



POLITOUR: POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY. A COMPARATIVE AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY ON CENTRAL AMERICA

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FUNDING

The research project POLITOUR 2011-2014 is funded by the Academy of Finland (522 440 €).

BACKGROUND

Tourism is an increasingly important global industry and it is the principal export in a third of all developing countries. The international bodies and national governments are recognizing the potential of tourism in the economic growth, while there is very little evidence of the connection between conventional mass tourism and poverty reduction. At the same time the growth of mass tourism has many times led to a wide range of environmental and social problems, cultural degradation and unequal distribution of financial benefits. The transnational companies of the tourism industry are adopting the Corporate Social Responsibility -language and acknowledging the need for 'greenwashing', while reaping the benefits and ignoring the well-being of those being visited.

Since 1980s, the tremendous growth of tourism in many of the Central American nations has affected not only national economies and infrastructures but also local environmental, social and cultural politics. Public planning has become ever more complicated with new actors entering coastal towns and natural parks. Many critical activists and researchers see the fast-growing tourism business as a postcolonial form of environmental and cultural aggression and there exists a growing need for finding more sustainable alternatives for tourism development.



Sustainable tourism development cannot take place without social justice and active local participation. At the same time carefully planned and managed tourism initiatives can strengthen the protection of threatened resources.

(Gandoca Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge, Costa Rica)



Garifuna village in Roatan island, Honduras

PURPOSE AND GOALS OF THE STUDY

This international comparative study of three Central American countries, Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua, aims contributing to finding the best solutions, ideas and practices for sustainable tourism business and industry. For this purpose, the project analyzes, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the development of power relations, politics, policies and practices of Central American tourism. At the same time, the study seeks the complex inter-dependencies between public, national and international planning, global tourism, local needs, sustainable development and business interests.

The main research questions of the study:

- How the *sustainabilities* are constructed in the tourism policies and practices?
- How different actors shape regional, national and local tourism policies?
- How the positive and negative impacts of tourism are distributed (in rural and urban contexts)?
- How the power relations develop between local, national and global actors?
- How the Corporate Social Responsibility practices can be used and improved in the tourism industry?

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The project contributes in building bridges between theories, strategies and practices, and moreover intends to reveal the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in academic research and practical development work.

The innovativeness of the research is based in a genuine interdisciplinary approach. The project brings together political studies, sociology, anthropology, development studies, tourism research, environmental studies, history, economics and business ethics, in a way that can promote the further determination of *sustainabilities* in different areas of studies.

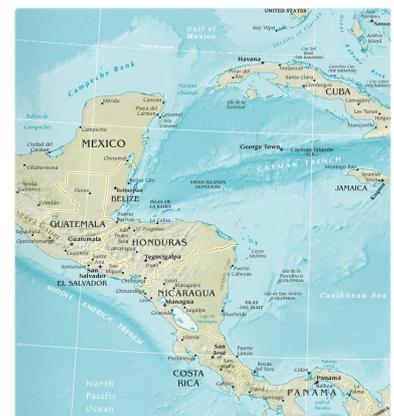
The research materials include a wide array of documents, semi-structured interviews, surveys, and results of participatory observation. Case studies are conducted in all three countries, and comparative macro-analyses of national tourism policies are made.

FINNISH DEVELOPMENT POLICY

From the perspective of Finnish development policy and academic development research, this project accords with their clearly pronounced objectives. Tourism is also one of the most important export industries in nearly every country that Finland has a long-term development cooperation partnership with.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable development; tourism; poverty reduction; urban, environmental and regional planning; public policies; corporate social responsibility; pro-poor tourism; community-based tourism; Central America; Costa Rica; Honduras; Nicaragua



Central America

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