The imprints of tourism on Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico

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Tourism is a major economic activity with significant social, political and environmental repercussions that affect people and places in virtually every corner of the contemporary world. This study focuses on tourism development in Puerto Vallarta (PV), Jalisco, Mexico. The region has been almost completely transformed by this industry in a relatively short period of time since the development of the first major hotel in 1948. The article begins by discussing the development of PV as a place, as a coastal tourist resort and also as a set of quite different cultural landscapes. Building on this we specifically identify, describe and discuss some of the major cultural imprints of tourism upon PV, including hotels, restaurants, the gay community, art galleries and Internet cafes as well as ecological imprints of

Les empreintes du tourisme sur Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexique

Le tourisme est un secteur d'activité économique de première importance générant des retombées notables sur les plans social, politique et environnemental qui touchent les populations et les lieux dans presque tous les coins du monde contemporain. Cette étude porte principalement sur le développement du tourisme à Puerto Vallarta, ville de l'état de Jalisco au Mexique. Le tourisme a presque entièrement transformé cette région au cours d'une période de temps relativement courte, soit depuis la construction du premier hôtel d'envergure en 1948. Cet article traite du développement de Puerto Vallarta en tant que lieu, station balnéaire touristique, et comme un ensemble de paysages culturels

tourism (using ecological footprint analysis). The conclusions provide a commentary on the potential for and challenges of continued tourism development in PV, as a place that is likely to face serious questions regarding sustainability as the new millennium unfolds.

particuliers. De manière plus spécifique, nous identifions, décrivons et discutons certaines des plus importantes empreintes du tourisme laissées sur Puerto Vallarta, comprenant notamment les hôtels, les restaurants, la communauté gaie, les galeries d'art et les cafés internet, en plus des empreintes écologiques du tourisme (étudiées à l'aide d'une analyse de l'empreinte écologique). Des observations sont présentées en conclusion sur les possibilités et les défis inhérents au développement du tourisme à Puerto Vallarta, qui est un lieu susceptible d'être confronté, un jour ou l'autre, à de graves enjeux de durabilité au cours du nouveau millénaire.

Introduction

Tourism is an economic activity that has social, political and environmental consequences that affect every corner of the contemporary world, including Mexico. As one of the fastest growing industries in the world (Seddighi and Theocharous 2003), tourism has attracted increased research attention (Scott 2007). However, as Boots (2000) suggests, its study is still neglected in Canadian geography.

In February 2007, the *Guardian Weekly* reported, on UN information, that over 840 million people took vacations in 2006, the largest number ever recorded. Simultaneously, fears of terrorism, bird flu, rising oil prices, hurricanes and threats of personal violence cast shadows over the travel industry, including destinations such as Mexico. Clearly tourism is a somewhat fragile sector of an economy, yet one that some governments and private sector investors promote to serve inter alia local interests and the improvement of quality of life for local citizens. In Mexico, various government agencies have been involved with tourism over the years, and the Secretaría de Turismo (SECTUR) is now integrally connected with all aspects of the industry. The government has intervened more directly in tourism since 1974 when Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo (FONATUR, the National Trust Fund for Tourism Development) was set up to raise capital and promote development in the tourism industry. Yet, there is debate about the exact nature and extent of the costs and benefits

that flow from tourism to a local region, and the sustainability of tourist-related activities as well as matters concerning ways and means to deal with issues of fairness and equity in the distribution of benefits to citizens.

This article focuses on the impacts of tourism on the growth and development of Puerto Vallarta (PV) in the State of Jalisco in Mexico. Over two million tourists visit PV annually according to the self-proclaimed Top Puerto Vallarta Website (http://www.puertovallarta.net/fast_facts/g_city_info.php), making it the second most visited resort in Mexico. There is considerable research literature on tourism in Mexico (Casado 1997; Clancy 2001; Brenner and Aguilar 2002; Meyer-Arendt 2002; Brenner 2005; Greathouse-Amador 2005; Torres and Momsen 2005; Hernandez-Lobato *et al.* 2006; Lopez-Lopez *et al.* 2006 and Tamborini 2007). However, the systematic study of the impacts of tourism in PV is a recent endeavour (Mungiá Fregoso 1996; de Oca de Contreras 2002; Chávez *et al.* 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Rodrigues 2006; Sanchez 2006). This article builds on this growing research effort. In particular, this article discusses the development, or the 'leisurization', as Hoffman (1992) calls it, of PV as a tourist destination, and as a place. We describe the early growth of PV, and the development of the contemporary urban area as well as selected contemporary place characteristics of and imprints upon the town. Imprints take a variety of forms and this article concentrates on cultural and ecological themes to illustrate some of the diversity of place making and place

selling developments that have occurred in PV in the recent past, as well as what is occurring at present and might occur in the immediate future. We operationalize imprints through a variety of methods and maps as there is no one way to demonstrate this multiplicity.

This article reports some results from a collaborative project under the aegis of a formal agreement between the University of Guadalajara, Centro Universitario de la Costa at Puerto Vallarta (CUCOSTA), and Brandon University (BU), Canada. This project is discussed in a series of working papers (Everitt *et al.* 2001, 2004, 2005; Massam and Everitt 2001, 2004; Massam *et al.* 2003, 2007). The Web site of the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University (www.brandonu.ca.rdi) gives access to the Working Papers 2003-01, 2004-01 and 2005-12 that focus on PV.

PV is the subject of this article because Mexico in general and PV in particular have recently assumed a growing importance as a winter tourist destination for Canadians, and because it is neglected in the academic literature (Page 2002). Furthermore, PV, as Everitt *et al.* (2001) argue, exemplifies the process of tourist place making in the contemporary global economy and society, as a way of producing locations that are more pleasurable and interesting (Project for Public Spaces Inc. 2002). Also, it is important to know about different places, for as Aguiar *et al.* (2005, 124) point out, 'different places are reinvented differently' and knowledge of the processes involved helps us understand the order within the cultural landscape. Information for this study is drawn from a variety of primary sources, most notably key local informants in the public and private sectors of PV as well as various secondary sources. Some local residents have distinct views about tourism and its positive and negative effects on traditional values. We have explored the attitudes of residents of PV as well as those of small towns near PV that typically serve as sources of labour for the hotels and other tourist-related activities in the town (Massam and Everitt 2001). Following this introduction the article is organized into three major sections that successively examine PV as a place, its evolution, and the nature of tourist imprints, the latter disaggregated into cultural impacts, environmental effects, and sustainability.

Puerto Vallarta as a Place

PV is a *place*, within the literature of human geography a 'multi-layered and multi-purpose' topic (Harvey 1993, 4; Cresswell 2004). A layering of meanings can be distinguished in PV, like most places, reflecting the ways that this place has been socially constructed by different groups, or for different social, economic and political purposes.

If places have a distinct *natural context*, they have been increasingly *constructed* or *made* by a combination of local and outside forces, and as such can be *read* by researchers. They have thus become a text and a context where social interaction takes place (Knox 1995, 215–216), and globalization has accelerated this process. One of the chief beneficiaries of globalization has been the tourism industry, and it is probable that large numbers of in-person interactions between culture groups that would otherwise have no contact will take place in the future as a result of participation in this industry. Thus it is most likely, according to McCabe (1998) and Davis (2005), that the character of many places is related to and a function of tourism. This relation is particularly the case for places that are dependent upon and perhaps would have no significant existence without tourism.

More than other places perhaps, tourist destinations have residents who have little independent control over their destinies and, as Hutchings (1996) has noted, there is often 'trouble in paradise' as a result. Perhaps such a place is PV (Figure 1). The Vallarta region is a vernacular region in Jalisco. It consists of the city of PV and a number of other areas around the city. The terminology has recently been extended by some boosters in the region to include the populated areas in this part of Jalisco, but also parts of the neighbouring state of Nayarit. Sometimes the terms Vallarta and Vallarta Coast are used synonymously.

Slaymaker (2006) suggests that the cultural landscape is part of the 'grammar' of geography: we need to be able to read these landscapes to build a sense of place. Tourism can have many imprints upon a cultural landscape. Sometimes they are obvious and sometimes more subtle. Sometimes they are obvious to the local—'visited'—people, but are taken at face value by
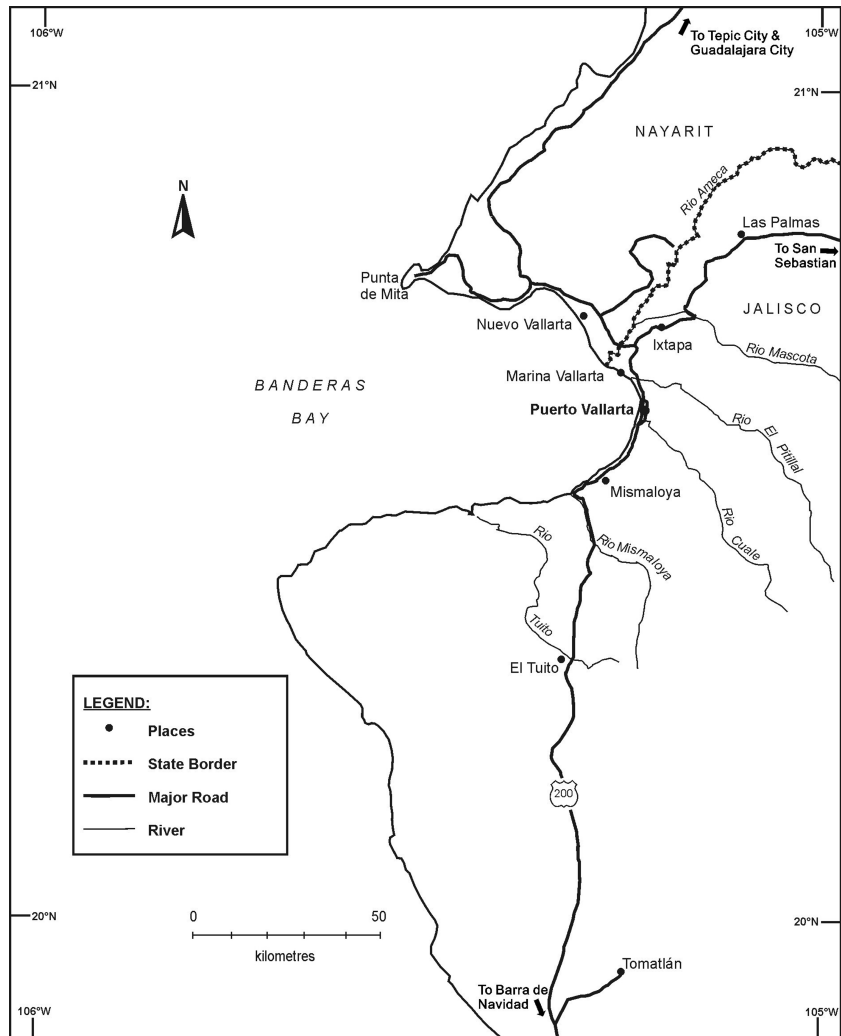
Figure 1
The location of Puerto Vallarta

the non-locals—the 'visitors'. In the case of PV, the situation is complicated, as Everitt and Welsted (1999) have reported for another destination in Jalisco, because many of the locals are themselves recent migrants, and the non-locals consist of tourists of various kinds, including Mexicans, who stay for a few days or weeks as well as 'snowbirds' who stay for months, and 'expats' who call PV home. It is thus more difficult to deconstruct the Vallartan sense of place, and this process is complicated further by the change in these imprints over time and over space.

The impacts of tourism on PV are extremely significant. For example, in terms of the sights and sounds of the visitors as they join the local residents and amble, and occasionally jog, along the Malecón, participating in the tradition of the paseo, so common in many Latin countries, partaking of the 'sun, sand and sea' at one of the beach resorts, or arriving from one of the

frequent cruise ships and taking taxis or special buses to the shopping areas of the town to spend their time, as well as their pesos or (US) dollars for the few hours the cruise ship is in harbour.

Distinct land use patterns have emerged that mirror the influence of the tourists who stay for long or short periods, and reside in modern large all-inclusive hotel complexes, in the cheaper older small hotels in old PV, in time-share apartments or condominiums. Commercial districts have developed and Internet cafés, art galleries, bars, cafés and night clubs catering to a variety of tastes and budgets are in evidence and complement the traditional plazas, which are one of the basic land use forms that characterize a major social and economic feature of most villages, towns and cities in Mexico. In addition to particular land use patterns that are evident on the ground and are readily mapped, there are perceptual patterns that are superimposed on the spaces of PV. The common physical place is shared by a number of users, and the types of users can vary between the early morning, the afternoon and the late night scene. In this article we comment on selected elements of these spaces.[1]

Clearly there are significant impacts on the local economy in terms of investments inter alia by the public and private sectors, on infrastructure such as roads, bridges, sewage plants and water treatment facilities, as well as health, education and cultural facilities, such as the new *Museo Histórico Naval* and the *Centro Cultural Rio Cuale*, which serve to enhance the attractiveness of the place for tourists. Visitors are encouraged to purchase a full range of goods to remember their time in PV. Indeed, the growth of employment opportunities related to tourism is a topic worthy of careful consideration in a complete assessment of the impacts of tourism. There are also impacts in terms of personal security and numerous measures are taken to ensure that visitors feel safe. Tourist security services ('Tourist Police') and arrangements to protect resorts from unwelcome visitors are in evidence, and the abundance of police and other official uniformed

personnel attests to the ways that the local government tries to ensure that tourists can roam freely around the town at all times of the day or night.

Coastal resorts: The case of Puerto Vallarta

The coastal resort has long been a magnet for tourists and recreationalists. Although the Romans frequented coastal settlements for recreational purposes, the coastal resort of today according to Hugill (1975) and Pearce (1995, 136) has its roots in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European seaside towns, and the elites often chose such locations, for example Biarritz in France, for health purposes. Mass tourism became a feature of contemporary societies in the industrialized states in the latter part of the twentieth century, and with it came a multitude of new coastal resorts such as Cancún, Cozumel, Acapulco and PV, catering in part to new tourists, such as cruise-shippers. Torres and Momsen (2005) clearly associate these places with the latest developments in the leisure and transportation industries, which can be seen as both positive and negative. In 1997 the Council for Environmental Cooperation, an agency set up in Montréal under NAFTA, released to the public a 'factual report' on a proposal to build a cruise ship terminal at Cozumel. This report illustrates the concerns expressed by many about environmental consequences of a growing tourist industry based on cruise ships (http://www.cec.org/files/pdf/COUNCIL/97–9e_EN.pdf).

The coastal environment is part of a complex system, and problems with this environment affect peoples' perceptions of and thus visitations to a place. For instance, recently *The Globe and Mail* has drawn attention to the damage of hurricanes and the effects on tourism in PV and elsewhere in Mexico and, for example, in October 2002 a massive hurricane (Kenna) hit PV and an enormous amount of destruction occurred as well as deaths (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Kenna; Massam *et al.* 2007). The worst of the hurricane's effects occurred between San Blas in Nayarit and PV in Jalisco, where over 100 people were injured and thousands of homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed. Buhasz (2002) reported that a 'week after hurricane Kenna plowed into Mexico's Pacific coast near

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1 The choice of representative elements was made in concert with our faculty collaborators as well as local key informants who were long-term residents of PV and thus cognizant of the changes that have been stimulated by tourism.

PV, as many as five resorts and up to 1,600 hotel rooms in the city remain closed after sustaining water damage'. But by the time of our next research visit in the spring of 2003 most of the damage had been repaired. Similarly, the Cancún region has suffered considerable destruction from hurricanes (Buhasz 2006; Weissert 2006). But reflecting the importance of these resorts to the Mexican economy, the damage was also quickly repaired. Immen (2006) has drawn attention to the reaction of some tourists to the prospect of hurricanes, and he notes, 'it's hurricane time in the Caribbean. But despite last year's record storm season, cruise passengers don't seem to be shying away'. In fact, cruise bookings have been strong, and many fall cruises in the Caribbean are already full or near capacity, says Mary Jean Tully, president of The Cruise Professionals agency in Mississauga. 'Truth is, we aren't seeing clients booking just because there are deals', she says.

Although many coastal resorts are quite recent, they are distinctive tourist places. First, they are based upon, as Pearce (1995, 136) puts it, 'sunlust tourism' and as a consequence have cultural landscapes that differ often markedly from other tourist areas, as they are based upon proximity to and use of the ocean. Second, there are different kinds of coastal resorts that reflect different local factors, and that can give important insights into local cultures and the challenges of and to these cultures. Although tourism promotion in Vallarta is not significantly based upon ethnicity, there are elements of what van den Berghe (1995) calls *ethnic tourism* in the local area. Third, these resorts are located in geomorphological zones that are commonly more fragile than other physical environments, resulting in a series of ecological challenges. Fourth, and as a direct result of the first three points, coastal resorts are often confronted by a series of contentious social issues, are usually associated with planning nightmares, and are often areas where ecological conflicts and confrontations are continually coming to the fore. Many of these issues have arisen extremely rapidly.

The early growth of Puerto Vallarta

A relatively recent place in the Mexican context, PV officially became a municipality of about 3,000 people in 1918 and a city in 1968 (de Oca de Contreras 2002). It succeeded an earlier settlement dating from the mid-nineteenth century known as Las Peñas (The Rocks). Although it was associated with commercial fishing and to some extent agriculture at an early date, its first important connection with tourism is usually dated to the opening of its first true hotel, the Hotel Rosita in 1948. The first provision of tourist services by the local population began in 1952. In the succeeding years, Americans began to build homes along the Cuale River (in what became known as 'Gringo Gulch'), but development remained predominantly in the hands of Mexicans (de Oca de Contreras 2002). In 1954 the beginning of air transportation made the city more accessible to the rest of the world, and a sportfishing club began in 1955, but the next major event that brought Vallarta to the attention of the rest of the world came a decade later. To quote a Vallarta Web site: 'In 1963, with the filming of "The Night of the Iguana" in nearby Mismaloya (south of town), PV was mentioned on the world news and quickly became one of the most popular destinations in the Mexican Riviera' especially for Anglo-Americans (http://www.puerto–vallarta.com). The first cruise ship, the Princess Patricia, arrived in the mid-1960s, but like most vessels had to anchor offshore. In the 1970s, government policies to increase population in this Jalisco coast area coincided with a rapid increase in vacation time and disposable income for Anglo-Americans (Hall and Page 2002), and PV began to grow more rapidly as a tourist resort, although remaining a very Mexican place in many ways.

Successive governments have promoted tourism as a mechanism for encouraging economic development (Pearce 1989), and tourism has become the driving force behind the overall growth of the Vallarta region. The local physical geography has been a major factor in shaping this growth. PV is located at the head (east end) of Banderas Bay, the 'Bay of Flags' (Figure 2), first explored in the early 1500s by Francisco Cortés de San Buenaventura, nephew of the famous Conquistador Hernan Cortés. He so named the Bay because he was received by 20,000 Indians bearing feather flags. Banderas is the Spanish word for flags. The town itself was founded in 1851 and was named after Ignacio L. Vallarta in 1918.
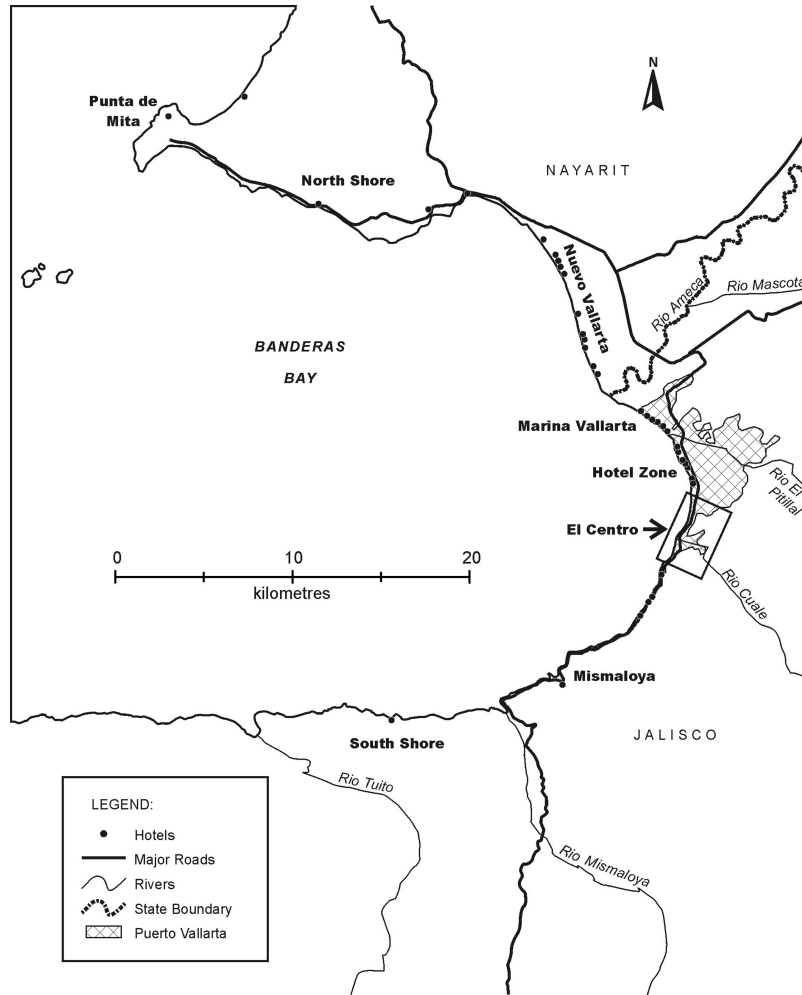
Figure 2
The Vallarta Coast of Banderas Bay

It became a city in 1968 (http://www.pvconnect.com/map.html). It is located in the northwest corner of the State of Jalisco, but is adjacent to the border of the State of Nayarit, the boundary of which runs along the valley of the Rio Ameca. However, this natural boundary has recently proved to be a source of political and social challenges, particularly associated with the tourist industry. The Old Town of PV is backed by a series of highlands (up to 2,000 metres in height), which give considerable scenic value to Vallarta in addition to affecting the local weather and climate. However, these mountainous areas also cause challenges for the process of urban growth by restricting the amount of easily serviceable land that can be used for building construction, as well as for transportation. As a consequence, traffic congestion is a major and growing negative characteristic of PV, and is a continually growing challenge in this region (Chàvez Arce, personal communication). These site characteristics are particularly important to the understanding of recent growth patterns in the Vallarta region. At one time poorer housing

was concentrated in these hills, but recently expensive tourist villas have been taking over this scenic landscape, and the indigenous or at least local population has been impelled to move elsewhere, along with newer in-migrants. This movement has been further inland, as well as to satellite settlements in the greater urban region and is important to an understanding of the development of tourism in the Banderas Bay region.

The Making of Puerto Vallarta

Clearly, the people in this region have been dramatically affected by tourism. It is hard to examine precisely these effects, in part because it is difficult to decide exactly who has been affected and to what degree. However, interviews with key informants over the last 8 years on an annual basis consistently support this assertion. These key informants also assisted the authors in the identification of important developments in tourism that have affected PV (that we were later able to map), as well as the most appropriate variables to be included in the questionnaire surveys.

The indigenous Indian groups have been impacted, but they may have had little historical coastal presence. Many Mexicans who have been affected are later arrivals; many of whom may themselves be products of, and players within, tourism. Vallarta has many immigrants and they are by no means all Anglo-Americans. To a great extent these subgroups can be seen to live in different social spaces (Figure 3[2]) and to some extent have different and unpredictable reactions to tourism (Harrison 2001; Iroegbu and Chen 2002). Cultural integration of these different groups has not, of course, been equal and various social strata have been produced. To a large extent, these appear to be reproductions of social sectors found elsewhere in Mexico, with the tourist, snowbird and expat groups as an added ingredient to the mix. Thus although Indians are found in the Vallarta area they tend to be less afflu-

ent and less well integrated than other groups. They are commonly represented as street or beach sellers of goods that have been made commercially or in traditional ways using traditional techniques. Other less well educated groups act as taxi drivers, construction workers and service workers. Most of these occupations are relatively poorly paid, and are clearly affected by the seasonal nature of tourism. Although some of the locals voice concern about the threats that tourism may constitute to their quality of life (Massam and Everitt 2001; Massam *et al.* 2003), most residents of the Vallarta region, as has been found elsewhere by Gjerald (2005), still seem to believe that tourism benefits will outweigh its costs.

As noted earlier, Vallarta was originally an agricultural centre and a fishing village, and was isolated from the rest of Mexico. The first dirt road to Guadalajara (the state capital) was built in 1941. Even after its incorporation as a municipality PV retained its earlier functions, with some tourist activities being grafted onto the original Mexican settlement. Despite the influence of air travel, Hollywood and tourism, growth has been (until recently) quite slow. From 12,500 in 1964, by 1970 (when development in Cancún began) the population of the settlement had risen to only 24,115. However by 1990 the population of PV had grown to 111,457 and that of the Jalisco coast, which can be viewed as greater PV, now has an estimated population of over 350,000 (Jiménez Martínez, 1998; http://www.pvconnect.com/map.html), has at least 15,000 hotel rooms (http://www.puerto–vallarta.com), and receives over two million visitors annually. PV now receives about 30 percent of the total tourists of Jalisco State. Between 1970 and 1990, the tertiary sector of the economy (principally a tourist-oriented sector) increased in value from 59 to 82 percent, with the primary sector dropping from 10 to 2 percent, and the secondary sector from 24 to 16 percent (Jiménez Martínez 1998).

Arguably the most noticeable recent developments along the Jalisco coast have been the cultural landscape changes that, as is often the case, provide primary sources of information that enable us to understand the evolution of a region. Over the past 20 years the urban area has grown dramatically, and what was once a Mexican centre

2 This map was produced from key informant interviews that included simple cognitive mapping questions based upon the work of Lynch (1960), Orleans (1973) and Everitt (1976), as well as site verification using field research over an 8-year period.
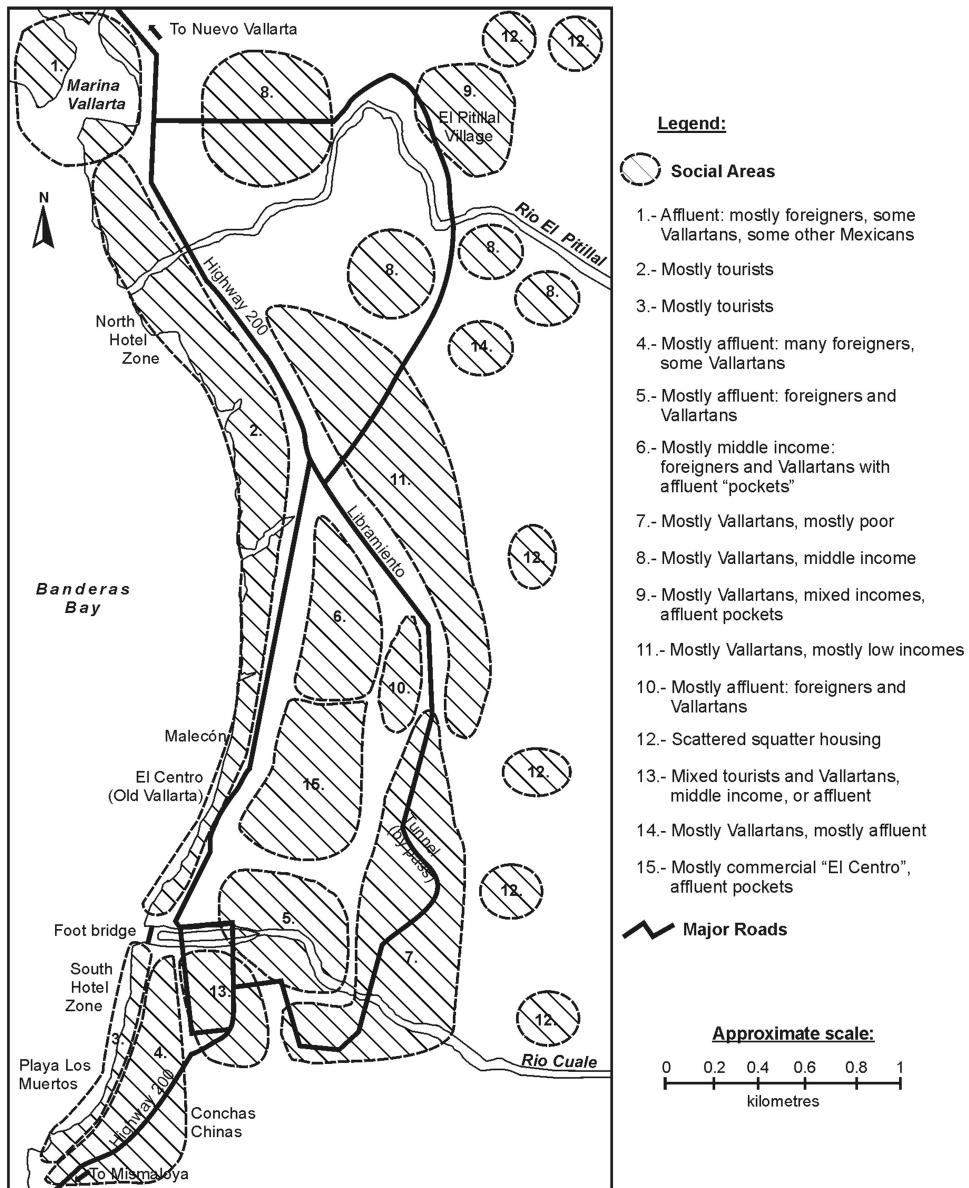
Figure 3
Social Areas of Puerto Vallarta

with tourism grafted onto it, has become a popular resort, a 'leisure product' (Hall and Page 2002, 114; Shaw and Williams 2002) with a Mexican character. However, the relatively slow and recent population growth has meant that the retention

of 'character' has become part of the charm of the settlement and this has become official policy in the city, which for instance restricts building heights and controls other elements of the cultural landscape. There is evidence, however, that

this character is eroded when the demands of increasing tourism conflict with traditional values. Thus one hotel on the coast that was constructed in 2006 is exceeding the official height limits, apparently because of the political connections of the developers, and three of the four historic city plazas are being transformed to accommodate car parking.

Arreola and Curtis (1993, 133) suggest that five traditional functions, notably plazas, relative compactness, core versus periphery traditions, distinctive barrios and small neighbourhood stores and stands, have persisted in many Mexican cities despite significant cultural landscape change. Although all five are characteristic of PV, the plaza is particularly indicative of current events in the region and nowhere 'is the impress of tradition more evident than in the plazas of *El Centro*'. The main plaza (Plaza de Armas) was the principal public space and was commonly surrounded by institutions such as the church and government offices. It was often a hub of commercial activity, as well as for social and recreational activities (Figure 4). What Arreola and Curtis (1993, 45) term 'proper Spanish colonial towns' also had smaller secondary plazas that had different functions and were related to different patterns of urban activities. To a greater or lesser extent these spaces and places have maintained themselves as the urban forms have grown and developed and 'modernized', and taken on different functions such as modern-day industry and commerce, and recreation and tourism. Everitt *et al.* (2004) and Massam and Everitt (2004) have described the four important plazas within the old city of PV. One is clearly the most important, with the other three having always been subordinate to it as public spaces and places, but just as obviously all contained many elements of a common model. Although plazas in PV are very traditional, they are also subject to change. Over the period 2005–2007 one had been converted to a parking garage, and underground parking had been added to two others (Massam *et al.* 2007).

However eroded by perceived necessity, this concern for the traditional continues to contrast with manufactured resorts such as Cancún and Los Cabos as reported by Hoffman (1992) and Torres and Momsen (2005), and as we shall see, the 'integrally planned resort' that is being
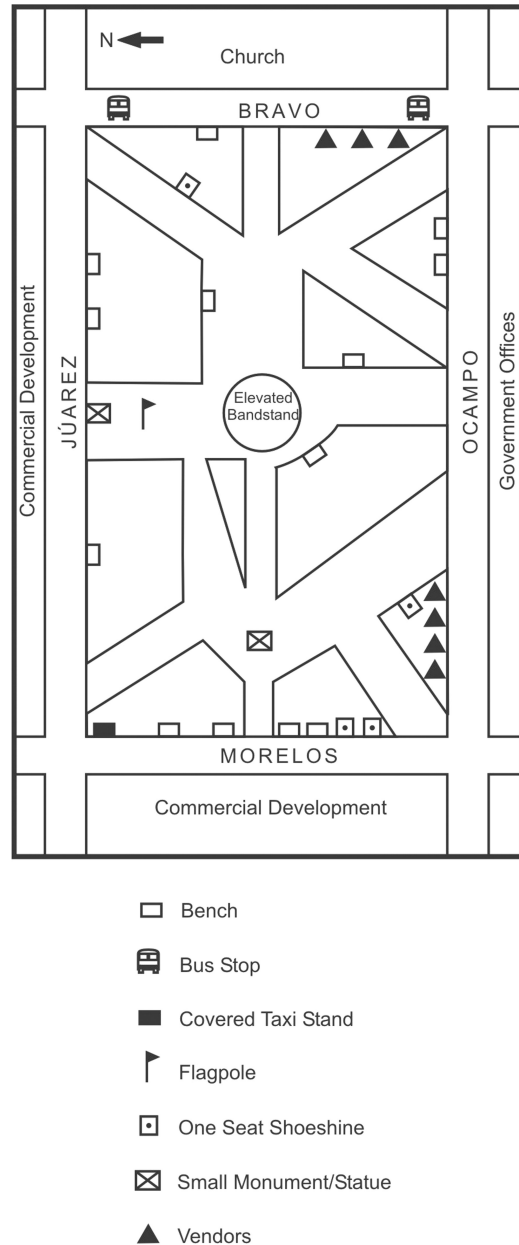

Figure 4
Generic Plan of a Mexican Plaza

built at Nuevo Vallarta. One result is that the core/downtown of the city (Viejo Vallarta) still retains many older buildings, of traditional architectural style, although many of these have been

converted from upper status housing to restaurants, art galleries and Internet cafés. Despite these recent changes, which include the 'popularization' of the town with the standard fast food chains and clubs of Anglo America (such as McDonald's, Wendy's, Hooters, Domino's and Planet Hollywood), PV is considered by many to be the 'most Mexican' of all the beach destinations in Mexico. Its home state of Jalisco is known as the 'most Mexican' of all the states, due to its rich traditions and folklore.[3]

In part the retention of this character reflects the position of Vallarta within the Mexican urban system. For the Vallartan urban area is clearly dominated by the primate city of Guadalajara as this latter centre is itself dominated by Mexico City. Several million people live in and around Guadalajara, and many Puerto Vallartans access this urban area on a fairly regular basis for many traditional urban functions (such as health care, higher education, shopping and entertainment). As a consequence, the Jalisco coast area has not taken on some of the urban functions that might otherwise be associated with a central place for 350,000 people, and the CBD is still noticeably low-rise and non-metropolitan in form, and has become in essence a recreational business district (RBD) with true CBD functions being few and far between.

Today the greater PV region can be seen as a series of zones (Figure 2). Not surprisingly, these correlate well with social areas within the city (Figure 3), that are important, as will be discussed below, in terms of the making of the tourist landscape. Although traditionally three (Viejo Vallarta, the North Hotel Zone and Marina Vallarta) have been recognized within PV, nowadays at least three others (the South Hotel Zone, South PV and Nuevo Vallarta) directly related to tourism are clearly identified within the larger region. Outside of these are areas of population (such as squatter settlements) that are functionally tied to tourism, but which rarely are used by tourists. They are essentially removed from the 'tourist gaze' (Norton 2006, 372) and rarely even appear on the

3 PV claims to have given to Mexico its traditional costume, the charro; its national beverage, Tequila; and its most representative music, that of the Mariachi (http://www.puerto–vallarta.com).

popular maps given to tourists (Massam *et al.* 2007).

Tourist Imprints on Puerto Vallarta

The effects of tourism on the Vallarta region are both broad in scale and deep in consequence, and are briefly illustrated by a selection of what we term the tourist imprints. A number of cultural imprints are discussed that fit into the urban landscape context elucidated above. These cultural imprints were not selected at random, but represent some of the most important tourism imprints on PV. Although some of these imprints may be found throughout the Vallarta region, our illustrations are particularly drawn from the historic urban zones immediately to the south and north of the Cuale River: the commodified historic landscapes. This is where they are better developed, and have had a more widespread and prominent influence. The data that produced the discussions of these imprints were gathered from three sources. First, published vernacular literature, of which there is abundance in Vallarta, was collected and surveyed over an 8-year time period. This data source was supplemented by fieldwork over the same time period, as well as key informant interviews.

In addition to the cultural imprints, an ecological imprint, popularly known as an ecological footprint, is developed in more detail to emphasize the environmental effects of tourism, which Everitt *et al.* (2005) suggest have been neglected in the tourism literature. These data were collected by using a standardized questionnaire (in Spanish or English depending upon the sub-sample), which was downloaded from the Internet. The questionnaires were applied by the research team to a series of different sub-samples to build as complete a picture as possible of this footprint.

Cultural imprints

Five cultural imprints—hotels, restaurants, the gay community, art galleries and Internet cafés—were selected to demonstrate the influence of tourism upon place making in Vallarta. The five were chosen after discussions with our key

informants. In addition, our field research indicated that they were representative of the major developments of tourism in the Vallartan cultural landscape, and were imprints that were recognized by both locals and non-locals. In social terms these important symbolic spaces include all major kinds of visitors, as well as many locals. At the same time they represent both small and large groups, both traditional and modern activities, as well as activities that are acceptable to the majority of people and those that represent spaces of resistance to the dominant social order.

Hotel imprints. Hall and Page (2002, 114) note that hotels are a critical part of the 'leisure product' that characterize places such as contemporary PV. The hotel industry is now a global industry, with significant internal differentiation that in PV comprises traditional and modern hotels. Traditional hotels are locally owned and inexpensive, whereas modern hotels are owned by large companies and in many cases by international hotel chains. Both have a number of important place characteristics, which are related to their location, landscape characteristics, and clientele. First, the traditional hotels are located away from the beach and are mostly on the inland side of Insurgentes, a major street in the zona romantica. Second, they are smaller, have a lower vertical profile, and follow traditional architectural styles. Third, the clientele is distinctive. As this area is generally more peaceful, more 'Mexican', and of course a lower-rent district, it attracts tourists who cannot afford, or who do not wish to live in the more expensive hotels in PV. These tourists tend to be what Cohen (1972) has termed 'explorers' or 'drifters', and what Plog (1974, 2004) identified as 'venturers'. Pearce (1995) points out that these different types of tourist seek different destinations that will change over time. Our research indicates that they also seek different areas within a destination. These also are likely to change over time. For instance, the Hotel Rosita was once a member of the traditional category, but rebuilding and renovation have now moved it into the modern category.

Modern hotels are found in Nuevo Vallarta, the Marina, and in the North Hotel Zone. These are commonly owned by chains such as Holiday Inn, Sheraton, Marriott, Four Seasons and
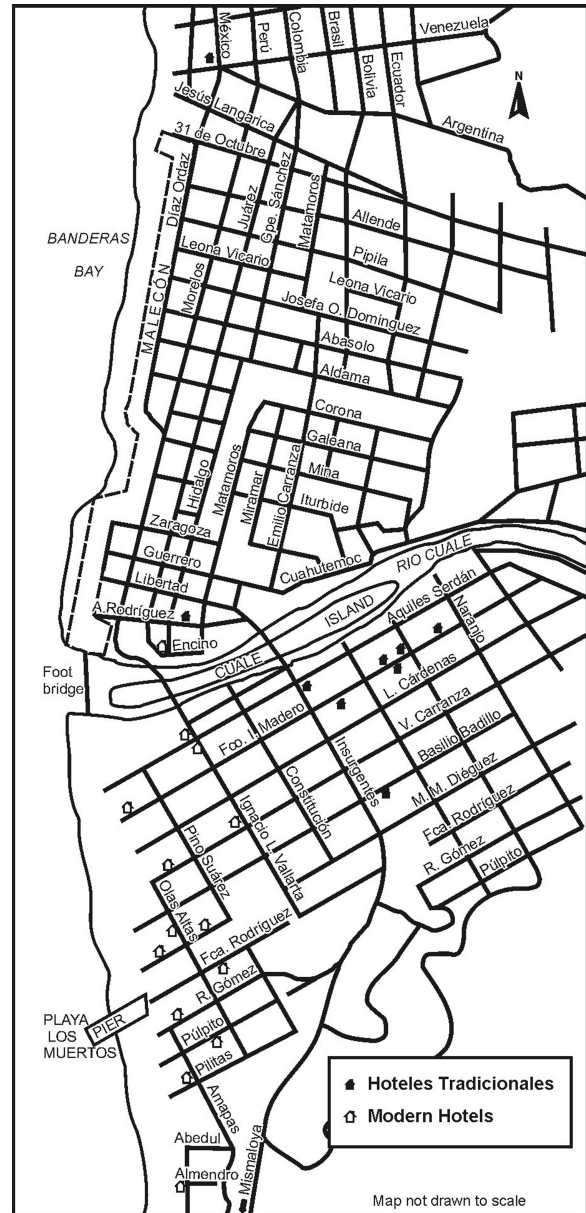

Figure 5
Hotels in Historic Puerto Vallarta

Mayan Palace. They are also increasingly found along with their functional cousins, the high-rise condominiums, in the coastal areas of the zona romantica (Figure 5). These hotels are oversized, and sell themselves in large part by being

close to or adjacent to the high-rent beach areas, as well as often being 'all inclusive' but at the same time *exclusive* of the local Mexican population.[4] In addition to their size they are characterized by modern architectural styles and are commonly high-rise buildings. The modern hotels in the zona romantica attract a different kind of tourist from the traditional hotels, but also a different kind from the chains found elsewhere in Vallarta. The chains tend to cater to what Cohen (1972) termed the 'organized mass tourist', with the modern hotels in the old town catering more commonly to the 'individual mass tourist' who wants upscale physical facilities, but wishes to design their own social agenda and choose their own patterns of recreation. These 'near venturers' or 'centric venturers' as Plog (1974, 2004) calls them often try to deliberately distance themselves from the more so-called dependable tourists in the hotel chains. They do this both in their activity spaces as well as in their minds. In interviews they like to make it clear that they are different. In many instances these tourists began their foreign experiences in hotel chains but have now graduated (as they see it) to a more preferable level of tourism. They are commonly regular visitors to PV, often booking similar accommodation from year to year. They tend to avoid organized mass tours and plan their own trips—albeit often to locations also frequented by mass tourists. They thus exhibit another important aspect of modern tourist behaviour, the ability to be in the same space as other tourists, but in a different place.

Restaurant imprints. Although many restaurants are found within hotels, particularly in the hotel zones, El Centro and the romantic zone also contain a variety of eating establishments that cater particularly to the non-local population (Figure 6). These eating-places are varied in size, both small and large, and range from 'five star' to 'no star' as well as the street stands that typically cater to local demand. There are, of course, many Mexican food restaurants, but also others

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4 On one occasion, one of our research colleagues who is more Anglo-American in his features entered one of these hotels with Everitt and Massam with no problem. His brother, following a few paces behind, and with more Indian features, was initially refused entry by the security personnel.
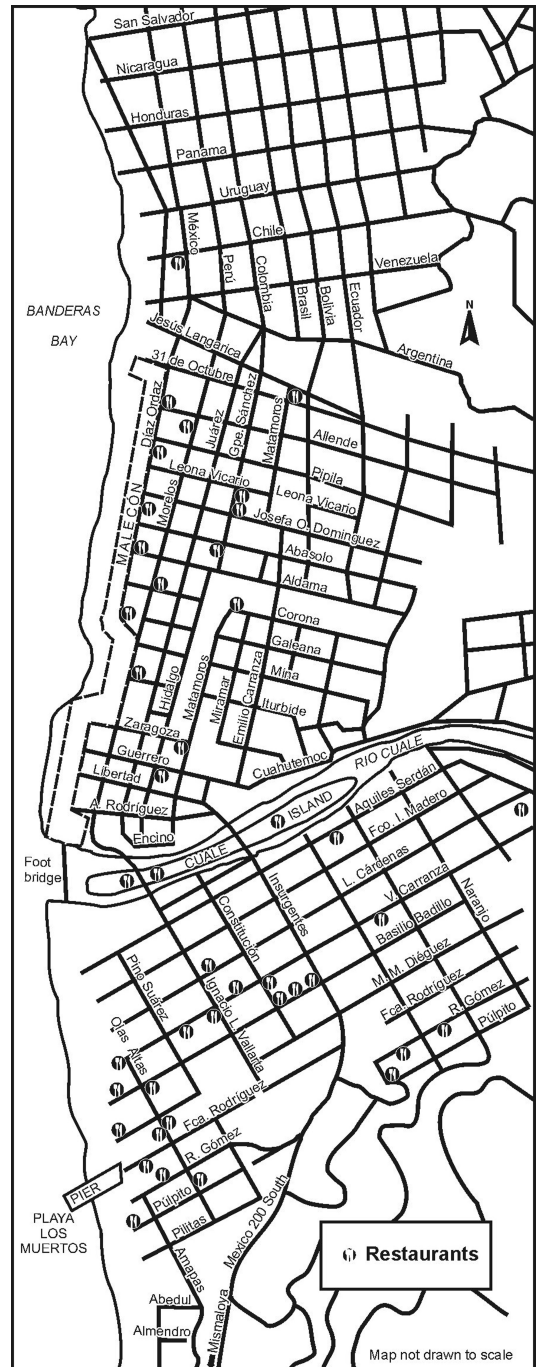

Figure 6
Restaurants in Puerto Vallarta

catering to a variety of tastes including Chinese, French, Italian, Spanish and nouveau cuisine style, as well as pizza and hamburger style places (Arana 2004). Some generalizations can be made about this footprint. The popular food restaurants of Anglo-American origin (e.g., McDonald's, Wendy's, Domino's and the No Name Café) are mostly close to or in the Malecón area of downtown. This is the area frequented most commonly by the mass tourists, and particularly the youth and families. The higher priced restaurants are usually farther from the seashore and farther uphill in El Centro, away from the madding crowds. The romantic zone is more mixed, but shows little evidence of North American chains: there are hamburger and pizza places, but they are more upscale in their architecture and food presentation, and locally owned. This area contains a variety of restaurants, many of which are quite expensive, with the cheaper restaurants and those catering to the local population and Cohen's (1972) explorers, usually being found farther inland (east of Insurgentes).

The gay community. It has long been noted by Norton (2006) and Knox (1995) among others that minority groups identify with and live within segregated spaces that are diverse and heterogeneous. In recent years Vallarta has developed a large gay community, which has concentrated in the commercial and residential areas of the zona romantica, in particular, but also in El Centro (Figure 7). Such concentrations have been shown to exist in other cities such as San Francisco, Philadelphia and Vancouver, BC (Clift *et al.* 2002; Norton 2006). Businesses owned by, or catering to, the PV gay population are rarely obvious to most passers-by, but a guide to this 'place' has been produced and published, and is readily if not widely available (Gay Guide Vallarta 2005). A related website also exists (http://www.gayguidevallarta.com/). Using the terminology discussed by Knox (1995), the gay space of Vallarta constitutes an 'enclave' where the community has clustered together in order to maintain internal cohesion and provide mutual support for its members. The businesses advertised in the gay guide are commonly oriented to both heterosexual and homosexual communities, with this being most true of restau-
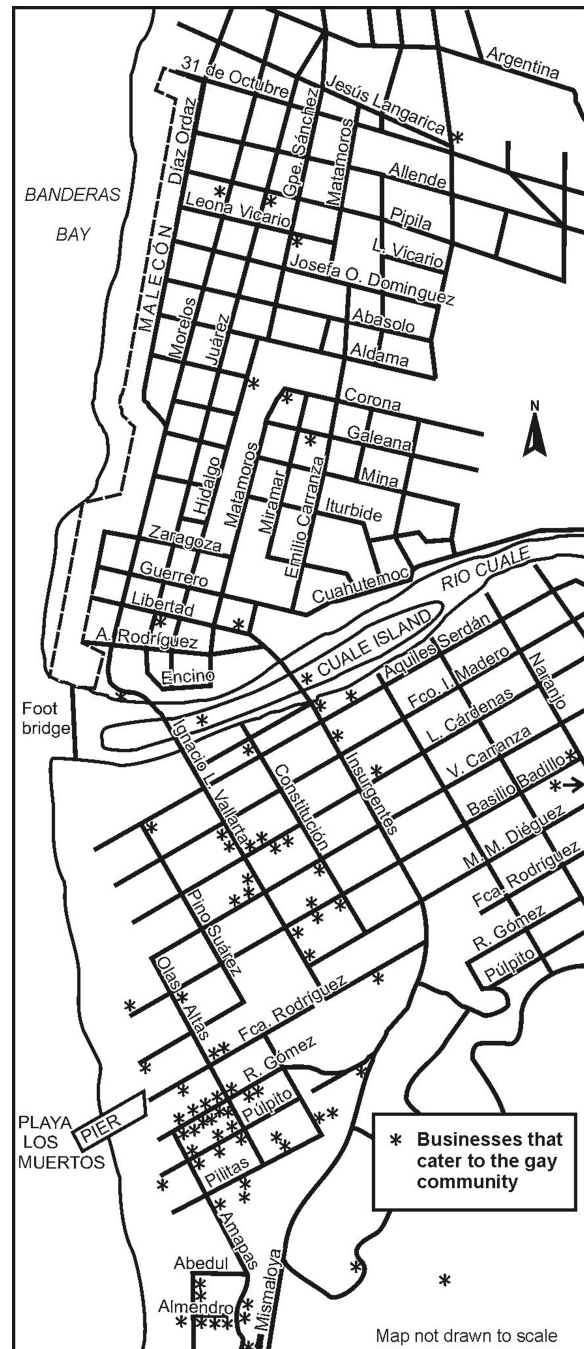

Figure 7
The gay community imprint in Puerto Vallarta

rants. In other instances they are clearly oriented to the gay community alone (Jordan-Bychkov *et al.*. 2006). Thus 'Blue Chairs' is a well-known gay-oriented hotel on the Playa Los Muertos. Its blue beach chairs and its advertising ('The largest gay and lesbian beachfront resort in the world!') make clear statements as to the sexual orientation of the clientele. Similarly Diana's Tours advertises PV's Gay Cruise. The large majority of the advertising is aimed at gay men rather than lesbians, which according to Norton (2006, 306–313) appears to be the usual state of affairs in these sexual landscapes. Colloquially PV is said to be the largest gay community outside of San Francisco, although no way to quantify this assertion has been found.

Art galleries. PV has long prided itself as a centre for the arts, including the performing arts, fashion, jewellery, sculpture, writing and more recently gallery art (de Oca de Contreras 2002). In recent years PV has attempted to sell itself as an 'intriguing' art destination (Gallery Guide 2004), and this has produced an important and distinctive imprint on the landscape. Although aimed in part at tourists, this form of expression has become more associated with Mexicans, snowbirds and expats—particularly from Anglo America. It is claimed that PV has 'more important galleries than anywhere else in Mexico with the exception of the capital' (Gallery Guide 2004). The first professional gallery (Gallería Uno) was founded in 1971 (Old Town Art Walk 2004–2005), and today at least two dozen are in operation at any one time, with the vast majority being located in El Centro or the romantic zone (Figure 8). Many of these are located in 'character' buildings, most of which were previously large houses, often of the old elite. Artists from around the world now call PV home, but the majority come from the United States. Some of these have become long-term residents in PV. Self-guided 'Art Walks' (with brochures and maps) combined with cocktail art exhibitions are now regular features in PV, as are art classes and training workshops. The cultural plaza (Centro Cultural Cuale) is a fine example of a space devoted to the teaching of the arts including, sculpture, drawing, painting, folk dance, photography, theatre, the guitar and other Latin American instruments. Interviews in 2007
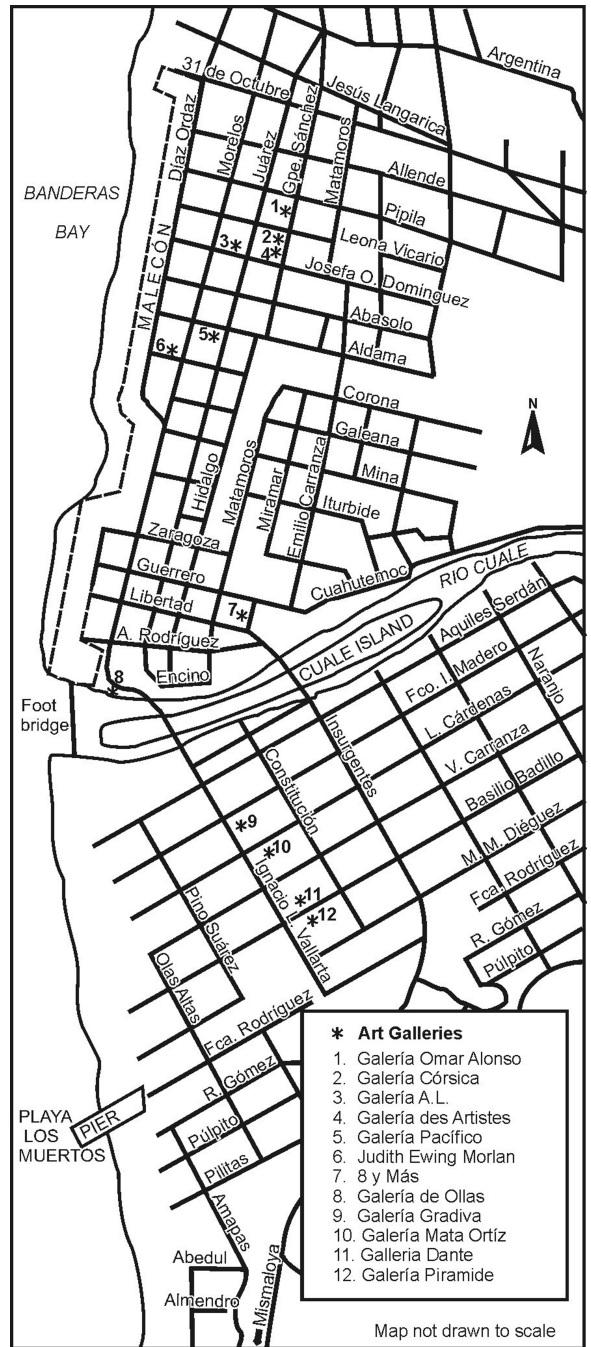

Figure 8
Art galleries in Puerto Vallarta

confirmed that most of the clients in the studios that surround the plaza are Mexicans.

In the same vein are public sculptures, particularly those along the Malecón, including 'The Seahorse' which has become one of Vallarta's most recognized place-making symbols within this artistic symbolic space. Recently 'Indian Art' has been promoted and many stores and stalls now sell Huichol artifacts. Attempts to promote this through official stores, which gave the Huichol a greater presence in the trade, were quickly circumvented by entrepreneurs, and Huichol crafts are now widespread throughout commercial Vallarta. Strangely Mayan art and artifacts are also sold in PV, presumably capitalizing upon name recognition rather than historical authenticity, as the Mayan homeland is far removed from coastal Jalisco.

The Internet café. The last cultural imprint that we recognize is arguably the most recent, namely, the Internet café (Figure 9). Although somewhat concentrated, it represents a major addition to Vallarta's tourist landscape, as well as a dramatic development in PV's connectivity with the outside world. PV, for most of its existence, was characterized by poor external communications (de Oca de Contreras 2002). Although land and air transportation have improved in recent years, other forms of communication infrastructure, which are critical to tourism (Harrison 2001), such as telephones, have lagged behind. Landlines have been poor and even cell phones are unpredictable (Richter 2001). The Internet began to have an impact in the last decade and this was accelerated by the beginnings of broadband connections and by the Internet café. The Cyber-C@fe, one of the longer-lasting operations, promotes itself as having offered the Internet since 2001! Modern hotels (such as the Krystal) sometimes supply this form of communication to their patrons but for many visitors, and especially those staying for longer periods of time, the Internet café has become their lifeline to the outside world. Many Internet cafés have had a short lifetime, but there are usually a dozen or more operating in El Centro and the romantic zone at any particular time, as well as others in the North Hotel Zone. Some have become fixtures in the landscape and the activity patterns of the visitors, and now the Net House asks travelers, "Have you e-mailed your
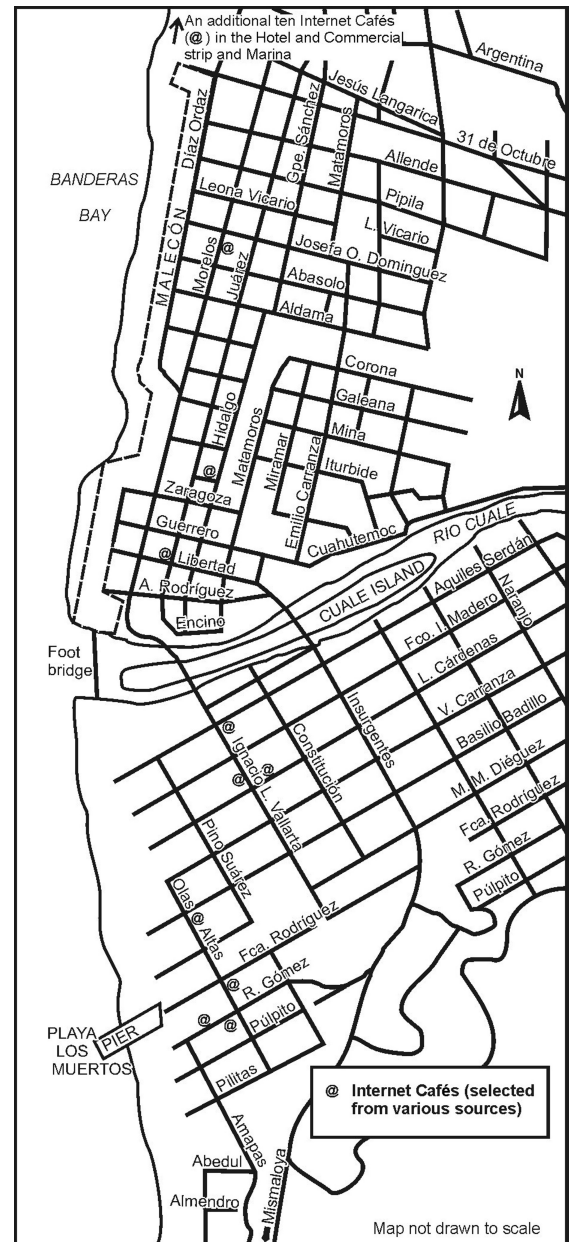

Figure 9
Internet cafés in Puerto Vallarta

mother today?" (Gay Guide Vallarta 2005). Although the non-local population probably stimulated the opening of many cafés, there are now operations that mostly serve the local people, and

particularly the youth of Vallarta. PV's tourist imprints are now firmly in and of the twenty-first century.

Ecological imprints. In concert with much of the rest of the world, ecotourism has become a major player in the tourist scene in Vallarta, although as elsewhere, there are debates about whether ecotourism can deliver economic benefits, or whether it is just 'green greed' (Duffy 2002). Certainly, the impacts of the modern day tourist upon the environment have increasingly become central to life in Vallarta, and as Ryan (1991, 95) has suggested, it 'is not difficult to make the case that tourism is damaging to the environment'. Within the Vallarta urban area traffic, air and water pollution have perhaps been the most commonly voiced areas of concern. But outside of the geographic city, there are different imprints as the rural environments are increasingly affected, and surrounding small towns such as El Tuito and Las Palmas (Figure 1) see a steady increase in tourist numbers. Although many of these are Plog's (1974, 2004) venturers, with a concern for environmental preservation and ecotours, others are more dependable, going on organized trips to the wilderness in safari buses, rented jeeps and four-wheel ATVs.

These qualitative changes in tourism have, as discussed earlier, occurred in tandem with the quantitative changes in tourist numbers and their consequent environmental impacts. Although such developments can be mapped in the way that we showed the cultural imprints, it was decided to use a different, more varied metric to demonstrate the ecological imprint of tourism. This work is part of an ongoing research project in Jalisco and is known as ecological footprint analysis. Although pioneered in Canada by Wackernagel and Rees (1996), and having an arguably Anglo-American bias in its methodology, it has now been used in many parts of the world as a means of measuring human impact on the earth (e.g., Barcelona 1998; Wackernagel 1998; Santa Monica 2004; Chávez *et al.* 2006a, 2006b). More recently efforts have been made to promote the use of a carbon footprint survey (www.climatecare.org) to make citizens aware of the damage being done to the environment and to promote responsible behaviour by citizens to contribute to the reduction of global warming,

and the adverse effects that are now being felt around the world and which have attracted much publicity, such as Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth* (http://www.climatecrisis.net/). Many tourists arrive in PV by air and the carbon footprint of such travel is disturbing. The prospect of the imposition of a carbon tax on plane tickets could have negative repercussions on the number of tourists who could afford to fly to this place.

Ecological footprint analysis is a simplified accounting tool that enables us to estimate the resource consumption and waste assimilation requirements of a defined human population or economy in terms of a corresponding productive land area. We suggest that its use helps to encourage a debate among citizens regarding sustainability, as it raises consciousness about the impacts of particular life styles on the environment. This indeed was one of the overall findings of this exercise. A detailed report on the work undertaken in PV on the ecological footprint is available in Everitt *et al.* (2005) and draws upon a questionnaire that allows calculation of the consumption that relates to specific types of human activity (www.earthday.net/footprint/index.asp). The ecological footprint quiz is structured around a set of 16 questions that focus on four basic categories of human activities each of which contributes to demand for land: food, mobility, shelter and goods and services. Scores are calculated that give the ecological footprints of the individual filling out the quiz. Although there are methodological challenges to this quiz technique, and some of our sub-sample sizes are problematic, interesting and consistent data can result. For instance, the number of planets (a rough vernacular guide to resource use on 'planet earth', with a score of 1.0 meaning that all of the present resources would be accounted for) that would be needed to sustain groups of similar individuals can be calculated. Two hundred stratified random interviews were conducted in PV in 2005, and the selected results indicated that

1) Tourists need 8.5 planets, if everybody lived like them ($n = 22$).
2) Mexican visitors need 5.8 planets ($n = 15$).
3) Seniors in PV need 2.6 planets ($n = 16$).
4) Middle-aged PV residents need 1.6 planets ($n = 15$).

5) Younger PV residents need 1.3 planets ($n = 30$).
6) Expatriate school teachers need 1.7 planets ($n = 8$).
7) Poor PV residents need 1.9 planets ($n = 30$).

Clearly tourists, especially visitors to PV from Canada and the United States have very large ecological footprints compared with the others we interviewed. And those who arrived by plane will typically have large carbon footprints.

With respect to these results it is clear that even at the scale of PV, if many others followed the general pattern of life style and consumption behaviour then a heavy strain would be placed on the carrying capacity of Jalisco and PV. The sample of teachers also has some members with high ecological footprints; typically they are expatriates working as visitors in PV. Two other groups, Mexican visitors to PV and the middle-aged people, have fairly high ecological footprints. It is not surprising that the poor have among the lowest footprints, but even their lifestyles are unsustainable in the long term. An extension of this analysis to other areas of Jalisco in 2005 produced similar results. In this case respondents in two localities to the south of Vallarta, Cabo Corrientes and Tomatlán, would need 1.5 and 1.6 planets, respectively, and residents in the rural areas around PV would need 1.5 planets, whereas the people in the Bahía de Banderas region in general would need 2.4 planets. Obviously the concentration of tourists in PV adds enormously to the ecological footprint and their high levels of consumption will inevitably place a strain on the supply of resources in the region. The inequalities in size of footprints between locals and visitors are evident and this may have serious social consequences in the future as the inequalities become more widely known and understood by residents of PV.

As Hall and Page (2002) have noted, the ecological imprint of tourists in the PV region, as elsewhere in the world, is both important and unsustainable and undoubtedly increasing. Although further research needs to be completed, our preliminary analysis demonstrates the impact of tourism upon all aspects of life, and earlier research by our team in Jalisco showed that many locals believe that this will reduce their quality of life (Massam and Everitt 2001; Massam 2002;

Massam *et al.* 2003). Whale watching, kayaking, snorkeling and scuba diving may not in themselves be as environmentally unfriendly as some of the other tourist activities, but they cannot be looked at in isolation. When combined with food, lodging and transportation they can have a significant threatening imprint upon this study region.

Conclusions

In its vision statement, SECTUR, the *Secretaría de Turismo* of the Mexican government, whose mission is to take the lead in developing tourism in Mexico, predicts that the country will be one of the world's leading tourist destinations in 2025 (http://www.sectur.gob.mx/wb2/secturing/sect_2_home). Indeed PV's specialization on tourism and its impacts are sources of concern. The diversification of the local economy should be sought and encouraged by government and private initiatives rather than an excessive dependency on revenues and employment from tourism. These points, along with environmental protection, should arguably be part of the efforts of FONATUR on the Vallarta coast with its planning of the Nuevo Vallarta area in Nayarit into what they call an 'integrally planned resort', (www.therealmexico.com/fonatur.htm). So far, however, this agency has been principally concerned with raising capital and promoting new infrastructures. The area of the PV region within Jalisco has not as yet been the focus of attention of this state agency, but given the very significant role of tourism in PV, and its potential role to enhance the standard of living of citizens, we hope that environmental sustainability does become a regional concern, and perhaps one of the aims of FONATUR.

We argue that monitoring the quality of life of citizens of PV as well as in the communities within the hinterland of PV should be part of the ongoing evaluation of tourism. This could be complemented by systematic evaluations of the changing ecological footprints and the carbon footprints of residents and visitors to the city, as well as for citizens in outlying places. This type of analytical work yields specific indicators and measure of impacts to complement the descriptive mapping exercises of land use patterns. We suggest that both types of results are

necessary to encourage public debate about the impacts of tourism and assist government officials in finding appropriate policies to implement.

The public spaces are working well in PV and the recent plans in three of the four original plazas to accommodate parking needs have been, for the most part, successfully designed to blend the old with the new. Attractive public spaces that link the Malecón to the main retailing areas and restaurants provide a milieu that is part of the basic character of PV, and further this provides appropriate separation of pedestrians and traffic. However, the increasing congestion due to cars, buses and taxis in the centre of the city is a serious problem that must be addressed. The construction of more parking places in the centre of PV is a measure that will not alleviate this growing problem. Perhaps a plan for the development of improved mass transit on dedicated traffic lanes along the strip from the North Hotel Zone to the central city could be considered, and restrictions on the use of private vehicles in certain parts of PV at certain times.

The cruise ship business is firmly established in PV and is increasing globally. One topic of future research that has been brought to our —attention by the key informants concerns the distribution of benefits from the cruise ship business: to what extent do local businesses and residents benefit from the arrival of cruise ships? Information about the fees charged by PV to the cruise lines that dock in PV are not readily available, and the balance sheet of costs and benefits deserves to be developed to encourage public debate and appropriate policy making. The general perception is that while the city has invested heavily in port and docking facilities and associated water systems and sewage treatment plants for the ships, the financial benefits to the majority of citizens are difficult to discern. This topic deserves closer examination.

Mathieson and Wall (1982, 177) suggested over two decades ago that 'it is inevitable that the development of tourism will induce some impacts'. Although the leisurization of the Bahía de Banderas region has been increasing for some time, the recent developments have led to more critical debate than did the earlier developments. As Gunn and Var (2002) have suggested, the sacred cow of growth is being questioned increasingly by both observers and researchers of tourism. In PV, this scrutinization partly reflects the magnitude of the recent changes, and thus its potential impact locally, regionally, and even nationally, and partly the increasing landscape impact of tourism upon the older character areas of the city. As Ryan (1991, 64 and 204) indicates, it is to be expected that tourist zones change over time, as the tourist experience is bound within a psychological, social and cultural milieu that is evolving. Although Lea (1988) suggests it is important not to let the industry expand beyond the local capabilities to control it, such a development has occurred in PV. The ecological footprint analysis clearly indicates that the size of the area needed to sustain PV in terms of food and water supply, waste disposal as well as energy production is several times larger than the municipality. Also, the footprints of long-term visitors are much larger than the poorer members of the local community, giving rise to questions of equity and leading to tensions among the various groups in PV. In addition, as Pearce (1989) shows, tourist expansion is cyclical and there are likely to be both 'ups' and 'downs' in the overall process over time. The big question is whether this probable growth and change can be maintained and sustained in PV, and what form this might take. Can the various imprints be controlled so that they do not lead to irreversible negative impacts?

Butler (1980) suggests that growth might be seen to prove to be beneficial or deleterious to pre-existing developments. For PV it could be seen as beneficial if it allows Vallarta to retain the character that has been part of its essence, and leads to a reduced negative impact, or even to a positive, planned, rejuvenation of the older area. It could be negative if it drains investment from the areas of original growth, or if it leads to the stagnation or decline of the place that was the initial attractive feature, and to environmental degradation. It is vitally important to assess strategically how many tourists are wanted in the Vallarta region, and how many can be sustained socially, economically and environmentally within this area (Ryan 1991).

Although data limitations remain, and are likely to continue into the foreseeable future, it has been possible to identify a number of general patterns within Vallartan tourism, and the processes that underlie these patterns. It is thus possible to

at least hypothesize some of the impacts of recent tourist developments in the Vallarta region. However, as major developments are still in an embryonic stage, scope exists for important research in this area. In particular there is a need to monitor the changes in morphology that are currently taking place so that the processes involved can be better understood, and further developments in this area can be better planned in order to allow for social, economic and environmental carrying capacities (Pearce 1995, Chapter 9). It is hoped that such research will enable us to better understand the impacts and challenges of tourism in the Vallarta region as well as give clues to similar activities on a larger national and international scale.

Tourism as Wilks *et al.* (2005) have noted is a challenge in our turbulent times, and its imprints have been the subjects of increasing criticism in recent years (South 1985; New Internationalist 1993; Hall and Page 2002). As we argue in the article, the global tourist industry is enormous and the Mexican component is growing rapidly, and moreover the impacts in PV are very significant for citizens in the state of Jalisco. The field of tourism in PV and the study of impacts demands increasing attention from academics, public agencies and concerned citizens. We hope that our work on PV will contribute to this initiative. At a more general level of concern about consumerism, sustainability and tourism, we would hope that if lively civil conversations can be encouraged among all stakeholders including citizens, investors, NGOs and public agencies, over time the rise of *Homo economicus* as the driving force of growth and social change will be replaced by *Homo susteins*, and the way communities reconcile economic change and growth with environmental sustainability. This challenge faces PV and many other tourist destinations.

Acknowledgements

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