THE MEXICO CITY INITIATIVE: RESEARCH
AND DOCUMENTATION OF EVERYDAY URBANISM

An expanding metropolis with close to 20 million inhabitants in its metropolitan area, Mexico City is an economically vibrant, physically expanding, environmentally fragile, and socially complex locale that has faced new urban challenges in the last several decades owing to de-industrialization, the increasing global economic flows that channel potential investments into the city, and a series of ecological barriers and population transformations that limit the sustainability of its continued growth. Like many other Latin American cities, Mexico City is facing pressures from those who wish to speed its transformation into a modern and economically dynamic metropolis with the latest infrastructure. At the same time, many residents are concerned about the implications of such changes for equity and the social or spatial exclusion of traditional residents and activities.

Complicating matters, the historic character of some of the most economically and culturally appealing areas of the city sets juridical and institutional limits on certain investments and land-use changes, particularly downtown and in far southern areas of the city where water-based agriculture still persists (chinampas). Designated as a UNESCO world heritage site, Mexico City’s historic patrimony must be taken into account in the march toward modernity. Finally, a veneer of insecurity clouds the horizon, with worries about crime and violence vying with employment, insufficient housing, flooding, chronic water scarcities, and an overburdened transport system as key concerns of urban residents.

The Mexico City Initiative (MCI), a multifaceted endeavor intended to generate actionable knowledge around state-of-the-art design concepts and planning sensibilities in the field of urbanism, announces a call for summer research proposals, open to all GSD students. Drawing on the generous support from Mr. Rolando Uziel, a Harvard Alumni, and under the direction of Diane Davis, Professor of Urbanism and Development at the GSD, the Mexico City Initiative (MCI) seeks innovative proposals in the fields of design or planning practice that will help guide Mexico City’s transformation over the next several decades.

Starting in June 2014, the MCI will offer a small number of stipends for summer research in Mexico City, with priority given to projects whose aim is to a) map, visualize, or quantify urban vulnerabilities or to b) identify and document innovations in everyday urbanism.

Urban Vulnerabilities. There exists a dearth of critical data on Mexico City’s rapidly transforming urban landscape, particularly with respect to the visual representation and spatial documentation of informality, property rights arrangements, the illicit economy, crime, and insecurity, as well as their relationships to each other. Better knowledge of key environmental risks and how they relate to other vulnerabilities is also a high priority, particularly with respect to water and other ecological challenges that impact built form, urban servicing, and resource distributions. A primary goal of the MCI will be to compile at Spatial Atlas of Vulnerabilities in the Mexico City metropolitan area, using this data to generate further research and hypothesis-testing about the sources and solutions to more sustainable urbanism.

Innovations in Everyday Urbanism. At the same time as risk problematizes the urban experience for many residents of Mexico City, citizens continue to produce and reproduce their daily lives with enormous creativity and innovation. The MCI also seeks to fund students willing to re-imagine and represent the quotidian and under-documented forms of urban practice (both formal and informal), particularly those that hold the greatest potential to counteract or diminish everyday vulnerabilities. We are particularly interested in discovering new forms of social and spatial innovation in the context of work, home, recreation/leisure, connectivity, and public space, and how they may produce more equitable, responsive, and invigorating forms of urbanism. We are open to innovations at a variety of scales, from the individual an household to the neighborhood, city and region. As with the Spatial Atlas of Vulnerabilities, our aim is to document published form an array of Innovations in Everyday Urbanism, with a special emphasis on where, how, and why they emerge in the Mexico City metropolitan area.
This initiative will provide grants up to $3,000 for students interested on further creating and developing proposals for summer of 2014. **The deadline for proposals is April 1, 2013.** Projects will be evaluated according to their quality, creativity, and contributions to the fields of urbanism. A jury will review the proposals by April 15, 2014. Please send applications to: ddavis@gsd.harvard.edu.

Each proposal must contain:

A. **ABSTRACT** (250 words) explaining the main objective, design of the project, and expected research, visualization, and/or mapping outcome. A defined problematic must be identified as contributing to larger research on challenges facing contemporary Mexico City.

B. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** (1000 words) providing a clear description of the project and the methods to be deployed. The description should include questions asked and hypothesis to be tested. This description should explain why the topic is relevant -- either as a contribution to the field of urbanism or in the study of Mexico City.

C. **GRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION** (optional). Proposal can contain graphic documentation that justifies or supports the main aim of the research proposal.

D. **HOST INSTITUTION/INDIVIDUAL.** Students will be expected to work in tandem with an institutional sponsor in Mexico City, either an established NGO, university, government agency, architecture firm, or other local individual or authority willing to guarantee access to sites or data. Please specify the sponsor and the nature of the relationship.

E. **TRAVEL ITINERARY.** Provide a travel schedule for project. It must include a research timeline, including the project’s main tasks and deliverables.

F. **BUDGET.** Provide a detailed budget for travel, including airfare, accommodations, and research expenses.

H. **CURRICULUM VITA.** Provide a CV and any additional background information on the candidate’s qualifications for undertaking this research.

**A NOTE ABOUT DELIVERABLES:** Outcomes and findings from the summer field work must be submitted to the Mexico City Initiative by September 30, 2014. Final deliverables must come in the form of textual, mapping, and/or visual documentation ready for publication. Students will be asked to present their findings to a larger audience sometime during the fall semester.