

Negotiating Development: Local Actors and Economic Change in Coastal Ecuador¹

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Abstract

In recent decades, coastal communities throughout Latin America have adopted ecotourism as an economic response to declining fisheries production. Based on research conducted in southern Manabí province, Ecuador, this paper focuses on the development of an actor-centered ecotourism cooperative as a concrete example of an actor-centered development project to complement mainstream, state-sponsored development. It specifically highlights certain difficulties encountered by a community cooperative to change from fishing and diving to ecotourism.

*Activities like fishing and diving won't be prosperous in the future...
we are looking for an alternative in tourism.*

— JUNIOR SALAZAR, a local diver and proponent of tourism development (Salazar 2003)

Introduction

Coastal areas throughout the world are undergoing dramatic changes as a long history of natural resource extraction gives way to declining productivity and the need for economic change. Throughout much of the coastal tropics, traditional economic activities such as fishing and diving are being replaced by tourism. In south-central coastal Ecuador, local actors are undertaking the tenuous process of negotiating economic change. Drawing from the case of Pueblo Verde, a rural fishing village located in Ecuador's southern Manabí province, (see Figure 1 below), this paper addresses certain difficulties associated with ecotourism development. It analyzes relationships among local groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and state agencies concerning development practices.

As the research presented in this paper illustrates, even when local development efforts are "actor-centered," they are indelibly tied ideologically to those that are state sponsored. My use of the term "actor-centered" stems from my own experiences with rural Ecuadorians and their attempts to realize a shift from natural resource extraction to conservation and ecotourism development. Within the context of this paper, the term "actor-centered" holds two meanings. First and foremost, actor-centered refers to the roles of local leaders and people within development processes. Actor-centered development is locally initiated, and the term "actor-centered" is used

interchangeably with the term "actor-initiated." Actor-centered initiatives mean that locals play a fundamental role in economic development programs even though they do not work independently of larger political, economic, and organizational structures. Secondly, the term "actor-centered" focuses on the perceptions, interpretations, understandings, and experiences of those who are locally involved with conservation and development.

This case study uniquely serves as an opportunity to understand economic development from the perspectives of local actors. Whereas, economic development in southern Manabí conforms to numerous other development studies by addressing issues of conservation and development (see Belsky 1999, Brown et al. 2000, Cruz-Torres 2001, McDaniel 2002, Place 1995, Walley 2004, and Young 1999), which are a fundamental feature of ecotourism (Walley 2004), the Manabí case emphasizes contradictions inherent in development. I discuss the complementary yet contradictory nature of southern Manabí development and focus on differential attitudes toward conservation from different state and NGO sources in the development process.

Ethnographic Methods

I conducted community-based research on ecotourism development throughout Ecuador's southern Manabí province during the summers

of 2002 to 2005. I use the term community in a broad sense. Drawing from the work of Stephen Gudeman (2001), community is herein conceived of as being a fairly small, intimate assemblage of individuals who are organized around a central set of activities that vary in importance according to their social and economic functions. I tracked the growth of ecotourism in the community of Pueblo Verde, Manabí, Ecuador. My research focused on economic transitions throughout the southern Manabí coast aimed at understanding a slowly developing shift from commercial fishing and diving to ecotourism. I employed participant observation as a primary means of data collection and conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with fishers, divers, tourism operators, and community leaders. All translations are my own and any errors or mistakes are my responsibility.

I focused specifically on interviewing individuals with an intimate familiarity of development processes in Pueblo Verde aimed at understanding development from the perspective of those individuals who were active in local development practices. My interviews document the economic history of southern Manabí province and the growth of regional ecotourism, and my questions focused on individuals' perceptions of ecotourism, conceptions of conservation, and rationales for adopting ecotourism, and the specific ways in which actors' engaged themselves in ecotourism projects. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms to protect informants' privacy.

Community Variability: Puerto San Miguel and Pueblo Verde

The town of Puerto San Miguel lies on the outskirts of Ecuador's Machalilla National Park, a 55,096 hectare park (136,142.22 acres) established by the Ecuadorian government in 1979.

Puerto San Miguel is the commercial center of southern Manabí and it is the one place that tourists are sure to find if they make their way to the southern Manabí coast. Puerto San Miguel is a bustling town with a population of nearly 15,000 and it is the tourist hub of the region. During the summer months of June through August the muddy streets team with tourists both foreign and national. The months of June, July, and August mark the migration of Pacific humpback whales and correspondingly

mark the high season for tourism throughout the province of Manabí. Throughout the day the cafes lining the ocean-front provide tourists with a place to relax and reflect while observing the beach-front activities. At night, *cumbia* and *salsa* music from the various *discotecas* and bars pulsates through the streets. Puerto San Miguel is the de facto stopping point for

tourists traveling the south-central Ecuadorian coast. Most tourists only spend a few days visiting the area attractions and almost all visits are highlighted by a whale-watching tour and a tour of Isla de Plata, a 1,120 hectare (2,767.5 acres) island located 24 nautical miles off the coast of Puerto San Miguel. Tourism is such an important part of the local economy that Puerto San Miguel is championed as the whale-watching capital of the world.

Six kilometers to (3.7 miles) the south of Puerto San Miguel is the sleepy fishing village of Pueblo Verde. The village of Pueblo Verde, population 1400, is situated in an ecologically diverse region with low hills to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Ecuador's coastal highway bisects the village and separates the majority of the village's residences from a vast expanse of communal land that borders the eastern foothills.

A large island, known as Isla Verde, is located approximately 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) off the coast, and is one of the most prominent natural

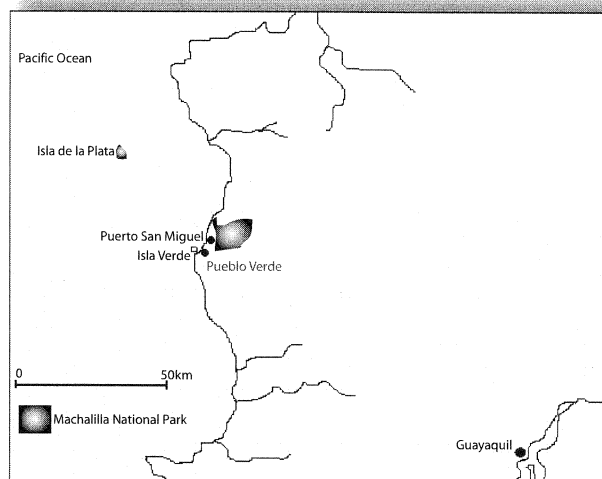


Figure 1: Location of Pueblo Verde, Manabí, Ecuador. Map prepared by the author.

features associated with the village of Pueblo Verde. For centuries, the island has served as a focal point for the inhabitants of the village. Elder members of the community speak of the once plentiful waters surrounding the island, waters that held bountiful amounts of lobster, *pepino* (sea cucumber), various fish species, and *Spondylus*, a bi-valve that has been utilized throughout the region for nearly 5,000 years (Harris et al. 2004). When I first began conducting ethnographic research in southern Manabí during the summer of 2002, the waters surrounding the island were greatly depleted due to over-exploitation by the commercial fishing and diving industries. While people still continue to fish and dive the waters associated with the island, recently realized ecotourism development initiatives are beginning to change the complexion of the once sleepy fishing village.

Stemming from the ecotourism success of Puerto San Miguel, and acknowledging the promotion of state-sponsored tourism, during the summer of 2002 members of the community of Pueblo Verde began investigating the economic potential of tourism. The result was the creation of PARCEMAR to promote tourism development and conservation in Pueblo Verde. The name PARCEMAR is derived from the desire of its members to establish a *parcela marina* or marine reserve on the northern side of Isla Verde.

Environmental Degradation and Economic Change in Southern Manabí

For over 5,000 years the natural resources of the Pueblo Verde region sustained its inhabitants (Harris et al. 2004). Prior to the 1960s, Pueblo Verde existed as a relatively isolated community where subsistence fishing and horticulture dominated the local economy. The adoption of motorized boating technology in the 1960s and the later construction of a coastal highway that connects Pueblo Verde to Ecuador's main port cities of Guayaquil and Manta transformed the village of Pueblo Verde into a semi-industrialized commercial fishing port. The fishing industry grew as people migrated south to Pueblo Verde from the inland region of Jipijapa and west toward the coast from the inland *montaña* region (Harris et al. 2004).

A recent study conducted by The Nature

Conservancy in conjunction with Ecuador's Fundación Natura (Gaibor et al. 2002) notes that Pueblo Verde experienced a three-fold increase in the number of active fishermen between 1963 and 1999 (Gaibor et al. 2002). "The global fisheries harvest increased six-fold since 1950" (Brown et al. 2002:9) so the growth of the Pueblo Verde fishing industry corresponds to the overall increase in the global fisheries harvest from 1950 to 1999. While this appears to indicate the overall economic growth of the local fishing industry, ethnographic data obtained between 2002 and 2005 suggests that as the number of people in the local fishing industry grew, an equally dramatic decline in fisheries production occurred.

The rapid of growth of commercial fishing and the corresponding decline in production has caused many individuals, including Don Antonio Moreno, a local boat owner and community leader, to question the feasibility of maintaining the industry as a primary economic activity:

Why fish? There is no money in fishing. Life is not good for fishermen; work is not stable. Everyday is worse than the day before.

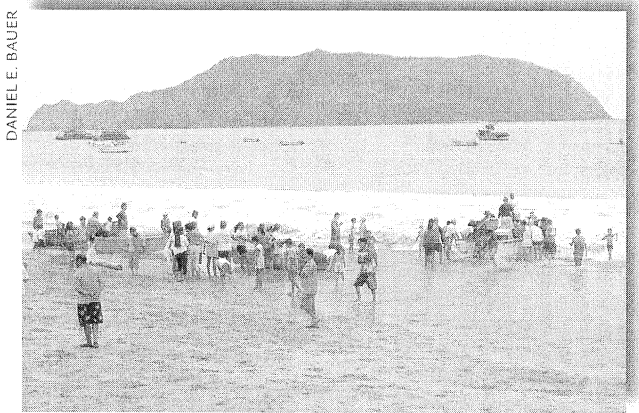


Sorting the daily catch before it is sent to market.

The local divers of Pueblo Verde share similar sentiments. In a 2003 video produced by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Tourism in conjunction with Machalilla National Park, one of Pueblo Verde's most respected divers, Junior Salazar, a 30-year-old who began diving in his early teens, critically evaluates the impact of commercial diving on the local environment. I repeat a statement of his that I opened with in my introduction above:

Activities like fishing and diving won't be prosperous in the future ... we are looking for an alternative in tourism.

He acknowledges that conservation-based ecotourism presents local divers with a means to bolster their incomes while protecting the resources on which they depend. For many locals, ecotourism is perceived as having the potential to provide the community with a viable economic alternative to commercial fishing and diving while maintaining an important economic and cultural connection to the Pacific Ocean.



Bringing in the daily catch.

During an interview, José Reyes, a young community leader and supporter of tourism development, spoke about the relationship between economic practice, the natural environment, and social identity. José slowly lifted his left arm and pointed to the west toward the Pacific Ocean saying that

It is the culture, people look toward the ocean ... the people only use one resource, fishing, we live for one type of work ... we are a village of fishermen.

He was implying that people could still focus on the ocean but switch from actual fishing to ocean-based tourism. That was explicitly expressed by a local diver as one of the founders of the local tourism cooperative PARCEMAR. He maintained that ecotourism development makes sense because

Tourism allows us to use what we know. ... We are fishermen and divers and tourism uses the same resource that we have used for generations.

The above-mentioned quotations provide us with an important insight as to the rationale for ecotourism development in Pueblo Verde. In Pueblo Verde, as is the case throughout much of coastal Manabí, the Pacific Ocean is a fundamental part of daily life. Not only is the Pacific Ocean the economic base upon which the community is reliant, the Pacific Ocean is also the cultural base of the community. Stephen Gude-man (2001) defines the community realm of economic interaction as a system of exchange that is characterized by the differential presence of the following traits:

- a *base* or *commons*, and ways of maintaining the base or commons through time;
- *cultural constructions* conjoining base and people, and helping to define identity;
- *situated* or *embedded reason* and *innovation*, which sustain and change the base;
- *self-sufficiency*, which supports independence and identity;
- rules of *allotting* and *apportioning* the base and products;
- forms of *re-allotment* and *reapportionment*, which mark changing positions, power, and accumulations;
- internal *appropriation* and *extraction*;
- expansion and contraction of borders through *reciprocity* and *force* practiced between communities; and
- *trade* for maintenance and exploration.

In the case of Pueblo Verde, the first four are the most applicable and pertinent.

In a similar manner, Shubi Ishemo (2002) argues that questions of identity are central to the cultural dimension of socioeconomic processes. In the case of Pueblo Verde, it is clear that economic activity is linked to identity formation. This recognition is consistent with Shubi Ishemo's (2002) approach that dimensions of social identity have to do with how economics influences culture. However, it is not enough to simply to recognize this connection. In order to more fully understand the interface of identity and economic practice, one must first examine the cultural value of the commons. As a shared interest or value, the commons is not only a

material entity, but also a foundation for shared knowledge and representations (Gudeman 2001). The commons is both physical and cultural. The community members of Pueblo Verde acknowledge that their relationship to the Pacific Ocean extends beyond the realm of economic production. The Pacific Ocean is the foundation for cultural production. Thus, for many local actors, the transition from commercial fishing and diving to ecotourism is perceived as both economically and culturally appropriate.

Ecotourism Development in Southern Manabí

Environmental degradation is one of the prominent factors leading to a shift from commercial fishing and diving to ecotourism. And divers played an important role in the establishment of the PARCEMAR tourism cooperative. The relationship between PARCEMAR, NGOs, and the state, and questions of community attitudes toward conservation figures in tourism development in Pueblo Verde and in the social and economic conditions that influenced many of Pueblo Verde's commercial divers to make the transition from diving to ecotourism. Commercial divers maintain a social and economic position within the community distinct from Pueblo Verde fishermen. Commercial divers gain a substantial part of their annual income during the relatively short *pepino* (sea cucumber) season that occurs each year in the Galapagos Islands between June and August. Despite the high economic yields, often as much as \$1500 for two months of work, most divers resent working in the Galapagos. For the divers of Pueblo Verde, most of whom range in age between 17 and 35 years, working in the Galapagos means spending two months aboard a 15-meter boat (49.2 feet) with as many as 20 other people. The divers eat and sleep on the boat as it makes its way along the coast of the Galapagos. Fiberglass boats ranging in size from 6 meters to 8 meters (19.7 to 26.2 feet) known as *fibras* or *pangas* are towed behind the dive boats. Two divers and a *pangero*, or driver man each *fibra*. Each day, the divers go out in a *fibra*, often spending 6 to 8 hours below the surface of the Pacific Ocean while oxygen is pumped through a one-half inch diameter tube

by way of a gasoline powered air compressor situated high above the diver on the floor of the *fibra*. Work is difficult and dangerous and many divers express a strong desire not to have to return to work in the Galapagos.

Due to their relative economic security, and their desire not to return to work in the Galapagos, the divers of Pueblo Verde have been much more apt than fishermen to interpret ecotourism as a viable economic alternative to marine resource extraction. Moreover, the relative independence of divers, working usually in pairs while in Pueblo Verde, as opposed to well-organized groups, provides them with the freedom to explore economic opportunities other than diving. Members of commercial fishing crews tend to be linked by strong ties of kinship and a clear family history of fishing. Commercial diving is much more individualistic. Divers also have much more free time to explore economic venues other than diving. Fishermen throughout southern Manabí province depend on the phases of the moon to dictate their fishing schedules. It is a general rule that fishermen work during the *oscuro* or dark period of the moon. During the full moon and surrounding days, known as the *claro* period, fishermen do not fish. This means that on average, fishermen work 18 days per month.

Divers on the other hand, rely on a far less predictable natural indicator for diving. Water clarity is the key variable that is necessary for successful diving to take place. Unlike the lunar cycle, water clarity is highly unpredictable. It can vary from one day to the next and is highly dependent upon wind and the condition of the sea. All people in Pueblo Verde are familiar with the potential of the sea to be *bravo* or rough. However, the rough conditions of the sea impact divers much more so than fishermen. In times of even minimal wind and strong waves, divers are unable to dive. As a consequence of the relative unpredictability of weather patterns, divers often work as few as 10 days per month. All of the above-mentioned factors have resulted in a situation in which divers are much more likely to adopt ecotourism as an alternative to commercial diving while fishermen are less likely to engage in ecotourism activities.

The Growth of PARCEMAR

The tourism cooperative PARCEMAR was established in June of 2002 with an initial membership of seven divers. Don Marcos García, a respected community leader and proponent of ecotourism development, discussed ideas about the formation of PARCEMAR with numerous local divers who also showed an interest in ecotourism development. The majority of the divers were familiar with the potential for ecotourism development as a result of their familiarity with the tourism economy of Puerto San Miguel. Moreover, the strong presence of NGOs throughout the region and the proximity of Pueblo Verde to Machalilla National Park helped convince members that ecotourism could prosper in Pueblo Verde.

During the summer of 2002, PARCEMAR experienced rapid growth. Two of the seven members of PARCEMAR opened individually operated offices in Pueblo Verde and five other members combined their resources to open a single office with the PARCEMAR namesake for a total of three offices whose growth was in part due to an idealistic notion of ecotourism development. Buying into the state discourse on tourism development that privileges conservation and highlights the natural environment as an important resource, the seven members of PARCEMAR believed that tourism would provide an important alternative source of income that required little up-front investment.

The members of PARCEMAR were not alone in their quest to promote tourism in Pueblo Verde. *Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli*, the Committee for the Development of the Peoples (CISP), a European NGO that provides funds for environmental conservation efforts, joined forces with the newly formed tourism cooperative by providing nominal financial and organizational support. CISP worked with the members of the cooperative to institute an organizational structure that required each member of PARCEMAR to *buy in* to the cooperative. Each member of PARCEMAR was required to purchase a share of the cooperative for \$50. CISP matched the funds provided by each member resulting in a total cost of \$100 per share. CISP also provided the members of PARCEMAR with items including life jackets and marine radios.

With the help of CISP, PARCEMAR grew from seven members to twelve members between 2003 and 2004 and grew organizationally. Between 2003 and 2004, Don Marcos worked tirelessly to organize the members of PARCEMAR and gather much needed information for its growth.

But a number of fees inhibited the growth and prosperity of the tourism cooperative. Start-up costs were one reason that ecotourism growth was limited initially. Minimally, members of PARCEMAR needed to outfit their boats and pay for guide licenses. Guide licenses allowing access to Machalilla National Park cost \$100 per individual. Fees also needed to be paid to the municipal office in Puerto San Miguel in order to register PARCEMAR as a business. The total cost of fees to be paid to the municipality was \$120 in 2003. Members of PARCEMAR were also required to register with the regional tourism authority in Puerto San Miguel at an additional cost of \$64 annually.

Motor costs increased. Tourism regulations require that each boat used for tourism have two motors. To add another motor to each of the boats in operation, the members of PARCEMAR determined that they would have to acquire nearly \$10,000. The overall start-up cost quickly exceeded the initial amount invested by each member.

Funding was not the only problem encountered. During my time working with the members of PARCEMAR, I frequently participated in conversations pertaining to PARCEMAR's relationship with Machalilla National Park. Many of the members shared the concern that national park personnel favored the tourism offices in the nearby town of Puerto San Miguel. Don León Novo, a retired diver and a proponent of tourism in Puerto San Miguel, spoke of the relationship between PARCEMAR and the national park during an evening conversation outside of his home. He stated that:

The problem with tourism here is that everything is associated with Puerto San Miguel and the national park. For example, if people want to have tours here in Pueblo Verde and they want the tours to go to Isla de Plata, they can't ... they keep track of the visitors and once the maximum number of

visitors is reached, no more are allowed. It also costs a lot of money and in order to have access to areas associated with the park, the tour company has to pay. The agencies in Puerto San Miguel have an advantage over us because the national park has an office in Puerto San Miguel. This office helps the agencies in Puerto San Miguel, but ignores the offices in Pueblo Verde.

Due to lack of support from the municipal government and the regional tourism authority, the members of PARCEMAR never acquired the requisite guide licenses for Machalilla National Park. This situation greatly inhibits their chances of success. Whereas, whale-watching tours near *Isla Verde* cost \$15 per person, and *Isla de Plata* is the destination that is most often frequented by tourists. Between January and July of 2001, over 6,300 tourists visited *Isla de Plata* (Baquero 2002). The current cost for a trip to *Isla de Plata* is \$40 per person. The inability of the members of PARCEMAR to obtain licenses for Machalilla National Park is therefore, a significant obstacle impeding the growth and prosperity of PARCEMAR.

The State and Actor-Centered Development

Following the 1992 establishment of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Information and Tourism, development projects geared toward ecotourism growth increased dramatically throughout southern Manabí. The state sponsored initiative highlighted tourism as a fundamental activity for the social and economic development of the nation. Primary goals of the tourism plan include creating an environment that is accommodating to foreign tourists as well as creating economic incentives for foreign investors. Within this frame, and corresponding to a broader Latin American trend (see Belsky 1999, Meyer 1993, and Young 1999) the Ministry of Information and Tourism has promoted rural development initiatives with an emphasis on utilizing the natural environment as a tourist attraction. An important feature of the initiative is the desire to promote and *sell* the idea of conservation to tourists. With these goals in mind, the ministry recently adopted the motto, "*Porque Somos Naturaleza*" (Because We

Are Nature).

Despite the Ecuadorian government's intent to promote tourism, it has not earned a reputation for being generous when it comes to providing much-needed capital for local level development initiatives. PARCEMAR members point to a lack of government assistance, which inhibits the growth of the tourism cooperative. With reference to the national park and the issue of funding, according to Don León, "people in Pueblo Verde can't afford to pay, and there is no governmental assistance." Governmental loans are virtually nonexistent, and small-scale bank loans to entrepreneurs are difficult to obtain without substantial collateral. Don León blames the Ecuadorian government and its limited role in developing ecotourism throughout the rural coast. The accomplished diver and carpenter spoke slowly and distinctly with a soft tone and precise hand gestures:

There is no incentive [for tourism]. The government promotes tourism, but it also impedes progress. There is no form of [governmental] assistance. In Ecuador, the government just takes from the people. The money goes directly into the pockets of the rich. The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.

Don León said this while running his finger across his throat. Don León is a man who knows about hard work in a life of poverty. He began diving at the age of twelve and has spent much of his life working as a carpenter and boat builder. His involvement in PARCEMAR stems from his interest in protecting the natural environment and improving the economic condition of his native community. His critique of the Ecuadorian government is due largely to what he views as a long-standing tradition of the Ecuadorian government to aid the rich and ignore the poor. In Puerto San Miguel, he has witnessed the growth of government supported tourism development, but, according to Don León, very little has been done to improve the lives of the individuals who are native to southern Manabí. Don León's criticism is that the Ecuadorian government has done little to provide financial assistance to local investors, focusing instead on attracting wealthy investors, both foreign and

national, with tax breaks and other incentives.

The words of Don León speak directly to what Jill Belsky (1999) refers to as *leaching*. Leaching occurs when income gained from ecotourism bypasses the communities where tourism occurs and goes directly into the hands of outsiders, often wealthy investors. As Belsky's (1999) work in Belize and mine in Ecuador illustrate, ecotourism is not free from leaching. Where it occurs, there is little direct economic benefit to local actors. In 2005, wealthy investors from the cities of Quito, Cuenca, and Guayaquil owned ten of the twelve tourism offices in Puerto San Miguel while only two of the offices were locally owned. Although the Ecuadorian government promotes ecotourism at the level of discourse, the government impedes local attempts to initiate tourism, which is a result in the eyes of many locals of not providing practical assistance to local actors.

It is obvious by analyzing the relationship between PARCEMAR and the state that there exists a corresponding, yet contradictory understanding of economic development. Despite a rhetoric that supports ecotourism growth and development, economic development in Ecuador all too frequently results in economic gains for the wealthy as opposed to improving the overall quality of life of the rural poor. Local actors hear the words that are being spoken by the government, but they rarely come face to face with the desired outcome. Ecuador has boosted its tourism industry since the early 1990s, and the number of tourists visiting Machalilla National Park increased by over 42 percent between 1995 and 2001 (Baquero 2002). During the same period, the number of foreign tourists visiting the park more than doubled (Baquero 2002). Despite these seemingly good indicators, many locals agree that the rural poor are not reaping the benefits of ecotourism.

Non-governmental Organizations and Actor-Centered Development

The Ecuadorian state has struggled to successfully implement development initiatives embracing the work of foreign non-governmental organizations to promote development. Starting in the 1980s, NGOs have become a dominant feature on the landscape of development and have become commonplace throughout Ecuador

because they are

seen as small-scale organizations closely linked to the communities that they serve. Unlike cumbersome state bureaucracies, NGOs are able to quickly implement projects, often in areas where the state lacks expertise (Segarra 1997:4).

Since 2002, southern Manabí has experienced a strong NGO presence for tourism development and conservation, not unnoticed by PARCEMAR.

One of my most memorable NGO encounters occurred during the summer of 2003 when the members of PARCEMAR attempted to secure funding from CISP, the European Union funded NGO that previously provided PARCEMAR with support. The members of PARCEMAR organized the meeting to gain information for financial assistance and took turns discussing the value of their tourism cooperative for local-level conservation. The primary goal of the meeting was to determine the amount of money needed to meet the needs of PARCEMAR. As the group discussed numbers and tried to figure out the necessary income that would need to be generated to repay a loan of roughly \$10,000, Alfonso Espinosa, the local CISP representative with whom the group was consulting, maintained that it would be difficult. His t-shirt extended a similar message in ironic fashion stating, "*Hay un mundo mejor, pero es carísimo.*" (There is a better world, but it is very expensive).

While NGO's have been and still are present throughout the region, in Pueblo Verde the success of NGO sponsored projects has been minimal. NGO aide has been used primarily to promote tourism while not providing funds to develop the infrastructure necessary for the transition from fishing and diving to tourism. Most notably, CISP utilized funds and labor to build signs promoting Pueblo Verde as a tourist destination. The signs, which promote local tourist attractions including the Pacific Ocean for whale watching, Machalilla National Park, and *Isla de Plata*, stand prominently along the highway that bisects the village. Used to attract tourists to the village, the signs present the casual observer with the image that development projects are being successfully negotiated in the

rural communities of coastal Ecuador. However, NGO efforts to promote tourism in Pueblo Verde occurred just prior to the scheduled end of the development project. NGO aide has provided the means to attract tourists but in many cases has not sufficiently provided for the fundamental requirements of a tourism agency such as office space and reliable boat motors. The net result of NGO activity in Pueblo Verde is that tourism offices are ill prepared to cater to tourists due to a lack of infrastructure.

Compounding the problems associated with a lack of government assistance and NGO support, is the recent disillusionment of members of PARCEMAR. In 2004, several members expressed an interest in selling their shares of the cooperative and running their own tours without the aid of the cooperative. One of the members of PARCEMAR described the potential move in the following way, "They want to leave because they aren't happy with the cooperative, and they think that they will have more success on their own. They don't realize that this will take time. We are working hard, but it takes time. If they leave, they will be operating without licenses. PARCEMAR is licensed, but the individual members are not. Without affiliation with PARCEMAR they will be operating illegally."

In the spring of 2005, two of the founding members sold their shares in favor of operating their own offices without the aid of the cooperative. Additionally, Junior Salazar, the diver who appeared in the promotional video for Machalilla National Park, sold his share of the cooperative and is no longer working in the tourism industry. Instead, he serves as the president of the newly founded *Organización de Busos en la Pesca Artesanal del Pueblo Verde* (Organization of Artesanal Divers of Pueblo Verde). He left the tourism cooperative to continue as a commercial diver because, as suggested by other members of PARCEMAR, the lack of funding is a fundamental problems inhibiting tourism development in Pueblo Verde. According to Junior Salazar,

one has to invest thousands of dollars ... for us that is very difficult ... tourism is very difficult. That is why I continue diving. I can make money by diving ... we can't live any other way.

Preaching Conservation in a Community of Fishermen

Ecotourism has predominantly been understood as a form of tourism development that values conservation as well as development. However, capitalist concerns often take precedence over conservation. The work of the PARCEMAR tourism cooperative illustrates the potential for a marriage between economic development and environmental conservation. The proposed protection of the *Parcela Marina* by the members of PARCEMAR demonstrates a clear concern for conservation on the part of the members of PARCEMAR, however residents of Pueblo Verde who are not involved in tourism development rarely echo the same sentiments. All too frequently, individual interests for economic gain are valued more than conservation. One of the biggest obstacles to the establishment of the *Parcela Marina* is a lack of community support.

By way of example, on a warm evening in August 2005, I joined Carlos Merced, a diver and one of the founding members of PARCEMAR, for a soda outside of his home. We stumbled into a conversation that we had encountered on numerous previous occasions about the progress of the *Parcela Marina* and the prospects for conserving the area. He quickly shifted in his seat and took on a serious tone:

The ocean is life for the people of the community. ... If people don't have anything else, they can always go out and get food. It is a problem, but it is life.

Throughout the course of my research, I encountered numerous similar situations. By further example, a female university student of ecotourism relayed a story to me in which her mother gathered 60 sea turtle eggs from the beach for household consumption. Another member of PARCEMAR summed up a local misunderstanding of conservation:

Divers go out, and everything they catch is worth money. Spondylus are worth money. ... the more you catch the more money you get. Fishermen are even worse, they take everything.

But another diver stated that

The protection of the environment is of great importance ... we need to protect our resources.

This statement highlights not only the need for conservation but also the relationship between community members and the natural environment. Local actors view the region's natural resources and the maintenance of natural resources as a community responsibility; a responsibility that many maintain has not been taken seriously by local divers.

According to Miguel Balán a respected diver weathered beyond his years from countless hours below the surface of the ocean, the majority of Pueblo Verde's divers have shown little interest in preserving the natural environment. Sitting outside of Miguel's home on a cool evening in June 2005, he discussed the recent formation of an association of divers in Pueblo Verde and criticized the desire of the association to regulate diving through the formation of protected no-dive zones. He said that the protected areas are only those areas in which resources have already been depleted:

The entire region around Isla Verde is part of Machalilla National Park. In order to please park officials, the divers have agreed to stop diving in certain areas such as the Parcela Marina. However, they have only stopped diving in areas that don't have any resources because they have already taken everything.

Even while many of the divers of Pueblo Verde support a local no-dive zone in the *parcela marina*, some divers still frequent the area looking for lobster, sea cucumber, and spondylus. One of the reasons that divers still work the waters of the *parcela* is due to the close proximity of the *parcela* to the coast. The *parcela* is approximately 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) off the coast of Pueblo Verde. Divers can travel to the *parcela* in a matter of minutes whereas other dive spots, which are further away, require an increased investment in both time and gasoline.

Varying attitudes toward conservation constitute obstacles for the realization of a marine reserve off the coast of Pueblo Verde. Despite conflicting views about the potential for suc-

cessful ecotourism and differing opinions about conservation, in the summer of 2005 Pueblo Verde's association of divers agreed to close to commercial fishing and diving the 100-meter (328-foot) square area encompassed by the marine reserve to commercial fishing and diving. Despite the fact that PARCEMAR has undergone significant changes since its inception, the original members who remain a part of PARCEMAR are dedicated to protecting the marine park.

Concluding Remarks

Community based studies on ecotourism development provide an important contribution to scholarly discussions of development by illustrating the interconnectedness of local actors, the state, and NGOs. As my research illustrates, community based studies have the potential to be valuable contributions to our understanding of development processes as anthropologists. The case of PARCEMAR in Ecuador, which like much of Latin America has undergone dramatic tourism growth since the early 1990s, is one example of the ways in which ecotourism development is negotiated by local actors. In the face of rapid natural resource depletion like the coastal regions of Ecuador, and influenced by both a state-sponsored initiative to promote ecotourism and a decline in fisheries production, local actors have responded by attempting to foster and promote tourism development and conservation. Effective local actors are not merely passive recipients of development, but rather are key factors in the development process.

This study illustrates the complementary yet contradictory nature of the relationship between state-sponsored discourses on tourism development and actor understandings of tourism development. And it illustrates how even when local actors buy in, so to speak, to state-sponsored efforts, success is difficult to achieve. With PARCEMAR, numerous factors inhibited the growth of the tourism cooperative including a lack of government support, a lack of NGO support, limited park access, and a general lack of concern for conservation. Ultimately nevertheless, anthropological research pertaining to economic development should focus on actors' roles, conceptions, concerns, and understandings of development processes. It is from this actor-centered

approach, that we can gain a more thorough understanding of the social, economic, and political dimensions of workable development. ○

Notes

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