

# Séminaire

## *Penser (avec et par) le tourisme*

Groupe « Cultures et natures du tourisme »

*Unil*  
UNIL | Université de Lausanne  
Institut de géographie  
et durabilité

## Shifting Sands: freedom and possession in a Mexican tourist town

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This paper looks at way tourists and locals navigate different ideals of freedom through possession in the coastal town of Puerto Escondido, Mexico. The first case of possession refers to the legal and non-legal ways private and communal property is managed under the pressure of skyrocketing land prices due to tourism. The second case of possession refers to the way tourists, as well as locals, perform techniques



of the self (self possession) in the exaggerated context of a tourist setting where concepts of freedom and escape dominate. The constant theme of working on, while being away from work, leaves a demand for discipline even in paradise. The final case of possession is somewhat spiritual, and addresses the way in which ritual, religion, and drink and drug abuse (being possessed/caught in possession) filters through the lives of those living on, and passing through, the coast.

**Paul Reade** is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Bern. He completed his PhD in 2014 at Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia. In his thesis he looked at memory and representation surrounding the 1997 massacre in Acteal, Mexico. He is currently employed as part of the SNF funded research project, "Trapped in Paradise: entangled mobilities and imaginaries of freedom," and is working in the tourist town of Puerto Escondido, Mexico. The project looks at the impact of unequal mobilities and the ways in which people make a life for themselves in tourist settings—where the imperatives of freedom and paradise can be both liberating and enslaving.