

Analysis of Community Based Tourism in Yunguilla Community, Pichincha Province, Ecuador

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine community based tourism in Yunguilla community. The study evaluates the ways in which community members are involved in community based tourism in Yunguilla, both at the individual and the community level. Community based tourism (CBT) is a process in which tourism is used as a tool for community development and the participation of the local people is necessary to prepare and build the capacity of the host community to manage tourism. This process occurs through increased importance of natural resources conservation and of protecting the environment associated to community based tourism into the concept of responsible tourism. Recent work in the field of community based tourism has shown that conservation and protected areas are key elements to develop community based tourism, closely linked to sustainable tourism development through community participation in decision-making process (Vikneswaran & Amran, 2015). A critical factor for success in community based tourism includes an understanding and acceptance by all members of local communities that their community share its environment and its way of life with visitors and also that communities incur costs when they engage in community based tourism (positive and negative impacts on destinations). Using a case study of Yunguilla community this paper contributes to the understanding of community participation in tourism development by examining local communities' views on their role in community development. The data for this study were collected from community leaders and local residents who engaged in tourism activities. The study included participant observation, household surveys and key informant interviews. The methodological process involved a review of the literature on community based tourism as well as tourism development, community participation and barriers of community capacity building. The results showed that: (1) community based tourism in Yunguilla can be divided into six categories; (2) Yunguilla community works as interdependent family teams and (3) there are some barriers to community based tourism that must be faced.

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1. Introduction

Tourism development and its links with sustainability represents a critical, polemic and contradictory topic with regards to economic growth. The variety of the criteria involved in tourism development goes beyond politics and ideological stance. Tourism is one of the world's largest industries, one of its fastest growing economic sectors, and its evolution is a common issue that affects every individual in our society. Tourism has many benefits and in many countries is the main source of income. On the other hand, tourism can also have many negative effects. In summary, tourism development brings benefits and costs to tourist destinations and host communities. From this perspective, community responsibility in tourism can be extraordinarily positive or productive or it can perpetuate socially dominant or ecologically destructive ideologies (Grimwood et al., 2015). In this context, sustainable tourism and community-based tourism have stimulated increased interest (Shunnaq et al., 2008). Hence, tourism can be seen as a tool to enhance local economies (Wahab, 2000; Ko & Stewart, 2002) where community participation influences decisions about programs and sustainable tourism policies (Azah et al., 2014).

Improving the production matrix is a great challenge for the Ecuadorian Government. In this context, the government considers tourism to be a key tool in socio-economic development for the country and is one of its priority industries for improving the production matrix. In recent years, the Ecuadorian government has made numerous efforts to position Ecuador internationally as an attractive destination for its wealth of biological, historical and cultural diversity through its "Four Worlds": the Coast, the Andes, the Amazon and the Galapagos islands. The biggest challenge at the macro level (Ecuador as a country); and, at the micro level (territories) is to have a reliable and timely statistics system that can be offered to different public and private stakeholders, which provides relevant information for decision-making related to their actual and/or potential of goods and services tourism.

Yunguilla community is located in the Protective Forests of the upper basin of the Guayabamba River. These forests play a major role in the conservation of the biodiversity, preservation of historic and cultural remains (Coluncos pre-Incas trail), and protection of water resources. This is a large area covered by cloud forest in the northwestern region of Pichincha province, Ecuador. The region is characterized by cloud formations and a rich ecosystem. In this forest located at 2650 meters above sea level, temperatures average between 12 and 24 degrees on the Celsius scale. The main threat faced by the area has been the felling of trees to obtain wood and charcoal. Since 1995, in order to protect the forest, a fundamental change in the behavior and attitude of the population towards the environment has been necessary and as an alternative to unregulated forestry, the implementation of ecotourism and agro tourism was proposed (GEF Small Grants Programme, 2006). Community based tourism in Yunguilla has been an alternative path towards the protection of biodiversity and is one way in which the importance of natural resources conservation and of protecting the environment form part of community strategies.

This study sets out to explore in what way the community members are involved in community based tourism in Yunguilla, both at the individual and the community level. Using a case study from Yunguilla

community, this paper contributes to the understanding of community based participation in tourism development by examining local communities' views on their role in communal development. Following the introduction there is a literature review on community-based tourism, sustainable tourism and local communities with a view towards exploring how these are related. It then continues with the mixed methods research methods adopted in this paper. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the results on views of community based tourism in the study area of their role in the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of sustainable development of tourism. The paper ends with discussion and conclusion with regards to major findings.

2. Literature Review

Community based tourism (CBT) is a process in which tourism is used as a tool for community development. In this way, private developers or government planners can interface with the community in the process of tourism development (Johnson, 2010). The participation of the local people is necessary to prepare and build the capacity of the host community to manage tourism. The community is linked to a group of individuals living or working within the same geographic area with some shared cultures or common interests (Aref & Grill, 2010) especially from the perspectives of tourism development. According to Muganda, Sirima and Marwa (2013), theoretically, the role of local communities in tourism development depends on the type and level of participatory approach within a tourist destination. In another way, the importance of natural resource conservation and of protecting the environment is associated with assimilating community based tourism into the concept of responsible tourism. This term tends to denote a process of planning, policy, and development that prioritizes community-level involvement, sustainable resource management, equitable distribution of benefits, and minimal negative impacts to local contexts (Grimwood et al., 2015).

Conservation and protected areas are key elements in developing community based tourism. Hence, it is closely linked to sustainable tourism development through community participation in the decision-making process. On the one hand, tourism development brings benefits and it plays an important role in the socioeconomic development of tourist destinations and host communities through the socio-cultural and environmental effects of tourism development. It can do this, for instance, by creating local jobs and business opportunities, bringing new money into the economy, and helping to subsidize the building of facilities and infrastructure developed for tourism. It can also benefit residents, and help to preserve the local culture. On the other hand, many jobs in the tourism industry are poorly paid and employment tends to be seasonal. Other negative trends can include increases in the price of goods and services, loss of natural landscape and agricultural lands to tourism, destruction of flora and fauna by tourists, displacement of residents for tourism development and loss of local identity (Lankford & Howard, 1994; Tosun, 2002; Nyaupane et al., 2006; Al-Oun & Al-Hamoud, 2008; Kruja, 2012; Rathore, 2012; Shkira & Horanlli, 2013). This analysis illustrates that tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on destinations (Khoshnevis, 2012). Negative impacts of tourism development have contributed a growing consensus and moral imperative that calls for a strategy of sustainable tourism in tourist destinations (Quintero, 2014). Thus, a critical factor for success in community based tourism includes an understanding and acceptance by all members of local communities that a local community share the environment and its way of life — culture, heritage, and wisdom — with visitors. Therefore, a local community is a kind of civil society that plays an important role in conserving, reviving, and managing the use of natural resources (Chaiphar et al., 2015).

Tourism is a complex system with multiple stakeholders (Dodds & Butler, 2010) where community participation in terms of community based tourism can help such communities to achieve sustainable tourism development. Hence, communities require an understanding of internal and external barriers to local participation. There are several sources in the literature that emphasize the barriers to tourism development through local communities, particularly, in developing countries. Azah, Azman and Ibrahim (2014) studied the barriers to community participation in tourism development in island destinations and identify obstacles such as: internal barriers (cultural roadblocks) and external barriers (operational and structural obstacles) which hinder community participation in Tioman Island, Malaysia. Operational limitations, structural limitations and cultural limitations are barriers identified by Tonsun (2000) in a similar study. The main barriers of community participation stated by Aref and Marof (2008) are the lack of powerful leadership in their study on Iran. Furthermore, studies on community participation developed by Scheyvens (2002), Cole (2006) and Simpson (2008) identified lack of financial resources, competition between local interest groups, lack of knowledge of the tourism industry, lack of leadership and lack of clearly defined goals as potential limits to a community's capacity for greater involvement.

3. Methodology

The research was divided into six phases (Figure 1). The data for this study was collected from community leaders and local residents who engaged in tourism activities. Preparatory meetings were held with the staff of Yunguilla Corporation to agree upon and formalize the scope of the work. The study included participant observation, household surveys and key informant interviews.

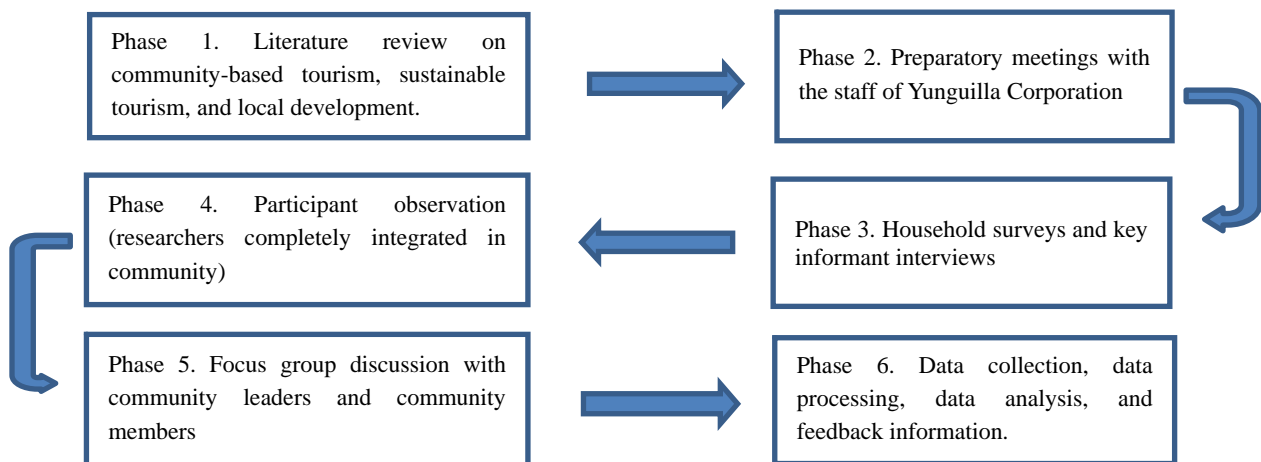


Figure 1 Yunguilla Community Based Tourism

Further, the data collected were obtained through direct observation and personal experiences from the local community in Yunguilla. Focus group discussion was also used to collect data from local residents through seminar workshops. The methodological process involved a review of the literature on community based tourism as well as on local development.

4. Results

The results of participant observation, household surveys, key informant interviews, personal experiences, focus groups, and seminar workshops showed that community based tourism in Yunguilla can be divided into six

categories: conservation of the biodiversity, hospitality; micro business project; agriculture and cattle-raising micro production; tourism activities and barriers of community capacity building (Figure 2). The categories are based on a community based tourism system in Yunguilla where the host community and tourists share space and resources. Such interactions include: how hosts see guests (tourists); how guests (tourists) see hosts; and how hosts and guests (tourists) interact with each other (Loi & Pearce, 2015).

The category of conservation of the biodiversity is related to the importance of natural resources conservation and of protecting the environment. This implies the understanding of people in Yunguilla about the impact of tourism on the community and environmental resources to ensure environmental sustainability and to avoid the degradation and destruction of natural resources crucial to Yunguilla community livelihoods. Biodiversity is part of a plurality of living states and biological processes: currents and potentials (Crist, 2003). In this regard, Yunguilla community has a local vigilance network to monitor environmental quality and biodiversity (forest conservation group). This group emphasizes community participation through learning about natural resources and environmental management, participation in seminars and training programs about environmental protection, conservation, restoration of biological diversity, sustainable use of natural resources, and environmental education as a process to increase biological and cultural knowledge (O'Hearn, 1982). The participants include community leaders and community members including youth and children. Furthermore, educational efforts to promote environmentally responsible tourism is the key element to mitigate negative environmental impacts through the education of tourists, and is one way in which the importance of natural resources conservation and of protecting the environment form part of community strategies.

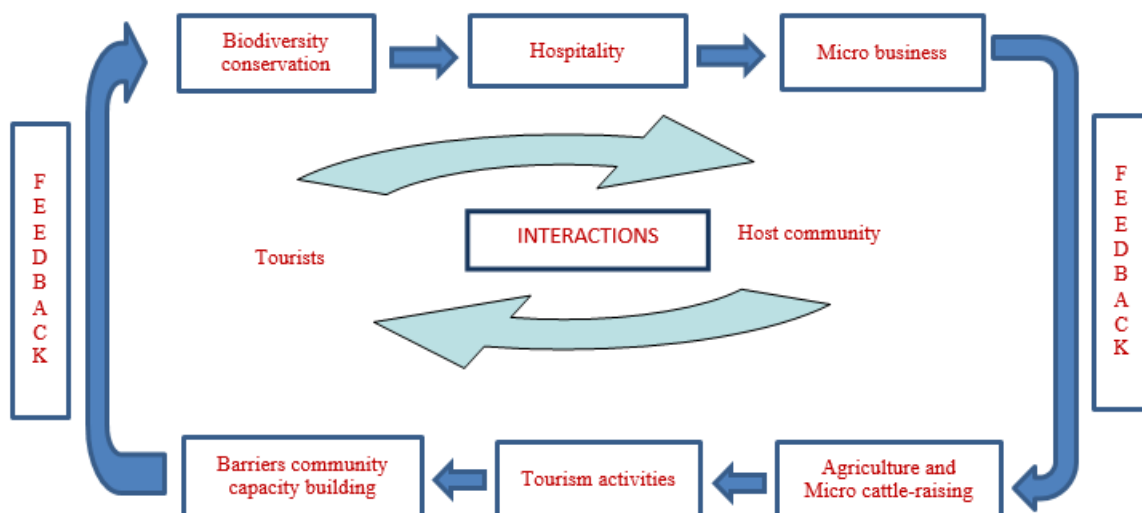


Figure 2 Yunguilla Community Based Tourism System

Tourist accommodation and the relationship between the guest and the host is the second category under the hospitality factor. Yunguilla is a community where there is a shared learning process between hosts and guests and building understanding of diverse cultures and ways of life. Visitors are integrating through interaction with many types of people including host families, local guides, and groups that organize activities in the community. Local people in Yunguilla share accommodation, food service, and cultural exchange with the tourists. According to Mathieson and Wall (1982) the interaction between tourists and the host community may lead to the development of improved lifestyles and practices from the tourists' examples. Associated with this idea, homestay is the form of

tourist accommodation in Yunguilla where tourists share authentic experience of staying with a family. Homestay refers to accommodations and services in which guests stay with foster families in rural areas and this contributes towards the hospitality experience and it is a type of lodging for international travelers (Oranratmanee, 2011; Othman, Sazali & Mohamed, 2013). In this regard, Yunguilla community responds to tourism demand with homestay programs.

The third category is the micro business projects which are small sized enterprises. These small businesses include three small factories: factory production of marmalades, factory production of cheeses and factory production of handicrafts. The employees are members of Yunguilla community. On the one hand, the production is for community internal consumption and on the other hand there is a commercialization process to sell the products in the market. As a consequence, in Yunguilla small businesses are a vital part of economic growth providing jobs and neighborhood stability. The tourists are integrated in the production of marmalades, cheeses and handicrafts. The small-scale businesses presents a constructive option for income generation for the Yunguilla community and thereby ensures benefits in the long term. The raw material to produce marmalades, cheeses and handicrafts is practically supplied by own production sources. The local families in Yunguilla obtain their raw materials from very small family-run orchards and cattle-raising micro production. Therefore, local families produce a given product on a joint basis so, that the production of different families sell together and enjoy the benefits of joint marketing. Yunguilla community works as interdependent family teams.

In the category of agriculture and cattle-raising micro production, learning the importance of preservation of natural resources is the main challenge to community participation. This category is related to implementation of activities to integrate and leverage the various agro-ecological and forest management initiatives in the cloud forest. Therefore, in Yunguilla, family-owned farms must implement sustainable agricultural and cattle-raising micro production. The production of agricultural products and cattle-raising is for the community's internal consumption, including the demand of visitors and production of milk for the cheese factory. Besides that, agro tourism is development through the participation of tourists in the agriculture and cattle-raising micro production.

Tourism activities are the fifth category. In this way, native guides accompany visitors in different activities and the visitors are educated about the environment and ecology of Yunguilla. The activities include early morning walks through trails within Yunguilla to observe the flora, which include several varieties of bromeliads, orchids, medicinal plants, and fauna of the region, such as hummingbirds, toucans, and parrots, as well as organic orchards throughout the region. A camping area is available according to preferences of tourists. Also, visitors can enjoy crystalline rivers, waterfalls in the cloud forest and an important tourist route: Coluncos pre-Incas trail used for commerce between coast and the highlands which later on served to smuggle liquor. Furthermore, horse rides around the community is another tourist activity.

The last category is related with the barriers to community capacity building. The household surveys, focus groups, and seminar workshops showed that the biggest barriers to the community based tourism industry in Yunguilla are issues such as: lack of access to tourism information (market research, tourist profiles, statistics and knowledge about potential markets and information for decision making); lack of foreign language skills (only 1% of the community population speaks a foreign language in Yunguilla); lack of home internet access (necessary for making bookings and market research); lack of involvement of young people in community affairs (youth are important part of community to community empowerment); insufficient funding for community projects (in Yunguilla lack of financial resources is a limitation for expanding tourism projects, for example, building new tourist restaurants to provide food and beverage services); limited knowledge of food preparation for foreigners

and lack of adequate knowledge and skills to provide satisfactory customer service.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated the community based tourism in Yunguilla community. This study has identified that community based tourism in Yunguilla can be divided into six categories: conservation of the biodiversity, hospitality; micro business projects; agriculture and cattle-raising micro production; tourism activities and barriers to community capacity building. The result shows that the barriers to community capacity building are based on lack of access to tourism information, lack of foreign language skills by community population, lack of home internet access, lack of involvement of young people in community affairs, insufficient funding for community projects, limited knowledge of food preparation for foreigners by community population and lack of adequate knowledge and skills to provide satisfactory customer service. Despite these barriers, community leaders and the community population are placing the utmost importance on community based tourism development. Therefore, the principle challenge now is the need to strengthen the community's organizational capacities in order to overcome the current barriers to community capacity building.

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