

## COMMUNITY - BASED TOURISM IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A CASE STUDY

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*Community-based Tourism is gaining prestige all over the world as an alternative to mass tourism. This new type of tourism favours a contact with the local community and the experimentation of different sensations. In this paper we show a study carried out in El Salvador about the opinions that residents have in order to develop a tourist destination based on the hospitality of hosts, on the remarkable ecologic resources of the area, and in the important of the role of the residents. The methodology is based on an empirical study realized in a rural area from September to November 2008. Most outstanding result is the local community perception that tourist development can create jobs and generate wealth, although it is necessary previous technical training from private and public institutions to fulfil these objectives.*

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### INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a change was observed the tastes of tourists, who moved towards other forms of tourism. This could have been due to knowledge of new destinations, up until that point unexplored by tourists, and the search for a destination with greater focus on local customs, history, ethics and the particular culture of the destination. In this sense, cultural diversity is looked upon as a means of enriching the



experience of increasingly active tourists who are looking for new experiences. On the one hand, at local level, opportunities have been observed to develop plans for the participation of new actors and strategies, and for the involvement of civil corporations in the development process. On the other hand, tourism linked to a community's inherent cultural and natural resources is one of the recurrent factors in fostering the development of such communities. One means of managing the coordination of the social and productive fabric of developing countries is found in cooperatives and other associative forms of social actor in different activities which are active in employment, such as would be the case of tourism. However, one fundamental factor must be pointed out: the decision to exploit natural and cultural resources in order to draw up development policies should come from local communities themselves. Moreover, it is clear that two essential elements should be taken into consideration when measuring their impact (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2006): firstly, the level of involvement of the local community and the level of control it has over tourism; secondly, the number and type of tourists. Thus, tourism is also considered as a tool in fighting poverty, with initiatives such as the World Tourism Organisation's Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) Programme.

The World Tourism Organisation (2002) points out that sustainable tourism developed in certain geographical areas may become a fundamental tool in the economic development of and the reduction of poverty in certain areas. It is possible to create businesses selling goods and services by means of the area's own cultural and environmental resources, offering low scale opportunities for job creation, especially for women and young people. This would always be a complementary activity and never a substitution for primary sector activities. In this respect, the literature claims that promoting tourist exploitation of underdeveloped rural areas in Developing Countries is not, *a priori*, good or bad, but depends on different political, cultural, social, economic and environmental factors.

In this sense, several tourist destinations have been established through the structuring of tourism supply and demand. The need to break with routine, ensure customer satisfaction and change the monotony of traditional tourism has fostered local initiatives incorporating natural attractions and leisure activities at local level. The effect of all this is that rural areas are undergoing a transformation which is changing both the local economic structure on the one hand and their traditional production activities on the other. These particular tourist initiatives have caused a natural repositioning of destination markets in accordance with

fluctuations in demand, and have led to certain emerging destinations becoming attractive for increasingly specialised markets. Thus, it is evident that opportunities for new projects, such as tourist exploitation of natural, social and cultures resources, are coordinated at local level and are always complementary to the local economic structure, which is based primarily on agriculture and livestock farming. This implies that, in order to implement a certain tourist product, there is a need to establish a suitable regional tourism policy based on three activities (Bringas and Israel, 2004): first, training of local people and raising awareness; second, infrastructure and equipment; and third, promotion.

In this paper, we present a study in which we analyse the extent to which this new form of alternative tourism could generate vast incoming economic resources and create employment, with the basic premise being that it is complementary to (never a substitute for) other economic activities, in rural or urban areas, based on the coordination of different tourist destinations which combine natural resources and cultural elements. Similarly, we present a revision of the existing literature in this field related to the relationship between tourists and the local community, which is much more intense than in the case of traditional tourism (Zorn and Farthing, 2007), mainly due to the involvement of hosts (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2006; Lepp, 2007), and to the fact that seeking contact with other cultures is a fundamental element for its own development. Furthermore, we present the main results of a field study carried out in the so-called *Flowers Route* in El Salvador (a small geographical area with very limited economic development). The residents of this area were invited to express their opinion on aspects related to this kind of tourism, and on the possibility of creating cooperatives to encourage community tourism in the area, by evaluating the advantages and disadvantages. The data from this field study has been analysed using various statistical and econometric tools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of Community-based Tourism (CBT) can be found in the work of Murphy (1985), where aspects concerning tourism and developing local communities are analysed, and in a further study by the same author in 2004 (Murphy and Murphy, 2004). Along with these two studies, there are several other research papers analysing the relationship between tourism and local communities (such as Richards and Hall, 2000). This concept paves the way for new lines of investigation and for the possibility of tourism development together with other alternatives

such as Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT); Community Benefit Tourist Initiatives (CBTIs) (Simpons, 2008); or Community-Based Enterprises (CBEs) (Manyara and Jones, 2007). To summarise, all these initiatives agree that the destination community should be included in the tourism planning and management decision-making process, owed to three main reasons: it considers them to be part of the tourist product, local communities adapt to changes easily, and it helps to open their minds.

Several projects based on CBT can be found in scientific literature: in Africa (Lepp, 2007; Manyara and Jones, 2007; Kibicho, 2008), Asia (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2006; Okazaki, 2008; Kayat, 2010), Oceania (Dyer *et al.*, 2003), and in different countries of Latin America such as Brazil (Guerreiro, 2007), Ecuador (Ruiz *et al.*, 2008), Mexico (Bringas and Israel, 2004) and Peru (Zorn and Farthing, 2007).

CBT is based on the active participation of the local community. This is why the creation of community events which may favour this type of tourism, while at the same time helping to create a relationship between the local community and visitors, is so important. To facilitate this, different public administrations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), private institutions and the local community itself should get involved and work together. According to Nyaupane *et al.* (2006), the main limitations local communities have to face when implementing tourism projects are the following: lack of financial resources, infrastructure or know-how; limitations of a cultural kind; and potential conflicts between the different public administrations. At the same time, the following factors are described as being highly important for CBT implementation (Kibicho, 2008): the inclusion of stakeholders, the evaluation of individual and collective benefits, the setting of objectives, and analysis of decisions to be implemented. The main benefits of community tourism are the direct economic impact on families, socioeconomic improvements, and sustainable diversification of lifestyles (Manyara and Jones, 2007; Rastegar, 2010). CBT is certainly an effective way of implementing policy coordination, avoiding conflicts between different actors in tourism, and obtaining synergies based on the exchange of knowledge, analysis and ability among all members of the community (Kibicho, 2008).

On the other hand, it is necessary to study how the community as a whole participates in the development of the area as a tourist destination, mainly due to the following reasons (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004): perception of tourism is based on the evaluation of the local community's attitude (including the environment, infrastructure and events); the participation model of people in the local community exerts a powerful

influence on the tourist's experience; and tourism planning effects the community as a whole.

One of the most controversial aspects in scientific literature is determining the number and type of tourists. Thus, Nyaupane *et al.* (2006) highlight the importance of receiving a small number of tourists, which means more contact with local culture and society. This way, the risk of tourists invading private aspects of the local culture is avoided. However, at the same time, his limited number of visitors reduces the economic resources generated by tourism. Having taken this element into consideration, the creation of cooperatives allowing the community to manage its own tourist resources is seen a fundamental element (Lepp, 2007; Gronau and Kaufmann, 2010). However, there are some negative aspects in the development of the tourist product, including the potential link between a high number of tourists, sex and alcohol, and the loss of cultural identity; and the hypothetical degradation of natural resources (Teye *et al.*, 2002). In this case, residents have five alternatives to minimise this negative impact on the community – resistance, retreat, boundary maintenance, revitalisation and adoption (Dogan, 1989). We must remember that tourism can change (or even destroy) the local culture if it is being treated as just another tourist attraction and only aims for a rapid development of the area (Dyer *et al.*, 2003).

CBT is based on the creation of tourist products characterised by community participation in their development. CBT emerged as a possible solution to the negative effects of mass tourism in developing countries, and was, and the same time, a strategy for community organisation in order to attain better living conditions. Its core idea is the integration of hotel management, food and beverages, complementary services and tourism management, but also includes other subsystems (infrastructure, health, education and environment) as main characteristics, thus presenting a sustainable development project created by the community, and encouraging interrelation between the local community and visitors as a key element in the development of a tourist product (Cioce *et al.*, 2007). CBT is protected and supported by different international organisations, such as the World Tourism Organisation (2002), and has several objectives, among which community empowerment and ownership, social and economic development, conservation of natural and cultural resources, and a high quality visitor experience, should be noted.

The structure of CBT can be broken down into four categories. Firstly, there are small tourist offices, which, in some cases, also work as tourist guides, and whose relevance is not yet of high importance due to a

lack of planning in the majority of the areas tourists visit. Secondly, there are institutions which collaborate with the local tourism industry, mainly local public administrations, NGOs and universities. Thirdly, there are direct service companies which can be further divided into two groups: accommodation and food and beverage; and shops selling local products, which are becoming increasingly important. Finally, there are various transport and financial businesses.

We can conclude that the production chain in community tourism is gradually incorporating different actors which, one way or another, are becoming part of the local tourist offer, the development of which is presented in table 1.

**Table 1** Community tourism production chain

PLANIFICATION	ACTIVITIES	FOOD	ACCOMODATION	TRANSPORT
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It can be noted that the here most important links related to higher presence of the local community in the chain, shown in table 1, are transport, accommodation and food, whereas both links at the extreme of the chain are usually the weakest. The necessary assistance from public administrations, NGOs and universities is required for an adequate planning of activities, together with necessary support from different public and private institutions to develop tourist activities. Therefore, the small businesses to be created in the future in these areas should be diversified, not only offering accommodation and food services, but also working with the sale of local products, tourist guides, complementary activities such as extreme or sports tourism, and in many cases, ground transportation.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

El Salvador is small country located in Central America with a total area of just under 21.000 km<sup>2</sup>, a population of nearly 6 million (although many of its people live abroad) and a great variety and wealth of natural and cultural attractions. At this point in time, El Salvador is still not recognised at international level as a tourist destination, mainly as a consequence of the armed conflict occurring between 1980 and 1992 and of the natural disasters which have recently affected the country (such as hurricane Mitch in 1998 or de 2001 earthquakes). Nevertheless, there is the firm conviction on the part of the different public administrations to

provide support to make El Salvador a quality international tourist destination.

In table 2 we can see the number of foreign tourists visiting El Salvador between 2004 and 2007, which shows a significant increase within this period.

**Table 2** Foreign tourists visiting in El Salvador 2004-2007

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007
Tourist	950.475	1.127.141	1.278.924	1.338.543

*Source: Ministry for Tourism of El Salvador (2008)*

According to data provided by the Ministry for Tourism of El Salvador, in 2007, most tourists came from Central America (63.70%), followed by North America (28.88%). Furthermore, the number of Salvadorian visitors living abroad (mainly in the USA) is very high (292.271 people). That is to say, 92.58% of tourists visiting the country come from two geographical areas. A tourist's average expenditure is \$90.10. The main reasons for visiting the country are to visit friends and family (33.7%), for a holiday (28.3%), and for business (25.6%). Similarly, according to El Salvador Ministry of Tourism figures, the contribution of tourism to the national economy was estimated in 2007 to be \$940.6 million. This means that tourism produces more foreign currency income than traditional exports such as coffee (\$187 million in 2007), which is evidence of the attempts support this economic activity, as indicated above.

The *Ruta de las Flores* (Flowers Route), the geographical area under analysis, covers a route starting at *Sonsonate* and is made up of five places: *Salcoatitán*, *Nahuizalco*, *Juayúa*, *Apaneca* and *Concepción de Ataco*. A combination of tradition and history along with an outstanding natural environment can be found along this route.

When the field work for our research was carried out in this area, there were very few small hotels, with a total of 162 rooms. Twenty-three restaurants can be also found on this route. It is worth noting the importance of local communities in the food and beverage industry because the majority of restaurants are run by these local communities. The situation is somewhat different with respect to accommodation. Hotels are generally owned by international and national corporations. Similarly, in the field study we discovered that, as far as infrastructure in the area is concerned, urban areas have drinking water and electricity,

whereas supply of these two vital elements is not guaranteed in rural areas. It must also be noted that the treatment of waste and refuse needs to be improved, in addition to better coordination of the financial system. At the time, there were serious deficiencies in medical care and public transport, although serious attempts to improve them are in progress.

## METHODOLOGY

To carry out this research, an empirical study in the geographical area of the *Flowers Route* in El Salvador was created. In this study, we have tried to determine the local community's perception of itself, its assessment of tourism in the area and of its potential improvement. The subjects of the study were residents in the area and a sample design was carried out by means of randomised sampling. Population distribution was always taken into account. The field work was carried out between September and November 2008. Survey specifications can be seen in table 3.

**Table 3** Survey specifications

<b>Area</b>	<b>Flowers Route</b>
<b>Population</b>	60.000 people
<b>Sampling</b>	645 interviews
<b>Simple error</b>	3.84%
<b>Procedure</b>	Simple randomised sampling
<b>Period</b>	September-November 2008

Our instrument of research was a structured and closed questionnaire made up of three sections:

- Section A. Socio-demographic profile of the surveyed group.

- Section B. Analysis of the community’s perception of itself, regarding the current situation of tourism and its potential development.
- Section C. Evaluation of tourist resources and infrastructure in the area

Data processing was carried out using descriptive statistical analysis consisting of bivariant analysis of independence or association between variables by means of contingency tables (chi-square/X<sup>2</sup> statistics). With these tables, our aim is to evaluate gender as a differentiating factor, due to the importance of women in the development of community-based tourism.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The most relevant socio-demographic variables of the sample are shown in table 4.

**Table 4** Socio-demographic profile

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Place of residence</b>	
Men	49.1%	Rural areas	63.5%
Women	50.9%	Urban areas	36.5%
<b>Age</b>		<b>Academic level</b>	
16 to 29	24.7%	Primary Education	65.9%
30 to 39	25.2%	Secondary Education	20.1%
40 to 49	28.3%	Higher Education	14.0%
50 to 59	15.4%		
60 and over	6.4%		

Once tourist resources had been identified, the first aspect in this investigation was to ask the local community (the target of economic

development through tourism in the area) which activities were considered to be increasing as a consequence of tourism development. The most common responses can be found in table 5. It is worth noting that one of the objectives of the development of such activities through community-based tourism is the creation of companies which could provide a satisfactory response to specific visitor profiles.

**Table 5** Potential development of tourist activities

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Accommodation	27.1%	26.6%
Food	11.6%	13.6%
Craftwork	32.3%	39.0%
Sports activities	24.2%	17.6%
Other activities	4.8%	3.2%

As shown in table 5, the activities which are expected to grow the most are craftwork sales and the creation of a network of accommodation for visitors. It should be pointed out that, according to our research carried out during the field study in this geographical area, accommodation is normally run by national and international companies, which means that implementing community-based tourism could be a reasonable way for locals to create their own hotels, with the aim of providing a better response to the demands of visitors. Similarly, complementary activities on offer and, in general, the development of sporting activities were also highlighted.

The second aspect analysed in this investigation was the evaluation, by residents, of tourism resources in the area, as well as of infrastructure and other necessary elements for the development of tourism. The

average evaluation of the area (1=poor; 3 =good) can be seen in table 6. As stated in scientific literature, the geographical area where community-based tourism can be implemented must possess resources attractive to visitors. In addition to this, it is also necessary that the minimal conditions in relation to infrastructure and other basic services can be found. However, as highlighted by Manyara and Jones (2007), community-based tourism can also be the backbone for further generalised socio-economic development in the area and, subsequently, for the improvement of infrastructure to be used by the local community itself.

**Table 6** Average evaluation of tourist resources

VARIABLE	Average	VARIABLE	Average
<b>Key factors</b>		<b>Tourist services</b>	
Fees	2.19	Information	2.33
Hospitality	2.59	Accommodation	2.55
Environment	2.27	Food	2.25
<b>General services</b>		<b>Activities</b>	
Transport links	2.48	Culture	2.31
Public safety	2.07	Stores	2.52
Cleaning	2.14	Ecology	2.28
Telecommunications	2.46	Wildlife	2.37
Food	2.54	Trekking	2.21

As shown in table 6, residents highly value the basics in the promotion of a tourist destination. Hence, ecology, wildlife and trekking – basic resources in the development of the *Flowers Route* – obtain remarkable scores. Residents also believe that there would need to be an improvement in aspects such as public safety and cleanliness.

The third characteristic analysed and put forward to residents in the area during this investigation was who would, in their opinion, benefit most if tourism was developed in the area. More precisely, three possibilities were offered: the local community, the national government

or private companies. A fourth alternative which encapsulated all three as a whole was also offered (table 7).

**Table 7** Beneficiaries of wealth generation

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
<b>Local community</b>	13%	<b>16%</b>
<b>National Govt.</b>	10.8%	<b>8.3%</b>
<b>Private Companies</b>	22.9%	<b>22.5%</b>
<b>All of the above</b>	<b>53.3%</b>	<b>53.1%</b>

According to the data collected and displayed in table 7, residents in the *Flowers Route* area believe that tourism implementation in the area would mainly benefit private companies, although they also think that it could have a very positive impact on the local community. It should be highlighted that, as stated by former studies (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004; Christou and Saveriades, 2010), it is very important that the local community can see that the economic development of community-based tourism generates benefits specifically for the local community.

The fourth aspect analysed in this investigation was residents' opinions on whether they thought the creation of a tour route would generate wealth and create employment. Therefore, only the percentage of positive evaluations highlighted by residents in the local community with respect to these two economic aspects is presented, since more than 90% believe that it would generate and 87.4% are of the opinion that it would create employment. It is interesting to discover that the majority of those polled highlight the establishment of tour routes as very beneficial for the area.

The fifth aspect under analysis is the knowledge of residents in the area with respect to the level of training and ability in matters directly related to tourist activities. The main results are displayed in table 8.

**Table 8** Perception of knowledge of tourist matters

	Men	Women
<b>Non Existent</b>	<b>7.3%</b>	<b>8.9%</b>
<b>Poor</b>	<b>51.9%</b>	<b>51.4%</b>
<b>Adequate</b>	<b>40.8%</b>	<b>39.7%</b>

Table 8 shows that the community does not perceive its training and subsequent knowledge to be sufficient for the development of tourist activities in an area managed by its own residents. Furthermore, this research finds that, in the opinion of those surveyed, public institution (59%), private companies (29.1%), and NGOs and universities (11.5%) should be the ones to provide residents with the necessary training to put tourism development into action. Therefore, this kind of response highlights the indispensable link between community-based tourist activities and improvement of quality of life through education. It is worth noting the incredibly important role to be played by NGOs and universities in the improvement of the educational levels of local people by bettering their technical qualifications.

## **CONCLUSION**

Community-based tourism is present in many different geographical areas of the world, in particular in developing countries. It was created as a different way to look for alternatives to traditional mass tourism, and it is giving rise to the creation of specific destinations which permits the generation of wealth for local communities and the creation of jobs. It should be seen as an activity which is complementary to, and never a substitute for, traditional activities based primarily on agriculture, fishing, and livestock farming.

In this paper, we have presented research into a specific geographical area known as the *Flowers Route* in El Salvador, where a project supported by public institutions in collaboration with different NGOs and Salvadorian and Spanish universities is being developed in order to create specific infrastructure in the area. However, in relation to tourism, this would be framed within a more ambitious project where the residents themselves could set out the guidelines for tourism development.

The main outcomes of this study show that this type of tourism is assessed by the local community in a very positive way, because it is perceived as a way of generating economic benefits and, at the same time, creating new jobs. In this sense, it is important to highlight the role of women (and young people) as crucial actors in the planning and development of tourist activities, and in the management of prospective businesses. Similarly, the development of tourism would mean the creation of resources (such as health services, education and infrastructure) for the community itself.

Finally, one major conclusion can be drawn from this survey: the local community is very much aware of the fact that it currently does not have the adequate training, education and qualifications to face the challenge of constructing good quality tourism products. Given this situation, NGOs and other institutions such as universities, both national and foreign, could perform a leading role in the training of local residents.

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## ENDNOTES

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