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## Sustainable Tourism Experiences in Ecuador: Implementing Social Knowledge' Construction Process in a Rural Community<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This work aims to socialize a successful experience for Social Knowledge Construction in the field of Environmental Literacy. This work takes place at the rural Afro-Ecuadorian community "San Miguel", located in Ecuador, South America. The participants are 35 women and men, who installed a communitarian tourism project with the support of national and international rural development programs in 2005. However, any study had been executed in the location to determine the impacts on the natural and cultural heritage, since the touristic project began; in consequence, the community has not information to take decisions about their entrepreneurship. This work applied the ethnographic social research method and the techniques of semi-structured interview and community surveys to collect data. It was applied the Model of Echavarren for Assessing the Tourism Impacts on Natural and Cultural Resources. The results show that the economical contribution from the touristic project is still low but, necessary in the community. There are no relevant impacts on the natural and cultural heritage. However, an Environmental Literacy Plan based on Mendonça and the Social Knowledge Construction approach is introduced by the authors to strengthen local people environmental behavior. This plan can be adapted and applied in other communities. It is concluded that environmental literacy plans can be more efficient when are applied as transversal topics during formal and informal communitarian activities. This community members respect their agreement for keeping their natural and cultural resources for the enjoying of the future generations; even when, this represents a limited economic retribution.

**Keywords:** [Alternative Education](#), [Communication and Leadership](#), [Ecuador](#), [Rural Development](#), [Sustainability](#).  
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## 1. Introduction

Asking and responding is a viable method used to support the knowledge' social construction process in current times (Mendoza, 2015). Thus, the work in collaboration, joint tasks, conversation and discursive as a whole, are social activities used to promote educational process in rural location in countries of South America based on language as a socio-constructionists human act which emerge into social worlds. In this sense, speech contribute to knowledge' social construction process (Wertsch, 1997); which is able to be applied in rural communities having as goal "to favor the development of autonomy, critical thinking, oral and written communication in learners" (Hewitt, 2007, p. 237) to develop in local people capabilities to take decisions before economic, environmental, social and technological impacts (Ruiz de la Pena, Lamoth, Concepción and Rodríguez, 2012).

To scholars as Pacheco, Carrera and Almeida (2011) the Community Tourism (CT) have become the engine of local development, cultural exchange, sustainable and endogenous development in Ecuador. Such complex combination of natural and cultural resources exposed to the touristic industry allowed strengthening the delicate symbiosis between private and governmental stakeholders to contribute to the rural development in Ecuador (Jaime, Casa and Soler, 2011).

In Latin America, the Cultural and Ethnic tourism is considered as an activity where communities have the opportunity to show their traditions and customs to visitors (Morales, 2008). Such kind of contact and cultural exchange use to helps these localities to illustrate their ways of life, allowing their population to reassess and preserve their cultural elements, recognition of their identity in daily interaction with their environment, etc. From a development perspective, this modality of tourism promotes a more conscious, responsible and solidary tourism activity; consequently, the tourist is not anymore a visitor-observer. The tourist is a person who assumes an active part and nourishes the community during their staying. They learn to prepare regular local food, create crafts for their personal usage, rehearse ancestral languages, use medicinal plants, cultivate and harvest the aliments they would consume daily. They become members of the traditional community events, where they perceive and appreciate religious and pagan beliefs (Secretary of Tourism of Mexico, 2004).

It is understood that Community Tourism activities "do not intend to replace the productive activities already developed in the rural communities, but to be gather into the local productive chains" (Cabanilla, 2014, p.39). "It is a resource for generating employment, since many people both directly and indirectly, gets benefits from it" (Coloma, 2015, p. 51). Tourism is a social activity that generates positive impacts on the economy system of a territory, but at the same time, it can be the cause of negative effects, which can be reflected on the communities' culture, social or environmental changes (Coloma, 2015; and Garcia, 2016).

The local community knowledge is recognized as a key factor which supports the sustainable development. Therefore, the sensible administration of these powerful endogenous and exogenous resources for sustainable development is important challenge. Thus, the Organization of the United Nations for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO, 2002) determines three fundamental objectives to be achieved: (1) Strengthen local community control over the processes of ecological, social and economic change, exploring the links and synergies between autochthonous and scientific knowledge; (2) Rehabilitate the transmission of traditional knowledge within local communities, strengthening links between the elderly and young people, and evaluating the opportunities and problems that traditional knowledge in education issues poses; y (3) Evaluate traditional rules and practices, which govern access to knowledge, with a view to the appropriate development of normative instruments to safeguard traditional knowledge.

To recognize the contribution of traditional knowledge to the protection of the environment, and promoting synergies between modern science and local knowledge is the route to follow (UNESCO, 2002). Thus, analyzing the Esmeraldas' rural environmental context, the study and conservation of the territories is presented and revaluated as a local priority. To respect and protect the traditional knowledge systems, especially those of indigenous populations, the organization of community's ecotourism projects could be the best strategy to apply (Marquez, 2014). This territory has cultural and nature characteristic which mixtures ethnic communities as Afro-Ecuadorian, Mestizos, Cayapas, Awas and Eperas populations (Villafuerte, Lucio, Rezavala, Mera, and Medina, 2016)

Protected areas in the Ecuadorian territory have an extensive history of human settlements; admitting that ancestral communities carry out their daily activities depending on the characteristics of

the area, favoring the obtaining of products derived from natural resources for subsistence, use and commercialization, and at the same time living organized in harmony with the environment. In Ecuador, there were 11 communities that were chosen to be protected during the last 30 years; but, they are part of the current national protected areas system (Ministry of the Environment, 2015). Some of these areas are: the Isla Santay recreation space in the city of Guayaquil, which hosts 56 families (approximately 207 and 230 inhabitants). The ecotourism due to the ecological characteristics community is the main product for visitors. The Manglares-Churute Ecological Reserve protects the dry and misty ecosystems found in the hills of the Churute mountains range and it is a refuge for many species of fauna, some of them threatened. It also includes archeological settlements as cultures Valdivia, Chorrera, Guangala, Jambelí populated more than 4,000 years ago on the current cities of Guayaquil and Milagro at the South Ecuador coast zone.

The province of Esmeraldas has Afro-descendant and mestizo's population settles in the buffer zones, such as the Cotacachi-Cayapas Reserve (Lower zone of Esmeraldas province), Cayapas-Mataje (San Lorenzo and Eloy Alfaro cantons), Mache-Chindúl Ecological Reserve (Quinindé and Esmeraldas cantons); and the Wildlife Refuge of the river Muisne. Users and communities established in these protected areas must adhere to the environmental regulations of the State (Ministry of the Environment, 2015).

In the case of the province of Esmeraldas in north Coast of Ecuador, tourism activity has focused on sun and sea attractions during decades (Rodriguez, 2012, p. 3). However, the initiative of this communitarian tourism entrepreneur in San Miguel has been supported by social development projects and the academy. Looking for its sustainability, it is required the systematization of this socio educative experience to determine its benefits and limitations (Gustavsen-Ferreira, 2011). Finally, tourism is one of the key sectors in the national project for change of productive matrix of Ecuador. Such initiative pretends to improve the local economy system, which is traditionally based on the exportation of petroleum (Villafuerte and Intriago, 2016).

The questions to be answer in this study are the following:

What are the tourism impacts on the San Miguel's natural and cultural heritage?

What were the processes applied to improve the environmental behavior in the rural community?

### 1.1 Language and social knowledge construction process

It is common to meet students do not understand terms as "ubiquity", "etymology", "epistemology", "hermeneutics", etc. The words or linguistic units are abstracted from the communicative context in which they were originally used. In the case of academic or scientific concepts, which have a definition and certain rigidity, almost opposite to that of everyday words, which are flexible and that they are linked to the experience or to the known world.

When people communicate ideas to others, people uses narratives people use to analyses concrete situations are relevant to generate a new knowledge about such problem or fact. "it's not just that you can say that both things are true, but both must be affirmed, [...] the nature of such facts allows to affirm two opposite truths" (Shotter, 1990, p. 142) meanwhile, the different ways of speaking extent what people pretend to say (Gergen, 1994).

In addition, academic concepts' relevance lies on the relationship they maintain with other concepts and their extra linguistic independence as a concrete experience. However, human groups have access to "more than one language when they describe and explain both, their own behavior patterns and thought like those of others" (Wertsch, 1997, p. 186).

Culture is as a major framework which gives guidelines to know how to behave in certain conditions. To Jerome Bruner (1997) the educational practice unfolds in a larger framework which includes the culture and ideologies of reproduction that represent the crosses of those signs. Here, the speech is inscribed in a social, sociocultural, socio- historical and traditions, and norms that a society provides to a group of people who live in community. Such social evolution is not homogeneous. Communities also have diversity, multiplicity, etc., among their characteristics. Communities' members also have preferences, follow tendencies and lived external influences. In this concern, Bruner (1997) advocated that inside a community, there are always small groups who think and act in different ways to the collective behavior.

To Ibanez (2003) language is not only the purely representational and designative notion. It is more than an activity in which a certain exchange of signs is possible. Language also represents a culture, a way of living and the appropriation of such cultural evidence (Núñez, 2004)

Language also allows communities to create rules of verbal exchange used during conversations, games even in multiple social relationships. Thus, the courts have their own frame of reference in which certain contents run and discursive structures; hospitals and theater environments are other examples because, the language is between the knowledge and the reality. Here, language is called as discursive which was used in professional fields as sociology, anthropology even psychology (Sisto, 2012).

Da Silva and Badaró (2012) stated that there is a reproduction of cultural identity and environmental benefits. Other authors criticize this type of community projects, the only thing that causes conflicts of interest, and since this is a negative aspect in the communities (Carpentier, 2011).

During the Social Knowledge Construction activities people use metaphors or the analogies to explain their ideas and visions; and to explore the ways how a speech is received, how it is shared, controlled, discussed, understood or even how knowledge is misunderstood; because, people use language to think, solve problems, create knowledge and share it (Mendoza, 2015, p. 92). Globally, language is also related to social position, instruction level, rural and urban areas, but also, gender differences. To Njeri (2017, p.77) "geographical and ethnic backgrounds share some experiences related to their towards a deeper understanding marginalised statuses and their economic, social and cultural motivations for pursuing tourist related livelihoods".

When mutual understanding is sought and knowledge is shared; it is when the knowledge' social construction process appears. In everyday life, people understand the meaning of what is spoken in a conversation but, the dialogues are immersed in a common framework. Such contextualized framework is provided by the local culture and the communities. Then emerges the Social Language which is used by groups in a certain way: priests, academics, lawyers, writers, etc. In addition, human speech comes from communities like: families, friends or neighborhood, where speeches and narratives have little or nothing to do with the language expressed in books or in the classrooms because, speech express a community agreement of any experience that was lived only by their members (Mendoza, 2015).

## 1.2 Sustainability and human development

During the World Commission on Environment and Development (1984) was emerged the concept of 'sustainability' that raises the economic growth of communities from the implementation of policies of sustainability and expansion of natural resources. Thus, professors Max-Neef, Elizalde and Hoppenhayn (1986) proposed the basic postulate of human development and sustainability, to affirm that the improvement of environmental conditions and the conservation of the cultural property are in direct interference to human action.

Sustainability is a development approach which prioritizes people and not objects. Thus, based on the 'Future in common approach' critical issues were examined to propose coherent global actions. Thus, the world summits of Rio de Janeiro, Johannesburg; and the promulgation of The Agenda 21 of the United Nations had a similar goal: to create multidimensional approaches and respond to the double demand: "the environmental requirement, which demand to preserve a finite natural resource base; and the social or equity factor to [...] adequately satisfy the basic needs of current and future generations" (Caride and Meira, 2001, p.166).

Authors like Elizalde (2003, p.3) in concern to human development argued "the fundamental change is not in the plane of technology, nor of politics or economy; it focuses on the plane of our beliefs, since they are the ones that will determine the world we inhabit. However, Jones (2005) determines that social and environmental changes occur while people get organize to implement communitarian projects motivated on the generation of a better future for their members.

Mata and Nobre (2006) argued that since 2002, the Initiative for the Sustainable Development of Latin America and the Caribbean has been given the "purpose of promoting investment to generate sustainable activities and maintain livelihoods to use the essential environmental goods and services" (p.7). In addition, Colom (2007) argues "Politics forms the context, affects, therefore, sustainability

programs, which is why we consider it one dimension of it. Economy as well as an explanatory dimension of sustainable development when a solution or strategy to carry it out” (p. 526).

The intervention in the community sectors, have led some researchers to have different points of view about communitarian tourism, ranging from the sociocultural and environmental anthropological approach. Thus, *Stronza (2001)* argues that, the most important contribution of the communitarian entrepreneurs is the potential interaction and power to promote social changes in the communities (*De Menezes, 2005*). However, *Brenner and San Germán (2012)* affirm the erosion of local institutions can emerge to generate inequalities and conflicts among the community inhabitants.

*Garcia (2016)* argues that initiatives such as community tourism (TC) had managed to articulate the participation of families living in rural communities next to peasant organizations, governmental and non-governmental institutions, etc. in order to work for the sustainability of the current natural heritage.

### 1.3 Communitarian tourism as a pro-sustainable entrepreneurship

According to *Hidalgo (2000)* tourism enhance economic growth (occupation of local labor, generation of employment, increase of capital, improvement of infrastructures, among others); while, as disadvantages were introduced the corrosive effects on the society, culture and living heritage even the abuse of ecosystems and nature destruction.

The World Tourism Organization (2004) affirmed that tourism generates benefits for nations. This social and economic activity could be assumed as solidarity-type entrepreneurship which is materialized through a trip.

To *Lopez-Guzman, Millan and Melian (2007)* Rural Tourism (RT) has the following two clear premises: (i) Reduction of the impact on the environment that seeks the conservation of local heritage and the environment; and (ii) Strengthening of autonomous economic dynamics.

*Lopez-Guzman and Sánchez (2009)* advocacy that Community Tourism (CT) should be conceived as a model of human development because, it enhances the participation of indigenous nationalities, and conserves natural resources in exchange for economic benefits that are distributed equally among the local population.

*Jimenez (2013)* defined the term Community Tourism as the "human activity that seeks to conserve biodiversity for the benefit of communities and people" (p.10). Under specific locations are exposed the existing biodiversity including the cultural values using techniques to avoid their impacts and destruction. This kind of entrepreneurs allows a moderate economic benefit to the communities in exchange for the preservation of their natural and cultural resources. In consequence, this kind of practices generate directly and indirectly employment to local people (*Coloma, 2015*). However, tourism development models require strategies to improve communities marketing processes to warranty permanent visitors' fluids to sustain these entrepreneurs since the economic terms (*Canada, 2015*).

The pro-sustainable entrepreneurs emerged as business whose goal is to contribute to the preservation of the nature, through the installation and operation of touristic services (*Shepherd and Patzelt, 2010*). The term entrepreneur refers to those individuals capable of innovating, recognizing business opportunities, making risky decisions, conducting actions, making efficient use of resources and providing added values to the products or services they commercialize (*Filion, 2011*). Entrepreneurs' growth is directly related to its institutional and legal environment; where labor, financial and consumer market conditions strengthen or weaken the potential of your business (*Oyarvide, 2013*).

Entrepreneurs have become agents of change whose success is the fruit of their creative capacity (*Benitez and Villafuerte, 2014*). The entrepreneurial development has achieved a high expansion in the region (*Sanguinetti, Ortega, Berniell, Alvarez, Mejía, Castillo and Brassiolo, 2015*) and they contribute to the economic growth of the social collective (*Oyarvide, Nazareno, Roldán and Ferrales, 2016*). In addition, "Entrepreneurship is based on social and economic reform for human capital development. It allows the disabled job opportunity other than government paid jobs which the society might deny them" (*Olufunmilayo, 2016, p.36*).

In Ecuador, community tourism emerged in the decade of 1980, on the Sierra high lands provinces and Amazon region. They were small endogenous and social projects financed for the European international cooperation (*Pacheco, Carrera and Almeida, 2011*). After, 1990 they became

touristic projects that offered gastronomy, handy crafts and the experience to know local communities through cultural exchange which required the coordination between the community leaders, local governments and the international cooperation (Jaime, Casa and Soler, 2011).

Ecuador was declared in 2011 as a pioneer country for the community tourism development (Moncayo, 2011). Ecuador also received the certification of social responsible country which promotes business and sustainable tourism in 2017. It was declared as pioneer tourist destination of South America (Ministry of Tourism, 2017).

Finally, Garcia (2016) argued TC is today a reality and not a dream. It is an activity "not without contradictions and some utopias, where the disagreement of the public and private sector, the academic sphere or some NGOs is evident" (p.611).

Among the studies reviewed in the framework here are quoted: Lopez-Guzman and Sanchez (2009) who studied about the accommodation and restoration services in rural tourism project in Nicaragua.

It is added the experience of Jiménez (2013), who developed in Bolivia group works to identify organizational solutions to communitarian tourism activities run at Villa Amboro Volcanes and Isama.

Mendoza (2015) explored the construction of knowledge since other look. He explored how two or more people can establish, through language and their speeches, a continuity of experiences that is itself greater than his speech or individual experience.

## 2. Methodology

This action research work is subscribed to the reflexive socio-critical paradigm. It is applied a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research approaches to determine the key elements that allowed to develop the sustainability thinking in the San Miguel's Touristic Entrepreneurship members. It is applied the ethnographic approach and the Echavarren's Model for Tourism impacts assessment (2007).

In addition, this process also applies the socio-educational interactions for environmental education in extra class interactions of Mendonça (2007). They were the base to design the meetings with the community members. Finally, collaborative learning approach is understood as group efforts which active participation and interaction between local population and researchers (Salinas, 2004)

### 2.1 The sample

It was integrated for 35 participants. 16 participants were men and 19 participants were female. The age average was 32 years. (4.2 points of standard deviation) 90% of the participants belong to the Afro-Ecuadorian ethnic group. The participants' selection criteria applied were:

- a) Live in the community of San Miguel
- b) Have participated directly or indirectly in the communitarian touristic entrepreneurship
- c) Have signed the respective informed consent letter.

### 2.2 Instruments

#### 2.2.1 The structured interview

A structured interview instrument was developed that includes elements of the model Echavarren (2007). The categories worked were: (a) Tourism impact on community socio-economic state (2) Tourism impact on community environment and (3) Tourism impact on community culture.

There were five the local leaders who responded to this interview (commune directives, leaders of women's groups, local authorities, etc.). The instrument was tested using the methodology of triangulation applied by experts in alternative education, sustainability development, and environmental education from the ULEAM University in Ecuador.

#### 2.2.2 The survey

This instrument takes aspects of the model Echavarren (2007). The instrument was adapted by the research team to the San Miguel communitarian context. This instrument consisted of 4 open questions about the following categories: (1) Training for work in tourism. (2) Participation in the

communitarian tourism operations. (3) Participants income flow. (4) Use of natural resources in the tourist activity. The instrument was tested through a process of expert triangulation. The experts profile included experts on environmental education, tourism industry, and rural development from the Ecuadorian universities PUCE-SE and UTLVT.

### 2.3 Ethical norms

In this study, the internationally accepted standards for socio-economic and educational research were applied.

- Participants should be informed of the objective and implications of this investigation previous the beginning of the process.
- The participants can express their agreement by signing the letter of consent. Once the consent letter is signed, they have up to 6 weeks to express their wish to refuse participation in the project.
- The data collected is considered confidential. The data and analysis are restricted to educational and non-profit purposes.
- The confidentiality of the information and the anonymity of the informants are guaranteed.

## 3. Results

### Question 1: What are the tourism impacts on the San Miguel's natural and cultural heritage?

(1) Training for working in tourism in San Miguel

Table 1: Local people's competences for tourism work

Competences	ONG	GO
Carpentry	3	0
Organizational strengthening	5	9
Agricultural production	4	4
Mechanics	0	0
Tailor shop	2	0
Bakery	4	2
Cabinetmaking	0	0
Hotel and tourism services	4	6
Floors	3	4
Cooking techniques	3	4
Tour guides	3	3
Business Administration	3	2
Maintenance	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>

Source: Survey (2016).

ONG= Governmental Organization

GO=Governmental Organization

(2) Involvement of participants in tourism operations in San Miguel

Table 2: Local participation in the tourism entrepreneur

Participation frequency	N°	%
High	12	37,14
Medium	5	9,29
People do not participate	22	62,86
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Interview with leaders of the communities studied (2016)

## (3) Flow of economic income

Table 3: Daily income per person from community tourism

Incomes categories	San Miguel Participants
Less than USD 10.00	0
USD 10.00 – 20.00	8
USD 21.00 – 30.00	4
More than USD 30.00	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>

Source: interview to leaders (2016).

Nomenclature: USD = American dollars.

Table 4: Participants' satisfaction levels for touristic project incomes

Satisfactory factor	N°	%
High Acceptable	0	0.00
Acceptable Medium	9	25.71
Low	10	28.57
Dissatisfied	16	45.71
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: interview to leaders (2016).

## (4) Usage of natural resources in the tourist activity

What are the natural and cultural resources used for touristic operation in San Miguel?

*Marimba and other local dances*

The Waterfall

Flora tours (exotic flowers, cacao plantations, tropical forest)

**Cotacachi Ecological Reserve – Cayapas.**

Hiking and observation of fauna

“Chigualos” festival (Musical Pray)

**Visit to Chachis communities**

Typical food: “Encocados” (food accompanied with a coconut sauce)

Figure 1: The leader's responses

Source: The San Miguel leader's responses (2016).

Note: Cayapas and Chachis are aborigine ethnic communities

Table 5: Tourism impacts on San Miguel's natural and cultural attractions

Resource	Turistic resource / attraction	Impact for touristic activity
Natural reserves	Cotacachi- Cayapas	Low. Alterations appear as an effect of climate change. The visits to the area are accompanied by local guides.
River, waterfall	San Vicente	No impacts
Religious	Local cathedral	Medium. Garbage accumulates in the caves. The passengers are not careful enough for it, the local population organizes mingas.
Forest observation	Natural Forest Reserve “Tigrillos” (The small tigers)	Low. Participated in processes of renewal of cocoa plantations
Etnography	Afro community and Chachis	Low. There are signs of acquisition of terms and



ethnic groups	expressions of Colombian tourists.
Typical food Encocados	The local cuisine is very well appreciated.
Virgen of Carmen Monserrate	No impact
Marimba dance, Arrullos and chigualos (Afro ecuadorian music and prays)	No impact
Handicraft (vegetable fivers, wood, seeds and ivory nut)	Artisans manage to sell their products easily but at a low price.

Source: The leaders of San Miguel (2016)

The perceptions of the population about tourism impacts

In the survey applied, the perceptions of 35 community members regarding the impact that community tourism has generated in the dimensions: environmental resources, social benefit, cultural heritage, economic benefit.

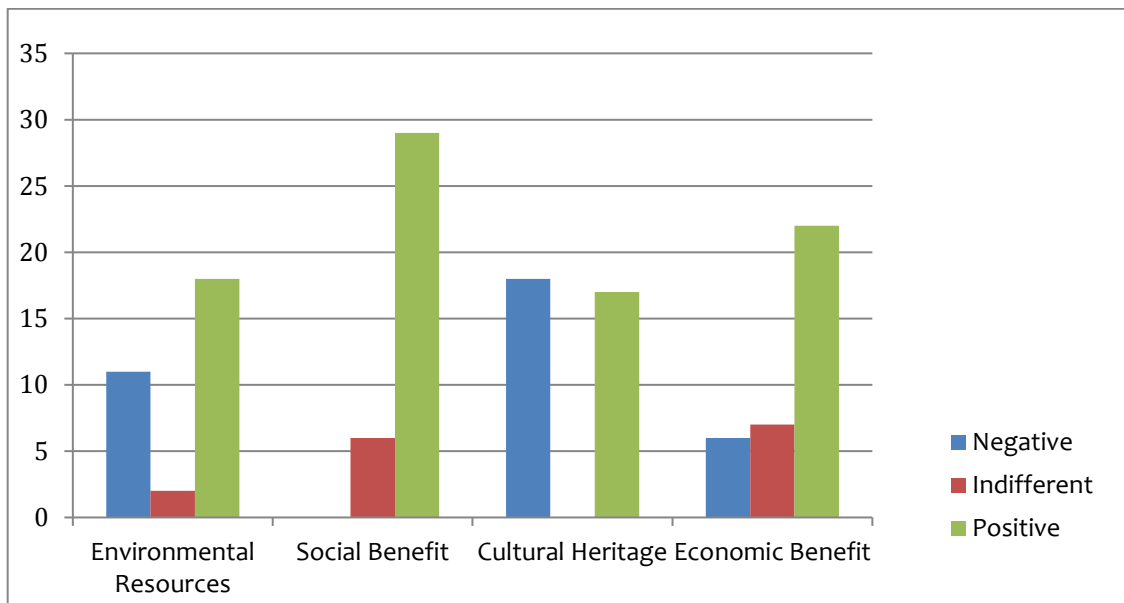


Figure 2: Tourism Impact on San Miguel natural and cultural resources

Source: Research team (2017)

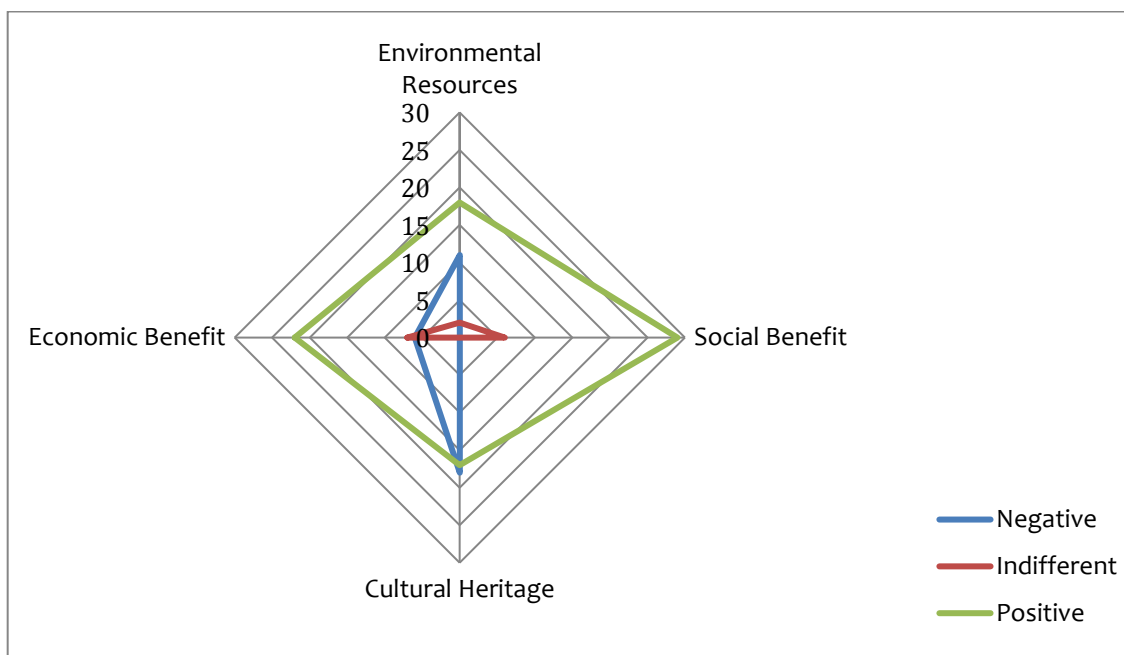


Figure 3: Multidimensional analysis of the Tourism Impact at San Miguel

Source: Data analysis (2017)

### Question 2: What was the process applied to promote the environmental behavior in the community San Miguel?

Table 7: Itineraries and activities to execute in the sessions

Topic	Goals	Activity
Contents	Include examples of ventures that attempt against the planet.	Training planning
Public politics	Position the community members in their condition of citizens from the knowledge and analysis of public policy.	Debates
Sensitization and wakefulness	Raising awareness among community members about the exercise of citizen rights and professional practice around the environment	Workshops and dialogues
Motivation to action	To transmit to the local people the values and a philosophy of awareness to their students.	Film Forum
Ethics and self-assessment	Impact wakefulness capabilities for correction and remediation	Self-analysis exercises
Arts and environmental	Guidance to reduce impacts generated by ventures.	Role-play
Continuous learning	Reconciling the technical with the ethical in professional and personal life.	Debates

Source: Research team (2016)

Following [Mendonça \(2007\)](#), social and environmental issues are dealt with transversally during work meetings with the community. The perception expected in the local population is the strengthening their environmental behavior.

Table 8: Minimum contents of environmental literacy

Fundamental contents	Learning objectives
Ecological cycles	Develop fundamental concepts about the environment in the local people
Population growth	
Loading capacity	
Origin of environmental movements	The community members will be worried about environmental issues
World conferences on global warming, Our Common Future report, UN Conference on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 and Agenda 30.	
Environmental problems due to social problems, Ecotourism	Sustainable Tourism and Responsible Tourism.
Environmental impacts of tourism	Protective guardian of paradise
The perception of the landscape modified by human action	
The local people or "comuneros" as agents of change of their visitors and clients.	Diffuser of the care of the environment
Environmental educators of the children and adolescents of the community and visiting families	

Source: Research team (2016)

## 4. Discussion

The results of this work coincide with the results of the work of [Moises Hidalgo \(2000\)](#), regarding that tourism is a tool for countries that are facing serious socioeconomic difficulties and that require the implementation of productive and cultural enterprises. One of the most striking elements is the extensive geographical dissemination of community tourism initiatives that involve national parks

and virgin territories, where a multiplicity of indigenous peoples live (Cox, 2009, p.203). The scarcity of diffusion towards tourist points limits the level of visitor flows (Cabanilla, 2014), but by respecting the load capacity, there is no damage to natural and cultural resources; allowing respect to the fulfillment of basic rights and needs that all human beings should enjoy (Martinez, 2015).

It persists the necessity of technical mechanisms directed to improve the linkage between peasant family farming and alternative means of marketing, promoting and strengthening associativity and food sovereignty, with principles of equality, equity and solidarity from the practice of the emerging community tourism. Faced with this situation, it is necessary to continue discussing the degree of participation of the organizations that support this proposal, through timely accompaniment; and promote the promotion of San Miguel as valuable community tourism destinations.

Based on the principle of sustainable development, community initiatives were implemented in Ecuador to generate economic income and activities of low environmental impact, to promote the conservation of natural resources in protected areas. These initiatives offered the ideal opportunity to promote the cooperation and coordination between local government, private and cooperation sector (De Menezes, 2005).

The community model implemented in the community of San Miguel can be taken as an example in other rural areas where social dynamics promote the incorporation of new forms of entrepreneurship for their community development, offering new perspectives of administration and community organization; as well as observation of the territory as a starting point, for the conservation of the natural and cultural resources of your locality. In the same way, it is necessary to continue working in the environmental education process, due to external factors that may threaten the territory, such as: the entry of foreigners, extractive activities in nearby sectors, non-compliance with forest management plans in the protected area, and more active involvement of local people in community administration; aspects that must be taken into account to achieve an efficient community development.

Training programs through participatory workshops, is a channel to maintain ongoing dialogue with local agents to achieve consensus, especially to internalize cultural aspects and the relationship with their environment; In this sense, the San Miguel district clearly understands the dynamics of daily life with the environment, maintaining a direct relationship with nature without fractionating it with human culture or activity and ecological process.

The participation of local agents can show the different forms of conservation against their environment, taking into consideration that they are the ones who know what sociocultural dynamics and ancestry are, which is a lost aspect for some localities; it can be assumed that it is a point in favor to re-empower their different ways of life within community projects.

### **Question 1: What are the tourism impacts on the San Miguel's natural and cultural heritage?**

In San Miguel the economic income from local productive activities (agriculture, commerce, fishing, etc.) used to be between 100-200 American dollars/month. The community tourism work at lodging or feeding can represent an income of 10-30 American dollar/day. However, the tourist activity is run only on the weekends (Friday to Sunday) which represent an average of 40-120 US/dollar/month. That amount is not enough to cover all the basic needs of a 5 member family; however, it represent an important benefit.

It is noted that not every the members of the community take part of the touristic entrepreneur. It is the most important weak to improve under the community possibilities, without putting in risk the cultural either the natural attractions or community heritage.

The community population in general has a positive perception of the tourism entrepreneurship even not all the members have a direct employ. They consider the most outstanding contribution of the community tourism is on the environmental conservation. The social and economic benefit in community tourism is the most limited contribution but, the local people have the expectation on the business improvement.

The inhabitants consider that the most outstanding contribution of community tourism is the conservation of the environment, based on the fact that the number of visitors that arrive is minimal, therefore, the extraction of local products for family and tourist consumption (wild animals), fishing in the river, family farming, raising animals, among others) is done on a small scale. The town under study

has these considerations for being ancestral lands and for being in the buffer zone of the Cotacachi-Cayapas Reserve, whose lower area belongs to the province of Esmeraldas.

It is essential to highlight that in the conservation management of natural resources, the black community of San Miguel is part of the socio-forest program, which seeks the conservation of native forests (primary and secondary), through economic incentives allows community members to plan and sustainably manage forest goods and gifted income, in this way, they are distributed equally by the local representative to cover basic needs (basic services, health, education, among others).

Culturally, customs are rooted in the daily life and the universe, which are reflected in the different forms of production where ancestral methods are applied to preserve the heritage inherited from their generational roots. It should be noted that, in this task, the elderly play an important role in teaching their knowledge to the new generations

### **Question 2: What was the process applied to promote the environmental behavior in the community San Miguel?**

The process applied is based on the ancestral knowledge concepts which states, knowledge is shaped simultaneously by the appropriation and construction of cultural products that represent communitarian practices and language (Núñez, 2004). Those forms of knowledge constructions were incorporated to the process applied in this work through individually and communitarian formats to support the human appropriation, recycling of ideas, environmental behavior transformation, and the transmission and revaluation of local cultures.

This process can be assumed as a didactic tool that articulates the accompanying processes of tourism entrepreneurship projects or communitarian dynamics through the hidden curriculum. The application of this didactic can be transversal in order to be introduced in every communitarian activity in workshops, meetings, etc. It is emphasized the necessity to achieve a transformation of the participants' principles; such condition allows community change their consumerism and materialism behavior to a different philosophy, to respect and protect their local culture and natural resources without any other kind of social control or communitarian pressure. Therefore, the intervention called environmental literacy must exceed the level of social consensus to become into a legitimate transformative experience.

This work authors ratify the term "Environmental Literacy" as individual or groups dynamics used to educate people who have not previously worked on the environmental theme. In addition, authors recommend motivate participants permanently to overcome the role of passive recipients and assume their responsibility before the environmental and cultural well estate. It is recommended to assume that all participants regardless of age's difference, have at least a basic knowledge about environmental education. One of the challenges for environmental literacy is to provide opportunities for the participants reflection about ecological problems without having to allocate meetings for the exclusive treatment of environmental issues.

In addition, hidden curriculum allows participants be introduced into theoretical environmental contents, normative and environmental legal framework, sustainable management techniques, etc., through the informal conversations, pathways, field work "mingas" (collaborative work), etc.

This work's authors advice, the study of public policy regarding environmental education, should be included in specific activities. The environmental literacy must invoke permanently the citizens' rights, but also responsibilities, before the nature and cultural Heritage conservation. Another relevant challenge is to establish in the participants an own system of values or self-regulation competence to reduce their impacts on the nature and cultural resources. This is extremely necessary to install in people the value of responsibility on the conservation of the planet.

Taking into consideration the components of Intangible Heritage in the field of knowledge and uses related to nature and the universe, in agreement with local members, the most relevant aspects of traditional productive techniques (agro diversity, artisanal fishing, handicraft talents, etc.) were discussed. Traditional ecological knowledge (knowledge and uses related to astronomical and natural phenomena, knowledge and uses related to plants, animals and minerals), gastronomy (daily, festive, ritual, artisanal food products), traditional medicine, symbolic spaces (sacred and symbolic places) (National Institute of Cultural Heritage, 2011). The ancestral knowledge of material and immaterial cultural heritage should be considered in the design of Environmental Literacy Programs, having clear

concepts clear about conservation to establish the relationship between the theoretical and empirical elements.

In order to validate this process applicability in the territory; it was necessary to develop participatory workshops, group workshops and debates on the different topics. The results demonstrated this process (didactic) was the main way to keep permanent dialogues between the governmental institutions, local public and private organizations, and cooperation sector to value, internalize and protect the local cultural characteristics, promote positive local relationships, tourism service organization, and other social dynamics. This organizational experience has allowed to the “comuneros” (community members) of San Miguel, to understand their role in the conservation action of their natural and cultural Heritage for the knowledge and enjoying of the future generations.

## 5. Conclusions

The objective set for this study has been achieved, making evident that it is possible to improve the rural community environmental behavior through a middle term transversal literacy process which includes reflecting activities and collaborative work.

The communitarian tourism entrepreneurship in San Miguel has been executed considering as priority the conservation of the environment and cultural resources. The demand for visitors is still low, limitation that should be improved to increment the number of visitors to warranty opportunities of participation and access to its benefits to every the local families. However, it would be necessary to establishes local normative to apply the controls of tourism impacts when the touristic flows be increased.

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