

## USUMACINTA CANYON STATE PARK: SOCIAL TOURISM ALTERNATIVE

Manuela del S. Camacho Gómez, Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco  
Cecilia García-Muñoz Aparicio, Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco  
María del Carmen Ancona Alcocer, Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco

### ABSTRACT

*Alternative tourism represents an important source of income in Mexico. There are many potential sites remaining to be developed in the southeast of the country. Included in this group is the state park Cañón del Río Usumacinta, Boca del Cerro. This park is located in the municipality of Tenosique and is surrounded by indigenous populations of the Tzotzil, Chol, Maya and Zoqueg. The objective of this study is to carry out an integral diagnosis of socioeconomic and demographic conditions, and of nature in the region, to identify sites and strategies for tourism development in the area of the Cañón del Usumacinta state park. The study is non experimental as none of the variables described in the project were controlled or modified. Rather the study is trans-sectional as the data were recorded at a single moment in time. The objective is to characterize the phenomenon to provide alternatives or solution proposals (Hernández, Fernández, Baptista, 2006). The paper reports results of 129 interviews carried out with residents of areas adjacent to the Cañón del Usumacinta state park. The paper also identifies the ecotourism potential of the area. The findings of the study constitute a series of marketing ideas, useful in decision making with respect to the tourism development of the region.*

**JEL:** M21, M31

**KEY WORDS:** Cañón del Usumacinta State Park, alternative tourism, communal host, social marketing.

### INTRODUCTION

Mexico occupies an important position with respect to tourism offerings and demand, especially in the sun and beach segment. Alternative segments remain under development. The sun and beach sector has a positive impact in the Mexican economy. However a new focus should lead to planning and sustainable development of activities. Tourism options have become increasingly more diversified. In particular, sustainable tourism has the potential to create permanent and well paying jobs for individuals including the inhabitants of the areas developed for such tourism.

The Cañón del Usumacinta state park is a natural destination that covers approximately 25,000 hectares. It has outstanding scenic and landscape value, and important qualities that emphasize its potential as a natural resource. For this reason it was selected for inclusion in the state system of protected natural areas in June 2005 (Sistema Estatal de Áreas Naturales Protegidas). Considering its strategic importance for national development, state authorities have undertaken efforts for the area to be declared a refuge for wild flora and fauna. With this categorization it would be possible to access important sources of world financing that favor conservation and development strategies in protected areas.

The results obtained in this study and in those of other specialists indicate that the Cañón del Usumacinta (Boca del Cerro) state park has potential for ecotourism. It has a close relationship with nature protected, areas, and the social impact it has on the vulnerable groups that inhabit the area. The Quebec Declaration emphasizes that tourism is one of the most important sectors in the world economy. Its potential to reduce poverty is recognized, together with its contribution toward environmental protection and

threatened ecosystems. Ecotourism is based on the principles of sustainable tourism in economic, social and environmental terms. It is different with respect to its contribution to the conservation of the natural and cultural patrimony, and the inclusion of the local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, that contribute to social well being. It also provides travelers with an interpretation of the natural and cultural patrimony of the tourism destination. It lends special attention to independent travelers, as well as to organized circuits for small groups.

In a global context, cultural diversity is recognized because of the presence of indigenous communities that have preserved their customs and traditional practices. These customs and practices have proven to be sustainable throughout the years. Protected areas, rich in biodiversity and culture, are the home of populations that frequently live in poverty and lack minimum services like health, education, communications and infrastructure that are needed to access development opportunities. As a consequence, ecotourism represents an alternative source of income for local and indigenous populations and their culture, as well as for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources (OIT, 2006).

The results presented in this paper correspond to a project financed by the Fondo Mixto CONACyT and the government of the state of Tabasco. The paper is organized as follows: The literature review presents the background of tourism in Tabasco and the trends of alternative tourism. Next, the methods section describes the segments studied and emphasizes the inhabitants of six communities adjacent to the Cañón del Usumacinta. The research techniques used are presented, together with the design and dimensions of the applied instruments, and analysis techniques utilized. The results section presents the field data recorded for the segment of communal inhabitants. Finally, the conclusions present a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of designing and developing sustainable tourism projects that include social, cultural and economic development of community inhabitants.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism has been practiced throughout time and has evolved. Seguí (2006) noted the existence of a new science at the start of the XXI century called touristology. From the point of view of AMFORTH (Asociación Mundial de la Formación Turística y Hotelera), there is present need to analyze tourism from all points of view specifically considering its multidisciplinary nature. The term *tourism*, as Amaya (2006) noted, means different things in different cultures. In English speaking countries, the terms “travel industry” and “hospitality industry” are used apart from the word *tourism*. In Mexico, this term includes all meanings, whereas in English speaking countries it refers more to leisure travel. Thus, in the United States, a business trip is not considered tourism, while in Mexico one speaks of *business tourism*.

Álvarez and Espinosa (2008) stated that tourism constitutes one of the faster growing economic activities worldwide. According to Álvarez and Espinosa (2008), tourism has created a new culture in which growing environmental concerns are a strong factor. They encourage a new tourism with the goal of integrating with nature, consolidating international request for products with specific characteristics, and directed towards the very varied forms of this type of tourism, many of which have developed around protected areas. Tourism is no doubt following new lines directed towards the enjoyment of nature with a social focus. Álvarez and Espinosa (2008) stated the autochthonous culture of every territory is the result of humanized nature, where the individual not only creates objects that allow him to satisfy his material needs, but is constantly reproducing himself, enriching and diversifying his social relationships.

Tourism as a human activity has received little attention in social analyses. However, tourism from an integral point of view is the object of research, study and debate within various social sciences such as sociology, economy, anthropology, politics and geography. A multidisciplinary interest that converges around touristic activities may be seen. In this sense, nature tourism or ecotourism has been treated from

the perspective of landscape ecology, where geography, biology and architecture are combined. That is to say that landscape ecology analyzes the area and borders of ecosystems, particularly those that are influenced by human activities (Castillo & Panosso, 2010). Worldwide trends show marked interest in services that, together with market products, currently constitutes the axis of consumer and labor markets. In other words, a balance between commercial and social objectives is being sought through sustainability. Fenell (2002) stated that sustainable tourism leads to the application of sustainable development principles in the context of tourism. Salido *et al* (2009) pointed out that there are various definitions and focuses regarding sustainable tourism. Bringas and Israel (2004) pointed out that the idea of sustainable development is having an important impact on tourism activities. Together with the sun and beach sector, new forms of thinking and engaging in tourism are emerging, from which natural and cultural resources are used in a sustainable way. These new forms have been called “alternative tourism” by academics.

According to Pinkus (2010), ecotourism is incongruent with the social, economic and environmental impacts in the communities. Studies carried out in Quintana Roo, Campeche, Chiapas and other states of the Mexican Republic, as well as in other countries of the region such as Guatemala and Belize, have reached the same conclusion (Norris *et al.* 1999, Daltabuit *et al.* 2000, Barbosa 2006). Ecotourism must not create false expectations of its potential, but should complement the different productive activities of each community, depending on the real needs and environment where they are located. For ecotourism to be successful it must be incorporated into an integral plan of sustainable development that takes into consideration traditional community activities (Pinkus, 2010).

In this paper, Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) focuses on promoting the development of tourism that favors and balances social equity, natural sustainability and profit, with the purpose of satisfying needs of the host regions, tourism investors, people that provide tourism services and tourists, in order to protect, strengthen and guarantee future development opportunities (SECTUR/SEMARNAT, 2004:12, cited by Salido, Bañuelos, Romero, Romo, Ochoa, Rodica & Olivares).

### Tourism in Tabasco

The territory of Tabasco was a transit corridor for various migrations. Because of its geographical location, it was the commercial border between two great worlds of pre-colombian Mexico: the Maya and the Aztec. Since remote times, the abundance of water and natural resources have made Tabasco an ideal land for the establishment of human settlements. One of the oldest Mesoamerican civilizations, the Olmec, bloomed in these lands towards the year 1500 BC. They were followed by the Zoques, their possible descendants, who settled throughout the region. Later, the Mayas dominated the area and built many cities. The marvelous settlements that remain in Comalcalco, Pomoná and Reforma, and the Aztecs located further south in Cupilco are monuments to these civilizations.

In the context of these natural characteristics, tourism in the region has not been developed fully and its related activities have tended to be isolated. Business tourism has been the most prosperous, but other options such as alternative tourism have not been developed. This is surprising given the region is one of the richest in flora and fauna diversity. Moreover it has huge cultural potential that has accumulated throughout the history of the Mexican southeast. The government divides the state into two regions: the Usumacinta region and the Grijalva region, and subdivides it into five regions according to the location and the natural characteristics of each: the central region, Chontalpa region, wetlands, mountain region, and the region of rivers where the municipality of Tenosique is located.

Projects have been carried out to take advantage of adventure tourism in places like the caves Grutas del Coconá, the wetlands of Pantanos de Centla, the rivers Grijalva and Usumacinta, and the so-called Seven

Routes: Ruta Biji Yococt'an, Ruta del Chocolate, Ruta Villahermosa, Ruta Pantanos, Ruta Ríos, the mountain adventure route Ruta Aventura en la Sierra, and Ruta Olmeca Zoque.

### Ecotourism and Adventure Tourism Markets

Ecotourism is oriented to consumers that travel for interaction, knowledge and observation of nature, and seek to contribute to its conservation. It tends to take place in areas unaltered by man and usually includes activities aimed at understanding and cultural awareness (SECTUR n/d). Hernández and Gunhill (2006) suggest that sociocultural and environmental characteristics are important factors of the local identity, and that tourism activities frequently do not consider the fragility of the ecosystems or favor the wellbeing of the local inhabitants. In spite of the fact that tourism is considered an economic motor, it is also the source of environmental damage. San Martín and Salcedo (2007) stated that this activity has an important impact on social relationships, both in the places where it takes place and in the countries of the visitors. Thus, an ecotourism product requires the development of a strategic plan that includes attractive places and activities for the buyers, infrastructure, services providers and an optimum level of hostmanship on the part of the local population.

Among the main activities considered in an ecotourism product are the observation of the ecosystem, stars, flora (cacti and orchids), the geology and fossils. These services are characterized by a precise profile, as ecotourists and adventure tourists are different. Adventure tourists tend to be young people that travel mainly in couples (48%). Moreover 67% of these tourists are 25-45 years old. Ecotourists span a wider range of ages, with most 25-45 (42%) and 46-60 (26%) years of age who travel in couples (39%), groups (37%) and families (23%) (CESTUR, 2006).

The establishment of ecotourism and adventure tourism in Mexico is possible thanks to the wide range of activities that may be practiced, the great biological diversity and variety of places, and the existence of businesses that offer related services (SECTUR, 2001). According to data published by SECTUR (2006), the market segment to which these efforts are directed is both national and international. In the latter group, the United States represents 71% of the tourism market in Mexico. The ages of the national and international clients vary between 25 and 49 years, with Mexicans representing the younger group. Both groups have university educations (70 and 80%, respectively) (CESTUR, 2006).

The spending capacity of ecotourists is approximately \$40,000 pesos per month, equivalent to \$43,636 USD per year (CESTUR, 2006). With respect to adventure tourism, the market is made up of people that travel looking for achievements and challenging experiences presented by nature and excluding sports competitions. According to SECTUR (2001), the value of annual formal demand for ecotourism and adventure tourism activities is more than \$750 million pesos. The activities with the greatest potential to grow include the observation of ecosystems, scuba diving, river rafting, walking and mountain cycling.

### Social Marketing

From the marketing point of view, sustainable tourism represents a program that foresees and prevents problems that may crop up in a particular geographical area when the reception capacity is overloaded. Many social communities that depend directly on tourism are not coordinated efficiently with productive sectors. Sustainable tourism is characterized by constant and growing changes, and responds with prices, comfort and opportunities that attract tourists (Kotler, 2004).

The application of social marketing to alternative tourism may carry direct or indirect benefits to those that participate in the interactive processes, including the buyers, sellers and society on the whole. Through social marketing, one endeavors to determine and satisfy the needs and desires of the goal

market, the wellbeing of society through the health care of the consumers, and the preservation of the environment. Thus, its application increases the possibilities for businesses and organizations to obtain short, medium and long term benefits (CESTUR, 2006).

In order for social marketing strategies to be effective in alternative tourism, seven elements must be considered: to make each member of the business or organization aware; to identify and satisfy the needs and desires of the goal market; to conceptualize products or services that increase or preserve the wellbeing of the clients and society; to find purveyors that are familiar with the concept of social marketing; to follow laws and rules that are in force; to avoid a product or service from affecting the clients' health; to generate expectations that can be delivered or improved on, and not lie about competing groups (Thompson, 2006).

With respect to alternative tourism products, the goal is to understand the needs of the consumer as the main axis of commercialization strategies (Vera, 2003). For this reason, a constant monitoring and close communication with clients requires efforts on the part of the businesses and institutions that give the service, in order to provide a new level of value creation and differentiate one destination from other destinations. The objective is to transfer whole experiences to clients, as they are buying the promises and skills that they will get when they consume the products and services (Araujo & Clemenza, 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The general objective of the study is to carry out an integral diagnosis of the socioeconomic conditions and of nature in the region to determine the ideal sites and tourism development strategies in the area of the Cañón del Usumacinta state park. The study design was defined as non experimental as none of the variables described in the project were controlled or modified. The study is trans-sectional as the data were recorded at a single moment in time. It was descriptive as its objective was to characterize the phenomenon in order to provide alternatives and new proposals (Hernández, Fernández, Baptista, 2006).

Three segments were studied: 1) the people of 26 communal lands adjacent to the Cañón del Usumacinta state park, 2) the directors of travel agencies, business consultants, and employees of the national institute of anthropology and history (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) and local government deputies, and 3) national and international tourists.

People of the communal lands were selected from the six communities nearest the canyon in order to observe and identify the phenomenon in greater detail. Businessmen and employees selected were related to the tourism sector. National and international tourists were interviewed at strategic entrance points. The segments were classified as A (local population), B (businessmen and employees) and C (tourists). Of these segments, the results relative to Segment A are reported in this paper.

Three individually designed instruments were used, one for each segment. In the case of segment A, the instrument was structured with four dimensions (level of hostmanship, knowledge of the area, care of the environment and tourism potential) distributed in 25 questions. Eight general questions were also included of which four correspond to socio demographic variables such as age, sex, schooling and housing, and four to data on work and family income. The instrument was designed with multiple choice questions with five response alternatives. The questionnaire was applied as an interview to the people of the selected communities. The test period lasted almost one month, and a total of 129 questionnaires were collected. The details of the questionnaire and the definitions of each dimension are presented in Table 1. Analyses were carried out by hand and with the aid of other analysts, as the study was predominantly qualitative. Care was taken at all times to interpret the data considering the field observations.

**RESULTS**

After carrying out a physical inspection of the 27 localities, six of the most representative, both in terms of the population and of potential touristic development, were selected. In general, the field study was varied in order to obtain an integral diagnosis. A definition of proposals focused on specific segments that allowed the design and development of tourism products, and their commercialization from the social marketing point of view.

Table 1. Survey Specifications

Dimension	Definition	Questions
Level of hostmanship	It refers to the training and willingness of the communal people to receive the tourists that may arrive at their communities.	9.- Of the following, which two phrases best describe tourism for you? 10.- How well or badly prepared do you personally feel to deal with national or international tourists? 11.- What requirements must people satisfy to be able to provide a good service to tourists? 16.- Do you know what ecotourism is? 17.- Have you participated in any tourism activity? 18.- As part of the community, would you be willing to receive tourists that visit the Cañón del Usumacinta and its natural areas? 21.- Would you like to learn to design or make a traditional product? which? 22.- Up to how many tourists per day could you and your family attend to? 23.- Would you be willing to receive tourists in your house? 24.- If you would, how much would you charge them per day?
Knowledge of the area	It seeks to evaluate the knowledge of the people of the communities with respect to their geographical and cultural context.	1.- Do you know what touristic destinations there are in Tabasco? 2.- In your opinion, what is the main touristic attraction of Tenosique? 8.- What do you consider is best to receive an economic profit from the natural richness of the Cañón del Usumacinta? 20.- Do you know how to make a traditional product of the region?
Care of the environment	It evaluates the type of commitment that the communal people have towards the care of the environment.	5.- Of the following, who would you say is mainly responsible of caring and protecting the ecology and environment of the state? 6.- Of the following, which would you say is the most important ecological and environmental problem of the state? 7.- When someone lives in an area with Nature as important as that of the Cañón del Río Usumacinta, what activities should he carry out to care for it and economically profit from it? 14.- What relationship should there be between the economy and the ecology? 15.- In general terms, how much do you think that people like you and me worry about protecting and conserving the ecology and environment?
Tourism potential	It refers to the importance that the people of the communities give to the area of the Cañón del Usumacinta and the possible products they envision.	3.- To which tourism projects should economic resources be given in Tenosique? 12.- If you could decide on a tourism project in the area, what would you ask for as a benefit? 13.- What do you think of the tourism development in the area? 19.- What activities could you offer tourists? 25.- Would you be willing to participate in courses for training and formation in tourism? 26.- What would you be willing to do to make the Cañón del Usumacinta an attractive site for national and international tourism?

*This table presents the questions applied to inhabitants of the six communal lands adjacent to the Cañón del Usumacinta state park. The instrument was designed with four dimensions: level of hostmanship, knowledge of the area, care of the environment and tourism potential.*

The study provides data on the potential for development of alternative tourism in the region, an inventory of urban and rural fixed social capital, an inventory of urban and rural tourism accoutrement, and the touristic vocation and profile of the communal hosts. The diagnosis also identified strengths and weaknesses in the communities, with regard to tourism development.

Touristic Potential of the Cañón del Río Usumacinta State Park

To determine the touristic potential of the Cañón del Río Usumacinta, the study took into account the economic and development needs of the communities in the municipality of Tenosique, Tabasco, the natural beauty of the place, and the potential contribution to the objectives of the state’s tourism program (Programa Estatal de Turismo). The touristic potential of the area considers potential intercultural relationships derived from the touristic development of the area, in association with social relationships

maintained during the visitors' stay. In this context, the social responsibility of inhabitants of the potentially touristic area must be considered.

The activities most suitable for development, according to the preferences of the interviewed tourists, were walking along trails, riding and swimming in the rivers. Places that visitors choose to visit in Tabasco were mainly beaches and natural areas. This proves that the region may profit from its geographical location, climate and vegetation to establish tourism programs, projects and products. In addition to ecotourism and adventure tourism, the long term possibility of developing activities related to rural tourism, that would require adequate projects and investments, may be seen (Table 2). Under this perspective, both the tourist's knowledge about the Cañón del Usumacinta state park and the promotional activities that the municipality of Tenosique carries out regarding tourism to attract visitors to the area, play an important role.

Table 2: Preferred Place to Visit in Tabasco

OPTION:	ABSOLUTE	PERCENTAGE
Beaches	86	32%
modern cities	36	13%
ecotouristic parks	18	7%
colonial cities	27	10%
archaeological areas	34	12%
natural places	58	21%
others	14	5%
	<b>273</b>	<b>100%</b>

*This table presents the preferences of the tourists that arrive in Tabasco, with respect to places to visit during their stay. Touristic parks and natural areas total 28%, which means that approximately three out of ten visitors would seek options with alternative tourism activities.*

### Inventory of Urban and Rural Fixed Social Capital

Urban inventories include Tenosique, the municipal capital. It's infrastructure includes communications, gas stations, taxis and urban transport. Access routes and inter-municipal roads that connect the communities have faulty paving due to a lack of maintenance. Signs and signals are present a measure of order, although they are still insufficient and non competitive for the purposes of touristic activities. The municipality has a good telephone system that includes telephone booths that provide service to communities distant from the municipal capital, as well as special offices that provide service.

The examination of rural fixed social capital revealed the infrastructure and communications in the communities, except Redención del Campesino, do not include some basic services such as gas stations, regular passenger transport or other means of transportation like taxis. The network of roads leading to these communities are acceptable for traffic, although some are difficult to drive on. Access routes to the municipal capital Tenosique and on inter-municipal connections is not entirely acceptable with a combination of paved and dirt roads. Inhabitants of the communities tend to walk many kilometers, and then use basic transportation such as horses. These conditions do not seem to represent an obstacle for the establishment of alternative tourism products. According to the experts, such conditions are ideal for these activities.

The signs and signals that exist are basic and modest, but useful for starting programs and products of ecotourism and adventure tourism. Some houses have telephones or telephone booths. All the studied communities have a health care center and primary schools, as well as grocery stores where basic products can be bought.

Inventory of Urban and Rural Touristic Accoutrement

With respect to the urban inventory of tourism accoutrement (lodging, food, leisure and other complementary services), a variety of commercial places including restaurants, small eateries, taco restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, grocery stores, supermarkets, clothes shops, chemists, bank services, internet services and, although the exploration was preliminary, it was observed that the existing economic entities modestly provide the minimum services required by tourists. However, it was also noted that the availability of the two basic services, food and lodging, is insufficient and deficient. It is not easy to find a place to have breakfast. In contrast, there is a great diversity of places open at night offering a variety of dishes. Interestingly, no alcoholic beverages are sold, not even with meals.

The infrastructure, comfort and cleanliness of the hotels are seriously deficient for overnight stays. The time tourists stay in the municipal capital is short as people only pass by Tenosique. Visits seem to be limited to the archaeological area of Pomoná, which results in limited use of locality lodging services. In the rural areas, there is no infrastructure for lodging, food, leisure and other complementary services, however, the services expected by ecotourists are different from those required by conventional tourism.

Touristic Vocation

Touristic vocation in the area may be defined in many ways depending on the segment of the market to which products are directed. However, initially it may be defined as nature tourism considering the presence of natural touristic resources such as mountains, hills, ravines, canyons, caves, forests, wild fauna, rivers, streams and waterfalls. A second vocation may be defined as action tourism considering the opportunities there are to practice multiple activities of extreme sports, including kayak, tyrolean, rappel, caving, bungee jump, paragliding and motonautics. A third vocation would be relaxation tourism which uses natural beauty elements in a different way from nature tourism. Finally, rural tourism enables city people to interact with rural inhabitants, both in their daily work and in sharing their food and customs. The separation of vocations does not mean that the different products cannot combine aspects of the different vocations. They are separated only on paper for organization and analysis purposes.

Profile of the Communal Host and SWOT Analysis

Six variables related to care of the environment, economic activities, knowledge of the area, life styles, training and education were recorded for the profile of the inhabitants as potential hosts for tourists as is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Profile of the Communal Host

Environment	Economy	Knowledge of the area	Life style	Training	Education
Interest in caring for the environment.	They wish their community to develop economically.	Most don't know the most attractive areas in their municipality.	The life style of the communal inhabitants is unhygienic and gastrointestinal diseases are common.	They are aware of their weaknesses regarding the knowledge and abilities required by tourism.	They are untrusting, polite and educated.
They are not aware of the natural richness they have but wish to care for it.	They see in tourism an alternate source of work and improvement of their lives. Their main activity is in the primary sector.			They are willing to take integral training to become competitive. They wish to cooperate to be trained to attend to tourists.	Most studied primary or incomplete primary, and others are illiterate.

*The table describes the levels of hospitality and willingness of residents to establish or develop tourism products. Willingness to cooperate in projects and to train in activities of the sector were observed. These communal advantages could be employed usefully if they have project leaders that manage them with seriousness and respect that they deserve, as authentic owners of the natural richness that surrounds them.*



The study found potential for the design and start of tourism products. The Cañón del Río Usumacinta (Boca del Cerro) state park has enough natural attractions that are not fully employed usefully to warrant additional development. Several advantages and disadvantages of development, both exogenous and endogenous, were identified in Table 4.

Table 4: SOWT of the Cañón del Usumacinta (Boca del Cerro) State Park

Strengths	Opportunities	Weaknesses	Threats
There is a complete willingness of the inhabitants to train to receive tourists. There are very attractive natural areas with potential for ecotouristic development.	There is a definite coincidence among what is requested, is suggested and is offered in terms of ecotourism and adventure tourism activities.  An opportunity lies in the construction of part of the Guatemala-Mexico highway that will allow more tourists to pass by the municipality. This may serve to attract them to the area.  Changes in choice of sites, permanence and petition of services by tourists constitute an opportunity for the state of Tabasco, the municipality of Tenosique and the Cañón del Río Usumacinta state park. According to the world organization for tourism (Organización Mundial de Turismo), there are growing requests for alternative tourism worldwide. The official declaration of the Cañón del Usumacinta state park as a natural reserve.	Other adventure tourism projects have remained unfinished. That has disappointed the residents, as they feel cheated and their expectations have changed unfavorably.  Unsanitary conditions in the life style of the community residents.  The community residents are not ready to become hosts to tourists that visit their lands, as a result of their scarce contact with areas outside their places of origin and of their low or null level of studies. Most of the interviewed tourists came from the southeast, which proves that a greater promotion is needed in the central and northern states of Mexico. Promotion has not been sufficiently effective to attract tourists to this geographical area.  The pochó dance and Pomoná are the main known attractions. However, neither are competitive, the first because it has lost originality and quality and the second because it is not efficiently administrated and controlled.  Boating competitions in the Cañón del Usumacinta are no longer taking place. This has diminished interest in the municipality.	An insufficient structure for the development of tourism products.  The movement of illegal migrants from Central America and the resulting presence of military stop points in areas near the communities to be developed for tourism. The scarce presence of tourists in the municipality of Tenosique and the low commercial position of the place and its communities.  There are very few foreigners that seek alternative tourism services. They represent 3% of all tourists that visit the state. Knowledge and physical references to the state park on the part of tourists, business employees and directors, and local residents are very low. There are communities with residents that do not speak or understand Spanish which, although constituting an attraction to tourists, also limits training for tourism with a view to establish tourism products. Felling of forests and tropical forests, and pollution of aquifers and air obviously affect the environment and restrict the vastness of natural attractions. Almost half of the interviewed tourists showed no interest in knowing Tenosique and its adjacent areas, because of a lack of knowledge of its attractions. The constant slashing and burning of lands in the area will on the short term result in the elimination of the flora and fauna, apart from environmental pollution.

*This table presents the internal and external advantages and disadvantages of the Cañón del Usumacinta state park. Challenge to the development of an ecotourism project that involves the participation of community residents may be seen. The study identifies several disadvantages that must be resolved before an ecotourism project may be developed.*

## CONCLUSIONS

An integral diagnosis of social and economic conditions of the Cañón del Usumacinta State Park region identified characteristics, conditions and natural resources favorable for tourism development. The study's results suggest the design and establishment of adventure tourism and ecotourism products that are associated with a need for studies on ecology, identity and culture, effort to develop, and economic impact. The Cañón del Usumacinta State Park has all the conditions necessary to capitalize its nature potential and convert the site into an alternative tourism route. With appropriate strategies it would become competitive in its surroundings and for the tourism market.

Regarding identity and culture, it is important to make community residents and leaders or group heads aware of local identity and culture issues. For this reason, both a diagnosis of local culture and inventory of cultural attractions should be completed. This should be done with participation from all stakeholders, as the axis of the product would define cultural attractions with adequate information development and that could form part of a circuit. It is also necessary to carry out a diagnosis and inventory of cultural attractions with social and economic participation, and determine the legal framework that would emerge from the communities tourism activities.

In economic terms, it would be necessary to determine the impact of potential touristic development through a cost-benefit study of possible product components, and to evaluate the existing infrastructure and touristic services that would be used in the product development. The impulse required for these tourism products does not require a large investment, but it does require a high level of hostmanship on the part of community residents interested in participating in the tourism activities.

The development of three projects is considered possible with a view toward establishing a sustainable plan that would favor the communities adjacent to the Cañón del Usumacinta: 1) the development of community tourism products and their commercialization, 2) the legal framework in force and the development of the community's tourism, and 3) efficient business efforts to be carried out regarding tourism activities. In each case, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that must be considered when preparing a new tourism projects must be analyzed.

With respect to activities related that need to be carried out, actions for awareness and the presentation of a pre-design of the tourism project to organizations like the tourism sub-secretariat of the state (Subsecretaría de Turismo del Estado de Tabasco) should be carried out in order to receive financial support and to involve them in the project development.

The construction of a sustainable tourism product for the Cañón del Usumacinta state park requires the creation of an economically viable business community that applies strategies for the conservation of the natural resources and shows respect for and value the ancestral cultures. These details require previous training and a continuous and strict monitoring by the community.

It is necessary to define tourism products, to establish competitive prices in agreement with the market segments, and to design and implement promotional programs based on touristic attractions and quality of the services. Communal residents must play an outstanding hosts representing a part of the service itself. The residents, as potential hosts for tourists, desire community development. They realize that tourism represents an alternative source of work and improvement in the quality of their lives. They are aware of their weaknesses with respect to knowledge and abilities however, they are fully willing to train in order to become competitive. There are serious deficiencies including a high level of illiteracy among communal residents that will hamper their training. Also, their life style involves little hygiene leading to frequent gastrointestinal diseases and a reduced quality tourist products.

Finally the results indicate that communal residents of localities adjacent to the Cañón del Usumacinta are worried about the development of tourism products. They fear two problems: the destruction of forests, and the pollution of water and air caused by the slashing and burning that is common in this type of area.

## REFERENCES

Alvarez R. y Espinosa Y. (2008). *Turismo y desarrollo local. Proyecto para convertir «cocodrilo» en pueblo turístico sostenible en un área protegida de la Isla de la Juventud (Cuba)*. Universidad de Murcia, España.

Amaya C. (2006). Relaciones entre el turismo y la cultura: turismo cultural, cultura turística en México y en Colima. *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas*, 12 (024). pp. 9-33.

Araujo R. y Clemenza C. (2005). *Sistemas de información de mercadotecnia; herramientas necesarias en la toma de decisiones gerenciales*. Enlace; Revista Venezolana de Información, Tecnología y Conocimiento, Mayo-Agosto, año/vol.2, número 002. Universidad de Zulia. Zulia, Venezuela. pp. 27-35.

Ascanio A. (2007). Reseña de "Travel, tourism and hospitality research: a handbook for managers and researchers" de J.R. Brent Ritchie y C.R. Goeldner (Eds). *Pasos, Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural*, 5 (001). pp. 129-131.

Bringas N. e Israel J. (2004). El turismo alternativo: una opción para el desarrollo local en dos comunidades indígenas de Baja California. *Economía, Sociedad y Territorio*, 4 (005), pp. 551-590.

CESTUR (2006). *Perfil y grado de satisfacción del turista que viaja en México por motivos de Ecoturismo*.

Fennell D. A. (2002). *Ecotourism Programme Planning*. UK, CABI Publishing.

González D. (2008). Reseña de "Planificación territorial y desarrollo sostenible en México: perspectiva comparada" de Belén Boville Luca De Tena y Diego Sánchez González. *Convergencia*, 15 (47). pp. 319-325.

Hernández J. y Gunhild H. (2006). Turismo de naturaleza, desarrollo local sustentable y megaproyectos hidroeléctricos en la Patagonia chilena. *Sociedad Hoy*, 11, pp. 87-108.

Miranda G. (2006). La participación del turismo en la modificación del paisaje cultural de Malinalco, estado de México. *Pasos, Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural*, 4 (002). pp. 201-211.

OIT (2001). Turismo sostenible con comunidades indígenas mercado y sostenibilidad. La Paz, Bolivia.

OIT (2006). Turismo y comunidades indígenas: Impactos, pautas para autoevaluación y códigos de conducta. OIT, Ginebra.

Salido P., Bañuelos N., Romero D. M., Romo E. L., Ochoa A. I., Rodica A., Olivares J. (2009). El Patrimonio natural y cultural como base para estrategias de turismo sustentable en la Sonora rural. *Estudios Sociales*. 17, Número Especial, pp79-103. Recuperado el 13 de septiembre de 2010 de <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/pdf/417/41712087004.pdf>

San Martín F. y Salcedo M. (2007). Turismo, sustentabilidad y certificación: un reto global. *Revista del Centro de Investigación. Universidad La Salle*, enero-julio, año/vol. 07 número 027. Universidad La Salle. Distrito Federal, México. pp. 77-91.

SECTUR (2001). *Estudio estratégico de viabilidad del segmento de ecoturismo en México*. Recuperado de <http://www.sectur.gob.mx/work/sites/sectur/resources/LocalContent/14664/11/InformeEjecutivo.pdf>

Seguí M. (2006). *Hacia una ciencia del turismo. Siguiendo los pasos de georgescaze. Aportes y Transferencias*, 10 (2), pp. 11-16.

Thompson I. (2006). *Marketing social*. Recuperado en: <http://www.promonegocios.net/mercadotecnia/mercadotecnia-social.html>

Vera M. J. (2003). *Reflexiones sobre la transformación y vigencia de algunos modelos en mercadotecnia*. Contaduría y administración, octubre, número 211. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Distrito Federal, México. pp. 39-50.

## BIOGRAPHY

Manuela Camacho Gómez has a PhD in International Education. She has carried out specialized studies at the Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi in Milan, Italy, the Centro Internacional de Formación de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo in Turin, Italy, the Centro de Estudios Empresariales in Zaragoza, Spain, and the INCAE Business School in Managua, Nicaragua. She directs and collaborates in diverse research projects on tourism, marketing, negotiations and international education.

María del Carmen Ancona Alcocer has a Master's in Administration from the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco. She has a Bachelor's in Administration from the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco. At present, she is the director of the División de Ciencias Económico Administrativas of the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco and is a member of the academic body for globalization and public policy.

Cecilia García Muñoz Aparicio has a Master's in Administration from the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco. She has a Bachelor's in Business Administration from the Tecnológico de Monterrey (ITESM). At present, she is the administrative coordinator of the División de Ciencias Económico Administrativas of the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco and collaborates in the project Aspectos Económicos de los Desastres en Tabasco.