

BOOK REVIEW

Hyper-Border. The Contemporary U.S.–Mexico Border and Its Future**By Fernando Romero/LAR****Princeton Architectural Press, 2007, 320 pages**

Reviewed by Oscar Sosa

Hyper-Border. The Contemporary U.S.–Mexico Border and Its Future is Fernando Romero/LAR's (his architectural firm) attempt to show the complexity of U.S.-Mexico relations in 300 black, white, and magenta pages. This nicely designed book is divided into two main sections. The first contextualizes the U.S.-Mexico border region by presenting basic statistics on both nations and comparing their border with other borders around the world. The second is a compendium of the major issues pertaining to U.S.-Mexico relations: Security; Narcotraffic and Corruption; the Informal Sector; Migration; Education; Economic Development and Trade; Transportation; Energy; Health; Environment; and Urbanization. The second half also features 38 imaginary scenarios of what the relationship between these two countries might look like in the near future.

Romero uses the first part of the book to argue that the intense nature of the uneven relations between Mexico and the United States in the current global society make for a *hyperborder*. But for Romero this *hyperborder* is a place where present issues and chaos can also lead to progress, if the right actions are taken. Moreover, the author firmly believes that the U.S.-Mexico border has potential to be an example of success for other border regions of the globalized world.

The second part of the book is a rather ambitious attempt to include everything one might want to know about the border, and then some. Images, graphs and diagrams accompany paragraphs that inform the reader about issues that range from the border law enforcement, to the influence of Latino figures in U.S. politics, to Internet piracy, to global warming and the energy crisis. This makes it a useful book for someone not familiar with the border and its main dynamics and problems. *Hyper-border* is easy to read, the design is clean yet edgy, and the use of collages and renderings for the future scenarios is fun. However, the reader should be aware that attempting to look at topics so broad and diverse in one book comes at a price: the information presented is basic and the level of critical analysis is minimal.

Moreover, social scientists and anyone particularly interested in bi-national issues will find this book too simplistic. Romero uses facts and statements in arbitrary fashion, "California and Baja California, which currently make up the fifth largest economy in the world..." (p. 95). The last time this reader checked, California did not need Baja to be the fifth largest economy in the world. Some of the sources are rather questionable, like the use of a Nicaraguan newspaper article to argue that current Mexican oil reserves are almost depleted. Other ideas are presented in a simplistic way, "By focusing on improving the quality of life at the border through city plans such as those that Bogotá has implemented [*TransMilenio*], high immigration rates to the United States could be greatly reduced." (p. 279)

More critical readers will find that what begins as an "*Exhaustively researched and provocatively designed [...] Non partisan in its politics...*"¹ book, ends up being a recipe of what the border should be like if it wants to be an example for the rest of the neo-liberalized world. Romero's agenda is very clear: make border trade more efficient, increase education to attract high-tech industry, eliminate informality, open state-owned oil company *á la* PEMEX to private investors, create a guest worker program and attract the creative class *á la* Richard Florida.

The 38 future scenarios round up Romero's argument with ideas that go from interesting ("Mexico Displaces Florida and California as the Most Popular Location of Nursing Homes Catering to elderly Americans," (p. 262)) to apocalyptic ("Looting of tug boats shipping drinking water from Canada to the Juarez-El Paso continue," (p. 249)) to plain obvious ("Recent trade accords with China are predicted to boost the Mexican economy and have significant social impact in Mexico," (p. 155)).

Readers new to the border or just looking for a fun, easy way to see the complexity of the North American region will find this book interesting, if read with the necessary precautions. But those looking for a novel way to think of a future for the border and the North American region will have to look for another book - perhaps one not written by the son-in-law of the second richest man in the world, Carlos Slim, and sponsored by some of Mexico's largest industrial and financial groups (Bimbo, Inbursa, and Júmex).

¹ Inside cover sleeve