Collaboration theory and tourism practice in protected areas: stakeholders, structuring and sustainability

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A growing body of research is emerging on tourism and partnerships in protected areas, but conceptual development remains fragmented. This paper tackles this challenge by focusing on three aspects important for sustainability: (1) complexity (nested systems of biophysical environments, tourism and park management structures, community–resident systems, local–global systems and use–conservation gap; (2) scale, structure and scope of collaborations (including community involvement and control) and (3) challenges of implementation and long term structuring (for sustainability and success). Some related questions are: How does the tourism system fit with the protected area system? Who represents “Nature” in negotiations over conservation and use? How can plans and programmes be effectively enacted at the local level for long term success? A theoretical discussion plus an example of community-based collaboration for conservation and economic development in Bolivia (Chalalán Ecolodge) are provided to explore these questions. Chalalán shows an evolving partnership between local and international stakeholders toward local control, and also a complex relationship between local–traditional and scientific knowledge, and cultural change.

Keywords: Chalalán Ecolodge; collaboration; community-based ecotourism; Madidi National Park; protected areas; stakeholders

Introduction

The theory and application of collaboration to tourism planning and protected areas management are evolving as new forms of collaboration arise to manage growing concerns over climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion and impacts of globalization on indigenous and local inhabitants. Definitions vary over the span of disciplinary efforts, and “partnership” or “collaboration” is commonly used as a general descriptor for joint efforts. The term “collaboration”, however, has a much richer description in the interorganizational relations and business literature than the meaning ascribed to it in everyday use, where it tends to be another synonym for cooperation. Collaboration provides for a flexible and dynamic process that evolves over time, enabling multiple stakeholders to jointly address problems or issues (see Gray, 1989). Recognition of the need for citizen involvement and grassroots participation in managing natural and cultural resources makes “community involvement” an increasingly important sustainability principle (cf. Hibbard & Lurie, 2000; Mitchell & Reid 2001). A number of questions that are especially pertinent to protected areas are:

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What issues contribute to complexity in protected area planning and management domains? Specifically, how does the tourism system fit with the protected area system?

Who are the stakeholders in protected area destinations and how are they involved? Who represents nature in collaborative planning processes and negotiations in these destinations?

What are the scales, structures and forms of tourism collaborations?

How can implementation and long term success of collaborations be better assured for sustainability at the local level?

This paper aims to help guide future theory development, research and practice in protected area destinations in the above areas. The topics addressed are not meant to be an exhaustive list; rather, they point to issues in collaboration that remain under-researched despite their importance to sustainable tourism. Key aspects are illustrated through a case study of community-based ecotourism in Bolivia.

The protected area destination – domain characteristics

Sustainable tourism “is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems” (World Tourism Organization, 1997, p. 30). The complexity of the tourism domain is particularly evident in attempts to integrate these vital components for ecological and societal sustainability.

Complexity

A useful way to approach the study and management of tourism destinations in general, and protected areas in this instance, is to view them as complex planning domains (Jamal & Jamrozy, 2006). They often comprise multiple stakeholders who may hold diverse views on development and varying degrees of influence over decision making – no individual stakeholder can fully control planning. Conflicting public/private sector interests and activities can impact economic, ecological and sociocultural wellbeing. Communities located within and around the protected area are especially vulnerable. The planning challenge increases further as key stakeholders (e.g. large tour operators) are not always located at the destination. The challenge of sustainable management is compounded by the fact that international tourism destinations (e.g. Great Barrier Reef) deal with local impacts as well as those that stem from actions and pressures exerted elsewhere in the local–global tourism system. These are not only economic or environmental (e.g. climate change) impacts but also social and cultural. The globalization of labor, capital, information and culture industries brings mobile populations, multiculturalism and contested heritages into an already fragmented planning domain.

Farrell and Twining-Ward (2004) argue that the tourism system operates within a nested set of systems and a sustainability focus entails viewing them as complex adaptive systems whose management requires consideration of spatial and temporal factors, as well as of the decision-making dynamics. Systemic interactions between tourism and other sectors increase the scope and scale of impacts, adding further to domain complexity. Collaboration and continuous, integrated planning, modeled as an interactive system, are therefore recommended (Gunn & Var, 2002; Hall, 2000). Such a systems approach is
essential to protected areas destination management – it enables an understanding of tourism and biodiversity conservation as systems of interrelated and interactive components (Christ, Hillel, Matus, & Sweeting, 2003). An important sustainability issue arises here. Most destination tourist organizations tend to focus on marketing and promotion; they are not closely involved in resource conservation and planning for sustainable use – which is the function of administrators and organizations in charge of managing the protected area. The resulting marketing–planning gap has serious consequences for destination sustainability. In protected areas, much of this issue plays out at the interface between the management of use (for visitation, habitation) and conservation (of biodiversity, culture), where a use–conservation gap can be similarly identified.

A number of challenges face the conservation of protected areas as global visitation increases; while new parks and protected areas are being developed, decreasing tax-based budgets are requiring new management shifts (Eagles, 2007). Conflict with respect to conservation, visitation and habitation (local residents) is expected to rise, and new forms of governance are emerging to address these changes. Parastatal organizations, for instance, adopt flexible financial management forms that tend to operate like corporations – they typically have a government-appointed board of directors. They are perceived to be effective in managing tourism because they are much more client focused and view the visitor as a benefit (Eagles, 2007). An example of this is Parks Canada, considered to be the first park agency with a service quality goal-oriented to visitor satisfaction. It has some historical experience at hand – older Canadian parks like Banff National Park (BNP) were created to protect special features for the enjoyment of tourists who arrived by rail to stay at well-appointed hotels owned by the railroad company (Canadian Pacific Rail in the case of BNP) within the Park. It is only more recently that concern about biodiversity has taken greater priority in the Canadian and US park system (Phillips, 2003). Like its Canadian counterpart, the original mandate of the US National Park Service was to protect “scenery” for public “enjoyment” and for future generations (Sellars, 1997). The “traditional park” (like Yellowstone and Grand Canyon) originally was designed for tourism more than for resource management.

Though the two functions of conservation and tourism could be considered symbiotic, they are generally conducted by very different organizations within and outside the tourism destination. This can create a gap in information flow with resulting difficulties in destination development. Integrating tourism into traditional park functions is not an easy option, due to financial constraints and the complexity of the destination domain. Budowski’s (1976) early observation was that tourism industry and park agencies should collaborate for mutual benefit, but park management should not be left in the hands of tourism authorities – not only due to potential disjunctions between market capitalism and conservation interests, but also due to the different knowledge, training and resources within each system. Selin and Beason’s (1991) study on interorganizational relations between the US forest service, chambers of commerce, and tourism associations adjacent to an Arkansas National Forest applies a qualitative research design based on collaboration theory. Their study shows that lack of awareness and differing ideologies act as barriers to effective communication between tourism agencies and natural resource management (contributing to the marketing–planning and use–conservation gaps noted earlier).

Another management problem lies in organization and policy barriers to effective public input, civic education and community debate on sustainability choices. As Healey (1997) notes, traditional organizational structures and functions tend to isolate destination marketing, land-use planning, resource use and conservation from each other and from societal values and learning. An informed public is a valuable ally for protected area
administrators with respect to gathering support for policy, appreciating the purpose and mandate of the protected area as visitors, and assuming stewardship roles. New forms of collaboration are emerging as this is increasingly recognized. Co-management agreements, for instance, provide for management plans that address the rights, obligations and interests of indigenous people as well as the interests of the relevant government agency. In the World Heritage Area of Kakadu, Australia, for instance, the 1999 Plan of Management articulates four overriding principles that bridge resource management, tourism, and livelihood needs of the Bininj/Mungguy Aboriginal peoples (Wellings, 2007):

1. **Recognition of Bininj/Mungguy interests** (including the rights to hunt and forage, and engage in economic and community development);
2. **Caring for country** (recognizing that conserving the unique natural and cultural heritage is essential to park management. Also, acknowledging Kakadu as a cultural landscape and the role of the Aboriginal people in protecting it and the Park’s World Heritage values);
3. **Tourism** (recognizing that tourism was an important aspect of Kakadu, and that its traditional owners were proud to share their place with tourists; however, tourism would not supervene the above two interests); and
4. **Telling people about the park** (interpretive programmes to communicate Park heritage and values to visitors and the broader public is integral to Park management).

The above discussion corroborates Farrell and Twining-Ward’s (2004) description of systems complexity which shows the tourism system as being nested with other systems. In the protected areas context then, the parks system, the tourism system, the ecological system, and the community–resident system can be seen as interlocking, nested systems whose interrelationships and interdependencies contribute to the overall complexity of the system. Added to this are the multiple stakeholders within each system, who are (or may have the potential to be) affecting one or more systems, and who may be connected to other systems globally (hence the local–global system of which tourism is a part).

**Stakeholders**

The tourism destination environment is complex and dynamic with linkages and interdependencies, multiple stakeholders often with diverse and divergent views and values, and lack of control by any one group or individual. In rapidly developing tourism destinations, these characteristics, combined with the pace of change, greatly increase complexity and uncertainty, creating a turbulent environment. In order to cope with such turbulent environments, Emery and Trist (1965) and Trist (1983) argue that organizations have to shift from an intralogizational goal focus to determining goals and goal paths which maximize the interests of all parties in the interorganizational domain. Gray’s (1989) seminal work defines five key characteristics of such interorganizational collaboration: (1) the stakeholders are interdependent, (2) solutions emerge by dealing constructively with differences, (3) joint ownership of decisions is involved, (4) the stakeholders assume collective responsibility for the ongoing direction of the domain and (5) collaboration is an emergent process by which organizations collectively deal with growing environmental complexity. Collaboration is “a process of joint decision making among key stakeholders of a problem domain about the future of that domain” (Gray, 1989, p. 227).
The problem domain refers to a situation where the problems are complex and require inter- or multiorganizational response (Trist, 1983). Stakeholders are the actors with an interest or stake in a common problem or issue and include all individuals, groups or organizations “directly influenced by the actions others take to solve a problem” (Gray, 1989, p. 5). Gray provides a three-phase collaboration framework: (1) problem setting, (2) direction setting and (3) implementing/institutionalizing. Whether collaboration is convened to address conflict, or to set new policy, plans or management directions (e.g. a community-based visioning or monitoring process), it is vital to identify and involve key individuals and groups (stakeholders) early since “failure to include them in the design stage only invites technical or political difficulties during implementation” (Gray, 1989, p. 65) and can significantly influence the success and outcome of the process (Hardy & Phillips, 1998; Healey, 1997).

The issue of involvement and legitimacy are closely connected, for a legitimate stakeholder may be not willing to (or may not choose to) participate in the collaborative process for various reasons. Mitchell, Agle, and Wood’s (1997) well-cited paper on stakeholder identification argues that stakeholders become salient to an organization’s managers when three attributes are perceived: (1) the stakeholder’s power to influence the firm, (2) the legitimacy of the stakeholder’s relationship to the firm and (3) the urgency of the stakeholder’s claim on the firm. Power alone is insufficient, legitimacy is necessary to enable authority and urgency is required for execution (stakeholders must recognize their power and be willing to use it). In some instances, a powerful, legitimate stakeholder may choose to sit back rather than participate in a collaborative planning issue because he or she feels it is not urgent to do so.

Gray also argues that a sufficient (but not necessarily equal) distribution of power is necessary to insure that all stakeholders can influence direction setting, but joint (consensus-based) decision making is critical. Moreover, collaborative outcomes are strongly dependent on mutual understanding of, and access to, information concerning the issue (Gray, 1989). Issues of power, control, stakeholder involvement and knowledge legitimation are important through every phase of the collaboration process. Who to involve depends in part on the perceived legitimacy of the person, topic and knowledge being presented. Recognition of the importance of a problem, perception of interdependence and belief that significant benefit may be achieved through collaboration may be enough for partners to come together in the early (convening) phase or moment. Joint discussion commences formally or informally, depending on the structure and form of the collaboration.

A number of tourism and planning studies address theoretical dimensions of collaboration (cf. Araujo & Bramwell, 2002; Innes & Booher, 1999), but two aspects that merit greater attention in protected areas research are: the representation of nature and the challenges of implementation, especially the long term structuring and outcomes of collaborations involving local communities and residents in/around the protected area.

Driscoll and Starik (2004) critique and expand the stakeholder identification and salience model developed by Mitchell et al. (1997) by reconceptualizing the stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency, as well as by developing a fourth stakeholder attribute: proximity. Their work points to the salience of the natural environment as the primary and primordial stakeholder of the firm. In an earlier essay, Starik (1994) argues that the notion of a stakeholder is subjective and value-oriented, hence “if one thinks something affects or is affected by (or could potentially affect or be affected by) oneself (or my organization or society), whether it is human or not, alive or not, perhaps even physical or not... that something could be said to be a stakeholder to that person (or to his/her organization or society)” (Starik, 1994, p. 94). He indicates that the natural
environment is itself a stakeholder as might be currently non-living future generations. Holden (2003) forwards the notion of addressing ecosystems and their components in terms of intrinsic value rather than the instrumental value generally accorded to them by those who value them in terms of use and profit, as a means toward an end (see also Fennell, 2006).

Paloniemi and Tikka (2008) note that the growing need for biodiversity conservation and ways of achieving it have been defined in international and national procedures regulated by the public sector (hence a key stakeholder), and in governance processes managed by other stakeholders (e.g. international and local NGOs). At the local level, they observe, the issues and relationships surrounding biodiversity conservation play out in different ways, for instance, in places of local/indigenous people dwelling and everyday life, through their social positions, cultural activities and cultural heritage. The cultural relationships of ethnic groups with the biophysical world are diverse and can vary significantly with respect to religious, spiritual, traditional/historic and practical/subsistence relationships. Each merits legitimacy as a “stakeholder”.

A stakeholder theory of collaboration in protected area destinations should, therefore, integrate the relationship between public/private sector organizations, the natural area destination (the biophysical world within the protected area) and those who inhabit it, as well as others who have a “stake” in it. Environmental NGOs are often viewed as key stakeholders in biodiversity conservation, and scientists, too, are viewed as crucial knowledge holders. Critiques of ecological modernization raise a common concern about the power and dominance of these groups to represent nature’s interests (Agrawal, 2005; Chapin, 2004 Dryzek, 1997). Observing that “the discourse of ecological modernization – with its emphasis on win-win solutions, the need for universal regulation and appeals to science – has been popular of late”, Everett and Neu (2000, p. 5) propose that “the ‘ideological effect’ of ecological modernization is such that the intersection of ecological and social realms is ignored and issues of social justice are effectively erased, despite this discourse’s ‘radical’ or ‘critical’ aspirations”.

Such critiques open the door to the often overlooked questions: who represents “Nature” at a conflict negotiation or planning process in natural area destinations (or, more specifically, in protected areas)? What roles do local and indigenous knowledge and human–environmental relations (of local, indigenous and other groups such as visitors) play in collaborative initiatives addressing conservation and use issues? What interests do NGOs represent? What constitutes a legitimate stakeholder in environmental decision making, and who decides this? What decision-making roles should be enabled, recognizing that public input without decision-making authority might result in “tokenism” (Arnstein, 1969)? Eckersley’s (2004) critical political ecology approach indicates that the domination of nature is a complex phenomenon that has been mediated by economic–social systems and privileged social classes in a way that has systematically brought benefits to some nations, social classes and groups at the expense of others (both human and non-human).

Social and environmental justice to redress such inequities can be achieved in part through participatory dialogue within the broader context of communicative justice, that is, “a fair/free communicative context in which wealth and risk production and distribution decisions take place in ways that are reflectively acceptable by all ‘differently situated others’ (or their representatives) who may be affected” (Eckersley, 2004, p. 10). The relevance to collaboration in the protected areas context lies in ensuring just and equitable participation of those most disadvantaged or least capable of receiving fair treatment in the collaboration and its outcomes; it is here that close attention needs to be paid to enabling not merely “input” by various stakeholders groups (including community members living in and around the
protected area), but also direct participation in decision making and control of the process and outcomes.

It follows from the above that careful attention has to be paid to the types of knowledge that are perceived to be “legitimate”. In protected areas with communities located within and around it, at least three types of knowledge are identified as important to involve: (1) scientific knowledge, (2) indigenous (traditional) knowledge and (3) local knowledge (e.g. older residents derive a cultural heritage from generations of inhabitation there, but newer residents arriving for jobs and retirement will also develop local knowledge of the place and a new cultural heritage over time). Tensions over the domination of scientific knowledge over traditional and local knowledge are well documented (Agrawal, 1995; Berkes, 1999). The interests of park agency managers and conservation scientists may be oriented predominantly to ecological integrity and conservation from “Western” scientific perspectives, but local people living within the protected area (e.g. farmers’ long term historic occupation within the UK’s Yorkshire Dales National Park) or indigenous dwellers in a protected Amazon rain forest also have valuable knowledge to contribute (local/traditional knowledge).

The above exploration offers useful insights into examining the role of park agencies and managers of protected areas, as well as NGOs, local residents in/around the protected area and the wider public, in park governance and collaborative initiatives. The communicative context that Eckersley (2004) describes not only raises the question of who and what constitutes a stakeholder (and how should nature’s interests be represented), but also the question of a fair process for identifying stakeholders and discussing environmental problems (Haigh & Griffiths, 2007). The various interest groups may not quite see the problem the same way. What an environmental participant might value about the protected area may differ significantly from that of a tourism promoter or developer, recreational user or local resident (Jamal, 2004).

Scale, structure and scope of collaborations
Collaborations span across planning scales and organizational levels. They can be local, regional, national or international level initiatives; organizations can collaborate within and across these spatial domains, for example, local or area-based initiatives (e.g. Bramwell & Sharman, 1999), local–international collaborations for local level sustainability (e.g. North–South and South–South technology and knowledge transfers, cf. Jamal, Kreuter, & Yanosky, 2007), national–international collaborations for global level issues or conservation concerns within the country, and poverty alleviation as well as community development initiatives involving North–South partners (see community case study in this paper). Partnership structures can also vary greatly depending on the purpose and scope of the collaboration. They may be formally instantiated and structured, such as co-management agreements between park agencies and indigenous groups in protected areas (e.g. in the Kakadu World Heritage Area). They may be formulated to enable joint control or full local ownership; the Ecolodge, Posada Amazonas, is the product of a joint venture between the Lima-based private tour company, Rainforest Expeditions, and the Native Community of Infierno in the Peruvian Amazon (Stronza, 1999, 2007).

Alternatively, collaborative arrangements may operate through informal agreements and in unstructured forms (e.g. networks and grassroots initiatives that arise temporarily to solve specific problem in the domain – the social movements may involve coalition-building and joint action without formal agreements). Brown (1991, p. 5) described four kinds of bridging organizations, which span the social gaps among organizations and constituencies
to enable coordinated actions, ranging from loosely structured networks to formally structured partnerships or coalitions: (1) an interorganizational network, (2) an association of organizations and networks, (3) an intersectoral partnership and (4) a social movement and related coalition – these may be loose networks or formal coalitions. Collaborative initiatives are necessary in complex sustainability domains to facilitate domain organization, and can be viewed to evolve from “underorganized” to “organized” as coordinated action occurs (Brown, 1991; cf. Rahman, Waddock, Andriof, & Husted, 2002).

The collaboration’s scope can span a spectrum of issues and topics in protected area destinations, like conservation, use, economic development, poverty alleviation, cultural protection and heritage management, tourism and growth conflicts and so on. Consider, for example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO)/Norwegian government-sponsored initiative at the World Heritage Site of Luang Prabang, Laos. This alliance’s purpose was to coordinate heritage conservation and tourism development by facilitating collaboration between tourism and heritage conservation stakeholders (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005). UNESCO RACAP (United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific) and the Norwegian government came together and launched a three-year project called “Cultural heritage management and tourism: Models for co-operation among stakeholders” that commenced in December 1998. Luang Prabang was one of nine World Heritage pilot sites in Asia and the Pacific for this project. A working group of local to international stakeholders was set up to operate and implement the project, as well as an advisory group (Aas et al., 2005).

Community level collaborations are another important area to examine in terms of scope. Scherl and Edwards (2007) identified three main categories with respect to tourism in protected areas: community-managed, private sector/government/NGO, and joint venture. They grouped private sector, government and NGO-managed tourism interests together as stakeholders external to the community and often external to the protected area as well. They note the existence of community-based conservation areas (CCAs) that are owned by the community and where community-based tourism may be operating. Their analysis indicates two important factors in such community-based partnerships: (1) ensuring long term sustainability of tourism and natural resources and (2) community or local/indigenous ownership, control and management of tourism enterprises and activities (e.g. community-based EcoLodges, community involvement in guiding, concession, cultural activities and goods being produced for tourist consumption, etc.). Both these issues are examined below in the case of community-based ecotourism in Bolivia.

Implementation and institutionalization of collaborative outcomes

A major weakness of collaborative processes lies in the third phase (implementation and institutionalizing the shared meanings that emerge), with the earlier two phases being problem-setting and direction-setting (Gray, 1989). Interorganizational scholars like Trist (1983) argue that long term direction, management, monitoring, regulation and implementation in a complex domain may require more formalized structuring of a collaborative “referent” organization (also see Andriof, Waddock, Husted, & Rahman, 2003). Examples from the literature and from the authors’ own community-based research in protected areas corroborate this proposition. The co-management of protected areas is one example of this type of longer-term collaborative arrangement (“referent” organization), and the community-based ecotourism collaboration described next illustrates other forms and issues that may arise if a longer-term perspective and plan is not adopted. Collaborative forms
and structures can emerge during the early and later stages of the process, for example, when stakeholders are identified and convened early to a proposed collaboration with the help of experts (e.g. the convener, mediator or facilitator), or later when discussion focuses on how to effectively implement the outcomes and results of the negotiation. The result may be a new collaboration to engage in implementation, or the participants may decide to continue with the same structure.

In this sense, it is important to view collaboration as spatial and temporal, activities are occurring both within and outside the collaborative space of gathering; they may involve short or medium term collaborations with a finite end (e.g. the three-year heritage collaboration mentioned above, Aas et al., 2005), or may involve a longer-term collaboration with phased ownership and other development/management activities to be implemented over time (that are decided jointly in the direction-setting stage of the collaboration). The case of Chalalán Ecolodge below illustrates the latter type, a phased ownership and management structure based on collaborative planning. Spatially, collaboration can range from being entirely local (consisting of local stakeholders and occurring in local spaces) to including regional, national and international stakeholders. It should be noted, too, that what appears to be a locally situated collaboration may have significant interlinkages at other scales. A range of decisions and impacts on the local destination may be extrinsically induced rather than locally initiated (e.g. marketing impacts in a globalized tourism system where the global and the local are intricately linked at the global–local nexus; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Marketing decisions impacting a “remote” destination locale may be effected thousands of miles away, or joint (collaborative) decision making may be undertaken by the formation of alliances and partnerships ranging from local–local to local–regional, local–national and local–international (e.g. a local community collaborative with an international NGO to conserve a natural/cultural protected area or site, as in the Bolivian case below).

Closing the marketing–planning and use–conservation gaps is a significant challenge to sustainability in protected areas. For park agencies to take on additional tasks, such as meeting visitor needs and satisfactions, puts an increasing burden on scarce resources and requires a different set of skills, knowledge and networks. Greater collaboration between parks and the tourism industry has resulted in new forms of partnerships and use agreements (e.g. the private sector taking over the management of various concessions in parks), and working with local communities within and around protected areas offers an effective means for bridging the gap between governance and use in protected area destinations. Benefits can include effective environmental stewardship that builds on indigenous, local and scientific knowledge, economic development, social empowerment, the protection of cultural heritage and the creation of interpretive and nature-based experiences for tourist learning and cross-cultural appreciation.

**Community-based partnerships: Chalalán Ecolodge**

Chalalán is the first community-owned and operated ecotourism project in Bolivia. It began with a partnership in 1998 between the local community of San Jose de Uchupiamonas, and two global actors, Conservation International (CI) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Chalalán was designed with the explicit goals of generating material benefits for people while also helping to conserve biodiversity in the lowland rain forests of Madidi National Park in northern Bolivia. The lodge is now owned and managed entirely by the community, and local leaders collaborate effectively with the Bolivian government to protect and manage Madidi National Park.
Information for the extended case study reported in this paper of the Chalalán Ecolodge came from a variety of sources. Secondary sources included archival data, project reports and financial records from Conservation International and the Inter-American Development Bank, the two agencies partnered with the community of San Jose de Uchupiamonas to lead the Chalalán project (officially titled “Program of Sustainable Development and Ecotourism in San Jose de Uchupiamonas and Establishment of a Protected Zone for the Proposed Madidi Park, 1995–2001”). Popular and journalistic articles and videos about Chalalán were also gathered. The primary source was three months of ethnographic research in the community of San Jose de Uchupiamonas, conducted between 2002 and 2004 and including 67 semistructured interviews with heads of household. Each interview lasted two to three hours and questions addressed demographics, social and economic characteristics of households, as well as opinions about conservation, ecotourism and community relations with NGOs, park managers and the government. Additional insights came from in-depth interviews with key informants in the La Paz and Washington, DC offices of Conservation International and the National Protected Area Service (SERNAP) in Bolivia, as well as with the tourism industry in La Paz and Rurrenabaque.

The partnership focuses on Bolivia’s Madidi National Park, created in 1995 and protecting a swathe of land that stretches from the high Andes to the Amazon Basin. Spanning 19,000 square kilometers, the park features lowland rainforests, cloud forests, dry forests and pampas grasslands. The Park is part of the Vilcabamba–Amboro Biological Corridor, a chain of 19 protected areas that straddle Peru and Bolivia. International environmentalists have identified the region as a conservation priority for its biodiversity (e.g. 1000 species of birds, 44% of all mammal species known to the Americas, and 38% of all neotropical amphibians). The area is also culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse. The indigenous peoples who were native to the land long before it was a “corridor” of protected areas include the Aymara, Quechua, Tacana, Mosetene, Tsimane, Toromona, Araonas, Yuracare, Yuqui, Sirionos, Moxenos and Lecos (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, 2000).

Tourists numbering 7000 to 8000 a year are drawn to the wildlife, forested landscapes and mountain vistas of Madidi. The Park is about the size of Massachusetts, with a population of only 1700 inhabitants. Despite a century of extraction booms in rubber, timber, quinine and animal pelts, the forests retain high ecological integrity (Myers, Mittermeier, Mittermeier, da Fonseca, & Kent, 2000). In this premier environmental setting, the Chalalán Ecolodge, owned and managed by the villagers of San Jose, is the premiere ecotourism destination.

San Jose is the only community within Madidi National Park, and is located in an area zoned as an “Integrated Management Area”. The center of the community is a settlement of thatched roof, adobe-style homes lining wide grass pathways. The village has a population of approximately 630 people (100 families) who identify themselves as Quechua–Tacana in ethnic origin. Their ancestors migrated to the Tuichi River from the Bolivian highlands 300 years ago. Over years of living with the indigenous Tacana people, the highland migrants learned to thrive in the lowland rainforests of Tuichi, practicing swidden-fallow agriculture to grow rice, bananas and manioc. Today, they also raise chickens and a few cattle, and produce coffee, cacao and citrus. As they are located far from the regional market town of Rurrenabaque, and demand is small, San Josesanos commercialize only a small proportion of what they produce.

Through collaboration with park authorities, and with revenues generated by their ecotourism lodge, the community secured title to their land, which the Bolivian government grants to indigenous communities as “Communal Territories of Original Inhabitants” (TCO). The status of TCO for San Jose enables them to formalize their land rights and
prevent colonization and resource extraction by external actors. As in most Amazonian communities, the people of San Jose have intimate and long-held understandings of their natural environment. As subsistence farmers and extractivists, they depend directly on the wildlife, fish, forests, rivers and lakes – the biodiversity of priority concern to conservationists – for their livelihoods. Before the community became involved in ecotourism, outmigration was a social concern. Even the rich hardwoods of the area were insufficient; small scale timber harvesters reported earnings of just $5 a day, not enough to provide for a family.

Contemporary San Jose is a reflection of its history, as a nexus of both Andean and Amazonian cultures. Local medicinal use of plants and animals incorporate Andean techniques as well as techniques from Amazonian cultures. Most people (95%) speak Spanish and/or Quechua, and only a few people know (or remember) Tacana. Since Chalalán Ecolodge opened, more Josesanos have been learning English and French. This historical, cultural, linguistic complexity of San Jose makes it challenging to consider “the community” as a single stakeholder, or to imagine their relationship with the rainforest as unidimensional or easy to “represent” in collaborative negotiations over tourism and protected area management.

Tourism in the broader region of the national park began to prosper between 1992 and 1998. In 1992, approximately 1000 tourists visited the area for three-day tours with local operators. In 1998, the number had risen to 7000, and by 2000, 12,000 visitors (Stronza, 2006). Chalalán Ecolodge hosted 200 tourists in 1998. Between 1999 and 2001, the number of tourists increased by 17–19%; in the period 2001–2004, the lodge hosted between 1000 and 1200 tourists per year. The lodge features 12 trails with interpretative materials, focusing on avifauna, primates and other mammals and plant species, including those used locally by San Josesanos for medicinal or other purposes. As a community lodge, Chalalán has a multiplier effect in the local economy. Many lodge provisions are purchased locally, and several families from San Jose supply farm produce and native fruits to the lodge. Handicraft sales have been on the rise. San Jose is especially famous in the region for its wooden carved masks, but local artisans also make baskets and handmade cards. All receive fixed salaries, except the guides, who are paid by days worked (see Table 1).

Table 1. Chalalán Ecolodge: a community-based partnership for tourism.

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<td>Protected area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>San José de Uchupiamonas (60–70 families)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Tacana and Quechua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Conservation International (NGO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecosystem</td>
<td>Lowland rainforest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>18–24 Josesanos at any given time, receiving fixed salaries; guides, paid by the days worked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue-sharing model</td>
<td>50% to shareholders (74 families); 50% to community-wide fund¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists/year</td>
<td>1000–1200 (between 2001 and 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beds</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ¹First profits of US$15,000 were distributed in 2001; 50% was directed to a community fund for health, education and infrastructure; the rest went to 74 families who are shareholders (US$105/family) (Stronza, 2006).
Partnering for ecotourism development

When occasional backpackers first arrived to San José de Uchupiamonas in the 1970s, their goals were primarily hunting and fishing. There was little talk of “biodiversity conservation”, “sustainable development”, “community participation” or “eco” associated with tourism and Madidi National Park had not yet been established. Tourism in real numbers near the Chalalán Lake began in 1992. That was the year when a group of community leaders in San José de Uchupiamonas began to seek new economic opportunities through nature tourism. Their hope was to make tourism an alternative to logging, which they had begun to perceive as short-lived, poorly paid and destructive of the very forests on which they and their forbearers had depended for at least three centuries. They found an outsider to the region and owner of a tour company based in La Paz. The company agreed to join with the community and invest $3500 in a plan to create a rustic tour camp in San Jose, with two bunkhouses that could accommodate up to 40 backpackers.

Though some leaders in San Jose gained management experience while hosting the backpackers, the rustic tour operation fell through, mostly for lack of capital resources, marketing and strategic planning. In the mid 1990s, policymakers began talking about tourism as a potential market-based tool for making conservation economically and socially beneficial to local communities. Planning involved creating a new national park in Madidi that would contain both San Jose and the patch of forest where the local leaders had envisioned building their tourism business (Hendrix, 1997). Conservation International’s report, “A biological assessment of the Alto Madidi region, and adjacent areas of Northwest Bolivia” (1991), had revealed Madidi to be one of the most ecologically diverse regions in the world and made a strong recommendation to the government to create a protected area in the region for conservation and ecotourism (MacQuarrie & Bartschi, 2001). In 1995, the Bolivian government agreed to designate 1,271,500 hectares as Madidi National Park and 624,250 hectares as an adjacent Integrated Management Area. That was the same year Conservation International and the community of San Jose joined forces to build the Chalalán Ecolodge (Pastor, 1999). The community needed technical support and international funding to build this ecotourism lodge.

Vision, structure and implementation

The initial plans were to improve the bunkhouses that the men of San Jose had built earlier. More ambitiously, the long term vision for Chalalán was to make ecotourism work for the integrated goals of community development and biodiversity conservation and in so doing garner local support for managing the new national park. After a series of prefeasibility studies and discussions, San Jose and Conservation International prepared a formal funding proposal for Chalalán. As part of this effort, US$25,000 was channeled from the Bolivian “Debt-for-Nature Swap” to fund development in San Jose. This was intended to help address the immediate needs of San Jose – in education, health, river transportation, etc. – until Chalalán could become a reality. In 1995, Conservation International secured non-reimbursable funding of $1,250,000 for a four-year programme from the Multilateral Investment Fund, an affiliate of the Inter-American Development Bank that finances private sector projects.

Most of the money from the Inter-American Development Bank was dedicated to capacity building in San Jose. Capacity building entailed working with residents to construct the lodge with local materials and local labor and skills, providing training for staff in hotel management and service through on-site experiential learning and rotating shifts and
establishing an organizational and legal structure for the company. Construction and preparation for Chalalán began in 1995 and took three years to complete, though construction was not fully complete until 2002. Over the years, Conservation International brought in consultants, volunteers, researchers from various disciplines, marketing and design experts, conservationists, community development workers, journalists and filmmakers from the United States, Bolivia and Peru.

A priority indicator of the success throughout the process of preparation, lodge construction, and training was the degree to which people of San Jose invested their own resources in the project. Chalalán was never intended to become another top-down, “paternalistic” development project, led by outsiders and delivered to passive “beneficiaries”. Rather, it was meant to serve as a model for community-created and community-driven initiatives. One of San Jose’s first in-kind contributions was the commitment of 70 families to volunteer at least 20 days of labor to building the lodge. Over time, the community also invested their unpaid time to the local promotion and marketing of Chalalán, and to the coordination of transportation and food for volunteers and workers.

Today, Chalalán is a company with stocks, a “Sociedad Anónima”, but when Conservation International and San Jose partnered to create it, there was no precedent for a community company of this kind. There was a general lack of understanding in San Jose about what a business was, and what the process of creating a community-based enterprise would entail. Conservation International initially became the principal shareholder, and San Jose had just one share. This initial imbalance generated tension between the partners. When distrust in the project began to mount, the leaders of San Jose suggested a fee of $5.00 per tourist so that people in the community could start receiving some material benefit from the lodge directly and immediately, even while shares remained in the hands of Conservation International. A strategy for “Social Reinvestment” was created to define how the fees could be applied to community development needs in categories they identified as education, health, agriculture, recreation, legal representation and other miscellaneous needs. In 1999, the community received a total of $2000 from this fee.

Before Chalalán was transferred to San Jose and its community company, the partners on both sides, Conservation International and San Jose, experienced debilitating problems of miscommunication and lack of trust. In retrospect, and according to the archive of progress reports written by consultants and leaders from San Jose, the distrust seemed to have emerged from perceptions among community members that the “rules of the game” for creating and transferring the company of Chalalán to the community were not well understood. Among other problems, there were also new divisions between community members who were closely associated with Conservation International and the Inter-American Development Bank, and those who kept their distance. The community proposed several solutions to strengthen the collaboration and trust with Conservation International: create a new organization to represent the community in all matters relating to the project, assume shared and equal responsibility for the implementation of the project, clearly define the roles and responsibilities for each partner in the implementation of the project and ensure complete transparency in all communication. By 1999, relations between the partners had improved, and members of San Jose perceived the outside consultants more positively as “facilitators for community development”.

Discussion

The first part of this paper sought to provide some theoretical considerations and literature contributions to three aspects that are important to protected areas tourism: (1) complexity
of the protected area system, (2) stakeholders and the issue of representing nature in planning and negotiations, and (3) scale, structure and forms of partnerships/collaboration, with particular focus on implementation for long term success and sustainability. Each of these is discussed further below, using the case study to illustrate various conceptual insights.

Complexity: nested systems and local–global impacts

The protected area destination, as described earlier in the paper, consists of nested systems (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004) that include (1) the tourism (industry) system, (2) the park management system, (3) the ecological and biophysical systems, (4) community systems that include resident and indigenous communities, all operating within an interconnected local–global system. Chalalán Ecolodge is at the global–local nexus (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001) of ecotourism in Madidi National Park; external influences and local activities affect its biophysical, economic, social and cultural environment. While the “use–conservation gap” in this protected area was being bridged by partnering with Conservation International who brought conservation science, lodge development and management expertise to the collaboration, changes through ecological modernization facilitated by this partnership are clearly evident as noted in the case above. Important issues that deserve research attention are the social and cultural impacts. Although the Chalalán partnership strengthened ties between San Jose and the global market economy, these linkages have triggered myriad cultural changes. Chalalán leaders in particular now operate from paradigms that are both indigenous and western, and that include traditional relations of reciprocity as well as business management concepts of “quality control”, “market niche”, “cost–benefit analysis” and “strategic planning” (Stronza, 2006).

The members of San Jose have also had to learn how to manage a business while adjusting to new ways of earning a living and interacting with each other – from friends, family and neighbors, to business partners, employees and managers (Stronza, 2008). In the light of this, conflicts in the community have ensued, especially as new opportunities and responsibilities have emerged. The disputes over who participates, who is a partner, who benefits and who pays are inherent to the process of establishing a community-based business, and managing such discussions and conflicts should also be factored in as start-up and fixed costs. These issues are pertinent in discussion of the stakeholders in protected areas tourism.

Stakeholders and the representation of nature

An important stakeholder group in protected area destinations like Madidi is the local residents who live within it and depend on it for their well being. Chalalán is illustrative of a community-managed collaboration (Scherl & Edwards, 2007). But it should be noted that, as in any form of social change, paradigm shift or community “awakening”, effective ecotourism depends on the vision, dedication and leadership of key individuals. Though Chalalán’s success as a community-run company ultimately required the support and work of most families in San Jose, only a few people really drove the process. Had it not been for the perseverance of these leaders, Chalalán would likely be little more than a few bunkhouses on the banks of the Tuichi River. This raises an important insight for collaboration and partnerships: while the local community is often positioned as a stakeholder, it is clear that “community” is a heterogeneous concept here, where different individuals and groups play different roles and wield varying degrees of power.
Representing the local community in collaborative initiatives related to protected areas tourism thus needs to be supplemented with consideration of the heterogeneity of “community”, both with respect to the various interests that may be present (e.g. those with a direct interest in tourism development and benefits, versus those with little to no interest in it), as well as the different levels of power, influence and authority, and the issue of “representing” nature. Complementing the argument in the first part of the paper that nature is a legitimate stakeholder in collaborative initiatives related to conservation, planning and development in natural area destinations, the Chalalán case helps to address the question of who represents nature in protected areas destinations. In this case, the Conservation International consultants and others western experts (including biologists, social scientists and park managers) represent conservation interests using scientific knowledge (science). The Inter-American Development Bank’s interests in conservation, for instance, represent an instrumental concern – protecting vital biodiversity for future generations (a sustainability mandate), and the Bolivian government shares these interests as well as the utilitarian interest of garnering benefits for Bolivian citizens (including local residents and the wider Bolivian population). But the role of the local Chalalán residents in representing their interests in, and relationships to the biophysical world and nature is not one that can be substituted by scientists or NGOs. Their human–environmental relationships are primarily subsistence and medicinal use, and they bring to the collaboration traditional and local knowledge, as well as a cultural–historical relationship with the biophysical world that provides for another way in which nature’s interests may be represented.

Power distribution to enable meaningful local participation and capacity building are crucial for long term success of (eco)tourism projects involving local communities, as Chalalán demonstrates. The role of Conservation International consultants there is best described as facilitators, ensuring technology and knowledge transfer, as well as training assistance to enable the local community to take control and successfully manage the project for long term social and ecological sustainability. Private and nonprofit partners to communities may be eager to initiate the processes of building capacity to enable community leaders to run an ecotourism business of their own. The teaching, however, should ideally work within a context of respecting local leaders, local processes for making decisions, local institutions and local knowledge (in addition to the scientific knowledge brought by outsiders like Conservation International). Invariably, any effort to work within local approaches will take considerably longer than standard western business practices, and the implementation of collaborative initiatives in protected area destinations, like Chalalán Ecolodge in Madidi National Park, has to consider not only necessary resources but also a longer-term time horizon for success.

Organizing for long term success

In the first part of this paper, it was noted that collaborations can take various forms and structures, and extend over various scales and time horizons. The Chalalán Ecolodge project was structured as a formal partnership between the San Jose community and Conservation International as the primary stakeholders (the Inter-American Development Bank and the Bolivian government, plus tourism operators in La Paz and Rurrenabaque can be identified as some important secondary stakeholders). Following Brown’s (1991) framing of the sustainability domain and the types of bridging organizations present, it can be argued that the protected area domain occupied by the Chalalán and San Josesanos was underorganized with respect to tourism and conservation. Minimal benefits through serving backpackers and increasing recognition of the need to conserve Madidi as a protected area
led to the organization of this sustainability domain via partnerships with Conservation International, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Bolivian government. As a *bridging organization*, the community–Conservation International partnership eventually gave way to full local ownership, aided by various steps (see below), including the creation of a new organization to enable better community representation in project matters. It can be argued that a *referent organization* (Trist, 1983) evolved to aid with the organization of ecotourism and conservation in Madidi National Park. Additionally, the communicative and participatory nature of this organization indicates a role for communicative justice as discussed by Eckersley (2004), and an avenue for future research.

However, partnering had its perils and pitfalls as well as its benefits. Growing distrust and suspicion of the outsider Conservation International consultants was a key challenge in the case above. The community proposed several solutions to strengthen the collaboration and trust with Conservation International that corroborate key principles in collaborative planning: in the Chalalán case, (1) a new organization was created to represent the community in all matters relating to the project, (2) shared and equal responsibility for the implementation of the project was assumed by the partners, (3) the roles and responsibilities for each partner in the implementation of the project were clearly defined and (4) complete transparency in all communication was initiated. As described above, relations between the partners improved as these measures were implemented, and members of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration topic</th>
<th>Key theoretical points</th>
<th>Chalalán case examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Complexity</td>
<td>Nested systems (Farrell &amp; Twining-Ward, 2004); <em>Global–local nexus</em> (Milne &amp; Ateljevic, 2001)</td>
<td>Chalalán Ecolodge (community-managed ecolodge in national park of international conservation concern); Madidi National Park (multiple ecosystems: cloud forest, lowland rainforest, savannah); San Jose de Uchupiamonas (heterogeneous actors with diverse concerns, needs and interests).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ecological/biophysical system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community–resident system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Local–global system</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Stakeholders and representing nature</td>
<td>Diverse stakeholder groups and interests: public, private, NGO, scientists, consultants, tourism industry. Local residents and indigenous dwellers, tourists; Interdependence; scientific, local and traditional knowledge. Legitimacy, influence and power (Mitchell et al., 1997).</td>
<td>Major stakeholders (primary &amp; secondary): Conservation International (CI), Inter-American Development Bank, Bolivian government, tourism operators in La Paz and Rurrenabaque (plus others brought in by CI). Direct community representation as legitimate stakeholders in decision making over use and conservation of nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Structuring and implementation</td>
<td>Local involvement and control <em>Bridging organizations</em>, formal–informal, networks; long term domain organization and structuring for sustainability (Brown, 1991); formation of <em>referent organization</em> (Trist, 1983).</td>
<td>Local capacity building over stages (wage labor to administration), heavy initial investment of capital from outside. Formal community partnership with CI as a <em>bridging organization</em> to phased community ownership and full control with aid of a new management structure (<em>referent organization</em>).</td>
</tr>
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San Jose then perceived the outside consultants more positively as “facilitators for community development” (again, showing progression toward full community control over time).

Chalalán demonstrates that community-based ecotourism is a potentially good strategy for connecting the business of tourism with goals for sustainable development and long term conservation. Most such communities may need some kind of support to create and manage their own operations. Communities like San Jose are clearly able to manage lodges like Chalalán on their own, but the initial assistance in product design and investment, marketing, formulating business strategies, building professional protocol, handling conflicts and other administrative and managerial skills are critical aspects of “capacity building”, specifically here, the capacity to develop and operate an ecododge through collaborative partnerships successfully over the long run after the partners depart. Table 2 illustrates some of the key theoretical/conceptual issues raised in this paper and some examples from the Chalalán Ecolodge case as discussed above.

Conclusion
This paper commenced with an overview of the complex characteristics of tourism destinations. The protected area destination domain is highly complex due to multiple interconnected systems and numerous stakeholders often holding diverse interests and views on tourism and sustainability. The “use–conservation gap” frequently present in protected area destinations indicates the need for collaboration and coordination to ensure that the parks system and the tourism (industry) system work closely together for sustainable destination management. Sustainability of natural and cultural resources can no longer be viewed as isolated efforts and in terms of independent stakeholders. Impacts are often interrelated, and multiple stakeholders from the local to the global may be required to address the issues. Rather than merely symbiotic (as in park agencies and tourism industry cooperating for mutual benefit), their relationship may be strongly interdependent (neither can manage use–conservation issues effectively without the other). These points are well illustrated by the Chalalán case.

The scale, structure and scope of collaboration and partnerships to manage protected area destinations vary depending on the type of issues, stakeholders and intended outcomes. In Chalalán, biodiversity conservation, community development, capacity building and long term phased ownership were strategic goals of the formally structured partnership between Conservation International and the local community. This bridging organization (Brown, 1991) was key to managing the complexity of Madidi National Park, with its vital biodiversity resources and local population in need of economic diversification and capacity building.

Two additional issues were also addressed here: the representation of nature as a stakeholder, and the challenges of long term implementation. This case of community-based ecotourism (i.e. Chalalán) helps to illustrate some of the characteristics and issues raised earlier in the paper, and offer further directions for research and practice. The local San Josesanos are legitimate stakeholders whose relationship with the biophysical world around them merit direct participation in collaborations over use and conservation of nature (and the biophysical world more broadly). Their right to participate in decision making over use and conservation is primarily legitimized (1) practically as subsistence users of biodiversity resources (plus minor resource extractive activity) and (2) historically through a long-standing dwelling and development of local and traditional knowledge (aided by living with the indigenous Tacana), for example, medicinal use of plants and animals incorporating Andean and Amazonian cultural techniques. They are now incorporating new techniques.
in conservation ("western" scientific knowledge), an outcome of the ecological modernization brought by Conservation International. Plus their role as (3) local conservationists of Madidi and ecotourism operators adds further legitimacy to their role as stakeholders.

The Chalalán case also offers useful research direction into long term implementation as well as performance indicators for sustainability. Both quantitatively measurable and qualitative items should be including in gauging local project impacts. Pride in the value of local contributions, the quality of their work, and the protection of forests and rivers for subsistence needs should be calculated alongside total profits and assets in success indicators. Lessons on long term implementation challenges from Chalalán include acknowledging the heterogeneity of communities, the need to get more than a few key individuals involved and training new leaders to assume project management. Cultural change is an important avenue for future research and theory building in protected areas tourism, where the impacts of ecological modernization through scientific partners (like the NGO Conservation International in the Chalalán case) paradoxically operate hand-in-hand with providing local control and empowerment through community-based ecotourism development.

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Notes
1. Ecological integrity has taken precedence as increased visitation has adversely impacted biodiversity health in iconic parks such as Banff National Park (Parks Agency, 2001, 2004).
2. This convening stage may be useful to identify clearly as the first phase (Selin & Chavez, 1995), followed by the three phases forwarded by Gray (1989) that were adapted for tourism settings by Jamal and Getz (1995).
3. The collaboration’s initiator or sponsor (e.g. regional government) may assume the role of a secondary stakeholder, monitoring progress and receiving benefits of successful collaboration (e.g. cooperation over conservation and use).
4. While there is a large literature that discusses what “community” means, community as used here refers to a body of people living in a locality (cf. Aas et al., 2005).
5. The lodge also features traditional culture and contemporary community life of San Jose. Occasionally, tour groups are given the option to take a day trip from Chalalán to San Jose to see and engage in the religious feast day of the patron Saint Joseph (or San Jose).

References


Appendix. Background to the Chalalán study

In 2003, three indigenous communities in the Amazon regions of Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia joined in a six-month comparative study of ecotourism partnerships (Stronza, 2005). Leaders from the three sites compared their experiences in ecotourism. All were involved in community-managed ecotourism projects that had begun as collaborative efforts with conservation NGOs, private tourism companies and/or multilateral development banks. All three projects were located in buffer zones of national parks or regions of high conservation priority, and they were intended to foster economic development while also supporting resource management needs. The comparative study was funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, a consortium of Conservation International, the Global Environmental Facility, the MacArthur Foundation and the Government of Japan. The funding enabled participatory evaluations of the three kinds of partnerships for ecotourism: community–NGO (Bolivia), community–private company (Peru) and indigenous federation–private company (Ecuador).

As a “south–south” exchange of lessons learned, the aim of the study was to generate grassroots consensus on best practices for community-based ecotourism. Several community members from each site were involved in every phase of the analysis and exchange, including 3 five-day workshops held in each of the tourism lodges. Leading up the workshops, a team of trinational researchers carried out two months of ethnographic research in each of the communities and conducted semistructured household interviews among lodge workers and community members. The inquiries focused on social, economic, cultural and environmental changes introduced by ecotourism.

Building on the results of the ethnographic research, the researchers worked with community leaders to develop discussion themes and activities for the workshops. Topics of discussion included impacts of tourism on communal resources, negotiations between partners, and challenges and successes of partnerships for conservation and development goals. During the workshops, delegates stayed in each others’ lodges as tourists, learned about each others’ operations first-hand and engaged in informal, candid conversations. All of the delegates worked in ecotourism in their communities, and the same delegates attended all three workshops. Other participants included representatives from nonprofit, research, government and private sectors in each country. At the end of the workshops, the local leaders organized press conferences in La Paz and Quito to share lessons learned with wider audiences. Following the comparative analysis, the Inter-American Development Bank requested a more thorough evaluation of the ecotourism partnership in Bolivia, the Chalalán Ecolodge.