

Boomtown Modernism: Urban Planning and Crisis Management in Tijuana,
Mexico. 1960-1982.

By

Christian Rocha

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Edward Wright-Rios, Ph.D.

Paul A. Kramer, Ph.D.

Tijuana's seems an unlikely locale to feature Mexico's most ambitious modernist urban planning endeavor. Built on a narrow valley that surrounds the Tijuana River, northwest Mexico's largest city has expanded to occupy the canyons and hills overlooking the original settlement. Colorful improvised housing, a product of the city's wild economic boom, hangs from the valley's ladder. The city's old downtown also has an anarchic flavor to it. Decaying early century buildings host family businesses, modern buildings are home to medical offices, and donkeys painted as zebras anchor some of the center's prime intersections. Amidst this hectic urban landscape, only two architectural features appear to be orderly: the border fence separating Tijuana from California and the canal containing the Tijuana River.

Judging from its current shape, Tijuana would appear to be a candidate for further urban planning, not a city that has actually benefited from previous renewal efforts. Yet, Tijuana was the site of an urban renewal effort intended to assuage the city's urban ills and control the periodic flooding from the Tijuana River. The *Proyecto Río Tijuana*, a federal project that lasted from 1972 to 1982, was an idealistic effort to create a truly modern border city. Planners believed that they could impose order to what had become an increasingly chaotic boomtown through architectural intervention.

The technocratic vision of Tijuana resulted in the Zona Río, a new modernist urban core loosely based on the standards of modernist planning dogma. Despite the planner's high expectations, the shortcomings of the Zona Río are evident. A visitor will inevitably notice the lack of visual cohesion pursued by modernist planners across the West. A vibrant discordance of buildings of different architectural styles, heights, and functions captures the eye of the viewer. Contemporary mid-rise office buildings, a restaurant designed after an idealized hacienda, and a nightclub that looks like a cave all are located on a roundabout that features a sculpture of Abraham

Lincoln. Another *glorieta* (traffic circle) anchors an urban space that has a Starbucks, a symbol of transnational consumption, across from a restaurant that specializes in serving mole, Mexico's national dish.

The contrasts are also visible in the ways how the modernist design is apparently disconnected from the population's behavior patterns. Originally intended to remind drivers of the institutionalized version of Mexico's history, the Zona Río's numerous *glorietas* represent obstacles for local motorists. *Tijuanenses* (Tijuana dwellers), unaccustomed to roundabouts, have nullified the supposed advantages of roundabouts. Traffic lights have been installed to help regulate the circulation of vehicles. Pedestrians, a rare occurrence in this part of the city, have largely ceded control of the district to cars. The Zona Río's sidewalks may be luxuriously broad for what is common elsewhere in the city, but pedestrian crosswalks feel like precarious places to be in the face of aggressive drivers.

Finally, the unevenness of the Zona Río is also present in its irregular density patterns. High end housing developments stand next to empty lots full of metal scraps and junk. Shiny office buildings have outstanding views of the river, but they also overlook empty concrete areas awaiting redevelopment. The Zona Río, despite its role as the premier commercial center of the city since the late 1970s, looks very much like an unfinished project.

This paper explores the attempts to build a modern urban center in Tijuana and how these urban renewal efforts were embedded in broader responses to national emergencies. Mexican modernism, unlike its hemispheric counterparts, reached its zenith under the direction of a politically unstable central government. Therefore, it acquired a distinct function from that of other national variants in the movement. While other modernist traditions focused on enshrining the nation or alleviating local issues, Mexican modernism ultimately became a form of national crisis

management. Nowhere is this more obvious than when examining the blueprints, property deeds, speeches, and ministry documents relating to the Proyecto Río Tijuana. Tijuana's renewal became symbiotically related to Mexico's deepening crisis. Political, social, and economic catastrophes fundamentally shaped, catalyzed, and curtailed Tijuana's redevelopment scheme.

The investigation of the twenty year-long planning and construction process of the Zona Río allows us to gauge larger historiographical debates within the academy. The first one, an issue of interest to urban and planning historians, is how modernism adapted (or failed to do so) in the context of a sprawling city on the rise. In particular, a boomtown in a developing country presents an especially engaging case study for the flexibility and applicability of modernist planning tenets. This, of course, ties with the apparent flaws of the Zona Río when judged against the lofty modernist ideals of Mexican planners. The necessity for elasticity eventually led to the uneven design for the Zona Río.

The second question regards how the Mexican regime responded to the increasing challenges that came after the student protests (and subsequent crackdown) of 1968. Examining the continuities and breaks in urban planning strategies over an extended period of time, especially the acceleration of languishing redevelopment projects like the Zona Río, sheds light on how the government sought to reinforce its sense of legitimacy. Massive public works like the Proyecto Río Tijuana often contained social components to target specific demands from the population. Examining planning concerns also exposes what the state considered to be the most pressing problems facing the nation. While Tijuana's localized social problems could not attract the attention of the federal authorities, their conjunction with a worsening political context made the town's urban renewal a national priority.

Modernism and the City

Modernist urban planning is largely a reflection of the ideals of a broader modernist philosophical tradition that came to force in the late 19th century. Just as modernists in distinct fields pursued rationality, efficiency, and the achievement of human perfection, urban planners sought to shape metropolitan landscapes that facilitated the attainment of such goals.¹ Architectural modernism, for example, pursued the end of stylistic eclecticism in favor of design in which regional differences disappeared and “form followed function.”² Modernist urban design shared modernism’s willingness to dismantle prevailing social and cultural structures. Planners, then, felt justified in disrupting the existing urban fabric given the potential greater benefits of their plans. The advent of High Modernism in the post-1945 period, which claimed that the current was universal, further injected urban planning with the notion that ideal (academically anointed) models applied across regions and societies.³

Although the fundamental canon of the movement remained constant, the methods used to achieve it and what the proper modern city looked like changed over time. A narrative of the types of ideal modern cities can be drawn from Haussmannian Paris, to the post-1945 “new towns” in Britain, culminating with the planned cities of Chandigarh and Brasília.⁴ This transformation reflected the institutionalization of modernist notions. In particular, the creation of the *Congrès*

¹ Jane Hobson, “New Towns, The Modernist Planning Project and Social Justice: The Cases of Milton Keynes, UK and 6TH October, Egypt,” The Bartlett Development Planning Unit Working Paper No. 108, University College London, 2.

² Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 11.

³ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Otto Koenigsberger, “Foreword”, Turner, ed. *Cities of the Poor: Settlement Planning in Developing Countries* (London: Croom Helm, 1980),13.

⁴ Hobson, “New Towns,” 3. The idea of Paris’ centrality as an early site for genres and trends associated with the notion of modernity, such as Modernism, is explored in David Hardy, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2005), 10-13, 80-85, 99. Hardy suggests that Haussmann created the myth that his project was a break from the past, despite the fact that some of his ideas had longer precedents. Nonetheless, Paris’ urban renewal responded to preoccupations that Modernists would carry on: efficiency, improvement of the human masses, and hygiene.

International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1928 provided a venue to disseminate (and validate) increasingly radical notions of planning. Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, a model that reimagined the city as a "machine," attained notoriety among those associated with the CIAM. By the 1930s new modernist proposals began to incorporate Le Corbusier's signature features: high-density housing, "superblocks" surrounded by green space, strictly zoned districts, and a prevalence of automobiles.⁵ The 1933 CIAM's Athens Charter formalized the importance of the segregation of the functions of work in modernist urban planning.⁶

Despite the understanding that modernist planning had universal applicability, its practical manifestations differed depending on the country. Within Latin America, Brazil is best associated with its development. The pre-planned capital city of Brasilia was the first time the tenets of the CIAM type of modernist planning were implemented in the construction of an entire city. Observers recognized Brasilia as a distinctively Brazilian iteration of modernism. For some, Brasilia's "Brazilianness" is evident in the excessively decorated buildings and designs that belied modernism's functionalist tendencies.⁷ Others, however, believed that what makes Brasilia truly Brazilian was the manner in which local inhabitants subverted the ideals of modernist urbanism.⁸ Ultimately, Brasilia embodied Brazil's perceived increasing stability and economic progress during the rule of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961). Regardless of whether Kubitschek's Brazil

⁵ Although it was not Le Corbusier's first theoretical city, Villa Radieuse was incredibly influential on subsequent urban development. Ville Radieuse's design lines had echoes in the plans for Brasilia thirty years later. See William Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1982) 118, 207-9.

⁶ Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*, 11.

⁷ Zilah Quezado Deckker, *Brazil Built: The Architecture of the Modern Movement in Brazil* (London: Spon Press, 2001) 2, 56, 58, 61, 148.

⁸ See Norma Evenson, *Two Brazilian Capitals: Architecture and Urbanism in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasília* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); David Epstein, *Brasília, Plan and Reality: A Study of Planned and Spontaneous Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

was as successful as then commonly perceived, its modernist monument-city certainly captured a slice of that optimism.

If Brasilia represented the efforts of an increasingly stable and prosperous state to commemorate its successes, North American modernist planning was mainly the affair of multiple local governments responding to deepening social problems. Post-WW2 urban renewal, the height of American modernism, combined federal funding with local concerns regarding the decay of the city and the exodus of middle class consumers to the suburbs.⁹ City officials and urban designers looked to modernism to inspire their redevelopment schemes. These projects included razing old retail buildings lacking a “unified” look, replacing slums with new housing, and expanding highway access to the city’s core.¹⁰ Although their efforts lacked the scale of Brasília, they left social and architectural wounds in the hearts of American cities. Above all, however, they normalized modernist design principles in American metropolises. U.S. urban centers began to accommodate the predominance of the automobile, actively constructed high-rise public housing as potential “reservoirs” for acceptable consumers, and willingly demolished the existing urban fabric and structures in the name of social progress.¹¹

Mexican modernism, unlike its American counterpart, remained very much a centrally controlled affair. Earlier forms of urban planning, especially those associated with Haussmann’s vision of Paris, had left their imprint on renewal efforts across the country in the period between

⁹ Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 171.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 198; Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 226-7; Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: Penn University Press, 2008), 98, 159.

¹¹ Not all American cities endorsed the same features of modernist planning. For example, Oakland’s renewal projects did not lead to massive public housing projects because of entrenched opposition from property owners. In fact, Oakland only added 500 public housing units from 1945 to 1965. That was at the same time as the city and neighboring towns demolished WW2 era public housing. See Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 73-74, 145-146.

the 1890s and 1910.¹² On the other hand, CIAM-styled developments were often limited to state-built public and subsidized housing.¹³ By the 1960s, when Brazilian and North American planners had already built their greatest examples of modernist planning, Mexico's federal authorities were pursuing efforts to reinforce the traditional urban design of Mexico's oldest cities.¹⁴ The utmost irony was that Mexico's late embrace of full-scale modernist planning did not occur until modernist planning (and planners) faced widespread criticism throughout Western Europe and the United States.¹⁵ It was not until 1972, four years after a student massacre that forced the government to bolster its legitimacy, when the regime began to build its greatest modernist urban planning venture.

The site for Mexico's great modernist statement would not be a new capital city (a Brasília) or an old city suffering from chronic ills. Instead, politicians looked to the periphery to make a statement about the faltering regime's capacity for action. The target, a chaotic border boomtown, would challenge the capacity (and patience) of planners and politicians alike.

Social Crisis: Boomtown in the City of Cardboard

Between 1966 and 1970, a barrage of memos from the Ministry of Hydraulic Affairs detailed the seemingly unsolvable problems of Mexico's fastest growing city: illegal occupations,

¹² Examples include: Allan Wells and Gilbert Joséph, "Modernizing Visions, "Chilango" Blueprints, and Provincial Growing Pains: Mérida at the Turn of the Century" in *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 8.2 (1992) for Mérida; Mark Overmeyer-Velazquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) for Oaxaca; Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario," in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28. 1 (1996) for Mexico City.

¹³ Louise Noelle Merles, "The Architecture and Urbanism of Mario Pani: Creativity and Compromise," in *Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico*, ed. Edward Burian (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997)

¹⁴ See Carlos Lira Vásquez and Danivía Calderón Martínez, "La identidad 'colonial' de Oaxaca. Una invención de la política turística y patrimonial" in *Ciudades mexicanas del siglo xx. Siete estudios históricos*, ed. Rodríguez Kuri et al. (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2009)

¹⁵ Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*, 3, 175.

imminent natural disasters, and bureaucratic paralysis.¹⁶ For a city with the motto “the Homeland Starts Here,” Tijuana had become an increasingly embarrassing gateway to the Mexico.

Tijuana first gained renown as a magnet for North American tourists during Prohibition. World War II, and the subsequent American economic boom, then consolidated Tijuana’s reputation as a haven for sailors and other Americans indulging various illicit pleasures.¹⁷ Tijuana’s increasing popularity led to a demographic boom. A town of merely 1,330 inhabitants in 1921, it had mushroomed into a city of 165,000 by 1960.¹⁸ The rapid population growth, a characteristic of an “instant city,” put great pressure on the existing infrastructure. By the 1960s water supplies, which seemed safe thirty years earlier, had become a topic of concern for the authorities.¹⁹

To make things worse, Mexico City’s envoys warned that government inertia and corruption aggravated the city’s problems. The lands touching the Tijuana River were, according to Mexican law, the nation’s property. Rival federal ministries openly competed to sell illegal permits to settle federally owned lands. In fact, the national government was not even certain what physical assets it owned in the city since the Tijuana River had fluctuated in size over the years. Efforts to chart the “*tierras federales*” (federal lands) had failed. Competing ministries challenged the efforts of rival agencies to delimit federal holdings surrounding the Tijuana River.²⁰ The result

¹⁶ AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29631, Legajo 3/3, Foja s/n, “INFORME CONSENDADO DEL PROBLEMA OCASIONADO POR LA INVASION POR PARTICULARES”; AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29641, Legajo 2/3, Foja s/n, “GERENCIA GENERAL EN EL EDO. DE B.C./AGUA POTABLE Y ALCANT./20-B-144/3387”; AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29641, Legajo 2/3, Foja s/n, “SECRETARIA DE RECURSOS HIDRAULICOS/DIRECCION GRAL. DE APROV. HIDRAULICOS. FEFATURA/ EXP. 201/485 (722) 15414”; AHA, CT, Caja 9, Expediente 54, Legajo 3/3, Foja 203

¹⁷ An excellent account of this phenomenon is Humberto Félix Berumen, *Tijuana la horrible: Entre la historia y el mito* (Tijuana: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2003).

¹⁸ Dalia Barrera Bassols, *Condiciones de vida de los trabajadores de Tijuana, 1970-1978* (Mexico City: INAH- Serie Antropología Social, 1987), 91

¹⁹ AHA, CT, Caja 9, Expediente 54, Legajo 3/3, Foja 201, Memorandum Num 6-0599.

²⁰ AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29631, Legajo 3/3, Foja s/n, “SECRETARIA DE RECURSOS HIDRAULICOS/DIRECCION GENERAL DE APROVECHAMIENTOS HIDRAULICOS/ México, D.F., a 7 de

was, predictably, gridlock. Worse, the speculative frenzy that government agents facilitated led to the illegal settlement of the banks of the Tijuana River. Tijuana had acquired a city of cardboard within its own city limits: Cartolandia (Cardboardland).

Cartolandia originated in the 1940s. By 1970 the cardboard settlement was home to over a thousand families. The photographs that the Ministry of Hydraulic Affairs commissioned paint a desolate situation.²¹ Flimsy houses made out of bedsprings, boxes, and cardboard stood next to dried up creeks. Abandoned cars and junkyards dotted a landscape devoid of much greenery. The few pictures in color depict how the morass of cardboard camouflaged with its surrounding arid brown environment. Yet, the images also highlight that far from being an “urban cancer,” as a local political referred to the slum, Cartolandia had a vibrant community integrated with the rest of the city.²² Food vendors who served tourists and locals alike lived in the shantytown. The junkyards were vital for people who “recycled” used American cars. For the authorities, however, the presence of this cardboard city was problematic. It was located next to the road that connected Tijuana to San Diego. More importantly, the dwellers of Cartolandia were living in the floodplain of an unpredictable river. Tijuana’s squatters were one big storm away from calamity.

Ironically, Cartolandia’s dwellers were not the only ones living in a state of legal limbo. Private company *Inmuebles Californianos S.A.* (ICSA) claimed ownership of the land on which most of the city had been built. ICSA had bought the land titles from one of the Arguello brothers. The Arguellos, original owners of the Tijuana Valley lands and founders of the town, had been in conflict with the federal government regarding their ownership claims. Although most of the

octubre de 1969”; AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29631, Legajo 3/3, Foja s/n, “SECRETARIA DE RECURSOS HIDRAULICOS/RECTIFICACION DEL RIO TIJUANA, B.C./EXPEDIENTE: 201./485 (722) 15414.”

²¹ The pictures are AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29631, Legajo, Foto 2-9.

²² Milton Castellano Everardo, *Del Grijava al Colorado: recuerdos y vivencias de un político* (Mexicali: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2005), 317.

Arguello heirs accepted the government's offer of compensation, a recalcitrant sibling refused the deal and eventually sold his title to ICOSA. The company's claim on Tijuana's lands became a real threat as they achieved a significant amount of success in the courts. In 1964, the President of the Supreme Court validated ICOSA's claims by denying a revision of the case.²³ Tijuana's property owners suddenly found their possession of lands in question. The real estate market depreciated given the legal uncertainties. Middle class Tijuaneños went as far as paying fees to ICOSA in order to safeguard the ownership of their houses.²⁴

As the 1960s roared, Tijuana's population growth continued unabated. In fact, the number of Tijuaneños would more than double by 1970.²⁵ Scrutiny of the city intensified. The increase of alarming government memos soon captured the attention of Mexico City policy makers. Urban planning, as opposed to social reform, would become the intended solution.

The Modernist Solution: PRONAF and the “Proyecto Nueva Tijuana”

In 1966, Antonio J. Bermúdez published a pessimistic account of his ephemeral role as the head of the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (National Border Program- PRONAF). His memoirs dwelled on the possibilities of what a well-funded federal program's potential was for the Mexican borderlands. In particular, he admitted that his personal desire to transform Tijuana into a modern city had failed because of financial constraints and the eventual disappearance of PRONAF as a viable government agency in 1964.²⁶

²³ Yolanda Sosa, Silva Garcia, Maria del Refugio Macias Sandoval, and Javier Antonio Martinez Alarcon, “Derecho Civil,” in *Evolución del derecho en Baja California*, ed. Aurora Lacavex Berumen (Mexicali: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2006), 162-3.

²⁴ Ibid., 164.

²⁵ Dalia Barrera Bassols, *Condiciones de vida de los trabajadores de Tijuana, 1970-1978* (Mexico City: INAH- Serie Antropología Social, 1987), 91

²⁶ Antonio J. Bermúdez, *El Rescate del Mercado Fronterizo: Una Obra al Servicio de México* (Mexico City: Eufesa, 1966), 64.

Created as an independent agency in 1961, PRONAF's fundamental mission was to maintain Mexico's foreign currency reserves. The Mexican Border States, with their strong links to American and British (Belizean) consumer markets, engaged in commercial and consumption patterns troubling to the national government. The agency assumed that the transformation of Mexico's border towns into tourist-oriented cultural centers, the incorporation of border dwellers into the national consumer market, and the creation of Mexican owned local industries would allow the country to stop the outbound flow of capital that occurred on the Mexican border every year. Somewhat peripheral to the financial objectives of PRONAF was the agency's commitment to urban redevelopment. PRONAF's charter granted it the mandate to "change the physical appearance of the border towns to benefit the good name and reputation of Mexico" given that they were the "gateways" to the country.²⁷

In practice, the PRONAF engaged in more piecemeal solutions because of financial and political limitations. This meant simplifying the mission of the agency, which largely became a "domestication" of the border market. The agency's other commitments, such as urban planning, went largely disregarded. PRONAF bureaucrats initially focused on short-term fixes to force border dwellers to consume Mexican goods. Anti-contraband campaigns and discounts on train transportation fees encouraged the presence of domestic products in the region.²⁸ Unable to displace the local preferences for second hand American goods, PRONAF eventually had return to its other (peripheral) goals: urbanization and the cultural potential of the border towns. For example, the agency financed the expansion of handicrafts centers that produced the curios that

²⁷ Programa Nacional Fronterizo, *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (Mexico City, 1961), 3.

²⁸ Lawrence Herzog, *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space, and Politics on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, Austin, 1990), 110.

were sold to American tourists.²⁹ More significant, however, was that PRONAF became more interested in building large-scale infrastructure that would accommodate new immigrants and “encourage identity construction amongst the new settlers.”³⁰ Tijuana’s *tierras federales*, despite their ambiguous dimensions, were a prime location to pursue PRONAF’s stated goals if only on paper.³¹

Just a year after the federal government created PRONAF, famed Mexican architect Mario Pani designed the agency’s master vision for Tijuana’s urban development. The project envisioned partially rerouting the Tijuana River underground in order to maximize the amount of recovered land. The newly available basin would then be used to fulfill some of the city’s pressing needs. Housing was a prominent feature in the blueprints. Pani reserved twelve out of the approximately twenty-five zoned plots for apartment buildings, which responded to the city’s lack of suitable land for new settlers.³² The blueprints did not indicate whether the housing was to be built by the state or private contractors. Considering how Bermudez’s lofty ideals differed from PRONAF’s *modus operandi*, it is likely that the planners would have preferred a governmental agency to design and build the residential centers. PRONAF’s limitations, however, would have made it impossible to execute a project of such magnitude without the private sector or the support of a presidential ministry.

²⁹ Alejandro Mungaray, Patricia Moctezuma “El mercado de la frontera norte y las políticas de integración del consumo fronterizo a la producción nacional” in *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 50.4 (1988): 235-236.

³⁰ Jesus Angel Enriquez Acosta, “Migration and Urbanization in Northwest Mexico’s Border Cities,” in *Journal of the Southwest* 51.4. (2009):446.

³¹ Francisco Manuel Acuña Borbolla and Miguel Ángel Pérez, “El Proyecto Río Tijuana,” in *Tijuana: Historia de un porvenir*, eds. Francisco Manuel Acuña Borbolla and Mario Ortiz Villacorta Lacave (Tijuana: XIX Ayuntamiento, 2010), 478.

³² The growth of shantytowns suggests a lack of land. Moreover, the decision of Governor Maldonado to expand the city limits in 1957 suggests that the availability of good land within the city quadrant was depleting. See Antonio Padilla Corona, “Desarrollo urbano” in *Historia de Tijuana: Semblanza general*, ed. David Piñera Ramírez (Tijuana: Centro de Investigaciones Históricas UNAM-UABC, 1985), 187.

PRONAF hired Pani and his team to develop urban plans for Mexico's border cities in 1960, seven years after the completion of Ciudad Universitaria. Pani's studio created blueprints, all modernist in inspiration, for a variety of border cities. In particular, Pani's plan for Ciudad Juarez received a significant amount of attention because of the nationalistic implications of re-urbanizing a city that had recently incorporated El Chamizal, a portion of land that the United States returned to Mexico in 1963.³³ PRONAF's willingness to accept the vanguardist perspective of Pani and his disciples could have been a natural consequence after years of the nation-state's gradual acceptance of Functionalist structures as the solution for social ills. The Cardenas administration (1934-1940) intended to solve Mexico City's housing shortages by building massive modernist apartment towers.³⁴ After World War II, successive administrations began to deliver on the Cardenista aspiration.³⁵ UNAM and the newer suburbs of Mexico City, such as Ciudad Satélite, operated under the modernist paradigm. However, even those examples did not match the magnitude of creating a self-sustaining modernist urban core that would host, employ, and entertain a large population. By endorsing Pani's idea for urban planning, PRONAF was taking a risk.

The *Proyecto Nueva Tijuana*, as Pani's plan became known, proposed a new center for the city. The Tijuana river basin was to serve as the location for a modernist downtown. Pani envisioned a civic center as the focal point for this new area. A new governmental district would permit a consolidation of all municipal and regional operations within one single space. This ideal

³³ Marisol Rodríguez and Héctor Rivero, "ProNaF, Ciudad Juarez: Planning and Urban Transformation," in *A/Z ITU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 8.1 (2011): 198

³⁴ See Patrice E. Olsen, *Artifacts of Revolution: Architecture, Society, and Politics in Mexico City, 1920-1940* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008)

³⁵ See Louise Noelle Merles, "The Architecture and Urbanism of Mario Pani: Creativity and Compromise," in *Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico*, ed. Edward R. Burian (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 177-194; Georg Leidenberger, "Intermediaries and the Construction of a Revolutionary Nation," 126th American Historical Association Conference, January 6th 2012.

for a cohesive governmental area contrasted with the manner in which government buildings were scattered all over Tijuana’s downtown. Considering the city’s expanding size and population, the civic center would have allowed the local and federal government to have buildings befitting the city’s increasing importance. Furthermore, the creation of a new downtown meant displacing the existing commercial district. Built alongside the border like in other binational cities, Tijuana’s old *centro* lacked the order or modernist credentials that Pani’s vision offered.³⁶



Image 1. Mario Pani’s design for PRONAF (“Nueva Tijuana”). Francisco Manuel Acuña Borbolla and Miguel Ángel Pérez, “El Proyecto Río Tijuana,” 481-2.

The creation of a new downtown to replace the existing one had important political undertones. The plan intended to build new residential areas away from the overcrowded western section of the city, within a cluster of government-affiliated peasant communities.³⁷ This expansion eastward, on lands hosting *campesinos* (peasants) and ranches, demonstrated planners’ commitment to Tijuana’s future as an “urban gateway.” PRONAF policymakers were willing to challenge the cohesion of peasant collectives tied to the federal government. These bureaucrats,

³⁶ Eloy Méndez Sáinz, “Procesos de formación y rasgos actuales de las ciudades de la frontera norte de México,” in *Cambios territoriales en México: exploraciones recientes*, eds. Javier Delgado and Diana R. Villarreal (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana- Xochimilco, 1991), 78.

³⁷ Antonio Padilla Corona, “Desarrollo Urbano,” 200.

then, prioritized good urban planning over existing patronage connections with the region's campesinos. The attempts to dislocate the peasants were to become a salient issue that would require the intervention of Mexico's agrarian bureaucracy.³⁸

The Proyecto Nueva Tijuana's political agenda was also visible in regards to tourism. Pani envisioned a new district for travelers. This component of the plan intended to reform and moralize the city's tourism industry. Historically associated with the illicit activities that the government tried to purge in the 1930s, Tijuana's offerings to visitors brought in a considerable amount of foreign currency into the region. PRONAF's plan, however, suggested a new model of tourism: wholesome, cultural, and yet still lucrative. According to the blueprints, the large tourist district was to transverse the river basin, making it comparable in size to the existing quarter catering to sightseers. The state would own the facilities, so it could dictate the type of items and attractions offered in those venues. Moreover, the recalcitrant downtown business owners that had dismissed the government's moralizing campaigns would face competition from state-sponsored tourist attractions.

The newness of Pani's vision, however, was not limited to the project's name (which translates as 'New Tijuana.')

The PRONAF sponsored plan displaced earlier Mexican ideas about urban planning. Mario Pani's shaping and positioning of well-defined zoned plots did not correspond with the traditional gridline model dominant in Mexico's colonial cities. It was also incongruent with the Haussmann inspired urban policy that Mexico's liberal rulers had implemented in Mexico City between the 1880s and 1910.³⁹ Instead of a centrally symbolic colonial *zócalo* (main square) or a grand Parisian style boulevard, Pani's design featured circular

³⁸ AGA, Expropiación de Tierras, Expediente 618, Legajo 7, Foja 25.

³⁹ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario," in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28. 1 (1996): 83-88.

and semi-circular grand avenues that delimited each zoned cluster. He also prioritized the division of the different redeveloped areas according to their use: housing, commercial, cultural, and governmental. These well-defined areas, “urban cells,” followed modernist cannon. Modernist urban planning prioritized the creation of task-oriented sectors/neighborhoods within a city. In fact, the plan’s outlines followed the lines with the type of submissions that international architects created for the competition to design Brasilia in 1956. Pani was presenting a plan that drew its inspiration from the ultimate modernist architectural urban design.⁴⁰

Another comparison with Brasilia, and a contrast to traditional Mexican cities, is the manner in which Pani organized the flow of people within the redeveloped area. He proposed a road design that benefited the automobile over the needs of the pedestrian. Partial cloverleaf interchanges, which most Americans would associate with highway exits, would minimize the need to stop motorized traffic. The existence of the larger “urban cells” also encouraged the use of cars since they reduced the number of intersections and made walking inconvenient. More symbolic, however, was Pani’s idea to replace the creek with a new river of concrete. An expressway would exist on top of a covered river canal, funneling traffic in a North-South direction.

That Pani eschewed the previous urban planning models in his design for Tijuana is unsurprising. He had previously collaborated in the planning and construction of Ciudad Universitaria, the new home for the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City.⁴¹ The campus, with its clusters of academic halls and extensive open spaces, is a monument to architectural modernism that has become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. By

⁴⁰ The diagrams for the different submissions for Brasilia are in Norma Evenson, *Two Brazilian Capitals: Architecture and Urbanism in Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

⁴¹ Celia Ester Arredondo Zambrano, “Modernity in Mexico: The Case of the Ciudad Universitaria,” in *Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico*, ed. Edward R. Burian (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 92, 95.

endorsing Pani's modernist approach to urban planning, PRONAF was well aware that they were advancing a newer vision for urban organization in Mexico.

Pani's PRONAF sponsored vision for Tijuana, just like the other PRONAF urban plans, never materialized. Started during the administration of President Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964), PRONAF's importance declined with every incoming presidential administration. By 1970, PRONAF had lost favor and was the target of a corruption investigation.⁴² PRONAF's financial investment in Tijuana was limited even during the agency's earlier years. For example, it received smaller amounts of money than other border cities despite the potential symbolism of the *Nueva Tijuana* scheme.⁴³ *Nueva Tijuana*, then, never amounted to more than a project on paper.

One lesson from the PRONAF's plan was that social crisis, which could lead to the construction of federally funded modern complexes in the United States, was not sufficient to trigger national action in Mexico. Political realities made it impractical. There was no urgency to place the project under the care of a powerful ministry.

Nevertheless, the project left an important legacy that would influence Tijuana's future urban development. First, it suggested that the state could be a key player in the region's urban development.⁴⁴ Also, subsequent plans to urbanize the Tijuana River area drew inspiration from Pani's plan. In particular, the eventual implemented model for Tijuana's redevelopment appropriated the modernist elements of the Proyecto Nueva Tijuana and injected them with stronger symbolism. In regards to policymaking, the failure of the PRONAF design for Tijuana

⁴² AGN, LEA, 192, Caja 4364, Dossier on PRONAF.

⁴³ PRONAF spent 10.2% of its funding on Tijuana compared to 31.16% for Juarez or 16.6% for Nogales. This is too low of a share considering the city's population growth. See Mungaray and Moctezuma, "El mercado de la frontera norte y las políticas de integración del consumo fronterizo a la producción nacional," 235.

⁴⁴ The previous great project built in the city, "The Puerta México," was a privately funded project given the disinterest of the local and federal governments. José Gabriel Rivera Delgado, "El Puente México," *El Mexicano*, May 16 2002, 4.

suggested that successful large scale urban planning required a strong political will for its fulfillment.

Local Responses to Tijuana's Crisis

PRONAF, however, was not the only player trying to alleviate Tijuana's social ills. Just as the federal efforts faltered, local political figures and businessmen mobilized to develop their own alternative strategies. Tijuanaenses were particularly concerned with two potentially destructive factors to Tijuana's development: the unpredictable Tijuana River and ICOSA's extensive land claims.

The canalization of the Tijuana River had long been one of the key demands of the state (provincial) government. When the Territory of Baja California became a state in 1955, one of the first actions of the newly elected state government was to begin an embankment to control the flow of the Tijuana River. Controversy engulfed the state project as soon as contractors demolished some of the shacks built on the riverbank. The outraged owners claimed they had land permits or titles, which raised the possibility of endless litigation and ultimately derailed the project.⁴⁵

A second local attempt to canalize the river occurred in 1970. A provincially funded redevelopment scheme, the *Plan Tijuana*, offered a modest (and decidedly less modernist) vision for the Tijuana River zone.⁴⁶ The blueprints indicate that the province did not intend to build a covered canal like Pani did. This reluctance to force the stream underground may have derived from the uncertainty of the river's strength during an unusually active rainy season.⁴⁷ Instead, a

⁴⁵ AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29631, Legajo 3/3, Foja s/n, INFORME CONDENSADO DEL PROBLEMA OCASIONADO POR LA INVASION POR PARTICULARES, AL CAUCE Y ZONAS FEDERALES DEL "RIO TIJUANA," EN EL TRAMO DE LA PRESA "RODRIGUEZ" A LA LINEA DIVISORIA CON LOS EE.UU.

⁴⁶ Francisco Manuel Acuña Borbolla and Miguel Ángel Pérez, "El Proyecto Río Tijuana," 483, 486-7.

⁴⁷ Tijuana's rain cycles are extremely hard to predict, which makes hard to actually calculate the potential power of the river. As late the 1960s, the Ministry of Hydraulic Affairs was still trying to determine the power of the river. AHA, CT, Caja 9, Expediente 54 1/3, fojas 6-11; AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 2109, Legajo 3/3, Foja

large uncovered canal was to transverse the heart of the city. On one side of the canal, the plan extended the old street patterns until they met the embankment. The eastern side of the canal, however, was to have a dedicated civic center, urban housing, and even a brand new stadium. This emphasis on developing the eastern side of the river is congruent with a desire to shift the city's development away from the existing urban core.

The 1970 effort was as unfruitful as the earlier attempt. Above all, international politics made the project unviable. The Tijuana River crossed the international border. According to a 1944 treaty with the United States, this meant that any significant change in the river's flow required consultation with American authorities.⁴⁸ Surviving documentation from the IBWC (International Boundary and Water Commission) outlines the challenge of selling the concept of a canalized Tijuana River to the members of the binational panel.⁴⁹ Yet, the provincial plan introduced a potential upside to what could have been an expensive program: the notion of self-financing through selling real estate.⁵⁰ The notion that real estate could justify any capital investment on an urbanization/canalization project would become important in subsequent plans.

Compared to the unpredictable threat of the Tijuana River, ICSA's danger seemed more salient to many local players. Even Tijuana's most prosperous property owners were in a state of liminal legality. ICSA, a company that had a close relationship to former high ranking national figures, represented a challenge to the local elite's power over the city. After petitions to the president failed to trigger federal intervention, local business notables organized into a group to actively challenge ICSA's legal efforts. The state's bar association also mounted its own legal

s/n, "SECRETARIA DE RECURSOS HIDRAULICOS/DIRECCION GENERAL DE APROVECHAMIENTOS HIDRAULICOS/ México, D.F., a 7 de octubre de 1969."

⁴⁸ The Tijuana River was part one of the rivers under the aegis of the Water Treaty for "The Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande" signed in February 3rd, 1944.

⁴⁹ AHA, CT, Caja 9, Expediente 54 1/3, fojas 1-4.

⁵⁰ Francisco Manuel Acuña Borbolla and Miguel Ángel Pérez, "El Proyecto Río Tijuana," 488.

assault on ICSA's claims.⁵¹ The result of this storm of local activity was a stalemate between the two sides. While ICSA remained an important impediment to the city's proper growth, the country's political situation would soon change the prospects of Tijuana's renewal.

Political Crisis

In October 1968, the Mexican government crushed a student protest movement known as the Tlatelolco Massacre.⁵² Although some recent historians have challenged the alleged centrality of this event in the emerging legitimacy crisis of the Mexican nation-state, the massacre challenged assumptions that middle class Mexicans had about the national government.⁵³ Former student movement members headed to the countryside to radicalize peasants, journalists used reporting on the vicissitudes of the student movement as a vehicle to criticize the regime, traumatized students diverted their energies away from politics and towards the counterculture, and everyday onlookers privately admitted their bewilderment at the government's response.⁵⁴ The end of Mexico's "economic miracle" was also important. Mexico's ruling party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) had increasingly depended on the delivery of economic prosperity to gain the support of a new class of consumers.⁵⁵ Mexico's burgeoning

⁵¹ Yolanda Sosa, "Derecho Civil," 162-4; Ignacio Ramirez, "Tijuana", *El Universal*, December 24 2000, <<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/44137.html>> (accessed October 9 2014).

⁵² Ariel Rodríguez Kuri best describes the immediate reasons surrounding Mexico's student movement, which was eventually crushed during the Tlatelolco Massacre. See Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, "Los primeros días. Una explicación de los orígenes inmediatos del movimiento estudiantil de 1968" *Historia Mexicana*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Jul. - Sep., 2003), pp. 179-228.

⁵³ Louise Walker challenges the centrality of Tlatelolco in the recent history of Mexico. See Louise E. Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes after 1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 12. On the other hand, Gladys's McCormick suggests that the violent authoritarian tendencies of the Mexican regime were constitutive of the Mexican regime from its beginning. They did not suddenly emerge either in 1968 or in the years preceding it. Gladys McCormick, *The Political Economy of Desire in Rural Mexico: Revolutionary Change and the Making of a State, 1935-1965* (PhD dissertation, Wisconsin-Madison, 2009).

⁵⁴ See Walker, *Waking from the Dream*; Dolores Trevizo, *Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy in Mexico, 1968-2000* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2012); Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Elena Poniatowska, *La noche de Tlatelolco* (Mexico City: ERA, 1971); Claire Brewster, "The Student Movement of 1968 and the Mexican Press: The Cases of "Excelsior" and "Siempre!" in *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 21.2 (2002): 171-190.

⁵⁵ This process started in the post- WW2 period when advertising began to disseminate the idea of a Mexican "consumer democracy" By the 1970s, access to consumer goods made a significant difference on class attitudes

middle classes tolerated the restricted political arena that the regime offered in exchange for economic opportunities. The late 1960s, then, presented a repressive reality to most Mexicans: the massacre delineated the limits of political participation, while an economic slump suggested that the economic benefits to political authoritarianism were fleeting and reversible.

Facing growing discontent, PRI insiders accepted the imposition of a “compromise” candidate for the 1970 presidential elections: Luis Echeverría Alvarez.⁵⁶ The former Secretary of the Interior at the time of the Tlatelolco Massacre, Echeverría sought to deflect his association with the brutal events of 1968. In a sense, he attempted to mollify right wing and left wing opponents. This meant, in practice, a military campaign against leftist radicals in Guerrero, an increasingly public battle with Mexico’s disenchanted industrial elites, elevated anti-Imperialist rhetoric to placate the Mexican left wing, and an expansion of federal programs to employ and serve a larger number of Mexicans.⁵⁷

Tijuana, remarkably, represented a golden opportunity for a regime seeking redemption. Tijuana had problems to solve for a government that needed to demonstrate its utility to an increasingly disenchanted population. The fact that many of Tijuana’s urban ills had their origin in federal neglect and corruption only enhanced the attractiveness of turning Tijuana into a “model city.” In the context of a government trying to prove its value, Tijuana’s redevelopment had national resonance. Now, theoretically, Tijuana’s redevelopment would not only create an

towards the government. See Chapter 4 in Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don’t Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Walker writes about the Mexican middle classes becoming a “consumer-citizen” class and how the government reacted to that in Chapter 4, *Waking from the Dream*.

⁵⁶ Walker, *Waking from the Dream*. 71

⁵⁷ Samuel Schmidt, *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), 107, 121-126. For the Guerrero campaign see Alexander Aviña, “We have returned to Porfirian Times”: Neopopulism, Counterinsurgency, and the Dirty War in Guerrero, Mexico, 1969-1976” in *Populism in 20th Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, eds. Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 106-121.

impressive architectural statement in what had become the country's principal gateway to the United States, but it would also demonstrate the ability of the Mexican government to turn what had become an overgrown *pueblo* (town) into a proper city.⁵⁸

Considering Echeverría's desire to placate the increasingly frustrated conservatives that previously tolerated the PRI's rule during the boom times, an effort to build a clean and modern downtown for Tijuana could gain the regime political credibility within Mexico's right wing. The city made its mark on national consciousness during Prohibition. By the late 1930s Tijuana's thoroughly seedy reputation inspired outside intervention. Still riding a wave of reformist zeal following its consolidation of power after the Mexican Revolution, the federal government imposed a moralistic, agrarian vision for the town. In fact, while still immersed with the self-legitimizing state-building processes inspired by revolutionary upheaval, government officials facilitated the creation of peasant communities linked to the state apparatus through quasi-governmental peasant organizations. Policy makers in Mexico City, at the time, hoped workers in "immoral" establishments would abandon their jobs and join one of the peasant communities.⁵⁹ These efforts failed and by the early 1970s, Tijuana's "black legend" was very much alive. Tourist books, directed at Americans, described the different forbidden services that the city offered to visitors such as prostitution, abortion, and drugs.⁶⁰ The proposals to provide the city with a proper urban development did not contain the "moral" language of the nation-state's moralizing campaigns of the 1930s. Nonetheless, the construction of an ideal downtown would have been a

⁵⁸ AGN, LEA, 192, Caja 4360, "Conferencia de prensa concedida a los corresponsales extranjeros que lo acompañaron en su gira de trabajo por el Estado de Baja California, a bordo del avión que lo condujo a la ciudad de México," pg. 1,2.

⁵⁹ AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29631, Legajo 3/3, foja s/n, "SECRETARIA DE RECURSOS HIDRAULICOS, RECTIFICACION DEL RIO TIJUANA, B.X.M EXPEDIENTE: 201./485 (722) 15114," p.2; Paul Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) 167-9.

⁶⁰ See Ronald Gordon, *Tijuana: The Visitor's Complete Guide* (Privately published, 1968), 52; Jan Wood and Casey Crawford, *Tijuana: So Near and Yet so Foreign*, (San Diego: Forum Publications, 1973), 15, 16.

welcome form of state intervention in what was considered to be a neglected city of illicit pleasures.

Conversely, the fact that many of Tijuana's social problems derived from the city's lack of cogent urban planning meant that a major federal initiative in the city could play into left wing demands to improve the conditions for Mexico's working classes. Unlike the potential moral upside of the federal government's intervention on Tijuana's urban development, Echeverría and his envoys were quite explicit in describing the positive impact that Tijuana's urban renewal would have for the "proletariat." Tijuana's workers would access better housing and services.⁶¹ Moreover, in Echeverría's visits to the region he reinforced the social aspects of the project. Thus, he walked proletarian neighborhoods as if he were campaigning, met with "popular groups", and listened to all their grievances.⁶²

Finally, Tijuana's location made it an appropriate setting for the government's efforts to restore its credibility. Just as policy makers before him, Echeverría saw the urban transformation of Tijuana as a project that had international ramifications.⁶³ The city where the "Homeland started" would become an "exhibit" for the rest of the nation. The location of Tijuana also played into domestic concerns regarding the peripheral nature of Mexico's borderlands. A state-led urban

⁶¹ AGN, LEA, 192, Caja 4360, Folder "GIRAS DE TRABAJO DEL C. PRESIDENTE DE LA REPUBLICA POR DIERENTES ESTADOS, 1971," "Palabras al finalizar la reunión de trabajo con los residentes de 107 colonias populares de esta ciudad/ Agosto 16 1972.," AGN. LEA, 192, Caja 4360, "GIRAS DE TRABAJO DEL C. PRESIDENTE DE LA REPUBLICA POR DIERENTES ESTADOS, 1971," "Declaraciones a la prensa, a bordo del autobús presidencial, durante el recorrido por las colonias populares Los Laureles, Ávila Camacho y Lázaro Cárdenas", fojas 1-3.

⁶² Ricardo Acevedo Ramírez, "Ceden Tierras Cultivables de Particulares para Campesinos," *El Heraldo de Baja California*, August 16 1972, 1A; "Visitó LEA Obras de la Escuela de Medicina," *La Voz de la Frontera*, August 15 1972, 9-A; "El Sauzal de Rodríguez," *La Voz de la Frontera*, August 15 1976,1.; Edmundo Bustos Pérez, "Como en Campaña, Echeverría Recorrió a pie Diez Cuadras," *La Voz de la Frontera*, August 14 1972, 12A.; Ricardo Acevedo Ramírez, "Junto con el Pueblo Sigo Inconforme: LE," *El Heraldo de Baja California*, August 16 1972, 1A

⁶³ AGN. LEA, 192, Caja 4360, "GIRAS DE TRABAJO DEL C. PRESIDENTE DE LA REPUBLICA POR DIERENTES ESTADOS, 1971," "Declaraciones a la prensa, a bordo del autobús presidencial, durante el recorrido por las colonias populares Los Laureles, Ávila Camacho y Lázaro Cárdenas", fojas 3-4.

renewal venture would signify the presence of the nation-state in a previously neglected region. Ironically, Tijuana's relative isolation from the rest of the nation made it a somewhat more hospitable location for a state project to restore legitimacy. During the early 1970s, the industrial core of northern Mexico suffered terrorist kidnappings, Mexico City experienced more student demonstrations, and an open insurgency emerged in southern Mexico.⁶⁴ Tijuana presented itself as a relatively safe alternative to the political conflict disrupting much of the rest of the nation.

Modernism Compromised: The Proyecto Río Tijuana

Launched in 1972, the Proyecto Río Tijuana was the most ambitious public works venture undertaken during the Echeverría administration (1970-1976). As with previous designs for Tijuana's urban redevelopment, the project intended to canalize the Tijuana River and build a modern downtown. The first stage of the project, which took four years and required thousands of workers, was to urbanize 410 hectares of reclaimed land into the Zona Urbana Río, commonly shortened to Zona Río. Two other stages, in which more recovered land would be civilized, were to follow. However, the construction of this monumental scheme required more than the skills of civil engineers. Urban planners soon realized that political and social engineering would be necessary to fulfill the state's vision of a model, modern Tijuana. By the time the first phase of the project commenced, the government had set in motion a sociopolitical process that would not only force the state to correct previous problematic policies in the city, but would also lead to the resettlement of thousands of squatters and peasants.

Pedro Moctezuma Díaz Infante and Rodolfo Chávez Carrillo were in charge of designing and executing the master plan for Tijuana's new downtown. Chávez Carrillo was a former governor of Colima and resident of Tijuana. His provincial affiliations were unusual in a period in

⁶⁴ See Aviña, "We have returned to Porfirian Times," and Walker, *Waking from the Dream*, 21, 23, 27-31.

which the nation-state depended on Mexico City architects to build its vision for the country.⁶⁵ Díaz Infante, on the other hand, had strong connections to the PRI. He had designed the national headquarters for the ruling party and eventually even received an award for his services to the Mexican government.⁶⁶ Unlike Pani, Chávez Carillo and Díaz Infante had built careers out of serving the state as opposed to designing projects reflecting the most vanguardist architectural styles. The designs for the Proyecto Río Tijuana favored practicality rather than political or stylistic trends.

Although the engineers working on the project stated having little familiarity with Pani's earlier design, the blueprints of the Proyecto Río Tijuana had similarities with its PRONAF predecessor.⁶⁷ The idea of well-defined zoning areas, based on their function in the city, remained in the new scheme. The land to be reclaimed and develop for the first stage of redevelopment was to be divided into several distinct commercial, cultural, civic, and tourist areas. Pani's circular and semi-circular grand boulevards, which served as the borders between different sectors within the new downtown, were absent. In their place, the new planners created a more traditional gridline. The survival of these specialized zones after inhabitants began settling them, of course, was not guaranteed. Just as in Brasilia, the planner's desires to neatly organize an urban space clashed with a local tendency to create small businesses within residential developments.⁶⁸

Unlike Pani's plan, the Proyecto Río Tijuana took into consideration features present in earlier Mexican city planning. The traffic circles are a case in point. While Pani's vision included partial cloverleaf interchanges, Chávez Carillo and Díaz Infante turned to *glorietas* to slow down

⁶⁵ Francisco Manuel Acuña Borbolla and Miguel Ángel Pérez, "El Proyecto Río Tijuana," 466-7.

⁶⁶ "Muere Pedro Moctezuma Díaz Infante," *El Universal*, October 21 2011 <<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/190048.html>> (accessed April 28 2013).

⁶⁷ Interview with Ing. Fernando Aceves Salmón. October 17th 2014. Tijuana, Mexico.

⁶⁸ David G. Epstein, *Brasília, Plan and Reality: A Study of Planned and Spontaneous Urban Development*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). 93

and redistribute automobile traffic. In fact, they intended Paseo de los Heroes, a relatively short boulevard running throughout the Zona Río, to have five monumental roundabouts. Each traffic circle would feature a national hero or symbol. The layout of a boulevard replete with grandiose *glorietas* followed the example of Mexico City's Paseo de la Reforma. Built along the lines of a Parisian boulevard, Paseo de la Reforma had become the most iconic avenue in all of Mexico.⁶⁹ By imitating its Mexico City counterpart, Paseo de los Heroes presented echoes of an earlier modernist ideal: Haussmann's Paris.

In regards to controlling the river, the Proyecto Río Tijuana borrowed from the failed 1970 provincial plan. The newer project replicated the earlier plan's idea to build an uncovered canal to contain the Tijuana River. Unlike the earlier projects, which focused on the construction of an embankment or covered canal between the Alamar Creek and the U.S.-Mexico Border, this latest proposal intended to canalize the entirety of the river up to Tijuana's Abelardo L. Rodríguez Dam. This not only meant extending the waterway by twelve kilometers, but it also promised to recover hundreds of river bank acres for future urban development. The bureaucrats in Mexico City, however, understood that a project of this magnitude had to be built in stages. While the government was to build the canal all at once, the urbanization of the recovered lands was to occur over decades.

Despite the city's acute need for appropriate housing, the original plan minimized the creation of apartment buildings in the redeveloped core. To the contrary, the project (as intended) would actually lead to a reduction of the city's housing supply. The governor, as well as federal

⁶⁹ Works addressing the transformation of Paseo de la Reforma into a venue for national symbolism and sophistication include Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario" in *The Journal of Latin American Studies* 28.1 (1996): 75-104 and Verónica Zárate Toscano, "El papel de la escultura conmemorativa en el proceso de construcción nacional y su reflejo en la Ciudad de México en el siglo XIX," in *Historia Mexicana* 53.2 (2003): 417-466.

officers, supported the notion that the new urban area should be reserved for commercial and public uses.⁷⁰ The ferrous commitment to this vision would lead a centrifugal government effort that would disrupt Tijuana's social structure.

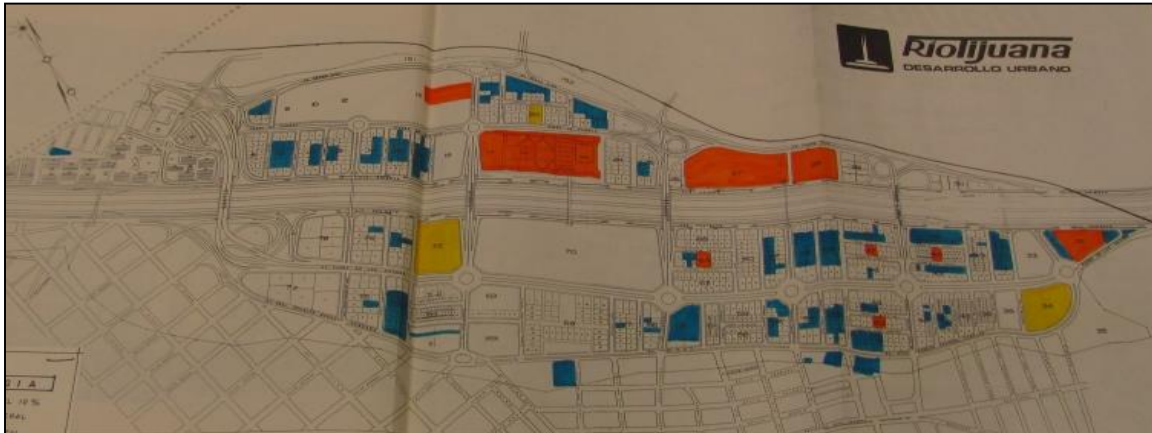


Image 2. “Proyecto Río Tijuana.” AGN, JLP, Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 96

Enforcing Redevelopment through Federal Power

Building the Zona Río required the most robust federal intervention in the city since the late 1930s “morality” campaigns. The central government, which had largely regarded Tijuana as a peripheral location, brought bureaucratic machinery intended to palliate social problems in order to make redevelopment viable. Social harmony, however, was obviously secondary to the political goals of the scheme. The state machinery would eventually engage in increasingly constructive and destructive roles to salvage the Proyecto Río Tijuana. Presidential power, or the perception of it, would grant federal agents the safeguard to upend the city.

The support of the Echeverría administration was an obvious asset to the urbanization efforts. Legally, the fundamental problem impeding a federal-led urbanization of the river zone was the uncertainty regarding the ownership of the lands. The federal government was supposed

⁷⁰ Castellanos Everardo, *Del Grijalva al Colorado*, 318.

to have legal jurisdiction over these lands. The decade-long inter-ministerial squabbling regarding the demarcation of the *tierras federales* had a rather straightforward solution: the creation of a new presidential demarcation effort. Nonetheless, ICOSA's claims were a more problematic issue. The federal government had previously taken a noninterventionist stance regarding the issue. ICOSA had strong connections to previous presidents and to other notable members of the ruling party.⁷¹ President Luis Echeverría, despite his public persona as a populist maverick, was unlikely to simply impose his will on a company that had the support of powerful politicians and the Mexican Supreme Court.

Memoirs and surviving correspondence suggest Echeverría's inner circle was sympathetic to the interests of the city of Tijuana. The President knew the Governor of Baja California, Milton Castellanos Everardo, from his early days working for General Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada.⁷² Then there was Hugo Cervantes del Río, Secretary of the Presidential Ministry. Cervantes del Río had settled in Tijuana and had strong connections in the region. He served as the conduit between the presidency and petitions coming from all of Baja California.⁷³ A disproportionate number of the petitions Cervantes responded to or forwarded to the President came from Baja California. However, it was easier for Cervantes to obtain a high school scholarship or job for a requesting Tijuanaense than to get Echeverría to squash ICOSA.

Unwilling to tackle the issue directly, Echeverría utilized his soft power in favor of his client network. Governor Castellanos described Echeverría as a friendly mediator in the ICOSA controversy. The President hosted representatives from the State of Baja California and ICOSA at

⁷¹ Ignacio Ramirez, "Tijuana", *El Universal*, December 24 2000, <<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/44137.html>> (accessed October 9 2014).

⁷² Castellanos Everardo, *Del Grijalva al Colorado*, 108

⁷³ The collection of petitions and responses from Baja California's inhabitants to Cervantes del Río are collected in AGN. LEA, 192, 4362 and 4363.

the National Palace in order to listen to their positions.⁷⁴ The outcome of the reunion was a promising one for the supporters of redevelopment: ICOSA would be willing to abandon its claims in exchange for a reduced sum of money. The city collected the money by selling lands that the Tijuana Country Club owned.⁷⁵ Appropriately, Echeverría symbolically gave the check to ICOSA representatives at a Country Club meeting in September 1972.⁷⁶

Once the project became legally viable, the federal executive power became a strenuous agent of redevelopment. Fortunately for the backers of the plan, the Proyecto Río Tijuana had the institutional sponsorship of the *Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional* (Secretariat of National Patrimony- SEPANAL). The PRONAF project had failed, in part, because the agency did not have the political clout to execute a scheme of such magnitude. This time Tijuana's redevelopment had the support of several powerful political sectors. The SEPANAL was one of the most active cabinet ministries during the Echeverría years. It was entrusted with the construction of much of the infrastructure built in the country between 1970 and 1976.

Other federal agencies did not get involved in the actual construction of the Zona Río, but they engaged in other types of constructive measures to make its creation possible. In particular, the *Instituto Nacional para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad y la Vivienda Rural* (National Institute for the Development of the Community and Rural Housing, INDECO) began operations in 1970. INDECO had the task of building affordable housing for Mexico's burgeoning working classes.⁷⁷ Tijuana, with its booming population, was thus a site of interest for the agency. The minutes from the 1972 meetings of INDECO officials with other cabinet members reveal their interest in

⁷⁴ Castellanos Everardo, *Del Grijalva al Colorado*, 328.

⁷⁵ Yolanda Sosa, "Derecho Civil," 165; Ruben Téllez Fuente, "Ahora sí: Adiós a ICOSA", *El Heraldo de Baja California*, 1B, July 21 1972.

⁷⁶ Yolanda Sosa, "Derecho Civil," 165

⁷⁷ AGN. LEA. Caja 4374, "PROCESO DE URBANIZACION Y PROBLEMÁTICA DE LA VIVIENDA EN MEXICO."25

Tijuana's housing situation.⁷⁸ Subsequently as a result of these talks, the agency began planning the construction of its most expensive and extensive housing subdivision in the country: a new project in Tijuana's Mesa de Otay district.⁷⁹ The construction of the Mesa de Otay would ease pressure on the authorities, which disliked the notion of building housing in the Zona Río.

The federal presence in Tijuana also facilitated a palliative solution to Cartolandia. The national government offered squatters access to housing opportunities in newly urbanized areas around the city. The idea of an amnesty was not new. In 1969, rumors of an amnesty shook the city. The word on the streets was that a government canalization of the Tijuana River was imminent, and that all squatters living near the river would gain access to public housing. The power of the story was so strong that thousands of Tijuanaenses, including people who had homes in other parts of the city, built shacks on the dried river bed to claim a future state-sponsored apartment or house.⁸⁰ The implemented plan, however, turned out to be rather unattractive to potential beneficiaries. Some of the new developments intended for the illegal tenants were located in underdeveloped and badly communicated areas. Many squatters soon started petitioning for a more fitting restitution, while others resisted removal as long as possible.⁸¹ Unfortunately for the petitioners, the regime's goal was to develop Cartolandia, not to address the underlying social

⁷⁸ AGN. LEA. Caja 4373, "ORDEN DEL DIA A QUE SE SUJETARA LA SESION DE CONSEJO DEL INSTITUTO NACIONAL PARA EL DESAROLLODE LA COMUNIDAD RURAL Y DE LA VIVIENDA POPULAR A CELEBRARSE A LAS 9.00 HORAS DEL DIA 24 DE AGOSTO DE 1972,"6. AGN. LEA. Caja 4373, ORDEN DEL DIA A QUE SE SUJETARA LA SESION DE CONSEJO DEL INSTITUTO NACIONAL PARA EL DESAROLLODE LA COMUNIDAD RURAL Y DE LA VIVIENDA POPULAR A CELEBRARSE A LAS 9.00 HORAS DEL DIA 213 DE DICIEMBRE DE 1972," 10-12.

⁷⁹ AGN. LEA. Caja 4373, "MEXICO, D.F., mayo 25 de 1972/ Reunión del INDECO celebrada en el salón de sesiones de la Dirección General, presidida por el señor Hugo B. Margáin, Secretario de Hacienda y Crédito Público," 9a parte, 12. INDECO's investment for the Otay project exceeded that of other projects for the year 1974. AGN. LEA. Caja 4374, "SECRETARIA DE LA PRESIDENCIA. SECRETARIA PARTICULAR. No. 31"

⁸⁰ AHA, AN, Caja 2109, Expediente 29641, Legajo 2/3, Foja s/n, "José Loza Muñoz"

⁸¹ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 95, Documentación en tramite: anexa memorándum No. 313402 del 12-XII-80; "Tijuana Destrozada! Las Colonias Populares Inundadas; Desastroso Estado de las Calles," *Diario Baja California*, March 13 1973; "Anarquía y abusos en 'Cartolandia,'" *El Heraldo de Baja California*, 1A, 18 Julio 1972.

causes behind its creation. In the end, however, the government destroyed the shantytown and relocated the urban mire away from the river zone.

The actions of federal ministries had destructive implications for other Tijuanaenses. The development in the Mesa de Otay and some of the lands near the Tijuana River required of the expropriation of *ejidal* (peasant collective) lands. The communities were a legacy of the late 1930s campaigns in the region. Although elderly and numbering few, the angry peasants became vociferous in their demands to receive appropriate restitution for the expropriations.⁸² They sent representatives to Mexico City, pleaded with the state's bureaucracy to respect the government's ideological commitment to their collectives, and finally pressed for cash payments for compensation. This legal imbroglio endured over a decade, but it culminated with the dissolution of the region's last agrarian communities. Ultimately, federal intervention allowed Tijuana's urban growth to consume much of the region's rural lands.

Patching Redevelopment: Watering Down a Compromised Vision

For all of its interventionism in order to secure the project, the federal government could not prevent the adulteration of the grand vision proposed in the blueprints. It all came down to money and the (growing) assumption that the project had to be self-financed. The cost of the first phase and the canal was an estimated 1.3 billion pesos (approximately \$104 million USD in 1972). In comparison, the cost for Ciudad Universitaria was 25 million USD in 1955 (roughly \$39 million dollars in 1972). The sale of plots of land was to offset the high cost of capital investments. Many of the sales were made in US Dollars in order to bolster the value of the sales of lands in a period in which the Mexican Peso declined in value vis-à-vis the American Dollar.⁸³ Regardless of the

⁸² The inhabitants of the Ejido Tampico sued to change the way how they were going to be compensated for the expropriation of their lands. AGA, Expropiación de Tierras, Expediente 618, Legajo 7, fojas 15, 25, 36 53, 75.

⁸³ Walker, *Waking from the Dream*, 67

potential future profits from the real estate, the project required immediate financing to start construction.

The government's fiscal needs encouraged quasi-governmental agencies to adulterate the original plan. The *Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores* (Institute of the National Fund for the Housing of Workers, INFONAVIT), a body in charge of funding worker's housing, was a major culprit in voiding the initial plan. The INFONAVIT retained and developed plots within the Zona Río, which then sold as condominiums to qualified buyers. It also provided mortgages to purchasers. INFONAVIT's footprint in the downtown area may have been relatively small, but it set an important precedent: the initial veto to residential development in the Zona Río was over. The original vision for the downtown was secondary to economic realities.

In addition, the state turned to private investors to set the direction for redevelopment. The Echeverría administration may have expanded the role and reach of governmental agencies, especially the housing ones, but it did not turn the newly redeveloped area into a downtown of state owned office buildings, cultural centers, and government run shopping complexes. Tijuana was not to become a Mexican Brasília. Instead, private developers acquired undeveloped lots. Land in the new downtown was sold to private citizens primarily through the *Banco del Atlántico* (and its predecessor the *Banco Internacional Inmobiliario*).⁸⁴ The *Banco del Atlántico* had sold dozens of land plots by 1980.⁸⁵ The prices for those lots depended on size and location within the new downtown. Most of these buyers were either Tijuana natives or local agents of out of town developers. It is significant, however, that local business collectives bought some of these plots of land. The *Unión de Comerciantes Locatarios y Semi Fijos del Mercado del Norte A.C.*, a group

⁸⁴ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 94, Plano de lotes.

⁸⁵ By 1980, fifty four of those buyers were at risk of foreclosure. AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 95, Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, Oficio No. 42-UA-0345-80

representing the salesmen working at the Mercado del Norte, bought a plot of land for over \$31,000 USD.⁸⁶ These salesmen did not shift their commercial operations to the new plot of land. Instead, they subdivided the land and later sold the subdivisions to multiple investors. This example suggests that the federal government's inability or unwillingness to execute an all-encompassing development vision for the new urban area had long-term consequences. Private investors not only bought most of the plots of land, but they also gained control over the type of development that the zone would have for decades to come.

The government's decision to abdicate initiative to the private sector soon translated into an uneven pace of redevelopment within the Zona Río. This often took a jarringly visual manifestation: modern midrise buildings, the dream of planners, standing next to permanently unpaved lots featuring the regions' arid landscape. *Manzana* (superblock) 64 is particularly emblematic of this phenomenon. The block has an enviable location within the redeveloped district. It is one block from the Cuauhtemoc monumental *glorieta*, a busy strip mall, and the city's first American-styled shopping center. Yet, it has seemingly unexplainable empty lots. Lots 11 and 13 have become residential complexes, which is unsurprising given that they are further away from the main avenues and provide a quieter environment for potential residents.⁸⁷ Lot 1, on the other hand, remained underdeveloped for over thirty years despite being across the boulevard from the shopping mall.⁸⁸ The distinctive fortunes of these plots respond to a combination of factors: the demand for housing, the manner in which the buyers acquired their plots, and the hope for reselling the land to another developer. In the case of Lot 1, the Mexican buyer acquired the lot

⁸⁶ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 95, CONTRATO 00105 del Desarrollo Río Tijuana, Manzana 22, Lote 20.

⁸⁷ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 95, CONTRATO 00249 del Desarrollo Río Tijuana, Manzana 64, Lote 13; AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 95, DW-1006, Manzana 64, Lote 11.

⁸⁸ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 95, CONTRATO 00102 del Desarrollo Río Tijuana, Manzana 64, Lote 1.

through a mortgage denominated in U.S. Dollars. Unless the buyer had a steady access to U.S. currency, he faced a financial crush during the devaluations of the 1980s that would have limited his ability to develop the land. Cash controls after 1982, which hindered the use of Dollars in Mexico, likely also had an impact. It is likely that the lot's long-term underdevelopment was a reflection of either an impossibility of the owner to invest a higher amount of money or a hope that he could hold onto the land until its value increased exponentially. The owners of Lots 11 and 13, on the other hand, paid for the land with cash and (correctly) assumed that the city's real estate market was strong enough to be able to recover their initial investment.⁸⁹

In the end, however, the state's willingness to sacrifice its vision for profit did not pay off. In 1980, a governmental restructuring left INDECO responsible for the Zona Río's assets and debts. INDECO's audit of the project's finances crushed any hopes that the redevelopment could become remotely self-financing in the medium-term. The construction and operation of the Zona Río had led to a debt exceeding 2.6 billion pesos with BANOBRAS, the federal redevelopment bank.⁹⁰ The debt servicing was so poor that unpaid interest amounted to almost 2 million pesos a day.⁹¹ Ironically, the ambiguity in the state's vision for the district had contributed to the financial burden. INDECO's specialists suggested that the state's earlier pretensions to control the direction (and ownership) of the district had reduced the land available to be sold. The authorities had taken 65 hectares off the real estate market to serve public needs or compensate affected property owners.⁹²

⁸⁹ The information of how buyers acquired their lots, whether through mortgages (either denominated in US Dollars or in pesos) or in cash, is present in the plano de lotes located in AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 94.

⁹⁰ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 96, INDECO. SUBDIRECCION FINANCIERA SF00.2/406. 4 DE MAYO DE 1981.

⁹¹ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 96, 43/3, INDECO: DESARROLLO RIO TIJUANA, 3.

⁹² AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 96, INDECO. SUBDIRECCION FINANCIERA DG00-101/31. 13 DE FEBRERO DE 1981, 6.

The government was not the only party to suffer an increasing financial burden from the project. The banks involved in the real estate transactions also faced issues. Multiple buyers lagged behind in their mortgage payments. The *Unión de Comerciantes Locatarios y Semi Fijos del Mercado del Norte A.C.*, for example, was 45 months behind in its mortgage by June of 1980. The auditors also found that seven of the contracts owed more than 50 months' worth of mortgage payments, which suggested the debtors had likely not made a single monthly payment since the properties were sold in the period between 1975 and 1976.⁹³ This problem may have not affected the federal government at the time, but it was about to do so. In 1982 the Mexican government, responding to a new type of crisis, an economic one, nationalized the banks and assumed responsibilities for those mortgages.

Economic Crisis

The federal government's investment on the Tijuana River Project weathered the end of the Echeverría administration in 1976. Populist president José López Portillo (1976-1982) maintained support for Tijuana's fiscally unsustainable project. The urbanization of the second stage of the Tijuana River Project, a relatively small piece of land, occurred during his presidency.⁹⁴ Furthermore, López Portillo's administration oversaw the repair of the river embankment after the 1980 floods.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, López Portillo's greatest contribution to Tijuana's redevelopment was to start envisioning the possibilities for the third stage of the scheme. This area, consisting of the extensive southernmost lands reclaimed from the river, had received scant attention from urban designers.⁹⁶ López Portillo ordered the construction of bridges in the

⁹³ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 95, JUNTA FEDERAL DE MEJORAS DE TIJUANA, B.C. OFICIO NO. 42-UA-0345-80.

⁹⁴ Interview with Ing. Fernando Aceves Salmón. October 17th 2014. Tijuana, Mexico.

⁹⁵ Ibid.; "No estan solos en la desgracia: López Portillo," *Baja California*, 1, No. 110.15. January 31st 1980.

⁹⁶ Interview with Ing. Fernando Aceves Salmón. October 17th 2014. Tijuana, Mexico.

third stage to catalyze its potential urbanization.⁹⁷ At the time it seemed that the country's oil boom could finance a Zona Río type of development in the third stage. Elegant, modern buildings were to follow. Soon enough, however, economic realities derailed those efforts.

The 1982 crash was the result of a decrease in the prices of Mexican crude, the government's excessive public spending, and the increase of U.S. interest rates.⁹⁸ From enjoying a coveted status as a preferential borrower of international banks, Mexico became a debtor suddenly unable to pay its massive debt load. The situation became so alarming that the country had to ask for assistance from the IMF. Austerity, a sharp contrast to the populist euphoria of the oil boom, became the norm.⁹⁹ The federal government no longer had the resources to subsidize its semi-modernist model city.

The subsequent crisis affected the project beyond cutting the flow of federal largesse. The upper middle class buyers who had participated in the real estate rush to buy land in the Zona Río initially saw their investment capacity halved. Part of their problems reflected those largely affecting their counterparts in the rest of the country: a harsh tightening of credit, high inflation, and economic uncertainty.¹⁰⁰ However, Louise Walker also documents that the crisis soon led to a bifurcation within the existing middle class. Savvier middle class members profited from the crisis, while others saw their fortunes reduced.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately for many investors in the Zona Río, their location on the border and the government's crisis management particularly hindered their interests. For example, the authorities forced the conversion of all bank accounts in US

⁹⁷ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 96, INDECO. SUBDIRECCION FINANCIERA DG00-101/31. 13 DE FEBRERO DE 1981, 7.

⁹⁸ Walker, 143-144.

⁹⁹ Wayne A. Cornelius, "The Political Economy of Mexico under De la Madrid: Austerity, Routinized Crisis, and Nascent Recovery" in *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 1.1 (1985): 93

¹⁰⁰ Walker, 107; Adolfo Barajas and Roberto Steiner, "Why Don't They Lend? Credit Stagnation in Latin America" in *IMF Staff Papers* 49 (2002): 159.

¹⁰¹ Walker, 145, 155.

Dollars (“médolares”) to pesos in September 1982.¹⁰² The conversion scheme was part of a broader campaign to defend the country’s Dollar reserves. Border dwellers, who had easier access to US Dollars, had largely deposited their savings in the U.S. or in Dollar denominated accounts in Mexican banks.¹⁰³ Those who had trusted the Mexican banking system “received” devaluated pesos vis-à-vis the Dollar from the Mexican government. This meant that many Tijuanaenses suffered a shock drop, calculated between 30-70%, in the value of their savings.¹⁰⁴ Worse, many of the buyers had signed for Dollar denominated mortgages. These investors were in a particularly delicate position as devaluations and forced currency conversions limited their ability to pay their bills. The lenient banks they had dealt with in the past had been nationalized. The lenders now had to respond to state-led banks eager to squeeze any money from their borrowers.

Unsurprisingly, the new economic conditions depleted the impetus behind the redevelopment. The third stage of the project, which López Portillo believed to be a possibility, became paralyzed. Prime land would remain undeveloped and vacant until the late 1990s.¹⁰⁵ The economic situation also hindered the development possibilities of the many of the sold plots in the already urbanized Zona Río. Empty lots languished for decades contrary to come despite the district’s increasing importance for city life.

Despite the destructive effect of the economic crisis on the vision for Tijuana’s urban renewal, López Portillo managed to salvage one of his pet projects in the Zona Río. In 1982, the *Centro Cultural Tijuana* (Tijuana Cultural Center- CECUT) opened to great fanfare. The center was part of FONAPAS (*Fondo Nacional para Actividades Sociales*), a program that the first lady

¹⁰² Ignacio Mas, “Policy-Induced Disincentives to Financial Sector Development: Selected Examples from Latin America in the 1980s” in *The Journal of Latin American Studies* 27.3 (1995): 690- 691.

¹⁰³ See footnote #5 in Guillermo Ortiz, “Currency Substitution in Mexico: The Dollarization Problem” in *The Journal of Money, Credit, and Banking* 15.2 (1983): 177.

¹⁰⁴ This is based on Mas’ study of the real (black market) exchange rate compared to the official value given to the converted Médolares. See Mas, “Policy-Induced Disincentives to Financial Sector Development”, 691.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Ing. Fernando Aceves Salmón. October 17th 2014. Tijuana, Mexico.

envisioned to advance the spread of culture and the arts in Mexican society.¹⁰⁶ CECUT represents the most obvious modernist feature in the Zona Río. Popularly known as “la bola” (the ball), the CECUT’s design honors the modernist notion that form should follow function. A large concrete sphere, from which the center gets its nickname, is the focal point of the center. The building holds a planetarium and an OMNIMAX theater in its interior. A circular plaza surrounding the “bola” enhances the centrality of the structure within the complex. The remaining structures, rectangular buildings home to a museum and a theater, have simple lines that don’t visually compete with the grand planetarium.

Ironically, CECUT also embodies many of the ills associated with the type of development schemes common during the Echeverría and López Portillo administrations: an expensive personally driven monument that undercut its profitability. CECUT, for all its cultural contributions to the city, occupied prime estate that INDECO accountants wanted to sell to help pay for the Tijuana River Project.¹⁰⁷

As it turned out, the inauguration of CECUT was the last gasp of the state’s effort to build a modernist Tijuana. The grand modernist center suffered without generous federal funding. Within a few years it was unceremoniously dumped on the provincial authorities. The federal project for Tijuana was over.

Conclusion

The study of the Tijuana River Project suggests the limits of modernist urban planning. A superficial evaluation of the modernist credentials of Tijuana’s renewal is bound to result in a pessimistic appraisal. Pani’s grand vision of a modern “New Tijuana,” the plan of a renowned

¹⁰⁶ *Centro Cultural Tijuana: 1989-1993*. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 5.

¹⁰⁷ AGN. JLP. Comisión Intersecretarial para la liquidación de la JFMM, caja 96, INDECO. SUBDIRECCION FINANCIERA DG00-101/31. 13 DE FEBRERO DE 1981, 6.

architect and befitting of a renewed and orderly metropolis, gave way to a compromised scheme. Worse, the resulting redevelopment project was never properly finished because of economic and political difficulties. “Proper” modernism failed to take place in Tijuana. A pessimist may simply admit that the survival of any trace of modernism was quite an achievement considering the social, economic, and political context.

Yet, a closer analysis of the Zona Río suggests a surprising resilience. The average Tijuanaense has embraced the Zona Río precisely because of its modernist undertones. The district is in many ways a failure: it constantly floods during the rainy season, is unable to handle the city’s increasing vehicular traffic, and still has empty lots. Nonetheless, Tijuanaenses often refer to it as the only orderly and modern place in their chaotic city. A faded example of modernism seems bright in such a disorderly environment.

The examination of how this imperfect urban development was built also reveals the modus operandi of Mexico’s federal government. The long period that took the regime to actually start building the canalization and urbanization efforts suggests that social crisis was not a primary concern of the regime. Countless reports had arrived in Mexico City documenting the ills affecting the town. However, Tijuana’s intense social problems in themselves were not enough to force the decisive federal action needed to start the project. Mexican renewal, unlike its North American counterpart, did not respond to social conditions in the cities. Instead, the project only started construction as a response to the 1968 political crisis. Self-preservation, then, drove the government’s commitment to large urban renewal.

Finally, the redevelopment’s treacherous trajectory also reveals something key to recent Mexican history: the centrality of the 1982 economic crisis.¹⁰⁸ The common narrative of the

¹⁰⁸ I am by no means the first person to suggest this, but my findings reinforce what other scholars have considered a link between economic crisis (and the subsequent market reforms) and the decline of the state’s

decline of Mexico's dominant party system is that the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre began a process of political unraveling. To a degree, the traditional interpretation is correct. The post-1968 crisis encouraged Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo to pursue expensive populist policies. These high spending administrations fueled the conditions for the massive economic failure of the 1980s. However, the 1982 crisis was the real catalyst of the disintegration of Mexico's political system. The economic meltdown not only halted the government's third phase of the Proyecto Río Tijuana and rattled the private investors in the Zona Río, but it also limited the regime's effective methods to gain popular support. The system could have survived unmodified through high spending policies for years to come. 1982 changed that. Instead, a period of economic restructuring soon led to public discontent, an urban crisis, and the first instances of opposition political victories.

political authoritarianism. See Walker, *Waking from the Dream*; George Phillip, *The Presidency in Mexican Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Dolores Trevizo, *Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy in Mexico, 1968-2000*.

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