

Lifestyle migration and socio-spatial segregation in the urban(izing) landscapes of Cuenca (Ecuador) and Guanacaste (Costa Rica)

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Abstract

Elite-oriented urban transformations have played a crucial role in social and symbolic struggles in, and over, Latin American cities. In general, they have shaped processes of privatization and socio-spatial segregation and have increased social inequalities in and across the city, for example by forcing low-income groups to make place for wealthier city dwellers. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the underlying dynamics of these global trends and their meaning and potential in terms of development this paper focuses on the impact of lifestyle migration in intermediate cities and urbanizing regions. More concretely, the paper underscores the importance of 'privileged mobilities' in shaping contemporary urban space in Latin America by comparing the effects of lifestyle migration on socio-spatial transformations in Cuenca, an intermediate city in southern Ecuador, and the urbanizing coast of Guanacaste province in northwest Costa Rica. These research sites are two of Latin America's main current destinations for international lifestyle migrants, and are hence experiencing spiraling real estate development. Both areas have developed into increasingly exclusivist spaces; and as such show that intermediate cities and urbanizing regions can no longer escape the spatial segregation, gentrification and inequality that used to be associated almost exclusively with metropolitan centers.

Key words: lifestyle migration, gentrification, spatial segregation, urbanization, Latin America

Introduction

Lifestyle-related mobilities such as retirement migration and residential tourism have emerged as important drivers of contemporary social and spatial change in Latin America during the past two decades. In towns and cities throughout the region, such 'privileged mobilities' have started to influence social and spatial arrangements in diverse ways. While the role of these kinds of mobilities in engendering urban transformations has been widely recognized in relation to South-North migration, when it comes to reversed mobilities (North-South) the literature is more scarce and recent. The fact that lifestyle-related mobilities have surged only recently, together with the difficulty of capturing them in statistics, renders them largely invisible in urban debates. Nevertheless, lifestyle migration is a salient aspect of current globalization, and its influence on urban space is evident in cities and incipient urban areas such as Cuenca (Ecuador), Panama City

(Panama), San Miguel de Allende (Mexico), Granada (Nicaragua), Guanacaste (Costa Rica), and Northeast Brazil.

Most lifestyle migrants in Latin America are North Americans who move temporarily or permanently to the continent in search of a more relaxed lifestyle, a lower cost of living, better weather, etc. Together with wealthy domestic migrants, returnees and foreign entrepreneurs, they are increasingly investing in Latin American real estate markets and converting specific areas of the Latin American city in new spaces of consumption and western lifestyles. Cuenca and Guanacaste are two of Latin America's popular destinations for international lifestyle migrants, and are hence experiencing spiraling real estate development. In this paper we elaborate how this recent process has left clear marks of socio-spatial segregation in intermediate cities and urbanizing regionsⁱ, suggesting that segregation is not confined to metropolises and megacities in the continent.

By drawing on these two cases, we aim to widen the geographic basis of the lifestyle migration debate, by including urban and urbanizing regions and by focusing on Latin American destinations. Subsequently we aspire to deepen the debate on lifestyle migration's local implications, by connecting it to debates on urban socio-spatial change (e.g. segregation and fragmentation). Furthermore, the paper highlights the importance of current privileged mobilities for urban debates. It does so by introducing a conceptual outline on lifestyle migration, urbanization and spatial segregation; followed by the two case studies of Cuenca and Guanacaste; and finalizing with some concluding reflections.

Lifestyle migration, urbanization and spatial segregation in Latin American cities

In a world of mobile lifestyles where the divide between dwelling and travelling, sedentarism and nomadism, and between home and 'on the road' is increasingly challenged (Urry, 2007), there has been some conceptual confusion around the phenomenon of lifestyle migration. At least, a variety of terms is used for similar phenomena: residential tourism (e.g. Aledo et al, 2013, McWatters, 2009, Van Noorloos, 2014), retirement migration (e.g. Lizárraga Morales, 2012, Migration Policy Institute, 2006), amenity migration (e.g. Matarrita-Cascante and Stocks, 2013, McIntyre, 2009), North-South migration (e.g. Fernández, 2011), second home development (e.g. Matteucci, 2011, Visser, 2004, Hoogendoorn and Visser, 2010). In this paper, we define 'lifestyle migration' as the temporary or permanent mobility of relatively well-to-do citizens from mostly Western countries to a variety of destinations, where they buy or rent property (Van Noorloos, 2012). The search for a better quality of life (often for a lower cost) is a main driver of such mobilities. Hence, in accordance with Williams and Hall (2000) we conceptualize lifestyle migration as a hybrid form of privileged mobility ranging from permanent migration to prolonged tourism.

While lifestyle migration is leaving clear marks on the social, economic, cultural and spatial landscapes of many regions in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the literature still breathes a twofold bias. First, it prioritizes Europe and North America as destinations and second, it pays only scarce attention to the implications of the phenomenon for the destination areas and their pre-existing populations (Janoschka and Haas, 2013). In other words, the debate on lifestyle migration is rather consumer-focused or migrant-focused, by elaborating and in-depth theorizing of migrants' motivations and experiences (e.g. Williams and Hall, 2000, Benson and O'Reilly, 2009, Hayes, 2014a, Hayes, 2014b).

Despite recent calls for a better analysis of lifestyle migration's effects (Janoschka and Haas, 2013, van Noorloos, 2012), a thorough empirical and in-depth account of lifestyle migration's local consequences and responses in the global South, moving beyond the migrants themselves, still seems challenging, apart from some notable exceptions.

Indeed, some studies – while acknowledging the inevitable complexity of measuring change in a multifaceted global context influenced by many factors - do provide accounts of local impacts such as the economic implications of lifestyle migration and residential tourism (Visser, 2004, Hoogendoorn and Visser, 2010, Van Noorloos, 2012); socio-political conflicts and struggles over space and meaning - including land and water conflicts (McWatters, 2009, Bonilla and Mordt, 2011, Bastos, 2013, Van Noorloos, 2011) and shifting local power relations and inequalities (Aledo et al., 2013, Janoschka, 2009, Barrantes-Reynolds, 2011); spatial and environmental change (Spalding, 2013, Román, 2008, Van Laar et al., 2013, Van Noorloos, 2012). However, many of these studies focus on rural areas.

Research on lifestyle migration's effects in urban areas of the global South is still in its infancy; yet it is clear that new types of urbanism are key to understanding lifestyle migration's contribution to urban segregation and fragmentation. First of all, we can observe a shift towards entrepreneurial urbanism in which the focal point of urban governance moved from managerialism or strategies that were primarily oriented towards the local provision of services, facilities and benefits for the urban population, to an entrepreneurial stance on economic development (Harvey, 1989). Neoliberal policies have transformed the city from a center of production and work to a place of global capital in which the urban space has been converted into what Smith (1996) calls the 'revanchist city'. One feature of revanchist cities is the privatization and commodification of urban space in order to sell, promote and market the city. The increasing commodification of land – the conversion of land/housing into marketable real estate property – has been intensified by a real estate boom dominated by foreign investors, national and transnational migrants, and lifestyle migrants such as old and early age pensioners.

Secondly, city marketing strategies and different forms of commercial revitalization are often accompanied by processes of socio-spatial exclusion, in which low-income residents are being displaced by transnational companies and middle and upper class residents (Smith, 1996). As urban regeneration programs often result in excessive prizes on the real estate market, core urban areas gradually transform from working-class areas into middle class neighborhoods. Nasser (2003) argues that pressure on the prices of property and consumption goods results in social exclusion and creates 'outsider' zones, over which locals have lost participatory power and benefits. Indeed, gentrification and displacement are common consequences of lifestyle migration. Gentrification traditionally refers to an influx of middle-class residents in 'degraded' urban neighborhoods, where they revalorize urban space (Smith, 1996, Smith, 2002). In a broader sense, it refers to the creation of affluent space (ibid.): indeed, the creation of new real estate markets is intrinsically linked with gentrification in Latin America (Janoschka et al., 2013). Gentrification – both material and symbolic - has been observed in various lifestyle migration contexts, e.g. in Mexico (Enriquez, 2008, Lizárraga Morales, 2012, Fernández, 2011). The increasing monopolization of space and urban functions by more privileged groups recall the worldwide right-to-the-city debate that focuses on equal access to urban spaces and facilities (Brown and Kristiansen, 2008, Fernandes, 2007, Marcuse, 2009). It has stimulated a revival of the debates on access to public space as introduced by Lefebvre. In 'The Right to the City' he discusses the right to appropriate public space and to participate in the use and production of urban space in general (Lefebvre, 1968). Although his work has been contested, he has made an important contribution to urban studies by addressing the right-to-the-city as an all-inclusive notion, rather than addressing specific rights to specific parts of the city (Brown and Kristiansen, 2008). Also, his work contributes to the debate by focusing on inhabitation as the main condition for the right-to-the-city.

However, focusing on inhabitation does not in itself offer a solution to the issue of unequal power relations between different inhabitants, including privileged migrants (Smith and Guarnizo, 2009). This brings us to the third point: many authors observe the

importance of segregated urban types such as gated communities in contemporary lifestyle migration, particularly in Latin America (Matteucci, 2011, Jackiewicz and Craine, 2010); this seems in tune with general urbanization trends in the region (see Borsdorf, Hidalgo, and Sánchez, 2007; Coy, 2006). Enriquez (2008), who studied lifestyle migration in Puerto Peñasco, Mexico, frames lifestyle migration in coastal urban areas as 'defensive urbanism': it consists of condominium complexes and gated communities that are closed off from their surroundings with high level security, regulation and walls; with a lack of public access (e.g. restricted access to beaches) and implying the privatization of public space. Such defensive urban types are oriented to the higher classes, largely North Americans, and they imply social and economic exclusivity and distance (Enriquez, 2008). As such, defensive urbanism in Puerto Peñasco is peripheral and diffuse: there is no continuation or relation to the pre-existing urban nucleus, and the infrastructure and equipment is very different from traditional urban space (ibid.). Such spatial characteristics often engender a further social separation between lifestyle migrants and other migrant and local populations (Matarrita-Cascante and Stocks, 2013). However, urban fragmentation and segregation can take different forms: more network-type enclaves (Rodgers, 2004) and gentrified inner-cities surrounded by peripheral local neighborhoods are other possibilities. However, it is notable that these processes mainly take place in intermediate cities and incipient urban areas and as such introduce urban transformations such as spatial segregation, and concentrations of poverty that used to be associated almost exclusively with metropolitan centers. These supposedly livable and harmonious urban environments are increasingly jeopardized by the growing imbalance between the livelihoods of local residents and those of transnational elites (Steel, 2013).

In this paper we aim to further analyze the impact of lifestyle migration on contemporary Latin American urban processes of segregation, fragmentation and the physical creation of class barriers by focusing on the specific cases of the intermediate city Cuenca in Ecuador and the urbanizing coastal region of Guanacaste in Costa Rica.ⁱⁱ

The case of Cuenca

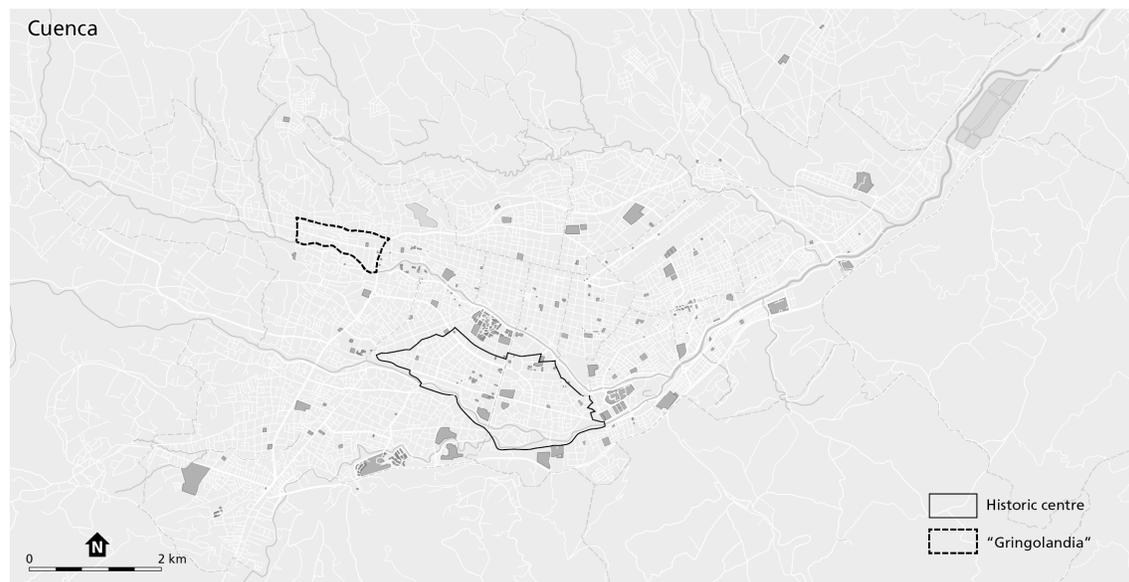


Figure 1: Map of Cuenca

C&M-carto – Department of Geo Sciences – Utrecht University

Cuenca is an intermediate city located in the Andean Highlands of Ecuador at 2500 meters above sea level (figure 1). It counts about 505.585 inhabitants (INEC, 2010).ⁱⁱⁱ

Since the 1950s, many of its inhabitants have migrated to the US - and after the 1980s crisis also to Spain - in search of better livelihood opportunities (Albornoz and Hidalgo, 2007). However, the world financial crisis in 2008 has also initiated some counter flows of migration. Ever more Ecuadorian migrants are returning to their home towns because labor opportunities in the US and Spain have decreased significantly (Pesántez, 2011). In addition, a striking number of lifestyle migrants from the US, Canada and other Western countries are considering Cuenca as an attractive low-cost retirement destination (Hayes 2014a; 2014b). Especially since the city of Cuenca has been recognized as the world's number-one retirement destination by the International Living website, the number of retirees has increased exponentially. Although exact statistic data on the numbers of lifestyle migrants does not exist, the US embassy estimates that there are actually some 4,000 English speaking expats in Cuenca.^{iv}

Advocates argue that the city is big enough to absorb these growing numbers of lifestyle migrants without bringing significant alternations in the city's dynamics and its urban identity. However, in order to analyze lifestyle migration's impact on socio-spatial dynamics of the city we will take a closer look at lifestyle migrants' daily routes, routines and real estate investments. Most lifestyle migrants in Cuenca live in penthouses and new-built condominiums in so-called '*gringolandia*', the Northwest suburb of the city along Avenida Ordóñez Lasso. However, contrary to what the nickname might suggest, this neighborhood is far from exclusively inhabited by North American migrants. Actually the dominant real estate investors in these areas are returning Ecuadorian migrants and (high) middle-class Cuencanos.^v In some extreme cases local condominium developers have explicitly refused to sell their condominiums to foreign buyers because they are considered too demanding clients (Cuenca High Life, 2013a). They put for instance much more emphasis on official papers and authorized agreements than local buyers do. Although the discrimination of foreigners is absolutely no visible trend in Cuenca, it clearly illustrates the fact that the real estate market in Cuenca is strong enough to exclude a certain type of potential buyers.

At the same time, lifestyle migrants seem to show a decreasing interest in the real estate for sale: they have shifted away from buying real estate to renting. Academics and local newspapers refer to the retired age and limited purchase power of the migrants in order to explain the decreasing interest in the real estate investments (Cuenca High Life, 2013a; Hayes 2014a, 2014b). In our interviews, it became clear that we have to take an additional aspect into account. At least, several migrants indicated that it is more convenient to put their savings on an account of an Ecuadorian public bank instead of investing in real estate. By putting savings on a bank they can obtain a 10% interest on their invested capital, which is guaranteed by the Ecuadorian state, while real estate investments are less predictable. Furthermore, as one of our informants explains, "when I invest all my money in real estate I do not have cash in my hand for daily spending, although now I just rent a relatively cheap apartment in the historic center of Cuenca, I have put my savings on the bank and I can live quite comfortably from my yearly interests".^{vi} Lifestyle migrants' increasing demand for rentals coincides with a growing number of migrants who rent a place in the historic center of Cuenca, which is on the UNESCOs World Heritage List since 1999. According to Hayes (2014a), these rentals contribute to certain forms of gentrification in which apartments and historic buildings are renovated and refurbished in such a way that only a more affluent group of clients can gain access to them.

The shift to rentals shapes the contours of how lifestyle migrants influence socio-economic inequality and spatial segregation in the city. Instead of contributing to large-scale city invasions in which local populations are displaced and have to make way for ethnic enclaves or exclusive gated communities, it is rather 'quiet encroachment'^{vii} that typifies the growing presence of lifestyle migrants in the city of Cuenca. As their Spanish language skills are often very basic, many lifestyle migrants make use of their English speaking networks in order to find an apartment. There are, for instance, just a few

expats who find their way to the rent advertisements in the local newspapers. Hence lifestyle migrants generally make use of international real estate agents that provide full management services in English and that know to ask good money for that. These agents operate completely separated from the local rent market.

Also when it concerns access to health, living and entertainment services retirees prefer to fall back on a narrow network of English speaking persons that are recommended by other lifestyle migrants or that are promoted by international (online) advertisements. The choice of the city of Cuenca as a place to retire is generally based on international lifestyle marketers (Hayes, 2014b). Lifestyle migrants' favorite bars, restaurants and supermarkets are the ones that are offering western products, provide English-speaking service (or at least menus) and generally uphold higher prices than local establishments. Entertainment announcements, advertisements and cultural events are posted on the 'Gringo Tree' website, an online platform for expats living in Cuenca (and Quito). These are just a few examples on how the life of lifestyle migrants in Cuenca runs around a restricted number of places in the city and within networks of English speaking persons. As far as they build upon encounters with the local population, these networks are restricted to a number of English speaking Ecuadorians who are well equipped through their own migration experiences to benefit from the money that foreigners bring in.

In other words, the presence of lifestyle migrants in Cuenca leads to the popping-up of small 'hubs of gringolandia' in different parts of the city. Lifestyle migrants in Cuenca do not intrude a specific or entire area in the city, but they gain ground by dominating specific nodes of exclusivity and affluence that are not spatially concentrated but rather dispersed across the city. These nodes – which Rodgers (2004) refers to as 'fortified networks' – partly build upon local networks of affluence and contribute to a further polarized and fragmented urban environment of islands of wealth and islands of poverty. The urban impact of lifestyle migration is embedded in local socio-economic and spatial structures and as such difficult to distinguish from other ongoing processes of gentrification and segregation in the city of Cuenca. However, the conglomeration of these different urban processes shapes the growing disparities between those who have access to global interconnectivity and those who do not.

The case of Guanacaste

For decades, Costa Rica has been a well-known relocation destination for North Americans. The flow of lifestyle migrants has recently intensified and extended geographically to new coastal areas such as the northwest coastal region of Costa Rica in the Guanacaste province (figure 2). In the 2000s this traditional cattle farming region converted into an urbanizing hotspot for tourism and real estate. It is estimated that about 5% of the population^{viii} are permanent lifestyle migrants, while between about 8% and 12% of the population consists of temporary lifestyle migrants at any given moment of the year (Van Noorloos, 2014). Indeed, permanent migrants are still a small group; many people use their property as a second home or investment. Buying is the main modality for lifestyle migrants in Guanacaste, who are mostly from the US and Canada, but also Costa Ricans from the Central Valley. Individual house buying has made way for an extensive real estate sector, where most properties are bought within residential projects and urbanizations. The developers and investment capital mainly come from the US and Canada, although there is also much domestic investment; in addition, collaborations between North American and Costa Rican investors are common (Van Noorloos 2012, 2014). Local and domestic elites are strategic brokers that enable real estate investment, for example in complying with coastal governance regulations^{ix}; and they have often been the first actors to establish second homes in Costa Rica's coastal areas since about the 1950s. Hence although we can observe a clear 'foreignization' of space, it is also evident that pre-existing power structures and local elites are essential in enhancing and shaping lifestyle migration's socio-spatial implications.

Lifestyle migration in a region such as Guanacaste introduces new privileged populations and hence inevitably creates social inequalities, which are clearly marked in the landscape. This is particularly visible in the prevalence of gated communities (or 'fortified enclaves' – Caldeira, 2000): about half of the completed developments on Guanacaste's coast are advertised as such. These gated communities are master-planned by the developer and provide a high standard of service on site (including exclusive communal areas, private nature reserves, recreation facilities, golf courses, marinas, shopping centers and medical services) and an exclusivist sense of community among the inhabitants. Security measures and gates are an important part of this. Defensive urbanism and 'fortified enclaves' thus clearly abound; although the impermeable character of the borders and the strong sense of community are not always a reality, for example because the temporariness and absenteeism of the population.^x All-inclusive gated communities are not the only destinations for lifestyle migrants in Guanacaste; there are also apartment complexes, villas, and plot subdivisions, with varying degrees of security and community building. Also, gated communities are not a new concept introduced by lifestyle migrants alone: since the early 2000s, Costa Rican elite and middle-class investors and home buyers have acquired increased spending power and started looking for complete housing solutions (gated communities and condominiums), especially in suburban areas of the Central Valley (Román, 2007).

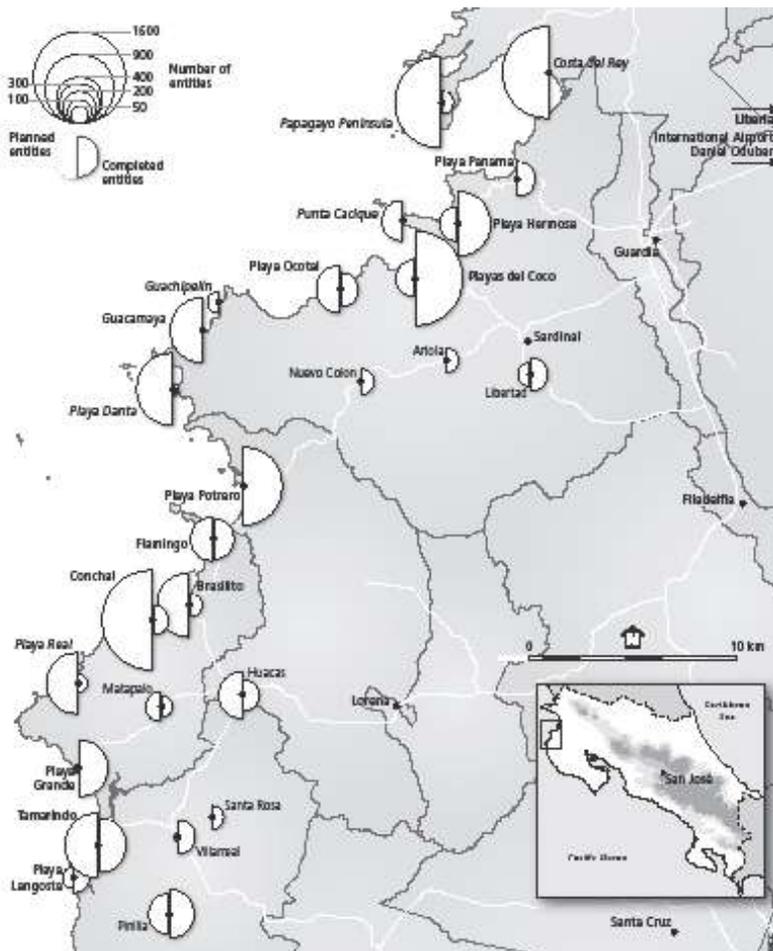


Figure 2: Coastal part of Guanacaste, Costa Rica: Planned/announced and completed residential tourism entities (plots, houses and apartments) (2011). *Source: author's research*

Such residential projects are not clearly spatially concentrated in certain areas, but rather scattered around the landscape – although segregation is often visible on a micro scale.^{xi} Indeed, rather than a large-scale spatial segregation, lifestyle migration and the related real estate and construction industry have enhanced fragmentation: new residential projects and their related services have often been inserted into existing coastal communities (see also Roitman and Giglio, 2010). This spatially uneven development has led to fragmented land markets. The influx of new high-income population groups who are willing and able to pay large sums for real estate, next to local and immigrant groups with much lower incomes, means that average household incomes in such areas become meaningless for predicting land and real estate prices: indeed, in Guanacaste there has been no even spreading of an expensive land and housing market in the area, but rather a fragmentation and differentiation of land prices. Even on a micro scale, land prices vary by more than 700\$/m² (valorizations by Ministerio de Hacienda, 2010), depending on location (urban-central or rural, beachfront or interior); accessibility; quality of housing; and amenities including 'tourist quality' such as beach views.

Real estate growth and the influx of new elites have caused some direct displacement of local populations, but this displacement is mediated by various local factors. Recent pressures on land have not led to massive displacement, because of the low population numbers, low agricultural use of land, fragmentation, and spatial characteristics of the investment. Indeed, most displacement had already taken place during earlier 'land grabs' (Edelman, 1998), so that the impact of current land sales is not that high. Land sale has been mostly voluntary, though not free from structural factors such as power differences and processes of societal change (Van Noorloos, 2011). Land rents have been captured mostly by external real estate speculators, rather than local populations, who were often in distress or unaware of the value of their land. There has been an increased incidence of land conflict and privatization.

Nevertheless, the main cause of exclusion of local populations is the rise of property prices – and consumption prices more generally. With the arrival of higher-income groups and people who are prepared to pay 'tourist prices' for house rental or buying, housing prices become out of reach for large parts of the local population. In the coastal area of Guanacaste, indeed, land and housing prices have increased greatly, especially between 2000 and 2008 (Van Noorloos, 2012, 2014). Because of the high prices, lower-income groups, including younger generations and immigrant laborers, are unable to buy new property in certain areas. Hence lifestyle migration-related gentrification has clearly led to displacement in indirect ways. Although the tourism and real estate industry has brought employment and business opportunities in Guanacaste, there is a mismatch between income levels and the real estate market; hence a large part of the real estate market is inaccessible for local and low-income immigrant populations.

Conclusion

In order to link the discussion on the impact of lifestyle migration in developing countries to urban debates, this paper has compared lifestyle migration dynamics in two different urban areas, an intermediate city (Cuenca) and an urbanizing region (Guanacaste). We have focused our empirical analysis on social and spatial changes in these two popular Latin American destinations. Table 1 systematically compares the two cases.

	Cuenca	Guanacaste
Urbanity	Intermediate city	Coastal area in process of urbanization
Lifestyle migration	Retirement migration	Broader lifestyle migration, incl. temporary / seasonal 'residential tourists' and younger people
Impact on real estate market	Mostly renting; addition to strong local market	Mostly buying; lifestyle migration drives market
Spatial segregation	'fortified networks'	'fortified enclaves'
Impact lifestyle migration	Relatively low and invisible	Very visible, gentrification

Table 1. Comparison: Cuenca (Ecuador) and Guanacaste (Costa Rica)

In both urban areas we observed some significant forms of direct and indirect displacement. Local residents of the historic buildings in the city center of Cuenca have to make way for high class entertainment facilities and for people who can afford to buy or rent a renovated and refurbished house in this part of the city. Through rising land and housing prices, local residents in Guanacaste are expelled to more remote and less expensive areas in the region. They lose ground to large scale condominium developments in the better located, urbanizing parts of the region. However, these forms of displacement only partly explain the main processes of urban change we have described in this paper. It is rather the way in which both areas have developed into increasingly exclusivist regions that marks the current impact of lifestyle migration on the urban dynamics in the regions under study.

In the Guanacaste case, we clearly observed several forms of residential segregation and social exclusion through increased privatization and securitization in coastal areas, of which gated communities or 'fortified enclaves' are the most exemplary forms. In Cuenca, we identified some exclusivist nodes or 'fortified networks' across the city that bind and demarcate the socio-spatial movements and activities of lifestyle migrants. The rise of high quality restaurants and other luxury establishments are the physical evidence of the growing discrepancies between those who do have access to migration and those who do not. In line with 'entrepreneurial urbanism' (Harvey, 1989), and exacerbated by deregulation and laissez-faire urban policies, space and services are becoming increasingly fragmented. Gated communities, condominium buildings and other elite housing compositions are spatially mixed with the housing facilities of other social groups in both cases. This fragmentation of landscape is reflected in high discrepancies in land and rent prices across the cities under study. At the same time, while services such as security, health, entertainment and transport have become more widely available across the city, due to privatization they are still largely inaccessible to certain parts of the population. These deepening social disparities are also visualized in a symbolic 'foreignization' of space and fragmented social landscapes: the use of English on the streets and on billboards, foreign influences in the architecture (see also Klaufus 2012), and images of 'white' families in advertisements (see also Torkington, 2013).

Nevertheless, in order to contribute to the broader discussion on the link between 'privileged' mobilities and urban change, we need to scrutinize any simple attempt at evaluating the real impact of lifestyle migrants. Cities are by definition very hybrid and socially divided spaces in which social heterogeneity, mobility, historical trajectories and policies emerge as intermingling factors of spatial fragmentation and segregation. The current urban transformations and the growing pressure on land and housing market in Cuenca and Guanacaste cannot merely be ascribed to the rise of lifestyle migration. In both regions, international flows of migrants converge with local dynamics of urban segregation and fragmentation that had already started before the arrival of the lifestyle

migrants. Lifestyle migration merely impacts on the extent and speed with which these patterns of socio-spatial change take place, and still these impacts vary according to the level of urbanization. In an intermediate city such as Cuenca, lifestyle migrants' establishment in existing and rental housing, together with prior socio-spatial segregation processes and the traditional importance of local elites, amount to a relatively low direct impact of lifestyle migration. On the other hand, in urbanizing regions such as Guanacaste, a new real estate and construction industry is created with the explicit aim to attract and profit from lifestyle migration through smart marketing and speculation. Hence social and spatial impacts are more visible in the case of Guanacaste than in the case of Cuenca. But even in Guanacaste, existing demand by local and domestic elites and pre-existing national dynamics of gated community expansion have paved the way for these dynamics to emerge.

In other words, the urban transformations we have described in this paper are encapsulated in ongoing processes of socio-spatial change. We could not very clearly disentangle the impact of lifestyle migration from local dynamics of gentrification, urban regeneration and spatial segregation. In the urban and urbanizing regions we have studied, processes of spatial segregation are shaped by a complex assemblage of different factors of which lifestyle migration is just one of the many different triggers. This is why studies on the urban impact of lifestyle migration should drop a narrow distinction – which is still maintained in rural studies – between lifestyle migrants and locals. In multifaceted urban areas, lifestyle migrants connect with certain local elements while remaining separated from others; the lifestyle migration industry also intermingles with certain existing social, economic and spatial elements.

This is why further research on urban lifestyle migration should give more attention to the chain of actors involved in producing lifestyle migration spaces. In-depth research on the powerful industry related to lifestyle migration will contribute to a better understanding of how the interaction between real estate brokers, local elites, foreign entrepreneurs and lifestyle migrants has contributed to a new socio-geographical hierarchy in the urban spaces in developing countries. As Woods (2011) also argues, the transformative impact of lifestyle migration on local space can only be understood in concert with other globalization processes such as tourism, overseas investment and property speculation, the arrival of transnational companies, and cultural hybridization. It is exactly these processes that deserve more attention in future research on lifestyle migration in cities in developing countries.

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ⁱ Cuenca (Ecuador) is an intermediate city; Guanacaste (Costa Rica) is a coastal region in which tourism and real estate have caused urbanization on a smaller scale.

ⁱⁱ Our findings are based on various episodes of fieldwork between 2008 and 2014, in which semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus groups and the review of secondary materials (e.g. media, policy documents, websites) were the main techniques (see for more detail Van Noorloos, 2012 for the Costa Rica case).

ⁱⁱⁱ These statistics refer to Canton Cuenca and includes some rural communities.

^{iv} Personal communication, March 2014.

^v Although these Ecuadorians also reside in Gringolandia and maintain lifestyles that are related to those of the lifestyle migrants from the US, Canada and other Western countries, this empirical analysis only focusses on the urban impact of this foreign group of lifestyle migrants.

^{vi} Focus group, 31 March 2014, single female from US.

^{vii} Bayat (1997) uses this term to describe the resistance strategies of 'ordinary' people; in our view the term can also be used for the analysis on how more affluent groups try to gain (political) position in the urban landscape.

^{viii} The research area includes the coastal area of Guanacaste province between Papagayo and Pinilla.

^{ix} Coastal land concessions cannot be granted to foreigners that have lived in Costa Rica for less than five years; or to corporations with more than 50 % foreign capital; or to corporations established by foreigners or with residence outside Costa Rica (law no. 6043, Ley sobre la Zona Marítimo Terrestre, ZMT, of 1977).

^x This temporariness and absenteeism is also related to the fact that residential tourism and short-term tourism are deeply intertwined: large gated communities also tend to include large international hotels, and furthermore the houses and apartments are frequently rented out to short-term tourists.

^{xi} Coastal areas and hills behind the coasts are popular sites for lifestyle migrants, and isolated coastal areas and small towns towards the interior of the province are envisaged as the new development areas.