

**Blurred Borders: Trans-Boundary Impacts & Solutions in the  
San Diego-Tijuana Border Region**

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## Dedication

Blurred Borders is dedicated to Chuck E. Nathanson, Ph.D. (1941-2003), the visionary co-founder of the San Diego Dialogue, who for over a decade actively promoted the vision of a stronger, more vibrant binational civil society in the San Diego-Baja California region.

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The Editors

## **About the Editors**

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## ***Executive Summary***

Over the years, the border has divided the people of San Diego County and Tijuana over language, culture, national security, public safety and a host of other cross-border issues ranging from human migration to the environment. For some, the 'us' versus 'them' mentality has become more pervasive following the tragedy of September 11, 2001, with a growing number of San Diegans focusing greater attention on terrorism and homeland security, as well as the need to re-think immigration policy in the United States as a means of fortifying the international border. This is validated by a recent KPBS/Competitive Edge research poll that found 46% of English-speaking San Diegans desiring that the U.S. impose tighter restrictions on the border.

Yet the question remains: if San Diegans and Tijuana are so different, why is our shared port of entry the most busily crossed international border in the world with over 56 million crossings a year? The answer is simple. Opposites attract. The contrasts and complementarities between San Diego and Tijuana are so powerful that residents, as well as visiting tourists and business people, endure post-9/11 traffic and pedestrian delays to cross the border for work, school, cultural enrichment, maintaining family ties or sheer economic necessity.

Irrespective of how "secure" the border ultimately does become, the fact remains that the border between San Diego County and Tijuana is increasingly becoming blurred as the impacts of globalization and human migration obscure political boundaries. The ties that bind this binational sister city region in the areas of cross-border trade, commerce, and tourism are indisputable, and their combined comparative advantages have contributed to job creation and economic opportunity, as well as increased cultural and ethnic diversity for local people and businesses. Throughout the San Diego-Tijuana border region there are multiple issues that require proactive binational solutions, greater investment and expanded cross-border civic participation by the private, public and non-profit sectors. San Diego and Tijuana are also inextricably tied through inter-personal and family ties with a growing number of San Diegans relying on Tijuana for affordable housing and cost-effective prescription medicine and health care.

Blurred Borders highlights the contrasts, the inter-connections and the challenges that San Diego County, Tijuana, and adjoining counties share, addressing the range of community-based issues. Of particular interest is how the proximity of the border impacts the lives and livelihoods of poor and under-served communities in both San Diego County and Tijuana, as well as what can be done to address their growing needs.

Validating the growing importance of the border to both San Diego and Tijuana, Blurred Borders presents the findings of an unprecedented binational, bilingual survey of San Diego and Tijuana residents undertaken by Cross Border Business Associates (CBA) demonstrating the many shared and common interests that exist between residents of both communities. In particular, the survey found that the three top issues of importance to residents of both San Diego and Tijuana were **education and schools, health care, and jobs and the economy**. In spite of these shared public sentiments, few collaborative programs exist in these areas.

While the CBA study highlighted areas of common interest, it also pointed to areas where there is a greater need for consensus and cross-border dialogue. In particular, **terrorism and homeland security** remain very high on the list of concerns among San Diegans but are viewed as un-important by Tijuana residents relative to other issues, such as public safety, even in spite of the direct impact that increased security measures at the border is having on cross-border trade and commuting delays. Urban sprawl was universally seen as the least important issue of concern among San Diegans and Tijuana residents even though sprawl is negatively impacting the quality of life of residents on both sides of the border.

While San Diegans and Tijuana residents did not universally agree on all issues, there is consensus that the border matters. According to CBA's findings, 69% of San Diego residents (English and Spanish speaking) and 68% of Tijuana residents felt that the border had a positive impact on their community. Less than 15% of San Diego residents and only 11% of Tijuana residents felt that the border had a negative impact on their community. Complementing the referenced KPBS/Competitive Edge survey, CBA's survey found that those San Diegans of Mexican descent had a more positive perception of the border than other residents. The study also found that among those Tijuana residents surveyed, over 40% had family and relatives in the United States.

According to the US Census, over 26.7% of San Diego County's population was of Hispanic origin in 2000 and Hispanics are expected to be the majority by the year 2040.<sup>1</sup> Given this trend, the ties between San Diego and Tijuana are expected to grow even stronger over time, irrespective of the prevailing public opinion and perceptions by San Diego County's English-only-speaking population.

Blurred Borders also highlights the present indifference in both San Diego County and the municipality of Tijuana to the region's emerging challenges due to the

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Puente and Martin Kasindorf, "Blended races making true melting pot." USA Today, September 7, 1999.

growing economic disparities that exist not only between these two sister cities, but also between the affluent and the poor within their respective communities. These disparities are further exacerbated by four interlocking problems impacting the San Diego-Tijuana border region, namely urban sprawl, human migration, racial and socio-economic segregation and concentrated urban and rural poverty.

In San Diego County, urban poverty is on the rise. In fact, according to a recent Brookings Institution report, San Diego now ranks sixth in the country in terms of metropolitan areas that have seen marked increases in poverty among census tracts in their respective regions.<sup>2</sup> A review of matrícula consular data for San Diego County reveals a positive correlation between those areas experiencing increases in poverty with those that have high concentrations of Mexican migrant workers.<sup>3</sup> In Tijuana, urban poverty is also rising in disturbing proportions with half of all new residents living in squatter communities without adequate infrastructure. Left unattended, the resulting consequences pose a threat to the quality of life and economic prosperity and long-term competitiveness of the San Diego-Tijuana region vis-à-vis other metropolitan areas of North America.

In spite of the challenges faced in the San Diego-Tijuana border region, Blurred Borders also illustrates the tremendous progress being made to build and strengthen the shared social capital that exist between our two communities. Building on this, the report highlights the shared assets in the San Diego-Tijuana region that are far too often overlooked.

While binational collaboration in the region needs to be expanded, there are a number of committed non-profit organizations from both San Diego and Tijuana forging partnerships on a wide range of issues of importance including: affordable housing; health education, particularly in the areas of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other preventable diseases; migrant youth and parental education; drug and alcohol prevention; trans-boundary environmental impacts to shared air and water; and cultural enrichment. If the San Diego-Tijuana region is to be successful in strengthening its social capital, such binational collaboration needs to be further expanded.

Similarly, several critical ingredients are also necessary (see Chapter 9 for details):

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<sup>2</sup> Jargowky, 2003, *Stunning Progress, Hidden Problems: The Dramatic Decline of Concentrated Poverty in the 1990s*, May 2003, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

<sup>3</sup> Rungsten, David, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), "The Origin of Mexican Migrants in San Diego County: Information from Mexican Matrícula Consulars," Preliminary research findings presented at workshop "Ties that Bind Us: Mexican Migrants in San Diego," UCSD Center for U.S.-Mexico Studies, November 14, 2003

- Prejudices and perceptions must be overcome;
- Cross-cultural connectors need to be strengthened;
- Cross-border institutional ties need to be strengthened;
- Greater binational collaboration among non-profits is needed;
- Transnational communities necessitate greater inter-jurisdictional cooperation;
- Greater sensitivity to the plight of the poor and the challenge of slums is needed;
- Investment in expanded education and health care needs for the region's migrant community is critical;
- Opportunities for expanded cross-border trade, commerce, tourism and cultural exchange with migrant-sending communities need to be promoted;
- Philanthropy needs to play a critical role in addressing border challenges and needs;
- We need to focus on our collective regional assets;
- Much more should be learned about the San Diego-Tijuana border, including social science research to support future public policies and community interventions; and
- Measuring our progress is critical.

Irrespective of one's personal perceptions and opinions, the border truly matters. The U.S-Mexico border is the front line where the impacts of globalization and human migration collide along the geo-political fault line of the industrialized and developing world. Nowhere else on earth are the contrasts and contradictions so great as in the San Diego-Tijuana border region. As the border is here to stay, it behooves San Diegans and Tijuans to overcome their mutual differences so that they can recognize and embrace their mutual strategic assets. Only then can they collectively improve the quality of life and economic prosperity for all who live in this truly unique binational region.

Here, much work remains to be done. Through this report ICF seeks to promote (see Chapter 9 for details):

- Investment in binational social change
- Investment in future binational leaders and the region's cross-cultural connectors
- Education about the border and migrant issues
- Vision beyond the immediate border
- Expansion of the level of cross-border collaboration and civic engagement
- Increased levels of attention from our elected officials on border-related issues
- Increased visits to Tijuana and/or surrounding communities