

## **Urban heritage: morphology, memory and perception: A case study of three former villages on the northern edge of Mexico City**

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### **Abstract**

Urban heritage forms the basic structure of contemporary cities, yet it receives a differential treatment, since historic centers are generally favored over local landmarks. In Mexico, this difference in appraisal is particularly visible in towns which were absorbed by Mexico City's expansion during the past 50 years, as they are now surrounded by populous neighborhoods on the edge of the city. An example of these are the colonial towns of Santa Isabel Tola, Cuauhtepac, and Ticomán, which were used as a case study to prove this point.

The paper proposes an enlarged definition for the concept of urban heritage, based on a multidisciplinary perspective including morphological, historic and perceptual considerations; it also sets forth a method to study urban history and urban heritage. The main research question was whether officially recognized heritage components actually remain significant for these communities' perception of their spatial and social environment.

Heritage is a dynamic and evolving concept, as is the construction of local identities, their connection to the landscape and to those elements which are significant as depositaries of collective identity. Six components are proposed to build a larger definition of urban heritage, and include historic, territorial, environmental, landscape, cultural and urban dimensions. The definition compounds elements which promote collective heritage appropriation, adding historic, symbolic, cultural, environmental, identity, functional and social values, leading to an integral view of heritage which should play an essential role in city planning. Research results go beyond the issue of heritage conservation and outline a set of proposals which should be central to urban planning.