

## **Imaginary Maps and Urban Memory: Elements for the Study of Territorial Identity**

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This study analyzes 13 maps of the imaginary of Mexico City throughout a period of five centuries in the history of the metropolis, in order to understand both the urban memory and the imaginaries that sustain the current representations that this great city inspires in today's residents. In the antique maps shown, the prevailing urban imaginary can be observed in each period from the 16th to the 20th century. In spite of the city's transformations and its representations, there are elements that help recreate the urban memory (mythical, social, architectural) that sustains its territorial identity.

**Keywords:** *territorial identity, imaginary maps, collective memory, social representations, Mexico City.*

There are cities that in response to the level of historical patrimonial conservation, allows the resident or visitor the reconstruction of the city's past. Other cities though, have been completely transformed, so that the insight into its past relies more on an imaginary reconstruction, than on a

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concrete material support. Mexico City is an example of this last case, because, since its foundation by the Aztec people around 1325, it has been constantly and radically transformed, so that it has become a most difficult task to either, identify with it or to recognize oneself in it.

Mexico City's current urban imaginary is split between the magnificence of its historical past and the typical urban problems of a metropolis over 20 million inhabitants. At each stage of its history, the city has generated mythical and fanciful representations stemming from its own specific characteristics, but also originating in the imagination of the person perceiving it. For example, it has been called: the cradle of the founding myth of the Aztec Empire; the "Venice" of the Spanish conquistadors; the "City of Palaces" of the Spanish colonies in America; the example of modernity for 19th Century; the centre of power and the country's development for post-revolutionary Mexico and finally, it seems to have abandoned its glories to become one of the largest metropolis of the 21st Century.

Throughout its history, the imaginary of Mexico City has been manifested equally in verbal expression as well as in cartographic representations (maps). Here we analyze some antique maps of the city, using them as a prototype of a socio-spatial representation of a certain period. It is not our intention to offer a historical/geographical analysis, rather, to have a psychosocial look at these imaginary maps, so as to understand better how the city is experienced, remembered and imagined today.

We will consider imaginary maps to be spatial representations created by a social subject that reflect the different meanings of the territory (Jodelet, 1982; Arruda & de Alba, 2007). In imaginary maps, both the urban experience and a collective memory are expressed; these constitute the basis of socio-spatial identity, not only in terms of certain social belongings in some neighborhoods, but also in terms of a national and cultural identity.

First we will discuss about the relationship between social representations and imaginary maps. Secondly, we will present the analysis of antique maps of Mexico City in chronological order up to 1900, the time when it clearly loses the original outline of what had been the Aztec and the colonial city (Monnet, 1993). Finally, in order to connect the antique maps with the contemporary city live, we will present the results of drawings of mental maps, created by a sample of residents of the current metropolitan area. This comparison aims to answer two relevant questions for the analysis of collective memory and national identity in the context of

big contemporary metropolis: What remains of the historical city in the symbolic construction of the megacity? Where does the contemporary city-dweller find the roots of his identity and the traces of collective urban memory?

## SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACE AND IMAGINARY MAPS

The study of social representations of space is a complex topic because it involves important dimensions of spatial analysis: The social dimension of the occupied space given by the group membership and the social meaning of the place; A territorial dimension seen as the physical context, but also as the scenario of economic, political and cultural dynamics that create and re-create it; A subjective dimension: the subject constructs his space in the experience of the territory and simultaneously the space itself grants him identity and socio-territorial belonging (Vidal and Pol, 2005); A temporal dimension that anchors current representations of the territory in both a remote and immediate past. Because of its complexity, the analysis of socio-spatial representation requires a methodology that combines diverse techniques that offer a grasp at territorial images together with the experience of the space present and past. The concept of mental map has been accepted as an appropriate theoretical-methodological tool for the study of spatial representations in different scientific fields (Kitchin, 1994).

Mental maps can be considered social representations since they are spatial images (not literal copies of the real thing), built up from the individual's socio-cultural baggage, his social position and experience of the place. The space itself, is the context in which groups or society as a whole project their actions and social structure (Jodelet, 1982).

There are different methods for observing mental maps based both on the individual's graphic and verbal expressions. A drawing is often a frequent way of studying these maps. In spite of the methodological challenges (Evans, 1980), it offers a wealth of resources for studying the imaginary, because it allows individuals to create their map in a drawing that expresses their socio-territorial identity, their memories, convictions, beliefs and their cultural baggage in a projective form. The space represented is endowed with the socio-cultural meaning that its creator grants, thus an individual drawing becomes a figurative form of a social representation. Its imaginary aspects are captured in the free trace of the line, in its contents that seek to represent

a space, its imagined space. By the term imaginary map, we refer to a creative vision of the social representation that goes beyond the restrictions of rationality, giving free flight to the imagination of the individual who constructs a representation of a certain territory. Beyond its practical function, the imaginary map expresses mythical, idealistic, fanciful, utopian aspects of the shared culture from which the creator cannot escape.

Consequently, when analyzing the drawing, we do not expect to find a faithful reflection of reality, but an analogous one, whose distortions, omissions and additions are a projection of the person drawing it. While clinical psychology studies the drawing as a projective personality test, social psychology looks for the projection of socially defined individuals immersed in the course of a cultural history as groups. The drawing shows how it is represented through codes and socially constructed concepts, and it bears the creative mark of its creator, who reproduces real things in accordance with the ability of his imagination.

Social or environmental psychology usually deals with mental maps constructed by residents or non-residents observing the cognitive creation processes of spatial images, linked to certain characteristics of people and/or territory. Antique maps rarely attract the interest of the social or environmental psychologist, even though they can be defined and studied as mental maps. In them, just as in drawings by our current subjects of investigation, the period's dominant social representations of space are observed, as well as an urban imaginary that does not betray the designer's worldview. We agree with Harley (2001-2005) who suggests that maps are images that "*re-describe the world, in the same way as any other document, in terms of the relationships and practices of power, cultural preferences and priorities. What we read in a map is as related to an invisible social world and ideology as to phenomena seen and measured in the landscape*" (Harley, 2001/2005: 61).

We know maps that contain information about a place help to construct a social representation of the space and to disseminate its imaginary aspects. These maps, when published, become the graphic support of the mental maps of those who know them and use them. The antique maps that we analyze here were chosen because they are well known; they had and still have a certain potential influence on the establishment of historical representations of Mexico City.

### Some words about method

The analysis of imaginary maps was based on the method proposed by Barthes (1982) for the study of the figurative arts: drawing, photography, piece of art, film. This author treats image as a form of communication with a double message: denotative and connotative. The former refers to the aspects of the image that make it an analogy of reality. A photograph or drawing aims to represent objects, people or real scenes. The connotative message is related to the occult or abstract meaning not explicitly captured in the image, but that is inferred from the situation, the way it has been produced, and the cultural codes shared between author and observer.

The connotative message leads us to seek the social, cultural and historical referents in which such an image acquires meaning. In the case of antique maps, for the author of the cartographic representation of the city, this task had meaning, according to the socio-cultural system of his time. The users or observers of the map granted its meanings in terms of their imaginary and belief systems, their social representations of the city, along with their interests and objectives when looking at the work.

So as to observe the denotative and connotative messages contained in the analyzed antique maps (1. Codice Mendoza 1549, 2. Nuremberg 1524, 3 y 4. Upsala 1556, 5. Transmonte 1628, 6. Castera 1776, 7. Valdez y Cueva 1880, 8. Plano 1810, 1876, 1909), we made a chart describing those elements contained in each of them (urban structure, edifices, natural elements, animals, people, actions and symbols), in order to interpret and compare their sense and meaning according to the historical and cultural context in which they were created. This procedure also helped to find out what is it that changed and or remained in the different maps throughout time, and thus analyze the influence of antique maps on the 110 sketches of the city, performed by non-specialists between 1998 and 2004. In the next paragraphs we present a synopsis of the analysis of each map.

## THE FOUNDING MYTH OF MEXICO-TENOCHTITLAN



Figure 1, Codex Mendoza, c. 1549<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, no pre-Cortés map of Tenochtitlan has survived, though it is known that the Mexicas created maps for various purposes (Medina, 2007; Toussaint, Gómez and Fernández, 1938). Certain viceregal codices, created with the assistance of natives at the behest of Spanish compilers, reproduce, up to a point, representations of the pre-Columbian city. We have chosen the Codex Mendoza (c. 1549; Figure 1) as a spatial representation of the city for several reasons:

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/Codex\\_Mendoza\\_folio\\_2r.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/Codex_Mendoza_folio_2r.jpg)

it was one of the western world's main sources of information about life before Columbus, it shows the spatial representations of Mexica culture as it was created in the style of pre-Columbian codices, it represents the moment of the foundation of the city and its original structure, which will have an important influence on the colonial outline (Mohar, 1996). The codex, commissioned by Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza (1535-1550), would be incomprehensible without knowledge of the founding myth of the pre-Columbian city. The Mexica (hence the name Mexico) left the mythical city of Aztlán in search of a new territory to found a city with an auspicious and magnificent future. They should settle down in a place where an eagle perching on a nopal cactus was devouring a snake. After a long and circuitous voyage, they found the sign on an islet located in the lakes of the Valley of Mexico. The warlike Mexica, or 'Aztec' people founded the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in this peculiar location in around 1325. The founding myth and the representation of the city come together, mirror and blend into one another, just as is shown in the Codex Mendoza and as certain historians point out: "As with every urban location, every city built by men, it was born, structured, developed, from the birth of a myth, a symbolic combination that gave it meaning. The splendid 15<sup>th</sup> Century city was the social, architectural and spatial translation of that founding myth" (Baudot, 1988, p.15).

Figure 1 shows the page in the Codex where the history of Tenochtitlan begins. In the centre of the figure, you can see the eagle on the nopal cactus (the symbol of national identity, borne on the national flag and stamped on Mexican coins), situated at the heart of the city. The division into the four neighborhoods of the city is shown as an X; within each neighborhood the most important lords who represent them are depicted. The squares that frame the city refer to the Mexica calendar. The scene in the lower portion refers to a battle between two towns situated in the Valley of Mexico.

## THE “VENICE” OF AMERICA



Figure 2. Map of Nuremberg, c. 1524<sup>3</sup>

The Aztec city had a mainly lake-type landscape at the time of the Spaniards' arrival; hence, on seeing it, they imagined it as the “Venice of America” (Monnet, 1993). The identification of Tenochtitlan with Venice is a demonstration of the power of representations derived from European culture when confronted by a new world. It is a good example of the process of anchoring in the theory of social representations. Astonishment at this exotic city, generated from a totally unknown worldview, can be seen in both the earliest descriptions of the city and the cartography created to inform the King of Spain of the new conquered territories.

Figure 2 shows the map published in Nuremberg in 1524, created by an engraver based on a drawing sent by Cortés to King Carlos V of Spain in around 1521. This is the first map of Tenochtitlan prepared by the Spanish. The city is depicted in the right side of the map; the image

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.motecuhzoma.de/Karten.htm>.

of the left side represents the coast of Veracruz. The engraver did not know the New World city and so his work shows a remarkable Europeanization of architecture and urban forms: the city walls, the change from pyramids to churches with bell-towers, houses with tiled and sloping roofs, windows, squares in the style of European public squares, and so on. The creators of this geographical representation, firstly an amateur draftsman and secondly a professional engraver, are more noticeable in the map than the city depicted. In the map, Tenochtitlan looks more like a medieval city, such as Venice, than to itself.

The engraver took certain existing elements of the Mexica city: the city built on an islet surrounded by lakes and lagoons, the earthen wall that controlled the frequent floods, the names of neighboring towns. The pyramids are depicted in the central square and the city's most important government buildings. The four roadways connecting it to other places can also be seen, as well as squares and temples. The rest of the map bears a strong influence of the engravings of famous islands that were carried out in Europe at that time (Toussaint et al. 1938). It includes fanciful elements reflecting the myths that the Europeans believed about pre-Columbian civilizations (Mier y Terán, 2005). For example, in the centre of the drawing, one can see a decapitated man still standing. At the upper part of the pyramid, the inscription "*templum uvi sacrificant*" can be made out, highlighting the practice of human sacrifice that was considered frequent in pre-Columbian culture. Toussaint et al. (1938) state that the map is probably strongly influenced by the engraving of the Island of Utopia, intended to add substance to Thomas More's utopian society, suggesting that the new continent and hitherto unknown indigenous cities might be fertile soil for a utopian reality, different to that experienced in Europe. Either that or they idealized the life of the natives there. The Nuremberg map served as a model for generating new representations of the pre-Columbian city throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, without there being any concern for matching the engraving to the reality of the new continent (Toussaint et al, 1938).

This is a demonstration of the enormous cultural clash that the conquest of Mexico represented. The psychological, social and cultural framework of the Spanish influenced the interpretation of a reality that was foreign, totally different, distant, even fearful. The elements of the pre-Columbian city on the Nuremberg map correspond to the nodal aspects of Mexica culture. The rest is anchored in well-known parameters of European ways of representing space. It also portrays the imposition of Spanish on the indigenous culture, not only at the level of the

imaginary that the New World inspired, but also on the political and ideological plane. Colonization implied the domination of indigenous peoples through radical changes in space and beliefs, a conquest of space through Iberian urbanism, and of souls by means of evangelization.

## THE COLONIAL OUTLINE

Hernán Cortés decided to build the “most noble and loyal City of Mexico” on the same spot as the Mexica city for strategic military and political reasons, in order to recapture the material and symbolic power the Aztecs had. The first radical transformation of the city was carried out as follows: Tenochtitlan was destroyed to construct the capital of New Spain using the same stones. The Aztec theocratic-military order was replaced by the Spanish viceregal order, infused with strong Catholicism: churches, government buildings and mansions were built in Spanish style in the place of the old temples and Aztec palaces. Mexico-Tenochtitlan was quite literally buried, as may be observed in the Uppsala Map, drafted in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (c. 1556; Figure 3).

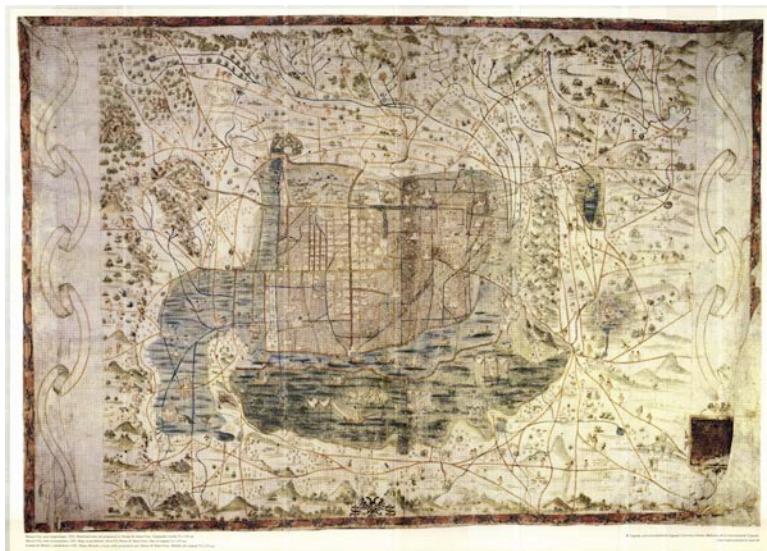


Figure 3. Uppsala Map of Mexico City, 1556<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mapoteca. W2.siap.sagarpa.gob.mx/mapoteca

The Uppsala Map has been attributed to Alonso de Santa Cruz, Carlos V's cosmographer. However, several specialists on the map (Toussaint et al, 1938; Medina, 2007) assert that the author was very probably a native specialist in the creation of codices, a fact that explains the cultural syncretism of the map, perceived in the mixture of European and pre-Columbian techniques. The centre of the map bears the influence of Renaissance landscape cartography; the border contains typical elements of indigenous codices. The whole depicts details of nature, the form and life of the people who occupied the Valley of Mexico.



Figure 4. Detail of central area of Uppsala Map<sup>5</sup>

Figure 4 shows a detail of the central part of the map, in which several of the city's locations and constructions have been identified. What is immediately noticeable is the small

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.motecuhzoma.de/Karten.htm>.

area occupied by the colonial city compared with that occupied by the indigenous city, represented by small houses located both on the islet and the mainland. It indicates social and spatial segregation: The Spanish city is located within the grid-like layout, while the indigenous city forms a belt around it, being practically in the same state as before the conquest, as there was no plan to give it order (Mier y Terán, 2005).

Catholicism had a strong presence in the urban landscape, as it is showed by the domes of the churches that stand out in both the various Indian neighborhoods and within the Spanish area. The Convent of Santiago Tlatelolco and its square area are of disproportionate size. The relevance of the indigenous world may be observed in the importance that the map's creator gives to the indigenous rural life (fishermen, porters, people wearing indigenous clothes). The complete version of the map (figure 3) creates the impression that the Spanish city is immersed within the indigenous world, being a small central area compared with the rest of the territory. The map portrays less the cultural clash between the European and indigenous worlds than the coexistence of the one with the other. The power of the colonial city is observed entrenched in the Spanish layout, protected by channels and lagoons, surrounded by strange and mysterious "others".

The map spatially expresses the process of acculturation that would characterize the colonization of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Mier y Terán, 2005). The domination of Spanish culture would not occur cleanly - it definitely imposed one order upon another, but rather the society of New Spain would adopt unavoidable features of pre-Columbian culture. The colonial layout was unable to do away with the basic urban structure of the pre-Columbian city (the existing roadways and canals, the sites of military and religious power), as it was unable to suppress the complex indigenous civilization rooted in the conquered territories. The map itself expresses the influence of both cultures, a cohabitation that would go on to become *meztilaje* (miscegenation).

## THE VICEREGAL CITY



Figure 5. Map created by Juan Gómez de Transmonte, 1628<sup>6</sup>

The map by Juan Gómez de Transmonte depicts the city in perspective, in an attempt to locate it in its natural context in 1628. Little is known about the reasons that led the author to create the map, though he is known as a master architect who had some influence on the decision making on the hydraulic works the city needed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The reproduction of the map we present is the version executed by a Florentine lithographer, commissioned in 1907. There is little doubt that the original is by Juan Gómez de Transmonte and that the Florentine lithography is a faithful copy of the original (Connolly, 2008). The analyses carried out by Toussaint et al. (1938) on this map indicate that it also includes omissions, additions and distortions. Seen as an imaginary map, such errors can be attributed to the transformation that reality undergoes when passing through the filter of the imagination. Jodelet (1989) affirms that, during the process of objectification of a social representation, the object represented is distorted, loses properties, or additions are made that it did not possess. Thus, Juan Gómez de Transmonte, an architect

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mexicomaxico.org/Tenoch/EvolTenoch/images/Mexico5.jpg>

concerned with Mexico City, inadvertently reveals elements on his map that suggest his desire to see it more urbanized, with larger squares, churches and houses more beautiful than they really were. For example, the roofs of houses in the colonial city were not tiled, as drawn in the map. The towers of the churches were neither so high nor so pointed. The indigenous city took up much more space and gave an impression of greater urban disorder, contrasting with the breadth of the Spanish area drawn on the map.

Connolly (2008) points out that this distortion has been attributed to the urban disorder in native neighborhoods, yet she does not consider it urban disorder, but a different order, incomprehensible to the map's author. She points out another important distortion in the map, related to the water problems that Mexico City had since its origins. Constant floods gave rise to complex hydraulic systems to solve the problem, since pre-Columbian times. In the map, the city appears to be in harmonious coexistence with the lakes, which is a long way from the truth, because it is known that the city was flooded from 1621 to 1627, shortly before the map was drawn. According to Connolly (2008), the map is a "propagandistic simulation" seeking to convince the city Authorities to undertake the expensive hydraulic works to save this beautiful city, facing the threat that New Spain's capital might be transferred elsewhere.

In spite of its distortions, the map is accurate regarding the inventory of a series of places that characterized the capital of New Spain in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in its effort to emulate European cities: construction of hospitals, spread of convents, construction of schools and the creation of the university, construction of the Alameda, the first leisure garden. Gómez de Transmunte presents an imaginary map of an idealized Mexico City, in alignment and well planned, seemingly lacking nothing according to the 17<sup>th</sup> century European city planning standards.

## THE SCIENTIFIC, ACCURACY AND FUNCTIONALITY: THE ENLIGHTENED CITY



Figure 6. Ignacio de Castera 1776<sup>7</sup>

Thus far, maps of the city have been true mental maps in the sense in which we defined them earlier on. In spite of the author's efforts towards objectivity and accuracy, undoubtedly a great deal of subjectivity creeps in when attempting to represent the whole city. In the maps of later centuries the geographer's scientific thought takes precedence over the common sense of the artist or the Spanish conquistador. They start to be prepared by a team of specialists, whose intention is to create representations of territories that are accurate, functional and trustworthy.

<sup>7</sup> <http://bvpb.mcu.es/en/consulta>

The question that arises is: to what extent can these new maps be considered mental maps, or as socio-spatial representations? A tentative answer would be that even when they aim to be faithful copies of reality, these maps do not cease to be social representations of the city created by social actors, with purposes that acquire meaning in a specific social context. Even with the help of modern cartographic techniques, maps of urban spaces almost always have an intention: to enable orientation or to highlight certain aspects of elements. It is through intentions such as these that the author or authors of the maps express the ideals or ideologies of their period in them. As actual geographers point out, mapping is “a way of thinking about the world, offering a framework for knowledge, and a set of assertions about the world itself” (Kitchin, Perkins and Dodge, 2009: 1).

In this change of representations that takes place from one century to another, Mexico ceases to be the American Venice to move towards becoming the enlightened and rational city of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is exactly what is observed in Ignacio de Castera’s 1776 academic map (figure 6): “*Geometric map of the imperial, noble and loyal City of Mexico*”.

Hernández (2006) points out that Castera’s maps, in spite of the attempt to be technical and scientific, reflect the intentions of the Bourbon regime to create an inventory of their possessions in the New World to administer to better advantage. The 1776 map was prepared for controlling tax collection in Mexico City. In it, the city limits are clearly indicated, as are the main paved streets and drainage ditches that make it possible to move into the Spanish area easily, and locate civil and institutional properties. The map also reflects the spatial differentiation between the impoverished indigenous city and the powerful and dominant Spanish area. The map shows an orderly city - a concern for line indicating the regularity of the streets, showing planned growth which was governed by the delineation of boulevards and avenues. We might say that it is the expression of a Cartesian order that finds a perfect fit in the grid-like appearance of the colonial city. The emphasis is on adding precision to the grid-like appearance of the Spanish city. The indigenous city disappears almost completely, and where it is drawn, the effort made to align it geometrically can be observed. This is a difficult task to achieve, because the groups of houses on the edge are tenuously drawn, as if being expendable elements on the map. The presence of water diminishes considerably, even when it continues to be an element that marks the urban landscape of the period. The lake is not included on the map and the canals

are drawn in form of main roads for traffic. The Alameda and the squares appear as orderly points that harmonize with the geometry of the group, rather than places for socializing and relaxation, as they may have been thought to be from Gómez de Tansmonte's map. It is not that these social (the impoverished indigenous city, on the outskirts) and city-planning elements (water, spaces for socializing) have disappeared from the city, but rather that they are suppressed in its cartographic representation for the sake of granting greater rationality to the urban space.

## THE CONTROVERSIAL MEXICO CITY OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

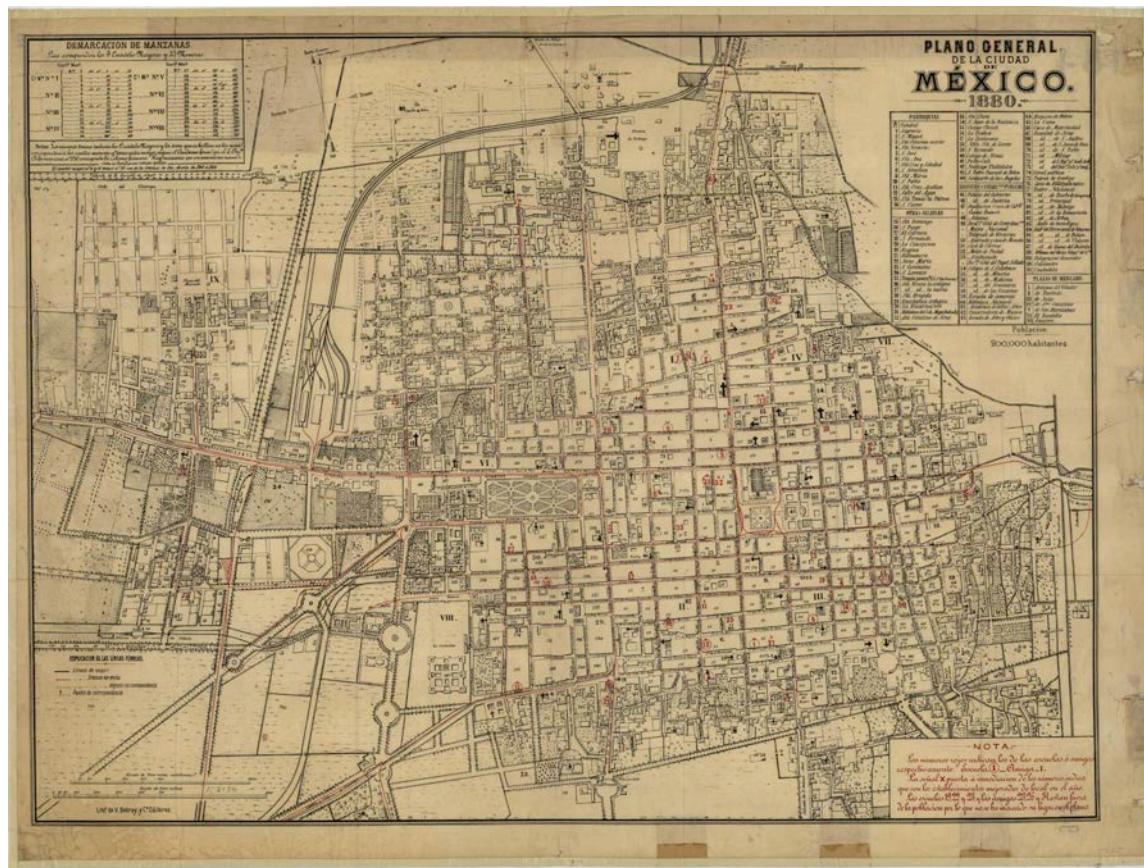


Figure 7. Plano de Valdez y Cueva, 1880<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mapoteca. W2.siap.sagarpa.gob.mx/mapoteca

Mexico achieved independence from Spain through a war that lasted from 1810 to 1821. Towards the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city underwent another radical change in its structure and functions. The Reform Laws allowed the State to confiscate the majority of the Church's property. A large number of religious buildings were demolished to build more modern constructions and improve traffic by opening up streets. These transformations brought an exodus of the wealthy sectors of the city to new neighborhoods being built towards the west, on either side of the current Avenida de la Reforma (Monnet, 1993). The city ceased to be a predominantly religious space, opening the door to new functions and new meanings associated with modernity and progress.

In the 1880 Valdez y Cueva map (figure 7), the influence of scientific geography is again shown, guiding an accurate and rational representation. A new element is development planned on either side of Avenida de la Reforma, towards the west of the city, giving rise to new bourgeois neighborhoods. The city also spreads towards the north and east, although in a more irregular way. The importance of the lake landscape disappears to give greater emphasis to other aspects of the represented space : efficiency, communication, development of new neighborhoods, installations, etc.

The railway lines and the Buenavista railway station are a symbol of progress in the map, representing a radical change in transport for people and goods from the rest of the country. Also marked are the tramways that connected the Mexico City of the time with the surrounding towns. In maps from 1900, water and electricity networks are shown, also symbol of modernity. One sees maps that reflect a greater concern with ordering the urban space, to introduce the services and installations worthy of any progressive city of the time.

The development of transport imprints a greater dynamism on the city by facilitating the flow of people and goods, as well as the possibility of living further from the central part of the city. It is the beginning of an urban expansion that may be observed in the map entitled, "*Mexico in 1810, 1876 and 1909. Map of the city. Its progress during the government of General Porfirio Diaz, president of the United States of Mexico*". (Figure 8).

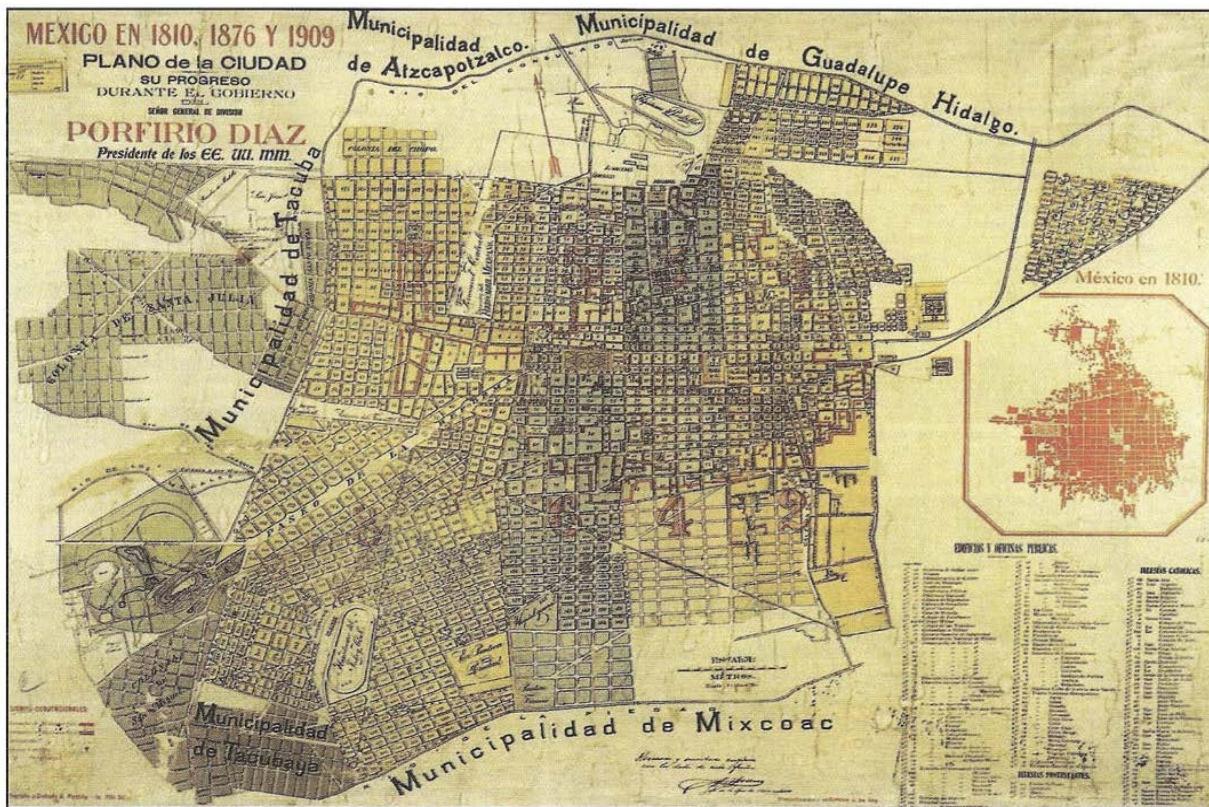


Figure 8. Map of Mexico City 1810, 1876 and 1909<sup>9</sup>

The city at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is implanted in an urban area that thirty years later doubles its size and population. Mexico became an industrial city where the power of the Church and the State had to compete with the vigorous capitalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to García Rojas (2010) a number of objectives can be seen in the map: The first is geopolitical by making a direct connection between Mexico City in 1810 militating for independence and the city of ‘order and progress’ under the Porfirio Díaz government (1876-1910). The second is socio-cultural: it highlights buildings, churches, recreation centres reserved for high society, educational centres and institutions that demonstrate “conservative progress” and bring equanimity to the new bourgeoisie. The third message is commercial: the map portrays a modern city, attractive to foreign capital. The map is mainly aimed at the civilian population and has no governmental

<sup>9</sup> Mapoteca. W2.siap.sagarpa.gob.mx/mapoteca

decision-making purpose; moreover it is not the work of one author, but of geographers from public and private institutions.

The Porfirio Díaz presidency was overthrown by the 1910 revolutionary movement. The capital of post-revolutionary Mexico continued with a rate of growth and modernization in which the colonial outline was confined to a perimeter of approximately 10 square kilometers, designated in 1980 as the Historical Centre of Mexico City.

The current metropolitan area is unrecognizable compared with its original urban outline, which disappears within an infinite agglomeration that can only be taken in via satellite images, unknown in practice for most of its inhabitants. Mexico today is stigmatized as one of the great “megalopolises” of the world (Monnet, 1993; Alba, 2006).

## **IMAGINARY MAPS AND THE DAY-TO-DAY EXPERIENCE OF MEXICO CITY TODAY**

We close the analysis of antique maps of the city in 1909 (the date of the last map analyzed above) because in earlier works (Alba, 2004) we have observed that the historical centre of the city has an important presence in the imaginary maps drawn by current residents. This suggests that the old city, bringing together the vestiges of Tenochtitlan, the colonial layout and its development up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, recreates urban memory and gives meaning to the socio-territorial identity of its inhabitants.

The previous analysis suggests the elements that become permanent in maps from 1524 up to 1909 constitute the territorial nucleus of the collective memory and cultural identity of the city. From the Códice Mendocino on, Tenochtitlán is structured based on two perpendicular axes whose center symbolized the origin of the city. It is a center of strong mythical-religious contents (first Aztec, then Catholic) to which other meanings were added, mainly of the political order. The perpendicular axes organize the pre-colonial city in four districts that will become the basis of the reticular trace of the colonial city, and also the reference that will guide the urban development of the nineteenth century.

The symbols contained in the maps, reveal the ideology and the dominant imaginaries of each period: symbols of the Aztec calendar, the eagle on the nopal, the Carlos V coat of arms,

and of the House of Spain, as well as the specialized geographical symbols. The symbols and the text that accompany the maps indicate the transformation from a religious worldview to a scientific and propagandistic one.

Beginning with the Uppsala map of 1556, the maps reflect a socio-cultural division of the space: the urbanized and wealthy Spanish city is within the colonial trace, in the periphery we find the indigenous, impoverished city. According to Lira (1983) the Indian territories or spaces officially disappear in 1919 as an administrative figure; nevertheless it does not mean the indigenous people living in them, disappeared. The Indian periphery begins to disappear starting the XVIII Century by an urban trace that only symbolized progress.

The analysis of present and absent elements in the antique maps can be infinite as suggested by Penn (2000) in regards to the semiotic analysis of the images. We are presenting those results that may be useful in order to answer our original question: Which is the influence of imaginary maps of the past on those maps of the present?

To observe the importance of the historical node of the city in the construction of contemporary maps in the sample prepared by residents in 1998 (60) and 2004 (50), we analyzed the frequencies of the places drawn in the 110 sketches of the metropolitan area. The old Mexico City, approximately coinciding with the urban area in 1900, is present in 80% of the sketch maps of the city. The original grid-like structure is drawn in 49%.

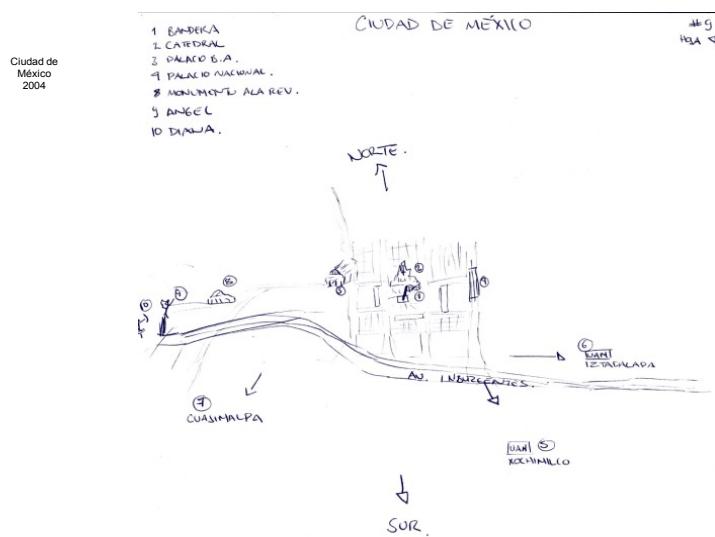


Figure 9. Old Mexico City

The drawing depicted in figure 9 is representative of the type of maps in which the grid-like appearance is reproduced; in which the symbolic importance of the central square is also observed, over-flown by the Mexican flag, flanked by the Cathedral and the National Palace. This map condenses historical memory of the city, represented by the principal monuments that have become symbols of nationalism, the Monument to the Revolution and the Angel of Independence. It is important to note that in the drawing the contemporary city is similar to the 16<sup>th</sup> century colonial layout; elements located outside this area are presented as outlying. Avenida Insurgentes tries to connect the centre with the east, at whose limits Iztapalapa appears, this being the location of the university and where the author of the sketch studies. As in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city seems to extend along an axis connecting the colonial layout towards the west, except that in this drawing, Avenida Insurgentes has been confused with Paseo de la Reforma.

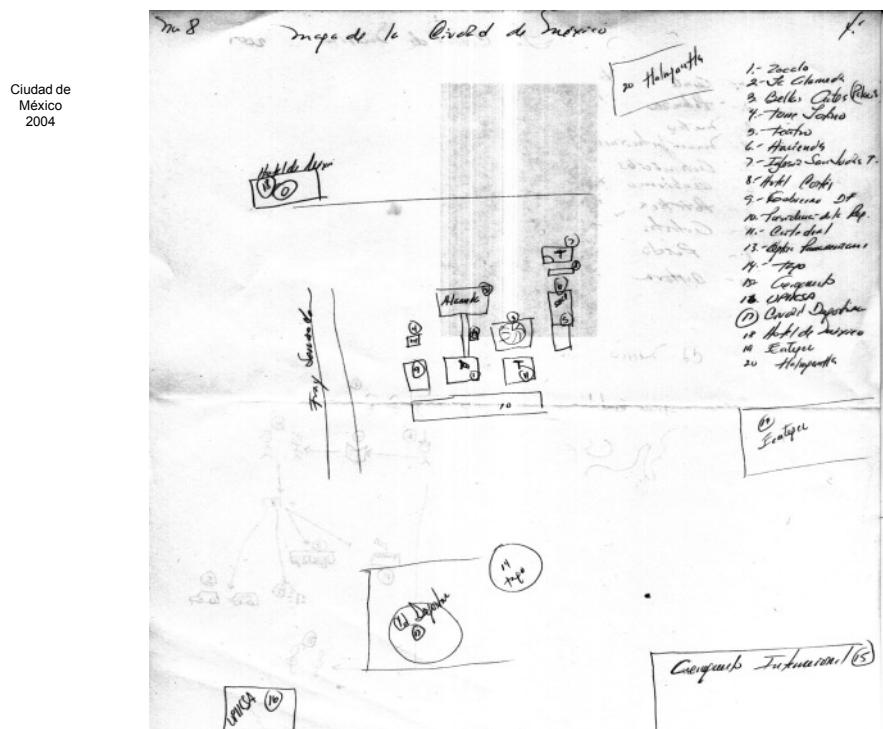
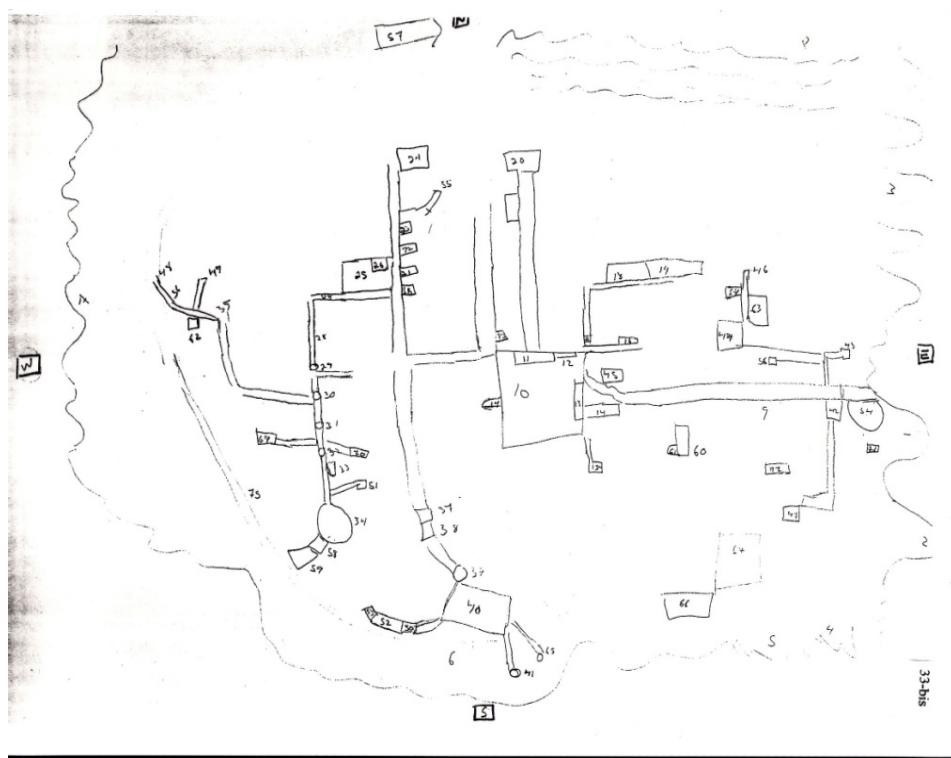


Figure 10. Old Mexico City centre

The drawing depicted in figure 10 represents a similar structure to the previous one: the colonial city at the centre, surrounded by installations and places that symbolize the rest of the metropolitan area. Let us recall that in the Codex Mendoza the symbol of the eagle perching on

the nopal cactus was located in the centre, residents usually draw the national flag flying in the central square, as in figures 9 and 10. This can be interpreted as a reminiscence of the founding myth of the city, because the eagle on the nopal cactus, devouring a snake, is portrayed on the Mexican flag.

On other maps, one can see an evocation of the four roadways that structured the city since its origin and which have remained essential elements in imaginary maps from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Both in antique maps and in the residents' sketches, the roadways radiate from the centre, symbolized by a square, toward the four points of the compass, as seen in figures 11 and 12.



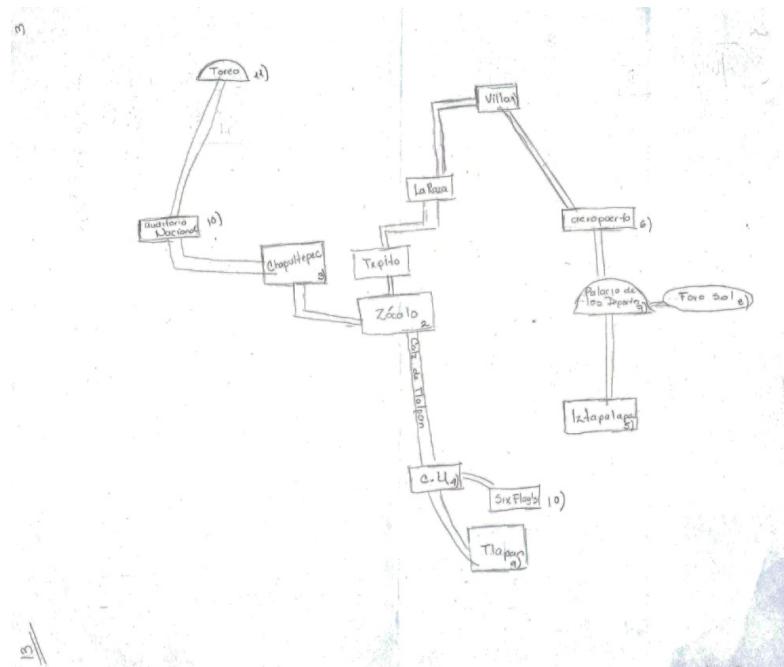


Figure 12. Resident sketch of the roadways

Some drawings portray the whole of the metropolitan area, surrounded by the mountains that delimit the Valley of Mexico, in which the historical centre appears enlarged and developed in detail. These maps, as in figure 11, recall both the drawing in perspective in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Gómez de Transmunte map, and the more scientific maps developed from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

Other maps are structured in the form of a Cartesian map, as if the four roadways extended into the whole of the current metropolitan area. Map of figure 13 is representative of that type of sketch: the historical nucleus of the city, symbolized by a circle, constitutes the origin from which the axes of the Cartesian plane radiate.

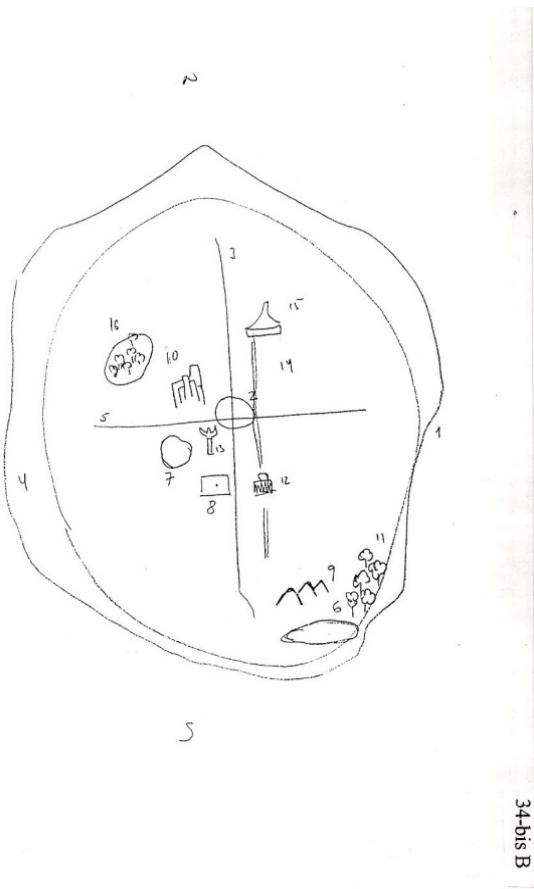


Figure 13. Sketch in style of Cartesian map

In spite of the variability of the sample and the different conditions in which these imaginary maps were drawn, the historical icons of the city are constant from 1998 to 2004, just as they were in the antique maps down the centuries. In current maps, urban elements vary, related with practical use of the city, with their functions or with the interviewees' personal experience of the space, but the monumental spaces remain in most of them. A strong presence of what used to be the Aztec city and the colonial layout may be observed in the collective representation of the city, which suggests that urban memory gives coherence and unity to the contemporary megacity, in spite of being a fragmented space in both practice and experience. It is what gives structure and meaning to the rest of the city. The centre and the historical monuments constitute the anchorages of territorial identity.

The maps carried out by residents express an urban experience that is personal-affective (Haas, 2004) and socio-cultural, which is located in present and past. This experience generates place identity (Proshansky, 1978; Vidal and Pol, 2005), in which the history of the city and the history of the individual are blended and shared. The city-dweller moves from place to place by personal and collective memory. He experiences emotions when recalling or visiting certain places related to his life or some collective event in the past. Some individuals recognize their roots openly in the vestiges of the pre-Columbian city, or in colonial *mestizaje*, both as different stages in their life associated with certain locations. Historical symbols contribute effectively to the formation of a national identity (Nora, 1986), though it is not a simple process. Each individual chooses the history with which he wants to be identified via an attraction for certain places and a reject for others. What he knows and what he has experienced in different parts of the city constitute the anchorage points of his territorial identity.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this study has been to analyze some maps that are representative of different periods in the development of Mexico City without taking them as merely geographical data, but as the expression of social representations and urban imaginaries anchored at each historical stage. We find in them the predominant vision of the city regarding socio-cultural aspects, and those of the urban and natural landscape. The cartographic map of each period was considered to be the socio-spatial representation of the person drawing, artist or geographer who, by representing the urban reality of his period, leaves us a testimony of the values, ways of life and the established order expressed in the space.

The journey through time undertaken in this work allowed us to observe an important feature of urban memory: in spite of the radical transformations that the city has undergone, its historical nucleus preserves an identity that connects the mythical Tenochtitlan of the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the megacity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to Halbwachs (1950), collective memory can be reconstructed so long as there are social frameworks within which it can entertain itself. The vestiges of the old city, now transformed into monuments, and socially constructed representations, such as imaginary maps that have survived down the years, constitute

foundations so that current residents may continue to trace a past that gives meaning to their socio-territorial, national, social and personal identity.

In this study, we have succumbed to the charm of images and the imaginary that they stimulate. Each of the antique maps, each historical period of the city and the mental maps of current residents would require a detailed analysis that goes beyond this article. These maps help us to understand the reasons why the current Historical Centre continues to be more of a symbolic than a geographical or financial centre (Monnet, 1993). It is a node that structures the representation of a space that cannot be encompassed in day-to-day practice, formed by poly-centralities (old towns or commercial centres), fragmented by rapid-transit roads. Without doubt, the historical node of the current Mexico City gives meaning to the experience of traveling around it daily, and to imagining it in its present and its past.

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