Zuni Pueblo Economic Development:

Keeping the money leaving from the Pueblo

**Who are the Zuni’s?**

Zuni tribe is an ethnic group indigenous to North America, Southwest region of the United States. This Pueblo is 150 miles west of Albuquerque at the western border of New Mexico and the eastern border of Arizona. This tribe lives in a reservation that is located in their ancestral land where they have lived for thousand of years; however, the United States government reduced the size of the land. As opposed to open-air prison reservation models where tribes and family were separated, this model of reservation has allowed Zuni culture to remain alive. Furthermore, their geographic isolation allowed them to kept their language. 85.6 % of the Zuni population speaks a different language than English at home. Their traditions are focused on agriculture, art, and jewelry making.

**What are the reasons the Zuni Pueblo could not develop economically?**

Historically, Native-Americans could not develop economically because they were not allowed to interact with society when living in reservations. Moreover, Zunis are geographically isolated. For many decades, Native-Americans were able to improve their economic status by joining the military. Zunis are currently affected by their position in the past. For example, residents are forced to leave the Zuni Pueblo Reservation to satisfy their basic necessities. Zunis have to travel to Gallup, New Mexico to buy goods and services and to pay their bills because they do not have those services or grocery stores with a variety of goods in the Reservation. Furthermore, the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Tribal Council must approve the lease of land or buildings to non-members of the tribe resulting reducing outside investment to the local community. This situation creates obstacles to develop the Reservation economically. According to research done by the University of New Mexico, 70% of Zunis purchase their groceries in Gallup, 22% purchase their groceries in Zuni, 6% purchase groceries in Albuquerque, and 5.5% buy groceries in both places. From the people who buy their groceries in Gallup, 36% shop in Wal-Mart. These results show how transnational companies are taking away customers and money that could stay in the Reservation.

Even though the University of New Mexico – Gallup is about a 45-minute drive from the Pueblo, the Zuni group has a low rate of education because of their disadvantaged position. Zunis have a low enrollment rate in preschool resulting in low performance in standardized tests. Zunis reflect the lack of preparation in the standardized tests, reading, science, and mathematics, compared to the students from the rest of New Mexico. Besides, 98.5% of Zuni students who take standardized tests learn English in school as their second language. It is possible that one of the reasons for low performance on these exams might be because English is not their first language and, as a consequence, it is difficult for Zuni students to understand the questions of the exams. As a result, education in McKinley County, where the Zuni Pueblo is located, is ranked lower than in the rest of New Mexico.

**How is this lack of development currently affecting the Zuni Pueblo?**

The scarcity of jobs has forced Zunis to work in different cities. Albuquerque is a source of 309 jobs for Zunis. From the 309 jobs, 285 jobs are their primary employment. Similarly, Farmington is a source of 206 jobs, where 200 jobs are their primary jobs. In addition to working in different cities, workers have to live there during the weekdays. As a consequence, they spend money from their earnings in housing.

This lack of development has made the arts and crafts as Zunis’ main income resource within the Reservation. 25% of the artisans sell at fairs and festivals, 16% of them at stores outside the state, 5% sell online, and 45% sell to traders. Unfortunately for the artisans, finding non-member buyers is another challenge because most of their sales are made during the summer due to tourism. As a result, most of them have to travel to other cities to be able to sell their art. 55% of the artists sell their art at stores in Zuni, 39% sell in stores in Gallup, 7% sell in Santa Fe, and 10% sell in stores in Albuquerque.

However, obtaining the supplies to create the crafts is a challenge for Zunis as well. Most of the time, artisans have to travel to another town to buy the supplies. The transportation cost increases the investment to create their artwork. As a result, the crafts have to be sold in at a higher price so that the artists can make a profit. In order to maintain a stable source of income, Zunis need an arts and crafts supply store with reasonable prices in their community. Without having to drive to Gallup, reasonable prices for supplies will allow for artists to decrease their selling price or make a greater profit on sales.

Besides having a arts and crafts supply store in the Pueblo, having a laundromat, a dollar store, additional grocery stores, more banks, hardware stores, lumber stores, and auto parts stores that are owned by local residents will allow their money to stay in their community and increase their overall wealth. In addition to businesses, Zunis want education to be prioritized and improved. Also, they are expecting help from the local government to help them create jobs for college educated and skilled workers to increase the number of higher paying jobs.

**Are there any exceptions in the Zuni Reservation?**

Black Rock, a town inside the Reservation, has a different economic situation. Young families and medical professionals live in Black Rock. Also, 91.1% of the population has a high school diploma and 26.6% of the population has a bachelor’s degree, graduate, or professional studies. These factors have made that Black Rock residents have more money to spend on education and leisure activities. However, they often spend their money in businesses outside the Reservation due to the shortage of options inside Zuni Reservation.

**Are there alternatives to solve this issue?**

The local government does not allow large corporations or chains to open in the Reservations resulting in restricting economic growth. Nevertheless, to maintain a sustainable development for the community, businesses need to be owned by Zunis. Unfortunately, the local credit union does not give business loans. Therefore, residents of the Reservation have to get financial support from other entities. The Choctaw Nation Credit and Loan Department provides loans to Native-Americans who cannot get loans from other sources. This department provides small business loans, agriculture loans, and home purchase and improvement loans.

As 80% of the community’s income goes to other cities, the Zuni Councilwoman, Virginia Chavez, and other tribal officials are supporting the current economic development in the Zuni Pueblo by creating an investment committee. According to the Native Times, a Gallup bank is financing a bigger supermarket with a $2.75 million loan and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development is providing a guarantee for the loan. Moreover, a new airport with a longer runway is being built a few miles from Zuni. The airport will have a total cost of $5.5 million dollars. The Federal Aviation Administration covered 90% of the total cost of the project, the New Mexican government paid 5%, and the tribe covered the remaining 5%. Finally, the Pueblo has been leasing its share of slot machines to other tribes in southern Arizona.

**References**

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