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# **Community Participation in Tourism Development and the Value of Social Capital**

-the case of Bastimentos, Bocas del Toro, Panamá

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tourism has become a major agent of transformation in every society and destination it has touched, and this change involves a price. Many communities, particularly in developing countries, are unaware of the costs and difficulties associated with this transformation of development. The purpose of this study was to explore the role and value of social capital in community tourism development. The study applies the concept of social capital to create an understanding of how a community constructs, perceives and participates in tourism development. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observations were conducted within a qualitative fieldwork. By comparing two different communities in Panamá, findings show how one village with strong social networks and cooperation for mutual benefits has initially developed community-based tourism. Whereas, in the other community local associations and engagement in collective efforts are either poorly limited or absent. Thus, communities with high social capital, together with capable agents, present better conditions to induce development. More importantly, the willingness of the community to participate and its ability to develop practical options needs to be implemented.

**Keywords:** Community development, resident perceptions, local participation, social capital, Bocas del Toro.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

*This thesis aims to explore the role and value of social capital in community tourism development. In the following chapter the reader will be introduced to the chosen area of research. The research problem, relevance of the study and its contributions will be identified and discussed. In the end, the research question and objectives are clarified.*

Concerns for disappearing native cultures, social exploitation of developing countries by multinational corporations and the spread of the western influences creating a more uniform world have been debated within the sociology field of tourism. Tourism has become a major agent of transformation in every destination it has touched, and this change involves a price. Many communities, particularly in the developing world, are unaware of the costs and difficulties associated with this rapid transformation of development. As a result, engaged locals taking part in tourism development is seen as one of the alleged solutions. Yet, according to Mowforth & Munt (2009) and Simpson (2008), many have failed to understand the social structures that affect the outcome of participation. Thus, what if an initiative for participatory community tourism development is started but the local residents lack the interest and concern to participate? Various community development researchers (Grant 2001; Pretty 2003; Iyer et al. 2005; Bridger & Alter 2006; Vermaak 2009) have therefore started applying the concept of social capital to observe the degree of collective participation for mutual community benefits. As social capital is a relatively new implication within tourism research (Jones 2005; Okazaki 2008), this study applies it to create an understanding of how a community constructs, perceives and participates in tourism development.

As a socio-cultural phenomenon, tourism can be both desirable and detrimental. Travelling is inevitably associated with pleasure, yet takes place in the context of great inequality of wealth and power. Analysing negative impacts have been one of the major outputs of tourism research, and studies have tended to highlight the economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts (Nash 1977; Pizam 1978; De Kadt 1979; Mathieson & Wall 1982; Murphy 1985; Krippendorf 1987; Lea 1988; Doğan 1989; Cater 1995; Rátz & Puczko 2002). Issues that regard the strengthening of communities through tourism development and local participation are increasingly important and debated, and thus require further research and analysis (Simmons 1994; Joppe 1996; Pearce et al. 1996; Ashley 2000; Scheyvens 2002; Macleod 2004; Mitchell & Muckosy 2008; Simpson 2008).

## **1.1 Local participation and perceptions towards tourism**

A number of researchers have noted the need for further analysis within the field of resident perceptions, since the findings show many diverse indications of host communities' quality of life and their willingness to participate (Doxey 1975; Murphy 1985; King et al. 1993; Johnson et al. 1994; Lankford 1994; McCool & Martin 1994; Simmons 1994; Williamson & Lawson 2001; Scheyvens 2002). According to several previous studies (Brougham & Butler 1981; Ap 1992; Joppe 1996; Mason & Cheyne 2000; Macleod 2004; Lepp 2008), communities are not homogeneous groups of like-minded people, but instead a collection of individuals with ambivalent or mixed feelings in relation to the perceived impacts they have of tourism.

Within this field of research, previous findings reveal that there are little attitudinal studies that have focused on communities either in the pre-development stage or prior to any tourism development (Hernandez et al. 1996; Mason & Cheyne 2000; Harrill 2004; Lepp 2008). Findings show significant level of opposition and negative reactions of suspicion, anxiety and fear locals have towards a proposed plan of tourism development at an early stage. Hence, there is a need and interest for studying feelings, hopes, expectations and concerns of residents that have little or no prior experience with, or knowledge about tourism.

## **1.2 Problem discussion**

Local participation in tourism has been regarded as a positive force for change and passport to development. This, however according to Mowforth & Munt (2009) represents an oversimplistic conclusion. The principle behind local participation may be easy to promote, however the practice is far more complex. Generally, it is often assumed that members of a community are willing and able to participate equally (Hall, 1995). This has been a continuing debate and issue within community development studies. Participation of local people is a criteria often agreed on as an essential condition for development and sustainability of any 'new' form of tourism (Poon, 1994). Yet, it is the combination of the two words 'local' and 'participation' that is paradoxically implying local residents being so often left outside of the planning, decision-making and managing of tourist development (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Clearly, the ideal would be for communities to decide the form and function of tourism developments and have full control over any tourism schemes in their location. In reality however, local residents often lack the experience, resources and hence even interest, needed to establish successful tourism ventures (Scheyvens, 2002).

As a result the following problem statement arises: what if an initiative for participatory community development is started but the local residents lack the interest and concern to participate? The emphasis on the assumed solidarity in communities has led to relegated attention to community conflicts and exclusion. Moreover, many have failed to understand the social structures that affect the outcome of participation (Mowforth & Munt, 2009), or discuss different participative techniques rather than focus on a deeper meaning of the value of participation per se (Simpson, 2008). In order to understand the reasons behind the lack of participation interest within a community, this study applies the concept of social capital to understand how a community constructs, perceives and participates in tourism development.

Social capital can be explained as collective actions for mutual benefits within a particular group or community (Krishna, 2002), and can be divided into structural and cognitive social capital. The structural includes associational links or activities, networks, rules, and refers to what people *do*. Whereas, the cognitive component comprises norms, values, beliefs, attitudes or perceptions of support, reciprocity and trust, and relates to what people *feel* (Jones, 2005). Three types of connectedness – bonding, bridging and linking – have been identified as important social networks within, between and beyond communities (Pretty, 2003).

The notion of social capital has gained popularity during this last decade within community development literature (Grant 2001; Lin 2001; Krishna 2002; Perkins et al. 2002; Flores & Rello 2003; Pretty 2003; Rohe 2004; Vidal 2004; Iyer et al. 2005; Bridger & Alter 2006; Hanna et al. 2009; Vermaak 2009). Yet, it is a relatively new concept in the field of tourism studies (Jones 2005; Okazaki 2008).

Among others, Lin (2001) and Krishna (2002) argue that a better understanding of social capital is important for providing a feasible way to develop sustainable communities. While others (Bridger & Alter 2006) do not regard social capital to always be the answer to greater development, instead referring to communities being dependent on social interactions. On the other hand, McCool & Martin (1994) argue that those residents with a stronger than average attachment to their community, have stronger views, are more informed and hence more concerned about tourism development in their location, regarding both positive and negative impacts. According to Vermaak (2009), previous studies using social capital have mostly focused on industrialised countries, whereas the value of social capital in the context of the developing countries is relevant to analyse in a much greater extent.



This study demonstrates its relevance for the academic community of tourism sociology scholars in various ways. Besides contributing to further analysis of attitudinal research, it contributes to the understanding of the concept of social capital. As mentioned earlier, the relevance of social capital in tourism development has not been explored to any large degree within the academic field of tourism. For these reasons I find it very relevant to conduct further research on this notion.

Moreover, as will be seen, my research was conducted in an area still in the pre-development stage of tourism and where residents have little prior knowledge about this industry and business. As mentioned earlier there are limited amount of studies concerning this matter, which makes it all the more relevant. Panamá, and particularly its north-western Caribbean archipelago Bocas del Toro, is an emerging tourism destination with an enormous unexplored potential. In the end of the 1990's tourism began relatively spontaneously on the islands, and there have been few controls as well as weak sustainable planning of its development (L. Mou, personal communication, March 6, 2010). Today, the islanders, ranging from Afro-Caribbean to indigenous communities, are struggling to maintain their simple lifestyles and customs in the face of rapid tourism expansion, globalization and modernity. Lastly, the small-scaled case in a remote area used in this study fits as a contribution to previous research findings. As Pearce et al. (1996) argues; there is a need for investigating fewer sites, explored in greater detail.

### **1.3 Research question and objectives**

In order to explore the meaning and value of social capital within community tourism development, this study aims at answering the following research question;

*How to understand the role of social capital in community tourism development?*

To facilitate addressing this question, three objectives were set;

1. To understand how the community constructs their *development*
2. To find out how the community *perceives* tourism development
3. To discover if the community is willing to *participate* in tourism development

These three objectives worked as my guidelines when I conducted interviews within my fieldwork. I therefore divided my questions according to the objectives, in order to find an answer to my main research question. The purpose of this study was to explore conditions and

reasons that either stagnates or contributes to certain community (tourism) developments, and how collective actions for mutual benefits can play an essential role. My goal was to conduct an academic research touching upon a highly important issue and increasingly current concern the tourism industry is inevitably dealing with. I hope the findings will be of interest for tourism scholars within this field, and transferable to other communities in similar contexts.

The idea and motivation behind this research is my own interest. Not only did I want to hear what vulnerable communities think of tourism, whose voices rarely get heard by the public. But moreover, to explore the interesting aspect of what makes people participate triggered my concern and attention. Since I started studying tourism six years ago, the negative, particularly socio-cultural impacts of the industry and its dark side has been a subject and area of big interest. I therefore hope to develop my own understanding of this topic and gain useful knowledge for a potential career in the future.

I limited my research by studying two communities located on the same island, rather than focusing on the entire archipelago. This way I got a closer insight on their collective actions towards tourism development, and hence understand the value of social capital in a more comprehensive way. Bastimentos and its two out of three communities were chosen due to their extreme cultural and social distinction, representing different community development models. Once in the field, I decided to focus on their comparison.

#### **1.4 Outline of the study**

In the first chapter the research topic was introduced, followed by discussing the problem formulation and its academic relevance, as well as presenting the research question and objectives. The second chapter contains the literature review, where previous research, findings and concepts regarding community tourism development and local perceptions are described. The notion of social capital is explained and used as an implication for the study. The following chapter presents the methodology of how the empirical data was collected. At this point the explorative case study and its sample are introduced. The major empirical results gathered from the qualitative fieldwork are presented in the fourth chapter. Analysed through narrative and open content analysis the findings are discussed in the fifth chapter. In this section the linkage between my research objectives, the theoretical framework and empirical study is clarified. At the end, main findings will be concluded, their applicability in practice discussed and recommendations for further research presented.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW – Understanding how a community constructs, perceives and participates in tourism development**

*Based on previous literature and theories, this chapter will present the relationship between community development, perceptions and participation (the research objectives) and social capital (the research question). Previous research and findings will be explored and the concept of social capital, used as an implication for the study, will be explained.*

As noted, tourism is a powerful agent of change in the developing countries, and the potential negative impacts are often due to locals having no control over its development. Yet, as this research tries to find out, what lies behind the interest to participate as well as the diverse perceptions people have against the phenomenon of tourism, goes further and deeper than that. In order to understand why residents respond to and participate in tourism development the way they do, one needs to look at bit more elaborated into various community aspects. The complexity and significance of local participation in tourism development is easier comprised by understanding how a community constructs their development.

Looking at previous literature, it is notable that among the advocates of participatory planning in tourism development, Murphy (1985) formed the basis for many studies when it comes to classic review of community participation. A clear message he already tried to get across in his book “*Tourism – A Community Approach*” (1985), was that in order to rectify tourism planning weaknesses, focus and emphasis needs to first and foremost be put on the community of a destination. He further recognised that experts cannot judge the perceptions, preferences and priorities of host communities. Thus, the potential social benefits can only be possessed by a transparent and community-oriented approach, which understands the local image and views tourism as a local resource (Murphy, 1985). The debate around the relationships between tourism, communities, development and participation has evolved significantly since then, within socio-cultural impact studies (Nash 1977; Pizam 1978; De Kadt 1979; Mathieson & Wall 1982; Krippendorf 1987; Lea 1988; Doğan 1989; Cater 1995; Rátz & Puczko 2002). Nevertheless, issues that regard the strengthening of communities through tourism participation are still increasingly important and require further research and analysis (Simmons 1994; Joppe 1996; Pearce et al. 1996; Ashley 2000; Scheyvens 2002; Macleod 2004; Mitchell & Muckosy 2008; Simpson 2008). As Pearce et al. (1996:1) argue, a “...better long-term planning for tourism must be guided by a more sophisticated understanding of how communities react to the burgeoning phenomenon of tourism”.

## **2.1 The significance of community tourism development**

Why is the importance of considering community participation in tourism development getting such attention within the tourism literature? This constant issue is getting tourism practitioners and academicians all the more aware, yet the unequal and sometimes detrimental outcomes make one question what really goes wrong within development schemes. Evidently, the tourism industry has great potential to affect the lives of community residents. In their study, Bartholo et al. (2008) presents two successful cases of community-based tourism in northern Brazil where not only a fair and environmentally responsible model was rooted, but the communities' quality of life improved significantly. They further discuss the concept of 'situation-centred' development. This notion of development, which goes beyond economic considerations, adapts to the locality, reinforces the centrality of local knowledge and recognises ordinary people as actors in the process of transforming their territories (Bartholo et al., 2008).

On the contrary, Mitchell & Muckosy (2008) argue that community-based tourism (CBT) can be a misguided quest. Their research, situated in Latin America, show that CBT rarely reduces poverty and that communities should instead try to access mainstream tourism markets, which may have a more beneficial impact than traditionally thought. They further state that many CBT projects have failed and initiatives collapsed when it comes to achieving pro-poor benefits. This is mostly due to the lack of financial viability; poor market access and poor governance. Many CBT cases are not participatory in local power structures and decision-makings, and as a result the solution, according to Mitchell & Muckosy (2008), would be to link poor communities with major tourist flows, rather than pursuing 'alternative' tourism. Yet, Poon (1989, cited in Mowforth & Munt, 2009) argues that rather than relying on multinational corporations, what holds the key to future survival for tourism in developing countries is fostering indigenous skills, creativity and innovativeness. Hence, this may lead to communities managing to take a degree of control and exercise power over tourism developments in their localities (Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

## **2.2 How does a community perceive tourism development?**

Knowledge of residents' perceptions regarding tourism development is highly required in order to understand the significance and value of local participation (Pearce et al., 1996). The findings from previous studies show a diversity of perceptions and hence diverse indications of host communities' quality of life, which has sparked a lot of research into this issue over the

last decades (Doxey 1975; Murphy 1985; King et al. 1993; Johnson et al. 1994; Lankford 1994; McCool & Martin 1994; Simmons 1994; Pearce et al. 1996; Williamson & Lawson 2001). The reason why many of these researchers have noted the need for further analysis within this field is the increased evidence showing that communities are not homogeneous groups of like-minded people, but rather a collection of individuals with ambivalent or mixed feelings in relation to the perceived impacts they have of tourism (Brougham & Butler 1981; Ap 1992; Joppe 1996; Mason & Cheyne 2000; Macleod 2004; Lepp 2008). Research into the antecedents of resident perceptions towards tourism can therefore help planners in a significant way. If it is known why residents support or oppose tourism, it will be easier to select those developments which can minimize negative social impacts and maximize support for alternative modes of tourism (Williamson & Lawson, 2001). It is further suggested that to consider local issues and personal values of residents rather than looking at demographic variables and factors, will be more helpful when interpreting and understanding community perceptions (Ibid.).

Johnson et al. (1994) discusses resident perceptions in a rural area experiencing an economic transition and refer to several studies conducted by Allen, Long and Perdue (1988, 1990, 1993). In their studies, they propose the following relationship; in rural communities with low economic activity and low tourism development residents have high expectations for future tourism development, and have therefore more favourable perceptions towards tourism. They conclude by indicating that resident perceptions towards tourism are related to the level of economic activity within the community (Johnson et al., 1994). From their study investigated on Fiji, King et al. (1993) propose that residents of communities dependent on tourism can clearly differentiate between its economic benefits and social costs. Yet, they found that the awareness of certain negative impacts does not necessarily lead to opposition towards further tourism development (King et al., 1993).

Capenerhurst (1994, cited in Mason & Cheyne 2000) argues that if community residents feel their identity to be threatened by the tourism industry they will develop attitudes which are at best doubtful, and at worst hostile. He further suggests that the size of the community is important to consider in relation to the reactions to tourism. Thus, it is argued by both Capenerhurst (Ibid.) and Pearce et al. (1996) that smaller destinations are likely to react more strongly to development as the impacts will be a lot more visible for them. Further studies show (McCool & Martin, 1994) that those residents with a stronger than average attachment to their community, have stronger views, are more informed and hence more concerned about tourism development, regarding both positive and negative impacts.

The most intense or negative perceptions tend to appear from the following conditions; 1) the physical presence of tourists, 2) the ‘demonstration effect’ and 3) foreign ownership and employment. Wall & Mathieson (2006: 227) explains the demonstration effect as “...residents frequently resent the apparent material superiority of visitors and may try to copy their behaviours and spending patterns”. On the other hand, observing and interacting with visitors can benefit as well, if it encourages local residents to adopt and work for things they lack in their community. It can lead to the process of development, or it may lead to dependency, reinforcing existing social discrepancies and weak structures. In this case, only a few members of the community participates and consequently gains from tourism schemes (Wall & Mathieson, 2006).

### ***2.2.1 Tourism cycle development theories***

Two of the most known and used scholars that argued for how residents’ attitudes changes towards tourism as the industry develops are Doxey and Butler (1975; 1980, cited in Hernandez et al. 1996). They suggested that the locals’ perceptions are initially positive and evolve to irritation and resentment only in later stages. The famous Irridex model – irritation index – by Doxey (1975, cited in Murphy, 1985) describes visibly four stages of locals’ reactions, passing through euphoria, apathy, irritation and antagonism. Assumingly, the presence of tourists forms a source of pressure on local residents, and as the number of tourists grow permanently, the bigger the pressure will be and residents’ feelings towards tourism will gradually become negative and socially irritated. Butler’s (cited in Hernandez et al., 1996) similar destination lifecycle theory is concerned with a destination’s carrying capacity, and follows an assumed growing path of stages starting from exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and rejuvenation or decline. These theories are limited to the assumption that homogeneity characterises a community, yet as mentioned earlier, resident opinions tend to be mixed with diverse and heterogeneous feelings as well. Since then, these models have therefore been questioned and contradicted by scholars (Mason & Cheyne, 2000).

### ***2.2.2 Social exchange vs. social representation theory***

As a contradiction to the aforementioned tourism cycle development theories, various researchers within the tourism literature have used the social exchange theory as their theoretical base when studying perceptions towards tourism and its impacts on communities. Ap (1992: 668) describes it as a theory “...concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation”. From a tourism point-

of-view this exchange can be understood as residents evaluating the expected costs and benefits that derive from tourism in return for the services they supply for the tourists. In other words, the theory is based on the assumption that tourism development comes with economic benefits in exchange for social and environmental impacts. As a result, it is argued that residents who perceive themselves benefiting from tourism are likely to be more in favour of it, and vice versa (Ekeh 1974; Ap 1992; King et al. 1993; Getz 1994; Hernandez et al. 1996; Williamson & Lawson 2001; Andereck et al. 2005).

On the other hand, Pearce et al. (1996) criticises this theory by arguing that it is inappropriate since it fails to recognise the reality of the people being studied. They further state that this concept focuses on individuals as isolated units with equal influence on policy and planning, which according to them is an unrealistic assumption. Therefore, to understand the complex and often conflict-ridden social nature behind people's responses to tourism, a more contextual approach is needed (Ibid.). As a solution they use the theory of social representations, which concisely put tries to understand how and what people think in their everyday lives, and particularly how a wider social reality influences these thoughts. This concept is especially valuable when explaining social conflicts or reactions to relevant issues within e.g. a community, since this way the various social representations are more likely to emerge (Pearce et al., 1996).

### ***2.2.3 Perceptions at a pre-development stage***

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, there is little attitudinal research that has focused on communities either in the pre-development stage or prior to any tourism development (Hernandez et al. 1996; Mason & Cheyne 2000; Harrill 2004; Lepp 2008). In his literature study, Harrill (2004) noticed that nearly all attitudinal studies have been measured after the tourism industry was well-established in the area and residents had already become familiarised with the phenomenon. In their research in Puerto Rico, Hernandez et al. (1996) found ambivalence regarding perceptions towards an instantly built resort enclave, yet the locals had generally positive feelings during the development phase. In a rural New Zealand region, Mason & Cheyne (2000) found respondents showing significant level of opposition from the early stage of proposed development plans, despite the low tourism activity the destination currently had. Hence, all the aforementioned study results do not support the tourism cycle development model by Doxey (1975), since the model does not include a pre-development phase, is only concerned with slowly growing tourism developments, but above

all because it suggests that attitudes start at a favourable stage and end up in a resentful or antagonistic stage (Hernandez et al., 1996).

Lepp's (2008) research in a small rural village in Uganda show similar, contradictory findings to the previous tourism cycle development models. Here residents, who had no prior experience with tourism, all reacted negatively in the beginning and initially perceived tourism development with suspicion, anxiety and fear. Furthermore, it took several years before the attitudes began to improve. He analysed that the attitudes were dependent on events which had occurred long before tourism was introduced to the village. The research therefore suggest, that if tourism is to be developed in an appropriate way for local conditions, a multitude of factors which can potentially influence residents' perceptions, and hence the complexity behind tourism must be recognised (Lepp, 2008). As an example he discusses a case on the Solomon Islands by Sofield (1993) where local community efforts constructed simple tourism accommodation, yet they were prevented by the central state government since the community did not meet the legislated requirements. This shows that the residents' initial reactions towards tourism were favourable, yet the political barriers to local participation were the cause behind frustration and passive attitudes. The same goes for a case in China by Yiping (2004, cited in Lepp, 2008), where some residents initially showed interest in participating in the development process in transforming a remote village into a modern resort. Nevertheless, the heavy hand of the Chinese government excluded valuable local efforts and hence the residents' attitudes turned apathetic (Lepp, 2008).

In this subchapter the second research objective, how the community perceives tourism development, was discussed. Previous findings show that variables that lead to either positive or negative feelings towards tourism depend on the degree of economic activity within the community. The ones gaining benefits tend to be favourable and the ones loosing costs or supplies are likely to be resentful. With low economic activity and low tourism development residents have high expectations, and hence favourable perceptions, towards future tourism development. Yet, if community residents feel their identity to be threatened by the presence of foreigners, they will develop attitudes which are at best doubtful, and at worst hostile. In general many of the aforementioned studies reveal that perceptions towards proposed or early tourism development tend to be heterogeneous and initially apathy is a common reaction.



## 2.3 The willingness to participate

In this subchapter I discuss the third objective; to discover if a community is willing to participate in tourism development. Within the context of tourism planning, community participation can be defined in the following way: “a process of involving all [stakeholders] (local government officials, local citizens, architects, developers, business people, and planners) in such way that decision-making is shared” (Haywood 1988, cited in Okazaki 2008: 511). Community participation is a topic debated within various research regarding sustainable tourism development (Prentice 1993; Simmons 1994; Jamal & Getz 1995; Joppe 1996; Li 2006; Okazaki 2008). Generally active local participation in decision-making is alleged to be a precondition for benefits to reach communities. Yet, this is rarely found in developing countries and as Li (2006) argues, is not a necessary condition in all contexts. More than often, residents themselves do not even know where to begin or how to get involved when it comes to participation (Joppe, 1996).

Although responsible or ethical tourism is advocated by tourism organisations, the body of policy still remains largely intact, unchanged and insensitive to alternative approaches. National governments, particularly in the developing countries, are unlikely to promote change that will alter the balance of power between all the players in the tourism field. Thus, possibilities for change are unlikely to come from the top, but rather from the grassroots level, where the need for change is the greatest (Mowforth & Munt 2009). Consequently, NGOs and their networks and alliances are becoming increasingly important for national and regional development, particularly amongst marginalised people in remote communities. However, according to Simmons (1994), many tourism planners rush to involve various public authorities in their projects without fully considering the support and means of local participation first. In addition, while many researchers support greater public involvement, few have tested or evaluated appropriate methods to secure local residents’ interest and support for tourism planning (Simmons, 1994).

The assumption that members of a community are willing and able to participate equally (Hall, 1995) has been a continuing debate and issue within community development studies. As Pretty (1995, cited in Mowforth & Munt, 2009) has identified, there are clearly different types of participation ranging from passive to self-mobilised and connected participation. This is explicitly illustrated in a figure (see Appendix 1) by Mowforth & Munt (2009: 227), where the dissonance between the ‘expert’s’ vision and plan (for e.g. by an NGO) and the local

indigenous group's reaction and approach to the idea is shown. According to Taylor (2001), local participation does not work when it is promoted by the values of 'outside experts' or by powerful elite interest. Instead the outcome of an initiative needs to be represented by local interests and circumstances (Taylor, 2001).

This leads to the main problem statement of this research; what if an initiative for participatory community development is started but the community does not fully participate due to lack of interest? The willingness of the locals to participate and their ability to develop practical and logical options are highly crucial factors to consider. Yet, as discussed in the introduction chapter, this is easier said than done. Clearly, the ideal would be for communities to decide the form and function of tourism developments and have full control over any tourism schemes in their location. In reality however, local residents often lack not only experience and resources, but in some instances interest needed to establish successful tourism ventures (Scheyvens 2002). This latter factor will later be shown in the case study.

## **2.4 The role of social capital within a community**

The previous discussion leads to the main research question of this study; how to understand the role of social capital in community tourism development? In order to understand the reasons behind lack of interest and passive participation within a community, this study applies the concept of social capital to question and observe the degree of collective actions. The dynamics of social change and the conditions that affect certain community tourism developments will be easier to explore and understand by using this concept.

### **2.4.1 Definitions**

Social Capital represents a tendency for mutually beneficial collective actions, "...and it derives from the quality of relationships among people within a particular group or community" (Krishna, 2002: ix). Putnam (1995) has defined it (cited in Krishna, 2002: 2) as: "features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit". Another viewpoint is defined by the World Bank in 1998 as: "...the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development...It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust, and a commonsense or 'civic' responsibility that makes society more than a collection of individuals" (Vermaak, 2009: 402).

#### ***2.4.2 Different identifications of social capital***

To start with, two valuable distinctions have been identified between structural and cognitive components of social capital. The structural includes the intensity of associational links or activities, networks, rules, roles, precedents, and refers to what people *do*. Whereas, the cognitive component has to do with norms, values, beliefs, attitudes or perceptions of support, reciprocity and trust, and relates to what people *feel* (Jones, 2005).

Three types of connectedness – bonding, bridging and linking – have been identified as important social networks within, between and beyond communities (Pretty, 2003). Bonding social capital refers to relations people have within internal community ties, such as families, friends and neighbours, or groups with similar objectives such as sports clubs or mothers' groups (Pretty 2003; Okazaki 2008). Bonding can also be explained as linking 'sameness'; bringing people with resemblance or who already know each other closer (Vidal, 2004). Bridging social capital implies the capacity of tied groups to connect across with other external groups that may have different views or people who previously did not interact with one another (Vidal 2004; Jones 2005). Linking social capital refers to the connections society has with the state, and the ability of groups to engage with external agencies, to either bring resources or influence their policies (Pretty 2003; Okazaki 2008). The two first aforementioned connections can be compared to horizontal (bonding) and vertical (bridging) engagements. Horizontal involvement refers to the amount and quality of interactions among neighbours and volunteer activities inside the neighbourhood, whereas vertical engagement implies interactions and participation in organisations outside the neighbourhood (Rohe, 2004). Both integrations are required for effective community development efforts (Ibid.).

In communities where social capital is high and well-established, people tend to have more confidence to invest in collective engagements and collaboration, trusting that others will do so too (Pretty, 2003). However, trust takes time to build and is easily broken. When a community is characterized by distrust or conflict, cooperative activities are unlikely to emerge. To increase trust reciprocity is needed, which refers to simultaneously exchanged goods and knowledge. A benign reciprocity develops sustainable obligations between people, which leads to mutually agreed upon drivers of behaviour, i.e. norms and rules of society. As can be seen, four interconnected features of social capital are listed as essential; relations of trust, reciprocity and exchanges, common rules and norms, and connectedness in networks and groups (Pretty, 2003).

### ***2.4.3 Previous literature***

As Krishna (2002) discusses, the main previous studies and theoretical viewpoints of social capital has been by Bourdieu (1986) as the relationship of mutual acquaintance and recognition, by Coleman (1990) as mostly individual relationships and by Putnam (1993, 1995) as social organisations and connections. These three were the pioneers in designing the social capital paradigm. Putnam however, has been more widely supported and accepted. He contributed with a major advance and change of thought since he showed that social capital can be a valuable resource that results from people's social connections and reciprocity from horizontal networks (Vermaak, 2009). Within the last decade social capital has increasingly become a focus for policy, practice and research within community planning and development literature (Grant 2001; Lin 2001; Krishna 2002; Perkins et al. 2002; Flores & Rello 2003; Pretty 2003; Rohe 2004; Vidal 2004; Iyer et al. 2005; Bridger & Alter 2006; Hanna et al. 2009; Vermaak 2009). Yet, it is a relatively new concept in the field of tourism studies (Jones 2005; Okazaki 2008).

Among others, Lin (2001) and Krishna (2002) argue that a better understanding of social capital is important for providing a feasible way to develop sustainable communities. It has been proposed as the 'missing link' in development and many regard it as central for democracy, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability (Jones, 2005). While others (Bridger & Alter, 2006) do not regard social capital to always be the answer to greater development, instead referring to communities being dependent on social interactions. On the other hand, McCool & Martin (1994) argue that those residents with a stronger than average attachment to their community, have stronger views, are more informed and hence more concerned about development in their location, regarding both positive and negative impacts.

Grant (2001) did a study of poor communities in Guatemala City, without access to any kind of insurance or welfare benefits, struggling to achieve local development. Her findings show that social capital, consisting of e.g. community protests, together with a degree of security through land tenure, were critical factors for efficient community development strategies (Grant, 2001). Similar cases are found by Flores & Rello (2003) in Mexico and Central America, where the influence of social capital on poor rural communities has been the recovery of locals' trust in their abilities and strength of unified actions. According to some previous research (Hanna et al. 2009; Vermaak 2009), communities can grow and prosper without significant social capital. However, their resilience and capacity to cope with stress,

transition and unique events may be weakened if a strong social capital base is missing from the community (Hanna et al., 2009). Social capital can even be created and built up within a relatively short period of time, making it possible for local people to take advantage of the existing and available social community resources. By emphasizing the need of viewing social capital as a resource, it enables a community to develop and reproduce new forms of social capital (Vermaak, 2009).

It is further argued by Vermaak (2009) that social capital is limited or absent particularly in the developing countries, since generally communities here do not have the same access to resources as in the western industrialised countries. Nonetheless, it is precisely here, within the context of desires and/or problems, that social capital and its potential for satisfying needs becomes apparent as well as significant. Furthermore, as detected easier at a micro level, social capital provides more realistic ways of building it in small rural communities. Research shows that in Latin America indigenous women are empowered by participating in local associational activities and engaging in reciprocal supportive relations (Vermaak, 2009).

#### **2.4.4 The role of agents**

As mentioned before, one of the identifications of social capital is the *linking* connection to external agencies. Various earlier studies indicate the importance of synergy between social capital and agency, in order to create meaningful change (Hanna et al., 2009). The intersectoral cooperation among public agencies, NGO's, international contributors and grassroots groups within a community, has been recognised as a useful and important policy resource for solving development issues and conflicts (Vermaak, 2009). External agents, particularly NGO's, can play a crucial role in community development by providing support for locals to gain access to key groups or resources that will enable them to collaborate in projects aiming to improve their living conditions and environment (Grant, 2001). Collective action can exist and occur even in the absence of agency help, since democratic institutions are not built from the top down, but rather from the social relations and in everyday traditions among citizens that exist at the base of society. Informed and effective agents, such as political parties or organised interest groups (e.g. NGO's), are essential however, for selecting goals that are feasible and likely to be achieved (Krishna, 2002). These agents can recognize opportunities that exists in villagers' environment, help them organise themselves in ways that are more likely to succeed, plus have regular contact with state officials and market operators, who are familiar with the practices and procedures.

Understandably, as Flores & Rello (2003) discusses, governmental agents ought to create institutions to facilitate participation of excluded groups and share decision-making authority with community associations and local organisations. This, however, is a very optimistic view, premised on the assumption that it is easy to organize groups of citizens and its action, and that people all over the world can act collectively in a coordinated and effective manner. The factors that enable coordinated local action must be available and become more precise and predictive, particularly in the developing countries (Lin, 2001).

In the industrialised countries of the West, a large part of the citizens are members of civic associations, which is a common means of measuring social capital. In the developing countries these proportions seems to be extremely poorly stocked. Nonetheless, it is not only the number of memberships in associations that increases collective action. What matters even more are attitudes and behaviours that might be displayed without the support or registration of any formal organisation, by simply trusting one’s neighbours and engaging in collective efforts to clean and improve their neighbourhood. Many cases in developing countries show that informal, rather than formal associations value more for citizens (Lin 2001). What Krishna (2002) concludes from his findings in 69 Indian villages, is that particularly the newly emerged set of younger and more educated community leaders is the type of agency that matters most for development performances.

The following table summarises this subchapter and describes the role of social capital and its relevant contributions for community development.

<b>What?</b>	- Collective actions for mutual benefits - Cooperating and volunteering as a unified, engaged group
<b>Identifications</b>	- Structural: associations, networks, activities – what people do - Cognitive: norms, values, trust, reciprocity, perceptions of support – what people feel
<b>How?</b>	- Bonding, bridging and linking connections within, between and beyond communities
<b>Essential variables</b>	- Relations of trust → reciprocity and exchanges → common rules and norms → connectedness in networks and groups (both inside and outside the community)

**Table 1.** The role of social capital and its relevant contributions for community development.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

*This research adopts a qualitative method approach consisting of semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observation. This chapter will explain the scientific approach and describe the methods used for collecting and analysing the data. Moreover, it will discuss the validity and reliability of the research in order to evaluate its quality. In the end the case study, sample selection and chosen respondents will be presented.*

#### 3.1 Research design: an explorative study with a qualitative approach

As this study is concerned with exploring people’s way of life; their actions, perceptions and every-day thoughts, a qualitative approach was chosen as a more appropriate method. There are areas of social reality which statistics, hence quantitative methods, cannot measure. The main advantage with qualitative research is the ability to study and describe experiences and social phenomena (Silverman, 2006). Since the research question is to understand the role of social capital, an exploratory research design was chosen to provide insights and comprehension to this socially constructed issue. This approach “...is particularly useful when researchers lack a clear idea of the problems they will meet during the study” (Blumberg et al., 2008: 201). During my fieldwork the concept of social capital evolved more clearly within me. This design was suitable since I wanted to find out what was going on socially within the communities, the meaning behind their actions and their communal concerns or issues.

Since I wanted to explore both cognitive and structural social capital in two communities (what people do respective feel), the models of ‘emotionalism’ and ‘constructionism’ were appropriate guidelines for planning my qualitative research and fieldwork. The ‘emotionalism’ model reflects the feeling of ‘the individual’s point of view’. Whereas, the ‘constructionism’ model prioritises interaction over meaning, and thus prefers to look at what people do, without necessary referring to what they think or feel (Silverman, 2005: 101).

	<b>Emotionalism</b>	<b>Constructionism</b>
<i>Focus</i>	Meaning, emotion	Behaviour
<i>Aim</i>	Authentic insights	How phenomena are constructed
<i>Preferred data</i>	Open-ended interviews	Observation; texts; tapes

**Table 2.** The differences between ‘emotionalism’ and ‘constructionism’ (Source: Silverman, 2005: 11)

## **3.2 Semi-structured interviews**

Open-ended, flexible or non-structured interviews are generally used in ‘life history’ interviews. The keynote is active listening, allowing the respondent to talk freely and ascribe meanings, while keeping in mind the broader aim of the research (Silverman, 2006). In some interviews I used a more standardized technique, yet most of the questions occurred randomly and freely. I tried to interact with each interviewee and understand their experiences, opinions and ideas in order to get their perceptions of the matter. This method is particularly useful when accessing individuals’ attitudes and values. Interviews offer a rich source of data, which provides access to how people account for their troubles as well as joy. However, as interviews produce and offer indirect ‘representations’ of an individual’s view or opinion, they lack a direct access to events, ‘facts’ and apparent ‘realities’ (Silverman, 2006: 117).

### ***3.2.1 Focus group***

An unstructured interview can be held with a group of people being focused on. The group, either experts within an area, or demographically homogeneous or heterogeneous people, are asked to discuss various open questions and topics the interviewer gives them. The disadvantage with this method is the danger of people holding back their own opinions if they get influenced or intimidated by others in the group. Hence, it can be looked upon as biased since it might consider only the majority of the groups’ feelings or ideas. Then again, the advantage with focus groups is the actual interaction between the groups participants since they can build their thoughts upon the contributions made by others, as if they were brainstorming about a topic together. This way they might inspire one another and create new and more elaborated ideas through an active discussion (Blumberg et al., 2008). The conducted focus groups were more frequently and inevitably based on conversational practices, without a tape-recorder, occurring spontaneously and freely.

## **3.3 Observation**

In order to not solely rely on deep-interviews of the respondents’ self-report, my research consisted of observations. This method was an important resource in understanding the character of the communities and the lifestyles of its residents. As the observer I looked, listened and recorded. As the social scientist I wrote ethnographies about my observations in the form of a diary with simple logs of activities, feelings and interpretations. Since ‘ethno’ means ‘folk’ and ‘graph’ derives from ‘writing’, ethnography refers to social scientific writing



about particular groups of people. Ethnography is also the study of individuals in naturally occurring settings which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities (Silverman, 2006). Within my fieldwork I studied ‘sideways’, with direct and participant observation. Yet, occasionally the observations became like ‘shadowing’, following selected people in their everyday actions. This method refers to understanding a context in terms of what *is* going on, rather than what *should* be going on (Czarniawska, 2007). Moreover, I used photographing as an additional research method, where I tried to shoot everyday things and catch ‘tourism development’ on picture.

### **3.4 Conducting the analysis: content vs. narrative analysis**

In my research I have chosen open content analysis as the way to analyse most of my empirical data and findings. Through this analysis the researcher gathers the general message of the text and creates a set of subject categories by coding systematically the number of instances when those topics are mentioned within a particular text (Blumberg et al., 2008). Within qualitative research it is important to distinguish that the analysis records the words or phrases, usually presenting them as quotations under each category. An advantage this measure offers is convenience; through simplifying and reducing large amounts of text into organised segments. Yet, the main problem is the overlooked categories that get no attention and hence the conclusions may often seem quite banal or commonplace (Bryman, 2008).

The answers some people provide can be viewed as stories if it relates to their lives or surrounding events, and as such can be conducted through narrative analysis. I used this method since one of my interview respondents provided a narrative account by putting the answer into a bigger context and describing it in timely order. Follow-up questions to stimulate the flow were not required, since it came naturally, including all details and impressions. Narrative analysis is a used approach within in-depth and explorative research, since it provides a strong focal point on understanding the narrative as a whole. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to analyse how the respondent evaluates the occurred actions from her perspective (Blumberg et al., 2008).

### **3.5 Reliability and validity**

Reliability refers to whether a researcher has used consistent measures, and depending on how one has categorised the findings, if the results are stable or not. In other words, it relates to research trustworthiness and conformability (Bryman, 2008). By tape-recording all the

interviews conducted and transcribing all the answers word for word, I made the results of the study repeatable, and could therefore go back and recheck the answers or reactions. In order to make it as trustworthy and representable as possible, all the exact empirical data is attached as appendices in this thesis. This way the reader gets a chance to read the entire answer, account and representation of each respondent.

Validity is another criterion that needs to be considered when conducting a research. Validity is concerned about the integrity and truth of the conclusions made. Internal validity relates to the casual relationship between independent and dependent variables, one having a casual impact on the other (Bryman, 2008). In this case the causality would be whether existing social capital (independent variable) leads to improved community tourism developments (dependent variable). Yet, since I used an exploratory design approach in this research, neither a definite nor a casual conclusion could be drawn from this study since other possible factors influenced the outcome, i.e. the dependent variable. In this case looking at the bigger context of the issue, the background of the sample and understanding the meaning behind different actions and social constructions. The case studies and nearly all respondents were randomly chosen, once in the location of my fieldwork, and hence were mostly influenced by the surroundings, people and circumstances. This probability sampling might indicate a better credibility of the research findings. The researcher's own interpretations of e.g. a group of people are inevitable within qualitative research, and this study was no exception. External validity refers to whether results of a study can be generalised and applied to other contexts (Bryman, 2008). As previously explained the exploratory approach of this study gives a more general understanding of the matter and hence could be more transferable to other communities in similar contexts. Additionally, my study is ecologically valid since all the interviews took place in naturally occurring settings and environments (Bryman, 2008).

### **3.6 Case study**

Within my qualitative research I chose to study a case in order to emphasise "...the embeddedness of a phenomenon in its real-life context" (Blumberg et al., 2008: 375). Panamá and the archipelago Bocas del Toro with the island Bastimentos were chosen due to personal connections. Moreover, being a relatively remote yet new tourism destination, the area suited as an interesting and relevant case. The fieldwork in Panamá was a longitudinal study, carried out and observed over a period of three weeks. Once in the field I chose to compare two communities on the same island Bastimentos, since I realised their distinct socio-cultural

settings. Choosing a comparative design implied that I could “...understand social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations” (Bryman, 2008: 58).

### ***3.6.1 Presentation of the case***

Bocas del Toro is formed by 70 islands and over 200 uninhabited islets (see Appendix 2). Approximately 9800 inhabitants (2000 census) live in the archipelago (Discover Bocas del Toro, 2010). The area has a long history and a diverse cultural past. It is shaped by the common heritage and characteristics of the Caribbean (slavery, colonialism and plantation) and is mostly known for bananas and turtles (I. Lasa, personal communication, 7 March, 2010). In the late 1800’s British colonisers brought native Caribbean and West Indian workers (descendants from African slaves) who became the new neighbours for the inhabited indigenous Ngöbe-Buglé tribes. Thus, this area has little in common with the rest of Panamá and its history, which already created an identity of its own (Ibid.). When the banana plantations grew and the United Fruit Company established their headquarters in Bocas town in 1899, the areas cosmopolitan culture began to take root. Yet, due to various setbacks the popular success of the province vanished as swiftly as it had arrived (Discover Bocas del Toro, 2010). All this has marked and influenced the mentality of the local people. Today, the emerging tourism boom during the last decade can in many ways be compared to the previous mentioned phenomena.

Bastimentos is one of the nine principal islands and is home to three communities; two indigenous Ngöbe tribes (Bahía Honda and Salt Creek) and an Afro-Caribbean (The town of Old Bank). Furthermore the National Marine Park listed as a World Heritage site is situated on this 51 sq km size island. Bastimentos is the only island in Bocas del Toro with settlers of the former colonial Jamaicans and West Indians who arrived to work at the banana plantations. Thus, evidence of various characteristics can clearly be distinguished in Old Bank through the sound of the reggae music played and the local Creole language (Wari Wari) spoken. There are around 800 Afro-Caribbean inhabitants in the Old Bank neighbourhood. The indigenous Ngöbe tribe in Bahía Honda is scattered around a mangrove bay and consists of approximately 40 families with an estimated population of 200. They mainly sustain themselves through subsistence farming and fishing, and producing handicrafts such as chacara bags, an ancient custom (Discover Bocas del Toro, 2010).

### ***3.6.2 Sample selection***

I chose a smaller sample in order to get closer to the respondent's perspective. As Silverman (2006: 9) indicates: "...qualitative researchers are prepared to sacrifice scope for detail", and here detail means finding out precise data about people's lives, perceptions and interactions. The selected sample in this research was mostly chosen through probability sampling on a random basis, to reduce sampling bias. Yet, it was ensured that the resulting sample was relevant for the study with a variety of different key characteristics. When choosing the respondents it was important to consider various actors in different areas presenting their perspective of the matter. Even if the emphasis was on the local residents, authorities, an NGO, foreign settlers and other key persons with valuable experience and insights were interviewed. This gave me a wider range of perceptions and hence a better understanding of the whole context. Mostly through word-of-mouth and the 'snowball' effect I contacted people by calling them or visiting them spontaneously.

I informally talked to many people in the Afro-Caribbean community in Old Bank and the Indigenous Ngöbe community in Bahía Honda. I chose eight local residents to formally be my interview respondents, due to the sufficient material I had received. They have different roles within their communities and represent different age, sex and occupation, both in tourism and other activity. I observed the local life in these communities and the archipelago as a whole during 15 days of my fieldwork. All interviews were tape-recorded and similar open-ended questions were asked from the local residents (see Appendix 3 & 4).

All the five informal focus groups that I conducted in Old Bank occurred spontaneously: elderly sitting in the park enjoying their day; middle-aged men and a few youths sitting on a house front yard, playing cards; a mixed aged group of people both male and female sitting and having a discussion on a veranda; an argument or discussion between my respondent (Madeleayn Robinson) and her family (aunt, siblings, grandmother). I intruded these groups, besides the last one where it happened more naturally alongside my interview, since family members joined the discussion. In the end it became a heated argument between the family and I became like an outsider albeit my presence.

### 3.6.3 The chosen respondents

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation/activity</b>
Authority, ATP	Jenny Mair	Regional Coordinator
Authority, ATP	Denis Alfonso Couto	Regional Coordinator
Authority, ATP	Victor Georget	Regional office in Bocas del Toro
NGO, Bocas Sustainable Tourism Alliance	Alexandra Dennis	Responsible of office and practical work
Environmental and community activist	Iker Lasa	The Nature Conservancy in Panamá (NGO)
Local resident on Isla Colón, experience with environmental impacts	Luis Mou	Vice-president of BSTA, part of tourism impact projects & studies, one of the National Park creators, Hotel owner
Foreign settlers	Henry Escudero, Margaret Ann	Owners and runners of eco-lodge in Bahía Honda, a community-based tourism venture
Local resident	Enrique Dixon	Owner of Hostel Bastimentos, active community member
Local resident	Dayra Powell	Director and teacher of the local school
Local resident	Jaguar	Local teacher & hostel owner
Local resident	Madeleayn Robinson	High school student & restaurant owner
Local resident	Alfonso Zegsiq	Restaurant owner in Cayo Coral
Local resident	Josefina	Local teacher
Local resident	Luis Bryan	Boat driver, family hotel business
Local resident	Rutilio Milton	Informal community leader, runs restaurant and cave tours

**Table 3.** The chosen interview respondents within the fieldwork.

## 4 FINDINGS

*In this chapter, my empirical data will be presented and described. I will start by presenting the material from my interviews with the authority, NGO and an environmental activist who is involved in tourism community issues. The results from the interviews and focus groups within the two communities will be presented according to my research objectives. Finally, my own observations during the field work, written in diary form, will be described.*

The complete questions and answers to all the conducted interviews can be found as appendices (3 & 4). The chosen results presented in this chapter are therefore clearly marked as single or double quotations of the exact comments made by the respondents, depending on if it is said by many or by one individual.

### 4.1 What does the authority say?

**Interview with ATP (Autoridad de Turismo de Panamá), 2.3.2010, Panamá City**

*As the highest tourism authorities in this country, what are you doing in order for the local residents in Bocas del Toro to get more involved in the planning and participate in the decision-making of tourism development?*

*Jenny Mair, Regional coordinator: “Although we have a powerful influence, we still do not have the last word. ATP has to come to an agreement with e.g. ANAM (the National Environmental Authority), and obviously the local people. And here the problem particularly arises; sometimes the locals are actually the worst, since locals believe it is their land to govern through their own Indian autonomous (‘comarca’) rules. This territory is very valuable and ideal for tourism but they are not willing to share it, especially with the white people. We try to put sense into these people by making them understand that they would have a better chance for education, living and working conditions, vacations etc. through the tourism industry. To construct their future, we are trying to create small businesses. It is incredibly hard however, since the locals do not want to lose their cultural traditions and they remain speaking the same language they have probably spoken for the last 10.000 years. This becomes a problem as they do not want to change. Therefore our challenge is to change their mentality, since they are so much behind when it comes to modernity. We are not willing to share a land that is not suitable for tourists.”*

*Denis Alfonso Couto (Regional Coordinator):* “The majority of Bocatoreños (locals of Bocas) are lazy; they do not like to work and they hang out at the parks all day long, watching the day pass by. Why? Because of old relaxed lifestyle and mentality. They have attractive nature, yet they do not realize its potentiality and how they could use it for tourism. The foreigners are the ones managing and starting the tourism businesses such as hotels, restaurants and attractions (e.g. adventure tourism) but the locals are not doing anything. It bothers me that most of the hotels are owned by foreigners (mostly North Americans) since they are not ‘nationalists’. The foreigners tend not cultivate or nurture the product they have in the most sustainable way, and are just living the way they want to. We try to train the locals to become e.g. guides, but if the locals do not want to participate, take part in working opportunities or lack the interest for tourism, it will not work. I have personally gone eight times to Bocas to train tourism guides, and only one is working as guide now! After that many times and efforts I will not go any more, since it is clearly a waist of my time. They are impudent people, who do not take advantage of what they have in the area.”

## **4.2 What does the NGO say?**

### **Interview with Bocas Sustainable Tourism Alliance (BSTA), 5.3.2010**

BSTA is a destination management organization and tourism information centre dedicated to promoting the natural and cultural attractions in Bocas del Toro. This alliance is an initiative by Solimar International (a non-governmental organisation (NGO) who supports global development through sustainable tourism).

*Alexandra Dennis:* “Since we have just started as an organization the fact that we are still functioning here and getting new members in the alliance is important. There has not been anything like this in Bocas del Toro before and it is really needed. We still have a lot of work to do, once we get settled a bit more. We want to go out to all the islands and communities and talk to the locals, let them know about us, learn about them, establish contacts, connections and relationships. What we want to focus on is to promote already existing and potential sustainable tourism businesses in the area. Furthermore, we need to promote cultural traditions of the communities, for instance by engaging the local women to do handicraft or other organic products to sell. So far, we have been doing beach clean-ups and waste management in this town, which has given us credibility within the community. A successful project was “Move the dump”, where we got the whole archipelago’s dump moved, pushed the issue of recycling and got trash bins outside in the streets.”

### **4.3 What does an environmental and community activist say?**

**Interview with Iker Lasa** (from Panamá City, has lived six years in Bocas), 7.3.2010

“In 2005 when I started working for The Nature Conservancy I ended up living in Bahía Honda. While getting to know the area and community, I found out about the American Red Frog Beach Club (RFBC) project taking over the territory. Hence, I got more involved with the community by supporting them and fighting for their rights. It turned out that the square where the school is was actually the only piece of land the locals owned as a community. Everything else surrounding it is today owned by the RFBC people. The NGO and I, together with lawyers, did a lot of research in order to actually do something about this. We have taken them a few times to court here in Panamá. We sued them by presenting the constitution of Panamá and proving that there was no balance of power when the RFBC project made the decisions. We have been able to stop and deny some of their plans, e.g. a bigger marina and a golf course, which people do not realize. As a result, I have to this day nine dead threats on me. The last and very smart solution we came up with was to create a land use plan, mapping the whole territory of Bocas into zones. All the scientific research that exists here in Bocas, done by the scientific institute Smithsonian, is unique in the world. Thus, we used all this present science on our side to get our message across; sustainability, conservation, buffer zones, referring to the national park and rules for how to use certain areas and spaces.”

“Right now we are talking with the present Mayor to structure out an environmental department in the municipality to start managing a lot of unprotected nature here, which is under the risk to be taken over by some projects. Luckily the current mayor is interested in this idea of land use plan that we have initiated. If he adopts and passes it through it will be law, which of course is very powerful here. As a result, everyone who will come here to buy land will simply have to leave empty handed. Bocas is finally starting to realize what the future might look like if we do not take actions. We are now in the moment of having the opportunity to start managing and planning this area as it should. But we need to secure the basis, and have the law on our side. We need to have a structure so that the local people who live here can demand things to happen, which never has happened or existed here. The tool for the future is to create the environmental department (link to the authorities), together with all the NGO’s, Smithsonian research institute, and other concerned people. After having researched and fought for the environment and local people, I realized that the enemy here is an intelligent rule that is beyond discussion.”



#### **4.4 What do foreign settlers say?**

##### **Interview with Enrique (Henry) Escudero and Margaret Ann, 14.3.2010**

They are a foreign couple who initiated and runs La Loma, an ecological jungle lodge and chocolate farm in Bahía Honda, Bastimentos. As a community-based tourism venture, they started a program ('Hooda Chi' = little community) that operates to support the local community through education ('The Bocas School Project'), enabling representation to defend indigenous rights and empowering them through various sustainable projects and networks. Through the program's donations they have among other things been able to fund numerous community-wide celebrations, cover the costs for representatives of the community to attend national meetings, and coordinate 'Soulsong Ngöbe Dolls', a group of community women who formed a cottage industry to create fabric dolls (La Loma Jungle Lodge, 2010).

According to Henry Escudero, "the Bahía Honda community is well organized and they participate in community meetings all the time, concerning land usage rights and their rights in general. They communicate a lot and advertise their meetings through radio announcements. Volunteer activities are done collectively by cleaning the school yard, getting the teacher's house ready for the New Year and having a system of 'barn raising', where they get together to help someone clean their farm or plant harvest rice etc." A few either formal or informal social networks exist; "a Parent Teacher Association through school, a local sports club and the women's cultural handicraft group gathered frequently at the local restaurant. Undoubtedly, they also have close contacts with other certain groups (clans) of the Ngöbe community, and get together for sports activities and parties."

The issue regarding the community's lack of trust, Henry Escudero explains it as "the community has seen enough corruption and mismanagement from the government and its agencies that they are very cynical about them. Generally they are happy to work with NGO's and aid agencies". This referring to e.g. the TIMOROGO project (Timorogo, 2010). When talking about the Red Frog Beach Club project taking over the community's land, he mentions "Red Frog assumed that the Indians would be easy to take advantage of. They didn't understand that 500 years of oppression has made the Ngöbe suspicious of newcomers with big promises". Even some "especially Rutilio Milton, were suspicious in the beginning" against the tourism venture La Loma, yet "once Milton realized that we had similar ideals and concerns (sustainability, concern for the environment and preservation of local culture, etc.) we became good friend collaborators". How the quality of life has changed for the community

due to tourism, they point out “some things have been lost (roaming rights, cost of living has gone up) and some things gained such as more food supplies and living in healthier environments (e.g. using propane gas for cooking instead of fire wood)”.

#### **4.5 What do the local residents say?**

Coming next is a general summary and main points commented by the residents interviewed, either individually or in group, within the Afro-Caribbean community and Ngöbe community on Bastimentos Island. The exact questions and answers can be viewed in appendices (3 & 4).

##### ***4.4.1 How the community constructs their development***

For many residents in the Afro-Caribbean community in Old Bank, ‘development means progress and better opportunities for everyone in a community; better access for the kids, better education, better jobs and facilities, hence a chance to live a better life’. Yet, they all agree that ‘development can lead to both good and bad. It can change a community and their lives completely; either towards a better way of living or changing the mentality of the people’. Thus, according to Enrique Dixon, “a community needs to manage and accustom themselves when changes occur so that they can balance development in the right way”.

In general their values in life are ‘to preserve our culture, traditions and core principles of respect, fairness and generosity, since they are gradually fading away within the community’. Education is mentioned by all the respondents as ‘the number one priority’. Yet, Jaguar reveals that “many people in this town lack interest in education”. Enrique Dixon was the only one mentioning “the importance of trying to live together as a community”. He is also one the few concerned about protecting the environment, and particularly focusing on “keeping the nature clean by picking up trash and managing the garbage in their town”. Alfonso Zegsiq, who lives in the other end of the island running his restaurant in between the mangroves, “wants to keep Bastimentos as it was before; maintain and preserve its uniqueness both in terms of culture and nature”. Some pointed out ‘the necessity of maintaining their land’. According to Dayra Powell, “before we could go anywhere and one was freer, but now most of the land is sold out as private properties.”

For the indigenous Ngöbe community in Bahía Honda, Rutilio Milton points out “one important priority is to preserve our native language, since we do not want it to die out or get transformed. We also value our lifestyle. How we produce our land, look up to our ant-sisters and continue practicing our old traditions is something natural that properly symbolizes our

lives.” Milton further mentions “the importance of respect”. “To be respected, as well as supported, by outsiders leads to trustable relationships with authorities”, yet in this community “we completely lack trust in the authorities”. According to Milton this is explained “by the fact that nobody who has the power is taking real actions to avoid negative impacts in the area”.

Within the Afro-Caribbean community the lack of trust for authorities is mentioned through ‘the necessity of being informed and empowered’. Besides the school and the new public park, they are ‘unaware of where all the financial support goes to. We all pay 10% in taxes yet we have no idea what it results in’. Enrique Dixon suggests that “even a small amount of the profits the island’s national park generates through entrance fees, should be invested into the local communities of the island, and not go entirely to the authority ANAM”. ‘Trust within the community is decreasing since jealousy has risen as an outcome of some benefitting from tourism more than others’. Some revealed that ‘trust across borders towards Indian communities does not exist’. Even if it is not directly mentioned by all, most of them indicate that ‘foreign settlers or outsiders have improved the development of the community’. Whether it is individuals in Old Bank (trash pickup, water system, fighting for their rights or social boat race event), or NGO’s in Bahía Honda (community-based tourism initiative and fighting against the RFBC project), ‘outsiders have been the driving force behind initiatives taken’.

#### ***4.4.2 How the residents perceive tourism development***

All respondents agree that ‘the rapid development of tourism has brought big changes into our lives and transformed the area completely’. For the Afro-Caribbean group the positive aspects are clearly ‘the increased work opportunities, a more active economy, better facilities and cleaner environment since tourists dislike trash’. They say ‘we are slowly realising our great dependence on tourism, as well as where it can lead to if it is not well-managed’. Enrique Dixon “does not see another way for our community to survive than through tourism”. Dayra Powell, the director and teacher of the school, mentions how “we try to teach the kids what tourism is all about, getting them prepared to work within this industry and explain that if the businesses are run by ourselves the money will stay here and not flow outside”.

The negative perceptions of tourism are ‘the assumed influences tourists have had on the local youths’. According to all respondents ‘the youth has started imitating the foreigners in their dressing (e.g. piercing, dreadlocks), behaviour (e.g. drinking, smoking drugs) and lifestyle (e.g. surfing)’. Other negative aspects due to tourism are ‘the rise of crime (the youths

stealing) and higher prices of everyday commodities and transport'. According to Luis Bryan, "because of tourism locals have fewer resources to use or eat. For instance the lobster is now very rare because it is caught too much and sold to all the restaurants and tourists". When asked the elderly focus groups how life was there before tourism arrived, the two most commented changes were 'the youths not sharing the same respect and values as in the past'. Many of them said 'it is much worse now due to foreigners and hence tourism'; "before it was poorer, but better – now it is hell for some and really good for others".

According to Milton, in Bahía Honda, the indigenous community "initially perceived tourism as something good, since this way we get to preserve our natural resources, maintain our cultural traditions and safeguard our community's future. Due to tourism many locals have become more aware and concerned about our own environment, and more regulations have been created". 'Tourism has generated more money into the community', since they are no longer dependent on agriculture or fishing. On the other hand, "tourism has evidently brought in too many foreign investors and settlers, who not only destroy the nature surrounding the community, but take over our land".

#### ***4.4.3 If the residents are willing to participate in tourism development***

According to Dayra Powell, the Afro-Caribbean people "need to be prepared to whatever tourism will bring. We need to have more investments for the locals; small tourism businesses, more circulated economy and hence the money stays within the community". "Some residents are gradually realising the demand of tourism and consequently started renting out rooms or building a separate little house for accommodation". There are 'exceptions that have accepted the development and made it into a beneficial living'. Yet, most of the respondents are 'well aware of us lacking joint actions for future tourism development' that could lead to mutual benefits for the whole community. Enrique Dixon recognises that "as we do not get support neither from authorities nor outsiders, we need to collect the money from our members as a community-driven initiative to get things developed on our terms, which is evidently not happening". Thus, the crucial point argued by Enrique Dixon, is "for our community to get more united to make people aware and engaged". He further states that "if we were empowered by the authorities (the community board representative) to make our own decisions and had the opportunity to get financial aid, where everyone knew practically where the money was going to, it would make our community

more proactive. This big unawareness is one reason why many do not care or participate in even trying”.

For Dixon “the ideal Bastimentos would not have any more tourism development” and he further states that “we need the law on our side and a really strong and well organized community group that comes together and makes plans for how they want to be developed”. For Alfonso Zegsiq in Cayo Coral, “it is about uniting all the communities on this island (Afro-Caribbean with indigenous communities) and sticking together. Although geographically the island is quite small, it is hard to cooperate across borders since they are culturally so different”.

Albeit the cultural festivity ‘May Pole’ celebrated annually for the Afro-Caribbean culture, ‘we have no other social gatherings, networks or associations created or initiated by us’. Once a week ‘the children get taught how to collect trash together during lectures. According to Milton in Bahía Honda, the indigenous community “wants all tourism development to be focused on sustainable eco-tourism”, and gives as an example the eco-lodge started by Henry Escudero and Margaret Ann. Yet, Rutilio Milton clearly points out that “to participate better in future developments the community needs to organise ourselves more as a group”. ‘Even though we are more united than many other communities’ within the entire Ngöbe community, “we need to gather the authority (ANAM) together with everyone involved with the cave bat tours, to start manage them similarly and cooperate across communities”. ‘Through gathered community meetings we try to participate and get everyone informed and engaged.’ Nevertheless, Milton indicates that “we count on the support from outsiders (NGO’s), who have better chances to get our message across, empowered and involved”.

According to Luis Mou, a local resident from the main island Colón, “to get the local people here to participate in any new forms of tourism, such as community-based tourism, is very hard. This is mostly because we did not choose tourism, tourism chose us, and it has been a challenge for all the locals to adapt to this rapid transformation, since tourism was irresponsibly unorganised. Back then there was hardly any presence of tourism organizations like ATP. Tourism planners did not really exist here and the authorities like the government did not support local participation. Hence, less than 5% of all the hotels in the area are owned by local residents, the rest are by foreigners.” Mou further states that “in order to fight against and refuse (big) projects exploiting their land, nature and culture, different institutions or associations have to be present, and here in Bocas there is not a strong representation of

them”. The other “problem” as he points out is clearly “the lazy mentality amongst the locals; their lack of motivation to work, concern to be aware and interest to participate.”

#### **4.5 What do my observations say?**

*Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> of March:* When I met and interviewed two regional coordinators at the office of ATP (Tourism Authority of Panamá), I was surprised. The answers and hence outcome of both interviews were unexpected, yet interesting. ATP not only wants to train the locals, but through modification, standardization and commercialism, make them into a modern commodity, hence more comfortable and convenient for the tourists. The atmosphere and their cynical approach were at times quite defensive. Clearly, these answers triggered some new insights and thoughts within me. My case study became all the more interesting when hearing their comments, since now I wanted to hear the locals’ point of view even more.

*Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> of March:* My third day in Bocas del Toro. When I visited the office of ANAM (the National Environmental Authority) to ask for a contact person, they were not helpful at all. Rather reacted suspiciously towards me and my research, which resulted in limited access to a potential respondent. Later today they had a local event with loud music on the main street. It was arranged by a mobile operator trying to promote their brand. Although globalization reaches every corner of the world, it was clear when observing the elderly local people’s estranged reactions that it did not fit in to this environment. To see and observe tourism development taking place here is disturbing; big concrete luxury apartment complexes being built, which do not blend in neither with the surroundings nor the local architecture, and Swedish ‘knäckebröd’ (crisp bread) being available in the superstores.

*Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> of March:* My first experience in Bastimentos was both good and bad. Right from the first moment I stepped ashore I could see and feel the difference between the two islands. Here there are not many tourists at all, the local population and community’s presence is much stronger, with children running around and playing all over. The first locals I met by the main pavement were immediately acting disturbingly and rudely towards me. One of my first impressions of observing and talking to these people is that it will be hard to get them to understand me or even take me seriously, not to mention win their trust.

*Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> of March:* Been living and observing the Afro-Caribbean community for a couple of days now. The environment and atmosphere is definitely different from the rest of the islands. It is interesting to listen to their language Creole (Wari Wari), which is spoken by

everyone all the time. After all my observing, even if it is generally quite deprived, it feels more real and 'authentic'. This is evidently because tourism has not been developed here in any greater extent and most of the land is (still) owned by locals.

*Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> of March:* During days it has been harder to observe the social life here, and I hardly see any people at all. Thus, my observations have been livelier during evenings. The atmosphere is very relaxed, no hurries, people hanging around and music being played loudly.

*Friday, 12<sup>th</sup> of March:* Being a researcher here is difficult and challenging to say the least. In order for me to move around here from island to island or from one community to another, I would really need a boat of my own. I would have to pay around 120 US\$ to get to Bahía Honda by myself and back! In order to interview a local restaurant keeper near Cayo Coral, which is in the other end of this island, I had to do something I dislike. I joined a tourist group of various Europeans on their excursion, since the price was lower this way. We started by looking for dolphins. The interesting and almost surreal part was not the actual dolphins, but the numerous amounts of tourist boats surrounding and following the same two dolphins for more than an hour. Not only did I feel sorry for these dolphins who clearly wanted to be left alone. But I was amused by all the tourists who were going crazy with their cameras just to get that one good shot of a dolphin, to take home and show the rest of the world. Instead of observing the sea and glimpses of a dolphin, I observed the tourists and their behaviours.

When we arrived to Cayo Coral, the tourists went snorkelling for a few hours while I interviewed Alfonso Zegsiq, who owns and runs his restaurant in the middle of simply mangroves and pure nature. We continued the excursion towards the 'notorious' Red Frog Beach. We passed the marina, where we had to enter the property of the American project (RFBC). In order to come to the beach, which is a public beach, we had to pay 3 US\$ as entrance fee, jump on a car (which has never existed on this island before) that drove us to the beach. I could observe many interesting things on the way there; construction sites and material, trucks, tractors, more cars and roads. The saddest thing was when the driver commanded four local indigenous kids walking barefoot on the side of the road, to go away since they are not supposed to be there. At the beach, the only food stand was a sandwich and hamburger bar by the RFBC project. I asked some innocent questions from the Americans, and they proudly presented what their project was planning and building. While sitting on the beach I could not hear the sea breeze and nature around me, but rather the beeping sound of trucks and tractors backing and driving right behind the beach inside the forests. So, I decided

to sneak in to their private property to see glimpses of their construction sites and the villas they have already built. And what a sight! It was as the luxury villas had been taken straight from some rich neighbourhoods in the USA. I got some good pictures from the surroundings, until an American saw me and made me leave their property. I of course acted as a lost tourist who knew nothing about this place.

*Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> of March:* The impressions I had before have slightly changed. They have gradually evolved into a more critical way of looking at the Afro-Caribbean community and understanding the whole context. Now it is getting all the more clear to me that in reality this community is lacking social capital. It is interesting how many of the foreign settlers I have talked to have been suspicious towards me and my research. One couple, who runs a diving club for giving excursions and licenses, explained how they have tried to reach out to the community members, by training four of them for free and employing them to become professional divers. But in the end the locals stopped caring and threw it all away. They further blamed the locals for trying to take advantage of foreigners and stealing from them. To some degree it might be true, yet it was all too much stereotyping for me.

*Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> of March:* How can it be so difficult to gather a small group of people who all live within the same tiny neighbourhood? Ever since I arrived to this town I have tried, with the help of Enrique Dixon, to form some kind of social meeting or gathering, and hence create a focus group. Enrique was sure he was going to get people together for me. Yet, every time it was supposed to take place no-one showed up. Consequently, I really started to realize and understand how this social bonding and capital is missing from this community – very unfortunate and disappointing. Today I went back to Bahía Honda with Luisito, a young boat driver who has taken me there for a fair price. This time I went to interview an informal community leader. Luisito was also present, so at times it became a discussion between us three. The atmosphere was out of the ordinary. We were sitting in their community restaurant, on the porch next to the sea, with no sounds around us besides the birds and monkeys. Clearly, a big difference from my previous community experiences here.



## 5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

*In this chapter, my empirical data will be analysed. The results of the interviews, focus groups and observations will be open content analysed according to my research objectives. Some results will be analysed in a narrative way. In general all findings from the previous chapter will be linked to the theoretical framework and discussed according to previous research.*

### 5.1 Socially constructed roles and images

The empirical data in this study consists of various actors in different fields presenting evidently their own perspective of the matter. This makes it interesting to see how relationships and roles are socially constructed, and how people perceive each other within a society. The tourism authorities in Panamá (ATP) clearly wanted to construct their image of the local residents in Bocas del Toro as a group of ‘lazy’, ‘impudent’ people. Albeit the truth in some of their statements, their approach indicates that ATP see themselves as the ‘modern’ people coming to demonstrate for remote communities how to become ‘civilised’, and hence adapt to the norm of Western culture. Furthermore, they did not see any harm or problem with this approach. For them to train the locals and create small local businesses is a good effort, but if they do not fully accept, acknowledge and appreciate the locality of the place and its people, it will not work. This is discussed by Bartholo et al. (2008) who mention the concept of ‘situation-centred’ development that adapts to the locality and reinforces the centrality of local knowledge.

### 5.2 A contextual approach: putting the issue into a bigger context

As explained before within the methodology chapter, when a respondent provides an account that reminds of a story, it is easier to understand the findings when analysing it as a narrative and putting it into a bigger context. This took particularly place when interviewing the environmental and community activist, Iker Lasa. Thus, I will analyse how he evaluated the occurred actions from his perspective. The main statement in his entire contextual account is the realization he got after having researched and fought for the environment in Bahía Honda and its local Indigenous Ngöbe community, that the enemy in Bocas del Toro is an intelligent rule that is beyond discussion. Being a Panamanian, researcher in Bocas, involved as an NGO member and an active fighter on the ‘frontline’, indicates his insights and knowledge within the issue of foreign multi-corporations and mega-projects exploiting the locals’ land and the

lack of local participation. Yet, as Lasa points out, in order to understand the real problem behind this issue, one has to look at it from a bigger context. Hence, he explains the history of Bocas del Toro and background of the two extremely different local communities; Afro-Caribbean and Indians. This is discussed by Pearce et al. (1996), who uses the theory of social representation to understand the complex and often conflict-ridden social nature behind people's responses to tourism. They argue by saying that in order to understand how a wider social reality influences the locals' perceptions, a more contextual approach is needed. This applies to the present case of this study. Why the locals lack the interest or concern to participate touches upon a cultural problem. As the banana industry declined and a lot of people moved away, Bocas del Toro was almost forgotten. Throughout the past, local people have witnessed the process of changes coming in and out for so long. All of this has made the locals develop a passive attitude. They might agree and back someone up on an argument, but when they are asked to take some action nothing will happen. This lack of enforcement was particularly noticed within the Afro-Caribbean community.

Furthermore, as Cabezas (2008) discusses, due to global inequities that usually underlie tourism projects, it is important to consider old colonial patterns of capitalist growth when studying tourism development, in this case in Bocas del Toro. The capitalist world keeps on expanding through access to cheap land, resources and labour. Unfortunately economic power is usually the most important element when developing tourism. This prevents poor communities to promote participation in the most marginal parts of their communities. Instead it enables multinational corporations to use their resources, superior technology and commercial power to control the destinations in the developing world. Here tourism has a tendency to continue patterns of economic dependency and vulnerability.

In the same way Lepp (2008) analysed that resident perceptions are dependent on events which have occurred long before tourism is introduced to a place. His research suggests that if tourism is to be developed in an appropriate way for local conditions, a multitude of factors behind potential attitudes, and hence the complexity behind tourism must be recognised (Lepp, 2008). In this case it can be recognised as Henry Escudero, foreign settler in Bahía Honda, explains that 500 years of oppression has made the indigenous Ngöbe community suspicious of newcomers with big promises. Mason & Cheyne (2000) argues that if community residents feel their identity to be threatened by the tourism industry, the case for Bahía Honda, they will develop attitudes which are at best doubtful, and at worst hostile.

### **5.3 How the residents perceive tourism development**

Even if tourism and foreign settlers have expanded rapidly in Bocas del Toro during this last decade, the area is still quite unexplored and most of the islands have not been exploited to any great extent (yet) by tourism development from outside. Nonetheless, the locals have not had time to adapt to the transformations of the phenomenon in a structured way. The findings from this empirical research show that the Afro-Caribbean residents have clearly mixed and ambivalent feelings towards tourism development, which reinforces the previous findings done by Brougham & Butler 1981; Ap 1992; Joppe 1996; Mason & Cheyne 2000; Macleod 2004 and Lepp 2008. Furthermore, those residents with a commercial stake in the tourism business on Bastimentos were likely to have more positive opinions, than those with little or no direct involvement. They only pointed out the disadvantages and negative outcome, as cited by an elderly Afro-Caribbean: “now it is hell for some and really good for others”. This refers to the social exchange theory used by various researchers (King et al. 1993; Getz 1994; Hernandez et al. 1996; Williamson & Lawson 2001; Andereck et al. 2005), who argue that residents who perceive themselves as benefiting from tourism are likely to be more in favour of it, and vice versa. In this case, only a few members of the community participates and consequently gains from tourism schemes, which evidently can be noticed within the Afro-Caribbean community.

Many of the indigenous Ngöbe residents in Bahía Honda initially perceived tourism with suspicion and resentment. These negative reactions remind of Lepp’s (2008) research findings of a small Ugandan rural village with no prior experience with tourism. Another research, done by Mason & Cheyne (2000), found residents showing significant level of opposition from the early stage of proposed development plans. Similarly, the Ngöbe community had never heard of tourism before it was introduced and proposed to them by NGO’s only a decade ago. These findings, together with the heterogeneous community perceptions, clearly contradicts the classic tourism cycle development theory introduced by Doxey (1975, in Murphy 1985), who suggested that the locals’ perceptions towards tourism are initially positive and evolve to irritation and resentment only in later stages due to the growth of tourism. Albeit the simplicity of the models’ framework, there is still some indicating factors lying behind uncontrolled tourism development that leads to such social change that at least some residents will develop resentful attitudes towards tourism. This

could even be seen or felt within the Afro-Caribbean community, where locals occasionally acted rudely and vulgarly against tourists.

This leads to the question of how the quality of the communities' lives has changed socially because of tourism. As all the Afro-Caribbean respondents agreed upon the assumed influences tourists have had on the local youths; imitating the foreigners in their dressing, behaviour and lifestyle, it refers to the 'demonstration effect' discussed by Wall & Mathieson (2006). On the contrary, observing and interacting with visitors can benefit as well, if it encourages local residents to adopt and work for things they lack in their community. This relates to Madeleayn Robinson, a 16-year old high school student, who gradually realised the rapid growth of tourists visiting their town, but with too few restaurants to meet the demand. She therefore smartly enough opened her own restaurant with the help of her aunt. Unfortunately, she is one of the few young exceptions within the Afro-Caribbean community. Other negative or lost aspects for both communities are roaming rights and the increased cost of living in the area due to tourism. The former, relating to foreign ownership and employment, appears to be one of the conditions to intense negative perceptions against tourism development, mentioned by Wall & Mathieson (2006).

#### **5.4 The communities' willingness to participate**

As Joppe (1996) points out, often residents themselves do not even know where to begin or how to get involved when it comes to participation. The empirical findings show how the Afro-Caribbean community not only lacks experience, knowledge and resources, but interest and will to establish community-driven tourism ventures or initiatives, which according to Scheyvens (2002) are all required factors. Although lack of concern was a common reaction in this case study, some residents within both communities (e.g. Enrique Dixon in the Afro-Caribbean and Rutilio Milton in the Ngöbe), were more involved within the community than others. This conforms to a study done by McCool & Martin (1994) who found that those residents with a stronger than average attachment to their community, have stronger views, are more informed and hence more concerned about tourism development, regarding both positive and negative impacts.

According to Taylor (2001), local participation does not work when it is promoted by the 'expertise of outsiders', and argues that the outcome of an initiative needs to rather be represented by local interests. This is explicitly illustrated in a figure (see Appendix 1) by Mowforth & Munt (2009). Yet, in the case of the Ngöbe community in Bahía Honda, the

initiative was specifically taken by various NGO's since the community did not have prior experience or knowledge within tourism. Thus, even if there might have been local interest, the fact that 'outsiders' approached them in order to facilitate them, made it possible for the Indians to start community-driven tourism ventures.

## **5.5 The role of social capital within the communities**

The Afro-Caribbean people's main former employment within the banana industry, made them dependent on the United Fruit Company. Now on their own, they have to care for themselves. In general, most Afro-Caribbean residents (particularly the young generation) do not understand that their town and environment can be destroyed or lost. They do not realize that by taking care of the island in mutual efforts and making a living for themselves through tourism, they have a better possibility to safeguard this place in their own hands. However, some residents realise that they lack a strong and well organized community group that comes together and makes plans or takes mutual actions for how they constructively want to be developed in the future. Even if the core values, norms and beliefs have drifted apart between the older and younger generation (due to tourism or globalisation), one can still sense some degree of *cognitive* social capital in this community. This is due to the older generation expressing similar feelings for their island and people. Yet, all the other components (perceptions of support, reciprocity and trust) and particularly *structural* social capital (associational links or activities and networks) as mentioned by Jones (2005) are missing.

This refers to the three different connections of how to create or recognise social capital; through bonding, bridging and linking (Pretty, 2003). In general the Afro-Caribbean people want to bond within their community, yet it is not strongly represented or established. They have no interest in bridging across to other communities in the area since they are Indians and some even frankly pointed out their dislike against them. Though, Alfonso Zegsiq mentioned about uniting all the communities on Bastimentos (Afro-Caribbean with indigenous communities) and sticking together. Nonetheless, he points out that although the island is geographically quite small, to cooperate across borders is hard, since they are culturally so different. Lastly, they do not trust linking connections beyond to authorities and some feel the NGO's support does not reach them. The big unawareness of how decisions are made and where their supposedly support money goes to, is one reason why many do not care or participate in even trying. This indicates that they are neither empowered nor informed by the authorities or external agents. This relates to the study done by Yiping (2004, cited in Lepp,

2008) where the Chinese government excluded valuable local efforts and hence the residents' attitudes turned apathetic. Thus, whether alone or united, the Afro-Caribbean community clearly lack interest, motivation or belief to work mutually for a better and communal future.

On the other hand, in Bahía Honda both cognitive and structural components of social capital are present, as well as all three bonding, bridging and linking social connections exist to some degree. The indigenous community wants all tourism development to be focused on sustainable eco-tourism that generates benefits for the community. Volunteer activities are done collectively, protests are arranged and both formal and informal social networks exist. Similarly to Vermaak's (2009) research in Latin America, indigenous women are empowered through local associational activities and engaging in reciprocal supportive relations.

Apparently, the right for land tenure, suggested by Grant (2001) as one of the essential factors for efficient community development strategies, does not exist in Bocas, at least not in practice. Hence, by participating in well-organised community meetings they try to get everyone informed and engaged, concerning their land and other issues. They further recognise that they themselves need to take the initiative to arrange meetings with other locals and the authority to start managing e.g. cave excursions similarly and cooperate across communities. Nevertheless, they acknowledge the support they get from NGO's who have better chances to facilitate them. Interestingly, if tourism would have emerged unexpectedly in Bahía Honda, without any warning or information from the NGO's, the outcome of their reactions and participatory processes would have certainly ended up differently. Furthermore, as a base for social capital existed from before, their resilience and capacity to cope with stress, transition and unique events (in this case referring to the arrival of the Red Frog Beach Club) were strengthened, which conforms to the previous findings by Hanna et al. (2009).

The body of policy still remains largely intact in Bocas del Toro, and possibilities for change are unlikely to come from the top, thus the resource for fighting and solving development issues and conflicts has clearly come from the grassroots level, in this case referring to e.g. Iker Lasa and the Nature Conservancy (NGO). Mowforth & Munt (2009) and Vermaak (2009) mention that NGO's and their networks and alliances are becoming increasingly important for national and regional development, particularly amongst marginalised people in remote communities. This relates to the increased concern and newly emerged actors in Bocas del Toro; Bocas Sustainable Tourism Alliance and INBOCA (Iniciativa Bocatorenña para la Cultura y el Ambiente).

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

*In this final chapter, the main findings of this study will be summarised, and referred to the main research question. A model will be used to demonstrate the relationships between the research question and objectives. The main findings' applicability in practice will be discussed and recommendations for further research or practitioners presented.*

The main purpose and research question of this study was to explore and understand the role of social capital in community tourism development. To facilitate addressing this question and the concept of social capital, three research objectives were set to create an understanding of how a community constructs, perceives and participates in tourism development. Hence, this study wanted to explore the conditions and reasons behind participation, and how collective actions for mutual benefits can play an essential role.

### **6.1 How to understand the context behind participation and perceptions?**

As noted, tourism is a powerful agent of change in the developing countries, and the potential negative impacts are often due to locals having no control over its development. As this study indicates, this issue has to do with the relationship between the global and the local, and how dependency from outside can affect vulnerable social changes within a destination.

Local participation in tourism has been regarded as a positive force for change, yet represents an over-simplistic conclusion. The principle behind local participation may be easy to promote, however as seen in this case the practice is far more complex. Generally, it is often assumed that members of a community are willing and able to participate equally. But what if an initiative for participatory community development is started but the community does not fully participate due to lack of interest? The willingness of the locals to participate and their ability to develop practical and logical options are highly crucial factors to consider. Clearly, the ideal would be for communities to decide together the form and function of tourism developments and have full control over any tourism schemes in their location. In reality however, local residents often lack the experience, resources, empowerment and hence even interest, needed to establish successful tourism ventures. All of these factors, particularly the last one, were clearly the case in the empirical study of this research.

In order to understand the complex social nature of participation and the perception people have towards the phenomenon of tourism development, a more contextual and elaborated

approach is needed. It is clear that the local residents' apathetic and passive attitudes towards participation in Bocas del Toro are dependent on events which have occurred long before tourism was introduced to the place. The historical circumstances play a decisive role in this issue, regarding their mentality and vulnerability. Thus, one has to take their background and their social context into consideration. Both the Afro-Caribbean people and the indigenous people do not fit into the general norm, i.e. rest of the country being decedents to Spanish colonisers. Both minority groups have been discriminated in the past and left outside of the support system, which inevitably influences the outcome of participation and affects how actions are taken and being perceived. Thus, why most of the locals in Bocas del Toro, particularly in the Afro-Caribbean community, lack the interest, concern and enforcement to participate touches upon a cultural problem. Furthermore, as the banana industry declined and a lot of people moved away, Bocas del Toro was almost forgotten. Throughout the past, local people have witnessed the process of changes coming in and out for so long. All of this has made the locals develop a passive attitude. They might agree and back someone up on an argument, but when they are asked to take some action nothing will happen.

The rapid tourism expansion in this area has evidently transformed their social lives, yet many of the locals do not realise their dependency of this activity and has made them perceive it more resentfully and suspiciously, rather than favourably. One reason to this is that they did not choose tourism, tourism chose them. Foreign influence on behaviour, increased prices, roaming rights and land use issues are the most common perceived reactions towards tourism in the area. In addition, tourism development was badly managed and organised from the start, initially without any tourism organisations or authorities support for local participation, which has made the locals without control, influence and awareness.

## **6.2 How to understand the role of social capital in community tourism development?**

This leads to the complexity and significance of local participation in tourism development, which is easier comprised by understanding how a community socially constructs its development, and hence what value social capital has. Social capital refers to collective actions for mutual benefits within a particular group or community, and can be divided into structural and cognitive social capital. The structural refers to what people *do*; networks, associational links or activities. The cognitive refers to what people *feel*; norms, values,



beliefs and trust. Three types of connections – bonding, bridging and linking – have been identified as important social networks within, between and beyond communities.

From the findings of this research one can see that it was hard, at least for one community (Afro-Caribbean), to engage themselves in mutual initiatives and actions. The unified feeling of cooperating for a better future through various developments was clearly missing, almost as if they were without hope. This community lacked both cognitive and structural social capital, and had weak connections bridging and linking over to other communities and authorities, mostly due to lack of trust and support. They felt they were outside of the support system, yet relied completely on external help and initiatives from outside, hence they could be perceived as ‘victims of a society’. They had a lot of feelings and opinions to say, yet no enforcement or actions took place on the grassroots level.

In the other community (Ngöbe Indians) the case was different due to various reasons. Clearly the socio-cultural and historical distinctions of these two racial groups are evident. However, the different circumstances they were under tourism development wise, makes it interesting to see how valuable social capital is within a community. The Indians had never heard of tourism one decade ago. They were approached by NGO’s who introduced the concept of tourism and helped them facilitate the arrival of increased foreigners in their community, before it was proposed or developed. These actions made them not only more aware of the possible consequences of tourism, but community-based tourism ventures were initiated and created. This activity as well as the nearby threat of a foreign mega-project taking over their land, has made the community more unified, active and engaged to fight for their rights. It has made them more concerned of how to preserve what they have; their nature, environment, culture and community. Clearly the relation of trust is stronger, and connections in various networks and social groups have increased. Albeit the lack of trust in the governmental authorities, they are involved with several NGO’s through meetings and other community projects. This way they get tools and resources for unified actions and hence get their message across and voice heard. In other words, the three connections of bonding, bridging and linking social capital play a valuable role.

This indicates how social constructions of collective roles are created. Clearly, collective actions are required to achieve any sort of mutual development, yet it is important to recognise that it does not equal collective *achievement*. Referring to this research, one can see that the social interaction between a unified community and agency capacity (authorities, NGO’s etc.)

is essential for achieving any well-managed outcome. Clearly, local residents and communities within tourism development need to be informed and get support, yet more importantly they need to be represented by someone who is informed of what the community's interest is. If the authorities do not fully accept, acknowledge and appreciate the locality of the place and its people, community tourism development will hardly succeed. This linking interaction with external organisations is necessary for providing reciprocal access, resources and knowledge, which are all important factors to consider within community development.

Albeit the complexity of directing its causality, it seems possible that in communities where social capital is high and well-established, people tend to have more confidence to invest in collective engagements and collaboration, both within and outside the community. Hence, as this research illustrates, community cohesion, which more than likely will lead to community members willing to participate in various activities and initiatives for development, is significant when planning and managing tourism development schemes. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, in many remote communities to reach mutual actions is not enough. In order to reach outcomes of achievement, connections with external bodies are needed. As a result, the table below illustrates how the role of social capital is embedded in various aspects. Yet, this typology tries to demonstrate what is necessary and how social capital could be accomplished in a valuable and practical way.

### **The role of social capital in community tourism development**

<b>What?</b>	- Collective actions for mutual benefits - Cooperating and volunteering as a unified, engaged group
<b>Identifications</b>	- Structural: associations, networks, activities – what people do - Cognitive: values, trust, reciprocity – what people feel
<b>How?</b>	- Bonding, bridging and linking connections within, between and beyond communities
	- Linking to external organisations or agencies necessary for achieving practical outcomes
<b>Essential variables</b>	- Relations of trust → reciprocity and exchanges → common rules and norms → connectedness in networks and groups (both inside and outside the community)
<b>Potential outcome</b>	- more enforcement and initiatives to participate from the grassroots level - more interested, aware and concerned community members - more unified and mutually engaged actions taken - better general social interactions towards various directions (better collaboration)

**Table 4.** The role of social capital in community tourism development

### **6.3 Recommendations for practitioners and academicians**

To suggest practical applications for improving the conditions for a community, whether within tourism or other developments, is complex since the conditions are dependent and influenced by its contextual setting. As can be seen from the findings and discussions of this study, the background and context of a community plays a valuable role. One has to therefore take into account various aspects when considering tourism development within a community. The kind of social constructions, connections and interactions a community and its residents have within their own group, as well as towards external bodies, have to be considered and approached. Ordinary local residents would become more productive if they were informed of decisions taken and empowered in development projects. Yet, if the authority, law or democracy is not on their side, the locals have to take actions themselves to get more involved, concerned and interested in their potential influence. This influence is stronger and more well-managed if it represents the locality of the community, and is unified by its members. Even if a coherent community is an ideal situation, there are still some core principles behind this argument.

With strong bonding social networks, meetings, groups or associations, the members of the community has a better chance of becoming more engaged and informed. By emphasising the need of viewing social capital as a resource, it enables a community to develop and reproduce new forms of social capital. These actions on the other hand lead to stronger and increased cognitive social capital of shared values, beliefs, trust, feelings and perceptions of support. The industry and local agencies ought to arrange informal meetings and promotional campaigns with the local people. A method needs to be found to direct the industry's contribution towards community goals, thereby guaranteeing the locals' support and consequently participation. The community's concerns, issues and wishes needs to be considered and managed, and thus develop a better understanding of the local image. It is precisely here, within the context of desires and problems, that social capital and its potential for creating participation and satisfying needs becomes apparent as well as significant.

From an academic viewpoint, I believe this research can contribute to the community of scholars particularly within the socio-cultural field, as it deals with a highly relevant issue. Moreover, since this study applied the concept of social capital, which is relatively new within tourism research, I believe the findings to be of relevance for potential scholars in similar studies. It would be interesting to see further tourism research applying the same concept within other contexts and communities in the world.

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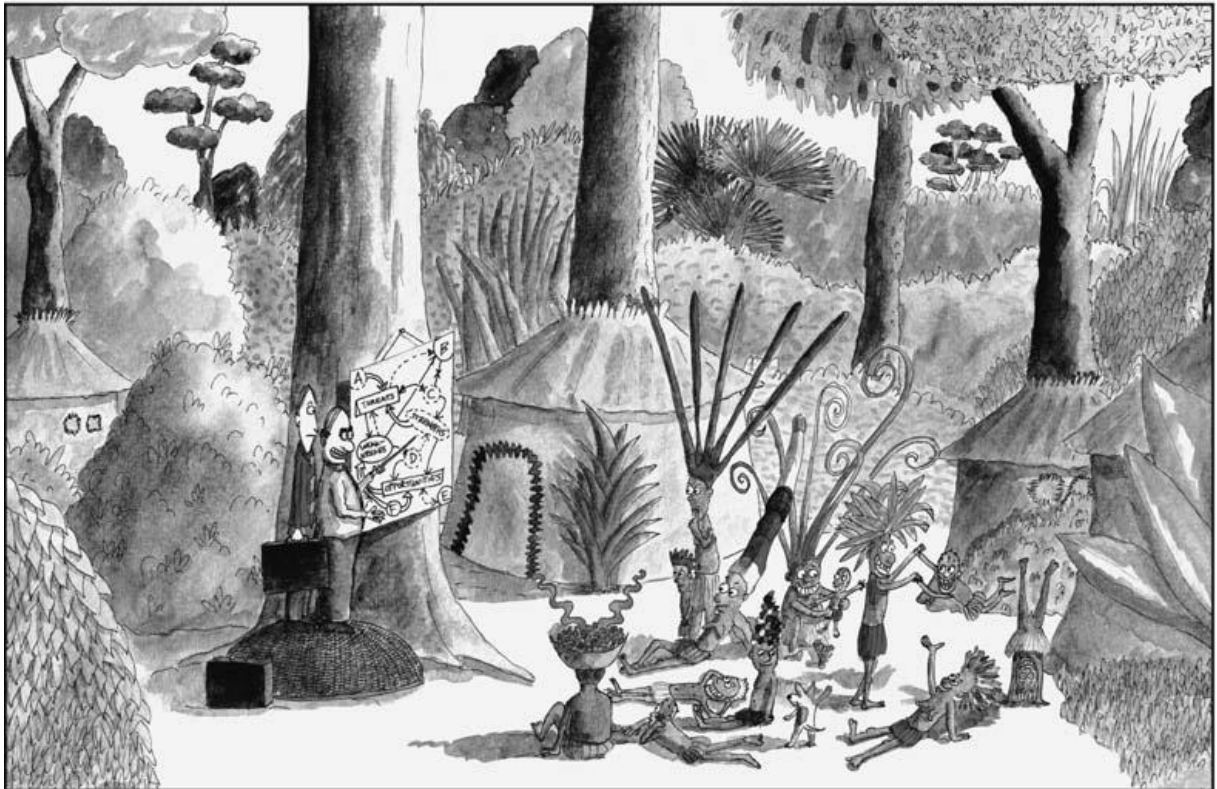
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Victor Georget, interview, Isla Colón, Bocas del Toro, Panamá. March 8, 2010.

## Appendix 1

Figure



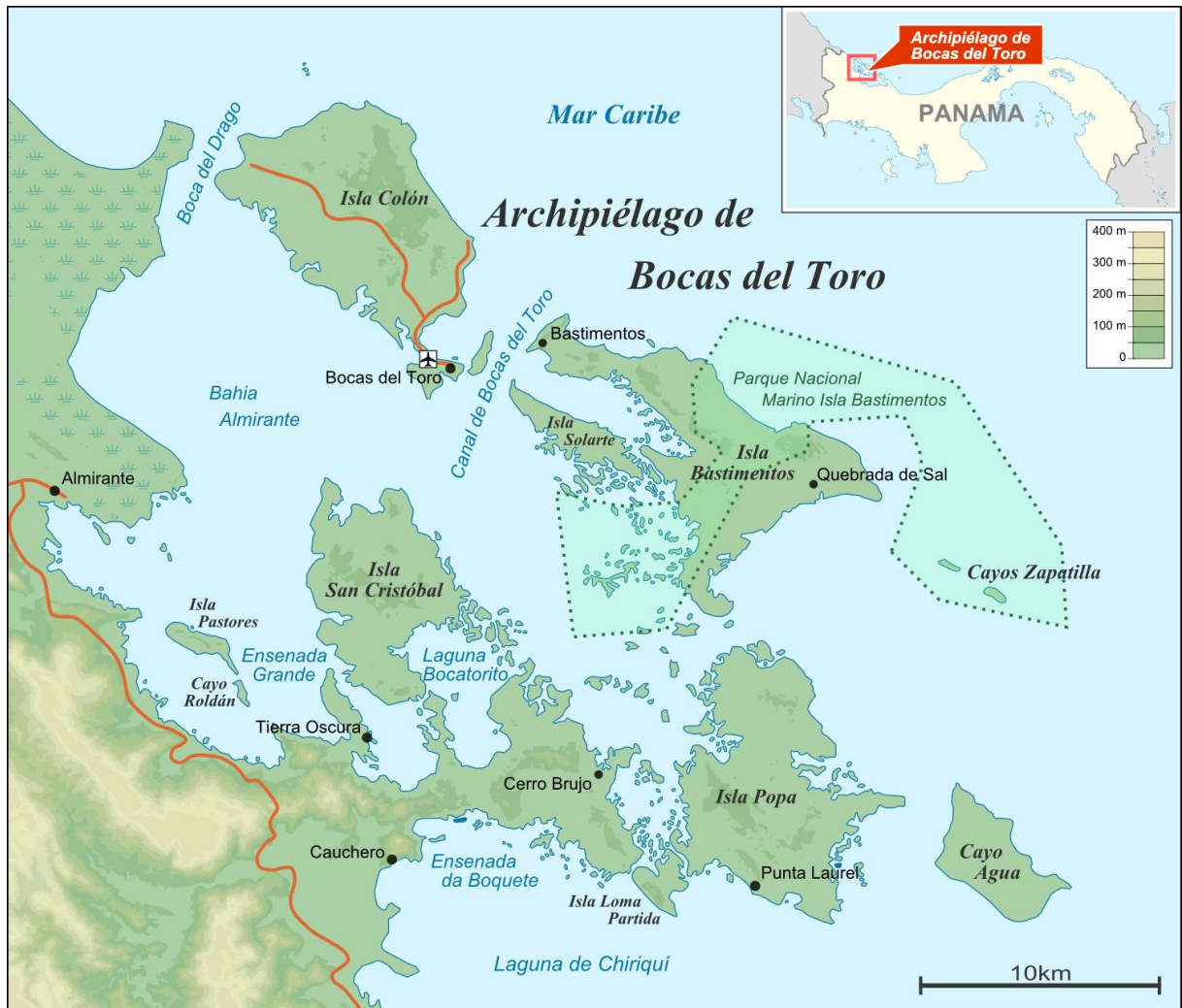
*We started with Participatory Community Development...*

*but they did not fully participate.*

(Source: Mowforth & Munt, 2009: 227)

## Appendix 2

### Map of Bocas del Toro archipelago



(Source: [www.bocaspanama.com](http://www.bocaspanama.com))

## **Appendix 3**

### **Exact interview questions for the local residents**

#### *Regarding development...*

1. What does development mean to you?
2. What are the priorities/most important things in your life?
3. How is local welfare represented in this community?
4. What do you and this community value in life?
5. What comes into your mind when you think about this place (home, town or island)?
6. Do you trust other local residents in this community? Do you trust the authorities? Do you trust foreign settlers or tourists?
7. What kind of support does this community get from the authorities or other external agencies?

#### *Regarding perceptions...*

1. What are your perceptions towards tourism development in Bocas del Toro or Bastimentos?
2. How was life here before tourism arrived?
3. How has tourism affected (changed) your home environment and your lives?

#### *Regarding participation...*

1. Would tourism be part of the Bastimentos you dream of?
2. How would you like tourism to be developed here on this island?
3. How do you think the community could participate in tourism development?
4. Would you like to be part of decisions-making and planning when it comes to developing your community through tourism?

#### *Regarding social capital...*

5. Do informal community meetings take place here at times?
6. Have you created any social groups, networks, associations or projects within this community?
7. Do you have (close) contact and collaborate with other communities on this island or in this archipelago?
8. Have you participated in community surveys, protests or taken initiatives/actions for improving this community the way the residents want it to be developed?

## Appendix 4

### Exact interview answers from all respondents

#### Interview with ATP (Autoridad de Turismo de Panamá)

Jenny Mair (Regional Coordinator) 2.3.2010, Panamá City

Although we are the governmental authority of tourism in the country and we have a powerful influence, we still don't have the last word. Tourism goes around everything in the government (infrastructure, hospitals, bridges etc). ATP tries to have the most power to create jobs through tourism and sustain tourism, but not easy when you don't have the last word. ATP has to come to an agreement with ANAM (Autoridad Nacional del Ambiente), who is a very powerful force in this country, with Autoridad Maritimas and of course the local people. And here is where the problem particularly arises; ATP has to admit that sometimes the locals are actually the worst, since locals believe it is their land to govern through their own 'comarca' rules... The government gave them power and land to build their own little country inside and this land is very valuable and ideal for tourism plans and they are not willing to share it, especially with the white people.

#### *Are you trying to let them be part of decision-making and participate in planning?*

\* We try to put sense into these people by making them understand that they would have a better chance for education, living and working conditions, vacations etc. through the tourism industry on their land.

\* They are trying to create small businesses, such as boating, transportation, tourist guides...

First they have to come to terms with these people to be able to construct their future, but it is incredibly hard, since the locals don't want to lose their cultural traditions and they remain speaking the same language they have probably spoken for the last 10.000 years

\* They have to do major changes; if the locals don't know what they have in three days (don't plan the future), if the locals don't take shower in four weeks, if the locals steal food from the beach or river, One has to make conscious and make them aware before anything, ATP are not willing to share a land that is not suitable for tourists to come and get sick – ATP has to work and change the locals mentality (not so much their traditions...) they have to make a bond with the locals and teach them, since they don't think inclusive (water, clothing...). The locals are so much behind when it comes to modernity. ATP can work anything around the government, train them to become guides or other work such as in hospitals, but if the locals don't want to participate or take part in working opportunities and lack the interest for the environment or tourism, it won't work.

#### *Is this for one community in particular or the whole area in general?*

This takes place all over the archipelago, since it's mainly an Indian reservation.

#### *Do you think these reactions and negative interest might be due to mega tourism projects (such as RFBP) owned by foreigners who come in and buy their land and build luxury for Westerners?*

No, the only thing they are destroying is the little red frogs.

Of course there has to be security, and this resort/enclave is meant for foreigners – but the locals can use the red frog beach.

#### Denis Alfonso Couto (Regional Coordinator)

#### *In what ways could the local residents get more involved and participate in the decision-making and planning of tourism development?*

To be honest, the majority or Bocatoreños (locals of Bocas) are lazy; they don't like to work.

They have attractive sights, beaches, forests but they don't realize it themselves and therefore they are not doing anything about it. The foreigners are the ones managing and starting the tourism businesses such as hotels, restaurants and attractions (e.g. adventure tourism) but the locals don't do anything.

*Why do you think it is like this?* Hard to say, maybe the islands, the sea, coconuts... Because of old relaxed lifestyle and mentality.

#### *Even if you explain the benefits tourism can bring them; work, money, education, better facilities – it still doesn't work or affect them?*

They are impudent people, who do not exploit what they have in the area. A lot of people do not like to do anything; they are hanging out at the parks all day long, watching the day pass by. Why? Because of old relaxed lifestyle and mentality. ATP offers support through promotion and training. I have personally gone eight times to Bocas to train tourism guides, and only ONE is working as guide now! After that many times and efforts I will not go any more, since it is clearly a waist of my time. Of course it bothers me that most of the hotels are owned by foreigners (mostly North Americans) since they are not 'nationalists' and their money does not stay in the destination. The foreigners do not cultivate/nurture the product they have in the best or most sustainable way, they just leave the environment dirty, lack the prediction for the future and are just living the way they want to. Most of the locals are still working within the Banana plantage company, and the rest are just sitting on their butts watching the days pass by. The supermarkets are run by the Chinese and other businesses by foreigners, and they are all independent.

*But what about projects concerning community-based tourism, where the community doesn't have to be directly working with tourism but they are involved and the money stays in their locations in order to develop and sustain the area?* That it is very difficult to get around, since the situation is that they don't like to work nor participate.

**Victor Georget** (ATP, responsible of the regional office in Bocas del Toro) 8.3.2010, Isla Colón, Bocas del Toro

***What have you achieved so far (activities) in order to cultivate sustainable tourism here, particularly the communities, local residents and their social lives?***

Since we are quite new here (I have only been in office for six months) with a new name and office, we are only starting. But we are trying to have good communication with as many as possible. We try to contact and get to know the local communities on all the islands.

We want to create small local businesses. We arrange meetings where we promote this (now we have 15 members). The new thing we have recently started is that the government will give a loan of 500-1000 US\$ to locals in order for them to establish their own business, either within tourism or something else. We try not to sell any more land to foreigners or outsiders, which is a new regulation. A lot has already been sold, but what is left we need to make sure the local inhabitants can create something on their land.

But one has to understand that all this development takes a long time, and we have a long way to go still.

***Do you know if there exist social networks and other cultural groups or activities here?***

There are community groups already, such as handicraft networks for women within or across communities. We have contact with many of them. Then some communities have started with some kind of ecological community-driven tourism activity. If I get a group of tourists who contact or visit me here and wants to have something tranquil, authentic and ecological, I always send groups to these communities that can offer such things (on the condition that the community has space, room or time). Then they arrange a big cultural festival every year in May, which will take place here in Bocas Town, but it is for the whole province.

We work a lot together with the nature and environment, within different projects or initiatives. The social and cultural aspects are not as important yet. This is mostly because people here have not realized what they can do with their place mixed with tourism. We work a lot together with the nature and environment, within different projects or initiatives. The social and cultural aspects are not as important yet. This is mostly because people here have not realized what they can do with their place mixed with tourism. We try to contact and get to know the local communities on all the islands. We want to create small local businesses. We arrange meetings where we promote this (now we have 15 members). The new thing we have recently started is that the government will give a loan of 500-1000 US\$ to locals in order for them to establish their own business, either within tourism or something else. We try not to sell any more land to foreigners or outsiders, which is a new regulation. A lot has already been sold, but what is left we need to make sure the local inhabitants can create something on their land. But one has to understand that all this development takes a long time, and we have a long way to go still.

**Interview with Bocas Sustainable Tourism Alliance (BSTA) – Alexandra Dennis, 5.3.2010, Bocas Town**

***What is your main task as an alliance?***

As we are such a new organization our main focus right now is to keep the office open and keep the alliance going, because we are given a grant (by USAID and SOLIMAR international), but it's going to run out soon. Thus, our main task is to get new and different kinds of members (annual membership) to join the alliance (hotels, businesses, tour operators and communities) in order to continue stay open and function. Since we are new in the community we need to make people aware of our existence. We work with our website and web portal with information of the communities here, activities to do, hotels in town (that are their members) and then the office in town, which functions as a general tourist office as well and small boutique with locally made organic products. The other function we have is the alliance.

***Is there a particular issue or priority currently on the agenda?***

What we really want to do and focus on is to promote already existing and potential sustainable tourism businesses in the area. We have been doing beach-clean ups and waste-management, which has given us credibility within the community. "Move the dump" project was successful, where we pushed the issue of recycling and got trash bins outside in the streets. We got a ban on catching one type of lobster that is already quite extinct in the area, and spread the info to all their members – the restaurants who serve this lobster will be fined.

***What has been the biggest achievement so far?***

Since we've just started the fact that we are still functioning here and getting new members is great. There hasn't been anything like this in Bocas before and it is really needed, so we still have a lot of work to do, once we get settled a bit more. We want to go out to all the islands and communities and talk to the locals, let them know about us, learn about them, establish contacts, connections and relationships.

***In the future, how could you focus more on the socio-cultural impacts?***

For instance on the island San Christobal the indigenous women have started a crafts group called "Mesi hablado" where they get to preserve their cultural customs at the same time as having an economic opportunity, which has turned into a sort of CBT project, since they get respectful people to visit, and the money stays there.

## **Interview with an environmental and community activist, Iker Lasa, 7.3.2010, Bocas Town, Isla Colón**

### ***How did you end up in Bahía Honda, and what did you there?***

For the past 18-20 years I have come various times to Bocas del Toro because of my career; I'm a commercial diver. In addition, I have a lot of knowledge within ocean and marine biology, so I came here because of the scientific research institute Smithsonian. Before Bocas was a place with peaceful atmosphere and open houses with amazing people welcoming everyone who passed by. Now that is all gone however. Even if it was poor it was beautiful, with nice and proud people. It was like a place back in time, which is hard to find in the world these days. Then one time when I came back, I got a huge shock when I saw what had happened to the islands during the few years I was gone. Suddenly there were more supermarkets, gringos, sports-bars etc., because of tourism development. I could hear gringos talk about them taking over this place and replacing the locals, since they are the only thing in the way between them and the land. Clearly this made me wake up, and it triggered many thoughts within me. In reality it showed me the aspect of the gringos and the purpose of why and what they are coming here for.

One day I was sitting in a bar and I could hear a couple of gringos talking in the table behind me. They were saying how the problem of Bocas were the damn Indians and Panamanians, and continued by saying sarcastically that what they need to do is put them all on a ship and sink it, because that is the only thing in the way between them and the land. Clearly I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It made me so angry and shocked, and it triggered so many thoughts within me. In reality it showed me the aspect of the gringos and the purpose of why and what they are coming here for. Back then one of my best friends was the director of The Nature Conservancy in Panamá. They came looking for me and asked me to apply for work in their organization because they actually needed someone here in Bocas to manage this whole area. Even if I have never studied ecology, we still shared the same ambition and passion for the environment. During this time (around 2005) I met some friends who were living in Bahía Honda, and so I moved there with them. While getting to know the place (together with The Nature Conservancy people) and community (like Rutilio Milton), we found out about these Americans and their new project called Red Frog Beach Club, who were taking over the place. In one of their first meetings initiated by the RFBC team, the community wanted me to be there since by then I had won their trust and become like a local. The same was for Henry (Enrique from Peru) who had started an eco-lodge in Bahía Honda, who I met the first time through these meetings. When I heard the Americans say at the meeting that they are going to start an ecological project and build 900 homes next to the National Park, I knew from the first surreal moment that they were manipulatively misleading the local community. From that day forward I started attending all their meetings. I realized that the man who represented the RFBC people was an idiot. We had long discussions and heated arguments where I accused them for so many things. Fine you can go and make your case, but there was no basic respect whatsoever for these local people and in reality they were just taking advantage of the community.

After all this Henry and I started talking, getting more involved with the community, supporting and fighting for them and their rights. Why? Because at that moment the only thing the community was complaining, and these people hardly ever complain, was that they wanted to do an ecological impact study. However, when you do one of these studies one has to have all the residents' or neighbours' approval for presenting the results and everyone has to agree on this. Obviously, the RFBC neighbours did not approve since they wanted to build a huge marina there and basically surround the entire community. There is a trail passing through the whole community going to Henry's eco-lodge. However, the RFBC people came in, put a fence right across it and closed it. In Panamá there are actually laws about this, when there is an ancient trail that someone has been using for ages, they should have the right to use it. And that is something that should be respected; even if an outsider buys the property the locals should still be able to use it. But in this case, the foreigners just went in and put a fence. There are actually signs in the jungle of Bastimentos, where you see signs saying "If you trespass this property you will be prosecuted by the Oregon law" (i.e. in USA).

### ***How is it possible that the RFB project could even buy the land where the community's school is?***

It turned out that the square where the school is was actually the only piece of land the locals owned as a community. Everything else surrounding it is today owned by the RFBC people. But the community has been used to using the land around where for instance their football field for their kids is, since the previous owners allowed them to use it. But then there was a teacher in charge of the school who was bought by the RFBC project. What she then did was asked the whole community to put money to go and register the land and everything else, in case something happened they would have it all organized in paperwork. Then she went and put the land in the name of the Ministry of Education, since they own the law of all the schools. So, this way the RFB team got to deal with the authorities who then were able to sell the piece of land of the school to them, on the condition that the project would build a new school for the community. Of course this school would be somewhere further away down the island. That is how they got a hold of that piece of land. But they are still going to continue go to school there. One of the saddest things was when one of the projects bulldozers run over and killed four kids on their way to school.

After seeing all this I became part of The Nature Conservancy organization and we started fighting for real, together with the community and other NGO's. But in reality the RFBC project is only a small part of the general problem; an economical model that consists of simple business of buying land as cheap as possible, speculate on it, convince an idiot to buy it for more, sell it and leave to redo it somewhere else. In this whole equation, which is the fastest way to make money, the human factor is not considered or involved; it doesn't respect or take into account that there is a community right next to or on a property, or that there is history on the place, or a national park next to it or animals that only exist in that jungle. The formula doesn't contemplate any of this, because it doesn't matter since it's all about making profits. The system in itself demands things like this to happen, and it has nothing to do with development. In the case of RFBC they came in so strong

that they nearly even had a police force (around 50 people) of their own. Back then there were actually Indians killed, since they didn't want to sell their land, and in those days there weren't really any laws here.

Now it has changed a bit thanks to us and other activists who have fought for this place. As a result, I have to this day nine dead threats on me, by people involved in foreign projects. On my initiative, The Nature Conservancy together with lawyers took them to court here in Panamá and sewed them. We have done it so many times that they have ended up broke and they actually don't have money left to finish the project. We researched a lot and presented a case in court saying that the constitution of Panamá, which they luckily can't go against, states that there needs to exist a balance of power, meaning the decision-making needs to be well-made and based on all the facts. And we proved in the court that there was no balance of power when the RFBC project made the decisions. Thus, the phase one of the project is still on hold, and after a long break phase two has gradually continued since ANAM approved it (even if they shouldn't have, but the problem is that they are also kidnapped by the system, it is a formality they have to go through to respond to their interest). But thanks to us a lot of plans have been stopped and denied, such as the big marina, a golf course, the amount of villas etc., which people don't realize. Because the sad reality is that the original plans by RFBC project was to create a boom of being the new Cancun (the over-exploited and destroyed resort destination by the Caribbean coast of Mexico). Thankfully, that never happened. We made a lot of effort and did a lot of things to fight them. We made a public town meeting with the mayor and a lot of local people attended. The question discussed was: what do we, as local people, want our development to be; do we want to be the new Cancun or do we want to be something of a community tourism. Obviously the result was that no-one wanted a new Cancun, but rather a more ecological, as well as social and cultural based tourism projects.

Probably the solution we came up with, which everyone here in Bocas foresaw, was to create a land use plan, meaning grabbing the whole territory of Bocas and make 'zonifications' to the place. All the scientific information that exist here in Bocas, due to the research done by the institute Smithsonian since the 1940's and 50's, is so unique in the world since it doesn't exist anywhere else. So with all this science here we used it on our side to make our point clear; sustainability, conservation, to get buffer zones, referring to the national park and rules for how to use certain areas and spaces. And hence we had the whole science behind us backing our case for conservation. And nobody likes rules here because if you have rules one has to play fair. So, this whole case became a whole other fight with more pressure and bigger issue. Basically we realized that the enemy here is an intelligent rule that is beyond discussion. In a sense, we are all part of this big corrupted system that is hard to change. Unfortunately many people think the reality is that in order for them to do business here one has to be corrupted and that there is no other way to do it if you follow the law.

Once a local politician came and said to me: "It sounds fabulous what you are saying about these local people that they should be united as one, that they should be prepared for the tourism that is coming, and that there should be more tools and opportunities for them to develop their own island" but he continued "be careful with the people who can manage the circumstances, because if a person with millions of dollars comes and wants to do a project, he is going to need a lot of cheap labour, but if everyone is happy with their own little businesses, who is then going to work for them? So, we have to manage the circumstances ourselves, hence create other work for locals". All these issues, and the fighting and problems we have caused have lead to that the Panamanian Minister of Tourism is sick and tired of hearing about Bocas. He doesn't want to have anything to do with this place and its conflicts. But we don't care; we are going to continue our work. For instance, right now we are talking with the present mayor and we are actually trying to structure out an environmental department in the municipality to start managing a lot of unprotected nature here. We need to preserve a lot of areas that have been or could be under the risk to be taken over by some projects. Luckily the current mayor is interested in this land use plan idea that we have initiated. So, if he adopts and passes it through it will be law, which of course is very powerful here. As a result, everyone who will come here to buy land will simply have to leave empty handed.

Bocas is finally starting to realize what the future might look like if a lot won't be done. We are now in the moment of having the opportunity to start managing and planning this area as it should. But we need to secure the basis, and have the law on our side. We need to have a structure so that the local people who live here can demand things to happen, which never has happened or existed here. The tool for the future is to create the environmental department (link to the authorities), together with all the NGO's, Smithsonian research institute, and other people interested and concerned. Furthermore, what urgently needs to be done is to actually push the land use plan, because that in itself will deny outsiders the right to buy land/property. No matter how much money they offer, if it is inside an area of regulations and scientific conservation with unique animals and nature, there is nothing they can do. In many cases it will not always be a complete denial, but it will direct how they will develop the area; in a more sustainable way that conserves the environment and its people.

***How do you think the locals could get more involved (and hence be part of the decision-making)?***

It is a difficult issue, as it touches upon a cultural problem. As the banana industry declined and a lot of people moved away, this area was sort of forgotten. Throughout the past, local people have witnessed the process of changes coming in and out for so long, such as a big earthquake, and hence suddenly speculators were here and for some period the area was attractive all over again. All of this has made the locals develop this kind of passive attitude. They might agree with you completely, and back you up, but when you ask them to go and take some action nothing will happen. This applies especially to the Afro-Caribbeans. The Indians have learnt a whole lot more and gradually adopted new attitudes, which might be due to their different mentality. The last advice the previous chief of the Ngöbe community gave to his people was to reproduce, in order to grow and get political power.



## **Interview with a local resident from Isla Colón working with environmental impacts, Luis Mou, 6.3.2010**

### ***What is your background of working within environmental impacts and tourism?***

Around 1996-98 the first tourists starting to arrive, and in 2000 tourism started develop a bit more with the first hotels being built. During one year eight hotels were built within the same little neighbourhood area (a few blocks) here in Bocas town. The transformation was very strong, since it happened all very fast. Back then it was really cheap to buy land here which was one of the reasons why this area became so attractive for foreigners, especially Americans. There were some tourism projects that started but many did not get realized in the end due to financial or other problems. Since 2005, there haven't been any mega projects launched here except for the Red Frog Beach Club project, which is more seen as a residential project rather than a tourism project. Some bigger resorts that has been built or are under construction is Popa Paradise on the Popa Island and a Hotel resort with around 200 rooms on Tortuga (Turtle) Beach. These are all owned by foreigners. All the rest are very small projects.

Due to tourism Bocas del Toro has changed completely. Before the economy was slow and all were employed by the government or municipality (or Bananas), all the locals stores were by the Chinese. Now the economy is active and boosting of various work opportunities for locals, and that is good. When settlers moved here from outside around 1993-1994 they brought development with them, for instance cars.

With the RFBC project initially many locals got work, but their qualifications of knowledge and how to build was not professional and good enough for the Americans, so in the end most of the employees are brought from outside (around 400 workers), either the capital (inner land) or from abroad. In the beginning they did all at once and wanted to finish/realize the project as fast as possible. The marketing and promotion was huge; they brought in charter planes with people to present and show the area, their plans, what they were doing to try to sell, and initially they did sell a lot of them (almost 60% of them). But since the project did not meet the requirements (e.g. working conditions and salaries) set up by authorities like ANAM, they had to pay many fines of 150 000 US\$ and in the end they had used all their money. So, the whole project seized/stopped for almost a year. And now when they've started again and continued with the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase they are building one villa at a time, slowly and in various stages. This project is strictly under environmental studies of the maximum category (3). It has been under public consultation various times and meetings with the local inhabitants have taken place. Since it is a third category the project has to call for a public meeting/forum and invite locals to join where they present the project goals and results, and here the local residents get to ask questions, and might get their say through. This happened through the protests of the Bahia Honda community residents who, by arguing that it was affecting the environment too much since the project was bordering the island's national park, took the project team (owners) to the Supreme Court of justice, and fell some geographical locations and plans the project had as objectives.

To fight projects like RFBC different institutions/organizations/associations has to be present, and here in Bocas there is not a strong representation of institutions. Furthermore, sad to say, the people here are very loose (relaxed) and they don't seem to care much about these things. Why? It is their mentality, living day by day, not doing the best they can out of their work or life – not very reliable, hard-working people. They don't care about tomorrow, they only think about the present moment. Many of them are still living in that old way of lifestyle, with not much worries or the need for necessities. And during this last decade tourism has become the major and number one dependent economy which has transformed the islands so rapidly. However, many locals (mostly the older ones) are not thinking in this way, or they are only starting to get used to this development. The newer generation is realizing this but the towns and general area should be much better prepared.

Bastimentos before was only dependent on the Banana company (now Chiquita). They even transported around 150 people with boats especially for them mornings and evenings. They could earn up to 400-500 UD\$ per week! But then later the company changed their working systems, with cooperation and most of the work became automatic. So it was a huge change for them to get used to, since they were mostly fishermen or in agriculture growing their land. So in that terms tourism has brought significant work for many of them, through renting their rooms, starting hostels, several boats for private transportation, since that is the only way to get from island to island.

But when it comes to new forms of tourism such as Community-based tourism, I see it very hard and challenging to get something like that started. Mostly because the thing is we did not choose tourism, tourism chose us, and we just had to go with it. It arrived here when we hardly knew what it was. And back then there weren't much presence of tourism organizations or institutions like ATP (before IPAT) to help out. Less than 5% of all the hotels in the area are owned by local residents, the rest are by foreigners. This was because before when tourism started growing it was all very unorganized and irresponsible. There were neither plans nor management for the development of tourism. Tourism planners did not really exist here and the authorities like the government did not support local participation, and had not thought out or considered the sustainable aspect of it. Now there are finally regulations to follow, and hence more paperwork and bureaucracy to go through first.

For me it's very important to keep up the local identity and traditions, e.g. the architectural style of building houses – but not everyone agree and as a result ugly, horrible cement buildings can be found in some places here. Before there were no rules of how to build a house here, now it is a bit stricter.

### ***Do you get together with the community for local/public meetings where you discuss various issues?***

No, the people are not organized here.

There exists a chamber of tourism but it needs to be reorganized again. Out of more than 60 hotels only around 2-3 are members. Thus, it has never been able to unify or organize the tourism businesses here. Now there are luckily new organizations recently emerging such as the alliance (BSTA) and INBOCA (a project by the Nature foundation). But these

are all founded and initiated by outsiders or foreigners. Of course there are some locals, including me, participating in the meetings or planning.

There has been a lot of conflicts with the land tenure, land use and the fact that one piece of land can have been sold three times always for a higher price. More importantly, tourism has brought negative impacts into this area. The habits and cultural customs have changed immensely, particularly amongst the youth. They get affected by the image of foreigners and assume that they always live this relaxed life, but what they don't know or consider is that when the backpackers or surfers go back home they work for many years to earn that vacation. There's not much training or education for youths here. The school is trying to develop and improve the opportunities for locals who don't have resources to send their kids further away to universities after high school. In order for these youths to have some kind of idea or knowledge of what to do after having finished high school, the public sector would need to start with a lower level of technical and practical career education/training, within e.g. administration or tourism. They actually have plans to open this kind of new institute here in Bocas, but many of the teachers here resist the idea because they don't want a change, they want things to be like they've always been.

When we established the national park on Bastimentos, the local indigenous community nearby (Salt Creek) was completely against us who were part of the planning and designing team. Back then they did not understand the reason behind founding a national park there, mostly because they couldn't continue cutting down trees within those set borders. They claimed it would affect them and their lives greatly. In addition, they were totally disunited. For instance, when we came to build them a pier/dock nobody from the community came and helped us out. They were not a unified community, and one group were completely separated from the rest and showed total apathy. We got an NGO (Nature foundation) to support them and gave them some financial aid to start community tourism, to build a ranch with accommodation (a couple of rooms and a bathroom) and a restaurant. Yet, it was impossible to organize it since we only got a small group of them to participate who did not represent the community as a whole. We completed with all the constructions, but since the local organizing was missing, the project died/fell in the end. One can see that recently they've slowly started to understand and realize what tourism is, and what they can do with it. They've changed their mentality. Now this community has many small tourism projects going on and a handicrafts shop. But yet nothing is constructed or represented by the whole community. For instance now there are three paths/routes in their area (besides some natural ones) but they are all built only by a few residents.

But when it comes to big projects like RFBC, they sort of have the capacity to unite and come together to protest and have public meetings. A couple of women who are born here have started a community board (junta comunal) because they try to fight for their rights of belonging here for years, but they don't represent all the communities in this archipelago. Not everyone's voice gets heard, since a chamber of tourism and an organization that represents or unifies the whole archipelago is missing. But now with the new alliance there is hope that this can be improved, and things can gradually be done differently in the future. But at the same time it is very difficult since the voices being heard are apathetic or lacks interest, and this is even so within the existing chamber of tourism.

For me the Afro-Caribbean's are a particular group of people, and since they've always been together yet outside the society, it is hard for them to change. But now with external influences and mentality – foreigners visiting or settling into their community and the amount of tourism/tourists growing – it is hopefully going to make them see things differently. Before Bastimentos town was very dirty, with a lot of waist and trash/garbage that the locals threw everywhere. There was no kind of organizing the waist or fixing the water system, because they had their own way of drinking and fixing the water... but someone had to clean the tanks etc, but there was nobody who was worried or concerned about that. And if it was plugged/tapped/closed they waited for someone from the health department or another outsider to come and fix it instead of fixing and dealing with it themselves, due to laziness. But now thanks to foreign influence and initiative (an American settler concerned about the environment and community), they have organized plastic bags for the locals to throw it in them instead of into the nature, gather the bags at a point where they will be picked up once a week by a garbage boat to transport them to the 'dump' of Bocas (on the main island... a whole other issue/problem and case by itself...). So, one could say that thanks to tourism (since tourists and trash don't go well together) and foreign settlers, the community is cleaner and more taken care of.

**History/background of Bocas...** Bocas had its golden age/era in the 1890's until around 1920's, when the banana corporation United Fruit Company started its business for real. Back then its main commercial center and head offices of the company were here in Bocas town on Isla Colón. The economy here was boosting back then, as the best in the country, with a lot of commerce, activity, transportation and ships going in and out with various products (besides bananas) like cacao were exported. (And this was a place that didn't even have any roads before this era.) Labour was another attractive driving-force for both domestic as well as foreign workers, such as more than 500 Chinese settlers (one of them being my grandfather). Everyone in Panamá and the nearby countries came here looking for work. This was the place you wanted to be in back then. They were even considering this town to become the capital of the entire country due to the Banana economy. That of course changed it all when the canal was built in the beginning of the 1900's, which made Panamá City the capital and the main commercial centre of the country. The peak time or boom of Bocas lasted almost until the 1960's-70, after which the economy dropped/sank/declined greatly and all the activity became slow. Although the slow mentality still remains in some cases and areas here, the economy has definitely diversified and become activated again because of tourism.

Back in 1992-93 I was in a project called 'Frontera agrícola' (border farm) where I brought a couple of fishermen from different communities here in Bocas (Salt Creek and Carenero Island) to the country of Belize. The idea was for them to get familiar with similar local fisherman there (both caught and sold e.g. lobster) and to show them literally/practically how the Belizeans had succeeded in transforming their activity from fishing to tourism. I got them together with various organizations

of ‘boatsmen’ for more insights. However, the difference was that the bank in Belize supported their fishermen with an initial credit that had a ‘kind’ interest rate, for the purpose of buying a boat and a motor. In addition, they trained, consulted and facilitated them in Belize, in contrast with Panamá and Bocas del Toro where none of this took place. With the amount of tourism and the support from higher institutions the fishermen in Belize changed their attitudes and activities, and started working as tourism guides on boat tours. These locals realized that this activity/business gave them more income and deposit into their bank accounts than going out fishing for a whole day. When we came home from Belize the project was terminated, since the money was finished. Moreover, this was all before tourism had arrived to Bocas, so it was all very new and unfamiliar. Today when I see the men they still remember that experience, and say that if they had been organized in a proper way, they would have had it so much better now, with an own boat and well-established and consolidated business.

Now however, there are numerous boats all over Bocas but a common regulation and control is missing. If there is a big event (festival or carnival) happening in Bocas that attracts a lot of visitors from outside, everyone wants to do the same excursions, e.g. to watch (follow) dolphins or go snorkeling to Cayo Coral. But there is no limit or control of how many of the 100 boats or people can go on these tours at the same time, which puts a lot of pressure on the animals and nature, and their environmental carrying capacity becomes too small under this stressful atmosphere. A system and policy plan for how to meet this carrying capacity is completely missing. For me it is a very sensitive/delicate topic and situation, since having more than 10-15 boats following and circling a couple of dolphins all day long, every single day, or having 100, sometimes 200, tourists snorkeling within the same area frequently, is evidently mistreating the nature and its animals. They should have had some sort of general monitoring, supervision or policy how to go about from the start. Even more they would clearly need a manual or code of conduct, of what the boatsmen can and cannot do in their excursions in order to avoid ill-treating the animals. We who are part of the new alliance (BSTA) want to establish this kind of monitoring or policy. We wanted to bring in an experienced group of people from a foundation in Costa Rica, but unfortunately we couldn’t find funding for that initiative, since it would have been a seminar of two to three days. But we are going to continue dealing with this issue and try to achieve at least awareness. However, we can’t change the law, the authorities do that, and in this case it would be the institution ARAP (Autoridad de Recursos Acuáticos de Panamá) that is present, yet not active nor aware. The same goes for the tourism authorities ATP (Autoridad de Turismo de Panamá) who only has one director here in Bocas and who, together with his secretaries, knows nothing about tourism (has been six months in office). How can one then expect support from an authority such as ATP? We can’t get very far with that. It is all very political – to come here one has to work a lot within politics and have contacts to the current mayor. Yet, when they come they know nothing. What’s worse, the person in office before him was a nurse – a nurse! The functions of ATP are more for the hotels; gathering them, giving them information or consultation, and do a plan of work. But they are not covering even close to the majority of the people, or sitting down with the communities on a grassroots level. Clearly, this is all a bit frustrating. This place needs someone (mostly referring to the politicians and the mayor who has the power) who really cares about this area and its communities, and invests in them (The former mayors, particularly two of them in the 1990’s were completely corrupted, doing illegal business, did a lot of damage for this place and one even went to prison for a year).

[Playa Primera (Whizzard beach) on Bastimentos (about 2km long) had 30 properties, which were all for sell. In 1997 an American came and bought them all, the whole beach. And what’s worse he bought each property for 1000 US\$ (!). However, today the properties are up to millions of dollars and with the changed law, the right to process, he is not the owner of the beach but has the right to use the land behind it. But this is only if he has a presentable tourism product plan of what to do with the area that is suitable and feasible to develop. And this requires money and resources.]

**Conclusion:** there is neither interest nor knowledge nor support of authorities for local tourism initiatives, participation, planning or management – adding to that the worst issue is the general lazy mentality of the locals. However, tourism has brought in employment (more work and hence more active economy) and public infrastructure, which the government has had to invest in to improve the water system, roads, privatization of electricity etc. So in one way the general living conditions have improved due to tourism.

**Interview with foreign settlers in Bahía Honda, Enrique (Henry) Escudero & Margaret Ann** (owners of La Loma, an ecological jungle lodge and chocolate farm, a community-based tourism venture)

**Questions about La Loma:**

- *When did you start the eco-lodge?*

Margaret and I moved here in August of 2003 and opened for business in August 2005.

- *How did you accomplish doing it?*

We took our time and hired only local builders, and used local materials to build our structures. We also planted many fruit trees and native hardwood trees.

- *What were the biggest challenges?*

Being an island, materials acquisition and transportation was always a challenge. The weather too as it rains a lot in Bocas.

- *Was the local indigenous community initially favourable or more resentful or suspicious towards your tourism idea?*

Some members, especially Rutilio Milton, were suspicious in the beginning and others were just happy for the work or unconcerned. Once Milton realized that we had similar ideal and concerns (sustainability, concern for the environment and preservation of local culture, etc.) we became good friend collaborators.

- Was it hard to get the local community involved/to participate in your project?

Not really. They all wanted jobs so it was easy to get everyone involved. We've never fired anyone and many of our employees have been with us since 2003.

#### **Questions about Bahía Honda and the Ngöbe community:**

- What was their main income or what did they mainly produce before tourism arrived?

They were mostly subsistence farmers some with large farms, although most sold off much of the land to foreigners. They were also avid fishermen and accomplished lobster divers. Some worked for the few afro-Caribbean farmers in the area.

- Do they get any financial donations or other support/help from external agencies, authorities or NGO's?

The Bahia Honda restaurant which Milton manages was started with a grant from the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Program, funded by the World Bank. There were several other projects like this in other communities in the archipelago. Over the last few years the women have been receiving assistance from a government program called "Red de Oportunidad." I'm not really sure what it's about. Through a La Loma guest we were put in contact with the World Veterinary Congress out of Canada. Over the last 3 years they have given the community over \$45,000.00 US in order for 20 families to have 20 egg-laying hens, materials and feed. We have just recently applied for round 4 of funding and are going to begin producing our own feed from coconut pulp, a bi-product of the coconut oil manufacturing process. We can see the coconut oil in town.

- What is a 'comarca'? Does the Ngöbe community belong under a comarca? Does it mean that they have the rights and control for domestic purposes of their area?

Technically comarca means "region or area," although it can also be used as "shire or county." The Ngobe in association with the Bugle (a much smaller group on the north-eastern edge of the comarca) have a very large area of land that is their own. Officially it is almost completely autonomous but similarly to Native American reservations in the US the federal government often disregards this autonomy especially with regards to mineral rights. My understanding is as follows and this might not be entirely accurate: Private property is prohibited in the comarca and all land transactions are by common consent rather than by legal paperwork. This prevents the indigenous from selling their land to foreigners, a potentially good thing. However the government retains the right to sell beach-usage rights to foreign developers. So the result is that the indigenous can still have their land taken away from them but are not able to profit from it.

For the last several years there has been talk about "annexing" island communities to the comarca. Generally this has been favoured by the indigenous and some NGO's supporting them (I strongly suggest that you contact ACD Panama for lots more information), and rejected by everyone else. The last I heard Bahia Honda was being excluded for the annex because of its proximity to the Red Frog Project. To be honest I haven't heard much about the annex lately and am not sure what's going on.

#### **More questions on their community life and the affects of tourism:**

- In your perception, has the quality of life (or standard of living) in their community declined or improved due to tourism?

This is a hard question to answer because some things have been lost (roaming rights, cost of living has gone up) and some things gained. Overall it seems like people certainly have more income and as a result are living in healthier environments (e.g. using propane gas for cooking instead of fire wood; zinc roofs instead of thatched roofs) and they have more food and consumer items. The downside to this is that many of their traditions are being lost (e.g. thatch roofing; bag weaving; dress making), and they also spend money a lot of money on non-essential items like cell phone cards, perfume and DVD's. However, I don't think it is our place to tell them how to spend their money. It should be their choice.

- How did they avoid being replaced or resettled further down the island by the Red Frog Beach Club project?

The project's dealings with the community were never dealt with properly. In other words the project heads completely underestimated the resolve of the community and assumed that they would be easy to manipulate. They made constant promises that they never kept (boats, schools, clinics, land for everyone, water tanks). The community kept resisting any promises without seeing proof or money and in the end the project ran out of money and the global financial crisis killed whatever grand designs they had. This is not to say that the community could not have been bought (I think everyone has a price) it's just that Red Frog assumed that the Indians would be easy to take advantage of. They didn't understand that 500 years of oppression has made the Ngobe suspicious of newcomers with big promises.

- What techniques have they used to allow them to consultate or participate in decision-making concerning their land property and the environment, for ex. debate in either formal or informal meetings, public surveys, protests?

They are well organized and participate in meeting all the time, about land usage rights and their rights in general. They communicate a lot through radio announcements. In other words, meetings are advertised over the radio.

- Do they have much influence in decision-making?

Officially they have many rights and privileges that non-indigenous Panamanians don't have, but in practice they are completely ignored. There is a lot of racism in Panama and it's very much on the surface. The indigenous are at the bottom of the pecking order. There is good information on ACD's website and their facebook page. Last years several members of the Ngobe and the Naso went to Washington D.C. for a hearing of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The Panamanian ambassador the UN (or the US I'm not sure) was there and it was obvious that not only was he not interested in their grievances he openly disliked them.

- *Has the government or ATP or ANAM created any institutions or links to facilitate their participation?*  
On paper I'm sure they have but I haven't seen anything. Again most Latinos don't really like the indigenous.

- *Does there exist any social networks or local associations within their community?*  
There is the Parent Teacher Association which is through the school of course and then there is a local sports club.

- *Do they have any volunteer activities where the villagers join together for community work?*  
Yes. I know they get together to clean the school yard and to get the teacher's house ready for the New Year. They also have some system of "barn raising" where they will get together to help someone clean their farm or plant rice or harvest rice, etc.

- *Do they have links or good relationships with the other indigenous community (Salt Creek) on the island?*  
There are no officially bad relationships and they certainly get together for sports activities or parties, but the clan lines determine allegiances.

- *Do they interact or trust external agencies, people or organisations from outside?*  
Generally no, at least not at first. They have seen enough corruption and mismanagement from the government and its agencies that they are very cynical about them. Generally they are happy to work with NGO's and aid agencies. They tend to welcome Peace Corps volunteers.

**Interview with Dayra Powell** (school principal, teacher and active community member in Old Bank)

Me and my family have lived our whole lives here in Bastimentos town. I have been the principal of the local school since 2000. It started back in the beginning of the 1900's as an only English speaking school, when the area was very active with a lot of people living here. Then it was a private school for the Jamaican workers' children who came seasonally. In 1943 it was established as the local bilingual public school with Spanish and English as the teaching languages. Today the school has around 170 students, and everyone here goes to school for free; they have equal rights and opportunities. The government pays their monthly fees and supports them and the school with books, bags, uniforms and equipment. **Development?** For me it means progress, but with that comes two sides; positive and negative. We have to look forward to see the positive things and put the negative to the side, but not hide it.

**Priorities/what is important in life in this community?** First of all, that we should keep our culture and traditions. We have to keep up many of the core values and principles (showing respect, honesty/fairness, generosity and love) that we see are gradually losing/getting lost. Try to promote education always as the first priority in life. Through the school we have to start working with the young people, the next generation, because they are the future. All the time we try to teach them about our community's culture, background, where we come from, who we are. The teachers try to investigate on the history and ask me how this community got established, how everything started and where the name Bastimentos originates from (why it is called that).

**When you think about this island, town and community, what comes into your mind?**

Well, first I think about the positive things that used to be here the first time. There has been a lot of progress since then, but unfortunately a lot of good things have been lost. Before you could go anywhere and one was freer, but now most of the land is sold out as private properties wherever you go.

**Trust outside the community?** I feel like we have good contact with the government, and usually we trust the foreign settlers moving in here. Often it is outsiders (strangers) who help us, for instance an American group ENSOLARTE who all over the world supports many schools in remote areas. Right now we are getting English-speaking teachers supported by them. The local 'Fundación BESO' (The Bocas Educational Service Organization) is part of this group, and is looking for local funding, businesses or tourism entrepreneurs from Bocas del Toro to be involved in supporting financially the school with books, computers, feeding the kids and grants or scholarships for students to send them outside to study, who do not have sufficient money to pay it themselves. So sometimes we get people visiting to see where their support has gone to and get very happy when they see the result. And another American together with USAID has helped started a collection of the sewage and waist in this town.

But I believe we could work more and get more support, with for instance people like students from outside coming to visit, and bringing new stuff and equipment for the kids and school. And this of course is reciprocal since the visitors get to see how the kids work here. Right now I have a black people's community association in Panamá bringing us donations through sports uniforms for all the kids in school. And some friends in a black community organization in USA are sending things for the black kids here in this community. We get help and support from some outside, and we try to participate and get involved to collect trash for instance. The ecological research institute and laboratory here in Bocas, Smithsonian (which attracts a lot of foreigners from around the world), is an institution that has helped us a lot with a program at school during this whole year. In the end of the school year they made a seminar for all the teachers, to teach them about the conservation of the area in order to make it a topic or subject in school.

**What are your perceptions of tourism and its development here in Bastimentos?**

We used to work in school with a program of tourism, to make the kids aware of and know what tourism is. This way they would know in which month we have more tourists visiting, how to entertain and treat the tourists and most importantly to keep the island and town very clean. That is the positive affect/influence from the tourists, since they don't like to see trash. But I would not like the kids to imitate tourists when it comes to dressing and other behavior. It is important to explain to the kids that tourism is the future, and getting them prepared to work within this industry. And explain that all the hotels or

businesses in this town that are by native people, the money will stay here and not flow outside, so we will always have something to lean back on.

***How was life here before tourism arrived?***

Education, respect, values and principles were vitally important back in those days. This island was called the 'religious island' because of the importance of the church here. But I'm not saying that this is all because of tourism. It is because of progress and general change, hence modernity and globalization. With more building going on, influences from outside, the locals here craving different things. So, the negative changes have to do with more trash, less trust, houses built out of cement, the usage of drugs, crime and stealing. Now the kids don't have respect anymore, for instance before everyone greeted everyone when passing by and the community was closer. Now the youths are behaving differently and their attitudes are different in life. That has become much worse. Additionally, before only English was spoken here, but now there are a lot of influences from Spanish.

***How unified is this community?***

Well, before we didn't really have to work as a community or take care of each other since the United Fruit Company (bananas) took care of most of the people here. But since that ended, we have had to think more about ourselves and our fellow neighbours, and started coming more together as a unified community. We are trying to work on this, but it is hard. But the development that has taken place on Isla Colón would not happen here because we are more as a system.

***Does there exist any social gatherings, meetings, networks or groups in this community?***

Sometimes we gather students (either from here or from other islands) to collect trash and show them literary how it looks like, for them to learn and realize that if no-one else will come and do it for them, they have to start picking up trash and cleaning this island themselves. When we started the project it was during Saturdays, but now it can be during weekdays.

***Do you have any kind of social networks or associations here?***

I was once part of forming an organization to work together across communities and islands, but it is functioned by others in Popa Island one and two, so I don't work actively in it anymore and letting them manage it by themselves. It is for fishing and diving, to take care of the under-water life and making sure no small lobsters will be caught. Then I've been part of starting a dance festival of the May Pole which goes all around Bocas del Toro. It originates from Jamaica, and is meant to keep up and celebrate the black people's culture and food. The focus is on traditional things to eat and cultural customs, and it is a competition, so we have won many prizes/awards. We try to promote this event and festival a lot. We have even got some support from the University of Changinola (mainland nearby), where the director was part of the judging team and helped us getting cultural movements initiated around this area (archipelago). I was also honored by the president of the republic with an award for working with and promoting my culture in this province. I was the only young woman there, all the rest were older.

Tourists and foreign settlers from different nations have started a fair or an annual event here in the archipelago; a boat race. They arrange it for the local residents since things can be quite low here during off-season – to raise funding through lottery, give out prizes (fishing), to get people participating and engaged. A lot of people do get involved, has fun, gets prepared and actually everyone sells more during those days.

***How would you like tourism to be developed here in this town?***

If tourism will start to grow more we would like to be prepared to whatever tourism will bring with it. We would have to have more investment for the locals, to have more hotels by natives so that they will have their own business here and therefore the money stays here. And this leads to us working much better together, cooperating. If not, the economy won't circulate. Like now for instance a lot of strangers and foreigners who have settled here are doing a lot of money, yet it is not distributed to the area. So, I would want people here to start thinking of establishing their own businesses and develop in that way. Some people here are starting to realize slowly that tourism is the economy we are all dependent on now, and want to start something. Like my daughter has built a little house down the hill for the purpose of renting out three rooms and a common kitchen for tourists. And many others are starting to follow this trend of business, either in their homes or building a separate little house. We need tourism; restaurants, accommodation, boats. We depend on it.

***Interview with Enrique Dixon (hostel owner and an active community member in Old Bank)***

***When did you start this hostel, and how?***

I started this hostel by myself in the year 2000. As the first tourists started coming here back then but they had no place to stay in this town, so in the beginning it was a small business in my own home where I rented only three rooms. The more tourism grew, the more I started expanding the hostel, building more around the original house. Today we have a complex of four houses, 40 rooms (?) and a separate little private cabin for rent. In addition, my own house is here within this complex. I financed and invested most of this establishment with money the TV-program Survivor (the British one) paid me when I had an accident behind the set while working for their TV-crew. Several Survivor programs from all over the world have been shot here in the archipelago of Bocas del Toro, because of the low prices, its environment and remoteness but still conveniently close to necessities. Since 2002 I have been part of seven Survivor crews all from different countries, as they needed someone local to help them out with the activities and give advice. Due to these programs there has been a big impact, and I think that is one of the reasons why this remote area was found so quickly. About 15 years ago we could only see 1-2 tourists per year coming to visit our island. I also think the increased popularity and growth is because of the far more developed tourism country Costa Rica right next to here, bordering these islands. Many travelers or backpackers stay longer

time in Costa Rica, and there they hear about this archipelago and decides spontaneously to cross the border to come here for a few days or a week.

***What does development mean to you?***

It can mean both good and bad, depending on where you take it. Development can change a community and their lives completely; either towards a better way of living or changing the mentality of the people. Thus, a community needs to manage and accustom themselves when development or changes occur so that they can balance it in the right way.

***What are the values, priorities and the most important things in this community?***

Our values are most of all to keep our culture, and try to live together as a community. Also to maintain the environment like it is, and not make it change. Therefore, we cannot make the foreigners come in and do what they want with this town or take over. Rather it is important that they respect us as a community. Our community is small, and we don't have the power or strength to decide what we want. For instance, if we don't want them to build a three-storied building in our town, maybe five or ten of us try to stop it, but the government here will explain that it is good development for us, more money and taxes with more people living here, and hence, we can't do anything about it. And that is the big problem here.

***Don't you try to turn to or push other authorities or organizations for support?***

Well the tourism and environment authorities (ATP and ANAM) are both governmental, so it doesn't help much. In the end they are all the same, even if there are a couple of persons working in ANAM who tries to conserve the nature around the islands. When ANAM established the National Park on this island, they were apparently so concerned about the nature and said nothing was going to be built within those borders. Now when you drive around the island close to the park, you see people catching lobsters and other species that should be protected. Furthermore, ANAM has not only built a house inside the part, but is running a place for tourists to stay in. So, it is very contradictory. I agree that it is good to have the park, but I disagree with ANAM who keeps it, since they charge 10 US\$ for the entrance fee, but where does this money go? We who live here on Bastimentos would like to know exactly where it goes, and what more practical than developing the communities with the profits. As this National Park took over a lot of land which the communities used here, then at least some (even 10%) of the profits should stay on this island, for the communities to do something with it, if not in Old Bank than Salt Creek or Bahía Honda. But ANAM takes it all! With that money we could build a proper path to the Wizzard Beach on the other side of the island from our town. Just like the Americans (RFBC) charge 3 US\$ for the entrance to the Red Frog beach, we could take 50 cents of each visitor who passes by our town in order to go to the Wizzard beach. That could be a supportive fee for the community.

The government actually has elections where representatives from different communities can get elected. Bastimentos has a woman, but who is not really representing this community as a whole, or who is actively lobbying and fighting for the locals' rights (Interviewers comment: they would need someone like you, i.e. Enrique). She (Mayra) is an indigenous woman from Solarte island where she lives, and hence she doesn't really understand us every time and I then again don't trust Indians completely. Every year the canal in Panamá City distributes around 20.000 US\$ to Bocas del Toro, and then this sum of money is shared between all the communities on this and Solarte island. What Bastimentos needs urgently right now, is a proper water system. Because when it doesn't rain we are out of water. This has been a problem for us nearly 30 years, but we don't have enough money to build it. But albeit this necessary and urgent need, the government still doesn't give us adequate support (according to them there is not enough people living in this town for it to be built properly).

***Does this mean you don't trust the authorities? What about trust within the community?***

We trust each here, but what does it help when we don't have trust or help from the government. However, Bastimentos people are very jealous. If they see someone like a fellow neighbor doing better they want to have or do the same – so it is very much competition in this community.

***What does this place mean to you? When you think of Bastimentos what comes into your mind?***

Well this is the place I grew up in and therefore means a lot of different things to me. Looking at it now, I never thought cars would drive on this island, yet it happened since the Americans (RFBC) brought them. So for me this place means that this little community and town should stay like it is now. I would not like to see change here, such as big two, three storied-houses. Instead I want Bastimentos to maintain the real, authentic atmosphere and feeling that it has.

***What actions are you trying to take in order to preserve your town or oppose to unwanted developments?***

I don't try any actions or do any structured plans. But I do try to talk to the youth and children of our community, and explain to them that we have to be ourselves, and not try to imitate tourists or be like the Americans. We have to continue living our way of lives. Now the youths are having dreadlocks (which never existed here before), piercing or started surfing, as well as smoking drugs. Most people who come from outside want to see the real Bastimentos, not some influences from the Western culture, or even as close as Bocas town (on Isla Colón) which is already destroyed by foreign influences. I've tried to talk to all the local businesses here in town like the Chinese grocery stores, the hotels, hostels and restaurants, to start some sort of collection where every business puts 20-30 US\$ into constructing a proper wooden path to Wizzard beach. Because if this trail would be easier and nicer to walk (and not muddy, inconvenient and difficult) more people would stay longer in our town due to the access to the beach. Now many arrive here, see the muddy path and leave. Additionally, it is for us the locals as well; I haven't been to our beach in over three years. But no-one gave a penny for this. Many people talk and plan about it, but hardly any are taking actions and actually doing something about it. I got an engineer from the capital, which the government sent us, to visit our town. When we had the local meeting for him only a few locals participated and showed interest. I presented our idea of not building a concrete path but rather a wooden natural bridge type of trail. The

engineer of course disagreed. There still hasn't been any result or decision, they promised to come back. I've been to Europe where things just happen so efficiently and here everything is so slow and hard.

When the Red Frog Beach Club project started five years ago, I was one of the first to oppose from this community. In the beginning the project (Americans) promised to help with the water system, build new schools etc. But they haven't done anything. They promised to create new jobs, but our community here refused working for them since the daily salary was so low. Whereas, the Ngöbi (indigenous) community in Bahía Honda accepted the work and were paid only 8 dollars per day. Now we have also started to put pressure on the government to get police and security here, which was our initiative. Sometimes there have been these signature lists where we have got up to 300 signatures for various protests or to oppose. Then we have a race event for the local communities, to have social fun and engagement, but this was initiated by American settlers.

***Are you trying to arrange any informal meetings here with some of the community members?***

No, I haven't tried to arrange any meetings here in this community. Before though, they had some community meetings now and then here at the local park. Then there has been a group who called themselves "Fight for Bastimentos' rights", and it was formed by more than ten persons. Two of them who were involved fighting for our community's rights was an American couple who lived here and had an interest for this community. It was going really good, but after the foreign couple moved away the local group members all sort of lost interest, fell out and the group stopped functioning. And unfortunately no-one continued what the foreigners had initiated.

The representative of our community (Mayra) has plans of trying to unite the communities, and she arranges meetings where she invites members from all the Bastimentos communities. But no-one shows up, maybe 2-3 persons but nothing more, due to lack of interest – they don't care. But then they criticize that no-one does anything; a lot of talk but no action.

When we have meetings for the mayor of Bocas, I always attend and speak constantly. Sometimes I get so tired of me always speaking and standing up for us that I've been quiet on purpose to let someone else take the stand. The common thing in this community and its people is that when they have a chance to speak out during a meeting to some authority or organization they don't speak, but when the meeting is over they go home and then they start criticizing and complaining like crazy.

If you want to gather people here for a meeting, and talk about issues such as cleaning or picking up trash, you have to have a case of beer or rum for them to get them to join and maybe listen. That is why I rather have Indians working for me, when I need to construct something, because they worker harder and longer. They have different work ethics.

***What is the reason behind this passive mentality? Why is it so hard to get people engaged here?***

We are very different from the others here in Panamá, culture, ethnicity, race and language wise. We speak Gauri-gauri (broken English) and before we used to speak Patuá (broken French), but it has died out. Clearly these differences have to do with the history and background; when the French started building the canal in Panamá City in the late 1800's they got people from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands to work there. The same happened with the banana industry here; before 90% of the people here in Bocas worked for the United Fruit Company, and this company took care of its workers and their community. Hence, the government never needed to care for our African community. So, when the banana work declined and fell completely we were left outside of all support and help, because no-one was used to caring for us. And this hasn't really changed. So we are slowly starting to realize that we have to care for ourselves. Neither do we have a community leader like they have in San Blas, the archipelago on the Pacific side of Panamá, where they have strict rules not to make any changes within their community or their traditional way of living. They have succeeded in sustaining their area through well-managed community tourism where everything is decided on their terms.

***Would tourism be part of your 'ideal' Bastimentos? What are your perceptions of tourism here?***

To be honest, I don't see another way for this community to survive than through tourism. Before tourism arrived many here used to get very well paid by the United Fruit Company (Chiquita), so for a long time they got accustomed to handle big money. The banana company took well care of the workers. And since then there hasn't been any other big project or work like this besides tourism. If there was something like tourism that would bring in as much money and be a general activity, I would be very happy.

***How would you want tourism to be developed here in Bastimentos?***

That's the thing; I don't want tourism to be developed here. My ideal Bastimentos would be my community like it is, with no more tourism development (it can still be an activity but needs to be more well-managed and eased down on). We need the law on our side, and a really strong and well organized community group that comes together and makes plans for what we want to do with this island. We literary need to write down the requirements for our town; what we want and don't want here to happen. For the government to listen to us we have to be a strong and bigger group of our community members.

***Do the youth here realize that they need to focus on tourism businesses in the future in order to safeguard a living?***

They don't care or pay attention to those things. They live in the moment, day by day and don't think about tomorrow or the future. When and if they make a dollar they use it the same day and are not able to save it. But luckily there are exceptions like Luisito, who has an open mind and wants to be superior. He wants to see the tomorrow and give a future for his kid. But the other youths hanging and chilling around here by the pavement they want to have fun, pass a night with a woman (usually a foreigner), get something to drink and smoke, and party, call for a boat, get the tourists and off they are spending the night. *And you think this is mostly due to tourism?* Yes, of course it's because of tourism, what else would it be? When I was a young seven-year old in Bocas town, I started to earn my first money by shining shoes before going to school, or help my mother with making bread or selling newspaper, and from there I started to save. Then later in Bastimentos I had a farm with pigs and chicken. Back in the past when we used to farm we had a lot of young boys working hard, picking up coconuts all



over to sell them to the capital – now if you asked a young person to go collect 50 coconuts they would think I'm crazy. They don't work hard, efficient or smartly, saving what they earn.

We are really dependent on tourism. One can really feel it when the amount of tourists drops, like it happened during the two last years because of the global financial crisis. Today most families work with boating; have their own boat to transport people or take tourists on tours.

***How do you think this community could get more involved in community life? Or how change the behavior and mentality of the youth?***

It's not too late for them to change, but it has to start from the school. But there they don't educate enough about things concerning the community. I feel like the teachers would need to unite more with the community, and not just with the kids. In school they have the potential power to influence the minds of the kids. For instance, when it comes to picking up trash, cleaning the environment here in town and our garbage system, the teachers could have a program where they invite some community members to come to school to have a small presentation or discussion around this issue. We could literally show them how to recycle and use the trash again for something, or explain to them how plastic can damage and kill animals such as the turtle. This way they would get a bigger impact of understanding it and change their way of thinking. And gradually make them realize the meaning behind it, not only to throw trash in bin but actually picking up other trash they find in the ground. If they need to learn how to count to ten, then I feel they would need to learn what they can do with trash in ten different ways as well. They have something like this happening within the school, but they should also explain to the kids why they need to do it; the idea behind recycling. Of course it is not only up to the school, but also the parents and what they teach their kids at home.

When I was part of the American settlers' initiative to start the trash collection and pickup, I had an idea that by paying the kids with a few cents they would pick up trash. Even though it's not maybe the best way to do it (almost like bribing them), but that is at least for now the only way to get them pick up trash voluntarily. Then more they do it, the more they will get used to it, and in the end it might come more naturally.

I have been the spokesperson and initiator in this community when it comes to waste system, picking and cleaning up trash around the town. I have paid myself the few garbage bins there are by the pavement. So many of us are complaining about the water system, but how can we start a clean water system when the water is dirty of trash from our community? That is why I've suggested to the authorities to charge a fine for each community who doesn't keep their water areas clean, and with this fee people are going to seriously start cleaning. Because I have been to Switzerland where I got some influences, I will start (as the first person in this community) recycling at this hostel, even with the compost.

What bothers me is that when I try to keep this island clean and make people pick up the trash, they ignorantly respond that I only say it since I have a big hostel and earn money. This all has to do with the jealousy issue I mentioned earlier. Some kids have even commented that if the trash is so important for the tourists (white people) they can pick it up themselves – why do I have to do it for them? This demonstrates so clearly their ignorant and narrow-minded way of thinking. Of course more trash and their behavior might bring fewer visitors, but they don't understand that it is for their own good to keep this environment clean.

***How could this community start participating and deciding on your terms about tourism development in this town in the future?***

In this community we need to have a representative with more local knowledge, awareness of what is really happening and who understands us. We need someone who is more open to our community, telling us straightly where the money goes to he/she gets. If I had 100.000 US\$ from the government I would hold an open meeting at the town park, and let all the people have a chance to speak out because I want the majority of this community to decide what we do with this money. I don't want decide by myself what needs to be built or developed in this community. Then I'd write it down and take it further. When there is a project going on here in this area, the local community might know what will be built but they don't know where the money actually goes to. That is a big reason why so many don't care, participate or have a feeling to work. Thus, if we were empowered by the authorities (the representative) to make our own decisions and had the opportunity to get financial aid, where everyone knew practically where the money was going to, it would make our community more proactive.

In Bastimentos we have a community board (junta comunal) who is supposed to represent the communities concerning development decisions on this island. The elected representative in the government (Mayra) is the president of this board. I have never seen they have a meeting yet. We can't get any money before it passes through the community board. Other communities get funding from rich people or their American friends. We don't have nothing like that, so I myself have to go collect money from different community members for instance to build a Maypole (a symbol for their cultural festivity). So, we need a person who represents us who actually puts the development money into the community for useful things, so that we can see it.

***Interview with Jaguar (teacher and hostel owner in Old Bank)***

***What does development mean to you?***

It means better opportunities for everyone; better access for the kids, better education, better jobs, and access to go to hospitals and get its service. Development means a chance to live a better life. Development brings prosperity, but here in Bocas nowadays we've experienced that it brings both good and bad – and now the ones who are prepared for development can refuse what is bad, and accept what is good. For instance, 20 years ago in Bastimentos we could walk in to every house and go everywhere and there was no problem, people trusted each other more. When you left home no-one locked the doors but kept it open always. But now in the last years there has been a change, if we now leave the house it has to be secured with locks, because otherwise anyone will go in there and steal something. Before there weren't any thieves or crime on this

island, but now the tourists come and the money goes around, the people who don't work want their money so they try to steal the tourists, and when they can't they will steal from the locals – that (crime) is the worst change in development here in Bastimentos town.

Within the education department it is sad to see that many people on this island don't have interest in education. We as teachers need to do some job to give the right advice of what is the value of education. There are few exceptions apart from the majority who think education is the future, including me. This small group of people think that there will come times when you can't only rely on your work and getting money, but that you need to send your kids away for better education and not only stay in Bastimentos. Many others prioritize gambling (has been a big interest and tradition of this community throughout the past), fishing, sports, alcoholics who like to drink rum every day, and some work. That is the reality of this island (community) the way I see it. The problem right now concerns their land; people coming in a buying land and everyone would like to get some of that big money but then everyone does not know how to handle or do something good with money. So before they know it they've lost both their property and money. I think it's because they don't have education or knowledge enough to administer it and they lose everything quickly, and then soon give problems to the next one.

***What symbolizes a good life or welfare here?***

For some a symbol for welfare is having a home, job and education for the kids. I send my kids to good schools, give them what they need (not what they want) and give advice for what the future can bring them with a good education. Time will tell if they want to stay here or move to the bigger city to study or live.

For me it is important to conserve our cultural traditions, and that is why I try to teach the kids in school about who they are, where they come from, about their culture, background etc. Especially because my family was one of the three first settlers on Bastimentos more than 100 years ago.

***How was life here before tourism arrived?***

Before many men of Bastimentos town (around 50-60) worked for the Banana company in Almirante, and got very well paid, pension and take care of. But because of various reasons they had to let them go, and now the alternative is tourism. So, many have started with having boats to transport tourists around (and locals as well). Some have rooms in their home for rent or do different things to make it better for tourists. So, economically tourism has brought positive effects. But, socially when foreigners come here especially the youths want to imitate the tourists, not only what they look like and what they have – but in particular the use of drugs. I would say almost 90% of the tourists who come here take drugs; they either bring it or crave it when they come here, since they assume or expect dark skinned people to have it. And this of course affects the newer generation. Before we only drank alcohol like beer or rum now and then, but smoking and taking drugs never existed in this community. Now in the last years it is very common within the younger generation, and this is clearly because of the tourists influence. For instance before no-one surfed in this community but since a lot of young surfers come here to stay, some local youngsters have started surfing and imitating this lifestyle as well. Same goes for the dreadlocks (Rasta hair) and piercings on the body – did not exist here before.

In the beginning when foreigners who intend to stay come here they act very kind and lovely, and the locals do a lot for them. Then when the foreigners build their house and get established, and have everything well, they change and act differently towards the locals, and don't want the locals around them anymore. It is very hard to find people who come from outside that are nice or who likes to interact with us, after they've become established and don't need our help anymore. Most of them are here, but not amongst us as a community, because they don't need us anymore. As we live in a small community where everyone knows everyone, it becomes hard to trust the foreign settlers.

***Links or trust to the authorities?***

We have both good (reliable) and bad (corrupted) authorities.

Now we have a local police station here in town which is quite new, and they come from Bocas. The only communication link is the 10% of my income (taxes) that I have to pay to the government (ATP) in the end of each month (which is a law here in Panamá). I'm not sure what they do with it, but probably help bring in tourists and market the area. They are good at giving support for the community when it comes to the school, such as books, uniforms, backpack and other equipment. They also built a small public park here and have more plans to expand it in the future over the water; both nice for tourists and locals. They have also tried to help out with sanitation, garbage system and the water-system for clean water (the tap water is drinkable), which has been very problematic. But they should help more in giving help to find a job and good advice for how to develop tourism in Bocas or start a tourism business.

***How did you start this hostel?***

About 8½ years ago I started small by renting out three rooms we have in our current house. Then when the tourists started coming more, we built a house here on the sea with seven rooms, a kitchen and veranda. And now my sister is starting her hostel next doors, which is recently finished. So, I work as a teacher during days, and then after school I come down to the hostel around five and work here the rest of the day. I like to entertain my guests, and sometimes we play local music for them with my group of friends and my wife sings.

**Interview with Alfonso Alfredo Zegsiq** (Afro-Caribbean owner of a local restaurant in the other end of Bastimentos Island near Cayo Coral)

For me development means good and positive progress for local communities. The priority here is to keep Bastimentos as it was before; maintain and preserve its uniqueness. Before tourism (around 1997) it was better, life was different. The most important thing is to not sell any more land to outsiders, unite all the communities on this island (Afro-Caribbean, Ngöbe in Bahia Honda and Salt Creek) and stick together. But it is hard to cooperate across borders here, although geographically the island is quite small, but culturally we're so different. The Salt Creek, where I have some close contacts to, want their own independence sort of as an own government (comarca). I have worked a lot within the service industry like restaurants, serving and experiences. Five years ago I established this restaurant here on the water between all the mangroves with my own money (and also got some help from my parents) but we get no help or support from outsiders such as authorities, bank or government. So it was very challenging and difficult. It started slowly but then after tourism has grown in the last years it has become a very active and busy business. A lot of foreigners try to come here to convince me to sell this business and my land here nearby to them. Or they try (e.g. a lot of Italians for some reason) to become part of my business, by offering to build bigger, expand the business idea, cut the mangroves and basically destroy a lot of the nature lying here around, in order for it to become 'better', prettier and fancier. But I have never accepted any money offers or business ideas/companionships that they've come with. It has been a clear negative answer from me, since I want this place to be exactly like it is, because that is what makes it so nice; the natural beauty. This all has made me more suspicious towards foreigners who either want to meet me for business or who are settling here in this area. That is also why I have only locals working for me in this restaurant.

**Interview with Josephina** (teacher in Old Bank)

Bastimentos town is a village that needs a lot of help – the kids are poor in culture – they all sort of live a happy life and party life. Yet this community has an old culture and background, and some older residents still continue the old customs, such as food dishes, parties or traditional way of celebrating, which is important for them, but this is slowly getting lost with the newer generations. With tourism in the area life is much better, and it helps a lot. It has definitely changed towards a more positive direction because it has developed the islands, particularly for the poor. On the other hand, with tourists coming in the prices go up, so now it's more expensive. And people don't want to work for the locals because the foreign settlers are paying them a little bit more.

Before tourism arrived the town was very Jamaican (even more than now), with income coming from fishing, bananas, growing food, cacao... the fact that the kids in the school don't realize that tourism is something of their future to achieve for is more up to their parents to teach and push them up, not so much the school.

The kids have a lot of contact with foreigners/tourists, which has lead them to perfect their language (English) in school. For them to participate is more through tourism: the tourists bring in the money, each business pays taxes to the government, and the government pays back that money by building new or developing the neighbourhoods. This is at least how it should be. Then they have a community board (junta communal) that gathers community tax money and build e.g. a new gym for the kids and youths. Other than that the local government doesn't support or help the community in any other way.

**Interview with Madeleayn Robinson** (16-year old owner of a new local restaurant in Old Bank)

I started this restaurant called 'Sonrisas del Mar' together with my aunt (she is the financier). It was opened in December 2009, so we have only been running it for a couple of months.

***How did you as such a young age come to think of starting a business like this now?***

I realized during these last year's how tourism has grown rapidly in this area and that it brings money. So, I figured to have an own business will safeguard something for the future. Besides, there are only a few restaurants in this town, and compared to how many tourists come here the amount is way too little.

I still have two years left of high school, which I attend on the main island, Isla Cólón. During weekdays I study and during weekends I work in the restaurant, with of course some homework on the side. So that my studies won't affect too much, my aunt helps me with running the business.

***What are your perceptions of tourism development here and how has it changed your lives?***

It has definitely changed for the good. Without tourism and white people Bastimentos would be nothing. Yes, it is maybe more rude, but at the same time it's more free and not so strict like it was before. And this is not because of tourism; it is more because of general globalization.

***What are your values/the most important thing in your life?***

I prioritize my studies and to have an education. To have the freedom to do whatever I want with my life. To have better schools, work chances and to have more than one job is important. In general, what is valuable is to have opportunities to be someone better. After finishing high school my plan is to continue studying at a university, maybe business administration, either in the capital or then my dream is to go studying in USA. And then I can always come back here to Bocas, and still have my restaurant (that my aunt has promised she will take care of when I'm gone) that I can lean back on whatever happens or if the studies don't work out.

**Interview with *Rutilio Milton*** (informal leader for the Ngöbe community and tourism entrepreneur in Bahía Honda) together with ***Luis Bryan*** (22-year old Afro-Caribbean, tourism entrepreneur in Old Bank)

Tourism arrived to our community around ten years ago, around 2000, when the tourism boom was taking place in the whole archipelago. Many of the indigenous communities like we, had no idea of what tourism meant before that. We had never heard or thought of it. Back then I was already quite involved and had gone to some of the meetings held by NGO's such as UCN (Unión Campesina Nacional), where they explained about tourism and its significance. They said it would bring in benefits and money for the local community, as well as be profitable for the local women to be able to sell their handicraft and hand-made dresses. I was also participating in meetings and seminars within a Central American program by PROARCA Costas, which was directed for Guatemala and Panamá. And quite quickly it made me awaken or realize the meaning behind tourism. But for the community it was something completely new, different and strange. At the meetings by NGO's they further explained what tourists are looking for, what they want out of their stay etc. We thought that tourists would come here to walk around. But in reality we later realized that they come here to investigate, to get acquainted with the place and learn about the fauna, forests and trees – the whole surrounding, which we have here all over the archipelago. But the main issue/question and realization became clear that it was all about conservation; to conserve the natural resources, forests, mangroves, animals, specific fish species, lobsters etc. Before tourism arrived there existed some laws or regulations by ANAM regarding conservation in this area, but no-one hardly practiced them. There wasn't enough awareness and besides we never expected this big tourism boom to bring tourists who mostly want to see and learn about the nature and animals here. In this way many locals became more aware and concerned about our own environment.

We realized with time that some tourists came as tourists (visitors) but later stayed here as investors, which for us was something very strange. They cut down trees, bought wood, and land, which of course made us worried. Today it is more like we the locals are strangers on our own land. We can only watch the foreigners becoming localized and doing all these things instead of us. When a foreigner buys a piece of lot or land here, they enclose it completely for their private use only and no-one can enter or even pass by, and we are not used to that. We have to be concerned about our inhabitants here, because the population is growing and therefore we need to save these natural resources that they are cutting and putting down, for the next and future generations. We are talking a lot about how the future will look like or be for our children after ten years or so. In order to understand this, we have to consider and talk a bit about the history and background of our people. Our ant-sisters have been living on this island for centuries (for more than 500 years). But the war and many battles that took place in this area between indigenous people and colonists, made our people flee up to the mountains on the mainland for a long time. Now we are finally getting reunited again. It has been 50-60 years since we started coming back to these islands, to find our land where our ant-sisters once lived. Today however, the fighting and battle is not anymore with guns, but with intelligence. Now the tourists pay us to buy land, and if we don't sell then they will take it from us, because the government will come and lose it for us. It doesn't matter how long you have lived in an area, if you don't have a formal and legal document stating that you are the owner of that land (which is usually the case here), you will lose the property. Before lots and pieces of land were sold for ridiculously cheap prices of sometimes around 500 US\$. Now they are up to 30.000 or even 60.000 US\$. Local people here had no clue of what this land was worth, and the sad part is that now when they are more knowledgeable, there is no more land they could sell. It's all gone, owned by foreigners. It is also common that a foreigner comes and buys all the properties in one area, and then sells them further to other foreigners for twice as much/double the price. This makes us think and wonder, because we live here, yet it feels like we are only living here temporarily.

With the case of Red Frog Beach, they started by buying only one piece of land close to our community, where the marina is now. Then they found out about a Panamanian timber company (Tioval) who was working here nearby. They realized that this company was selling a property right here next to our community, which before was a livestock farm with around 600 horses. This property was owned by a German man in the past, but who had to flee from Panamá and abandon his land and farm due to the coup of Noriega and his dictatorship. The bank was left with the costs of the farm, so they sold almost all of the horses and later put the property on sale, to retrieve/get back the money that the German owed the bank. After this the timber company Tioval from Panamá City arrived with a family of lawyers and doctors who bought the property for 150.000 US\$. Tioval removed the remains of the livestock farm and started investing in wood by reforesting the area, mostly of freckle trees (There are still around 300 hectares of freckle trees on this island). But when the company realized that there wasn't a big enough return of this investment (since the trees grew too fast because of the strong winds here, and it became a problem for them), they decided to sell the property. Meantime, the Red Frog Beach Club team was looking for more land and thus bought the whole property for 5 million US\$. It reaches from the marina further down the island all the way up here, bordering to our community's land. So, that all belongs to this foreign group of people.

They were convinced to have some of the land on our side by measuring it, but we had to fight back by doing our own measurements together with the Ministry of Education, to keep this piece of land in our hands. Later, after having bought all this terrain, RFBC team wanted to further occupy 17 hectares of sea and construct a marina with 250 boat spots, right here in front of our community. Clearly, we could not accept this, since we use this area frequently, not only for fishing but for all the indigenous kids from other nearby communities who arrive here by boat to attain school every day. As a result we did a protest of a three-month marching on this island, to get our say through. After that, to be more effective, we hired a lawyer to fight against their 'second phase' constructions (the big marina) and we managed to send their team to court. Luckily, the court argued for us and our community won the case. This meant that they had to withdraw all their material they had brought here and their big plans further down the island, where a smaller current marina is now built. And all their additional mega plans of a golf course and 800 luxury villas, has been decreased due to all the protests by the locals. The golf course plan is on a hold, and the amount of villas has gone down.

***What do the authorities say, like ATP and ANAM? Are they supporting you in all this?***

Yes, ANAM (and the local government) was with us, but they haven't done any environmental impact studies, even if they approved them. So, the only thing we could do was fight against them (RFBC). There were 41 signed letters (that I still have saved) that environmentalists (both local and foreign) sent to ANAM to make them delay the process/project by doing environmental impact studies, which they never had done to begin with. But it did not work.

***And this was initiated because the community was very united, thought in the same way?***

We were almost all together in this fight, and we felt the same. For us the main issue, besides the nature, was the people; the residents of our community. The RFBC project promised us so many various things; a renewal of our school, a library, solar panels, computers etc., in order to get us convinced of their plans. Their aim was to replace and resettle us further up the island, so that they could buy and use the land where we are living on now. But never for a second did we believe them. We knew it was all part of a scheme. They were tricking us and playing with our minds, trying to manipulate us.

There were NGO's like The Nature Conservancy and TNC (Trade Negotiations Committee) who helped us negotiate, gave us advice and told us not to listen to the RFBC team, not to sign any papers or documents no matter what they promised us and not make them fool us. And we maintained it like that. I attended all the meetings and was actively in the group who fought against them. And people from the community started coming to me for guidance, as well as outsiders who were part of this issue somehow, such as the president of the RFBC team turned to me or approached me. They organized many meetings with us here, and they even brought the police and security with them to the meetings, perhaps to intimidate us. But that did not have an effect on us.

***If you could choose, would tourism be part of Bastimentos and your community?***

The whole world is talking about conservation. Thus, our dream and what we want is to preserve the nature here as it is. And that we continue with our culture, traditions and customs like they are and this way go forward. But I don't think someone will come and change that easily. So, tourism can exist here on the condition that our way of life will continue as it is. What our community is dreaming of is perhaps completely different from what other communities, such as the Afro-Caribbean people are dreaming of. How they live their lives are so different from how we live our lives.

***What are your values or the most important things in life here in this community?***

Firstly, the most important thing is to preserve our native maternal language, Ngöbe. We don't want it to die out or get changed. We also value our lifestyle, i.e. the way we live our lives. How we produce this land, look up to our ant-sisters and continue practicing our old traditions is something natural that properly symbolizes our lives. To preserve our traditions is highly important, perhaps because I can see how life and our culture have changed a lot already. Even if the women in our community are still practicing the old way of doing and wearing our cultural costumes and handicrafts, what worries me are the kids that go to our local school here. The children don't use our cultural dress anymore, and the school is transforming their minds, even though the two teachers are local indigenous women. But I have heard that the Ministry of Education has plans of starting a subject for our Ngöbe children, to practice and write in our language and learn about our culture, which would be very good. Now the kids here are talking all the more Spanish, but that has to change. Because even if Spanish is the official language of Panamá, we shouldn't forget or let go of our language but continue practicing it and make sure it will exist for the future generations. That is what the whole community here would want.

***How is local welfare represented or symbolized here? What does development mean to you?***

For us welfare is not represented through money, but rather through *respect*. We want the government and other authorities or institutions such as environmentalists (or just people in general who visit us) not only to help and support us, but to respect us. This means also a good and trustable relationship to the authorities.

***Tell me about your tourism business (CBT) here – how did you start it all?***

We've had this little eco-restaurant for nine years, which I and my wife and family own. It is the only restaurant in this community and only locals work here. It was financed by the bank (Banco Mundial) through ANAM. Then we have the local women who come here every day to do handicrafts and sell them later to visitors. We also have tours for tourists, where I take them with a boat here close by to show them the forest with various animals and to caves where there are bats. We are dependent on the tourism business, albeit the slow days with no customers at all. So, we always hope for at least a few visitors per day. But then we have days when for example a group of 25-30 people come here and we prepare a big local dinner and take them on the tour. We don't have permanent labor/employment through the government, so we are not dependent of them, we are dependent on ourselves. We want to work for ourselves so that we can learn about our own work and way of doing things in order to continue as we are in a more sustainable way. In this way our children will hopefully do the same when they grow up, because we can teach them about this local work. Or they will go outside to study but then return here to practice what they learnt, together with us (the older generation). Moreover, all the money that tourism generates stays in this community. That is what we want here in Bahía Honda, and I think other communities here in Bastimentos want it as well.

***How was life here before tourism arrived?***

Before, 15-20 years back, all the people here dedicated more time on agriculture, producing products from the field, bananas, plantain, yucca/cassava/manioc and cacao. In addition, our livelihood was based on fishing. These were before our economic dependencies, which of course was at times not sufficient especially when considering the market; how much cheaper it was before tourism arrived. Now however, our main dependency has totally changed to tourism; receiving tourists and serving

them. What I earn now when taking e.g. a couple for a one-hour tour to the forest (around 10-20 US\$) is more than I would have earned going fishing for a whole day and selling the capture, which was my main livelihood back then.

***What are your perceptions/opinions of tourism development here – is it more positive or negative?***

I think it is more positive, because this way we get to preserve our natural resources, maintain our cultural traditions and safeguard our community's future. If tourism had not been developed here, people would have cut down more trees and destroyed the environment, which is still being practiced but to a much lesser degree. True, but I (**Luis**) then again think that if tourism had not found this place, we the locals would have more resources food wise; things to eat, like for example the lobster that is now very rare because it is caught too much and sold to all the restaurants. Now all the resources are sold to the tourists, and nothing is left over for the local people to enjoy. That is what frustrates many of us because outsiders come and not only exploit but use all our resources that belong to this place. There is too big of a demand but not enough to provide all. You hardly see any octopi, snails or lobsters anymore, and even various fish arts are extinguished. And if they are found, they are sold for a very high price. In our community we don't sell nor serve shrimps, shellfish, octopus, snail or lobster. We want to be protectors/preservers – not build or offer something extinguished just because the tourist demand it. For instance, in the three restaurants in Cayo Coral they all serve these animals because they are popular amongst tourists.

***What are people working with (other employments) in this community?***

Some work as construction workers or farmers at the eco-lodge founded and run by Enrique and Margaret (foreign couple), some are tour guides like me, some work for the RFBC people as constructionists. They say their project brings a lot of local employment and support for the community, but I have not yet seen any of these benefits really. I have and will never work for them. We have women doing handicraft such as bags and dresses. And then some are still dependent on selling wood, for instance to other communities like the Afro-Caribbean might need for constructing a house. I don't know how it will be in the future, because this activity is decreasing, since wood is not used as much anymore.

***Do you trust each other within this community? Are you close to each other?***

Generally yes. Altogether, we are about 150-160 people living in this community, and the amount is growing.

***Do you trust or have close relationship with other communities on this island or archipelago?***

Yes, in many ways we do because in some cases we face the same issues or situations and therefore try to support each other. For instance, I would say that the indigenous community on the island Solarte nearby and opposite to us, has lost their hope and their lives have changed completely because the entire island is bought and owned by foreigners or outside settlers. Thus, the local community can't move around any longer on this seven kilometer long island and has been fenced in/enclosed to the other end of the island where their school is located. It is similar to us; we are surrounded by the RFBC foreigners and their projects, and if it wasn't for this school we would probably have been replaced as well.

***Do you trust the authorities here?***

No, we do not have any kind of confidence in them. Right here in this area people (strangers hired by foreigners) started cutting a big amount of mangroves, and we made a complaint to the authorities. ANAM announced a fine, and due to this nothing has been cut nor constructed in front of our community. But here nearby they are cutting so much trees and mangroves for construction. And even if the fine was set on them, the authorities still don't make them stop what they are doing. No-one who has the power here is taking real actions to avoid this. I try to visit ANAM's office as often as possible to discuss and apply for support/help, but they are not eager to support us.

***How has tourism affected/influenced your social lives, e.g. for the kids?***

Last year I received 30 kids (age 6-12) from USA brought by the RFBC people, to make a cultural exchange with the kids here in school. The idea was to share how they do tasks, play games or other interests in life from both countries. But it didn't really work. The children here were estranged by the American kids because of the huge differences. The local kids were isolated and felt a bit lonely or outside. Thus, instead of cooperating they created separate groups. They managed to play some games together, but it wasn't at all what the RFBC people had expected. For us it was clear, since people from outside is something strange and different here.

***Have you taught the kids here about tourism and what they can do with it when they grow older, simultaneously preserving their culture and nature?***

We try to teach them a little bit of English a couple of days a week, which is good to know for the future regarding tourism. For example I would need to know a bit more words in English when explaining something for tourists who don't know anything else but English.

Obviously we need to teach them how to maintain our cultural traditions. Yet, inevitably due to general outside influences and development of the area (globalization) we lose parts of our culture, such as the Ngöbe Cultural dance, which in the past was practiced by the community. However, the older generation has not passed it on the younger ones. It is more a strange and unfamiliar dance for the kids, who would prefer having reggae as their typical music to dance to. They are losing little by little of our culture, and I think a lot has to do with the school not being private, but public. Consequently, we can't decide or affect what and how they teach our kids.

***How would you like tourism to be developed here?***

In order to protect the nature the impacts have to be as low as possible and a focus should be on eco-tourism. Such as the eco-lodge by Enrique and Margaret who has a community-based eco-business with a farm, shop and a couple of lodges. This

project with low impacts, has not affected the environment or the community in any negative or harmful way. The local people working for them are permanent employees.

***How could the community participate more in the future tourism development?***

I think the community here should get organized more as a group. For instance, the case of the bat cave tours has been a small issue. We, the community of Bahía Honda, should be the ones receiving all the tourists who want to see the caves (because they are in our area and we started the idea of taking visitors there) and we should be benefiting most of all from these tours. One always has to engage the local people and community. Now there are several big boats, even by foreigners, coming to the caves only to show them superficially the location and then they leave immediately. The other issue is these foreign private boats who take tourists to the caves charge half the price more than we do, and all that money goes to them. The community here doesn't benefit from those at all, nor do they show what else the surroundings or the journey to the caves have to offer. We would need to organize ourselves better, with the five guides and three good rowing boats (NOT motor boats!) that we have.

It bothers me so much when I have 5-6 tourists in my boat, rowing and explaining about the importance of the mangroves; what they are called and what they are for, what the difference is between the red, white and black mangroves etc. While at the same time a motor boat passes by, not only disturbs the sound of me talking but the tourists get annoyed and bothered by the motors as well. This happened even to the degree, that once one of my customers started arguing with the captain and people of the motor boat, when they met by the caves.

If we want to continue with tourism, tours, guiding and so forth, we need to conserve and protect what we have, because that is what makes it worth coming here in the first place. We need to educate both the locals as well as the tourists. Many tourists actually want to learn and be aware, and they will understand it more than well. We need to stop the motor and start rowing. The motor boats are destroying a great deal of the mangroves, and disturbing the animals and tourists who want to hear sounds of the nature and animals in various routes. But with motor sounds passing by everywhere they won't hear anything.

The problem of our people is the ambition. Although the caves are natural, we initiated this project, by being the first to publish and promote this trail and tour (e.g. through a brochure). We did everything. Yet, still I try to include families from other communities who want to make tours there as well, since they've realized that it generates money. And now they are the ones managing the caves. But the result is that for them the route does not have any significance. Neither we nor ANAM understand why they need to charge the tourists on shore as well (besides the boat trip). That is why I need to arrange a meeting with people from ANAM so that they can explain to these local people who make tours to the caves and charges extra. It bothers me immensely when I bring tourists there and I see that the others haven't managed the place; the trail/path is all dirty and muddy. Next Tuesday I will bring 25 tourists and when they arrive they will get charged 3 US\$ per person – but for what? What do these people do with 75US\$ if they don't manage and keep up the area and clean the trail. Now we have ordered them to clean, and put at least some of the benefits into the area, and not their own pockets. **Luis:** It should be managed in a more community-driven way; everyone who earns money from the caves has to put a certain amount into the area and keeping up the trail. Otherwise it won't work. This area is part of the National Park and I've tried to call the authorities many times. But that is why I'm saying that the authorities don't do much since they don't listen or they don't want to be/get involved, and therefore don't make decisions.

***Do you think that you could have more possibilities to take part in the decision-making and decide on your terms regarding tourism development here in the future?***

By organizing ourselves better and arranging meetings where we discuss various issues, and make the whole community aware, I believe anything is possible. But we have to count on the support and help from the authorities as well. Because sometimes there are people who don't understand, don't listen or they don't recognize or acknowledge the work we do in our community. There are many outsiders/foreigners doing tours as well as locals who are stubborn, who none of them want to listen. Thus, we need an authority that gives them an idea and explains how they should do things. That is the way to proceed further, to organize and form ourselves more, which our community has been quite good at so far. Within our community when we organize a meeting people show up. We have ten groups and 5 guides for the cave tours. Our clan works more united, but there are other clans within the entire Ngöbe community who are more divided or split.

***What is the degree of 'social capital' in this community?***

For us it is very important to include the whole community in discussions or decisions. We have a community meeting in the end of each month, where we make everyone aware of topics or issues concerning our people or place. And every time there happens something different, like for example your visit and concern here now, will be one of the topics in the next meeting the upcoming week. Everything we have talked about here I will share with the rest of the community. I think it is important to inform everyone what is going on with their surroundings, either bad or good.

Right now we are planning to do some protests and a question list (almost like a survey), so we get to hear all the voices of this community regarding some issue.