

Urban Regions of Mexico

Introduction

Mexico is a heavily urbanized country with one of the largest cities of the world, various metropolitan areas and a number of medium size cities. Within its process of urbanization, urban regions have been taking place either naturally or in a planned way.

As it has done on prior occasions, the Mexican Delegation of the ISoCaRP held a seminar preparatory to our Association's 40th World Congress, in order to analyze the congress topic within a national context. In this paper a summary of the most relevant reports is presented, which will permit a view of selected typologies among Mexico's urban regions.

LOCATION OF CASE STUDIES



Challenges for development in the Valley of Mexico Metropolitan Region

Various opinions exist as to the inconvenience caused by large areas of urban congestion and the growing inability to manage them adequately. However, satisfactory answers have not been given for determining whether the Valley of Mexico Metropolitan Region (VMMR) is a very large such area or not.

In reality there exists no agreement as to the optimal size for cities, and thus a certain amount of orientation is needed even before discussing the subject.

A megalopolis like the north-eastern United States, where New York stands out with its more than 16 million inhabitants, does not present serious problems for development, and fewer for governability. In contrast, Nigeria's capital of Lagos, with more than 12 million inhabitants,

daily finds itself in a greater state of underdevelopment and crisis; of the world's large cities, it is one with a very low quality of life.

In relation to these two cases, the VMMR finds itself in an intermediate situation. Its problem is not its degree of concentration, but the conditions presented by its site. A large metropolis might have even greater magnitude, if it has the technology and social conditions which allow humans to live in immense cities.

However, when the city is built in a place that was previously occupied by a system of lakes; when throughout the centuries the basin has been drained and has reached a point of exhausting its water reserves; when indiscriminate expansion has caused occupation of forest and agricultural areas and natural resources have been destroyed; when there lacks a long-term project for the population's mobility which verges on transit paralysis; then a large metropolis becomes a problem.

The challenge is thus not necessarily size, but the conditions by which the city is developed and managed. The ability to govern it is proportionate to the community's capacity for responsibly and democratically taking on the problems it faces and the State's capacity to understand the true national and regional role the metropolis plays, its socio-spatial complexity and the risks and opportunities the future presents, as a basis for today's actions.

It is likely that this large metropolis will reach its maximum limit for growth before the first half of the XXI century, according to widely-accepted population growth tendencies, and that it will then have approximately 26 million inhabitants.

Among the arguments favouring this scenario is certainly the qualitative transformation of metropolitan functions, more oriented to third-party services than to industry. In addition there are advances in Mexico's incorporation into the world economy, most significantly our relations with NAFTA countries, which generate new forces for attracting productive investments toward the central-northern and northern parts of the country.

Another central theme concerns the actual urbanization model for the Valley of Mexico. Behind this question is the argument for the efficacy of decentralizing the metropolis, instead of allowing it to physically expand virtually without limits.

Without question, world experience tends toward decentralization and not toward greater concentration. Thus the formation of megalopolis is a worldwide factor.

As was proposed in the Management Program for the Valley of Mexico's Metropolitan Zone it is necessary to replan new growth in the metropolis (growth which will occur no matter what), using new ways of territorial organization such as development corridors controlled along selected regional highways, and new cities with the greatest possible degree of autonomy in employment and social mechanisms.

The key is an integrated land-use policy which permits the government, together with investors and landowners, to control large amounts of land surface in order to effectively agree upon which uses and intensities should be allotted to them. It is no longer possible for the land-use market to operate without effective controls; the price society has paid for uncontrolled use is already too high.

The other central element is mass transit. A Mass Transit System must be created in order to structure future metropolitan growth which, as we know, will occur fundamentally in the territory of the neighbouring state of Mexico.

To annually accommodate more than 250,000 new inhabitants in one part of the metropolis – the adjoining municipalities of the state of Mexico – requires agreements and supports shared by all governments involved, under the principle of the VMMR's being a large unit whose inhabitants know little of administrative boundaries, and that one part of it is confronting the most acute phenomena metropolization can cause.

These agreements should yield compensatory policies that permit support for those who contribute most to the rest of society. For this, it must be precisely determined who contributes what and who receives the benefit, leaving aside any myths or clichés that have added little to understanding the phenomenon, and conjointly designing a modern and effective system of urban-regional management.

Xochimilco an urban region within a metropolitan region

Xochimilco is a region of 1251.7 Km² (483.3 square miles) with 400,000 inhabitants (its population having grown from 197,819 inhabitants in the year 1980 to reach 368,798 in 2000), which comprises part of the large Valley of Mexico Metropolitan Region and which administratively constitutes a Delegation of Mexico City.

The cultural, urban and rural characteristics of this region, declared a World Cultural Heritage site by UNESCO, were the principal factor used in establishing strategies and policies for the Delegation. We should also make clear that since their origins, its population and the region itself have to a greater or lesser degree suffered illegal and cultural invasions, attacks on their heritage as well as their distinctive ancestral urban and agricultural spaces. This has given the native and neighbouring population very particular, and very different, characteristics; which have obligated separate delegational governments to act and react in various ways, not all of them entirely fortuitous.

The Delegation's ecological heritage is unique of its kind and is therefore the most important in the Valley of Mexico. The *Chinampera* Zone (cultivated areas surrounded by water channels), which produces this region's own flora and fauna and generates income from national and foreign tourism, is its principal feature. Virtually the only area in our country with such characteristics, it is dedicated to farming while at the same time comprising an ecological and aquifer renewal reserve for Mexico City and its Metropolitan Area.

In just a few years this entire region has received new immigrants seeking work in urban activities within the Mexico City metropolitan area, who thus require places to live. These new residents currently represent 45% of the Delegation's inhabitants and many of them have not yet identified with the setting in which they find themselves. It is not important to them, nor do they see it as a priority, to preserve the abovementioned characteristic heritage of Xochimilco. Inertia has caused many of the old inhabitants of the region to illegally sell their lands for a bit of income. On the other hand, the rest of the long time residents, those with a consciousness of historical values, cry out for conservation, and this creates very serious internal conflicts.

The types of housing for a region and its rural infrastructure are seen to be seriously affected by the urbanization process' deforming the region's traditional image: with its characteristics of high historic, preservationist, economic, ecological and certainly touristic value. On the other hand, answers to housing, land-use and urban infrastructure needs have not grown in proportion to uncontrolled demographic increase, and the population has not been able to adapt its openness to preservation with the overwhelming impetus toward change in urban patterns.

Only with gradual change in attitudes and customs by authorities, residents and other relevant groups, and the participation of a democratic government, will the commitment of all other city agencies be possible, and will Xochimilco be able, in upcoming years, to begin to see general change, and the image we want to leave to those who make Mexico City their home in the XXI century. All of this is crucial for showing that the committed participation of all agencies makes it possible to continue to rescue identity and trust, as part of the task of revising current patterns of behaviour in order to achieve the cities we all want.

The Central-Western Region

In the country's Central-Western region, in a hitherto unknown process of grassroots regional development, the governments of nine states have joined to generate mechanisms for:

- Managing territory and sharing responsibility in exploiting environmental resources
- Integrating production links and strengthening the internal market
- Modernizing infrastructures
- Jointly undertaking public works and projects
- Optimizing the scope and quality of social services

In sum: undertaking interstate regional studies and projects, and other work that involves the states' joint efforts and resources, generates more effective results for regional coordination.

The first phase of the work considered sectoral planning exercises on the topics of: environment, infrastructure, education, health; social, economic and rural development; technology, water, energy, public safety and coordination of development plans. There was also consultation with the public via the internet, by which the perceived needs of the population and the proposal for regional projects were determined.

In the second phase of work, exercises for the region's future were conducted.

From the results of this process, the following integral strategies were established:

Strategy 1:

Impetus toward the region's inclusion in global activities.

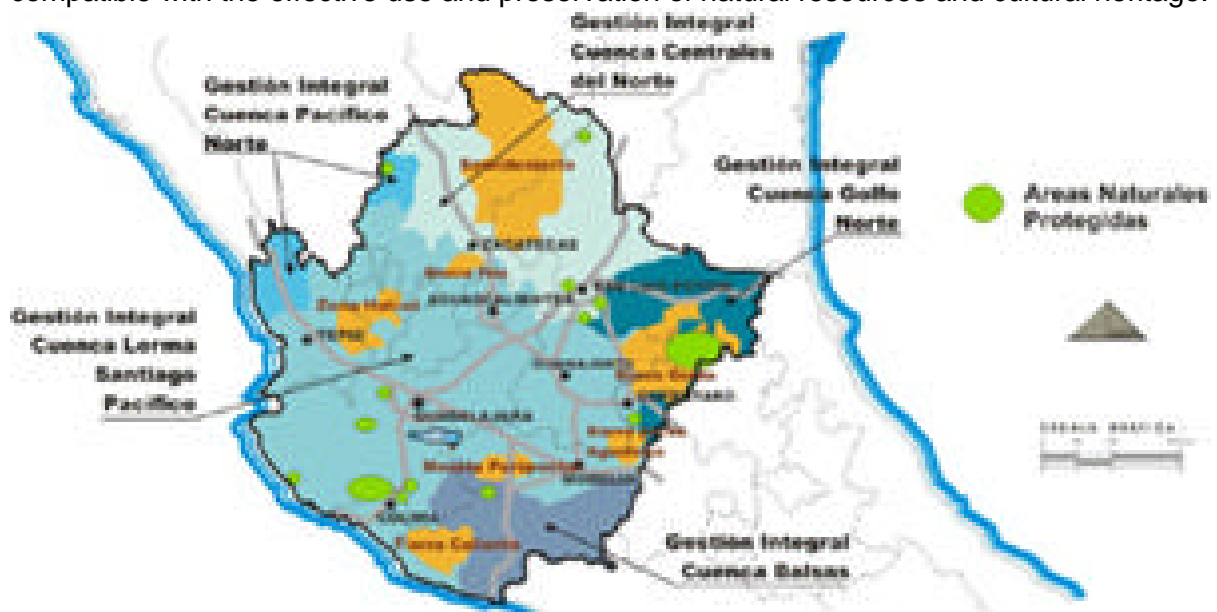
Revitalization of the role played by the region in national projects, via an impetus toward introducing the region into favourable globalization dynamics. This involves greater participation with and interdependence between global cities, their growing importance along axes of international exchange and their ability to benefit from the advantageous aspects of international migration.



Strategy 4:

Reversal of environmental and social deterioration.

Lessening critical conditions and reversing processes that threaten regional sustainability, giving priority to management of the Lerma river basin, integration of underdeveloped micro-regions, improvement of civic safety and solvency of regional energy supplies, in a manner compatible with the effective use and preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage.



Strategy 5:

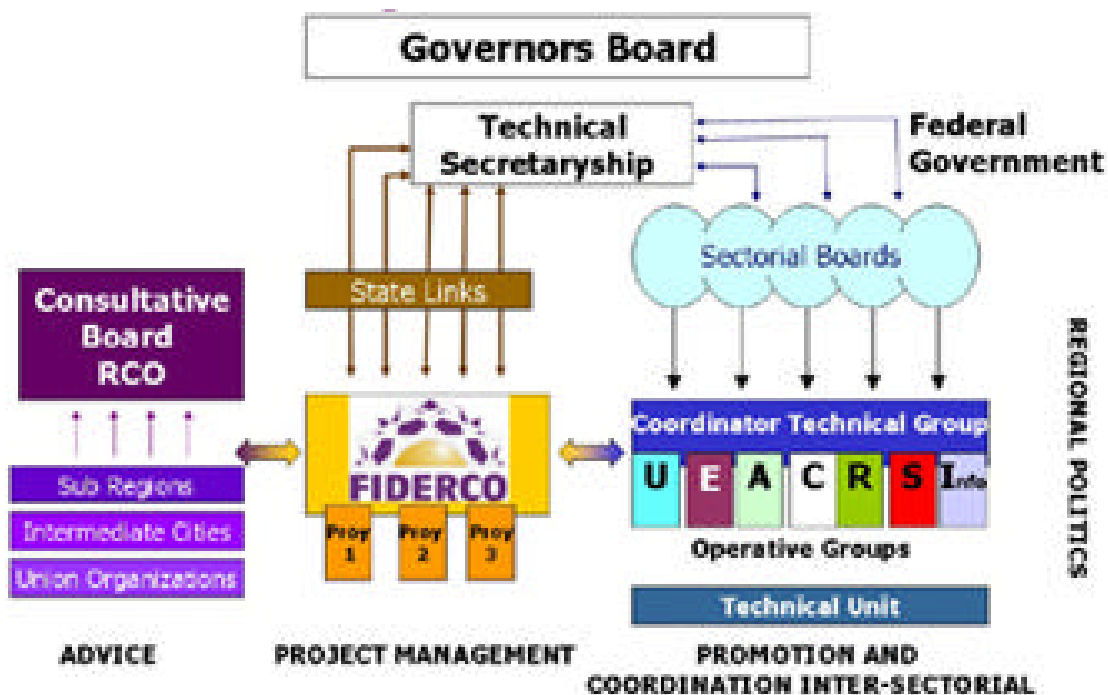
Formal Status for Regional Development

Construction of mechanisms and instruments that strengthen decentralization and federalism through: promotion of regional development management, intersectorial coordination, social participation and consolidation of formal status for regional development.



Strategies are implemented through a series of regional macro-projects; each of which has an operational program directed by micro-regional/inter-sectoral commissions made up of government and society.

EXPECTED EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL MANAGEMENT MECHANISM



The regional group considers the region's greatest challenges to be:

- Modernization of infrastructure and economic competitiveness
- Reversal of processes of environmental and social deterioration, and establishment of support bases for productive activities and for regional integration
- Confrontation of challenges presented by globalization

As regards these challenges, the group of states considers that it has achieved:

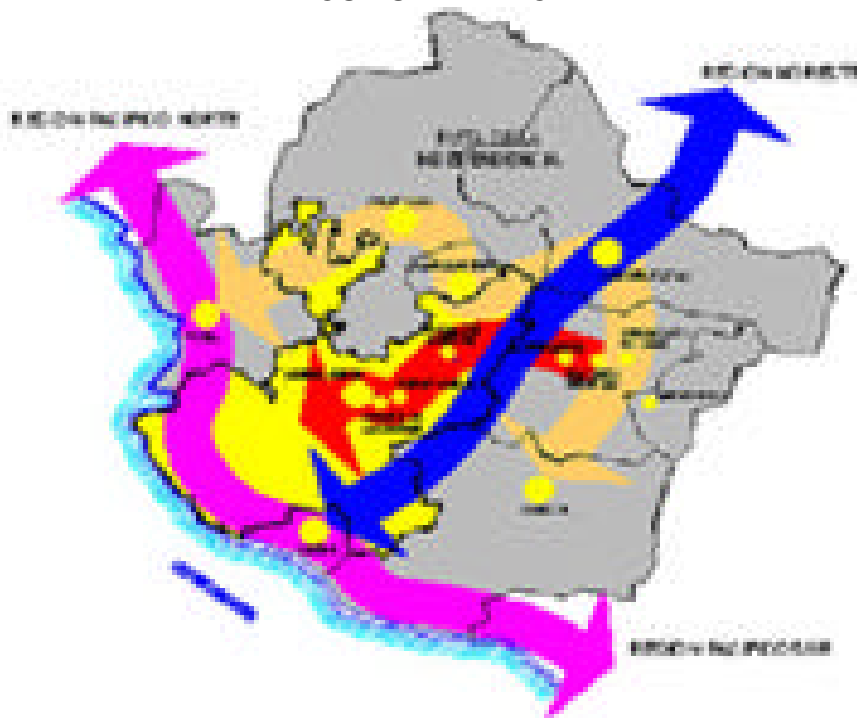
- Qualitative advancement for decentralization and federalism
- Strengthening of states and municipalities, starting with a condensed strategy for building a national project
- Identification of the areas presenting problems and/or opportunities which require coordinating and increasing state efforts and resources for a regional-level solution
- Implementation of an inverse decentralization:
 - = Management on an intermediate scale between states and federation
 - = Interstate regional management

The Metropolitan Region of Guadalajara

The Guadalajara Metropolitan Region, with 4 million inhabitants spread over an area of 56,000 has (216 sq. miles), is Mexico's second-largest urban mass. Hub of the Central-Western region, it is also a pole for business and selective industrial development and a center for specialized services. It generates 5% of the gross internal national product, (with 4% of the national population) and more than half of its economy depends upon the tertiary sector.

It is expected that its population growth will stop in 5 million inhabitants within 40 years, requiring 12,000 hectares (46 sq. miles) of new urbanized land. The region is extended over a dozen municipalities set in agricultural valleys, and is surrounded by natural areas of great environmental and scenic value.

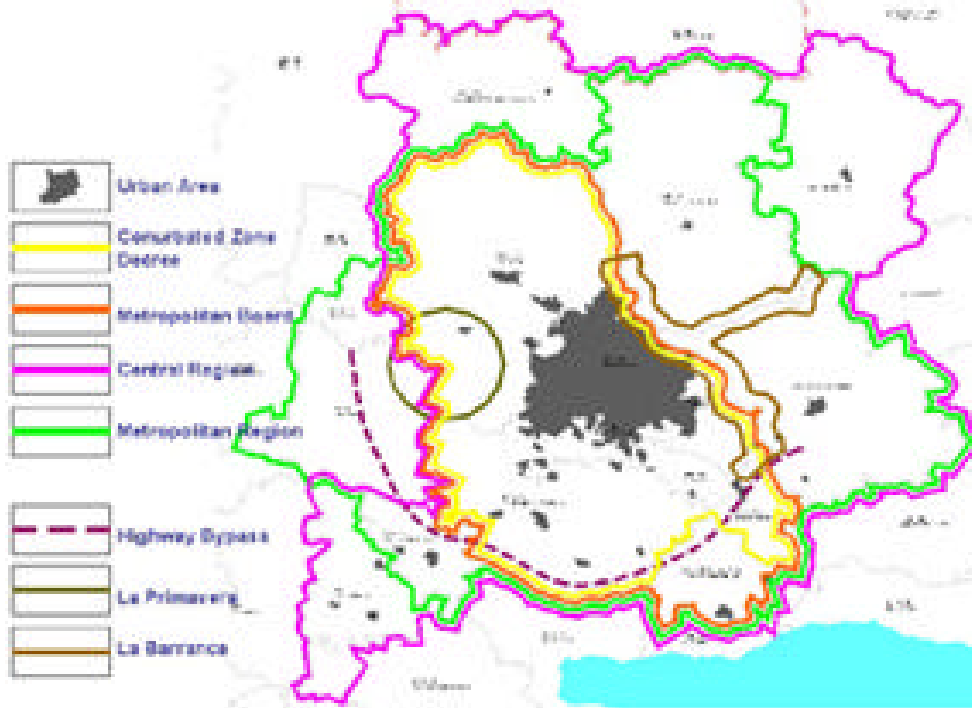
REGIONAL CORRIDORS LINK FOR CENTRAL-WESTERN REGION ECONOMIC AND TOURIST DEVELOPMENT



Starting from a more or less regulated growth rate, the past decades have seen explosive development that has left a disjointed suburban periphery and great dispersion of rural population around the metropolitan area.

The metropolitan municipalities, coordinated by the state government, operate intermunicipal action through the Metropolitan Council, which has prepared a Regional Management Plan.

MULTIPLE ADMINISTRATIVE REALMS

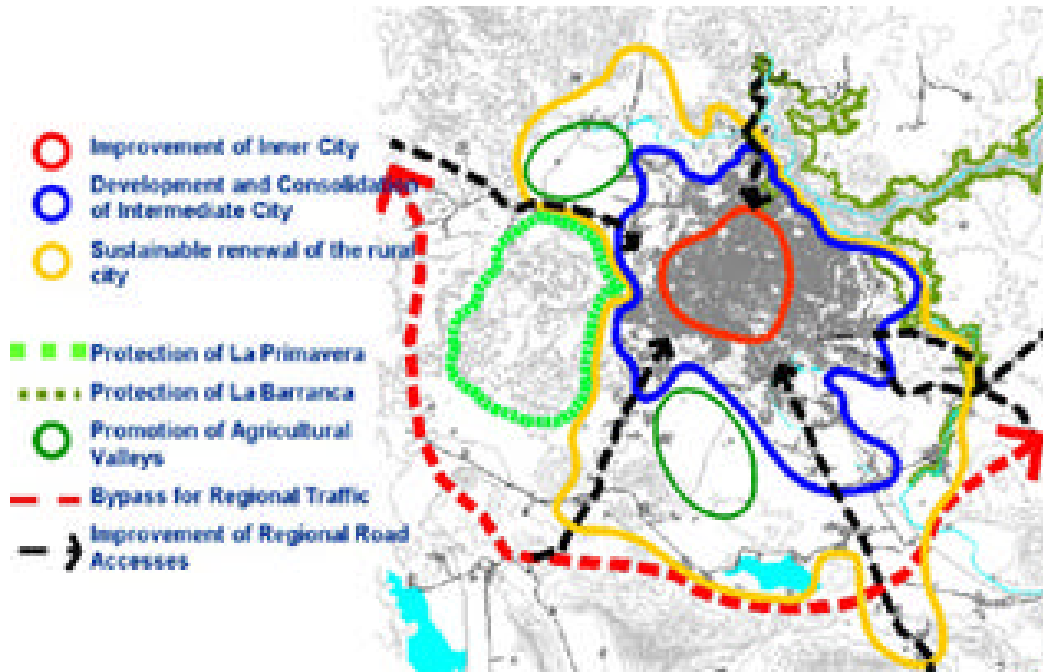


The central strategy of this plan proposes three large territorial areas and lines of action:

- Improvement of the *inner city*
- Development and consolidation of the *intermediate city*

Sustainable renewal of the *rural city*

STRATEGY: CENTRAL CONCEPTS

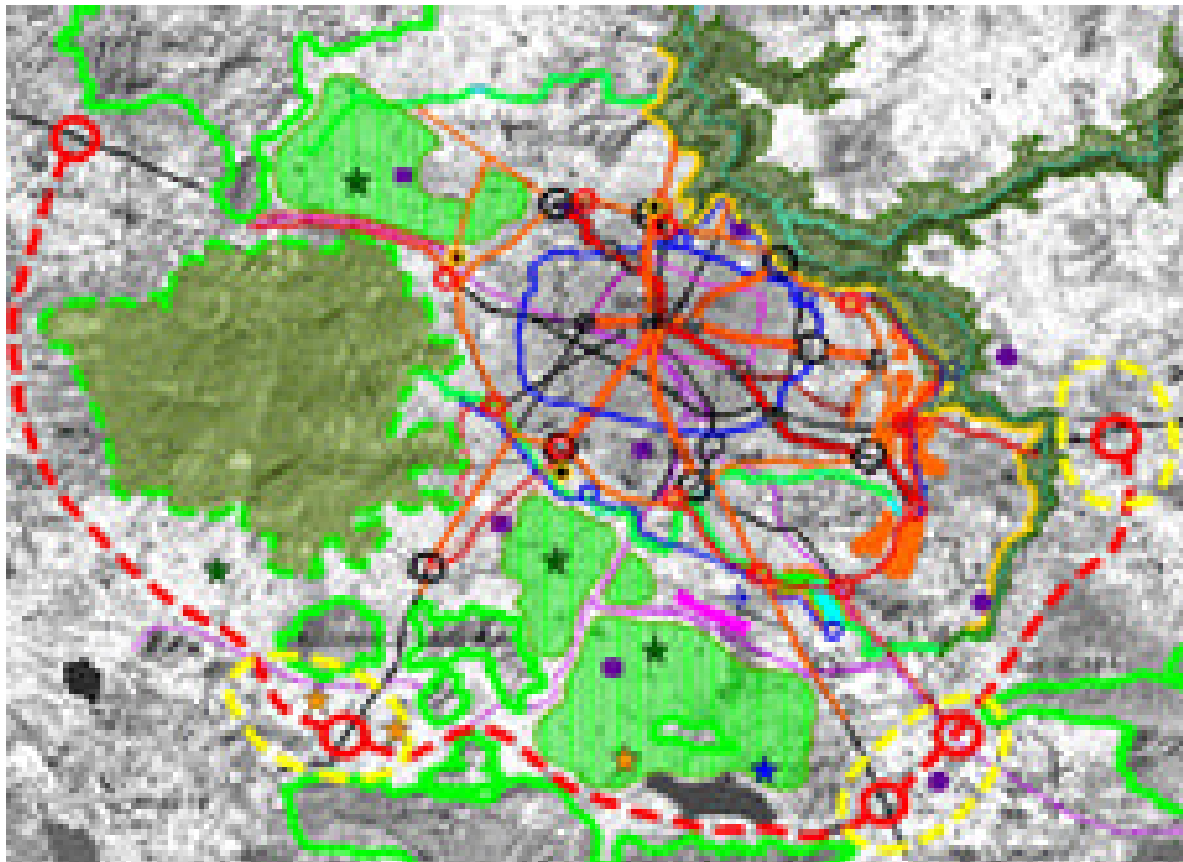


It additionally proposes:

- Protection of natural woodlands and canyon areas bordering the urban area
- Development of agricultural valleys
- A bypass for regional traffic

The territorial planning strategy is complemented by a portfolio of strategic infrastructure projects.

STRATEGIC PROJECTS



- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Protection of La Primavera |  | Improvement of Highway Accesses |
|  | Protection of La Barranca |  | Alternative Access Highways |
|  | Protection of Mountains |  | Peripheral Highway Completing |
|  | Arceiano Dam |  | Highway Nodes |
|  | Sanitation of Verde and Santiago Rivers |  | Comprehensive Public Transport System |
|  | Improvement of La Barranca Edge |  | Interchanging Stations (Abroad Transport) |
|  | Metropolitan Water Treatment |  | Rail Ways Saving |
|  | Recovering and Improvement of Streams and Bodies of Water |  | Improvement and Extension of International Airport |
|  | Sanitation of El Ahogado Dam (Tierra Mojada) |  | Multimodal Station |
|  | Protection of Refilling Aquifer Areas |  | Handling of Solid Waste Sing
- Sanitary filling
- Interchanging Station |
|  | Urban Public Land |  | Agricultural Promotion |
|  | Regional Highway |  | - Protected Agriculture |
|  | Regional Facility Nodes
- Freight Regional Station
- Supplying Regional Market
- Regional Slaughterhouse |  | - Tech-Irrigated Agriculture |
| | |  | - Organic Agriculture |

TERRITORIAL STRATEGY



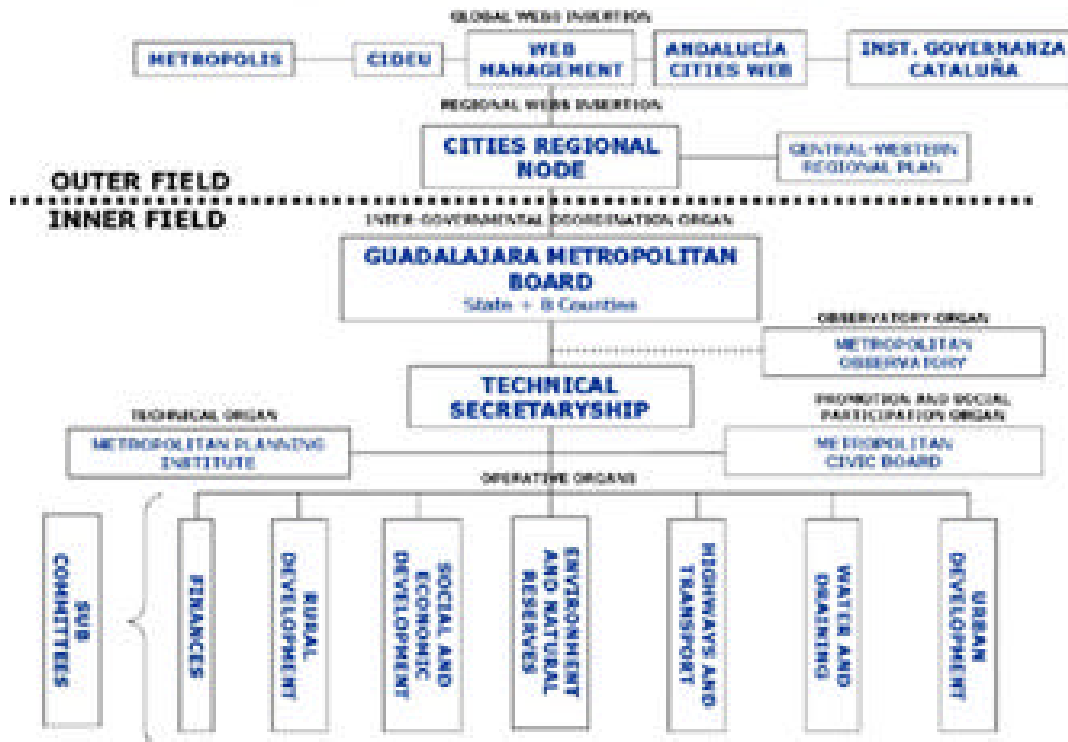
Planning and operation of the metropolitan region is managed by the Metropolitan Council, comprised of eight municipalities and the state government, each with voice and voting power, and by representative of state and federal agencies. The Council is supported by a technical secretariat, the State Ministry of Urban Development. Council actions are carried out by seven sub-commissions which address the subjects of: urban development, water and sanitation, highways and transportation, environment and nature preserves, social and economic development, rural development, and finance. Certain public services are managed by metropolitan organisms, as in the case of water and sanitation.

The Council operates a fund for financing metropolitan projects, comprised primarily of state and municipal resources, to which are occasionally added federal and private resources for specific projects.

Recently a Metropolitan Observatory committee was formed. In process are the creation of a Metropolitan Planning Institute, as a technical body, and a Citizens Council, as an body for social participation and urban promotion.

In the superregional realm, Guadalajara's Metropolitan Region is part of the Central-Western Region of the country and participates in various international organisms and networks.

METROPOLITAN MANAGEMENT MODEL



Ten Final Reflections

No attempt has being done to force linkage between these samples, nor a conclusion has being set, since these are not the objectives of this paper. Nevertheless, some reflections can be done from the cases presented in this preparatory seminar.

1. Nowadays, urban strategies often have to surpass administrative territorial boundaries and define new territories to be managed.
2. Territories (municipal or supermunicipal) call for a strategy to make them economic development and social assets.
3. With globalization, “the city” is generally an urban region of cities which plays a much more relevant role in a globalized economy.
4. Governing on a regional scope implies networking between cities and municipalities.
5. In most cases, there is neither an effective political nor legal framework for the management of urban and metropolitan region.
6. Today’s territorial management must be based upon a process of relational-collaborative negotiation rather than competitiveness. The competitive advantage in an urban and regional economy is the “collaborative” strength.
7. The difference, sometimes enormous, of the socio-economical levels of the population within a urban region, makes its management even harder.
8. Some key issues in the management or urban regions are:
 - Coordination among local governments
 - Social participation
 - Vision of a common project
 - Strategy projects
 - Efficient instrumentation
9. The failure of many urban and regional plans occurs because of a lack of proper management and not because of improper planning.
10. Good planning without good management makes just good ideas. Good management without good planning just makes bad ideas.