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**Community-Based Ecotourism to Meet the New Tourist's  
Expectations: An Exploratory Study**

Amélie Fiorello

Damien Bo

## **ABSTRACT**

Tourism is destructive toward host communities and their natural environment. However, the general attitude of society toward the environment is changing and consequently, people are developing an appreciation for the value of responsible travel. Alternative forms of tourism have been conceived, such as ecotourism, and are viewed as a mean to meet the expectations of the *new tourists*. Ecotourism is a method to satisfy the concern of new tourists for environmental conservation but it neglects one of the key factors of sustainable tourism today: the host communities. Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) aims at environmental conservation but it is also a way to empower communities, by allowing them a degree of control over tourism projects and their impacts. This paper reveals the varying degrees of empowerment of host communities provided by community-based ecotourism through a meta-study analysis of six case studies of tourism projects. Not all contemporary tourism projects take local populations into consideration thus the six case studies are nonrandom selections for the purpose of representing the concept embodied in the thesis and showing its appropriateness with the new tourists' expectations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism generates significant revenues and accounts for 12% of the world gross domestic product. Tourism can be a driving force for economic development of communities that would otherwise have limited development opportunity. However, tourism contributes to the degradation of regional resources; for example, tourism accounts for 5% of global carbon emissions. Mass tourism affects the natural resources of a given community and also impacts the cultural identity of the community.

For the past three decades, even if mass tourism is far from disappearing, a new tourist has been emerging in correspondence with increasing concern for the environment. The new consumers are increasingly demanding of the quality of the residence and reception during vacation. They are also more sensitive to the values and the cultural identities of the places visited.

As the behavior of tourists changes, so too must the opportunities available. Usually, decisions about tourist activity in certain communities are made by professionals of the tourism industry and governments; the local population is regarded merely as an object of tourism, unintentionally negatively affected by the industry. Communities impacted by tourism tend to deteriorate and are eventually abandoned by tourists, leaving the local population living in bad conditions.

New tourism projects must take community choices and community welfare into greater consideration and optimize the consequences of economic growth caused by tourism to be relevant and to meet the expectations of the new tourists. In other words, it is essential to match the created economic benefits with the needs and the values of the local population (Michael, 2007).

Contemporary tourism must be economically profitable, environmentally sustainable and socially equitable (WWF, 2001).

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **The new tourist's behavior**

Tourist activity negatively impacts the environment and its population (Buckley & Araujo, 1997; Holleran, 2008). As realization of the environmental and social damage caused by tourism swells, tourists will increasingly prefer to involve themselves in more sustainable and more responsible forms of tourism (Dimanche & Smith, 1996).

We will try to draw up a general portrait of the new tourists, to define their expectations and their characteristics in order to show how the main features of community-based ecotourism are a suitable answer to current expectations of the new tourists.

Tourism is a dynamic phenomenon which involves the vagaries of human behavior and which thus cannot be dissociated from the changes and transformations of a society (Le Roy, 1999). The demand for mass tourism, which was insensitive to its economic, environmental and social effects, is being replaced by a demand for sustainable tourism, more concerned of its impact. It should be noted that the demand for sustainable tourism is far from being homogeneous. Indeed, various tourist preferences exist and each tourist can have at once various and potentially conflicting demands (Meyer, 2005). Nevertheless, some common characteristics and preferences are emerging which make it possible to draw up a general portrait of a new tourist.

Initially, tourism was reserved for the elite. During the 1950s, tourism was extended to broader layers of society largely as a result of the economic growth that ensued the end of World War II. As a result of the rapid economic growth, *les Trentes Glorieuses*, lifestyles were transformed, vacations were lengthened, purchasing power increased, and urbanization increased, thereby reinforcing the demand for leisure (Le Roy, 1999). To meet this new demand, mass tourism was developed which provided a fixed tourist package, identical for all customers (Cuvelier, 1994, p.40).

Mass tourism is primarily centered on the pairings “sun and sea” and “sun and mountain.” Tourist products are highly standardized and result in the development of destinations such as the Balearic Islands or the French Riviera. This kind of tourism, referred to as “fordist”, is had by a standard, inexperienced tourist, in search of hot climates and suntan within the framework of organized holidays (Poon, 1993). Mass tourism came to its peak between 1970 and 1980 but reached its quantitative and qualitative limits at the end of the 20th century (Moutinho, 2000).

In reaction came the advent of the new tourists or “post-fordist tourists” (Urry, 1995), who rejected mass tourism and demanded alternative forms of tourism. New tourists can be distinguished from former tourists because they are more experienced, more ecologically aware but also more spontaneous and more unpredictable. New tourists are also accustomed to a greater degree of flexibility and independence (Poon, 1993; Ioannides & Debbage, 1997).

The general framework of behavior has changed: travelers leave more frequently and for shorter periods, distant destinations are preferred, people are no longer attached to a particular locality, and rigidly packaged holidays are rejected in favor of unique designs (Poon, 1993; Urry, 1995).

The motivations to travel vary with a downward trend for the “sun and sea” destinations (Aguilo, Alegre & Sard, 2005). “These new consumers want to be different from the crowd. They want to affirm their individuality and they want to be in control” (Poon, 1993, p.219)

One of the most important characteristics of the new tourists is the commitment to responsible travel, which is a product of increasing environmental concern as well as growing sympathy toward the local populations of the visited countries. Additional characteristics of the new tourist can be found in various studies which analyze types of tourists.

In the case study by King and Hyde (1989), *anti-tourists* are studied. Anti-tourists perceive themselves as nonconformist and correspondingly pursue unique forms of tourism. They avoid mass tourism and assign a great value to authenticity.

In the study by Dalen (1989), new tourists are identified as the *modern idealists* and the *traditional idealists*. The modern idealists seek excitement and entertainment but are also interested in more intellectual and cultural activities. They refuse mass tourism and fixed itineraries. The traditional idealists await a quality tourist offer that ensures peace and security as well as visits to famous places and access to the culture and lifestyle of the local population.

The new tourist is also a synthesis of three types of tourists proposed by Cohen (1972): the experiential tourist, the experimental tourist, and the existential tourist. The *experiential tourist* is in search of authentic experiences. The principal desire of the *experimental tourist* is to be in contact with the local population. The *existential tourist* wishes for total immersion in the local culture and lifestyle. Each type wants to be affected by the local population rather than be ignorant of the population and the impact of tourism.

Another interpretation of the new tourist is Gray's (1970) *wanderlust* tourist who pursues multi-destination holidays and seeks foreign cultural experiences to satisfy the hunger for learning as well as for exoticism.

More recent studies (Crouch, Devinney, Dolnicar, Huybers, Louviere & Oppewal, 2005; Dolnicar, Crouch & Long, 2008; Dolnicar & Matus, 2008) concentrate on environmental awareness and detail the principal features of the *environment-friendly tourists* or ecotourists.

The environment-friendly tourists are different from the other tourists by their socio-demographic characteristics, their behavior and their travel motivations (Crouch & al., 2005; Lawton, 2001). They are young, have a higher level of education, a higher level of income and generally originate from more developed countries (Dolnicar & al., 2008; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). These tourists travel in families or groups of friends and search for friendly social encounters. They appreciate physical exercise (like trekking), pay attention to what they eat, and appreciate nature (AGRIDOC, 2004). The new tourist is close to the description of the backpacker (Paris & Teye, 2010) whose main motivations, among others, are personal and social growth, experience, independence, acquisition of cultural knowledge, and relaxation.

The new tourists want to enrich their knowledge and are interested in learning during the vacation (Dolnicar & al., 2008). Environment-friendly tourists are not only concerned with protection of the environment; they also prioritize respect for host communities and their economic and social



development. There is an expectation on the part of the tourists for a tourist experience that values sustainable development at the tourist destination. New tourists are attracted to tourist opportunities that offer authentic contact with other cultures that have sustained traditions and mutually offer comfort and distractions (Le Roy, 1999). The new tourists are looking for an unfamiliar scene, which involves a new landscape as well as discovery of new cultural elements and civilizations. Indeed, these travelers do not want to limit their contacts with the host community to commercial contacts. They are open, active and interested in local populations, their lifestyles, their habits, and their difficulties. They appreciate locally grown products and traditional dishes. The new tourists are willing to donate money for development or humanitarian projects if they can be sure of the destination of the donations (AGRIDOC, 2004). They are respectful of local populations and their environment. They expect a warm and friendly welcome from residents and hope that this hospitality will lead them to share their “intimacy”. Alexander, Bakir and Wickens (2010) write that holidays are now seen as a way to learn about the self and this phenomenon can be a result of interactions with the host community. In reaction to the destructive impact of mass tourism and the expectations of the new tourists, alternative forms of tourism have developed, such as pro-poor tourism (Briedenhann, 2011), volunteer tourism (McGehee & Andereck, 2009), ecotourism (Sheyvens, 1999) and community-based ecotourism (Okasaki, 2008). We will discuss community-based ecotourism.

### **Community-based ecotourism**

Community-based ecotourism (CBET) is anchored on the three main elements of sustainable development: economic efficiency, social equity and ecological sustainability (Mbaiwa, 2004). Economic efficiency means that tourism activities must produce the maximum output to make

sure that the people will have access to a high standard of living and that benefits are shared equally between all entities involved in the activity.

Social equity means that all user groups involved in a CBET must experience fair and equal access to resources as well as a fair share of revenues, decision-making participation and management related to the tourism activity. All the people of a community involved in a CBET project should have the opportunity to benefit from it. Ecological sustainability means that CBET activities must avoid any stress imposed by human activity and maintain the stability of the ecosystem. The goal of CBET is to ensure natural resource conservation in addition to respecting the host community.

Community-based ecotourism is centered on the host community (Ruiz-Ballesteros & al., 2008). Tourists and the host community have a reciprocal relationship. While the tourists impact the environment, community and reputation of the place, the host community also impacts the tourists. Local issues have a direct and important impact on the tourist experience; the culture of the local people, infrastructure, and special events affect tourist activity and give the destination its image. Tourism is very sensitive to internal and external forces. So, to increase the feasibility and longevity of tourism projects as well as the economic benefits gained by the community, tourism projects must be linked or integrated with the overall socioeconomic development of the community (Okazaki, 2008).

Several authors have highlighted key factors of the CBET concept. According to Hiwasaki (2006), there are four key success factors: institutional arrangements, self-regulations related to conservation, high environmental awareness, and existence of partnership. Okazaki (2008) states that participation, empowerment, and collaboration are also essential features to the success of CBET projects. For Mitchell and Reid (2001), integrated community participation is characterized by three decisive parameters: community awareness, which refers to the

“conscientization” (Freire, 1970) of people with regard to tourism development issues; community unity, which refers to solidarity; and power or control relationship, which refers to empowerment.

According to several authors, empowerment is a mainstay feature of CBET. For Rowland (1997) “empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceived themselves as able and entitled to make decisions” (p.14). It means that community members need the adequate resources and skills to develop the capacity to take a real part in every aspect of the tourism project. The power to obtain them is often held by government or other stakeholders who do not regard local residents as equal partners (Gray, 1985).

Empowerment involves the surrender of power by the authority but also relies on community participation and collaboration. Based on previous work by Haywood (1988) and Arnstein (1969), Okazaki (2008) states that participation is about power redistribution, knowledge spillovers and a decision-making shared among all stakeholders. A successful CBET also includes collaboration to secure benefits and to solve problems and tensions among stakeholders. Collaboration implies autonomous and empowered stakeholders (Getz et Jamal, 1994); everyone should be involved in decision-making (Jamal et Getz, 1999). Scheyvens (2002) and Simpson (2008) argue that empowerment is essential for CBET and that empowerment requires a certain level of control, property and influence. The intensity of control makes the difference between traditional forms of ecotourism and community-based ecotourism. There is a difference between ecotourism cases entirely controlled by external operators where members of the community are used as workforce and cases where a community truly controls all aspects of the project and the key consequence of this difference is the impact on the community (Wunder, 2000).

According to Scheyvens (1999) there are four levels of empowerment: economic empowerment, psychological empowerment, social empowerment and political empowerment (figure 1).

**[Figure 1: levels of empowerment of local communities in touristic projects]**

CBET relies on empowerment of the host community but also on ownership. Local people must have access to resources, but they must also possess their own land.

For Hiwasaki (2006) the objectives of CBET are “communities’ empowerment and ownership, conservation of natural and cultural resources, social and economic development, and quality visitor experience” (p.677). CBET involves conservation of resources, social and economic development and must lead to the quality of the visitor experience (Hiwasaki, 2006; Jennings, Lee, Lunny, Cater & Ollenburg, 2009). The tourism product must be attractive to tourists, which implies that community hosts must behave as tourists expect them to behave.

This paper gives evidence through a meta-study of six cases that community-based ecotourism exists, proves that the new tourism products cater to the new tourist expectations, and identifies which features differentiate community-based ecotourism from other “traditional” ecotourism.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Meta-study analysis of cases**

This paper uses a meta-study approach as specified by Van der Linde (2003). The meta-study is similar to the meta-analysis strategy, which has been very popular in medical research. The idea is to pool the information from other studies and then systematically search and quantitatively combine the results of studies that address a similar research question. Then, it isolates moderator variables and verifies their overall impact on the relationship being studied.

In tourism research and for our topic in particular, this strategy has two shortcomings. Firstly, in medical studies the dependent variable is well defined, whereas tourism research is interested in a variety of outcomes, such as the rate of innovation, job creation, value created for stakeholders, and protection of natural resources. Thus the dependent variable cannot be isolated and is arguably an indefinite factor. Secondly, tourism research, in particular concerning our topic, tends to be more qualitative than quantitative in nature (Xiao and Smith, 2006).

As Stake (2000) noted, the qualitative research strategy relies on “*the study of the particular*” (p.438). Qualitative research helps to apprehend the nature, history, and socio-cultural contexts of specific cases. In qualitative research, the chosen unit of analysis is critical; qualitative research deals with a system of action rather than an individual or a group of individuals (Tellis, 1997). This means that it facilitates research aimed at understanding the interactions of actors more than their voice and perspective. The tourist offer is increasingly addressed as a cluster problem (Novelli, Schmitz & Spencer, 2006); studying it through a multiple case meta-study would produce the most satisfactory results.

We collected from academic and non-academic literature, qualitative cases that seem to embody the essence of community-based ecotourism, and we derive from them some characteristics to seize the nature of this emerging concept.

## CASE STUDIES REPORTS

### *Case 1: The indigenous reserve of Malekus in Costa Rica*

(Auzias, Labourdette & Varela, 2008)

The indigenous reserve of Maleku is located at the north of the country. Among the 24 indigenous reserves in the country, only 5 of them, including the Maleku community, kept their customs and habits. Ten years ago, a chief of the community, Wilson Morera Elizondo, wished to save the Maleku culture and encouraged the young people to perpetuate their language and their traditions by explaining to them that it would bring a new source of revenue and better living conditions for the community. From an ecological and cultural perspective, he had ranchos (traditional houses) built with local materials to accommodate for tourists eager to discover one of the first civilizations of Costa Rica, its natural environment, its traditions and its knowledge inherited from ancestors. Today, this community-based ecotourism project allows visitors to discover and share the everyday life of the community. The visitors are thus placed in the traditional ranches and are catered typical meals, prepared from food products collected in the reserve. Activities are varied and are primarily based on the discovery of the natural environment and the Maleku culture. Activities include excursions to the main sites of ecological and cultural interest and to cultivated lands, excursions to discover fauna and flora, excursions in the primary forest, participation in the indigenous ceremonies and further discovery of the Maleku culture such as learning about medicinal herbs used. In parallel, there is a reforestation program and a conservation program to preserve the natural habitat of the animal species. As a result of these programs, the ecological impact of tourism is minimized; waste is sorted and organic waste is given to the animals of the community or transformed into fertilizer. All the people who work for this project belong to the Maleku community. Artisanal products made by the inhabitants are sold in the information center of the reserve and for each tourist, 1\$ is put in a community chest.

## *Case 2: Mayas of Guatemala*

(Chazel, 2007)

Mayas represent nearly 60% of the population of Guatemala, but this community lives in a marginal economic and social situation. It is destitute while at the same time its culture is one of greatest riches of the country. Ak' Tenamit is a local association, founded in 1992 by Steve Dudenhoefer, two English volunteers and villages leaders. The association aims to improve the living conditions of the Maya communities of the rural region of Izabal by improving their access to basic health care, education and by developing income-generating activities. Today the various programs of the association federate 9,000 Mayas living in 45 villages of the area. An all-indigenous board that is elected by the communities it serves runs the association and its programs.

Since 2000, Ak' Tenamit has maintained a community-based ecotourism program. Traditional accommodations, located within the small Maya villages, allow tourists to live a one-off experience within the community. "These activities bring incomes with the families implied and contribute to finance the health and education services and infrastructures offered" explains Audrey Lamothe, a volunteer at the association (Chazel, 2007). The involvement of the communities in this form of tourism exceeds creation of incomes. The stress is laid on the comprehension and the practice of the cultural and spiritual aspects specific to the Maya.

The area concerned by the Ak'Tenamit's project is located in Rio Dulce National Park. The tourist structures were design to limit the environmental impact.

Community-based ecotourism thus generates twofold positive effects for the communities. On the one hand, it provides income for the families and on the other hand, it promotes their lifestyle and their culture. The project is particularly important for the young Mayas because it provides job opportunities, thereby detracting the sense of need to leave and look for work in urban centers.

***Case 3: The Zapotec community in Ventanilla, state of Oaxaca, Mexico***

(Avila Foucat, 2002)

Ventanilla is located in the state of Oaxaca on the southern Pacific coast of Mexico. Oaxaca is the state which has the greatest ethnic and biological diversity but also a significant level of poverty. Ventanilla comprises 19 families for a total population of 97 people. The Zapotec represent the ethnic group of origin but today, only two elderly people still speak the language.

The area has a single ecosystem, the mangrove swamp and a particular fauna made up of crocodiles and marine turtles. The tourists who visit Ventanilla are most often backpackers and tourists taking part in an organized tour of the villages of the area. Community-based ecotourism works thanks to a cooperative (“Cooperativa de Servicios Ecoturísticos Ventanilla”) founded with the help of non-governmental organizations but only members of the community are responsible for the cooperative. This cooperative manages all the ecotourism activities such as lodging and catering. The operating process is collective and incomes are equally distributed between members of the community. For half of the families, ecotourism is the main income. The community gave itself the mission of preserving the richness of their territory and is actively involved in the rehabilitation of the forest of the mangrove swamp with the help of governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as the University of the Sea. Each family is also involved in the protection of the marine turtle. Men are on patrol each night, on 4km of beach, to collect turtle eggs and to store them securely during the time of incubation, in order to prevent them from being stolen and sold. These patrols are voluntary and the tourists can take part in them. A center devoted to the marine turtle was created and tourists can come to get information on this species and also to take part in excursions by foot or by canoe. Ventanilla is in charge of a network of 17 communities engaged in actions of protecting the fauna and the flora and in particular, protection of the turtle on the pacific coast. It welcomes volunteers (Mexicans students, scholar groups, foreigners) who come to help or learn, according to their competencies.



#### **Case 4: The Agua Blanca community in Ecuador**

(Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011; Ruiz-Ballesteros & Hernández-Ramírez, 2010)

Agua Blanca is located 5 km from the coast, in the Machalilla National Park, in the province of Manabi. It is a small community of 260 inhabitants grouped into 60 families and which belongs to the Manta culture. At first, with the development of the National Park, the possibility of evacuating the population from the protected area was discussed but the local population set against this project and fight for an alternative. The tourism product proposed by the community of Agua Blanca is an additional offer to the National Park and combines cultural and natural inheritance. Every year, the community receives around 9500 visitors with varied profiles: groups of students, university students, Ecuadorian families, and foreigners. Agua Blanca and its surroundings enjoy a unique and rich biodiversity and also a great cultural wealth. The main element is a one-to-three-hour trail named “Discovering the Manta Trail”. This trail starts with the visit of a small local museum where tourists can learn about the Manta culture and see some archeological remains. The trail continues through scenic areas, dry tropical forest, cloud forest, and banks of the Buena Vista River, during which time the guide explains the fauna, the flora and the climatic characteristics. Then tourists visit a plantation where community members grow food. There are also recreational activities such as bathing in the sulphurous lagoon, which has medicinal properties. The trail is offered and guided by members of the archaeological committee, which is also in charge of the maintenance and the adaptation of all of tourist-related infrastructure. Agua Blanca community organizes itself to offer tour guide services and this activity involves 30 families. The archaeological committee operates by delegation from the community assembly, the highest governing body of the community. Others activities linked to tourism have developed such as small retailers, family accommodations, catering, and a craft industry. Tourism is the main source of revenue and is also the main activity in the community; 70% of families participate in the tourism activities. The development of tourism has boosted consumption and quality of life, enhanced communitarian organization, reduced emigration and improved environmental conservation. Aguablanquenses used to depend on charcoal production, tree felling, and hunting; now the community is more conscious about its natural environment and has discontinued activities that negatively impact the ecosystem.

### **Case 5: The Taquile island in Peru**

(Mitchell and Reid, 2001)

Taquile Island is a small island located on Lake Titicaca in the southeast of Peru, about 25 kilometers from Puno, the regional capital. The population of Taquile is mainly Queshua-speaking and amounts to 1,850 people. The area and the island are famous for their natural beauty but also because the Lake Titicaca is one of the highest navigable lakes in the world. Taquileños are also known for their globally unique weavings, coming from a tradition and an ancestral savoir-faire. Handcraft is a major component of the Taquileño lifestyle. Taquileños have control over every stage of the manufacturing process and marketing of their craft industry. The island integrates a traditional and modern political and administrative system, which ensures democratic governance as well as transparent and consensual decision-making over activities that concern the whole population, including tourism. Initially, people from the island were reluctant toward tourism development. When tourism benefits became increasingly evident in collaboration with the determination and efforts by an ex-governor (the traditional highest-ranking authority on the island) and expert weaver Francisco Huatta Huatta, a Belgian priest and a former Peace Corps volunteer, tourism became fully integrated to the traditional way of life. Furthermore, it is the main means of livelihood. In 1998, 98% of the adults were directly employed in the tourism industry. Tourists arrive at the village, after a boat trip, only by foot. They are welcomed by a reception committee and are assigned accommodation with a local family in an adobe hut. Restaurants in which they can eat are also owned and managed by groups of families. Taquileños control their whole touristic offer: entrance fee collection, handcraft, local accommodation, catering. Generally, local ownership of the industry is high except for guide and boat transportation, which are increasingly managed by private operators (sailboat cooperatives owned by Taquileños families are diminishing). With the development of the tourism industry and globalization, certain individualism spread in the community. Thereby some artisans or families earned more than others thanks to contracts or agreements made with foreigners. Furthermore, leakages of high revenue are occurring in many tourism services. But, on a general level, there is a community-based control on decision-making and on tourism management and revenues are fairly distributed among the local population.

***Case 6 : Monteverde Natural Park, Costa Rica***

(Aguirre, 2006)

Monteverde National Park is one of the most visited places in Costa Rica. It is also an ideal destination for tourists in search of outdoor activities, like tree climbing, and ecotourism.

The tropical forest park is 3,604 hectares and hosted 73,000 visitors in 2004. According to Aguirre (2006), the area is going through an intense period of stress between park managers and host communities. This stress is explained by the strategic change the park has undergone. Once a place for scientific investigations, it is now a strong economic stake for the country. Host communities tend to feel that they should gain from all resources..

Quakers, a religious community from the United States, founded Monteverde Park in 1951. In opposition to the Korea War that was lead by the U.S. Government, some Quakers left the states in search of a quiet and peaceful place. At present, the park is owned by a non-governmental organization, which has its headquarters in San José, the capital town of Costa Rica, 60 miles from the park.

Like other national parks in Costa Rica, Monteverde has entrance fees for visitors, tourists and host communities. These fees are then given to the central state administration and are the source of funds for the yearly budget of the park.

Aguirre (2006) has observed that a large part of government funds are spent on monitoring the park boundaries because park managers fear that people from other communities come to destroy natural resources such as protected species or plants.

## RESULTS

These cases show that community-based ecotourism is a developing phenomenon and that it differs from ecotourism and other forms of alternative tourism. Community-based ecotourism appears to be the most successful form of sustainable tourism because it meets the societal request for a respectful form of tourism that will bring economic, social and ethical added-value (Mazuel, 2003, p.333). CBET also meets the new tourists' expectations.

The first five cases contain similar elements and allow us to isolate and draw attention to the main features of community-based ecotourism. The first five cases are concerned with small communities with some economic and social difficulties but with a great ancestral history; their lifestyles are linked to the natural environment, which is a rich and sometimes fragile ecosystem. The most important feature is their level of control over the tourism project, or, in other words, their extent of empowerment.

In the light of this analysis from our meta-study, we can draw a synthesis of the main features of community-based ecotourism.

### **[Table 1: The main features of community-based ecotourism]**

As we can see in this table, the first four cases show common features such as the origin and the management of the tourism project, which are internal to the communities, even if some external forces are involved at the beginning of the project. These cases are also similar in that they offer the kind of activities which are essentially nature-based, discovery of the natural environment and participation in environmental protection; culture-based, discovery of the culture and the traditions; and sometimes recreational, bathing in a sulphurous lagoon. The emphasis is put on conservation of the environment and empowerment of communities. The tourists are pro-active;

for a few days, they can experience a complete immersion within the communities, sharing their lifestyle. They can stay with families in traditional dwelling, taste local meals and sometimes engage in the daily and traditional activities of the community such as participation in indigenous ceremonies with the Malekus, or activities dealing with environmental conservation such as protection of the marine turtle in the Zapotec community case.

Case 5 is unique because environmental conservation is not a priority and it shows that even with a good governance, the social link of the host community tend to be loosen up due to globalization and growing individualism. It means that even with an empowered community, tourism cannot always avoid negative impacts on host communities' social link.

In the first five cases, CBET provides economic empowerment in that it offers jobs opportunities and the benefits go to the community in a fair way, with the exception of the fifth case where some artisans and families earn more than the rest of the community. The cases also demonstrate that CBET provides psychological empowerment because it allows communities to be autonomous, to promote their culture, and to share their traditions. Hence, they gain pride from the experience. CBET promotes social empowerment on the basis that it relies on engagement by everyone in the community in the governance of the project, which thereby reinforces cohesion. It preserves the social capital by providing job opportunities and thereby preventing the exodus of the youth toward urban centers to find opportunities. But the fifth case shows that the affect of CBET on community social equilibrium is unpredictable. Even with features that are supposed to ensure wealth to host communities, individualism and inequalities can arise with negative consequences. Political empowerment is a common feature of the first five cases because institutional arrangements were made to make tourism projects work and to ensure a transparent and democratic decision-making process.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The new tourist is sensitive to environmental issues as well as to local culture and gives special attention to the attitude of host communities. The behavior of host communities thus has become a major asset of tourist destinations. On the other hand, individuals forming host communities have a fear to lose control of their environment or lose their identity. Consequently host communities often seem reticent and discontent with general tourism development projects (Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Capenerhurst, 1994). Community-based ecotourism seems to be a way to meet new expectations of tourists and, at the same time, a means of overcoming the fears of the local communities and thus deterring hostility toward tourists by implicating people and involving them a part in all steps of the tourist initiative.

Ecotourism can be defined as a form of tourism based on nature-based activities, focused on the tourist learning about the ecosystem. As can be seen in Table 1, CBET is also based on preservation of natural resources; in only one case environmental conservation was not a priority. But community-based ecotourism goes further. Community-based ecotourism also emphasizes human welfare as well as social, economical and cultural viability in the long run of host communities. Communities have to be implied or at the origin of the development and the exploitation of tourist activities. The community must maintain significant control of the development and the management of the tourism project to ensure that a significant portion of the benefits will remain within the community. CBET insists on giving host communities a higher level of control over tourist projects and a significant share of economic outputs (Liu, 1994; Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996; Sheyvens, 1999). According to Murphy (1985) a total engagement of local communities can enable the community to control the pace of tourist-related development, to integrate tourism in the economy, and to offer a more individualized tourism product. This also requires that the communities provide an offer to tourists, which is based on local culture and

traditions, as is the instance in the first five case studies. The residents are more than components of the tourism product; residents are the most important element, in fact the host community is a key for success of the tourist offer (Brent Ritchie, 1993). The community-based ecotourism approach must start from the needs, the expectations and the wellbeing of host communities (Scheyvens, 1999) and must be based on the empowerment of the host community.

For as much control of decision-making as host communities keep, participation of government, companies, non-governmental organizations and external private sector investments or assistance are not excluded from CBET. Collaboration between authorities, external private companies and local communities, should lead to co-decision, co-production and co-management of tourism development programs. For Akama (1996) “the local community needs to be empowered to decide what forms of tourism facilities and wildlife conservation programs they want to be developed in their respective communities, and how the tourism costs and benefits are to be shared among different stakeholders”(p.573). If the host community is not at the origin of the project, it must take part in the decisions that have an impact on the life of its members, they must be able to maintain an extent of control over the essential resources to meet their needs, and they must have democratic and representative structures in decision-making instances. The success of community-based ecotourism relies on good governance principles, in other word it relies “on a system or a network of actors whose logic of action relies on the negotiation and is centered on the realization of a common product” (Lequin, 2001, p.85).

In five of our case studies, host communities decided on the type and level of tourism that they wished to develop even when government or non-governmental organization were involved. Their level of control is high and goes beyond basic social empowerment. Tourism became a part of their lifestyle and the entire community is involved in decision-making and management of tourism activities. Under these conditions, tourism gives them the opportunity to improve their

quality of life but also to show pride for their culture and traditions. This attitude is the best way to ensure that tourists receive a warm welcome and the immersion they wish for in the local life of places they visit.

The sixth case concerning *Monteverde Natural Park*, sixty miles from San José in Costa Rica, embodies a counter example. There, the problem is to preserve the natural surroundings and to negotiate with the host community. The idea of negotiation itself implies that this case does not correspond to community-based ecotourism. In the other five cases host communities do not have to beg for the positive externalities of tourist activity, they gain benefits directly. In the case of a national park, sometimes ecological concerns can be seen as counter to the welfare of host communities and vice versa.

#### **STUDY LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Tourism consumers have changed. They are increasingly nonconformist and have rejected mass tourism. They are also more sensitive about the environmental, social and cultural impact left on the places they visit and the local population. The host communities wish to benefit from all the advantages that tourism can offer, but do not always want to be subjected to tourist activities because they want to protect their cultural identity and their natural resources. That is why community-based ecotourism is the best compromise between tourists' and communities' expectations. According to us, it is more than a compromise. Ruiz-Ballesteros et al. (2008) argue that CBET is not an adaptation to the market but a translation of the market, CBET is about seizing an opportunity and CBET is a mean to reinforce the community rather than alienate it. It provides reliable resources and activities through which they can maintain autonomy without being isolated for their political, social and economic background.



Five of the six cases used in this paper show that, under the conditions of internal origin of the project, internal management, and economic, psychological, social and political empowerment of the community, community-based ecotourism projects are designed to be sustainable and to meet the new tourist's expectations for immersion in the local life, environmental conservation, and sustained quality of life of the host community.

In spite of these results, our study shows some limitations that are inherent to its exploratory nature and dependency on qualitative results.

Our goal now is to lead further investigations on both host communities and tourists who have experienced this type of tourism, to deepen our knowledge of its effects on the tourist experience.

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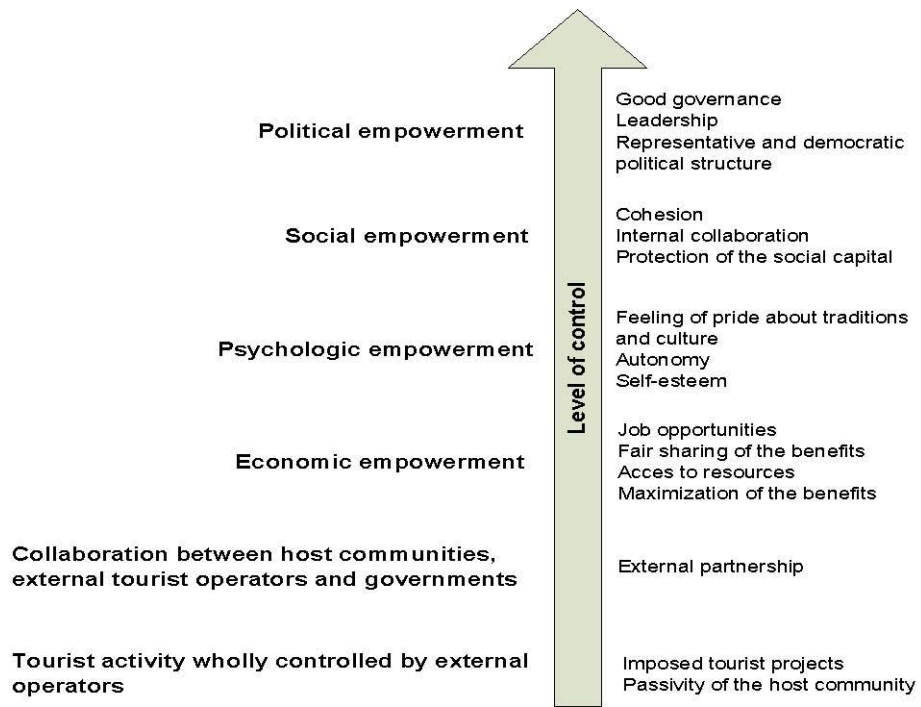
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**Figure 1**



**Table 1**

<b>Community-based ecotourism's features</b>	<b>Case 1</b>	<b>Case 2</b>	<b>Case 3</b>	<b>Case 4</b>	<b>Case 5</b>	<b>Case 6</b>
<b>Origin of the project</b>	<i>A chief of the community</i>	<i>Local people and three foreign people</i>	<i>Local people and non-governmental organizations</i>	<i>Local people fighting against a central state project (National Park)</i>	<i>A local chief and two foreign people</i>	<i>Foreign Investment</i>
<b>Management of the project</b>	<i>Internal</i>	<i>Internal</i>	<i>Internal</i>	<i>Internal</i>	<i>Internal</i>	<i>External NGO</i>
<b>Activities proposed to the tourist</b>	<i>Nature-based Culture-based</i>	<i>Nature-based Culture-based</i>	<i>Nature-based Culture-based</i>	<i>Nature-based Culture-based Recreational activities</i>	<i>Culture-based</i>	<i>Nature-based Recreational activities</i>
<b>Immersion of the tourist in the local life</b>	<i>Complete: lodging, catering &amp; activities</i>	<i>Complete: lodging, catering &amp; activities</i>	<i>Complete: lodging, catering &amp; activities</i>	<i>Complete: lodging, catering &amp; activities</i>	<i>Lodging and catering</i>	<i>None</i>
<b>Environmental conservation</b>	<i>Minimized environmental impact</i>	<i>Minimized environmental impact</i>	<i>Environmental protection activities</i>	<i>Growing awareness</i>	<i>Not a priority</i>	<i>A priority</i>
<b>Economic empowerment</b>	<i>Job opportunities; Fair sharing of the benefits</i>	<i>Job opportunities; Fair sharing of the benefits</i>	<i>Job opportunities; Fair sharing of the benefits</i>	<i>70% of job opportunities</i>	<i>Job opportunities (on site) Leakage of revenues</i>	<i>None Benefits are given to the central state administration</i>
<b>Psychological empowerment</b>	<i>Feeling of pride about traditions and culture Autonomy</i>	<i>Feeling of pride about traditions and culture Autonomy</i>	<i>Feeling of pride about traditions and culture Autonomy</i>	<i>Feeling of pride about traditions and culture Autonomy</i>	<i>Handcraft traditions only</i>	<i>None</i>
<b>Social empowerment</b>	<i>Cohesion Internal collaboration Protection of the social capital</i>	<i>Cohesion Internal collaboration Protection of the social capital</i>	<i>Cohesion Internal collaboration Protection of the social capital</i>	<i>Cohesion Internal collaboration Protection of the social capital</i>	<i>Growing inequalities Individualism</i>	<i>None</i>
<b>Political empowerment</b>	<i>Good governance</i>	<i>Good governance Local association All-indigenous board</i>	<i>Good governance Local cooperative</i>	<i>Good governance Local committee</i>	<i>Good governance in the bounded area Traditional and modern political and administrative system</i>	<i>None</i>