

Residential tourism and its implications for equitable and sustainable development in Costa Rica

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Research abstract

This research is about residential tourism, a phenomenon that has recently become more prominent in developing countries. Residential tourism is the temporary or permanent mobility of relatively well-to-do citizens from mostly western countries to a variety of tourist destinations, where they buy (or sometimes rent) property. Residential tourism is interconnected with large increases in foreign and domestic investments in land, and therefore constitutes an urgent research topic in current debates on land (the global 'land grab') and development. The number of residential tourists has increased greatly during the past ten years in various countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The aim of this research was therefore to obtain a better understanding of residential tourism and its implications in the context of debates on large-scale land acquisitions, globalisation and mobility. In particular, the research has assessed the implications in terms of equitable and sustainable development in one important destination area: Guanacaste province, Costa Rica. Data collection consisted of interviews with different population groups, a survey among residential tourists, participant observation and analysis of secondary data.

Guanacaste underwent a residential tourism boom from about 2002 to 2008, which has triggered a number of social, economic and environmental changes. Residential tourism transforms local destinations into transnational spaces that host many different groups: residential tourists, but also labor migrants. The absenteeism, flexibility and temporariness of many groups is a major barrier to a cohesive local society. With regard to economic effects, the combination of short-term tourism and residential tourism has led to a large increase in employment and business opportunities. Economic benefits are not only locally perceived but often transferred to migrants and distant areas. Residential tourism particularly provides high profits for the real estate and construction sector, rather than benefiting small-scale traditional tourist services. Furthermore, residential tourism causes vulnerability to shocks, volatility and land price inflation. The latter leads to displacement and exclusion of local and poor migrant groups, though in more subtle, mediated ways than expected. Residential tourism adds new elements to the relation between tourism and sustainability: while it is a strong driver of environmental degradation (with its focus on construction, high use of resources and land price inflation), it may also enhance conservation due to the environmental awareness and long-term involvement of residential tourists.

This research has shown that sustainable development's three strands cannot be viewed in isolation; furthermore, a temporal and dynamic perspective should be taken into account. In addition, it should be noted that local development is increasingly defined trans-locally: with flows of people, finance and resources coming into Guanacaste and producing a residential tourism boom, development implications also flow back along these corridors. The research has also demonstrated that globalised phenomena result in local spatial, social and economic fragmentation.

In order to contribute to equitable and sustainable development, the Costa Rican state should greatly improve regulation and control of the residential tourism sector, promote democratic community decision-making rather than recentralise and privatise decision-making, and reflect on the model of tourism it is promoting.

For the 'land grab' debate, the case of residential tourism shows that rather than only focusing on direct displacement, the broader processes of speculation, increasing land prices and exclusion are important to take into account. In addition, policy responses to the global land rush often focus on stimulating responsible investments and establishing counterbalancing institutions. Although these measures are necessary, the Guanacaste case shows that it is extremely difficult and often insufficient, given the broader underlying

processes of land-based development. This dissertation also shows that people's involvement in decision-making and compensation for loss of land are often much more complex than assumed.

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Publications

VAN NOORLOOS, F. (2013). *¿UN LUGAR EN EL SOL PARA QUIÉN? EL TURISMO RESIDENCIAL Y SUS CONSECUENCIAS PARA EL DESARROLLO EQUITATIVO Y SOSTENIBLE EN GUANACASTE, COSTA RICA.* ALBA SUD: *OPINIONES EN DESARROLLO 15* (MAY 2013).

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Forthcoming:

VAN NOORLOOS, F. (FORTHCOMING). TRANSNATIONAL LAND INVESTMENT IN COSTA RICA: TRACING RESIDENTIAL TOURISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT. IN ZOOMERS, A. AND KAAG, M. (EDS), *BEYOND THE HYPE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 'GLOBAL LAND GRAB'*.

VAN NOORLOOS, F. (FORTHCOMING). *EL TURISMO RESIDENCIAL Y SUS IMPLICACIONES PARA EL MERCADO INMOBILIARIO Y EL ACCESO A LA TIERRA.* ALBA SUD, FORTHCOMING.

VAN NOORLOOS, F. (FORTHCOMING). COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION-MAKING: THE CASE OF RESIDENTIAL TOURISM IN COSTA RICA. CHAPTER IN EDITED BOOK.

Biography

Femke van Noorloos is a social science researcher with a broad interest in international development, land issues, sustainability, anthropology, tourism, migration, climate change, etc. She did her Bachelor's and Master's studies (cum laude graduated) in Cultural Anthropology at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands from 2002 to 2007. After that, she worked as a research assistant at the department of Human Geography at RU Nijmegen, where she assisted in a study on bilateral migration agreements. In 2008 she wrote a proposal for her PhD research, and in 2009 she joined the International Development Studies group (Human Geography & Planning, Faculty of Geosciences,

Utrecht University) to continue this research. Her research was also incorporated into the LANDac network and programme, where she is also involved as a coordinator. During her PhD Femke has published various articles in peer-reviewed journals, and presented many papers at national and international conferences. She was also involved in coordinating and lecturing at the Utrecht Summerschools on Land Governance for Development; supervising theses and giving guest lectures; organizing conferences and workshops; and more. Femke is also a writer, editor and board member for La Chispa magazine on Latin America and the Caribbean.

Femke obtained her PhD degree on 14 December 2012. Currently, she is working as a researcher at International Development Studies (Utrecht University) and as a coordinator at LANDac.