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Résumé de l'article

Le présent exposé souligne quelques-uns des changements fondamentaux qui se produisent dans la distribution spatiale des fonctions et des classes sociales au cœur des villes hispano-américaines. Puebla (Mexique) en est l'exemple concret. L'un des facteurs qui influent sur l'avenir des villes est la mutation de l'organisation sociale de la zone interne. Les familles de la haute société se sont déplacées vers des secteurs résidentiels modernes, tandis que leurs maisons à la patio de type colonial ont été transformées en habitations collectives de type multi-familial (les « vecindades ») à l'intention des classes inférieures.

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Changes in the Socio-Economic Pattern of Spanish-American Cities With Special Reference to Colonial Town Centres

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Résumé/Abstract

Le présent exposé souligne quelques-uns des changements fondamentaux qui se produisent dans la distribution spatiale des fonctions et des classes sociales au coeur des villes hispano-américaines. Puebla (Mexique) en est l'exemple concret. L'un des facteurs qui influent sur l'avenir des villes est la mutation de l'organisation sociale de la zone interne. Les familles de la haute société se sont déplacées vers des secteurs résidentiels modernes, tandis que leurs maisons à la patio de type colonial ont été transformées en habitations collectives de type multi-familial (les «vecindades») à l'intention des classes inférieures.

This paper outlines some of the key changes in the spatial distribution of functions and social classes in Spanish-American cities, with Puebla, Mexico, used as a case study. Among the factors which influence the future of the cities is the changing social structure of the inner zone. Upper class families have moved into modern residential areas while their large colonial patio-houses have been transformed into lower class multi-family quarters known as vecindades.

The most important factor today in the discussion of urban development in Latin America is the huge sprawl of uncontrolled housing resulting from migration from rural areas. In the last few years there have been an increasing number of scientific investigations about these problems. These studies have also dealt, in part, with the change of structure within the suburban areas.

The equally marked changes in the type of building within the cities have been noted. However detailed works are not available which discuss the processes which led to the completely altered patterns of spatial distribution of both functions and social classes. Another point that needs to be investigated is the extent to which the processes of urbanization, as related to the appearance and socio-economic structure of cities, can be compared to those in Europe or Anglo America.

A provisional hypothesis is that until early in this century the similarities between the north and the south of the continent were essentially confined to the grid pattern of street plan. The socio-economic structure of Spanish-American cities bore more similarities to conditions in Europe. However, the actual physical appearance of Spanish American cities was not comparable to Europe or Anglo America. It is true that the *patio*-house had its origins in the Roman *atrium* and was introduced into Latin America by the Spanish, but after Roman times it was never the norm in the Mediterranean region.

It has often been emphasized (e.g. Whiteford 1964) that, in contrast to Europe and the United States of America, the upper classes lived in the close vicinity of the *Plaza Mayor*. This central square was at one and the same time the political, economic, religious and social centre of the town. However, the supposition of this difference was only partly true, in that the socio-economic conditions were very similar to those in pre-industrial Europe. Of course the changes in the Old World came about much earlier because of industrialization and railway construction. The medieval fortifications were dismantled at the same time. Therefore, the transition from the old town to the new building areas of the nineteenth century was very marked.

With the exception of the last-mentioned point, similar developments were experienced in Spanish America about fifty years later following the same pattern. Railway stations were also established on the edges of the colonial towns. The stations

developed into new centres for trade and other tertiary activities. Consequently a central business district developed from the *Plaza Mayor* towards the new railway station. In contrast, many towns in Anglo America owe their existence to the construction of railway stations which were the focal points right from the start.

The above-mentioned functional changes within the colonial towns were not always immediately visible with the construction of much new building, for a new function does not necessarily need a new building. The *patio*-houses had originally been a combination of flat and shop or workshop, similar to the burghers' houses in pre-industrial Europe. These houses were increasingly used for purely business purposes, until the owners moved with their families to new residential areas in the suburbs. Even then, it was not always the case that the *patio*-houses were demolished and redeveloped. The *patios* were quite often provisionally covered over with a simple roof to provide more space for storage and business (cf. Gormsen 1963, 1966). It was only in the larger cities that buildings with more than three or four storeys appeared in the first industrialization phase around 1900. They followed the European, very often French, design. This process ensued in the other towns several decades later. Then they were built in concrete style, showing the influence of North American architecture (cf. Gormsen 1963, 1966).

Meanwhile, the changes in the socio-economic zones and the physical appearance of the larger towns spread from the centre to the periphery in a series of different waves. Amato (1970) illustrated this phenomenon, taking the cities of Bogotá and Lima as examples. He described the shift in the upper class residential areas since the beginning of the twentieth century. Mexico City shows the same characteristics of development. At the turn of the century, the first modern residential estates were built there to the west of the colonial city. Today these form important parts of the central business district. For example the "Colonia Roma" is important predominantly for governmental and business offices and the "Zona Rosa" is now the most exclusive shopping area in the city. This change of function has long been completed in both areas. However, many houses in the style of the turn of the century are still standing there, and they are kept in good repair.

The modern skyscrapers housing offices and hotels are primarily on the main street-axes. Their height directly reflects the high ground rents. A corresponding change has even more obviously affected the old colonial city of Mexico. Apart from government departments, almost all the head offices of the banks are concentrated in a few streets. Some occupy palaces of great architectural value from the colonial times, which have been very well renovated. Then one finds ordinary retail shops. A few blocks to the north and east one sees slum areas (*Zonas de Vecindades*¹) with small shops and workshops. The upper and middle classes have long since moved out of these central urban areas. We can see that the model of social decay from the centre to the suburbs postulated by Whiteford (1964) using Popayán (Columbia) and Queretaro (Mexico) as examples does

not hold true for most cities. This already applied in about 1960 to the above-mentioned cities, as well as to many others. In this paper, we will examine corresponding developments since the middle of the nineteenth century in Puebla (Mexico)².

This city has always been one of the most important in the country. The number of inhabitants increased from 65,000 in 1877 to 94,000 in 1900; 115,000 in 1930; 211,000 in 1950; and 402,000 in 1970 (Censos de Poblacion). The present-day population is estimated to be over 800,000. As a consequence of the process of metropolization many changes occurred in the socio-economic zoning within this city. The three pairs of maps (Figs. 1 to 6) show these changes in the spatial distribution of shop and workshops between 1852 and 1973³.

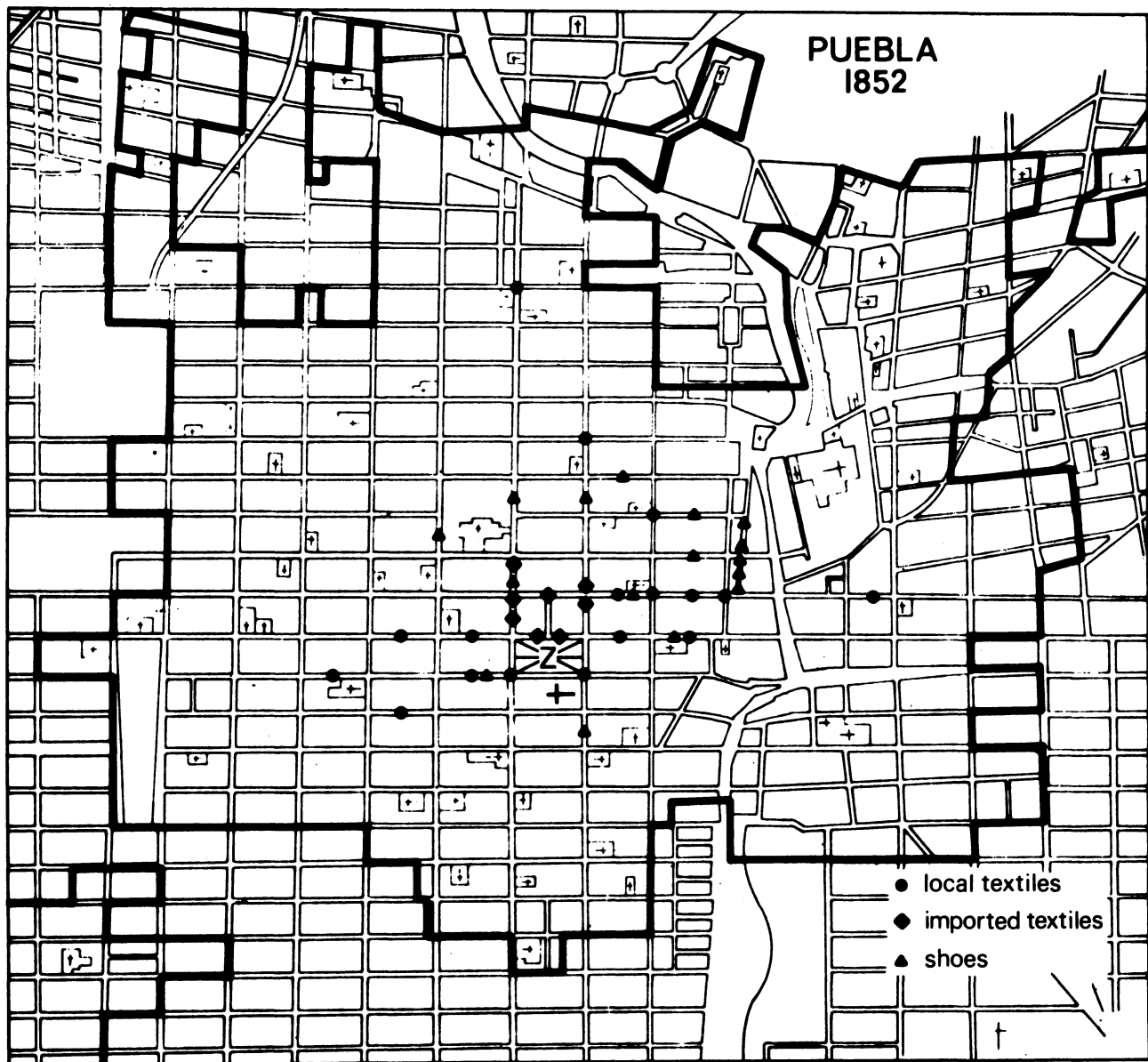


Fig. 1 Spatial distribution of TEXTILE and SHOE shops in 1852; each symbol represents 1 to 4 shops.

Source: Del Valle:Guía de Forasteros de la ciudad de Puebla 1852
Z: Zocalo

Figs. 1-2: Not only has the number of textile and shoe shops increased considerably but their location has also shifted from the eastern part of the colonial town to an area northwest of the central plaza (Zocalo). They are concentrated mainly around the most important marketplace, which was established in 1854 in the courtyards of the former Dominican monastery. Nevertheless, in 1852 imported textiles were sold next to the Zocalo, on almost the same site as the higher quality shops of today. However it should also be mentioned that many new shops and boutiques have been established recently in suburban shopping centres which have been developed quite a distance away from the colonial city core area, (Figs. 3-4). In 1852 the tailors naturally played a much more important role⁴. Consequently, they were concentrated in the town centre, while nowadays they are dispersed in the peripheral zones of colonial Puebla.

Figs. 5-6: The number of carpenters within the old part of the city has decreased during the 120 years under investigation. This results from the fact that more workshops (or even small factories for furniture) have been established in the suburban zones. Even in Mexico today industrially-made furniture becomes more and more important.

Considering the maps together, it is evident that circa 1850 the focal point of economic activities of the city was located in the northeast of the Zocalo. This area still preserves most of the beautiful *patio*-houses of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Unfortunately, many of them are now in a deplorable state, both from the architectural and the social point of view. They are often used as cheap housing for about ten families, in what was previously a one-family mansion.

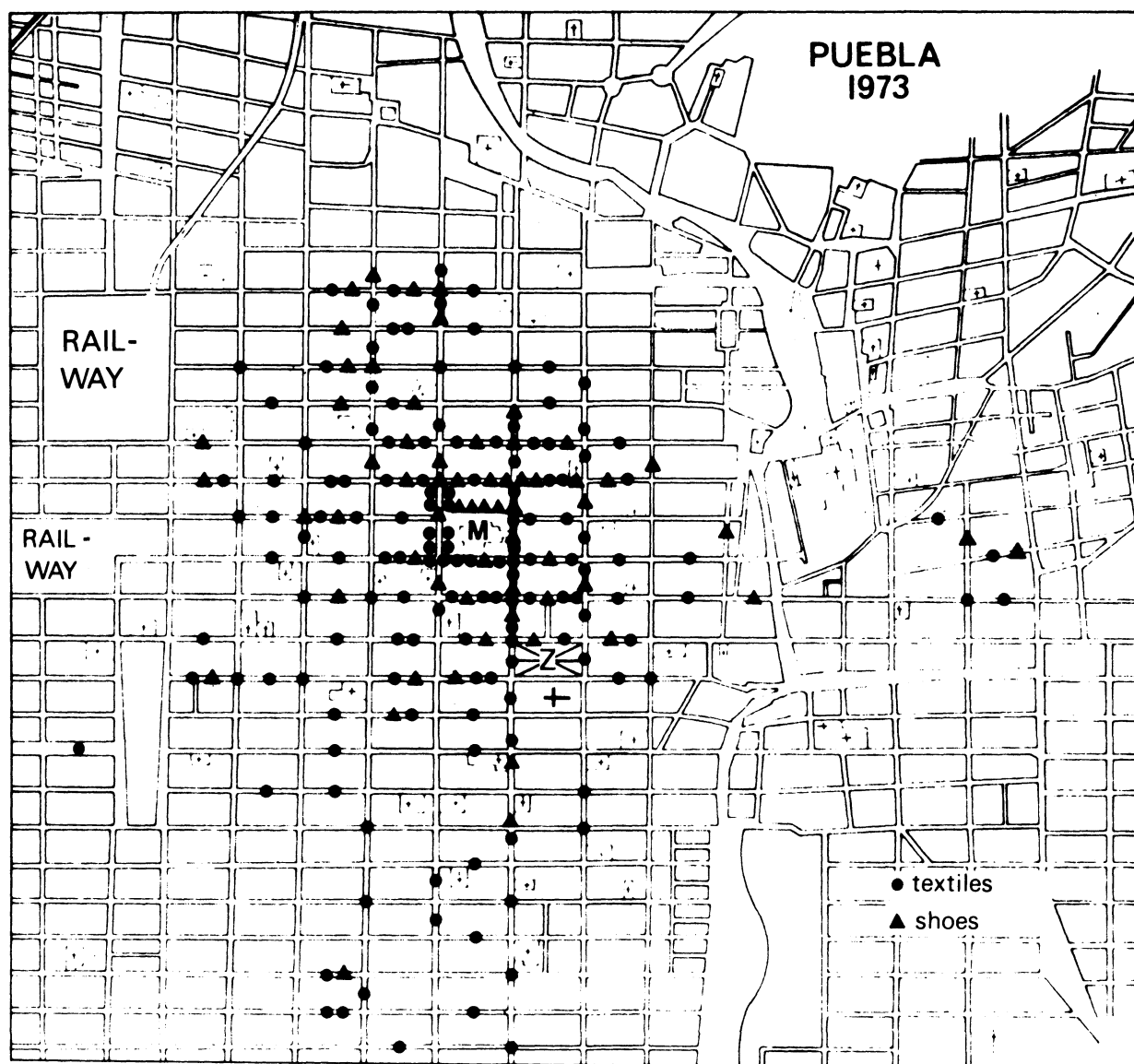


Fig. 2 Spatial distribution of TEXTILE and SHOE shops in 1973; each symbol represents 1 to 4 shops.

Source: Direct mapping by the INAH, Centro Regional Puebla 1973
Z : Zocalo
M : Market

It has already been emphasized that the spatial distribution of economic activities does not present a completely accurate picture of the socio-economic zoning of the town. One must consider this in conjunction with the social structure. The value of the ground rent provides a certain indication of this but, of course, the ground rent does not depend solely on the quality of the housing. Nevertheless, when one compares the maps from 1832 and 1978, one can easily recognize considerable changes. The 1832 map (Fig. 7) still shows the centre-periphery model of social decay of the typical Spanish American colonial city. Since then the highest ground rents have shifted from the Zocalo to the west and north (Fig. 8a). This corresponds to the general tendency of the growth of the central business district which was partly due to the railway construction in 1873. This means that the last wealthy families have moved from their well-maintained *patio*-houses to suburban residential areas of high quality.

One result of the construction of upper class residential areas is that the value of the land does not decrease steadily from the centre towards the periphery, as illustrated by the generalized map (Fig. 8b) showing the whole city. The lowest ground rents are in the poor residential areas of the marginalized population in the north; whereas many of the residential areas, above all in the south, cost five times as much. The same is true of the main street-axes, which have largely developed as shopping areas.

One can determine even more clearly the present-day distribution of the different social classes using the figures for monthly income of the 1970 census⁵. The relationship between income group and population density is very instructive (Fig. 9), although an even more precise spatial division is desirable in some places. At a glance one sees that no hypothesis can be based solely on population density. This is in contrast to the

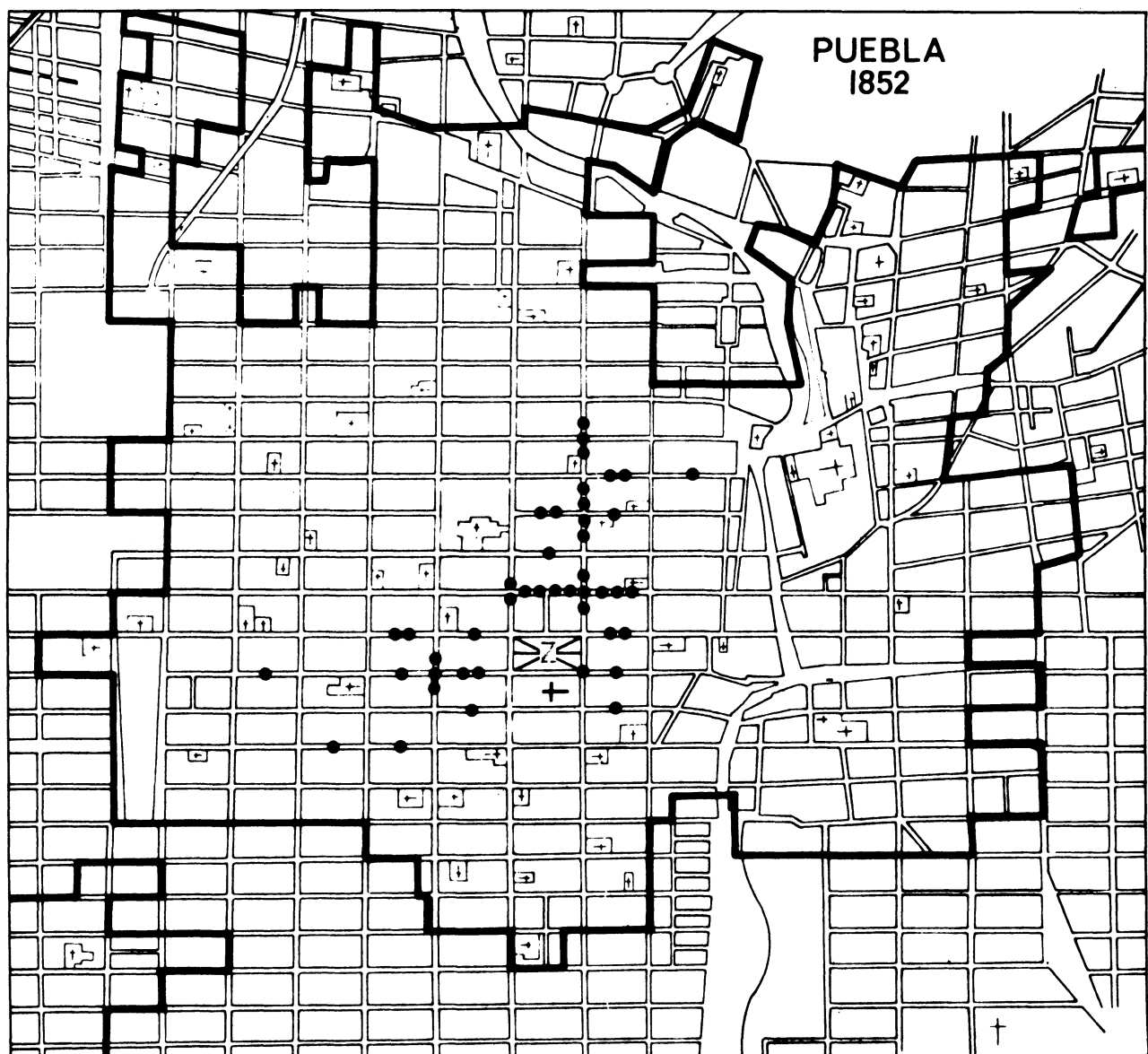


Fig. 3 Spatial distribution of TAILORS in 1852; each symbol represents one workshop

Source: Del Valle:Guia de Forasteros de la ciudad de Puebla 1852
Z: Zocalo

classic industrial countries with their enormous blocks of flats from the nineteenth century. Our research shows that the population density is as low in the poorest temporary shantytown areas as in the luxury residential areas and in the central business district, even if this does result from completely different reasons. The highest densities are to be found in the transitional zone to the north of the central area, where unfortunately, many beautiful colonial houses have become *vecindades*. Most of the new *vecindades* were built in the neighbouring area to the north. Here the spacious courtyard is reduced to a narrow passage.

What are the consequences of this change in socio-economic zoning for the problems of the colonial city centre? The map on a larger scale (Fig. 10) shows two factors, namely the population density and the types of housing, both by street blocks. The diagrams show the percentage of families living in⁶ A: temporary dwellings, B: *vecindades*, C: apartment houses, D: family houses.

It is apparent that a major part of the colonial city core consists of *vecindades* and that these blocks are amongst those with the highest population densities (over 450 or 600 per hectare). This implies that many of the oldest and architecturally most interesting buildings are terribly overcrowded with inhabitants on a low income. Low densities in the central business district itself are, of course, due to the fact that more space is needed there for shops and offices. But even there the remaining dwelling space is composed to a very large extent of *vecindades*. Nowadays it is extremely rare to find *patio-houses* occupied by only one family.

This map naturally needs a much more intensive interpretation in the light of an existing map of functional differentiation. The importance of the central business district can be deduced from the number of commuters from within the city boundaries. In October 1975, the number of people commuting to the central area of 45 blocks (for work, shopping, schools and offices, etc.) had already reached 186,000. And this does not take into

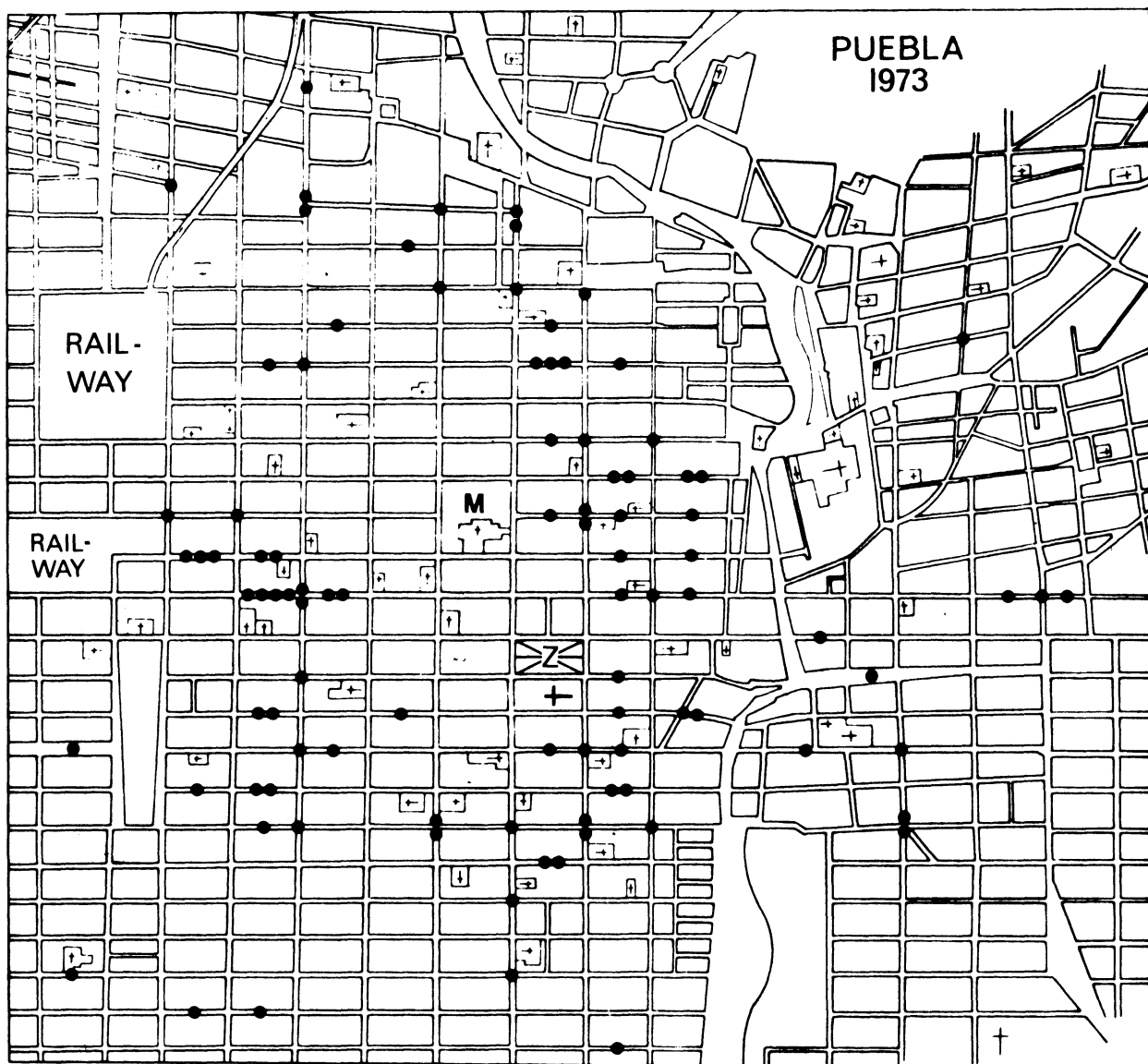


Fig. 4 Spatial distribution of TAILORS in 1973; each symbol represents one workshop

Source: Direct mapping by the INAH, Centro Regional Puebla 1973
Z : Zocalo
M : Market

consideration commuters from outside the city limits (Estudio de origen y destino . . . 1976). The level of traffic density can easily be imagined. This is aggravated by the fact that there is no modern mass transport system, except for the more or less worn-out buses. These are responsible for a great deal of the heavy air pollution.

But this is only one of at least four conflicting factors influencing the future of Spanish colonial cities, which like the old towns in Europe, are in need of very serious rehabilitation programmes in order to preserve them from gradual destruction.

The factors are:

1. The landowners who want to draw the highest possible rent from their properties. This results in high-value land use. Consequently there is a tendency towards high-rise building (Mexico-Reforma) and there are even a few examples in Puebla, built in the last few years. Caracas and other cities in Venezuela show the consequences of the almost total replacement of colonial houses by modern skyscrapers. However we must admit that, due to several factors, colonial architecture in Venezuela cannot be compared to that in Mexico.

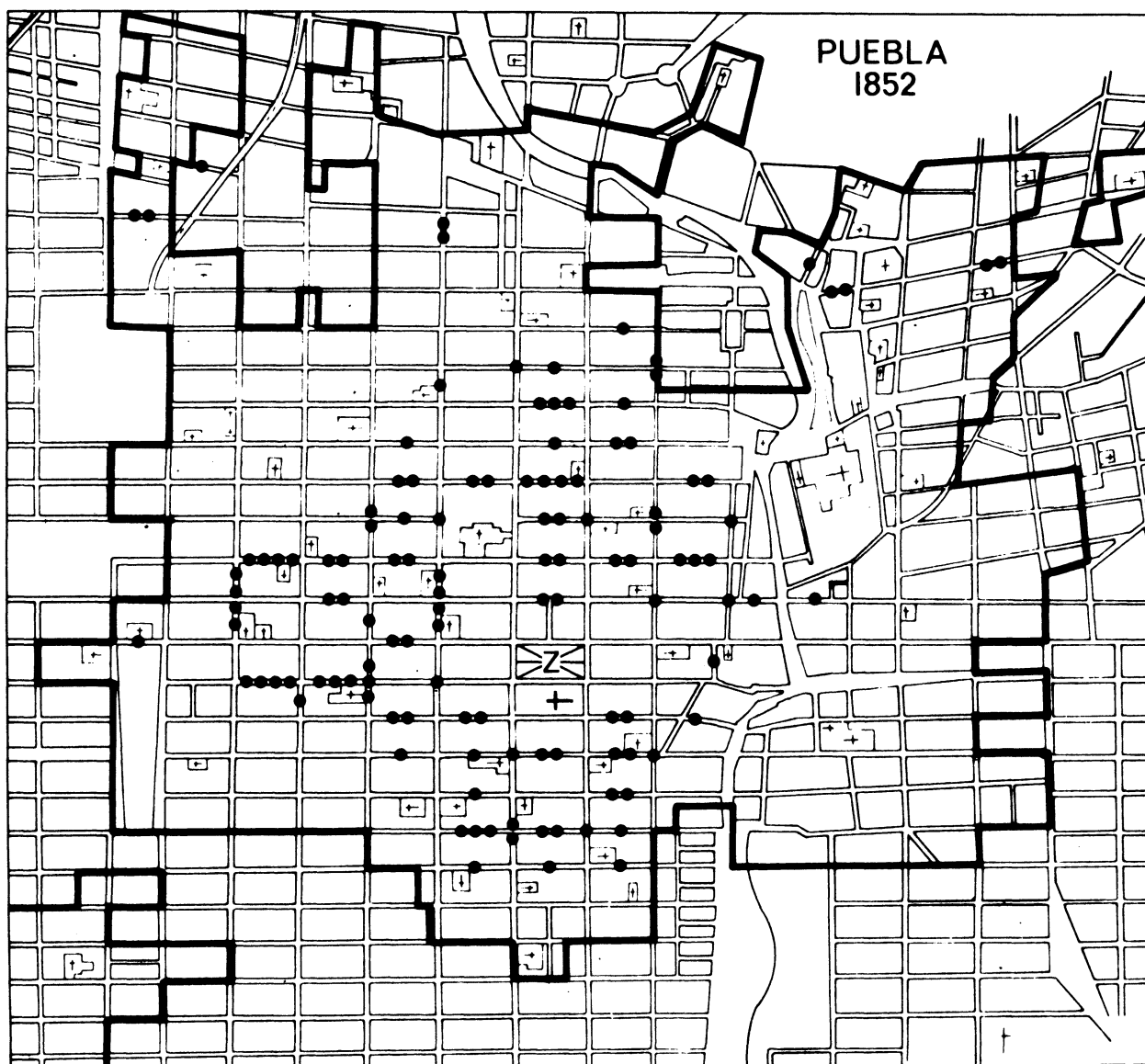


Fig. 5 Spatial distribution of CARPENTERS in 1852; each symbol represents one workshop

Source: Del Valle:Guía de Forasteros de la ciudad de Puebla 1852
Z : Zocalo

2. The consciousness of the value of cultural inheritance (colonial architecture) in modern cities. This has only recently been accepted by a broader public, and Puebla is the first Mexican city for which a presidential decree regarding the conservation of a clearly defined zone of historical monuments has been issued. Among other things, it limits the height of construction to three or four floors.

3. The automobile traffic which, because of the absence of modern mass transport systems, is even more disturbing here

than in many industrialized countries. Until now only a few streets in Puebla and other Latin American cities have been closed to automobiles. There has been considerable protest from merchants against these administrative regulations although their advantages have been proved in many European cities provided that parking space and/or public transport are available.

4. The social structure which has totally changed in the inner zones of larger cities because the upper-class families

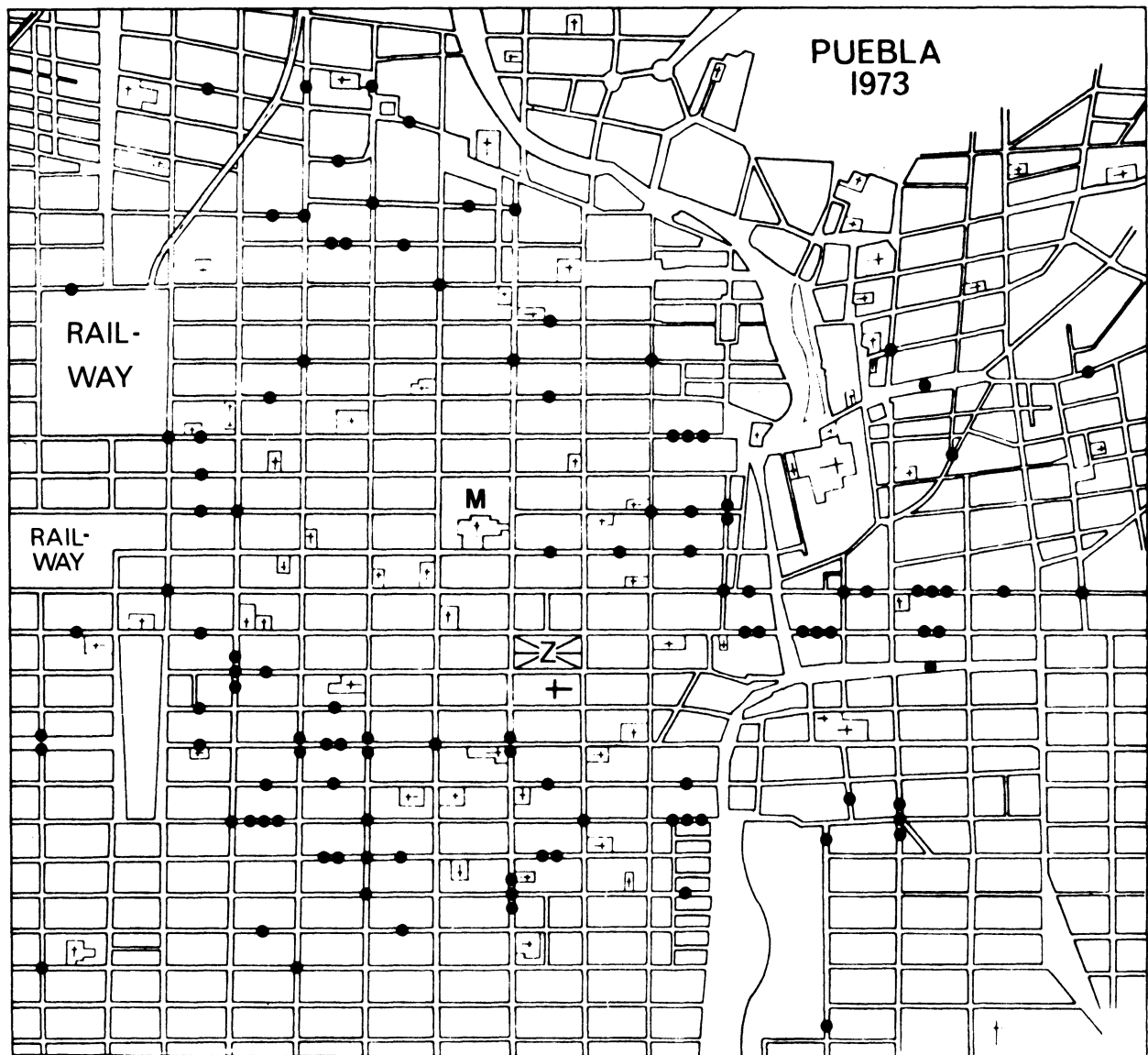


Fig. 6 Spatial distribution of CARPENTERS in 1973; each symbol represents one workshop

Source: Direct mapping by the INAH, Centro Regional Puebla 1973
Z: Zocalo
M: Market

have moved into modern residential areas while their large colonial *patio*-houses have been transformed into lower-class multi-family quarters known as *vecindades*. As a consequence, these are being neglected by their owners who very often have neither the will nor the means to keep their property in reasona-

ble repair. It seems as if this socio-economic aspect of the problem which constitutes a most important part in similar European situations has hardly been taken into consideration in public discussions on the future of colonial town centres.

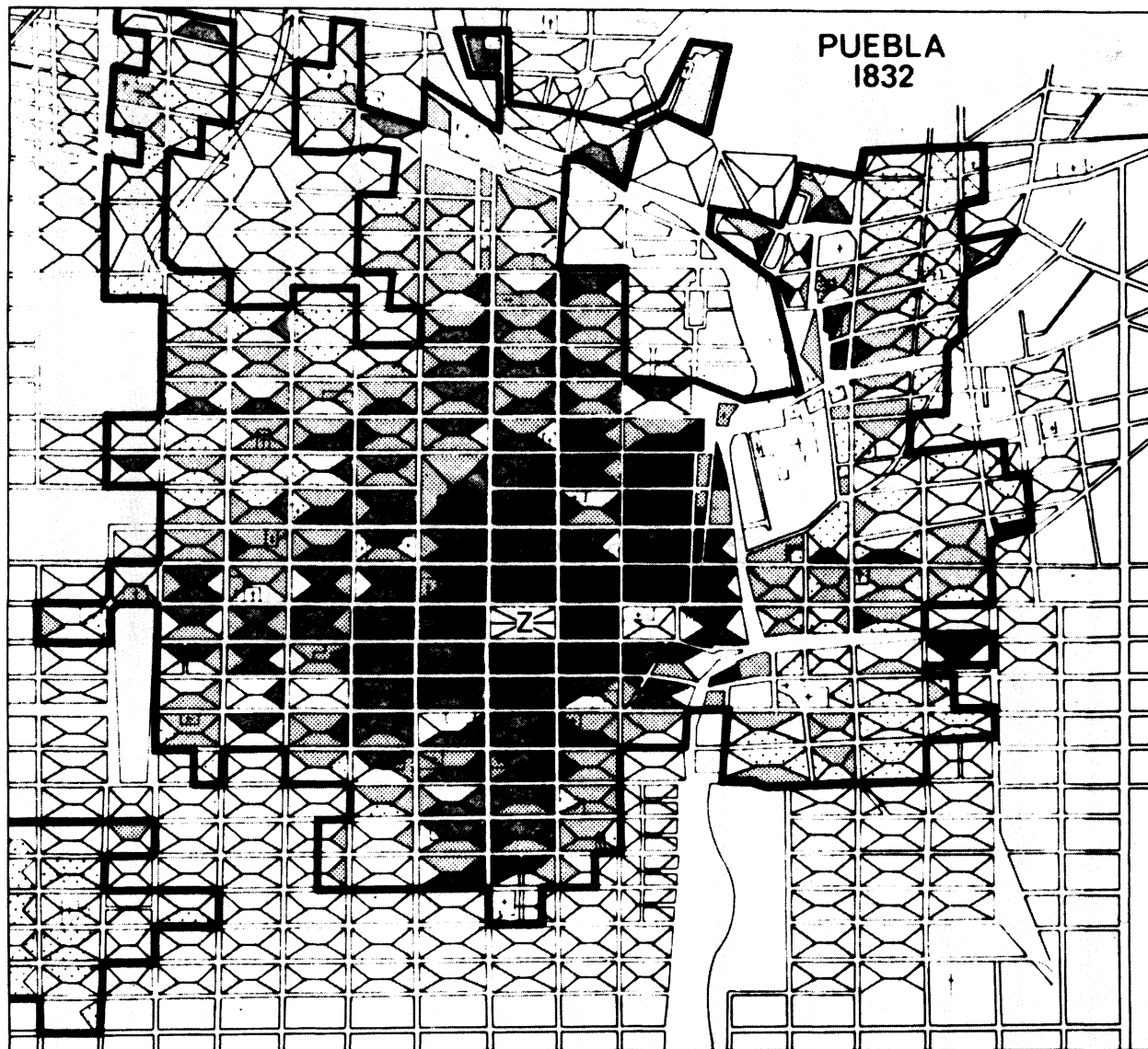








Fig. 7 VALUES OF GROUND RENT IN 1832 (average taken for each side of street section)

Pesos  < 50  51-100  101-200  201-400  401-600  > 600

Source: Padrón de Casas de 1832. Archivo Municipal de Puebla

Z: Zocalo

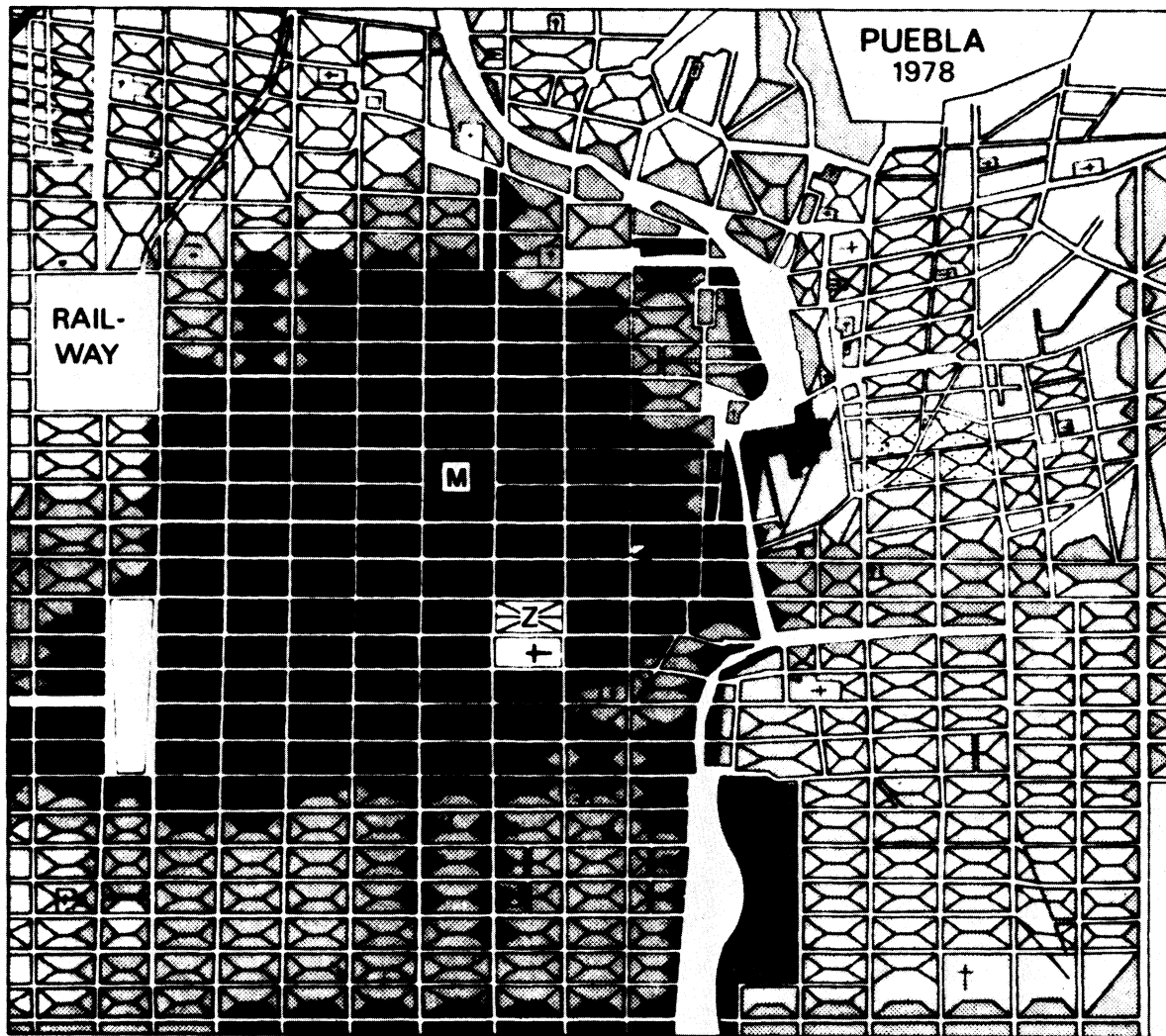
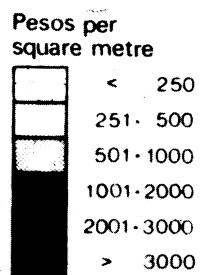


Fig 8a, 8b
VALUES OF
GROUND RENT
PER STREET
SECTION IN
PUEBLA, 1978



Source:
Plano Catastral
de la Ciudad
de Puebla 1978

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E Gormsen

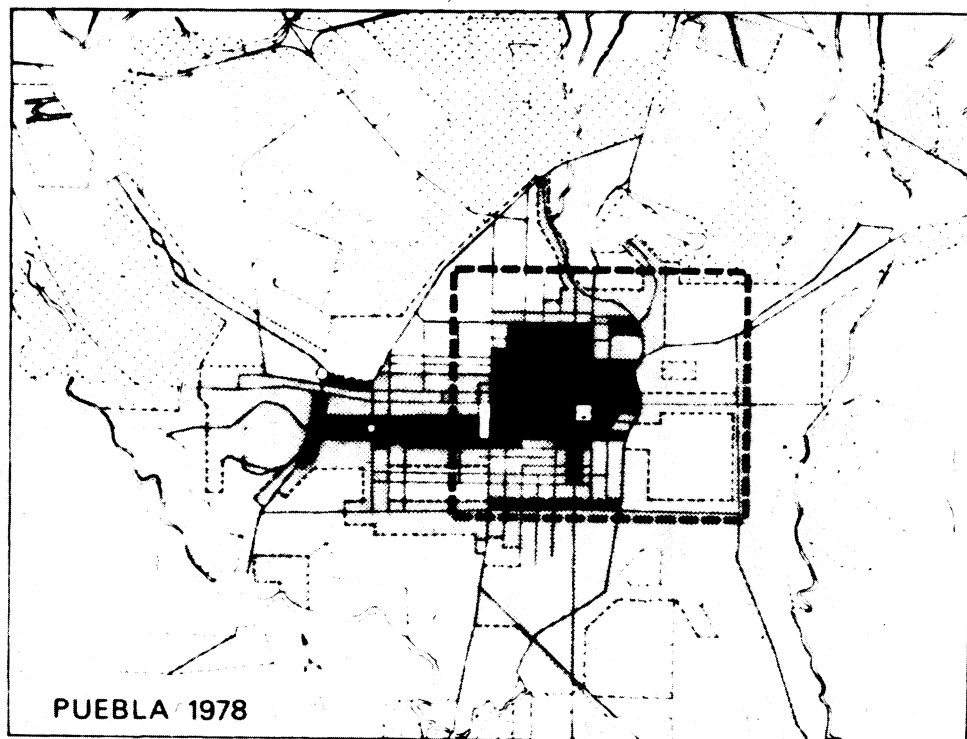
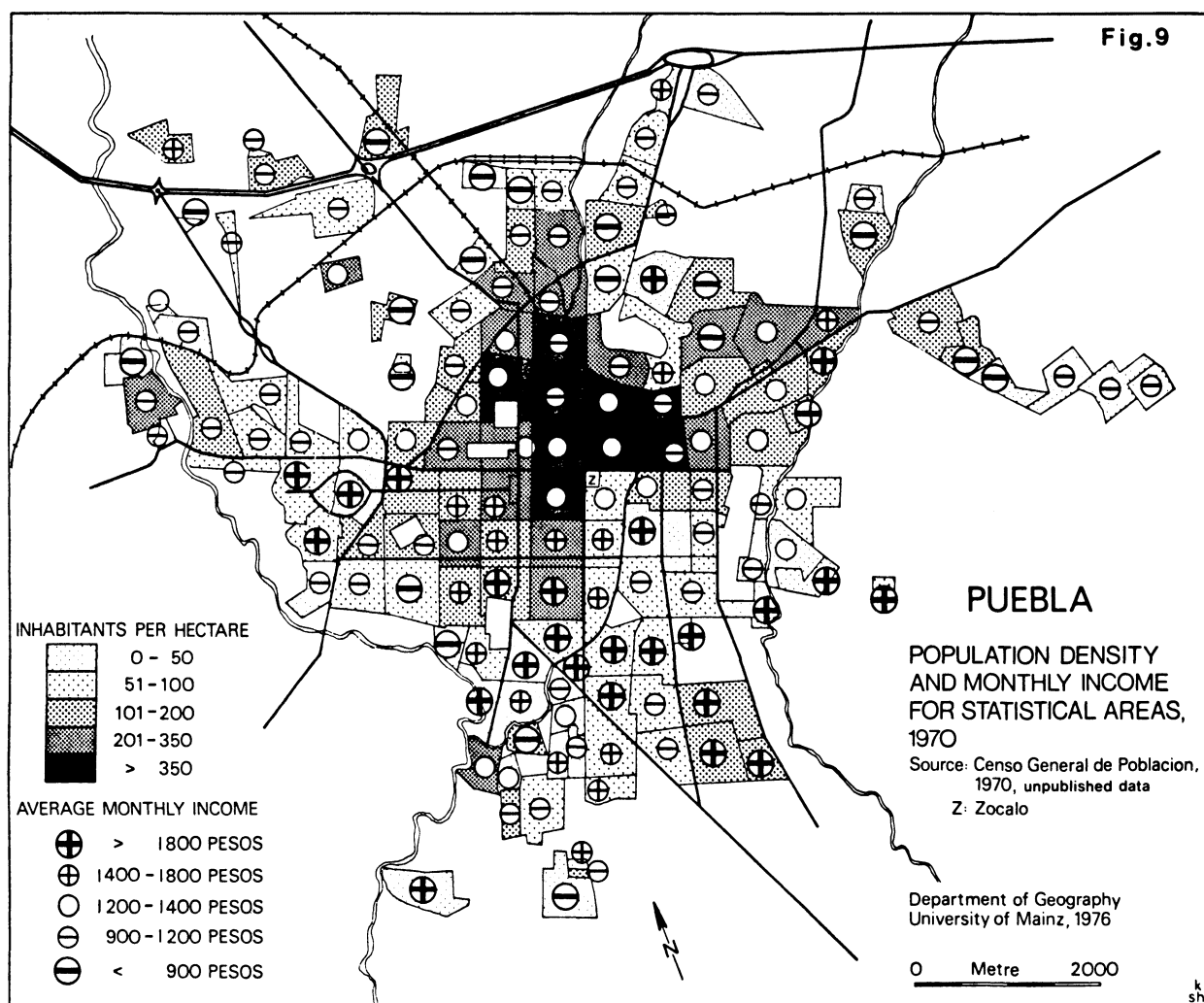
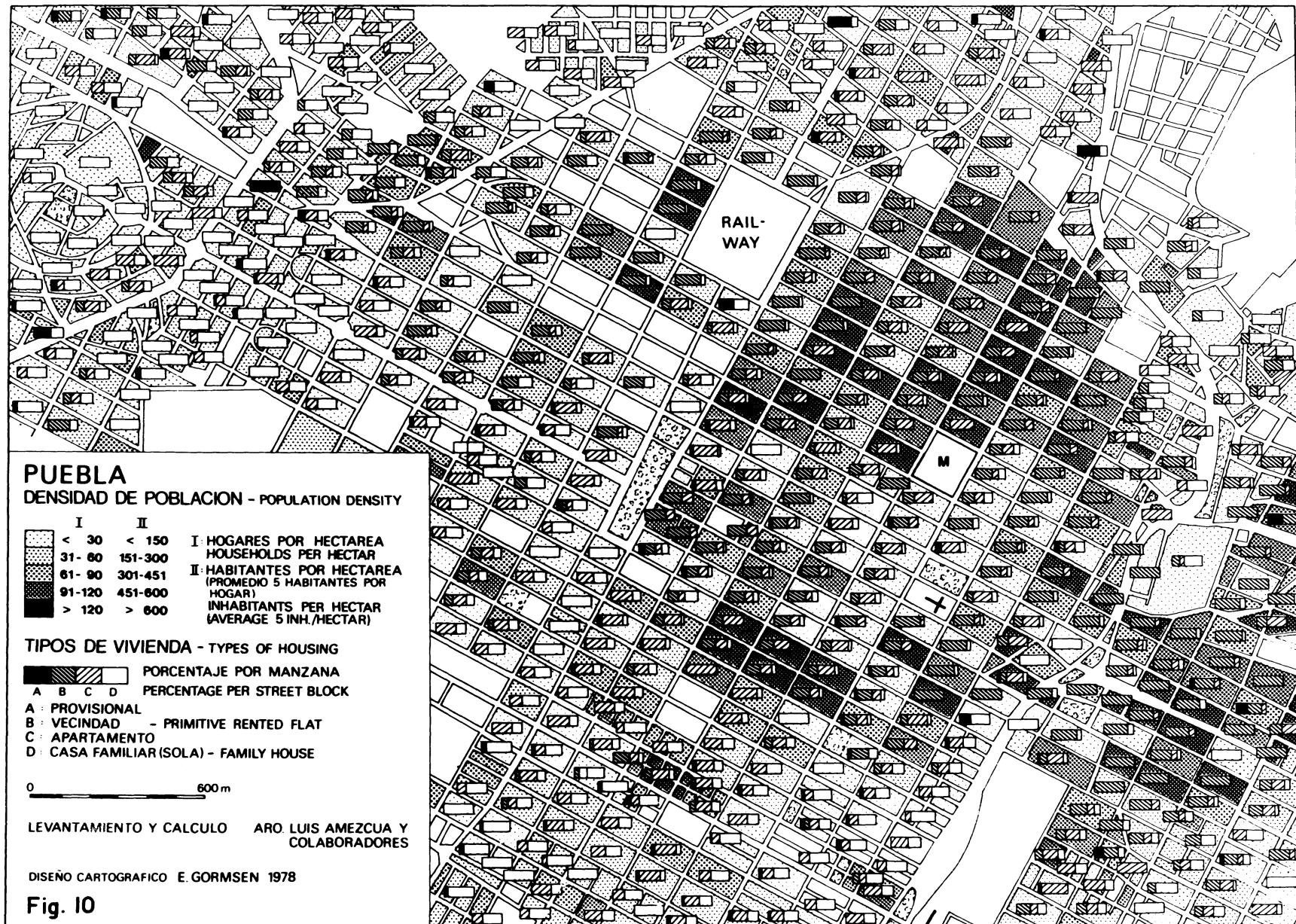


Fig.9





NOTES

1. *Vecindades* are primitive one-room flats along an uncovered passage, each with its own small cooking area, but with only one water tap and one toilet for every ten or more flats. While *vecindades*, corresponding to the above explanation, have been constructed since about the beginning of this century, many colonial *patio*-houses have been turned into *vecindades* in recent years.
2. Research has been carried out within the German-Mexican Puebla-Tlaxcala Project, financed by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft).
3. del Valle (1852); direct mapping by the Centro Regional Puebla of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) in 1973; Cartography: Department of Geography, University of Mainz, Germany.
4. The first Latin American textile industries were founded in Puebla in 1834.
5. Unpublished data from the Dirección General de Estadística, Mexico.
6. Direct mapping by the Comisión de Planeación Urbana de Puebla.

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