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Evaluating the Design and Management of Community-Based Ecotourism Projects in Guatemala

Kassandra Lynne Miller

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EVALUATING THE DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT OF
COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM PROJECTS IN GUATEMALA

By
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B.S. University of Montana, 2004

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Community-based ecotourism (CBE) has become the newest buzzword in development circles for its purported ability to provide alternative income generation for families and incentives to protect natural resources. Organizations such as the World Bank, World Wildlife Federation and USAID have supported these small-scale projects across the globe. However, there has been much debate over the efficacy of these projects. They are often developed, managed, and even owned by NGOs, not by local communities. Economic benefits resulting from the project are often directed toward one or two people in prominent positions within the community and not evenly distributed. The increase in use of natural areas due to ecotourism activities can have more damage to the environment than had tourists never been introduced to the area at all. Community-based ecotourism, while conceptually promising, has faced barriers that have been insurmountable in some cases.

This thesis explores common elements of community-based ecotourism projects through a case study of four projects distributed throughout Guatemala. These four cases represent different project design and management strategies, levels of community management and ownership, levels of involvement with NGOs and support from the local community. Using criteria identified by William Hipwell (2007) in his research of Taiwan aboriginal ecotourism, I evaluate the efficacy of these cases. These criteria are (1) tourism activities must be small enough to be managed solely by the community without outside support; (2) a broad representation of community members must be actively involved in the project; (3) the project must benefit the community as a whole; (4) the project must improve the quality of life for community members across the board; (5) it must result in increased awareness of conservation values; and (6) it should facilitate the maintenance or enhancement of the local culture.

Through a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observation and document reviews, this thesis argues that community-based ecotourism projects in Guatemala often struggle even when meeting the criteria above. This occurs when the distribution of benefits is shared between too many community members so that the benefits are diluted. In order to increase economic benefits under these situations, further emphasis must be placed on increasing tourist numbers, which can lead to further environmental degradation and community conflict. These projects also suffer from a lack of community capacity in the form of local leadership, which keeps them dependent on NGOs and outside organizations. I argue that the problems facing these and perhaps other, community-based ecotourism projects are due to the lack of incentives for local leadership and a distribution of benefits too wide to truly benefit anyone. To remedy this, I offer the example of Plan Grande Quehueche as a model of small-scale ecotourism that equitably distributes benefits to an entire community and exemplifies excellent local leadership.
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I dedicate this thesis to my mom who taught me as a child the value of exploring new places and who accompanied me on the hardest parts of this journey and gave them meaning and depth.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry accounts for nearly 10% of global employment and capital formation. Worldwide spending in 1995 by tourists reached $3.4 trillion and surpassed $4.2 trillion by the year 2000 (Dodds & Joppe 2005). From 1950 to 2005, international tourism expanded at an annual rate of 6.5%, growing from 25 million to 606 million travelers. “The business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products of automobiles,” (WTO 2008). The fact that tourism represents one of the main income sources for many developing nations has important implications for global economic development.

The global tourism industry is vital to many of the world’s poorest countries. In Guatemala, the focus area for this research, tourism employs over 45,000 people and accounts for the second highest amount of foreign exchange, outranked only by coffee exportation (Primack, et al 1997). However, the global tourism industry has historically been comprised of private ownership by those with the means to develop tourism. That is to say, it has not traditionally been concerned with improving quality of life for those in developing countries. In fact, “in most countries, especially low income countries, tourism is seen as a viable option for economic growth, but current unsustainable tourism practices can impact the health and well-being of the environment and community as well as tourism itself” (Dodds & Joppe 2005:8).

Beginning in the 1980s, efforts were made to transform mass tourism into a more sustainable and beneficial force both for the environment and communities. “Subsequently,
concerns with environmental degradation, global warming and growing socio-economic disparities between the haves and have-nots led to a new paradigm within tourism and gave rise to the ‘greening’ of this industry in the late 1980s” (Martain-Haverbeck 2006:4). This new paradigm produced a host of more “ethical” tourisms: ecotourism, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, cultural tourism, responsible tourism, community-based ecotourism, ethno-tourism, and volunteer tourism. These new breeds of tourism focus on environmental, cultural and community conservation aspects.

“Over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest growing sectors in the world. Modern tourism is closely linked to development and encompasses a growing number of new destinations. These dynamics have turned tourism into a key driver for socio-economic progress,” (WTO 2008).

Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) has emerged as one of the most promising methods of integrating natural resource conservation, local income generation and cultural conservation in the developing world. While the term “ecotourism” is often debated, The International Ecotourism Society defines it as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people,” (TIES 1990). Yet community-based ecotourism emphasizes more than the direct benefit of ecotourism distributed to the local population. With CBE, local groups assume “substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community,” (Denman 2001). This framework encourages empowerment of local communities while acting as a development tool.
CBE plays an important role in development efforts because it recognizes that it is crucial for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to devote more attention to the needs of the host community and to provide means to improve their quality of life. Previously, NGOs have sometimes developed projects for communities without consulting community members or allowing them to identify their own needs. The communities accept the project in the belief that all development projects will bring economic benefit to the community. When the NGO fully implements the project and hands over management to the community, the project can easily fail because there has not been either initial or sustained support on the part of the community. However, when the community is involved in the planning from the outset or, even better, wholly responsible for it, it has been found that there is a higher level of support for the project community-wide (Hipwell 2007).

Community-based ecotourism is becoming more prevalent in the hope that local populations can reap a portion of the financial benefits and develop a foundation that alleviates poverty. However, recent studies have suggested that CBE projects often fail in their goal to provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people (Hiwasaki 2006). More specifically, it has been shown that community-based ecotourism often benefits only a small group of local people within a community, often those with familial ties to a direct participant in the project (Belsky 1999). The problem of equitably distributing benefits among community members is of great importance to the sustainability of these projects because inequities fester into tensions and social divisions all too reminiscent of prior patterns of privilege and exploitation.
These issues lead to two critical questions: (1) are there any common factors of community-based ecotourism projects that allow for widespread community benefit and (2) how can these factors be managed for in future CBE projects? Hipwell (2007) provides a framework of six criteria for sustainable CBE: (1) tourism activities must be small enough to be managed solely by the community without outside support; (2) a broad representation of community members must be actively involved in the project; (3) the project must benefit the community as a whole; (4) the project must improve the quality of life for community members across the board; (5) it must result in increased awareness of conservation values; and (6) it should facilitate the maintenance or enhancement of the local culture. These criteria are argued to be the distinguishing features of successful CBE projects (Hipwell 2007).

Hipwell’s criteria help define a specific type of CBE within the spectrum of ecotourism projects. In the case of criterion #1, it is essential that tourism activities be small enough to be managed solely by the community without outside support because in order to be sustainable, the project must be able to be managed by the community without logistical or monetary support from an NGO or other organization. If an NGO manages the project from outside of the community, this exposes the project to weakness. Their support may increase or decrease with changes in administration or outside funding. In addition, when NGOs manage a CBE project for too long, community support wavers because people begin to think that the NGO will never hand the project over to the management of the community, where the project is being implemented. Community support of a project is essential to sustainability and success. Anything that undermines that support and creates conflict may eventually cause rifts between the NGO and the community and thus, damage the project.
Hipwell’s second criterion: a broad representation of community members must be actively involved in the project, is of particular importance because the distribution of power within rural communities often falls heavily to one or two families of privilege. Privilege, in this manner, may be due to large land holdings, higher level of education, religious leadership, or other indicators that designate someone as powerful. If there is broad representation across the community of those involved in the project, power balances are distributed more evenly, thus more equitably distributing benefits. If a wide array of different interests are actively involved in the project, there is less of a possibility that any group of people will feel discriminated against, which can lead to community divisions. In Guatemala, these lines can seem ambiguous to an outsider at times, but they exist and are rooted in a turbulent history of cultural conflict.

The third criterion: the project must benefit the community as a whole, is fairly straightforward. If only certain players are receiving benefits from the project, eventually the other community members will become discontented which will weaken the project. If benefits are being accrued even by those not actively involved in the project, community support will be hard to avoid. If a family is not involved with the CBE project, but their child receives school books or crucial medications at no cost because the project provided them from their revenues, the family will be able to see that this project has benefits for everyone regardless of social, cultural, economic or religious factors. The project can take on the role of a community unifier, instead of being a cause of conflict.

It is critical that the project must improve the quality of life for community members across the board. If only certain community members’ lives are being improved, this leads to
an increased disparity between the haves and have-nots. One of the goals of CBE projects is to improve the quality of life for entire communities, not just particular people or families. As a development tool, in order to be successful entire groups of people must benefit and be able to see these benefits translate into a better life for themselves and for the community as a whole. Any CBE project that can accomplish this will strengthen the longevity of the project because this gives the community an incentive to ensure that the project succeeds.

Community-based ecotourism was conceived as both a development tool and a conservation tool. If CBE does not result in increased awareness of conservation values, then we can choose from any other number of tools that help improve the economic situation of a community or area. CBE projects have the advantage of being able to instill an environmental ethic in a community while simultaneously improving quality of life in an economic sense. CBE gives communities an option other than resource extraction. If tourists come to an area because of a stunning waterfall and the water becomes contaminated from people washing their clothing in the river, tourists will no longer choose to travel there. Ideally, in time the community members will choose to protect the resource because they value it for their livelihood or at least for more than just an economic incentive.

The final criterion can often be the most difficult to measure. Facilitating the maintenance or enhancement of the local culture can be an ambiguous factor when evaluating community-based ecotourism. Tourism can have negative cultural effects on communities because the influence of western culture can be powerful in situations where the tourists have more wealth, education, and opportunities than the people living in the community. This can lead to insecurities among local populations, especially young males, and degrade local culture.
Conversely, in CBE tourists take an active interest in the daily life and culture of these communities, thereby bolstering the feeling that the local culture is valuable. If tourists are willing to pay money to participate in everyday life with indigenous families in Guatemala, that sends a strong message to the communities that their way of life is valuable. CBE can have negative and positive impacts on local culture and it is imperative that these projects do more to strengthen local culture than to destabilize it.

This thesis explores common elements of community-based ecotourism projects through a case study of four projects distributed throughout Guatemala. The four case study sites are EcoQuetzal in the department of Alta Verapaz, Eco-Aldea Maya Lagunita Salvador on the Rio Dulce, Plan Grande Quehueche near the city of Livingston and Chiabal in the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes Mountains. These four cases represent different types of project design and management, levels of community management and ownership, levels of involvement with NGOs and support from the local community. Using the criteria identified by William Hipwell (2007) in his research of Taiwan aboriginal ecotourism (see above), I evaluate the efficacy of these cases.

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. The introduction is the first chapter. The second chapter reviews tourism research and literature, particularly as it relates to small-scale community tourism and ecotourism. Chapter three provides a brief background of Guatemala, its social, cultural and political history, as well as the history of tourism in the country. The fourth chapter explores the methodological approach of the research and provides details of the fieldwork. It examines in further depth the six criteria of sustainable CBE provided by Hipwell and explores issues of cross-cultural research. Chapter five introduces the four case
study sites and the functioning of the CBE projects. Chapter six evaluates the findings of these case studies using Hipwell’s criteria, and then offers a comprehensive and comparative examination of the results. Lastly, the conclusion offers a brief summary of possibilities for designing and managing CBE projects that are small-scale and benefit the entire community.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on tourism is vast and complex and can cause significant problems due to undetermined terminology. As Martain-Haverbeck pointed out, “answers to simple questions, such as ‘what is tourism?’ or ‘who is a tourist?’ may vary widely” (Martain-Haverbeck 2006:9). Even a seemingly large distinction between terms such as recreation and tourism and leisure has been notoriously difficult to classify as evidenced by the broad array of universities offering one of the subjects, but not all three (Ross & Wall 1999). At times even attempting to define these terms can be a cause for further confusions. Take for example:

“Tourism represents a particular use of leisure time and a particular form of recreation but does not include all uses of leisure time nor all forms of recreation. It includes much travel but not all travel. Conceptually, tourism is, therefore, distinguished in particular from related concepts of leisure and recreation on the one hand, and from travel and migration on the other,” (Mathieson & Wall 1986:4).

This definition illustrates the ambiguity of tourism definitions and the vagueness of the boundaries between the concepts.

Tourism has traditionally been defined either in terms of the activities of the tourists or the activities of organizations supplying the tourists. The WTO defined tourism as “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes,” (World Tourism Organization 1995). This definition, though still broad, allows us to move beyond the
complexities of the Mathieson and Wall definition and understand a little better what it means to be a tourist.

When the concept of “ecotourism” emerged from traditional mass tourism twenty years ago, few suspected this small niche market would rise to the prominent position it holds today (Weaver & Lawton 2007). An indicator of this prominent position includes the United Nations declaring 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism. There is even now a peer-reviewed Journal of Ecotourism in regular publication. Ecotourism is offered as a course of study at many colleges and universities and is taught with textbooks that address ecotourism specifically. These indicators denote the mainstreaming or “coming of age” of ecotourism in modern society and suggest that ecotourism has morphed from a “fad” within mass tourism to a concrete subsector of one of the largest industries in the world.

A legitimate field of academic research surrounds the topic of ecotourism. In their seminal piece, Twenty years on: The state of contemporary ecotourism research, Weaver and Lawton evaluate the various subsets of ecotourism research. They identify these as: the nature of ecotourism, venues, industry, ecotourists as a market segment, ecotourist market segmentation, interpretation and marketing, institutions, ecological impacts, socio-cultural impacts, economic impacts, and quality control and ethics (Weaver & Lawton 2007).

The nature of ecotourism is an area of study essential to the development of the field. “An important indication of the maturation of any field of study is agreement or near-agreement over the terms of reference that pertain to the phenomena of interest and subsequently allow them to be investigated, and knowledge accumulated, in an orderly manner,” (Weaver & Lawton 2007:1169). Although definitions of ecotourism abound in the
literature, there is a general consensus that ecotourism consists of three main principles: (1) the tourism attraction is nature-based, (2) an element of education or learning is included in the attraction, and (3) the tourism must be ecologically, socio-culturally and economically sustainable (Blamey 2001). Fennell (2001) identified 85 definitions of ecotourism and found that value-based dimensions such as conservation, ethics, sustainability, education and community benefits tended to be more prominent in the recent research. Weaver and Lawton (2007) argue that there has been a trend toward dramatically expanding the boundaries of ecotourism from its original inception in the 1980s and that due to this trend, a consensus on terminology is more easily reached, giving ecotourism a more unified front than it necessarily merits. Honey echoes this sentiment when she states that “much of what is marketed as ecotourism amounts to only ecotourism light,” (Honey 1999:390).

Ecotourism can be further narrowed to what emerged as subsets to it: cultural tourism, community-based ecotourism and regional ecotourism. Some of these fields overlap. For instance, community-based ecotourism generally has a component of culture included in its tenets and cultural tourism has criteria for conservation of natural resources and community economic development. As community-based ecotourism is the focus of this study, I will proceed by exploring the literature specifically relating to CBE.

CBE grew out of the desire to practice ecotourism in a way that not only conserves ecosystems, but also empowers local communities. The shift toward tourism that is culturally and environmentally ethical gave rise to the concept of community-based ecotourism itself. “A community-based approach to ecotourism recognizes the need to promote both the quality of life of people and the conservation of resources,” (Scheyvens 1999:246). In a report for the
World Wildlife Federation, Denman defines community-base ecotourism as “a form of ecotourism where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community,” (Denman 2001:4). Furthermore:

“How the community is defined will depend on the social and institutional structures in the area concerned, but the definition implies some kind of collective responsibility and approval by representative bodies. In many places, particularly those inhabited by indigenous peoples, there are collective rights over land and resources. Community-based ecotourism should therefore foster sustainable use and collective responsibility. However, it must also embrace individual initiatives within the community,” (Denman, 2001:4).

The United Nations’ World Tourism Organization provides further characteristics of community-based ecotourism including: (1) involves appreciation not only of nature, but also of indigenous cultures prevailing in natural areas, as part of the visitor experience, (2) contains education and interpretation as part of the tourist offer, (3) generally, but not exclusively, organized for small groups by small, specialized and locally owned businesses, (4) minimizes negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment, (5) supports the protection of natural areas by generating economic benefits from the management of local areas, and (6) increases local and visitor awareness of conservation (WTO 2008). These vast definitions and characteristics seem overwhelmingly complex as they should; the projects and processes they seek to define are just as complex and even more varied because they include human relationships with the natural world, with other community members, with those outside of the community and with the tourist.
The previous literature in community-based ecotourism has focused on its socio-cultural, economic and ecological impacts. Because of its emphasis on local communities, most of the literature explores the socio-cultural implications of CBE (Weaver & Lawton 2007). A prevalent theme within CBE literature is the question of whether local communities receive tangible benefits from ecotourism projects (Campbell 1999; Colvin 1996; Loon & Polakow 2001). Scheyns (1999) measures the success of ecotourism projects based on the level of community control and equitable distribution of benefits, while many others also include the factors of community empowerment and cultural preservation. Reed expands on this aspect by identifying the significance of the power relations among stakeholders in CBE, such as the program participants, general public, local government and organizations, and the importance of the collaboration process (Reed 1997:567-568). Others, including Wall argue this point, claiming that local participation should not always be encouraged because community members do not necessarily have the ability to understand the complexity of tourism development with awareness of the full implications (Martain-Haverbeck 2006). However, this argument has been historically used in various forms to justify relegating communities, especially indigenous communities, to a subservient position within the greater society, even when discussing their own development prospects. Even though locals may not completely understand the ramifications of ecotourism, they can still inform organizations and local government on matters such as their vision for the future of the community and their desires for their children’s future.

The current trend in the literature focuses on examples of CBE where communities have more involvement with projects from their inception, but it is still rare to find examples where
projects are not initiated, planned or managed by forces outside the community (Belsky 1999). Notable exceptions include indigenous ecotourism development in Ecuador (Colvin 1996; Wesche 1996) and The Gambia (Jones 2005). There is also a growing recognition of failure rates within community-based ecotourism projects, as high as 90 percent (Epler Wood 2003).

The Guatemala case studies presented here will help fill the void in the literature of community-based ecotourism by identifying factors of these projects which serve to equitably distribute benefits throughout a community, which can be utilized by other areas looking to implement their own CBE project. This research also explores the relationship of the four case studies with both national and international NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and helps reveal both harmful and helpful aspects of these relationships. Additionally, it identifies the importance of local leadership to these projects and discusses ways to build community capacity. This research provides a deeper understanding of the promises and pitfalls of ecotourism in Guatemala and highlights a model which satisfies Hipwell’s criteria.
CHAPTER THREE

BACKGROUND

Guatemala

*Physical Geography*

Guatemala is a Central American republic (Fig. 1) bordered by Mexico to the north, Belize to the east and Honduras and El Salvador to the southeast. It has coasts on both the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Guatemala is a country roughly the size of Tennessee, with an area of 42,042 square miles (Coates 1997). Guatemala is extremely mountainous, except for the south coastal area and the vast northern lowlands of the department of Petén. Two mountain chains divide Guatemala from west to east, into three major regions: the highlands (where the mountains are located), the Pacific coast (south of the mountains), and the Petén region, north of the mountains. The majority of Guatemala’s large cities are located in the highlands and Pacific coast regions, whereas areas such as the Petén are sparsely populated. This is due to mostly to employment opportunities and ancestral homelands. The three regions vary in climate, elevation and landscape, providing striking contrasts between hot and humid tropical lowlands and colder, drier highland peaks. Guatemala hosts the highest point in Central America at the top of the volcano Tajumulco, 4,220 meters above sea level (CONAP 2003). Guatemala is home to thirty-three volcanoes in total. These extinct and active volcanoes make the country prone to eruptions and earthquakes. The great earthquake of 1976 caused catastrophic damage to Guatemala City and the surrounding areas, killing more than 25,000 people (Coates 1997).
Figure 1: Guatemala Map
Source: Google Images
Because of its varying geography and climate, Guatemala hosts fourteen distinct ecoregions including mangrove forest, dry forest and thorn bushes, subtropical and tropical rain forest, wetlands, cloud humid forest, mixed, and pine forest. According to the IUCN, Guatemala is considered the fifth Biodiversity Hot Spot in the world (Mittermeier et al. 2004). About 36% of Guatemala is forested and almost 50% of the forested area is classified as primary forest. Guatemala represents nine different biomes that occur from sea level up to more than 4,000 meters above sea level (Villar 1994). The fauna, flora, climate and topography of these biomes provide fascinating contrasts, especially since they occur in a relatively small country with enormous biodiversity. Many endemic bird species are found in the Montane forests of the highlands region, although the Tropical Humid Forest, Mountain Conifer Forest, Tropical Rainforest and Tropical Humid Savanna occupy the majority of land in the country. Guatemala is home to almost 1,250 known species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles. 6.7% of these species are endemic and 8.1% are threatened. Guatemala also hosts at least 8,681 species of vascular plants. 13.5% of these species are endemic (CONAP 2003).

Guatemala is often called the land of eternal spring, however this can be misleading. The climate of the country is characterized by a dry season lasting from December to April and a rainy reason from May to November. The average annual temperature in the highlands above 3,000 ft is 59°F, while in the lowlands the average is 77°F (CONAP 2003). In the lowlands the temperature can reach 90°F or higher and the months with the highest temperatures are from May to July. Precipitation is highest on the Atlantic slope of the eastern mountains, and ranges between 157 and 235 inches per year. By contrast, the driest area of the country, the Motagua valley in the east, receives less than 23 inches of rain per year (Coates 1997).
Of all the Central American nations, Guatemala has the highest amount of land under protection, with 120 protected areas covering 7,890,067 acres of land, and representing 29.3% of the country (CONAP 2003). Unfortunately, 35 of these areas have not been formally demarcated or do not have the proper administration necessary for appropriate conservation measures and just 64 have been assigned to government administration or to other academic or conservation organizations (Coates 1997).

Historical and Cultural Geography

Guatemala has a population of over twelve million people, with 25 different languages spoken throughout its boundaries. 21 of these languages are Mayan languages such as K’iche’, Q’eqchi and Kaqchikel (fig. 2). Some of these languages share some similarities, while others are unrelated to each other. The non-Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala are Spanish, Xinca, Garifuna and Arawakan. It is difficult to accurately evaluate the number of indigenous and ladino (of mixed Spanish and Mayan descent) residents in the country as it is common for someone of indigenous descent to abandon their traje and traditional language when living in an urban area after some time. Some figures cite the percentage of indigenous population as high as 70% (Martain-Haverbeck 2006). Guatemala’s National Statistics Institute cites the number as 55.7% of the total population, while the CIA World Factbook cites a low 40.6% (CIA 2008). Cultural identity is difficult to ascertain in a country that boasts a long history of subjugating its indigenous populations, with multiple incentives for partial or full assimilation into the dominant Spanish-speaking culture.
In order to fully grasp the current political, cultural and economic fabric of Guatemala, the history of the Mayan people and their struggles for basic political and economic opportunity must be understood. In the Pre-Columbian period, the Mayan people spanned a region from Guatemala and Chiapas to the Yucatan Peninsula and excelled in science, cosmology, medicine, agriculture and the arts until the time of the Spanish conquest in the 15th century. Mayan cities flourished across Central America, complete with remarkable pyramids, temples, observatories and libraries. Their scholars produced works of literature, philosophy, art and architecture. Particularly skilled in mathematics and astronomy, Mayan scientists developed a calendar more precise than that used by most countries today. Approximately
1200 years ago, this high civilization suffered a collapse thought to be due primarily to resource exploitation, though multiple factors have been hypothesized.

With the invasion of the Spanish in the 15th century, the world of the Mayans changed dramatically.

“The intrusion of the Spanish feudal system with a different set of values, including a caste system that paid taxes and tribute to the Spanish crown and the imposition of land ownership, has had a lasting and devastating impact on the indigenous culture. The primary intention for Spaniards to conquer and settle was economic – the desire to gain quick wealth, followed by the expansion of Christianity by missionaries,” (Martain-Haverbeck 35-36).

Guatemala won its independence from Spain in 1821. Historically, Guatemala has produced conservative military leaders as presidents with the notable exceptions of Juan José Arévalo (elected in 1945) and his successor, Jacobo Árbenz. These reform-oriented presidents attempted to institute a land reform program throughout the country to alleviate the poverty of the indigenous population. These reforms led to a CIA-backed coup which culminated with the overthrow of Árbenz and a period in Guatemala’s history characterized by military dictatorships and a 36-year civil war. During this time, some 200,000 people died, 40,000 officially ‘disappeared’ and up to a million people became refugees (CIA 2008).

The civil war ended officially in 1996 with the signing of the Peace Accords. The document, signed by both the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity group, outlines human rights, resettlement, demilitarization, search for peace by political means, democratization, socioeconomic reforms, indigenous rights and identity and the strengthening of the civilian power. The Peace Accords attempted to address the existing
problems in Guatemala’s government and society, but unfortunately many tenets of the Peace Accords have not been honored. Guatemala is still only in the beginning stages of implementing the accords and it will take time to see lasting change in the fabric of society.

The current cultural climate in Guatemala is characterized by a process of *ladinoization* of the indigenous Mayan population. This is most prevalent in men, who no longer wear traditional *traje* in all but a very few towns. Men are also more likely to achieve higher levels of education, which affects how much Spanish they learn. In most Guatemalan schools, the curriculum is taught in the local Mayan language only until second grade, at which point classes are taught exclusively in Spanish. In rural areas, children usually have to travel to the closest city to attend high school and most cities in Guatemala are heavily ladino. “It is not rare for the process of education to cause a loss of culture in Mayan children. Many children from the village go to the city to receive their education and when they return, they no longer desire to wear *traje* or speak their indigenous language,” (Interview #25). Influences from the United States and Mexico may also play into this phenomenon. Overall, the power structure in Guatemala continues to revolve around the *ladino* population, to the exclusion of the indigenous.

**Community-Based Ecotourism in Guatemala**

With an end to the region’s longest running civil war, Guatemala has rapidly been growing into a premier Central American ecotourism destination. According to The International Ecotourism Society:
“In 2004, Guatemala enjoyed a 34 percent growth in international arrivals, demonstrating its expanding draw in the global marketplace. According to the Guatemalan Tourism Institute, more than one million international tourists visited Guatemala from January through August 2006 – a record number,” (TIES 2008).

Guatemala has a rich history of tourism with impressive cultural and ecological sites, such as Tikal and Lake Atitlán, drawing tourists from around the world. In 1999, tourism alone brought Guatemala US$570.1 million (INGUAT 2006). With national ecotourism organizations such as Alianza Verde and Puerta Mundo Maya working to conserve and promote both the natural and cultural resources of Guatemala, community-based ecotourism has started playing a more prominent role in the overall structure of mass tourism.

Tourism revenue has dramatically increased due to the end of the civil war and the Guatemalan government has been diligent in helping to develop the requisite infrastructure and marketing to afford tourism the preeminent position it holds in the country today. Former Guatemalan President, Oscar Berger, appointed a Presidential Tourism Commissioner, created a Tourism Cabinet and a Tourism Table to enhance national tourism. Additionally, the national agency of tourism, Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo (INGUAT), was created to strengthen marketing and development of tourism throughout the country. Until just a few years ago, INGUAT focused almost exclusively on ecotourism and cultural tourism in sites such as Tikal and Lake Atitlán, but has recently moved toward promoting smaller community-based projects.

Ecotourism emerged quickly in Guatemala, due to its abundance of wildlife, rain forests, highland cloud forests, white-water rivers, volcanoes, stunning lakes, national parks and wildlife reserves. Guatemala is one of the world's richest areas of biological diversity and attracts
visitors from all areas of the globe who mainly come to experience the beautiful natural environment and unique culture that Guatemala offers. Community-based ecotourism plays a much smaller role in the overall tourism structure of Guatemala. Although not new to Guatemala, CBE has received much less attention than traditional mass tourism. As these projects tend to be small-scale and offer fewer amenities many types of tourists are not interested in CBE. However, this trend may be changing as responsible travel becomes more desirable.

Traditionally, CBE projects in Guatemala have been developed and managed by NGOs on behalf of communities. Often it is NGOs that possess the knowledge and access to resources that communities lack. In many cases, an NGO already working in a community or region suggests the idea of a CBE project to the community as an alternative method of generating income. The actual project may take many different forms depending on the situation, but it is often the NGO that supplies the financial capital to design the project, develop the infrastructure, train the community in hosting tourists, and promote the project. Ideally, the NGO trains members of the community to manage and promote the project without outside support, so that they can eventually leave the project in the hands of the community. In order to achieve this, there has to be a mechanism within the community that is responsible for governance of the project. In Guatemala, NGOs often set up an ecotourism committee within the community as one of their primary objectives. Committees are formed in various ways: through elections, volunteers, or chosen for their leadership skills by the NGO. Members of these committees generally work with the NGO to guide the development of the project and
help make decisions. Leadership in the committee is integral to success of the project as the committee is in charge of management after the NGO leaves.

The role that NGOs play in these projects has been heavily critiqued (Zeppel 2006). NGOs sometimes manage these projects for years without giving management power to the communities they represent. Many reasons may exist for this occurrence: communities that ask for continuing support, NGOs that believe the project will fail if abandoned too quickly, NGO staff that wish to continue working on the project to sustain their job security. No matter the reason, it often occurs that NGOs help manage CBE projects for many years, sometimes in perpetuity.

In an online search of tourism organizations offering ecotourism-specific trips to Guatemala, hundreds of companies were noted. Ecotourism in Guatemala has historically revolved around Tikal National Park in the department of Petén. The ancient Mayan ruins surrounded by tropical jungle are the largest tourism draw in the country, followed by Lake Atitlán in the department of Sololá. Yet, with the advent of ‘responsible’ and ‘green’ tourism many tourists are looking to augment their trips, either by choosing to include a foray into a smaller, more ‘authentic’ community-based ecotourism project or to avoid the major tourist destinations altogether. Additionally, more wealthy Guatemalan nationals wishing to vacation within their country have often already experienced the major destinations and are looking for something different.

In 2006, INGUAT sampled eleven projects throughout the country to determine the year’s statistics for community-based ecotourism: B’omb’il Pek, Mucbilhá, Candelaria, Sepalau, La Unión, Cancuén, Salto de Chilascó, Rupalaj K’stalin, Katinamit, Pascual Abaj, and Corazón del
Bosque. The majority of these projects are located in the department of Alta Verapaz due to the recent focus on the region as the *Puerta al Mundo Maya* (the door to the Mayan world) and funding of CBE projects there. In a 2006 study, INGUAT found that 85% of the visitors to CBE sites throughout the country were Guatemalan nationals and 15% were international tourists. Most international tourists were from the United States (6%) and Canada (2%) (Table 1). The study found that 55% of these visitors were between ages 25 and 44 and that 76% of the visitors were male. 49% of visitors stayed for a half-day, 27% for 1-3 hours, 22% for an entire day and 2% from 1-3 nights. Most visitors were attracted to the area for hiking (26%) or for the opportunity to explore caves (26%). 19% of visitors were primarily drawn by the ability to go tubing and 9% were most interested in bathing in hot springs. Other reasons for visiting these sites were opportunities to camp, buy local *artesanías*, listen to the marimba, visit lagunas, consume traditional food, and weave.

![Chart showing nationality of visitors at community tourism sites in Guatemala – 2006](image)

*Table 1: Nationality of visitors at community tourism sites in Guatemala – 2006*

*Source: INGUAT Estadísticas de Turismo Comunitario en Guatemala*
Most of these tourism sites are off the well-beaten path of traditional mass tourism in Guatemala. 41% of visitors found information about these sites on the internet and television. 17% were introduced to these sites by word of mouth from friends and family. 6% visited due to a brochure, 5% from the Guatemalan newspaper *Prensa Libre*, 3% from tour operators, and 2% from INGUAT promotional material (INGUAT 2006). The other 22% heard about the sites from international publications, ecological conferences, tourism guides, road signs, schools, radio spots and conservation organizations (Table 2).

![Bar chart showing means of discovery of community tourism sites in Guatemala](image)

Table 2: Means of discovery of community tourism sites in Guatemala  
*Source: INGUAT Estadísticas de Turismo Comunitario en Guatemala*

Due to efforts on the part of the Guatemalan government, INGUAT and other national groups such as tourism operators and NGOs, community-based ecotourism in Guatemala is starting to garner serious attention on an international scale. The number of CBE projects in the country has soared in recent years, as funding for these types of projects increases and the trend
toward more responsible tourism grows stronger. Community-based ecotourism projects can be found in all regions of the country, though many are still relatively young. The recent trend in CBE projects in Guatemala has focused on bringing tourists to stay in communities for multiple days, thus increasing the amount of monetary benefits to communities and cultural interaction for tourists. The future of CBE in Guatemala is predicated on the ability of these small grassroots projects to find success amongst a market saturated with mass tourism and a handful of small projects like their own.
CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Procedures

Due to my previous experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala (2005 to 2007) working with a community-based ecotourism project in the department of Huehuetenango, I was able to identify four case study sites distributed throughout the country. With the help of several ecotourism professionals in Guatemala, proper site selection was discussed various times to ensure adequate information could be attained. These sites were chosen based on their distribution throughout different regions in the country, diversity of indigenous Mayan groups represented and difference in operations from community-owned and operated to simply community-based and owned and operated by an outside organization. These sites have been operating their projects for between two and twelve years, allowing for different levels of experience, longevity and insight. Community-based ecotourism is still a very young and emerging field in Guatemala and even the most established projects have only been functioning for around twelve years.

A case study approach was chosen because of its strength in explaining contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin 2003). Also, case studies are particularly suited to answering questions of “how” and “why” which were paramount in this particular study. “The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristic of real-life events,” (Yin 2003:2). Using the case study methodology
allowed me to conduct this research using direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the people involved in the ecotourism projects. This is not to say that the case study method is flawless. Like all methods, it has its critiques. Perhaps most relevant to field research is the criticism that the researcher has been sloppy, lazy, has not followed systematic procedures, or has allowed bias to influence the direction and findings of the research. In this research, I addressed this issue by using an interview guide so that each research participant answered the same questions. In the case of bias, I attempted to be aware of any bias that I have and maintain self-reflexivity during the analysis process. I am also aware that bias can not be completely eliminated from the research process. Another common critique of the case study method is that it is not generalizable, but as Yin argues: “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a “sample,” and in doing a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization),” (Yin 2003:10-11).

To discover the underlying causes and conditions affecting ecotourism in the four cases, a qualitative, multi-method approach was employed. The heart of data collection revolved around a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of participants in the CBE projects within each case. A total of 29 interviews were conducted lasting anywhere from 45 minutes to 3 hours in length. In addition to the interviews, the research relied on participant observation derived from field work completed in Guatemala from June to August 2008. Two open-ended, researcher-created questionnaires were used, one for community members and one for organizations (Appendix B & C). The questionnaires were designed
specifically with the purpose of revealing to what extent each of four projects fulfills Hipwell’s six criteria and to illuminate the history of each project and its benefits, obstacles and challenges. The interviews were captured with a digital voice recorder. Each interview was analyzed and coded using QSR NVIVO 8 software. The interviews were coded using Hipwell’s 6 criteria as well as other important criteria that emerged during this research such as leadership, marketing of the project, and NGO involvement. A total of 54 codes were revealed during the analysis of the data. Some of these codes surfaced in nearly every interview while others were only mentioned by a few. This allowed me to determine which factors were of greatest importance. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, photography, documents and field observations were used for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EcoQuetzal</th>
<th>Eco-Aldea Maya Lagunita Salvador</th>
<th>Plan Grande Quehueche</th>
<th>Chiabal</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Number of Interviews</strong></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time at Site</strong></td>
<td>14 days</td>
<td>13 days</td>
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*Table 3: Interview and Time Distribution Table
Source: Author*

I worked from the qualitative field research paradigm of grounded theory, which Babbie defines as “an inductive approach to the study of social life that attempts to generate a theory from the constant comparing of unfolding observations,” (Babbie 2007:296). The grounded theory approach to data analysis presents various advantages. It allows the researcher to be scientific and creative simultaneously. This paradigm permits the researcher to think comparatively about numerous incidents, obtain multiple viewpoints of participants, periodically step back and validate data against interpretations, maintain an attitude of skepticism and follow the research procedures of making comparisons, asking questions and
A grounded theory approach was chosen because it allowed me to derive theories from the analysis of the four case study sites from an analysis of the patterns, themes, and common categories discovered in the observational data I collected during field research. Other methods could have been employed, such as an ethnographic methodology; however ethnography focuses on detailed and accurate description rather than explanation. While this study uses description, the focus is on explaining the “why” and “how” of the case study sites. Grounded theory emphasizes using research procedures such as systematic coding, which help allay the common criticism of many qualitative paradigms that they produce unreliable and invalid data (Babbie 2007).

The first case study site is EcoQuetzal, with an office located in Cobán in the department of Alta Verapaz. I spent two days interviewing organization members at their office before departing for the community of Chicacnab, where the project is situated. I booked an open-ended trip with the intent of experiencing as many facets of the project and community as possible. I travelled by bus to San Lucas, where my hostess and guide, Doña Luciana and her daughter, accompanied me on a two hour hike to their home in Chicacnab. I spent the evening with their family, making tortillas and becoming introduced to their day-to-day lives. The next day was spent hiking through the forest with Doña Luciana, chatting about the project and what it meant to her to have tourists staying in her home. We conducted a formal interview that evening after supper while shelling beans. Although she only recently learned Spanish, she was very easy to understand due to her formal training in Cobán. I stayed with different families every night in order to get a broad representation of the people involved with the project. I also spent time during the evenings in the town center, talking with people passing through to
do their shopping and playing soccer with the children. I completed seven interviews in Chicacnab.

The rest of the case studies were conducted similarly. I spent two weeks in each case study site, forging relationships, conducting interviews and informally talking with community members in public venues, such as markets, homes and tortillerias. In-depth interviews were initially conducted with persons directly involved with the CBE project including, but not limited to: community leaders, tour operators, NGOs, host families and guides. Using “snowball” sampling, additional research participants were identified and interviewed. In order to attain an acceptable level of diversity in viewpoints, participant observation was conducted to observe readily identifiable impacts of each CBE project and its effects on the community as a whole.

From Cobán, I made my way east to the village of Lagunita Salvador in the department of Izabal, between Río Dulce and Livingston. Lagunita Salvador hosts a homegrown CBE project that is owned and operated by community members without management support from an NGO or other outside organization. I stayed at the project’s ecolodge and ate at both the project’s restaurant and with various families during my time there. I interviewed guides, including Don Marcos and Don Francisco, on excursions through the jungle, to waterfalls and throughout the water of the Río Dulce. The community here is small, having only twenty-two families. People were excited to see a gringa after security problems have upset the area. Belgian tourists were kidnapped from their boat on Río Dulce in March of 2008. They were returned unharmed after 24 hours, but the area has seen a marked decrease in tourism since then. A total of 7 formal interviews were conducted at Lagunita Salvador.
From Lagunita Salvador, I travelled further east to the coastal area of Livingston and the village of Plan Grande Quehueche. I spent two weeks investigating the project there, staying in the ecolodge and eating meals with local families. I travelled to Livingston to interview volunteers and employees of Ak’Tenamit, the local NGO that provided funding for this project. I completed a total of 7 interviews in Quehueche.

The final case study site returned me to one of the villages I worked in as a Peace Corps volunteer. The CBE project in Chiabal, Huehuetenango, in the northwestern part of the country was the location of my primary project as a volunteer. I spent three weeks in and around Chiabal, interviewing personnel from the two NGOs who run the project as well as community members in Chiabal. I completed a total of 8 formal interviews in Chiabal.

Community Access Issues

Access to communities can often be a difficulty in cross-cultural research, particularly in indigenous Mayan communities. I had the advantage of having lived in Guatemala for two years and three months. As a Peace Corps volunteer working with ecotourism projects in the department of Huehuetenango, I forged relationships with communities and projects throughout the country, along with my twelve Peace Corps counterparts in other regions. The sites selected for study have a history of working in positive synergistic relationships with Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) and with volunteers from other organizations. These former PCVs worked with me to assist in providing historical background for the communities and projects, key contacts for interviewing and other knowledge that can only be gained by living in a community for this length of time. The former PCVs also contacted the leaders in these
communities to let them know of this research and myself, which helped to lend credibility and importance to the endeavor with community members, who were happy to help out old friends. When I explained to community members that I worked and lived in a community like theirs and had a similar job, they seemed to understand better why I was interested in studying Guatemala because I had already spent time there and was invested in an ecotourism project elsewhere.

I had hoped that the community members in the study sites would recognize me both as a former Peace Corps volunteer (PCV) and researcher, but in reality they understood my role better as a PCV, perhaps because they can easily identify what that means while the term “researcher” can seem vague to people in rural villages. Because most people were able to understand my former role in their country as a PCV and understand what my background and intentions were, reactivity was reduced in the cases of EcoQuetzal and Chiabal. Babbie defines reactivity as “the problem that the subjects of social research may react to the fact of being studied, thus altering their behavior from what it would have been normally,” (Babbie 2007:290). In the cases of Plan Grande Quehueche and Lagunita Salvador, I was understood to be a former volunteer (with whom both projects have previously worked) as well as a researcher. People in these communities seemed to recognize me as someone who had helped another community and had returned to Guatemala to learn more and write about my experiences. As a woman in Plan Grande Quehueche noted:

“We never had a volunteer that stayed for two years. The Spanish boy stayed for three months and we were sad to see him go. I’m glad that you came back to Guatemala to
learn about our project. I hope that you find something out that can help us make it better,” (Interview #21).

I am not claiming that reactivity was eliminated completely, even when interviewing people I previously worked with from the NGO in Chiabal. In the other three cases, I was still someone new to them, a researcher and an American, but they could also better understand my motives and desires because they have had volunteers work in their communities before.

I often played the role of both observer and participant, in that I participated in daily life within the community, but was also observing and taking note of relationships and information shared. The risk of a researcher “going native” always exists in cross-cultural research. I had expected that after being immersed in indigenous Guatemalan culture and communities for two years that had I the propensity for “going native,” it would have shown itself before returning to complete my research. I believe that I gained a sense of objectivity by returning to Guatemala a second time after spending a year in the United States. I certainly felt more able to step back and examine situations from a less involved standpoint. In qualitative research, objectivity is not necessarily expected. Reflexivity and transparency help to deal with the subjectivity of the research. I do not believe that the level of “closeness” to a project necessarily precludes relevant analysis. In fact, my experience in Chiabal allows data and situational analysis to become that much deeper and more meaningful to this thesis. That said, being open about my connection with this particular project is critical in light of my history there. I have had to constantly question myself to ensure that my evaluation of this project is on the same level as with the other case study sites.
Cross-Cultural Research Issues

Because of the time I have spent in Guatemala, I possess somewhat of an insider position and perspective. Banks (1998) divides “insider” and “outsider” status into four subcategories: the indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider and the external-outsider. Clearly, I am not of the indigenous typologies as I do not share the same ethnicity as those I am studying. The external-insider was born and raised in an outside culture, thereby adopting its beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge. Because of specific experiences such as marginalization by their indigenous community or discontent with the beliefs of their indigenous community, the person rejects many or all of the belief systems of their indigenous community and adopts those of the studied community. The community, in turn, adopts the person into their community (Banks 1998). This differs from the external-outsider who knows little about the culture or community they are studying. They view the community or culture as intrinsically different from their own. Oftentimes, the community being studied distrusts the researcher for their lack of empathy and understanding (Banks 1998). Neither the external-insider, nor the external-outsider perfectly fit my position as a researcher in this context. I propose that my position falls somewhere between the two, as an external-insider, but without rejecting my own American culture. This will lead to a blending of the emic and etic perspectives.

Another common problem in cross-cultural research is the barrier of language differences. Guatemala is a country with twenty-one distinct Mayan languages. Most men, even those of Mayan descent, speak Spanish. However, indigenous women in the most rural of
areas rarely speak Spanish. Women act as the heads of the household and are often integral parts of CBE projects, because they are the ones providing meals and care to tourists. For this reason, interviews with women were essential to this research. I used local Q’eqchi’ translators for three of the study sites: EcoQuetzal, Lagunita Salvador and Plan Grande Quehueche. I used female translators with the research participants because it was only women who did not speak Spanish and they felt more comfortable speaking to me through other women. Having translators that are the same gender as the interviewees and that are known members of the surrounding community aided in building trust and increasing reliability of data. Usually these were close members of the family, such as daughters, who were already very aware of their family member’s thoughts and feelings about the project. My role as a female researcher gave me access to the female perspective on these CBE projects that I would not have gained otherwise. I was able to spend hours with the women in these communities making tortillas or helping with chores, which gave us time to share our experiences and talk about their interactions with ecotourism. Of course, in any situation where translators are utilized, it is important to note that information can be altered or lost during translation. Also, the relationship of power and politics between the translator and research participant can skew the information shared.

The limitations of this thesis include the short amount of time spent on location, the understanding that this is a snapshot of reality at a particular place at a specific point in time, the language barrier and the issues surrounding how different cultures define terms. It is impossible to spend enough time in each site. As a fluent Spanish and K’iche’ speaker, I have found that much is lost through translation. This study involves Spanish to English translation,
but also two indigenous Mayan languages to Spanish. In certain instances, the questions asked were not understood and had to be explained further. Many concepts that exist in the United States do not exist in rural Guatemala. The opposite is also true.

Analytical Framework

In his 2007 article, *Taiwan Aboriginal Ecotourism: Tanayiku Natural Ecology Park*, William Hipwell identifies six criteria that critical scholars “univocally regard as the key attributes of successful CBE projects” (2007:881). These criteria have been outlined previously. Although there are many more criteria that have been used to evaluate community-based ecotourism projects throughout the world, these six criteria are widely regarded to be the essential hallmarks of sustainable CBE projects (Hipwell 2007). I designed the questionnaires in a way that would elicit responses concerning these factors as they apply to each case study site, but without referring to them exactly. Some of the factors were evident without even having to ask about them, while others such as culture, were more nebulous. Of course, culture is ever-changing especially within the context of Guatemala, but indigenous groups have been more empowered over the past five years and some are starting to recognize their heritage as a valuable and precious part of life.

At times, I had to ask about these criteria outright, but only in the case of NGOs which manage or fund the CBE projects. Often, NGO employees are a bit more distanced from the project, not living in the community and usually from outside of the culture. In Guatemala, NGO employees are generally *ladinos* and have a higher level of education than the community
members. Because of this higher level of education, I was able to more directly ask about some of the criteria that require an understanding of the definition of terms.
CHAPTER FIVE
PRESENTATION OF CASE STUDIES

EcoQuetzal

Situated amongst the cloud forests in the department of Alta Verapaz, the village of Chicacnab exists very much apart from the hustle and bustle of nearby Cobán, the department’s capital city. To call it remote would be an understatement. Chicacnab is reached by bus from Cobán with a stop in Carchá to switch to another bus, which will take you as far as San Lucas, along rough dirt roads that should not be attempted by anything other than a four-wheel drive vehicle with high clearance. This part of the journey will require a half day on its own. At San Lucas you ascend into the pristine cloud forest on a steep trail that is often muddy because of the cold and wet climate of the region. After a nearly two-hour trek through farmland, second growth and old growth forest, you arrive at the village. There is no electricity in Chicacnab. The only phone in the area is powered by a battery and functions for one hour in the morning and another in the afternoon.

Life in Chicacnab, like much of Guatemala, revolves around corn: planting, weeding, fertilizing and harvesting the fields. The community holds its own forest reserve as do many families, but much of the lower slopes in the valley are deforested and dedicated to sustaining the families that live there. The village is situated around a central area at the bottom of the valley that holds a primary school, a Catholic church and a small store. Also, currently being built is a community center where the village can hold meetings and host events. The families of Chicacnab live scattered about the hillsides of the surrounding valleys in houses made of
wood and either thatched or tin roofs. The people here are Maya Q’eqchi’ and many speak only their indigenous language or have learned enough Spanish only to sell their goods in Cobán on market days.

What makes Chicacnab unique is the prolific abundance of the national symbol and bird of Guatemala, the Resplendent Quetzal. The Quetzal is listed as a protected species in Guatemala due to habitat loss and hunting for food and trade. However, the forests around Chicacnab house the highest density of Quetzals in the country. In 1988, a group of German graduate students came to Alta Verapaz to complete an inventory and monitoring project for the Quetzal. They found that the mountainous areas of Caquipec, Guaxac y Yalijux were home to the highest numbers of the bird in the world, roughly 145 per square kilometer. Chicacnab happens to be located in the middle of Caquipec. One of the German students, David Unger, found the forests around Chicacnab of particular interest and decided to found an NGO with a group of Guatemalan counterparts. In 1994, the Asociación Biósfera y Desarrollo Agrícola Sostenible (BIDAS) was formed to promote environmental, social, cultural and educational development in the department of Alta Verapaz. BIDAS acts as the umbrella organization for Proyecto Ecológico Quetzal (EcoQuetzal), which is currently BIDAS’ only project.

EcoQuetzal is a non-profit NGO located in Cobán, “dedicated to the conservation and protection of the forests of the department of Alta Verapaz” (EcoQuetzal 2008). EcoQuetzal works with Mayan Q’eqchi’ communities to promote the sustainable use of the natural resources found in the area. Within those communities, they aim to identify alternative sources of work for people traditionally dependent on agriculture only. The current programs of EcoQuetzal include sustainable agriculture working with over 1,000 rural farmers,
ecotourism, bio-monitoring of the local bird populations and environmental education to strengthen awareness and respect for nature. The mission of EcoQuetzal is “to conserve and protect the habitat of the Quetzal and other species of wildlife in the forests of the department of Alta Verapaz by providing its inhabitants alternatives and promoting the rational and sustainable use of renewable natural resources. We employ various components such as sustainable agriculture, bio-monitoring of bird species, and handicraft and ecotourism (low-impact tourism) projects as alternatives to protect the sub-tropical rain and cloud forests of Alta Verapaz and improve the quality of life for the rural poor inhabitants of this region” (EcoQuetzal 2008).

EcoQuetzal has created many projects over the years, but its largest and most enduring program has been ecotourism. In fact, EcoQuetzal is used as a model for burgeoning ecotourism endeavors all over the country. They are considered to be the most sustainable and successful community-based ecotourism program in Guatemala and are often asked to share their experience with start-ups in other regions. They have obtained support from various international institutions such as National Fish and Wildlife Foundation of the United States, GEO Tropical Rainforest of Hamburg, Germany and La Unión Mundial para la Conservación de la Naturaleza.

EcoQuetzal sends tourists to stay with indigenous families in either Chicacnab or San Lucas. The program allows tourists to experience everyday life and learn about Q’eqchi’ culture. They may participate in daily activities with the family, learning to make tortillas, weaving or farming corn. Most tourists choose to go hiking in the cloud forest with a guide
from the family, where they can see wildlife such as quetzals, trogons, toucans, jaguars and howler monkeys. If staying more than one night, the visitor has the option to explore the

Figure 3: EcoQuetzal’s ecotourism project sites
Source: EcoQuetzal website

biological station operated by EcoQuetzal, the Mirador and a ceremonial cave sacred to the Maya. The tourist eats traditional Q’eqchi’ meals with their family and is provided with basic accommodations including a bed with at least a foam mattress located in an area slightly apart from the family. Each family has space for only two tourists, so larger groups are split among families.

There are three groups of families that participate in the project: two groups from Chicacnab and one from San Lucas. Originally, the people in Chicacnab were wary of the idea of hosting tourists because they had no conceptual basis for understanding what tourism or a
tourist was. Some families warmed to the idea after learning more about EcoQuetzal’s intentions and receiving trainings on tourism. As these families became involved and began receiving tourists, other people in Chicacnab recognized that they were losing out on an opportunity to add to their household income and wanted to become involved. EcoQuetzal, wanting to mitigate any possible community conflict and secure the sustainability of the project, allowed for inclusivity in the project. Today, all but two of the families in Chicacnab receive tourists.

EcoQuetzal obtained a big boost in tourist numbers in 2001, when the project was included in the Lonely Planet guidebook. Soon, Moon Guides followed suit and added EcoQuetzal to their publication. As more and more tourists got off the bus at San Lucas and began hiking toward Chicacnab, the people of San Lucas felt that they should be included in the project as well. Why should Chicacnab receive benefits from having tourists but not their own community? EcoQuetzal relented and a third group of families was formed in San Lucas. Because San Lucas is close to the road and has electricity, many tourists that otherwise could not hike into Chicacnab or prefer more comfortable accommodations often choose to stay with a family in San Lucas, though many are ladino.

Families receive tourists on a rotational basis. Each group takes its turn and the families take turns within each group. This way the earnings from the program are distributed evenly between the families. One person from the group operates a radio to receive updates on tourist groups. When a tourist books a trip at the EcoQuetzal office in Cobán, the radio operator is notified when and where the tourist should be met and tells the office staff who will be meeting the tourist in San Lucas.
Tourists pay 300 quetzales (approximately $40 USD) for each night of their stay per person. This fee includes lodging, three meals and a guide. The guide is a member of the family (or two) who not only accompanies the visitor on the hike to and from their homestay, but also is available to take the visitor to any of the nearby attractions, such as the caves and biological station. The host family receives 15Q for lodging, 15Q for each meal and 35Q for guiding the tourist. The radio operator receives 10Q of the 300 paid by the tourist for advising the families. 15Q is deposited directly into a bank account for the community to use as they wish. For every 300Q paid by each tourist, assuming that they eat three meals with the family, the family and/or community receives 120Q or 40%. The other 180Q (60%) goes to paying the administrative costs of EcoQuetzal, such as salaries, daily operating costs and promotion of the project.

Chicagacab has elected an ecotourism committee that manages the community bank account and decides how to use the funds. This committee is also responsible for managing the community’s end of the project, communicating with EcoQuetzal about future plans for the project and what the community would like to see happen. The president of this committee is Don Marcario, a strong community leader who travelled to Ecuador as part of a group of Guatemalan CBE leaders to learn about similar projects there. Community members in Chicaca cab rely on Don Marcario to help manage and promote the project and bring more tourists to the area. Due to his experience and travels, he is able to access resources that other people in the community can not.
Ecoaldea-Maya Lagunita Salvador

More than thirty years ago, six families fled Cobán during Guatemala’s civil war looking for a place to settle that was outside the long arms of the conflict. They eventually found a place beyond all roads, beyond other villages, only reachable by boat or rough trail. They made their home there and became fishermen of the many species that reside in the waters of Rio Dulce. In 1989, the protected area of Biotopo Chocón Machacas was formally designated by the Guatemalan government in order to conserve the manatees that reside there (INGUAT 2008). The village, Lagunita Salvador, fell within the borders of this protected area. The
government considered relocating the village outside the boundaries of the biotope, but eventually relented, allowing the residents of Lagunita Salvador to stay as long as the village maintained its current size and did not infringe on the laws protecting the surrounding area (CONAP 2003).

The six families eventually grew to twenty-two. Most of the families are still fishermen, but catches have decreased greatly due to overfishing. There are not many other options for employment in the area. There is not enough land for families to grow crops other than what they require for survival. Surrounding the village is lush tropical forest, which the inhabitants of Lagunita Salvador can not utilize to make a living because of its protected status.

Five years ago two Catholic missionaries living in the village suggested that the community might benefit from a cultural center based off of the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii. Maria and Norm Kaesberg have been living and working in the Rio Dulce area for 15 years. “I originally came up with the idea of a tourism project in Lagunita Salvador as a way for people to earn money and retain a sense of pride about their culture,” (Interview #10). The foreman of the mission, Luis Xol, also thought that a tourism project could benefit the community: “there are no opportunities for work here. We can’t do anything that hurts the forest in the Reserve and we are too far away to work in the city (Rio Dulce). Tourism seemed like a good opportunity and Maria and Norm were here to help us.”

When the missionaries left Lagunita Salvador to spend time back in the states, Luis took all the money he had made as the foreman and began building the ecolodge. In three months time, the enormous wood lodge was built. The bottom floor consists of a large open room and a fairly modern kitchen. The large open room became the restaurant dining area
after tables and chairs were made. A spiral staircase leads upstairs to a long dormitory-style hallway lined with ornately carved doors. Behind each of these doors is a room. Some rooms have two single beds, while others have bunk beds. The bathroom at the end of the hall has a flush toilet, shower and a wood sink carved into the shape of a *cayuco*, the canoe used by the indigenous people of Rio Dulce. At the other end of the hallway is a balcony with seats overlooking the village square: the soccer field.

When Maria and Norm returned, they began a year-long effort to prepare the community to host tourists. Maria taught local women to cook and sanitize food for tourists and to provide hospitality services. Norm taught the men what tourists would expect from a guide. They built a store in which to sell *artesanías* (local crafts) and ran radio ads asking people from the surrounding communities to bring in their crafts. They trained guides, dancers, cooks, waiters and housekeepers. When they opened, the lodge was booked to capacity with 28 guests.

When Norm and Maria Kaesberg left Lagunita Salvador to work in other areas of Guatemala, Luis began looking for support for the project from other avenues. The community secured a grant from the Canary Islands, which allowed them to hold more training sessions and begin work on a bungalow down by the water with more private accommodations (Interview #8). The grant also allowed the village to install solar panels on the lodge and other buildings in town, whereas before the entire village had been without electricity. Luis hopes to be able to secure enough money to get solar panels for every house in the village and also dreams of bringing in satellite internet service, which would facilitate easy communication with tourists (Interview #8). As it stands now, he has to travel by boat forty-five minutes to Rio
Dulce to check the project’s email and answer phone calls from his cell phone. Cellular service in Lagunita Salvador exists, but is very spotty. When I called to let Luis know when I was coming, the connection was cut short three times before we gave up. Teachers at the local school would also like internet access to use as a teaching tool and be able to help their students set up email accounts.

After the Catholic missionaries left to return to the states, Luis began looking to local NGO Ak’Tenamit for help in training, funding and marketing of the project. Ak’Tenamit (which means “new village” in the Q’eqchi languages) began sending tourists to Lagunita Salvador and dedicated a small section of their website to promoting the project. They held more training sessions on guiding, food preparation, sanitation and hospitality. A volunteer working directly with Lagunita Salvador created a Spanish language website promoting the project. A poster was designed for promotional purposes and copies were distributed to every major hotel and tourist trap in Rio Dulce. In fact, that is how I learned of Lagunita Salvador. I saw a poster in the restaurant of the hotel I was staying in, which is a testament to the power of small-scale marketing.

These efforts paid off for the project. Tourists began pouring into the community, some three hundred groups in the first year alone. The second year saw four hundred (Interview #9). Then, in March of 2008, four Belgian tourists were kidnapped at a popular tourist stop on the Rio Dulce and held hostage due to a land rights dispute between a village and the Guatemalan government. Since that time, tourism numbers have greatly decreased in the area, particularly in Lagunita Salvador, where the government suspected the tourists had been taken (mistakenly).
Not only has the project had to contend with security issues, but Guatemala’s park service, Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (CONAP), has challenged the building of the lodge and bungalows (Interview #10). Because Lagunita Salvador lies within the boundaries of the biotope, CONAP can approve or disallow a project of this size. No one from Lagunita Salvador consulted CONAP when building the lodge. When CONAP found out what was happening, they threatened to shut it down (Interview #8). Luis explained the project to them and how he had taken care to make sure it was ecologically sensitive to the environment and sustainable. CONAP eventually relented after the government of the Canary Islands committed 65,557€ to the development of the project. Now, Lagunita Salvador works closely with CONAP to ensure that proper guidelines are followed to protect the ecosystem of the laguna.

Ecoaldea-Maya Lagunita Salvador charges $10 for a single room, $15 for double occupancy, and $22 for triple occupancy in the lodge. Prices for the bungalows with private bath have not yet been determined as the bungalows are in the finishing stages of completion. The restaurant serves traditional Q’eqchi cuisine such as Kak’ik (a turkey leg soup), seafood and handmade tortillas. Breakfast ranges from $2.50 to $5.00, lunch from $5.00 to $8.00 and dinners cost between $2.50 and $8.00. Local women, including members of Luis’ family, are employed in the kitchen. At the time of my visit, the food was well prepared, however there were not many options available and often I ate whatever was on hand. Perhaps this is due to the sharp decrease in the amount of visitors since the time of the kidnappings. In any event, the restaurant was unprepared for tourists, which could have negative impacts on future visitors.
Guides for excursions to surrounding areas require an additional fee, starting at $8. Lagunita Salvador offers hikes to sacred caves, rivers, waterfalls, nearby peaks overlooking Rio Dulce, and other larger tourist attractions such as Livingston, Siete Altares and Aguas Calientes. As Lagunita Salvador is located on the laguna, tourists can also explore the hidden back channels of the laguna in traditional cayucos free of charge or with a guide for a small fee. The project also offers trip packages from 2 days and 1 night up to 4 days and 3 nights, including food, lodging and guide fees. Prices range from $70 to $140 for the all-inclusive packages.

These fees are divided between guides, kitchen staff, cleaning staff, and Luis. Guides receive all of the money paid by tourists for excursions. Kitchen staff receives a wage for each meal they cook, but that wage depends on how many tourists they are cooking for. Luis retains much of the money paid for lodging as he acts as the general manager of the project and is often the only person on staff when small groups (such as myself) arrive. The project has donated money to the community for new soccer stands, supplies for the health center and a new roof for the school. The ecotourism committee decides how much money goes to guides, kitchen staff, the community, infrastructure improvements and Luis acting as manager. Because the project is only in its third year, some of these numbers are still being determined and change when necessary.

Though Luis is currently managing the project, he stated several times that he does not want to act as the manager in perpetuity. He wants to hand it over as much as possible to the community to manage. The tourism committee in the village would be poised to assume this responsibility. He is not the president of the committee, though he is a member. He also said that he does not expect to recoup all the money he invested in the project. He wants the
project to be managed by the committee and would like to step back soon and let them take
more control of the day to day operations. What is clear is that he has the vision and follow-
through to take an idea and turn it into reality, quickly and effectively.

Figure 5: the ecolodge at Lagunita Salvador
Source: Author

Plan Grande Quehueche

The village of Plan Grande Quehueche is located eight kilometers from the Caribbean
Sea and the town of Livingston. It is accessible only by foot through a system of trails that wind
through the Rio Sarstun Special Protection Reserve. Quehueche is surrounded by tropical
forest, though much of it has been denuded in order to plant corn. A crystalline stream runs
through the center of the village, providing fresh water and a cool place to escape the humid
afternoon heat. The people of Quehueche are Maya Q’eqchi. Many of the women in the village speak Q’eqchi only.

Figure 6: Map of the community-based ecotourism projects at Plan Grande Quehueche and Lagunita Salvador
Source: Ak’Tenamit

In 1999, a Spanish volunteer working with local NGO Ak’Tenamit visited Quehueche to evaluate possible development projects for the area. He suggested to Ak’Tenamit that Quehueche be considered for an ecotourism project and began discussing the proposal with the inhabitants of the village. Most did not know what a tourist was or what a tourism project would entail. After much explanation and basic training sessions, the community decided to form an ecotourism committee with the purpose of “developing tourist activity in a responsible
way; in such a way that the arrival of visitors would aid in the revaluing and strengthening of its
traditions, at the same time supporting the sustainable development of the local town and
conserve the protected area it is located in,” (INGUAT website).

Ak’Tenamit helped the committee secure a grant in order to build a lodge, bathroom
and shower facilities for tourists. The lodge is a two-story wood building split into four large
rooms with single foam-mattress beds, mosquito nets, table and chairs. The bathrooms are a
short walk away from the lodge, across the path and up a small hill. They have two flush toilets
and a small sink with running water. The bathing facilities contain two showers, slightly down
the hill from the bathroom, with cold water and cement flooring. Quehueche is blessed with
electricity, making night forays from the lodge to the bathroom less intimidating for the
average tourist. Quehueche’s facilities are comfortable, though rustic. It is difficult to forget
that you are in the middle of the jungle when large green lizards greet you from the toilet basin
in the middle of the night.

Quehueche offers trails through the jungle, visits to caves, rivers and lagoons, waterfalls
and to Quehueche beach (which is actually located near Livingston), Mayan stories told by the
fire, traditional dances, music and ceremonies. One of its main attractions is Siete Altares
(Seven Altars), a natural paradise in the dense jungle, formed by a river that cascades into
seven waterfalls with aqua pools perfect for swimming, all of which flows directly into the
Caribbean Sea. The cultural exchange is one of the most relevant aspects of this project. The
entire town gathers on the first night of the tourists’ visit to share a traditional Mayan
ceremony, play the marimba and dance. The women are especially open and encourage the
tourists to dance with them.
Although the project is owned and managed by the ecotourism committee in Quehueche, tourists book their stay through Ak’Tenamit who advises the committee when groups are coming to visit. Guides from the community then arrange to accompany the tourist to Quehueche, much in the same manner as EcoQuetzal. Ak’Tenamit also coordinates the marketing and promotion of the project through their website (Ak’Tenamit 2008).

Tourists eat their meals with families from the village, who use a rotational system to ensure that each participating family benefits equally from the project. During my visit, I ate with various families and found this to be one of the most valuable aspects of my time there. It allowed me to get to know individual people within Quehueche and experience a slice of everyday life of the Q’eqchi. The price per person per day is Q300 (approximately $40USD). This includes a guide to and from the point of departure, which may be Livingston or the Tatín project of Ak’Tenamit, in addition to all the previously specified activities that may be carried out, and lodging in the guest house with three meals. A two day stay is suggested to be able to enjoy all the activities, but one day is sufficient for fit people and a short visit.

The ecotourism committee, which is comprised of four men and three women, manages the money that the community earns through tourism activities. The money is deposited into a community account controlled by the committee. At the end of each calendar year the money in the account is distributed. 10% of the money goes to maintenance of the project, 10% goes to the ecotourism committee, 10% goes to buying medical supplies for community use, 10% goes to the school for supplies and paying teachers, and the other 60% goes to the families that work with the project. Because the families receive tourists on a rotational basis, the money is more or less fairly distributed between participants.
The CBE project in Quehueche has been strengthened by its excellent local leadership. The president of the committee travelled to Ecuador to learn about CBE projects there as part of a group of community leaders from Guatemala. Because of this trip, Oscar was able to network with other CBE project leaders like Don Marcario from EcoQuetzal and learn about aspects of ecotourism that are important to the functioning of the project at Quehueche.

“Now, when we face a difficulty, we at least know what we can do to solve the problem. Before, we were dependent on Ak’Tenamit to help us. Also, I can ask Marcario what he would do or talk to other people I met on the trip,” (Interview #19).

Plan Grande Quehueche has been receiving tourists for six years. Since March of 2008, the number of tourists has decreased dramatically due to the aforementioned kidnapping of the Belgian tourists and the deterioration of the security level throughout the country in general (mostly due to the recent changeover in presidential administrations). On the average, the project receives thirty to thirty-five groups of tourists per year. These groups vary in size from two to fifteen people, but the majority come in groups of two to five people. Twenty-three families in Quehueche are involved in the tourism project. The one or two families that choose not to work with the project do so due to time constraints.

The people of Plan Grande Quehueche are still excited about tourism in their community and seem genuinely happy to have tourists there. On the first night of my visit, the entire community arrived at the ecolodge to welcome me. The local pastor blessed my trip and led the community in praying for me. Then, a group of women performed a Mayan ceremony with the four cardinal points displayed in different colors of flower petals. Afterward, we
danced to traditional marimba music played by men from the community. This is the welcome they give to all tourists who come to Quehueche.

The community of Plan Grande Quehueche has a desire to increase the magnitude of their project. They have been working for six years and still have goals for improving the service they offer. They have plans to build a café, akin to Lagunita Salvador’s restaurant. That way tourists do not have to wait for a family member to come bring them to a house in order to eat a meal. They can simply walk across the road to have a meal. Sometimes tourists are tired when they arrive at Quehueche and would like to spend time resting and relaxing before having a meal. Ak’Tenamit has been working with Quehueche to find funding for the café and hopes to have it built by the end of next year.

Ak’Tenamit has played an important role in the development of the CBE project in Quehueche. This NGO was founded by an American who was travelling in Guatemala and recognized a need in the people of Rio Dulce for greater access to education and health care. Today, Ak’Tenamit runs a school for Q’eqchi children on the Rio Tatín, between Livingston and Rio Dulce and a health center on the Rio Dulce. The school teaches children from kindergarten through high school levels and tuition is extremely low compared to most other schools in Guatemala. There are scholarships available for those who can not afford tuition. The children live on-site in dormitories so that they do not have to travel from their rural communities on a daily basis. Ak’Tenamit is considered by many to be a model NGO because of its focus on rural development, especially education. “We believe that the best way to help the people in this area is to provide quality education for rural children and teach them a set of skills during high school that will allow them to return to their communities and become instigators of change,”
One of these learning tracks is ecotourism. There are 13 students currently in the ecotourism track and they learn everything from designing community projects, to hosting tourists, to guiding, to cooking and serving food. They practice these skills working in Ak’Tenamit’s restaurant in Livingston (BugaMama) or guiding tourists that come to the school site. Many of these students noted that they would like to return to their villages and start ecotourism projects of their own.

Because of its relationship with CBE and rural development in the area, Ak’Tenamit as an NGO has aided Lagunita Salvador and Plan Grande Quehueche in the development of their CBE projects, though it plays different roles in each community. One of Ak’Tenamit’s former ecotourism students is now directing the ecotourism office in Guatemala City and is responsible for promoting and marketing community projects in the Rio Dulce area (see Figure 7 below).

“When people see the website, posters or brochures, they call the office here and I give them more details and help arrange the trip for them. I also make contacts with tour operators who send groups to these projects. Some people can’t physically make the trek to Quehueche, so I often send them to Lagunita Salvador. More adventurous people really like the idea of hiking into a village in the jungle and I send them to Quehueche,” (Interview #15).

Ak’Tenamit has also been involved in providing training sessions to both of these communities. However, their role in Quehueche is much more involved due to the history of funding and developing the project there.
With help from Ak'Tenamit, Quehueche plans to implement a trail improvement project soon. The trails from Livingston and the Ak'Tenamit project are very rocky and muddy during rainy season. The ecotourism committee has also been discussing ways to provide private bathroom facilities for tourists so that they do not have to walk outside at night. This may mean building another bungalow with private bathrooms apart from the lodge or renovating the lodge to include a private bathroom in some or all of the rooms. The ecotourism committee does not have the money to complete these kinds of improvements, especially because the number of tourists per year is low. With higher number of tourists, there is more
money at the end of the year for advancing the infrastructure of the project. The committee is looking toward Ak’Tenamit to provide the funding necessary for some of these projects. In addition to the infrastructure, Ak’Tenamit will be providing training sessions for four new guides this year. This training will focus on nature interpretation and tourist expectations of guides.

Figure 8: the community of Plan Grande Quehueche gathers to welcome the visitors with Marimba and dancing
Source: Author
Chiabal

The village of Chiabal resides high above the rest of Guatemala, perched atop the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, the tallest mountain range in Central America. The top of the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes is a broad plateau where several villages are located including Chiabal which boasts an elevation of nearly 11,000 feet above sea level. The countryside surrounding Chiabal is distinctive. Large rocky outcroppings dot the fields where sheep graze, enclosed by natural fences comprised of a plant the locals call cola de gallo. The people of the cumbre (as the plateau is called) are mostly Mam, though some outlying villages speak K’iche’ and Popti’. Like elsewhere in Guatemala they are farmers, though due to elevation constraints only potato, cauliflower, fava bean and some corn is grown. Most families own at least a few sheep and llamas and alpacas can still be seen, left over from a development project which ended in 2006.

To the outsider Chiabal feels as if it is on another planet, separate from the rest of Guatemala. Though accessible by dirt road, it is far removed from the activity of Huehuetenango, the department capital in the northwest portion of the country. Chiabal is thirty minutes by bus from Todos Santos, a town famous for its horse race, beautiful traje worn by both women and men, and towering mountains forested in pinabete, an endemic and endangered species of pine. Tourists pass by Chiabal in buses bound for Todos Santos daily, but whereas Todos Santos has become inundated with tourists, Chiabal is a village still relatively unknown.

The idea of developing tourism in Chiabal came about in the mid-1990s. Asociación de Organizaciones de los Cuchumatanes (ASOCUCH), an NGO based out of Huehuetenango that works exclusively with villages in the Cuchumatanes, has been working with the agricultural
cooperative in Chiabal for over twenty years. Chiabal’s cooperative, Unión Cuchumateca, has received various projects from ASOCUCH, mostly centering on agriculture and marketing. The hallmark of Unión Cuchumateca is its slaughterhouse facility which produces high quality chorizo and longaniza made from local sheep. In recent years, the slaughterhouse has fallen into disarray due to corrupt management on the part of Unión Cuchumateca and general disinterest from the cooperative’s members.

ASOCUCH has existed for more than fifteen years in one form or another and has weathered various transformations in management and concept as development trends have changed. Originally called PCUCH, then PROCUCH and finally ASOCUCH, its goal has always been to provide assistance to the villages of the Cuchumatanes Mountains region through development projects. Funding for ASOCUCH has been provided, nearly exclusively, by the government of Holland, with ASOCUCH writing grants for specific projects. Historically, ASOCUCH has focused on agriculture projects as most villages have relied on subsistence farming for hundreds of years. Most recently, Holland has been most interested in funding environmental conservation projects, moving away from agriculture projects that sometimes promote environmental degradation. This interest in conservation has yielded ASOCUCH Ambiental, a $5,554,260.00 project replete with new staff, vehicles and projects in twenty villages, including Chiabal.

As ecotourism was becoming a buzz word in development in the mid 1990s, many embassies and NGOs were looking for opportunities to implement ecotourism projects in their own regions. Personnel from the embassy of Holland on a visit to the Cuchumantanes with ASOCUCH found just such an opportunity. ASOCUCH represents over 28 organizations located
in villages in the Cuchumatanes. These 28 villages comprise four separate Mayan ethnicities. A tourism program was conceived by which tourists could visit three different villages in the area with three separate cultural groups, in three distinct ecosystems. Tourists would stay with families in one of six houses in each community which would be built by ASOCUCH, partake in daily life with the family and go hiking with a local guide to volcanoes, mountain peaks, waterfalls and other attractions. This project mirrored EcoQuetzal’s project in Cobán.

The embassy personnel and ASOCUCH developed the project together, informing the members of the cooperatives in the communities and gaining their support. However, two of the communities, Climentoro and Petatán, ended up withdrawing from the project after several years of wavering support on the part of ASOCUCH. Three houses were eventually built with families in Chiabal and tourist groups began arriving, mostly from Commundo, a Dutch-based NGO which organizes volunteer vacations where the participants work as well as travel in developing countries. As the three families in Chiabal began to accrue benefits from the project, other members of the community began to voice concerns that the project was not benefiting the community as a whole. They argued that the project was property of ASOCUCH and not Chiabal because the community had never approved it at a meeting and was not involved in its management or control. The tourism project in Chiabal began to suffer as interest in the project waned on the part of ASOCUCH’s board of directors. Two Tourism Coordinators were fired and a third has been overburdened with various projects not related to tourism; projects that accrue more economic benefits for ASOCUCH.

In 2006, ASOCUCH received funding for ASOCUCH Ambiental and began working in the newly designated Todos Santos Forest Reserve which spans the area between Chiabal and
Todos Santos. However, because ASOCUCH lacks experience working with protected areas another NGO, Fundación para la Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación (FUNDAECO), was contracted by ASOCUCH to work within the reserve near Chiabal. FUNDAECO, a Guatemalan organization, has worked throughout the country in various national parks and reserves and has an excellent track record of integrating local people in the management and decision-making processes of reserves.

FUNDAECO began working in the reserve by holding several community meetings in Chiabal and Todos Santos in order to ascertain what projects the communities would like to see implemented in and near the reserve. Chiabal wanted to build a trail to the Piedra Cuache, a tremendous rock formation atop a mountain overlooking their valley, for tourists to visit. Piedra Cuache is located within the new reserve, but the part of the mountain where the trail would ascend to enter the reserve is community land. The community voted to donate the land and even decided that local men would donate their labor to build the trail. Local women bring lunch to the workers every day on a rotational basis. As of August 2008, three quarters of the trail had been built including four rest huts and an observatory.

The other tourism component of FUNDAECO’s work in Chiabal is focused on providing a space for community members to sell their artisan goods and other wares to tourists. Again, the community decided to donate the land and labor for this project. The land they donated has a historic building on it, a building that served as a jail during the civil war. After many discussions the community decided to keep the building due to its history. Carpenters from Chiabal have been working to restore the building since July of 2008. In addition to the community center, the people of Chiabal have decided they would like to build several rooms
within the center to house tourists, or perhaps a few bungalows behind the center that could hold up to twenty tourists. The community views the three houses built with families to be a private project of ASOCUCH, not of the community and would like to offer tourists the opportunity to stay in a setting with more privacy, apart from families. Also, the ASOCUCH houses can only house two people per room or a group of six split up between the three families. Often families travelling together would prefer to stay together, in which case they would have the choice to stay with families or in bungalows.

Figure 9: Chiabal community-based ecotourism brochure (Spanish only)
Source: ASOCUCH

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As of this writing, ASOCUCH charges $15USD per person for a one night stay, including three meals with a family. For a half day excursion with a guide, the cost is $10 extra or $17 for a full day. Guides can accompany tourists to the Piedra Cuache, the Torre (the highest non-volcanic point in Central America), Piedra Piksik, or to Todos Santos where tourists can explore the market, museum and ruins. Tourists are also welcome to make tortillas, learn to weave, pasture the sheep and llamas and help with the farming of potatoes and milpa. Of the $15 each person pays, $2 goes back to ASOCUCH and $1 goes to a community bank account. The family receives $12. Each of the three families was required to sign a contract with ASOCUCH stating that for a five year period after the tourism house was built, they would return $2 to ASOCUCH for every tourist in order to help recoup the costs of building the houses in Chiabal. The houses were built with grant money received from the government of Holland.

Figure 10: Overlooking Chiabal from Piedra Cuache
Source: Author

CHAPTER SIX

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FINDINGS

While these case studies reveal significant differences, there are common themes that allow for comparisons across the board (Table 3). This presentation demonstrates the basic components of each case study, contrasting in a side-by-side manner and serves as an overview.

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<td>CONAP Netherlands</td>
<td>Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>EcoQuetzal</td>
<td>Missionaries Ak’Tenamit</td>
<td>Ak’Tenamit</td>
<td>ASOCUCH INTECAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Beneficiaries</td>
<td>60 families</td>
<td>22 families</td>
<td>23 families</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Beneficiaries</td>
<td>3 communities</td>
<td>5 communities</td>
<td>1 community</td>
<td>One village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services Offered</td>
<td>Lodging with indigenous families, guiding, artesanías</td>
<td>Ecolodge, private bungalows (future) traditional restaurant, artesanías, guiding, dances</td>
<td>Ecolodge, meals with families, artesanías, guiding, dances, marimba</td>
<td>Lodging with indigenous families, ecolodge (future), café (future), guiding, artesanías</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Numbers</td>
<td>~250 annually</td>
<td>~400 annually</td>
<td>30-35 groups annually</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotation System</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>__</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 4: Case study comparison table
Source: Author
As introduced previously, Hipwell’s 6 criteria for successful community-based ecotourism projects were used to provide a framework for evaluating each case study site. Like all case study research, these examples represent a snapshot in time and thus, the evaluation of these sites is limited to this snapshot.

**PRESENTATION OF CRITERIA**

**Criterion #1**

To begin, we will examine Hipwell’s first criterion: tourism activities must be small enough to be managed solely by the community without outside support. This factor is crucial. Of all of the six criteria, this emerged as one of the most critical to the ability of a community to own and operate the project themselves. If the project is not small enough to be managed completely by the local community, an outside organization, such as an NGO, will have to be relied upon to provide logistical support to the project. When this is the case, the sustainability of the project comes into question. One of the goals of CBE is to provide communities with an additional form of income generation. If the project is too large or complicated for the local community to administer unaided, it will almost never be sustainable over the long term.

This criterion may differ between projects, regions, countries and contexts. What is small-scale in one context may be too large in another. In the context of Guatemala, the smaller the project is, the more able the community will be to manage it. Community capacity can be built through training sessions provided by NGOs or other CBE projects in the region. The area where communities struggle without outside support is often in promotion of the project and infrastructure improvements. Technologies such as cell phones are common even
in rural Guatemala, but internet and email are usually the domain of the younger generations. NGOs often have the capacity and connections to create websites, design and print posters and brochures and create relationships with tour operators around the world. They also have greater access to funding opportunities for improving infrastructure such as trails and lodging. As the web of promotion gets larger with websites and email, communities may find it difficult to manage this aspect of the project without outside support. If someone within the community has this capacity or can be trained to do so, the project can be managed wholly by the community.

EcoQuetzal has sacrificed the small scale of their project in order to accommodate open entry to involvement. This is a difficult and dangerous position. Because the project found success (in tourist numbers) in its first few years in operation, other families and communities desired to be included. They wanted to improve their quality of life through involvement in the project. However, as more and more families were included, the project only became larger. Now, with two separate (and conflict-ridden) communities receiving tourists, the project has become so large that handing it over to the exclusive management of Chicacnab and San Lucas would require tremendous effort. Chicacnab has a tourism committee that makes decisions concerning the project on behalf of the community. The committee’s role is to co-manage the project together with EcoQuetzal, but without the NGO to aid them, they believe they could not manage. As a member of the committee explained:

“EcoQuetzal should not be running the project anymore because they don’t do enough for us. If we were in charge, we could keep all the money from the tourists and invest it back into the project and the community. But we don’t have computers or internet and
we don’t speak English, so we can’t do it. We don’t know how to bring the tourists here without them (EcoQuetzal),” (Interview #6).

Additionally, EcoQuetzal has been managing the CBE project for 12 years. Staff at EcoQuetzal expressed reluctance towards potentially forfeiting their jobs if the community were to decide they wanted to manage the project by themselves. EcoQuetzal employs 2 full-time staff members whose salaries are paid by revenues from the CBE project. If EcoQuetzal were to hand over management of the project wholly to the community, these staff members would lose their livelihood. Because this project is not small-scale enough to be run by the local community, EcoQuetzal does not fulfill the first criterion.

Lagunita Salvador has often been oppressed by its fixed borders inside the biotope. In the case of the CBE project, this restriction might act as a blessing. There are only 22 families living in the village and that number will be slow to increase due to the lack of land. Offspring and their families have already chosen to emigrate elsewhere as they struggle to grow enough food to sustain themselves (Interview #9). The number of families has facilitated the small-scale nature of their CBE project. The project has always been managed by members of the local community without outside support. It is true that the project has received support in the form of funding and training from outside entities, but it has always been managed wholly by the community. No NGO from afar designed the project or makes management decisions. The idea for the project came from a foreigner, but the project was designed and implemented by local people. In fact, the original idea of Maria Kaesberg has been completely transformed from just a Mayan cultural center, to a center that blends Mayan culture with nature tourism
and community tourism, yet still remaining small enough that the day-to-day operations are managed by the tourism committee. Because Lagunita Salvador already manages their project without the oversight of an NGO and the population of the isolated village is small and land availability is nonexistent, the project has fulfilled the first criterion.

Plan Grande Quehueche has a similar project with a similar size. The community is comprised of 25 families, with 23 actively involved in the project. Quehueche manages every aspect of their project except for the marketing and booking of tours. When the representative from NGO Ak’Tenamit notifies them of a tourist group, they are in charge of notifying the families in rotation to care for the tourist, the guides and cooks. The family members travel to either Livingston or Rio Tatín and guide the tourists back to Quehueche. The community gathers and welcomes the tourists. The community manages essentially every aspect of the project besides the marketing and initial contact with the tourist. This situation could be altered so that Quehueche manages all aspects of the project. Ak’Tenamit could continue to host information about the project on their website and brochures, but could add local contact information so that tourists could arrange their visit directly with the community. As Quehueche has a tourism committee that oversees the project, that person could be the president of the committee. Ak’Tenamit also sends groups to visit Quehueche from tour operators located in the capital. They could continue to do so until the tour operators have become comfortable sending groups to Quehueche and then urge the companies to arrange tours with the community leader directly. This way, community capacity in Quehueche will be increased and the project can be managed exclusively by the tourism committee. The size of the project is certainly manageable by the community and, for all intents and purposes, the vast
majority of the project is owned and managed by Quehueche. Quehueche is an excellent example of a small-scale operation in the context of Guatemala.

Chiabal’s project is still being developed, which makes it difficult to evaluate its manageability on the part of the community. Additionally, two different CBE project have been merged, increasing the complexity of the matter. If we evaluate the project on the assumption that it will eventually function with all of its planned segments (bungalows, accommodations with families, community center, trail network), it becomes even more obscure. Chiabal is a much larger town than Lagunita Salvador, Chicacnab or Quehueche, which may work to its detriment. As benefits accrue to those involved in the project, more people may ask to be included (as evidenced by EcoQuetzal). If they are excluded from involvement, community conflicts could increase dramatically, with negative results for the CBE project. On the other hand, the community is cohesive and organized for the first time in fifteen years. The important factor at play here is that the community has been included in the developing and management of the more recent project headed by FUNDAECO. This has helped to heal the negative feelings the community held toward past projects headed by ASOCUCH and the community cooperative, Unión Cuchumateca. One community member noted, “working with FUNDAECO has been good. We support this project and feel like they listen to us and let us make most of the decisions,” (Interview #28).

The CBE project in Chiabal is beginning to grow to a size that might not be manageable by the community on its own. With a community center, a store selling artesanías, possible bungalows, a café, a trail to Piedra Cuache and community guides, and the three existing host family houses, this project could eventually have so many facets that the community may not
be able to manage on their own. Furthermore, coordinators of the CBE project from ASOCUCH and FUNDAECO have no plan for handing over management of the project to the community anytime in the foreseeable future. “That’s not something that we are planning for yet. We would like to let the community manage the project, but it won’t be feasible for a long time,” (Interview #23). Because this project is not technically up and running at 100% capacity yet, there really is not enough information to know whether the community will be able to manage the project in the future without outside support.

**Criterion #2**

The second criterion outlined in Hipwell’s article, a broad representation of community members must be actively involved in the project, speaks to the importance of community participation and support. It is not enough that only a handful of well-connected individuals or families are actively involved in the project. Often these are the people who are included in other prominent positions and projects. If this same small group continues to control access to other projects, community support may decrease and resentment may build toward the project in general. For this reason, it is important that a full and diverse representation of community members is involved in the CBE project. In the case of Guatemala, this may mean both men and women, ladino and indigenous, Catholic and Evangelical. To include all groups in the project ensures that benefits are more equally distributed across the community and that no group feels excluded because of their level of income, religious affiliation, gender or race.

Because EcoQuetzal has allowed open access to involvement in the CBE project by both Chicacnab and San Lucas, they have ensured a broad representation of community members.
Nearly every family has chosen to become host families and guides for tourists. “I think there are 2 families in Chicacnab that do not host tourists because they live too far away. Almost everyone has tourists in their homes,” (Interview #6). With the high level of participation by nearly all community members, broad representation is assured.

The project at Lagunita Salvador has come a long way in involving a more diverse representation of community members in the project. The planning stages of the project actively involved only a few people from the local community, though many were consulted on matters concerning its development (Interview #12). As the project moved from the planning stages to implementation, more people became involved. Guides were trained from the local community, women were taught to prepare food for tourists (though during my stay only members of Luis’ family cooked), and people from both Lagunita Salvador and the surrounding communities brought their artesanías to be sold. The board of directors is made up of both men and women from Lagunita. However, Luis is the general manager of the project. He runs the day-to-day operations, his family often is conveniently available to cook for tourists, he is a member of the board of directors and he lives next-door to the ecolodge, so he is always there if something is needed. His is one of the contact numbers on the project’s web site and he is responsible for travelling to Rio Dulce to check email inquires concerning the project. It is true that he has many months of his salary invested in this project and therefore has an incentive to see it succeed. Luis has done well to involve as many people in the project as possible. He has said that in the future he would like to “hand over control of the project to someone else in the community,” (Interview #8), but his leadership is an important aspect of the project’s
functioning. As it stands now, the project is satisfactory in its broad representation of community members.

Plan Grande Quehueche has done exceedingly well in involving nearly everyone in their community in the CBE project, which is why it stands out as the model for other ecotourism projects. 23 of 25 families work as guides and provide meals for tourists in their homes. When tourists arrive, community members play marimba, dance and participate in a traditional ceremony to welcome them. On my visit to Quehueche in July of 2008, more than 60 people attempted to cram into the ecolodge in order to welcome me, overflowing into the rainy night outdoors. They are not forced to welcome the tourist. They have no economic incentive to show up. As one woman explained, “we like to have you tourists come to our village. Everyone is happy when the tourists come,” (Interview #21). Plan Grande Quehueche has done an excellent job of involving the entire community in the project, which is another reason they stand out as the model of effective CBE in Guatemala.

The CBE project in Chiabal has a long history with many different community and NGO players. The initial project headed by ASOCUCH involved only three families from the community as well as the cooperative Unión Cuchumateca who directs this part of the project. These three families host tourists in one-room houses next to their own which were built by ASOCUCH, so the families benefit, but the community does not benefit as a whole. Because former leaders of the cooperative stole money from the accounts, the community is wary of any project headed by them. Accordingly, the part of the project that offers homestays with indigenous families would merit an unsatisfactory rank. However, in the past two years the project has undergone a transformation with the inclusion of work from FUNDAECO. The
community has decided to broadly support the new project and whenever a decision must be made concerning it, a town meeting is called and “everyone attends. If the heads of the family can’t attend, they will send older children,” (Interview #22). At one of these meetings, the town decided to form a tourism committee and elected the members themselves. However, the committee members are all men. The town also elects new guides, all of which are men. Women participate in the town meetings, have a committee to sell their artesanías to tourists, and bring food to the men who are building the trail system and the community center. Much of this is due to the fact that the women in Chiabal can sometimes be uncomfortable in new roles that men traditionally hold, especially when they have a lower level of education and feel that they might not have anything important to add. Chiabal is a mix of positives and negatives when it comes to including a broad representation of community members that are actively involved in the project. In the past two years, the situation has improved dramatically, but there is still more that could be done. As of August of 2008, this criterion would be fulfilled satisfactorily.

Criterion #3

The third criterion defined in Hipwell’s article requires that the project benefit the community as a whole. This is an important distinction; one of the most prevalent critiques of CBE argues that these projects often benefit only a select group of people from the community who often have a higher level of education, access to opportunities or position within the community (Belsky 1999). When this occurs, CBE becomes a tool to allow the relatively rich, to become richer, while the disadvantaged within the community continue to suffer. In theory,
CBE works as both a conservation and development tool. If only certain members within the community are receiving the economic benefits (and thus the incentive to conserve natural resources), then CBE fails on both fronts. When the community benefits as a whole from the institution of a CBE project, the entire population has the incentive to conserve certain resources so that tourists will pay to enjoy them.

EcoQuetzal’s project does benefit the community as a whole. The project is run on a rotational basis, so that every participating family hosts a group when it is their turn. Every family receives the same amount of income for every group of tourists. For every tourist that participates in the project, a portion of the proceeds (10Q) is deposited into a community bank account. This money has been used to build a community center and pay for educational supplies such as books. With approximately 250 tourists visiting annually, that provides the community around $333 USD to do with as they choose. This amount of money might seem negligible, but can go a long way in rural Guatemala.

When speaking with community members in Chicacnab, it became clear that people think that EcoQuetzal retains too much overhead from the income of the project. It’s true that the community receives approximately half of the money that each tourist pays. The percentage that EcoQuetzal keeps goes directly to paying the salaries of the two staff members that run the office. The office staff is responsible for promoting the project and serving as the contact point for incoming tourists. According to one man, “they keep more than half of our money and don’t do anything to improve the project. There aren’t as many tourists coming to Chicacnab. We need more to come here and they aren’t doing anything about it,” (Interview #3). So, even though the benefits are being distributed to everyone in the communities
equally, it has been argued that too much of the income from the project is being kept by the managing NGO. People feel that “when they keep more than 50% of the money, it’s too much. We’re supposed to be the ones getting this money, not people who work in the office in Cobán,” (Interview #6).

In the case of Lagunita Salvador, the project does benefit the community as a whole, but the situation could use some improvement. Anyone is welcome to sell their artesanías at the craft store in the village, so a potential benefit exists in that medium. Guides and cooks make daily wages for their work. But the majority of the work is done by Luis and his family members, so a majority of the benefits accrue to his family. However, Luis invests almost all of this money back into the project for improvements and maintenance (Interview #14). His family certainly does not live at a higher level than any other family in the community. They have only had their own house for a year now and it still does not have walls.

The way that this project benefits the community as a whole is through its grant writing activity. Lagunita Salvador received a large grant from the Canary Islands government not only for improving their CBE project, but also for developing the community across the board. A project is currently underway to bring power to the village through solar panels (which the ecolodge already has) and to provide the community with satellite internet access. The CBE project has brought much attention to Lagunita, which increases its ability to secure funding for development projects.

In addition to grant money, Luis has organized a regional soccer tournament. Village teams from all over the area travel to Lagunita to play in a soccer tournament every Sunday. They often host 12 different teams in one day. Women from Lagunita arrive at the ecolodge
midnight on Saturday night to prepare the food and drinks they will sell to the visiting teams the next day. When I visited, many of the women explained to me that this was the most important form of income generation for their family. The ecolodge sells literally cases of beer to the teams and their fans. During the entire day the women of the community are busy working in the kitchen, trying to get orders out to the hungry soccer players. All the money made by the project from these events is split between the families in Lagunita Salvador (Interview #10). Even those that do not participate get an equal portion. The project has paid to have the soccer field improved multiple times and has bought small bleachers for spectators to utilize. After church on Sundays, Lagunita Salvador goes crazy with activity. I have never seen anything like it before in Guatemala, especially in a rural Q’eqchi village. Without the ecolodge and the CBE project, this soccer tournament would not bring in the money it does. The project has supplied the requisite infrastructure to host an event of this size.

Plan Grande Quehueche has a special design that ensures that the community benefits as a whole from the project. It distributes 10% to the school, 10% to the church, 10% to the health center, 10% to the tourism committee and the other 60% is divided between the families involved in the project. Because all but two families are involved with the project, the benefits are accruing to all, even those not involved (through the church, school and health funds). The school uses the fund to pay their teacher, who is also a member of the community. The health center uses the fund to buy emergency supplies such as bandages and antiseptic. The church often gives small amounts of money to families with special needs to weather difficult circumstances. Altogether, this project is an excellent example of a system of distributing benefits from a CBE project to ensure that the community is benefitting as a whole. The design
of giving 10% of its revenue to community organizations such as the church, health clinic and school, ensures that the entire community benefits in some way, even those who are not able to participate in the project. This is another reason why the project at Quehueche provides an outstanding model of designing and implementing CBE projects in Guatemala.

As the project stands in Chiabal today, there are not many mechanisms in place to ensure that the benefits of the project are distributed equitably throughout the community. Of the 115Q per night that each tourist pays to stay with a host family, 15Q goes directly back to ASOCUCH to pay for employee salaries, 10Q goes to a community fund, and the rest goes to the family. The community fund has the potential to benefit the community as a whole, but unfortunately is being used to reinvest in the tourism project. According to one person working with the project:

“It’s not going to education. It's not going to people who need scholarships. It's staying within the tourism project. You can't pretend that some ecotourism project is going to benefit everyone. It's not. Ecotourism is an ideal. If it involved artesanías, of all the women in the community, maybe 15 would benefit; of all the guides, maybe 5. How many people are there in the community? We can pretend it's a community-based thing, but really the money is going to stay inside the tourism project. Really and truly, we can not benefit everyone. We can not; if we were a community of 10 families, 20 families, maybe then,” (Interview #22).

At this point in time, the CBE project in Chiabal is not benefiting all members of the community and it will be difficult to do so in the future due to the sheer size of this project. However, the second part of the project has the potential to benefit everyone if mechanisms are put in place that allows a portion of the income to be distributed to all families in Chiabal or if a fund were
instituted that allowed the community to decide what it should be spent on. As it stands now, the project does not satisfactorily benefit the community as a whole.

**Criterion #4**

EcoQuetzal receives approximately 250 tourists per year. Families reported receiving around 2 to 3 groups of tourists every year. If a family receives 3 groups of 2 tourists every year, they earn 900Q or $120 USD. Even in rural Guatemala, this is not enough to dramatically improve quality of life, but it does allow people to purchase the little things they normally would not be able to and that does make a difference. Families reported using this income to buy surplus corn, clothing, kitchen utensils and school books (Interview #2). They stressed that they were grateful to have the money the project earns, but that it was not enough to make a big difference in their lives (Interviews #3 & #6). The families all stated that they would like to have many more tourists in their homes, as many as 2 per weekend or 8 per month.

Improvement of quality of life has been limited due to the large numbers of families involved in this project. EcoQuetzal allows anyone to host tourists that is interested, whether or not they live in Chicacnab or not (i.e. San Lucas). Because so many families are now involved, the benefits have been spread so thin that they no longer make much of a difference in the lives of the families in the area. Quality of life can be improved by more than just direct financial benefits. In the case of Chicacnab, quality of life has been improved with the use of the community fund that has gone toward building a community center and pay for school supplies. On the level of improving everyday life for every member of the community, though, EcoQuetzal has not performed well.
The project at Lagunita Salvador has improved the quality of life for community members across the board in various ways. Everyone in the community has benefited from the income generated from the soccer tournaments that the CBE project has allowed to happen. Since the lodge has been built, the children attending school have a specific time set aside for picking up trash in the community and disposing of it in the landfill in Rio Dulce (Interview #13). Community morale has been boosted by hosting the soccer tournaments as well (Interview #12). The lodge acts as a community center. Many people spend time chatting in the shade of the awning while drinking soda pop. Guides, housekeepers and cooks have been hired, providing much needed jobs. The store selling artesanías provides another opportunity for artisans to sell their wares. Grants that have been secured by the project have had important impacts on the community as well, including the solar panel and satellite internet projects and the building of the church, health center and school. Lagunita Salvador supplies many opportunities for people to improve their quality of life. Because of this diversity, community members across the board feel that their quality of life has been improved (Interview #12).

Plan Grande Quehueche has lower tourism numbers, which limits the amount of money each family earns from its participation in the project. Last year, each family received $50 USD, which people used to buy little necessities that they otherwise would not have been able to. Because of its 10% policy, quality of life is improved through greater access to school and health supplies. The fund allows the community to pay the salary of the school teacher, so that children are not required to walk multiple hours to school every day. It ensures that medicine is readily available to people when they need it. If tourism numbers increased dramatically, quality of life could be improved as the amount of money each family would receive would...
increase as well, however, if tourism numbers increased, there could be other negative impacts to the local culture, environment and traditional values.

Improvement of quality of life can not yet be determined in Chiabal as the entire project has not been implemented. With the opening of the community center, bungalows and trail system, quality of life could very well increase across the board in Chiabal. Estimating it at this point would be presumptuous.

**Criterion #5**

Conservation values can be a difficult standard to determine in any culture, let alone a culture different from one’s own. Ideally, community-based ecotourism benefits conservation goals because it provides economic incentives to protect the resources that draw tourists to an area. Yet, the real measure is not always whether conservation goals are being met, but if people’s values are being changed. If the CBE project can cause community members to reevaluate not only their actions, but the motivations behind those actions, lasting change can be effected; perhaps even long after the CBE project ceases to exist. This can happen in various ways. CBE tourists are often more environmentally and culturally sensitive than the average tourist and want to share their values with host communities, while at the same time learning about the host community’s values. There is potential for interchange at that level. Also, as communities accrue benefits from CBE projects, more emphasis can be placed on children attending school. As the education level in a community increases, the other generations learn from the children attending school and, thus, the entire learning of the community increases (Interview #5). One grandfather put it perfectly: “my grandson comes home from school and
tells me not to throw trash on the ground. He tells me about pollution. I don’t want the rivers to be polluted. I won’t throw trash,” (Interview #17).

EcoQuetzal has effected some change in conservation values in the communities of Chicacnab and San Lucas. One community member from Chicacnab noted that “here it is beautiful and there is nothing to be afraid of. There are no mosquitoes, no thieves; no bad people. Everything is wonderful, fresh and peaceful,” (Interview #3). Another person noted that tourists come to Chicacnab because “they like the fresh air here. The air is clean and unpolluted and the forest is thick. This is why the quetzales live here. This is why the tourists come,” (Interview #2). The same person pointed out that she only takes firewood from already downed logs in the forest and never cuts a live tree. Whether this is a result of increased awareness of conservation values or just a preferred response given to a researcher is difficult to determine, but the respondent was not proud of her response, but rather, very matter of fact. Another community member said that he liked living in Chicacnab because of:

“the beautiful natural resources and the Mayan ancestry we share. Because of this, we are protecting this place. This is why we are here. Before we started this project, almost nobody had any idea of how to protect a forest or why we should, but now they are protecting the forest because they know it’s important. We want to protect it because it is our future and our children’s future. Our grandparents never thought about us, but we are thinking about our children and grandchildren. If we need shovels or trees, instead of just going out and cutting them from the forest, we think, ‘do our children need these for the future?’” (Interview #6).

It appears that an increased awareness of conservation values has resulted from the CBE project in Chicacnab. People, at the very least, know the rhetoric of conservation values and
know what it is that others believe they should be doing with their land.

Lagunita Salvador is a community that has a fairly unique relationship with conservation values. They are perhaps more familiar with the concept of conservation values than other rural communities in Guatemala because they have resided within a protected area for many years. This does not necessarily translate into conservation values within the community, but does suggest that the community has been exposed to western concepts of natural resource conservation. Many people within the community reported feeling that it was special because of its natural resources and forests (Interviews #8 and #9). “This is what I like the most: the beauty, the lagoon, the forest. In reality, we came here because we like to fish and also because the forest provides material for our houses. Now, we can make money from things other than fishing, so we don’t’ cut the forest as much. Also, the community is scared that we’ll get in trouble for cutting,” (Interview #8). Again, perhaps this does not directly translate into conservation values, but could signify the beginning of people thinking about their relationship with the protected area. Additionally, the indigenous population of Guatemala has been living on this land for thousands of years and has a set of conservation values that might not fall within the western viewpoint of what constitutes “correct” conservation values.

Another factor that may affect conservation values is the high level of mobility that many indigenous communities have faced due to the war. Both Lagunita Salvador and Plan Grande Quehueche are Q’eqchi communities living in the Rio Dulce area. Before the war, the Q’eqchi lived in the mountains near Cobán, but fled due to the heavy violence in the area (Interview #11). These displaced communities found themselves living in a tropical ecosystem that they had no traditional knowledge of. In these cases, indigenous communities may cause
as much environmental damage as a ladino community because they have not evolved the
cultural ecological knowledge of living and farming on a landscape for thousands of years.

The people of Plan Grande Quehueche also expressed a desire for their children and
grandchildren to experience nature as it is today.

“We have four caballerias of communal land under protection. There are jaguars and
deer there. It is in the mountains and we respect the animals that live there because
further on in the future our children might not see animals like that or large trees.
Because of this, we protect the forest so that our children can see what we saved for
them. They will be able to grow up with these things and understand and respect them.
They can learn from our example,” (Interview #19).

This statement revealed a deep appreciation for and understanding of the importance of
conservation. When I noted that land around Quehueche was converted to cropland, my guide
explained that much of the surrounding area was converted to provide food for the village, but
that the more sensitive and diverse areas had been protected. The next day, we explored the
protected community land, which was full of birds, animals and plant species. The guide
explained how the community felt about this place. “It is important to have both milpa and
forest. This way people can have enough food to eat and also be able to preserve the heritage
of our land,” (Interview #18).

Chiabal also seems to have a long way to go in order to achieve a semblance of
increased awareness of conservation values. It is important to note that Chiabal does not yet
have a fully functioning project. They are still in the process of implementing many facets of
their full CBE project. However, there does seem to be a disconnect between the NGOs
working in Chiabal and their ideas of how natural resources should be conserved and the
community ideas. The Todos Santos Reserve is newly designated and many people in the area are unaware of the designation or what it means. However, the project is planning to implement an environmental education component with the local schools. Teachers will be bringing their students to the reserve to do biomonitoring and learn about the endemic and endangered species in the reserve. With time, this may result in increased awareness of conservation values in Chiabal.

**Criterion #6**

One of the critiques of community-based ecotourism has been that these projects often do more harm than good to local culture. In particularly rural areas, the previous influence of the western world can be quite negligible. When tourists begin to arrive, it can have critical effects on the community. Conversely, responsible tourism can bolster cultural pride, especially in a country like Guatemala where the indigenous people have been persecuted and ridiculed. Yet, when this tourism becomes large-scale, it can be humiliating: imagine having busloads of rich foreigners taking your picture as they race on by on the road, while you are attempting to bring all of your goods to the market in Antigua. Like conservation values, cultural effects are difficult to gauge because they are complex and the vast majority of the people studying them are not from within that particular culture. Also, local culture can be difficult to gauge when western ideas have already had a large amount of influence.

The communities of Chicacnab and San Lucas are very different. Chicacnab is intensely rural and 100% Q’eqchi Mayan. There are no roads and no electricity. San Lucas is relatively rural and accessed by a dirt road. Buses run every few hours from San Lucas to Cobán. The
town is ladino. Most tourists choose to go to Chicacnab because of its Mayan ancestry and its closer location to the Quetzal. However, people in Chicacnab identified natural resources as the reason that tourists visit the area, not the culture (Interviews #1, 2, 3, & 5). While the project does not seem to enhance local culture, it also seems to do little harm. After 12 years of hosting tourists, people in the community view their lives as being “almost the same as before. We just know more about other people in the world,” (Interview #3). It is difficult to determine whether there has been more cultural harm than good, as is the case in many CBE projects.

Lagunita Salvador is also a Q’eqchi Maya village, but the role that culture plays in their project is much more prevalent, probably because of the manner in which the project was originally conceived. Maria Kaesberg modeled the project off of the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii, so there has always been a particular focus on Mayan culture. The project offers traditional Mayan food in their restaurant and showcases the dance of the venado, which is a traditional ceremony of the Q’eqchi. As a “tourist” in Lagunita Salvador, I felt a distinctive balance between myself as a tourist and the residents of the community. An older woman explained it to me this way: “you are different and you have come here to experience our way of life. That is good, as long as you don’t think I should become like you. You are you and I am me. That is good,” (Interview #9). There seems to be a preexisting cultural pride in Lagunita Salvador that is evident. That may be due to the influence of the missionaries or Lagunita’s isolation from the rest of the villages in the area. The project seems to highlight the village’s culture without idealizing it as is done in so many other places.

Plan Grande Quehueche seems to understand better than most other projects that
tourists are coming to experience the natural environment along with the Mayan culture. This is also a Q’eqchi village with strong ties to its traditional heritage. Like Chicacnab and Lagunita Salvador, the people of Quehueche speak Q’eqchi. In fact, many of the women speak only Q’eqchi. The community is proud of their culture and prepares a welcome party for each tourist group, replete with a marimba band, dancers and a Mayan ceremony. The entire village shows up to participate. Of all the projects in this study, the people of Quehueche appeared to be most culturally empowered by their project. I felt unworthy of their ceremonies and dances, but they coaxed me into participating and were happy to hear my sad attempts at the Q’eqchi language. Plan Grande Quehueche satisfies this criterion because it seemed to embody the idea that CBE projects can have positive impacts on local culture.

Chiabal is the only community in this study that is mixed 50% ladino and 50% Mam Mayan. The interesting factor at play in Chiabal is that the Mam population tends to be wealthier than the ladino population. Mam people hold more positions of power within the community. The indigenous population in Chiabal wears the traje of Todos Santos, the nearby town that is renowned for its strong culture. Chiabal has been exposed to western influences for many years. It is located a few miles off of a main highway in the country and Todos Santos has been a hotbed of tourist activity for many years as well. The CBE project in Chiabal has been diligent in including all parts of the community. There is nearly equal representation of ladino and indigenous background in the project. The president of the tourism committee is Mam. Because many of the facets of the project have yet to be instituted, it is hard to discern whether the project will have positive or negative impacts on the local culture, however, the indigenous culture of Chiabal has been exposed to outside influences for quite some time and
has proven to be resilient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>EcoQuetzal</th>
<th>Eco-Aldea Maya Lagunita Salvador</th>
<th>Plan Grande Quehueche</th>
<th>Chiabal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 1: Small-Scale</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Not enough information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 2: Community Representation</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 3: Benefits entire community</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 4: Improves quality of life</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Not enough information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 5: Increased conservation value</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion 6: Enhances culture</td>
<td>Not enough information</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Not enough information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Case study evaluation matrix

Observations and Analysis

This research revealed several trends that emerged in nearly all of the case study sites. These trends are important to note as they play significant roles in the functioning of CBE projects in Guatemala and may have implications for other sites or potential projects.

The Nature of Community-Based Ecotourism

It is important to note that overarching this research is a tension concerning the nature of community-based ecotourism itself. One of the critiques of CBE argues that it does not constitute sustainable development due to the possibility of local communities, cultures and natural resources being exploited. Many of Hipwell’s criteria have ethical or moral implications.
They have less to do with the day-to-day functioning of projects and focus more on what “good” or “ethical” CBE should be. This is an important contribution because it helps define the nature of CBE in an ideal situation.

A further tension surrounding CBE is its overarching contribution to sustainable development. Is CBE an ethical choice for sustainable development when considered alongside issues such as global climate change, fossil fuel consumption in tourism, and carbon footprints? Will concepts such as CBE and other responsible tourisms diminish due to these concerns? If we can reasonably believe that in the long term this will be the case, can we ethically be promoting the development of CBE? Do these projects really do more harm than good to the local culture, communities and natural resources over the long term?

It is important to note in this case that CBE was never intended to be a cure all, nor was it intended to serve as a single source income for communities. It was developed in order to give communities a way to improve their quality of life on a small scale. As this research demonstrates, where design and scale are key considerations, it does so in certain cases. Quehueche can pay their teachers, buy medicine for their health center and provide extra income for the families in their community. Lagunita Salvador is bringing solar power to the families in their community and provides employment for community members. Chicacnab has built a roof for the school. These are important indicators of improvement in quality of life. These are the types of benefits that CBE can provide. They are not huge things. They are not supposed to be huge things, but they make a difference.

In the light of global climate change, it is difficult to determine how long-term CBE will be a viable method of rural development. With evolving environmental consciousness it is
certainly possible that global tourism will decrease dramatically, especially if people are
required or morally obligated to buy carbon credits in order to travel. Under these
circumstances perhaps it is best to view CBE as a bridge between the old “top down”
development agenda and a future agenda that is truly sustainable. There is nothing to say that
CBE projects must exist forever. If they function for a few years, build community capacity and
modestly improve quality of life, perhaps that is sufficient. In the same way that hybrid vehicles
are seen as a bridge between the old regime of fossil-fuel dependence and new technologies
that are currently being developed, perhaps CBE is best viewed as a bridge as well. Regardless
of these issues, CBE does provide benefits to communities and improves quality of life in many
cases. It should not be regarded as a long-term cure all for sustainable development.

Dilution of Benefits

During research, the criteria presented above revealed certain weaknesses that can
undermine the goals of community-based ecotourism projects. These criteria posit that a
sustainable ecotourism project must be small-scale, involve a broad representation of the
community, benefit and improve the quality of life for the community, increase conservation
values, and protect the local culture. This research revealed that community participation,
when it is too extensive, actually has the potential to dilute the benefits accrued by the
community.

In all of the case studies presented here, community buy-in was hard to achieve during
the beginning phases of the projects. Often this results from a lack of understanding on the
part of the community concerning the nature of tourism and how it could affect the
community. Perhaps one or two families offer to host tourists in their homes in the beginning. These families will be ones that have had more interaction with foreigners, have a higher level or education or access to resources and/or power within the community. The people who volunteer to host tourists first are usually those who have a greater understanding of what tourism and a “tourist” is. As these families begin to receive tourists and earn income from the project, other families in the community begin to see what it means to host tourists and that they are missing out on an opportunity. Then the other families desire to participate in the project.

“I wasn’t one of the first ones to have tourists because I was afraid. I didn’t know what a tourist was or what they would do here. Maybe they would kidnap my child, maybe they would steal from me. I didn’t know at first, but when they started coming, I realized what it meant and then I wanted to be involved too. Then, everyone wanted to be involved too,” (Interview #2).

Usually, a high level of community involvement is something to encourage as it enables a wider distribution of benefits throughout community members, but there is a point at which too many people become involved with the project and those benefits are diluted.

In a small community such as Lagunita Salvador this might not yield devastating results, especially as it is isolated from other villages. In the case of EcoQuetzal, the NGO allowed a whole separate community to become involved. Now there are so many people hosting tourists that the economic benefits to each family have decreased. “Five years ago, I was making $300 per year from tourism. Last year, I made $100. Now tourists are going to San Lucas instead of coming here and there are too many families,” (Interview #3).
NGOs have often correlated high community participation with sustainability of a project, but unless that community is comprised of around 25 families or less, the distribution of benefits gets spread around to too many people. In the case of EcoQuetzal, most families said they would like to host an average of 2 groups of tourists per month (Interviews #2, #3 & #6). That would increase their yearly income by almost $1,000 USD. That amount would certainly allow them to improve their quality of life across the board. However, receiving an average of 4 tourists per family per month would yield 2,880 tourists visiting Chicacnab and San Lucas per year. That would increase environmental degradation, garbage accumulation and human waste to a level beyond a community’s ability to manage these impacts.

In order to improve quality of life for community members in any real appreciable way, the projects must be receiving a steady flow of tourists. In community-based programs this can be a difficulty. There is only a small segment of the tourism population that desires to have this type of experience. Additionally, there are several of these projects operating in Guatemala. On a typical 10-day journey, a tourist may visit one of these projects, but it is very doubtful that they will choose to spend all of their time in Guatemala exploring community-based ecotourism projects.

There is an evident tension between demands to keep projects small-scale and the moderation of community conflict over fair, full distributions of benefits. This research demonstrated that there are mechanisms to alleviate conflict when not all families are invited to host visitors. The development of a community-level CBE fund from project proceeds can be applied to more widespread community development demands or even split among all community members. It might be possible that non-hosting families can be given other roles,
such as guiding, working on promotion and marketing, or selling goods to tourists. Plan Grande Quehueche provides an excellent model for equitably distributing benefits while at the same time improving quality of life for community members. Because Quehueche gives 10% of its revenues to the local church, school and health clinic, everyone benefits from an increased quality of life regardless of whether or not they are directly involved in the project. The families that are directly involved split 60% of the fund equally between them. This design is an excellent way to ensure that everyone in the community benefits regardless of their level of involvement. Additionally, the project is managed by the ecotourism committee which is elected by the community. This allows the community to have control over how the project develops, how many people are involved and how to deal with possible conflicts, instead of an NGO.

Role of the NGO

As explained previously, NGOs often play important roles in the design and development of community-based ecotourism projects. The decisions that NGOs make can have profound impacts on the future of these projects and the communities in which they operate. All four of the case studies have had interaction with NGOs at some point with both positive and negative effects. EcoQuetzal has had a heavy-handed role in the CBE project in Chicacnab and San Lucas. Staff members of EcoQuetzal identify this role in the following:

“We really are the ones that manage this project. We deal with conflicts and problems. We promote this project. We are in charge of administering funds. The community hosts the tourists and receives a portion of the revenues,” (Interview #1).
This is an example of a dominant NGO role. Some community members in Chicacnab resent the presence of EcoQuetzal. Every person that I interviewed in the community identified the NGO as one of the largest problems facing the project. “We can do this without EcoQuetzal. We don’t need them anymore,” (Interview #6). In fact, the founder of the NGO was surprised to hear that they were still in operation, having planned on them managing the project only for the first few years (Interview #5). This is a prime example of an NGO over-managing a project when it could best be handed over to community leaders, such as the ecotourism committee.

The phenomenon of suppressive, external organizations - even when they may be well-meaning NGOs’ – were also apparent in the CBE project in Chiabal. Like EcoQuetzal, the NGOs working in Chiabal have controlled nearly every part of the design and management process. The community has been given more of a voice recently, but the trend over the past five years has been to accumulate power on the part of the NGO’s such that they make decisions and the community must accept them. This breeds an unhealthy relationship where the community allows the NGO to develop and implement projects just for the sake of taking advantage of opportunities, regardless of their appropriateness for the community. An example of this occurred five years ago when ASOCUCH donated llamas and alpacas to Chiabal. The NGO thought that the high-altitude environment would be perfect for raising the animals and it would be a good opportunity for people to earn income selling the wool. The community members were afraid of the animals, being accustomed to raising sheep. This resulted in nearly all of the animals dying.

Lagunita Salvador has had a nearly opposite relationship with NGOs. The Catholic Mission helped the community develop the preliminary format for the CBE project, provided
limited funding and training and then left the community to manage on their own. The project website and interpretive signs were created by volunteers. Recent funding has come from academic institutions in Guatemala and the government of the Canary Islands, but their role is in approving funding, not in management or project design (Interview #11). Ak’Tenamit has provided marketing for the project, but does not interfere with community management. This lack of dependence on NGOs has fostered local leadership and a sense of empowerment in the village.

“From time to time, we need outside help with things like funding, training and marketing. We have had to solve these problems ourselves because there is no NGO taking care of us. The committee has visited other projects like ours to find out what they have done. Sometimes, we ask Ak’Tenamit for help because they have the experience. They have come here and done trainings for guides, but that’s all they do,” (Interview #12).

Plan Grande Quehueche has had a similar experience working with Ak’Tenamit. The NGO helped design the CBE project, trained families to host tourists, found funding to build the ecolodge and left. “We felt very abandoned at first. Ak’Tenamit had worked with us for almost two years and then they were gone. We were still in contact because they were sending us tourists, but it was up to us to follow through on our plans and training,” (Interview #17). The role that Ak’Tenamit has played in both Lagunita Salvador and Quehueche is ideal for CBE projects in Guatemala. The NGO provided the funding, information and training that the community needed to design and manage their own project and then left the community to do so. In both of these cases, Ak’Tenamit returned to provide further training for guides and families when the communities requested it. In this way, the NGO is building community
capacity while avoiding heavy-handed management from an outside organization. This is an appropriate role for NGOs to play in these projects.

NGO culture and characteristics can also be influential in CBE projects. NGO culture often seeks to perpetuate itself indefinitely and is predicated on access to resources and knowledge. NGOs have the power to facilitate the transfer of knowledge or suppressing its transference to communities. For instance, EcoQuetzal holds tightly to its authority over the CBE project in Chicacnab. They still retain decision-making power as well as 60% of the profits of the project. Staff members at EcoQuetzal justified these conditions because they led to the payment of their monthly salaries. Without this project, staff members would lose their employment. This type of NGO culture can lead to negative effects as evidenced in Chicacnab.

In contrast, Ak’Tenamit provides an example of positively reconstructing NGO culture. Ak’Tenamit is characterized by having local, indigenous leaders on their board of directors. These individuals are very aware of the issues that communities in the area face. They grew up in these communities, which allows Ak’Tenamit to be extremely relevant where it works. Although Ak’Tenamit is becoming a large, influential organization within the NGO fabric of Guatemala, it is characterized by comparatively very little bureaucracy and its staff is made up of former students from the Ak’Tenamit school. When it comes to CBE projects, Ak’Tenamit employs a “bottom-up” hands-off approach. They provide some initial funding for projects as in the case of Quehueche, but their focus is on is providing knowledge in the form of training sessions and marketing. These two areas are where NGOs can support, rather than impede, community development.
Leadership

Another trend that emerged from this research was the importance of local leadership to CBE projects. Frequently, projects are developed and instituted by NGOs on behalf of the community, so the community becomes accustomed to looking to the NGO to provide leadership. This is acceptable during the beginning stages of a project, but when it has been functioning for many years and the community continues to depend on the NGO, the relationship becomes unhealthy. When NGOs are involved, they need to be careful to develop community capacity in the form of local leadership. It is important to have a community ecotourism committee formed from the inception of the project to work side-by-side with the NGO. This way, mentoring can occur between fledgling committee members and more experienced NGO employees. FUNDAECO has accomplished this task very well in Chiabal by forming a committee that is elected by the community and has been involved in every aspect of the planning, design and implementation of the CBE project. The ecotourism coordinator at FUNDAECO consults the president of the committee on every decision made and has been instrumental in the development of local leaders (Interview #23).

Local leadership can be problematic to develop in CBE projects because there is often no incentive for one person to put more effort, time, money or energy into the project. If someone does invest heavily in the project, they will not be the only one reaping the benefits of this effort; the entire community will. Under these circumstances, it can be difficult to find people to volunteer to work on ecotourism committees for an extended length of time, especially as president, which requires a greater time commitment. The president of the ecotourism committee in Chiabal noted:
"I would like to continue as president of the ecotourism committee, but I can’t. I have learned a lot in the past two years and I think this project will be great for the community, but I have a family to provide for and I don’t make any money as the president. In fact, I have had to cut down on my job as a carpenter to be the president of the committee and have not made as much money because of it. If I received a salary for my work on the tourism project, I would continue to do it, but I can’t,” (Interview #28).

Plan Grande Quehueche has dealt with this problem by earmarking 10% of the project’s revenues to pay the committee members. Each of the seven members receives a salary based on their position, with the president earning the most. This provides the committee with an incentive to invest more in the success of the project.

“I know that if we spend more time promoting the project and making contacts with tour operators, that more tourists will come. The more tourists that come, the more we will see in our 10% share and the more I will make at the end of the year,” (Interview #20).

Quehueche’s system of incentivizing local leadership allows committee members to earn an income while working for the project. There is the additional understanding that if a committee member does not perform their duties well, the community has the power to elect someone else to that position after their two-year term. There is no limit to the amount of time a committee member can serve if reelected. A good, experienced committee member could work for the project as long as the community was happy with their accomplishments.

**Security**

This study also revealed that communities are worried about the level of safety in
Guatemala and its effects on the tourism industry. Petty crime has always been a problem for tourists in the country, but the situation has worsened in the past two years. As previously noted, in March of 2008 Belgian tourists were kidnapped from their boat on the Rio Dulce and held for 24 hours due to a land rights dispute between the government and an indigenous community in the area. A travel advisory was issued in August of 2008 when a Texas man was murdered on his sailboat in Lago Izabal. According to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, there is a trend of increasing violence in Guatemala, among nationals and against tourists (CIA 2004). This has been attributed to the recent elections and new presidential administration, but many Guatemalans spoke of other reasons for the increase in violence.

“Many people think that things are getting worse in this country and that there is no other choice but violence. When young men can’t find jobs and have too much free time and not enough money, this is what you get,” (Interview #26).

This increase in violence has had detrimental effects on tourism. Every case study site noted a decrease in tourist numbers since March of 2008. EcoQuetzal and Plan Grande Quehueche’s numbers have declined 40% from the previous year, while Lagunita Salvador has seen a decrease of 60%. Chiabal’s project had received no tourists since March of 2008 at the time of this research in August. Unfortunately, the overall security level in the country is not something that individual communities can change. Communities can provide certain accommodations to tourists when visiting that can increase tourists’ feelings of safety. For instance, while the author stayed in the ecolodge at Plan Grande Quehueche, two members of the community slept in the room downstairs. This made me feel more secure as a solo female traveler. I also had multiple guides, both male and female, while hiking near Quehueche. In
Lagunita Salvador, two night guards are employed to make sure that tourists are safe during the night. Tourists in Chiabal and Chicacnab stay with families who are nearly always with them.

It is common for security levels in developing countries to shift with political, social and economic changes. While communities managing CBE projects cannot alter the overall level of safety in their country, they can provide certain accommodations which increase the level of security for tourists within their site.
The focus of this thesis has been to critically examine the design and implementation of community-based ecotourism projects in Guatemala. CBE has been touted as a tool which can achieve natural resource conservation goals while also promoting the development of local communities. This economic development is intended to be small-scale and serve as an alternative to preexisting local income generation. It is also not intended to be a universal tool, but an option for communities with a high level of natural attractions and the infrastructure to support such an endeavor.

The problem identified in this thesis is the discrepancy between CBE conceptually and the one-the-ground reality of projects attempting to come to grips with complex sets of situations and problems. While all of these CBE programs have been functioning for at least two years, some have been more successful at integrating the six criteria than others. However, this study found that these criteria cannot be weighted with equal importance when applied to these case studies. The distribution of benefits and scale of the project were revealed to have a greater impact on the functioning of the CBE projects than the other factors.
Additionally, whether the projects successfully abide by the six criteria does not always guarantee their success or sustainability. In fact, this study found that other factors such as unhealthy relationships with NGOs, dilution of economic benefits and lack of local leadership can have just as much importance as the criteria identified by Hipwell. These factors relate more to the economic viability and sustainability of the project, while Hipwell’s criteria delineate the characteristics of more idealized community-based ecotourism.

Ultimately, the promise of community-based ecotourism is small-scale. It provides supplemental income in addition to current methods of income generation. CBE is not meant to be the only source of income for communities. When projects are not kept small-scale, communities find it difficult to manage projects or equitably sustain meaningful benefits to the community at large. Larger projects also increase the potential for other negative effects on culture, natural resources, family structure and community cohesion. If a community can not manage a project without outside support, then the project might be more sustainable under a reformed structure.

It is also important to examine the details of project management, particularly how revenue from the project is distributed throughout the community. This is not a new issue to ecotourism research. Equitable distribution of income has become one of the hallmark problems of CBE projects. However, this research revealed a case study site that has successfully dealt with this problem. Plan Grande Quehueche’s 10% policy ensures that not only participating families directly benefit from the project in an equitable manner, but that nonparticipants in the community benefit through increased access to education, medical supplies, and spiritual guidance. It is often the ill and elderly that are not able to participate in
these projects and this project design provides them a benefit as well. CBE projects must take into account equitable distribution of benefits not only to participants, but to those in the community who do not participate in the project.

The role that NGOs should play in the design and management of these projects is another important finding of this study. It is unrealistic to claim that NGOs should be eliminated from the equation altogether. They have an important role to play. However, a common failing is that they often are involved in CBE projects for too long. The appropriate role for NGOs in these projects is to provide assistance when communities request it.

Ak’Tenamit is an example of a positive NGO relationship. They have helped Quehueche design an effective project, providing information, funding and training and then left the community to manage the project. Ak’Tenamit was careful to develop community capacity in the form of local leadership, even sending the president of the ecotourism committee to Ecuador to learn about CBE project management. This way, when the NGO finished working with the community, there were people in Quehueche who were ready to provide guidance and direction. The project in Quehueche is not without its hardships, but the community has the resources to deal with problems when they arise.

Community-based ecotourism has gone through many phases. It has been widely lauded as the future of integrated conservation and development projects and, more recently, has been criticized as an ideal that can never be achieved in reality. Perhaps it is neither of these things. Whatever the promises and pitfalls of ecotourism, there is a potential for community empowerment through increased ownership and incentives. It is time to take a
long hard look at the way that these projects are being designed and implemented and ensure that the communities are the ones truly benefiting from these projects.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

EcoQuetzal
Interview #1. June 30, 2008.  EcoQuetzal employee
Interview #2. July 1, 2008.  Community member
Interview #3. July 1, 2008.  Community member
Interview #5. August 1, 2008. Former EcoQuetzal board member
Interview #6. July 4, 2008.  Community member
Interview #7. July 15, 2008.  Former Peace Corps volunteer at EcoQuetzal

Lagunita Salvador
Interview #8. July 19, 2008.  Community member
Interview #10. September 25, 2008. Former volunteer at Lagunita Salvador
Interview #11. August 20, 2008. Representative from Canary Islands grant committee

Quehueche
Interview #17. July 28, 2008.  Community and Ecotourism Committee member
Interview #18. July 28, 2008.  Community member
Interview #20. July 29, 2008.  Community and Ecotourism Committee member

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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for Community Members

1. ¿Cuales son los aspectos que le gusta más de su comunidad?
   • ¿Por qué le gusta esta cosa?
   • ¿Hay otras cosas que son importantes?

2. ¿Qué sabe del proyecto de turismo?
   • ¿Cómo es el proyecto?
   • ¿Cuándo empezó el proyecto?
   • ¿Cómo empezó?
   • ¿Quién empezó el proyecto? Cuéntame la historia del proyecto.
   • ¿Quién maneja el proyecto?
   • ¿Quién toma las decisiones sobre el proyecto? ¿Quién está encargada del proyecto?

3. ¿En el principio, por qué le involucró en este proyecto?
   • ¿Para los beneficios?
   • ¿Para las oportunidades?

4. ¿Y esas cosas, ya realizaron?
   • ¿Qué cosas no realizaron?

5. ¿Quién mas recibe los beneficios del proyecto?
   • ¿Hay alguien que recibe más que otras?
   • ¿Hay personas que no reciben beneficios?
   • ¿Cuáles son estos beneficios? ¿Dinero, escuelas, educación, orgullo en su cultura ...

6. ¿Qué puede hacer con los beneficios del proyecto?
   • ¿Puede comprar cosas nuevas? ¿Qué cosas?
   • ¿Puede mandar sus hijos a escuelas?
1. ¿Qué otras cosas?
2. ¿Qué no funciona con el proyecto?
3. ¿Hay problemas que podemos arreglar?
4. ¿Qué aspectos del proyecto le cambiaría si podría?
5. ¿Hay algunos aspectos que quisiera cambiar?
6. ¿Quiénes son los turistas?
   • ¿Cómo son los turistas? Personas de Europa, los Estados Unidos, México, aquí? Mochileros, familias, hombres, mujeres, estudiantes?
7. ¿Por qué vienen los turistas?
   • ¿Qué les gustan los turistas cuando vienen al proyecto?
   • ¿Qué dicen los turistas sobre que les gustan más de su experiencia aquí?
8. ¿Cómo cambiarían cosas aquí desde el principio del proyecto?
   • ¿Hay cosas que están cambiando en la comunidad?
   • ¿Hay cosas diferentes para su familia?
9. ¿Generalmente, que piensan la comunidad sobre este proyecto?
   • ¿Le gustan el proyecto o no?
   • ¿Por qué?
10. ¿En su opinión, qué es la mejor opción para usar la tierra alrededor su comunidad?
   • ¿Para tours? ¿Agricultura? ¿Nada? ¿Conservación?
11. ¿Qué más hace daño a la tierra?
   • ¿Basura?
   • ¿Corta de leña?
   • ¿Agricultura?
12. ¿En el futuro, que va a pasar en la comunidad?
   • ¿Va a cambiar más? ¿Cómo va a cambiar?
13. ¿Qué involucran los miembros de las comunidades en proyecto?

**Interview Questions for NGOs**

1. ¿Hace cuánto tiempo se fundó la organización?
2. ¿Cómo se fundó la organización?
3. ¿Cuál es la misión de la organización?
4. ¿Cuántos empleados/trabajadores hay en la organización? Voluntarios?
5. ¿Quién maneja el proyecto de ecoturismo?
   • ¿Quién toma las decisiones? ¿Cómo se hacen?
   • ¿Quién esta encargada de comunicación con los turistas?
   • ¿Quién esta encargada cuando hay problemas con turistas y comunidades?
6. ¿Cómo involucran los miembros de las comunidades en proyecto?
• ¿Cuál miembros de la comunidad tienen contacto con los turistas?
• ¿Quién en la comunidad puede tomar decisiones?
• ¿Quién esta encargada de promoción y mercadeo del proyecto?

7. ¿Qué beneficios provee a la comunidad esta organización?

8. ¿Cómo se distribuyen los ingresos?
   • ¿Los turistas quien pagan? ¿Pagan las familias directamente o pagan la organización?
   • ¿Cuánto es el ingreso anual del proyecto?

9. ¿Cómo eligen a participantes locales para el programa de la organización?

10. ¿Cuáles son los problemas que la organización enfrenta?

11. ¿Cuáles cosas han cambiado desde el principio del proyecto?
   • ¿Ha visto cambios en las comunidades?
   • ¿Hay mas personas que no están trabajando en agricultura?
   • ¿Ha visto cambios en el nivel de interés en conservación de recursos naturales en el parte de las comunidades?
   • ¿Hay más infraestructura en las comunidades?
   • ¿Ha visto cambios en el nivel de salud?
   • ¿Ha visto cambios en la cultura?
   • ¿Ha visto cambios en el medio ambiente?

12. ¿Cuáles son sus metas para el futuro de la organización?

13. ¿Cuáles son los éxitos de la organización?

14. ¿Cuál es el presupuesto de esta organización? ¿Cómo se distribuye? ¿De donde vienen los fondos para manejar la organización?

15. ¿Cómo evalúan el trabajo que están haciendo con las comunidades?