

For this issue on lands we have posed a series of key questions: should urban land be expanded or compressed? Who bears the costs and who profits? Does such an answer contribute to equality between city's inhabitants? The responses here presented show that the notion of 'urban land' is a disputed territory where the point of view does matter, as it literally has urban-scale consequences.

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Dispersed or compact cities?

A false dichotomy

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In a film, British actor Dirk Bogarde was asked which of the two lobsters he preferred for lunch. After careful thinking, he replied: "both." We must say the same when presented with the alternative between dispersed or compact cities. The obvious answer is both, since they are not exclusive. Some (the minority) will prefer to live in high-rise buildings –hopefully with a good view– close to major accessibility nodes, such as subway or suburban train stations, stating feeling more secure and avoiding the need to take care of a garden. Others (the majority) will prefer to live in wide spaces with a yard or garden where children can play and where to eat outdoors with friends. The city must allow the freedom to choose lifestyles instead of forcing people to conform to a single way of living.

Those who choose to live in high-density areas do so mostly because of economy, since the land is more expensive in accessible areas and building high-rise is a strategy for reducing the impact of land-value on the price of flats. But they also suffer its drawbacks: annoying neighbors, the non-payment of common expenses with the consequent degradation of buildings, the impossibility to expand or improve the dwelling, etc. Those who choose to live in low-density areas do so mostly because of quality of life, since green areas improve the environment and allow for more flexibility to expand or improve the dwelling. The drawbacks are also numerous: longer commutes to work or services and higher dwelling costs. But here's the thing: a goal for urbanism is to allow for people's freedom of choice, provided that this choice does not involve costs for others.

The fundamental principle of planning is to achieve that 'the one who uses, pays –otherwise abuses.' In the case of those who choose to live in dispersed areas, they pay for the land, construction and urbanization (local roads, infrastructure, services, etc.). Water, sewage system, gas and electricity are paid according to consumption. They pay for

transportation as well as through fuel cost in cars and now through express-roads tolls. Streets maintenance costs, urban lighting, garbage collection, etc., are (or should be) paid through contributions and vehicle licenses. Those who live in compact areas also pay for maintenance through contributions, but not always for the additional costs imposed by using existing infrastructure.

The current problem, in both cases, is that there are negative externalities –costs not paid by users which are imposed to the rest of the population– such as traffic jams, pollution, over-use of existing infrastructure and equipment. The solution is to intelligently charge both congested streets when jammed as mobile and stationary sources of pollution, while charging also for additional construction unit (either housing, businesses, etc.) to cover the cost of expanding public schools, clinics, parks and infrastructure facilities. There should exist charts for universal charging instead of leaving them to the discretion of municipal authorities as they lend to corrupt practices.

Developed countries show that low-density urbanization generates less segregation, as land-value is lower. The same could be happening in metropolitan Santiago: that in peripheral developments located in communes such as Maipú, Pudahuel and Puente Alto there might exist less segregation than in more compact and central districts. The latter, deserves further studies before being confirmed or rejected. **ARQ**

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