

The Green Propaganda: Paradoxes of Costa Rica as the Poster Child for Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract : Since the boom of tourism in the late 80s and 90s, Costa Rica is considered as one of the leading countries for tourism. The size and geography of its territory, its low population density, and its image of being one of the most stable Latin American democracies make Costa Rica an attractive and safe target for foreign investors. Land ownership by foreign investors has increased as the natural resources in rural communities have been exhausted. When nature becomes an instrument to increase profit, it loses its communal value contributing to local communities losing their sovereignty and access to basic resources. The rural regions in proximity to the most tourist areas are often the most marginalized. The purpose of this research is to use the case of the rural community Sardinal and its struggle to protect its aquifer to investigate the economic and cultural consequences of the tourism boom in Costa Rican rural communities. The process of reclaiming the access to and the preservation of the aquifer enabled individuals to redefine their political views and their political power. The case of Sardinal broke the stereotypes about rural individuals and their ability to politically educate themselves and organize. Sardinal's conflict brought to light the necessity of questioning the role of modern tourism as part of Costa Rica's national identity, and as a tool for development

Keywords : Costa Rica, tourism, rural development, economy, ecotourism, environment, water, Sardinal

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