“Ir al Otro”

The Process of Sustainable Tourism Development in Ukupseni, Kuna Yala

Ariella Orbach
McGill University
Department of Anthropology

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Togdar nuerbarye necuebur Ukupseni ga anabindagsadbarye nued cudigusadborye. Togdar nuedye pebo arbasmalgine.

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Cultural survival is founded on self-determination: the ability to determine one’s own future on one’s own land. It does not necessarily demand clinging to tradition and resisting change at all costs. (McIntosh 1999: on-line)

One of the ways indigenous peoples have attempted to confront and adapt to change while at the same time maintaining the strength of their cultural heritage has been by welcoming tourists to their lands. Many have hailed small-scale tourism development as a way for communities to protect their cultural and environmental heritage while at the same time encouraging their economic and social development. However, these projects have not always met with success, and it appears as though there are many ways in which the introduction of the tourism industry can do more harm than good.

Working with one community in the process of developing its tourism sector, I will attempt to evaluate how best to go about the process. Ukupseni is a village located in Kuna Yala, an autonomous indigenous territory on the Caribbean coast of Panama, inhabited and administered by the Kuna people. By spending time in the community, interviewing a variety of residents, and holding two workshops for community members, I have learned how tourism has developed in Ukupseni, what its problems are, and what have been its successes. Based on literary research and experiences in the field, I have come to understand what conditions are necessary for a community to successfully and sustainably develop tourism for the benefit of its residents, and what problems and obstacles may occur along the road. This insight has allowed me to make a number of concrete recommendations to the community of Ukupseni for the future development of its tourism industry.

Thus, this project will be divided into four main sections, the first being a review of the literature regarding sustainable tourism, its benefits, and the problems associated with it. Then, I will provide background information on the Kuna people and then on tourism in Kuna Yala, both necessary to understand the context within which Ukupseni finds itself. Finally, I will review the opinions of the community members I have spoken with, and from all of the above data, come up with a list of recommendations for the community.

I - Sustainable Tourism: A Conceptual Overview
If the tourism industry were a country, it would have the second largest economy in the world, topped only by the United States. The industry currently employs more individuals than any other, in 1999 accounting for 10 percent of jobs worldwide (Honey 1999: 9). Clearly, tourism is a global force that cannot be ignored. It has the potential to sustain a nation's economy and provide employment for many. However, traditional large-scale tourism also brings with it many social and environmental problems. Increasingly, people the world over are becoming aware of these issues, and looking for new, more sustainable ways to take part in the tourism industry. Many tourists themselves are becoming more environmentally and socially sensitive, avoiding polluting, socially and culturally intrusive large-scale tourism developments (Inskeep 1998: 20). Consequently, alternative forms of tourism that focus on local environments and cultures have been rapidly growing in popularity.

Sustainable tourism has been defined in a variety of ways, but all emphasize the maintenance and enhancement of local environmental and cultural resources, the ability of the tourism sector to continue providing for and satisfying tourists into the future, and the need for tourism to benefit local inhabitants. According to the World Tourism Organization,

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems (Inskeep 1998: 21).

More than that, sustainable tourism also suggests the involvement and control of local people in the development and management of tourism activities in the area. The community thus becomes a “core component” of the local tourism industry, allowing benefits to flow directly its inhabitants (Woodley 1993: 137).

Ecotourism and cultural tourism are two of the most popular forms of sustainable tourism. Ecotourism, often claimed to be the most rapidly expanding type of tourism today, involves travel to natural areas, encouraging their conservation and appreciation. It minimizes the negative effects of tourism on local environments and cultures, contributes financially and practically to conservation and community development projects, and raises awareness about local environments among both tourists and locals (Honey 1999: 6).

Similarly, cultural tourism also emphasizes a minimization of the negative effects of tourism and the contribution tourism must make to local lives. However, as its name suggests, cultural tourism has as its basis not the natural environment, but the culture and traditions of the host communities. Cultural tourists are those motivated to travel to a particular destination due to interest in local history, culture, art, and lifestyles (Leung 2001: 173). Yet in many ways the
distinction between these two types of tourism is artificial. While some tourists travel solely in search of natural beauty, most ecotourists are also interested in the local peoples who interact with the environments they are visiting. Likewise, most tourists interested in foreign cultures have some desire to experience the environments that these people inhabit (McLaren 1998: 97). For this reason, for the remainder of this paper I will largely refer to these two tourism types together.

A final definition of relevance to this study is that of indigenous tourism. This is a particular form of sustainable tourism, almost always involving both ecological and cultural elements, in which “indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction” (Hinch and Butler 1996: 9). As we will see throughout this paper, indigenous involvement in tourism based only on their culture being an “attraction” is rarely enough to ensure the sustainability of tourism on their lands, nor to ensure that the benefits of tourism are used to improve their social and economic situation. Ideally, tourism involving indigenous peoples should always be developed and managed by, or in partnership with, these very peoples. Although a tourism run by and based upon small communities can of course exist outside the indigenous context, the issues, benefits and problems arising from this type of tourism are especially significant for indigenous groups. For this reason, I have focused this study specifically on indigenous tourism.

The benefits of sustainable tourism

Proponents of sustainable indigenous tourism argue that many benefits arise out of this type of development, benefits that are both economic and social. For one thing, tourism provides an opportunity for the economic development of small-scale, poor indigenous societies that respects traditional ways of life and does not demand of the people a change in the essential structure of their society. As compared to other forms of employment, this type of tourism is far less disruptive of traditional lifestyles and culture. In fact, it often reinforces them (Brandon 1996: 19). For example, ecotourism is an activity that is “generally consistent with indigenous values about the sanctity of the land and people's relationship to it” (Hinch and Butler, cited in Zeppel 1998: 65). Thus, indigenous societies can, through tourism, seek the economic self-sufficiency needed to allow them to break out of the cycle of marginalization and poverty in which many find themselves today (Hinch and Butler 1996: 5).

The economic opportunities provided by a local tourism industry also allow indigenous peoples to fight against trends of outmigration. Many indigenous areas are economically depressed, offering few ways to make a living aside from subsistence labour. Often, members of the younger generation see employment as a way to improve their lives and social standing. With few options within indigenous territories, many end up migrating to the cities or other nearby areas in search of
new opportunities and better lives. The result is weakened communities and families torn apart by necessity, as well as a marked loss of culture on the part of many of those who left. By creating jobs within indigenous areas, tourism can motivate people to stay within the area and help avoid these problems (Inskeep 1998: 28).

In fact, supporters of indigenous tourism point out that involvement in the industry can actually help maintain traditions and cultural pride. Ecological and cultural tourists travel across the world to catch a glimpse of the cultural and environmental heritage of particular peoples. Upon observing the value outsiders place on these aspects of their lives, the people themselves are likely to experience a renewed sense of pride in and value for their traditions and way of life (Inskeep 1998: 29). Furthermore, tourism can actually encourage the maintenance or resurrection of dying cultural practices, due to interest in these on the part of the tourists. For indigenous groups who have for years lacked a strong sense of cultural identity and pride, tourism provides an opportunity for them to rediscover lost traditions, because there is a demand for these to be displayed to interested tourists (Doğan 1989: 223). Deborah McLaren (1998) gives an example from the Balinese village of Ubud, where traditional dances are performed for tourists. The dances are created by the community itself, and the performances have generated interest in traditional dance not only among the tourists but also among the younger generation of villagers. Although the shows are put on especially for tourists, friends and family of the dancers, as well as other interested community members, come out to watch the performances. As a result, more youth have become interested in learning traditional Balinese dance techniques from the old masters (53).

Similarly, sustainable tourism development can renew pride in, and respect for, the natural environment. Once a people realize that the environment can benefit them while being kept intact, they will be more motivated to care for it and conserve it (Inskeep 1998: 27). This notion has been called “stakeholders theory” - people will protect what they know has value to them (Honey 1999: 12). For societies who have lost their cultural and spiritual connection to the environments they inhabit, tourism can help return a sense of ownership and stewardship of natural resources, by exposing local people to the value outsiders place on these environments. For peoples who have been forced out of economic need to unsustainably harvest their resources, tourism offers an economic alternative that allows the environment to remain intact. Furthermore, revenues from tourism can be put toward the conservation or recovery of these resources (Inskeep 1998: 27).

Finally, proponents of sustainable indigenous tourism point out that it brings diverse peoples together, and in doing so, increases cultural understanding and tolerance. It is assumed that many of the injustices faced by indigenous people arise from ignorance on the part of the non-indigenous. When outsiders come to indigenous territories and experience the people's culture and lifestyle firsthand, their understanding of and appreciation for the issues faced by these people is improved.
Tourists then return home and share what they have learned, helping lead to improved attitudes toward indigenous nations, and hopefully to a more equitable relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (Hinch and Butler 1996: 5). With today's wealth of technology, people can be informed, and misinformed, about others without ever having to meet them. Indigenous tourism allows for direct, face-to-face contact between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, allowing the two to communicate directly, share, and learn from one another. At the same time, indigenous peoples have the chance to create and project an image they wish foreigners to have of them (McLaren 1998: 41).

*The problems with tourism*

Despite the many potential benefits mentioned above, any tourism, no matter how sustainable, also brings potential problems to the host communities. While tourism has played the role of fortifying cultural traditions, it may be argued that it can also serve to erode them. When tourists come into an area where there were few foreigners before, they expose the local people to new behaviours and ways of life. Often enough, the behaviours tourists bring with them are considered inappropriate or unacceptable by local standards (Chambers 2000: 87). Because the tourists who come appear wealthy and worldly, it is often the case that members of host communities end up valuing the foreigners’ ways more than their own. The younger generations, who often already aspire to “modern” lifestyles, are the most vulnerable to a resulting loss of culture and values (Inskeep 1998: 30). Another effect of exposure to tourist lifestyles is the possibility of resentment and envy arising among local populations faced with the inequalities of wealth and social standing that the tourists’ presence makes so noticeable (Louw and Smart 1998: 82). This phenomenon of sudden exposure to apparently “better” ways of being, and the resulting dissatisfaction with traditional lifestyles, has been called the *demonstration effect*, and some have gone so far as to characterize it as a “revolution of rising expectations and Western consumerism” (Zhen-Hua 1998: 33).

Age-old social structures can be quickly broken down by tourism development as well. New employment opportunities lead to shifts in traditional systems of authority and prestige (Chambers 2000: 54). Tourism-related revenues can disrupt family structure and gender relations, leading to increased tensions within the community. For example, a child may make more money selling handicrafts to tourists in a day than her father does working in the fields for a month. This inevitably lessens the importance placed on traditional labour, and the older generation may begin having a harder time convincing the younger of the value of these ancestral ways (Brandon 1996: 18).

It is important to note, however, that no society can be expected to remain static and to
never adapt to changing times. Indigenous cultures are as dynamic as any others, something often overlooked by those who consider “traditional” cultures to have arisen, and to exist today, in isolation (Chambers 2000: 98). In fact, all cultures are constantly undergoing change and adapting to new circumstances. However, the problems start when this change is far too rapid or sudden for the culture to cope. Tourism often evolves rapidly as new destinations are discovered and the word spread, and therefore can cause such problems (Brandon 1996: 18).

Another intrinsic problem associated with tourism is the commoditization of culture for tourist consumption. This involves the “marketing of indigenous culture” as an attraction or curiosity (Chambers 2000: 39). In the process, indigenous peoples and their cultural traditions are often given new meanings in order to fit within a particular discourse meant to attract visitors, such as Romantic notions of the “noble savage” living in perpetual harmony with nature (Hutchins 2003: 159), or of exotic peoples living simple lives disconnected from modernity (Chambers 2000: 80). Of course, the danger here is that the lifeways presented to the tourist become more and more distanced from the realities lived by the host society (Hollinshead 1996: 313). Meanwhile, local people perceive what the tourist is looking for, and may begin to market themselves, their history, religion, and culture for tourist consumption. The authenticity of the cultural exchange between local and tourist is lost. As McLaren puts it,

> Many local people are simply identifying and selling any community resources they think tourists might buy, sometimes fabricating performances and ceremonies they believe tourists will pay to see. In doing so they are prostituting their identities and manufacturing themselves as tourist attractions (1998: 47).

Indeed, tourism does often bring about a commoditization more than just culture – it also turns human relationships into ones based on money. Social relationships are brought into the economic sphere, and human interactions simply become a way to earn a living (de Kadt 1979: 61). Thus the ideal of people of different cultures being brought together through tourism and learning to respect one another through direct contact is not always met. On the contrary, the commoditization of human relationships can cause tension between the host people and the tourists. When locals insist on payment for every small service they might offer to the tourist, such as giving directions or posing for a photograph, they may end up not only frustrating the tourist but also projecting a negative image of themselves and their people onto the visiting foreigners. In turn, when tourists are not willing to buy souvenirs, handicrafts or services, local people may become upset or unable to understand why the wealthy visitors are not willing to share what they have (Weaver 1998: 58). Rather than being a stage set for intercultural sharing and learning, tourism can cause new stereotypes and tensions to form.
Tourism controls

It is clear that sustainable tourism development can bring both the good and the bad to indigenous peoples looking to open up their communities to visitors. It is also clear that given the potential benefits of tourism, communities looking for a sustainable route to self-directed economic and social development should not rule it out as an option. Indeed, many indigenous communities have turned to tourism development as a way out of economic stagnation and dependence, and have succeeded. There is always the risk of any of the above mentioned problems developing. However, it appears as though the trick to avoiding these problems is to ensure that tourism is properly controlled by the community, to a degree that suits its particular needs and concerns.

A variety of such controls exist. Erve Chambers (2000) describes the strategy of *boundary maintenance*, used by communities who are ready to encourage tourism development but want to ensure that the local lifestyle and social structure is maintained. As such, certain essential parts of local life are off-limits to tourists. For example, tourists may be encouraged to visit certain areas while at other, perhaps more culturally important ones, entrance is prohibited to outsiders. Another form of boundary maintenance involves making a distinction between aspects of the culture meant for tourist consumption, and those reserved for members of the community or society. For example, in Bali, a major destination for cultural tourists, some communities have maintained the sacredness of their traditional dances by deliberately altering the ones they perform for tourists. This way, the religious significance of the “real” traditional dances is not lost. (55).

Generally, a community can set a variety of controls to limit what parts of the local culture and environment tourists can have access to. These controls include *spatial limitations*, when entry to the area itself or to sacred sites is limited; *activity limitations*, when certain tourist activities are permitted and others prohibited; *temporal limitations*, when the host community decides when tourists can access the area; and *cultural limitations*, when limits are set on tourist access to cultural knowledge and ritual happenings (Zeppel 1998: 73).

Sustainable tourism can indeed benefit indigenous communities looking for a way to improve their economic situation and social standing while at the same time preserving and enhancing their cultural heritage. However, to do so tourism must be carried out properly. Local people must have control over the tourism industry, and develop it to best suit their specific needs. Although some problems and conflicts are inevitable, as with any new development brought to a community, these can be minimized by proper planning. I will now turn to the case of tourism in Kuna Yala, and in the community of Ukupseni in particular, in order to better understand what needs to be done to ensure the success and sustainability of a local tourism project.
II – The Kuna People and their Lands

The vast majority of the Kuna people, or Dule as they call themselves, live along the Caribbean coast of Panama.\(^1\) Their territory includes an archipelago of over 300 tiny coral islands and the thickly forested slopes of the San Blas mountain range, a 200-kilometre stretch from the Panamanian province of Colón all the way to the Colombian border. Approximately 30,000 individuals, almost all of whom are Kuna, inhabit the 3,200km\(^2\) territory made up of 49 villages, most of which are on islands close to shore. The Kuna territory is known as Kuna Yala or San Blas, the name given to it by Spanish colonists. While many Panamanians still use this Spanish name, there is a growing preference for the use of Kuna Yala, which in the Kuna language (Dulegaya) means “Land of the Kuna”.\(^2\) The Kuna only began inhabiting these lands in the 19\(^{th}\) century, when according to oral history they were forced to emigrate from northern Colombia due to pressures from hostile neighbouring peoples (Ventocilla et al. 1995: 10).

Kuna Yala

The Kuna nation is internationally known for its political organization and grassroots approaches to development. The Kuna have even been called “one of the most organized and sophisticated indigenous groups in the world” (Epler Wood 1999: online). Despite decades of Spanish, Colombian, and Panamanian colonial pressures, they have managed to maintain a high degree of economic, political, and social autonomy (Tice 1995: 3-4).

This autonomy largely comes from the geographic isolation of Kuna Yala. The only way to reach the territory is by plane or boat, and as such the Kuna have managed to preserve their culture, language, and political system. However, they have also had to fight for these rights.

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\(^1\) There are actually three groups of Kuna. Smaller populations live on the Pacific slope of Panama and in northern Colombia. The Kuna of the Comarca Kuna Yala are by far the most numerous and have the most political power and visibility. When I refer to the Kuna in this paper, I refer solely to those people living in, or originating from, Kuna Yala.

\(^2\) Some authors continue to use the name San Blas, as a way to differentiate the Comarca Kuna Yala from other Kuna Lands. However, in respect of the Kuna’s wishes that their territory be known by its Kuna name, I will use Kuna Yala.
The Revolución Dule and the Comarca Kuna Yala

The Kuna were not always blessed with the rights and freedoms they now have. In the early 20th century, the Panamanian state made its presence clear by establishing a regional office, or *intendencia* on El Porvenir, the capital, and placing colonial police in every community. These Panamanians soon began suppressing local customs and traditional practices, attempting to acculturate the Kuna by coercion (Howe 1986: 19). Traditional political practices were prohibited, as were healing practices, religious rituals, and the clothing traditionally worn by Kuna women (Tice 1995: 40). In February 1925, the Kuna rose up in what is known as the *Revolución Dule*, or Kuna Revolution. Planned in secret by members of various communities and carried out in the village of Ukupseni, the Revolution led to the death or expulsion of all Panamanians from the Kuna territory. Although the Panamanian state was ready to reply with a boatload of new police to restore order, the United States intervened in the Kuna’s favour and forced Panama to negotiate. This was the first step in a series of negotiations that led to the creation of today’s Kuna Yala. In 1938, the Panamanian government recognized Kuna Yala as an indigenous territory, or *comarca*. In 1945, Kuna and government delegates created the *Carta Orgánica de San Blas*, the Kuna Constitution which formally recognizes the Kuna high authorities as the governing body of the territory. Finally, on the 19th of February 1953, *Ley Número 16* was accepted by the Panamanian State. This law makes it clear that the Kuna governing body has the right to determine the destiny of Kuna Yala according to Kuna tradition, as long as their rulings do not contradict the Panamanian Constitution and the national laws (República de Panamá 1953).

The Revolution was a turning point for the Kuna people. After 1925, the Kuna began a continuous struggle for self-determination and control of economic, political, and social processes within their territory. Local political leaders, who had always worked independently of one another, united to negotiate with the Panamanian government, thus bringing the many communities together and strengthening the Kuna political system (Tice 1995: 40-41).

When the Panamanian State recognized the Kuna’s right to control their lives and lands, it granted them *comarca* status. A Panamanian *comarca* is an autonomous indigenous territory, collectively owned by the indigenous nation and run by local authorities. Traditional social and political institutions are respected and officially recognized by the national government, and all internal decisions can be autonomously made by traditional authorities, with the exception of those that would contradict national laws or the Panamanian Constitution (Alvarado [no date]: 2).

The governing body of the Comarca Kuna Yala is the *Congreso General Kuna*, or the Kuna General Congress (CGK). The high chiefs who sit on the CGK (in Dulegaya, *saila dumanggan*: Throughout this paper.
singular, *saila dummad*) meet twice a year, although emergency meetings are called if needed (Tice 1995: 41). All residents of the comarca must comply with the CGK’s rulings and resolutions. If these are broken individuals are punished according to the *comarca*’s laws (Alemancia [b] [no date]: 1).

**Kuna lifestyles**

Traditionally, the Kuna economy is based on subsistence fishing and agriculture, with the sale of coconuts to Colombian traders playing an important role in the mid-twentieth century. The coconut trade was the main source of income for many communities during these times, and coconut palm monocultures were extensive. Through this trade, the isolated Kuna were able to gain access to essential goods they could not produce themselves, such as oil, salt, sugar, gasoline, and other necessities. Today, the sale of handicrafts, salaried labour, and tourism have taken over as the main sources of income in the *comarca* (Ventocilla *et al.* 1995: 17), although employment of family members in Panama’s large cities serves as the primary source of income for many families (Ventocilla *et al.* 1995: 18).

The Kuna political system is structured around the *onmaket nega*, or congress house, of each community. Every village is headed by local chiefs, called *sailas*, whose number depends on the size of the community but is generally three. These leaders hold almost daily meetings at the *onmaket nega* to discuss current issues and make decisions, and to teach the community’s residents about Kuna history, values, and culture through song. The *sailas* are chosen, through election, based on their knowledge of Kuna traditions and their behaviour. The benefits of holding the position are not financial, but of prestige and influence (*Indios Cunas* [no date]: 30-31). The *sailas* live as any other member of the community would, and are expected to lead lives that exemplify the ideal behaviour of a Kuna (Howe 1986: 85). The Kuna way of life is generally egalitarian, including the political sphere. Although the opinions of a *saila* are respected, the majority can overrule a decision made by the chiefs (Howe 1986: 89).

The constant gatherings at the *onmaket nega* are what unifies Kuna communities, and makes them stronger. In many ways, these gatherings have helped the Kuna keep their identity in the face of the assaults on their culture by colonialism and the modern world (Howe 1986: 51-52). However, communities express their unity in the everyday sphere as well. Many daily activities, such as agricultural labour, the cleaning of the community, or construction, are carried out by work groups organized by a variety of committees within the community. Well-organized and working under the authority of the *sailas*, these commissions ensure that all community members participate in labours meant for the common good (Alvarado 2002: 20-21).

Kuna women are highly respected in what is a matrilocal society. Women are considered
economic assets, and the birth of a girl is always celebrated. However, women do not play an important role in decision making and politics, nor do they hold roles in important traditional institutions (Alvarado 1995: 3). Yet this does not mean they are never involved in public life. Women sit on some of the village commissions, and certain ones are made up entirely of women. Although they do not have a direct voice in decision making, they often make their opinions clearly known within the community.

The Kuna worldview, like that of many indigenous peoples who continue to rely on their surrounding environments to meet their survival needs, includes a vision of a natural world that must be respected and cared for. The Kuna do not separate man from nature. Rather, they identify themselves with nature and see wisdom in it, using examples from the natural world to help guide their own lives (Alemancia {a} [no date]: 19). Animals and plants are personified, and thus must be treated as if they were human (Chapin 1994: 90). All natural resources were created by the Kuna god, Pab Dummad, and as such they cannot be the property of any one person. Rather, all must care for the natural world around them and ensure that it can continue providing for the people (Alvarado 2002: 38).

**Current problems in Kuna Yala**

As is the case in any society, the Kuna way of life is not static. With the changing times the Kuna people have had to adapt in many ways, and like anywhere else, the people of Kuna Yala are dealing with social, economic, and environmental problems.

Although in comparison to other areas of Panama the environments in the Kuna’s territory remain relatively intact, a growing population has been placing increasing strain on both terrestrial and marine resources. Traditional slash-and-burn agriculture can only support small populations, and with over 30,000 mouths to feed, resources are being degraded (Archibold and Davey 1993: 56). Although much of Kuna Yala remains forested, deforestation is slowly becoming a problem. In some areas farmers have cut too much forest, and in others environmental regulators such as mangroves are being overharvested. As well, Kuna lands have always been under threat by Panamanian colonists attempting to enter their territory and clear lands for agriculture (Ventocilla *et al.* 1995: 26).

The Kuna culture has also been threatened by outside influences. Although Kuna authorities accepted the introduction of the Panamanian education system in their schools in the early 20th century, they saw it as nothing more than a useful addition to traditional Kuna knowledge, a way for the Kuna people to ensure that they would not be left behind or considered backward. However, the Western-style national education system ended up affecting them more than they would have imagined. As Mac Chapin (1994) puts it,
At no time did [they] entertain the notion that [their] people should have their cultural identity eroded away, leading them in the direction of becoming Panamanians, or that modern education would drastically transform their minds. Yet this is essentially what has occurred. Although they have picked up useful skills, the younger Kuna in areas of deepest penetration of Western education have been socialized into an alien value system, with all its accompanying prejudices and biases, to the point where they are fundamentally different from their parents (94).

As a consequence of being taught for years that their language is but a “dialect” and that education will prepare them for a “better” life than that of their parents (Chapin 1994: 94), many Kuna youth regard their cultural heritage as more of a curiosity than a way of life, and do not see its relevance to their daily lives. Although in some communities revival of Kuna culture among the youth has taken place through the creation of cultural centres and classes teaching Kuna history and value systems (Chapin 1994: 95), in many cases this loss of cultural identity among the young has led to an increase in the number of Kuna who leave their territory in search of new opportunities in the cities. While some return to Kuna Yala, others remain in the city and raise their families with little connection to the Kuna culture (Archibold and Davey 1993: 56).

Today, a significant percentage of Kuna live outside the Comarca, mainly in Panama’s two largest cities, Panamá and Colón. In 1960, census data showed approximately 2,000 Kuna living outside Kuna Yala. By 1980, that number had jumped to 10,000 (Tice 1995: 46). Today, many households are supported by a male working in the city, and in some communities less than half the men of working age are involved in agriculture, once the central occupation of the people (Chapin 1994: 99). Because of this growing emphasis on cash incomes, traditional customs of cooperation and group work have been waning and people have become more individualistic (Archibold and Davey 1993: 56-57). According to one woman from the community of Ukupseni,

La cultura kuna se debilita, sus autoridades muchas veces ya no tienen voz de mando, de unidad y de cohesión de la población. La gente tiende a dedicarse a trabajar individualmente y ya son pocos los que confían en la cooperación mutua y solidaridad. Surgen sentimientos de egoísmo en nuestra sociedad (Alvarado 1995: 37).

As dreary as this picture may seem, the fact remains that in general, the Kuna culture remains strong and the people proud, and many communities have consciously made efforts to return a sense of identification with the Kuna lifestyle and value system to those who have lost it. Because the Kuna have managed to retain control of their lands and of their destiny as a people,

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3 The Kuna culture is no longer as strong as it once was. Our authorities are often no longer able to unite the people. People prefer to work individually, and there are few left who rely on mutual cooperation and solidarity. Egoism is growing within our society. (My translation)
they have been able to confront these problems and try to adapt to them. Although Kuna lives have been changing and some traditions are being lost, the Kuna have been able to survive as a culture because they are capable of making the necessary decisions, and are in a political position to do so (Maybury-Lewis 1994: xiv). Societal changes are natural and inescapable – the Kuna have learned to deal with them by maintaining control over the process of change (Chapin 1994: 92).

The presence of tourists and tourism infrastructure in Kuna Yala is one such change which took place in the mid-twentieth century. Although we will see that tourism has brought its own set of problems to the Kuna communities involved, we will also see that tourism development has been just one of the Kuna’s attempts to adapt to modern realities without giving up control over the process of development and without compromising their culture or their values.
Although tourists began coming to Kuna Yala after World War II (Howe 1986: 17), the tourism industry in the Comarca really took off in the 1960s and 1970s (Snow 2000: 735). Today, between 80,000 and 100,000 tourists visit Kuna Yala every year (Gilberto Alemancia, personal communication). Many of these tourists arrive on cruise ships which bring their passengers to islands located in the Golfo de San Blas at the western end of the Comarca, where waters are deep enough for the large ships to dock. The majority of the hotels found in Kuna Yala are in this area, and very few communities outside of this region are involved in tourism.

Nonetheless, income from tourism plays an important role not only for the communities directly involved, but for the entire Comarca. The CGK is able to function largely because of tourism revenues, in the form of a variety of taxes paid by all tourism operations in Kuna Yala. This amounts to approximately $58,000 a year, including a $1 tax paid by all hotels and cruise ships for each guest and $10 a month in taxes to be paid by each hotel. Cruise ships must pay $300 to anchor in the Golfo de San Blas and private yachts and sailboats are also charged lesser fees (Gilberto Alemancia, personal communication). Although the CGK attempts to closely monitor all tourism operations, travel is difficult in the Comarca and tax collection can be sporadic at times. It is not uncommon for hotels to underreport the number of tourists arriving, in order to reduce their taxes (Snow 2001: on-line).

The tourism industry in Kuna Yala has had its share of conflict and controversy. In 1973 the Instituto Panameño de Turismo (IPAT), Panama’s national tourism bureau, set forth a proposal to build a 686-room resort near the community of Río Sidra, in the Golfo de San Blas. The Kuna were deeply divided over the issue, and in the end the majority opposed the project. They threatened to go so far as to use violence to prevent the hotel from opening. IPAT abandoned the plan in 1977, but relations between Kuna leaders and the government agency have been strained since (Bennett 1999: on-line).

In the 1960s, American investors build two small hotels, Islandia and Pidertupu, despite existing laws prohibiting non-Kuna commercial activities that require land within the Kuna territory. In both 1969 and 1974 Islandia was burned down by angered Kuna, and in 1981 the owners were forced out of the Comarca during an altercation that ended with one of the Americans wounded and two Kuna police accidentally killed (Bennett 1999: on-line).

More recently, conflict arose near the village of Ukupseni, this time in the less touristed central region of the Comarca. In 1994 five Panamanian investors and one Kuna opened up Hotel Iskardup on an uninhabited island. Four years of conflict followed, and the hotel was closed down several times. Because the hotel had been profitable, contributing $400-$800 a month to the
community in taxes and employing 15 people (Bennett 1997: 21), some local people offered to take over its ownership. The original investors were forced to leave and the hotel was eventually reopened under local ownership. Today it continues to do business, under the name Sapibenega.

The Estatuto de Turismo of the CGK

Due to conflicts such as those mentioned above, in 1996 the CGK formalized its tourism regulations in the *Estatuto de Turismo en Kuna Yala*, a Comarca-wide tourism statute. The Statute is meant to counter problems of exploitation by non-Kuna tourism operators, competition between communities and within them for tourist dollars (Snow 2001: on-line), the loss of tourism revenue due to foreign or Panamanian ownership of tourist venues, and to endure the environmental and social sustainability of the tourism industry in Kuna Yala.

In order to avoid “leakage”, or the removal of tourism income from the host country or territory by foreign owners and investors (Chambers 2000: 33), the CGK officially declared that all tourist facilities must be owned and operated by Kuna individuals (Article 50, *Ley Fundamental de la Comarca Kuna Yala*, 1995). The CGK has the power to shut down any operations not complying with this or any other regulation of the Statute (Article 260, *Estatuto de la Comarca Kuna Yala*, 2000), and in order to open a business in the tourism sector one needs the direct authorization of the CGK (Article 254). With these laws, the Kuna authorities are trying to ensure that the benefits of tourism flow directly to the host communities, and are distributed equally among their members through taxation regimes.

The *Estatuto* also attempts to ensure the environmental sustainability of tourism activities, and a minimization of the cultural and social impacts that tourism can bring. According to Article 253,

> En la Comarca Kuna Yala serán posibles, estricta y únicamente, las actividades turísticas y sus infraestructuras que respeten, conserven, valoricen y defienden tanto los recursos naturales, el medio ambiente, la biodiversidad de la Comarca, como los valores socio-culturales, políticos, económicos, religiosos, y las normas y costumbres kunas(C GK 2001: 100).

4 The only tourist activities and infrastructure possible in Kuna Yala will be, strictly and solely, those that respect, conserve, value, and defend the natural resources, environment and biodiversity of the comarca, as well as the sociocultural, political, and religious Kuna norms and customs. (Translation taken from Snow 2001)
bathing suit, hunting, SCUBA diving, and taking photographs of individuals without first asking their permission. Tourists are also asked to respect Kuna norms and culture, as well as any sacred sites they may visit, and to use biodegradable products whenever possible (Article 274).

Although the CGK’s efforts have led to a high degree of control over the tourism industry, enforcement remains a problem. While the Statute gives the CGK the power to limit the capacity of all hotels in the Comarca, it is hard to keep track of the many cruise ships that ply the waters of the Golfo de San Blas (Snow 2000: 738). As mentioned above, tax evasion by hotel owners is not uncommon. While the tourism sector is reserved for Kuna businesspeople, in reality very few Kuna have the capital necessary to invest in a tourism operation (Bennett 1997: 69). And although the intention of the Estatuto was to limit competition and ensure all members of the Kuna nation benefit in some way from tourism, in reality competition exists and has caused tension and resentment within and between communities. Unequal distribution of the benefits of tourism remains a fact, although some redistribution is enforced through the $1 tax payable to the CGK for each tourist that visits the Comarca (Snow 2000: 737). Furthermore, the Kuna have been forced to confront many of the problems that come with tourism development anywhere in the world.

Trouble in paradise – problems caused by tourism in Kuna Yala

Despite the CGK’s efforts to encourage a tourism that respects and does not do harm to the forest and marine environments of the Kuna territory, the sheer number of tourists that visit western Kuna Yala inevitably place new pressures on the environment, use up resources that could otherwise be preserved, and create new sources of pollution, such as large amounts of garbage (Archibold and Davey 1993: 56).

Tourism has also increased the importance of money in a society in which not so long ago, the coconut was the primary form of currency. More Kuna are now interested only in making money, and residents of more heavily touristed islands have become shrewd capitalists. Many individuals are in the habit of asking for payment for every service they may perform for a tourist, and the Kuna have been developing a reputation for being “money hungry” (Snow 2000: 739).

One form this desire for cash income has taken is the commercialization of molas, the multi-layered patterned blouses traditionally worn by Kuna women. These colourful works of art not only depict plants or animals of cultural significance to the Kuna, but they are also a sign of the Kuna’s independence and the persistence of their culture despite outsiders’ attempts to acculturate them (Alemancia [a] [no date]: 8). The mola has become a symbol of the Kuna people not just amongst themselves, but to Panamanians and foreigners as well. During the 1960s, the mola was adopted by the Panamanian government as a national symbol, along with the pollera dress worn by women in the Interior provinces (Tice 1995: 66). Foreigners began identifying the mola with
Panama, and by the 1980s, browsing and buying molas had become the main reason most tourists were coming to Kuna Yala (Tice 1995: 69). Consequently, molas have been highly commercialized, with women in heavily touristed areas creating them specifically for sale to tourists, often in very large quantities. In some cases this has led to a drop in artistic standards (Archibold and Davey 1993: 57). Women learned the aesthetic preferences of tourists, and began creating their molas accordingly, often introducing colours or patterns not normally used by Kuna women, or avoiding traditional colour combinations or designs because they see that they do not sell well (Tice 1995: 95). Often, the tourists buying the molas know little or nothing at all about the social and cultural context from which they come (Tice 1995: 96).

These things have led some to believe that the commercialization of molas has caused them to be “detached from their original meaning and social context” (Tice 1995: 96), and has led to the “alienation of [the] producers from their craft” (Tice 1995: 188) and a loss of respect for the rich traditions associated with mola-making (Archibold 1993: 57). According to others, the craft’s commercialization has led to intense competition among the women and an unequal distribution of resources between those successfully involved in the trade, and others who are not. Both these things in turn introduce new tensions within communities (Tice 56-57).

The following scenario, recounted by an anthropologist living in the village of Cartí-Sugdup in the most heavily touristed part of the Comarca, sums up the negative aspects of tourism development in Kuna Yala. It is clear from the literature that the type of tourism that has developed in the Golfo de San Blas is far from sustainable, despite the best efforts of the CGK to regulate it. In the next section of the paper, I will move to an in-depth study of tourism in the community of Ukupseni, one of the few villages outside of the Golfo that regularly receives tourists, and a community that still has a chance to properly develop a sustainable form of tourism.

By 8:30 A.M. the next morning, the main street of the island was festooned with molas. The Kuna women, themselves a colorful sight, sat waiting hopefully and expectantly for the tourists to arrive. Small children were dressed up ready to pose for pictures. I positioned myself near the narrow pathway that led from the dock to the main street and watched while three little girls were posed with pipes in hand and parakeets on their heads to encourage picture taking by the tourists (fifty cents a picture). The tourists arrived. … Kuna children ran about begging money from the tourists. The older boys paddled out to the cruise ship and dove for money and fruit tossed overboard.

A shuttle boat continued to bring passengers to the island until about three in the afternoon. When the cruise liner left with its one thousand passengers, … the general consensus was that this had been a boat full of ‘bad tourists’. Some women had sold a mola or two, many had not sold a thing (Tice 1995: 115-116).
IV – One Community’s Experience with Tourism Development: The Case of Ukupseni

The town of Ukupseni, also known by the Spanish name Playón Chico, is located on an island about halfway between the western edge of the Comarca and the Colombian border. With almost 3,000 inhabitants, Ukupseni is the second most populated community in Kuna Yala. The
island is located about 500 metres from shore, and a bridge has recently been built to connect the community to the mainland, where the school, airstrip, and cultivated lands are. Because the island itself is very small, overpopulation has become a problem. Although once Ukupseni was surrounded by beaches and coral reefs, today houses are built right to the edge of the water, and pollution caused by garbage and human waste has killed the corals near the island.

Being far removed from the Golfo de San Blas and the cruise ships that ply its waters, Ukupseni has not had a long experience with tourism. However, it is one of the few communities in the area that regularly receives tourists, albeit in very small numbers. No tourist facilities exist on the island itself, but two small hotels are located on uninhabited islands just a short ride away by motorized cayuco. Both hotels are relatively new and still establishing themselves. Yandup, with four cabins and a small dining area, has been in operation for about two years and is still working on making a name for itself. Sapibenega, mentioned above, has been running for three years under its new ownership. With 14 cabins and a large dining room, this hotel attracts a more constant flow of tourists, in part due to the reputation it had already developed in its days as Iskardup. Both hotels are owned by Kuna from Ukupseni now living in Panama City, and following CGK law, all hotel employees and managers are residents of the community.

Both hotels regularly bring their clients into Ukupseni for a guided tour of the village. This is the main venue for contact between community members and tourists, who otherwise spend most of their time on uninhabited islands at the beach, or in the forest with hotel guides. Although Ukupseni’s leadership has never formalized its own set of tourism regulations, the community and the hotels generally uphold and enforce the Comarca-wide laws as set down by the CGK’s Estatuto de Turismo.

As the community’s experience with tourism is just beginning, residents interested and involved in the tourism sector are still in the process of figuring out how they want to develop the industry. In recent years there was a tourism commission of 5 community members set up to undertake an analysis of how Ukupseni could develop a type of tourism that would allow for a positive exchange between community members and tourists. However, this analysis was never completed and the commission is now defunct. Very recently, a new commission was created, this time made up almost entirely of women. As of yet it has only met a few times and is still in the process of figuring out its mandate. Within the community, few individuals have a proper understanding of what tourism is, how to interact with tourists, or how to develop a sustainable, beneficial form of tourism. While in general the community’s authorities keep an eye on all movement within the tourism sector, they have not yet chosen to play an active role in its development.

Because it was felt that the community has not come together to form a vision of how
tourism can be developed in the future and of how to confront the problems that may exist, I was asked to undertake an analysis of the sentiment of various community members regarding Ukupseni’s tourism industry. In order for tourism to develop in a way that maximizes benefits to both community members and tourists, those working on tourism development within a community must be aware of current issues and problems, and areas that can be improved. For this to take place, the opinions and ideas of as many community members must be known, and the people must learn to work together as one. Through semi-formal interviews with 15 community members ranging from community leaders and activists, to hotel staff and guides, to women and artisans, I learned how people in Ukupseni perceive the tourism that takes place in their community, what benefits they see as arising from it and what harms, what is problematic in the way tourism has developed and what needs to be improved upon, and finally, how can these problems be solved and a better form of tourism created. Furthermore, by holding two workshops within the community, I attempted to bring together various individuals and committees, to encourage them to exchange ideas and overcome differences.

In order for the relationship between locals and tourists to develop in a positive way, it is crucial that both parties have a heightened sense of intercultural understanding, and are open to natural interaction and learning from one another. For this reason, I included sections in the workshops on why tourists come to Ukupseni and what they are hoping to experience, and made concrete recommendations to the community on how to better foster these types of exchanges. I also created an informative pamphlet, to be given to tourists arriving at the nearby hotels, in order to increase tourists’ understanding of and appreciation for Kuna lifestyles and culture, as well as to better convey to them the importance of following the tourism regulations set down by the Congreso General Kuna.

Over the course of four short visits to the community during a four-month period, I documented the people’s thoughts and opinions, along with my own taken from experiences of participatory observation within the community and at the hotels. Finally, within the last days of my stay in the village, I held the two workshops meant to inform community members about tourism and share ideas on how perceived problems can be solved and an improved tourism encouraged. One workshop was held for the children and youth of the community, and the other for the members of the new tourism commission, the environmental commission, the garbage disposal commission, and other interested community leaders. The workshops were meant to be forums of discussion and opportunities to exchange knowledge. They were designed in an interactive manner to encourage participation and contribution from all those in attendance. This involved the use of

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*For the compilation of all interview responses, see Appendix I.*
questions and photographs (for the adults), dramatizations and group work (for the children). The ideas and opinions expressed during both the interviews and the workshops, as explored below, have been compiled into a comprehensive list of suggestions for the community as it develops its tourism sector. Copies will be given to Ukupseni’s authorities and its new tourism commission, to provide them with both the knowledge of how residents feel about tourism, and suggestions as to how to improve it.⁶

Although I hope that the information I have gathered and the products I have developed will be sufficient to begin the process of an improvement of Ukupseni’s tourism sector, due to the short amount of time I actually spent in the community, there are several limitations to my results. Firstly, I was only able to speak directly with 15 individuals, and hold two workshops. Although I tried to vary the types of people I interviewed and thus gather as wide a range of opinions as possible, I have clearly only touched the surface of the community’s wealth of opinions and suggestions. However, it became clear after several interviews that certain themes seem to be on the minds of many community members, and I therefore believe that the data I have gathered is nonetheless significant. Another obstacle I faced was the fact that I was not in the community long enough, nor for enough days at a time, to truly get to know the people and the way Ukupseni works, both socially and politically, nor to ensure that the people were comfortable enough with me to share their deepest concerns. Finally, language was of course a barrier, as I did not have the opportunity to learn how to communicate in Dulegaya. Many Ukupseni residents, particularly the women, are not as comfortable expressing themselves in Spanish, and thus may hesitate to really speak their mind. This became apparent during group interviews and workshops, when most of the discussion among community members was done in Dulegaya. In this way, I was also not able to grasp the nuances of the people’s opinions and ideas.

The costs and benefits of tourism

Both the benefits of tourism and the harm it can cause were apparent to most respondents, although more individuals perceived benefits arising from tourism development in their community than perceived harms. All but one respondent named at least one benefit that tourism has brought to the community, but 8 respondents could not identify any harm coming to the community due to tourism development. In general, the main perceived benefit was an economic one. Common answers were that tourism stimulates the local economy by providing employment to community members and by creating business for the local stores and fishermen from whom the two hotels buy their food. Also very significant is the $6.00 per tourist tax levied by the community. The hotels

⁶ For the complete list of community members’ suggestions and my own recommendations, see Appendix II.
pay this tax directly to the community, where it is put into a community account at the local bank. The sale of handicrafts, particularly the sale of molas by the women, was identified as a way that tourism can directly improve the financial situation of families, as was the $0.50 per tourist fee paid by the hotels to the owners of the uninhabited islands where tourists are taken to the beach.

However, non-economic benefits were also perceived by some respondents. One individual pointed out that tourism can help bring back interest in lost or dying traditions, such as handicrafts that are no longer produced. Another emphasized the importance of the cultural exchange for which tourism sets the stage. For him, tourism is an opportunity for people to broaden their horizons, for the Kuna way of life to be taught to outsiders, and for the people of Ukupseni to learn from the foreigners that visit. Finally, two respondents recounted how due to tourism, the community has been forced to confront its garbage disposal problem and attempt to make itself look more presentable – a benefit for tourists but also locals. When asked if tourism can help counter the problem of outmigration by youth looking for better opportunities in the cities, all respondents who answered did so in the affirmative. Many young people do not wish to make a living based on subsistence farming or fishing, and feel the need to leave Kuna Yala due to a general lack of other employment opportunities within the villages. Thus, tourism can bring new opportunities to the communities, perhaps encouraging many young people to stay. Similarly, tourism can be a force that returns lost pride in Kuna traditions to the young people. According to many respondents, there is no shortage of youth interested in getting involved in the tourism sector.

The main harms perceived as coming from tourism were environmental and cultural in nature. Three respondents said that tourism can have a negative impact on the local environment, due to garbage generated by the hotels, or tourists uninformed regarding how to treat vulnerable ecosystems such as corals. According to two respondents, tourism leads to people placing an increased importance on money. One pointed out that communities may begin seeing their culture as an economic asset, and performing traditions not out of a love and pride in them, but in order to earn money from interested tourists. The other emphasized the danger of a community getting used to constant exposure to tourists, which may lead the children to pick up the habits of the tourists, ways which are not necessarily acceptable in traditional Kuna society.

Although more than half of the respondents did not identify any way in which tourism development has harmed their community, three of them pointed out that Ukupseni has been able to avoid problems because of the small scale of its tourism development. When asked their opinions of the type of tourism carried out in the Golfo de San Blas, all those who responded identified this type of large-scale tourism development as very problematic. Common issues brought up were the increased and exaggerated importance of money, which has led people to abandon traditional ways of life (four respondents) or to do things that go against their culture just so that they can earn
money (one respondent); the way in which communities are overwhelmed by the number of tourists that come with the cruise ships (two respondents); and the negative impacts of tourism on the children, such as their habit of chasing after the tourists for money (two respondents) or diving after money thrown into the water by tourists arriving in the big ships (two respondents).

*Perceived problems with the tourism sector in Ukupseni*

A number of key problems and necessary improvements were touched upon by various members of the community I spoke with. Although the benefits of an interaction between tourists and Ukupseni residents were given importance by many respondents, the general feeling was that an open, natural, and positive cultural exchange between the two is lacking. Three respondents identified the problem as being the short amount of time the tourists actually spend in the community, while three mentioned the fact that the tourists almost only speak to their guides when they are in the community. Three saw the language barrier as the major problem, given that few guides and almost none of the community members are functional in English, and many North American and European tourists do not speak Spanish. The inability to communicate was also identified as a problem by almost all the youth participating in the workshop.

Many respondents identified problems with the way *molas* are sold within the community, but none perceived any issues with the commercialization of *molas* itself. The women I spoke to continue to take pride in the *molas* they make and do not feel as though production for tourists has changed the cultural significance of the *mola*, nor did any of the men I interviewed see *mola* commercialization as the commoditization of their culture. One artisan who produces *molas* for sale did mention that *molas* made for tourists are different from those made for personal use, because the women watch to see what the tourists like and focus on creating *molas* in those styles. In some cases, they may produce *molas* for tourists that they themselves would never wear, because to a Kuna woman they are not aesthetically pleasing.
However, where the problems begin is in the way the community has approached mola selling, which is the same way almost every touristed community in Kuna Yala has – when the women know tourists will be visiting the village, they begin hanging up their molas for display outside their homes, particularly on the main streets of town. By the time the tourists come through, the streets look like an outdoor market, with women and their children waiting for tourists to browse their wares. Competition between women and the disparity of mola prices among sellers was mentioned by five respondents, although three of them did not perceive this competition as problematic, just natural. On the other hand, the other two individuals felt that through better coordination among the women and an effort to train them to understand the economics of mola selling, such as how much tourists are willing to pay for the handicrafts, inequalities between women who sell more and those who sell less would be avoided. Two respondents were also critical of the purely monetary nature of the relationship between tourists and local women. Finally, the general sentiment among both people interviewed and those participating in the workshops was that by aggressively trying to sell their wares on the streets, local artisans were bothering tourists and invading their space. One elderly artisan’s frustration sums up the problematic nature of mola commercialization:

I don’t understand why tourists never bought my molas. It was not worth it for me to try to sell them, so I stopped trying to be involved with the tourists.  

Another problem commonly mentioned is the lack of training on the part of the guides working at the two hotels. In fact, there has never been a formal training session given to any of the guides since the two hotels have been in operation, although under its old owners, Sapibenega/Iskardup had arranged a training workshop led by staff from IPAT. Two individuals directly mentioned the importance of training guides to know how to take tourists through the community and explain to them the culture and lifestyle they are experiencing, as did one group of children at the workshop. Others focused more on the importance of training community members in general regarding how to treat tourists and explain to them the Kuna lifestyle (four respondents).

Finally, many individuals interviewed felt that there is a significant lack of open communication between hotel staff, community members, and Ukupseni’s authorities. One respondent mentioned the lack of communication between the hotels and the tourism commission,

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7 No direct quotes were taken from informants. All quotes were both paraphrased and translated into English by myself.
and another between the hotels and the authorities. Another respondent saw the problem as being between the hotels and the community in general, while yet another pointed to a lack of communication between the authorities and the community.

Suggestions and ideas for the future

Of the fifteen individuals I spoke with, 7 did not have any suggestions as to how to improve Ukupseni’s tourism sector. However, the other 8 respondents, as well as most individuals attending the two workshops, put forth a series of ideas as to how the community could avoid the problems mentioned above and develop a more sustainable, beneficial tourism.

Four individuals placed importance on education and capacity-building within the community, in order to ensure that the people understand what tourists want, how to treat them, and how to present a positive image of their town. This was also discussed at the workshop attended by members of the various commissions. One individual specifically pointed to the need to teach the children how to treat tourists, so as to avoid the present situation when they crowd around tourists, follow them around, or demand to have their photo taken. Two respondents also mentioned the need to better train the guides working at the two hotels, in terms of both how to show tourists around the community, and in English language skills. A group of children at the workshop emphasized the need for guides to be well-informed about their own culture and history before showing tourists around the village, so that they are prepared to explain the Kuna way of life and answer the tourists’ questions.

Four of the people I interviewed, two groups of children at their workshop, and some of the adults attending the other workshop all pointed out a need to better coordinate and organize the sale of handicrafts, specifically molas. The general consensus was that by lining up in the streets, competing with one another, and trying to convince tourists to buy their wares, the women were not portraying a good image of the community and may end up making the tourists feel uncomfortable. Two respondents and one group of children at the workshop suggested that the women should come together to sell their molas in one location, where tourists could browse at their leisure and learn about the cultural significance of these handicrafts.

The general feeling of most individuals I spoke with was that the money that comes to the community through tourism, specifically the $6 per tourist tax, is a key benefit of having tourism in Ukupseni. However, two respondents mentioned that this money is not being used for projects for the betterment of the community as it should. Suggested uses were for the maintenance of the airstrip, cleaning up the community, improving the trail to a waterfall on the mainland, one of the tourist attractions, or that the money be put toward the construction of a new library that is currently taking place at Ukupseni’s school. Two respondents felt that in order to improve the state of
tourism, the community needs to take the initiative to improve its infrastructure. The need to clean up the garbage from the streets of the community and from the airstrip was a key theme throughout the interviews, and was also mentioned at the workshop for the commissions. Another suggestion was for a better pier at the airstrip, which is essentially the first part of the community seen by the tourists.

Two individuals interviewed desired an expansion of the tourism sector to include community tourism as well. They believe that more benefits can reach the community, and the tourists, if they were to stay overnight within Ukupseni rather than only at the hotels. It was suggested that willing host families be found, or that the community build special houses which could then be rented by tourists. Community tourism would allow for more money to flow directly to families who need it, and would also create conditions more conducive to intercultural exchange and learning. This idea was also discussed among the members of the various commissions present at the workshop, who thought that the tourism commission should organize itself to promote community tourism.

Finally, other suggestions put forth were for the community to locate and develop new tourist attractions (two respondents), to develop regulations and employment standards for both hotels (one respondent), and to improve the tourism commission, ensuring that it is active and organized (two respondents).

**Recommendations**

Based on the information shared by the various individuals I spoke with in Ukupseni, my own observations while in the community and at the hotels, and the wealth of literature that
explores the costs and benefits of sustainable tourism in indigenous communities, I have put together the following recommendations for the future development of Ukupseni’s tourism sector:

- All hotel staff should undergo basic training to ensure an understanding of how the tourism industry works, why tourists travel and what they are looking for in the places they visit, and how to treat tourists. Specific training for the guides is essential, including sessions on Kuna culture and history and how best to describe these, how to guide tourists through the community, how to ensure that the tourists feel comfortable in the community, and how to encourage an open and natural interaction between tourists and local inhabitants. Although the community has not worked closely with IPAT, it may be worthwhile to consider using their resources for these training sessions, as nobody in Ukupseni is qualified to lead such sessions. IPAT has several Kuna staff who could perhaps get involved. I would also suggest that any training be done for employees of both hotels together, to help ensure that tourists are getting similarly positive experiences from both establishments. Currently, for example, the guiding styles of the two hotels are very different, and as such visitors to Ukupseni may be getting very different views of the community and its people.

- It is also key that hotel employees have some knowledge of the English language. At least one staff at each hotel should be functional in the language, although ideally all those working at the hotels should be proficient enough to communicate with the tourists and ensure their needs are met. All guides should receive intensive English training, as it is part of their job to explain Kuna culture and history to the tourists. They are the ambassadors of their people and if they cannot communicate with visitors, these tourists will not gain the experience they came there for. The hotels should take advantage of foreign volunteers to organize and give English lessons to their staff. The help of the Peace Corps volunteers residing in Ukupseni can be solicited. If they are not available, there is always a wealth of young people from Europe and North America looking for volunteer opportunities abroad. By connecting to organizations that package and offer these opportunities, the hotels can train their employees without incurring costs.

- The community, and specifically the new tourism commission, should look into the possibility of developing a community tourism sector in Ukupseni. Willing households could welcome tourists for short stays, and would directly receive the financial benefits. Or, the community or sociedades within it can collectively create lodging on the island for these tourists, and fairly distribute the rents collected. Because too many tourists staying in the
community may cause social or cultural problems, strict limits and regulations would need to be applied. By welcoming tourists into the community, the cultural exchange that is such a key part of sustainable tourism would be fostered.

- The tourism commission and other community leaders should meet with all women who sell their handicrafts to tourists, to try to find a better way to carry this out. The possibility of creating a *casa de artesanía* or other such venue for *mola* selling should be considered. Not only would this avoid competition and make the tourists feel more comfortable, but it would facilitate intercultural understanding by offering a place where the women and tourists can interact freely, and where explanations about *molas* and their significance can be given at leisure. By collectively charging each tourist a small fee upon entry, all women would be assured of at least some income, regardless of sales.

- The community, through the tourism commission, should decide how revenues from the $6 tourist tax be used, and should begin such projects. This money should be put to use in two ways: first, some should be reverted back to the tourism sector in order to improve it where necessary. Second, some should be used for projects that will benefit the community as a whole and help in its development. Ideally, tourism revenues should be used for projects that do both at the same time, such as improving or adding essential infrastructure.

- The tourism commission should receive basic financial training in order to enable it to better manage these revenues. Furthermore, its members should also have a basic understanding of the various aspects of, and issues surrounding, tourism development. Perhaps it would be beneficial for at least some members of the commission to join the hotel employees in their training.

- Ukupseni’s authorities should create and formalize the community’s own set of tourism regulations, as well as ensure that all of the CGK’s regulations are met. It is essential that open communication is established between the authorities and the hotels and their guides. Currently, not all guides are aware of the regulations that exist, and enforcement varies between the two hotels.

- Finally, for any of the above recommendations to be effective, Ukupseni as a community must unite and work together. The various commissions, the hotel management and guides, and the authorities should meet occasionally to exchange ideas, resolve conflicts, and ensure
that all are working for the same goals.
V – Concluding Thoughts

Although some of us might continue to entertain a Romantic image of indigenous people living isolated from all of the modern world’s stresses and vices, it is clear that they are as much a part of today’s world as we all are. Having been to varying degrees integrated into the global system that now dominates, members of indigenous societies are currently faced with new needs and new desires, including the need for some source of cash income (Alvarado 2002: 38-39). Many indigenous nations have confronted these changes by seeking ways to adapt to change while maintaining the essence of their culture and identity. As Charles David Kleymeyer (1994) wrote,

Throughout human history, people have expended time, energy, and resources to both produce and adjust to change while preserving their culture from being assimilated wholesale into another one. For the most part they prefer to integrate themselves into a larger society on their own terms, without having to deny who they are. They accept and affirm their ethnic identity but not the material and social conditions to which they are subjected (3).

I believe that both the literature and the experience of the Kuna show that with proper planning, sustainable tourism development can be a viable option for indigenous people looking to meet their need without sacrificing who they are. However, success requires that certain conditions be met.

No sustainable form of tourism can develop unless the local people have full and total control over the tourism sector on their lands. The experience of the Kuna shows that by regulating the number of tourists granted entry and the activities they may do, ensuring that tourism revenues stay within the territory and are redistributed within society, and requiring the environmental sustainability of all tourist-related enterprises, an indigenous nation can indeed develop a beneficial tourism within its communities. On the other hand, where control is absent or regulations hard to enforce, such as in the area of Kuna Yala visited by the cruise ships, tourism can become more of a negative force than a positive one. However, regardless of existing regulations, if a community cannot unite and work together to develop its tourism sector, success will be difficult to achieve.

Even in communities with extensive regulations, tourists will still bring with them practices or behaviours that may negatively influence local people, particularly the younger generation already vulnerable to a decrease in the value placed upon their indigenous heritage. The literature shows that in some cases, contact with tourists strengthens cultures and revitalizes dying traditions, while in others it quickens the process of assimilation. It seems as though the deciding factor may be the already existing strength of the culture and the unity of the people. The Kuna, despite whatever problems they might face, are an incredibly proud, well-organized nation, living together
in a territory they control and freely practicing their traditions. For this reason, their social cohesion and cultural integrity are less prone to being adversely affected by a tourist presence than would be the case in other communities. Although some of these concerns were expressed by residents of Ukupseni, the general feeling in the community is that the benefits of tourism, both economic and cultural, far outweigh its costs.

Finally, we have seen that for indigenous tourism to succeed at one of its key goals, bringing people together and increasing intercultural understanding, both community members and the tourists that visit must be sensitized to the culture and lifestyle of the other, as well as to their needs and desires. True exchange and learning can only take place if conditions are created that allow for a natural and unrestrained interaction between the two parties. If these conditions do not exist, the benefits of tourism remain largely economic.

Sustainably developed tourism, then, can under the right conditions be a good choice for indigenous communities seeking ways to develop their economy on their own terms. It allows them to find new sources income development without having to sacrifice their values. Along the way, the importance of their culture and their environment are reaffirmed. For the Kuna, as for any other indigenous people, this is key. As one high chief of the Kuna nation has said,

La identidad de un pueblo es el valor intrínseco de la vida de un hombre, cuentan nuestros padres, mantener nuestro espíritu dule, y no permitir aculturizarnos pues es el único medio que le queda a un pueblo para sobrevivir (Kungiler 1997: 104).  
-Saila dummad Inageliginya (Carlos López)

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APPENDIX I

Interview Results

The following is a comprehensive list of the answers interview respondents gave me. Note that no direct quotes were taken from any of the individuals interviewed. All responses, as presented here, have been paraphrased and translated into English, although I have attempted to retain the tone and nuance of the comments as best as I could. Responses are presented in the order in which individuals were interviewed.

What type of relationship have you (or Ukupseni residents in general) had with the tourists that visit the community?

- Friendly. At the hotel we make an effort not to create distance between ourselves and the tourists. Rather, we try to create a natural relationship. Sometimes tourists come who do feel they should be treated as if they’re special, so then we adapt our relationship with them. But normally, most tourists are looking for a natural, friendly interaction. It’s nice to be able to be friendly and share ideas and knowledge with people from different cultures and different parts of the world. This type of relationship also allows tourists to help the community. In the community, there’s the most interaction between the tourists and the kids, since they always run up to tourists, take their hands, want to play. Interactions between tourists and adults are much more formal. But the people here always have a big smile for the tourists.

- We create close relationships with the tourists who come here. We communicate with them, and do not treat them as if they were different or special. I try to encourage the staff to think this way. Other hotels, in the Cartí region,\(^9\) treat tourists in a different way, leaving them to do their own thing alone. This is not good. Because we treat tourists in a friendly way, they open up to the staff, confide in us. Sometimes tourists who have stayed here keep in touch after leaving, send us letters. There is not much interaction between community members and tourists. People think that they shouldn’t disturb the guides while they are doing their job, so they only say hello to the tourists but do not really make any contact. But if a tourist wants to talk with someone, they can, it makes people happy to do so.

- Friendly. We talk to each other, interact, learn from each other, become friends. Particularly here, it was not that way where I worked before. There, there is no interaction between the staff and the tourists. The guides do spend a lot of time with the tourists, but the other staff, like the cooks and the women, do not interact with them. I think that the owner does not want them speaking to the tourists. I like the way it is here much better, where people are friendly and get to know each other.

- The relationship between tourists and members of the community is very positive, most residents greet the tourists when they see them. But ultimately, it’s more of a monetary relationship, people here believe tourists have just come here to buy things. Some artisans get upset when tourists don’t buy from them.

- There is not much interaction between community members and tourists, it’s usually just limited to saying hello. This is because the tourists pass through the town quickly, only spending about an hour in town. Only when tourists stay longer in the community is more

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\(^9\) The Golfo de San Blas is also known as the Cartí region, or sector Cartí in Spanish, as this is the name of an important town in the area.
contact made, do people become more comfortable with each other and the tourists more comfortable in the Ukupseni environment. Once friendships can be made, then there can really be a cultural exchange, the tourists can learn far more, and so can we. It’s nice when we can form friendships, have memories of the tourists we meet. This way we can get that much closer to another country, without actually having been there.

- There is not much interaction between tourists and locals because tourists do not stay in the community for more than forty-five minutes or one hour. That’s not enough time to get to know one another or form relationships. For this reason, it would be better if tourists would stay longer, like a few hours or overnight, in the community. As it is, when they pass through with their guides, their main interaction is with the guides, they do not really speak to members of the community.

- There is not much interaction. Usually, when tourists pass through the streets they only speak with their guides, so there is not much interaction between tourists and locals, and when there is it is usually when the tourists are buying something. This should be changed. If a guide has good training (and some do), he will be the bridge between the community members and the tourists, bring them together so that they can talk. But some just take the tourists through the community, without trying to make this contact. Language is often a barrier between locals and tourists, and some Kuna are too shy to talk with tourists.

- Some locals do interact, ask questions, are curious to know about the tourists. Others do not talk with them at all, so the only interaction they have is observing one another.

- Sometimes there is an interaction. Sometimes the tourists will talk to women, they ask for explanations, for example of the molas the women are selling.

Are there communication problems between the tourists and the staff of the hotels?

- Yes, when we do not speak the same language. Not understanding English is one of the obstacles in the tourism business here. But in my experience, few tourists come here that don’t have at least one person in the group who speaks a bit of Spanish. Even when they do not, we can still make ourselves understood through basic communication, by using the dictionary, imitating and learning words, using body language. It can be very frustrating when we cannot understand each other. Once, before I knew any English, a group of South Africans who spoke no Spanish came to stay here. Because we could not communicate, they missed their plane. I felt so bad, and that was when I decided to learn some English. I think learning English is the best way to overcome these frustrations. On the other hand, tourists coming to a place where they know people do not speak English should make an effort to learn Spanish before coming.

- When the tourists do not speak Spanish, there are communication difficulties. Then the tourists want to say something but can’t make themselves understood, or want to know something but can’t ask the question, and they get frustrated and annoyed. Sometimes we use books, like the Spanish-Kuna-English dictionary, so that tourists can read out the phrases they want to say in Spanish or in Kuna.

- Yes, when tourists only speak English. I can understand a bit and I know the most basic and important phrases, but when a tourist does not speak Spanish, I cannot interact with them the way I like to. All the staff here should learn at least some English.

- Yes, there are when tourists do not speak Spanish. But usually tourists come in groups, and one person in the group speaks a bit of Spanish.

- No, usually we do not have any problems, because there is always someone around who speaks Spanish. Right now, nobody at the hotel speaks English. We are not trying to learn. But I know that we should be learning English. The problem is that we are always so busy, we do not have the time to hold seminars. The Peace Corps volunteers are willing to teach us English, but we simply cannot find the time. Learning English is important.

Are tourists interested in learning about Kuna culture? Are the residents of Ukupseni
interested in learning about the tourists and their culture?

- The tourists are very interested in Kuna culture. They want to know how the people here work, how the community is organized. It is interesting for them because it is so different from how it is back in their country. Often they are impressed with what they learn, and get their friends to come here too. In Ukupseni, there’s always someone who will ask the tourists questions when they are passing through the streets. Or, if a tourist asks someone about life here, he will answer and then want to know how it is in the tourist’s country. I want to learn about the tourists, share experiences and knowledge. I also take pride in teaching others about our ways here. But there are some hotel staff who are just here because it is a job, to make money, and they are less interested in learning about the tourists.

- Yes, the tourists are very interested but they ask more questions to the guides than to community members. Even if they do not ask questions, we usually tell them a bit about ourselves anyway, like about our political organization or our history. But in the community, there is not much communication between tourists and locals, because they don’t have a lot of time there. Often they do not go into Ukupseni to speak to people, but rather to buy things, to see the town’s attractions. I myself and the other staff here are very interested, we ask a lot of questions.

- The tourists are very interested, they ask many questions to the hotel staff. Most tourists, that is. There are always some who are not interested at all. The staff enjoy learning about the tourists’ culture and country. We enjoy learning English words too.

- There is a lot to tell tourists, about Kuna politics, ceremonies, and Ukupseni’s organization. They always want to know about these things, because they realize how different life is here. Residents of Ukupseni are not that interested in learning about the tourists, maybe some people but not that many. It’s because tourists do not stay long in the community, so there is not much of an opportunity. But when a tourist a tourist stays longer, people get used to him, feel more comfortable with him and have more confidence and trust in him, because they know him better. When tourists do not speak Spanish, this makes exchanges very difficult.

- Residents of Ukupseni are interested in learning about tourists who come here, but it is hard because the tourists do not stay here very long.

- Tourists do have a lot of questions but they ask them to the guides, because their main interaction is with the guides. Residents of Ukupseni do not really get a chance to any questions they might have because they don’t have much contact with the tourists, unless they work as a guide or hotel staff.

- Usually tourists are interested in learning about Kuna culture. They want to know about the molas when they pass by the women selling them in the street. They usually ask questions. Only some Ukupseni residents ask tourists questions. Only those who are comfortable talking to tourists.

- Yes, the tourists are very interested. They always want explanations for what they see in the community. They ask their questions to the guides.

- The tourists always ask many questions when we walk through the community. Some residents of the community are interested in the tourists, there are certain people who are always interested. And there are others who are not at all. Some people just want to make a dollar, they don’t want to talk to the tourists.

How can tourism benefit the community?

- In many ways. It helps the economy, helps people get going economically, it stimulates them. It can help bring back interest in lost traditions, like handicrafts that are no longer made.

- Some tourists want to help and support the community, they want to send things like
medicine, school supplies to help the children at our school. But usually, they just talk about this, it has not yet actually happened, because of a lack of communication. The authorities do not follow up on this. Tourism is good for business, for the stores in Ukupseni, because the hotels buy their food from them. It is also good for fishermen and divers, because the hotels buy seafood from them. We buy as much as possible from the community, it is just the fruits and vegetables that we bring in from Panama City. Tourism has many economic benefits for the community. They are not like the Colombians who come to sell us things at high prices. Tourists don’t come to do business, just to leave money behind in the community.

- The money the tourists bring helps people make a living and the community develop. The six dollar tourist tax is what most benefits the community. Also tourism helps farmers, fishermen, and shopkeepers because those who work in tourism and do not do their own farming or fishing have to buy their food from them. Also the hotels buy from them. Through tourism people can make a living, feed their families, and send their kids to school.

- There are direct and indirect benefits of tourism. Income is very important. The congreso always asks tourists for a contribution, in order to help the community. Money is also earned through the sale of handicrafts.

- Economic benefits are important. The taxes the tourists pay benefit the community, and the sale of handicrafts directly benefits families. Hotels buy produce from people’s farms and from fishermen. Tourism forces the community to think about how we can improve ourselves, clean up and make Ukupseni more presentable.

- The main benefit is economic. Tourism gives work to hotel employees. It would be good if the hotels had more cabins, so that more people could be employed. It is also good for the women who sell their molas. Because much less money comes in during the low season of May to December, the community should look for ways to attract tourists all year. People here now want to earn money, few still want to work in the fields. Some try selling produce or fish within the community, to earn some money. But who is going to buy these things? Anyone can go get his own fish. There is an abundance of these things here. Neither can people sell their produce in the cities, because the cities have many factories producing these things. So how can people earn money? Tourism is one of the few options, because it provides jobs. It also gives people an opportunity to sell their produce to the hotels. But right now the hotels are too small, there are not many tourists and sometimes the hotels are empty. So they cannot buy enough food to really provide opportunities for producers. The hotels should be bigger, able to accommodate fifty, one hundred people. That way there would always be tourists around, each day 100 more would arrive. There would be plenty of opportunities for people to earn money.

- I don’t know. I don’t understand why tourists never bought my molas. It was not worth it for me to try to sell them, so I stopped trying to be involved with the tourists.

- A very big benefit is the income brought to the community by tourism. These earnings can be used communally, for various activities like community celebrations and construction.

- The tourism taxes are a benefit. Also the sale of molas, and the hotels buy fish and seafood. At the hotel we buy all our food from the community, all of the decorations here come from the people of Ukupseni. So tourism provides income for many different people. The hotel also benefits the community, for example we have an aqueduct bringing us water from the mountains. Fifteen families in the community get their water from us. Others also benefit when we bring tourists to the beach. All the beaches are owned by families, people own the islands. So when we take tourists to the beach, we pay the owners fifty cents per tourist.

- Traditional healers benefit from tourism, because many tourists want to talk with them, they are interested in learning about medicinal plants. Tourism has really helped improve our garbage situation, because tourists come here, the community was forced to act. We have made our community a lot cleaner. Now people keep the area around their houses free of trash.
- Before, everyone used to throw their garbage right into the ocean, people threw their batteries into the water. Now people do not do that as much, because we have seen that the tourists notice the garbage, and ask about it.

**How can tourism harm the community?**

- In many ways. Tourists can have an impact on the environment and harm the local ecology. If many tourists come, communities may begin to do things just for tourists, only to get money. They are no longer keeping traditions because of the love, pride, and value of them. This is beginning to be a problem in Ukupseni.
- Hotels generate a lot of garbage. I’ve seen up to ten garbage bags sitting outside Sapibenega. Plastic bottles are brought in from Panama City. The garbage is burned. There are problems when many tourists (100 or 200) come, because some of them might have bad intentions or cause problems. But we never get that many tourists here so that does not become a problem. With fewer tourists we can control them better, make sure that they understand and comply with the rules.
- I don’t see problems with tourism. It is better the way it is here, without too many tourists. Because tourism brings people livelihoods and allows them to meet new people and learn from them, it is a very good thing. Before working in tourism I worked the land, and now I live just as well, but need to work less hard to support my family. But I have heard older men in the community speaking of problems brought by tourism. I’ve heard one man say that now, the youth no longer want to farm, they just want to wait for money to come to them. There is a loss of tradition, of a way of life. I don’t necessarily see this since I am making a good living doing this. When I was younger the fields were full of produce. People went to work each other’s lands in groups, work teams. Today there are no longer as many things growing, and less people going to work the land.
- Problems arise when the community gets used to tourists here, and to getting money from them. They are always asking to have their photo taken for money. The danger is more for the children, who can see tourists do things that are not acceptable for members of the community to do. Tourism can also cause environmental problems, when tourists are not informed of how to be careful around corals, or plants in the forest.
- Here tourism is on such a small scale, so it does not have much of an impact on the community. Tourists only come into Ukupseni for one or two hours, they stay at the hotels, and so do not directly affect the people here. If the hotels were actually in Ukupseni, there would be more of an impact and more harm.
- I have not seen any problems, I haven’t heard of any problem for tourists or for the people living here.
- We should have many more tourists here, I do not see any problem with that.
- No, tourism does not cause any problems. Because we have rules made by the community and by the Congreso General Kuna. There is a maximum number of cabins any hotel can have, so there can never be too many tourists coming. So there are no problems. The norms and rules of the Comarca are applied, and they ensure that if an operation is causing problems, it will be shut down. We are the largest hotel in all of the Comarca, we can have more tourists than any other hotel, up to forty. Because of this the Congreso General Kuna watches over us carefully, there are always people coming to make sure everything is alright here. We are not allowed to put in any more cabins.

**What do you think of the type of tourism that exists in the Cartí region?**

- When tourists come everyone goes into the streets to sell handicrafts. There are too many tourists. Here in Ukupseni we need to look for alternatives to mass tourism. We need to
make plans, organize tourism and our involvement in it. It is important that the community understands tourism and tourists. We should not have so many tourists. The community should get involved, for example a group of men got together to clean up the beaches at the hotels, they contributed their labour, their boats.

- I have never seen the cruise ships and the tourists on them. According to a friend who was there once, there are 700, 800 tourists coming with the ships. They come into small communities. When cruise ships come, everything shuts down, classes are cancelled, and nobody goes to the mountains. Everyone does what they can to get some money, even if it goes against their culture. Like asking tourists to take their photo so that they can get some money, even though it is not Kuna custom to have your picture taken. People disturb the tourists, try to get them to buy things. This happens in Ukupseni also. People expect all tourists to buy *molas*, and get upset when they don’t. They think of tourists only in terms of money. We must control tourism, limit the amount of tourists coming here. About 30,40 tourists can fit into the two hotels here. If the hotels would be full, this would be too much for the community to handle. It has happened before. When the group of British yachts came last week, there were 20 people walking around town, it was too much, the streets were full.

- The problem with too many tourists coming to that area is that the people there have too much money now. They no longer help each other out, or trade good and labour. Now they just want money for everything. They do not want to work the way they used to, they just want to buy things. It is important to put limits on the number of tourists that can come, or the capacity of the hotels. But this is not an issue here. I think Yandup should expand, they are hoping to build six more cabins.

- Too many tourists is a problem. When a place fills up with tourists people forget about their other responsibilities, they do not want to go work in the fields. People only think about money. They just wait for tourists to come so that they can earn easy money from them.

- There are too many tourists there. People have told me that when a cruise ship comes to an island, the tourists throw money overboard, and the children swim out to go get it. The children there are always chasing after the tourists, asking “money, money”. Kids in our community have started to do this too. To avoid these problems, the number of tourists arriving here must be controlled. For this to happen, the people of Ukupseni must have open communication with the two hotels. Otherwise there can be no control. Now, there is no communication.

- There, in Cartí, cruise ships come and cause problems, because the tourists throw money into the ocean for the children.

- Giving money to the children causes problems. Here we avoid that altogether by telling tourists not to give money or candy to the kids. If they do, the children will never leave the tourists alone, they will always crowd around them. They will get used to handouts. So here the children have learned that they will not get these things from the tourists, and they do not ask anymore. Another problem in Cartí is that there are too many tourists. There is not enough room in the communities to show the tourists around, to take them on excursions.

**Some people say that the Cartí region has become too dependent on tourism. Do you see this as a problem?**

- People assume that because so many tourists have been coming for so many years, they will always get money that way. They are not as aware of the possible problems of tourism. We do not want that type of tourism here. But the people there, they will still go work in the fields, they still go fishing. They don’t seem short on produce. When the tourists come, they continue to live life as always, they go to their fields, they go out in their *cayucos*.

- Cruise ships do not come every day, so when they are not there, people need to go back to
the fields to work. But people no longer want to do this, they want easy money from the tourists, so they just wait for the next ship rather than working. This is why the Congreso General controls tourism, and limits the number of cabins at the hotels. So that communities do not become dependent. The problem is that the Congreso General does not have rules, limits, or conditions for the cruise ships. Because they have been coming for so long, the people there oppose any new regulation the Congreso tries to pass, because they want as much money as possible to come to them.

- People are too dependent because they are money-hungry, they no longer want to work in the fields, and no longer want to help each other out for free.

**With the introduction of an economy based on money, has Kuna society changed?**

- The style of tourism has changed. Before people wanted to share their experiences and lifestyle with tourists, and teach them about their ways. Now they want to sell things. Everything is based on a monetary relationship. It is not a natural interaction anymore. There needs to be a balance. Tourism cannot just be about money, but we cannot forget about money either. I bring people to my house, to introduce them to my family, to show them the house, what a traditional kitchen looks like. We sit outside and chat, just like we do here all the time. I like to make the tourist feel at home. We should sell the tourists natural things, like food, drink, little things for a few cents. But in a natural, friendly way.

- The authorities and community leaders need to meet to think of alternative ways to develop tourism, so that money does not become a problem. Now the authorities are not thinking much about this.

- It used to be that Kuna men went to work in the fields all day, they would get up early and come home late. Now they only work in the morning, from 7:00-11:00am. There is less food and more people. We need to buy food from the Colombians, much more than we used to, when we were self-sufficient. We need money now. A money economy is not new with tourism. Before there were companies coming here to find workers. There were changes. But before people were not watching and waiting for planes the way they are now, to see if tourists have come. Tourism is better, because when the companies came to look for workers, only a few people got jobs. But when tourists come everyone can get involved, they can sell things, explain things or show them around, have their picture taken.

- Money and its new importance has changed the way people work, and how they help each other out. There has been a loss of the Kuna way of doing things. But money is a fact of life here, it is good for the community and families need money to live. Tourism is good because it brings them that money.

- Society has not really changed. Money is important for families, in order for them to support themselves. Some support themselves by owning stores or selling molas. Others go work in the fields. There is no difference.

- The Kuna are a people who traditionally live off subsistence production, fishing and agriculture. But now that is not enough for many people. Everyone wants money, they no longer want to go to the fields. The national education system forced upon us by the government does not reflect the reality we live. It is adapted to the reality of rich people in the city. So young people get out of school and are not motivated to work in the fields. They want to earn money. They either go to the city to get a job, or end up hanging around town doing nothing, waiting for an opportunity to earn money. But there are very few of these opportunities here.

- What people do depends on their family history. Some people grew up in families in which the father always worked the fields, or always fished. My family was always one of campesinos, we always worked in the fields. That’s why I stopped working for the hotel, because I wanted to work in the country like my father did. But others did not grow up this way, their families were never closely linked to the fields, or to fishing. These are people
who want money. They see the dollar, they think it will make them powerful, happy. But it
is the earth, the fields, which really provide. Money goes fat, it disappears. The problem is,
many people working for money then go and spend it on drink, on vices. Then there is no
money left. But the countryside will always be there to provide. With fields you will never
find yourself lacking anything.
- We used to live off the land, back in the ‘60s and ‘70s when the prices for produce were
better. We sold to the Colombians, many coconuts because we could get twenty cents for a
coconut. Now the prices are nothing like that. So we need to earn money now.

What is the role of women in the tourism sector?
- The woman has an important role in tourism. She is the one who is most representative of
Kuna culture, by making molas and because she’s more visible in her traditional dress.
Women play a big role in Kuna society. She is more typical of our culture. At the hotels,
men are guides and do manual labour, women serve at the restaurants and bar, and clean the
 cabins. It is important to have women working at the hotels. Once when we did not have
any women working here, a tourist commented that the hotel needs to have women working
there, not only men. Because without women, something is missing. They should
participate more, as guides. A while ago there was a female guide at Sapibenega, but now
there are none.
- There have been women guides at Sapibenega. There was once a female guide who spoke
some English. There are many girls from the community studying tourism. Women mainly
serve food, clean cabins. They should participate more. They are better at waitressing than
men are, that is their strong point. It’s important to have a female presence at the hotels
because if tourists only see men they do not get the full experience.
- The main role of women is making molas to sell.
- I insisted that women be part of the tourism commission. I have always supported women,
even though the original commission had no women on it. Since men are more occupied in
the fields, women have more time to dedicate to tourism development. For this reason I
think that the commission will work out this time, now that it is all women. Women and
men are like the two wings of a bird. The bird cannot fly with only one wing. Likewise,
women and men have equally important roles, even if they are different ones. Traditionally,
Kuna society saw women’s role as only what was related to the home. This needs to change
and that’s why I pushed for a commission made up of women.
- There are not many women working at the hotels, just a few. The female staff at
Sapibenega changes often, because women get pregnant and have to leave work. So there
are new women working every year or so. It is better when women are older and more
mature, like myself. That way this is not an issue.
- Here, our female staff acts as the secretary, she keeps track of who comes to stay at the
hotel, and takes down their passport numbers. She also cleans the cabins.
- Women are important because they are the ones who are more traditional. We want to make
sure women are always present, because they wear the traditional clothing.
- We should participate more in tourism. We also let tourists take our photo, those of us that
work at the hotel. Tourists really like taking photos of the women, and we don’t mind, we
don’t ask for money like they do back in the community. We are used to it, it’s part of our
job.

Have the CGK’s tourism regulations benefited the Kuna people?
- I don’t know if the congreso’s rules and limitations are obeyed in Cartí. Once a cruise ship
bigger than the island docked at the pier, and the tourists filled up the island. The whole
community prepared molas, got ready to have their pictures taken. They try to get all of
their income at once. There are way too many tourists. Right now in Ukupseni, the
community is not involved in creating tourism laws. We maintain the Congreso General’s rules, but are not organized to make our own. A problem is that the community leaders and authorities make the regulations, but they are just making rules, while the guides are those who see what the tourists want and need. There is no communication between the authorities and the guides. The guides do not even know about all of the regulations. These are always made by the sailas, community leaders, and commissions. Tourists always understand the rules. A guide should always explain them to the tourists before taking them into the community. It is important to explain why these rules exist. Sometimes, tourists try to avoid following the rules, but only very few of them.

- The laws are very important. Without them outsiders could own hotels, and the money earned there would not benefit the communities. Once a gringo owned a hotel in the Cartí area but he was kicked out by a group of Kuna youth. They shot him in the leg. Two Kuna policemen were sent in to deal with the situation and were killed by the youth. This was a big problem for all the communities in Kuna Yala, to have Kuna killing other Kuna. Laws avoid situations like this from happening in the first place. Many outsiders see that this is an area with a lot of tourism potential, and without laws they would build their own hotels. Ukupseni does not have any formal regulations for tourism. We should make our own Statute. We should also hold seminars for youth interested in tourism, to teach them about Kuna culture so that they can teach the tourists. This may have been done at Sapibenega. Yandup is planning to do the same, and bring in a Kuna teacher.

- The tourists always respect our regulations, of course. They always obey the rules. Sometimes they ask whether they can do this or that, can I go into the community in a bathing suit? The community should make more tourism regulations. Giving money to the children, right now this is not regulated. Neither is the taking of photographs. It should be prohibited to take photos of people without asking first.

A significant percentage of Kuna live outside the Comarca. Is this a problem?

- In Ukupseni, about half of the three thousand people live in Panama City. Some of them come back to the Ukupseni and want to use their knowledge and experience to help the community. That is why this community has so many leaders and activists. But there are also those who grow up here but want to leave to look for more opportunities. It’s a problem when young people come back from the city after having lived there for a long time, because they come back with different ways of thinking, behaving, that are not good for the community. Tourism can help give these youth economic opportunities but also a chance to learn about their culture, and respect it. But it is hard to speak to them, to make them understand. For me, working in tourism has helped me learn, understand my culture. It gave me an opportunity after coming back from Panama City. Now I want to stay here.

- Yes, it is a problem. People leave their families behind to find work, most end up forgetting their family, awed by all the things in the city. They forget about their home, their kids. In the end they often cannot send money home, because it’s expensive to live in the city. Kids who grow up in the city come here and many can’t speak Kuna, have a different culture. They do not want to act or live like a Kuna. Tourism can help. There are many guys working at Yandup in temporary positions, and they like it.

- Many youth do not feel like working as farmers, so they go to the city instead, to look for other forms of work. If young people have a chance to find work other than farming in Ukupseni, like tourism, then they can earn a living and stay in the community.

- There are many people who want to work in tourism, people looking for new ways to employ themselves in the tourism sector. Tourism here is not big enough to provide jobs for everyone.

- The main reason people leave is to search for new opportunities, to have a higher quality of life. Young people leave so that they can give their children a better education, or so that
they can buy land. There are not many job opportunities on the island, so tourism is an important sector because it can create jobs. It is important to develop tourism even more.

Is a loss of cultural knowledge and pride a problem among the youth? Can tourism help restore what has been lost?

- It would be hard to get a group of young people who came back from the city to want to learn about their culture and to value it. They are enmeshed in the city lifestyle. But it is not impossible to get them interested. It would be good for them.
- This loss of culture is a problem. Young people and those who go to study at university believe that anything they learn or are told in the city is true, because anything that is modern is valued more than Kuna ways. They listen to “modern” people, like doctors, professors, more than they listen to traditional Kuna knowledge. Many things the Kuna believe are true, there is a reason for all of our traditions. Tourism forces people to learn about their own culture. But actually, the youth are recovering their traditional knowledge. They are becoming more interested. There are Kuna books, and music. They are waking up from a loss of tradition. There are also good things that come from the outside world. A balance is important.
- Many youth do want to work in tourism, but there are only two hotels. There are not enough jobs for everyone, and sometimes very few tourists come.
- The youth are interested in working in tourism. But the working conditions at the hotels need to be improved. It is important for young people to participate in tourism. It provides them employment.
- Tourism can help bring pride in our culture and a desire to learn about it. Often, we only appreciate what we have when it is lost. Now people are realizing that they are losing their culture, and that through tourism they can help revive it, and lead to its appreciation. It is important to revive the culture of our youth. It used to be that all young people were gathered and brought to the congreso to learn Kuna values, religion, how to live a good life. This is no longer done, and they are losing their cultural knowledge and values.
- There has been a loss of culture among the young people. Those who live in Panama City bring back customs from the city. They have completely lost their culture. There are some young people who want to work in the tourism sector. These are the youth who already know a lot about their culture.

What is your opinion of the commercialization of molas?

- Most women believe that tourists are rich, they have a lot of money and have come here especially to buy molas. They set their prices very high, sometimes up to fifty or seventy dollars. Others set their prices lower. Just like anyone else, tourists, no matter how much money they have, are looking for the best deal, the cheapest prices. By setting their prices so high, some women are losing business, because the tourists do not buy from them. They don’t realize that molas are sold all over, not just in Kuna Yala. They have to compete, otherwise tourists will just buy cheaper molas in the city. The women should be better trained, so that they understand the economics of the work they do. They must understand that tourists will not buy anything just because they have money. There should be more coordination among the women. The women on the tourism commission have been working on suggesting more appropriate prices for molas that take into account the materials needed to make them and the amount of time and effort put in.
- There should be more communication between the women and the tourists. Now it is just a monetary relationship. There is a need for education, so that the women better understand how to treat tourists.
- The molas the women make for themselves and those they sell are the same. There is no
difference. Tourists usually want to know about the *molas* they buy. They ask how they are made, what the designs mean.

- The *molas* for the tourists and those we make for ourselves are different. But we have not stopped making traditional ones for ourselves. We see what the tourists want, and make *molas* accordingly. If we see that one design sells well, we will make it again, and other women will copy it. Some of the *molas* we make for tourists, with pictures of birds or animals, are not done with the traditional technique. There is just a lot of stitching. A Kuna woman would never wear one of these as a *mola*, we do not really like that. We just make them for the tourists. More recently, the tourists have become interested in our traditional *molas* with geometric patterns. These are the ones our ancestors made, but we also make them for the tourists. Tourists always ask about the significance of the *molas*, what their designs represent. They always want to learn these things, and the women are happy to explain it to them.

**Do you believe that interaction with tourists can help increase intercultural understanding? What conditions would be necessary to make this possible?**

- People here are generally friendly and open to tourists. Language is a barrier to understanding each other. Sometimes people want to speak to the tourists, or ask them something, but they don’t know how because they cannot communicate. If tourists stayed in the community for a whole day or two, communication problems would not be such an issue. The *Casa Cultural* allows tourists to come learn how to make Kuna handicrafts, speak to people and learn from them. An exchange of ideas is important. Something like this allows for more communication. We should make a museum that the tourists can come visit for half an hour, to ask questions and learn. This sometimes happens at the *Casa Cultural*, but the displays are not finished yet. More people should be trained so that they can receive tourists and are ready to talk to them and explain things to them. Here there are only a few people who deal with tourists regularly, and when they are not around, people do not know what to do. When tourists just walk around the streets, without staying anywhere, they do not have a chance to interact with the people.

- The tourists who stay in the community and who speak Spanish can really learn a lot about the Kuna people.

- Yes, it is very important for people to know and understand each other. Forming friendships is very important. But for this to happen tourists must stay in the community for more than one hour. I would like to see more tourism within the community, where tourists come to stay in the homes of the people here. That way there is more of a chance for this understanding to take place. Tourists should stay longer, that way they could get to know the people better, make more contact. There needs to be some education and training of people here, including the guides, so that they know how to answer the tourists’ questions and how to explain to them the things they want to know about Kuna culture and traditions, and the community and its history. It is important for the community as a whole to understand how tourism works, and how the hotels work.

- Absolutely. It brings people closer together, so there is a great potential for increased understanding. But unless people interact in a friendly, natural, and relaxed way, which does not happen that often, the barriers and the distance remain. What we need to do now is find ways to break down those barriers. We’re all one species, humanity is united despite our different colours and languages. This is the feeling tourism should bring. A uniting of people and their ideas. As if we were all sitting around a large, round table, sharing our thoughts and ideas on how to improve the world. We need to educate people about how to welcome tourists and interact with them, and how to treat them. In the Kuna culture, when we go to another village, it is important to welcome the visitors, give them a place to sit, make them comfortable. That same respect and welcome should be given to tourists. If
they feel strange, uncomfortable, or unwelcome here, they will not come back, they won’t think or speak highly about the place and its people.

- Yes, of course. The proper training of guides is important. Now, guides do not know enough about our history, for example the Revolution, to explain these things properly. Another problem is that many guides bring tourists to their own homes, to meet their own families. This is because they know that tourists want to buy things, and hope that they will buy from them. But tourism should be a communal thing, something that benefits everyone in the community.

Do you have any suggestions for the future development of tourism in Ukupseni?

- We need to train people so that they can learn how to treat the tourists who come here, how to welcome them. People need to learn how to interact with people from other parts of the world. That’s part of Kuna culture too. How to live together with others is what the sailas teach us at the congreso. How to help others, how to share. Tourism should also be a relationship of sharing, of exchange. Each side brings something to the other. We should develop more handicrafts than just molas. There is such a richness of traditional crafts that can be shown to tourists. This can help us recover lost traditions.

- The community should organize itself more in order to manage tourism. The sale of molas needs to be better organized. When tourists are walking through the streets, the people trying to sell them things can be overwhelming. It may bother them. We need to find a better way. The six dollar tax that the community gets should be used to better maintain the airport, and clean up the garbage there. Also to create a better, more accessible trail to the waterfall. During the winter we often cannot get to the waterfall, because the trail is rained out. We need to look for new tourist attractions, like places to take them fishing. Otherwise the tourists will get tired of always going to the beach or to the cemetery.

- Everything is good the way it is. There could be more of a focus on cleaning up the community and getting rid of garbage like plastics. Tourists want the place to be natural, so garbage lying about is not what they want to see. Natural things like palm fronds or organic waste is not a problem.

- I have not seen any problems with tourists. But this is something new for the community, we need a better tourism commission, and to explore new ways to welcome tourists. When tourists walk down the main street, the women set up their handicrafts, one asking them to buy from her, then the next asks them to buy from her. It would be better to build a Casa de la Artesania, where everyone sells together. That way the tourists are not bothered. Because tourism is new here, and both hotels are relatively new, people are not used to it. The community is not well prepared. We should become more of a touristy village, we should think of projects to better the community, clean up the beaches, and manage the community better. We should make the village look nicer.

- In the future, there will be more tourism here. We have to get it right, train the community. It is important that not just the hotels but also the people of the community welcome tourists into their homes. That way families benefit economically. We need to educate the people about how to talk to tourists, how to have a better relationship with the tourists. The community should clean up the garbage, so that tourism here can grow. Also, people need to know how to explain their culture and lifestyle to tourists. They need to learn more about themselves. Things are changing. Tourism here used to be traditional tourism, they would just go to the beach. This benefited the community far less. Only the airport tax went to the community. We need to make better conditions for backpacker tourists who come here and want to stay in the community. We could build houses, owned by the community, for them to rent. Or, families could build separate houses for tourists to stay in. The authorities should meet with the hotel owners to think of ways to give jobs to the young people who need them.
We should have an island that tourists can come to, and bring their food, a tarp or tent, and stay there. Also more tourism within the community, homestays. This way more individuals benefit financially, and more contact is made. The hotels need to create more regulations. Neither hotel has internal regulations. They work their staff hard, sometimes all day and all night, and they don’t have any free time. This is not the way it should be in Kuna Yala, and this way they will not attract youth to work in tourism. They need to create rules and regulations to ensure fair working conditions and wages. These need to be presented to the community. The hotels must be controlled. Tourism should improve the quality of life in the community. We should focus more on improving Ukupseni, both for tourists and for ourselves. We need to build a good pier for the boats that come pick up tourists at the airport, and we should keep the airport cleaner. The hotels should train people financially, for selling molas. We need to learn how to welcome tourists, how to sell molas, and how to improve the quality of tourism.

At least one guide or employee at each hotel should speak English well enough to converse with the tourists. People need to be taught how to better interact with the tourists, so that they can get to know each other, and learn from one another. So that the interaction is not only with the guide. When people from here go to other communities they hope that they will be treated well, and if they are, they will return. Ukupseni needs to treat tourists like they are in their own homes, so that they will want to come back. This requires education. But it’s alright that tourism is not perfect yet. Imperfections allow us to progress, because we learn from our mistakes. If the world was perfect and nature unflawed, then man would never have the opportunity to progress or move forward. Because the world is imperfect, and we make mistakes, we are forced to seek ways to progress, to improve our situation and our environment. Through our mistakes we learn, and in the end we are better than before. We used to apply many chemicals to the land, we were killing the soil. Now we are learning how to care for our fields organically. There are some authorities in the community, and older, more traditional people, who do not want any changes, progress, new projects. They oppose and many times stop new initiatives. These people come up against those who are more progressive, who want to see changes and improvements. These improvements may not be purely traditional. But some of us here want to use our knowledge of the world to better our situation. These clashes of opinion are the reason that it is sometimes hard to get new projects started. Money from tourism should be used for community projects, like building the new library. The problem is that we’ve always been disorganized. We need training on how to organize and manage money. Right now it just sits in the bank.

We need to organize and create specific places where tourists can come to learn about the community, the Kuna people. We need a museum, and a place for the sale of handicrafts. This way people would not be scattered in the streets selling molas. Prices should be set, and everyone should be selling together. The way it is now, one person sells for one price, another price over there, another price over there. The problem is that some women make many molas, and so sell a lot. Meanwhile others sell very little. This causes inequality. If we had one place where all the women would come together, each would bring the same amount of molas to sell. The Casa de la Cultura is one such place. But based on a recommendation from the Congreso General de la Cultura, we have decided to keep it purely for the telling of the history of the Revolution. There are some handicrafts as well for the tourists to see, but the Casa de la Cultura, which we are still developing, will be a historical museum about the Revolution. So we must find other places for other aspects of Kuna culture. The tourism commission should develop these. The Revolution is very important for us. It did not take place in some other community, it happened right here. The massacre happened here. We need to be organized, so that the guides can tell the tourists about the Revolution, so that they can take them around to the important sites. There has never been training and orientation for the guides. There is also a lack of
communication between the management of the hotels, the guides, and the tourism commission. Now the commission is new, and they have not done much yet. But they are key. We need a strong and active tourism commission. Without them nothing can happen. It should be the sailas and voceros who give training to the guides. But they are not involved in tourism now. They deny the reality of modern life and Western ways. They are only concerned with our culture and traditions. So they are not very interested in tourism.

- No... not really. Everything is fine the way it is.
APPENDIX II

SUGERENCIAS Y RECOMENDACIONES PARA EL FUTURO DESARROLLO DEL TURISMO EN UKUPSENI

La siguiente lista es una compilación de las opiniones, ideas, y sugerencias de varias personas de la comunidad, entrevistadas durante mi tiempo en Ukupseni, y de los participantes de los dos talleres que di sobre el turismo. También, incluye mis recomendaciones generales.

Espero que esta información les ayudará en el desarrollo de un turismo sostenible que será de beneficio a toda la comunidad.

Ariella Orbach
Estudiante de la Universidad McGill, Montreal, Canadá
Apoyado por: Fundación Dobbo Yala

LOS PROBLEMAS IDENTIFICADOS

- Existe una falta de comunicación entre los turistas y la gente de Ukupseni. El problema es que los turistas vienen a la comunidad solamente por una hora, y no tienen la oportunidad de conocer a los residentes, hablar con ellos, y sentirse cómodos en la comunidad. No tenemos la oportunidad de desarrollar una amistad con los turistas, compartir con ellos y aprender de ellos.

- El problema es que los turistas que vienen a Ukupseni hablan solamente con sus guías, y no con la gente de la comunidad. Normalmente, la única interacción entre los turistas y los habitantes de Ukupseni es cuando los turistas hacen compras. Los guías deben facilitar la interacción de la gente con los turistas. El idioma también es un problema que obstaculiza la comunicación.

- Los guías necesitan formación, para que sepan cómo explicarles a los turistas nuestra cultura, la vida en Ukupseni. Algunos guías llevan los turistas directamente a su casa, porque saben que los turistas quieren comprar cosas y esperan que van a comprar de ellos. Pero el turismo debe ser algo que beneficia a toda la comunidad.

- La gran mayoría de los empleados de los hoteles y los guías no hablan inglés. A veces no pueden comunicar con los turistas, cuando vienen turistas que no hablan español.

- Cuando los turistas que no hablan español vienen a la comunidad, si los guías no hablan inglés los turistas no aprenden nada sobre la comunidad ni sobre el pueblo kuna, porque los guías no pueden explicarles.
La relación entre los turistas y los residentes de Ukupseni es de dinero, la gente piensa que los turistas vienen acá solamente para comprar cosas. Hay artesanas que están frustradas cuando los turistas no compran de ellas.

Antes, la gente quería compartir su estilo de vida y su cultura con los turistas, enseñarles sobre el pueblo kuna. Hoy, solo quiere vender cosas. No hay interacción natural entre los turistas y los residentes de la comunidad. Turismo no debe ser solamente algo de dinero.

La mayoría de las mujeres piensan que todos los turistas son ricos, y vienen a Ukupseni solamente para comprar sus molas. Ellas ponen precios demasiado altos. Les falta capacitación para que puedan entender la economía de la venta de molas. También tienen que entender que los turistas no van a comprar cualquier cosa solamente porque tienen dinero.

El turismo es una de las únicas oportunidades de trabajo en la comunidad, y también lleva muchos beneficios a los pescadores y agricultores que vendan sus productos a los hoteles. Pero ahora los hoteles son demasiado pequeños para dar trabajo e ingreso a todos los que lo necesitan, y a veces no llega ningún turista a los hoteles.

Si muchos turistas llegan a una comunidad, la gente podría empezar a hacer cosas solamente para que los turistas le paguen. Por ejemplo, va a practicar sus tradiciones no a causa de un amor, valor, y orgullo en ellas, sino porque los turistas quieren verlas y pagarán. Esto empieza a ser un problema en Ukupseni.

Los hoteles causan un problema de basura, ellos llevan plásticos y otras cosas de la ciudad y cuando los turistas se van, la basura queda acá.

Falta la comunicación entre las autoridades y dirigentes que hacen los reglamentos de turismo, y los guías quienes trabajan directamente con los turistas y quienes saben lo que necesitan. Muchas veces, los guías no conocen todos los reglamentos.

Ahora los ingresos del turismo quedan en el banco, mientras que podríamos utilizarlos para el desarrollo y la mejora de la comunidad.
SUGERENCIAS PARA UN TURISMO MEJOR

- Tenemos que capacitar a los residentes de Ukupseni, para que sepan cómo tratar a los turistas, cómo darles la bienvenida. La gente tiene que aprender como hablar con personas de diferentes partes del mundo. Los sailas nos enseñan que tenemos que convivir con otros, compartir con ellos y ayudarles. Tenemos que hacer lo mismo con los turistas.

- Tenemos que enseñar a la gente como explicar sus tradiciones a los turistas. Por eso, ellos deben aprender más de su propia cultura.

- Hay que hablar con los niños, enseñarles como tratar a los turistas, para evitar que ellos les molestan en las calles.

- Los sailas y los voceros pueden capacitar los guías y asegurar que ellos saben de su cultura e historia.

- Por lo menos un guía o empleado de cada hotel debe hablar inglés para que pueda conversar con los turistas.

- Podemos buscar maneras de promover un intercambio cultural entre nosotros y los turistas. Los turistas vienen acá porque quieren aprender un poco sobre nuestra cultura, pero nosotros, que quedamos aquí en la comunidad y no tenemos la oportunidad de viajar, queremos aprender de los turistas también, aprender de su cultura, aprender un poco de inglés.

- Debemos buscar otros tipos de artesanía para vender a los turistas, no solamente las molas. Tenemos una riqueza de artesanías tradicionales y venderlas a los turistas puede asegurar que no se pierdan.

- Tenemos que organizar la venta de molas, mejorarla. Todas las artesanas vendiendo molas en las calles pueden molestar a los turistas. Tenemos que buscar una manera mejor para vender las artesanías.

- Podemos construir una Casa de la Artesanía, donde todas las mujeres vienen juntas para vender sus molas a los turistas.

- Hay que buscar sitios específicos donde los turistas pueden venir para aprender sobre la comunidad y sobre el pueblo kuna. La Casa de la Cultura es uno de estos lugares, pero debe ser un museo solamente sobre la Revolución. Necesitamos también un lugar donde las mujeres pueden venir para vender su artesanía. Así las artesanas no estarán en las calles, pueden vender juntas para los mismos precios, para evitar la competencia y para asegurar que cada mujer se beneficia de la venta.

- Los hoteles pueden capacitar a las mujeres para que ellas entiendan más como manejar la venta de sus molas.

- Debemos limpiar la comunidad, hacerla más bonita para los turistas y para nosotros también. Podemos limpiar las playas también.
o Debemos utilizar los impuestos que pagan los turistas para mejorar el aeropuerto y para limpiar toda la basura que hay alrededor. También podemos utilizarlos para crear un sendero mejor hacia la catarata, para que podamos ir en el invierno.

o El problema es que siempre hemos sido desorganizados. Necesitamos capacitación para el manejo de los ingresos turísticos. Debemos utilizar este dinero por proyectos para la comunidad, por ejemplo la construcción de la nueva biblioteca.

o Hay que enfocar más sobre la mejora de Ukupseni, tanto para nosotros como para los turistas. Hay que construir un muelle mejor al aeropuerto, y debemos mantener el aeropuerto más limpio.

o Tenemos que buscar nuevos sitios turísticos en la comunidad y alrededor, para que los turistas no se cansen de ir siempre a la playa o al cementerio.

o Podemos buscar una isla donde los turistas pueden hacer un campamento en vez de quedarse en los hoteles.

o Debemos desarrollar un turismo comunitario, para que los turistas vengan a la comunidad por más de una hora. Ellos pueden quedarse en las casas de familias, de esta manera más gente se beneficia directamente del turismo y sus ingresos. O la comunidad puede construir casas que los turistas pueden alquilar. Tenemos que desarrollar opciones para los mochileros.

o La comisión de turismo debe organizarse para el desarrollo de un turismo comunitario. Puede hablar con la gente de la comunidad, para saber quien quiere que los turistas queden con ellos. Tienen que asegurar que haya lugares donde los turistas pueden quedar en la comunidad antes de iniciar el turismo comunitario en Ukupseni.

o Los dueños de los hoteles y las autoridades deben reunirse para buscar maneras de crear trabajo para los jóvenes que lo necesitan.

o Los dos hoteles tienen que hacer reglamentos internos, para asegurar que sus empleados no trabajan demasiado, como hoy. Estos reglamentos hay que ser presentados a la comunidad. Tenemos que controlar las condiciones de trabajo y los salarios de los hoteles.

o Hay que mejorar la comunicación entre la gerencia de los hoteles, los guías, y la comisión de turismo.

o La comisión de turismo es importante, y hay que tener una comisión fuerte y bien organizada. Sin ella no podríamos desarrollar un turismo sostenible.
MIS RECOMENDACIONES

- Hay que capacitar todos los empleados de los dos hoteles, para asegurar que ellos entienden como el turismo funciona, porque los turistas viajan y que están buscando en los lugares que visitan, y como tratar a los turistas. Formación específica para los guías es esencial, incluyendo seminarios sobre la cultura y historia kuna y cómo explicarlas, como guiar los turistas dentro de la comunidad, como asegurar que los turistas se sienten cómodos cuando están en la comunidad, y como iniciar interacción entre la gente local y los turistas. Aunque la comunidad no ha trabajado mucho con IPAT en el pasado, tal vez sería beneficioso utilizar sus recursos para seminarios de capacitación. Hay algunos Kunas que trabajan en el IPAT y ellos pueden involucrarse. Sería mejor si la formación fuese dada por los empleados de los dos hoteles juntos, para asegurar que los turistas reciben experiencias positivas tanto en un hotel como en el otro.

- También es importante que los empleados de los hoteles hablen inglés. Por lo menos un empleado en cada hotel debe poder conversar y contestar a las preguntas de los turistas. Idealmente, todos los que están trabajando en un hotel deben conocer el idioma para que puedan comunicarse con los turistas. Todos los guías deben asistir a cursos de inglés, porque es su trabajo explicar la cultura e historia kuna a los turistas. Si no puedan hacerlo, estos turistas no tendrán la experiencia para la cual vinieron a Ukupseni. Los hoteles pueden beneficiar de la presencia de voluntarios extranjeros para organizar y dar cursos de inglés a sus empleados. Pueden pedir la ayuda de los voluntarios del Cuerpo de Paz. Si no, hay bastante jóvenes de Europa y de Norteamérica que están buscando oportunidades de trabajo voluntario al extranjero. Para contactar organizaciones que crean y ofrecen estas oportunidades, los hoteles pueden capacitar sus empleados sin crear nuevos costos.

- La comunidad, y específicamente la comisión del turismo, debe considerar la posibilidad de desarrollar un turismo comunitario en Ukupseni. Los turistas pueden quedarse con familias en sus casas, y estas familias se beneficiarían directamente de los ingresos turísticos. O, la comunidad misma o sociedades dentro de ella pueden construir hospedaje en la comunidad que los turistas pueden alquilar, y distribuir los ingresos entre sus miembros. Porque demasiado turistas quedando en la comunidad puede causar problemas sociales o culturales, límites y reglamentos estrictos deben ser creados. Para darles la bienvenida a los turistas dentro de la comunidad, pueden promover el intercambio cultural que hoy no existe.

- La comisión de turismo y otros dirigentes de la comunidad deben reunirse con todas las mujeres que venden su artesanía a los turistas, para buscar una manera mejor para venderla. Pueden considerar la posibilidad de crear una Casa de la Artesanía u otro lugar para la venta de molas. Esto evitaria la competencia, y en un lugar así los turistas no se sentirían incómodos y podrían comunicar con las mujeres y aprender del significado cultural de las molas. Cobrando una tarifa pequeña para la entrada, cada mujer ganaría algo si vendió artesanía o no.

- La comunidad, trabajando siempre bajo la comisión de turismo, tiene que decidir como utilizar los impuestos turísticos que cobra la comunidad. Este dinero debe ser utilizado en dos maneras: primero, algo de los impuestos debe ser revertido otra vez al turismo, para mejorarlos. Segundo, los impuestos deben ser utilizados para proyectos que beneficiarán a toda la comunidad y ayudarán en su desarrollo. Idealmente, ingresos del
turismo deben ser utilizados por proyectos que cumplen estas dos metas al mismo tiempo, por ejemplo la creación o la mejora de infraestructura esencial.

- La comisión de turismo debe recibir formación básica en el manejo de recursos financieros. Sus miembros también deben tener un entendimiento básico de los varios aspectos de, y los problemas con, el desarrollo turístico. Sería beneficioso si por lo menos algunos miembros de la comisión acompañarán a los empleados de los hoteles en su formación.

- Las autoridades de Ukupseni deben crear y formalizar reglamentos turísticos de la comunidad misma, y al mismo tiempo asegurar que todos los reglamentos del Congreso General Kuna son cumplidos. Hoy, no todos los guías conocen todos los reglamentos que existen, y los dos hoteles tampoco cumplen cada reglamento en la misma manera.

- Para que estas recomendaciones sean efectivas, Ukupseni como comunidad tiene que unirse y trabajar junto. Las varias comisiones, la gerencia y los guías de los hoteles, y las autoridades deben reunirse a veces para cambiar ideas, resolver conflictos, y asegurar que todos están trabajando por las mismas metas.
APPENDIX III

Project Information

Host Organization

Fundación Dobbo Yala
Urbanización Linares
Barriada Nuevo Reparto El Carmen, Casa 13-B
Detrás de El Triángulo
Apartado 83-0308 Zona 3, Panamá
República de Panamá

Telephone: (507) 261-6347
Fax: (507) 261-7229
E-mail: dobbo@cableonda.net
Website: www.dobboyala.org.pa

Fundación Dobbo Yala was founded in 1990, with the goal of protecting and strengthening indigenous rights while at the same time encouraging the conservation of the environment. Dobbo Yala works with Panama’s various indigenous peoples, supporting them in their fight for economic development and autonomy. Almost all of the individuals running the Foundation and working for it are Kuna, and many come from the community of Ukupseni.

Thank-you notes should be sent to:

Heralcio Herrera, at above Dobbo Yala address
Beatriz García, at above Dobbo Yala address
Johnny and Malvita Morris
Playón Chico
C/o Fundación Dobbo Yala (see above address)

Number of 8-hour Days Spent on Project

In Ukupseni: 17 days, 136 hours
In Panama City: 23 days, 184 hours
Total: 40 days, 320 hours

General Context and Background Information

See Section I – Sustainable Tourism: A Conceptual Overview, for background information about sustainable tourism development and indigenous tourism

See Section II – The Kuna People and their Lands, for information about the Kuna and the Comarca Kuna Yala

See Section III – A History of Tourism Development in Kuna Yala, for general information about the tourism industry in the Comarca

The Issue Addressed in this Project
Small-scale indigenous tourism development allows income to flow into communities and can thus be beneficial for their development. However, it is difficult for communities with little experience in the tourism sector to develop a sustainable tourism that is beneficial for all members of the community, without letting in some of tourism’s harmful effects on local environments and culture. The community of Ukupseni, located in Kuna Yala, an autonomous indigenous territory on the Caribbean coast of Panama, has been developing its tourism sector over the past few years. Yet its residents are still in the process of forming a vision of what type of tourism they want, and how to make this tourism benefit the community as a whole. Because they are new at this, there are still a variety of problems that need to be worked out.

With this project I undertook an analysis of community members’ feelings about the developing tourism sector in their community, its potential benefits and the problems that have arisen, and how it can be improved in order to be both more sustainable and more beneficial for the community as a whole. I also focused on capacity-building within the community, in order to ensure that community members understand tourism and what it can do for their community, and work together to solve the problems that currently exist. Through workshops, an attempt was made to increase the intercultural understanding of Ukupseni’s residents, while pamphlets were created for the tourists arriving at the community’s two hotels, to in turn increase their understanding of the Kuna people and their culture.

A Justification for this Project

In order for tourism to develop in a way that maximizes benefits to both community members and tourists, those working on tourism development within a community must be aware of current issues and problems, and areas that can be improved. For this to take place, the opinions and ideas of as many community members must be known, and the people must learn to work together as one. For this reason I attempted to gather and compile as many opinions and suggestions as possible within a limited time-frame, from as wide a variety of community members as possible. By holding workshops within the community, I attempted to bring together various individuals and committees, to encourage them to exchange ideas and overcome differences.

In order for the relationship between locals and tourists to develop in a positive way, it is crucial that both parties have a heightened sense of intercultural understanding, and are open to natural interaction and learning from one another. For this reason, I included sections in the workshops on why tourists come to Ukupseni and what they are hoping to experience, and made concrete recommendations to the community on how to better foster these types of exchanges. I also created the informative pamphlet in order to increase tourists’ understanding of and appreciation for Kuna lifestyles and culture, as well as to better convey to them the importance of following the tourism regulations set down by the Congreso General Kuna.

Methodologies and Limitations

Over the course of four short visits to the community, semi-formal interviews were held with 15 community members ranging from community leaders and activists, to hotel staff and guides, to women and artisans. Using this information and my own background research, I then held two workshops in April, meant to inform community members about tourism and share ideas on how tourism in Ukupseni can be improved. One workshop was held for children and youth, the other for members of the new tourism commission, the environmental commission, the garbage disposal commission, and other interested community leaders. The workshops were meant to be forums of discussion and opportunities to exchange knowledge. They were designed in an interactive manner to encourage participation and contribution from all those in attendance. This
involved the use of questions and photographs (for the adults), dramatizations and group work (for the children). The ideas and opinions expressed during both the interviews and the workshops, as explored below, have been compiled into a comprehensive list of suggestions for the community as it develops its tourism sector. Copies will be given to Ukupseni’s authorities and its new tourism commission, to provide them with both the knowledge of how residents feel about tourism, and suggestions as to how to improve it. A trilingual (Spanish, English and Dulegaya) pamphlet has been designed in Panama City, to be handed out to tourists arriving at Ukupseni’s two hotels. The pamphlet explores Kuna culture and history, and explains the Congreso General Kuna’s (CGK) tourism regulations.

Although I hope that the information I have gathered and the products I have developed will be sufficient to begin the process of an improvement in Ukupseni’s tourism sector, due to the short amount of time I actually spent in the community, there are several limitations to my results. Firstly, I was only able to speak directly with 15 individuals, and hold two workshops. Although I tried to vary the types of people I interviewed and thus gather as wide a range of opinions as possible, I have clearly only touched the surface of the community’s wealth of opinions and suggestions. However, it became clear after several interviews that certain themes seem to be on the minds of many community members, and I therefore believe that the data I have gathered is nonetheless significant. Another obstacle I faced was the fact that I was not in the community long enough, nor for enough days at a time, to truly get to know the people and the way Ukupseni works, both socially and politically, nor to ensure that the people were comfortable enough with me to share their deepest concerns. Finally, language was of course a barrier, as I did not have the time to learn how to communicate in Dulegaya. Many Ukupseni residents, particularly the women, are not as comfortable expressing themselves in Spanish, and thus may hesitate to really speak their mind. This became apparent during group interviews and workshops, when most of the discussion among community members was done in Dulegaya. In this way, I also did not grasp the nuances of the people’s opinions and ideas.
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