



*2<sup>nd</sup> International Workshop on Lifestyle Migration and Residential Tourism  
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***Contested Spatialities of Lifestyle Migration  
Public policies, local democracy and global market forces***

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**ABSTRACT**

**Turism and realestate investments on the islands of Kuna Yala and las Perlas  
(Panama)**

Tourism-understood as a social phenomenon (Barreto 2007) – is expanded through the process of globalization and internationalization of national economies, changing patterns of national and local development. Tourism impact in many areas in different ways related to the everyday life of social groups which receive its influence. In this preliminary work we intend to discuss the expansion of tourism and property investments in Panama, focused in two groups of islands: Kuna Yala archipelago (Atlantic) and Pearl Islands (in the Pacific). Since late'90, successive Panamanian governments have implemented a series of policies towards tourism investment and development in general. A tourism model, based on speculation and several attempts to seduce foreign residents, has been developed is the driving reason behind these policies. The implementation of this model has triggered the pressure on land, coasts and islands. The situation described has caused different changes in the organization of spaces, use of land, heritage management, ways of thinking and living, consumption, inter-ethnic relationships, among others (Hernández 2006). The results expected by employers and Panamanian government, often do not match with

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those expected by local populations involved. While tourism in Panama is considered as a positive aspect and synonymous of "local and economic development ", this paper tries to go beyond these tautological statements. The aim is to problematize the tensions that arise with the expansion of this particular model of tourism development. Besides, we would like to understand the underlying logic behind these discourses.

Our discussion will take as its starting point two very different social realities. The first context will be the region of Kuna Yala. We will describe the failed attempts of governments and business sectors to promote property investments in the region of Kuna Yala based on the ethnographic experience of Monica Martinez Mauri in Gardi (2000-2010). It's necessary to remind that this indigenous region has been consolidated as a political autonomy which allows the local authorities stop any foreign investments in these islands. It's remarkable there are still 400 islands controlled by the locals and on which only locally financed establishments (hotels, lodges, restaurants, beaches, etc.) exist. This reality contrasts with the black communities living in the Pearl Islands. Thanks to the ethnography of Eugenia Mellado in these Pacific islands, we discuss the sales of land and beaches in this archipelago linked to the residential tourism expansion. After the experience of Contadora in the '70-'80, several projects are being developed, while contradictions become more noticeable with local populations in terms of land, resources and interests. In conclusion, we will try to understand the role of tourism in the "local development" and their effects on the control of resources by the local population

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