Fast Urbanism and Slow Urbanism: Globalization and Public Space in Three Mexican Cities[1]

by: Lawrence A. Herzog
        Professor
        Graduate Program in City Planning
        School of Public Administration & Urban Studies
        San Diego State University

Urban theory, public space and city building in a global era

Over the last decade, contemporary urban theory (in geography, urban planning, design, etc.) has tended to emphasize what I will term "fast urbanism." While its proponents may not be entirely aware, "fast urbanism" authors have in common the assumption that the increasing techno-digitization and corporatization of cities is inevitable. One identifiable cluster of these scholars is the so-called "Los Angeles" school of urban theory.[2] Their discourse is largely post- modern, trying to make sense of the fragmentation, chaos and decentralization of hyper-suburbanizing places like southern California. Los Angeles is considered a prototype of cities, whose decentralized urban growth patterns are inevitable. LA school writers deconstruct space, finding new kinds of hybrid places and novel identities. Patterns are viewed as logical outcomes of history. The L.A. school generally tends to avoid discussions of Los Angeles' sustainability.

Another example of "fast urbanism" lies in the literature on digital cities, and the evolution of cyber communities.[3] These approaches explore the ways in which computers are reinventing urban space. Digital technology is seen as a replacement for some institutions and social practices in cities—universities, museums, offices, shopping streets, or cafes. A new language is introduced—"internet café," "information highway", or "virtual museum". Virtual space is viewed a viable substitute, in some cases, for the physical spaces of traditional cities. Some critics, however, have pointed to the many failures of virtual or "simulated space" in cities.[4] One has to ask, therefore, how much of the super-rapid, electronic, digitized connections will ultimately replace conventional urban meeting spaces? And at what point will city dwellers and planners decide that there must be a balance between digitized convenience and the human need for convivial places in real space?

"Fast urbanism" is the product of late twentieth century high technology. But it is perhaps equally influenced by the increasing power of giant corporations to homogenize and control the experience of city dwellers by managing the design of physical space, transportation, housing, offices, and commerce. In a more abstract sense, corporations have had a huge impact on how people think about urban life and urban space. "Fast urbanism" thus feeds the ultimate corporate fantasy: cities filled with willing, spatially separated, electronically connected consumers.[5]

This brings me to globalization, which is yet another important dimension of the "fast urbanism" paradigm, and central to the remainder of this paper. "Globalization" has become one of the pillars of conceptual discourse in urban planning.[6] The globalization literature has been dominated by "economic globalization" which argues that the world is shrinking (or "flat" according to some), and that high technology allows investment decisions to quickly link producers, buyers and sellers. Economic globalization frequently makes reference to the decreasing importance of nation states and national borders in a world where digital communication trumps all.[7] It identifies the great global headquarters of the international economy—"global cities", and seeks to understand how power is consolidated in these new mega- control centers.[8] Taken to an extreme, global corporate power could even overshadow the need for people to live in cities as we know them, leaving the possibility of a world defined by mega- corporatized cities such as the one depicted in the sci-fi film "Blade Runner."[9]

The alternative to "fast urbanism" is what I call "slow urbanism." Slow urbanism is linked to the larger discourse on "sustainable development," but it occupies a distinct corner of this paradigm. I coin this term to bring together the ideas of preservation of sense of place, cultural identity, unique neighborhoods, diversity, historic architecture, and the promotion of walkable communities. "Slow urbanism" is slow because it emphasizes the use of design and planning to literally and spiritually "slow down" city dwellers so they can reconnect with the space around them, and at the same time care about their environment.[10] Where "fast urbanist" proponents celebrate "speed" in the form of fast computers, instantaneity, channel surfing, web marketing, mixing, multi-tasking, and the complexity of urban life, "slow urbanists" espouse a city that recaptures the civic virtues of convivial space, street cafes, walking, and caring about "the power of place."[11]

At some level, both slow and fast urbanism will define the future of cities. But, I return to my point that many urban theorists tend to overemphasize the importance of fast urbanism, in part because it is trendy to be a fast urbanist at the beginning of the twenty first century.

Mexico offers an important subject for this debate. Mexico is a nation whose culturally identity was once significantly built around "slow urbanism" and respect for tradition. Before the 1990's, the Mexican government celebrated its history, and protected its cities, even to the point of creating a semi-official term—"cultural patrimony"-- often cited by national leaders in defense of tradition, and in defense of the celebration of historic spaces in cities. Yet, in the short span of a decade, Mexico has become perhaps the most rapidly globalizing nation in Latin America. Its cities are often caught between the allure of "fast urbanism" and globalization, on the one hand, and the power of national identity, the preservation of Mexican culture, and "slow urbanism" on the other. In this chapter I review three cities, exploring the problems and challenges faced by their historic cores over the future of public space and public life in the presence of fast urbanism and globalization.

Globalization of Mexico City's Historic Core

Few studies have explored the impact of globalization on historic downtown zones.[12] As mentioned, Mexico has become a nation that embraces many forms of globalization. Mexico City is the great capital and launching pad for Mexico's globalizing future. Some have argued that global capital prefers to invest in the periphery.[13] The "edge city" of Santa Fe, a large- scale, mixed use new town on the eastern edge of the urban area is a primary example. Santa Fe represents the largest concentration of global capital, as well as global technology and design in all of urban Mexico. Its built landscape is the product of foreign investors and transnational (U.S., Canadian, European, etc.) architects and engineers. For example, one new mixed use mega-development was designed with the Los Angeles architect team of Jerde Partnership.

But globalization has also found its way to the historic core of Mexico City. UNESCO's designation of the historic center as a world heritage site provided a crucial form of international recognition of the historic infrastructure of downtown, and became a catalyst for schemes to promote new investment. This unleashed forces that could begin to counteract the negative stereotypes of Mexico City, spread by global media over the last decade. For much of the late 20th century, international news coverage in Mexico City focused on negative events: political corruption, the devastation of the 1985 earthquake, the problems of air pollution in the early 1990's, and reports of crime against foreign visitors, particularly in the form of taxi cab kidnappings. Mexico City's glamour as a tourism destination had never been particularly high; it was usually overshadowed by beach destinations or more famous historic sites. UNESCO's designation reminded the world design community that the central core of Mexico City is a rich depository of historic buildings, streets, patios, and plazas.

In post-NAFTA North America, Mexico realized it needed foreign capital to transform the historic downtown of its national capital.[14] Foreign capital recognizes the potential of Mexico City's giant population concentration, as well as its symbolic importance as the trend-setting location for the entire nation. If an international firm wants to market its product, success in Mexico City will provide important leverage for opening markets elsewhere in Mexico. Therefore global capital has been very interested in Mexico City, especially since the early 1990's.

NAFTA opened the path for global hotel chains to fill a huge gap in the city center: the lack of high end (four and five star) hotels. A number of international hotel chains have arrived in Mexico City's historic center. Also arriving have been global restaurants, food vendors, house ware stores, media companies, and other consumer goods outlets. This has unleashed an explosion of globalizing entrepreneurship in the city, with the opening of internet cafes, advertising companies, real estate operations, marketing and other global enterprises.

Post-NAFTA Mexico's embrace of transnational consumer products, especially from the United States, has clear impacts on the quality of downtown. For example, many global corporate consumer chains have arrived in the historic core in the form of "commodified" spaces —from global corporate retail outlets and chain stores (7-11, McDonald's, Walmart, etc.) to shopping malls.

Foremost in the minds of many planners in Mexico City is the need to reconstruct the downtown to facilitate its connection to the world economy. One of the icons of downtown modernization-- the Latin American Tower—joined the globalization

campaign by planning a major structural rehabilitation. This building is a kind of symbol of 1960's modernist architecture at its best, and its redesign would make it available to global service industries seeking office space downtown. It is also a testimony to a form of earthquake-prevention technology that Mexicans can point to as successful-- the tower was undamaged by the 1985 disaster.

Perhaps the most glaring example of the penetration of global capital itself in the historic center, lies in the Alameda district. The attraction of the Alameda was that it was adjacent to the historic quarter, but not inside the boundaries of the landmark district, where severe restrictions on building height and development would impede large- scale investment. Historic preservation at the core led global capital to the Alameda, where it was able to take advantage of the attractions of the historic center, without paying the huge costs of regulation. Mayor Cuahtémoc Cardenas' late 1990's appointment of an international trade expert, with no previous experience in urban development, to head up the redevelopment agency for the Alameda district (Fideicomso Alameda), makes it clear that the government was committed to using global capital to finance the revitalization of downtown.

The juxtaposition of new technology, global media, trans-national investment, and free trade imply a new kind of city-building that could disrupt or even destroy the strong neighborhood identity, the dynamic street life and pedestrian scale of much of the central urban core, and the active and convivial public spaces that have survived modernization in the last century.   Opposition to the reshaping of downtown, however, has been fragmented.

Perhaps the most potent anti-globalization force has been the popular sector. It represents the lower and working class residential sectors who believe that the downtown space should be liberated for the construction of more housing and employment space for the lower and working classes. It opposes government- sponsored efforts to revitalize the downtown solely as an historic core zone for tourists, where public spaces would be for outsiders rather than residents. The popular sector also opposes "tertiarization" of the downtown, that is, its conversion to a service zone, dominated by globalizing commerce, banks, offices, etc.[15] The left, which has often aligned itself with the popular sector, has not really crafted a strategy for the downtown zone. As critic and writer Carlos Monsiváis has said, "the left gave the gift of the past (the historic zone) to the right."[16]

On the other side, the private sector offers a different form of opposition to government revitalization. The private sector wants to convert the historic downtown into a privatized international tourism zone.[17] One example of this kind of private sector ambition is the Plan Alameda, a project that has removed buildings around the Alameda, one of the treasured public spaces in the downtown. New development has displaced residents and installed a giant hotel/luxury housing/ office and commercial complex. The architecture is high tech and post-modern, some designed by North American architects.

Despite protests among residents, designers, historians and small businesses, the displacement and massive redevelopment continues to move forward. The Alameda Plan won government support during the Salinas administration, which strongly backed the private sector approach.   Momentum surged during the Zedillo administration, although it was slowed by fiscal delays due to a struggling economy. During the Fox administration, redevelopment once again continued.

One of the largest opposition interest groups is "ambulantes" or street vendors. They have long been a volatile political force in the politics of downtown Mexico City.[18] This dates back to the 1930's when laws were created giving the government the right to regulate street vendors so that they would not interfere with public spaces. In 1967, the government published in the Diario Oficial a set of regulations prohibiting and controlling vendors in public streets, where they might obstruct traffic, or interfere with residents' use of the streets, get in the way of ongoing construction, block vehicular circulation, or otherwise disturb the downtown.[19]

The sheer size of the ambulante sector-- some 25,000 vendors in Mexico City alone, has made it difficult for the government to challenge them.[20] During the late 1990's, analysts claimed that some of these 25,000 vendors had become a kind of mafia, where legitimate goods were stolen and resold by vendors on the streets of downtown Mexico City.[21]   Logically, the ambulantes want to be in the places where the largest flow of pedestrians occurs. And that is precisely where the government planners don't want the vendors to be, as the downtown streets are already severely congested, and store owners and businesses are strongly opposed to having competing sellers on the public streets and plazas.[22]

As Mexico City's downtown space becomes more valuable, there will be even more pressure from land owners and global businesses to keep the streets free of clutter, and especially, to keep ambulantes out. Planners are now looking to downtown public spaces-- plazas, gardens, etc.-- as anchors for redevelopment.[23] In this scenario, the government would recuperate some 63 civic squares, plazas and gardens in and around the historic center, physically rehabilitate them, install new facilities (like bathrooms), expand police presence, and promote cultural programs like "Sunday plazas in the historic center," which will bring antique dealers, artists, book fairs and entertainers to downtown squares.[24] Clearly ambulantes in large numbers would not fit into this vision. Instead, planners want to restudy new locations for vendors, what kind of substitute markets can be designed and how product sales can be controlled. But vendors resist this whole notion of their reinvention. Moving takes them away from their main profit locales, and having their merchandise sales controlled means many will not be able to sell illegal or stolen items, a major source of revenue. Thus, there is a serious conflict brewing , and, as one senior planning official noted "We're at an impasse. It's going to end up as a political decision." [25]

Further complicating the street vendor debate is the growing importance of the informal marketing of pirated CD's, DVD's and computer software on the streets of Mexico City. Globalization means that new technologies are penetrating third world countries like Mexico. Global media glamorize movies, music and other forms of entertainment. The high cost of entertainment consumer goods (DVD's, CD's, computer games and software, etc.) makes these products inaccessible to working class and poor Mexicans. The easy availability of computer software copying has made pirating a globally profitable industry, and it has been especially successful in Mexico City, where sales of pirated CD's and DVD's are threatening to put legitimate stores and entertainers out of business.

Modernization, Public Space and Querétaro's Historic Center

In 1994, a publication in the form of a comic book entitled *Volver a Nuestras Calles* ("Return to our Streets") began circulating in Querétaro, a medium-sized city that anchors the region called the Bajío two hours north of Mexico City. Sponsored by the State of Querétaro's Governor's office, the publication told the story of three strangers who meet on the streets of the historic center of Querétaro. They include a conservative storeowner, his neighbor--a local resident, and a visitor from the suburbs. The storeowner is passionately opposed to downtown revitalization; he believes that any attempt to pedestrianize downtown, including the exclusion of automobiles from certain streets, will severely hurt local businesses.[26]

The publication employs the more liberal voice of the store owner's neighbor, as well as that of a young, open- minded visitor from the suburbs to explain the virtues of revitalization of the historic center. Through clever drawings, fantasy images and dialogue, it demonstrates how less cars and more pedestrians can lead to a completely different kind of historic center—one where restaurants, cafes, galleries, nightclubs, boutiques, bookstores and other commercial uses create a critical mass of activities that make downtown attractive to residents, shoppers and tourists.

In 1996, two years after this publication appeared, Querétaro's central historic quarter was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, placing it among the prestigious list of Mexican downtowns recognized globally for their colonial historic heritage. The story of Querétaro's evolution, and of the preservation and reinvention of its historic plazas and urban spaces offers an important example of one of Mexico's many booming medium sized cities, with populations ranging from one half to three million people. The explosion of medium sized cities like Querétaro can be linked to Mexico's late twentieth century increasing global economic integration with the United States. Along the "NAFTA corridor" between Mexico City and the Texas-U.S. border, high tech, multinational companies have relocated to take advantage of low Mexican wages, and proximity to Mexico City.

Historically, Querétaro was one of a number of colonial settlements created by Spain in the sixteenth century as an outpost for expansion into unsettled frontier zones. Querétaro was, in fact, the fortress town and administrative center for the expansion north of Mexico City into a region of great mineral wealth. It was founded in 1531as a port of entry for goods and colonists heading north along the "Camino Real (the royal highway).

Querétaro's social ecology reflects a polarized settlement dynamic dating back to the colonial period: a zone of churches and rectangular, grid iron streets, on the one hand, a district of irregular, spontaneous street patterns and secular land uses, on the other. The religious zone was designed by Juan Sánchez de Alanís, according to the Spanish colonial plan, and it consisted of a main plaza, and principal church, the Church of San Francisco, as well as numerous convents, monasteries, temples and cloisters, all laid out within the grid iron pattern between 1550-1600.[27]

To the east of this district, lies Sangremal Hill, the oldest portion of the city, and its secular quality, irregular street layout, and hilly, windy topography stand in stark contrast to the Alanís zone. Many of the streets in fact follow the original morphology of the ancient Otomí town that covered Sangremal Hill before the Spanish arrived.

Public space has played a critical role in the evolution of contemporary Querétaro's historic downtown, particularly in anchoring the revitalization of a district that was economically distressed only two decades ago. Historically, the downtown suffered when many buildings and spaces were destroyed or severely damaged in the mid- nineteenth century War of the Reformation, and there was instability associated with the foreign governance of Austrian Duke Maximilian. Following this difficult era, the new independent Mexican government began to confiscate church properties in cities, and either demolish or recycle them to secular use. In Querétaro, dozens of cloisters, convents, monasteries, gardens and even churches were demolished or transformed for other uses in the late nineteenth century. This led to the overall densification of the downtown, as more activities filled in the previously undeveloped church gardens, patios or cloister spaces. At the same time, many of these spaces were converted back into "modern" public spaces—gardens, squares, and promenades.

From 1900-1950, Querétaro retained its colonial scale, and the historic center did not change dramatically. However in the 1950's and 1960's, the industrial boom in Querétaro led to a period of dramatic urban growth; the city's population expanded from 60,000 to nearly one million in the next four decades. This massive growth triggered a period of spatial decentralization, with industry relocating to the north of the city, and residential suburbs spreading out in all directions across the rough topography of canyons and hills surrounding the city.

This massive growth, the exodus of capital and people to the suburbs, and the emergence of automobiles posed challenging questions about the future of downtown. Mexico, as a nation, did not have national planning law until the 1983 Law of Human Settlements was passed. Thus, no single system of laws and rules governed the planning and preservation of historic colonial districts, and in other cities in Mexico, valuable heritage was destroyed. But Querétaro had the advantage of a strong regional tradition of pride in local history, and respect for the past. Some date this cultural attribute to the late nineteenth century resentment by Querétaro citizens of the destruction wrought upon the city by the War of Reformation, and the subsequent War of Intervention. The failure of the Federal government to offer reparations to the city following these events led to a determination along Querétaro citizens to protect their historic patrimony in the future.[28]

With strong local leadership, officials organized a revitalization effort in Querétaro's historic center as early as the 1970's. One project focused on removing traffic and creating pedestrian "andadores" downtown. During the administration of Governor Camacho Guzman (1979-85), formal programs for downtown redevelopment were initiated. These efforts remained high priorities under subsequent governors of the state. The revitalization programs brought diverse interest groups together—the Governor, the municipality, the federal agency in charge of historic monuments—INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History), as well as elite families who owned land, houses and businesses in downtown. There was some limited opposition, either from land speculators or poor people afraid of losing their homes. But neither group was able to block the revitalization project.[29]

For Querétaro, the cause of downtown redevelopment was noticeably aided during the administration of Mexican president Carlos Salinas (1989-95). Salinas paved the way for Mexico to enter the era of globalization, through a foreign policy strategy of economic integration with the U.S.(and the signing of NAFTA). The "NAFTA

president" also believed large cities could better compete in the global and national economy with federal government support for redevelopment and modernization. Thus he crafted national development programs like "Solidaridad" and "100 Cities." Querétaro's progressive leaders successfully pursued membership in the 100 Cities program, and were able to procure financial support for a number of development projects, including: a traffic re-circulation plan to detour heavy vehicles out of the city center, a modern bus terminal, remodeled historic streets, and new mass transit.

Central to the downtown redevelopment model employed in Querétaro was an emphasis on protecting the center- city from automobile traffic by reinventing pedestrian space. To do this a system of interconnected public spaces-- plazas linked by closed off pedestrian promenades-- was created. The two anchoring plazas in this system are the Plaza de Armas, and the Jardín Zenea. The Plaza de Armas is a rectangular, Renaissance-style square first laid out in the sixteenth century. It continues to preserve its original form today—two story colonial buildings, with covered portals on two sides. A three-sided "u-shaped" hedge of Laurel trees runs along the interior edge of the plaza, creating a parallel edge to the buildings.

Zenea Garden sits upon the former atrium of the San Francisco convent; it was created when church properties were liberated in the late nineteenth century. To the west, following a one block interruption, a string of pedestrian promenades leads to the third major anchor in the downtown public space system: Hidalgo Garden. This public plaza also lies on a former religious space—the Santa Clara convent. Plaza Hidalgo is another rectangular space in the French romantic landscape tradition — it is also surrounded by a wall of green, one- story high Laurel bushes, impeccably pruned to proportionately match the buildings.

Querétaro's downtown redevelopment faces a number of political conflicts: how to plan for tourism development, how to accommodate the demand for space by street vendors, and how to modernize the planning process. Recent governors' administrations in the 1980's and 1990's recognized that Querétaro's downtown, with its rich colonial heritage and human scale, holds enormous economic potential, both nationally and internationally.

Nearby cities, especially San Miguel de Allende, have profited dramatically from the globalization of their tourism economy. Up to now, Querétaro has kept a low profile in tourism— indeed, it is the fourteenth largest metropolis in Mexico, but ranks thirty second in tourism revenue nationally. Downtown Querétaro has the ingredients to become an economic growth pole and an international tourism magnet in the region by combining historic preservation, properly scaled commercial development, traffic management, and urban design programs that emphasize pedestrianized streets and public plazas. In such an economy, the number of residents living downtown can increase, while the number of local businesses (boutiques, restaurants, hotels, cafes, bookstores, art galleries, etc.) could double or triple in number and revenue.[30]

Queretaro's downtown, like other Mexican cities, was overrun by street vendors. Both the state and local governments were quick to impose restrictions on street vendors and not allow them to build a political power base in the historic center. During the 1980's and 1990's, state government used police and other officials to clear vendors out of the historic center's parks, gardens, plazas and promenades. Formal street vendor policies and regulations were put in place—these included a photo-credential program,

identification cards, a negotiating commission, a public fund to finance vendor management projects, and a plan to create alternate sites for vendors, in public markets for example. This dual approach—enforcement and planning—allowed Querétaro to avoid the confrontational politics that occurred between local officials and street vendors in places like Mexico City and Morelia, cities where it has been much more difficult to remove vendors from the historic center.[31]

The politics of public space tend to reflect the larger character of national politics—where party affiliation and connections with powerful leaders often overshadowed serious consideration of planning and urban design. The recent remodeling of another of Querétaro's important downtown squares—the Plaza de la Constitución, offers a vivid illustration of the new politics of urban Mexico. Plaza de la Constitución was originally built in the 1960's, a typical early modern design—one story of underground parking, and a treeless, formal public square above. It's lack of shade caused it to fall into disfavor— one resident described its micro-climate as "un calor infernal" (an infernal heat).[32] It was dramatically underutilized between 1970 and 1990, leading the city to decide to demolish it. In 1990, a new competition was held for engineering the multi-story underground parking structure. In 1995, a second competition was initiated for the design of the plaza above. Plaza design competitions in Mexico are notoriously political—every famous architect wants to put his or her stamp upon a major public plaza. Querétaro was no exception—a number of prominent national figures, including Pedro Ramirez Vasquez,[33] lobbied to be awarded the prized commission. On top of this, local architects aligned with the Governor of the state pressured to be awarded the design. A lot of pressure was being placed, and the governor felt the heat.

Not until a new administration came into power in the late 1990's did the design competition reach a conclusion. The new PAN governor's office suggested a radical solution that shocked many designers: that all of the candidates pool their ideas to create a joint solution as a public service. This meant no one architect would win the competition, but rather, it would be designed by committee. According to some observers, most of the top designers and other locals quickly began to drop out of the competition. The best two remaining candidates were given the project.[34] This outcome suggests that in a more democratic, open political system, which Mexican politicians publicly aspire to, decisions about inner city design and public space may begin to be made on the basis of merit, rather than on the basis of a traditional spoils system. This is a dramatic change for Mexico.

Globalization and Public Space in Tijuana

Tijuana is one of a string of northern Mexican border cities whose growth and urban form have been dramatically powered by their integration with the United States. Tijuana is, in fact, the prototype of the globally molded border city, a city's whose economy is driven by the triple engines of global manufacturing, free trade, and tourism. It is also a city whose population expansion has been fed by the constant stream of international labor passing through the region.[35]

Between 1950 and 2000, Tijuana was among the fastest growing cities in the Americas, its population increasing from 65,364 in 1950 to nearly 1.5 million in 2000[36].

The city's spatial form became more dispersed—served by the increasing automobile ownership in the post-1950 era and the nearby example of southern California's "freeway city." Tijuana became a city oriented along radial commercial boulevards, or peripheral highways. Traditional urban spaces face many obstacles in the twenty first century.

Tijuana's spatial form is a metaphor for a city struggling between two cultural paradigms: its origins as a Mexican city, and its future as part of the southern Calfornia/northern Baja California mega-urban region. This dual identity manifests in the city's cultural polarization between what I would call old public spaces and new public spaces.

Tijuana has only the barest of remnants of the kinds of plazas and traditional public spaces one finds deeper in the interior of Mexico, in cities like Querétaro or Mexico City. In border towns like Tijuana, the main plazas or zócalos tend to have a number of common elements: they are often, but not always, adjacent to the port of entry; they are called "parques;" they tend to be rectangular and cover a complete city block; they are usually adorned with a kiosk, benches, fountains, monuments and statues. Most of them are landscapes in a "garden-plaza" style, thus typifying the style of Mexican plaza design developed during the mid nineteenth century during the brief presence of the appointed European ruler, Maximilian. The garden plaza grew out of the French and Italian romantic design approach where carefully landscaped parks in cities symbolized man's ability to tame nature and create a new urban order.[37]

The main example of a traditional plaza lies in downtown Tijuana. It is called the Parque Teniente Guerrero. This space grew adjacent to one of the original secondary plazas from the city's original 1889 town plan. Its site plan conforms to the traditional morphology of the colonial era-- rectangular streets, interspersed with plazas.[38] The plaza was expanded to cover an entire city block early in the twentieth century; its radial pedestrian paths leading into a central square within the park mirror the macro design of the larger town in its original urban plan. Today, it stands as Tijuana's throwback to the colonial zócalos that grace Mexico's older cities. Its tall trees are formal, painted white on the bottom portion. A large kiosk in the center serves as a bandstand, and is surrounded by wrought iron benches in a circular space. But even this plaza has a cross border "California connection"—virtually all of the surrounding buildings that enclose the space were constructed during the 1920's and 1930's period when Mexico embraced "California style" architecture (Mission or Spanish Colonial Revival), a trend that dominated early twentieth century architecture north of the border.

The park no longer serves the larger city, which has grown too large and too spatially decentralized to depend on open space near the old center. Teniente Guerrero remains, however, a well- maintained neighborhood public space, heavily used by residents of the downtown zone. At dusk, the plaza comes alive with children on bicycles, young couples, pigeons, shoe shine stands , and vendors selling elote (corn on the cob). In a city largely devoid of well- designed open spaces, this plaza is a welcome anomaly.

But what really dominates modern Tijuana is its U.S.-like suburban morphology. Like most of Mexico's border cities, later 20th century development and urban form were shaped by the automobile, the highway, the construction of suburban-style, single family housing projects, and the great twentieth century public gathering mecca—the shopping mall. Ironically, the current Mexican word for shopping mall—"plaza"-- is derived from

the earlier term for town square, plaza mayor. Of course, the two places could not be more different. The traditional plaza was the outdoor living room of the town, a place of discourse, serendipity and free access to all. The shopping plazas are privately owned, rigidly controlled, and often oriented toward indoor spaces.

In Tijuana, the largest and most visited public space is a private outdoor shopping mall called "Plaza Rio Tijuana," completed in 1982. Built along the lines of a modernist southern California regional shopping mall, it is anchored by three large department stores (two of which are Mexican companies, the other a Sears), a multiplex movie theater, restaurants, and an array of smaller shops that sell everything from designer clothing, books and records to shoes, athletic equipment, and pastries. The design of the mall allows mostly middle and upper class shoppers, who arrive mainly by car, to actively utilize open- air public spaces within the shopping center. These spaces consist of sunken plazas. The plants, shrubs and flowers are neatly cut and well kept. There are fountains and shade trees.

In the United States, over the last decade, shopping mall development has experienced a dramatic restructuring. Malls have had to reinvent themselves to keep customers. A competitive atmosphere between regional malls has led to massive reconstruction and mall revitalization, with malls building newer, larger multiplex movie theaters, restaurant complexes, playgrounds, community centers, fitness facilities, and other amenities that seek to make the mall the true community gathering place of the city.

Globalization is causing this investment tactic to shift south of the border. Developers tried building specialized shopping malls in Tijuana with mixed results. One example, Plaza Fiesta, was completed in 1986 in the heavily traveled River Zone. It sought to re-create the ambience of a colonial town in a space dominated by outdoor cafes and restaurants. Some say its designers tried to resurrect the feeling of Guanajuato, Mexico, one of Mexico's greatest colonial cities. The buildings are of white stucco, with pseudo-arcaded facades and second floor balconies with iron railings and lanterns. The public areas have fake kiosks and fountains. There is very little public seating; users of these spaces are primarily those who sit at costly outdoor cafes or restaurants.

The designers of this commercial center envisioned a lively ambience; they placed brightly colored awnings and umbrellas in front of the many restaurants serving international cuisine--Greek, Italian, and French. The center offers live entertainment in the evenings. But it has become a largely underutilized, claustrophobic and not very public place. It is cut off from the rest of the city by boulevards with heavy automobile traffic surrounding it. Its fake architecture and poor location evoke neither a sense of place nor a feeling of community.

Modernist architects in Mexico have sought to adorn the contemporary urban landscape with ritual public squares constructed with the most advanced materials and architectural techniques, but in a style and scale that brings to mind the Mesoamerican plaza of pre-colonial times. Examples of these grand modernist spaces in Mexico City include the Plaza of Three Cultures at Tlatelolco, the INFONAVIT (National Workers' Housing Institute) building plaza, and the Anthropology Museum central patio. In Mexico's second largest city, Monterrey, the "MacroPlaza" is an example of a modern public space built at a grand indigenous scale, but surrounded by modernist buildings.

The most salient example of this kind of *avant garde* ceremonial public space in Tijuana is found in the river zone—at the outdoor plaza of the landmark CECUT Cultural

Center (Central Cultural de Tijuana) building, the cultural museum complex designed in 1982 by the nationally known architect Pedro Ramirez Vazquez, and local designer Manuel Rosen. The designers believed the museum would be more exciting if it included a usable outdoor space. The plaza they created has touches of the indigenous ceremonial plazas, empowered by the massive concrete walls of the museum and a globe- shaped amphitheater. This is one of the more popular civic spaces in the city.

This space has become symbolic of Tijuana's connection to the global economy (its giant "globe" is a resounding metaphor). Thus, it is frequently the subject of artistic and literary debates. For example, in the fall of 1997, during an international art festival called INSite 97, one artist created a temporary exhibition entitled "Century 21" (Siglo XXI). The artist cleverly located the performance sculpture on the plaza of the CECUT building. The sculpture consisted of a re-creation of an actual shanty residence, built of corrugated metal, wood and cardboard. It was surrounded by discarded oil cans, drums once used to store toxic chemicals used in the maquila factories. The irony and symbolism of the exhibit were quite powerful—"Century 21" is also the name of a global real estate corporation that personifies private land investment in Baja. The exhibit was actually a spoof—it created a fictional real estate project in which all the shanties were being marketed by a developer, much like actual subdivision housing. The exhibit challenged viewers to understand that even poor people deserve to live in an organized, legitimate housing complex. The use of the name of a U.S.-based real estate company also implied that U.S. and global capital ought to get involved in helping Mexico with its housing crisis.

Perhaps the most glaring example of the globalization of public space in Tijuana lies in downtown Tijuana. "Avenida Revolución" (Revolution Avenue) is the quintessential hybrid border "main street," a popular, if not somewhat mythologized pedestrian space. Every Mexican border city has a main commercial street like Revolution Avenue, and in Tijuana this iconic promenade is first and foremost a global tourist space, the first main street millions of foreign visitors ever see in Mexico. In this sense, it is the quintessential "other directed" tourism landscape, a stage designed to loosen the wallets of tourists. It is bursting with curio shops that offer colorful and exotic fare: leather, jewelry, knives, serapes, sombreros, bottles of tequila. It teems with bars, discos, restaurants and nude dancing revues.

Taxi drivers wait at every other street corner; also present are hot dog vendors, photographers with striped donkey carts, and "greeters" in front of each bar trying to coax people in. The visual landscape screams out like the carnival in Rio. Oversized signs in English that run the length of buildings read "Margaritaville." A life- size yellow school bus is appended to the second floor of a bar; balloons are everywhere. Turn of the century Spanish colonial revival buildings, or ticky-tack facades sit alongside the commercial icons of globalization: Jack in the Box, Carl's Jr., the Hard Rock Cafe. Revolution Avenue has always been a bubble of American culture.

One of the many side effects of globalization is a shift in the balance between public and private life. One trend is to privatize the experience of public encounters. along the Mexican border this takes a number of forms. One example is the "new auto-oriented tourism corridor", a post- modern version of the 1950's strip developed road. The small city of Rosarito, 15 miles south of Tijuana, offers a lesson on the future of the street and the square along the Mexican border. Rosarito is a classic "strip development

town," several miles of restaurants, hotels, and drive in stores that follow the old, toll freeway coastal highway. Not unlike a frontier town, the development falls off quickly as one moves away from the main strip. Rosarito is, in every sense, a highway town, a modern town, a U.S.-oriented, tourism corridor. There are no central plazas or pedestrian gathering spaces here. The plazas have been replaced by indoor patios wedged inside of luxury hotels. The main walking spaces lie hidden along the sides of the coastal road, which is completely dominated by cars, slanted parking, and the road. The newest additions to the landscape of the coastal highway in Rosarito are post-modern hotels that celebrate the view from the automobile, the main vehicle from which to experience this space.

A second form of privatized border space is the "global tourism promenade." Part of the NAFTA process in Mexico has been the shift toward privatization of economic sectors that were once controlled by the government: telecommunications, transport, and tourism. Large- scale public infrastructure-- parks, promenades, ports, airports-- are gradually converted to private enterprise. An excellent example lies in the privatization of the port of Ensenada. Ensenada has long been a key to Baja California's future economic development. It is one of the best deep- water ports on the west coast of North America. The highly centralized Mexican political system tended to favor infrastructure in the central regions of the nation; for decades Ensenada's promise as a major port was held back. The decade of the 1990's saw the resurgence of Ensenada in an atmosphere of decentralization and NAFTA. The Mexican government has been gradually privatizing the operations of the port. The goal is to dredge the harbor, expand shipping, trade, and the tourism economy, and clean up the environment. One piece of this larger plan lies in creating and expanding public spaces along the waterfront. By the early 2000's a network of new promenades had been constructed along the harbor, in tandem with housing, parking garages and commercial development projects.

Conclusion

"Slow urbanism" has been an important component of Mexico's urban and political history. Most of Mexico's important cities (with the exception of the northern border and a few tourist centers) were influenced by colonial Spanish city-building, and retained large stocks of colonial-era buildings and public spaces, principally in and around the historic centers. Mexico's most important political party of the 20th century, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), crafted its political power base around the idea that preservation of the past—the "cultural patrimony"—was a nationalist enterprise that should be supported by voters. Public spaces—town squares, gardens, courtyards, promenades, parks—are thus an important element in Mexican urban planning and politics.

One can argue that Mexico is a nation where "slow urbanism" has been important both culturally and politically. Yet traditional spaces in Mexico are challenged by the same "fast urbanism" forces that impact cities across the planet —globalization, urban expansion, high technology, new forms of travel. This leaves the future of historic centers in question. I have explored this question for three cases—Mexico City, Queretaro and Tijuana in this chapter.

Globalization has quickly injected "fast urbanism" into every corner of Mexican cities: from the "perificos" or freeways that ring Mexico City, to glass and steel skyscrapers, mega shopping malls, cybercafés, and the ever present satellite dish on the roofs of the homes of all social classes. The city's gargantuan geographic size, and its status as both national capital and political-economic control center, make Mexico City a special case. Global enterprises and fast urbanism seem perched to overrun the historic center. Yet, evidence suggests that neither the government nor city dwellers have made up their minds about what to preserve and what not to preserve in the historic center. For the moment, there is still a great deal of history in the *centro historico*.

But just beyond the official boundaries of the historic core, fast urbanism is staking its claim in the Alameda district. Here a global investment coalition has begun tearing down the edges of the neighborhood, or building on the empty spaces left by the 1985 earthquake. Luxury apartment towers and office buildings are rising up alongside mega office-hotel complexes. The opposition to this project did not successfully defeat it, although there is still a rumbling from the popular sector and the 25,000-strong street vendor lobby. Mexico's historic core remains up for grabs, and the future of the zócalo and other public spaces remains uncertain.

In Querétaro, on the urbanizing "NAFTA corridor" north of Mexico City, "slow urbanism" strategies were used by politicians and enlightened interests to preserve the historic downtown, which today, is notable for its system of well designed public spaces, a series of promenades linking major plaza activity nodes. Querétaro appears to have successfully created a balance between "slow urbanism" in the historic downtown, and "fast urbanism" along highways and in satellite towns. "Slow urbanism" in the historic center has embraced economic activities that benefit from "slowness" and public life— cafes, restaurants, movie clubs, bookstores, clothing stores, street vendors. The city has managed to create a dual identity of slow and fast urbanism in the appropriate locations. This is an appealing model for other cities in Mexico.

Tijuana is one of a string of northern Mexican border cities lacking in traditional public spaces or historic centers. Both its economy and the organization of space have been influenced by proximity to southern California,. It is a city that has learned to build successful "fast urbanist" spaces-- shopping malls, high tech hotel/office complexes, global tourism spaces and retail corridors oriented toward cars. Yet, despite this globalization surge, Tijuana continues has a "slow urbanist" culture, which permeates its streets and neighborhoods. Pedestrians, vendors, collective taxis, buses, and mass transit strongly define the city's visual character. Its identity remains as a high density city, where walkable spaces still proliferate, and where the geographic center retains some functional importance. There is a buzz and bustle here that, at times, feels much more like Mexico City than Los Angeles. People continue to crowd into the high density zones of the city: the river zone, and downtown. In the end, Tijuana may be the ideal 21st century barometer for the future of Mexico and its cities, as it plays out the tradeoffs between slow and fast urbanism.

ENDNOTES

[1] Some of the ideas in this chapter are drawn from my new book, Lawrence A. Herzog, 2006. *Return to the Center: Culture, Public Space and City-Building in a Global Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press).

[2] See, for example Edward Soja. 1996, *Thirdspace* (Cambridge: Blackwell); Michael Dear, 2000, The *Post Modern Urban Condition* (Oxford: Blackwell).

[3] An excellent example is William J. Mitchell, 1995, *City of Bits* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press)

[4] See Michael Sorkin, ed. 1992. *Variations of a Theme Park* (New York: Hill & Wang).

[5] The sociologist Leslie Sklair has pointed to the disadvantages of globally controlled consumer behavior. See Leslie Sklair, 1991, *Sociology of the Global System*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins).

[6] See, for example, American Collegiate Schools of Planning, 1994, *Globalizing North American Planning Education* (ACSP); Saskia Sassen, 1994. *Cities in a World Economy* (London: Pine Forge).

[7] See Thomas L. Friedman, 2005, *The World is Flat* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

[8] See John R. Short and Yeong-Hyun Kim, 1999, *Globalization and the City* (London: Longman); Saskia Sassen, 1991, *The Global City*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

[9] Mike Davis, 1990. *City of Quartz* (New York: Verso).

[10] See Ray Oldenburg, 1989, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Marlowe and Co.); David Sucher, 2003, *City Comforts* (Seattle: City Comforts, Inc.).

[11] See the book with that title, Dolores Hayden, 1995, *The Power of Place* (Cambridge: MIT Press).

[12] One exception can be found in Joseph L. Scarpaci, *Plazas and Barrios*, 2005 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press).

[13] See, for example, A. Rowland and P. Gordon, 1996 "Mexico City: No Longer a Leviathan?" in Alan Gilbert, ed. The Mega City in Latin America (Tokyo: United Nations Press), 173-202.

[14] Lawrence A Herzog,, 1999, *From Aztec to High Tech* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins),

[15] Ana Maria Rosas Mantecón, 1990. "Rescatar el centro, preserver la historia." *Ciudades*. 8:15-21.

[16] Ibid.: 15

[17] Emilio Pradilla Cobos, 1993. "Reconstruccion del centro historico de la ciudad de Mexico." *Ciudades*. 17: 14-21.

[18] Street vendors have been an important political actor in other historic centers in Mexico. See, for example, Gareth Jones and Ann Varley, 1994. "The contest for the city center: street traders versus buildings." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. 13: 27-44. For a more general overview of the politics of land use change in Puebla, Mexico, see Gareth Jones, 1999. "The reconquest of the historic center: urban conservation and gentrification in Puebla, Mexico." *Environment and Planning: A*. 31: 1547-1556.

[19] J. L. Lezama, 1991. "Ciudad y conflicto: usos del suelo y comercio ambulante en la Ciudad de mexico," in *Espacio y Vivienda en La Ciudad de Mexico*, ed. M. Schteingart (Mexico City: Colegio de Mexico).121-135.

[20] Ibid.

[21] W. Foote, 1997. "Mexico City's Street Vendors Have Big Brothers," *Wall Street Journal*. February 14.

[22] See also John Cross, 1998. *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

[23] Mercado y Asociados, 1997. *Proyecto Centro Historico: Ciudad de Mexico*. (D.F.: Asamblea de Representantes).

[24] Fideicomiso de Centro Histórico, 1998. *Plan estrategico para la regeneracion y el desarrollo integral del centro historico de La Ciudad de Mexico* (D.F.: Gobierno del Distrito Federal).

[25] Rene Coulomb, 1998. Field interview, Mexico City.

[26] Comisión Estatal de Vivienda, Querétaro, 1994. *Volver a Nuestras Calles*. (Queretaro).

[27] Conrado Tostado, 1998. *The State of Querétaro*. (Mexico City: Reproducciones Fotomecanicas).

[28] Carlos Arvizu, 2001. Field interview, Querétaro.

[29] Alejandro Cabrera, 2001. Field interview. Querétaro.

[30] Municipalidad de Querétaro, 2000. *Plan parcial de desarrollo urbano—delegación centro historico* (Querétaro: Municipalidad de Querétaro).

[31] Cabrera, 2001

[32] Ibid

[33] Pedro Ramirez Vázquez is one of Mexico's leading modern architects. His works include the Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, the Mexicana Airlines building, Mexico City, the Sports Palace, museums, hospitals, housing projects and numerous other commissions.

[34] Cabrera, 2001.

[35] The growth of Tijuana is the subject of several key books, including Herzog, Lawrence A., 1990, *Where North Meets South* (CMAS: University of Texas), Herzog, Lawrence A., 1999, *From Aztec to High Tech* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins), Arreola, Daniel and Curtis, James, 1993, *The Mexican Border Cities* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press)

[36] Official estimates by Mexico's statistical bureau, INEGI, routinely undercount the populations of border cities like Tijuana. INEGI's estimate of 1.275 million inhabitants for Tijuana in 2000 fails to include numerous "illegal" squatter communities that census takers either ignored or were unable to fully cover. Further, it is well known that the Mexican government may want to undercount border city populations as a way of minimizing the number of migrants heading north toward the United States.

[37] Arreola and Curtis, 1993.

[38] Ibid.