Participation, empowerment and the role of external actors in community-centered tourism

San Juan de Nicaragua

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Abstract

The concepts of participation and empowerment are widely used in both development theory and in tourism development that includes the local community in its considerations. The concepts are either accepted without question in the tourism development discourse as essential elements of community-based tourism (CBT) which brings community control, sustainability and the equal distribution of benefits to a community, or they are dismissed as obstacles to the most efficient way of bringing benefits such as employment, income and efficient development through community benefit tourism initiatives (CBTI). This research has explored the complexities of participation, empowerment and external actor involvement in community-centered tourism in rural Nicaragua and found that these both form the basis of and are the result of the internal and external power structures that form a crucial part of the modern, heterogeneous community. With research based on the case study of San Juan de Nicaragua, where a locally based tour operator is under development, we suggest for tourism researchers to create stronger cross-disciplinary ties to development theory scholars who have long concerned themselves with the challenges inherent in these two concepts. In doing so it may be possible to look beyond the discussion of whether or not to include community members in participation and empowerment and instead realise that the two approaches might have more in common than what divides them. Namely the concepts that form the core of their very definition and presumed opposition to each other and the fact that they are united in the common challenge of applying them in more nuanced ways. Furthermore the role of the external actor involved in developing this local tourism initiative was found to be of great significance to the tourism development in the community. In particular it was found that external actors, when engaged in community-centered tourism, have the potential to either assist the community greatly through the resources they contribute or to cause detriment to the community when local knowledge is dismissed and the internal power structures ignored.

Appendix

Audio files

1. Interview with Enrique and Raúl Gutierréz, September 28th, 2016
2. Interview with Jimena Jimenez, September 29th, 2016
3. Meeting with Tourism Committee, October 22nd, 2016
4. Meeting with guides, November 6th, 2016

Documents

5. Propuesta de Tour Operadora para los Gobiernos Comunales de Graytown e Indian River (April 11th, 2014), *Lic. Néstor Gutiérrez*
6. Segunda Etapa del Proyecto Ecoturismo Comunitario en el Territorio Rama Kriol Comunidades Graytown y Río Indio, San Juan, Nicaragua (November 15th, 2015), *Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University*

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1. Introduction

Over the past years, the acknowledgement of tourism as a potential instrument for development in a community context has increased, due to its potential of providing an alternative source of income while contributing to the improvement of community living standards through capacity-building. An increasing amount of researchers are embracing the community-based tourism (hereinafter CBT) approach as a successful tool to obtain social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability in tourism development. Terms such as *empowerment* of the community and *participation* by local residents in the decision-making process have been recognized as important factors to maximize the local community's benefits of tourism development. However, some researchers take a different stand on community's role in tourism development, and move the focus to the perceived benefits for the local community, in community benefit tourism initiatives (CBTI). Throughout this thesis the term *community-centered tourism* will be applied to the collective tourism development approaches which to some extent include the local community in their considerations.

1.1 Background for this research

As part of our master's degree in tourism studies, we had the opportunity to do an internship for a period of three months in a Danish or foreign tourism organization, located in Denmark or abroad. Through one of the students' job at Forests of the World, an NGO focusing on forest conservation through various means, the connection with the indigenous Rama and Kriol governments in San Juan de Nicaragua (hereinafter SJN) was established. Forests of the World has worked in close collaboration with the local indigenous populations and their representative governments in the SJN area over the past years in order to strengthen the conservation of the Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz, as well as securing the local indigenous populations' rights to control and protect the indigenous territory. With support from the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University in Nicaragua, the indigenous Rama and Kriol governments in SJN have recently initiated a tourism project, in the form of a tour operator, which aims at benefitting and including the local community by providing them with an alternative source of income and contributing to the conservation of the natural environment. The goal of the internship was to support the indigenous Rama and Kriol governments in the organization of tourism efforts in relation to the establishment of the tour operator in the town of SJN. On the basis of our experiences during the internship and the knowledge gained through the work with the community members of SJN, the topic for this thesis was chosen as will be described below.

Upon return from Nicaragua and when we started to look into existing literature on community-based tourism initiatives, we soon realized that most of the existing research points toward the same key factors as of how to achieve sustainable and participatory tourism development. However, as criticisms of the community-based approach indicate, most of these recommendations are good in theory and seem to fit the specific case of the research, but can rarely be applied outside the case of study, since the success of tourism development projects depends on the local community, the stakeholders and the general context of the case. Having experienced firsthand the difficulties of finding facts, grasping formal and informal power structures and assessing who participated in what, we realized that trying to define which

tourism model better fit the tourism initiative in SJN was irrelevant. Instead the broader challenges involved when implementing community-centered tourism in cases such as ours are more interesting to look into in order to understand what comes between the good intentions and successful community-centered tourism development.

1.2 Research question

The research question evolved after working with the empirical data collected during our stay in SJN, a process which will be elaborated on in the methodological chapter. On the basis of the above introduction and for the purpose of this thesis, the following research question will be explored:

How is the complexity of participation and empowerment of community-centered tourism played out in San Juan de Nicaragua and how is the role of the external actor defining in the implementation of community-centered tourism?

1.2.1 Research aims

- Compare and contrast CBT's and CBTI's approaches to community-centered tourism.
- Examine how the concepts of participation and empowerment are applied in community-centered tourism in SJN and to what effect.
- Seek to understand the role of BICU in the community-centered tourism efforts of SJN and how this role has affected the implementation of the town's locally based tour operator.

1.3 Defining community

The term *community* is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. There can be found as many definitions of the concept of community as researchers trying to define it. For the purpose of this thesis, a definition of the term has been adapted from Clausen and Andersson's (2014) work on the redefining of community, whose traditional conceptualization has been challenged by global mobilities. The authors argue that community can be

> *lean and flexible. This requires leaving the traditional conception of community as territorially bound, small-scale social entity, united by traditional values and embrace a view of community as globally networked, heterogeneous and ideologically diverse*
>
> Clausen & Andersson, 2014, p. 10

This definition highlights that community in a development context cannot be defined as homogenous, as will be our argument throughout this thesis. Furthermore, by having its foundation in the development context this definition goes to emphasise the connection between development theory studies and tourism development, a cross-disciplinary approach that we too favor.

1.4. Setting the scene

1.4.1 Tourism in Nicaragua

As it was noted by Gascón (2013), a mantra seems to have made its entry into the global tourism industry, promoting the implementation of tourism initiatives as a quick and easy solution for development. From experiences during our internship in SJN and from travelling two weeks on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua after ending the three months internship, this mantra seems to have left a mark in the minds of both the SJN community members and indigenous government members where data for this thesis was collected, as well as in the larger tourist destinations we visited in other parts of the country. Following a 40 years dictatorship, Nicaragua suffered years of political instability and faced heavy debts and financial downturn at the end of the conflicts. Tourism was seen as a *"driver for development"* (Carroll, 2007 in Hunt, 2012) and a number of initiatives were introduced to make foreign investment more attractive, with the intention of creating favourable conditions for foreign investors and tourism developers. Despite the achievements of the social transformations during the 1980s, Nicaragua is today the second poorest country in Latin America (Zapata et al., 2011). However, the substantial economic incentives and tax breaks have led to an increase in tourist arrivals of 250 % from 1997 to 2009 and according to INTUR, the national governmental tourism institute, these initiatives have resulted in tourism overtaking the export of traditional products such as coffee, meat and fruit to become the country's main export (Hunt, 2012). Although tourism has increased, the effects are primarily limited to the regions on the country's Pacific coast, with major tourist cities León, Granada, Masaya and San Juan del Sur. The less accessible towns on the Caribbean coast and the immense natural reserve, Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz, continue to be in the shadow of the more developed tourist destination on the opposite coast.

1.4.2 San Juan de Nicaragua

The small and remote town of SJN is located by the Caribbean Sea near the mouth of the Río San Juan, which rises from the immense Lago de Nicaragua. It can be reached by boat in seven to ten hours, departing three times a week from the nearest bigger city, San Carlos, or by a two hour flight from the capital city of Managua twice a week. While Bluefields is only approximately 120 kilometers North of SJN, local geography and logistics means that for most people it is a two day journey by boat and bus to get from one to the other.

The town has suffered from many years of territorial conflicts due to its close location to the border with Costa Rica, and the latest conflicts have resulted in an increase of military checkpoints along the Río San Juan, in the border area between SJN and Costa Rica. Before the closing of the border and due to its remoteness and challenging accessibility to nearest major cities San Carlos and Bluefields, most supplies to SJN came in from across the border and community members reported that at a time, the Costa Rican Colón was more commonly used than the national currency and the open borders also meant a greater tourism flow.

SJN is located in the South Eastern corner of Nicaragua, only separated from the Caribbean Sea by a narrow tongue of land between the Río Indio and the coast. The Río San Juan, rising from the Lake Nicaragua, make up the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica between El Castillo and the Caribbean Sea[1].

The town of SJN is surrounded by the huge natural reserve of the Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz and counts approximately 2000 inhabitants represented by three main ethnic groups: the indigenous Rama population (approx. 5% of SJN population), the Kriol afro-descendant population (approx. 10% of SJN population) and the Mestizo population, which constitutes the majority of the population in the town as well as the country. Besides the population living in the town, SJN counts a smaller number of Rama families livíng in small communities along the Río Indio inside the Biological Reserve, and an equally small number of Kriol families living in coastal communities by the Caribbean Sea. The majority of the community members live from small scale fishing, hunting and agricultural activities around SJN. Most families in SJN have installed electricity, which is available 15 hours a day, however only few have access to running water inside their houses. Families in the communities of the Río Indio and by the coast have limited access to solar produced electricity. Unemployment in the town is high and most community residents have received no more than basic primary schooling.

The tourism industry in SJN is very much in its infancy. Tourists have been coming to experience the Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz and the sports fishing opportunities for several years, but information on tourism offers is limited, and together with the remoteness of SJN, the flow of tourists is low. During our three months stay in the town, an average of for to five tourists a week arrived in SJN. There is a handful of experienced guides working independently, offering day trip tours to the nearby Cemetery and the lagoons as well as overnight trips into the Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz. These guides benefit from mouth to mouth recommendations and one guide from a close collaboration with one of the local hotel owners. There has been several national and international attempts at boosting tourism in the

[1] Map retrieved from http://www.ourbiggerpicture.com/single-post/2015/09/26/The-Rio-San-Juan

area, both by foreign and national NGOs and latest by the Nicaraguan National Tourism Institute, (hereinafter referred to as INTUR), with the tourism programme *La Ruta del Agua* (2008[2]), which focused on the promotion of tourist attractions along the Río San Juan. During this programme, INTUR provided training to a selected amount of the local community members in guiding and the handling of tourist businesses, issuing certifications to the participating residents and service providers.

1.4.3 Local Rama and Kriol governments

The Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz and the communities belonging to the town of SJN are located within the indigenous Rama and Kriol territory. Since the adoption of the law 445[3] on communal ownership from 2004, the rights to self-control over the territory the size of 4068 km2 along the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, was acknowledged by the national government in Nicaragua. The administration of the whole indigenous territory, which counts a total of 1600 Rama and 400 Kriol members, is managed by the *Gobierno Territorial Rama-Kriol* (GTR-K) based in the city of Bluefields. GTR-K consists of nine indigenous communities - seven Rama and two Kriol - located different places within the territory and each community is represented by a local government consisting of seven community members. In SJN, two indigenous communities are present: the indigenous Rama community of *Indian River* and the Kriol community of *Greytown.* Both the Indian River and Greytown communities are represented by each their local government consisting of seven community members, elected for a period of four years by the respective community. The local governmental work is voluntary. While the Kriol government of Greytown is currently fully represented with seven members, the Rama government of Indian River was at the time of research missing two members, who no longer live in SJN.

1.4.4 BICU

The Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (hereinafter referred to as BICU) has been the external actor impulsing the latest tourism initiative in SJN. BICU has been the principal driving force behind the idea of a tour operator and has managed the organization of the project up until the time of research. Two professors in particular from the university's tourism programme were involved in the formulation and development of the tourism project which was created on the basis of funds from BICU's ecotourism department and the Council of Nicaraguan Universities. The project involved that 150 beneficiaries among the SJN community were selected at the start, divided between 60 Rama, 60 Kriol and 30 Mestizo. The selection process of the beneficiaries was never made clear to us during the internship despite several meetings discussing the topic. Over the course of time, some 30 beneficiaries have either moved away from the town, stopped working in tourism or dropped out of the group for other reasons, leaving approximately 120 beneficiaries during the time of research, who received training in aspects of tourism organization. The two professors were in charge of carrying out training classes in SJN as part of the project as well as the conception of a document to describe the second phase of development.

[2] https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:4321-a-cuatro-anos-de-su-ejecucion-ruta-del-agua-ha-llevado-desarrollo-economico-a-rio-san-juan
[3] http://www.poderjudicial.gob.ni/pjupload/costacaribe/pdf/Ley_445.pdf

1.4.5 Greytown Rama Kriol Tours

The local tourism initiative supported by BICU resulted in the local indigenous Rama and Kriol governments forming a collaboration and applying for a license to run a tour operator with the name of Greytown Rama Kriol Tours which is to include the town's three ethnicities. The license is issued by INTUR, and provides a certification for the local governments to legally operate a tour operator, promoting and selling tourist tours around the SJN area and into the Reserva Biologica Indio Maiz with certified guides. The tour operator does not yet have an office, although furniture financed by BICU has been delivered to the local government in SJN. They are currently kept stored by one of the Kriol members, until they can be moved into an actual office. The Kriol government's community house has been selected to house Greytown Rama Kriol Tours' office, however, this community house is currently under construction.

1.4.6 The Tourism Committee

The Tourism Committee consists of seven community members, three Kriol members, three Rama members and one Mestizo member, however only one of three Rama positions is occupied for the same reason as the lack of members in the Rama indigenous government. The Tourism Committee has been elected by the beneficiaries and is formally in charge of managing Greytown Rama Kriol Tours.

2. Methodology

2.1. Methodology introduction

The research for this thesis was conducted during a three months' 9th semester internship in SJN, a small town in the Southeastern corner of Nicaragua in Central America. The community came to serve as a case study for our research into participation and ownership in community-centered tourism, and thus became our basis for a qualitative study based on an exploratory approach. Our extended presence in the town allowed us to conduct participant observation as both tourism developers and community members. Through meetings, interviews, formal and informal conversations with local community residents, representatives of the local indigenous governments, members of the Tourism Committee and local institutions, as well as drawing information from our observations, we gathered extensive information about tourism development in the small community. The nature of this study favours a primarily inductive research approach, where the specific research question was defined on the basis of the information about the current tourism situation and development challenges that was collected. In this chapter, the research approaches will be presented as well as the collection of empirical data and how this data was analysed.

2.2 Methodological approaches

2.2.1 Qualitative research

This thesis is characterized by its qualitative research approach, which according to Kuada (2012), is a term used to describe a variety of data collection methods including ethnography, participant observation, in-depth interviewing and conversational interviewing (Bryman and Bell, 2011 in Kuada, 2012, p. 93). The use of quantitative research methods stands in contrast to the qualitative approach, where research is based on quantifiable data often collected through questionnaires and surveys which can be verified or falsified as often favoured by the natural sciences. It is widely agreed though, that "*the subject matter of the social sciences - people and their institutions - is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences*" (Bryman, 2016, p. 26) and as such merit a fundamentally different approach. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain multiple levels of understanding which go beyond the mere factual and explore the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem (Creswell, 2014) as was the aim of our research.

By applying more exploratory tools for data collection such as those mentioned above we were able to gauge the community's sentiments regarding the development of tourism in their town beyond what they themselves expressed, rather than only measure what had been done and who formally played which role. Questionnaire-type data collection would have most likely provided us with information on how many people were involved in this project, when it was initiated and by whom, but it is unlikely that it could shed light on issues such as informal power

structures, the actual level of participation and the support offered by BICU, which came to form the very basis of this research. Thus, in this particular case, the qualitative approach was considered most effective in gaining insight into the process of implementing tourism development in a community perspective. The study of people and their feelings is a delicate subject which requires the researcher to search and make use of alternative forms of evidence and information (Walle, 1997).Through qualitative research methods, data can be collected in the participants' setting (Creswell, 2014) making it possible to create a more confidential setting for the research. It facilitates insight into people's thoughts, perceptions and feelings (Bryman, 2004 in Wright, 2014), which was valuable in the case of SJN with regard to the success of the local tourism project. Getting to know the community members at this level is crucial to a research topic like the present, where the success of the initiative may very well be measured on the people it affects.

2.2.2 Role of the researcher

With qualitative techniques, the researcher becomes the principal instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2014). Interviews and observations, which constitute the majority of how data was collected for this thesis, are strongly reliant on the researcher - both in the way she chooses to carry them out, but also the perceptions and convictions she brings into the research, whether consciously or not. Consequently, "*The researcher is viewed as implicated in the construction of knowledge through the stance that he or she adopts in relation to what is observed"* (Bryman, 2016, p. 388), including the way this knowledge is interpreted and ultimately put into text. Ontologically, this research is based on a constructivist view in which there is no definitive truth within social science to be discovered through research. Rather, the researcher presents her version of social reality as she too takes part in constructing it (Bryman, 2016). Similarly, social phenomena such as culture are a produced through social interaction and continuously reconstructed (Bryman, 2016). This means that the researcher cannot go in search of a certain truth but rather must consider her own role in creating it and bear in mind that different starting points can and should yield different results. It is thus of high importance that she be reflexive of her role in gathering data as well as interpreting it (Beeton, 2005; Creswell, 2014).

As white, university educated Westerners there was no doubt that we brought with us a very different perspective than most of the residents of SJN. We have both travelled extensively before and so have other experiences that might help us in our initial approach to the community. More importantly, we were fortunate to have the time available in the community to get accustomed to a culture markedly different from ours and to learn the routines and practices of the people we were studying. We eventually befriended several community members but have made our best efforts to factor these amicable feelings towards some residents into our observations. Our particular roles in the context of participation will be further discussed in section regarding participant observation. The role of the researcher becomes similarly crucial when qualitative methods are linked to the *interpretivist* epistemological conviction as they often, and certainly in our case, are. Interpretivism "*focuses on understanding and interpretation"* (Decrop, 2004, p. 157) and thus places an emphasis on understanding human behaviour rather than explaining it (Bryman, 2016) as well as understanding *"natural occurring phenomena in their naturally occurring states"* (Decrop, 2004, p.157) rather than in a standardised environment. This was imperative in our research

in SJN where the challenge was not to find the quantifiable facts of the tour operator initiative but rather to gain an understanding of the mechanisms at work to cause its success or failure.

2.2.3 Exploratory research

Having carried out the research for this thesis in connection with an internship which had its own goals and methods resulted in an exploratory research approach to the present work. Living in the community for a prolonged period of time meant having access to significant amounts of data concerning several topics relating to community development and community-oriented tourism. Only through continuous exploration and narrowing down of the core of the challenge the community faced did we reach a clarification as to the focus for our research. This type of immersion into the subject of study allows for a continuous interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014). Over time, new information is uncovered which reflects on the ongoing collection of data, such as when towards the end of our time in SJN we realised that the head of the Tourism Committee in charge of running the tour operator had in fact started his own tour company parallel to the community initiative. As also suggested by Veal (2011), revelations such as these reflect back on data already collected but also inspire revisits to previous interviewees and as such allows for a continuous and informed build-up of relevant data, which was in part facilitated by the nature of the case study as described below.

In accordance with this, the qualitative approach allowed the research question to evolve in accordance with the information that was uncovered during the research period: "*precisely what will be studied and how it will be regarded as problematic must be clarified and refined by reference to human existence in everyday life situations*" (Jørgensen, 1989, p. 5). Having encountered existing literature on CBT and CBTI before the internship, these did provide a vague theoretical basis for our first explorations into the life in SJN. However, the work has been primarily inductive, as is often the case in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014) since our research on site was very much the driver for our theoretical findings, rather than theory informing what we focused on during our research. Specifically, we started out with a broad range of possible challenges that the community faced with regard to local tourism development. These included the complex organisational structure in this small town, which complicates the options for taking collective action. We also considered the obstacles the community faces with regard to marketing their destination due to a lack of training, network and means. However, in the end we came to find, as will be expanded upon below, that these were both overshadowed by and intertwined with the eventual topic for our research: the complex roles of participation and empowerment in community-centered tourism development. By keeping our research topic open we became able to observe the patterns within the community of SJN from which theoretical contributions might emerge.

2.2.4 Data analysis and literature search

At the end of the research period, our data was a combined mass of field notes, interview tapes, personal diary entries and pictures. In order to analyse these many input, we decided to compile the different sources into complete texts with each their empirical topic, such as

“Meetings”, “Training course” and “Interview with XX” in which we tried to include the statements and observations related to the category in question. Throughout these texts we would look for comments, phenomena and inconsistencies which were repeated throughout the categories. In accordance with the concept of exploratory research this led us to identify the patterns or emergent themes (Veal, 2011; Creswell, 2014) that would prove to form the main challenges for the town of SJN and the basis for this thesis. These patterns formed around the following themes:

- Participation
- Power
- External intervention

These themes led the way for us in terms of seeking out relevant literature to inform our analysis. While our starting point was existing theory on CBT and CBTI, our search was quickly expanded in order to better cover participation, power and the role of external actors from broader angles. Our efforts to bring scope to our topic led us to first search out literature on tourism as community development, which was then expanded to a look into community development in general. By broadening the search to work outside the field of tourism we came to find that participation and empowerment are recurrent themes in development studies theory as well, which let us draw parallels between e.g. participation in tourism development and development in general. From the body of work that we were able to include in our research, a similar pattern emerged: participation, empowerment and the role of external actors are all important topics in the majority of existing literature on community-centered tourism development, albeit providing different viewpoints. The comparison between existing theories on the above themes and the data collected in SJN would eventually shape our research question into focusing on the discrepancies between the two.

2.3. Empirical data and fieldwork

2.3.1 Case study

We based our research on a case study as a way of conducting a detailed and intensive analysis of a single case as suggested by Bryman (2016). We spent three months in the village of SJN from September to December of 2016 while working with the community on bringing their multi-ethnic tour operator to life. We took part in various meetings, festivities, touristic excursions and sports activities over the course of the three months, the results of which will be discussed in detail throughout the thesis. We spent part of the stay living with each our host family for two weeks - one with a Rama family while the other stayed with a Kriol family, which granted two distinct perspectives on community life. Living with the families allowed for more intimate insights into the interaction between not only tourists and hosts, but very much between community members. This insight was gained by means of observation as well as many conversations regarding the significance of visitors, past experiences with tourism and the internal disagreements in SJN.

The selection of SJN as a case for this research was at first an opportunistic one, as defined by Veal (2011) since it was the town suggested to us by Forests of the World as a site for our

internship. The location turned out to be a very interesting case in and of itself, but the fact that the town was not specifically selected for the purposes of research into participation and empowerment in community-centered tourism is well in line with our inductive approach which meant drawing relevant issues from the material at hand. This case of local tourism development in SJN served as an instrumental case study (Miller & Salkind, 2002) in providing insights to a current and developing example of community-centered tourism in a small Nicaraguan community. This type of case is also considered *explanatory* (Veal, 2011) as it may be used to test existing theory or develop theory in fields or areas where there is none. In order to gain a comprehensive level of insight into the case, multiple sources of information were sought out, such as documents, interviews and participant observations. The natural limits of time and geography inherent in a case study make for a manageable data collection process (Veal, 2011) and the use of various means of data collection adds to the reliability of the research. This span is common in case studies (Beeton, 2005; Miller & Salkind, 2002) and allows for a deeper understanding of the case at hand.

Case studies allow the researcher to study contemporary phenomena in a real-life context whereby theoretical notions can be held and further developed against a local reality by concerning itself with the "hows" and "whys" that e.g. surveys cannot (Yin, 1994 in Beeton, 2005). It allows the researcher to gain in-depth understanding about a specific setting (Creswell, 2014) and to treat that setting as a whole "*rather than abstracting a limited set of pre-selected features*" (Veal, 2011, p. 346). In this case the understanding of how the tourism initiative is implemented and received in the community is a significant point of the research, and being wholly immersed in a single, delimited geographical area allowed us to see the most relevant issues emerge. These characteristics are part of what make the case study design fit for the social and anthropological nature of tourism (Beeton, 2005).

The contextual value of case studies, however, means that the findings may not necessarily be generalised or applied to other related cases (Creswell, 2014), but rather it serves to concretise the existing theoretical knowledge concerning community-centered tourism to produce a more complex and practical understanding. The value of the case study is in its particular description and themes developed on the basis of it rather than its generalisability (Creswell, 2014; Veal, 2011). However, as with most case studies, ours does not only come to conclusions based on the case at hand, but rather draws on other comparable cases as well as an extensive literary background which lends to the external validity of the research. Furthermore, in adding another case study to the pool of studies on related topics we mean to contribute to the accumulative knowledge within the field, establishing patterns to be considered and applied in future work: "*the accumulation of evidence from a number of case studies may build a consensus around the findings of a programme of case study research and other evidence"* (Veal, 2011, p. 345).

2.3.2 Participant observation

2.3.2.1 Benefits of participant observation

For this research, several key elements were drawn from the methodology of participant observation in the form of casual conversations, in-depth as well as informal interviews and qualitative observation, where field notes were taken on the behaviour of the individuals on

the research site. To Bryman (2016, 424), participant observation is an extended period of immersion, regular observations of behaviour, conversations, collection of documents as well as the conducting of interviews to clear up matters that were not clearly observable. Veal (2011) finds observation to have an important role to play in most research whereas Jørgensen (1989, p. 3) finds participant observation particularly suitable in cases with "*location in the here and now of everyday life situations and settings as the foundation of inquiry and method*." Our research was very much based on how tourism development is implemented in the existing community life and thus found the technique to be useful.

According to Kuada (2012) the benefit of using a participatory research method when collecting data is that it provides the researcher with a *"profound understanding of the setting within which the research is done"* (p. 97). By participating rather than just observing, it becomes easier to understand the mindset of those studied, such as in the case of tourism providers and local governments in SJN. Furthermore, as part of the range of qualitative research methods, Jørgensen (1989) states that participant observation allows the researcher to learn about the ordinary and natural environment of the subjects, unlike what is typically produced by experiments and surveys. Bryman (2016) promotes the approach as a way of gaining a deeper understanding of the community in question in the right context (Bryman, 2016). Using participatory observation methods is time consuming and requires that the researcher spends a longer period of time in the environment of study and with the people that are of interest for one's research (Kuada, 2012). The extended period of time we spent in the community meant that participants were able to come to us over the course of the three months with any concerns they had concerning our work as they grew more comfortable with us and more aware of the work we carried out in connection with our internship. This meant that we gained more detailed and perhaps reliable knowledge as the research period progressed since community members would add more stories as time passed, for example about how previous tourism efforts had fared or nuances to their own involvement in these.

Apart from living in the community, we had the opportunity to participate in scheduled meetings, excursions on the river in connection with community work, local festivities and other day-to-day activities during the research for this thesis. Meetings were held with the local indigenous governments, the town's mayor, the local INTUR representative, the Tourism Committee and a group of young women interested in promoting the tour operator. Some of these meetings will be described in detail below.

2.3.2.2 Gaining access

For McMorran (2011), work as a form of participant observation was the optimal way to gain access to the people he set out to study. Working alongside the subjects allowed McMorran (2011) unique insights and helped him gain access to local staff members who would not otherwise have engaged in earnest conversation with him due, among other things, to a difference in status between him as a man, guest and researcher and the women as housekeepers and hostesses. For most researcher walking around the village of SJN and talking to community members would have been unproblematic. The community also happily shared their thoughts and hopes for tourism in the area. However, there is no guarantee that this kind of dialogue alone will provide the researcher with the full picture.

Getting access to the details of the inner workings of the village's tourism organisations is not as open an environment. The village's residents were happy to talk about their current and past experiences with both community development and tourism's influence in the area but getting to know the challenges involved with organising efforts to attract and handle more tourists required different levels of insight. We were only granted this kind of access through our affiliation with the environmental NGO Forests of the World which is well-known in the area through years of work with the local governments and other NGOs working to improve living conditions for the indigenous peoples and for the Biological Reserve. Although the general population were very accommodating of us, the communal leaders would have served as gatekeepers to the details about the area's tourism structure and contemplations.

Research as a participant observer may be done overtly or covertly with each way having its advantages (Bryman, 2016; Veal, 2011). In this case, our role as researchers was overtly explained to everyone we interacted with from an early outset. They were informed that we were in town to do an internship working with the local governments to develop the local tourism initiative and that this was done while conducting studies for our Master's thesis in Tourism. It was not an option for us to not reveal the purpose of our presence in such a small town, but also we found that our presence there as volunteers wanting to help them with their local tourism efforts lent us a certain level of kindness and goodwill. Being immersed in the community's everyday lives and participating in their organisational work allowed us to gain first-hand knowledge of the community's routines and customs, the way tourists were greeted and the inner workings of the current structure surrounding tourism in San Juan de Nicaragua. The observations became important sources of information when trying to better understand opinions and feelings about tourism development expressed during group meetings and individual interviews, in line with Kuada's (2012) suggestion that observations be used to verify the information or *accuracy* of the researcher's inferences.

2.3.2.3 Degree of participation

Observation techniques may be divided into two types according to Kuada (2012): non-participant observations and participant observations. The main difference lies in whether the researcher takes active part in the situation that is being observed or positions him-/herself in a passive outsider observational position. If observations are made in a non- participatory way, the researcher may be viewed as an outsider to the group of study, which may prevent the subjects of study from acting naturally in their environment, making the observed situation *"less normal"* (Kuada, 2012, p. 96). As mentioned above, McMorran (2011) used work as a form of participant observation whereby he became immersed in the everyday lives of his study subjects. Since we were doing our internship at the time of research it may be argued that we, too, carried our work as a form of participant observation. We worked alongside local authorities and community members to develop their local tourism initiative, whereby we gained insight into the visions, practical challenges and tasks to be carried out in order to progress with the tour operator.

However, participant observation is supposed to be quite unobtrusive (Creswell, 2014; Jørgensen, 1989) and be centered on the researcher taking part in everyday or typical activities within the community (Creswell, 2014; Jørgensen, 1989). In our case, a lot of the time it was quite clear that data was being collected and as such may have affected the

subjects' behaviour. Most of the meetings were in fact arranged for our benefit and may not have taken place were it not for our presence. For example, the meeting with the guides and some of the joint government meetings would not necessarily have been held had we not invited. As such, parts of our research was in fact carried out in environments that were created and managed by researchers, contrary to what Jørgensen (1989) and McMorran (2011) find characteristic about participant observation. Consequently, this particular working situation may not quite reflect McMorran's (2011) views on work as participant observation, but our approach certainly allowed for a deeper involvement with the residents than what simple interviews or observations might have.

It is worth it to keep in mind that there are different levels of participation for researchers as well. Several authors have presented attempts at dividing participation levels into scales, with e.g. Bryman (2016) including categories such as *covert full member*, *partially participating observer* and *non-participating observer with interaction*. These scales may be useful as a way for the researcher to stay conscious of his or her role in the community, but they also imply a risk of oversimplification. For example, Bryman (2016) also suggests that the higher degree of participation that the researcher engages in, the less he or she is likely to rely on interviews and documents and vice versa. This assumes that observations from participation and e.g. documents provide the same type of information and that one may replace the other. This was not our experience. Rather we found a higher degree of participation to warrant even more information from other sources since it left more data in need of corroboration or comment. Veal (2011) suggests that becoming part of the group is the obvious way of studying the group. As suggested above, we found this to be true but being present at activities conducted by the group is not the only requirement for meaningful participation and thus study. As with the concept *community participation* which will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapters, the researcher cannot assume that presence equals participation. What is being said in meetings and on tours, for example, may not constitute the whole picture. Rather, true involvement and confidence with the study subject is key to meaningful participation as a researcher. Jørgensen (1989, p. 10) states that "*the relationship between the participant as observer, people in the field setting, and the larger context of human interaction is one of the key components of this methodology*". Bryman (2016, 433) adds that even if the researcher wished to remain within the same level of participation through the full research period, this would most likely not be the best solution. Most research will require a fluctuation between levels based on the day-to-day situation and the information that is sought. Being able to adjust the level of participation allows for more flexibility in handling people and situations (Bryman, 2016). On the basis of the above discussion, we took on several roles during the research period, all with the same goal in mind. The highest degree of participation in the sense of being immersed but unobtrusive took place in touristic activities (tours) as well as the everyday lives of village residents (homestay, festivities) and in the role of tourism developers we participated in work within the village's tourism structure (approaching tourists, interviews, meetings).

2.3.2.4 Limitations

These considerations regarding the nature and degree of participation reflect the discussion surrounding certain concepts in community-centered tourism development, such as participation, which form the points of analysis for this thesis. Our observations during the research period were continuously used to add nuance to the information given to us by community members through interviews and meetings as will be described below. As for the

limitations to the method of participant observation, one should keep in mind two things in particular: It may be argued that participation in itself builds credibility (Ryan, 2009 in Bryman, 2016) but for some scholars, authenticity becomes an issue due to the researcher's role, since as an interpretive researcher he or she gets involved in the social context which is under study (Decrop, 2004). This challenge has been addressed above. Secondly, what is observed for the limited time of research is not necessarily representative of the general situation: *"what you observe is [...] a snapshot and partial evidence of what actually happens"* (Kuada, 2012, p. 98). This latter is one of the reasons why our observations would be supported by information gathered through interviews lending perspective and documents lending context.

2.3.3 Meetings and interviews

In addition to the information obtained through observations, meetings, formal and informal interviews became an important and extensive part of the empirical data for this thesis due to their essential role in our internship work with the local Rama and Kriol governments and Greytown Rama Kriol Tours. All meetings with the principal organisers behind the tourism initiative, as well as structured and informal interviews with some of the key stakeholders in tourism in the SJN area were held in Spanish, which is the official language in Nicaragua. The Rama and Kriol residents of SJN moreover speak a combination of Kriol English among themselves, mixed with indigenous Rama words, which made it difficult for us to fully understand. Spanish was therefore preferred to avoid misunderstandings that could happen when trying to communicate in the local Kriol English dialect, and to include the mestizo participants, since the majority only speak Spanish. Malinowski (1922 in Adams, 2012) argues that the ability to communicate with the local community in their native language contributes to the researcher's immersion into the social and cultural context of study. Although we were not able to communicate in Kriol English, several community members commented positively on us speaking Spanish, which they mentioned only few foreign visitors did. This facilitated day-to-day contact with the local community, both in terms of the internship work concerning the tour operator and when it came to engaging in informal conversations with community members such as host families, the people we became friends with, buying groceries, engaging in town festivities etc., which made us feel part of the community and allowed for a more immediate involvement and trust between us and the community.

From our experiences during the first few weeks in SJN, it soon became clear that the process of calling a meeting or scheduling an interview was rather casual. Invitations would be given no more than two days in advance, and most often one day prior to the meeting or interview taking place. This practice increased the number of attendants in meetings and made sure an interviewee would not have made other plan at the time of interview. Moreover, we learned that calling for a meeting before lunch time decreased the amount of attendants, since most community residents spend mornings working on their farms, fishing, doing laundry, cooking, etc. However, holding a meeting on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon was not uncommon.

Combining participant observations with individual in-depth interviews, informal interviews, and meetings, allowed us to compare situations and environments that had been observed previously, with the information gained during meetings and interviews and thereby note inconsistencies in the information provided by the informants (Kawulich, 2005). Furthermore,

by doing individual interviews and having informal conversation with some of the tourism actors in SJN, outside the meeting situations provided the interviewee the opportunity to share additional information which they would not necessarily share in front of a larger group during meetings with local governments and the Tourism Committee.

2.3.3.1 Meetings

Due to the role of the local indigenous Rama and Kriol governments in the tourism initiative in SJN, and due to the fact that they were our official internship contacts in town, meetings were held with a few weeks interval. The first few meetings with the governments were set up by the Rama and Kriol governments. The president of the Kriol government in SJN, Aldrick Beckford, in particular took the overall responsibility for calling a meeting, made sure notice of meeting reached the invitees, welcomed at the beginning of the meeting and concluded when time was up. Whenever the Rama and Kriol governments set up a meeting, Aldrick Bedford's niece, a 24-year old young woman who recently graduated in Ecotourism from the university of BICU, was most often in charge of noticing the participants by biking around the town with a list indicating the names of the participants.

However, once we had settled down in SJN, we often arranged meetings ourselves when a new topic or challenge was encountered, and there was a need to discuss the issue in plenum. When we called meetings, most often we would split up and each walk from house to house one day before the meeting and invite the participants ourselves, and brief them of the meeting agenda. Meetings were always held in the former restaurant of one of the Kriol government members, and we would arrive prior to the agreed time to arrange chairs in the room. The environment was informal. When inviting with one day of notice, most invitees would show up around the time the meeting was announced to begin. The first participants arriving would usually choose a chair in a corner opposite of where we sat, or move around the chairs so they would be more to the back. Some of the invitees avoided sitting down, and stayed close to the stairs/entrance, behind a railing dividing the room from the entrance area.

The former restaurant where meetings would be held. Chairs and one table was provided by the local governments so we could use the room as an office when working individually. To the right, the railing dividing the room and behind which some invitees preferred placing themselves.

Apart from joint Rama and Kriol meetings, we arranged individual meetings with each local indigenous government, to allow each ethnicity to express themselves without the presence of the other. Moreover, meetings were arranged with the members of the Tourism Committee, people currently working as guides and people involved in tourism in SJN in other ways. The observations made and the information gained through the different meeting situations provided us with important insights on the cultural and social structures embedded in the community of SJN.

The interview approach used during the meetings is similar to the method of group interviews as presented by Veal (1992). He describes this method as useful when the researcher is seeking to obtain information from a larger group of people rather than an individual. During a group interview, Veal (1992) argues that the interviewer becomes *"a facilitator of a discussion rather than an interviewer as such, which means that the participants interact with one another"* (p. 95). This was true in the case of the meetings held in SJN, were the environment was open and meetings often ended being a couple of hours long conversations and discussions between the different ethnicities and ourselves. Although having prepared the general points of discussion before each meeting, we often found ourselves with newly gained information and knowledge of a new area of concern we had not previously been aware of, which led to the rise of new questions, which meant that a new meeting had to be arranged. This is described by Kuada (2012) who argues that it may provide the researchers with important information for further research: "*qualitative methods also allow the participants to raise topics and issues that you may not anticipate and that might be critical to the investigation. Furthermore they allow participants to express their feelings and offer their perspectives in their own words"* (p. 94). In this context, the time frame of our stay in SJN was a benefit, since it allowed us time to gain a deeper understanding of the issues related to the development of community-based tourism in the small town of SJN and the mechanisms of power among the involved stakeholders.

As mentioned above, the meetings often spanned over a couple of hours, during which a lot of information was shared, some more relevant than other. It was our role as researchers to guide the discussion when some of the participants went off topic. The challenge of conducting group interviews as the meetings often characterized as, was to ensure that everyone in the group had their say and that the discussion was not dominated by one or two participants or by one of the ethnicities if the meeting was held between the Rama and Kriol governments (Veal, 1992). An example can be seen in the joint Rama and Kriol meetings, when Edgar Coulson, member of the Kriol government was often found to share long historic, cultural, and political anecdotes from his his many years working as a guide.

Augencio Salomon, Lorenzo Martinez and Aldrick Beckford (by the window), among others, during final presentation of our findings during.

2.3.3.2 Interviews

In addition to the meetings, a few in-depth interviews were done at the beginning of the stay in SJN to help us create an overview of the current tourism situation in town. Interviews are widely recognized and acknowledged as qualitative research methods and the term covers a variety of techniques including semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions (Veal, 2011) which were our main approaches. Although follow up in-depth interviews were not done later during our stay in SJN, conversations with the same persons and other key persons in local tourism took place under the form of informal interviews as will be presented below.

Selecting our interviewees was done through purposive (Bryman, 2016) or purposeful sampling (Veal, 2011) which meant aiming to find the people in and around SJN who would best be able to provide us with information relevant to our research and expand our perspective on existing knowledge. We intended to find a broad selection which would be diverse enough to allow us to gain comprehensive insight into community matters, but keeping in mind that we would not be able to find and interview a fully representative segment of SJN. However, structured in-depth interviews were limited to the town's hotel owners and the Tourism Committee chairman.

The first interviews were held with the owners or daily managers of the town's accommodation facilities. Due to the small size of SJN and the current low level of tourism flow, accommodation offers are narrowed down to two options in town: Hotelito Evo and Hostal Familiar. Both are family run businesses, and have existed 15 and eight years respectively. The first of the two interviews took place in the backyard of the Gutiérrez family's house and hotel, the Hotelito Evo. We had not announced our arrival prior to showing up at the Guitiérrez' house, but were fortunate to find Enrique and Raúl Guitiérrez, dad and son, both available to tell more about their involvement in tourism in SJN. The family is originally from SJN and Enrique Guitiérrez has been involved in tourism since he opened up the small hotel in 2000/2001. Out of his four sons, three of them are involved in tourism as INTUR certified guides and two of them are furthermore working on the reparation of five cabañas to serve as additional accommodation for tourists who are staying at the Hotelito Evo

The Guitiérrez family therefore is an important stakeholder in tourism in SJN. Moreover, the Guitiérrez is a mestiz family, and had not directly been invited to become part of the local indigenous Rama and Kriol government's' tourism initiative, although this project is claimed to be a multi-ethnic tourism development effort. We felt it was important to gain knowledge of the Guitiérrez family's current state of tourism involvement and their views on the local governments' community-based tourism project. The environment in which the interview was held was relaxed, and the interviewees felt comfortable and at ease being in their private sphere. We had prepared a few questions to open the interview with, and had written down some key points regarding the development of community-based tourism, which we wanted to hear the interviewees' take on during the conversation. This characterizes in-depth interviews, which tend to be less structured and emphasize a small group of subjects, with open ended questions rather than following a questionnaire (Veal, 1992). There was a natural flow between Enrique and Raúl, who took turns answering questions while both complementing each other's answers when needed. The interview was recorded using a cell phone, and we had beforehand decided that only one of us would be taking notes, so the other could focus on the interviewees and the natural flow in the conversation.

Following the interview with the Guitiérrez at the Hotelito Evo, we planned an interview with Jimena Jimenez, the daughter of the owner of the Hostal Familiar, the only other alternative to the Hotelito Evo, for tourists wanting to stay in the town of SJN. Hostal Familiar is owned by Martha Obregon, Mestiza from El Castillo, a small river town a few hours from SJN. She opened the Hostal Familiar in SJN eight years back, and has been living in the private housing connected to the hotel with her two daughters and ex-husband. We had tried to set up an interview a few times before succeeding, because she had trouble finding the time for us. The interview took place in the restaurant area of the hotel, a terrace in front of the Río Indio river, which meant that the conversation was interrupted several times by the passing of motorboats. Similar to the previous interviews, we had prepared a list of questions to initiate conversation and to be used as a guideline during the interview. The interview was recorded and notes were taken by one. Although our initial impression had been that Jimena was reluctant to speak to us, she seemed happy to talk us during the interview situation.

Besides talking to the owners of the local accommodation facilities, we interviewed the Tourism Committee chairman, Augencio Salomon. This interview took place a month after arrival in SJN, which meant that we already had met the interviewee through meetings with the local governments, and got to know him briefly from the daily life in SJN. The interview with Salomon was held in a relaxed environment on the terrace in front of his house, which we had visited before on other occasions. This combined with the fact that we had previously engaged in formal and informal conversation with the interviewee, meant that the setting is non-threatening and encouraged open discussion, and both parts felt comfortable and at ease to talk freely during the interview. The interview was characterized by a semi-structured format, where a few key questions had been prepared to open the interview with and hereafter led the conversation flow.

Augencio Salomon by his house during interview, October 2016

The interviewee is a middle-aged Rama originally from the Bluefields area in Nicaragua, a few hundred kilometers North of SJN. Salomon has been living in SJN with his family since 2002, and has been working as a tourist guide since that time, although only working as a certified (by INTUR) guide for the past four years. Due to his extensive experience working with tourists he has gained recognition in SJN and his business is based tourists that seek him because of recommendations from previous travellers, as well as having a close collaboration with before mentioned Martha Obregon, the owner of Hostal Familiar. In addition to his work as a tour guide he has moreover been elected president of the recently established Tourism Committee whose role is not clearly defined.

2.3.3.3 Informal interviews

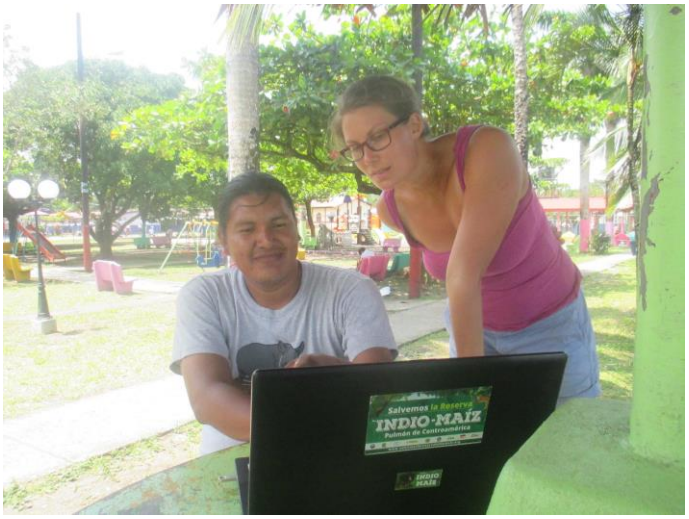
Lastly, data collection consisted of informal interviews, which differ from casual conversations by being characterized by a question-and-answer format (Jørgensen, 1989). This technique was used when we had follow-up questions to some of the members of either the local governments, the Tourism Committee or other local tourism stakeholders. We discussed a list of topics to go over or issues to clarify before turning to the interviewee, and most often these informal interviews were not arranged at a specific time and day. Instead we showed up unannounced at their home or took advantage of a meeting in the hotel or in the town square. We contacted one person at the time, to allow people to speak freely and not be affected by others as might be the case in the meeting situation. In contrast to the casual conversations we had with community members, these informal interviews most often involved one or both of us taking notes during the situation.

2.3.4 Other methods

In addition to the above research methods, data for this thesis was collected throughout our three month stay in SJN and the experiences related to this this. By investing in community and aiming at obtaining an understanding of the cultural practices, human beliefs and behaviors, the researcher *"generates insights into sociocultural relationships and the "native's" point of view"* (Adams, 2012, p. 339), which can be characterized as ethnographic studies. It is argued by Adams that ethnographic research methods are useful when studying encounters

between different groups, such as the case of the diverse population of SJN. Apart from what has already been described above, we engaged in the following activities as an ethnographic contribution to our research.

Insights and impressions were gained through daily life in the small town, and through interaction with community members. Most often we were approached by local residents on the public playground centrally situated in the town, which was also where the public wifi had been installed a few weeks into our stay in SJN. For this reason, we would often be sitting at one of the tables by the playground, when we needed to use internet connection. Because of the wifi connection, many locals would hang out on or around the playground, and we would often end up having casual conversations with the locals about everything from our internship work to politics and cultural topics. Being a relatively unknown tourism destination, few foreigners make their way to SJN. The locals therefore soon came to know us, when they realized that we not tourists, but were staying for a longer time, as Kuada (2012) explains, the researcher will usually interact with what he or she is studying by engaging *"in informal conversations with other participants as part of the data collection process"* (p. 97). They were all very positive towards us and interested in holding conversations with us either on the streets, at the local restaurant or at the aforementioned playground. Some of the impressions gained from these informal conversations were written down as field notes during our stay, as well as notes during meetings and interviews and personal diaries were kept. Field notes were not taken every day, due to the time frame of the stay and the constant impressions gained, but written down whenever possible and summarised when necessary. When no specific interview or meeting is mentioned throughout our analysis the information will have been taken from our field notes and day-to-day conversations with the population of SJN.



Informal meetings and talks would take place in the playground (due to wifi), on the river banks, in the park and at people's homes.

However, being the two of us allowed us to share impressions and discuss experiences and knowledge gained through meetings, interviews and casual conversations, which helped us process and remember important situations. Moreover, it allowed us to be present at several places "at once", meaning that we could split up and speak to different people during the same time, which meant that more information was gained in less time. We furthermore took advantage of being two people present in interviews to allow one person to listen more actively

while the other took notes. As already discussed, the researcher becomes part of the construction of reality and certainly the interpretation of it. The fact that we have been able to discuss our experiences with each other and complement each other's views throughout the whole research has made for both a fuller analysis of the topics as well as a more reliable data collection process.

Lastly, experiences and information was acquired through field trips in the area. Some took the shape of actual touristic excursions, others were arranged to show us the area as part of our internship and others still were pre-arranged trips that we were able to join to learn more about the people on the trip the destinations and their travel forms. Concurrently with the fieldwork we conferred with a number of texts provided to us by the local indigenous governments. In particular we found the following two texts to be of value:

1. Propuesta de Tour Operadora para los gobiernos Comunales de Graytown e Indian River, 2014 (appendix 5), which is the proposal made by SJN resident Raúl (Nestor) Gutiérrez as part of the application for the tour operator license. This text will hereinafter be named Propuesta.
2. Segunda Etapa del Proyecto Ecoturismo Comunal en el Territorio Rama Kriol, November 2015 (appendix 6), which is the follow-up plan made by BICU to express the vision and proposed budget for the tour operator after the license was given. It will hereinafter be named Segunda Etapa.

Meeting with members of the smaller Rama community along the Río Indio

Neighbors and family members were often found to be observants at meetings when visiting the smaller communities in the Reserve

Attendance at the presentation of our final findings in the Casa de la Cultura (communal hall) at the end of the internship.

2.4 Limitations and implications

As with all methods (Veal, 2011) there are limitations to the ones we have made use of for this research. According to Decrop (2004) it is important to address the issue of *trustworthiness* of qualitative and interpretive data collection in tourism research. The author argues that credibility in research is at risk in cases where the researchers spend a longer period of time in the research setting as can be argued was the case in SJN. Our research is very much carried by qualitative methods and thus subject to this concern. Having lived with both a local host family and two of the "*prestadores de servicios"* there is a possibility that we have been influenced by the people we were observing resulting in a certain level of bias after spending this much time with the source of research. We have, however, made efforts to counter the

risk of subjectivity by comparing our observations to those found in existing literature as well as by discussing extensively with each other throughout the period.

On the other hand, our being noticeably different from most of the residents in matters of ethnicity, culture and education may also have created a distance between us and the community for better and for worse. We got the impression that residents would often tell us things they might not tell each other directly, but also things they thought we as university students wanted to hear, SUCH AS noget om CBT? As with most qualitative research (Bryman, 2016) our specific data will be difficult to replicate and verify. We did encounter situations where we only had the residents' respective versions of events to rely on, but where the residents contradicted each other. We found, however, that in most of these cases what was important was how they added to our impression of community cohesion rather than what was the facts of the case in question.

Our research was naturally limited to the events and developments that took place during our time in SJN. We were not able to experience firsthand the initial phase of the project in which the tour operator proposal was formulated and the license applied for. For this we had to rely on community accounts of the process which were not always entirely clear-cut. This implies a level of uncertainty in the relay of these events. This uncertainty in itself, however, added to our data pool surrounding the community's involvement in the process. Furthermore, during our time in SJN only one of the BICU training sessions was held, giving us only that one opportunity to participate in the training activities and collect data from this setting. We did not get the impression that this course was conducted in a significantly different manner from the other sessions which had taken place over the course of the past 12-18 months. However, the subject matter of the course we attended was law and as such might have been the one to give the least concrete skills or tools, which may have affected attendance in terms of numbers and composition.

We recorded a number of interviews and meetings held in SJN from September to December 2016 but some of the recordings disappeared due to a recorder being stolen. Notes were taken during each session, which still left us the opportunity to recall some of the information that was given during interviews but which limited our possibility to give examples using residents' own words.

3. Theory

In this chapter, the theoretical considerations for this thesis will be presented in the shape of a review of the existing literature on community-centered tourism approaches. In the first section, the potential of tourism as an instrument for development will be presented. In the second section, the benefits of participation and empowerment in CBT and CBTI development approaches will be discussed, as well as the role of external actors in each of the respective community-centered tourism development approaches. This will be followed by an assessment of the potential of CBT and CBTI to create economic, social and cultural development and empowerment of local community in section three. Lastly, the fourth section of the theoretical chapter will critically address the implementation of community-centered tourism approaches and the stands on participation and empowerment of community.

3.1 Tourism in a development context

Tourism is broadly accepted as a means of development contributing to increased wealth in disadvantaged contexts (Giampiccoli & Saayman 2016). For at least 10 years, tourism has increasingly been seen as an important sector for development cooperation (Hummel & Duim, 2012; Spenceley & Mayer, 2012 in Gascón, 2013). This focus has meant that for many governments, agencies and organisations, the implementation of tourism has become a go-to tool assumed to guarantee development for any destination: "*The decision [to implement tourism initiatives] may easily be dominated by discourses which, like a mantra, the sector repeats over and over (tourism as a quick and easy route to development) and which coincide with the desires of the population*" (Gascón, 2013, p. 721). Tourism should, however, be applied as part of a holistic approach to community development which includes environmental, educational and social concerns (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016; Höckert, 2011). Many of the concerns which are currently being addressed by tourism researchers and practitioners are similar to challenges faced by those in the field of community development in general. However, the experience accumulated by those in the development field over the past several decades is significantly larger than what tourism researchers have had a chance to gather in only 10-15 years and so we might encourage more cross-disciplinary studies and exchange of knowledge than what is currently taking place. When it comes to the challenges that will be discussed below, such as participation and community empowerment, the findings here which relate to tourism in a small Nicaraguan village may well add to the joint experience pool of both tourism and development.

Tourism can take as many shapes as there are destinations, but tourism literature often divides the sector into such categories as mass tourism, niche tourism and/or alternative tourism which have all been employed in more or less conscious efforts to generate development and especially income through tourism. Among those advocating tourism as a driver for development, many argue that the planning and development should include the communities who are to receive the tourists in some form or another, a stakeholder who has not always been included in traditional tourism plans. By doing so, it is believed that the local population will best benefit from the development of tourism in their country and that tourism

becomes a sustainable alternative source of income for local population. There are however, different opinions on how to best approach the inclusion of communities in tourism development. The main division is seen in the question of how and how much to formally include community members in the initiation, development and management of new tourism projects. The approach which is most prominently featured in existing literature and most widely described, is that of community-based tourism (CBT). The other, while sharing certain similarities with CBT, is markedly different in its view on community involvement and will in this thesis be treated under the joint phrase community benefit tourism initiatives (CBTI) as coined by Simpson (2008), the most prominent advocate of this approach. These two approaches to community-centered tourism thus share the interest in conveying direct benefits to the communities involved, but take rather different approaches to how this is best done.

Since this thesis aims to analyse the effects of community-centered tourism in particular, in this chapter we will look at existing literature from the two ideologies, their characteristics and presumed development potential. As noted by Tosun (2000), community involvement in the tourism development process can be seen from two perspectives: the decision-making process and the benefits of tourism development. We will be examining the two ways of including destination residents in this development and to what extent CBT and CBTI may realistically be considered tools ready for application.

3.2 Characteristics of CBT

CBT as a tourism form is often brought forward as a means of community development in developing countries based on several cases from around the world (Baktygulov & Raeva, 2010 in Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). As with many terms, the concept of CBT and its outcomes have been subject to different interpretations and understandings depending on the researchers and how they have studied this particular approach. When it comes to defining CBT, there is little agreement on how exactly to do so (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). However, certain elements do seem to appear in most attempts at a definition of the concept. These points of agreement generally relate to participation, ownership, distribution of benefits and sustainability. Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) present a comprehensive list of requirements for CBT projects: environmental sustainability, community participation, equitable distribution of financial benefits, community empowerment, improvements in standard of living, and community management, control, and ownership of tourism projects. Höckert (2011, p. 9) defines CBT as *"an approach where the wellbeing of the community is viewed as being the starting point and tourism as one of the possible instruments to promote it"* which also ties it to the idea of tourism as part of a holistic development strategy. Giampiccoli & Saayman (2016, p. 1669) focus on redistribution and ownership by suggesting the development of CBT "*should be directed towards just, equitable and redistributive forms of tourism in which the community becomes the owner, manager and beneficiary (not only in* economic *terms) of the tourism development process*".

Zapata et al. (2011) list three main criteria that characterize CBT which they base on existing literature. The first being that CBT is located within a community, secondly that it is owned by one or more community members and lastly that it is managed by the community members. The Thailand Community-Based Tourism Institute highlights CBT as a tourism form which

apart from environmental, social, and cultural concerns is also "*managed and owned by the community, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life*" (2013 in Kontogeorgopoulos, 2013, p. 110) whereby even the role of visitors is drawn into the concept of CBT.

The present case of tourism development in SJN in the shape of a local tour operator shares in the above characteristics in a number of ways. The community is invited to participate in training courses and in the ownership of the tour operator through their local representatives. Furthermore, the tour operator will have its own executive body in the form of a Tourism Committee constituted only by members of the community and finally there is a vision for the distribution of benefits within the community in the form of communal development projects. These elements will all form part of the analysis of the implementation of this tourism development in section 4.3. In order to better explore the actual characteristics of CBT as described by the above authors, the elements most commonly included in CBT definitions will be explored in further detail below.

3.2.1 Participation in CBT

The terms involvement, community needs and equity all amount to some form of participation which, as one of the major common denominators in most definitions of CBT, is a main component of this type of tourism development. Salazar (2012) states that the importance of CBT has been recognized over the past couple of decades and that it has been proven that tourism becomes sustainable and viable when community members participate and support the project. He further argues, that the idea of CBT is that it aims - discursively - to create a more sustainable tourism industry which has its main focus on involving host community in planning and maintaining tourism development. Goodwin and Santilli (2009) even state that participation and the equitable sharing of benefits form the very basis of CBT (in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). Giampiccoli and Saayman (2016) describe CBT as a form of tourism which is initiated by the community rather than mainstream actors approaching the community. One of the arguments for CBT is the need for an (eco)tourism approach that is based on the needs, concerns and welfare of the host community (Scheyvens, 1999), something that is unlikely to be achieved without involving the community in identifying and expressing these needs by participating in decision-making process (Tosun, 2000). More broadly, there is wide recognition that a large degree of community participation at all stages of tourism development is crucial to sustainable tourism development and to ensuring that maximum benefits are achieved (see Simpson, 2008). This vague use of the concept participation applied by many of the above authors will be addressed in section 4.3.

Mowforth and Munt (1998) found that the concepts of participation and host communities are often tied together in general development cases as well as in tourism development studies, and even though the locals in many cases of tourism development have been left out in the decision-making processes, participation and *"people-focused approaches"* (p. 212) have become tantamount to development. The involvement of locals has become so important in development projects, that Henkel and Stirrat (2001 in Mowforth and Munt, 1998) go as far as saying that it can be hard to find a development project that does not favor a bottom up approach which includes participation and empowerment of local community members, such as it was argued by Okazaki (2008), who comments that community participation has long

been seen as an integrated part of sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, Mowforth and Munt (1998) note that as part of the publication of the Agenda 21[4] on sustainable development in the 21st century, local participation and development have become inseparable concepts.

CBT and ecotourism *manuals* as Gascón (2013) refers to, consider the local population's participation in the implementation phase and decision-making process of tourism planning a necessity because their involvement contributes to the sustainability of tourism initiatives, the residents' benefits from the project are increased and participating and being part of the decision-making process gives the residents ownership of their own future. Tosun (2000) defines community participation as "*an educational and empowering process in which people, in partnership with those able to assist them, identify problems and needs and increasingly assume responsibility themselves to plan, manage, control and assess [the further process]"* (p.615). According to Okazaki (2008) community participation has been proven to increase the carrying capacity of a community by reducing the negative impacts deriving from tourism, at the same time as enhancing the positive benefits. The author refers to Haywood (1988) in an attempt to define the notion of community participation, who argues that the process involves all relevant stakeholders *"in such way that decision-making is shared"* (p. 511). Successful cases have also been found to be based on local involvement in the "*whole process of tourism development including decision making, implementation, sharing benefit, monitoring and evaluation of tourism development programs"* (Tosun, 1999 in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014, p. 117) which is to say the entire span of the development process, whereby community members are likely to gain knowledge of more complex tasks than the typically low-skilled jobs that come with regular employment in the service industry.

Most development practitioners have incorporated participation into their development strategies due to a general understanding of its positive contribution to the sustainability of development projects. However there has been no agreement on what the implementation of *participatory approaches*, and the associated term of *empowerment*, actually imply, as argued by Mikkelsen (2005): *"there is no one a priori strategy for* who *participates in the development mainstream, in* what and why *they participate and* how *and* on which *conditions"* (p. 58). The term participation has been used in such a broad wording that the meaning has become blurred, it is recognized as a fundamental concept in the development cooperation context because of its *"potential for different stakeholders to influence development strategies and interventions"* (Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 53). However, Mikkelsen (2005) states that in a context of democratic process, locally initiated and managed participation is the overall desired goal.

3.2.2 Empowerment and capacity-building through CBT

Within CBT, ownership, control and more equal power relations are another main concept shared by most authors on the subject. They are highlighted as ways that CBT is more focused than other alternative tourism forms on changing the structural inequity of global neoliberalism (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016) which is prevalent also in traditional forms of tourism development. To some researchers, CBT directly refers to tourism which is managed and

[4] Agenda 21 is a non-binding, voluntarily implemented action plan of the United Nations with regard to sustainable development, product of UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992.

controlled by the community (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016; Höckert, 2011) and which promotes self-reliance, self-planning and self-management (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2015 in Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016) as well as the inclusion of all community groups in the planning of tourism (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014, Höckert, 2011). Willis (1995, p. 212) found that *community participation, as an ideal type, involves a shift of power, from those who have had major decision-making roles to those who traditionally have not had such a role* (in Tosun, 2000, p. 615). He states that it can be argued that community is the main actor in the development process since it means basing the development strategy on community resources, needs and decisions (Willis, 1995 in Tosun, 2000).

While there have been cases where the community benefitted from tourism without ownership, most highlight the importance of community initiative and control (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). Gascón (2013) argues that the sustainability of a tourism project is highly increased when the local population has been involved in the design of the project, making it their own and thereby feeling ownership of their future. Communities with a presence of indigenous minorities such as the Rama and Kriol groups in San Juan de Nicaragua, often lack equal access to political and economic resources. In these cases, a community-based approach to tourism development can provide the community with an opportunity to take a step in the direction of greater political self-determination, *"if local control is maximized"* (Salazar, 2012, p. 12).

One of the requirements for community control may be suitable local leadership. Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) compiled several researchers' work to conclude that leadership is generally considered just one of several factors in the success of CBT, whereas they argue that leadership should be at the top of factors to consider to successfully develop tourism with local ownership. Despite this, only a few authors highlight the quality of leadership and the importance of the community having a "champion" to motivate the community and serve as the link with external actors (Aref, 2011; Blackman et al., 2004 in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014).

3.2.3 The role of external actors in CBT

In this thesis we have chosen to address "external actors" as a single category, even though it is of course comprised of a multitude of different types of actors. Within tourism literature alone there are several views on who constitutes an external actor and what it means to be one. It is, for example, well worth discussing whether geography, origin or culture is the defining feature to distinguish between internal and external, but the full definition and categorisation of all those possibly involved in tourism development is beyond the scope of this thesis. Here the term "external actor" applies to any institution, group or business - public or private - which engages in community-centered tourism development outside of their own community.

The role of these external actors is a defining one in the distinction between CBT and CBTI. As concluded above, in CBT the focus is very much on community involvement in as much of the development phase and decision-making process as possible and ideally community initiative. External actors do, however, often present opportunities for CBT projects that the communities themselves might not be able to reach without external help. In fact,

Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) name external support as one of three key ingredients to success in CBT citing the example of a Thai village which received training, research and connections with tour operators, educational institutions, and other CBT organizations that helped them achieve significant benefits to the community. Not only did the external actors provide intellectual support, but also helped promote the village through governmental tourism campaigns, networks and relevant websites, and by holding up the village as an exemplar in CBT. This saved the community significant sums in advertising and raised visitor rates (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). Giampiccoli & Saayman (2016) found the same to be true, stating that CBT projects can best successfully adjust to the circumstances they are set up in when institutional structures lend support in the form of policy, organisational links and skill development.

The inclusion of external actors does present a challenge for the ideological foundations of CBT, since the balance between lending support and taking control quickly becomes a contested subject. Based on their own study from 2013, Giampiccoli and Mtapuri (2016) conclude that CBT projects are most often supported by an external stakeholder in the marketing and general assistance of the initiative. Accordingly, Gascón (2013) found that the majority of CBT is initiated with some sort of external support and funds, although mentioning cases of community-based tourism initiated by peasants having set aside a percentage of their resources for the development of tourism. While most new development projects may be initiated externally, better benefits are achieved when the process is bottom-up (Zapata et al., 2011). The authors state that external actors such as governments, donors, NGOs and development agencies have focused on investing in the CBT model since it first occurred in development context, making the *"NGO community"* an important support of CBT. Jones and EplerWood (2002) argue that this has made CBT turn out to be a top-down development in most cases, with 60 % of CBT projects in Nicaragua and 40 % of the projects in Latin America founded by an external stakeholder (in Zapata et al., 2011). It is noted that a CBT can be initiated both internally as well as externally. However, research shows, that the latter is the most common and that "*CBT projects initiated independently by communities are rare, especially in the initial stages"* (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016, p. 156). Considering the emphasis put on participation in all stages of the development process by the same authors, it is well worth noting how this rather significant remark concerning external involvement in the initiation of tourism projects is granted relatively little attention in their work. The external initiation (and development) of tourism is a consistent characteristic of CBTI projects, as will be presented below, which introduces a debate concerning the fragility of the CBT model, the actual distinction between the two approaches and the importance of local initiative which will form an underlying part of this thesis.

3.3 Characteristics of CBTI

While some of the above definitions of CBT are more comprehensive than others, spanning to include environmental concerns and the distribution of benefits, they all include elements of empowerment and participation for the community in question. These authors all focus on tourism development being *based* in the community and presume this to form the basis of the project's success. One author in particular distances himself from this approach by instead placing the emphasis on the *benefits* achieved by the community through a given tourism

development. Simpson (2008) introduced the term *community benefit tourism initiatives* (CBTI) to the discussion about CBT and how to best generate the desired outcome within the community-centered tourism framework. Rather than focusing on empowerment, participation and ownership, Simpson (2008) suggests community *benefit* should be the primary goal of any venture aiming to create tourism opportunities in a given community. And it is exactly this focus on benefitting the community - by whichever means deemed most efficient - that sets CBTI apart from CBT. Certain elements from the CBTI framework are also reflected in the work with setting up Greytown Rama Kriol Tours in SJN. In particular, the way the project has been initiated and not least developed outside of the community by actors assumed to be better capable of formulating a successful goal and process is very much in line with the views that form the CBTI approach. The characteristics of the tour operator will be discussed in section 4.1.2 of the analysis and the views behind CBTI will be laid out in detail below.

3.3.1 Participation and empowerment in CBTI

In accordance with one of the main principles of CBTI, the participation of the community members is seen as a possible contribution rather than a key element. Based on a case of CBT in China, Li (2006) found participation in decision-making to be just one of several ways of working towards achieving benefits for the local population for tourism developed in their community - not a goal in itself. In developing countries, rather than participating in decision-making processes, community has been found to benefit from participation in the form of employment as workers or small business operators (Tosun, 2000; Li, 2006). The CBTI model is claimed to take socio-economic factors into account and the author goes so far as to state that the principles of CBTI take account of and address "*the needs of communities in all situations and in all environments*" (Simpson, 2008, p. 2). This wide reaching promise of inclusion and suitability is what leads the author to suggest that CBTI be applied whenever tourism development takes place.

In fact, not only is participation not a crucial part of the CBTI framework, it is often not a desired part of tourism development. Simpson (2008) argued that involving the community can directly work against the aim of generating benefits for them, even aggravating and creating internal conflicts. Li (2006) expresses a similar uncertainty whether participation is in fact a prerequisite for the community's possibility to gain the most benefits. Addison (1996) described lack of experience and training in the tourism field as time-consuming barriers to overcome (in Okazaki, 2008). Adding to the above view, Li (2006) brings up efficiency as a concern when community gets involved in decision-making. She argues that especially at the beginning of tourism development, efficiency may have to weigh higher than fairness and involving the community is well known to make the process slower and more expensive (Li, 2006). By explicitly stating that the community itself is likely to present a hinderance rather than an advantage in community development, the authors effectively challenge Kontogeorgopoulos et al.'s (2014) claim that tourism can be both community-based and community-oriented. This view on the value of participation is closely linked to the CBTI approach's view of external actors, which will be described below.

In CBTI, local ownership in community development is not prioritised. Rather, it is believed that communities will build capacity even without involvement in the initiation and management of tourism ventures: *"To distribute benefits to a community, the tourism initiative need not always involve the community in any rights, tenure or control of the project"* (Simpson, 2008,

p. 2). He does state that ownership should be aimed for in tourism development, but mainly in order to "*ensure delivery of the appropriate proportion and type of benefits to the relevant community*" (Simpson, 2008, p. 2). He recommends that communities "*need to be seen as suitable partners of the private sector and governments in tourism development in initiatives"* (Simpson, 2008, p. 7) which is in contrast to the owner role promoted by CBT advocates. Similarly, Honggang, Sofield and Jigang (2009) argued that communities may benefit economically from existing mass tourism even without being included in ownership of tourism businesses (in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014).

3.3.2 The role of external actors in CBTI

The role ascribed to external actors in the CBTI framework is markedly different from how most CBT scholars view it. Rather than the community ideally initiating their own projects and external actors only providing sometimes necessary support, NGOs, governments and foreign institutions form a core part of the CBTI approach. Kontogeorgopoulos et al.'s (2014) observations regarding the value of support from private and governmental external actors very much apply to this form of community-centered tourism. Advocates of CBTI - and Simpson (2008) in particular - emphasise the increased resources that external actors represent in relation to tourism development within the communities. Simpson (2008) furthermore states that governments have become more motivated to play a collaborative role in tourism planning and that the private sector requires governmental support to ensure the sustainability of tourism. Within the CBTI framework, it is even argued that not involving the community in the tourism development process allows for better opportunities for external actors to contribute to community development by being "*able to design and deliver benefits to a community without the 'baggage' that can come with community involvement in the decision-making processes"* (Simpson, 2008, p. 2*).* On the contrary, having to include community is likely to deter stakeholder contribution. There are certainly challenges involved in engaging the community which will be discussed in section 4.3 below.

Simpson (2008) argues that by not involving community in tourism initiatives, several counterproductive elements are likely removed. Among these are external pressures and conflicting stakeholder agendas, since leaving community out would allow external actors to work around local jealousies and power struggles. It is also argued, that in many cases of tourism development, an external entity can act as a facilitator, easing and helping the dialogue between stakeholders, turning a destructive conflict into a constructive dialogue. The facilitator in a community setting, an NGO, government representative or consultant, facilitates respectful relationships *"by empowering the stakeholders, especially the community members and their representatives"* (Okazaki, 2008, p. 515). Simpson (2008) brings up what he considers a successful tourism venture in southern Thailand and concludes that "*this type of tourism would not have flourished without ownership and control being in the hands of foreign expatriates"* (Simpson 2008, p. 4). Overall, Simpson (2008) considers foreigners rather than locals best placed to ensure sustainable, responsible tourism because they are unaffected by cultural and national issues such as corruption and unethical business practices.

3.4 The development potential of CBT & CBTI

While tourism in general is considered useful in generating both income and work for the recipient countries, both CBT and CBTI aim to bring the benefits of tourism to those who are directly involved and affected. While CBTI has community members as one of several stakeholders to benefit, CBT has more of a focus on the complete community involvement and ownership as it is them who receive the tourists and who thus feel the full spectre of effects from tourism development. As such, the differences between the two approaches are significant in certain areas, but their focus on the community in tourism development do share certain potential benefits - and challenges, as will be discussed in section 3.5. Armstrong (2012) compiled a long list of benefits achieved by CBT (in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014) which include a strong and cohesive host community, genuine community participation, ownership and control, quality products based on community assets; transparent financial management and effective monitoring and evaluation. Some of the listed benefits accredited to CBT are likely to overlap to some degree with those a CBTI might hope to generate, such as engagement with the private sector, planning for commercial viability, sound market research and demand-driven product development.

According to Khalifah (2009) there has regularly been made suggestions to *"scale up CBT to become the mainstream tourism form"* (in Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016, p. 156). This particular tourism form is more and more often considered as a better strategy choice for sustainable development due to its inherent solidarity, community control, participation and equality (Höckert, 2011) as also promoted above. In the declaration of San Jose (Redturs, 2003), representatives from a Latin America-wide network of indigenous peoples agreed to support tourism which is based on community self-management to ensure control in planning, development and operation of local tourism and avoid threats such as social cohesion. The declaration explicitly seeks to support the development of networks of CBT as a means of sustainable development. This increased focus indicates how CBT is by some considered the better alternative to traditional tourism development and one better equipped to counter the typical negative impacts that often follow in the wake of a higher influx of tourists.

Just as tourism should form part of a holistic development approach, within tourism several factors should be included to design a successful community-oriented tourism strategy. This should take into account how environmental, commercial, social, and management components of tourism are all interconnected (Murphy, 1985 in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). CBT is considered to have an especially strong potential and value as a tool for holistic community development (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). Three elements recur throughout existing literature on the benefits expected from CBT: economic, environmental and social advantages over traditional tourism development. These three elements are included by most advocates for the CBT approach, who see almost equal potential in each. In this thesis the focus will primarily be on the economic and sociocultural benefits of CBT.

Unfortunately, most of these attempts at defining what CBT is and should be lack concrete success factors which would better allow for the evaluation of development projects during and after their execution. Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) suggest success might be calculated as either financial rewards in absolute terms, the elimination of poverty and improvement of working conditions and security or in net gains in community benefits and

significant community participation in tourism arguing that the two ways of evaluating a given project is likely to yield quite different results. Höckert (2011) looks to the human dimension to establish success factors, such as freedom of choice, social justice and empowerment which she believes deserve more attention.

3.4.1 Economic development

In order to find out how destinations which experienced growth through tourism can translate this into socio-economic development, Zapata et al. (2011) looked into which tourism models are most suitable in poverty reduction and under which conditions. Tourism is generally found to have great potential of generating income and development in less developed countries and economic growth is often used a as parameter indicating the success of tourism development projects. Although a variety of positive outcomes of the implementation of tourism is listed by Zapata et al. (2011), it was found that in 10 out of 13 countries that are home to 80 % of the world population living in extreme poverty, traditional tourism development programmes did not reduce poverty (Plüss & Backe, 2002). In fact, according to UNWTO (2004), the less developed countries that experienced the highest rate of tourism growth experienced a decrease in per capita income at the same time (in Zapata et al., 2011). Plüss and Backe (2002) therefore state that the poorest part of the local population very often do not benefit directly from tourism development projects and that tourism in some cases have even made the poor poorer (in Zapata et al., 2011). As an example of this, Costa Rica, neighbor country to Nicaragua, has experienced a high increase in tourism development over the past decades due to an investment in creating awareness of the country's unique nature and the variety of eco touristic offers. Despite the country positioning itself as one of the most important eco friendly tourism destinations, the local population of the Guanacaste region, which hosts a large percentage of both national and international tourists, have not felt any significant reduction in poverty rates (GTZ, 2007 in Zapata et al., 2011).

Zapata et al. (2011) suggest that instead of traditional tourism development CBT is a more suitable tourism approach when seeking poverty alleviation in rural destinations. CBT has been widely promoted as a tool for poverty reduction and general community development in developing countries (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). It is especially recognised as an appropriate instrument when it comes to providing alternative income in rural areas with economic struggles (Gascón, 2013; Rozemeijer, 2001 in Salazar, 2012) - such as San Juan de Nicaragua. The potential of introducing CBT is considered relatively higher in remote areas where economic development is otherwise scarce (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). Simpson (2008) also highlights the potential economic gains for the communities from CBTI in the form of direct employment as well as economic benefits from the sales of handicrafts and meals. However, the typically small scale of this type of tourism development has also led to criticism that it often delivers only limited possibility for economic growth (Höckert, 2011, Gascón, 2013) and that CBT overall has been said to in fact have a lower impact on poverty reduction that mainstream tourism (Mitchell & Muckosy (2008 in Zapata et al., 2011). This leaves the economic development value of CBT in doubt and as a weak argument at best for its implementation.

3.4.2 Social, cultural and environmental development

In addition to the economic and environmental advantages of CBT, compared to other forms of alternative tourism, "*CBT is better positioned to advance a more socially just and equitable tourism*" (Giampiccoli & Saayman 2016, p. 1668), which would better distribute the benefits of tourism among community members than both mass tourism and other types of niche tourism such as pro-poor tourism and fair-trade tourism. CBT also presents an opportunity to include marginalised groups in the process of tourism development on their own terms (Höckert, 2011). "*CBT can be used as a tool for social justice, equity, redistribution of wealth and resources, and empowerment"* (Giampiccoli 2015 in Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016, p. 4). Besides poverty alleviation, CBT is an appropriate instrument for development cooperation and can contribute to the conservation of natural areas Gascón (2013).

When developing tourism in any community, there is a risk that the local culture is adversely affected. By keeping control in the hands of the community itself, the cultural aspects may better be preserved and promoted to the community's benefit (Redturs, 2003). Within CBT, the UNWTO has identified cultural tourism as the most promising niche to develop CBT programs in and expect it to become "*one of the major growth markets in global tourism"* (2001 in Salazar, 2012, p. 11). Similarly, Saayman and Giampiccoli (2016) argue that while CBT is often considered a small-scale concept there is no reason it should not form the basis of development at a larger scale, thus going beyond the local approach and into the mainstream and global levels (in Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016). These observations once again indicate the potential many developers see in CBT not just for the communities but also for tourism in general.

Zapata et al. (2011) found that community residents' perception of the acquired skills and knowledge, obtained through training provided by external actors, were as important of an asset as the economic benefits related to the implementation of CBT projects, and as a community resident from the project expresses, the training has provided the community members with confidence. Höckert (2011, p. 11) argues that *"the central human values of self-esteem and freedom of choice can be seen as both means and goals of sustainable tourism development"* both of which she states are linked to raising the living standard through higher incomes, education and attention to cultural and human values. This is what Scheyvens (1999) termed psychological empowerment whereby communities gain the confidence to seek further education and training through outsiders' appreciation of their culture, knowledge and natural resources.

Gascón (2013) furthermore considers CBT a helpful approach when aiming at preserving natural areas, and Baktygulov and Raeva (2010) argue that CBT can contribute to the promotion of both positive environmental and social impact (in Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). By encouraging community control of tourism development, the Redturs network (2003) believe that environmental concerns are more likely to be taken into consideration. In this relation, when community residents experience the use of natural resources for tourism, it encourages them to protect and use the resources in a sustainable way (Rozemeijer, 2001 in Salazar, 2012) and in general lets them learn through tourism to appreciate what they have (Höckert, 2011).

3.5 Criticism of CBT & CBTI and their implementation

With this multitude of benefits to achieve through community-oriented tourism it is tempting to suggest applying the approach to most new and existing tourism destinations. However, while there are many overlapping elements among most scholars' contributions, very few present concrete tools to help developers carry out this transition to basing tourism development in the community or even benefitting the community. Many scholars and practitioners agree that tourism should be to the benefit of those directly involved. However, the gap between theorising about community involvement and successfully carrying out the approach in practice has not been properly addressed (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). Balslev Clausen and Gyimóthy (2016, p. 319) point out that "*We know little about how sustainable development and community-based policy initiatives are implemented and become jeopardized on the local level*", indicating that previous research has tended to draw conclusions based on theoretical discussions rather than practical experiences. This sentiment goes for both CBT and CBTI approaches as well as other possible attempts at alternative/sustainable tourism development.

It is even argued by Gascón (2013) that while there exists a large amount of published articles on the benefits and success of implementing CBT in tourism development, most of the studies done on this issue have been conducted by people who are involved in the projects and they can therefore not be characterized as neutral sources. Moreover, it should be noted that it is not always clear whether the results presented in such literature are based on the entire reality of a tourism development process or are based on the first positive results from a flourishing tourist destination (Wheeler, 2006 in Gascón, 2013). In relation to this, Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) emphasize that the evaluation of how successful the implementation of a CBT approach has been is subjective and based on the each individual's perspective and perception of the outcomes. Among the concerns raised regarding the implementation of community-oriented tourism, Gascón (2013) lists a low level of economic viability, the fact that this approach emphasizes the "*social differentiation and intra-community conflict processes"* (Morais, Cheng, Dong & Yang, 2006 in Gascón 2013, p. 717), natural resources are commodified and the local community's control over tourism activities are undervalued and reduced due to constraints imposed by external agents. These inconsistencies between theory and practise will be discussed in detail below as we aim to identify some of the challenges faced by many CBT projects and by the efforts to create a local tour operator in SJN in particular with a focus on the issues of community, participation and empowerment.

3.5.1 Words that make a difference?

Giampiccoli & Saayman (2016, p. 1668) bring up a general concern not just for the use of CBT but for many types of alternative tourism which aim to bring different values into tourism development: "...*the terminology of alternative tourism forms often seems to be unclear and overlapping or, possibly more importantly, does not necessarily mean in reality what the term suggests to indicate*", suggesting developers should be careful assuming that these benefits are automatically generated just because development is carried out using a certain term for the framework. Already over a decade ago, Cornwall & Brock (2005) wrote about buzzwords such as "empowerment" and "participation" as concepts that have been included with too little clear definition in too many policy papers so as to eventually lose their meaning. The authors argue that there is a very real risk that such words not only do not contribute with real change

but also increase the risk of adding legitimacy to projects that do not in fact have empowerment and participation as concrete pointers in their development aims (Cornwall & Brock, 2005). Höckert (2011) argues that it is the lack of cultural understanding and appreciation of the local reality on behalf of tourism developers which causes the highest risk of "empowerment" and "participation" becoming empty buzzwords.

Similarly, Höckert (2011) warns that the word "development" is both vague and tied to Eurocentric thinking. According to Mowforth and Munt (1998), there is a general overly positive perception of participation as being key in development, which has resulted in participation being put on a pedestal. They argue that the popular and commonly used concepts of participation and empowerment, in most development studies have been conceptualized uncritically and that the recommendation of their implementation is based on research seen in the view of a First World project planner. The term ecotourism, which has been used to describe the development of environmentally responsible tourism that aims at ensuring benefits for local host communities, has also long been used as a marketing tool, which, according to Scheyvens (1999), has led to a risk that *"the ventures which emerge may serve to alienate rather than benefit local communities"* (p. 245). Although she acknowledges the importance of the concept of participation in a development context, Mikkelsen (2005) argues that the word has been used in such a broad variety of contexts, that the meaning has become blurred just as the case with many catchwords in development studies. Moreover, she adds *empowerment* and *partnership* to participation, all as a central concepts in the millennium's "*mainstream development discourse"* (Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 56).

3.5.2. Participation in community-centered tourism

3.5.2.1. The ideology of participation

Much of what has been written about CBT is criticised for relying too much on Western perceptions of development. Le et al. (2012) note a general concern that local and non-Western perspectives and knowledge have too little influence on development and decision-making approaches such as the CBT model (in Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). Li (2006), too, calls community participation a Western paradigm and Midgley (1986) argues that the idea of community participation is deeply ideological, reflecting social and political beliefs of how society should be organized (in Tosun, 2000). Similarly, current CBT approaches are criticised for continuing to advance Western ideas of what tourism is and the inherent interpersonal relations despite formally having moved from a top-down to participatory style (Sammy, 2008 in Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016).

Mowforth and Munt (1998) state that "*the push for local participation comes from a position of power, the first world*" (p.240). The assumption that the participation concept of the Global North may easily be transferred to communities in the Global South is a questionable one. Communities which have not traditionally been included in decision-making processes are unlikely to take it up easily as many groups will traditionally have found themselves outside of influence and thus do not naturally jump to the chance to participate (Balslev Clausen & Gyimóthy, 2016). Tosun (2000) also found that not all cultures appreciate dialogue-based processes or find those to be most efficient. He believes that community participation since

the 1970s has become "*a new genre of development intervention*" (Tosun, 2000, p. 615), and that the idea of suggesting a development strategy that is not participatory would be reactionary. If planners and developers do not keep this bias in mind, they are less likely to be attuned to and understand the relevant community's perspective.

3.5.2.2. Ability to participate

Many studies identify the importance of community participation in tourism development but few recognize the actions that need to be taken to encourage this participation. In this context it is important to keep in mind that "*the capacity to participate cannot be guaranteed merely by the right to do so: the means to get involved are also necessary"* as stated by Jamal and Getz (1999, in Okazaki, 2008 p. 512). Tosun (2000) argues that due to socio-cultural, economic and political conditions, including power structure and institutional systems, a majority of developing countries experience operational, structural and cultural limitations to community participation in tourism development (Tosun, 2000). Furthermore, recent years have brought criticism of the *"unequal relationships of power that hide behind participation mechanisms"* (Gascón, 2013, p. 720) and which CBT tourism scholars are only just starting to pay attention to. According to Mikkelsen (2005), critiques of participation in development most often comes from scholars and development agencies with experience in the field, and more uncommonly from the participants themselves, a pattern which is often seen in development processes, and may reflect, according to the author, "*the imbalance in partnership among donor and recipients"* (p. 76).

In cases where a community has no prior experience with tourism, the complexity of understanding the benefits and challenges (how the value chain works, training costs, use of natural resources, working hours required, the seasonal nature of the new activity etc., (Gascón, 2013)) related to the development of this activity, it is difficult for the local residents to have the full overview of both the positive and negative consequences that may occur when initiating tourism development (Gascón, 2013; Höckert, 2011). Mirroring this statement, Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) confirm that the opposite holds true, namely that "*communities with an existing history of cooperation and active involvement in key decisions are well positioned to develop community-based forms of tourism*" (p.114). Mowforth and Munt (2000 in Gascón, 2013) argue that if only a part of the population has previous experience within the field of tourism, implementing a tourism development initiative can "*increase socio-economic differentiation within the community"* (Gascón, 2013, p. 722). This indicates the risk of creating a differentiation within the community of SJN, since some of the community members have experience working with tourists and in the field, whereas some of the community residents that have participated in the BICU trainings, do not have any previous practical experience.

Gascón (2013) exemplifies this with his field study on the island of Amantaní in Southern Peru. In this case, the population of the island had no previous experience in the field of tourism which meant that there was no understanding of *"the tourism sector, how demand is created, how to prepare a destination, marketing, planning, visitor management, the consequences* [of tourism] *on social relationships, cultural practices, etc…"* and Gascón therefore concludes that the residents' *"ability to make decisions appropriate to their interest is practically nil"* (2013, p. 721). In a comparison study of CBT projects in rural Nicaragua, Zapata et al. (2011) found that

besides economic capital, cultural capital was a necessity to materialise the idea of developing tourism in the community under observation. From their research they found that the community residents who had lived and been socialized in a rural environment, had not developed the necessary skills and knowledge to operate in the tourism industry. Gascón notes that *"no matter how participatory and democratic the decision process proposed in relation to CBT, if the community has no in-depth experience of tourism, the CBT process cannot be democratic or participatory"* (2013 p. 722). This of course is not limited to CBT nor to tourism alone but to the involvement of community in development matters in general. Cole (2006) states that meaningful participation cannot take place before a community understands what they are to make decisions about (in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014).

There is a lack of written material and research regarding limitations to community participation in tourism development in Third World countries (Tosun, 2000) which is perhaps why it may seem easy on paper to promote and encourage local host participation in the development process than it is in practice (Mowforth and Munt, 1998). In accordance with this, Timothy (1999) points out that *the education of local residents and the involvement of locals in the economic benefits of tourism are happening in theory… and to a lesser extent in practice"* (in Tosun, 2000, p. 614), based on research of local participation in Indonesia. Gascón (2013) proposes that the consequences, potentialities and risks of tourism development should be explained to the local community. He admits, however, that it can be difficult to provide enough training and information to community residents who have not before been involved in the development of tourism, for them to be able to make *"decisions consistent with their interests and expectations"* (p. 721). Perhaps this is the same logic behind Simpson's (2008) argument that involving the community in tourism development may contribute to the creation of unrealistic expectations. As a consequence, the misunderstandings that may occur from overlooking and neglecting the needs of the community lead to disappointment in the community which eventually may end up resenting tourism development and the changes connected to this activity (Salazar, 2012).

In Gascón's (2013) study of tourism implementation on the Peruvian island, he explains that although the decision to open the small island up to tourism was made as a group by the island's population, the same population's lack of knowledge about tourism implementation meant that external *agents* were invited to make proposals on the structure of tourism in the island. The external agents copied a tourism initiative from another project, not taking into account the specific case and needs of the island and its residents, which ultimately meant that the tourism development initiative in Amantaní failed. Similarly, it has been pointed out that "*there are no universal models of tourism that can guarantee success, poverty reduction and the equal distribution of benefits"* (Cañada & Gascón, 2007b, in Höckert, 2011) and that therefore it cannot be copied from one destination to another as "*the potential and interest for involvement varies a great deal from place to place"* (Cañada & Gascón, 2007b, in Höckert, 2011).The parallel to SJN's involvement with BICU seems obvious and will be discussed in the Analysis chapter.

Yet another critical angle on the concept of participation is that of the actual quality or depth of participation. Often it is taken for granted that when the community is invited to participate in decision-making processes they will both attend the required sessions and engage with the organisers and that the organisers wish for the community to do so. The dogma of participation often goes unquestioned (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014) and there is a naïve assumption

that participation in general is good *"regardless of who participates or who gains"* (Chambers, 1994 in Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 77). It is not, however, uncommon for community participation to be more of a front than a fact. "*Participation is an attractive principle in theory, but comes in a wide variety of forms in practice*" (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014, p. 109). Those participating in meetings, for example, may not be allowed to ask questions (Cornwall & Brock, 2005) or members on a board or committee only have pro forma power over decisions and execution as was seen in Balslev Clausen and Gyimóthy's (2016) study of tourism development in a number of Mexican villages.

Several authors have recognised that "participation" is not just a single, well-defined concept. The term participation can be used to describe a wide level of voluntary involvement of people in a development initiative and in the "*development of themselves, their lives, their environment"* (Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 54). There are many scales which aim to classify the various forms that participation can take, e.g. Arnstein's (1969) *ladder of participation* (in Okazaki, 2008), Tosun's (1999) *typology of tourism participation* (in Tosun, 2000) and Pretty's (1995) *typology of participation in development* (in Höckert, 2011). The terms used by these authors all vary, but their categories cover a range from the lowest level, being only informed about decisions already taken. Slightly higher on the scales is a superficial type of participation where the participant has no real say and at the top are different versions of autonomy, where the participants take their own initiative and make own connections.

Mikkelsen (2005) does not present a scale of her own but concludes that participation does not equal representation. Tosun (2000) states that there seems to be no examples of participatory tourism development in developing countries that have gone beyond community consultation or *manipulative* [superficial] *participation.* This lack of true participation is clearly exemplified in several instances in SJN and in several ways. When the majority of the course participants at a BICU training session are only paying scant attention to the professor and perhaps even leave the room for long periods of time, it raises the question of whether presence equals participation. Similarly, when the community has been encouraged to form a local Tourism Committee to run the new tour operator, this would appear to be an example of participation in the management of the initiative. However, the Committee members have not been provided with any training to be able to handle this task in valuable manner. These and more examples will be thoroughly discussed in the analysis.

3.5.2.3. Community as a homogenous unit

Another main problem with the concept of participation is how it often assumes community to be a single unit. CBT has specifically been criticised for treating the host community as a homogeneous entity (Blackstock, 2005 in Salazar, 2012) invoking a "*false sense of tradition, homogeneity and consensus"* (Höckert, 2011, p. 18). Some researchers warn the use of the term community in participation context because of the risk of perceiving community as a *"homogenous, idyllic, unified population which researchers and developers can interact with no problems"* (Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 78). This is used when highlighting the benefits of including community in decision-making, planning and management of community tourism as well as using the term community interest. It is typical for organisers to *"ignore the problematic assumptions embedded within the community concept itself*" (Tosun, 2000, in Salazar, 2012, p. 9). Simpson (2008) too recognises that a community rarely acts as a unified entity and that divisions can occur that can prove potentially destructive. When certain voices raise above

the rest, there is a risk that a silent majority is formed which is likely to disrupt the operation of a tourism initiative. Simpson's (2008) suggestions for ways to solve these issues is the creation of structured communication approaches where the community is heard in the development process. However, in this lies the assumption that given the chance community members are likely to make themselves heard. It does not take into consideration the internal power structures of a community that may cause some groupings to keep their criticism quiet if others are in favour or who will not bring it up in open forums. Mikkelsen (2005) similarly found that in development the often public orientation of participation may limit practices in reaching socially marginalized groups, such as indigenous groups and women.

3.5.2. Empowerment

3.5.2.1. External actors

Even in CBT's infancy, it was emphasised how community control is key in tourism development (Murphy 1985, in Salazar, 2012). Despite decades of experience and experimenting, however, the issue would not seem to have been solved quite yet. Almost 30 years on, the local community's control over tourism development is still undervalued (Gascón, 2013). Hall (2003) and Scheyvens (2002) both made it clear that "*Power, both relative and absolute, is an enormous issue for communities involved in and affected by tourism initiatives"* (in Simpson, 2008, p. 11) making it a topic of concern for any tourism developer. However, in line with the above considerations regarding the practical value of words such as empowerment in a development context, this element is often neglected or only superficially included.

The role of external actors is a defining difference between the two tourism development approaches described in this thesis. Some of the arguments for giving external actors a lesser role have already been brought forward, and here we will address some of the related challenges that the two share. Scholars have warned that involving external stakeholders in the development process can produce unforeseeable and undesirable outcomes (Gascón, 2013) and that initiatives quickly weaken after external support is withdrawn (Höckert, 2011). This tendency to rely on external actors may be one of the reasons why many CBT development projects fail. Even when the initiative is community-based, the external involvement is likely to result in lack of financial sustainability (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2014) since the top-down model creates low life expectancy when external economic funds end (Sebele, 2010 in Zapata et al., 2011).

Simpson's (2008) argument that leaving control in the hands of external actors rather than the community would allow development to happen without external pressures or conflicting stakeholder agendas is counterintuitive. Both challenges would be at least as relevant with control of any given tourism project in the hands of outsiders. His notion that foreigners can better steer clear of cultural and national issues, for example, must be based on the assumption that they are not personally affected by e.g. cultural considerations the way locals are. However, this same assumption would mean that foreign actors are less likely to be aware of and understand the cultural issues that can, right enough, affect tourism development in a given area or even country: "*external tourism developers cannot directly enhance poverty*

reduction or empowerment without understanding the local context, local knowledge and the different aspects of tourism on people" (Höckert, 2011, p. 12).

This also relates to the question of when an outside institution is and should be considered an external actor as discussed in section 4.2.1. It is worth keeping in mind the role played by an actor such as BICU in the present case. Balslev Clausen and Gyimóthy (2016) point out the possible discordance between the insight those who assist the community believe that they have and that perceived by the community in question. Mosse (2001) found that when external actors are in control of the implementation and development process, valuable local knowledge is often dismissed in favour of the knowledge that external actors presume to bring with them (in Mikkelsen, 2005). There may also be inconsistencies between the capabilities the external actors are perceived to have and what they are actually able to contribute with, i.e. in the shape of their education. But being from Nicaragua, even from the same region and with a university background, the professors may feel like they are part of the community and thus understand the members and their challenges. As it will be demonstrated in the analysis, though, this is not evidenced by the way the tour operator initiative was developed and unfolded. The fact that in SJN the tour operator initiative was taken and developed by external actors has meant that the project has got off to an insecure start which includes uncertainty regarding funding, the internal divisions and who is in charge of moving forward. This will be discussed and analysed in detail in chapter/section 4.2.1.2.

3.5.2.2. Power structures

Several authors have questioned the claim that CBT is particularly beneficial for communities in terms of empowerment due in part to the lack of consideration for local power structures: "*CBT as a whole has also been criticized because of its inability to overcome the global, national, and local power inequities that limit community benefits and constrain community control over tourism"* (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014, p. 109). Hall (2003) calls it a naive and romantic perception of CBT to think that all community members have equal access to power, representation and benefits (in Höckert, 2011). CBT has also been criticised for not paying enough attention to *"(external power-based) structural constraints on local control of the tourism industry"* (Blackstock, 2005 in Salazar, 2012). If this is the case, this undermines a large part of the rationale for CBT as promoted by most scholars. It does, however, leave room for Simpson's (2008) interpretation where benefits are prioritised over empowerment for the community. Beeton (2006) too believes that CBT does not live up to the potential most authors ascribe to it in terms of community empowerment: "*CBT differs from general community development theory and process in that it does not have the transformative intent of community development and does not focus on community empowerment*" (in Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016, p.4). In saying so, Beeton even questions the very developmental intent of CBT and specifically questions the value of the local empowerment many scholars and practitioners claim to provide through this particular tourism form.

Part of the argument for including empowerment as an important factor in CBT is its potential for capacity-building. Höckert (2011) worries that if tourism development is not followed by relevant capacity-building and new skills, it could in fact lead to disempowerment, not the opposite, despite local participation. The reliance on outside resources not only risks making CBT projects unsustainable, but are also likely to promote neo-colonialism and reinforce dependency in developing countries (Manyara & Jones, 2007 in Salazar, 2012). For example,

an NGO may provide help by carrying out research on behalf of a community, which may prove useful to the community for the specific purpose of the research. It does not, however, provide the community with the tools to carry out their own research in the future. Mowforth and Munt (2003) even express concern that the CBT approach can lead to "*a monopolisation of benefits by elites and even the exclusion of the poor from community structures"* (in Zapata et al., 2011, p. 727).

Rowland (1997) argues that the notion of empowerment of community includes more than participation in the process of decision-making, it focuses on promoting processes that make local residents perceive themselves as *"able and entitled to make decisions"* (in Okazaki, 2008, p. 514). By including community members in all development phases and levels, they are assumed to gain more new skills than when being simply employed by external actors. This assumption is challenged, however, by Simpson (2008), Tosun (2000) and Li (2006) who state that even within a CBTI framework, local residents will build capacity through the increase in employment and influx of tourists. However, when community members are not involved in the development and management of the tourism initiatives, the jobs that are provided are likely to be traditional unskilled service positions such as waiters, cleaning staff and guides, which fits poorly with Simpson's (2008) statement that it is important to build capacity within the affected communities.

One of the factors that the success of Kontogeorgopoulos et al.'s (2014) Thai case rely on is transformational leadership. They ascribe a large part of the success of a small village's CBT efforts to the legitimacy, recognisability and social skills of a local leader. While there is no doubt that strong leadership can help a community gain traction with its partners, reliance on a single strong character within the community also presents certain risks. Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) themselves recognise some of these challenges in the form of the risk of one leader dominating the development process and in close relation, the volatility of hinging development on a single person. Secondly, as a development strategy it is difficult to rely on a community being able to produce a strong leader in order for them to carry tourism development.

3.6. Sustainability

Intervention in any kind of development process implies an impact on the host community. It can be difficult or impossible to determine the impacts on community, and whether they affect the host society in a negative or positive way (Gascón, 2013) but regardless of how tourism development is carried out, there is a real risk involved that it brings with it cultural change and conflict within the host community (Höckert, 2011). Salazar (2012) highlights the sociocultural effects of tourism as some of the most *"worrying aspect of a global(ized) sector"* (p. 17) and argues that tourism has impacts on both local culture and landscape which means that *"cultural change reflects the influence of tourism as one of the agents in place transformation"* (p. 17). These changes are often slow and invisible as they may not become evident to those affected until after a long and gradual process, but - for those same reasons - they are permanent. It is therefore suggested that the impacts on local environment as well as the

community's ability to adapt are assessed before introducing CBT (Gascón, 2013). Höckert (2011) similarly recommends thoughtful consideration and assessment of potential socio-cultural impacts before introducing any type of tourism development, including in the shape of so-called sustainable and responsible tourism.

Sustainability is not a straightforward issue and the complexity of tourism development is often overlooked. While every CBT initiative claims to aim for sustainable development, "*the practical discourse around community-based tourism seems to lack a holistic view on the issue*" (Höckert, 2011, p. 8). The focus, even for supposedly responsible tourism initiatives tends to be on the economic outcome alone. This way of approaching sustainability "*jeopardises CBT's possible contribution to holistic community development*" (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016, p. 4). If other elements are factored in it is typically the environmental impacts alone that may be included and if socio-cultural changes are addressed they are almost always assumed to be negative (Höckert, 2011). Simpson (2008, p. 9) himself points out one of the risks involved with relying on outside agencies such as the typical, externally driven tour operator, namely that they are likely to "*respond more quickly and more dynamically to market trends and to perceived opportunities rather than local social concerns*" and that they cannot be expected to offer long-term commitment to the development of the community where they are represented. These are both strong arguments for the creation of a locally based tour operator in SJN.

Even though the economy is often a major focus of new tourism projects, even within CBT, the majority of community-based tourism planning initiatives are in fact economically unsustainable (Balslev Clausen & Gyimóthy, 2016; Gascón, 2013). This has already been touched upon as a consequence of external involvement, but it is not unlikely that it is also a result of the failure to implement tourism as part of a larger, more holistic development process. Höckert (2011, p. 10) expresses this sentiment exactly by concluding that "*Slowly it has been learned that economic growth does not contribute to development if it does not translate to the social change and increased capability to function of the poor".* Simpson (2008) also acknowledges that the employment created by CBTI tourism ventures is often in the form of unskilled labour such as transportation and construction which is typically low paid, seasonal and/or short term jobs. While employment of this type is certainly better than no employment it is unlikely to create long-term development in the community in question. What does create this type of continual development, is empowerment. This, argues Höckert (2011), will allow communities to take over and sustain development projects which have only been scheduled for a limited time. Similarly, Gascón (2013, p. 720) concludes that *the viability of the project is hugely reduced when the local population has not made it their own by design."*

The several challenges presented above may lead practitioners to believe that community-oriented tourism does not hold the promise first ascribed to it. However, as noted by Okazaki (2008) alternative approaches to community-based tourism development has not been suggested by the critics of the participatory model, which he continues to find the most suitable when seeking to achieve sustainable tourism development. Moscardo (2008), however, argues that despite CBT (and ecotourism) not having proven as effective or sustainable as envisioned, these tourism forms still show the greatest potential for many regions. Her conclusion is thus that true CBT has not yet been implemented.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, the theoretical considerations will be applied to discuss the findings in the empirical data collected during the time of research in SJN. As the themes of how to best address empowerment and participation of the local community in community-centered tourism development are closely related to one another, findings in the data collection would most often fall under both categories. In an attempt to divide the main concepts of discussion in a logical order, the first section of the analysis will address the development potential of community-centered tourism and the CBT and CBTI elements of Greytown Rama Kriol Tours. The following section will focus on a discussion of the positioning and role of the external actor BICU in relation to the empowerment of local community. Lastly, the third section will discuss how meaningful community participation has been in the case of community-oriented tourism in SJN and which social and structural conditions this is affected by.

4.1 Tourism development in SJN

4.1.1 The development potential of community-centered tourism

Tourism in general has long been hailed as an engine for economic growth and in particular as a way to generate wealth in disadvantaged contexts (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016). Tourism became a primary route for guaranteeing development for any destination, in particular offering an alternative source of income in rural areas, which lack these alternative sources of income (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016; Gascón, 2013; Hummel & Duim, 2012 and Spenceley & Mayer, 2012 in Gascón, 2013). It was found, however, that traditional tourism development often does not create economic growth for the poorest part of the local population as would be expected but rather risks having an adverse effect on local economic stimulus (Zapata et al., 2011). The low influx of tourists especially in recent years means the tourism supply in SJN is quite low. However, the Río Indio Lodge, a luxury resort located within a few kilometers of the town of SJN, has successfully been running for years, perhaps due its focus on sports fishing tours, a niche tourism in this area. Besides this, the Lodge sometimes hires experienced guides from SJN to take tourists on jungle tours into the Reserve. The Río Indio Lodge is moreover known locally for delaying payments of salaries. According to some community members who have been working there for periods, pay checks can be delayed up to half a year, which makes working there less attractive and adds to the motivation of increasing tourism offers from the town of SJN. The employees, whether it be as guides, administrative employees or kitchen staff, are either SJN town locals or from the Costa Rican villages across the nearby border and a very large number of SJN residents have worked for the Lodge at some point.

The way this lodge operates in the community of SJN illustrates quite well the pitfalls of the types of tourism where external actors hold the control. While it is not possible to establish the intent with which the Río Indio Lodge was founded, it clearly operates in a way where the local population is only seen as employees and not participants by any means, which was confirmed by one of the government members: *"El Río Indio Lodge nos pasa por encima"*[5] (meeting with

[5] We are passed over by the Río Indio Lodge.

local governments, September 2016). This constitutes an example of how external actors operating mainly with the markets in mind are not likely to commit to the development of the community where they operate (Simpson, 2008). While some SJN residents have secured steady work at the Lodge, most of the workers are hired per week or sometimes even per day as guides, restaurant staff or construction workers. This furthermore questions the claim that even with an increase in tourism in the area, the community can build capacity through mere employment (Simpson, 2008; Tosun, 2000; Li, 2006). Unreliable work like this is unlikely to spur development for the individual who is not provided with much training and cannot rely on the next day's paycheck. The Lodge is also an example of how the term ecotourism has become more of a marketing concept than a stamp of environmental responsibility leading to the alienation of the local communities rather than their benefit (Scheyvens, 1999).

The residents of SJN's experience with Río Indio Lodge was probably a contributing factor in the community's decision to get involved in the local tourism initiative, Greytown Rama Kriol Tours. Moreover, a higher volume of tourists over the previous years would have meant better business for the town's guides, accommodation owners, restaurants and vendors. Perhaps this is why, when speaking to the community residents in SJN, it became evident that the majority had a positive perception of tourism and tourists in general, and that they saw the opportunity to increase the amount of tourists in the area as a potential to create employment and economic growth. Ecotourism and community-based tourism are attractive in a town like SJN considering the natural surroundings and the desire to boost local development in the area.

More recently, community-centered tourism rather than traditional forms has been highlighted for its potential to create economic growth as well as development in the involved communities (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016; Höckert, 2011). Even within tourism development, there are several aspects to consider to best be able to successfully formulate a community-centered tourism strategy. This, too, should consider environmental, commercial, social and management components (Murphy, 1985 in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013). In the vision expressed for the tour operator in SJN several of these aspects are in fact included. The main goal for the Rama and Kriol governments when they applied for the license to run a tour operator was to promote a sustainable and community-based form of tourism that would generate an alternative source of income for the community. Furthermore the tour operator should create awareness within and outside the community of SJN of the importance of protecting the natural resources of the immense natural Reserve which surrounds SJN and covers an important part of the South Eastern part of Nicaragua. This vision reflects the one expressed in the Propuesta to initiate a tour operator in SJN, which was elaborated by mestizo town resident and tourist guide Raúl Gutiérrez upon request from one member of the Kriol government, the vision of Greytown Rama Kriol Tours was presented as follows:

> *la conformación de una tour operadora de administración comunitaria para desarrollar íntegramente las actividades turísticas de las Comunidades de Greytown e Indian River, [...] proveer a los comunitarios nuevas alternativas de ingresos económicos para su supervivencia, formando también conciencia para la protección y conservación de los recursos naturales*[6]

[6] the formation of a tour operator managed by the community to develop the touristic activities of the Greytown and Indian River communities in an integrated way, [...] to provide the community members

As stated earlier, tourism should be seen in the context of the overall development strategies of a destination and that tourism development is applied as part of a holistic approach to community development which includes environmental, educational, cultural and social concerns (Giampiccoli and Saayman, 2016; Höckert, 2011). This, of course, is also true in the case of SJN where tourism is very much viewed not just as a means to create employment but also to raise overall skill levels, prosperity and national recognition. During a joint meeting with the members of the indigenous governments and the Tourism Committee (October 2016), the general visions and goals of Greytown Rama Kriol Tours were discussed. When the participants at the meeting were asked about the overall objectives that they hoped the tour operator would work towards, goals such as the direct work with and promotion of tourism from SJN, generating direct and indirect employment, the promotion of SJN tourism and culture on a national and international level, and contribution to the conservation of the Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz were all mentioned by the participants. These wishes reflect some of the core values of CBT, i.e. solidarity, community control and participation (Höckert, 2011; Redturs, 2003), which will be further elaborated upon below.

Providing SJN residents with new skills through the BICU courses contributes to the raising of living standards and increases the locals' confidence (Höckert, 2011; Scheyvens, 1999). Through participation and training especially, community members are likely to not just learn the skill which is the focus of the training, but also gain confidence (Zapata et al., 2011), self-esteem and freedom of choice (Höckert, 2011). In SJN residents who had participated in courses, however small, would consistently display their diplomas on a prominent wall in their home, hinting at a feeling of accomplishment among those who had attended training.

Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2013) found a number of possible benefits to be achieved through CBT, including a cohesive host community, genuine community participation, ownership and control, quality products based on community assets, elements will be analysed in further detail in the sections below. Among the reasons for this discussion is Cornwall and Brock's (2005) warning that certain words in the development discourse had already then been used to an extent that they were in very real risk of losing their meaning. These words or concepts include "participation" and "empowerment", two words that are among the core concepts of CBT. Giampiccoli and Saayman (2016) express concern that words such as these are not only vague but even may be used in cases where they do not mean what the term otherwise indicates. When important concepts such as these are watered down by over-use the inherent risk is that they end up lending legitimacy to projects - not just in tourism - that should be considered neither "participatory" or "empowering" (Cornwall & Brock, 2005). Similarly there is a concern that the term "development" is applied too uncritically and that it is in fact based on a Eurocentric world view (Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Höckert, 2011). As seen from the visions expressed above, the residents of SJN has high hopes for the benefits that may be gained through CBT in their community. The expectation that the tour operator will bring with it income, environmental awareness and skills development among community residents is very much tied to the idea of ownership (Gascón, 2013).

with new economic income alternatives for their survival, as well as the building of an environmental consciousness for the protection and conservation of the natural resources

Both the Propuesta which originated in SJN and the Segunda Etapa elaborated by BICU place an emphasis on community ownership and participation. However, whether these ideals are in fact reflected in the implementation of the initiative is not as certain. In the case of SJN there is nothing to suggest that external actors such as BICU are consciously using these terms without meaning to follow through on their application. Even so, those involved should be careful to stay conscious of the meaning behind such words if they wish to implement them in their own efforts. It is characteristic for many authors on community-centered tourism that their visions lack concrete criteria to measure the success of a tourism development project (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013). For example, the typically small scale of CBT often results in limited economic potential despite community involvement (Höckert, 2011, Gascón, 2013), meaning that success can rely heavily on how it is measured. This only adds to the risk that the above concepts are used indiscriminately and without much effect. The levels of empowerment and participation will be discussed and analysed below in close relation to the role of the external actor, BICU, involved in setting up community-centered tourism in SJN.

4.1.2 CBT or CBTI - The Tour Operator

The tour operator which is currently under development in SJN is the concrete result of a long-standing local wish to generate more tourism in SJN - and on the community's terms (meeting with local governments, September 2016). During our very first meeting with the local indigenous governments in SJN, we were introduced to the project of the tour operator, why and how it had come to be and which activities had been carried out as part of this process, i.e. the training courses and the collection or acquisition of furniture and a computer for the future office. Everyone was in agreement that the tour operator would be a locally owned and managed tourism initiative founded on the community's wish to generate more tourism in SJN and to do so with local employment, knowledge and control as the starting point, generating an alternative source of income and jobs, and fairer wages for those involved (meeting with local governments, September 2016).

The tourism initiative was always presented to us with characteristics identical to those described by CBT promoters, in particular the element of local ownership. This wish for local control was confirmed several times over the course of the research period during local government meetings, the meetings with the Tourism Committee (appendix 3) and the guides (appendix 4) as well as during informal individual talks with members of both indigenous groups. As stated in the tour operator's vision, the main objective is to focus on the unique multi-ethnicity of the town by encouraging all three ethnicities present in town to participate. Moreover, the aim is to create an alternative source of income for the community residents, since unemployment in the area is high, and many residents have ended up leaving town in search of job opportunities in neighbor country Costa Rica. However, we were not able to garner many tangible details about how these goals would be reached and through which means. It had not been established how prices would be settled, how profits would be shared, how bookings would be made or who would handle payments (appendix 4). These elements were all brought up by us on several occasions and while most of the guides and some of the government members did have suggestions as to how some of these things may be carried out, it was clear that none of it had been worked out in collaboration with BICU or at the time of applying for the license. Aldrick Beckford, the local Kriol leader and he who had invited BICU to help, was the community member who best knew the details of the application process. He

did not, however, know the official name of the tour operator nor was he able to explain the current status of the second stage of BICU funding for the project. Thus, it cannot be said that Greytown Rama Kriol Tours, despite its locally-sounding name and good intentions, did in fact include the community in its initial phases of conception, planning and development as instructed by most CBT scholars (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016; Höckert, 2011; Scheyvens, 1999; Gascón, 2013; Tosun, 2000).

As illustrated above, Greytown Rama Kriol Tours is not a strictly CBT project. Other characteristics are more recognisable from the CBTI framework. In particular, the involvement of an external actor in the shape of Bluefields university BICU makes this initiative stand out from the core principles of CBT. The university was invited by a community member which might still allow it to fall within the CBT framework, according to Mtapuri and Giampiccoli's (2016) finding that CBTs are often supported by external actors in the initial phases. However, in the case of Greytown Rama Kriol Tours, it was evident that the design, execution and funding of the project was all undertaken by BICU without much local consultation. We got the distinct impression that the community did not in fact know very much about the concrete implications of the license for the tour operator. Being an external actor and taking this much ownership and control of the development and execution of the tourism project makes this situation an example of CBTI initiative, according to characteristics presented by Simpson (2008), which favors less involvement of community in the tourism project design phase, assuming their lack of experience in the field will prolong the process and possibly create internal conflicts among the local community.

The CBTI model focuses on the delivery of benefits to the community rather than control (Simpson, 2008). This is also the declared purpose for BICU who wishes to increase tourism flows and generate a profit to be spent on social, infrastructural and environmental improvements in the town and Biological Reserve (appendix 6). The challenge for BICU as with any external actor is to pinpoint the community's actual needs when they are not themselves part of the community and indeed the challenges involved in delivering the benefits to the community members as will be discussed in section 4.3.3. Furthermore, the reliance on external actors and what happens when they are no longer involved will be analysed in section 4.2.1.2.

The creation of a diverse Tourism Committee to represent the collective community groups in SJN and to be in charge of this locally based initiative is in line with the calls for local ownership within CBT (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016; Höckert, 2011). The decision to leave the management of the tour operator to the Committee shows dedication to the ideal of local control and empowerment so emphasised by several authors on the topic (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013). Similarly, the Segunda Etapa explicitly states an intent to continue building local capacity and to strengthen the awareness surrounding the local peoples' rights in their own territory (appendix 6).

The difficulty of categorising Greytown Rama Kriol Tours as either a CBT project or a CBTI is of utmost relevance with regard to the complexities of participation and empowerment, which are topics for discussion in this thesis. The fact that despite having very different perspectives on these two elements of community-centered tourism it is not always possible to clearly discern them would indicate that they have other things in common. We find that the two approaches are faced with similar challenges when it comes to the concept of community and

what it means for its members to participate and be empowered. Examples of this will be illustrated and analysed in the following.

4.2 Empowerment

As one of the core concepts for many scholars within the CBT framework empowerment should play a major role in the analysis of existing and future community-centered tourism projects. In the case of SJN and the creation of a local tour operator the main topic is whether the community has been given the power and the means to implement and develop the project on a local basis. This will be analysed through a look at the external power structures involved in the tour operator project and how responsibility for the initiative has been transferred to the community and to what effect.

4.2.1. External power structures

Power invariably becomes a factor when external actors are involved in development projects and so also in community-centered tourism development. It is widely acknowledged that successful CBT involves community ownership of and involvement in local tourism development (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016; Simpson, 2008). This serves to ensure some of the major selling points of CBT such as redistribution of resources, social justice and sustainability (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016) and that the needs and welfare of the community are in fact taken into consideration (Scheyvens, 1999). However, the existing power structures at the destination may at times prove a hinderance to the ideals of empowerment (Tosun, 2000).

4.2.1.1 Positions of power

Power can take many forms, not least in a development context. Power is not just expressed through the formal authority over someone e.g. in decision-making but also in the form of perceived power, knowledge and dependency, which are all interrelated. What with empowerment being a central issue of debate for community-centered tourism scholars, the role of power and how it affects relations between the community and those assisting it cannot be neglected. In the case of SJN the town has received support from BICU in terms of both initiative and to some extent capacity-building. One such form of power is knowledge which can present a conscious or subconscious way of asserting oneself over others or a reason for holding someone in higher esteem.

The professors from BICU who have been involved in the initiation of the tour operator project in SJN are both from Nicaragua. However, due to the university's geographic distance and the markedly different characteristics of the city of Bluefields compared to the remote town of SJN, the two cannot be considered 'locals' in the way that the residents of SJN are. Additionally, having a university degree is not very common in countries such as Nicaragua, which means that such a degree automatically lends prestige and authority to those who have it. This type of power imbalance between the residents of SJN where few have much formal education, and the external counselors from BICU means the local population was unlikely to question the proposal they were presented with. However, having a university degree does not necessarily mean that the external actors have the appropriate knowledge or are those best equipped to generate tourism in places such as SJN. The point of CBT is that it should be

based in and sustained by the community which is why the external actor's thorough understanding of the cultural and social dynamics involved is required, as noted by Höckert (2011) who said that empowerment of local community cannot take place without "*understanding the local context, local knowledge and the different aspects of tourism on people"* (Höckert, 2011, p. 12).

The pride the community members take in their course diplomas is not equaled by the care BICU takes in issuing them. Several participants had received diplomas with misspelled names or more importantly which misstated the course taken. One woman had received a diploma to say that she had completed a course in the administration and management of hospitality and ecotourism businesses when she had in fact attended a cooking course. Furthermore, the title of the misstated course was so long and complicated as to barely express the actual content of the training. This too is a way that BICU - consciously or otherwise - set themselves apart from the community they are assisting in terms of knowledge and consequently power.

While the knowledge that external actors bring with them are likely to be a valuable addition to community development, with it comes the risk that local knowledge is passed over. When external actors are in control of the implementation and development phases it often happens that useful local knowledge is ignored in favor of that brought from outside the community (Mikkelsen, 2005). Education should by no means be dismissed as the important contribution it may bring to community development, but nor should it be regarded as a substitute for the knowledge already present at the site of development. The offering of financial and social support in the form of designing the extended process of developing the tour operator, determining the number of beneficiaries and their distribution across ethnicities, as well as the formation of a multi-ethnic Tourism Committee, the planning and execution of training sessions and presentation of diplomas shows BICU's feeling of ownership over the tourism initiative. It also shows, however how the dominant involvement of an external actor throughout the development process risks crowding out valuable local knowledge.

This local knowledge may often be used to avert tourism development failures such as Gascón's (2013) Peru example in which external actors planned a new tourism initiative without local involvement only to see it fall apart shortly after. Similarly, Cañada and Gascón (2007b in Höckert, 2011) have stated that the tourism development model from one project cannot be transferred directly to another due to the significant differences between these places. Both the destination's potential and the local residents' interest in taking part may vary. In the case of SJN the expressed vision for the tour operator is to be in control and take charge of the initiative. However, as will be discussed below, the actual participation among the residents is somewhat diffuse. Had the community's own knowledge of their own habits and interests been involved to a larger degree, the initiative may have moved forward more rapidly or with higher attendance. This will also be elaborated upon below.

Quite opposite to the idea of valuable local knowledge is Simpson's (2008) belief that external actors are in fact better equipped to create responsible and sustainable tourism since they are unaffected by cultural and national issues and "*able to design and deliver benefits to a community without the 'baggage' that can come with community involvement in the decision-making processes*" (Simpson, 2008, p. 2). The idea that one might entirely circumnavigate the so-called baggage, i.e. the cultural backdrop to one's tourism development project is quite

unusual and at odds with what we saw in SJN. On one occasion, the BICU lecturer asked one of the participants to bring him a special dish for lunch, because he knew her and knew her to be a good cook. This, however, would mean that the participant was likely to miss part of next day's class as this was a time consuming dish to prepare. The participant herself said it was not a problem, as it would only mean leaving early from group discussions which her group had already completed. It is, however, indicative of an external actor who may well wish to contribute to the project but who clearly does not have personal stakes in the success of the classes or the project in general. This lack of cultural understanding and appreciation of the local reality is what increases the risk of concepts such as empowerment and participation becoming buzzwords (Höckert, 2011).

Tosun (2000) expressed a wide-reaching vision for the participatory process when he said that:

> *It is an educational and empowering process in which people, in partnership with those able to assist them, identify problems and needs and increasingly assume responsibility themselves to plan, manage, control and assess [the further process]*
>
> Tosun, 2000, p. 615

The challenges inherent in the concept of participation will be discussed below in section 4.3 but the statement holds points about empowerment that are worth expanding on to analyse the efforts made by BICU to prepare and empower the community of SJN to manage the tour operator and develop their tourism supply. Tosun's (2000) view assumes an external actor which assists the community in the process of assuming responsibility. In this lies the understanding that the external actor brings knowledge to the community that the community does not already possess, as is often the case with e.g. NGOs and in our case a university and as was discussed above. More importantly the statement holds the notions of partnership and an increasing responsibility, indicating a closer cooperation between the community and external actor and a greater sharing of knowledge than what has been illustrated above. This very much affects the community at the time of assuming the responsibility as will be analysed below.

4.2.1.2 The volatility of external actor involvement

As was argued by Mtapuri and Giampiccoli (2016) and Gascón (2013), CBT projects are most often supported by an external stakeholder, both in terms of the general administration of the project, the marketing and not least as a financial support. An external actor, the BICU University of Bluefields, has been supporting the Rama and Kriol governments' community-based tourism project both economically and by providing training of the community residents that were involved in the project. This external support of the initiative was made clear from the beginning during our very first meeting with the local government: *"la BICU finanzó todo lo que era el ecoturismo comunitario en Greytown* [SJN]"[7] (Committee & governments meeting, September 2016). As noted earlier, very few CBT cases are initiated by community alone, and most often they involve an external stakeholder in the startup phase or as the responsible unit for the project. However, when community-centered tourism development is

[7] BICU has funded all that is ecotourism in Greytown [SJN]

aided and/or initiated by external actors it will often be the case that they are only invested in the project for a limited period of time.

As was discussed in section 4.1.2 regarding the categorisation of the tour operator, there is a high risk that tourism development stalls when the external actor withdraws from the process. The low sustainability is typical for projects which have not included the local population in the design and development phase (Gascón, 2013). According to Höckert (2011) the best way to ensure the continued development is to involve and empower the communities who are to sustain the projects. Otherwise, when the external actors do eventually pull out, due to to exhausted funds or interest, the community-centered tourism initiatives quickly weaken (Höckert, 2011). The sudden lack of external funding can cause major problems for communities who have relied on external actors (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; Sebele, 2010 in Zapata et al., 2011).

For the community of SJN it is not currently the financial sustainability which constitutes the main concern since the money invested so far has primarily gone into courses and the development of a plan for future (long-range) development (appendix 6). In this plan there is suggestions as to investments in e.g. a boat, but these funds had neither been found nor spent at the time of research. More problematically, the lack of intellectual and social support and follow-up after the initial stages of the project were carried out has resulted in a standstill in the tourism development in SJN. As will be demonstrated below, the official responsibility for the tour operator was left in the hands of the Tourism Committee, which was set up for this purpose as part of BICU's plan for establishing the tour operator. However, once BICU was no longer directly involved in the actions to be taken, the progress seemed to stall. The Tourism Committee has not taken initiative to move forward with the creation of the tour operator for reasons which will also be discussed below and few beneficiaries have taken measures to increase or improve the tourism supply or demand in SJN.

After each course most participants would eventually receive a diploma, but there was often a delay of several months between the completion of the course and the delivery of diplomas. During the first meeting with the members of the Rama and Kriol governments, we were told about the courses organized by BICU, and that several community members had been *"certificados desde varios meses*[8]*"* at that point and were still waiting to receive their diploma for completing training, as mentioned by one of the government members (Meeting with Rama and Kriol governments, September 2016). It was mentioned on several occasions that they were waiting to receive these certificates before they could continue with their plans to engage in tourism activities (i.e. Meeting with Tourism Committee, appendix 3). The BICU certificates hold no official permission to work in tourism and as such the wait for the physical diploma should not present an obstacle for the continued development of tourism plans within the community.

Similarly, we presented our findings and recommendations for how the community might move forward with activating the tour operator at an open presentation at the end of our stay attended by several members of the Rama and Kriol governments and the Tourism Committee. There was, however, a delay in producing the final written report holding those same recommendations which resulted in what appeared to be a complete standstill in the

[8] "certified several months ago"

implementation of even the most straightforward steps, such as adding a photo to the tour operator's facebook page. These are examples of how the community often comes to rely on the external actor for continued stimulus which in turn reinforces dependency in line with more traditional and neo-colonial tourism forms (Höckert, 2011; Manyara & Jones, 2007 in Salazar, 2012), which is quite the opposite of the purpose of CBT (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016).

There have been several previous attempts to boost tourism flows in and around the villages along the Río San Juan. The community of SJN has been approached by various external stakeholders before the university of BICU, and their attempts to boost tourism, such as the national government's tourism programme *La Ruta del Agua* (initiated in 2008), as well as a number of tourism development programmes implemented by national and international NGOs (appendix 1). However, neither of them have succeeded in promoting the attractiveness of SJN to the same extent as the most popular tourist destinations in Nicaragua. According to SJN local guide Raúl Gutiérrez, he had been greatly involved in the national tourism institute, INTUR's *La Ruta del Agua*-programme, and as a result he was among the first locals to receive guide training making him one of the first INTUR certified guides in SJN (appendix 1).

Despite this, the programme, as previous programmes alike, did not have the desired effects on tourism levels as the residents of SJN had hoped for nor did it succeed in creating the desired awareness of the local offers on a national nor international level. Based on the guides' description of the previous programmes, these seem to have hit similar pitfalls to the ones described and analysed in this more recent case of a locally based tour operator. Despite early signs of progress the development quickly stalled after the official programme steps were finalised leaving the town to further development on their own, which, as Höckert (2011) warned, often result in a disintegration of the initiative. The analysis of these previous programs cannot be included in this thesis, but it is worth keeping in mind what appears to be a repetitive pattern of unsuccessful attempts at tourism development in the area.

4.2.1.3 Fulfilling potential as an external actor

From the above it can be seen that external actors have the opportunity to advance the development of tourism and increase sustainability but also that the external involvement presents a risk that benefits are only temporary or in some cases even a detriment to the community if in the end it creates a degree of dependency. The outcome depends on the tools provided by the external actor to make the community able and entitled to make decisions, as argued by Okazaki (2008).

Despite the fact that previous external actors have not yet succeeded in generating a more stable tourism flow with the implementation of their respective tourism development projects in the area around SJN, it has been noted by Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) that the presence of an external actor in the implementation phase of community-based tourism, is one of three key elements for a successful and sustainable CBT project. In Kontogeorgopoulos et al.'s (2014) research they found external actors to be a significant help to the Thai community's efforts to develop local tourism. Various organisations, including governmental

ones, helped build capacity, create demand and promote the village. An external actor can furthermore support a host community and the local residents in areas that they may not have the economic, educational or cultural capacity to reach regarding the implementation and development of tourism.

This presents an opportunity to benefit from an increased resource pool, often in financial form but it may also take the form of better networks, marketing skills and ideas for product development (Simpson, 2008). As such, at least some CBT and CBTI scholars agree on the potential for community-centered tourism in inviting external actors into the development process. As mentioned above, however, other scholars argue that this type of involvement of external actors leaves the communities vulnerable to dependency (Höckert, 2011; Manyara & Jones, 2007 in Salazar, 2012). The support that external actors can bring to a community may come at a risk to the independence of that community. When BICU takes care of the initiation, planning and development phases of tourism development these are skills that the locals do not learn, leaving them to still rely on external assistance for the next project. As such it would seem that the inclusion of external actors can provide benefits as well as disadvantages dependent on their ideology and strategy for involving the community in local tourism development.

As an example, CBT is seen as an opportunity to include traditionally marginalised groups in the process of tourism development and on their own terms (Höckert, 2011). In SJN the indigenous groups have formal rights to self-determination in the town and the surrounding area as it is their territory but they are a minority, even when taken together, and are under pressure from central and local government structures. The community in SJN does not only consist of the minority peoples, but the tour operator is very much based on the town's multi-ethnicity and initiated by a Kriol resident. By developing local tourism from a community standpoint there is a chance to include the minorities in the process to a larger extent than what is usually the case. In order to make the most of this potential, BICU might have used its perceived power, as described above, to assist the minorities of SJN in gaining a foothold with the municipality and INTUR coming as they do from a relatively higher position of power than the indigenous governments. Similarly, we as interns initiated a process of regaining control of a former tourism office that the municipality had not been inclined to discuss with the indigenous governments. This complicated relationship between the municipality and indigenous governments will be analysed further in section 4.3.2 where the internal power structures in SJN are discussed.
However, had BICU intervened more in local power relations and had we completed the process of regaining control, it might have enforced the notion that external actors are the only ones able to get things done that Simpson (2008) adheres to.
Parallel to the issue of the tourism office was the lack of action on setting up a source of information as a first step towards attracting more tourists and providing better information. No effort had been made upon our arrival on behalf of those involved in the tour operator. This was no doubt due in part to a lack of training within the field as only very few residents had experience with anything other than very basic internet functions. It also demonstrated the lack of follow-up support from BICU which would have helped provide the momentum needed for the community to take charge of the development. When we tried to help with this task in our role as interns we too had to find the balance between assisting the residents and carrying out the work for them. Höckert (2011) worries that if tourism development is not followed by

relevant capacity-building and new skills, it could in fact lead to disempowerment, not the opposite, despite local participation.

According to Simpson (2008) CBTIs, where community benefit takes precedence over community involvement, are as good at providing capacity-building as CBT. It may indeed be argued that the kind of training provided through the BICU courses do not provide substantially better capacity-building than the kind of employment that more traditional tourism forms provide. Typically, the jobs provided by external projects such as hotels and large tour operators will also provide training in cooking and guide skills. However, Simpson's (2008) claim that CBTIs provide capacity-building is also very limited in its view of community development. If projects - CBT or otherwise - provide only low-skilled jobs with no involvement in management or development, it is no guarantee of increased capacity levels within the community in question. Employment does not equal capacity-building (Simpson, 2008 on the creation of employment is better than no employment, even if low-skilled, however it does not contribute to sustainable development of community). Rather, to maximise the potential inherent in the larger resource pool that external actors do often bring to community-centered tourism development, the training and empowerment of local actors should be the focus. Local involvement in the whole process is important in order to maximize the community residents' learning. Involving the community in the development process will give insights into how to better organize the tourism efforts, so as to create more sustainable benefits for the community. Moreover, by being included in a conscious and determined learning programme the community members will have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and obtain a deeper and more complex understanding of the development process, than typical low-skilled jobs in mass tourism offer (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013).

4.2.2 Transfer of power - the Tourism Committee

The concept of empowerment of the local community is identified by several researchers as one of the key elements of sustainable CBT development (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013; Höckert, 2011). It was argued that by empowering community members, the feeling of ownership for a tourism initiative is increased among local community. Empowerment can be manifested by including local community in the initial phases of tourism development, providing them with the tools to take on responsibility of the design of tourism in their own community, and making them feel ownership of their future (Gascón, 2013). In SJN, in an attempt to empower community residents and give them ownership of the tourism initiative, 150 beneficiaries were invited to participate in training courses in aspects of tourism organization, held by the university BICU. The participatory approach in the implementation of the tourism initiative and the characteristics of community participation in SJN will be further elaborated in section 4.3.1 on meaningful participation in tourism development.

In this section, the formation of the Tourism Committee and the empowerment thereof will be discussed. At the start of the development process, BICU encouraged the formation of a Tourism Committee to hold the official responsibilities of managing Greytown Rama Kriol Tours (appendix 3). The Committee was to consist of seven community members, three from each indigenous community and one from among the Mestizo. The process of forming the Committee was described by the members of the local indigenous governments as a simple

process, where the seven members had been elected among the 150 beneficiaries by the beneficiaries. The responsibility of Greytown Rama Kriol Tours would officially be in the hands of the Committee once it had been formed. The fact that it was the university of BICU, the main originator behind the tour operator, who from the outset urged the community to form an executive Tourism Committee shows how external actors can serve as a catalyst for local control of CBT projects as discussed in section 4.2.1.

During a meeting with the local government members, it was mentioned that BICU had divided the tourism project into two implementation phases: the first focusing on training courses and practical concerns such as the acquirement of supplies for the future office which had not yet been constructed. The second phase had focused on the transfer of power to the Tourism Committee: *"durante la segunda etapa se pasó el poder de la tour operadora al Comité de Turismo"* (meeting with Rama and Kriol governments, September 2016). This indicates that the Committee, at the time of the meeting, was formally the responsible authority of the tour operator and the unit in charge of decision-making regarding matters of the tour operator. As interns supporting the startup of the tour operator we were therefore advised by the local Rama and Kriol governments that *"el contacto directo entre las practicantes y la tour operadora es vía el Comité de Turismo"* (September 2016). However, this was not the case during our time in SJN, since the actual execution of the transfer of power to the Tourism Committee had been insufficient or practically non-existing.

This may constitute an example of Yüksel et al.'s (2005) point that the transfer of authority is made difficult by the lack of a participatory democratic tradition (in Balslev Clausen & Gyimóthy, 2016) as is the case with SJN. We called a meeting with the seven members of the Tourism Committee to discuss their vision for Greytown Rama Kriol Tours and how this may be carried out. During this meeting it became clear that a certain level of ownership had been given to the Committee members by giving each member a role as president, secretaries and accountant (appendix 3). The members had held several meetings around the time of its formation in the first phase of BICU's tourism project. What had not taken place, however, was any kind of transfer of knowledge from BICU to the Committee members to prepare them to carry out the tasks assigned to the Committee.

The members of the Committee felt that they lacked training and information about their independent role and area of responsibility within the Committee. The president himself stated that *"falta un reglamento interno de la Comisión"*[9] (Augencio Salomon, appendix 3). In fact, the Committee members were not quite clear on which tasks did indeed fall to them just as the vice president of the Rama government had not been properly informed of the work the tour operator was to carry out (meeting with Rama government, November 2016), which will be discussed in session 3.3. The Committee meetings until this point had primarily dealt with beneficiaries who had left town for work or family reasons elsewhere. Two Rama members of the committee itself had already left SJN and at the time of research still needed to be replaced. Moreover, as one member of the Kriol government expressed during our first meeting in SJN: *"la tour operadora es manejada por el Comité de Turismo, pero también con supervisión de los dos gobiernos"*[10] (meeting with Rama and Kriol governments, September

[9] An internal set of regulations is missing (has not been elaborated).
[10] The tour operator is managed by the Tourism Committee, however under supervision of the indigenous governments.

2016), which indicates that the despite the declared goal that the Tourism Committee be the point of contact and the entity in charge of running the tour operator they had not yet been given the means or the authority to do so.

By giving the responsibility of managing Greytown Rama Kriol Tours to beneficiaries that did not have previous experience with management of tourism organizations, the empowerment of these community members through the training courses provided by BICU was crucial in order to make sure that the members became aware of their areas of responsibilities and would feel comfortable in their work tasks. However, as documented above, the members of the Tourism Committee admitted that a lack of training and acquaintance with their respective roles with regards to the work ahead, currently meant that the work of the Tourism Committee had come to a standstill and that they had not been meeting since 2015 (appendix 3). The lack of empowerment seems to have led to the lack of commitment mentioned by Gascón (2013) and Höckert (2011) when the community is not duly involved. An example of this was seen at the joint Committee and local indigenous governments meeting in late October 2016, where the president of the Tourism Committee did not show up, although he had been personally invited and confirmed his participation in the meeting a few hours earlier. This typical consequence of outside involvement will be discussed in section 4.2.1. BICU had encouraged the formation of the Committee, and despite the intention of forming a community-based authority to be responsible for the management of the tour operator being a sign of empowerment and involvement of the community in the decision-making process, the fact that BICU had not provided the fundamental training of the Committee members means that the work cannot move forward.

This illustrates how the empowerment of local community can be time consuming and how insufficient training leads to a less efficient process. Efficiency in the initial stages of tourism development was mentioned by Li (2006) as an important factor for successful development and Addison (1996 in Okazaki, 2008) points at the community itself as a hinderance for community development due to training and empowerment of local community being an inefficient and time consuming process which can be eliminated by leaving the managerial responsibilities to experienced external actors. This way, the benefits for the local community will be maximized, since the community itself will not hinder community development with potential lack of experience which can slow down the development process. However, this approach relies on the continued involvement of the external actor, including in the managerial phase, not just during setup. If efficiency had been the reason for the lack of preparation of the Committee, BICU would instead have assumed the role of managers, which was never the intent (appendices 5 & 6) nor what came to be.

Just as with the concept of participation, where attendance does not equal influence, as will be discussed in section 4.3, there is no guarantee that the formal transfer of responsibility to local actors means that they gain actual power, as was also exemplified by the Mexican villages in Balslev Clausen and Gyimóthy's (2016) research. In the case of the Tourism Committee in SJN a good basis has been formed to facilitate a local centre of control for the town's tourism industry. The creation of a formal framework is a good first step towards control but more attention needs to be paid to the capacity of these local actors to handle the responsibility. Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2013) found leadership to be an underestimated factor in successful CBT efforts. In their Thai case they found it to be one of three major reasons for the project's success whereas most literature treats is only as one of a multitude

of factors. While in the Thai case the concept applies to a single strong leader it may be argued that the Tourism Committee of SJN has the potential to carry out this responsibility - if properly prepared to do so.

The local Kriol government's community house was still under construction at the time of research.

from the three ethnic groups present in SJN, to represent the interests of each ethnicity,. However, the ethnicities were not equally represented, since the Rama and Kriol communities were represented by three members each, and the Mestizo community represented only by one member. The unequal representation of the three ethnicities may be due to imbalances in power relations among the ethnic groups in the town of SJN, which will be further elaborated in section 3.3.

4.3 Participation

The term participation was highlighted as an important element in the context of development of sustainable tourism, both through its contributions to the social and economic sustainability of tourism initiatives, as well as the longevity of the project and its legitimacy within community-centered tourism development. In this section we analyse the level of participation in SJN's local tourism initiative, Greytown Rama Kriol Tours, as well as the obstacles involved in its implementation.

4.3.1 Meaningful participation

Despite its omnipresence in tourism development studies, the concept of participation is a fuzzy and debatable one (Cornwall & Brock, 2006; Balslev Clausen & Gyimóthy, 2016). The

word itself does not detail the extent, intensity or function of the participation nor how to facilitate it. In fact, Mikkelsen (2005) argued that the term participation has been used in such a wide context, that the meaning of the word has become blurred. However, the term continues to be linked to community-centered tourism and the idea of presenting a tourism development strategy that does not favor a participatory approach might still be considered reactionary (Okazaki, 2008), which can be seen in the number of researchers underlining the importance of participation for sustainable tourism development, and overall community development. The tourism initiative in SJN is an example of the popularity of incorporating community participation in development projects. The participatory role of the community in the development of tourism was presented as an essential point in the local tourism project when we talked to the members of the indigenous governments, and as it was stated in the vision of Greytown Rama Kriol Tours (appendix 5). The tour operator's overall aim is to provide development for the local community by giving it an alternative source of income and a larger degree of control over its own development. However, the ideas behind and implementation of a participatory approach to tourism and community development in SJN has not been made clear to those involved, which can be seen in the way participation, or lack thereof, in the tourism project has unfolded in SJN.

Apart from including community representatives in the form of a Tourism Committee as discussed above, BICU invited community members to take part in the tourism project by offering training courses within the field of tourism to the project's beneficiaries. Over the course of 18 months, training courses have been provided in the town of SJN spanning subjects such as cooking and kitchen hygiene, administration and guide skills. Each course would span two or three days and consist of class lectures, printed course material as well as group discussions and presentations. The training courses have provided participants with knowledge of relevant matters such as hosting, cooking, administration and legal matters concerning their co-determination over their territory. The skills and knowledge obtained by the local community through training courses such as the above mentioned, were highlighted by Zapata et al. (2011) to potentially be as important assets as the economic benefits of CBT projects. The invitation to participate was extended to all three ethnicities through the beneficiaries group as described earlier and so would present an inclusive way of involving the community in the tour operator's progress. In bringing in a course on legal aspects in tourism, it even has elements of the holistic approach to tourism development promoted by Giampiccoli and Saayman (2016) and Höckert (2011).

The course participants were selected among the beneficiaries by each ethnic group advertising among themselves the training that would be offered and the different courses to attend, filling spots with community residents that were available and interested in each. This indicates that the choice of participating was given to the community residents, and only those interested would show up for training courses, which goes in line with the principle presented by researchers of participation being an individual's voluntary action (Tosun, 2000; Mikkelsen, 2005). One Rama resident told us that among the Rama community, the selection process was quite simply done by circulating a list with the course names at the top and room for participants' names underneath. There were no restrictions as to who could sign up to which courses or how many courses one beneficiary could attend. This meant that some beneficiaries participated in several courses while others participated in none.

However, this system - or lack thereof - risks producing a very random selection of people to be trained. It includes no consideration as to the spread of existing capabilities, trades, ability to attend or commitment to do so, which became clear during a meeting with members of the Rama and Kriol governments who mentioned that some of the beneficiaries were already involved in tourism either as guides, hotel or restaurant owners, while others did not have any previous experience in the field. It was mentioned that training was open to everyone, regardless of their previous tourism experience and educational background (meeting with Rama and Kriol governments, September 2016). Within the town's modest tourism industry there were different groupings as well in terms of experience levels and how well the guides especially were established in the business. The fact that some of the project's beneficiaries were already working as independent guides meant that there was an unequal level of experience among the beneficiaries in the training courses. This situation was mentioned by Gascón (2013) who argued that different levels of tourism experience among host residents can create a negative differentiation in the community. According to at least one member of the Kriol government, a lot of the participants in the guide training mainly signed up because they were offered the opportunity - not because they had any interest in working as a tourist guide (appendix 3). An example of this can be seen in the case of Yahaira Thomas, the daughter of one of the Kriol government members. She had no previous direct experience in tourism herself, although her father had previously run a now closed restaurant. Yahaira had signed up to become a guide, but later admitted to us that she regretted doing so, due to her lack of interest in becoming a guide and when realizing she was among the only women in the training course. Curiosity did seem to drive some of the participants, but more for this unusual event than for the contents of the course. It presented a welcome opportunity to meet with a larger group of SJN residents to socialise, keep each other updated on news and observe fellow residents. As a way of making the courses practically possible it is customary to offer the participants free lunch or the money to buy lunch on course days, as was the case in SJN. This too seemed to be at least part of the reason for some of the participants' interest in the course.

During our stay in SJN, we got to observe one of the training courses held by one of the professors from the university of BICU. This course dealt with the legal aspects of a tourism organization and classes were spread over three days. Starting hours were commonly stated a good half hour before the professor actually intended to start his lecture so as to accommodate latecomers. This often resulted in participants assuming that the course would start late and thus arriving an hour or more after the stated time. On the first day, approximately 60 town residents showed up for the introduction to the course. About one third of participants sat at the front of the class paying close attention to the BICU lecturer. Another third in the middle of the room seemed more "present" than "attentive" while the last third would constantly move in and out of the room, minding children, talking on their phones, leaving for long periods of time or talking among themselves. First of all, as illustrated here, course participation was quite varied both in terms of actual presence and activity levels while there. All participants were at the course voluntarily, and although the selection process may not have been perfect, at least the three ethnicities were all represented as well as both genders and different age groups. As such, this could be a strong example of community involvement in tourism development and does seem to demonstrate a significant improvement over traditional enterprises' employer/employee relationship but with clear limitations.

Training course organized by BICU on legal matters and co-determination over indigenous territory.

However, the community members' lack of participation in the training classes organized by BICU may also have been due to their lack of previous tourism experiences. As was stated by Okazaki (2008), inviting community members to participate in the initial phases of tourism development is not enough, the same members need to have the means to get involved in order for them to be able to participate in the process in a meaningful way. This means either the right educational background or experience within the field. In the case of the tour operator, the majority of the project's beneficiaries in SJN that were involved in the tour operator tourism initiative had very little or no previous experience in tourism. Proper capacity-building is essential for a community to be properly prepared for the impacts of tourism and not least to make decisions regarding new initiatives and development within tourism. Only when those involved are properly informed can they be said to truly participate in the decision-making process (Cole, 2006 in Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013) and take their own interests into account in doing so. Many residents of SJN have not traditionally been included in decision-making processes either nationally where the democracy is faulty and their rights often neglected or even locally where the indigenous peoples constitute a minority. This is likely to affect how readily they can engage in this kind of participation to which they are not accustomed (Balslev Clausen & Gyimóthy, 2016). CBT does however present a potential way for minorities and indigenous peoples to gain co-determination where they have previously had little (Salazar, 2012). The question is whether the purpose of participation was made sufficiently clear and whether the courses provided by BICU constitute adequate information and training to not only carry out service jobs but also make decisions about the community's development.

As it was argued by Jamal and Getz (1995 in Okazaki, 2008), community participation cannot be guaranteed based on the community being given the right to do so, they will need the capacity to participate too. In SJN, the community members' perception of how and when to participate is defining the degree to which participation will happen. There are different opinions as to which degree community needs to be involved in community-centered tourism development. Simpson (2008) argued that the community need not be directly involved in the

management of the tourism initiatives to benefit, including in the way of capacity-building. While it is true that any new tourism business is likely to bring employment, including to a town like SJN, it is likely that without a dedicated focus on the development of residents' qualifications, this will be unskilled employment as is often the case in the service industry. The above example of the tourism committee and how they did not receive sufficient training to participate in the development of the tourism initiative in a meaningful way is also a good illustration of this, and leads us to question whether the goal of genuine community participation through CBT (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013) has in fact been achieved in SJN.

4.3.2 Internal power structures

4.3.2.1 Power relations between the three ethnicities

One of the challenges faced by those wishing to implement a participatory approach is the oversimplification involved when researchers and practitioners alike apply the term "community" to the joint group of residents of a given village or destination. In doing so, the problematic assumptions of the community concept are widely ignored (Tosun, 2000). KAN UDVIDES. In the case of SJN, the *community* is divided along several lines. Most obviously are the ethnic divides, which see the town's small population divided between at least three ethnicities, namely the Rama, Kriol and mestizos. While the atmosphere among the three was generally amicable, there was a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them' which was heard and seen when members of one group would characterize the others or suggest who we ought to talk to. Although officially both local indigenous governments are the principal organizers and promoters behind Greytown Rama Kriol Tours differences were seen in their respective involvement in the project. Furthermore, the notion that this was a multi-ethnic tour operator constituted by all three main ethnicities in the community of SJN was challenged on several occasions.

The way the idea for this tourism project originated and the way the license to run the tour operator was obtained are both examples of how there exists an uneven power relation between the two indigenous groups in SJN, as will be discussed in the following. The indigenous Rama and Kriol populations have lived side by side in the area for generations but, as we learned during the three months' internship, are very different in their temper, with the Kriol residents typically being more assertive and extroverted than the Rama, in general terms. This meant that discussions during joint meetings often ended by being dominated by one of two Kriol government members, who are especially expressive. This meant that the Rama government members would often be left with little inclination to have their say during meetings, which illustrates Mikkelsen's (2005) argument that participation is not necessarily equal to representation and influence. The scenario implies the risk that decisions on joint causes are in fact not made in agreement or through shared decision-making between the two governments, and ends up instead being controlled by one of the indigenous groups. We did not get the impression that this challenge arose from any ill will but rather that it is simply based in the human composition of this particular community.

An example of this can be seen in the way the idea of applying for the license to run a tour operator originated. During separate sessions with each indigenous government, we got the impression from the Kriol government, that the idea for initiating the community tourism project

had originated between one of the members of the Kriol government and a professor from the university of BICU who was an old school mate. This was confirmed a few days later during a meeting with the members of the Rama government, when Lorenzo Martinez, Rama vice president, stated that *"la idea de pedir la licencia surgió muy rápido, sin consulta entre los gobiernos comunales"*[11] (meeting with Rama government, November 2016). Following this, the same representative explained that the license application process had been handled by Kriol government president Aldrick Beckford: "[Aldrick] *pidió la solicitud él mismo con una delegada de INTUR"*[12] (Lorenzo Martinez, November 21st, 2016). This indicates a lack of communication between the two governments, which has led to one member of the Kriol government going forward with the application process on his own.

Kriol president Aldrick Beckford taking the charge on this initiative is well in line with Blackman et al.'s (2014) suggestion that an individual champion is important for CBT's success (in Kontogeorgopoulos, 2013).. This is based on leadership being a motivating factor and a link between the community and the external actors. However, the example also reflects the pitfalls of having one strong leading character take charge within community development, namely the large shadow cast by the leader and the volatility of relying on one person for driving force (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013). Also, the fact that other parts of the community, namely the Rama government as mentioned above, were only involved at a much later state after the framework for the cooperation had been established, indicates the tendency of CBT to emphasize the "*social differentiation and intra-community conflict processes"* (Morais, Cheng, Dong & Yang, 2006 in Gascón 2013, p. 717) that are not uncommon in communities of every size and composition. The Rama vice president even told us, a year after the license was obtained, that he does not know the role that a tour operator serves (meeting with Rama government, November 2016).

Despite the fact that the INTUR license to run Greytown Rama Kriol Tours was obtained in 2015, the tour operator itself continues to be limited to existing on paper. It does not yet have a physical office in the town, nor virtually in form of a web page displaying the local offers, because of a general lack of organization and coordination of the administrative and economic efforts among the beneficiaries. Specifically, it had been determined that the office would be housed in the local Kriol government's new house, which was under construction during the time of our internship. It was stated on several occasions that the Kriol were only awaiting funds to finish the office. It was never made clear when the funds were expected or whether only Kriol money would go into the work. The Rama government did not object to this placement, but we did not get the impression that the decision was the result of a thorough debate of the options available. A similar example of the lack of communication among the local governments will be discussed in section 4.3.2.1. The Rama government's house had recently been finished but was not brought up as a possibility for a temporary or permanent solution to the missing office. Both governments did agree that the ideal placement for the tour operator's office would be a building on the pier which was originally constructed for tourism (meeting with Rama and Kriol governments and Tourism Committee, October 2016). This building had been appropriated by the municipality for administrative purposes but no recent attempts had been made to regain control of the office for the benefit of local tourism, perhaps

[11] The idea of applying for the license occurred very quickly, without consultation between the local indigenous governments.
[12] [Aldrick] applied for the license, along with a representative from INTUR.

due to the power imbalances between the Municipality and the local indigenous governments which will be discussed below.

It was noted that in situations like this, the external actor can act as a facilitator easing the dialogue among the local stakeholders (Simpson, 2008; Okazaki, 2008). However, this does not seem to have been the case in SJN, since BICU has not taken an active part in the dialogue among the local governments (including the municipality) according to the information we were given by government members. This shows a possible lack of understanding of the community on BICU's part as analysed in section 4.2.1.1., including the assumption that the community of SJN is a homogenous entity.

There is also some friction between the indigenous communities and the Mestizo population in SJN. At the time of our internship, two hotels were actively running. Both hotels are family owned and run by local Mestizo families from the SJN town and river area. Both families have been working in the tourism industry for many years and have been doing business in the area. The Gutiérrez family, who have been running the Hotelito Evo in SJN since early 2000s , have four sons out of which three are INTUR certified guides who have been doing guided tours in the area for the past ten years (appendix 1). During an informal conversation with one the sons, Raúl Gutiérrez in November, the researchers were informed that he had been asked by the indigenous Kriol government to formulate a proposal document on the potential to run a tour operator from SJN. When asked why he had been asked to prepare such document, he mentioned his educational background in administration studies at BICU and his experience as a tourist guide. Raúl Gutiérrez furthermore explained that after handing in the Propuesta in April 2014, he had not heard any news of the tourism project until our introductory meeting in September 2016, when he found out that the local indigenous governments had applied for and obtained the tour operator license on the base of the Propuesta he had produced. This was also an example of the kind of information that forced us to revise our perception of the case as it unfolded as mentioned in section 2.2.3.

During the interview with him and his father, Raúl Gutiérrez expressed frustration and the feeling that the indigenous governments did not acknowledge the work he did with the Propuesta nor take him or his family into consideration when applying for the license: *"nosotros los hicimos gratis, los proyectos. Ellos* [los gobiernos comunales] *vienen y aprovechan de las personas y después no vuelven"* [13] (appendix 1). He elaborated on a rather larger scale stating that it might be argued that the Mestizo as an ethnicity had more entitlement in the region than Kriol, being as they were "*una raza que vino, nada más*"[14] rather than a mix with the original population as the Mestizo are (Raúl Gutiérrez, appendix 1). He was, however, convinced that they all needed each other to move ahead. The frustration that the Gutiérrez family experienced because of the lack of information and follow-up from the indigenous governments resembles the potential conflict that may present itself when stakeholders try to act independently in a collaborative initiative and which will cause frustration among the rest of the involved parts, as presented by Okazaki (2008). The indigenous (Kriol) government members' lack of information sharing with the family Gutiérrez and the lack of effort to invite them to participate in the initial phase may be caused by the different interests held by different

[13] We did them free of charge, the projects. They [the local indigenous governments] come and take advantage of people, and then they never return.
[14] a race who came, nothing else

stakeholders within the community (Jamal & Getz, 1995 in Okazaki, 2008). In SJN, these relatively minor individual clashes thus end up causing unequal and imbalanced power relations among the ethnic groups on an overall level which complicates the collaboration effort.

A second example of the missing communication and collaboration between the indigenous governments and members of the mestizo community was given by Jimena Jimenez, daily manager of the other local hotel in SJN, Hostal Familiar. Despite being a major player among the local service supplier she seemed to have had little involvement in the initiation of the tour operator project. She admitted during an interview in September 2016 that: *"no tengo ni idea de lo que trata el proyecto"*[15] (appendix 2), which indicates the that the communication between the indigenous governments and Jimena Jimenez too had been insufficient, in relation to the orientation of the local tourism initiative, such as the lack of information sharing between the local Kriol government and the Gutierréz.

The effort may be further complicated by the fact that these disagreements are rarely expressed out in the open. The feeling that the three ethnicities needed each other was quite often expressed both in meetings and in less formal settings, but the differences they need to overcome in order to truly work together were rarely addressed, and never in joint meetings between the three ethnicities. In relation to the above dissatisfaction expressed by the Gutiérrez family it is important to note that both men were present at the introductory meeting upon our arrival in SJN which the indigenous governments are likely to have considered an appropriate way of including the author of the Propuesta. Both examples indicate that although the Rama and Kriol governments argue that the tour operator initiative centers around the multi-ethnicity of SJN and that it is a community-based project for the benefit of the entire local community, the collaboration with the mestizo community and the urge to include and invite existing service providers to participate in the project seems to be lacking.

4.3.2.2 Power relations between the municipality and the indigenous governments

Another clear distinction was seen between the indigenous governments and the municipality who often found themselves at odds. During the time of present research, a course was held which centered on the rights of the residents and especially the rights that they as indigenous peoples have to the territory that they inhabit according to international law and the existing national agreement with the central government of Nicaragua. The course lasted three days and was held in the local assembly hall, the Casa de la Cultura, which is a single room house in the centre of town. The course had been planned well in advance and the use of the hall had been agreed on by the municipality, which has the keys. On the morning that the course was due to start, the municipality would suddenly not let the organisers have the key, since the room was now due to be used for dance practise later in the day. After about an hour, and only after one of the indigenous leaders had himself insisted on getting the key, they were let in the building and the course would start.

[15] I have no idea what the project is about.

The above example from the legal course shows how the community of SJN is not only divided along ethnic lines but also between municipality interests and those of the local indigenous governments. While the mayor stated several times that he was very dedicated to bringing more tourism to SJN and how the project had his full support, this was not always how it was perceived among those involved. The attempt to keep the beneficiaries out of the communal hall was one such example. More generally there was also the feeling that it might be part of the municipality's responsibility to initiate tourism projects rather than relying on those thought up outside of the village, as for example when they mayor said the former tourism office would be made available for local tourism projects again once they were organised. The municipality did not, however, provide any sort of support towards this organisation. We were informed by the mayor that a plan for local tourism development had been composed by a consultancy firm (from Costa Rica) a couple of years previously, but this was not to be found, not even in the municipality's archives. The mayor did tell us that he would always be available to them and would help wherever possible. On the day that we were to present our initial thoughts on the tour operator and how to move forward, he confirmed that he would attend the presentation but then did not show up and did not seem to regret this when we talked to him later that same day. This shows a discrepancy between the support stated by the municipality's highest-ranking representative and the support demonstrated at the time of action. While this was a fairly minor nuisance to us as interns, it would provide significant issues for the population of SJN who cannot rely on the support of the public institution in charge of the town and residents' welfare. It is also an example of the challenges developing countries often face with regard to the structural, conditions for participation (Tosun, 2000), in this case the political frame under which the community operates.

Another example of less than optimal cooperation between different parts of the SJN community is the role of the national tourism institute, INTUR. The institute has a representative in SJN who serves as a liaison between the tourism businesses in town and the regional and national tourism offices. She is furthermore in charge of registering and certifying new and existing tourism businesses according to national standards for hotels and restaurants. Part of the purpose of the BICU courses is to prepare SJN residents to start their own small tourism businesses, e.g. in the form of homestays. As mentioned in the introduction, within the Reserve the indigenous peoples have a significant degree of autonomy to decide on their own internal matters parallel to national law. However, INTUR maintains the right to deny operation to those tourism businesses which do not comply with national standards. It is an area of legal contention which stands in the way of including more community members in the development of tourism supply in the village. This also serves as a point of debate concerning the idea of empowerment in relation to CBT efforts. While the indigenous governments and the newly constituted committee may be doing their best to take control of tourism development in the village, they do not in fact have the formal power to bring their ideas to life. This does go to support Simpson's (2008) argument that the private sector - in this case the tour operator - needs government assistance to ensure sustainable tourism. It also, however, illustrates an example of how this government support cannot be taken for granted.

The above examples of internal fractions found in a community as small as SJN furthermore constitute an illustration of what Simpson (2008) considered to be the problem related to community involvement in tourism development - how the divides within the community can easily hamper the planning and not least execution of new tourism initiatives. The little

progress made locally since the license was approved in 2015 may support Li's (2006) notion that at times community participation must be sacrificed in the early stages of tourism development in order to bring benefits to the very community. It furthermore begs the question whether CBT is in fact likely to result in a cohesive host community, as claimed by Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2013).

4.3.3. The concept of community needs

CBT can be seen as an instrument to promote the community's needs and wellbeing (Höckert, 2011) which reflects the idea of tourism as part of a holistic development strategy (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016). As stated by Scheyvens (1999), the CBT approach is based on the needs, concerns and welfare of host community. Meaningful community participation in tourism development invites the community to take part in tourism development from the initial design process to the implementation process (Salazar, 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2013; Scheyvens, 1999). By inviting community members in SJN to take part in the tour operator, the chance of identifying the needs and interests of the local community is increased, which was noted as an essential factor for the future feeling of local ownership of a tourism project. The first step in meeting these needs would be to identify them, but this refers back to the problematic assumptions inherent in the concept of community as discussed in section 3.5.2.3.

The indigenous governments, and the Kriol in particular, were convinced, possibly through conversations with BICU professors, that the concept of community-based ecotourism would be the most appropriate type of tourism to implement in an area like SJN. According to members of the local governments the overall objective of the local tour operator is to create an alternative source of income for community members of all three ethnicities that will contribute to the general development of the community and generate an income for the preservation of the Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz. Previous programmes' lack of significant impact on tourism flows in SJN frustrated local residents and government members. They furthermore expressed a wish to promote the local indigenous cultures and traditions to increase local pride of the culture and create awareness of the same both nationally and internationally. One community member and guide even mentioned that he had offered free tours into the Reserve to representatives from INTUR during the Institute's visits in the area, in order to provide INTUR with information about the tourist offers for national promotional material but to no effect (appendix 4). Moreover, several community members mentioned that the increasing military checks along the Río San Juan due to border conflicts with neighboring country Costa Rica has given SJN negative publicity, which keeps tourists from visiting the area (appendix 3).

The local governments' tourism initiative was therefore an attempt at promoting tourism in SJN and the Reserva Biológica Indio Maíz directly from SJN in order to ensure correct and updated information about the area which the indigenous governments do not feel has been promoted in the past. CBT presents an opportunity to include marginalised groups in the process of tourism development on their own terms (Höckerts, 2011; Salazar, 2012), which is exactly what the indigenous government are trying to do by initiating a community-based tour operator in SJN. In doing so community members are invited to contribute on their own terms to the promotion of local culture and traditions. In addition to this, by placing control of tourism development in the hands of the local residents and indigenous communities, the chance of

keeping their interests and needs is better kept, and the risk of tourism having negative impacts on the local culture is reduced, as it was implied by Redturs (2003).

These, then, are the goals and needs that the community at large do seem able to agree on. They are all quite grand and fairly non-specific and formulated to ensure benefit to all community groups. Parallel to these, or sometimes even contrary to them, however, are other needs and wishes that are shared only by certain individuals or groupings within SJN. For example, as was hinted at in section, the fact that Aldrick Beckford decided to initiate tourism development on his own may not only reflect a wish for local tourism to move ahead as soon as possible, but also the attraction of being the leader who made it happen. The two are not mutually exclusive, and Aldrick himself repeatedly said that he had no interest in being in charge of the initiative.

According to one researcher, the ideal community participation involves a shift of power from the people who are used to being involved in decision-making, to the ones are not accustomed to this role (Willis, 1995 in Tosun, 2000). However, by inviting community residents to participate the way that it has been done in the tourism project in SJN, the risk arises that it is not in fact everyone who is asked, but only those who are close to members of the local governments or the community members who already have experience in the field who will be asked to participate. When we were presented with the list of beneficiaries, we soon recognized some of the names of the beneficiaries as the names of community members who have previously been or currently are involved in tourism, either as guides or hotel owners. As an example, the names of Augencio Salomon, Hilario McCrea, Filemo McCrea and Edgar Coulson all appeared on the list, and are all among the few people who were currently actively working as independ tourist guides. It is only natural that those already involved in running the town's current tourism supply be included among the beneficiaries. However, Augencio Salomon's three sons and one daughter were all on the list of beneficiaries as well, although three of them did not show much interest in actively taking part in the tourism initiative, our conversations revealed.

Perhaps more notably, the town's INTUR representative's family owns and runs the Hostal Familiar, one of the few hotels currently in business in SJN. It was insinuated multiple times during meetings that she may be in a conflict of interest in that she would not personally benefit from a broadening of the tourism supply in town. In this way, the INTUR representative may be challenged in combining and balancing the interests of the tourism institute, her own family and the multi-ethnic efforts with the new tour operator. What with the previously mentioned conflict between territorial and national law, the situation in SJN gives the impression that the INTUR presence limits local tourism development in the village as much as it promotes it.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to explore the complexities of the concepts participation and empowerment in the development of community-centered tourism as well as the role played by external actors in bringing them about in tourism development. Having conducted related work in the town of San Juan de Nicaragua as part of a 9th semester internship, the community and its recent license to run a locally managed tour operator proved illustrative of the above challenges. By living and working alongside the community members for three months and assisting them in their tourism development efforts we were able to gain firsthand knowledge not only of the formal mechanisms behind the town's tourism development efforts but also the more intricate details of the community interaction.

A review of existing literature on the topic of community-centered tourism revealed that the concepts of participation and empowerment as well as the role played by external actors are all essential to both scholars within community-based tourism (CBT) and community benefit tourism initiatives (CBTI). Additionally we found these to be recurring concepts in the development studies field as well, where they have been subject of research and practise for longer than the tourism field has been around. The difference, at first glance, lies in how these concepts are viewed. While at first glance CBT and CBTI hold opposing views on the importance of participation and empowerment, we found the two approaches to be united in the common challenges they face in the application of their views.

CBT holds that community participation and empowerment are the key to creating sustainable and equitable tourism development based on the community's needs whereas CBTI advocates claim to find them obstacles in the path towards community benefit in the shape of employment and capacity-building. CBT hails community initiative and ownership as the way to develop tourism whereas CBTI prefer that the community stays out of both lest they slow down the development process. However, several CBT scholars acknowledge that CBT projects are rarely locally initiated and even less often locally funded. At the same time CBTI proponents say involving the community can be beneficial in order to gauge the community's needs and thus be able to provide them with the benefits they require. What furthermore joins the two approaches is how they underestimate the complexities of the concept of community and thus those of participation and empowerment.

The degree of participation is not new to this research but it is still worth keeping in mind that attendance does not mean participation and nor does participation equal representation. The culture and structural conditions for participation vary from community to community and so does the ability to participate in a meaningful way. Empowerment does not happen just because someone is formally put in charge. Rather, successful empowerment is reliant on capacity-building to prepare the community to assume responsibility.

The role of external actors is a defining one in the debate over community-centered tourism. Through their actions and their engagement with the community they hold the power to help the communities to develop or they can act to their detriment. This power lies in the external actors' will and ability to acknowledge existing power relations with an inside the community

and to make use of local knowledge as a minimum to gain the insight needed to act on the community's needs.

The present research does not claim to have produced a model for the successful implementation of community-centered tourism in developing countries. Rather it has gone beyond the mere discussion of whether or not to include the local population through participation and empowerment to explore how these two concepts permeate the discussion surrounding community-centered tourism regardless of whether a CBT-like or CBTI-like approach is favored. It was established in this thesis that there is no universal model to fit all destinations as it is not only the approach that differs but also how the approach is received by the community in question.

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