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Sociocultural Sustainability of Rural Community-Based Tourism

*Case Study of Local Participation
in Fair Trade Coffee Trail, Nicaragua*

To the Faces behind the Coffee Cup

Abstract

Rural community-based tourism (turismo rural y comunitario) is small-scale tourism in poor rural areas, where the local people are active actors in tourism development. It is often perceived as a sustainable and responsible form of tourism. However, in practice the planning and evaluation of the tourism development is often concentrated only upon rapid economic and environmental impacts and the *sociocultural* significance is left without proper attention. The issues about sociocultural development have not been considered seriously enough in alternative tourism contexts. This study aims to fill this gap by bringing together *cultural studies of tourism* and studies of *development*. The starting point of this study is that *sustainable* tourism development cannot take place without social justice and active local *participation*.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the sociocultural possibilities and challenges of rural community-based tourism development in the host communities. This research has an ethnographic approach and it includes a field study in three communities of *Fair Trade Coffee Trail* in San Ramón, Northern Nicaragua. The idea for the tourism development was born after the coffee price crisis in 2001, given that the main objectives of tourism were to bring complementary income to the poor coffee farmers and to promote equal participation inside the communities. Data for the sociocultural impact analysis was collected through 23 semi-structured interviews and participatory observation during four week period of fieldwork in 2008.

The results of this study support the assumption that the real essence of rural community-based tourism is its potential to promote people's control over factors that affect their lives – in other words to support *empowerment*. In San Ramón tourism development had especially brought new opportunities to the young people working as guides and to the women responsible for the tourism accommodation. Women and young guides had been able to enhance their self-esteem and freedom of choice through new contacts, knowledge, new skills and cultural pride. The encounters with visitors had been mainly positive. Alternatively, the weakness in the local broker's coordination had threatened the whole tourism development. The sociocultural benefits of tourism had not reached the community level and therefore had not promoted the social empowerment of communities.

The results of this study can encourage and help development agencies to support community-based tourism initiatives as a tool of sustainable development. Developing a holistic guideline for rural community-based tourism development presents a challenge for further studies.

Keywords: sociocultural, cultural studies of tourism, development, sustainability, participation, empowerment, rural community-based tourism, Nicaragua

Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	6
Nicaragua on Map.....	7
1 INTRODUCTION.....	8
1.1 Focus on Tourism in Rural Communities	8
1.2 Previous Studies	10
1.3 Purpose and Goals of the Study.....	13
1.4 Methodology and Data	15
1.5 Structure of the Study.....	17
2 WHAT IS RURAL COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM?.....	18
2.1 Seeking for New Forms of Tourism	18
2.2 The Principles of Rural Community-based Tourism	20
2.3 The Brokers' Role.....	22
2.4 Responsible Tourism in Nicaragua	24
3 RE-CONSTRUCTION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS.....	28
3.1 Sociocultural Impacts in Tourism Research.....	28
3.2 Development - Looking Beyond Economic Growth.....	31
3.3 Local Participation and Empowerment as a Basis of Sustainability	35
3.4 Analytical Framework of Sociocultural Sustainability	38
4 ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK	41
4.1 Before Entering the Field.....	41
4.2 Data Collection through Semi-structured Interviews and Field Notes	43
4.3 Position of 'Self' Studying the 'Other'.....	47
4.4 Analyzing and Reporting.....	49
5 CONTEXT OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SAN RAMÓN	53
5.1 Communities of San Ramón	54
5.2 Tourism Life Cycle in San Ramón.....	59
5.3 Importance of the Brokers in the Tourism Development.....	63
5.4 Host's Viewpoint about the Guests.....	65
6 SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM TO THE HOSTS.....	69
6.1 Participation of Women and Young People.....	70
6.2 New Skills, Knowledge and Self confidence	75
6.3 Presentation of the Community Culture	79
6.4 Feelings of Pride and Relative Deprivation.....	83
7 UTOPIA OF THE HOST COMMUNITY.....	88
7.1 Fragmented Communities.....	88
7.2 Planning and Management of Community-based Tourism.....	91
7.3 Challenges of Social Empowerment.....	93
7.4 Indirect Benefits at the Community Level	96
8 CONCLUSIONS.....	101
Acknowledgements.....	107
References.....	108
Annex.....	116

List of pictures and tables

Picture 1: Main road and the centre of La Pita community.....	44
Picture 2: The office of UCA San Ramón on the main street of San Ramón.	54
Picture 3: Young local guide presenting the different steps of coffee production.....	57
Picture 4: Woman responsible for tourism accommodation preparing lunch for family and visitors	58
Picture 5: Room built for the tourism accommodation.....	61
Picture 6: View to the coffee fields in El Roblar.....	68
Picture 7: Tourist guide in La Pita helping to build the eco-lodge for tourists.....	71
Picture 8: Local guide presenting the farm to a visitor.	76
Picture 9: Towards the coffee fields.	99
Table 1. Sociocultural significance of tourism in the communities of San Ramón.....	102

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CECOCAFEN	Central of Coffee Cooperatives in the Northern Regions of Nicaragua Fair Trade Coffee Trail Tourism programme in four communities of San Ramón, Nicaragua
FLO	Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International
HDI	Human Development Index, UNDP
INTUR	Nicaraguan Institute for Tourism
ILO	International Labor Organization Lux-Development Luxembourg Agency for Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
REDTURS	Latin American Network of Sustainable Community-based Tourism
RENITURAL	Nicaraguan Network for Rural Community-based Tourism Ruta del Café Tourism programme in northern Nicaragua called the Coffee Route
SGP	Small Grants Programme, UNDP
TIES	The International Ecotourism Society
UCA	Union of the Agriculture Cooperatives
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Nicaragua on Map



Map of Central America from "International Relations Since 1945" by Young, JW (2003), by permission of Oxford University Press.

Five northern departments of Nicaragua belong to the touristic *Ruta del Café* – Coffee Route.

Fair Trade Coffee Trail in the municipality of San Ramón (department of Matagalpa) forms a part of this Coffee Route.



Map is modified, original image from ODAnc developed by Development Gateway

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Focus on Tourism in Rural Communities

Rural community-based tourism (turismo rural y comunitario) is small scale tourism in economically less developed rural areas in the Global South, where the local people are active actors in tourism development. In tourism research it has been widely accepted that the hosts can benefit from tourism only when they are accepted as agents of their own development (Shen, Hughey & Simmons 2008, 7; Wild 2008, 74, cf. Li 2006). During the last two decades, a strong undercurrent of community-based tourism has become an underlying principle in the realm of new, alternative and responsible tourism (Singh, Timothy & Dowling eds. 2003, 5–6). Recently a growing number of small, rural and economically marginalized communities around Latin America have sought to combine economic growth with social and environmental sustainability through this kind of tourism (Cañada & Gascón 2007a, 18–19).

Nicaragua is a good example of a Latin American country where exists a growing trend of rural community-based tourism. Even though tourism has been Nicaragua's biggest export during the last few years, the volume of tourism is still small compared to its neighbour Costa Rica (INTUR 2006, 76). Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America and one of its primary export products is coffee. Nicaragua's coffee and tourism sectors meet on the *Ruta del Café* – Coffee Route¹ in northern Nicaragua, where national and international tourists can learn about coffee production and experience the rural life with the local communities.

Fair Trade Coffee Trail in San Ramón's municipality forms a part of this Coffee Route. A young tourist guide in San Ramón described the beginning of the tourism development in his community as follows;

¹ Nicaraguan tourism institute INTUR and Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation Lux-Development are financing a five-year (2007–2011) programme of *Ruta del Café* with the main objective of supporting local economic development.

The crisis of the coffee price influenced us a lot after the year 2000. This cooperative of small producers was affected very heavily. Some families have income only from coffee. Therefore they started to find new ideas about how to help the families... So they would not to be so dependent on only coffee. That is how they came up with the idea of tourism. Tourism is like complementary to the coffee cultivation and it started in 2003. Tourists came here to get to know the coffee, the families and the cooperatives.

In San Ramón, tourism was introduced to four communities in order to reduce the economic vulnerability of the poor coffee producers and to create new contacts with the Fair Trade coffee consumers in the Global North (Cañada, Delgado & Gil 2006, 83). In the beginning of the project the local families and young guides received different kinds of training, financial aid and microcredit to be able to improve the local conditions for the paying tourists. Today these four communities of San Ramón – *El Roblar, La Corona, la Pita* and *La Reyna* – are considered some of the main pioneers of community-based tourism in the country.

During recent years official development assistance has formed approximately 15 percent of Nicaragua's Gross Domestic Product (UNDP 2007, 292). Before starting this study I worked with development cooperation in Nicaragua and Central American region. During this time I observed that the interest of international donors and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was growing rapidly towards these kinds of tourism initiatives and their role in tourism development in the country was becoming noticeable. Even though the focus of the tourism research has been traditionally on the encounters between hosts and guests, Stephen Wearing and Matthew McDonald (2002) present that tourism should be perceived as a tripartite system including also the *intermediaries* or so called *brokers*, such as previously mentioned development actors, tour operators and the local governments.

Today it would be challenging to find development strategies or project documents which would not be claiming to promote 'sustainable development'. However, different actors use these concepts in very different ways. Even though the *San José Declaration of Rural Community-based Tourism* (2003) emphasizes social, cultural, ecological and economic sustainability, the practical discourse around community-based tourism seems to lack a holistic view on sustainable development. Many examples from Nicaragua support the argument of Fujun Shen, Kenneth Hughey and David Simmons (2008, 8) about tourism often being treated as one of the 'productive' rural sectors, which oversimplifies the complexity of tourism development. There is a tendency of measuring the benefits of community-

based tourism only in economic terms and the demands of sustainability are commonly understood to refer only to the mitigation of the environmental costs. Even though the importance of tourism profitability can never be denied, too often the larger context of tourism is dismissed when the economic motive overrules other essential reasons for tourism development (Fennell & Przeclawski 2004, 144; Richter 2001, 289).

Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winner in Economic Science, (1999, 14) states that “Without ignoring the importance of economic growth, we must look well beyond it”. The role of income and wealth should be integrated into a broader and fuller picture of success and deprivation (Sen 1999, 20). However, the issues in sociocultural development such as well-being, freedom of choice and empowerment have not been considered seriously enough in the context of tourism (Hashimoto 2002, 202, 218; Wall & Mathieson 2006, 286). One of the underlying assumptions of this study is that the sociocultural factors cannot be ignored in tourism planning, management and impact analysis, as the tourists and the brokers leave behind much more than just money. In fact, tourism can have profound impacts – both positive and negative – when tourists and brokers aim to introduce the different worldviews and practices to the rural communities (Wearing & McDonald 2002, 191).

1.2 Previous Studies

Rural community-based tourism can be placed under a broader term of community-based tourism as a special form of tourism that is taking place in the economically marginalized rural communities. During recent years there has been a growing amount of literature focusing on the communities' role in tourism development. There exists research for instance on tourism and sustainable community development (in Hall & Richards eds. 2006), on local community and culture (Fagence 2003) on development issues and destination communities (Tefler 2002a; 2003) and on cultural tourism, participation and (re)presentation (in Smith & Robinson eds. 2006). What all the literature listed above have in common is the complexity of the community concept and the difficulties in promoting community participation and empowerment in practise (see e.g. Popple 2000).

In 1976, Emanuel de Kadt published *Tourism: Passport to Development?* which, for the first time, brought the discourses of tourism and development together. However, during the last decades tourism literature has mirrored the changes in the alternative development framework without real acknowledgement and understanding of the overriding development paradigms (Tefler 2003). Today a few authors like Richard Sharpley and David J. Tefler (e.g. 2002), Wearing and McDonald (2002), Martin Mowforth

and Ian Munt (2003) and Jim Butcher (2003) have reviewed development discourse in the tourism context. In her article, Atsuko Hashimoto (2002) has concentrated particularly on the connections between development theory and the sociocultural aspects of tourism. Tourism development and empowerment have been studied especially by Regina Scheyvens (1999, 2002) and Stroma Cole (2006), while the broker's role in the tourism development has been analyzed by Wearing and McDonald (2002) and by René van der Duim, Karin Peters, and John Akama (2006, 104–123).

There exists, however, a lack of studies of sociocultural impacts from the local communities' perspective in the Global South, and many developing agents are not aware of the possible impacts of tourism development, nor of the local rural realities. According to Geoffrey Wall and Alister Mathieson (2006, 53, 286, 308) the new research of so called responsible tourism initiatives has been concentrated mainly on economic and environmental rather than sociocultural consequences and there is an urgent need to study the social impacts of tourism in the host communities. Moreover, the tourism planning is often directed to consider the tourists' needs, whereas instead the tourism developers should devote more attention to the welfare of those who are being visited.

In general, the tourism literature includes three different kinds of opinions regarding the existing studies about sociocultural impacts. A part of the tourism literature suggests that it is not only the tourism industry and the development agencies that are failing to see the whole range of impacts that tourism can cause. There exist strong arguments about the sociocultural dimension of tourism having received too little attention in sustainable tourism debate, and there is fundamental need to improve the databases of social and cultural circumstances (Fagence 2003, 75; Swarbrooke 2002, 69). There are still only a few accessible studies that provide balanced analyses of tourism impacts and incorporate them with the values and goals of the local people. The tourism impact research has also focused mainly on the conventional mass tourism and there have not yet been many studies about the effects of interactions of hosts with 'non-institutionalized tourists'. (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 28–29, 286, 315.) Geoffrey Wall (2001) argues that it is not enough to study and list the sociocultural impacts without asking in what circumstances tourism can be sustainable.

On the other hand, a wide range of tourism research is inferring that the concern about the sociocultural impacts is continuously growing and that the amount of studies is rapidly increasing. One example of this kind of holistic, comprehensive text of tourism impacts is Wall and Mathieson's (2006) *Tourism, Impacts and Opportunities*. In recent years many more studies have emerged, but in contrast to the economic effects, the sociocultural impacts have been often portrayed in a negative light (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 220). The impacts on the daily life are often described as unwanted

rather than something that could be desirable and lead to further economic improvement. Sometimes there has been an almost paternalistic desire to protect host communities from negative impacts of tourism development. (Hashimoto 2002, 213–214; Swarbrooke 2002, 69.)

The third kind of opinion is that although many tourism studies offer holistic information about sociocultural impacts, there still exists a wide gap between tourism theories and practice. Ironically (and sadly), the tourism industry itself has not yet fully recognized and supported tourism research and scholarship (Jafari 2001, 39). The critical and warning tone has been characteristic among the academics – while the private and the public sectors have often easily ignored the sociocultural impacts. Many tourism researchers criticize that many people working on the ‘field’ fail to identify the different components of tourism development and to integrate them into the planning framework. Therefore the impacts are often assessed only when negative impacts of crisis situations appear. (Trousdale 2001, 242; Wall & Mathieson 2006, 38, 314.)

It can be summarized that tourism literature typically presents the sociocultural impacts in a negative light, but in practice these ‘theoretical warnings’ are not acknowledged. William Trousdale (2001, 242) argues that the growing gap between accumulated information generated by tourism research and its practical application is especially wide in the South. Salvador Palomo Pérez (2003b, 6) has studied the relationship between tourism and international development agencies, and criticizes development agencies for often getting involved with tourism without an adequate knowledge about the tourism development and its impacts. It seems that the problem is not always the lack of knowledge but also the values. According to Rosemary Viswanath’s (2008, 51) tourism industry and developers are unwilling to acknowledge and take a stand on the immense social, cultural, political and human rights issues.

However, A. M. Johnston (2003, 125) considers that the dialogue on how to broaden the discussion of sustainability in the tourism sector is in transition. Lately there has been more interest to study tourism as an agent for cultural change and transformation (Asworth 2003, 79), and the interest towards the ethical questions of tourism has grown (Viljanen 2008, 28). The ethics of tourism and examples of more humanistic tourism have been considered from communities’ perspective, for example by D. A. Fennell and K. Przeclawski (2003). Cesar D’Mello’s (ed. 2008) *Transforming Reforming Tourism – Perspectives on Justice and Humanity in Tourism* contains Jeff Wild’s (2008) article about tourism’s contribution to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Tricia Barnett’s (2008) analysis of tourism’s possibilities to work as a tool for a genuine exchange of cultural understanding.

1.3 Purpose and Goals of the Study

The research question of this study is: *What are the sociocultural possibilities and challenges of rural community-based tourism development?* The study focuses on the sociocultural significance of tourism development from the rural communities' standpoint. I recognize that the research subject could be narrowed down more in this master thesis study. However, as rural community-based tourism is still a relatively unknown form of tourism, there was a need to approach and introduce it in a wider context.

This research includes an ethnographic fieldwork study in three communities of San Ramón in northern Nicaragua. Therefore, this study provides information primarily about the sociocultural impacts of tourism in these three communities, and secondly about the special character of rural community-based tourism that can be applied to wider context. The main goal of the study is to contribute to the building of a bridge between theory and practice. This study introduces information and guidelines for tourism researchers, local communities, tourists as enlightened consumers and for tourism brokers, such as international development agencies, NGOs and tour operators et cetera. One of the objectives is also to encourage different actors promoting tourism development to systematize their practical experiences of sociocultural impacts of rural community-based tourism.

Rural community-based tourism is commonly seen as a responsible and sustainable form of tourism, but there have been also counterarguments. The supporting arguments emphasize its fairness, community control and participation. However, the critics state that the idea of community participation is largely a myth or that this kind of small scale tourism can bring only minimal possibilities of economic growth and therefore does not reduce poverty (see e.g. Mitchell & Muckosy 2008, 102; PEMCE 2008, 7; Rocha 2008). On the other hand, there are also opinions according to which these kinds of forms of new moral 'tourism' would be as unsustainable as the conventional forms of mass tourism (Butcher 2003; Mowforth & Munt 2003, 91). The main purpose of this study is to explore the sociocultural significance of rural community-based tourism and in that way contribute to this conversation. Generally speaking, the tourism scholars have mainly concentrated on tourism's negative sociocultural impacts at the expense of seeing the positive ones (Fagence 2003, 55; Swarbrooke 2002, 71) whereas the tourism brokers have had a tendency of doing either exactly the opposite – or of simply ignoring the sociocultural aspects of tourism development. In this study I have aimed to place myself somewhere in the middle, and to acknowledge the possible positive sociocultural impacts, but also the existing challenges.

This study brings tourism research together with the development studies. In order to understand community-based tourism it is important to recognize the overriding development paradigms and their relationship to community development (Tefler 2003, 175). Rural community-based tourism and development studies share the main goal of poverty reduction. The interconnection between tourism research, development studies and rural community-based tourism is logical, as community is widely considered as a cornerstone of sustainable development, and approximately 75 percent of world's poor population lives in rural areas. Sociocultural impacts are an inseparable aspect of poverty, since 'poor' does not refer only to financial aspects, but also for instance to powerlessness, vulnerability, insecurity and isolation (Chambers 1983, 112).

Even though the simplest definition of development is change, the concept is everything else but self-evident (Aronsson 2000, 31). Therefore it is essential to be aware of what is meant by sustainable development; what is wanted to be 'developed' and what is to be 'sustained'? Without ignoring the economic, social and cultural diversity, it is still possible to determine universal values, such as sustenance, self-esteem and freedom of choice (Todaro & Smith 2006 20–24). The *first* sub-task of this study is to *consider the significance of sociocultural impacts in sustainable tourism development*. The re-construction of the analytical framework follows the discourse of alternative development approach and the principles and guidelines of responsible tourism.

However, in order to analyze the sociocultural impacts of tourism development it is important to understand the local context where tourism is taking place. This means that for example the local community characteristics, the stage and type of tourism development, the host-guest relationship and the role of the brokers should be recognized. The *second* sub-task of this study is to analyze *in what kind of circumstances rural community-based tourism can be socioculturally sustainable*.

The basic principle of responsible tourism is that sustainable tourism development cannot take place without social justice and local participation (Tefler 2003, 175). This agency aspect plays a significant role, particularly in community-based tourism. The *third* sub-task of this study is to analyze *how this kind of tourism can promote equal participation and community involvement*. Michael J. Hatton (1995, 5) expresses that the real essence of community-based tourism is that it can prepare local people to take advantages of further opportunities. That is why an important challenge of sustainable tourism development is to ensure ongoing individual and community involvement. The *fourth* sub-task of this study is to analyze *how community-based tourism can promote people's control over factors that affect their lives*. This kind of process is often termed *empowerment* in development jargon. According to Regina Scheyvens (1999), empowerment

can be divided into economic, political, social and psychological types of empowerment. In this study the sociocultural analysis is limited to the psychological and social types of empowerment at the individual and community level.

One of the underlying assumptions in this study is that development is about human development and therefore it can be too narrow to measure the success of tourism only in economic terms. On the other hand the impacts on the host community's normal daily life are often argued to be something unwanted, rather than something that could be desirable and lead to further economic improvement (Hashimoto 2002, 213–214). Therefore the last sub-task of this study is *to estimate tourism's possibilities to contribute to development and poverty reduction even when it does not bring large economic benefits to the local communities.*

1.4 Methodology and Data

In this research I have used the ethnographic approach because the aim of the study is to understand the tourism impacts from the local point of view. For a long time, ethnographic and community studies have been the most prominent ways in anthropology and sociology to get some empirically based insight into human relationships and to understand local realities. Still, many ethnographic studies have been criticized for ignoring the power relations, the lack of agreement of defining communities, the lack of generalizability and the bias towards studying small and isolated communities, just to mention a few (Brunt 2001, 80, 88–89; Scheyvens & Storey 2003). Despite this criticism, ethnography is the most suitable approach when people's actions, culture or social organization are studied in an everyday context as it includes an intent to be open to everything unknown (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001, 160; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 3, 18).

Ethnographic traditions consist a wide range of differences and tensions, but they are all still usually based on researcher's first-hand experience, exploration of a particular sociocultural setting and observation of the participants (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Loftland & Lofland 2001, 4–5). Even though there has been criticism of studying communities as united entities, ethnographers are still convinced that social research has to be done in some context (Brunt 2001, 90). In this study the community is the natural context where the sociocultural changes are appearing, as the community concept is central in most debates of sustainable tourism. Still, the concept of community can invoke a false sense of tradition, homogeneity and consensus, and many authors have stated that the idea of community is largely a myth (Little 1994 in Singh et al. 2003, 8; Swarbrooke 2002,

129). Without ignoring the criticism, I follow Lodewijk Brunt's (2001, 90) statement how community can be as good context as any, even if the community was imagined. Thus it is important in the community context to acknowledge what kind of context the community really is.

This study follows Steinar Kvale's (1996) seven steps of research; thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. The empirical data was collected during four weeks of fieldwork in September–October 2008 in three coffee cultivating communities of San Ramón, Nicaragua. During this time I lived with the local families who had prepared their homes for accommodating tourists. Even though observation and participation are the most characteristic features of the ethnographic approach, conversations and interviews are still central parts of the interaction in the field study settings (Atkinson et al. 2001, 4–5). It was essential to incorporate interviews into my fieldwork, as the purpose was to learn how people had experienced the changes during the tourism development process. Therefore I used semi-structured interviews as the main method of empiric data collecting. The fieldwork included a total number of 23 interviews, out of which five were conducted in groups and the rest of them as individual interviews.

A semi-structured interview has a sequence of themes to be covered and suggested questions (Kvale 1996, 124). The semi-structured interview method could also be described as ethnographic interviewing, given that according to Barbara Sherman Heyl (2001, 369), the principles of ethnographic interviews are adequate time and openness, along with respectful and ongoing relationships with the participants. Interviews were supported by a participatory observation method and the field notes were applied to understand and explain better for instance the context of the interviews and community characteristics. Newspaper articles, programme memos, pamphlets and web pages of different Nicaraguan authorities and organizations were used as secondary sources of this study. One important secondary source was also UCA San Ramón's (2008) project proposal document to UNDP's Small Grant Program (SGP).²

After the fieldwork, the interviews and field notes were transcribed and translated from Spanish to English. The produced data was organized and analyzed by utilizing qualitative content analysis and categorization.

² I used this document with a certain caution since I knew that this project proposal was written by a representative from a foreign NGO. It is obvious that the donors' interests have influence on the project strategies and contents and therefore it can be sometimes quite challenging to evaluate project proposal documents and what is really planned and going to be done.

1.5 Structure of the Study

The *second* chapter of the study introduces the phenomena of new forms of responsible tourism and how rural community-based tourism can be placed in the centre of the discussion about sustainable tourism development. It also considers the importance of the role of the brokers, in other words, the intermediaries between the hosts and the guests, in the community-based tourism initiatives, and how this kind of tourism has developed in Nicaragua. The *third* chapter is dedicated to the re-construction of the analytical framework that is used in the sociocultural analysis of this study. The main concepts of this framework are sociocultural impacts, development, sustainability, participation and empowerment. This third chapter introduces how the sociocultural aspects of development are approached in both tourism and development studies, and how the local participation and empowerment are currently seen as the basis of sustainable development. The framework used in the analysis could be described as more conceptual than theoretical, as the sustainability in tourism research can be rather seen as an approach than a holistic theory.

In the *fourth* chapter I explain shortly why I have done this research in Nicaragua and how I chose to do the case study in the communities of San Ramón. In this chapter I also analyze my position as an ethnographic researcher and introduce how I used the semi-structured interviews and participatory observation as data collecting methods and what kind of methods were used to analyze the corpus.

The chapters *five*, *six* and *seven* include the presentation and analysis of the empirical data collected through the fieldwork in San Ramón. These chapters are divided so that the fifth chapter introduces the context where the tourism development has taken place, the sixth approaches the significance at the individual level and the seventh analyses the tourism development from the whole communities' point of view. In this way the sixth chapter concentrates on the changes in human capital, cultural values and psychological empowerment, while chapter seven focuses on social capital and social empowerment. The conclusions of this study are in the last, eighth, chapter. There I show, for example, how the results of this study could be applied to practise and what the needs for further studies are.

2 WHAT IS RURAL COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM?

2.1 Seeking for New Forms of Tourism

The developing countries are attracting a growing share of global international tourism. Tourism industry is one of the major export sectors in the South and the international bodies and national governments are increasingly recognizing the potential of tourism in the economic growth. (WTO 2002, 10.) According to The United Nations World Tourism Organization – UNWTO (WTO 2002, 9), 80 percent of its efforts are dedicated to support the developing countries to benefit from tourism development. UNWTO's poverty reduction initiatives can be seen as a search for economic fairness in tourism business at the global level. The message is clear "Sustainable tourism can be one of the few development opportunities for the poor. Let us use it wisely and soon." (WTO 2002).

Tourism is increasingly perceived as a tool for poverty reduction in rural areas in developing countries (Shen et al. 2008, 1), even though there is no direct evidence of the connection between tourism development and poverty reduction (Palomo Pérez 2003a, 3; 2003b 10; Viswanath 2008, 43). At the same time the growth of mass tourism has many times led to a wide range of problems such as environmental, social and cultural degradation and unequal distribution of financial benefits (Mowforth & Munt 2003, 90). Consequently during the last decades there has been a growing tendency of looking for alternative ways of tourism development in order to slow or arrest the deterioration process of mass tourism. In a way this process can be described as a search of alternative and responsible tourism that would be an antithesis of mass tourism. (Singh et al. 2003, 5.)

In the broadest sense the concept alternative tourism refers mainly to some form of tourism that is relatively new and that is alternative to the traditional forms of tourism. The differences between mass tourism and alternative new forms of tourism can be described, for example, with the following counterparts: mass tourism vs. individual tourism, packaged

vs. unpackaged and flexible, homogenous vs. hybrid, irresponsible vs. responsible, Sun Sand and Sex vs. Travelling Trekking and Trucking, having vs. being, superiority vs. understanding (Butcher 2003, 13–14; Mowforth & Munt 2003, 26; Poon 1993, 10).

It seems that many alternative tourism models could have better possibilities to be more sustainable than the contemporary forms of mass tourism. However, all the alternative forms of tourism are not initiated with the needs of the locals in mind. Alternative tourism is by no means always more sustainable or responsible. For instance, risk tourism, adventure tourism and ethnic tourism are perhaps alternatives for mass tourism, but not necessarily responsible forms of tourism (Canada & Gascón 2007b, 68, 100). Mowforth and Munt (2003, 94) state that the study of the new forms of tourism has just begun and the lack of consensus on the definitions and practical boundaries is still striking. On the other hand, it is good to note that in some cases mass tourism can be more sustainable than alternative forms of tourism, as in the packaged mass tourism the impacts can be better controlled when they are limited only to a certain geographical area.

In the 1980s the development of the environmental movement offered an alternative to 'bad' mass tourism. The concept of ecotourism was used to describe more sustainable forms of tourism and in the end of the 1990's ecotourism was the fastest growing sector of global tourism. However, sometimes, when economic profit and environmental conservation have been the main driving forces behind ecotourism, the ventures have rather alienated than benefitted the local communities. Later on, ecotourism programmes have been sometimes called community-based ecotourism to emphasize the intentions to promote the conservation of nature and the quality of life of the local people. (Dowling 2003, 210–212; Mowforth & Munt 2003, 95; Scheyvens 1999, 245–246.) Today The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) emphasizes the importance of uniting "conservation, communities and sustainable travel" and their mission includes promoting the well-being of local people.

After the beginning of the ecotourism 'boom', other alternative forms of more equal and socially just tourism have been initiated, for example, in community-based tourism, pro-poor tourism and fair trade in tourism. Scheyvens (2002) has introduced a relatively new concept of justice tourism as a new label of tourism which directly aims at meeting the criteria of social and environmental sustainability. The fundamental terms of new tourism are globalization, sustainability and development, and the prefixes such as alternative, responsible, acceptable and sustainable try to challenge the notion that all types of tourism would be harmful for vulnerable host communities (Butcher 2003; Mowforth & Munt 2003, 42, 78). From a humanitarian perspective alternative forms of tourism can serve as a search for community and social support in an oppressive, competitive and individualistic society. (Campfens 1997 in Tefler 2003, 163).

2.2 The Principles of Rural Community-based Tourism

Rural community-based tourism can be placed in the heart of alternative and sustainable development discourse which emphasizes the importance of control of the local communities. Community-based tourism is often viewed as a more sustainable alternative than the traditional mass tourism as it allows host communities to free themselves from the hegemonic grasp of outside tour operators (Timothy & Tosun 2003, 184). Wearing and McDonald (2002, 201) point out that many marginalized communities are voicing opposition to the traditional Western-based tourism industry and that these communities can help to develop strategies for changing the operation of tourism. Barnett (2008, 38) uses an expression of 'social enterprises' when describing these kind of initiatives that ensure the benefits of tourism for the local people. In these kinds of responsible forms of tourism the quality of life of the community is taken as the starting point and tourism is seen as one of the possible instruments to improve it (Postma 2002 in McGettigan, Burns & Candon 2006, 155).

Especially in Latin America the concept of rural community-based tourism is used to refer to small scale tourism in rural areas, where the local communities are in control of tourism development. However, the terminology of these new forms of tourism is not very clear and it is possible that similar kinds of tourism initiatives are also called, for instance agroecotourism, solidarity tourism or simply community-based tourism. Ernest Cañada and Jordi Gascón can be seen as the advocates of the rural community-based tourism with the main focus on the tourism's economic impacts and on the food security (see e.g. Cañada & Gascón 2007b, 87). Cañada and Gascón have promoted community-based tourism in connection with their extensive critique towards contemporary mass tourism. Their basic argument is that the positive impacts of mass tourism are mostly myths, especially among vulnerable populations in the Global South. In general the existing tourism literature speaks very little about rural community-based tourism in developing countries, and even the terminology around this type of tourism is not always clear. It is often mainly just mentioned as an alternative form of tourism with a short description of its main characters.

There is no universal model of rural community-based tourism, but the principals of community-based tourism in Latin America are listed in the Declaration of San José (2003). According to the declaration, this kind of tourism development should be socially and environmentally responsible, economically viable, and to enrich the cultures. Rural community-based tourism should not be directly copied from outside, since tourism developments are very situational and the potential for local involvement

varies a great deal from place to place (Cañada & Gascón 2007b, 74). An important feature of community-based tourism is the respect for local culture, heritage and traditions. Community-based tourism's activities should value the local handicrafts, celebrations, music, dance, clothing, myths and legends. In addition the gastronomic services in the communities should prefer the local culinary traditions and the local food products. (Cañada et al. 2006; Maldonado 2005, 15.)

Rural community-based tourism seeks to combine economic growth with social and environmental sustainability. The main goal of rural community-based tourism is to reduce income poverty, vulnerability and isolation by diversifying, not by replacing the traditional income sources of rural communities. It can create new job alternatives in rural areas and therefore reduce situations where people are forced to migrate to the cities against their will. Rural community-based tourism can also be seen as an opportunity to secure that the farmers' land will not be sold, for instance to foreign tourism investors. This form of rural tourism can be seen as a unique opportunity for the marginalized groups to participate in tourism development. (Cañada et al. 2006; Cañada & Gascón 2007, 73–75; Maldonado 2005, 14; Tefler 2006, 242–245.) Maldonado (2005, 14, 15) points out that the communities should promote practices that eliminate whatever forms of exclusion and discrimination and that it is central to pay attention to gender equality in tourism development.

Rural community-based tourism proceeds rarely as an unplanned intervention of free market process but more as a planned programme that is a part of local or regional development strategies. This makes it possible to plan community-based tourism development carefully. Tourism development is supposed to be led by an organization of the community and the benefits are distributed equally inside the community. The starting point is to discuss and to identify the local values and needs and the possible impacts of this kind of tourism development. The communities should discuss what they are willing to contribute and what they are not willing to give up. (Cañada & Gascón 2007, 73–75; Hatton 1999, 3; Tefler 2006, 242–245.) The vision and the goals of tourism development should be established in community meetings and everybody should accept the community's plan. Carlos Maldonado (2005, 15) brings up the importance to determine the boundaries, or the ethical codes and codes of conduct for tourists and brokers. When the boundaries are decided, the local cultural brokers – the local guides have the responsible task to ensure that these boundaries are being respected.

Alister Mathieson and Geoffrey Wall (1982) name three types of culture which are attractive to tourists and are also possible to change with tourism development. These three categories are inanimate forms of culture such as monuments and arts, animated forms of culture such as religious events and

carnivals, and the reflection of normal daily life as well as activities of the host community. In community-based tourism the sociocultural environment of the community serves as a tourism attraction but also as the recipient of tourism impacts (Lindeberg & McKercher 1997). Host communities should control what to present from the local culture and the everyday life. This also means that the communities should decide how close they let the visitors come and how much they can see the real life or so called 'authenticity'. Particularly vulnerable groups can need special attention and protection in this planning process (Fagence 2003, 75).

2.3 The Brokers' Role

One principle of responsible tourism is that it is not sufficient for the host communities to gain material benefits from tourism development without having control over the tourism process (Scheyvens 2003, 229). However, the active local participation has turned out to be challenging to promote in practice. Greg Richards and Derek Hall (2006, 303) claim that a stronger role of the third sector, NGOs, is perceived as a potential solution to promote the participation and empowerment in tourism development. Cañada and Gascón (2007b, 85–91) see that international development agencies should follow the model of community-based tourism in their tourism development strategies and concentrate on equal distribution of benefits within marginalized groups. Development agencies have been recently increasingly interested in funding tourism development projects with a high degree of community involvement. Therefore community-based tourism is seen as a safe option for community development and poverty reduction. (Ashley & Roe 1998, 10.) It has been noticed at the global level that unless the funds are targeted to assist in the community tourism development projects, the potential for community development may be lost in the pressures of the global economy (Tefler 2003, 160).

In this form of tourism the guides and local coordinators are culture brokers at the local level, but in many cases even more powerful brokers are the international development agencies, NGO's or tour operators (Cañada & Merodio 2004, 10–12; Fennell & Przeclawski 2003, 146–147; Smith 2001, 276). Therefore the community-based tourism planning and management process can involve many fields of knowledge (Wearing & McDonald 2002) and many different views about what would be the best for the locals.

Wearing and McDonald (2002) have researched the role of intermediaries in community-based tourism development. They point out the development agencies' top-down implementation of tourism projects and, on the other hand, the tour operators' tendency to reap the big benefits from tourism

development. Many other authors as well have emphasized the important role of brokers in community-based tourism development (see e.g. Cheong & Miller 2000; Fennell & Przeclawski 2003; Smith 2001; van der Duim et al. 2006).

Assisting communities with tourism development should extend beyond merely supplying the funding to start the tourism project (Briedenhann & Ramchander 2006, 124). Tourism planners have to find an agreement between various stakeholders and interests in tourism development (Hall 2003, 100). A broader brokers' support is usually important to the local communities, as the rural communities might need help in learning how to market tourism, how to contact and receive tourists, and how to manage tourism development. It is also common that many poor communities have a very limited access to the information about the pros and cons of tourism and how the tourism development might affect people's lives in the destination community (Scheyvens 2003, 233). Not the least importantly, the brokers' role is to support the communities to value their social capital and the factors that promote the cooperation and collective efficiency (Maldonado 2005, 14). This kind of promotion of knowledge and usage of social capital can prepare the local communities to take advantage of the further opportunities (see e.g. Hatton 1999, 5).

Even though the communities need help with tourism development, there exists a clear difference between development that is generated in that community and ideas of development that have come from somewhere else. In rural community-based tourism the idea of practicing tourism is often introduced by brokers, such as development agencies or NGOs. Most of the development assistance is normally channeled through projects which are limited in space and time and represent the choices made by the planners (Nolan 2002, 92). When the strategies and financing come from outside it is always questionable what happens when the outside support ends or the projects are handed in to local coordinators. There are examples of tourism initiatives that have weakened significantly when brokers such as development agencies have withdrawn (see e.g. van der Duim et al. 2007, 109–110).

The brokers or intermediaries should not be in charge of the tourism projects, but instead they should work as facilitators, in other words, sources of information that can eventually be utilised and transformed into knowledge by the communities themselves. There is a need for understanding local realities, respectful partnerships and participatory practices. These can empower the local people to define their own development problems, goals and solutions. (Parpat 2002 in Miettinen 2007, 39; Wearing & McDonald 2002, 203–204.) However, it is common that the brokers, such as development agents or tour operators, enter rural areas without prior full understanding about the local realities or about the interconnection

between tourism and rural community development (Wearing & McDonald 2002). Community involvement in tourism planning can slow down and add costs to the tourism planning (Swarbrooke 2002, 128) which can often lead to using faster top-down implemented strategies. As Maria Eriksson Baaz (2002, 83–85) states, very often local communities have to share the goals and objectives of the donors. Often the local communities are not even properly informed about the projects and the impacts they may have (Pleumarom 2002 in Wild 2008, 73).

When the brokers play an important role in community-based tourism planning, the local participation and empowerment are in danger of becoming just empty buzzwords. In practice the local people are frequently left out from the planning and decision-making of tourism development (Mowforth & Munt 2003, 212). According to Palomo Pérez (2003b, 6), there is a common but incorrect picture of the linkage between the international cooperation and responsible tourism. The international cooperation programmes do not automatically lead to responsible and sustainable tourism. Palomo Pérez criticizes the development cooperation for often getting involved with the tourism development without adequate knowledge about tourism development and its impacts. (Palomo Pérez 2003b, 6.)

Systematization of previous experiences of this kind of tourism is valuable in the planning process of new initiatives. One of the existing methodological guidelines for rural community-based tourism analysis is written by Maldonado and published in 2005 by International Labor Organization (ILO) and REDTURS, the Latin American Network of Sustainable Community-based Tourism. This methodology lists, among other things, also possible social and cultural impacts that rural community-based tourism can cause (Maldonado 2005, 13–15).

2.4 Responsible Tourism in Nicaragua

Nicaragua has the population of approximately 5.5 million people and it occupies the 110th place on the list of the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). It is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, as 45 percent of the population survives with less than US\$1 per day and almost 80 percent with less than US\$2 a day. (UNDP 2007, 231, 239.)

In Nicaragua, almost five decades of Somoza dictatorship ended with Sandinista revolution in 1979, and in the 1980's, Nicaraguans suffered from the civil war and trade embargo led by the U.S. During the 1990s and in the beginning of the 21st century Nicaragua was led by liberal governments, and in 2006 the Sandinistas made a comeback to power. Just as in all Central American countries, armed conflicts are left behind, also in Nicaraguan

history. The global increase in food prices has reduced food consumption among the poorest, and one of the most important goals of Nicaraguan government and the international development agencies is to promote the food security in the country (WFP 2008, 2, PNDH 2008). Poverty is the most widespread in rural areas, and the promotion of rural population's integration to development is a big challenge for Nicaragua (Sistema de las Naciones Unidas 2007, 17, 20).

Even though Nicaragua has made satisfactory progress in meeting the first Millennium Development Goal of reducing extreme poverty (World Bank 2007), the levels of inequality still remain high (UNDP 2007, 283, Sistema de las Naciones Unidas 2007, 13). The Nicaraguan government's National Human Development Plan (PNDH 2008, 116) describes that the majority of Nicaraguan people live in poverty, inequality and in social exclusion. Most often women, children, young people, indigenous people and afro descendants who live in rural areas or marginal urban areas are socially excluded and have little participation in decision-making. One of the difficulties is that the vulnerable groups in Nicaragua are not 'empowered' by their rights and in some cases they do not know their rights. (Sistema de las Naciones Unidas 2007, 34, 74.)

Tourism has been considered a fast way to economic development in Nicaragua. In 2007 800 000 international tourists visited Nicaragua. 65 percent of these tourists arrived from other Central American countries, 25 percent were from North America and the remaining 10 percent from the rest of the world. The tourism growth has been rapid as the number of tourists has doubled during the last ten years. (INTUR 2006; 2007.) One interesting fact about international tourism in Nicaragua is that almost all the tourists organize their trips independently apart from the tourism agencies (INTUR 2007, 23). For instance surfing and volcano climbing are popular activities among the tourists visiting the country.

Approximately 10 percent of the tourists travelling in Central America arrive in Nicaragua (2007). The bigger tourism countries – Costa Rica, Guatemala and El Salvador – are receiving most of the tourists in the region when Nicaragua, Honduras and Panama are receiving approximately the same amount of tourists annually and Belize is currently the smallest tourism country in the region. However, in Nicaragua the revenues from tourism are relatively low compared to its neighboring countries. At present Nicaragua has an advantage of having a better safety situation than for instance Guatemala and Honduras (see e.g. International Alert...). Since the tourism has not boomed yet in Nicaragua, there exists an opportunity to create a reputation for Nicaragua as a country of "responsible tourism" just as Costa Rica is already known as a land of "ecotourism" and for instance Guatemala is famous for its Maya-culture.

The previous governments have welcomed foreign investors to the Pacific coast beach line, which has already caused serious land tenure problems (Bonilla & Mordt 2008; Cañada & Merodio 2004, 1). There have been several bad experiences of tourism development in Central America, when foreign investors have bought rural land and left local people with little alternatives. Many farmers or fishermen have lost their traditional income from agriculture or fishing and are now working with tourism development. As Barnett (2008, 34) puts it “When the tourists come the fishermen learn to be waiters”. These changes always have social consequences and some of the mistakes are impossible to correct later on.

Today Nicaraguan Sandinista government emphasizes the importance of supporting local small tourism enterprises (PNDH 2008, 188), and rural community-based tourism fits very well also in government’s plans to promote participation and reduce inequality among marginalized groups. In practice, the Nicaraguan Tourism Institute INTUR promotes the *Ruta del Café* (Coffee Route) programme in northern Nicaragua which includes the support to the small and medium-sized enterprises in the area. However, there exists a common hope that INTUR would support the small tourism initiatives even more in the future (La Prensa 12.12.2007). The current constraints slowing down the tourism initiatives in Nicaragua are weak infrastructure, insufficient knowledge and education as well as poor knowledge about the existing laws. Sustainable ways of supporting the communities practicing rural tourism would be both to work with institutions that have possibilities to influence the juridical and political framework in Nicaragua and to support the communities to create their own agenda and plan for the advocacy. This kind of access to the decision-making process can be seen as one of the indicators of sustainability (Mowforth & Munt 2003, 107).

Rural community-based tourism is becoming a relevant form of tourism in Nicaragua. During the last years organizations of communities, farmer families, indigenous groups and handicraft associations have started different kinds of tourism initiatives throughout the country. These initiatives make it possible to visit and get to know Nicaragua in alternative ways. (Cañada et al. 2006, 7.) In Nicaragua this kind of new form of tourism has recently received attention also in the national media, and *Foundation Luciernaga* (Cañada et al. 2006) has published a guidebook of rural community-based tourism destinations in the country.

The existence of RENITURAL (Red Nicaraguense de Turismo Rural Comunitario), network organization promoting the community-based tourism in Nicaragua demonstrates the popularity of this type of tourism. RENITURAL was founded in 2004, and only four years later it was already representing nearly 60 community-based tourism initiatives. These initiatives have been divided into four zones with their special characters; North with

coffee farming and nature, South with history, art, beaches and volcanic lagoons, West with volcanoes, water biodiversity as well as agrotourism, and the Caribbean zone with fishing, beaches, Caribbean culture and Rio San Juan. (RENITURAL 2008.) According to RENITURAL's baseline study (SNV 2007, 22), in 2006 approximately 20 000 national tourists and 9000 international tourists visited rural community-based tourism initiatives in Nicaragua. However the numbers are only directional as many communities have not kept official record on the visits.

In addition to these NGOs, many international development organizations are also interested in this kind of tourism in Nicaragua. In 2008 the strongest actors in the tourism sector were the Netherlands Development Agency SNV, the Luxembourg Agency for Development, Cooperation Lux-Development and the German Development Service DED. Out of these actors, SNV had been focusing also on the sociocultural issues of community-based tourism. UNWTO had supported tourism development in the country for example through the ST-EP programme. UN SGP was concentrating especially on rural community-based tourism initiatives. In addition to these international development organizations, also the Rainforest Alliance had been involved in the tourism development in Nicaragua.

The presence of the third sector and different international development agencies can be noticed also in the number of workshops and conferences related to community-based tourism. As an example, Central American regional rural community-based tourism conference was organized on February 19–20, 2008 on an island called Isla de Ometepe in Nicaragua. The theme of the conference was *Advocacy of Rural and Community based Tourism and the juridical and political framework of tourism in Central America*. In this conference, the central message was that careful planning and advocacy is needed in order to promote sustainable and equal tourism development in Central America. This conference had attracted participants from all Central American countries, and during these two days the issues of sustainable tourism development were considered at the regional and national levels.

3 RE-CONSTRUCTION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Sociocultural Impacts in Tourism Research

The impacts of tourism refer to the net changes brought by the process of tourism development (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 21; Wolf 1977, 3). I have chosen to use more frequently the concept of sociocultural *impacts*, as this concept is the most common one in the tourism research. Still it could be more appropriate to emphasize the agency of the local people by using the concepts such as tourism's sociocultural *significance* or *consequences*. Wall and Mathieson (2006) argue that the people in the tourism destination areas are not passive and simply 'impacted', but often actively seeking for tourists, investors and developing agencies.

Sociocultural impacts can be connected to the concepts of 'livelihood impacts' or 'people impacts', and they emerge in the form of changed human behavior (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin 2001, 23; Wall & Mathieson 2006, 19; Wolf 1977, 3). This means that the emphasis is not on the environmental or financial impacts, but instead on the less studied area; *social and human capital and cultural values*. The clear categorizing of sociocultural impacts seems to be more typical in tourism research than in developing studies. As the economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts of tourism overlap and influence each other, this kind of categorizing is not self-evident. In a way sociocultural impacts should not be taken apart from economic and environmental impacts, since the impacts of tourism development should be seen more holistically. Still, in tourism research this division can help to notice the broad consequences that tourism development can cause. As the sociocultural impacts of tourism are often been left without appropriate attention, this study emphasizes the importance of sociocultural impacts in sustainable development.

Sociocultural approach includes factors such as well-being, value systems, attitudes, behavioral patterns, education and skill base, cultural

heritage, creative expressions, intercultural understanding, social structure, equity, participation and empowerment (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2005, 262; Fox 1977, 27). As an example, tourism can reinforce cultural understanding and local pride, but on the other hand, it can also contribute to the loss of cultural identity and induce conflicts in the host community. In addition, the impacts are not the same for everyone in a tourism destination. It is vital to acknowledge that all the people in the host community are not hosts, but still influenced by tourism development in the area. What may be a benefit to one group within the community may be a cost to the neighbors (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 8).

In tourism literature the sociocultural impacts are frequently presented as a list of negative and positive impacts. The listing of positive sociocultural impacts of tourism development is often started with a very broad statement according to which tourism 'improves the quality of life for local residents' or 'reduces poverty'. More specifically, tourism is considered to reduce racial, political, religious, sociocultural and language barriers, which can lead to inter-cultural understanding and peace. Tourism can also foster local pride and enhance the appreciation of one's own culture, which reinforces the preservation of heritage, tradition, history, culture, legends et cetera. Positive sociocultural impacts also include the reduction of dependency, the increase of security by generating income, and the positive changes in the migration patterns. (Cooper et al. 2005, 246; Jafari 2001, 30; Smith 2001, 110; Trousdale 2001, 247.)

However, it is often argued that these kinds of positive impacts of tourism development are only myths when it comes to the contemporary forms of mass tourism. It has been stated that 'the true cost of holidays' are the conflicts about land and water, displacement of local people, human rights abuse, and exploitation of women and children. (Cañada & Gascón 2007a; Hickeman in Viswanath 2008, 50–51.) Tourism is also blamed for increase in undesirable activities such as alcoholism, drug abuse, crime, black market in import or substitute goods, prostitution and gambling. Moreover weak preparation for seasonality and employment of non-locals are common reasons for negative sociocultural impacts. Tourism has led to gradual erosion of indigenous languages and cultures and to superficiality as well as commercialization of culture, arts, religion and more. Often listed negative sociocultural impacts also include demonstration effect, relative deprivation, generation of stereotypes, breakdown in a family, or community cohesion, and even the spread of diseases. (Fagence 2003, 62; Jafari 2001, 30; Moworth & Munt 2003, 90; Smith 2001, 110; Swarbrooke 2002, 72; Trousdale 2001, 247; Wall & Mathieson 2006, 285.)

Thoughtful consideration and assessment of the potential impacts should be included in all kinds of tourism initiatives – even in supposedly more sustainable and responsible forms of tourism. In general, the main

objective of sociocultural impact assessment or analysis is to provide information about host communities' perceptions of tourism development. This information is essential to all the parties working with tourism development in a certain destination in order to reinforce the positive impacts and mitigate the negative ones. The conventional impact assessments have often been reactive and have had focus only on immediate impacts. Even the consideration of impacts and alternatives should never be discouraged, still it would be ideal to assess the possible impacts already before the final design of tourism development. It has increasingly been recognized that one-time impact assessment may be inadequate and there is a need for evaluation in different stages of tourism development. (Trousdale 2001, 242–245, 253, 256; Wall & Mathieson 2006, 299, 316.)

The amount of empirical research is growing, however, many authors argue that there is still a lack of conceptual and methodological guidelines as well as technologies for the prediction and assessment of sociocultural impacts of tourism (Rätz 2006, 36; Trousdale 2001, 243; Wall & Mathieson 2006, 326). The impact assessment should always be contextualized (Trousdale 2001, 246–247) and that is maybe why it is not even possible to create one general tool for tourism development. Today there are some tools, such as the Delphi technique, carrying capacity calculations, public attitude surveys and a field methodology called Appropriate Tourism Impact Assessment (ATIA). As an example, ATIA is a practical model for sociocultural impact assessment, which is designed to assist in tourism planning by recognizing local problems and by assisting in their remediation (Trousdale 2001, 242). It seems that the challenging part of planning these kinds of tools is to create well-functioning categorizes of sociocultural impacts. Different kinds of rural development appraisal tools have also been indented to adjust to the tourism research and many of these have strong emphasis on the local participation. Examples of these kind tools are Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) (Mowforth & Munt 2003, 219; Shen et al. 2008). However, these rural appraisal techniques seem to have shortcomings in the context of tourism development. What seems to be common to both tourism and rural development techniques is the concentration mainly on the problems, leaving out the possible beneficial impacts that could be promoted.

Even though the impact assessment should be modified according to the type of tourism, there are some common factors that always have relevance to economic, environmental and sociocultural impacts. Wall and Mathieson (2006, 65–67) argue that it is not the most important to ask “What are the impacts of tourism?”, but instead to consider “In what circumstances these impacts are likely to occur?”. They have named three main factors that should always be taken into account in tourism impact analysis. The *first* factor are community characteristics, such as the resource base, availability

of alternative economic opportunities, social structure and organization, political organization and the extent of local control in planning and decision-making. The *second* factor is the level and type of tourism development, as the number of tourists, accommodation type, the length of stay and the touristic activities. The *third* factor is the nature of host-guest relationships which include the frequency, locations, seasonability and the spontaneity of the interactions are also relevant in tourism development.

The impacts of tourism development are likely to change over time. Tourism is dynamic and cumulative, and the impacts of tourism are normally more than results of a specific tourist event, activity or facility. Impacts linger and interact with each other and are linked to a number of other agents of change influencing the destination. (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 19–21.) Sociocultural consequences usually occur slowly over time and they are also largely invisible and intangible. Yet the social changes caused by tourism are usually permanent. (Swarbrooke 2002, 69.)

Tourism development can also stop, change direction or modify its character. Different changes in tourism development can be caused by changes in motives, attitudes, knowledge and aspiration of tourists or residents, for instance. Tourism development can produce outcomes that are not expected and that are difficult to predict, and changes may be caused by outside forces over which those involved in tourism have very little control of. (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 21.) Even though all the possible effects cannot be predicted, there is a growing recognition that anticipatory control of development impacts will lead to a better quality of life and development (Trousdale 2001, 243).

But if tourism is expected to lead to a better quality of life, sustainable development and reduction of poverty, what is normally meant by these broad concepts? I would like to point out the broadness and fuzziness of these terms by starting with a quick historical review of the most central concept: *development*.

3.2 Development - Looking Beyond Economic Growth

'The age of development' and a new era of interventions began as the U.S president Harry S. Truman declared in his inauguration speech on January 20, 1949 that the Southern hemisphere was an 'underdeveloped area' (Edwards 2004, 28; Sachs 2001, 2). On that day, two billion poor people were discovered and became underdeveloped. North America and Europe were seen as the models on the development path, and the material advancement was perceived to be the only way to reach cultural, social and political

development. Alternatives were left out from the development discourse. (de Vylder 2006, 26; Easterly 2006, 21; Escobar 1997, 86, 90.) It was never clear how this development model could actually eliminate poverty, and this 'development' has, on the contrary, caused growing inequality and deprivation in many places (Edwards 2004, 70, 114).

Chambers (in Hettne 1990, 9) described in 1985 the progress of development theories and practices by saying "It is alarming how wrong we were and how sure we were that we were right". Slowly it has been learned that the economic growth does not contribute to development if it does not translate to social changes and increase the capabilities to function of the poor (Edwards 2004). Since Truman's speech the concept of development has been evolving chronically through four main schools of development, which have always appeared as a reaction against the previous paradigm. These schools of development have been modernization, dependency theory, economic neo-liberalism and *alternative development approach*. (de Vylder 2006, 24–38; Tefler 2003, 158–161.)³

In the 1990s softer values became more central in the development debate and so called alternative development approach evolved out of criticism towards euro-centrism and the economic models of development that had preceded it (de Vylder 2006; Schmidt 1989 in Tefler 2003, 160). This development paradigm adapted a more holistic view of human society and development. The goal of development is no longer determined as economic growth, but as human development. In the alternative development approach poverty is understood to have many dimensions which cannot be explained only by looking at income or material living standards. In addition to the economic disadvantages, poverty has been linked to powerlessness, vulnerability, isolation and physical weakness. The alternative development discourse has placed the people in the center of development, and the alternative development strategies have tended to stress the basic needs, environmental and cultural sustainability as well as the gender aspect of development. Today the emphasis is on bottom-up approaches and on grass-root level development which often means community participation and small-scale as well as locally owned development. (Chambers 1983, 108–114; de Vylder 2006, Sen 1999; Tefler 2003, 161.)

Particularly the significance of human and social capital has been emphasized in the latest development discourse. The previous development paradigms stressed the economic capital, whereas now the balance between

³ Some authors have also added 'the school of sustainable development' to the main approaches of development, but there are different opinions whether this school has emerged before or after alternative development approach (see e.g. Mowforth & Munt 2003, 32; Shen et al. 2008). There is also a growing school of post-development with a strong criticism against the orthodox of development (see e.g. Escobar 1997).

human, social, economic and also natural capital is recognized to be central. The human capital – good health, education, skills, creativity and experiences – is believed to create sustainable development when the social capital is seen as an invisible glue that keeps the society together. The more social capital there is, the easier it is to trust and work together. (de Vylder 2006, 13, 40–41, 47.)

The values and definition of development play central role in the tourism impact analyses. These analyses can yield contradictory findings according to the perspectives held of the role that tourism has in the destination (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 21). As introduced here, the concept of development is artificial, vague and it has emerged from Eurocentric thinking. Marja-Liisa Swantz (2009, 29) states that there is no simple definition of development, since the concept is one of contradictions. Development means different things to different people, and this is why the definition of development must be spelled out carefully (Todaro & Smith 2006, 25). The learned lessons about ‘failures’ in development include implicit recommendations to be very humble in front of the development questions. Still, there are certain core values and goals of development that can be universally approved.

In this study I borrow Todaro and Smith’s (2006, 20–24) definition of the core values and goals that can serve as a conceptual basis and a practical guideline for understanding the inner meaning of development. These core values are *sustenance* – the ability to meet basic needs, *self esteem* – to be a person and *freedom from servitude* – to be able to choose. (In this study I use the concept of *freedom of choice*). As this study has the focus on the sociocultural aspects of development, I analyze how the values of self-esteem and freedom of choice are connected to the tourism development in rural communities. Todaro and Smith (2006, 20–24) determine that the value of self-esteem is connected to the development objective of raising the level of livings. This means that higher incomes, jobs, education, and great attention to cultural and human values all generate greater individual and national self-esteem. The basic value of freedom of choice is connected to the objective of expanding the range of economic and social choices which lead to freedom from servitude, dependence, ignorance and human misery.

One of the important contributions to the alternative paradigm has come from Sen’s (1999) *Development as Freedom*. Sen’s *capabilities to function* -approach contrasts the narrow view of development, as it views the clear difference between income and achievements, commodities and capabilities. Sen has stated that in order to understand better the poverty of human lives, the attention should be shifted from exclusive concentration on income poverty to the more exclusive idea of capability deprivation. This capabilities approach concentrates on positive freedom, meaning that a person has an actual ability to be or do something. Therefore the effectiveness of freedom should be seen as a means – not just as an ends.

One of these kinds of instrumental freedoms are the social opportunities. According to Sen, having a greater freedom is significant in itself, but also important in fostering the person's opportunity to have valuable outcomes. Therefore freedom is a principal determinant of individual initiative and social effectiveness. Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world. These matters are central to the process of development. (Sen 1998, 18–20, 37–38.)

Sen's approach of capabilities and increase in the human choice have been lifted to the center of the development debate. His way of thinking still remains marginal, however, he has helped to re-prioritize a significant sector of economists and development agencies, and has also had a considerable influence on the policies of the United Nations. Sen's analysis has contributed to the creation and respect of United Nations HDI, which is in charge of ranking countries according to their health, education and income level. (Todaro & Smith 2006, 20).

In September 2000 the world's leaders from 189 countries adopted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Millennium Declaration. Now, for the first time, there exist global and clear time bound targets and benchmarks of development (Wild 2008, 70). MDGs are divided into four different groups; economic well-being, social development, environment as well as democratic participation. The key features of this declaration are firstly the commitment towards "halving poverty" and secondly the objective of achieving other human development goals by the year 2015. The emphasis of this Millennium Declaration is on caring for the vulnerable and enabling participation of all citizens (Wild 2008, 70). If these goals were reached by the year 2015, it would considerably improve the lives of the poorest, and would expand their range of choices. Although only few of the targets could be reached, MDGs have provided a unified focus to the development community unlike anything else before. (Todaro & Smith 2006, 22–23.)

Development is not only something that is happening, but it is also planned social change (Hagberg, no date). These planned social changes take place in different development settings that include states, international development organizations, NGOs, organizations at the grassroots level as well as private donors. However, there is still much development occurring also in traditional forms without this kind of specific development context when the people are making plans to improve the current situation. (Nolan 2002, 36–44, 91.) The Western countries have had to learn that development is not a movement only from the West to the rest of the world (Swantz 2009, 31). Even though the development is defined still in a variety of ways, these definitions include usually the following central aspects; *improvement*, *empowerment* and *participation* (Nolan 2002, 20).

It is important to understand the relation between development and tourism development, since tourism is not isolated from other aspects of

development (Cañada & Gascón 2007b, 98; Swarbrooke 2002, 207). This is particularly true in economically poor rural areas. It has been experienced that the contemporary mass tourism has not been able to decrease poverty and in many cases it has just caused environmental and sociocultural problems among the local people. According to Trousdale (2001, 243), the fundamental reason for failures in tourism development in developing countries is an 'ill-defined messianic faith' in economic growth.

For the last 20 years the alternative tourism discourse has more or less attempted to mirror the more extant framework of sustainable development (Robinson 1999, 379). Alternative tourism strategies have often stressed the same themes as the alternative development approach; small scale, locally owned development, community participation, and cultural as well as environmental sustainability (Brohman 1996, 65 in Tefler 2006, 243). Mowforth and Munt (2003, 95) state that ecotourism, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, ethical tourism and pro-poor tourism are the forms of alternative tourism that have been able to define themselves somehow in relation to sustainability and development. However, many of these new forms of tourism have also faced critique. For instance Canada and Gascón (2007b, 83) state that pro-poor tourism does not always considerably differ from mass tourism.

Even though alternative tourism development has mirrored the school of development studies, a yet greater input from development studies to tourism would be important. As an example, tourism development could acknowledge better the reversals in thinking presented by Chambers (1983, 171–173); the last should be put first, rural before urban, agricultural before industrial, low-cost before high-cost, poor before rich etc. Wall and Mathieson (2006, 288) remind us that "Tourism should be encouraged more for the fact that it may contribute to the well-being of local people in destination areas and less for the reason that it is good for the tourist industry". In this study I have acknowledged the post-colonialism's criticism towards the objectifying of the 'other' in tourism research and practices (see e.g. Wearing & McDonald 2002, 200–201).

3.3 Local Participation and Empowerment as a Basis of Sustainability

Some community-based tourism guidebooks simplify that community-based tourism is socially sustainable (see e.g. Hatton 1999, 3). However, this statement can be understood in many ways, since there are many different definitions of sustainability. In the broadest sense sustainable development was defined in Brundtland Rapport in 1987 as "... meeting the needs without

compromising the needs of future generations” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). The roots of the word ‘sustainable’ origin from the concern about natural resources and environment, and sustainability is often used to characterize the desired balance between economic growth and environmental preservation (Mowforth & Munt 1998, 22; Todaro & Smith 2006, 471).

Later on there has been a shift towards more holistic “triple bottom line” development that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. This list of three dimensions of development could be continued also with technical, political and legal dimensions. The importance of sustainability in tourism sector was recognized for the first time in a larger scale in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 created in the Rio Conference in 1992 (Aronsson 2000, 37). The common statement is that sustainable tourism’s challenge is to plan and manage tourism in destinations in ways which maximize the positive impacts and minimize the negative ones. From another point of view, instead of maximizing some effects and minimizing some, the whole tourism system should be moved in the direction of sustainability (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 314–315).

Sustainable development can be seen as an oxymoron, since something cannot be changed and developed while keeping everything the same. Some refer to sustainability as something wanted and positive, whereas others argue that sustainability means only that the development is not harmful. Nolan (2002, 316) points out that sustainability can indicate how long for instance project benefits last and how these are maintained over time. Even if sustainability is a fuzzy term, it can give practical guidance in the selection of opportunities to follow. Sustainability can be used as a set of ideas that include the principals, values and goals, and this set can work as a guideline or strategy (Cooper et al. 2005, 284; Smith 2001, 188). There have been many these kinds of guidelines for socioculturally sustainable tourism development. As an example, Swarbrooke (2002, 69) argues that the 4 E’s of Equity, Equal opportunities, Ethics, and Equal partners can work as a framework in socioculturally sustainable tourism development.

Sustainable development requires multi-sector perspective, which means that tourism developers have to consider the sustainability from a wider viewpoint (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 292, 312). It is a challenging to balance economic, ecological and sociocultural dimensions of sustainability with the decision-making and planning. In these kinds of processes it has to be asked what level of unsustainability do we think is reasonable and for whom, where and when (Persson-Fischler, no date). Seeing that sustainability has global, regional and local levels, it depends from whose point of view we want the tourism to be sustainable. Wall and Mathieson (2006, 53) argue that if tourism is to contribute to sustainable development,

it has to be socially and culturally acceptable. Just like economic unfreedom can breed social unfreedom, also the social and political unfreedom can foster economic unfreedom (Sen 1999, 8).

The fundamental principal of sustainable and socially responsible tourism development is that the host community is in control of the local tourism industry and its activities (Hall 2003, 99; Swarbrooke 2002, 123; Tefler 2003, 169). This is not solely a theoretical nor ideological principle, but there are many practical grounds for community participation. It has been recognized that sustainable tourism development has good possibilities to succeed when the level of community participation is high and it is based on the local resources. Communities that have based tourism development on an open and inclusive process appear to reap benefits earlier, more broadly and in a more sustainable fashion. (Cole 2006, 95; Miettinen 2006, 174; Wild 2008, 74.)

The principle of local participation implies, paradoxically, that very often local people have been left out of the planning and decision-making of the tourism development (Mowforth & Munt 2003, 212). The underlying assumption is that the local people should be actively involved – given the opportunity – in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of development programs (Sen 1999, 53). The principles of the participatory approach emphasize planning with – instead of planning for – local communities. The idea of participation is that it should create a forum for debate and also to spark awareness about the prejudice and knowledge within the brokers themselves. (Wearing & McDonald 2002, 202–203.) It is considered very important to make the tourism planning process as transparent and inclusive as possible. This way more people can see a process in operation and they are also more able to negotiate and plan in their own interests. This means that tourism planning is already much about developing social and human capital (Hall 2003, 110).

In development literature participation is connected very often to the concept of empowerment. It is assumed that even though the development projects are normally limited to last only a certain time, empowerment can guarantee the continuity of the development. Conventionally, empowerment is considered to be the answer to poverty and social exclusion (Edwards 2005, 228). At the same time many authors claim that the concept of empowerment is also in a great risk of becoming just another more or less empty buzzword, or that real empowerment exists only at the rhetorical level (see e.g. Richards & Hall 2006, 303; Wearing & McDonald 2002, 202).

Empowerment represents the top end of the participation ladder, which refers to the capacity of individuals, groups or communities to determine their own affairs. The process of empowerment is understood as a process that helps people to exert control over factors that affect the quality of their lives. (Cole 2006, 97.) Empowering people also signifies promoting human

rights (UNCDF 2003, 67). This means that people should be empowered in a way that they are able to claim their rights instead of giving people their rights. On this highest level in the ladder of participation, local people are active agents of change, can find solutions to their problems, make decisions, implement actions and also evaluate their solutions (Cole 2006, 97). Empowerment is multidimensional in terms of social, economic, psychological and political change (Scheyvens 1999, Tefler 2003, 264).

As mentioned in the introduction, some scholars have stated that community-based tourism embraces the possibility of supporting the local people to take advantages of further opportunities. From this perspective the community empowerment is seen also as the key criteria in the later tourism development. (Hatton 1999, 5; McGettigan et al. 2006, 151). It is often suggested that empowerment requires that the consciousness of the local people rise. But does the level of consciousness capture the whole complexity of tourism development? It looks as if the consciousness alone without self-esteem and freedom to act, could not lead to empowerment.

3.4 Analytical Framework of Sociocultural Sustainability

Sustainability can be seen as a baseline, meaning that tourism development is not harmful to the local communities. In tourism research the concept of carrying capacity is very often used in the same context with the term of sustainability. Sociocultural carrying capacity is the volume of visitors that can be received before the host community's society and culture begins to be irreversibly affected (Swarbrooke 2002, 261–262). It seems like these kinds of concepts draw attention primarily to the negative impacts of tourism, and Wall and Mathieson (2006, 52) argue that even the word 'impact' has come to have a negative connotation. However, the sociocultural impacts of tourism can be also positive. In fact, in order to guarantee the continuity of community-based initiatives, tourism development should be socioculturally beneficial to local people.

Chambers (1983, 158) states that it is important "...to look for potentials, not for problems, not for obstacles, but for opportunities". This study aims to look for possibilities instead of only pointing out the problems, and to look at the negative impacts as challenges instead of a static situation. It would be a pity to concentrate exclusively on the negative impacts even though the positive experiences are relatively small in relation to the number of today's travelers (Barnett 2008, 35).

In this study the analytical framework of sociocultural sustainability is formed together with the principles of development studies and cultural

studies of tourism. The framework of this study is constructed around the idea that central human values of self-esteem and freedom of choice can be seen as means and goals of sustainable tourism development. It can be summarized that in order for rural community-based tourism to be socioculturally sustainable, tourism development should:

- Support equal participation
- Promote community ownership and control
- Create new contacts
- Promote awareness about the locals' own rights, knowledge, new skills and confidence
- Promote the cultural heritage and pride of the local communities
- Respect cultural differences and foster intercultural understanding
- Lead to individual and community empowerment

These basic principles of sustainability have turned out to be complex to implement in practice. This shows that it is equally important to understand the local context of tourism development and the actual impacts of tourism. In this study the local realities of tourism development are approached by following Wall and Mathieson's (2006, 65–67) division of local tourism context to community characteristics, the state and type of tourism development and the host-guest relationship. But even though Wall and Mathieson (2006) include the brokers in the first category of community characteristics in this study, I treat the role of the brokers as a separate *fourth* factor of tourism development in the destination area.

While the tourism initiatives are often started from outside the communities by different brokers, it is important to understand how the local people are participating in the rural community-based tourism development. I have used Jules Pretty's (1995) typology of participation to understand and determine in which way the local people in tourism communities have participated in tourism development. His six types of participation range from first level of passive participation, at which people are told what has been already decided and what has happened, to the sixth level's self-mobilization, in which people have full control, and they take initiatives as well as develop contacts independently.

I have acknowledged that there are doubts about tourism's possibilities to support empowerment if the local people are not 'empowered' already in the beginning of the tourism development process. Scheyvens (2002, 61; 2003, 233) argues that empowerment should be already precursor to community involvement in tourism since it can be seen as a means for determining and achieving community's objectives. According to Mowforth and Munt (2003, 216, 218) the existing power relations could change only when the

initiatives are originated inside the local communities. These approaches are partly contradictory to the idea of development agencies promoting the empowerment from outside.

The criticism and questioning of the empowerment is very welcomed, because it reminds us about how it is not self-evident that all kind of participation in tourism activities automatically leads to individual or community empowerment. In this analytical framework I have brought together Stroma Cole's (2006) and Scheyvens' (1999; 2002) approaches of empowerment through tourism development. The reason for this choice lays in the fact that these authors have indirectly included the aspects of social and human capital as well as cultural values to their definitions of empowerment. In the empowerment framework by Scheyvens (1999, 235, 247; 2003, 59–63), social empowerment means that community cohesion improves as individuals and families work together to build tourism development. These concepts are central in community-based tourism, where the tourism should be based on community organizations, equity, fairness, active participation and positive action at the community level.

According to Cole (2006, 89), external contacts, self-esteem, pride and confidence are central factors in tourism development that can increase empowerment. On the other hand, a lack of knowledge about tourism, a lack of self-belief, or a lack of skills can lead to disempowerment even though the locals were participating in tourism development. Scheyvens' (1999, 247) definition of psychological empowerment is similar to that of Cole's, although Scheyvens speaks about empowerment more at the community level. Psychological empowerment means that the community's self-esteem is enhanced because of outside recognition of the uniqueness and value of their culture, natural resources and traditional knowledge. When the confidence increases, it leads community members to look for further opportunities. (Scheyvens 1999, 247.)

4 ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

4.1 Before Entering the Field

In 2007–2008 I worked at the Finnish Embassy in Managua, Nicaragua, with development cooperation in Central American region and also participated in the planning process of the PROPEMCE⁴ programme – *Enhancing small enterprise growth and opportunities for women and excluded populations in Nicaragua, 2009–2012*. This nine-month work experience offered me good opportunities to follow also the situation of tourism development in the area and to participate in several conferences and workshops about rural community-based tourism. As mentioned in the introduction, during this time I noticed that many brokers had interest to promote tourism development in the country without adequate knowledge about the tourism sector. The debate was also concentrated mainly on the economic and environmental impacts of this kind of tourism, while ignoring the sociocultural aspects. This made me realize that there was neither enough interest nor accessible information to understand the sociocultural significance of this kind of tourism for the host communities.

In a few conferences, different local communities were introducing their experiences with community-based tourism. As an example, the tourism programme of *UCA Tierra y Agua* by the volcano Mombacho in Nicaragua had had encouraging experiences of tourism. People representing UCA Tierra y Agua explained that tourism had brought new opportunities especially for young people and women. They experienced that people working with the tourism programme had started to appreciate and to take better care of the local communities. (Cañada & Merodio 2004; Gil, no date.) In one of the conferences, a woman from an island called Isla de Ometepe approached me, telling me about the difficulties that her community and

⁴ This programme is planned and funded jointly with (MFA) Finland's Ministry for Foreign affairs and (DFID) Department for International Development, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

she personally had faced during the tourism development process. She explained that the biggest obstacle had been many men not having accepted women participating in the meetings that were organized outside their own community, or that women worked against domestic violence in the local organization. Sen (1999, 115) writes that in many developing countries women are not allowed to seek for employment outside the family, which is in itself a serious violation of women's rights of liberty and gender equality. This woman in the conference continued by telling that when she persisted to continue to work with tourism and to defend women's rights, her husband had left her and many people in the community had treated her in a bad way. Apart from this I was being told that in a certain rural area of Nicaragua even the community-based tourism had been connected to child prostitution.

These were examples of my experiences in Nicaragua that encouraged me to explore the sociocultural significance of rural community-based tourism. I considered it essential to learn from the local communities that had been already working with this kind of tourism in the country. However, at this point I had to contemplate my position as a researcher and to think whether or not it would be suitable to do an ethnographic fieldwork in the local communities.

During the recent years there has been debate about the cons of relatively privileged Western researchers traveling to the countries in the Global South to study people living in poverty (Scheyvens & Storey 2003, 2). Even though this kind of research can be called 'academic tourism' (Mowforth & Munt 2003, 205–207) I felt that in order to understand the sociocultural significance of tourism for local communities, I would need to hear people's first hand experiences in the local context. Above all, the purpose of the study is to learn from the local communities and possibly to use their experiences in the further sustainable tourism planning. I also argue that in tourism research, the term 'academic tourism' does not contain such a critical tone, as in these kinds of cases, the local people participating in the tourism research are most likely used to receiving foreign visitors to their communities. In these circumstances I experienced that it would be suitable and essential to do an ethnographic fieldwork – as long as I conscientiously acknowledged the existing power relations and my ethical responsibilities as a researcher.

In 2008, UNDP's Small Grants Programme (SGP) was perhaps the only international organization concentrating mainly on small rural community-based tourism initiatives in Nicaragua. Their focus had been principally on the environmental issues related to these kinds of tourism programmes. The representatives of this UN programme in Nicaragua were interested in supporting me in this study, as they perceived my study to be important and that they would be able to use the new information in the future. During my stay in Nicaragua SGP supported me by providing important information, by

helping me to participate in the relevant tourism workshops and meetings, and by including me in some interesting field visits.

In the beginning SGP provided me with information about different tourism communities that they were currently supporting in Nicaragua. After visiting several tourism communities, I chose a tourism programme called *Fair Trade Coffee Trail* in San Ramón, northern Nicaragua, where four communities were involved in tourism development. In ethnographic research the focus is usually on few cases, which increases the depth of the study (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 3, 18). For that reason I chose three communities for my study: *La Pita*, *El Roblar* and *La Corona*. I experienced that it was possible to study these three communities together, since they were very similar to each other, and the tourism development process had been almost identical in all communities. A partial reason for leaving the fourth community, *La Reyna*, outside the scope of the study was that only the first three communities were receiving financial aid from SGP. Still, even though I obtained help in choosing the communities from this UN programme, it has not affected my objectivity as a researcher, and the research itself has been conducted independently, without any influence from outside.

I decided to choose these communities, because they had worked with tourism already for several years and were considered in a way pioneers of rural community-based tourism in Nicaragua. I found it interesting that UCA San Ramón's (project document 2008) general objectives for tourism development were the following; to bring complementary income, to diversify the activities, to improve the protection of natural resources through education, and to improve the life conditions. Indirect benefits of tourism development had been expected to be local pride when the communities get noticed, new opportunities through tourism service development, such as new music groups or horse rental, and the opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with national and international tourists. I chose these communities also for the reason that it seemed meaningful to learn more about the connection between Fair Trade coffee cultivation and tourism. Besides all this, I was willing to choose a tourism programme where the idea of tourism was introduced to the communities from outside, since this has been relatively common for tourism initiatives in Nicaragua (even though those communities that have started tourism projects by themselves, might have succeeded in general much better).

4.2 Data Collection through Semi-structured Interviews and Field Notes

I visited the communities of San Ramón several times between July and November 2008, and the actual four-week fieldwork was conducted in

October, in the same year. During the fieldwork I stayed with local families who had prepared their homes for tourism accommodation, and gathered the ethnographic data through semi-structured interviews and participatory observation and field notes.

The fieldwork included a total number of 23 interviews. Five of them were made in groups and the rest of them were individual interviews. The interviewed people can be divided into three main groups; women and men accommodating tourists, young tourist guides and men and women in the communities that had not been directly involved with the tourism project. In addition, a group of three people working with sexual health and gender equity were interviewed during their visit in one of the communities. A total number of 34 people participated in the interviews, out of which 20 were women and 14 men. The age range of the informants was between 16 and 60 years of age. Most interviews were made in the interviewees' own homes. All interviews were made in Spanish and they lasted from 15 minutes to 1,5 hours. The longest interviews were made with the local guides who could also be considered my key informants. After 23 interviews it seemed that the data collected was already large enough, because the new interviews were not producing any more new or relevant information.



Picture 1: Main road and the centre of La Pita community

The postmodern approach emphasizes the constructive nature of the knowledge created through the partner interaction in the interview conversation. An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond a spontaneous exchange of views and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge. This kind of interview is not an equal situation because the researcher defines and controls the situation. (Kvale 1996, 6, 11.) However, I chose the semi-structured interview method in order to allow the interviewed people to express their opinions and experiences of tourism development in their own words. Like mentioned in the introduction, this kind of interview method could be described also as ethnographic interviewing. Sherman Heyl (2001, 369) describes that the principles of ethnographic interviews allow the interviews enough time and openness, and that the researcher can establish respectful and on-going relationships with the informants. The strength of an interview conversation is to capture the multitude of views of a theme and to picture a manifold and controversial human world. In semi-structured interviews the subjects do not only answer questions that have been prepared, but themselves formulate their answers in a dialogue, expressing their own conceptions of their world. (Kvale 1996, 7, 11.)

Ethnographic interviewing focuses on the goals which are consonant with those of feminist researchers. Particular interests of this literature are the concepts of empowering the respondents and the reflexivity of the interviews. (Sherman Heyl 2001, 375.) During the planning of this study and throughout the actual fieldwork I acknowledged that the interviews can have either positive or negative influence on the informants. My original intention was to prefer group interviews so that people could discuss also with each other the sociocultural significance of tourism development. Chambers (1983, 202) argues that a small casual group interview can be an excellent source of insight where it is not only the outsider who gains or who holds the initiative. He states that in this kind of interview everyone taking part in the conversation can influence the direction of the discussion and be absorbed in learning. However, I experienced in the beginning of the fieldwork that all the people did not feel comfortable with speaking in the group. I acknowledged that the interviews should establish an atmosphere in which the interviewee feels safe enough to talk freely about his or her feelings and experiences (Kvale 1996, 125) and hence I began to prefer individual interviews. I consider that this was a good decision when, for example, a woman who had been rather quiet in the group situation spoke very openly when we discussed in private.

I had also planned that these group interviews could include simultaneously people who were participating in the tourism programme and those who were not. This turned out to be very challenging to organize

in practice, and finally only one of the group interviews included in this sense 'both sides' of the destination community. Even though the previous group interviews had not been very successful, this experience supported Kvale's (1996, 101) idea that the interaction in the group interviews often leads to spontaneous or emotional statements about the topic. In fact, the informants had probably not brought up their opinions as strongly as if the interviews had been made individually.

According to Kvale (1996, 97), the interviews should be more explorative than hypothesis testing, when the researcher introduces an issue and follows it up. This means that the research should be able to 'uncover' lived world prior to scientific explanations. The very virtue of qualitative research is their openness. (Kvale 1996, 1, 5, 84.) The sociocultural impacts of tourism on the communities were not well known beforehand, and this was one of the reasons why the questions had to be open enough to all kinds of experiences. Still, the interviews had to have a sequence of themes to be covered and suggested questions so the focus stayed on the theme. On the other hand, the sequence of themes helped people to think what kind of changes had been occurring during the tourism development. As an example, Wall and Mathieson (2006, 55–56) explain that many people in the tourism destination might mention littering as the biggest problem in the area, but do not, for instance, bring up the rise in the land value. In this kind of situation it may be wrong to suggest that the littering would be the most significant problem just because all the people point it out in the interviews.

The interviews were based on the open questions about the tourism programme and about the changes it had caused in the community. In addition to these questions, I also used more specific questions to facilitate and support the interviewing. These questions were categorized under groups by using existing information about possible sociocultural impacts caused by tourism. These groups were; community and social capital, work, gender equality, new skills, self-esteem, cultural heritage, cultural exchange, and values and behavior. I experienced that these kinds of pre-constructed categories would not prevent new ideas, while they were used to support the open questions and to receive possible further information about the topics that the informants themselves had already mentioned. These categories also helped me to make sure that all the topics related to sociocultural sustainability had been noticed in the interviews at least at some level. The lists of open and supportive questions are presented in detail in Annex 1.

The questions were modified to the kind of form and language that made it easy for all the interviewees to speak about the topics. This kind of operationalisation of the concepts was done also continuously during the fieldwork when I learned what kind of concepts the interviewed people were used to apply. A good example of this kind of topic was gender equality.

Some of the people were familiar with the term, and they were able to analyze how the gender equality had changed with the tourism development. Still, I noticed that in many cases it was better to ask more concrete questions, for example, about the different family members' role in the family. A few times I also followed Kvale's (1996, 128) advice to 'round off' the interview by mentioning some of the main points that I had learned from the interview. In these kinds of situations my informants were able to comment or add to this feedback. Moreover, in the end of the interviews I always asked if the interviewed had something more to add to the conversation, or something to ask.

I agree with Michael Bloor and Fiona Wood (2006, 71) that observation is an essential method in ethnographic research, as it enables the researcher to access what the people actually do instead of what they say they do. In my fieldwork I received important information, for example, about women's role in the families through the observation method. In this case I felt that the observation method helped me to gather field notes about topics that the informants did not talk about.

4.3 Position of 'Self' Studying the 'Other'

During my fieldwork I participated in people's daily lives as an ethnographic researcher. I walked to school with the children, helped women in the kitchen, took many photos, answered to questions about my home country, rode a horse, helped to build an Eco-cottage in La Pita, sled after a football on a muddy field and played card games with the children. I also collected coffee, learned about the coffee production and drank many liters of sweet and tasty local coffee.

As an ethnographic researcher I have had to acknowledge that I am a Finnish woman who analyzes the sociocultural changes in another cultural context. Since I have been taught to use a certain kind of cultural framework, it is important to learn how to take distance to this prior framework. In this learning process I have found Mats Friberg's (1999, 148) following questions very valuable:

1. How much of what I believe is nothing more than a package of ideas that I have unconsciously taken in from my own culture?
2. To what extent am I prepared to regard the ideas and values of other groups as equally valid as mine?
3. Is it even possible to use ideas and norms which have been developed in my own culture and apply them to other groups?

Regina Scheyvens and Donovan Storey (2003, 182) argue that in research with the marginalized groups it is essential that the research questions are centered on the issues and concerns which are important to the informants. They point out also the obvious that even the marginalized groups are active subjects rather than passive objects of the research. I argue that I have seen the people participating in the study as active subjects of the research by keeping the interviews open and allowing the interviewees to explain their experiences of tourism without leading the answers too much with the questions. In this study I followed Sherman Heyl's (2001, 370) instruction about how the researcher should listen well and respectfully the interviewees and to develop an ethical engagement with the participants. Many of the interviewed women were happy that I was interested in hearing about their feelings and that I considered their experiences very important. I also experienced that the people in the communities of San Ramón considered this study necessary. Some of my interviewees encouraged me by telling that they hoped my study could help them and also other communities to work with tourism development.

Good fieldwork relationships are essential in ethnographic research and that it is important to have the support of the 'gatekeepers' of the community (Bloor & Wood 2006, 70). In my fieldwork these gatekeepers were the young guides who helped me to contact different people in the communities and to ask tentatively if these people were interested in participating in the study. When I met the interviewees for the first time I always explained what my background was, what the study was about and summarized shortly what I would like to ask during the interview. After this I solicited for the final permission for the interviews and asked if the people wanted to know more before starting the interview. All the interviews except one were taped, and the permission for recording was also always asked before starting the interview. According to Kuitunen (1995, 29), this kind of 'informed consent' is a basic requirement in ethical research.

As research ethics can be seen as the starting point of the study, the outcome of the interviews depends on the knowledge, sensitivity and empathy of the interviewer (Kvale 1996, 105). During my fieldwork I experienced that my fluency in Spanish helped me greatly and it was clearly an advantage that I had lived already one year in Nicaragua before beginning the fieldwork. Despite this, I argue that it is challenging to create contacts that allow the interaction to get beyond merely a polite conversation or exchange of ideas (see e.g. Kvale 1996, 125).

Mishler (1986, 122–132 in Sherman Heyl 2001, 375) has identified three types of relationships between interviewers and interviewees; *informants and reporters*, *research collaborators*, and *learners/actors and advocates*. As a student I found it challenging to move on from the first level of informants and reporters even though the empowering component is larger in the two

other kinds of relationships with the interviewees. In some of the interviews the interviewees were mainly just informants, whereas some of the people that I lived with could be described more as research collaborators. I noticed that the interviews were mutually more fruitful when the interviewees and I had succeeded in establishing respectful and on-going relationships. The families that offered me accommodation and food had more confidence in me and they spoke more openly about their experiences with tourism development. For that reason, a longer fieldwork would have allowed me to live with more families and to create a closer relationship with a larger number of people.

I could call some of the interviewed people research collaborators or research participants and some of the interviewed people simply informants who gave me information without me being able to give that much anything back. However, without making the reporting more complicated I have decided to align the terminology by using the terms 'informants' and 'interviewees'. This way I also admit that my role in this study is to be more like a receiving junior researcher and that I still need to study and practice the empowerment aspect of the interviews. At the same time I have experienced that with the empowerment discourse it is also good to take another look at Friberg's (1999, 148) three questions presented earlier and to ask: *In which kind of position am I to aim to empower other people?* As a young researcher I experienced that for me it was primarily important to follow Kvale's (1996, 12, 111) notions of respecting the confidentiality of the informants and to avoid harming or causing stress to my informants. In addition to this, it was very nice to notice that some of the informants were very happy to tell me about their experiences.

In few cases some of the women (who were not participating in the tourism programme) were really shy and they experienced that they could not help me with my study in any way. In these kinds of situations it was difficult to know whether to encourage the people to speak or to simply respect their doubts. In two cases I decided not to stress the women with the interview and in one of these situations a local guide was present at the interview to support the woman. In the latter case this woman commented after the interview that she had been happy to participate. In other interviews I asked the guides not to participate in the interview situations.

4.4 Analyzing and Reporting

"Fieldwork ends when the researcher leaves the community, but the ethnography continues" (Fetterman 1998, 10). After the fieldwork, the interviews were transcribed. The transcription process was quite demanding

as it included translation from Spanish to English. Moreover, noises like heavy rain on a metal roof, roosters crowing or dogs barking had been left without attention in the interview situations, but were not that easy to ignore in the transcription phase.

In this study the organization and analysis of the collected empirical data was made by utilizing categorization and qualitative content analysis. The whole process of analysis of data involved interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of people's actions (see e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 3). This analysis was started by clarification of the transcribed material, which meant elimination of digressions and repetitions. In this case, the digressions mean for example detailed explanation about happenings during the civil war in the 1980's. The repetition refers here to the answers where the informant was mentioning the same things many times in different words. Simultaneously I acknowledged that the informants might have used the repetition in order to emphasize the importance of a certain matter. However, all the information related to the tourism programme was considered as important. Transcribed and clarified interviews formed altogether 78 pages of corpus for the next phase of categorizing the data.

Categorization of meanings has been used already for a long time to analyze qualitative material as it can structure extensive and complex interviews and give an overview of the interviews (Kvale 1996, 197–199). Particularly in the ethnographic studies, developing categories is considered as an important initial analytical task (Robson 2002, 489). As the empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews, the next phase was firstly to categorize the corpus according to the main themes brought up in the interviews:

- Development of the tourism programme
- Positive things about tourism
- Negative things and challenges about tourism
- Meaning of tourism to the informant
- Informant's conception about the meaning of tourism to other people

After this initial categorization the main themes were divided into subcategories. For example, the subcategories under the last main theme were topics such as *improved language skills* (young guides) or *cleaner community* (for everybody). I acknowledge that at this phase of the analysis it was important that the categorization was still done as close as possible to the subjects' self-understanding so that in principle the subjects could also accept the categorization of their statements (see e.g. Kvale 1996, 197–199). Even though the theoretical discussion in tourism research and development studies had guided me in choosing the themes of the semi-

structured interviews, at this point of the study I was still looking at the ways the local people had experienced the tourism development. This kind of interpretation of the situation by the interviewees represents so-called first-level interpretation. However, the description of the informants' interpretations is not sufficient in the qualitative research. In fact, the actual analysis commences after organizing the corpus. (Eskola 2001, 145; Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 142, 149.)

I continued the analysis by connecting the created subcategories to the analytical framework of participation and empowerment presented in the third chapter. By doing this I provided new perspectives to the corpus from previous research on the phenomena. As I had noticed already during the fieldwork, the significance of tourism development differed greatly between different actors. The next phase of the analysis was to organize the formed subcategories into an illustrative table and then divide the table according to different actors. This reorganization helped me to notice that it was more meaningful to divide the subcategories under the following main categories:

- Description of the beginning of tourism development
- Issues related to equal participation
- Importance of new skills, knowledge and confidence about tourism
- Feelings related to cultural presentation
- Current challenges in the programme.

The analytical process of categorization and sub-categorization of the corpus supported well the identification of the most important issues and also, the analysis of the consistency and difference between the various opinions.

It is good to remember that the forms of interview analysis can differ as widely as there are different ways of reading a text and it has to be considered how deeply and critically the interviews can be analyzed (Kvale 1996, 13, 111). It can also be challenging to be able to separate affects that are attributable to tourism and those that are the outcomes of more general social change. The social and cultural characteristics of the host-community are continuously influenced by the political, economic, technological, social, cultural and natural aspects of their wider environment. This means that all the social problems that are coincident with the development of tourism may not have tourism as their principal cause. (Fagence 2003, 74–75; Rátz 2006.)

This study is written in English in order to serve better United Nations' SGP in Nicaragua and also, to possibly reach other development organizations working with tourism development. The whole study will be sent directly to the communities participating in the study. However, this study should be

translated back to Spanish in order to serve better the people working with tourism development in San Ramón. That is why I am considering an option of later adding an annex about the recommendations for action, which will also be translated into Spanish. It would be ideal to be able to return to Nicaragua as soon as possible and hand the study of the communities in person. This would offer an excellent opportunity to continue the discussion about the possibilities and challenges of community-based tourism presented in this study. Even though this cannot be done immediately after finishing the study, a list of recommendations for action could hopefully benefit the communities of San Ramón in some way directly.

I feel that the plan of sending this study to United Nations' SGP and the communities of San Ramón has not had any restrictive influence on the content and no the reporting of the study. Throughout the analysis and reporting I have considered the confidentiality and anonymity of my informants. This study acknowledges and follows the *Guidelines on Research Ethics* by Academy of Finland (2003) and the University of Lapland's (2009) instructions for ethical research practices. The recorded interviews and the transcribed and clarified data have been saved at Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD). I have seen the saving of this data as essential for ethical reasons and also, because the collected data could be used in the further studies⁵. The direct quotations of the interviews are coded and marked by referring first to the number of the interview. After this it is indicated if the informant was female "F" or male "M". The last part of the code presents if the informant had been participating in the tourism programme "Y" (Yes) or if the she or he had not been actively involved with tourism "N" (No). As an example, a direct quotation from a young man working as a guide is coded 8MY.

I have added pictures and maps which serve the purpose of putting the study in context. These pictures have been taken by me and the people present in them have given their permission to use the pictures in this study.

5 (See www.fsd.uta.fi/english/index.html.)

5 CONTEXT OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SAN RAMÓN

This chapter introduces the local context of tourism development in three communities of San Ramón including community characteristics, the stage and type of tourism development and the role of the brokers and tourists in the local tourism development. As most of the families living in the communities of San Ramón are very poor, it is possible to understand that people had not had previous experiences of tourism or of being a tourist. This chapter presents how the local people had felt about the tourism development in the beginning of the initiative and what kind of encounters people had had with the tourists. It is good to notice that the guests visiting the communities of San Ramón actually live with the hosts, which differs greatly from most of the forms of contemporary tourism. Another difference compared to many other forms of tourism is that on average, the tourists seem to be very responsible. Common negative impacts of conventional mass tourism such as increase in undesirable activities (drugs, alcohol, crime or prostitution) or the employment of non-locals had not appeared in the communities of San Ramón.

A special characteristic of the local context in San Ramón is the existence of cooperatives and cooperative unions. The idea of an agricultural cooperative is that its members farm jointly and pool resources such as land and machinery. In San Ramón tourism development is also led cooperatively in each community and the whole programme is coordinated by the *Union of the Agriculture Cooperatives Augusto C. Sandino* – shortened to UCA San Ramón, which represents 21 agricultural cooperatives in the area. The activities of UCA San Ramón include micro-credits to the farmers, commercialization, capacity building, legal assistance, improvement of the housing and toilets, improving drinking water, roads and health, scholarships for students, social projects and promotion of the community-based agroecotourism (UCA San Ramón 2008, 2–3).



Banner states: Stop the violence against women! "That is my right"

Picture 2: The office of UCA San Ramón on the main street of San Ramón.

5.1 Communities of San Ramón

The Nicaraguan northern highlands are heavily dependent upon coffee production and very vulnerable to the global price fluctuations. The three communities of this study receive most of their income from small-scale coffee cultivation. Even though coffee is one of the most heavily traded commodities in the world, the benefits are very few for the small-scale farmers. Between the years 1998 and 2001, the average price received by coffee exporters decreased 61 percent and by 2001 the price received by coffee producers was barely sufficient to cover the production costs. Small farm households in particular suffered the most from the coffee crisis and many farmers in Nicaragua were forced to reduce their activities or even abandon coffee production altogether. Estimates suggest that 35,000 permanent coffee farmers and workers and more than 100,000 seasonal plantation workers might have lost their jobs. The impacts of this crisis were obviously also social. (Vakis, Kruger & Mason 2004, 2, 4.) In this context there was an urgent need to find economic alternatives.

The vulnerability of the small farmers was reduced through Fair Trade coffee certification and the new tourism initiative. One of the important goals of the tourism project was to increase the understanding between

the coffee consumers in Global North and the small-scale coffee farmers in Nicaragua.

It's not as though these coffee growers are getting fat off Fair Trade – most make around 2\$ per day. But in desperately poor region where electricity and running water are luxuries, a better and more reliable price for their coffee means three meals a day – by no means universal in Nicaragua – plus the chance to plan for the future. (Lonely Planet Nicaragua & El Salvador 2006, 212.)

While this description from *Lonely Planet* is somewhat theatrical, it does capture the reality of coffee-cultivating rural areas in Nicaragua. On the other hand cooperatives sell only less than half of their coffee as Fair Trade certificated due to the small global markets of this kind of coffee and additionally, the price differential received from the normal and Fair Trade certified coffee has more recently become almost the same. According to Joni Valkila and Anja Nygren (2009, 38) the economic significance of Fair Trade coffee certification was noticeable during the low world coffee prices in 2001–2004 but the benefits have been relatively small since the recovery of the global coffee prices in 2004.

It is true that many families are still struggling. The basic grains like corn, beans and rice play the biggest part in the rural diet. Most of the families eat chicken only seldom and almost never eat meat or fish. According to recent field analysis the raising of the basic food basket has reduced the food consumption in the poorest families in Nicaragua by 26 percent (WFP 2008, 2). Houses in the communities are very basic. They are made of wood, adobe or cement bricks and most of the houses have a dirt floor. In the kitchens the food is prepared on an open cooking fire and in many houses the smoke can only pass out via a gap between the wall and the roof, leaving smoke in the kitchen.

Most of the families have no fridges or other household appliances. Those houses closer to the main roads often have electricity, the others do not and power failures are very common. Almost all the families use latrines and outdoor bathing areas, but some families in La Corona and La Pita have constructed inside showers and toilets for tourists. All families however have at least one mobile phone and in some families almost all the family members have their own phones. In some areas there is no reception and the prepaid calls are very expensive in relative terms. Nevertheless, it is nowadays common that in the poorest areas mobile phones appear before clean water or toilets (Helsingin Sanomat, 3rd of November 2008).

Most of the adults in the communities have studied only for a few years or less. Today the younger generation has better possibilities, but

the children are still not all going to school, mainly for economic reasons. UCA San Ramón has helped some of the young people with the school costs. It seems that the young people are not planning to migrate to the cities, but are looking forward to developing their skills and continuing to work within the communities. Many people in the rural communities go to church and religion plays a big part in people's lives. As with everywhere in Nicaragua, in the communities of San Ramón you can hear very often statements such as *Si Dios quiere* (If God wants), and *Gracias a Dios* (Thanks to God). Alternatively, alcoholism and domestic violence are fairly common in Nicaraguan rural areas (Sistema de las Naciones Unidas 2007, 32). UCA San Ramón for example, has worked in the communities with the gender issues, as women are often in a more vulnerable situation than men. Families that are working with the tourism programme have agreed that all the families that offer accommodation have to be responsible and honest and there cannot be these kind of problems. *And maybe if somebody in the family is drinking, they do not drink when the tourists come (2FY)!*

The three tourism communities of La Pita, El Roblar and La Corona are located in the municipality of San Ramón, in the department of Matagalpa (see the map p. 6). From Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, it takes 3–4 hours to travel to San Ramón and the journey requires one bus change in the town of Matagalpa. The public buses in Nicaragua are mainly colorful 'chicken buses' – the old school buses from United States. Tourists can arrive to all the communities through the UCA San Ramón office from where the guides pick them up. *The guide of rural community-based tourism in Nicaragua* (2006, 84) recommends that the visitors should inform UCA San Ramón when they are arriving. It is also possible to travel independently direct from the city of Matagalpa to El Roblar and La Corona with a bus. To La Pita there is no access with public transportation, and the three kilometers from San Ramón to La Pita can be travelled by foot, or 4x4 vehicle. Almost none of the people living in these communities have their own cars, so most of the moving around is done by foot, bike or by horse.

In the communities of San Ramón the tourists are staying with the local families who have prepared their private homes for the use of the tourists. Tourists can experience and participate in everyday life and the routines of the local families. It is possible to learn to cook traditional food such as tortillas made of corn or local delicacy called 'nacatamales', or to make natural medicines with the women. Many families roast their own coffee and the visitors are welcome to be a part of this process. Tourists can also visit a community centre, church or school and go to watch baseball and football games.



Picture 3: Young local guide presenting the different steps of coffee production

Depending on the time of the year, the visitors can participate in the different phases of agricultural production such as sowing, planting trees to give shade to the plants, organic composting and harvesting. The biggest interest of the majority of visitors is on coffee cultivation, as people want to gain understanding of Fair Trade and organic coffee production. The young local guides in particular tell visitors about the function of the coffee cooperatives or about the previous coffee crisis. Normally between October and January the visitors can participate in the coffee collecting, while during the rest of the year the tourists can learn about the coffee production, coffee planting, fertilizers et cetera. It is also possible to visit a private hacienda nearby and talk with landless coffee workers who can tell ‘the other side of the coffee story’. (Cañada et al. 2006, 85–87; Fair Trade Coffee Trail...)

Natural and cultural resources are the biggest tourism attractions in Nicaragua, and essentially all the Nicaraguans have access to these resources. In these mountainous areas used for coffee cultivation, tourists can hike on the trails around the communities, observe birds, flowers and animals and visit the lookout points (located as high as in 900 metres) offering panoramic views. It is also possible to visit the gold mines of the area, swim in lakes or by a waterfall or jump in to the small pool of La Pita. The communities are calm, and at night the main attractions are fireflies, stars and sounds of the

nature. In general the tourism has very little of a commercial touch and there are almost no souvenirs to buy. (Cañada et al. 2006, 85–87; Vianica.)

The prices of the tourism services are the same in all three communities. An entrance to the communities cost US\$1, a guided tour for one day costs US\$10 for a group, accommodation US\$5 per night/per person and US\$2.50 per plate. Horse rental costs US\$10 for the whole day. Cultural activities and workshops for groups about traditional food or natural medicines cost around US\$25 per group. These prices have been the same since the beginning of the tourism project and the communities had been discussing about the possibility of raising the prices a little.

Today information about the tourism project of these communities can be found online at the following address: <http://fairtradecoffeetrail.googlepages.com> and also in the Nicaraguan guidebook for rural community-based tourism (Cañada et al. 2006, 82–87). There has also been at least one radio broadcast about the tourism in San Ramón which was used to attract the potential national tourists (Onda Local...). There are also hopes that the forthcoming *Lonely Planet* guidebook about Nicaragua will include a section of community-based tourism in the country and make particular mention of the communities of San Ramón.



Picture 4: Woman responsible for tourism accommodation preparing lunch for family and visitors

5.2 Tourism Life Cycle in San Ramón

The communities of San Ramón had already been receiving foreign visitors before the community-based tourism programme started. International solidarity caused by the Revolution in 1979 and the *Contra war* in the 1980's had brought the first foreign visitors to the communities. At this point tourism had not yet been organized at any level and these visitors *attended as friends – not as tourists* (21MN). The first visitors had brought their own food and stayed with the families for free. They had been interested to help the communities and to learn about the Nicaraguan socialist revolution and about the new coffee cooperatives. According to one of my informants, these kinds of visits and the unofficial help had stopped when the Sandinistas lost the elections in 1990 and the liberals came into the power. In addition to the 'solidarity tourism' in the 1980's, national tourists have been arriving to the communities, especially during Easter, to enjoy the waterfalls in La Corona and El Roblar and the small swimming pool in La Pita.

The idea for more organized tourism development was born during the coffee crisis in the beginning of 21st century. *The Central of Coffee Cooperatives in the North* (CECOCAFEN) had invented the idea of tourism as an alternative to help poor families in the communities become less vulnerable to the fluctuations of global coffee prices. With the support from CECOCAFEN UCA San Ramón had chosen four coffee producing communities to start with the tourism project. A pilot project was started first in El Roblar and La Corona and a few years later, La Pita and La Reyna were also included to the tourism development. When comparing the beginning of tourism development in San Ramón to Pretty's (1995) six-point typology of participation it can be described that some of the people participated by being only informed or consulted about the tourism development. On the other hand, some of the people had been included at the level four *Functional participation* as they had been forming groups to meet the predetermined objectives of the cooperative unions. This supports Hall's (2003, 103) statement how it is mainly a naive and romantic view of community-based tourism that everyone in the community would have equal access to power and representation.

As the idea of tourism development was introduced to the communities from the outside, the reactions towards the idea varied greatly. It is normal that people might have limited capacity to understand the tourists and how the tourism industry works (Ashley et al. 2001; Cañada & Merodio 2004, 8; Cole 2003, 99) and this had happened also in the communities of San Ramón. The people that had already received foreign visitors before had in general been more open to the new idea. *We thought that tourism can help us a lot. We wanted most of all to include the young people and the adults*

and families. We wanted to develop the community and to bring extra income as economic help was needed. (2FY.) However, not everybody had seen the potential or advantages in the tourism project. Instead of people being afraid of negative impacts many people simply did not know what tourism was. Some thought also that tourism could only exist on the beaches of the Pacific coast and that rural communities would not have anything to offer to the tourists. Some people saw rural community-based tourism just as a crazy idea and thought it seemed odd that international tourists would actually like to go to the viewpoints or to the waterfall, or see the coffee cultivation.

In order to gain more understanding about tourism, some of the locals had travelled to visit other community-based tourism initiatives in the north. These visits meant that the local people themselves also got an opportunity to become tourists. Some of the women mentioned that these trips had been unique experiences for them. During this visit they had understood that they could have something to offer for the tourists and that they could be losing a good opportunity if they did not start with tourism. Finally, approximately five to eight families from every community decided to commit themselves to the tourism programme.

The first ladder towards empowerment is information provision, as meaningful participation cannot take place before a community knows what they are making decisions about (Cole 2003, 98). Despite the fact that some of the people had visited other tourism programmes, the planning process had lacked open and inclusive discussion about the possible negative impacts of tourism development. This supports the other studies which argue that very often the local communities largely ignore or are not properly informed about the potential for negative sociocultural impacts (Pleumarom 2002 in Wild 2008, 73; Trousdale 2001, 251). Still, the planning process should include raising the awareness of probable tourism impacts so that the individuals can make informed decisions regarding the desirability of tourism (Dowling 2003, 214).

Tourism started officially in 2003 and it was named as *Agro-Ecoturismo Comunitario* (Community-based Agro-ecotourism). The families and guides working with the tourism programme had started to receive different kinds of training to be able to receive the visitors. Some of my informants mentioned that the more they had learned about tourism, the more tourists had come to the communities. This demonstrates that the people had perceived it important to learn new skills in order to make the tourism programme more successful. Sometimes the communities had received big groups of 20 people who had also stayed for longer periods of time. Many of these groups had also returned several times to the same communities. One woman explained: *Every community had their own special friendship groups. This one group came five times and was really special to us. (20FY.)* Tourism

had brought some extra income to the families in the programme and had allowed them to make their houses better. When more tourists had been arriving, the families had been able to take loans to improve conditions by building separate rooms (only some of the families), beds and buying water filters, mattresses, sheets and mosquito nets for tourists. Some communities had also received significant donations for these investments from *The Lutherans World Relief* in North America.

But as the tourism conditions had become better and the families and guides felt well-prepared to receive the visitors, the amount of visitors had notably declined in 2007. The people in the project explained the difficult situation with the loans: *But when we got ready with all this – the tourists are not coming anymore. That is weird and it has left us with the loans. (20FY.) ...If there are no tourists, they cannot pay the loans. Now they have paid the loans with the coffee... (1MY.)* Some guides had also hoped that tourism could help them to finance their future studies at the University. Even though most of the people in the communities understood that tourism is supposed to be only complementary to the agriculture and the tourism development can be slow, they experienced that the tourism project was currently at a stagnation point.



Picture 5: Room built for the tourism accommodation

In tourism literature it is sometimes assumed that the local people's attitudes towards tourism and tourists change from positive to negative, from euphoria to antagonism (see e.g. Fagence 2003, 59; Wall & Mathieson 2006, 54–55). In the communities of San Ramón, some of the people had started to feel disappointed and slightly unmotivated with the tourism programme when the number of visitors had recently declined. Despite this, all the people were looking forward to continuing with the tourism programme as they felt well prepared for that. Almost all of the participants in the tourism pointed out that even though there have been difficulties, their experiences with tourism development had been generally very positive. One of the participants expressed: *It is nice to work with them. It is just boring to wait them to come.* (11FY.) In one group interview the informants emphasized: *The project has had a lot of importance to us. We have loved the project! We would like to advance a lot more and develop the project a lot more!* (1MY.)

Some people in the project said that they would like to receive tourists all the time if possible. In some cases there were also hopes of tourism development on a larger scale. One of the guides however, argued that even though they are hoping that more tourists would come, they still would not like to have the tourists there all the time; nor have them in very big groups.

This could bring positive economic impacts, but how this could affect us who have to live our life here, to study and work and do everything at the farm? /.. / If visitors come all the time more and more it changes too much the life and the culture here in the communities and inside the families. Good that the tourists come, but with a slow rhythm! (8MY.)

It seems as if the positivity towards tourism could be directly related to this *slow rhythm* mentioned by the guide. It sounds logical that less negative sociocultural effects occur when the growth of tourism is slow and not overwhelming – and if the local populations have time to adjust for tourism itself (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 326).

Even though this study introduces the local context from the four perspectives, tourism or the development projects are not the only factors influencing the local realities. Nicaraguan newspaper *El Nuevo Diario* (14th of October 2008, 8B) reported – in the beginning of the coffee-collecting season and during my fieldwork – about the global economic crises' negative effects on the global coffee prices. The financial crisis also affected the tourism industry, which might have contributed to the situation where communities were receiving less money from both the coffee and from the tourism. As Fagence (2003, 74) argues; any social pathologies that are happening at the same time

with the tourism development may not have tourism as their principal cause. In fact there are a whole lot of changes or so called development going on without any projects or strategies, which makes the analysis of sociocultural significance very challenging, but also interesting.

5.3 Importance of the Brokers in the Tourism Development

Almost all my informants explained that the decline in the number of tourists had been caused by the changes among the two cooperative unions working as intermediaries between the hosts and the tourists. These cooperative unions, UCA San Ramón and CECOCAFEN, had worked as significant brokers in the tourism development as they had introduced tourism to the communities. It can be stated that the tourism programme in these communities would probably have not started and proceeded without these brokers. Communities had received valuable knowledge about tourism and training about hospitality through UCA San Ramón. However, it had turned out to be problematic that the people in the communities had experienced almost no direct contact with the potential visitors, while the brokers had played very big role between the hosts and the guests. Therefore it seems that the local people in the tourism project had very little to say at present about whether the project will continue to decline or rejuvenate.

The common argument was that the biggest reason why the tourists had no longer been coming was the problem with the tourism coordination at UCA San Ramón. The interviewees referred that the situation had been better when the previous foreign coordinators had been bringing international groups to the communities. People felt that these kinds of contacts had been lost when the previous coordinator was changed to a local one. I also observed that the new local coordinator at UCA San Ramón did not feel comfortable at her work position as she politely turned down all my requests to do a live interview with her. I was encouraged to send my questions instead via email, but I still did not receive any answers to them despite sending several email requests. According to my informants the local tourism coordinator at UCA San Ramón should have motivation, language skills and experience of tourism development and have many contacts of previous and potential tourist groups. Without exception my informants mentioned that the coordination should be fair and unbiased so that all the communities could receive the visitors and the benefits equally. Many people had laid their hopes on the new tourism coordinator that was starting at UCA San Ramón during my field study. This underlines the brokers' importance in the tourism development.

The tourism communities had also received essential help from different aid organizations, for example, from the previously mentioned The Lutherans World Relief. The majority of the participants experienced that it would still be important to improve the conditions and comfort for the tourists by obtaining better toilets and sinks and by building better signs, viewpoints, trails, or swimming places. During 2008–2009, UNDP's Small Grants Programme (SGP) had granted financial aid to these three communities for making these types of physical improvements. The people in La Pita were already preparing to receive bigger groups soon as they had been building a bigger *eco-cottage* accommodation with the help from a French NGO called *Ecotours*. These examples show that the international donors and the role of NGOs are also central in rural community-based tourism. It can be asked if this kind of great support from the brokers can also cause negative consequences in the communities. At least it seems that the tourism development had not empowered the local people to be able to influence the direction in which the project will be developed. It seems also possible that when the communities are used to receive funds from outside from different kinds of projects, it decreases the initiatives from within the community. This kind of development can be described even as *disempowering*.

Another point is that the brokers can create feelings of relative deprivation – just like tourists – by proposing and instructing what kind of material improvement would be needed in order to satisfy the visitors. The cross-cultural encounter of brokers and local people is already a potential for disappointment and disaster (Nolan 2002, 21). One of my informants told of how a representative from an international NGO had explained how the foreign tourists want to always select their meals from menus and therefore the rural families should have more than one option for every meal. I argue that the preparation for several meal alternatives would lead to unnecessary stress and economic difficulties for the hosts and besides, it would be far from 'authentic'. It is common that the tourists (self) are prioritized before the hosts (other) (Wearing & McDonald 2002). This also appeared notably in one of the communities of San Ramón when a representative from Rainforest Alliance pressed a local guide for an answer about the emergency plans for the visitors. The young guide had to admit in shame that the tourists' access to the hospital services was almost as difficult as it was for the locals. Even though the tourists' safety is essential, it is socioculturally very unsustainable to point out that the tourists' safety would be more important than the locals' own safety. Whereas, when the ideas are presented in a more responsible manner it would mean for instance that an emergency plan for the locals could also serve the visitors.

5.4 Host's Viewpoint about the Guests

As communities become tourist attractions the backstage and front stage areas are established and the tourists gaze is restricted to the staged authenticity of the front stage (Richards & Hall 2006, 4). In community-based tourism the backstage or so called no-go area is very small as the tourists actually live with the local families. As many tourists are interested to see 'the real life of the local people', home stay with the local families can give a feeling of peeking into the backstage. Many families and guides had been very excited and nervous when the first 'official' tourists had arrived. Families had felt embarrassed when the visitors were living in their homes even though the first tourists had not paid for the accommodation, nor for the guide services. First there were no separate rooms or beds for tourists and sometimes families shared their bedrooms with the visitors. This kind of very close relationship between hosts and guests can create stressful and awkward situations. On the other hand it is often lamented that the host-guest relationships lack spontaneity (Wall & Mathieson 2006, 224), which certainly is not an issue in these kinds of home stays.

Everybody in the families had to adapt and many believed that they did not have the skills or physical conditions to work with tourism.

We could not take any money from that because we were still learning and the conditions were not enough good at that point. This is how all the families learned to be with the tourists. At this point we did not know that the foreign visitors do not eat the same food and drink the same water as we do. (7FY.)

Families had been also worried that the communities would be too loud and the tourists could not sleep, which had turned out not to be the case. In the beginning the hosts had felt very insecure and shy to communicate with the tourists, or to attend to them and that is why many had left the visitors, for example, to eat by themselves. At that time nobody in the communities could speak English and the communication was done with many tourists only through gesturing.

All this was funny but at the same time difficult. The very first tourists came here directly to share the life with the families. They wanted to know about the fair trade and coffee cultivation. They wanted to be here close to us and it was very interesting that the tourists were participating with the activities here. They were in the kitchen, came to church... But at the same time we had had many volunteers, doctors, Peace Corps here

*before, so then we had have people here in the houses. So people were kind of used to it too; **Aa, vienen los gringos**⁶... (8MY.)*

Even though the first tourist visits had been challenging for the hosts, most of the people had, later on, started to enjoy the tourists' visits. People experienced that it had been essential to learn new skills and create proper physical conditions in order to receive the visitors properly. Fennell and Przeclawski (2003) argue also that it is very important that the people are well prepared for the contacts with the tourists. Just like Cole (2006, 89) states, the lack of knowledge about tourism can restrict the empowerment of the people participating.

All my informants participating in the tourism programme emphasized that the experiences with tourists had been pleasant and interesting. *Everything has gone good with the tourism! We have had nice experiences with the tourists!* (7FY.) People told how they had been always happy to receive the tourists. It had happened several times that families had really liked some visitors and they had missed them after they had left. One woman lodging people in her house said: *The tourists feel like part of the family here, and often they do not want to leave from here, but stay living in the community with us.* (11FY.) Some of the informants told that some tourists had been sick during their visits in the community and that the families had been very worried about them. In these cases families had been happy to help the visitors and according to the informants the natural medicines had also been helpful in these situations. It seemed crucial for most of the people that the visitors were happy with their stay. It was obvious that the tourists were treated with a special attention and the tourists' meals were sometimes better than the hosts'. On the other hand, the tourists' arrivals were often special occasions for the whole family as everybody was eating more varied food or different dishes than they would normally.

The majority of foreign visitors had been very content with their visit and also very touched by the hospitality of the families. It is common that the tourists are emotional when they have to leave the communities. Sometimes new longer-term friendships had been established and the visitors had stayed in contact and perhaps visited the same communities again. These new special friendships were particularly cherished by many people in the communities. Many of my informants mentioned that they are happy that the tourists were interested about their life in the community and often asked many questions. People had seen that it had been positive that tourists were often taking many pictures. *It is nice that we know that they have liked it here with us, and want to have memories of us and show them*

⁶ "the gringos (North-Americans) are coming"

to their families. (2FY.) I noticed also that most of the people liked to be in the pictures and enjoyed to look at the pictures from the camera's digital screen. Fagence (2003, 68) argues that the tourist's gaze can be disturbing if it upsets routine rural activities and domestic regimes, but it seems that the normal life had not been disturbed by the tourists presence. The informants were unanimous that the visitors on average had not caused problems to the community: The tourists visiting the communities are responsible and they do not drink here, and the smoking is okay. They come here to get to know our life and how is Nicaragua. They are not here to cause problems. (15FY.)

However, there had been a big difference between the foreign and Nicaraguan tourists visiting the communities of San Ramón. When following Stanley C. Plog's (1991) definitions, the international tourists in San Ramón can be described as *Allocentric* types of travelers who are exploring and looking for less travelled paths. In San Ramón the international tourists are interested in the coffee cultivation and are normally well prepared for simple accommodation. In general the national or Central-American tourists had been more *Psychocentric* tourists who prefer hospitality similar to their own homes and activities that were physically less challenging. These tourist groups and even students studying tourism research had been expecting that rural community-based tourism would have been more luxurious. Complains from national tourists had led to the impact of *relative deprivation* which will be discussed more in detail in the chapter 6.4. of this study.

In San Ramón the relationship between locals and visitors had also been complicated when the national tourists had arrived at the communities without permission. One of the guides explained:

We feel bad if people just come here without us, and without control, because practically the cooperative is the owner of this land and area. They should respect that that this is a private property, but they do not show respect to this place and to us. They just march in without a guide and go to the mountains. Sometimes also other guides bring tourists here without our permission. /.. / Now we decided that every person has to pay US\$1 and Nicas 10 Cordobas [approximately 50 cents]. By doing this we try to control some people passing here. (10FY.)

The principle had been that the tourists should always walk in the communities with the guides. The only exception had been the area around the home where they were staying. According to one of the guides: *...here close everybody can walk, but not to the mountains or coffee fields. We have received the trainings and have learned this there. So we are slowly learning what the tourists can do, and what they cannot. (8MY.) R. K.*

Dowling (2003, 214) points out that it is important to discuss and decide where the tourists are allowed to go in the destination community. It is good that the locals create their own rules and 'codes of conduct' (Ashley & Roe 1998, 36). In San Ramón this can be seen as a sign of the local communities – at least to a certain extent – being in charge of the tourism development in their own area.



Picture 6: View to the coffee fields in El Roblar

6 SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM TO THE HOSTS

Virtually everywhere in the poorest countries, the women and children are more likely to suffer from poverty and deprivation (Todaro & Smith 2006, 227) and the rural areas in Nicaragua are no exception (Sistema de las Naciones Unidas 2006). UCA San Ramón has had a strong focus in gender equality since 1996. For that reason UCA San Ramón's tourism programme is also planned to promote the integration and participation of women and young people. This transversal gender theme can be recognized for example in the communities' tourism commissions where the women and men are equally presented. However the most visible signs of the gender and youth policy are the many women responsible for the tourism accommodation and the young people working as guides.

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the significance of tourism development to those people who had been actively involved with tourism. This part of the study concentrates at the individual and family level and analyzes how the participation had impacted on people's confidence, self-esteem, skills and knowledge. All these factors are important in the psychological empowerment and help people to have control over factors that have importance in their lives (Cole 2006, 89; Scheyvens 2003). At the same time the confidence of the hosts and sufficient knowledge about tourists and tourism can be seen as basic requirements for sustainable community-based tourism development. This chapter analyzes how the hosts had been presenting their local culture to the visitors, and how this had influenced the way people perceive their own culture and local community. Even though tourism had caused feelings of relative deprivation, it seems that one of the young guides summarized most of the hosts' feelings by saying; *Thanks to the tourism, we Nicaraguans have learned to value what we have here (21MY)!*

6.1 Participation of Women and Young People

One of the targets of the eighth MDG is to “Develop decent and productive work for youth”. In San Ramón all the tourism communities had chosen young guides – boys and girls – between 16 and 24 years old to participate in the tourism project. This work as a guide had had a great significance to the young people who had not before had official responsibilities at the community level. Tourism development and the guide’s work had been especially important opportunities for the girls as it is common that only the sons continue their parents’ work at the farms. One of the guides explained:

... we are only daughters of the members of the cooperative, and here they normally leave their lands to their sons, not to the women. So we have this problem. /.. / We are hoping that the tourism project will get better and we are thinking that this way we could stay in the community and work with the tourism. (16FY.)

All the young guides brought up in the interviews that they would like to continue with tourism development in the future, but also would like to study at university. Common hopes among this young generation were to study tourism development or agronomic engineering and to return after this to their home communities. Scheyvens (1999) presents that psychological empowerment happens when increasing confidence in the community leads its members to seek out further education and training opportunities. In this sense tourism had supported young people’s empowerment. However, until now only one of the eight guides was studying at university and some of the guides mentioned that they were hoping that tourism could bring extra income that would allow them to continue their studies.



Picture 7: Tourist guide in La Pita helping to build the eco-lodge for tourists

Tourism has also brought adult women a new opportunity to officially participate in a community programme. In most of the families women had committed themselves as responsible for the tourism accommodation. The sizes of these families accommodating tourists varied greatly and some of the women in the tourism programme were single mothers. In some families there were only one or two children, while the biggest family had 13 children and many grandchildren. Before tourism development, these women had had very limited possibilities to participate in the official meetings and in the decision-making. Therefore, tourism had brought a significant change to some of the women.

One participant told how she had lost her right to be a cooperative member almost twenty years ago after she had got her first child:

Before I could not be part of almost anything. But when the coffee price went down my husband came and asked if I would like to start to work as a lodger for the tourists; I said Yes! And now I was able to go to official meetings and workshops and trainings with the other women. Before I had never been able to do that! I have been also able to visit few other communities when we have gone to the workshops. (20FY.)

Even though she had received some foreign visitors already in the 1980s, now she had an opportunity to join the other women in the community project and to work with tourism in a more organized form. Thomas Lea Davidson's (2005, 26) argument explains well the importance of the organized tourism project for this woman. He notes that the tourism industry designation enhances the self-identity of those involved in tourism by specifying their clear association. This means also that tourism's relative contribution to the economy can be taken more seriously. (Davidson 2005, 26.) In addition to be officially participating in the programme, it was very important to all the women that they were able to go to the meetings and to get new contacts through tourism.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are central aspects of development and these are emphasized especially in the third MDG. UCA San Ramón had arranged different kinds of training about gender equality, domestic violence and sexual health. Tourism had promoted some of these meetings, as part of the profit from tourism is directed to the social fund of UCA San Ramón. The meetings about gender equality had been often directed towards all the members of cooperatives or the whole community. In addition UCA San Ramón had organized special meetings just for the people in the tourism programme. During my fieldwork I had an opportunity to take part in a sexual health education meeting in La Pita. When the meeting was over I continued the discussion with three local gender experts from UCA San Ramón. They explained:

We have talked for example about self esteem in the workshops. This means that we have spoken that you have to value your self – and that we all are original and that everybody has the same rights. /.. / We have trained women to make decisions. So the husbands are not deciding about everything, but the women can also have a word in the house. (22MN.)

However, the change towards gender equality had not been easy and there still remained many challenges. Many of my informants mentioned that machismo is still a present problem in the communities of San Ramón. In general the changes in these kinds of sociocultural 'stereotypes' have been challenging to promote in Nicaragua (Sistema de las Naciones Unidas 2007, 33). In San Ramón common problems had been that men had not let women participate in the meetings or that the women had been too shy to participate. Alternatively, men had not normally been interested in joining the meetings where both men and women should have attended together. The gender experts from UCA San Ramón explained that the workshops were meant for families and that they had tried to include both men and women. They stated that it is very hard to achieve progress if only women

or only men came. These kinds of factors should be acknowledged in the planning and implementation of any kind of initiatives that aim to promote the women's participation in the communities.

In reality, the power structures are quite complex (van der Duim et al. 2007, 114) and the gender inequalities do not easily disappear by simply giving voice to the women and including them in the development strategies (Parpat 2002 in Miettinen 2007, 39). For example, in those families where women were connected to the tourism programme through their husbands, the change had been very small. As an example, when I mentioned the concept of equality between genders in the interview, one of the women answered: *I do not understand the concept of equality of gender – It is that I almost never go to the meetings, so I do not know about that. I do not understand what means gender, but I know that I would like to go to meetings too.* (9FY.)

Mowforth and Munt (2003, 219) remind us that even though formal and informal meetings are traditionally used to discuss the issues affecting the communities, it is not always all-inclusive as often women and children are not allowed to participate. Men have traditionally represented the families in the rural areas of Nicaragua. This means that often women are not actively participating in institutional relations, meetings and workshops. In this kind of situation, women would be only on the first level of Pretty's (1995) typology of participation, called *Passive participation*. It seems that many of the people in San Ramón understand equality to refer primarily to the equal numbers of women and men participating. There are guiding participation quotas for women guides, families accommodating tourists and tourism commissions in each community. Still, equal participation in numbers cannot guarantee gender equality, as women can often be present without participating. This means that in practice the men represent their families and women remain in the margins.

Despite these difficulties, many of the people participating in the tourism project felt that there had been significant progress towards more equal participation. For example, one of the young guides considered that: *Now the young men already know and understand that the women can go by themselves. Tourism has changed this some as the Nicaraguans have seen that the culture can be different too.* (3MY.) The gender experts agreed that young men in particular had changed their attitudes towards gender equality.

As the women committed to the programme had been able to participate in the meetings, another change had also been the decision-making inside the families. Several women explained that previously their husbands had been in charge of all the economic and other matters that affected their families. In this kind of situation women had not even been able to discuss particular subjects. Some of the women explained that they had never

known how much money the family had and what their money was used for. Informants referred that men often used the money on something that did not help the whole family. Men could for example sell their animals or land without even asking the women. As an example, one of the women expressed how she had felt very low and bad before and how it had seemed like she did not even have rights over her own children. The previous situation in the communities of San Ramón also supports the arguments of how women are often more disadvantaged and poor than the men (see e.g. Chambers 1984, 108; Todaro & Smith 2006, 227).

In order to change this, apparently UCA San Ramón and Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO) had together implemented an effective rule that men and women had to sign certain household loans together. This requirement had promoted equality in decision-making between men and women. In addition to this, women working with the tourism project had been able to take micro-loans also by themselves. Although the availability of the micro-loans had brought women more alternatives and flexibility, there had also been some serious problems. I was told this kind of story more than once:

At least what happened in our family in the beginning was that I had the loan but my husband took my money that I got from the tourists. Then we learned in some workshops that we do not have to give the money to the men, but that money is actually for our children and for us! They said that maybe the men will get angry, but if we have worked, we deserve the money. I do not want to give the money to my husband so that he can just go waste the money in San Ramón while I and the kids have no things that we really need. This has been a problem to us. /.. / We have been fighting and now the situation has improved and I can keep the money. (20FY.)

The gender experts noted that this situation had not completely improved, but already it was much better than before. Today women also had their own saving accounts that were called 'solidarity savings'. These loans had allowed women to have more power and to become more active in the matters that affect their families. With these loans women had made their own houses better and improved the conditions for the tourists. This shows how the access to credit can bring women stability and eventually help them to become an established entrepreneur (Todaro & Smith 2006, 241). Tourism development in San Ramón supports Scheyvens' (1999) theory how access to jobs and cash leads to an increase in status for women and young people. Also Satu Miettinen's (2006, 174; 2007) two recent studies show that tourism can enhance women's identity construction and feeling

of independence through income generation and self-esteem. However it seems that it had been essential that women had not received only access to the loans, but also training in how to manage the new situations inside the family.

The following chapters present in more detail how this participation had given women and young guides new skills and knowledge and how it had influenced their confidence and self-esteem. I argue that tourism had contributed to the empowerment of some individuals who had previously been more in the margins. Still, it has to be remembered that tourism has been only one factor in the individual and community development and it would be misleading to state that all the changes have tourism as their primary and sole cause.

6.2 New Skills, Knowledge and Self confidence

In San Ramón the young guides had been studying English since the beginning of the tourism project. English classes had been organized at the office of UCA San Ramón mainly by foreign volunteers. One of the guides described *I'm happy that I have learned English. I can already do the tours in English, but I should speak it more. It is good when I have to speak and learn with the tourists.* (8MY.) Even though most of the guides had been learning more English continuously they still felt that it was challenging to speak well enough with the visitors. In addition to the English courses, these guides had also received other training that had prepared and helped them to work with the tourists. The guides had learned for example, about coffee cultivation, history, culture, local geography, plants, flowers, trees and animals. There had been training about the guide's work in general, such as how to speak with and in front of the visitors, how to plan different kinds of activities and how to give first aid. In addition to this, the guides had taken care of the tourist trails and viewpoints.

Though the economic profits from tourism might be small, the young guides felt they were important. Yet most of the guides stated that the most significant individual benefits from their work had been the new skills they had learned with the programme. One of the new guides emphasized the educative part of the guide's work even though his family was having economic problems after his mother's surgery *I do not care if I earn money from this or not. I want to work as a guide to learn. And even though I felt dumb, it is really nice to learn.* (19MY.) The mother of this guide explained how it had been really nice that the young people had got the opportunity to work as a guide. Also other mothers whose children were guiding the tourists emphasized how much the guides had learned and how proud they were of their children.

People participating in the tourism programme experienced that the guides had been very important links between the visitors and the communities and that they had always taken good care of the tourists. During my fieldwork and other visits I noticed that the guides were outgoing, confident and were able to present their local communities very well. The young guides had learned to speak well in front of people and most of them also had the courage to communicate in English. Many of the guides mentioned particularly that they were happy with how they had got rid of their shyness. Some of the guides explained how they had learned leadership through the tourism project. Organizing tours, activities, timetables and all other aspects had given them more confidence and they felt that they had developed on a personal level.

Some of the guides had also been using their new skills of leadership separate from the tourism context. In one community two female guides had been in a leading role, organizing a new 'cooperative of young people' where young women and men were both participating. This cooperative had also created their own agenda of political initiatives that they had presented to the mayoral candidates during the elections. This group of young people was willing to promote the civil participation, education, economic possibilities and recreation opportunities for the local people.



Picture 8: Local guide presenting the farm to a visitor.

Without this group, they would not know our needs and agenda. /.. / We are like a bridge – a connection to the young people here in the community. We bring the information to the young people in the community and we help with the initiatives to solve the problems we have here. We have learned a lot as being guides, self-esteem and experience to be able to speak in front of other people. As we have worked as guides we know people there at UCA San Ramón. I think this connection is very important. (16FY.)

Mowforth and Munt (2003, 218) state that only local people really participate in Pretty's (1995) typology's fifth level of *Interactive participation* and sixth level of *Self-mobilization*. This means that the existing power relations could only change when the initiatives originate from within the local communities (Mowforth & Munt 2003, 216). Most of the participation that has taken place in the communities of San Ramón has not included so-called self-mobilization. However the previous example of the young people's cooperative shows that tourism had supported these young guides to take and promote their own initiatives. Like this guide mentions above, the new skills and confidence that they had gained from tourism development had made it possible to take action. Therefore, the power relations can in fact change at the individual level even when the initiative of the tourism development was introduced from outside.

Smaller children had also gained more confidence during the tourism development. In the beginning of the tourism development some of the children had even started to cry when the foreign tourists had arrived. Now this had changed and the children were now playing with the tourists and enjoying the visits. Woman working in the tourism project said that *This is definitely progress – this has helped my children to develop too* (20FY). Children had started to study English with volunteers that had stayed for longer periods within the communities. I noticed that the children liked to introduce their village to the visitors and they were also interested to hear about the countries from where the tourists came. Tourists had brought games, books, paper and paints for the children and many of the mothers explained that the children had learned how to share with the visitors and how to play with them.

In addition to the guides, the families accommodating tourists had also received different kinds of practical training at UCA San Ramón. Like Fennell and Przeclawski (2003, 147) state, it seems to be very important that the hosts are informed about the foreign tourists culture, customs and behavior and that they are also helped with any hospitality issues that arise. People working with the tourism accommodation in San Ramón had learned how to attend to the tourists and what kinds of hygiene issues are related to the

accommodation services. Many people felt that it had been very important to learn about the eating habits of the visitors. For example, as many of the visitors had been vegetarians, local women had received training to learn to prepare food from soya. This training had also included how to make drinks from local fruits and how to purify the drinking water with a filter. Many women pointed out that the new knowledge had helped the families to vary their own diets as well.

During the tourism development the local people had also started to cultivate new trees and plants that had not traditionally been grown in the communities. There had been workshops about preparing natural medicines from the plants and the idea was that women could transfer their new knowledge about natural materials to tourists. The community of La Pita also had their own project where women learned how to make postcards and notebooks from recycled paper and visitors had bought these products as souvenirs.

The new practical skills that women had learned through training and tourism development had an essential meaning for the women participating in the tourism programme. Many of my informants referred that these women had previously been much more shy before and had low self-esteem. One of the gender experts from UCA San Ramón argued: *I feel that many women have got more self-esteem with the tourism. I think that the change is pretty big and the improvement is important.* (22MN.) New skills, better knowledge about tourism and the positive new experiences had helped women to feel more secure about themselves and to increase their self-esteem and empowerment. Following Cole's (2006, 8) arguments about empowerment in tourism, it can be argued that the lack of skills and lack of knowledge about tourism could have even had an opposite impact.

Women told me that they were proud of being in charge of the tourism accommodation in their family. The significance of women's empowerment is most notable at the level of family. As indicated in the previous chapter, tourism had helped women to have more power in the decisions that touch the whole family. Tourism and the training together had also improved the difficult situation of domestic violence since many women had gained more confidence to speak out about the subject. Some families had separated when women had started to take initiatives and their role in the family had changed. It is very difficult to estimate the total influence of tourism in this process, but it seems in average that those women that had been in the tourism project had gained more self-esteem and also felt less powerless than before.

When analyzing women's roles inside their community or family it is good to acknowledge post-colonialist feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1999) argument of how Western feminism has tended to gloss over the differences between Southern women. Mohanty states that Western

feminist discourse constructs a category of the Third World woman as a monolithic subject. It is often described that women in third world countries have 'needs' and 'problems', but few if any have 'choices' or 'the freedom to act'. (Mohanty 1999, 195, 200.) In a rural community-based workshop in Catarina, Nicaragua (30th of August 2009) a tourism research professor argued strongly that community-based tourism does not really change the women's roles as women continue cooking and cleaning even though the tourists are there. When these kinds of arguments are presented from outside, they include an implicit assumption that women would be better off doing something else other than what they have traditionally done and that tourism should change this. During my fieldwork I understood that women were not hoping that tourism would change their practical everyday role in the family. The women working with tourism development in San Ramón pointed out instead that it had been convenient how they had been able to take care of the home and the children even when the tourists had been there. Many participants had experienced that it had been positive that the families had been able to continue more or less with their normal lives even with the tourists there. It seemed that women were not even expecting that men would help them in the kitchen: *...the men in Nicaragua do not cook. They cannot do it, because they are rougher.* (20NY.)

The changes of the roles inside the families had meant that some of the husbands were supporting their wives more than before. It seems that a symbolic change can be as important as a pragmatic one. My informants described that traditionally there had been more strict division between men's and women's work, but tourism had contributed towards some changes in these divisions. Even though some families had separated after the tourism programme had begun, many families had also become more united and they had begun to do more things together. One of the women was happy to tell how nowadays her husband shows respect, listens and also gives time to their children. She experienced that in her family they had equality in this way *...in the countryside there has been a lot of machismo but we have already broken this in our family* (20FY). The gender experts supported this opinion and they had perceived that: *The change has been positive because now the whole families are participating together in the project. /.. / With tourism the roles have changed and mixed some and there is more participation on different kind of jobs.* (22FN.)

6.3 Presentation of the Community Culture

In San Ramón many local people had needed to learn more about their own communities and about Nicaragua in general, in order to be able to answer

all the questions tourists had. I was amused to hear how we foreigners always wanted to know facts in exact numbers like *how many people live in the community?*, *how big is this area?* or *how many kilos of coffee did you sell last year?* Although in Nicaragua common answer to these questions would be *bastante* which means *enough* – now the local people had got used to answer with clear numbers, just like the tourists wanted. All the participants noted that most of the time they had felt happy when the tourists had been asking many questions and showed interest towards the local culture. *I'm happy to be able to tell about our culture and for example religion, if the tourists are interested about this. We like if they are interested about us. And we feel happier like this.* (10FY.) However, in the beginning several people had felt bad or ashamed when they had not been able to answer all of the questions the visitors had posed. This is why it is essential that people are prepared with the sufficient knowledge so they can feel proud of themselves when communicating with the visitors. On the other hand the hosts should also acknowledge that they are not obliged to answer all the possible questions the tourists might pose.

My informants stressed that it had been very important to determine clearly what they could offer the visitors and how they would have enough things to do during their visit. The most important tourism attraction in San Ramón had been the coffee cultivation and many visitors had been interested in understanding the significance of Fair Trade coffee certification to the local farmers. This is the reason why the coffee-cutting season between October and January had also been the high season in tourism. Even though this season is normally a busy period for everybody in the coffee cultivating communities, it had not been a problem that the tourists had mainly arrived at the same time. My informants made clear that when the visitors had come to the communities they had dedicated those days to them. *It is nice for the tourists to see the whole process of coffee and we are happy to show them this. There are many tourists that have seen the coffee before only in a supermarket and in a coffee cup.* (21MN.) Also many Nicaraguan tourists that live in the urban areas had been interested to try the coffee collection in practice. The hosts described that they had felt very secure about showing the work at the farm as they had been presenting what they know the best. Some of the families were specialized in organic coffee and one of the women in the tourism programme was happy to tell: *We feel proud of the organic coffee that we cultivate here and what we work here with* (12FY).

Even though the coffee cultivation had been very important attraction for tourists, it was still not the only one. The communities had collected local stories about the development of the cooperatives or legends about the gold mines that they had been presenting to the visitors. According to the guides, the older people especially knew the legends well and they had been happy when the visitors had been interested to hear them. The young guides had

collected old stories about the gold mines as well. This supports Hashimoto's (2002, 215) and many others' statement that tourism can contribute to the enhancement and protection of local culture and traditions.

Even the people who were not participating in the tourism project considered that tourism development had supported San Ramón's cultural heritage. These communities had begun to present the traditional dances and guitar music from northern Nicaragua for visitors. In the beginning of the programme every community had formed their own folkloric dance groups which had started to practise and later to perform for the visitors. For example in the community of La Pita seven young girls formed a cultural group called *Flor de Jamaica*. One of the girls in the group proudly showed me what kind of beautiful red and white dresses the girls were wearing in these presentations. Her mom and sister told that the tourists had really liked to see the folkloric dance. In another community a guide was happy to tell that he had also taught two visitors how to perform a traditional dance. They had practised for four days and after that, surprised other tourists by presenting this dance in traditional Nicaraguan clothing. This guide had been working with the tourism programme since the very beginning and he stated that tourism has helped the local people to know and better value their own culture.

However, tourism had not had a revival impact on the local handicraft traditions. Only one or two people had made paintings on different materials about local landscapes for tourists to buy and children had decorated tourists' rooms with their paintings. Similarly, as mentioned before, the women in La Pita had made cards and notebooks from recycled paper for the tourists. These products had been decorated with materials from nature. All the guides together had taken an intensive course to learn how to make necklaces from coffee. Later, they had made a large number of necklaces and had sold them to a contact person in United States. However, the guides were no longer making the necklaces as they had run out of the small pearls that were also needed. Smaller numbers of women were also working with the recycling project after the work station had been moved away from the community. The ideas and financing for the recycled paper and coffee necklaces had been introduced from outside and these can be seen as examples of new cultural products that can be born with the tourism development. The production of natural medicines had not belonged before to the contemporary culture either. However, it seemed as if these new handicrafts and 'traditions' were lacking continuity, as there were no real traditions in making them.

In addition to the interest towards coffee cultivation and cultural traditions, tourists had often been posing questions about history, politics, the Sandinista revolution, war and religion. Most of the people thought that it had been nice that the foreign people were interested about Nicaragua's history and that they had wanted to help the visitors understand the local

circumstances. There was a common implicit rule that hosts did not begin to talk about politics or religion if the visitor had not particularly posed a question about these topics. Many people felt that it is important that the foreign people came to see how the political situation really was in the country. However, for many people religion was more sensitive topic than the politics. There had been some incidences when the visitors had been defending their own atheistic views, for example, and questioning host's religious views. There had been also a conflict when one foreign visitor had wanted to change her host family since the family had got up at 04:30 every morning to pray and sing. Two guides explained that they were members of the Adventist church and some visitors had made them feel uncomfortable with very personal questions. The guides explained that they had decided not to defend their political or religious beliefs: *We respect other people's religions and they should respect our views* (16FY).

Tourists' awkward questions can lead to stressful situations for the hosts (Barnett 2008, 37), and also in this sense, the local guides have an important role between the local families and the visitors. Two guides explained that in addition to the religious topics, tourists' questions about gender equality had sometimes been uncomfortable for the hosts. Many of the women told that they were happy that the visitors were interested to see how the women work at home and that they can teach tourists how to cook traditional Nicaraguan food. However, sometimes the visitors had been willing to discuss about the women's role in the families and compared the local life to the situation in their home countries. In this context it seems that Mohanty (1999, 195) is right when she argues that the women in the western world especially, often feel some kind of responsibility to save the *oppressed sisters in South*.

On the other hand the guides had been needed as middle-men when the foreign female visitors had felt uncomfortable from local men's often very harmless attention. Just as in many Latin American countries, in Nicaragua many men try to get women's attention when they meet in a public place. A young man working as a guide explained the following: *I have learned that the tourists do not like that the men are saying things to, or about them when they are passing by* (3MY). This guide continued by telling that *I explain to the tourists about our culture how it is with the people who are saying things to the girls on the streets*. He thought that the macho culture is in slow change on account of tourism development as some of the local families and especially men have seen that there existed different kinds of alternatives of gender equality.

Even though the encounters with the tourists had sometimes been challenging or even stressful for the hosts, the local people were still willing to present their home communities themselves. People that were committed to the tourism programme had had disappointing experiences when guides from outside the communities had taken freedom to present the local life

and coffee cultivation to the tourists. These guides from outside had also showed tourists how to make typical Nicaraguan meals even though the local women should be in charge of these kinds of activities. In these kinds of situations the local people had felt that these culture brokers from outside had not respected them, their knowledge or their culture. Even though the local guides had received money from walking with the group they had felt awkward for participating only passively. The young guides in San Ramón experienced that although there was sometimes language barriers between them and the foreign visitors, this did not entitle the outsiders to ignore the local guides. It had happened that these outsider guides had not had knowledge about coffee cultivation for example, but they still simply overlooked the local guides. One of the guides explained: *It is bad if I cannot explain tourists anything about my own community that I know, and which I normally present* (16FY). In La Pita the local guides had set a rule that the local guides should be always in charge of the tourists' visits and the guides from outside were allowed to work only as translators. In this sense tourism had encouraged the local guides in La Pita to actively shape the factors that are negatively affecting their self-esteem.

6.4 Feelings of Pride and Relative Deprivation

When hosts present their life to the visitors it contributes to the way the local people value their community and themselves. Tourism literature often presents that tourism development can accelerate changes in social and cultural values especially amongst the young population (see e.g. Harrison 1992). These kinds of arguments include the normally embedded idea that tourism can cause westernization of people's values in the global South. However some authors (see e.g. Huntington 1996) state that this kind of fear would be almost pointless as these kinds of changes do not occur rapidly and also the possibilities of remarkable change diminish continuously with age. Despite this, I argue that in San Ramón tourism had changed some people's values, but this change had been more positive than often presented in tourism literature. However, firstly I present here the few contradictory experiences from tourism that had appeared in San Ramón.

In tourism literature the changes in local people's values are usually explained through two broad concepts of demonstration effect and relative deprivation. These concepts can in practice mean imitation of the visitors' culture or resentment towards the visitors. (Swarbrooke 2002, 73–74.) In San Ramón the demonstration effect had taken place in the way that some young guides dressed or how they had started to speak. One of the guides

explained that some of the guides had adapted words from Spanish visitors or had started to make mistakes with articles just like the foreign visitors commonly do. He felt that tourism could change the values and identities of the young people who were continuously in contact with the foreign visitors and that they should be careful with these kinds of negative impacts. However, many young guides mentioned that on average they had never felt themselves different from the tourists in any significant way.

Mathieson and Wall (1982) have argued that the larger the cultural and economic difference between tourists and local residents is then the more obvious and more significant the tourism impacts. In the rural community-based tourism context these differences can be wide especially between the hosts and the foreign visitors and therefore it can lead to relative deprivation or to unwanted demonstration effects. What can make a difference between the hosts and the guests is that tourists often travel with electric equipment such as cameras, phones, iPods and computers. Fagence (2003, 71) mentions that the younger age groups can question their rural lifestyle if it seems not to provide these kind of technological accoutrements.

The majority of the people in San Ramón had mobile-phones and some of those phones also had a camera. Today a few people have computers that have been sent by tourists⁷. It is sometimes stated that the tourist intrusion upon the local communities can contribute to a deterioration of the quality of 'the special cultures' (Fagence 2001, 205). In tourism talk the change of 'special cultures' often includes questions about authenticity. Cohen's (2001, 28) analysis stresses that some of the local group's main tourism resources and attractions are their 'underdevelopment', marginality and distinctiveness. These questions can be very problematic if they are considered from the post-colonial perspective. Arguments like *...if remote cultural tourist destination modernizes, it is no longer primitive and it loses its appeal* (see Cole 2006, 92) takes us back to the assumption that the 'other' is there for 'self'. It seems like the families receiving the tourists had not expected that their poverty would be the tourism attraction being highlighted in the encounters with the visitors.

One of the guides mentioned that better access to computers and the internet would help the local people learn new skills and also give them better possibilities to contact potential tourist groups. Some people referred that the computers would not change the culture but would help the local people to *move on and develop* (8MY). Already in 1982, Mathieson and Wall argued that demonstration effect could be beneficial if it encourages the local people to adapt to or work for the things they lack. On the other hand many of these technological commodities are painfully out of reach for many people (Mathieson & Wall 1982). One of the guides mentioned

⁷ The community of La Corona is an exception as they have an opportunity to offer students computer training in a local training center.

that it is not good for the local people if they learn to think that this kind of technology is very necessary, since they might not have any opportunity to purchase or obtain them by themselves.

Even though the hosts in San Ramón had had mainly positive experiences of the tourists' visits, not all the tourists had made the locals feel happy and proud. My informants explained that normally the foreign tourists had come to the villages with realistic expectations and they had been tolerant and adapted easily to the rustic accommodation and simple meals. More problems had appeared with national tourists and with visitors from other Central American countries. These tourists had often expected more luxurious tourism conditions and they had not had very much interest in participating in the everyday life of the rural families.

Once came a group from El Salvador and they made us feel really bad. They left from here and were saying bad things about us. We felt so bad because we do not have money and this was the best we could offer. The hotels have their refrigerators and everything but we do not. So we cannot prepare the same kind of food that the hotels offer! We make rice and beans and typical food here. So they left very unhappy from here. (20FY.)

It is important to note that the food expenses represent the major proportion of overall household spending in Nicaragua (WFP 2008, 1–2). However, the families had already been giving slightly better food to the visitors, for instance chicken, than they themselves would normally eat. Therefore it is very understandable that the hosts had felt that this critique from the Salvadorian tourists was unfair. I also noticed that the hosts had felt self-conscious about the simple conditions even when the visitors had not complained about anything. Especially in the beginning of the project, many women had been embarrassed to give the tourists a bed from the same room where the family was sleeping. Many people felt also ashamed when they had not had showers, sinks, inside toilets, or refrigerators which they considered to be essential conditions for tourists – but not for them. This is a good example of relative deprivation.

One of the guides explained that Nicaraguan tourists had normally been wealthier and lived in the bigger towns and they had wanted to give advice to the people in rural communities. This guide thought that even though their countrymen's initiatives could have been good, this had still been annoying to the local people and made them feel bad. It had also happened that the Nicaraguan visitors had not been happy with the services and therefore refused to pay. Also, Nicaraguan students who were studying tourism research at university had behaved in this way and managed to

make the locals feel worse. Fagence (2003, 73) states that the feelings of relative deprivation can lead to new investments at the expense of much needed community services for the hosts. This kind of demonstration effect can take place also at the family level when people are taking big loans for things that they believe that the tourists would require.

Despite of these partly negative experiences, the changes in people's values and pride have been mainly positive. As an example, one of the guides wanted to assert that these kinds of needs of the tourists' for better conditions should not change the *local agricultural reality* (21MY). He emphasized that the hosts should remember that they live in the countryside and that the tourism is only something that can bring some extra income. Also, even when the tourists had been complaining about simple conditions, people had felt that they had still much to offer. *They should know that we are poor and we are friendly and we offer them our friendship and the best we have. And we tell them about the life here and we can teach them to make Nacatamales and everything. We share with them what we have.* (20FY.)

On average, the young guides had started to value their own communities more, their culture and the work on the farm. The guides stated that they also valued the other cultures, but saw that it was important to keep the Nicaraguan habits. This supports Ashley's and Roe's (1998, 16) argument of how tourism can increase local people's recognition of the cultural and natural assets of an area and therefore strengthen cultural and social traditions. Two girls working as guides told that they were not working on the farm as much as many women normally do. By working as a guide, these girls had learned more about the work on the farm and understood the real value and difficulty of the work and the coffee cultivation. They thought therefore that tourism had been a valuable experience for them in this way as well. Just like all the other guides, the girls also told that they had liked explaining about life in the country and in the community and they were very proud to do this.

Many of the guides said that during the tourism project they had got to know the local natural environment better and started to value it more. One of the guides explained: *Tourists can be impressed about the beauty of a bird. This makes us to see the bird from the tourist's point of view, and to understand how nice it is here!* (21MY). The young people had not been interested in nature and the animals around the community and they had never really noticed them, even though they were always there. But today they knew more about the birds and the trees and were interested to learn more.

In addition to the young guides, people working with the tourism accommodation also expressed how most of the time they had felt very proud and happy to be able introduce the visitors to the local way of life. People thought that it had been very nice that the visitors had come to see

what their communities had accomplished. The hosts also thought that the communities were today cleaner and more attractive than before and that tourists liked the cleanliness of the communities as well. *I feel proud of the community and everything when the tourists come and it makes us happy when the tourists are happy* (17FY). As M. Esman (1984) presents, tourism development can promote the renewal of community pride. This pride is one of the important factors that can increase psychological empowerment (Cole 2006, 89; Scheyvens 1999).

7 UTOPIA OF THE HOST COMMUNITY

The previous chapter indicates how tourism had brought new opportunities to participate, especially to women and young people. The people who had committed themselves to the tourism programme had learned new skills and gained so-called human capital and psychological empowerment. However, the significance of the community-based tourism in San Ramón had been much smaller at the community level. It seems like the visitors and researchers should forget the idyllic notion of all the people in the local village warmly welcoming the visitors to their home community.

This chapter presents how those people that were not actively involved with the tourism development had experienced the tourism initiative in their community. It presents how the communities that are organized into cooperatives can be fragmented and how challenging it can be to promote the building of social capital through tourism development. Without seeing only the problems, the last part of this chapter analyzes the possible indirect benefits from tourism to these communities.

7.1 Fragmented Communities

Despite all the beautiful guidelines of community participation, the concept of community is very complex, problematic and overused. Keith Popple (2000, 2–4) argues that the whole concept is contested and does not really have a universally agreed meaning. The traditional view represents community as a place of warmth, intimacy and social cohesion (Popple, 2000, 2). German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1955) has influenced the dominant view of community with his division of community into two different kind of social relationships. One is based on friendship and affection – the other on the division of labor and contractual relations between isolated individuals. Community can be defined also in geographical, social, political, psychological and economic terms and vary in size, structure and

organization (Cole 2006, 89). In tourism literature, community is often understood as a population residing in local area which has common social characteristics and goals (Richards & Hall 2006, 302). This definition of community is suitable for the sociocultural analysis of tourism impacts in the coffee cultivating communities of San Ramón. These three communities are geographically restricted areas where all the population can be potentially affected by tourism.

As K. Crehan (1997) uses the term of *fractured community*, I see that the tourism communities of San Ramón had been fractured along the line of cooperative membership. In these three communities a division existed between people who were members of the cooperatives and those who were not. Tourism development was led by UCA San Ramón – Union of the Cooperatives – and in practice only the families that had a family member in the cooperative had been able to participate in the programme. Neither had all the members of the cooperatives actively participated in the programme, as in each community only 5–8 families were directly benefitting from it. This supports the very common argument in tourism literature; all the people in the communities are not hosts (see e.g. Swarbrooke 2002, 129).

In this study, the communities can be divided into three different groups of people; *the first group* of cooperative members actively participating in the tourism programme, *the second group* of cooperative members that were not participating in the tourism programme and *the third group* of people who were not cooperative members. My informants who belonged to the third group referred to themselves as outsiders. They explained that they did not know much about the tourism as they had not had opportunity to participate in the programme. *I would like to participate too and to make my house better... But they come to the houses of the people who are members of the cooperative, so I do not have a chance to get into the programme.* (13FN.) Some comments referred that there had not been noticeable attempts to include the community members in the programme. One woman expressed *The bad thing is that they have their view-points, or whatever there, but they have never invited us to come to visit there. These things are just for them and for tourists.* (4FN.)

In tourism impact analysis it is important to remember that all the social pathologies that are coincident with tourism development may not have tourism as their principle cause (Fagence 2003, 74). In this study it is central to notice that the division between cooperative members and non-members had already been clear before the tourism initiative. Similar divisions inside the communities had also occurred when aid organizations or NGO's had only helped some people in the communities while leaving others without this aid. Therefore the tourism can be seen as a new factor that can either widen the existing division or at some level positively unite the community. In San Ramón these divisions had unfortunately become more visible with tourism.

One conversation at a local kiosk revealed different perspectives of tourism development in that particular community. This conversation included two girls working in the kiosk and one man actively participating in the tourism development. In the beginning of the conversation this man described how well the tourism programme had gone and how much all the people in the community liked tourism. He explained how they had planned to make the trails and viewpoints better, which would hopefully bring more visitors to their community. The girls listened to this and answered bitterly that the people involved with tourism had always claimed that tourism was good and nice for the community, but in practice nobody else other than them had been benefiting from the programme. The girls had not felt involved in the tourism development in any way. One of the girls explained;

My grandmother cultivates coffee, but the tourists never go help her to collect the coffee, or with other things. She collects the coffee by herself, so it would be really nice experience for her if some tourists could go there and help her and she could also show them her work and her farm. The tourists never visit her! (14FN.)

The man answered to the girls that tourism had been very organized and that the families currently participating had been specially chosen and prepared. He also pointed out that this girl's grandmother was not a member of the cooperative and could not therefore participate. The girls stated how it would be fairer if more people could participate.

It is happy for your families that the tourists come, but they do not make us happy. They do not talk to us or do anything with us /.. / How does it help me or my grandmother if they are here? /.. / We would be happy if they wanted to come to visit our families too and we could have some exchange with them too. And they could play with the kids and help my grandmother. Now we feel that we are not invited to the activities. (14FN.)

During this debate the girls were not mentioning economic benefits of tourism but mainly emphasized their wishes to enjoy the company and friendship of the tourists. They found it unfair that only the cooperative members had been receiving the positive outcomes of tourism. The man's answer to these strong statements was that the people currently involved with tourism had initially had an impression that most of the people in the community had not been willing to get involved with the tourism programme.

7.2 Planning and Management of Community-based Tourism

Mowforth and Munt (2003, 215) express that even though the principle of participation is easy to promote in theory, the practice is much more complex. Timothy (1999 in Shen et al. 2008, 7) points out that participation should be viewed from at least two perspectives in the tourism development process, namely 'participation in decision-making process' and 'tourism benefits sharing'. It seems like in San Ramón those people who had not officially committed to the tourism programme had not been able to participate in making decisions, nor enjoy direct positive impacts from tourism. It can be argued that if you are not benefitting from the tourism, it is most likely that you do not feel like a host (Singh et al. 2003, 10).

There existed two different stories about the beginning of the tourism initiative and about the intentions to include all of the cooperative members into this programme. The first opinion, which was often pointed out by the people currently involved with tourism, was that all the cooperative members were asked more than once to join the new initiative but many people had refused to join. Their analysis was that many people did not want to commit to the tourism programme, which had many rules and restrictions. The second opinion is that only a few families were chosen to participate and they had not tried to include more families into the process. This second opinion refers that tourism development had not been started as openly and equally as it could have been. The last conception is supported by the fact that in the beginning many people had wondered why the tourists were suddenly coming to the communities. This would mean that the people on average had not been participating in the planning phase or they were only informed about the already-made decisions. In this case it can be stated that in terms of Pretty's (1999) typology, most of the community members participated only at the first and weakest level of participation, which is called *Passive participation*.

Michael C. Hall (2003, 110) reminds us that there is no such a thing as a perfect planning process, but despite this, it should at least be as transparent as possible. Tourism planning can function as an opportunity to support the development of social and intellectual capital in the communities (Hall 2003, 111). In San Ramón the planning process itself had not led to these kinds of benefits at the community level. The tourism planners often took it for granted that at the community level the decision-making is equal, which can even widen the existing inequalities and differences in the community. In this kind of situations especially, those who are not willing to be involved in the tourism development can suffer. (Cole 2006, 89, 94–97; Richards & Hall 2006, 1, 7.) In every community there had been few people who had

not wanted to have anything to do with the tourism programme. As Fagence (2003, 74) emphasizes, all the people have the right to say no to tourism and their opinion should be acknowledged in the tourism planning and management. Guides told that they had respected these people's opinion and asked me – a foreign visitor – not to approach these people either. However, it was a shame not to be able to hear why these people felt so strongly against tourism. Some of the guides estimated reasons: *They might feel uncomfortable with tourists. Their house is little smaller, so they might think that they cannot receive visitors. Maybe they are shamed or shy and that is why they do not want to get involved.* (16FY.)

Even though the planning process had not promoted the cooperation at the community level, there had not been any resentment towards the visitors. In general, many people experienced that tourism had been a neutral or a positive thing. As I asked about changes at the community level, the majority of people answered that it had been positive that the communities had not changed. The common view was that the communities had stayed very calm and the tourists had not caused any problems. One of my informants pointed out that: *The cars here give foreign people ride – although they would not give a ride to a Nicaraguan person. So they are happy that the tourists have come here.* (12FY.) I also experienced that most of the local people smile and greet the foreign tourists and do not seem to be bothered by the visitors. A woman who was not part of the programme told that *My 12 year old son is so happy when 'cheles' [whities] come. He comes running here home and tells that we are going to play football with the cheles, and it is nice because they always invite everybody to play. We are happy when they come to the community.* (18FN.)

Some of my informants who were participating in the tourism programme had noticed the need take more people into consideration. One participant told that: *...people ask me here in the community, why do the tourists come here, and what do you do with them.* (9FY). In this community they had arranged a public meeting later on where it was explained that the tourists were interested about coffee cultivation and about everyday life in the community. Therefore, tourists had been introduced to more people and they had visited local schools and talked with the students. It had been noticed that new opportunities to communicate with the visitors had made the 'outsiders' feel more included into the programme. In addition to this, better interaction between the official hosts and the other people in the community had improved the community cohesion.

One opportunity of participation had also been the dance and music groups that had performed for tourists. These groups had basically been open for all the people in the communities. These cultural groups had performed for the tourists but sometimes other people were also invited to enjoy these shows. During my stay in La Pita the local guides had received

economic help from UCA San Ramón in order to organize a goodbye party for two Danish volunteers. All the children who had been studying English with the volunteers were invited. There was a bonfire, decoration and music and the children thought it was hilarious when two tall Scandinavian young men tried to hit a piñata with a stick.

Different kinds of local festivals are not only an opportunity to celebrate cultural heritage and identity, but an opportunity as well to bring the local people together and to enhance local community's empowerment. The experiences in presenting one's own culture can have an effect on people's ethnic identity and on their self-esteem. Also the outside recognition of tourism initiatives adds to the local people's and the communities' local pride. (Cole 2006, 98; Maldonado 2005, 13, 15.) This is why the communities should try to include all the people in their communities when the dance and music groups are performing. Even wider participation in the cultural activities would be important as Scheyvens (1999, 248) states that a community which demonstrates pride in their traditions and culture is psychologically powerful.

7.3 Challenges of Social Empowerment

According to Scheyvens (2003) social empowerment refers to a situation where tourism development has confirmed or strengthened a community's sense of cohesion and integrity. She states that tourism can promote social empowerment most clearly when profits from tourism are used to fund social development projects identified by the communities. The tourism programme in San Ramón had also included an idea of regulating the tourism incomes by leaving 10 percent of the profits to the cooperatives, 10 percent to the communities and 10 percent to the social fund managed by UCA San Ramón. This social fund had been used for the young people's scholarships, to fund capacity building, to build libraries and to buy books etc. The idea behind the fund had also been to facilitate the members of the cooperatives to use the social and cultural services of UCA San Ramón. Even though many people in the communities had appreciated this social fund before, the situation had worsened more recently. Today people felt that there was not enough transparency with the usage of the social fund and they didn't see that the fund would be beneficial for everybody. UCA San Ramón (2008) had also stated that one of the sub-goals was to also include aged people and disabled people into the tourism development. In practice this kind of progress was not visible.

It seems at present that tourism could have caused more social disempowerment than social empowerment. The families involved with

tourism felt that many people in the community had misunderstood that tourism would be very profitable. Some people who had not been involved in the tourist programme mentioned that they were glad for the families who had been able to improve their houses with tourism incomes even though they had not had the same opportunity. Still this kind of unequal distribution of financial gain had predominantly caused jealousy. Most of the negative visions were based on the fact that only a few families had seemed to benefit directly from tourism. One of the participants described that *Some people were jealous that we were in the programme. They were gossiping about us. We did not care that much because we knew what the programme was about. And we knew that we were working hard. But it bothered us a little and made us feel little uncomfortable.* Scheyvens (1999) explains that social disempowerment can occur in this kind of situation when the tourism benefits are distributed unequally and people feel ill-will or jealousy towards people that are gaining from the tourism. In one of the communities this kind of critique had led to a situation where the guides had not been allowed to take the tourists to the pool area or to walk freely anywhere on the mountains. A more transparent and equal planning process could have possibly mitigated these kinds of negative perceptions and opinions of the people that were not profiting directly from the programme.

Tourism can unite communities by promoting respect, trust and cooperation in the community and yet on the other hand it can divide or widen already existing divisions in the community. de Vylder (2006, 13) states that the social capital is essential, as development needs cooperation – working together. He states that the selfishness and lack of mutual trust can lead to ineffectiveness. When the people in the community do not feel that the decisions are made transparently this diminishes this kind of mutual trust. This is why it is vital that community-based tourism development promotes the dynamism and cooperation inside the community, and does not harm it. In San Ramón tourism had contributed positively to the social capital or, what Scheyvens (2003) calls social empowerment, only inside the group of people working with the tourism programme.

Given one of the central values of development is freedom of choice, Sen (1999) argues that individual freedom has to be seen also as a social commitment. This means that there is a strong interdependence between freedom and responsibility. This kind of approach allows us to acknowledge the social values that can influence the freedoms that people enjoy and have reason to treasure. These shared values and norms influence social features like gender equity, nature of child care, family size and fertility patterns and many other arrangements and outcomes. (Sen 1999, 282–283, 297.) In that sense tourism development in San Ramón could have affected the local values related to the gender equality.

The gender experts from UCA San Ramón stated: *It is obvious that those working with the tourism have advanced more in the gender equity than those that are not (22FY)*. Still this change had been significant not only to the people in the tourism programme, but also to the whole community who had taken one step towards the more equal participation of men and women. In the community of El Roblar, the women had started their own cooperative after they had been able to actively participate in the decision-making in the other cooperative dominated by men. This new women's cooperative called *El Privilegio* (The Privilege) included many women that were not in the tourism programme, but were now able to participate more actively than before. Women who had been participating in the tourism development had begun to enjoy larger freedom of choice and this freedom had become visible also as social, mutual responsibility inside their community.

Another example of positive changes in social capital relates to the fact that people had started to act more responsibly towards environment.

Before we did not care about the community. But now we do and take better care of it. /.. / We go together to clean the streets in the community and we want our community to look good. And also we have included the school in this kind of work. /.. / Now the other people have learned it too. (7FY.)

In the communities of San Ramón many people experienced that the communities had become cleaner with tourism development. Families working with tourism had cleaned streets together and this was an example to the other people in their communities. They felt that the community was now more pleasant for the local people and for tourists. This could be described as a benefit for everybody.

It remained unclear how equal the opportunities of participation really were in the beginning of the tourism initiative. In spite of this, I experienced that it was even more important and interesting to hear how the different people had experienced the foundation of the tourism programme than to know how it had exactly happened. Some of the people participating pointed out that many families had not wanted to commit themselves, as the whole tourism process had included so many rules, responsibilities and different kinds of training. Guides explained that more people would have wanted to get actively involved later on. *Now they see that the families have had some success and some extra income from tourism, and after that many families have been sorry and upset that did not get involved in the beginning (16FY)*. It is common in community-based tourism development that on average, some people are willing to join the programmes when the risks are smaller (Siclari, no date). Those people who had actively participated in tourism in San Ramón had experienced the process of tourism development to be

really demanding. This is why their opinion was that it would be difficult for the new families to join without proper training. Additionally, many people felt that it would be senseless to include more families, when the amount of tourists had recently decreased.

The community of La Pita had been an exception, with more people being able to join the tourism programme due to a more recent development. In La Pita this larger participation had been possible because the members of the local coffee cooperative had begun to build an eco-lodge for bigger tourist groups. As mentioned before, the idea and financial aid for this eco-lodge originated in a French organization called Ecotours. People in La Pita were expecting that Ecotours would be bringing more French tourists to their community when the lodge was ready. It seems that this process had contributed to the social capital as the cooperative members together had been responsible of the building. It seems that as the tourism can bring extra income to communities' social funds, also these kinds of projects with voluntary input can promote the social empowerment inside the communities.

It is a normal consequence that the conflicts occur in periods of change and these kinds of situations can be valuable opportunities for creative problem-solving. Still, if the conflicts are not managed properly, it can divide the community and cause disorder. (Millar & Aiken 1995, 620.) Arlinghaus' (4.9.2008) study presents an extreme example from Peru where a community president was shot and the whole village was divided as a consequence of the problems of tourism development. These kinds of examples seriously undermine the statements that *community-based tourism is always socially sustainable* (see e.g. Hatton 1999, 5). Even though the local participation in tourism planning is essential for successful tourism development, it does not automatically lead to sustainable and equal tourism development inside the communities. It seems obvious that if tourism divides the community, it can cause serious obstacles to the future development of the community. Therefore tourism can be a cause for social disempowerment instead of supporting the community cohesion.

7.4 Indirect Benefits at the Community Level

Fennell and Przeclawski (2003, 145, 147) argue that the economic and social benefits of the tourism process should be felt across the community, at least in an indirect fashion. Even though most of the people in San Ramón had not enjoyed direct profit from tourism development, there had been less direct benefits such as the mutual responsibility of keeping the environment cleaner or people being able to participate in the cultural performances.

However, one of the most important indirect benefits would be how the tourism had decreased the isolation of these coffee communities. Many of my informants mentioned that it had been nice to notice that their communities and the tourism at the *Fair Trade Coffee Trail* had become more famous in Nicaragua but also abroad.

Scheyvens (2002) presents the concept of *justice tourism* to describe that kind of tourism where historically oppressed communities have the opportunity to share their experiences with the visitors. She states that the justice tourism is characterized by solidarity between visitors and those being visited and the promotion of mutual understanding and equal relationships. In a sense community-based tourism could be also defined as justice tourism, as the local people are able to share their own experiences of poverty and of the war in the 80's. During my fieldwork I noticed that for some people it was important to be able to talk about their difficult experiences during the war. People always ended their stories about the war with *Gracias a Dios* (Thanks to God) that there was no longer war in Nicaragua. Even though the people have experienced those times as very difficult, many of these stories reflect also a certain pride of the 'struggle heritage' (see e.g. Cole 2006, 124).

At the same time these kinds of encounters had reduced local people's prejudices against the tourists from United States. One of my informants described local people's relationship to United States as following;

We have had here U.S. as an enemy because of the war and everything. U.S. is in many ways guilty of stopping this country of developing. /.. / There have been millions of dollars invested in guns and this has not helped the farmers at all. The farmers in Nicaragua have been exploited and this is why we are so very poor. (21MN.)

After the Sandinista revolution in 1979 the relation between United States and Nicaragua took a turn for the worse when U.S. government began funding counter-revolutionary military groups called *Contras*. These Contra groups were based in Honduras from where they were attacking the *Sandinistas* in Nicaragua. Many people from the communities of San Ramón fought in this war for the Sandinistas. This civil war, which is known best as the *Contra War* continued throughout the 1980's. In addition U.S. also initiated a trade embargo in 1985 that strangled Nicaraguan economy the next five years until the Sandinistas lost power.

Despite the difficult history between U.S. and Nicaragua, some of the people mentioned in particular how good it was that North American tourists had been visiting their communities in San Ramón. Today they had many friends from United States with whom they had discussed about politics and about the Contra War.

We speak with the tourist and maybe they are not agreeing with their country's politics neither. /.. / We have spoken how the U.S. government harmed Nicaragua. They also are sorry about all the actions of their own government. And also our governments have had their faults. But it is not easy to change your mind about the politics, but maybe at least you will have a different idea after the discussion, and you understand better the other person's point of view. This kind of exchange of ideas is important! (21MN.)

I agree with Barnett (2008, 35) that tourism can reduce stereotypes and make 'the other' less different or suspicious. Barnett states that if tourism can break barriers between different cultures, it offers a scenario of a more enlightened world. It seems that community-based tourism has potential to be a medium through which the hosts and guests can reach each other and it can offer possibilities for an open exchange of experiences and views. This kind of positive scenario and the 'fine art of tourism' are usually considered to belong in the past as they exist so rarely in conventional mass tourism (de Kadt 1979; Singh et al. 2003, 3). These kinds of situations are not strictly limited to the encounters between tourists and the people committed to the tourism programme. Even though not everybody in the community had been in contact with the visitors, often many direct family members and those from extended family were able to discuss and exchange experiences with the visitors instead.

As most of the people in the communities had not had opportunities to travel even within Nicaragua, the visitors had been connecting the 'local' to the 'global'. *With tourism the most important thing is to learn about different cultures and to talk and present Nicaragua to the tourists (8MY).* Many guides emphasized the importance of mutual learning and a woman accommodating tourists described that: *I have learned a lot about friendship and relationship with other people and their countries. I have learned about other cultures and my own – and to value different countries and cultures and way of life. (12FY.)* Many people had enjoyed when the visitors had shown pictures and told them about their home countries and families.

In this way tourism can be seen as an open window to the world which can promote education, tolerance and positive attitudes towards others (Fennell & Przeclawski 2003, 144).



Picture 9: Towards the coffee fields.

One of the most important sub-goals of the tourism programme had been to create new contacts and increase the understanding of coffee consumers in the North. In these communities the foreign tourists were able to see, above all, how difficult and demanding the coffee cultivation was. At the same time the tourists were able to learn how essential it would be that the consumers in the North would buy the Fair Trade certificated coffee and in that way support the small farmers. In fact, amongst the different global certifications, the Fair Trade certification is the only one that is targeted solely to the small-scale producers (Nygren 2009, 192). The common hope was that the tourists could indirectly help the communities by distributing information in their home countries about coffee cultivation, about the Fair Trade system and about rural circumstances, as there is an urgent need to find new consumers for Fair Trade products.⁸ In San Ramón one coffee farmer explained that many tourists had not been ready to hear the truth about the current situation related to the Fair Trade coffee certification;

The farmers are not making that much from Fair Trade coffee. It looks nice, but in reality there are so many steps in the value

⁸ The supply of Fair Trade coffee exceeds the demand globally and therefore most of the cooperatives in Nicaragua had been able to sell only 30–60% of their coffee through Fair Trade channels (Valkila & Nygren 2009, 21).

chain of the coffee that the farmer cannot win that much. And most of all, the market of the fair trade coffee is not big enough. Maybe somebody else working with the coffee drive with fancy cars, but we are well exploited. Everybody does not want to hear this. It hurts – but this is the truth... (21MN.)

However, Valkila and Nygren (2009, 30) explain that even if Fair Trade cannot correct the inequalities in the global coffee trade, it is still an important initiative that supports the disadvantaged coffee producers in the Global South. This statement is supported also by my informant in San Ramón, who continued by saying:

Still it is better to buy the Fair Trade coffee as it comes from the small producers and not from the big farms – from the rich people. So in this sense it makes more sense to support the Fair Trade coffee. At least you support some of the poorest people. We get little more with Fair Trade – but not as much as you people think. But when people come here they see the reality of life here and they understand how it is. /.. / So the direct financial help is not the only help they (tourists) give us. – Actually they can help more when they go back to their home countries. So they help us in different ways. (21MN.)

This coffee farmer was not actively participating in the tourism programme, but he had experienced that in this way tourism was helping the whole community. But although he seemed to understand very well the function of Fair Trade certification, most of the people did not. The same people who felt comfortable about presenting the coffee cultivation in practice to the visitors were lacking much-needed information about the Fair Trade certification. Many young guides and women working with the tourism accommodation mentioned that the specific questions about Fair Trade had often been uncomfortable since they were not aware of the Fair Trade and coffee markets. In fact it is very common that the coffee producers in Nicaragua have a relatively poor understanding of what Fair Trade certification means and what rights and responsibilities are related to this (Valkila & Nygren 2009, 20). It currently seems that the visitors are probably not able to take much concrete information about Fair Trade certifications with them when they return to their home countries. Therefore one of the challenges in the future would be to increase the knowledge about Fair Trade coffee certification in the North *and* in the South.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This study has focused on the sociocultural significance of rural community-based tourism in three communities of San Ramón, Nicaragua. One of the main purposes of this study has been to participate in the debate about the possibilities and challenges of these kinds of 'new' alternative forms of tourism. I have posed a question about the potential of community-based tourism to contribute to human development and poverty alleviation even if it does not bring large economic benefits to the local communities. Before answering this question I present shortly the results of the previous analysis.

In San Ramón tourism development had brought new opportunities of participation particularly to the young people working as guides and to the women responsible of tourism accommodation. There had been a significant change in the women's participation, considering that before tourism many of these women had not been able to influence the decision-making or even to go to public meetings by themselves. People committed to the tourism programme had actively participated in different kinds of trainings in order to learn new skills for the tourism development. This kind of capacity building had helped young people and women to feel more confident with tourists, and despite some difficulties, the experiences with tourism had been mainly very positive.

Although rural community-based tourism had been socioculturally beneficial to some individuals, the significance at the community level had been very small – even though the tourism development was supposed to be *community-based*. The communities of San Ramón are not solid harmonized units, and the tourism programme had not been able to significantly contribute to the social capital of the people living close to each other in a certain geographical area. It seems like the lack of transparency in the planning and management of tourism had led to some hard feelings between the hosts and other people in the communities. However, most people were still happy to see tourists arriving, since the visitors per se had not been causing notable problems in the communities.

The following table summarizes the sociocultural significance of tourism in the communities of San Ramón. The results of the analysis are divided into groups according to different factors increasing or restricting empowerment through tourism development: new contacts, new skills, awareness and confidence, cultural integrity and pride.

Socio-cultural significance	Individual level People in the tourism programme	Community level Everybody	Future challenges
New contacts	+/- Intercultural exchange of information, ideas and experiences with tourists + Visiting peer groups/other communities working with tourism +/- Financial and capacity building support from the brokers - Powerlessness when only the brokers can contact the potential tourists	+ Coffee consumers from the Global North + Children playing with the tourists - Most people have no contacts with tourists - Irritation when tourists enter the communities without local guides	? Bring more tourists ? Include more people ? Reduce the dependency of the brokers ? To control the intrusive brokers and guests
New skills, awareness and confidence	+ Awareness of one's rights → improved ability to claim them + Knowledge about tourism and hospitality → confidence + Women: cooking, recycling paper, natural medicines, social skills + Guides: English, social skills, new plans for studying, leadership + Knowledge about local culture, history, geography & nature	+ Improved awareness of gender equality + Children studying English with volunteers + People taking better care of nature and keeping the community cleaner + Folkloric dance and music groups	? Gain a better understanding of the Fair Trade ? Improve English ? More people understanding tourism ? Improved sanitation and filtered water also for the families, not only for the tourists
Cultural integrity and pride	+ Young guides: greater respect and value towards work and life of their community - plans to stay + People in the project more proud to present their life, community and coffee cultivation than before -Relative deprivation when visitors complain about the conditions	- Revival of folkloric dance - Difficulties to see their community as a tourism attraction + Reduced isolation when the community gets more known	? More people to enjoy the tourism facilities ? To prevent the feelings of relative deprivation and negative demonstration effects

Table 1. Sociocultural significance of tourism in the communities of San Ramón

Tourism had widened some people's freedom of choice and self-esteem, which can both be considered essential values in human development. This study supports the idea that rural community-based tourism can have significant sociocultural benefits to the local people, particularly at the individual level, and the essence of this kind of tourism can be seen in the possibility to support the hosts to take advantage of further opportunities. This study has shown that tourism can reduce vulnerability, isolation and powerlessness and therefore contribute to the poverty alleviation even when tourism is not economically significant. Especially women involved with tourism had gained psychological empowerment which had strengthened their agency within their families.

It can be still questioned if 'enough' empowerment had ever taken place, because the local people did not seem to have possibilities to influence the future of tourism development. When the amount of tourists had declined, the hosts had felt powerless, and did not know what to do. If tourism is treated as a time-limited project and there is no continuity and sustainability, the people involved are likely to feel powerless and disappointed. This makes it less likely for the people to feel empowered to have influence on their matters. It has to be acknowledged that the local people participating in the tourism development in San Ramón had put their heart and time to the programme. Many women had believed in tourism when they had taken the loans to improve the tourism condition. If tourism did not recover, these women would be left in a difficult situation with their loans. The continuity of tourism development requires visits which bring economic benefits. Still, this study has shown that the real value of rural community-based tourism is not only in the extra income, but in the positive sociocultural impacts. Therefore it is worth continuing tourism development even if there were only some tourists coming and the economic benefits were not large.

I experience that the data which I collected during my fieldwork was able to provide enough information to answer the questions posed in the beginning of the study. The study has been made in a certain local context and the results cannot be generalized per se. In fact, the analytical framework re-constructed for this study encourages acknowledging and understanding the local context where the impacts caused by tourism occur. I have perceived that Cole's (2006) and Scheyvens' (1999; 2002) concepts and definitions of empowerment functioned well as a part of the analytical framework in this study. Another important factor supporting the sociocultural analysis of this study has perceived tourism as a tripartite system between hosts, brokers and guests. Tourism development in San Ramón supports previous studies of Wearing and McDonald (2002) and van der Duim et al. (2006, 116) which have indicated that the success or failure of community-based tourism depend greatly on the power of the brokers between hosts and the guests.

I acknowledge the subjectivity of ethnographic research, and many things would have been done differently. When I lived with only four different families during my fieldwork, I became much closer with some of these families than with many other interviewees. Even though these 23 semi-structured interviews provided very much information for the analysis, I feel that I could have stayed in the field much longer and conducted the interviews at a slower pace. On the other hand, my role on the field was to be mainly a learning researcher, since I did not feel skilled enough to think about the ways of empowerment through the interviews. Still, instead of judging myself for these kinds of weaknesses, I would like to cherish the lessons learned – it was nice to notice, for instance, that the last interviews were much better, smoother and relaxed than the first ones conducted in the beginning of the fieldwork. Despite the challenges during the research process, I feel that this study has been able to present the significance of community-based tourism from the local standpoint.

Many of the concepts used in this study, such as sustainability, development, participation and empowerment, are very broad, so I felt that it was vital to be able to define clearly the meaning of these concepts. It has been interesting and challenging to bring together cultural studies of tourism and development studies, for the reason that they are both interdisciplinary schools of studies which have their own established jargon. I have considered this approach rewarding, because there is a need to move the focus of tourism practices more towards human values, instead of concentrating only on the economic and environmental issues related to tourism. In further tourism research and tourism planning there is also a call for moving the focus slightly away from the tourists' needs and experiences. I see that Wearing and McDonald (2002, 201) have a point when they state that the whole tourism theory could be pushed beyond its boundaries if the 'other' assumed as much importance in the conceptualization of tourism as the tourists. I would like to continue the tourism research from the locals' and also brokers' point of view and, if possible, to 'keep one foot in the academia, one on the field'.

The distance between theories and practice is often very long, but in practical context the distance between office and the actual field is long as well. This means that even if the brokers had the needed theoretical information, in any case they will have to go to the field to understand the local circumstances. Right now there is still a shortage of practical tools that can provide well-needed support for the sustainable community-based tourism in rural areas. Considering the terminology, I have my doubts about the need to create a 'tool' for rural community-based tourism development as the tool would still always have to be conceptualized. The word 'tool' has its connotations to the quantitative research methods without sociocultural sensibility and therefore I would prefer calling this tool for example a framework. In the most ambitious visions it would be

interesting to strengthen the sociocultural perspective of already existing larger methodological frameworks instead of creating new frameworks.

In any case, I acknowledge that in order to create a functional and holistic framework for rural community-based tourism planning, management and evaluation, it is not enough to analyze the existing situation only from the local communities' perspective. In a further study there would be a need to analyze the brokers' role in the community-based tourism from a non-normative perspective and to try to understand the undergoing tendencies and realities in their current development work. This could be done for example by using ethnographic approach to understand better how different development organizations work with tourism development. To continue this study, I could use the results about sociocultural significance at the local level and bring them closer to the brokers' perspective.

Even before this kind of further research, this study can be applied in practice in various ways. In this study I have pointed out the obvious – at least for the tourism researchers – that sustainable and successful tourism development requires knowledge and skills of tourism. It is important for people in the rural communities to receive support in forms of capacity building in order to feel confident and proud receiving the visitors. At the moment different actors working with the tourism development need more information about sociocultural significance in tourism, in order to be able to offer this kind of aid to the rural communities. The analytical framework used in this study can help and encourage different actors to systematize and share their practical experiences of sociocultural impacts of tourism.

The new information that this study has provided can support communities also in a more direct manner. The results of the analysis can give grounding in developing an information package about rural community-based tourism. This 'package' could be, for example, a booklet containing basic and practical information about tourism and the possible positive and negative impacts tourism can cause. It could provide suggestions and guidelines that should be taken into consideration in sustainable tourism planning and management. Examples of these kinds of suggestions are to collect needed information about the local culture, traditions, history and nature, and to decide that the local people will be in charge of presenting the community to the visitors. The booklet could even summarize the facts that are often asked by tourists and, for example, background information about local traditions. These suggestions should emphasize the importance to guarantee that tourism development would be as inclusive and transparent as possible at the local community level. In addition to these guidelines, this booklet could also contain different kinds of ideas for improving rural community-based tourism initiatives. These ideas could include for example starting tourism development by receiving volunteers which can help local people to improve the local tourism conditions and also allow hosts getting

used to receiving tourists. Other ideas could be such as teaching Spanish or folkloric dance to the foreign visitors or organizing situations where the local people are presenting stories about local legends. The production of this booklet could be made as a project in close contact with local tourism actors, universities and for example cultural institutions.

Another – although more indirect – way in which this study could be applied in practice is the development work of Fair Trade coffee certifications. This study has touched on glance the topic and it seems that the local people are lacking information about the meaning of Fair Trade system and therefore are not able to inform the visitors, either. Valkila and Nygren (2009, 21) bring up a central point when they state that “This issue of farmers’ limited knowledge of Fair Trade certification raises doubts about the ability of Fair Trade to significantly empower marginalized small producers.”. There is a need to consider how community-based tourism could improve the Fair Trade coffee certification system at the local and also global context. This would be an interesting theme in the further tourism research. One practical idea at the local level is that the people who understand well the function of the Fair Trade system could be responsible of representing the topic to the visitors and also to other people interested in the subject. This way the local people would also gain a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities related to the subject and possibly support their agency as coffee farmers.

I consider that community-based tourism contains what Barnett (2008, 35) calls humanitarian solidarity of tourism. At the global level the coffee consumers from the Global North can learn about the circumstances of coffee production and about the disparities in wealth between producers and consumers. At the local level this kind of tourism promotes new opportunities for people that are in the margin and aims to ensure that the benefits are distributed at the local level. Rural community based tourism is in a way much more ‘fair’ than the Fair Trade coffee cultivation, as the local people can present directly to the tourists what they are doing in the communities. In most of the cases the economic benefits come to the communities without middlemen. Through tourism, poor communities can become exporters, which they are directly not with the coffee (WTO 2002, 10).

In community-based tourism the close contact between the hosts and guests creates opportunities to open intercultural exchange and mutual understanding which exist rarely in conventional mass tourism. When everything goes well, tourism can actually be a beneficial tool for genuine exchange of cultural understanding and enjoyment. As tourists arrive at the communities to meet ‘the faces behind the coffee cup’ – rural community-based tourism can have a possibility to revive the lost charm and vitality of tourism. I argue that when tourism can work as a tool for a more humanized world it must be worth it to try to solve the challenges of sociocultural unsustainability.

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Annex 1. Semi-structured interviews used in this study

The basic questions

- This is the structure of the questions asked in all interviews:
- How did the tourism development start in the community?
- How the decisions were made about tourism development?
- How did you feel about the idea?
- How did people on average feel about the idea?
- How have you participated in the tourism programme?
- How would you like to participate in the programme in the future?
- Who in the community is involved with tourism?
- What do you think about visitors staying in the in your house/ in your community?
- What do you present to the visitors here in the community?
- What are the visitors most interested to see?
- What have been the positive/negative things about tourism development?
- What has been the biggest surprise/disappointment about tourism?
- How tourism has changed your life personally?
- How tourism has changed your family's life?
- How tourism has changed your children's life?
- How tourism has changed the life in the community?
- What are the current challenges in the tourism programme?
- How would you improve the tourism programme?
- What advice they would give to other communities starting with tourism development?

1. Supportive questions

In addition to basic questions, I used the following categories as supporting the interviews and to make sure that all the topics related to sociocultural sustainability had been noticed at some level. However, all these questions were obviously not mentioned in all the interviews but I used them more as facilitators in the interview situation and also to receive further information about topics that the informants had perhaps already mentioned.

Community and social capital:

- Is somebody in the community in charge of tourism development?
- Has everybody had equal possibilities to participate in the tourism programme?
- Do you see that people in your community share common values and goals?

- Have you had conflicts inside the community because of tourism?
- Did you have similar conflicts already before tourism?
- Do you think that the local values have been taken into consideration in tourism development?

Work:

- Has tourism changed how and how much you work?
- How do you see the relation between tourism and coffee cultivation?
- How do you divide the workload during the high season of coffee and tourism?
- How do you share tasks inside your family?
- Have tourists helped you here with your everyday tasks?
- Do you feel that tourists are paying enough for the services in the community?

Gender equality:

- How do you understand the goal of promoting gender equality?
- Do you think there is need to promote the equality between men and women?
- If yes, how would you like the current situation to change?
- What are the current challenges related to the equal participation between men and women?
- How the different family members are in contact with the visitors?
- Do you think that tourism has changed the way women and men participate and what kind of roles they have in the family?

New skills:

- Have you learned something new with tourism development? What about your family members?
- Can you estimate what kind of importance these new skills or new knowledge have had?
- What would you like to learn in the future?

Self-esteem:

- How were the first experiences with the tourists?
- Have the social relations between you and visitors changed after the beginning of tourism programme?
- How do you feel about being with the tourists now?
- How do you feel when you present your home and community to the tourists?

- How do you feel when tourists are taking pictures here in the community?
- Has tourism changed your or your family members' self-esteem?

Cultural heritage and traditional arts?

- Are you presenting local dance, music, arts or something else similar to the visitors?
- Are these forms of culture changed after tourism begun? Did they exist before tourism?
- Have you told local legends/ stories to the visitors? Who has done this?
- Are tourists interested to hear these stories?
- Have you learned something new about your community after starting with tourism?

Cultural exchange?

- How do you like to speak with the tourists?
- How do you feel about the questions the tourists pose?
- What do you speak about with tourists?
- Is there something you do not like to speak about with the tourists?
- What do you think tourists have learned from you?
- Have you learned something new from the visitors?
- How do you feel when the visitors are sleeping and eating in your home?

Values and behavior?

- Do you like to work with tourism/ would you like to work with tourism?
- Have tourism changed the way the young people value the rural life and coffee cultivation?
- Are the young people willing to continue the work on the farm?
- Has tourism changed local people's needs (for example food, technology, clothing)?
- Have tourism changed the values of the people in your family/ community?
- Has tourism changed people's behavior in the community?
- Have any people started to imitate the visitors in any way?
- Has tourism increased the usage of alcohol or drugs?

