



# Indigenous tourism and cultural justice in a Tz'utujil Maya community, Guatemala

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## ABSTRACT



Despite explicit links to justice issues inherent in indigenous rights movements, little research has been undertaken to understand Indigenous Tourism from a justice perspective. This study employs ethnographic interviewing, participant observation, and archival data to study tourism in the Tz'utujil Maya community of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala. Findings emphasize emic views of local community members that offer valuable insights for understanding justice as it relates to Tz'utujil culture. We argue that the loss of Indigenous culture, ways of living, and ways of knowing would almost certainly be hastened if tourism and the associated cultural valuation were not present. Furthermore, direct participation in negotiation on tourism related matters is a key principle to facilitate autonomy, agency, fairness and equity in cultural justice. Authenticity, similarly, is a negotiated concept, requiring direct participation to facilitate fairness and equity in cultural tourism, as seen being practiced by the Tz'utujil people. The cultural justice framing here makes a valuable contribution to recent writing in tourism studies on indigenous environmental justice.

## KEYWORDS

Indigenous tourism;  
authenticity; agency;  
cultural justice;  
ethnography; Guatemala

## Introduction

Nowhere is there more at stake regarding the consumption of cultural assets through tourism, or greater need for performative resistance to globalization, than in Indigenous communities. Indeed, a large body of writing has unfolded since the 1970s to analyze tourism and Indigenous peoples with an emphasis on cultural impacts, cultural commodification, and Indigenous control—or lack of—in tourism development (for an overview, see Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016), yet the study of justice in Indigenous Tourism has seen little momentum. In the 2016 special issue of *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* on “Sustainable Tourism and Indigenous Peoples,” the term “justice” itself was mentioned only in passing in the otherwise outstanding contributions. A few studies in the context of Indigenous tourism can be identified, such as Schellhorn (2010) on social justice, Whyte (2010) on environmental justice, and Jamal and Camargo (2014) on justice related in issues among the Maya in Quitana Roo, Mexico. Given a lengthy history of marginalization and endangerment of Indigenous communities through irresponsible forms of tourism (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Johnston, 2006; van den Berghe, 1994), and the ongoing loss of cultural diversity underway worldwide (Gorenflo et al., 2012), much greater research attention is needed

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to understand how Indigenous peoples negotiate the tourism in ways that facilitate just and fair outcomes for them.

This paper undertakes this task through ethnographic study of a geographically constrained Indigenous group in highland Guatemala. Composed of just 60,000 members, the Tz'utujil Maya are restricted to the town of Santiago Atitlán and the two smaller neighboring villages of San Pedro La Laguna and San Juan la Laguna. These communities are located on the shores of Lake Atitlán, one of the Guatemala's primary attractions for international tourists. We take a situated approach to our ethnographic study in Santiago Atitlán, attempting as much as possible to ensure our approach was guided by decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2012, 2nd edition). While familiar with western notions such as of procedural and distributive justice, our participatory, facilitative approach strove to understand the emic views of key participants in cultural tourism in this community. Our findings, while mixed in some instances, collectively provide strong indications that tourism offers an important vehicle for the Tz'utujil people to negotiate their cultural identity and well-being within the changing context of broader Guatemalan society and forces of globalization. We argue that tourism provides a valuable tool to the Tz'utujil people for ensuring their agency, autonomy, and rights to shape their cultural tourism offering and their cultural heritage. These are performative endeavors facilitated, too, by direct participation in controlling and managing cultural tourism. In doing so, we provide a much-needed contribution to the literature to facilitate thinking on *cultural justice* in the context of tourism and Indigenous People.

## Indigenous tourism and justice research

### *Challenges to indigenous survival in a globalized world*

Historical forms of colonial and neocolonial challenges have greatly endangered cultural survival of native populations, and globalization and tourism mobilities continue to exacerbate the problem. Many find themselves struggling to maintain or reconcile their indigenous identity. A strong critique of tourism arises here as facilitating dependency and neo-colonialism through tourism (see Sharpley & Telfer, 2015).<sup>1</sup> As they negotiate external forces of globalization that perpetuate colonial and neocolonial power structures, native populations find themselves struggling to maintain or reconcile their Indigenous identity when tourism arrives to subject them to the tourist gaze (Hollinshead, 1992). Both material culture, such as language and clothing (Whitney-Squire, 2016), as well as immaterial culture (Ruhanen & Whitford, 2019), become salient yet susceptible expressions of Indigenous identity. The demonstration effect introduces and reifies the perception that non-Western modes of consumption (e.g., Indigenous dress, food, language, etc.) are a proxy for poverty (de Kadt, 1979). Indigenous people typically serve as the basis for the *imaginaries* used to promote tourism (Salazar, 2012). Through visual imagery that includes, but is not limited to, archeological ruins and colorful ethnic clothing, Indigenous tourism encourages travelers from around the world to seek out windows into the way the "exotic other" lives (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Johnston, 2006; van den Berghe, 1994; Zepfel, 2006).

In the context of Indigenous tourism, many have been excluded from fair and equitable economic benefits and may suffer appropriation of their traditional knowledge, traditional medicines and healing practices to serve touristic interests (e.g., Johnston, 2006; Salazar, 2012). Examples abound in tourism studies of appropriation of land and exclusionary practices, such as the exclusion of nomadic tribes from newly formed protected areas (Charnley, 2005) or disregard and disrespect of sacred lands (Figueroa & Waitt, 2010; White et al., 2013). In such instances, historical and economic exploitation and exclusionary practices are exacerbated by tourism in a way that can contribute cumulatively to cultural disintegration, political disenfranchisement, discontent, increased violence, and conflict in Indigenous communities (Johnston, 2006).

### **Challenges related to indigenous tourism**

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples make an explicit link to justice that had always been inherent, if less explicitly addressed, in the writings on tourism in Indigenous communities (e.g., Greenwood, 1977; Ritchie & Zins, 1978; Swain, 1977; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Rapid loss of cultural diversity at the global scale (Gorenflo et al., 2012) makes research into the effects of tourism development on Indigenous communities, and their ability to obtain just outcomes, particularly urgent. Regrettably, the scholarly record—too large to fully cite here—is clear that tourism often causes disruption, exacerbation of inequalities, exploitation, and conflict in Indigenous communities (e.g., Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Johnston, 2006; Stronza, 2008; Zeppel, 2006). Colonial histories often leave complex *power dynamics* in place within local and regional tourism industries (Nepal & Saarinen, 2016; Pereira, 2016). Social inequities can flare up at the local level, leading to local competition and rivalry for access to tourism resources (Belsky, 2009; Carlsen, 1993). Wealth redistribution associated with rapid and often inequitable economic change can result in social destabilization as dominant local elites work with foreign interests to accumulate capital and resources at the expense of local populations and disadvantaged, minority groups (Belsky, 2009; Chan et al., 2016). Unequal power relations affect the ability of indigenous peoples to exert their *agency* in management decisions related to tourism; thus, despite acknowledged potential for alternative forms of tourism, such as ecotourism, to improve indigenous livelihood possibilities in certain circumstances (e.g., (Stronza, 2007)), in practice the distribution of economic benefits are often uneven and tend to favor community elites (Coria & Calfucura, 2012).

A key challenge that arises here is the weakening of communality and a *sense of community* and the corresponding changes in informal cultural institutions. Communities are founded in social settings that extend beyond one's own life, resulting in a form of social control reinforced by ongoing relationships and the need to take responsibility for one's actions (Goodsell et al., 2014). In traditional rural communities, these social settings were established and reinforced by spatial proximity; however, changes in global connectivity and communication technology have "melted down" the various institutions that provided stable contexts and frames of reference" as well as those that have helped to maintain social equity (Goodsell et al., 2014, p. 633). Macro-level processes such as urbanization, industrialization, and centralization of bureaucratic power can weaken the autonomy of once-isolated rural and indigenous communities, aligning them more with the needs and decisions of mass society. This "institutionalized individualism" means that people, especially members of indigenous groups, are forced to adapt to changing life conditions without the support formerly supplied by family, religion, class, and culture, bringing in new elements of risk and destabilizing community trust (Goodsell et al., 2014).

Despite the negative socio-cultural processes and outcomes resulting from tourism development identified in the preceding section, scholars have identified other situations where tourism has provided empowering opportunities for the preservation—and even the revitalization—of Indigenous identity, knowledge, and tradition (e.g. Butler & Hinch, 2007; Chan et al., 2016; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016; Holmes et al., 2016; Medina, 2003; Stronza, 2008; Zeppel, 2006). As is true with the conservation value of tourism (Stronza et al., 2019), the positive effects of tourism on culture are likely be come into sharper relief when we consider how Indigenous communities would have otherwise fared in tourism's absence. In any case, individuals are often differentially exposed to processes of cultural reinforcement and revitalization as a function of differential access to capital, markets, training, and/or other capabilities. Bunten (2010) contends that, with careful planning, tourism can be a powerful tool for peace and prosperity within Indigenous communities—not only for supporting preservation of knowledge and cultural values, but also for bridging cultural boundaries. She points out that value judgments made by (expert) researchers such as "cultural commodification" have to be carefully scrutinized. They arise in relation to particular, situated practices in place, and assessing what they mean requires understanding *local*

*perspectives*, how for both individuals as well as collectively within the place and space of the community (Bunten, 2010).

### ***The promise of tourism and “justice” through tourism***

As seen above, an increasingly interconnected global environment creates numerous threats to the cultural, linguistic, and traditional ecological heritage of indigenous peoples (Gorenflo et al., 2012). International tourism development has led to improved economic conditions (Wunder, 2000; Stronza, 2007) and strengthened cultural identity (Stronza, 2007; Zeppel, 2006) for indigenous communities, but has also resulted in numerous adverse impacts such as commodification of culture and dispossession from traditional lands (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Johnston, 2006). Tourism is frequently promoted as a viable strategy for addressing some of the challenges noted above, and achieving some or all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in which issues of inclusion, justice, and strong institutions (e.g., SDG16) feature prominently (UNWTO, 2017). Sustainability must consider not only the promotion and perpetuation the local biophysical environments, but also conservation of their local commons and maintenance of their cultural relationships to those environments. Costs and benefits (e.g. environmental, social, financial, and cultural) ought to be *distributed fairly* such that environments, culture, and relationships can be maintained over time and across generations, avoiding “colonization” and dependencies. It must facilitate agency and autonomy, and as well as respect for those involved in developing and selling their environmental and social-cultural goods (Hollinshead, 1992; Whyte, 2010). A key principle to ensure such equitable and fair outcomes is that the products and experiences being developed for tourist consumption must be *negotiated by those whose ecological and social-cultural goods and relationships, and their identity and well-being, stand to be most impacted* by the commodification of their ecological and cultural goods. Discussions of justice have been slow to arise in tourism and Indigenous Tourism contexts, but this important norm is being addressed in discussions of environmental justice (e.g., Mohai et al., 2009) and in the context of environmental justice as related to environmental tourism in Indigenous communities (Whyte, 2010).

Theoretical notions of justice span a range of approaches including *distributive justice*, *procedural justice*, *recognition justice*, and *environmental justice* (see, for example, Johnston, 2006; Rawls, 1997). Scholars of tourism are beginning to explore these from a destination perspective (e.g., Jamal & Camargo, 2014), while others examine diverse ethical perspectives that offer justice insights (e.g., Hunt & Stronza, 2011, Smith & Duffy, 2003). Forms of *justice tourism* at the destination level have arisen (e.g., Scheyvens, 2002) with related discussions of the influence of globalization (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). The broad questions these raise, such as of fairness and equity in the use and distribution of societal goods, as well as fair participation for due legal recourse, recognition of political status as a cultural group, offer a valuable guide to approaching the study of justice in tourism (see Whyte, 2010). So far, however, very little has been done to specifically examine notions of *cultural justice* in tourism from an emic perspective, i.e., from a local, place-based perspective of cultural participants in developing cultural tourism. How they negotiate sharing what they wish to of their cultural practices and cultural good to provide what they perceive to fair and equitable outcomes for themselves and their community? How do tourism researchers ensure that their approaches are fair and attentive to the well-being of the cultural group, their cultural heritage, and their intangible as well as tangible cultural goods? These are among the questions taken up in the present study. Given that it is impossible to separate ourselves from our theoretical influences means that we approached this study with care and thoughtfulness, attentive to approaches to justice widely and in the Indigenous context (see below), implementing decolonizing methodologies and situated, place-based approaches in Indigenous Tourism that facilitate local, emic views to participate fairly in dialogue and discussion (e.g., Smith, 2012; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).

## Study setting: the Tz'utujil people of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala

In the five centuries since their conquest by the Spanish in the 1500s, the Indigenous population of highland Guatemala “has been repeatedly victimized” (Verrillo & Earle, 1993, p. 226). More recently, the nation’s brutal 36-year Civil War bore an immense toll, resulting in the genocide of over 200,000 people, 83% of whom were Indigenous descendants of the Maya (de Onis & Yates, 2011; Devine, 2016). Fueled by structural racism, this violent conflict resulted in the militarization of rural areas (Carlsen, 1993) and the appropriation of Indigenous land (de Onis & Yates, 2011; Carlsen, 1993). More than two decades after the United Nations-facilitated Peace Accords of 1996, Indigenous Guatemalans continue to negotiate injustices relating to identity, land tenure, and livelihoods (Devine, 2016).

The multicultural discourse used by the government in tourism promotion today comes in sharp contrast to decades of discrimination and state-sponsored acts of genocide against Guatemala’s Indigenous population. Since the late 1990s, Guatemala has joined Honduras, El Salvador, Belize, and Mexico in the *Mundo Maya* project, a large-scale promotion supported by the World Tourism Organization (Brown, 1999; Devine, 2016; Magnoni et al., 2007). This effort recharacterizes Guatemalan national identity in an attempt to capitalize on the “Maya culture” as a source of competitive advantage on the global tourism stage (Brown, 1999; Devine, 2016; Little, 2004). International campaigns that promote Guatemala as a cultural tourism destination also present the state’s Indigenous communities with opportunities for economic and cultural revitalization.

Around Lake Atitlán in particular, over 95% of the population self-identifies as belonging to one of three Indigenous ethnic groups of Maya descent: the Tz’utujil, Quiche & Kaqchikel peoples (INE, 2002). This geographic concentration of indigenous population is a relic of the Spanish conquest of the 1500s, during which indigenous people of Guatemala were pushed from their central and coastal lowland homes into the highlands (Carlsen, 2011). Coupled with the highly aesthetic landscape, the modern culture of the local Kakchiquel, K’iche’, and Tz’utujil people is a primary pull factor bringing over 300,000 international and domestic visitors to the Lake Atitlán region each year (Centro de Salud Santiago Atitlán, 2011).

As the capital of the Tz’utujil people, Santiago Atitlán is the largest of three villages where the Tz’utujil reside and is a pueblo rich with the “living culture” that attracts visitors to the lake region. The municipality of the same name encompasses 136 square kilometers, comprised of the urban center and small satellite settlements located within expansive rural surroundings that are a mix of forest and agricultural production (Carlsen, 2011). The town is growing at a notable rate, close to 3% annually, and projections put the 2018 population of the urban center alone over 37,000 (Centro de Salud Santiago Atitlán, 2011). Much of the economy is based on farming and the production of artisan goods. Individual families manage small plots of farmland, or milpas, on the volcanoes’ slopes, where they grow coffee, avocados, corn, beans, and other produce for subsistence use, sale in the local market, and – when yield permits – widespread distribution through large corporations (Carlsen, 2011).

The town is known for its quality handmade woven fabrics, clothing, and glass beads, which are sold to locals, national and international tourists, and Indigenous peoples from other regions of Guatemala. Santiago also holds a wide variety of lesser-known attractions of the type that tourists travel the world to seek, including both religious and nature-based attractions. Mirroring steady growth on an international scale—from 25 million tourist arrivals in 1950 to over 1.3 billion in 2017 (UNWTO, 2018), tourism to Guatemala, and thus tourism to the Lake Atitlán basin, has grown dramatically in recent decades. There is a body of anthropological writing on distinct Maya ethno-linguistic groups engaging in tourism in other regions of Guatemala, (e.g., Little, 2004, and numerous writings by Walter Little about tourism in the colonial city of Antigua), yet there remains limited fine-grain data on tourism-related outcomes within the Tz’utujil or the two



Figure 1. Map of Guatemala, with Sololá & Atitlán Inset.

other Maya Indigenous groups (*Quiche & Kaqchikel*) residing on Atitlán's shores, despite the lake being among Guatemala's most visited tourist destinations (Figures 1 and 2).

## Methodology

This study undertook qualitative work grounded in the emic perspectives of those involved—and those to whom the cultures and environments belong. Ethnographic methods and an exploratory and inductive approach provide a platform for participants to share their emic views (Bernard, 2017; Harris, 1976). Given that 98% of Atitecos self-identity as Tz'utujil (Centro de Salud Santiago Atitlán, 2011), an ethnic group whose involvement in tourism is unique and relatively undocumented, this emic perspective is not one that can be easily found within existing literature or by using quantitative, deductive approaches (Creswell, 2013). While the history of virtually all social science methodologies is subject to much warranted critique, the ethnographic approach taken here is situated at the more humanist and interpretivist end of the social science spectrum, providing more in the way a “decolonizing methodology” than more positivist, survey-based approaches that characterize much of tourism research. The ethnography conducted here sought to facilitate fair and equitable participation of residents and communities in developing and enacting the research processes, discussing the findings, and participating in how the results were to be shared, and how they could contribute towards communal well-being and culturally just tourism.

Both authors are white North Americans who speak Spanish fluently as a second language. The second author engaged in ethnographic work in this region in 2003, returning briefly in 2005. Relationships with Santiago community members established during the 2003 fieldwork, as well as with anthropologists with longer-term presence in this region, facilitated re-immersion into Santiago daily life and access to community leaders (e.g., Santiago's Tz'utujil mayor), facilitating collaborative engagement and research design on the present research being undertaken in Santiago. Both authors collaborated with local participants on the current research design. The first author resided in the community of Santiago Atitlán to oversee new data collection during a period of 10 weeks in 2017.



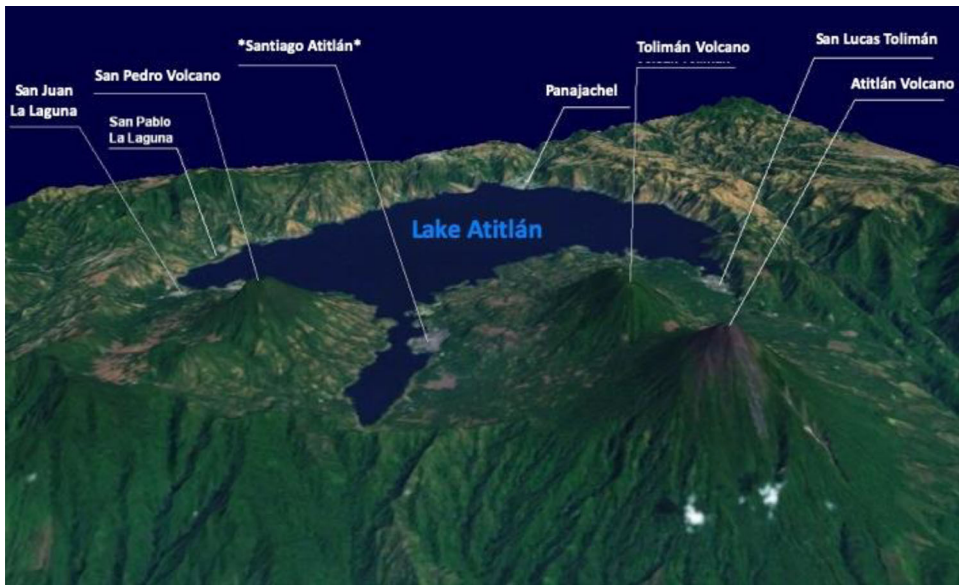


Figure 2. Lake Atitlán map with relief.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Ethnographic methods that facilitated storytelling and rich, joint discussions were employed to capture emic views of tourism and its influence on justice. Data collection activities fall into two categories. Existing archival data, in the form of relevant scientific and academic research, local government planning documents, external reports, and social media posts of those involved in tourism were sought and compiled from various local and online sources. Ethnographic data were generated through (i) daily participant observations (ii) structured interviews based on typical case sampling of tourism-related business owners or employees ( $n = 34$ ) in the shops, cafes, restaurants, and stores along the *Calle Real* (primary tourism street) in Santiago, and (iii) semi-structured key informant interviews ( $n = 15$ ) that were conducted with individuals purposively sampled for expertise in tourism. In an effort to capture a diverse range of perspectives from community members involved in tourism, these key informants were sought within the following strata: local tourism business owners, tour guides, hotel owners or employees, Municipal Government employees, members of Santiago's original Tourism Self-Management Committee (CAT) formed in 2004, members of Santiago's recently-appointed CAT formed in 2016, and members of other local committees. Some interview subjects belong to two or more categories. Of these 15 key informants, 6 self-identified entirely with the indigenous Tz'utujil race. One informant identified as a mix of Tz'utujil and K'iche', while another informant identified as Kakchiquel. As is common within the tourism industry, one informant – a hotel owner – was an expatriate American citizen.

Both structured and semi-structured interview themes explored how participants experienced and negotiated tourism development and their interactions with tourists, Tz'utujil identity and heritage, the impacts of tourism in Santiago, factors influencing quality of life for local residents, and a census of local institutions related to tourism. These efforts resulted in interviews ranging from 25 to 92 minutes in length. Informal interviews addressed similarly themes, though also diverged into other topics depending on the expertise of the informants encountered. With one exception, all interviews except were conducted in Spanish, a second language for the researchers as well as the informants (Tz'utujil being the primary language). Repetition and summary feedback were frequently employed as they were particularly useful to facilitate further discussion and storytelling, expanding on insights as they arose (Musante & DeWalt, 2011).

All data sources described above were converted into a text format prior to analysis. Audio-recorded key informant interviews conducted in Spanish were transcribed directly into English by the first author, prioritizing preservation of the interpreted meaning of the conversation over a strict word-for-word conversion. The transcriptions from the recorded interviews, along with field notes documenting participant observation and archival data constituted the knowledge base from which we engaged with further analysis. We were able to further understand the emergent trends by thinking through how they might inform notions of justice, but our focus here was not to peg them to specific etic terms or concepts like distributive or procedural or environmental justice. Rather, we sought to identify broad ethical and moral principles of justice that might comport with the emergent themes, e.g., fairness, equity, as well as key values that were important for Indigenous well-being (e.g., agency, autonomy, reciprocity). While not consistent with a traditional definition of “grounded theory” that indicates the development of new theory, the authors’ process nonetheless adheres to more liberal and interpretivist approaches to this method (e.g. Bernard et al., 2016).

### Study findings of indigenous cultural tourism in Santiago Atitlán

The sale of culturally-based commodities and services is central to tourist encounters in Santiago. This section presents examples of the complex ways in which Tz’utujil culture is commodified in the name of tourism. The data presented here show how the influence of tourism—both positive and negative—on social processes indeed leads to the commodification of non-material (e.g., language, knowledge) and material (e.g., clothing) aspects of culture. Yet, the study participants also see tourism as invoking a corresponding re-arrangement and re-negotiation of a complex Indigenous identity in ways that preserve threatened Tz’utujil culture.

#### *Market opportunities for cultural flourishing*

Indigeneity across Guatemala is characterized by place-based identities, something that is particularly notable around Lake Atitlán (Carlsen, 2011). Through the use of specific colors, design patterns, and objects depicted, clothing is used as a signal not just of one’s ethnicity, but of one’s village (Little, 2004). While many Atitecos, especially women, continue to dress in *traje* (traditional Mayan vestments), globalization has resulted in a blurring of this visual signal of indigeneity. As Carlsen (2011) writes, tourism demand influences the amount of social control Tz’utujil weavers have to experiment with wider color palates and creative new designs. At the same time, access to wider markets mean that more people are buying clothing based on other characteristics—like preference, quality, and price (van den Berghe, 1994).

Santiago Atitlán’s reputation for high quality handwoven and hand embroidered clothing, in combination with relaxed social norms around *traje* (Figure 3), has enabled Atitecos to expand their market to Indigenous people from all over Guatemala, as demonstrated in the following participant observation vignette:

*June 11, 2017: I approached a stall hung with row upon row of huipiles (traditional embroidered blouses worn by women), stretching across the 3-meter-wide stall from the ground to the roof. The vendor, Rosario, was a young woman in traje, perhaps about my age. Her stall was on the outskirts of the market, and it was still early in the day—around her, other stalls were still just setting up. She wasn’t busy, and happily obliged to my questioning.*

*When I asked where the huipiles came from, she said here in Santiago Atitlán—pointing to the top two rows. The huipiles in the top row were adorned with colorful birds of various sizes; the next row was covered with flowers. The designs in these two rows were embroidered onto the vertically striped fabric that is typical of the Atiteco traje. Sometimes the patterns were concentrated just around the collar area, with large areas of open cloth. On others, the vertical stripes had been crossed with embroidered horizontal stripes, turning the cloth into rows of boxes, each of which contained a different bird. They were very detailed, and complex.*





Figure 3. Tz'ujujil traje, typical indigenous apparel.

**Author 1:** [pointing to the top two rows] Who made them? You?

**Rosario:** Yes.

**Author 1:** By hand, right?

**Rosario:** Yes, always by hand, these ones, from Santiago Atitlán.

**Author 1:** Wow, they're beautiful. How long does it take you to make them?

**Rosario:** Two months.

*Below the top two rows of birds and flowers, there were several rows of huipiles that were completely different. They were entirely covered with colorful geometric patterns, with none of the base cloth visible. The embroidery was much more uniform, and the stitches had a cross-stitch like pattern (a bunch of Xs) instead of the handmade ones, whose patterns were made from longer, straight parallel stitches and no Xs. Below these, there were several more rows of huipiles that were more similar to the upper rows (more exposed cloth, distinct objects depicted, like flowers, instead of geometric patterns) but had a more "modern" look. They were adorned with sequins, sparkles, and 3D designs of coiled material.*

*Rosario indicated that these bottom two sections were all machine made, and not from Santiago. She told me that these ones came from other places, like Xela<sup>2</sup>. While she had originally answered in the affirmative when I asked her if she made them, she now spoke of it more as a network of people working together. The hand-embroidered, Atiteco-style huipiles in the top two rows were all made by hand here in Santiago Atitlán, by various local women. The other ones that were machine made were purchased from Xela, and brought back here to be sold.*

**Author 1:** So the ones that come from Xela, where do you buy them? From the market?

**Rosario:** Yes, in the market. We go buy them there, and bring them back here to sell.

**Author 1:** And do people from Xela also come to Santiago Atitlán and buy your huipiles, to take back and sell them there?

**Rosario:** Yes, it's an exchange of business. We buy from each other to sell in our markets.

**Author 1:** But in Xela, they're Kaqchiquel, right?

**Rosario:** Yes, they're Kaqchiquel and here we're Tz'utujil.

**Author 1:** But you buy their things and sell them here?

**Rosario:** Yes, these ones [indicating top row] are our traditional *traje*. These are the style of Xela [indicating the middle section described above]. But people like to choose.

As indicated here, weavers diversify their offerings in order to target several niche markets simultaneously. Far from passive reaction to an imposed market, this reflects active negotiation of market-related opportunities, a type of involvement in tourism that Bunten (2010) refers to as "Indigenous capitalism."

In another conversation at the market, a young man selling bolts of the woven cloth that is used by to make *faldas*, the long skirt that is part of the female *traje*, confirms these arrangements:

**Author 1:** And who buys your fabric? Only locals? Or do tourists buy them too?

**Misael:** Some tourists. Mostly Atiteca women, but also women come from other places, like Xela and Panajachel. They come here to Santiago to buy their skirts.

**Author 1:** Why?

**Misael:** The quality. They know the quality of the weaving here.

**Author 1:** But in Xela and Panajachel they're Kaqchiquel, right?

**Misael:** Yes, they speak Kaqchiquel.

**Author 1:** They wear different *traje*, right?

**Misael:** Yes, but they can choose what they want to wear.

Again, this informant indicates how globalization in the form of tourism leads to relaxation of rigid norms, yet this relaxation opens up additional opportunities for skilled local artisans to gain recognition in the national market. Maria, an artisan who earns money hosting foreigners in her family home and who is an artisan skilled in hand embroidery, expressed pride in the ability to share her life and culture with guests. "If you bought a *huipil* that I made," she said, "It would make me happy because it shows your appreciation for my unique skill and hard work." In this regard, the vending of handicrafts in tourism is a source of individual as well as collective pride and reflection on Tz'utujil culture (Little, 2004; Stronza, 2008). Among the many homogenizing forces of globalization, work in tourism is seen as holding promise for conserving the Tz'utujil culture for Maria. Whether tourism is indeed seen more broadly as facilitating *cultural justice* subsequent the colonial-era suppression of longstanding Tz'utujil traditions, knowledge, and practices, is an important question that we pursue below .

### ***Resisting colonization of Tz'utujil language***

In an increasingly globalized world, loss of Indigenous language is a prevalent concern (e.g., Gorenflo et al., 2012). Language is key part of Tz'utujil identity, and something of which Tz'utujil informants indicate that they are most proud. Unfortunately, tourism development in the community also creates pressure to reject Indigenous language. When asked about criteria for being Indigenous, Pedro – a Santiago tour guide who picks up business informally by waiting for tourists disembarking at the boat dock – explains:

The negative side is that nowadays, some Indigenous people, when a child is born—the first language is Spanish. Only Spanish. But also there are—for example, [pointing to his young son, who he brought with him]—he speaks very little Spanish. He only speaks the Maya language ... because my primary interest is the Maya language. Spanish, he's going to learn in school. (Pedro, Tour Guide)

Atitecos who only speak Tz'utujil have little opportunity to engage in the tourism industry, with the exception of artisans who sell their work through middlemen (van den Berghe, 1994), or the few women who get by selling souvenirs with a basic vocabulary. While tourism incentivizes empowering skill development for certain languages, like Spanish and English, this can come at the expense of a devaluation of the Tz'utujil language, as Pedro notes here. The process he notes is consistent with the findings about local language loss in other Indigenous tourism contexts (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Johnston, 2006; Whitney-Squire, 2016). Yet, as seen below, there are other spaces and opportunities in which the language facilitates both economic opportunities and cultural well-being

### ***Negotiating cultural exploitation and discrimination for mutual benefits***

The use of culture to earn money is not inherently problematic, as numerous tourism scholars have noted (e.g., Bunten, 2010; Medina, 2003). Indeed, when asked if their capacity to earn money was connected to their Indigenous identity, many informants who work in the tourism industry answered affirmatively. When asked if he has noticed any misuses of Tz'utujil culture in Santiago Atitlán, tour guide Pedro indicates that culture is definitely misused by some in order to earn money, explaining:

So—this happens more touristically. Sometimes a tourist comes and says, I'm looking for a shaman to talk to with, to do a ceremony. And I could say, "Ah, I'm one!" But I'm not one. (Pedro, Tour Guide)

Here tourism creates a monetary temptation to stage Indigenous authenticity for visitors in Santiago Atitlán (MacCannell, 1976). However, as Miguel, another tour guide notes, staging is just as likely to occur on the part of non-Indigenous guides. He feels it makes sense for him to call upon his genuine Indigenous identity for mutual benefit (his and for visitors):

I have friends that aren't Indigenous, and although they want to identify as Indigenous... first of all, they don't speak a Maya language. And visually, or physically, it's very noticeable. You can say "I'm Indigenous," but if your physical appearance doesn't show it... So then, when people see me—dark-skinned, short stature—they say "Ah, you're Indigenous!" and they start to ask me things. And people value that a lot. They ask how I live, how I have overcome all of those social problems, especially discrimination. So then, in the end, they appreciate it, and they can value you for a certain amount of money—they can give you tips.

While the leveraging of culture to earn income within the tourism industry might lead some scholars to frame these manifestations as exploitive, the way the Tz'utujil use their culture suggests active and conscious appropriation to generate benefits, overcome discrimination (see quote above), and "perform" their culture for mutual benefit—appreciation by visitors and some income for the Indigenous tour guide.

Miguel later elaborates on the features identified above as generating pride and sense of well-being and worth—physical appearance and language. When asked how his interactions with tourists make him feel about his identity, Miguel continues, "they make me feel very proud,

very happy. And them too. When I teach everything that I am, and that I feel—they also appreciate that. They realize that I am proud of my culture, and of my work, what I'm doing. And it's a combination—because they leave satisfied, seeing someone so proud." Tourism here is offering opportunities to counter entrenched colonial injustices and to facilitate Tz'utujil cultural survival, but it is also contributing immensely to individual well-being (Miguel's, for instance) and to a good experience for visitors.

### ***Reciprocity and equity in interactions***

Overwhelmingly, participants interviewed in this study agree with Miguel, indicating that their interactions with tourists, who travel from across the globe to experience authentic Maya culture, create feelings of immense pride in Tz'utujil cultural heritage, offering a new postcolonial "mirror" through which to see themselves (Stronza, 2008). Informants say that their interactions with tourists, in addition to bringing income for individuals, help to reinforce and sustain a collective pride, a finding that has been noted in other Indigenous tourism contexts (Bunten, 2010; Coria & Calfucura, 2012). As such, tourism not only offers a valuable economic supplement to current livelihood alternatives in agriculture, fishing, and other sectors, but also crucial opportunities to enact and "perform" their culture for individual and communal identity and well-being. But there is also a sense of reciprocity and equity that weaves through discussions such as with Miguel above.

Numerous examples in the case show how tourism allows local artisans to leverage cultural heritage to generate increased income and support continuity of their cultural traditions. In Santiago, Atitecos do not feel that the artisanal markets necessarily result in less authentic products or the loss of cultural practices, nor has it led *away* from traditional materials and methods of production in favor of advanced technology, as scholars have feared in other contexts (e.g., Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Johnston, 2014; van den Berghe, 1994; Zeppel, 2006). In fact, the view conveyed by informants is that the opposite outcome has occurred, as tour guide Daniel notes, "Because, for example, an artisan, its more—[tourists] like their work more. Because what the tourists want is more so the craftsmanship. And so, more is made by hand, rather than embroidered by machine." Local artisans thus also experience increased valuation of their traditional cultural skills developed through learning from interactions with visitors. There is a sense of *equity* and *reciprocity* in this relationship, where both sides benefit mutually, neither feel exploited.

### ***Learning related reciprocities***

Some study participants emphasize the influence of tourism on improved environmental conditions within Santiago. The following two exchanges demonstrate this. When asked what he sees as the advantages to working in tourism, a local tour guide responds:

**Guide:** The advantage is, let's say... one can learn other cultures. Other cultures, and also, to share—right? To share with people, because cultures are different. Here in Guatemala, the reality is, we have a culture, let's say... For example, here the majority of the people—their trash? They throw it in the street. But a tourist, even if it's the smallest piece of plastic, they always put it in the trash bag. So then, that's a culture that we have to copy, because we need it. To conserve our lake, our volcanoes, and... many things. To develop, to treat people well...

**Author 1:** It's not only to share your culture, but also to learn the cultures of the visitors.

**Guide:** Exactly, yes. That's it.

Similarly, David, a weaver and Santiago municipal government employee, discusses the influence of tourism on environmental learning among the Atitecos. Again, reciprocal benefits and relationships are observed here:

**David:** Yes, yes. The tourist is an example for us, of education. A tourist comes asking where he can put this trash, and the people watch him—this is how you do it. So [the tourists] come, they [Atitecos] learn, and they leave their trash there. This is the help, the support, which tourism gives us. ... Tourism is helping us in an education.

In another compelling quote, Felipe explains how working as a guide has encouraged him to remain engaged with, and to continue to learn from, local elders:

Ok, when I started working as a tour guide, it interested me a lot, because it's a very special subject for me. Because within the area of tourism, as a guide, one works in subjects like archaeology, anthropology, ecology, the Maya worldview, Maya spirituality ... all those subjects. And I take part in the Cofradías a lot, with the elders. For me, they're great people, they're the best teachers. I use a lot of the customs, the oral traditions from our ancestors, our grandparents, our parents—and today, well, I manage quite a lot of information, and I continue learning. Because when a tourist arrives in Santiago, he asks about everything, he wants to know about everything, right? And as a guide, you have to be well prepared, to give good service. (Felipe, Tour Guide and Artisan)

The spirit in which Felipe conveys these views makes it clear that this engagement with local elders, and in particular the perpetuation of Tz'utujil knowledge and practices, would not occur without his involvement in tourism. The new valuation of Tz'utujil knowledge is extended from younger generations with direct links to tourism to members of older generations without direct interaction with tourists. Felipe's account thus conveys outcomes of tourism where different social strata within Santiago's Tz'utujil population benefit from the complex negotiation between culture, tourism, commodification, authenticity, and justice.

### ***Control over tourism development and equitable access to tourists***

A number of social stressors are evident in the accounts presented by several of Santiago's local tourism stakeholders. One key issue that informants identified is the lack of a central tourism office to help direct tourism to the community. An older guide and artisan, who has been operating in Santiago Atitlán since 1996, is at the center of this drama. In his words:

We had the beginning of a guide office. Before, there wasn't an association, there were just guides. We had the office, but the office ... tourists didn't get over to it, because the commission agents, the unauthorized guides—they go down directly onto the dock. So, they divert the tourists, they misinform the tourists, and the office—although it was open, although we had a good display, the tourists didn't come there. Because of the disorder.

Access to visitors here is viewed much like a common-pool resource that is being over-exploited by unregulated tour guides, just as described in a recent study of Indigenous involvement in ecotourism in Ecuador (Marcinek & Hunt, 2019). This appears to be consistent with Felipe's account, and this is corroborated in an additional account for why the office and guide group fell apart. As another guide Diego describes:

There isn't activity. They left the group ... Felipe is a very ... He doesn't work transparently. That's why they fall apart, the associations, because if something comes for the group, only one person does it. And he, as president—every group that comes, he's guiding it. And there isn't anything for the others. They get angry. Only one person benefiting, while the others contribute their time. He is everywhere. I don't like how he works. (Diego, Local Committee Member)

Several informants indicate that Felipe took more than his fair share of the guiding business, while Felipe writes this off as jealousy over the increased attention he received after he had the good fortune to be featured in a *Lonely Planet* travel book. In this case, an external publication governed Felipe's ability to pursue what he feels are fair outcomes of tourism for himself, though

for others this situation created an impediment for other tour guide informants. Lack of control and processes for fair and equitable access to tourists is creating “winners” and “losers” – has served to destabilize the sense of community among these guides (Belsky, 2009; Carlsen, 1993). Yet another informant, Juan, describes how Felipe destroyed his business more than twenty years ago, resulting in Juan leaving tourism altogether and starting a new career. Juan describes how he started an office and tour guide cooperative down by the dock but, because he is illiterate, he relied on Felipe, a blood relative, to be his secretary. By Juan’s account, Felipe became jealous and angry, claiming that Juan was taking more than his share of the tours. Felipe extorted 1000 quetzales (about 140 USD) from Juan, and then sold Juan’s office space to the next-door vendor, who now uses the space to sell tourist trinkets. Inequities are clearly evident here at the micro-level for fair and equitable access to the benefits of tourism.

### *Environmental conservation through ecological tourism*

Atitecos view their natural environment as an asset that can be leveraged to proactively influence how tourism manifests in their community, and thus to optimize tourism outcomes. Recognition of a growing demand for ecotourism and nature-based tourist activities, such as bird watching and climbing volcanoes, is prompting the creation of new products that incorporate the natural environment. However, they are thoughtful to the importance of intrinsic Tz’utujil cultural value of the environment being preserved in the process. For example, when asked the reason for building a trail and viewpoints at a popular birdwatching spot, an employee for the municipality’s Commission for Economic Development, Tourism, Environment, and Natural Resources explains the economic argument towards the end of conserving vital local habitats:

Because in Santiago Atitlán, there is lots of biodiversity. So, we want to implement this... it was implemented, most, to conserve it. Because right now, well, many people go there, but they don’t respect the biodiversity. So, we want to implement this to attract more tourists—foreigners, national and international—in order to generate the economic gains needed to conserve the forest.

But do all these changes mean that Santiago, too, will undergo commodification of its cultural and now ecological goods, to the point of unsustainability of the biophysical environment and the well-being of local residents?

Tourism has dramatically changed the appearance and cultural character of other adjacent towns on the Lake Atitlán shoreline, including Santiago’s Tz’utujil neighbor San Pedro La Laguna, where one can find a plethora of businesses adorned with colorful signs, written in both Spanish and English, announcing their goods and services. While the imagery present in San Pedro would not seem unfamiliar to travelers who have visited touristy, tropical locations, tourism has yet to lead to such manifestations in Santiago Atitlán. Tourism stakeholders in Santiago do recognize that changes are needed to improve access to tourism’s benefits. But they are taking control in establishing processes and strategies for better outcomes after regarding the types of changes in built environments that they feel have undermined the cultural identity of San Pedro. As one experienced local guide elaborates:

What I’m trying to implement right now more than anything is bird tourism. Bird tourism, because Santiago Atitlán is known as the House of the Birds. If Santiago Atitlán is known throughout the whole country as the House of the Birds - it’s because there is a great concentration of birds here. And it’s one of the things that I like to do, because, apart from being a way of life for me, it’s something quite interesting for many people from outside. And what I want now basically, is to have the most suitable places to take them, because some of the birders from other places, they’re older people. So, this the reason I say that more than a job for me, it’s a passion. This is what I want - to convey all my knowledge to people.

In sharp contrast to the neighboring villages, tourism-related changes to the ecological and cultural environment are navigated with care in Santiago—both within and from outside the



community—in order to preserve it as the primary bastion of Tz’utujil Maya identity and cultural integrity.

## Discussion and directions for future research

Much research has been conducted that shows tourism can improve economic and social-cultural conditions for Indigenous communities (Stronza, 2007; Wunder, 2000; Zeppel, 2006; Carr et al., 2016) and that it can also result in adverse impacts commodification of culture and dispossession from traditional lands (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Johnston, 2006). A plethora of analyses on tourism “impacts” and principles for responsible, sustainable and community-based tourism and ecotourism complement such studies (the list would be too long to cite here). Our study above shows that it is important to investigate not just the net effect of tourism development on the community as a whole, but *how* these costs and benefits are distributed and negotiated among individual local people and institutions, and what norms guide good tourism development that facilitates communal well-being and justice. Given a lengthy history of marginalization and endangerment of indigenous communities through irresponsible forms of tourism (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Johnston, 2006, 2nd edition, 2014; van den Berghe, 1994), research that determines how Indigenous peoples can negotiate the arrival of international tourism in ways that promote social, cultural, and environmental justice is especially important (Carr et al., 2016). Yet, despite a large body of scholarship on sustainable tourism and Indigenous peoples, and the centrality of justice within the Indigenous rights movement, very little scholarly effort has been dedicated to the study of justice in the context of Indigenous Tourism.

Our aim here was to attempt to explore how the Tz’utujil Maya were engaging with tourism, what they felt were fair and good outcomes of tourism development, how they were negotiating these and the resulting changes. We were especially concerned to approach the study in a way that did not colonize the meanings that arose by imposing a “western” frame of justice to guide the study, but sought instead to explore in rich detail *how* tourism development was being enacted and negotiated, and principles we could identify that facilitated fair and just outcomes as they perceived and experienced it. It is clear from our case that tourism development as being currently enacted by Tz’utujil Maya facilitate critical Indigenous principles like self-determination, autonomy, reciprocity, and perhaps even mutual respect (less clear but implicit) (de Lima & King, 2017; Escobar, 2018; Hollinshead, 1992; Whyte, 2010).

Emic views of Tz’utujil Maya community members indicate that tourism is slowing the erosion of threatened culture heritage in Santiago Atitlán, just as it is often slowing the erosion of threatened natural heritage in other contexts (Stronza et al., 2019). While there remains evidence of the tourism industry’s appropriation of knowledge, intellectual property, and other Tz’utujil resources in some cases, by and large the Tz’utujil people involved in tourism in Santiago Atitlán are negotiating tourism—and even the practice of commodification itself—in ways that resist historically entrenched colonial influences to situate their own ways of being and knowing. Their language is currently flourishing, their visitors are curious to learn more about their culture and heritage, and there is evidence of reciprocity in learning and sharing knowledge and insights. Rather than attempt to “nail” down specific theoretical perspectives that may do little justice to the emerging form of cultural tourism in Santiago Atitlán, we draw on Whyte’s (2010) cogent argument for norms guiding environmental justice for Indigenous Tourism, which includes close consideration of environmental heritage among other environmental relationships. His careful analysis identifies *compensation justice* (related to distributive justice, and involves fair exchange of goods, bads, and risks), *participative justice* (opportunity to give informed consent by all who stand to be benefit or be harmed) and *direct participation* (related to *recognition justice*, and involves being able to integrate one’s own cultural terms and social circumstances in decision making) as key dimensions of environmental justice in Indigenous Tourism.

The Tz'utujil people are developing cultural tourism and also getting into environmental tourism. The close relationship between 'culture' and 'environment' for Indigenous people (Hollinshead, 1992; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), including the Tz'utujil Maya (Carlsen, 2011), suggest that Whyte's (2010) framework may be a helpful one to build on.<sup>3</sup> Based on our study, we draw on the general principles forwarded by Whyte to suggest a preliminary framework to guide future research on cultural justice in Indigenous Tourism:

1. *Compensation justice*: A number of examples in the case note challenges with distributing the economic benefits of tourism fairly. There were also some emerging debates within the community regarding the procedures needed for managing tourism more sustainably in the future. However, tourism is in early stages of development, and while conflict can be identified (e.g., among the tour guides seeking access to tourists), processes and structures (e.g., local tourist office) will need to be developed to organize and manage the tourist flows for more *fair and equitable distribution* of economic costs and benefits. However, in the context of *cultural justice*, much greater attention will need to be paid to addressing the intangible as well as tangible impacts of cultural tourism development.
2. *Recognition justice*: Despite the history of persecution, racism, and cultural devaluation that Indigenous peoples across all of Guatemala face, the Tz'utujil participants in this study expressed immense pride when discussing their cultural identity and practices, and the opportunity that tourism presents to be *recognized* and share it with visitors. However, a long history of colonization, discrimination and racism experienced by the Tz'utujil Atitecos (Carlsen, 2011) suggest that mechanisms for are needed to ensure that they are accorded recognition status and due recourse if they experience discrimination and unfair treatment. This is closely related to procedural and participative justice, as well as direct participation as argued by Whyte (2010).
3. *Procedural justice/Participative Justice and Direct Participation*<sup>4</sup>: The Tz'utujil Atitecos are exercising *agency* to capitalize on the opportunities provided by tourism (see also Buntun, 2010). They are currently actively engaged to preserving the Tz'utujil culture in Santiago, and highly aware of how they don't want it to develop watching other communities in the area. As numerous approaches to community-based tourism and ecotourism advocate (Belsky, 2009; Schellhorn, 2010; Scheyvens, 2002; Stronza, 2008), the Tz'utujil people will need to continue to be directly involved in tourism development, as well as in the management and marketing of their tourism offerings. Tourism was playing a significant role to facilitate economic well-being as well as cultural well-being, facilitating not just agency but also *autonomy* to develop cultural tourism as they wished, through *direct engagement and participation in the process*. When asked how he learned the job skills he needed to be a guide, one respondent replied simply, "It's my life. I lived it."

### **Directions for future research and practice**

It cannot be denied that there will be factors in every particular cultural setting that make it unique. However, here the use of rich, thick description by the authors in presenting these findings—including direct quotations of emic perspectives and sufficient detail of the environment in which conversations and observations occurred—allows the reader to determine how and where the empirical findings are transferable to other settings or themes. The drivers of development and globalization—including tourism—have many complex and overlapping impacts on Indigenous communities that can only meaningfully be assessed by capturing local emic views with ethnographic sensitivity. Their perceptions of what constitutes fair and equitable outcomes of tourism emerges through the meshing of their economic needs, and social and cultural norms, values and beliefs with the enactment and negotiation of tourism development. In this

sense, it could be argued that insights on norms that guide fairness and justice are arising performatively in the community, guided by communal social and cultural norms. However, institutional structures for the regulation of tourism, mechanisms for procedural justice as well as participatory planning to ensure that community members have voice and *control* over tourism development, may be needed as tourism continues to develop. Direct participation is a crucial principle, as Whyte (2010) argues.

Based on our joint experience, the following suggestions are offered for future research and practice, and to help build a robust framework for cultural justice in Indigenous Tourism:

- Use decolonizing methodologies and develop research topics and research design collaboratively with the Indigenous community; involve them directly in the data gathering, analysis and sharing of research that emerges (e.g., Smith, 2012). Also, partner with researchers familiar with the language and cultural context when undertaking research in Indigenous communities. Anthropologists, in particular, can serve a valuable role as “cultural brokers” to facilitate communication of diverse interests between Indigenous peoples, state institutions, and visiting tourists.
- Establish and make accessible for joint discussion during tourism development the cultural laws of the community (which are generally intangible), and how these would influence tourism related practices, cultural tourism ‘products’ and experiences to ensure cultural justice (e.g., Holmes et al., 2016). This might include establishing off-limits areas of the community to prevent tourist intrusion and appropriation of cultural practices that the Indigenous people do not wish to share.
- Encourage hospitality, service quality, and language training that emphasizes cultural heritage interpretation through direct participation of local Indigenous residents (as has been done with environmental interpretation & hospitality training to expand the opportunities in the ecotourism sector for rural youth in Costa Rica, for example; see <http://inogo.stanford.edu/selal%3Den?language=en>)
- Campaign for greater links with INGUAT and other national agencies involved with tourism planning and promotion in the region. Demand greater participation and representation in tourism-related decision making for local residents, drawing on principles of inclusivity and communality. This may help unify rival local guide groups described above in an effort to promote their collective interests.

## Notes

1. Commonly known as Quetzaltenango, but often referred to in this part of Guatemala as Xela (pronounced SHAY-lah), a shortened version of its Indigenous name
2. Such inequities will only continue to be exacerbated as biodiversity loss, species extinction, global warming and its related impacts continue through the Anthropocene (Steffen et al., 2007).
3. Note that Jamal et al. (2010) also attempted to dissolve the artificial nature-culture divide by grappling with the notion of eco-cultural justice, drawing strongly on principles of environmental justice.
4. As Whyte (2010, p. xx) explains, “[t]he norm of direct participation requires accountability on the part of tourism operators and tourists in ways that are not covered by the norm of participative justice.”

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