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Demographic and urban impacts of tourism policies in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

This paper has two objectives: the first is to review tourism policies that have been implemented in the Mexican coastal municipality of Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, and the second is to analyze demographic and urban impacts of these policies in the selected territory. Undoubtedly, Puerto Vallarta has recorded in the last 30 years robust tourism, high population increases and urban growth. The same dynamic is present in the neighboring municipality of Bahía de Banderas, located across the state line in Nayarit, forming today a metropolitan area of interstate character.

Key words: Tourism Policies, Metropolitan Area, Population Growth, Urban Growth

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Introduction

In México tourism contributes 8.7 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (INEGI, 2016). In 2017, Mexico received 39 million tourists and 21 billion dollars from the business. In addition, the country was ranked 8th in the category of most visited countries in the world (Sectur, 2018). However, tourism has had negative impacts on places where the industry is promoted, associating it as a generator of social problems (Castellanos and Machuca, 2008; Castellanos and París, 2005; Marín, 2008; 2009; 2012; 2015; Oehmichen, 2013 and Osorio, 1994).

Regarding the literature that has been written about the relationship between tourism and coastal cities, the following can be mentioned. Initially and in an international context, we find pioneering works (Anton, 1998; Mathieson and Wall, 1990; Mullins, 1991; and Pearce, 1988) which discuss tourist destinations, especially in coastal zones. Such poles of sun, sand and surf are characterized by rapid population and urban growth on the one hand, and socially differentiated urbanization on the other, among other features.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hiernaux (1989), and Hiernaux and Rodríguez (1991) exposed three issues in the Mexican context: the birth of cities due to tourism, the processes of segregation that occur in these urban centers and the lack of planning in them. A decade later the number of authors who have tackled the task of explaining the origin, development and evolution of coastal tourist destinations has grown (Vera, *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, there are authors such as Díaz who emphasize that urban cities have developed their own urban forms, such as ports, marinas and even micro-cities (2013: 195). Nonetheless, most authors continue to recognize the same problems that are generated in such spaces as: a) spatial segregation; b) high urban growth without control; and c) lack of general, comprehensive and future planning (González, 2013 and Vera, *et al.*, 2013). In these

processes, different government institutions as well as multiple economic and social groups play an important role (Díaz, 2004).

In the contemporary age, economic neoliberalism is a key element to understanding the urban dynamic that exists in most of the tourist-oriented territories, given that such places are travel destinations possessing attractive attributes that will be exploited by private and foreign capital with the minimum intervention of the State. Thus, in coastal resorts, the beach will become "the most demanded, coveted and conflictive space" (Rea, González and Navarro 2015). Quite frequently, because their access is restricted, the beaches will not be able to be enjoyed by the majority, as indicated by Marín (2012 and 2015) and Sosa y Casal (2015). This dynamic of coastal "privatization" also takes place in Jalisco (Ávila Luna, 2013; Ramírez, 2015, and Gerritsen and Álvarez, 2017).

For Puerto Vallarta, authors have analyzed the impacts of tourism (Everitt, *et al.*, 2008 and Pérez 2010), the specific area of occupation of the territory (Baños, 2012) and urban growth (Baños, 2010, Olivares, 2013 and Cárdenas, 2016). Similarly, emphasis should be placed on written works that have addressed population growth through the migratory variable (Winnie 1984, Velázquez 1993, Velázquez and Papail 1997, Canales and Vargas 2002, and Cárdenas 2014a).

In this context, this article jointly analyzes the demographic and urban impacts generated by tourism in Puerto Vallarta. Regarding the former, emphasis is placed on the high population growth registered in the last few decades. Correspondingly, the number and origin of migrants that were counted in 2015 in the Jalisco municipality are illustrated. As for the latter, mention is made of the high urban growth that has taken place in recent years, as well as the urban transformation of the city. Problems such as gentrification, spatial segregation and obstacles to beach access are pointed out.

Puerto Vallarta is one of the most prominent resorts in Mexico. The city has 23,797 hotel rooms (Secturjal, 2016) and enjoys a “high presence of foreign visitors” (Brenner, 2007). In 2016, for instance, Puerto Vallarta was visited by 4,203,516 tourists, of which 2,643,666 (62.82%) were nationals and 1,559,851 (37.10%) were foreigners. Of the latter, 67.49 came from the United States of America, 29.08 from Canada and the rest from other latitudes. Foreign tourists in Puerto Vallarta contribute 54.85% of the state of Jalisco’s tourism income.

Puerto Vallarta is situated on the Pacific Ocean and has an area of 681 km². Today’s city traces its origins to December 12, 1851, when Don Guadalupe Sanchez settled with relatives and friends on the Rio Cuale and constituted the village Las Peñas de Santa María de Guadalupe (Munguía, 1997: 100). On May 31, 1918, Puerto Vallarta was legally declared a municipality, adopting its current name (Montes de Oca, 2001: 37). The defining features 100 years ago included a small population mainly dedicated to agriculture and fishing. The coastal town’s tourism industry dates back to the 1940s, when a project for the settlement of the coast of Jalisco was sponsored by the administration of Governor Marcelino Garcia Barragan. The Planning Commission of the Coast of Jalisco (Comisión de Planeación de la Costa de Jalisco), which originated in 1953, followed up on the initial project. Both, in turn, were part of the national project called “Marcha al Mar,” created by the federal administration of President Adolfo Ruíz Cortines (Rodriguez, 1994: 28).

The implementation of tourism policies in Puerto Vallarta

The central objective of tourism policies is to improve the welfare of citizens (De Kadt, 1984 and Monfort, 2000). In Mexico’s case the “government had three main goals: “earning foreign exchange, creating employment, and diverting internal migration toward tourism development poles” (Wilson, 2008: 37). Nowadays, tourism is one of the mainstays

of the Mexican economy (Clancy, 2001: 129 and Wilson, 2008: 37). Surely the biggest reason for that economic status is that “Mexico benefited from its proximity to the United States, the largest tourism sending market in the world” (Clancy, 2001: 130).

Several studies have analyzed and classified Mexican tourism policies (Clancy, 2001; Coll, 2016; Jiménez 1993 and Molina 2007). Most of these emphasize the strong participation that the federal government has had in its management. In México the number of actors who are involved in tourist activity has multiplied, generating impacts as will be seen in the following paragraphs. In the case of Puerto Vallarta, Cárdenas (2017), following Jiménez, identifies seven phases of tourism policies, covering the period 1945-2016.

Methodology

This research is the result of academic documentation and field work. The first task consisted in the review of academic articles, data and official publications. This provided a solid basis to analyze, narrow, categorize, clarify and synthesize, in addition to making a comparison between the information obtained (Pérez, 2002: 102). The field work was carried out at the beginning of February 2018 in Boca de Tomates, Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, where five semi-structured interviews were conducted with three natives of Las Juntas, a fisherman and a restaurateur. The reason for doing field work at Boca de Tomates’ beach is because in the last 50 years it has emerged as a leisure space for the inhabitants of the periphery of Puerto Vallarta.

Results

Demographic impacts of tourism policies in Puerto Vallarta

The main impact of the tourism policies implemented in Puerto Vallarta has been a wholesale change in the economic strategy in the territory. This was the impetus that drove the coastal municipality of Jalisco State from a village to an international tourist center in

merely decades; additionally, it is a central city of a Metropolitan Interstate Area (Everitt, *et al.*, 2008; and Cárdenas, 2014b).

To understand the change of economic activities in Puerto Vallarta, it should be considered, for example, that in 1940 70.8 percent of the economically active population worked in the primary sector (Winnie, 1984: 151), while circa 1970 this figure dropped to only 11.0 percent (Arroyo, Winnie, *et al.*, 1986: 126). By 2010, 81.25 percent of the population was employed in the tertiary sector in Puerto Vallarta, 15.21 percent in the secondary sector and only 1.34 per cent in primary sector related activities (INEGI, 2010). Certainly, tourism imposes itself on other economic activities (González 2013 and Pérez and Santos 2015).

As observed by several authors tourism brings with it various impacts, one of them being robust population growth in the territories where it is developed (Anton 1998; Cárdenas 2014b; Díaz, 2004; Mullins, 1991; Pearce, 1988; Pérez and Santos 2015; and Vera, *et al.*, 2013). This result can be seen in the case of Puerto Vallarta, where the number of inhabitants mushroomed from 10,801 in 1950 to 275, 640 in 2015 (see figure 1). Thus, one of the objectives of Mexican tourism policy was achieved (Wilson, 2008: 49).

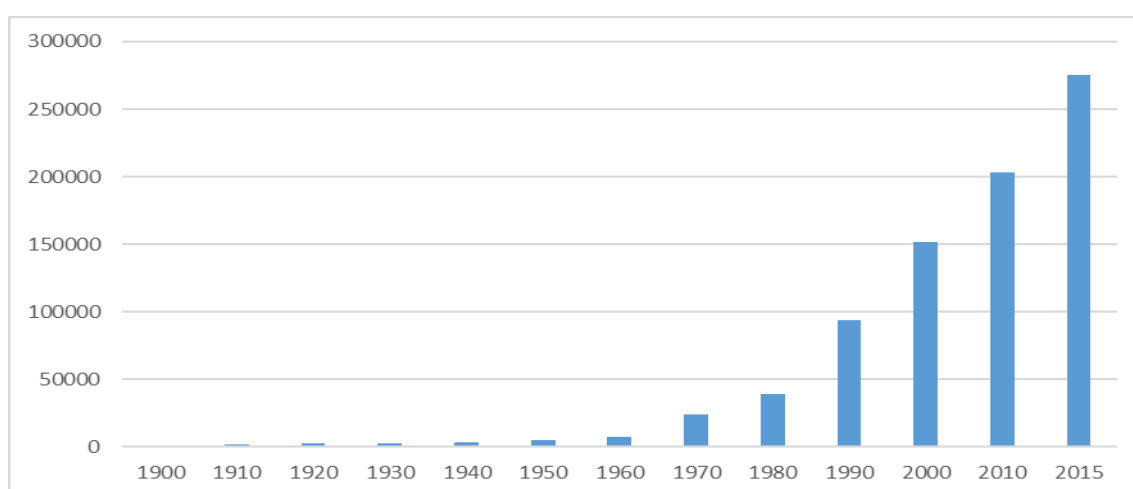


Figure 1. Population of the municipality of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico 1900-2015
Source: INEGI. General population and housing of the census, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 and Intercensal Survey 2015.

The period 1960-1970 documented (figure 1) the highest population growth rates, after that decade a downward trend is observed. The demographic dynamics experienced by Puerto Vallarta imply “creating new problems daily” (Evans, 1984: 315), due to the fact the government should provide public services, housing and employment. In addition, the natives associate the social and insecurity problems in their community with the arrival of immigrants (Andrade, 2006; Olivares, 2013: 536). To know more accurately the origin of migrants to the municipality of Puerto Vallarta in the year 2015, see figure 2.

Of a total of 75,466 domestic migrants, the breakdown is as follows: Nayarit contributed with 18,036 (24%), Guerrero 12,075 (16%), México City (Capital of the country) 8,830 (12%), Michoacán 6,981 (9%), and the state of México 3,358 (4%) (INEGI, 2015). Unsurprisingly, considering that Nayarit is next door to Puerto Vallarta, the state is listed as one of the top sending entities of migrants to Puerto Vallarta.

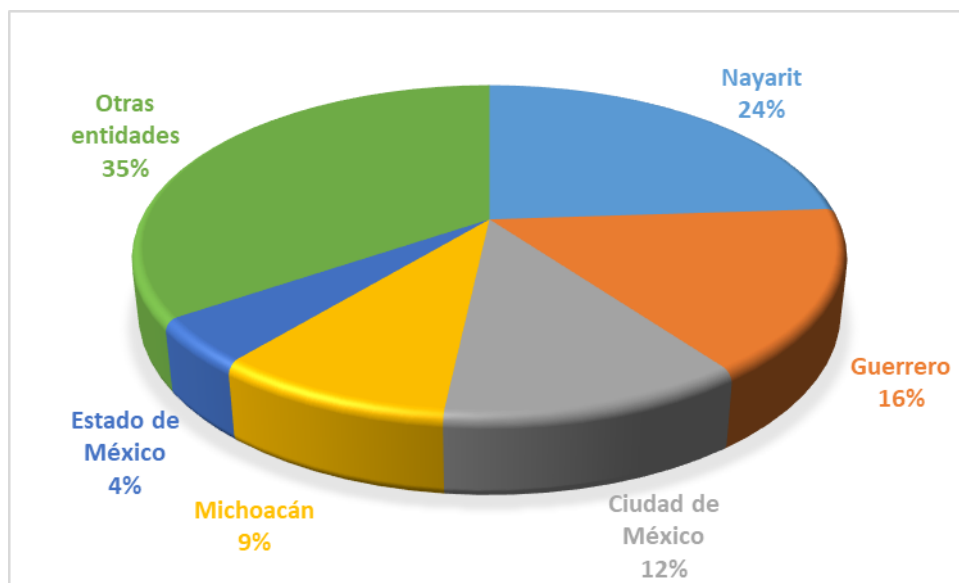


Figure 2. Migration by residence in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico
Source: Own elaboration based on Intercensal Survey 2015. Data provided by the INEGI Microdatos Laboratory.

Domestic structural problems are among the main causes of migration in México. In this context, “The migrants to Vallarta say they have many more advantages than they had in

their villages and give two reasons for their move. That there is work here... and opportunity for their children's education" (Evans, 1984: 319). Twenty-eight years later, little has changed for *Chiapanecos* residing in this place, who state that their main reason for moving to Puerto Vallarta is 'to get a job' (Cárdenas, 2014).

Notably, many international immigrants settle in Puerto Vallarta. In 2015, there were 3,060 Americans and 2,399 from other nations (Intercensal Survey 2015, data provided by the Microdata Laboratory of INEGI). But informal local estimates of foreigners living in Puerto Vallarta and the adjacent Riviera Nayarit, however, range much higher. Many of these immigrants are retired citizens who like pleasant weather. For more detailed reasons motivating the new immigrants, it would be necessary to undertake a thorough study about characteristics and needs, as well as to research the nature of the relationship between native and new residents, among other issues. Clearly, the attraction of both national and international immigrants has been one of the biggest impacts of tourism in the *jalisciense* resort. At the same time, the Banderas Bay region is a place that retains its native population.

Tourism policies previously implemented in Puerto Vallarta were later extended to Nayarit, leading to the formation of the municipality of Bahía de Banderas. Currently, both municipalities share an economic unit, even standardizing the time zone, as well as managing federal resources to apply them in road works for the benefit of the population. A joint, international promotion of Puerto Vallarta and the Riviera Nayarit has diversified supply. Nonetheless, many residents of Vallarta contend that the opening of new resorts in Nayarit has produced a loss of business and income to the older vacation spot.

It must be recognized that the Metropolitan Area of Puerto Vallarta benefits the economically strategic twins of sun and sand; it is interstate and originated due to the participation of the central city of Puerto Vallarta. Although, it should be noted that high rates of population growth are currently recorded in the young municipality of Bahia de Banderas

(Cárdenas, 2014b). This largely explains why the land in the coastal strip of Puerto Vallarta is almost all bought up, with the few remaining parcels commanding a high value (Márquez and Ocampo, 2009). Similar investment is targeted on Banderas Bay, even as a labor force is drifts into the area in search of better life opportunities.

In figure three you can observe that in more than two decades the population of Bahía de Banderas has tripled.

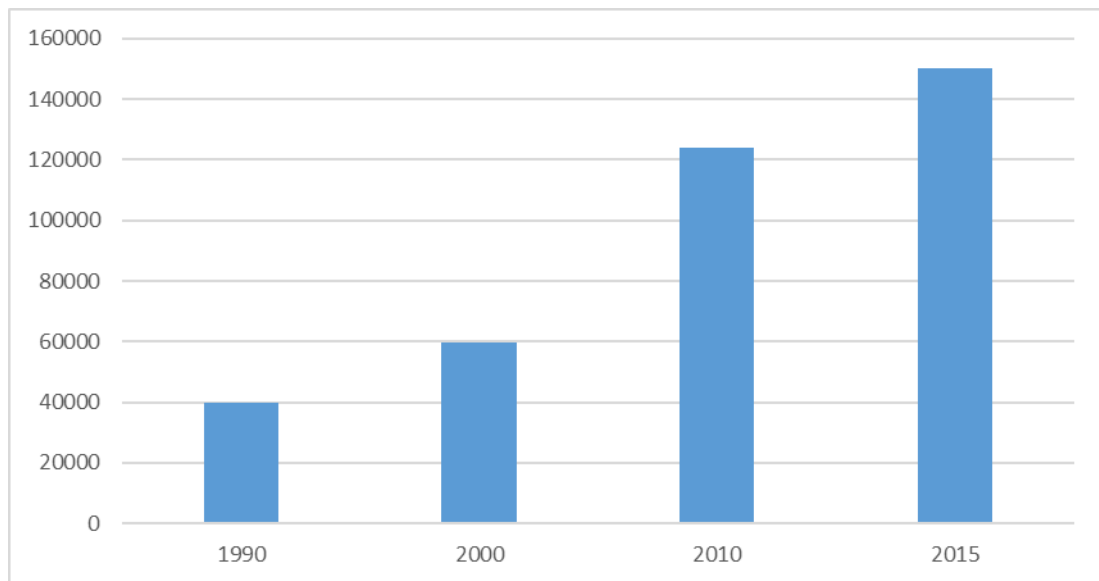


Figure 3. Population of Bahía de Banderas, Nayarit, Mexico 1990-2015
Source: INEGI, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and Intercensal Survey 2015.

Since 2000 the demographic growth rates of Bahía de Banderas, have been higher than those of Puerto Vallarta. It is important to underline that this metropolitan area has good weather and many beaches as its tourist specialty, similar to Acapulco and Cancun.

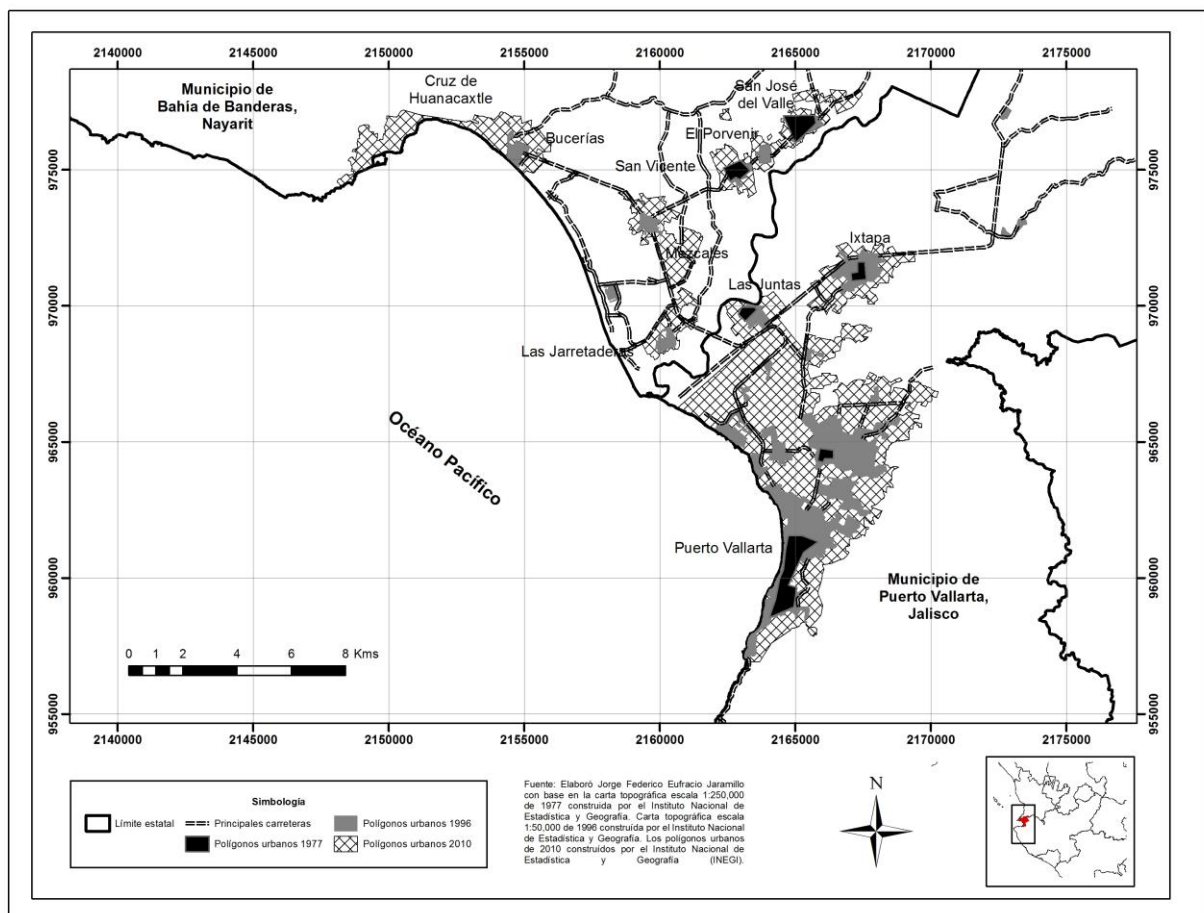
In the Metropolitan Area of Puerto Vallarta, 78.87 percent of the economically active population worked in trade and services, 16.88 percent is in the secondary sector and only the 2.42 in the primary one (INEGI, 2010). Tourism created employment, but it is “seasonal and low paying” (Clancy, 2001: 137). With empirical evidence it is possible to observe a condition of labor precariousness in the circumstances of *Chiapanecos* migrants employed in

the construction of the Mayan Palace of Nuevo Vallarta (Cárdenas, 2015). On this score, “the growth of employment opportunities related to tourism is a topic worth of careful consideration in a complete assessment of the impacts of tourism” (Everitt, *et al.*, 2008: 88).

Urban impacts of tourism policies in Puerto Vallarta

In Puerto Vallarta, it's clear that demographic growth "is immediately reflected in urban planning and prints a spatial expression of social relations" (Gilabert, 2011: 147). As Mathieson and Wall suggest, “tourism has urban repercussions” (1990: 152). As seen on the map 1, 6,953 hectares were urbanized in Puerto Vallarta in 33 years. (Calculated from urban estates INEGI based in the letters mentioned on the map and ArcMap tools)

Map 1. Urban growth in the Metropolitan Area of Puerto Vallarta, 1977-2010



Source: Jorge Federico Eufrazio based on INEGI.

Map 1 shows the urban growth of Puerto Vallarta and its metropolitan area over 33 years, divided into three phases: 1) beginning with the year 1977; 2) covering the period of 1978-1995 and 3) finally, encompassing the years of 1996-2010.

The first phase started when the tourist activity had already consolidated in the founding center of Puerto Vallarta. We will recall that in the 1940s the first hotels had opened and were in the downtown area of the Jalisco state resort. Other changes that occurred during the dates in question were: a) the provision of various public services; b) the layout of the guidelines for the first two new neighborhoods, Emiliano Zapata and December 5; and c) the emergence of “Gringo Gulch,” the popular nickname of a new zone where several North Americans decided to acquire houses on the Río Cuale (Montes de Oca, 2001: 169); among others. Undoubtedly, the developments mentioned above planted seeds for the urban transformation of Puerto Vallarta.

The map illustrates the urban polygons of Puerto Vallarta in 1977, which were: the central zone, El Pitillal, Las Juntas and Ixtapa; However, the settlements were disconnected from each other. In that year, Puerto Vallarta had 372.31 urbanized hectares. In the second phase (1978-1995) 2,499.99 hectares were urbanized. During this time the local coastal strip was transformed after the arrival of international hotel chains, implying "the organization of the territory" (Hiernaux, 2010: 13). This change happened after the construction of Marina Vallarta, as already indicated. At the same time Puerto Vallarta also received a large number of immigrants, attracted by the port's economic dynamism and settling as best they could in Las Juntas, Ixtapa and El Pitillal. Altogether, 59 low-income neighborhoods were formed (Rodríguez, 1999).

Three main zones converge in Puerto Vallarta: 1) the central zone, formed by the original population nucleus and the zone that provides the main services; 2) the tourist space on the coast; and 3) the peripheral zone, where the largest population centers are

concentrated. Gómez (2003) highlights that in the first and second zones there are sufficient and efficient allocations of public services while in the third zone there not (2003), though even in the first two areas complaints about garbage collection and public transportation are frequently registered. Authors like Ricardo Fletes, Rogelio Marcial and Roberto Rodríguez, (1999) label the peripheral spaces of the Jalisco tourism mecca as "The Other Vallarta".

Nonetheless, others classify Puerto Vallarta's space in distinct ways (Everitt, *et al.*, 2008; Baños, 2010; Pérez, 2010; González, 2013). Yet, the academic community agree on the socio-spatial segregation lived in Puerto Vallarta. On the last point, in *Vallartense* terms, it is striking that the different public and private actors do not agree on dynamic territorial organization. Consequently, Puerto Vallarta's urban development plan has not been updated since 1997. Of course, there have been three attempts (2003, 2006 and 2009), all of which proved unsuccessful because they faced rejection from some sectors of civil society or were countered by several administrative legal judgments.

Mexican urban normativity also recognizes what are called Urban Development Partial Plans, some of which have directed the urban growth of certain districts of Puerto Vallarta. But as pointed out by Vera, *et al.*, "It is not an easy task to establish new guidelines that limit territorial expansion when the profitability of real estate processes has been and continues to be the only meaning of some models of implementation" (2013: 127). In addition, a far-reaching political vision is a somewhat complicated issue because leaders feel desperate and aim to achieve the development of their cities at any cost (Judd, 2003: 57). Prior to recent political reforms that now allow for the direct reelection of mayors, short-term visions prevailed in a system in which the mayor served one, three-year term before vacating office.

In the last development phase under consideration gentrification hit the section of downtown Puerto Vallarta known as the *Zona Romantica*, or Romantic Zone, where "foreign

citizens acquired properties at low prices and began to transform the area" (Medina and Rodríguez, 2017: 11). Gentrification coincided with the aim of making Puerto Vallarta known as a gay friendly destination. Another significant fact, for that time, is that some authors emphasized that restricting beach access appeared "to benefit no one but affluent nationals and foreigners" (Evans, 1984: 314).

In the third phase that commenced in 1996 and continues until today, 7,325.21 hectares have been urbanized. The boom is characterized to a large extent by the construction of second or vacation residences for both foreigners and nationals. Some examples are: Shangri-La, Avalon, Enclave, Grand Venetian, Miramar, Paramount, Peninsula, Las Moras and Fluvial Vallarta (Chavoya, *et al.*, 2010).

As already indicated, two of the peculiarities of coastal destinations are "real estate speculation and revaluation of the soil" (Enríquez cited by Vera, *et al.*, 2013: 13). This is not the exception in Puerto Vallarta where the local coast line as well as other sites in the historic center have a high value, since there is a great interest in obtaining high profits in the short term. For example, in 2009 the assessed property tax value of rural properties, with irrigation for potential agricultural use, was \$143,300, an amount which jumped to \$174,200 in 2018 (Municipal Government of Puerto Vallarta).

In a neoliberal economic environment accompanied by institutional weaknesses, densification processes are positioned as the most suitable for the urban growth of the tourist destination. The development model has territorial implications. In the construction of Punta Península and Grand Venetian it was necessary to change land zoning, resulting in an increase of the built surface and landscape modifications, since the buildings consisted of 26 floors (Baños, 2010: 68). Another example is found in the Romantic Zone, where almost 900 housing units were built on just over 23 thousand m² during the last eight years. This undoubtedly generates a series of problems, such as: a) intense pressure with respect to public

services; b) traffic congestion in the absence of parking; c) shortage of public space; and d) unfair competition with the traditional hotel sector (Ocaña, 2018).

The municipal government has recognized these problems, evidenced by the Partial Urban Development Plan of District 9, which covers the neighborhoods of Amapas-Conchas Chinas, Punta Negra and El Nogalito. The plan states: "In Amapas, Amapas Sur, Amapas Conchas Chinas and Conchas Chinas, several multi-family housing complexes were built, most of them violating the regulations expressed in the current Urban Development Plan (1997)" (Gaceta Municipal of Puerto Vallarta, 2012: 112).

Socio-spatial segregation is still present in this phase of development and can be modified through the provision of public services. For example, in 2013 out of the 68,616 housing units that exist in Puerto Vallarta, 92.51% have water and 95.13% have connected drainage (Government of the State of Jalisco, 2016). These are acceptable figures when compared to other cities in the interior of Jalisco and the rest of the country. On the other hand, the lack of efficiency in the provision of public services continues to be concentrated in the peripheral neighborhoods of Las Palmas de Arriba and Ixtapa. The former registered high percentages for not having piped water and electric energy (3.1% and 0.4% respectively), while the latter experienced higher proportions of housing without a toilet (2.2%) or a land floor of 2.1%. Similarly, problems of marginalization are present in these delegations (Government of the State of Jalisco, 2016).

A crucial point that must be emphasized is that Puerto Vallarta's urban growth has not respected environmental regulations. In both the formal and informal market, public and private actors have built on dunes, mangroves, estuaries, etc. Alcalá has noticed the disappearance of some fish stocks that existed off the beaches of Las Germelas and Conchas Chinas (1994: 2001). Gilabert goes so far to assess the development of Puerto Vallarta as "the paradise to the Gates of Hell" (2011). Serious environmental problems continued well into

21st century Puerto Vallarta. In 2015, the Competitiveness Agenda indicated "the coverage in the wastewater treatment system is very low and deficient, and a large amount of the wastewater reaches the body of water without any treatment, contaminating (it) and creating foci of infection and bad smells" (Gómez, 2015: 13).

Regarding the field work done in February of 2018, it was noted that the lack of beach access in Puerto Vallarta remains an issue, notwithstanding a 2017 state law that sanctioned the privatization of beaches in Jalisco. For natives, specifically the people of Las Juntas who have a tradition of going to Playa de Boca de Tomates to fish and eat food, an activity which assumes singular importance as a space and ritual in their lives, enjoying the beach becomes more and more an alien, complex and uncertain task. In an interview some natives comment:

"Before (when we were children) we came up twice a week. We came to fish in the mangroves, where there were many fishes, but no longer, everything is full of crocodiles, besides there is the fear that the people from the ramadas (restaurants) will be evicted. But the fault lies with the ejidatarios who sell" (Blanca Martínez, personal communication). As another native commented: "look at the problem is that it is devastating the ecosystem. Once there were banana trees, raccoons, armadillos, rabbits. Now there is nothing and what are we going to leave to our children?" (Isaac Martínez, personal communication).

This supports Mathieson and Wall when they affirm that certain effects of tourism are "the elimination of some plants and animal habitats, the destruction of geological features by excavation, water pollution, and a decrease in the aesthetic qualities of the scenario" (1990: 146).



Image 1. Boca de Tomates Beach, Puerto Vallarta.

Source. Archive of the author.

Getting to Boca de Tomates is a complicated task because public transport does not frequently go there, with only two runs at 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Persons without vehicles must pay ticket prices of 100 pesos each way. This has been the case for a long time, but the problem is worsening because of changes to the mass transit routes. The residents of Boca de Tomates live in uncertainty because they do not know if the Mayan Palace is going to evict them, as rumors foretell. Although the issue is dated, it comes up every three years when there is a change of municipal president (Antonio Covarrubias, personal communication). Restaurateurs fear that they will be evicted or their businesses burned, businesses that are more than 58 years old. Locals have organized, hired lawyers and enlisted the support of the public for their cause, according to one of the owners of the Ramada Sabino (Julio Rodríguez, personal communication).

A fisherman and member of the Cooperative Boca Negra complained that that the Mayan Palace bought the boundaries of the Ameca River, but that so far, no one has approached his group to talk about the matter. He expressed a desire to continue working in Boca de Tomates because he's been a fisherman all his life and has no idea what he will do if he is evicted.

This same trend continues north of the municipality of Puerto Vallarta, specifically, in the ejido of Las Jarretaderas, of Bahía de Banderas, where the inhabitants lost four access points to the Ameca River, which flows into the sea, in exchange for Grupo Vidanta building the community a one-way road. The road is dangerous because of the presence of crocodiles, the entry and exit of heavy cargo trucks and the lack of security. In hindsight it might be said that "the rich can dominate space while the poor are trapped in it" (Harvey, 1989: 179).

In recent years the federal, state and municipal governments have focused on actively looking for private investment, especially from foreigners, without envisaging the implications of what new development entails. Often the result has been the privatization of public spaces, (Marín 2012 and 2015). Despite other measures undertaken to promote the tourist destination, it has been harmed by a heavy dependence on the North American market, as well as the health and safety crises that the country has faced. While government has implemented aesthetic policies to beautify Puerto Vallarta's historical center, some structural problems remain unattended, such as achieving (sustainable) development for its inhabitants and protecting natural resources, shortcomings which are also seen at the national level (Gómez, 2016; and OCDE, 2017).

Conclusions

Throughout this article two primary issues can be observed: first, that the tourism policies that have been implemented in Puerto Vallarta can be classified into seven phases.

These are illustrated by the transition from an agricultural and fishing village to a major international tourist destination. Thus, it was discussed how the territory was endowed in different stages with public services, given a basic urban infrastructure of roads and granted an airport. Among other measures taken, legal mechanisms were created to give certainty to investors.

In demographic terms, it must be underscored that Puerto Vallarta had 10,000 inhabitants in 1950 but consisted of more than 275,000 residents by 2015. This spectacular population growth was not natural, driven instead by migratory flows received from the Mexican states of Nayarit, Guerrero, Michoacán, Guanajuato and México, as well as the former Federal District, now called Mexico City. Joining the in-country migrants was a considerable number of immigrants from other countries.

The population growth that has occurred in the municipality of Puerto Vallarta impacts the coastal reserve, which is almost depleted and now very expensive. As land availability dwindled in Puerto Vallarta proper, urban growth expanded in Bahía de Banderas. In 33 years, Puerto Vallarta urbanized 6,953 hectares, undergoing a process which frequently did not respect the environment, as mangroves, dunes, marshes and other natural places were destroyed; rivers, streams and beaches were polluted and ecosystems altered. Additionally, in Puerto Vallarta and in Bahía de Banderas, problems of spatial segregation, gentrification and restricted beach access are present. Here is a textbook case where in the future it will be necessary to monitor urban growth while not forfeiting the tourist potential.

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