

Urban Lost Space: Redevelopment
Opportunities and Compatible Land Use with
the Cupey Station

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The purpose of this research is to create a land use area plan for the Tren Urbano Cupey Station that incorporates new urbanism principles, and stresses redevelopment. It will set a general framework for area plans, for other stations in the TU corridor.

Objectives

1. Contribute with a groundbreaking methodology that focuses on "urban lost space" as key opportunity for stressing redevelopment surrounding TU stations, versus development elsewhere
2. Set a framework of analysis for the incompatibility of existing land uses surrounding the TU station Cupey in the short and long run
3. Identify and recommend innovative policies, regulations and guidelines that, while taking care of community needs and regional economic objectives, is supportive of TU

Theoretical framework

New Urbanism:

Transit Oriented Redevelopment and job-housing ratio

- ✦ Transit effectiveness depends to a great extent on land uses around the system, hence the requirement of integrated planning of both: transportation and land uses
- ✦ Three principles to foster: diversity, human scale and identity
- ✦ Prioritize mixed land uses and higher densities
- ✦ A balanced job-housing ratio would increase accessibility and the use of the train system
- ✦ Job-housing balance has limited fiscal advantages at the local level, but increases regional efficiency of the system
- ✦ Conventional zoning by segments goes against New Urbanism principles

Redevelopment and infill

- ✦ Infill is a type of redevelopment of growth management that takes advantage of "urban lost spaces" and has the potential to maximize efficiency of infrastructure and land resources while reduces speculation
- ✦ Infill is possible if:
 - (a) an urban growth boundary is set
 - (b) land is available inside the boundary
 - (c) monetary incentives are available

(d) the community supports it, specially for multi-family housing

(e) the land market is strong

- ✚ Conventional zoning limits infill opportunities
- ✚ Gentryfication may result from infill if inclusionary housing is not fostered

Strategies recommended for Transit Oriented Redevelopment

- ✚ Alternative zoning: special districts, overlay districts, planned unit development (PUD) or redevelopment (PUR), incentive and performance zoning rather than requirements, large lot zoning
- ✚ Incentive property taxation: two-rate property tax system
- ✚ Design guidelines and reviews for complex projects
- ✚ Capital improvement programs
- ✚ Greater community participation
- ✚ Ordinances rather than zoning regulations
- ✚ Economic development incentives: marketing programs, tax-relief policies, enterprise zones
- ✚ Affordable housing programs: inclusionary housing, subsidy, low-cost financing, "diversity allowances"
- ✚ Transfer of development rights
- ✚ Streamlining regulations
- ✚ Regional coordination of planning

Research site

Tren Urbano
Cupey Station, Río Piedras



U.S. Geological Survey, 1997

The total area for this research includes industrial sector, El Cinco and surrounding residential areas of Belisa, El Paraíso, El Cereza, De Diego, Parque El Señorial, Reparto Luquetti, Extensiones de San Gerardo, El Dorado San Gerardo, and industrial sector Víctor Fernández. The total area covers approximately 2.5 sq. miles. However, the area of 600 meters from the station to the south, north and east has been selected as focus of analysis for possible intervention. The west side of the station was not included because of the physical fragmentation that road PR-1 imposes to the area.

Urban lost spaces in the area

There are more than 40 parcels under the following categories:

1. Undeveloped parcels
2. Parcels currently developed with uses that are likely to redevelop during the 20 year planning timeframe because the improvements on the land are worth less than the value of the property (underutilized)
3. Vacant parcels



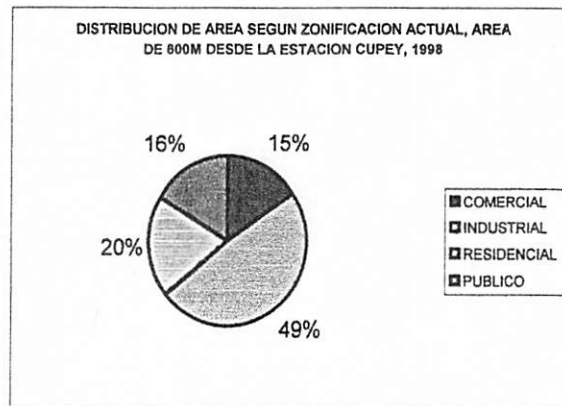
Parcel classified under category #2, on road PR-8838
Picture by N. Peña, 9/1999

Unique mixture of landmarks that contributes to the "place identity"

- Tren Urbano Cupey Station
- Jardín Botánico
- Bosque Estatal del Nuevo Milenio
- Universidad Metropolitana
- Río Piedras and creeks
- Puente Antiguo: 1853
- Aqueduct system: 1800's

Zoning regulations in the 600 meters radius from the station

The majority of the area is classified as industrial (I-1 and IL-1) and residential (R-3) districts with varying degrees of intensity of use.

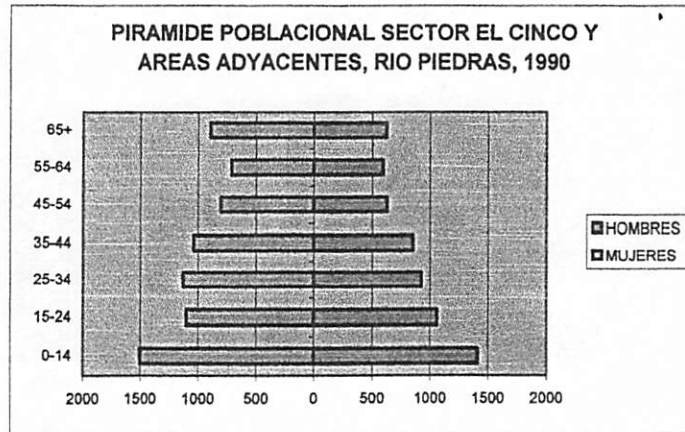


Junta de Planificación, Mapa de Zonificación de San Juan, Sección Río Piedras, Mapa 22, 1998

Socioeconomic profile: population, housing and employment

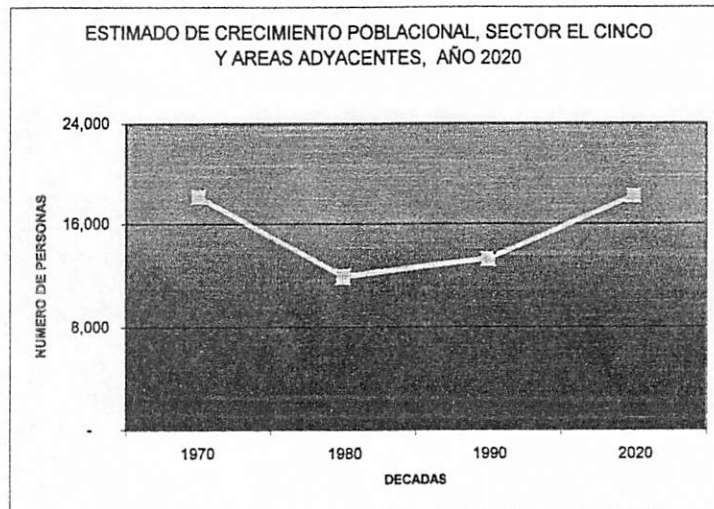
Population: 13,259

Population density of total area: 2,071.72 hab/km²
 Population structure 1990: age and gender



U. S. Department of Commerce, 1990 Census of Population and Housing

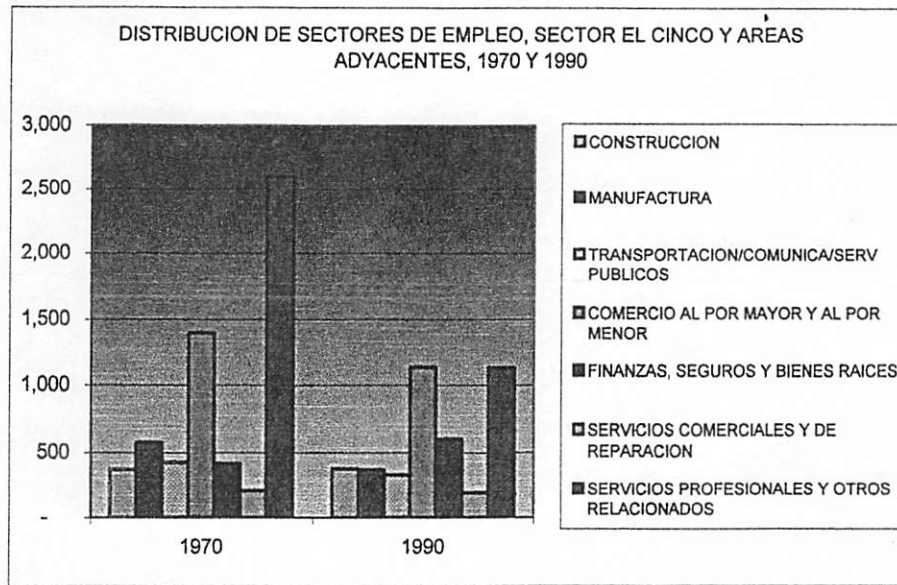
Population change: decades 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2020



U. S. Department of Commerce, 1970, 1980, and 1990 Census of Population and Housing

Households 1990: 4,266
 Households 2020: 8,143
 Housing units 1990: 4,607
 Housing vacancy status 1990: vacant: 7%
 Housing median value 1990: \$110,400

Change in employment distribution by sector 1970 to 1990



U. S. Department of Commerce, 1970 and 1990 Census of Population and Housing

Policy summary

Urban Policy: San Juan Municipality policies to be adopted when it becomes autonomous

- ✚ Stop urban sprawl to the south of the municipality through rezoning of the area and a moratorium
- ✚ Transform S.J. through the "Proyecto de Ciudad," which identifies the Tren Urbano stations as key nodes of opportunity for redevelopment
- ✚ Integrate industrial areas to S.J.'s urban structure; does not mention the Sector Industrial, El Cinco
- ✚ Support active community participation
- ✚ Protect and improve the quality of natural resources
- ✚ Revitalize urban centers which include some TU stations
- ✚ Protect residential areas
- ✚ Strengthen "community life" through provision and rehabilitation of public spaces
- ✚ Protect architectural, cultural and art patrimony

- ✚ Increase parking areas
- ✚ Rehabilitate and reuse existing buildings and construction of new ones in vacant land for residential use
- ✚ Transfer development rights
- ✚ Provide for low-cost housing
- ✚ Use infrastructure more intensely, and make developers responsible for new systems where necessary
- ✚ Support transit use through incentives

Urban Policy: Federal level, housing and transportation

- ✚ Supports single-family and multi-family housing for rent, purchase and improvement through loan and mortgage insurance
- ✚ Provides rental assistance for very low-, low-, and moderate-income households
- ✚ Promotes reducing lower-income groups isolation regarding housing
- ✚ Provides for the development of a national intermodal transportation system that improves mobility for elderly, economically disadvantaged persons, and persons with disabilities, while reduces pollution and traffic congestion

Conclusion

- ✚ The Cupey station area has a mix of uses non compatible with a transit system, where the majority is dedicated to industry activity.
- ✚ Some of the zoning districts do not match the current activities held there, showing the overdue need for revision and modification of the document and for alternative mechanisms of land management.
- ✚ The trend of the population structure shows a growing inverted pyramid, meaning an increase of the older groups and decrease in the younger ones; this follows a common characteristic of the so called "developed" countries, and has housing, services, and activities implications.
- ✚ Transfer of development rights has little precedents in the Island, which will make it more difficult to implement in the near future.
- ✚ Eventhough SJ Municipality incorporates in its plan TOR principles, prioritizing parking space availability might be detrimental to the TU system in the long term.

✚ SJ Municipality does not consider the Tren Urbano as a system, but a group of isolated redevelopment nodes; this might limit the coordination of plans for the benefit of both the system and the inhabitants of the region.

✚ The participation of the community "at large" would depend on the public sector's real interest in communicating, negotiating and including them in the processes of "making city."

✚ Convincing developers of the advantages of redevelopment might be the greatest difficulty in making it happen.

✚ Proposed strategies for redevelopment include:

- Public/private partnerships for capital investments and share of profits, and for covering the costs of supportive infrastructure
- Infrastructure investment directly or through tax increment financing
- In house real state office for management of the land
- Lower the costs of land assemblage
- Provision of loan guarantees in case of market downturns
- Changing zoning requirements to standards, like to allow for less parking space given higher density near the stations, and mixed use of land
- Tax abatements for impact fees
- Incentive zoning like including density bonuses for both housing and employment
- Identify leadership, the "champions," within the public and the private sectors that will take initiatives, extra effort and are committed to the implementation of the TOR vision
- Induce to mortgage qualification calculations that take into account the reduction of expenses related to transportation (having one car instead of two)
- Illustrative plans are necessary as an exercise to visualize potential TOR design results since there are not many examples in the Island
- Development of new ordinances for the stations based on TOR principles
- Fast-tracking for projects that are compatible with TOR
- Streamlining permit procedures and reviews: distribution of information about procedures, concurrent reviews, etc.

✚ Transit capitalization effects have been positive and negative among cities; there is no single magic formula, but "ingredients" that can help.

✚ Limitations to TOR related to market feasibility include preference for low density housing, banks hesitancy to provide permanent financing, and higher risks.

Further research

- ✚ Compile community expectatives: El Paraíso, El Cinco, UMET, Río Piedras Pueblo, UPR, developers, real state agents
- ✚ Detailed land use inventory
- ✚ Functional population analysis

- # Detailed census data analysis
- # Analysis and evaluation of alternatives
- # Project proposal: implementation plan

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