

Tijuana: A City on the Border of Cutting Edge Park Design?

A Research Prospectus
For

The University of Southern California
Sustainable Cities Program
La Frontera 2000
In conjunction with
El Colegio de la Frontera Norte
Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico

By

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July 2000

Abstract

Of the carloads of tourists known to visit Tijuana, one place many people probably won't see in Tijuana is a park. In Tijuana, residents are known to picnic on the green grass of boulevard medians because parks are allowed proportionally little space and green open spaces are at a premium. Yet, the new presidential regime in Mexico is reportedly interested in increasing the quality of life for all Mexican citizens, which could lead to a revitalization of parks in Mexican cities, especially in financially significant cities, such as Tijuana. Consideration should be given now to the type of park that is right for Tijuana that will specifically address the needs of the citizens. In this paper, the author argues that given the special history of parks in North America and the history of the Mexican border town Tijuana, a study of the two involving citizen input could result in innovations in park design worthy of academic research.

Introduction

The objective of this prospectus is to propose a topic relating to the US – Mexico border which pertains to sustainability and is suitable for further research. The topic selected by the author, the suitability of Tijuana, Mexico for innovation in park design, is based upon observations made by the author during the La Frontera 2000 Program while based in Tijuana. The proposed topic relates to the US – Mexico border and sustainability in as much as it considers the design of a city element arguably essential to sustainability, parks, in a city on the US – Mexico border, Tijuana, Mexico.

Accordingly, this prospectus consists of three sections: Discussion of the Proposed Topic, Recommendations for Research of the Proposed Topic, and Relevance of Possible Conclusions. The Discussion of the Proposed Topic section provides the historical context of the proposed topic and a statement of the problem. The Recommendations for Research of the Proposed Topic section of this prospectus tells which disciplines or fields of study may be interested in this topic. The section also lists recommended questions and project stakeholders. Finally, the Relevance of Possible Conclusions section reveals what the possible outcomes of the proposed research could mean.

Discussion of the Proposed Topic

The proposed topic of this research prospectus, deemed suitable for further research by the author, is the suitability of Tijuana, Mexico for innovation in park design. This discussion begins by placing this topic in a historical context. The historical context of Tijuana, Mexico and parks in general, provides information useful to understanding why innovation may be especially applicable to park design in Tijuana. The discussion then turns to the problem statement. The problem statement provides the purpose of this proposed topic and answers why the author chose the proposed topic.

The histories of Tijuana, Mexico and the development of parks in North American cities could not be more different. Tijuana began as a boomtown on the US – Mexico border, in the early to mid 20th century, to serve the needs of US residents hungry for tempting

delights offered there but not allowed to flourish in American towns, such as casinos, dancehalls, speakeasies, and whorehouses. In the shadow of Hollywood, Tijuana became a favorite hangout of popular movie stars, gangsters, and excitement seekers. Originally known as a kind of 'Sin City,' Tijuana is still relatively young, only a little over half a century old, and continues to grow by leaps and bounds.

Quite different from Tijuana, parks in North America cities began in the mid 19th century, with the inception of Central Park, and quickly became places of civic pride no city could do without. Imported from Europe by American blue bloods such as Frederic Law Olmsted Sr., parks ushered into the urban core relief from the congestion, noise, smell, and other severities associated with city life. With their genteel, quiet environments reminiscent of the country, parks became known as the 'country within the city.' After the success of Central Park, cities across the US rushed to incorporate them into their urban cores, often imitating Central Park as closely as possible.

As different as they both are, Tijuana and most parks in North America cities share a common purpose, to provide a form of escape, which contributes to a common problem. Originally, Tijuana was generally known for the loose, sinful escape it provided, whereas North American city parks for the gentle, serene escape they provided. Unfortunately, as cities and society changed and escape was no longer needed, Tijuana and parks in North America continued in the role they were cast. Tijuana with runaway development and meager social services for its burgeoning population continues to promote its image of a 'good time' city with bars and nightclubs that line its main strip to attract American capital. Parks in North American cities designed and implemented according to the precedent set by Central Park began to deteriorate as urban populations decreased and suburban populations grew with people attempting to move to the country environment emulated in parks.

The problem addressed by the topic proposed in this research prospectus involves the perception of Tijuana and of parks and how a change in the perception of parks might be used to change the perception of Tijuana for the advancement of sustainability. There has been some headway in changing the perception of Tijuana and parks in North American cities as escape destinations. For example, the proliferation of Maquiladoras in Tijuana which also attracts American capital, and the development of greenways in some North American cities which allows people no longer interested in quiet reflection to move through green, open space. Yet, little has changed. Tijuana is still heavily associated with the brashness of the bar and nightclub scene and North American city parks with the quiet country-feel of green vistas and trees.

Recommendations for Research of the Proposed Topic

To further promote research of the proposed topic, the suitability of Tijuana, Mexico for innovation in park design, disciplines or fields of study, which maybe interested in this topic, recommended questions for research, and the project stakeholders are outlined in this section. Disciplines or fields of study possibly interested in this topic are important because they may provide useful insight into research methodology and/or sources of

research material. Recommended questions for research may provide ideas for leads a researcher could use to approach the subject matter. The project stakeholders are the possible clients of any project that might result from this research and should be considered as early as possible.

There are several disciplines or fields of study, which may be interested in a research project investigating the suitability of Tijuana for innovation in park design. Those who may find the most relevance in this topic are those whose work directly involves urban open space, such as urban planners, landscape architects, architects, and sustainable city theorists. Others who may find this work of interest are experts in the field of US – Mexico border relations, environmentalists, Tijuana city historians, and park historians.

Some of the questions the experts and practitioners mentioned might find worthwhile to providing research leads on the proposed topic, the suitability for innovation in park design, are:

- How do parks in the US and Mexico, and their perception, use, etc. generally compare?
- How might innovation in park design occur?
- What are the existing park spaces in Tijuana like, quantity and quality, and how innovative are they?
- What conditions are necessary for innovations in park design?

As experts and practitioners consider these questions, they will also want to consider the project stakeholders, those who will interact with the implemented project. Project stakeholders exist in the public and private sector. Examples of possible public sector stakeholders are community members or residents of Tijuana, visitors to Tijuana, public officials, civil service workers, and schools or other public institutions. Examples of possible private sector stakeholders are businesses, outside investors, and developers.

Relevance of Possible Conclusions

There are two main points of relevance of possible conclusions for a study of Tijuana's suitability for innovations in park design. First, new methodologies in park design useful to Tijuana may be useful elsewhere. For example, Los Angeles is a city facing open space planning issues similar to those of Tijuana. Secondly, innovations in design may consider issues not yet successfully addressed by park designers, such as homeless people in parks, greater involvement of community in park design, and the controversy between parks designed for special interests groups vs. multi-purpose parks.

Conclusion

The objective of this prospectus was to introduce a topic relating to the US – Mexico border that pertains to sustainability and may be of interest for further research. The topic selected by the author, the suitability of Tijuana, Mexico for innovation in park design, is relevant, timely, and based on observations made by the author during the La Frontera 2000 Program while based in Tijuana. Tijuana shares with parks in North America a traditional image of a good place to escape to for differing reasons. However, both North American parks and Tijuana have outlived their images as people have moved on and fulfilled their needs elsewhere. A study of the opportunities that exist in Tijuana for the development of new methods in park design would greatly benefit both parks and Tijuana.