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Mazatlán as a Heterotopia of Retirement: Global Flows, Non-Places, and Deterritorialization in Expatriate Migration

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Abstract

This article examines the international migration of retired expatriates to Mazatlán, Mexico, through a critical theoretical framework that articulates the concepts of scapes (Appadurai), non-places (Augé), and heterotopias (Foucault). Drawing from poststructuralist and posthumanist approaches to space, identity, and globalization, the paper argues that the presence of North American retirees in Mazatlán is not merely a demographic trend but a complex reconfiguration of urban, social, and symbolic landscapes. Through the deterritorialized circulation of people (ethnoscapes), capital (financescapes), and imaginaries (ideoscapes), Mazatlán is increasingly inscribed into global geographies of retirement and lifestyle migration. These flows produce zones of comfort and cultural friction: gated communities, English-speaking enclaves, and foreign-run businesses emerge alongside traditional urban fabrics and local ways of life. The result is the creation of hybrid heterotopic spaces—material and symbolic islands where expatriates reimagine aging, privilege, and belonging. Based on ethnographic-style interviews with expatriates, this study explores how retired foreigners reproduce and negotiate cultural practices in a context marked by inequality, hospitality, and glocal transformation. The paper calls for a critical reflection on how posthuman mobility, affective geographies, and economic asymmetries reshape urban life and generate novel forms of spatial citizenship in the Global South.

Keywords: Glocal Retirement Migration, Heterotopia, Non-Places, Urban Transformation, Expat Enclaves.

Introduction

The city of Mazatlán, located in the state of Sinaloa in northwestern Mexico, has in recent decades become an attractive destination for foreign retirees, particularly from the United States and Canada. This international retirement migration is part of a broader global trend known as *lifestyle migration*—also referred to as *expat retirement migration* (García-Macías & García Zamora, 2024) or *amenity migration*—in which retirees seek a better quality of life, a pleasant climate, and a lower cost of living abroad (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Koh, 2020).

Mazatlán—a traditional beach resort town that peaked in popularity during the 1970s—has seen a notable increase in its foreign retiree population, although its overall tourist growth has been slower than that of other Mexican coastal destinations. Many of these retired expatriates first arrived as tourists; it is estimated that around 95% of American retirees living in Mazatlán had previously visited the city before deciding to settle there. Today, they form retirement communities that coexist with the local population, transforming the city's urban landscape and socio-cultural fabric.

This study develops a theoretical framework to understand the migration of foreign retirees to Mazatlán in a complex and multidimensional way. It draws on three key theoretical perspectives:

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Arjun Appadurai's theory of global "scapes," which situates this phenomenon within the context of transnational flows of people, capital, information, and culture; Marc Augé's concept of *non-places*, which is useful for analyzing spaces of anonymity and transience linked to tourism, consumption, and modernity—and how retired expatriates re-signify these spaces; and finally, Michel Foucault's notion of *heterotopia*, which allows for the interpretation of expatriate communities as "other spaces" within the city, with internal dynamics that reflect tensions between global and local forces. By integrating sociological, cultural, touristic, and urban approaches, the analysis explores how retired expatriates transform the local space, build specific communities, generate symbolic representations of place, and produce tensions between global flows and Mazatlán's local identity. The following sections develop each of these theoretical frameworks and their application to the case of Mazatlán.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodological approach, grounded in the principles of ethnographic research and the critical interpretation of urban space. The approach is based on the understanding that phenomena such as retiree migration, spatial re-signification, and cultural transformation are complex processes that must be analyzed from the perspective of the social actors involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

To this end, semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with expatriate retirees residing in Mazatlán. The in-depth interview technique made it possible to explore not only visible practices but also symbolic representations, imaginaries of retirement, perceptions of cultural integration, and the re-signification of urban spaces (Kvale, 2007). Seven participants were selected using a theoretical and purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2015), prioritizing diversity in age, country of origin, area of residence in Mazatlán (historic center, Zona Dorada, Cerritos, mixed neighborhoods), and degree of integration into local life. This strategy aimed to capture the heterogeneity of experiences, ranging from those who reproduce cultural enclaves to those who actively participate in local communities.

The open-ended interviews followed a thematic guide based on the concepts of *scapes* (Appadurai, 1996), *non-places* (Augé, 1993), and *heterotopias* (Foucault, 1986). Each session lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in informal settings—such as cafés, private homes, or public spaces in Mazatlán—to encourage spontaneity and reflexivity in participants' narratives (Spradley, 1979). The data analysis was carried out using a thematic coding approach (Saldaña, 2013), identifying narrative patterns related to the proposed theoretical categories. Emphasis was placed on narrative fragments that illustrated global tensions, spatial re-significations, dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and identity negotiation.

Ethical principles of qualitative research were strictly observed throughout the study (Tracy, 2010): participants' autonomy was respected, verbal informed consent was obtained prior to each interview, the anonymity of interviewees was protected through the use of pseudonyms, and the confidentiality of recordings and transcripts was ensured. This methodological approach not only gathered descriptive testimonies but also provided insight into how expatriates negotiate meanings of belonging, identity, and space within a context of global-local transformation.

Global Scapes and Retirement Migration

Arjun Appadurai (1990; 1996) proposes understanding globalization as a set of complex and disjunctive flows of people, technologies, capital, media, and ideas across borders, rather than as a simple dichotomy between "the global" and "the local." In his influential essay *Disjuncture*

and *Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, Appadurai introduces five dimensions—or scapes—of globalization: *ethnoscapes* (flows of people: migrants, tourists, refugees, expatriates), *technoscapes* (flows of technology and technical

knowledge), *financescapes* (global movements of capital and financial

resources), *mediascapes* (global circulation of media and visual narratives),

and *ideoscapes* (flows of ideas, values, and ideologies) (Appadurai, 1996). These landscapes are profoundly disjunctive and not always synchronized, giving rise to tensions and fragmentation within the globalizing process. In other words, the global-local relationship is neither linear nor homogeneous, but shaped by the complex interaction of these overlapping flows.

In the case of Mazatlán, Appadurai's scapes offer a framework for understanding how retirement migration is embedded within broader global dynamics: the *ethnoscape* is reflected in the influx of North American retirees who settle in the city; the *financescape* appears in the flow of pensions and financial resources that stimulate the local economy; the *technoscape* manifests through communication and transportation infrastructures that facilitate mobility; the *mediascape* is present in the dissemination of idyllic representations of Mazatlán as a retirement paradise; and the *ideoscape* emerges in notions of the “good life” and “authentic retirement” that motivate this migration. As these flows interact in disjunctive ways, they produce a complex reterritorialization of the urban landscape (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). In sum, retirement migration to Mazatlán is the outcome of converging global flows—human, financial, informational, and ideological.



Figure 1. Mediated representation of the idealized retirement lifestyle in Mazatlán. Promotional image from International Living (2020).

Photograph Sourced from International Living (2025).

Appadurai (1996) emphasizes that in late modernity, global flows operate in a deterritorialized manner, disembedding cultural practices from their places of origin and relocating them within new contexts. This is clearly observable in Mazatlán, where North American expatriate retirees

reproduce many aspects of their home cultures in a foreign geographical setting, creating what could be described as deterritorialized North American spaces within Mexico—such as gatherings for U.S. holidays, local businesses catering to foreign tastes, and the widespread use of English.

At the same time, this process intensifies tensions between global and local dynamics. Following Appadurai, the disjunctures between scapes explain the frictions that emerge: for example, the influx of foreign capital (*financescape*) can drive up real estate prices and exacerbate inequalities with lower-income local residents, while the ideas and lifestyles brought by expatriates (*ideoscape*) may conflict with local traditions. As exemplified by Cannon, an 81-year-old American expatriate living in the historic center: "*Living downtown means living within history. Here, I feel like I'm part of something.*"

This sense of integration shows that the *ethnoscape* does not always result in isolated enclaves but can instead lead to locally re-signified forms of belonging. Cannon also reflects: "*When I arrived in Mexico, I was a tourist; now I'm a neighbor. Learning Spanish was hard, but I try every day. I didn't come to impose my culture—I came to learn another.*" (Cannon, personal communication, March 2023).

His trajectory illustrates that Appadurai's *ethnoscape* can also give rise to processes of rooting and local reterritorialization. Yet this is not a simple binary clash; rather, it is a constant interaction. The presence of retired expatriates also fosters cultural exchange, economic opportunity, and new forms of local imagination. Mazatlán has, in fact, partially reinvented itself as a result of this global flow, incorporating the role of international retirement destination into its local identity.

This demonstrates that ideological flows are not monolithic but rather adapt and transform as they embed themselves in preexisting contexts. The emergence of social structures inspired by Anglo-Saxon models—such as neighborhood associations or philanthropic volunteer initiatives like Rotary Clubs—is clear evidence of the magnitude of global influence on urban space (Salazar, 2010). These structures, though rooted in particular cultural values, aim to integrate ideals of individualism and efficiency into local community governance (Heyman & Campbell, 2009). The migration of expatriate retirees brings with it sociopolitical and organizational practices that act as tools for constructing a new social order in Mazatlán. However, these practices carry inherent tensions, as they may conflict with existing forms of collective organization rooted in local culture (Smith, 2007). Thus, a negotiation emerges in which public space becomes a contested arena for competing cultural logics.

Mazatlán's process of glocalization is reflected not only in economic and organizational changes but also in the transformation of official discourses and tourist narratives. Local authorities, aligned with global trends, have begun to reconfigure the city's image to position it as an international retirement destination (Salazar, 2010). This reinvention involves a discursive construction that fuses local symbolic elements with global references, producing a hybrid narrative of a "city open to the world" (Heyman & Campbell, 2009). Urban marketing strategies draw on *mediascapes* that highlight exotic and affordable features while simultaneously reinforcing the appeal for foreign investment. In this way, the reconfiguration of Mazatlán emerges as an active process of cultural and economic negotiation, with local institutions playing a key role in shaping a new collective imaginary (Smith, 2007).

The transformation of Mazatlán's urban landscape reflects not only the convergence of imported

cultural practices but also the emergence of new interactions that redefine the meaning of place (Salazar, 2010). This phenomenon translates into the creation of hybrid enclaves, where contradictions emerge between a historical Mazatlán and one reinterpreted through global lenses. Such spaces, though geographically localized, are symbolically linked to references from the Global North, producing a fragmented and complex geography. The migration of North American retirees to Mazatlán has fostered the development of hybrid enclaves where practices, symbols, and values from the Global North intersect with local cultural dynamics. Rather than homogenization, this overlapping produces a constant reconfiguration of the territory, highlighting tensions between the historical and the contemporary, between local tradition and imported references. These spaces, though physically embedded in the Mazatlán context, are symbolically tied to external imaginaries, generating a dense and fragmented cultural geography (Salazar, 2010; Appadurai, 1990).

These spaces will later be analyzed through the lens of Marc Augé (1993); many of them can be interpreted as *non-places*: transient, indifferent spaces where traditional social relations are diluted. Gated communities, international cafés, or shopping zones oriented toward expatriates often lack the historicity and identity of anthropological places, functioning instead as spaces of consumption and anonymity. The proliferation of such *non-places* transforms Mazatlán into an ambivalent territory, where senses of belonging are constantly negotiated and the experience of dwelling is redefined.

In this context, Appadurai's (1990) *scapes* theory helps reveal how flows of people (*ethnoscapes*), images (*mediascapes*), capital (*financescapes*), and ideologies (*ideoscapes*) traverse the local space, generating cultural recomposition. The insertion of foreign elements alters not only urban and commercial practices but also the symbolic relationships between local residents and expatriates, who share a space shaped by disjunctive flows (Heyman & Campbell, 2009). This is not a matter of simple cultural adoption but rather a situated reworking that produces new imaginaries and hybrid forms of identity.

This dynamic of deterritorialization and relocation is reflected in reconfigured neighborhoods, adapted gastronomic practices, and reinterpreted celebrations—evidence of the environment's capacity to absorb, negotiate, and transform diverse influences (Smith, 2007). At the same time, the increasing presence of *non-places* reveals a structural tension between the experience of dwelling as symbolic anchoring and the globalizing logic of spatial standardization. Consequently, the transformation of Mazatlán should not be understood as a linear process of modernization but rather as a multidimensional phenomenon in which the global and the local intertwine in a dialectic of friction, creativity, and resistance (Salazar, 2010).

Non-Places, Enclaves, and Residential Anonymity: Insights from Marc Augé

The arrival of international residents seeking leisure and tranquility is closely tied to the phenomenon of tourism and the spatial forms it produces. Marc Augé (1993) coined the term *non-places* to describe those spaces of supermodernity characterized by transience, functionality, and a lack of rooted identity. Classic examples include airports, hotels, highways, shopping malls, and generic resorts—spaces where individuals pass through anonymously, without forming lasting relationships or deep identity ties. In a non-place, “instaneity and transience prevail,” creating anonymous and homogeneous environments where the question of the identity of place becomes irrelevant (Augé, 1993, p. 83).

Retirement migration to Mazatlán often begins with the experience of non-places (international flights, airports, highways, hotels) as retirees move from their home country to their destination. Mazatlán itself, as a tourist city, contains areas that can be understood as non-places: planned tourist enclaves, international hotel chains and franchise restaurants, newly built gated condominiums—spaces offering foreign retirees a familiar and standardized environment that is relatively disconnected from the local cultural context. Many foreign retirees initially experience Mazatlán through the lens of sun-and-sand tourism, staying in hotel zones that could easily be substituted by those in other destinations. This anonymized phase facilitates the initial adaptation of the retired expatriate by offering comfort and security in recognizable surroundings—such as speaking English in certain restaurants or shopping at familiar brand-name stores.

However, unlike the fleeting tourist, the retired expatriate eventually seeks to anchor their everyday life in Mazatlán and turn what was initially a tourist space into a meaningful place. Here we observe a transformation from *non-place* to *place*—the latter understood, in classical anthropological terms, as a space imbued with identity, history, and social relationships.

As exemplified by Helen, a 74-year-old British retiree living in the Lázaro Cárdenas neighborhood: “*I chose Mazatlán because the pace of life here is human. I didn’t come to recreate England in Mexico. I came because I wanted a place where each day had meaning beyond consumption.*” (Helen, personal communication, September 2023).

Her testimony illustrates how some expatriates re-signify their everyday experience by integrating into authentic local practices, such as shopping at neighborhood markets or engaging in cultural activities. In Augé’s terms, Helen moves from a space initially perceived as a non-place to the active construction of an inhabited place, affirming the individual’s agency in transforming their surroundings.

In contrast, Margaret, a 73-year-old Canadian retiree living in a modern condominium in the Zona Dorada, states: “*Here I have peace. In Vancouver I couldn’t even afford rent. Here, I live by the sea, I do yoga with my Canadian friends, and I walk my dogs.*” (Margaret, personal communication, March 2023). While Margaret attempts to connect through activities like volunteering, her residential environment continues to function under the logic of a closed enclave, characteristic of non-places as defined by Augé (1993).

In a different tone, Claire, a 79-year-old French expatriate, describes her motivations:

“*I didn’t want a tourist spot—I wanted a real place. I came to Mazatlán because it still has something authentic. I like its chaos, its people, its street art.*” (Claire, personal communication, February 2024). Her experience shows how, even in touristic contexts, expatriates may choose to re-signify spaces through an ethic of authenticity and aesthetic connection, in contrast to the standardized logic of non-places.

Once settled, expatriates often generate routines and local networks: they frequent markets and cafés, form friendship circles, and participate in community activities. In Mazatlán, expatriate clubs, volunteer groups, and regular social events have emerged, bringing together both foreigners and some locals, thereby imbuing previously transient spaces with continuity and a sense of community. As a result, certain restaurants, plazas, or beaches may cease to be generic tourist spaces and become familiar places filled with personal memories and social connections. This reversal of the non-place dynamic illustrates how retired expatriates re-signify space: what may appear as anonymous to the conventional tourist becomes part of the expatriate’s notion of home.

The everyday experience of retirees in Mazatlán is shaped by ideologies that serve as normative frameworks within contexts of tourism-driven development and urban transformation. These ideologies influence how subjectivities are constructed, how social bonds are formed, and how belonging is reconfigured, particularly within gated residential communities. Such enclaves, conceived as safe and comfortable refuges, reinforce dynamics of exclusion that limit cultural interaction with the broader local community (Requena, 2024; Hernández, 2021).

From this perspective, Marc Augé's (1993) concept of the *non-place* offers a key interpretive lens. Retirement enclaves may be read as non-places insofar as they are spaces of anonymity, transience, and emotional detachment. This characterization highlights a loss of historicity and a reduction of space to utilitarian functions, weakening symbolic ties to the surrounding environment. These enclaves privilege a functional experience of space, stripped of collective memory, which restricts the possibility of constructing a rooted cultural identity.

Heterotopias of Integration and Exclusion

Michel Foucault's (1984) concept of *heterotopia* enriches this analysis by suggesting that these spaces are not simply homogeneous or devoid of meaning, but rather embody a logic of "otherness," functioning as places that contain multiple layers of reality. Retirement enclaves in Mazatlán can be understood as heterotopias insofar as they simultaneously include and exclude, producing an ambiguous spatiality where the desire for integration coexists with the practice of segregation.

An example of a heterotopia of integration is illustrated by Richard, a retired American, and Paulina, his Mexican-American wife, who shared:

Paulina: "Returning to Mexico was my dream. And Richard fell in love not only with me, but with this city."

Richard: "Mazatlán gave us something we never found in Chicago: community. Here, Sundays feel like real Sundays."

(Richard and Paulina, personal communication, February 2024)

Their experience reveals how certain expatriate heterotopias may dissolve symbolic boundaries and foster a more porous and reciprocal cultural citizenship. This tension is expressed through the coexistence of local and imported norms, which creates a socially regulated yet fragmented space.

The intersection between *non-places* and *heterotopias* thus enables a more complex reading: retirement enclaves are not merely transient and meaningless spaces, but rather territories saturated with contradictory meanings, where both detachment and symbolic reconfiguration are experienced. While Augé's theory emphasizes the erosion of symbolic references in the era of supermodernity, Foucault draws attention to the ways these spaces operate through logics of emulation and control. Both approaches reveal how, in Mazatlán, these enclaves become sites where the global and the local intersect in conflictive ways, generating new spatial and social configurations.

In this context, urban policies must recognize the specificity of these hybrid spaces and promote integration mechanisms that enable retirees to participate meaningfully in community life. Only by doing so can these heterotopias avoid becoming permanent non-places, disconnected from the city's social fabric. The revitalization of the public sphere—through intercultural

communication initiatives and programs that foster symbolic appropriation of space—emerges as a necessary condition for re-signifying the urban environment and constructing a retirement experience grounded in belonging and social agency.

As residential enclaves inhabited by retirees become detached from the broader social dynamics of their surroundings, a duality emerges in which the desire for security stands in contrast to the need for cultural integration. This duality manifests in everyday practices that produce closed circuits of communication and aesthetic experience, distancing residents from the vibrant interactions that characterize Mazatlán. The proliferation of *non-places* in these contexts highlights how tourist saturation influences mentalities and social organization, weakening individuals' ability to experience the territory fully. This situation underscores the urgency of revitalizing public spaces through interventions that reaffirm local cultural identity and allow for the coexistence of diverse ways of life. Public policies that integrate historical heritage with intercultural communication strategies represent, ultimately, the most viable path toward restoring social cohesion between retirees and local residents.

The transformation of spatial experience in Mazatlán calls for a reevaluation of social integration mechanisms that enable retirees to maintain meaningful ties to the territory. The theoretical foundations of *non-places*, drawn from Augé's work, provide an analytical basis for identifying spaces prone to detachment and isolation. This theoretical framework is complemented by empirical studies showing how the presence of gated enclaves erodes social interaction and community cohesion. In this context, interventions in urban planning and intersectoral policy design become crucial strategies for combating marginalization. Through careful planning and the implementation of participatory programs, the holistic nature of urban space can be recovered and endowed with shared and affective meanings.

The revalorization of Mazatlán's cultural heritage—as an integrative element in the retirement experience—calls for public policy that embodies both tradition and modernity. The coexistence of traditional discourses with contemporary practices offers an opportunity to forge new narratives that resist the disintegrative effects of mass tourism. In this regard, it is imperative to strengthen community-based spaces that promote intercultural dialogue and encourage the active participation of retirees in recovering collective memory. Cultural and heritage spaces should serve not only as witnesses of the past but as pillars for constructing a more inclusive and resilient future. Thus, heritage recovery becomes a transformative strategy that ensures a retirement experience rooted in a dynamic and robust local identity.

The articulation of an integrated cultural policy emerges as a viable alternative to counteract processes that, on the one hand, promote tourism development and, on the other, weaken the traditional social fabric. Promoting cultural activities—such as festivals, artistic events, and historical storytelling—not only enlivens urban life but also reinforces retirees' sense of belonging. These initiatives have shown significant potential to contribute to the reconstruction of local identity and the creation of shared spaces that dissolve the structural barriers inherent to *non-places*. In doing so, they foster an environment conducive to knowledge exchange and the reconfiguration of everyday experience in a city undergoing constant transformation. Ultimately, cultural integration proves to be a fundamental pillar in addressing social fragmentation and promoting resilience in later life.

Reflections on the retirement experience in Mazatlán take on added complexity when examined in light of the urban transformations that have paralleled tourism expansion. These changes reveal a reconfiguration of public space that often privileges commercial interests at the expense

of cultural practices and social participation. In such a scenario, retirees' experiences are impoverished by the lack of authentic spaces that encourage interaction and nurture a sense of place. The interplay between the modernity of economic growth and the preservation of traditional identity demands a rebalancing that gives equal weight to both dimensions. This integration is essential to infuse the urban context with cultural vibrancy, enabling retirees to reconnect with their environment in genuine and meaningful ways.

In line with Augé's (1993) theory of *non-places*, these anonymous and detached spaces reinforce the patterns of urban fragmentation already observed. Addressing these challenges requires initiatives that articulate dynamics in which tradition and modernity intersect, generating proposals that transcend the barriers imposed by tourism-driven urban growth.

The integration of public spaces designed with high levels of safety and accessibility facilitates the creation of hybrid environments that combine the best of both worlds, fostering a renewed sense of community. Ultimately, the commitment to urban design that is sensitive to the needs of retirees becomes an opportunity to strengthen social cohesion and to revalue local cultural heritage.

The retirement experience in Mazatlán cannot be understood in isolation; it is deeply shaped by the social and economic transformations the city has undergone in recent decades. Identifying the patterns that link the construction of *non-places* with tourism-based urban development allows for a broader understanding of the impact on the city's social fabric. Integrating multiple levels of analysis opens the possibility of designing interventions that benefit both vulnerable populations and the wider community. In this context, policies aimed at promoting culture and civic participation emerge as essential tools for addressing the negative consequences of touristification. Accordingly, a thorough and multidimensional analysis of these dynamics is critical to formulating strategies that ensure an inclusive and empowering retirement experience.

Mechanisms of social integration capable of reversing the formation of isolated enclaves are grounded in the development of robust community networks and the active promotion of participatory initiatives. The implementation of such networks contributes not only to the reconnection with cultural heritage but also to the creation of shared spaces that allow retirees to interact freely with the wider city. Revitalizing community life thus becomes a strategic response to the deficits produced by tourism-driven transformations. In this regard, collaboration among governmental institutions, civil society organizations, and private actors becomes imperative for shaping inclusive and vibrant environments. This intersectoral synergy acts as a catalyst for the regeneration of the social fabric, enabling a retirement experience defined by active participation and a genuine sense of belonging.

The analysis of the retirement experience in Mazatlán is enriched by incorporating studies that highlight the evolving culture of retirement in response to urban and economic transformations. These studies demonstrate how the integration of cultural, artistic, and communicative elements contributes to re-signifying the very concept of retirement. The implementation of cultural interventions shows that shifts in the perception of retirement can be achieved through processes that strengthen affective ties to place. Such processes prove to be powerful tools for countering the tendency toward enclave formation and for promoting a form of social integration that embraces the diversity of the surrounding context. Consequently, there is a clear need to ground these changes in strategies that combine communication, culture, and urban design—thus redefining the meaning of retirement within a transformed environment.

A deep understanding of the social and economic strategies adopted by expatriate retirees is essential for analyzing integration dynamics within urban spaces shaped by processes of touristification. Approaches that combine place attachment theory with empirical research on social integration provide a perspective that enables the identification of both strengths and weaknesses in the retirement experience. These multidimensional approaches facilitate the diagnosis of critical areas and the design of solutions that address both economic and cultural challenges. Emphasizing the creation of participatory spaces and the recovery of local traditions strengthens social cohesion and the social capital of the retiree community. It becomes clear, then, that the challenge lies in transforming spaces of re-signification into environments rich in exchanges and shared meanings, with a view to building an inclusive and resilient urban future.

The everyday experience of retirees gains further complexity when examined through theoretical frameworks related to the culture of space, which reveal how dynamics of exclusion and segregation are materially expressed in the formation of *non-places*. Integrating these insights with studies on touristification enables a better understanding of the dual nature of the phenomenon: the economic opportunities it creates and the cultural identity it may erode. The transformation of the city into a space of consumption and transient mobility affects not only the daily lives of retirees but also the broader social fabric that surrounds them. This comprehensive perspective allows for the identification of complex connections between tourism dynamics and the reconfiguration of community space. Ultimately, it underscores that the recovery of local identity is a continuous process that demands the active and coordinated participation of society as a whole.

In sum, Mazatlán represents a paradigmatic case in which international retirement migration reveals glocal dynamics of tension and re-signification. The concepts of *scapes*, *non-place*, and *heterotopia* help illuminate how space, identity, and belonging are continuously negotiated. In the face of growing fragmentation, there is an urgent need to promote inclusive urban policies that encourage integration, symbolic participation, and the protection of local heritage as pathways toward an active and rooted experience of aging. Constructing a shared narrative that recovers and rearticulates the traditional elements of the territory emerges as an effective tool for addressing social fragmentation. Likewise, collaboration among the various actors that shape urban life is essential for promoting inclusion—transforming spaces that have become *non-places* into vibrant, meaningful environments. In doing so, a model of urban development takes shape that integrates memory, culture, and active participation, fostering a retirement experience that is both enriching and socially embedded.

The convergence of multiple theoretical and empirical perspectives on the retirement experience helps illuminate the inherent complexity of the relationship between identity, territory, and tourism in Mazatlán. The integration of research in intercultural communication, place attachment, and the analysis of touristification processes reveals a social reconfiguration that is multifaceted and constantly evolving. This theoretical convergence materializes in the formulation of proposals aimed at restoring a sense of belonging and promoting spaces for interaction and dialogue. Implementing these strategies requires a collaborative effort between institutions and civil society to reverse trends that lead to the formation of *non-places* and social isolation. In this way, the retirement experience becomes enriched by a vision that recognizes and values the multiple dimensions of coexistence and identity within a dynamic and transforming urban context.

Ultimately, the synthesis of the concepts addressed in this analysis highlights the urgent need to

understand and transform the dynamics that shape the experience of retirees in Mazatlán—dynamics marked by processes of touristification and the emergence of *non-places*. Ideological strategies, cultural discourses, and intervening urban policies act collectively to define a living space that, at times, excludes those seeking safety and cultural affinity. The integration of research in intercultural communication, place attachment, and socioeconomic development provides a solid foundation for proposing interventions that restore both territorial value and civic identity. The challenge lies in transforming these enclaves into spaces of convergence and dialogue by prioritizing strategies that emphasize inclusion, diversity, and social resilience. In doing so, the path is cleared for a retirement experience that is both enriching and actively engaged in the positive transformation of the urban environment—benefiting not only retirees but the broader Mazatlán community.

The everyday experience of retirees in Mazatlán is shaped by ideologies that operate as normative frameworks within contexts of touristification and urban transformation. These ideologies influence how subjectivities are constructed, how social bonds are formed, and how senses of belonging are reconfigured—particularly within gated residential communities. Such enclaves, conceived as refuges of safety and comfort, often reinforce dynamics of exclusion that limit cultural interaction with the local community (Requena, 2024; Hernández, 2021). From this perspective, Marc Augé's (1993) notion of the *non-place* provides an essential interpretive key. This characterization highlights the loss of historicity and the reduction of space to utilitarian functions, thereby weakening symbolic ties to the surrounding environment. Such enclaves privilege a functional experience of space—stripped of collective memory—thus limiting the possibility of constructing a rooted cultural identity.

Complementarily, Michel Foucault's (1984) notion of *heterotopia* enhances this analysis by suggesting that these spaces are not merely homogeneous or meaningless but instead embody a logic of "otherness," operating as layered spaces that contain multiple levels of reality. Retirement enclaves in Mazatlán can be interpreted as heterotopias: sites that simultaneously welcome and exclude, generating an ambiguous spatiality in which the desire for integration coexists with practices of segregation. This tension is expressed in the coexistence of local and imported norms, resulting in a social space that is regulated but fragmented.

The intersection between *non-places* and *heterotopias* thus allows for a more nuanced reading: retirement enclaves are not merely transient spaces devoid of meaning, but rather territories saturated with contradictory symbolic densities, where both detachment and re-signification take place. While Augé's theory underscores the erosion of symbolic references in the age of supermodernity, Foucault reveals how such spaces operate through logics of emulation and control. Both approaches suggest that in Mazatlán, these enclaves constitute sites where the global and the local intersect in tension-filled ways, generating novel social and spatial configurations.

In this context, urban policies must recognize the particularity of these hybrid spaces and promote mechanisms of integration that facilitate the active participation of retirees in community life. Only in this way can these heterotopias avoid becoming definitive non-places, disconnected from the city's social fabric. The revitalization of the public sphere—through intercultural communication initiatives and programs that foster the symbolic appropriation of space—emerges as a necessary condition for the re-signification of the urban environment and for the construction of a retirement experience grounded in belonging and social agency.

Glocal Dynamics: Tensions and Negotiations

By articulating the perspectives of Augé, Foucault, and Appadurai, it becomes evident that the migration of foreign retirees transforms not only the economy of Mazatlán but also the ways in which urban space is inhabited, imagined, and governed. This glocal dynamic unfolds across multiple dimensions.

In urban and economic terms, the arrival of expatriates has stimulated the revaluation of coastal and historic areas through real estate developments tailored to their preferences. While this revitalizes specific zones, it also contributes to processes of gentrification and the exclusion of local populations (Rojas et al., 2014). The case of Thomas, a 70-year-old American retiree living in an exclusive condominium in Marina Cerritos, Mazatlán, illustrates this phenomenon:

“When I retired, all I wanted was security and comfort. In the U.S., my pension barely covered the basics. Here, I live like I’m at a resort. I’m not really interested in integrating—I came here to relax, not to complicate my life.”

(Thomas, personal communication, February 2024)

Thomas’s experience reflects a logic of a self-contained enclave, where comfort is prioritized over interaction. From Augé’s (1993) perspective, his condominium functions as a *non-place*, structured by the logic of functional anonymity. From Foucault’s (1986) point of view, it could be interpreted as a *heterotopia of control*: a surveilled, ordered, and symbolically closed space that privileges familiarity over genuine local engagement.

Thomas exemplifies how many expatriates replicate standardized residential models, creating enclaves that, according to Augé, constitute spaces of comfort and anonymity. Simultaneously, as Foucault would argue, these are regulated spaces in which control is internalized through architecture, routine, and social codes—where the predictability of life takes precedence over intercultural exchange.

Figure 2. Retired expatriate on a Mexican beach.



Figure 2. Retired Expatriate on A Mexican Beach. Photograph Taken By The Author, March 2023.

Appadurai (1996) offers a useful lens for understanding how the global *financescape* materializes in standardized developments and commercial circuits targeted toward the expatriate community, while Augé (1993) would caution against the homogenization of the urban landscape: condominiums and cafés that could be found in virtually any resort town around the world. Nevertheless, nuances exist: some expatriates become active participants in traditional neighborhoods, renovating homes and encouraging intercultural interaction.

At the community level, social enclaves have formed, sustained by transnational networks and cultural affinities, serving as spaces for mutual support, volunteering, or religious practice (Lizárraga, 2008). From Foucault's perspective, these enclaves function as heterotopias—spaces that appear open but operate with their own internal logics. The strong cohesion of these networks, mediated by communication technologies, produces a deterritorialized affective landscape (Appadurai, 1996). However, the limited linguistic and political engagement of many expatriates raises questions about their role in the local community: are they privileged observers or integrated actors?

George, a retired Texan, reflects on this transition: *"I'm starting to get out of the bubble. I'm taking Spanish classes and went to a baseball game with a Mexican neighbor. I'm beginning to realize this place isn't just about sun and cheap beer."* (George, personal communication, March 2023). His adaptation process suggests that although many expatriates initially inhabit standardized, disconnected spaces, there are also dynamics of re-signification and active participation.

The symbolic dimension is also crucial. For many retirees, Mazatlán represents a *retirement paradise*, an idealized space narrated as a refuge from the stresses of modern life (International Living, 2016). This image, fueled by the *mediascape*, intersects with local representations that now promote the city as an international retirement destination (Oppenheimer, 2010). However, such idyllic narratives can obscure social issues or reduce cultural authenticity to a commodified product. In this sense, Augé (1993) warns of the risk of transforming authenticity into just another object of tourist consumption.

Finally, glocal tensions emerge. While expatriates contribute to local economic dynamism, they can also drive up prices and create visible disparities in purchasing power. Cultural frictions—such as limited language skills or behaviors perceived as exclusive—coexist with stereotypes directed at foreigners. Here, Appadurai (1996) suggests that disjunctures between global *ideoscapes* and local *ethnoscapes* create points of cultural friction that require negotiation. Likewise, from Foucault's perspective, these heterotopias may become strained when expatriates attempt to influence local political dynamics without genuine rootedness. Still, paths toward integration do exist: some expatriates adopt local practices, and many Mazatlecos value the cultural and economic contributions of the foreign community.

In sum, Mazatlán represents a glocal space where the interaction between expatriate retirees and the local community generates both enrichment and tension. The concepts of *non-place*, *heterotopia*, and *scapes* help to unravel these complex dynamics, positioning the city as a social laboratory of globalized retirement.

Local Transformations and Glocal Tensions in Mazatlán

By articulating the perspectives of Augé, Foucault, and Appadurai, it becomes evident that the migration of foreign retirees transforms not only Mazatlán's economy but also the ways in which urban space is inhabited, imagined, and governed. This glocal dynamic manifests at multiple levels.

On the urban and economic front, the arrival of expatriates has driven the revaluation of coastal and historic areas through real estate projects tailored to their preferences. While these developments revitalize specific zones, they also contribute to gentrification processes and the exclusion of local populations (Rojas et al., 2014). Appadurai's (1996) concept of the *financescape* helps explain how global capital materializes in standardized developments and commercial circuits geared toward the expatriate community, while Augé (1993) would caution against the homogenization of the urban landscape—condominiums and cafés that could be located in virtually any global resort. However, there are important nuances: some expatriates actively engage in traditional neighborhoods, restoring homes and fostering cultural interactions.

At the community level, social enclaves have emerged, sustained by transnational networks and cultural affinities, which function as spaces of mutual support, volunteering, or religious practice (Lizárraga, 2008). From Foucault's heterotopian perspective, these enclaves operate as semi-autonomous spaces: outwardly open, but governed by internal logics. The strong cohesion of these networks—mediated by communication technologies—produces a deterritorialized affective landscape (Appadurai, 1996). Nevertheless, the limited linguistic and political engagement of many expatriates raises questions about their role in local society: are they privileged observers or truly integrated actors?

The symbolic dimension is also critical. For many retirees, Mazatlán represents a “retirement paradise,” an idealized space imagined as a refuge from the pressures of modern life

(International Living, 2016). This image, fed by the *mediascape*, intersects with local representations that now promote the city as an international retirement destination (Oppenheimer, 2010). However, such idyllic narratives can obscure social challenges or reproduce cultural stereotypes. In this sense, Augé (1993) would warn against the risk of turning authenticity into yet another commodity of tourist consumption.

Glocal tensions inevitably emerge. Although expatriates contribute to economic dynamism, they may also drive up prices and accentuate visible disparities in purchasing power. Cultural frictions—such as limited language proficiency or behaviors perceived as exclusionary—coexist with stereotypes directed at foreigners. Here, Appadurai (1996) argues that disjunctures between global *ideoscapes* and local *ethnoscapes* create points of friction that demand cultural negotiation. From Foucault's perspective, such heterotopias may become strained if expatriates attempt to influence local political dynamics without establishing meaningful rootedness. Nonetheless, there are paths to integration: some expatriates adopt local practices, and many Mazatlecos value the cultural and economic contributions of the foreign community.

Conclusions

Mazatlán has become a *heterotopia of retirement*, where global flows, aesthetics of comfort, and cultural tensions converge to reshape urban space. This form of migration not only transforms residential and economic dynamics but also establishes a new symbolic regime in which aging is articulated through privilege, displacement, and dispossession.

From a critical perspective, what appears as an individual search for quality of life is also an expression of the affective geopolitics of the Global North upon territories of the Global South. The *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, and *financescapes* that traverse Mazatlán are not neutral: they generate enclaves that, in their ambivalence, oscillate between symbolic integration and structural exclusion. The identified *non-places* reveal not only anonymity but also a spatial will to control, while *heterotopias* point to spaces charged with contradiction—open yet segregated, hospitable yet normative.

The testimonies of retirees illustrate diverse trajectories—from a search for authenticity to the reproduction of North American comfort—but in all cases it is clear that the territory does not remain untouched: it is negotiated, adapted, and at times erased. This glocal logic, marked by differences in class, language, and purchasing power, raises an unavoidable question: what kind of city is emerging through this form of transnational retirement?

There is an urgent need for a perspective that transcends tourist idealization and addresses the necessity of intercultural urban policies—ones that protect local memory, strengthen community life, and prevent these enclaves from becoming definitive *non-places*. In sum, Mazatlán represents a glocal space where the interaction between expatriate retirees and the local community generates both enrichment and tension. The concepts of *non-place*, *heterotopia*, and *scapes* enable us to unravel the complex dynamics that configure the city as a social laboratory of globalized retirement.

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