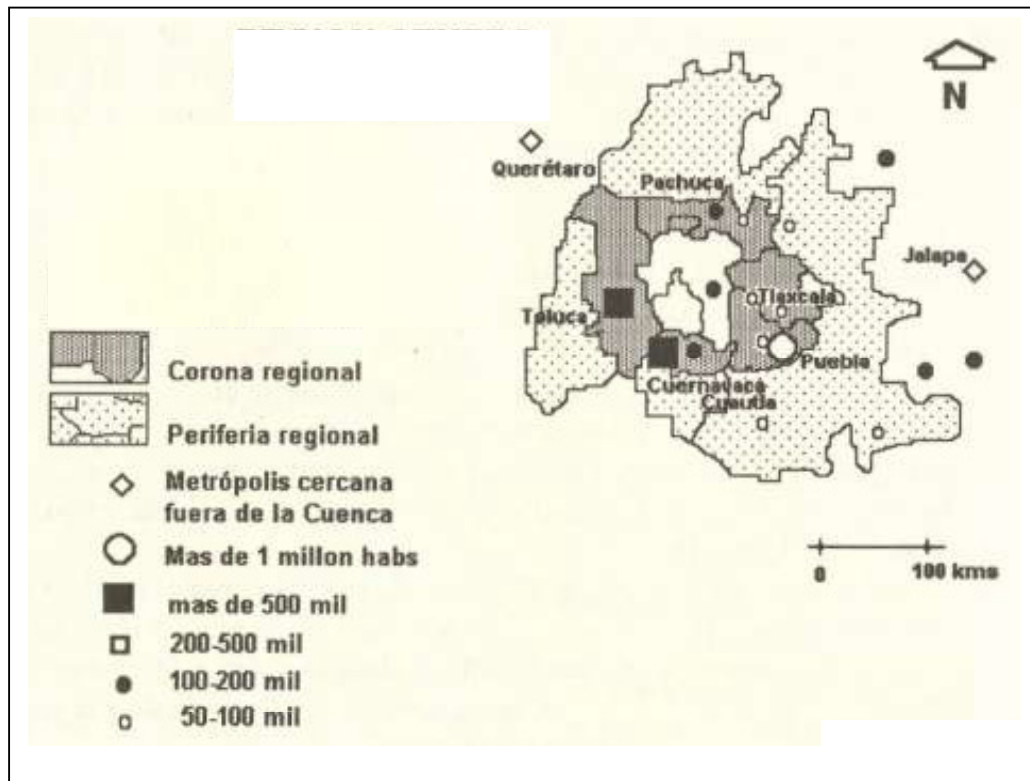
Source: SEDESOL, CAM-SAM, IIEc-UNAM (2001)

Figure 2. Cities Subsystem in Central Mexico



Source: CONAPO (2001)

Figure 3 Región Centro de México.



Source: Delgado (1998).