

Global Tijuana: Exploring Its Seven Ecologies

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According to Dr. Herzog, though the border region has long been misrepresented as a peripheral, transitory, and unstable space, the increasing interdependence of Mexico and the United States has revealed the importance of border cities and border people. “No border zone in the world has experienced the magnitude of urban growth found in this region,” Dr. Herzog observed. Dr. Herzog argued that the region’s unique transformation is occurring at a time of globalization and “post-modern” urban processes that have contributed to a new “post-border” reality impacting nation-states. Dr. Herzog identified Tijuana as the ultimate “post-border city.”



According to Dr. Herzog, Tijuana finds itself pulled in the multiple directions of Mexico’s three urban models: indigenous, colonial, and modern. In this sense, Dr. Herzog observed, Tijuana is a hybrid that blends the perspectives of North and South, local and global. Dr. Herzog identifies seven “urban ecologies” found in this hybrid mixture, including three spaces formed by global economic actors (global factories, transnational consumers, and global tourists) and four spaces representing regional and local responses to globalizing forces (post-NAFTA neighborhoods, transnational community places, spaces of conflict and invented connections). First, the development of industrial space along the border has been driven primarily by the proliferation of “global factories,” known as *maquiladoras*. In 1965, Mexico implemented the border industrialization program, allowing *maquiladoras* to assemble and export products with taxes only on the value added. Suddenly, said Dr. Herzog, the border became “a legitimate place for business.”



Second, with the advent of NAFTA, the border has become a place for transnational consumerism. Dr. Herzog noted that the emergence of consumerism in the borderlands raises possible concerns about the homogenization of urban space, as Mexico adopts the “culture and ideology of consumerism” that proliferates in the United States. In this new context of consumerism, Dr. Herzog, there is a tendency toward privatized and simulated public spaces such as malls and theme parks, where citizens are more restricted from otherwise normal activities (e.g., sleeping, sitting, using restrooms, walking dogs, etc.). To enjoy these spaces, citizens are increasingly required to pay for access, resulting in the decline of truly public space. At the same time, Dr. Herzog argued, urban design along the border increasingly involves theme-oriented commercial establishments, often simulating other very different spaces and experiences (e.g., the Titanic). As Mexico moves in this direction, Dr. Herzog expressed concern about the disappearance of Mexico’s “organic”

public space and traditional places of consumerism, such as *tianguis* and street vendors faced with competition from U.S. fast food establishments like McDonald’s, Carl’s Jr., Domino’s, etc.

A third “urban ecology” found in Tijuana is that of global tourism. Global tourism, Dr. Herzog argued, tends to manipulate the experience of visitors rather than to portray the reality of the place they are visiting. “The tourism industry, controlled from international command centers in wealthy nations, tends to promote distorted images of Third World nations like Mexico... Global tourism firms have little interest in portraying nations as they really are... poverty is

minimized or ignored, as are many local customs and practices.” In Tijuana, Dr. Herzog noted, Revolution Avenue provides a useful example of this tendency: the setting is a classic “other directed space,” a vacation-land and consumer haven created for outsiders. “One could argue that Revolution Ave. was designed to be an idealized ‘Mexico-land,’ a fantasy exotica of what Americans imagine Mexico to be.”



Fourth, Dr. Herzog noted that post-NAFTA neighborhoods in Tijuana have been transformed in a manner similar to that found in the United States. Though traditionally located near the city’s downtown core, wealthy residences have increasingly moved away from the core and into new, residential enclaves. These enclaves have also attracted residents from the United States to take advantage of relatively inexpensive real estate, resulting in the displacement Mexican nationals and redesign of homes along the Baja coastline. This infusion of wealth into certain communities is juxtaposed by the poverty of the squatter communities of workers drawn to the new industrial zones of the region.

Fifth, the evolution of a community of transnational citizens that have a presence north and south of the border, and consume the built environment itself—by purchasing land and housing on both sides of the line. The hard edge of political demarcation—the physical boundary line—begins to blur. The larger transfrontier region becomes the true urban living space of the border dweller. One of the more vivid examples of transborder community place-making is how local citizens are choosing to humanize the border and redefine the boundary, turning a negative (smuggling, illegal immigration, border police forces) into a positive (works of art, monuments and commemoratives for the community).



A sixth part of the “urban ecology” in Tijuana is the border itself, which has grown more militarized since the early 1990s and especially since the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. For Dr. Herzog, the 47-mile Tijuana-San Diego border fence evokes images of the Berlin Wall, and stands in stark juxtaposition to the borderless world celebrated by proponents of globalization and NAFTA. “Today, globalization along the border evokes a critical debate —does the region’s future lie with perpetuation of the wall, and all that it symbolizes—national security, sovereignty, defense, and militarization, -- or does it reside in the propagation of a world of transparent boundaries and trans-frontier cities?”

Finally, Dr. Herzog described Tijuana’s border ecology as a space of possible connections and place-making. On the San Diego-Tijuana border, visionary developers are beginning to see the area adjacent to the San Ysidro crossing as a place unto itself. These developers hope to create a complex with mixed uses: a public plaza, a new pedestrian crossing, a World Trade Center, a market, and links to the existing trolley and Revolution Ave. According to Dr. Herzog, “What is novel about this vision is its recognition of the boundary itself, as a space of community life, rather than a space of instability, conflict, and smuggling.” Dr. Herzog described this project as a highly innovative and potentially positive direction for the border’s urban ecology.

Overall, Dr. Herzog emphasized that a new global landscape is taking shape in Tijuana. Each of the facets of this landscape constitutes a reflection of the many global processes that are redefining the U.S.-Mexican border, and the cities that reside along it. “In the end, the global landscape is one of contrast and contradiction—between rich and poor, investment and disinvestment, labor and capital, modernity and post-modernity, planning and spontaneity.” Dr. Herzog emphasized that “global equity must also be addressed as a long-term problem for this region” to prevent Tijuana from perpetuating old, negative stereotypes of the border as a “global badlands.”

Speaker Biography

Dr. Lawrence Herzog is a Professor of City Planning in the School of Public Administration and Urban Studies, San Diego State University, San Diego, California. He specializes in urban/environmental design, public space, community planning, downtown redevelopment, and international/ regional development with an emphasis on Latin America, Mexico and the Mexico-United States border. Dr. Herzog’s scholarly publications include: *Shared Space: Rethinking the U.S.-Mexico Border Environment* (2000); *Return to the Center: Politics, Public Space and City Building in Spain and Mexico* (in progress); *From Aztec to High Tech* (2001). Other works include: *Architecture and Landscape Across the Mexico-U.S. Border* (1999); *Changing Boundaries in the Americas*, ed. (1992); and *Where North Meets South* (1990). He has also published widely in refereed planning, urban policy, design and social science journals including Harvard Design Magazine, Urban Studies, Places, Natural Resources Journal, Cities, Geoforum, Social Science Journal, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, and International Journal of Urban and Regional Research.