

A DISRUPTION IN THE “PURA VIDA” LIFESTYLE: THE PROGRESSION OF DISPLACEMENT IN GUANACASTE, COSTA RICA

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Abstract

- This study will address the issue of local population displacement in Guanacaste, Costa Rica.
- Through analysis of existing literature and a 6-month case study consisting of participant observation and interviews with locals and lifestyle migrants, new findings will be useful to understand the importance of ethically attracting foreign real estate investment that does not interfere with local cultures in the Global South.



Fig. 1: Map of Costa Rica, Guanacaste.

Introduction and Literature Review

- Since the 1980s, real estate investment from North American and European tourists have driven up property values. Costa Rica attracted an average of 2.7 billion worth of foreign direct investment per year between 2018-2021, thus increasing the country's GDP.
- However, locals living in formerly disinvested communities cannot afford rising housing prices and they often feel excluded from these luxurious projects.
- Current literature focuses on the consequential relationship between tourism and lifestyle migration and its effects on the Costa Rican economy. It fails to provide a universal definition of displacement and racial demographics on displacement in Guanacaste.

The increase of foreign investment from tourism and lifestyle migration will not offset the growing income inequality that has resulted from the displacement of local populations. This inequality stems from the fact that direct investments do not circulate into local business and stay within closed foreign communities.

Proposed Method

- In order to study the relationship between tourism and lifestyle migration and what role the Costa Rican government played regarding this, the process will be as follows:
 - Literature on Costa Rica's financial progress and the displacement within the coastal region of Guanacaste will be collected.
 - A 6-month case study will be carried out in Guanacaste featuring participant observation along with interviews with both local families and lifestyle migrants.

15-20 lifestyle migrants recruited through travel communities on Facebook. They will be interviewed during 10 minutes at the beginning and at the end of the 6 months to measure their interactions with the local community. They will be asked about their means of survival, the communities they spend time with, and the structural changes that they notice during their stay.

10-15 local families recruited during informal street encounters will be interviewed for at least 30 minutes to 1 hour, either in a cafe or in their home. They will be asked to explain their experiences with displacement and the structural changes within their community. They will be asked about the changes they have noticed within their communities:

- Topographical changes
- Local demographic changes
- Policy changes
- Changes in livelihood



Fig. 2: Beginning of a hotel construction in Guanacaste.

Results

- It is predicted that:
 - Lifestyle migrants will gravitate towards their own foreigner communities and will introduce structural changes to Guanacaste (e.g. by starting their own businesses).
 - Local families will have limited interaction with lifestyle migrants, mostly limited to the service industry. In several cases, they will experience land loss due to an increased cost of living and many will come to rely on the service industry as their means of income.
 - Black/Indigenous families might face displacement at higher rate

Discussion

- The proposed case study in Guanacaste has varying strengths and limitations:
 - Although 6 months might accurately follow the adaptation of lifestyle migrants, it might not fully encompass the displacement process of the locals.
 - There is a lack of statistical data regarding racial demographics.
 - An accurate displacement study might take 10 years or longer to capture structural changes. It would need to include variables like job loss, natural disasters and life changes along with the tourist impact.



Fig. 3: Hotel Riu in Guanacaste.

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