

BOOK REVIEW

Legalizando la Ciudad: Asentamientos Informales y Procesos de Regularización en Tijuana

by Tito Alegria and Gerardo Ordonez El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2005, 176 pages

Reviewed by Paavo Monkkonen

Galvanized by the arguments of Hernando De Soto (1980 and 2000), the international development community and many academics have pushed land titling as an essential way to help the people of low-income settlements around the world. However, research has demonstrated that the act of defining property rights is problematic: there are often multiple property rights systems operating in any given place (Payne 2002) and the act of defining rights can generate conflict and violence (Alston et al. 1999). Thus, studying the process of land titling is especially important at the present time. Mexico has one of the longest running and most ambitious land regularization programs, making it an obvious place for research. In *Legalizando la Ciudad*, Tito Alegria and Gerardo Ordonez present an exemplary case study of land regularization in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. It is unfortunate that the book is only available in Spanish, as it is rich in data and historical analysis of the institutions of land regularization.

Legalizando la Ciudad is the result of a two year research project that sought to document the irregular settlements and land regularization processes through available administrative and census data, historical archives and interviews of public officials. The authors present data on land values and the inhabitants of irregular settlements in the city in order to address commonly held stereotypes of irregular settlements. More than half of the area of the city of Tijuana was developed irregularly, including centrally located areas that have since become sites of commercial use, formal planned urban developments sponsored by the government, and the more commonly conceived squatter settlements at the urban periphery. The land varies not only in its location and current use, but also in its origin and the way it was developed, from massive squatter invasions to the illegal subdivision of private land.

However, the diversity in irregular development is nothing new; the literature has documented the fuzzy idea of an informal sector for several decades (Peattie 1987). What jumped out to me upon reading *Legalizando la Ciudad* was first, there was a huge amount of land regularization occurring

in Tijuana and by definition, a vast quantity of irregular development preceding it. Regularization agencies in the city have begun proceedings in more than 160,000 lots in a city that according to the 2000 census had only 270,000 households (INEGI 2000). Secondly, the institutional complexity of the regularization agencies is surprising. Data presented in the book were gathered from the six land regularization agencies operating in the city. Yes, there are six different land regularization agencies operating in the city - one federal, three state, and two municipal. Finally, the relative lack of participation by the inhabitants of irregular settlements seems to contradict much conventional wisdom about land titling. Of the 160,000 lots in which proceedings have begun, less than 40 percent have received titles - even those that began proceedings in the 1970s and 1980s. It seems that either the process has some serious flaws or the benefits of land titles are not as attractive as some believe.

Legalizando la Ciudad makes a significant contribution to the literature on land titling in its aggregation and analysis of the administrative data on land regularization agencies. While Mexico is atypical of developing countries in many ways, *Legalizando la Ciudad* points to important directions for research. It shows that the institutional structure of regularization systems is important. The agency structure can be quite complicated due to the historical development of existing institutions. Understanding the demand for land titles among residents of irregular settlements is crucial to making the programs function. The book shows that in the case of Mexico, there is a significant amount of administrative data on irregular settlements available; it simply has not been collected in one place. Finally, the book suggests that future research should focus on documenting the details of the urban development processes that lead to the irregular development of land and understanding the processes that seek to regularize land. When more than half of a city's residential area was developed irregularly, it suggests that the development process must be addressed as well as *ex post* regularization and titling.

References

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