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Donald K. Alper

The Idea of Cascadia: Emergent Transborder Regionalisms in the Pacific Northwest-Western Canada

This paper examines the binational economic and ecological region in the Pacific Northwest and western Canada known as "Cascadia." Growing awareness of regional economic strength and ecological interdependence has stimulated various Cascadia visions and agendas aimed at diminishing the barrier effect of the Canada-United States border. These visions vary depending on how the region is geographically constructed and the extent to which growth economies or ecosystems are valued. The paper argues that business groups and nongovernmental organizations are the key actors promoting regional ties. The nature of these linkages and cooperative processes that have evolved to sustain them are discussed. The paper concludes by assessing Cascadia as both a set of mind-sets about the region and evolving frameworks for transnational cooperation and problem solving in the binational area.

J. Michael Patrick

A Preliminary Assessment of NAFTA's Impact on the Texas Border Economy

The Texas border region with Mexico enjoys a unique geographical position at the center of the NAFTA market. In its first year, 1994, NAFTA gave a boost to already expanding U.S.-Mexican trade and regional cross-border commerce, begun in 1986 with Mexico's accession to GATT. The December 1994 peso devaluation slowed substantially the pace of trade and investment between the two countries, having a negative impact on the economy of the Texas border region. While many businessmen and women and public officials remain optimistic about the region's future under NAFTA and expanding U.S.-Mexican trade ties, others are not so sure. Some officials and academicians caution that NAFTA will change the way U.S., Mexican, and Canadian investors and entrepreneurs conduct business. This is particularly true in areas of transportation and warehousing services as well as retailing, putting in jeopardy the very industries that traditionally have been the mainstay of much of the Texas border economy.

Chad Richardson

Building Strength from Within: Colonias of the Rio Grande Valley

Much of the extreme poverty found along the Texas-Mexico border is concentrated in what are known as colonias. These impoverished housing enclaves, found almost exclusively along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo border, are often regarded as "rural slums" by public officials and in media reports. Indeed, much of the legislative focus on colonias centers around attempts to stop their growth. Any efforts to reduce the poverty of border colonias must do more than curtail their growth or provide missing infrastructure. Colonias have many positive features related to their borderlands identity that could enable their residents

to become key players in overcoming their poverty. The research reported herein describes a particular civic-participation strategy that aims to build a sense of community and empower colonia residents in Hidalgo County. Four colonias where the BARCA (Border Association for Refugees and Colonia Advocacy) organization had conducted such efforts, and two where they had only conducted a self-development program, were matched, colonia for colonia, with six that had experienced neither form of intervention. Over five hundred randomly-selected respondents in these colonias answered fixed-response and open-ended questions that were developed from previous in-depth interviews. The analysis supports BARCA's claim that their organizational strategy promotes collective action among low-income women and raises their sense of efficacy in improving colonia conditions. It fails, however, to support their claim that the strategy builds a stronger sense of belonging in the community and willingness to provide mutual assistance. Some tentative explanations of these findings are proposed.

David Wasserman

The Borderlands Mall: Form and Function of and Imported Landscape

For an economic innovation to succeed in the developing world, it must adapt to the social and economic structures of the host society. Some scholars consider the Mexican shopping mall an imported innovation that has altered the traditional landscape of urban commerce. This paper details how the landscape form and business functions of two regional shopping malls in Ciudad Juarez, the Plaza Juarez and Rio Grande malls, reflect their unique borderlands location. It then analyzes the form and function of traditional commerce in Ciudad Juarez, including street vendors, markets, and downtown stores. Next, traditional commerce is compared to shopping malls of the city. The study demonstrates that Ciudad Juarez's shopping malls have undergone an adaptive process, adopting the "recession proof" form and function of the informal economic sector. This assures the permanence of these facilities in a region dominated by transborder retail trade.

Robert G. Varady, David Colnic, Robert Merideth, and Terry Sprouse

The U.S. Mexican Border Environment Cooperation Commission: Collected Perspectives on the First Two Years

This article assesses the first two years' activities of the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC), and synthesizes the invited commentary from several BECC observers along both sides of the border. As a framework for assessment, the paper delineates several key elements of BECC's design--namely, its binationality, openness to the public, and the existence of criteria for project certification--that give the institution the potential to promote innovative and sustainable solutions to border environmental degradation. The article then evaluates the commission's effectiveness in implementing these design components, concluding that, although BECC has stumbled occasionally in its first two years, it has made significant progress, demonstrating that it is capable of defining its agenda, implementing rules and procedures, devising certification criteria, and moving ahead to approve proposals.
