RESORT DEVELOPMENT IN THE VENEZUELAN CENTRAL LITTORAL: THE CASE OF NAIGUATA'

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Naiguatá is a small coastal town in the Federal District of Venezuela some 24 miles from Caracas (Map 1). Because of this proximity to Caracas, land use patterns have been significantly affected in recent decades by resort development. Accelerated growth of the Metropolitan Area of Caracas has created a need for recreational facilities away from the congestion of the capital. Naiguatá has satisfied that need to some extent, but, for several reasons, future growth and expansion are limited. The town is located on a narrow peninsular-like site hemmed in between the steep flanks of the Coastal Range mountains and the Caribbean Sea. Much of it is covered with unconsolidated material, and has a rocky shoreline exposed to powerful wave action. Future economic and social development in Naiguatá is severely limited by the restricted extent of the site. The community cannot support unlimited growth without destroying what vacationers go there to enjoy.

In addition, further development will depend in part upon various official decisions which the Federal Government of Venezuela may be called upon to make. These decisions need to take into account, among other things, geographic factors, for indiscriminate growth could make life in Naiguatá unbearable for everyone in a short time.

The Coastal Range mountains rise steeply from a depth of 100 fathoms in
the Caribbean Sea. The range is a huge anticline oriented east to west, made up principally of metamorphic rocks which have been subjected to severe faulting. It has the characteristics of a young range, with "V"-shaped quebradas and block mountains seemingly arranged at random. Marine terraces along the Central Littoral indicate that the range may still be slowly rising. Recent earthquakes are further proof that the entire area is a zone of crustal instability.

The site of Naiguatá is the alluvial fan deposited by the Naiguatá river. Wave action induced by the northeast trade winds has gradually formed a bar of the alluvial material brought down by the river. Artificial beaches at Puerto Azul Club have been formed in the quiet waters to the lee of this peninsula.

The Federal Government's concern with Naiguatá was very limited until the beginning of the 1950's. Since that time the growth in population and developmental pressures have prompted the government to install utilities and governmental facilities. The Central Littoral Project is really an ongoing program, the role of which is to evaluate the potentials for resort development of the entire Central Littoral area and, where feasible, to act on the recommendation of the government planners.

When the author first saw Naiguatá, it was a small community with no significant activity other than the two local private clubs: Puerto Azul and Playa Azul. There were few local businesses and only a few streets were paved. Niaguatá was little known then. There were a few small cultivated plots (conucos), but very few people were engaged in agricultural activities. There had been no recent investments, and housing was relatively inexpensive and available. The incidence of unemployment and crime was low, making the town a quiet and comfortable place to live both for its residents and for the vacationers who came from Caracas for the holidays and weekends.

The literature available contains little spatial or time sequence studies which focus on the problems of Naiguatá. Field research was thus indispensable in carrying out urban geographical studies, and in updating data on areal distributions of local nonagricultural and resort activities. Special attention was given to past, present, and future patterns of land use and development.

A factor responsible for the rapid growth of Naiguatá as a resort community is its proximity to the Metropolitan Area of Caracas. The proximity of the capital to the sea has influenced the rapid urban development of a narrow strip of the Central Littoral area. Although not officially included in the Metropolitan Area, the Central Littoral depends heavily on the capital and its surroundings. This urbanized area extends from west to east between the towns of Catia la Mar and Los Caracas (Map 1). It is centered on the cities of Maiquetía, developed next to the International Airport that serves Caracas, and the maritime port-city of La Guaira.

The public demand for beaches and tourist areas easily accessible from the capital by millions of vacationers explains the development of private and public bathing and vacational resorts, that dominate the littoral scene to the east of La Guaira. The communities of Macuto, Naiguatá, and Los Caracas have large public facilities and capacities to accommodate thousands of bathers.

The rapid rate of population growth experienced during the decade of the fifties by Naiguatá slowed considerably by the decade that followed Table 1. There is every reason to believe that the population growth rate during the seventies will be even slower. Fur-
TABLE 1
Naiguatá: Population and Percentage Increase by Decade (1941-1971*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population Increase</th>
<th>Percentage Increase</th>
<th>Accumulative Percentage Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941-1951</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>1,703</td>
<td>44.85</td>
<td>44.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1961</td>
<td>9,552</td>
<td>4,052</td>
<td>73.67</td>
<td>151.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1971</td>
<td>14,400</td>
<td>4,848</td>
<td>50.75</td>
<td>379.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Unofficial estimate given by the City Mayor's office.

ther rapid growth is not likely. The rest of the available land is too expensive or too steep and unsuitable for construction. Naiguatá could grow in the future through the construction of high rise buildings. Although this solution may solve some problems, it creates others because sewers and service facilities are already inadequate to serve the population. Traffic and communication congestion already make living in the town almost unbearable to residents and vacationers alike during the peak travel hours of holidays and vacationing periods. More important, the geology of the empty slopes make the safe construction of heavy structure impossible.

It is evident that the population will consist increasingly of vacationers—tourist and weekend visitors from Caracas.

Geographical Settings and Varieties of Life Styles in Naiguatá

Naiguatá means different things to its different types of vacationers and residents. Geographical realities contrast significantly with each other. The resort area with its skyscrapers and exotic gardens and facilities differs markedly from the provincial part of downtown with its quiet and shaded sidewalks. The narrow dead-end alleys of the slum sector with its open sewers and crowded huts stand next to the crystal-clear waters of the Naiguatá river.

The Labor Situation

There is employment available in the local tourist industry, especially during high peaks of holiday and vacation periods; the local personnel available is either not qualified to handle a job or not willing to work on weekends. Those already employed usually reject offers to work overtime.

The high percentage of local unemployment (20 percent in 1971)3 can be explained in many ways. The attitude of local residents toward work in the local resort industry has created hostility to them on the part of operators of the large hotels and private clubs. As a result, organizations do not hire personnel from Naiguatá. Instead, positions are filled with people from nearby La Guaira and other towns of the Littoral. More skilled or professional positions necessitate the importation of labor from Caracas, and in the case of certain executives, from the United States and Europe. This situation is detrimental to the town. So long as the local population does not take full advantage of the opportunities of employment available locally, there seems to be no solution in sight of the problem of unemployment. To the
large institutions and organizations, the importation of labor is detrimental also. The employer must provide travel pay and room and board allowances as set by law for travelling employees.

The lack of skilled personnel in Naiguatá is also disadvantageous to the hotels and clubs when it is necessary to find a substitute for an absent worker. The owner and manager of the luxurious “Hotel Monaco” explained, in an interview, the problems connected with labor shortage. For the larger private clubs the shortage of skilled labor is easier to solve. They have efficient employment offices in Caracas, and can offer higher salaries and more fringe benefits. The owner of one of the local pensions complained about the lack of personnel, skilled and unskilled, during weekends and holidays and the continuous poor service given by his employees. When asked what the population that refused to go work on weekends and holidays did during those periods, the pension owner explained that they like to mingle with and become tourists themselves! They drink at local bars and loiter at the entrance to Naiguatá.

The town could better fight the high rate of unemployment and be better off if no labor (skilled or unskilled) could be imported from Caracas. In addition to the fact that the local inhabitants do not want to work on weekends or holidays they lack preparation in trades and professions related to tourism. There are few skilled personnel available to Naiguatá to take over jobs requiring minimum training. A solution has been offered, however, by some local hotel and pension owners. They are willing to start apprenticeships in their places of business, with even a nominal apprentice’s pay. Mr. Saveur Lucien, owner of “Cariño Pension”, explained:

...I am willing to pay someone to come into my business and learn a tourist trade, such as bartending, cooking, or waiting on customers. The problem, however, is that no one in town wants to come in and learn, they want to come in and earn. Apprenticeships are taboo in Naiguatá. No one, and especially young people, like to say to their families and peers that they are working as an apprentice...

As private clubs and hotels prosper and expand, the people of Naiguatá lag behind; they do not benefit from the jobs made available by the local tourist industry as much as they should. Since population growth has skyrocketed, unemployment has risen to an all-time high. With so many unemployed, the crime rate has also risen, while the town’s purchasing power and tax revenue have dropped. The unemployed loiter around the center of town, and at its entrance, giving the incoming tourist a negative impression of the resort.

Local Municipal Government: Responsibility Without Power

Law enforcement is the responsibility of the local government. The resources available to enforce the law in Naiguatá are limited. Two patrol units and a small group of poorly trained and poorly paid policemen are the law enforcement body. The twenty percent unemployment rate may account for the high frequency of crime. One local administrator, in explaining the problems associated with crime and law enforcement, said:

...I am responsible for security in the institution I administer. Once I apprehend someone who is caught stealing from the tourist or breaking and entering into one of my installations, I notify the local police of Naiguatá. Usually one of the institutional ground guards escorts the apprehended person to the local police headquarters, where the suspect is booked. The escorting guard must fill
out an official complaint. We have experienced the case that, by the time the guard returns here, he finds the person that he had just apprehended already back at the entrance of the institution. Such was the recent case, when one of my men was shot by a released suspect, upon returning from filing the necessary complaint...

Although Naiguatá has one major industry, tourism, around which its present and future development revolve, it is impossible for the local government to cope with vagrancy, crime, and law enforcement generally, much less initiate major projects such as highway construction and slum clearance.

Land Use Patterns: The City Proper

Dependence on tourism in the last two decades has significantly changed the original pattern of land use in Naiguatá. A simplified land use map of the city proper shows two major areas: the private and public resorts and the residential sections (Map 2).

The town has been forced to grapple with problems of extreme congestion on very little land. Slum housing has aggravated the problem by occupying valuable land and space that could be more profitably used for further development of the resort industry or to house the growing population more effectively. The commercial business district has relatively narrow streets and dead end alleys, while low density residential areas have wider and less congested avenues and boulevards.

No major land use study has been made to evaluate the problems related to accelerated growth and congestion in the center of town.

Naiguatá: a Limited Recreational Area

What is the essential attractiveness of Naiguatá? Why is it so densely developed? While there are several other areas in the littoral more suitable for resort development, this alluvial fan represents the highest values in resort investments and the most intensive pattern of land use. If the resource base, that is, the recreational attractiveness of Naiguatá is to be sustained, development should be carried out within the framework of an overall, long range, master plan.

The effects of rampant population growth, housing shortage, pollution, and congestion are everywhere evident, and Naiguatá today is faced with all the major illnesses of a super metropolis, while the local public resources to cure them are little more than those of a poor hamlet. Now only the resources of the Federal Government of Venezuela can cope with the results of three decades of uncontrolled, indiscriminate growth. Only rigid building codes and the carrying out of major urban programs can stop sprawling development and solve slum congestion (Map 2).

A vigorous recreational industry has been established, at the cost of tremendous urban congestion; all available space was used and the beach aspect practically destroyed. But the process has been very wasteful of the local human resources.

Conscientious planning is urgently needed to insure the social and environmental viability of both resort and town.

This alluvial fan is an area of scarce level land. No landscape of the Central Littoral can be so quickly destroyed by intrusions of uncontrolled development as can Naiguatá, because the town is tightly squeezed between the Caribbean Sea and steep slopes of the Coastal Range. No other regional site is more desirable to the investor and developer, but the setting as well as three decades of millions of dollars' worth of resort investment can so easily be destroyed. The white sand beaches

55
and the green slopes of the Coastal Range mountains are an integral part of the recreational aspects of Naiguata and their preservation is extremely important. Should the green vegetation be felled and replaced by high rise buildings or one-room huts, and should the beaches be polluted and blackened with litter, the beauty, serenity, and a lot of value of the scene would have vanished. Miraculously, the natural environment has somewhat resisted the intrusion of the developer. The steepness of the slopes of the Coastal Range has discouraged the investor and protected the green vegetation from destruction. The very absence of sewers in the slum sector has prevented the overloading of the sewer downtown and further pollution of the beaches!

The Best Development is the One That Provides Maximum Social Benefit at the Least Social Cost

In the design of private resorts in Naiguata, the problem has been traditionally reduced to the simplest and most commonplace terms. Private developers and investors have come to Naiguata laden with money, offering the enormous bribe of paying for land many times what the land is really worth, for speculative purposes. Give us your city, they said, your shoreline and green slopes, and we will construct multi-million dollar hotels and clubs with the capacity to accommodate thousands. The results, the developer claimed, would be more tourism and profits for those living in Naiguata. But uncontrolled developments everywhere have resulted in congestion and pollution, and these blights have come to Naiguata. The millions of dollars required for urban renewal cannot be envisioned by the speculators and developers.

The author questioned a land developer in Naiguata regarding what alternatives were left once there was no more land and congestion had reached an all time high. The developer replied that, when that happened, additional investments would make possible the cutting of a portion of the 9,000 foot high Coastal Range to make room for more development!

When a developmental site is considered in such narrow terms, there are to be sure conflicting objectives, for space is monopolized and hopeless congestion may result.

The fabulous value of good level land causes the poor to build slums on the steeper slopes and less attractive sites. The objective of development should be to maximize social benefits while minimizing social costs.

Originally, the resort clubs blended with the natural beauty of the shore property; they were an asset rather than a liability. The almost uninhabited rocky shoreline was used to satisfy the recreational needs of those fleeing the hectic life of Caracas. The first two resort clubs improved the natural landscape, at the same time meeting the modest needs for recreational facilities as well as residents. In some areas little work was required to show off to best advantage the beautiful natural scenery. The Naiguata Peninsula was merely reinforced, not destroyed, so that it could stand rough seas, but still retain its beauty.

Further Uncontrolled Development is Not Inevitable

Many local residents and investors of Naiguata assume that further, uncontrolled development is inevitable and that they must simply adjust to it. Naiguata is already congested, but high and constantly rising land values seem to indicate that land owners anticipate further development. The Federal Government, on the other hand, thinks
differently. Regional planners have observed that uncontrollable growth has proved highly destructive in the case of Naiguatá. The alluvial fan has been practically obliterated as the tiny remnant of green landscape was blotted out and the beaches became a prey to congestion and pollution. Precisely those aesthetic and recreational aspects that originally attracted Caraqueños have been destroyed, as the slopes to the south were gashed deeper and deeper by the bulldozers of the builders. Only the Federal Government has the power to contain the headlong development. The possibility of finding substitute areas for further development of recreational facilities is one of the objectives of the Central Littoral Project.

"Excessive and Uncontrolled Development Destroys What Vacationers Come to Enjoy"

Although the rate of population growth will probably continue to diminish in the decade of the seventies, nevertheless, the number of residents in Naiguatá will increase. Resort developments already in progress cannot be stopped. Those unavoidable increments are indicators of what will happen in the near future unless control of development is taken firmly in hand by the authorities. To be sure there is a need to find new lands on which to accommodate future population growth and to continue resort expansion more effectively than it has been done in the past. While growth and development are inevitable, they need not be destructive.

Physiographic Principles for Conservation and Development

The first phase of bringing some semblance of law and order into the growth of Naiguatá would be rigid enforcement of a building code. This would be a first test in controlling growth. To prevent erosion and future mud landslides, the areas under vegetation to the south of town should be off-limits to development. High rise development should be restricted to the more stable northern part of the alluvial fan. The area surrounding Naiguatá River should be reserved for recreational uses and open spaces. The numerous trees in the downtown area and the woodlands just south of town should by all means be preserved.

There is a scarcity of level land in Naiguatá (Plate 1). The moderate to steep slopes to the south do not lend themselves to the construction of high rise buildings. Between the south slopes of the Coastal Range and the level land of the alluvial fan, there is a narrow terrace congested with slums. On this terrace future expansion could be effected in accordance with the guidelines of the Central Littoral Project (Map 3). Those people at present living in the slums would be relocated in government-built housing for low-income groups. This relocation would leave the terrace available for construction of high density housing for people in low-income brackets. Such construction would mean more effective use of this terrace land and would act as a brake on congestion in downtown Naiguatá. The original development of Naiguatá was on the basis of cost-profit only; the government plan considers and incorporates physical, social, and aesthetic values as well. Most of these considerations do not fit into the simple cost-profit equation, but the government plan substitutes the concept of the greater good for the greatest number for the old robber baron mentality.

Conclusion

Naiguatá, a sleepy little coastal village a few decades ago, has become a
### LAND USE PROFILE

**EXISTING**
- Forest
- Scrub Land
- Slums
- CBD
- Medium Income Housing
- Resort

**PROPOSED**
- Forest
- Planted Forest
- Low Income Housing
- Medium Density
  - Medium Income Housing and
  - High Rise Commercial & Resort
- Landscaping
thriving tourist center. Level land is in short supply, hence expensive, because the rate of growth of population and of tourism with its related service industries has been phenomenal. Downtown streets have become congested, slums have mushroomed on the steep mountain slopes, and rates of unemployment and crime have skyrocketed. Venezuelan leaders have become keenly aware that long-range regional planning for the wise use of the physical endowments of this narrow but extremely valuable coastal area is a must. The government is increasingly held responsible for providing the rank and file with such amenities as bathing beaches, views of the blue Caribbean, and space for recreation and repose ‘far from the madding crowd.’ As Venezuelan agencies of the Federal Government assume a more and more powerful role in nationwide planning, the Central Littoral Project will become less a nebulous “project” and more an ongoing program of regional development. And it follows that, as the Federal Government becomes increasingly responsive to social needs, and as the collective good rather than private individual gain becomes the summum bonum, more and more federal tax money will be spent to make amenities once deemed the prerogative of the millionaire available to the common man.

(2) A “V-shaped”, steep-sided stream bed, ravine, gorge
(3) Official estimate given by the City Mayor’s Office
(5) Based on interview with Dr. Arnaldo Mura, Regional Manager of the National Tourism Corporation, Caracas, Venezuela, December 27, 1970
THE GEOGRAPHICAL BULLETIN

Published by Gamma Theta Upsilon is available by subscription for $4.00 per year. Individual copies may also be purchased from Gamma Theta Upsilon at $2.00 per issue. A supply of back issues is available for $2.25 per copy.

An authorized purchase order, check or money order, must accompany subscriptions and be made out to the Geographical Bulletin.

GAMMA THETA UPSILON
2000 N.W. WILSON STREET
PORTLAND, OREGON 97209

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