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"PRO-POOR" TOURISM IN NICARAGUA:

A CASE STUDY OF THE TELICA ROTA NATURAL RESERVE

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The following paper is an ethnographic study that was conducted over the course of eleven months while working in León, Nicaragua, for an international NGO. It adds to existing literature that illustrate the shortfalls of community-based tourism projects, particularly when multiple stakeholders are involved. It focuses its attention on the cultural misunderstandings between the NGO, municipal government, and a rural tourism cooperative regarding tourism development and land management. Furthermore, it highlights the cooperative's efforts in maintaining its agency when it felt as though its interests were being ignored by organizations with greater social, political, and economic capital than they had.

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Introduction

Nicaragua: Land of Lakes and Volcanoes reads the unofficial slogan of the small Central American country that lies sandwiched between Costa Rica to its south, and Honduras to its north. Its six million inhabitants indeed live in a land abounding in natural resources; its epithet comes from being home to 24 volcanoes and a plethora of freshwater ecosystems (The World Bank; Visit Nicaragua). It is these qualities that make Nicaragua a backpacker haven for many budget-conscious tourists who want to "trek off the beaten path" and explore a country that promises both leisure and adventure centered around Nicaragua's many active volcanoes. In fact, tourism in Nicaragua has boomed in recent years. The number of tourist arrivals has increased from 281,000 in 1995 to 1.3 million in 2014 (The World Bank). With leading publications ranging from the *New York Times* and *CNN* to the *Huffington Post* and *Fox News* urging their readership to visit Nicaragua before it is spoilt, the uptick in tourist arrivals comes as little surprise (The New York Times; CNN; The Huffington Post; Fox News).

The tourism industry is plenty aware of Nicaragua's allure, and is actively working to capture the imagination of visitors hoping to be wonderstruck by its awesome landscape despite the country's substandard infrastructure and high rates of poverty. In fact, some might argue that many tourists visit Nicaragua not in spite of its underdevelopment, but because of it. Much to the ire of academics in development studies, a multitude of non-profit organizations and tour operators are making bank by offering high school and college students the opportunity to participate in the profitable economy of *voluntourism*; as its name suggests, voluntourism presents visitors with the hybrid opportunity to participate in both volunteer and tourist activities. That is, students

and their families pay hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dollars to live and work in Nicaragua's rural communities for periods spanning from several days to several weeks in order to at best "make an impact" and at worst build their resumes. When they are not busy building houses or teaching dance at a local elementary school, they spend their free time hiking Volcán Mombacho or sledding down the graveled slopes of Volcán Cerro Negro (Figure 1). One must ask, however, how much of an impact is made when many of these voluntourists do not speak Spanish, are unskilled, and lack meaningful work experience. Some Nicaraguans fear that well-meaning tourists are not only unhelpful, but that they also threaten to outcompete qualified Nicaraguans working in industries reliant on manual labor, like construction, thus reducing the need for local employment.

In Summer 2016, I worked as a field leader for an American NGO that funds its operational costs almost entirely on foreign volunteers it hosts throughout the year. Its largest income providers are undergraduate students that travel to Nicaragua for ten weeks in the summer months to offer pro-bono small business consultations, perform eye exams in pop-up clinics, and conduct community needs surveys in rural, subsistence farming communities. These students pay over US$3,000 in program fees, and the group size varies yearly from between 20 students to 30 students. Most of the program participants were economics or engineering students in their first and second years of university, and the majority of students I supervised that summer lacked basic Spanish proficiency. Despite these shortfalls, students were expected to assume the work typically done by full-time, permanent staff members throughout the year in periods of just a few days in each community they visited. My coworkers—foreign and local like—frowned upon this practice due to the low-quality service the students provided, and the

inadequate survey responses they garnered due to their poor language skills. However, leadership insisted that the students were paying to gain this precise experience, and was reluctant to amend existing policy to incorporate what many staff members believed to be legitimate concerns.

One particularly egregious memory recalls orientation week. Senior staff members were instructed by their supervisor to train students in conducting community needs surveys in communities in which the organization has not worked in the past, and has no plans to work in the future. Each student was provided a slip of paper that included an introductory blurb about the organization that they were expected to read to each survey respondent. The blurb asked for the respondent's contact information so organization staff would be able to notify respondents of their imminent return to that community in order to implement the project they described to them. Of course, this was all hypothetical. The respondents were unaware that what seemed like a genuine interaction was actually a training exercise, and became visibly emotional at the possibility that this organization would be able to meet the needs they expressed in the survey. This anecdote highlights the problem of many voluntourism programs that rely on program fees by "do-gooder" tourists to fund their operational costs year round. That is, they are oftentimes obliged to satisfy the interests of program participants before they can satisfy those of their intended project beneficiaries. In other words, these organizations profit by creating structured, resume-building programs for students by exploiting the lived hardships of impoverished Nicaraguans.

If communities do not always benefit from such projects, why do they collaborate with non-profit organizations at all? Part of the answer relates to the presence of an

unequal power dynamic between NGOs and rural communities. This imbalance is based on differences in political and economic capital. Approximately 30 percent of Nicaraguans live on less than $2 per day, and nearly 50 percent of households in rural areas live in extreme poverty, which the World Bank defines as under $1.25 per day (Opportunity International; Overseas Development Institute). Many of these communities lack health care, paved roads, and water access, and their children sometimes hike upwards of one hour each way to attend school. In communities facing such dire circumstances, NGOs present them with greater access to wealth, often times in the form of microfinance, infrastructure development, and donated goods. To further illustrate, one high-ranking official of a large international NGO in Nicaragua told me that many communities agreed to certain project proposals his organization offered, only later to admit that those projects were actually both unwanted and unhelpful. They confided in him months after those projects had terminated that they accepted the aid because they were afraid that if they had turned it down, the NGO would either decide to forgo future projects, or retract its ongoing projects in the community, however baseless and untrue (personal communication, June 2015). In sum, rural communities with little access to basic amenities sometimes accept aid for fear of retribution or neglect.

Many NGOs acknowledge that the power imbalances described above indeed negatively impact their ability to appropriately respond to community needs. In order to better serve communities, some organizations are addressing this impediment directly. They accomplish this by attempting to transfer power from organizations to communities by moving away from voluntourism-based projects towards ones based on economic empowerment. These organizations do not just donate *things* to communities, but they

also actively work to ensure that communities are self-sustaining by providing them business training and increased access to markets. They ultimately aim to reduce reliance on non-profit actors by increasing communities' economic and political capital. In this model, NGOs play a minimal, supportive role in the implementation and development of community-based projects. One such non-profit organization—and the focus of my ethnographic research—is the British charity Fuertes Juntos.

I learned of Fuertes Juntos in my junior year through the International Internship Program, and was instantly drawn to it. The organization was looking for volunteers to be *learners*, not *doers*. That is, they were searching for college students to observe them in practice, and support the staff only when needed. They advertised this position as an opportunity to conduct research on topics relating to water access, natural resource management, rural agriculture, and non-profit management, among others. I had spent the latter half of that year taking courses related to international development, and had grown weary and disillusioned by international humanitarian aid. That is probably why Fuertes Juntos stood out to me. I took their volunteer description to mean that they were aware of how few skills college students actually offer non-profit organizations; however, instead of refusing to accept volunteers entirely, they simply reimagined their role as passive rather than active. Furthermore, volunteers were not expected to pay program fees. They were expected to fund their own living expenses. These policies were enforced in order to avoid conflicts of interest like those described in the example provided earlier. Their ultimate hope was to inspire volunteers to fundraise for the organization upon their return to the United States, and spread awareness of the vital work it strives to accomplish.

Fuertes Juntos is an international NGO located in León, Nicaragua, that traces its origins to another non-profit organization based in Texas, called Mercy Ships. Its founders, Samantha and David Smith, had graduated from the University of Oxford. Samantha had become a schoolteacher, and David a geologist. In 2003, however, they decided to leave their familiar lives in England to volunteer with Mercy Ships, which had committed itself to the creation and implementation of several projects on the Telica volcano about an hour and a half drive from the city of León. However, after just a few short months Mercy Ships pulled out, leaving much of their work unfinished (as often happens with non-profit organizations once their project cycle finishes or funding runs out). Samantha and David, however, were unwilling to abandon the communities with whom they had developed relationships. They therefore gathered the resources needed to found their own organization—Fuertes Juntos—in 2005. The organization has since expanded upon the projects Mercy Ships began; it has not only scaled up the number of communities it serves, but also the breadth of projects it offers. These projects include water access, as well as agricultural, beekeeping, and, most recently, tourism endeavors. The primary goal of Fuertes Juntos is to provide communities with the spiritual guidance, technical skills, and knowledge necessary to generate a sustainable source of income.

Fuertes Juntos currently has twelve full-time staff members, as well as a team of dedicated construction workers that they contract throughout the year. With the exception of the Smiths and a few foreign volunteers, all team members are Nicaraguan. The majority of its staff is men; only four team members are women, including Samantha. The team boasts beekeeping specialists, agricultural engineers, civil engineers, a social worker, a lawyer, a computer technician, and a pastor. Although recent financial

constraints have limited most employees to the office to help with administrative chores, in the past team members traveled daily to the countryside in order to train community members in everything from harvesting pineapples to bookkeeping. Most staff members have been with the organization for five or more years.

Due to the Smiths' experience with Mercy Ships, Fuertes Juntos strongly believes in long-term development. The organization has worked from between five to ten years in just six communities, and is currently conducting focus groups and community needs surveys to expand to other areas. These communities are relatively isolated. Some can only be reached by foot, while others are vehicular accessible. In fact, Fuertes Juntos is largely responsible for the latter. It built dirt roads in order to transport materials they needed to build infrastructure, like rainwater harvesting tanks to improve access to arsenic-free water. Although the local government has an obligation to deliver *canastas básicas* (basic goods, like sugar, salt, and cooking oil) to rural communities, for the most part they have been absent, long having neglected residents of the Telica volcano. Additionally, the local government has never collected census data on the communities, which were informally established approximately 50 years ago along the volcano's slopes and near its crater. In fact, Fuertes Juntos has filled a gap where the government has failed to fulfill its obligations. For example, it conducts census surveys, provides social services, and creates infrastructure. Fuertes Juntos is the only NGO operating in the area, however in the past they have collaborated with the Peace Corps and the European Union, among other organizations.

The Telica volcano communities consist of subsistence farmers, however a small number of those living closest to the crater also work as guides occasionally contracted

by foreign-owned tour operators based in the city of León. It is a largely patriarchal society; the men dedicate themselves to farming corn and beans, while the women devote themselves to childrearing and domestic chores. Women are not expected to work outside the home, and those that do are often criticized for being neglectful wives and mothers. Due to the limited amount of work available on the volcano, the average family income is approximately USD$100 per month. However, this amount is highly variable; it depends on rainfall and drought, as well as volcanic conditions. That is, the volcano regularly emits chemicals into the air, which can be converted into acid rain. If the wind sends the rain in the direction of the farms, it can destroy an entire season of crop harvest (they only cultivate crops twice a year).

Due to the volatile conditions, Fuertes Juntos identified the need to develop a variety of income generating projects in order to diversify the local economy. They therefore established a model farm and apiary in each community, as well as implemented a community tourism project in the community located closest to the crater. All these projects are modeled on the concept of cooperatives. David believes that cooperatives are among the most effective business models, particularly in resource-scarce regions since it reduces the burden of cost and labor for each individual associate. He also respects the cooperative model due to the success cooperatives have achieved throughout Europe. He admits that his high regard for cooperatives is in large part due to his British background; England was one of the first countries to adopt the cooperative business model. Therefore, the cooperative model Fuertes Juntos follows is a strictly British one, despite the fact that Nicaragua has a profound history of its own regarding

cooperatives. The farming, beekeeping, and tourism projects in which Fuertes Juntos applies cooperative theory are described below.

The objective of the model farm is to teach community members how to harvest more weather-resistant crops, such as pineapples, passion fruit, plantains, bananas, and dragon fruit, among others (Figure 2). Once they have learned to cultivate these crops, they are encouraged to plant them on their own farms and trained to sell them at the local market. They also receive training sessions both in the field and in the office, and learn how to detect plant diseases, apply pesticides, price crops, maximize sales, and market their goods. Similarly, Fuertes Juntos' beekeeping initiative allows community members to raise bees in order to harvest and bottle honey; this honey is exported to England where it is sold in farmers markets (Figure 3). Part of the proceeds return to the community beekeepers. Both the farming cooperatives and beekeeping cooperatives are informal collectives. They are not registered businesses, and they lack the minimum personnel necessary to become official cooperatives. They consist of five to ten community members. In most communities, these members are men. However, the most successful cooperative Fuertes Juntos supports is all female. These individuals coordinate weekly visits to the model farm, and divvy up the work as they see fit. They share the same fertilizer, pesticide, and inorganic compounds, and are expected to sell their products together and share the income.

Fuertes Juntos' most recent foray in cooperative development was spearheading a tourism project with the same communities it had collaborated with to implement the projects described above. Likewise, it was intended to provide an additional source of income, particularly to individuals living closest to the crater. Fuertes Juntos worked in

cohort with community members, the municipal government, the Nicaragua Tourism Board, and the European Union to construct tourism infrastructure and train community members in how to form an official tourism cooperative and successfully compete with foreign tour operators based in León. The goal of Fuertes Juntos was to center tourism around the community, and ensure that they were the primary beneficiaries of all tourism activity occurring near the crater. This project is consistent with widespread support of tourism as a poverty reduction strategy in developing and least developed countries. This subset of tourism is referred to in the literature as "pro-poor" tourism. That is, tourism that provides net economic, social, environmental, and/or cultural benefit for individuals living under the poverty line (Rotarou 2014).

The opportunity to develop a "pro-poor" tourism project was glaring. Foreign tour operators had been visiting the community with tourists almost daily to hike along the crater during the day, and peer into it at night to catch a glimpse of incandescent rocks and exposed lava. All the while, the community was unable to cash in on these tourist arrivals; they lacked infrastructure, business know-how, and seed capital to found their own tour operation. Therefore, they engaged with existing tourism in a limited capacity. The little revenue they received came from charging tour operators an entrance fee to pass through their land. Fuertes Juntos aimed to change this by providing community members with the necessary tools (e.g. knowledge, skills, and infrastructure) to competitively participate in the tourism industry.

When the opportunity arose, Fuertes Juntos enthusiastically accepted a grant from the European Union to provide technical and infrastructural support to a group of 13 men (and one woman) from a rural subsistence farming community to establish a tourism

cooperative (which they named Telica Unida) near the crater of Telica. The project, called *Ruta Colonial y de los Volcanes*, was an initiative funded by the European Union that aimed to support local economic development through Nicaragua's emerging tourism sector. The European Union dispersed £7 million to various non-profit organizations (like Fuertes Juntos) across the country to support the growth of tourism services and infrastructure in rural, underserved areas in collaboration with municipal governments and the Nicaragua Tourism Board. Using these funds, Fuertes Juntos constructed a café, visitor's center, and hostel, as well as erected multiple maps and hiking trail markers. Fuertes Juntos also funded full time staff and hired contractors to provide training in price setting, customer service, restaurant management, bookkeeping, basic accounting, safety and first aid, and tour giving (Figure 4). The organization ultimately hoped to integrate its ongoing projects (i.e. farming and beekeeping) into this newest initiative by offering tour packages that would allow tourists to tour the model farm and apiary with local guides as a way to learn about Fuertes Juntos, and also to gain insight into the lives of people living on the volcano. These tour packages would also allow tourists to have direct contact with community farmers and beekeepers, providing them with the opportunity to purchase produce or honey from them on site.

This tourism project is the centerpiece of the essay that follows. It presented various challenges, including but not limited to conflicting ideologies between stakeholders regarding cooperative development, land ownership, and natural resource management. The project also left Fuertes Juntos financially crippled. They spent more than their budget allotted, leaving them in debt. This was in part due to their commitment to providing high-quality service despite the potential costs. However, it was also

discovered towards the final weeks of the project that poor bookkeeping, lack of communication, and competition for financing among managers of the tourism and agricultural projects were also to blame for the financial crisis that ensued. This forced Fuertes Juntos to lay off employees, and focus its attention away from its tourism initiative towards other projects that were more likely to garner funding (i.e. clean water, food security, and beekeeping). This was not only bad news for Fuertes Juntos, but it was also a blow to Telica Unida. Fuertes Juntos had little choice but to leave construction projects unfinished. The café lacked kitchen appliances, and a volcanic eruption left its ceiling looking like Swiss cheese. Additionally, the hostel lacked beds, doors, and windows, as well as electricity. Although the cooperative members felt grateful in many ways, they felt gipped in several others. While still full of potential, "pro-poor" tourism on the Telica Rota Natural Reserve provides a classic case study of some of the shortfalls of community-based tourism efforts.

Background

The rapid rise of tourism in Nicaragua since the mid-1990s coincides with the global spread of neoliberalism as the prevailing economic theory of the late 20th century through the present day. Proponents of neoliberalism argue in favor of economic diversification. That is, they believe that countries should not rely on a single industry, but instead should invest in several economic sectors. Furthermore, they believe that worldwide economic integration can improve the quality of life in rural areas by reducing poverty and inversely increasing material wealth (Gössling 2003, 383). Tourism supports both of these neoliberal aspirations. Moreover, development organizations believe that tourism is able to "initiate and support local development, while transferring capital resources from the developed to the developing world" (Gössling 2003, 384). This runs counter to popular opinion that tourism supports exploitative relations between largely wealthy Western tourists and locals by framing international tourism as a wealth distribution method. Tourism proponents refer to this phenomenon as the *democratization of the dollar* (Vanegas and Croes 2007, 7).

Due to the socioeconomic possibilities tourism evokes, it has garnered political and financial support among governments and civil society alike. It is preferred over other industries due to its ability to "[improve] the standard of living, [and increase] Foreign Exchange Earnings for a country and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)" (Magigi and Ramadhani 2013, 1108). Tourism as a poverty reduction strategy in developing and least-developed countries has been implemented throughout the Global South using both bottom-up (e.g. grassroots development) and top-down (e.g. non-profit organizations, foreign-owned businesses) approaches, and it has been correlated with

substantial economic expansion (Vanegas and Croes 2007, 13). For example, the United Nations' Millennium agenda aimed to reduce extreme poverty worldwide from 30 percent in 1990 to 15 percent by 2015 (Vanegas, Gartner, and Senauer 2015, 159). As a result, poverty relief efforts focused on stimulating the agricultural, manufacturing, and tourism sectors. Among them, tourism was found to generate the most jobs, stimulate economic expansion, and equalize income distribution (Vanegas and Croes 2007, 5). Tourism can provide locals with the opportunity to sell handmade crafts or occupy jobs that require few skills. However, if the poor are not leading their own economic development, they are unable to fully benefit from tourism initiatives. As a result, rural community-based tourism has become a popular alternative to conventional tourism in alleviating poverty.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNTWO) argues that tourism is a logical intervention in poor communities because rural areas are often abundant in attributes sought by tourists. The UNTWO also asserts that tourism offers direct client interaction, provides job opportunities to women and youth, and supports the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, and Vanderschaeghe 2011, 726). When the needs and opportunities of the poor are considered in developing tourism initiatives, it is referred to in the literature as pro-poor tourism (Ashley, Boyd, and Goodwin 2000, 1). In order for the poor to economically participate in tourism, Ashley et al. (2000) stress that they must receive skills training, access to social capital, and negotiating power with tourism companies. The authors further write that tourism can support livelihood goals, expand economic opportunities, build assets, and improve locals' ability to influence policy, while also undermine economic security

due to the industry's volatility, place constraints on other subsistence activities, erode assets by overburdening ecosystems, and exacerbate policy constraints (Ashley, Boyd, and Goodwin 2000, 4). In order to lessen the negative consequences of rural tourism, the authors argue that efforts should be pro-poor and community-based. That is, locals need to take ownership of tourism initiatives if they hope to benefit from them. In other words, their interests need to be placed above those of other stakeholders.

The economic potential of tourism has not been lost on the Government of Nicaragua. In 2002 it joined the international bandwagon in creating policy aimed at supporting tourism development as a poverty reduction strategy. After Haiti, Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere (Vanegas and Croes 2007, 5). In 2015, its GDP per capita was USD$5,000 (CIA Factbook). Furthermore, nearly half of its population lives in poverty, and 15 percent of them live in extreme poverty (Vanegas and Croes 2007, 5; Vanegas, Gartner, and Senauer 2015, 161). In order to accommodate tourist arrivals, the government has expanded its international airport, created a promotional campaign, and invested in infrastructure and facilities (Vanegas and Croes 2007, 5; Vanegas, Gartner, and Senauer 2015, 167). Additionally, Nicaragua signed the Declaration of San José, which states that tourism development should be "socially and environmentally responsible, economically viable, and directed to enrich the culture" (Höckert 2011, 10). Nicaragua has essentially created an economic policy that favors community-based tourism.

In spite of Nicaragua's policy, most community-based tourism projects are not locally derived. Over 60 percent of community-based tourism projects are started by donors and NGOs, which can have little impact in alleviating poverty, in part due to their

low life expectancy following the end of project cycles (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, and Vanderschaeghe 2011, 727). In Zapata et al.'s (2011) study of the Community Based Tourism Nicaraguan Network, the researchers found that tourism provided increased employment opportunities, while failing to generate a substantial amount of direct income (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, and Vanderschaeghe 2011, 736). On the other hand, they also learned that women had greater participation in the labor market through the revalorization of traditional female skills (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, and Vanderschaeghe 2011, 378). On the Telica Rota Natural Reserve, for instance, women are encouraged to participate in Fuertes Juntos' tourism project as contracted cooks and servers. There is also an abundance of external funding available for NGOs that aim to provide income-generating projects for women. This can impact project development, implementation, and beneficiaries.

Among Zapata et al.'s (2011) most intriguing revelations related to the minimal economic impact made by top-down community-based tourism projects. NGOs and donors focused on long-haul markets based on their networks, despite the fact that long-haul markets are largely removed from local community members' networks (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, and Vanderschaeghe 2011, 742). As Zapata writes, "Western ideas were applied without translation to the local resources available in the context of [community-based tourism] in Nicaragua" (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, and Vanderschaeghe 2011, 743). Moreover, community members were expected to learn about Western culture in order to better market their services to that clientele (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, and Vanderschaeghe 2011, 743). I witnessed that firsthand when Telica Unida members were told during training sessions by the Nicaragua Tourism Board to abandon traditional recipes when

creating their café menu in favor of Western dishes in order to appeal to the *gringo's* palette. They were also encouraged to create an "authentic" experience for tourists by telling them stories of living life on an active volcano. However, tour guides ended up reusing sensational stories they were told by their neighbors, thus undermining the authenticity of their tours.

The literature argues that community-based tourism can indeed stimulate economies and reduce poverty. However, they caution that communities must be at the center of tourism development if they are to receive the full economic benefits of tourist arrivals. In the case of community-based tourism in Nicaragua where over 60 percent of projects are founded by external actors, this is particularly pertinent. Fisher (1997) argues that NGOs can either be democratic or oligarchic. To avoid the latter, NGOs must strive to provide community members with increased participation in project development and implementation (458). In rural Nicaragua, NGOs should be expected to make an extra effort to ensure that community members' worldviews, desires, and interests are integrated into tourism development.

Research Methodology

I traveled to Nicaragua on two separate occasions to conduct a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995). During my first visit, I volunteered with Fuertes Juntos, and was financed by a travel grant provided by the International Internship Program. I traveled to Nicaragua in May 2015, and returned to the United States in January 2016; my stay lasted just over seven months. Prior to my arrival, I consulted with Samantha to make clear my intentions to conduct research based on my volunteer experience. My research would be written as my honors thesis for the Anthropology Department at Penn. I also promised Samantha I would provide her with the final copy of my paper so that Fuertes Juntos could consider my findings. In this way, the objective of my research has always been to support the organization's existing and future projects by highlighting challenges, exposing deficits, and providing insight into community members' perspectives. Due to the motives of my research and its possible impact, this project easily falls into the category of applied anthropology.

In my first two months, I was expected to go to the countryside with staff members three to four times per week. This is standard protocol for all of Fuertes Juntos' volunteers so that they can learn about the projects the organization has implemented through conducting site visits, witnessing staff at work, and meeting community members. This was particularly useful in allowing me to enter the field as an anthropologist. I became a familiar face among staff members and project beneficiaries alike, and also had the opportunity to meet several key figures in the community. When I introduced myself to community members and Fuertes Juntos staff, I always made sure to state that I was not only Fuertes Juntos' newest volunteer, but that I was also an

anthropology student interested in researching the organization and its relationship to the communities in which it works. Many Nicaraguans I met were unfamiliar with *anthropology*—only one university in the entire country offers anthropology as a possible area of study. Therefore, I attempted to describe my particular concentration (i.e. cultural anthropology) in plain terms that emphasized my interest in inter-group relations. My goal was for all possible research participants to understand who I was and what my research entailed. Unfortunately, though, many community members perceived me to be more of a volunteer than a researcher. My close association with Fuertes Juntos made it difficult to get honest feedback from community members during my interviews.

To illustrate, I interviewed Telica Unida members in December 2015, and again in August 2016. In December 2015, the interviews were short because community members' responses were concise. They seemed unwilling to expand on their responses or use the interview as an opportunity to voice their grievances. In fact, to my surprise hardly anyone had anything negative to say about a project that had more or less failed. This stood in contrast to conversations I had overheard between community members during site visits, which revealed frustration in the project and mistrust in Fuertes Juntos. Instead, the community members heaped praise on Fuertes Juntos, even when I provided them with opportunities to say otherwise. In August 2016, Telica Unida members continued to express their gratefulness for Fuertes Juntos' efforts. However, they were also willing to admit that the tourism project was not everything that it was hyped to be. Some expressed that the time and energy they expended in labor did not produce adequate income, and many confided that they were disappointed with Fuertes Juntos and the municipal government's lack of follow up.

Other challenges I faced were the direct results of natural phenomena. During the months of July, August, and September, heavy rains obstructed vehicular access to field sites. The road conditions grew so poor that the only way to reach the communities living on the Telica volcano was via motorcycle, which volunteers were prohibited from riding. Collapsed trees and muddy terrain made it nearly impossible for Fuertes Juntos' two four-wheel drives to pass. Therefore, I had little choice but to redirect my research focus from the countryside to the office. I used that opportunity to conduct interviews with organization staff, and to collect documents that pertained to Fuertes Juntos' tourism initiative. I was relieved to finally visit the communities again once the rains had ceased and the roads had been repaired in October.

November, of course, brought on new challenges. The Telica volcano violently erupted. From its craters spewed huge, hot rocks. While fortunately no one died, the rocks crushed several livestock to death and damaged property. The eruption even destroyed the infrastructure Fuertes Juntos had inaugurated less than a month earlier. The Telica volcano was deemed unsafe, and the municipal government barred entry for over one month. Additionally, many of the communities evacuated to settlements hours away from León. Frustratingly, Fuertes Juntos closed for the holidays in mid-December before the volcano was reopened to visitors. I therefore was unable to arrange transportation to visit the Telica volcano before leaving Nicaragua in January. My exit from the field was abrupt. In a disappointing finish, I returned to the United States feeling that I had many questions still left unanswered.

Therefore, I decided to return to Nicaragua in May 2016, and stay until the end of August. I was reluctant to volunteer again with Fuertes Juntos for several reasons. First

and foremost, I wanted to cultivate my image as separate from the organization to garner better, more comprehensive, and more honest responses during interviews with community members. In other words, I did not want them to feel that their opinions could jeopardize their relationship with Fuertes Juntos. Second, I was interested in using my summer to explore the general non-profit landscape of Nicaragua. Therefore, I searched to involve myself with other NGOs dedicated to rural development. Third, for all practical purposes I needed to fund my trip. Therefore, I accepted an offer to work on a 10-week contract as a field leader for another NGO. I describe this organization in further detail in my introduction (recall voluntourism).

During both visits, I received verbal consent from research participants to conduct semi-structured and unstructured interviews with Fuertes Juntos staff and leadership, development experts, and community members living in the Telica Rota Natural Reserve. In particular, I interviewed people affiliated with the tourism project, including project managers and cooperative members. Unfortunately, I was unable to interview foreign tour operators, government officials, or project supervisors contracted by the European Union due to time restrictions. This would have certainly allowed me to gain a more comprehensive perspective of León's tourism ecosystem than the narrow scope of my research presented in this paper. Additionally, I conducted site visits. These visits included the cluster of homes closest to the Telica crater, the model farm and apiary, and the tourism infrastructure that Fuertes Juntos constructed. I visited the site before and after the volcanic eruption that occurred in November 2015 to survey the damage upon my return to Nicaragua in 2016 (Figure 5 and Figure 6). I also visited on several

occasions the cooperative's León office it rented to improve its visibility and better sell its volcano hikes and community tours to backpackers.

What set my first visit apart from my second visit was that in the first I served as a volunteer for Fuertes Juntos. Therefore, I was conducting participant-observation research. This ethnographic research method allowed me to learn about the organization and its relationship to the communities in which it works by contributing to their work in whatever capacity I was able. As a volunteer, I wrote blog articles, translated board-meeting transcriptions, brainstormed project ideas, co-wrote grant proposals, and aided in road clearing and farming. While I in fact *did some doing*, in no way did the organization rely on my volunteer labor. I merely served as a support. However, I was not always participating; I also played a passive role. I sat in on weekly staff meetings, attended forums in both the municipal government office and on the Telica volcano, and observed countless capacity training sessions. My constant presence and involvement helped me build trust with all parties involved in the tourism project. People saw the value of my research, and supported me by consenting to interviews and providing me with resources, such as legal documents and business constitutions.

In summary, I conducted a multi-sited ethnography across time, space, and culture. That is, my visits were spread over a span of one year and three months, with a five-month hiatus from my research in between. This prolonged period of time allowed me to conduct follow-up interviews and site visits. It also allowed me to track changes over time regarding the development of the tourism project, as well as beneficiaries' perceptions of that project throughout. My research was not only multi-sited in a chronological sense, but also in a spatial sense. As described above, I followed Fuertes

Juntos staff from the office to the field, and sometimes from the office to the municipal government building. I also met with community members at various locations, including their homes, the model farms, hiking trails, and their León-based office. For both groups, a large amount of my research actually happened while traveling to and from the volcano in the back of a pick-up truck.

Lastly, my research was multi-sited in a conceptual sense. I was a bilingual American anthropologist studying a British NGO with a largely Nicaraguan staff, the majority of which were born and raised in the city of León. Meanwhile, community members living on the Telica volcano infrequently travel to the city, and they boast that they are culturally different from their urban-dwelling Nicaraguan counterparts. In fact, many believe that they are morally superior because they falsely claim that vices like alcohol, tobacco, and infidelity do not exist in their rural communities. Field visits unified these distinct groups in a single site, and meetings were typically centered on a common issue. Although meetings were conducted in Spanish, cultural misunderstandings constantly occurred. Therefore, bodies became loci of interest due to the different cultural values and life histories they embodied. That is, they became sites themselves. This concept will be particularly useful in understanding the challenges that Fuertes Juntos faced in developing the tourism project on the Telica Rota Natural Reserve. As the following sections demonstrate, a radical interpretation needed to occur between Fuertes Juntos and community members that moved beyond language to the ethereal realm of culture, values, and ideology.

Results

During my first few months as volunteer, it became apparent that important differences existed between Fuertes Juntos' and Telica Unida's understanding of the cooperative model. These differences were largely rooted in culture. Fuertes Juntos leadership was confident that cooperatives were sensible business models to incorporate in the rural communities of the Telica Rota Natural Reserve. In particular, David demonstrated himself to be a fierce advocate for cooperative development. He grew dismayed when he resumed the mantle of director in July 2015 after taking a six-month sabbatical to find that Telica Unida was not functioning as he had intended. Left without his direct supervision, the cooperative had evolved into something else. While at its core—and by legal definition—it remained a cooperative, Telica Unida was becoming less inclusive, and more exclusive. That is, it denied membership to enthusiastic community members that had been originally involved in David's early tourism training sessions. In particular, David felt that the cooperative—composed largely of middle-aged men—was actively discriminating against community youth who saw the tourism project as an opportunity to earn additional income as tour guides.

At the moment of this discovery, David called for an emergency staff meeting to discuss the implications. He was visibly upset. After all, he had high expectations for the project, and he did not trust Telica Unida's president enough to let the cooperative continue in this unexpected direction on its own. He urged for Fuertes Juntos to intervene. He decided that if after that the cooperative still refused to make policy changes and provide membership to the young tour guides, Fuertes Juntos would pull out of the project completely. That is, he was willing to forgo the third and final installment

of the European Union grant, and leave the café and hostel only partially built. He wanted no part to play in a project that had already led to exclusion, and, he feared, would eventually lead to corruption if left on this trajectory.

In a PowerPoint presentation David gave the following week to Fuertes Juntos' predominantly Nicaraguan staff, he explained that cooperatives were highly successful models in Europe, and he believed this business model offered enormous potential for the Telica volcano community given their scarce resources. In essence, cooperatives allow members to pull their limited resources together, and share the profit of their labor. In farming communities, for example, it could mean buying fertilizer together instead of each farmer buying his own. In theory, this would lower costs. Additionally, if several farmers devote their time, energy, and resources to the same piece of land, this in turn could increase production and crop yield, leading to increased profits (personal correspondence, July 2015). Furthermore, David explained that traditionally cooperative members pay a one-time membership fee to join. Once they become members, they are each given voting power to make executive decisions regarding the business. In this way, power is distributed evenly among all cooperative members, since each member—independent of position (e.g. president, vice president, treasurer, etc.)—has one vote. While they all have the same number of votes, they do not necessarily all receive the same pay. Income generated is distributed to members based on hours worked. Members who work more hours correspondingly receive more pay. Additionally, a percentage of total income is set aside. Members vote on whether to use this money to pay bonuses or reinvest in the business. Given cooperatives' major success in Europe, David reckoned, it was an optimal model to implement in Nicaragua.

In fact, cooperatives are no new concept in Nicaragua. Cooperatives grew in popularity after the Sandinistas won the revolutionary war in 1979. After they rose to power, the socialist government formed farming cooperatives on land that had been seized from *terratenientes*. *Terratenientes* belonged to a powerful, land-owning class that amassed large amounts of wealth and political influence by essentially controlling a serfdom made up of poor, *mestizo* farmers. As a means of redistributing wealth and providing justice to the *pueblo*, the Sandinistas re-appropriated the land to the proletariat *mestizos*. These farmers, however, were poor and uneducated, and were not able to effectively manage the land. Furthermore, they faced several harsh winters, and lost many crops. They consequently fell into debt. The national bank therefore seized their land and placed them in the hands of the government (personal correspondence, November 2015).

Many older Nicaraguans today remember the introduction of cooperatives as a corrupt government scam that knowingly targeted naïve farmers. They believe that the government did so anticipating that the farmers would be unable to manage their new wealth, thus making a government land seizure not only inevitable, but also justifiable. Some former cooperative members also feel uneasy about cooperatives because they remember it as inhibitive. The government placed limits on the price at which a farmer could sell his goods, reducing competition. They believe that this example of government overreach stifled their ability to succeed financially. Consequently, older Nicaraguans maintain a traumatic memory of cooperatives post-revolution, and therefore generally regard them negatively. Younger Nicaraguans, however, have largely forgotten this part of their country's history, and are eager to try the cooperative model out.

Misunderstandings surrounding the purpose and function of cooperatives as a result of their historical context may account for part of the reason Telica Unida deviated from David's expectations. However, in the minds of Fuertes Juntos leadership, the dynamic described above between the cooperative members and the young tour guides ultimately boiled down to money and power. To address the former, Telica Unida members broke with tradition and voted to divide the profits equally between all members, regardless of hours worked. In order to maximize their income, they decided to bar further community members from joining their collective. Logically, they feared that the more members the cooperative had, the less money each one would receive. This did not only contrast to standard payment policies, but it also went against the egalitarian spirit of cooperatives that David hoped the project would instill. That is, he believed that the decision was rooted in greed and individualism, not inclusivity and community.

In fact, Fuertes Juntos leadership speculated that power imbalances contributed to the present situation due to differences in age and status between Telica Unida and the tour guides. To provide context, David intended for Telica Unida to be a cooperative that performed a variety of functions, including but not limited to road maintenance, hotel and restaurant management, and tours. While interested community members were trained in several of these functions, a split occurred after David left on sabbatical. Middle-aged and older adults became official Telica Unida members, while young adults and teenagers did not. Instead they became low-paid tour guides contracted by Telica Unida, while Telica Unida assumed all higher-paying management responsibilities discussed above. While it is still unclear how this happened, it is believed that the older adults used their age-related status within the community to discourage the others from joining.

Additionally, many of the Telica Unida members are the fathers or uncles of several tour guides, and might have used this as leverage (community workshop on cooperation, October 2015). When asked about the divide, however, Telica Unida members refer back to their constitution, which states that immediate relatives are not allowed to be members of the cooperative in order to avoid certain families from disproportionately benefiting from the tourism project.

Furthermore, Telica Unida views its relationship with the tour guides not as one defined by exploitation, but by social impact. In one interview, the vice president of Telica Unida said it was unfortunate that Fuertes Juntos had judged the cooperative without meeting them first to understand their perspective. He claimed that in fact there had been a misunderstanding between Telica Unida and Fuertes Juntos. According to him, the cooperative decided to limit membership to tour guides because they did not believe that cooperative membership should be the end goal for the guides. Instead, he said that Telica Unida hoped to redirect the resources and training they received from Fuertes Juntos to mentor the tour guides themselves. He said their goal was to support the tour guides, not compete with them. Furthermore, he expressed that contracting the tour guides was akin to providing them with an apprenticeship opportunity, which the cooperative hoped they would use to work as tour guides independent of any one particular tour operator (personal correspondence, December 2015). In essence, the vice president viewed Telica Unida not only as a source of employment, but also as a leader in community development.

Telica Unida's president, who is also the community leader, echoed this point. He said that the ultimate goal of Telica Unida is to provide social services on the Telica

volcano and surrounding communities. For example, he would like Telica Unida to use its social capital to find funding to provide emergency medical transport from the volcano to León, since currently the only method to transport the injured or sick is having several men take turns carrying them in a hammock on a two hour hike down the face of the volcano. He also says that he would like Telica Unida to use a percentage of its income to provide elderly care, donate school materials, fund burials for the deceased, and host end of year activities (personal correspondence, August 2016). By law, they are required to use six percent of their income towards community development projects to maintain their cooperative status (personal correspondence, December 2015).

While power politics may or may not be the cause of this division, it is certainly a consequence of it. For example, rather than fully integrate the tour guides into the cooperative, Telica Unida members decided they would contract tour guides instead. Without cooperative membership, tour guides are not allowed to make executive decisions regarding the community tourism project. Without a vote, they have less bargaining power in negotiating their pay. As a result, Telica Unida has monopolized decision-making. In other words, it has complete power to make critical decisions that preference its interests over those of the tour guides. The cooperative members therefore unilaterally agreed to pay tour guides a flat rate of approximately $10 for each tour group they guide in Telica, regardless of the number of individuals in that group, whether just three people or twelve or more. Therefore, the larger the tour group, the more egregious the pay differential. Fuertes Juntos does not agree with this decision for two reasons. First, David is convinced that tour guides in fact do the bulk of the work, and should therefore be paid appropriately. Second, tour guides may decide that they no longer want

to receive the low, below-market wages Telica Unida provides, and seek employment with foreign owned tour operators based in León. This would undermine the original motive of beginning a "pro-poor" tourism project on Telica.

In order to try to convince Telica Unida to provide cooperative membership to the tour guides, David scheduled a meeting with both parties in August 2015 to address the particular issues described above. In essence, he wanted to convince them to change their pay model to eliminate the incentive for excluding the tour guides. The cooperative, however, was not having it. At one point, the president of Telica Unida said that he believed that David was trying to coerce the cooperative to do things Fuertes Juntos' way. He expressed distrust, and acknowledged that Fuertes Juntos had more leverage because they had more economic capital in the relationship. It became clear that Telica Unida was intent on exercising its autonomy and resisting the influence of outside forces. It wanted to make decisions on its own.

While David disagreed with Telica Unida's position, he ultimately decided to continue forward with the project and see it to its end. The project concluded at the end of October with the inauguration of the café. The café was the only building to be completed, although it still lacked a kitchen, dinnerware, and seating. In November, however, Fuertes Juntos experienced a string of bad luck. The organization had overspent its budget, and found itself in a dire financial crisis. Furthermore, the Telica volcano erupted. It spewed huge, boiling hot rocks from its crater. These rocks landed on nearby properties. They crushed several horses and cows to death, and tore holes through families' roofs. Not even the café was spared. The roof endured a beating. During a site visit several months later, the Fuertes Juntos team counted over twenty holes in the roof,

even damaging its structural integrity. Due to the weight and velocity at which the rocks were moving, the floor also sustained damage. That is, some rocks crashed through the concrete roof, and then went through the concrete floor, where they traveled several feet below surface (Figure 7). Fuertes Juntos was not only in debt, but it also lost a large portion of its investment thanks to the volcanic activity. The government barred entry to the volcano for over one month due to safety concerns, delaying any immediate assessments of the damage. Then in December, Fuertes Juntos reluctantly laid off two team members, and its remaining staff worked overtime to find additional funding sources for the new year.

Telica Unida was also devastated by the eruption. Not only did some of its members lose livestock in the volcanic eruption, but many also became discouraged about the prospects that the tourism project offered due to the damage the café sustained, and Nuevas Esperanza's lack of involvement thereafter. The president even went to social media to express his frustration over what had occurred. Moreover, the cooperative members had an "I told you so moment." They had originally advised Fuertes Juntos not to build the café in that particular location near the crater. According to Telica Unida, they were familiar with the dangers of the volcano, and knew that area near the crater to be vulnerable to volcanic activity. According to Fuertes Juntos, however, this was impossible for them to have known since the last eruption of this kind happened decades ago. Rather, Fuertes Juntos leadership asserts that the true reason Telica Unida disapproved of the café's location was related to control. Telica Unida wanted the hostel and café to be built on land they rented from the government; land that they perceived to be theirs. Meanwhile, Fuertes Juntos and the municipal government feared ceding all

control of the tourism project to the community. Therefore, they agreed to build the hostel on Telica Unida's land, and the cafe on public land. Instead of giving 100 percent control of the tourism infrastructure to Telica Unida, they only got 50 percent. Therefore, if Telica Unida ever decided to sell its business to a private entity—although illegal—the municipal government would be able to maintain ownership of the café.

In fact, disputes regarding land rights and natural resource management were another major theme to emerge during the development of the tourism project. The Telica Rota Natural Reserve is a national park and therefore public property. The communities that live there illegally settled along the volcano's slopes nearly 50 years ago. By the time the government discovered them, too many families had made a life for themselves there to simply kick them out. They had built houses, raised livestock, and grew beans and corn on their farms. The municipal government therefore gave them informal permission to continue living on and using the land. Although the community members do not technically own the land, the lack of government presence has aided them in perceiving the land to be their own. As a result, they cut down trees for farming, repair damaged roads, and charge an entrance fee to enter "their" property. In fact, they have been known to threaten tour operators with machetes in the past for failing to pay this fee. According to one informant, ideas of ownership likely also contributed to the property conflict regarding the café and hostel discussed above (personal correspondence, March 2016).

The volcanic eruption not only renewed old tension regarding the placement of the café, but it also led to further feelings of neglect. Out of concerns for safety, the municipal government barred all entry to the volcano. Fuertes Juntos was unable to return to the Telica volcano for over one month after the eruption, and until present the

municipal government has refused to allow its officials near the crater. Furthermore, Fuertes Juntos has been unable to find additional funding to repair the café and finish work on the hostel. As a result, Telica Unida searched for other funding to finish the job that Fuertes Juntos had begun. They received a grant from the Peace Corps to construct a kitchen and dining area near the hostel on "their" property (Figure 8). However, it was not enough to cover the entire cost. Therefore, they made up the difference by taking out a loan from a friend in León. They also had to arrange to transport the building materials to the crater after Fuertes Juntos had declined to offer them support. Using independently contracted construction workers, they built a modest kitchen with a refrigerator and stove. The electricity is supplied by solar panels on its roof. With the new café finished, they hope to procure additional funding to install windows and doors on the hostel (Figure 9). Tourists currently sleep in the hostel using foam mattresses and sleeping bags, and dogs sometimes sneak into the hostel and take their belongings while they are asleep or away on hikes. Additionally, some tourists have complained that the lack of windows and doors makes them feel unsafe. Telica Unida hopes that by making infrastructural improvements, they can provide a higher-quality service to tourists. Some of them also believe that it would allow them to focus their efforts on skill building, like learning English, marketing, and web management.

Discussion

As the ethnography above details, tourism development on the Telica Rota Natural Reserve was fraught with issues related to cultural misunderstandings among the distinct social groups implementing the project. At the core of these cultural misunderstandings, however, was a jostle for power. All the while, Telica Unida defiantly attempted to exert its agency to determine the outcome of the tourism project. This was evident in conflicts relating to cooperative development and land management. Regarding the former, Fuertes Juntos leadership was intent on forming a cooperative under a strictly European model. This ideology, however, was incompatible with local understandings of cooperatives. Furthermore, Fuertes Juntos was in a position to impose its ideology onto Telica Unida. Some cooperative members even acknowledged this; recall that the president claimed that Fuertes Juntos was using its political and economic capital to pressure the cooperative into changing its pay model.

In many ways, Fuertes Juntos' relationship with Telica Unida mirrored that of the Sandinista government's relationship with farming cooperatives in the past. The government controlled market prices for goods. Cooperative members viewed this as an infringement of their liberty to fully participate as economic citizens in the way they had envisioned. Similarly, Fuertes Juntos attempted to control cooperative membership, operations, and pay structure, and threatened to withdraw their support of the project if the cooperative did not make changes to allow for the tour guides to join their collective. Undoubtedly, the motives are different. According to Nicaraguans' accounts, the government controlled cooperatives in order to oppress them. If anything, Fuertes Juntos attempted to control Telica Unida in order to *protect* the guides from oppression by

community elders. Despite the differing rationale, the ends remain the same. Telica Unida felt that their independence from external influences was threatened, and they successfully managed to retain their agency.

While they managed to hold onto their autonomy from Fuertes Juntos' influence, the struggle may not be over yet. That is, their renewed relationship with the municipal government may prove to be another battle to be fought. For decades, the inhabitants of the Telica volcano were largely forgotten by the municipal government. Although they had been previously living outside of the government's gaze, they were brought back under its control due to the community development projects Fuertes Juntos began. This was a point of contention regarding land rights and land management in constructing the café. Because the café was built on public land, the municipal government now has the power to seize it from the community on a whim. Furthermore, they now have a stake in the community tourism project, and may try to control what is legally theirs. Additionally, the cooperative for years had been collecting an entrance fee for tour groups to pass through their land. The municipal government, however, now expects them to use a percentage of that income to fund park rangers and road maintenance. Whereas before community members had unlimited power to arbitrarily collect money from visitors and manage the land as they pleased, moving forward they must negotiate with the governmental forces now at play.

Conclusions

Community-based tourism projects are promising initiatives in alleviating poverty. They are highly successful models in providing communities with increased employment opportunities, and distributing wealth from wealthy tourists to poor communities in developing countries. Furthermore, tourism development in rural areas reintegrates subsistence farming communities into an economy in which they had previously been marginalized. Despite the overwhelmingly positive impact tourism can provide, however, the present ethnography demonstrates that barriers exist in meeting all its intended goals. For example, infrastructure is critical in providing tourists with the services they might expect upon visiting a site, such as food and lodging. Additionally, locals need training in marketing, tour giving, business management, quality insurance, and customer service. Language skills are also a plus, especially in a country like Nicaragua where the majority of tour operators are foreign-owned and have English-speaking staff. Like any other business, community-based tour operators need to be able to successfully compete in the market, or else they might fall behind.

While many of these issues are foreseeable, the situation I found myself studying on the Telica Rota Natural Reserve was inconvenient. David expected the cooperative to evolve in the way he had trained them. However, when he returned from sabbatical the cooperative had become what he saw to be a potentially exploitative body in the community. Furthermore, the volcanic eruption was a major setback for the project, especially because it happened just one month after the project cycle had ended. Without the procurement of further funds, the tourism project is effectively dead from Fuertes Juntos' end. The cooperative, however, is determined to see the project through. They

even asked me to use my network to search for funding for them. One added that if I go on to work for an NGO in León, to make sure to return to Telica to help them finish the project that Fuertes Juntos started. Unfortunately, project funding does not work that way. As a staff member at an NGO, I would have little ability to fulfill their requests.

Based on my research with Fuertes Juntos and Telica Unida, I recommend that non-profit organizations do the following when implementing projects. First, do not enter communities with preconceived notions of what motives they might have to act in certain ways. Cooperative members expressed to me that they wish Fuertes Juntos had talked to them before accusing them of exploiting the tour guides. Second, it is important to understand the cultural-historical background of any humanitarian intervention being implemented in a foreign context. Although Fuertes Juntos staff spoke Spanish, cultural barriers continued to lead to misunderstandings. Specifically, these barriers related to differences in cooperative ideology. A more serious effort to translate not only literal language, but also cultural differences in multi-stakeholder meetings could have allowed for greater cohesion in the project's implementation.

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Figures

Figure 1 Tourists prepare to sled down Volcán Cerro Negro in a popular tourist activity known as "volcano boarding" (Bridges 2015).

Figure 2 One of Fuertes Juntos' five model farms (Bridges 2015).

Figure 3 A Fuertes Juntos beekeeping specialist trains community members (Bridges 2015).

Figure 4 Telica community members receive Red Cross emergency training as part of the Fuertes Juntos' tourism development project (Bridges 2015).

Figure 5 The café Fuertes Juntos built on the Telica volcano during construction; image taken before the November volcanic eruption (Bridges 2015).

Figure 6 Image taken following the November 2015 volcanic eruption. The roof sustained significant damage, and its structural integrity was threatened (Bridges 2016).

Figure 7 A hole formed in the concrete floor from the impact of a high-velocity rock from the November 2015 eruption (Bridges 2016).

Figure 8 New café built by Telica Unida with the help of a grant from the Peace Corps (Bridges 2016).

Figure 9 The unfinished hostel constructed by Fuertes Juntos personnel with funding from the European Union (Bridges 2016).