

Study of a self-assessment system for the ecotourism
group in Curuçá:
Accounting for tourist opinions while maintaining initial
goals



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An Independent Study Project for
World Learning - School for International Training – Study Abroad
Brazil Amazon Resource Management and Human Ecology
Fall 2008 – Gustavo Negreiros Ph.D. – Academic Director

Abstract

Community-based ecotourism can be a potential tool to both promote empowerment and conservation of the local environment. One of the main goals of community-based ecotourism is to ensure that participating communities take an active role in the development and management of ecotourism activities. One way to measure if their goals are being reached is through a system of assessment, through which an ecotourism community will be able to account for the opinions of the tourist, the guide operators, and the local community. The general objective of this paper is to determine how a community-based ecotourism group can account for the opinions of all those involved while still working to maintain their goals. The ecotourism group of Curuçá, Brazil has been chosen for the research site because it is in early stages of development but has already handled several practice tours. The researcher used participant observation and semi-structured open-ended interviews to complete the research. In the group interview, the group spoke, without prompt, of their desire to spread environmental awareness to other members of the community. Important connections were also made between the promotion of culture, the building of environmental consciousness, and environmental preservation. This then suggests another approach to the conservation of the local environment—the building of cultural self-esteem. Both goals of ecotourism, environmental protection and empowerment, were exemplified in the interview. While this project was approached with the potential of creating a system of assessment that would assist the group in understanding the social impacts of ecotourism, it is clear that the timeframe and the context of the group itself have hindered that goal. The most significant lesson overall however is that more research needs to be put into understanding how a community-based ecotourism group can measure themselves in order to improve, grow healthily and avoid the prospect of failure.

Resumo

Ecoturismo de comunidade pode ser uma potencial ferramenta para promover a capacitação e a conservação do meio ambiente local. Um dos principais objetivos do ecoturismo de comunidade é assegurar que participam comunidades ter um parte activo no desenvolvimento e gestão das atividades de ecoturismo. Uma forma de medir se os seus objectivos estão a ser alcançado é através de um sistema de avaliação, que uma comunidade ecoturismo será capaz de contabilizar os opiniões do turista, o guia operadores, e da comunidade local. O objetivo geral deste trabalho é o de determinar como um grupo de ecoturismo de comunidade pode representar as opiniões de todos os envolvidos, simultaneamente, continuar a trabalhar para manter os seus objetivos. O grupo de ecoturismo Curuçá, o Brasil foi escolhido para a pesquisa no site porque ele está fases iniciais de desenvolvimento, mas já tratou várias práticas turísticas. O pesquisador usado observação participante e entrevistas semi-estruturadas aberto de entrevistas para completar a investigação. Em entrevista ao grupo, o grupo falou do seu desejo de difundir a consciência ambiental a outros membros da comunidade. Também foram feitas ligações importantes entre a promoção da cultura, a construção da consciência ambiental, e preservação ambiental. Isto sugere, em seguida, uma outra abordagem para a conservação do meio ambiente local, a construção da auto-estima cultural. Ambos os objetivos do ecoturismo, a protecção ambiental e de capacitação, foram exemplificados na entrevista. Embora este projecto foi abordada com o potencial de criação de um sistema de avaliação de que o grupo iria ajudar na compreensão dos impactos sociais do ecoturismo, é claro que o contexto do próprio grupo ter impedido que a meta. A lição mais importante porém é que mais global de investigação deve ser posta em compreender como uma comunidade baseada no ecoturismo grupo pode medir-se a fim de melhorar, crescer saudável e evitar a perspectiva de fracasso.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, João Meirelles, for opening the Instituto Peabiru doors for me and for taking the time to help. I would also like to thank Gabriela, for being the wonderful enthusiastic woman that she is and helping me out, even while back in the States. I would also like to thank everyone in Curuçá for being so warm and taking the time to show me around, feed me, and let me stutter along in Portuguese. Specifically I would like to thank Xavier and Liliana at Casa de Virada, and Charles, Branco, Moreno and all the other Tapiaims. I wish you all the best of luck in your future endeavors with the ecotourism project. Thank you!

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Justification	1
2. Objectives	7
3. Background of the Research.....	8
3.1 Ecotourism in Curuçá	8
3.2 Map of Curuçá	10
3.3 Activities of the Group.....	11
4. Methods	12
5. Responses and Results	13
5.1 Environmental Consciousness	13
5.2 Promotion of Culture	14
5.3 System of Assessment.....	14
6. Analysis.....	18
7. Conclusion	21
Appendix A.....	23
Literature Cited	25

1. Introduction and Justification

Since the 1970s, ecotourism has grown in popularity as a potential solution to many of the problems conventional tourism has on host countries, such as the disenfranchisement of local peoples and the depletion of natural resources. As defined by the International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism philosophy generates “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.” Today ecotourism, “is viewed perhaps more than any other global industry as a tool for both conservation and local community development” (Honey 14). This stems from the hope that well-planned tourism could provide both economic and political incentives for conservation, as well as bring additional benefits to local communities (Salam et al. 56).

While there are many potential benefits from ecotourism, ecotourism is still not a panacea; it should be integrated with conservation management and community development in order to be effective. It should be understood then that the development of a conservation system calls for a fundamental understanding of the connection between the target area, adjacent ecosystems, and local people. Many conservation organizations and NGOs use ecotourism as a method for preserving wildlife and their environment, the international leaders being The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and the World Wildlife Fund (Lash and Austin 16). These organizations are successful links to communities because of highly trained field staff who continually dialogue with communities by understanding expectations from the start and assisting where change is necessary (Lash and Austin 16). There is a separation here though between those organizations that first work to conserve the environment, those that wish to build harmony between local people and protected areas, and those that see ecotourism first as an economic venture. The way these three types of groups approach ecotourism is different and can have a great effect on the development of the project. Ecotourism certainly can be a potential tool for communities, especially traditional communities, to both promote their own empowerment and conservation of their local environment, but it must be well planned and community-based.

An emphasis then should be placed on the idea of ‘well-planned tourism’ because “the way in which ecotourism is approached is critical to its success in terms of promoting the well being of both local peoples and their environments” (Scheyvens 1999, 246). Scheyvens highlights then that “a community based approach to ecotourism recognizes the need to promote the quality of life of people *and* the environment” (Scheyvens 1999, 246). A community-based approach then understands that the local community can be empowered when given the opportunity to decide which forms of tourism and conservation programs they want to be developed in respect to their needs and desires (Scheyvens 1999, 246). This involves strengthen local social organizations so that the traditional communities are not lost in the margins of society. Community-based ecotourism can then be defined as when “local people are involved in all aspects of the conservation and development process, both as principle actors and prime beneficiaries” (Lash and Austin 5). From this, Marris (2001) identified three main goals to community-based ecotourism:

1. to make a viable tourism business which contributes to local economic development in a way that minimizes negative impacts on the natural and cultural attractions upon which the tourism is based;
2. to actively contribute to the conservation of both the natural environment where the tourism is taking place and to the conservation of the cultural heritage of the communities;
3. to ensure that participating communities take an active role in the development and management of ecotourism activities (Marris 5).

The third goal is of specific importance here because participation specifically empowers communities and people to take an active role in managing their resources and controlling the activities that affect their lives (Pleno 138). As Pleno (2006) discusses, “knowledge, confidence, power, skills and access to knowledge” are all important elements of empowerment (Pleno 138). Ecotourism has been shown to “empower local communities by giving them a sense of pride and awareness of the importance of their natural resources and control over their own development” (Scheyvens 2000, 233). Scheyvens (1990) has additionally developed a framework linking ecotourism and empowerment/disempowerment through economic, social, psychological, and political

means in order to understand the connection between the two. Pleno's study also found that ecotourism improved the environmental consciousness of local women, as well as that of the local community as a whole. This improved consciousness has been shown to provide a jump-off for further conservation efforts and reinforce the ecotourism industry.

This also reaffirms the initial concept behind ecotourism—"that protected areas would only survive if the people in and around these fragile ecosystems saw some tangible benefits from tourism" (Honey 13). Many studies then have promoted this connection by showing that "it is difficult to protect the flora and fauna unless there are economic benefits to the country as well as to the local people," while also demonstrating how community involvement in conservation activities contributes to a local conservation commitment (Salam et al. 56). Indeed more and more people are beginning to understand how conservation of fragile ecosystems and beneficial community development can go hand in hand.

Furthermore, this community-based approach to ecotourism is unique in that it accounts for the perspectives of all members of the community, even those not directly involved in the project; and like all ecotourism ventures, it strives to not only entertain the tourists, but also educate them in an interactive way. Thus a successful ecotourism project benefits the lives of all involved. All of this is easier said than done however and it is a consistent challenge for small community based ecotourism projects to meet the needs of the tourists while not compromising their own goals. Often in conventional tourism, communities that did not develop a means to regulate tourism development consequently felt they had lost the ability to determine their own fate (Lash and Austin 5). This has led to a growing set of cultural impacts, socio-economic inequities, and environmental problems worldwide—these are the very reasons ecotourism was started (Land and Austin 5).

This frustration is one of the aspects of mass tourism that ecotourism strives to better, making it critical to understand. Unfortunately, there is a large lack of research focusing on how a community can continually monitor their venture in regards to their own goals, positive and negative effects on the community, and tourist satisfaction. Without a means to assess themselves, an ecotourism community will not be able to account for the opinions of the tourist, the guide operators, and the local community.

Such a system of assessment then should reflect the community-based perspectives of the group, as well as those of the tourists that visit. Examples of components within such a system are visitor feedback questionnaires and self-evaluation forms. Without a system of evaluation, the group has few means to adjust problems within itself, let alone factor in the goals and desires of the general community and the tourist. An evaluation system then will help the group make improvements, generate statistics to gage their work, and form a structure for accountability.

While many outside certification programs offer their methods as a way to help operators and the public—in most cases, their cost is not feasible for small businesses found in community-based ecotourism, especially for the initial evaluation, training and set-up. While these kinds of outside systems may not be feasible, they do yield incalculable benefits and teachings for creating such a system. One of the most thorough theoretical guides, the World Wildlife Foundation's (WWF) Guide to Community-Based Ecotourism, describes specific qualities an ecotourism group should strive to achieve for performance monitoring, but never details *how* to initiate and facilitate such practices. Such WWF suggestions are:

1. Ecotourism projects should be designed and managed for long-term viability and success;
2. Regular monitoring and feedback to assess success and identify weaknesses that may need to be adjusted;
3. Simple indicators;
4. Cover economic performance, local community reaction and well being, visitor satisfaction and environmental changes;
5. Monitoring should be kept simple and should be obtained from visitors, tour operators, and local people (Denman 20).

It should be noted that monitoring then is more than surveys, it is a way of learning how a system is changing and helps to measure progress and identify problems (Marris 8). Such systems of assessments have clear goals and objectives and should be able to identify key direct and indirect indicators which are simple and not time consuming to measure (Marris 11). Indicators then are the measurement tools while the method is the techniques used to measure; these are the components of a system of

assessment that help a community based ecotourism group achieve their goals. Examples of monitoring techniques are visitor feedback questionnaires, forms for recording observations of the ecoguides, and workshops and discussions with participating communities (Marris 11).

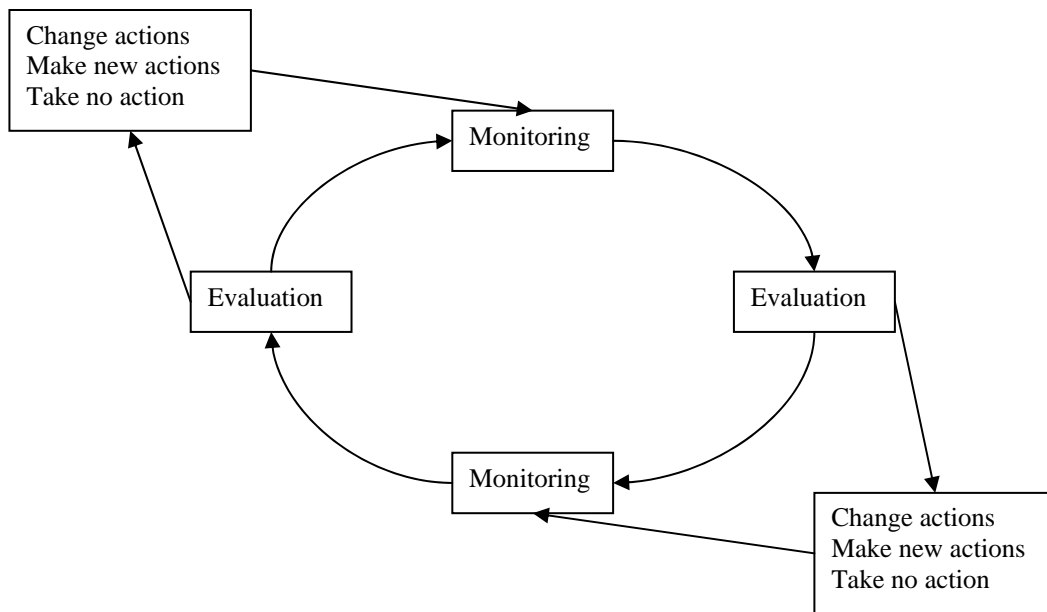


Figure 1 Monitoring Cycle

Designing a community-based ecotourism self-assessment system requires, first of all, to initiate a long conversation with the community itself so that all positive and negative aspects are understood. Each community is different and each community needs their own specific system that will help them evaluate their own attitudes, awareness, sensitivities, and constraints (Lash and Austin 7). Such a system needs to be simple, concise, thorough and repeatable. It also needs to provide immediate results because those without economic security do not have the means to wait on a nine-month study. Such a system would also require minimal training, which can hopefully be facilitated by a partner business venture or NGO ideally already involved with the community and with long-term intentions (Lash and Austin 32). It is their social responsibility, and likely in their financial interest, to tailor this system for the community. They are already familiar with the community, understand the background, and have built rapport (Lash and Austin

32). Such a tailoring process through should always be participatory and collaborate, which is reflexive of the ideals and goals of community-based ecotourism.

Additionally, without this ability to meet their own goals and needs while still maintaining tourist allure, a project may fail. Many community-based ecotourism groups have failed because blanket formulas are used to help a community establish ecotourism, but leave the community dry as they have no system to assess themselves. Some fall short because they were not established correctly while others are unsuccessful because they have no means to account for changing trends and attitudes. While it is agreed that the project's development needs to be examined to understand why some fail and some succeed, any project that ignores follow up data will likely fail as well. Not all projects are created sustainable at first, and even if they are, changing political, economic, environmental, and social factors need to be accounted for.

While it has become increasingly apparent that a project needs a clear method to be able to account for the perspectives of all involved, there is very little academic research and almost no tested theory on the potential for a community to self-assess their progress after their venture has begun. Economic, environmental, and social impacts are all important qualities to assess, but it is social impacts that are of particular concern here. A truly empowered and self-determined community should have the capacity to assess themselves because a community should be able to determine their own future and adequately be able to analyze the sustainability of their own project.

2. Objectives

The general objective of this paper is to determine how a community-based ecotourism group can account for the opinions of all those involved while still working to maintain their goals.

Specific objectives are:

- To look beyond the lack of research that examines local ecotourism groups themselves and look at the perspectives and goals of an ecotourism group. This involves directly identifying the goals and perspectives of the group in regard to ecotourism.
- To determine what steps a small community-based ecotourism group can take to meet the needs and desires of the tourist, to ensure economic security, while still maintaining their own goals and meeting the needs of the community.
- Finally, to propose a system of evaluation for the ecotourism group that could account for the perspectives of both the ecotourists and the ecotourism guides. This system will clearly only be the groundwork, and it is expected to be an evolving idea that changes with the needs and growth of the group.

3. Background of the Research

The ecotourism group of Curuçá, Brazil has been chosen for the research site. It is an ideal location for studying the creating of assessment systems because it is in early stages of development but has already handled several practice tours.

3.1 Ecotourism in Curuçá

A significant portion of the Municipality of Curuçá in Pará, Brazil is occupied by the Federal Conservation Unit, Reserva Extrativista Mãe Grande de Curuçá (translated as Big Mother Extractive Reserve of Curuçá—the one who provides everything) which is composed of 52 thousand hectares.

The area between Belém, Pará's capital and São Luiz, Maranhão's capital, is home to the largest continuous stretch of mangrove on the planet. It hosts 75 traditional communities for 6,000 families, most of whom live below Brazil's poverty line (under US\$ 3/day). The reserve itself is additionally the main source of survival for the 30,000 people that live in the greater area.

The terra firme (firm land) forest already has one of the highest rates of deforestation in the entire Amazon region, where 98% of the original vegetation has been removed. As a result, the mangroves are suffering because of severe environmental consequences, such as erosion and drought. This environmental degradation is expected to only increase if the construction of the Espadarte Off-Shore Port is confirmed. One of the first impacts will be a massive migration to mangrove borders, an already low resilience area.

The idea of ecotourism was brought into the region just two years ago in 2006 by Instituto Peabiru, a regional NGO with partners throughout the country and world. Previously, tourism was nonexistent in Curuçá. Community based ecotourism was brought into the region with specific goals for the development of:

1. The formation of citizenship
2. The strengthening of self-esteem
3. The generation of income for the socially excluded youth
4. The conservation of the marine and coastal environment

5. The enhancement of the culture of the traditional communities

Instituto Peabiru's tourism support specifically came in the form of vocational training, strategic planning and community organizing, and promotion and marketing.

As of November 2008, 18 community members participated in 104 hours of lecture classes divided into seven modules on such topics as Lodging and Food, Market Research, and Monitoring; 36 hours of technical visits to the possible visits; 16 hours of lecture from four lectures; and practice with three different tour groups.

3.2 Map of Curuçá

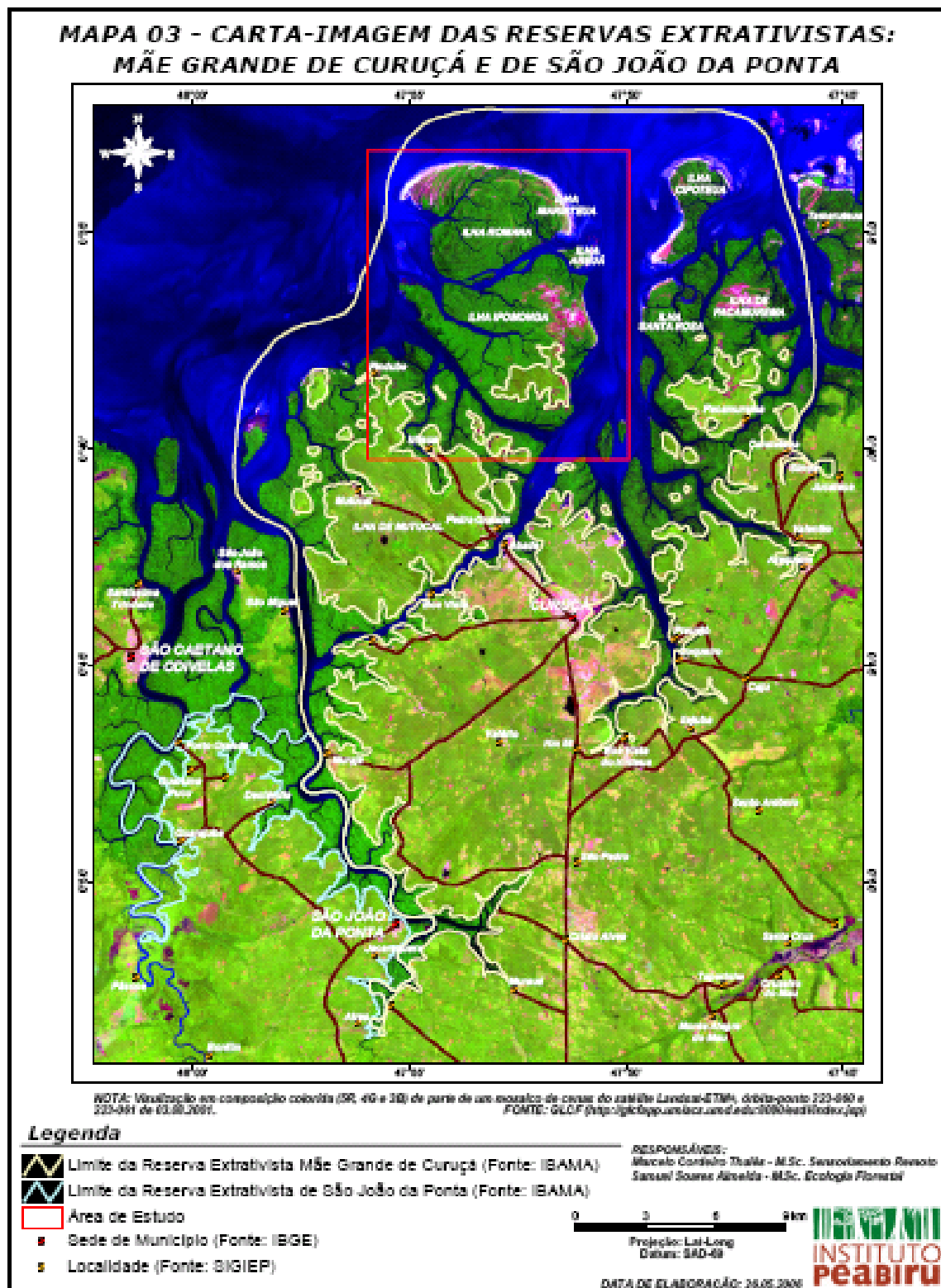


Figure 2 Map of Curuçá. Courtesy of Instituto Peabiru.

3.3 Activities of the Group

The Curuçá group currently has two planned ecotours: one to Romana Beach and the other to Pedras Grandes.

The trip to Romana Beach includes a two-hour boat ride to a 15 km beach solely inhabited part-time by 15 fishermen, swimming in the ocean, a lunch of freshly caught fish, and a livelihood demonstration of the fishermen's routine and tools. Upon returning to Curuçá, the tour group visits a house of arts and crafts, eat traditional food for dinner and participate in traditional dancing and music (Carimbó, which originated in Curuçá). The official description reads as follows:

Romana Beach is the first ocean beach after the opening of the Amazon River. The route was created by the Curuçáense community for small groups to learn about the Paraensa Amazonia, a fascinating place that mixes the native cultures of fishermen with the natural beauty of the beaches, mangroves, and forests. In three days you will enjoy a different type of tourism that values the local culture and generates benefits for the community (My Translation).

The route to Pedras Grandes on Ilha de Fora includes a two hour walk through the forest, a swim in Igarapé (creek) and a livelihood demonstration on farinha (manioc flour) production. The trip could be made in only one day, but guests have the option of spending the night in the community.

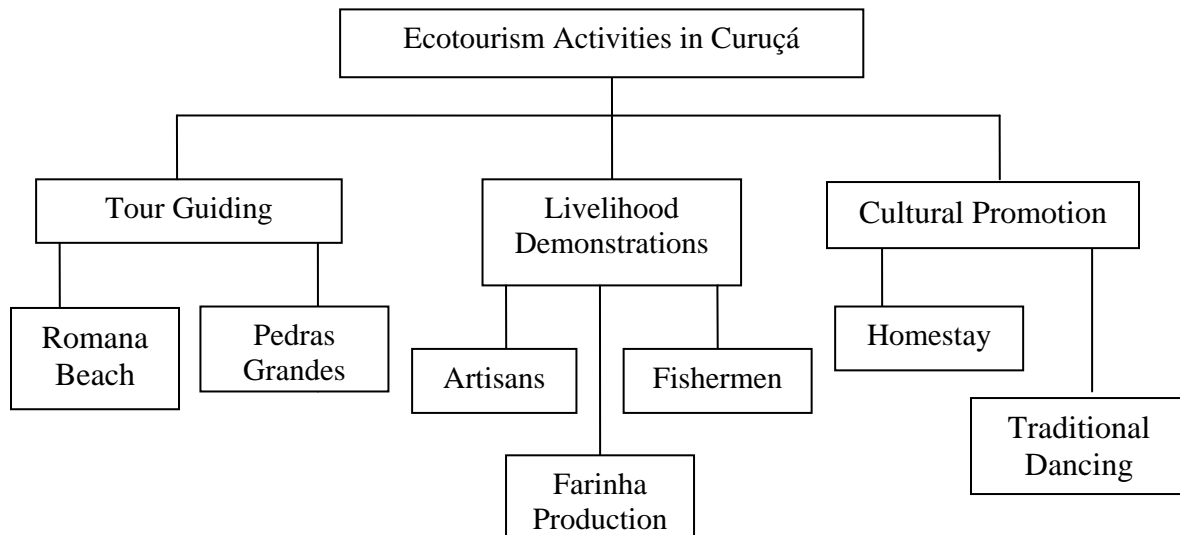


Figure 3 Ecotourism activities in Curuçá

4. Methods

The researcher used participant observation in the form of informal interviews, direct observation, participation in the life of the group, participation in an ecotour, and collective discussions.

The researcher also conducted semi structured open-ended interviews (Appendix A) with 9 of the 18 members of the ecotourism group in a group setting. While there are many factors that influence group versus individual responses, time did not permit individual interviews to take place. Since all group decisions are made collectively, and given the topic of research, a group interview did not seem to compromise the goals of the paper.

5. Responses and Results

5.1 Environmental Consciousness

In the group interview, a strong desire and dedication to their local environment and to the mangroves was expressed. There is an agreement that conserving the environment is their first and foremost mission—not just to maintain natural beauty but to protect the livelihoods of the traditional fishing community. The trash they felt had reached horrible levels and blamed lack of responsibility and environmental education. The group spoke, without prompt, of their desire to spread environmental awareness beyond the ecotourism group and those directly affected to other members of the community.

Dedication to the environment:

“We want this [ecotourism] group to help build responsibility. Our whole community is filled with trash. Everywhere we go is filled with trash. We want to see people be responsible with the environment.”

“Our first and primary goal is to preserve the environment, to preserve the mangroves.”

“...appreciation of the mangroves, the flora, the culture, the Amazon.”

“Look at all of this trash! The day I can look to this area and see nature and not litter will be a happy day.”

Through participatory observation members of the group were often quick to point out the trash on the side of the road and how ashamed it made them feel when an outsider came to the area. Additionally, individual members were eager to share plans separate from ecotourism to promote environmental responsibility among other members of the community. This promotion was spoken of both in reference to the greater community of Curuçá and even more so for the fishermen on Romana Island. One idea a group member spoke of is for the members to participate in a group bike ride to the Igarapé in order to clean up the area, in hopes that their numbers and actions will promote environmental consciousness.

Promotion of Culture

Through the group interview it was also made very clear that preserving and improving their own culture is the second most important goal of the group. Many members of the group drew a link between environmental conservation of the environment and strengthening of their traditional culture without prompt. The group made clear that the income they currently earn from ecotourism, since the project is only in its first stages, is only supplementary but that the ability to support their culture has value too. One member was quick to point out that the Amazonian culture of the coast was very different from the river culture and from Belém, so that sharing their culture was both beautiful and educational.

Improvement of culture:

“Our work is about our culture, spreading the culture, and improving the culture. All these things are about support.”

“Ecotourism is a new means for us to make money and improve our culture.”

“For our principal duties we have two—first is preservation, the second is improving culture.”

In observations all the group members were proud to share aspects of their culture and often unaware drew a link between their culture and the environment. The most prevalent example is the use of mangrove mud during Carnival, in which they cover their bodies in mud for the festivities. They spoke of a strong sense that this is unique to Carnival in Curuçá and that is made them ashamed to see trash in the mud. Outside of the formal group context, many members made the link between ‘improving culture’ and ‘improving the economy’ more apparent.

System of Assessment

Both of the creation of environmental consciousness and the promotion and improvement of culture became reoccurring themes as the group discussed the creation of a system of assessment. The heart of the responses were centered on trying to account for the opinions of the tourists and how to make sure the ecotourists both learn a lot and have

a good experience. The group expressed positive responses toward the idea of a questionnaire and stressed that suggestions were the most important for them receive. One member of the group clarified that while negative and positive points are really important, the whole program is changing so much all they can really hope for more positive points than negative points. Without prompt, many members of the group debated the significance of language in understanding the tourists' opinions. Some felt that English should be included in a questionnaire to accommodate for tourists, while others feared their lack of ability to understand the responses.

Accounting for the tourist's opinions:

"We want to know about the whole experience...Our program is new and changing it is important to be able to know what they think as well."

"Yes these are questions we should be asking ourselves but did not ask before. What things are not in the program but that the tourist wants? What things can we include? How can we budget our time?"

"We really want suggestions from the tourist. We do not know how other ecotourism groups work. We do not know what we are missing. Suggestions will help a lot."

"I want the tourist to return so I want to make sure they have a good time."

In participant observations, this fear of language barrier became more evident. Often I would be asked to provide English lessons with the specific reasoning geared toward being able to better communicate with the tourists. When past tours were discussed, it was often coupled with frustration at not being able to communicate and express their ideas. On another note, one member also talked of the website he is working to create and expressed excited for the day the first tourist finds the Curuçá Ecotourism group through the Internet.

The group as a whole agreed that the questions concerning them specifically were the most important. Overall they expressed concern—concern that they do not know enough, concern that they will not practice good ecotourism. Most of this concern was focused on the lack of knowledge the group feel that they have. For this they responded that they would like a physical test to see if they knew enough. The idea of a self-

evaluation form was also greeted with positive results, but specifics into wants and goals for the form could not be provided.

Accounting for the group's opinions:

"I understand that is important because the group will change with education, work, etc."

"I want to improve our interaction with the tourists, communication. How can they learn about our goals if we do not talk with them?"

"There are a lot of points, assisting information on how to practice, how to improve. There is a lot of information we need to learn about ourselves."

The most impassioned the group became however was in discussion about the opinions of the local community, specifically the fishermen. In this time connections were made between working with the community and the promotion of culture and environmental awareness. Strong connections were made between supporting the fishermen and cleaning the environment and it was made evident that the ecotourism venture is supposed to benefit them as well. Additionally, the topic of sustainable development and the threat of the Espadarte Off-Shore Port were brought into context for the first time. In participant observation, the port was a constant discussion and a clear source of concern.

Community Involvement:

"I want partnership with them [the fishermen] too. We want to work together with them because when the mangroves are made better, they win with sustainable development."

"We want to help the fishermen a lot. We help them by buying fish, by building consciousness, building responsibility for the environment."

"Our goal is to indirectly help them. Our local help is to clean, help the economy, preserve the environment, and build consciousness."

"We can not tell them [the general community] what to do. We can just hope to build awareness. Our goal is to continue our work and help the community understand why our work is important for us."

It should also be noted that during the entire group interview, the three women present did not respond or actively participate. While the men in the group often encouraged them to talk and asked for their opinions, but when it came a woman's turn to answer she often shrugged off a response or even left the room.

6. Analysis

The group's clear motivation and determination to conserve the mangrove area is a measurement of the awareness and knowledge their environmental education has produced. At Pleno (2006) discusses, knowledge is a key sign of empowerment, and is emphasized here by the positive results of environmental consciousness. Additionally their desire to spread environmental awareness confirms that one of the goals of ecotourism has already been reached and that the improved consciousness has been shown to provide a jump-off for further conservation efforts and reinforce the ecotourism industry. Early ecotourism theory solely focused on raising environmental awareness among the tourist, not within the local community, but this result is representative of the changing trends in ecotourism thought and emphasizes that further research is needed. Overall, heightened environmental consciousness is crucial not only to the creation of environmental goals, but to the success of the group reaching their goals.

There was a strong sense however in later discussion that the group members do not have the tools and resources to complete their environmental dreams and goals. This reaffirms the necessity of capacity building, training sessions for the group, and the need for a system of assessment. While there have already been several 'modules,' another training session to reaffirm what they have learned and strengthen self-esteem would be useful. Additionally, incorporating a method into the evaluation system to encourage group members to identify what tools they need would promote empowerment; by organizing their needs and wants the group will better be able to address these concerns and improve their ecotourism venture.

Specifically, the strong feelings of lack of experience and knowledge were most prevalent once the questions were directed to their understanding of the tourist experience. More than once a group member would declare that there is so much more information that they do not know how to receive. The group however has received intensive training hours that have covered all of the fundamentals of ecotourism. These concerns then reflect not merely a lack of education, but rather more so anxiety and fear. The language debate further revealed a deep insecurity about communication with the tourist. This highlights that most of the group anxieties are centered on interactions with

the tourist—both for appearing inadequately trained and being unable to express themselves. This further reveals specifically why individual members of the group stressed suggestions as an important portion of the tourist related section of an assessment system. Suggestions are a way for the group to account for both the opinions of the tourist and receive more knowledge on ecotourism indirectly via previous experiences of the ecotourist.

The importance of sharing the Curuçáense culture shows a sign of self-esteem, as well as empowerment in form of confidence. This was apparent in their identification of goals, as well as the enthusiasm expressed during discussion of the fishermen and accounting for their opinions. Placing the opinions of those indirectly influenced by the ecotourism venture is a sign of social health within the community. This highlights the success of another goal of ecotourism, the promotion of local culture, which is often left to the sidelines in academic research. While empowerment of individuals is often addressed in ecotourism literature, the impact on the greater community and their culture is rarely focused upon.

In the overall group interview, especially when talking about the greater community, important connections were made between the promotion of culture, the building of environmental consciousness, and environmental preservation. These are connections that were made without prompt and show an important result that differs from initial ecotourism theory which believes that a community needs to see economic benefits in order to participate in conservation efforts. This then suggests another approach to the conservation of the local environment—the building of cultural self-esteem. Much of this is a direct result of Insituto Peabru's efforts to focus more on self-esteem than on ecotourism tools. This does not negate the common believe that economic incentives are the only means to reach environmental conservation, but rather suggests other alternatives that are rarely discussed in ecotourism philosophy. It also furthers the idea that community involvement in conservation activities contributes to a local conservation commitment.

The most significant results of the interview concerning the system of assessment were the creation of awareness regarding accounting for opinions and looking to the future for improvements. On several occasions, both in the group interview and through

participant observations, a group member would proclaim that s/he had not considered the importance of measuring for opinions before. The consequence of more awareness is extremely significant because through the building the consciousness, the group will be able to better support themselves.

This lack of awareness however hindered the ability to work with the group to propose a system of assessment. This emphasizes that greater background research is needed to create such a system and the benefits of hiring an outside agency in conjunction with a partner venture or NGO. The fostering of awareness though is clearly the first step in a long process to understand the wants and needs of the ecotourism group from an outside perspective. With the groundwork laid within the group, further efforts will prove to be more practical.

7. Conclusion

While the foundation of community-based ecotourism strives to promote involvement and improvement of the entire community, there is very little academic research and almost no tested theory on the potential for a community to self-assess their progress after their venture has begun. A truly empowered and self-determined community should have the capacity to assess themselves because a community should be able to determine their own future and adequately be able to analyze the sustainability of their own project.

While this project was approached with the potential of creating a system of assessment that would assist the group in understanding the social impacts of ecotourism, it is clear that the timeframe and the context of the group itself have hindered that goal. This then places the importance of having background contact with the group, and of building rapport with the group. This initial conversation with the group however will hopefully continue to foster awareness and lead to further conversations in the future. Additionally, the strong sense of fear and frustrations within the ecotourism group however needs to be addressed before further steps can be made. Designing a system of assessment may help the group by improve self-esteem, providing motivation and direction, and ease anxieties. Working with the group also further revealed the need for an assessment system to look at environmental and economic, not just social, impacts once the venture is more developed.

An important conclusion here though is the significance ecotourism has had on the Curuçá group, even in its very early stages. The goal of ecotourism is to promote both environmental protection and empowerment of the local people—both of these qualities were exemplified in interviews with group members. Specifically, important connections were made between the promotion of culture, the building of environmental consciousness, and environmental preservation. This then suggests another approach to the conservation of the local environment—the building of cultural self-esteem—and the need for further research. Additionally their desire to spread environmental awareness confirms that one of the goals of ecotourism has already been reached and that the improved consciousness has been shown to provide a jump-off for further conservation

efforts and reinforce the ecotourism industry. This also warrants the need for further research. The lack of involvement from the female members of the group however suggests that more attention needs to be paid to their needs and emphasizes the need within ecotourism literature to further study the impacts of ecotourism on women's empowerment.

The most significant lesson overall however is that more research needs to be put into understanding how a community-based ecotourism group can measure themselves in order to improve, grow healthily and avoid the prospect of failure. This aspect is a crucial component to the building of self-esteem and empowerment within a community and without it, pieces are missing. Theoretical knowledge and guidelines should not stop at the development stages of ecotourism but should follow through to continually help communities several years down the line. As ecotourism continues to develop around the world, further research will be developed. Ecotourism, especially community-based ecotourism in traditional communities, is a new venture and there is still much to be learned.

Appendix A

Questions for group interview

Eu estou aqui na Curuçá porque eu quero estudar ecoturismo e o empoderando de comunidade. Um moda de empoderamento é um sistema de auto-avaliação. O sistema de auto-avaliação é para medir os impactos na comunidade e melhorar de grupo de ecoturismo. O sistema de avaliação tem especificos objetivos e metas. Por exemple: para ver se as turistas estão satisfeitos ou para saber se os resultados esperiados estão alcançados.

Então eu quero trabalhar com vocês para criar o sistema de auto-avaliação. Agora eu quero falar com vocês sobre seus objectivos de um sistema, com perguncas especificas. E depois eu vou organizar seus ideias e fazer uma lista de sugestãos para voces.

Para o primeiro parte eu quero falar come vocês sobre o sistema de auto-avaliação geralmente.

1. Geralmente, o que qualidades você quer por o sistema de avaliação?
2. Especificamente o que informacao você quer aprender/receber? (que tipo de informacoes especificos)
3. Quando voce pensa sobre o sistema de avaliação, o que você imagine? (valorizao)
4. Tem mais informacoes você quer falar comigo sobre o sistema?

Os partes II, III, e IV e sobre subjetos mais especificos.

Parte II- As Touristas

E imporante para o program de ecoturismo ver se as turistas estão satisfeitos. Se elas estao satisfeitos, sem problem. Se não estão satisfeitos e importante compreender por que e como melhorar. Mas, o opinãos de turistas mundar com tempo, e com o sistema e possible para voce medir as mundancas. Um exemplo de avaliação: o questionario por a turista

5. O que informação especifico você quer sober/aprender sobre a experiencia de visistances/touristas?

6. Tem o parte no programa você esta preocupado sobre de experiencia de turistas?
7. Você quer o especifico tipo de formulario para a turistas?
8. Geralmente o que e sua meta/objetivo para a avaliação de experiencia de turistas?
9. Tem mais informacoes que você quer falar comigo sobre o opinião de turista?

Parte III-O Grupo

Sim e importante medir a opinião de turista, mas e mais importante compreender de opinião o grupo. Quando o group tem o problema, o programa de ecoturismo tem o problema. Parte de programa mundanca com tempo tambem, e assim o necessidades do grupo. Exemplos: formulario para observacoes, relatorio de problema, auto-avaliação, etc,

10. O que informação especifico você quer sober/aprender sobre o group e o qualidade de trabalho?
11. Tem o parte na programa voce quer melhorar mais?
12. Você quer o especifico tipo de formulario para o grupo?
13. Geralmente o que e sua meta/objetivo para a sistema de auto-avaliação de grupo?
14. Tem mais informacoes você quer falar comigo sobre o opinião de grupo?

Parte IV- o populacao local/o comunidade

O projeto de tourimo afeta muitas pessoas diretamente e indiretamente. E importante tambem compreender o opinião deles. Para o final parte, precisa pensar sobre o que e viavel. Exemplos: discussao de comunidade, representacao, etc

15. O que informacao especifico você quer sober/aprender sobre o opinião de comunidade?
16. Quer aprender sobre o opinião de comunidade?
17. Voce quer o especifico tipo de modo?
18. Geralmente o que e sua meta/objetivo para a avaliação de opinião?
19. Tem mais informacoes você quer falar comigo sobre o opinião de comunidade?

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