

## COMMUNITY WORLDVIEWS AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Rosa María Velázquez-Sánchez<sup>1</sup>  
Jesús Gómez-Velázquez<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Mexico is widely recognized by the international tourism due to its natural and cultural attractions with coastal, ecotourism and community tourism destinations. There are several community tourism destinations in the southeast region of the country and mainly in Oaxaca State, which main attraction is its cultural heritage. In the northern highlands region of Oaxaca, where most of the indigenous groups are located, it is common to find a pre-Hispanic worldview based on the relationship with the earth and in this region is where the largest number of community tourism destinations is located. The community tourism lies in the appreciation of the natural environment in coexistence with the culture of the local inhabitants. However, the Mexican tourism policy has oriented the growth of tourism in indigenous communities with a homogeneous model based on the construction of cabins with modern elements and without considering the community worldview. In this research, the elements of the community worldview that relate to the conservation of cultural and natural heritage in the development of tourist destinations were analyzed qualitatively with the use of in-depth interviews with key informants. The results provide indicators of community worldview that explain the preservation of culture and can contribute to establish the bases for the development of sustainable tourism destinations in indigenous communities.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Worldviews, Sustainability, Culture, Indigenous Communities.

**JEL Codes:** Q01, Q26, Q28.

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**Citation :** Velazquez-Sanchez, R.M. & Gomez-Velazquez, J. (2020). Community Worldviews and Heritage Conservation in the Development of Tourist Destinations, *Review of Socio- Economic Perspectives*, Vol 5(4), 141-150.

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**Article Type:** Research / Original Article  
**Application Date:** 11.09.2020 & **Admission Date:** 17.11.2020  
**DOI:** 10.19275/RSEP101

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<sup>1</sup> Universidad Autónoma "Benito Juárez" de Oaxaca, Mexico  
ORCHID ID: 0000-0001-5442-7243  
E-mail: romavesa205@yahoo.com.mx

<sup>2</sup> Instituto Politécnico Nacional (Mexico)  
ORCHID ID: 0000-0002-6188-7464  
E-mail: agame\_velasquez@hotmail.com

## 1. Introduction

The cultural richness of Mexico is shown in each of its 68 indigenous peoples. In the southeastern region there are 31 groups and particularly in Oaxaca there are 14 ethnic groups: Chatinos, Chinantecos, Chocholtecos, Chontales, Cuicatecos, Huaves, Ixcatecos, Mazatecos, Mixes, Mixtec, Tacuates, Triquis, Zapotecs and Zoques with a whole population of 819,725 inhabitants distributed in 570 municipalities (CDI - National Institute of Indigenous Peoples, 2019).

Oaxaca is divided into eight regions. In the northern highlands region there is located the largest number of tourist destinations developed under the Mexican Tourism Policy, where the "Pooled Towns Route" (Ruta de los Pueblos Mancomunados) highlights. The Mexican tourism policy argues that the development of tourist destinations based on the construction of tourism infrastructure in indigenous communities will allow economic development.

However, the development of tourist destinations in indigenous communities has only contemplated the economic development, leaving out the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage. The Mexican model on which the development of tourist destinations is based contemplates the construction of cabins with a "homogeneous type of wood and modern construction and infrastructure elements" for the comfortable lodging of the visitors, which unfortunately are built in the best spaces for landscape contemplation to increase the visitors attraction, neglecting the impact on the environment as well as the cultural elements.

The environmental impact caused by the development of the tourist destinations in indigenous communities and the exclusion of preservation actions for the culture have caused problems among the inhabitants and some disputes have led to social and environmental vulnerability by the deterioration of the natural and cultural heritage.

Some scholars from indigenous communities such as Díaz Gómez (2004) and Martínez Luna (2013) have analyzed the community worldview in the social construction of these communities and have defined the elements of community culture within the Commonality concept (Comunalidad).

On the other hand, De Witt et al (2016) have explained the environmental behavior patterns throughout the worldviews based on the cultural cognition theory (Kahan 2012). However, to date there has not been a study that analyzes the relationship between the particularities of the indigenous community worldviews and the preservation of the natural heritage.

In this paper, the towns that integrate the "Pooled Towns Tourist Route" in the Northern Highlands of Oaxaca were considered to analyze how the worldviews of the community inhabitants effects the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage in the development of their ecotourism destinations.

## 2. Literature Review

In the review on the study regarding the community culture of the northern highlands region of Oaxaca, Díaz-Gómez (2004) developed an explanation of the oral-based indigenous knowledge through the ethnographic method on which the “communality” (Comunalidad) raises as a concept to understand these communities dynamics and worldview. The Communality explains the coexistence of the indigenous communities within their territory based on this non-written expression and understanding of the ways of community organization, the identification of the authorities as an element of social service and the indestructible and eternal link of belonging to the earth and place of birth (Martínez-Luna, 2003).

The elements that support the commonality in the indigenous peoples are based on their worldview and self perception at the territory they inhabit and which they belong to, their language, the annual holiday and the traditional organization based on the decision making by the community assembly as part of their identity and sense of belonging (Martínez-Luna, 2003).

This philosophical interpretation of the non-written knowledge has been taken as a base for a first mention of the community worldview under the “communality” approach. Velázquez-Sánchez et al (2013) developed the commonality indicators through the analysis of community sustainability in the Mexican communities with ecotourism destinations. Then, they developed the economic and environmental indicators of these indigenous communities with ecotourism (Velázquez Sánchez, Ramos Soto, & Gómez Velázquez, 2015).

On the other hand, the New Environmental Paradigm has been the theoretical base for the understanding of the human – environment relationship. This theoretical base integrates an approach, which relates the changes in environmental attitudes, values, and behaviors to the changes in the sociocultural systems (Arcury, 1986).

As the environmental, social and economical variables can represent risks, the human perceptions to several variables have been analyzed based on the Cultural Cognition Theory (Kahan 2012) as well as the Cultural Theory of Risk (Douglas & Wildaysky, 1982) under the premise that the individuals beliefs about societal dangers that reflect and reinforce their commitments to particular visions of the ideal society (Kahan, 2012). This theoretical base allowed De Witt et al (2016) to develop a tool for the identification of the worldviews regarding environmental variables. The beliefs and behaviors for climate concerns establish the worldview approach for a traditional, modern, postmodern or integrative category De Witt et al (2016).

The understanding of the worldview patterns in the indigenous communities with tourism projects with an environmental approach (ecotourism or adventure tourism) can explain the actions that lead to the specific behaviors of people when they belong to this common group. In this case, there are several particularities within the community worldview that are not contemplated yet and need to be understood to link the actual theory to the particularities of the context.

### 3. Methods

This study was developed in the in the indigenous communities of the northern highlands of Oaxaca, Mexico with ecotourism projects. These ecotourism destinations are characterized by the appreciation of natural landscapes located in indigenous communities. These communities have organized themselves for the tourist development for common welfare within “The Pooled Towns Route” including the ecotourism destinations of Benito Juárez, La Neveria, Cuajimoloyas, Llano Grande, Latuvi, Lachatao, Amatan and Yavesia. This region of Oaxaca, Mexico is the origin of the reformulation of the Commuality concept by Díaz Gómez (2004) and by Martínez Luna (2002).

The approach of this study comes to retake the tool to “map” the worldviews by De Witt et al (2016) and the community sustainability elements from commuality described and operated by Gómez Velázquez, Velázquez Sánchez, Morales Santiago, & Pérez Delgadillo (2016) to relate both variables and give and perform the theoretical base in the local context. To develop this research, it was necessary to carry out a qualitative stage in order to review the categories of Community Worldview and Conservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage. First of all, for the identification of the key informants, they were identified based on their participation in the community assembly, in the municipal government and in the participation in the development of the tourism project and the sample was defined from the total number of inhabitants among those involved with the tourist practice. The in-depth interviews were applied for the data collection tool and allowed sporadic opening in the conversation without limits and without a specific guide. The provided data was analyzed through the content elements suggested by the phenomenology analysis and then, for the identification of the categories with Atlas Ti program to review the relevance or contrast with the findings of Gómez Velázquez et al (2016). 6 in-depth interviews were conducted with the same number of key informants, two in each of the eight communities from “The pooled towns route”. The interviews were structured to identify the main elements of the worldview elements and those of conservation of the natural and cultural heritage from their position as members of the community to their perspectives about the establishment of the cabins and the tourism project.

The qualitative results allowed to define the categories of the community worldview variable: The territory they inhabit and share, the traditional organization elected to fulfill the service to others, the party in its relation with the offering to the land and the indigenous language as the means of oral communication with the earth. The categories that were formed with the qualitative analysis for the conservation variable of the natural and cultural heritage were: The belonging to the community, the meaning related to the Mother Nature, the interpretation as a living being, the natural relationship with the planting cycles, the relationship with the life cycle and the relationship with the cosmos.

For the operational definition of the variables, the Integrative Worldview Framework (IWF) was taken as base with its categories: Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology, Anthropology and Societal View (De Witt et al, 2016). Then, the “pillars” of the communities in “commuality” defined the community worldview shift with the Territory, Traditional organization, Social Celebrations and Indigenous Language (Martinez-Luna, 2013) categories in order to adapt the theoretical tool for the perceptions in the local context.

For the interpretation of heritage conservation, there were categories related to the community belonging, such as the respect for the meaning of the Mother Nature, interpretation as a living being, respect for the natural relationship with the planting cycles, the relationship with the life cycle and their relationship with the cosmos also found within the communality transcripts (Martinez-Luna, 2013). Then, the community worldview was operationally defined as a variable composed of categories: The territory they inhabit (Anthropology), the traditional organization (Axiology), the social celebrations (Ontology), the indigenous language (Epistemology) and the Sense of Belonging (Societal View). The heritage conservation variable was also treated as a variable composed by the following categories: The meanings related to the Mother Nature, the interpretation as a living being, the natural relationship with the planting cycles, the relationship with the life cycle and its relationship with the cosmos.

Within the identified categories of community worldview and heritage conservation variables, 9 indicators were developed to design the 57 items for the Community Worldview variable and 10 indicators and 40 items for the Conservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage output variable. The Reliability Test after dimension reduction of the factors of both variables by means of factor analysis by principal components and varimax rotation, the reliability test carried out a Crombach's alpha of 8.1.

The factors of the community worldview variable were analyzed in their correlation with the output variable of conservation of the natural and cultural heritage to express the understanding of the ecotourism development from the community worldview and relate it with the conservation actions of their natural and cultural heritage.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The results defined a Community Worldview construct by The Pooled Towns Route in the Northern Highlands Region of Oaxaca, Mexico under the adaptation of following the categories for the proper understanding in the local context based on De Witt et al (2016) proposal:

- Territory (Anthropology): Through the manifestation of the significant experiences of the territory that represents the earth that gives life, provides food, shelter and shrouds – relationship to nature and context.
- Traditional organization (Societal View): This category was mainly expressed by the participation of the interviewees in traditionally and historically determined positions and by those who, due to the new times, are assigned according to the cultural ancient social structures – Society processes.
- Social Celebrations (Ontology): It is the category that defines the syncretism between the pagan commemoration aimed at gratitude to the natural elements and the imposition of Christianity imposed by Catholicism and that give rise to the commemoration that identifies the community – Metaphysical beliefs and meanings.

- Indigenous language (Epistemology): This category that represents the oral expression as the basis of the culture and identity of indigenous communities – Rationality and knowledge.

- Sense of Belonging (Axiology): The category of what they define as the “sharing facts” which they manifest through their beliefs, their origins as an integrated group, the validity of their ancestors thinking, the permanence of their legends, the transmission of their history as part of their expressions with the nature – Community values and morality.

For the Heritage Conservation Variable, the inhabitants of the “Pooled Towns Route” in the Northern Highlands of Oaxaca, Mexico defined the following categories from their worldview and words:

- Nature as a mother: It is the expression that defines the meaning and significance of the earth where they inhabit as a living being that has an equivalence to the meaning of the mother.

- The life cycle: Respect for the cycles and their relation to life and death as a similar with the sowing and harvest, with the earth and the cosmos.

- The earth as a living being. The nature and the beings that inhabit it, the forest, the plants, the trees, the birds and other inhabitants are living beings that share a common territory.

In the analysis of the constant oral expressions, the categories matched perfectly according to the common ways of meaning in all of the communities in the Pooled Towns Route. Then, the worldview as a construct can define “the communality” in an adapted form as the community worldview.

These expressions were expressed in terms of the importance of the forests, for the community, in the care of the animals, plants and the river. The importance of knowing the plants they use to heal as the elders did since several generations and the respect they show with the earth when it is time to prepare the land, when it is time to plant and harvest, but mainly when it is time to thank the earth. So, the natural heritage represented by the nature, and the cultural heritages represented by the traditional elements are themselves a construct from the oral communication and worldview of indigenous communities expressed in the tourist destinations operation. The resulting categories of these analyses are shown in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Categories identified for the Community Worldview construct and those by Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation.

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Category</i>
<i>Community Worldview</i>	<i>Territory (Anthropology)</i>	<i>Traditional Organization (Societal View)</i>	Social Celebrations (Ontology)	Indigenous Language (Epistemology)	Sense of Belonging (Axiology)
<i>Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation</i>		The Nature as a mother	The Life Cycle	The Earth as a Living Being	

The factor analysis by principal components was performed 4 times to select the factors and to reduce the items number. At the beginning, a non-significant contamination was observed, so the factors were purified twice and thrice.

The factor analysis shows the commonality of the items and the accumulated variance under the principal components criterion and varimax rotation to observe the grouping of the factors. For the Community Worldview Variable, 5 factors with 30 validated items were clearly identified and matching with De Witt et al (2016) categories. For the Heritage Conservation variable, only 3 factors were identified with 29 Validated items with a difference of 5 items compared to the result of the pilot proof. The results of the factorial analysis are detailed in Table 2:

**Table 2.** Final Factors from validated items of both Community Worldview and Heritage Conservation variables:

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Factor</i>
<i>Community Worldview</i>	<i>Territory (Anthropology)</i>	<i>Traditional Organization (Societal View)</i>	Social Celebrations (Ontology)	Indigenous Language (Epistemology)	Sense of Belonging (Axiology)
	8	5	6	5	6
<i>Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation</i>		The nature as a mother	The life cycle	The earth as a living being	
		10	10	9	

After debugging the variables of the Community Worldview and Heritage Conservation, the reliability test was carried out by means of the estimation of Crombach's alpha. The result showed an alpha of 8.5 of reliability with a better result compared to the pilot test. With the findings of the qualitative analysis, a questionnaire was designed to perform the quantitative analysis in the following correlation of the variables for the hypothesis test.

The hypothesis test was performed based on Pearson's bivariate correlation test to observe the relationship between the Community Worldview and Heritage Conservation variables. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship (.979 \*\*) between the Community Worldview categories expressed by the inhabitants of the communities of Benito Juárez, La Neveria, Cuajimoloyas, Llano Grande, Latuvi, Lachatao, Amatan and Yavesia and the elements of Conservation of the Cultural and Natural Heritage. The results of Pearson's Bivariate Correlation are showed in Table 3.

**Table. 3** Pearson's Bivariate Correlation Worldview-Heritage Conservation

Correlations

		COMMUNITY WORLDVIEW	HERITAGE CONSERVATIO N
Communi ty Worldvie w	Pearson Correlation	1	,979**
	Sig.		,000
	N	35	35
Heritage Conservat ion	Pearson Correlation	,979**	1
	Sig.	,000	
	N	35	35

\*\* . The correlation is significant at 0,01 level (Two-tailed).

Source: Result of the analysis of the difference in means made with the SPSS program 20

The results showed that the Community Worldview elements are closely related with the Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage expressed by the inhabitants of the ecotourism destinations in the Pooled Towns Route of Oaxaca, Mexico. With this, the hypothesis was generally tested by confirming that the Community Worldview guarantees the Conservation of both natural and cultural heritage of the communities in the risk that the modern elements such as the provision of ecotourism services and facilities can represent.

## 5. Conclusion

The community worldview elements of the communities of Benito Juárez, La Neveria, Cuajimoloyas, Llano Grande, Latuvi, Lachatao, Amatan and Yavesia in the Northern Highlands Region of Oaxaca, Mexico were identified by the adaptation of the theoretical tool to map worldviews (De Witt et al., 2016) to the context variations of language, understanding and worldview itself. These findings allow showing that there is a great similarity between the categories proposed by De Witt et al (2016) and the beliefs and behaviors in the local context. It implies the understanding of the differences between indigenous groups to express their worldview about their natural and cultural heritage even with a great theoretical background such as the cultural cognition theory (Kahan, 2012). However, the results showed a coincidence with the theory in that the Community Worldview is a variable that can explain the environmental beliefs and behaviors of the indigenous group in the development of their ecotourism projects. As the way of seeing and conceiving the world is the fundamental for the permanence of indigenous groups it is also expressed in the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage in the presence of tourism development projects.

The results allow us to add a new perspective to the studies carried out by Gómez and Velázquez (2016) to consider the Community Worldview as a variable for the study of heritage conservation as well as for the particular considerations needed to develop following research on worldviews and environment. "The Community Worldview allows the Conservation of the Heritage in the indigenous communities with ecotourism destinations".

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this study refer to the theoretical discussion of the findings, which hope to be our next research paper. Then also, the worldview profiles provided by De Witt et al (2016) tool were not explored in this research yet.

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