

# CHAPTER TWO

## **Overview of Housing in Tecate, Baja California**



The City of Tecate, Baja California faces challenges because of its location just beyond the edge of the expanding Tijuana metropolitan region. While the local government has sought to retain the quality of life and ambience of a small Mexican border town, it is threatened by an increase in the population of the region and a proliferation of *colonias*, informal communities housing low-income migrants who have often been drawn by the maquiladora economy. In order for the community to meet this challenge and also to provide adequate living conditions for both old and new residents, it is important to understand the state of the housing supply as it exists.

### **GEOGRAPHIC SETTING**

The City of Tecate, Baja California is located on the western edge of the U.S.-Mexico border in the northern Mexican state of Baja California (Figure 6). It is just east of the coastal city of Tijuana. The city has a smaller counterpart, Tecate, California, across the border in the United States.

As in every Mexican state, Baja California is divided into municipalities which are the equivalent to counties in the U.S. Each municipality has a main city, which is called the “head of the municipality”. These municipalities include rural and urban areas, and are the basic sub-state administrative unit in Mexico. The municipality of Tecate is the third largest in geographic area (Figure 7) and the fourth largest in population counts of the five municipalities in the State of Baja California (North). Its main city is the City of Tecate.



**ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Baja California is a state known for its maquila-oriented economy and also for the fact that the population density in its rural areas is low, especially towards the southern end of the state. In the northern part of the state a majority of the population concentrates in cities along the border, particularly in the large cities of Tijuana and Mexicali. The phenomenon of growth of border cities is long-standing (Peach and Williams 2003) but has been particularly significant in the past decade, since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the United States and Mexico in 1994 (Peach and Williams 2000). The strategic location of the border cities such as Tecate has facilitated the introduction of maquiladora (manufacturing) industries, which have promoted economic development and increased the attractiveness of the city for immigrants in search for jobs and a better quality of life.

Cuamea Velázquez and Gerber (in Ganster et al. 2002) provide a detailed overview of economic activity in Tecate. They point out that the long-term economic boom in northern Mexico has been led by the maquiladora sector and associated companies. Employment in the maquiladora sector in Baja California has not been limited to the two most urban municipalities of Tijuana or Mexicali. Although Tecate is the most rural of the municipalities in Baja California it has a more concentrated manufacturing economy than both the nation and the state. In 1998 Tecate’s manufacturing sector accounted for 61 percent of total employment and the bulk of this (95.4%) was accounted for by the maquiladora sector (Cuamea Velázquez and Gerber, in Ganster et al. 2002).

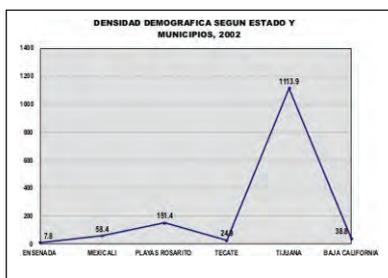
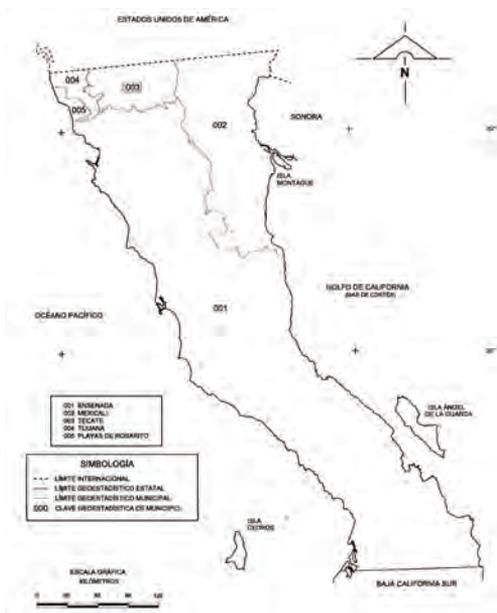


Figure 6: Location of Tecate  
 Figure 7: Municipalities in the State of Baja California  
 Figure 8: Urban Density in Municipalities of Baja California

**POPULATION**

Tijuana and Mexicali have experienced exponential population growth. This in-migration in search of jobs has brought with it a need for housing and presented challenges in instituting rational systems of urban planning and provision of housing and infrastructure. To some extent the City of Tecate, Baja California has escaped proliferation of low-income marginal housing,

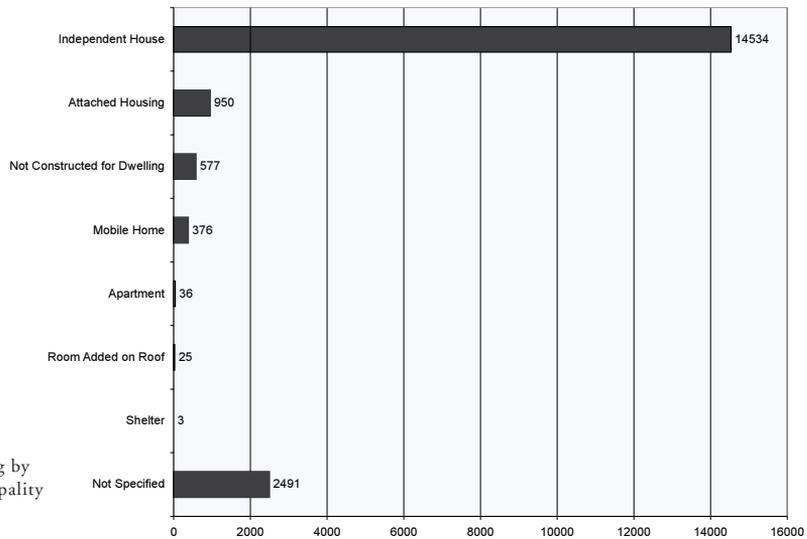


Figure 9: Private Dwelling by Type in Municipality of Tecate

Source: Municipality of Tecate, Department of Urban Administration

inadequately provided with infrastructure, because the interaction between the two countries across the border at Tecate has been significantly lower than in Tijuana and Mexicali. Access to Tecate, California (U.S.A.) is by two-lane roads, and the town is much smaller than Tecate, Baja California, Mexico. Nonetheless, the elected political leadership of the City of Tecate is well aware that the city is currently in the line of Tijuana's growth towards it to from the west. It has begun to experience the effects and problems of uncontrolled growth and urbanization.

In 2000 the Municipality of Tecate had a population of 77,795 inhabitants (CONAPO 2000), which represented only the 3.1% of the population of the State of Baja California. The characteristics of the population are similar to the rest of the state with one exceptions—a much larger share of the population in Tecate Municipality (32.7%) lives in rural areas as compared to that of Ensenada (18.4%) and the largest Municipalities of Tijuana (0.9%) and Mexicali (13.4%). Tecate, located between the cities of Tijuana and Mexicali, is under pressure from their growth, especially on its western edge where the border with Tijuana is close and the urban population is rapidly expanding.

**GROWTH RATE AND URBAN DENSITY**

In the 1990s, the state of Baja California and the municipality of Tecate grew faster than the

country as a whole. From 1995–2000, the Tecate Region had an annual growth rate of 4.4%, which is well above the 1.4% population growth rate for Mexico and the 3.3% for the Baja California region (INEGI 2000). In the second half of the 1990s, Tecate's growth rate exceeded that of the state's by 1.1% and the nation by three percentage points (Cuamea Velázquez and Gerber in Ganster, 2002). Despite this growth one of the factors that helps Tecate maintain its 'small town' character is its low population density. Even when 67.3% of the population of the Tecate municipality lives in the city of Tecate, the municipality has a relatively low density of 24.98 people per sq. kilometer (64.69 people per sq. mile). Compared to the state's average density of 35 people per sq. kilometer (Figure 8), and the neighboring municipality of Tijuana's density of 1113.9 persons per sq. kilometer, Tecate's low density offers a great opportunity for the City of Tecate to develop in a sustainable way so as to maintain a high quality of life. However, this comparative advantage is threatened. The presence and expansion of the maquiladora industries have attracted a worker population to the city and increased the need and demand for housing. The city of Tijuana is rapidly expanding towards Tecate as its working population seeks habitable land for housing construction.

Figure 10: Occupancy Levels and Housing Type Municipality of Tecate

Number of occupants	Total	Independent House	Apartment	Attached Housing	Mobile Home
1	1355	1102	52	60	69
2	2450	2074	122	94	56
3	3158	2645	183	126	76
4	3788	3187	241	138	91
5	2984	2579	183	73	54
6	1627	1424	89	50	12
7	807	717	40	16	7
8	398	343	23	11	7
9 and more	513	463	17	9	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>17080</b>	<b>14534</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>376</b>

Figure 11: Households in the Municipality of Tecate by Family Type 2000

	Household Type	Total Households of Type	Households with Men as Head	Households with Women as Head
Family Households		15725 (91%)	12881	2844
	Nuclear	11566	9919	1647
	Extended	3737	2645	1092
	Integrated	305	222	83
	Unspecified	117	95	22
Non-family Households		1547 (9%)	1082	465
	Individual	1403	973	430
	Shared	144	109	35
	Unspecified	16	13	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>17288</b>	<b>13976 (81%)</b>	<b>3312 (19%)</b>

Figure 12: Provision of Water, Sewer and Electricity to Regularized Private Housing Units in Tecate

	Inhabited Private Houses	With Piped Water	With Sewer	With Electricity
State	559402	499982	458047	543561
Municipality	17080	13744	14518	16173
City of Tecate	11780	11332	11306	11689
Percentage Houses within City Served		96.2	96.0	99.2

Source Figures 10, 11 & 12: Municipality of Tecate, Department of Urban Administration

## HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS IN TECATE

In 2004 there were 19,020 dwellings in the City of Tecate (CONAPO 2004). The City Department of Urban Administration estimated that at that time this represented a deficit of around 4,000 dwelling units (personal interview with Architect Eduardo German Gonzalez Aguirre, Urban Administration Director, November 1, 2004).

### HOUSING TYPE

As illustrated in Figure 9, the dominant category of housing in the City of Tecate is private housing (99.85%), collective housing accounts for a negligible 0.15% of the total number of units. The majority (76.5%) of dwelling units are detached or independent houses. The second most common housing type is an apartment located in a building (5%), followed by attached housing (3%) also called “vecindad” and mobile

homes (2%). The clearly indicated preference for individual housing units is also reflective of the fact that the density in this municipality is low. Interventions and suggestions for improvements towards sustainability must take note of this preference.

### OCCUPANT (HOUSEHOLD SIZE) AND HOUSING TYPE

As shown in Figure 10, the average occupancy per dwelling is 4.1 persons in the Municipality of Tecate. Units in apartment buildings consist predominantly of 2 to 5 inhabitants and attached housing units of 2 to 4 inhabitants. More than 18% of the units of mobile homes are occupied by single persons. Some explanation of this is the fact that there is a migrant population and it is relatively easier to obtain this type of dwelling unit given its “temporary” nature and price.

## HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

As shown in Figure 11, an overwhelming majority (91%) of households in Tecate consist of family units with nuclear families (74%) predominating and another 24% living in extended family units. Also, a majority of households in Tecate (81%) have a male head of households. Thus the families in this area are fairly typical of the rest of the country. There are however, some 19% of households which are headed by women. This is a significant indicator because of the various reasons that women in these households have particular needs of their housing and community. In these households, in informal *colonia* settlement such as El Rincon, women often have to assume the responsibility for earning income, rearing children, and, sustaining the relationships within the community that are key to enjoying a safe and secure life. Their ability to do so is powerfully shaped by their housing (Dandekar, 1993).

## URBAN PUBLIC SERVICES

Alegría and Castro Ruiz (in Ganster et al. 2002) provide a detailed description of the urban public services available in Tecate. They point out that potable water and sewage systems are managed by the State Public Services Commission of Tecate (Comisión Estatal de Servicios Públicos de Tecate – CESPTE), which is a decentralized state agency. Tecate also has a storm water drainage system which covers approximately 15% of the urban area. This service is under the responsibility of the municipal government (INPRODEUR). They point out the difficulties faced by the municipality in billing and regulating clandestine users of the services.

The provision of electricity is Mexico's most complete service at the urban level and the fact of clandestine users remains an issue. As Figure 12 indicates, over 90% of regularized private housing units in Tecate are served with water, sewer, and electricity.

## COLONIA HOUSING

While the term *colonia* has its origins in the Spanish word for “neighborhood,” in the U.S. it has come to refer to a residential development characterized by substandard living conditions such as a lack of access to potable water, sanitary

sewer systems, paved roads, and standard mortgage financing. Definitional issues of what exactly constitutes a *colonia* pose a challenge (Mukhija and Monkkonen, 2007, Huntoon and Becker, 2001). While communities with high poverty rates and substandard living conditions exist throughout the U.S. and Mexico, *colonia* advocates contend that the *colonia* phenomenon is really a unique problem tied to the intertwined border economy between the two sovereign nations of Mexico and the United States. They posit that *colonias* in the U.S.-Mexico border region have become strategic locations where populations with low incomes have sought to fulfill their aspiration for access to housing and for home ownership through self-help. *Colonias* are often unincorporated communities located along the U.S.-Mexico border. Although numerous *colonias* developed in the 1950s, they remained relatively unnoticed until the 1980s. A 1983 Border Environmental Agreement between Mexico and the United States defined the “border region” as a zone within 100 kilometers, or 62 miles, on either side of the political boundary. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began to address environmental issues of common concern through this agreement on cooperation between the two nations. Most of the families in *colonias* have limited resources with which to finance the construction of standard housing. This fact, coupled with an inability of government to enforce land use and zoning regulations, subdivision laws, and, building codes have resulted in the proliferation of informally constructed housing developments (Dandekar and Dabir, 2001).

Because of deficits in housing and infrastructure, residents of *colonias* tend to produce a disproportionate amount of environmental pollution. Practices such as the burning of garbage, and the burning of hazardous materials (such as tires) for heating and cooking tend to produce air pollution. The absence of sewers combined with substandard latrine construction causes waste to pollute the local area and eventually drain into local aquifers. Water shortage and contamination, air pollution, raw sewage, lack of solid waste disposal systems, and lack of appropriate infra-

structure for small scale, income-generating activities with resulting environmental pollution, are some of the major environmental problems that characterize *colonias*. These conditions lead to public health concerns. Residents of *colonias marginales* or *colonias precarias* (the term which is often used for settlements in Mexico which are low income and have poor quality housing) are consequently at increased risk from environmental hazards associated with air pollution, inadequate plumbing, poor access to clean water, and makeshift sewage disposal systems (Sadalla et al., 1998.)

Because so many of these public health problems are associated with housing conditions in the *colonias*, improving these environments will help to improve environmental conditions and quality of life in the U.S.-Mexico border areas.