



## Smart Growth Study 2009 Executive Summary

What follows is a summary of this Smart Growth Study Report prepared by the Smart Growth Committee of the Punta de Mita Foundation. The primary issues and challenges are briefly outlined here, with some of the potential solutions as presented by the executors of this report. This is a quick glance as to what the report entails, those interested in further information on these issues should read further into the report.

### Introduction

Over the past decade the achievements of the Bay of Banderas in regards to tourism development have been significant, however, there remains many challenges for the future. In particular, Punta de Mita, has felt most deeply the changes that have occurred in the tourism industry and the major problems generated by its expansion. These are two major barriers that need to be overcome in order to achieve successful and sustainable development in the region of Punta de Mita.

The major tourist centers around the Bay pose problems arising from social and economic inequalities and the area of Punta de Mita is no exception. This study intends to make a socio-economic diagnosis of the populations of Nuevo Corral del Risco and Emiliano Zapata in Punta de Mita, Nayarit. In addition the study provides a brief environmental assessment of the region in relation to development. As a result the study will assess the problems that these populations currently face and detect areas of opportunity and potential solutions.

Within this platform we can define a vision for achieving sustainable development and strategies to achieve this goal. This begins with the towns; finding a cultural identity, followed by consolidating growth in tune with greater social equality. This is the foundation needs to ensure secure real estate investment and sustainability for the future of the tourist destination.

### Sustainable Development Defined

Sustainable development should seek development that reduces social imbalances and the unequal relationship between rich and poor sectors of society. In this context, there are two populations: Emiliano Zapata and New Corral del Risco, that have become trapped between development and marginalization. They have lost much of their appeal, due to a decline in tourism because of a lack of a physiognomy and identity. The loss of beaches and new attractions, as well as a growing number of migrant workers has created "dormitory" towns for construction projects. Many problems arise because of the lack of permanent and well-paid employment, regulations and their enforcement by the authorities, and the lack of clarity in the actions carried out by different actors. As a result, what is seen is the combination of negative environmental impacts with the social and economic issues.

It is necessary to consider the provision of infrastructure, both social and educational, recreational and health, as a basic theme in the planning of development. Without accounting for such a balance in urban planning, the environmental, social and economic aspects of our quality of life will deteriorate.

### The Study identifies ten areas of concern or issues within the communities of Nuevo Corral del Risco and Emiliano Zapata.

#### Water & Sewage Treatment Plant

Water shortages and disruptions in service plague both communities, especially in the spring months. There is barely enough water that can be obtained from the existent well systems to service the communities and often DINE has to step in and provide the towns with water. Recommendations made to resolve this problem are the following 1. Obtain the support of the Municipality for the construction of a new tank at a higher altitude to increase the water pressure and thus increase supply. 2. The support of the Municipality for better infrastructure with higher horsepower pumps for distribution, coupled with preventive maintenance. 3. Coordination of state and municipal governments to implement the mega project that is planned to build a radial well in the vicinity of the river Amecca leading 500 lts. / sec. to the people of Emiliano Zapata, Nuevo Corral del Risco and Higuera Blanca. 4. Actions taken by the local organizations aimed at awareness of water use, care of the natural resource and the environment in general. 5. The development of environmental education programs by the municipality in conjunction with education authorities to foster a culture of caring for the water. 6. Traps to capture fats

and oil dispersed by restaurants as currently they are releasing into the sewage system and it clogging up the sewage treatment plant. 7. Establish a committee or group that can give oversight and accountability to the Treatment plant to ensure black water is not being released into the bay.

### **Zoning, Bylaws and Urban Planning**

There are rules and regulations that have caused problems between neighbors in the community, especially along the beachfront. These discrepancies are mostly due to unclear and vague rules regarding how high someone can build upon their property. Lawsuits have entailed because of this and it has left current owners uncertain as to what they actually can or cannot build upon their land. Recommendations are to lobby the municipality to be more specific in the by-laws and to include them in the new Urban Plan they are currently working on. The beachfront properties have also been effected by loss of land caused by the last hurricane, which took the sand away from the shore and placed it far offshore. This has moved the line of the maritime zone well inside their property lines, thus effecting how much land is available for development. This has seriously affected property values and limited owners as to what they can do with their land. For restaurant owners it has limited the amount of space available on the beach for their clientele.

### **Employment**

The primary employer is the construction industry as residents have taken advantage of the amount of development that has taken place in and around their communities. Tourism places second with fishing a distant third. Construction often faces downturns, (it is currently entering into one, which could be prolonged), which can be difficult for the residents. Tourism would certainly be one that could be better for the towns, especially considering their location at the point and close proximity to fishing, diving, snorkeling, whale-watching, surfing, etc. Wages tend to be quite low with 50% of the heads of the household earning less than \$5,000 pesos per month. Recommendations would be to look into how the region could be service the demand for tours and activities and improve the beach region. The Parking/Plaza/Promenade/Playa Project would certainly be something to help increase the attractions of visitors and tourists to the region.

Another area of tourism that could help the local economy is tapping into the demand for people to work at the hotels, condominium developments and large homes. Currently most of the workers come from outside the area because locals lack the training and education needed for these types of middle-income jobs.

### **Parking/Plaza/Private Right-of-Way/Promenade/Playa**

This project involves bringing together five components in order to better service the demand for tourism services in the region. There is a demand for beach access as well as the activities and tours that this area could offer however, there are a number of issues holding the project from moving forward. The primary problem is coordination and oversight. Each component involves multiple players and often one cannot move forward until the other has finished their responsibilities. This has left much of this project in a state of limbo for a number of years. The Study identified that the promenade portion of the project alone entails 13 different entities. Community awareness of what benefits the project could bring to the area needs to be better communicated and the municipality needs to be lobbied so as more local participates can be involved. The success of this whole project hinges, however, on sand being brought back to these beaches. After the 2002 hurricane, sand was taken from the beach and ocean bottom and placed further offshore. Because of the jetty system the natural currents of the ocean have not been able to bring the sand back due to the existent jetties that block them. If there is no sand, there's no room for visitors to sit/lounge on the beach, and they cannot swim because of a rocky ocean floor bottom. A solution needs to be found to bring back the sand. One possibility is trucking in the sand as it will not come back with the current jetty system. One jetty has already been removed and modifications are being made to the others, but it is more to help retain the sand once it is there. The solution is open. Transparent communication is needed between the entities involved and concerned about this project, as well as leadership to ensure that the project moves forward in a timely manner and is properly funded and planned.

### **Migrant Workers**

At the present it is estimated that the number of immigrants in the study area is about 1,500 out of 4,000 people. Punta de Mita, because of the construction industry and tourism, has generated a growing migration, originating primarily from the states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Chiapas, State of Mexico, Guerrero, Sinaloa and Mexico City. 91% of migrants after having found work have remained here, which has caused problems with increased population, lack of proper housing and taxed services such as potable water, health services, educational services and security. These people often find there is little to do after work, with little or few activities to participate in. This has led to problems with drug and alcohol abuse and some minor crime. The study identifies these problems as those that are urgent to address through building more educational facilities and providing recreational and cultural areas around the towns for workers and their families to use.

## **Education**

Education facilities have been lacking for some time, but especially so during the past five years because of the increase in migrant workers who have been bringing their families with them. There are not enough classrooms to service the youth population. It was found that more than 50% of the community has an education level no higher than the primary level. Many children are forced to leave school because they family cannot afford it and they need them to work. Recommendations are to continue raising funds to be able to build new classrooms. A strong economic base is needed, offering better salaries, so that families can support themselves without taking their children out of school.

## **Health and Day Care Services**

If the father of a family is only bringing at best \$5,000 pesos, the mother will have to work. If there is no day care, this will force one of the older children to stay home from school to babysit the younger siblings, in order for the child to leave school to work. With day care, the mother can work and the older children can stay in school. This is identified as a necessary social services provision for the communities in the future. Since public health and social services of this type only reach 33% of the population it is necessary to invest in building a better health clinic that can care for the size of the population and more day-care facilities for workers and their families.

## **Garbage Pick-up and Recycling**

Currently there is a new garbage pick up system working in the two towns of Punta de Mita. This is administrated and managed by the municipal-contracted company GIRSA. This pilot program has many advantages and disadvantages. The local non-profits are also involved in trash clean up programs as well as recycling. Recycling has helped remove waste from the towns and decrease the volume of trash going to the municipal dump. These efforts need to be ramped up over time with the growing population. In addition, the study indicates that better, more efficient trash containers provided by GIRSA as well as garbage collection on a daily basis will help reduce the amount of trash. Keeping the streets clean and preventing waste from entering the riverbeds and ocean are primary environmental concerns of the region, especially if it is to remain a tourist attraction.

## **Housing**

It is fortunate that most residents own their own homes and property, many being the original re-settled people when the town was moved from the point to its current location. A problem, though, has been upkeep of the properties, and this is due mostly to lack of funds. If the local economy were to do better, people would be in a better position to fix up their homes. As most properties are titled, they would also have access to financing or home equity loans in order to improve their properties. Urban planning is needed, with guidance from the municipality, to improve facades and finish partially completed buildings.

## **Road System**

Roads are continually in bad condition and it can take months for them to get repaired. Many of the roads are repaired and then their conditions deteriorate during the rainy months. Keeping the roads free from litter is another overlapping issue that comes into play with both the construction workers that travel on buses and trucks, as well as the necessary environmental education programs that are being instituted by the non-profit associations in both communities. The state of the roads as well as various solutions to their improvement are investigated in the study and range from actions from the private sector to coordinate efforts between governmental and non-governmental associations.

## **Conclusions and Indicators of Sustainable Development**

The conclusions of this study analyze the indicators of sustainable development and how they pertain to Punta de Mita. These indicators as established by the OECD and the World Tourism Organization, are economical, environmental and social. The ones that are focused upon for this study are water, waste, economic impacts, tourism and urban development. These are particularly important because 80% of the local population perceives tourism as a culprit for the current economic, social and environmental issues. As a result it is urgent and necessary that the region attend to these issues in the near future in order to attain a sustainable development that will benefit the local communities both socially and economically, while protecting the environment and increasing property values.

Smart Growth Study Committee

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