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**The Continentalization of San
Andres Island, Colombia: Panyas,
Raizales and Tourism, 1953-2003**

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The Continentalization of San Andres Island, Colombia: Panyas, Raizales and Tourism, 1953-2003

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Cartagena de Indias, August 2003

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Abstract

The Colombian islands of San Andres and Providence, located 180 kilometers of the coast of Nicaragua, and initially populated by English settlers and their slaves, were characterized until 1953 by having a population which was predominantly English speaking, Protestant and black. However, since the declaration of the islands as a free port, in 1953, an enormous immigration from continental Colombia transformed their economy and society. This was especially true in the case of San Andres, since Providence remained relatively isolated. For that reason I will not analyze the case of Providence.

In this paper I study the main stages in the economic history of San Andres. Special attention is given to the period since the beginning of the free port. The rapid population growth generated by immigration, above 20% in the early 1960's, led to the social and economic marginalization of the local inhabitants, *panyas*, which are currently less than half of the total population of San Andres. Next, I discuss the issue of overpopulation, which has been proposed by many of the local leaders as the main problem currently affecting the island. Finally, I highlight that the economic prosperity of San Andres depends on its ability to establish competitive conditions for attracting tourists with a good spending capacity.

Keywords: San Andres Island, Free Port, Overpopulation, Raizales, Panyas, Tourism.

JEL Classification: R11, N96, O18

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POEMA CI

La criatura de isla paréceme, no sé por qué una criatura distinta. Más leve, más sutil, más sensitiva.

Si es flor, no la sujeta la raíz; si es pájaro, su cuerpo deja un hueco en el viento; si es niño, juega a veces con un petrel, con una nube...

La criatura de isla trasciende siempre al mar que la rodea y al que no la rodea.

Va al mar, viene del mar y mares pequeñitos se amansan en su pecho, duermen a su calor como palomas.

Los ríos de la isla son más ligeros que los otros ríos. Las piedras de la isla parece que van a salir volando...

Ella es toda de aire y de agua fina. Un recuerdo de sal, de horizontes perdidos, la traspasa en cada ola, y una espuma de barco naufragado le ciñe la cintura, le estremece la yema de las alas...

Tierra firme llamaban los antiguos a todo lo que no fuera isla. La isla es, pues, lo menos firme, lo menos tierra de la Tierra.

Dulce María Loynaz

Map 1 San Andres and Providence



Source: Modelo de Desarrollo del Plan Maestro de Turismo de la Biosfera Archipiélago de San Andrés y Providencia, Fase II, DNP, Documento Borrador.

Map 2
San Andres and Providence



I.- INTRODUCTION

The Colombian islands of San Andres and Providence are located in Caribbean Sea, 180 kilometers of the coast of Central America and 480 kilometers from the Colombian mainland.¹ Both because of their location and their history, closely related to that of the English speaking Caribbean, the cultural, religious, and linguist characteristics of the people that have inhabited these islands have been very different from those that have predominated in the mainland of the country it has formed part of since the early 19th century, what is now Colombia.

Well into the 20th century there was a limited economic and cultural interaction between the islands and the mainland of Colombia. Thus the descendants of the planters and slaves from Jamaica and other islands of the British Caribbean that emigrated to San Andres and Providence in the 18th century, were able to maintain their cultural identity while being citizens of a mostly Catholic and Spanish speaking country. However, things began to change dramatically since 1953, especially for San Andres, when these islands were declared a free port through which a legally accepted possibility for buying foreign goods with almost no import taxes up to a certain value, was given to Colombian citizens.

Thus since the late 1950's, thousands of Colombians began to travel to San Andres to buy relatively cheap foreign goods and, additionally, stay for a few days in this Caribbean paradise.²

The free port brought along not only tourists but also thousands of immigrants, both merchants and workers, from the mainland of Colombia and, in limited

¹ James J. Parsons, "English Speaking Settlements of the Western Caribbean", Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, 1954, p.11.

² To be able to buy foreign goods Colombian tourists were required by the law to stay for an established minimum amount of days.

numbers foreigners, mainly Arabs and Jews. As a result the native inhabitants, which currently define themselves as *raizales*, eventually became a minority in their own land. In contrast, continental Colombians, Panyas³ for the natives, have become a majority that controls the economic activity of the island.

The objective of this paper is to study the economic history of San Andres in the period since 1953, when a process of continentalization of the society and culture of the island occurred making it in many ways (culturally, ethnically, linguistically), more similar to the mainland of Colombia. It is my sincere wish that this analysis might be helpful in some way for those Colombians who wish that our country will start soon to solve the deep economic, social, but especially cultural crisis in which San Andres finds itself currently.⁴

II.- HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON THE SETTLEMENT OF SAN ANDRES AND PROVIDENCE, 1629-1953

All the available evidence indicates that in pre-hispanic times the islands of San Andres and Providence were deserted, although they were probably used as temporary fishing bases by the Miskito indians living in the nearby coast of Central America.

These islands already appeared in European maps by 1527, but the Spaniards showed little interest in populating them.⁵ It was only a century later that a

³ Panya is used by the native population of San Andres to refer to continental Colombians. It comes from Spanish man.

⁴ The case of Providence will not be studied, mainly because that island did not become a commercial and tourist center during the era of the free port, thus it did not experience a large inflow of immigrants and was able to maintain its cultural identity and its economic structure without the distortions of the free port induced growth.

⁵ James J. Parsons, Las regiones tropicales americanas, Fondo FEN, Colombia, Bogota, 1992, p. 187.

group of English Puritans established the first permanent settlement in the island that the Spaniards had called Santa Catalina and Puritans renamed as Providence.

The historian Isabel Clemente has proposed a chronology for the history of San Andres using the basic orientation of its economy through time.⁶ For Clemente, the three main periods in the history of San Andres have been: a) the era of cotton exports, 1620's to 1853, b) the era of coconut exports, 1853-1953, and c) the free port, beginning in 1953. I find this periodization quite helpful and thus I will divide the present section in the first two sub-periods she suggests.

It is important to highlight that during each of the three periods suggested by Clemente, the islands had very different rates of growth of their total population, as a result of the different labor requirements of each export.

There is no systematic information on the population of San Andres and Providence before 1793. From this last date until 1851, the population of San Andres expanded from 393 inhabitants to 1.275, at an annual rate of 2.0% (see Tables 1 and 2). In the next sub-period annual population growth dropped to a mere 1.1%. There were two main reasons for this. The first one is that when coconut exports were expanding (1853-1930) labor requirements were not very high since that type of agriculture is not labor intensive. Thus, there was no need to attract immigrants and population grew at the natural rate of reproduction. As a result, the annual rate of population increase was 1.6%. However, when coconut exports entered into a crisis at the end of the 1920's,

⁶ Isabel Clemente, "El Caribe insular: San Andres y Providencia", in Adolfo Meisel, editor, Historia económica y social del Caribe colombiano, Ediciones Uninorte, Barranquilla, 1994.

as we shall see, emigration of San Andres's inhabitants resulted in that the population observed in 1951 was similar to that of 1918.

When the free port was declared in 1953 the new economic opportunities that it brought about led to a large flow of immigrants to San Andres. Thus, population growth during the era of the free port rose to the highest level recorded in the history of the island: 6.5% from 1951 to 1993.

Although, only a few years have passed after the free port era, there is some evidence that the rate of population increase has begun to go down. The annual rate of growth for the period 1993-1999 was 2.3%, and it is very probable that it will continue going down given the current economic problems of San Andres.

A. The era of cotton exports, 1620's-1853

In a cold morning in February of 1631, some 100 English Puritans left London aboard the *Seaflower*. They sailed across the Atlantic to arrive in Providence island. The year before, two Puritan corporations had been formed, one to establish a colony in Massachusetts Bay and the other in Providence. According to the historian Karen O. Kupperman: "The Providence Island colony attracted many colonists of the same middling Puritan stripe as did New England; backers and settlers alike expected to create a solid godly community in the Indies."⁷

⁷ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630-1641, The Other Puritan Colony*, Cambridge University Press, USA, 1993, p. 1.

The promoters of the Providence Island Company were a distinguished group of merchants and Puritan leaders, many of which became well known opponents of Charles I. It included John Pym, the Earl of Warwick and his brother the Earl of Holland, Lord Brooke, Sir Gilbert Gerard, Sir Benjamin Rudyerd, Lord Robartes, Sir Benjamin Rudyerds, among others.⁸

Although short lived, the evolution of the Providence island colony was quite different from the Massachussets experience. A few years after their initial arrival the Caribbean Puritans were involved in bitter factional confrontations that threatened the long term survival of the settlement.⁹ However, these disputes were only symptoms of more profound problems.

The historian Karen O. Kupperman believes that the reason for the failure of the Providence colony was that the Puritan grandees who organized and backed it insisted in an institutional design that doomed it to failure.¹⁰ In particular she highlights three institutions that worked in a completely different way in Massachusetts in comparison with the Providence colony. In the later Puritan settlement:¹¹

- 1) settlers remained tenants
- 2) governors and councilors were appointed from London
- 3) professional soldiers were an influential group

⁸ Arthur Percival Newton, Providencia. Las Actividades colonizadoras de los puritanos ingleses en la Isla de Providencia , Banco de la Republica, 1985, p. p.56.

⁹ By the beginning of 1635 there were more than 500 white settlers in Providence: 500 men, 40 women, and a few children, James J. Parsons, Las regiones tropicales americanas , Fondo FEN Colombia, Bogota, 1992, p. 191.

¹⁰ Ibid. , p. XI.

¹¹ Ibid.

In the opinion of Kupperman, the Providence Island Puritans took a wayward route when as a consequence of been denied the property of land they decided to invest heavily in slaves, something that did not happen at the time in other English colonies. Thus by 1637 slaves constituted around 50% of the population of the colony.¹²

Although in Kupperman's interpretation the adoption of slavery is seen as the result of a faulty institutional design, the refusal to grant private property of the land to the settlers, a recent article by the economic historians Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff allows for a different interpretation.¹³

Engerman and Sokoloff have argued that institutions, such as slavery, are not simply exogenous variables imposed on the colonies by their promoters but that to a large extent they are determined by the initial factor endowment. Their interest in this issue arose from the observation that different English colonies in the New World, although beginning with fundamentally the same legal and cultural background, evolved in very distinct ways. Thus English culture or Protestantism would not seem to be the key.¹⁴

According to Engerman and Sokoloff, the reason why some New World societies introduced slavery was that their initial factor endowments, climates and soil conditions, made them suitable to grow crops such as sugar or cotton, where there are substantial economies of scale. The introduction of slaves led to marked inequalities in incomes, wealth, and political power, which reinforced the different paths of development followed by the colonies.

¹² Newton, Op. Cit. , p. 211.

¹³ Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, "Factor Endowments, Inequality, and Paths of Development Among New World Economies", NBER Working Paper Studies, No. 9259, October, 2002.

¹⁴ Ibid. ,p. 3.

Although they brought the same intense work ethic of the Puritans that arrived in the Mayflower, those that headed for the Caribbean in the Seaflower soon found out that from an economic point of view it made sense to introduce slaves for the cultivation of cotton.

There was a further problem that the Puritan settlers of Providence were to encounter. Since they were located very near to the coast of the Spanish American colonies, and Spanish ships used nearby navigation routes, the settlers were soon involved in the highly lucrative activity of privateering. Furthermore, in 1636 they were granted a license for privateering. However, this was eventually to lead to the final failure of the colony since the Spanish authorities were increasingly bent on getting rid of this English settlement which was a permanent danger for its ships.

On May 6, 1641 a fleet of eleven ships and 2.000 men, between sailors and soldiers, under the command of Captain Francisco Diaz Pimienta sailed from Cartagena de Indias with intention of conquering the island of Providence and getting rid of its settlers, whose privateering activities had become a nuisance for Spanish trade.¹⁵ On May 24, the Spaniards defeated the Puritan resistance and captured a total of 350 settlers that would later be sent to Cadiz. The slaves, 381 in total, were sold in the port of Cartagena.¹⁶

After, 1641 the Spaniards maintained a small garrison in Providence to stop the English from retaking the islands. However, after 1670 the islands were uninhabited and it was only more than a half a century later that it was slowly

¹⁵ Rodolfo Segovia Salas, "La recuperación de Santa Catalina", Boletín de historia y antigüedades, Academia Colombiana de Historia, No. 816, 2002.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 123.

repopulated by settlers from Jamaica, Curacao, Scotland, and Ireland.¹⁷ These English speaking settlers were involved in the extraction of wood, planting of cotton with slaves, and exports of turtles.

After the Treaty of Versailles of 1783 the Spaniards were to expel from their domains the English settlers living in several enclaves in Central America and its coast, but those in San Andres and Providence asked for a permission to stay, which was granted with the condition that they convert to Catholicism and declare loyalty to the Spanish Crown¹⁸. These settlers were now mainly located in San Andres (see Table 1).

B. The era of coconut exports, 1853-1953

When Spanish America obtained its independence from Spain in the first decades of the nineteenth century, San Andres and Providence declared its loyalty to the new Republic of Colombia on June 23, 1822.¹⁹ However, until the end of slavery in 1853 the economy and society of San Andres and Providence changed very little: it was dedicated to the agriculture of cotton with the use of slaves owned by a small group of English speaking planters.

With the abolition of slavery in continental New Granada (Colombia) in 1851, things began to change since San Andres and Providence had to accept abolition, which finally came to the islands in 1853.

After the abolition of slavery in 1853 the plantation owners of San Andres turned to coconut. This was a crop for which at the time there was a high demand in

¹⁷ Clemente, Op.Cit. , p.336.

¹⁸ Juan Carlos Eastman, “ El archipiélago de San Andres y Providencia, Formación histórica hasta 1822”, Credencial historia, Tomo III, No. 25-36, 1992.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the US market. Additionally, it required very little labor and the soils of the island were especially adequate for its cultivation.

On December 31, 1873, the commercial agent of the US in San Andres wrote:²⁰

The social and commercial changes in this island from the year 1850 to this epoch has been marvelously great. At that time slavery existed and cotton was cultivated by slave labour. Some struggling coconut trees were in existence from which coconut oil was made ...It was about the year 1850 that attention of five or six holders were turned to planting coconuts and before the emancipation of their slaves, they had served large coconut groves which is now the support of their offsprings in easy circumstances...

By 1883, San Andres and Providence, but mainly the former, were exporting 4 million coconuts per year. This figure had increased to 16 million by 1906, when many observers were commenting on the general prosperity of the inhabitants of the islands. However, by the end of the 1920's there were claims that the limits of the coconut export expansion had been reached and diminishing returns were setting in, leading to unemployment. Some observers even spoke of overpopulation and the need to promote emigration.²¹

The economic situation deteriorated dramatically with droughts (1929-1932), plagues, and the proliferation of rats, all of which lead to a significant reduction in the coconut harvest. To make matters worst, the onset of the Great Depression meant that the prices of coconut fell in the international market.

²⁰ The National Archives, Despatches from the United States Consul in San Andres, 1870-1878, Washington D.C., 1961.

²¹ Juan Carlos Eastman, "Las amenazas de "La Arcadia feliz y deseada": El archipiélago de San Andres y Providencia en 1927, Visiones desde las islas", Sotavento, Universidad Externado de Colombia, Vol. I, No. 2, 1988, p.28.

Thus, San Andres entered into a period of economic depression which resulted in the emigration of many of its inhabitants to Panama, the coast of Central America, and continental Colombia.

In 1951, the population of the islands had fallen to 5.675, a reduction of 853 persons with respect to the census of 1938. In 1953, James J. Parsons wrote:²²

It is quite probable that there are more natives of San Andres and Providence islands living in Colon and within the Canal Zone than on the islands themselves. Almost everyone has lived and worked at one time or another at Colon. Although recently the oil fields of the Magdalena River valley in Colombia have attracted growing numbers of island job-hunters.

It was under these conditions of crisis in the export of coconuts, depopulation, and emigration, that San Andres and Providence found themselves at the beginning of the 1950's.

²² James J. Parsons, "English Speaking Settlements of the Western Caribbean", Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers , 1954, p.12.

Table 1
Population of San Andres and Providence, 1793-1999

Year	San Andres	Providence	Total
1793	393	32	425
1835	644	342	986
1843	731	294	1.025
1851	1.275	640	1.915
1870			3.530
1912	3.124	1.924	5.048
1918	3.653	2.300	5.953
1938	4.261	2.267	6.528
1951	3.705	1.970	5.675
1964	14.413	2.318	16.731
1973	20.359	2.624	22.983
1985	32.861	3.654	36.515
1993	56.361	4.679	61.040
1999	64.801	5.077	69.878

Source: (1) Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi, San Andrés y Providencia, Bogotá 1986, p. 80, for 1793 - 1973.

(2) DANE, for the population in the period 1985-1999.

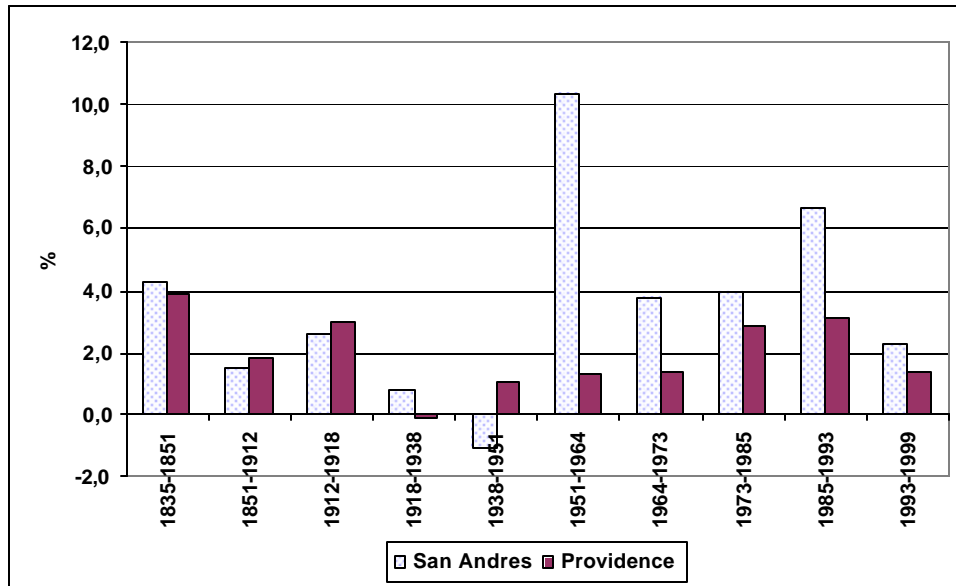
Note: The data for 1993 corresponds to the population adjusted for coverage, which represents an increase of 21,9% over the population initially reported by the census. This factor was estimated by the Colombia statistical agency, DANE. For 1999 we have used the same adjustment parameter.

Table 2
Rate of Annual Population Increase of San Andres and Providence, 1835-1999

Period	San Andres	Providence
1835-1851	4,3	3,9
1851-1912	1,5	1,8
1912-1918	2,6	3,0
1918-1938	0,8	-0,1
1938-1951	-1,1	1,1
1951-1964	10,4	1,3
1964-1973	3,8	1,4
1973-1985	4,0	2,8
1985-1993	6,7	3,1
1993-1999	2,3	1,4

Source: Table 1 and calculations by the author.

Graph 1
Rate of Annual Population Increase of San Andres and Providence,
1835-1999



Source: Table 2 .

III.- THE FREE PORT AND THE ECONOMIC , SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MARGINALIZATION OF THE RAIZALES, 1953-1991

In 1953, the North American geographer James J. Parsons, from the University of California, Berkeley, visited the islands of San Andres and Providence. The vegetation of San Andres caught his attention because of the: "...graceful palms which today make it one great seven-mile long coconut garden." But what most impressed Parsons was the close to 6.000 inhabitants of the islands and their tenacious defense of their Anglo-Caribbean cultural heritage, especially because they were : "...under various degrees of pressure to conform to the Latin norm."²³

²³ Ibid., p. 15.

Parsons believed however, that the passing of the age of sail would help the preservation of the culture of the Anglo-Caribbeans living in the coast of Central American and San Andres and Providence, although they were part of countries ruled by Spanish speaking and Catholic majorities:²⁴

In the age of sail their location was central and strategic, but in the age of diesel motorships and air travel they are bypassed and forgotten, cultural anachronism created by historical accident and preserved through isolation and persistence of the human spirit.

At least in the case of San Andres, he could not have been more wrong about the supposedly isolating effect of air travel, because it was precisely the beginning of air travel from continental Colombia on a commercial scale that completely transformed the island after 1953.

As was discussed in the previous section, during the century and a half after Colombia's independence from Spain the commercial interaction between San Andres and Providence and the continental area of the country was quite limited. There were even less opportunities for direct contact between the native dwellers of the islands and the mostly Spanish speaking inhabitants of continental Colombia.

However, this situation began to change in the late 1940's with the beginning of regular commercial flights connecting San Andres with the main cities of Colombia.

On November 13, 1946 the first regular commercial flight from Cartagena to San Andres was inaugurated.²⁵ A Catalina hydroplane from the airline Avianca

²⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁵ El siglo, noviembre 13, 1946.

was used since at the time there was no airstrip in San Andres. These flights opened, for the first time, the possibility that many inhabitants from the rest of Colombia could spend their vacations in San Andres.

However, the massive influx of continental Colombian tourists began in the late 1950's, as a result of the legislation that established San Andres as a free port in 1953.²⁶ At the time Colombia was following the heavily protectionist foreign trade policies associated with Import Substituting Industrialization (ISI), under which imported goods, such as consumer durables, could often be sold in the domestic market for a price several times their price in the international market.

The legislation of the late 1950's which regulated the functioning of the free port allowed tourists from continental Colombia to introduce into the mainland foreign merchandise bought in San Andres, up to a certain value, without having to pay for the import duties.²⁷ Thus it became very attractive to fly to the island to buy consumer durables such as televisions, electronic devices, wrist watches, liquor, perfumes, and additionally stay a few days to enjoy the beautiful beaches and the nice Caribbean weather.

The result was a rapid increase since the late 1950's in the number of tourists, especially from the rest of Colombia. By 1960 the island was receiving a total of 54.517 tourists a year, of which 53.800 were from Colombia (see Table 3).

Since the population of local residents was also growing, to fully appreciate the impact of the increase in the tourism induced by the extremely favourable

²⁶ By a government degree of 1953 San Andres was declared a free port so imports did not have to pay any tariffs. Later, Law 127 of 1959 and the Decreto Reglamentario 00445 of 1960 established the characteristics of the free zone.

²⁷ Alvaro Lopez Toro, Estudio socio-económico de San Andres y Providencia, 1963, p. 17.

shopping conditions created by the free port, in Table 4 and Graph 2 the number of tourists in per capita terms is presented. In Graph 2 we observe that the fastest growth in the number of tourists per capita occurred from the mid 1960's to the early 1980's. The maximum number of tourists per capita was achieved in 1982.

A very simple analysis of the economic determinants of the number of tourists per capita indicates that this variable is closely correlated with the evolution of the real exchange rate of the Colombian peso with respect to the US dollar. The correlation coefficient between the real exchange rate (that is taking into account the price level in Colombia and the US) and the number of tourists per capita for the period 1975-2001 was -0.6. Thus, when the real exchange rate was going down the relative attractiveness of San Andres increased since it became cheaper comparatively to buy foreign goods, which was the main motivation for Colombian tourists traveling to the island. As a result, the period with the fastest growth in the number of tourists per capita coincided with the revaluation in real terms of the peso between 1975-1982 induced by the coffee boom generated by the Brazilian freeze of 1975.

Table 3
Tourists Arrived in San Andres, 1960-2001

Year	Colombians	Foreigners	Total
1960	53.800	717	54.517
1961	53.500	799	54.299
1962	59.000	1.100	60.100
1963	85.000	1.058	86.058
1964	73.100	876	73.976
1965	40.700	236	40.936
1966	65.900	500	66.400
1967	71.600	1.429	73.029
1968	56.900	2.111	59.011
1969	75.300	1.986	77.286
1970	76.080	2.591	78.671
1971	104.073	5.539	109.612
1972	96.532	9.197	105.729
1973	103.467	19.380	122.847
1974	135.730	24.350	160.080
1975	83.094	25.505	108.599
1976	119.696	27.126	146.822
1977	146.526	32.173	178.699
1978	163.375	31.862	195.237
1979	160.694	27.799	188.493
1980	183.075	21.687	204.762
1981	201.420	16.544	217.964
1982	261.220	14.408	275.628
1983	226.418	13.011	239.429
1984	214.078	13.821	227.899
1985	233.575	17.568	251.143
1986	276.054	20.587	296.641
1987	294.019	24.675	318.694
1988	270.425	25.202	295.627
1989	276.781	24.192	300.973
1990	280.851	26.637	307.488
1991	274.277	25.431	299.708
1992	274.087	25.557	299.644
1993	360.801	31.484	392.285
1994	369.534	24.199	393.733
1995	327.421	38.129	365.550
1996	398.218	34.755	432.973
1997	376.440	33.519	409.959
1998	394.900	18.465	413.365
1999	351.911	17.345	369.256
2000	327.812	20.726	348.538
2001	281.984	24.099	306.083

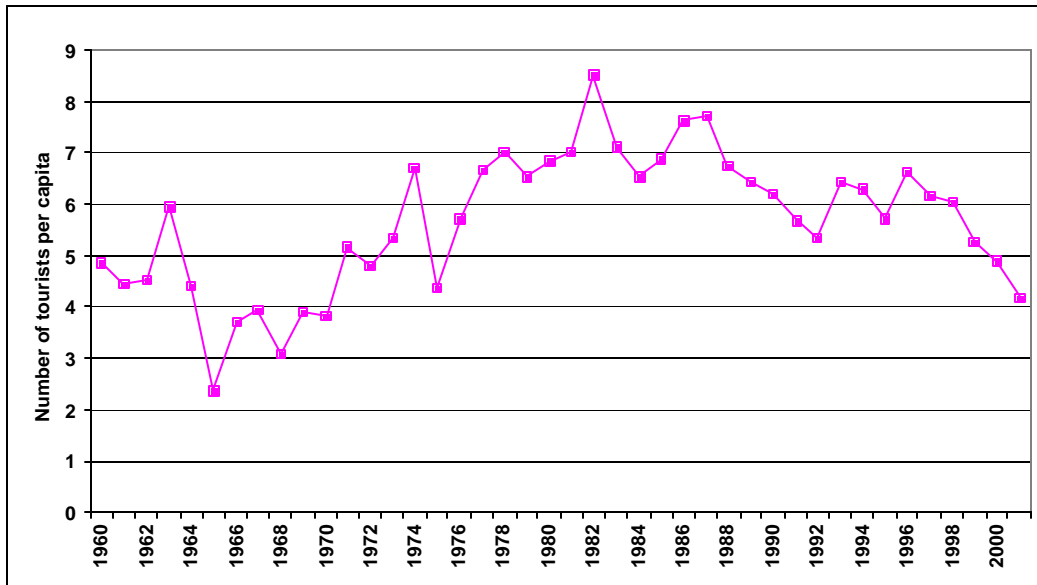
Source: (1) María Robertina Caycedo Peña, "San Andrés Puerto Libre, Consecuencia para el comercio y el turismo", Tesis de grado, licenciatura en Comercio Internacional, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Bogotá, 1979, p. 81, for the period 1960-1970.
(2) Intendencia Especial de San Andrés y Providencia Islas, Secretaría de Planeación, Anuario Estadístico del Archipiélago, San Andrés, 1987, for 1976-1986.
(3) Aeronáutica Civil for the rest of the years.

Table 4
Tourists Per Capita Arrived in San Andres,
1960-2001

Year	Colombians	Foreigners	Total
1960	5	0	5
1961	4	0	4
1962	4	0	5
1963	6	0	6
1964	4	0	4
1965	2	0	2
1966	4	0	4
1967	4	0	4
1968	3	0	3
1969	4	0	4
1970	4	0	4
1971	5	0	5
1972	4	0	5
1973	5	1	5
1974	6	1	7
1975	3	1	4
1976	5	1	6
1977	5	1	7
1978	6	1	7
1979	6	1	7
1980	6	1	7
1981	6	1	7
1982	8	0	9
1983	7	0	7
1984	6	0	7
1985	6	0	7
1986	7	1	8
1987	7	1	8
1988	6	1	7
1989	6	1	6
1990	6	1	6
1991	5	0	6
1992	5	0	5
1993	6	1	6
1994	6	0	6
1995	5	1	6
1996	6	1	7
1997	6	1	6
1998	6	0	6
1999	5	0	5
2000	5	0	5
2001	4	0	4

Source: Table 1 and 3 and calculations by the author.

Graph 2
Tourists Per Capita Arrived in San Andres,
1960-2001



Source: Table 4 .

The rapid expansion in tourism induced by the possibility for mainland Colombians of acquiring merchandise free from the very high import duties existing at the time had enormous consequences for the economy, society, and culture of San Andres. One of the most dramatic changes occurred in the total population, as a result of an influx of continental Colombians and foreigners, mainly Arabs and Jews, who came to establish many of the shops that sold imported goods to the tourists.

There was also a great need for laborers for the construction of hotels, housing, and other facilities. This later demand for labor was mainly filled with immigrants from the Caribbean Coast departments of continental Colombia.

The population of San Andres increased from 3.705 inhabitants in 1951 to 14.413 by the census of 1964. This rapid growth of population continued throughout the period under analysis and by 1993 the number of inhabitants was estimated in 56.361 (see Table 1). The fastest rate of growth occurred between the census of 1951 and 1964 when an annual rate of population increase of 10.4% was achieved (see Table 2). Since the free port was declared in 1953 and such facilities as the airport were only constructed in the late 1950's, most of the population growth must have occurred between 1959 and 1964. Thus the rate of population growth in this later sub period must have been above 20.0%, certainly the highest rate in the history of these islands.

The enormous growth in population was mainly achieved through immigration. In the census of 1964 the percent of immigrants in the total population of San Andres was 50.6%.²⁸ That immigration was beneficial in that it allowed a rate of economic expansion which would have been impossible with the native population. However, and as we shall see, it also had negative effects on the social and economic well being of the *raizales*.

The economic expansion of San Andres is clearly illustrated by the behavior of the per capita deposits in the banking system in real terms. With minor fluctuations these deposits expanded until reaching a peak in 1987 of \$ 1.787.113 pesos of 1998, as can be appreciated in Table 5 and Graph 3. After 1987, there is a drop in per capita bank deposits in real terms which is coincident with the devaluation of the peso in real terms that occurred in the late 1980's, as well as with the drop in the number of tourists per capita.

²⁸ Plan de desarrollo Siglo XXI , Departamento Archipiélago de San Andres, Providencia y Santa Catalina, 1991.

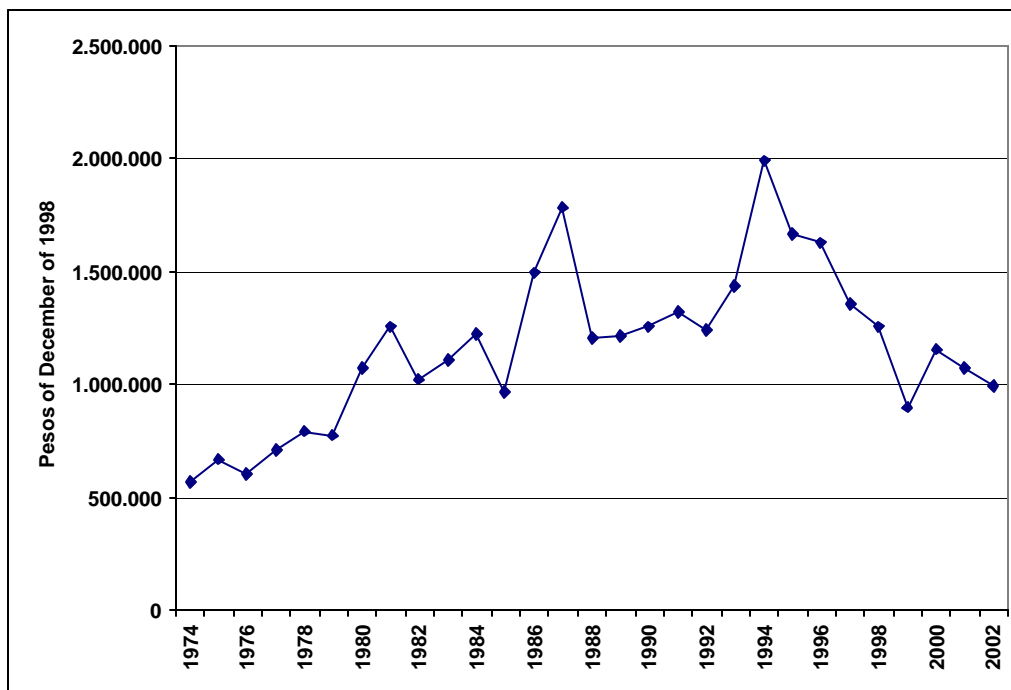
Table 5
Total Deposits in the Financial System of San Andres, 1974-2002

Year	Millions of pesos of December, 1998	Pesos per capita
1974	13.672	572.740
1975	16.677	672.654
1976	15.511	602.331
1977	19.036	711.694
1978	22.183	798.458
1979	22.353	774.583
1980	32.194	1.074.050
1981	39.218	1.259.595
1982	33.274	1.028.825
1983	37.136	1.105.418
1984	42.694	1.223.416
1985	35.503	972.287
1986	58.262	1.500.428
1987	73.801	1.787.113
1988	53.030	1.207.352
1989	56.913	1.218.129
1990	62.587	1.259.219
1991	69.828	1.320.491
1992	69.809	1.240.721
1993	87.706	1.436.856
1994	124.358	1.992.862
1995	106.438	1.668.448
1996	106.229	1.628.824
1997	90.390	1.355.692
1998	85.495	1.254.265
1999	63.123	903.328
2000	82.839	1.159.563
2001	78.887	1.080.109
2002	74.395	996.331

Source: Banco de la República, San Andres.

Note: The current values were deflated using the Colombian consumer price index (December 1998=100). The value for 2002 corresponds to June of that year.

Graph 3
Total Per Capita Deposits in the Financial System of San Andres,
1974-2002



Source: Table 5 .

Without any doubt the most negative effect of the expansion in economic activity and population induced by the tourist boom of the period 1953-1991 was the marginalization of the local population, the *raizales*, from the main economic activities related to tourism and commerce. An additional consequence was that the predominant economic activities of the natives in 1951, coconut agriculture and fishing , ceased to be competitive, because of the new relative prices brought about by tourism, and gradually died out.

Already by 1962, of the merchants inscribed in the Chamber of Commerce those that were *raizales* were only 14.6% of the total, the rest been immigrants or continental Colombians (see Table 6). The capital of the businesses owned by the *raizales* was only 8.0% of the total.

Table 6
Establishments Registered in the Chamber of Commerce of San Andres,
1962

Origin of Owners	Number of Establishments	%	Capital in millions of pesos	%
Natives	52	14,6	5,5	8,0
Foreigners	115	32,3	25,0	36,2
Continental Colombians				
Nationalized Foreigners	189	53,1	38,5	55,8
Total	356	100,0	69	100,0

Source: Alvaro Lopez Toro, Estudio socio-económico de San Andrés y Providencia, 1963, p.19.

The economic displacement of the native inhabitants became even more extreme after 1962. By the end of the 1951-1991 period *raizales* were a clear minority in the sectors that employed most people: construction, commerce, and hotels and restaurants. In 1993, in these three activities, they represented only 13.7% of all the employees, mainly in the less well paid jobs.²⁹

In the 1993 census there were only three sectors where the *raizales* were a majority of those employed: agriculture, fishing, and government (see Table 7). However, of these three sectors it was the government that employed the largest number of *raizales*, a total of 724. While there were more natives working in commercial activities, 810, those that were more qualified tended to be government employees.³⁰ This is not a coincidence; rather it was one of the consequences of the distorted economic growth generated by the free port legislation.

²⁹ I Censo experimental de población y vivienda, 1993.

³⁰ Not all of the sectors dominated by non-natives had high wages. For example, in construction, which had the lowest salaries, natives only represented 13.1% of the workforce. Most of the construction workers were immigrants from the continental Caribbean departments of Colombia, and especially Bolivar and Atlantico.

Table 7
Origin of occupation of Labor Force bay Sector in San Andres in 1993
(Number of persons)

Sector	Natives	Non natives	Without Information	Total	Percent of Natives in this Sector
Agriculture and Cattle	106	65	2	173	61,3
Fishing	173	101	6	280	61,8
Mines	1	22		23	4,3
Manufacturing	146	824	4	974	15,0
Electricity	66	132	1	199	33,2
Construction	243	1.601	9	1.853	13,1
Retail	810	4.548	24	5.382	15,1
Hotels and restaurants	274	2.190	11	2.475	11,1
Transport and Storage	529	1.195	17	1.741	30,4
Finance	98	259	2	359	27,3
Real Estate	89	392	2	483	18,4
Public Administration	724	594	20	1.338	54,1
Education	320	352	8	680	47,1
Social Services	236	302	4	542	43,5
Other Commercial Activities	221	700	5	926	23,9
Private Homes	123	1.250	9	1.382	8,9
Foreign Institutions		3		3	0,0
Other Activities	286	745	5	1.036	27,6
Not Available	636	1.287	60	1.983	32,1
Total	5.081	16.562	189	21.832	23,3

Source: DANE, I Censo experimental de población y vivienda, 1993.

After the establishment of the free port in 1953 San Andres became the local government with the highest income in Colombia. The reason was that all the imports into San Andres had to pay a 10% local tax. Since so much was imported into San Andres to sell to the tourists for the authorized value they were allowed to introduce legally into the mainland (and very probably also some merchandise was sold illegally to continental Colombian merchants), the revenues from that tax were enormous. Thus, already by 1961 the tax revenues per capita of San Andres were 3.4 times higher than those of Cundinamarca, the second department in terms of per capita tax revenues.³¹ In 1987, at the peak of the free port period, San Andres was receiving more tax revenues than any other territorial unit of Colombia. In fact, these revenues were 12.6 times

³¹ Lopez Toro, Op.Cit., p.28.

higher than the average for the rest of the territorial units (see Table 8). The total fiscal revenues per capita that the local government of San Andres had to provide public services, such as education, for its citizens was 6.4 times higher than what the rest of the territorial units had on average. Some of this was reflected in a larger supply of schooling for the local population. However, to the extent that there was a capture of the local state government by the *raizal* elite, much of the government revenues went to increase the government number of employees rather than to benefit the overall population or the long term growth potential of the island.

When the government of Virgilio Barco started to gradually change the protectionist model through which Colombia had promoted industrialization since the late 1940's, San Andres found itself in a very vulnerable situation since all of its tourism and commerce had been based on a loophole in that model. Since the declaration of the island as a free port in 1953, Colombia had permitted its mainland citizens traveling to San Andres to introduce foreign goods without having to pay import duties. When the restrictions on imports were rapidly lowered during the administration of President Cesar Gaviria (1990-1994), the island entered a new phase in its economic history.

The legacy of the free port was in many respects quite negative. The infrastructure for tourism that had developed in the period 1951-1991 was very deficient in many respects. Since the main factor attracting Colombian tourists to San Andres was the possibility of acquiring foreign goods at very good prices, the quality of many of the hotels was not up to international standards. In the north end of the island, where most of the hotels and shops were located,

constructions often blocked the view of the sea, and left very little space between buildings and for recreation.³²

Furthermore, the quality of basic public services such as water, electricity, sewerage, and garbage collection was very poor. Finally, because of a lack of adequate controls and investments in conservation the island showed clear signs of a deterioration in its eco-system.³³

IV.- FOREIGN TRADE LIBERALIZATION AND SAN ANDRES'S SEARCH FOR A NEW ECONOMIC MODEL, 1991-2003

The process of eliminating the protectionist trade regime that Colombia had put in place during the era of import substituting industrialization was achieved fairly rapidly under President Gaviria (1990-1994). Thus it became possible for inhabitants of mainland Colombia to acquire imported goods through the formal commercial sector at very competitive prices. As a result, shopping stopped being the main reason for traveling to San Andres. Even more problematic for the island, because of economies of scale and the costs of transport, it became cheaper to buy in the mainland many goods, such as televisions and other electronic devices. This situation led to a continued decline of the number of tourists per capita. However, the number of tourists per capita does not reflect the extent of the economic crisis of San Andres since there was also a change in the type of tourists from "shopping tourists", with relatively high buying power,

³² Modelo de Desarrollo del Plan Maestro de Turismo de la Biosfera Archipiélago de San Andres y Providencia, Fase II, DNP., 2002, Documento Borrador, p. 63.

³³ CORALINA, Plan Trienal, Síntesis Ambiental, San Andres, 2002, p. 23.

to a new which simply came for the “sun and beaches” in all included packages, often with relatively low quality of the services provided.³⁴

One statistic that clearly reveals the extent of the economic crisis of San Andres since the late 1980’s is the per capita value of local tax revenues. These revenues came mainly from the 10% tax on imports and they fell sharply as a result of Colombia’s trade liberalization. As can be appreciated in Table 8, in 1987 San Andres received 12.6 more local tax revenues than the other territorial units of Colombia. By 2000, that ratio had fallen to only 2.5. In real per capita terms the local tax revenues fell from \$ 542.000 in 1990 to \$192.500 in 2000 (see Table 9).

Table 8
San Andres’s and Providence’s Fiscal Revenues Per Capita Divided by the Per Capita Fiscal Revenues of the Rest of the Colombian Departments

Year	Total Revenues	Current Revenues	Tax Revenues	Transfers
1987	6,4	7,2	12,6	1,5
1988	5,0	5,9	11,1	0,9
1989	4,0	5,0	9,7	1,5
1990	3,5	4,3	8,9	0,1
1991	3,2	4,9	8,1	0,1
1992	2,7	3,7	6,2	0,04
1993	3,4	4,8	5,1	1,3
1994	3,7	5,4	4,3	1,3
1995	3,8	4,6	3,5	2,1
1996	3,2	3,9	2,8	1,0
1997	2,9	4,0	2,9	1,9
1998	2,2	3,0	2,8	1,0
1999	1,4	1,9	2,5	0,8
2000	1,4	1,9	2,5	0,9

Source: Contraloria General de la Republica and calculations by the author.

Note: Total Revenues= Current Revenues+Capital Revenues; Current Revenues= Tax Revenues + No-Tax Revenues + Transfers. The per capita revenues of San Andres and Providence have been divided by the per capita revenues of the rest of Colombia (Departments+ Municipalities).

³⁴ Interview with Anamaria Fajardo, Director of Ashotel, San Andres, October 31, 2002.

Table 9
Public Finances of San Andres and Providence
(Thousands Pesos of 2000 Per Capita)

Year	Total Revenues	Current Revenues	Tax Revenues	Transfers
1987	1.301,1	1.097,4	936,9	101,1
1988	1.099,6	886,8	758,4	69,6
1989	984,7	843,7	642,5	155,6
1990	914,8	726,8	542,0	15,2
1991	754,6	740,3	472,1	11,1
1992	515,6	445,0	322,8	3,4
1993	903,7	763,3	281,6	145,5
1994	942,3	884,2	251,5	157,5
1995	1.034,0	802,6	208,5	292,4
1996	1.157,7	847,8	184,1	207,8
1997	1.175,2	987,9	194,7	436,6
1998	822,4	779,7	192,5	249,0
1999	559,5	547,8	179,1	223,5
2000	575,7	569,7	192,5	252,7

Source: Contraloria General de la Republica and calculations by the author.

Table 10
Composition of San Andres's GNP (%)
1994-2000

Sector	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Agriculture, Cattle, and Fishing	0,82	0,54	0,70	1,83	0,67	1,92	2,33
Mining	0,39	0,22	0,27	0,13	0,10	0,08	0,08
Electricity, Gas, Water, Sewerage	4,10	4,42	4,15	3,45	4,85	0,60	2,71
Industry	0,55	0,53	0,47	0,47	0,46	0,51	0,44
Construction	8,77	4,71	5,19	2,81	2,02	0,40	0,10
Commerce	22,82	24,90	21,21	22,39	21,82	20,06	25,04
Hotel and Restaurant	20,23	20,22	24,14	21,31	18,89	23,12	19,78
Transportation	14,80	16,43	12,28	12,47	11,68	11,83	10,25
Communications	2,32	2,72	2,45	2,87	2,27	2,10	1,85
Financial Sector.	2,78	3,00	3,09	2,93	2,55	1,46	1,16
Public Administration	9,60	8,41	13,61	15,58	20,58	22,96	20,93
Other services	12,96	11,93	11,35	12,27	12,25	10,87	9,29
Subtotal	95,60	92,88	93,29	93,45	93,59	93,61	92,29
Taxes minus subsidies on production	4,40	7,12	6,71	6,55	6,41	6,39	7,71
Total GNP	100,00	100,00	100,00	100,00	100,00	100,00	100,00

Source: Dane, Cuentas departamentales.

Although in the 1990's there was a sharp reduction in the commercial activity of San Andres, this sector is still the main one in the economy of the island. For example, in 1997 it represented 22.39% of the local GNP (see Table 10). Commerce together with hotels and restaurants, comprises the current economic base of the island with 43.7% of the GNP. It is very probable that towards the future the relative importance of the hotels and restaurants sector will increase while that of commerce will decline.

Table 11
GNP per capita of San Andres Compared to the GNP per Capita of the Rest of Colombia and With the Continental Colombian Caribbean

Year	Compared With The Rest of Colombia	Compared With the continental Colombian Caribbean
1994	1,57	2,38
1995	1,38	2,08
1996	1,53	2,28
1997	1,46	2,17
1998	1,52	2,19
1999	1,52	2,19

Source: DANE and calculations by the author.

Note: The GNP per capita of San Andres has been divided by the GNP per capita of the rest of Colombia and of the continental Colombian Caribbean, respectively.

In spite of the difficult times the economy of San Andres has been going through in the last decade, its GNP per capita is still well above the average for the rest of Colombia, and more than twice that of the departments of the continental Colombian Caribbean, from where most of the immigrants to the island have come from (see Table 11). Thus, for many inhabitants of continental Colombia San Andres is still an attractive place to migrate to. Obviously, the deteriorating economic conditions have reduced that attractiveness. This is clearly appreciated by the fact that the rate of population growth between the

census of 1993 and 1999 was 2.3 %, the lowest recorded since the free port was declared in 1953 (see Table 2).

There is an additional reason, and perhaps especially important for qualified labor, why over the next years we will probably see less immigration into San Andres: the legal restrictions on the immigration of continental Colombians and foreigners and the control of population density allowed by article 310 of the Colombian Constitution of 1991.³⁵ This article led to the creation in 1993 of the OCCRE (Oficina de Control de Circulacion y Residencia), whose main task is to control population density through restrictions on the immigration of foreigners and continental Colombians.³⁶

The control of population density is based on a supposed overpopulation of San Andres, that for the local environmental agency, CORALINA, is seen as the main cause for the deterioration of the environment.³⁷ However, the issue of overpopulation is highly politicized and no one has made any effort to rigourously establish the criterias for overpopulation. Perhaps the most articulate defender of this position is CORALINA. But beyond showing that San Andres is the most populated island in the Caribbean there is scarcely any effort to sustain this claim. The comparison with the other major islands of the Caribbean is scarcely relevant since they are all much bigger than San Andres. The only island similar in size in the Western Hemisphere is Bermuda, with an area of 52 square kilometers and a population density of 1.260 inhabitants per square kilometer. This last figure is very similar to the population density of San Andres in 1985, 1.217 inhabitants, when many people were already claiming it

³⁵ Artículo 310, Constitución política de Colombia.

³⁶ Cuadernos del Caribe, No. 1, Institutos de Estudios Caribeños, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede de San Andres, p. 15.

³⁷ Coralina Op.Cit.

was greatly overpopulated. For example, in 1984 an organization of the *raizales*, SOS (Sons of the Soil), claimed that its main objectives were to save the island from immigrants and the negative consequences of overpopulation.³⁸ Certainly no one speaks of Bermuda as being overpopulated. Much less would one think that with a population density of 5.475 inhabitants per square kilometer the island state of Singapore, the tropical country with the highest GNP per capita in the world, is overpopulated.³⁹

Since Robert Malthus's 1798 treatise on overpopulation, economists have often been sceptical about uses of this term. Some well known economists, such as Julian Simon, believe that the carrying capacity of a country or region is very elastic. In fact there is a positive correlation between the population density of a country and its level of GNP per capita.⁴⁰

Often, overpopulation becomes a subjective evaluation of a supposedly maximum carrying capacity that a given country or region has achieved. How this maximum capacity is established can be rather arbitrary.

Furthermore, it is worrisome that with this lack of clarity about the presence of overpopulation in San Andres the main strategy for its development might become the control on immigration. We say this because such controls could end up being detrimental for the long term growth process of the island. These controls could end up denying the island access to well qualified potential immigrants which, through their human capital and financial resources, would promote the economic well being of all the inhabitants of San Andres.

³⁸ J.M. Giraldo, SJ, "El grito de una etnia despojada, Movimiento Sons of the Soil (SOS), Hijos raizales, San Andres y Providencia", (mimeo), 1987, p. 32.

³⁹ Brian Carnell, "Overpopulation, An Introduction", 2000, (mimeo).

⁴⁰ Julian Simon, "Economic Thoughts About Population Consequences: Some Reflections", (mimeo).

Additionally, if the controls on immigration are effective when bottlenecks in certain sectors of the labor market develop rents will accrue to those in possession of those skills. Most of these persons are not even *raizales*, since the later are currently a minority of the total population of the island. Thus it is not even clear that the OCCRE model will end benefiting either the economic development of the island or the incorporation of *raizales* into the mainstream of productive activity. This last objective could perhaps be better achieved through serious efforts to increase the level of human capital of the *raizales* and through an effective promotion of equality of opportunity.

However, the future of all the inhabitants of the island will depend on an economic prosperity based on making the island competitive in the activity for which it has a clear comparative advantage: tourism.

Unfortunately, the era of the free port left the island with a very inadequate urban and private infrastructure to promote a tourism that demands the amenities offered in other Caribbean destinations.

Thus there is an urgent need to diversify the supply of services available for tourists. This way, it would be possible to attract different types of tourists from those which are currently the main source of demand for the island. For example, San Andres has clear possibilities for increasing conventions tourism, eco-tourism, cruise ship tourism, and nautical sports tourism.⁴¹

⁴¹ Modelo de Desarrollo del Plan Maestro de Turismo para la Reserva de la Biosfera del Archipiélago de San Andres y Providencia, DNP, Fase II, Documento Borrador, 20 02.

V.- CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have discussed the profound economic and social changes that San Andres went through as a result of the free port model established in 1953. The economic changes brought about by the end of that model have also been shown.

The opinion prevalent among the *raizal* leadership is that the main economic problem affecting San Andres is overpopulation. Thus, a constitutionally backed control on immigration is currently being enforced. However, it is not clear at all that this is the main problem of the island or that the best way to deal with it is through population control. Furthermore, those controls could lead to economic rents in favour of the elite of the local residents, both *raizales* and *panyas*, without benefiting the vast majority of the population.

In our opinion there are two main problems in San Andres. The first one is economic: the island needs to build its competitive advantage in tourism. The legacy of the free port era for this purpose is very inadequate and key investments need to be made, with the help of the national government, to make it internationally attractive for tourists. The second, and more serious problem, is the social, economic, and cultural marginalization of the *raizales*. These needs to be addressed in an open and direct way, since the indirect policies designed to benefit this population, such as the controls on immigration, could make things even worse. Many of the solutions to this problem will involve a serious commitment on the part of the Colombian government to respect the cultural characteristics of the *raizales*. It will also imply establishing specific programs to increase their levels of human capital and a deliberate effort to create equality of opportunity so that they may regain the control of their island.

Appendix
Main Hotels of San Andres
(March 2002)

Name of the Hotel	Rooms	Beds	Employees
Arena Blanca	72	nd	38
Bahía Sardina	42	113	22
Cacique Tone	144	344	78
Calupso Beach	78	198	50
Casablanca	51	200	36
Caribbean S.A. Royal	59	169	26
Cocoplum Beach	38	124	10
Decamerón Aquarium	250	375	160
Decamerón Isleño	49	116	60
El Dorado	63	200	50
El Encanto	10	21	4
El Pirata	24	41	5
El Recreo	18	35	5
Free Port	32	88	10
Galaxia	47	150	10
Hill Side View	23	47	3
La Posada de Lulú	8	18	3
Las Américas	52	200	25
Las Brisas	31	95	11
Lord Pierre	60	196	41
Los Delfines	26	110	13
Natania	nd	nd	nd
Paradise Beach	55	132	13
Portobelo	10	35	7
Portofino	50	200	22
Sol Caribe Campo	212	460	81
Sol Caribe Centro	225	456	90
Sol Caribe Providencia	35	54	13
Sunrise Beach	169	303	210
Tiuna	162	365	85
Tres Casitas	10	43	9
Yokohama	45	90	10
Verde Mar	44	140	14
Total	2194	5118	1214

Source: Ashotel.

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