Mexico City’s Mid-Century Colonias Proletarias: Beyond the City Limits, Within the Political Community

This paper studies colonias proletarias, the most important housing form in Mexico City in the period between 1930 and 1970. Colonias proletarias were low-income peripheral neighborhoods that were officially sanctioned by the political branch of the city government (Gobernación). At the same time, they were oftentimes outside of the city master plan and were not recognized by Mexico City’s public works offices (Obras Públicas). This paper explores this ambivalent position: invisible from the perspective of planning offices but well-integrated into the political networks of the city government. It explores how the same neighborhoods could simultaneously be viewed as squatter settlements, government-sponsored neighborhoods, or ordinary low-income neighborhoods depending on the viewer. This multiplicity of perspectives has continued to shape how we think of Mexico City’s peripheries and their relationship with the city government and the city as a whole.