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In Search of Reciprocity in Indigenous Tourism Research

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Title: In Search of Reciprocity in Indigenous Tourism Research

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Abstract:

The practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit, or the social norm of reciprocity, is a widely accepted rule in many cultural milieus. However, research on Indigenous contexts has largely, and for a long time, ignored these rules, favoring practices of intensive data and artifact appropriation.

Critical and decolonizing theorists are questioning the extractive nature of traditional research on Indigenous communities. Scholars, of Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous origins, are proposing new collaborative and participatory research approaches based on genuine respect and mutual benefit (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Chilisa, 2011; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). In the field of tourism studies, a growing body of literature shows examples of research done *with* the involved communities (Koster, Baccar, & Lemelin, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016) rather than on them.

With this working paper we intend to contribute to the ongoing conversation on decolonizing methods and approaches, presenting the ontological and epistemological framework that has guided our long term research in southeastern Mexico. Following an interuniversity agreement between the Intercultural University of Chiapas (Mexico) and the University of Alicante (Spain), a multidisciplinary and multiethnic team of researchers have been collaborating on different studies with Lacandon, Ch'ol, and Tzeltal communities engaged in the business of tourism. Throughout the process, many agreements have been reached, projects developed, and interactions established between external and internal co-researchers. In this paper, we will critically reflect on the reciprocities negotiated with these Maya communities and their entrepreneurs, giving particular attention to the issues of reflexivity, the co-research process, and the reporting back of findings to their rightful owners.

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