In other words, this region is a unique laboratory to reimagine urban resiliency everywhere, since the future of many cities around the world depends today on more meaningful cross-jurisdictional partnerships, and a political leadership that reaches across conventional boundaries to confront socio-economic inequality.

In essence, while the destinies of San Diego and Tijuana are intertwined, the border region has lacked shared urban policies that promote socio-economic co-operation, mutual environmental interests and common regional rights. This absence of an integrated bi-national vision, which affects not only San Diego-Tijuana but many other cities and border urban zones across the world, results from a fragmentation of institutions, agendas and resources involved in civic interests, as well as a deficit of institutional trust, civic engagement and community participation in the shaping of a cross-border vision.

Re-thinking Citizenship at the San Diego-Tijuana Border

The border cities of San Diego and Tijuana comprise the largest bi-national metropolitan region in the world. But while these border cities have roughly equal populations, San Diego has sprawled approximately six times larger than Tijuana in the last decades. This uneven urbanization at the border is emblematic of one of the most pressing challenges for many regions across the United States: how to reverse unsustainable patterns of urban growth and challenge the policies and planning practices that have misallocated our natural, social and financial resources.

Additionally, the radical proximity between wealth and poverty that defines the urban asymmetry between San Diego and Tijuana makes this border region an urgent site against which new collaborative models of equitable economic growth and environmental resiliency can be developed and tested.
For these reasons the San Diego - Tijuana border region’s future depends today more than ever on a more substantial bi-national public sensibility, enabling us to think regionally, incentivizing cross-border urban dynamics, to produce new strategies of co-existence and inter-dependence between these two border cities. It is from contested geographies of conflict like this one, where new conceptions of citizenship can be shaped beyond the arbitrary jurisdictional boundaries that too rigidly define cityhood, and beyond the identitarian politics of the nation-state.

Instrument

The Bi-national Citizenship Culture Survey

These provocations have inspired the construction of the Bi-national Citizenship Culture Survey by the legendary former Bogota Mayor, Antanas Mockus and his non-profit Corpovisionarios, in collaboration with the University of California, San Diego, the municipalities of Tijuana and San Diego and a variety of cross-border local community-based NGO’s. The Ford-funded Bi-national Citizenship Culture Survey is an instrument that will measure and help visualize the shared values and norms, the common interests and sense of mutual responsibility around which a new bi-national conception of citizenship can be formed.

The results of the survey will be stewarded by a cross-sector bi-national council, who will develop a set of priorities and proposals in collaboration with the municipalities of San Diego and Tijuana, and will instigate a new era of cooperation between them. By recognizing each other’s urban policies and taking account of the assets, resources and ideas that can be shared, the survey will facilitate the co-production of bi-national vision and a process that derives its strength from cross-border synergies, inclusive of the most vulnerable communities on both sides of the border. The results of this survey will be the foundational script for the Political Equator 5. (Attached please see the two letters written by the Mayor’s of San Diego and Tijuana, to Darren Walker President of the FORD Foundation, expressing enthusiasm for the Survey project).

The Political Equator 5:
The Cross-Border Citizen
Trans-Border Itinerant Dialogues

Since 2006, the Political Equator Meetings have taken the form of nomadic urban actions and debates involving institutions and communities, oscillating across diverse sites and stations between Tijuana and San Diego. These ‘conversations on the move’ have proposed that the inter-disciplinary debate takes place outside the institutions and inside the actual sites of conflict, enabling the audience to be both witness and participant. The meetings unfold around a series of public works, performances and walks, traversing these conflicting territories, and serve as evidentiary platforms to re-contextualize debates and conversations among diverse publics and institutions.

In the Fall of 2015, the Political Equator 5 will focus on the issue of citizenship. The event will be the public unfolding of the Bi-national Citizenship Culture Survey, a platform to reveal and make visible its results, inaugurating a new era of collaboration between these two border cities. As in previous events, arts and cultural activity, cross-sector debates and symposia will be vehicles for mobilizing awareness of these issues, and this time, the strategic instruments to communicate and translate the meaning of the survey to the public.

The event will be curated by the Center for Urban Ecologies and the Center on Global Justice at the University of California, San Diego and co-produced in collaboration with local, community-based non-profit organizations on both sides of the border, the municipalities of San Diego and Tijuana and the Bogota-based Corpovisionarios, led by former mayor Antanas Mockus. A preliminary list of national and international artists, scholars, activists and political figures is being developed in collaboration with local NGO’s and government officials from both cities.
The Political Equator 5 will seek the construction of an elevated performance stage-platform that will literally straddle the border fence near the location where it sinks into the Pacific Ocean. With the use of projection technologies, audiences on both sides of the fence will witness and participate in a series of performances, presentations and debates.

* The Binational Citizenship Culture Survey is a project of the UCSD Center on Global Justice and the UCSD Center for Urban Ecologies, in collaboration with Antanas Mockus and Corpovisionarios, Bogota. It is funded by the Metropolitan Opportunities Program of the Ford Foundation.

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