
Social capital, ecotourism, and empowerment in Shiripuno, Ecuador

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Abstract: Indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon have struggled for a sustainable, long-term development path since the entrance of large, foreign-owned oil companies to the area in the 1970s. Ecotourism may offer a sustainable development option for indigenous communities that have been exploited by extractive industry. This paper describes rapid ethnographic research carried out in the indigenous Amazonian community of Shiripuno, Ecuador. It argues that social capital, termed by some as the 'missing link' to development, was stimulated by the initiation of a community-based ecotourism project. Prior scholarship suggest a theoretical framework supported here that demonstrates how increased inter and intracommunity relationships and communication pathways provided a solid base for future sustainable development of this community. The ecotourism project's roots in an indigenous women's association offers a space for considering the connection between social capital and gender empowerment, and the potential this connection provides in machismo-dominated societies.

Keywords: ecotourism; social capital; empowerment; Amazon; indigenous; Ecuador.

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1 Introduction

Identified as one of the most ecologically diverse parts of the planet (Ceballos and Ehrlich, 2006), the Amazon has long suffered deforestation due to the construction of access roads and the installation of pipelines, along with contamination from oil spills and wastewater (Cowell, 1990; Finer et al., 2008). With the boom in oil extraction in the Ecuadorian Amazon beginning in the 1970s, extraction-based development has caused major environmental and social impacts throughout the Ecuadorian Amazon (Finer et al., 2008; Sawyer, 2004). Oil currently accounts for over 50% of Ecuador's exports, and more than two billion barrels of this oil has been extracted from the country's lowland rainforests (OPEC, 2013).

Environmental degradation resulting from petroleum extraction has provoked a backlash in the indigenous populations that comprise much of the Amazonian population. Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) is "the national umbrella organization [that] has acted as the primary indigenous body that negotiates Indian demands with the Ecuadorian state, and beyond" [Sawyer, (2004), p.43]. It opposes old and new oil projects in the Amazon due to increased colonisation brought about once oil company access roads have been established (Finer et al., 2008) as well as the higher instances of cancer documented in villages surrounded by oil fields (e.g., San Sebastian et al., 2001). Environmental damage and resulting health consequences in Ecuador were dramatically depicted in the 2009 documentary *Crude: The Real Price of Oil*.

Oil companies, as Smith (2014) notes, have a long history of unfulfilled promises to Amazonian indigenous communities. Stretches of pipeline fell into dangerous disrepair after the Ecuadorian Government forced oil companies to renegotiate their contracts with the state. Some companies in the northern Napo Province pulled out, leaving communities accustomed to the textbooks, food, stipends, communal buildings, and other 'trinkets' provided by the oil companies with only contaminated water, degraded forests, and dried-up croplands. Caught in a vice of poverty and extraction pressure, indigenous Amazonian communities in Ecuador desperately need alternative livelihood strategies.

Ecotourism is one option being pursued in communities abandoned by the oil companies (Smith, 2014). This paper argues that community-based ecotourism not only provides a non-extractive livelihood alternative but that it can also provide a means for indigenous peoples to develop critical social capital, termed by some as the 'missing link' for sustainable development. Original research carried out in the indigenous Amazonian community of Shiripuno, Ecuador gathered data that speak to how an ecotourism project impacted social capital, reduced gender inequality, provided an alternative to extraction-based activities, and ensured a more sustainable base for future development.

2 Ecotourism as alternative development strategy

Representing the tourism industry's response to the Brundtland Report's global call for sustainable development, ecotourism is seen as an alternative, sustainable development option (Stronza, 2007). Epler Wood (1991, p.201) provides a frequently cited definition of ecotourism that we espouse here: "purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the

ecosystem while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources financially beneficial to local citizens". Key to this definition – and indeed to most definitions of ecotourism (Fennell, 2001) – is the way that economic opportunities based on nature-based tourism activities can serve as an incentive to conserve natural resources. Yet, for ecotourism to do this effectively, it must supply more than 'modest cash benefits' to just a small proportion of the community [Kiss, (2004), p.234]. Thus, economic impact and employment are necessary, but insufficient, for ensuring favourable outcomes from ecotourism (Stronza, 2007, 2010).

Several debates have unfolded about the ability of ecotourism to meet its other lofty social and environmental objectives [for instance, see Higham's (2007) edited volume]. Reviews of scholarly writing on ecotourism have concluded that both critics and proponents see ecotourism as a promising path for protecting tropical biodiversity (Agrawal and Redford, 2006). Since ecotourism often takes place in remote, biodiverse areas, it also often occurs in the presence – or at least the vicinity of – indigenous peoples. Not surprisingly, a considerable body of scholarship has emerged specifically about *indigenous* ecotourism [although a full review is beyond the scope of this manuscript, see Zeppel (2006), and Butler and Hinch (2007) for excellent reviews]. These authors note a need to complement ecotourism activities with other development efforts and mechanisms to expand the political voice of often disenfranchised indigenous groups. Yet, given such bold claims of ecotourism, skepticism about the outcomes of this activity for indigenous people persists (Johnston, 2005).

In a review ecotourism scholarship stemming from research in the developing world, Coria and Calfucura (2012) conclude that ecotourism does not automatically lead to biodiversity conservation or economic development for indigenous groups. Even when ecotourism generates viable livelihood alternatives, negative results of small ecotourism initiatives can arise in the form of increased resource extraction or expansion of agriculture when new household earnings from ecotourism are invested in more efficient technologies (Langholz, 1999; Stronza, 2010). In contrast, involving local indigenous people in the management, decision-making, and ownership of ecotourism projects has been linked to favourable outcomes for both environment and Amazonian indigenous communities in Peru (Stronza, 2007, 2010) and Ecuador (Wunder, 2000; Borman, 2008). Specific to the Napo Region of Ecuador, Hutchins (2007, p.81) example of RICANCIE (Indigenous Network of Upper Napo Communities for Ecotourism and Intercultural Living) demonstrates that indigenous peoples can harness ecotourism as 'both a justification and a means of financial and moral support' for cultural revitalisation through development alternatives. In the nearby Brazilian Amazon, other evaluations of ecotourism initiatives indicate that efforts to involve locals in decision-making and planning remain unsatisfactory (Wallace and Pierce, 1996). A better understanding of the mechanisms that contribute to favourable outcomes of ecotourism in Amazonian indigenous communities thus remains elusive.

3 Social capital: the missing link?

Grootaert (1998) describes social capital as the set of norms, networks, and resources through which help people gain access to power and resources, and through which decision-making and policy formulation occur. Power and decision-making are related to

the means by which future generations reap the same amount or more capital as the current one – a key to sustainable development. The concept of social capital is thus often referred to as ‘the missing link’ in development, as it takes into account the way in which individuals interact and organise themselves to generate development and growth (Grootaert, 1998). Scholars have attempted to outline the specific characteristics of social capital (see for example, Narayan and Pritchett, 1999; Pretty and Ward, 2001; Harpham et al., 2002; Hunt et al., in press). As is the case with the concept of ecotourism, Serra (2011) points out that the implications associated with social capital, however, often conflict with each other. This results in an unsatisfactory framework that does not give enough weight to context-dependent factors of social networks, norms, roles, and values. Serra (2011) encourages anthropological research to better provide such context.

Harpham et al. (2002) suggest that social capital has two distinct categories – structural and cognitive. According to those authors, structural social capital takes into account the networks, roles, and rules present within a specific community. It is what people *do*. Cognitive social capital includes norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs, in addition to perceptions of support and trust. It is what people *feel* (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001; Jones, 2005). A consideration of both networks-based and norm-dependent measures is important when assessing social capital because a combination of social networks and social norms is necessary for mutually beneficial collective action (Krishna and Shrader, 2000; Jones, 2005).

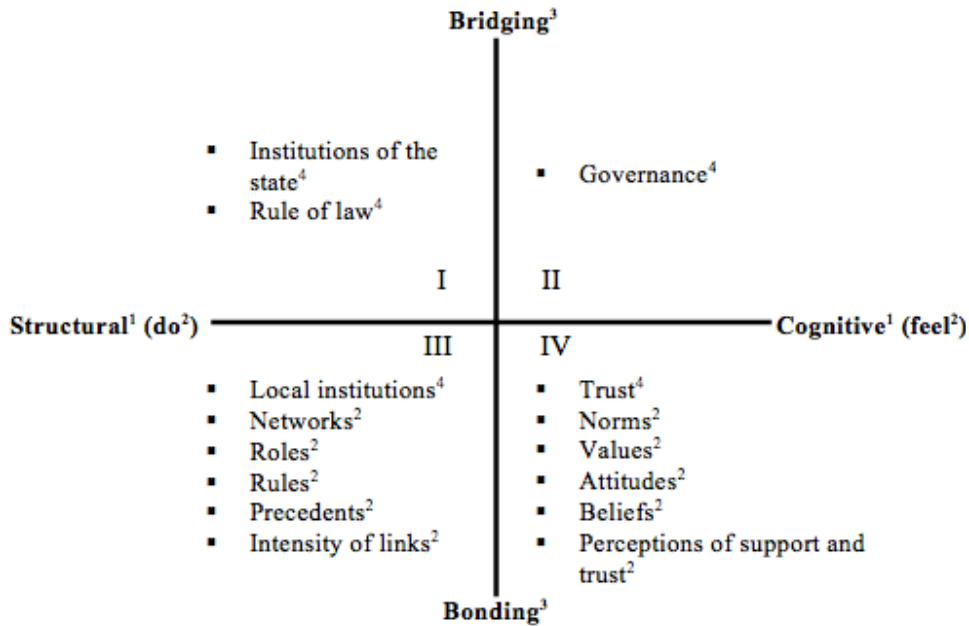
Structural and cognitive social capital functions both within a community and between communities in a way that further differentiates social capital into bonding and bridging forms, respectively (Harpham et al., 2002; Narayan and Pritchett, 1999). Warren et al. (2001) describe the importance of strong social bonds and effective organisations within a community in providing a foundation for development. The strengthening of these intracommunity bonds forms a basis for productive ‘bridging’ to actors beyond the community. This bridging is a key concept when considering the capacity of small indigenous ecotourism projects to empower community members (Jones, 2005). Grootaert and Van Bastelaer (2001) emphasise the need for communities to ‘bridge’ with third parties, such as NGOs and the government, as an important indicator of effective social capital. Communities lacking broader connections remain isolated from more powerful actors (Warren et al., 2001; Hunt et al., in press).

In the late 1990s, the Government of Denmark made an effort to assess the impact of social capital on 12 of its development projects and to then further develop specific indicators of social capital (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001). This social capital initiative (SCI) resulted in a collection of writings that summarise macro (bridging) and micro (bonding) social capital as manifesting along a one dimension and cognitive/structural social capital along a perpendicular one, creating the four-quadrant conceptualisation of social capital presented in Figure 1. Research assessing social capital on all four of the quadrants would clearly be more comprehensive than those that do not; yet, studies within the SCI itself focused on only one or two of the quadrants, revealing a tendency to situate the focus at the micro level (bonding level) of social capital (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001; Serra, 2011).

In an attempt to provide comprehensive assessment of community-based ecotourism’s impact on social capital in Shiripuno, Ecuador, we assess project outcomes according to the respective quadrants represented in Figure 1. This reinforces the differing yet equally valuable roles that both intra and inter-community relationships and connections play toward the stimulation of social capital within a community (Hunt et al.,

in press). It also ensures consideration of the specific indicators, and the function of those indicators, at the micro (bonding) and macro (bridging) levels of social capital.

Figure 1 A unified social capital framework



Source: Adapted from sources noted: ¹Harpham et al. (2002), ²Jones (2005), ³Harpham et al. (2002) and Narayan (1999), ⁴Grootaert and Van Bastelaer (2001)

4 Methods

4.1 Study site

Napo Province is located entirely within the Ecuadorian Amazon. With 56.8% of the 100,000 residents self-identifying as indigenous, Napo is the only province in Ecuador with an indigenous majority (INAC, 2014). Kichwa-speaking communities make up the majority of this indigenous population. Achuar, Shuar, and Waorani peoples border to the north, east, and south. These groups maintain separate sets of cultural and linguistic characteristics. Tena, the provincial capital, is the principal urban zone and commerce hub. It serves as the conduit for adventure tourists looking to explore the significant biological diversity (Ceballos and Ehrlich, 2006). A regional airport and bus terminal in Tena make it a popular jumping-off point for tourists visiting the Ecuadorian Amazon.

Straddling the rocky dirt road to the southeast of Tena sits the small Kichwa community of Shiripuno, population about 200. Communal buildings, a school, a nursery, and an activity pavilion cluster near the community soccer field. Situated on the far side of the soccer field is a small wooden sign that reads, ‘Bienvenidos a Shiripuno’ [Welcome to Shiripuno]. Two symbols indicate that sleeping and eating arrangements are

available at the Amukishmi ecolodge located at the end of the well-kept trail flanking the Napo River.

Amukishmi (Association of Kichwa Women of Shiripuno, Misahuallí) was established in Shiripuno in 2005 with the assistance of the French NGO Planet Heart (<https://sites.google.com/site/planetecoeur/>), a volunteer-based organisation. Its 100 regular donors favour projects focused on childhood education and income for the poor, and Planet Heart supports nine similar projects around the world. Representatives of Planet Heart assisted the women of Shiripuno with the submission of the foundational statute to Ecuador's Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion. It was formalised on March 6, 2005 in accordance with Ecuadorian Civil Code, Title XXX. This act created the community ecotourism project in Shiripuno and legally formalised the Amukishmi women's association.

With the statute in place, Amukishmi constructed an ecolodge compound capable of accommodating large groups of day tourists and smaller groups (e.g., couples, families) overnight. The 31 active members of Amukishmi independently operate the ecolodge. They provide rainforest excursions and cultural demonstrations of chocolate-making and dance/song performance. A primary purpose is preserving and teaching Kichwa customs and values to tourists and project interns. Proximity to Tena and Puerto Misahuallí, historically popular adventure tourism hubs, ensures a reliable flow of visitors. By upholding traditional ecological knowledge and values, and by providing employment alternatives to extraction-based livelihoods, Amukishmi's ecotourism operations preserves Shiripuno's little area of the rainforest in a sustainable fashion, making it the main development initiative within the community.

4.2 Ethnographic research

This research approach taken here is best characterised as a rapid ethnographic assessment (Bernard, 2011). The primary author spent three weeks in Shiripuno in June of 2013. She engaged in semi-structured group interviews with the local women and partook in participant observation while participating in daily Kichwa lessons from four of the Amukishmi women. The second author supervised the analysis and theoretical framing of the data gathered during this fieldwork.

At the tourism compound, the first author was given the opportunity to witness the complete functioning of the ecolodge. This included 'back-stage' access into the organisation and implementation of tourism production (MacCannell, 1976). The relatively small size of the tourism compound facilitated observations of the tourist/employee interactions, and also allowed for the author to interact with tourists and talk to them about their travels and their experience at the ecolodge. Conversations were often lighthearted and not always focused on their work in ecotourism, though occasionally issues relevant to the research were discussed in this space. Participant observations were recorded in a jot book throughout the day and elaborated into full journal entries each evening.

This participant observation data informed a subsequent series of semi-structured interviews. These interviews were generally conducted in a group format with several Amukishmi members present. They took place at various locations around the ecolodge: inside of the shaman's hut, on a bench on the river beach, in the cacao hut, on top of the 'piedra sagrada' [sacred rock], and inside of the lodge's open-air dining room. Interviews were conducted in the morning before visitors arrived and while the women were getting

the lodge organised for the day. Usually, a break was taken from food preparation or jewellery making in order to participate in the interview. No compensation was offered for these interviews. Although all women of Amukishmi speak some level of Kichwa, interviews were conducted in Spanish, which was a fluent language for both the author and all interviewees.

Since Amukishmi women are the sole operators of the ecotourism project, Amukishmi members were purposively sampled for the interviews. These individuals hold the most cultural knowledge about the role of ecotourism in their community and any changes resulting from the implementation of the project (Bernard, 2011). Initial interviews 'seeded' snowball sampling as interviewees directed the primary author to specific people based on their potential insight into the questions that had been asked. Lengthy interviews were carried out with six Amukishmi women. Interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 54 years old. All but the youngest one had been a part of the community ecotourism project since its creation in 2005. All interviewed women had at least one child, and at least one child still lived in their household. Each woman had finished grade school, with one, the current president of the association, having gone on to pursue postsecondary coursework in order to become a teacher. The then-current president of the association was key to informing the research team of the logistical workings of the association and ecolodge.

Interviewing was structured around a few principle themes:

- a the founding of Shiripuno
- b the way ancestors lived in comparison to today, especially after oil companies entered the region
- c the role of Amukishmi within the community
- d each woman's specific jobs within the ecolodge
- e the difficulties women face both within the community and throughout Ecuador.

With varying degrees of elaboration, interviewees also touched on household dynamics, organisation of Amukishmi and the ecolodge, education, life histories, and reflections on Kichwa youth in today's society. Average interview length was 100 minutes, ranging from 75 to 123 minutes. Both audio recordings and jotted notes were taken during the interviews, with jotted notes were elaborated into detailed journal entries each evening. Interviewees specific references to government laws or policies were later corroborated by obtaining the official documentation found on website of the Ecuadorian Government and Planet Heart.

Archival data was further used to substantiate interviews and participant observation. The principal resource was the Amukishmi's written statute. Photographs were taken of each page for future, off-site reference. The statute provides an outline of goals of the ecotourism project, and roles and responsibilities of each woman involved. The statute explains the purposes of Amukishmi's communal fund as a contribution to the social, economic, and cultural betterment of the members of Shiripuno. It also details the rights that women have being a part of Amukishmi, which include federal protection and backing in the case of abusive domestic disputes. There is a detailed description of the governance structures including the 'Asamblea General' (General Assembly) and the 'Directiva' (the Board). Nomination and election procedures are outlined, as are the

requirements and procedures for joining and leaving the association. Existing research and scholarly writing on indigenous communities, ecotourism, and oil extraction in the Ecuadorian Amazon provided additional background information.

After the fieldwork, recorded interviews were translated and transcribed into English by the author for the purpose of data analysis. Both journal entries and interview transcriptions were subjected to an applied thematic analysis. This two-step process first explored the observation and interview data using open coding as described by Emerson et al. (1995). Upon identifying themes of interest related to aspects of social capital, the ethnographic record was reviewed and re-coded with the themes identified through open coding. The results of this analysis are presented in the section that follows.

5 Ecotourism and social capital in Shiripuno

In this section, we structure insights into the ways that ecotourism influences social capital in Shiripuno using the quadrants of Figure 1. New forms of social capital resulting from the Amukishmi ecotourism project, as well as potential drawbacks of increasing social capital, are addressed. The seeds of new social capital resulting from ecotourism were planted with the establishment of Amukishmi's statute.

5.1 Structural-bonding: the statute of Amukishmi and the ecolodge

The tourism project at Shiripuno came about through the efforts of the well-organised local women's association Amukishmi. This strong level of organisation is enabled by its written statute – itself a manifestation of structural social capital (Harpham et al., 2002). Social capital of Shiripuno is enhanced from this realisation of Amukishmi as a local institution (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001). It is further supported by the clear, detailed, and pervasive knowledge of the specifics of the statute. By outlining the rules, roles, and precedents expected from members, this physical and legal document details the duties and obligations of each position within the Amukishmi network so that decisions can be made in a collective, productive, and transparent manner (Jones, 2005). The statute outlines the association's main purposes, goals, and systematic function, and it also functions as a reference for how the ecolodge is to be organised and operated. The statute's guidelines for both members of the association and operation of the ecolodge are made clear to each member at her time of joining, and are reinforced every two months when the statute is recited aloud to the association.

According to the current president, this statute provides a mechanism for implementing sanctions for members who stray from the association's rule, such as when women show up late to work. Tardy employees adhere to the policy of having their wages docked, and the corresponding amount is then deposited directly into a communal fund. "It's so they learn to be responsible...the [statute] helps me with this", she stated. The creation and enforcement of this rule, as the president emphasised, will teach habits that are necessary in a functioning tourism business to a group of people who may have never been exposed to the responsibility of a work schedule before. This facilitation of mutually beneficial collective action among the members of Amukishmi's network is similar to the outcomes of tourism-related social capital documented elsewhere (Jones, 2005).

The Amukishmi ecotourism project is a new institution in the community. Although the women's association is the main body controlling this project, members of the Shiripuno community (men and children) are all encouraged to participate. Men were routinely witnessed laboring at the tourism compound to construct a new 'camping' area for tourists. When asked about the male presence, the oldest female interviewee, herself a mother of three, explained that the communal fund occasionally provides wages for men from the community; "we are women and we need strong men to build these buildings. We are working together to help the community, bit by bit".

Although it is difficult to quantify the intensity of links and relationships between Amukishmi and those non-members from the community who are contributing (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001; Serra, 2011), it is clear that the bond is present and productive. As reported by the Amukishmi president, this collective effort between the men and women of Shiripuno was not typical before the project came into fruition: "we talked to our spouses. They said the project wouldn't be easy. They wanted the women to stay in their houses with their kids; they didn't want the association...there were lots of conflicts, problems with spouses. There were fights, hits, mistreatment because of the project; they didn't want it". Over time, with the successful implementation of the Amukishmi statute, the two genders, described as previously in discord at the time of the association's formation, now share a productive set of relations contributing to profitable ecolodge operation and continued enhancement of social capital in the community (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001; Jones, 2005).

The facilitation of young interns and local youths within the everyday function of the ecolodge is another example of newly fostered relations in Shiripuno. Formalised by the statute and the ecotourism project (Jones, 2005), secondary student internships offer the next generation of community leaders the opportunity to experience first-hand the inner-workings of an ecotourism project and to engage actively with the women of Amukishmi. This inculcates youth with the preservation and stewardship of their indigenous cultural knowledge due to the culturally-focused nature of the ecotourism project itself. These individuals often participated in daily Kichwa lessons, acting as enthusiastic 'tutors' toward visitors. Quantifying the 'amount' of relationship inherent in this newfound bond may not be as important as noting the mere existence of these relationships, attributable directly to the establishment of Amukishmi and its ecolodge.

5.2 Cognitive-bonding

The manifestation of cognitive bonding within the women's association in Shiripuno can most accurately be attributed to the shared norms of traditional Kichwa culture that value a positive future for the community's children. All of the women work to preserve and teach to the youth of the community (Fukuyama, 2001), as one woman who had previously served as president of the association explained, "Overall we work to value and honor our project for our children. Everything is to value our ancestral customs. Everything; the dance, the dress, the drinks, the Kichwa language. We will never leave these things behind. These customs, we want to give to [our children]".

The youngest interviewee, a mother of one, elaborates on how those values are of utmost importance to Amukishmi's work, "respect, coexistence; first to nature, then to people, especially the wise folk. These value the Kichwa culture". In support of this statement, the current president of the association attributed the community's recent

rejection of an oil pipeline on their land to their cultural (and therefore environmental) purpose:

We started this project to rescue, value, and save the environment. [An oil company] came to buy our lands to take the oil. They wanted to give us wells. They wanted to give us food. But the president didn't want this in Shiripuno. He refused. He said he wanted to pursue a different lifestyle for his children. He wanted the community to be rich with cultivated lands.

Had the previous seven years of Amukishmi's mission not yielded economic benefits for the women of Amukishmi and their families, it is unlikely that the same decision – so crucial to the current and future sustainable development of Shiripuno – would have been made. The value and shared purpose of Amukishmi to maintain traditional Kichwa values in Shiripuno has resulted in mutually beneficial collective action among members of the broader community (Jones, 2005; Krishna and Shrader, 2000).

One of the most profound cognitive shifts in Shiripuno – brought about by the creation and enforcement of Amukishmi's statute, the operation of the tourism project, and the provision of steady, reliable incomes for the women involved – is a consensus about diminishing machismo attitudes. One woman, a 26 year old mother of three who has been involved with the project since 2005, praised new willingness of her husband to split household chores since they both now out of the house all day. Additionally, the youngest interviewee explained the attitudes that men now have toward the women working at the Amukishmi tourism compound:

The men understand that the women have a job here. They make decisions together. It's to say that there is more respect...today there is not much violence. The women dedicate themselves to tourism and have an income, and there is far less machismo...The women leave and go to their jobs. They leave at six in the morning and return six at night. There is more love and caring because of this.

As the oldest interviewee explained, there are now rules and laws if something related to domestic abuse occurs and thus 'everything has changed'. When domestic abuse now arises, the president of Amukishmi quickly convenes a meeting between the woman, her husband, and an additional group of Amukishmi women. The husband is made to apologise to both his wife and to the association for violating the protection the document legislates. As the president noted, when multiple occurrences of domestic abuse occur, men are taken to jail by authorities.

These newfound perceptions of support and trust brought about by Amukishmi's governmentally recognised statute embody the intertwined relationship between empowerment and enhanced social capital (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001; Scheyvens, 1999). Additionally, Amukishmi's legal backing from the Ecuadorian Government provides protection to the women of the community, which contributes to bonding capital among women, and also extends this bonding capital to improved interactions between men and the women. There is now legal recourse for accessing outside authorities, a bridging relationship with key actors in positions of power (Bebbington, 1999).

5.3 *Structural-bridging*

Many scholars emphasise the role of social capital for facilitating the broad connections outside of a community that are needed to avoid isolation (e.g., Warren et al., 2001; Hunt et al., in press). Social capital stimulates such connections by enabling communities to ‘bridge’ with each other, with third parties such as an NGO (Borman, 2008), or with private companies (Stronza, 2010). Such outside organisations can serve a crucial role as a social and financial advocate (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001) and thus significantly enhance local communities’ access and influence on key actors at the regional, national and international levels (Bebbington, 1999; Hunt et al., in press). In the case of Shiripuno, the connection between the community of Shiripuno and Planet Heart greatly facilitated the creation of Amukishmi’s statute as a legitimate legal document. It has further enabled access to resources and opportunities that have strengthened the social fabric of the community over time [Warren et al., (2001), p.11]. The relationship has worked from the bottom up to create an ecotourism project sustainably grounded in local values. Financial success in tourism is now linked to a larger communal fund designed to support the betterment of Shiripuno as a whole.

5.4 *Cognitive bridging*

Amukishmi has materialised into the dominant form of governance in the community, and is now tasked with development-related decision-making that considers the betterment of the community. Elaborating on ways in which Amukishmi has influenced such decision-making, the association’s president shared an anecdote about a trip she took to a Waorani community in another Ecuadorian province. This trip, she explained, was “to know another culture for the tourism project in Shiripuno”. She had aspirations of becoming president of the association one day, but felt a need to understand other indigenous communities in Ecuador and how they functioned before pursuing the presidential title. Expecting to travel into primary forest in order to get to the Waorani community, she was shocked by the clear-cut land she found instead, dotted with oil machinery and worker camps.

The people of the Waorani community, she explained, had no interest in working. They had grown used to handouts in the form of paychecks and meals offered to them by the private oil company who had built a pipeline on their land. People were growing ill from contamination in the rivers. The community’s leader eventually died from cancer in 2011. She clarified, “the indigenous people don’t die of cancer. If they die, it is from the flu or maybe from age or an accident. But he died from cancer. Why? Because his lands were contaminated”. Such outcomes of extraction are well documented (for instance, Sawyer, 2004; Smith, 2014).

Her description then revealed a powerful consequence of this trip – the initiation of intercommunity relationships that characterise bridging forms of social capital between neighbouring indigenous communities (Harpham et al., 2002; Narayan and Pritchett, 1999). “[I returned] to the [Amukishmi] project to tell this to the people. Because I was a part of this women’s association. They needed to know how the oil companies were contaminating the communities. The Waorani were dying. I needed to tell people”. The Amukishmi ecotourism project in Shiripuno provided the initial impetus to travel to another indigenous community in the Amazon – an opportunity far outside the norm for community members. Yet, this act of bridging across different low-income communities

(Warren et al., 2001) directly influenced the community's decision to reject the construction of an oil pipeline on their land in favour of continued development of what they perceived of as a more sustainable enterprise – their tourism project. The value added by these new social relations is clear for Shiripuno. Follow-up research might reveal how such interactions may have caused the Waorani to reconsider their own path.

With the legitimisation of Amukishmi's statute, the women of Shiripuno were able to bridge with the Ecuadorian Government for additional legal recourse to domestic violence, a widely noted characteristic of machismo culture (Stevens, 1973). As reported by interviewees, this has led to a marked decrease in instances of spousal mistreatment throughout the community. Within the community, the support of key actors has strengthened the social fabric and provided a solid foundation for future sustainable development (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2001; Warren et al., 2001). Amukishmi's female-focused statute has facilitated the further participation of the women of Shiripuno in the development effort (Scheyvens, 2000). In her interview, the Amukishmi president quoted the statute in explaining how the organisation has helped the women of her community, "we have rights. We have a voice and a vote". Shiripuno's partnership with Planet Heart's mission to create a development initiative that directly helps the women of the community has allowed for great strides in terms of community-wide development. The community-based ecotourism project perpetuates these gains.

5.5 Other consequences of new social capital

As Serra (2011) notes, there is a tendency in the literature to overemphasise the positive results of increased social capital among a specific group. In the interest of maintaining a critical approach to analysing this research, the authors now address a few indications of uneven distribution of social capital benefits. For example, there are currently 31 members of Amukishmi. These women work daily at the ecolodge to contribute money for the communal fund and gain individual income through personal artisanal sales or as a forest guide for visiting tourists.

The literature suggests that increased social capital, especially regarding membership of a certain group, can lead to a disparity of distribution of benefits (Serra, 2011; Collier, 2002) and there is some limited indication of this occurring in Shiripuno. When asked about how a woman not involved in Amukishmi would make her own money, the oldest respondent said, "they are in their houses, planting in their gardens. I do not know how they live their days. There are about 10 women that do not work for Amukishmi. They have no way to make money. They only wait for their husbands to come home, and cook food". Thus, only those 31 women that are members of Amukishmi have the direct benefit of a personal income, which is linked to positive household dynamics (Belsky, 1999; Stronza, 2010) and empowerment (Scheyvens, 1999). Non-members often cannot reap these benefits due to their inability to gain their own steady income separate from their husbands. Bridging to outside communities has also brought about some detrimental impact to internal cultural identity, a critical resource to a community whose well-being is now significantly linked to tourism. As the shared fund grows for the community of Shiripuno, youth are given the opportunity to travel outside of the community to high schools, which may further dilute Kichwa culture. When asked about the life experiences of 16-year-old girls today compared to when she was 16, a 24-year-old mother of two explained:

Now the young ones go to high school in Tena and Misahuallí. They go outside [of the community] and they have lots of friends, and these friends only speak Spanish. The young ones see many things in the cities. Those girls have short hair and lots of make up. They aren't as natural – it's a large change among the young ones.

There is unanimous concern about the loss of Kichwa identity in the emerging generation.

Tourists – originating mainly from France (due to the Planet Heart influence), the USA, and coastal Ecuador – can inadvertently reinforce inequalities between hosts and guests (deKadt, 1979). Tourist trappings bring material disparities in sharp relief, as can research-related materials. The presence of notebooks, pens, recording devices, and other research-related accoutrements brought to the surface not just a disparity in material items but also an educational disparity between the researcher and some women of Amukishmi. A hesitation to participate in interviews on the part of otherwise verbose women of Amukishmi may have been due to embarrassment about an inability to read and write. Thus, not all outside bridges result in positive cognitive outcomes.

Nevertheless, the advantages and new opportunities arising from the increased social capital that has resulted from Amukishmi and its ecotourism project still outweigh these important but less significant negative influences on social capital. And many are being addressed through time. Tensions that arise from membership-only benefits are decreased by the bonding opportunity offered to all of the women of Shiripuno to join Amukishmi. The entire community of Shiripuno now benefits from the communal fund that was setup by the Amukishmi statute and maintained by tourism revenues. Children in Amukishmi member households are not denied school supplies. Even host-guest interactions contribute to cultural valuation and even revitalisation, as has been seen in other Amazonian communities (Borman, 2008; Stronza, 2007; Wunder, 2000).

6 Conclusions

The Napo Province of the Ecuadorian Amazon provides a setting for evaluation of community development alternatives that offer more in the way of sustainability than extractive activities that tend to damage both the environment and the social fabric of surrounding communities. The economic status of most indigenous communities in the Amazon makes them susceptible to the financial inducements offered by foreign oil companies interested in exploiting their lands. Ecotourism may offer a more socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable alternative to extraction-based livelihoods.

The women in the indigenous Amazonian community of Shiripuno created a legal statute that legitimised the Amukishmi organisation for women as well as the associated ecotourism venture. These two new institutions have stimulated the growth of social capital among the community as a whole by fostering productive and mutually beneficial relationships and decision-making. In this paper, we argue that the cultivation of the cognitive/structural-bridging/bonding social capital resulting from Amukishmi's involvement in ecotourism has led to a more sustainable future for Shiripuno. Although this ecotourism project has its roots in a women's association, the findings of this research are not limited. Social and environmental disaster as a result of close proximity to sites of industrial extraction is the dismal but all too common fate of many indigenous

communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon and beyond. Without research into the potential of development alternatives like the one pursued in Shiripuno, these community will continue to fall into the unsustainable offerings of extraction-based entities.

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