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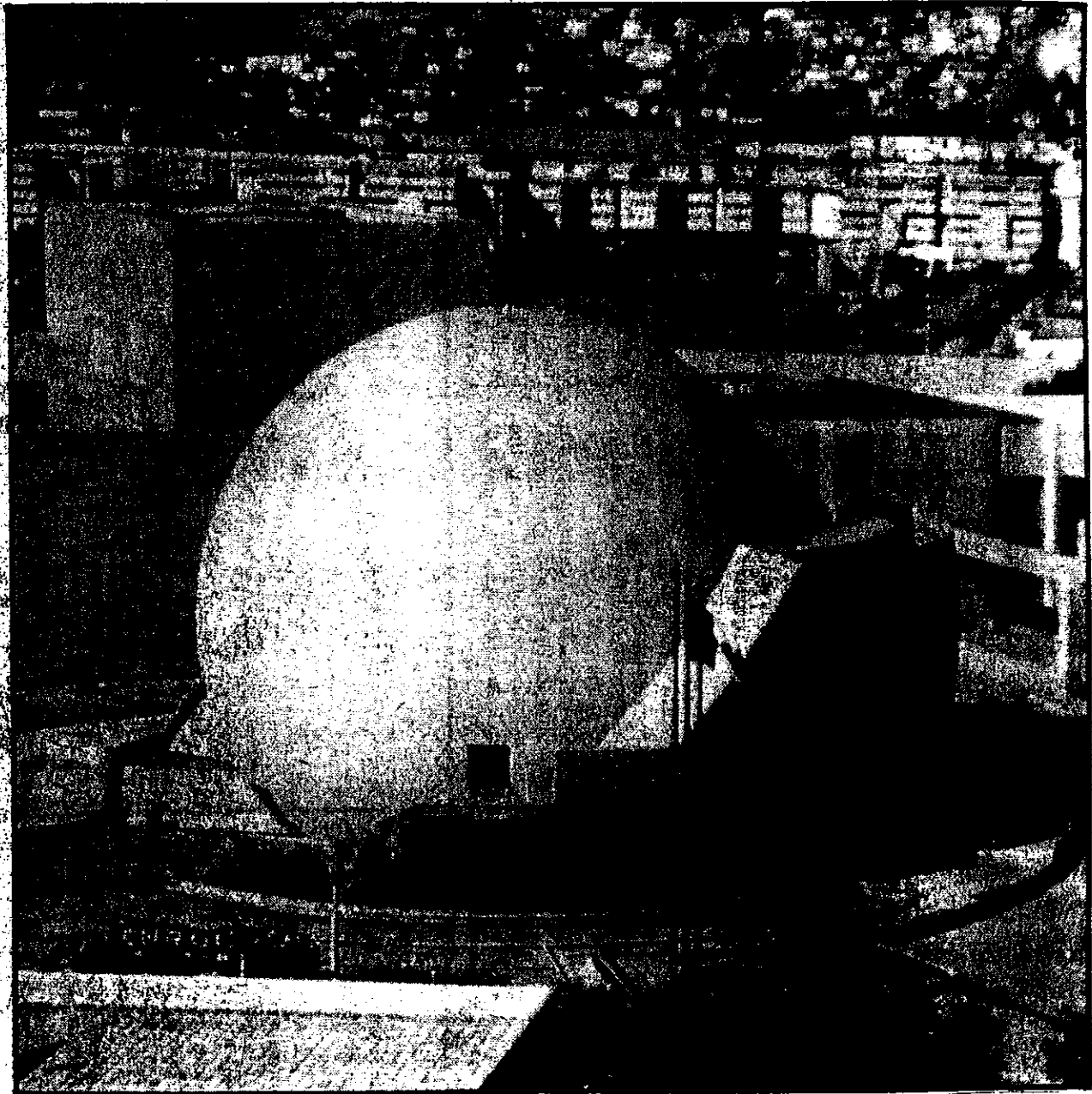


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Tijuana: Third World city

Will explosive growth overrun Tijuana?

by Lawrence A. Herzog

Tijuana, Baja California. In 1848, the fate of a small cattle ranching town in the Mexican territory of Alta California was decided. A 'rancheria' of little distinction known as Tijuana, which lay on the upper banks of a fertile river valley of the same name, was transformed into an international border town through an agreement between the U.S.A. and Mexico, aimed at settling a territorial war that had erupted two years earlier. At the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexican diplomats negotiated to preserve their nation's access to the Pacific Ocean via the Baja California peninsula.

The delimitation of the 1848 boundary line bisected the natural contour of the Tia Juana river valley, leaving the narrow upper portion of the river, a hilly surface interrupted by steep canyons and gorges, within Mexico, while the wide floodplain of the river, and its relatively flat lands, became the territory of the U.S.A. It was not until more than a century later, that it was noted that Tijuana received the poorest lands in the region when the border line was drawn. It is now necessary for Tijuana, one of the largest cities on the rapidly urbanizing U.S.A.—Mexico border, to engineer an urban development plan for nearly one million inhabitants, superimposed upon a very difficult urban topographic surface which is dominated by floodprone canyons and river beds, steep sloping hills, mountainous terrain and inadequate sources of potable water.

To appreciate the problems facing urban planning experts seeking to bring three decades of chaotic sprawl under

control in this, Mexico's largest northern border metropolis, the foreign visitor need only drive through any one of the city's numerous working class districts, termed 'asentamientos irregulares' (irregular settlements) by Mexican planners.

In the largest of these communities reside upwards of one hundred thousand members of the city's working class and poor. These areas tend to be hidden from the view of Tijuana's growing, but still limited, network of paved roads. They are particularly remote from the insular routes travelled by American tourists—Revolution Street in the downtown area, the River zone, or the bull ring at Playas.

But the visitor who ventures beyond the familiar tourist sector, and spends, let us say, the hours of dusk riding the dusty back streets of a sprawling "col-

onia" will find the problems of Tijuana akin to those of a frontier town in the American west of the 19th century. Throw in the elements of a Third World country with a unique culture and history, and place that frontier town at the competitive juncture of the late twentieth century and you have an idea of where Tijuana stands.

The problems facing Tijuana lie no further than that which a visitor's sensory impulses can record in the early evening rush hour. As the sun lowers in the horizon, the return journey from work to residence ignites a flurry of activity. Sounds, aromas, vivid landscapes of motion unfold in this Mexican border rush hour scene that is orchestrated each evening. Children scream from all sides; buses, cars, and trucks honk, and screech in and out of uncurbed, unpav-

ed streets. Heavily worn gears of aging vehicles grind and rattle under the strain.

In these canyon and hill neighborhoods that typify Tijuana are found communities that truly reflect the original meaning of "frontier". Winding up and down steep dirt paths, some barely wide enough for a motor vehicle, one finds plots of land being squatted upon by recently arrived families. Fires burn the scrub brush away. Makeshift fences mark off family turf. Canvas tents, wooden or cardboard walls and roofs of plastic sheets provide temporary shelter. Piles of bricks suggest improvements on several plots of land. Clusters of used tires are filled with sand to stabilize the terrain in areas where housing has been built on the steeper sloping land. In these newly settled sectors, there is no water or electricity, no plumbing facilities.

If the visitor is shocked by this symphony of residential chaos, it is to be expected. Despite tremendous strides made by the Mexican government in rebuilding and modernizing the city of

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Table 1. Population growth: Municipio de Tijuana, Mexico.

Year	Population	Growth rate (%)
1930	11271	-
1940	21977	6.9
1950	65364	11.5
1960	165690	9.7
1970	340583	7.2
1975	492666	7.3
1980	709340	7.3
1984	812404	5.6
1990	1129000	5.6
2000	1815000	4.8

Sources: Secretaria de Industria y Comercio, Direccion de Estudios, Censos de Poblacion 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, and Oficina del Gobernador, Estado de Baja California, *Plan de Desarrollo Urbano de la Ciudad de Tijuana: Version Abreviada*, Mexicali, Baja California, 1984, pp 93-94.

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Tijuana, it remains a metropolis shackled with the classic symptoms of urban poverty and residential deprivation of the less developed world.

Perhaps the single most crucial ingredient in the city's future is water, a resource precious to all cities in the arid borderlands, and more so to Tijuana which is so distant from the nearest major source of fresh water, the Colorado River. Great hope is placed upon the Colorado River—Tijuana aqueduct as the solution to dire water shortages currently facing the city. Yet the provision of water and the construction of this aqueduct are further complicated by the inadequate condition of Tijuana's ageing sewerage infrastructure. Ironically, an expansion of the city's water supply and piped water facilities will generate a corresponding increase in the demand for improved sewage management. More water overall will mean larger volumes of sewage flows. Further complicating the matter is the fact that raw sewage spills generally flow into the Tijuana river watershed, and eventually seep across the international boundary into the U.S.A. Recently, the Inter-American Development Bank, in granting a loan to Mexico for construction of the Colorado River-Tijuana aqueduct, requested a guarantee from Mexico that adequate measures would be taken to construct sewage facilities to arrest the flow of untreated Tijuana sewage into the U.S.A.

Water is but one of several public services severely lacking in many neighborhoods of Tijuana. The city's second major challenge in planning for the future will be to provide the full range of basic urban services to the growing number of inhabitants living in the poorest zones of the city, termed by Mexican planners 'asentamientos irregulares', (irregular settlements), due to their chaotic and unplanned nature. According to a recent study, 43.8% of the city's population is without running water, 47% is lacking in drainage facilities, 58% of city streets remain unpaved, and 70.6% of those streets are without lighting facilities.

Though these numbers are telling, they are not really surprising if one looks at the history of the city over the last three decades. During the 1950s and

1960s, Tijuana grew at an unprecedented rate, as steady streams of immigrants found their way to the border, and to the United States. Between 1950 and 1970, Tijuana's population size skyrocketed from around 59,000 to nearly 400,000. While rough master plans were drawn up over the years, planners underestimated the size of the growth, and were typically unable to provide an efficient mechanism for regulating the size and location of new residential developments. With the exception of land platted for the upper classes, most of the residential development occurring in the 1950s and 1960s was the result of spontaneous, often illegal, invasions of land by poor immigrants from rural Mexico.

The result of two decades of excessive immigration from Mexico's interior is clearly visible on the land pattern of Tijuana today. Much of the city consists of poorly laid out residential colonies, inefficient transport routes, and inadequate sewer, water, electricity and other service lines connecting these areas. On top of this chaotic land use arrangement, Tijuana is a geographically difficult place—the numerous flood-prone canyons, river beds, and steep hills, slice through residential communities, adding further land use problems to an already poorly planned environment.

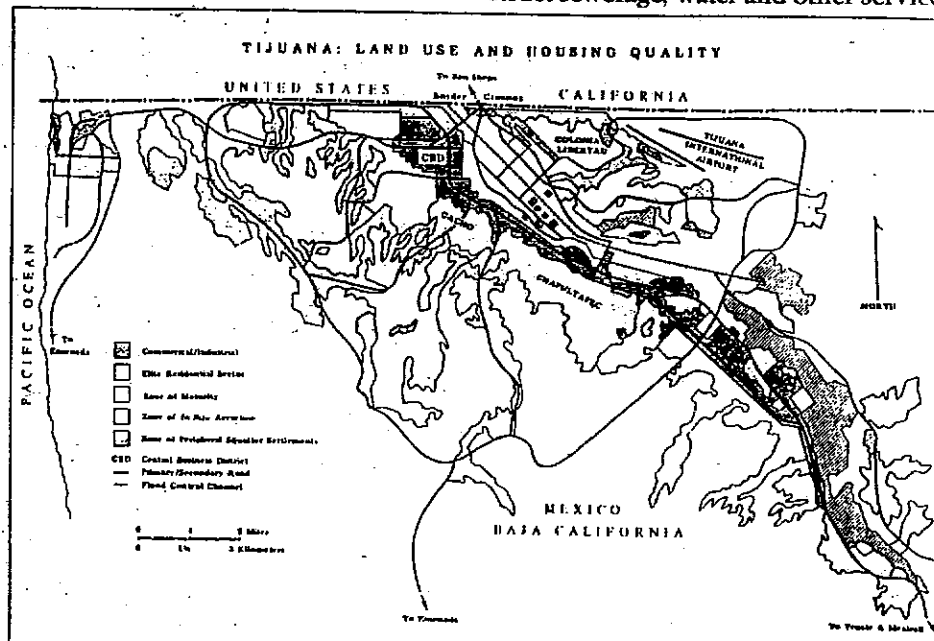
Another policy concern facing planners and city officials is the problem of land tenure. Since many of Tijuana's squatter communities formed as a result of spontaneous land invasions, or undocumented land sales, records of property ownership typically do not exist. This generates an atmosphere of uncer-

tainty and even hostility towards government and has led to a recent upgrading of efforts to 'regularize' land tenure.

Taken together, water supply and land ownership represent two crucial planning issues directly affecting more than half of the residents of Tijuana. This fact was reflected in the recent campaign for the state governor of Baja California. The slogan of the victorious candidate in Tijuana was 'agua y lotes para todo Tijuana', (water and land parcels for all of Tijuana).

What hope is there for creating a more orderly and well planned city in the short and medium term? Not much.

In the short run, the outlook for providing comprehensive urban services to the ubiquitous squatter communities is not particularly encouraging. The Mexican government finds itself deficient in monies for 'soft' urban improvement (social infrastructure). A program of fiscal austerity, including recent devaluation measures, has diminished the size of the public budget, making it more likely that government funds will be diverted toward capital-intensive projects, such as industrial parks or tourism facilities. The most recent Urban Development Plan for the Municipio of Tijuana dwells far more heavily upon land and environment planning policies than it does on improvements for the squatter communities and the urban poor. An additional problem facing the government is that the urban area's complex topography has created a geographically fragmented infrastructure, making it even more costly to construct sewerage, water and other services.



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trunk lines in underserved areas.

As migration from the interior continues, land invasions persist. Saddled with problems of international debt, and a program of fiscal austerity, the government can ill afford to pay for the basic needs of the poor urban neighborhoods—water, sewer, roads. Like other Third World nations where the central government controls the public budget, Mexico would sooner invest in developments that increase national revenue, than in "soft" improvements for residential areas. Thus in cities along the border like Tijuana, the landscape of the tourist districts will continue to improve, with newer hotels, restaurants and commercial developments seeking to bring dollars into the nation.

Around these tourist facilities, private investments, and the neighborhoods of the rich and upper middle classes will add to the impression of a modernizing border city. In the meantime, in the back hills of lower class colonies, progress will be slower and less visible.

Politics will play a crucial role in deciding the fate of these colonias. On the one hand, the government has engaged in a campaign to convince the public (and the United States) that migration to the border region is slowing down. Demographers in Mexico City claim that the growth rates of 7% or more of the last three decades are tailing off, as migration slows down. But local experts in cities like Tijuana, Mexicali, and Ciudad Juarez dispute these calculations. They claim migrants continue to come to the border, and they seem to have the data to prove it.

On the other hand, the government knows that in the end, residents will bargain for services in their neighborhoods through the traditional means of trading service provision for votes. When queried about when certain areas lacking electricity will finally get access to these services, some researchers at the Autonomous University of Baja California in Tijuana claimed, "When the next election for Governor of Baja California takes place, these areas will all sell their votes to the PRI (ruling party) candidate in return for a promise of services." In a frontier city in Mexico, the weight of politics, in the end, leaves a deeper imprint on the quality of residential life than do the formal channels of government. ■

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