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Urban environmental problems affecting quality of life in cities of the central west region of Mexico: Security, resilience and integral risk management

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Cities around the world face numerous environmental health problems, such as air, water and soil pollution, traffic congestion, noise, urban amplification of heat waves and poor housing conditions, aggravated by unsustainable urban development and climate change. The urban environment implies health risks, insufficient distribution and unequal accessibility to urban amenities, and clear differences between different groups of the population regarding risks and vulnerability to environmental disasters. It is also an auspicious space to marginalization and segregation, especially of the less favored social classes. In Latin America, the problems that affect cities are very diverse, but could include the inefficient functioning of mobility and transport networks and their impact on air pollution, inequity in distribution and access to green public spaces, the deficiency in the quality and coverage of the potable water, drainage and urban sanitation systems, the lack of planning and control in the changes of land use and a growing demand for social housing.

But cities also generate opportunities for economic and social development, and promote creativity and innovations that allow balancing the relationship between costs and benefits of living in an urban environment. Undoubtedly, the growth of cities is driven by expectations of an improvement in the quality of life of its residents, in access to equipment and infrastructure, and in policies and actions aimed at solving the most common problems that affect urban life.

In this context, the conference addresses the cases of six metropolitan areas of the Central - Western Region of Mexico: Guadalajara, León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Aguascalientes and Zacatecas. During the last two decades, these cities

have observed an upward trend in urban competitiveness and productivity, a notable economic consolidation and the development of important industrial conglomerates -as in the case of the manufacturing, automotive, aerospace and electronic sectors-. Likewise, its economy diversified, encompassing the services, tourism and transport and commercial exchange sectors. Additionally, of the 40 cities where the creative class is concentrated in Mexico, five of the selected metropolitan areas achieved a locational coefficient greater than one. However, recent studies indicate that, as a result of globalization and the existence of local governments with low performance, the benefits of economic growth and competitiveness in these cities have not been widespread so far to all its inhabitants, generating a marked inequality in the quality of life of the different strata of the population, processes of exclusion and urban segregation, and a polarization between the winning socioeconomic groups and losers of globalization. In addition, the presence of an expansive, diffuse and fragmented urban model is observed, characterized by a pattern of land consumption above the national and regional average, and processes of degradation of the urban environment.

The objective of the conference is to intervene in the debate on urban environmental problems that affect the quality of life in cities, to discuss the links between the social and environmental determinants of human health in urban environments, and to analyze the possible sustainable alternatives that, from the perspective of Smart Urban Governance could promote security, resilience and integrated management of environmental risks in Mexican cities.

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