

# Community-Based Tourism and the Politics of Development<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Eric Bauer<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*This article examines the negotiation of community-based tourism development in coastal Ecuador. Based on fieldwork conducted in Manabí province and using local development practices as a case study, this article highlights the political dimensions of development practices by emphasizing the role of identity in the negotiation of community-based tourism development. I focus specifically on the intersection of identity and development while emphasizing the politics of development (the strategic use of politics and frames of understanding by local populations during the process of development). Through an examination of community-based development as it is experienced by local actors, I suggest that development can become a form of political capital that can be used as a mechanism for expanding and maintaining a local political base. [community development, tourism, identity, Ecuador]*

## Introduction

**O**n a cool damp afternoon in October 2007, I sat with Don Agustín in his humble home located in front of the beach.<sup>3</sup> It was my last research trip to coastal Ecuador and I was there to find out local reactions to a number of recently completed community-based development projects that had been administered by the *comuna* Macaboa.<sup>4</sup> I have known Don Agustín for years. He is a short man with a thick build. He is almost always impeccably dressed whether working on his boat or attending an important community function. Don Agustín is the son of one of the village's wealthiest men. Despite coming from a family of means, he has little himself. When the weather is willing, he works his fields in *la montaña*, a place that he lovingly refers to as *la loma* (the hill). When the rains do not come, he makes a living from the ocean. In many ways he is the prototypical Macaboano. He is a child of Macaboa and he has spent all of his 60 plus years in the community in which he was born.

"*Es dinero perdido; . . . no se sirve la gente*" (It is lost money; . . . it doesn't serve the people) he said as his face turned flush with anger. Don Agustín was referring to the money that the *comuna* had received for community-based tourism development projects; projects that, according to many, were ill-conceived and that have provided little benefit for the community as whole.

This article examines the politics of community-based development in the coastal Ecuadorian community of Macaboa. Over the past decade, Macaboa has undergone two important

transitions. In 2004, the *comuna* Macaboa gained official recognition as an indigenous community and a shift from traditional economic endeavors such as commercial fishing and diving to a growing focus on tourism development has followed. This shift quickly followed, with the defining moment being the implementation of a World Bank funded community development initiative that emphasized community heritage and cultural identity in the form of *turismo comunitario* (community-based tourism). I situate these development practices within the context of ongoing struggles for local political legitimacy. By looking at the interface of identity, political action and development, I attempt to move beyond idealized notions of community development that all too frequently ignore the internal politics that mediate development practices. I use the case of community-based development in Macaboa as a focal point for the presentation and discussion of the politics of development. The politics of development is here conceived of as the strategic use of politics and frames of understanding by local populations as they negotiate the course of development. The case presented in this article illustrates the interface of development and identity by exemplifying how development intervenes and mediates in the cultural and political negotiation of collective identity.

One of the key issues at stake in development practices is the issue of power; most scholars recognize that politics and development cannot be compartmentalized. In both theory and

practice development is political. My focus in this article is the intersection of development and identity with an emphasis on the negotiation of development through an examination of the contributing social and political factors that influence development practices. It is within this context of understanding the political dimensions of development that I examine the case of community-based tourism development in rural Ecuador. I suggest that by looking at the competing visions of development as presented by the various actors involved, we gain an appreciation for the politics of development. In presenting this case study, it is not my goal to shed a negative light on local political institutions, but instead I intend to utilize the case of community-based tourism development in the comuna Macaboa as a launching point for an expanded discussion of the politics of development.

### **Case Study: Community-Based Development in Rural Ecuador**

Community development has long been a staple of the alternative development paradigm; consequently, it has a storied history within the context of anthropological research. The marriage between community development and anthropological inquiry seems quite natural. Community studies have been a cornerstone of anthropological research since the early days of the discipline. Although the anthropological quest for knowledge has moved away from a focus on the local, community studies still maintain an importance within the discipline. This is especially true when it comes to studies pertaining to economic development.

Understandings of community and community development have changed over the course of the past few decades, as have anthropological approaches to community development. Veltmeyer notes, "community-based or community-directed development – the community development movement – has had a checkered but long history, waxing here, waning there, resurfacing or reasserting itself in different forms, places, and contexts" (2001:27). Despite its persistence as a particular discourse of development and as an area of focus for anthropologists, the notion of "community" remains a point of contention for many anthropologists; for some it is viewed

with outright disdain due to its amorphous nature and the difficulty in defining exactly what constitutes community. In her discussion of community-based tourism development in East Africa, anthropologist Christine Walley questions the practice of using the term "community" by suggesting, "drawing boundaries around groups of people is extremely difficult in practice" (2004:133). While the boundaries Walley refers to have to do with the demarcation of a marine park, the notion of boundaries is not merely physical.

It is equally challenging to draw conceptual boundaries around members of a proposed community. Moreover, for scholars as well as development practitioners, there is often a tendency to formulate an idealized notion of community. With reference to tourism and community, McIntyre, Hetherington and Inskeep define community as "any homogenous place capable of tourism development . . . below the national and regional levels of planning" (1993:1). The mention of homogenous is particularly problematic. Challenges notwithstanding, I find it virtually impossible to avoid using the term "community" within the present discussion and therefore, it is necessary to continue forward while simultaneously recognizing the inherent deficiencies associated with such a term. These deficiencies include: (1) the fact that the "concept of community serves to draw attention away from and ignore the internal class divisions and structural forces operating on individuals at this level" and instead presents an essentialized picture of economic, social and political homogeneity (Veltmeyer 2001: 27-28) that emphasizes unity and sameness over difference (Belsky 1999); (2) the concept of community frames community as a bound social entity when in reality communities overlap, intertwine and are intersected; and (3) the concept of community suggests a sense of permanence and immutability as opposed to recognizing that communities are constantly undergoing processes of change and transformation.

Even though the concept of community is riddled with complexities, I suggest that we can approach community in the following manner. Borrowing from Gupta and Ferguson (2002: 67), we can here conceptualize of community as

consisting simultaneously of a physical space and “clusters of interaction” to which we can attribute certain ways of doing and a sense of social identity and solidarity. In the case of my research in coastal Ecuador a sense of community among local inhabitants comes from an understanding of shared history as well as a connection to place. It is from this point of departure that we can begin to gain a more informed understanding of community-based development.

By definition, community-based tourism involves the host community in planning, developing and maintaining tourism projects (Blackstock 2005). Community-based tourism development corresponds to other forms of community development by striving to engage local populations in development processes by affording them control over development projects (Blackstock 2005). As a form of participatory development, community-based tourism ideally includes “equitable sharing of the control, division, and use of resources and of the ultimate benefits of development in a community” (Anacleto 2002:172). At its core, community-based tourism, or CBT as it is known by development practitioners, strives to engage local actors as active participants in development projects. Even with such an apparently equitable approach to devel-

opment, community-based development regularly fails to recognize how local practices mediate development processes. Building on this discussion of community-based development, I use the case of community-based tourism development in Macaboa to exemplify the politics of development.

### The Comuna Macaboa

The comuna Macaboa was formed in 1976. It includes the villages of Macaboa and Río Piedra. However, despite having access to land, it was not until 1991 that the comuna Macaboa was granted communal title to 2,536 hectares (6,266 acres) of land that extends from the northernmost point of Macaboa to the southernmost point of the village of Río Piedra and inland to an area known as El Oro. Of the approximately 1900 individuals who reside in the comuna Macaboa (1400 in the village of Macaboa and 500 in the village of Río Piedra), fewer than 400 are registered *comuneros* (members of the comuna).

Macaboa is a tranquil village located on Ecuador's south-central Pacific coast (see Figure 1). The region is decidedly rural and is characterized by rolling hills and dense tropical vegetation in the form of both humid tropical forest and dry tropical forest. Where the rugged hill region

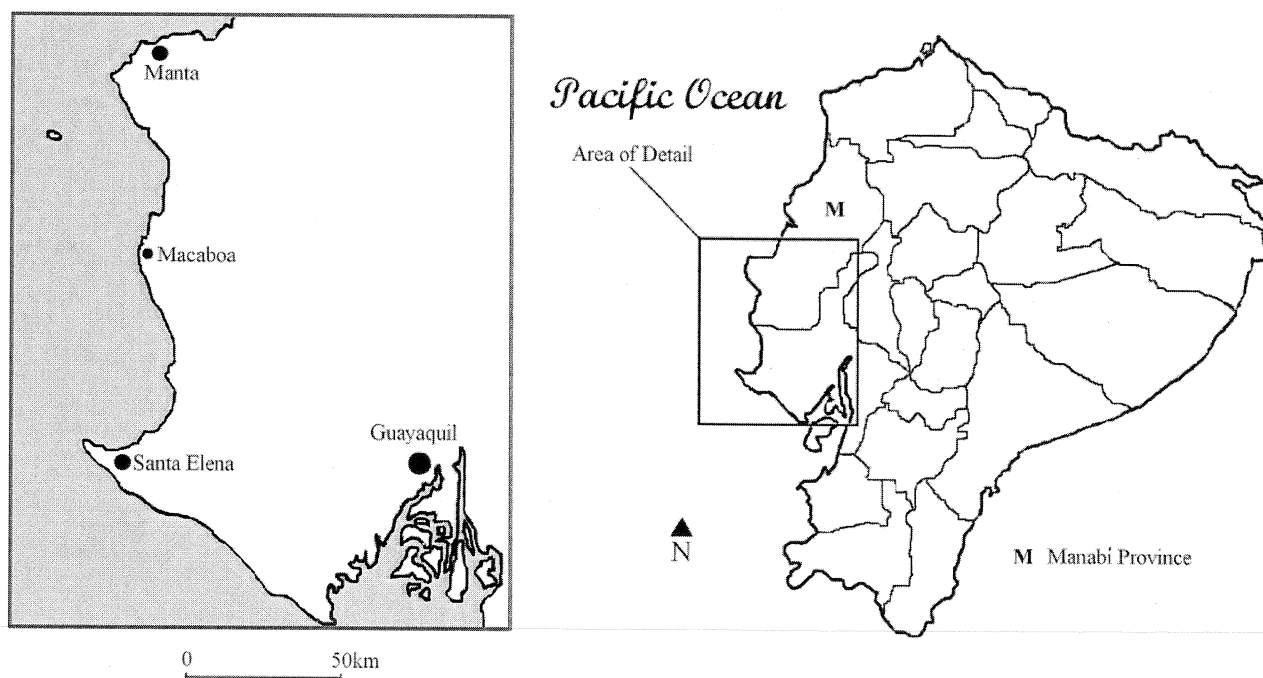


Figure 1: Map of South-Central Coastal Ecuador (Daniel E. Bauer)

of the Ecuadorian coast meets the Pacific Ocean, there are numerous natural bays upon which many of the towns and villages of the area are situated. In Macaboa dirt streets meet the ocean and bicycles outnumber automobiles. On any given afternoon one can witness children playing soccer in the streets while women converse on the stoops of their brightly colored homes and men congregate at the beachfront or at one of the many small stores in town. In many ways Macaboa is a typical Ecuadorian fishing village and *tranquilo* (tranquil) is the word that most residents use to describe the community.

Despite the peaceful setting that largely defines the village the community is not void of political tension. The quest for control of the comuna has led to an internal fission. Since 2002 the comuna Macaboa has undergone a political transition in which development has played a central role. The shift toward tourism development was punctuated by the implementation of a World Bank funded community-based tourism initiative in 2006. During this same period the comuna gained official state recognition as an indigenous *pueblo* or community. Conflicting views of local development fall along political lines and community development has been used to legitimate political claims. As the following case illustrates, tourism development can be understood as a form of political capital in which identity is a commodity that is used to negotiate the course of development. It is within this context that I examine the political dimensions of community-based tourism development.

In the spring of 2005, the comuna Macaboa made plans to begin a broad-based initiative to promote tourism in the villages of Macaboa and Río Piedra. Prior to this time most of the tourism development in Macaboa occurred under the auspices of private development or, on some occasions, cooperative investment in tourism.<sup>5</sup> However, prior to 2005, tourism remained a minor part of the local economy and tourism development in Macaboa is still in its infancy. The community development plan that was proposed in 2005 was different from previous development efforts in that it was a plan to initiate and develop “turismo comunitario” or community-based tourism as opposed to private or cooperative tourism development.

Throughout Ecuador the term “turismo comunitario” has been adopted to describe tourism that is community-based in as much as the perceived benefits of tourism are not for an individual, but for the community as a whole. Turismo Comunitario differs from other types of tourism not only because it is “communal” in form, but also because the dominant ideology behind turismo comunitario is one that attempts to provide tourists with an “authentic” experience living in a rural Ecuadorian community. Tourists are encouraged to stay with local families and to take part in the practices of daily life to the extent to which they are comfortable. In this way turismo comunitario is meant to put the tourist face to face with local culture.

Relating to the growing discourse of ecotourism throughout Latin America, Ecuadorian turismo comunitario relies heavily on the implementation of ecotourism projects, as such projects are often considered to be environmentally and culturally sustainable. While definitions of ecotourism vary, it is generally recognized that ecotourism projects are designed with a conscious intent of environmental sustainability. In the case of turismo comunitario there is an emphasis on ecotourism as a culturally and environmentally appropriate form of development. In my own encounters with development practitioners as well as participating community members, ecotourism was more often than not interpreted as a form of development that utilized the natural environment and cultural heritage as attractions for tourists with a less explicit focus on environmental sustainability. Thus, ecotourism became a concept that could be utilized to promote tourism to potential customers even if local understandings of ecotourism were often vague or ill-defined. It is important to note that this emphasis on the natural environment is not unique to the cultural context of Macaboa. Corresponding to a broader trend throughout Latin America, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Information and Tourism, which was established in 1992, has promoted rural development initiatives that emphasize utilizing the natural environment as a tourist attraction. With this goal in mind, in 2004 the Ministry adopted the motto “*Porque Somos Naturaleza*” (“Because we are Nature”). This

focus on the natural environment has subsequently become an important feature of turismo comunitario.

The rhetoric of turismo comunitario permeates discussions of rural development strategies in Ecuador and turismo comunitario has become such a meaningful yet often misunderstood term that it holds a prominent place in the state-sponsored development discourse. The most significant proponents of turismo comunitario are the organizations *Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador* [CODENPE Council for the Development of Nationalities and Communities of Ecuador] and *Federación Plurinacional de Turismo Comunitario del Ecuador* [FEPTCE Plurinational Federation of Community Tourism in Ecuador]. Each organization provides guidance and funding opportunities for development projects within Ecuador's indigenous communities; indigenous communities in Ecuador fall under the administrative jurisdiction of CODENPE. The fact that CODENPE and FEPTCE provide oversight for development in indigenous communities is something that should not be overlooked and indeed is a significant detail.

Prior to 2004, the comuna Macaboa was officially recognized as a *mestizo* or mixed-blood community despite deep historical roots that extend back nearly 5000 years and a continuous occupation that is supported by the archaeological record and historical documents. Internal conflict over the sale of communal land led to a shift in power and to members of the comuna Macaboa to petition the Ecuadorian state for official recognition as an indigenous community. In 2004 the comuna Macaboa gained official recognition as an indigenous community. In doing so the comuna joined 318 other communities that together comprise the *Manta-Huancavilca* (alternate spelling *Wankavilca*) ethnic group. The comuna also gained access to the institutional support of CODENPE and FEPTCE: access that would ultimately prove important for the implementation of various community development projects. In 2006 the comuna Macaboa joined four other comunas to form *Pueblo Manta*. I suggest that gaining official indigenous status provided for a strategic opening that could be used to gain access to development resources.

Thus, the politics of identity became an important component of the development process.

Identity in Macaboa is anything but transparent. Macaboanos recognize their indigenous heritage although they do not necessarily self-identify as being indigenous. Many Macaboanos choose to self-identify as *cholo* (mixed-blood fishers) or *mestizo* while relegating indigeneity to the past in manner similar to what Godreau (2002) refers to as "discursive distancing," representations of collective identity that emphasize temporal and spatial removal from the present by locating "phenotypic and cultural signs 'somewhere else' and in pre-modern times" (283). Complicating this situation in Macaboa is the fact that some Macaboanos stake claim to an indigenous identity that is rooted in the deep pre-history of the region. Godreau's (2002) notion of "discursive distancing" can be applied to the Macaboa case on two simultaneously present and overlapping levels. First, dominant conceptions of indigeneity in Ecuador situate indigeneity geographically and culturally in the highlands and Amazon. Second, for many people in Macaboa, indigeneity is relegated to the past despite its importance in defining ethnic identity in the present. Moreover, it is only within the last decade that ethnic identity in Macaboa has gained considerable significance in the arena of local politics. An increased emphasis on the expression of an indigenous ethnic identity in Macaboa corresponds to a the growth of indigenous politics throughout the Ecuadorian highlands and Amazonian regions, and more recently throughout the Ecuadorian coast (see Álvarez 1999, Bauer 2008, and Bazurco Osorio 2006 for further discussion). In Ecuador, as in much of Latin America, it is common for ethnically indigenous peoples to suppress signifiers of their indigenous identity in favor of the adoption of a *mestizo* cultural identity. Whitten and Fine (1981) refer to this process as *blanqueamiento* (whitening) and suggest that it serves as a master narrative for understanding indigenous/white polarities in Ecuador. Only recently have coastal indigenous inhabitants embraced an indigenous ethnic identity and cultural heritage in opposition to the dominant ideologies of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento*.

## A Longitudinal Study of Community-Based Development

I began conducting research in Macaboa as a graduate student at the same time that the comuna was undergoing the political transition that has defined local politics since 2002. Between 2002 and 2008, I lived and collected data in Macaboa for a period totaling 24 months. My research can be divided into three stages. The first portion of my research focused on documenting natural resource utilization and the local fishing economy. I conducted participant observation and interviewed fishers and divers in order to understand the relationship between identity and economic practice. During the second phase of research I aimed to understand the growth of tourism development in the comuna Macaboa. I paid special attention to private development practices and the growth of an NGO sponsored tourism cooperative. This research was primarily qualitative in nature and data were gathered through participant observation, interviews, and attending meetings of the cooperative. I made numerous research trips to Macaboa between 2005 and 2008 that comprise the third phase of my research. At that time, my research began to shift from a focus on private development and cooperative development to the politics of community-based development corresponding directly to the changes that were taking place in the community at the time; my research during that period forms the basis for this essay.

The data presented here come from two primary sources: (1) participant observation and detailed field notes taken during interactions with individuals participating in the comuna sponsored development initiative, along with notes taken at meetings, reunions and the implementation of development projects and (2) in-depth interviews conducted with stakeholders participating in development initiatives as well as community members who were not involved in the planning or execution of development practices. Follow-up interviews were conducted with individuals after the completion of development projects and these interviews were structured by the use of an interview guide. The qualitative data from follow-up interviews were compared in order to discern patterns in

informant responses. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and all translations are my own.

## Negotiating Community-Based Development

On July 5, 2000 the World Bank approved a loan of \$25,200,000 to be used for sustainable development and the reduction of poverty in rural Ecuador. Funds for the loan were provided by the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and were secured by the Ecuadorian government in June 2002. PROLOCAL (Poverty Reduction and Rural Development Project) funds were to be used for varied activities such as natural resource management, environmental protection, small business development, small-scale farming development and sustainable tourism development.

The community-development plan outlined by the comuna Macaboa consisted of multiple sub-projects including fisheries development, environmental protection eco-tourism and artisanal development. In the spring of 2006, funds were granted for three of the five projects outlined in the proposal. Surprisingly, funds were not granted for fisheries development or environmental protection. Instead, the sub-projects that received funds included *Ecoturismo y Desarrollo Comunitario* (Ecotourism and Community Development), *Ecoturismo y Desarrollo Artesanal Comunitario* (Ecotourism and Artisanal Community Development), and *Implementación de Fincas Integrales en la Comuna Macaboa* (Implementation of Integrated Farms in the Comuna Macaboa). The total monies granted for the three projects exceeded \$150,000.

The sub-project *Ecoturismo y Desarrollo Comunitario* consisted of three related projects that focused on using the natural environment as a tourist attraction. The first phase of the sub-project was the planning and construction of a *sendero ecológico* (ecological hiking trail) in the inland region of Río Piedra. The second phase of the sub-project was the construction of a *mirador* (scenic overlook) on the crest of the southernmost point of the village of Macaboa. The final phase of the project was the construction of a *mirador* in Río Piedra in conjunction with the *sendero ecológico*.

The sub-project Ecoturismo y Desarrollo Artesanal Comunitario included the construction of a *taller artesanal* (artisans' workshop) in Río Piedra. The rationale for building the workshop was to give local artisans a place to work on their own crafts while also providing a space for younger generations to learn local craft traditions through the realization of formal classes. Ultimately, the construction of the community artisans' workshop would allow artisans to increase production and provide a more uniform line of products to the growing tourism market.

The sub-project *Implementación de Fincas Integrales en la Comuna Macaboa* consisted of the construction of two *viveros* (plant nurseries) in the comuna Macaboa. One of the viveros was built in Río Piedra and the other in Macaboa. The purpose of the viveros was to grow traditional plants such as citrus varieties including oranges, limes and grapefruit as well as ornamental plants both for communal use and for profit.

The above-mentioned sub-projects form the core of the PROLOCAL funded development efforts in the comuna Macaboa. All of the projects were implemented in consultation with FEPTCE and CODENPE and executed between February 2006 and February 2007. In the pages that follow, I place community-based development at the center of the struggle for political legitimacy. I pay close attention to local responses to and understanding of community-based development. The majority of the information presented in this section is drawn from my daily interactions with individuals involved in the projects. These individuals include, but are not limited to comuna leaders, project *técnicos* (technical experts) and various individuals who participated in the projects in some capacity. I also present data collected during follow-up interviews that were conducted in the fall of 2007.

In early February 2006, I attended a reunion held in the *casa comunal* to discuss the progress of the various sub-projects. The *casa comunal* is a cavernous building with dim lighting and stale green paint on the walls. It is sparsely furnished and has been for as long as I can remember. There is little appeal to the building other than its capacity to serve as a meeting place for mem-

bers of the community. On this particular day the concrete building served as a cool oasis from the penetrating heat of the afternoon. Prior to the meeting most of the work regarding the projects existed only on paper. I, as well as most of the community, was relatively unaware of what the projects entailed. Approximately 50 individuals attended the meeting and all of them had arrived in order to get a brief introduction to the projects and their potential impact on the comuna Macaboa.

The then-president of the comuna, Roberto Toledo, led the meeting and was assisted by the various *técnicos* who were working with the comuna. Toledo spoke passionately about the upcoming projects and the potential held within each of them. One of the main objectives of the meeting was to provide tangible evidence that the projects were indeed soon to be under way. The corner of the building was filled with various items including plastic tubing, wheelbarrows, barbed wire, shovels and other miscellaneous construction materials. The items were more than their material components. They represented the beginning of the projects and validated Roberto Toledo's authority and power as the president of the comuna. Unlike previous comuna presidents Toledo had made good on his promises. He was responsible for obtaining funds for the projects, demonstrated by the materials that were present at the meeting that day. Thus, the material markers of success gave credibility to Toledo's vision and authority.

Throughout my time in the field I became acutely aware of the close connection between development, identity and local politics as I worked directly with comuna members and individuals who participated in Macaboa's various development projects. The implementation of the numerous community development projects occurred between February 2006 and February 2007. Although each project was separate, they all formed part of the larger *proyecto del turismo comunitario* (community-based tourism project). I provide an overview of the projects in the pages that follow.

Construction of the taller artesanal began in late February 2006. On an unseasonably muggy morning I met Ana Jura, one of the coordinators of the project, as we walked the highway south to



the site of the taller. When we first arrived I was a little taken aback by the location of the taller. It is located on a small hill east of the highway at the north end of the village of Río Piedra. A steep path was carved into the side of the hill and we slowly made our way up the muddy path to the top. I asked Ana about the location and she maintained that the land was “donated” by a comunero. In effect, even though land in the comuna Macaboa is communal, most of the land belongs to individuals in the form of use rights. Therefore land was “donated” back to the comuna by the individual in possession in order to provide a location for the construction of the taller artesanal.

My first visit to the taller artesanal took place only a few days before I was scheduled to leave Ecuador and resume my life as a graduate student. Work on the taller began with the digging of footers for the placement of *pilares* or cement pillars. Construction was scheduled to last approximately two months at which time the taller would be outfitted with the equipment needed for artisans to practice their trade. The rationale behind constructing the artisans’ workshop in Río Piedra was to create a place where local artisans could not only practice their craft, but pass their knowledge on to successive generations. In this way, the workshop would play an important role in the maintenance of important components of the local culture and identity.

The taller was inaugurated in early May 2006. Numerous individuals from the communities of Macaboa and Río Piedra attended the event. The event was not only important because it marked the completion of the first of the PROLOCAL funded projects, it was also important because it established credibility among the acting *cabildo*. In very real terms the opening of the taller illustrated the ability of the *cabildo* to obtain funding for a project and then successfully negotiate the project. The taller thus became a tangible expression of the *cabildo*’s power and authority.

Despite the successful completion of the taller it did not take long for people to demonstrate discontent with the project. I sat with my *compadre* (literally co-father) in a pair of hammocks outside of his family home. We often retreated to the hammocks to avoid the after-

noon sun and to carry on casual conversation about the daily catch, local politics, national news and just about any other topic of interest. On this particular day we spoke about the success of the taller artesanal. During our conversation I recalled seeing a handwritten list of workshop participants posted on the wall of the taller when I had visited earlier that same day. I asked my *compadre* if he had ever participated in any of the workshops. He told me that he had never attended a class because, “*No es bien organizado . . . y también tengo otros compromisos*” (It isn’t well organized . . . and I also have other obligations). Other individuals whose names appeared on the list, but who claimed to have never or only occasionally attended the classes, gave similar reasons.

Activities in the taller continued on a consistent basis for the first few months of its existence. However, despite the fact that the taller was getting consistent use, strong sentiments of discontent were building among members of the comuna. By way of example I relate the following interaction that occurred during one of the many communal meetings I attended during the course of my research.

In late July 2006 I attended a meeting at the casa comunal in order to discuss the current state of the development projects that were underway. The meeting was sparsely attended, although the individuals in attendance demonstrated a vested interest in the state of the development initiatives. Comuna president Roberto Toledo spoke with passion and confidence about the status of the various projects. At the time the only project completed was the taller. After his brief introductory comments Toledo turned things over to the coordinating técnico (technical advisor) Raúl Vargas. The meeting proceeded in a smooth manner as Raúl championed the success of the taller project. While numerous people nodded in agreement with Raúl, others began to converse among themselves in an air of discontent at which point questions were raised regarding the taller and the participation of youth in the afternoon workshops. A robust middle-aged woman made note of the fact that some people were being excluded from attending classes at the taller. At first the exclusion was blamed on the fact that the youth were not



children of community members who contributed financially to the project. This answer did not sit well with most of the people in the audience and numerous people spoke up with a general dissatisfaction with the rationale for denying access to the taller. One individual noted, "*El proyecto es un proyecto comunitario y el taller es de la comunidad . . . entonces la puerta sería abierta para cualquier miembro de la comuna Macaboa*" (The project is a community project and the workshop belongs to the community . . . therefore the door should be open for whichever member of the comuna Macaboa). A groan of agreement spread through the crowd. The statement was then addressed by asserting that those who were beneficiaries would be given the first opportunity to attend the activities of the taller. When the outbursts became too much for Raúl to address, Roberto Toledo stepped in and relieved him. Roberto maintained that for two classes, 23 students were signed up for the afternoon class and 18 for the night class. He also maintained that the maximum number of students is 25 per session. Various comuneros complained that the maximum numbers were not met yet people were still being turned away.

As I sat witnessing the dissatisfaction associated with the project and its execution, I thought back to one of my previous visits to the taller to visit the children working. Only about eight students were there. When I reviewed the names on the list, I recognized the names of at least five people who I knew had never attended and probably had no intention of attending. Thus, while people had signed up, they were not actually taking up space. The problems inherent in the project were largely due to a lack of communication and a lack of commitment on the behalf of the individuals who had signed up to take the courses and who then decided not to attend the classes.

By the fall of 2006, the taller had fallen into a state of non-use. Even though the project was completed in a timely fashion and a finite number of students received some sort of training, the taller did not appear to provide any tangible benefits to the community as a whole. Thus, while the project was successful in its implementation, it has had little if any longstanding benefit.

The *viveros* (plant nurseries) in Macaboa and Río Piedra shared much the same fate as the taller. Like the taller, work on the viveros began in the spring of 2006. The first vivero was constructed in Río Piedra that spring. Located some four kilometers into the interior of Río Piedra in an area that is normally reserved for horticultural activity, the vivero provided the ideal location for the growth of native plants. The original vivero, constructed in Río Piedra, was completed in the early summer of 2006. The second vivero, located in Macaboa on a piece of property flanked by the casa comunal was completed later that same year. The Río Piedra vivero was originally conceived of as a production vivero. The Macaboa vivero was constructed with the idea that it would be used as a facility for the sale of native plants. In this way the viveros were intended to provide an economic benefit to the communities of Macaboa and Río Piedra. Unfortunately, the *vivero* in Macaboa has received little use since its construction. The vivero in Río Piedra has fared only slightly better. Much like the taller artesanal, the projects were completed but there has been little follow-through on the part of local residents.

Two other projects formed part of the complete effort between PROLOCAL and the comuna Macaboa to promote tourism in the Macaboa region. These include the *sendero ecológico* and accompanying mirador in Río Piedra and a mirador in Macaboa. The sendero has seen limited use since its completion in late 2006. Accessibility to the sendero is difficult even though it is located in an attractive area. Moreover, publicity for the sendero and mirador has been severely limited. When I spoke with Nestor Barrea, a local guide who lives in Río Piedra and who was active in the construction of the sendero and mirador, he maintained that the sendero had received little use since its completion and that it was already in need of maintenance only a few short months after it had been completed.

The mirador in Macaboa is one of the most attractive features of the comuna's push to promote turismo comunitario. It is situated high above Macaboa at the southern point of the village and it provides striking views of the Pacific Ocean and all of the territory encompassed by the comuna Macaboa. Work on the

mirador began shortly after the completion of the taller artesanal and continued throughout the summer of 2006. Unlike the taller, the mirador was not initially conceived of as a project that would provide a direct monetary benefit to the comuna. Instead, the mirador was considered a tourist attraction that would have the potential to draw tourists to the comuna Macaboa.

The crew in charge of building the mirador included members of the comuna Macaboa including cabildo member Antonio Arenas. One of the benefits of the various projects, the mirador notwithstanding, is that all of the projects provided temporary employment for a number of comuneros. In some cases, individual comuneros worked under contract on multiple projects. This was most often the case when the individual was a member of the cabildo. As numerous informants pointed out to me during our discussions about the projects, participation in the projects was often limited to the little more than the members of the cabildo. On multiple occasions informants critiqued the fact that the cabildo allowed the same individuals to be contracted for work on more than one of the projects. Some people even went as far as to suggest that the projects were only executed in order to provide a financial benefit to those individuals who were involved directly (e.g. members of the cabildo).

The construction of the mirador developed very quickly and it was completed in August 2006. The completed mirador is a beautiful structure, but it has no practical use in terms of providing significant benefits to the community. One of the things hindering the mirador is the fact that it is only accessible by way of a fairly treacherous roadway cut into the side of mountain. As such the mirador is slightly beyond the path traveled by most tourists. Shortly after the completion of the mirador the comuna began a second phase that included the construction of a *comedor* (restaurant) and an artisans' shop for the sale of locally produced crafts.

Dissatisfaction began growing in the community after the completion of the mirador. Many people, although content with the mirador as a physical structure, did not understand the rationale for building the comedor and artisans' shop at the same location as the mirador. In the

section that follows I expand upon this brief mention of the dissatisfaction expressed by some community members by examining local reactions to the advent of turismo comunitario projects in the comuna Macaboa.

### **Turismo comunitario Revisited: Local Voices**

I want here to take a step back from addressing the negotiating of community-based development and the projects themselves and shift my focus to a discussion of Macaboa's development projects from a political perspective with special attention being paid to the competing visions of development as expressed by the various individuals involved in the development process. It is of foremost importance to recognize that the shift to turismo comunitario in Macaboa cannot be separated from the political tensions that defined village life throughout my time in the field.

By the spring of 2007, approximately one year into the development projects, it was clear that the expectations posed by turismo comunitario had not been met. If the feelings of many of my informants are at all representative of the sentiments surrounding turismo comunitario in Macaboa, there was a clear if not explicit suggestion that tourism development was a form of political capital that provided political leverage for the acting cabildo and that the success of the projects was paramount for the success of Toledo as the president of the comuna. Toledo took control of the comuna in 2004 following a great deal of political unrest in which he led a popular movement that sought to gain recognition for Macaboa as an indigenous pueblo, which forced the previous leadership from office and drove a wedge into an already divided community. Toledo struggled to maintain support for his agenda, but his focus on community development proved to be an avenue through which political legitimacy could be gained. Toledo's political aspirations were never a secret and he was the target of substantial criticism during his four years as comuna president. For those strongly opposed to Toledo, he was running a corrupt regime that benefited Toledo and his closest confidants both financially and politi-

cally. For Toledo's supporters, he was a revolutionary with strong moral principles and a willingness to fight for his community.

Toledo's success did not go unchallenged despite his hard work and his focus on highlighting local culture through development. Community members voiced their discontent with the projects and Toledo. Some went so far as to suggest directly that community-based development in Macaboa was about nothing more than maintaining political control. Others accused Toledo of corruption and putting his political aspirations above the well-being of the community.

Turismo comunitario became a clear point of contestation by the time I left the field in May 2007. People who had previously supported the projects began to openly question their success and tensions between the community's two factions were at an all-time high. All of the projects had quickly fallen into disrepair and none of them were generating funds for the community. Numerous individuals also made accusations of corruption and fund mismanagement; the types of which are all too common in Ecuador. Some people even went so far as to directly state that the projects were part of comuna president Toledo's attempt to realize his vision of ethnic revitalization for the community. Implicit in the accusation, which was made by a member of the opposition, was the suggestion that Toledo was using the projects to garner much needed support for his own politically motivated interests and that development was used to brokerage the cultural and political negotiation of a collective indigenous identity. More explicitly, identity became a mediating factor in the process of development. As mentioned previously, the funds and oversight for the development projects outlined in this case study were obtained from CODENPE and FEPTCE. The organizations provide support for Ecuador's indigenous communities and as a consequence aid is provided only to communities with indigenous status. The fact that the comuna Macaboa gained indigenous status in 2004 allowed the comuna to obtain funding for turismo comunitario. Thus, in the case of Macaboa, identity was an important component of the politics of development.

The issue of identity came into question on multiple occasions during my time in the field. Individuals who supported Toledo's development efforts also seemed to generally support his pro-indigenous agenda; whereas members of the opposition, including Don Agustín, dismissed completely the notion of indigenous identity. "*Somos mestizos, cholos, o montuvios pero no somos indios*" (We are mestizo, cholo, or *montuvio*, but we are not Indian).<sup>6</sup> In a radio interview conducted in late October 2007, the same message was broadcast to the listening public as the opposition brought identity to the table in a public display of discontent.

Other individuals made less direct comments about indigenous identity, including the vice president of the comuna under Toledo who maintained that while members of the community do not embrace directly an indigenous identity, it is an important aspect of cultural identity due to the rich history of the region. Another informant maintained that Macaboaños have indigenous roots and it is important to acknowledge their roots. She also informed me that she supported the work of Toledo by stating, "*A veces el president coje el dinero, pero Toledo está usando el dinero para el beneficio del pueblo*" (Sometimes the president [of the comuna] takes the money [for personal use], but Toledo is using the money for the benefit of the community).

The commentaries that I encountered in May 2007 carried over to my final research trip in October 2007. While traveling by bus from Guayaquil to Macaboa I spoke with my compadre about the status of the projects and the local reaction to the projects. He was adamant about the fact that people were not seeing the benefits that they hoped would be gained from the projects. "*Todavía no hay muchos beneficios*" (there still aren't many benefits) he said in a concerned tone.

One of the problems associated with community development is that there is often a gap between "concept and implementation" of community-based development efforts (Stonich 2005:79). This is to say that expectations frequently are not realized because there is a great disparity between rhetoric and practice. The reasons for this can be numerous. In some cases, as Stonich (2005) suggests, the various parties

involved directly in development projects have conflicting goals or agendas. Political conflict became a mediating factor in the case of Macaboa. For community members who supported development and Toledo's political agenda of ethnic revitalization, there was an underlying belief that turismo comunitario would result to economic benefits for the community. For opponents of Toledo, turismo comunitario was less about development aimed at benefitting the community as a whole and more about supporting a specific pro-indigenous political agenda.

In the case of Macaboa, local interpretations of community-based development become most clear by addressing the reactions of locals to community-based development. In what follows, I revisit some of the conversations that I had with people in order to contextualize local interpretations of community-based development. Informants exhibited a variety of opinions about the overall impact of the various projects. Comments pertaining to community-based development in Macaboa include the following; *"El dinero supuestamente fué para turismo comunitario pero quedó con el cabildo"* (the money was supposedly for community-based tourism, but it stayed with the leadership); *"Nunca ha dado cuenta a la población general. . . . Hizo todo entre ocho o diez personas. . . . Un por ciento se beneficia, noventa y nueve por ciento no recibió nada"* (He never took account of the general population. . . . Everything was done between eight to ten people. . . . One percent (of the population) benefits, ninety-nine percent didn't receive anything); and *"Beneficios a la comunidad . . . no hay muchos"* (Benefits for the community . . . there aren't many). When asked about participation in the projects community members responded in the following way: *"No sabía nada de los proyectos"* (I didn't know anything about the projects); *"No participé primeramente por falta de comunicación...me parece que siempre el grupo de ellos está colaborando juntos. Siempre es sólo un grupo."* (I did not participate first for a lack of communication. . . . It appears to me that the group always works together. It is always only one group).

Even when people did not necessarily agree with the management of funds, they did believe

that the projects had a positive impact on the community. When asked about the impact of the community-based tourism development projects one informant stated, *"Es algo positivo...no cien por ciento pero algo positivo."* (It is something positive...not one hundred percent but something positive) and *"la comunidad se beneficia...es algo bueno porque están haciendo bastante proyectos"* (the community benefits...it is something good because they are doing many projects). For Toledo, the projects were implemented for the benefit of the community. During an interview that I conducted with Toledo at the vivero in Río Piedra he spoke about the importance of the project in the following manner, *"Dejando en claro que este proyecto está manejando por la comuna Macaboa, pero este proyecto pertenece a cien familias, beneficiarios actores, que son justamente miembros, socios activos de la comuna Macaboa"* (Let it be made clear that this project is managed by the comuna Macaboa, but this project belongs to one hundred families, acting beneficiaries who are members, active members of the comuna Macaboa) [author's translation].

A few things are made clear in the statement provided by Toledo. The first is the prominent statement that the project is a communal project that is managed by the comuna. Toledo also notes that the project belongs to the participating members or beneficiaries as they are referred to in the statement. Throughout the course of the projects Toledo maintained a steadfast commitment to the community and he clearly envisioned the development projects as providing benefits for the community despite individual commentaries that indicated otherwise.

Since 2007, the comuna Macaboa has undergone significant changes. Toledo is no longer president of the comuna although he is still an influential figure in local politics. Toledo went on to become vice president of CODENPE and was a candidate for the position of *alcalde* (mayor) of Puerto Azul, the canton to which Macaboa is administratively dependent. The current president of the comuna is continuing along the path laid by Toledo and community-based development is still a central focus for many community members. The community remains divided along political lines.

## Identity and the Politics of Development

In this article I have focused on the negotiation of development in the comuna Macaboa. In doing so, I have paid special attention to broader social and political dynamics that influence community-based development projects. As I have illustrated, development practices are complex and sometimes contradictory. In this section, I want to move the lens back a bit and look at how the case examined in this article relates to broader questions of development and identity.

The case of turismo comunitario in Macaboa presents us with an appropriate context for examining the politics of development with reference to identity. It is no small detail that the growth of community-based tourism development in Macaboa corresponded directly to the rise of indigenous politics in the village and surrounding area. Based on my experiences in coastal Ecuador during both the growth of locally fostered indigenous politics and community-based tourism development, it became clear that the two processes were not mutually exclusive. The rhetoric involved in public and private discussions of development and indigenous identity consistently blurred the boundaries between the two themes. In fact, it was often common for development to be couched in terms promoting “*la historia y identidad del pueblo*” (the history and identity of the village).

As my research suggests, the government institutions FEPTCE and CODENPE are important players in Ecuadorian tourism development and the politics of identity. Both institutions act as organizing bodies for the indigenous pueblos of Ecuador while at the same time acting as two of the state’s most prominent development organizations. The significance of this dual position is that populations that are recognized as indigenous have unique access to the support provided by FEPTCE and CODENPE. If we return to the case of Macaboa, we see that the push for state recognition of indigenous status in 2004 and the subsequent formation of *Pueblo Manta* in 2006 are significant for understanding the politics of development. It is only through the self-articulation of indigenous identity and the subsequent recognition of this identity that the comuna was able to foster relationships with FEPTCE and CODENPE that would ultimately

result in the implementation of turismo comunitario in Macaboa.

Solidifying the position of the comuna Macaboa as an indigenous community and a community that practices turismo comunitario was a legal shift of jurisdiction of the comuna Macaboa from the *Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganaderia* (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock) to CODENPE. Moreover, the establishment and execution of the various turismo comunitario projects can be seen as tangible representations of progress and change that justified Toledo’s position of authority as the president of the comuna. Thus development in Macaboa was not solely about creating changes that benefit the community in social and economic terms. Development became a mechanism through which power is established, exerted and maintained. Escobar (1995) argues in somewhat different terms that development is a Western project aimed at the establishment, exertion and maintenance of power. I suggest that development is concerned with instituting and maintaining power and control, but these directives are engendered not only at the “top” as Escobar (1995) implies. The political dimensions of development are multifaceted and omnipresent and as I have suggested, we can conceive of local political actions that serve to mediate development practices as the politics of development.

## Conclusion

In this article I have tried to illustrate the interconnectedness of the politics of identity and community-based development. My research suggests that development does not exist outside the realm of local politics and local political agendas. Instead, just as development projects can be used to support the interests of national and international donor organizations, they can also be used as a mechanism for expanding and maintaining a local political base. In the case of community-based development in Macaboa, it can be argued that tourism development shared a close camaraderie with political development. The institutionalization of identity in the form of CODENPE and FEPTCE allowed for a unique window of opportunity in which identity and development could be brought together in an attempt to gain political support.

In this article I utilize the case of Macaboa as a concrete illustration of the politics of development while simultaneously suggesting that scholars adopt an approach that emphasizes the political dimensions of development in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with community development practices. Perhaps one of the most noteworthy aspects of the Macaboa case is the transparency with which my informants recognized the political dimensions of community-based development and the ways in which they not only recognized, but expressed their own positions within the development process. The case outlined in this article also illustrates the politicization of identity within the context of development. Most of all, this research sheds light on the complex and often contested nature of development by suggesting that community development entails much more than mere economic change. In Macaboa, local politics are entangled in processes of development and questions of identity often manifest themselves within the context of community development. ○

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology held March 17-21, 2009 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I am grateful to the other panel members and conference participants for their valuable feedback. I also thank the HPSfAA, the editorial staff of *The Applied Anthropologist* and the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and input.

2. Daniel Bauer earned his Ph.D. in anthropology from Southern Illinois University – Carbondale. He is an assistant professor at the University of Southern Indiana. He can be contacted at the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice Studies, College of Liberal Arts, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, Indiana (IN) 47712 USA or by e-mail at debauer@usi.edu.

3. Pseudonyms have been used to protect informant identity.

4. The term “comuna” was originally used in conjunction with Ecuador’s 1937 *Ley de Comunidades Indígenas y Montuvias* (also known as the

Law of Peasant Communes). The law provided legal recognition for indigenous communities through the formation of comunas. More recently the term comuna has come to refer to populations that have access to and administrative control over communally held land. A comuna consists of a five person elected council known as a cabildo and a general membership composed of comuneros (Becker 1999).

5. See Bauer 2007 for a detailed discussion.

6. The term “mestizo” refers to individuals of mixed Spanish and Indian descent. The term “cholo” refers to mixed-descent peasant fishermen. The term “montuvio” refers to mixed-descent peasant horticulturalists of the coastal provinces of Manabí and Guayas.

## References Cited

- Álvarez, Silvia  
1999 *De Huancavilcas a Comuneros: Relaciones Interétnicas en la Península de Santa Elena, Ecuador*. Quito, Ecuador: Abya-Yala.
- Anacleto, Odhiambo  
2002 “Research into Local Culture: Implications for Participatory Development.” In *Development and Culture*. Edited by Deborah Eade. Pages 168-173. London: Oxfam Publishing.
- Bauer, Daniel E.  
2007 “Negotiating Development: Local Actors and Economic Change in Coastal Ecuador.” *The Applied Anthropologist* 27(2):118-128.  
2008 *Negotiating Development: Identity and Economic Practice in Coastal Ecuador*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University – Carbondale.
- Bazurco Osorio, Martín  
2006 “Yo Soy Más Indio Que Tú” *Resignificando la Etnicidad: Exploración Teórica e Introducción al Proceso de Reconstrucción Étnica en las Comunidades de la Península de Santa Elena, Ecuador*. Quito, Ecuador: Abya-Yala.
- Becker, Marc  
1999 “Comunas and Indigenous Protest in Cayambe Ecuador.” *The Americas* 55(4):531-559.
- Belsky, Jill M.  
1999 “Misrepresenting Communities: The Politics of Community-Based Rural Ecotourism in Gales Point Manatee, Belize.” *Rural Sociology* 64(4):641-666.

- Blackstock, Kirsry  
2005 "A Critical Look at Community Based Tourism." *Community Development Journal* 40(1):39-49.
- Escobar, Arturo  
1995 *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Godreau, Isar P.  
2002 "Changing Space, Making Race: Distance, Nostalgia, and the Folklorization of Blackness in Puerto Rico." *Identities* 9(3):281-304.
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson  
2002 "Beyond 'Culture:' Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." In *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*. Edited by Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo. Pages 65-80. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- McIntyre, George, Arlene Hetherington and Edward Inskeep  
1993 *Sustainable Tourism Development: Guide for Local Planners*. Madrid, Spain: World Tourism Organization.
- Stonich, Susan C.  
2005 "Enhancing Community-Based Tourism Development and Conservation in the Western Caribbean." *NAPA Bulletin* 23(1):77-86.
- Veltmeyer, Henry  
2001 "The Quest for Another Development." *Transcending Neoliberalism: Community-Based Development in Latin America*. Edited by Henry Veltmeyer and Anthony O'Malley. Pages 1-34. Bloomfield, Indiana: Kumarian Press.
- Walley, Christine J.  
2004 *Rough Waters: Nature and Development in an East African Marine Park*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Whitten, Norman E. Jr. and Kathleen Fine  
1981 "Introduction." In *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*. Edited by Norman E. Whitten, Jr. Pages 1-41. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.