

CHAPTER 6. UNIVERSITY BASED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING



In 1978 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was putting final touches on an agreement with the Mexican government for the development planning of Northeast Mexico. The project was to be under the direction of the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon (UANL). With some hundred thousand students, it was the major state university of the region. A recently created research unit within the school, the Center for Urban Studies (CIU), would direct the project.

At the time I was consulting with the UN in New York. One day I was informed that a delegation from Mexico was in the city, was interviewing prospective international directors for the project, and would I be interested in being interviewed. Because Mexico historically had been resentful of the interventionist actions of the United States, it had for many years opposed the use of American consultants for public programs with high visibility. Consequently, with no expectations, but interested in the project, I agreed to an interview. Given the short notice I received, I reasoned that a pre-selected candidate from Latin America was in the wings and that I was being invited to give the appearance of options available to the Mexicans. That might have been the case, but, in the event, it didn't work out as planned.

Until a much later date, I was unaware of all of the reasons why the Mexican delegation was in town. Although the project was getting underway, some of its

activities were still under intense discussion. From the outset, the project was the subject of contention. Not only did the Mexicans insist that CIU, a minor appendage of a state university, administer the project, but they also wanted most of the consultants associated with the project to be drawn from the staff of that university. In addition, because of the added work and responsibility, the Mexican authorities were insisting that the salaries of all of the employees of CIU be supplemented by the UN. Of particular concern to the latter was the inclusion in the budget of significant sums of money for activities which still lacked clear definition but which CIU wished to assign to local consultants or subcontractors.

1/ The person who would be designated to serve as the international coordinator of the project was only one of a number of points of contention.

My interview was chaired by the executive director of CIU, a handsome, well spoken young man, an architect who had studied in France. I took the interview expecting it to last a half hour or so. To my surprise it consumed the better part of the afternoon, at which point the delegates informed me that they wanted me to receive the appointment. The overseers of the project in New York were pleased by my acceptability to the Mexicans. Why the Mexicans found me acceptable I never determined. Perhaps it was simply exhaustion — and the fact that I was not on the initial list put forth by the UN.

I was surprised but elated. I had visited Mexico on a number of occasions, was familiar with its colorful history, respected its past revolutionary zeal, and admired many of its artists and writers. Especially exciting, in 1977 rich new oil reserves had been discovered. International credit agencies and foreign creditors were pushing loans onto the government. Throughout the country, expensive public sector projects were being launched. Clearly, I thought, it was an opportune moment to be involved with the country's development efforts.

Because I had been so certain I would not be acceptable to the Mexican officials, I was unprepared to make an immediate decision. Furthermore, I was already committed to several short term consultancies. Consequently, I equivocated. My acceptance would depend on whether I could postpone my joining the project for several months and whether my wife would be able to take

an administrative leave from her work to accompany me. Both proved to be possible, and I joined the project in Monterrey, Mexico, the first of May, 1979.

As stated in the formal accord, the project was imposing in its ambition with a budget of over \$2 million. The projected scale of the planning effort was equally impressive. The contribution of the Mexican government alone was to include the full time involvement of 50 professional and technical personnel from the University of Nuevo Leon (including the complete staff of CIU), plus an additional 1,110 man-months (that is, just slightly over 92 man-years!) of part-time assistance provided, collectively, by different academic departments of the university, the governments of the three states that make up the region, and the national government. 2/ Obviously, the project was viewed by at least some components of the UN and the government of Mexico as important to the planning of the country's future.

At the time, the overwhelming role being played by Mexico City in the development of the country was widely viewed with alarm. Population growth was so rapid it was projected that the metropolitan area would grow to over 30 million by the year 2000 and would become the largest urban agglomeration in the world. All of its public services were in crisis. Major sections of the metropolitan area, which counted millions of people, had few or no services. On most days of the year, the valley in which the city is located was enveloped in a shroud of pollution, a result of the uncontrolled spewing of industrial waste combined with exhaust fumes from thousands of cars stalled in traffic jams. 3/

To ameliorate the situation in the capital district other sections of the country needed to retain their populations, attract additional economic activity, and invigorate a generally eroding agricultural base. The strategy of the government was to stimulate the development of selected, outlying regions of the country. As part of this approach, the Northeast region of the country, comprising the border states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon and Coahuila, was expected to play a lead role.

The region is enormous. It covers 114,000 square miles (nearly twice the size of all of New England), shares a 600-mile border with the United States, and

includes nearly 300 miles of coast on the Caribbean. It encompasses the major seaport of Tampico, a significant portion of the Sierra Madre mountain range, a vast semi-arid savanna, and numerous deep, often spectacularly beautiful, canyons. More significantly, it includes Monterrey, Mexico's second largest industrial city, the capital of Nuevo Leon, and an urban complex which in 1979 numbered close to two million people.

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Our project, as expressed in the formal documents, was thoughtfully constructed, with instructions to:

- undertake an extensive examination of the social and economic conditions of the Northeast and identify its principal developmental problems and prospects;
- propose a generalized, overall development strategy for the region with special emphasis on strengthening interrelationships among cities, improving the agricultural base, and preserving the natural environment;
- produce more detailed development proposals for three subregions that encompassed, along with extensive agricultural areas, the capital cities of the states of Tamaulipas and Coahuila as well as an important area of Nuevo Leon bordering on the United States;
- design, in even greater detail, programs and projects to upgrade living conditions in three major low-income communities of Monterrey;

- improve, through training, the research and planning skills in regional development of the professionals associated with the project, including selected groups of students at the University of Nuevo Leon;
- motivate the citizens' groups within the three selected subregions and several low-income urban communities, to participate in upgrading activities.

Three underlying objectives were clearly evident in the construction of the planning effort: extend the development effort throughout the Northeast and not simply to concentrate attention on Monterrey; prepare specific, financially viable, development projects; and assist the University of Nuevo Leon, principally through CIU, to play a leading technical role in the region's development. Parenthetically, no role was ascribed to local governments, only to the national and state governments and to the university. 4/

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At the time of my arrival, Monterrey was popularly, and accurately, known as "The Pittsburgh of Mexico" — actually an earlier Pittsburgh, the one notorious for industrial blight. It was the Pittsburgh before its renaissance in the 1950s and the enshrinement of its improvement efforts in the construction of the Golden Triangle at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers. Comparable to Pittsburgh, Monterrey hosted enormous manufacturing plants producing glass, iron, steel, but most of all, beer. The popular beverage was the initial foundation of the industrial empire of the small controlling elite, the Garza-Sada family combine, known throughout the industrial world as the Monterrey Group. 5/

Besides the general sense of blight within the city, I was put off by what I perceived as the plainness of the semi-arid character of the surrounding area. After a short time, however, I became aware of the enormous variety of flowering

trees and shrubs, the beauty of giant cottonwood, jacaranda, pecan, elm and California pepper trees, and, throughout the region, an extraordinarily colorful and varied bird life — a condition greatly enhanced by semiannual migratory passages between the United States and the Amazon Basin. I discovered, too, that most of these special features of the landscape were best experienced within the many, meandering canyons of the region. What became regular weekend excursions through the many creases in the landscape of Northeast Mexico remain vivid and pleasurable memories.

When I arrived at the offices of CIU, located in a modest off-campus commercial building close to the center of the city, I learned that two UN colleagues were already in place. They were both experienced, competent, and likeable. One was from Uruguay, an engineer and project analyst with international experience in Africa as well as Latin America. The other, a woman, was from Mexico, a trained executive secretary and bookkeeper who performed these dual roles for our project. Also present was the international director of a rural development project, co-sponsored by the Organization of American States, which was also to be carried out in concert with CIU. He was from Chile, experienced, and, from the outset, remarkably forthcoming. Each had doubts, expressed delicately but clearly, about the competency and general professional behavior of the leadership and staff of CIU.

It soon became clear that CIU had already purchased virtually all of the equipment that was to be employed for the project — an extensive list that included such items as jeep minivans, computer, typewriters, photo copier, stencil machines, heliographic copier, paper perforator, television set, paper cutter, and hand-held voice recorders. While such acquisitions in the absence of the international director were unusual, in view of my late arrival, they were understandable. What was not understandable was the treatment accorded some of the equipment and the selection of others.

Four Jeep Wagoneers had been ordered and then shipped by sea from the United States. They were picked up at the docks at Tampico by members of the professional staff of CIU and driven to Monterrey. Inconceivably, no member of

the staff thought to put motor oil into the engines or to have the vehicles greased. As a consequence all four vehicles broke down, their motors burnt out, and, at the time of my arrival, were in the shop for extensive repair. Subsequently, one recovered, a second, with constant attention, was enabled to limp along, and two, despite months in the shop, never did make it back to health for secure driving.

Unfortunately, too, several critical pieces of the office equipment, such as the photocopier, were neither manufactured nor serviced in Mexico. As a result, when one of them broke down, which occurred with maddening regularity, either nothing could be done or, at considerable expense, inconvenience, and month-long waits, it would have to be carried to the United States and then, much later, retrieved. This series of ill-contrived tasks was usually accomplished by employment of the few operational Wagoneers.

Just as disturbing, despite the project having been officially underway for eight months and actual work proceeding for close to six, virtually all of the substantive efforts of CIU were being concentrated on the identification of fundable projects within the two subregions of Tamaulipas and Coahuila. Obviously, the approach was due principally to the strong interest of the national government in getting construction projects underway. In addition, however, as the staff of CIU had little knowledge of regional planning, they were following the most obvious and least arduous route — packaging easily identified projects.

To assist with bringing order to the proceedings, the project's engineer began work on a manual for selecting, in a systematic manner, potential development projects, and for classifying and rating them at successive levels of specificity. In addition, I had two international consultants brought onto the scene to advise on the planning of agricultural development and urban systems. Both proved to be excellent colleagues. The rural expert, from Chile, had been the Minister of Agriculture under the former, democratic government of President Frei, while the other, from Poland, had a recent doctorate in development planning from MIT, as well as previous experience in Mexico.

A first chore was to initiate a series of seminar-like meetings with the staff of CIU to sort through our disparate ideas about the project and arrive at an understanding of our common assignment and the best process for fulfilling it. However, unlike my previous experiences with this approach, the sessions were a disappointment. The director of CIU did not evince particular interest in the process, and, without his enthusiastic involvement, the staff was equally disinterested. If I had been more attuned to the nuances of the situation, I would have picked up the message at that point that actually no one at CIU had any interest in regional planning and development as contained in the project document. Rather, their idea of the task was simply to identify and package as many projects as possible. With unlimited financing apparently available from the national government, it appeared to them to be the sensible approach.

Early on, I also began a series of excursions through the region with my UN colleagues and key staff members of CIU. Over and above the need to acquire a general feel for the region and assess the work achieved thus far, I was eager for us to identify our many collaborators and learn the extent of their commitment to our project as well as their competence in contributing to it.

To my surprise and chagrin, I soon discovered that few others knew or cared about the project. The numerous collaborators who, according to our plan of action, were to be close working colleagues were nowhere in evidence. A second disillusioning discovery was that only two or three members of the professional staff of CIU had either a sufficiently broad education or depth of work experience to be of significant assistance in what I envisioned as an extremely broad-scaled undertaking.

Despite my deepening qualms, my companions were agreeable, and I always enjoyed field trips. These excursions were no exception. We made giant sweeps through the states of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas; through their capital cities and major towns; the selected subregions of each state; portions of the coastal zone; and Nuevo Leon's border with the United States. Unfortunately, I ate something along the way— I strongly suspect a taco of doubtful origins in a border cafe — which made me violently ill. I was invalided to a hospital in

Boston and spent the next six weeks on my back, able to communicate sporadically with Monterrey, but effectively out of the action.

When I returned, I discovered that, apart from the work of my UN colleagues, little was being accomplished. In my absence, the director of CIU had been pushing the UN to hire several local consultants, who, inconceivably, had written the terms of their own contracts. I learned, too, from my team members that, behind the scenes, the director was angling for a high level planning position with the state government. It was clear that his efforts to secure the regional planning project for the university and CIU, and to gain the collaboration of the UN and OAS, had been ploys to advance his own career and not to enhance the interests of either the university or the region. At that juncture, I requested the UN in New York to put a hold on all recruitment activities, informed CIU that I would close down the project unless it was redefined and reorganized, and began a series of consultations with the leadership of the university respecting the need to rectify matters.

As a project coordinator operating in the field, I did not, and could not, have formal approval of the UN for my actions. I had to rely on informal approval and my sense — hope, actually — that, in the event matters did not work out satisfactorily, my past record would be sufficient to protect me from dismissal and subsequent ostracism by the UN.

The next several months were among the most emotionally trying of my career. After several meetings, the rector of the university appointed a special committee to investigate the situation. The committee, in turn, held a series of closed hearings at which various of the presumed collaborators, including members of the faculty from different departments of the university, gave testimony. On three occasions the UN sent a special representative from New York to evaluate the situation. It was a situation rife with rumors and speculations — about university and party politics, intergovernmental accords, personal ambitions and interrelationships. Every agency involved at the international, national, and state level was bent on protecting its interests and smoothing its relationships. In this maelstrom, try as I might, I was certain I never understood

more than a small part of what was actually taking place — and, most probably, would never find out.

Briefing notes prepared at UN headquarters in New York, in commenting on the evaluation meetings, observed that a notable feature of the project had been the tendency of CIU to view the project simply as a fountain of financial resources. Moreover, the outside financial resources appeared to be going more towards enhancing the personal prestige of individual national counterpart staff than towards meaningful research. 6/ As the discussions proceeded, I could see that the leaders of the university had little interest, nor any real prospect, in trying to involve itself in development planning for the states of Coahuila or Tamaulipas. Even to accomplish anything within Nuevo Leon, it would have to put together a much broader and more effective collaborative effort both within the university and in concert with key agencies of the state and national government.

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The first substantive moves by the university came in January, 1980. The director and most of the staff of CIU were dismissed. The remnants of its operation were shifted to the Faculty of Architecture, and a new, university-wide research institute was created to handle our project. Gradually, this new unit acquired a formal board of directors, composed of the heads of 16 academic faculties whose activities related to development concerns, a board chairman (one of the rector's closest collaborators within the university), an executive secretary, and a small professional staff. The new entity was the Institute for Development Studies, or INEDES, its acronym in Spanish. Although both the chairman of the board and the executive secretary of INEDES were obviously extremely political, their rank within the university, in conjunction with the expected participation of the directors of so many faculties, offered hope for the future.

With the creation of the new institute, an additional series of discussions and meetings began that spread over several months. What began to evolve was a

university-wide institute that had the capacity to assist with the coordination of interdisciplinary research, extend technical assistance to public agencies, and provide professional training for public officials. Although this was not what our project had set out to accomplish, it would be an achievement of enormous benefit, initially to the region, subsequently as a model for other universities.

At one of the very first meetings, the board of directors of the new institute observed that practically every unit of the university was in some manner involved with the problem of water and its scarcity within the Northeast. Thereupon the board decided that an effort should be made to learn what water-related research projects were underway within the university, what the focus was of each research effort, and whether others within the university might assist in achieving the objectives of the research. Regrettably, our UN team was not greatly involved in this activity. It was simply not advisable, for it involved sensitive discussions among members of the faculty (frequently suspicious and jealous of one another) of their projects' aims, methodologies, funding and results.

I did participate in several informal meetings with faculty members of different departments and discovered that, in reality, little of the research into the sources, provision, and sustainability of the region's water resources had any practical application. There were a number of research projects, but few of the researchers knew what the others were doing, and little of the work was geared to assist with the alleviation of a particular, adverse condition. There was a marked absence of professional connection between those who taught and carried out research and those who worked in government to identify problems and then to package and budget for their solution.

The problem of extending technical assistance to public agencies was equally complex, but it was one the UN team could begin to address directly. This was done by simply incorporating the professional staff of INEDES into the on-going activities of the UN consultants. Over the months, the UN advisors had begun to establish working relationships with state and national planning agencies within the region and to assist them to develop and apply planning methodologies geared to their particular requirements. This was far from a straightforward business. In

the design and application of an approach for strengthening economic ties among communities, it was necessary to build into the process techniques for addressing the realities of public service in Mexico, such as:

- A constant loss of official material within public offices.

While we were advising one state planning department, significant pieces of information disappeared on three separate occasions, and in one instance everything was either lost or stolen — maps, charts, tables, drafts, everything! The situation was common. It resulted from the lack of a tradition of maintaining information in an organized manner as well as from a failure to appreciate and reward professional competence. Thefts by constantly-changing, ill-paid personnel were the norm, particularly by office managers, who regarded material generated within their purview as their personal property.

- Among the quantities of information available, difficulty in locating any of particular relevance. That which did appear relevant was most often untrue, incomplete, or out of date.

Reams of statistical data were collected with little regard to their relevance in understanding processes, causes, and relationships. People with professional degrees were not accustomed to going into the field themselves to gather information; rather they sent lower level data gathers (encuestadores) who, among other deficiencies, almost never brought back unwelcome information, such as, news of schools, health clinics, and other public facilities that had existed at one time but were currently abandoned or destroyed.

- Planning activities performed by personnel with little knowledge or experience related to the responsibilities of their public office.

The few who did have the requisite qualifications would usually be on tight schedules, because they maintained a private practice on the side.

They used the outside office to augment their public salary and as their safety net when the inevitable moment arrived when they would be dismissed.

- Lack of continuity in the personnel.

Traditionally, in Mexico, there has been a complete turnover of public service personnel every six years, along with the change of the presidency. However, even within each six-year period, personnel changes were constant. In the majority of cases, those appointed were selected because of personal or political connections and while in service were shifted about and dismissed abruptly. The situation of those who worked in state or municipal offices was doubly unstable, as their job often depended upon short term assignment of funds from the national government.

Of the several activities projected for INEDES, getting it started in the field of training was the easiest to accomplish. In discussing the approach that should be taken, we learned that a key agency of the national government, the Secretariat of Human Settlements and Public Works (SAHOP), with the support of the World Bank, was developing plans to sponsor a broad-based training program. It was being designed to encourage state universities with a regional influence to train public functionaries in the planning and administration of non-metropolitan communities. In the Northeast region of Mexico this would include all of the towns and cities except Monterrey.

The UN team sought and gained the support of SAHOP in the preparation and mounting of a pilot course at INEDES, entitled "Administration of Urban Development." In concert with the professional staff of INEDES, we traveled to the state capitals and other key urban centers of the three states within the Northeast. There we discussed their special training needs and encouraged key state and national agencies to nominate candidates for the initial course. We not only wanted to have the course reflect the interests of the client group, we wanted the initial set of trainees to participate constructively in discussions of the different topics, their content, and methodology of instruction.

We conducted a three week course that reflected the views we had gathered in the field. It emphasized the use of case studies and other action-oriented teaching methodologies, and, to the extent possible, employed practicing professionals drawn from the area as instructors. Despite these efforts, the course had some slow moments, occasioned usually by an instructor getting carried away by the sound of his voice and lapsing into a lecture mode. However, the response of the twenty-some participants was positive. They indicated they had learned a good deal. They had obviously begun to coalesce into an informal support group and expressed an interest in meeting periodically to discuss their professional work and its problems, most of which they found were held in common. The mood was sufficiently upbeat that a month later we held a day-long reunion which, along with the expected camaraderie, produced unexpected results.

We met without a prearranged agenda. Refreshments were served, and we gathered in a large circle. As the senior person present, I felt it my role to open the discussion. I did so by restating how positively the group had reacted to the course and how useful it appeared to be for them. I then asked them to respond by a raise of a hand how many of them could state honestly, unequivocally, that during the month of their return to their posts they had applied something they had learned in the course. About two and a half hands went up, all accompanied by noticeable hesitation. I would like to say that I had anticipated that response, but I had not, and, as I recall, exclaimed in somewhat the following manner, "*Chuleta!* We put the course together after talking to the directors of your offices. We sought to make the course as relevant as possible. Now that we are friends and talking off the record, why don't you explain what it is you *actually* do, rather than what we are *told* you do?"

Their replies suggested major alterations in the course, starting with changes in its content. For example, the participants did not believe their offices were organized sufficiently well to respond to the massive amount of work that had to be accomplished. Consequently, despite official rhetoric to the contrary, there was no realistic prospect that any of their offices would, or even could, undertake the rigorous quantitative evaluation of potential development projects taught in the

course. Rather their need was to have relatively simple, well organized, primarily qualitative, methods that would assist their offices to sort through and assign priority to the hundreds of project proposals made annually. The system should gradually apply more rigorous sets of standards to those proposals with highest priority. At the end, a handful of the proposals that might require the most rigorous type of quantitative analyses could best be undertaken by outside specialists. As a consequence, the participants recommended that we eliminate the sessions of the course devoted to cost/benefit analysis and substantially expand those that dealt with an evaluation and selection process devised by the UN team's expert on project evaluation. 7/

Wildly broadcasting projects over the landscape to impress the citizenry is not a process invented by Mexican politicians. However, it has developed as well there as anywhere in the world. A front page story in *The Boston Globe* of February 5, 1996, reporting on the alleged rule by terror of the governor of the state of Guerrero, stated that he had started 20,000 public works projects. Some may have been counted more than once, for example, when the project was announced, at the groundbreaking ceremony, when the first concrete was laid, when a roof was installed, upon the visit of a particular politician, when a ribbon was cut, and so on. Even so, a quarter of 20,000 would an impressive number and provides a glimpse of the desperation of the course participants.

Another major suggestion of the participants was to design a course methodology which, in some manner, would permit those responsible for the technical work of their offices to exchange ideas with those responsible for establishing the policies that governed that work. It was a thoughtful, useful, and with some imagination, a do-able suggestion. Unfortunately, little could be expected immediately. A short while before the changed course could be mounted, the Ministry of Exterior Relations sent word that it planned to transfer a major portion of the funding for our project to another program. The UN seized on the planned shift of resources to terminate the project, and the consultant on urban systems and I, the remaining members of the UN team, made preparations to leave our posts.

I had come to hope that INEDES, with the support of key faculty directors, would prosper within the University of Nuevo Leon and become an example for other universities in Mexico for improving their ability to assist the processes of governance. In this, I was mistaken. Events were to demonstrate that the board chairman of INEDES, comparable to the executive director of CIU, had little or no interest in the activities of his institute except as a vehicle for promoting himself, in his case to the rectorship of the university. When in 1984 he made his move, he failed. The rector was able to hold his ground, fired the board chairman along with the entire staff of INEDES, and closed down the institute.

Earlier, while in Venezuela, I had taught at Central University in Caracas, and over the years had lectured in other universities in Latin America. By the time I left Mexico, I was familiar not only with the poor academic instruction of many state-run universities in Latin America but also with the absence of support for the development concerns of government. As the result of a history of interference with the educational processes, over time many universities had been converted into autonomous — often huge enclaves — and their public role had become negative and adversarial. At the undergraduate level, at least, they had become behemoths of little educational value. The Faculty of Architecture at the University of Nuevo Leon, for example, had an enrollment of over 5,000 students. I was given that figure on several occasions, but I still have trouble believing it. There could not have been that many openings in all of Mexico for draftsmen, much less for architects.

Upon my return to the U.S., I suggested to UNDP that it broaden its area of action to encompass assisting universities to participate more effectively in the processes of development. Creation of multi-faculty, cross-disciplinary approaches to the training of public functionaries, extension of technical assistance to the public bureaucracy, and encouragement of research of a more extensive nature than is practical in public offices could help provide a bridge between the intellectual forces of universities and the world inhabited by politicians and public functionaries. I thought it was a useful idea to propose in the late 1970s; I continue to think so in the late 1990s.

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I pondered much at the time, and have reflected often since, how the leadership of CIU and subsequently INEDES could have stumbled so badly, could have so miscalculated as to end up on the outside staring in rather than ensconced on the inside happily looking out. I wondered, further, if there were ways I might have acted that would have kept the ship afloat.

One of the elements of the situation that I failed to appreciate fully was the destructive influence of autocratic governance. Corruption and inefficiency are endemic to the political system of Mexico. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has been in power since 1946 — and under a different name before that. It sustains itself through bribery and co-opting. Its influence penetrates through every level of society. One result is to create and reinforce cultural blinders. Those with whom we were associated, who misjudged so grievously, were neither unintelligent nor uneducated; quite the contrary. They behaved according to the dictates of the system. They did not care about their agencies nor about programmatic results. They cared about raising their image and advancing their insider relationships. That anything from outside the system, such as the United Nations, might be able to assist them, or could be anything other than an additional source of income, never penetrated their consciousness.

That those involved with the project in responsible positions did not care about their agencies nor about programmatic results is understandable. If there is no job security, if one's livelihood is dependent upon one's personal loyalties, the sense of allegiance to an organization or to a community has no practical worth, indeed, can be harmful to the individual.

Years after the event, I was told by a former UN official who had served in Mexico that the project and its location were not based on strategic decisions. Rather, the Mexican government pushed both solely as a favor for the then governor of Nuevo Leon. Whether I, knowing these circumstances, personally could have acted in a way that would have brought about different results remains a question. I certainly should have been more alert to the nuances of the situation.

If my briefings in New York had been less perfunctory, and had I been made privy to the difficulties the project had encountered from the time of the initial overtures of the Mexican government, perhaps my own cultural blinders would have been sufficiently lifted to let me peer out and operate more effectively. Unfortunately, I will never know. What I did learn, though, is that Mexico is an enormous, richly endowed country and, because of its strategic geographic position, extremely important to the welfare of the United States as well as to the rest of Latin America. As a consequence, greater risks will be taken by the international aid community to help it create a democratic and prosperous society than will be the case with other less-well endowed and positioned countries.

NOTES

1. Reinhart Helmke, Area Officer of UNDP, "Note to the File". Report on meeting with other UN officials regarding need to address the various points of disagreement with the requests of the Government of Mexico on the prospective project. (UNDP: MEX/78/005, May 4, 1978).

2. "Documento del Proyecto: Investigacion para el Desarrollo del Noreste". Denoted by the UN as Project MEX/78/005, formally signed, July 19, 1978.

3. One of the best portraits of Mexico in this period is drawn in Alan Riding's *Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans*. The chapters "Mexico City: Magnet and Monster" and "The Other Mexicos" are especially informative. (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

4. "Documento del Proyecto".

5. An extensive review of the history of this financial empire is contained in the book by Alex M. Saragoza, *The Monterrey Elite and the Mexican State, 1880-1940*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

6. "Briefing Note" of Project Management Officer Antonia Garcia. (UNDP: MEX/78/005, September 19, 1980).

7. "Proyectos de Desarrollo: Su Proceso y Valoracion por Objetivos", Final Report of Duncan Alvarez Stewart, Expert on Project Evaluation. (UNDP: MEX 78/005, October, 1980).