

Place, Preservation, and Mobility: Amenity Migration and the Politics of Preservation in the Ka'ū District of Hawai'i Island

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Abstract

The increase in human mobility can be seen in the relationship between tourism and migration where the distinctions between traveling, visiting, and migrating are becoming increasingly blurred, resulting in new categories of migrants such as amenity migrants, second homeowners, and alternative lifestyle migrants. Such migrations are increasingly part of the tourist-scape where changing demographics and incoming residents challenge traditional notions of community, identity and belonging in mature destination areas. Based on qualitative, ethnographic fieldwork in the rural Ka'ū District of Hawai'i Island, this thesis examines the links between mobilities and preservation movements wherein conflict over a planned tourist resort raises significant issues pertaining to tourism development, community planning, and cultural revitalization. Previous scholarship has tended to overlook preservation movements within the tourist-scape, focusing instead on the fluidity of identities and inhabitants of place (Cresswell 2009; Sheller and Urry 2006). This study provides a necessary addition to mobility scholarship by reexamining place from multiple perspectives, emphasizing the power relations inherent in amenity migration and the construction of place.

The findings from this study are three-fold. First, while mobility emphasizes fluidity and ever-changing notions of place, indigenous preservation movements are based on a strong sense of regional heritage, identity and ancestral ties to place. In this case, increased mobility corresponds with increased efforts to preserve places and identities within the tourist-scape. Secondly, the influx of amenity migrants into rural areas results in a disintegration of a single, coherent community, leading to a fundamental problem of 'voice' and who or which interest group should determine the area's future in decision making processes. Finally, the restructuring of communities through amenity migration and tourism development reflect broader historical, social and economic processes that are inherently linked with power and should be considered within a mobilities framework.

Keywords: amenity migration, preservation, place, cultural revitalization, tourism, Hawai'i.