

Pura Vida en Tres Comunidades: Palmichal

Creative Projects from the RCAH Program on Sustainability in
Costa Rica

Rachel Cozzi

“Costa Rica has the reputation of being a lush, tropical country full of biodiversity and renewable energy. As I began to explore the city, I noticed that everywhere I walked, the streets of the country’s capital were astonishingly full of litter. The sidewalks, ditches, sewers, and roads contained a multitude of garbage. I chose this project because I really care about the environment, especially when it comes to recycling and anti-littering. I believe that if more people were informed about the harms of littering, that it would be reduced greatly. Education is incredibly important regarding the everyday impact individuals can make to help or hurt the earth.”



Recycling Bins in Palmichal



“Pile of trash near my house that I passed everyday, Palmichal”

Camri Nelson

“The lens of this project is connected to is Sustainability of Everyday Life. People of everyday life have identities that constricted the block identities that Costa Rica has. Place plays a role as well and shows reflects sets of identities and power that is local.

The connection between the sustainability of everyday life and the notion of block identities and exceptionalism is not defined or supported here. The sustainability of everyday life – and also place (since it is mentioned formally here) needs to be defined, described, discussed and connected both the your discussion of this narrative of exceptionalism and the project.”

Costa Rican Myths

- It is hot and sunny year round
- Gayo Pinto is 100% Tico
- Costa Rica is the safest place in Central America
- You can't drink the water
- Health care is great for everyone
- Everyone is Catholic
- Costa Rica is a Third World Country

Kate LaFrenz

“I wanted to create a reminder of my Costa Rican experiences and especially, of the people who made an imprint on my life, so every day over a period of two months I documented something about those 24 hours in the form of a one-second video. Then, I compiled each visual snapshot into a two-minute-long video. The video will give friends, family, and others a brief look at my daily life in Palmichal. Many things are more complicated than they appear on the surface. My video suggests this is true of Costa Rica as well. The country is a complicated eco-paradise, despite contradictions to this narrative.”

(The following slides include the manuscript of Kate’s video)

The 3 P Model and Sustainability

The 3 P Sustainability Model strives to find a balance between planet, prosperity, and people in order to achieve sustainability (Yates 2012). The goal of **planet** is to protect the environment. Next, **prosperity** seeks to positively impact economic concerns of a community or country. Finally, **people** relates to the overall social well-being and happiness of people. To be an eco-paradise, Costa Rica must be sustainable. The stories below, organized by the dates of videos, seek to exemplify how the everyday lives of Costa Ricans fit into the 3 P Model.

Planet

Planet is practiced in Costa Rica through protection of the country's diversity and its natural resources. Despite contradictions to Planet in Costa Rica, I found that delving into the root causes of contradictions illustrates how some Costa Ricans deal with challenges while still trying to maintain the nature they love.

2/11/18

We attended a River Day celebratory picnic at Nacientes Palmichal on our second weekend living in Palmichal; this is where today's video was taken. A community leader asked us to help dig a hole and bury used toilet paper, diapers, and plastic. We were confused as to why we had been asked to do this because our perception was that Nacientes Palmichal is rooted in promoting sustainability and conservation.

3/11/18

Today's video features a family dinner at Don Hernan's house, the founder of Nacientes Palmichal. It was captured the day we learned that Nacientes Palmichal and the town of San Pablo was facing the threat of demolition by the Ministry of Health. Thinking back to the disturbing picnic clean-up day, we still don't, and probably never will, know the exact reason we were asked to help. However, knowing of this threat now made us wonder if we may have been asked to do the dirty work so that the community members at the picnic who would soon testify for Nacientes Palmichal weren't involved in the clean-up. Whatever the reason, this experience showed us how complicated answers and actions can be and the importance of slowing down to consider more than a first instinct

2/21/18:

In Costa Rica, not everyone disposes of trash in an eco-friendly way, contradicting their image of an eco-paradise.

The first time I saw trash being burned in Palmichal, I took a video to ask my host family about it. They explained that trash pickup didn't exist in the community until recently, and many Palmichal residents who burn their trash don't have the extra money to pay for it. I realized that I had been quick to make a judgement because \$10 a month seems like nothing to me -- it is the price of coffee and a snack in the U.S.

Prosperity

I have seen prosperity represented in Costa Rica in different forms. Specifically, in the development of the tourism industry and in everyday jobs.

4/6/18:

Today's video shows off one of the many hot springs in Arenal. Hot springs are loved by some and scoffed at by others who consider it to be cheesy and unnatural. It represents part of the booming Arenal tourism industry, which is an important part of Costa Rica's economy.

3/26/18: A man walks down a steep hill with a bag of soil and sticks balanced on his shoulders. He exemplifies the sustainability of everyday life which includes people who work hard to earn a living and to support their lifestyle.

People: My experiences in Costa Rica have led me to observe that many Costa Ricans are people-oriented with joy-filled personalities. They love life, love others, and love their country -- all especially important when maintaining a sustainable lifestyle.

4/8/18: We had no power in my house, hence this video that displays my fashionable headlight. When I went into the kitchen, it was filled with people. Instead of heating water for hot coffee, we made cold coffee -- enough for the entire room of people. I spent the afternoon and night laughing, using empanada dough as playdough, and playing Uno.

When the power came back on a few hours later, conversations hardly wavered. It took another 2 hours for people to return to their houses. Being a part of this day showed me how Costa Ricans choose to be joyful each day, even when houses are flooding from rain and the coffee is cold.

4/9/18

Jessica, my host mom in Palmichal, babysits 9-month-old Diana every day while her mom works. When I asked why she does this, she said: “Diana’s mom is single. She doesn’t have family here to help. I am doing what any person here would do.”

A Complicated Eco Paradise? “You want to know why I love Costa Rica? Well, here we are free. Here we have farms, plants, rivers and friendly people that give us everything we need to survive and be happy. Here I have my wife and kids and Pato (the cat). When you came into my house, you said you were scared. I thought this was silly. But in this house and town, we have seen you be brave, Kate. I think that this is because you let Costa Rica help you. I always say that if you love Costa Rica, it will love you back. You did that, and that is why I think I love Costa Rica the most.” – Javier, my host dad in Palmichal

The more time I spent in Palmichal, the more contradictions to Costa Rica as an eco-paradise I encountered. And the more time I spent with the people of Palmichal and saw their compassion and love for others and their country, the more I came to believe that Costa Rica is a complicated eco paradise. My video is an unfiltered look into real lives of hard-working Costa Ricans who value and work toward sustainability whether they realize it or not. Costa Rica is not a flawless eco paradise, and it never will be. Instead, it is a place full of people who love their country wholeheartedly and do the best they can. My view of Costa Rica is filtered through my own experiences and judgements: what I see is a complicated and evolving eco paradise.