



Amenity migration to the global south: Implications for community development



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ABSTRACT

Despite a growing trend of migration to countries in the global South fueled by their natural amenities (i.e., natural amenity migration), research on this topic has predominantly been conducted in the global North. This is problematic given the notable socioeconomic, attitudinal, and behavioral differences between amenity migrants (often urbanites from developed countries) and local people (often rural residents of developing countries). Grounded in community field theory, this study begins to fill this gap in the literature by increasing our understanding of the ways in which local residents and amenity migrants interact in the amenity-rich community of Nuevo Arenal, Costa Rica. We found that linguistic, cultural, and spatial barriers (real and perceived) created a social climate in which the interaction between local residents and amenity migrants was primarily based on mundane interactions and did not lead to social integration. This proved to be a hindrance to the creation of the community field, which led to a lack of joint planning and participation in activities and projects that sought to improve the overall living conditions in the community. Explanations of these findings and the implications of such a divide are offered.

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1. Introduction

Many rural areas around the world are experiencing dramatic changes as a result of population growth. The relevance and scope of this growth “is not a simple movement of people, but involves a re-creation of the rural” (Abram et al., 1998: 236), as landscapes, social relationships, and local economies are reshaped by this phenomenon (Glorioso and Moss, 2007; Moss, 2008). This is particularly the case in rural areas notable for natural features like forests, mountains, and lakes (hereafter referred to as amenity-rich areas). Their aesthetically attractive surroundings and the associated experiences they offer (e.g., outdoor recreation and relaxed pace of life) have encouraged population movements to these areas, a phenomenon known as amenity migration (Abrams et al., 2012; Beyers and Nelson, 2000; Fuguitt and Beale, 1996; Hawley and Mills, 1981; Johnson and Purdy, 1980; Johnson and Beale, 1994; Moss, 2008).

Amenity migration has become prominent in many parts of the world. Nonetheless, our knowledge of this phenomenon has been predominantly informed by research conducted in developed countries of the global North (Buller and Hoggart, 1994; Dijst et al., 2005; Matarrita-Cascante and Luloff, 2008; Smith and Krannich, 2000; Quinn, 2004). Consequently, studies that examine

amenity migration in developing countries of the global South are limited in number (exceptions include Chaverri, 2006; Gordon et al., 2010a; Otero et al., 2006). Glorioso and Moss (2007) identified only 14 studies that examined this phenomenon in economically developing countries. Given the growth of international amenity migration to developing countries (Dixon et al., 2006; Emling, 2010; van Noorlos, 2013), it is increasingly important to understand the effects of this phenomenon in amenity-rich communities of the global South.

In this study, we begin to address the gaps in our understanding of the effects of amenity migration to the global South by examining this phenomenon from a community field perspective. Community field theory examines the ways in which residents work in collaboration for the common good of the community (Wilkinson, 1991). This perspective is useful given the demographic and cultural differences between amenity migrants and local rural residents, which have been shown to contribute to social disruption and cultural clashes that deter social relationships in multiple literatures examining similar population shifts (e.g., tourism, boomtown; Graber, 1974; Freudenburg, 1986; Buller and Hoggart, 1994; Rothman, 1998; Harrill, 2004; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2006; Winkler et al., 2007). Such strained relationships can obstruct the formation of the community field, thereby deterring locally-designed and led development efforts. Thus, the contribution of our study is twofold: (1) to increase our limited knowledge of amenity migration, specifically in the context of the global South and (2) to view this phenomenon from a community field

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perspective, an angle that has not explicitly been employed in the amenity migration literature.

The current study is focused on *permanent* amenity migrants¹ and addresses two fundamental questions. First, we investigate the nature of the interactions between local rural residents and amenity migrants in an amenity-rich community. Second, we ask how these forms of interaction contribute to or inhibit locally-driven community development processes.² To achieve the study's objectives, the interactions between permanent international amenity migrants and domestic rural residents were studied in the rural, natural amenity-rich community of Nuevo Arenal, Costa Rica. This locality is highly desirable for foreign migrants, who are attracted by its aesthetic qualities, particularly Lake Arenal (Costa Rica's largest inland waterbody), making it an appropriate place for studying the phenomenon of amenity migration. Permanent, as opposed to seasonal, amenity migrants were selected for this study because they were the migrant population that had the most visible presence in the study community, were the most likely to interact with local residents, and were the most likely to engage in community development activities on a consistent basis. Domestic amenity migrants from other cities in Costa Rica were not prominent among the population of Nuevo Arenal and thus were not included in this study.

2. Amenity migration

The initial studies of amenity migration originated in the 'rural renaissance' or 'non-metropolitan turnaround' phenomenon that took place in the United States during the late 1960s and 1970s (Morrison and Wheeler, 1976; Brown and Wardwell, 1980; Johnson and Beale, 1994; Johnson and Fuguitt, 2000). This phenomenon consisted of an uncommon pattern of population movement characterized by:

...renewed and widespread population growth and by net migration gain in non-metropolitan areas. This turnaround contrasted sharply with earlier long-term trends, in which net migration into growing and multiplying metropolitan areas predominated (Johnson and Fuguitt, 2000: 27).

These first studies of rural in-migration, and the different research foci they later inspired, were primarily concerned with explaining the population growth in these rural areas. One of the lines of inquiry that emerged from this literature in the 1990s, noted that rural population growth was particularly evident in communities with high levels of natural amenities (Beyers and Nelson, 2000; Deller et al., 2003; Green, 2010; McGranahan, 1999; McGranahan and Beale, 2002; Shumway and Otterstrom, 2001). Population movement to these areas was attributed to a number of mediating factors, or *facilitators*, including an increasingly mobile society as a result of improved telecommunications and transportation technologies, and more discretionary wealth and time (Beyers and Nelson, 2000; Moss, 2008). Parallel to such facilitators, *motivators* that explained amenity migration included people's desire to live away from urban centers and in close proximity to the natural beauty, diverse wildlife and ecosystems, and the different culture found in rural localities (Beyers and Nelson, 2000; Deller et al., 2003; McGranahan, 1999; Moss, 2008; Shumway and Otterstrom, 2001). Associated with the attractive natural

characteristics and cultures of these places, studies reported migrants to amenity-rich locations also found them preferable due to fewer perceived health risks, a slower pace of life, and increased opportunities to engage in leisure and recreational activities (Chaplin, 1999; Quinn, 2004; Rupasingha and Goetz, 2004; Sofraniko and Williams, 1980).

While the phenomenon of amenity migration can be broadly defined as "the movement of largely affluent urban or suburban populations to rural areas for specific lifestyle amenities" (Abrams et al., 2012: 270), migrants to amenity-rich communities vary considerably with regard to their length of stay and origins. In terms of their type of stay, some migrants move to such areas seasonally (e.g., second or recreational homeowners) while others migrate permanently (e.g., retirees). Seasonal migrants have been the focus of considerable amenity migration research because they are seen as a middle point between less permanent visitors to rural areas (e.g., tourists) and more permanent migrants (e.g., exurbanites or retirees). Many terms have been used interchangeably to refer to seasonal migrants including "second homeowner", "seasonal", "cottage", and "occasional use" (Marcouiller et al., 2013). The common denominator among these concepts is that seasonal migrants maintain multiple dwellings and are highly mobile from one locality to another based on their needs and desires (McIntyre et al., 2006; Marcouiller et al., 2013). Alternatively, permanent migrants refer to individuals who move and start a new life in a different community than their own. In contrast to seasonal residents, permanent migrants are less mobile. Some of these permanent migrants maintain a need to secure an income, resulting in remote employment (using technology to work from afar), the establishment of new businesses, or seeking jobs in the new community. Others are retirees who have no need for formal employment and are more concerned with the enjoyment of their retirement years.

Amenity migrants can be domestic or international in origin. The former group is predominantly represented by affluent nationals who settle seasonally or permanently in rural amenity-rich areas. The latter (the focus of the current study) is represented by residents of developed countries migrating to underdeveloped ones due to the natural amenities, lifestyle choices they offer (Abrams et al., 2012).

Studies of amenity migration have frequently noted the existence of demographic, economic, and cultural differences between amenity migrants and local rural residents. Amenity migrants tend to have grown up in large cities, are better educated, and earn a higher household income when compared to local rural residents (Buller and Hoggart, 1994; Harrill, 2004; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2006; Winkler et al., 2007). Studies have also contrasted the cultural characteristics of rural residents with amenity migrants, reporting that their different backgrounds result in distinct perceptions and behaviors, ranging from religious and political beliefs to choices regarding local development strategies (Brehm et al., 2006; Clendenning and Field, 2005; Krannich and Petzelka, 2003; Hunter and Toney, 2005; Toney et al., 1997).

Other studies have focused on amenity migrants themselves, seeking to better understand the meanings and attachments they ascribe to their chosen amenity-rich community. These meanings and sentiments have most commonly been associated with the experiences that resulted from their interaction with the natural landscape rather than with other social groups (Gustafson, 2006; Kalterborn, 1997; McIntyre et al., 2006; Stedman, 2006a,b; Van Patten and Williams, 2008; Williams and Kaltenborn, 1999).

The consequences of amenity migration have also served as a research focus. Studies have revealed changes in employment patterns from extractive-based to service-oriented jobs; increased property values, taxes, and overall cost of life; higher demands for infrastructure, commercial activities, and public services;

¹ Amenity migrants in this study refer to foreign expatriates who have permanent, rather than seasonal, residence in the study community. The terms expatriates and amenity migrants are used interchangeably throughout this paper. Internal amenity migration (i.e., among urban Costa Ricans) is not addressed in this paper, as it is uncommon in the study community.

² Here, community development is defined as locally born and driven activities. We see these efforts as community development as they are led by community residents in collaboration with other residents or local organizations (national citizens or expatriates) focused on improving the living conditions of their community.

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