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ECOTOURISM AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY IN
QUINTANA ROO MEXICO

By

Mayra Sanchez Morgan

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In Environmental and Energy Policy

MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

2019

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This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Environmental and Energy Policy.

Department of Social Sciences

Dissertation Advisor: *Richelle L. Winkler*

Committee Member: *Melissa F. Baird*

Committee Member: *Angie Carter*

Committee Member: *Kamara Taylor*

Department Chair: *Hugh Gorman*

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Preface

This doctoral dissertation contains material previously reviewed and published in scientific journals. Full citation of these are as follows

Chapter 3

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Author Contributions

Morgan	Research design; data collection, analysis, and interpretation; literature review; writing manuscript; corresponding author; revisions and editing.
Winkler	Data analysis and interpretation, manuscript preparation; editing and manuscript review.

Acknowledgements

My doctorate degree has been a challenging, but very rewarding journey that I could not complete without the help, advise, encouragement, and support of many people. I want to start by expressing my deepest gratitude to my advisor Dr. Richelle Winkler for all her help, support, and advise. It would be impossible for me to achieve this goal without her guidance and encouragement. I enjoyed working with her and I learned a lot from her. Thank you Richelle for everything, you are the best advisor a student could ask and I was fortunate to have you as mine.

I want to express my gratitude to my committee members Dr. Melissa Baird, Dr. Angie Carter, and Dr. Kamara Taylor, thank you for all your comments, support, and encouragement. I learned a lot from you and your expertise. Thank you for meeting with me and sharing so many valuable resources that are important for my research and my career.

I want to thank the wonderful women from the female-only ecotourism cooperative “Orquideas de Sian Ka’an” and the people from Punta Allen town. Thank you for your kindness, support, and participation during my time in Punta Allen town. You opened your homes and hearts to me and I really value that. I am looking forward to go back and share my results with you (and go for a boat ride to the Blanquizal and swim in the piscina natural). Also, I want to express my gratitude to the ecotourism cooperative “Community Tours Sian Ka’an”, thank you for all your help, for sharing with me your professional and personal experiences, for allowed me to be part of the cooperative activities and your personal lives, taking me to amazing tours, and feeding me with delicious local food (I

miss that pollo pibil). Special thanks to the manager Roman Caamal for his support, openness, and willingness to help. I want to thank the non-profits Sustentur, especially the director Vicente Ferreyra, and Amigos de Sian Ka'an who helped me to arrange trips and make connections on the field. Thank you to the Ecotourism Genuino community for their help, support, and for promoting my research.

My PhD studies and research would not be possible without the support from the Mexican Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) who gave me a scholarship to pursue my doctorate studies. Thank you to The Rural Sociological Society Dissertation Research Award, The Ecosystem Science Center at Michigan Technological University, The Sustainable Futures Institute at Michigan Technological University, and The Social Science Department at Michigan Technological University all contributed critical funding for executing my research project, as did a group of donors who supported this research through Michigan Technological University Superior Ideas crowdfunding. Thank you to the Graduate School at Michigan Technological University for awarding me the Finishing Fellowship to complete my degree.

I want to thank the chair of the Social Sciences department Dr. Hugh Gorman and his wife Dr. Bonnie Gorman, I thank you for all your help and support from the beginning of my PhD journey, you were always there willing to listen and help. Particularly, I want to say *Gracias* to Hugh for speaking to me in Spanish every time I talked to him (unless it was something “serious”) and for his jokes in Spanish too. Also, I want to thank Gina Stevens, Amy Spahn, and Christine Flood for your willingness to help with everything I needed it. I want to thank the faculty and students from the Social Science department for all their support.

I want to express my appreciation to the Graduate School for allow me to work as an admission assistant, I really enjoyed working there and helping students. The Graduate School staff were always very supportive, I really appreciate all your help, kindness, and chocolates. I also appreciate the support of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, The Canterbury House, and all the student organizations I was a member, thank you for all the things you do to promote diversity and inclusion on campus.

I want to thank my mom, my dad, my sister, my nephew, and all my family members. Thank you for your unconditional love, support, and for always believing on me. I could not achieve this goal without you. Thank you to my husband Dan for his unconditional love and support always and forever no matter what. I want to thank to all my friends at Michigan Tech who have become my family here, thank you for all the help, support, and fun. Special thanks to my dear friend Ulises Gracida for his valuable support, encouragement, and for being my ear.

Mama, Papa, Sandra, Luis Andrey, abuelitas, abuelitos y el resto de mi familia, los amo y les agradezco con todo mi corazon y mi ser todo lo que han hecho por mi. Gracias por su apoyo incondicional y por siempre creer en mi. No lo hubiera logrado sin ustedes y su infinito amor. Mama tu eres mi ejemplo a seguir y sin tu amor y apoyo no hubiera podido lograr esta meta. Gracias por la fuerza y el valor de seguir adelante siempre. Tambien, muchas gracias a mis amigos y amigas en Mexico que desde ahi me acompanan y apoyan sin importar el tiempo y la distancia.

Finally, I want to thank God for all his love and blessings.

Abstract

Globally, women make up a relatively large proportion of the tourism workforce; however, they usually do menial jobs and earn lower wages than men doing the same job. Traditional gender expectations and unequal power relations between women and men persist, limiting women's opportunities. Ecotourism could be a tool for sustainable development and might be expected to empower women, given its explicit attention to social justice, grassroots development, and empowering local people. However, it may primarily empower groups that already have power, and not those who already are in disadvantaged positions, including women. Without explicitly considering gender and power complexities, ecotourism might be a "gender blind" industry that only reinforces traditional gender expectations instead of promoting gender equity, women's empowerment, and social justice. The purpose of this research is to understand the processes through which ecotourism empowers or disempowers women. My research analyzes two ecotourism projects in rural Mexico. One formed exclusively by women and another with male and female participation. I also examine how Mexican tourism and ecotourism policies incorporate women and gender equity. Results show that power is concentrated in an elite group of male decision-makers who control resources. International, federal, and local tourism and ecotourism policies rarely incorporate gender or women's empowerment, and when they do goals are not set, progress is not tracked, and implementation is often voluntary and not appropriately incentivized. The most successful federal policies that aim to integrate women in ecotourism projects only lead to nominal inclusion. Even in the case where the ecotourism project is entirely organized and run by women, local gender

expectations prevent women from fully participating in and committing to the ecotourism cooperative. Women's lives, in this rural Mexican context, are constrained by existing family and work demands (first and second shifts), so that taking on the additional work of starting and running an effective ecotourism project (a third shift) is beyond their capabilities. Ultimately, I argue that the Mexican ecotourism industry largely reinforces traditional gender expectations and perpetuates existing power divisions, putting women in disadvantaged positions instead of promoting empowerment as it promises.

Introduction

The tourism industry has become one of the most significant economic sectors in the world over the last six decades (UNWTO, 2015). Tourism has primarily developed massively, symbolized by the “four S”: sun, sand, sea, and sex (Honey, 2008). Mass tourism generates high economic revenue, which contributes 9% to the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and it creates one of eleven jobs worldwide (UNWTO, 2014). However, it has brought negative environmental and social impacts to local communities, such as pollution, biodiversity loss, water shortages, land tenure problems, and uneven development (UNEP, 2014; Honey, 2008). The tourism industry might be useful for economic growth, while not necessarily suitable for the environment and local societies.

Ecotourism emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a response to adverse environmental and social impacts of the mass tourism industry. Since then it has proliferated. International Organizations such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO’s), and many governments consider ecotourism as a means to make the tourism industry more environmentally and socially friendly because it aims to promote conservation and development of local communities (UNWTO 2015 & TIES, 2019). However, critiques of ecotourism point out that it may not have the expected positive impacts on the environment and people, particularly on women.

In Mexico, the government began concerted efforts to develop the tourism industry in the state of Quintana Roo during the 1970s as a way to bring foreign revenue to the

country and create employment. Since then tourism has grown rapidly, mostly following the “four S” formula, because of its natural and socio-cultural amenities that attract millions of tourists every year to destinations such as Cancun, Playa del Carmen, Cozumel, and Tulum. Twenty years ago, Quintana Roo’s tourism industry started to diversify with the creation of ecotourism projects promoted by local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Ecotourism projects are particularly popular in the Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve and the towns surrounding it.

Women experience gender inequalities and uneven power relations on a global scale (Aitchinson, 2005). In developing countries, women are more often undereducated, underrepresented, and many times, restricted to low-paid and unskilled jobs due to traditional gender roles and lack of access to resources (Beneria, 2013). United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number 5 aims to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” (UN, 2015). Tourism could be an essential tool for contributing to this goal by providing women with jobs and other new opportunities (UNWTO, 2015). However, women’s contribution to the tourism and ecotourism industry has been overlooked, as they usually do menial jobs and earn lower wages than men doing the same jobs (Ateljebic, 2008).

Generally, NGOs, academia, and some international organizations promote ecotourism broadly and globally as a path for sustainable development because it promises to alleviate poverty while protecting the environment. In theory, it should bring real economic, social, and ecological benefits, and promote real participation and empowerment (Gray, 2003; Chok et al., 2007; Scheyvens, 2010). Specifically, the

UNWTO and some researchers believe that ecotourism could be a tool to promote women's empowerment (Moswete & Lacey, 2015; UNWTO, 2015; Walter, 2011). However, only a small body of research has begun to document the impacts of ecotourism on women's empowerment. Results of these studies suggest that ecotourism might provide economic opportunities, but might not contribute to political, social, or psychological empowerment (Ferguson, 2011, Scheyvens 2010) or ecotourism sometimes empowers people that already have power (Scheyvens, 2010). Therefore, ecotourism might not promote empowerment and gender equity; instead, it might disempower women and strengthen social and gender disparities.

Background

Since 2000, the UNWTO has been promoting policies and tools to make the tourism industry more sustainable. One of these tools is promoting ecotourism, which claims to be more sustainable than the mainstream tourism industry because it is developed at a smaller scale, is based on nature, and is concerned with the benefits that the tourism industry brings to local communities (Honey, 2008; UNWTO, 2015). In 2002, the United Nations declared the International Year of Ecotourism and assumed many activities, including regional conferences and the World Ecotourism Summit, to start creating guidance and methodologies to promote this type of tourism (UNWTO, 2002). Since then, the ecotourism industry has been growing globally as a means to promote economic development while protecting the environment (UNWTO, 2002). During the 1990s the

annual growth for ecotourism ranged between 10 to 30%. In the 2000s, ecotourism grew three times faster than the entire tourism industry (Honey, 2008).

Currently, there is no agreement about an ecotourism certification, indicators, or criteria for defining and evaluating this industry (Honey, 2008). However, some principles have been agreed upon by the UNWTO, NGO's such as the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), researchers, and practitioners. These principles include: travel to natural destinations, development on a relatively small scale, minimization of impacts, promotion of conservation and environmental education, empowerment of local people, respect for local culture, and support for human rights (UNWTO, 2002; TIES 2015; Honey 2008).

In Mexico, ecotourism started to grow during the 1980s as an alternative to the mass tourism industry (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1998). Ecotourism is considered one of the three components of nature tourism alongside adventure tourism and rural tourism (SECTUR, 2018). The Federal Tourism Secretary (SECTUR) defines nature tourism as a “type of trips that have as a main objective to do recreational activities in direct contact with nature and cultural expressions and that involved an attitude and commitment to know, respect, enjoy, and participate in the conservation of cultural and natural resources” (Aquellos viajes que tienen como fin realizar actividades recreativas en contacto directo con la naturaleza y las expresiones culturales que le envuelven con una actitud y compromiso de conocer, respetar, disfrutar y participar en la conservación de los recursos naturales y culturales) (SECTUR, 2017). The SECTUR has a list of activities that are included as part of ecotourism differently than rural and adventure tourism: wildlife watching, flora and fauna watching, fossil watching, ecosystems watching, observation of

special nature phenomena, geology observation, sidereal observation, picture safari, hiking, environmental education workshops, participation in projects to rescue flora and fauna, participation in biological research project (SECTUR, 2017). The activities presented are mostly related to the environmental part of ecotourism and not the social or cultural part. Cultural activities such as “visiting indigenous towns” are considered part of rural tourism and not ecotourism. However, in reality, many ecotourism projects include cultural and nature-based activities together.

Tourism history in Quintana Roo

In 1974 the Mexican government started a tourist project called “Proyecto Cancun” (Cancun Project) in Quintana Roo, also known as the Mexican Caribbean, to promote economic growth, create jobs for the local population, and bring foreign currency to the country (Balam, 2010). Since then, the tourism industry has grown rapidly in the state. In 2009 the number of hotels in Quintana Roo was 852, however by December 2017 that number had increased to 1,067 (Quintana Roo Tourism Secretary, 2019). Over, 17 million tourists visited the Mexican Caribbean in 2017, bringing in over \$8,851 billions of dollars to the Mexican economy (Secretaria de Turismo del Estado de Quintana Roo, 2019). Women have participated in the tourism industry in Mexico, particularly in Quintana Roo, since its inception. Currently, 40% of tourism workers in the state are women (INEGI, 2014).

In the beginning, Cancun city was the main attraction and the only city to boom as a result of tourism, with many hotels and beautiful infrastructure. More recently, other

places such as Playa del Carmen, Isla Mujeres, Mayan Riviera, Cozumel, and Tulum have been developing rapidly as popular tourist destinations in Quintana Roo.

Although the tourism industry in Quintana Roo is the most important economic activity and it generates jobs for people that depend upon them to survive, most jobs are menial, such as waiters, drivers, maids, and cooks; with low salaries and poor working conditions (Balam, 2010). The local people often do not benefit from facilities that are built for the tourism industry such as roads, parks, electricity and clean water; because they are built close to the resorts and not in the neighborhoods where local people live (Balam, 2010).

The tourism model that the Mexican government has been promoting in Quintana Roo since the creation of “Proyecto Cancun” is mainstream tourism or mass tourism. Under this model, large hotel companies from all over the world build big resorts occupying almost the entire coast of the state. Millions of tourists visit the state every year. Some researchers argue that this model is positive because it promotes economic growth, creates jobs, and values the natural environment for its scenic and recreational beauty (Kumar & Ramaswamy, 2010). As mentioned before, economic growth and employment generation were the principal drivers for the Mexican government to enhance this model of tourism (Balam, 2010). Others claim that the massive tourism model has many negative environmental impacts, and it does not bring real benefit to the local people, including women (Gray, 2003; Walter, 2011). In the state of Quintana, the robust tourism industry contributes to environmental and social problems, such as mangrove deforestation, waste

generation, contamination of soil and water, and commodification of nature and people (Belsky 1999; Gray, 2003; Balam, 2010).

Ecotourism and the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve

A different type of tourism, ecotourism, is on the rise in the center of the state of Quintana Roo. Ecotourism projects are particularly popular in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve and the towns close to it. Before the ecotourism industry was promoted in this area, people used to work in the fishery, agriculture (in a very small scale), or as workers of the mainstream tourism industry in the northern part of the state (Balam, 2010). Currently, local people combine tourism services with other economic activities such as lobster fishing or flyfishing. At present, there are eight ecotourism destinations in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve and the surrounding towns, including: Sijil No Ha, Balam Na, Chunhuhub, Kantemo, Muyil, Punta Allen, Senor, Tihosuco (Caminos Sagrados, 2019). Figure 1 shows where the eight ecotourism destinations are located.

Figure 0. Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve and the ecotourism projects.
Source: Caminos Sagrados Maya Ka'an – NGO

The Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve is the largest Protected Natural Area in the Mexican Caribbean. In 1987, it was designated a World Heritage Site by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This World Heritage designation was promoted by a Non-Governmental Organization called "Amigos de Sian Ka'an" (Sian Ka'an friends), which has been working on conservation and development in the area for more than 20 years. The organization partnered with the Mexican Government to protect this biosphere reserve and its fragile ecosystems from the expansion of the mass tourism industry (Maya Ka'an, 2014). Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve has 528,148 hectares of natural ecosystems; and it has archeological sites, beaches, fresh and saltwater lagoons, cenotes (limestone sinkholes), swamps, coastal dunes, mangroves, savannahs, jungle, and an extensive chain of coral reefs (Maya Ka'an, 2014).

There are only two towns inside the reserve: Punta Allen and Punta Herrero, with a total population of 800 people, most of them fishermen (INEGI, 2014). However, over 100,000 tourists visit the Sian Ka'an annually (Maya Ka'an, 2014). Large tourism companies from Cancun and Tulum bring tourists mainly to the town of Punta Allen and charge between \$140-\$160 dollars to each, but only give \$20 to the fishermen that provide boat rides to the tourists (Vicente Ferreyra, personal communication, 2015). This large number of tourists stresses the environment by not considering the carrying capacity of the place, it brings much waste, and it only provides menial benefits to the locals (Balam, 2010; Brown, 2013). The local people only benefit from the \$20 dollars per capita that tourists pay for the boat rides and occasionally from additional consumption in locally-owned businesses, such as small shops, restaurants, or small hotels. However, tourists tend to

spend relatively little money in town because the outside companies provide out-and-back same-day transportation with meals included, and the tourists solely come for the boat rides in Punta Allen (Vicente Ferreyra, personal communication, 2015). As an alternative, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), including “Amigos de Sian Ka’an” and “Sustentur”, are partnering with Mexican Government agencies, such as the National Commission of Protected Areas, The National Commission of Indigenous Peoples, Quintana Roo Tourism Agency; and with local cooperatives to promote locally-based ecotourism projects in the Sian Ka’an Reserve and the towns close to it.

In this research, I investigated two ecotourism projects: *Orquideas de Sian Ka’an* in Punta Allen town and *Community Tours Sian Ka’an* in Muyil town. In each project, I investigated an overarching research question: What are the key processes through which ecotourism empowers or disempower women in the state of Quintana Roo in Mexico?.

Theoretical perspectives

Tourism and Development

International Organizations such as the World Bank, The United States Agency of International Development (USAID) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization consider the tourism industry as a means to promote development particularly in developing countries (Ferguson, 2011). For instance, for the World Bank, the tourism industry is a good tool to promote economic development and to bring foreign currency to

developing countries (Ferguson, 2011). For USAID, tourism can be an important tool for poverty reduction around the world (USAID, 2013).

For the UNWTO, tourism is a “key to development, prosperity and well-being” (UNWTO, 2015). Tourism expansion and diversification in the last six decades have created socio-economic development through employment, business, and infrastructure generation (UNWTO, 2015). The UNWTO also believes that tourism, if developed sustainably, is an important instrument to achieve and promote the Sustainable Development Goals (UNWTO, 2015).

These international organizations support the expansion of the tourism industry to create development and improve people’s well-being. Tourism developed on a massive scale does create employment and high economic revenue. However, the environmental and social impacts are often negative and can include the destruction of rare species and habitat, mangrove deforestation, generation of waste, soil and aquifer contamination, introduction of invasive species, and few benefits to locals (Brown, 2013; Garcia-Frapolli et al., 2008; Jimenez, 2007; Balam, 2010).

The tourism industry tends to pay its employees very low wages compared with other industries (Church & Frost, 2004; Riley & Szivas, 2003) and relies on and supports the capitalist system through the positioning of multi-national companies that solely create low-paid and seasonal labor that barely benefit the local population more than menial employment (Aitchinson, 2005). In average, women earn less money than doing the same job in the tourism industry and have more challenges than men to access to leadership and managing positions (Feng, 2013; Thrane, 2008). Women’s labor is underestimated because

women tend to accumulate work experience slower than men due to gender expectations on them such as: maternity, marriage, and caregiving (Thrane, 2008).

Ecotourism and Sustainable Development

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people and involves interpretation and education.” (TIES, 2015). While there is no consensus for a clear ecotourism definition (Fennell, for instance, identified more than 80 ecotourism and sustainable tourism definitions, 2001), standard variables associated with ecotourism include: natural settings, preservation and conservation, sustainability, benefits to locals, education, and ethics and awareness (Donahoe & Needham, 2006; Fennell, 2001). International Organizations, such as the UNWTO and NGO’s such as TIES promote ecotourism as a tool for conservation and development. However, different stakeholders promote different ecotourism discourses, some highlighting conservation, and other development, and ecotourism strategies are not without significant critique. Three general positions promoted by different actors are ecotourism for the environment’s sake, ecotourism as a profit generator, and ecotourism for the benefit of locals; each of which has different implications for sustainable development (Gray, 2003).

Ecotourism for nature (environmental protection and conservation) focuses on the protection of natural areas because ecotourism depends on “pristine nature” that is required to be legally protected. According to Gray (2003), this discourse is based in naturalism and states that nature should be protected first because nature rules should govern the world.

This discourse is promoted mainly for governments, but, also for some international organizations such as the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and environmental NGOs.

This discourse is behind the creation of Protected Areas (PAs), which strictly limits human impact. In order to protect the natural areas, local governments create PAs and NGOs buy lands, and in the process, many locals are displaced. In this discourse, ecotourism is promoted as traveling to pristine natural areas free of humans (except for some “ecotourists”); many times locals are not allowed to enter these areas (unless they work in the industry as guides or lodges employees) because they can “damage” the natural resources (Honey, 2008). This situation had created conflicts between locals and governments because locals cannot use the resources of the PAs as raw materials for housing or other activities such as lodging or hunting as they used to do before the PAs were created (Honey, 2008; Balam 2010). Ecotourism sustainability is not only about preserving the nature, it is about rural development and local empowerment.

Another discourse is ecotourism for profit. Ecotourism is seen as a way to make conservation profitable and to promote “development” (Gray, 2003). This is a market-based approach, and it is promoted mostly by international organizations such as the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and is very popular in the travel industry. In this discourse, ecotourism is a crucial tool for communities to create revenue for conservation and to promote economic growth. For communities in developing countries, ecotourism is viewed as a win-win formula for the market and the people (Gray, 2003).

This discourse has been criticized because while it has “good intentions” such as poverty alleviation, in practice, it reproduces western values such as “business as usual” where nature and locals are commodities. In this sense, it might not be different from the mainstream tourism industry, except that it is on a smaller scale (Gray, 2003; Bianchi, 2009; West, et al., 2006). Another critique is that ecotourism is an opportunity to greenwash international organization and travel industry images while continuing with large-scale economic development projects (Honey, 2008). Others see this type of ecotourism as a new type of imperialism; eco-imperialism whereby developing countries (the periphery) are the host destinations that supply and comply with developed countries (the core) tourist’s perceptions of nature (Brown, 2013). This type of ecotourism creates uneven relations between tourists and locals, and local people become dependent on them. This type of “ecotourism” is also questionable because it has a “business as usual” approach that only benefits the big players of the industry (such as the travel companies) and not the locals (Gray, 2003; Bianchi 2009).

Moreover, many “ecotourism” companies are “greenwashing,” which means that they called themselves ecotourism or use the label “Eco” in their names (eco-lodge, eco-hotel), but they do not follow ecotourism principles, such as local empowerment. One example of this is the parks “Xel Ha” and “Xcaret” in Quintana Roo, Mexico. One of the main attractions of these parks are the underground rivers inside caves that are advertised as “natural.” However, these rivers are not natural because the company that owns both parks used dynamite to bomb the caves in order to build these popular attractions (Yuri Balam, personal communication, 2014). Those actions are prohibited, and they damaged

the environment, but these unsustainable practices are common in the area. Another issue is that the hotels, lodges, parks, and tour companies that call themselves “eco” bring few benefits to the local communities. The owners of these companies are mostly foreign-owned. Therefore, there are financial leakages because tourism earnings do not stay in the community. Locals cannot compete with international companies because they lack marketing and technical skills, and they do not have the “business as usual” vision (Balam, 2010). While these businesses bring employment to the area, most of the jobs are of poor quality, they contribute to the privatization of natural amenities, and restrict local access (Balam, 2010, Gray, 2003).

Another discourse is ecotourism for the people. This discourse has been promoted mostly by NGOs, academia, and some international organizations. Here, ecotourism should be a real tool for poverty alleviation; it could bring real economic, social, and ecological benefits, and promote active participation and empowerment (Gray, 2003; Chok et al., 2007; Scheyvens, 2010). According to Bianchi (2009), this type of ecotourism tries to be a counterforce to the mainstream tourism industry. If done well ecotourism will improve economic and social wellbeing, and if locals are involved in it, it is more likely that they will support conservation projects (Gray, 2003). In Mexico, this is the type of ecotourism that it is promoted (Vicente Ferreyra, 2016 personal communication).

This type of ecotourism (for the people) also has shortcomings. For example, it might not promote real participation and empowerment of locals because outside institutions usually initiate and lead the projects; therefore, they promote top-down participation, and have paternalist practices (Gray, 2003). Another significant critique is

that not all locals benefit the same way - only those who can invest funds or who already own resources such as boats for rides or extra rooms in their houses for providing “bed and breakfast” services will benefit (Azcarate, 2006; Honey, 2008; Belsky, 1999); therefore, less advantaged local groups may not benefit, including women.

Another critique states that ecotourism considers communities as homogeneous entities overlooking local complexities that might not allow ecotourism projects to be successful. For instance, in some communities, political capital is very complex, because the power is concentrated in a small group, or many political groups are competing with each other (Azcarate, 2006; Balam, 2010; Belsky, 1009). Communities, where ecotourism projects are developing, are heterogeneous, and they might be divided according to class, age, ethnic group, and gender. Gender roles and disparities are important to consider, and most of the time women benefit the least from ecotourism projects (Shceyvens, 2010). This dissertation is particularly valuable for understanding how ecotourism projects affect local women.

Gender and Women’s Empowerment

Women experience gender inequalities and uneven power relations on a global scale (Aitchinson, 2005). Traditional gender roles put women at a disadvantage (Beneria, 2003). In developing countries women are generally undereducated, underrepresented, and many times restricted to low-paid and unskilled jobs in all industries (Moswete & Lacey, 2015). Traditional models promote gender inequalities and hierarchical power relations (Beneria, 2003; Sayer, 2005). Traditional gender roles are more prominent in rural regions

where women find themselves at a disadvantage due to limited access and control of resources (Beneria, 2003; Manzanera-Ruiz, et.al., 2016; Rickson & Daniels, 1999). Therefore, gender equity and female empowerment is a serious concern for researchers, international organizations, grassroots developers, and feminist theorists.

There is no universal definition of women's empowerment. Some researchers define empowerment in terms of participation in different spheres and the achievement of capabilities and legal rights (Moghadam & Senftova, 2005). While some consider women's empowerment as gaining control and decision making over life, environment, and resources (Boyle & McGehee, 2014), others define women's empowerment in terms of gender equality, men and women having the same opportunities, and rights and obligations in society (Das & Deori, 2014). While there is no agreement about its definition, there is some consensus that empowerment is a multidimensional process that includes different spheres, such as economic, political, ecological, social, and psychological (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Dilly, 2003; Mendoza Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Pleno 2006; Scheyvens, 2010).

For the purpose of this dissertation, I conceptualize women's empowerment as a dynamic process through which women learn and grown as they navigate barriers and benefit from helpful resources (Cornwall 2016). Women's empowerment implies a change from one state to a better one (Kabeer, 1999). I based my conceptualization of women's empowerment in the Gender at Work framework. The Gender at Work framework acknowledges the interconnection of four components: access to resources, formal rules and policies, individual consciousness and capabilities, and systemic informal norms and

exclusionary practices for women's empowerment and gender equity to be transformational (Cornwall 2016; Rao et. al. 2016).

Figure 2. Gender at Work Analytical Framework
Source: <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

Resources are catalysts and assets including financing, material goods, education, training, and social networks (Rao et.al., 2016). This component has received most of the attention of organizations and governments working for women's empowerment (Rao, et.al., 2016). They are necessary for women to experience positive change, but not sufficient, because women may still lack decision-making power, self-determination, or the capacity to challenge institutions and norms (Malhotra and Schuler 2005, Rao et. al. 2016).

Formal rules and policies are necessary for women's empowerment, they determine who has power, who sets the agenda, and who gets resources (Rao et.al., 2016). Policies can promote positive change and advance gender equity; however, they can also perpetuate inequalities. The solely present of formal policies to promote gender equity will not necessary translate in women's empowerment because there is still a gap between policies intents and achievements; formal policies are disconnected from the other components of the GAW framework (Rao et.al. 2016).

Individual consciousness and capabilities allow people to understand and be aware of the power and gender relations in their context and how are they being part of and contributing to the continuation of gender inequality dynamics. A critical consciousness challenges the power relations status quo and allows women to claim their rights and see themselves as active agents of change and not only as victims of an unquestionable system (Rao et.al., 2016).

Social norms and exclusionary practices are socially constructed and dictate how gender expectations are build and perpetuated. The social norms are part of a deep structure that governs gender relations and are usually imperceptible because they are considered "normal" (Rao et.al., 2016).

The four components of the Gender at Work Framework are deeply interconnected, one component can have a significant impact on others. The four are necessary and depend of each other for women's empowerment and gender equity to transition from "good intentions" to a goal in reality.

Women's empowerment achievements might include indicators like gaining employment, measures of equity (e.g., declining gender wage gap), or personal development (e.g., confidence and self-esteem- Das and Deori 2014; Scheyvens 2000). Achievements are about women and men having more equal opportunities, rights, obligations, power, and status (Das and Deori 2014; March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay 1999).

The most important part of the process of women's empowerment is Agency. Agency allows women to turn the four components of the Gender at Work framework into empowerment achievements (Hanmer and Klugman 2016; Malhotra and Schuler 2005). Agency is an ability to make strategic choices and decisions, to negotiate or manipulate, or otherwise to control resources and decisions (Kabeer 1999; Malhotra and Schuler 2005). It is the power to resist, to challenge existing ways of living and working (Rao et.al., 2016). It allows women to overcome barriers, challenge situations of oppression, and be heard by others (Sen 1985). The exercising agency can lead to empowerment, because it makes it possible for women to defy norms and institutional constraints that put women in disadvantaged positions to begin with (Kabeer 1999).

For this dissertation, I consider gender as an encompassing social structure with individual, cultural, and institutional dimensions that impact all facets of daily life (Bird, Sapp and Lee 2001; Lorber 1994; Risman 2004). Gender as a social structure theory recognizes the interrelated dimensions of individual socialization into viewing oneself as a gendered being, cultural notions of acceptable gendered behavior, and institutional constraints based on socially constructed gender differences (Risman 2004). I focus

especially on constraints associated with culturally expected gender roles that limit women's ability to exercise agency and are one of the most constraining factors in women's empowerment (Risman 1999; Risman 2004). In rural areas, and especially in developing countries such as Mexico with deeply patriarchal histories, gender roles tend to be particularly embedded and based on a classical division of labor (O'Brien and Wegren 2015; Schmalzbauer 2011). Women are primarily responsible for caregiving (childcare and care for a spouse, elders, and sick or disabled) and domestic work (Omoyibo, Egharevba and Iyanda 2010; Schmalzbauer 2011). This female model oftentimes comes attached with expectations about women's behavior towards men: women should be passive, submissive, belong to the private domestic sphere, and obey their husbands (Omoyibo et al. 2010). The traditional male gender role dictates that men are the primary providers of the household and they dominate the public sphere (Schmalzbauer 2011). While the specifics of women's roles vary from culture to culture, they are almost always valued less than men's roles, reinforcing gender inequalities. In these contexts, men generally control access to resources, decision making, and participation in both the private domestic sphere and public and social affairs (Schmalzbauer 2011).

Feminist theory and research suggest that persistent and pervasive gender models that reinforce stereotypical differences between men and women may limit women's contribution to and empowerment from tourism and ecotourism projects (Beneria, 2003; Nelson, 2009).

Tourism & Women's Empowerment

Research clearly shows that women's work in tourism is usually concentrated "in seasonal, part-time and low paid activities such as retail, hospitality and cleaning" (Ferguson, 2011:237). According to the UNWTO, tourism has the potential to promote gender equity and women's empowerment (UNWTO, 2015). However, the UNWTO fails to state how this might be put into practice. Some researchers argue that this might happen in theory, but not in reality, because the tourism industry often overlooks the persisting traditional gender models and power relations between men and women (Ferguson, 2011; Walter, 2011). For the tourism industry to be considered a tool for promoting empowerment, a feminist vision should be taken into account (Ferguson, 2011).

In the tourism industry, men and women typically work in different spheres based on traditional gender models (Ferguson, 2011). As Phillips & Taylor (1980) note, even when men and women are part of the labor force and work in the same industry, they are positioned differently. Usually, women's jobs are within the service sector and informal employment. This is because of the stereotypes associated with female workers: docility, acceptance of low wages, and poor working conditions (Piper, 2003). These traditional stereotypes might decrease the opportunity for women to actively participate in the ecotourism industry, in the same ways as they do in mass tourism.

Ecotourism could be a tool to promote women's empowerment (Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Walter, 2011). It claims to be more socially just than the traditional tourism industry, and one of its main principles is to promote participation and empowerment of the local people, including women. However, there is not enough awareness of the significance of

gender in the field of ecotourism (Walter, 2011). The limited body of research on this topic, however, has found mixed results.

On the one hand, research shows that ecotourism has the potential to empower local women psychologically, socially, economically, environmentally and sometimes politically through female participation in ecotourism projects (Aitchinson, 2005; Das & Deori, 2014; Dilly, 2003; Pleno, 2006; Walter, 2011; Scheyvens, 2000). For instance, Moswete and Lacey (2015) find that women participating in ecotourism projects in Botswana felt that their ecotourism employment freed them not only from the dependency of men but also from the “economic, social and psychological burdens of dependency on a matriarchal family, government support programs and begging” (Pp. 614). Pleno (2006) finds that women in the Philippines believe that ecotourism projects promote socio-political empowerment for women participating in the projects (Pp. 137). Research conducted in Belize demonstrates that ecotourism can provide employment and business ownership opportunities to rural women with lower education levels (Belskin, 1999; Gentry, 2007). Also, ecotourism can give women control of their resources, their own development, and increase their sense of pride for their own culture (Scheyvens, 2010).

On the other hand, critical feminist theory and supporting empirical research suggests that ecotourism could reinforce existing gender hierarchies because in many cases it does not consider local gender complexities, disparities, and traditional models that might prevent women’s empowerment (Belkin1999, Ferguson, 2011). Also, ecotourism should not be considered as a panacea for ending gender inequalities and poverty (Dilly, 2003). Ecotourism might empower women in one respect, for instance, psychologically, but

disempower them in others, such as socially and politically (Pleno, 2006; Walter, 2015). Both Ferguson and Scheyvens argue along similar lines, that ecotourism might provide economic opportunities, but might not contribute to political, social, or psychological empowerment (Ferguson, 2011, Scheyvens 2010).

Some NGOs, government agencies, and development consultants that work with local communities to create ecotourism projects might ignore women's active participation because usually, they work more closely with local leaders, who are mostly men (Scheyvens, 2000). Thus, ecotourism sometimes empowers people that already have power, for instance those who already have resources such as boats or rooms for rent, and not the most disadvantaged people, which include women. Thus, it is important to consider "who, in fact, is being empowered by ecotourism?" (Scheyvens, 2010:233). For this reason, ecotourism might not promote empowerment and gender equity; instead, it might disempower women and strengthen social and gender disparities. Therefore, it is significant to raise awareness of the importance of gender inequalities and women's empowerment in the ecotourism industry, and my research contributes to filling this gap.

Summary of Research Design and Dissertation Structure

This dissertation investigates how ecotourism impacts women in a popular tourism destination- Quintana Roo, Mexico. It focuses on the processes through which (how and why) ecotourism promotes (or not) women's empowerment, including the role of international, federal, and local policies, using a case study methodology. A case study

methodology is appropriate because I aim to understand women's empowerment and gender inequality within the real-life context of ecotourism projects in a developing country setting where tourism, and increasingly ecotourism, is a dominant industry. Quintana Roo is a good case study because the tourism industry is the main economic activity in this Mexican state.

My research design, analytical approach, and interpretation is framed as feminist research because it puts gender and women's empowerment at the center of the analysis (DeVault, 1999; Hesse-Biber, 2014). My research favors women's issues, unique lived experiences, and voices as valuable sources of knowledge and as an understanding of their social reality (Harding, 1993; Smith, 1990). My research portrays social injustices that affect women in ecotourism. Particularly, my research is informed by the Gender at Work framework because it emphasizes the importance of both structural (formal rules and policies) and cultural (gender norms and individual and collective consciousness) factors for women's empowerment.

My research is feminist ethnography because it analyzes power dynamics from a gender perspective using qualitative ethnographic fieldwork (Davis & Craven, 2016). I spent twelve weeks in the field and collected data from three sources: semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document review. I studied two community-based ecotourism projects: *Oquideas de Sian Ka'an* and *Community Tours Sian Ka'an*. The *Orquideas de Sian Ka'an* was chosen because is the only women-only project in the area and in the country that is solely devoted to ecotourism, there are other female-only groups, but they are not ecotourism projects, although they might engage in some informal

ecotourism activities such as tour guiding. Also, government officials and local NGO's were promoting the group with a lot of pride. It was expected that by women developing the project and holding all the leadership positions women's empowerment will happen. *Community Tours Sian Ka'an* was selected for this research because the government and local NGO's consider this project very successful and *the* example of community-based ecotourism because is fully functioning and growing. The group has a lot of local and international attention due to its accomplishment: good environmental practices, employment generation, and good profit. Moreover, it has women and men participation which makes very pertinent for this research.

The dissertation is organized as a set of three stand-alone articles. The three papers are informed by the Gender at Work framework and contribute to the four quadrants. The first paper- "Ecotourism and Gender: A review of policies and programs"- was prepared with the intention to submit to the journal *Environmental Science & Policy*. This paper contributes to the formal rules and policies quadrant of the Gender at Work framework. This manuscript uses quantitative and qualitative content analysis of tourism and ecotourism policies pertinent to the ecotourism industry in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico to analyze the extent to which and how tourism and ecotourism policies incorporate gender or women's equity. I show that tourism and ecotourism policies barely include women or gender equity. When these are included, the policies generally do not include implementation strategies, goals, evaluation, or appropriate mandates or incentives and thus incorporate gender/women's equity in only a nominal way.

These findings motivate my second paper- “Ecotourism, Power Relations, and Women’s Participation in a Community-based Ecotourism Project”- which was prepared with the intention to submit to the journal *Society & Natural Resources*. This manuscript contributes to the social and cultural norms and individual consciousness quadrants of the The Gender at Work framework. This paper draws on the case of a highly successful ecotourism cooperative which includes men and women as members to analyze how uneven power relations lead to the continuance of power among an elite group of men who maintain the status quo rather than promoting gender equity or social justice. Women only participate in roles that are an extension of their households, such as cooks and maids. Women’s inclusion as members, in this case, was driven by federal policy but resulted in only nominal and disempowered participation.

The third paper- “The Third Shift? Gender and Empowerment in a Women’s Ecotourism Cooperative”, published in *Rural Sociology* (Morgan and Winkler 2019)- investigates whether and how women are empowered through the implementation of a female-only ecotourism cooperative. It focuses on how gender dynamics in the broader socio-cultural community impact women’s ability to participate and limit empowerment possibilities. Women’s lives, in this rural Mexican context, are constrained by existing family and work demands (first and second shifts), so that taking on the additional work of starting and running an effective ecotourism project (a third shift) is beyond their capacity. This paper contributes to the cultural norms quadrants of the Gender at Work framework and to the resources component by highlighting how providing only resources will not necessary translate to empowerment outcomes. Finally, this dissertation includes a short

conclusion with a summary of the results, key contributions, limitations, and future directions.

1 Ecotourism and Gender: A Review of Policies and Programs

Abstract

Ecotourism is often promoted as a tool to increase women's empowerment. Research shows that in social contexts where gender expectations associated with masculine dominance remain strong, policy structures that mandate steps toward women's empowerment are critical for achieving gains. It may take compliance with outside policies and standards to significantly improve women's outcomes. It would follow then, that ecotourism policies and programs might be expected to include specific attention to gendered inequalities and women's empowerment. This paper systematically reviews international, national, and local policies that impact the tourism and ecotourism industry in Quintana Roo, Mexico. Using qualitative and quantitative content analyses, I reviewed 44 policy documents looking for any attention to women, gender or women's empowerment. Results show that the policies rarely include women or gender. If they do, they mostly incorporate them in a nominal way. Also, the policies hardly include any strategy, evaluation, or incentives about how to make gender equity and women's empowerment a reality.

1.1 Introduction

Since 2000, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) started to promote policies and tools to make the tourism industry more sustainable. One of these tools was

promoting ecotourism, which claims to be more sustainable than the mainstream tourism industry because it is developed at a smaller scale, targets environmental conservation, and promotes development and empowerment to local communities (UNWTO, 2015). In 2002, the United Nations declared the International Year of Ecotourism and initiated many activities, including regional conferences and the World Ecotourism Summit, to start creating guidance and methodologies to promote this type of tourism (UNWTO, 2002). Since then, the ecotourism industry has been growing globally and is promoted as a means to promote economic development while protecting the environment (UNWTO, 2002). During the 1990s the annual growth for ecotourism ranged from 10% to 30%. In the 2000s ecotourism grew three times faster than the entire tourism industry (Honey, 2008).

In 2015, the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Goal number 5 “Achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls” specifically targets gender equity and empowerment. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) suggests that tourism including ecotourism can contribute to achieving this goal because it has the potential to empower women by providing employment and income opportunities in the industry (UNWTO, 2013; UNWTO, 2015). Women make up 60% of the tourism workforce (UNWTO, 2015). Tourism and ecotourism have the ability to unlock women’s potential and help them to be leaders in today’s society; however, women tend to get the lowest income and status jobs and perform a lot of unpaid work in the industry (UNWTO, 2015). Scholars have found that ecotourism can give women control over resources, provide business ownership opportunities, increase their self-esteem, and increase sense of pride in their local culture (Belsky 1999; Gentry 2007;

Scheyvens 2000). Others have argued that ecotourism is a “gender blind” industry that does little to promote gender equality (Morgan & Winkler, 2019; Walter, 2011).

One way women and gender equity can be promoted in the tourism industry is through policies and standards. Formal policies are a critical component to address gender inequality and to transform disadvantaged contexts for women (Connell, 2005; Rao, Sandler, Kelleher, & Miller, 2015). The Gender at Work Framework highlights the significance of formal policies and establishes that policies need to be interrelated with other systemic factors such as exclusionary practices and informal norms, and individual factors such as access to resources and individual consciousness (Cornwall, 2016; Edwards & Stewart, 2017; Rao et al., 2015) to be transformational. This paper extends the policy component of the Gender at Work Framework to the tourism and ecotourism context. If ecotourism policies and programs don’t include attention to women or gender, they may only perpetuate unequal power relations and limit women’s opportunities. The purpose of this paper is to review international, national, and local policies and programs that influence the tourism and ecotourism industry in Quintana Roo, Mexico to determine the extent to which and how tourism and ecotourism policies incorporate gender and women’s equity.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Successful Empowerment Policies

There is not a clear consensus in the literature about the best approach to evaluate policy effectiveness (Jacob & Fidelman, 2019). However, research on policy development has

shown important factors to consider in order to achieve women's empowerment and gender equity outcomes in policies: training on gender and women's empowerment for policy developers, a state willing to enforce the policies in a long term, women's participation in policy development, practical gender strategies, and developing indicators to measure policy outcomes are all important (Edwards & Stewards, 2017; Hunt, 2004; Hunt & Weldon, 2010).

People in charge of creating and implementing the policies need to have a gender lens (Edwards & Stewart, 2017). Training in gender equity and women's empowerment is important to create the necessary engagement. Policies can be well designed, but if the people involved are not engaged or committed as agents of change, the policy will be difficult to implement (Edwards & Stewart, 2017). Another important factor to promote gender equity in policies is state effectiveness, a weak state becomes incapacitated and unable to implement and enforce women's empowerment policies. A state not only willing to do it, but also with the capacity to ensure it in the long term is critical (Htun & Weldon, 2010).

Women's participation in policy development is also important to create successful policies, whether the policy is specifically targeting women's empowerment or not. Using participation strategies that specifically involve women in policy design and implementation is essential; however, the sole participation of women does not necessarily mean that gender equity will be addressed since many times women are still underestimated and overlooked (Hunt, 2004). Women from diverse groups and organizations working to and for women's empowerment are rarely invited to develop policies that are not

specifically targeting women (Htun & Weldon, 2010). Active women's involvement alongside building partnerships is very significant to achieve women's empowerment.

Policies and programs need to have practical gender strategies and identify how and why gender equity and women's empowerment are relevant for the specific program or policy. Understanding what gender strategies mean in practice, what resources are needed, what outcomes are expected, and how these gender strategies will contribute to the overarching project or program objective needs to be mandatory for all projects and programs (Hunt, 2004). Another important aspect to have successful gender equity policies in practice is to collect information about how men and women are participating in and benefiting from the programs and projects, collecting sex-differentiation information will be important to understand what is preventing women's participation and how the policy can address the potential benefit gap (Hunt, 2004). Also, developing indicators to measure how the different policies are including gender and women's empowerment during the policy design, implementation, and evaluation is significant to achieve women's empowerment and gender equity (Hunt, 2004) alongside with clear evaluation processes, enforcement mechanisms and mandatory application (Hunt, 2004)

1.2.2 Mexican Tourism Policy Framework

The Mexican tourism policy framework was first developed in 1929 with the creation of the first pro-tourism commission as the first organization in the country specifically created for tourism (Madrid, 2015). The policy was further consolidated during the 1960s and the 1970s. In 1963 The Mexican Federal Government took the lead in planning the tourism

industry in the country and created the first National Tourism Managing Plan with a strong emphasis in developing infrastructure and promoting investment (Bringas-Rábago, 2002). In 1974 the Mexican government created the first tourism law called Tourism Promotion Law (Ley de Promocion Turistica) and the National Fund for Tourism Promotion (Fondo Nacional de Promocion Turistica) (Madrid, 2015). The Mexican government wanted to promote economic development through tourism by creating employment, attracting foreign revenue, and enhancing development on marginal and poor regions of the country with the potential of tourism (Bringas-Rábago, 2002). The Mexican federal government continued developing policies to promote tourism in the country sometimes in partnership with international organizations, such as the World Bank.

Tourism policies eventually evolved in two different ways- the promotion of new infrastructure in tourism spaces already functioning and the creation of new entirely planned tourism places called “Centros Integralmente Planeados (Fully Planned Centers), such as Cancun in the state of Quintana Roo (Bringas-Rábago, 2002; Madrid, 2015). The state of Quintana Roo grew fast and is currently one of the most intense and popular mass tourism places in the world. The Mexican government hoped these policies would encourage economic development in poor areas; however, outcomes were contradictory. Policies aimed to improve infrastructure and amenities (airports, good roads, water sanitation, electricity, etc.) to benefit both tourism and the local population. In reality, the new infrastructure disproportionately benefits the tourism projects and increased the gap between the touristic areas and the neighborhoods where poor people live creating more segregation between the local population and tourism development (Balam Ramos, 2010).

For example, Quintana Roo has been a very popular tourist destination bringing a large economic revenue to the country, but 35.9% of the population in Quintana Roo state are still in poverty (Madrid, 2015).

Currently, the laws, norms, rules, and programs that regulate the tourism industry form the Mexican Tourism Policy Framework. The policies are horizontal. According to the Federal Tourism Secretary (Secretaria de Turismo, SECTUR here after) the tourism policy framework should promote innovation and competitiveness, diversify the different tourism products in the country, be specialized by segments (such as ecotourism and adventure tourism), and consolidate a model of sustainable tourism development (SECTUR, 2017).

Some scholars argue that the tourism policy framework has mainly focused on increased revenue, reduced leaks of money outside of the country, and evening the distribution of tourism wealth (Araújo-Santana, Parra-Vázquez, Salvatierra-Izaba, Arce-Ibarra, & Montagnini, 2013). However, others believe that the majority of the policies are focused on environmental conservation of natural resources or in economic outcomes and barely target social sustainability (Brenner, 2010). They neglect the socio-cultural impacts of the tourism industry (Bringas-Rábago, 2002) and do not consider the sociopolitical realities of the places impacted by tourism (Brenner, 2010).

In Mexico, the National Women Commission (INMUJERES) announced in March 2015 to the media that it had signed agreements with the SECTUR and local governments to establish a more gender equal tourism industry and to promote more locally based ecotourism projects by giving funding and training to women who want to start an

ecotourism project. According to the news article, INMUJERES plans to promote workshops to Mexican agency officials in charge of promoting tourism and ecotourism in Mexican states, particularly those where the tourism industry is large, such as Quintana Roo (INMUJERES, 2015). However, it is not clear if the agreements exist, were really signed, which policies or programs INMUJERES is going to use to promote gender equity in the tourism and ecotourism industry, how it is going to do it, and more importantly when.

1.2.3 Ecotourism in Mexico

During the 1990s the massive tourism model was in crisis in Mexico due to negative impacts on the environment and poor benefits to local people (López Pardo & Palomino Villavicencio, 2008). This led to growing environmental conservation concerns. These two tendencies, the mass tourism crisis and the increased interest in environmental conservation, led government agencies to strongly promote the ecotourism industry (Araújo-Santana et al., 2013; López Pardo & Palomino Villavicencio, 2008). Since then, the Mexican ecotourism industry has grown rapidly. In 1995 there were 8 ecotourism projects in the country. In 2018, the number had grown to 105 (Mexico desconocido, 2018)

Since the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002, many countries (including Mexico) have created policies to promote ecotourism. In 2006, Mexico created the first Mexican Ecotourism Norm called NMX-AA-133-SCF-2006 “Requirements and Regulations of Sustainability in Ecotourism” (known as NMX133) as a means to regulate the ecotourism industry. The NMX133 is a voluntary certification and establishes sustainable and “good practices” for all the groups interested in developing ecotourism

projects within the country (Rhodes, 2015). The norm was revised and a new version was released in 2013 that canceled the 2006 version. The 2013 revised version focuses more on the environmental component of ecotourism and less on the social component (Mastra, 2015). The Federal Economic Secretary (Secretaria de Economica) presented the 2013 version instead of the SECTUR or the Environmental Secretary.

1.2.4 Research Design and Methods

The purpose of this paper is to understand the extent to which and how tourism and ecotourism policies incorporate gender or women's equity. More specifically, I ask:

- 1- To what extent do tourism/ecotourism policies mention women or gender?
- 2- How do tourism/ecotourism policies talk about women/gender?
- 3- How does this vary between international, federal, and local policies?
- 4- Do policies incorporate key mechanisms for successfully achieving women's empowerment, such as clear indicators and evaluation processes, enforcement through incentives/disincentives, and/or mandatory application?

The questions are significant because in order to keep the tourism and ecotourism industry accountable for women's empowerment, formal policies and programs need to actively incorporate women and gender equity and have clear implementation and evaluations mechanisms. Otherwise, the policies may perpetuate a systemic patriarchy bias in the tourism/ecotourism industry.

This paper uses content analyses to review tourism and ecotourism policies and programs that affect the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. I systematically analyze the

various policies that together form the Mexican Tourism Policy Framework (25 policies) along with 14 international tourism and ecotourism policies, and 3 local policies that are relevant to the ecotourism industry in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. I employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis (Stemler, 2001). The quantitative analyses (concept analysis) counts the times keywords (such as woman/women and their Spanish equivalents, since the majority of the policies are in Spanish) are used (Rourke & Anderson, 2004; Stemler, 2001). Results are analyzed to summarize where the use of these terms appears (what policy/program and at what level). The qualitative analyses is a discourse analysis of how women and gender are discussed in the policies and programs looking for meaning, relationships, and context (Krippendorff, 2018; Stemler, 2001). I also looked for evidence of effective policy mechanisms with regards to promoting women's empowerment including indicators, mechanisms for enforcement, and mandatory application.

I started the analysis by creating a list of keywords related to women, gender, gender equality, etc based on literature on gender and women's empowerment (Morgan & Winkler, 2019; Rao et al., 2015; Walter, 2011). Then, I systematically read all the policies and counted the times woman/women in their Spanish equivalence (*mujer/mujeres*) were included in the policies to analyze the extent to which the policies mention women and gender. While reading and analyzing the presence of woman/women in the policies, based on presence and context (how they were present), I came up with with a list of relevant themes (see table 4 in the findings section for the list of themes). With the list of themes, I did thematic coding using a qualitative analysis software (Nvivo 12) to code every theme

and to text search, word frequency, and matrix coding to count the themes and to study the sentences, phrases, and the deeper context where themes were located in the policies to analyze how the policies address women and gender (Rahman, Wellstead, & Howlett, 2019). I divided the analysis by federal policies, international, and local to compare them.

The policies and programs that I included were chosen through a consultation process with members of an international ecotourism stakeholders community led by a Mexican NGO called Ecoturismo Genuino (Genuine Ecotourism). I am part of this community and I participate in webinars, online conferences, and discussion forums about ecotourism. I sent a message to the community asking for suggestions of public policy relevant to tourism and ecotourism in Mexico that I should include in this paper. I got responses from 14 different stakeholders with diverse expertise and involvement in tourism and ecotourism, including practitioners from NGO's working directly with ecotourism groups, government officials from the National Commission for Protected Areas (CONANP) and other agencies, members of local ecotourism projects, researchers, etc. Altogether, there were 53 suggestions for policies to analyze at international, national, and local/regional levels. However, I discarded the ones that are too old, not valid anymore or older versions of current policies. In the end, I chose the most relevant policies including 25 federal, 14 international, and 3 local of the State of Quintana Roo including one of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve where the majority of the ecotourism projects are located. All policies were reviewed in Spanish language, where available, and in English language otherwise. Appendix 1 includes a complete list of the reviewed policies, in Spanish and English, and the agencies and organizations that administer them.

1.3 Findings

The policies and programs pertinent to tourism and ecotourism in Quintana Roo mostly focus on the environmental component or in tourism promotion. They barely mention women in relation to gender equity. The few ecotourism policies that do have standards that include women or local empowerment, rarely provide any guidance for their implementation or indicators to evaluate them. Some certifications that could be important to promote gender equity or local empowerment, such as the NMX 133 for ecotourism, are voluntary which reduces their effectiveness. The following sections examine these results in detail starting with the international policies, then national, and finally local policies of the state of Quintana Roo.

1.3.1 International Policies

I reviewed 14 International policies searching for times where the policies mention women/women or mujer/mujeres. Table 1 shows how many times the international policies relevant to tourism and ecotourism mention woman or women.

Table 1. Number of times international policies mentioned woman/women.

Number	Name	Reference Mujer/mujeres Woman/women
1	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/71/173 “Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection” Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas A/71/173 “Promoción del	10

	turismo sostenible, incluido el ecoturismo, para la erradicación de la pobreza y la protección del medio ambiente”	
2	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/72/174 “Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America” Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas A/72/174 “Turismo sostenible y desarrollo sostenible en Centroamérica”	3
3	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/73/274 “Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection” Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas A/73/274 “Promoción del turismo sostenible, incluido el ecoturismo, para la erradicación de la pobreza y la protección del medio ambiente”	24
4	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/193 “International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development” Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas A/RES/70/193 “Año Internacional del Turismo Sostenible para el Desarrollo, 2017”	1
5	Global Code of Ethics for Tourism Codigo Etico Mundial del Turismo. Para un Turismo Responsable	1
6	Mexican Tourism Policy Studies (From OECD) Estudio de la Política Turística de México (de la OCDE)	2

7	Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC Criteria) - Industry Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible Criterios GSTC – Industria	1
8	Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels with indicators Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible Criterios GSTC para Hoteles con Indicadores de Desempeño sugeridos	2
9	Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC Industry Criteria for Tour Operators with indicators Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible Criterios GSTC para Tour Operadores con Indicadores de Desempeño sugeridos	2
10	Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC Destination Criteria Criterios Globales de Turismo Sostenible para Destinos Turísticos	1
11	Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goal. Good Practices in the Americas El Turismo y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. Buenas Prácticas en las Américas	9
International Policies in English		
12	Tourism and Visitor Management in Protected Areas. Guidelines for Sustainability Turismo y Manejo de Visitantes en Areas Protegidas. Guia para la Sustentabilidad	5
13	Towards a GREEN Economy.	2

	Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication Hacia una Economía Verde. Caminos para el Desarrollo Sustentable y la Erradicación de la Pobreza	
14	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/70/L.1 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” – Sustainable Development Goals Resolución A 70 de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas “Transformando nuestro mundo: La Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sustentable”- Las Metas del Desarrollo Sostenible	32

The majority of the international policies mention woman/women less than 10 times. Two policies that mention women more are from the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), *Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection* (24 times), and the *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Sustainable Development Goals* (32 times). The first policy directly targets sustainable tourism. The second policy is the United Nations (UN)' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). This is one of the most important policies in the world that the UN launched in 2015 to promote sustainability and a better world for everyone, including women. As mentioned earlier the SDG number 5 specifically targets women's empowerment and the UNWTO expects tourism to be a tool to achieve it (UNWTO 2015). So, it is not surprising that the SDG would mention women several times, because they are an important part of the UN sustainability agenda. These policies are not mandatory and are expected to inform national or local level policies in different countries.

At the other extreme is one important policy that does not mention women or gender equity at all. This is a very popular international certification mechanism- the Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria (GSTC Criteria). It is used as a reference to measure sustainability in the tourism industry in Mexico, according to the stakeholders that provided me information for this paper. This GSTC provides indicators to measure sustainability in the tourism industry. Although, it focuses more on the industry in general, hotels, and tour operators, the fact that women and gender equity are missing from these

criteria is relevant because it overlooks women's disadvantaged situation and contribution to the industry in an international level.

1.3.2 Mexican Federal Policies

I reviewed 25 federal policies from different agencies, only 16 of them mentioned *mujer* or *mujeres* (woman or women) at least once. Table 2 shows the policies that mention woman/women and how many references to women they make.

Table 2. Number of times that federal policies mentioned woman or women

Number	Name	References
1	National Strategy for a Sustainable Tourism Development and Recreation in the Mexican Protected Areas Nacional Turismo Areas Naturales Protegidas Estrategia Nacional para un Desarrollo Sustentable del Turismo y la Recreacion en las Areas Naturales Protegidas de Mexico	9
2	Strategy to Promote and Develop Nature Tourism In Mexico Estrategia Turismo de Naturaleza Estrategia para el Impulso y Desarrollo del Turismo de Naturaleza en Mexico	1
3	Strategy to Integrate Conservation and the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity Estrategia de Integracion para la Conservacion y el Uso Sustentable de la Biodiversidad	1
4	National Institute of Indigenous Peoples Law Ley del Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indigenas	8

5	General Law on Human Settlements, Territorial Planning and Urban Development Ley General de Asentamientos Humanos, Ordenamiento Territorial y Desarrollo Urbano	5
6	General Law of Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection Ley General del Equilibrio Ecológico y la Protección al Ambiente	1
7	General Law of Cooperatives Societies Ley General de Sociedades Cooperativas	3
8	Strategic Framework of Sustainable Tourism in Natural Protected Areas in Mexico Marco Estratégico de Turismo Sustentable en Áreas Naturales Protegidas de México	3
9	Mexican Norm NMX-AA-133-SCFI-2013 Requiriments and Specification of Ecotourism Sustainability Norma Mexicana NMX-AA-133-SCFI-2013 Requisitos y Especificaciones de Sustentabilidad del Ecoturismo	1
10	Tourism Sectorial Program 2012-2018 Programa Sectorial de Turismo 2013-2018	11
11	Reglas de Operación del Programa para el Mejoramiento de la Producción y Productividad Indígena Rules of Operation of the Program for the Improvement of Indigenous Production and Productivity	38
12	Regulations of the General Tourism Law	1

	Reglamento de la Ley General de Turismo	
13	Rules of Operation of the Sustainable Development Conservation Program Reglas de Operación del Programa de Conservación para el Desarrollo Sostenible (PROCODES)	75
14	Rules of Operation of the Program of Sustainable Tourism Regional Development and Magic Towns Reglas de Operación del Programa de Desarrollo Regional Turístico Sustentable y Pueblos Mágicos (PRODERMAGICO)	9
15	Rules of Operation of the Program of Social Economy Promotion Reglas de Operación del Programa de Fomento a la Economía Social	44
16	Sustainable Tourism in Mexico - Document Turismo Sustentable en Mexico - Documento	8

As seen in table 2 only 16 federal policies out of 25 mention women. One of the policies that does not mention women is the General Tourism Law, which is the most important federal law that regulates the tourism industry in Mexico.

The majority of the 16 policies that mention mujer/mujeres do it less than 10 times, and several only once. Most commonly, women are mentioned as part of who are the beneficiaries of the programs “men and women”. The federal policies that mentioned women the most- 38, 44, and 75 times- are targeting economic and rural development for indigenous peoples and provided funding for rural cooperatives to develop productive projects including ecotourism projects, but they are not specific tourism or conservation policies. Their objective is more rural development than tourism.

The federal policy that mentions Mujer/Mujeres (woman/women) the most (75 times) is *El Programa de Conservacion para el Desarrollo Sostenible* known as PROCODES (The Conservation for Sustainable Development Program). This program provides funding to local groups to develop conservation projects in protected areas. This policy is very important because it provides a large amount of funding for community-based projects (including ecotourism). In 2018, it had a budget to fund projects of \$261,746,818 Mexican pesos (\$13,087,340 US dollars). Every project or organized group can apply for up to \$1,200,000 Mexican pesos (\$60,000 dollars). PROCODES is also one of the few policies that targets conservation and sustainability and still promotes gender inclusivity.

The PROCODES policy has inclusive language throughout, referring to both *mujeres y hombres* every time it talks about who are the beneficiaries and the expected target population of the projects. It consistently encourages women's participation. It aims “(t)o promote equitable participation of women and men of the community in the workshops, training, technical studies, projects and other objects of support”. It provides more funding if women are involved. In the application for funding process, projects are given more “points” if the group has 100% women participants (3 points) or at least 50% women (2 points). The specific requirements of this policy to include women by providing more funding if there is male and female participation can motivate the local groups to include women in the projects, however, the policy does not provide instruments or indicators to measure how women should be included or how to promote their active participation. The PROCODES program also requires the establishment of a project committee that includes women as part of one of the leadership positions, if women are part of the project.

In the *Guide to Facilitate Development of Sustainable Tourism Zones and Delineating their Boundary* (Guía para facilitar la presentación de los instrumentos de los lineamientos para la dictaminación de las zonas de desarrollo turístico sustentable) there is one suggestion to include, as part of the application requirements for the funding that this program provides, a document called “Operative Policy About Gender Equity in Development (Política Operativa Sobre Igualdad De Género en el Desarrollo)” to promote gender equity in the sustainable tourism zones. However, the whole policy is voluntary and

including this document about gender is not necessary to develop sustainable tourism zones.

The only policy specifically targeting ecotourism is *The Mexican Norm NMX 133*. It was presented by the Economic Secretary and created and approved by the Technical Committee of National Normalization of the Environment and Natural Resources (Comité Técnico de Normalización Nacional de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales COTEMARNAT). It has as main objective to establish the requirement and specification of ecotourism environmental performance in Mexico. It is a voluntary certification. The policy states clearly that it does not correspond with any international policy, because there is no policy related to ecotourism. It targets mainly tourism service providers. The NMX133 promotes projects based on nature and respecting the environment, but only briefly mentions the social benefits of these projects and does not mention anything about gender equity (Mastra, 2015; Rhodes, 2015). It only mentions gender or women twice- one to request a register for the type of tourists visiting the projects (by sex), and second it states that the guides will be local and hired “observing as much as possible gender equity” (NMX 133, 2013: 24).

1.3.3 Local Policies

None of the three local policies I reviewed mention woman/women (mujer/mujeres) at all. These are the most important tourism policies in Quintana Roo that regulate the tourism

industry in the state and in one of the most important protected areas- The Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve- where the majority of the ecotourism projects are located. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3. Number of times local policies mentioned woman or women.

Number	Name	References
1	Tourism Law of the State of Quintana Roo Ley de Turismo del Estado de Quintana Roo	0
2	Agreement and Sectoral Program for Tourism Diversification Acuerdo y Programa Sectorial de Diversificación del Turismo	0
3	Management Program of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve Programa de Manejo de la Reserva de la Biosfera de Sian Ka'an	0

The fact that women are not mentioned once in the Quintana Roo tourism policies shows that gender equity is not a significant part of tourism development in the state. For instance, the *Agreement and Sectoral Program for Tourism Diversification* emphasizes how to make the tourism industry more competitive, but it does not address the social impacts of the tourism industry growth, and it does not say how local people will benefit from anything more than employment opportunities. The local policies also highlight the importance of institutional collaboration to achieve a better tourism industry, but the fact that they do not mention women once implies that the collaboration with institutions targeting vulnerable groups and gender equity is missing.

1.3.4 How policies include women, gender, and empowerment

In addition to counting references to women, I qualitatively reviewed the instances where women were mentioned paying attention to the meaning ascribed to women, the context within which women were mentioned, and any indications for how the policy would implement, measure, or evaluate impacts for gender equity or women's empowerment. Table 4 shows the themes that emerged across my review of all of the policies. It includes the number of instances of each theme (total references), and the number of different policies that included that theme. The following paragraphs then elaborate on the more common themes and the themes that are more relevant for the promotion of gender equity and women's empowerment in the tourism and ecotourism industry.

Table 4. Number of times the themes emerged in the policies.

Themes	Total	
	References	Number of policies
Woman/Women Mujer/Mujeres	259	22
Promotes women's participation Promueve la participation de las mujeres	67	14
Women as a vulnerable group (women presented in a vulnerable category as youth, indigenous, and elderly) Mujeres como grupo vulnerable	44	12
Inclusive language Lenguaje inclusivo	43	3
Women as beneficiaries mentioned only in a nominal way (number of women) Mujeres mencionadas en una forma nominal	39	8
Promotes employment or income opportunities for women	35	14

Promueve oportunidades de trabajo o sueldo para las mujeres		
Gender equality between men and women Igualdad de genero	32	12
Promotes women's empowerment Promueve empoderamiento de mujeres	25	8
Promotes interinstitutional collaboration Promueve colaboracion interninstitutional	25	9
Promotes Gender Equity Equidad de Genero	20	7
Funding incentives for women's involvement/participation Incentivos para la participacion de las mujeres	20	8
Business opportunities for women in tourism Oportunidades de negocio para las mujeres	19	10
Gender lens Lentes de genero	19	8
Promotes women development Promueve el desarrollo para las mujeres	16	6
Sustainable tourism Turismo sustentable	16	5
Women's rights Derechos de las mujeres	15	7
Training opportunities for women in tourism or ecotourism Oportunidades de entrenamiento o formacion para mujeres	13	7
Sanctions discrimination against women Sanciona la discriminacion hacia las mujeres	11	8
Sanction or prevent exploitation in the tourism industry Sanciona o previene la explotacion de las mujeres en la industria turistica	8	7
Promotes women's leadership Promueve el liderazgo en las mujeres	7	4
Clear practical gender strategies Estrategias de genero claras y practicas	7	4
Sanctions violence against women Sanciona o preveniene la violencia contra la mujer	7	3
Traditional gender expectations for women (housekeeping, cooking, etc.) Espectativas tradicionales de genero	6	5
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Metas del Desarrollo Sostenible	6	3

Ecotourism Ecoturismo	6	1
State effectiveness Efectividad del estado gubernamental	5	1
Women's involvement in developing policies Involucramiento de las mujeres en el desarrollo de las políticas publicas	4	2
Voluntary Es voluntaria	2	2
Women as peace builders Mujeres como constructoras de paz	1	1

1.3.4.1 *Gender equity (20 references in 7 different policies) and gender equality (32 references in 12 policies)*

Several policies do place attention on gender equity, gender equality, promoting women's participation, and women's empowerment. Still, upon further analysis, the policies refer to these themes as something important to include, but they rarely present strategies for implementation or enforcement mechanisms.

Most of the policies mention more gender equality than gender equity. The policies promoting gender equity mostly refer to a “gender perspective” and/or “gender lens” that encourage the participation of both men and women in the programs as the PROCODES program mentioned: “promotes participation in an equitable way of women and men in productive activities...” (PROCODES, 2019). Three federal policies stand out in the promotion of gender equity by encouraging the incorporation of a gender perspective while developing the projects they fund; *The Rules of Operation of the Program of Social Economy Promotion* (Reglas de Operacion del Fomento a la Economic Social), the PROCODES program, and the *Rules of Operation of the Program of Sustainable Tourism*

Regional Development and Magic Towns (PRODEMAGICO program). The three programs have as their main objective to promote the economic and social development of vulnerable groups in Mexico, including women. Only one of the programs is specifically targeting tourism, the PRODEMAGICO, which is a program that provides subsidies to organized groups, such as local cooperatives, to build better infrastructure to improve the quality of the tourism services they provide. The way PRODEMAGICO encourages the incorporation of a gender perspective is by analyzing what are the circumstances that put women in a disadvantaged position towards men in order to create mechanisms to eliminate them to increase gender equity between men and women.

Gender equality mainly means respecting or promoting equal rights between men and women, equal opportunities between men and women, or equal participation of men and women. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) substantially mentions gender equality as an important goal to achieve to promote gender empowerment. For the SDG goals there is an ambition for “A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed” (UN, 2015), but at the same time, the SDG acknowledges that gender equality is still a key challenge worldwide.

Only one policy the Sustainable Tourism in Mexico document from the SEMARNAT agency includes a section on gender equality. This policy is important because it is specifically for the tourism industry in Mexico, while for the majority of the policies that include gender equity and equality their main objective is rural development and not tourism or ecotourism. This policy is a report and it is not mandatory. It is mainly

to inform how is the tourism industry in Mexico regarding sustainability. The SEMARNAT policy emphasizes the importance of reflecting on how tourism activities incorporate gender equity. In many projects, women don't make decisions, are prevented to assume management or leadership positions, and there is an income gap between men and women in the industry. Employment in the Mexican tourism industry still has a traditional gender division of labor where the most important positions with higher salaries are given to men while women are still getting jobs as cooks or maids with low incomes. This situation increases women's vulnerability in the tourism industry. This policy also highlights the urgency of having tourism policies with a gender perspective in all tourist areas and to incorporate women in more active roles in the industry. This policy is one of the few that proposes practical gender strategies, such as the implementation of "gender quota" in the tourism industry to guarantee more female involvement and participation (SEMARNAT, 2017).

1.3.4.2 Women's Empowerment (25 references in 8 policies)

The policies that mostly mention women's empowerment are the SDG and the international policies from the UNGA A/71/173 and A/73/274 *Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection*. In these policies, the tourism industry including ecotourism should provide development opportunities to local communities to empower women and youth with programs targeting poverty eradication. Tourism should pay attention not only to conservation of the local natural and cultural heritage but also to the empowerment of women and other vulnerable

groups through funding and training opportunities (UNGA, 2016, 2018). These policies encourage governments, especially the agencies in charge of tourism to collaborate with local communities and to incorporate women in an active manner in all the tourism operations and in the development of tourism policies. Incorporating women in tourism policy development is one of the most important mechanisms for the promotion of women's empowerment. The USGA policies are mostly guides for governments and agencies to incorporate in their own local policies and programs, but they are not mandatory.

In the Mexican tourism policy framework, only one policy specifically mentioned women's empowerment. The "Tourism Sectorial Program 2012-2018" which is a program that states the actions that the government will take during the six-year term of office of the last Mexican president. This policy states that the government will develop a program called "Economic empowerment of women from small and large business in the tourism sector" that include workshops about how to develop tourism and ecotourism productive projects, this program was only for women. However, there is no information available of this program and it is unknown if the program was launched or not and when.

1.3.4.3 Inclusive language (43 references in 3 policies)

Although inclusive language of "men and women" together in the same sentence has a large number of references, it was only found in 3 policies. Two federal policies and one international. The federal policies are the *Rules of Operation of the Program for the Improvement of Indigenous Production and Productivity from the Indigenous Peoples*

commission and the PROCODES program. The two policies are targeting development and poverty eradication and the first one is direct to indigenous peoples. Both programs provide funding to local groups to develop productive projects, including ecotourism projects. Every time they mention the beneficiaries of the program they include both genders “women and men” which is different from other policies that only mentions the general word “beneficiaries” in the Spanish male version of the word (beneficiarios) or only mention women when they want to highlight gender equity or equality. The only international policy that uses an inclusive language once is the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* (in its Spanish version) promoted by the UNWTO as an ethics guide for tourists visiting other countries.

1.3.4.4 *Promotion of women’s participation (67 references in 14 policies)*

The theme that appears the most in the policies is the promotion of women’s participation. Seven federal policies including three laws, one national strategy, and three programs highlight the significance of including women in the policies. *The National Strategy for a Sustainable Tourism Development and Recreation in the Mexican Protected Areas* is the oldest policy included in this paper (launched in 2007), and it is the background of newer policies that regulate protected areas in Mexico. This policy calls for the establishment of actions that support women’s participation in tourism, these actions needed to be created through interinstitutional collaboration. Although this policy only mentions women participation once, it was a good precedent for the following policies in protected areas to continue this effort. However, this did not happen because the policies targeting protected

areas, such as the *Sian Ka'an Management Plan* focus only on environmental conservation and do not mention women.

The *National Institute of Indigenous Peoples Law* strongly encourages indigenous women's participation to follow the actions of federal, state, and local authorities to protect and sanction any type of discrimination against women in the country, especially women in even more vulnerability such as girls and the minority African-Mexican group. This law mandates to include gender equality in every policy and program from the Federal government to promote women's rights. Also, it requires the creation of the National Indigenous Council with equal participation of indigenous women and men. Although this law promotes women's participation in public policies, it does not say how and the only practical strategy that proposes is the integration of women as part of the National Indigenous Council. This law is not specifically for tourism, but since many groups that develop tourism and ecotourism projects in local communities are indigenous, this law is relevant for the tourism industry.

The *General Law on Human Settlements, Territorial Planning and Urban Development* calls for the creation of mechanisms that will allow women and other vulnerable groups to participate in the planning and authorization of land change when the land or territory needs to be legally changed to allow the development of projects that will impact local communities, including tourism and ecotourism projects. This law is important because the government many times authorizes the land use change where local people live without their consent or without informing all the different groups in the community, and women and other vulnerable groups are usually left behind. The *General*

Law of Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection only mentions women's participation once, however, it presents women as important agents to achieve sustainable development because they have an "important function in the protection, preservation, and sustainable use of the natural resources" (SEMARNAT, 2018). This law is one of the few that incorporates women and recognizes their important role in environmental conservation. Still, it does not include any mechanism for implantation or enforcement of women's participation. This last version of the policy was launched in 2018, the previous versions did not mention women and only focused on environmental protection.

The programs that give funding to local groups to develop productive projects, including ecotourism projects, have done the most to promote women's participation. The *Rules of Operation of the Program for the Improvement of Indigenous Production and Productivity*, The *Rules of Operation of the Program of Social Economy Promotion*, and the PROCODES program include women's participation 7, 16, and 11 times respectively. These policies call for the guarantee of active participation of women in decision making in the projects and their communities, and to incorporate women in management and leadership positions. Also, the policies require to analyze and prevent the obstacles that prevent women from being actively involved in projects. These programs give funding incentives to projects that are exclusively formed by women or that include equal women's participation. Also, they encourage the respect of women's rights and the promotion of their development and well-being, including recognition and incorporation of women's opinions, points of view, and initiatives.

The international policies that largely incorporate women's participation are developed by the UN the Sustainable Development Goals, the UNGA, and the UNWTO. As mentioned before UNGA A/71/173 and A/73/274 *Promotion of Sustainable Tourism, Including Ecotourism, for Poverty Eradication and Environment Protection* promotes women's empowerment by encouraging collaboration between the government and local groups, including women's groups and the active participation of women in tourism policy development. The A/73/274 also presents how different Latin American countries are promoting women's participation. For instance, there is a certification in Uruguay that encourages women's participation to reduce inequalities between men and women in the tourism industry. Countries such as Uruguay, Peru, and Guatemala, have incentives for projects lead by women. Although the policy does not specifically include Mexico, some strategies from other counties could be applied to the Mexican context, a mandatory certification for ecotourism projects that reduces unequal participation and promotes empowerment between men and women would likely produce positive gender equity outcomes in the Mexican tourism industry.

The UNWTO *Sustainable Tourism for Development* states that tourism is an important tool to provide opportunities to women at many levels, like employment, but it calls to increase awareness of the vulnerability of women in the industry and to strengthen policies to increase their pay and protect their working conditions. It argues that tourism should engage women and remove barriers that will prevent their active participation in the tourism industry. It calls for governments and other institutions to constantly review how

well women are included and create clear strategies to improve their position and increase their opportunities.

Similarly, women were mentioned only in a nominal way, as numbers of beneficiaries of the projects of programs 39 times in 8 different policies. Mostly as a way for the policies to measure women's participation by requesting the number of participants divided by sex. The numbers of women participating in the projects have been used to measure "success" in policies, although, the solo number of women's participating does not necessary produce empowerment or gender equity.

1.3.4.5 Women as a vulnerable group (44 references in 12 policies)

Women are recognized in the policies as a vulnerable group and often mentioned alongside children, indigenous, elderly, and people with disabilities. This way of presenting women is a precedent to present actions, recommendations, or rules to promote gender equality, women's empowerment and participation in the policies. Almost every time that the policies incorporate gender equality or women's participation, they first state that women are part of vulnerable groups, then present their suggestion or rule. As the UNGA A/73/274 says it is significant that governments "collaborate with women, children, the youth, indigenous peoples, and other professionals in a local level in the planning and application of policies, plans, and norm (related to tourism and ecotourism)" (UNGA, 2018).

1.3.4.6 Promotion of business opportunities (19 references in 10 policies), employment and income for women (35 references in 14 policies)

Some of the policies promote women as entrepreneurs in the tourism industry and in productive projects. The UNWTO *Sustainable Tourism for Development* says that employment and entrepreneurship are very important to create gender equity in the tourism industry. Also, it encourages the creation of resources that will allow women to be successful entrepreneurs, such as credit lines, access to land, and training (UNWTO & European Commission, 2013). The *Towards a Green Economy. Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication* document from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) promotes microfinance and it states that funding microcredits to women's projects in rural areas will have positive outcomes for women in disadvantaged positions (UNEP, 2011). The *Study of the Mexican Tourism Public Policy* from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) says that in Mexico the financial reforms from the last president are encouraging banks in the country to provide funding to small tourism companies which increases the financial participation in the market of vulnerable groups, including women, that otherwise will not have access to loans or other financial opportunities. This policy also establishes that tourism growth in the country will create better jobs, increase local income, and create more employment opportunities for women and indigenous groups (OECD, 2017).

Policies directly analyzing or regulating the tourism industry acknowledge the fact that tourism is a tool to create employment and income opportunities for women. The UNGA A/73/274 highlights the importance of creating employment in tourism for

vulnerable groups, including women. The UNGA Resolution A/RES/70/193 *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development* acknowledges tourism as a tool to eradicate poverty, to increase the wellbeing of vulnerable groups, to economically empower women by creating employment, and to contribute with the three dimensions of sustainable development in developing countries. *Tourism and Visitor Management in Protected Areas. Guidelines for Sustainability* guidelines from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) says that the countries will expand their market of tourists if there is a clear recognition of women's rights and increase in economic opportunities for women. These practices are very attractive for a segment of tourists who want to support more sustainable tourism and ecotourism projects (IUCN, 2018).

1.3.4.7 Interinstitutional collaboration (25 references in 9 policies)

As showed early in other themes, few policies highlight the importance of collaboration between government agencies, NGO's, and international organizations to promote gender equality, mostly the policies related to development and poverty reduction through productive projects, including ecotourism projects. For instance, the *Rules of Operation of the Program for the Improvement of Indigenous Production and Productivity* states that it was sent to the National Women's Institute for its approval before launching it. This policy also mandates that every agency of the Mexican Federal Government that promotes programs for women and gender equity inform the results to the public and particularly to indigenous local communities in their own language. Also, government agencies should establish mechanisms that guarantee that indigenous people will clearly understand the

requirements and benefits of their programs and how they can have access to them. Surprisingly the *General Tourism Law* also promotes interinstitutional collaboration by saying that Mexico needs to establish a tourism advisory council and lists the agencies that should send a representative to join the council, it includes the National Women's Institute. However, it does not include women in any other way in the rest of the policy.

1.4 Discussion and Conclusion

This paper aims to understand the extent to which and how tourism and ecotourism policies incorporate gender equity and women. None of the three local policies mention women and only 30 of the 39 relevant international and national policies mention them.

The international policies that focus the most on women are those from the United Nations (UNGA and UNWTO). The national policies that mention women the most are not targeting tourism or ecotourism; they are targeting development for indigenous peoples and poverty eradication. Both, international and national policies acknowledge the fact that women's participation in the industry and procuring gender equality is important, but they do not provide any instruments to evaluate if and how women are participating more than statistics about how many women and men are participating in the projects and empowered in the tourism industry. The local policies aim to address "sustainability" in the local tourism and ecotourism industries, but they only focus on environmental conservation or in economic growth, excluding any specific attention to women and other disadvantaged groups, such as Indigenous Peoples.

The majority of the policies from the Mexican tourism policy framework that specifically target tourism or ecotourism barely incorporate women and gender equity. This includes the most important policy that regulates the tourism industry in the country, the General Tourism Law that does not mention women at all. The only ecotourism policy and certification in Mexico the NMX 133 only mentions women once. In the federal tourism policies, women are mostly mentioned as the number of participants or beneficiaries of the tourism programs and projects. Only one tourism federal policy- *Sustainable Tourism in Mexico*- specifically has a section on gender equality. Still, this policy is not mandatory, because it is not a law or certification that tourism projects need to comply with in order to get funding or to develop a project. This policy encourages the tourism government authorities to incorporate gender equality as part of the tourism industry and highlights the importance of having tourism policies with a gender perspective in all tourist areas and to incorporate women in more leadership positions in the industry, but it does not present mechanisms for their implementation and enforcement. The fact that the majority of the policies are not mandatory reduces their effectiveness.

Contrary to the promotion of gender equity, some policies are more concerned about creating more accessibility and inclusive tourism industry for people with disabilities. Similarly, the policies are more worried about the impacts on the environment and how to minimize them, than putting attention on the social impacts of tourism and its stakeholders, especially those that are part of vulnerable groups such as women. The tourism policies sometimes mention the importance of creating a more sustainable tourism industry in the country, but they mostly focus on the environmental part. When the tourism

policies address local communities, they mention them as if the beneficiary groups were homogenous without considering internal local dynamics that will benefit some participants more than others. We know from the literature that this often means that women are left behind (Morgan & Winkler, 2019, Rao et.al., 2016, Walter, 2011). The cultural context of policies matters, policies can be more effective if the cultural context and social complexities are considered because policies are closely related to social norms and exclusionary practices, people's consciousness, and resources available. Policies cannot be separated from these other components if they mean to be transformational and have better empowerment outcomes (Rao, et.al., 2016).

The policies that highly incorporate women, women's equality, women's empowerment, women's participation, and a gender-inclusive language are not directly focusing on tourism, their main objective is to promote the development of rural areas and poverty eradication for indigenous and other vulnerable groups, such as the PROCODES program. Although including women, gender equity, and participation is very important and it is a step towards the right direction to achieve women's empowerment, these policies lack practical gender strategies, and they do not specify how are they going to evaluate or enforce them. According to the literature, practical gender strategies is one of the most important elements for a policy to promote women's empowerment effectively (Hunt, 2004). The lack of practical gender strategies in these policies reduces their impact and effectiveness. Although, some policies require statistics about the number of men and women participating in the programs, the sole statistics does not necessary guarantee active

participation and fair distribution of benefits. It is also important to evaluate how are they involved and who are the real beneficiaries of the policies.

The revised policies highlight the importance of promoting collaboration between the different federal, state, and local agencies to achieve their goals. Interinstitutional collaboration is important to promote better outcomes for women (Htun & Weldon, 2010); however, the tourism policies barely involve agencies and organizations that directly work with and for women. If they do it, they only include women's agencies in a passive way, only when the policy requires a committee and it mentions the different agencies that are invited to send a representative to join the policy committee. Besides this passive inclusion of women's organizations, the policies do not include a clear directive for collaboration with women's organizations. Women organizations are usually not invited to collaborate in policy development unless the policy is specifically targeting women as beneficiaries (Htun & Weldon, 2010).

From the data available here in this content review, the process of how policies were developed and who was involved is not clear. It is impossible to know the degree to which women were involved and if they were, how actively or passively they participated. Women's involvement in the development, evaluation, and enforcement of tourism policies is very important for the policies to be tools to achieve women's empowerment (Hunt, 2004). Additionally, it is important that the people in charge of developing, revising, and implementing the policies have "gender lens" (Edwards & Stewart, 2017). However, it is not clear if the agencies in charge of the policies promote any type of gender training or if the officials in charge of the policies have the gender lens needed because there is no

indication if the Mexican government officials take any course, training, or are knowledgeable in women, gender, equity, and women's empowerment issues. This is one limitation of this study- it is a simple review of what is included in the policies. Future research should investigate the processes of agenda setting, policy development, implementation, enforcement and evaluation and dig further on policy effectiveness.

Another important element for policies to effectively promote women's empowerment is state effectiveness (Htun & Weldon, 2010). In the Mexican tourism policy framework, state capacity is not well defined. It is not clear who should implement the policies, who should enforce them, and how. The Mexican Tourism framework is vast; however, policy implementation is limited because there is no connection between the different agencies that should target tourism sustainability and gender equity. The Mexican state is also weak because of corruption. Another important issue that limits policy effectiveness is the lack of continuity because the Mexican federal government changes every six years and every new government official wants to bring their own ideas and leave their own "footprint" so they create new policies or develop new versions of existing policies, it is difficult to have effective policy implementation, evaluation, and enforcement if the policies are constantly changing or getting cancelled.

Overall, the findings show that the tourism and ecotourism policies and programs generally overlook the importance of women, gender equity, and power dynamics in the industry. They are predominately "gender blind" and ignore the impact of gender and power relations in practice. If the ecotourism and tourism industry is meaningfully contributing to achieving Sustainable Development Goal number 5 "Achieve gender

equality and empowerment of all women and girls,” tourism and ecotourism policies that specifically incorporate gender equity, demonstrate its implementation, and come with enforcement could be critical for moving women’s empowerment from a goal in theory to reality in practice.

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2 Ecotourism, Power Relations, and Women's Participation in a Community-based Ecotourism Project

2.1 Introduction

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector in the tourism industry (Fretters, 2017). In 2018, this industry comprises \$4000, 000,000 Mexican pesos (\$200,000,000 American dollars) of the Mexican national economy (Tourism Secretary, 2018). Community-based ecotourism is promoted by governments and international organizations as a path to ecological, social, and economic sustainability of local communities (Scheyvens, 1999). The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/223 *Promotion of Ecotourism for Poverty Eradication and Environment Protection* declared that ecotourism provides positive impacts on socioeconomic development, local empowerment, and creates jobs (UNGA, 2013). Ecotourism can bring higher income than other economic activities in rural areas (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Hunt, Durham, Driscoll, & Honey, 2015), contributing to poverty eradication (Hunt et al., 2015). It promotes respect for cultural differences and human rights (Honey, 2008; Scheyvens, 1999), provides access to different resources, strategic information, and opportunities to develop new skills, such as learning a new language (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Hunt et al., 2015), and it can build social capital and enhance self-stem (Scheyvens, 1999).

Ecotourism principles focus on local community empowerment (The International Ecotourism Society [TIES], 2019). However, emerging research indicates that ecotourism may do little to challenge preexisting power relations. Ecotourism can perpetuate inequalities by creating an uneven distribution of income, power, and resources (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014). For some, ecotourism is a neoliberal policy that only enhances preexisting patterns of social and political disparities (Fletcher, 2012; Horton, 2009). Ecotourism can disempower local people and divide communities because the benefits do not impact everyone equally (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Agarwal, 2001; Belsky, 1999). The poorest people are often excluded because they do not have access to the necessary resources, such as buying boats or building rooms in their homes for Bed and Breakfast lodging (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Belsky, 1999; Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Horton, 2009). Some scholars even believe that equitable outcomes are not possible to achieve (Sharpley, 2006).

This paper presents a case study of a community-based ecotourism cooperative in rural Mexico- *Community Tours Sian Ka'an*- to show how power dynamics and processes are at play. *Community Tours Sian Ka'an* is often referenced as a highly successful, model ecotourism initiative because it has good environmental practices, generates profit, and creates job opportunities. Yet, as I argue here, power relations limit participation benefits from the project. The analysis draws on Agarwal's (2001) participatory framework to understand different levels of participation in ecotourism projects and extends Gaventa's (1982) theory of power to understand processes through which power relations are perpetuated in an ecotourism case. Together, these theories explain how individuals get

slated into and kept within different levels of participation, putting many in disadvantaged positions and limiting the distribution of benefits to a small group, despite ecotourism claims for empowerment.

2.1.1 Ecotourism, Development, and Empowerment

Ecotourism has many positive outcomes. It has been shown to effectively promote environmental conservation (Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Horton, 2009; Hunt et al., 2015; Stem, Lassoie, Lee, Deshler, & Schelhas, 2003). As Horton (2009) and (Hunt et al., 2015) found in the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica where ecotourism is booming, ecotourism has not caused serious negative impact to the environment; on the contrary, it has promoted a switch from environmentally damaging activities such as massive agriculture and cattle ranching to fewer damaging ones, such as ecotourism. People working in ecotourism are less likely to engage in resource intense livelihoods (Stem et al., 2003). Ecotourism can also promote environmental education and raise funds for biodiversity conservation (Honey, 2008; Hunt et al., 2015). Ecotourism can engage local communities in environmental conservation and encourage tourists to respect the environment (Henderson, Teck, Ng, & Si-Rong, 2009). Beyond environmental conservation, ecotourism aims to follow a set of social and economic principles, including development and empowerment goals (Henderson et al., 2009; Hunt et al., 2015; Scheyvens, 1999; TIES 2019). It generates employment and income (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1998; Hunter, 2002), promotes education opportunities (Das & Chatterjee, 2015), a sense of accomplishment and higher self-esteem

(Morgan & Winkler, 2019; Scheyvens, 1999) and it can be a means to sustainable development for the most vulnerable (TIES, 2019).

Despite these promising outcomes and the corresponding high hopes of large organizations and governments for an ecotourism panacea, ecotourism has significant criticism. The increasing popularity of ecotourism destinations promotes the development of tourism infrastructure which can create biodiversity loss (Honey, 2008). This creates conflicts between biodiversity conservation and ecotourism goals (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). The creation or expansion of protected areas where many ecotourism projects are located has created problems with land displacement and land insecurity for local people and restrictions of uses of natural resources (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). Often, local people do not participate in the planning of ecotourism projects which creates conflicts with the governments, lack of support, or sabotages (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Das & Chatterjee, 2015). Ecotourism does not challenge unequal accumulation of wealth and it can reinforce hierarchical relations based on gender, age, education, and ethnicity, whitening its participants (Ramón-Hidalgo, Kozak, Harshaw, & Tindall, 2018).

A growing body of research shows that ecotourism's primary beneficiaries are those who already have resources or power within communities. In many cases, these are men (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Horton, 2009). For instance, Ramón-Hidalgo et al. (2018) found that in Ghana women are significantly less empowered to make decisions over projects than men, and Morgan and Winkler (2019) found that gendered expectations about balancing work and family life limit women's empowerment and threaten the viability of the cooperative even within a women's only ecotourism

cooperative. Although emerging research recognizes these power issues in tourism (Blackstock, 2005; Hall, 2010), we don't yet know very much about how these power dynamics work and are perpetuated in the ecotourism context.

2.1.2 Community empowerment through participation

Participatory governance models are promoted as a key solution to alleviating power differentials in natural resource-dependent communities (Lund & Saito-Jensen, 2013; Sindiga, 1995; Sneddon & Fox, 2007). They are expected to increase conservation efforts and promote local empowerment by involving locals in the decision-making process and co-management strategies (Andrade & Rhodes, 2012; Davis & Wali, 1994; Nagendra, 2008) and to create a common ground in decision making with win-win outcomes (Andrade & Rhodes, 2012; Fiallo & Jacobson, 1995). However, not everyone can participate equally (Belsky, 1999). In Australia, a study found that those with more financial resources have more coercive and induced power than other stakeholders in deciding tourism destinations management (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). A study in Kenya found that a small group of elites makes meetings for the entire community wildlife sanctuary (Amati, 2013). In some ecotourism projects in Ghana, men make all the decisions putting women aside (Ramón-Hidalgo et al., 2018).

Agarwal's (2001) theory of participation in community-based forestry groups offers a model for understanding how participation is structured with implications for power distribution in natural resources dependent projects such as ecotourism. Agarwal divides participation in community-based groups in six levels: nominal, passive,

consultative, activity-specific, active, and interactive/empowering. In the nominal level, the participants are members “in paper”, but do not attend meetings or other activities; in the passive participation members attend meetings, but do not raise their opinions due to fear of being ignored or shut down. In the consultative participation level, the elite can ask the opinions of the non-elite members but does not guarantee that they will have any influence or be considered. In the activity-specific participation level, non-elite members are asked to volunteer only in specific and temporary tasks such as cleaning for an important event. If there is active participation, the members express their opinions and take initiative, in the last level of interactive participation all the members (not only the elite) have voice and impact in decision-making (Agarwal, 2001). Only the last two levels of participation, active and interactive, have the potential to promote empowerment and even distribution of benefits.

2.1.3 Power in natural resources dependent communities

Rural communities that are economically and socially dependent on natural resources (usually for extractive purposes such as mining, logging, or agriculture) face particular social, economic, and environmental challenges, including persistent inequalities (Peluso, Humphrey, & Fortmann, 1994). While not extractive, per se, tourism/ecotourism is another type of natural resource dependence that has been shown to impact rural communities in a similar fashion (English, Marcouiller, & Cordell, 2000). Natural resource-dependent rural communities tend to suffer from power differentials that perpetuate poverty and discourage local empowerment and create an uneven dynamic between those in power and those

without it, where the powerless rarely challenge the powerful (Agarwal, 2001; Gareau, 2007; Sindiga, 1995).

John Gaventa's (1982) theory of power and powerlessness in natural resource dependent communities helps us to understand how systems of power and inequalities are reinforced over time. Gaventa shows how elite actors construct a general feeling and attitude of quiescence among less powerful people such that they don't act to challenge the power structure despite suffering from unfair, discriminatory, and uneven conditions. Gaventa bases his analysis of power disparities on Lukes (1974) three dimensions of power concepts. In Gaventa's first dimension of power, the elite control resources and decision making and the powerless don't have the resources to challenge the uneven power dynamics. In keeping control of the resources, the elite creates barriers preventing the powerless from mobilizing in ways that would challenge the elite's power within the system (second dimension). Barriers can include developing images, beliefs, and values to manipulate community consciousness to keep control over the powerless (Gaventa, 1982).

In this paper, I extend Gaventa's theory to understand power processes in the ecotourism context in a rural area of Mexico. In Gaventa's case study of a coal mining town, the elite was formed mainly by external agents (Gaventa, 1982). However, in ecotourism and other community-based projects, the elite is not necessarily external. Rather, powerful elites often live within the same local community. In either circumstance, the uneven power dynamics between the elite and the powerless could limit participation and decision making of the non-elite members (Amati, 2013). By limiting participation,

the elite perpetuates the power dynamics that benefit them and allow them to keep control over the powerless.

In this paper, I employ Agarwal's participation framework to understand the different levels of participation, along with Gaventa's dimensions of power to analyze power dynamics, quiescence, and barriers that an elite puts in place to control participation in an ecotourism context. From Agarwal, we start to understand the various levels of participation in the ecotourism cooperative. Then, we examine deeper the processes through which peoples' participation is embedded in each of these levels drawing on Gaventa's theory of power and powerlessness. I merge and extend these two theories to understand how and why the different types of participation and power dynamics occur the way they do in an ecotourism context. I want to understand what power hierarchies may continue to persist even as an ecotourism project is considered "successful".

2.2 Research Design and Methods

The purpose of this paper is to identify power dynamics: control over resources, decision making, agenda setting, etc., alongside female participation in a community-based ecotourism setting by extending existing theories of power in natural resource-based communities to an ecotourism context. I employ a qualitative case study analysis using a circular (dialective) process to move between inductive and deductive logic as I compare theory with empirical data of a community-based ecotourism cooperative- *Community Tours Sian Ka'an* (hereafter *Community*) to understand power dynamics and participation

in an ecotourism case. I began the research looking for gender-based power differentials and gendered explanations for ecotourism participation and distribution of benefits. While collecting data and during analysis, multiple sources of power emerged as important for understanding the distribution of resources in this case. In response, I combine broader theories of power in natural resource-dependent communities (Gaventa 1982) and in environmental governance Agarwal (2001) to understand how power hierarchies affect the distribution of benefits in this “successful” ecotourism project.

2.2.1 Community Tours Sian Ka’an

Community Tours Sian Ka’an (Community) was chosen as a case study upon recommendation from a local NGO called *Amigos de Sian Ka’an* when I was searching for fully operational ecotourism projects in the Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. *Amigos de Sian Ka’an* recommended visiting this cooperative because it is considered a “success story” of ecotourism in the area and in the country and it has been very functional and growing for more than 10 years. Men and women alike participate in *Community*. *Community* only observes a gender binary of men and women (as many groups in rural Mexico), however, it is still an interesting case in which to analyze gender relations and to look at the different power dynamics and participation.

Community’s main location is in Muyil town, which is 20 minutes (22 km/14 mi) from Tulum town in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. *Community* has two offices. Their main office is in Muyil and they have another smaller office in Tulum which is mainly to make reservations. The Muyil office has a museum, a restaurant, a kitchen, a butterfly farm,

restrooms, and a building that has office space, a shop, and two rooms with a bathroom. The two rooms and the restroom serve as a house for one of the workers who is a driver and guard in the cooperative and lives there permanently with his wife who does not work for the cooperative. The Muyil office also stores some of the materials for the tours, such as life jackets, boat motors, paddles, kayaks, etc. The boats usually stay in the lagoon. The big restaurant also serves as a space for meetings, workshops, and parties. The group owns three vehicles, a van to transport tourists, a truck to transport gasoline and other heavy equipment such as motors or kayaks, and a small compact car for administrative trips.

Community offers eight different tours. Four of these tours take place inside the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, a local protected area and UNESCO designated World Heritage Site. The four tours inside the protected area include boat rides to watch manatees, crocodiles, and other local flora and fauna, as well as kayaking, bird watching, floating on one of the canals of the lagoon, and a visit to a Mayan Archeological site called Muyil. The other four tours that are not inside of the Sian Biosphere Reserve include trips to various towns that have projects to promote the Mayan culture and heritage. None of the members or workers of the cooperative live in Muyil. They live in Chumpon town or Tulum and they travel every day to the Muyil or Tulum offices.

Community is considered by the local government, as well as by national and international NGOs, as a successful community-based ecotourism project because it is profitable and has good environmental practices (e.g. respecting the carrying capacity of the protected area, implementing waste separation, and a commitment to reduce their CO2 emissions through carbon credits). *Community* is considered an exemplar of community-

based ecotourism projects in the area and even in the country. It is locally run by Mayan Indigenous people and fully functional and growing. *Community* has received a lot of funding from the United Nations Development Programme and other organizations, as well as awards and certification not only from the Mexican government but also from international organizations due to their good management and organization, environmental practices, and community impact. They have been invited to present their project at international conferences and workshops and to tourism national and international fairs.

2.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data between 2015 and 2016. Data collections included detailed field notes from participant observation fieldwork of six weeks in the field; transcripts of 38 semi-structured interviews conducted with cooperative members, workers (non-members), ex-members, ex-workers, and tourism officials; and document analysis. I first visited *Community Tours Sian Ka'an* during the summer of 2015 at the invitation of the cooperative (after an introduction from *Amigos de Sian Ka'an*) and I participated in a tour in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve to meet the project.

Between February 2015 and December 2018, I reviewed documentation about the project, including its official documents and minutes and policies, related government and protected area policies, and official documents of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve. I stayed in contact with the manager of the group and some of the members through Facebook where they post regular pictures, group activities, and trips to conferences and

meetings nationally and internationally. I also followed news related to them from local, national, and international newspaper and other websites.

I conducted preliminary fieldwork for a week in 2015 visiting both offices in Tulum and Muyil and joining a tour. During the preliminary fieldwork, I made arrangements for extended fieldwork and conducted 2 preliminary interviews. I then spent five weeks living and conducting participant observation in Tulum and Muyil during November-December 2016. While living in the area, I visited the cooperative on a daily basis, usually spending the mornings and afternoons in Muyil and the evenings in Tulum. During my stay, I joined regular activities such as meals, tours, informal meetings, and cultural celebrations like the Hanal Pixan (Day of the Dead in Mayan). I participated in the daily life of the cooperative in both offices as fully as possible. I took nightly field notes and made memos documenting these experiences always paying attention to how the cooperative works, how are the social interactions between men, women, members, workers, and tourists. I participated in five tours. Two of the tours included boat rides to watch flora and fauna and floating in the canals of the lagoons. The other two tours included a boat ride, a hiking trip through the forest and a visit to the Muyil archeological site. The last tour was a weekend trip to know the projects that promote Mayan culture and heritage in the area.

I lived in a hotel room in Tulum and travelled back and forth between Tulum and Muyil daily. At the beginning of the fieldwork in November of 2016, I was planning to stay in one of the rooms of the Muyil office, however, after two days I realized that it was not very productive because the members and workers do not stay there and after 4 or 5 pm they leave to their hometowns. Living in Tulum allowed me to spend more time during

the evenings with some of the guides, members, and workers that live there or close by. Besides the formal interviews, the daily conversations with the members, employees, and visitors helped to establish connections throughout the group and to learn more about the history and workings of *Community*. The members and workers were very welcoming and made invitations to share meals with them, hang out with them after working hours, visit their hometowns, their work areas, and to attend personal and family events. Being a Mexican woman and a native Spanish speaker helped me to gain trust and to quickly establish relationships. However, my lack of Mayan language limited some of the interactions because some of the members spoke to each other in the Mayan language when speaking informally, although they spoke Spanish during meetings or formal events or when they were talking to me or to other workers who cannot speak Mayan.

In total, I conducted 38 semi-structured interviews with 11 women and 27 men. Interviewees included 5 women members, 7 men members, including the manager; 5 men workers, 13 men workers; 3 former members or ex-employees and 1 women ex-member; 3 professional tourism and development practitioners (consultants working or promoting ecotourism projects in the area or NGO's members that worked with *Community* in the past) and 1 Mexican government official. Discussions with the interviewees focused on their participation in the cooperative, their lives in their communities, their own personal histories, experiences with the cooperative, other social and economic obligations in the community, and gender relations in their families and in their broader communities. I employed snowball sampling techniques beginning with the *Community* manager who then

introduced me with the group and told them that I was going to be around for a few weeks learning about the group activities and conducting interviews.

The interviews lasted 1-2 hours. Most of the interviews were in the Muyil office, the Tulum office, or in a coffee shop or park in Tulum. I also visited Chumpon to interview some of the women members who are not participating in the cooperative. Interviews with practitioners were conducted in person, through Skype or telephone. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded in Spanish. Four interviews with women who are cooperative members, but not participating in the project, were conducted in Mayan with the help of a translator. Themes and quotations included here are translated into English. Names used here are pseudonyms to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality.

Data were analyzed using a process of thematic coding and memo-ing (Yin, 2017). The data analysis began in the field making preliminary memos nightly and sharing summaries with my advisor regularly for discussion. I personally transcribed all but four of the interviews, which were transcribed by another native Spanish speaker. An initial codebook was developed based on concepts from the literature on power relations, community participation, gender, ecotourism, and development. Using NVIVO 12 qualitative research software, I reviewed interview transcripts and field notes looking for instances related to these codes and revising the initial codebook as new ideas emerged from the data (see appendices for codebook). The codes were grouped into bigger ideas (themes). After the coding and analysis of field notes and interviews, I used Agarwal's (2001) participation framework to group all the cooperative participants (both members

and employees) and examined who falls in each level. Then, I used Gaventa's (1982) theories to understand the process that puts specific participants at each level of Agarwal's framework, and I analyzed how and why they have stayed there.

2.3 Findings and Analysis

To present the findings, I use "thick description" (Geertz, 2008) to show the context where the cooperative is located and how within this context of mainly massive tourism industry this cooperative started, grew, and it is considered a successful community group run by Mayas. The context and story of the group serve as a framework to understand how power relations were developing. Afterward, I examine the levels of participation in the cooperative, and finally, I analyze quiescence and power mechanisms in the group.

2.3.1 The tourism context of Community Tours Sian Ka'an

As mentioned before *Community* has two offices, one in Muyil and another one in Tulum. This is strategic because Tulum has been growing fast and attracts many tourists and visitors. Tulum is located in the state of Quintana Roo. The state of Quintana Roo is worldwide known because of its intense massive tourism industry mainly in the north of the state in places such as Cancun, Cozumel, Isla Mujeres, Playa del Carmen, Mayan Riviera, etc. Tulum is 81.3 miles (131 km) south of Cancun. It is known because of its Archeological Site, the beautiful beaches, and the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve. The tourism industry in Tulum started to grow during the 1970s when Cancun started to boom

as a massive tourism place, a road was built between Cancun and Tulum to create a destination first called “Cancun-Tulum corridor” and then “Mayan Riviera” (Riviera Maya) to promote the beaches, natural amenities, and places such as Playa del Carmen, Akumal, Puerto Aventuras, and parks such as X’caret and Xelha that are in the corridor. Tulum archeological site started to be visited by hundreds of tourists coming from the north of the state of Quintana Roo and became the main attraction in town. Before the tourism industry, Tulum was mostly inhabited by Mayan peoples, who according to Balam (2010) the Mayas first came from Chumpon town, the same town where the *Community Tours Sian Ka’an* members are from. The Mayas used to perform ceremonies in the Tulum archeological site and it was considered a sacred place for them, but with the tourism industry booming in the north and attracting tourists to visit Tulum ruins, the Mexican government decided to take over to manage it and prohibited the local Mayas to enter the site and to perform their ceremonies and rituals (Balam, 2010).

Figure 3. Maps of Mexico and Quintana Roo

The tourism industry also attracted migrants from other small towns (some of them Mayan, too), other Mexican states, and even other countries that were searching for jobs in the industry or to develop businesses. The Mexican government facilitated the means and resources to large companies mostly foreign, to develop large hotels and resorts to respond to the demand of tourists coming to the area. Since the 1970s Tulum has grown exponentially with not much planning. Currently, there are three areas in Tulum, 1) the archeological site that is managed by the Mexican government and it is visited by thousands of tourists that do not necessarily stay in Tulum town, 2) the downtown (el pueblo de Tulum) which developed in the south of the ruins and it is where the people live. It has hotels, restaurants, tourism companies, coffee shops, banks, schools, etc., and 3) the beaches and the hotel zone which is 3 km (1.8 mi) from downtown. Although the beaches are public, the area has been developed with boutique hotels, resorts, and cabins that cater to international tourists. This area is also known as “Boca Paila” and it is the most important entrance to the Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve. In general, Tulum has become an expensive town because of the tourism industry’s growth.

The type of tourist that visits Tulum varies. There are some day trippers who only visit the archeological site and do not stay in town. There are tourists that are looking for comfort and relaxation and go to the hotels on the beach and stay exclusively in that area. There are also the “hippies” which are mostly young people from all over the world that see Tulum as a place where they can connect with nature. The “hippies” usually stay for several weeks in downtown hostels or tents. The “hippies” are generally the least well-liked by the local residents. As one taxi driver told me: “they only use bikes (instead of

taxis or other public transportation), they are poor, do not spend money, and they are very dirty and stinky. Finally, there are tourists that arrive on their own and stay a few days in town; this type of tourist is looking for tours or to visit other places in the area and is one of the most important clients for *Community*. Other important clients for the cooperative are tourists staying in the hotels and resorts from the Mayan Riviera and Tulum hotel zones since the group has a van they usually pick up the tourists in their hotels or ask them to be at the Tulum office to start the tours.

Figure 4. Map of Tulum and Muyil

Community started 19 years ago as a rustic furniture group formed mainly by the Caamal brothers and nephews from a small Mayan town called Chumpon. The founding members used to be “chicleros” (chewing gum producers) and farmers. Due to the lack of employment, they decided to go to a different town, Muyil, and started to sell their handmade furniture. They chose Muyil because of its location; it is only 22 km/14 mi from Tulum and it is right on the main road that goes from north to south on the state of Quintana

Roo, uniting places such as Cancun in the north to Chetumal (the capital city of the state) in the south border of the country and passing through important touristic places such as Playa del Carmen, Tulum, Carrillo Puerto, Bacalar, etc. With Muyil's location, the Caamal brothers expected to have more visibility to sell their products.

Muyil is also at the border of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve and it is one of the main entrances that leads to a lagoon inside the Protected Area. The Caamal brothers and nephews realized that they can use the lagoon for tourism activities, so they decided to start the ecotourism cooperative as a male-only group. One of the founding members told me that at the beginning they had many challenges, including not knowing anything about tourism and the belief that a local Mayan group cannot provide good quality of services, resulting in the hotels and other tourism companies not wanting to promote their project or refer their guests. As one of the members told me: "*Community* proved them wrong."

The founding members met the *Amigos de Sian Ka'an* NGO which was doing some tours inside the protected area. With the help of the NGO and the Mexican Commission of Protected Areas (CONANP), the cooperative took workshops and training about what is a protected area, what is ecotourism, etc. They got the ecotourism guide certification from the Mexican government and some of them also certified as boat captains. They were first called "Aluxes", eventually, they changed the cooperative name for marketing purposes from "Aluxes" to "*Community Tours Sian Ka'an*". As one ex-member mentioned, "Aluxes is the mom of Community" legally the cooperative name is still "Aluxes".

As *Community Tour Sian Ka'an* started to grow the original members included the brothers' other relatives as official members or workers (employees). However, according

to one of the workers, the founding members were resistant to include others as part of the group because they did not want to share the ability to make decisions over the project. However, they had to include other people because while the cooperative was growing new challenges arose, such as the need for using a computer or managing social media. The founding members' ability to overcome these types of challenges was limited due to their lack of formal education. After realizing that it was necessary to include others, they accepted, but with the condition that only the members will make decisions over the project. They invited brothers, nephews, nieces, uncles, and since eight years ago wives and mothers. The wives and mothers were invited when the group needed to apply for funding to a Mexican federal program that required women participation in the group. They also started to employ them as freelance guides, administrative support, cooks, boat captains, janitors, gardeners, etc.

The members identify as Mayan and are very proud of their history and identity. Some of the workers are from other towns, Mexican states, or even foreigners who migrated to the area, mainly to Tulum searching for jobs or to find "the meaning of life," as one of the guides who is from Germany told me. Besides the diversity of the members and workers, the Mayan identity is strong in the group. In spite of the large number of migrants from everywhere that came to Tulum searching for jobs in the tourism industry, the Mayan identity is still present and a source of pride in Tulum and close towns such as Muyil and Chumpon. For instance, there is a Mayan church in Tulum downtown that is guarded by Mayas where they still perform rituals and ceremonies. Also, during my fieldwork, I witnessed celebrations such as the "Hanal Pixan" (Day of the Dead in Mayan

language) during November 1st and 2nd in 2016. When I returned to visit the project in early 2019, I could not find anybody because it was 6th of January and they were celebrating the three kings festivities (the nativity) in Chumpon, so they closed the project for a few days for they can celebrate with their families in their hometowns. Some of the interviewees, especially the cooperative members, expressed a lot of pride in being Mayas and they acknowledge the fact that their Mayan identity and heritage is very attractive to tourists. They showed their pride by speaking in Mayan many times, especially when they were communicating between each other, they also expressed a pride of being from Chumpon and they constantly invited me to visit their hometown, which I did.

The Mayas in the broader area are mostly employees serving tourists for externally owned corporations and businesses, such as large resorts, theme parks, and restaurants; however, that is not the case of *Community*. In the cooperative, the members and some of the employees are proudly Mayan. They own the project and manage it without external intervention. They provide employment to non-Mayas and even foreigners. Also, they allow students who do their professional practice there or their research with them (like me). The cooperative is creating employment and professional development opportunities for others which is another source of pride for them and one of the reasons why *Community* is considered a successful community-based ecotourism project. Besides the challenges, many interviewees told me that they used to work in one of the all-inclusive resorts of the area as janitors, bartenders, waiters, etc., but when one of the *Community* members invited them to work in the project they did not think it twice and accepted the job because the

payment is better and they have more freedom to do other activities such as planting crops or having bees, some of the workers even have a second job.

2.3.2 Level of participation in the cooperative

As mentioned above Argawal (2001) divides participation in natural resources dependent community groups in six levels: nominal, passive, consultative, activity-specific, active, and interactive/empowering. I use Argawal's (2001) participation framework to understand the different levels of participation in *Community*. Figure 4 summarizes the participation levels of *Community*'s participants.

Figure 5. Levels of participation in Community Tour Sian Ka'an adapted from Agarwal (2001) participatory framework. Numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of people in that specific level(s) or participation.

Community is formed by 56 people, a large number in comparison to other community-based ecotourism projects. The cooperative is divided into *socios* (cooperative member/owners who are officially registered in a legal document called Acta Constitutiva) and non-socios or workers. Hereafter, I refer to these groups as “members” (*socios*) and employees (non-socios). The members are the founders and hold equal ownership of the cooperative according to the Acta Constitutiva whereas the non-socios are only employees. There are 12 members in the cooperative--5 women and 7 men --and 44 employees--8 women and 36 men. In sum, there are 13 women vs. 43 men participants.

Members use their membership status as a power source, particularly an elite of men who are the ones who make all the decisions. The elite holds leadership and managing positions and is formed by four members: the president, the accountant, the manager, and the secretary. All of them are brothers, except for the manager, who is their nephew. The other three members are siblings of the elite too, but they are not included as part of it, maybe because two of them are the youngest and the other one is older, but his Spanish is not as developed as the elite members. Many of the interviewees who are not members told me: “they (the elite) can do whatever they want because they are socios” or “I cannot do it (speak up) because I am not a member”. The employees complained a lot about how the members were the only ones making decisions without including them.

Women joined the cooperative about eight years ago, they were invited to participate in a nominal way when the group (formed exclusively by men at that time) needed to apply for funding to build infrastructure in the Muyil office. The women who were included as members (*socias*) are close relatives of the men, they are their wives and

mothers. The group needed money to build better infrastructure and the government program that they wanted to apply for funding had as the main requirement that the community-based group must have men and women participation. Therefore, the men needed to include women to get the necessary money to build the restaurant, offices, bathroom, sidewalks, and other infrastructure. That is the only reason why they incorporated women as members according to ex-members and the women that I interviewed. However, one of the elite members, the treasurer, told me a different story; he said that they included women to actively participate in the cooperative because they need them to keep them accountable and to “watch” them. He said: “The money was not being handled very well, that is why women joined. They wanted to see how the money was being administrated”. Despite his explanation, women currently do not manage any money or have any idea how much money is in the cooperative.

Women members' participation is very nominal or passive, they do not attend meetings or join the project. Some of them have never done the tours, they do not get any income from the cooperative, or visit the main office in Muyil or Tulum unless they are called to help cleaning (fajinas) or to sign paperwork. There are only two women whose participation is more than passive because they work in the cooperative and get an income from it. One is the main cook and is in charge of the kitchen; she is the wife of the president, but they are separated. Although she is a member, she acknowledges the fact that women's participation is very limited and they are not allowed to raise their opinions. She explained: “When we say our opinions they say (the men) that we do not know anything about it, they do not like it, maybe because I am not a captain and I am a woman”.

Compared to the male employees, she has a little bit more power than they do because she is a member and she handles what happens in the kitchen. Men I interviewed also told me that she sells alcoholic beverages during the evenings after working hours and the money goes to her. While I was spending time at the cooperative, I saw a beer company coming at least twice a week to bring many boxes of beer to the kitchen. However, the cooperative does not sell the beer to the tourists during the day. When I interviewed the woman, she told me that her husband (the president of the coop) uses the restaurant to sell beer to local men after hours and the money is for him, it is his own business, and she expressed that she disagrees with that and she does not like it, but there is nothing she can do about it. She also mentioned that the other members who are men know about this too, but they allow him to keep selling beer to his own benefit.

The other female member/employee is the “pagadora” (the person who pays the salary to the workers every other week). The “pagadora” is the wife of the accountant (one of the elite members), and according to the employees that I interviewed, she does not make decisions at all about finances; her husband does. She only goes to the bank because the account is on her name, gets the money, and pays to the workers, but she does not participate in meetings, her husband does it for both of them. Therefore, her participation in the group is quite passive. The participation of the only two women members who work in the cooperative is passive because they don’t make suggestions or decisions about what happens in the cooperative either, although sometimes they join general meetings.

The other women that work in the cooperative are cooks, maids, tour guides, and the Human Resources Coordinator. Only the HR coordinator, is in a managing position.

Her participation is usually passive but sometimes is consultative because she joins the meetings with the manager and the rest of the workers. She also manages the work schedule for the captains and other workers, but according to them, she depends on the manager. Although she joins group meetings she doesn't make decisions without consulting the manager and she told me that sometimes the male employees challenge her and prefer to go directly to the manager to discuss issues instead of coming to her first. According to the manager, women do not participate too much in the project because they feel that they have nothing to contribute due to their lack of education.

The men employees usually attend meetings when they are asked to join, however, they only listen and they are afraid to speak up. They feel that they are not asked for their opinions at all; the rare times when they are asked, their opinions don't matter, therefore their participation is passive or consultative. As one of them told me: "why would I say something about the things I do not like here? It does not matter, they don't listen to anybody". However, some of them are occasionally asked to do specific activities, especially those who have a scholarly degree, such as going to conferences with the manager, create new projects (developing an app), or attending meetings with other organizations. Hence for many male employees, the participation is activity-specific. In general, men are better positioned in the group than women.

2.3.3 Quiescence, power mechanisms, and barriers

The elite has different power mechanisms to maintain quiescence in the cooperative: lack of transparency, control of decision making and agenda setting, language barriers, and

offering limited educational and networking opportunities for non-elite people. As Gaventa (1981) mentions, those who hold the power create barriers that will prevent the powerless to challenge them. They have mechanisms in place that make it impossible. The elite controls the money and other resources and does not inform the rest of the group how they handle them. They also control information and do not tell the other members and workers about what is happening in the cooperative. The elite makes all the decisions without asking the rest of the members and workers, which is one of the main complaints from the non-elite people. They also establish the agenda of things that are important or not, and they control who benefits from training opportunities or conferences.

Community has been getting a lot of funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and from different Mexican government agencies. Since 2007, they have been getting money to build infrastructure, to get training, to buy resources, such as vehicles, boats, kayaks motors, etc. They have gotten funding to help other ecotourism cooperatives in the area and to support the CONANP to build an ecological sidewalk inside the Sian Ka'an Reserve to reduce the "traffic" of tourism in the lagoon canals. According to the manager, the cooperative has gotten \$105,000 US dollars from the UNDP and \$2,482,000 Mexican pesos (\$126,761.35 USD) from the Mexican government, totaling \$231,761.35 USD since 2007. The money has been controlled by the elite, the non-elite participants and women don't know how much funding the cooperative gets from international organizations and the government because the elite doesn't share that information with them. Besides the amount of funding, the manager and other members

complained about the fact that the Mexican government charges them many fees to keep their certifications and permits.

Additionally, to the funding received from the government and the UNDP, one of the elite members told me that the cooperative makes \$700,000 Mexican pesos (\$35,750 dollars) monthly during high season and \$150,000 Mexican pesos (\$7,660 dollars) monthly during the low season, in a year they make close to \$6,200,000 (\$316,648 dollars), which is considered a good revenue for a community-based ecotourism group. Similarly, to the external funding, the earnings are controlled by the elite members, the participants do not know how much revenue the group makes monthly or yearly or how it is spent.

Many interviewees mentioned that the "lack of communication" is something that can be improved in the cooperative. However, the major complaint is the lack of payment and income. The non-elite members and the other employees were not paid every other week as they were told. When they complained about it, the elite says that "there is no money" to pay them. That was hard to believe for the workers because there were tourists coming to the project and paying for the tours, even during low season (September to November) . During the time of the fieldwork, it was low season and I observed that there were tours every day. The interviewees understand that there will be less money coming to the cooperative during the low season, however, the fact that they were still giving tours every day means that there is money coming to the coop, but they do not know what happens with it, why they are not being paid, and why the elite does not inform anything to them.

One of the women workers told me: “According to them (the elite), there is not enough money, they say that they do not have money (to pay us), but there are socios that come and say ‘I need money because I will buy something’ but that is something personal that has nothing to do with the coop; so they take the money and spend it in other things and that is why there is not enough money to pay us”. Another man also said: “When I started working in the coop they promised me that they will give me commissions for each tourist every time I sell a tour, but as for now, I have never seen any commission from the sales I am doing, the members keep everything for themselves”.

The lack of payments and transparency and the fact that only the elite controls the money causes a lot of stress and unhappiness with the workers, they think that it is not fair and they do not understand what is happening with the money. One worker mentioned: “I do not know why do they (the elite) say that there is no money, if you make the numbers and add how many people are coming every month and how much they charge per pax (pax = tourist), there is enough money. For instance, only in July (2016), there were 199 tourists, each of them paid \$109 dollars; if you subtract the money needed for gas for the boats and the vehicles and another stuff...there is still enough money to pay us, they just do not want to do it, that is very upsetting”. According to the manager, in 2014, 8000 people visited the cooperative and did the tours.

Another way to exercise control over the group is by reminding them who owns the land where the project is located in Muyil. The president has the legal title of the property. As soon as he became president he put the property under his name. Some of the workers complained that he does nothing in the group, the other members and workers, including

the elite members have a position and work in the coop; for instance, two of them are tour guides, the manager runs the administrative part and the outside connections. But the president does not do any job in the group, although he has a boat captain certification. During the fieldwork, I used to see him arriving at the Muyil office and staying there during the day reading a newspaper or enjoying the fresh air. The workers told me that the reason why nobody can kick him out is that he threatens to take over the land and eject the cooperative. One worker mentioned: “The president has said that if we do not like what he does and if we want to kick him out, we will need to pay him \$600,000 Mexican pesos (\$30,000 dollars) for his land...he feels that he is the owner of the group, that he owns us.”

In the cooperative, the elite sets the agenda, they act as gatekeepers of information, they control who participates or not in the meetings, and they even control which are the concerns that are important to bring up or not during the meetings. They also control what information to share and how. The employees are afraid of speaking up or saying their opinions about what can be improved in the coop to the elite because they believe they will not listen or it is “pointless”, they make all the decisions and do what they want. One ex-member expressed that he felt threatened when he started to speak up about the things that the cooperative needed to improve:

Researcher: When you were a member, did you tell them the things they could improve?

Interviewee: Just a little bit because the meetings became “private” so I joined just a few meetings because they stopped inviting me.

Researcher: Why did they stop inviting you to the meetings?

Interviewee: They stopped inviting me because they knew that I speak up during the meetings and I tell them what is wrong and why. But they started to hate me because of it, they hated me more and more, I got scared.

Researcher: Are you saying that because you used to tell them what was wrong with the coop they got upset with you?

Interviewee: Yes, they used to get very upset with me, more and more every time. Until one day they told me that they could send someone to do something bad to me or my family because there is no more place for me there...so I decided to quit and take distance, now I work by myself as a tour guide.

Another member mentioned that he used to tell them what he thinks could improve in the cooperative, but he stopped doing it because they did not listen. The man said: "I used to tell them (what it needs to improve), but they did not hear me, they did not care about it, so I stopped telling them. It is better like that, now I just do my job and that is it". This is a good example of quiescence, how the elite establishes mechanisms to convince the powerless that there is no point to challenge the system because is it just the way it is.

Besides control over resources, information sharing, decision making, and agenda setting, another instrument of exclusion is language. Many women members and some of the workers only speak Mayan or their Spanish is very limited. If the meetings, courses, and training are in Spanish they cannot participate even if they attend. This is also a control mechanism and a way to keep them away from opportunities and information. This gives power to members who can speak and communicate in Spanish much better than others, such as the president and the manager who are those who mostly make decisions and control the information sharing to the rest of the members and workers. Hence, language is a source of power and disempowerment. One of the members, the oldest brother told me that he attends the meetings when he is invited because he is a member, but he is not invited

to every meeting and many times does not raise his opinions because he feels they do not listen him besides being their brother and a member, when I asked why he thinks that happens, he said: “maybe because my Spanish is not as good as theirs or because I am their older brother they just don’t want to tell me everything or considering me”.

Knowledge and outside connections are other sources of power. The members don’t have a high education level, only the manager has a bachelor degree. However, the elite members took advantage of the training, workshops, and outside connections to manage the group and hold the power. For instance, one of them told me that they took an English course that allowed them to become guides, make more money, and meeting people. When the group started to grow they started to hire their relatives mostly their spouses and children. The members’ children who work in the cooperative have a higher education level. They all hold a bachelor’s degree and started working there as “apprentices” for free assuming projects to benefit the group without payment, for instance, working as a receptionist, or creating an app for the group; after a few months, they became formal employees. The fact that the children of the members and other workers have a higher education level is not enough for them to challenge the power of the elite.

In sum, applying Argawal (2001)’s different levels of participation in the coop shows how women are marginalized and the relatively few people who are truly empowered in this “successful” ecotourism cooperative. Gaventa’s theory of power then helps to understand how the elite maintains their hold on power, by cultivating quiescence among the workers and women by putting different barriers- controlling information and resources, using language differences to exclude, and setting the agenda- in place(Gaventa

1982). Ultimately, this means that rather than broadly promoting empowerment, social justice, and sustainability; this ecotourism cooperative serves to preserve power for a small elite and perpetuate marginalization of the powerless.

2.4 Conclusion and Implications

There are many documented cases around the world of ecotourism projects that are not successful (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). However, *Community Tour Sian Ka'an* is different in its recognition as a successful ecotourism project. *Community* had a challenging start. The founding members did not know how to run an ecotourism project, but they learned through the support they had from the Mexican government, non-governmental organizations, and international groups. They took advantage of every opportunity they had. They proved to larger companies that they can provide good services and can participate in a very competitive tourism market. *Community* overcame all their obstacles and grew.

The cooperative has earned certifications and is recognized locally and internationally due to their achievements. The manager has done many positive things for the group, he has a lot of vision, many outside connections, and has increased international exposure. Also, the cooperative is located in a tourism intense area where the competition with other types of tourism and companies is high, but *Community* still makes good revenue. *Community* is considered a good and sustainable ecotourism project by many.

However, the success is the shiny part, the relationships that happen in the day to day life matter for the cooperative being considered socially just and therefore socially sustainable. By extending Gaventa's theories of power to an ecotourism context and applying Argawal participation framework, this paper shows how power dynamics are reproduced and perpetuated in an otherwise "successful" ecotourism project.

In *Community* there are multiple dimensions of power that the elite, a small group of men, exercises perpetuating uneven power relations not only between men and women, also among men. Women participate in a nominal way and in traditionally gendered roles, such as maids and cooks and do not make decisions at all. The non-elite men are also part of the power hierarchy that the elite establishes putting some of them in less advantaged positions and limiting their benefits and opportunities. An ecotourism cooperative that does not promote inclusivity and women's empowerment cannot be considered "successful" if that means that only a small group of men will hold the power and benefit from the project. If the power dynamics and gender expectations are overlooked then uneven power relations will continue to be perpetuated. The *Community* case shows that patriarchy affects both, women and men.

As Gaventa (1982) analyzes in his case study of coal miners in Appalachia, another natural resource dependent group, the cooperative had established mechanisms to perpetuate the quiescence, the uneven relations between the power and the powerless. As in other groups, in *Community* the elite hold the power to control resources, agenda setting, and decision making (Ramón-Hidalgo et al., 2018) and to create a situation that otherwise will not happen or prevent situations from occurring (Flora, 2013). The elite usually

manages the degree of which other members participate in the projects, by exercising their power as “gatekeepers” of resources and information. In ecotourism, the powerless are usually participants who are in disadvantaged positions in the community, such as women, elderly, and the poorest. Ecotourism becomes a place where diverse marginalizations that go beyond gender intersect and include land ownership, language, age, ethnicity, etc. Also, ecotourism becomes an extension of the power and gender dynamics that prevailed in the community, perpetuating the disparities and uneven relations (Ramón-Hidalgo et al., 2018). The powerful gain more and the powerless less (Gaventa, 1982); hence ecotourism empowers those who already have power and resources and not those who needed the most. These power dynamics are clear in the case of *Community*.

While extending Agarwal (2001) typology of participation to the case of *Community*, it is clear who benefits the most from the community-based ecotourism project and how women and other members of the group are participating. In general, women and non-elite members participation are usually nominal; they are members, but do not attend meetings nor do they are informed of what happens in the group. Non-elite members participate passively. They might attend meetings, but do not raise their opinions; if they do, they do not matter to the rest of the group or the elite. If the elite men inform some of the participants about decisions, they do it afterward when the decisions have been made and cannot be changed (Agarwal, 2001). These control mechanisms keep the participation low and perpetuate quiescence.

Although active and empowering participation is important, participation alone in community-based projects does not necessarily create empowerment or equitable

outcomes as seen in the case of *Community*. Participation benefits are limited by preexisting power relations, community social norms, and economic inequalities (Agarwal, 2001; Belsky, 1999). The gender relations in *Community* reflect the gender dynamics that happen in their local rural communities; the women are at the lowest level of participation. The way women are participating in this ecotourism project reflects what happens in the main tourism industry, where women participate only in a nominal manner and rarely hold higher positions. If they do, they have to fight against men and sometimes other women too, who do not validate them or put them down. In the tourism and ecotourism industry, men act as gatekeepers and limit women participation and benefits. Women also have to overcome uneven cultural circumstances in the broader community that put them in vulnerable positions towards men and limit their ability to participate in ecotourism as equals (Morgan & Winkler, 2019).

There is a commonly-held naive belief among organizations and governments that work with community-based ecotourism projects that local communities and groups are homogenous, which is not the case as shown in the *Community* cooperative. Organizations that facilitate funding, training, or workshops should consider the power dynamics that prevent participation and perpetuate quiescence. Additionally, organizations working with local groups to promote empowerment should establish strategies that will contribute to enhancing participation of those who usually do not engage due to the internal barriers that prevent them to do it. One strategy that organizations could implement is teaching workshops or training in the group's native language (or having a professional interpreter) to include all the members and workers and not only those who can speak the dominated

western language and are already in managing and powerful positions. Otherwise, the organizations keep benefiting elites who already have power and excluding the powerless perpetuating the uneven power dynamics. Another strategy is incorporating women from the beginning of the project and every step of the process, asking women directly what do they need to participate more actively, how can they be supported, or how the organizations can facilitate their active involvement and empowerment, for instance, many women might not attend meetings because they do not have the family support necessary to do it, organizations can work with women and their families to come up with specific strategies to change this. Women's voices and involvement are very significant for women's empowerment, but men should be involved too. Involving men in conversations, workshops, and projects related to women's empowerment and gender equality, is very important to achieve equitable outcomes and to promote social justice and gender equity.

Another belief that organizations usually have is that the sole facilitation of resources will automatically translate to local empowerment; however, this will not happen if local norms, beliefs, and values that perpetuated power vs. powerless relations are not challenged and if there is not a change in personal and group consciousness. For instance, Community has received a lot of money and resources from many different organizations. The funding has been good to help them build infrastructure and to run the project, however, it has not been enough to promote gender equity, even participation, and social justice in the group. Organizations that facilitate funding usually give it to the elites and do not question how the resources are managed, who controls them, and why. By doing this,

organizations are contributing to maintaining the quiescence in the community-based groups because the elites control the funding perpetually.

Besides the uneven power dynamics, many interviewees expressed how thankful they are because of the opportunity they had to join the cooperative. They are proud of being part of it, proud of their achievements and persistence. The project gave them better employment than what they had before- *Community* gave them the opportunity to transition from working in very demanding jobs such as waiters, maids, cooks, or facilities staff, earning low income in a big resort to getting a better income working as captains or other positions in the cooperative. There is no question that ecotourism can strengthen employment opportunities, but that is not enough to create empowerment for all.

Understanding these power dynamics can be opportunities to start the transition to a better and more inclusive community-based ecotourism industry if they are addressed. In the case of *Community*, these internal dynamics do not diminish their accomplishments: good environmental practices, entrepreneurial skills, achievements, economic profit, employment generation, and the pride in their natural and cultural heritage. However, this cooperative cannot be considered socially sustainable if the power dynamics do not change.

Ecotourism can bring better economic and other empowerment opportunities than the massive tourism industry; it is a better option for local people and it can be combined with other income generating activities such as crops. However, if ecotourism is to transition to a more empowering tool for all, the power relations and women's participation are things to prioritize and to address when working with community-based ecotourism projects.

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3 The Third Shift? Gender and Empowerment in a Women's Ecotourism Cooperative

Abstract

Ecotourism is lauded as a path toward sustainable development and women's empowerment in rural areas around the world, but little is known about how gendered expectations shape its processes and outcomes. This paper employs an in-depth qualitative case study of a female-only ecotourism cooperative in rural Mexico to investigate how local gender dynamics influence women's opportunities to benefit from ecotourism development. Findings show that women's family and work commitments prevent their ability to devote the resources and energy necessary to make the cooperative successful. In this context, women are first expected to be wives and mothers and to fulfill the substantial daily expectations associated with those roles. In addition, most women work outside the home. This leaves little time or energy for a "third shift" as ecotourism entrepreneurs running their own cooperative. Women put their own interests and goals on the back burner, because of the demands of the first two shifts. If ecotourism is to empower women, localized gender structures must be understood and addressed. Overlooking these challenges can mean that ecotourism projects, even those specifically aimed at empowering women, may only further burden women and reinforce gender models that perpetuate inequality.

3.1 Introduction

Ecotourism is widely promoted by development organizations, non-governmental organizations, and national and local governments as a path toward sustainable rural community development. The United Nations (UN), in particular, serves as an international leader encouraging support for ecotourism projects (i.e., A/RES/69/233) (UNGA 2014). Most recently, the UN named 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, arguing the potential for sustainable tourism (including ecotourism) to serve “as a positive instrument towards the eradication of poverty, the protection of the environment, the improvement of quality of life and the economic empowerment of women and youth... especially in developing countries” (UNGA 2015:3).

Despite the theoretical potential of ecotourism to simultaneously promote local empowerment, economic development and environmental protection, critical review of ecotourism projects yields mixed results. Some projects have been successful in promoting conservation, reducing environmental impacts associated with extractive activities, educating an environmentally aware citizenry, and promoting economic development (Ceballos-Lascurain 1998; Hunter 2002; Kruger 2005). Other studies find that ecotourism can increase environmental damage (Brown 2013; Das and Chatterjee 2015; Hiraes-Cota et. al. 2010; Kruger 2005; Padilla y Sotelo and Luna Moliner 2003), contributes little to local development and poverty reduction (Afenyo and Amuquandoh 2014; Barkin 2003; Goodwin and Santilli 2009; Kruger 2005), and tends to concentrate resources among already powerful actors (Belsky 1999; Ramón-Hidalgo, Kozak, Harshaw, and Tindall 2018). Scholars around the world have found that, despite considerable economic

investment from governments and other organizations, many community-based tourism projects do not succeed because they lack entrepreneurship knowledge (Goodwin and Santilli 2009; Jacquemin and Thomas 2016). Rather, community-based tourism projects become dependent on the funding agencies, and when the money runs out, the project fails (Goodwin and Santilli 2009; Zapata, Hall, Lindo, and Vanderschaeghe 2011).

While UN resolutions note the potential for ecotourism to contribute to women's empowerment, the sustainable tourism paradigm resists incorporating gender equality and gender analysis as key principles (Ferguson and Moreno Alarcon 2015) and research into relationships between ecotourism and gender relations is rare (Bella 2018; Ferguson 2011). The ecotourism industry has been accused of being “gender-blind” and “largely behind the times... somewhat of a (male) dinosaur amidst the larger world of gender-aware environmental conservation and sustainable development” (Walter 2011:159). Consequently, we know little about how gender dynamics play out in ecotourism projects, how ecotourism impacts women's empowerment, or how gender expectations impact the functionality of ecotourism projects.

This paper analyzes how gender dynamics in rural Mexico impact women's empowerment in an ecotourism project. Using a qualitative case study of a female-only ecotourism cooperative, we show how local gender expectations prevent women from becoming effective ecotourism entrepreneurs. We extend Hochschild and Machung's (2012) theory of the second shift to consider the possibility for women to take on a “third shift” running an ecotourism project. We show that women's lives, in this rural Mexican context, are constrained by existing family and work demands (first and second shifts), so

that taking on the additional work of starting and running an effective ecotourism project (a third shift) is beyond their capabilities.

3.2 Background and Theory

3.2.1 Ecotourism and Women's Empowerment

The travel and tourism industry is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries (Statista 2018, UNWTO 2018), and the proportion of women who work in tourism is high. In Latin America and the Caribbean, over half of tourism workers are women (UNWTO, UNWOMAN and Ferguson 2011). Still, women's roles tend to be restricted to unskilled, low-paid jobs that reinforce traditional gender expectations (Cave and Kilic 2010; UNWTO, UNWOMEN and Ferguson 2011); (see Boley et. al. 2017 for a contradictory example finding that women tourism workers in the USA and Japan felt equally empowered as men).

Ecotourism, however, may prove more promising for rural development and for women's empowerment (Aitchison 2005; Das and Deori 2014; Dilly 2003; Pleno 2006; Scheyvens 2000; Walter 2011). Ecotourism specifically aims to empower local populations while protecting the environment and developing local economies (Gentry 2007; Honey 2008; TIES 2015). Ecotourism can give rural women control over resources and their own development, provide employment and business ownership opportunities (Belsky 1999; Gentry 2007), and increase a sense of pride in local culture (Scheyvens 2000). Projects in the Philippines find that women believe ecotourism promotes socio-political empowerment

(Pleno 2006), and women participating in ecotourism projects in Botswana felt that their ecotourism employment freed them not only from the dependency of men, but also from the “economic, social and psychological burdens of dependency on a matriarchal family, government support programs and begging” (Moswete and Lacey 2015:614).

On the other hand, critical feminist theory and supporting empirical research caution that ecotourism may reinforce existing power dynamics and gender hierarchies (Bella 2018; Belsky 1999; Dilly 2003; Ferguson 2011; Ferguson and Moreno Alarcon 2015; Scheyvens 2000). Ecotourism often exacerbates gendered divisions of labor and may increase domestic workloads, particularly when home-stays are common (Tran and Walter 2014; Tucker and Boonabaana 2012; Vandegrift 2008). It might offer economic opportunities, but not contribute to political, social, or psychological empowerment (Ferguson 2011; Pleno 2006; Scheyvens 2000; Walter 2011). Moreover, women are sometimes discouraged from participating in ecotourism projects because of community norms and associated social sanctions or because their husbands directly discourage their participation (Schellhorn 2010; Tran and Walter 2014; Tucker and Boonabaana 2012; Walter 2011). In other cases, women don’t have enough opportunity to participate in local decision-making or have access to property-ownership or loans that would be necessary to see the benefits of ecotourism trickle down to women’s spheres (Scheyvens 2000; Scheyvens 2007; Schwartz 2017). Thus, ecotourism may mostly consolidate power among community-members with the most resources and decision-making authority, rather than empowering disadvantaged groups, such as women.

3.2.2 Gender and Empowerment

We conceptualize women's empowerment by orienting it within gender as a social structure theory (Risman 2004), the Gender at Work Analytical Framework (Rao, Sandler, Kelleher and Miller 2016), and the importance of women's agency (Kabeer 1999). Gender is an encompassing social structure with individual, cultural, and institutional dimensions that impact all facets of daily life (Bird, Sapp and Lee 2001; Lorber 1994; Risman 2004). Gender as a social structure theory (Risman 2004) recognizes the interrelated dimensions of individual socialization into viewing oneself as a gendered being (including gender identity and gendered consciousness), cultural notions of acceptable gendered behavior, and institutional constraints based on socially constructed gender differences.

Recognizing these interrelated dimensions within which gender works, transformational empowerment requires not only offering women access to resources, but also raising self-consciousness of existing inequalities and belief in one's own ability to act to address them within a supportive normative structure (Cornwall 2016; Rao and Kelleher 2010). Empowerment is a process that might be thought of as a "pathway" or journey through which women learn and grow as they navigate barriers and hurdles and benefit from helpful resources along the way (Cornwall 2016). The Gender at Work Analytical Framework draws attention to the interplay between access to resources, formal rules and policies, individual consciousness capabilities, and systemic informal norms and exclusionary practices (Cornwall 2016; Rao et. al. 2016). Formal access to resources (including financing, material goods, education, training, and social networks) and formal rules and policies that offer basic protections, prohibit discrimination, and promote

women's engagement are necessary for women to experience positive change, but not sufficient (Kabeer 1999; Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Rao et al. 2016). Women may still lack agency in the form of decision-making power and self-determination (Cornwall 2016; Malhotra and Schuler 2005). Agency is at the heart of the process that allows women to turn formal resources into positive outcomes (Hanmer and Klugman 2016; Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Rao et. al. 2016). It is an ability to make strategic choices and decisions, to negotiate or manipulate, to overcome barriers, to challenge situations of oppression, and to be heard by others (Kabeer 1999; Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Sen 1985). But women's agency is limited by gendered social structures that affect both individual self-image of abilities and culturally embedded normative expectations and beliefs (Cornwall 2016; Rao and Kelleher 2010; Rao et. al. 2016; Risman 1999; Risman 2004).

In this paper, we focus especially on constraints associated with informal culturally-embedded normative expectations and their relationship to exercising agency. The empirical case we investigate is one where basic resources and programmatic support for women's empowerment have explicitly been provided through the establishment of a female-only ecotourism cooperative. We seek to understand how cultural notions of appropriate female and male behavior (informal norms) and associated interpersonal interactions impact the project's success.

Normative expectations and exclusionary practices tend to be particularly embedded and based on a classical division of labor in rural areas, and especially in developing societies with deeply patriarchal histories (Little and Austin 1996; Omoyibo, Egharevba and Iyanda 2010; Schmalzbauer 2011; Smith 1974). For example, in rural

Mexico women are primarily responsible for caregiving (childcare and care for spouse, elders, and sick or disabled) and domestic work (Chant 1985; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Pagan and Sanchez 2000). They are expected to be passive, submissive, belong to the private domestic sphere, and obey their husbands (Kanaiaupuni 2000). Men are expected to be the primary providers for the household and they dominate the public sphere. Men generally control access to resources, decision making, and how women participate in social affairs (Chant 1985; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Taylor and Behnke 2005).

3.2.3 Ecotourism as a Third Shift

Despite growing cultural acceptance for women to work outside the home, the ideology that dictates women's primary role as the caretaker of the family is entrenched, and domestic expectations on women remain high (Omoyibo et. al. 2010; Schmalzbauer 2011). A "second shift" (reproductive role) of unpaid work caring for families and household can be even more demanding than "first shift" employment outside the home (Castellanos 2016; Hochschild and Machung 2012). This leaves scarce time and energy for women to develop their own personal aspirations, skills, and interests (O'Brien and Wegren 2015). We argue that despite women's interest in ecotourism entrepreneurship, committing to another activity beyond paid employment and household work can become a triple burden (or "third shift") that, given other demands, may be too difficult to successfully pursue.

Other scholars have similarly discussed a third shift or "triple burden" for the work that women do outside the formal productive workplace and the home (Moser 1993;

Castellano 2016; Gerstel 2000; Hook 2004; Kramarae 2001; Lobao and Meyer 1995). Most notably, gender and development (GAD) literature has for decades recognized the “triple role” that women face in serving reproductive, productive, and community-managing responsibilities (Moser 1993). These multiple responsibilities challenge women’s ability to participate in development activities and limit possibilities for transforming the balance of power between men and women.

Feminist scholars often refer to social and volunteer work in the community as a third burden for women (Gerstel 2000). Others argue that women’s work in support of family farms (Lobao and Meyer 1995) or in the extra labor associated with provisioning food from alternative food networks (Castellano 2016) constitutes a third shift. Bolton (2000) refers to women’s own personal pondering over their guilt for realizing the various trade-offs between formal-work and family-work as a third shift. Kramarae (2001) describes challenges that women face in online education programs. She finds that given the work and family demands that women already face, taking on a mentally- and emotionally- demanding, time-intensive third shift for which they may receive little family support is daunting and often results in failure (Kramarae 2001).

In this article, we argue that there is danger for empowerment activities (like ecotourism participation) to burden women with a third shift. Empowerment activities are personally rewarding, belong to women and require women’s leadership, and could improve women’s opportunities; but they require a strong commitment and significant investment of time and energy. We theorize that a key reason why such projects fail is that despite their intentions, women are constrained by the first two shifts and related gender

constructions that prioritize family and caregiving such that they can't adequately commit to a third shift. Women's dreams, aspirations, and empowerment potential may reside in the third shift; yet ultimately, the demands of the first two shifts limit women's ability to take advantage of such opportunities.

3.3 Research Design and Methods

The argument above is based on an inductive qualitative case study of a female-only ecotourism cooperative (*Orquideas de Sian Ka'an*, hereafter *Orquideas*)¹ with the broad goal of understanding gender dimensions of ecotourism programs. We generally follow feminist methodological principles. In addition to generating knowledge about gender and ecotourism, we seek to document and understand women's struggles and oppression by prioritizing women's voices as protagonists, subjects of knowledge, and experts about their own experiences and focusing on the meanings that women give to their world (Harding 2004; Smith 1987). Still, participation by the women of *Orquideas* was fairly limited to helping coordinate fieldwork activities, providing access, and participating in interviews and discussions. They did not define research questions, collect data themselves, or participate in interpretation.

¹ Orquideas means Orchids in Spanish. It is a popular flower in the area of research.

We began the study seeking to learn the processes through which a female-only ecotourism project facilitated women's empowerment, or not. However, upon arriving in the community for extended fieldwork in 2016, we found that the *Orquideas* project was not operating in practice, but only existed in name. The group did not offer active tours, maintain an open office, or otherwise engage in regular promotional activities. Members said that it wasn't operating. Learning this, we extended our research focus to understand why *Orquideas* was failing and how gender dynamics impacted its ability to succeed.

The empirical case is one where resources and institutional support for women's empowerment have explicitly been provided through start-up funds from government offices, development programs, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is a rare example of a project where women occupy all of the positions in the organization from leadership and decision-making, marketing, and accounting to serving as guides, cooks, secretaries, and cleaning. In this context, women are put in roles that have more traditionally been reserved for men (leadership, guides, finances, etc.). They are the entrepreneurs taking the initiative and making the project work. Thus, the formal policies/institutional set up is designed to empower women, and so we might think this a best-case scenario for ecotourism to work for women's empowerment. Yet, it is failing. This makes it a good case for investigating how informal norms and everyday gendered practices impact project success.

3.3.1 Punta Allen town

The *Orquideas* project is based out of Punta Allen in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. This is a remote rural community that serves as a destination for approximately 163,000 tourists each year (Sian Ka'an director, personal communication). Most tourists that visit Punta Allen are day trippers who visit Punta Allen with outside touring companies and stay overnight in Cancun, Playa del Carmen, or Tulum. A smaller number arrive independently and stay between one and seven nights in Punta Allen, often to flyfish. Punta Allen is located inside the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve 50 kilometers (31 miles) south of Tulum.² Sian Ka'an was declared a Protected Area on January 20th of 1986 by the Mexican President, and UNESCO included it as part of its World Heritage list in 1987. It includes a stretch of coastline along the Caribbean Sea with tropical forests, mangroves, marshes, marine areas and a barrier reef that are home to more than 859 flora species and 326 fauna species, many of them endangered (CONANP and SEMARNAT 2014).

Punta Allen has a population of 469 people (INEGI 2010). Due to a lack of public transportation and bad road conditions, the community is isolated. Electricity is inconsistent and internet access is rare. Still, a growing number of tourists arrive via boat trips south from Tulum or Cancun or via private jeep or "jungle bus" tours. Fishing

² Quintana Roo (home to Cancun, Playa del Carmen, Tulum, and Cozumel) is one of the world's most popular tourism destinations. The Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve is a protected natural area in the center-south of the state.

(predominantly for lobster) and tourism are the two primary economic activities. There are seven cooperatives. One fishing cooperative, five tourism cooperatives that provide boat tours to tourists (with snorkeling, dolphin/turtle watching, and swimming), and one ecotourism cooperative- the *Orquideas de Sian Ka'an*. The fishing cooperative and the tourism cooperatives are led almost exclusively by men with some females working as secretaries or cooks, and two female boat captains among 52 male captains.

3.3.2 Orquideas de Sian Ka'an

Orquideas was formally started in 2011. The idea came from a member of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) who visited, invited women to attend meetings, and encouraged them to form an ecotourism cooperative. *Orquideas* organized with economic, social, and environmental objectives aiming to promote sustainable tourism activities, earn income, gain confidence, and improve the lives of participants and their families (Acta Constitutiva). Activities include providing various ecotourism services (i.e. kayaking, biking, bird watching, hiking, etc.) and selling food and handicrafts (Acta Constitutiva). At first, more than 100 women attended the meetings. Thirty-three initially decided to formally start the cooperative and join as members. At the time of our research in 2016, only nineteen members remained.

3.3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected between 2015 and 2017. They include detailed field notes from participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. We first met

the *Orquideas* in January 2015 when *Amigos de Sian Ka'an* invited the first author to a two-day “familiarization” trip aimed at promoting the *Orquideas* cooperative. *Orquideas* members mentioned, at this time, that they were not officially operating yet, they were only doing some familiarization trips (mostly free) to organizations (schools and local NGO’s) to promote their services. It was this initial encounter that led us to decide to study the *Orquideas* more in depth as a case study investigating ecotourism and women’s empowerment.

Between February 2015 and December 2017, we reviewed documentation about the project, including its official documents and minutes and policies, related government and protected area policies, and official documents on the Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve. We followed *Orquideas* members and reviewed Facebook posts. Several members and others in the Punta Allen community are active on Facebook, particularly in a group called “Mercado Libre Punta Allen” where they share concerns, call for meetings or special events, and sell food, products, and services. The first author joined this group and regularly reviewed community happenings. We also followed news related to the Punta Allen cooperatives from local newspaper websites.

The first author conducted preliminary fieldwork in Punta Allen for seven days in July 2015, during which time she made arrangements for extended fieldwork and conducted 3 preliminary interviews. During this initial fieldwork, *Orquideas* members continued to say that they were not operating yet. In September-November 2016, the first author returned to spend five weeks living and conducting participant observation in Punta Allen and an additional 5 weeks in nearby Tulum. It was during this time, that it became

clear that *Orquideas* had never really become fully functional, and members were more candid about the fact that they were not operating. Fieldwork included visits to the cooperative, attending community meetings and celebrations (festivals and birthday parties), participating in two boat tours with male tourism cooperatives, and participating in the daily life of the community as fully as possible. The author took nightly field notes and made memos documenting experiences, always paying attention to the rhythms of daily life, gendered normative expectations, women's voices and perspectives, and social interactions among men, women, children, and visitors.

The author lived in a cabin that belonged to a former *Orquideas* member. Daily conversations with the owner, her employees, and visitors helped to establish connections throughout the community and to learn more about the history and workings of *Orquideas*. Within a few days of being in this small isolated community, everybody knew that the author was a student interested in the cooperatives and local customs. People were welcoming and made invitations to visit in their homes, at their work, and to attend events. Being a Mexican woman and a native Spanish speaker helped the author to gain trust and to quickly establish relationships.

The first author conducted 39 semi-structured interviews. Interviewees included twelve *Orquideas* members, five former members, nine women that never were members, eight men from the local community, four professional tourism and development practitioners, and one Mexican official. Discussions with community members focused on their lives in the community and their own personal histories, experiences with the cooperative, other social and economic obligations in the community, and gender relations

in their families and in the broader community. We employed snowball sampling techniques beginning with the president of *Orquideas* and the three executive board members who then recommended others to talk with, specifically including others who may have different experiences.

Most interviews lasted 1-2 hours. Interviews with women were mostly conducted in their homes or in the cooperative offices where they work. Interviews with men took place in the cooperative offices or in public spaces. Interviews with practitioners were conducted in person, through Skype or telephone. All interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed in Spanish language. Themes and quotations included here are translated by the authors into English. Names used here are pseudonyms to protect privacy and maintain confidentiality.

Data were analyzed using a process of thematic coding, memo-ing, and constant comparative analysis which was loosely based on a grounded theory approach (Glaser 1998), but included an initial and ongoing literature review. The first author began analyzing data in the field making preliminary memos nightly and sharing summaries with the second author regularly for discussion. Upon returning from the field, the first author personally transcribed all but five of the interviews, which were transcribed by another native Spanish speaker. Throughout analysis, the two authors worked together to talk through data, to seek connections between themes, and to probe emerging findings. We developed an initial codebook based on memos from field observations as well as concepts from the literature on gender, tourism, and development (including a focus on the importance of resources, agency, and gendered norms for women's empowerment). Using

NVIVO qualitative research software, we reviewed interview transcripts and field notes looking for instances related to initial codes and continually revising the initial codebook as new ideas emerged from the data (see supplemental documents for final codebook). Codes (e.g., housework demands) were then grouped into larger themes (e.g., second shift). Memos connected these themes to start to develop a theory of the relationship between gender, ecotourism, and women's empowerment based on a combination of data emerging from the field and our reading of the literature on gender and women's empowerment. Memos were tested against existing data until we ultimately developed an emerging theory (described below) which held consistent across data inputs.

3.4 Findings

“The training was difficult...I had to clean the house, take care of my kids, cook food, do laundry, and leave everything ready (before attending the cooperative training workshops), plus my jobs. I had to do everything in a couple of hours so that I could go out of my house.”

In summary, we found that the *Orquideas* project was failing because it was too difficult for the participants to find the time and energy necessary to start and maintain the business given the more primary demands of family and work in their already busy lives. We identified six key themes that work together to lead us to this conclusion, including: work demands, family demands, gender relations, access to resources, cooperative demands, and personal aspirations and empowerment. Each theme is described in the sections that follow.

Putting them together, we see the following story. Women typically work outside the home. They also remain primarily (or even solely) responsible for childcare, eldercare, and housekeeping. Caring for the household is their primary responsibility. Gender relations between women and men are governed by strict gender expectations whereby men maintain control and authority within the household and across the broader community. This control is supported through machismo, verbal abuse, and sometimes violence. The *Orquideas* have sufficient access to resources, but they aren't able to convert these resource into productive opportunities. The cooperative requires leadership and demands resources, time and energy. Women recognize and appreciate the empowerment potential of participating in *Orquideas* and see this as an opportunity to self-actualize. However, because of gender expectations dictate that women first prioritize caregiving/housework and second immediate wage earning as employees in accepted feminine roles (e.g., cooking and cleaning); women put cooperative activities on the back-burner finding time only when they have met their other demands. Because other demands are great, there is rarely enough time for women to contribute enough to the cooperative. This context is the primary reason why the cooperative struggles to successfully operate.

3.4.1 Work Demands

Most of the women we talked with hold jobs that follow prescribed gender roles, including caregiving and housework. They work in restaurants as cooks, in hotels as maids or cooks, or in tourism cooperatives as secretaries. Only two women we met challenge this pattern

and work in more “masculine” roles, as boat captains. Women generally found their jobs demanding and often complained about the work. Dalia, who is an *Orquideas* member, used to work as a cook in one of the fly-fishing lodges. She said: “My schedule was hard. I had to be there at 4:00 am to prepare breakfast. After lunch I had some time to come back home and cook, take care of my kids and husband, then I had to go back to the hotel to cook dinner. I used to come home at 11:00 pm or later. I was exhausted!” Landy, another *Orquideas* member, said her job as a maid in a hotel was very stressful for her: “I was always tired, my back was hurting, and I didn’t have time to take a break.” Some of the women that we spoke with who are not part of the cooperative, decided not to join because their jobs kept them too busy to assume another responsibility.

Women expressed the need for money as the primary reason to hold a job. Single mothers need to support their kids, and married women need to “help” their husbands. Paid work serves as a means to an ends to support the family. Still, women do feel proud of the hard work they do and define themselves as hard workers. Hard work in paid employment provides some sense of self-accomplishment, but they generally feel that men don’t adequately appreciate their effort. For instance, Maria an ex-*Orquideas* member, said: “men should be proud that their women have jobs and help them...but they do not see that.”

3.4.2 Family Demands

Women’s primary role in Punta Allen is being wives and mothers. When we asked men “What do women in town do?” they typically answered: “women are housewives.” Then

they usually described women's activities by dividing them in two shifts- work and household chores. Josue, a man who is the owner of a restaurant and a member of one of the male cooperatives explained: "All women are housewives here, but some of them work too. When they work, first they go to their jobs, then they go back home around 2 or 3 pm, and they stay there in the house taking care of the family. That is all they do." When asked the same question, women described females using words like "hard workers" or "fighters," and they described female activities differently than men. First, they do things around the house, then go to work, and then come back to the house to do more work. They said they are exhausted and don't have much time for themselves.

Women described how they are expected to commit most of their energy to the family and the household chores, even when they have formal jobs. Isaura, an *Orquideas* member, explained that she used to work for her ex-husband repairing boats. Although they both had the same work schedule, she was the only one in charge of cooking and taking care of the kids: "I had to deal with everything related with the kids, I had to bring them breakfast to school, pick them up, and go to the school meetings."

Pressure from families and community to get married and bear children is strong. One woman (a boat captain who is not affiliated with *Orquideas*) explained that she is a lesbian, but she married a man and had a child because that is what was expected from her in the community and because she did not want to upset her family: "I got married and had a child because I did not want to disappoint my parents. I felt that they were not going to accept me because in this town women only can marry men." Once married, women are expected to devote themselves to caring for their husbands and families, regardless of any

personal aspirations. Minerva, an ex-*Orquideas* member, described how she had to quit her dreams to be a secretary when she got married: “I finished high school, and I started to study a technical degree to be a secretary, I did it for one year, I really wanted to continue, but once I got married, I was locked at home, and I could not do it anymore.”

3.4.3 Gender Relations

Gender relations in the community are patriarchal with men maintaining almost all power and decision-making authority in household and community relations. They maintain power through machismo and social sanctions when women challenge widely accepted norms (e.g., starting an all-female cooperative), and sometimes through violent force. Machismo is often expressed in abusive ways by calling women names, criticizing, and sanctioning them when women challenge the status quo. For instance, when women formed the *Orquideas* cooperative men called them names such as: snakes, bitches, witches, or *chacalacas*.³

Men generally control much of women’s lives, including whether a woman should work outside the home and whether or not they can join *Orquideas*. Phrases such as “my husband asked me to quit my job because he can support us” or “my husband didn’t want me to work when I got pregnant because he can support us” were common. Minerva said

³ Chachalaca is a type of local bird that has a loud and annoying laugh.

that her husband did not want her to join the cooperative or otherwise work outside the house because he feared she wouldn't be able to do her activities as a wife and mother. Speaking of her husband, she said, "He comes from a different culture. He is a peasant, and as you know Mayan peasants are like *I rule here* so he didn't want me to go outside the house, he wanted me to stay with the kids." The men we spoke with similarly reinforced their decision-making authority within the household. As Amador said, "My wife stopped working when she married me. She wanted to continue working, but I told her that there is no need for her to work, we will figure things out with the money I am making. She should stay at home because we just got married."

Some women did not join *Orquideas* because their husbands did not want them to participate in the group. This dialogue demonstrates what Nubia, a secretary and housewife, experienced:

Nubia: When the *Orquideas* were starting, I was invited to participate, but my husband did not want me to join.

Researcher: Why did your husband not want you to join the *Orquideas*?

Nubia: Because my job here at the cooperative (Vigia Grande) absorbs me, my schedule is long. I spend more time here than at home, and I must come every night to confirm the next day boats. He told me, seriously, do not join the *Orquideas* because he does not see me very often and I must take care of our child and the

house too. He thinks that if I join the *Orquideas* he will never see me, and I will never be at home to take care of him and our little girl. That is why I could not join.

In another example, Irino is a member of one of the five male cooperatives, he also owns a hotel and a restaurant in town. When asked what he would think if his wife decided to join *Orquideas*, he immediately said: “she cannot do it, she is busy. Besides the house, she has to work at the restaurant with me, so she does not have time for those things.”

When interviewed some men said that they support women working outside the home in general, or even the *Orquideas* specifically. They think that is good that women do something to “help their families.” Still, their perspectives on this are often complicated by the overarching notion that women’s primary role is in the family and that men are the decision-makers. For instance, one man expressed pride that his daughter could be part of the cooperative one day because her grandmother is already an *Orquidea*. However, when asked why his wife did not join the group he said: “she can’t, she is devoted to our kids.”

When women in Punta Allen do challenge culturally accepted gender expectations, they face social sanctions. One of the female boat captains said that men questioned her “intent” to be a captain and that they criticized her for wanting to ride a boat instead of taking care of her kids. She shared an experience about how another boat captain purposely hit her boat causing her to crash into rocks. When asked why he would do that, she answered: “because I am a woman and they are very *machistas*.” She said that eventually men accepted her as part of the captains group and now respect her, but sometimes they still make jokes about her doing a “man’s job.” Another woman (Ingrid- an *Orquideas*

member) obtained captain certification, but she works as a secretary now. Ingrid described the difficulties she had in the captain's training. She felt that the men taking the certification with her, and even the government facilitators, made everything more difficult for her. She was told that she needed to look "like a man" with short hair, no earrings, and wear a manly shirt, to take the captain certificate pictures. She remembered that very well because she felt uncomfortable during that moment. When asked why she thinks the authorities asked that, she said: "they don't like women to be captains, they think that only men can be."

When the *Orquideas* started, many men reacted negatively. They did not like the fact that women were forming a tourism cooperative. One member explained: "Men thought that we were planning to do boat rides, they felt that we were going to be competing with them. But, they were wrong because we did not want to do that. What we want to do is different activities..., we want to do ecotourism and not boat rides." Women believe that men were against the *Orquideas* because they did not want women to leave their traditional "female obligations." Geny said: "Men were against us. They used to say: *look at them, they are going to the streets, they are abandoning their homes.*" Hilda mentioned: "Men did not like the idea of a female-only cooperative. They used to say: *no, what are women doing there? Women are for cooking at home, women should stay at home...they really made our lives impossible. They even called us chacalacas.*"

Although some men said that they currently support the *Orquideas*, they doubt their ability to run the project. Adolfo said: "It is a female group. Maybe they wanted to do it to get ahead...but you know, even men's cooperatives have obstacles, imagine a female cooperative. It is even worse. I can imagine it is way more difficult (to run the project)."

Patriarchy is also maintained through domestic violence, which is common in Punta Allen. Despite the associated stigma, three women spoke freely about their personal experiences with domestic abuse during the interviews. Laura said that her ex-husband used to hit her every time he was drunk or when she did not have the food ready when he arrived home. Andrea shared a personal story about how she used to have fights with her husband that escalated. One time he was trying to take away one of her kids, she tried to stop him, and he tried to hit her with a truck. In informal conversation, women told more stories of abusive relationships. They explained that women stay because of social expectations to take care of their husbands and kids no matter what. Extended families are often aware of abuse, but pressure women to stay with their partners because they are wives and mothers above anything else. As one woman said: “My husband...was abusive to me. I decided to tolerate it because of my parents, my parents did not want me to leave him. We separated twice, but every time I ended up coming back to him because of my parents.” Domestic abuse happens regularly, and people know about it. It is seen as “normal” enough that men hit their wives if they are drunk or upset, or otherwise challenge their husbands. It is one of the ways that men maintain control of their female partners.

3.4.4 Resources

Since its conception, the cooperative has received substantial support from organizations that have provided funding, training, and other resources. Besides the UNDP, a local non-profit conservation-focused organization called “Amigos de Sian Ka’an” worked with

Orquideas to facilitate access to government funding and certifications. Amigos de Sian Ka'an served as consultants and acted as a bridge between the *Orquideas*, the Mexican Government, and other NGOs. The Mexican government's Natural Protected Areas National Commission (CONANP) provided funding for *Orquideas* members to earn certification through the Latin American Center for Tourism Guides Training (CENLATUR) to become guides for kayaking, biking, hiking, and bird watching. All the members took guide certification courses, workshops, and trainings. They learned how to use kayaks, bikes, the names of local plants and animals, and first aid responses.

Orquideas received additional resources (including bikes, kayaks, boats, and helmets) through grants and donations for the project from various NGOs and private companies, including: the Nature Conservancy, the World Wildlife Fund, and the "Carlos Slim's Foundation" (a Latin American foundation that supports development programs in education, health, economic development, and humanitarian aid). As a result, *Orquideas* owns two boats with ecological motors, professional bikes, helmets, kayaks, a truck, uniforms, radios, office equipment (including a computer, office chair, desk, books, and videos), and an office/house/storage space which they rent. Ultimately, we found no indication that women don't have the skills and basic resources they need to operate the project. This is important to note because it means that resources are not the key limiting factor in the project's success.

3.4.5 Cooperative Demands

Participating as an *Orquideas* member places burdensome demands on women's finances, time, and energy. Women must pay a monthly fee of \$250 Mexican pesos (\$14 USD) to cover administrative expenses, including accounting fees and rent for the office/storage house. Additionally, they pay extra if something comes up, such as, the payment for the legal renewal of the "Acta Constitutiva" or the costs of room and board for visitors who promise to promote them. These fees are an important complaint, especially given that the project isn't earning income, and have caused some women to leave the project. For example, Julia said: "We are paying the fees and everything and we are not working. It is hard to pay all the monthly fees and extra stuff. I do not think it is fair. I want to work in the project. I will continue as a member until I cannot do it. We are not working, but we are paying a lot."

The members also struggle to commit time to cooperative activities, such as: selling food to raise funds, cleaning the office, and participating in meetings. The meetings are long and not always productive. Many women do not attend the meetings, which makes them less effective. Women do not attend or leave early because of the demands of work and family. As one member said: "As women we have a lot of obligations, more than men. The majority of us work and take care of our families. We do not have time available. For instance, I have two jobs, my house, kids, and the cooperative. Sometimes I leave my job to attend the *Orquideas* meetings, or I must leave the cooperative meetings early because of my family or my jobs. That is such a burden for me. It is truly really hard for all of us."

Men also believe that women have more important demands than the *Orquideas*. For example, Jose said: “Unfortunately they are women. They are wives and have other family commitments. They need to take care of their kids, or maybe they work in a business in town...because normally here women are housewives. Plus it is hard for them to drive a kayak...”

Forming and operating *Orquideas* demands skills that many members didn’t initially have. It is hard work physically, mentally, and emotionally. Several women still do not know how to use a computer, and at least one does not read or write. When the cooperative started, women had to attend workshops and participate in demanding trainings. As Mariana said: “When we were getting the training, we studied, and we cried many times. We stayed up until very late working on homework. In the morning, we had to be at the lagoon at 5:00 am, it was raining, and the water was cold. We were asked to immerse ourselves into the water, we had to hold our breaths until they tell us. We were not used to doing that at all. We do not have the physical conditioning for that, plus many of us were scared because we don’t know how to swim.” The training schedule was long and required a lot of time away from families. As Sandra said: “We had 5 courses, 200 hours total, and they were between 8 and 13 hours each day. We had to be there the whole time, we had to leave our house, our kids, our husbands, everything to take the courses.” The time and commitment that courses and other training required, created some family conflicts between women and their husbands. Luci explained: “My husband was really upset with me because I was not at home most of the time. Besides the courses, I had to work as a janitor at the kindergarten. I used to go to work very early in the morning, then

at 8 am I was at the course, then between noon and 4 pm, I go home to prepare food, clean the house, and take care of my husband, then go back to the course. I used to come home at 10 pm or later...my husband was not happy.”

These demands, when added to women’s regular activities, make it very difficult for the members to fully commit to the project. As Sary said: “I am a single mother, I have kids and I must look after them, so I cannot just say ‘I will commit all my time to the cooperative’ because I cannot. I also have to work at the kitchen’s restaurant so that I can have money for my household expenses and the cooperative fees.” As a result, several original members have left the cooperative. Those who left gave multiple reasons, including: lack of money, disappointed because the cooperative is not working, and disagreements with the president. Yet, the most important reason they shared was the inability to commit to the cooperative demands, due to the multiple commitments they already have as workers, mothers, and wives.

3.4.6 Aspirations & Empowerment Potential

Despite the fact that the cooperative is not fully operational, the project fosters women’s personal aspirations and provides empowerment potential. Participants value their new skills and knowledge seeing it as a form of personal development and self-growth. They appreciate their new friends and social networks. They have gained a sense of pride and increased self-esteem. They recognize the potential for empowerment and they retain hope for job security and economic and social empowerment through participating in the project. *Orquideas* offers women a dream and an opportunity for personal fulfillment. Still, these

more personal objectives often take a back seat to the more pressing demands of family and work.

Women started *Orquideas* with high hopes for the opportunities it could bring, including job security, a steady income, independence from men, a sense of agency, and prosperity. The president of the group said: “We expected (from the cooperative) that women can work, sustain their families, get more income for their households. We also want women to prosper and to be independent from a male figure.” Participants are excited about these opportunities in the short-term and for the long-term possibilities for job security for both themselves and their daughters. Diana explained, “It can benefit my daughter in the future, she can inherit my membership, work and have some income.” Women talked about the UNDP representative who encouraged them to start the project as raising the idea of women’s empowerment and sharing a specific route to do it through the cooperative, and they liked this message. One member said: “He (the practitioner) said that it was the time to have a female cooperative in town because why can only men do it? Those mothers, daughters, grandmothers out there should form a cooperative and make it strong...and we said: yes! Let’s do it!” The idea of the coop really resonated with women and gave them something to dream about.

In practice, members recognize that *Orquideas* provides educational opportunities and a growing sense of independence and self-accomplishment. Lorena said: “The *Orquideas* has brought many benefits, in such a short time, I learned to be independent, not 100% because we are not getting an income yet and I still have my husband who helps with the house expenses. But, I learned a lot. I learned to not to be afraid to overcome obstacles.”

For some women, the cooperative was a good way to take a break from their household chores and family demands. Landy mentioned: “I wasn’t used to being out of my home, but when you join the cooperative, you have to attend meetings and go out. It was good to leave the house for a little bit.” Suly also said: “The cooperative has not brought economic benefits, but a lot of new knowledge. It is rewarding for us because what would we learn about the ocean if they (men) never take us out of the kitchen?” The new knowledge and skills women gain from coop participation improve their self-image. Women said things like: “I am a better person now”, “I am not afraid to talk in public”, “I have new friends”, and “I learned a lot in the courses.” They recognized that some of the training was difficult and physically demanding, but they overcame the “obstacles” and gained confidence.

Still, these benefits were mostly temporary during the beginning of the project when members were taking the courses and training to become ecotourism certified guides. Over time, the cooperative has increasingly become more of a burden, adding more weight to women’s shoulders because they have not been able to commit the necessary time and effort to make it successful. Given the other demands at work and in the family, *Orquideas* (and women’s hopes for a better future) are put on the back-burner. One ex-member explained this conflict well, saying: “I had to work, then go back home to cook, do laundry, and everything, so when would I do the cooperative? Once I am done with everything (work and household chores) it is almost 8 pm and we need to go to bed. The next day is the same story, so I do not have enough time for the cooperative...I think this happens to many of us, we needed to put more dedication to the *Orquideas*...”

3.5 Discussion

This study seeks to understand how gender dynamics impact opportunities for women's empowerment through ecotourism, using a case in rural Mexico. We make two key contributions. First, our findings reinforce work on gender and development showing that culturally-embedded informal gender norms are critical for shaping women's empowerment potential. Second, we extend this work to the ecotourism setting and set forth a theory of how informal gender norms limit the success of ecotourism empowerment projects by arguing that pursuing ecotourism entrepreneurship constitutes a third shift burden for women.

Existing scholarship on gender and tourism shows that women's empowerment through tourism is limited because women usually don't hold leadership roles and they participate primarily through menial, feminized labor (Chant 2005; Ferguson 2011). In the *Orquideas* case, however, women were provided basic resources to support the creation of a female-only ecotourism project, whereby women hold all positions including those of power. Our findings show that even in this scenario specifically set up to empower women through ecotourism, informal gender norms impact day-to-day life demands and the context within which the project operates limiting its potential for success. This reinforces the Gender at Work Framework argument that beyond resources, formal institutional policies, and individual consciousness; supportive informal norms and expectations are critical for women's empowerment.

Still, we found evidence that female-focused ecotourism projects, such as *Orquideas*, may generate some important positive outcomes, even if they are not fully successful. For example, *Orquideas* isn't functioning economically, but it has provided opportunities for psychological empowerment and conscious-building, skills building (human capital), and some social independence (e.g., getting out of the house). Members successfully incorporated the cooperative and completed difficult training programs. These accomplishments helped to raise women's consciousness and belief in themselves. They came to recognize injustices and inequalities, and they believe in their potential for success.

Our other key contribution is extending Hoschild and Machung's (2012) theory of the second shift to understand the process through which gender norms shape women's opportunities in ecotourism. We argue that *Orquideas* failed to fully operate because women have overwhelming demands from their jobs (first shift) and their families (second shift), making it hard to commit to a physically and emotionally challenging "third shift" in the cooperative despite its recognized potential for helping them to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Regarding the first shift, *Orquideas* suffers from a problem of delayed economic payment. Any entrepreneurial endeavor takes time before it can turn a profit. In the time necessary to become profitable, women must juggle two productive work shifts (the first shift plus the cooperative) rather than risking delayed economic gratification. Such a juggling act is especially untenable when women lack decision-making authority within the household to negotiate the importance of taking such an economic risk.

While women-centered development initiatives attempt to give women power by placing them in positions of authority and decision-making, when they fail to consider the multiple competing roles that women already maintain, they inadvertently assume women's labor can expand to take in these extra roles without providing the resources necessary to support this expansion. In our case, women lack the agency to make the cooperative work because gender expectations require them to be the primary caretakers of the family. They can't fully commit to the project, because men control much of their time and make decisions related to what they do outside the home. In other words, local gender prescriptions limit women's agency and their ability to transform resources into empowerment outcomes. Ultimately, the results show how gender inequality is reinforced (increasing the physical and emotional demands put on women by adding a *third shift*), despite specific efforts and associated resources devoted to empowering women through ecotourism. Extending second shift theory helps us to understand the *Orquideas* case, and we expect that it could also be applied more broadly to understand gender and tourism, entrepreneurship, education, and other aspirational activities.

Future research should develop this theory more fully, testing its potential for application to other forms of entrepreneurial, political, or recreational activities where women have potential for meaningful empowerment opportunities, but may be limited by first and second shifts. We believe this line of reasoning might especially apply to activities that require a substantial investment of time and energy (like starting a cooperative or getting involved in politics) and that limitations of a third shift may be applicable in a wide variety of cultural settings, from rural Mexico to rural Wisconsin and urban China.

The current study is limited to one case organization and a limited period of data collection. Studies of women's involvement in ecotourism in other contexts and in different capacities would be important to understand better how gender works. For instance, is it the fact that the cooperative was female-only that drove the problems described here? Or more, was it that women were taking on specific roles traditionally seen as masculine in nature (e.g., guiding and outdoor recreation)? Future work should especially consider how gendered norms that limit women's opportunities can be overcome. Are there scenarios in which ecotourism projects lead to shifting norms? Moreover, the relationship between financial barriers and gender barriers remains unclear in this case, as the *Orquideas* did overcome many gender barriers in order to incorporate and train in the first place. Still, taking on the extra burden of cooperative work for a discrete time period (e.g., during the two-weeks of training), is much more doable than doing so indeterminately to make the project to work long term. There may be specific kinds of financial resources that could be directed to address the third shift problem by shifting cooperative activities to the first shift (as discussed below), and these should be further investigated.

3.6 Implications

Interest in developing ecotourism projects for women in Latin American countries is high. However, there is little attention to how the gender structures in which women are immersed might impact project success. Our research shows that development projects continue to be flawed in their assumption that targeting women will empower them, without addressing norms and constraints. When projects (such as *Orquideas*) fail,

development officials tend to blame women's lack of leadership and commitment, without understanding the situated contexts that prevent women's full commitment. There is much attention to empowering women to be leaders and protagonists of their own change rather than passive recipients of resources, but in order for women to take on these roles they must first achieve enough agency within the household and in the broader community to be able to devote themselves to that work.

If ecotourism projects are to succeed in empowering women, they need to consider and address systemic gender expectations (including formal and informal norms and constraints) that limit women's ability to participate. Because expectations vary from place to place, the first step is understanding the local context so that programs can build-in strategies for overcoming whatever barriers are in place from the start. This should include consideration of how to balance household demands and transform power relationships between men and women in order to make space for women's participation. For example, the Gender at Work organization uses gender action learning, strategic planning and program development, training, and reflective learning to build cultures of equality and inclusion using capacity development for organizational change (<https://genderatwork.org/our-work>). Any project should be especially cognizant of the potential for ecotourism development to become a third burden on women's daily lives and find ways to alleviate or overcome that problematic.

In the *Orquideas* case, the combination of gender barriers (a demanding second shift) and economic barriers (requiring women to work in menial tourism employment) limited the cooperative's success. For ecotourism projects to meaningfully empower

women, they will need to lighten the burden of these first two shifts. Ideally, ecotourism should generate enough profit through meaningful work that it can become (replace) women's first shift. But, turning a start-up operation into meaningful employment for dozens of members is a difficult task. Every entrepreneurship adventure takes time to make good profit, and this is particularly challenging when the entrepreneurs have substantial family and work demands (as in the Orquideas case). In addition to resources for physical materials and human capital (e.g., through trainings), launching a successful women's ecotourism cooperative may require significant start-up funding in terms of salary support that can make the ecotourism work attractive and feasible enough for women to quit their other jobs. Funding options might include grants from NGOs and other groups or microloans through programs such as KIVA (www.kiva.org) or Womentum (<https://www.womentum.io>).

Parallel approaches might increase women's agency within the household and address domestic violence prevention by involving men and the broader community in efforts to transform the power balance between women and men (Moser 1993; White 1997). Prior studies have shown that men can be important supportive partners for empowering women (Falb, Annan, King, Hopkins, Kpebo and Gupta 2014). For instance, in Ivory Coast, engaging men in empowering women's programs, such as gender dialogue groups, reduced domestic violence and increased men's support for women's outside-the-home activities (Falb et. al. 2014). Feminist organizations could work with women, men, government programs, NGOs, practitioners, and other "front-line intermediaries" (Cornwall 2016) to design gender training (Ferguson 2019) programs to support normative

change and conscious-raising, integrating these into ecotourism project design in addition to resources and policies that support women's engagement. At the same time, programs might incorporate opportunities for women to alleviate the housework/carework burden by hosting common meals or childcare shares.

These kinds of ideas aren't new- they have been promoted by Women and Development and Gender and Development programs for decades (for more discussion/examples see Kabeer 1991; Reeves and Baden 2000; Schalkwyk 2000)- but ecotourism scholarship and practice has generally not engaged with gender structures theory and practice. Instead, ecotourism has been promoted primarily by conservation organizations that have little experience working with gender as a key issue. Ultimately, it will be important for those organizations that are promoting ecotourism development to engage with and potentially explicitly integrate with organizations that have direct expertise in gender and development and women's empowerment.

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Conclusions

Summary of Results and Key Contributions

Overall, my research demonstrates that the ecotourism industry in Quintana Roo reinforces traditional gender models and maintains power among those who already have power in rural communities, putting women in disadvantaged positions instead of promoting empowerment as it promises. International, federal, and local tourism and ecotourism policies rarely incorporate gender or women's empowerment, when they do, it is only in a nominal manner, and there is not a clear strategy to track progress and evaluate implementation. When men and women participate in ecotourism projects, the power is concentrated in an elite group of men who make the decisions and control the resources; ecotourism reproduces uneven gender and power relations. Even when women are solely in charge to develop and run an ecotourism project, local gender expectations prevent them to fully commit, thus the project becomes more a burden than an opportunity for empowerment. In sum, ecotourism in Quintana Roo, Mexico is “gender blind” and does not promote women's empowerment.

Ecotourism is a growing industry worldwide. It is considered a more sustainable option than the mass tourism industry because it promotes conservation (environmental component), economic development (economic component), and it is supposed to create new opportunities for empowerment in rural communities where it is being developed (social component). However, little research has been done about how this growing

industry is developing in places that are traditionally considered massive tourism destinations, such as Quintana Roo, Mexico.

While ecotourism claims to be more socially just, one of its main critiques is that it overlooks gender complexities that create gender inequalities for women. Gender complexities are important to consider, otherwise, ecotourism might be reinforcing the traditional gender models that put women in disadvantaged positions towards men instead of promoting gender equity and social justice for women. Besides this critique, there is limited research about how women are participating in the industry and how ecotourism empowers or disempowers them. My research contributes to filling this gap to understand the processes through which ecotourism empowers or disempowers women.

My research contributes to the scholarship of women/gender and development and ecotourism by extending the Gender at Work framework to an ecotourism context and showing the significance of policies, cultural norms, change of consciousness, and resources, and they interdependence to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in the ecotourism context. Ecotourism has generally not engaged with gender theory and practice. Rather, ecotourism has been promoted primarily by conservation organizations that have little experience working with gender as a key issue.

My research extends ecotourism scholarship to seriously consider gender dynamics and their influence in ecotourism projects. Ecotourism is more than an environmental tool. It is a gendered industry that brings opportunities for empowerment or perpetuates patriarchal dynamics if gender dynamics are overlooked and if ecotourism is considered mostly a conservation tool.

One of the key contributions of my research is that it extends the theory of the second shift to introduce the possibility of a “third shift” for women in the tourism industry. Women working in the tourism industry already have two shifts, one formal job that is paid, and then the household chores and family responsibilities that become a second demanding shift. As shown in my research, when women want to start or participate in an ecotourism project, this can become a third shift or triple burden instead of an opportunity for empowerment. My research’s findings lead to propose the importance of developing collaborative projects for women to transition the third shift into a potentially empowering first shift in entrepreneurial development. There is much attention paid to empowering women to be leaders and protagonists of their own change rather than passive recipients of resources, but my research shows that in order for women to take on these roles they must first achieve enough agency in their households and communities.

My research is important for environmental policy. It informs governments and tourism policy analysis about how gender and women’s empowerment are important to incorporate in policies and enforced in reality to have a more inclusive industry. My research also highlights the fact that social justice matters to developing policies for ecotourism. The fact that the Mexican tourism policies barely include women or gender equity and they are mainly considering the ecological component and not the social justice aspect and gender equity, could mean that the tourism and ecotourism industries are not being developed in a sustainable manner. My research shows that ecotourism is more than just environmentally friendly principles, it is about social justice, gender equity, and women’s empowerment. Governments, including the Mexican, international and local

organizations including the UNWTO, NGO's, and companies should develop pertinent policies: laws, norms, programs, criteria, indicators, etc. with a gender lens and practical gender strategies and enforce them, in order to label the tourism and ecotourism industries as sustainable.

For ecotourism or any other project or program that aims to empower women and to be a path towards sustainable development, it is important to actively include women and to ask them how to start the process, what works or what does not, what are the resources, policies, norms, and consciousness that need to change in order to transition to a more empowerment tool. It is also significant to include men in the process, it is not possible to achieve more even and equal gender relations if men are excluded.

Key limitations and future directions

My research is limited to a single case area, Quintana Roo, Mexico. It would be interesting to investigate other areas of the country where ecotourism is developing under different conditions: tourist vs. no touristic areas, beaches vs. forest/others, only ecotourism vs. ecotourism and other activities. Also, it would be interesting to compare different countries to see how ecotourism is developing and how local communities are participating. In that regard, I would like to expand my research to different Latin American countries, particularly to Costa Rica. Costa Rica is considered one of the most important ecotourism countries in the world, where it is expected that ecotourism will support biodiversity conservation and bring tangible benefits to the host communities. Research analyzing

whether ecotourism delivers its promises in the country is vast and shows that ecotourism supports conservation efforts, provides employment opportunities with a higher income than other industries, and access to resources and personal development opportunities, such as education. However, a gender perspective analyzing how women are running ecotourism projects has not been explored. I would like to do ethnographic research with a feminist methodologist framework to analyze how women are participating in ecotourism projects in Costa Rica and compare projects on different stages including more successful ones and their opportunities and challenges they present. I would like to compare both countries, Mexico and Costa Rica. Expanding my research to more than one country will inform international organizations, NGO's, and governments to develop policies that incorporate women as active actors in the tourism industry and promotes their development. It would be interesting to analyze how in other countries the tourism policies incorporate women or gender equity, particularly, I would like to explore countries where the federal policies are explicitly promoting women's active inclusion to investigate if that leads to better outcomes for women.

My research is qualitative in nature, qualitative research has some advantages because it can explore meaning and consider the contexts of the data. For this research it was very important to give voice to the research participants, particularly women, and to analyze and understand deeper meaning, context, and underlaying reasons and opinions. The qualitative nature of my research did not allow me to understand important qualitative aspects, such as the economic impacts of tourism in women's lives. In the future, I would like to incorporate quantitative data to complement and extend this case of study.

My research has the limitation of including only two ecotourism projects. I would like to expand this research and include more ecotourism projects in different stages to analyze how women are involved and empowered. Still, as Yin (2014) says, the type of research I'm completing is an empirical light to develop analytical generalizations, in this case about how ecotourism is developing, how women participate in the ecotourism industry, and how and why ecotourism empowers them or not.

Appendix 1

Table 5. Policies, agencies, and year in English and Spanish

Federal Tourism and Ecotourism Policies					
All Policies in Spanish	Name of policy (with acronym is applicable)	Policy name in English	Agency that promotes it (with acronym is applicable)	Agency name in English	Year created or last reform
1	Programa de Ordenamiento Turístico General del Territorio.	General Program of Tourism Territory Planning	Secretaria de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2016
2	Estrategia Nacional para un Desarrollo Sustentable del Turismo y la Recreacion en las Areas Naturales Protegidas de Mexico	National Strategy for a Sustainable Tourism Development and Recreation in the Mexican Protected Areas	Comision Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP)	National Commission of Protected Areas	2007
3	Estrategia para el Impulso y Desarrollo del Turismo de Naturaleza en Mexico	Strategy to Promote and Develop Nature Tourism in Mexico	Secretaria de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2017
4	Estrategia de Integracion para la Conservacion y el Uso Sustentable de la Biodiversidad	Strategy to Integrate Conservation and the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity	Secretaria de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2018
5	Lineamientos para la Dictaminación de las Zonas de Desarrollo Turístico Sustentable	Guidelines to Rule the Sustainable Tourism Development Zones	Secretaria de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2016

6	Ley del Instituto Nacional De Los Pueblos Indígenas	National Institute of Indigenous Peoples Law	El Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI)	National Institute of Indigenous Peoples	2018
7	Ley Federal de Responsabilidad Ambiental	Environmental Responsibility Federal Law	Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente (PROFEPA)	Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection	2013
8	Ley General de Asentamientos Humanos, Ordenamiento Territorial y Desarrollo Urbano	General Law on Human Settlements, Territorial Planning and Urban Development	Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario, Territorial y Urbano (SEDATU)	Agrarian, Territorial and Urban Development Secretary	2016
9	Ley General del Equilibrio Ecológico y la Protección al Ambiente	General Law of Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection	Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT)	Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources	2018
10	Reglamento de la Ley General del Equilibrio Ecológico y la Protección al Ambiente en Materia de Áreas Naturales Protegidas	Regulations of the General Law of Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection in Natural Protected Areas	Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente (PROFEPA)	Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection	2014
11	Ley General de Sociedades Cooperativas	General Law of Cooperatives Societies	Secretaría de Economía	Economy Secretary	2018
12	Ley General de Turismo	General Tourism Law	Secretaría de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2015
13	Reglamento de la Ley General de Turismo	Regulations of the General Tourism Law	Secretaría de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2015
14	Programa de Desarrollo Regional Turístico Sustentable y	Program of Sustainable Tourism Regional Development	Secretaría de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2018

	Pueblos Mágicos (PRODERMA GICO)	and Magic Towns			
15	Reglas de Operación del Programa de Desarrollo Regional Turístico Sustentable y Pueblos Mágicos (PRODERMA GICO)	Rules of Operarion of the Program of Sustainable Tourism Regional Development and Magic Towns	Secretaria de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2018
16	Programa de Manejo de Areas Naturales Protegidas - Lineamientos (PROMANP)	Management Program of Protected Areas	Comision Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP)	National Commission of Protected Areas	2018
17	Marco Estratégico de Turismo Sustentable en Áreas Naturales Protegidas de México	Strategic Framework of Sustainable Tourism in Natural Protected Areas in Mexico	Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) Comision Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP) Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD)	-Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources -National Commission of Protected Areas -United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	2018
18	Norma Mexicana NMX-AA-120-SCFI-2016 que establece los Requisitos y Especificacion	Mexican Norm NMX-120-SCFI-2016 that establishes the Requirements and Regulations of Sustainability	Secretaria de Economica	Economy Secretary	2016

	es de Sustentabilidad de Calidad De Playas	of Quality For Beaches			
19	Norma Oficial Mexicana NOM-09-TUR-2002 que establece los Elementos a que deben Sujetarse los Guías Especializados en Actividades Específicas	Mexican Official Norm NOM-09-TUR-2002 that establishes the Elements to which the Specialized Guides in Specific Activities Should Abide	Secretaria de Turismo (SECTUR)	Tourism Secretary	2002
20	Programa Sectorial de Turismo 2013-2018	Tourism Sectorial Program 2012-2018	Gobierno de Mexico 2012-2018	Mexican Government 2012 - 2018	2013
21	Reglas de Operación del Programa para el Mejoramiento de la Producción y Productividad Indígena	Rules of Operation of the Program for the Improvement of Indigenous Production and Productivity	El Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INPI)	National Institute of Indigenous Peoples	2019
22	Reglas de Operación del Programa de Conservación para el Desarrollo Sostenible (PROCOCODES)	Rules of Operation of the Sustainable Development Conservation Program	Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT)	Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources	2019
23	Reglas de Operación del Programa de Fomento a la Economía Social	Rules of Operation of the Program of Social Economy Promotion	Instituto Nacional de la Economía Social (INAES)	National Institute of Social Economy	2019
24	Turismo Sustentable en Mexico - Documento	Sustainable Tourism in Mexico	Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT)	Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources	2017

25	Norma Mexicana NMX-AA-133-SCFI-2013 Requisitos y Especificaciones de Sustentabilidad del Ecoturismo	Mexican Norm NMX-AA-133-SCFI-2013 Requirements and Specification of Ecotourism Sustainability	Secretaria de Economia	Economy Secretary	2013
International Tourism and Ecotourism Policies					
Policies in Spanish	Name of policy (with acronym is applicable)	Policy name in English	Agency that promotes it (with acronym is applicable)	Agency name in English	Year created or last reform
1	Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible Criterios GSTC - Industria	Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC Criteria) - Industry	Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible	Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)	2016
2	Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible Criterios GSTC para Hoteles con Indicadores de Desempeño sugeridos	Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels with indicators	Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible	Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)	2016
3	Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible Criterios GSTC para Tour Operadores con Indicadores de Desempeño sugeridos	Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC Industry Criteria for Tour Operators with indicators	Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible	Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)	2016
4	Criterios Globales de Turismo Sostenible para Destinos Turísticos	Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC	Consejo Global de Turismo Sostenible	Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)	2016

		Destination Criteria			
5	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas A/71/173 “Promoción del turismo sostenible, incluido el ecoturismo, para la erradicación de la pobreza y la protección del medio ambiente”	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/71/173 “Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection”	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas	United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	2016
6	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas A/72/174 “Turismo sostenible y desarrollo sostenible en Centroamérica”	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/72/174 “Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America”	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas	United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	2017
7	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas A/73/274 “Promoción del turismo sostenible, incluido el ecoturismo, para la erradicación de la pobreza y la protección del medio ambiente”	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/73/274 “Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection”	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas	United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	2018
8	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas A/RES/70/193 “Año	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/193 “International	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas	United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	2015

	Internacional del Turismo Sostenible para el Desarrollo, 2017”	Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development”			
9	Codigo Etico Mundial del Turismo. Para un Turismo Responsable	Global Code of Ethics for Tourism	Organizacion Mundial del Turismo de las Naciones Unidas	United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	2001
10	El Turismo y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. Buenas Prácticas en las Américas	Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goal. Good Practices in the Americas	Organizacion Mundial del Turismo de las Naciones Unidas/Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA)	United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)/ Organization of American States	2018
11	Estudio de la Política Turística de México	Study of the Mexican Tourism Public Policy	Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos (OCDE)	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	2017
Policies in English	Name of Policy	Name in Spanish Translation)	Agency or Organization	Organization name in Spanish (Translation)	Year created or last reform
12	Tourism and Visitor Management in Protected Areas. Guidelines for Sustainability	Turismo y Manejo de Visitantes en Areas Protegidas. Guia para la Sustentabilidad	International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	Union Internacional para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza	2018
13	Sustainable Tourism for Development – European Commission	Turismo Sustable para el Desarrollo – Comision Europea	United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	Organizacion Mundial del Turismo de las Naciones Unidas	2013
14	United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/70/L.1 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”	Resolucion A 70 de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas “Transformand o nuestro mundo: La Agenda 2030	United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas	2015

	– Sustainable Development Goals	para el Desarrollo Sustentable”- Las Metas del Desarrollo Sostenible			
15	Towards a GREEN Economy. Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication	Hacia una Economía Verde. Caminos para el Desarrollo Sustentable y la Erradicación de la Pobreza	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)	ONU Medio Ambiente	2011
Local Tourism Policies of the State of Quintana Roo, Mexico					
All Policies in Spanish	Name of policy (with acronym is applicable)	Policy name in English	Agency that promotes it (with acronym is applicable)	Agency name in English	Year
1	Ley de Turismo del Estado de Quintana Roo	Tourism Law of the State of Quintana Roo	Gobierno del Estado de Quintana Roo	Quintana Roo State Government	2014
2	Acuerdo y Programa Sectorial de Diversificación del Turismo	Agreement and Sectoral Program for Tourism Diversification	Gobierno del Estado de Quintana Roo	Quintana Roo State Government	2017
3	Programa de Manejo de la Reserva de la Biosfera de Sian Ka'an	Management Program of the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve	Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP)	National Commission of Protected Areas	2014