

ORIGINAL

Transformation of Urban Habitability in the Face of Residential Tourism

Transformación de la habitabilidad urbana ante el turismo residenciado

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ABSTRACT

The research analyzed the effects of residential tourism on urban habitability in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, focusing on the Palos Prietos neighborhood. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through surveys applied to permanent residents and residential tourists, as well as the analysis of official sources such as INEGI and IMPLAN. The results showed an accelerated transformation of the urban environment, characterized by the replacement of single-family homes with vertical real estate developments intended for tourist accommodation, particularly of the Airbnb type. This process generated social tensions, loss of neighborhood identity, and displacement of the local population toward peripheral areas with limited access to urban services. Likewise, increases in noise levels, traffic congestion, and environmental deterioration associated with the rise in construction activity were observed. It was concluded that residential tourism significantly modified housing dynamics, affected the inhabitants' quality of life, and reconfigured the urban landscape. Finally, the study suggested the need for comprehensive urban management policies to regulate land use and promote sustainability, aiming to balance economic development with social well-being.

Keywords: Residential Tourism; Urban Habitability; Gentrification; Urban Transformation; Mazatlán.

RESUMEN

La investigación analizó los efectos del turismo residenciado en la habitabilidad urbana de Mazatlán, Sinaloa, con énfasis en la colonia Palos Prietos. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo, se recopiló datos a través de encuestas aplicadas a residentes permanentes y turistas residenciales, además del análisis de fuentes oficiales como INEGI e IMPLAN. Los resultados mostraron una transformación acelerada del entorno urbano, caracterizada por la sustitución de viviendas unifamiliares por desarrollos inmobiliarios verticales destinados al alojamiento turístico, en particular de tipo Airbnb. Este proceso generó tensiones sociales, pérdida de identidad barrial y desplazamiento de la población local hacia zonas periféricas con menor acceso a servicios. Asimismo, se observó un incremento en los niveles de ruido, congestión vehicular y deterioro ambiental asociado al aumento de construcciones. Se concluyó que el turismo residenciado modificó significativamente las dinámicas habitacionales, afectó la calidad de vida de los habitantes y reconfiguró el paisaje urbano. Finalmente, se propuso la necesidad de una gestión urbana integral que regulara el uso del suelo y promoviera la sostenibilidad, con el fin de equilibrar el desarrollo económico y el bienestar social.

Palabras clave: Turismo Residenciado; Habitabilidad Urbana; Gentrificación; Transformación Urbana; Mazatlán.

INTRODUCTION

Mazatlán was initially inhabited by the Totorames and Xiximes indigenous peoples, who settled in the southern part of the state of Sinaloa from 900 to 1200 AD.⁽¹⁾ Mazatlán was founded as such after the arrival of the Spanish in 1531. However, March 23, 1792, is proposed as the official date of its government's creation.⁽²⁾

The arrival of foreigners in the port is linked to its opening to the international market in 1822, when they settled in what is now Villa Unión. It was mainly during the 1840s that the largest settlement of foreign population took place, dedicated to mining.⁽³⁾

The development of tourism as an economic activity in Mazatlán dates back to the arrival of the so-called "Spring Breakers" during the 1960s and 1970s. This phenomenon led to the creation of hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies, though most were more improvised than professional services, primarily aimed at foreign tourists. According to Ceballos⁽⁴⁾ in 1973, Mazatlán received 778 715 visitors, of whom 473 829 were foreigners and 315 886 were nationals. It is noteworthy that during this period, "local entrepreneurs were still reluctant to abandon traditional activities such as agriculture and fishing in favor of tourism," which was part of the region's particular identity.⁽⁵⁾

Currently, there are differences in the urban space: on the periphery, low-income neighborhoods of social interest or self-built neighborhoods, and, parallel to the coast, gated communities and high-rise buildings; a process of change that has generated significant spatial transformations.

However, the "old" area has been neglected, undergoing gradual changes, and is no longer used or inhabited by the local population, but rather to generate additional spaces for visitors. The local population, as in other processes of gentrification-touristification, increasingly tends to settle in the peripheral areas of Mazatlán with fewer urban services, in this case to the south and northeast.

The problem arises when this growth displaces the local population to make way for new residents. In recent years, this movement has taken the form of real estate developments occupying areas that were originally residential, directly affecting the habitability of the space —both indoors and outdoors —and changing the urban dynamics of each region. According to Heidegger⁽⁶⁾ to what extent does building belong to dwelling? He suggests that building is not simply a technical act of construction, but a manifestation of how human beings occupy and give meaning to their environment. Such is the case of the neighborhoods located in the residential strip behind the buildings on Avenida del Mar in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, such as the Ferrocarrilera, Tellería, and Palos Prietos neighborhoods, which have similar characteristics in terms of infrastructure and therefore serve as a reference point, as they have undergone a notable transformation in recent years.

CASE STUDY AREA

The Palos Prietos neighborhood has become a benchmark for transforming the urban context amid the city's growth, as it was originally composed of large single-family estates. Today, it is divided into mixed-use areas consisting of the original residences, commercial businesses, and new real estate developments intended for tourism, as it is a strategic area directly connected to sites of interest to the tourism sector.

Through surveys of permanent residents of the Palos Prietos neighborhood, the narrative indicates that the arrival of tourists has affected the tranquility of the area due to harassment by developers toward neighbors to sell their properties, an increase in foot traffic, excessive and constant noise from construction, obstruction of streets by heavy machinery, and an increase in the number of people living in condominiums. This has led to a loss of peace and tranquility, as these buildings generate trash and disturbances from parties, since some are used for vacation rentals such as Airbnb.

In recent years, the flow of American residential tourists to Latin America, especially Mexico, has increased rapidly. These tourists are mostly retirees with high purchasing power, allowing them to live away from home for long periods, with significant socioeconomic impacts on destination locations, leading to a socio-spatial reorganization of urban space.⁽⁷⁾



Figure 1. Río Presidio Street, Colonia Palos Prietos, Mazatlán, Sinaloa in 2014



Figure 2. Río Presidio Street, Colonia Palos Prietos, Mazatlán, Sinaloa in 2024

REFERENCES

In Santa Elena, a province on the west coast of Ecuador, there has been constant growth since the 1970s, beginning with the development of a seaside resort that gave rise to buildings up to 22 stories tall. Subsequently, in the 1980s, the construction of family vacation homes began, mostly from Guayaquil, to spend weekends there.

Sun and beach tourism in Ecuador ranks third among the most commercialized tourism products.⁸

The municipalities of Salinas and Santa Elena are experiencing housing growth determined by a “historical confusion between what tourism development and real estate development mean”.⁽⁹⁾ In Salinas, the few residents who choose to live in these developments demand services from the municipality –such as garbage collection, water supply, sewage management, and public lighting –that are more expensive because of the small number of residents. The short time that residential tourists spend in the area complicates administration and public investment, which, during high seasonality, often fails to provide visitors with sufficient water, electricity, mobility, and road access.

The case of the Spanish Mediterranean is a perfect example of all these potential transformations associated with residential tourism.⁽¹⁰⁾ Attracted by the natural attractions of the coastal region, the cost of land and residences (lower than in the European market), the low value of the Brazilian currency in relation to the euro and the dollar, and the greater availability of low-cost flights in Brazil, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese citizens have been buying residential properties or land to build at a rapid pace.^(11,12)

According to Fonseca ET AL.⁽¹³⁾ and Bernal⁽¹⁴⁾ international entrepreneurs, whether associated with Brazilian groups or not, are investing in the construction of mega real estate developments, some with more than 10 000 residences, commonly integrated with golf courses and leisure infrastructure to meet growing demand. While this represents an excellent opportunity for economic growth, it also poses a significant risk of exacerbating socio-environmental impacts, as these developments are being built in areas where socio-environmental controls are fragile, potentially resulting in substantial effects on the local population and natural resources.⁽¹⁵⁾

In the Mediterranean arc, the tourist-residential phenomenon has become widespread due to the solvent demand of migrants, mostly retirees from northern Europe, who decide to take up residence in areas with a warmer climate and a lifestyle linked to leisure and consumption.⁽¹⁶⁾

The migration of foreign retirees to Mexico has increased, especially in Los Cabos, Baja California Sur, the second state with the highest number of foreign residential tourists in Mexico. The current development trend in Los Cabos is the construction and sale of homes and condominiums for foreigners. This type of settlement is a viable alternative for working- and middle-class people from the United States and Canada who plan to retire in the short- or medium-term, which may be accentuated by the recession in the United States and the loss of purchasing power.⁽¹⁷⁾

However, this reality, combined with the lack of regulation by local authorities on land use management, is cause for concern in rural coastal areas, as sooner or later these new settlements will demand more infrastructure and services (primarily water, a scarce resource in the state), increasing current and investment costs, which are rarely offset by the income generated by these tourists,⁽¹⁸⁾ in addition to the environmental implications for sensitive sites such as dunes.

METHOD

The research in question is intended to be conducted using a qualitative approach. Information will be collected through structured surveys administered to a representative sample of permanent residents and new residents (resident tourists) to understand changes in perceptions of habitability. At the same time, the changes in land use, the registration of new constructions, urban modifications, and densification will be analyzed through the creation of maps, supported by official sources.

To delimit the case study, the Palos Prietos neighborhood in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, was established according to

the characteristics and current urban dynamics of the area, taking as a sample the residential strip between the International Highway and Cruz Lizárraga Avenue, as shown in figure 3.



Figure 3. Internal delimitation in the Palos Prietos neighborhood, Mazatlán, Sinaloa

For the delimitation of the case study, Colonia Palos Prietos in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, was selected based on the area's characteristics and current urban dynamics, with the residential strip between the International Highway and Cruz Lizárraga Avenue serving as the sample, as shown in figure 3.

In turn, figure 4 presents recent real estate developments in the delimited area to emphasize the current transformation dynamics facing the Palos Prietos neighborhood, which is why it was chosen as a sample in the urban context of Mazatlán, Sinaloa.



Figure 4. New real estate developments

RESULTS

The results obtained showed a significant transformation in the urban livability of the Palos Prietos neighborhood in Mazatlán, Sinaloa. A process of substituting traditional residential use with vertical real estate developments primarily intended for residential tourism was identified. Surveys of residents showed that 82 % reported a decrease in environmental tranquility due to increased noise, vehicular traffic, and construction activity. Likewise, 76 % reported having received purchase offers from real estate developers, reflecting constant pressure to sell their properties.

CONCLUSIONS

The research concluded that residential tourism profoundly altered the urban and social structure of Mazatlán by promoting a development model geared toward the tourist market rather than the well-being of the local population. This phenomenon contributed to the loss of neighborhood identity, increased land prices, and reduced urban livability.

It was determined that the absence of effective land use regulation and the lack of comprehensive urban planning facilitated the uncontrolled expansion of tourist real estate projects. The need to establish public policies that balance economic development with the preservation of the social fabric and environmental sustainability was highlighted, ensuring equitable and livable urban growth for permanent residents.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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