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## Anthropology as a Driver for Tourism Research



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### **3 Anthropological Research on the Impacts of Indigenous Tourism**

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#### **Chapter summary**

The chapter is based on longitudinal fieldwork on the effects of tourism on indigenous people, which the author has carried out in the Guna Indian community in Panama since 2003. The first section of the chapter presents a historical overview of the academic debate on the concept of indigenous tourism and shows how the interpretations have evolved from an object-centred orientation – defining indigenous tourism as a commercial product offered to tourists – into a more subject-centred orientation – referring to the travel motives of tourists. When indigenous tourism reaches the maturity stage and entails economic benefits for the host community, the pitfall of cultural commodification is always present as well as the potential loss of non-lucrative traditions. In the anthropological analysis of the issues related to this field of tension, three types of vision can be distinguished: an optimistic-positive vision on the impact of tourism, emphasizing the economic profit as well as the revitalization of arts, handicrafts and traditions; an oppositional-critical vision on the impact of tourism, which highlights the negative effects of mass tourism development for indigenous communities; and a vision that takes the middle course between the two preceding visions and is inspired by the best practices of those indigenous communities who have managed to develop creative cultural adaptations to the changes produced by tourism.

## Introduction

Since the 1990s, indigenous tourism has rapidly grown due to the Western belief that indigenous people are the preservers of the most genuine human values and that they are closer to the nature and the environment already considered as devastated in the Western world. This development has boosted anthropological studies on indigenous tourism. The first part of this chapter offers a critical review of the various definitions of indigenous tourism. The evolution in anthropological thinking on the effects of indigenous tourism on receiving communities is the subject matter of the next section. Finally, a general typology of visions on the impact of indigenous tourism will be presented, deduced from field research in Latin America.

### How to understand and define indigenous tourism?

*From object-centred to subject-centred perspectives:  
a historical overview of conceptions of indigenous tourism*

Indigenous tourism has become an important field of investigation since the 1990s (Mercer, 1995; Zeppel, 2007). The Canadian Tourism Commission (1997) compiled numerous bibliographic references for the Canadian case and Heather Zeppel (1999) did the same for the Australian case. More recently, a work by Diana Kutzner *et al.* (2007) gathered 323 bibliographic references about indigenous tourism and, since its launch in 1981, the *Bulletin of Latin American Research* published 41 articles related to indigenous tourism. Michael Hall *et al.* (2007) showed that the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic group* appear 57 times as key words in the books published in 2002 by CABI, a publishing house specialized in tourism and social sciences.

In the 1990s, indigenous tourism was defined as a set of first-hand experiences with indigenous cultures (Harron and Weiler, 1992), a form of cultural collection (Volkman, 1990) and also as a field of co-ethnic relations (Van den Berghe, 1980; 1994a), characterized by the attraction of the Other and his or her culture, the different and the 'ethnic exoticism', the native as an object of 'tourist' curiosity. In this context, Valene Smith defined indigenous tourism on the basis of the four 'H's':

Indigenous tourism (...) is taken as that segment of the visitor industry which directly involves native peoples whose ethnicity is a tourist attraction (...)  
Indigenous tourism involves four interrelated elements: the geographic



**Figure 3.1** Guest and hosts: a Spanish tourist with the Nalunega island dance group of Guna Yala, Panama (Photo by the author).

setting (habitat), the ethnographic traditions (heritage), the effects of acculturation (history), and the marketable handicrafts (1996: 283, 287) [Figure 3.1].

Richard Butler and Tom Hinch seem to be in favour of the commercialization of indigenous tourism with indigenous controlled by local communities because they define the term as follows:

Tourism activities in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction (1996: 10).

From the perspective of the quoted researchers, indigenous tourism is considered more as a product than as a different form of travelling, that is to say, a commercial relationship between producers (locals) and consumers (tourists) interested in habitat, cultural heritage, social history and craftwork of the natives. In this line, Charles R. De Burlo defines indigenous tourism as

a term used in the literature to refer to those activities which directly involve indigenous peoples. In this type of tourism, the native groups are in control of enterprises which have indigenous culture as a main attraction (2000: 304).

A critical position is taken by Edward Bruner (1995) stating that the real lives of the natives are masked in order to make the search for indigenous local colour more attractive to the tourist visitors and satisfy their expectations. Paradoxically, the traditional and indigenous cultures described by anthropologists in the past and now looked for by the tourists, have changed and are not the same anymore.

Within the framework of typological classifications, authors such as Valene Smith and Peter Van den Berghe conceptualized indigenous and ethnic tourism as different from cultural tourism (Pereiro, 2009). On the other hand, Greg Richards (1996) affirms that ethnic tourism can be regarded as a form of cultural tourism. The same goes for the WTO (the World Tourism Organization), which defines indigenous tourism as a form of cultural tourism driven by the interest in ethnicity, traditions and lifestyle of communities as visit motives (OMT, 2003). Since 2000, some new attempts were made to define the term *ethnic tourism*, for example by Tim Oakes:

Ethnic tourism may be defined as a form of tourism in which the prime motivation of the tourist involves a desire to experience and interact with exotic ethnic peoples (2000: 204).

This definition focuses on the perspective of the tourist and his or her travel motives. According to this approach, exoticism is the first attraction for a tourist who expects to see ways of life different from his own and to reconstruct the sense of identity, place and tradition (ibid).

The distinction between indigenous, ethnic and cultural tourism is rather blurry, but there are some key features that are distinctive of indigenous tourism. Cultural tourism covers a broad gamut of tourist experiences inspired by artistic, historical, heritage, ethnic or indigenous products (cf. Pereiro, 2009). Ethnic tourism refers to the tourist experience with ethnic groups and their cultural roots (cf. Yang and Wall, 2009). Indigenous tourism is more centred on the attractiveness of indigenous groups living in particular ecological niches. From this last perspective, Rodrigo de Azeredo Grunewald (2003) tries to define indigenous tourism by reconciling the focus on the object of the tourist visit, i.e. the native population, and the subject-centred perspective on the tourist motivation. This researcher

compares indigenous tourism to a social movement that constructs a specific ethnicity to be shown in the sphere of tourism. Just like Comaroff (1992; 2011), Grunewald understands ethnicity as a do-it-yourself project, modelled by the local culture and the global market.

#### *Ethnicity between commodification and recreation of traditions*

In 2005, two authors from New Zealand, Chris Ryan and Michel Aiken, edited a collective work about indigenous tourism that had a huge impact on anthropological tourism research (Ryan and Aiken, 2005). Case studies from Oceania, East Asia, Canada and Scandinavia converge in this work, but examples from Latin America or from indigenous authors are missing. Nonetheless, the theoretical perspectives concerning indigenous tourism are innovative. In the introductory chapter, Chris Ryan affirms that tourism contributes to the creation of stereotyped images of indigenous villages (Ryan, 2005a: 1-15). In the same line, Chris Ryan and Jeremy Huyton (2005: 51) assert that for visitors to local communities the interactive experience is not as important as buying arts and crafts.

In his analysis of the indigenous tourism product, Chris Ryan (2005b: 69) emphasizes the paradox that tourism in its function of satisfying the desire for new economic opportunities for indigenous areas clashes with the efforts made by natives to protect their culture against commodification. Indeed, the commodification of indigenous culture seems to be inevitable if the main objective is to make a profit from tourism. The basic question is whether tourism should have ethical limits, or, as it is put in the conclusions of the quoted work, how to avoid the loss of traditions and profit from tourism. In essence, the contributions to the quoted work focus on the analysis of how indigenous groups create and recreate their identities through tourism, while taking indigenosity as a factor of tourism differentiation in the context of globalization.

This reconstruction of the indigenous ethnicity for tourists had already been observed and studied by other anthropologists (MacCannell, 1984; 1992; Grunewald, 2003; Vermeulen and Govers, 2003). It has led to the promotion and the merchandising of the indigenous culture, transferring the local identities and places to the global tourist market. This process can result in the preservation, reinvention and recreation of ethnic attributes by the natives, but usually it is at the expense of losing privacy and experiencing a certain feeling of invasion and threat. Therefore, the indigenous and the ethnic should be applied as malleable, flexible, dynamic and strategic categories, not absolute, but subject to constant negotiations and renegotiations. Basically, ethnicity can be defined in three different ways:



1. as a form of social organization of difference between human groups in contact (Barth, 1969; 2003);
2. as a generally symbolic frontier between groups in contact and not strictly as a different cultural content;
3. as an ascription or classification by a third party and/or as a self-ascription, i.e. as a means of social identification based on a shared belief and a conscience of difference, common interests, lineage and common history (Vermeulen and Govers, 2003).

Ethnicity can also take shape as a narrative, particularly if it is used for the political expression of identities under permanent construction, as these are always incomplete. Indigenous ethnicity is also reconstructed by tourism, which happens in part because of what Renato Rosaldo defined as 'imperialist nostalgia', a perspective which makes colonial and neo-colonial domination seem innocent and pure (Rosaldo, 1989) (see also Noel Salazar, this volume Chapter 2). Imperialist nostalgia is inspired by the regret of what Western colonists have destroyed before by altering the way of lives of the natives. Western tourists still feel guilty for what their ancestors have done and want things to be as they were before, wishing to turn indigenous areas into a kind of zoo with frozen animals.

From a similar perspective, researchers like Dennison Nash (1977) or Duccio Canestrini (2009) have interpreted tourism as a form of imperialism and neo-colonialism, a view that can be easily applied to indigenous tourism. In this critical line, Alison Johnston (2006) has studied the development of tourism in indigenous areas, pointing out ecotourism in indigenous areas as a tourist practice that comes up to the search of Western middle classes for a solution to their feeling of loss of cultural and natural heritage. Born in the 1980s, ecotourism was linked to the sustainability trend, then in the following decade it appeared as a popular alternative to economic destructive exploitation. While ecotourism, which currently represents 5% of international tourism, is generally considered as a benign form of tourism because it supports indigenous cultures and creates spiritual connections with nature, Johnston argues that ecotourism in indigenous contexts causes the collision between environment, multinational companies and indigenous cultural interests. It brings about a loss of the rights of the natives, the conversion of individuals and indigenous communities into goods, the destruction of cultural identity and heritage, and the continuation of colonial policies and practices. In comparison with the common point of view expressed in the studies collected by Ryan and Aicken (2005), which let coincide the position of researcher and that of designer of tourism products, models of change and the way of managing these,

Johnston is very critical of the commodification of indigenous culture and its environment. She does not regard tourism as something inevitable indigenous communities have to stick to, as Ryan and Aicken suggest. On the contrary, Johnston asks herself whether those things the natives deem to be sacred and spiritual have to be sold through tourism.

#### *New horizons in ethnic tourism*

It is a fact that tourism is a powerful force that encourages intercultural contact and creates a new framework for interethnic relations. Tourism spans frontiers, divulges pre-existing images, recreates them and generates new images upon the Others, which have a bearing on the redefinition of cultural limitations and create new cultural forms that become commodified (Hernández Ramírez, 2006) (see also Noel Salazar, this volume, Chapter 2). Different geopolitical constructions of indigenous tourism in Central and South American countries, such as Guatemala, Panama, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil, have geared the development of indigenous tourism towards international tourists attracted by indigenous exoticism without involving the local communities. Consequently, the majority of national populations see the natives as poor, inferior and as a cause of a certain state of national backwardness. In reaction to this, new forms of indigenous tourism have emerged, belonging to the category of sustainable, responsible and alternative tourism, and are realized in tourism development projects to fight poverty. These projects are carried out within the framework of international cooperation (Gascon, 2009) on the basis of the Pro-poor Tourism and the ST-EP (Sustainable Tourism Eliminating Poverty) strategies developed by the WTO. Indigenous tourism will benefit from being increasingly integrated into these kinds of local social movements and alter-globalist tourism (see the debates on the Social Forum of Portalegre 2002 on [www.ivt-rj.net/destaques/forum/index.htm](http://www.ivt-rj.net/destaques/forum/index.htm)).

From this perspective, some researchers are extending the conceptual definition of indigenous tourism under the wings of ethnic tourism to include groups of peasants who develop tourism in a rural space, to roots tourism or nostalgia tourism, cultural heritage tourism and intercultural tourism (Costa, 2006; Cavaco, 2009). These new directions call into question the reduction of ethnic tourism to indigenous tourism and stretch it to include other kinds of tourism, such as cultural tourism. In this way, different forms of ethnic tourism, including indigenous tourism, can find their place in what Smith and Eadington called alternative tourisms, or:

Those forms of tourism that are consistent with natural, social and community values, and that permit to hosts and guests to enjoy of a positive interaction and valuable shared experiences (1992: 3).

According to Margarita Barretto, these are the alternatives to traditional tourism in the form of sea, sun and sand products. For this author, ethnic tourism is a particular, recent form of cultural tourism in which 'the main attraction is the way of living of certain human groups, differentiated by race, religion, origin and other common characteristics' (2005: 40). So, the ethnic groups use their ethnic differential as a tourist attraction. According to Barretto, there are two ways of developing ethnic tourism:

- a) Ethnic tourisms, born of purely commercial interests that reduce tourism to business. This type is a non-planned tourism, without expressed consent of the community and leading to the creation of human zoos.
- b) Ethnic tourisms as the result of community projects of cultural revitalization and affirmation of ethnic identities. In them, human groups self-determinate to show the tourists some elements of their culture in a selective way. In this type of development of ethnic tourism consultation, public policies and functions of regulation are fundamental at the time of developing the tourist activities (2005: 50-51).

This second form meets the objectives of community tourism, but we cannot put aside the economic interests often aimed at by the same communities and organized by the power of their collective identities. This implies that, for them, tourism is 'a business' or 'the business', an opportunity of survival in some cases, and of reproduction and indigenous affirmation in others.

### The evolution of the anthropological analysis of tourism impacts

Traditionally, the anthropology of tourism has been characterized by its research focus on the impacts of tourist activity on the receiving communities (cf. Boissvain, 1996; 2005; Pereiro, 2009). As Noel B. Salazar (2006; 2010) has pointed out, the anthropology of tourism in countries of geopolitical periphery has largely dealt with questions related to the dynamics and impacts of intercultural contact between tourists and natives, the representation of the culture in tourism scenarios, the ethnic stereotypes built and manipulated by tourism, the change of the cultural values due to commodification, and the power relations in the context of international tourism.

However, until the 1970s and above all in the 1960s, tourism was considered from an almost exclusively economic perspective as a driving force for increased prosperity without attention being paid to its social, cultural and environmental effects. One of the first theoreticians to analyse the socio-cultural impacts of tourism was the American anthropologist Valene Smith. Her reference work *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (1977) offers a collection of critical texts on the negative effects of tourism, and especially of ethnic tourism on the receiving communities. In the same decade, Emmanuel De Kadt qualifies tourism as 'a plague for the developing countries' (1979: 11). The collection of studies edited by De Kadt has drawn attention to the substitution of primary activities (e.g. agriculture and fishing) by tourism, the increasing dependence on tourism within the receiving communities, the sharpening of social divisions between locals who benefit from tourism activity and those who don't, the inflation, the territorial expropriation of indigenous areas and real estate speculation, among other negative effects of tourism, on the host community. Both quoted works express fundamental worry for bad development of tourism if it is not planned and managed in a well-considered, sustainable way. In the revised edition of Smith's *Hosts and Guests* (1989a) the tone is slightly more optimistic, but some contributors maintain their negative perspective regarding the effects of ethnic tourism. Davydd Greenwood (1989), for instance, still typifies the commodification and commercialization of culture as a negative development for the receiving population, a point of view which he had previously adopted in his interpretation of the celebration of the Alarde ritual in the Spanish Basque Country (1978). However, other contemporary anthropologists are less categorical. Erick Cohen (1988) criticized this pessimistic perspective on the impact of tourism for its excessive overgeneralization. In his view, commodification of culture is not always negative, but can also lead to the recovery of cultural traditions and bring about advantages for the receiving population. Valene Smith (1989b) also points to the diversity of community reactions to tourism in her study of two Inuit communities (King Island and Shishmaref in the Bering Strait), adopting completely different positions towards tourism. On the one hand, the community of King Island rejected tourism by betting on gold mining and shipyards. On the other hand, the community of Shishmaref embraced tourism as an opportunity for development. This case study illustrates how, within the same cultural ethnic universe, answers and reactions can vary per community depending on the coexisting opportunities, strategies, ideologies and interests.

The anthropological research on the effects of tourism and tourists on the receiving communities eventually led to three major conclusions:

1. tourism is the most important driving force for social and cultural change, and sometimes operates as the only one;
2. receiving communities do not take an active part in tourism development;
3. tourism is an external force with a heavy acculturating effect on the guest community.

However, over the last twenty years the anthropology of tourism has been slowly changing its vision, affirming that tourism is neither the only nor the most important driving force in many cases (Santana, 1997; Barreto, 2007). Indeed, cultural change can also be caused by migrations, urbanization processes and mass media. Moreover, tourism is not always developing from outside to inside, but often the other way round, as the ethnographic empirical reality usually demonstrates. That is to say that there is a relationship between the local and the global, and an active participation of ethnic groups and localities in tourism development, which can even entail forms of resistance. Facing the models of acculturation, of cause-effect impacts and of external-internal relationships, some anthropologists, such as Margarita Barreto (2007), suggest new models based on reflexivity, dialogism, cosmopolitanism, cultural hybridism and limits of acceptable change. Noel B. Salazar also converges towards this perspective when he argues that 'we must not forget that the tourism is only one of different global flows with enough influence to affect the attitudes and values of people in all the societies in an important way. Others include the globalised mass media, the education and urbanization' (2006: 118).

### Three visions on indigenous tourism

Based on anthropological literature on indigenous tourism in Latin America, three general types of interpretative analysis of its impact can be deduced:

1. an optimistic-positive vision on tourism;
2. an oppositional-critical vision on tourism;
3. a vision based on creative adaptation to changes produced by tourism.

#### *The optimistic-positive vision*

From the 1990s onwards, many authors have presented an optimistic outlook on indigenous tourism, affirming that it can revitalize arts, promote cultural creativity and produce a platform for positive presentation of human groups. When an-

alysing the positive effects of indigenous tourism in Latin America, researchers emphasize that meeting different people, cultural exchange and tourist interest are all stimuli for handcraft production (Getino, 1991). Tourist visits to indigenous communities can create major respect for the locals helping them to maintain or revitalize languages or traditions, and can bring economic benefits as a solace for extreme poverty (Mastny, 2003). Typical representatives of this positive vision are Ingles (2002) in his case study of the Peruvian Amazon, Maldonado (2006) in his research on redturs website (see <http://www.redturs.org>), Espinosa (2010) in his publication on the community tourism website Saraguro Rikuy in Ecuador (see <http://www.turismosaraguro.com>), Chernela (2011) in his investigation on Guna ecotourism, and Morales and Marías (2007) in their analysis of the Mundo Maya project, a Central American initiative for tourism cooperation in which Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras take part. In this project native women make blouses and other textile products decorated with indigenous motifs, and grow corn and chilli pepper, which they sell to tourists.

The case of the Peruvian Cofan in the Amazon and the Kuaorni or Huaorani in Ecuador conducted by Mastny (2003) is particularly interesting for the implementation of visitor management, still rare in indigenous tourism. These tribes have actively organized their tourism and created accommodation and handcrafts shops generating \$500 of annual income per person. The Huaorani are developing community tourism with equitable distribution of money, earning twice as much as oil company workers. These Indians only accept a group of visitors two to six days a month, as they are afraid that tourism could destroy their hunting and farming way of life. They guide their guests through the rainforest and teach them ethnobotany and craft techniques. They are advised by a tour operator, Tropic Ecological Adventures, which has extensive experience working with indigenous communities. This project received the award for the best ecotourism project at the 1998 Tourism Exhibition in Berlin (Blangy, 1999). Another striking example is the Wanamei Expeditions travel agency, headquartered in Cuzco, which is the shared property of eight indigenous communities in the Amazon rainforest. It organizes responsible tourist tours through the traditional territories of the Harakmbut, Yine and Matsiguenga via the Madre de Dios River (see <http://www.ecoturismowanamei.com/main.php>). In Capirona (Ecuador), a Quichua indigenous community has been developing a model of tourism based on community ecotourism (Falconi and Ponce, 2007) since 1989. The community consists of 113 people and the project receives mainly European visitors interested not only in its culture and biodiversity, but also in experiencing a unique adventure in the Amazon. The community of Capirona is integrated into the indigenous Community Network of the Upper

Napo for Intercultural Exchange and Ecotourism (RICANCIE), which has been developing community ecotourism in nine Quichua communities since 1993, implementing organized tourism as a counterpart to what the quoted authors call 'aggressive tourism' (see: <http://ricancie.nativeweb.org/html/quienes.html>). Unlike Capirona, the nearby community of Ongota formed by 156 Quichua people has opted for a development model with direct access to modernization, working as employees in a mine and depending more on the neighbouring small town of Tena, a 45-minute bus ride away. The result has been major exclusion and inequality, and problems with its natural resources illustrated by the pollution of the local river.

In summary, according to this line of thought, tourism revitalizes the social organization of indigenous communities, gives them economic yields, brings them social benefits and opens the doors to revealing their cultural identity to the world.

#### *The oppositional-critical vision*

A second category of researchers is more critical with regard to the effects of tourism on indigenous populations (Gascón Gutiérrez, 2005; Gascón and Cañada, 2005; Vigna, 2006; Cañada, 2010). Some issues of the *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine* in 1982 and 1990 (see <http://www.culturalsurvival.org>) already served as the first warning in this sense, highlighting the negative consequences of tourism for indigenous groups. A significant and enduring building block for this vision was provided by the work of anthropologist Pierre Van den Berghe (1994b), who analysed the case of San Cristobal (Chiapas, Mexico) and the changes produced by tourism. While in the 1960s the community received only a few backpackers, in the 1980s it was overwhelmed by hundreds of tourists in search of the 'ethnically exotic', the 'untouched', 'primitive' and 'authentic', generating radical alteration in the indigenous ways of life. Pierre Van Den Berghe defines indigenous tourism – which in his point of view is the same as ethnic tourism – in the following way: 'Ethnic tourism represents the last expansion wave of the remote periphery of world system' (1994b: 10). For this anthropologist, tourism appears to be a kind of Western reconquest, with the tourists serving as the neo-conquerors. One of the most critical and accurate analysts of the tourism development of Latin America is Ernest Cañada (2010), who argues that it is necessary to question the official discourse which attributes to tourism playing an outstanding role in poverty reduction. Following the 1980 agricultural crisis in Latin America, the economic weight of tourism has grown, resulting in what he calls 'tourism without development' and an 'unsustainable tourist model' (2010: 12). As the governments had

little influence on the role of the private sector and foreign capital as key factors in tourism development, investments have been concentrated in the sun, sea and sand destination model leading to the creation of resorts by big international chains profiting from all-inclusive packages, cruise ship holidays and residential real estate tourism. Another example of a bad practice is the case of Cancun in the region of Quintana Roo (Mexico), where tourism development has caused the mischaracterization of the population of Mayan origin, the loss of their language, traditional dress and socio-cultural space. Mass tourism and its typical consumption culture have provoked the displacement of 65% of the Mayan population (Arnaizburne, 1996), the destruction of communal property, the consolidation of private property as well as the increase of social inequalities (Pi-Sunyer *et al.*, 2001).

#### *The adaptive vision*

'Tourism has good and bad things, but for the bad ones there is a medicine' (Esterbino, 'Saila' (Chief) of Armila, Guna Yala, Panama, 11-01-2010, quote recorded by the author).

The third perspective reconciles the two preceding visions by stating that, while tourism can bring about positive and negative effects, it also pushes communities to readjust to the changes in a creative way (Pérez Galán, 2011). From this point of view, instead of being reduced to a simple derivative of cultural tourism allowing to diversify the tourism supply, indigenous tourism can develop into an alternative, more reflexive form of ethic and educational tourism. The realization of this type of tourism will only be possible if it is done in a planned way (Butler and Hinch, 1996), self-controlled by the natives in its dimensions, velocity, resources and empowerment. This is what some authors call socially responsible tourism (Goodwin, 2011), or community-based tourism with a high degree of self-consciousness (Rodríguez Miranda, 2011).

The work of Grunewald (2001a; 2001b) offers a representative elaboration of this third way. This Brazilian anthropologist has worked with the Pataxó natives in the northeast of Brazil, who have used tourism to develop a differential status for the indigenous community as well as new cultural skills. They have proven themselves as creative, adaptive and inventive with respect to their own culture, as the documentary by Peter Anton Zoettl (2010) on the Pataxó (part of the Coroa Vermelha community) demonstrates. Another illustrative example of the adaptive perspective is the study by Elisabeth Kirtsoglou and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2004) on the Garifuna in Roatan, an insular area of the Honduran Caribbean that



receives approximately a hundred thousand tourists a year, mainly American, who come by plane and cruise ship. The Garifuna realized that they benefited too little from tourism and wanted to control not only the economic profits, but also the presentation of their cultural significance. After having bent the situation to their will, the Garifuna now highly value tourism because of the economic profits, the recognition of their cultural identity and property, and the freedom they have to introduce themselves to the tourists, without the mediation of external agents. This case proves that advantages for the local population are bigger if the natives manage and control tourism development directly (Chambers, 2000; 2005).

Our own fieldwork on indigenous tourism to the Guna Indian community in the geopolitical periphery of Panama was carried out between 2003 and 2010, and was based on the application of longitudinal ethnography as an anthropological method (Pereiro and De León, 2007; Pereiro *et al.*, 2012). The research outcomes show that tourism can act as a double-edged sword, producing different types of effects. However, if it is politically controlled by the indigenous, the tourism system allows for a better distribution of benefits, a decrease or palliation of negative effects, a creative adaptation to the local-global relations and a positive ethnic self-awareness within local communities. In this way, the quasi-monopoly of tourism development realized by the Guna is a part of their strategy of survival and cultural adaptation. Far from being passive and indifferent, the Guna use tourism as a tool to reach economic (decrease poverty and increase the economic benefits), political (claim their territories), environmental (preserve their environment) and socio-cultural (increase their cultural rights and collective self-esteem) goals [Figure 3.2].

### Conclusion

The anthropology of tourism has contributed in a substantial way to the analysis and elucidation of the tourism impact on receiving communities. A revision of the theories formulated with regard to indigenous tourism reveals that, for a long time, the concept of indigenous tourism has remained imprecise, ambiguous and polysemous. As it is closely related to the concepts of ethnic tourism, ethnotourism, ethno-ecotourism and aboriginal tourism, it should be understood not only as another type of tourism, but also as a new way to travel, and it should play a crucial role in the relation between tourism and poverty reduction strategies.

The international anthropological research on indigenous tourism is characterized by a strong focus on Africa, Asia, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. On the contrary, much less attention has been paid to the Latin



**Figure 3.2** A Guna woman selling a *mola* (textile handicraft) to a Portuguese tourist in Gardi Suidup, Panama (Photo by the author).

American experience. This imbalance is due to three reasons: the dominance of English as the scientific language in tourism studies – consequently, publications in Spanish or Portuguese, which are the prevailing languages in Latin America, have had less impact in international research (Mowforth *et al.*, 2008); the relatively recent development of indigenous tourism in Latin America; and, finally, the postcolonial interest of many researchers in working in the former colonies of their country. We believe that international research on indigenous tourism can enrich itself in its diversity by shedding more light on the Latin American context and the ideas and perspectives developed by Spanish and Portuguese anthropologists. Therefore, we have analysed three visions on indigenous tourism in Latin America: the optimistic, the pessimistic and the adaptive. They basically coincide with the platforms of scientific knowledge of tourism proposed by Jafar Jafari (2001; 2005). The first vision rests on the empowerment of indigenous groups, but highlights only the positive aspect of tourism development. The second warns of the negative impact of tourism on Latin American indigenous communities by questioning the benefits, or lack thereof, for the natives due to the leakage effect. This

other side of the coin urges critical anthropologists to plead for alternative forms of indigenous tourism (e.g. community, fair, responsible, ethic) that should go beyond window dressing or a simple marketing strategy. Finally, the third perspective is inspired by the wish to overcome the dichotomy of the other two visions by constantly evaluating the positive and the negative effects of tourism according to its contexts and casuistry. It centres on creative adaptations by indigenous groups towards tourism, on participation and self-control of natural and cultural resources, so desired by predatory tourism; in sum, on tourism development following the principles of sustainability and responsibility. All of this without forgetting the indigenous right to say 'no' to tourism.

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