

The Innerburbs in Close-up

La Florida

La Florida was founded shortly after the passing of the Agrarian Reform Law (Decreto 900) when the Aycinena family –facing the possibility of having this section of their land holdings expropriated- subdivided and sold the plot of land formally known as *Potrero El Espinal*. The new settlement, named ‘La Florida’, was located on what was then coffee and corn growing land on the north end of the Mixco municipality (Mixco borders the Municipality of Guatemala and is located to its west-northwest). The settlement remained part of Mixco until 1958 when the *Comité Pro Mejoramiento de la Colonia ‘La Florida’* (the neighborhood betterment committee) finally achieved the settlement’s annexation from Mixco and automatic incorporation into the Municipio de Guatemala. This annexation was promoted by the neighbors on the grounds of the ineptitude and inefficiencies of the Mixco Municipality in providing for the rapidly growing settlement’s basic urban necessities (drainage, electricity, pavement, etc). Soon thereafter the Municipality of Guatemala began construction of the Mercado Cantonal on land that was previously the settlements soccer fields; this market would soon grow into the largest and most important market in the western part of the metropolitan area and have profound effects in the settlement’s trajectory.

In 1968 the typical lot in La Florida was inhabited by a single poor family living in a small owned or rented single-room dwelling. The lots, uncommonly large (about 9m x 27m), usually also included an open courtyard or space for washing and cooking (Roberts, 1973). The settlement is located about 5 miles west of the city centre, or a 7 mile drive (see Map 1). Though at the time of the original study the settlement contained a relatively high proportion of migrants (75%), these were generally long term residents of the city (over 80% of sampled heads of households had either been born in the city or have lived there for over a decade). The population was then estimated to be 12,000.

Today La Florida is a heavily commercial and diverse settlement. The market has outgrown its limits several times, and as a corollary economic activity in the forms of small scale production, clothing shops, general stores, services (hair salons, etc), restaurants and bars, and rental housing is flourishing throughout the settlement. This access to employment opportunities close to the home, as well as its relative closeness to the city centre and other nearby sources of employment, makes the settlement an attractive place for its residence. Lots in La Florida house both owners and renters (50% of each according to our preliminary findings). While owners tend to be long term residents of the settlement, many of who have lived their entire lives in the settlement (though have commonly owned or lived on different lots), renters tend to be those waiting for the opportunity to buy property in La Florida or adjacent settlements, or have come from rural areas in search of employment opportunities, sometimes returning to their villages after a few years, other times eventually settling with their families in other sectors of Guatemala City.