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**Introduction**

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Growing up in the northeastern United States with its long, cold winters, relatively expensive cost of living, excessive traffic, crime, etc., the desire to retire in Florida was a dream to which many aspired. Indeed, many aspects of life, including retirement seemed so much less complex than they do today. My parents fulfilled their “dream” and relocated to Florida’s Gulf Coast shortly after I left for university and joined many fellow Northeasterners and Midwesterners seeking sun, year round golf, early bird dinners, and more affordable living; all of which were readily attainable. As we entered the new millennium, traditional retirement destinations in the US, such as Florida and Arizona, began to lose many of the attributes that made them appealing to retirees in the past and thus the migration flows began to disperse to less traditional destinations. Moreover, retirement or amenity-driven relocations are no longer just for the elderly, as this special issue illustrates.

Social Scientists have become increasingly interested in what is being labeled “lifestyle migrations”. For Benson and O’Reilly (2009: 2) lifestyle migration is the “...spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time, to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer the potential for a better quality of life.” Thus, they are not driven by job opportunities or solely by economic reasons that have driven much of migration throughout history. However, before we settle on “lifestyle migration” as the accepted definition of this movement, others who have conducted research in this arena have

employed the terms of International Retirement Migration (see Williams, et al. 2000) and Residential Tourism (see McWatters 2009; Rodriguez 1998), both of which are used in this issue to describe such movement, although I feel that lifestyle migration is a more encompassing term and therefore more pragmatic in describing the heterogeneity of this group.

The aim of this special issue is to introduce some of the breadth of research being done on this topic, broadly defined. The importance of these population movements will continue to increase as “baby boomers” continue to retire and others sour on life in industrialized countries and have the means to move abroad. Scholarly research is still in its early stages and thus it remains a fertile avenue for research. Questions abound as to which destinations are most popular and are they able to retain their popularity despite increasing competition from locales throughout the world. Moreover, how long can some countries afford to offer extremely generous incentives to would-be migrants before social, economic, and environmental stresses reach their breaking point? A casual review of the demand, i.e. migrants seeking an international destination; and supply, i.e. places luring potential migrants; suggests that the supply may soon outweigh the demand jeopardizing the long-term future of this form of development.

This issue illustrates some of the diversity of topics and approaches to research that have emerged over the past several years. Researchers from various disciplines have taken an interest in lifestyle migration, which is reflected in the differing approaches to the topic. In this issue, we hear from geographers, anthropologists, and social scientists as they shed light on the diversity of the lifestyle migration process in various parts of the world.

The first article, by Edward Jackiewicz and James Craine, examines the surge of lifestyle migrants relocating to Panama. The focus here is on the national level as they question the sustainability of the project and whether or not Panama should embrace, i.e. subsidize; lifestyle

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migration as part of their development arsenal. They also bring attention to the dealmakers or “middlemen” in the migration process, in this case the company International Living, who specializes in connecting would be migrants to destinations throughout the world.

The second article is by Swedish anthropologist Annie Linderson, who provides us with a methodological piece on how to do research on this topic. The paper is based on her research in the Costa del Sol, but its applicability is versatile and could be embraced by those doing research in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

This is followed by an article by Mari Korpela using extensive interviews with Westerners who have migrated to Varanasi, India. Many have eschewed the Western lifestyle and left with the intention of finding a better life in India and ended up “finding themselves” and now many of those who leave Varanasi return on an annual basis and have formed their own community there.

The final article of this issue is by Mexican social scientist Omar Lizárraga Morales who takes a critical stance on the increasing presence of Americans in the popular tourist destination of Los Cabos, Mexico. He argues that the growing presence of Americans has resulted in deep social and environmental problems that jeopardize the sustainability of the region and make it increasingly difficult for locals to cope due to rising costs of living, environmental degradation and social exclusion.

## References

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