

BOOK REVIEW**Fifty years of Change on the US-Mexico Border: Growth, Development and Quality of Life**

**By Joan B. Anderson and James Gerber
University of Texas Press, 2008, 226 pages**

Reviewed by Paavo Monkkonen

In *Fifty years of Change on the US-Mexico Border: Growth, Development and Quality of Life*, Anderson and Gerber have carried out a fascinating quantitative exercise - the comparison of Mexican border *municipios* and US border counties based on the standardization of various economic and social indicators - and integrated it into a book that gives an excellent overview of life along the U.S.-Mexico border and various trends during the last five decades.

After a brief description of the history and landscape of the border region, Anderson and Gerber compare trends in seven areas: demographics, border relations, trade and manufacturing, the environment, labor, income and equity, and living standards. They then introduce a Border Human Development Index (BHDI), a combination of indicators of income, education, and health similar to the Human Development Index. The BHDI enables a direct comparison of Mexican *municipios* and U.S. counties along the border. The most interesting findings actually came from the index's components, which indicated that there is a large gap between educational attainment across the border, yet many Mexican *municipios* have a higher GDP per capita than their neighboring US county.

In addition to providing someone unfamiliar with life and conditions along the U.S.-Mexico border an excellent survey of issues and trends, *Fifty years of Change on the US-Mexico Border: Growth, Development and Quality of Life* would be very useful as a teaching resource for a course in development studies, planning, or area studies. Additionally, a course with a quantitative bent would benefit from the book's explanation of many basic quantitative concepts. Several call-out boxes explain the details of indicators such as unemployment, compound growth, and net migration.

Yet there are three areas where the book would have benefited from deeper analysis. Firstly, while the difficulty in defining the border region is mentioned, there is no discussion of the cause of this difficulty or the conflicting definitions used by various government and non-

governmental entities. Given that much of the substantive analysis depends on the initial definition of the border region, a longer discussion is warranted. Moreover, the competing definitions of the border would provide great examples of the difficulties in quantitative research, adding to the value of the book as a teaching resource.

Secondly, although the audience of the book seems to be primarily readers in the United States, the section on border states (Chapter 3) would benefit greatly from a deeper exploration of the role of Mexican border states in politics and life in Mexico. Not only are cities like Juarez or Tijuana important centers of manufacturing, it has been argued that local politics in Baja California and other border states had an important role in the rise of the *Partido de Accion Nacional* (PAN), the opposition party that won the presidency from the dominance of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) in 2000 (Rodríguez 1997). Furthermore, the cultural contributions of the border region, Tijuana in particular, to contemporary Mexican art, music, and style, would provide an interesting comparison to the role of California in the culture of the United States.

Thirdly, the recent wave in violence in cities on the Mexican side of the border seems too important for life in the region to neglect. From the tide of murders of women in Ciudad Juarez beginning in 2000 to the explosion of kidnappings and violent crime in Tijuana, life along the border has been affected dramatically by violent crime.

Nonetheless, *Fifty years of Change on the US-Mexico Border: Growth, Development and Quality of Life* does an excellent job at presenting trends in demographics, economics, and development along the U.S.-Mexico border and I look forward to using it as a resource in years to come. The arguments put forth in the introduction and conclusion on U.S.-Mexico relations are especially insightful. In the areas of immigration and national security, the authors juxtapose U.S.-Mexico relations at the national level and border life at the local level, as well as present the conflicts between national priority and local reality very well. They argue for increased integration of the two countries as a means to deal with the immigration “problem,” exactly the direction in which I think policy should move. Perhaps it is time for a border-region lobby in Mexico, D.F., and Washington, D.C.

Reference

- Rodríguez, Victoria E. 1997. *Decentralization in Mexico: From Reforma Municipal to Solidaridad to Nuevo Federalismo*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.