**Regional Studies in Mexico**

Historically, Mexico has been characterized by acute inter-regional socioeconomic disparities. Broadly, there has been a large north-south divide but the geography of development has become increasingly more complex. In order to achieve a more balanced spatial development, the role played by regional knowledge in understanding the country's territorial evolution must be recognized. Although the origin of regional analysis dates back to pre-Hispanic times, some systematic efforts to address regional and urban problems and carry out territorial delimitations in the country date back to the sixties. Claude Bataillon with Regions geographiques au Mexique (1967); David Barkin, The beneficiaries of regional development (1972); and Luis Unikel, Urban Development in Mexico (1976) paved the way for a means of recognizing and analyzing development issues from a regional and urban point of view. Gradually, there has been an expansion of research and teaching about regional issues as well as of the systematization of regional information, data and indicators. This awareness has corresponded to a number of actors but mainly to academics from different disciplines, methodologies and approaches to reality. The national statistics office has also directed more attention and resources to generate subnational data but policy makers have observed and attended regional issues to a lesser extent.

In Mexico from the 1940s, a national strategy was designed to promote industrial growth through a model of import substitution. It was thought that industrial growth would guarantee the economic development of the whole country, and would be an automatic calming factor for already existing spatial inequalities. In the stage of substitute industrialization, sectoral policies aimed at the formation and strengthening of development poles were promoted. The State had a central role as responsible for economic and development policy but the territorial scope of its initiatives was limited.

In the eighties, an export-oriented industrialization strategy was established. Subsequently, the State significantly reduced its participation in many areas. The impetus to regional development began to be subject to the consideration that openness and trade integration were the mechanisms to prosperity and growth. Regions and cities had to show or create their own capacities to access international markets and participate in international flows of investment. In addition, the free mobility of productive factors would lead to the eradication of territorial disparities, so that a central policy of promoting balanced regional development was not required, which translated into an absence of federal action. On the other hand, the municipal and state levels sought to strengthen initiatives to boost local development, with none or varied results.

The absence of central policies for regional orientation and the low effectiveness of policies from local levels have been evident. The federation has not broken with the sectoral and centralized vision of development projects. Establishing a strong link between academic research and policy making is yet a great challenge for regional studies in Mexico.

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