

EXCEPTIONAL COSTA RICA



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BONILLA

Exceptional Costa Rica

How does it benefit us all?



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303.497.286

B837e Brenes Bonilla, Lizette

Exceptional Costa Rica : How does it benefit us all? / Lizette

Brenes Bonilla. -- San José, C. R. : Fundepredi, 2022.

1 recurso electrónico (143 páginas) : E-book ; 317 Kb. -- (Be Exponential ; No.3)

ISBN 9789930973646

1. DESARROLLO SOCIAL 2. CAMBIO SOCIAL 3. GLOBALIZACIÓN 4. COSTA RICA I. Título

Book cover design:

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www.amirajalet.art

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Producer:

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First edition. Number 3.

San Pedro, Costa Rica, 2022

The drums of globalization, technological lightning, and the climate threat have tested human capacity worldwide. So, what has Costa Rica done?

Costa Rica is more than a country; it is a concept. Since the end of the last century, it has made social innovations whose results have attracted disproportionate global attention.

I am a Costa Rican and a citizen of the world, fortunate to have been born in this country and been able to travel and discover places on every continent. On each trip, when I introduced myself as a Costa Rican, I collected reactions generally of admiration or surprise.

As a leader, consultant, and academic, I have dedicated more than 20 years to understanding the dynamics between innovation and well-being. Yet, at the same time, I have seen many people coming to Costa Rica in search of our secrets to achieving well-being, similar to that of a rich country without being economically prosperous.

The journey to understand the social innovations of Costa Rica in this era is presented in ten chapters dedicated to one topic each. Each chapter begins with a story that illustrates the topic and an international news item that highlights Costa Rica in that topic.

The international news about the country talks more about the cherry on the cake and less about the recipe. So, in search of the actual recipe, we identify the social innovation called "leapfrogging." Then, we will have stories, international news, and social innovations for each topic.

Let's discover what can be learned from today's Costa Rica to improve our life journey if your relationship with this country provokes a smile, a sigh, or curiosity.

Foreword

Costa Rica is a wonderful country. Probably the most wonderful of all the countries in the world. **Its exceptionality is based on a set of conditions that are difficult to find separately in many countries and practically impossible to find together in any other country in the world.**

That social fabric that coexists as one with nature, in an atypical society, with its characteristics and idiosyncrasy so particular that it is drawn in details as every day as coffee afternoons, going for pills to EBAIS, participating in an ASADA or the possibility that a child can take to the top of the regulatory framework: to the political constitution, the human right to a healthy environment.

Through this work, Liz Brenes invites us on a magical journey to try to discover the recipe that makes the country the exceptional country that it is. In her own words: "Costa Rica, more than a country, is a concept". Although this concept has been designing itself over two centuries, the truth is that there is a set of outstanding milestones between the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century that allowed us to advance qualitatively in the generation of conditions that today amaze the world.

These leaps and bounds, as Liz calls them, have allowed us to take the universalization of rights to another level. These include access to water and the democratization of its management, access to health and environmental protection, the promotion of sustainable tourism, support for exports, and the stability of our democratic system, to mention a few examples.

Costa Rica is a country that has managed to normalize the extraordinary. It has made the delicacies that rich countries can access -without being rich- look like daily bread.

The country is known as a middle-income country, it is not a developing country, but it is not a rich country either. However, the most interesting thing is that it has managed to have conditions typical of rich countries. So, how has Costa Rica done it? It is still the question that thousands of world experts in many areas of knowledge are still trying to answer.

The truth is that there is no single answer or a single cause. The case of Costa Rica is in itself a rarity in the world, a case study worthy of the leading international organizations and admiration by the most knowledgeable on issues of social progress, quality of life, democracy, peace, environmental conservation, human rights, sustainability...

Liz gives us a clue. She does much of the homework for us, compiles a set of international news, stories, and reliable sources, and draws us part of the recipe that has made Costa Rica the exceptional concept it is. It allows us to immerse ourselves in the daily dynamics of the life of anyone who lives in the country or has visited it. It shows us the Costa Rican idiosyncrasy, customs, sayings, and ways of thinking. And the most magical thing of all is that it illustrates the softness with which an artist draws delicate strokes on a painting, the ways to connect that daily life with the Costa Rican exceptionality.

With subtle elegance, she reminds us that many things we take for granted as "normal" in the XXI Century are not so in all corners of the planet, even though we Costa Ricans often believe this is normal.

For example, opening the faucet and drinking water from the tap is a privilege that Liz reminds us of. Only in Costa Rica and Chile can it be done in Latin America. This country is first place worldwide in gender parity in political participation. Anyone can interpose a "salacuartazo" or go to the Constitutional Court when they feel their rights are being violated. That we live in a habitat of peace and freedom to such an extent

that even those who swear and perjure that Costa Rica is not so exceptional can rant, criticize and complain at full volume and in all the ways they want without any fear of reprisals because "the freedom to decide and to do is a characteristic that the Ticos live without thinking".

That freedom at the highest level allows us not only to have our own opinions but, as a stubborn society, to promote our ideas and create reality on our whim. Examples of this include when we created the Payment System for Environmental Services - Costa Rica's innovation for the world - or when we decided to diversify the applications of the ecological blue flag mechanism.

Costa Rica is undoubtedly paradise on Earth. However, trying to decipher its exceptionality is to enter a path that leads to the understanding that the welfare of people and nature -in its broadest sense- is the common answer to all the questions that were once asked when thinking about creating legislation, institutions, regulatory frameworks, or promoting innovations that have drawn line by line the conditions that today define daily life in this small (big) Central American country.

Pablo Acuña Ramírez

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACAE	Central American Aeronautics Association
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ADI	Association for Integral Development
AFP	Agence France-Presse
AGECO	Asociación Gerontológica Costarricense
ASADA	Sanitary Aqueduct Administrators Associations
AyA	Costa Rican Water and Sewerage Institute
CECI	Intelligent Community Center
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
CGST	Global Council on Sustainable Tourism
IACHR	Inter-American Court of Human Rights
CIJUL	Online Legal Information Center
CINDE	Costa Rican Coalition of Development Initiatives
CONADECO	National Confederation of Development Associations
COVID-19	Coronavirus 19
CSJCR	Supreme Court of Justice of Costa Rica
CST	Certificate for Sustainable Tourism
EBAIS	Basic Health Care Teams Headquarters Establishments
ENB	National Biodiversity Strategy
USA	United States of America
FB	Facebook
FOD	Omar Dengo Foundation
ICT	Costa Rican Tourism Institute
INAMU	National Women's Institute
INFOCOOP	National Institute for Cooperative Development
INEC	National Institute of Statistics and Census
FONAFIFO	National Forestry Financing Fund
MCECR	Ministry of Foreign Trade of Costa Rica
MCJ	Ministry of Culture and Youth
MINAE	Ministry of Environment and Energy
MIDEPLAN	Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy
MNCR	National Museum of Costa Rica
MINCIT	Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism
NCA	Nosara Civic Association
NU	United Nations
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Tourism Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PBAE	Ecological Blue Flag Program
PEN	State of the Nation Program
PJRCR	Judicial Branch of the Republic of Costa Rica
PROCOMER	Foreign Trade Promoter of Costa Rica
SINAC	National System of Conservation Areas
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TEC	Tecnológico de Costa Rica
TSE	Supreme Electoral Tribunal
UCR	University of Costa Rica
UNED	State Distance University
WRO	World Robot Olympiad™

I

Intensely natural

"Today, people who lead must accept that they are responsible not only for their own people, but for every man, woman, child, and animal on the planet. They are responsible not only for their territory but for every square meter of the earth's surface and the atmosphere above it.

Simon Anholt

More than once, you will feel like walking inside a nature documentary. Perhaps, you will think you hear the narration of David Attenborough (2021) explaining every movement as you walk through the most naturally intense place on the planet; it is almost spiritual.

You could wish for more senses to experience the iridescence of the hummingbird, the splendor of the sunset that seems digitally enhanced, the steam of the hot springs, so many shades of green, and sour flavors that feel sweet, and the elegant farewell of the night and the sound of the rain that sneaks into your thoughts.

In Costa Rica, your gaze always meets nature. You can feel the natural richness at every step that invites you to live with it. It is life happening all around. It seems inevitable to coexist with nature, feeling part of nature.

Walking through a documentary, feeling like the protagonist of an adventure commercial, having breakfast in the Caribbean, and watching the sunset on the Pacific. Megadiverse, Costa Rica, is the most intensely biodiverse place on the planet.

Costa Rica is one of the 25 mega-biodiverse countries in the world. Not only because of the number of species - more than half a million, 4% of the expected world total of species, of which there were 94,753 known species as of 2013, 5% of the world's known biodiversity - but also because it is possibly the country with the highest density, that is, the highest number of species per square kilometer. It is also considered a hotspot of marine diversity with some 7,000 species. Despite being a small territory - 51,000 km² of land area but more than 550,000 km² of territorial sea and exclusive economic zone - Costa Rica is a bridge between continents and oceans. This condition, location, geographical aspects, and the variability of microclimates make it a country rich in landscapes and biodiversity (MINAE, 2017).

People in Costa Rica feel part of nature. Their relationship and connection have been recognized internationally. Even the official world-class storyteller of nature documentaries: Sir David Attenborough (2021) has visited intense Costa Rica for his productions.

Nature is the soul's home, so it shelters my beloved partner Georgia, who was born in Australia and lives in Costa Rica, and so many people who move between geographically distant homes that feel close thanks to a tree or a song of nature.

The international news often tells green stories about Costa Rica, only they talk more about the cherry on top and less about the recipe. In search of an actual recipe, we will review how the connection with nature is lived in today's exceptional Costa Rica.

Long before Greta Thunberg and social networks in Costa Rica, there lived a brave boy who changed history.

The boy and the river

Story time! -says Auntie Luz.

Almost six years old and wearing pajamas, at 7:00 p.m., Nene is not ready to sleep, but she is always ready to dream. "The childhood that saves the world" is her favorite book. Every night, she and Aunt Luz choose a story. One of their favorites is Malala from Pakistan. Yesterday they read Greta's from Stockholm. Today, Carlos from Costa Rica:

Once upon a time, in a very near place, there was a boy named Carlos. He loves to study, he happily goes to school, and, in the afternoons, he plays and does homework. But, that day it was getting dark and he didn't start his homework.

-What's wrong? -His grandmother asked him, "It's late and you haven't started your essay.

-I'm not going to do it. I don't want to, I can't.

-You're very good at essays, why not?

-I want to write about a clean river, not this one, said Carlos.

-It was a beautiful river, Carlos, said his grandmother. When I was a child, it was heard from home and every special day was shared by the river," his grandmother told him. It was surrounded by trees that were full of flowers in December. We could smell the scent of their yellow flowers and we knew it was summer. Those were happy times. Of lunches by the river and wet laughter.

-This river? -he asked, surprised.

-Yes, this river. It's the fault of the municipality and the ministry that it's like this.

-But everyone dumps garbage there!

-Yes, that's bad, but what are they going to do if the municipality and the ministry don't pick it up?
-The river is sick and sad. The last tree died. It makes me sad. If the river is full of garbage, my eyes are full of garbage. The river is silent, but I can talk. If we go to the municipality or the ministry, do they clean the river?
-We have already gone with letters and many signatures, and nothing happens. But now that I think about it, there is one way left: go to the Fourth Chamber," said the grandmother.

A few months later, the voice of the river was heard. The Fourth or Constitutional Chamber said that clean rivers and a clean environment were a right for all rivers and all people, but also for the forests, for the sea, for all of nature.

Thanks to Carlos, now in Costa Rica, everyone has the right to a healthy environment. Little by little, the aromas and sounds of life in harmony are coming back, and this story is not over...

The story "The Boy and the River" is based on the actual achievement of Carlos Roberto Mejía Chacón. Fortunately, childhood has decided to lead this adult community that has forgotten what is important.

Many years before Greta Thunberg started the global movement of awareness and action on climate change, across the Atlantic, in a neighborhood in Costa Rica, lived the brave boy who changed history and started a heroic childhood movement.

In March 2021, the BBC told Carlos' story: "The human right that benefits nature" (Zimmer, 2021). That adventure continues to change the world as more countries are inspired by Costa Rica's leapfrogging.

Leapfrogging

The human right to a healthy environment

At the end of the last century, we were used to adult leaders. Child leaders had not yet awakened in this global era. After Greta and Malala, we understand that the adult community needs help from children to pay attention to what is important; but, before them and the social networks, there was Carlos. In the resolution that gave a response to the child Carlos Roberto, section V expresses:

V.- Human life is only possible in solidarity with the nature that sustains and sustains us, not only for physical nourishment but also as psychic well-being: it constitutes the right that all citizens have to live in a pollution-free environment, which is the basis of a just and productive society (CSJCR, 1993).

This action had repercussions at the highest level, as it was part of the qualitative leap that allowed the right to a healthy environment to be recognized in article 50 of the Political Constitution of Costa Rica:

Article 50.- The State shall procure the most significant welfare for all the country's inhabitants, organizing and stimulating production and the adequate distribution of wealth. Every person has the right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. Therefore, they are entitled to denounce the acts that infringe on this right and to claim reparation for the damage caused. The State shall guarantee, defend and preserve this right. The law will determine the corresponding responsibilities and sanctions (Law 7412, 1994).

This shows the importance of the Constitutional Chamber in the national life of Costa Rica, which, at that time, was only three years old. Further on, more information on this institution is given below.

This new stature achieved by the healthy and ecologically balanced environment accelerates initiatives that weave a better relationship between people and nature. In 2010, the country passed a law to improve the integrated management of solid waste, and in this law, two principles stand out: responsibility is shared, and citizen participation is necessary (Law 8839, 2010).

Specialists call this category of human rights "third generation" or "rights of solidarity among peoples" (Cijul, 2013). From my perspective, they are collective human rights:

human and nature. They are emerging human rights, gaining traction and promoted by the community but not yet consolidated (Cuadrado, 2009).

**In Costa Rica, emerging human rights are maturing and ascending
to the next generation of rights:
the rights of the planet?**

Exceptional is the community where a child mobilizes a legal action that turns a well-kept feeling in the soul of Costa Ricans into a "legal fairy tale" (Zimmer, 2021), with a happy ending and whose ripples continue to benefit the natural state of Costa Rica.

The happy endings of this era are short-lived; only until the next season begins. Costa Rica's natural state requires a recipe for managing its protected areas, equivalent to more than a quarter of its territory. Therefore, the responsibility for the most intensely diverse spot on the planet is enormous and growing.

In times when a pandemic has compromised the mental health of humanity, a natural exfoliant is all the more necessary. Thus, green frequency in life, albeit through a window, has proven to be a solution to improve public health: anxiety, loneliness, and depression decrease (Masashi et al., 2021). Something similar happens with blue and proximity to water. Being near, in, or underwater improves mood and concentration (Nichols, 2014).

The nature surrounding us in Costa Rica is a constant call to live in the present. Alvaro Neil has traveled worldwide and, after visiting 117 countries, said, "I live in the present, which is the best country there is" (Neil, n.d.).

According to Overton's window, there is room to address a few priorities in every era, and currently, they coexist very tightly: mental health, climate change, and the circular economy.

All three priorities of the era we live in are connected to nature. So, how do we activate wills to meet the great challenge of conserving the intense natural wealth in Costa Rica?

A shark at the table

It is Saturday morning. Breakfast is celebrated with every sip of coffee, the ephemeral breeze of freshly baked bread, the slowness that becomes poetry. *Al fresco* is better. The chairs feel more comfortable than on a Monday or Friday.

It was a normal Saturday until it stopped being one. My phone vibrates with a call and that's strange these days.

-Hello," I answer.

-Hi Liz, it's Mariela, you should see we have a situation in Guanacaste.

-Sure, tell me about it. I tell her surprised

-You should know that my friend Luna, from the NGO, will receive tomorrow a donation of shark sperm and we need a freezer because theirs is not working.

-I understand! Let me contact some people and I'll tell you. How have you been?

-All good, learning a lot! Great, hug, thanks.

I go back to fruits, honey and coffee and tell Georgia, my partner, the shark story. We send three or four audios to people we know in Guanacaste. A businesswoman, an activist, a university student, a leader who is a businesswoman, an activist and a university student.

We trusted that something good was going to happen and we continued with our Saturday.

Shortly after, messages started to come in from people who can help us.

This story is also true. That day, in less than an hour, we had freezer space to store ten times what Luna would receive. A fishermen's association, a company, and a laboratory offered support, which is no exception. A positive and generous response is expected when community stakeholders are called upon for common causes.

On June 1, 2020, the BBC published the story: "The long road to becoming a zero-carbon country" (Timperley, 2020). The article highlights the challenges and aspirations of Costa Rica concerning that great goal.

Thanks to that great goal, in 2019, the United Nations (UN) awarded Costa Rica the Champions of the Earth award (Rukikaire, 2019), the highest environmental recognition for a country for its environmental policies. Specifically, Costa Rica is

considered a leading nation in sustainability of its plan to decarbonize its economy by 2050. The 2050 strategy, known as 3D, aims for decarbonized, decentralized, and digital development (Mideplan, 2021).

This plan seeks to find a happy contrast between the territory's short- and long-term decisions. More than a quarter of the territory is protected areas in the most intensely diverse spot on the planet.

Now, what is the formula for managing these protected areas in the most intensely natural area of the earth when the number of people wishing to visit them is growing?

Leapfrogging Democratic protected areas

Residents and tourists will inevitably find themselves in natural protected areas. 26.1% of the national superficie are terrestrial protected areas and state inland waters (ENB, 2018).

The scenario of maximum wealth is also the encounter in the harmony of people with the rest of the biodiversity. Whenever you visit a protected area, **imagine that people from that area meet periodically to make conservation and project management decisions for that protected area.**

There are more than 80 councils that give vitality and local vision to the management of protected areas.

These areas are distributed throughout the territory. For that reason, between 1994 and 1998, a participatory formula was developed for their management. A co-creation process culminated in a participatory system (MINAE-SINAC, 2017, p. 17).

This is the creation of the National System of Conservation Areas (Sinac) (n.d.b). In this way, Costa Rica has been a pioneer and innovator in creating a participatory platform to manage both the forest resource and wildlife, protected wild areas, and hydrographic resources. Sinac (n.d.a.) is divided into twelve conservation areas. Protected wildlife areas include national parks, biological reserves, refuges, wetlands, etc.

It is not a question of the quantity of protected territory or the quality of this diversity, but rather the intensity of the relationship between society and the territory that makes Costa Rica exceptional.

This intensity of the relationship with the territory suggests the importance of nature to this society. In Costa Rica, society and nature are one. Megabiodiversity includes people, and people feel part of it.

A collective emotion in Costa Rica drives social harmony and harmony with nature. Schwartz calls "universalism" "the understanding, appreciation, and protection of the well-being of all people and nature" (Schwartz, 2012). Universalism is fundamental to Costa Ricans.

That collective impulse moves Costa Rica toward seeking harmony with nature, protecting, or enjoying, and repairing damages caused. Notably, the spirit of the times in the world aims to improve the relationship with nature, but Costa Rica prioritizes it and does it in its own way.

So far, two examples of universalism with long-term effects and innovative participation have been presented. In the first, a child leads an outstanding achievement; in the second, the conservation and management of nature are entrusted to the collective action of the community in the territories.

The first ingredients of Costa Rican exceptionalism are seen in its relationship with the natural intensity that surrounds it and the innovative and democratic spirit to make decisions about nature.

That collaborative and democratic spirit is remarkable in how both examples in this chapter crystallize.

The symphony of planetary human culture is under construction, and Costa Rica offers tones of harmony that have been recognized. Little by little, the country is being linked to that quest. For example, when *The Economist* imagines the future, Costa Rica is already a protagonist in the search for harmony. This excerpt from the podcast imagines the future:

It is the year 2042, and they join Costa Rica, the Netherlands, and Belize in banning the production and sale of all animal meat. The vegetable or bioreactor-grown option is cheaper and more plentiful and will help the countries reach their goal of zero emissions by 2060 (Standage, 2022).

Costa Rica may be exceptional, but it is far from perfect. There are several advances and setbacks in the pursuit of the happy contrast. One of the great difficulties it faces is its transportation system. Most use petroleum derivatives, and public service is insufficient. In parallel, the use of electric vehicles and their infrastructure is slowly growing.

While families are more tempted to recycle, reuse and reduce consumption, and the practice of composting is gaining users, some degree of contamination persists on beaches, rivers, and national parks; in addition, there is still a need to improve solid waste management.

The hope is the constant stream of initiatives to strengthen the relationship with nature, such as the Law for the Prohibition of the Use of expanded polystyrene,

approved in 2019 (Law 9703), and the Law for the Prohibition of the Use of Single-Use Plastics (Law 9786), in force in national parks and monuments since June 2021. In the same year, Costa Rica published the first book on supra recycling in the region and one of the first in the world: Rubbish doesn't Exist (La basura no existe) (Brosse, 2021).

There is also a growing supply of organic, supra-recycled, local, and increasingly sophisticated design products. At the same time, second-hand products are becoming more widely accepted.

Towards the more distant horizon, the decarbonization plan aims for Costa Rica to be a modern, green, emission-free, resilient and inclusive economy (Gobierno del Bicentenario Costa Rica-MINAE, 2018).

This intense spot on the planet is a home for the soul that attracts more nature, such as whales from the north and south that choose the Costa Rican Pacific coast to renew life. It also attracts human life that finds a smiling habitat.

If you wish to explore the history of Costa Rica, we recommend the Open Digital History Museum and its selection of 100 historical highlights.
<https://mhadi.uned.ac.cr/>

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican. To find out if you are becoming a Costa Rican, we share the following checklist.

- The day is beautiful, and you go out and enjoy the day
- You are surrounded by nature, and you think you need new little plants in the yard and inside the house.
- You do not accept that a beach can be private.
- You predict exactly when it is going to rain because you feel the breeze or the smell of rain
- There are sweet days with the aroma of grated coconut.

II

The fountain of youth

"To have or not to have money is the same thing."

Pablo Castillo Carrillo, Costa Rican, 96 years old (Rodríguez, 2021).

"If you are a good person, God treats you well; if you are a bad person,
you don't live long."

Dominga Álvarez Rosales, Costa Rican, 104 years old (Rodríguez, 2021)

We Costa Ricans often smile without thinking. Life may have become more urgent, but the air is still sweet, perhaps because our true wealth is well-being. If you have lived long in Costa Rica, you may notice that it is no longer so important whether it is summer or rainy season, nor whether you are young or old.

The fountain of youth is still a secret; however, healthy longevity finds its ingredients in Costa Rica. It is no coincidence that Costa Rica's health gained international recognition for its high life expectancy, similar to that of wealthier countries (Masters et al., 2022). Its level of well-being also gains traction for having one of the five blue zones in the world.

Costa Rica enjoys a robust and supportive public health system. Individuals contribute according to their income, and everyone is entitled to the same service. Next to it, private health and wellness services show vibrant growth and sophistication.

In some of the visits we made to Nicoya at the beginning of the century, I remember Dr. Guido Miranda, whom I love and thank. His hope for services was oriented more toward promoting health and less toward treating disease. His ideas, and those of others, have thrown seeds of intellectual beauty into the Costa Rican health system; and then they accompany them so that they are democratized and reach all people, no matter where they live.

Explorers visit the country to study the health culture and discover the successes and challenges. At the same time, the population maintains a digestive struggle between the abundant natural ingredients and the colorful advertisements.

The geography of wellness in the country shows Costa Rican exceptionalism and takes us now to my grandmother's house and neighborhoods.

Holy remedy!

On the way back, Nelly and Blanca are smiling. Adelia walks angrily.

Perfumed with pride, they carry their medicine bags in their right hand and their handbags in their left. They were served quickly because they are "golden citizens". The girl already knows them and is like a granddaughter to them.

Nelly, the butcher's wife, chose one of the dresses printed with flowers and the purse in the same color as her shoes. Her makeup makes her look 80 years old instead of the 85 she turned 85.

Blanca, widowed and full of life, wears white pants with a long-sleeved blouse and high neck, black low-cut shoes and a large purse. Blanca is about to celebrate her 90th birthday.

Adelia loves her sandals; besides, she can only wear sandals because of her foot problem. For this day, she chose the brown petticoat and the woven blouse, which is the latest treasure she found in an "American" used clothing store. She is the youngest, at 82 years old, she avoids makeup for days like today, so they don't think she is well.

The three of them look forward to the first Tuesday of every month. They go to get their medications and then to Adelia's for coffee.

After picking them up, they go to Adelia's to share their pain and relief. In the center of the kitchen table, they carefully and happily place their transparent bags with boxes, bottles, blister packs of pills and creams. It is the only day of the month that their purses lose prominence to the bag of medicines.

Adelia puts on the coffee dripper, the water for the tea and starts making the tortillas with cheese. Meanwhile, she has one ear on what she is thinking and the other on the conversation. She pays close attention, because everything they say is useful.

Blanca is the first to open her bag and start the show and tell or elevator pitch.

-See this, it's an ointment, it doesn't smell very good, it's for my feet, but I've used it on my neck and it helps me warm up at night. They gave me two, I can share one if you want to try it. -Each one has different pains that are cured with the same thing-. Nelly continues:

-I have continued to be affected by my chest, the cough doesn't go away, but the syrups are bad for me, so I have been drinking ginger tea with lemon and my granddaughter brought me these drops of natural oils, they are magnificent to calm the cough. I asked the girl if I could get a prescription for them, but she says they don't have them. They are for coughs, but the other day when my ear was blocked, I put them in and "holy remedy".

"Holy remedy", Adelia repeats, and continues with her story:

-You were lucky, remember that the doctor of the last appointment was a young man who knows nothing and that can't be right! He sent me more tests than necessary, to finally tell me that I have nothing. Me, what I have not suffered from. I definitely prefer Dr. Vargas she sent less tests and knew more. He was denying me the medicines! I had to tell him that I am a golden citizen, so that he would give me the same as always and something for the headache. I haven't even checked what they gave me. I'm furious. . .

Nelly asks her: "Are you also suffering from a headache?"

Adelia answers:

-No, I asked for you, let's see if this will help you!

Adelia is my grandmother, who passed away at 93. Nelly and Blanca were her dear friends. The story is true. I often witnessed those afternoons of coffee and the "unauthorized" exchange of medicines. It was at the turn of the last century.

Many older adults treasure those socializing spaces. My Grandmother (Abuelita) tried to be extraordinarily negative, but her smile, generosity, and love always betrayed her.

August 23, 2021, The New Yorker tells the story of a Harvard University professor who wanted to discover why Costa Ricans live longer than people in the U.S. (Gawande, 2021).

To find out the secret, he visited Costa Rica. He studied its data and behavior: "with one-sixth the per capita income of the U.S., Costa Rica exceeds the life expectancy of the U.S. and the American continent with the sole exception of Canada" (Rodriguez, 2021).

The very fact of its impact and results, beyond the size of its economy, is exceptional, and I believe it has enormous lessons for the whole world, even for us (in the United States) (Rodriguez, 2021).

The search for the secrets of well-being has grown in this era. The illusion of a harmonious life attracts more people who want to feel it or take the recipe with them. Another example is actor Zach Efron who toured Costa Rica and explored the secrets of wellness Costa Rican Style or "a la tica" in the episode of his series "Con los pies en la tierra" (Efron et al., 2020).

For almost a hundred years, the country has joined forces to ensure that health reaches all people. For example, health units for rural areas began in the 1930s, and mobile health units have existed since the 1960s (Vargas, 2006). However, the qualitative leap that changed the geography of health in the country is very recent and consists of the arrival of health services to the neighborhoods. How are health services brought closer to families throughout the country?

Leapfrogging Health services in the neighborhoods

The geography of health in Costa Rica changes dramatically when primary health care reaches the communities, which is very recent. The intention to offer a universal public health service has been key to the country's well-being. Its achievements are notable in life expectancy at birth, 80.3 years (Inec, 2019).

Costa Rica has stood out for its health system in the region, as reported by the OECD (2017). The study points out challenges, such as growing obesity, demographic changes, or waiting times for surgery.

In addition to universality, another principle of the health system is solidarity, which means that each person contributes according to his or her income.

Twenty-five years ago, the opening of primary health care centers known as Ebais (Equipos Básicos de Atención Integral en Salud) (Norma 30698) began, given that the health system aspires to serve the entire population residing in the country (PAHO/WHO, 2019). These centers have general medicine, nursing, and pharmacy services. There are more than a thousand throughout the country, equivalent to approximately one for every five thousand people.

The Ebais have been protagonists in times of pandemic, and their space in Costa Rican neighborhoods and culture is growing. If you talk more than ten minutes with a Costa Rican, you will hear a story about the Ebais.

Are you going to the dead man's ball?

-I'm so happy that Juan died peacefully! -replies Alma, the doctor who prepares the dead for the wake. I was talking to María Félix, the dead man's mother.

-You're right. Besides, if one is going to die, it is better to die now that everyone is vaccinated and can go to the wake.

-Of course, María Félix, I'm glad you called me. Yes, yes, it's true, they are such different times before and after COVID-19, that it doesn't seem that the same people can live both.

-How to explain the wake to Juan's gringa widow?

-Not easy, María Félix, it is one thing to understand the language and another thing to understand the culture.

-You can tell her that for us the wake is very important as a way to say goodbye to the loved one and, for that reason, we go to the dead person and tell him/her what we feel, we pray and say goodbye.

-Of course, the music and the dancing in the wake can scare her.

-I would tell her that it is our way of celebrating Juan's life. That we don't think it's better to laugh than to cry, rather, we think it's better to laugh and cry.

-Of course, I recommend that you do it in the courtyard if the night is nice. Put the chairs apart. I can imagine the long patio table full of food, the outside lights all on, people talking, music and people dancing as before. The line of people ready to say goodbye to Juan. I would put Juan in the corridor facing the patio.

-Yes, Juan's gringa widow may not like that, but it's what Juan would have wanted.

-I don't know if they give permission to held wakes.

-You're right, it's better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission, and we're all vaccinated.

-That's right, at this age it doesn't matter what they say. Do you remember when I was going to get divorced? Exactly, when I was going to get married, I was too young to get married, when I was going to get divorced, I was too old to get divorced.

-Yes, María Félix, from here I can hear the neighborhood kitchens dancing with yoltamal and chicken. Of course there's going to be food left over.

-Don't worry, you have every right to mourn your son and receive the affection of the people. Yes, he was a stubborn Juan, how could he think of not getting vaccinated and having the Ebais next to the house. That's the last straw!

-I'll be there in about an hour to get him ready.

-I'm sure I'll make it to the wake, after all, Juan is the father of my children.

This story could be true. It is inspired by those told to me in Nicoya, our blue zone, by my dear friend and brother Benicio. When a person dies, the custom is to watch over the body in the house, and it is prepared so that it can be extended for days so that all

the people who want to say goodbye can arrive and do so. Also, it is common for meals, dancing, and a mixture of laughter and crying to abound.

In April 2019, Forbes published the article "How people in blue zones make ends meet: Costa Rica" (Gilman, 2019). The journalist tells about his visit to blue zoners in Nicoya and Santa Cruz to learn about their economic capabilities. The following is one of the exchanges collected during his trip:

-Sometimes I have enough, sometimes I don't.

-Do you ever run out of money?

-Always, he answered with a laugh.

José Bonifacio Villegas Fonseca, 101 years old (Gilman, 2019).

Aging seems to melt savings and the body, not the spirit. Conversations with blue zoners in Costa Rica move away from purchasing power or economic freedom. They come closer to their positive, active spirit and community capacity to accompany their own aging. Feeling welcome in these communities depends less on welcome signs in all languages and more on unprofessional smiles.

The journalist had the opportunity to get a close-up of the wrinkles in their smiles: the close and caring families and friends; the small pensions they can aspire to; the few material needs they feel; the stories of their working lives; the health services close by and available to them.

Costa Rica has appeared on the world longevity map since the first National Geographic expedition led by Michel Poulain & Dan Buettner (2022). Nicoya is one of the five zones identified in the world (BLUEZONES®, 2022).

The interest in discovering the secret of longevity in this population is palpable in growing research. For example, Mora et al. (2015) found that the water they consume

in Hojancha, Santa Cruz, Nandayure, Carrillo, and Nicoya is considered "moderately hard" because it has high concentrations of calcium and magnesium. These minerals offer essential health benefits.

Other studies analyze the diet to discover the nutritional simplicity of rice and beans, not the sophistication in daily and traditional dishes. The chef Mariano Fernandez (Hill & Hill, 2020), of Argentine origin and resident in the area, emphasizes that Costa Rica is the only place with a blue zone that is not yet recognized for its gastronomy, despite the quality and abundance of fresh ingredients.

Much remains to be learned about the reasons why, in these towns, longevity is outstanding. However, the warmth of the people and their stories will make you feel even the memory of a place not visited.

But what to do when life expectancy increases, and it is not a rich country? Let's see how Costa Rican society tries to respond to its uniqueness when it comes to the growing population of older people.

Leapfrogging Supporting elderly people

As life expectancy increases, so does the proportion of older adults. This is a demographic trend in Costa Rica and many parts of the world. For this reason, in November 1999, the Integral Law for the Elderly (Law 7935) was approved.

The intention became law to guarantee equal opportunities and dignified life for the elderly in all areas. The law encourages them to remain in their family and community environment. It intends to organize the use of the knowledge and experience of these people. It also aspires to inter-institutional attention with programs and services designed for them.

To implement these intentions, the law created the National Council for the Elderly, which is attached to the Presidency of the Republic. Likewise, considering the demographic trend and the economic challenges of the elderly, Law 7523 was created, and in 1995, the Private Regime of Complementary Pensions.

The pension systems' reform continues to fine-tune the conditions to the new realities. For example, one of the funds, known as ROP (Mandatory Pension System), was designed with the intention that the person would receive the accumulated amount at the time of retirement. Recent reforms have determined that people can receive monthly savings upon retirement (Law 9906).

Before these laws, there was the pioneering Costa Rican Gerontological Association (AGECO) (2019), dedicated to the study and care of the elderly. With broad participation and public funds, this organization has been strengthened to offer programs and services to this population.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Costa Rica has prioritized the elderly for care, vaccination, and protection.

Costa Rica has one of the highest life expectancies in the region, reaching a value close to 81 years in 2019, mainly as a result of the decrease in infant and child mortality, an aspect that added to the reduction in fertility rates has influenced the country to be in the process of aging (INEC, 2020).

The belief that well-being is the main wealth and to procure it for all, are ingredients of Costa Rican exceptionalism, are as present as rice and beans in its dishes. Likewise, society's value of its older adults is highlighted as an ingredient that favors the well-being of all. Schwartz (2012) calls "benevolence" the second universal value. It refers

to "preserving and enriching the welfare of the community to which the person relates."

Costa Rica co-creates this general welfare in its unique way. It relies on the universal, supportive, and close health system while strengthening measures to ensure that the elderly are prioritized and have a dignified life.

Throughout the chapter, we have presented the paths that Costa Ricans follow to **guarantee the wealth of well-being for all people**, with emphasis on vulnerable populations.

Costa Rica has been recognized for its health system, reflected in life expectancy and its blue zone. Its achievements attract visits from specialists who wish to learn about the path of wellness in Costa Rica.

The most noteworthy trends concerning wellness can be expressed in strengthening the country as a wellness and health destination accompanied by the elevation of Costa Rican gastronomy.

The wellness aspect in Costa Rica is broadening and deepening. For example, the offer of traditional and alternative health services is growing in every corner of the country. Thus, the convenient price/quality ratio of functional, aesthetic, and dental medicine attracts visitors. This way, popular health practices worldwide, such as yoga, pilates, and meditation, are gaining traction among tourists and locals.

In the last decade, we have experienced a gastronomic awakening that has pleasantly surprised me. Chef Mariano Fernandez (Hill & Hill, 2020), an Argentinean-born Nicoya resident, recognizes the variety, quality, and abundance of fresh ingredients

and wonders why this area is the only blue zone that is not yet recognized for its gastronomy.

Gastronomic sophistication is strengthened by co-creating the unique Costa Rican National Sustainable and Healthy Gastronomic Plan (Vargas et al., 2014). It is sprinkled across all sectors and all types of talents. It intends to elevate Costa Rican gastronomy from the quality of healthy and sustainable ingredients while dusting off or relaunching cultural treasures.

The gastronomic awakening is a movement beyond the plan nourished by diverse initiatives and cultures. For example, a group of neighbors promoted a gastronomic zone in Barrio Escalante (García, 2019) in recent years, and the arrival of new generations of innovative chefs excites the palate.

Recently, chef Santiago Fernandez prepared a Costa Rican gourmet experience at the Sundance Film Festival (Klaus, 2019), and in 2020, Costa Rica received the Excelencias Gourmet award for its gastronomic plan. The wealth of food available in the country is astounding. The possibilities for using it as medicine or a complement to healthy living are endless.

Now, that quest for global wellness manifested itself in the first weeks of the pandemic when Costa Rica promoted the creation of a repository on COVID-19 and was launched in conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO) (COVID-19 Policy-making tracker, 2020). The intention was to promote global health and solidarity supported by scientific collaboration.

A constant challenge that Costa Rica must navigate in this century is to maintain the quality of life for the elderly while integrating and taking advantage of the growth of this population through different policies.

Interestingly, these are not older adults with the same characteristics as the last century. On the contrary, they are people who not only live longer but remain active and have projects. Both stories in this chapter included active older adults with projects. Both depicted the common social fabric in Costa Rica: the network of family, friends, neighbors, etc.

The aging process of the population is enriched with technological options to support this stage: it facilitates physical activity, motivates cognitive activity, and simplifies interaction with their network of family, friends, and support groups or institutions (Castro, 2020).

Despite being a favored population, yellow light has been lit during the pandemic regarding food insecurity. Older adults in poor households (by income) and with low schooling are at risk of lacking the required food and nutrition (Araya & Carmona, 2021). Fortunately, in most communities, initiatives for this population are identified.

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican. To find out if you are becoming a Costa Rican, we share the following checklist.

- Can you please come here?
- “ahorita” (aoreeta)
- When are you going to bring it?
- “ahorita”
- Do you want to eat this fruit?
- “ahorita”
- Are you coming for a walk?
- “ahorita”

The Costa Ricans' favorite answer is "ahorita" meaning "maybe," and it is perfect for answering without answering. It is also a symbol of living without hurry.

- You smile and greet strangers
- You go to the Ebais for the prescription and, after that, you go to the macrobiotic and to the neighborhood pharmacy.
- You offer remedies for almost anything
- You are close to your grandparents
- You go out with the whole family for ice cream
- You believe in miracles and always hope for the best.
- You say that the most important thing is to be healthy
- You make up words for ailments and diseases



Wearing the rights on the skin

"Costa Rica's generosity towards people in need of international protection is an example to the world"

Filippo Grandi (UNHCR, 2021)

"This is one of the strongest and most trusted voices on human rights, democracy and the rule of law (about Costa Rica)"

Anthony Blinken (EFE Agency, 2021a)

It is the unexpected encounters, in the places that look like a movie set for that scene, that change our lives. A few years ago, while I was in Switzerland, it was break time, and we were having chocolate while looking at the snow-capped mountain when a colleague from that country asked me: After the abolition of the army, was there any attempt to recreate it? I found the question fascinating. The answer is a soft no.

That question has provoked many thought experiments: on the one hand, I now consider the abolition of the army to be, at the same time, the cause of a peaceful essence and the effect of that peaceful essence. Both are entrenched in strength: perhaps, the courageous and visionary decision found a courageous and visionary society. On the other hand, I believe that peace always takes the longest road, which is the safest.

For this reason, abolishing the army did not guarantee a democratic regime in the following years. In fact, experts indicate that the transition to democracy in Costa Rica took **ninety years**, almost a century, from the late nineteenth century to 1975 (PEN, 2017), even a quarter of a century after abolishing the army in December 1948.

We Costa Ricans wear our rights on our skin. Breathing peace and freedom requires a constant dance between a strong state and an equally strong society, as say the experts (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019).

In the second part of the twentieth century, the Costa Rican state strengthened its institutions and its capacity to decide and act. To balance, it became essential to strengthen society so that the dance of peace and freedom could continue. Now, let us discover how these transformations that nurture Costa Rican exceptionalism are harvested.

From pilgrimage to Pride

I hear footsteps in the kitchen. I know it's time to get up. I get up now.

The aroma of freshly ground coffee opens my eyes.

Now it's my footsteps that are heard heading to the bathroom. The morning is warm and tidy and I can't find my sneakers. What do you eat for breakfast to go to a pilgrimage? Is it better to eat fruit or take it, I think to myself.

-Gays at the pilgrimage of the "Virgen de los ángeles"! -says Eddy.

-I don't think we are the only ones or the first ones," I answer.

-Do you remember when we met Amelia and Luis?

-Sure, we met on FB and then we met during our visits to Limón. Everything was surreal. We looked like missionaries visiting houses, but for politics. Gays and Catholics together. The best thing is to love people so different, but so similar.

-Yes, imagine: now they are Luisito and Ami, and we are "the kids.

On the other side of town, Luisito slowly walks up with coffee, gallo pinto and toast.

The wooden steps whispered with every step, saying good morning. The light has already reached every corner of the house.

Amelia is getting the rosaries, water and hats ready. Four rosaries. Two for them and two for "the kids.

In the family chat, everyone announces last minute plans because it started raining in Cartago, but the rain is light. The weather app says that, in the afternoon, it is no longer raining, so they are going to delay their departure until the afternoon.

Luisito places the breakfast tray, checks the chat and meets Ami's gaze with doubt: to go in the morning, even if it rains to go with the kids, because they work in the afternoon or go, as usual, with the family, but in the afternoon?

Luisito and Ami smile and put in the chat:

-We made plans with the kids so we leave now. -Ami writes.

-Fare well! We'll keep you posted. -Juan writes.

This story is real, although the characters could be hundreds. Many people met and developed new friendships or enmities in the circumstances that were experienced in Costa Rica in the 2018 presidential election process. There was a renaissance of activism. One of the issues of major friction in that election process was equal marriage, which Costa Rica legalized in May 2020 (Haynes, 2020).

On February 25, 2021, the BBC discussed why do nations fail. The answer is offered by experts who have studied the world history of societies and states to find the prerequisites for glorious peace and freedom:

So I don't think it's surprising that Costa Rica is the most successful country in consolidating democracy and laying the foundations for independence. It was

one of the countries to suffer the least from the consequences of the elites who subjugated the indigenous populations and repressed them afterward (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019).

**It is essential that they be strong, both the State and society.
This strength allows for constant friction in favor of rights and
the continuity of peace and freedom**

"Costa Rica is in some sense the best performing democracy in Latin America and generally protects people well. But it has a long way to go in terms of dealing with inequalities and other problems still" (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). But, how exceptional is the way rights are worn on the skin, even today?

Leapfrogging Creation of the Constitutional Chamber

In Costa Rica, the final word on the matter does not belong to the President of the Republic or the deputies in the Legislative Assembly. The Constitutional Chamber has the last word.

In the 1980s, a leap in the way rights are lived in Costa Rica began to be designed. Finally, Articles 10, 48, 105, and 125 of the Political Constitution were reformed with Law 7128 of August 1989, and the Constitutional Chamber, known as the Fourth Chamber, was born (Sala Constitucional, 2022b).

The Fourth or Constitutional Chamber is created within the Supreme Court of Justice, with autonomy for its operation and management autonomy. The Legislative Assembly appoints the members. The Costa Rican model has influenced other countries in the region (García, 2003). It is a direct and reliable way to claim rights that Costa Ricans feel they have. They may or may not be accepted, but there is a place to take the matter, and the decision is respected.

Since its entry on duty, the Constitutional Chamber has given "normative force to the Constitution," guaranteeing the respect of the rights, principles, and values recognized in our Constitution. The above makes it clear that the Constitution is a "living and dynamic instrument", since there is no right that is immutable or eternal (Miranda, 2019, p. 259).

I was fortunate to meet Dr. Rodolfo Piza Escalante, who, in addition to being president of the Constitutional Chamber in its beginnings, had become the institution's image for many people.

I met him at the end of the 20th century, and he left a great impression on me. He said that every appeal to the Constitutional Chamber was a story that would multiply and that this was the most outstanding merit to which the chamber could aspire. Especially when people could write down on paper that they felt their rights had been violated and could come to a place where they would be attended to with great interest.

Over the years, I have not been surprised by the popularity of the Fourth Chamber and its unpopularity as well. In Costa Rica, we all feel we can go to the Fourth Chamber if something is unfair. It has become a cultural monument constantly referred to in the press and at the dinner table.

Fourth Chamber decisions find space in thousands of conversations frequently. "¡Poné un salacuartazo!" is just one of the many expressions that Costa Ricans use when promoting its benefits. This superpower offers peace to the citizens and a lot of work to the room whose activity has been intense.

Costa Ricans travel with their rights. That is why I was not surprised by the story of a friend who was in another country when he felt it had violated his rights. He looked for the Constitutional Chamber to file an appeal for protection and did not find it.

The Constitutional Chamber is an institution that travels in the imagination of Costa Ricans outside the country, and they look for it hoping that, in other countries, it works the same (see more about its functioning) (Miranda, 2019, p. 259).

The Legislative Assembly attends consultations on the harmony of the laws it intends to approve with the Constitution. Judges can also use the mechanism of consultation with the Constitutional Chamber, although society's most significant demand is made on its own.

The Constitutional Chamber receives an average of 20,000 appeals per year, and the most used mechanism is the Amparo appeal. Health is the issue for which most Amparo appeals have been filed, including Amparo appeals on COVID-19 (Constitutional Chamber, 2022a).

There is a before and after in our legal system with the creation of our Constitutional Chamber that came to limit the arbitrariness of the public authorities. It allowed, for example, the direct access of the individual through an "Amparo recourse" with broad criteria of legitimacy recognized internationally as an example of access to justice (Miranda, 2019, p. 256).

Thirty years after its creation, the chamber has become the fifth power of the republic and the one with the last word. The other four branches are the Executive Branch (Government), the Legislative Branch (Legislative Assembly), the Judicial Branch, and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, whose independence is guaranteed by the Constitution (Constitutional Chamber, 2022b).

The Costa Rican ecosystem is a suitable habitat for defending human rights. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), since its origins in the 1970s, has its headquarters in Costa Rica (IACHR, 2022).

Costa Rican society wears its rights on its skin, but how does it act concerning the rights of others?

I don't envy the joys of Europe....

-I am pregnant," I said to my aunts. Drinking coffee, in small chairs, with red velvet seats, three chairs around a small round table where the cups and croissants barely fit.

The news was the size of the Almudena Cathedral, and it seemed like a miracle. I am in my thirties and I have no husband.

Aunt Silvia, with her gray hair in the best style of the Queen of England, was the first to jump for joy, almost without moving. She hugged me as best she could and began to think of names.

Aunt Maria, with her freshly painted nails, took off her coat, taking care not to damage her nails. She didn't know where to put it. As she held it with her left hand, she reached out with her right to reach for me.

Her hand on my face, while the smile lit up the entire Gustos café in Madrid, near Plaza Mayor.

The tias are my closest family and their visit was part of everything good that happened in my life. Ris and I had been married for a year and were pregnant, something that seemed to come out of the Museum of Illusions where I pass by every day.

The next day, I listened to them as they were packing for their return trip.

-In Europe they are always ahead.

-There in Costa Rica, it's still not understood. "I don't envy the joys of Europe" (MCJ, 2012), hahaha, it's our big lie...

-I think the best thing to do is to tell the truth. Whoever doesn't like it, shouldn't hear it!

-Me too. I will tell the truth. There's nothing to hide.

-Well said, nobody cares that you met Raul on the Internet, and when does he arrive in Costa Rica?

-In a month...

-What a thrill! When they meet him they'll see how lucky you are and if they talk, they'll talk...

On December 1, 2018, the BBC published an article entitled "How much has Costa Rica's economy gained from abolishing the army 70 years ago?" which mentions that Costa Rica went from being the fourth Latin American country with the lowest GDP per capita growth rate before the abolition of the army, to be the second fastest growing, only behind Brazil (BBC NEWS, 2018). Moreover, even though surrounded by international problems in the region, it has been able to maintain its stability:

From 1951 to 2010, there were 97 coup attempts, 21 episodes of global political violence, 134 episodes of civilian political violence, and 35 episodes of ethnic violence in the region. Costa Rica was practically on the fringes of these events, as well as dictatorships and autocratic governments (BBC NEWS, 2018).

Costa Rica has not been on the sidelines regarding receiving people in its territory. It is a society of social openness and for that reason, it has been recognized. Thus, on February 15, 2021, Deutsche Welle (DW) reports that Spain and the European Union highlight the regional role that Costa Rica has both in welcoming migrants and in respecting their rights (DW, 2021a).

The ambassador of the European Community considers the support provided to Costa Rica to strengthen its capacity to care for and integrate these migrant communities to be opportune and necessary. This is further relevant when the country faces difficulties exacerbated by the pandemic.

We have supported the refugee policy for the protection of the rights of these people. Costa Rica has been a country that has focused on human rights, and we want it to continue on this path. We understand that it is difficult for a country with 21 percent unemployment and 26 percent poverty to cope with a 10 percent migrant population (DW, 2021a).

Costa Rican society wears its rights and the rights of others on its skin. It believes in social openness, as evidenced by its actions over the past decades in which it has not found it easy to find measures for the recipe of its cultural melting pot. So how does society find the balance as a hostess?

Leapfrogging

Social openness and integration policy

Two people arrive in Costa Rica for every one that leaves. Its role as a host society has grown steadily and diversified over the past thirty years. This has required a qualitative leap of significant impact in its architecture for migrations. Maria Antonia Calvo puts it this way: "Costa Rica is one of the main migrant-receiving countries in Latin America. Proportionally, it receives as many migrants as Mexico" (DW, 2021a).

According to official data, the emigrated population represents 5% of the national population, while currently, the immigrant population is close to 10% of those residing in the country (Mideplan, 2017).

In the first decade of this century, society confronted varying positions on migration. Fortunately, the path chosen by Costa Rica was that of integration and respect for human rights.

In this context, Costa Rica's current Migration and Alien Law 8764 was published in 2009. The law, at the time, was described as an innovative, progressive, and pioneering regulatory advance in the region, introducing the concept of integration into the migratory sphere, creating regularization mechanisms, and safeguarding the human rights of migrants (Chaves & Mora, 2021, p. 13).

For its part, in February 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner recognized Costa Rica's actions as a host for refugees: "Costa Rica's generosity in assisting people in need of international protection is an example for countries around the world" (UNHCR, 2021).

The political situation in Nicaragua recently triggered a new wave of people to Costa Rica. "Costa Rica hosts more than 85,000 Nicaraguan refugees and asylum seekers who fled their country since 2018" (UNHCR, 2021).

In April 2018, the BBC broke the story of a direct and sad relationship between Costa Ricans in great economic need and mafias paying them to marry foreigners they never knew. These findings, exposed by researchers from the Universidad Estatal a Distancia, Costa Rica (UNED), awakened the authorities' actions to improve the process of obtaining citizenship in the country. Marriage to a local person is no longer enough (Gil, 2018).

According to the integration plan, "Costa Rica has always been a receiving country, which makes it a multiethnic and multicultural country, diverse and with geographical, social, political and economic particularities conducive to human mobility" (Mideplan, 2017)." (Mideplan, 2017). However, recent growth has challenged all of the country's capacities. For example, according to the same source, total immigration in 2016 reached 440 109 people, corresponding to 9% of the total population.

In the decade between 2006 and 2016, the process to obtain residency grew staggeringly: from Colombia (from 11 316, in 2006, to 26 789, in 2016); from the United States (from 8902 to 24 201); from the Northern Triangle of Central America (went from 10 527, in 2006, to 20 283); from Europe (from 8958 to 19 683); from Asia (from 8902 to 15 852); and Venezuela (from 1350 to 7692) (Mideplan, 2017).

Human mobility had a pause during the pandemic. However, in 2021, as humanity began recovery, migration resumed its path for Cubans, Haitians, Venezuelans, Colombians, and Argentinians. Costa Rica grew as a host society.

The country seeks balance amid international pressures, especially in the Central American regional situation. In June 2021, the U.S. Secretary of State visited Costa Rica to meet with the foreign ministers of Central American countries to discuss migration and cooperation.

Regarding Costa Rica, he noted that

Costa Rica is one of the strongest and most trusted voices on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The State Department estimates that 120,000 Americans reside in Costa Rica, primarily retirees, and notes that more than 200 U.S. companies operate in the country (Agencia EFE, 2021a).

People in Costa Rica carry their rights and those of others on their skin; when necessary, they act before the institutions to be respected.

How the Costa Rican people live their rights is another flavor of their exceptionalism: they wear them on their skin; when appropriate, they claim and wait. They listen to the answer and accept it or look for another institution where they can continue their claim. Then, security, stability, and harmony depend on the old and new institutions that protect their rights and on the society that actively watches over their rights concerning the institutions.

For Schwartz (2012), "security" is another universal value, and its purpose is "the protection, harmony, and stability of both the community, the relationships between people, and the self." Similarly, security, harmony, and stability are essential for Costa Ricans. In their dance of grievances, they seek a balance between peace and freedom.

Like the aunts, Costa Ricans trust that they can make decisions and take action in liberty, while locals and visitors trust the country's stability. Confidence in institutions is very high, but can the consequences of the pandemic weaken that confidence?

The State of the Nation Report analyzed the face of the questions: will democracies fall, will there be popular revolts due to hunger, lack of employment, or against inequality, or will countries succumb to authoritarian regimes (Alfaro & Vargas, 2020).

This feeling of confidence, stability, security, and harmony explains, in part, the low migration of Costa Ricans to other countries and the number of people who come to live in the country.

Being a host community fills with flavors of the Costa Rican exceptionalism that has recently evolved from migration to integration.

Costa Rica integrates people who arrive for multiple reasons, from saving, changing, or improving their lives to investing in the country.

The richness of these waves of diverse cultures adds to daily life and gives it an extraordinary and cosmopolitan air. In my opinion, we co-create life in democracy continuously, and the process continues to have ups and downs. The examples in this chapter are the cause and effect of this constant search for harmony by the longest route.

The beginning of the chapter shares news about the book that studies freedom, *The Narrow Corridor: state, societies, and the fate of freedom* (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). The book's accent is on the importance of having a strengthened community and state to guarantee freedom.

There is a temptation to consider Costa Rican society weak, which explains harmony and stability. Perhaps it confuses the excess of kindness and openness of some Costa Ricans. Such an assessment is false. Regional wars, internal conflicts, prolonged strikes, provocations, natural disasters, and pandemics have tested Costa Rican society.

The country's history will show, on each occasion, the friction between a strengthened state and an active, vigilant, and strong society. Some historians frame Costa Rican democracy in the first international wave of democratization at the end of the 19th century (Molina, 2015). More than a century later, peace and freedom in Costa Rica depend on the strength, friction, and dialogue between state and society.

In that habitat of peace and freedom, the Costa Rican diplomatic atmosphere broadened and deepened relations with Chinese society when, in 2007, Costa Rica established diplomatic relations with China and became the first Central American country to do so.

The relationship has strengthened, as it has existed for 165 years, with the arrival of people from China to Costa Rica. Its constant and extraordinary influence on Costa Rican customs is remarkable (Heng, 2020). The Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica has decreed the commemoration of Chinese Culture Day, which coincides with the Chinese New Year and will be integrated into educational and cultural activities, for the first time, in Latin America and the Caribbean (Law 9733).

I do not think it is new to wear our rights and those of others on our skin. If we go far back in time, we look at our original peoples and that spirit of harmony and freedom that we nurtured and cared for approximately 12,000 years ago (MNCR, 2022).

Carrying our rights and those of others on our skin is always manifested in our opinions and actions. We believe in democracy and that everyone has the right to have a say. This value has been key to the democratization of power in Costa Rica, as we will see in the next chapter.

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican. To find out if you are becoming a costarican, we share the following checklist.

- You look for ways to defend your rights and those of others.
- You think that anything can be resolved by the Constitutional
- You like to having friends from other countries
- You mention the Constitutional Chamber even when you are traveling
- You are trusting
- You get off the uber and they are already friends.
- You say no, without saying no
- You say “ahorita”
- You like to try dishes from other cultures
- You forget who was your worst enemy for life.

IV

A Costa Rican, an opinion.

"I feel that women tend to be more collaborative, we tend to be more long term and have more global thinking because of our natural role of leading in society."

Christiana Figueres (Naidu, 2019).

Where there is a Costa Rican person, there is an opinion. People in Costa Rica believe that democracy is good for everything and that everyone has the right to have an opinion and to lead. This belief has caused power to be very democratized. We have created a network of participatory organizations planted in all territories of the country that play a vital role.

The broad democratization of power in Costa Rica brings another flavor to exceptionalism, along with the parity of access to power, which is the least recognized ingredient. To begin with, the five powers of great transcendence: Government, Legislative Assembly, Judiciary, Supreme Electoral Tribunal, and Constitutional Chamber, are joined by the 84 local governments.

This is only the beginning of the distribution of power...

Women of light

It is a special morning in April 2021. People gather on the side of Rio Claro Guaymi, in the south of the country. All around is greenery and the river. That is where the meeting will take place. Some families arrive on foot; others on horseback.

Lucía is one of the grandmothers chosen by the community. They trusted them to go to India to learn about solar energy.

Lucia looks for the center of the place to talk to the group. Her traditional long dress is light blue; it has the outlines and waist embroidered with a ribbon of purple and orange diamonds:

-I am very happy! It was a sacrifice for me and my family, but we are going to have light in our homes. I will explain how to install the panels and then we will give one to each family on the list.

Agripina approaches Lucia with her eyes on her green sandals. Agripina's dress is yellow, the diamonds are blue and her sandals are green.

-I'm not on the list, I didn't sign up. Are you going to make a new list?

Three years earlier, the community chose three grandmothers to travel to India to learn about solar energy and return to install panels in their remote communities in Punta Burica, Costa Rica. This is 300 solar panels for 300 Ngöbe families who have not had electric power in their homes.

On May 8, 2018, the BBC reported on the first Afro-descendant to reach the vice presidency of a country in continental America: Epsy Campbell (Lima, 2018). When Kamala Harris was elected vice president in 2021, she was the second woman of African descent to hold the position in continental America. In 2018, in Costa Rica, another Afro-descendant with Jamaican roots moved that frontier. How is power democratized for women?

Leapfrogging

Law on Real Equality and creation of the National Women's Institute

Women's movements in the 1970s crystallized into government offices to address women's issues in several countries. Costa Rica created its own with a strategy of limited scope as it was an office within the Ministry of Culture. This office promoted the important Law for the Promotion of Real Equality for Women (Law 7142, 2019) in force since 1990; however, this vital leap required other actions of greater breadth and depth.

Near the end of the century, in 1998, the Legislative Assembly ensured a qualitative improvement for women's rights by creating the National Women's Institute (Inamu), giving it the status of a ministry and, thus, ensuring an active voice in the Government Council (Inamu, 2022).

The institute has been strengthened over the years and has programs and outreach in different territories of the country. Actions are mainly oriented toward protecting rights, especially in the face of violence, and promoting economic autonomy, education, health, and citizen participation (Inamu, 2022).

Parity in political participation remained an aspiration for almost sixty years after the first woman voted in Costa Rica in 1950 until Costa Rica's achievements in this area were real and global. For example, the Council on Foreign Relations, an international organization with more than one hundred years of studying advances in political power, highlights **Costa Rica in the first place worldwide for gender parity in political participation** (Vogelstein & Bro, 2021).

It is one of the achievements, when in 2009, it approved the integral reform to the Electoral Code (Law 8765, 2009).

Article 1.- Principles governing electoral matters

In electoral matters, in the absence of express provision, the general principles of law shall apply.

Article 2.- Principles of political participation by gender

The political participation of men and women is a recognized human right in a democratic, representative, participatory and inclusive society, under the protection of the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Participation shall be governed by the principle of parity which implies that all delegations, lists, and other even-numbered bodies shall be composed of fifty percent (50%) of women and fifty percent (50%) of men, and in delegations, lists or odd numbered bodies the difference between the total of men and women shall not exceed one.

The country aspired to this parity and had taken previous steps that allowed the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to design and promote this reform (ECLAC, 2012). Thus, the women's rights movement, the political will, and the action of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal favored Costa Rica to occupy the first place in the world for gender parity.

The evidence to demonstrate the wide distribution of power for the different vital areas in the territories is further along in this book. Before, it was imperative to understand the dynamics of power and how the intentions of the elites in each era and their international influences are translated (Martínez & Sánchez, 2017).

For example, how decisions are made around the country's strategic resources.

Next, we explore the organization and distribution of power around the water resource.

Water for all

In La Cruz the scenery is magical. From the lookout point, you can see part of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Ileana enjoys picnic lunches al fresco surrounded by her family and two countries. That day lunch is interrupted by a phone call.

- What did they want? -asks her daughter Laura.
- To run for the board," answers Ileana.
- That of the cooperative?
- No, the association's.
- Ahh, the neighborhood association?
- No, the ASADA.
- And what do you think?
- I don't know, it's just that I'm already on the Board of Health.

On March 4, 2021, another international news piece about Costa Rica emerged. This time the German media Deutsche Welle reports on the project to conserve water from springs in Costa Rica. The article highlights that the country has included the human right to water access in its Political Constitution (DW, 2022).

In addition to being a human right, Costa Rica and Chile are the only countries in Latin America where you can drink water directly from the pipe. This daily act in the lives of Costa Ricans is as relevant to the quality of life as air is, and it is as natural as that.

Water is a vital resource. The power over water is a determinant of the quality of life. Costa Rica deepens human rights and gives it constitutional stature; however, in the

Costa Rican style, this achievement requires the necessary actions so that control over water is effectively democratized and there are collective mechanisms for its management.

The qualitative leap that Costa Rica takes is to distribute power for water management in the communities with a democratizing strategy natural for Costa Ricans: associativity, a collective space for decision-making. How is control over essential resources democratized?

Leapfrogging Sanitary Aqueduct Management Association

Many paths could be followed to ensure that water can reach all households throughout the territory, but the least common is to create private neighborhood associations.

At the end of the 20th century, another leap in the modernization of the Costa Rican State took place: the Instituto de Acueductos y Alcantarillados (AyA), the governing water institution, handed over water management to the Asociaciones Administradoras de Acueductos Sanitarios (Asadas), private associations in rural or peripheral territories in the central region.

The Asadas are private associations constituted under the Associations Law No. 218, but their sole purpose, according to their statutes, is the administration and operation of the drinking water distribution system. Thus, these associations provide water services in rural and peri-urban areas and are regulated by Executive Decree 32529- S-Minae of 2005.

In any association, power is distributed at three levels of decision making: the assembly, which is the highest body and includes the people who comprise it; the board of directors, which is elected by that assembly; and the executive positions.

The creation and empowerment of the Asadas constitute a qualitative leap in water management in the country, especially in the territories outside the central area. They replace the aqueduct and sewerage committees that used to operate, as they assume greater functions and powers, always under the supervision of the water governing institution: AyA. For example, the Asadas build, operate, manage, and maintain the aqueducts.

The contribution made by these territorial organizations is of great value for the health of their populations and the strengthening of the active social fabric of each community. There are more than 1,500 Asadas. That represents approximately three per district (Monge, Paz & Ovares, 2013). In addition, they constitute the current national water policy:

The National Policy for the Drinking Water Subsector of Costa Rica 2017-2030 (PNAP) aims to contribute to governance based on several principles, such as transterritoriality and interculturality, as well as on the human right to drinking water, gender equality and equity, and citizen participation, which represents an opportunity to maintain the country's drinking water coverage in an equitable manner, accessible throughout the territory (equally for urban and rural areas). **It also aims to ensure availability to indigenous groups, migrants and people with lower socioeconomic status living in extreme poverty** (AyA, 2016).

The Costa Rican community associates to achieve many other goals and applies its faith in democracy in an amazing way. Let's discover how far this democratizing spirit goes.

The Costa Rican way to achieve common or community goals is to associate and participate. The association to manage water is not the exception, rather it is the rule. Two aspects stand out about power and status in Costa Rica. First, they like to have a say in the different spheres of their lives; therefore, they democratize as much as possible. Second, people feel comfortable associating to achieve their personal and collective goals.

By virtue of the above, spaces to assume positions of power or status abound in Costa Rica's democratic culture (Fantin et al., 2019). Consequently, attaining power represents status, prestige or control and dominance over people or resources, according to Schwartz (2012).

There is a large network of democratic associations or cooperatives in the Costa Rican social fabric, understood as the spaces in which the citizenry defines and achieves that their aspirations are met in an equitable manner (PEN, 2017).

At least once a year, the members of an association or cooperative members exercise their right to vote. They elect the board of directors and make other decisions with their votes. For example, Integral Development Associations (ADI), cooperatives, solidarity associations, and health or education boards. Therefore, the democratic style of the Costa Rican people transcends the national government and that of each territory to favor organizations of a productive life: labor, business, health, education, environment, etc.

Democracy makes it possible to elect representatives, participate in defining the rules that will govern the group, and plan the following projects together. These organizations are quite horizontal and democratic in their behavior. Verbigracia, according to Coto (2022), the study of 12 communities where there is a cooperative tradition shows that this form of organization has favored the social progress of the community in concrete aspects such as access to housing, higher education, among others (interview with Luis Guillermo Coto, in 2022).

A person in a community must elect their representatives in different spaces. For example, there are 3000 ADIs dedicated to developing a community, not counting associations for specific issues (Conadeco et al., 2021). Five hundred ninety-four cooperatives stand out in the productive sphere, with 887000 members, equivalent to 21% of the national population. It is no coincidence that the largest and most recognized company in Costa Rica is a cooperative (Infocoop, 2019).

Costa Rica not only creates associations, but it also invents them. It originated the Solidarity Association:

An innovative social labor organization was developed, which has contributed and will contribute in the future to the broadening and deepening of the economic and social democracy of the community. This social labor organization is called a "Solidarity association"; the system is called the Solidarity movement or sector (Law 6970, 2010).

It is financed by the savings of the associated person and the company or institution, which contributes an advance on the severance pay of each worker. Medium and large organizations have widely accepted the model. Currently, there are 1474 associations with 374 000 members (Hernández, 2018).

Then, suppose one adds 1500 Asadas (water), 594 cooperatives, 3000 integral

development associations (not counting specific ones), and 1474 solidarity associations. In that case, more than 6000 assemblies must meet periodically and vote to elect their boards of directors, among other decisions.

This translates into more than 30,000 leadership positions that people in the communities must assume. For every 150 people, one board position must be filled, without considering the other boards that do not correspond to the organizations mentioned, such as educational, environmental, health, emergency committees, etc.

All of this broad participatory system is complementary to the power of local and national governments. Thus, decision-making and leadership positions abound in all communities and many institutions. For example, elections are held in public universities to choose who will lead the university.

A seat on a board of trustees is both a service to the community and a symbol of prestige. It offers real power to those who participate in shaping their communities and achieving their goals. On the Costa Rican horizon, these alternative strategies for providing social and economic opportunities, such as solidarity and cooperatives, persist and are being strengthened. Since 2011, both organizational models have been elevated to constitutional status (Law 8952, 2011).

The other way Costa Rican society establishes relationships that strengthen dialogue at the table between the State and society is by appointing sector representatives on the boards of directors of autonomous institutions.

Costa Rica enjoys a robust institutional fabric. Autonomous institutions, such as health, insurance, electricity, and water, among many others, do not depend on the central government. Their boards of directors have some positions that the Governing Council of Costa Rica defines; but in addition, there is the representation of workers,

cooperatives, in some cases, civil society or universities.

In the same way, institutional coordination is strengthened in the territories. In 2010, cantonal councils for institutional coordination and participatory budgets were created as part of the General Law for the Transfer of Powers from the Executive Branch to the Municipalities (Law 8801, 2010).

Article 18.- Cantonal Councils of Institutional Coordination

Cantonal councils of institutional coordination are created as an instance of political coordination among the various public entities with cantonal representation for the purpose of coordinating the design, execution, and oversight of all public policy with local incidence. The councils will be chaired by the Mayor of each municipality (Law 8801, 2010).

It is not the institutions or programs; it is how society adopts, adapts, and takes advantage of them in an intense and specialized way. It is also the interaction between people and people with institutions. An outstanding example is the new space Civic Center for Peace. It consists of an inter-institutional alliance between the central government, municipalities, and other actors. Its mission is:

Promote physical spaces so that communities, and in particular young people, can have opportunities around recreation, art, culture, and sports that facilitate the transformation of crime and violence hotspots into opportunities for education, healthy coexistence, respect, cooperation, tolerance, and development (Law 8801, 2010).

In this century, Costa Ricans have strengthened and expanded spaces to influence decisions and seek justice, and they use them intensively. Unfortunately, two abuses of power that damage the social fabric persist. First, violence against women and

femicide (PJRRCR, 2020). Second, corruption, which resembles organized crime more than isolated cases.

On both fronts, progress has not been sufficient; however, there is growing popular pressure on decision makers to increase measures and see results in the affected sectors.

In general, Costa Rican society tends to be collective, although there is a myth that we are individualistic, despite the fact that what has been presented in this chapter contradicts this.

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican.

To find out if you are becoming a costarican, we share the following checklist.

- You always have an opinion
- You are on a committee or board
- «You are saved by the Association or coope»
- You brag about your or your family's achievements
- Sometimes you are “busybody”

V

Living outside the box

Life is half fiction and half reality; the fiction part it's the one that seems more real.

People in Costa Rica live outside the box. Novelty and challenge surround the life of any Costa Rican and nurture their pioneering capacity. That exploratory and experimental spirit seem to be another flavor of Costa Rican exceptionalism.

In part, it may be because nature, which gives us everything, also reminds us constantly that our life is in danger. We live among a chain of active volcanoes, overflowing rivers, occasional hurricanes, and earthquakes. Lucky and always ready for what can happen.

Nowadays, it is easy to travel almost the entire country on passable streets, while my childhood memories are of walks, scripted like an action movie, crossing rivers and mountains to reach the beach.

That dichotomy of life in Costa Rica moves creative emotions. It is unnecessary to believe in magic because it already happens daily. There are rivers that change color before your eyes, sunsets that need more than one painter to be authentic, or birds painted in fiction.

"The importance of stimuli, novelty, and challenges in life" is the fifth universal value of Schwartz's theory (2012). Constantly stimulated, Costa Rica has been a pioneer in many topics and is internationally recognized for its innovative capacity. Let's look at some results that seem like magic.

Green magic

The afternoon begins near the color-changing river. Under her favorite tree, Pina travels through the world of magic while reading. She starts to turn the page very, very slowly because she hasn't finished reading it, but she already wants to know what happens on the next page.

It's too exciting: Harry is teaching boys and girls how to rise and float in the air, how to change color, how to disappear, and someone comes to that secret place where the children are learning magic.

He feels the breeze announcing rain and hears it approaching, but he cannot stop reading. She can't go home to read either because she should be doing homework.

The first drop in the book makes her jump. He thinks he can walk and read. He heads for the house.

The sky becomes furious and suddenly Pina hears something fall.

The one that fell was her... she didn't see the root of the tree and fell. The first thing she rescues is the wet and dirty book, then she sees her knees and runs to the house. She cries and everyone thinks it's because of her knees. Pina wonders, "What will happen to the children and their magic, do they discover them, do they magically move to another place, do they disappear?". Well, it's time for homework, it's an essay about her surroundings: Maybe the river changes color because of aluminum and silicon. Maybe the volcanic rocks around us are from the Jurassic era. Maybe the forests were reforested because of the environmental services program, but they could also be magic. That night, Tita tells her that everything is going to be okay, as she cuddles her and kisses her forehead. Pina falls asleep saying under her breath some of the incantations to get the book back to normal. Tita reaches for her secret book, the one she enjoys even though she is not supposed to read about magic. She has already prayed for forgiveness for that. With soft steps, she puts it down on Pina's small table and turns off the light.

Pina is a beautiful girl who lives near the Celeste River and the Tenorio Volcano in the north of the country, surrounded by real magic.

On October 18, 2021, the BBC published that these are happy days for Costa Rica:

Last week, the band Coldplay announced it would open its The Music Of The Spheres ("Music of the Spheres") concert tour scheduled for 2022 there, because of the small country's worldwide reputation for clean energy use.

And on Sunday, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, presented his government with the Earth shot Award in the category "protecting and restoring nature."

A £1 million (about US\$1.3 million) recognition for its successful model of forest conservation (Cruz, 2021).

Costa Rica was the first tropical country to halt and reverse deforestation, thanks to an innovative incentive that changed the course for thousands of families and the country (BBC News, 2021). The news highlights the aspects that have allowed the country to achieve results that seem like magic. How does Costa Rica get out of the box to reverse deforestation?

Leapfrogging

Creation of the payment for environmental services program

More than twenty years ago, in 1996, Costa Rica created an incentive to recover forests and stop deforestation with the payment for environmental services.

The creation of the National Fund for Forestry Financing (Fonafifo) has been essential to motivate small farm owners to conserve the forest with all that it implies. Financing comes mainly from the hydrocarbon tax, which discourages consumption.

The Environmental Services Program shows extraordinary achievements benefiting more than 18 000 families; 1.2 million hectares; 7.4 million trees planted, and whose investment exceeds \$500 million (Fonafifo, 2018).

**It became the first tropical country to halt and reverse
deforestation and the first in Latin America (UN, 2020a).
More than half of the country is covered by forest.**

Some advantages of the program are the availability of relatively stable funds and the support of the different governments of the present century, which allows for medium-term contracts with families. Some challenges it faces are the growing demand and budgetary pressures that threaten the horizon.

The legal framework aspires to achieve the following (Executive Decree 39660, 2016):

- reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (carbon sequestration);
- protection of water for use in urban, rural, and all areas or to produce electricity;
- biodiversity protection for conservation purposes; and
- sustainable use of biodiversity for scientific and pharmaceutical purposes;
- research, genetic improvement and protection of ecosystems and life forms;

- conservation of natural landscapes, particularly for tourism purposes (Rodriguez, 2003).

Fonafifo also facilitates knowledge transfer. The best way to learn about the program is to visit the country and the places where it has been applied. Morocco, Peru, and the Dominican Republic are some of the countries that have benefited from Costa Rica's experience (UN, 2020b).

Out of the planet

I put soil in the container, in the center the seed and some water. I tremble a little when I see people approaching and I will have to explain everything.

This tree is an experiment on the International Space Station. If there is no gravity, the tree will grow faster than on Earth. Laughter mingles with some applause and my teacher smiles.

Twenty years later, I tremble again before talking to Simonetta. I am in California at the Cubesat satellite development workshop, and she is leading the space initiative at the United Nations (Cubesat, 2021).

I tell Simonetta: -we want to build the satellite in Costa Rica and then put it into orbit to work on monitoring carbon sequestration by trees in the north of the country.

-In Costa Rica," asks Simonetta.

-Yes," she answers. At the university. We will look for crowdsourcing funds if necessary. She smiles. I am still trembling.

The project's leader inspires this story to launch the first satellite sent by Costa Rica into space, Mr. Carlos Enrique Alvarado Briceño.

On April 3, 2018, France24 reported on "the first Costa Rican-built satellite launched into space" (AFP, 2018), a project led by the Costa Rican university Tecnológico de Costa Rica (TEC) and under the framework of the Central American Aeronautics and Space Association (Acae/TEC, n.d.).

On May 16, 2020, the BBC published the report "How Costa Rica became one of the most innovative countries in Latin America (and what are some of the most surprising inventions)" (Barría, 2019).

The last article highlights Costa Rican astronaut and entrepreneur Franklin Chang as a symbol of innovation. He is currently leading several initiatives in the country, including the plasma propulsion system for space transportation and renewable energy solutions using hydrogen (AD ASTRA, 2022).

Franklin Chang's story is the stuff of fairy tales with off-planet endings. His achievements as the first Latin American astronaut in NASA's Hall of Fame and with a record seven space missions are inspirational for several generations. I remember him at a conference for young people in which, with his unhurried enthusiasm, he dreamed everyone's dreams with his unhurried enthusiasm.

The book compiling eleven stories of Costa Ricans at NASA was recently published (Callow & Monge, 2018).

From being known as exporters of coffee and bananas, the "Ticos" evolved into microchip manufacturing in the 1990s and then into the export of services and advanced technology, taking advantage of the talent of an educated and bilingual population (Barría, 2019).

In April 2021, Agencia EFE reported: "One of the most advanced space radars in the world is inaugurated in Costa Rica." The company chose Costa Rica "because of its strategic geographic location close to Ecuador and because of the country's vision and the advances the country has shown in the aerospace industry in recent years" (Agencia EFE, 2021b). How does Costa Rica jump to a better technological and scientific place?

Leapfrogging

Promoting scientific and technological development

Incentivizing scientific and technological development was another qualitative leap that explains many of Costa Rica's recent results. This is Law 7169 on the Promotion of Scientific and Technological Development of 1990 (Law 7169, 2019).

Thus, the institutionality for the sector and a series of incentives in the form of funds are created, and that is not what is exceptional; the regulation recognizes the role of sustainability and welfare from its first article:

Article 1.- For the purposes of scientific and technological development object of this law, it is set as a general objective to facilitate scientific research and technological innovation that lead to greater economic and social progress within the framework of an integral sustained development strategy, with the purpose of conserving, for future generations, the country's natural resources and guaranteeing Costa Ricans a better quality of life and well-being, as well as a better knowledge of themselves and society (Law 7169, 2019).

This law establishes mechanisms and spaces such as the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Telecommunications, the National Science and Technology System, the Incentives Commission, and the scientific colleges.

It also creates the incentive fund that, over time, has managed a wide range of possibilities for individuals and companies, from scholarships for international postgraduate studies in science and technology research projects innovation or quality certifications (Monge, Crespi & Beverinotti, 2020). For their part, science colleges encourage young people to strengthen and specialize in STEM in their last two years of high school (Brown et al., 2020).

Later, following the tradition of democratizing access and digital literacy, Smart Community Centers, known as CECIs, are founded, which operate in partnership with universities and municipalities above all. There are more than 240 CECI nationwide, approximately three per canton. They offer space and technological equipment for digital activities and free courses. The actions of these centers continued virtually during the pandemic (Presidency of Costa Rica, 2022-2026, 2021).

The sustainable approach to scientific and technological development, the scientific space in secondary schools with the scientific colleges and democratization, with the CECIs, stand out as ingredients of Costa Rican exceptionalism.

It is common for people in Costa Rica to think and live "out of the box", as they value novelty, excitement, passion and challenges. They are also dreamers who seek or create their own path. In moments of creation, it keeps its democratizing spirit present. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in our country, the stimuli created are aimed at families, in the case of environmental services; at students, in the case of the incentive fund or the scientific colleges; at MSMEs, in the case of the propyme fund, or that the CECI are open to the public.

In Costa Rica, natural stimuli abound and compete with digital ones. In general, they resonate, thanks to an imaginative community:

The imaginative community builds local character and civic pride while captivating external audiences. They visualize and achieve unique, unconventional, original, creative local initiatives in the form of projects, infrastructure or events, which reinforces the sense of community and how it is perceived by the public. Imaginative communities that are a constant source of these original initiatives achieve unique positioning in the minds of global audiences (Govers, 2018).

The Costa Rican community is imaginative, and pursuing its ideas requires an entrepreneurial person's persistence and optimism.

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican.

To find out if you are becoming a Costa Rican, we share the following checklist.

- You live outside the box
- You`re a dreamer
- You believe in magic
- You offer your ideas to the community.

VI

Optimistic and stubborn

"Living here makes you a better person"

Madeleine Karlson, Swedish, living in Costa Rica

People in Costa Rica are optimistic and tenacious. These virtues make it easier for them to decide their own path or lead the way when necessary.

A few years ago, I met Christiana Figueres at a conference she gave in Costa Rica (Figueres, 2022). Her words are amazingly Costa Rican and constitute a truth that only she knew how to put in the best way: "I am stubborn, and it is good to be stubborn for the common good" (Figueres, 2016).

I remember approaching her to thank her and adding that I am also a stubborn optimist. It was the post-Paris Agreement, and she already figured as the great Costa Rican leader who orchestrated the most important global agreement to address the challenges of climate change. Christiana is a Costa Rican who changed the world's attitude on climate change with stubborn optimism (Figueres, 2016).

Stubbornness should be better studied and appreciated. It is also the pepper of Costa Rican exceptionalism. That uncompromising optimistic intensity is remarkable in the pioneering actions that Costa Rican society has driven.

Let's discover what happens when stubborn optimism leads with intensity.

Being different

Omi's eyes and breath say NO before her voice, as she listens to her mom's heated campaign. It's November 2030 and her 18th birthday is coming up:

-Driver's license is more important than you think! We women have to be independent. The same day I turned 18, I went to get my identity card and then applied for my driver's license test.

To which Omi finally replied:

-Precisely, I am an independent woman because I do not depend on a car. It's not about having or not having a car; I am not binary in any aspect of my life. Mom, I just don't see the point in "owning" a car or having to drive it," Omi replied.

-It will make sense in the future when you need a vehicle to get around. -the mom insisted.

-The worst mobility is the one that depends on a vehicle. -exclaims Omi.

-I don't understand, Omi, you like to travel.... -insists her mother.

-Exactly, I already do it: I get to another city by train or hyperloop, then I move by bike or walk. If I'm in a hurry, there's Uber or ehang (unmanned passenger drone). I go to another country by non-polluting boat or hybrid plane. Eight options and none require me to be licensed. Also, my favorite cities have already banned vehicles.

-What? Which cities have banned cars? How awful! says her mother, even more concerned.

In June 2018, Reuters reported on the first certified indigenous tour guides (Hares, 2018). This is a new type of certification and a sign of differentiation. It all started thirty years ago with the Certification of Tourism Sustainability (CST) created by Costa Rica. The intention to differentiate the country also offered an advantage for the company and the tourist.

Both certifications make it possible to offer a differentiated service that aspires to sustainability. Companies with CST have followed sustainability processes in their business practices and the services of a native people add the richness of ancestral customs and wisdom.

With optimism and persistence, an original certification model was implemented at the same time that tourism growth began. How does Costa Rica promote sustainability in tourism from the beginning of its growth?

Leapfrogging Certifying sustainability

Barcelona's citizens have raised their voices against mass tourism and, during the pandemic, have enjoyed their city. Other cities have suffered from over-tourism: Venice, Rome, Paris, etc. Over-tourism can be related to the quantity and quality of visits and the effect it has on the visited community. Costa Rica has experienced steady growth in tourism for decades and has taken measures to attract tourists who identify with sustainability.

Since its inception, the sector has promoted innovations in favor of sustainability and, fortunately, the economic balance of tourism in Costa Rica has been positive (Yong et al., 2009). In 1997, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT) launched the CST with optimism: "the intention is to turn sustainability into something practical and necessary for the country's tourism competitiveness" (Sustainable Tourism CST, 2019).

Maintaining the standard and evolving, over the years, has required a stubborn commitment, as sustainability, from a practical perspective, represents many fronts of action. For example: avoiding emissions and pollution, using biodegradable products, improving waste management, community relations, hiring local staff and local purchasing. All are aspirations within the framework of sustainability.

This certification has had international recognition that culminates in 2020, as the Global Council on Sustainable Tourism (CGST) declares it: "Recognized Standard" (Wtm Global Hub, 2020). Tourism companies can opt for it. It starts with their self-assessment on the level of sustainability, followed by an audit that determines whether they receive certification and in which category.

Obtaining the CST becomes a competitive advantage for the company that adds value for marketing, because of its commitment to continuous improvement of its sustainable practices. This certification focuses on tourism companies that are vital for the sector and the country; however, it is not enough to stimulate sustainable practices on a massive scale in the territory.

Green is blue

That early morning the family's happiness was asleep until the alarm clock rang at 4:30 am. Julia gets up, on her side of the bed, and walks down the hallway, almost sleepwalking, knocking on the bedroom doors. She wants to make sure that each of the children goes to sleep in the car.

-Felipe, it's time.
Jason, it's time
Rachel, it's time

Remember to brush your teeth

Ramon also gets up on his side of the bed and walks to the kitchen to put coffee on for him and Julia. He takes out a thermos to carry hot coffee.

He prepares the basket with the rice cooker that is already filled with rice and chicken, adds the potatoes, hard-boiled eggs, and cabbage salad.

Then he opens the cooler he left next to the refrigerator the night before, fills it with ice, soft drinks and beer.

-I'll bring you your flaxseed water," he says to Julia.

While everything is flowing, Julia and Ramón can already feel the soft warmth of the sun and the dancing of the waves in the sea.

-Don't forget the speaker," says Ramón.

-Rachel is carrying it and the ball," Julia replies.

Two hours later, it is almost 7:30 a.m., they are already a few meters from the sea. They discover a nice shady parking place under an almond tree. They get out of the car and open the trunk. They each take their load and start walking along the path to the beach.

The attentive monkeys inspect this family and let them pass. They carry the baskets with food, chairs, umbrella, cooler, garbage and recycling bags, backpacks with clothes and towels, the speaker goes in Rachel's bag and the ball is carried by Julia.

The sea smiles too.

Julia and Felipe are good at finding the best place to settle in.

Once settled, breakfast is in order, sandwiches start coming out, orange juice and coffee is served. The aroma of coffee is confused with the smell of sand and sunblock.

Rachel sees volunteers picking up trash and decides to go over and say hello.

-Hi, can I help?

-Sure, are you guys out for a walk? -The volunteer replies.

-Yes, we come from San José, you?

-Since the pandemic started, I live and work nearby.

Rachel picks up trash with her new friend. The guide tells her that the beach has a blue flag. Rachel tells her that she is on the Blue Flag Committee of the school and the neighborhood.

When she returns to her family, Rachel says:

-Alexa: turned up the volume! Her favorite song of this week is on.

Julia tells her that she doesn't like "Bugs Bunny", while Rachel dances to the rhythm of "Bad Bunny". Some with the ball, others with the music, others with the food, but everyone is happy, it's 9:00 a.m., and they haven't even dipped their feet in the sea yet...

On November 5, while the United Nations Climate Change meeting COP26 was being held in Glasgow, Reuters published a report highlighting Costa Rica's environmental,

social and economic achievements. They announced the "Beyond Oil and Gas" alliance (Goering, 2021).

In the news, it is stated that Costa Rica and Denmark will launch the initiative that promotes a transition to an economy that does not depend on oil and gas (BOGA, 2022).

For the future not to rely on oil, there is still a long way to go; however, with stubborn optimism, Costa Rican society, for decades, has been promoting a strategy to involve as many people as possible in sustainable practices. How does Costa Rican society measure what it thinks is good and intend to apply it to the maximum?

Leapfrogging

Our blue flag movement

You have probably seen some blue flags in your country; if not, you will see many in Costa Rica. The Ecological Blue Flag program has played an essential role in raising community awareness of sustainability. It has become a social movement.

It started in 1995 in AyA (Costa Rican Water and Sewerage Institute), and its first area of action was beaches. It was inspired by the recognition created in France in 1985 for beaches and marine areas (Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature, 2022). Communities could apply to have the status of their beach recognized with an ecological blue flag. The program has had a successful track record attracting different audiences and political and community support.

Costa Rican society felt that the incentive could be applied to almost any area of life where sustainability can be measured and rewarded. So people come together, learn, act, and then receive recognition - we love that! It became a movement, a far-reaching social enterprise.

So, the flag was awarded to beaches and communities in 2001; then to educational centers in 2004; between 2006 and 2010, to protected natural areas, micro-watersheds, climate change actions, and climate-neutral communities. In 2011, it shifted to health: community health promotion, sustainable homes, and special events. In 2015, the local government category emerged.

In 2021, 138 beaches achieved the award (ICT, 2022) and there are thousands of blue flags flying on beaches, communities, educational institutions, events, etc. (AyA, 2021). The multiplier effect of this strategy is sensational because behind these thousands of flags, for each one, there is a group of people committed to sustainability.

The program has motivated other countries in the region to promote similar initiatives. It has been so popular that it has become part of Costa Rican culture to recognize the value of the ecological blue flag wherever you see it. Perhaps, if you are having a wedding or event in Costa Rica, you might opt for one.

The Costa Rican community is intense, optimistic and stubborn. When these three virtues come together, they become the sweet taste of its exceptional pioneering ability. It does not stop to think if it can make it or if it has the freedom to try. Costa Rica is renowned for its respect for individual and collective freedoms. It generally ranks first in the Latin American region in both press freedom (RSF, 2022) and human freedom (Vásquez et al., 2021).

Self-direction is one of Schwartz's (2012) universal values, and refers to independent thought and action, a decision that Costa Ricans put into practice every time they try a new path.

This chapter has shown paths explored, with their intensity and stubborn optimism, until the results are extraordinary. In these cases, both have continued for three decades and have received the acceptance of the local and international public (Schwartz, 2012).

Imagination, in Costa Rica, continues its flight, generating new possibilities. For example, it tests its digital currency recipe with ecoins: the loyalty program that uses digital currency to reward recycling (Ecoins, 2022).

Its stubborn optimism believes in the need for a law to eliminate any possibility of oil exploration or exploitation in its territory (Chacón, 2021). This capacity for self-direction also arises in other areas of national life, for example, in economic activity.

In Costa Rica, 98% of companies are micro, small or medium-sized. MSMEs have been the backbone of economic development because they generate half of all employment.

Increasingly, society sees entrepreneurship as a life option, as a form of human expression and fulfillment, of survival, or as an income supplement. For two hundred years, MSMEs have been giving life to the territories. Recently, foreign direct investment has generated opportunities for people who have managed to develop skills in languages and technological languages. In all cases, Costa Rican talent is on trial.

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican. To find out if you are becoming a Costa Rican, we share the following checklist.

- You are optimist and stubborn
- You are an intense person
- You think of a better way of doing anything
- You add ice to your drink even if it is cold.
- You ask if they recycle, wherever you are.

VII

«*Talented by nature*»

(Esencial Costa Rica, 2018)

The entrance time of the schools in Costa Rica is an anthill of people arriving. Education is one of the most essential values for Costa Rican society.

The achievements of Costa Rican talent and educational merits have also been recognized internationally. The educational system that lives in every community has been nurtured by natural talent.

Education in Costa Rica is always in the conversation. All roads lead to education, and the desire to excel begins with education. This does not mean it is perfect; it is far from it. Educational challenges have worsened with the pandemic, to the point of creating the so-called "educational blackout" (Vega & Vargas, 2021).

Since the end of the last century, the drums of globalization and technological lightning have hurried the educational pace in two paths: languages and digital competencies. Achievement in those fields did not seem optional in the face of the threats and opportunities of a connected world that feels smaller and closer.

In this chapter, we seek answers about the importance of talent in this era and explore how Costa Ricans find or create their edge in the symphony of human culture.

We think we are speaking English

-Hello (me in Costa Rica)

-Hello -accompanied by laughter- (Ovidia, Martina and Lucia, women of light, Costa Rican grandmothers in India)

-How have you been?

-Well, happy birthday!

-Thank you, what's new?

-Well, we think we speak English," they say with laughter.

-Really? What a success!

-What have you learned?

-Solar, control, yes," says Martina.

-light, on, off, hungry," says Lucia.

-tea, good morning," says Ovidia.

-Are you teaching them?

-No, but we are learning," they say with laughter.

This scene happened when we had a video call a few years ago, while the Women of Light, Costa Rican grandmothers from the Ngöbe community, were in Tilonia, India. They were on a scholarship from the Barefoot College, learning about solar energy, thanks to the project promoted by the UNED of Costa Rica.

Ovidia, Lucia and Martina were already bilingual in Ngöbere/Spanish when they traveled alone from Costa Rica to India. Suddenly, they found they were learning English, their third language.

On July 21, 2021, while the pandemic did not seem to be subsiding, Agencia EFE (2021c) announced that Intel would increase its planned investment in Costa Rica from \$350 million to \$600 million.

The company's operations in the country have always generated interest. Since 1998, it has remained in Costa Rica, but its activities have been transformed. In the beginning, the emphasis was on manufacturing. Currently, it mixes research and development activities, global services, and the new assembly and testing activity (EFA Agency, 2021c).

The strategic role of the Costa Rican operations has been strengthened with the shift in activity and the appointment of the first Latin American to the position of vice president of the global design and engineering group.

Costa Rican Ileana Rojas has excelled since joining the company 20 years ago. Her undisputed talent and leadership have roots in the Costa Rican public education system and, surely, in the vein of her parents, both educators (Cinde-Essential Costa Rica, 2021).

I was fortunate to share with her and the people of the company during the International Women's Day 2021 when we were invited to present on social innovation projects led by women. The digital distance did not prevent us from feeling Ileana's energy and light in a space to reflect on the role of women.

Costa Rica has learned to be strategic in attracting the investments it promotes. It has achieved the shift towards services, innovation, sustainable productivity and aspires to better distribute investment in territories of great potential.

In these areas, the official language is English and it is also the official language for scientific and technological content available on the Internet. Language learning, in general, continues to be a determining factor for the exchange between cultures that will make it possible to weave a better world. How did Costa Rica manage to leap in language learning when the drums of globalization started beating?

Leapfrogging Learning English

Given the importance of coffee exports to England and trade relations with two English-speaking countries: England and the United States of America, the teaching of English became official in Costa Rica in 1901 (Marín, 2012).

By virtue of that reason, it is not surprising that the last century began with the exchange with American teachers and ended with the internship of Costa Rican teachers in England to create new materials.

At the end of the 20th century, a qualitative leap occurred with the triple relaunching of the English learning strategy in the country. First, with the support of the British government, the "communicative method" was implemented, which reoriented learning by emphasizing oral communication rather than written communication.

Second, in the mid-1990s, an English teaching plan was implemented in 27 schools in tourist, rural and marginalized areas, with the intention of expanding opportunities for these populations at the school level. Thirdly, in 1998, the pilot plan for learning English at the preschool level was launched (Córdoba, Coto & Ramírez, 2005).

In that decade, in parallel, the supply of language education in the country grew, when schools, colleges and universities expanded their offerings. This strategy has been key to Costa Rica's navigation in global waters, on the Internet and, in particular, in science. A high percentage of scientific knowledge is published in English. In fact, 84% of the knowledge generated in the region is published in English (Badillo, 2021).

Naturally, in addition to English, in recent years, there has been an effervescence of languages in the country. Some are more traditional for Costa Ricans, such as French, Italian and Portuguese, and others are less, including Mandarin or Korean.

Teacher training is key in this process and, according to studies on English learning in Latin America, the current levels of English proficiency in the Latin American population are low, Costa Rica and Chile demonstrate the best performance in English proficiency by teachers (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

Raise your hand if you have a smartphone!

-Raise your hand if you have a smartphone!

Nobody raised their hand...

It was 1987

-Raise your hand if you have a tablet!

No one raised their hand

It was 1997

-Raise your hand if you use WhatsApp!

Nobody raised their hand

It was 2007

-Raise your hand if you use Zoom!

No one raised their hand

2017 Era

-Raise your hand if you use TikTok!

Few raised their hand

It was 2021 (Everyone uses it; few accept it).

A friend said, -I took ten minutes to relax with TikTok and, three hours later, I hadn't relaxed....

On March 25, 2021, CNN published a story on why digital nomads choose Costa Rica to work (Villanueva, 2021). The article refers to the exceptional conditions that the pandemic has caused. It tells the story of people whose offices were temporarily closed and allowed them to continue their activities from their homes.

This scenario tends to remain for people who have found new and better life options. When the marriage of technology and activities allows mobility, many possibilities arise to mix nature, surfing, yoga, new friendships, and new life-enriching experiences.

Such conditions were once exclusive to tech-savvy people; such conditions are now democratized and reach a wider audience: entrepreneurs, therapists, researchers, designers, innovators, etc. Although the news refers to foreigners visiting the country, moving to less urban places also applies to Costa Ricans who, during the pandemic, have moved their center of gravity elsewhere. The nearby beaches and mountains are a great temptation. On the other hand, how did Costa Rica face the digital educational demands?

Leapfrogging Public-private alliance

In Costa Rica, there are more cell phone accounts than population, making it the Latin American country with the most active mobile lines per person: 1.7 (Pasquali, 2019).

The source of national initiatives, so that the population has access to technology and possesses the skills to take advantage of it, begins with the alliance between the Ministry of Education (MEP) and the Omar Dengo Foundation (FOD) that started in

1989. This strategy has allowed the country to have talent that takes advantage of new technologies and that learning begins at the preschool level.

In 1992, in conjunction with UNED, the Educational Informatics career was created and, in 1997, the country started the educational robotics plan (FOD, 2019). Currently, the coverage of its programs reaches 92.2% of students from preschool to ninth grade.

In 2017, the World Robotics Olympiad was held in Costa Rica and represented the first time that such an olympiad was held in the Americas (WRO, 2017). Costa Rican society bets on education to nurture its talent and improve its opportunities for achievement.

Achievement is another of Schwartz's (2012) universal values, and refers to the demonstration of competencies according to cultural standards. In this era, that translates into languages and technology. With those two competencies, anyone can find opportunities.

In this way, the global evolution towards another economic dynamic accelerated by both technological leap and globalization and pandemic is evident. Now, countries are aiming to strengthen ICT infrastructure; they are also revising the energy matrix while transportation is transforming into mobility.

Agriculture is nourished by scientific and technological change and regenerative or organic options are flourishing. Services are moving up the career ladder.

From an open country, the space for talent development and opportunities are global. The presence of powerful companies with strategic operations and the growth of tourism activity since the end of the 20th century is notable. The demand for people with digital skills and languages is constantly growing in the country and in the world, and it is not easy to meet it.

The key to access to local and global opportunities in adult life depends on education. There is a direct correlation between access to job and economic opportunities and educational attainment.

A national challenge is the inclusion of people who do not have the skills to opt for opportunities. Strategies have been tried that still do not favor this important sector of the population. Another national challenge is to reinvent education for the new generations. The model of the 20th century does not offer the necessary advantages for global, mobile, connected, and post-pandemic times.

From the international perspective, Costa Rica ranks first in the region in international student tests; however, no Latin American country surpasses the average of OECD countries (BBC News Mundo, 2019b). As we approach a new universe or metaverse, whose gateway is the internet, in Costa Rica, SMEs and research groups experiment and learn (Ruiz, 2022).

Social and labor inclusion is not easy in an open economy where people with better skills can secure the best working conditions. In contrast, those who lack digital skills and languages have limited opportunities (Martínez & Sánchez, 2017).

Talent must have access to greater opportunities for research, innovation and development. Therefore, it is essential to increase higher value-added products and services. To achieve this, productivity must be improved, which means more innovation. According to experts, this is what "distinguishes upper middle-income countries that made the successful transition to high-income countries from those that did not" (Monge, Crespi & Beverinotti, 2020).

Although it may not seem like it, skills are the protagonists of inequality. They create two populations: the one that is internationally linked and the one that is only locally linked. Languages and technological languages are the main bridge.

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican. To find out if you are becoming a Costa Rican, we share the following checklist.

- You are always just a click or touch away
- Your Spanish is good enough
- You know someone who works in technology and the language in the company is English.
- You want to learn a language
- You expect to have internet access everywhere

VIII

Marinated in coffee

"When I'm not in my country, I feel like one of those transplanted bushes. Those that have roots that don't adapt to new lands."

Carmen Lyra

In the afternoon, it is easy to see the lines of people attracted by the smell of freshly baked bread in any neighborhood bakery in Costa Rica.

Afternoon coffee is a ritual for thousands. It is the respite to end the day or the occasion to marinate in coffee the stories we were not going to tell. Afternoons with friends or family with the aroma of coffee in various versions are a tradition in Costa Rica. There are plenty of places to go to enjoy a good coffee.

The technological events of globalization and the pandemic put other traditions to the test. An example is the pilgrimage that mobilizes thousands of people to the Basilica of the Virgin of the Angels at the beginning of August.

Although Costa Rican native peoples are the best exponents of the traditions, some are artistic, others ceremonial, textile, or handicraft. However, it is easier to find Costa Ricans creating, adopting, and adapting new traditions than practicing ancestral traditions.

The weight of openness facilitates active participation in creating planetary culture, while life becomes a collage of own, adjusted, and imported traditions.

Coffee time

Mario was driving the minibus on the way to the volcano when it was time for coffee, between 4 and 5 in the afternoon.

He imagines the aroma and the fog coming out of the cup and he can already taste it. It is a beautiful December afternoon when the hot coffee feels delicious in his hands.

He looks on the side of the road for a restaurant to pass by.

In the soft green shadows between the harvested rows, you can see some planted houses, one here and one there. Finally, he sees a sign and decides to stop.

The open gate invites him to leave the car in the middle of the courtyard and walk towards the restaurant house.

He enters from the side, there are many potted plants and someone in the kitchen. The aroma is delicious.

-Good afternoon

-Good afternoon

-The smell of coffee is like a magnet, do you have any coffee?

-Sure, I just dripped, come in, come in, sit down.

-Are you going to the volcano?

-Yes, to pick up people.
-It was nice today," says the lady while she finishes dripping her coffee. I even felt hot, now early in the morning, hopefully we don't get quake.
-Let's hope so... and do you have an omelet with cheese over there?
-You're hungry!
-Yes, I've been driving for a while and I could really use a little something. How nice is the lime tree!
-It is, sometimes lemons get lost. -I have tortilla with meat, would you like some?
-Even better.

They talk for a while about the bushes and the volcano.

-I'm going to go get some eggs in the back," says the lady as she dries her hands on her apron.
-Of course, but first tell me how much I owe you because I have to leave.
-Nothing, nothing, have a good day.
-No, seriously, tell me, you didn't start a restaurant to lose money.
-A restaurant?" she says with a surprised face, "This is my house... ahhh you thought this is where Chepi's place," she says laughing. Chepi's place is next door.

This is a true story. It happened to a dear friend, but it can happen to you too.

In April 2021, Agencia EFE (2021d) reports that "Costa Rican Tarrazú coffee obtains protection in 180 countries".

Thanks to the denomination of origin granted by the World Intellectual Protection Organization, the bag of coffee with the legend "Tarrazú" requires authorization. This coffee, of great personality, is produced in the mountainous area of Los Santos, in the south of the country, and has gained prestige for its flavor and acidity. The high altitude zone in which it is grown and the type of bean has special characteristics.

Costa Rican coffee occupies its place in the world with a more artisanal, family, and community-based production than industrial. "It has some 84,000 cultivated hectares and some 50,000 producers, most of them small, throughout the country" (Agencia EFE, 2021d). How did Costa Rica become the first high-tech exporter of coffee par excellence in Latin America?

Leapfrogging

Promoting exports

Costa Rica's exporting tradition took a leap with the trade opening strategy that the country has promoted since the end of the previous century. Both tourism and international trade are decisive sources of foreign currency and that reason precipitated the changes.

After the crisis of the early 1980s, which demonstrated the failure of the development model followed until then based on import substitution, Costa Rica began to push hard for a different model, centered on trade liberalization, export promotion and attracting foreign direct investment (Monge, Crespi & Beverinotti, 2020, p. 9).

To promote foreign trade, the Promotora de Comercio Exterior en Costa Rica (Procomer) was created in 1996 with Law 7638 (Procomer, 2022). With two hundred years of foreign trade, Costa Rica has a broad export platform. Approximately half are goods and half are services. Procomer accompanies Costa Rican companies in their export adventure (Procomer, 2020).

Exports contribute 34% of Costa Rica's gross domestic product. The exporting exercise, which began with coffee, today exceeds 4400 products in more than 150 markets worldwide (Procomer, 2020). Costa Rica's export growth reached 24% in 2021, the highest growth in 15 years; all sectors grew.

Coffee is no longer the country's largest export product: the most important export sector is precision and medical equipment; the second is agriculture; and the third is the food industry (MCECR, 2022).

In the words of foreign trade expert Velia Govaere (UNED, 2022):

In that we were, again, successful. A country of only 5 million inhabitants is today the leading exporter of high-tech products in Latin America. Excluding minerals and fuels, which we do not have, Costa Rica is also the first per capita exporter of goods in the region, with more than 4,000 companies exporting more than 4,500 products to 146 countries (UNED, 2022).

However, while international trade has flourished, the local business park faces challenges to maintain its activity in the face of the effects of the pandemic, economic pressures and its productivity. Intensely export-intensive, Costa Rica must increase its business capacities for the domestic market sector.

From the old golden fig tree that is in front of the old Muñoz and Nanne supermarket

-Where is Abu? -I ask my grandmother to get to our new pilates class.

-It's easy: from the old golden fig tree, which is almost in front of the old Muñoz and Nanne supermarket, 100 yards down the street, turn right where there is a bus stop. Walk straight ahead, this is a dead-end street, until you come to a fence. It is the second house on the left. With two palm trees outside... green gate.

-Abu, can you share the location with me?

-Of course, by WhastApp?

A few years ago, in October 2014, the Washington Post reported on the success that the Waze app achieved in Costa Rica (McFarland, 2014), which is not surprising, given our style of providing directions.

The story recounts the experience of young volunteers who spent much of their free time editing or adding locations on the maps of Costa Rica to which they had access in the form of satellite imagery. Eager to contribute to improving the experience of people wanting to get to a place, they come up with folklore explanations that confuse even Costa Ricans.

If you have tried to ask Costa Ricans for directions, they probably kindly helped you not to find the place you are looking for. It is necessary to value this experience as the cultural

heritage that it is and that reflects the importance we give to certain places that become navigation points.

But what if you want to send something by mail or courier in Costa Rica?

Leapfrogging

The mailing service works

Step by step, the Costa Rican tradition of giving addresses “a la tica” or Costa Rican style is being replaced by applications such as Waze and Google Maps. Recently, the delivery of goods and correspondence to addresses in Costa Rica improved overnight. The strategic qualitative leap is due to the transformation of the postal company and the arrival of mailbox services for Internet shopping.

In May 1998, Correos de Costa Rica was created as a state-owned company under private law (Correos de Costa Rica, 2020a). Law 7768 allows it to enter into alliances or contracts to expand its services (Law 7768, 2010). It is a strategic company for Costa Rica to operate with improved logistics in the new economy. It has also been innovative in its portfolio of services.

In addition to shipping documents or goods, it has become a source of public services in the territories. For example, a certificate related to your property registered in the Public Registry, the handling of documents for passport renewal or visa procedures for entry into another country. It also offers logistics for national and international trade: it can receive and ship goods, inside or outside Costa Rica. More than 100 branches throughout the country keep these services available to the communities (Correos de Costa Rica, 2020b).

Costa Rican customs and traditions are alive and changing with the seasons. Some of them, such as the way of giving directions, is elevated to cultural heritage capable of

coexisting with Google Maps and Waze (Guzman, 2014). Therefore, when you have the opportunity to ask a Costa Rican for directions, you will receive a performance worthy of TikTok.

"Respect and commitment to traditions" is another universal value of Schwartz's (2012). Given the cultural diversity in the territory and the interaction between these cultures, the wealth of traditions that can coexist is boiling.

The Costa Rican outlook is young and seems to devote more attention outwardly than inwardly:

It began to look outward, it was necessary and preemptory. But... we stopped looking inward. Outwardly, we became one of the most emblematic models of internationalization. Inwardly, we remained stagnant, with the productivity of domestic industry in decline since 1980. That is, factor productivity has steadily declined since then (UNED, 2022).

In other words, Costa Rica has been able to increase the sophistication of its products and services outwardly and jumped to other markets without transforming its own with the same intensity.

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican. To find out if you are becoming a Costa Rican, we share the following checklist.

- You need your afternoon coffee
- You like going out for coffee with friends
- You give the address of the old golden fig tree in front of the old Muñoz and Nanne supermarket...
- You could get lost if the palm tree or the dog is no longer outside as expected.
- You ask someone on the street for directions
- You say that your route is better than Waze's
- You go to your neighborhood post office to pick up your renewed visa or passport.
- You give directions to those who ask for them with a performance.

IX

Living dreaming

"They live a relaxed style as if they were an island in the Caribbean."

Alan, USA, exchange student to Costa Rica in 1987

"Costa Rica is a shining example of a happy country despite its economic capacity."

Jeffrey Sachs (Kovinsler, 2016)

The first time, standing in front of the sea...
The end of the wave barely touches me...
Waves later, I'm still standing, facing the sea...
The waves reach me
and the sand escapes under my footprints...
My feet don't know whether to sink or run...
Waves later, I'm still there, facing the sea.
I keep my balance.
Perhaps the waves want me to swim or
maybe they are getting to know me...
and they make room for me, between the sand and the water.
Maybe I'm getting to know them too,
between doubt and calm...

They live with an easy smile and a totalizing line: pure life! It is more than a greeting; it is the desire for well-being for the one who receives it, the well-being of the one who gives it, and the gratitude for life.

There are no expert voices on how to enjoy life, but people in Costa Rica are constantly trying. You could wish for more senses to experience the intensity of the iridescence of the hummingbird, the splendor of the sunset, the steam of the hot springs, so many shades of green, sour flavors that feel sweet, the elegant farewell of the night and the sound of the rain that sneaks into your thoughts.

Finding people enjoying themselves is very easy. Improvising a good time could be the specialty of Costa Ricans. For that reason, sharing with the locals is almost inevitable when visiting a national park, the beaches, or the mountains in Costa Rica.

In our country, it is not necessary to attack the vacation with a military plan; instead, it is good to let yourself go with the rhythm of the days and take advantage of the closeness of everything and the magic of improvisation. Do not try to avoid Costa Ricans; it is not possible.

There is one Costa Rican for every tourist in a national park. Protected natural areas are visited in similar proportions by foreigners and residents; for example, in 2019, they received 1 266 801 foreign tourists and 996 430 residents (ICT, 2021). It is like living in a large park. Nature is always nearby.

The second specialty of Costa Ricans is dreaming and following their dreams inside and outside the country. Often, there are figures that stand out in the world and fill life at home with smiles and sighs.

Recently, Costa Rican dreamers and the country's happiness were in the news. On the one hand, while a Costa Rican woman surfed her way to success during the Olympics in Japan, another improvised a trip to the other side of the world. Costa Rica is once again in the news as the happiest country in the region and number 16 in the world, ahead of a good number of European countries and the United States.

The architecture of rights that Costa Rican society lives in, from the sense of dignity to the sense of gratification and personal fulfillment, should cover all people.

Living in a big park!

We arrived in Costa Rica early in the morning and took the rental car at the airport. I still had the cold from the plane on my skin when we started the trip to the hotel near the Arenal Volcano.

We followed the route marked by Google Maps. As the minutes passed, the untidy vegetation increased on both sides of the road. It was only interrupted by a few houses with tidy gardens. Kim was driving almost in a meditative state until he suddenly stopped.

-What's wrong? -she asked.

-I don't know. The car in front just stopped.

-But why?

-I don't know.

-Now they're taking something out of the trunk. The car probably failed.

-What do we do?

-I don't know. -Can we pass them?

-No. -They pull out a cooler, they're smiling and taking off their clothes.

-WHAT?

They're coming... should I open the window? Well, it's a family, let's see if they understand us.

-Hello, hello..." I said.

-Hot springs here! Let's go," says the young woman smiling and pointing across the street.

As we roll down the window, we hear a river and, on the other side of the street, we see people entering among plants and trees. We smile with our eyes and decide to follow the locals.

-I'm Laura, by the way. I'm José... -they say to us.

We cross the street, follow Laura and José. A few meters ahead, we start walking down a slippery terrain, covered with plants and messy trees.

Seconds later, we were immersed in natural hot springs and joined several families of Ticos who, on any given day, simply decide to go to the river and stop the car in the middle of the street and do it.

This is a true story that is happening right now somewhere in Costa Rica. The protagonists and the scenario may change, but the story lives on. Costa Ricans stop their vehicles without concern and without consideration.

The cause may be that they saw a sloth, a troop of monkeys, a bird or, simply, they decide to do something on the way, like contemplating a view or a sunset. The freedom to decide and to do is a characteristic that Ticos live without thinking.

In July 2021, Tsurigasaki is the most watched beach in the world, as the first Olympic surfing feats in history are celebrated. The day is gray and the waves are not helping Brisa Hennesy, from Costa Rica. She waits for the ideal moment to run smiles in the sea.

While Brisa becomes the best qualified of the Hispanic participants, Reuters publishes the news about Carlos Muñoz, Costa Rican surfing veteran, who rides cloudburst waves traveling around the world to get to Tokyo to compete. At the last minute, an opportunity opened up for him when Frederico tested positive for COVID-19 (Martin, 2022).

On top of that news full of gray days and epidemic comes a typhoon warning that could delay the competition and allow Carlos to arrive on time. Everything looks wonderful for Carlos.

Meanwhile, Costa Rica's social networks are awash with joy for Brisa and encouragement for Carlos. Costa Ricans always hope for the best. They always believe in miracles. Is there a leap that has improved conditions for athletes and artists?

Leapfrogging to make

Unfortunately, these desires are not accompanied by public and private policies that promote the realization of people in the sports and cultural fields. Although the Costa Rican Sports Institute and the Olympic Committee exist, they still do not have the capacity to support national talent in a strategic and fair way (Law 7800, 2022).

In the last Olympics, four Costa Ricans were among the top 10 in the world in surfing, BMX, athletics and judo: Brisa Hennessy, Kenneth Tencio, Andrea Vargas and Ian Sancho. Surfing and BMX are sports that were premiered in these Olympic Games and were a showcase for Costa Rican talent, thanks to the constant support of their families and friends (Monge, 2021). The only recent medal was won by Sherman Guity in athletics in the Paralympic Games (International Olympic Committee, 2021).

In sum, from the above, a pending leap is the innovative and far-reaching strategy to accompany athletes and include other sports. For example, jiu-jitsu, in which Costa Rica also shines, thanks to Sebastián Rodríguez (BJJ HEROES, 2014); or tennis, in which the country has outstanding exponents, such as María Moya, who leads her academy and is regularly invited to coach internationally. (Moya Tennis Academy, 2022).

Who understands us?

A few months ago, during the pandemic, she finally decided to try Airbnb and offer a room she has long unoccupied. The room has a double bed, two bedside tables, a closet, the light from the window and the touristy air of this area.

However, there are two non-negotiable aspects for her: she prefers to receive women in her house, since she is a lady who lives alone and, besides, breakfast will not be included.

Everything was going well with the first reservations until Carlos' reservation arrived. Her first impulse was to reject that reservation. She called us daughters to talk and the decision was to reject the reservation. So, she logged into the platform and accepted it... (because Carlos looks like a nice guy).

-Tell the uber to tell the guard to let him pass, he's just coming to drop him off. -My mom writes to Carlos.

As soon as he arrives, she welcomes him, shows him to his room and reminds him that the accommodation does not include breakfast. Carlos is a Salvadoran doctor visiting Costa Rica to attend the Coldplay concert.

-Oh yes, I came because this concert is unique in the world," says Carlos.

-I love music, especially tango; and, also, I'm looking forward to a concert. In a few days, I'm going to see Raphael! -my mother tells him.

-Wonderful, madam, your house is very nice!

-I left enough towels in the bathroom.

-Thank you!

-Good night

-Good night

-Good morning

-Good morning," says my mom from the kitchen. I'm making eggs with bread and coffee; would you like some?

-I'd love to, thank you.

Two days later, I get a call from my mom and she tells me that Carlos is charming, he looks like my brother and puts him on the phone.

He's going with her to my mom's friend's birthday, because "poor thing" had no plans that day.

Carlos plans to return with his wife and children.

Of course, they don't fit in the room, but we'll get organized... when it happens...

This is a true story, which is constantly repeated by my extraordinary and cosmopolitan mom and probably by hundreds of Costa Rican families. We connect and are always won over by the desire to support.

Another story

Me getting in the uber:

-Liz?

-Yes, Esteban?

-Yes.

Me, getting out of the uber:

-Well Liz, all the best! Now I'll send you the link and send me the language one. I'm going to start with Portuguese.

-Ciao, Esteban! Yes, of course, all the best and have a good exam tomorrow. I'll send you the link.

-Thank you, nice to meet you. Oh, and I'll send you the recipe later.

Super, thanks!

Costa Rica maintains the first place in Latin America regarding the level of well-being felt by its inhabitants, despite being in the middle of the pandemic. Finland continues to be the happiest country in the world. In the United States report, it dropped one position (19) and is three positions below Costa Rica (16) (Helliwell et al., 2021).

This report is promoted by the United Nations with the participation of experts from prestigious universities and the information from the global survey is from Gallup (Helliwell et al., 2021).

On the one hand, the report highlights the importance of society's trust in institutions for the success of pandemic measures. They have studied this issue in other crisis cases and the importance of trust is only growing.

On the other hand, they also conclude that people with high trust in society and institutions are happier than those who live in less trusting environments.

Furthermore, they underline that a large number of studies show that communities with high levels of trust are more resilient.

From trust and cooperative social norms, a happiness bonus arises when people can see the goodness in the actions of others and when they perform them themselves (Helliwell et al., 2021, p. 23).

Renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs points to Costa Rica as a shining example of a happy country despite its economic capacity (Kovinsler, 2016). However, what are the pending leaps Costa Rica has to make to extend well-being to the entire population?

Leapfrogging to make

As long as there are Costa Ricans who do not live *pura vida!*, there are reasons to co-create the pending leaps, not only to cover physiological needs, but also to help all people reach their potential and social and emotional harmony.

The importance of a "sense gratification" is one of the universal values according to Schwartz (2012). Not surprisingly, art and culture are real priorities for happiness and, despite this, are in search of their deserved space in public and private policies. "Why tractors without violins?" (MCJ, 2012) is a phrase said by a Costa Rican fifty years ago that makes infinite sense.

Costa Rica enjoys the National Symphony Orchestra, the Costa Rican Philharmonic Orchestra and the National Music Education System. However, it is still pending to orchestrate the decisive and strategic support to music, cinema, theater and the arts in general. Also, spaces must be maintained to live them and feel the collective emotions that elevate the spirit. Why wifi without hugs?

Sense gratification is easy to achieve thanks to nature, the spirit of the people in Costa Rica and their talent. However, the opportunities to empower Costa Rican talent are insufficient.

**Happiness in Costa Rica is achieved with less economic resources,
but with more social and environmental resources. With rights in
the skin, with optimism, living outside the box and with integration,
rather than migration.**

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican. To find out if you are becoming a costarican, we share the following checklist.

- If you set up on the beach with music, pots, chairs and umbrellas.
- If you are worried about your car's paintwork when ash falls from the volcano.
- If all platforms are useful to make friends
- You support the Ticos(as) when they compete

X

Diay, what can we do?

"New places that haven't seen you will be dazzled at your arrival, old places that know you will act as if nothing has happened since they last saw you."

John O'Donahue

During the first two years of the pandemic, no military supervision was necessary for Costa Ricans to respect the restrictions imposed. They demonstrated that they could follow directions as long as they were given reasons.

Costa Rican society, in general, behaves according to the rules. If the rules or restrictions seem unfair, they don't accept them. They will start with complaints to whom it may concern or in social networks. Then, they would go to institutional or judicial instances according to the situation. The possibility of protesting in the streets is open, generally with peaceful marches.

Listening to complaints is common. The most common are about the cost of living or economic crisis, followed by some health "ailment" and complaints about some person, usually bosses, politicians, or soccer players and their coaches. As has been reported, there is always the option of going to the Constitutional Chamber.

When a natural disaster happens, people unite, resolve and return, little by little, to their slow pace. When a pandemic or disaster starts to trickle into the country, all senses are activated, and we wait to see what happens.

Let's wait and see what happens!

At midday, tens of thousands of houses are silent to listen.

To enter Ana and Juan's house is to take steps into the museum of their lives. The door opens slowly skimming the wooden floor.

In the living room, armchairs, well dusted and arranged, are accompanied by small tables that treasure photographs of their trips with their daughters. Some smiling in Berlin, others in Barcelona. Alongside the photographs, there is an Eiffel Tower and a replica of the Pietà.

On March 16, 2020, at noon, they are again on the couch and, in silence, to listen to the news on TV.

-The health minister says that you have to stay in the house, -John says.

-We can't go out," says Ana.

-How can we work or buy what we need? -says Juan.

-Wait to hear well," says Ana.

-The journalist summarizes: "We are in a national emergency. Isolation is preventive. Especially we have to stay at home to protect the elderly".

-What can we do," says Juan.

-Yes, let's wait and see what happens," says Ana.

This scene can be multiplied by thousands of Costa Rican households, starting in March 2020 and every day, at noon, for more than a year. The news included a report from the health minister and others leading the pandemic response.

On April 29, 2021, Reuters reported that Costa Rica decided to close stores, restaurants, and churches at the height of the pandemic. The article highlighted the government's decision given the increase in cases and the low percentage of people vaccinated at that date. The vehicle restriction also contributed to the measures by limiting mobility.

At that time, the increase in cases caused pressure on the demand for intensive care services, which is the reason for the new measures to be taken (Reuters, 2021).

Those were the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and things were about to get worse, not because of the virus.

Mady in Nosara

-I live very close to the river, the sea and the sky in Nosara, a beautiful coastal town in Costa Rica," says Mady in an interview. The simple life I was looking for found me in a community so cosmopolitan and so remote that should not be part of the same story. Every day was magical: going surfing early, then to the organic market, greeting friends, connecting with the world and, in the evenings, always something new.

The days were ideal, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, until Hurricane ETA hit. The water raged, washed away the bridge and left the entire community isolated. That day felt like the end of the world. In the neighborhood chat, we were invited to go out and see how we could help. I leave the house with cautious steps and somewhat numb from the raindrops that have not stopped in three days.

We go to the river bank and it is hard to imagine that yesterday there was a bridge. I have learned that the problems of a coastal town are different, they are problems that grow with the water and go with the water.

I see the people from the committee and many neighbors contemplating the void left by the San Fernando bridge.

The neighbors talk about what they want to do. "It's crazy. It's not going to work."

In any case, I go to get what they ask for. I walk a few minutes down the street towards Jane's house.

-Yes, we need gloves, bags and helmets.

I'm sure it won't work, but I want to support the local people with their ideas. -I explain to Jane from Sweden.

She replied

-I'm coming from the bull ring, that's where they made the shelter.
-The place where they are going to see the bulls? -I asked.
-Yes, they say they always do it that way.

"The pandemic is driving them crazy," I think.
"They probably gave up already," -I think as I head to the river.
As I get closer, I hear them communicating loudly with those on the other side of the river.
I wonder "why don't they call each other on the phone".
A cable crosses the river and there are people on each side holding it:
-Higher! they shout.
-Like this?
-Yes!

I hand things over and I don't understand what's going on.
-Let's try! they say.
-Yes.

I see a bag ziplining this way. The bag gains speed and has difficulty slowing down. It arrives "all at once", and is greeted by the people on this side shouting with joy. They open the bag and take out stones. They see my bewildered face and tell me that this is just proof that it works. Now they start passing food supplies through the zipline. They shout for joy, suddenly, I find myself clapping and joining in the shouting. I ask myself "what did they want the helmets for", better not to ask.

This is a story based on a true experience Madeleine Karlsson, from Sweden, had in Nosara, a coastal town in Guanacaste, with Hurricane ETA in 2021 (NCA, 2020).

In Malcolm Hill's interview on what it is like to move to live in Costa Rica (Hill & Hill, 2021), she finds Costa Ricans to be problem solvers and have a sense of joy and peace. But what to do when living in nature can become an emergency at any moment?

I think there is a connection between the rain that accompanies us for several months each year and soothes the spirit with the low resistance we put up to events. That mixture favors us to deal with difficult situations; but what to do when living nature can turn into an emergency at any moment?

Leapfrogging National Emergency Law

The protagonist of these stories is an emergency. Fortunately, Costa Rica made a qualitative leap of the tremendous impact that allowed it to face emergencies with a national strategy.

In 1999, the National Emergency Law was approved, and five years later, it was expanded to integrate risk prevention and became Law 8488: National Law on Emergencies and Risk Prevention (Law 8488, 2020).

This approach is essential in a country like Costa Rica, where volcanic eruptions coexist with earthquakes, floods, and other natural events and situations exacerbated by climate change.

The law not only refers to the actions of the State and the Government but also designs a network with high participation of different organizations in the territories: institutions, companies, associations, community organizations, etc. This strategy allows the network to be always latent and activated as soon as necessary.

The law creates the National Commission for Risk Prevention and Emergency Attention, which is attached to the Presidency of the Republic. This coordinated activity has allowed society to maintain the unity and tense calm necessary for emergencies. This tense calm tests the character of Costa Rican society in many ways.

What are you?

-I'm inviting you to my bar mitzvah," says Ana.

-Wow, that's great, of course I'll come! -replies Celeste.

-What are you? -asks Ana.

-Normal! -replies Celeste, as she raises her shoulders.

This is a true story about the response of a Costa Rican teenager living abroad when a friend invites her to an unfamiliar religious ceremony. She gives voice to a diplomatic Costa Rican response that also allows her not to go into political or religious details.

On December 17, 2021, Deutsche Welle reports that Costa Rica elects the first woman as president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (DW, 2021b). Eugenia Zamora Chavarría assumed this leadership position just before the 2022 elections with her extensive experience and capacity.

On February 6, 2022 France24 reported on people in Costa Rica, beginning to parade to polling places to elect president and deputies (AFP, 2022). The tense calm once again tests the character of Costa Rican society.

Elections in Costa Rica have been a source of national pride given the democratic consistency, and civility cemented in that voting is a right and a duty. Unfortunately, abstentionism grows as the number of people who do not feel motivated to exercise their right increases.

After two years of pandemic, with the economic, emotional and social affectation, people return to the polls. There is an abundance of options, but so is the uneasiness. The elections of governors, in Costa Rica, went from being a national celebration to a national concern.

Velia Govaere, friend, scholar and opinion maker, emphasizes that Costa Rica is the first country where the contrasts and divisions caused by globalization are manifested at the ballot box.

In 2008, there was such opposition to the signing of a trade agreement with the United States that a referendum had to be held. The country was evenly

divided. Costa Rica has served as a laboratory where the contradictions of globalization have been revealed. The results of the referendum were a precursor for more than ten years to BREXIT in England, the presidential triumph of Donald Trump in the United States, and the same national first-round election results in 2018. All these political upheavals are rooted in the same phenomenon that Stiglitz (2002) called "The Globalization malaise" (UNED, 2022).

Costa Rica was the first country in the world where the losers of globalization demonstrated at the polls explicitly against the internationalization of the country (UNED, 2022).

On February 6, the BBC reported concern about what it calls the "cracks in the welfare economy" (Atahualpa, 2022). Specifically, it highlights the inequality that emanates from two worlds that coexist in the territory: that of people with opportunities connected to the new economy and that of people without opportunities connected to the old economy.

This laboratory, called Costa Rica, is betting, once again, on the new and different. On April 4, 2022, Costa Rica elected as president the newly arrived leader of one of the newly created parties. The confidence in the proposals of Mr. President Rodrigo Chaves opened the door to the presidential house. Costa Rican society preferred a different proposal for the challenging present. But which leaps left behind the bipartisan political life?

Leapfrogging

The supreme power

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) is not only one of the five powers of the republic but has become a recipe for Costa Rican exceptionalism: it is the transparency that allows the other ingredients to shine.

Again, it is at the end of the twentieth century that national political life took a double leap. The first leap was taken by the Electoral Code which, for almost fifty years, had slight reforms until it took a leap, in 1996, when it substantially changed half of its articles (TSE, 2022).

The second leap occurred outside the institutions. In the 1990s, political life was in ferment and provoked the most dramatic political transformation in decades:

The number of parties that had competed in presidential and parliamentary elections since 1953 grew slowly until 1994. But already by the 1998 elections a significant change was observed, for while the average for the 1953-1994 period for presidential candidates was 5.2, in 1998-2006 it rose to 13.3. Meanwhile, the number of parties in legislative elections during 1953-1994 was 10.8 and in 1998-2006 it was 22.6 (Picado, 2018).

Candidates and parties doubled by the end of the 20th century. Fortunately, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal managed to read the times and promoted a reform of the Electoral Code approved in 2009. With it, it brought Costa Rica to the democratic dynamics demanded by the times: "It defines rules on internal democratization of political parties, parity and alternation as gender equity norms, authorizes the vote of Costa Ricans abroad, among other things" (TSE, 2022).

Today's politicians face the gap between the real reality, augmented reality, virtual reality and mixed reality.

The world of perceptions is becoming more sophisticated, making global political strategies look rudimentary.

The "self-control and responsibility" that allow rules to be followed is the universal value discussed in this chapter. According to Schwartz (2012), it is about conformity expressed in everyday interactions.

Currently, the main threat is inequality. There is a high risk of losing the common welfare when the gap between those who have the most and those who do not manage to satisfy their basic needs widens (PEN, 2022).

Costa Rican society has demonstrated its temperament and strength to maintain dialogue and friction with the State. The next few years are decisive to co-create the scripts of the story that will be told about exceptional Costa Rica.

Costa Rican checklist

Many people decide to extend their trip and stay longer than expected in Costa Rica. As time goes by, they begin to discover new behaviors and attitudes and seem to breathe Costa Rican. To find out if you are becoming a Costa Rican, we share the following checklist.

- You complain about the crisis
- You accept what the Emergency Commission says.
- You support when there are emergencies
- You wish the best to the new president
- You go to vote and accept the result

Final thoughts

«The amazing ability to become»

Tom Bilyeu

Costa Rica is like a good friend. In its presence, we can feel all the emotions, and it invites us to live in the present. It provokes astonishment for life and its landscapes, like the ones the brush dreamed of. It is a living being and is exceptional in its society and territory. It is a presence that helps us to find ourselves.

The news that circulates the world about Costa Rica is primarily positive. These are influenced, in general, by the known history of the country; however, it had to make transformations at the end of the twentieth century to sustain and achieve the current exceptionality.

As a living being, Costa Rica feels the pains of the crisis in the 80s. Then, in the 90s, it listened to the drums of globalization, the call of nature and technological lightning. Faced with this, it made social, environmental, economic and political decisions. In that final decade of the previous century, Costa Rica made qualitative leaps that sculpted the gestures of our times.

Each of the ten chapters of this work shows the flavor of life in Costa Rica from each of its values. The ingredients of its exceptionality are natural and the recipe is very human.

1. Intensely natural

- It is the most highly biodiverse place on the planet, and it is also a nursery where the new generation of rights matures.
- It is the first place where a child's action guarantees the right to a healthy environment and has constitutional, national and international consequences. Twenty years before Greta, Malala and social networks.

- Costa Rica preserves for the world more than 25% of its territory, and does so in an innovative and participatory way, with each community and in each territory. In general, she believes in sustainable tourism.
- Champion of the Earth dreams of being carbon neutral, meanwhile its nightmare is the transportation system.

2. The fountain of youth

- Its human geography attracts specialists from Harvard, National Geographic, and other latitudes. They are all looking for recipes whose ingredients have the flavor of solidarity and universality of health services and are simmered.
- It shows one of the first blue zones discovered and the only one not located in a rich country. However, it reached the life expectancy of a rich country of 80.3, with one-sixth of the budget.
- Health data tends to hide our attitude which is an essential part of our health.
- We like to have an Ebais in the neighborhood, a natural medicine store, and a pharmacy nearby, because we can be a little hypochondriac.
- Our health, too, benefits from rice and beans, vegetables, fruits and an abundance of fresh produce. It is awakening our gastronomic sophistication and aspires to be sustainable and healthy.

3. Wearing the rights on our skin

- We wear our rights and the rights of others on our skin. We are a strong society that maintains dialogue and friction with a strong state.
- The religion with the most followers in the country is the Constitutional Chamber, which has the last word.
- We have five main powers: Government, Legislative, Judicial, Electoral and Constitutional.
- For every person that goes to live in another country, two come to live in Costa Rica.
- We believe in social openness, therefore, we understand migration as integration. There are thousands of reasons to come to live in Costa Rica, but all of them are related to the welfare that the country offers.
- When we travel we take our rights with us, and we hope that they will be possible where we are.

4. A Costa Rican person an opinion

- Where there is a Costa Rican person there is an opinion.
- Women have political parity; a women's institute was created with the rank of a ministry and there is still a long way to go in social justice. In the continent, the first African-American vice-president was Costa Rican.
- We democratized everything. There are thousands of positions on boards of directors of labor associations, community associations, specific for water, health, education, cooperatives, and we invent the associations that are needed.

- The robust institutional fabric maintains, in its boards of directors, the voice and vote of workers, cooperatives, universities and civil society. In addition, we created a mechanism for national institutions to coordinate their actions in each territory.

5. Living outside the box

- **Costa Rica is a social, environmental and economic innovator.**
- In Costa Rica, we live outside the box. Experimenting is natural for us. Faced with a problem as big as deforestation, we applied the innovation of payment for environmental services and reversed it.
- Its recognition of the country comes from diverse sources: the United Nations, royalty or a pop band.
- Our scientific and technological network is committed to sustainability, to young people with science schools and to digital inclusion with intelligent community centers.
- Increasing investment in research and development is the necessary bridge to new opportunities.

6. Optimistic and stubborn

- Costa Rican people “are like everyone else, only more so.” (Lionel Blue) It is an intense society. On a day-to-day basis, they may complain about many situations; however, on balance, they are optimistic.
- For example, they created a tourism sustainability certification when the subject was not discussed and adopted the blue flag incentive to apply it to everything and motivate thousands.
- People join, learn, act and then receive recognition. We love that.
- It's not blind optimism but the result of balancing the pros and cons, where taking action to make things better wins.

7. Naturally talented

- Since the end of the 20th century, the educational pace has been accelerating in two directions: languages and digital skills.
- Talented by nature, Costa Rican society believes that all roads lead to education and seeks it for its inhabitants.
- A good part of its population has achieved the skills demanded by the times in languages and technologies. However, inequality emanates from two worlds that coexist in the territory: that of people with opportunities connected to the new economy and that of people without opportunities connected to the old economy.
- Social and labor inclusion is not easy in an open economy where people with better skills can secure the best working conditions, while those lacking digital skills and languages have limited opportunities. These are the pulsating challenges.

8. Marinated in coffee

- We like to live traditions and create new ones. Given the opportunity, we can dramatize an address or get some English words "out in the sun".
- We live marinated in coffee. Afternoon coffee is a ritual for thousands. It is the respite to end the day or the occasion to marinate in coffee the stories we were not going to tell.
- We have a tradition of giving directions and, if we use an app to navigate the roads, we will have opinions on a better route.
- Mail in Costa Rica is not like it used to be, now it works and it is a source of innovation that serves for many other services.

9. Living dreaming

- They live with an easy smile and a totalizing line: pure life! It is more than a greeting, it is the desire of well-being for the one who receives it, the well-being of the one who gives it and the gratitude for life.
- We are happy with less, economically, but more, socially and environmentally.
- Sports and the arts are full of talent and empty of the support they deserve.

10. Diay, what's left

- People, in Costa Rica, follow directions, as long as they are given reasons.
- If the rules or restrictions seem unfair, they do not accept them. If the situation warrants it, they go to institutional or judicial instances. The possibility of protesting in the streets is open; generally, with peaceful marches.

- We unite in emergencies and separate in soccer finals.
- We breathe democracy and admire the performance of our Supreme Electoral Tribunal.
- With the heartbeat of this century, bipartisanship is over. We prefer new political proposals and try new cultural and religious balances.
- Costa Ricans abroad can vote and women participate in politics on an equal basis; however, we are unveiled by femicides and corruption.
- The importance of following the rules permeates the daily lives of most people in the country. However, inequality stalks social peace and challenges not only the welfare economy, but also the capacity of education and productive reconversion of the sectors that remain in the old economy.

Finally...

Costa Rican society has never been easy to conquer, rather it is the conqueror of its own destiny.

In Costa Rica, you can breathe democracy, drink water from the tube, wake up with the aroma of coffee, become nature and receive unprofessional smiles.

Part of the future came, first, to Costa Rica to elevate rights: the right to a healthy environment, the right of an African-American woman to occupy the highest positions, the right to have a say in whether or not to open trade.

Costa Rica finds and creates its place in the symphony of human culture with coherence among its policies. "More than what is the innovation, education or science policy, what is relevant is the coherence between the different policies", according to Vihma-Purovaara (2021), Minister of Education, Science and Culture of Finland (2021).

Now, it must be studied who our elites are, what their priorities are and which international ideas form the spirit of the times and the times to come. In Bilyeu's words, "We have the fascinating ability to become. We can choose the world in which we live our story, sometimes, we will be the hero; sometimes, the villain, but we star in the story we want to feel and, if in our world is Costa Rica, they will be pages worth living.

Thank you for the shared moments, we would love to know your impressions!

Write to us at: lbrenesb@gmail.com

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