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Ecotourism and Sustainability: Social Impacts on Rural Communities

Case: San Luis Potosí, Mexico

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2013 Kerava

Laurea University of Applied Sciences
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**Ecotourism and Sustainability: Social Impacts on Rural
Communities**
Case: San Luis Potosí, Mexico

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Degree Programme in Tourism
Bachelor's Thesis
May, 2013

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Year 2013 Pages 86

The aim of this thesis was to examine and analyze chosen tourism destinations in the state of San Luis Potosí in Mexico from the perspectives of ecotourism and sustainability. The purpose was to find out how the development of tourism has affected the communities living in the area. Moreover, it aims to find out if the destination claimed to be ecological and sustainable genuinely follows the principles of these concepts.

In the recent years green trends and values have become more acknowledged in all the sectors of business - tourism being not an exception. The rise of green values and discussions of ecological issues and sustainability have created a need for greener travel choices. Instead of beach-resorts and all-inclusive getaways, tourists are looking for authentic experiences and traditions of the destinations including the local people, enjoying the learning and immersion of the culture without closing their eyes of the challenges and drawbacks tourism may cause. As these greener trends motivate tourists to discover remote places to an increasing extent, the rural communities in these areas face challenges in meeting different cultures, turning their conventional sources of livelihoods into unfamiliar tourism business while adopting new routines and procedures. Tourism may work as a savior by ensuring viable economy and providing income for the local people and conserving the nature and culture while offering tourists quality services and experiences. However, if not planned and managed properly, the development of tourism may cause various negative impacts on these fragile areas and eventually destroy them.

The issues related to ecotourism and sustainability are complex. The theoretical framework of this thesis aims to uncover what these concepts really seal in, including literature reviews of ecotourism and sustainability, discussing the economic, ecological and social perspectives without forgetting the challenges of sound tourism management. The empirical section consists of interviews of villagers of the Tanchanchín and El Cafétal towns and to a representative of Tourism Secretary of the state of San Luis Potosí. Observation was also used as a supportive data collection tool.

The results of the study reveal that tourism provides several benefits for the local communities. On the other hand, negative impacts were also discovered. The main recommendations given by the villagers and the researcher were a better organization and management and a stronger support from the government's behalf. The results of the thesis are planned to assist the local communities and authorities to understand the impacts of tourism in the area and make improvements for the future development.

Key words: ecotourism, sustainable tourism, Mexico, rural community, quality of life

Marika Valtonen

**Ekomatkailu ja kestävät toimintamallit: matkailun sosiaaliset vaikutukset kyläyhteisöihin
Case: San Luis Potosí, Meksiko**

Vuosi

2013

Sivumäärä

86

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tutkia ja analysoida valikoituja matkakohteita eko- ja kestävä matkailun näkökulmasta San Luis Potosín osavaltiossa Meksikossa. Tavoitteena oli saada selville, millä tavalla matkailun kehitys alueella on vaikuttanut paikallisiin kyläyhteisöihin, ja lisäksi, seuraavatko ekologisena ja kestävä markkinoidut kohteet todellisuudessa kestävä matkailun toimintamalleja.

Viime vuosina ympäristötrendit ja -arvot ovat tulleet entistä suositummiksi ja hyväksytyimmiksi monilla aloilla, matkailu luonnollisesti mukaan lukien. Näiden arvojen kasvanut huomio ja huoli ekologisuudesta ja kestävästä toimintamalleista ovat luoneet tarpeen vihreimmille matkailuvaihtoehdoille. Täysihoito- ja rantakohteiden sijaan monet matkailijat etsivät aitoja kulttuurielämyksiä, oppien ja ymmärtäen paikallisia ihmisiä ja heidän tapojaan sulkematta silmiään matkailun mahdollisilta varjopuolilta. Samalla, kun yhä useammat matkailijat ovat motivoituneita löytämään syrjäisimpiä kohteita, näissä kohteissa olevat kyläyhteisöt vaihtavat perinteiset elinkeinonsa, kuten maanviljelyn ja kalastuksen, uusiin matkailualan ammatteihin. Uusien toimintatapojen ja käytäntöjen opettelu ja vieraiden kulttuurien kohtaaminen luo haasteita tehden näistä yhteisöistä haavoittuvia nopeasti kehittyvälle matkailun alalle. Matkailu voi toimia kyläyhteisöjen pelastajana tarjoamalla elinvoimaisen tulonlähteen, suojelemalla ympäristöä ja paikallista kulttuuria tarjoten samalla matkailijoille laadukkaita matkailupalveluita ja elämyksiä. Kuitenkin huonosti suunniteltu ja hallittu matkailu voi aiheuttaa hauraille kyläyhteisöille monenlaisia ikäviä seurauksia ja lopulta tuhota alkuperäisen matkailutuotteen.

Eko- ja kestävä matkailuun liittyvät ongelmat ovat moninaisia. Tämän opinnäytetyön teoreettinen osuus pyrki selvittämään, mitä nämä kaksi konseptia todella pitävät sisällään. Teoreettinen osuus käsitteli kirjallisuutta molempiin aiheisiin liittyen, ottaen huomioon ekologisen, sosiaalisen ja ekologisen näkökulman, unohtamatta terveen matkailun toimintamallin haasteita. Työn empiirinen osuus koostui haastatteluista Tanchanchinin ja El Cafétalin kyläyhteisöjen asukkaille, sekä San Luis Potosín osavaltion matkailun kehittämiskeskuksen edustajalle. Havainnointia käytettiin tukevana tiedonkeruutyökaluna.

Tulokset paljastavat, että matkailu tarjoaa useita hyötyjä näille kyläyhteisöille. Toisaalta matkailun aiheuttamia huonoja vaikutuksia oli myös havaittavissa. Keskeisinä kehitysehdotuksina mainittiin matkailun organisoinnin parantaminen ja parempaa tukea valtion puolesta matkailun kehittämiseen tutkimusalueella. Opinnäytetyön tulosten toivotaan auttavan paikallisia kyläyhteisöjä ymmärtämään matkailun vaikutuksia alueella ja löytämään parempia toimintatapoja tulevaisuutta ajatellen.

Avainsanat: ekomatkailu, kestävä matkailu, Meksiko, kyläyhteisö, elämänlaatu

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1 Introduction

This study aims at providing a comprehensive idea of the practices and impacts of tourism in the Middle and Huasteca Regions, in the state of San Luis Potosí, Mexico. Also, a vital element of the topic is sustainable tourism including ecological, social, and economic elements. Today responsibility, environmental and social issues are tendencies steering the choices of companies, governments and single consumers into more socially and ecologically responsible direction. Many tourism leaders see the concept sustainable tourism as a management philosophy (Edgell 2006, 104-105), which indicates the term is not only temporary trend but more of a new viewpoint.

There exist several concepts such as 'ecological, sustainable, green, organic, and responsible' to attract consumers and to manipulate their choices. Some of the terms are solely used for marketing purposes, others for more sincerely and very often they are all mixed up together, creating a confusing jungle of terms declaring responsibility and green values, which confuse not only the consumer but the governments and companies as well. In this paper definitions and versatile opinions of different scholars will be reviewed in order to make a conclusion of what these concepts actually stand for.

1.1 The aim and delimitations

The thread of the thesis is to examine and analyze the impacts of tourism on the Middle and Huasteca Regions of the state of San Luis Potosí. Thus, the main questions is what the impacts of tourism are and how the people of the area perceive tourism industry. Another question is whether tourism has succeeded improving the locals' quality of life. Moreover, to assess the destination's performance as to sustainability by following the criteria and points mentioned in the literature review in order to evaluate whether the ecological, social and economic issues are taken into account properly.

The aim of this thesis is to produce a comprehensive evaluation of tourism operations in the investigated area considering the social, ecological and economical aspects. However, an emphasis will be on the social aspect. The goal is to find out if the public image and promotion of ecotourism in the research area correspond with the reality: whether ecological and sustainable guidelines are followed and what kind of positive and negative impacts regarding environmental, social and economic viewpoints tourism has on the area-

The outcome of the thesis is aimed to help the researcher to gain a profound picture of the tourism in the area. Ideally it will be helpful for the local community to evaluate and to develop and manage tourism in their area by providing suggestions for future development.

Furthermore, this study aims to be a messenger and connector between the government, volunteer organizations, locals, authorities and any other interest groups involved in tourism activities in the Middle and Huasteca Regions.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

To understand the aim of this thesis and the various concepts used for this study, the paper starts with a literature review. First, the concept of ‘sustainability’ will be introduced in a universal sense and later in the frame of tourism. The second key concept is ecotourism, which possess the sustainable ideology in its characteristics, which makes the relation between these two undeniable. Regarding these key issues there are several sub-concepts and terms, which will be reviewed and discussed as they appear in the text.

As in all the business, especially tourism-related, management is seen highly important element to ensure the profitability and continuity of the destination, in ecotourism destination the importance of proper management is amplified. Therefore, the chapter 4 is devoted for the discussion of challenges and solutions including the management issues. When it comes to ecotourism the management cannot be highlighted too much since the core idea of this type of tourism is all about the balance between nature and human action. Without one another ecotourism cannot be carried out purposefully.

The paper continues with a review of tourism in protected areas in Mexico, including national parks and biosphere reserves, which often are scenes for ecotourism. Next, the paper moves on to the particular area of investigation, to Middle and Huasteca Regions. A brief review to areas’ history, culture and economy will be made after which the paper deals with the actual research, interview analysis and conclusions.

Later, the issues of validity and reliability will be discussed in terms of the study in question. Also, problems regarding on data collection will be reviewed. Finally, the last chapter will be devoted for the suggestions for future tourism development in the research area.

2 Sustainable tourism

Nature and its surroundings provide the vital environment and scene for almost any kind of tourism and activities from beach to urban environment or countryside, including versatile activities such as biking, hiking, visiting unique scenes and attractions. Thus, it can be suggested that nature is actually the most important tool and essence of most of tourism products (Edgell 2006, 6), especially in the case of ecotourism. Sustainability is a term referring to a practice that aims to fulfill the current needs without preventing the future

generations of fulfilling theirs. Next chapter will take a look on sustainability in relation with tourism.

2.1 Definitions

Sustainable tourism can be applied to any type of tourism from urban to rural environments, in small or in large scale. As well it can be applied to all sectors of tourism industry from lodging to guiding and transportation. Many times the mass tourism areas are considered to be unsustainable whereas small, rural destinations are perceived sustainable. However, the case of sustainability is more complex and destinations require closer monitoring before being judged. For instance, a small, locally owned guesthouse can as sustainable as a large chain hotel in an urban area. Likewise both can be as irresponsible and unsustainable. (Bien 2006, 5).

According to United Nations' definition (in Bromberek 2009, 3) sustainable (tourism) development “ - - *meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*” This definition encapsulates the core idea of sustainable development, which is to make use of the available resources while they are preserved for the future generations as well. This definition seals in the idea of generosity and mindfulness, suggesting a radical change in one's way of thinking. Instead of greediness and ignorance the trend is to consider the needs of people around without forgetting the environment. Bromberek (2009, 3) also suggests that sustainability is more of an attitude and new worldview where the core challenge is to find a balance between the aesthetic and environmental needs of a project, as well as between tangible and intangible threats and opportunities and to secure increasingly scarce resources for future generations.

Mowforth, Charlton & Munt (2008, 110) also recognize there is a paradigm shift especially in the attitudes and mindfulness of tourists: instead of being completely unaware of the impacts tourism may have, the tourists are encouraged of being mindful over the environment and ecological processes, the wellbeing of the host communities and their economic state and also the presence of tourism industry. In other words, sustainable tourism destination pursues tourists to be mindful over their own actions and help them to understand a bigger scale while enjoying the activities. The key point is to make the best practice, meaning to be aware of the risks and avoid them. However, Bromberek (2009, 6) states that even if all these factors are taken into account sustainability cannot be guaranteed because it really does not mean that nothing ever changes nor anything bad happens. Neither it is maintaining the status quo or trying to reach perfection. In conclusion, realizing sustainable practices is actually detecting and considering the pros and cons of each option available and after careful evaluation choosing the one considered the best for the particular case, giving more

attention to one of the three dimensions which are either economic, ecological or social viewpoint. Inevitably, there is no way to satisfy all of those three equally. Therefore, the mission is to find a compromise between them.

Sustainability covers three essential aspects that must be considered: social, economic and ecological sustainability. Edgell (2006, 4) takes into consideration all the three aspects by stating that sustainable tourism is quality growth managed in a way that does not damage the natural nor the built environment but also preserves the culture, history and heritage of local people. For sustainable practices being implemented purposefully all the three must be taken care of. In the Figure 1 the upper part, sustainable tourism, is displayed as an umbrella covering all the sub categories of social, economic and ecological approaches. The lowest sub category displays different forms of tourism and indicates that all of them demonstrate social, economic and ecological aspects.

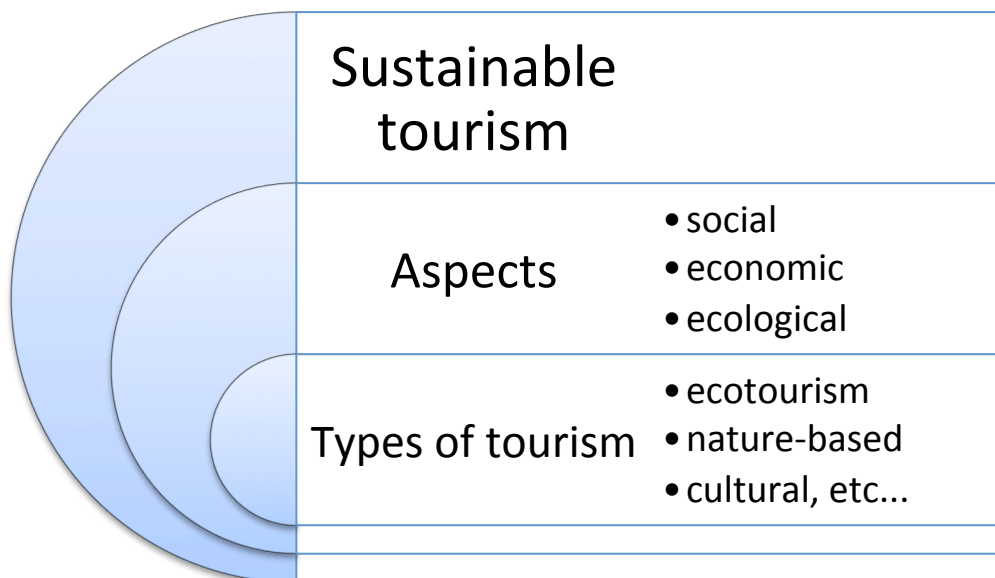


Figure 1: Structure of sustainable tourism

2.2 Social sustainability in tourism

Social sustainability in general refers to operations or management models that enable communities to develop processes and structures which not only support them but also the future generations. In tourism social sustainability pays a special attention to human rights, aiming to increase the opportunities of all the members of community. Also, it aims to distribute the benefits generated from tourism equally between the locals, assuring fair and equal growth within the community and avoiding certain groups from being exploited (Lisse,

2013). As well, the activities carried out in the area should not harm but may revitalize the local culture and communities (Bien 2006, 4).

Edgell (2006, 22. Adopted from *Beyond the Green Horizon: Principles for Sustainable Tourism*) notes that integrating tourism into strategic planning and environmental impact assessments increases the vitality of tourism. Also, consultation between the tourism industry and local communities and organizations is essential to ensure good cooperation and resolving conflicts. In addition, recruiting and involving the locals into the work practises in all levels improves the quality of tourism product, not forgetting the education and staff trainings.

In short, social sustainability in tourism aims to respect and consider the interest of host communities and conserving their culture. Host communities have vital role in the success of tourism: if they are not included in the planning or the actual execution of the tourism operations, the vitality and continuation of the destination is endangered.

2.3 Ecological sustainability in tourism

Ecological sustainability can be seen as a way to live harmoniously with the environment that allows healthy and essential ecological organisms to be preserved (Benefits-of-Recycling 2013). Thus, similar to social sustainability, the ecological sustainability aims to conservation but instead of humans its main interest is in the environment and its flora and fauna. From tourism point of view this is highly important since environment is the essence of tourism destination and activities.

Ecologically sustainable tourism destination should take into account the reduction of overconsumption and waste because it prevents the long-term environmental damage but also contributes to quality of tourism. Likewise, the natural diversity is an essential factor for long-term sustainable tourism and a strong base for the industry. (Edgell 2006, 22). Minimizing any damage for the nature, water, energy and waste management as well as avoiding any contamination are important points also (Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development 2006, 4).

2.4 Economic sustainability in tourism

Economic sustainability is about ensuring the vitality of the business, to make it work efficiently and generate income and value for a long period of time (Sustainable Directions 2010). In tourism economic sustainability often refers to the viability of the economy of a local community. Purchasing and using local services helps to enhance the host community's

economy and strives to involve the locals into tourism industry. The main idea is that the financial gain stays within the community. (Lisse 2013). If the locals receive economic benefits from tourism the industry is more likely to last longer while the quality of tourism product improves as well. (Edgell 2006, 22).

2.5 Triple bottom line and its aims

The combination of the three aspects of sustainability (economic, ecological and social) is sometimes referred as triple bottom line, which pertains to a case where a business operates respecting the social, environmental and economic aspects by monitoring its own performance. In other words, it makes responsible business without destroying the resources on which it depends on and therefore, maintaining itself profitable for longer period of time and ideally benefitting the surrounding nature and communities. (Bien 2006, 4-5).

In relation to the three bottom line theory, Bien (2006, 5. Adopted from United Nations Environment Programme - World tourist organization 2005) introduces twelve aims for making tourism more sustainable. Each one of the aims contribute to one of the three bottom lines - economic, ecologic or social:

1. Economic viability: to verify the competitiveness and viability of the tourism enterprises in a way they will be able to prosper for a long period of time.
2. Local prosperity: to maximize the economic benefits of tourism in favour of the host communities, to make sure the portion that tourists spend stay within the locals.
3. Employment quality: to enforce the number and quality of local work places created and supported by tourism, including improving the level of salary and working conditions and making the jobs available to everyone regardless gender, race or any other discriminative motives.
4. Social equity: to improve a fair distribution of the economic benefits of tourism among the recipient community, also to alleviate poverty and improving opportunities, services and income.
5. Visitor fulfilment: to provide a satisfying and safe experience for the tourists regardless of their gender, age or any other personal feature.
6. Local control: to involve and empower the locals in planning and decision-making regarding the management and future of tourism in their area, in cooperation with other stakeholders.
7. Community wellbeing: to maintain and enforce the quality of life of the local people, including access to resources, services and life support systems, avoiding discrimination or exploitation.

8. Cultural richness: to enhance and respect the cultural richness, historic sites and heritage, traditions and other distinctive features of the host community.
9. Physical integrity: to respect and enhance the quality of landscapes, both rural and urban, and to avoid physical and visual decay of the environment.
10. Biological diversity: to reinforce the conservation of natural areas and its species, minimizing any damage.
11. Resource efficiency: to minimize the usage of non-renewable resources in operation of tourism facilities and services.
12. Environmental purity: to minimize pollution and contamination in air, water and land and the waste generation by the tourists and tourism enterprises.

This comprehensive list shows that there are various points that need to be considered if a tourism establishment or enterprise is to follow sustainable guidelines. Clearly, starting establishments without knowhow or earlier experiences may not be able to adapt or make rapid changes to their way of operating. However, the objective is not to make quick fixes but long-lasting and profound changes.

3 Ecotourism

Deriving from the trend of globalization and urbanization, tourism to the natural areas has become more popular during the recent years. To balance their busy city lives people crave for wildlife experiences in the natural environments and people living in these areas have acknowledged this need and turned their conventional source of livelihood such as fishing, farming and forestry into running tourism business (Buckley 2003, 1).

This kind of radical change from agriculture into a multi-dimensional tourism industry possesses lot of challenges that may be difficult for rural communities to overcome if not operated and managed properly. Due to the lack of know-how, education and experience for tourism business, the communities in these remote natural regions are prone to exploitation of cultural and natural richness and in the worst case can lead to an uncontrolled tourism practice and eventually to destroy the original tourism product: the authentic culture and nature. To avoid this undesirable development many nature-based destination have started to practice a style of tourism, which enhances learning and interaction with the local culture in a natural area respecting and conserving it applying sustainable principles. This practice is known as ecotourism, which is a widely discussed and controversial topic which some scholars highly support and others even deny its existence suggesting it being only a marketing tool for tourism enterprises. To uncover this issue it is necessary to look at the definitions and earlier discussion on the topic.

Bromberek (2009, 8) notices that ecotourism has become a fashionable trend, which emphasizes a direct contact with the nature protecting and conserving it. In recent years the term of ecotourism has become widely visible in the tourism industry. The trend of ecotourism derives from the trend of the ideology of responsible, sustainable and ecological consuming concerning any kind of activity including tourism. It has been argued whether these ecological and sustainable values are only temporary trends or stable evolution in the tourism. This is an issue where scholars have not reached consensus upon and only time will tell how the future will be. The concept of ecotourism is complex and frequently it is mixed with the concepts of nature-based, rural, adventure or other types of tourism. Though, many times ecotourism forms an amalgam with some of the mentioned types of tourism. Moreover, it is difficult to determine what lies in the essence of ecotourism: what kind of activities, people, management and environment are involved? (Weaver 2008, 2). In the following chapters the history and definitions of scholars will be reviewed, continuing with the introduction of the profiles of 'soft' and 'hard' ecotourists.

3.1 History and definitions

For better understanding the concept of ecotourism it is essential to review some of the definitions of different scholars, tourism operators and organizations. One may argue that there exist as many definitions as definers. Depending on the stakeholder some definitions emphasize more the natural aspect, others the educational and sociocultural issues but eventually it can be stated that most of them include the essential components to fulfill the concept of ecotourism. In the following paragraphs we will take a look at the history to see how ecotourism emerged and how it was defined in the early stage. Also, a comparison with the contemporary perceptions and situation will be made.

Ecotourism has existed as long as tourism has existed but Epler Wood (2002, 11) suggest that the modern ecotourism's origins take place in Africa and Latin America where remote natural areas with rain forests, coral reefs and their endangered species became a hot subject for biologists and researchers in early 1980's. These places also were popular scenes for nature film documentaries so when the filmmakers and scientists arrived to these areas, small, local businesses started to prosper to provide accommodation and other services to these travelers. Later on, as the interest of birdwatchers and other nature travelers grew, more formal tourism establishments were launched in places like Costa Rica and Ecuador. However, even if ecotourism existed before the first time of mentioning the concept "ecotourism" can be traced back to the year 1983 when a Mexican ecologist Hector Ceballos-Lascurain defined ecotourism with the following words:

“Ecotourism involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects found in these areas.”

Ceballos-Lascuráin (1983, in Ecoclub 2006) continues that ecotourism entails scientific, aesthetic or philosophical approach even if an ecotourist is not required to be a professional scientist, artist or philosopher. Instead, the important point is that the ecotourist immerses him -or herself in the nature, enjoying the activities or attributes that is not possible to enjoy in urban existences. Eventually, this person will reach an awareness and knowledge of natural and cultural aspects that will transform him or her into a person enthusiastic about conservation issues.

Ceballos-Lascuráin’s definition is said to be the first official one for ecotourism. He emphasizes the observation and studying of nature, animals and culture, whereas Valentine (1992, 6, in Weaver 2004) also points out the management issue saying that ecotourism is ecologically sustainable nature-based tourism in relatively undisturbed natural areas, is non-damaging and non-degrading. Also, it contributes directly to the continued protection and management of protected area, and is subject to an adequate and appropriate management regime. In addition to the aspects of nature conservation and admiring Valentine highlights the issue of management of ecotourism, which many stakeholder agree should be generating value and revenue for the local community involving them in the tourism development in the area inhabited. Thus, if ecotourism is due to be applied properly, the local community must be involved in the planning and management process. As already mentioned in the list of sustainable tourism aims in chapter 2.5, the locals should have the control over the tourism in their area.

In opinion of Scace, Grifone & Usher (1992, 6, in Weaver 2004) ecotourism contributes to conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the integrity of host communities. This is to say; the ecotourist should respect the local culture as it exists while trying to conserve the culture in its authentic outfit. One of the significant aspects Bromberek (2009, 9) notes is that ecotourists are encouraged to get involved in primarily, if not exclusively, outdoor activities such as wilderness exploration, water sports, scenic trips or even soft pastimes such as photographic expeditions. This is not a coincidence since market research shows that ecotourists are especially interested in wildlife and pristine areas while educating the tourists about the value of healthy environment and nature’s diversity (Epler Wood 2002, 7). From this point of view, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2002) defines ecotourism as nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas. Similarly, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES 2006) defines ecotourism

as responsible travel to natural areas that protects the nature and creates welfare to local communities.

Other distinctive qualities of ecotourism are educational features, which specialized tour operators for small groups generally, but not exclusively, organize. Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be small locally owned businesses. Also, ecotourism minimizes negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment, supports the maintenance of natural areas that are used as ecotourism attractions by generating economic benefits for host communities. It helps the organizations and authorities to manage the natural areas with conservation purposes, providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities while increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists. (UNWTO 2002).

Returning to the nature issue, in contrary to Valentin's and Ceballos-Lascuráin's perceptions Weaver (2004, 10) suggest that ecotourism does not necessarily need to be based on purely natural or undisturbed area but it can be focused on observing a single element in a small scale ecosystem, for example, a certain specie of flora or fauna. In this case ecotourism is mixed with wildlife tourism that involves animal or nature watching (Weaver 2004, 19). According to Goodwin (1996, 7, in Weaver) ecotourism is low-impact nature tourism contributing directly to the preservation of the flora and fauna or indirectly by generating revenue and value to the local community. To put an example of a direct contribution could be an activity of cultivating corn with a local family in rural area in Mexico. An example of indirect contribution would be supporting locally owned enterprise by staying at local guesthouse and consuming only locally produced food. Namely these are examples of activities generating benefit for the area and culture visited rather than the visitor and that is one of the main peculiarity in the nature of ecotourism - instead of taking advantage of the visited destination and being concerned only about the benefit of tourist, the fundamental basis of ecotourism lies in the idea of generating value and conserving the visited destination. Still, it is evident that the visitors receive the benefit in terms of education, knowledge or spiritual reward.

During this literature review it has become clear that some definitions emphasize more the natural component than cultural, some more preserving than learning. Weaver (2004, 11) provides an explanation to this phenomenon suggesting that depending on the observer people and cultures are sometimes incorporated to the ecosystem as part of the nature's fauna. For example, this applies with indigenous cultures, which have been living on nature's conditions for several centuries, and their existence is highly dependent on the surrounding environment. One could say that it is not only extremely difficult to make a distinction

between cultural and natural components but also irrelevant because the distinction is made subjectively according to the context and the perception of the stakeholder.

In his criteria for ecotourism, Weaver (2004, 10-16) also adopts a three-essential-component - scale of which first one is 'basis in nature'. This refers exactly to his statement of ecotourism existing in small -or big scale ecosystems, admiring the whole systems as such or concentrating on specific pieces of nature such as birds, mammals, trees or human culture. The second component is 'learning' which may occur in conscious or subconscious level of the visitor. Also, the learning can be 'deep' or 'shallow' depending on the commitment of the ecotourist - the soft ecotourist might be satisfied with the superficial presentation with basic information whereas a hard ecotourist wants to be immersed to the subject, to make connection with other local and global issues and in this way to gain a comprehensive learning experience (Weaver 2004, 43-44). The profiles of soft and hard ecotourists are introduced in chapter 3.3 in more detail.

When it comes to learning about cultures, ecotourism fosters the cross-cultural learning and understanding between the visitor and the local culture. Usually the visitor has already a pre-experience about the destination which has been provided by guidebooks, online sources, word-of-mouth, literature and other resources which contributed to the decision of visiting a certain destination (Weaver 2004, 13). In the process of cross-cultural learning there lies a risk for the host culture having an impact on the visitors' culture which may bias their authentic behavior and predispose them for false or imitative behavior only for entertaining or money making purposes. For example, in a small island named Janitzio in Mexico fishing is one main source of livelihood. Upon the arrival to the island the fishermen make a fishing show for the visitors arriving in a ferry, using the traditional tools and techniques to make it look natural but at the end they arrive asking money from the visitors and posing for photographing. In this case the learning does not happen naturally and its main purpose is to entertain visitor and collect money from them. In ecotourism prerequisite of learning is that it happens in natural environment in the free will of the host culture without the pressure of entertaining or generating money on the tourists. Unfortunately, sometimes the host cultures become very clever to understand what tourists want to see and experience. Consequently this may lead to behavior described above. What makes the matter more complex is that it is not always easy to separate authentic behavior from factitious.

Finally, after this discussion of authenticity we arrive to the third component, which is 'sustainability'. This component amplifies exactly the point of ecotourism to have a minimal impact on the nature and the host culture. Weaver (2004, 14) divides sustainability into anthropocentric and biocentric approaches depending on context. He also points out the question of "sustainable to whom?" For example, in a case where local community living in a

preserved rainforest decides to cut the virgin forest away from a new guesthouse, the decision benefits the culture and visitors but destroys the surrounding ecosystem (Weaver 2004, 15). Consequently, depending on the condition of an ecotourism site he suggest enhancing status quo sustainability, referring to maintain the current situation and balance between the nature and human, and in endangered or imbalanced destination to apply enhancement sustainability, an approach where the nature is the main stakeholder. In these kinds of destination the visitors are directly involved in afforestation projects and carbon offsetting in order to generate benefit for the nature (Weaver 2004, 15-16). Controversially to Weaver's opinion, Bromberek (2009, 6) suggests that sustainability is not about maintaining the status quo or reaching perfection. Apparently, he refers to the fact that in all the cases when tourism is practiced it has unsustainable impacts hence the whole term itself is inaccurate and more of an idea than an actual practice. Therefore, instead of sustainability he prefers to use a term of best practice. However, he admits that if ecotourism is practiced mindfully it is capable to reach an acceptable progress regarding natural resources, biodiversity, waste and emission processing. In his opinion ecotourism appears to be a value - or philosophy -laden approach to tourism, aiming at environmental sustainability. In this regard, he encourages one to ask what is sustained (natural environment, culture, the activity itself) and how is it sustained at what costs and benefits and who is to benefit finally. (Bromberek 2009, 7-9).

According to World Conservation Union (1996) ecotourism is travel to relatively undisturbed natural area in order to enjoy the nature and any accompanying cultural features that promotes conservation, has a low visitor impact and provides socio-economic benefit to local populations. (in Epler Wood 2002, 9). This definition addresses many of the points mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, it does not include the learning aspect, which Weaver emphasizes in his definitions.

One distinct difference between the contemporary and early days' ecotourism definitions is the emphasis on avoiding the usage of non-renewable resources like fossil fuels and to strive to maximize the revenues of tourism for the local businesses and communities. Whereas the earliest definitions are more about conserving the nature and the culture and learning, the modern definitions, without forgetting the basic principles, are broader in the sense of energy and waste management. It is evident that during the past years these problems have been also addressed by many other industries apart from tourism, which indicates the importance of these issues.

To sum up, Epler Wood (2002, 14) identifies nine principles of ecotourism, which comprehend a vast range of important points that define the nature of ecotourism.

1. Minimize the negative impact on nature and culture of the destination.
2. Educate the tourist on importance of conservation.
3. Stress the importance of responsible businesses, which work cooperatively with local people and authorities to meet the needs of the locals and conservation objects.
4. Direct revenue to the management and protection of the natural areas.
5. Highlight the need for regional tourism zoning and visitor management planning for the areas that are to become ecotourism destinations.
6. Point up the importance of long-term environmental and social studies and monitoring programs in order to detect and minimize the defects tourism may be causing.
7. Aim to maximize the economic benefit for the host country, local communities and businesses, particularly to those living near to the natural and protected areas.
8. Ensure that the tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits agreed by the researchers and local residents.
9. Depend on the infrastructure that has been built in balance with nature, avoiding the usage of non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels, conserving the vegetation and blending with the natural and social environment.

Like in the aims of sustainable tourism list (see chapter 2.5), Epler Wood stresses very similar points in the case of ecotourism: generating revenue for the local communities and having them incorporated in the tourism planning. Also, it minimizes the negative impacts on nature and culture and contributes directly to the conservation.

3.2 Connection with other types of tourism

In some occasions ecotourism is mixed with adventure tourism carrying out extreme sports in a more or less natural environment without a concern of preserving the area applying sustainable practices (Ceballos-Lascuráin 2006 in Ecoclub). It is possible that ecotourism activities include adventurous features as well but adventure tourism itself is not ecotourism unless it complies with the sustainable and eco-principles. To make the difference more clear Martha Honey has listed six key principle characters of ecotourism:

1. Minimize impact
2. Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
3. Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
4. Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
5. Provide financial support and empowerment for local people
6. Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental and social climate

(Martha Honey in Mowforth, Charlton & Munt 2008, 110-111).

According to Honey's list what seem to be the prevailing characteristics of ecotourism distinguishing it from other types of tourism is the equality of the host and visitor. The host culture is not placed in the position of entertaining the guest nor strengthening or weakening his perception of the culture visited. Instead, both parties are involved equally and given a chance to learn and respect each other. Whatever activities or cultural peculiarities may be demonstrated by the part of host or the visitor it happens naturally, thrived by free will rather than by pressure of generating revenue. Above all, it is cross-cultural learning and mutual respect.

Epler Wood 2002 (11) suggests that ecotourism together with adventure tourism can be placed under the category of nature tourism. The justification is that ecotourism is about observation and appreciation of nature and culture whereas adventure tourism is more about physical exercise in natural environment. The author perceives ecotourism to be closer to rural or cultural tourism than adventure tourism. The figure 2 illustrates this suggestion.

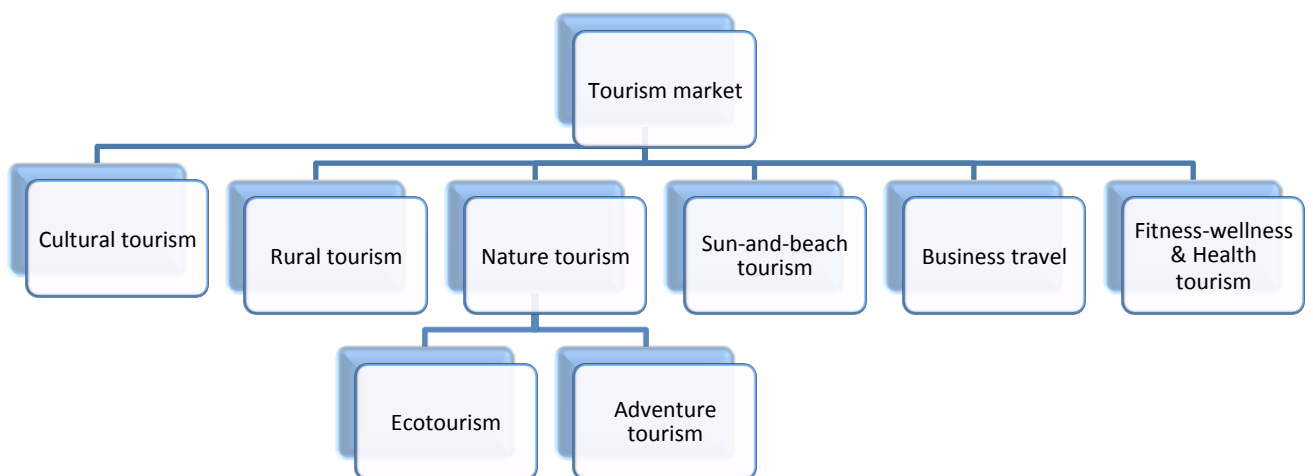


Figure 2: Ecotourism as a market segment (adopted from Epler Wood 2002, 11)

According to the figure adopted from the author, Epler Wood (2002, 9) suggests that ecotourism is actually sustainable version of nature-based tourism including also rural and cultural elements. However, as already mentioned in chapter 3.1 Weaver presents a fairly contradictive viewpoint saying that ecotourism does not necessarily need to be based on

purely natural or undisturbed area. It can be focused on observing a single element in a small-scale ecosystem, for example, certain species of flora or fauna. In this case ecotourism is mixed with wildlife tourism that involves animal or nature watching (Weaver 2004, 19).

3.3 Ecotourist profiles

Like in all types of tourism, the tourist profiles differ according to the motivations and values of the tourists. Inevitably, this is the case in ecotourism as well. When observing and comparing the definitions of different scholars one may distinguish two main groups: the first one including 'hard' or 'committed' ecotourists who are generally perceived to be well aware of their travel and consumption preferences as well as global and local issues regarding sustainability, responsibility and ecological lifestyle. The concept of biocentrism is often related with hard ecotourists. This group of ecotourist is comprehensively committed to carry out their work -and leisure time truly respecting the components involved in ecotourism: with minimal impact on nature and host culture, preservation, learning and direct or indirect contribution to destination's well-being.

Another group comprises the 'less committed', 'soft' and sometimes called as 'shallow' ecotourists who might be aware of environmental issues to some extent but still regard their own comfort as priority. (Weaver & Lawton 2001, 5-8). Frequently ecotourists represented by this group are satisfied with superficial scratch of the eco-setting without going any deeper into the issues concerning the nature or community in the destination (Fuad-Luke 2008). In the following chapters these two profiles are introduced in detail.

3.3.1 Hard ecotourist

Instead of using the word 'tourist', Fuad-Luke (2008, 7) talks about 'eco-travelers', which, according to his definition, goes further than plain ecotourism. He considers an eco-traveler as a person with an augmented sense of awareness of the consequences of his or her actions and actively seeks ways of travelling better by contributing more to the places visited and by stepping with lighter ecological footprint. The main distinction is done between the concepts of 'tourism' and 'travel', this is to say, when using a term 'eco-traveller' Fuad-Luke includes all types of travelling including tourism.

At this point it is noteworthy to recall the difference between a visitor, a traveler and a tourist. UNWTO (2012) defines the term of a visitor as a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside of his or her usual environment for less than a year. The motivation for the trip is business, leisure or other personal purpose but not to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited. A visitor is classified as a tourist if his or her trip

includes an overnight stay. A same-day visitor is defined as excursionist. To make a comparison with the activity of travelling UNWTO (2012) states that a traveller is someone who moves between different geographic locations, for any purpose and any duration. The visitor is a particular type of traveller and consequently tourism is a part of travel.

Observing the previous definitions it can be agreed that not all travelling is tourism, for example, commuting or travelling in the usual area of residence. In contrary, all the tourism is travelling because it involves visiting a destination outside of the usual area of residence. Hence, Fuad-Luke's term of eco-traveler coincides with the term of ecotourist even if it compasses an extended sense of travelling inside the area of residence as well. He makes no distinction between 'hard' or 'soft' traveler. However, in comparison with the definitions of other scholars one may interpret Fuad-Luke's definition to represent 'hard' ecotourist profile since attributes such as 'heightened sense of awareness', 'understanding the interconnections between the environment, economy and society' and 'deep ecologists' (Fuad-Luke 2008, 7, 16) are all likely to be represented when portraying typical characteristics of a hard ecotourist.

Hard ecotourists are often related with biocentric way of thinking, therefore, before listing more characteristics of hard ecotourists it is important to understand what is meant by biocentrism. Fennell & Dowling (2003, 150) point out that biocentric philosophy requires recreational users to take wilderness on its own terms rather than manipulate it to serve human needs. This definition suggests that hard ecotourist perceive humans and nature as a solid function without separating them from each other. However, they also suggest biocentric approach eventually to be anthropocentric - in other words benefitting humans over the nature - because what generates good for the nature finally benefits the humans as well who are part of the ecosystem (Fennell & Dowling 2003, 150).

Weaver (2004, 308) agrees with Fennell & Dowling by stating that biocentric approach contributes to the welfare of nature. However, there exists a controversy of biocentrism being anthropocentric deep down in its essence. After a deeper contemplation one may suggest that out of the two approaches the biocentric one is more committed to generate benefit for the nature, even if including humans. At the end it aims to improve and sustain the whole ecosystems, balancing the flora and fauna without downgrading any specie in it.

Weaver (2004, 43) defines the hard ecotourist as a tourist with strongly biocentric attitude that involve a deep commitment to environmental issues, a belief that one's activities should enhance the resource base, and a desire for deep and meaningful interaction with the natural environment. Also, he states that hard ecotourists are more likely to invade backstage spaces and to disturb wildlife and spread exotic flora and fauna across a larger area. Moreover, he

mentions that hard ecotourist participate to ecotourism activities in order to attain holistic picture and make improvements for the nature and the community in the destination. (Weaver 2004, 106).

3.3.2 Soft ecotourist

The majority of ecotourism markets consist of soft ecotourists. The profile of soft ecotourist can be classified into more anthropocentric type since the tourists' main interest lies on their personal comfort and they are not concerned about environmental issues whatsoever or at least not in the same extend as hard ecotourists. They prefer short-term contact with the natural environment in well-serviced settlement including toilet, parking, and guided tours with minimal physical stress. In contrary to hard ecotourist, the soft ecotourists are often seen in large groups because they feel comfortable surrounded by other tourists. Usually the soft ecotourist are regarded as mass tourists who are taking a one-day excursion in a multi-purpose trip, therefore their commitment is not too extended and they are satisfied with a shallow and temporary contact with nature. In addition, soft ecotourists are likely to have formal travel arrangements with tour operators and travel agents. (Weaver 2004, 44). So, it seems that soft ecotourists often take the nature watching, learning experiences and conservation more as an entertainment than pure interaction with the nature and local community. However, this does not reduce the value of ecotourism.

Inevitably there exist several variations of hard -and soft ecotourists as well. Even if the hard-soft measure is widely used and supported the fact is that the motivations and preferences between the ecotourists vary to a great extent; some of them fall between the ends of hard and soft, producing amalgams of these two types. For example, a tourist can demonstrate traits of hard ecotourist by taking long hikes and observing the nature enthusiastically but when it comes interacting with locals he might not find it comfortable or interesting at all. This illustrates a shallow interaction with one of the key elements of ecotourism, the interaction with locals. Due to this duality one could suggest that classifying the ecotourists is not meaningful at least in all the cases. Instead, the classification and evaluation of the product and destination itself would be more relevant. It is important to acknowledge this fact because it helps us to understand better the ecotourism product that is sought and to determine what kind of clientele is interested in particular destinations and activities. (Weaver 2004, 46).

4 Challenges and solutions in sustainable -and ecotourism

Various people from different cultures are involved in ecotourism business worldwide with their unique ideas and creative approaches, which results that the actions are rarely carried

out same way twice. This is also one major reason why it is extremely difficult to establish internationally common guidelines and criteria of how ecotourism should be carried out. Operating an ecotourism business in Kenya by following certain type of policies might not work in an eco-destination in Mexico because the prevailing nature or culture might require another kind of approach and management.

Sustainable actions and policies fundamentally aim to generate positive impacts on the visited sites by respecting and conserving the environment and the communities. As much as these areas are meant to be conserved and developed, inadequate planning and inappropriate management may ruin this noble idea and instead of conserving to the nature and the people it may destroy it. Problems may occur in one or in all (social, economic and ecological) aspects of sustainability. The next chapter will review some examples of undesired development and possible solutions for sustainable tourism development. Chapter 4.3 will discuss about issues related to management and the challenge of balancing optimally human activity with nature's wellbeing.

4.1 Environmental issues

As ecotourism settlements are typically located in pristine and fragile ecosystems there lies a risk of the ecotourism project of destroying the area on which the whole project depends. In environmental terms the risk areas are waste and contamination of the environment or loss of the biodiversity. Several stakeholders must be included in an ecotourism project in order to assure mindful implementation: businesses, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local communities. Also, certain guidelines and principles must be followed, certifications and regulations applied in order to implement the tourism purposefully. (Epler Wood 2002, 5-8).

The potential negative impacts on environment caused by tourism are erosion of the nature caused by excessive visitation, pollution of the seas, lakes and rivers through boating and littering or other touristic activities. Also, visual facets like hotels blocking landscapes and the noise and traffic caused by tourists can be perceived as negative impacts on environment. In some cases the air quality may suffer due to smokestacks and emissions derived from tourism. Lack of public facilities like restrooms, parking lots or trash disposals may result into inappropriate usage and contamination of the surrounding environment. During the peak seasons the shortages in energy, water or sewage may occur as well. (Edgell 2006, 105).

Yunis (2003, in Buckley & al. 2003, 14-15) indicates the same impacts, adding the heightened risk for forest fires. He notices that these impacts start showing up when the visitor numbers reach the point where the carrying capacity of the destination is exceeded. Also, the author

points out that these problems are mainly derived from the lack of know-how of the companies or governments which leaves them clueless for self-monitoring their performance and development.

Pickering and Weaver (in Buckley & al. 2003, 9) acknowledge that the direct and obvious impacts of tourism, for example usage of off-road vehicles, are understood, but proclaim that there is a lack of knowledge in less obvious and complex issues such as weed and pathogen diffusion. Consequently, they call for more local and high-quality ecological research regarding the management of touristic areas, especially those with high conservation value. As a continuation to the topic, Ralf and King (in Buckley & al. 2003, 89) similarly points out that the land managers must understand the impacts of different tourism activities in different environments and ecosystems. Studies carried about direct and lasting impacts such as trampling are not sufficient for a comprehensive mapping of the impacts. Some impacts such as water-borne pathogens, noise disturbance to rare fauna or interference with plant-pollination ecology are examples of more complex and indirect impacts, which should be included to the monitoring process. The rangers and staff of the protected areas, alongside with competent scientists, would have the responsibility of monitoring these area.

It seems that together with the observation and studies, the environmental education is important tool for preventing the decay of the nature. Bromberek (2009, 23) provides a strategy of 4Rs, which is a useful guideline for educating staff of tourism establishments who later are able to transmit their knowledge to tourists as well.



Figure 3: The strategy of 4Rs, adopted from Bromberek (2009, 23).

In eco-tourism context ‘reduce’ refers to a considerable usage of energy, like electricity and water supply or other key resources. ‘Reduce’ refers to efficient management of waste and emissions. ‘Reuse’ means using a product as many times as possible as long as it still serves its original purpose. Afterwards, when the product does not serve its original purpose anymore, alternative uses should be looked instead of disposing the product. However, when is time to throw something away it should be guaranteed to be recycled properly, in other words, to be delivered to some place or somebody who might still find use for it. If that is not an option and there is no use for the product anymore it should be disposed properly, meaning that it is treated correctly and causing minimum damage on the environment. Lastly, if necessary, the

product or service can be replaced with a new one. When investing in a new product a careful evaluation on the usage, environmental impacts and also long -and short-term costs should be considered. Instead of using energy-intensive technologies running on non-renewable sources that usually provide luxury comforts such as air-conditioning, it is worthwhile to consider using environmentally friendly options such as solar, hydraulic or wind generators. The usage of these resources reduces the dependency on unnecessary energy input. Also, the ecotourists most likely appreciate the option of using environmentally friendly energy resources. (Bromberek 2009,23.)

The fundamental idea of 4Rs is to avoid unnecessary consumption and waste and carefully consider the functions of each object and element involved in tourism operations. These operations are site-specific; still the eco-destinations share the same objectives of using only the prerequisite energy supply in efficient way with minimal impact on environment. Finally, the careful planning and management leads to cost and impact reduce which is beneficial both for environment and the viability of ecotourism. In some eco-lodges even services like cooking facilities, electricity or water have been cut or reduced to minimum for the sake of saving and protecting the resources and the nature.

4.2 Social issues

Inadequately planned and managed destination is likely to cause many social issues to the local communities who are most at the stake. In a case the ecotourism fails the communities and the surrounding environment are the ones to pay the highest price. Therefore, the locals must be fully devoted for the ecotourism management and development since the beginning of tourism development planning. Ideally, before any tourism involving, the communities should be provided with adequate information of the possible consequences of tourism development. (Epler Wood 2002, 5-8).

Barking (1996, in Mowforth, Charlton & Munt 2008, 124) describes a situation where ecotourism creates a socio-cultural conflict between the locals and visitors: In the state of Michoacán in Mexico, the Monarch butterfly reserve is a huge attraction among national and international tourists. Earlier the local communities used the area for resource-based activities but later it became declared as a biosphere reserve in order to prevent encroachment and damage caused by the activities of locals. This resource regulation was perceived as a counter to the locals' interest and created lot of resentment among them. The visitor numbers of the reserve have risen significantly during the years, yet the benefits of tourism are not seen as adequate compensation of the disruption of their original livelihood associated with the reserve.

Mowforth & al. (2008, 137-138) have noticed the indigenous cultures in Latin American countries represent huge varieties and are very often one of the motivators for western tourists to travel in those countries. They find the culture in the destination exotic, attractive, harmonized with nature, totally opposite to their daily lives at home. Therefore, they hope to learn and develop their lives outlooks, on the other hand, contrast their culture in order to see the pros and cons in both their own and the host culture. Many indigenous are involved in the activity of tourism either as objects to be viewed or increasingly as active and willing participants in the exchange. In any case, the cultural difference from the visitors can represent a set of opportunities like entering to money economy, to promote a general understanding and sensitivity towards their life, culture, society and beliefs. On the other hand, the corrupting effect of money and the new lifestyle adopted through entering to monetary system, exposure to alien diseases and conflicts with developers can have serious consequences; decay of the original culture and extinction at worst. Mowforth & al. continues (166-167) that other possible problems related to indigenous groups are that governments try to assimilate them into the national identity, exploit or miss-interpret them if they have no control over tourism in their lands or perceiving indigenous as alien species.

The possible social issue an inappropriate tourism practice may create is also an inadequate attention to the safety and security both to the visitor and locals. In some cases there might occur resentment and friction between the host community and tourists. This happens more likely if the locals feel they do not receive adequate compensation from the tourism, like described above in the situation of Michoacán. Other indicators of social problems are risen crime, drug abuse and prostitution levels. (Edgell 2006, 105).

An efficient tool for preventing these problems is careful planning and assessment of the possible risks and impacts. Although this does not guarantee problem-free results but creates a fruitful soil for healthy, successful and sustainable tourism practices. The locals must evaluate whether the benefits from tourism will be worth the possible drawbacks, which might follow due to the tourism development. Edgell introduces a planning process, which starts with an inventory of the potential tourism attractions. This helps the community to outline the attractions and spots, evaluate their potentiality and have an idea of what kind of development these places would face. Next phase is the development, which should be implied in a sustainable way, enabling the preservation of the attractions. The development step is crucial regarding the future of the destinations since it highly determines the direction of future development and management politics. If implemented purposefully, sustainable tourism should bring short -and long-term benefits and upgrade the quality of life of the communities. Last step would be marketing of the tourism product to the target groups by using appropriate channels such as up-dated webpages, alliances, partnerships and other strategic allies. In addition, usage of e-commerce tools like online payment or reservation

services may facilitate the operational processes and attract customers from a far distance as well. (Edgell 2006, 88-94).



Figure 4: Strategic plan for sustainable tourism development (adopted from Edgell 2006, 93-94)

Edgell (2006, 55) presents a case study about sustainable ecotourism development in the Emberá indigenous communities in Changres national park, Panama. In short, the positive and negative impacts found out in the study were following:

Positive impacts	Negative impacts
+ More money is entering the community	- Dependence on tourism -no economic diversity

+ Relations with government and NGOs have improved	- Training is limited to the same core group
+ Women have more value and are participating in the decision-making process	- Community is dependent on a few people
+ Donations of equipment have been received	- Community is developing into a consumer society
+ Social values have improved and alcoholism has reduced	- Individualism has been promoted by capitalism
	- Internal fights over roles of traditional government and tourism management

Table 1: The positive and negative impacts of tourism in the Emberá indigenous communities in Changres national park, Panama. (adopted from Edgell 2006, 55)

From the Table 1, it can be observed that as a result of tourism development the economic situation of the community has been improved, alongside of receiving donations and equipment. Socially, the community has forced its relations with government and NGO's. The social values seem to have improved while at the same time alcoholism reduced. Also, the women's status seems to have upgraded and they are more incorporated into decision-making process. On the other hand, the increased dependency on tourism and on some key persons was perceived as negative impacts. Other points were the trainings, which seemed to be limited only to a certain group of people, as well as the internal friction regarding the management issues of tourism. Also, some cultural changes within the community, namely highlighted individualism and development towards consumer society, were perceived as negative impacts. In this case tourism seems to work as double-edged sword bringing development in regard of economic and social aspects but at the same time seems to impair some social values, making the community more dependent on tourism.

As a summary, Edgell (2006, 121) suggests that properly managed tourism offers environmental benefits, improved facilities, clean and attractive destinations and the maintenance of historical and cultural heritage. Furthermore, it adds value to the visitors experience and upgrades the quality of life of the local communities.

4.3 Economic and balancing issues

Bushell and Robyn (in Buckley 2003, 197-198) notice that several managers of protected areas are facing difficulties balancing the demands of conservation and visitors. To reach the optimal balance between visitor numbers and conservation, data on appropriate use, visitor-use impacts and visitor needs are required. The visitor-impact management poses several difficulties because systems of management and control are not equipped to predict or monitor often complex, distinct and cumulative impacts on biological diversity or cultural heritage in either the short or long term. Pickering, Weaver, Ralf and King discussed this same issue in the chapter 4.1 in regard of environmental issues. The fact that different stakeholders have diverse views on what constitutes appropriate use makes the matter even more complicated. Another point is that tourism is highly seen as a source of revenue that can replace public funding. Therefore, the managers of protected areas are encountering increased difficulties in balancing the demands of conservation work and visitor management. Consequently from the lack of governmental support, many protected areas become dependent on the support of non-governmental resources such as tourism, local communities, private donations, land users and NGO's.

The pressure of finding an adequate and stable economic resource may drive the destination becoming dependent on the visitor flows and in some occasions to neglect the agreed visitor limits exceeding the carrying capacity (Bushell and Robyn (2003, 199-200). The authors describe a case in Australia where the reductions of federal-government budget led to increased dependence on external sources of funding such as entry fees, licenses, concessions, levies and development rights, which created pressure for higher visitation and granting for more licenses. These kinds of situations may hinder the sustainability of the tourism in protected sites.

Mowforth & al. (2008, 140-141) suggest that Third World governments are often concerned about the economic model of development rather than the actual conservation. Being in that role they are keen to capitalize on the income potential represented by natural resources within their national boundaries. Exploitation of natural resources such as mineral wealth, timber, plant diversity, hydroelectric energy and even wildlife has proved easy to exploit if destruction of the natural environment and removal of its inhabitants can be disregarded. The authors continue that some governments of Latin American countries have indeed managed to disregard the natural ecosystems in their 'development' of natural resources while at the same time stressing the need to protect the environment. This might be the case of Mexico as well, however, further investigation should be done before making any conclusions from this suggestion.

To conclude, when it comes to the ecological, social and economic issues related on sustainable tourism, careful and fundamental evaluation needs to be carried out in order to

provide a truthful picture of sustainability. If some area of the triple bottom line is ignored, the truthful assessment of the level of sustainability cannot be reached. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, it is not possible to implement the sustainability equally between the three dimensions. However, all of them should be taken into consideration by finding a compromise between them. Also, due to the versatile environments and conditions where tourism practices and activities are carried out, individual evaluation is needed since one-size-fits-all grading scale does not fit to all cases. International guidelines and laws are a good start but to gain detailed and accurate information, each tourism destination must be looked at individually.

4.4 Greenwashing and certificating

Greenwashing simply refers to a case where an enterprise or organization presents itself as green, responsible, eco, sustainable etc. when it actually does not follow the generally accepted standards, or worse, if it is in contradiction with them. These false presentation have decreased the credibility of those enterprises truly committed for sustainable and eco principles. One way of separating which enterprises are genuinely following the guidelines is through certification. There exist businesses that follow the principles of eco-or sustainable tourism, some falsely claim to and others do not care. Some would like to but they do not know how. A way of honoring the ones who truly follow and achieve these goals is an outside recognition in form of a certificate. Even if a business would never acquire the certificate, the certification process itself can teach the businesses better and efficient practices and broad their know-how. (Bien 2006, 4-7).

Certification is a way to ensure that activity or product meets certain standards. Different organizations within tourism industry have established certification programs measuring different aspects of tourism, which are: quality for the entire industry, sustainability for all the sectors and ecotourism. Sometimes certification is used interchangeably with ecolabel even if they have different significance. Environmental certification is granted for those businesses that absolutely meet the requirements and standards, which often require no more than the legal regulations. On the other hand, ecolabel is an award granted to an enterprise that in terms of the triple bottom line has significantly better performance than the average business in its sector. The rising awareness of good business practices has raised the requirements for receiving these labels and only those ones who show exemplary performance receive these labels. (Bien 2006, 7-16).

Mowforth, Charlton & Munt (2008, 113) define ecolabel slightly differently than Bien. According to them ecolabel is a seal of approval awarded to a service to enable both producers and consumers to identify providers whose practices do not harm the environment

and society in which they occur. In tourism, ecolabelling refers to the level of responsibility with which the enterprise carries out their operations in a way that all aspects of a service are arranged on an ethical basis, taking due considerations of the local people, the environment and the labor rights of employees. Eco-labelling schemes generally offer use of a logo to those service providers, which meet the criteria for membership of the scheme. This definition does not include the aspect of exemplary or significantly better practice, which leads to a conclusion that there is no unanimous opinion of how ecolabels should be granted.

In Latin American and Caribbean the tourism organizations are initiating a huge variety of ecolabels. By 2001 sixteen different certification labels were available in the tourism industry of Central America alone. Obviously, such a myriad number of labels leaves tourist bewildered of what they actually stand for. With such a range, it becomes impossible to distinguish the relative merits of each label without a degree of research that is not normally accepted element even in the case of ecotourism. Although, ecolabelling is potentially useful as a tool for assisting both producers and consumers its current practice suggest that it may be used more as a tool for greenwashing or as an ideological support rather than a genuine guide for tourists. To overcome such suspicions the numbers of labels need to be reduced, rationalized, and harmonized. An effective mechanism for monitoring the labelling needs to be developed and the labels awarded in respect with specified criteria rather than merely a commitment to improve. Also, the certification should cover social, cultural and economic aspects of sustainability as well as environmental performance. (Mowforth, Charlton & Munt 2008, 113-115).

Bromberek (2009, 43) suggests that despite the various regulations and policies concerning the environmental issues and performance of ecotourism destinations, the concern rises beyond the regulations itself, questioning the intentions and sincerity of tourism stakeholders; there have been cases where eco-terminology is purely applied for marketing purposes and the standards and regulations have been utterly neglected. Unfortunately, these cases might have declined the creditability of ecotourism settlement. On the other hand, they have revealed that there exist misuse of the regulations and one should always be critical when it comes to evaluating tourism establishments.

Epler Wood (2002, 12) agrees with Bromberek that the eco-terms are widely misused. The author points out that this misuse is due to the lack of the regulatory body for ecotourism, which makes it easy for tourism business and governments to promote their destinations even without trying to implement any single principle of ecotourism. Undeniably this has had an impact on the reputation of ecotourism. The author suggests that some, even not all, greenwashing is due to the lack of education and understanding of the underlying principles of ecotourism. International publications and workshops have made some progress in

educating governments and other stakeholders about ecotourism but still the issue of greenwashing continues to be a problem worldwide.

In addition, Honey (in Mowforth, Charlton & Munt 2008, 112) says that many enterprises justify their actions and operations on behalf of being green when in reality the real concern lies somewhere else. For example, many hotel chains offer an eco-option of not having the towels and sheets changed daily. These relatively minor efforts are advertised with claims like “Keep your towels and help us to save the world!” when in reality the hotels are saving sizeable sums on their laundry expenses. Of course small acts can have a positive effect also but saving in one particular field of operations is different than comprehensively following sustainable guidelines.

Since the year 2000 it has been recognized that various environmental certification programs are lacking socio-cultural issues while social and labor certifications do not consider environmental factors. This creates a conflict because for tourism to flourish for a long period of time it relies on a ‘three legged stool’ where one leg presents quality, the second health, hygiene and safety and the third one the triple bottom line (chapter 2.5). If any of these legs is too weak tourism business suffers and eventually will collapse. The trend and challenge in developing new tourism standards and guidelines is to base them on the triple bottom line theory and also to make them work in parallel with conventional star ratings and governments’ healthy and safety regulations. (Bien 2006, 9-10).

In conclusion, despite of all the efforts of trying to regulate ecotourism and to establish guidelines for ensuring better performance, the ecotourism certifying continues being in its infancy. In order to certify eco-destinations, comprehensive studies of social and environmental performance of the businesses and companies should be carried out by gathering data and later verifying this data. Certifying eco-destinations is challenging because it is defined through its stakeholders and marketplace, which obviously vary from place to place. Another challenge is the fact that many eco-destinations are located in developing countries where monitoring and communication systems may not be available. Also, many of the eco-establishments are small-scale businesses, which might be best evaluated with a criteria exclusively designed for them. Even if certification programs for ecotourism have been established, there is an urgent need for international guidelines, which determine how to manage and develop these programs. (Epler Wood 2002, 17-18).

5 Protected sites and ecotourism in Mexico

Many Latin American countries are associated with a vast ecotourism market, Mexico being the market leader (Mowforth, Charlton & Munt 2008, 111), which is no wonder when

considering the scope of tourism and related activities the country has to offer. The variety is the very adjective to describe Mexico as a destination in general: from mountains to forests and jungles, from lakes and rivers to beach, from dry semi-desert to hot tropical climate Mexico provides sceneries for myriad tourism experiences and definitely has something for every taste. Various ecosystems with their colorful flora and fauna make excellent settlings for many types of tourism.

Several natural areas in Mexico are proclaimed as biospheres, national parks or other protected sites to ensure better conservation and control over these areas. The country has a long history in conservation of natural areas since the first national park, Desierto de Leones, was opened in 1917 followed by many others in the 1930s (Mowforth, Charlton & Munt 2008, 122). Burgueño (2005) however claims that even before the Desierto de Leones there was a national forest of Monte Vedado de Mineral del Chico in the state of Hidalgo which dates back already to 1899.

The growth of protected areas in Mexico has been gradual: from 1970s until 2005 125 new protected areas were established since the president of the time, José López Portillo, was concerned about environmental wellbeing of the country and its people. Environmental programs known as Ecoplanes were carried throughout the national territory, which rapidly increased the number of the protected areas. (Burgueño 2005).

Currently there are 40 biosphere reserves (UNESCO 2013a) and 67 national parks in Mexico (SEMARNAT 2012), which, apart from the conservation and protection, are scenes for ecotourism as well. To have a reference point to the San Luis Potosí case later introduced in this paper, this chapter will take a brief insight into some of the natural conservation areas in Mexico that count with tourism activities.

According to the studies conducted by the Mexican Tourism Secretary (Secretaría de Turismo (SECTUR)) the protected areas are popular scenes for eco, nature and adventure tourisms. It is estimated that annually 5,5 million tourists visit the protected areas all around Mexico, generating more 3,000 million Mexican pesos (approx. 200 million euros) directly from the tourism activities. It has been observed that tourism in these areas is heterogenic and each one of the destinations has very different visitation level, which depends on several factors: the destination's relation on tourism industry, its focal attractions and other complements, as well as the infrastructure and level of development found in the area. For the same reasons, it is evident that management styles and policies in these areas differ in high level. The main factors on which the management depends on are institutional capacity and available resources in these destinations. (CONANP 2007).

5.1 Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development

The National Commission of Protected Areas of Mexico (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (CONANP)) is an institution, which main labors consist of conservation of the country's natural heritage through the management of the protected areas. In order to improve the development and management of tourism in protected areas, CONANP developed a six-year strategy (started in 2006 and finished 2012) named National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development and Recreation in the Protected Areas of Mexico (Estrategia Nacional para un Desarrollo de Sustentable del Turismo y la Recreación en las Áreas Protegidas de México). (CONANP 2007). This strategy stresses the importance of considering the needs of each and every protected area, taking the full advantage of the destinations' specific opportunities, establishing a thread that induce the actors of both local and national level to generate synergies and finally, to reach common goals regarding comprehensive development of sustainable tourism in protected areas. First principle objective of this strategy is to focus and join the efforts of those stakeholders who are interested in increasing the tourism in protected areas and to realize this increase by respecting the criterion of social, economic and ecological sustainability. Second important objective is to make tourism to contribute to the conservation and development of the area and to provide alternative livelihood that straightly benefits the local residents. Third objective is to identify the long-term definite changes regarding the management and development of protected areas through two strategic objectives, which are:

1. **Control and mitigation of the impacts of tourism.** CONANP conducts a visitor management and control in order to prevent and mitigate the negative impacts for conservation of natural and cultural heritage of protected areas.
2. **Sustainable tourism development.** CONANP, in coordination with other institutions, supports sustainable tourism development in protected areas, as well as other areas with different conservation methods as a tool for protection, management and restoration for the benefit of communities and local users.

(CONANP 2007)

The actions that need to be conducted in order to reach these objectives are:

1. **Development and effective application of the tools for impact management.** These tools are planning, legislation and regulation policies, collecting fees and monitoring the area.
2. **Support the development of the infrastructure and sustainable tourism projects.** This includes building installations that helps to decrease negative impacts while increasing the positive impacts of visitation. These are, for example, sanitary facilities, proper signaling, clearly defined paths and driveways and informative

material. The sustainable tourism projects aim to provide economic development opportunities for communities and those local users who contribute to the conservation.

- 3. Development of knowledge and skills with respect to sustainable tourism development.** This action focuses on educating the human resources involved in tourism industry. It includes the staff of CONANP, the communities and local users, the locals that use tourism services and finally the visitors. The goal is to develop the environmental education of the local or private guides and enable them to transmit this knowledge to the tourist and in this way to enrich their experience.

(CONANP 2007)

Additionally, part of the Strategy is to build 60 Cultural Centers for Conservation (Centros de Cultura para la Conservación) which purpose is to transmit the values and importance of conservation and to introduce the ongoing projects to the tourists (CONANP 2007). The Commission has really made an effort in conservation of the protected areas. There are a myriad number of protected, touristic areas in Mexico so the work to be done is therefore huge. Next, some of the protected areas, which are part of this CONANP's Strategy, will be introduced briefly.

5.2 Examples of protected areas in Mexico

5.2.1 Sian Ka'an's reserve

Starting from the Yucatán peninsula there are numbers of biosphere reserves and national parks that offer excellent variety of activities and landscapes for ecotourism. One of them is Sian Ka'an's reserve, located in the east coast of the peninsula in the state of Quintana Roo. This United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) world heritage site contains tropical forests, a large marine section and coral reefs. Also, it inhabits a great number of species of flora and fauna comprising more than 300 species of birds, which makes it a very good destination for bird-watchers. The reserve counts with 23 Mayan sites that make it culturally rich as well. (UNESCO 2013b).

5.2.2 El Vizcaino whale sanctuary

In the coast of Baja-California, north Mexico, there is a whale sanctuary El Vizcaino. The sanctuary counts with many interesting ecosystems and offers a shelter for grey whales, sea lions, northern elephant seal and blue whale. In the area there are founded approximately 20 threatened species, including marine turtle. The lagoons are important wintering refuges for

various species of birds. There are many important prehistoric sites, including wall paintings and petroglyphs and ancient ruined structures together with an evidence of European colonization. (UNESCO 2013d).

Both Sian Ka'an's reserve and the El Vizcaino's sanctuary work in conjunction with the UNESCO-United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)-Rare project which goal is to adjoin sustainable tourism development with biodiversity conservation. This four-year project emphasizes conservation education, site-community planning, marketing techniques and business development in order to create processes for using tourism to promote the protection of natural environment. Awareness building and cost and conservation monitoring are on the list as well. The purpose is to give training for the local residents so they will be able to operate as guides and have more understanding on tourism industry. The project also contributes to the economy of the local communities by ensuring the money generated from tourism goes to local people. As a result, the locals have been able to increase the average income per capita, bring variety to their merchandise and include women into the business life. (UNESCO 2013ce).

5.2.3 Cabo Pulmo national park

Cabo Pulmo is another protected site in the state of Baja-California. This Marine National Park consists of pristine beaches and one of the three living coral reefs of North America, which offers a haven for many of the 800 species of marine mammals found in the Sea of Cortez. Various species of flora and fauna inhabits the reef and its surroundings. Mollusks, snails and fish species are diverse and some turtle species visit seasonally to reproduce and looking for food. Some of the species like algae have commercial value. (Baja Life Online, 2005ab). During the 1980's the area was a scene for intensive water sports practice and commercial fishing. Over the time, as a significant decline in fish population became evident, the local population's concern rose and as a result of resilient lobbying the Mexican government declared the area as a National Marine Park in 1995.

Despite of all the conservation efforts, the residents of the town of Cabo Pulmo are mostly responsible of the success of the protection in the area. Although the federal enforcement and financial help are very little, the residents of the town, local and international conservation groups and the park's management are working together to implement programs like Park Enforcement, Reef Monitoring, Nest Monitoring for Sea Turtles and Beach Clean-Ups. (Baja Life Online, 2005a). There exist clear rules and regulations of the permitted and prohibited activities that may take place in the park. Within the permitted activities tourist may practice, for example, investigation, monitoring, photographing, videotaping of the flora and fauna, scuba -and free diving, windsurfing, kayaking, navigation and swimming. Among

the prohibited activities are jet-ski use, fishing, extraction of live rocks or minerals, anchoring in the reef areas, installation of tourist camps and leaving trash on the beach. (Baja Life Online, 2005c).

This brief view into the protected sites has shown that Mexico has a quantity of protected areas with tourism activities. Many of the destinations are committed to protect their natural biodiversity by launching or taking part of conservation programs, establishing rules and guidelines for the visitors and educating the tourists and locals about the importance of conservation. Still, many of the destinations require more action in the federal level, better funding and more human and financial resources to be able to deliver better training and education.

6 The case of San Luis Potosí

The state of San Luis Potosí was selected as an investigation area for this specific study for couple of reasons. Firstly, the state is famous for its rich ecosystems and the variety of different kinds of tourism activities, including ecotourism. Secondly, the geographic location was convenient to enable visits needed for realizing the interviews and observation. Considering these two factors, San Luis Potosí was perceived to be highly potential option for this thesis. Third reason was the timing; the research was carried out during the peak season of Eastern week, from 22nd to 23rd April 2013 and from 10th to 11th May 2013. The timing allowed the researcher to see how the destinations can respond to big tourists flows.

Ecotourism is one form of tourism promoted in the investigation area alongside with several other types of tourism. This promotion is seen, for example, in a leaflet of one local tour operator, Ruta Huasteca Expediciones, where the word “Ecoturismo” catches the eye in the front page. Similarly in their webpage can be found ecotourism packages, which include visits to waterfalls, caves and other destinations (Rutahuasteca 2013). Another expedition and accommodation operator, Huasteca Secreta, offers visitors an eco-resort of El Salto del Meco (Huasteca Secreta 2013). Huasteca is one more tour operator promoting ecotourism in their webpage (Huasteca 2013). Also, the tourism portal of San Luis Potosí state markets ecotourism activities, especially in Rioverde municipality, situated in the research area (Secretaría de Turismo San Luis Potosí 2013). Having a look at the ecotourism offer available in the region, it becomes clear that ecotourism is one form of tourism strongly promoted in the area.

Three specific sites were chosen in order to narrow down the scale of the research area. The first two places were the villages of Tanchanchín and El Cafétal which both are situated in the Huasteca Region in immediate proximity to popular tourism destinations. Tanchanchín is

located near to a Tamul waterfall and river which both are popular tourist attractions. In turn, El Cafétal is situated near to an attraction of Puente de Dios, which is an area comprising of several waterfalls and rivers with crystal clear water. Third place was a spring water lagoon of Media Luna, a very popular snorkeling and diving spot situated near the city of Rioverde, in the Middle Region.



Figure 5: The location of San Luis Potosí in the map of Mexico. (Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico 2012)



Figure 6: The four regions of the San Luis Potosí state: Altiplano, Central, Middle and Huasteca and the surrounding states. (Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico 2012).

All the three research areas are situated in close proximity to each other and are easy to reach following the main federal highway from the state capital also named as San Luis Potosí. All of the four regions have their distinctive characteristics in terms of nature and culture. A closer look will be taken to the exact research areas, which are situated in the Middle and Huasteca Regions.

6.1 Information and facts

The state of San Luis Potosí consists of an area 60 982.8 km², which represent 3.1% of the national territory. The state has boundaries with states of Zacatecas, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Hidalgo and Querétaro. (INEGI 2013). Due to its huge geographical area, the introduction of the state will be emphasized to the research areas located in the Middle and Huasteca Regions. Next, a review to the state's history will be taken following by information about the population, economy including tourism and some other relevant information.

6.1.1 History

San Luis Potosí was declared as an independent and autonomic state in 1824 (Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico 2012). Before the arrival of the first Spanish various indigenous groups originally inhabited the area where the state of San Luis Potosí was founded. Groups called Chichimecas, especially the Huachichile tribes, mostly inhabited the Altiplano Region. The Middle Region was also ruled by Chichimecas, particularly the Pame groups, whereas the Huasteca Region inhabited the Téneks and Nahuas principally. The first Spanish missionaries have been said to arrive around 1540 to the area of San Luis Potosí. They lived in symbiosis with the indigenous groups and exercised spiritual conquer instead of armed battle like elsewhere in Mexico. As a result, the indigenous started practicing Catholicism and gradually abandoned their original religions.

As the time passed, more Spanish conquerors arrived, especially to the area of present city of Rioverde (Middle Region) for it had become famous for its fertile soil and abundant waters. Pedro de Sifuentes was one of the first Spanish to inhabit the region. Near to the spring waters of Media Luna he built a residence which was later converted into the hacienda of Nuestra Señora del Rosario de El Jabalí. By the year 1800 the Middle Region was already full of small towns around the main city of Rioverde. Agriculture and livestock continued to be the main economic activities within the local communities. As the surrounding lands usually belonged to the Spanish owners of the haciendas, the residents of Rioverde cultivated the crops inside of the town. This was allowed by an original irrigation system; the several spring water canals derived from the lagoon of Media Luna, which permitted the cultivation of fruits like figs, bananas, peaches, oranges, limes and prickly pear cactus, also beans, peanuts and cotton all around the year. (Portal del municipio de Rioverde 2013).

Around 1850 Rioverde became a political and economical center of the state, however, the capital still being the city San Luis Potosí. The local groups, mainly led by the family Verástegui had a big influence in political decisions regarding not only the state but also the whole nation. Years later, during the Mexican revolution, the agrarian reform was applied which radically changed the tenure regime; the haciendas disappeared and the small communities started to flourish. During the 1900 and 2000 centuries the municipality of Rioverde has been a political and economic center of the Middle Region. (Portal del municipio de Rioverde 2013).

6.1.2 Population

According to the Mexican National Statistics and Geography Institution (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI)) statistics of 2010, the state of San Luis Potosí consists of 58 municipalities with 2 586 000 inhabitants including the number of those inhabitants without

any registered information. The Secretary of Economic Development (Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico 2012) forecasted the number for 2012 to be 2 660 278 in total, of which 1 712 699 living in urban areas and 947 579 in rural areas. The annual population growth of the state is 1.4, which is below the national level of 1.8.

Concerning the study of this thesis, there is no point for going through the demographics of all the state, however, it is important to take a closer look to the research areas used for this paper. For example, if we observe the Aquismón municipality where the town of Tanchanchín belongs to, the overall population is 47 423, which represents 1.8% of the state's population, 23 894 being men and 23 529 women. In the other municipality of Tamasopo where the town of El Cafétal belongs to, the corresponding numbers were 28 848 of the total, which represents 1.1% of the state's population, 14 563 being men and 14 285 women. The third area of Media Luna is situated in the Rioverde municipality where the numbers are: 91 924 total, 3.6% of state's population, 44 574 men and 47 350 women. Additionally, the average age of all the state is 25 years. The same number in the municipality of Aquismón was 19, in Tamasopo 25 years and in Rioverde 25 as well. Only the municipality of Aquismón seems to be below the national average in the average age.

In all the state the amount of habitants under 15 years was 30.4%, the national average being 28.9%. (INEGI 2013), which suggest the population being young in the research area in national average. From this statistics it can be observed that the number of men and women in these municipalities seem to be very equal or at least there are no significant differences. The average age of the three research areas is 23, which is below the state's 25 years, thus the population seems to be younger than in general in Mexico.

More interesting points regarding the population demographics came up: the state is above the national level of the population who speak indigenous languages. The national level is 6.7% whereas the San Luis Potosí's is 10.7%. The table presenting the availability of basic needs showed interesting numbers as well: only 59.9% of the state's population have access to pipe water, drainage system and electricity in comparison to the average national of 68.0% which have access to all three. When it comes to the access to private commodities such as fridge, washing machine, television, computer and Internet, the numbers were all below the national level except a vehicle ownership with 44.5% of the population, which was slightly above the national level of 44.2%. Comparing educational levels revealed that 7.8% of the state's population is without any schooling whereas the national number is 6.9%. Also, in the high school and university levels the state's numbers are below the national average. However, in basic education San Luis Potosí goes above the national average of 56.1% with a number of 59.2%. The basic education consists of preschool, primary and secondary schools. (INEGI 2013).

The conclusions that can be drawn up from these statistics are open to interpretation but they still help to draw up an image of the population. Because of the high number of people speaking indigenous languages it seems that the presence of indigenous groups in the area is stronger than in some other states. The low number of people having access to basic commodities is important observation as well. An interesting indicator was the schooling and educational statistics, which showed up that number of people without any schooling and the people receiving higher education in the state, are both below the national average. Surprisingly, the statistics indicated slightly higher average in the basic education from preschool starting around the age of 3, continuing to primary and secondary until the year of 15. The notion suggests that those who receive the basic education seem to be more likely not to continue to higher educational levels. Various reasons for this phenomenon may exist, but one could be that higher education is not perceived important or the school expenses are too high. Also, after finishing the elementary, the children are maybe needed in working life, which prevent them continuing their studies.

6.1.3 Economy

The state's gross domestic product with current prices is estimated to be 285 441 million Mexican pesos for the year 2012 (Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico 2012). Regarding the economic participation, the state was placed below the national average of 58.9% (population) with a number of 56.0%. This included the population up to 14 years who were perceived capable of contributing to the economic activities. The distribution of taking part to economic activities between men and women was also below the national levels. Only 39.1% of the state's women, comparing to the national number of 42.9%, contributed to economic activities. In comparison to men population of the state, 74.7% took part to the activities, which indicates lower participation in the national average of 76.6%. Economically inactive population of the state was 44.0% in comparison to the national level of 41.0%. In 2012 10.4% of the state's population did not have any income (the national number 8.4%). However, when it comes to two different sources of income the state was above the national average of 36.2% with a number of 40.3%. (INEGI 2013).

The percentage of unemployment seems to be smaller in the state than in the national level. Since the year 2000 until 2012 the unemployment level has been below the national average, for example in the last quarter of the year 2012 the state's unemployment was 3.1% whereas the national average was 4.9%. In 2008 the population working in agriculture represented 19.7%, above the national 14.3%. The dominant sector, however, goes to manufacturing industry with the percentage 52.3, followed by trading and other types of business with 15.0% in 2008. Agriculture by its part represents important part of the state's economy. In the

national level, the state is 2nd producer of corn, soya and sugar cane and important producer of other vegetables and fruits like orange, green chili, tomato and prickly pear cactus. (INEGI 2013). Mining is an important source of livelihood also as the state is actually the first producer of fluorite in a national level. Cadmium, zinc, copper, silver and gold are other minerals found in the state. (Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico 2012).

As a conclusion, the participation to economic activities is less than in average on national level and so is the women's participation as well. The lack of income was higher than the national average. On the other hand, having two incomes was more common and the unemployment levels were smaller than in the national average. This suggests that the population is practicing more than one type of business or employments. The predominant sectors in the state's economy are manufacturing industry and agriculture.

6.1.4 Tourism

There are no straight indicators concerning tourism sector, however, in a table representing characteristics of different economic units, in the non-financial services are included leisure and entertainment activities alongside with sports and other recreational services, also short-term accommodation and restaurant services. These all can be perceived as services used by tourist. 9.7% of the state's population is working in this sector. The touristic offer table from 2011 presents that in the whole state there were 354 accommodation establishments, placing the state in the 21st position out of the 32 states. Out from these establishments 30.0% was categorized without star rating and they consists of guest houses, cabins, suites, trailer parks, apartments, bungalows, camping areas, haciendas and other types of establishments. (INEGI 2013). With the percentage of 9.7 the tourism related activities make the 3rd biggest economic sector within the state population, after manufacturing industry and several types of business including trading.

6.1.5 Crime

The crime rates of the state were high in the national level. In 2011 San Luis Potosí held the 5th place among the states with highest crime rate. This rate was calculated by dividing the total number of crimes in the federal state of occurrence among the population aged 18 or older, multiplied by 100 000 habitants. This gave a number of 34 066 people committing crimes whereas the national average was 29 372. (INEGI 2013). This information has a value in terms of this thesis because a common perception among some people is that San Luis Potosí is a dangerous area. Ukwaiy & al. (2012) have noticed that the places that develop unsafe reputation may be substituted by alternative destinations that are perceived safer by tourists. This could be the case of San Luis Potosí as well, and therefore, is important to mention in

this paper.

6.2 The Middle Region

This zone is mainly based on agricultural activities. 2.0% of the gross value of manufacturing is generated here, the principle subsector in manufacturing being the food industry. The region's territory extends on 12 776 km², which is an equivalent to 20.51% of the whole state's territory. The climate is changing; occasionally dry, at times rainy and warm. The annual average temperature is 20,41 Celsius grades. In 2012 the region's population was 280 735 inhabitants of which 201 270 aged 14 or older. The population number corresponds to 10.55% of all the state's population. (Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico 2012).

The tourism offer of the Middle Region is versatile with several destinations. It would be excessively scrupulous and time-consuming to specify and introduce all the destinations the region has, therefore, the tourism offer will be introduced in more general framework with some occasional destinations mentioned. Because the lagoon of Media Luna is included in the empirical part of this paper it will be introduced in more detail.

The Middle Region is a mixture of thriving, developing cities and small towns that still call back to their indigenous and missionary roots. The area offers tourists various natural wonders from lakes to waterfalls and from caves to forests. (Guest Huésped San Luis Potosí Guide 2012, 42). The area has one of the richest ecosystems in Mexico, which attracts tourist to seek natural beauty and relaxation by swimming or exploring the nature.

The city of Rioverde offers more urban experiences with museums and art expositions and collections of fossils, petroglyphs, archeological artifacts as well as cultural exhibits. Approximately 30kms to west from Rioverde is situated another natural tourism destination of Cathedral and Angel Caves, which are naturally formed, underground caves where tours are organized. San Ciro de Acosta is an area with rich ecotourism offering, including forest landscapes, unexplored caves of the Sierra Gorda mountain range and the San Rafael Volcano. Lagunillas is a municipality with many natural wonders such as Colorado Lagoon with an enormous cliff for rappelling. Also, there are remains of an old volcano of the Culberas Hills and Pinihuán Canyon, which are popular destinations among hikers and rappellers. In addition to the natural wonders, in the municipality of Rayón one may find the biggest waterfall of the Middle Region: La Llovizosa with a height of 40 metres. In the surroundings it is possible to practice rappelling, cliff jumping, swimming and canyoneering. In the municipality of Santa Catarina, the Santa Maria Acapulco community offers an opportunity for interacting with indigenous cultures, for it is a historic and ceremonial center for Pame ethnic group. (Guest Huésped San Luis Potosí Guide 2012, 42-47).

Apart from exploring the nature, cities or small communities, other motivations for some tourists to visit are the historical and religious events that took a place in the area. During the Mexican Revolution around 1910 the area was a scene for important events that changed the course of the country. Regarding religious tourism, there are lot of national tourists who visit a stone where the Virgin Guadalupe (an important religious icon for Mexicans) is told to have appeared. These people arrive in huge groups, walking or with horses or donkeys. (Interview 2013).

The lagoon of Media Luna is considered to be the most important natural spring in San Luis Potosí, from a scientific, historic and ecological point of view and is also one of the most valued sites for enthusiastic divers. From the depth of 0,9 meter to 36,5 meters the lagoon is a home for countless species of wildlife, including submerged Sabino trees, Casuarina trees, tule rush, flowering *Nympaea* and hidden archaeological remains. (Guest Huésped San Luis Potosí Guide 2012, 43). Media Luna means The Half Moon and it has been named after its shape of half moon: it has approximately 300 meters length and 60 meters of width. It is a volcanic crater which makes the water +30 Celsius degrees all around the year. The crystal clear waters that well constantly from the undergrounds make it possible to see all the way until the bottom of depth of 36,5 meters. Outside of Mexico the lagoon is known as Mammoth Lake because remains of mammoths have been found in the lake. (Turismo en Mexico 2013).

Nowadays the site offers tourists recreational activities and counts with accommodation facilities, camping areas, restaurants, small shops and diving and swimming equipment rentals. (Guest Huésped San Luis Potosí Guide 2012, 43). The tourists who come to see the lagoon represent both national and international backgrounds. According to the registers, there are tourists from South America, United States, Canada, Europe and Asia. The national tourists come mainly from the Federal District, Querétaro and other surrounding states and obviously from the state of San Luis Potosí as well. (Interview 2013).

6.3 Huasteca Region

The Huasteca Region is situated to east from the Middle Region. The area is mainly agricultural, 5.6% of the gross value of manufacturing is based on this area, the main manufacturing subsector being the food industry. The extent of the region is 11 409,46km², which corresponds to 18.31% of the state's territory. The climate of the area is tropical and rainy, the annual average temperature being 23,89 Celsius grades. The region's population in 2012 was 732,525, which represent 27.54% of the whole population of the state. The amount of people aged 14 or older was 515 347 inhabitants. (Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico 2012).

The Huasteca Region is abundant with flowing, turquoise rivers and waterfalls and pit caves,

which are claimed to be its best features by many visitors. Archaeological sites and ethnic communities with their pre-Hispanic traditions can also be found in the area. The most important city of the area and secondly important of the state is Ciudad Valles for its recent economic and urban growth. The most hotel and touristic services are found in the city, which main attractions are the museum of the Huasteca Region and the museum of the Huasteca Cultures. Agriculture, industry and business are the main economic activities of the city. (Guest Huésped San Luis Potosí Guide 2012, 50).

For those interested in historical and cultural tourism, an excellent destination would be the pre-Hispanic city of Tamtoc, found around 1150 B.C. The city was an important religious and political center whose inhabitants possessed knowledge of engineering, hydraulics and astronomy. More than 60 hillocks, which used to serve as religious or economics centers and other purposes, have been discovered in the area. At the present, tourists may visit this archaeological site by taking a rowboat along the Tampaon river. (Guest Huésped San Luis Potosí Guide 2012, 60).

One of the area's natural attractions is a group of seven waterfalls, Micos, which provides tourists with chances of practicing adventure sports like kayaking, waterfall hopping, rafting, rappelling and skydiving alongside with less extreme activities like caving, hiking and mountain biking. (Mexico Desconocido 2013). Towards west from Ciudad Valles in the municipality of Tamasopo there are various waterfalls to visit. Here is also situated the spot of Puente de Dios, which is the main attraction near the town of El Cafétal, one of the areas used for this thesis. Puente de Dios is a humid spot in the forest with caverns and deep blue waters where it is possible to swim and snorkel, jump from the cliffs or just admire the surrounding natural beauty. (Guest Huésped San Luis Potosí Guide 2012, 62).

In the municipality of Aquismón one may find the Tamul waterfall, which is claimed to be the most important and beautiful waterfall of the whole state. The best way to enter this 105-meter tall waterfall is through the Tanchanchín community where professional guides with their boats take the tourists near the waterfall. Often the tour includes a visit to a Cave of the Water (Mexico Desconocido 2013), which is approximately 40 meters deep cave full of crisp rainwater from the mountains where tourists may take a relaxing dip during the tour. The Tanchanchín town was also one of the research areas used for this study.

7 Research methods

The research methods of this paper consist of ethnographic research, in other words, interviews, observation, casual discussions and notes made in the field. Qualitative methods were chosen for this study as it was estimated to produce more holistic and in-depth information of the research objects. This study is strongly concentrated on eco -and

sustainable tourism perspective and the main emphasis on the interview results will be in social impacts. The following chapters explain the usage and application of the mentioned research and data collection methods.

7.1 Qualitative research

Tourism is a field of study involving social sciences, in other words, it investigates the behavior of people in their natural and social environments. Qualitative research in social sciences aims to find out about the motives and fundamentally seeks answer for questions like *why*, *how* and *what is happening?* According to McNeill and Chapman (2005, 2) qualitative research is first and foremost empirical, meaning that all the evidence must be based on situations and experiences of the real world, whereas theoretical “what if?” scenarios are excluded.

The motivation for conducting a qualitative research rises purely from the curiosity of human being. One wants to know *why* and *how* things happen and qualitative approach provides the tools for investigating any social phenomenon. One motivator to conduct such a research is simply the thirst for knowledge, for example, to understand how the whole society or small cells like schools, households, and human relations function. A qualitative approach could be applied in a situation where a specific culture or a small community is studied and the experiences and stories of those living inside are regarded highly important. Qualitative research is not based on statistics so in general it does not require a sample group hence it emphasizes individuals’ experience and data collection techniques like in-depth interviews and participant observation which enable deeper connection and involvement between the researcher and the research object. Basically, any situation where one needs to understand human behavior, social phenomena, different culture, reasons behind of some phenomena or behavior, qualitative techniques are highly useful. (McNeill, Chapman 2005, 7).

7.2 Ethnography

Ethnographic research model includes participant observation, which basically means documenting about the way of life, culture or social groups (McNeill, Chapman 2005, 89). At its simplest sense it means that the researcher integrates itself to the culture or community, which he or she wishes to study about. The fundamental purpose of this kind of data collection method is to gain a profound, detailed picture of how is living in that certain community. Like interviews, observation also involves structured, known as unobtrusive/outside, aspect and unstructured, participant/inside aspect. In outside observation the observing is limited on the certain frames aiming to gain data only at specific time or way of behavior in order to produce more quantitative information (McNeill, Chapman

2005, 92-93). In contrary, qualitative data is gained through inside observation where the researcher actively participates to the group activities sharing the experiences and the social reality. Thus, all the interpretation and data collecting is purely based on listening, seeing and communication within the group (McNeill, Chapman 2005, 95). This is challenging for the researcher because one needs to consider what needs to be observed, how much and to what extent.

According to McNeill and Chapman (2005, 96) one must consider what is his or her role as an observer; a “complete participant”, hiding one’s true identity and motives from the group or “participant as observer” when one makes clear the motives and roles for being with the group. One issue with participant observation is also the fact that it is time-consuming and requires full-time observation to gain comprehensive and valuable data. (McNeill, Chapman 2005, 97).

There exist some ethical issues related to observation, which are discussed in more detail in chapter 7.4. The personal observations of this empirical study were realized in the role of complete participants. While visiting the towns of Tanchanchín and El Cafétal, Tamul waterfall and Puente de Dios, the researcher used the local tourism services like guiding, restaurant and accommodation, presenting herself as regular tourists in order to be treated as one and to receive the same information and experiences any tourist normally would. Many times after using the services there was casual talking with the locals. On this moment the researcher sometimes revealed the fundamental purpose of her visit and asked the local for an interview. The observation was also used in the site of Media Luna where the observation basically included the facilities like camping area, toilets, showers, waste management, other tourists and the personnel.

7.3 Interview

As part of ethnographic research, unstructured or semi-structured interviews are used to produce qualitative data. They resemble an informal conversation where the attitudes and personal opinions and experiences are aimed to be uncovered. Basically the interviewer has the topics to discuss about but does not ask standardized questions and allows the interviewee to lead the situation.

With unstructured interviews it is possible to gain more in-depth and detailed data because it gives the interviewee an opportunity to talk without limitation of topics, thus, perhaps to reveal something unexpected that the researcher would never have thought of. This may increase the validity of the findings of the research, however, one needs to keep in mind that all interview situations are interpret subjectively, accordingly the personal opinions, values,

social class and ethnicity of both interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, there always exists interview bias affecting on how the parties understand and interpret each other and what kind of information eventually will be gained out of the interview situation. Nowadays phone and online interviews exist as well but the problem with them is that the body language and facial expressions are excluded (unless using Skype). (McNeill, Chapman 2005, 56-66).

The interviews of this study were meant to be half-structured interviews with determined open questions. However, for various reasons they ended up being more unstructured interviews or mixture with half-structured. The very first interview was a kind of a pilot where the researcher tried to stick asking the determined questions, however, already during this interview it became clear that more narrative interview model would possibly work better. This happened because already after the first question some interviewees were very eager of telling about their lives and experiences, providing answers to several questions at once, which made it pointless of asking some questions. In some cases the interviewees were asked to provide elaboration to some matters.

Other reason for ending up to the partly unstructured interviews was that the interviewees seemed to have hard time in answering to some questions, mainly regarding the quality of life and their decision-making power. Also because in the interview situation itself it felt more natural to let the interviewee to speak without interruptions, occasionally asking details related to the topics that were more relevant from the point of the research. This arrangement seemed to work better for the interviewees as well since they could naturally move on from one topic to another, which probably facilitated them to keep up with their thoughts and to be more relaxed. The themes and topics discussed, though, were same in every interview.

7.4 Research ethics

When conducting a research the researcher should always consider the ethical issues and conduct her research in a way that does not cause any harm to the subject studied. Even if the researcher has the right to study and observe she also has the obligation and responsibility to protect the subject. McNeill and Chapman (2005, 12-14) discuss about six different ethical rules that a researcher should bear in mind. Firstly, the research object should always be aware that he or she is being studied i.e. the researcher should be honest in the first place about her motives. This rule suggests the role-playing and infiltration, as data collection methods are ethically wrong.

Secondly, the researcher should not engage oneself to deception and establish friendship with the subjects studied. Also, one needs to keep the subjects updated constantly about the

progress of the study and never conceal information from them. Thirdly, the privacy of the research subject should be preserved. However, due to the nature of qualitative research it might be challenging not to intrude to a private area of people's lives such as families or persons' behavior and opinions. Fourthly, the identities of individuals must always be protected. The information that the research subject provides must not be able to be tracked back later on, therefore their identities must be disguised with anonymity or names must be changed. If the identities are sealed properly the research subject will more likely feel confident to open up and share personal information with the researcher. Fifthly, the participants of the research should never be harmed physically. This is rarely a problem because qualitative research does not involve scientific experiments. Still, emotional harm may be caused accidentally e.g. when asked insensitive questions where the object need to confront uncomfortable memories or think about people who have injured her earlier. This applies especially in a case of crime victims. Lastly, the researcher need to think about the legality and immorality and avoid falling into a situation where she might get involved in crime, give false statements or lie simply for the sake of the research. All of the rules above should be respected. If not, people might not have trust on the researcher and thus she will fail to produce a valid and reliable research. (McNeill and Chapman (2005, 12-14)

8 Interview analysis

The objective of this thesis is to analyse the state of tourism industry in the research area from sustainable and ecotourism perspective. The objective of the interviews was to investigate how the local people experience tourism in their habitat, how their lives have changed due to tourism, what they wished to be done differently and what are their hopes for the future. The interview questions were drawn up from this approach. An important factor worth of consideration was that many of the interviewees might be without basic education and, therefore, it was important to form the questions in down-to-earth language.

As this thesis concentrates strongly on ecotourism perspective, which emphasizes understanding and equality between the tourist and the host community, it was important to find out whether this kind of development was happening. Ecotourism is one form of tourism promoted in the investigation area alongside with several other types of tourism (see chapter 6).

The idea of the interviews was to gain personal experiences and viewpoints of the interviewees, therefore questions were asked in a way the interviewees were able to tell with their own words during the time they wanted. As mentioned in the chapter 7.3, the half-structured interviews ended up being partly unstructured with defined themes. Also, some questions were left out or asked in different order in the interview situation according to the

topic the interviewee was talking about. Many times when answering to the first questions, the interviewees already provided answers to many questions later on and, for this reason, these questions were dropped out.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the investigation areas consisted of towns of Tanchanchín and El Cafétal, both in the Huasteca Region where the locals were interviewed. The governmental viewpoint represented by the local SECTUR licentiate took place in the tourist attraction of Media Luna, in the Middle Region district. Altogether, the study consists of five qualitative interviews, four of which to the local people and one for the SECTUR licentiate. The interviews were conducted during April and May 2013, in Spanish with a presence of a native Spanish-speaker to confirm the interviewees would understand the questions correctly. All the interviews were recorded in order to review and transcript them later on. The interviews lasted from 11 minutes up to 1 hour 5 minutes. The interviews were analysed and categorized according to the themes and topics that were relevant for this paper.

The interviewees can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of the local people of towns of El Cafétal and Tanchanchín who were casually selected for the interviews. The other group consist of the SECTUR's licentiate of tourism of the Middle Region who was contacted in advance and informed about the questions and themes of the interview. He was from Rioverde and the interview took place in the touristic site of Media Luna. The original plan was to interview a person of local tour operator that provides eco-, adventure-, cultural-, , extreme tourism tours in the state of San Luis Potosí in order to get some more in-depth information of ecotours etc. However, in the time of the interview this person was not available and unfortunately the interview could not be conducted. The reason for selecting two groups was mainly to find out if the perceptions and opinions of non-governmental and governmental persons are different from each other since the representatives of these groups possess very different kinds of backgrounds in social and economic respects. Regardless the backgrounds of the interviewees, both groups still represent the local opinion.

The advantages and disadvantages of tourism and living in the town were important theme of the interviews. Alongside, the safety issues, governmental participation and future suggestions were topics that some interviewees discussed eagerly. However, occasionally some questions seemed to be very difficult to answer for the villagers, which could be due to not understanding the question or reluctance to answer.

In the next chapter the answers are analysed and results presented according to the prevailing themes observed in the interviews. The analysis follows the interview structure, starting with the review of backgrounds of each interviewee, later moving on to in-depth

discussions about tourism and quality of life and finishing with future expectations and recommendations. The interview questions are attached at the end of this thesis.

8.1 Interview results

8.1.1 Population demographics

The average age of the interviewees was 40.4 years, which, according to INEGI (2013) suggest rather high average in the national level and even in the research area, since the statistic showed that the average age in the research area is 23 years. However, as the interviewee group consisted only from four, randomly selected persons with uneven ages, the oldest one being 66 years and youngest 27, this explains the high average. Five persons is not a number high enough to evaluate the age structure accurately but and it must be noted that one of the interviewees was remarkably older than the youngest one.

The amount of men and women seemed to be very equal, at least without outstanding differences. Still, only one of the interviewees was a woman. However, this could be more of a result of women being reluctant of answering questions due to the cultural issues. The woman who was interviewed first suggested to interview her husband instead of her because she felt that was not able to provide the “correct” information for the study. However, after having being explained the aim the study, she agreed for being interviewed. The phenomenon of women being shy taking part into this kind of studies or in general expressing their opinions and ideas could be related to a very common case observed in Mexico where women, especially in rural areas, are dedicated for taking care of the house chores and the children whereas the men are assigned with responsibilities of generating income, holding opinions and taking decisions.

Another point worth of mentioning at this point is that many times in rural areas of Mexico an uneven population structure is common. There are villages of women and children without a presence of men. This is due to the phenomenon where men of the village migrate outside of the country, very often all the way until The United States, to look for source of livelihood in order to support their families back at home. This case could be reality in the research area as well, however, according to the researcher’s observation and the interviews, this kind of development was not happening. Actually, there was one opposite case where one interviewee’s wife and children live in The United States but he himself has always lived in the town of Tanchanchín.

Majority of the interviewees were born and lived their whole lives in their town of origin. The exception was a woman who got married with a man from the village of El Cafétal, who later on moved there with her husband. Their two daughters were born in the village. All of the interviewees, except one, had their family, sisters or brothers, parents or children living in the town also. This evidence suggests that moving outside of the town of origin is not common within this population.

All of the interviewees were working for tourism business, the majority temporarily in high seasons, which are from December to June-July, and one for full-time as a licentiate of tourism for the SECTUR. The ones dedicated for tourism only seasonally told that outside of the seasons they work in agriculture, mainly cultivating corn and sugar cane or taking care of the cattle. One person also mentioned that his alternative source of livelihood is fishing since the Huasteca and Middle areas are full of rivers with several species of fish. These comments are verified by Buckley (2003, 1) who notes that the locals of rural areas with tourism potentiality have turned their conventional source of livelihood such as fishing, farming and forestry into running tourism-related activities. During the high season three of the interviewees employ themselves as tourist guides. Two of the interviewees from Tanchanchín town worked as “lancheros” who take the tourist with their boats along the river to see the Tamul waterfall. These two persons were working together in the same boating business and they explained that whoever could become a lanchero or tourist guide if he has a boat.

One interviewee from El Cafétal was working as tourist guide for a popular destination Puente de Dios, the forest spot with waterfalls. Besides of being a guide, he and his family used their private land (where their house was also situated) as a parking lot and camping area for tourists for a small fee. He also commented working for tourism only seasonally and off-season dedicating him for agriculture. Another interviewee from the same establishment was a housewife and during the high season she was taking care of the family’s private toilets that were opened for the usage of tourist. She commented that this year was the first time they decided to open the toilets for the public, because during the past years many tourists had been asking for toilet facilities so they decided to make a good use of the situation. The only person working full-time for tourism was the licentiate of tourism working for SECTUR, his post consisting of responsibilities of knowing all the touristic areas, potentialities in the Middle Region and the whole state of San Luis Potosí, also, to distinguish the value of each destination and understand the conjunction of tourism with the local culture and history.

In both towns of El Cafétal and Tanchanchín was possible to observe young children working in tourism encouraged or forced by their parents. As observed, the entrance to Puente de Dios was crowded with local children and probably their parents who delegated children as young as 12 years to operate as tour guides for tourists. Apart from guiding, the children of

these sites worked as vendors or car protectors, which are both very common posts from children all over Mexico.

8.1.2 Impacts of tourism on the community and the area

The oldest interviewee from Tanchanchín village commented that tourist started gradually arriving to the area 25 or 30 years ago because they had heard of the turquoise rivers and waterfalls. At the time there were no tourism services in the village but the locals would host these occasional tourists. The SECTUR interviewee commented that in the nearby destination of Media Luna the tourism really started off around 12 years ago. Before this there were only a handful of adventurers who would contact the SECTUR or local people for organizing a trip to the area. Because of the lack of tourism industry by the time, there were no installations like sanitary services, waste management or any restrictions of the usage of the area which during the years had several impacts on the area: uncontrolled tourist flows, destruction of flora and fauna, noise caused by the tourists and unclean environment, which are all common impacts derived from uncontrolled tourism (Epler Wood 2002, 5-8).

When asked about the negative impacts of tourism three of the five interviewees mentioned the noise caused by the tourists. However, they were very understandable regarding the issue. One commented that tourist arrive to have fun and enjoy themselves so they should be allowed to “get loose” and make a little noise - to do things they would not normally do in the city. Another person also said that when tourists make lot of noise they feel irritated and miss for the peaceful off-season times but when it is the off-season they miss the action and vibrant life tourist bring to the town. Consequently, the noise was not perceived as major negative impact at all.

The SECTUR interviewee had slightly stricter approach to the noise issue. For example, in the area of Media Luna it is forbidden to play music or make any other noise after 9 pm. This is to allow a peaceful night for the various bird species as well as the campers. He mentioned that those tourists who do not respect the rules would be expelled from the area by the security staff. The two interviewees from Tanchanchín did not mention any noise problem caused by tourists. Actually, they did not see that tourism brings any negative impact to the town. This could be due to the reluctance of sharing negative information since they seemed to be very conscious about treating tourists well and telling them positive things in order they would return. On the other hand, in the town of Tanchanchín there are no hotels for tourists to stay except a camping area that is located outside of the local residences. Therefore, the amount of tourists staying overnight in the town is not very high, which could be an explanation for the absence of negative impacts.

One significant disadvantage was the shortage of water during the high season, a case that Edgell (2006, 105) and Yunis 2003 (in Buckley & al. 2003, 14-15) both discuss of being a possible disadvantage during the peak seasons. Moreover, Yunis notes that during the peak season there is a heightened risk of forest fires, which actually happened very near the research areas only couple of days before the interviews were realized (Bermúdez 2013). Both interviewees from El Cafétal commented that the tap water of the town had been cut several times in order to provide better service for tourists. While the local people need to buy their water from a truck that passes the town every now and then, at the same time the tourist enjoy full convenience of tap water in the hotels and camping areas. According to the interviewees, this happens only before and during the high seasons of December to May. Neither one of them really knew who is the responsible for cutting the water but they reckoned the government must be behind of the problem.

Littering was perceived as a negative impact as well. One interviewee of El Cafétal mentioned that tourists tend to throw waste and leave their camping or food supplies to the nature, which the local people later clean up. However, she showed a tolerant attitude saying that sometimes the city people are ignorant or do not know that one should not throw waste into the environment. Both interviewees of El Cafétal also mentioned the tourists' occasional bad behaviour to cause friction between them and the locals. Although, it is very rare times when tourists arrive with an arrogant attitude, treating the locals and the environment inappropriately. One interviewee said that 99% of all the tourists behaves well.

All of the interviewees felt unanimously that tourism has definitely brought positive impacts to the area. The economic benefit was mentioned by all of them. Both interviewees from Tanchanchín mentioned that there is a lot work available during the high seasons and if one is willing to work hard tourism provides a good source of income. Also, the possibility of having an option to work either traditionally in agriculture or alternatively in tourism was mentioned as a benefit. Whereas earlier the only option was to be a farmer or a fisher, now people have from where to choose or even dedicate themselves for both industries seasonally. These ideas were shared with the interviewees of El Cafétal as well. However, one of the interviewees said that tourism has not yet brought any benefit for the village because they are just starting living from tourism. At the same time he mentioned that those locals who already started in tourism years ago already have better houses and have significantly improved their standard of living. Also, the village have already more hotels, restaurants and public toilets built especially for the tourists. The SECTUR interviewee agreed as well that tourism has definitely brought economic benefit in form of offering more jobs to local people.

When asking if tourism had changed the identity of the area the interviewees gave slightly varying answers. The SECTUR person certainly felt that tourism has not changed the identity of the area or its people. He felt that the case was actually quite opposite; the local people are proud of showing their culture and traditions for tourists who are willing and interested learning about traditional cooking, festivals, nature or history. Tourists often also support the local economy by purchasing handcrafts, clothing and food prepared in local communities. Even if tourists bring their own culture with them in the form of clothing, way of talking and acting, which is interesting for the local people to see as well, it has not affected to the local customs or resulted into erosion of the culture.

The interviewees of El Cafétal agreed that tourism has not changed the identity of the town or its people. One of them commented that she enjoys seeing tourists and their different ways of being but that has not had an impact on their culture. The other one also said that the identity has not changed, however, due to the bigger tourism flows the locals have become more open-minded and conscious of how to treat and communicate with tourists. Likewise, the SECTUR interviewee remarked that earlier the locals working in customer service did not know how to treat a tourist, whereas now they are more polite, giving advice and taking better care of the tourist. One of the interviewees of Tanchanchín village stated that tourism had not changed the identity of the village, whereas the other one said it has. When asked in which ways he said there are more restaurants, pavement on the roads and a bridge in the town. Apparently, there was confusion in the questions probably due to the language barrier or cultural differences. Eventually, he did not mention that tourism had changed the cultural aspects of the area, only that now there were more services available for the tourists.

8.1.3 Government's participation and the villagers' power on decision-making

When asked about the government's participation and support regarding the tourism business in the area the interviewees had very different opinions. One interviewee from Tanchanchín said the SECTUR of San Luis Potosí provides the locals working in tourism business with courses and trainings where they most importantly learn how to treat tourists, to be friendly and respectful. Also, the courses include first-aid and resuscitation training in case of an accident. SECTUR also establishes safety regulations, for example, the usage of life vest in the river is compulsory for all the tourists. The same interviewee also commented that his three brothers work for more extreme activities like rafting for which they must have a special permission from a local organization. It remained unclear whether this organization was part of the government or independent.

Besides of courses and trainings, the interviewee commented that SECTUR gave locals paint for painting their boats, life vests and other gear related to river boating. Also, to make the destination more accessible, the government is now constructing a road that leads straight into the river shore. During the visits it was observed that at the moment tourists need to leave their vehicles on the nearby road and walk approximately 1,5 kilometres to the river where the tours begin. This makes the destination inaccessible for tourists with mobility issues because the rough sand road does not allow wheelchair or baby carriage to enter or at least it complicates the access significantly. The interviewee told also that government had paved the main road, which earlier was a sand road. Moreover, five years ago they built a bridge across the river, which now allows crossing it any time of the year. Before during the high seasons it was difficult or even impossible to cross the river because it grew so big and the current was strong. The other interviewee of Tanchanchín agreed that the government helps them a lot, however, he did not mentioned as many points as the other interviewee. In general he felt there are more commodities in the village due to the government's support.

The interviewees of El Cafétal did not share the same perceptions even if these destinations are situated in close proximity from each other and both belong to the Huasteca Region, which is under the control of SECTUR of San Luis Potosí. First interviewee felt that the government has not supported them at all. She mentioned that the sand road to the village is in bad condition and for three past years the government has not repaired it anyhow. Sometimes before the beginning of high season they arrive to fill the holes with sand but later with the heavy use and rain the road ends up to be the same or even worse. The researcher's observation verifies this comment since the uneven road full of pits made it complicated to arrive to the town.

Similarly, the other interviewee of El Cafétal felt that there was no support on government's behalf. However, he mentioned that sometimes they have meetings with a government representative where they establish and go through rules regarding tourism activities. As well, they are provided with courses and trainings on how to treat the tourists. He did not mentioned if the courses and trainings were provided by SECTUR but most probably that is the case since it is the main authority in the area regarding tourism. The same interviewee stated that they do not have support from the government because of internal questions of the community. According to him, the government perceives the area very problematic and therefore withholds the support. Like the other interviewee, he commented the road's bad condition and said there is a part with pavement, which already was there before the arrival of tourists. At the end he commented that in the tourist spot of Puente de Dios some modifications have been done, like wooden stairs to facilitate moving in the terrain.

The interviewee of SECTUR explained that the government of San Luis Potosí is promoting the understanding of tourism being one of the biggest economic resource of the whole country. He stated that the government is making a remarkable effort in development of tourism services and looking for key persons to make this development to come true. However, despite of all the trainings and courses provided by SECTUR and the huge potentiality of the state's and the country's tourism destinations, the sound tourism business is still in its infancy.

The same interviewee continued that at the moment lot of cultural and natural richness is being wasted because of simply the lack of know-how of making the most of the destinations potentiality. In the existing destinations all the hotel and restaurant entrepreneurs and the people working in these establishment receive training provided by SECTUR of how to treat the tourists. There are easily around 30 trainings in a year where the locals are trained to cook national and international delicacies, to enhance their customer service skills and being qualified as housekeepers, receptionists and tourist guides. "Good service ensures good income" is one of the principle lessons taught in training. All the trainings are cost free and any tourism business from restaurant to hotel, from travel agency to tour operator is able to make use of these trainings in order to develop themselves. For some higher risk activities like scuba diving the establishment must request a certification from SECTUR to prove they are capable of providing tourists with a professional diving instructions to decrease the risks.

According to this interviewee's comments and the researcher's observation, it seems that locals are incorporated into the tourism operations to a great extent, which contributes positively to their economic sustainability. As observed by Edgell also (2006, 22), involving the locals in the tourism practices in all the levels and providing them with education and trainings the quality of tourism product improves significantly. The SECTUR interviewee continued that even if it is only the beginning of controlling the tourism, the government's programs enable a rapid development for the performance to be every time more professional while strengthening the competitiveness of the area.

Moreover, the interviewee explained that government is carrying out studies of wastewater and waste management in the touristic areas, as well as providing locals and authorities with trainings of environmental education. The municipality presidents are being compromised for making effort for better waste management and avoiding the water contamination. These signs of development are very welcome. Like Bien (2006, 4) notices: preventing erosion and destruction of the most important tourism product, that is to say nature, the environmental sustainability practises must be followed.

When it comes to decision-making regarding the development of the area, four of the interviewees could not tell clearly if they had power over making these decisions. One of the interviewees of Tanchanchín commented that whoever might choose working in boating, rafting, snorkelling or in restaurant during the time one prefers. Therefore, is each one's decision whether to work or not. However, he could not indicate any higher-level decision-making power in terms of how to develop the area. Only the SECTUR interviewee indicated that the local people working in tourism are those who continuously monitor the areas and are in contact with tourism, which makes them experts of knowing if the areas are missing any facilities. For example, if there is a shortage of camping area, sanitary facilities, trash cans or security staff the locals working in these areas are the ones to report these shortages to the government who then supports in building more facilities. They will write an observation report, which could include complaints and feedback from the tourists in order to point out the specific areas, which need to be developed. The government then evaluates the situation and supports the development projects within the limits of available recourses. In this way, the locals can determine the direction of tourism development in their habitat. He clarified that SECTUR is not dictatorial institution but more of an authority, which provides the locals with trainings and equipment and monitors their performance in terms of serving the tourists.

As Edgell (2006, 22) states, a consultation between the tourism industry and local communities is essential to ensure good cooperation, preventing and resolving possible conflicts. Indeed, the host community has a vital role in the success of tourism: if they are not included in the planning or the actual execution of the tourism operations, the vitality and continuation of the destination is endangered.

Moreover, the SECTUR interviewee explained that there exist some studies of the environmental impacts generated by a visit. Based on these studies, during the high seasons the visitors' access in some destinations are limited for not to exceed the carrying capacity level where the flora and fauna may suffer serious damage. Unfortunately, this notion is in extreme disagreement with the researcher's observation. During the first visit to the site of Media Luna in the Eastern week the area was extremely oversaturated. Upon the enter, the researcher was informed that the camping area is for maximum 4000 tents but there were already 6000 in by the time. Needless to say the place was in total chaos, not to mention the damage caused to flora and fauna. As visitors must pay entrance fee, this phenomenon of overcrowding might be due to the phenomenon described by Bushell and Robyn (in Buckley 2003, 197-198) where the protected areas become dependent on the visitors economic contribution, eventually blurring the most important point, which, instead of generating income, should be conservation.

8.1.4 Advantages and disadvantages of living in the village

This question was asked from the first interview group whose feelings about living in their habitat varied to a huge extent. One of the interviewee of El Cafétal straight admitted that she does not like to live in the town. This is because there are no shopping opportunities, communal transportation or a park where she could take her children to play. In contrary, the other interviewee of El Cafétal felt very proud of being born in the village and said he would never live anywhere else. He did not specify the reasons but seemed to be very content.

The interviewees of Tanchanchín had dissenting opinions about their town as well. The first one seemed to be slightly reluctant to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of living in the town and found his quality of life to be “more or less” at the moment. In comparison, the other interviewee found many advantages of living in the town, like the abundant amount of water, which secures the adequacy to the people and crops of the town. The water also provides work for several locals since the rivers and waterfalls are the main tourist attractions. In addition, he commented that in the town they have everything, referring to the services used by the locals. Finally, he said that there are no disadvantages in the town.

8.1.5 Tourists’ profiles and locals’ feelings about receiving tourists

Without an exception, all five interviewees felt positive about receiving tourists into their habitat. This question was slightly brought up in the paragraph of impacts of tourism but will be now reviewed in more detail. The interviewee of SECTUR explained that due to the extremely rich ecosystems with its flora and fauna, San Luis Potosí is able to offer several types of tourism attracting national and international tourists. Edgell (2006,6) supports this notion about the nature being important essence of most tourism products. The same interviewee continued that according to SECTUR’s statistics, lot of tourist come from the United States and Canada, several countries of Europe and South-America. Less, but still a significant share of tourists comes from Asian countries like China, South Korea and Japan. The national tourists come mainly from the surrounding states like the Federal District, Veracruz, Tamaulipas, Querétaro, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes and Hidalgo.

These tourist look for several types of experiences; some are interested in extreme sports in the forest, rivers or mountains while others studying flora and fauna, the history or cultural specialities from music and folklores to cooking. One interviewee explained that some Japanese tourists are very eager of exploring the nature and taking samples of species in order to study them later. As Weaver (2004, 46) notes, some hard ecotourists might destroy the flora and fauna by cutting vegetation and taking samples. They might also spread alien species unintentionally when exploring the nature. In contrary, according to the interviewees

there are also tourists who visit this natural destination in order to spend time with their family or friends, setting up their picnic or barbeque settings without further interest of exploring or respecting the nature. Thus, it seems that the ecotourism segment of the area consists both of the hard and soft ends described by Weaver (2004) and Fuad-Luke (2008) in the chapter 3.3.

The SECTUR interviewee commented he feels very pleased of receiving these tourists and showing them the traditions and other cultural peculiarities as well as scenic nature found in the area. The El Cafétal interviewees shared same feelings also. Both felt that they had lot of interaction with tourists who are curious to know, for example, the names of plants and trees they see around them. Other interviewee commented that while he is taking the tourist to a tour in the spot of Puente de Dios he tells them about the vegetation and animals, typical fruits growing in the area and about life in the village. Also, he tells them anecdotes and stories. Both interviewees said that interacting with tourists is very much casual conversation where both share information and experiences of their own culture. One of them added also that only seeing the tourists is interesting for her, even if she does not know where they come from or which language talk but simply seeing the diversity pleases her. Also, she mentioned that keeping her busy with the tourists keeps her from just wasting the day for nothing and she feels doing something meaningful when interacting with tourists.

One interviewee of Tanchanchín mentioned that sometimes the language barrier with international tourists hinders the communication, however, most of the tourists speak at least the basics of Spanish. Both interviewees of Tanchanchín also mentioned that occasionally they invite the tourists to their house to have a party where they offer traditional food and beverages and demonstrate some cultural specialities like music and dance to their guests. The other one said he feels very pleased when the same tourists return later because it means they did a good work and the tourists were satisfied with the service. These kind cross-cultural learning experiences between the locals and the tourists apply very well to Honey's (in Mowforth, Charlton & Munt 2008, 110-111) description of how learning in ecotourism should happen in natural environment, on the conditions of the host culture. Similarly, Weaver (2004, 13) finds out that ecotourism fosters cross-cultural learning and understanding between the visitor and local culture.

8.1.6 Safety issues

Apart from the interview questions, a significant point of security came up during couple of interviews. One interviewee of El Cafétal and Tanchanchín mentioned a decrease in the tourist flows during the past years and both reckoned this could directly derive from the increase of crime. As a reference, according to the statistics of SESNSP (Secretariado

Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública/ Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security) in the year 2011 the state of San Luis Potosí registered 402 homicides, 40 kidnaps and 8 million 116 robs subject to individuals or their houses, banks and enterprises (Bonilla 2013). Considering this, the high crime rates might banish the tourists' interest of travelling to the area or make them to choose alternative destinations perceived safer (Ukwayi & al. 2012). The researcher's experience supports this statement. Before travelling to the investigation area, several persons discussed about the safety issues related to the area, suggesting that one should not travel there. Though, this was an opinion of people who all lived outside of the state of San Luis Potosí and who do not travel there frequently precisely because of the image they have of the area. Thus, it seems the reputation of the state might withhold the tourist flows at some extend.

One interviewee of Tanchanchín was convinced that due to the crime the tourist do not visit the area so much anymore. He told stories of crimes committed in the area during the past years and also said that all the locals have a fear that something will happen to them. Controversially, the other three interviewees did not mention anything about the security issues and when asked about it, they stated the area is completely safe. The difference of the opinion could be explained with the reluctance of sharing inconvenient or troublesome issues with outsiders and tourists because it might scare them away. On the other hand, inside of the state the crime rates vary as well as the perceptions of the people regarding the crime issue

8.1.7 Recommendations for tourism development in the future

The last questions concerned the future development regarding tourism in the area, to where the interviewees gave varying suggestions. Both interviewees from El Cafétal stressed that a better tourism planning is definitely needed in order to make the most out of tourists' visit. One of them commented they were not prepared well enough for the arrival of tourists during the Eastern week, which resulted tourists asking for food and other services which they could not provide because of lack of planning. In addition, the other interviewee felt there are many internal things concerning the community, which need to be improved in order to enter to better-organized tourism business. Besides, more services like public toilets and better water distribution systems are needed to improve the quality of tourists' experiences. Also, he hoped that government would support them more in the development process and would promote tourism to attract more tourists. The both interviewees of Tanchanchín gave ideas regarding the already existing services. One said he hopes the government provided them with better boats and more life vests for taking the tourists to the river. Also, he mentioned that hopes to give better service to the tourists that could be interpreted as more training and courses provided by the SECTUR. The other interviewee mentioned also that there is no

hotel in the town, which often leads tourist to use the camping area or look for place to stay elsewhere. Thus, his suggestion was to build hotel in the town.

The interviewee of SECTUR gave very profound recommendations for the future development. He explained that parts of the current problem are the cultural attributes that prevent the development towards better planning and organization of tourism. He said that often Mexicans do not take care of the hen that lays the golden eggs, referring that they want to take the advantage in such a great extent that eventually destroys the original source of income. This challenge of making the use of the tourism product while conserving it at the same time is the precise issue mentioned by Bromberek (2009, 3). Likewise, Bien (2006, 4-5) states it is ultimately a question of self-monitoring the triple bottom line and making responsible business without destroying the resources where it ultimately depends on.

The same interviewee would like to see a more close cooperation between different government organs and establish a better educational systems starting from the primary school, which would educate the children and raise the awareness of tourism being important source of income. The children since early age should be raised up understanding the social and economic benefits tourism brings to the area. Moreover, this would include culture education where people are taught to be more receptive and understanding towards different cultures because tourism, in the first place, is about cultural interaction. This is exactly what Sinha (2006) supports for a sound tourism management regime.

8.2 Research conclusion

During the research it became clear that tourism has had and continues having a significant role in determining the future development of the research area. As many of the locals have turned, at least partly, their conventional sources of livelihood like agriculture and fishing into tourism, there have been problems and challenges in the past, which are still present, though, not as strongly.

It seems that finally people both in non-governmental and governmental sectors are starting to realize the potentiality of tourism being a virtuous tool in developing and securing the continuity of these rural areas. Some areas have already received more attention and governmental support in regard of tourism development, whereas others are still living in the hope of having this support. All in all, real sound tourism development still appears to be in its infancy, however, the area seems to be on its way to more sustainable tourism practises.

When tourism gradually started in the Middle and Huasteca Regions approximately two decades ago, no tourism services on the behalf of locals, not to mention planning or

management regimes existed. As occasional tourism turned to be more frequent, the lack of services and management led to a quick erosion and destruction of some natural areas. Littering, trampling, contamination and noise by uncontrolled tourists masses and oversaturated destinations were very common phenomena. Unfortunately, as the researcher experienced during her visits, the same phenomena is still present in some destinations during the peak season, which suggest inadequate control and dependency on the revenue generated from the entrance fees. Although, as some of the interviewees commented, compared to the past the current situation is a lot better.

The current negative impacts caused by tourism and perceived by locals mainly concerned the noise and littering generated by tourists and the periodical water shortage. However, none of these was perceived as a grave problem. All in all the locals seemed to bear very understandable and harmonious attitude towards the tourists and the possible disadvantages they bring along. Even the water shortage in order to give tourists better service seemed not to cause resentment or hard feelings towards them. Instead, the interviewees paid more attention to the positive impacts brought by tourism, the economic benefit ranked at the top. Without an exception the locals felt that their employment opportunities have improved in the way that they have chance of choosing whether to work in tourism and in which activities. Thus, alongside with the traditional agriculture and fishing, tourism provides an alternative or extra source of income for those who want, and many indeed, seem to be willing to do so. The phenomenon speaks for itself that tourism development seems to be very welcomed and accepted trend among the local people to earn their first or second source of income. Improved infrastructure and services were other benefit brought by tourism and perceived by the locals, although some of them felt that certain points are still neglected, for example, fixing a worn out dirt road leading to the El Cafétal town. Considering also the interviewees' positive feelings of receiving tourists, it seems that more positive than negative impacts caused by tourism were perceived. A table 3 in the chapter 10 provides more elaboration to this suggestion.

One objective of this study was to find out whether there are contradictions in the non-governmental and governmental opinions of the interviewees, and if so, to understand why is that. Before starting the investigation, the researcher expected countering more differences in opinions that she eventually did. Both interviewee groups discussed about the positive and negative impacts brought by tourism, the government's support and participation and ideas for future development. It goes without saying that being an expert of the tourism in the area the SECTUR representative had very wide knowledge of the prevailing state of tourism and the impacts on community and nature in comparison to the other group who represented non-governmental opinion. All in all, there was nothing contradictive in the opinions of these two groups, but more between certain individuals of the first interview group: as each

interviewee's viewpoint is subjective, it is clear that unanimous opinions cannot be reached and actually should not in the first place. The differences and disagreements in qualitative study are valuable since they show that within one phenomenon there can exist several realities and perception, which enrich the study, giving the researcher a chance for providing explanations and detailed scrutiny. As might be expected, some interviewees felt some issues more important than others, but once again, this was because of personal opinion rather than representing governmental or non-governmental viewpoint.

Another objective was to gain information of a local ecotour operator in order to examine the state of ecotourism and evaluate whether the ecotourism of the area is carried out purposefully or it is subject to greenwashing as discussed in the chapter 4.4 by Mowforth, Charlton & Munt (2008), Bromberek (2009), Epler Wood (2002), Martha Honey (in Mowforth, Charlton & Munt 2008), and Bien (2006). As mentioned already in the chapter 8, the ecotour interviewee was not reached at the time of the research, which resulted that the interview could not be conducted. Therefore, this study is lacking ecotour operator's perspective and all the statements regarding ecotourism are based on what the other interviewees said and to researcher's observation. Thus, unfortunately the results of this study are not adequate for comprehensive evaluation of ecotourism in the area. To have more detailed picture of the area's ecotourism performance, further investigation should be done.

Third objective was to understand the locals' point of view regarding the social impacts of tourism in the area. Despite some interviewees had hard time in answering to some questions, this aim was completed successfully as the interviewees were cooperative and provided the researcher with lot of information, which enabled multidimensional reflection and detailed observation of the impacts.

Finally, one objective was also to extend researcher's overall understanding of the research area in terms of the destinations, tourism business and local culture and nature. Indeed, both the theoretical framework and the empirical study have significantly augmented the researcher's perception and provided valuable experience where the researcher was subject to learn processes of qualitative study and understand complex issues behind tourism development in rural communities.

As a conclusion, all the initial objectives of this study were achieved except the part of ecotourism, which results remained inadequate. Possibly, the researcher could have improved the results by better planning or making an additional visit to the research area for completing the planned interview. Still, considering that the cultural etiquette when planning appointments in Mexico is rather informal and sometimes with low commitment, the same

case of not getting into contact with the interviewee could have happened in any case. Also, the schedule of this thesis did not permit to spend more time for the fieldwork.

9 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are issues, which need to be evaluated when conducting an empirical qualitative or quantitative research. Like Patton (2001, in Golafshani 2003) states, validity and reliability should be taken into account already when designing the study, in the result analysis phase and finally when judging the quality of the study. These concepts are easy to apply in natural sciences, in quantitative research, but with qualitative one involving humans these concepts cannot be adopted as such. Kananen (2011, 66) states that there are no absolute truths concerning reliability and validity. However, this does not mean that they will not be assessed. Next chapter will take a look into some philosophical perspectives when evaluating qualitative research.

9.1 Philosophical perspectives

The bias, validity and reliability of data collection have been argued over and as a result there have emerged several schools supporting different approaches in qualitative research. One of these, known as positivism, relied much on statistical techniques like surveys. This positivist ideology was questioned in 1960's when many sociologists applied ethnomethodological data collection techniques in their researches, in other words, unstructured interviews and participant observation. The anti-positivist ideology is near the ethnological approach and it gives value for subjective experiences and uses the same research methods as ethnographers; interviews and participant observation. (McNeill, Chapman 2005, 99).

In the 1990's postmodern approach emerged suggesting that bias-free and authenticity are unattainable for researcher because each research and data collection situation is unique and happens in a subjective world of certain individuals and cannot be repeated exactly anywhere else. Consequently, the postmodernist reject the concept of research experts because they see researcher as an individual interpreter of time whose perception of truth is no more valid than any other's. Therefore, they also reject the concept of validity. (McNeill, Chapman 2005, 4-6). Also, the post-modernist ideology claims the positivist interpretation techniques biased or partly distorted. They reject the positivist concept of only one truth and reality - postmodernist think that there exist several. As well, they reject the validity of ethnographic research because it represents an autobiography and only one kind of an interpretation of reality. If a different researcher had carried out the same research in the same time and place it would have been different because of the personal interpretation. (McNeill, Chapman, 2005, 100), Creswell and Miller (2000, in Golafshani 2003) advocates this

perspective by suggesting that validity in qualitative research is not applicable because the term is affected by researcher's perception and way of interpretation.

Today's sociological qualitative research often applies data and researching methods of all kinds, including a variety of secondary data to support the actual research being done. Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Golafshani 2003) see the matter of reliability and validity in qualitative research as a question of "*How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?*" As these two concepts are essential to measure the quality in quantitative research, likewise in qualitative research the measures correspond to credibility, neutrality or conformability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985, in Golafshani 2003) apply "dependability" in qualitative research, which nearly corresponds to "reliability" in quantitative research. Similarly, Clont (1992) and Seale (1999) (in Golafshani 2003) support the idea of dependability along with the concept of consistency or reliability in qualitative study. The concept of validity in qualitative research is often substituted with more applicable terms such as rigor and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 2000; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001 in Golafshani 2003).

9.2 Evaluation of this study

Traditional Criteria for Judging Quantitative Research	Alternative Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research
Internal validity	Credibility
External validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Conformability

Table 2: Criteria for judging validity and reliability in quantitative research and alternative criteria for qualitative research (Trochim 2006).

Following the measurements presented in the table above is used for testing the validity and reliability of the research used for this study. Shenton (2003) lists several points of testing credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability and these points will be used assessing the research of this thesis. Credibility seeks to ensure that the study actually

measures the qualities what was intended in the first place. In this light, the first point to assess is the adoption of the research methods selected for the concepts being studied. (Shenton 2003). For this study, the object was to analyze the impact of tourism in the research area with an ecotourism perspective for which the methods of interviewing and observation were perceived to be the most efficient data collection tools since they are meant to produce qualitative data, exactly how was planned from the beginning.

Second point of credibility is to establish familiarity with the participating culture before the data collection itself (Shenton 2003). In this research the familiarity was gained through preliminary research, mainly through Internet, about the destinations and cultures in the area, also from casual discussions with the people already travelled to the area. However, the initial idea the researcher possessed about the area before travelling there, came to correspond very well her previous experiences from trips to the rural areas and communities of Sierra Gorda, situated in very close proximity from the research areas in San Luis Potosí.

Third point measuring the creditability is random sampling, which helps to avoid the researcher's bias of selecting only certain types of participants (Shenton 2003). As mentioned already, four out of five interviewees were randomly selected for this study. In this regard, the bias of selecting only certain types of participants seems to be very small.

Fourth point is triangulation, which means looking the research subject from a different angle and involving alternative data collecting methods like observation (Shenton 2003). For the research conducted for this thesis, casual conversations, secondary data and information gained from people living outside and in the research area were used, for example, to verify the comments of the interviewees by looking similar observations from the secondary data. Thus, the usage of these several types of data collection methods increases the creditability of this research.

Fifth point is the tactics to help ensuring honesty in the participants when contributing data; in other words, the person who is approached for the study should be given a chance to refuse from participating. In this way, only those who are genuinely willing to participate and provide data in their free will are included. Also, the researcher should try to establish rapport with the participant, emphasizing his or her independence from any external party and encourage the participant to be frank, stressing that no right or wrong answer exist (Shenton 2003). This was the approach in each interview conducted for this study: the possible interviewee was first asked to be interviewed and after his or her acceptance was being explained the purpose of the interview. All the interviewees unanimously accepted being interviewed even if one at the start (the only female interviewee) was shy of being interviewed but eventually agreed after being explained the purpose of the study.

Each interviewee was informed about the independency of the researcher, being encouraged

to express themselves frankly, without being afraid of losing their credibility in the eyes of their community, government or any other party. All the interviewees seemed to be very relaxed in the interview situation and, without couple of exception, seemed not to have difficulties answering when asked about uncomfortable issues like the negative impacts of tourism, disadvantages living in the village and the governments participation or crime. However, when asked about the government's participation from one interviewee, slightly hesitating he if he could give his frank opinion. After an affirmative answer he eased up and kept on talking. This shows that despite the researcher had made her motives and independency clear, among some interviewees there still existed at least a slight lack of trust and fear of speaking up one's mind.

Also, when asked about the negative impacts caused by tourism, couple of interviewees seemed to become slightly uncomfortable and could not really give any answer. Possibly they could not simply see any negative impacts or alternatively, as they saw the researcher in a role of a tourist they wanted to bring up only the positive impacts brought by tourism. On the other hand, the other one of these interviewees opened up about the recent crimes in the area, which, on the other hand, indicates the trust of talking about difficult issues as well. On the whole, the honesty of the participants was aimed to be maximized by voluntary participation, making clear the motives and independency of the researcher and encouraging free expression of opinion and honesty.

Sixth point in evaluating the credibility is iterative questioning, which purpose is to detect the possible deliberate lies told by the interviewees. The researcher may ask rephrased questions related to the topics already discussed in order to see any possible inconsistencies in the interviewees' answers. If contradictions appear, the researcher may choose to discard the data, as it is not seen creditable. Other option is to pay attention to the results in the final report and look for contradictive information and provide possible explanations (Shenton 2003, 67). During the interviews iterative questioning was not done. However, many questions were connected to each other and several times the interviewees came back to same topics already discussed to add or elaborate something they did not mention earlier. Hence, any contradictions or straight lies could not be detected, neither possible motives for doing so. However, as already mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is possible that some interviewees embellished the truth by concealing some information related to difficult topics discussed. The scrutiny about this topic remains since there is no evidence for or against this statement.

Seventh point is member checks where the participants itself check the accuracy of the data. In retrospect, they may be asked to read the transcripts or listen the tapes of the interviews they participated in order to see if their words really correspond of what they intended to say in the first place. Another component of member checks is participants' validation for some

theories observed by the researcher, in other words, when appropriate the researcher should ask the interviewees to provide possible reasons for the phenomena or particular patterns observed by the researcher. (Shenton 2003, 68-69). The member checks were not used for this study, which decreases the credibility. However, during the interviews the participants actively pondered the possible reasons behind some phenomenon. For example, one interviewee reckoned that the reason behind the recent decline of tourism flows could be due to rainy and cold weather, whereas other interviewees reasoned the cause to be increased delinquency.

Transferability in qualitative research evaluates of how well the findings of one study can be applied to a wider population. Even if the fundamental purpose of qualitative research is not to measure the applicability to other situations and populations, the transferability should be still evaluated. Instead of the researcher itself the reader of the study evaluates the transferability with the help of the background information provided by the researcher. In this information should be included the scales of the study, the number of groups or persons taking part to the study, the geographical location, the data collection methods, the number and length of the data collection sessions and the time period over which the study was conducted.

Also, the results of a qualitative study should be understood in the context of the particular group studied and the geographical area in which the research was conducted. Finally, to evaluate the degree to which the findings may be compatible with a group in other settings, similar projects applying the same research methods but conducted in different geographical areas may be of great value. Even in cases where the same research methods were used but the results are not consistent with one another, it does not necessarily suggest that one is more reliable than another. The simple explanation could be that there exist multiple realities and if the reasons behind these variations can be discovered, the understanding of these reasons may prove to be as useful as the results itself. (Shenton 2003, 69-71). Now, as this perspective suggest, the researcher is not in the position of evaluating the transferability of the study but the readers have the chance for doing so, based on the information provided in the theoretical as well as the empirical part of this paper.

Dependability in qualitative research corresponds to the concept of reliability in quantitative research, where the aim is to measure whether the results are consistent if the research was conducted again with same methods and participants. Because of the changing nature of qualitative research the reliability cannot be applied as such. Instead, the researcher should report the processes of the study in detail in order to enable future researcher to repeat the work following the same processes. So, for the reader to gain a profound understanding of the methods used and their effectiveness the following matters should be discussed: the research design and its implementations by describing what was planned and accomplished, following

with the operational detail of data collection, to say, describe in detail what was done in the research field, and finally offer a reflective evaluation of the project assessing the effectiveness of the process undertaken. (Shenton 2003, 72-71). In this paper the chapters 1 and 7 are directed to provide information on these matters, although throughout the paper there are parts, which aim to offer detailed information of what was being studied, from which approach and methods used, what data was gained and what kind of findings discovered.

Lastly, the conformability refers to the degree to which the findings can be verified by others (Trochim (2006)). The conformability aims to assure that the findings in the study are genuinely the experiences and ideas of the participants instead of personal preferences of the researcher. Again, the role of triangulation comes important to reduce the effect of researcher's bias. In addition, other topics to address are the ideas and beliefs, which reinforced the researcher to choose a certain viewpoint, the weaknesses and techniques employed, as well as any possible preliminary theory that finally were not shown up. (Shenton 2003, 72). As mentioned in this chapter, triangulation was used as a method to increase the creditability of the study in question. The judgments for choosing the social and ecotourism perspective are explained in the chapter 1 and the beliefs and reasons behind selecting the particular investigation area are explained in the chapter 6. Before starting conducting the research there were no preliminary theories related to the study.

As noticed by McNeill and Chapman (2005, 56-66) social class, values and ethnicity of both interviewer and interviewee affect on how the questions and answers and interpreted and understood. When the parties come socially and culturally from different ends there lies a bigger risk for bias and to be misunderstood. In question of this study, there lies rather high risk for bias caused by cultural and social differences. As it came up during the interviews, some interviewees had hard time answering to some questions, possibly due to not understanding the question or due to reluctance to answer. Highly possible reason is that they felt some questions too intrusive and personal, and therefore, preferred not to answer.

Also, one important point in evaluation of credibility of this study is the possible bias due to translating the interviews from Spanish to English. As said, the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Later on the recordings were transcript in Spanish and only in the analysis phase were translated into English. When translating from one language to another there always lies a risk of leaving important details or even bigger points out, losing or misinterpreting the metaphors or other verbal expressions said by the interviewees. The accuracy of the translation depends on the translator, in this case, the researcher's Spanish language skills, which correspond to high intermediate level. The possible bias due to translation was understood since the beginning of the study, which is why a native Spanish-speaker and fluent English-speaker was asked to be present during the interviews as an interpreter and during the

data analysis phase as well. This was done in order to minimize the possible bias of the translation.

10 Recommendations for the future

Resulting from the interviews and the observation, several recommendations regarding future tourism development can be provided. This chapter is dedicated for the suggestions given by the interviewees and the researcher. First, the recommendations given by the interviewees will be reviewed, following with the recommendations that were not mentioned by the interviewees but which the researcher, with the support of secondary data, finds possibly effective and functional for the research area. In the end of the chapter, the tourism impacts, their influence and recommendations for the future are collected into a table as a summary.

The first suggestion mentioned by the interviewees was better planning and organizing. As one interviewee commented, now the tourists arrive asking for accommodation or restaurant services, which they are not able to provide because of lack of planning and preparing. Even if the motivation and resources are there, the lack of planning and management skills are preventing them of making the most of the tourists' visits. To improve this inadequacy, one suggestion is to include education of time management and planning regimes in the trainings and courses offered by SECTUR. Instead of employing external labour for management and planning, the locals should have the opportunity of internalizing better-organized regimes. This would ensure the continuity of local ownership and viability of their economy, allowing the communities to enter to socially and economically sustainable model where both the locals and the visitors stay satisfied.

Secondly, regarding the water shortage in the town of El Cafétal, better water distribution system was mentioned as one recommendation. To ensure adequate water supply both for the locals and tourists, some further studies regarding the water resources should be done, after which to determine the acceptable level of usage, for example, per household or per tourist. Also, a good piping system is needed in order to allow the water to arrive until the houses, camping areas and other establishments. Regarding the tourists' water usage, one suggestion, though maybe not very efficient, is to encourage visitors to use water economically in the showers and toilets. Other, maybe more efficient methods could be installing water saving showerheads and toilets in the accommodation and public facilities. If not done already, rainwater harvesting could also be a viable option ensuring the adequacy of the water supplies.

Third suggestion mentioned was more services and better infrastructure. Even if there are already more hotels and restaurants for tourist, there is still need for more establishments

like public toilets for example. Also, improving the infrastructure was recommended in order to facilitate not only the tourists but also the locals mobility and accessibility to the touristic areas. This issue is directly addressed to the government who is responsible for building and maintaining the basic infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

Fourthly, the interviewees wished for more extensive support from the SECTUR's part: more trainings and courses, in addition to tangible donations like equipment for making the tours more safe and pleasant for the tourists. It was also recommended that SECTUR would adopt more dynamic model in the regard of promoting tourism in order to attract even bigger tourism flows. To the researcher's opinion, this suggestion is controversial since during the observation the carrying capacity of the destinations seemed to have been already overpassed or at least pushed into the maximum limits. However, as Edgell describes in his Strategic plan for sustainable tourism development (see chapter 4.2), directing efficient promotion of the area to the appropriate clientele, that is to say, those ones interested especially in adventure -, nature -, culture -and ecotourism could be potential idea.

The fifth recommendation was closer cooperation between different governmental and non-governmental organs, including schools. The interviewee would like that since early age the children are taught about the country's potentiality as a tourism destination and the social and economic benefits tourism might bring. In the schools the curriculums would include education of confronting different culture, learning tolerance and adapting the service attitude so they would be competent of providing quality service to the tourists.

As a complement to the suggestions given by the interviewees, there are other recommendations concerning mainly the environmental issues described in the theoretical part of this work and also observed in the research area. Even if social aspects have been the main theme throughout this paper, the study would be incomplete if leaving out the one important aspect of the triple bottom line, environment.

According to the observation, during the peak season the destinations' carrying capacity was being stretched to the extreme, which is why the first suggestion is better control over the tourist flows and general monitoring for preventing damage and erosion. Even more specific high-quality ecological research described by Pickering and Weaver, Ralf and King (see chapter 4.1) would be highly recommendable for assuring the conservation and continuity of these areas. The authors stress that studies carried out about trampling are not sufficient enough and more comprehensive charting of the impacts include, for example, studies of water-borne pathogens, noise disturbance to rare fauna or interference with plant-pollination ecology. Similarly, Bushell and Robyn (see chapter 4.3) note that in order to find the optimal balance between visitors' flows and conservation, the destination must undergo studies on

visitors' needs and user impacts, which, according to the SECTUR interviewee has already been conducted in some areas. However, considering the observation, it is evident that the balance has not been found yet, therefore, more intensive studies and monitoring is recommended.

Second recommendation is the application of the strategy of 4R's described by Bromberek (see chapter 4.1). Following the strategy would be useful for any organization or establishment outside of the tourism industry also, but especially in the case of this study, considering the water shortages and other challenges in the area, the strategy could help the tourism operators to manage the available resources, look for sustainable and long-term options when making new investments, find alternative uses for items and finally, to save money and increase their economic viability while contributing to the environmental sustainability.

Third recommendation for the community is to organize meetings where brainstorming, opinions and ideas are shared. Like discussed in the chapter 4.2, ideally before any tourism development, the locals should evaluate whether the benefits will be worth the possible drawbacks followed by the tourism development. Even if the case area of this study has already gone through lot of tourism development, it would be still useful for the locals to evaluate and discuss these issues within the community in order to reinforce the internal cooperation and have common vision of how they would like to tourism to be in their area. Once again, the Edgell's Strategic plan for sustainable tourism development becomes useful tool in planning and understanding these possible benefits and drawbacks.

In conclusion, as Edgell (2006, 121) suggests, properly managed tourism offers environmental benefits, improved facilities, clean and attractive destinations and the maintenance of historical and cultural heritage. Furthermore, it adds value to the visitors experience and upgrades the quality of life of the local communities. By all means tourism can act as a savior of rural communities in building sustainable, local economy while strengthening and conserving the cultural and natural heritage. However, the drawbacks of tourism development are inevitable even if operated following the sustainable principles. The decision whether to enter in tourism business is, and always should be, in the hands of the local communities. If they are willing to participate they should have the control over the tourism operations and development alongside with the governmental support.

The case of San Luis Potosí has showed that tourism can definitely improve quality of life of the local people in terms of increased opportunities, economic viability and understanding the visitors' cultures while reinforcing their own cultural pride. As well, it has showed that tourism development is not without negative impacts, however, with better tourism

management in the future these issues can be tackled, permitting the area to enter into more viable and sustainable tourism industry.

One more time, the findings of this study are presented in the following table together with the recommendations.

Perceived impact of tourism	Influence to the research area	Recommendations for the future
More money entering to the community	Positive - contributes to and sustains local economy	Local ownership, encouraging entrepreneurship
Increased working opportunities	Positive - variety in the labour market, balanced income, maintenance of the communities	More courses and trainings of SECTUR, more economic diversity
More services for tourists and locals	Positive - availability of services, tourists stay longer	Monitoring tourism, collecting feedback from tourists, community meetings
Improved infrastructure	Positive - accessibility to touristic sites, maintenance of facilities	More paved roads, better maintenance, better water distribution system
Improved tourism management	Positive - safety guards, better organisation and control, improved tourism product, cleaner environment	Better monitoring systems and control models, more trainings for the tourism staff both in low and high levels
Presence of foreign tourists	Positive - locals increased mindfulness, tolerance and interest towards different cultures	Encouraging interaction and communication, educating tourists on conservation issues
SECTUR's contribution	Positive - free of charge courses and trainings, direct economic contribution, tangible gifts	More equal distribution of the benefits between different communities, open cooperation with the communities, support and assistance in problem-solving
Uncontrolled tourist flows during the high season	Negative - damage to the flora and fauna, oversaturation, dirty	More: control, monitoring, visitor impact studies, clear and determined rules

	environment	
Noise	Negative - disturber of local people and the fauna	Establish rules, more safety guards
Littering	Negative - environmental issues, locals cleaning up	Visitor education, more trash cans, penalize for littering
Water shortages	Negative - local people stay without tap water	Better piping systems, charting the water supplies, better planning, control the water supply in touristic sites

Table 3. Impacts of tourism on Huasteca and Middle Regions.

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Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1. The interview questions for the non-governmental interviewees

Name:

Age:

Occupation:

1. How long have you been living here? Do you have relatives or children living here?
2. Has your life changed after the arrival of the tourists?
3. How is the quality of life in the village now compared to the time without tourism?
(Do you prefer the village before or after tourism?)
4. What kind of impacts you think tourism has brought to the village?
5. What kind of benefits you think tourism has brought to the village?
6. How do you feel receiving tourists into the village? Have you had chance to talk or communicate with them? Or learn something from them?
7. What are the benefits of living in the village? What about the challenges?
8. Do the villagers take part into decision-making when planning the tourism?
9. Have the tourism affected into your quality of life? How?
10. Do you think tourism has changed the identity of the area? How?
11. Would you do something differently when it comes to tourism development in this area?

11.2 Appendix 2. Interview questions for the governmental interviewee

Name:

Age:

Occupation:

1. How long have you been living here? Do you have relatives or children living here?
2. How was the area before tourism? How do you think it has changed after the arrival of tourists?
3. Do you organize tours? If yes, what does a tour consists of? Activities etc.
4. What type of tourist you receive and from where? What kind of experiences or activities they are mainly looking for?
5. Do you evaluate the sustainability of your performance? If yes, how?
6. Are locals involved in tourism business? How? Do they receive support from SECTUR?
7. Are you cooperating with other businesses or organizations?
8. Do you follow any specific guidelines for reducing your footprint or waste management etc.?
9. Do you think tourism has changed the identity of the area? How?
10. Would you do something differently when it comes to tourism development in this area?

11.3 Appendix 3. Photos from the research areas



The lagoon of Media Luna near Rioverde city in the Middle Region. Photo by Marika Valtonen 2013.



One part of the camping area in Media Luna. Photo by Marika Valtonen 2013



On a riverboat tour with a local guide from Tanchanchín town/ Tamul waterfall, Huasteca Region. Photos by Marika Valtonen 2013.



Water cave near Tamul waterfall/ Touristic site of Puente de Dios near El Cafétal town in Tamasopo, Huasteca Region. Photos by Marika Valtonen 2013.