

CHAPTER III THE CASE FOR INCREASED CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION

If we are to prosper as a region, cross-border collaboration between the private, nonprofit and public sector need to be more frequent and effective. For all the dialogue about cross-border collaboration in the San Diego-Tijuana region, the civic networks and linkages are not as well-developed as some civic leaders might think.

As busy as the flows of trade, commerce and tourism are between the San Diego-Baja California border, and in spite of recent progress to improve fiber optic linkages between the two communities, communications barriers continue to persist due, in part, to the long-standing language and cultural differences between the U.S. and Mexico.

For this reason, the region's cultural interpreters or connectors⁸⁰ play a vital role in helping to cement the institutional relationships that foster a vibrant binational civil society. While the number of cross-border "connectors" in the San Diego-Tijuana region is still relatively small, they are collectively helping to create the Tipping Point⁸¹ whereby others in the region will take a more active interest in the border's opportunities. Still, much work remains to be done since, for the average San Diegan, border issues remain low on their priority list.

In San Diego, civic leaders need to better understand the unique knowledge, skills and experience that exist in Baja California and San Diego County's growing Latino community. Unique opportunities exist to respond to U.S. issues such as culturally competent health care, youth counseling, educational enrichment, drug prevention, and environmental education. Additionally, San Diego area planners, economic development professionals and real estate developers need to properly consider the unique role that greater Tijuana is playing in providing an affordable housing alternative to San Diego's U.S. and Mexican workforce. Here additional research is necessary to better quantify the number of San Diegans that are now opting to live in Tijuana.

Civic and political leaders from both San Diego and Baja California also need to better appreciate the growing inter-dependencies between our two communities. Actions on one side of the border can and do cause irreparable damage and lasting impacts on the other side. More sensitivity is required to minimize unintended consequences.

⁸⁰ Cultural interpreters or connectors are people who have deep understanding of two different cultures and are able to work as the bridge between these two cultures and people.

⁸¹ Gladwell, Malcolm, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Boston: Back Bay Books, 2000.

While the crossings of people and goods are more visible, many of the impacts of living in the border region are invisible. For example, children cross the border from Mexico to attend school in San Diego. In some schools, such children constitute an estimated 20% of student population. Wastes from factories in Baja California, many owned by US or foreign companies, and refuse from housing units surrounding these factories, contaminate air, rivers and soil, and sometimes lead to beach closures in San Diego after heavy rainfalls. Undocumented immigrants often trespass on private properties to illegally cross into the US, upsetting property owners. Residents of San Diego who cannot afford to purchase medication or medical services in San Diego can often obtain them in Tijuana.

Baja California is affected by the border as much as, if not more than, San Diego. The real estate boom in San Diego has raised the property value in Baja California, making housing even less affordable to many residents of Baja California. U.S. teenagers and college students cross the border to take advantage of the lower drinking age in Mexico, often engaging in binge drinking and substance abuse. Many residents of Baja California are concerned about their negative influence on Mexican youth, in addition to the city's image and property values, not to mention the risk to young lives. Until recently, children from Baja California could visit museums and other cultural institutions in San Diego County for educational enrichment, but unfortunately, this longstanding tradition has been halted due to post-9/11 changes in US immigration policy.

In an effort to address the region's long-term energy security, plans for liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals are being proposed along Baja California's coast. On one hand, NIMBYISM among some Mexican residents and non-profit groups, could threaten the region's ability to achieve more reliable, cost-effective and clearer burning energy alternatives to conventional fossil fuels. Conversely, failure by energy concerns to properly consider the environmental impacts of their facilities could threaten fragile habitats in what is the last remaining undisturbed coastal sage scrub known to the California Floristic Province. In addition, not enough consideration has been given to the long-range environmental health impacts of siting gas power plant facilities on the residents of the Imperial/Mexicali Valley, a region that has the worst recorded air quality of the entire U.S.-Mexico border and among the highest reported cases of childhood asthma in North America.

The above-mentioned impacts are due largely to the disparities between United States and Mexico; other trans-boundary impacts are the result of the fact that the border region is an integrated region that shares natural and cultural

characteristics. As a recent play, *Nuevo California*,⁸² portrays, the Kumeyaay are now split between Mexico and the United States, for their sacred mountain lies on the US side of the border, while many of the tribe's people live on the Mexican side of the border. The planned border fence extension threatens the region's wildlife, as it will interfere with the wildlife corridors. Cut off from water sources on the Mexican side of the border, transitory wildlife is likely to be endangered.

Many of the impacts of the border are negative, but there are also positive impacts. For example, San Diego and Imperial Valley's Hispanic population can receive culturally competent medical and social services in Baja California, while Baja California's children with valid visas can enjoy educational exhibitions at San Diego's museums. Baja California's rich biodiversity, as well as lower costs of land and labor, can be leveraged for conservation efforts. San Diego and Imperial Valley's academic institutions can provide scientific resources, both human and capital, for environmental and health research in Baja California. San Diego and Tijuana have one of the few binational fiber optic networks along the U.S.-Mexico border, providing enormous potential for increased cross-border interchange of data and knowledge transfer between the business, governmental, academic and non-profit communities of San Diego and Tijuana, including the prospect of "two-way" telemedicine. These are only some of many assets of the border region that still remain relatively unexplored.

Despite the significance of Baja California to San Diego, and vice versa, recognition of this fact has been slow. For many San Diego business and civic leaders, border issues are not a strategic priority as so much of the regional economic growth is focused on the expansion of the biotechnology and telecommunications sectors. Also, to a large extent the perception of Mexico, for many San Diegans, is limited to trade and commerce.

San Diego-Tijuana: Comparative Advantages and Challenges

As the largest binational metropolitan area in North America, the San Diego-Tijuana region is truly unique with a gross regional product of \$125 billion (\$120B San Diego; \$5B Tijuana), that ranks 30th in the world, providing jobs in the manufacturing, biotechnology, agriculture, construction, defense, service and tourism-related sectors. The San Diego-Tijuana border region is also the most prosperous along the U.S.-Mexico border.

However, this regional outlook masks several important facts. **First, the income disparity between San Diego and Tijuana is far greater than the disparity between other border twin cities.** In two Texas-Mexico border regions (El

⁸² Directed by Sam Woodhouse, played at San Diego Repertory Theatre, February 7-March 2, 2003.

Paso/Juarez and Laredo/Nuevo Laredo), an average Texan earns a little less than 2.5 times their counterpart in Mexico. By comparison, the average San Diegan earns over 4 times more than the average Tijuaneño (See table 1).

Table 1: Gross Regional Product Per Capita, 1999

Municipality	Per capita County GRP*	Per capita Ratio
Mexicali	Imperial 17,550	2.76
Tijuana	San Diego 29,488	4.34
Juarez	El Paso 17,216	2.43
Nuevo Laredo	Laredo 14,112	2.48

*Gross regional product is the county or municipal equivalent of national GDP.
 Source: Jim Gerber (SDSU)'s calculations based on INEGI and Department of Commerce data.

Second, even though San Diego is the wealthiest county on the border, it also has the highest cost of living in the entire U.S.-Mexico border. As a basis of comparison, in 2003 San Diego had a cost of living that was 40% above the national average while El Paso, Texas had a cost of living that was 5.8% below the average across the nation according to the ACCRA cost of living index.⁸³

Table 2: Cost of Living Index Comparison (First Quarter 2003)

El Paso, Texas	94.2
Albuquerque, NM	99.3
Baton Rouge, LA	101.6
Cleveland, OH	103.9
Dallas, TX	96.4
Denver, CO	105.7
Los Angeles, CA	138.2
Minneapolis, MN	111.3
Tucson, AZ	97.5
San Diego, CA	140

Source: ACCRA Cost of Living Index, 1st Quarter, 2003

⁸³ ACCRA Cost of Living Index, 1st Quarter 2003

Third, in spite of San Diego's relative affluence, many communities across the County remain very poor, due to the higher housing costs and an increased cost of living relative to other U.S. border cities. In the San Diego communities of Logan Heights and San Ysidro, for example, over 38% of families with children under 18 had incomes below poverty line. This percentage is higher than some counties in Texas.

These contradictions are readily visible across San Diego County. In this binational region there are some of the wealthiest and most expensive communities of the United States such as Rancho Santa Fe, Del Mar and La Jolla. At the same time, the region is also home to some of the fastest-growing squatter communities in North America, built of cardboard and scrap materials immediately across the border in Tijuana. Across San Diego County, an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Mexican transnational farm workers still live in migrant worker camps with no access to clean water, while nearby sits well-appointed housing developments and estates.

Fourth, disparities in income are not limited to just San Diego. Across Tijuana there are vivid reminders of the huge gap that exists between the haves and the have nots in this increasingly divided city exemplified by thriving commercial districts, such as Zona Rio and Mesa de Otay, and affluent suburban neighborhood, such as Playas de Tijuana or Hipódromo, while a growing number of Tijuanaenses live in over crowded squatter settlements without basic infrastructure.

But the widening income gaps don't stop there. Due to rising public safety concerns, a sizable number of Tijuana's professional class now lives on the other side of the line, in suburban communities such as Bonita, East Lake, Otay Ranch or Coronado. While one may continue to work in Tijuana, these working professionals and their families, shop, go to school and enjoy recreational activities in San Diego. For these Tijuanaenses the level of appreciation and sensitivity to the growing economic and societal inequalities in their community of origin wanes over time as they can conveniently escape the daily realities of Tijuana each time they cross over to their adopted home on the other side of the international line.

Income disparity, both between and within San Diego and Tijuana, means that there are growing pockets of extremely underserved communities in this binational region. In both San Diego and Tijuana, these communities tend to have large populations of recent immigrants or migrants, with the majority coming from areas of extreme poverty from the interior of Mexico. How to meet the needs of these underserved communities is thus a common challenge that San Diego and Tijuana must face together.

One important element of the region's income disparity to consider is that labor costs, and the overall cost of living, is much lower in San Diego, but Tijuana remains among the most expensive cities to live in Mexico.⁸⁴ Many California companies and residents have taken advantage of this disparity with several Southern California businesses having set up maquiladoras or in-bond assembly/manufacturing facilities in Tijuana over the last three decades⁸⁵; workers with jobs in San Diego can much more easily afford a house in Tijuana; and many San Diego County residents take advantage of lower cost prescription drugs and medical services in Tijuana.

There are competitive advantages stemming from other unique characteristics of the region as well. Its proximity to the Greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, the port city of Ensenada and tourism-oriented Rosarito, have provided the region with a significant volume of trade and tourism, and prompted the region's visionary leaders to study the transportation potential of the port of Ensenada (and, for rail transportation, Tecate). The region also enjoys a vibrant arts culture that has contributed to Tijuana being recently recognized by Newsweek as one of the eight top emerging arts capitals of the world.⁸⁶

These advantages, however, have had some negative impacts on the region, or have remained under-developed. The maquiladora-led growth and the development of the energy sector on the border, albeit having some positive economic effects, has presented environmental challenges to the region. The development of factories on the border has brought with it rapid population growth, increase in hazardous and solid wastes, unplanned housing developments, and environmental degradation. Residents neighboring potential or actual sites of power plants suffer from, or fear, poor air quality and possible safety hazards. A greater integration of the economies of Baja California and San Diego has been hampered by the heightened security concerns in the United States after September 11th, 2001. In fact, a number of

⁸⁴ Research by Dr. Bonnie Bade, California State University-San Marcos (2003).

⁸⁵ The maquiladora (or in-bond industry) program allows foreign manufacturers to ship components into Mexico duty-free for assembly and subsequent re-export. Industry established under the maquiladora program is Mexico's second-largest source of foreign revenue following oil exports.

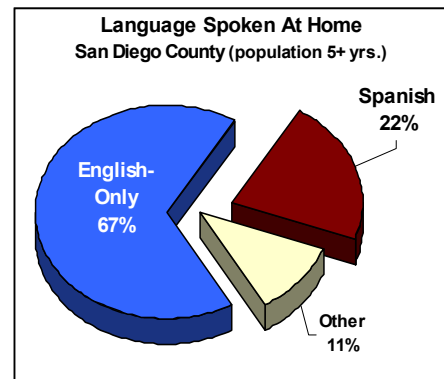
⁸⁶ Piore, Adam, "How to Build a Creative City" Newsweek, September 2, 2002.

cross-border cultural exchanges have been disrupted or discontinued due to stricter homeland security measures.

There are challenges that are becoming more complex, difficult and costly to effectively solve as the binational region's population grows. The skyrocketing housing prices, urban sprawl and subsequent loss of natural and sensitive habitats, school over-crowding, use of scarce water resources, and transportation are some of the problems that need urgent attention from both sides of the border, and that can only be effectively solved by greater binational collaboration.

In some instances, San Diego has more experience than Tijuana in addressing the issues of mutual concern. For example, in fighting uncontrolled urban sprawl and protecting the natural environment critical for the region's endangered species, San Diego has taken steps that Tijuana is yet to seriously consider. San Diego has also engaged in long-term planning for transportation and smart growth under the leadership of the SANDAG. Tijuana, and Baja California as a whole, can benefit from knowledge-sharing with San Diego planning agencies and NGOs to address these issues.

In other instances, it is San Diego that needs, and can benefit from, greater collaboration from Baja California. For example, Tijuana has taken recent steps to offer educational outreach to indigenous migrant students that San Diego's educational professionals could learn from. As San Diego's Latino population grows, it has become increasingly clear that it has a shortage of culturally competent services for this growing population, especially in the areas of education, health and human services. This is reinforced by the fact that according to the 2000 US Census, nearly 22% of San Diego County's population speaks Spanish at home with over half (approximately 10.5% of all residents) reporting that they speak English "less than well."

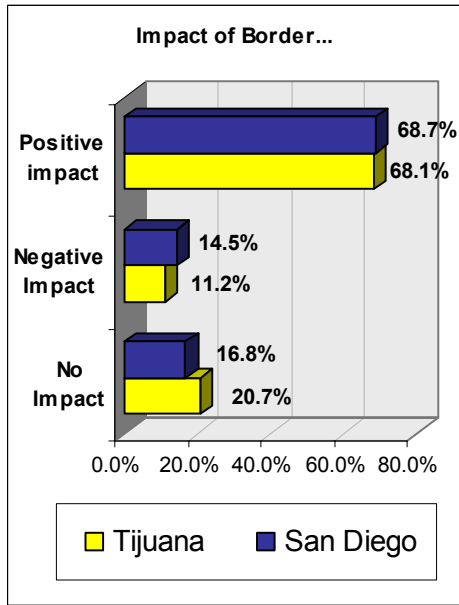


A survey undertaken by ICF of 12 leading migrant-serving non-profit agencies across San Diego County has revealed the need for more culturally and linguistically competent staff and a desire for greater collaboration with counter-part agencies in Mexico if additional funding were available. In particular, ICF found that while most migrant-serving agencies have a core group of linguistically competent Spanish speaking staff, the demands placed on these agencies has pushed many to rely on volunteers whose language skills can vary tremendously. Also, not all staff or volunteers have the cultural competencies to address the unique needs of the growing numbers of migrants

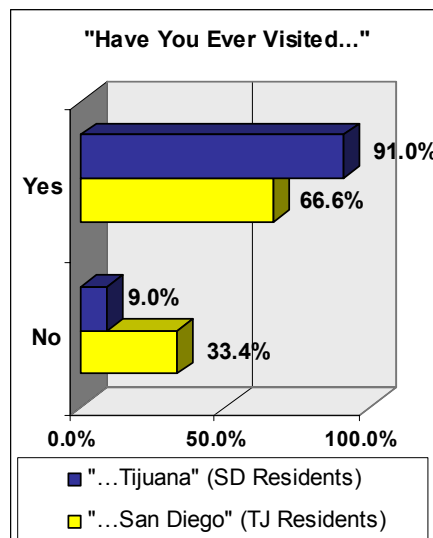
with indigenous cultures (Mixteco, Otomi, etc) who, at times, do not even speak Spanish as their native language. Here, Baja California area non-profits as well as those from Mexican migrant-sending communities such as Oaxaca, Guerrero, Jalisco or Michoacan are potential ideal partners in the provision of culturally competent care, outreach and support to Mexican migrants in San Diego County and beyond. Many San Diego area non-profits surveyed expressed an interest in such collaboration but funding remains an issue.

Thankfully, there is a growing consensus in the region that living in the border region is an advantage, and that closer collaboration across the border is important. According to an ICF- commissioned survey of San Diego-Tijuana residents by Cross Border Business Associates (CBA), the majority of San Diegans and Tijuana residents (about two-thirds on each side of the border) felt that having the border nearby had a positive impact on their community.

However, also notable is the fact that a small but still sizable portion of citizens from both San Diego (14.5%) and Tijuana (11.2%) feel that the border has a negative impact on their communities. While transboundary issues and concerns remain, people continue to cross the border. According to CBA's findings, 90% of San Diegans from across the County have visited Tijuana, with over 55% having visited in the last year. Among those San Diegans born in Mexico, 87.7% have visited Tijuana in the last year. In turn, 66% of Tijuana residents have visited San Diego.



Beyond general perceptions, the CBA and ICF asked San Diegans and Tijuana residents the mutual assets and challenges of the border, and, in particular their neighboring sister city. Here a vivid snapshot of key perceptions of area residents emerges.



Shared Perceptions San Diego-Tijuana

San Diego (as viewed by Tijuanaenses)

Assets:

- Cultural attractions/amenities; binational cultural fusion
- Employment possibilities (the opportunity to work on the other side of the line)
- Economic impact of San Diego on Tijuana
- Variety and prices of good and services in San Diego
- Enhances quality of life for those living in Tijuana (among those able to cross)
- Proximity to family and friends in San Diego
- Airport (for flights to the US/Europe/Asia)

Liabilities:

- Economic disparities between San Diego and Tijuana
- The aesthetic threat. The contrast in infrastructure, between green space and unplanned urban spaces makes you feel different –and threatened—when you cross.
- Mala influencia (bad influence of some American tourists in Tijuana including use of illegal drugs, drunk driving and under-age drinking; lack of respect for our culture and our laws)
- Racism
- Threat of Terrorism
- Border Delays

Tijuana (as viewed by San Diegans)

Assets:

- Cultural richness and attractions
- Provides U.S. senior citizens on fixed incomes with more affordable prescription medicine
- More affordable health care and housing
- Mexicans come to San Diego to purchase U.S. goods and services
- Proximity to family and friends in Tijuana
- Airport (for flights to Mexico)

Liabilities

- Poverty
- Crime, drug trafficking and desperation
- Illegal immigration
- Official Corruption

Identifying San Diego-Tijuana's Shared Regional Assets

Beyond the general perceptions than San Diegans and Tijuaneños may have of each other, there is a common sense by most of those surveyed that the border brings positive benefits to their respective communities. While this is so, the surveys also reveal that San Diegans and Tijuaneños tend to focus more on the challenges of their neighboring sister cities as opposed to focusing on their shared collective assets.

Some of the shared assets of the San Diego-Tijuana region include:

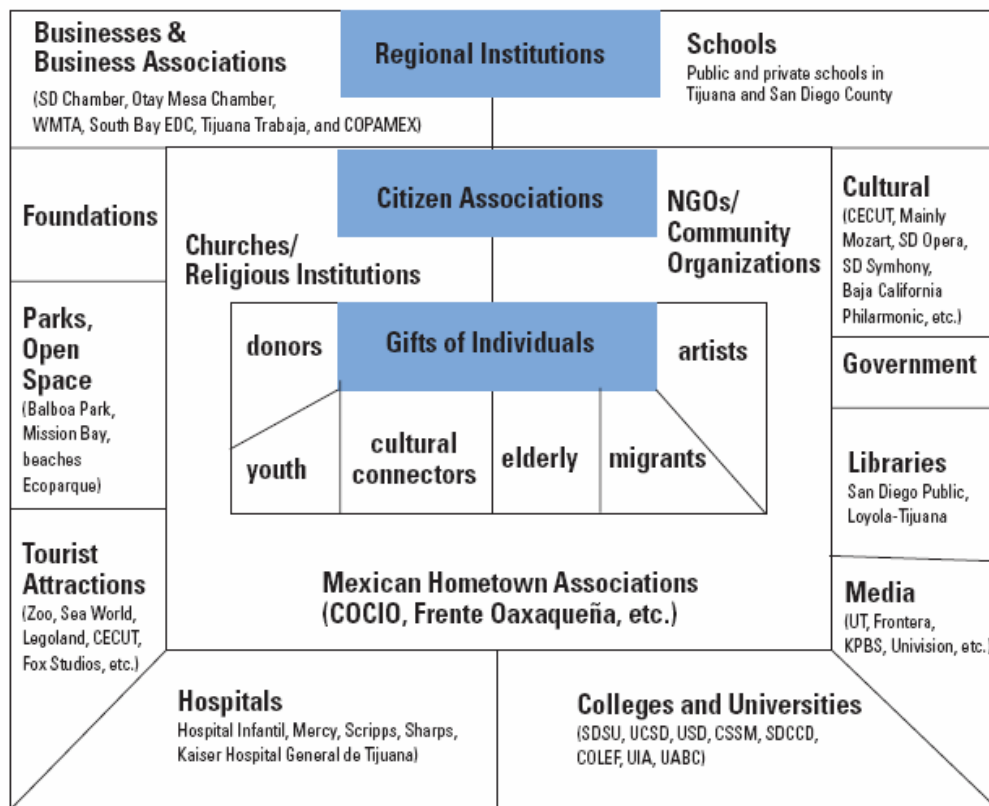
- **A thriving binational business community** with a growing number of cross-border partnerships, joint ventures and alliances forming on both sides of the border.
- **Potential R&D linkages to manufacturing** with San Diego's thriving wireless telecommunications, software, and bio sciences sectors and Tijuana's large number of world class manufacturing facilities.
- **A growing binational work force** that is bicultural and bilingual with many of Tijuana's professional workers being U.S.-trained. Expanded NAFTA professional visa provisions, as proposed by the current Administration, could further strengthen our regional advantage.
- **Specialized binational professional services in international trade** due to the presence of the border and the large number of multinational corporations operating maquiladoras in Tijuana.
- **Specialized binational medical services.** Because of Tijuana's proximity to San Diego (and the high demand for affordable health care from Southern Californians) the city has some the best medical clinics in Mexico outside of Mexico City.
- **Cross border fiber optic network** with capabilities to provide expanded telemedicine and distance learning services both North-South and South-North.
- **Cross-Border rail infrastructure.** The region has an expanded San Diego-Imperial Valley cargo rail line via Tecate. The new rail line will connect San Diego and Tijuana to eastbound ports.
- **Potential cross-border airport connection.** With the proposed cross-border passenger crossing at Otay Mesa, the Tijuana International Airport could provide the region with more easy access to San Diego residents for travel throughout Mexico.
- **Expanded cross-border natural gas linkages** that will soon provide a cleaner, more cost effective energy supply to both San Diego and Baja California.
- **A vibrant binational arts culture** with a diverse community of artists, musicians and writers that are coming from around the world to make this region their home.

- **A talented and able migrant workforce.** The passion and ambition of our migrant workforce is the greatest untapped and neglected assets in the region.
- **A shared culture and history** with sites of great historical significance on both sides of the border.
- **A native indigenous community** with cultures, traditions and language that are unique but are under threat and dying out. Presently, there are less than 1,500 indigenous native people left in Baja California.
- **A superb binational educational infrastructure.** When looking at the region's educational resources, San Diegans tend to focus solely on its own educational assets and neglect the growing number of excellent educational institutions that are now located in the state of Baja California and collaborating closely with institutions in San Diego. These include: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, among the most highly regarded think tanks for immigration studies in Mexico which has strong ties with UCSD, USD and SDSU; Universidad Iberoamericana with its border pedagogy program that is being developed in partnership with California State University, San Marcos; Centro de Investigación Científica y de Educación Superior de Ensenada (CICESE), a leading center for marine biology, physical oceanography, geophysics, marine pharmacology, and aqua culture which works closely with Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO); and the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California (UABC) Tijuana campus that has recently developed a joint program with San Diego State University focusing on transborder public administration and governance.
- **Potential cross-border CONNECT opportunities.** In 1994 UCSD Connect and San Diego Dialogue proposed binational technology collaboration through regional research institutions that could lead to technological innovation in the private sector. With the Mexico peso crisis, that vision was shelved but should be re-visited in light of San Diego's high housing costs and the unique research in marine pharmacology already taking place at CICESE (See above). A potential La Jolla- Ensenada bio tech connection? It is worth further exploring.
- **An emerging binational philanthropic** culture with institutions like the International Community Foundation, the San Diego Foundation and the Fundacion Internacional de la Comunidad (FIC) positioned to assist donors willing to support border-related issues on both sides of the line.
- **Our elders.** In both San Diego and Tijuana there are a growing number of talented retirees who are living longer and who can contribute much to the region. Because of the idiosyncrasies of Mexico's education system, there are a sizable number of former school teachers that have retired at 45 and 50 years of age that could contribute greatly the region's growing educational needs.

- **Our youth.** A growing number of young people in San Diego and Tijuana are looking beyond the border that divides us and seeking to become part of a shared binational region. This remains one of the binational region's greatest untapped resources.
- **Our non-profits.** There are a growing number of innovative and successful binational partnerships already being forged by non profits on a whole range of issues including urban and regional planning, education, health and human services, the environment and arts and culture. These partnerships and collaborations are highlighted in the next section of this report.

The assets that San Diego and Tijuana share are unique and collectively provide us with a vision of the possibilities for working together towards a more prosperous future for our combined binational region.

San Diego-Tijuana Community Asset Map



Adapted from: The Asset Based Community Development Institute, Northwestern University