
Community tourism in Amazonian Ecuador: economics of conventions perspectives

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Résumé

The communication shows that there are benefits and positive impacts of touristic activities, such as the reduction of poverty. However, many studies also reveal the complexities involved in the actual coexistence of touristic practices and traditional indigenous social and ritual life in places involved in tourism. These accounts have problematized hospitality, an approach that involves both ritual and relations defined by multiple social logics that are both local and market oriented.

The motivations of tourists, who realize short and long visits, can be very diverse: they seek to have intimate contact with ruins and traces of the past that allow them to "feel time" (Augé, 2003), to get to know the way of life of non-Western or "non-modern" cultures, to experience new feelings through spiritual celebrations or healing rituals, to learn new languages and cultures, and to support local initiatives that improve the lives of indigenous peoples, among other complex reasons. This same multiplicity of interests and perceptions, we can find also in the communities that take on tourists, in encounters in which their members can develop diverse forms and intensity of relational commitment to tourists.

The works I draw upon bring to light those conflicts in touristic activities, conflicts that are related to the diverse perspectives of the actors in their daily activities. The literature shows clearly the pluralism, in the concept of Boltanski (1990) and Thévenot (2006), that defines social action in touristic contexts involving both foreigners and locals. Espinosa (2010) argued that Latin America is not a unified region and is defined by a plurality of uses, customs, logics, and patterns of social action in development projects (Echeverría, 2006). Tourism, as I will show, is defined by a heterogeneity of perspectives that involve various social actors and social logics.

This project is also informed by the theoretical notion of "formatting" (Callon y Latour, 1997) to better understand the differences within the range of social actions and logics mediated by the market. For example, within the activities of agencies and private tourist companies, entities that seek to standardize all exchanges, there is left a few margin of uncertainty within the actual encounter of tourists with the "Other." We consider that tourist operators effect "formatting" activities that simplify the complex relations among communities and tourists with the objective of establishing parameters of stable quality in the need to control services, actions, costs, and prices. At the same time, and in contrast to the top-down standardization processes, social relations are also already "formatted" by the traditions and logics of indigenous peoples with regard to their relationships with "foreignness" in their communities through different forms of hospitality. The argument of Callon and Latour (1997)

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is holistically complex but relevant in the proposed project because these authors show how the collective logics of "gift" exchange and perhaps also even kinship and community imprint their "formatting" logics upon the exchange practices of the market, and that the differences between these value configurations require concrete strategies of interrelation-in the case of the gift-and of detachment, in the case of the market.

Mots-Clés: économie des conventions, tourisme communautaire, Ecuateur, Amazonie