

## Responses, Resistance, and Opportunities for Community-Based Tourism in the Yucatan Peninsula in the Face of Covid-19 and Recurring Crises

### *Respuestas, resistencias y oportunidades del turismo comunitario en la península de Yucatán frente al COVID-19 y las crisis recurrentes*

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**Abstract.** The COVID-19 public health issue came to be just another one — albeit not just any other — among the crises of different nature and magnitude that often affect the tourism sector in the Yucatan Peninsula. A number of environmental, economic, political, socio-territorial, commercial, and sanitary vulnerabilities affect the tourism sector in general and the community-based sector in particular. Faced with multiple recurring crises, tourism cooperatives have adopted various strategies to survive during adverse periods.

Pluriactivity — a historical cultural response of *campesino* (peasant) households to eventualities in their productive practices — stands out among such strategies. However, due to the long sector stagnation caused by the health emergency

lockdown, community-based tourism businesses have seen their income reduced in more than 50% compared to 2019 and are formulating new responses, as well as resistance mechanisms, to address the dilemma between missing two high-tourism seasons, on the one hand, and avoiding the health risks of their communities and visitors, on the other. Major response strategies adopted by community-based tourism businesses include returning to food self-supply and supportive exchange of products among social businesses, as well as to savings and economic provisions. Resistance mechanisms include shutting down towns and conflicts within and between communities stemming from the reopening of tourism activity. Based on our practical experience acquired through accompanying 24 community-based tourism

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businesses to face the ongoing public-health crisis — and given the still incipient studies that adopt critical approaches within the community-based tourism practice itself—, the final section of this article presents a theoretical reflection to envision the likely post-pandemic reconfiguration that a “deep community-based tourism” could go through to differentiate it from the multiple attempts to co-opt and alienate this activity, in the light of force-ideas such as proximity and everyday tourism.

**Keywords:** community-based tourism, vulnerabilities, pandemic, pluriactivity, Mexico.

**Resumen.** La contingencia sanitaria COVID-19 pasó a ser una más, aunque no cualquiera, entre las crisis de diferente naturaleza y envergadura que suelen afectar al sector turístico en la península de Yucatán. Una serie de vulnerabilidades ambientales, económicas, políticas, socio-territoriales, mercantiles y sanitarias afectan el sector turístico en general y en particular al comunitario. Ante la recurrencia de múltiples crisis, las cooperativas que se dedican al turismo han adoptado diversas estrategias para sobrevivir a los períodos de adversidad.

Entre estas estrategias destaca la pluriactividad, forma histórica y cultural de respuesta de los hogares campesinos a las eventualidades de sus prácticas productivas. Sin embargo, debido a la prolongada duración de la reactivación

del sector ocasionada por el confinamiento de la emergencia sanitaria, las empresas de turismo comunitario que ya han visto afectados sus ingresos en más del 50% con respecto al 2019, están formulando nuevas respuestas y resistencias para lidiar con la ambivalencia de afrontar la pérdida de dos temporadas de alta afluencia, por un lado, y el no poner en riesgo la seguridad sanitaria de sus comunidades y de los visitantes, por el otro. Entre las estrategias de respuesta de las empresas de turismo comunitario sobresalen el retorno al autoabasto alimentario, el intercambio solidario de productos entre empresas sociales, así como el ahorro y la previsión económica. Entre las expresiones de resistencia figuran el blindaje de los pueblos y los conflictos intra e intercomunitarios vinculados a las reaperturas turísticas. Partiendo de la experiencia práctica de acompañamiento a 24 empresas de turismo comunitario para hacer frente a la actual crisis sanitaria, y ante los aún incipientes estudios que establezcan planteamientos críticos al interior del propio ejercicio del turismo comunitario, en la última sección presentamos una reflexión teórica para imaginar las posibles reconfiguraciones pospandemia que podría experimentar un turismo comunitario “profundo” y diferenciarlo de los múltiples intentos de cooptación y enajenación de la actividad, a la luz de ideas-fuerza como las de proximidad y cotidianidad turística.

**Palabras clave:** turismo de base comunitaria, vulnerabilidades, pandemia, pluriactividad, México.

## INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism in Mexico, particularly in the Yucatan Peninsula (PY), has grown significantly over the past twenty years. The Mayan region, located in southeast Mexico and bordered by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, is well-known for tourism resorts such as Cancun.

Indeed, the construction of this tourism center in the early 1970s marked a turning point as the PY became increasingly focused on tourism activity: the Cancun-Riviera Maya tourism conurbation has become the major tourism region in Latin America (Jouault, 2018), the Mayan sites of Chichén Itzá, Tulum, Cobá, and Uxmal are among the top ten most visited archaeological sites in Mexico (INAH, 2020), Playa del Carmen, Tulum, Bacalar, and Mahahual are internationally renowned destination; Mérida and Campeche have rescued their heritage value as colonial cities; Isla Mujeres, Bacalar, Tulum, Palizada, Valladolid, and Izamal have been awarded the controversial designation

of *Pueblos Mágicos*; over one hundred towns in rural areas along the coastline and inland, as well as some regional protected areas, have engaged in community-based tourism (García de Fuentes, Jouault and Romero, 2019).

Community-based tourism includes tourism forms proposed and managed by the local societies themselves and which would fit “harmoniously” into the traditional social dynamics of the host site. In theory, this tourism activity is managed based on collective organization, assemblies, and consensual decisions. The activity is managed, in some cases, by the *ejido* but, in many towns, it is managed by a social enterprise created through public policies that support the activity. The social enterprise is an organization type, different from a private company, that helps to improve, in a horizontal and collective manner, the living conditions of those involved (Kieffer, 2018; Jouault, 2018). Some studies mention that this type of tourism has been carried out in the PY since the 1990s (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1994; Daltabuit et al.,

2000; Marín Guardado, García de Fuentes, Daltauit, 2012).

While the H1N1 swine flu, which emerged in the state of Veracruz in May 2009, shook the tourism sector in the PY and throughout Mexico, the COVID-19 pandemic has evidenced the fragility of the tourism phenomenon worldwide. In less than six months, the COVID-19 pandemic defeated the tourism industry worldwide, threatening the future of thousands of businesses and jobs directly and indirectly linked to this sector. Countries such as Mexico, whose national economy depend to a large extent on tourism, will have to innovate to support the sector recovery, with resistance or adaptation strategies to address the issue that will vary according to the territorial context.

The current pandemic poses multiple challenges for all humanity, but its short- and long-term effects on the tourism sector seem to be particularly massive. In its recent *Impact assessment of the COVID-19 outbreak on international tourism*, the UN World Tourism Organization estimated a 58% to 78% reduction in 2020 (UNWTO, 2020). This, along with the complete cessation of activities during the mandatory lockdown (#QuedateenCasa) and the slow recovery during the last months of 2020, depicts a complex future scenario. Some realities may seem minor compared to the widely media-covered issues facing large cities and other tourism destinations focused on mass tourism. However, the aim of this paper is to describe some of the challenges, issues, and opportunities for community-based tourism in the PY within the pandemic context, as well as the likely scenarios for the post-crisis period.

### Objective

Describe and analyze resistance strategies, local responses, and reconfiguration opportunities of social enterprises devoted to community-based tourism in the PY facing the tourism vulnerability exacerbated by the COVID-19 public-health crisis in particular and, more generally, by recurring environmental phenomena and other vulnerabilities.

## TOURISM VULNERABILITY AND RELATED CRISES

Tourism, in any of its modalities, takes place in a highly random market due to its seasonality and great vulnerability to six major phenomena:

- 1) *Environmental vulnerability* to extreme weather phenomena such as tropical storms and hurricanes, which are most common in the PY (Babinger, 2012; Cuevas and Euan-Ávila, 2009), with the long-remembered hurricanes Gilberto (September 1988 ), Isidoro (September 2002), Wilma (October 2005), Dean (August 2007), Delta, Gamma, and Zeta (October and November 2020); to frequent mass arrivals of sargassum that have been severely affecting Caribbean beaches since 2018 (León, 2020); or to beach erosion (Meyer-Arendt, 2001).
- 2) *Economic vulnerability*, since this activity is highly sensitive to market crises, economic recessions, and fluctuations in currency exchange rates (Flores Ruiz and De la O Barroso González, 2012).
- 3) *Political vulnerability* stemming from the instability of some governments, discontinuation of public policies for tourism, political misuse of government support programs for partisan purposes, armed conflicts, detractive campaigns such as the travel warnings that some governments issue advising their citizens against traveling to some countries or places out of (founded or unfounded) security concerns, border closures, etc. (De la Torre and Escobedo, 2013; Acosta Martín, 2017).
- 4) *Socio-territorial vulnerability*, related to conflicts between communities, land dispossession, and insecurity caused by organized crime, as is the case of the golden triangle in the State of Quintana Roo (Marín, 2015).
- 5) *Market vulnerability*, as tourism is highly sensitive to fashion vagaries. For example, tourism destinations that are hotspots but are quickly forgotten later on; shift in the interest of tourists to other sites, even other continents, redirecting the tourism flows, as is the case of

- Cancún, a major destination promoted in Europe in the 1990s, but was subsequently replaced by Indonesia and Thailand (Butler, 1980).
- 6) *Sanitary vulnerability*, to events such as the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, which affected the Zaaz Koolen *Ha* cooperative in Yokdzonot, near Chichen Itzá (one of the most successful community-based tourism businesses in the region) to such an extent that it took one year and a half for them to recover the activity level previously attained (Jouault, 2018); or the global effect of the current COVID-19 pandemic which, at the time of writing this article, had caused a six-month cessation of tourism activities around the world (Gaffney and Eeckels, 2020; Fletcher et al., 2020). The impact on the PY has been immense due to its heavy dependence on tourism; although measures seeking tourism reactivation are in place, these primarily target mass tourism. Tourism cooperatives have also suffered the total loss of revenue during two of the three peak seasons of the year: Easter and summer (June and August) (see Figure 1).

Undeniably, the duration and magnitude of the current pandemic, with no ending on sight, has

posed an unprecedented extreme scenario in the region. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the fact that tourism businesses have developed strategies to remain in the market under conditions of high instability and fluctuating inflows of visitors. Some large companies in the Yucatan peninsula and other regions of sun-and-beach tourism in Mexico have imposed a “supportive voluntary leave” scheme on their employees. Through this scheme, they temporarily dismiss a large part of the workforce under the promise that their “solidarity” guarantees their being hired again once the crisis is over. Workers of peasant origin from the peninsula return to their communities to retake their economic pluriactivity centered on family work while waiting to be rehired (Oehmichen and Escalona, 2020).

Social-sector businesses, particularly those of *campesino* or indigenous basis, have incorporated tourism as part of their complex system of survival and supportive work. This system allowed them to keep their tourism services operating despite the low inflow of visitors, and thus endure the six-month complete closure derived from the pandemic. However, the response to this prolonged crisis clearly shows that the businesses that had been most successful in terms of attracting tourists

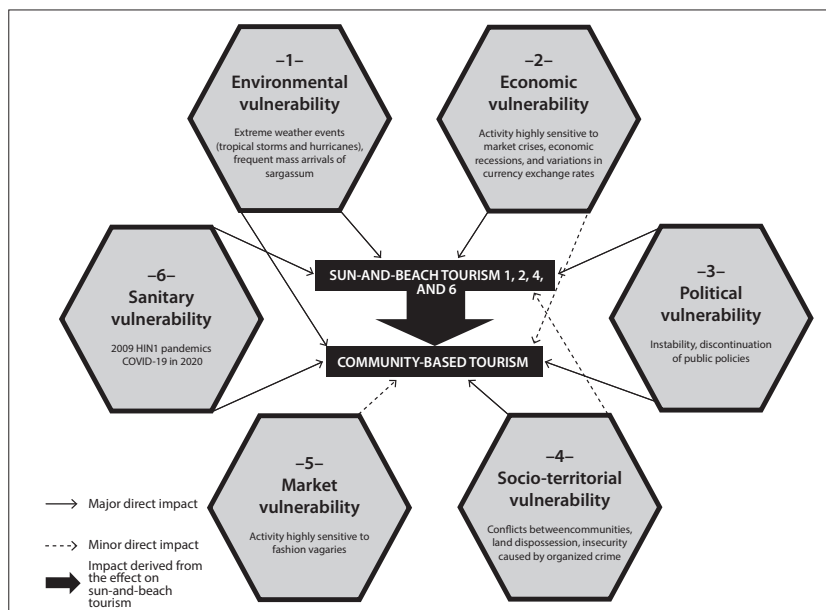


Figure 1. Proposal for a multidimensional model of vulnerabilities affecting community-based and sun-and-beach tourism.

— those that had left other activities to become solely or mostly dependent on tourism — are the ones facing the most difficult situation. Figure 2 summarizes the natural and socio-territorial risks facing community-based tourism and its vulnerability to them, based on the impact that the main vulnerability types have had on the 24 cooperatives that form the *Alianza Peninsular para el Turismo Comunitario* (Peninsular Alliance for Community-Based Tourism, APTC for its acronym in Spanish), seven in Campeche, eight in Quintana Roo and nine in the state of Yucatán.

## RESPONSES OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM TO RECURRING CRISES

Community-based tourism in the PY is experiencing the longest hiatus in its 25 years of existence. Operations stopped in mid-March 2020 in response to mandates issued by local, municipal, or state-level authorities; it was only until September when some businesses were allowed to reopen, under restricted conditions. Field visits and on-line interviews and surveys carried out by the APTC and its three component networks documented a number of household survival strategies, as well as strategies employed to keep tourism facilities in good operating conditions ready for reopening. Some of these local responses are entirely new and responded to the prolonged crisis; others had been implemented at different scales in previous crises.

At the household survival level, both community-based tourism businesses and farmers who migrate to Cancun and the Riviera Maya for jobs have endured low tourism seasons, hurricanes, sargassum mass arrivals, H1N1, and now COVID-19, by applying a couple of strategies linked to their temporary return to their communities: family and community solidarity, and pluriactivity. Experience from these previous issues and the lack of social health care led some community-based tourism businesses to implement supportive savings and welfare mechanisms for their partners and employees. In addition, the prolonged closure due to COVID-19 prompted two emerging

responses documented herein: self-supply strategies and supportive exchange of goods between cooperatives.

In relation to the survival of community-based tourism businesses, periods of low inflow of visitors are usually used for facility maintenance. However, previous closures were usually due to damages to equipment and facilities caused, for example, by the impact of hurricanes. In the current circumstances, maintenance activities and revision and improvement of operating processes are a way for businesses to make good use of the lockdown. Another emerging response to this crisis focuses on adjusting the service offer to respond to the new operating conditions that the pandemic will bring about in the future. The following paragraphs describe the way in which these responses are operating, based on information from the 24 APTC member businesses, which serve as a sample of what is happening in this sector in the three states of the PY.

### Strategy 1. Facility Maintenance

Despite the reduction in maintenance costs, 75% of the APTC social enterprises used of the lockdown period to improve their facilities and processes. Such activities included cleaning facilities, maintenance and adaptation of boats and engines, maintenance and repairing of facilities (bathrooms, dressing rooms, storehouse, painting cabins, swimming pool, kitchen and kitchen equipment), cleansing of air conditioners and fans, cleansing of wells, replacement of electrical installations, maintenance and repairing of *palapas* (thatched roof structures), watering and maintenance of green areas, maintenance and signaling of trails, cleaning of life jackets and camping tents, bird monitoring and filling of *jaltunes* (rustic troughs) to provide water to wildlife, repairing of dock piers, as well as reflecting on and formulating proposals for adjusting operating processes. These activities were carried out through shifts of voluntary work, in which participants contributed their work for the collective benefit, with the conviction that they are responsible for building the future of their tourism enterprise, which they had built with so much effort.



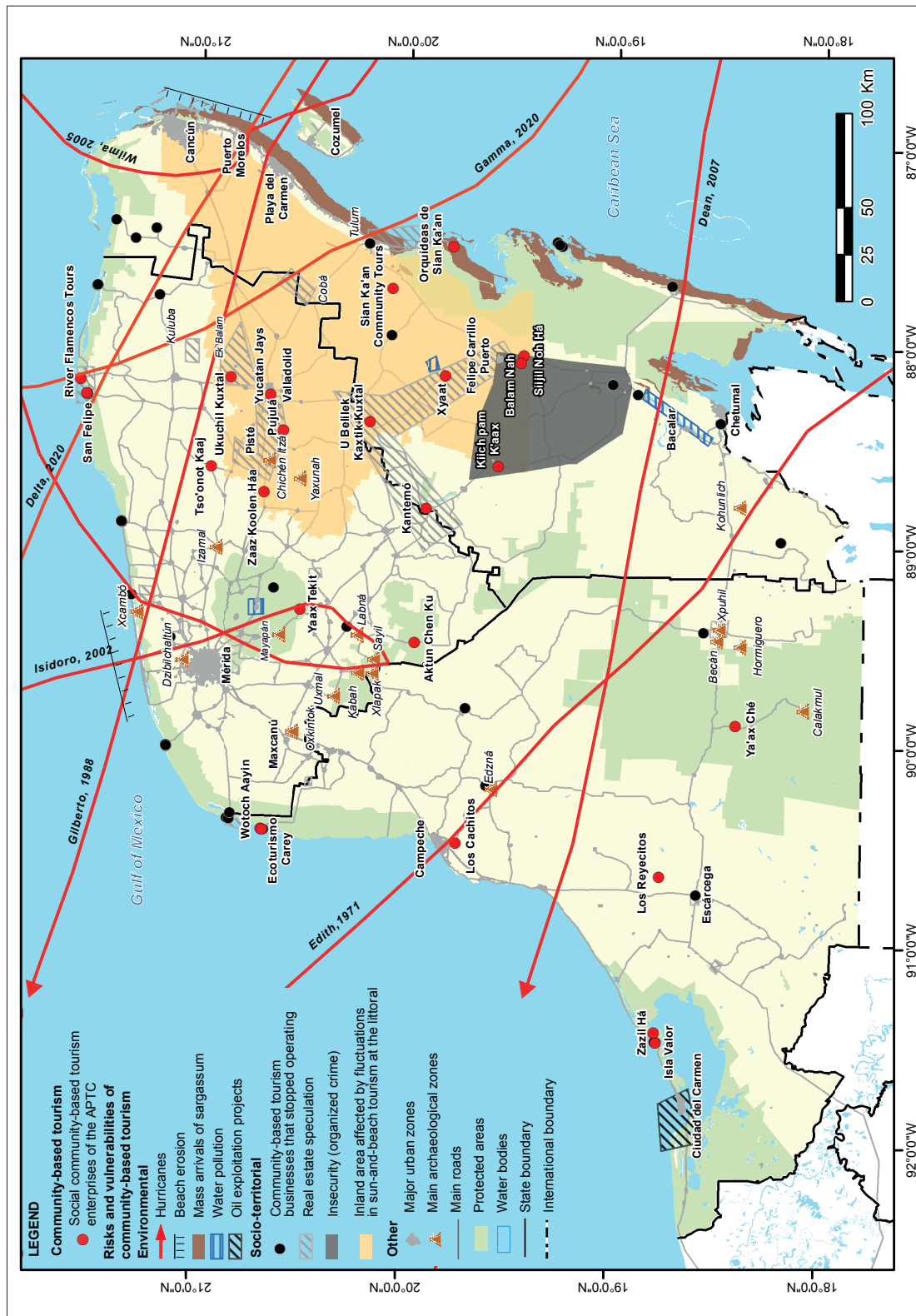


Figure 2. Types of vulnerability facing community-based tourism in the Yucatan peninsula. Source: Compilation by Alejandro Montañez-Gustinianovic, 2020.

## Strategy 2. Economic Pluriactivity

Living in a stony, soil-poor territory, with no rivers, and heavily dependent on the randomness of rainfall, the Yucatecan Mayans developed a complex farming system based on managing biodiversity. Such system allowed them to build up, under inhospitable tropical conditions, a great culture that thrives until today. Such farming system is based, in addition to managing biodiversity and like many other *campesino* practices, on a combination of productive strategies carefully tailored to specific spaces and times: the slash-and-burn *milpa* in crop fields, the knowledge and management of the forest successional stages, the gathering of forest products for multiple uses such as firewood, construction materials, forage, food and medicinal plants, hunting, etc. The forest provides survival resources in times of drought or crop loss. This is supplemented by backyard farming where vegetables and fruit trees are grown, and domestic animals are raised. Beekeeping has been practiced since pre-Columbian times and remains as an essential activity in Yucatán that makes use of vegetation flowering.

Since the introduction of monetary economy, this pluriactivity also includes manufacturing household utensils and garment turned into handicrafts for sale, paid jobs, temporary migration, community-based tourism, small retail businesses, and others. The temporality of fishing, driven by weather conditions and seasonal bans, made fishermen seek supplementary economic activities including cooperative tourism. This started as a supplementary activity, but quickly became dissociated from fishing, partly due to environmental policies mandating the use of boats specifically fitted for tourism that should not be used for fishing.

Undeniably, *milpa* farming has deteriorated severely as a result of the discontinuation of public policies aimed at supporting traditional agriculture. Nevertheless, this activity still plays a central role as a survival strategy for migrant *campesinos* that return to their communities in times of crisis (hurricanes, sargassum mass arrivals, deportations). Most tourism cooperatives have included tourism as part of an agricultural pluriactivity scheme that allows them to get monetary income by providing tourism services on a seasonal or weekend

basis. Members of cooperatives with high tourist inflow, such as Sian Ka'an Community Tours, no longer have the time to look after their *milpa* and hire workers to keep them. In coastal zones, the combination of tourism and fishing activities — a common practice in the early stages of projects — tends to disappear.

Our interviews showed that tourism cooperatives that have achieved a large visitor inflow and left pluriactivity to focus on the tourism business, reinvesting their profits in other commercial and service branches, are the ones facing the highest risk of succumbing to the lingering public health crisis.

## Strategy 3. Food Self-supply

The COVID-19 public health crisis is triggering an interesting twist closely related to strategy 2. Pluriactivity and self-consumption used to represent means of survival in times of crisis, with a trend to transition away from this type of economy towards the increasing incorporation of farmers into markets and wage labor. The serious current situation and the uncertain future are bringing about deep transformations that are not yet evident. Young people who had been engaged in tourism companies began turning to the *milpa*, something that would have been plainly rejected until just a few months ago. A noteworthy field-documented example is that of the Wotoch Aayin cooperative, an Environmental Management Unit for Moreletii crocodiles located in Isla Arena, northwest Campeche. Members of Wotoch Aayin exchanged experiences with farmers from inland tourism cooperatives to learn how to build *ka'anches* — a traditional Mayan cultivation system using raised beds as seedbeds or for growing vegetables, thus introducing this self-supply system into the sandy bar of the Campeche coast.

## Strategy 4. Supplementarity and Barter Schemes

The long-standing collaborative work between tourism cooperatives and the three APTC networks has built linkages that are being used at this time of economic crisis when building viable alternatives is badly needed. An example is the initiative put forward by the heads of the Isla Valor and Isla Pá-

jaros cooperatives — both located in Isla Aguada in the State of Campeche — who resumed their fishing activity in the Gulf of Mexico when tourism activities had to close down in early May 2020. They decided to set up a supportive barter scheme, which was not based on product value equivalence, but on actual needs. Thus, they contacted the Miguel Colorado tourism cooperative — located 100 km away from the port — and traded their seafood products for lemons, mangoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, and other produce. Following this example, a few weeks later members of the Wotoch Aayin and Ecoturismo Carey cooperatives (from Isla Arena, also in Campeche State) exchanged part of their fish catch with farmers from Halachó in the State of Yucatán (Figure 3).

### Strategy 5. Savings and Provision Funds

Cost reduction has been a cooperative management strategy commonly used during sanitary crises. In addition, in several cooperatives such as Zaaz Koolen Haa (located in Yokdzonot), or U Najil Ek Balam, savings and provision funds were operational during the first months of the crisis. Thus, basic food items were purchased and distributed to members and collaborators of Zaaz Koolen Haa, in Yokdzonot, during the first four months of the

crisis. Provision funds were used during the first five months of the crisis to continue paying wages to cooperative members who kept on working their shifts on duty at the U Najil Ek Balam tourism center in Ek Balam.

### Resistances: Shut Down of Towns and Intercommunity Conflicts

Not everything has been easy. The strategies described above have been developed within a context of great uncertainty and fear. Two resistance issues arose in community-based tourism that obliged tourism cooperatives to look for mediation and negotiation mechanisms amid the crisis. Such resistance issues included two supplementary processes: 1) some towns and communities shut down their borders to restrain the access of visitors, tourists, and even returning workers, in an attempt to prevent the entry or spread of the disease; 2) inter-community conflicts that arose from such shut-down initiatives.

Fear of contagion from the arrival of foreign or national tourists led many small ports and towns with tourism activity to unilaterally impose radical measures such as closing access roads to prevent the entry, not only of visitors, but also of migrant workers returning to their communities from tou-



Figure 3. Members of *Wotoch Aayin* and *Ecoturismo Carey* cooperatives from Isla Arena (State of Campeche) traveled to Halachó (State of Yucatán) to exchange seafood for milpa products. Picture: Israel Molas, 2020.



rism areas in the Caribbean. This was particularly noticeable in port towns where fishing coexists with second-home tourism, with a significant presence of North Americans and Canadians who usually spend six months of each year in these coastal towns. Thus, access to the port towns of Isla Arena (State of Campeche) and Sisal, Río Lagartos, and San Felipe (State of Yucatán) was shut down since April, thus preventing the arrival of tourists during the Easter holiday. Examples from inland communities where APTC tourism cooperatives operate include the Tekit town, where only one access road was left open with checkpoints to control passage, which was limited to residents; in the San Agustín cooperative, passage through the Xul town was also restricted.

These shut-down processes were imposed by local authorities — municipal presidents or commissioners, depending on the case — under pressure from the local population, and led to inter-community conflicts. The first, and highly publicized, conflict occurred in the San Felipe town where the entrance of returning migrant workers was impeded. The conflict was resolved by imposing a mandatory 14-day home quarantine to visitors, before being allowed to interact with neighbors. Conflicts and negotiations also arose between local populations and tourism-related sectors, including duck hunting guides from Sisal town, hotel and second-home owners, and others.

Agreements were eventually reached in most shut-down towns; in general, these agreements restrict the use of public spaces for tourism activities. This is important for tourism cooperatives as resuming their activity will require negotiation mechanisms and clear agreements with the rest of the community, so that they can resume operation under conditions that provide security and reassurance to the neighbors. That is, the mobility and interactions of visitors outside of the cooperative facilities will have to be monitored and controlled.

### **Opportunities for and Reconfiguration towards Deep Community-based Tourism — Would it be Possible?**

The still evolving COVID-19 public health crisis raises more questions than answers for adversely

impacted economic sectors. After six months of inactivity, the different economic sectors are exploring ways to resume activities without compromising the integrity of their workers and users, in the so-called “new normality.” The tourism sector is a particular case facing not only the current lockdown, but also an uncertain future as the economic crisis translates, on the one hand, into a low spending capacity of tourists and, on the other, into the need to enforce tight controls on the flow of visitors to avoid contagion during traveling. To date, the social APTC businesses have suffered a reduction of at least 50% in direct annual income versus 2019. These tourism businesses also benefit, directly or indirectly, other economic activities (guides, artisans, suppliers, producers, local transportation, etc.) that are also being deeply affected; however, no academic — much less governmental — efforts have been carried out yet to learn and evaluate the monetary losses and social repercussions.

Based on the new national and international guidelines for travel and tourism activities during the sanitary crisis and under a post-pandemic scenario, and taking into account the figures and upward trend of alternative tourism modalities (the fast-growing niche tourism sector in the past decade; SECTUR, 2017; UNWTO, 2019), we believe that, due to its preference for travelling in small groups to relatively isolated places, community-based tourism may be one of the tourism modalities with the highest potential for growth and consolidation in the coming years. However, given the overall need to reinvent the tourism offer to fit the post-pandemic scenario, we also foresee two further issues that may emerge or be exacerbated: sham community-based tourism by corporate tourism companies, which has nothing to do with the principles and ethics of this tourism modality (Delisle and Jolin, 2008; Schéou, 2009), and explicit and deliberate attempts to co-opt and privatize social enterprises that have been genuinely carrying out the activity out of real vocation (Jouault, García de Fuentes and Rivera, 2015).

To a large extent, this has to do with the huge conceptual and practical gaps that still exist — both in the academic literature and in tourism management models — about the features that distinguish

community-based tourism from other tourism forms and the internal constitutive attributes that would allow delineating key variants or classes within community-based tourism (Cabanilla, 2018), although the use of the term “community-based tourism” has been on the rise lately.

Thus, in this coincidence of conjunctural opportunity and opportunistic threat, we believe it is vitally important to make a theoretical effort to differentiate what we would call (a) ‘conventional community-based tourism’ that can be carried out by both social enterprises and various simulation formulae or interventions by private companies that promote community offers but with no true social coherence, from (b) ‘deep community-based tourism’, whose ethical and operational features are grounded on the deep motivation of the offer,

that is, attracting, through horizontal relationships, a type of tourist that is truly committed to learn about local contexts following the pace and logic set by the realities of social enterprises rather than by its own expectations, stereotypes, and normative visions projected and imposed from outside (Table 1). However, beyond this analytical exercise, many social enterprises are currently operating with features of both types of community-based tourism.

We carried out a second conceptual exercise aimed at delineating a typology of the offer that would fit and facilitate the adoption of the differential attributes and features of deep community-based tourism. As has been widely documented, the Yucatan peninsula is a biogeographical and cultural region where the Yucatecan Mayan people

Table 1. Main features differentiating conventional community-based tourism from deep community-based tourism.

Features	Conventional community-based tourism	Deep community-based tourism
Travel motivation	Usually associated with having an experience as part of a conventional tourism trip or for a highly specialized elite.	Deep motivation for and interest on the cultural, geographic, and ecological spaces to visit, as well as a commitment to new ways of life, including new forms of tourism
Tourist type	Targets high-spending international tourism, not necessarily having detailed knowledge on the local environments to visit	Seeks to meet both recreational and learning needs of local, regional, national, and international visitors, opening up new tourism niches
Visitor-host relationship	Usually through tour-operators or travel agencies that establish contractual, vertical relationships with communities	Mainly direct relationship or through solidarity networks, where visitors and hosts share horizontal experiences and fairly exchange resources for services
Visit duration	A few hours or even a full day of activities, but usually no overnight stays	A few days according to the local timeframe to learn about and enter into the community and regional life context
Tourism dynamics	Community and domestic dynamics, geographic spaces, and local knowledge are shown often in a stereotyped fashion according to pre-set tourism scripts or to meet the preconceived expectations of visitors	Delving into the spaces, relationships, practices, knowledge, beliefs, and community and domestic rhythms in a realistic, in-depth, and critical manner, beyond a performance.
Tourism outcome	Shallow, mediated interactions that convey conventional aesthetic visions of local cultures and environments	Greater knowledge of community life spaces and ecological environments, as well as awareness of the local challenges and issues, which can lead to supportive relationships

— through various historical processes — have preserved and shaped one of the greatest biocultural heritages of Mexico and mankind, as well as highly diverse, multifunctional rural means and ways of life (García, 2000; Barrera-Bassols and Toledo, 2005; Toledo et al., 2008; Terán and Rasmussen, 2009; Rivera-Núñez, 2020). Thus, we believe that rather than submissively adopting the stereotypical offer of the “Mayan experience” prescribed by tourism corporations (e.g., Grupo Xcaret) or expedition tour operators (e.g., Alltournative), the great heritage wealth of tourism is found — inherently and organically — within the rural communities themselves, in their daily dynamics, historical legacy, and surrounding geographic and ecological environment.

We summarized our typology proposal in seven offer types that, we believe, could frame a vision of deep community-based tourism grounded in the biocultural heritage of the Yucatan peninsula in

general and the Yucatecan Mayan people in particular: rural livelihoods, gastronomy and culinary art, nature and landscape, rituals and festivities, ethnoecology, ethnohistory, and gender perspective (Table 2). The revitalization of local practices and knowledge by social tourism businesses is particularly important in this tourism modality and its offer types. It also emphasizes the retention of young people in rural territories through their involvement in economic activities and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, with an assertive — rather than prescriptive — approach to gender. This tourism approach should be truly capable of eliciting the learning, awareness, and empathy of visitors towards rural and indigenous ways of life and their valuing of local ecological environments.

Those who venture to visualize the new configuration of post-pandemic tourism notice that the distinctive severity of the current tourism cri-

Table 2. Types of offer and features that must be consolidated to transition towards a deep community-based tourism in the Yucatan peninsula.

Offer	Spaces	Activities	Revitalization of local practices and knowledge by social enterprises	Experiences, learning, and awareness acquired by visitors
Rural livelihoods	Agriculture, forestry, fishing, beekeeping, livestock ranching	Sowing and harvesting the <i>milpa</i> , gathering in the forest, beekeeping, forestry production, artisanal fishing, livestock ranching practices	Opportunity to involve young people in tourism entrepreneurship, and to retain them through productive activities	Raising awareness about pluriactivity, rural work, and food production
Gastronomy and culinary arts	Kitchens, family orchards, forests	Food provisioning and conservation, cooking Mayan dishes, learning Yucatecan cuisine	Rescue and intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge	Experience and learning about culinary resources and local gastronomy
Nature and landscapes	Forests, cenotes, lagoons, beaches, coral reefs, estuaries and wetlands, caves, wildlife	Guided tours, camping, specialized wildlife observation, photographic hunting, catch-and-release fishing, caving, thematic diving, free swimming, sky observation	Conserving and safeguarding environmental resources and services	Valuing the natural heritage of rural and indigenous communities

Tabla 2. Continúa.

Offer	Spaces	Activities	Revitalization of local practices and knowledge by social enterprises	Experiences, learning, and awareness acquired by visitors
Rituals and festivities	Temples, ritual sites, sacred mountains, patron saint festivals, cemeteries	The Mayan cosmovision, traditional and religious celebrations, ceremonial clothing and food	Perpetuation and revival of ceremonial practices and community celebrations, spiritual and religious village festivals	Valuing the symbolic heritage of rural and indigenous communities
Ethnoecology	Forests, coasts, seas, coral reefs, wetlands, estuaries, wildlife	Local ecological knowledge, local names of plants and animals, medicinal uses of plants	Rescue and intergenerational transmission of local ethno-knowledge and practices	Experience and learn about local ethno-knowledge and practices
Ethnohistory	Archaeological zones, <i>haciendas</i> , chicle and copra plantations, forestry stands, salt mines	Visits to government- and community-run archaeological zones, archaeological diving, colonial infrastructure, historical narrative of productive activities and wars of the Mayan people	Deepening the historical memory and defense of community roots	Valuing the historical heritage of rural and indigenous communities
Gender perspective	Households, family orchards, workshops	Manufacturing crafts and textiles, raising domestic animals, maintenance and use of family orchards	Recognition of livelihoods and domestic activities that <i>campesino</i> and indigenous women carry out	Experience and appreciation of the role of women in the local economy and in daily sustenance in the countryside

sis — as opposed to the multiplicity of crises that this activity has, *de facto*, experienced — provides a unique opportunity to critically rethink the way of doing tourism. A first interesting feature of the recovery of the tourism sector is that it is expected to take place in a staggered manner encompassing three major stages: first, domestic travel within the same micro-regions; secondly, regional travel within the same State or neighboring States; finally, long-distance travel, across national and international destinations. The first reactivation stage is already taking place, mostly driven by local tourists who travel for a few (1–5) days, usually by car, to nearby destinations that have succeeded in disseminating the health security protocols imple-

mented. One of the key drivers for the reactivation of ‘proximity’ tourism is the aim to reduce exposure during long trips and as part of large crowds during visits and stays. Thus, rural spaces and open natural environments are the main destinations. This tourism motivation is largely influenced by what Gledhill (2005) called the social representation of rurality as cultural and geographic spaces of greater tranquility and lower exposure to risks, a scenario exacerbated by the current health reality.

Thus, we believe that the current public health crisis offers a real opportunity for the ‘daily’ and ‘domestic’ forms of tourism with deep community base (under the logic and types of offer proposed in this study) to thrive and consolidate as a coun-



terweight to mass tourism schemes. The concern of travelers for health security, their search for isolated rural and natural spaces, and their interest in not mass-marketed trips (Espinoza, Llanccaman & Sandoval, 2014) fit neatly with — and provide feedback to — the learning by rural communities of the need to embed tourism activity as part of the *campesino* economic pluriactivity, beyond hyper-specialization. This is possible by valuing those tourists interested in learning about rural ways of life and local ecological environments, as neatly expressed in the following account by a member of one of the APTC cooperatives in the Yucatan Peninsula:

*Our dream is that at least half of our visitors are local. In our experience, it is more difficult to serve locals than foreigners. As a cooperative, we want to contribute to creating a new tourism model, a form of daily tourism in which not only the host adjusts itself to meet the visitor's needs but also where the visitor has to adjust itself, and where the most important thing is the intercultural dialogue.*

Cooperative *Yaax Tekit*

## CONCLUSIONS

Every crisis provides opportunities for change. The months-long inactivity that the COVID-19 public health contingency has caused is making social community-based tourism enterprises of the Yucatan peninsula rethink the way they carry out their activities. As we have shown in this study, many of them are revaluing their pluriactivity, and it will be difficult for them to focus again on tourism hyper-specialization. We believe this represents an excellent opportunity to accompany social enterprises in the process of envisioning new tourism configurations that are better articulated with their rural means and ways of life. The horizon that we perceive, based on our long experience walking alongside social enterprises, is committing to the scheme of 'deep community-based tourism' outlined above. We believe that both the reflexivity of social enterprises and the new motivation and

travel modalities that tourists will seek, set the stage for reconfiguring the sector. However, in addition to the technical-academic support that we have provided, and will continue providing, the political will of the three government levels for a well-guided reactivation of community-based tourism will be crucial. Community-based tourism is still part of the Mexico long-forgotten by public policies, as shown by the lack of sanitary certification schemes *ad hoc* for rural tourism contexts that should be issued by the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR, for its acronym in Spanish) or its State-level counterparts.

It will be essential that community-based businesses are fully prepared with a sanitary response to guarantee a minimum risk of infection for potential tourists, taking into account that the geographic context of rurality and open natural environments are intrinsic factors that contribute to reduce risk. Thus, it is worth reflecting on processes for certification and capacity building on good sanitary practices that start from the own community context rather than from hegemonically and vertically thought processes issued from a distant consultancy firm or government office, with little or no information on the local context and poorly fitted to the reality of most of these social businesses. Community-based tourism may be a growing option for many tourists in the post-pandemic scenario, but it cannot seek validation by "copying and pasting" from urban or sun-and-beach tourism. On the contrary, community-based tourism has the conditions to privilege quality over quantity in terms of both tourist inflow and services.

On the other hand, those social enterprises of community-based tourism that have maintained pluriactivity schemes are the ones best adapting to the pandemic. This contrasts with the modernizing vision that favors super specialization in all areas and where community-based tourism is seen as a replacement for an undervalued agricultural activity. Thus, the crisis has worsened in cooperatives that exchanged their initial primary activity for a considerable economic income from attracting large numbers of tourists, and intra-community problems have started to surface. In contrast, social enterprises that have had tourism

as a complementary activity are managing — after more than six months of the pandemic — to stay with fewer problems. This leads to rethinking the model towards promoting our proposal for a deep community-based tourism. In order to survive and remain in the long term, the communal mode of tourism must undoubtedly be embedded in the rural way of life.

Among the strategies for containing the pandemic, one of the most widely adopted is the accelerated digitization of work centers by promoting actions such as telecommuting (home office), the use of online purchase services, and digital marketing strategies to continue being present among service providers and potential customers. These digital tools have become vital for any type of activity but pose great challenges for the community-based tourism sector, given the digital divide existing in rural areas due to the lack of stable internet connection and the low, or even inexistent, capacities in information technology management. The current public health contingency offers an excellent opportunity for young people — who can more easily approach digital technologies — to become involved, and lead the way, in addressing the challenges facing the sector in terms of dissemination, promotion, and marketing, and the need to offer at least minimum connectivity conditions to tourists.

The crisis also provides the conditions to rethink the networks of community value and, in general, a geographically localized economy. That is, to strengthen the kilometer-zero strategy: to produce and locally consume an increasingly higher percentage of food and non-food products. So far, cooperatives use very few local inputs to prepare dishes or drinks in restaurants and dining rooms, and in the supply of other products such as handicrafts and traditional garments. Linking the local production from the *milpa*, vegetables, fruits, and handicrafts with their use for supplying tourism cooperatives should be one of the main objectives of the post-pandemic reconfiguration of the sector. Guidance and technical and academic support will be essential in this work.

Finally, maybe the most difficult change to achieve but, at the same time, the most relevant in terms of the sanitary and environmental crises

currently faced at global scale, is setting limits on human hypermobility. Tourism is one of the most influential factors on the increase of long-distance travel, which has been recently exacerbated by low-cost flights (Lee et al., 2009; Brown et al., 2020). A shift of scale in tourism activity to prioritizes traveling within local and regional environments over national and international travels, is necessary. We are talking about a more socially inclusive domestic tourism where all sectors, including indigenous populations, can enjoy the biocultural heritage free from prejudices and inaccessibility barriers. Beyond the individual decision of choosing a destination, community-based tourism, given its scale (small groups), relationship with nature, and delivery of economic benefits directly to communities through social enterprises, will be key for the tourism consolidation of rural Mexico. Although not essential, it would be desirable to incorporate political will for promoting deep community-based tourism in the public agenda and government budgets, but not as a government assistance mechanism, but as the trigger for developing true endogenous capacities to respond to crises and economic and socio-territorial reorganization processes. Would this be possible?

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