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TEXTILE ART OF TAQUILE: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT: Taquile, a small island near mainland Peru, has been an example of a sustainable, community-driven tourism model. However, in recent years, due to an increasingly globalized world, the indigenous inhabitants have faced many challenges. The island is renowned for its traditional textile art, recognized as Intangible Heritage by UNESCO in 2005. Weaving and knitting are ingrained in daily life, societal structure, gender roles and tradition.

In this paper, I aim to explore how tourism in Taquile has developed and changed over the years. By opening its doors to the world in the 1970s, this previously isolated piece of land has made many adaptations and started investing in cultural tourism - ranging from welcoming foreigners into their homes, to new business ventures and key investments. Nonetheless, due to outside competition and a lack of sufficient political and legal support, tourism has been gradually shifting the benefits away from the islanders, putting them at risk of becoming passive participants.

Within the framework of Coria and Calfucura's (2012) perspectives and Charnley's, (2005), ecotourism guidelines, I plan to approach the concepts of sustainable tourism and ecotourism, to analyze the positive and negative impact of this economic activity, regarding Taquile's economy, society, and culture.

KEYWORDS: Taquile Island, Tourism, Tradition, Textiles, Sustainable

RESUMO: Taquile, uma pequena ilha perto do Perú continental, tem sido um exemplo de modelo de turismo sustentável e orientado para a comunidade. No entanto, nos últimos anos, devido a um mundo cada vez mais globalizado, os habitantes indígenas têm enfrentado vários desafios. A ilha é conhecida pela sua arte têxtil tradicional, reconhecida como Património Cultural Imaterial da

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Humanidade pela UNESCO em 2005. A tecelagem e o tricô estão enraizados na vida quotidiana, na estrutura social, nos papéis sociais de género e na tradição.

Neste artigo, o meu objetivo é explorar a forma como o turismo em Taquile se desenvolveu e mudou ao longo dos anos. Ao abrir as suas portas ao mundo na década de 1970, este território anteriormente isolado adaptou-se e começou a investir no turismo cultural - desde o acolhimento de estrangeiros nas suas casas, a novos empreendimentos comerciais e investimentos chave. No entanto, devido à concorrência externa e à falta de apoio político e jurídico, o turismo tem vindo a desviar gradualmente os benefícios dos habitantes, colocando-os em risco de se tornarem participantes passivos.

No âmbito das perspectivas de Coria e Calfucura (2012) e das orientações de ecoturismo de Charnley (2005), pretendo abordar os conceitos de turismo sustentável e ecoturismo, para analisar o impacto positivo e negativo desta atividade relativamente à economia, sociedade e cultura de Taquile.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ilha de Taquile, Turismo, Tradição, Têxteis, Sustentável

1. Introduction

1.1. Background on Taquile Island

Taquile Island is located on the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca, with the closest city being mainland Puno. The island has become increasingly popular over the decades as a tourist destination, mainly due to its unique textile art and rich cultural heritage. Despite its small length, an area of 5,7 by 2,2 kilometers, it is inhabited by around two-thousand indigenous, Quechua-speaking people – with a growing number speaking Spanish. Taquile stands at 3,815 meters above sea level, contributing to its tropical mountainous climate and daily swings in temperature (Ypeij & Zorn, 2007).

Until 1968, Taquileans only engaged in textile trade with mainland Peru. However, the dynamics changed after the signing of a treaty with a United States Peace Corps-inspired cooperative. After the collapse of the cooperative, men on the island turned to other trade opportunities, both inside and outside Peru. Most of Taquilean families are very poor, with their income deriving from farming, tourism, and weaving. Concerning infrastructures, the island has little access to electricity, and no potable water or sewerage systems (Zorn, 2013).

As previously stated, Taquile thrives on three key economic activities: farming, tourism, and textile sales. Their main crops consist of potatoes, other tubers, vegetables, and corn. The island is divided into *suyus*, land that is tended to within a system of community-shared crop rotation, based on the equal distribution of the goods and collective participation (Cheong, 2008, p. 49). Regarding livestock, community members raise sheep, chickens, and cattle. Even though islanders have easy access to lake waters, fishing has not been a strong means of sustenance since the 1990s. Curiously, due to the increase of tourism, some alpacas were brought to the island (Zorn, 2013).

Tourism and textile art are interconnected: traditional weaving is not only a way for indigenous populations to represent their culture and society, through intricate patterns, geometrical shapes, and colors, but also an attraction for visitors. During daily trips, tourists look to learn how these textiles are crafted, and are invited to buy some of the samples at the local store. These traditional handcrafts were recognized as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by

UNESCO in 2005. Travelers are also encouraged to participate in local dances and festivals as well as dine at family-owned restaurants – to cultivate inter-cultural interaction (Bustamante, 2021).

1.2. The Textile Tradition

As addressed in the previous section, the textile art of Taquile has become a growing source of income over the decades. It is also a powerful means for the indigenous community to express their heritage and lifecycle events. Likewise, they also serve as practical and daily garments. The patterns and designs are inspired on the Inca ancestry of the island's population, and it tells a visual story: just by looking at a man's belt, – the *chumpi* - Taquileans can perceive his life plans and aspirations (Frame, 1983, p. 23-25).

The *chullo* is among some of the pieces of daily dress pointed out by Bustamante (2021). It consists of a knitted hat worn and knitted exclusively by men. This colorful hat works as a head covering, but also conveys information about the wearer's marital status and social role within the community. Another notable item of clothing is the *lliclla* or *manta*. These are a type of cape worn and woven by women, they serve a practical purpose, helping women carry children and keep warm on chillier days (Traditional Andean Clothing, 2017).

The *chumpi* is Taquile's most significant garment. It can be worn both by women and men, however, the meaning of the belt varies by gender. Men use it when doing heavy work, since it gives some support to the lower back (Zorn, 2013). Furthermore, *chumps* display specific patterns to the region and the family, and ancestral iconography. They are often referred to as "calendar belts" since they include the twelve months of the year. As pointed out by Juan, a resident on the island, "(…) just by seeing his belt... we can know what plans he has. We can read just by watching the iconography and the colors." (Rhone, 2021).

Despite keeping its essence, Taquileans have made some changes to their handcrafting. To save time and increase production, they purchase factory-spun wool. They have also experimented with different background colors, added stripes to coca-leaf purses and invented new patterns (Zorn, 2013).

1.3. Gender roles on the island

In Taquilean culture, gender roles regarding textile work and farming vary from mainstream society. Men are the only ones who can knit, and, from a young age, boys are taught knitting skills. They take pride in these abilities, aiming to create the finest *chullo* to impress women. On the other hand, women in the community are responsible for weaving and collecting sheep wool, dyeing it with local techniques and minerals. Women also weave the intricate *chumpis*, to present to their groom on their wedding day (Rhone, 2021).

2. Development

2.1. Evolution of tourism in Taquile

Tourism in Taquile kicked off after 1976, when a notice about the island was published in a popular tourist guidebook – the *South American Handbook* – that praised the islands landscape and its people. Residents were able to invest in tourist related ventures due to the income from textiles sales from the U.S Cooperative (Cheong, 2008, p. 60). The influx of visitants increased over this decade. The number of people visiting the island changed from a few dozens to more than 40.000 yearly (Zorn, 2013).

During the 1980s, the community managed to secure a monopoly on fares to the island – they invested the income from tourism into buying second-hand engines to power motorboats. This allowed them to control transportation and regulate the number of visitors arriving on the island. Taquileans were backed legally by the Peruvian Coast Guard and the Ministry of Tourism, with fare regulation and licensing. In 1982, the Peruvian government granted them with the monopoly on transportation, giving islanders the conditions to compete with the already existing private boat owners. As I will later address, these early years were key to building a sustainable, community-controlled model of tourism (Ypeij & Zorn, 2007, p. 122).

However, the 1990s were a turning point for the Taquileans' decision-making power. They lost control of transportation to outsiders, resulting in a decline in income from tourism. This shift in dynamics affected the community's ability to oversee the flow of visitors and manage the economic benefits. A fast-growing number of tourists compelled businessmen to contest the Community Law of Peru that ensured Taquilean's monopoly on transportation. The law only covered land and dock areas, therefore, private agencies were able to argue that waterways were not covered. During Alberto Fujimori's time in office, the state took a non-interventionist stance on matters such as protecting indigenous communities. Furthermore, without the support of the government, Taquileans could no longer find legal recognition to enforce policies, like charging for entries into the island (Ypeij & Zorn 2007, p. 122 - 123).

Presently, most of the income generated from tourism on Taquile comes from family-owned restaurants, sale of textiles and overnight stays. While tourism continues to provide economic opportunities for the community, private agencies are often the ones to profit more rather than the residents themselves. This unequal distribution poses as the greatest challenge for Taquileans (Ypeij & Zorn, 2007). In addition to this, the tourist experience has also changed: direct interactions between residents and visitors are now shorter since day trips and half day trips are more common. In fact, in 2005, 95% of tourists only stayed for the day on the island (Cheong, 2008, p. 100). Pre-pandemic numbers show that Taquile received 116.663 visitors, most of which are foreigners that arrive in larger numbers in May, August, and September:

Visitantes a la Isla Taquile

Mes	2019			2020			2021			Var.% 2021/2020
	Total	Nacional	Extranjero	Total	Nacional	Extranjero	Total	Nacional	Extranjero	
Total año	**116 663**	**23 858**	**92 805**	**27 235**	**7 120**	**20 115**	**12 149**	**11 119**	**1 030**	**-55,4%**
Enero	2 695	766	1 929	11 600	3 100	8 500	920	920	0	-92,1%
Febrero	6 219	2 274	3 945	10 800	3 200	7 600	860	860	0	-92,0%
Marzo	9 800	937	8 863	4 835	820	4 015	1 050	1 050	0	-78,3%
Abril	5 459	1 182	4 277	0	0	0	951	951	0	-
Mayo	13 337	1 287	12 050	0	0	0	1 044	1 044	0	-
Junio	7 883	1 435	6 448	0	0	0	590	550	40	-
Julio	10 764	1 886	8 878	0	0	0	700	600	100	-
Agosto	12 391	2 043	10 348	0	0	0	2 050	1 900	150	-
Setiembre	14 312	3 014	11 298	0	0	0	2 395	2 100	295	-
Octubre	11 330	2 976	8 354	0	0	0	657	452	205	-
Noviembre	11 603	3 084	8 519	0	0	0	765	590	175	-
Diciembre	10 870	2 974	7 896	0	0	0	167	102	65	-

Source: Ministerio de Comercio Exterior y Turismo (2021)

2.2. Defining sustainable tourism and ecotourism

To ascertain how sustainable tourism in Taquile is, it is essential to first define the term. According to the World Tourism Organization (2023), sustainable tourism is to "(…) respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance". This approach highlights the significance of preserving traditions, cultural heritage and fostering dialogue between host communities and visitors. A balance must be found for the fields of environment, economy, and society (UNWTO, 2023). Sustainable tourism aims to minimize the negative impacts of tourism, and instead encourage its positive influences: namely increase education, economic growth and living standards (Cheong, 2008, p. 4).

Sustainable tourism can also be referred to as ecotourism, and as Charnley (2005) points out, it is meant to foster development in indigenous communities. To achieve this, some conditions must be met: "First, the economic benefits of ecotourism must be accessible to the target population. Second, indigenous communities need secure land tenure over the area in which ecotourism takes place. Third, ecotourism must promote deeper social and political justice goals to local communities, as well as the capability to make land use decisions for that area." (Charnley, 2005). Ultimately, my goal is to analyze Taquile's form of tourism within the context of these three guidelines.

2.3. Analyzing the case of Taquile

As mentioned in the previous section, some conditions must be met to maintain a sustainable tourism model. The first factor to consider is the distribution of the economic benefits. The income generated by tourism should benefit the host community – usually, in developing countries, inequality between stakeholders and indigenous communities is more evident. Private investors and indigenous people often fight for the control of resources (Coria & Calfucura, 2012, p. 50 - 51).

In the specific case of Taquile, some of the revenues have gradually shifted from the islanders to stakeholders. During the 1970s and 1980s, Taquileans made huge progress and invested in tourism – like, for example, buying motors for boats to bring visitors to the island. However, after a change in government policies and the push from globalization, residents started to lose ground to private tourism agencies. Even though the monopoly on transportation fares was lost, Taquileans were able to charge entry fees to all visitors (Cheong, 2008, p. 85) – one of the measures to generate profit. Besides this, residents of Taquile made the crucial decision to invest part of their tourism revenues in building a crafts store and other communal businesses, which encompasses another step to ensure equal distribution of economic benefits (Ypeij & Zorn, 2007, p. 122).

Secondly, land ownership is an encouragement for development in indigenous communities. Overall, when communities can own the property they inhabit, they feel more motivated to conserve the land and its traditions and invest in it, due to the long-term security. Unfortunately, most indigenous people around the world have lost land to private owners or to the state, leading to a growing disconnect and lack of dialogue with outsiders (Coria & Calfucura, 2012, p. 52).

Regardless of this, during the 1930s, Taquileans began a long legal battle to gain the right to purchase their land. The twenty years that followed were marked by harassment and persecution. Nevertheless, residents managed to claim most of the island's territory, and obtained the rest of it by the 1970s (Ypeij & Zorn, 2007, p. 122 - 123). Taquileans and Amantaníans – residents of neighboring island Amantaní – are in the unique position to limit access to their property and avoid forced acculturation (Cheong, 2008, p. 6).

To fulfill this condition, indigenous communities can resort to existing forestry and conservation laws to claim land. Additionally, they can also reach out to indigenous organizations with land titling initiatives, which are already being carried out in Peru (Coria & Calfucura, 2012, p. 52).

As per Charnley's (2005) perspective, legal, and political empowerment of indigenous communities is the third required key factor to ensure a sustainable tourism model. Without political recognition, members of these communities find it harder to set up direct partnerships with tour operators, get jobs and training in the tourism sector, and to address problems of corruption. Indigenous people often must fight to be recognized as an institution, and transfer power from the state and NGOs to themselves (Coria & Calfucura, 2012, p. 52).

When tourism took off in the 1970s, Peruvian law supported Taquileans being decision-makers. The Community Law of Peru enabled residents to have the monopoly on transportation of visitors

to the island. Aside from this law, Puno's Harbour Captaincy enabled islanders to collect a docking fee through a decree.

During the 1990s, however, external factors contributed to the situation changing. On one hand, the growing number of visitors rallied the interest of businessmen and travel agencies, increasing competition in the market. On the other hand, this decade was also marked by Alberto Fujimori's neo-liberal regime, when liberalization of the economy was fostered, and protectionism was discouraged. Therefore, islanders were not able to press for the rights they had previously acquired – in 1991, the Legislative Decree 701 brought an end to monopoly on transportation (Ypeij & Zorn, 2007, p. 123).

Over the decades, Taquile's initial sustainable tourism efforts were successful, but with the passage of time, external threats and internationalization, this model has been deteriorating. Still, we must consider that compared to other indigenous communities, including the neighboring islands, Taquileans are many steps ahead and working to regain full control.

2.4. Socio-cultural impact

The introduction of tourism to the island forever changed the way of life and social aspects for this indigenous community. One positive impact is the newfound closeness to mainland Peru. Taquileans are no longer isolated: cross-lake travel was facilitated and indigenous people from the island are not shunned when walking through downtown Puno. In fact, tourism has broken old barriers and encouraged dialogue. Contrary to the past, Taquileans are viewed as active contributors to society and can inclusively meet with authorities while wearing their traditional clothing. What was previously a sign of lower status in society, is now viewed with pride by Taquileans and as a symbol of their success. Besides this, education has also evolved through the decades. Schools were built in Taquile in the 1990s, and by 2005, 70% of the island's population was literate. Education provides the community with tools and management skills to face the growing competition – for example, becoming a tour guide or work at a tour agency office (Cheong, 2008, p. 89 – 96).

On an infrastructural level, some households and rooms of wealthier families have access to electricity, to comply with government guidelines. It can be argued that without the introduction of tourism, this improvement would have not been possible. These improvements are increasing

the quality of life and living standards of islanders. Smaller details - like stone paths from the docks to the center of the island – have also been arranged (Cheong, 2008, p. 90).

Nevertheless, threats to the community's authenticity and culture need to be acknowledged. With the islanders being pushed to the background when it comes to controlling tourism, the stereotype for indigenous people might be reinforced – that of servility and inferiority. Another interesting and predictable aspect is the decline in weaving. As mentioned before, young people on Taquile have access to education, therefore, they look for more formal, administrative jobs (Cheong, 2008, p. 100 - 101).

On the other hand, the production of textiles has suffered some changes. In order to comply with tourist demand, islanders started to use factory-spun wool. This fuels the discussion regarding the quality and authenticity of their handcrafts, who some argue have decreased in quality. Following this line of thought, present textiles can be perceived as somewhat simplified and mass-produced (Cheong, 2008, p. 102).

Lastly, the traditional communal system is being threatened by individualism. A sense of materialism is becoming more noticeable on the island: a gap between the wealthier families and poorer families. The introduction of capital inevitably results in a rupture of traditional communal values and in a newfound interest for frivolous goods. Competition and tensions are beginning to surface, as a direct result of the more educated and entrepreneurial families seeking to expand their wealth. An example of this is when families choose to sell textiles in their homes instead of the community craft store (Cheong, 2008, p. 104).

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the introduction of tourism to Taquile has brought significant economic and social benefits: it has provided them with an additional source of income, with the sale of their crafts, with national and international recognition, increased literacy, along with better infrastructures and living conditions (Cheong, 2008, p. 122).

However, there are some downsides to this increase in tourism: the risk of commodification of Taquile's culture with its exposure to mainstream society. Inhabitants are also being pushed into the roles of observers, instead of participants. The influx of visitors may create pressure on islanders to perform according to expectations. Even though the residents face challenges and threats with globalization, it has managed to maintain its authenticity and community-driven spirit appeal. Moving forward, the inhabitants are cooperating with NGOs to forge new touristic plans and invest in training for some Taquileans (Ypeij & Zorn, 2007, p. 125). Despite the deviation from community-controlled tourism from the early years, residents are finding ways to work around the changes in global demand, while managing to preserve their traditions and heritage – and sustainable tourism guidelines might be the answer.

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