¡No Al Aeropuerto en Texcoco! Regional Decision-Making and Community Countermobilization: The Siting of Mexico City’s New Airport

by

Christina Davis Rosan

B.A. History
Williams College, Williamstown, MA 1996

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER IN CITY PLANNING
AT THE
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 2002

© 2002 Christina Davis Rosan. All rights reserved.

The author hereby grants the Massachusetts Institute of Technology the right to distribute publicly the paper.

Signature of Author:

May 16, 2002

Certified by:

Professor Diane E. Davis
Professor of Political Sociology
Thesis Supervisor

Professor Dennis Frenchman
Chair, MCP Committee
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
¡No Al Aeropuerto en Texcoco! Regional Decision-Making and Community Countermobilization: The Siting of Mexico City’s New Airport

by

Christina Davis Rosan

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning on May 16, 2002 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in City Planning

ABSTRACT

Despite the presence of numerous urban and regional planning commissions in the Mexico City region, they are noticeably absent from the national decision to site a new airport. If regional and local interests do not have a say in national decision-making, what does this mean for democracy? These issues are particularly relevant in Mexico, the next-door neighbor to the world’s hegemonic leader, that for 71 years lived under de facto one party rule. With a new President, from a different political party, there has been a movement towards democracy. At the turn of the century with the signing of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) there is the promise of free trade that will help bolster Mexico’s national economy. For Mexico, the benefits of international economic integration are closer than ever. However, in the case of the siting of the new airport in the Mexico City region, this process went terribly wrong. Increasingly there is a tension between the need for developing countries to democratize their institutions at the same time that they pursue massive infrastructure projects that modernize infrastructure and bolster the national economy. This thesis explores the tension between international economic integration and democratization and how it is played out in national infrastructure decisions that have local and regional impacts.

Thesis Advisor: Professor Diane E. Davis
Title: Associate Professor of Political Sociology, Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Thesis Reader: Professor Lawrence Susskind
Title: Ford Professor of Urban and Environmental Planning, Department of Urban Studies and Planning.
Acknowledgements:

I’d like to thank the usals:

- The people who have been here throughout: Mom, Dad, Grandpa, Peter, and Liz
- My awesome roommates, Erica, Emily, and Hope, for making this a pleasant experience. Congrats! We’re done.
- My advisor, Diane Davis, who is never short of ideas and who spent hours with me discussing these ideas in Mexico City and Cambridge. Thanks for the encouragement. See you next year!
- My reader, Larry Susskind, who has an amazing ability to return corrected drafts hours after receiving them. Thanks for your insight and direction!
- Karl Munkelwitz who made me go to Mexico City for Spring break and spent hours wandering the streets looking at buildings and taking pictures. Thanks for being there and for the pictures!
- The people of San Salvador Atenco who shared their stories with me. It is amazing to meet ordinary people in such extraordinary struggles!
- And all my amazing DUSP friends, staff, and professors for keeping the bar high and the nights long!
Contents:

Chapter I: The National Economic Agenda, pages 7-13

Chapter II: The Decision to Construct and to Site the New Airport in the Mexico City Region, pages 14-38

Chapter III: Beyond Objectivity: The Challenges to Texcoco, pages 39-52

Chapter IV: Strategies to Counteract the Decision, pages 53-70

Chapter V: Reflections, pages 71-83

Bibliography: pages 84-88

Photo: page 89
Abbreviations:

AICM- Benito Juarez Airport. Existing airport in the Federal District of Mexico.

ASA- Airports and Auxiliary Services

PAN- Partido Acción Nacional; National Action Party

PRI- Partido Revolucionario Institucional; Institutional Revolutionary Party

SCT- Secretary of Communications and Transport

ZMCM- Metropolitan Zone of the City of Mexico consists of the Federal District, 53 municipalities in the State of Mexico, and one municipality in the State of Hidalgo.
The United States of Mexico: Land area-1,958,202km², Population-77,000,000
The Central Region (R.C): Land area-92,964km², Population-29,000,000
The Metropolitan Zone of the City of Mexico (ZMCM): Land area-7,860km², Population-17,500,000. It consists of 16 delegations in the Federal District, 53 municipalities in the State of Mexico and one municipality in the State of Hidalgo.
Chapter I: The National Economic Agenda

On October 22, 2001, Pedro Cerisola y Weber, Secretary of Communications and Transport in Mexico, announced the Federal Government’s decision to site a new international airport to the northeast of the Federal District of Mexico City\(^1\) on the former Texcoco lake, resulting in the expropriation of several communities’ lands. The Texcoco site would require 15,000 hectares. Most of the land was already owned by the federal government, but 4,500 hectares would come from the farmers of 13 ejidos\(^2\) (including San Salvador Atenco) through Presidential expropriation.\(^3\) It was a decision that came after almost 30 years of discussion about the need for a new international airport, but it was immediately met by local and regional opposition.

While the new airport would meet the national government’s objectives of having a global airport that could serve as a hub for international and domestic flights, the decision did not acknowledge the local and regional impacts that the construction of a new airport in the Mexico City Metropolitan region would have. There was little discussion about whom the airport would benefit and who would pay the costs. The decision also came as a surprise to those who had been looking to the new Presidential administration for signs of burgeoning democracy and citizen participation. Despite the rhetoric of Mexico’s

---

\(^1\) Officially, the Federal District is considered the boundary of Mexico City. The Federal District operates much like Washington, DC. It is the capital of Mexico and it is bordered by states. In this paper when I talk about the Mexico City region I am referring to what is known as the Metropolitan Zone of the City of Mexico (ZMCM) which consists of the Federal District as well as 53 municipalities in the State of Mexico and one municipality in the State of Hidalgo. This is the area that is in the Valley of Mexico and that today has somewhere between 16 and 26 million residents.

\(^2\) Ejidos were established in the 1920s after the Mexican Revolution, as a way to give small farmers a share of the land.

democratization, national interests were able to preempt local and regional concerns in a top-down, elitist decision-making process. As a result, the controversy over the siting of the new airport in the Mexico City Metropolitan region replicates the pre-democracy decision-making and politics. But more than an indictment of Mexico’s new democracy, the case reflects many of the growing tensions that developing countries face as they fight to compete in the global market economy while also trying to democratize their institutions.

Increasingly, there is an inherent tension between international economic integration and democratization in developing countries. In order to raise the standard of living, developing countries need to be connected to the international marketplace and to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). However, at what cost? This thesis will explore how these two goals collide and the effect this has on cities and regions. Will local and regional concerns--and regional efforts to address them--be preempted by the national need for economic competitiveness and international economic integration? The competing demands of economic integration and democratization pose new challenges for urban and regional planners because existing institutions are not capable of bridging the tension between national interests and local and regional concerns.

The expectations for Mexico in the 21st century are high: “[a]s democracy takes hold and corruption and repression begin to recede, we can expect a much more stable Mexico. Mr. Fox, who is a former Coca-Cola executive, has pledged to focus on economic
development, with a goal of 7% annual economic growth.”4 The election of Vicente Fox, a member of the Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), to the presidency represents a significant break in the monopoly over the political system held by the Partido Revolucionario Institutional (PRI). President Fox’s ascendency to power is interpreted by many as the coming of democratization. In addition, “Mexico has experienced uninterrupted growth since 1996. Growth averaged 5.2 percent from 1996 to 1999 and reached 6.9 percent in 2000.”5 There are expectations that Mexico will continue to grow economically and become a more open society. Fox’s decision to construct and to site the new airport in the Mexico City region tapped into these expectations and was based on a desire to promote Mexico’s economic growth and international position, create a Latin American air hub in the capital region, and take advantage of the presence of political and economic interests in favor of the Texcoco site.

According to Secretary Cerisola y Weber, President Fox is the first president in 30 years to do more than simply talk about the decision to site and build a new international airport: “the Government of President Fox has taken a responsible step [by initiating the new airport] that we believe is the only step that will allow us to move forward as a nation.”6 According to the World Bank, in Mexico “[p]ersistent low levels of public investment have already created a substantial backlog in basic infrastructure

---


improvements." The failure of previous administrations to invest in infrastructure was one of the factors that had set Mexico’s economy back.

However, Mexico’s prospects are strong. “Mexico currently has one of the strongest economies in all of Latin America and its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is roughly equivalent to that of Australia, India and Russia.” According to the World Bank, “Mexico is the world's 13th-largest economy, its eighth-largest exporter of goods and services, and fourth-largest oil producer. Far-reaching stabilization and structural reform efforts since the late 1980s are rapidly transforming the Mexican economy and clearly putting the country on a higher growth track.” Mexico’s GDP has grown from 484 billion dollars in 1999 to 590 billion dollars in 2001.

In the case of Mexico, which borders the world’s hegemonic leader, the benefits of growth are just to the North. With the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992, Mexico’s relationship with the United States has been strengthened and the promise of economic growth dangled before its leaders. According to the U.S. State Department, “Mexico is the second largest trading partner for the United States after Canada.” In 2000, two-way trade with the United States amounted to 275.2 billion dollars. When President Fox took office in December 2000, his national agenda

---

11 Ibid.
was designed to continue this trend of economic growth and international economic integration.

It is no surprise that Fox would look to invest in the Mexico City region. “Mexico City is the most important economic centre in the country, home to the entire Federal Government and the focal point for business. The Mexico City region dominates the national economy, generating nearly half the country’s GDP.”

Ever since the 1930s, the Mexico City region has generated more than 30 percent of the country’s Gross National Product (GNP) and there is no reason to believe that this trend will not continue. Between 50-60 percent of Mexico’s financial corporations are located in Mexico City.

Mexico City is also the capital of the country, which for political reasons makes a difference. Capital cities have an important symbolic value. Mexico City, with its rich history, is no exception. However, to stay competitive as a global city, improvements are sorely needed in the Mexico City region’s infrastructure to maintain and attract investment. According to Fox’s administration, the existing Benito Juarez (AICM) airport in Mexico City is not able to handle the anticipated short, medium, and long-term growth in domestic and international air passengers.

Fox’s strategy is to invest in Mexico’s growth engine--the Mexico City Metropolitan region--by proposing the construction of an international airport. This investment in

---

infrastructure is a key component in President Fox’s plan for national economic
development and international integration. The rationale behind promoting international
investment is that it raises tax revenue and Mexico’s ability to pay off its debt. For Fox it
also provides opportunity for political patronage and economic and political and stability.
Figure 2: The Existing and Proposed Sites for the Mexico City Airport

Figure 2 shows the urban growth of the Mexico City Metropolitan region as of 1993. Most of the urban growth took place in the area to the Northeast of the Federal District in the State of Mexico. On the map it is shown as black. This is the same area where the new airport at Texcoco has been proposed.
Chapter II: The Decision to Construct a New Airport and Site it in the Mexico City Region

Since the 1970s, successive presidents have toyed with the idea of building a new airport in the Mexico City region. As Mexico City has grown, the existing airport, Benito Juarez (AICM), in the Federal District, has gradually been encircled by the city; as a result of this urban growth, the Federal Government claims that it had no place to expand the airport. With its two narrow runways (that cannot be used simultaneously), Benito Juarez is thought to be reaching its saturation point. It currently “serves approximately 60,000 passengers per day and handles 800 flight operations every 24 hours.” \(^{15}\) In 2001, the need to do something about the Mexico City airport was reinforced when “[f]rom March 19th to April 4th a runway in the Mexico City airport was closed [due to maintenance], which represented extraordinary costs in jet fuel, crew overtime, extensions in airports schedules, jet ways overtime, passenger attentions and others.”\(^{16}\) According to airline figures, airlines serving Mexico City lost “around USD$1 million a day due to the closure for maintenance of one of the airport's two runways.” The Mexican carrier Aeromexico lost “an estimated USD$400,000 per day as a result of ticket cancellations and additional fuel consumption. Airline industry sources said Mexicana, the country's second major carrier, likely was losing a comparable amount and other airlines using the airport were probably losing a combined USD$200,000 dollars per day.”\(^{17}\)


According to Airports and Auxiliary Services (ASA), the federal agency in charge of airport construction and management, “in five or six years Benito Juarez will arrive at its limit of 320 thousand annual operations,18 we estimate that there will be problems with operations and delays in the flights, and the airport will not be able to meet demand. The decision simply could not be postponed more. As a Government we have the obligation to make difficult decisions and to surpass the lack of action of the past. The determination to locate the new airport in the Texcoco was made in an objective way, using strict criteria set by technicians: (1) making sure that the demands and necessities of the users are satisfied in the long term (50 years); (2) that the option is viable for the airlines; (3) that it is economically profitable; and (4) it has a positive impact on the urban development of the zone with the least environmental impact.”19

---

18 While this is the statement on ASA’s website, other studies commissioned by ASA and SCT say that the Benito Juarez airport is already at 320,000 annual operations. The studies predict that Benito Juarez’s maximum is 360,000 annual operations.
Figure 3: Level of Demand for Passengers to 2050


Figure 3 shows the demand scenario for number of passengers given a 4.5% and a 3.4% growth scenario. Currently, the Benito Juarez (AICM) airport accepts 21 million passengers. The demand scenario shows that the region will have to accommodate between 90 and 110 million passengers a year.

Figure 4: Level of Demand for Annual Operations to 2050


Figure 4 shows the demand scenario for annual operations in the Mexico City region from 2000 to 2050. Currently the Benito Juarez airport handles 320,000 annual operations. The demand scenario shows what the demands will be if there is a 4.2% growth in demand and a 3.0% growth. According to these figures, the existing Benito Juarez airport would not be able to meet increasing demand.
The idea of building an additional runway at Benito Juarez was thrown out because to do so it would be necessary to relocate the Control Tower, the Radar, and to relocate and expand the perimeter road. This would mean that Periferico Norte, the main ring road around the Federal District, would have to be diverted, along with the railway line, the Churubusco river, and the Tapo road. It would also be necessary to relocate the City’s landfills\textsuperscript{20} and the Alameda Oriente. Not only are these projects costly, but they would also impede the \textit{immediate} construction of the new runway since they would have to be completed first.\textsuperscript{21} The idea of expanding the airport was therefore dismissed and alternative sites were explored.

Texcoco, in the State of Mexico and Tizayuca, in the State of Hidalgo became the final contenders for the new airport. The Texcoco site (located 26km away from downtown) would mean the closure of the existing airport in the Federal District. The Tizayuca site, which was located 73kms away from the downtown area, would operate in conjunction with the existing Benito Juarez airport.\textsuperscript{22} This chapter explores the rationale behind siting the new airport in Texcoco.

\textsuperscript{20} Better described as garbage dumps. I visited these areas and they are enormous open dumps.
\textsuperscript{21} Retrieved May 1, 2002 from the World Wide Web: \url{http://www.asa.gob.mx/nuevo/index.htm}
\textsuperscript{22} Throughout the studies the estimated distance of the Texcoco and Tizayuca sites ranges. I have chosen the numbers that are quoted most often, but there may be disagreement about these numbers.
Table 1: Comparison of Costs and Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPTION</th>
<th>Benito Juarez (2001)</th>
<th>Benito Juarez (at maximum)</th>
<th>Texcoco</th>
<th>Benito Juarez (AICM) and Tizayuca</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Capacity (annual operations)</td>
<td>Currently= 320,000</td>
<td>360,000</td>
<td>1,080,000</td>
<td>600,000 Tizayuca + 360,000 AICM= 960,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Number of Passengers</td>
<td>21 million</td>
<td>28 million</td>
<td>90 million</td>
<td>52 million in Tizayuca +28 million in AICM= 80 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to Center</td>
<td>8 km</td>
<td>8km</td>
<td>26km</td>
<td>73km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Runways</td>
<td>2 (not simultaneous)</td>
<td>2 (not simultaneous)</td>
<td>6 (3 simultaneous)</td>
<td>4 at Tizayuca and 2 (not simultaneous) at AICM= 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Investment</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Investment</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total First Phase (First 5 years) Costs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>18,304 million pesos</td>
<td>28,059 million pesos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Second Phase (First 39 years) Costs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.507 million pesos</td>
<td>1,092 million pesos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Costs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>20,811 million pesos</td>
<td>29,151 million pesos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


26 At the time of this writing (May 2002), 1 US Dollar (USD) = 9.48000 Mexican Peso (MXP)
The Texcoco option, located in the State of Mexico near the existing airport, has been considered since the 1970s. The Texcoco lakebed is above Mexico City’s aquifers and has been the site of an ecological restoration project, Project Texcoco, which has protected it from development. It is an attractive site for the new airport because it is located near the developed areas of Mexico City, much of the site is owned by the Federal Government, and much of it is vacant ejidal farmland so that developing in Texcoco would not require uprooting thousands of existing residents. There are plans put forth by architect Alberto Kalach at the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) to use the financing of the airport to create an elaborate system of lakes surrounding the airport. The Texcoco Lake Project would create an ecological barrier to protect the area from further urban development. It could also be used as a recreation area.

The Texcoco site is also located in a part of the State of Mexico that has grown considerably over the past 30 years. Political and economic actors want the area to continue to grow. As a result of previous growth, there are powerful private interests who are willing to finance the construction a new international airport in Texcoco because the project will raise the value of surrounding land and generate millions of dollars in real estate investment. In addition, if the Texcoco site is chosen, the Benito Juarez airport will be closed down which will mean that the people who live nearby will no longer have to live at the runway’s edge suffering from noise and air pollution and other associated risks. It will also allow new real estate development opportunities at the site of the existing airport. Given the area’s proximity to downtown, this is a valuable
One of the plans is to turn the Benito Juarez airport into an ecological park which will enhance the aesthetics of this part of the city.

The Tizayuca site was more recently proposed by the Governor of the State of Hidalgo as a means of using Federal money and private development to invest in a part of the Valley of Mexico that has not experienced much growth in the past twenty years. Since the Tizayuca site is 73 kms from the Federal District, the plan calls for the investment in a commuter rail to link the airport with downtown. This would require significant additional funds.

The SCT’s October 2001 announcement to site the new airport in Texcoco, on the border of the Federal District, was supported “unanimously” by a series of expert evaluations in fields ranging from aviation to ecology. According to the SCT, the decision to choose Texcoco was based on aeronautic, technical, environmental, urban, and financial analyses of both options. What becomes clear when we examine the studies carefully is that they were primarily administered by Federal Agencies and they were guided by a set of criteria framed by national political and economic objectives. The studies are also very specialized so that there is not one document that synthesizes all the analyses. Table 1 shows the different pros and cons of each option. However, the focus of this chapter will be on the questions that experts did not ask and the consequences of not asking them.

The Texcoco site is chosen in part because it can accommodate the most number of passengers in one airport. However, there is never any discussion about whether having
an airport that can accommodate up to 90 million passengers is really a good thing for the region. What will the physical implications for growth of the city be? As critics of the decision to site the new international airport in Texcoco have pointed out, the Mexico City region *does not need* any more physical growth.

Worse than a planner’s nightmare, Mexico City is a depressing testament to administrative chaos and the excesses of rapid and concentrated industrial development. Since initiating industrial development in the 1940s, Mexico’s Capital has been transformed from a charming city with wide boulevards, an almost leisurely lifestyle, and a population of around 1.8 million to a living hell with nearly 16 million residents in the metropolitan area. It is now neck and neck with Tokyo for the dubious honor of being the world’s largest city, and it shows in the daily disorder of urban life.\(^{27}\)

Depending on what statistics are cited, the Mexico City region is home to between 17 and 26 million people.\(^{28}\) Mexico City is also dense. According to one statistic, “Mexico City at its current density can accommodate roughly the whole population of Australia” despite the fact that the area of “Mexico City is less than 2% of the area of Australia.”\(^{29}\)

From an urban development perspective, Mexico City is a megacity that is too big, too populated and too unmanageable.\(^{30}\) A 2000 study by the Federal District Government found that Mexico City’s shear size posed risks for the region’s sustainability. The study predicted that if no action was taken to reduce population growth, by 2020 the population of the Mexico City region would increase by 4.1 million people. The Federal District would increase by 500,000, while the surrounding municipalities in the State of Mexico

\(^{29}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) For a discussion of the unmanageability of Mexico City see Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan* and Alicia Ziccardi and Bernardo Navarro, eds., *Ciudad de Mexico: retos y propuestas para la coordinacion metropolitana.*
and Hidalgo would increase by 3.6 million. By 2020, these areas around the Federal District would constitute 60 percent of the population of the Metropolitan Zone of the Valley of Mexico (ZMVM). The study also showed that 82.5 percent of the anticipated population growth would be located in 15 municipalities, primarily in the State of Mexico, in the area near Texcoco.

Indeed, over the past 30 years there have been numerous attempts to deconcentrate development in the Mexico City region. These efforts have come from inside and outside of the region. For decades there has been frustration in other parts of the country that the Mexico City region is over privileged and absorbs too much Federal money. Indeed, in Mexico, the issue of regional disparity is high on the national political agenda. Political parties such as the PRI were able to win presidential campaigns based on promises of decentralization. According to the proponents of decentralization, the president’s role should be to disperse rather than concentrate development. Under De La Madrid’s presidential administration (1982-1988), decentralization became a critical part of the national development plan, but despite these efforts, Mexico City has remained the predominant city.

From an environmental standpoint, promoting future growth of one of the largest and most vulnerable urban areas in the world is potentially a huge mistake. Already the Mexico City region suffers from air pollution, sinking, water shortages, flooding, and a

---

32 Ibid.
lack of open space, all problems that result from being a megacity with an ever-
expanding population and burgeoning demands on the region’s natural resources.

“According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Mexico City's air averages 179
mg per cubic meter of suspended particulates, well above the WHO 90 mg maximum
recommendation. The Mexican government recognizes the severity of pollution levels
and has implemented legislation addressing the problem.”35 “Although pollutant
emissions have been reduced in the Mexico City metropolitan area (ZMCM),
approximately 4 million tons per year are emitted at the present time (1998).”36 In 1999,
“Mexico City had its cleanest year or the decade... when smog levels forced declarations
of an emergency only three times—covering five days—during the year. 37 Mexico City
is also “sinking at a rate of 3.25 feet per year due to the pumping of ground water.”38

“Mexico City’s water use in 1995 was 60.3 cubic meters per second. 43.5 cubic meters
per second came from the ground water wells in the city. Drawing at a rate of 43.5
meters per second, the water would fill the volume of Grand Central Station every two
hours, or 4,368 Grand Central Stations per year.”39 Given the sheer size of Mexico City,
there are questions about the carrying capacity of the city. “These statistics and the urban
volatility they represent contribute to the sense of urgency surrounding the debate that
posits Mexico City as an extreme case study for the contemporary Megacity.”40

37 Praxis, p. 16.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
Given the density of the metropolitan region, it might have been worth asking if it is wise
to invest public and private money in a new airport in an area that is already the center of
growth and development and plagued by environmental problems. Perhaps it would be a
better use of federal dollars and investment to promote growth in another area, as the
proponents of decentralization have been proposing for years. However, these concerns
were not a part of the calculation that guided President Fox’s national economic agenda.
There was little questioning of the wisdom of locating the new airport in the region or
estimates of how many dollars would be brought in by increasing the capacity of the
region’s airport and how those dollars would be distributed. Instead of addressing the
larger question of whether and how airports directly contribute to the national and
regional economy, and at what cost, the studies were concerned with situating the new
airport. Technical expertise—with its predetermined “mental model” of an international
airport—was used to justify what in many ways was a predetermined political and
economic decision to site the new airport in the Mexico City region in Texcoco.

The studies accept that the choice is either to build an integrated state-of-the-art airport in
Texcoco and close down Benito Juarez, or build a smaller, not integrated airport far away
from downtown and keep the existing Benito Juarez airport open. By not challenging
these assumptions, there is no discussion about what the purpose of this new airport is. Is
the goal to have the airport serve Mexico City or the national air system? Since there are
already several airports in the Mexico City region: Toluca, Benito Juarez, and Puebla, it
might have made more sense to work on integrating these airports. Or perhaps there
could have been a way to keep the Benito Juarez airport open in the Federal District and
build an additional runway on the Texcoco lakebed that could be attached by commuter train? It is interesting that these options were not raised in the formal evaluations. They might have been less costly than closing down a functioning airport and building a six-runway airport in Texcoco, only about 17kms away.
Figure 5: Regional Air System: Map Showing Existing and Proposed Airports

![Regional Air System Map]


Figure 5 shows that there are already numerous airports in the Mexico City region. AICM is the Benito Juarez airport. Puebla, Cuernavaca, and Toluca are other nearby airports. The Santa Lucia airforce base near Tizayuca would have to be closed down if the Tizayuca site was chosen. The Tizayuca site would operate in conjunction with AICM.
Many of the technical studies focus on what the international airlines want. International airlines, facing pressures of international competition, prefer to operate one airport in the region rather than two because there are significant costs that come with duplication. The demands of the airlines are certainly critical to this process of siting the new airport. There would be no reason to invest in the construction of a new airport using public funds that was not used. In fact, this would be a tragic waste. However, the technical criteria used by international companies are not weighed against other costs, such as the enormous costs of building a new airport instead of expanding the old one or the environmental costs that come with locating the new airport on the Texcoco lakebed, an area that for the past 20 years has been the site of ecological restoration and is located above the aquifers that supply water to Mexico City. There are certainly risks for Mexico City’s sustainability that need to be addressed.

In addition, the exorbitant costs of transportation to the Tizayuca site are often cited as one of the key reasons that the project is not chosen; however, there is never any discussion about the sunk cost of previous infrastructure investment (such as the construction of a new highway near the proposed site and a proposed metro expansion nearby) in the Texcoco region. Since the Texcoco project had been on the political agenda for more than 20 years, there have been public and private infrastructure and real estate investments in anticipation of the new airport that are never accounted for or discussed in the studies. There are also powerful economic actors who promised to fund the airport if it is located in Texcoco. Rumors are that real estate developers have been
buying up land around the site for years.\textsuperscript{41} Carlos Hank Gonzalez’s (son of the late Carlos Rhon, former mayor of the Federal District, former Governor of the State of Mexico, and former head of Gruma and Banorte) company, Grupo Financiero Interacciones, has recently been given the task by SCT of privatizing 34 airports throughout Mexico. Grupo Financiero Interacciones also agreed to finance the new airport if it is sited at Texcoco. These players are not mentioned in the technical evaluations, but, like many other outside factors, they certainly play a role in the decision.\textsuperscript{42}

Table 2: Trends in the Federal District, State of Mexico, and State of Hidalgo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Country of Mexico</th>
<th>Federal District</th>
<th>State of Mexico</th>
<th>State of Hidalgo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98 million\textsuperscript{43}</td>
<td>8.2 million\textsuperscript{44}</td>
<td>9.8 million\textsuperscript{45}</td>
<td>2.2 million\textsuperscript{46}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Party of Leadership</td>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>PRI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The debate over where to locate the new airport is very much about politics. The national and local political players are from different political parties. Notice that the State of Hidalgo has a much smaller population than the other jurisdictions in the region.

\textsuperscript{41} This is the rumor that I was told when I was in San Salvador Atenco. They are convinced that there are real estate speculators who are behind the Texcoco selection.


The Impact of a New Airport on the Regions:

The studies do not thoroughly evaluate what the placement of the new airport will do for the economies of the different parts of the region. Despite its proximity to the Federal District, the State of Hidalgo has not had the same kind of economic development that the State of Mexico has. The Governor of the State of Hidalgo argues that Tizayuca should be selected because the investment in the airport would help promote the region’s economy through direct investment in the region and in infrastructure that would create better transportation links with the center.

However, the Governor of the State of Hidalgo is not alone in his desire to have the new airport. The Governor of the State of Mexico, Arturo Montiel, has a vested interest in securing the guaranteed investment that will come with the construction of the new international airport in Texcoco. The investment of private and federal dollars in the State of Mexico combined with the guaranteed real estate development potential of the region and the accompanying tax revenue increases make the deal very attractive for Montiel, as well as those involved in the construction, housing, and real estate industries.

The State of Mexico, just over the Federal District’s border, has been focus of most of the new development in the region in the past 20 years. However, not all politicians in the State of Mexico agree with Montiel that more growth is a good thing. Local government officials question whether more urban development should be encouraged in the region. The Government of Texcoco warns about the necessary infrastructure costs associated with rapid population growth around the proposed Texcoco airport site.
On a regional level, there is concern that the Texcoco site will spur urban development at the edge of an encroaching megacity—in the one area in the whole region that had managed to maintain its semi-rural character. In addition, the Federal District warns that the closure of the Benito Juarez airport will cause significant dislocations and unemployment, but these costs have not been assessed or weighed against the benefits of Texcoco. The experts hired by the Federal Government argue that it makes more sense to concentrate growth near Texcoco in the midst of the Mexico City megapolis than to disperse it by creating a new economic pole for urban development in Tizayuca. Other urban experts praise the decision to close down the Benito Juarez airport and potentially turn it into a park because it will reduce the noise pollution in the city and “no other city in the world has this kind of urban development opportunity.”\footnote{Antonio Azuela de la Cueva, Investigador del Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, UNAM, Ex-Procurador Federal de Protección Ambiental, retrieved May 10, 2002 from the World Wide Web: \url{http://www.asa.gob.mx/nuevo/index.html}}
Table 3: Analysis of Options

**OPTION 1: Build at Texcoco, in the State of Mexico**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Who Supports?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Located near downtown (26km).</td>
<td>▪ Located in an already urbanized area</td>
<td>▪ Expert evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Most modern airport option with the most simultaneous runways. Most capacity and potential to meet future demand.</td>
<td>▪ Located in a vulnerable area—a former lakebed that is above Mexico City’s aquifers</td>
<td>▪ President Fox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Help promote international business</td>
<td>▪ For the past 30 years there has been a project: Project Texcoco that has been designed to restore the ecology of the region. If the airport is built there, what will happen to these plans?</td>
<td>▪ Governor of the State of Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Create an integrated airport with national and international flights.</td>
<td>▪ Also, the Texcoco lakebed is an important flood control area that prevents Mexico City from flooding.</td>
<td>▪ Business interests: construction, real estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Reduce the duplication costs of having to keep more than one airport open</td>
<td>▪ The Federal District will lose its airport. This will mean loss of jobs. In addition, massive investment will be needed to turn the area of the existing airport into a park and to make sure that it does not become another informal settlement</td>
<td>▪ International airlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Available financing from national and international companies</td>
<td>▪ The airport in Texcoco will also become a part of an ecological project. It will be surrounded by a lake</td>
<td>▪ Architects from the UNAM who want to build the Texcoco Lake Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Much of infrastructure has already been built nearby</td>
<td>▪ The Benito Juarez airport will be closed and noise pollution close to downtown will be minimized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The Benito Juarez airport can be turned into an ecological park in the city</td>
<td>▪ The airport in Texcoco will also become a part of an ecological project. It will be surrounded by a lake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The airport in Texcoco will also become a part of an ecological project. It will be surrounded by a lake</td>
<td>▪ The financing for the new airport can be used to create the Texcoco Lake Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The financing for the new airport can be used to create the Texcoco Lake Project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### OPTION 2: Build at Tizayuca, in the State of Hidalgo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Who Supports?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ▪ Texcoco area would not be built on and could be preserved as an ecological area | ▪ More expensive  
▪ Far away. Tizayuca is around 73 kms away from the center  
▪ More costs for infrastructure to get there  
▪ Might create another pole of urban development that would further expand the city  
▪ Does not solve any of the noise pollution concerns of the existing AICM airport  
▪ Not an integrated airport so it would not be a regional hub  
▪ Santa Lucia airforce base would have to be relocated | ▪ Governor of the State of Hidalgo  
▪ Mayor of Mexico City |
| ▪ Airport could be used as an economic development strategy to promote investment in the State of Hidalgo |                                                                 |                                   |
| ▪ Federal District would keep its airport and the associated economic development |                                                                 |                                   |

### OPTION 3: No new airport, but try to better integrate the existing airports in the region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Who Supports?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ▪ Idea of regional integration  
▪ Save money | ▪ Constrain economic development because there would not be a new airport to attract investment  
▪ The Mexico City airport will still be inadequate  
▪ The Mexico City airport will also still be located in the Federal District so there will still be air pollution and noise pollution | Never discussed as an option |

### OPTION 4: Build another runway at Benito Juarez in the Federal District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Who Supports?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ▪ Meet the short-term needs of aviation in the Capital Region | ▪ Could not happen immediately  
▪ Cost too much to expropriate land that was already built on  
▪ Would mean massive dislocations  
▪ Would not help any of the noise pollution concerns  
▪ Risks associated with having an airport in the middle of an urbanized area  
▪ Would have reroute the main ring road  
▪ Would not be any room for expansion | Dismissed as an option |
|                                                                 |                                                                 |                                   |
According to Airports and Auxiliary Services (ASA), the “determination to locate the new airport in Texcoco was made in an objective manner, with strict reliance on rigorous technical criteria, that examined the demands and necessities of satisfied users in the future (looking 50 years out), that would be viable for the airlines, economically feasible and have a positive impact on the urban development of the zone and the least environmental impact.” However, the “rigorous technical criteria” that experts were asked to follow greatly privileges certain outcomes. Since certain criteria, such as how large an international airport needs to be, are set by the international marketplace, their “absoluteness” removes the criteria from national, regional, or local scrutiny. According to international norms, an airport should ideally have three simultaneous runways. As a result the 2001 airport feasibility studies indicated that Tizayuca and Texcoco are the only sites up for consideration because they are the only sites that are at least 4,000 hectares of primarily flat land where an airport of this size can be built. However, the environmental sustainability of mega-airports is being challenged as new airports are many times bigger than the older airports and can cover more land area than some cities (and even some countries).

Chicago's O'Hare Airport sits on the site of former apple orchards. The St. Louis airport was once soybean fields. DIA is where winter wheat was once grown. China's Macau International spans two ecologically sensitive wetlands. You'd think that as the human population expands, and development consumes more and more of the world's remaining open land, airport planners would design with increasing efficiency. Instead, as old airports add new

---

49 From an engineering perspective, the distance of the Tizayuca airport to downtown was viewed by the engineers as a concern. From the Southern parts of Mexico City, the distance to the airport could be up to almost 2 hours. They were also concerned that if Tizayuca was opened and Benito Juarez, the existing airport, was kept open, that the cost of running two airports would be higher, and air travel would have to be divided between the two airports. This lack of integration was considered not to be optimal from the perspective of international aeronaviation.
runways, planners continue to use the same basic principles they've always used, and new airports tend to be more sprawling than the old. Denver's new DIA is 50 times the size of New York's old La Guardia, though they carry comparable traffic. The new Kuala Lumpur International, when finished, will be 30 times the area of the old Osaka Itami. Germany's new Munich Franz Josef Straus is 5 times the area of Norway's old Oslo Gardermoen.\(^5\)

**Figure 6: Comparison of Airport Size with City Size**

![Figure 6: Comparison of Airport Size with City Size](http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/mexenv.html)


Figure 6 shows the land area that new airports use in comparison with that of cities (and some countries).

The more that technical experts operate from strict, international guidelines about what is necessary to be globally competitive, the less room there is for political debate over whether or not such development is desirable in the first place. This becomes problematic for democratic institutions that need to balance the pros and cons of economic growth with other objectives.

A Mental Model of Being Globally Competitive: A Latin American Air Hub

If we look at the studies done by the experts, they reflect the accepted “mental model” of what an international airport should look like. The airport should be a regional hub, with integrated flights, that is close to downtown. This is because the currently trend in international aviation is to fly a “hub and spoke” pattern rather than flying direct. By flying passengers to a central hub, the airlines ensure that they can gather enough passengers with the same destination. This means that not every city has to have direct service to every other city. To compete, airlines like to create “fortress hubs” where passengers are flown in and rerouted to their destination on the same airline. Given this framework, there is a need for an airport where international and domestic connections can be made. As a result of this criterion, there is little doubt that the Texcoco site would be chosen. The Tizayuca site (73kms from downtown) was disqualified early on because it was too far away from downtown and it would have to operate in conjunction with the existing airport.

51 Based on an interview with a U.S. airline pilot, May 2002.
The desire to create an airport that can be a regional hub fits in with the changing trends in air transportation—reducing the number of flights through consolidation of passengers at regional hubs. President Fox sees the Mexico City airport competing with Miami to be the “gateway to Latin America.” This calculation may make sense from an economic point of view, but what do these international standards for airports and other infrastructure mean when they override national, regional, and local development goals? Some might argue that national goals are always more important than regional goals so they should win out. Others might propose that if the national decision helps the national economy, the region will eventually benefit from national growth. The value of land in the region will go up. Employment opportunities will be created and the net effect will be that everyone is better off. While these arguments may be true, what is troubling is that questions were never asked about the cost and benefits that come with development. In the case of the decision to construct and to site the new airport in Texcoco, the failure to ask these types of questions makes it difficult to evaluate the hidden costs. Perhaps the cost of throwing away the years of investments that have been made in the existing airport and the environmental restoration project in Texcoco, the social cost of expropriating ejidal lands and promoting urban growth in a megacity—potentially polluting Mexico City’s aquifers, or taking away an important source of revenue and employment in the Federal District are important enough that they should at least be considered.
Conclusions:

Since expert evaluations depend on who is asking the questions and how the questions are framed, it is often difficult to determine what the "correct" answer is. The way the debate is framed in the decision to choose Texcoco over Tizayuca plays a large role in determining the outcome. In the 2001 technical feasibility studies, the interests of international aviation outweigh concern for urban growth. The experts consistently disqualify the Tizayuca decision because if the airport is placed in Tizayuca and the Benito Juarez airport is kept open, the new airport will not be able to be a regional hub that offers integrated national and international flights. It will also cost airlines more money to operate two terminals in the same region.

The technical studies are also silent about the political and economic interests that have real estate investments near Texcoco. There is no mention of the fact that the Texcoco site has been under consideration for almost thirty years and as result, there have been public and private infrastructure investments near the site that make it more attractive. These investments are never discussed or calculated in comparison to infrastructure costs in Tizayuca.

Reading through the assessments and evaluations, the Tizayuca site appears to never have really been considered as a real option. If this is the case, then was it a real decision-making process or "business as usual" with the same small group of economic and political actors calling the plays? Were the technical studies simply used to justify a
decision that had been made years before? Was the Tizayuca site simply a straw dog?

Given the choice of Tizayuca and Texcoco and the set of criteria they were asked to evaluate, it is no wonder that the experts overwhelmingly chose Texcoco. However, this raises considerable doubt about the validity of the technical studies that were completed and the use of technical studies as a veil for closed door, elite, decision-making processes.
Chapter III: Beyond Objectivity: The Challenges to Texcoco

Immediately after the October 22, 2001 announcement of site of the new airport, there were several challenges from affected parties. The irony is that these parties are all local and regional actors who had a stake in the decision, yet had not been formally consulted. For each party, the decision to site the airport in Texcoco has a different consequence: the campesinos from San Salvador Atenco will have their land expropriated, the government of the State of Hidalgo will lose the opportunity to promote economic development through private and federal funds, and the Federal District will have its existing airport closed. Despite the different effects of the decision, all the excluded parties have similar things to say about the process. From a legal perspective, they are concerned about the lack of participation at all stages. From a technical perspective, they question the objectivity and depth of the studies used to justify the government’s decision.

Despite attempts by the campesinos, the Federal District, and the State of Hidalgo to participate in the federal evaluations, their interests have been consistently ignored. The left out parties feel that the studies did not ask all the necessary questions because the decision was already made by powerful economic players who support Texcoco. Some of the information from the studies was ignored, suppressed, or undervalued. They hope to bring this information to the forefront of political debate to reframe the issues and expose what the true consequences of siting the new airport in Texcoco will be. Finally, they renounce the decision based on its violation of a series of existing laws relating to urban and environmental planning, ejidal land rights, and political participation.
Figure 7: Map of the State of Mexico showing San Salvador Atenco

Source: [wwwedomexico.gob.mx](http://wwwedomexico.gob.mx).../PAGMUN/1100.jpg

Figure 7 shows that Texcoco is located in the State of Mexico at the edge of the Federal District, (marked D.F.).
San Salvador Atenco: Attempts to be included before the announcement

The area of Texcoco, with a population of about 35,000 people, is what remains of Lake Texcoco, the lake that was drained to create Mexico City. It is a flat area northeast of the city, much of which has remarkably remained farmland despite the encroaching urban development coming from all sides. The land was granted to the peasant farmers, or campesinos, as ejidal lands in 1928, after the Mexican Revolution. Since then, the campesinos have maintained control over the land. The community of San Salvador Atenco, one of the municipalities in Texcoco, has grown slowly in terms of population and physical size. Campesinos sell their farmland to make room for additional houses, mostly for the children of the community. The process has been relatively slow compared to the rapid urbanization of other areas in the Mexico City region.

When the official announcement was made on October 22, 2001, the experts hired by the Federal Government made presentations at the SCT offices about the feasibility of both sites. The SCT created a DVD with the expert evaluations that was shown and distributed at the meeting. Each expert was given a few minutes to show why Texcoco was the best option. However, the residents of San Salvador Atenco are frustrated that none of the experts ever asked them their opinion about what should be done. The community feels that they have in-depth knowledge about the site, particularly about the former lakebed’s flooding patterns. Depending on what month you visit the site, they say, you will find it dry as a bone or a virtual lake filled with migratory birds.

Since many of them have been farming the area for generations they know how high the water levels are during the rainy season. They also know what areas have which kind of birds and fauna. They also know something that none of the experts discussed--where the prehispanic archeological sites are in the former lakebed. But no one asked.

Figure 8: The Federal District

Source: mexicochannel.net/ maps/df_sct.jpg
The Federal District Government:

Despite the Federal District’s interest in keeping the Benito Juarez airport open, its concerns were not represented in the expert evaluations. According to ASA, the agency that oversees the existing Benito Juarez airport, 1300 taxis service the airport, 2,200 people work in the airport, and there are around 20,000 employees who work in hotels, customs agencies, restaurants, washing cars, parking, cargo transportation companies, etc. that are located around the airport. The value of the airport comes to about 2,000 million pesos and with the value of the surrounding industry, the Federal District expects to lose about 4,000 million pesos when the Benito Juarez airport is closed. The Federal District is concerned that the type of informal settlement that happened in Ciudad Neza (Netzahualcóyotl), Chalco, and Chimalhuacan might happen on the former airport site. This unregulated and informal population growth comes with a range of problems such as poor health, environmental degradation, social deviance, and pollution.

A classic example of the city’s unchecked expansion is the sprawling neighboring community of Netzahualcóyotl, in the state of Mexico. Economically and socially an integral part of Mexico City, the settlement was a sparsely populated lakebed in 1960. Its population grew to a little more than 500,000 people in 1970 and then more than doubled to 1,233,868 in 1995, making it one of the largest cities in the country. It had to deal with problems characteristic of much of the greater metropolitan area. In the late 1990s only 10 percent of the streets in Netzahualcóyotl were paved, and few public services were available. The people faced


54 “El Gobierno Del Distrito Federal Ante La Decision Del Gobierno Federal De Construir El Nuevo AICM En Texcoco, Estado De Mexico.” Comments by Jose Agustin Ortiz Pinchetti, Secretary of the Government in the Distrito Federal, at a January 29, 2002 Forum: “Por Que No Al Aeropuerto en Texcoco,” held at the Museum of the City, p. 3. Pinchetti sites the presence of latrines and domestic animals as a part of the environmental problem of informal settlements. He also warns about other types of problems such as the increased use of drugs, the negative impact on nuclear families, and the increase in delinquency.
poverty, massive unemployment, malnutrition, and soaring infant mortality rates.\textsuperscript{55}

The Federal District and the Federal Government will also have to invest in commercially and financially revitalizing the Benito Juarez airport area once it is closed. While certain development interests might benefit from this new real estate opportunity, the Federal District is concerned about the costs associated with this new development. Money will have to be invested in this area to provide services (drainage, electricity, telephone lines, pavement, new roads, public and private transportation). New employment opportunities will also need to be created in the area and the necessary urban amenities.\textsuperscript{56} The Federal Government has been silent on these issues--only saying that the existing airport will be turned into an ecological park.

In addition, the Federal District is concerned that the construction of the new airport in Texcoco will mean the end of an ecological project proposed by Nabor Carillo, an engineer at the UNAM, who advocated the construction of a system of lakes that could serve as a catchment area to protect the City of Mexico from future floods. The Federal District and the Federal Government has invested millions of dollars in this ecological restoration project, Hydrological Plan for the Texcoco Lake, and it now feels that the construction of the new airport in Texcoco will be the end of it.\textsuperscript{57} The Federal District argues that the preservation of the Texcoco site was not factored into the decision. If it had been, it might have justified the additional costs of developing the Tizayuca site.

\textsuperscript{55}Retrieved May 12, 2002 from the World Wide Web: http://www.greatestcities.com/North_America/Mexico/Mexico_City_Distrito_Federal_state_capital/metropolitan_area.html.

\textsuperscript{56}“El Gobierno Del Distrito Federal Ante La Decision Del Gobierno Federal De Construir El Nuevo AICM En Texcoco, Estado De Mexico.” Comments by Jose Agustin Ortiz Pinchetti.
But perhaps what most frustrated the Federal District was the feeling that the decision to site the new airport in Texcoco was made without any acknowledgement of the negative externalities that will be associated with the project. Even before the airport decision, President Fox’s lack of interest in the Federal District and political competition with the Andre Manuel Lopez Obredor, Mayor of the Federal District, raised suspicion about the President’s true motives. At a January 29, 2002 forum on “Why No Airport in Texcoco?” Jose Agustin Pinchetti, Secretary of the Federal District government said, “[w]e are convinced that in order to advance neoliberalism, the public interest is subjugated to the private interest. We are against the fact that a few private interests will greatly benefit economically from the decision to build the airport in Texcoco at the expense of the people who live in this metropolitan region. The project threatens the sustainability of the valley and its future viability.” 58 “They cannot sacrifice the future of 20 million people in exchange for the benefit of a few companies and politicians involved in the process of selecting the new airport. It is an extreme case of individualism, egotism, and political myopia.” 59 The Federal District representatives criticized the Federal Government for not responding to their requests to discuss the decision-making process. Instead, the Federal Government had made the “decision without consulting with the principal affected parties.” 60 The Federal District launched a campaign to “defend” the City of Mexico against the Texcoco decision through legal and political actions. The city took the case to the Mexican Supreme Court arguing that the decision

57 Ibid, p. 2.
58 Translation my own. From “El Gobierno Del Distrito Federal Ante La Decision Del Gobierno Federal De Construir El Nuevo AICM En Texcoco, Estado De Mexico.” Comments by Jose Agustin Ortiz Pinchetti, p.4
59 Translation my own. Ibid.
60 Translation my own. Ibid, p.5.
violated the Federal Planning Law, the human rights of the citizens of the City of Mexico, and Federal and local environmental laws.\footnote{Translation my own. Ibid, p.4.}

The Federal District is a two-time loser in the decision to place the airport in Texcoco. Not only is its existing airport being closed and development is being taken away from its jurisdiction, but also, the opportunity is lost to link federal money and private investment to improving the quality of urban life in the neighborhoods surrounding the airport. Jose Agustin Ortiz Pinchetti said that the two options that were presented to the public in 2001, to place the airport in Texcoco or in Tizayuca, were not the only options or the most beneficial to the City of Mexico and for the Metropolitan Zone of the Valley of Mexico.\footnote{Ibid, p. 6.} The question is why the other, more beneficial options that Pinchetti alludes to were not invented or discussed. Had they been, there might have been a chance for real debate about regional growth and coordination.
Figure 9: The Network of Urban Areas in The State of Hidalgo


Figure 9 shows the network of urban areas in Hidalgo. If the airport was placed in Tizayuca there would be opportunity to develop the Southern part of the state.
The State of Hidalgo:

The Governor from the State of Hidalgo wants to locate the new airport in Tizayuca because the area it is just far enough away from the core of Mexico City to have difficulty attracting economic investment. The opportunity to use the Mexico City airport project as a means of building physical and economic links with Mexico City would be beneficial for the State of Hidalgo. The Governor has also worked with the local community to discuss how to distribute the benefits of this development.

On October 22, 2001, when the decision came out that the new airport would be in Texcoco, the Governor of Hidalgo, said that he believes that “what we are living through is simply the formalization of a decision that was made a long time ago that they told us had not been made, but the facts show us that it was.” He made it clear that the State of Hidalgo had not participated in the decision. The Governor from the State of Hidalgo had only met once with the Secretary of Communications and Transport and the administrator of ASA. He felt that the way that they had treated him and the subsequent dismissal of the Tizayuca site was evidence that the decision had already been made beforehand.

---

64 Ibid.
The Environmentalists:

The environmentalist NGOs and activists, who were not included in the assessment, also complained that the true costs of the project—environmental degradation, the loss of the Texcoco lakebed and its birds, water and aquifer contamination, and the potential flooding of Mexico City—were not adequately measured. The head of Mexico’s Secretary of Ecology\footnote{Secretaria de Ecologia de Mexico} (SEMANART) had said that the two sites in Neza II and III (the area right next to AICM that is in the State of Mexico) that were thought about for the runway expansion of the existing airport were not considered because of birds and because the landfills in the area that attract birds.\footnote{"Dice Montiel que exigira a la SRA mejores indemnizaciones por terrenos expropiados." \textit{La Jornada}. October 25, 2001, p. 24} However, another study done by the UNAM in 1995 said that placing an airport in the Texcoco site would have a negative impact on the environment. Over the past 20 years there had been efforts to rehabilitate the ecology of the region. In addition, the Texcoco area is a necessary catchment area that helps prevent the flooding of Mexico City during the rainy season.\footnote{Angelica Enciso. "Estudio de la UNAM: Habra tolvaneras e inundaciones por nuevo aeropuerto." \textit{La Jornada}. October 25, 2001, p. 24} There was also concern about the water needs of Mexico City which suffers from a lack of water, despite the fact that 3.5 times the level of rain necessary for consumption falls in the Valley of Mexico. The problem is that water recycling and water catchment is practically non-existent because of the fear of floods.\footnote{Ibid.} The Texcoco lakebed is currently used as a catchment site for water in Mexico City and plays an important role in preventing flooding and water retention.
The Mayor of Texcoco:

The Mayor of Texcoco, Horacio Duarte, asked the Secretary of Gobernacion, Santiago Creel, to help arrange a meeting with Fox and “criticized the government for not having a representative from the Federal Government talk with the campesinos or with the municipal authorities over this topic.” Duarte also claimed that there “were many violations of various types, certain illegal and unconstitutional actions that took away power from the local authorities.” On November 6, 2001, the government of Texcoco sent a letter to President Fox challenging the way that the decision to site the new airport had been made. It was true that the decision was made in consultation with experts, the letter argued, but there were studies like those done by the University Program on the Environment (PUMA) that found that population growth in the area would go from 1.8 % to 7 % a year—at minimum if the new airport was sited in Texcoco. The concentration of people in this region, it was argued would affect the ecosystem of the valley. Duarte criticized the Federal Government: “[t]here is a lack of political sensitivity that they did not establish a process by which they consult with different sectors of citizens and with municipal government.” The letter asked that the decision to put the airport in their space—is not made by a small group of people. The Mayor of Texcoco questioned the federal decision to put the airport in Texcoco, questioned the attitude of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{69}}\text{Ciudad Perdida-by Miguel Angel Velazquez;} \text{"Entrevista con un pato canadiense: Firme desmentido de la especie.” October 29, 2001. p. 47...}\\ \text{\textsuperscript{70}}\text{“Censura el alcade de Texcoco indiferencia gubernamental ante protestas de ejidatarios.” La Jornada. November 8, 2001, Politica, p. 17.}\\ \text{\textsuperscript{71}}\text{Programa Universitario del Medio Ambiente}\\ \text{\textsuperscript{72}}\text{“Rechaza la alianza de pueblos del Anahuac la expropiacion de ejidos para el nuevo aeropuerto.” La Jornada. November 6, 2001. Politica, p. 20.}
the Federal Government and accused them of never telling the truth. He said that it was not a technical decision because the decision had been in the political arena.\(^\text{73}\)

\textbf{Regional Actors:}

In the Mexico City region there have been numerous efforts to coordinate on a regional level. Some examples of current and previous regional efforts include: Program to Improve the Air Quality in the Metropolitan Zone in the Valley of Mexico,\(^\text{74}\) Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Metropolitan Commission on Human Settlements,\(^\text{75}\) and the Commission of Conurbanization of the Center of the Country.\(^\text{76}\) While several of the experts commissioned by ASA and SCT discussed the implications for the region, it is interesting to note that despite ongoing efforts to create regional commissions and authorities in the Mexico City region, none of them had the standing to make comments for or against the airport.\(^\text{77}\)

\(^{73}\) "Censura el alcalde de Texcoco indiferencia gubernamental ante protestas de ejidatarios." \textit{La Jornada}. November 8, 2001, Politica, p. 17.

\(^{74}\) Programa para Mejorar la Calidad del Aire en la Zona Metropolitana del Valle de Mexico 1995-2000

\(^{75}\) Comisión Metropolitana de Asentamientos Humanos

\(^{76}\) Comisión de Conurbacion del Centro del Pais

\(^{77}\) For a history of metropolitan coordination efforts in the Mexico City region, see Alicia Ziccardi and Bernardo Navarro, eds., \textit{Ciudad de México: Retos y Propuestas Para La Coordinación Metropolitana}, (Mexico: Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, 1995).
Conclusion:

The reaction of the parties left out of the decision range from community informational meetings, to formal letters to the President and the Secretary of Communications and Transport, to political marches to the capitol, to outreach, to international social movements, to the filing of lawsuits protesting the unconstitutionality of the expropriation and the decision to site the new airport. The next chapter will discuss the strategies used for regional and community countermobilization.
Chapter IV: Strategies to Counteract the Decision:

"Papa, to distract me from the hunger, can you tell me again about the benefits to the macroeconomy of the country?"

Despite the SCT’s numerous technical studies and the Fox Administration’s promises of a more transparent Federal Government, the case of the decision to site the new airport has become a standoff between the local and regional interests and the national decision-makers.

The experts and planners who performed the studies did not need to “shout, to assemble a crowd of demonstrators, to sit down in front of the bulldozers to get the attention of
society. The radical opposition, however, needs to do just that.\textsuperscript{78} The opposition to the airport uses forces outside of the political system to demand a more inclusive system of political participation. Their countermobilization against the decision to site the new airport in Texcoco relies on the national and international media, symbols of international indigenous rights movements, coalitions with other human rights and environmental groups, and a series of legal inquiries into the decision-making process. This chapter will explore the strategies that allow those excluded from the decision-making process to find a voice using the framework provided by the globalization of political movements and the promise of democracy.

In places as diverse as Japan and Germany, there have been ongoing social movements against the siting and expansion of airports. These movements are often complicated and symbolic. Lisa Peattie, an urban planner who taught for years at MIT, says, “I have come to believe that the use of human bodies to cross official lines, to sit down in roadways, block police and the like is not simply a tactic for citizens opposing the state with its monopoly on the legal use of force; it also is a way of dramatizing the primacy of human lives against the domain of official rules and government and commercial interests.”\textsuperscript{79} I quote Peattie here because it is sometimes difficult to understand how and why controversies such as this one take on symbolic meaning. After all, it is just an airport. No ones’ lives are at stake. However, these controversies are important because they


\textsuperscript{79} Peattie, p. 17.
raise questions about how we as a society make value judgements about what should be sacrificed in the name of progress and what should be preserved.

The campesinos I interviewed in San Salvador Atenco talked about their relationship to the land given to them by their grandparents. They also have recently become well versed in the intricacies of land use law. According to them, land use changes must be made through community consultation. The Presidential decree expropriating their land for the construction of the airport violated this principle. Ever since April 2001, when it became public that feasibility studies were being carried out for the two airport sites in Tizayuca and Texcoco, the residents of San Salvador Atenco have had a crash course in community countermobilization. Rumors that Texcoco might be chosen began to spread throughout San Salvador Atenco, but most people in the municipality thought that the airport would be located on the federally owned land nearby. Of course, that would mean that the airport would be nearby, but it did not necessarily mean that it would be on their land.

However, some people in the community started to realize the implications for them of building a six-runway airport in the Texcoco lakebed. They started to draw their own maps (see Figure 10) and it became clear that the siting of the airport in Texcoco would mean the expropriation of their ejidal land as well in addition to the use of the Federal lands. Community members began to mobilize; in the summer of 2001, they sent letters to President Fox and the Secretary of Communications and Transport to ask for more information. The letter to Pedro Cerisola y Weber, the Secretary of Communications and
Transport, reads: “Those of us who live in the ejidos that are going to be affected, who for the most part live in the municipality of ATENCO and not in Texcoco (as the national and international public opinion believes), are well-informed that information has been given to other avenues of communication, while the majority of the people do not have it or know it. In addition, we have seen that in the few notes that have fallen into our hands that there are discrepancies between the publicity and the reality.” The letter was signed by the Citizens of San Salvador Atenco petitioning for the following:

1. “As citizens who would be directly affected, we want the Federal Government to follow through on its promise to inform us about the technical details of the project. This would fit in with the government’s effort to coordinate better with its citizens, which up to this moment has not been done by the municipal or state government. By communicating with us, we can avoid the suspicions about political and economic compromises.”

2. “That the citizens form a part of a Commission of Studies and Control of Work so that the activities of siting the airport are kept open and transparent to benefit the inhabitants of the municipality of Atenco.”

3. “That one of the fundamentals in Article 6 of the Constitution is that the State must guarantee the right to information and any other treatment is a violation of our human rights.”

---

82 Translation my own. Ibid.
83 Translation my own. Ibid.
84 Translation my own. Ibid.
Figure 10: This flyer was hung in San Salvador Atenco before the decision was announced encouraging residents to come find out more about the new airport. It warns about the size of the new airport and the need for new access roads that will cut through the town. It warns residents not to believe TV and Radio reports that the airport will be sited in Tizayuca. Residents are told that when they hear the alarm signal, they are needed to come and defend their land.

*CROQUIS AEROPUERTO*

ACTUÉMOS, NO DIVÁGUEMOS!

Atención, entérate y hazlo extensivo. Esto es lo que MONTIEL y sus secuaces están proyectando, falta contemplan vias de acceso que podrían pasar sobre ATENCO.

En el radio y T.V. se está manejando que el aeropuerto será en TIZAYUCA, hagamos caso, oimos ya que el gobierno trata de distraernos, no bajemos bandera y sigamos en nuestra postura "NO AL AEROPUERTO EN ATENCO" hasta que lo de Tizayuca sea un decreto.

Te invitamos a que te integres a las brigadas que están custodiando los estudios de ATENCO, para que no continúen los estudios de suelo, ya que estas personas no cuentan con ningún permiso, (centro de concentración cerca "HUATPEC")

"O esta alerta de la señal alarma RASA (UN CENTRO) que indica que se requiere tu participación para defender lo que es nuestro.

IDESPERTÉMOS COMPANEROS! ¡YA DESPUÉS SERÁ TARDE!

¡DE NADA SERÍAN LOS ACREPITAMIENTOS!
The letters to President Fox and the Secretary of Communications and Transport were the first part of a campaign to mobilize for inclusion in the discussion. On June 27, 2001, residents from San Salvador Atenco and some of the neighboring municipalities led a peaceful march to the office of the Secretary of Communications and Transport demanding more information. However, their calls were ignored.

After the October 22, 2001 announcement, the community of San Salvador Atenco gathered information from their own experts that they could use to counter the government assertion that Texcoco was the best place for the new airport. By November 2001, the conflict had started to enter the legal system. A legal case was brought against the Federal Government by some of the campesinos to complain about the price that was being offered. There was question about how their land was valued. Other campesinos were more radical in their stance that the government did not have the Constitutional right to take their lands.

Ignacio Burgoa Orihuela, a constitutional lawyer working on the case on a pro bono basis, is defending the campesinos of San Salvador Atenco against the Presidential expropriation of their land by arguing that thus far there had been no proof that there was a need for a new airport. When the government takes the land from the ejidos, it has to make public the studies that demonstrate that ejidal land has to be taken for this cause. According to Burgoa, this is one of the obligations of an ejidal expropriation, according to Articles 27 and 16 of the Constitution: “No authority can disturb or take anyone’s
property and rights without cause justified by tests, and studies.” He argues that President Fox and the Secretary of SCT have a responsibility to first demonstrate that there is an urgent need for a new airport and that it is a “public utility.” Secondly, the government should have presented all its findings in a district court and to the community. Since the government failed to do this before the October 2001 expropriation, Burgoa believes that it nullifies the expropriation claim. In addition, since the expropriation constituted 90 percent of the land in San Salvador Atenco, it will take away the livelihood of the people who live there and is akin to genocide. Burgoa claims that the price of 119.4 million pesos for 54 hectares in San Salvador Atenco does not represent commercial value required by Law of Expropriation. The inequity of the decision is a focal point of discussion. The President of the Ejidal Association of Santa Maria Chimalhuacan, Juvencio Perez Peralta, says that President Fox has spent more on his sheets and towels than the miserable price that he is offering per square meter of the parcels.

88 Notice in La Jornada. Letter to President Fox from Ayuntamiento Texcoco, November 6, 2001, Estado de Mexico, p. 40.
I raise the legal approaches in this chapter to demonstrate some of the various legal strategies that are being used. However, my aim is not to analyze the basis of these claims. The fact that the legal system is seen as a way to counter elite government decision-making is what interests me. At the time of this writing no final decision had been made by the Supreme Court, but the court cases are an important part of the community defense strategy. Some of the complications of the legal approach are that more than 1000 people either do not have the necessary paperwork (birth certificates, voting records, and titles to the property) to join the lawsuit because they have been living on the land informally, or they do not see a need to join the legal action. However, so far Burgoa has managed to win injunctions on the basis of his arguments and prevent the construction of the airport project until the legal issues are resolved.
The regional actors who were left out have their day in court:

On December 4, 2001, the municipalities of Texcoco and Acolman, Government of Texcoco, and the Government of the Federal District went before the Supreme Court to state their opposition to the new airport. The Federal District said that that the decision was an “irresponsibility” because it means that the city of Mexico will grow. The Federal District asked for the suspension of the construction of the project on the grounds that it violated the Articles of the Constitution—4, 16, 27, 15 and 115 and the Laws of Expropriation, Planning, Human Settlements, the General Law of Ecological Equilibrium, and Protection of the Environment. The Federal District claimed that the plan to place the airport in Texcoco distorts the goals of growth and development that are contained in the urban plans and programs in the capital. It said that the opposition to the new airport is not a rupture with Federal Government, but instead is an attempt to search for other less costly ways to meet the demand for a new airport. Ortiz Pinchetti, Secretary of the Government of the Federal District, said that it is risky to generate a pole of development in an area that is already saturated. To locate an airport “in a place that has huge population problems is simply an irresponsibility.” The siting of the airport in Texcoco negates the progress that had been made by the Hydrological Plan Texcoco to improve the ecological conditions of the area. The Federal District said that practically all the settlements located in the Valley of Mexico will be affected. A representative from Netzahualcoyotl (the area bordering the Federal District in the State of Mexico) said

---

89 Expropiacion, Planeacion, Asentamientos Humanos, General de Equilibrio Ecologico y Proteccion al Medio Ambiente
that they will be indirectly affected by the environmental degradation, and urban
development, and population growth that will come with the new airport.\textsuperscript{90}

From a legal perspective, the regional parties argued that the decision to site the airport in
Texcoco violates Article 27 of the Constitution because there is no evidence that this is a
public utility and that social benefits outweigh social costs. They also argued that “public
utility” requirement should be understood as the collective benefit of the project that
accrues to the community and not to individual hands. Another argument against the
expropriation is Article 115 of the Constitution, which protects the rights of
municipalities “to assign the use of their own soil.” The Presidential expropriation decree
means that the municipalities lost their right to decide if they want their land to be
farmland or urban. The expropriation also violates the Law of Ecological Equilibrium
because the new airport will have adverse environmental effects. \textsuperscript{91}

\textbf{Environmental Groups and Legal Inquiry:}

Other interest groups are also using the legal system as a check. One of the ironies of the
interrelationship between globalization and democracy is that the global treaties that
promote free trade and economic liberalism also open the door to international scrutiny of
political processes. Ecological groups threaten to use legal instruments from NAFTA if
the impacts of the airport project are not thoroughly explored. According to Article 14 of
the environmental agreement in NAFTA, a citizen can file a complaint if any government
agency is not enforcing or following legislation. Ecological groups argue that the Federal

\textsuperscript{90} Jesus Aranda y Ricardo Olayo. “Presentan controversarias municipios de Texcoco, Acolman y Gobierno

\textsuperscript{91}
Government has not upheld Article 28 of the Law of the General Ecological Equilibrium, in which the government needs to submit an assessment of the environmental impacts of the projects for community evaluation. NAFTA, therefore, acts as an additional check on the Federal Government to ensure that it is operating within the legal framework. In this sense, there is a new lever in the “business as usual” game of elitist decision-making that national politicians have tended to play. The irony is that the tension between environmental sustainability and international economic development is, therefore both exacerbated and relieved by the presence of international treaties such as NAFTA.  

The connection to other indigenous struggles and movements:

President Fox’s expropriation of indigenous ejidal land to build an international airport fits into a larger, on-going, national and international struggle for indigenous rights that has been on Mexico’s mind since the first day that NAFTA was signed and Chiapas erupted in violence. The National Indigenous Congress (CNI) is opposed to the airport because the action of expropriating the community land without any prior discussion with the community is indicative of an authoritarian government. Representatives from the CNI said that “this is a fundamental part of the Mexican government’s strategy of pursuing a free global market without caring about whether or not our villages and natural resources go into private hands.” According to the CNI, the expropriation of land in Texcoco represents an attack, not only against these ancient villages, but against all the

---

91 Ibid.
93 La Comisión de Seguimiento del Congresso Nacional Indígena"
indigenous Mexican villages.\(^4\) The symbolic meaning of having ejidal lands—that were given to the peasants after the Mexican Revolution—taken by Presidential decree for the construction of a new international airport is not lost on the campesinos.

The encroaching urban form had long been threatening the ejidal lands surrounding Mexico City.\(^5\) Local and national indigenous groups warn about the inevitable urbanization that will come if the new airport is sited in Texcoco; they are concerned about future land speculation and growing urban pressure on all the rural areas in the Mexico City region. They argue that the Mexico City region—one of the most populated in the world—has grown at the cost of the indigenous villages that had lived there for centuries, in the same way that the nation has grown at the cost to the indigenous people.\(^6\) According to a study on ejidal land and urban growth by David Cymet, “[e]xpansion of Mexican cities in general, and Mexico City in particular on its surrounding rural periphery, is taking place increasingly on ejido and communal lands.”\(^7\)

The history of ejidal lands and its relationship to urban growth is very much a part of what fans the fire in this particular debate over ejidal expropriation to build the airport. Ejidos were established in the 1920s after the Mexican Revolution, as a way to give small farmers a share of the land. However, as cities throughout Mexico have needed to expand, and there has been no other land available except ejidal land, there has been

---


\(^7\) Cymet, p. 78.
conflict and controversy. In the 1980s, amendments were made to ejidal land rules so that ejidal land could be used for urban growth and land reserves. Since the only way to expropriate ejidal land was to make sure that it was in the public interest, the Articles 112-VI and 122-II in the Federal Agrarian Law define the public interest as:

The foundation, improvement, conservation, and growth of the population centers whose ordering and regulation has been foreseen in the national, state and municipal plans of urban development and housing.

When the land was expropriated in the past, it was not unusual for the government to turn around and sell it to private interests for an increased sum. This practice caused resentment within the ejidos. Legal reform further undermined the autonomy and power of the ejidos. “With the amendment of 1984, diversion of ejido land by state agencies could be accomplished completely within the framework of the law.”

The Presidential expropriation of the ejidal land in Texcoco has been called robbery and a violation against the Constitution, The Agriculture Law, and against international conventions because it was decided without the community’s consultation. The CNI argues that the ejidos are being robbed and their property is being put in the hands of speculators and companies. The act of expropriation—violates the San Andres agreement which was signed by the Federal Government and the Ejercito Zapatista de

---

98 Cymet, p. 136.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid, p. 137.
101 Ibid.
102 La Ley Agraria
Liberacion Nacional (EZLN). In this sense, the government decision to build the new airport is an official genocide against our villages,” the CNI proclaims.

Strategies: Political with Tractors and Horses

A legal scholar would examine closer the particulars of the legal strategy. My purpose here is simply to show that the legal system is used as one tool for community countermobilization. While the legal battle is being fought in court, the residents of San Salvador Atenco continue to wage a political battle through organized marches to the Federal District and Toluca, the capital of the State of Mexico. In all of these marches there is careful attention to the symbolism of their fight. According to Lisa Peattie, “symbolizations” allow interests to be “seen and felt” which is critical for social movements. The protestors arrive at the Zocalo and the State of Mexico’s offices with horses and tractors to make a statement that they wanted to keep their way of life. They are fighting for the culture and tradition of their pueblos. The farmers bring their produce to the protests to demonstrate that their land is productive, despite the Federal Government’s decree that it is not fertile.

During one protest, almost 2,000 inhabitants of San Salvador Atenco, joined by 3,500 others from different organizations, marched to the Capital, closing the road from the Zocolo to the Angel de la Independencia. It took them 10 hours to march more than 20

---

103 EZLN is the liberation front in Chiapas.
105 Peattie, p. 19.
kms on the Texcoco-Lecheria highway from San Salvador Atenco to the center of the Federal District. They were headed by 12 men on horseback carrying the Mexican flag and flanked by statues of the patron saint of the village, El Divine Salvador. They carried signs that read, “For the defense of the land we cultivate!!” They chanted, “we will not sell our land because it is like our mother.” They came holding machetes, hoes, pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe. They came saying, “we did not come to negotiate, instead to tell you that we are not going to let you take our land.” Other signs said, “we will show President Fox that the resistance movement will not stop and that we will defend our land to the ultimate consequences.” The police were told to make sure that the people did not block the roads, but their presence was interpreted by the campesinos as an attempt to keep them from reaching the Zocalo, the square in front of the national palace. Conflict broke out between the protestors and the police. The police, armed in their riot gear, hit the protestors while the campesinos struck back with machetes. After the confrontation, one campesino said, “the worst injury inflicted by the government was the expropriation decree, not the hits we received from the police.”

107 “No vamos a similar una defense ante los afectados en Texcoco,” La Jornada, November 8, 2001, Politica, p. 16.
108 “Por la defensa de las tierras de cultivo…”
109 “No venderemos la tierra, porque es como nuestra madre”
110 The Virgin of Guadalupe is an important religious symbol for indigenous Christian Mexicans.
113 “La herida mas grande que nos hizo este gobierno es el decreto de expropiacion, no los golpes que recibimos de la policia.” “No habra marcha atras en la decision, insiste la SCT,” La Jornada, November 16, 2001, Politica, p. 17.
However, not all the affected communities have sent the same message. Different communities have been treated differently and are affected by the expropriation to varying degrees. Some of the campesinos from San Salvador Atenco, the municipality that had the most land expropriated by the Presidential decree, have taken a more radical stance saying they are not willing to negotiate, “that the government should not play with us because we will not give up our land and our lives and we will defend it at whatever cost.”\textsuperscript{114} The more radical residents of San Salvador Atenco have taken over the town square in protest. Since the October 22, 2001 announcement, they have established a headquarters in the town square where they have been on watch. They have erected a platform in the town hall with a painted mural showing images of heroes from the Mexican Revolution that symbolizes their struggle.

Afraid that the Mexican army would occupy the land that had been expropriated, some people in San Salvador Atenco started a 24-hour watch of their land. They threatened to use violence if government officials came on their land.\textsuperscript{115} They followed through on their threat by confiscating the trucks of government workers who came to take soil samples in Texcoco. The campesinos said that the fact that these workers were in Texcoco was proof that the Federal Government and the State of Mexico did not respect the injunction and the laws.\textsuperscript{116} When I asked people in San Salvador Atenco if they were concerned about this kind of “lawlessness,” they answered that it was the government that was being lawless, not them. Their lawyer, Burgoa supports this view saying that the

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{115} “No permitiremos que las fuerzas armadas ocupen nuestras parcelas,” \textit{La Jornada}, December, 2001.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Secretaries from the government would be in contempt of court if they try to build the airport: “a government in the hands of companies and economists is a terrible government. When an economic solution does not respect the law, it does not work.”\textsuperscript{117}

Conclusions:

It appears that the decision to site the airport in Texcoco was made just as all the other mega-infrastructure decisions were made before it--by a small group of national and powerful regional economic and political interests. What makes the decision to site the new airport in Texcoco different is that it comes at a time when the Federal Government had promised to move towards democracy. The non-democratic nature of the decision therefore, stands as an example of the difference between theory and practice of democracy. What we see in the legal opposition, the campesinos’ struggle, the Federal District’s opposition, the State of Hidalgo’s isolation, and the international movements for human and environmental rights are ways in which globalization creates new standards for transparent decision-making and pressures for democracy.

I have to admit, that when I was in San Salvador Atenco, looking out at the urban form encroaching from the distance, it was hard to feel optimistic that this community will win this battle. Even if they win the claim against the airport, they will have to continue to fight for their way of life. However, with increasing global pressures for economic integration comes the expectation of more transparent and democratic institutions and an increasing sense that justice can be accomplished in the legal system. There is a growing

\textsuperscript{117} Maria Rivera, “Juego al gato y al raton con los asesores juridicos de Fox,” \textit{La Jornada}, January 31, 2001, Politica, p. 17.
international movement of indigenous peoples around the world who are standing up for their rights. They are fighting the expropriation of their land within the context of an international struggle to maintain a way of life against the encroachment of global capital. When the Federal Government tells the ejitarios that they will be given jobs in the new airport, they respond that they do not want them. They want to keep their way of life, they argue, and they want their kids to be able to grow up in their communities. Perhaps this wish is fruitless. Perhaps there is no reason to think that they will be able to protect their lands when cities around the world are growing at such a rapid pace.

In 2001, in the context of an ongoing debate about globalization, growth and its impacts on regions and local communities, a decision that might have been announced silently twenty years ago, becomes the focal point of controversy. The debate raises some important questions about who benefits from economic growth. It is a debate that we still do not know how to answer. In the campesinos’ legal defense, their lawyer, Ignacio Burgoa argues that the Presidential decree of expropriation is unconstitutional because the Federal Government has not demonstrated the “public utility” of this new airport. He claims that the airport is not in the “public utility” of the ejiditarios because it will exterminate their way of being and they will never set foot on an airplane. It is clear that there are certainly benefits and costs of growth that need to be discussed and efficiently and equitably distributed. However, the “issues seem to be too big and too basic to be managed through political horse-trading.” As demonstrated by this case in Mexico, the existing political institutions are not ready to address the new tensions that arise between the integration of the world’s economy and democratic institutions. Instead of becoming
a forum for discussion about the growing tensions between these two goals, the process of siting the new airport is imposed by the national government from above. Technocratic studies mandate what should happen rather than an incorporative process of policy debate.

\[\text{Peattie, p. 16.}\]
Chapter V: Reflections

Increasingly national development goals of growth outweigh local and regional concerns about tradeoffs and their distribution. In Mexico, President Fox promised to move Mexico forward, both economically and politically. From an economic standpoint this means reinforcing the connections between Mexico and the international marketplace, particularly the U.S. To do so, the national engine of growth-- the Mexico City region-- needs to be competitive with other global cities in terms of the facilities and the services that it offers. Mexico has to have the same state-of-the-art infrastructure that more developed countries have, even if it comes at great economic and social cost and transformations to the urban form.

President Fox’s national economic agenda and decision to build a new airport in the Mexico City region is a part of what academics call “world city formation.”

World cities are extremely complex but constitute, historically, points of international articulation. Consequently, in the present era of large-scale rapid exchange of goods, people, and ideas, the importance of ports, airports, and teleports (indeed infrastructure as a whole) cannot be overemphasized. In order to prepare a world city to perform the functions it is supposed to discharge, there is a need for cities to plan, invest, and carry out a process that may be briefly described as world city formation.119

According to Peter Hall, cities like Mexico City and Rio, “the leading cities of continental-scale countries” are “central points for the exchange of information. They possess sophisticated banking systems and usually stock exchanges, some of which are of

---

sub-global rank. They are the seats of national or continental headquarters offices of major transnational corporations. They have major hub airports, connecting national and international networks and sometimes performing important international exchange functions.” Hall cites a 1995 study on “the interconnectivity of cities based on air travel” which ranked Mexico City eleventh. He sees this as evidence that these middle-income cities “perform a sub-global or even global role in relation to other parts of the world system of cities.” Hall predicts that “because of the rapid economic growth of those parts of the world in which these cities are located, over the next decade we should expect them to improve their positions.”

If this is the reality that cities face, then President Fox’s calculations make sense. The construction and expansion of airports play an important role in global competitiveness. Airports generate an enormous amount of revenue from construction, maintenance, and operation. The hotels, storage and equipment facilities, corporate headquarters, etc., that will be attracted to the new airport site will bring with them employment and revenue that will help the local, city, regional, and national economies.

Around these hubs develop clusters of activity, both directly related (hotels, service facilities) and indirectly generated (business parks, high-tech belts). In the most spectacular cases, entire new belts of activity have thus developed on the metropolitan peripheries: Los Angeles’ Aerospace Alley, the Dulles Corridor in Washington, DC, London’s Heathrow M4 Corridor, and Stockholm’s Arlanda E4 Corridor.

---

121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
Airports also fuel new international investments that are critical to economic growth in almost every country, particularly developing ones. "An increasingly fast-paced, economically-networked world, is changing the world of industrial competition and business location. International gateway airports are driving and shaping business location and urban development giving rise to an emerging airport-oriented urban form-the airport city." Indeed, airports around the world have become their own cities, with their own zip codes and management.

However, President Fox’s focus on making the Mexico City region globally competitive does not come without costs. According to a 1992 study on urban planning, "globalization of the economy and integration creates new inequalities between nations, between regions, and between social groups. Only a few elites will benefit from the new global context and only a few territories will receive the influx of funds… and in the Third World these places tend to be the national capitals." Such inequalities raise questions about the uneven power relations that often drive global transformations and govern the distribution of the benefits of such changes…” There is an “absence of social justice, or equity, in many forms of global change today, that is, how the process of urbanization in the South favors certain groups while constraining the opportunities of others. We emphasize the human dimensions of global change by focusing on the impacts of macroforces on different sub-populations defined by economic status, gender, and/or ethnicity. In this way we highlight some of the social inequalities that arise from the macroforces associated with global change.125

From a social justice perspective, the challenge of globalization will be to ensure that certain groups do not bear all the costs of economic integration while only a small minority prospers.

From an urban development perspective, the challenge is ensuring that local and regional interests are not ignored in the drive towards economic integration. Increasingly, cities are being shaped by national interests and the forces of globalization. Megapolitan areas are created through the construction of large infrastructure projects that ignore regional plans or the impacts of the infrastructure projects on the urban form. 127

The cost of placing national economic priorities at the top of the political agenda is that it comes at the expense of local and regional planning efforts. In addition, making sure mega-infrastructure projects get carried through in a timely manner can often mean ignoring the real spatial, economic, social, and environmental effects they have. Despite rhetoric about Mexico’s supposed movement towards democracy, in the decision-making process that determined where to site the new airport, public involvement of the local and regional decision-makers was conspicuously left out.

However, there are some positive lessons we learn from the case of the siting of Mexico City’s new airport. As discussed in Chapter IV, international economic integration and globalization is also met by new challenges. The internationalization of the media means that when the campesinos from San Salvador Atenco protest that they will not sell their

land, their struggle is framed as a part of a worldwide struggle for indigenous rights against global capital. Increasingly, there are international norms to which national political institutions are accountable. The campesinos whose land was expropriated without their consent contest the decision based on its violation of international agreements on human rights. Similarly, environmental laws from NAFTA allow citizens to demand that national environmental laws are properly enforced. In this new internationalized political context, those who were left out of the decision-making process have new strategies for protest.

While it is encouraging to see that globalization has created new avenues for protest, there are still many new dilemmas that the existing political institutions are not able to adequately address. The reality is that economic integration is not going away and governments throughout the developing world will follow in President Fox’s footsteps as they try to modernize the national infrastructure to meet international norms. This may be the only way that developing countries can continue on the path of development.

What is clear is that in the siting of new infrastructure projects there are a series of complicated issues and challenges that need to be resolved. I have addressed them only briefly in this thesis. The question becomes, which institutions will take on the responsibility of making sure that these dilemmas are addressed? If this is the reality that developing countries face, there need to be new ways to think about the relationship between the national government and local and regional players. There need to be intermediary institutions, that are neither national nor local, that effectively represent

---

127 Iracheta Cenecorta, “Espacio Metropolitano: Realidades y Planeamiento.”.
local regional interests. These institutions need to have enough political and economic leverage so that they are a part of the decision-making process, instead of waiting at the side-lines to dissent. They need to be forums for debate. They also need to able to help distribute the benefits of growth more equitably. Of course, the creation of these regional institutions will require careful planning and strategic thinking about how to link the benefits of national growth with local and regional development. This is a challenge waiting for careful analysis and discussion.

I wish that in the conclusion of this thesis I could provide answers, but instead I am left with more questions. I am reluctant to believe the arguments that the Mexican government is 100 percent corrupt and therefore we cannot trust the decision to site the airport in Texcoco. Perhaps, despite the presence of powerful economic interests pushing for the Texcoco site, it is still the best option. It makes sense for the government to chose the site that is cheaper, closer, and provides integrated air travel.

I am also skeptical that preventing the construction of a new airport outside of Mexico City will be good for the local, regional, or national economy. The rules of the game for economic development are set by international standards and demands which means that if Mexico wants international investments, it will need to invest in modern infrastructure that meet international standards. Perhaps the development of the national economy needs to outweigh the individual interests of the campesinos from San Salvador Atenco because in the long run, all Mexicans will be better off.
Depending on where one is on the political spectrum, the story can be interpreted very differently. The controversy over the siting of the new airport in the Mexico City region can be seen as a story of lawless citizens taking up arms against the government to stop progress. Alternatively, it can be thought of as a classic example of a big, corrupt government taking away the land of the poor to put it in the hands of the rich and powerful. I believe there is some truth in both these interpretations, but neither one of them touches on the complexity of the situation and the issues that it raises.

The need to make countries and cities competitive to attract development and investment will not go away any time soon. Leaders of developing countries will have to be adept at devising means of making their countries more internationally competitive. This means that new airports will have to be constructed. In the case of Mexico City, President Fox may simply be making a wise economic choice to try to develop a Latin American air hub. He has first mover advantage since Central America does not have a large, new international airport that meets the needs of international aviation. If Mexico City does become an international hub, the national and regional economy will certainly benefit.

If, in fact, the decision to choose Texcoco is the correct decision, then what was wrong with it? What lessons can we learn for the future? This is where my answer is less satisfactory than I would like it to be. I am most concerned with the process. In the case of the siting of the Mexico City region’s new airport there was a clear lack of transparency and democratic participation. One reason we will never know if Texcoco was the right decision on purely technical merits is that the choice appears to have been
predetermined by technical and political criteria. An examination of the Tizayuca and Texcoco sites shows that the Tizayuca site did not have a chance of being chosen. The requirements necessary for an integrated hub that meets international standards eliminated Tizayuca. In addition, financing from powerful economic interests made the Texcoco option much more financially viable.

If infrastructure decisions are made by politics and then justified using technical claims, it becomes difficult to disassociate the technical from the political. In a democratic society there should be a more transparent process of decision-making that has entry points for participation from different actors. Local and regional players should be able to formally interject their concerns before the technical evaluations are made. Their concerns for urban and regional growth, employment, environmental sustainability, and community rights should become a part of the evaluation criteria that can be considered in the final assessment. One of the benefits of this type of inclusive process is that if regional concerns are taken into account on the front end of decision-making, there may be more opportunities to invent creative options that address them. However, in this case, important local and regional concerns were an afterthought.

Despite the presence of numerous urban and regional planning commissions in the Mexico City region, they were noticeably absent from the national decision to site the new airport. If regional plans say there should be no more development in a particular region and then the Federal Government initiates development in that exact region, what should we make of it? Should we be concerned? Or should regional commissions only be allowed to have jurisdiction over things that do not interfere with national
development goals? Should national always preempt regional and local even at the expense of environmental degradation, urban sprawl, and property rights violations? How can Mexico claim to be moving towards a more open and democratic society while it continues to make top down, elitist decisions? Or is the story slightly different? Are powerful players in the State of Mexico (particularly those in the real estate and construction industries) using national power to get their way in the region despite agreed upon regional plans advocating an opposite course of action? These are some of the questions that I am wrestling with as I conclude this study.

These issues are particularly relevant in Mexico, neighbor to the world’s hegemonic leader, that for 71 years has been living under *de facto* one party rule. Now with a new President from a different political party, there has been a movement towards democracy; with the signing of NAFTA there is the promise of free trade that will help bolster Mexico’s national economy. For Mexico, the benefits of international economic integration are near. However, increasingly there is a tension between the need for developing countries to democratize their institutions at the same time that they pursue massive infrastructure projects that modernize the country’s infrastructure and bolster the national economy.

This thesis explores the tension between international economic integration and democratization and how it is played out in national infrastructure decisions that have a local and regional impact. One of the underlying themes is the tension between who wins and loses from new economic growth. A key assumption in development economics is
that economic development of the national economy is necessary to move the population out of poverty. In Mexico where, according to 1996 consumption measures, 28.6 percent of the population—or 27 million people are considered to be poor, this is a worthy goal. However, "this assumes that growth at the aggregate level manifests in improvement in the living conditions of the poor which in the past has not always been true." Unfortunately, as much as capitalist societies rely on the "rising tide lifts all boats theory," what is good for the national economy as a whole, may not always be good for individual communities, and, some communities consistently lose.

According to a 1963 study on Mexico, "[p]artly as a result of the obvious unfilled needs of Mexico, the country has been rocked with continual controversy over the question: Who has benefited from the improvements so far?" In 2002, the question is on the lips of the campesinos who are protesting against the Presidential administration for expropriating their land. If you ask Jorge, a resident of San Salvador Atenco, why he is opposed to the construction of a new airport, he will tell you that it is because only 3 percent of the people in Mexico can afford to fly. The majority of the people in the country that borders the US will never set foot in an airport, let alone a plane. Jorge tells me that in San Salvador Atenco, 0 percent of the residents will ever fly because they are too poor. And, so, the question is raised, "what will this airport do for us?"

---

131 Based on an interview with Jorge Oliveras in San Salvador Atenco, March 27, 2002.
The people of San Salvador Atenco follow in a long tradition of groups who have “tried to stop progress.” Some might argue that this is the hand that they were dealt and they need to accept it. Others might insist that they must fight until the death for their principles. I come down somewhere in the middle. I think there is a need to balance practicality with ethics, to promote development and maintain democratic principals. If the entire country is going to benefit from the construction of a new airport at the expense of one community, this may be a trade off that society is willing to make. However, what I think was missing from this story was a decision-making process that allowed “society” to say what it valued and wanted.

I am not proposing that we should ignore the national need for economic growth and international investment. At this point in time, we do not have other models for how countries can develop. However, what I am suggesting is that we cannot close our eyes to the fact that these policies often benefit small groups of well-connected people at the expense of the poor and underrepresented. This is where it is important for government to work towards minimizing the negative impact of policy decisions to “avoid the existence of outright ‘winners’ and ‘losers.’”132 Distributing the gains and losses of development in a fair and efficient manner should be one of the key responsibilities of government.

From an urban and regional planning perspective, the distribution of the benefits of growth has been the government’s primary responsibility for years. In 1981, Lloyd Rodwin wrote,

> Whatever disagreement there may be about the appropriate aims of development, there is apt to be consensus that the conventional aims are being reassessed and diversified. The new views stress the political as well as the technical issues. The new concern goes beyond growth to the incidence of benefits. The new aims are intended to ensure that the poor profit significantly from development and perhaps even participate more in decision-making processes, and that there be a greater concern for autonomy as well as environmental effects.\(^{133}\)

I agree with Rodwin that it is the role and responsibility of planners to ensure that the process of development is managed in a fair and open manner. Unfortunately, in Mexico, the national government has not taken on this role. Despite the “promised” movement towards democracy, transparent and participatory decision-making processes that allow for more equitable distribution of growth have not yet been created.

---

Bibliography:

Books and Articles:


Vernon, Raymond. The Dilemma of Mexico’s Development: The Roles of the Private and Public Sectors. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.


**Journal Articles:**


**Interviews:**


Interview with press officials at SCT, March 6, 2002.


**Unpublished Documents:**

Airport Studies:


Comments by Lic. Fernando Flores Perez, President of the Camara Nacional del Aerotransporte (CANAERO). Retrieved from the World Wide Web May 1, 2002

Comments of Engineer Alberto Vargas Contras, President of the College of Mexican Engineers in Aeronautics (CIMA), Retrieved April 12, 2002 from the World Wide Web: http://www.asa.gob.mx/nuevo/index.htm

Government Documents:


Electronic Media:


Photo of San Salvador Atenco: by Karl Munkelwitz

The mural in the town center symbolizing their struggle against the airport