

JORGE MEDRANO

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

FIRST PROJECT
SMART GROWTH

The present project will look at a smart option in the book 'Solving Sprawl' and compare it to an example not listed in it.

Bethesda Row

For the present project, I have chosen the smart suburb growth example of 'Bethesda Row' in Bethesda, Maryland. In the article 'Smart Growth in Action: Bethesda Row, Bethesda, Maryland' the Smart Growth Resource Library mentions:

'...located in the central business district of Bethesda, Maryland, [Bethesda Row] illustrates the revitalization of a suburban downtown area into a mixed-use, walkable shopping and restaurant district. It has become so successful it draws people from the surrounding county and Washington D.C.'



Jorge Medrano

Not so many years ago, the area where Bethesda Row is located now was a seven-block area built between 1945 and 1975 that was neither attractive nor particularly financially successful, an 'unremarkable suburban thoroughfare for automobiles, with outdated and unused shops, low-rise office buildings and surface parking lots'¹. A group of employees of Federal Realty Investment Trust's Bethesda were looking for a pilot project to show the company's new strategy for acquiring large multiblock sites and turning them into shopping districts. The answer for them was –literally–, around the corner.

Now Bethesda Row is the heat of the city. Thanks to consultation with the local community, Bethesda Row was tailored to their needs. The completed development honored requests for sidewalks along the facades of buildings, tree-shaded café

¹ Solving Sprawl, 2001. Pg. 87.

seating along the street, additional landscaping, benches and other outdoor seating areas, outdoor dining, and a central gathering place—a beautiful fountain surrounded by trees and comfortable seating. To accommodate these features, the builders got permission from the county government to widen the original sidewalks.



Congress for the New Urbanism

Access to Bethesda Row is supported by a central parking garage owned by the county government. The widened, tree-lined sidewalks provide space to stroll, window shop, and dine, perpetuating pedestrian use. Access to the city's metro system offers a public transportation option. A versatile blend of metered parking lots, metered street parking and daily or hourly garage parking accommodates the needs of shoppers and visitors as well as merchants. These facilities are supported by a property surtax on properties without parking. This prevents smaller individual buildings from having to wrestle with parking requirements, and allows parking to be managed and operated efficiently for the benefit of the whole community.



Jorge Medrano

The smart-growth features present in Bethesda Row are:

- Mix Land Uses
- Compact Building Design
- Walkable Neighborhoods (the most notable one)
- Distinctive and Attractive Places
- Development in Existing Communities
- Transportation Choices
- Predictable and Fair Decision Making

The other features are:

- Range of Housing Choices
- Preserve Open Spaces and Farmland
- Promotes Stakeholder Participation

Sur Plaza Boulevard

One of the consequences of the sense of insecurity in cities like Lima (and mayor cities in Latin America), a feeling created both by personal experience and the media, is the proliferation of gated communities that in various ways reproduce the protected environment so many are nostalgic for. The Asia beaches on the Lima desert coast are the site of the most radical experiments in contemporary Peruvian architecture, in communities where control seems to be the dominant concept.

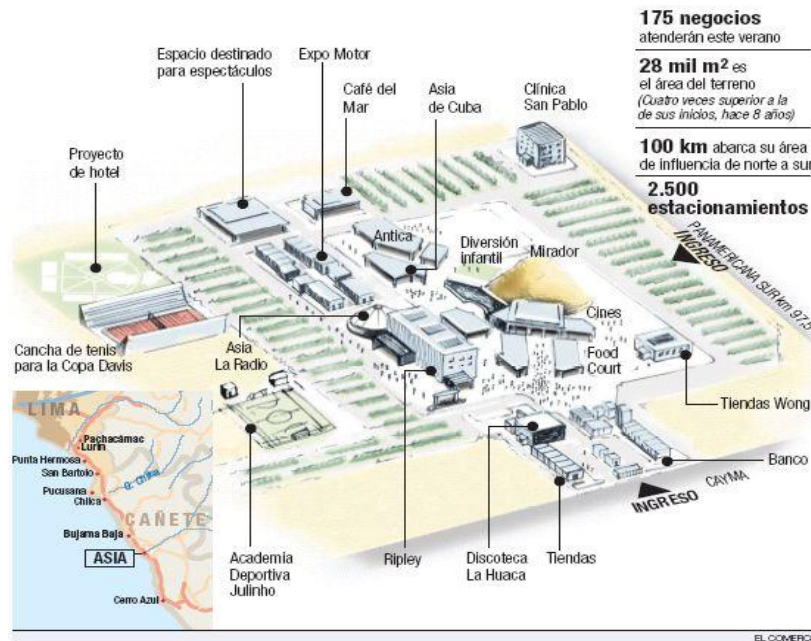
Asia, 1971
Servicio
Aerofotográfico
Nacional de Perú
(SAN)

This shopping center complex is located in the township of Asia, province of Cañete in Lima, Peru. As the case described above, the place where SPB is located now was very different before. This portion of the desert has been occupied since pre-colombian times. It played an important role during the *guano* (natural fertilizer) times until 1909 but was never a permanent settlement in there. In the second half of the 20th century, Lima went from less than 4 million in 1975 to more than 6 in 1986. This growth was based on the 'informal invasions', a consequence of the migration from the Andes of the people that was running away from the terrorism. Of course, the city grew without any government planning.

In this context, the beaches of Asia, a place for weekend camping, initiated its urbanization process. The first developments were born with an enthusiasm of the re-conquered democracy and a feeling of a city (Lima) that had no formal control.

To address all the needs that this urban growth was experimenting, a group of investors bought land near the beaches and right next to the *Pan-American Highway* with the idea of giving the people the same comfort they can have in Lima. Before, grocery shopping was 15 miles away and entertainment (just clubs and bars) were 40 miles away. Movies? In Lima, 60 miles away.

In an area of 30 000 m² (~7.5 ac) they have built an oasis in the middle of the desert, its influence now has a radius of 30 miles and is the heart of the upper class people from Lima in the summer.



Encouraged by the well sustained and recent economic growth in Peru, stores of every kind are there: restaurants, department stores, jewelries, shoe stores, night clubs, etc. A huge medical complex is planned to open next year as well as a golf course and a casino & spa hotel.

However, not everything looks good for the SPB. Even though its conception was planned and it was located after a deep market research, the lack of knowledge of new trends of development played an important decision-making factor. Moreover, the province of Cañete and the township of Asia never saw a development plan like this before and in this area live working class people with an income of 10% (in the best cases) of the people that have beach houses. In other words, they were probably easily corrupted to change the zoning codes and give building permits to the developers.

The smart growth features present in Sur Plaza Boulevard are:

- Mix land uses
- Distinctive and attractive places

The features not present in SPB are:

- Compact building design
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Development in existing communities
- Transportation choices
- Range of housing choices
- Promotes stakeholder participation
- Preserve open spaces and farmland
- Predictable and fair decision making

Conclusion

The next chart shows a comparison of both cases.

SMART-GROWTH FEATURES	BETHESDA ROW	SUR PLAZA BOULEVARD
Mix land uses	yes	yes
Distinctive and attractive places	yes	yes
Compact building design	yes	no
Walkable neighborhoods	yes	no
Development in existing communities	yes	no
Transportation choices	yes	no
Range of housing choices	no	no
Promotes stakeholder participation	no	no
Preserve open spaces and farmland	no	no
Predictable and fair decision making	yes	no

More pictures:

Asia, 1994 (left)
and 2000 (below)
Servicio
Aerofotográfico
Nacional de Perú
(SAN)



Above, first: Asia, ~ 2002 - Google Earth
Above, second: Asia Beach, 2004 - Science Fiction Peru

Resources

1. Congress for the New Urbanism
2. Smart Growth Online, Smart Growth Resource Library
3. EPA - Smart Growth Illustrated: Bethesda Row
4. Worldisround.com
5. ICSC – International Council of Shopping Centers\
6. Asia Sur Plaza
7. Diario La Primera (La Primera newspaper)
8. Revista Caretas (Caretas magazine)
9. Diario El Comercio (El Comercio newspaper)