Building an Airport in Paradise

Local views on the International Airport of the Southern Zone project and possibilities for development in Osa, in the context of the election of a right-winged, populist leader

MSc Thesis

Susanne Stevenhagen

Building an Airport in Paradise

Local views on the International Airport of the Southern Zone project and possibilities for development in Osa, in the context of the election of a right-winged, populist leader.

Susanne Stevehagen
1168274

Master Thesis
International Development Studies
Track: Politics and Governance of Development
Chair Group: Sociology of Development and Change
Wageningen University & Research

Supervisor: Dr. Robert Fletcher

December 15th, 2023

Note: The data used in this research was gathered through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Respondents were not involved in the analysing of the data or the writing of this thesis. They cannot be held responsible for any of the content of this thesis. For the sake of privacy, all respondents have been anonymised.

The larger image on the cover page belongs to the website Costa Rica te Enamora (https://costaricateenamora.com/en/). The two smaller images belong to the author.

WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

This page was intentionally left blank

1. Introduction

"*We cannot think only about money, about that there's a lot of employees and better living. We have to think about nature, there must be a balance. And I think the biggest problem with humans is that we don't know where that balance is.*"

- Marlyn, Owner of the Danta Lodge in The Goose with the Golden Eggs documentary

Within development studies, the balance between conserving natural resources and development has proven to be a highly contentious issue (Arsel, Hogenboom & Pellegrini, 2016b). Traditionally, economic development is viewed as a form of progress which is achieved by exploiting a country's natural resources for domestic use and, more importantly, export (Arsel et al., 2016b). Conservation generally implies that nature is protected from use and misuse by humans, and left as it is (Folke, 2006). Described such as this, it is understandable why the two concepts are considered to be polar opposites (Le Billion, 2021). This line of thinking presents the choice as either to save nature or the economy (Xanthakou, 2018). With the social and environmental consequences of natural resource extraction being more commonly known, this view that conservation and development are mutually exclusive has been met with growing criticism. Yet the notion that natural resources must be exploited to further economic development, regardless of the (permanent) damage done to natural resources and their environment, still strongly influences governments' strategies (Svampa, 2013).

Costa Rica, internationally seen as an ecological paradise, has often been used an example to counter the idea that economic development necessarily comes at the cost of the environment. Costa Rica's previous president, Carlos Alvarado, argued at the World Economic Forum that the idea that protecting the environment would go against the economy was incorrect, and that Costa Rica's tourism industry had grown precisely because of the country's large number of conservation areas and national parks (Fletcher, Aistara & Dowd-Uribe, 2020). Costa Rica's history of reducing deforestation rates by implementing such a national park system is what has propelled it to a front-runner in conservation and environmental responsibility (Zambrano, Broadbent & Durham, 2010). This image of a green utopia is further strengthened by the country's reputation as a peaceful and democratic nation, especially compared to the civil strife and authoritarian regimes that have long plagued other Latin American countries (Fletcher et al., 2020).

Despite its' image as a green utopia, internally the country struggles to juggle the conflicting demands of sustainability and economic development (Fletcher et al., 2020). As shown by Evans (2010), Costa Rica's history of conservation by creating national parks and protected areas to combat deforestation and the loss of biodiversity happened simultaneously with an increase of deforestation and exploitation in unprotected areas. Managing the conservation of large areas while being faced with pressure to expand extractive practices for profit remains challenging (Arsel et al., 2016b). In more recent years, it is the tourist industry that has boomed in Costa Rica. And this growth of beachfront hotels, resorts, and other infrastructure to further expand the sector has put pressure on the surrounding natural areas (van Noorloos, 2011). The northern province of Guanacaste is a prime example of how rapid, market-driven growth in the tourism industry creates

pressure to develop the area, causing social tension between foreign developers and locals, combined with reduced access to resources and environmental damage (van Noorloos, 2011).

Under the right-winged and populist president Rodrigo Chaves, who was elected in 2022, it seems the relationship between development and conservation is increasingly being presented as an either-or situation, and is shifting in the direction of the former, in the form of intensified resource extraction. Chaves, a former World Bank economist, has expressed an interest in drawing more foreign investors to Costa Rica to improve the economy (Quartucci, 2022). While the previous president, Alvarado, was very focused on the environment, sustainability and conservation, Chaves seems to be less interested in these topics and has already pulled Costa Rica out of the Escazú agreement, which would have required the government to consult with environmental experts for development projects (Kinzer, 2023). President Chaves has also announced that he intends to increase the tourism industry in the south by building an international airport near Palma Norte, a plan which had been proposed a decade ago but was met by strong resistance from local communities, environmental organisations, activists and farmers (Olivares & Ramírez, 2019).

The canton of Osa, where this airport would be located, is a biologically diverse area. The area contains multiple reserves and parks, like the Corcovado National Park, which is the largest area of protected lowland rainforest in Central America, and the Sierpe Terraba Mangroves National Wetlands which includes the largest intact estuaries in Central America (Driscoll et al., 2011). While being rich in biodiversity, it is also one of the more geographically isolated and poorer areas in the country (Horton, 2009; Zambrano, Broadbent & Durham, 2010). The tourism industry has grown in the area, but it is mainly ecotourists who travel to this region (Lopez Gutierrez et al., 2020). This type of tourism is focused on a more responsible from of travel that aims to sustain the well-being of local people and conserve the environment (Braun et al., 2015). In the case of the Osa peninsula, ecotourism is mainly small scale tourism, dominated by locally owned eco-lodges, and proving economic and social benefits directly to local communities (Braun et al., 2015). This is a vastly different type of tourism than is seen in more accessible coastal areas such as in the province of Guanacaste.

President Chaves has argued that by building and airport in Osa, the area would be more accessible to tourists as well as investors and companies, spurting economic growth which would in turn benefit the people living in the region (Guillén & Mora, 2020). Arguments brought forward against the proposal, when it was presented a decade ago, centred around how the construction of the airport, as well as the increase in tourism and economic activities, would reduce space for conservation, damage the environment, and displace local communities (Guillén & Mora, 2020; Olivares & Ramírez, 2019). Furthermore, even if the increase in tourism would be mainly eco-tourism, the supposed benefits of ecotourism, and other approaches to turning biodiversity into a commodity, are still a topic of debate (Donnelly et al., 2011; Fletcher, 2020; Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016; Horton, 2009; Hunt, 2015; Lopez Gutierrez et al., 2020; van Noorloos, 2011; Zambrano et al., 2010).

This thesis focuses on the discussion surrounding the airport project mentioned above, but limits itself to the region in which the construction site has been planned. This thesis looks at how

people living in Osa view the idea of building an airport in the region, what they think the possible advantages and disadvantages of such a project are for their region, and how the airport fits into their ideas on (sustainable) development. Topics such as ecotourism, conservation, locals' needs and what development should look like, are touched upon. The thesis also looks into their opinions on the election of a more right-winged president and his revival of the project. The results are then analysed against a background of theory (see chapter 2) covering sustainable development, neoliberalism and its influence on conservation, and the rise of right-winged, authoritarian politicians.

2. Theoretical Framework

§2.1 Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has gone from a concept relevant in academia focused on environmental issues to a paradigm for development that has shaped countries' policies and companies' business plans and slogans (Ruggerio, 2021). Since its' introduction in the Brundtland Commission's report in 1987 the concept has been considered as having 'come of age' (Elliot, 2012; Redclift, 2005). While the concept seemed to have emerged in the early 70's when concerns about the negative environmental impacts of the Green Revolution in the agricultural sector began to arise, many authors view this report, and later at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, as the starting point for discussions on sustainable development (Redclift, 2005; Ruggerio, 2021). At the time, sustainable development was defined as a form of development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Redclift, 2005).

With the Rio Earth Summit also being a call for partnerships between between businesses and environmental groups, sustainable development became increasingly influenced by market mechanisms and neoliberal policies (Redclift, 2005). Concepts such as eco-development emerged, which tried to combine social development with the protection of ecosystems (Ruggerio, 2021). Despite never being incorporated into development policy, such concepts served as a predecessor for further concepts that linked development to sustainability (Mebratu, 1998; Estenssoro, 2015). The previously mentioned needs in the definition from the Brundtland Report, which were assumed to mainly refer to human needs, were replaced by market preferences, and this capitalised form of sustainable development became increasingly mainstream in almost every field (Blewitt, 2012; Redclift, 2005). As a result, debates arose between those in favour of attaching a market value to nature, and those who felt nature was something that could not be given value the same way value was attributed to marketable goods (Blewitt, 2012).

At the turn of the century, there was a shift in a focus from needs to rights. While many environmental groups doubled down on their neoliberal approach, some were seeking to distance themselves from the neoliberal solutions to development issues that were being proposed (Redclift, 2005; Fletcher, 2023). For those that did try to move away from market influences, the new point of focus became communication, empowerment and natural justice within the context of development (Redclift, 2005). The turn of the century also saw a more globalised take on development arise. Environmental issues were increasingly seen as having far-reaching consequences, and that therefore a global approach would be needed protect the planet while improving people's quality of life (Blewitt, 2012). The Millennium Development Goals that were decided upon by the United Nations demonstrated this changing focus by not only having measurable goals to reduce poverty, infant mortality and the spread of major diseases, but also outlining commitments to human rights, good governance and democracy (Blewitt, 2012). Still, this more globalised approach was met with critique, with some questioning the assumption that development as done in the Global North was something all societies desired (Redclift, 2005). Amin (2006) argued that the supposed sustainable development brought by the MDGs was a cover to increase the Global North's economic and

political dominance over the Global South. The idea of having more partnerships and good governance was more about opening up markets to the big economic powers in the West (Amin, 2006).

The intertwinement of sustainable development with economic growth is a contentious issue, and has been strongly influenced by this heritage, continuing to cause debates about the concept and its contradictory meaning (Ruggerio, 2021). Considering that sustainable development has always included goals to enhance the economy, therefore pushing for economic growth, it is understandable that some scholars view the concept as a very contradictory one. The idea of infinite economic growth is quite simply incompatible with the idea of sustainability, because continuous growth on a planet with limited resources while aiming to conserve enough of those resources for future generations is, essentially, impossible (Spaiser et al, 2017). This contradiction is still the fundamental challenge of sustainable development. And as the concept has become a mainstream approach to development, governments, NGOs and businesses continue to try and make this seemingly impossible balancing act, between conservation and the extraction of our planet's resources, work (Ruggerio, 2021).

§2.2 The Conservation-Extraction Nexus

Negotiating the tension between biodiversity conservation and economic development is one common strategy through which sustainable development is pursued. Within the field of political ecology, conservation and extraction have historically been portrayed as two distinct and separate processes through which nature is managed (Fletcher, 2023). Conservation generally refers to the protection of nature from harm such as exploitation or destruction, but its more precise definition varies depending on the author (Sandbrook, 2018). Sandbrook (2018, p.565) attempts to formulate and overarching definition to include the different foci on areas, species, ecosystems, or genetic diversity by defining conservation as “actions that are intended to establish, improve or maintain good relations with nature”. This definition presents conservation as an active action that is *intended* to do good, meaning the definition allows for the reality that not all conservation projects are successful in achieving their goals as well as for differing perspectives on what a ‘good relation’ entails (Sandbrook, 2018).

Conservation practices have been common for a long time, with the first forms of public conservation, in the form of national parks, being founded in the late 19th century (Vacarro, Beltran & Paquet, 2013). This initial form of public conservation is also known as ‘fortress conservation’, due to it exclusionary approach which has often led to the expulsion of the area’s inhabitants (Vacarro et al., 2013). Due to accusations of environmental injustices with regards to local access to resources and land, as well as continued resistance by the displaced communities, the approach was eventually revisited (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Vacarro et al., 2013).

The introduction of sustainable development, postcolonial independence and the recognition of the role of local communities as well as how conservation policies impacted them led to a co-managed approach to conservation (Cinner & Aswan 2007; Escobar, 2011; Vacarro et al., 2013; WCED, 1987) . This approach entailed a more collaborative stance on conservation where human

activity was allowed within conservation areas, and the governance of these areas was no longer managed by one central institution but co-managed with or fully delegated to local partners (Igor & Croucher, 2007; Vacarro et al., 2013).

As the societies that have traditionally funded conservation efforts turned to neoliberalism, conservation in turn also became a process that needed to be economically sustainable. Especially the economic crash of 2008 strengthen the idea that conservation projects needed to generate more income as to rely less on government subsidies (Vacarro et al., 2013). As a result nature has become a commodity to be sold to ensure its financial viability in the long run (Igor & Brockington, 2007). This market-oriented approach seems to have moved away from the previous participatory approach and has instead taken on a semi-fortress approach to conservation, where a specific area is privately owned and conserved, or in the interactions between the conservation sector and the private exploitation ventures in certain areas (Fortwrangler 2007; Pearson et al, 2013)

It is worth noting that these three forms of conservation can exist at the same time and do not necessarily follow each other in that order within a certain area (Vacarro et al., 2013). The types of approaches to conservation used vary depending on the geographical location and time.

Often portrayed as a polar opposite to conservation, extraction is defined as the "extirpation of select 'natural' materials for human purposes, including export-oriented commodity trade and industrial production such as logging, fishing, agriculture and wildlife (Le Billon, 2021, p.866)". Often, the focus lies on the processes of extraction of non-renewable natural resources such as mining and oil and gas activities, that have become iconic examples of unsuitable development (Büscher & Davidov, 2013; Enns et al, 2019; Le Billon, 2021). The extractive sector has historically been promoted in resource-rich counties as the most effective approach to economic development by international institutions and even NGOs (Simpson & Zirhumana, 2020). Regardless of political agendas, both left and right leaning governments have turned to the extractive sector to fill up the public purse and boost their economy (Svampa, 2012). Yet, many political ecologists view the sector as maintaining injustices and a (neo)colonial dynamic through which the rich Global North extracts natural resources from the Global South (Simpson & Zirhumana, 2020).

In the 21st century, the extractive sector has increasingly faced backlash for the impact it has had on people and the environment. The sector has been enabled by existing inequalities, and has only served to exacerbate them (Simpson & Zirhumana, 2020). There is very little evidence to support that extraction can bring sustainable economic development for those living close to extractive sites (Douglas & Alice, 2014; Ye et al., 2020). As described by Enns et al. (2019), the current image of the extractive sector is that it is the prime example of a world where industrialism has gotten out of hand and is destroying 'Eden'. The solution to saving Eden lies within the conservation sector.

Despite the negative reputation of the extractive sector, it has managed to boom in the last three decades. Simultaneously, the conservation sector has also increased (Le Billon, 2021). Interestingly, these two processes of managing nature which are presented as separate and

contradictory, have quite a few similarities and are far less separate and opposite than one might assume (Le Billon, 2021; Enns et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2023). In recent decades these two sectors have actually become far more collaborative with each other, with many extractive companies participating in biodiversity conservation projects, and NGOs receiving funds from such companies for their projects (Enns et al., 2019). Some might find this increasing collaboration a bit paradoxical, but when taking a closer look at the areas in which these sectors are active, the reasoning behind their activities and the approaches they use, there are many overlapping points. Firstly, according to Enns et al. (2019), there is a 75% spatial overlap between the geographical areas where both sectors are active. Many extractive sites are in or close to protected natural areas, and this is likely to increase as the demand for certain minerals increases. Secondly, the motivations of both sectors have become more similar due to the neoliberalisation of conservation. As our societies have become more neoliberal, the conservation sector was put under pressure to be more economically sustainable and less dependent on donations (Enns et al., 2019; Igoe et al., 2010). As a result there has been in a shift in thinking within the conservation sector, from "how nature is used in and through the expansion of capitalism to how it is conserved in and through the expansion of capitalism" (Büscher et al., 2012, p.4). The focus now lies on the commodification of nature to not just conserve it, but also create value for nature that can be used to fund its protection. Conservationist organisations are commodifying nature to market and sell in industries such as (eco)tourism, similar to how extractive enterprises commodify nature for the resources that can be extracted form it and sold (Enns et al., 2019). Thirdly, both the extractive sector and mainstream approaches to conservation struggle with the presence of local communities, and their livelihoods and land uses in the areas they are looking to exploit/protect (Le Billon, 2021). Where the extractive sector has often been pitted against local communities and environmentalists, pushing back against their demonstrations with active support of the host country's authorities or elites, the conservation sector has often managed to displace people with less negative attention by using a 'green alibi' (Le Billon, 2021). Supposedly the presence of local communities is a threat to the nature that needs protecting, and therefore need to be removed from the area. Especially in fortress conservation this approach is quite common, but it can also be seen in the quasi-fortress conservation within the neoliberal approach to conservation (Fortwrangler 2007; Pearson et al, 2013). Lastly, the increasing collaboration seems to benefit both sectors. In short, extractive companies are trying to present a more 'green' image and require the expertise of conservation experts and organisations to do so, or to manage projects on their behalf (Enns et al., 2019). Conservation activities on the other hand, require funds to do their work, that extractive companies are willing to pay (Enns et al., 2019). As a result, unlikely partnerships have formed where conservation projects are funded by rich individuals or companies that have little regard for the perpetuation of inequalities or colonial histories (Le Billon, 2021). Their funding seems to secure them a 'green' licence for their extractive practices, because the damage done will be offset by a conservation project somewhere else (Le Billon, 2021). But while offsetting the impact can compensate for some of the impact, this practice reinforces the arbitrary division between nature that is deemed worth protecting and nature that can serve as extract resources. Conservation organisations have defended these partnerships by arguing that

partnering with extractive companies and involving them in conservation projects is a way to develop ‘good practices’ (Enns et al., 2019). According to the WWF (2019, as cited in Le Billon, 2021) extraction is not going to cease in the near future, and a future based on renewable energy will still need minerals for batteries and electronic components so it is more effective to be involved and ensure that these extractive practices are environmentally and socially responsible, causing as little damage as possible.

Even though extraction and conservation seem to be contradictory processes, they have quite a few similarities and have become increasingly interconnected, as mentioned above. To describe these connections and similar logics and approaches, the term ‘nexus' is often used (Büscher & Davidov, 2013). Büscher and Davidov (2013) describe a nexus as “not just the connection of things, but also the means of that connection (p.7)”. A nexus is the space in which the two interconnected things engage with each other, where they influence how knowledge on each other is produced or how their material practices are enacted (Büscher & Davidov, 2013). In the case of extraction and conservation, for example, the nexus can be spatial, as they compete for or collaborate within certain areas, or temporal when extractive and conservationist project are scheduled simultaneously for a larger development project. The conservation-extraction nexus is fueled by the similar reasoning and enmities of extraction and conservation processes, which have been strongly shaped by neoliberalism, and in turn is reinforcing the neoliberal territorialisation that divides nature into ‘extractable’ resources or suitable for ‘sustainable biodiversity’ (Le Billon, 2021).

§2.3 Neoliberalism and Conservation

The intertwinement of the conservation and extractive sector has in part been fuelled by the impact of neoliberal thought on conservation (Le Billon, 2021). Neoliberalism, while being a concept that is frequently brought up with regards to the conservation-extraction nexus as well as in larger societal debates, seems to be difficult to define in a neutral manner (Thorsen & Lie, 2006). Within more critical literature, neoliberalism is described as a return to a specific aspect of liberal tradition; economic liberalism. In short, this entails that the state is to remain as uninvolved as possible in the economy and let individuals make their own decisions in self-regulating and free markets (Thorsen & Lie, 2006). According to Harvey ’s (2005) wide definition, neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey, 2005, p.2)”. Neoliberalism, as described here, does not constitute a coherent political ideology or philosphy (Blomgren, 1997; Malnes, 1998). This is because neoliberal theory does not given any indication of how political processes should be organised. For example, it does not provide answer to the question whether a state should be democratic (Those & Lie, 2006). Neoliberalism is characterised by processes such as privatisation, marketisation, deregulation (Brockington, 2016). These processes centre around giving private property rights to social and environmental phenomena that were previously state-owned, the assignment of prices to such phenomena that were previously

shielded from the market, as well as the reduction of state involvement in social and environmental life (Brockington, 2016; Castree, 2008). Neoliberalism is therefore more accurately described as a set of ideas on how the relationship between the state and its external environment ought to be, rather than a political ideology (Thorsen & Lie, 2006). The state is perceived as inefficient and corrupt, so by reducing its involvement in the market and individuals' choices, peoples' lives would be able to improve (Fletcher, 2012). If people did not manage to thrive in this system, according to neoliberal thought, that was simply the result of not being able to effectively deploy their 'human capital' on the free market (Bonanno, 2020)

Neoliberalism has been critiqued for going too far in giving over to market control, resulting in the commodification of social and ecological relationships (Brockington, 2016). It has also faced backlash for its association with greater inequalities in society, the withdrawal of state support for the disadvantaged and favouring the rich and powerful layers of society (Brockington, 2016). The support for neoliberalism seemed to have reached a breaking point after the economic crisis of 2007-2008 (Tansel, 2017). The legitimacy of the neoliberal doctrine that had been embraced as the best approach to development was strongly questioned, with some arguing that the neoliberal age was coming to an end (Altvater, 2009; Tansel, 2017). This economic crisis also impacted many democratic political systems. The parties that had stood at the forefront of the neoliberal restructuring of the world for the past decades, saw their party base crumble while more authoritarian parties and regimes with similar neoliberal credentials saw their popularity increase (Tansel, 2017). Questions around social reproduction, such as housing crises, indebtedness, employment and access to public services and areas, caused many voters to be drawn to more authoritarian political figures (Streeck & Schäfer, 2013). Despite institutions facing legitimacy deficits at every scale, the neoliberal doctrine still seems to persist as the dominant economic model (Fraser, 2015; Tansel, 2017). There still does not seem to be a clear alternative available to neoliberalism (Brockington, 2016).

Since the rise of neoliberalism in the 80's and 90's, it has also influenced conservation policy and become a topic of debate within the field (West, Igoe & Brockington, 2006; Fletcher, 2020). The neoliberal philosophy that influenced conservationist policy led to, or promoted, the creation of markets for exchange and consumption of natural resources, the privatisation of natural resource management, the commodification of natural resources, the withdrawal of government intervention in the market transaction involving natural resources, and the decentralisation of resource governance to local authorities or NGOs (Castree, 2008; Fletcher, 2010; Fletcher 2020; Igoe & Brockington, 2007). NGOs and the private sector stepped into the gap left by the reduction of state responsibility and regulations, and privatisation was presented as the key to successful conservation practices (Igoe, 2007; Igoe & Brockington, 2007; Fletcher, 2020). Reducing state influence and partnering with companies and other non-state actors would allow for an infuse of resources that the state would or could not provide, and allow locals to better themselves economically by rendering the nature that was being conserved into a marketable, tradable good (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). This neoliberal approach of conservation would keep locals from

extracting natural resources because the profit of conservation would be sufficient and that way nature would be conserved. Furthermore, the increased collaboration with non-state actors, especially extractive companies, also provided a spatial fix for the first and second contradictions of capitalism that were becoming an increasingly larger issues (Enns et al., 2019). The first contradiction - capitalism's tendency towards underconsumption and overproduction, a direct result of trying to constantly maximise profit by cutting costs - can temporarily be resolved by moving to a different area (Le Billon, 2021; O'Conner, 1998). When extractive companies have reached a limit in how much they can produce for as cheap as possible, moving into new spaces can provide cheaper labour and cheaper raw materials, allowing companies to keep maximising their profit (Enns et al., 2019). The collaboration of non-state actors with conservationist organisations provided them with access to areas that were previously off-limits. The spatial fix provided by this collaboration also temporarily resolved the second contradiction of capitalism - that capitalist production tends to destroy the resources and conditions it depends on for production (Le Billon, 2021; O'Conner, 1998). By being able to move to new areas, the depletion of one area's resources did not have become a problem for extractive companies (Le Billon, 2021).

Despite its promises of being able to conserve nature by commodifying it, making conservation profitable for locals and increasing participation and democracy for locals, neoliberal conservation has not quite succeed in keeping all of its promises. In fact, neoliberal conservation interventions have often had the same effects on local communities as the more exclusionary 'fortress' approach (Fletcher, 2020). Rather than include local communities in the ongoing conservation projects to make the more democratic, locals are still regularly excluded from the conversation and are still displaced to make room for nature conservation, albeit by private companies rather than the state (Büscher & Dressler, 2007). Also, the promised economic benefits for locals by participating in the commodification and marketing of natural resource tend to end up in the pockets of private, and often foreign and larger, companies rather than back in the community (Büscher & Dressler, 2007). Foreign interest in purchasing land for investment and development has driven up real estate costs, increased construction and speculation, causing land privatisation and the alienation of locals (van Noorloos, 2011). Neoliberal conservation does not rely on including the locals excluded by 'fortress' conservation approaches to create protected areas. They often remain left out in this approach to conservation as well (Fletcher, 2012). Furthermore, it seems to promote a relationship with nature that focuses only on its monetary value, which Ehrenfeld (1988) argues does not help to combat the extraction of natural resources for monetary gain (as cited in Fletcher, 2020).

Even though neoliberal conservation has received critiques for the rather large difference between its ideas on paper and the results in practice, neoliberal conservation itself is not perceived as a failure by many conservationists (Büscher et al., 2014). This could partly be due to the entanglement of conservationist organisations and (extractive) companies, where the first is dependent on the latter for their funds. Because of the requirement to give investors a positive impression, projects must be marketable and keep up this image regardless of how the project may be doing in practice, leading to a disconnect between the promises made by neoliberal conservation

approaches and the actual impact of these projects (Büscher et al., 2014). It could also be due to the promise, of being able to develop while protecting the environment, being presented as a future that can be achieved, if given the correct tools (Fletcher, 2020). With this reasoning in mind, it becomes easy to pass off the projects that did not achieve the intended goal as bumps in the road, since they simply did not have all the right mechanisms in place to succeed in combining conservation and development.

§2.4 Authoritarian Neoliberalism and Populism

With currently no clear alternative, the neoliberal model of development persists, although a more authoritarian form seems to be on the rise (Tansel, 2017). Neoliberalism has always depended on large parts of society accepting a system that was not in their benefit (Bonnano, 2020). It has been a system that has reinforced, and is increasingly becoming more dependent on, coercive state practices to discipline, marginalise or criminalise the opposition, and using the judicial and administrative state apparatuses to limit possibilities to challenge the neoliberal model of development (Ayers & Saad-Filho, 2015). Historically, neoliberal reforms have often been implemented in rather undemocratic ways, or by dictators seeking to strengthen their claim to power by improving their country's economy (Mitchell, 1999). This use of rather undemocratic approaches to maintain itself, has only strengthened as the criticism has grown. It is for this reason that contemporary neoliberalism is not only compatible with authoritarian models of government, but is productive of such governments as well (Brown, 2006; Tansel, 2017).

Neoliberalism was already grounded in a rather shallow and formal form of democracy due to a few reasons (Ayers & Saad-Filho, 2015). Firstly, the globalisation of the market, which required international co-operation, harmony and legislation diminished the room for neoliberal states to shape policy within their own borders (Boffo et al., 2019). Secondly, the economic restructuring that neoliberalism is know for has created a lot of losses, especially for the working class (Boffo et al., 2019). The economic restructuring reduced job stability, disorganised and disempowered workers leading them to fall even further behind in political influence, and eliminated a lot of skilled jobs in advanced capitalist economies (Tansel, 2017; Boffo et al., 2019). The transformations of social structure have made it increasingly difficult for those losing out to resist the implementation of neoliberal restructuring. As a result, mass disengagement and general apathy prevail, undermining the political legitimacy of neoliberalism (Ayers & Saad-Filho, 2015). Lastly, the hegemony of neoliberalism has led to a narrowing of political ambition and possibility for collective change (Boffo et al., 2019). Alternatives to neoliberalism slowly disappeared when revolutionary movements and communist parties slowly made way for neoliberal states across the world (Boffo et al., 2019). Also, policing dissent escalated further, especially after 9/11, to the point where privacy, collective action and civil liberties are less of priority where 'security' is concerned, even though neoliberal states claim to value 'freedom' and 'democracy' (Boffo et al., 2019). Consequently, there does not seem to be an alternative to the neoliberal model anymore, despite the fact that many do not benefit from this system (Brockington, 2016). 'Losers' of the system are pushed to frame their disappointments as a conflict of insiders and outsiders, in a system where

exploitation supposedly does not exist (Boffo et al., 2019). Instead, it is the outsiders that are besieging the insiders, in the form of corrupt politicians stealing 'our' money, or immigrants taking 'our' jobs, without ever questioning the neoliberal, capitalist system we are in because there is no feasible alternative (Boffo et al., 2019). The fiscal austerity implemented to recover from the economic crisis of 2008 only served to strengthen this sentiment, as companies recovered quickly and the rich became richer, but the average worker did not (Ayers & Saad-Filho, 2015).

As a result of this increasingly shallow form of democracy, other political forms are taking form, of which the more common one is authoritarianism. Attention-drawing leaders are grounding their exclusionary programmes in the frustrations of the 'losers' of neoliberal restructuring (Bruff, 2014). Their anger is then mobilised against social groups even lower in societies' pecking order, like migrants or minorities in the case of housing, and poorer countries for taking 'our' industries and jobs (Boffo et al., 2019). This shift is not a temporary phenomenon resulting from the crises that have plagued neoliberal states for the past decade or so, that will stabilise when the economy improves again (Boffo et al., 2019). Instead it is the result of the erosion of neoliberal democracy under neoliberalism, the alienation form the political system and institutions representing the public, and the mobilisation of mass discontent by charismatic, far-right leaders (Bruff, 2014; Tansel, 2017). Their political success, despite their more authoritarian and exclusionary views, demonstrate the potential consolidation of the this new hegemonic block under global neoliberalism (Boffo et al., 2019).

Alongside this new authoritarian form of neoliberalism that seems to be on the rise, recent years have also seen in increase in authoritarian leaders that can also be described as populists. (Alonso-Fradejas, 2021; Ofstehage, Wolford & Borras, 2022). This authoritarian populist shift has its roots in the conjuncture of multiple crises, such as climate, environmental, energy and economic crises (Alonso-Fradejas, 2021). When referring to populism, this research uses Borras' (2020) definition of the term. He defines the term as the "the deliberate political act of aggregating disparate and even competing and contradictory class and group interests and demands into a relatively homogenised voice, that is, 'we, the people', against an 'adversarial them' for tactical or strategic political purposes (Borras, 2020, p.5)". This adversarial approach makes populism an inherently relational approach to politics (Borras, 2020; Alonso-Fradejas, 2021). It is rather a means to an end than being an actual goal in itself, allowing it to be easily adapted to different ideologies. As a result, populism can take up a multitude of forms, whether it be in more authoritarian, militaristic or democratic forms (Borras, 2020). Populism can be more right-winged or left-winged, and is seldom entirely authoritarian or democratic. Since populist movements often represent a variety of groups, it becomes beneficial for the movement to not specify where on the spectrum the movement stands, as to allow for people with differing opinions to still feel represented by the same movement (Borras, 2020). Regardless, populism presents itself as being 'anti-establishment' and either tactfully or openly works to undermine a selection of existing institutions (Borras, 2020; Ofstehage et al., 2022).

The homogenisation of the at times contradictory interests into one voice is made possible by populism's leader-centrism (Weyland, 2021). Populist movements present themselves as bottom-

up movements that empower ‘the people’, headed by one leader who will execute their will and speak for them. The heterogeneous group that supports this leader entrust their agency to this leader, leaving the leader to do as they see fit without having to face any real form of accountability (Weyland, 2021). Ironically, populism’s general distrust and open attacks on democratic institutions leads to a disempowerment of the people, as these are the very institutions that serve to make the people’s voices heard (Weyland, 2021). If anything, populism has the inherent tendency to turn authoritarian. Not just by disempowering the people and limiting their options to influence politics, but also by deliberately making enemies and attacking the established political class so that they may come across as the people’s hero (Weyland, 2018). When other politicians defend themselves against these repeated waves of attacks, they tend to go for increasingly drastic countermeasures such as protests, business lockouts and even coup attempts (Weyland, 2018). As the back and forth intensifies, democracy suffers and runs increasingly more risk of either being undermined by the populist leader, or disrupted by the adversaries attempt to counter and defend their position, thus creating a process for either to become a more authoritarian leader.

Overall, populist movements flourish in times of economic instability and use extractive methods to boost economic development (Ofstehage et al., 2022; Salas & Siles, 2023). Natural resources are framed as essential commodities to support the national economy and improve the wellbeing of the people overall, which weighs up against the damage caused to environment and the people living in the vicinity of such extractive projects (Ofstehage et al., 2022). In response to topics such as climate change and environmental conservation, populists choose to demonise scientists and promote climate scepticism, or frame climate activism and environmental conservation as discriminatory against the poor, as they are not given the same freedom to develop as others did due to the impact on the environment this would have (Ofstehage et al., 2022). This is a trend that cannot not solely be ascribed to right-winged populist movements, as many left-winged Latin American governments opted to fund their social plans through extractive practices during the “Pink Tide” era (Arsel et al., 2016a; Borras, 2020). Still the practice of infringing on protected or indigenous land for extractive projects that will ‘benefit the people’, is a tendency that is more often associated with the right-winged populism that has gained in popularity recently.

§2.5 Latin America’s Turn to the Right

As mentioned earlier, there seems to be a global trend where formerly progressive countries have turned to ultraconservative, authoritarian, populist political leaders (Alonso-Fradejas, 2021). The wave of crises that has been ongoing since 2008 has led some to argue that these interrelated and complex issues are a sign that our global economic system is slowly collapsing (Arguedas-Ramirez, 2021). The impact of these multiple crises have been rising inequality and ongoing injustices, which have been further compounded by the pandemic and the lockdowns implemented in countries across the globe (Arguedas-Ramirez, 2021). With a majority feeling like they are not benefitting from the current way of governing, many have turned to authoritarian populism, which builds on this combination of fear, frustration, economic insecurity, and sense of division (Arguedas-Ramirez, 2021; Ofstehage et al., 2022; Salas & Siles, 2023).

In Latin America, this turn to right winged populism can be seen as a form of backlash against the left-winged and/or progressive governments that came to power during the 'pink tide' and that did not manage to fulfil their promise of developing their countries in a more sustainable, nature-conscious and inclusive manner (Arsel et al., 2016a; Veltmeyer, 2016). The 'pink tide' or 'progressive cycle' in Latin America was a response to the call for change and anti-neoliberal sentiments that arose after years of neoliberal policies in the late 20th century (Arsel et al., 2016b; Svampa, 2019). Neoliberalism had become the new 'world order' in the 1980's following the global debt crisis and pushed for privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation in governments across the world (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001). For countries to be able to integrate their economies into the global economy, they had to implement policies aimed at achieving these changes (Veltmeyer, 2016). The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) was implemented to aid governments in achieving this goal, and due to the IMF and World Bank's acquired leverage in Latin America, the SAP was implemented there in full force (Veltmeyer, 2016). In exchange for the neoliberalisation of their economies and politics, Latin American countries saw a boom in foreign direct investments, followed by an explosion in quantities of capital investments for mineral exploration and extraction, at the turn of the century (Sena-Fobomade, 2011; Veltmeyer, 2016). Multinational companies made billions in profits and direct investment income in Latin America, of which most was derived from the export of primary commodities (Higginbottom, 2013). At the turn of the century this export-driven, commodity-based market was a major feature of the political economy in Latin American countries, but at the same time, neoliberalism had become increasingly unpopular as an economic doctrine (Arsel et al., 2016b; Veltmeyer, 2016). In multiple countries, social movements has formed, fed up with the SAP's impacts on citizens and their every day lives, and managed to successfully challenge the neoliberal model, resulting in a swing to the political left in many Latin American countries (Veltmeyer, 2016).

While the neoliberal doctrine had opened up Latin America to the global market, the effect on citizens was far less positive. The two major problems that the neoliberal doctrine was blamed for were the increases in inequality and in poverty (Arsel et al., 2016b). States reduced their expenditures by cutting back on social programs and welfare, and by privatising state-owned companies. Also, land grabbing and the destruction of the environment became an issue, especially for indigenous groups, as foreign companies searched for natural resource-rich areas to exploit (Veltmeyer, 2016). The financial gains of the investments and exporting primary commodities largely ended up in the hands of the companies extracting and exporting, rather than the local population working for these companies (Veltmeyer, 2016). This process has since been critiqued as being a more modern form of colonialism, where goods are extracted for little cost and with little benefit for the local population, to be sold and used to better former colonial powers (Arsel et al., 2016b). The onslaught on people's livelihoods that was brought on by the neoliberal economic doctrine, as well as this post-colonial dispossession, led many to vote for more left-leaning parties that promised a more inclusive, equal form of development (Radcliffe, 2015; Veltmeyer, 2016).

After 1999, Latin America saw a political retreat from the neoliberal reforms that had been imposed in the years before (Acosta, 2013). Instead the left-wing and progressive parties that came

to power introduced new regulations and controls on their markets, started processes to strengthen the state and focused on combating poverty (Acosta, 2013). This new regime was, despite its more inclusionary approach to development, still heavily dependent on global capitalist economies (Radcliffe, 2015). Alongside this political shift to the left in Latin America, a commodity boom occurred as a result of the Latin American markets being heavily favoured compared to the elevated international prices, leading to a wave of resource-seeking foreign direct investments in Latin America (Svampa, 2019; Veltmeyer, 2016). As a result, the turn to the left coincided with an increase in extractive activities in many countries in Latin America, fuelled by the idea that resource-rich countries could speed up their development by engaging in more extractive activities (Arsel et al., 2016b; Svampa, 2012). While the revenue generated was indeed used to fund programs and take steps to alleviate poverty and reduce existing inequalities, the rise in extractive activities resulted in a larger numbers of conflicts between indigenous groups, socio-territorial movements and socio-environmental groups on the one hand, and governments and large corporations on the other (Svampa, 2019). This new 'progressive' extractivism turned out to be very similar to earlier forms of extractivism with regards to its destruction of the environment and livelihoods (Gudynas, 2009). Veltmeyer (2016) points out that the problem that arose here was twofold; one being the continued dependence of these left-leaning post-neoliberal governments on neoliberalism, the other that these governments were striking a deal with global capital to share the resource rents that were derived from the extraction process. At their core both issues are the result of the inherent contradiction of extractive capitalism and the state's support of extractive capital, resulting in unequal economic and social development and, as in the case of many Latin American countries, the 'resource curse' - that resource-rich countries are developmentally poor, while resource-poor countries have achieved high levels of development (Acosta, 2009; Veltmeyer, 2016). In the case of resource extraction we see the contradictions of capitalism exacerbated as they relate to natural resources rather than labour exploitation, and reinforcing capitalism's central contradiction; its' tendency to produce ever-greater levels of inequality (Narváez, 2014; Veltmeyer, 2016).

After the Latin American 'pink tide' failed to deliver the alternative development that had originally been promised, resentment against the political elite and institutions that had maintained the extractive model of development grew (Cachanosky & Padrilla, 2019). People across Latin America were frustrated with the political elite, felt that international markets had been prioritised over them and began to turn to more right-winged populist leaders (Cachanosky & Padrilla, 2019). This rapid rise in popularity in populist, authoritarian, right-winged leaders is consistent with the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism in the world (Deutsch, 2021). Aspects of populism overlap with the approach of authoritarian political leaders, with regards to how they mobilise the frustration and worries of large parts of the population to then present themselves as being 'for the people' while simultaneously dismantling systems that allow people to voice their options and steer political decisions (Weyland, 2021).

§2.6 Ecotourism and Conservation in the Green Republic

Costa Rica, also known as the Green Republic, is considered to be an example of a peaceful, democratic country, that has managed to avoid the political unrest that has plagues many of its neighbours, and that has succeeded in a form of development that still allows the country to conserve and protect a significant part of the country's nature and biodiversity (Fletcher et al., 2020; Zambrano et al., 2010). In recent years, as other democracies elected right-winged populists as their leaders, Costa Rica's seemingly robust democracy kept the country from seeing authoritarian figures come to power, and the importance it places on the environment has created a reputation for the country as a safe and beautiful destination for travellers from all over the world (Fletcher et al., 2020). Roughly a quarter of the country's territory consists of national parks and the country is home to around 4-5% of the world's biodiversity, and considered the 'poster child' for ecotourism (Evans, 1999; Honey, 2008). Costa Rica was already know for its large system of national parks in the 19070's and 1980's (Evans, 1999; Zimmerer, 2011). But from the 1980's onwards this focus on protecting and conserving areas of land shifted to more market-driven purposes (West, Igoe & Brockington, 2006; Morrissey, 2017; Zimmerer, 2011). Neoliberalisation also influenced approaches to environmental conservation, meaning that conservation also needed to be economically viable, as discussed in §2.3. Costa Rica was no exception, and in fact market-based approaches to conservation became one of Costa Rica's main responses to intersections of environmental conservation and land use (Zimmerer, 2011).

Out of the multiple market-based conservation approaches, ecotourism has been the most longstanding and widespread (Fletcher, 2020). The term refers to forms of tourism where people travel to more remote and relatively undisturbed locations to enjoy and admire the scenery, wildlife and plants (Horton, 2009). Within the context of neoliberal conservation, the idea is to make the conservation of natural areas economically viable by charging tourists to have access or guide them through these protected areas. According to Honey's (2008) stakeholder theory, people will be more motivated to protect something if they receive value from it. If the conservation of natural areas can bring economic development to people in the area, by catering to the ecotourists, they will be more likely to support conservation practices. Interestingly ecotourism seems to be the only MBI under the umbrella of neoliberal conservation that has managed to genuinely harness local resources as economic revenue through market transactions (Fletcher, 2020). In the Osa region in Costa Rica, where the dominant from of tourism is ecotourism, people working in the (eco)tourism industry have reported receiving better wages than their counterparts not working in the industry, expressed mostly positive views about conservation areas such as national parks and seemed to have a stronger sense of environmental consciousness (Driscoll et al., 2011; Hunt et al., 2015).

While there are examples of ecotourism projects being successful in both promoting conservation and economic development locally, ecotourism has been critiqued for not meeting its' goals to conserve nature and promote local livelihoods, ideally while maintaining a small ecological footprint (Almeyda-Zambrano et al., 2010). Critics have argued that ecotourism is a form of tourism shaped by the neoliberal conservation agenda and can therefore not tackle the inequalities that are exacerbated by this form of conservation (Fletcher, 2012; Horton, 2009; Igoe & Brockingto, 2007).

The participation of locals in ecotourism for example has faced backlash for being unequal. There are differences in access to land and resources to start an ecotourism businesses, where wealthy foreigners tend to have easier access than the less wealthy locals (Flecther, 2009). Horton (2009) distinguishes three different tiers in participation, with the top tier consisting of people, often foreigners, with sufficient funds to start their own eco-lodges and make the highest profit. They are followed by the second tier that consists of smaller 'cabinas' that cater to budget travellers. And the third tier is made up of less well-off Costa Ricans who work in the industry as cooks, guides, handymen, etc., often employed by the richer international lodge-owners. The profits made though ecotourism are therefore quite unevenly distributed, meaning that economic development is not occurring for the wider community but only for a small group of most likely already wealthier people (Fletcher, 2012).

Another point that has been questioned is to what extent ecotourism enterprises help to spread environmental consciousness and whether that then actually leads to more environmentally friendly behaviour (Fletcher, 2012). In Driscoll et al.'s (2011) research in the Osa region they found that people working at ecolodges and as guides were more informed about conservation than those not working in the industry, but admitted to still occasionally using the for their won extractive benefit. Furthermore, ecolodges rarely actively offered classes and information to locals on the topic to spread more understanding and knowledge (Driscoll et al., 2011). Still, in cases of ecolodges presented by Hunt et al. (2015) and Almeyda-Zambrano et al. (2010), the people working at these lodges had more knowledge on conservation and the environment, and people living in the area were more positive about protected areas such as national parks. Horton (2009) points out that while the ecotourism industry in Osa has not had the desired success of combining conservation and local economic development, but there have also not been any extremely negative consequences either.

While ecotourism has often been presented as a positive agent of sustainable development by offering a from of conservation that can also make a profit, extractive practices have been presented as all negative and destructive (Honey, 2008; Fletcher, 2013). But, similar to how conservation and extraction are not polar opposites (See §2.2), ecotourism and extraction also overlap. As discussed in the paragraphs above, ecotourism can also entail negative social and environmental consequences (Neves, 2010). Consider the example of unequal wealth distribution and access among those working in the ecotourism industry, mentioned above. And having a government that promotes conservation on the one hand, while allowing extractive processes to be carried out in unprotected areas, seems quite contradictory, this Janus-face is less a trait of the government of Costa Rica and more the result of the neoliberal approach to environmental management (Fletcher, 2013). The market-based approach to conservation that ecotourism offers means that policy makers have few regulatory tools to ensure sufficient revenue to maintain conservation as a more attractive enterprise than extraction. Instead they depend on market forces. But as demonstrated by Fletcher (2013), more often than not extractive industries will offer more lucrative opportunities than the market-based instruments available for conservation, which pushes people toward the extractive approach rather than the supposed sustainable alternative. On the flip

side, extractive practices are increasingly being presented as contributing to sustainable tourism as well, with companies looking into corporate responsibility and ‘ethically’ sourcing their products. The line between conservation and extraction is increasingly blurred here, especially when investment in conservation are presented as offsetting the environmental damage the extractive practice in questions creates (Büscher, 2014). Ecotourism, as form of neoliberal conservation, and extraction are more like two sides of the same coin. Different approaches, but based in the same neoliberal way of thinking.

§2.7 Costa Rica’s Shift to the Populist Right

The neoliberal way of thinking that permeates Costa Rica’s environmental conservation approaches, has also been intertwined in the country’s economy and politics. The mounting critique on neoliberalism and people frustrations with the multiple crises that have occurred since 2008 (see §2.4 & §2.5) have also affected the people of Costa Rica. Facing similar issues as in other countries, such as rising inequality, worries about housing and jobs, and climate issues, were compounded by the lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic (Chaves, 2022). In 2022, the people of Costa Rica elected the right-winged populist Rodrigo Chaves in 2022, who has displayed a more authoritarian style of governing than his predecessors (Kinzer, 2023). He has repeatedly attacked the press, referring to national newspapers as 'the rogue press’, blames traditional parties for the political dysfunction in the country and has committed to banning gender education as well as rolling back on sexual and reproductive health and rights (Harrison, 2022; Vilchez, 2022; Webb, 2023).

The rise of populism in Costa Rica may seem surprising since the country is well known for history of democratic stability, bipartisanship and its promotion of environmental protection and conservation (Fletcher er al., 2020; Matamoros & Castillo, 2022; Zambrano et al., 2010). Yet Costa Rica has experienced crises that have affected the public’s welfare, creating an opening for the conservative and authoritarian style of politics that seems to have risen up in many formerly progressive countries (Alonso-Fradejas, 2021). The presidential election in 2018 already saw a the introduction of a populist candidate in the form of Fabricio Alvarado (Salas & Siles, 2023). Fabricio Alvarado positioned himself as the alternative option to a government that was failing to manage the fiscal crisis and struggling to maintain Costa Rica’s economy and standard of living in general (Salas & Siles, 2023). He was able to further increase his popularity after the former government, in which his opponent Carlos Alvarado served as minister of labour, was plagued by corruption scandals, as well as being blamed for the economic crises that occurred in the year leading up to the campaign (Matamoros & Castillo, 2023; Salas & Siles, 2023). A part of the population blamed the relatively more progressive government at the time for the deterioration the country’s economy and its cultural decadence (Salas & Siles, 2023). In the weeks before the election, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights published and advisory opinion which required Costa Rica to legalise same-sex marriage (Perelló & Navia, 2023). This demand boosted the more conservative candidate, which was met with backlash from more progressive parts of the population, that ended up helping Carlos Alvarado to secure a win with support from other parties (Perelló & Navia, 2023; Matamoros & Castillo, 2022).

The deterioration of the country's economy as well as the slipping living conditions, healthcare and education were issues that were of importance in this campaign, but had been a growing issue for a longer period of time (Perelló & Navia, 2023). The overall growing discontent stems back to the last decade of the last century, in which the effects of the pro-market reforms, that had been implemented after the economic crisis in the 80's, were being felt in services such as healthcare and education, that saw their public investments shrink (Salas & Siles, 2023). At the time Costa Rica's political system was a bipartisan one, consisting of the leftist Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) and the rightist Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC) (Perelló & Navia, 2023). The building crisis of representation in both parties led to the rise of new parties, such as the new leftist Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC), at the turn of the century (Matamoros & Castillo, 2022; Perelló & Navia, 2023). In response, the PLN moved more to the centre while the PUSC evolved towards a more liberal-conservative position (Matamoros & Castillo, 2022). Over the years multiple new parties emerged, as the growing discontent created a space for people outside of the traditional parties to enter into the political arena (Perelló & Navia, 2023). This did not prevent the decrease in participation in national elections, and only led to an increase in political fragmentation (Matamoros & Castillo, 2022). The splintered political landscape did not help the general dissatisfaction amongst the people of Costa Rica. The lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic saw a rise in inequality and poverty, as well as in unemployment (Arguedas-Ramírez, 2021). In this context, where many feel that life was better 'before', it is not very surprising that a candidate runs on a platform that promises to bring back this better version of the country. These promises often include promises to change or circumvent the slow, bureaucratic institutions that make up the democracy and have not listened to the public. Instead of the current government functions, more populist candidates claim they will work in a more direct and effective manner, which in practice tends to mean that democratic elements of governing are pushed aside and aspects such are human rights are ignored to bring back this ideals (Cabezas-Barrientos, 2021). In the case of Costa Rica the rise of populism has mainly occurred within the context of conservative and religious groups (Cabezas-Barrientos, 2021).

3. Case Description

The case selected for this thesis is the project of building an international airport in the canton of Osa, in the Brunca province of Costa Rica. This region has been one of the more impoverished regions of the country with the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC) reporting with a poverty rate of 35% and an extreme poverty rate of 15,8% (INEC, 2013; Hunt et al., 2015a). Over the last decade these numbers have improved, but as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, inequality and poverty levels rose again across the country (Arguedas-Ramírez, 2021). The Brunca region now has lower levels of extreme poverty but still has the second highest level of poverty in the country (see figure 1) (INDER, 2023).

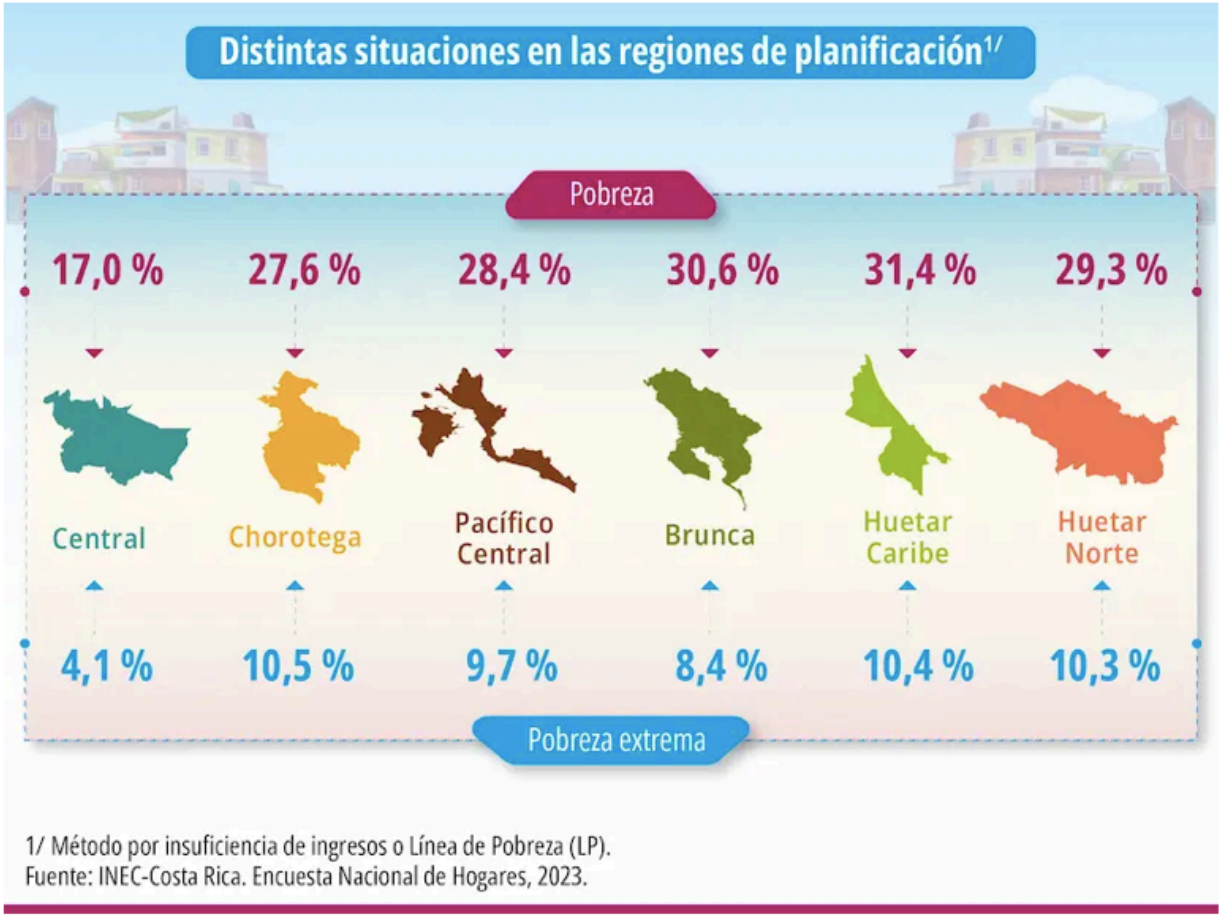


Figure 1: *Levels of poverty (top) and extreme poverty (bottom) per province. (INEC 2023)*

President Chaves' argument that the region needed to boost its economy through tourism, to improve the people living in the region, and that tourism was the best approach to do so, is not new (Guillén & Mora, 2020). In a document entitled "Plan Maestro del Aeropuerto del Sur – Costa Rica", the Department for Technical Cooperation of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (Dirección de Cooper-ación Técnica de la OASI) presented the stimulation of the tourism industry in the southern zone as being the main reason for the airport project (Mora Calderón, 2022). They list multiple reasons for choosing to build the airport in the Osa canton, near Palmar Sud (see figure 2), such as the region being suitable for runways due to the lack of strong winds, having soil suitable for building tracks, being in close proximity to the coastal and Inter-American highways,

and having the conditions to connect the airport to necessary services such as water, electricity and telephone (Mora Calderón, 2022). In the document the area is described as a site that was originally occupied by a banana company and now being partly used for banana production, and partly being overgrown with weeds. There is no mention of the communities in the fincas (Mora Calderón, 2022).

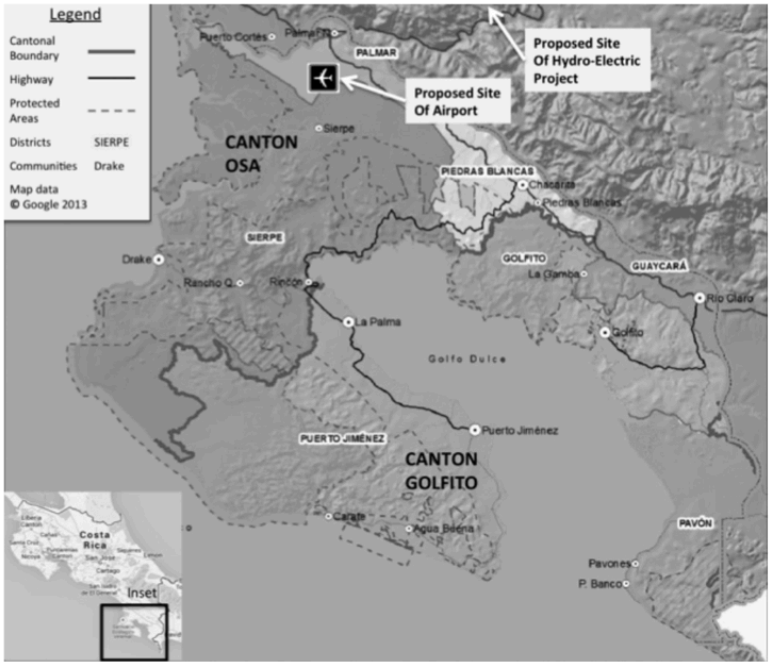


Figure 2: *Map of the Osa canton and Osa peninsula.* (Hunt et al., 2015)

At what point in time the project was proposed seems a bit unclear. What is clear is that the goal of finding a location for this international airport was turned into a declaration of public interest on October 16th, 2010, during the second administration of Oscar Arias (Mora, 2023, May 10th; Mora, 2022). In that time the fincas 8, 9, 10 and 11 of Palmar Sur in Osa were selected as the future airport's location (Mora, 2023, May 10th). A year later, during the administration of Laura Chinchilla, an executive decree was signed declaring that the construction of the airport was a viable project. During this time, the Vice-Minister of Air and Maritime Transportation, announced that the area was going to be reduced to only include fincas 9 and 10 (Mora, 2023, May 10th).

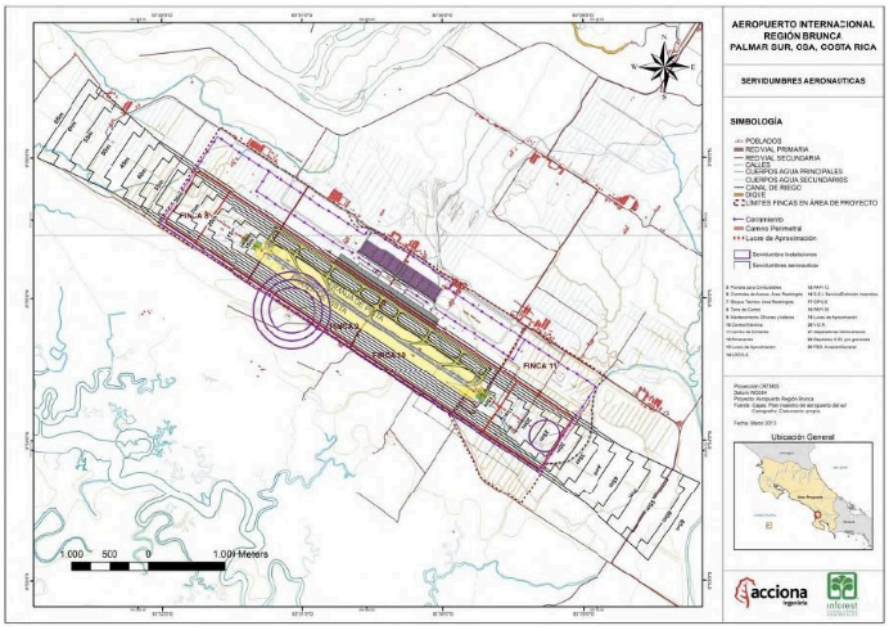
On the map in figure 3, the exact location of fincas 9 and 10 can be found. Some of the concerns mentioned on the podcast 'Voces y Politica', run by the University of Costa Rica's radio station, on the topic of the location that has been chosen are the proximity to the Terraba-Sierpe wetlands, and the archeological site containing pre-Columbian spheres (see figure 4), in finca 6 (Mora, 2023, May 10th). The potential impact of building a large scale project next to a fragile ecosystem such as the wetlands, as well as the possible impact on spheres in finca 6, which are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, should not be underestimated, according to those unconvinced by the choice in location (Mora, 2023, May 10th).

Considering the size and infrastructure an airport would need to be to accommodate aircrafts flying international routes, the project has been referred to as a mega-project (Abedrapo, 2011). In figure 4, the planned airport is mapped out with the actual runway in yellow covering the width of finca 9 and 10.

With an airport of that magnitude it is not only the actual construction site that will have to mitigate potential impacts. Concerns have also been voiced about the more far-reaching consequences for the entire region. Considering that the Osa is know for its high levels of biodiversity and large areas of protected land (see figure 3), it is not the construction of the airport

Figure 3: *Location of Finca 9 & 10 in Osa. (ElPais, 2023)*

itself, but how the improved access to the region will impact the surrounding areas. Seeing as the goal of the airport is to bring in more tourism, and hopefully lead to an economic improvement for the region, the increase in tourism will necessarily require more hotels, more activities for visitors, and better infrastructure. These changes will take up space, which will in turn reduce the space available for conservation efforts and likely damage the environment as well (Guillén & Mora, 2020; Olivares & Ramírez, 2019).



Note: Taken from Consorcio ACCIONA INFOREST (2013).

Figure 4: Airport project in Palmar Sur (Mora Calderón, 2022)

4. Earlier Research

The topic of the construction of an international airport in Osa has been researched before. The initiative INOGO (Iniciativa Osa y Golfito), a program set up by the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment, focused on sustainable development led by Costa Ricans, ideally from Osa or Golfito. With this focus on sustainable development, the initiative aimed to work on improving social and economic factors such as education and employment (INOGO, n.d.). The initiative worked with locals communities, the government, the private sector and NGOs. In 2012, as part of the initiative, Aguilar (2012) looked into the differing perspectives on the project to build an international airport near Palmar. The goal was not to argue for or against an airport, but rather to give an overview of information on the topic for those interested in learning more (Aguilar, 2012). The research included interviews with different actors, a survey conducted amongst the residents of Osa and Golfito, news articles and opinion pieces. It then describes four potential scenarios, without mentioning how likely one or the other may be (Aguilar, 2012). The first scenario describers the impact of an international airport becoming a popular destination, an increase in tourism occurring and the high-value tourism the region has make space for more low-value, large-scale tourism, despite incentives for tourist organisations to do otherwise. If the airport does bring in a lot of tourism, most likely regulations and incentives will do little to limit the 'Guanacaste-effect' and fast-paced development to accommodate all these tourists will occur. The second scenario is that of the airport being constructed but not drawing in as much tourism as hoped, which would preserve the low-impact high-value tourism in the region, but does little to incentive the economy. The third scenario takes a quick look at the expansion of the airport in Chiriqui instead, while the fourth scenario covers the idea to invest in the improvement of existing airports and roads to create a moderate growth in tourism and spread it throughout the Southern Zone. No one scenario is presented as better than the other. The scenarios are followed by a discussion of extreme weather incidences in the area and important environmental aspects to consider. The final parts of the research mention that decision makers and stakeholders should carefully analyse how tourism growth should be achieved and whether and international airport is the appropriate choice or not (Aguilar, 2012). The author does not express a clear stance on the matter.

The airport project has also been researched by the Kioscos Socioambientales program that is part of the University of Costa Rica. This program has mainly focused its research around the airport in the finca's where the airport is expected to be built. One of the documents published around 2015 focusses on who the campesinos living in finca 9 & 10 are, what their lives are like, explains a bit about their culture and history, as well as the struggles they face (Mora Calderón & Artavia Vargas, n.d.). The conflict about the land they are living on that is going to be used to build an airport is also mentioned. Here they briefly explain that their fight against the airport's construction continues but that they still have not received any information on the topic from the government (Mora Calderón & Artavia Vargas, n.d.). A second document focusing on campesino resistance in the fincas 9, 10 and finca Chánguena in Palmar was also made in collaboration with the same program by the University of Costa Rica and locals from the fincas (Guillén Araya, Mora Calderón & Morales Nuñez, 2019). This document focuses more on the history of the area, what it

was once used for and what is being cultivated now. The impact of recent extreme whether events are also covered and the document goes into more detail how the campesinos that are there now came to live there (Guillén Araya et al., 2019). The text also explains how despite caring for and cultivating the land for decades since the fruit cultivating companies left, the government does not see them as the land owners, placing them in a precarious position since this land is their only source of food and income (Guillén Araya et al., 2019). A third document focuses on similar topics, but from the perspective of the women living in the fincas (Cascante Jiménez & Artavia Vargas, 2019). This text also covers who they are, what their lives are like, how it impacts their health and also how they are involved in the fight for their lands and what step could be taken to continue their efforts (Cascante Jiménez & Artavia Vargas, 2019). While the last two documents do not cover the airport specifically, they do give a more detailed account of how precarious the position is of many campesinos since they do not own the land they live on and cultivate, and because it is quite literally all they have. Mora Calderón's (2022) research at the University of Costa Rica also goes into the airport's planned construction in fincas 9 & 10. While the thesis is about the banana cultivation company in Palmar, and how its presence and subsequent exit influenced conflicts of land rights more broadly, the case of the airport is also included. In this section, the projects proposal and slight modification, such as the reduction of the number of fincas that were going to be part of the construction zone, are explained. Mora Calderón's (2022) then goes into possible environmental and archaeological points of consideration, as well as the impacts for the locals living there, and how the issue of land rights come into play in the case again.

While not necessarily working on topics relating to the airport or locals views on development, organisations such as JUDESUR (The Southern Zone Regional Development Board) have been involved in multiple projects on topics relating to development, increasing tourism attraction and infrastructure (JUDESUR, 2017; INOGO, n.d.).

Another relevant development project in the southern region that has also been the topic of multiple research papers, is the El Diquís Hydroelectric Project (Adams et al., 2014; Campregher, 2010; Habtom, 2010; Mora, 2019; Mendoza, 2015; Opperman et al., 2019; Todd, 2013). This construction of this mega-dam on the Terraba River was a plan brought forward by the Costa Rican government to supply the growing national demand for electricity in a clean and sustainable way (Habtom, 2010; Mora, 2019). The project was given the status of priority with regards to the necessary research that needed to be conducted before construction could begin (Mora, 2019). But the dam was planned to be constructed in an area that would result in the flooding of parts of the indigenous territories near the Terraba river (Habtom, 2010). Throughout the process of developing the plans to build the dam, the indigenous people were not involved, and struggled to receive information about the project (Adams et al., 2014). As well as impacting territory that indigenous people lived on, the project would also have ecological impacts. The area that would be flooded would see al of its current nature destroyed, and the wildlife and sediment downstream in the river would be affected as well (Adams et al., 2014). The government indefinitely suspended the project in 2018, after continuous resistance from indigenous groups and environmental activists, arguing that it was no longer an attractive financial project due to other renewable resources being cheaper

to use for energy production thanks to advances in technology (Hite, 2022; Opperman et al., 2019). Hite (2022) points out that the project was suspended, and not completely abandoned. She argues that the hydroelectric dam is an example of process that tends to occur in these kinds of cases, where a very neoliberal approach to conservation is taken and a solution is proposed that supposedly allows more people to continue their way of life, in this case consuming as much electricity as they want, while not needing to repeatedly extract from a finite resource to supply this energy demand by using a renewable resource. That solution is then applied with little attention paid to realities in the local context, is then met with resistance, and is then cancelled or postponed only be proposed again in a different form after some time (Hite, 2022). The project of the hydroelectric dam bears a certain resemblance to the international airport project in Osa, in the sense that there is a similar tension between a project intended to meet an idea of (sustainable) development, but at the same time causes environmental damage and has undesirable societal consequences that are seemingly not considered. Both the research on the El Diquis Hydroelectric Project, as well as earlier research on the International Airport of the Southern Zone project in Osa, have served as important building blocks for this thesis, helping to place the initial ideas of this research project into a wider context of different views on approaches to development and the balancing act between development and conservation in Costa Rica.

5. Research Questions

Within the context of the more authoritarian neoliberal government that Costa Rica has recently elected, one may wonder how that might influence the Green Republic's approach to development. Especially since this new government is reviving development projects that had previously been paused due to critique and protests against the possible social and environmental impacts. The planned airport in the southern region of Costa Rica is a current example of such a project being revived, and happens to be in an area that is known for its high levels of biodiversity and successful conservation projects, but also for its relatively high levels of poverty and need for economic development. This begs the question how people view the need for development, and in what form, and protecting the region's natural biodiversity in such a different political climate than the country previously had. Therefor the main research question is as follows:

How do the local inhabitants of the Osa Peninsula view the future of development for their region in the context of the rise of right winged-populism,? To what extent does Chaves' government's revival of the project to build the International Airport of the Southern Zone (Aeropuerto Internacional de la Zona Sur) align with their views?

The main research question will be answered by looking into more detail by means the of the following four subquestions:

- *How do local inhabitants imagine the future development of Osa to be, particularly with regards to sustainable development?*

- *What do local inhabitants perceive to be the potential positive consequences of the construction of the airport?*

- *What do local inhabitants perceive to be the potential negative consequences of the construction of the airport?*

- *To what extent do local inhabitants perceive the election of a more right-winged, populist government to be of influence on the project's revival?*

6. Methods

§6.1 Research methodology

Since the objective of this research was to gain a better understanding of locals' views on the international airport project with regards to development in the context of the election of a new, more right-winged populist president, an ethnographic methodology was used. As described by Willis & Trondman (2000, as cited in O'Reily, 2012), an ethnographic approach usually entails multiple methods that involve direct and prolonged contact with those involved in the topic of research, recording the contents of the encounters in rich detail and attempting to represent the human experience within the chosen context of research, allowing for a high level of internal validity (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). In practice this comes down to participant observation for longer periods of time, and having the research design evolve throughout the process of the study (Savage, 2000; O'Reily, 2012). This methodology goes beyond the 'thin' factual description of the events that are occurring, and goes a step further to provide a 'thick' description that contextualises the action to understand its particular meaning (Geertz, 2008; Wilkinson, 2013).

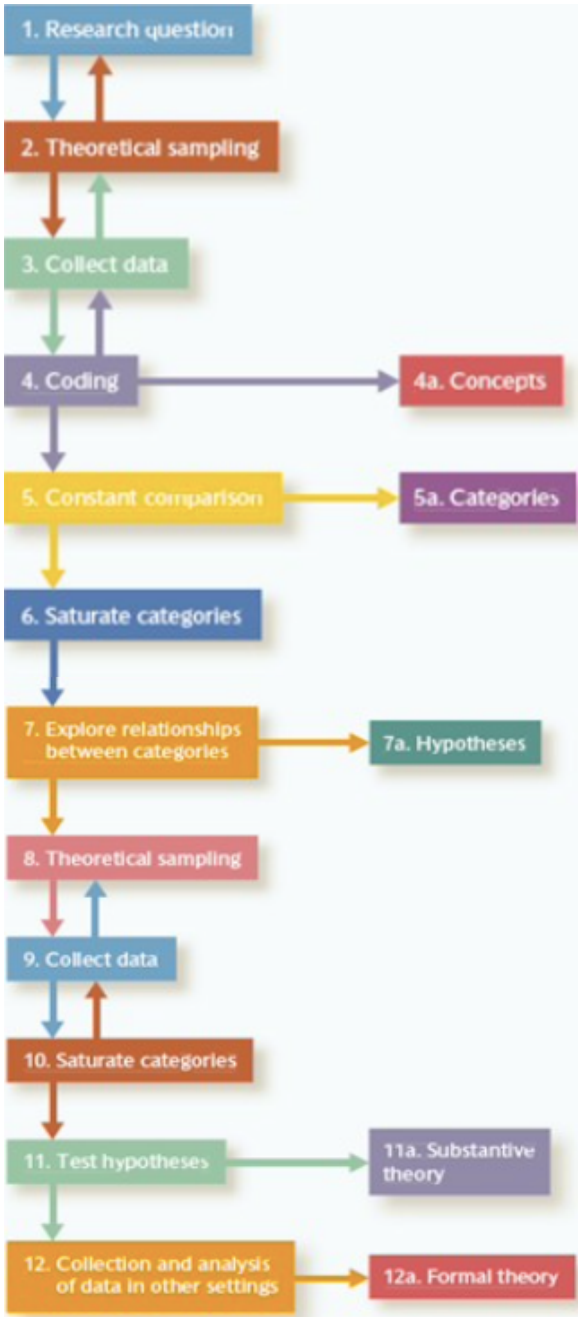


Figure 5: *Processes and outcomes in grounded theory* (Bryman, 2016, p.571)

This constant cycle of reflecting on new data, and adjusting or even reinventing the design of the research accordingly, is central to a grounded theory approach, which requires the researcher to start gathering data to shape their research questions and the direction of their research (Heath & Cowley, 2004). This approach was well suited to the case study of the international airport project in the south of Costa Rica, since it was difficult to find recent information on the project or the situation in the region from the Netherlands. This topic would require to enter the field and start gathering data while formulating research questions and shaping the rest of the research. Figure 5 gives an idea of the process of a grounded theory approach, and demonstrates the back and forth between the collection and coding of data and looking for relationships between the codes and categories that arise through

the process of coding. It is in this back and forth movement that I had the room to modify my interview guides and the theory I had entered the field with.

Throughout my time in the field, I opted for an overt, active approach to my research. The people I came into contact with were aware of my position as a student and researcher, which made it easier to obtain informed consent when asking people whether they were willing to be interviewed. I also opted for active participation because it facilitated my ongoing access to potential respondents, as well as the larger community. By helping out on farms in the area, and switching from a hostel to a local cooperative as my place of residence during my stay, I was introduced to people in informal settings. As a result, there was time to become acquainted, explain what I was doing there, and start a more natural conservation about development in the region, the airport and politics, which would then allow me to propose an interview to discuss these matters further. These approaches were extremely useful because they allowed to find a way around the lack of information on the topic during the preparatory phase before entering the field. People were also more comfortable with my request to record the interview when they had a better idea what I was researching, and what their answers were going to be used for.

§6.2 Research location

When looking into the planned construction of the international airport of the souther zone, it became clear that the somewhat bigger town in the area where I would have a better chance of finding a sufficiently large pool of respondents, was in the town of Puerto Jiménez on the Osa peninsula. Puerto Jiménez is a two hour drive away from Palmar. Just under Palmar Sur, in fincas 9 and 10, is where the airport is planned to be built. Due to a lack of contacts in that specific area, combined with the fact that Palmar is a small town and getting involved in daily life there could prove to be difficult since there are not that many opportunities or events to get to know locals, I made the choice to stay in Puerto Jiménez. Puerto Jiménez is a larger town and is also a popular destination for tourists interested in nature and wildlife, since the national park of Corcovado is accessible from this town. With regards to potential changes in tourism, this location also seemed like a logical choice due to the attractive destination it already is for tourists. Therefore potential impacts would likely be felt there, or at least be of interest to the community, that largely depends on tourism for its income. Due to the close contacts between people working in the tourism industry or in development, in different towns around the gulf and in Palmar, I was still able to speak with people from outside of Puerto Jiménez, which compensated of the fact that I did not travel myself out of Puerto Jiménez much during my time there, aside from nearby towns.

§6.3 Data collection & sampling

Throughout this research the three types of data collection that are commonly associated with ethnographic research were employed; interviews, observations and documents (Genzuk, 2003). The initial phases of preparing the fieldwork relied solely on documents such as news articles and existing academic research. Participatory observations and semi-structured interviews

were conducted throughout the six weeks of fieldwork. The choice to only conduct semi-structured interviews, was due to the goal of using a more bottom-up, qualitative method, where the respondents are able to steer the conversation towards what they feel is relevant to the context (Blair, 2015). This allows interviewees to frame their opinions and views in the context of their lived experience. I had prepared two interview guides with themes and questions that I believed to be relevant based on the preliminary research I had conducted before entering the field. One was designed for locals in the area that did not work in the conservation sector or have hold a politically relevant position with regards to policy on tourism, development or conservation. The other interview guide was designed with people in mind who were either working for NGOs, were foreign business owners, held a local seat of power, or were involved in policy around development, tourism or conservation. There was quite a lot of overlap in the two interview guides, but certain details were different with regards to how their work in a specific sector might provide them with different insights,

Aside from the interviews, I also engaged in participant observation throughout my time in the field. The advantage of engaging in participant observation is that as a researcher you are more closely involved in the day-to-day lives and activities of the people that you are observing. This serves to become better equipped at seeing as others see (Bryman, 2016; Genzuk, 2003). Where interviews make for only feeling contacts with people of the group you are observing, participatory observation creates closer contact, allows for a better understanding of the relations between contexts and certain behaviours and also coming across topics that were not expected but are relevant to the research (Bryman, 2016). Since the preparatory research conducted before entering the field did not give an indication of how the situation was being experienced at the local level, it was not possible to have a clear overview of themes I expected to encounter. It seemed more logical to keep a more open-minded approach and see what came up throughout my time in the field, and therefore take on methods that would increase my chance to encounter themes that were not common or widely known. This, again, also reinforced the need to use a method that was based in grounded theory.

At the start of my fieldwork I was brought into contact with a university professor who travelled to Osa often, also for some of his courses. Through this person I was able to get into contact with a number of people in the area who he thought might have an opinion on the topic. From there on more interviewees were found though the process of snowball sampling. While this approach did provide me with multiple interviewees, from different towns across the Osa, many of the interviewees were working in the same sectors. In an attempt to diversify my sample, I decided to look in to local organisations that were volunteering or involved in the community in some other way. Through online research, following groups on social media and looking at posters and ads around town, I ended up finding a local cooperative, focused on supporting local farmers and improving the contact as well as the trade between locals in town and farmers seeking to sell their products. By staying with this cooperative and participating in volunteering events to help out on farms in the area, I was able to enlarge my pool of interviewees to also include people from

different walks of life, helping to limit bias and distortion within my pool of respondents. At the end of my time in the field, I had conducted 21 formal interviews, 4 informal interviews for which there were no recordings other than my notes, as well as 17 informal conversations with people I met throughout my time in the field. In the group of people that I interviewed, the majority was living on the Osa peninsula, either in Puerto Jiménez, Carate, La Palma, or outside one of these towns on a farm. Some were from different towns such as Palmar or Golfito, and there were people from different sectors of work. Some worked for NGOs, other had their own businesses or farms, some were guides, other were locals that grew up in town, and some were higher placed officials, making for a relatively diverse pool of interviewees. 13 out of the 25 interview were in Spanish, the other half was done in English. The informal conversations that I held throughout my fieldwork were almost all in Spanish. Before going into the field I had spent a month living with a Costa Rican family and attending intensive Spanish classes five days a week. The goal was to be able to have a conversation with people on the topic of the planned airport, on their ideas about development and how the current political situation might be of influence. While my Spanish ended up being good enough to interview people and understand their answers, it was not fluent. The advantage of choosing to interview in Spanish as well as English was that it opened up a lot more opportunities to interview people since many did not speak English or did not feel comfortable speaking in English. Opting for Spanish allowed me to conduct interviews with these people as well. Another advantage of conducting many interviews in Spanish was that it allowed the respondents to express themselves in their native language, allowing them to explain in more detail an be more nuanced in their responses than in a language that they were less comfortable in. One point of attention that is worth considering is that, is that due to me speaking with and accent and making mistakes it is possible some respondents may have simplified or modifies their responses in a way that they felt might be easier to understand. Also, I was not always fast enough to ask follow-up questions in the middle of a long answer or story. Because of this certain details may have been missed. Having a someone who fluently speaks the language would have perhaps led to better quality data, or to respondents being able to speak more comfortably without having to mind my level of Spanish.

Aside from the interviews, I was also sent documents about earlier research on the topic, such as three documents made by locals form the finca's where the airport is going to be built, as well as three documentaries on tourism, development and conservation in Osa and the construction of the future international airport.

§6.4 Coding & analysis

Intelligent verbatim transcriptions were made of all the interviews, both in Spanish and English. For the purpose of having all quotes in the results in English, the Spanish interviews were then translated to English. For the coding of my data, I started with the open coding of my data and moving on to selective coding once all of the interviews, documentaries and files had been had been coded openly. The process of open coding entails the breaking down of data into small parts, comparing and examining them, to produce concepts that can be grouped into categories (Bryman, 2016). Charmaz (2006) describes this first phase of coding as initial coding, which tends to be very

detailed to provide initial impressions of the data. It is in this stage that new codes and ideas are created, requiring the researcher to keep an open mind (Charmaz, 2006). After having completed the initial coding of all the data I reviewed them again and proceeded to code selectively. In this process some codes that turn out to not be as relevant are dropped, and the focus is placed on the most common codes and those that are most relevant (Bryman, 2016; Charmaz, 2006). In this phase of coding the researcher can also look into the relationships between categories to create a better overview of a core category and how it links to other categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited in Bryman, 2016). The constant reflection while coding allowed me to slightly tweak my interview guides when topics arose that I had not previously considered as relevant to my research. This process of incorporating new topics into my interview guides, and continuing the collection of data was continued until successive interviews or observations led to the creation of a category and highlighted its importance, achieving theoretical saturation. As described by Charmaz (2006), this point where new data does not result in new theoretical understanding, means that the relevant categories are saturated and the collection of data can cease. At this point the categories and relationships were analysed further to create a substantive theory. This is a theoretical model that provides a 'working theory' for a specific context, which is not generalisable can be transferred to contexts with similar characteristics to the context beings studied (Gasson, 2009).

§6.5 Positionality

As a researcher, the positionally can influence the outcomes of your reproach project and is therefore worth reflecting on. Throughout my time in the Osa I struggled at times to contact potential respondents since on more than one occasion I was asked what my research was going to do for the people of Osa. The region has already been the topic of many studies, and a few of my initial contacts very strongly expressed a desire to see the information gathered be shared with the communities. While in most cases this was not meant as a reason for me to not conduct my research, for some it was a reason to respond negatively to my inquiries. This made me hesitant at times to reach out, not wanting to bother people who perhaps were no longer interested in being involved in research that was not communicated back to the community. This made me extra mindful of how I approached respondents, which may have influence who I did and did not end up speaking with.

On the other hand, the month of Spanish classes did open a lot of doors for me, as it allowed me to interview numerous people who would have not wanted to be interviewed in English, either because they were not comfortable expressing themselves in the language, or because they simply did not speak it. While my Spanish was not fluent, it was sufficient have a conservation, ask the questions I wanted to and understand the conversation throughout my interviews. I recorded the audio of my interviews, with the interviewees consent, to listen back at a later time for details I might have missed or not understood. I believe that being able to overcome this language barrier served to enrich the data that was available to me and allowed me to enlarge my pool of respondents significantly.

An important point to consider, in my opinion, is that my way into the community in Osa was through the contacts of a university professor. Many of his contacts were people who went to university and who worked either in conservation or in tourism, or both. Through the process of snowball sampling, my pool of respondents expanded and became more diverse once I was on location, but I had to make an extra effort to get into contact with people living in the more rural parts of the peninsula. It was not until my last two weeks in the field that I managed to conduct interviews with campesinos and engage in informal conversations with them. While the overall pool of interviewees does include people from different towns, different backgrounds, jobs and education levels, I do think this way of entry may have impacted my pool of respondents to have an overrepresentation of people with an academic background.

Lastly, the difficulty of getting around in the south of Costa Rica without a car or motorcycle did at times make it complicated to meet certain interviewees. While I was able to interview people though digital means such as zoom and WhatsApp calls, this may have impacted the conversations I had. I feel that some of the context that I would have gotten by going to meet certain interviewees in their place of residence or work in Osa could have provided me with more thorough details of the context they were in. Aside from the fact that it can be more difficult to build rapport over online calls, which impacts how comfortable people feel with sharing information, the internet connection was not always steady or available for these meetings, resulting in parts of conversations falling through and information not being recorded, and having to reschedule meetings which ended up costing more time than anticipated.

7. Results

§7.1 Views on development

Throughout the interviews, interviewees were also questioned about their ideas on potential development for the Osa in more general terms, than just with regards to the planned international airport. One of the main themes that came forward was about finding the balance between nature conservation and bringing more development to the region.

"*We all say, development has to come yes, but it has to be done in a balanced way. Without us compromising one thing or the other.*"

- Interview 22/06/23 (a)

"*The impact is always going to come one way or the other. That is how it was with the marina, […] and well, it was resolved, the marina is there, it is generating jobs, investment, it is an important project. The impact of poverty, the need and lack of development is worse than the environmental impact. I am not saying that we must destroy nature for economic progress, never. We must find the capacity to balance your environmental impact to generate wealth, but we cannot stop progress because of an issue for which ways should be found, […] technical and legal ways.*"

- Interview 15/06/23 (b)

Within the theme of striking a balance between conservation efforts and projects to boost the economic development in the region, and with it the quality of life and access to services, opinions differed as to where that balance should lie. Some felt that conservation efforts had been given too much room, and that as a result there were only limited possibilities to make a living in the area. While most did not see an issue with conservation efforts in general, those who felt conservation projects were being given too much freedom explained that the protective measures often resulted in locals not having access to resources or areas that they were part of their daily lives. They felt that the important of such resources and areas to locals were not taken into account, as well as the impact of restricting access was having on their income and/or food sources. The idea that they were harming that which needed to be protected was rebuked by arguing that when they made use of these resources, it was purely for sustenance, not to deplete it.

"*And one of the things that I personally see a lot is when people first come here they're so focused on their species of interest that they try to oversimplify the concept of conservation because they believe, hey, I really just love these sea turtles or I really just love these monkeys or I really love these sloths. And what can we do to move the rest of the world away from these animals to be sure that they can do what they do in their natural environment. And sometimes when you haven't lived here long enough it's easy to oversimplify the concept and not take the social aspect into account about how are all these people that actually grew up here and live here, how are they going to*

sustain themselves in a way where we can keep them purchasing food from the supermarket and not shooting it out of trees."

- Interview 07/06/23 (a)

"*It's the history of conservation in this region, [it] has a very dark edge to it and many people don't know about that. And it's also never really been acknowledged how the harm that was done to the people, and the way that they were painted as being harmful to the land, and how that was used as a justification for, basically for stealing land from people. Because even though it said that they were compensated for it, you can see that most of those people that have been displaced are living a subsistence lifestyle.*"

- Interview 17/06/23

In some instances, the protected areas that locals no longer were allowed access to ended up being used by hotels, companies, state projects, etc. This creates even more frictions, since the argument of conservation only seems to apply to locals, and not to those coming in with a business plan or development plan for the area.

"*And they are entitled to not let us go through it in kayak, by boat, go fishing there, go swimming there. Because it's private. They do have that marine space given to them as a concession. That's what they get when they build a marina. So that would be... And that is the part that causes more resistance because when people were fishing there and then the boats, the guards [from hotels] would come and tell them to leave the marine space. They were like, what the hell are you talking about? I have always fished there. What are you talking about? And that I think is the biggest concern for them.*"

- Interview 05/06/23

"*The other thing is also the place where it is going to be done, at some point it was planned to do it in a place very close to the wetland, destroying the wetland, destroying nature. So on the one hand, the Costa Rican is prohibited from investing and being able to take some 'chuchecas' [*molluscs*] as we call them, it is prohibited, they are stopped. But the State does come and builds and destroys.*"

- Interview 16/06/23

For some, conservation was important but they felt that the current state of affairs required a bigger focus on economic development: creating more job opportunities, reducing hunger, improving local healthcare and education. Conservationists were portrayed as people who did not seem to understand these issues, or who were not the ones most affected and could therefor afford to prioritise nature over human needs.

"*We have conservationist people who are always going to draw out everything. We have had people here with us who said, ah, look, but why are you doing this and why are you doing that? But these*

are people that they have nothing to lose. I understand. They want to protect everything, it doesn't matter if what's happening is affecting us."

- Interview 16/06/23

"*[If] we stopped struggling with education, with feeding people, like, there will be like a real distribution of this wealth. Then, for me, it would be really hard to argue that the wetland, it's an incredible channel for migratory birds and there will be a lot of trouble with birds with the airport, I won't be able to say protect birds when they are telling me this is going to save this much people, this is going to create this much jobs, this is going to create this much investment in education and health.*"

- Interview 05/06/23

In this context, almost all interviewees were referring to the protection of plants and animals went speaking about conservation, but a few also included the protection of historical and archaeological sites, like the pre-Columbian spheres in finca 6, as a form of conservation that was being prioritised over locals' needs for employment and sufficient food.

"*I am of the opinion that we cannot delay progress for the sake of some spheres, […] They are taken out, relocated in the museum of Finca 6, and we take advantage of them from the tourist, cultural and historical point of view, […]. It is not fair that a region has delays because of some pre-Columbian spheres that are very good, but now people need work. And I am very sorry, but in the face of need, hunger and lack of employment, we have to move forward with practical things.*"

- Interview 15/06/23 (b)

For many, the core of this issue was not so much that there were conservation efforts in the area, but more so that people in the area were really struggling to get by and were seemingly not considered when conservation projects were set up or requiring funds to function. With most naming lack of jobs opportunities and difficulty with putting food on the table as the biggest issues many faced, little access to healthcare and good quality education were also mentioned as issues that communities were struggling with. The phrase 'we can't eat leaves' was used at times to express their sense that conservation efforts in the area were not aware of the

"*I think because even for Puerto Jimenez, personally, I think a little bit more of jobs,*
a little bit more of income, it will be good for the area. Yeah, I think it needs a little bit more. There's people that struggle, you know, lots of people struggle around here."

- Interview 21/06/23 (a)

Amongst those who felt that a little less importance could be attributed to conservation, considering the issues many locals were dealing with, none argued against conservation per se. In fact, for many the richness in biodiversity was one of the most things they valued most about the Osa. Some of the interviewees who had grown up in Osa felt that respect for nature was part of their culture, that they

were already aware and mindful long before any NGOs showed up, and that their way of life was one that had little impact on the environment around them.

"*That's how we grew up, we were very, very, very poor, we had no money, but my parents always taught us many good values. My dad was always a nature lover, and today [speaking of family members] is very admired by many people, for the passion he has for nature, but that was, my parents instilled it in us since we were children, to take care of nature, not to destroy it.*"

- Interview 22/06/23 (a)

In conversation with one of the locals in Puerto Jiménez, whose family had lived in the before the national park of Corcovado was created, he mentioned that in his family the protection of turtle nests was part of their day-to-day life. That being mindful of nature was part of their life, even when they were out hunting, they would not take more than they needed. They were distrustful of conservation NGOs since they felt that while locals back in the day would only take what they needed and be mindful of their environment, NGOs now protected species by moving animals or their nests and offering activities or experiences around those animals to tourists to fund their work. They argued that locals had always conserved for free, it was part of life, and that they would not disturb the animals, whereas NGOs were disturbing them while trying to attract more money, and somehow it was the locals who were harming the environment and needed to be kept away.

Others felt that the little impact locals had on the areas was more due to the lack of wealth and resources to develop projects that could severely impact nature.

"*Yes, the thing is like us being not wealthy in the Osa peninsula, it's actually a good thing for the environment. Because if I want to build a bodega for the kayaks, I will build it with bamboo. Not because I am super conservationist, maybe because of it, but not mainly because of that, it's because I don't have the money to build like a monstrosity. But if I had the resources, I would probably first think, no, let's create this huge bodega with a lot of security. I cannot do that. And that's the case for most of the business owners in the Osa peninsula, it's like, yeah, no, I don't want a huge hotel, I just want cabinas. That's what we can afford. So that's actually our wealth level. It's a good thing for the protection of the environment. We are developing slowly, we are learning in the process, we are becoming more aware.*"

- Interview 5/06/23

Some argued that the awareness of the value of the environment around them was something that most understood in theory but did not or could not always apply in practice. In informal conversations with a member of NGO staff the example of fishers was given. They explained that some tend to fish more because the more they catch, the more they can sell. Yet, in the long run, this is likely to harm the fish supply and the fisherman's business as a result. And that this was a long-term view that not everyone shared yet. Among some of the expats in Osa, the sentiment was expressed that while they had seen a large loss of environment in their home countries, people in Osa had a very different way of life and had not seen such environmental degradation occur yet,

which might also explain why they had differing views on the value of nature and how far conservation should go.

"*[...] why are people cutting down so many trees? Well, when you've lived with trees your whole life And they've been everywhere. You actually don't think about there being a scarcity of trees. When you're coming from a place like myself, who has a scarcity of trees, and so you're nurturing every tree for it to grow. And you would never think about cutting down a tree. It's just a completely different context.*"

- Interview 17/06/23

When discussing what the future of development of Osa should look like, and what important aspects need to be considered, many suggested forms of development that were more bottom-up, with a long term focus, a consideration for people as well as the environment and shaped by the needs of local communities more so than big companies. Some referred to sustainable development, while others used different terms to describe variations on this concept.

"[About Corcovado] *I love hiking there I love to see the animals there, but we need to find other projects. We need to support community-based tourism. We need to find other attractions we can develop. Other types of tourism not only nature tourism, but traditional tourism with indigenous people cultural tourism with our culture being important too.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (b)

The main focus of the variations proposed was to ensure that people in town were able to maintain or set up small businesses to benefit from the tourism coming into town. Seeing what had happened to other remote locations when they opened up to a larger scale of tourism and development, was the main explanation for this fear, combined with the argument that people in Osa already had to work hard to get by. Therefor if the region was going to be developed, it should benefit the locals above all.

"*It's good to try to boost development in the area, especially for the people who live here. But you would have to think in another way, a more sustainable model and put in value what they really have here.*"

- Interview 2/06/23

"*Or people, they have business here and also people going to the park and staying in cabinas and eating at the restaurants in town. Instead of people like coming to a big hotel and like all inclusive and not even getting out of the hotels like it happened in Guanacaste. So that will be for me the sustainable development [...] that it could benefit the local people.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (b)

A few interviewees also pointed out that the pace of life in Osa was a bit slower than the rest of the world, and that it would be better for the region to develop at its own pace. This would allow for the elements that make Osa unique to be incorporated in its own form of development, rather than follow a mainstream, more capitalist model in which locals' values and traditions could be lost.

"[] the long-term impacts and the transformation of what is now the southern zone, which is mainly characterised by nature and indigenous peoples. And that it is a type of development. The problem is that they put it as if it were not development. It is as if it were backwardness or, if that were, I don't know… And instead people defend that kind of development. What people want is more support to continue doing what they do, not to be changed to do something else."

- Interview 9/06/23

"*It also allows the region to be very slow. It has a different timing from the outside world. When you're in the Osa, things are moving slower.*"

- Interview 5/06/23

Interestingly, while there was a lot of overlap in what sustainable development should entail, there were still variations in what it should include and what it should be called. As pointed out by two of the interviewees:

"*And so that's the beautiful part of this, is a lot of times different people will think of different things when we're talking about the same word, right? Like development.*"

- Interview 7/06/23 (a)

"*It is a sustainable development that is now being given another name, isn't it? And it's a regenerative development. It's another name, right. Because it's already very, very, what do you call it? It became like a catchphrase sustainable development. And most people don't apply it as it really is.*"

- Interview 7/06/23 (b)

During the interviews, various interviewees mentioned that a more capitalist idea of development was still very prominent in the region. They argued that for many people a development approach that focused on bringing in tourism and businesses, providing jobs and having an income. In one of the interviews, a respondent mentioned that many people do not know how to make money in other development models or think that there is no way for them to make money in more social, sustainable forms of development. They also mentioned that for many a promise of a big development project such as the international airport has been sold as a solution to all their financial and economic problems, in the short-term. Sustainable approaches tend to take longer, and can be more expensive, while the capitalist promise of cheap and fast solutions has already been promoted. Also, the larger tourism industries tend to attract businesses and tourists that do not seem to care

much about the environment or locals, rather about experiences when they want them without too much effort.

"[About who will support a more sustainable approach] *The minority. It's a minority, unfortunately. Like, hotels will support this idea, like ecologists… But all the other tour operators won't, and people in Drake Bay won't and… yeah, no. A small minority.* [Why?] *It's because it's easier to sell Sirena, and it brings you a lot of money, and you have a lot of customers. And it's easier to just convince that person that if you go with a boat to Sirena you'll see a tapir. It's so much more difficult to convince a family; you need to walk five kilometres and you'll see a tapir. I mean people just don't want to walk, people just want to see things like if it was a zoo. Also, tourists are not really well educated too, some are but not everybody. So yeah, it's something…, it's a world issue. It's not a simple local thing that we can change.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (b)

But some argued that there is a middle ground by which nature and local communities do not have to completely be destroyed for development, but while also not having to break with our capitalist world system en neoliberal economy. They argued for various forms of neoliberal conservation, by which the conservation of nature becomes profitable and support locals by having them manage it. Payment for environmental services, and especially ecotourism were mentioned as possible solution. A few respondents referred to such approaches a sustainable development as well, since this approach also takes into account the environment and the needs of locals.

"*I believe more in sustainable development, which puts the human being, the generation of resources, the triangle that exists, where there are three components that are important. Because only conserving, conserving, conserving generates poverty. Because it is a very closed circle. And if there is no policy, as I was saying now, from the State, to give back to the people who are conserving in some way, such as the environmental payment service, to those who have their farms, What are people going to live on?*"

- Interview 6/06/23 (b)

"*We have to get to the point of opening our minds and know that we have to do conservation with people, that we are not an isolated thing from conservation, but that we are integrated in conservation.*"

- Interview 7/06/23 (b)

"*Here there are many people, for example, in the Gulf Forest Reserve, so, it would be better if these people were deeded these lands and given the opportunity to develop tourism ventures, hand in hand with nature, because they are in the buffer zones*"

- Interview 22/06/23 (a)

§7.2 Reasons for an international airport

In all the interviews, formal and informal, reasons were given why an airport could benefit the region. The most common response was that the economy would be given a boost, the region would be more accessible to companies and tourists, that it would lead to the creation of more jobs and create a more stable source of income for many locals.

"*But also I was seeing other people and they say, you know, like this is going to be good because it's going to be more, create more jobs. And they've been saying this […] and it will be good because it's just an airport and people have easier chance to come to the area.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (a)

The Brunca region, under which the Osa falls, has the second highest percentage of people living under the poverty line (INEC, 2023). Many people, especially in rural areas, struggle to make a living. Multiple interviewees brought up the high levels of poverty, and that the additional work and tourism boost brought by the airport could perhaps help reducing this poverty. Some argued this would mainly happen close to the airport, since that is where the most jobs would be needed to provide services to incoming tourists, while others argued the effect would be felt further away from the planned construction site in Palmar, in areas that tourists would be more likely to visit.

"*Well, in relation to the airport, I believe that the airport will generate benefits at a local level, let us say, where it will be located, because it will generate employment. Within all the poorest areas there are those farms. So, if we think of something, of doing something in the poorest, poorest area, building an airport is a benefit. […]* [On the impact the airport could have on the tourism industry] *That the impact of the tourism that is going to come, is not going to be too big. And the impact is not going to be where the airport is. The impact will be on the tourist poles.*"

- Interview 14/06/23

"*So, what we* [in Puerto Jiménez] *are going to have is an indirect effect. It is not like a direct effect as Sierpe or Palmar will have.*"

- Interview 22/05/23

A few interviewees argued that the effects of the airport would not just be in a specific area, but that the whole of the Brunca region would benefit from having an international airport in the region. They felt that the project was necessary, since the region was not a very popular tourist destination and desperately needed more investments to improve its' inhabitants quality of life.

"*An airport investment will totally transform the socioeconomic reality, the demand for investment will be much higher, tourism will grow and the Brunca region will go from being the least visited region, to a region possibly with higher visitation, and possibly with higher tourism revenues. It is*

an issue that will make a socioeconomic change, and it is a relevant project, that is to say, it should never be doubted that the project is necessary."

- Interview 15/06/23 (b)

In Puerto Jiménez, the example of the new hotel Botánika was given to demonstrate how new businesses in the toursim industry could create more job opportunities. It is worth mentioning that the construction of this resort, as part of the Curio collection by Hilton, was not without controversy. Not everyone who was interviewed felt this type of high-end resort by a big hotel chain was fitting in Puerto Jiménez, a town that mainly caters to small-scale eco-tourism. But, as confirmed by one of the co-founders, the large majority of the hotel staff is from Puerto Jimenez or the Osa Peninsula. This approach to hiring locals was mentioned as a crucial component of the potential tourism boom that the airport could bring, as it would ensure that locals actually benefit from the additional that become available.

" *Because just as they could make more hotels and those hotels could hire people who are not from Jimenez, there could be hotels that have as a policy to hire people who are from the communities. I understand that this is a Hilton policy. Even before they built it they started recruiting people and training them. And if you go to the Hilton most of them are young people and people from the community that are working. Maybe like the general manager or the chef and some people like that are not from here. But I go to meetings at the Hilton and most of them are local people.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (b)

Another point that was made in multiple interviews was that the pandemic had definitely increased the need for economy activity and investments in the region. Interviewees explained that Costa Rica had a relatively long period of lockdown under Covid, in which the tourism industry practically shut down completely. In many areas, especially where tourism makes up a large part of the economy, this led to a rise in people losing their jobs, struggling to make ends meet, and little to no money available to invest in local infrastructure and communities' needs. As a result, the promise of a development project like the international airport bringing in more jobs, boosting the tourism industry and attracting more investments has become even more attractive than before.

"Y*ou know, there's different financial realities that come to pass and I feel like I feel like Covid almost really bankrupted the whole country here. And because tourism is so…, it's a big part, really the main part of the economy and in a lot of different ways certainly in small communities and areas like ours*"

- Interview 07/06/23 (a)

"*The benefits are, it's like textbook, any development. That there will be more work, there will be job openings, there will be more income from* [organisation]*, that everyone is going to be wealthy and happy because there will be more tourists coming and the Osa Peninsula will be in the map. It's like a very kind of classic explanation. Yeah, it's very classic and it's very centred in the income, in the*

economic income. And of course, when you have people that are struggling after a pandemic, and when you have people that are struggling just because we are struggling in the region, that sounds amazing for them."

- Interview 05/06/23

Aside from the possible increase in tourism and jobs in that sector, the airport could also improve trade conditions for the agricultural sector in Brunca. An informal interviewee explained that this sector could also see an increase in jobs if there was an airport closer by, through which fresh local produce could be exported in a shorter timeframe rather than having to transport produce up to San José first. For agricultural cooperatives an airport would also open up more business opportunities for this very same reason.

"*But in the end, international airports are not only for moving people and increasing tourism, which is good, but also for trade. It opens up a lot of business opportunities for cooperatives like us and farmers.*"

- Interview 15/06/23 (a)

Some even saw further possibilities of developing trade agreements with Panama and even a freer movement of people and products across the border with Panama. This would then improve trade and tourism sectors for both countries, and could potentially allow the Brunca region to expand multiple aspects of its economy.

"*We were even thinking of a free transit of the western regions of Panama and the Brunca region of Costa Rica, to facilitate trade, to have access to an international airport and for Panamanians to have access to tourism, right? And a lot of alternatives that would make it easier for us to position ourselves economically. I mean, no matter where the airport is, for us it is essential that it is built.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (a)

"*Because what is proposed with this airport is to make alliances with Panama. To be able to export products. And in addition to that, take the entire southern region, the entire Brunca region, which is from Pérez Zeledón to Corcovado and Punta Banco, Coto Brus. In other words, the whole region would benefit from this project. What does it mean? It would be a completely organised destination. A destination for the commercialisation of different products. And from there, many activities emerge. Transportation, new services, new hotels. Producers with a safer vision of producing and having cheaper transportation costs.*"

- Interview 07/07/23 (b)

As well as jobs and boosting the economy, improving the quality of life in local communities was mentioned as a reason why this airport is needed. One interviewee mentioned that the arrival of amenities such as electricity was something people in remote areas like Drake Bay had originally

been opposed to but are now very happy with. The world around them had changed and it was only normal that people living on the peninsula would also want modernise. A lot of this had to do with the low levels of education and lack of access to schools, lack of infrastructure and poor connectivity between cities and towns in the region, as well as to more important cities in the country.

"*We from the southern cantons, which are Corredores, Cotobrús, Buenos Aires, Osa and Golfito, and now Puerto Jiménez. We are in the indexes, the lowest socioeconomic indicators in Costa Rica. The best positioned is Golfito, which is ranked 63rd. We have no infrastructure, still no connectivity, it is very difficult to make connections, either by land or by air. We still do not have a decent road and also the public transportation resource is quite defective. It is not tourist friendly. So, the need to have an international airport is obviously a priority.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (a)

This is not to say efforts to improve the quality of life of locals in town such as Puerto Jiménez have not been made. Multiple NGOs do in fact focus exactly on such themes. Yet, despite the step being taken by NGOs and local organisations, improvements are slow due to the complexity and interrelatedness of multiple issues. For example, if an NGO works to provide children with better education in town, they will still need to leave the region to continue their studies at a higher level. This results in financial barriers since travel is time consuming due to poor roads and finding lodging closer by can be costly. For those who do get a degree and find a job, many will not come back to their village because it is hard to find jobs in the area. Having an airport providing more jobs and investments could help with finding the money to invest in the area to tackle multiple issues at once such as infrastructure, access to and the quality of education, healthcare services, etc.

"*For me, if you tell me it's going to be in Palmar, in one of those old pineapple fields, or old banana fields that are now palm fields, epic, go for it. Because at the end of the day, we need money to come in to the area. We put millions of dollars of money into it through our NGO, and we barely move a tiny bit of the community. If we've helped 50 families come out of extreme poverty, then I'm exaggerating. Even if our numbers are in the thousands, it's hard to actually make this work. It's a very slow difference. Whereas with let's say a couple of bigger opportunities that come into the region, it moves a little faster for sure.*"

- Interview 12/06/23

An international airport in the area was also presented as a way of the region to become less dependent on the money being made in popular tourist destinations in the north, such as Guanacaste. Having an airport would make it possible to redistribute the tourists across the country, by making the south a more attractive, accessible destination.

"*I feel like having an airport that is six and a half hours away, it creates a financial hurdle that is very troublesome on top of the fact that it's pretty expensive. And […] having one closer by would alleviate that, I think it would I think would help a lot of areas in in the southern zone of Costa Rica to become more popular.*"

- Interview 07/06/23 (a)

"*We need this to be a tourist destination and not to support us with Fortuna or Monteverde or San Jose, but we need to be a destination. How are we going to be a destination? If we have to bring clients from Santa Maria and Guanacaste. If we have an airport and they also allow me to make packages with Panama.*"

- Interview 07/06/23 (b)

In an informal interview, a respondent also pointed out that this greater accessibility would also help the connectivity between locals in the southern region and the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM). During the rainy season a few areas, especially in Osa, are hard to get to. Roads are out of use and people can be cut off. But even in general there are not many ways for people in the south to get to the GAM where major hospitals and universities are. Having an additional, larger, airport would improve this connectivity according to some.

Those in favour of the construction of an international airport were aware of some of the critiques the project was facing, such as environmental impacts due to constriction, an increase of people coming into the region and the fact the proposed construction areas is close to an archeological site that has been recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Amongst these interviewees, the potential environmental impacts were acknowledged but many felt that these environmental impacts were not going to be that large, that they were going to occur at some point regardless of the construction of an airport, or that nature would adapt as it had before.

"*Susana, you don't need an airport to ecologically impact a wilderness area. The tour guides of Puerto Jiménez themselves sought the possibility of increasing Sirena's carrying capacity. And to me that is a very negative impact for the protected wildlife area.*"

- Interview 07/06/23 (b)

"*There are impacts on nature, it is going to have more people, bring more people here, more tourism, more development. So more construction of buildings and that is going to have an impact on nature. […], but still nature always adapts to everything. The tapirs are used to seeing tourists arriving alongside them and already ignore them. They already know it is not a problem. Other things can be accommodated.*"

- Interview 16/06/23

In the case of the archeological site, some proponents of the airport argued that these sites could be incorporated into the airport project. Perhaps a museum could be built in the airport, or it could be made into a tourist attraction close to the airport that could profit from the incoming tourists.

"*And, for example, when it comes to archaeological sites, this is not new. For example, in Italy, in Rome. That is, any new construction that is done, they have to first remove what is there, because there are archaeological foundations. So, they take out what is there and then they build something new. So, also, like saying that we are not going to touch an area because there is archaeological evidence, it is not like a justification for not doing it. Because it could be managed, we could take out all the archaeological evidence and put it in places for exhibition.*"

- Interview 14/06/23

The potential impacts of the airport would even be mitigated, according to some, since the airport would serve to bring in tourism and the current form of tourism encountered in Osa is closely intertwined with environmental conservation. Many eco-touristic projects seek to make the protection and conservation of nature in the area something that is financially feasible for locals. Having a more tourism come in would increase the demand for such projects, since that is what the region is known for with regards to tourism, resulting in a monetary stimulus to conserve more.

"*All growth has an impact. What we have to be clear about is how to ensure that this impact does not affect the resources we have. And the main objective of an airport, such as the one seen here, is for tourism. So it is illogical and contradictory for some people to think that this airport is going to fence off forests. This is not the case. Rather, it will generate conservation projects because the objective is mainly for tourist visitation.*"

- Interview 15/06/23 (a)

Alongside the idea of mitigating the impact by setting up more eco-tourism projects that can help to conserve nature, there is also the fact that there are multiple rules about where people can and cannot build, what they can build, and what standards the construction must adhere to. According to some of the interviewees, this will limit the potential construction of large hotels and tourist attractions. There are also similar rules with regards to heritage sites, and archeological areas, where only steps can be taken when the proper checks have been passed. The example of Guanacaste is occasionally mentioned as an example of what the rules around construction in Osa and other areas will prevent. In Guanacaste a rapid increase in tourism resulted in very fast paced buying and selling of land, construction of beachfront hotels and infrastructure to meet the demands of the tourism industry, with little regard for the environment of local communities.

"*The Osa Peninsula already has protected areas. If you look at the map, there is the national park, there is the Golfo Dulce forest reserve. There is also the natural patrimony of the State. Yes, there is the maritime-terrestrial zone that also has regulations by law. The mangroves are also protected. Yes, and what else can I tell you? And all the water springs are also protected. The water springs have a protection of 100 meters around. Okay, so there are many parts of the peninsula that are protected. There's a lot of the peninsula that's protected and there's very little. There's very little*

land for development. So I wouldn't worry so much about encroachment or infrastructure overcrowding"

- Interview 14/07/23

"*But you know that there is what is called the Rule of Law, there is what is called the regulations, the agreements, and Costa Rica is a democratic country, defender of the Rule of Law, and if some person or some group says, no, this heritage must be preserve, we have to take care of them and they file a legal recourse or an administrative action, so the State has to take care of them in a diligent manner. In other words, we cannot say, oh, yes, yes, yes, take those spheres and throw them there, we have to comply with a series of requirements.*"

- Interview 15/06/23 (b)

"*I think that here we will never become like Guanacaste, I know Guanacaste today, because here we have many protected areas that are not protected in Guanacaste. So, let's say, those areas that are protected are going to remain protected forever, it is going to be very difficult to change a law and not protect them anymore, so in many places that in Guanacaste you can build and build big hotels, here you cannot do it.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (b)

§7.3 Reasons against an international airport

Throughout the interviews and informal conversations, people also had reasons why they felt the construction of an international airport near Palmar needed to be thought out further or abandoned altogether. One of the most common reasons given was in relation to the possible impacts on the environment of the Osa peninsula and the larger Brunca region. Concerns were voiced regarding the area close to where the airport was planned to be built, since this location is close to the wetlands, and the region is home to quite a lot of wildlife such as migratory birds. A few interviewees expressed their concerns about the construction of an international airport by pointing to the effects that the airport in Liberia had on the province of Guanacaste, due to the increase in tourism that it facilitated. They felt that an international airport would have the exact same results for the Brunca region, and especially the Osa peninsula.

"[Discussing hotels being built for tourists] *It is too possible that even a resort could be built there in La Palma or in Playa Negra, because it is a beautiful area. And we have no way of guaranteeing that this will not happen. And all that real estate development is triggered by an international airport. That happened in Guanacaste. Nothing can make us think that this will not happen in the southern areas.*"

- Interview 09/06/23

The possible increase in touristic activity as a result of an international airport closer by was seen as a reason against the construction of that airport because of the nature of the tourism industry. They

explained that the tourism sector in general is one that seeks to make a profit and is therefore motivated to increase the number of tourists that are coming to visit, which they were already seeing the effects of. They argued that this goal of making a profit and growing the business is difficult to combine with the goal of protecting nature, since an increase in the number of visitors generally means that the attractions will be more crowded, and in the case of nature that tends to have negative consequences.

"*But for example when you go to Sirena to see wildlife and before you will have two boats with 30 people. Yeah, now you have 15 boats with 10 people on each and you have 150 people and of course there's an effect on wildlife. Of course, there's an effect. Of course, the water sewage system is collapsed because it's not the same to have 30 people to have a 150 people. So those are the things that I know that are happening right now that will keep going and going and going and getting worse. Unfortunately, most of the touristic companies are only thinking about selling selling selling making money making money making money and not on the side of hey, this is enough. We should try to educate our traveler and customer to be more sensible about this.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (b)

Aside from the possible growth in numbers, some also mentioned their concerns about a change in the type of tourism that might occur of an airport starts to attract more tourism. The Osa peninsula is known for mainly offering more eco-touristic experiences, that cater to fewer people at a time, tend to be more expensive and have a smaller impact on the environment. Having an international airport to bring tourists in would most likely bring in more mass tourism, focused on more affordable, large scale tourism that tends to be less environmentally friendly.

"*But I think if the tourism grows too fast, in a, […] without control, it is going to be to change the animals. I think right now people come here because here is the most wild place in Costa Rica. I think if we change that the kind of tourists will change.*"

- Interview 02/06/23

Some interviewees felt this kind of tourism was already slowly creeping into the region, and that an airport would cause that type of tourism to increase rapidly at the cost of the eco-tourism in the region. They concluded that it is also probably people who stood to benefit from an increase in mass-tourism that were supporting the construction of an international airport.

"*Definitely, like 20 years ago when I got here it was like only eco travellers and naturalists and people that love nature they had like the bird list that they wanted to see. Like, now that I work, I've been working with tourism for 20 years, it's different. I mean, okay, we lost all these naturalists. We lost all these good travellers. Even now that Osa is not that developed. We have more like massive tourism people that want to just check on Corcovado. You know, it's it's a different type of tourism I can see it now happening. So it has changed.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (b)

"*The economic sectors that defend the project the most, well, it is definitely the tourism sector, but of a massive tourism, a resort type tourism, not necessarily the traditional tourism of the southern zone. Well, the traditional tourism of the southern zone, […], it is a type of low impact tourism, more of the type contemplative, an ecological tourism, that is not the tourism that bets for the construction of an airport, for that airport is more resort, houses of pensioners in the coastal row or in the forest, mass tourism that wants to go to Bahia Ballena or Manuel Antonio*."

- Interview 09/06/23

The possible changes and increases in tourism were not the only aspects of the airport mentioned as a point of concern. More ecologically focused interviewees pointed out that the construction of the airport alone would also have consequence for the area close to Palmar. The materials needed for construction, the infrastructure of roads, sewage, water, and so forth needed to build the airport as well as the presence of airplanes flying over would change the area significantly. This would most likely result in a disruption of animals such as birds, and potentially trash and runoff could find its way into the wetlands and rivers nearby.

"*It's like more volume requires more sewage systems, more, definitely higher electrical demand, definitely all the footprint regarding building and then all the transportation that comes in, all the noise. It's definitely the higher the volume, the more impact.*"

- Interview 12/06/23

"*Then, the other environmental impact is going to be the noise, the noise of the machinery, the noise, let's say initially, the vibration of the machinery that can generate an impact on the stone spheres and also an impact on the birds that live in the wetland, which are mainly migratory birds, but there are also species that are there locally.*"

- Interview 09/06/23

While a number of interviewees had expressed their trust in the system of environmental rules and requirements around what can be built and where, other worried that these rules would be easy to circumvent if those in charge of the airport's construction truly wanted to. Some mentioned that corruption was an issue at times, and that in other areas that were supposedly protected, buildings had been built anyways. This did not give them much hope that these rules would be adhered to if the airport were to be built.

"*Without a plan, they can do whatever. And with corruptions in the municipalities, they can do whatever. Like what happened in the Villa Costena over the years was that there were limitations. This land was reserved. The mayor started selling those areas and it was nothing they can do because they had the permit and they started doing the terracing of these mountains that were never*

supposed to be houses. It was a protected area or a protected forest. And here we are. If you see the Villa Costena, you know it's fully developed. And that happened in the last 15 years with all the regulations, with the forests protected with regulations on how much you can divide. So without an enforced plan regulator, then they can do whatever."

- Interview 11/07/23

"*If you see a project like Cocodrillo or like Botánika, but they give them the permissions in an area that is supposed to be a wetland. Which in Costa Rica, each wetland is considered in a category of Ramsar sites, […] and they give them the permission, so maybe it can be tricky. [Asking about possible corruption mentioned earlier in the interview] Already happened. Already happened a long time ago. Here, about Rio, that is one of the biggest all-included hotels, they have this condition of create big projects in areas where they're supposed not to be, like same mangroves, entrances of rivers.*"

- Interview 13/06/23

As well as environmental concerns, another major point of concern was brought up repeatedly. The potential effects on the communities, especially in the Osa peninsula, were a reason to worry for a number of interviewees. As mentioned in §7.1, the rhythm of life in Osa tends to be a bit slower than in other places. An explosive boom in tourism would mean rapid paced development to accommodate all these people, which would force Osa to develop at a pace far faster than it normally would. One of the worries was that this fast-paced development would steamroll the way of life in Osa and that it would be completely lost in the process

"*I think it's too bad that the development is going too fast because that will not give us the local opportunity to learn and develop our own business.*"

- Merlyn Oviedo, Owner Danta Lodge, in the documentary The Goose with Golden Eggs

"*The Osa Peninsula is not just a touristic place, it's a natural reserve, but it's also a lifestyle reserve, as I told you before. We are not Native Americans, we are mestizos, we are all mestizos there, and there are a lot of people from other countries living there. However, the lifestyle in the Osa Peninsula is something that is not put on the table when thinking about opening and becoming something else.*"

- Interview 05/06/23

The culture of Osa to a larger extent could be affected by a tourism boom and rapid development. In an informal conversation held with one of the older locals, they mentioned already seeing younger generations take up more western styles of clothing, eating and modelling their life goals after western ideals. They worried that if their town were to be even more exposed to tourism, this pattern could intensify to the point that the local culture would be forgotten by younger generations.

"*Whereas the tourism that they're promoting is actually, what it's promoting is for people to want to leave behind this lifestyle that is their heritage and step into the lifestyle of consumption and disposal and extraction and yada yada yada*"

- Interview 17/06/23

This does not only apply to cultural aspects that are specific for the Osa Peninsula or a specific town in the region, but to the larger Costa Rican culture as well.

"*I think the country is in danger of becoming very similar to other tourist destinations around the world, not very differentiated and losing a lot of the value and uniqueness that it has created.*"

- Lawrence Prat, Sr. Lecturer at INCAE, in the documentary The Goose with the Golden Eggs

"*...that by ignoring those archeological findings and relocating them, that is, resituating them, removing them, what we continue to do is to break down the national identity conformation, as they have done by moving the days of the national calendar, right? How are we going to celebrate April 11, April 14? They break the construction of the Costa Rican being, the identity. This is fundamental, because how are we going to build community if we ignore our past, if we relegate it, and we do not give it the value, a value enhancement as this past deserves.*"

- Dr. Patricia Fumero, previous director of the National Museum & ICOMOS Costa Rica,
on the UCR Kioskos Socio-ambitentales Podcast 10/05/23.

As well as the culture disappearing as mass-tourism increases, another worry was that the current small hotel and 'cabinas' owners would not survive the arrival of big hotels and resorts. The competition would drive smaller hotels out of businesses since they can offer more and usually for a relatively cheaper price. This would reduce the money entering the community, since most big hotels are not locally run.

"*Yeah, it would be really bad, you know, because like the small hotels, they will lose their business because people will be coming. Instead of staying in small hotels, they will go to the big hotels and like they say, all inclusive hotels. And they just go to the hotel out and go to do the tours. And the people, the local people would not get any benefit from from the tourism. So that would be really bad for the people of the area.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (a)

And for those who were hoping to benefit from the additional jobs opportunities that the airport and increase in tourism could bring, some of the critics of the airport project argued that most locals would not be hired for those jobs. Their point was that if big hotels were to come in, they would most likely hire people who can speak English and who have studied in a field relating to tourism, and the people who would meet such requirements were very likely to be from the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM) rather than from a local town. The possibility that companies would invest in training locals to be able to take up the positions they were offering was unlikely

according to the interviewees who raised this point. They argued that bigger companies were probably not going to spend the time, resources and money needed to train someone, when they could also hire someone who was already trained for the job from somewhere else.

"*... the people there are not prepared. Because they usually bring people from the capital, because they speak two languages, because they speak three languages, because they are from the university. So people say, yes, they are going to be... train people. People want very technical labor. In Guanacaste, when you go on vacation, you realise that the hotels, most of the people are from the capital. They are not the people who live in Guanacaste. No, the people who are still kind of the labor force are the people who are in the bar or the people who are cleaning the rooms. But all the jobs of a certain level, they are all from the capital. And this is happening here. That is, for the first time it is a small place. The tourism there is, which is a tourism, let's say, of five leaves* [rating for eco-friendliness of hotels]*, the most important jobs are of people who come from the capital.*"

- Interview 25/05/23

"*If they have an education, if they speak English, if they have experience to work in tourism, for example. And from the people of Palmar itself, first the government I think, or the local people, have to prepare themselves to see it as an opportunity, we have to prepare ourselves because if we do not have a high level of education, we do not have a good language, people will be brought from outside, then the communities become poorer, because there are no sources of jobs, it is a lot of things that are involved in talking about a project like this.*"

- Interview 22/06/23 (b)

"*Like you cannot employ, and I tell you this as someone who works in tourism, you cannot employ people who is not trained. You cannot, it's impossible. It's very hard to train them. It's something my family has been doing for 30 years. It's too expensive. It's too tiring. To employ people that are not trained and then wait for them to get trained and absorb all this learning curve. That's something that local businesses do, but it's not something big enterprises do because it's very expensive.*"

- Interview 05/05/23

The arrival of bigger hotels also could have consequences with regards to gentrification. For those that felt this worry, Guanacaste was once more the example of what that could potentially look like if left unchecked. In general, the point was locals would be left out, forgotten or pushed out, whether it be their jobs or where they are living. Guanacaste served as the example for how these thing can go wrong in multiple conservations and interviews.

"*You can just go to Guanacaste and see what happens there. Guanacaste is the poorest region of Costa Rica and it's where the biggest development of tourism is. But the people who were not trained, who were already living there, they are still poor. They are not taking advantage of this because they were pushed away. They are just living behind the hotels. They are living behind these beautiful places where people take pictures because they were not ready to receive and to take*

advantage of this development. So that is exactly what would happen. What has happened in Mexico, in any number of places, of beautiful places where they have very, very expensive tourism and very, very poor local population."

- Interview 05/06/23

"*Everyone will tell you, like, yeah, no, Santa Teresa is not the same anymore. That is what is going to happen to the Osa Peninsula. Oh, yeah, no, the Osa Peninsula is not the same anymore.*"

- Interview 05/06/23

A third major point of criticism the project is facing is the chosen location. The plan to build an international airport where finca's 9 and 10 are now has been questioned by multiple interviewees. Some speculated that the government may have had financial reasons to choose this land, because it is supposedly still government owned or would be cheap for the government to buy, due to the fact that most living in the communities there do not officially have the rights to the land they are living on. Others speculated that it might be because there were only small communities there that would not put up too much resistance, or perhaps people might not be fully aware of that they having been living there for generations and have built up entire communities there.

"*Because what the government is waiting for is that there is no opposition, that the people do not oppose. And at this moment, in the situation of the farms, it is convenient for the government, because the people are not going to give much opposition.*"

- Interview 09/06/23

"*It turns out that this airport is being built on two farms, Farm 9 and Farm 10. One hears the word "finca" and one can imagine it as a thing full of, I don't know, weeds or plantations, but don't imagine that this toponymy is really an inheritance of the banana company and that we are talking about entire communities. We are talking about quadrants, houses, soccer fields, schools, churches, commissaries. We are talking about people.*"

- Host of the UCR Kioskos Socio-ambitentales Podcast 10/05/23

Others questioned the choice of location due to environmental reasons. The area is known to flood during seasonal storms or persistent heavy rain, and is close to a protected wetland that is also home to many migratory birds as well as the archeological site of finca 6.

"*The project would be very close to the stone spheres, which, well, of finca 6, and there is also an archeological concern, and it would also be very close to the wetland altered to Sierpe, and there is a more environmental concern with an international airport neighbouring a wetland that is also a Ramsar site of global importance and a habitat for migratory birds, […] has a whole relationship with Corcovado, with Golfo Dulce, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. So there are many arguments to say that this airport is nonsense, but it seems that there are too many economic interests involved.* "

- Interview 09/06/23

"*If they're going to bring more tourism, they're going to require more development. Is it going to be sustainable? Is it going to be accounting for the water shortage? It's going to be accounting for the cultural heritage. It's going to be accounting for the biodiversity and the connectivity that have to still there. I mean, even remember that there's a huge migration of birds that happens and goes to is like, is it going to have an impact? Because at some point, even before the windmills, that was a discussion, right? There's an area that they shouldn't be putting windmills because that's in the migratory route of birds. It's like, okay, is that being considered? Just to mention a few, I mean, itself having an infrastructure where it used to be a wetland. I mean, it doesn't make sense to me.*"

- Interview 11/07/23

But despite the multitude of reasons people gave as to why the chosen location was not suitable for an international airport, no one seemed to know why the decision was actually made to build there. It does not help that the project has been around for a while and it is not clear when the decision for the location was made exactly. But as pointed out by one interviewee, it would be more costly to start all the necessary research all over again for a different location than to carry on with the existing plan.

"*I […] would like someone to tell us technically why Palmar was chosen and why other sites cannot be viable. Yes, yes, of course. So nobody knows why. Nobody knows why. And today, today it is cheaper because there are previous studies in Palmar. So today it is cheaper to continue in Palmar than to do a study and further delay the construction of the airport.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (a)

Beside the discussion on why the choice was made to build the new airport near Palmar, quite a few interviewees questioned why the new airport was necessary in the first place. They pointed out that there are multiple small airports already in the Brunca region, and that it would make more sense to invest in expanding one of those instead of building an entirely new airport.

"*I know everybody will say, yes, for sure. We need it. Yeah. But right now, I mean, we have an improvement or a rate of rise on the number of visits, visitations. We have an airport here. We have an airport in Drake. So I don't really see a need to have an international airport.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (a)

"*But from my side, I wouldn't do it. I will improve the ones that are, the one out there, because you have, you have Puerto Jimenez, you have Golfito, and you have Palmar. Palmar one is falling apart. So I will improve that one. That's what they want. And I mean, also promote a better connectivity, right? And lower prices to get to the south. I think that will bring more people and in a more sustainable way than just building an airport.*"

- Interview 11/07/23

A smaller point that was raised a few times by locals in Osa was that they were not aware of a clear plan to build the airport, and some doubted whether the government had the funds to pay for such a large project. As mentioned earlier, the pandemic and consequential lockdown had pretty heavily impacted the country's economy and many suspected that the government did not have huge reserves left to pay for development projects. Investors would be needed to make the project financially feasible.

"*The government is not going to be able to build it with money […], that is very clear. And we have never understood why he has not been able to sell well the idea of someone lending the state, let's say, the money to build the airport*"

- Interview 22/05/23

None of the interviewees living in the Osa had an idea of what the exact plan was, other than that they knew that there was specific research that needed to be done with regards to environmental impact as well as the archeological site, before the project could be fully approved. But locals felt they were not being kept in the loop, they did not have a clear idea of what research was already being done or how long it would take.

"*Recently I haven't heard in detail besides the announcement that they were looking again into the opportunity of building an airport. But I haven't seen any technical documents or any…, I don't have any clarity on what the process is.*"

- Interview 11/07/23

"*I know that this project has been there for years, because I have known about it for years, but what they are doing, how they are doing it, what the plan is like, what is going to be done, no, I do not really know that. There is little communication with the people of Osa, of the area here about the plan.*"

- Interview 22/06/23 (b)

This lack of communication was a sign for some that the airport would not be built anytime soon. Big projects like airports or major highways are examples of projects that tend to take a long time in Costa Rica. Many interviewees explained that this slower pace was standard and that the project could very well take another ten years to be built.

"*At least two, at least three governments, maybe, or two governments. Okay. It's always been something that they've talked about, either modifying one of the existing ones or creating that one. Just like it's always been talked that the Costa Rica's main airport is going to be in Orotina and so on. But usually the talk goes on for 10 or 20 years before it happens.*"

- Interview 12/06/23

But as a result of little communication and a sentiment shared by many that the airport would not be built for another few years, there was also no clear plan for towns and communities in the region for how to cope with this development, should the airport be built. Some feared that by waiting too long instead of being prepared, an increase in tourism and rapid development would come as a surprise, leaving locals unprepared and potentially with the same development pattern as in Guanacaste.

"*Because we have the same amount of money we had yesterday with or without airports. We don't have resources. We are not being accompanied by the government to take advantage of this development plan they are presenting. Because there is not a development plan. It's just a building tool that is necessary for who already has the tools, who already has the money and the power to create infrastructure and take advantage of this new tool.*"

- Interview 05/06/23

"*But when we don't have the vision, what happens in Guanacaste happens. And we should prepare ourselves.*"

- Interview 07/06/23 (b)

§7.4 The role of politics

When speaking to people in Osa, there was a strong sense amongst the majority of the formal and informal respondents that the airport project was something they were not actively involved with or informed about, and would not affect them any time soon. They felt the airport was far away, and that they had more pressing issues on the peninsula such as the marina in Puerto Jiménez.

"*A lot of people talk a lot more about that* [the marina]*, some on the positive side and others on the negative side. But I haven't heard so much about the airport, because it might seem far away from them. Right, right, because it's not, you know, next town over."*

- Interview 12/06/23

"*Not really. Not really. Mm-hmm. They talk more about the marina than about the airport.*"

- Interview 21/06/23 (b)

Some said that the topic of the airport was more relevant in certain social circles, amongst people who owned businesses related to the tourism industry, or worked in the industry. Those who did not had less of an interest in the topic.

"*But the truth is that I could not say that the people mention this, that the people are talking about it, no, the guides and the businessmen talk about it, but the community does not."*

- Interview 22/06/23 (b)

There was a general sense of detachment from the rest of the country and the government amongst many of the respondents in Osa. While it is true that getting to Osa takes some time and that it is relatively remote, there is also a sense of political detachment. National politics did not seem play a big role in people's day to day lives.

"*I couldn't say because I don't really pay attention to politics here in Costa Rica.*"

- Interview 17/06/23

This detachment is strengthened by the sense that those in charge are focused on the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM) around San Jose, and that the coasts of the country are forgotten. Examples that were given in interviews mention the quality of the roads in the region compared to the GAM, fewer job opportunities, as well as the lack of higher level education and healthcare services in the periphery. There was a sense of frustration as some respondents explained that they felt Osa was contributing to the country's economy because the paid taxes, they had a lot of natural resources and were doing the work of protecting them, but were not compensated for their efforts and participation. They felt like the financial rewards for their work were going straight to higher level institutions, like the state or heads of the province.

"*Of course, if the park entrance fees were to be invested in community projects, to give scholarships to young people, to fix roads, that would be very different, because that would generate development. But the money from the park entrance fees goes to the State's cash box and is not invested here. Ah, of course, then that is like money that is earned here, but it is not for the community here.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (b)

"*Costa Rica has a problem that all governments and all investments have been centralist. […] Yes, and development, although it is not the most beautiful thing, but development, thinking about universities, hospitals, the whole system, has focused more on the central part of Costa Rica. The peripheral parts, the parts more where there are protection zones, things like here, that have been given very little work. We have bad roads, we don't have internet, the people there are suffering over the internet right now. We don't have a public university. Those of us who were born here do not have the right to go to a public university. We have to leave our family, go to San José, live there for six years and when we graduate we don't want to come back here because we like the city. Of course we do. That kind of development has not taken place in this country as it should.*"

- Interview 15/06/23 (a)

The needs of rural areas are often not met, or rarely taken into account by higher up policy officials, according to locals. This translates to development projects as well. Many of the respondents who spoke on this topic expressed a sense of frustration at being unheard, and having a government draw up plans to build and develop without listening to the needs of locals. In their opinion, the type of

development that the peninsula wanted was not taken into account, leaving communities to adapt best they could to whatever the government decided.

"*I think that people in rural areas already understand that plenty of the decisions of the governments are taken from a point of view of something that we call it, 'Valles Centristas', so from the central valley to the outside, not really listening to the necessities of the rural communities to make their development in a way that we know that can be positive.*"

- Interview 13/06/23

"*I believe that here the policies of the State are not very clear about the development model we want. It seems to me that the actions that should be taken by the State should go hand in hand with the development model we want. If we, the people of the peninsula, the majority, not all of us, were asked what we want, we would think that an airport is not so convenient because we do not want mass tourism here. Because mass tourism becomes a pressure on nature and the areas that we have preserved.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (b)

It is partly this disconnect between the periphery and the centre of Costa Rica that some of the respondents feel is less present with the new president Chaves. In an informal conversation the centralist approach of Costa Rica was brought up in comparison to other countries where the coastlines tend to be better off and more developed than the more inland regions. They explained that in Costa Rica the more fertile soil was found inland, leading to the coasts being moved the background and over time creating a political system where presidents focus on the GAM because that is where most of the development has happened, and where most of their electorate can be found. With the election of Chaves this was actually flipped, as his electorate is far more present outside of the GAM. While mentioning the they themselves did not vote for him, they did think that this president was more focused on bringing progress to the regions that actually really needed it. This notion of bringing more progress can be seen in the president's focus on development projects and boosting the economy.

"*Not just the airport but also marinas and other very pro development pro-tourism type of projects, right? So it's a kind of trend that seems to be selling. Having more development projects popping up it seems to be an agenda of this current administration.*"

- Interview 17/06/23

Why this government is so focused on development under this new president could be due to multiple reasons. Respondents had different ideas, with some explaining that because the president used to work for the World Bank he had a more capitalist view of the world, and felt that the country's economy was the first thing that needed to be worked on. Other thought that the impacts of the pandemic had strengthened this view even further. A few also though that the focus on

development had more to do in being able to achieve what previous governments couldn't.

"*The president right now is somewhat development oriented. He got elected right after Covid and he knows what a difficult situation the country is in and so I think he, I think he's doubling down on development trying to pull the country out of the difficult situation it's in.*"

- Interview 07/06/23 (a)

"*At the political level, I think the government has focused on construction work as big victories that other governments did not achieve.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (a)

"*Yes, I believe that the current government is going to push it again because there are very strong economic sectors that need it. Because Costa Rica is one of the main exporters of pineapple in the world and there is Pindeco in Buenos Aires. It would be much better for them to bring that pineapple and export it there than to take it to Limón. And the other because there are people who believe that [by] having an airport more people would come here to the area […]. I think the current government, I don't know, but it thinks in a different step than before. It has a capitalist mentality.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (b)

Aside from his focus on the economy and development, he was also often described as a populist leader who was quite different from his predecessors. He was described as having a 'tough guy' attitude, not being a big believer in science, especially with regards to climate change, and not being a very strong supporter of democratic values. In an informal conversation, one respondent said they felt the president's discourse could vary to suit whatever point he was trying to make. His style of argumentation was described as being quite aggressive and straight-forward, but being more mindful when discussing topics that were important to specific societal groups who voted for him.

"*we're polite. So we are not going to, we are not like this president. That's not Costa Rican culture. We are not facing things and being violent with the vocabulary. That's not the Costa Rican way. So I feel like he's not representing actually Costa Rican culture, like how people feel when they meet Costa Ricans. Because I think most, actually the origin of our problems is that we are not straightforward. Right, too polite. It's really hard to have a straightforward conversation. A little bit too polite. And he is super violent, like his speech is very violent.*"

- Interview 05/06/23

"*this government is very populist and this government does not like, does not like to generate much conflict with certain sectors. For example, with the university sector, it does not care, it does not care to but with the peasants he does think about it more. I think, because, do you know why? Because they were the ones who voted for him.*"

- Interview 09/06/23

Chaves was even compared to other populist leaders in the Americas such as Trump and Bolsonaro, arguing that he was similar in his consistent blaming of previous governments, of more elite groups in society for the difficult situations of the rest of the population. This also played into the pre-existing division between the GAM and the more rural areas of Costa Rica.

"*his popularity levels are off the roof in those areas* [rural areas]. *And they think that he's actually working and fixing things. And, and that everything, the reason why we're poor, the reason why we don't have this and that is because the other people, the other governments, the other people in power always wanted it to be that way. They were always feeling; they always want to control. So very much like the speech that goes all over the world when, when, when the, not the radical, but the surprising winner, populist winner wins the elections, you know? So very much positioning themselves as opposed or different from what there was before. Very much like Trump or like Bukele in El Salvador or, or even maybe a little bit, even like Brazilian Bolsonaro with not so extreme, but same kind of speech.*"

- Interview 12/06/23

A few respondents described the president as more authoritarian than previous presidents. They felt that he seemed to care less about what people in government thought about him and not a strong group present in government to balance out Chaves or stop him from making certain decisions. What he did seem to care about was that people would see him as a strong leader, that makes clear decisions and gets the job done efficiently. Making it clear that he is the one in power seems to be important, according to some respondents. This is what some felt was more scary about Chaves compared to former leaders who were perhaps also similarly authoritarian.

"*I think that he just wants to make the population see that he has the power to make decisions that in governments that were before him were not made. So he wants to demonstrate that he can have the power to decide to make some projects, to close certain institutions.*"

- Interview 13/06/23

"*because that's what's scary that never happened before in Costa Rica, having a party that is run by a very dictatorship-like leader. That I've never seen before in Costa Rica. […] Yeah, it's not like we have not seen this leadership style because even like […] Oscar Arias, which was a very, he's a very strong leader and very self-centred. Like if he said so, that's what is going to happen. But still he was surrounded by a big party, like a lot of the country was, there were like lots of leaders that will oppose him and will bring him to his senses and block his craziness or his impositions. This is not happening. I can see like there is like, I've never seen, like I've seen this in Nicaragua, I've seen this in El Salvador, South America. I've never seen this in Costa Rica.*"

- Interview 05/06/23

Chaves' view on the environment are radically different than his predecessor, who was focused on pushing Costa Rica to meet specific climate goals ahead of the rest of the world. As mentioned in a few informal conversations, under Chaves' presidency, organisations that work on the environment and climate change have seen their budgets and staff shrink. Some worried that the president was slowly dismantling the system from within, by still leaving these institutions in place but making in nearly impossible for them to function. At the same time, the increase in state debt caused by the pandemic has also resulted in financial strain on many different departments.

"[Whether the government is aware of potential impacts on the environment] *No, it is not. Or if it is, it's not transparent. Ok. There is no transparency in that, because all the government wants to say is the possibility of employment generation. Of course, he* [the president] *doesn't care. No, he does not say anything. He doesn't say anything about the environment. But this government is not interested in environmental issues.*"

- Interview 09/09/23

At the same time, Costa Rica is known as the Green Republic and has gained the international reputation of being a very green, sustainable country, while being accessible to tourists and offering a decent standard of living. Chaves wants to protect that image because it also helps to attract tourists. This interest in how the international community views Costa Rica is one of the reasons why certain environmental projects are still being maintained according to a number of respondents.

"*Like even with the 30 by 30 that we recently…, that was like the expansion of Cocos Island and Costa Rica becoming the first one to protect 30% of the ocean. That was from the last government. And when this government came in, we were like, oh sh*t, they might want to, they might want to go against this and be like, no, the ocean has resources. We have got to use them. And the coastal communities are very poor, but not too long ago, there was a huge article on the news that the government was like, no, we're committing to this. We're not going to change it. It's the global agenda and it is what it is.*"

- Interview 12/06/23

Some worry that while the president's concern for the country's image as the Green Republic might help to protect existing natural reserves and protected areas, but that areas that are not protected yet are available to be exploited. Chaves has already expressed an interest in looking into oil drilling and legalising trawling method of fishing, for example.

"*On the one hand I hear them saying that they are working for the environment in Costa Rica, that this line is maintained, that Costa Rica does not lose the idea of being a country that has almost 25% of its territory conserved. On the other hand, I was horrified when they wanted to approve the trawling law. Yes, that is mistreatment, it destroys the marine soils.*"

- Interview 22/06/23 (a)

While Chaves might not value nature for the sake of it being nature, he does understand what its conservation is worth to the tourism industry and the country's international reputation. And, as explained by some of the respondents, for Chaves sacrificing some of the country's natural resources to improve the economy is worth it, but he will not go as far as to mess with the Green Republic's image.

"*Because I am not going to believe that the government does not care about nature. And he* [the president] *knows that this is something that generates more foreign currency for Costa Rica. He believes that with the airport, nature will be sacrificed a little bit, there will be an impact, but at the same time there will be more people, so there will be more resources for the people.*"

- Interview 06/06/23 (b)

8. Conclusion

This aim of this research was to create a better understanding of the views of locals in Osa on development, within the context of finding a balance between economic development and the conservation of natural resources, and to what extent the government's revival of the International Airport of the Southern Zone project as a component of an overarching right-wing authoritarian turn is in alignment with those views. To answer the main research question;

How do the local inhabitants of the Osa view the future of development for their region in the context of the rise of right winged-populism, and to what extent does Chaves' government's revival of the project to build the International Airport of the Southern Zone (Aeropuerto Internacional de la Zona Sur) align with their views?

From this, four different subquestions were formed:

- How do local inhabitants imagine the future development of Osa to be, particularly with regards to sustainable development?
- What do local inhabitants perceive to be the potential positive consequences of the construction of the airport?
- What do local inhabitants perceive to be the potential negative consequences of the construction of the airport?
- To what extent do local inhabitants perceive the election of a more right-winged, populist government to be of influence on the project's revival?

With regards to the future of development in Osa, the general wish of most of the people spoken to was that there needed to be some form of investment into the community to improve aspects of daily life such as education, healthcare and infrastructure. But for most interviewees, these need to be met in a way that does not completely transform their way of life. Many think that finding a balance is possible by limiting mass-tourism, focusing on small-scale tourism or ecotourism, and making ensuring the profit is made by local small-scale business so that the financial benefits actually go to the community. Terms such as sustainable, bottom-up or regenerative development were used to describe this view on development. Amongst the respondents, different accents were placed on what they felt was most important within this approach to development, with some supporting a neoliberal approach to conservation through ecotourism and forms of payment for locals working in conservation, while others were more focused a stronger conservation of the local way of life and perhaps limiting the possible expansion of the tourism industry.

The possible construction of the Aeropuerto Internacional de la Zona Sur, while not seen as a very important topic of discussion by many interviewees, was perceived to have the potential to change and improve the economy for not just Osa but the entire Brunca region. The region, which already has a significant percentage of its population living in poverty, could definitely stand to benefit from a project that will provide more opportunities for employment, and an increase in trade opportunities and tourism. These would benefit the economies of more touristic places such as the Osa Peninsula, as well as improve access to areas that now see very little tourism because they are

relatively remote. It seems that the Covid-19 pandemic and the complete shut down the tourism industry, which makes up an important part of the country's economy, has made the appeal of such a project even stronger.

Even though the airport project could provide considerable benefits, interviewees also had some reservations. The main concerns they expressed were in regards to nature conservation, which in the case of Osa is what attracts tourists there, the risk of locals being pushed out if the tourism industry were to explode while the region was unprepared for such a type of development, and the choice to build a new international airport in an area that was perhaps not entirely suitable when there were plenty of smaller airports in the region that could perhaps be improved or expanded. For some these reasons were enough to halt the project, while others felt that the new airport should still be built, but that it was important for the leaders of the province, the cantons, and local communities to prepare themselves so that they would have a clear plan of development when the airport does come, and so that locals would be able to prepare themselves so that they might benefit from this development rather than be left behind.

For the interviewees that were more invested in Costa Rican politics, as well as those who weren't, the election of Chaves as president had influenced the revival of the project, because of his pro-development stance, his background as a banker, and the fact that he felt that nature, to a certain extent that varies from interviewee to interviewee, could be sacrificed for the economic benefit of the population. While most interviewees did not express a strong opinion on whether they supported him or not as president, he was generally described as a more populist leader, that trying to differentiate himself from previous governments by breaking with their more centralist approach and focusing on the rural regions of country.

Many locals did not express a strong opinion about the president's more authoritarian, right-winged, populist traits. The idea that a political shift to the right had occurred in Costa Rica seemed to only be shared by a few. The physical and mental distance between the region and the seat of political power in the capital likely contributes to this sentiment. Locals feel like politics are something that occurs at a different level, which they are not involved in. As a result, their ideas on how the Osa should develop are more strongly based on the needs of the communities, the way of life and culture in Osa, the way the economy is structured there now and what they have seen or heard from other, more touristic regions of the country. They do align with the president in the sense that both feel the need to economically develop the region further as to have jobs, better education opportunities and an overall improvement in infrastructure, and that some conservation might need to make room for this. But for many of the respondents from Osa, the biodiversity and beauty of the region is something of value that needs to be protected. And while they feel that there needs to be some room for some compromise between conservation and development, they would like to see this happen in a sustainable manner, with attention being paid to people and the environment.

9. Discussion

In this section I will reflect on the findings discussed previously, look at some of the patterns and relationships that can be found and how they may relate to the theory and concepts discussed in chapter 2. I will first look at the themes of (sustainable) development and ecotourism, and how the airport project relates to these themes. Afterwards I will take a closer look at the political shift in Costa Rica, compare it to broader patterns of populism and authoritarian neoliberalism, and discuss whether this pattern is noticeable at a more local scale, such as in Osa.

The ideas on what development should look like in Osa seem to be very strongly rooted in the neoliberal idea that it is possible to develop while or even through conserving nature. Ecotourism is seen by many as the solution to a lot of the problems in Osa, and more ecotourism would mean more investments in the local community, more jobs and because these tourists are coming to enjoy the region's well-preserved nature, that will be maintained by the logic of supply and demand. If there is a demand for well-conserved nature, then people will pay for it, making it economically interesting to conserve it. When talking about increasing the scale of ecotourism in Osa, a lot of interviewees expressed the assumption or fear that there could be a change to mass tourism. It seems to be difficult to imagine ecotourism on a larger scale. I would argue that this is a logical consequence of what makes ecotourism 'eco'. One of the traits of ecotourism, that contributes to this form of tourism being more low impact, is the fact that this tourism is of a smaller scale, by its very definition. As described by Horton (2009), the practices of ecotourism involves travelling to relatively undisturbed locations to admire the scenery, wildlife and plants. Recreating such an experience on a large scale immediately eliminates the 'relatively undisturbed' aspect.

Some interviewees argued that with the regulations in place to limit construction and the value that the relatively untouched nature has as a tourist attraction will protect it. And while on paper this seems like a possible approach, critiques on neoliberal conservation and ecotourism show us that this is likely a false hope. While nature may be of value as a marketable tourist attraction, the minute people start coming in, it becomes less marketable as 'untouched nature'. The (extractive) alternative, to build a lot of hotels and offer activities and tours, regardless of the effects on the native species and their habitat, is likely to be more profitable than small scale ecotourism. And in a neoliberal state, market preferences will steer towards the financially more attractive option, making it even more difficult to maintain a sustainable approach (see §2.4) (Fletcher, 2013). Arguably, what we see here is typical of the Janus-face discussed in §2.6, which is created though the neoliberal approach to environmental management which prevails in Costa Rica. This management allows those in power to present as working on conservation and sustainability, when in fact they do not have the ability to make conservation a more attractive option than extractive practices, because that is now regulated by market mechanisms (Fletcher, 2013). The airport project fits into this discourse rather nicely, with officials explaining that environmental studies will be done to assess and mitigate potential environmental impacts, and presenting ecotourism as the economic solution to the region's poverty levels and job instability. In interviews with those in favour of constructing the airport, this idea of neoliberal conservation and development as the only

option is noticeable. They describe needing the airport to develop the region, to bring in revenue and met locals needs. There are no alternatives, and not building the airport is akin to refusing development. Here, we see this aspect of neoliberal development as the only option, which, as discussed in §2.3, is a result of the neoliberal hegemony having all but eliminated alternative approaches to development (Boffo et al., 2019). For locals in the Osa that favour developing the region, an increase in (eco)tourism is the only way. That is only 'marketable' thing that the region has to offer, to improve its position, and to not act on it would be to accept the continuation over lower living standards and incomes.

The Janus-face of conservation and development is seemingly being maintained by the new president, Rodrigo Chaves. As mentioned in the results section, many interviewees doubt that he values the environment much, but they do describe him as a 'numbers guy', an economist. So if the conservation of certain areas or species are of value to the tourist industry, which in turn brings in revenue, then it is worth protecting. But, as mentioned in the introduction, he has mentioned wanting to look into more extractive practices to attract foreign direct investments. Development and the economy are priorities for him and he seems more likely to embrace a sustainable approach if it is of economic relevance to conserve, because it is in line with Costa Rica's image as the Green Republic, and it draws in tourists. He will conserve certain areas when it is of economic use, but will simultaneously allow extractive project to be carried out in unprotected areas.

His prioritisation of the economy and development projects is not surprising, considering his stance on the environment, and his strong critique of the more environmentally oriented government before him. As discussed in §2.6, the election of Rodrigo Chaves is in large part due to frustration with previous government made up of established parties, and the sentiment that the people have been forgotten by the elite. These patterns align with the patterns discussed in §2.3, where many neoliberal, democratic states are dealing with increased frustration, detachment and anger within society as an increasingly larger group of the 'losers' of the neoliberal model struggle with housing, job security and indebtedness (Streeck & Schäfer, 2013). The cause of many of these crises, as argued in §2.3, is the neoliberal restructuring of the past decades that have especially hurt the working class (Tansel, 2017; Boffo et al., 2019). This distance from the elite is strengthened even further in Osa on the one hand by the geographical distance from the capital and the fact that the region is a bit more remote, but also by the centrist approach of many Costa Rican governments, that prioritised the GAM over the coastal and rural regions.

While Costa Rica has long been an example of a democratic and peaceful state, it does not seem immune to the tensions and contradictions of the neoliberal state, which are leading to a shift towards more populist, authoritarian, right-winged leaders across the world (Fletcher er al., 2020; Matamoros & Castillo, 2022; Zambrano et al., 2010). Since the implementation of the SAPs in the 1980s and 1990s, Costa Rica has also become a neoliberal state (Veltmeyer, 2016). Like in many other countries, the neoliberal restructuring in previous decades led to increases in inequality and poverty, while large companies made big profits, undermined the democratic apparatus and reduced the possibility for alternatives. The more recent crises have seen large business recover quickly, while people struggle to recover and have very few avenues to challenge the impacts of

neoliberalism. While the government is expected to step in, most of its ability to regulate has been delegated to international market preferences, leaving many at the mercy of the neoliberal market (Boffo et al., 2019). We see as similar tendency in the case of Osa, where many locals express the frustration at the lack of government action to help them, soften the effects of economic crises on their livelihoods, the most recent example being lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic. Just like in other neoliberal states, the groundwork for authoritarian neoliberalism has been laid, and a charismatic, populist leader like Chaves, claiming to be completely different from previous governments, that he will actually 'get things done' and is a man of the people, while having little regard for democratic institutions that actually allow the people to influence politics has managed to win the elections. It is with pointing out, that while Costa Rica is not exempt from the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism that seems to plague most neoliberal democracies at this time, it does distance itself from the typical authoritarian, populist discourse in some ways. While their political leader may be in line with the patterns seen elsewhere, outside of the GAM in a region like Osa, the effects of such a political shift to the right is not felt as strongly. Through my interviews in Osa I got the impression that people did feel like the government was far away, but that a lot of the gaps left by the government were being filled by local organisations and NGOs to the best of their ability. This is arguably part of the neoliberal approach to governance, which often reduces the role of the state and creates a greater role for non-state civil society actors such as NGOs and non-profit organisations to provide in public services (Igoe & Brockington, 2007; Evans & Shields, 2000). Perhaps a change in at the national political level would be felt more in Osa if the state was more present there. But for many respondents, life did not change with the election of their new president, and while they did not agree with some of his stances on the environment, on his authoritarian approach to governing they did not seem to worried about the impact on their region.

A personal observation of mine on this subject is that there seemed to be a tendency amongst respondents who had gone to university in the GAM and then came back, to be more strongly opposed to the new president. Amongst those who had a more practical formation, or only went to high school, they were more vague and brief in their answers. No responders expressed very strong support for the current president in their interviews. But this might also be due to the fact that not everyone feels comfortable expressing their political views to someone they do not know well, especially since political views have become more polarised in many countries where the authoritarian leaders are elected. The more nuanced or brief responses from locals who did not go to university might also have to do with the fact that for most people in Osa, the president and national politics are matters that are relevant to the GAM, and not so much for their region. This stronger opposition does not qualify for all respondents with an academic background, since some did not feel comfortable expressing their opinions on the president. For those whose jobs were somewhat related to policy, politics or the government, the preferred option was to give a very nuanced answer or move on to a different topic rather quickly. There seemed to be a worry that expressing strongly negative views of the president could affect their work. The potential repercussions of expressing negative views when your work is somehow linked to the president or his polices is not a topic that

I pressed further on, but could be a relevant topic for future research as more authoritarian presidents seem to be elected into office across the world.

As mentioned above, not everyone felt comfortable expressing their political views in their interviews with me, which could be for a variety of reasons. But it is worth mentioning that interviewees might not share as much with someone they do not know well, and especially someone who does not speak their language fluently. The majority of the interview were conducted in Spanish, and while my Spanish was sufficient to engage in a conversation on the topic of the airport and development and while most interviews were recorded and later translated to make sure no details were missed, I will not have picked up on every detail and nuance during the conversation, which is likely to have limited the quality of my follow-up questions. Furthermore, nuances are typically the type of detail to get lost in translation, so while answers remain largely the same after translation, it is important to consider that a slightly different or more nuanced answer was meant originally. Still, it seemed a more logical choice to conduct the interviews in Spanish as much as possible, because it not only enlarged my pool of possible respondents, it also made more sense from a data gathering point of view to have respondents answer in their native language. Having people speak English when they did not feel comfortable or able to do so would have led to shorter or less detailed answers, that I feel would have impacted more than my ability to translate when also having recordings of my interview to listen back to.

A final point of consideration, and a recommendation for future research as well, is that the majority of the respondents were based in and close to Puerto Jiménez. While people from Sierpe, Palmar and Golfito were also interviewed, the majority of respondents live or work on the Osa Peninsula. Due to the presence of the National Park Corcovado and other protected areas, it is possible that ecotourism and conservation might have been slightly more important themes than if I had also interview in other places in Osa and Golfito (the region). I also did not have access to many people who are closely involved in the airport project, so my results focus solely on the opinions of locals based on what they have been told. It would be interesting to receive more concrete information from those in charge at a national level, and how they think this project related to development and conservation. Also, the people living in the fincas south of Palmar have been interview and included in research conducted by the University of Costa Rica, which mainly focus on their way of life and their possible displacement if an airport were to built. Themes such as conservation and development were not mentioned. It might be that these are not relevant in that context, or that that was not the focus of earlier research. Either way, their thoughts on the airport and the possible consequences and benefits of having more development and tourism it may have would be a very interesting and important view to research as well.

References

- Abedrapo, E. (2011). Aspectos institucionales para el desarrollo de megaproyectos de infraestructura de transporte en Latinoamérica.
- Acosta, A. (2009). *La maldición de la abundancia*. Comité Ecuménico de Proyectos.
- Acosta, A. (2013). Extractivism and neoextractivism: two sides of the same curse. *Beyond development: alternative visions from Latin America*, *1*, 61-86.
- Adams, W. M., & Hutton, J. (2007). People, parks and poverty: political ecology and biodiversity conservation. *Conservation and society*, *5*(2), 147-183.
- Adams, J., Lin Chen, S., Cootauco, K., & Reid, K. (2014). Implications for hydropower development in Costa Rica: A spatial visualization and analysis of the implications for hydroelectric dams in the Chirripo Valley.
- Aguilar, M. S. K. M. (2012). El Proyecto de Aeropuerto Internacional para el Sur: Contexto, Percepciones y Perspectivas.
- Altvater, E. (2009). Die Finanzkrise ist eine Systemkrise des Kapitalismus. *Leviathan*, *37*(2), 197-210.
- Amin, S. (2006). The millennium development goals: A critique from the south. *Monthly Review*, *57*(10), 1.
- Arsel, M., Hogenboom, B., & Pellegrini, L. (2016a). The extractive imperative and the boom in environmental conflicts at the end of the progressive cycle in Latin America. The Extractive Industries and Society, 3(4), 877-879.
- Arsel, M., Hogenboom, B., & Pellegrini, L. (2016b). The extractive imperative in Latin America. The extractive industries and society, 3(4), 880-887.
- Ayers, A. J., & Saad-Filho, A. (2015). Democracy against neoliberalism: Paradoxes, limitations, transcendence. *Critical Sociology*, *41*(4-5), 597-618.
- Le Billon, P. (2021). Crisis conservation and green extraction: biodiversity offsets as spaces of double exception. *Journal of Political Ecology*, *28*(1), 854-888.
- Blewitt, J. (2012). Understanding sustainable development. Routledge.
- Blomgren, A. M. (1997). Nyliberal politisk filosofi: en kritisk analys av Milton Friedman, Robert Nozick och FA Hayek.
- Boffo, M., Saad-Filho, A., & Fine, B. (2019). Neoliberal capitalism: The authoritarian turn. *Socialist register*, *55*, 312-320.
- Bonanno, A. (2020). The Crisis of Neoliberalism, Populist Reaction, and the Rise of Authoritarian Capitalism. In *The Global Rise of Authoritarianism in the 21st Century* (pp. 15-29). Routledge.
- Braun, Y. A., Dreiling, M. C., Eddy, M. P., & Dominguez, D. M. (2015). Up against the wall: ecotourism, development, and social justice in Costa Rica. *Journal of Global Ethics*, *11*(3), 351-365.
- Bresser-Pereira, L. C. (2012). Five models of capitalism. *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy*, *32*, 21-32

- Brockington, D. (2002). Fortress conservation: the preservation of the Mkomazi Game Reserve, Tanzania. Indiana University Press.
- Brockington, D. (2016). Conservation and capitalism. International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology, 1-11.
- Brockington, D., Duffy, R., & Igoe, J. (2008). Nature unbound: conservation, capitalism and the future of protected areas. Earthscan.
- Brown, W. (2006). American nightmare: Neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and de-democratization. *Political theory*, *34*(6), 690-714.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford university press.
- Büscher, B. (2014). Nature on the Move I. *Nature™ Inc.*, 183.
- Büscher, B., & Davidov, V. (Eds.). (2013). The ecotourism-extraction nexus: Political economies and rural realities of (un)comfortable bedfellows. Routledge.
- Büscher, B., & Dressler, W. (2007). Linking neoprotectionism and environmental governance: On the rapidly increasing tensions between actors in the environment-development nexus. *Conservation and society*, *5*(4), 586-611.
- Büscher, B., Dressler, W., & Fletcher, R. (2014). Nature Inc.: environmental conservation in the neoliberal age. University of Arizona Press.
- Büscher, B., Sullivan, S., Neves, K., Igoe, J., & Brockington, D. (2012). Towards a synthesized critique of neoliberal biodiversity conservation. *Capitalism nature socialism*, *23*(2), 4-30.
- Cachanosky, Nicolas, and Alexandre Padilla. "Latin American populism in the twenty-first century." *The Independent Review* 24.2 (2019): 209-226.
- Campregher, C. (2010). Shifting perspectives on development: an actor-network study of a dam in Costa Rica. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 783-804.
- Cascante Jiménez, E., & Artavia Vargas, A. (2019) Nuestra lucha por la defensa de nuestros territorios: relatos de mujeres campesinas de Finca 9 y Finca 10, Palmar Sur de Osa, Costa Rica.
- Castree, N. (2008). Neoliberalising nature: processes, effects, and evaluations. *Environment and planning A*, *40*(1), 153-173.
- Cinner, J. E., & Aswani, S. (2007). Integrating customary management into marine conservation. *Biological Conservation*, *140*(3-4), 201-216.
- Douglas, L. R., & Alie, K. (2014). High-value natural resources: Linking wildlife conservation to international conflict, insecurity, and development concerns. *Biological Conservation*, *171*, 270-277.
- Elliott, J. (2012). An introduction to sustainable development. Routledge.
- Enns, C., Bersaglio, B., & Sneyd, A. (2019). Fixing extraction through conservation: On crises, fixes and the production of shared value and threat. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, *2*(4), 967-988.
- Escobar, A. (2011). Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World (Vol. 1). Princeton University Press.

- Estenssoro, F. (2015). El ecodesarrollo como concepto precursor del desarrollo sustentable y su influencia en América Latina. *Universum (Talca)*, *30*(1), 81-99.
- Evans, S. (1999) The Green Republic, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Evans, B. M., & Shields, J. (2000). Neoliberal restructuring and the third sector: Reshaping governance, civil society and local relations. *Centre for Voluntary Sector Studies, Ryerson University, Working Paper*, *13*.
- Fletcher, R. (2010). Neoliberal environmentality: towards a poststructuralist political ecology of the conservation debate. *Conservation and society*, *8*(3), 171-181.
- Fletcher, R. (2012). Using the master's tools? Neoliberal conservation and the evasion of inequality. *Development and Change*, *43*(1), 295-317.
- Fletcher, R. (2013). Between the cattle and the deep blue sea: The Janus face of the ecotourism-extraction nexus in Costa Rica. In *The Ecotourism-Extraction Nexus* (pp. 69-87). Routledge.
- Fletcher, R. (2020). Neoliberal conservation. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of anthropology*.
- Fletcher, R. (2023). Failing Forward: The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Conservation. Univ of California Press.
- Fletcher, R., Dowd-Uribe, B., & Aistara, G. A. (2020). The Ecolaboratory. University of Arizona Press.
- Fletcher, R., Massarella, K., Ferraz, K. M., Kiwango, W. A., Komi, S., Mabele, M. B., ... & McInturff, A. (2023). The production-protection nexus: How political-economic processes influence prospects for transformative change in human-wildlife interactions. *Global Environmental Change*, *82*, 102723.
- Folke, C. (2006). The economic perspective: conservation against development versus conservation for development. *Conservation Biology*, *20*(3), 686-688.
- Fortwangler, C. (2007). Friends with money: Private support for a national park in the US Virgin Islands. *Conservation and Society*, *5*(4), 504-533.
- Fraser, N. (2015). Legitimation crisis? On the political contradictions of financialized capitalism. *Critical Historical Studies*, *2*(2), 157-189.
- Geertz, C. (2008). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The cultural geography reader* (pp. 41-51). Routledge.
- Genzuk, M. (2003). A synthesis of ethnographic research. Occasional Papers Series. Center for Multilingual, Multicultural Research (Eds.). Center for Multilingual, Multicultural Research, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California. Los Angeles, 1-10.
- Gasson, S. (2009). Employing a grounded theory approach for MIS research. In Handbook of research on contemporary theoretical models in information systems (pp. 34-56). IGI Global
- Gudynas, E. (2009). Diez tesis urgentes sobre el nuevo extractivismo. *Extractivismo, política y sociedad*, *187*, 187-225.
- Guillén, M. J., & Mora, J. A. (2020, June 16). *El Aeropuerto Internacional del Sur no fue una solución en el pasado, y no lo va a ser en este nuevo contexto*. Unversidad de Costa Rica. http://kioscosambientales.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/noticias-sobre-kioscos/1785-el-aeropuerto-internacional-del-sur-no-fue-una-soluci%C3%B3n-en-el-pasado,-y-no-lo-va-a-ser-en-este-nuevo-contexto.html

- Guillén Araya, M. J., Mora Calderón, J. A., & Morales Nuñez, V. (2019) Tierras en lucha: resistencia campesina. Atlas de la memoria de las comunidades de Finca Chánguena, Finca 9 y Finca 10 de Palmar Sur de osa, 2016-2019.
- Habtom, G. (2010). The situation of the Térraba Indigenous people of Costa Rica: A request for consideration under the early warning and urgent action procedures of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Seventy-Seventh Session). *UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination UNOG-OHCHR. Geneva, Switzerland*.
- Harrison, C. (2022, April 4th). *With Anti-Establishment message, Rodrigo Chaves wins Costa Rica's presidency*. AS/COA. https://www.as-coa.org/articles/anti-establishment-message-rodrigo-chaves-wins-costa-ricas-presidency
- Heath, H., & Cowley, S. (2004). Developing a grounded theory approach: a comparison of Glaser and Strauss. *International journal of nursing studies*, *41*(2), 141-150.
- Hernández, R. F., & Vega, R. M. Índice de desarrollo humano local (IDEL) aplicado a la región Brunca de Costa Rica, 2018 Local human development index (LHDI) applied to the Brunca Region of Costa Rica, 2018.
- Higginbottom, A. (2013). The political economy of foreign investment in Latin America: Dependency revisited. *Latin American Perspectives*, *40*(3), 184-206.
- Hite, E. B. (2022). The many-headed Hydra: assessing the Indigenous-hydropower cycle in Costa Rica. *Journal of Political Ecology*, *29*(1).
- Hunt, C. A., Durham, W. H., & Menke, C. M. (2015a). Social capital in development: Bonds, bridges, and links in Osa and Golfito, Costa Rica. *Human Organization*, *74*(3), 217-229.
- Hunt, C. A., Durham, W. H., Driscoll, L., & Honey, M. (2015b). Can ecotourism deliver real economic, social, and environmental benefits? A study of the Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, *23*(3), 339-357.
- Igoe, J., & Brockington, D. (2007). Neoliberal conservation. *Conservation and society*, *5*(4), 432-449.
- Igoe, J. & Croucher, B. (2007). Conservation, commerce, and communities: the story of community-based wildlife management areas in Tanzania's northern tourist circuit. *Conservation and Society* 5(4): 534- 561.
- INEC (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos). (2023, 18 oktober). *NIVEL DE POBREZA EN HOGARES DISMINUYE a 21,8% EN 2023*. INEC. https://inec.cr/noticias/nivel-pobreza-hogares-disminuye-218-2023
- *About INOGO*. (n.d.). INOGO. https://inogo.stanford.edu/about?language=en
- INOGO. (n.d.). *Strategic Organization: JUDESUR | INOGO*. https://inogo.stanford.edu/strategic-organization-judesur?language=en
- JUDESUR. (2017). Proyectos Realizados en Osa | JUDESUR. https://www.judesur.go.cr/osa/
- LeCompte, M. D., & Goetz, J. P. (1982). Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. *Review of educational research*, *52*(1), 31-60.
- Maines, R., Lundström, M., & Blomgren, A. M. (1998). Liberalismens mangfold. *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, *101*(3).

- Mebratu, D. (1998). Sustainability and sustainable development: historical and conceptual review. *Environmental impact assessment review*, *18*(6), 493-520
- Mendoza, J. F. (2015). Creation of tourist routes and guidelines of action in the communities subject to resettlement, hydroelectric the Diquis Project, as a proposal of implementation, Southern, Costa Rica. *International Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, *1*(3), 105-120.
- Mora, M. (2019). Sacrifices for Development or Thirst for Capital Accumulation? Case Study on the "El Diquís Hydroelectric Dam" in Costa Rica.
- Mora, J. (Host) (2023, May 10th) Impact del aeropuerto internacional en Osa. In *Voces y Politica - Radios UCR*.
- Mora Calderón, J. A. (2022). Multiterritorialidades y conflictos por la tierra en Costa Rica: el caso del Antiguo Distrito Bananero de Palmar, 1984-2018.
- Mora Calderón, J. A., & Artavia Vargas, A. (Sin fecha) Tierra campesina: memoria de las comunidades Finca 9 y Finca 10, Palmar Sur, Osa
- Morrissey, M. (2017). Neoliberalism, development, and the Costa Rican state. *Latin American Policy*, *8*(2), 278-294.
- Narváez, S. G. (2014). Piketty, Thomas. Capital in the Twenty-First Century. Cambridge: belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014, 696 pp. *Economía*, *37*(73), 180-182.
- Neves, K. (2010). Cashing in on cetourism: A critical ecological engagement with dominant E-NGO discourses on whaling, cetacean conservation, and whale watching 1. *Antipode*, *42*(3), 719-741.
- Van Noorloos, F. (2011). Residential tourism causing land privatization and alienation: New pressures on Costa Rica's coasts. *Development*, *54*(1), 85-90.
- O'connor, J. (1988). Capitalism, nature, socialism a theoretical introduction.
- Olivares, A. M., & Ramírez, S. M. (2019, 18 August). *Aeropuerto Internacional de la Zona Sur (AIZS), Costa Rica | EJAtlas*. Environmental Justice Atlas. https://ejatlas.org/conflict/aeropuerto-internacional-de-la-zona-sur-aizs
- Opperman, J. J., Baruch-Mordo, S., Carvallo, J. P., Kammen, D., Kiesecker, J., & Weber, C. (2019). Sustaining the Last Rivers: The renewable revolution could keep dams off the world's remaining free-flowing rivers. *American Scientist*, *107*(5), 302-306.
- O'reilly, K. (2012). *Ethnographic methods*. Routledge.
- Peterson, R. B., Russell, D., West, P., & Brosius, J. P. (2010). Seeing (and doing) conservation through cultural lenses. *Environmental management*, *45*, 5-18.
- Petras, J., & Veltmeyer, H. (2001). Unmasking globalization: The new face of imperialism. *Halifax: Fernwood Books*.
- Redclift, M. (2005). Sustainable development (1987–2005): an oxymoron comes of age. *Sustainable development*, *13*(4), 212-227.
- Ruggerio, C. A. (2021). Sustainability and sustainable development: A review of principles and definitions. *Science of the Total Environment*, *786*, 147481.

- Sandbrook, C. (2018). Conservation. In *Companion to Environmental Studies* (pp. 17-21). Routledge.
- Savage, J. (2000). Ethnography and health care. *Bmj*, *321*(7273), 1400-1402.
- Streeck, W., & Schäfer, A. (Eds.). (2013). *Politics in the Age of Austerity*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Sena-Fobomade. (2011). Se intensifica el extractivismo minero en América Latina. *Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo*.
- Simpson, F., & Zirhumana, J. F. (2020). The "extraction-conservation nexus" in eastern DRC: cases of resistance and acquiescence in Itombwe Nature Reserve. *Conjonctures de l'Afrique Centrale 2020*, 131-50.
- Spaiser, V., Ranganathan, S., Swain, R. B., & Sumpter, D. J. (2017). The sustainable development oxymoron: quantifying and modelling the incompatibility of sustainable development goals. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, *24*(6), 457-470.
- Svampa, M. N. (2012). Resource extractivism and alternatives: Latin American perspectives on development. *Journal fur Entwicklungspolitik*, *28*.
- Svampa, M. (2019). Neo-extractivism in Latin America: socio-environmental conflicts, the territorial turn, and new political narratives. Cambridge University Press.
- Tansel, C. B. (Ed.). (2017). States of discipline: Authoritarian neoliberalism and the contested reproduction of capitalist order. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Thorsen, D. E., & Lie, A. (2006). What is neoliberalism. Oslo, University of Oslo, Department of Political Science, Manuscript, 1-21.
- Todd, H. (2013). Conflict Assessment of the El Diquís Hydroelectric Project: When Renewable Energy Poses Environmental Threats & Human Rights Violations. *Peace & Conflict Review*, *8*(1).
- Vaccaro, I., Beltran, O., & Paquet, P. A. (2013). Political ecology and conservation policies: some theoretical genealogies. *Journal of Political Ecology*, *20*(1), 255-272.
- Veltmeyer, H. (2016). Extractive capital, the state and the resistance in Latin America. *Sociology and Anthropology*, *4*(8), 774-784.
- Vílchez, D. (2022, April 7th). *Costa Rica's new president threatens women's and LGBTIQ rights*. openDemocracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/costa-rica-president-election-women-human-rights/
- Webb, A. Q. (2023, July 29th). Rodrigo Chaves, the populist technocrat who is shaking up Costa Rica. *EL PAÍS English*. https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-07-29/rodrigo-chaves-the-populist-technocrat-who-is-shaking-up-costa-rica.html#
- West, P., Igoe, J., & Brockington, D. (2006). Parks and peoples: the social impact of protected areas. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.*, *35*, 251-277.
- Weyland, K. (2018). Populism and authoritarianism. *Routledge handbook of global populism*, 319-333.
- Weyland, K. (2021). Populism as a political strategy: An approach's enduring—and increasing—advantages. *Political studies*, *69*(2), 185-189.

- Wilkinson, C. (2013). Ethnographic methods. In *Critical Approaches to Security* (pp. 129-145). Routledge.
- Willis, P., & Trondman, M. (2000). Manifesto for ethnography. *Ethnography*, *1*(1), 5-16.
- Xanthakou, S. (2018). Conservation for Who?.
- Ye, J., van der Ploeg, J. D., Schneider, S., & Shanin, T. (2020). The incursions of extractivism: moving from dispersed places to global capitalism. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *47*(1), 155-183.
- Zimmerer, K. S. (2011). "Conservation Booms" with Agricultural Growth?: Sustainability and Shifting Environmental Governance in Latin America, 1985–2008 (Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia). *Latin American Research Review*, *46*(S1), 82-114.
- Zambrano, A. M. A., Broadbent, E. N., & Durham, W. H. (2010). Social and environmental effects of ecotourism in the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica: the Lapa Rios case. *Journal of Ecotourism*, *9*(1), 62-83.