

The Experience of Community-based Tourism in Yunguilla, Ecuador and Its Social-Cultural Impact

Authors : York Neudel

Abstract : The phenomenon of tourism has been considered as tool to overcome cultural frontiers, to comprehend the other and to cope with mutual mistrust and suspicion. Well, that has been a myth, at least when it comes to mass-tourism. Other approaches, like community-based tourism, still are based on the idea of embracing the other in order to help or to understand the cultural difference. In 1997, two American NGOs incentivized a tourism-project in a community in the highlands of Ecuador, in order to protect the cloud forest from destructive exploitation of its own inhabitants. Nineteen years after that, I analyze in this investigation the interactions between the Ecuadorian hosts in the mestizo-community of Yunguilla and the foreign tourist in the quest for "authentic life" in the Ecuadorian cloud forest. As a sort of "contemporary pilgrim" the traveller tries to find authenticity in other times and places far away from their everyday life in Europe or North America. Therefore, tourists are guided by stereotypes and expectations that are produced by the touristic industry. The host, on the other hand, has to negotiate this pre-established imaginary. That generates a kind of theatre-play with front- and backstage in organic gardens, little fabrics and even private housing, since this alternative project offers to share the private space of the host with the tourist in the setting the community-based tourism. In order to protect their privacy, the community creates new hybrid spaces that oscillate between front- and backstages that culminates in a game of hide and seek - a phenomenon that promises interesting frictions for an anthropological case-study.

Keywords : Tourism, Authenticity, Community-based tourism, Ecuador, Yunguilla

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