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THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN MEXICO ✓

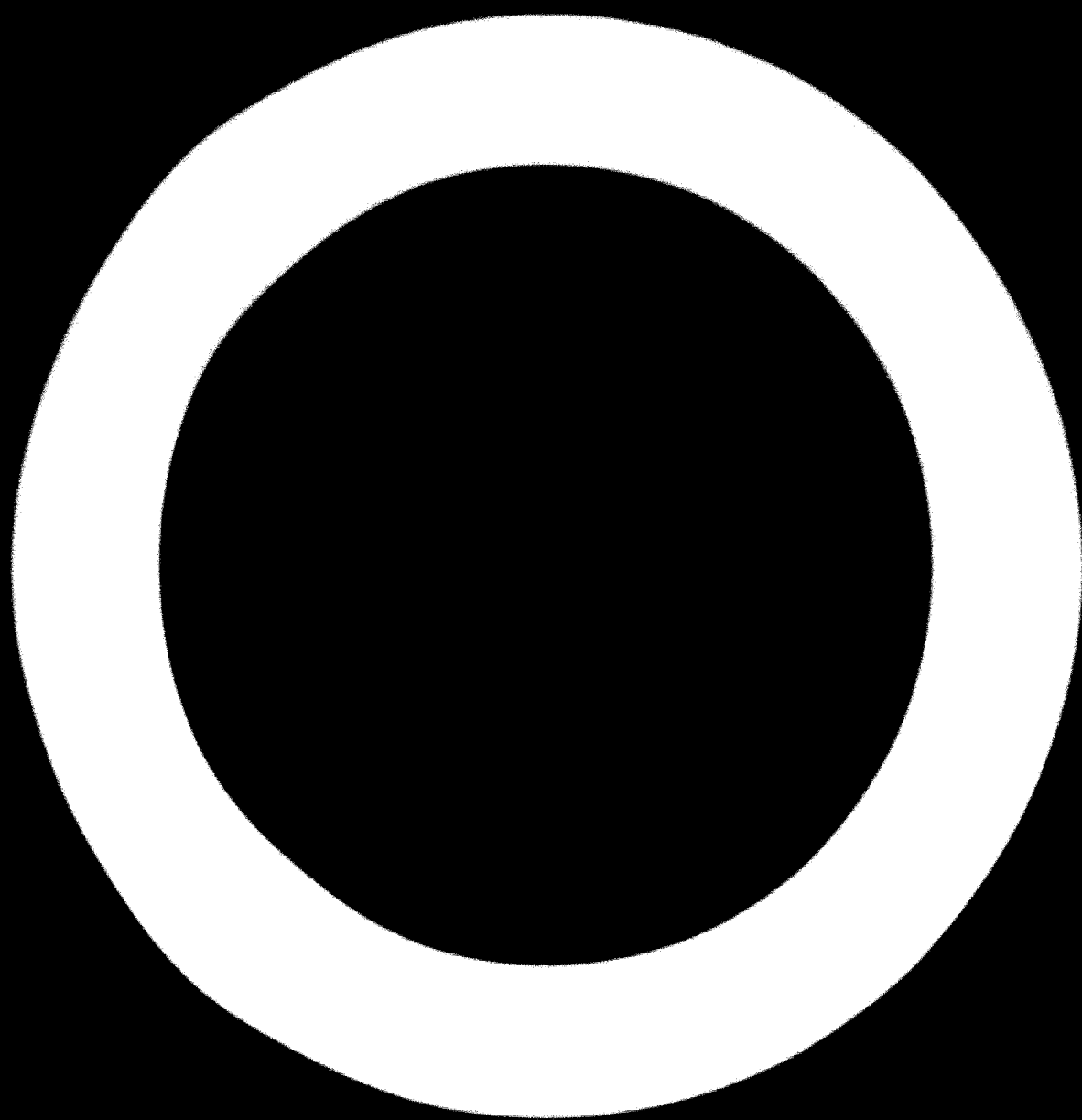
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INTRODUCTION

In Mexico, the furniture industry, like all other manufacturing industries, finds itself in a difficult situation due to the economic crisis and inflationary consequences that have plagued the Western world since the energy situation arose.

This situation in addition to those already referred to in other reports such as the socio-economic problems of social classes and unbalanced distribution of purchasing power, have worsened some of the six points mentioned in the 1974 Seminar by Wilfrido Servin and which I now list briefly:

- 1 - Unbalanced and difficult markets
- 2 - No training or educational system in this field
- 3 - Unappropriate use of some woods
- 4 - High costs of materials, and therefore production
- 5 - Poor design
- 6 - Lack of adequate hardware and machinery

Because of the above mentioned reasons, the Mexican furniture industry has had to continue depending more on imports.

ACTUAL SITUATION OF THE WOOD AND FURNITURE FOREIGN TRADE

In 1960, Mexico's external debts were 300.5 million dollars, which in a decade triplicated to become 949.9 million Dls. by 1970, and reached 1 billion 331 million Dls. in 1973.

The foregoing serves to point out the great dependence of the Mexican industry on imports, and the furniture industry is no exemption. In 1970 statistics indicated the following figures:

IMPORTS	I) Woods and wooden manufactured items	
		107,216,026 pesos.
	II) Furniture, furniture parts and accessories	
		11,179,831 pesos.
EXPORTS	I) Woods and wooden manufactured items	
		94,630,000 pesos.
	II) Furniture, furniture parts and accessories	
		43,107,093 pesos.

Considering that the forest production in Mexico has had an annual increment of 1.1%, and that the needs for wood will be doubled by 1980, the dependence on imported wood is expected to rise in the years ahead, if corrective measures are not taken.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

A proposal for the development of the Mexican furniture industry, would be to take as an example the Finnish and Italian furniture industries which around the sixties gained the prestige and recognition of being amongst some of the best known furniture manufacturers in the world. As I see it, this was achieved by the following means:

Tradition

Both countries had an enormous background of tradition in woodworking and exploited it as they entered the industrialization area.

In Mexico the tradition exists whereby original Mexican furniture, though it has much in common with other members of the Latin family, is unique as a reflection of the culture that has created it. It is outstanding for the dominant qualities of structural strength and richness of decoration rather than for refinement of line and gracious elegance.

The furniture commonly used in the XVI century Mexico was Spanish in style but as adapted by native craftsmen it acquired individual characteristics. The houses of the early important colonists were furnished with Spanish style furniture made by Mexican craftsmen, having a great influence from the sharp and natural variety of the Mexican landscape. The furniture pieces were very simple, allowing elaborate decoration without danger of overdoing it.

In this way, as a mix between Spanish forms and traditional Mexican handicraft, the Mexican furniture business was born. The so-called Mission chair which seems more typical to people as a representative piece of this trend, a walnut armchair with a square back and seat of leather are now manufactured in abundance throughout America.

The early Mexican dining tables, consisting of a long plank, mounted on sawhorses, still exist in some monasteries.

However, the Mexican furniture trade has been influenced by France and England through the introduction of new designs but such influences were not felt in the regional and folk furniture business which remains untouched and can be counted upon as the most authentic manifestation in the artistic sense of the people, thereby occupying an important place within the Mexican culture, arts and crafts.

From among the many varieties of forms and styles, there is a vast choice for the development of a new and better image of Mexican furniture trade.

Technology

Undoubtedly, Italy and Finland have developed their own technologies which are applicable to specific demands, and have industrialized their furniture production without loss of quality, thus reducing costs and being capable of expanding their markets.

In this connection Mexico is at the beginning of its industrialization, similar to that of the two mentioned countries in the fifties. It is now apparent that it is necessary to concentrate the efforts of this branch of the industry to import the required technology from the more advanced countries in this field and to develop a Mexican know-how for furniture construction.

The efforts of UNIDO are focused towards this transmission of technology and it is, indeed, a plausible approach. The next step should be to create an educational system in the country for the benefit of the same industry.

Design

Design has been an outstanding factor in the approach which was followed by Italy and Finland in the building of their respective industries. The satisfactory combination of material, form and function is what makes attractive furniture, not only more convincing for the buyers, but also more convenient for the manufacturers who must take into account the question of production and cost.

We can see the importance which design has played in the development of the furniture industry, in two different ways; from the slim pure lines and natural surface treatments of the woods and leather of the Finnish furniture to the soft cushioned steel structure and plastic parts of Italian designs, showing top quality images.

Design in Mexico, not only is important to reduce cost and raise quality for the development of a middle class internal market, but also to create a definite image of functionality and quality for world markets.

Exports

Both countries have the advantages of being in Europe, thus being able to share in the European markets, at the same time enjoying the privilege of participating in other overseas markets.

In Mexico, the United States being our main customer, we have an almost unlimited market to exploit in North America as well as into Europe. The situation, however, still has not been accepted in the minds of Mexico's furniture manufacturers, whose industrialization and expansion goals go no further than Mexico's domestic market.

It is evident that the promotion of exports in the area of furniture and furniture components must be a goal through the collaboration of industry and the Government so as to help equalize the country's balance of payments.

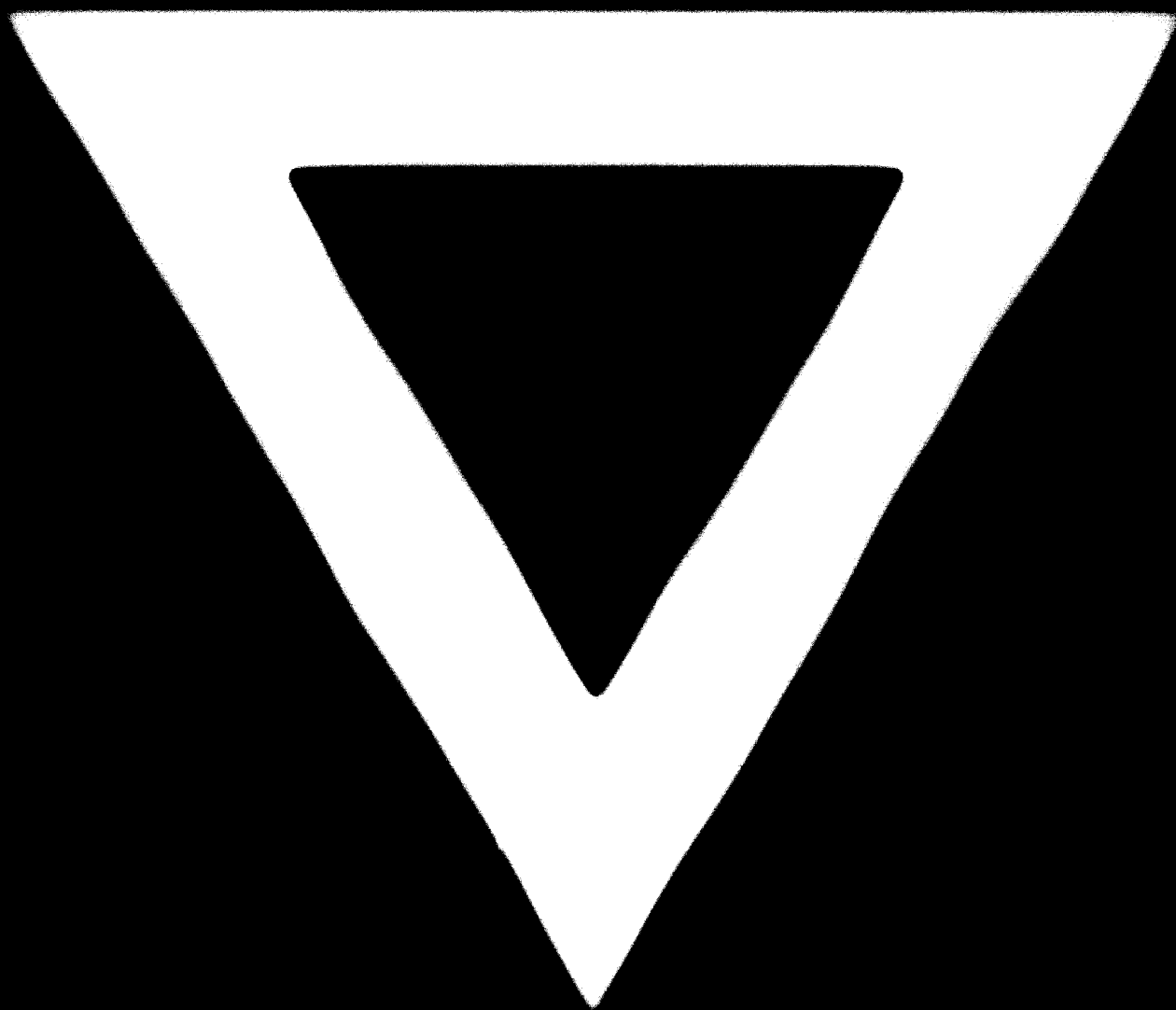
CONCLUSIONS

The national forestry development plan is on its way to develop and promote an adequate exploitation of the country's vast national forest resources.

Technology is beginning to reach the country by way of collaboration programs such as the UNIDO Seminar on Furniture and Joinery Industries.

The remaining subjects are, therefore, to promote the education and training of the available human resources and to develop design and world markets to take care of planned increased production.





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