

Tuesday, 7 January / Martes 7 de enero

14:00-15:30: Salón Rubí

Special Session / Sesión especial

“Land-Grab” in Latin America

“Acaparamiento de tierras” en América Latina

Chair: Ana K. Spalding

Finding the Plot: The Land Grab along Nicaragua’s Pacific Coast

Matthew J. Taylor,* Gary T. LaVanchy* and Anna G. Sveinsdóttir**

* *University of Denver*, ***University of Oslo*

Email: m.j.taylor@du.edu

We examine the land grab that has taken place along Nicaragua’s southern Pacific coast since the mid-1990s. To document the transition in land from rich, to poor and back to the rich again, we use a combination of data gathered from interviews (war veterans, agricultural cooperative members, resort developers, foreign second home owners, and Nicaraguan lawyers), historic land titles, newspapers, surveys documenting the spatial extent tourism operations, and legal documents. We comment on the changing value of coastal land from the perspective of local and outside actors. We nest our analysis within the larger ideology of Nicaraguan political regimes since 1979. We find that the massive transfer of land for tourism is laden with past and ongoing conflict. We also note that, despite sacrifices and gains made by Nicaraguan peasants during the 1970s and 1980s, they now feel powerless to oppose the economic machine of tourism. Agricultural livelihoods are eroded as houses with an ocean view proliferate.

Keywords: Nicaragua, land grabbing, tourism, Pacific coast

Creating Darién and facilitating land grabbing: Darién’s geographical imaginary

Julie Velázquez Runk

University of Georgia and Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute

E-mail: julievr@uga.edu

Globally, land grabbing is defined by the purportedly improved use of what some consider underutilized space. In this presentation I demonstrate how land grabbing in eastern Panama’s Darién region is facilitated by its geographical imaginary. I use content analysis of centuries of documents and images to illustrate the taken-for-granted representation of Darién as a primitive, dangerous place. I discuss how that imaginary facilitates land grabbing in the region. These results contribute to efforts to place Latin American land grabbing within larger narratives of power and history.

Keywords: Darién, geographical imaginary, land grabbing, Panama

Frontier land sales changing through time in Peru's high selva

Tim Holland
McGill University
E-mail: tim.holland@mail.mcgill.ca

Land cover change in the high jungle of San Martin, Peru, is driven largely by the arrival of migrants from Andean regions. Although some early arrivals stake unclaimed land, most migrants purchase their land. This research examines how the characteristics of land sales change through time as frontier areas develop. In three different sites in San Martin - one settled in the mid-1970s, one in the mid-1990s, and one in the early 2000s - information on land purchases was collected as part of semi-structured interviews with 190 small-scale landholders. Over time in all three areas, the parcels being sold became smaller, more expensive, and contained a lower percentage of standing forest. In the study area that was settled in the mid-1990s, the average parcel sold from 1995-1999 was 18.5 hectares, cost \$104 per hectare, and was 79% forested, while the average sold from 2010-2012 was 3.0ha, \$1340/ha, and 40% forested.

Keywords: Land sales, land price, migration, frontier dynamics

Re-conceptualizing the grab for land in Latin America: Lifestyle Migration as a driver of change in land tenure, land use, and socio-environmental aspects of life in Bocas del Toro, Panama

Ana K. Spalding
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
Email: spaldinga@si.edu

International flows of people from developed to developing countries constitute lifestyle migration, characterized by a search for so called 'lifestyle' destinations, with warm climates, cheaper costs of living, environmental benefits, and a perceived relaxed quality of life. Socio-economic and cultural differences between individuals of the countries of origin and destination raise interesting questions about the potential impacts of imported attitudes and behaviors on both natural resources and human communities of a given locality. In recognition of the growing importance of the Bocas del Toro Archipelago in Panama as one such lifestyle destination, this paper explores the socio-environmental implications of new migratory flows to the region. Additionally, this paper seeks to explore lifestyle migration as a main driver of change in land ownership in the archipelago, in the context of broad political economic process that is pushing the creation of a land market that caters to foreigners and wealthy Latin Americans.

Keywords: Lifestyle migration, Bocas del Toro, land grabbing, Panama

Discussant: Anthony Bebbington