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WELL-BEING IN LAS SALINAS, NICARAGUA

A Thesis in
Recreation, Park and Tourism Management

by
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Well-being has been explored from individual, family and community perspectives and involves people’s satisfaction with their quality of life. For developing countries, well-being is a concern because of widespread poverty and whether people’s basic needs are being met. One prominent idea for poverty alleviation and economic improvement is tourism development. Women especially are impacted by and receive benefits from tourism differently than men. The question is whether tourism can contribute to improving the quality of lives, for men and women, in developing countries. Surf tourism is a growing sector which has not received much academic attention but has the potential to have tremendous economic and social impacts on remote communities worldwide. Nicaragua is one such country that is seeing this sector grow due to its tropical climate and high quality surf generating coastline.

The community of Las Salinas, Nicaragua is one of the prime surf spots on the west coast of Nicaragua. Surf lodges have begun to pop up in there over the past 15 years. I stayed with a local Nicaraguan family in this community for three weeks and conducted interviews with 27 participants to learn about how residents perceived well-being in their community. The results revealed that the seasons, caring for the environment, foreigners, a bad economic situation, government forces, religion, social problems and family solidarity were the main factors which influenced well-being in the community. Tourism did emerge as a major factor in the economic well-being of the community. The implications of this study are that while tourism may improve the economic situation for the community, many other factors about community life need to be taken into account when considering tourism development. Future research might include studying more objective indicators of well-being for this community and including more residents. Another direction may be how much ownership and the level of influence in tourism
development increases or decreases the amount of benefits the community may receive that could contribute to their well-being.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................................. vii
LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................. viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................................... ix

Chapter 1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1
  Delimitations ...................................................................................................................... 4
  Limitations ....................................................................................................................... 5
  Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 6
  Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................... 7

Chapter 2 Literature Review .............................................................................................. 9
  Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 9
  Well-being ..................................................................................................................... 9
  Family Well-being ....................................................................................................... 10
  Women’s Well-being ..................................................................................................... 11
  Community Well-being ............................................................................................... 12
  Well-being and Tourism ............................................................................................... 16
  Tourism and Poverty Alleviation ................................................................................. 16
  Gender and Tourism ..................................................................................................... 21
  Coastal and Surf Tourism ............................................................................................. 22
  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 26

Chapter 3 Study Context: Nicaragua ............................................................................... 27
  Indigenous Groups in Western Nicaragua ................................................................... 28
  Tourism in Nicaragua .................................................................................................. 29
  Las Salinas ..................................................................................................................... 33

Chapter 4 Methods .......................................................................................................... 36
  Sample ........................................................................................................................... 39
  Data Collection ............................................................................................................. 39
  Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 42

Chapter 5 Results ............................................................................................................. 45
  Los Temporadas ............................................................................................................. 46
  Invierno .......................................................................................................................... 46
  Verano ............................................................................................................................ 48
  Cuidar La Naturaleza ..................................................................................................... 49
  Personas De Afuera ....................................................................................................... 51
Turismo .................................................................................................................. 51
Extranjeros ................................................................................................................ 53
La Economia Es Muy Baja ....................................................................................... 54
No Hay Trabajo ........................................................................................................ 54
Pobreza .................................................................................................................... 55
Gobierno ................................................................................................................... 56
Religion..................................................................................................................... 57
Problemas Sociales ................................................................................................. 57
Actividades Malas .................................................................................................... 59
Conflicto.................................................................................................................... 60
Comunidad Unida ..................................................................................................... 61
Hombres y Mujeres .................................................................................................. 61

Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion .................................................................. 65
Discussion................................................................................................................ 65
Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 74
Implications ............................................................................................................. 77
Future Research ...................................................................................................... 77

References ............................................................................................................... 79
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Surfing map of Nicaragua.................................................................33
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Well-being Interview Questions. .................................................................41
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Well-being is composed of “aspects of people’s lives that they value and have reason to value” (Alkire, 2005, p. 223). There are quite a few measures of well-being that have come out of development, social indicators, and feminist literature. Some define individual well-being as happiness or satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 2003; Veenhoven, 1991). Many studies have investigated well-being in communities or even countries, defining it by measures such as levels of literacy, life expectancy after birth, social ties within the community, environmental factors, as well as other indicators (Christakopoulou et al., 2001; Dasgupta, 1990; Sirgy et al., 2009). A number of studies have investigated the connection to income and well-being (Diener et al., 2010; Diener et al., 1993; Veenhoven, 1991), which begs the question of what sources of income communities may have available to them.

Tourism has a long history of being associated with alleviating poverty and improving the economic situation for developing countries (Enloe, 2000; Swain, 1995; World Tourism Organization, 2002). Tourism however, has been heavily criticized due to the negative impacts on host country environments, cultures and communities, which may indicate that tourism is negatively affecting well-being as opposed to improving people’s lives (Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Weaver, 1998). Alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism, sustainable tourism, and pro poor tourism, emphasize greater community involvement but may not be as beneficial to communities as many people believe (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Tourism in developing countries suffers from several problems that can prevent involvement by local communities and benefits going to the most needed sectors of the community (Tosun, 2000). The problems include: elites tending to dominate local industry, government structures and legal systems often
obstruct opportunities, a lack of financial resources and start up funds, and a lack of training (Tosun, 2000). Many authors have concluded that a community-based participatory approach is the key to successful and positive tourism development in these poorer countries (Sofield, 2003; Tosun, 2000). Their participation in tourism planning and development will offer them the opportunity to get the most benefit out of it and improve their well-being instead of standing by and watching development happen (Sofield, 2003). This leads to the question of what well-being involves for a community and what aspects of it could benefit from tourism.

Women in developing nations often suffer more from poverty than men (Ringer, 2007). Women’s roles in tourism are a product of the culture and society in which tourism development is occurring and they vary greatly, even among developing countries (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995). In some cases, tourism perpetuates gender roles, while in others it has contributed to greater women’s empowerment and gender equity (Lama, 2000; Nyaupane et al., 2006; Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995). Women and men differ in the factors that contribute to their well-being (Hill & King, 1995; Linneker & Bradshaw, [nd]; Sen, 1999). In Latin America, women who are impoverished have faced gender disparities that continue to persist today, one of the problems being machismo and a male dominated culture (Stevens, 1973).

According to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2008), Nicaragua is the poorest country in Latin America. In 2007, the country had a Human Poverty Index (a measure of health and life expectancy, education access, and standard of living) of 17%, ranking it 68 out of 135 countries (United Nations Development Program, 2009). One of the ways in which Nicaragua hoped to improve its economic situation has been to adopt tourism as one of its fundamental economic activities (La Asamblea Nacional De La Republica de Nicaragua, 2004). Some evidence suggesting that this strategy has had some success was reported in a recent study which found that tourism led to a higher gross domestic product, as well as other positive economic outcomes (Croes & Vanegas Sr, 2008).
One of Nicaragua’s primary tourism appeals is the country’s long, undeveloped west coast and its numerous surf breaks. According to industry observers, as new breaks are being discovered in Nicaragua and with the overcrowding and overdevelopment of surf destinations like Costa Rica and Mexico, Nicaragua is likely to observe fast growth in popularity among surf tourists (Hunt, 2009; Weisberg, 2010). Weisberg (2010), for example, commented that “Nicaragua has quickly shed its lawless, war-plagued stigma and hopped onto American surfers’ short list of affordable, yet paradisiacal destinations” (p. 108). Much of the push behind “surf tourism” is from U.S. tour operators who have started businesses and begun running lodging and surf tours (Popoyo Surf Lodge, 2008). Unfortunately, little is known about how coastal communities are reacting to the growth of surf tourism. Numbers from development indices and economic impact studies provide limited insight. Thus, if the Nicaraguan government is going to claim that tourism alleviates poverty, Nicaraguans’ perceptions of their well being and whether one of the growing forms of tourism in the country (i.e., surf tourism) is part of that should be examined.

To date, most efforts to examine surf tourism and its impacts on local communities have focused in the South pacific region, a region with long history of interaction between surf tourists, surf tourism providers and poor coastal communities (Buckley, 2002b; Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003; Ponting et al., 2005). Several scholars have studied surf tourism development in Indonesian and Pacific Islands; however, Central America, the primary destination for North American surfers, has received no attention with regard to surf tourism development. Therefore, research extending the current understanding of the impacts of surf tourism and extending this line of inquiry geographically to the Americas is needed.

The tourism literature includes a long track of studies reporting the impacts of tourism in host communities; however, few scholars have examined tourism from an in depth, qualitative analysis of well-being. Additionally, while various authors have examined communities’
reactions to small-scale ecotourism in mountainous regions, there is a shortage of empirical studies of the impacts of surf tourism on small coastal communities, especially on small communities like Las Salinas on the central Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, where surf tourism is rapidly growing. The research question guiding this study is:

R1: What factors do residents of Las Salinas regard as important to well-being in their community?

**Delimitations**

The findings of this study are relevant only to the community of Las Salinas, a small community on the south Pacific Coast of Nicaragua. Geographically, the community encompasses the village of Las Salinas, the Playa Guasacate, and a famous reef surf break called Popoyo. Las Salinas is relatively similar to other small coastal communities in Nicaragua, Central America, and perhaps globally, and, as a result, the findings of this study may provide insight relevant to other contexts.

However, as with most communities, Las Salinas is in many ways unique. Namely, Las Salinas is an indigenous community, delineated as such by the fact that it has its own local elected government consisting of a *presidente* (president) and a *junta directiva* (board of directors) even though it falls under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Tola, in the department of Rivas. The people of the town speak Spanish; it has been many years since they have spoken an indigenous language in this area. Many people associate indigeneity with speaking an indigenous language and wearing traditional dress in Central America, which is part of the reason the indigenous groups of Western Nicaragua have experienced difficulties with obtaining official recognition and gaining rightful land tenure (Field, 1998). Another unique aspect of the community is its reliance on salt production in the dry season (December-April), and crop production (beans, rice, corn) in
the rainy season (May-November). Popoyo reef has brought surfers and tourists to the community since the mid 90s, some of whom have built houses and bought property there, and live there for half or most of the year. This has changed the dynamic of the community as foreigners have become part of the cultural landscape of Las Salinas.

**Limitations**

The data for this study was collected in a relatively brief time period, over the course of three weeks between late December 2009 and the middle of January 2010. This period corresponded to the low tourist season; therefore, many people were not working at the time, and I was unable to observe what life is like when there are many tourists in town. However, had I been there during the high season it is likely that I may not have been able to interview as many people who worked in the local tourism industry.

The three-week period also seems like a very short length of time to collect data with sufficient depth and breadth. Cognizant of the short time period I had available; I devised an intensive data collection method. Namely, I took notes throughout all my interviews; I digital voice recorded twenty six formal interviews and four informal ones. I kept a journal which I wrote in everyday about my experiences, my frustrations, my feelings, my reflections, and my progress on the project. I took pictures documenting celebrations, places, people, and everyday life.

I am not a native Nicaraguan, nor am I a native Spanish speaker; therefore, cultural and language barriers may have hindered my ability to collect the most insightful data from the informants. Nevertheless, I lived in Guatemala for over 2 years as a Peace Corps volunteer in a rural region inhabited by indigenous communities partially involved in ecotourism. Thanks to this recent extended living experience in Central America I am fluent in rural Central American
Spanish and am relatively comfortable with some shared social norms in this region. In addition, during fieldwork I did not stay in a hotel; instead I stayed with a local family in Las Salinas in an effort to gain the trust of residents as a guest of a local family. Upon arrival, I quickly became a part of the family for three weeks. They introduced me to neighbors and extended family members and they often accompanied me when recruiting other community informants for my interviews.

**Significance of the Study**

I investigate well-being in a small rural community who is experiencing a growth in surf tourism. Whether surf tourism is a factor in community well-being is especially interesting to examine in this context since, in the majority of the world, it is a sport and industry that has been brought in by foreigners due to their desire to surf in less crowded conditions (Buckley, 2002a). This market demand for these small scale experiences offers the potential for local ownership and involvement in all forms of tourism services. However, if foreigners dominate surf businesses in these communities, there could be negative effects on their well-being or they could not be getting the greatest possible benefit out of it to improve their well-being. Additionally well-being along with gender within the context of surf tourism, a heavily male dominated arena, provides a new perspective on gender in tourism studies.

Beyond its conceptual significance, this study will also potentially bring important insight for practice. By asking Nicaraguans what is going on in their lives and with tourism in their community, the hope is to level the playing field and offer the hope of a shift in power from outside interests to the local community. There is very little research on surf tourism and local communities; more focus is placed on backpackers and ecotourism. Surfboards, transportation of boards, and boat trips are far more costly than backpacks. Little is known about what surf
tourism (and surf culture) is doing to these remote locations in Central America and the rest of the developing world. “There are now estimated to be over 10 million surfers worldwide, increasing at 12–16%...” per year (Buckley, 2002b, p. 407). Locals are learning how to surf but few of them are learning how to make money from this form of tourism. They may be gaining power over their resource (the waves and ocean), but not over the financial capital rolling into the town. The purpose of this study is to gain more knowledge about how residents’ well-being is affected by the growth of surf tourism and surfing in their communities. This way, instead of being a colonialist venture (Barilotti, 2002), local communities can benefit from it and improve their well-being through income from tourism.

**Definition of Terms**

**Developing Country** – A country with low to moderate level of economic development and material well-being. The United Nations classifies countries based on a composite index known as the HDI (Human Development Index) (United Nations Development Program, 2010). The World Bank classifies using “low income” (US $995 or less gross national income) or “lower middle income” (US $995-$3945 GNI) (The World Bank, 2010). These countries are sometimes classified as “Third World”, “Southern”, “non-Western”, “economically developing”, “poor”, or “under-developed” (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). All of these words are controversial and have power connotations, developing country was chosen in this study due to its common usage in relevant literature (Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

**Indigenous People** – people in Central America, namely Nicaragua, who consider themselves to be descendents of native groups in the region before the Spanish arrived to colonize (Membreño Idiáquez, 1992).
**Pro-poor tourism** – Making benefits to poor people the central goal in tourism planning and development (Harrison, 2008; Neto, 2003)

**Surf Tourism** – Any travel, domestic or international, that involves staying over at least one night, for the specific purpose of engaging in the sport of surfing and riding waves (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003).

**Sustainable Tourism** – tourism that preserves and protects economic, cultural, social and environmental resources for future generations; educational (for tourists and local population); and locally participatory (Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

**Sustainable Development** – defined in the Brundtland Report, from the World Commission on Environment and Development, as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (quoted in Mowforth & Munt, 2009, p. 379).

**Well-being** – Happiness or satisfaction with one’s personal life or with his or her community (Christakopoulou et al., 2001; Diener et al., 2003).
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The following is a review of the scholarly literature that informed this study. The review begins with an overview of well-being and the different aspects and definitions of it. This also includes discussions of individual well-being, family well-being, women’s well-being and community well-being. Well-being is found in some of the tourism literature, but this is followed by a discussion of tourism as a method of poverty alleviation, such it is more popularly framed in that manner. The complexity of gender dynamics and tourism in developing countries is included. The review concludes with a discussion about coastal and surf tourism in the developing world and the impacts and implications for communities.

Well-Being

Well-being can be defined from an individual perspective but from a societal perspective as well’ Diener and colleagues calls subjective well-being: “…one measure of the quality of life of an individual and of societies” (2003, p. 405). This study will only look at subjective well-being because the focus is on people’s perceptions of their lives, not objective measures of well-being such as socio-economic status, life expectancy, or birth rates. Subjective well-being is comprised of the cognitive and emotional evaluations people make about all aspects of their lives (Diener, 2009; Diener et al., 2003). Much of the research on subjective well-being includes happiness and life satisfaction (Diener, 2009; Diener et al., 2003). Some quantitative studies show evidence that income is related to well-being (Diener et al., 1993; Veenhoven, 1991). Measures
of subjective well-being have included factors such as health and nutrition, but also include psychological measures found on the General Well-Being Schedule (Diener et al., 1993). This schedule includes questions about feelings of sadness and happiness, as well as other indicators such as anxiety, stress and fatigue (Taylor et al., 2003).

**Family Well-Being**

Family well-being has been given attention from various perspectives; much of the work appears to focus on how things affect child well-being in the family (Armstrong et al., 2005; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000). How work influences family well-being is another popular topic of research (Greenhaus et al., 1987; Parcel & Menaghan, 1997; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000). There does not appear to be a widely used definition for family well-being, however Greenhaus and colleagues (1987) did a study which examined accountants and their work and family lives. They measured personal and family well-being through a marital adjustment scale, work-family conflict scale and a quality of life scale (Greenhaus et al., 1987). They found that work role conflict and a work environment where they did not receive much support “…were associated with low levels of marital adjustment and quality of life and high levels of work-family conflict” (Greenhaus et al., 1987, p. 211).

Parcel and Menaghan (1997) discussed how aspects of the home environment (father’s presence, number of siblings, child’s physical health, mother’s age, self-esteem and education) can influence a child’s development. They found that mothers with more complex jobs thought more creatively and encouraged their children to be autonomous, mothers who had low-paying repetitive jobs tended to encourage obedience (Parcel & Menaghan, 1997). The quality of home environments was worse for children whose mothers did not work and were on welfare, but even
if they had work, the type of job could influence whether their parenting was positive or negative (Parcel & Menaghan, 1997). Most of this work has been done in the American context.

Some work was done which examined the effects of HIV/AIDS on families in South Africa (Ferreira, 2004). Ferreira discusses the impacts of HIV/AIDS on family structures, income and education. For these families, medical help and care giving become primary goals and other things may fall out including money for food and education (Ferreira, 2004). Her policy recommendations include additional support for families such as grief counseling, prevention efforts, ensuring food security and healthcare and reducing stigmatization of the disease. Overall, there appears to be a lack of information on family well-being in developing countries.

Women’s Well-Being

In a study of how women’s education and economic well-being influences families and societies, Hill and King (1995) examined multiple countries and found that: “…countries with higher levels of women’s education experience more rapid economic growth, longer life expectancy, lower population growth, and improved quality of life” (p. 26). For Nicaragua in particular, they cite one study which found that the mother’s education had a positive association with increased caloric intake and height for children, whereas father’s education made no difference (Hill & King, 1995). In multiple country comparisons, gender disparity in education was shown to decrease social well-being whereas the mother’s education had a positive influence on family well-being indicators (Hill & King, 1995). Hill and King (1995) also discuss barriers to female education, one of which is socialization of female roles as caring for others and taking care of the home, not generating economic income for the home. Education is not free in all countries and incurred expenses can discourage parents from sending their daughters to school. Scholarship programs are one policy implementation they recommend, as well as informing
communities about the importance of women’s education and family planning to decrease teen pregnancy (Hill & King, 1995).

In a study done in Nicaragua from 1999 to 2001, Linneker and Bradshaw (nd) looked at how capital assets influence men’s and women’s perceptions of well-being. The assets they used included economic capital, human capital (health, education), social capital, environmental capital and psychosocial capital. Rural households were found to be worse off than urban households in terms of well-being, as well as families who had children in school. Five factors, in order of importance, increased the likelihood of women, who were the head of the household, to report improvements in well being. “The presence of a national NGO or civil organisation [sic] working for the community, feeling the community is prepared to face another disaster such as a hurricane, identifying local government as the main organisation [sic] working to improve the community, and having asked for help in times of crises” (Linneker & Bradshaw, [nd], pp. 13-14). These female heads of households viewed asking for any kind of help as negative and contributed to reduced feelings of well-being.

Community Well-Being

Veenhoven (1991) examined an earlier study conducted by Easterlin in 1974, which found very little difference in happiness between rich and poor countries, but concluded that rich people were happier than poor people in within country comparisons. Veenhoven (1991) challenged Easterlin on the number of underdeveloped countries used in the study and examined more recent data which includes more poor countries. He found a high correlation between GDP and happiness. He also refuted the second claim, and discussed how the variations revealed that the difference in happiness levels between rich and poor is smaller in richer countries (Veenhoven, 1991). One of Veenhoven’s conclusions is that: “The better their social and
personal living conditions, the happier people generally are” (1991, p. 18). In examining data from the U.S. and an international sample of colleges, Diener and colleagues (1993) found that income was related to subjective well-being. The authors make suggestions for why income seems to do more than just meet basic needs (food, shelter, health) such as: people with more income are able to hire other people to do work they do not want to do, and higher income makes life easier because the cost of living is higher in more industrialized countries (Diener et al., 1993). In a more recent study using data from 132 countries, Diener and colleagues (2010) found that income was strongly associated with life evaluation forms of well-being but social psychological prosperity (feelings of autonomy, competence and social support) was strongly associated with positive feelings. This possibly indicates that money does not necessarily mean happiness. Some countries that were less economically developed did much better on social psychological prosperity (Diener et al., 2010).

Dasgupta’s study of poor countries includes measures of well-being which he defines as: “per capita national income, life expectancy at birth, infant survival rate, adult literacy rate, and indices of political and civil rights” (1990, p. 3). These measures might be considered objective well-being since they account for nation-wide statistics instead of how people perceive their well-being. He examines these factors in 50 different countries he defines as poor (with per capita incomes at less than US $1000 in 1980). Dasgupta distinguishes between positive and negative rights and how these can affect well-being. Positive rights are basic needs which must be fulfilled and can be commoditized such as drinking water, number of hospital beds, and school enrollments. These can vary from person to person and have to do with resource availability. Negative rights are what Dasgupta claims provide the environment in which to fulfill positive rights: freedom to participate in political life, and freedom from persecution or abuse by others. His findings suggest that political and civil liberties (negative rights) do have profound effects on well-being (positive rights) - they are positively correlated with per capita income and growth,
better infant survival rates and improved life expectancy and adult literacy rates are negatively correlated with these rights.

At the societal or community level, different measures have been used. Sirgy and colleagues (2009) measured overall community well-being, overall life satisfaction, community commitment and social ties in the community. They also included a scale to measure how community systems affect residents’ safety, social, leisure, family and home, political, spiritual, neighborhood, environmental, transportation, education, health, work, financial and consumer well-being. These fourteen life domains were found to influence overall community well-being, overall life satisfaction, community commitment and social ties to the community; which was what they predicted. The study was conducted in the U.S. around Flint, Michigan (Sirgy et al., 2009).

Another community well-being scale which has been developed includes similar measures of a community: “(a) a place to live; (b) a social community; (c) an economic community; (d) a political community; (e) a personal space and (f) a part of the city” (Christakopoulou et al., 2001, p. 324). Christakopoulou and colleagues conducted their study in three different countries: Greece, Ireland and England. “Place to live” focused on satisfaction with housing, local facilities, services, and environmental conditions. “Social community” included questions about social support networks to community spirit. “Economic community” accounted for employment, investing, and spending in the community. “Political community” covered levels of participation in political processes in the community. “Personal space” basically examined residents’ place attachment and “part of the city” focused on the social, economic and communication links to the larger urban area of which the community was a part. Since this study was primarily concerned with development of a reliable and valid research instrument, the authors claimed than the instrument could be “a useful tool to inform a holistic understanding of urban communities” (Christakopoulou et al., 2001, p. 348).
A number of researchers have examined community well-being and natural resource dependence. Stedman and colleagues (2004) looked at resource reliance and well-being in rural Canada. Their measures of well-being included: “…rates of family poverty, individual employment and educational attainment, median family income, and five-year immigration rates” (Stedman et al., 2004, p. 223). Their overall results on the relationship between resource reliance and well-being were non-conclusive. However, when broken down into specific industries, there were more definitive answers (Stedman et al., 2004). Mining and energy were positively correlated with higher income; fishing was associated with high poverty rates, low education, unemployment and low income; and forestry varied from region to region.

Kusel (1996) calls for a different approach to examining well-being in forest dependent communities and uses Sen’s (1985) capabilities and functionings approach to measuring well-being. Capabilities consists of the freedoms and opportunities a person has, and functionings consists of a person’s achievements (Kusel, 1996). Forest dependent communities have a high economic reliance on forest resources which includes timber and tourism (Kusel, 1996). Kusel (1996) says the analysis of well-being should be expanded to include community capacity, which includes physical/financial capital, human capital and social capital. A community assessment of these factors will help residents to see what opportunities they have and how they can gain more influence over the industries they rely on for their livelihoods (Kusel, 1996).

In a comparative study of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) communities and non-CBNRM communities in Namibia, Morais and Zinn (2010) used nominal group technique to learn about well-being. Their measures of well-being included problems and contributions to: health, work, relationships, and the natural and spiritual world (Morais & Zinn, 2010). They found that conservancy communities had more employment opportunities, which contributed to their well-being, than non-CBNRM communities (Morais & Zinn, 2010). The researchers also noted that while CBNRM communities reported being in harmony with the
natural world, they also reported more social relationship and health problems, which detracted from their well-being (Morais & Zinn, 2010). Religion and traditions did not change for conservancy communities due to their participation in CBNRM (Morais & Zinn, 2010).

**Well-being and Tourism**

Within tourism, the well-being of the local communities which play host to tourism is supposedly one of the tenets of both ecotourism and sustainable tourism (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Choi and Sirakaya (2006) propose a number of sustainability indicators for communities involved in tourism. These indicators include economic, social, cultural, ecological, political and technological dimensions (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). They claim that improved quality of life for local residents is a goal of sustainable tourism and in order for this to occur, local communities must have the power to make decisions with regard to tourism development (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006).

In a U.S. Department of Agriculture economic report, recreation and tourism dependent rural areas had higher rates of employment, increased costs of living, increased population growth, reduced poverty, higher crime rates, more educated populations, and good health conditions (Reeder & Brown, 2005). In a study done in Colorado on the impact of tourism development on residents’ perceptions of community life, “…public services, environmental concerns, and opportunities for citizen involvement” were all facets of community life residents thought tourism had an impact on (Allen et al., 1988, p. 20).
Tourism and Poverty Alleviation

Tourism is often couched as a tool to improve well-being in developing countries in the context of poverty alleviation. The United Nations and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) have recognized tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation and reduction (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2005; Jamieson, 2003; WTO, 2002) and a source of debt relief for economically poor countries (Enloe, 2000; Kinnaird et al., 1994). According to the WTO (2002), tourism can reduce poverty “…by providing employment and diversified livelihood opportunities” (p. 31). The organization also claims that the tourism industry can link to other local businesses, is labor intensive, and that it predominantly employs women and vulnerable socioeconomic sectors of society (WTO, 2002). If the country does not have many options for exports, tourism provides a source of international revenue and can be built on natural resources and culture, which are assets of many poor communities (WTO, 2002). Tourism can also prevent the migration of rural populations to cities for work since it can provide opportunities for rural residents in their own communities (Jamieson, 2003).

Blake, Arbache, Sinclair and Teles (2008) investigated poverty alleviation from an economic standpoint in Brazil. Their computable general equilibrium (CGE) model separates other economic sectors from tourism sectors in order to determine specifically if tourism is benefitting the poorest in Brazil or if the money is going elsewhere. They found that the channels affecting distribution of income from the tourism industry were price changes, earnings, and the government. As prices of goods increase due to demand from an increasing tourism population, local residents can no longer afford what they need. Poor residents can benefit from increased earnings from tourism, but if they do not have the skills to get the higher paid jobs, this does not help them. The increased tax revenue the government sees from tourism may go towards improving programs for the poor but may also be used for other ends. The CGE model shows
that Brazilians in the lowest income sector benefit from tourism and that it potentially reduces income disparities between rich and poor. According to their model, if the government was to direct tourism earnings towards the lowest income sector of society, the benefits that sector receive would increase substantially.

Sustainable tourism has been hailed as a better strategy than mass tourism for increasing local participation and maximizing benefits to local communities (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). It has been defined as tourism that is economically, culturally, socially and environmentally sustainable, educates tourists and local residents; and includes local involvement in planning and management (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Some of the goals of sustainable tourism are: “(1) to development greater awareness and understanding of the significant contributions that tourism can make to environment and the economy; (2) to promote equity and development; (3) to improve the quality of life of the host community; (4) to provide a high quality of experience for the visitor; (5) to maintain the quality of the environment on which the foregoing objectives depend” (Fennell, 2008, p. 8). Ecotourism and sustainable tourism both emphasize heavy local involvement in the tourism development process.

Mowforth and Munt (2009) point out what the buzzword “sustainability” has become in the tourism industry, so much so that it has lost its original meaning. They also discuss the “unequal and uneven” development that takes place due to global capitalist structures and concede that pro poor tourism is going to vary in its benefits from place to place (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Much of the time, tourism may benefit the people who are not the poorest in the community and it requires defining poverty before you address the problem (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). NGOs (non-government organizations) and INGOs (international non-government organizations) focus on the community as a whole when focusing on the poor so evidence as to concrete poverty relief are sketchy at best (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). There is evidence that pro
poor tourism can better peoples’ lives but perhaps not eliminate poverty completely (Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

Neto (2003), as well as Jamieson (2003), advocate pro poor tourism since it makes poverty reduction the main goal of a country’s tourism development planning and management. While community-based and environmentally-based tourism share some of the goals of sustainable development, pro-poor tourism has the specific aim of getting benefits to the poor (Neto, 2003). The pro-poor tourism approach is defined as improved employment and business opportunities for poor people, training to “maximize those opportunities” (Neto, 2003, p. 220); measures to deal with the negative social and environmental impacts of tourism; policy reform which improves participation of poor communities in the planning, development and management of tourism development; and the development of partnerships with poor communities and government organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) (Jamieson, 2003; Neto, 2003). Jamieson (2003) urges adapting strategies to “local conditions, target markets, and interests of the poor” (p. 30).

Harrison (2008) commented that the idea of using tourism as an economic growth agent for the developing world began back in the 1970s. The ability of tourism to create jobs, alleviate poverty and protect host cultures prompted many international organizations, such as the World Bank, to become involved in tourism development. Academics, however, were quick to point out that, from the perspective of dependency theory and globalization theory, tourism had the tendency to contribute to increased inequalities and power dichotomies and as a result many voices begun questioning the real benefit of tourism development in poor countries (Harrison, 2008). Alternative, small-scale forms of tourism like ecotourism and sustainable tourism were then epitomized as the solution; this was then followed by pro poor tourism, which emerged in the 1990s (Harrison, 2008).
Pro poor tourism works with tourism already in place, it is not necessarily anti-capitalism, nor anti-mass tourism, pro poor tourism tries to get the benefits coming in from tourism to the poor (Harrison, 2008). Harrison also points out that it may be focused on non poor sectors of a community, since they may benefit from it more than the very poorest people. Pro poor tourism also concentrates on training and capacity building, not just economic benefits (Harrison, 2008). It also concerns the wider distribution of benefits to many in a country or community and requires collaboration of international, national and local stakeholders (Harrison, 2008).

International organizations may use the rhetoric of community participation and inclusion in the tourism planning process, but much of the time they are not really participating, but being told what will happen (Tosun, 2000). There are also operational, cultural, and structural limitations to community participation (Tosun, 2000). Operational limitations include: centralization of public administration of tourism, lack of coordination between the public and private sectors of the industry, and lack of information about tourism data (Tosun, 2000). Structural limitations are negative attitudes of host-country professionals, lack of expertise in the community, domination of state and business elites, lack of an appropriate legal system to protect and defend the local community’s interest, lack of trained human resource managers, high cost of community participation, and a lack of financial resources (Tosun, 2000). Cultural limitations, on the other hand, include: the limited capacity of poor people, apathy, and low level of awareness at the community level (Tosun, 2000). To overcome these limitations, general problems found in the social, economic and political structure of developing countries must be solved first (Tosun, 2000). Tosun (2000) advocates greater involvement of NGOs and more partnerships between organizations, greater education and training opportunities within communities so they can become more empowered to make decisions, and finding the exact reason for the lack of participation and figuring out how this can be fixed.
Mowforth and Munt (2009) bring up other barriers to effective and beneficial community participation in tourism in developing countries. They argue that Sen’s (1999) work, on recognizing the importance of government structures on personal rights and freedoms, could be useful in examining alternative tourism development in countries with weak human rights records such as Burma. People who lack opportunities and access to political processes are impoverished, not simply because they do not have much money. If tourism is developed in these places, they may never see the economic income from it since they are oppressed by the government or other forces (Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

**Gender and Tourism in the Developing World**

In examining tourism and its benefits for a community’s well-being, gender relations increase the complexity of the situation and further stratify the community with respect to where the benefits could go. Women tend to become engaged in tourism businesses because the entry level jobs are often low skilled, require little training, and involve activities women already know how to do as part of their socially constructed roles in society (e.g., cooking, cleaning, and overseeing the household) (Enloe, 2000; Gibson, 2001; Usher & Morais, 2010; Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995). Involvement in tourism can lead to increased leadership within the community due to their increased business responsibilities (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995).

Some authors argue that the increased pressure on women working in tourism just puts a greater burden on them because it adds to their household duties (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995). Others argue that it can perpetuate social norms of gender instead of promoting gender equity (Gibson, 2001). For example, women who manage guest houses are doing what they have always done: cooking, cleaning, and caretaking instead of sharing these jobs with men or changing social norms (Enloe, 2000; Gibson, 2001; Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995).
There is however, substantial evidence that tourism brings positive advancements to the lives of women in developing communities. In some areas, they make money from selling products and crafts made from local plants (Usher & Morais, 2010). Masai women are knowledgeable about walking routes; this close connection with nature has the potential for women to offer their skills as guides in the area of ecotourism (Scheyvens, 2000). In China’s Yunnan province and in Annapurna, Nepal, women’s involvement in tourism freed them from financial dependence on men and introduced them to ideas of gender equality after meeting women from other countries (Nyaupane et al., 2006). In Belize, as well as Jamaica, women leveraged their household management skills to run bed and breakfast establishments (Belsky, 1999; Momsen, 1994). Through NGO-assisted tourism development, women in communities in Nepal, rural Greece, and Mexico achieved greater self-esteem, family and community status, and input on community decision making (S. Walker et al., 2001).

Women with their own access to greater economic income have been found to use it for their families or improving their communities (Kevane & Wydick, 2001; Lama, 2000). In case studies from multiple developing countries, women with increased income had a significant effect on their children’s health, food education and well-being (Blumberg, 2001; Pitt & Khandker, 1998). The income generated from microfinance loans invested in their businesses gave women the financial ability to invest in their children’s well-being and gave them increased household decision making power (Blumberg, 2001).
Coastal and Surf Tourism

In coastal regions, economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism can bring drastic changes to communities. Reef damage can be a major problem due to jetty construction, ship anchoring, and sand mining and dredging (Gossling, 2003b; Sasidharan & Thapa, 2002). Sewage discharge and waste disposal are problems that arise as coastal areas become more crowded due to tourism (Domroes, 1993; Gossling, 2003b; Hall, 2001; Sasidharan & Thapa, 2002). Clearing vegetation near the ocean opens up the possibility of greater beach erosion during storms, which can compromise nearby housing (Hall, 2001). Chemical contamination from solvents, oils, pesticides and detergents from tourist resorts can contaminate the fresh water supply and the nearby marine ecosystems (Buckley, 2002b; Sasidharan & Thapa, 2002). Mangroves and estuaries face considerable problems due to increased construction, landfills, and dredging in some areas (Hall, 2001; Sasidharan & Thapa, 2002). The deterioration of mangroves and estuaries could mean ecosystem disturbance as fish species are eliminated and decreased protection from erosion during storms for those along the shoreline (Hall, 2001). Unfortunately, coastal impacts are generally referred to vaguely; specific impacts of tourism on coastal areas are difficult to measure and still not completely understood (Hall, 2001).

Ernoul (2009) investigated the perceptions of the residents of a coastal town in Morocco. Specifically, she studied the impacts a new beach resort sanctioned by the government would have on their community and the environment. While 64% of those surveyed believed the resort would have an impact on local development, 68% believed it would have a negative impact on the environment, citing deforestation, pollution and beach degradation as the major impacts. Just over half of those surveyed said they would not work in the new resort. This may be because farmers constitute the majority of the population, and very few of them benefit from the construction of the resort. Some cited losing land and strains on fresh water supplies as potential
impacts from the resort. Of those who wanted to work for the resort, only 7% wanted to open their own businesses that would be linked to it. Many of the construction workers were actually transported in from other areas of Morocco where the wages are much lower for construction (Ernoul, 2009).

Surf tourism development has resulted in negative social impacts, such as prostitution, for some small coastal communities (Barilotti, 2002; Gossling, 2003a; Morais et al., 2005; Oppermann, 1999). In the Mentawaian Islands, local kids have adopted surf culture after being exposed to Western tourists and localism, which is when local surfers claim ownership of the waves and priority in the surf lineup, has resulted in local surfers threatening tourists with death (Barilotti, 2002; Gossling, 2003a; Ponting et al., 2005).

Surf tourism is considered adventure tourism and most often grouped with ecotourism, since it involves the natural environment (Buckley, 2000). Tourism scholars who have investigated surf tourism in the Southern Pacific and Indonesia have recognized that development efforts with surfers and surf communities do exist, but few involve locals in tourism planning and management. Central America is still developing as a surf tourism destination and is popular with surfers from the United States due to its proximity. According to Board Trac, in 1999 it was estimated that there were 1.7 million surfers in the United States; in 2005 there were estimated to be 2.5 million (Billabong, 2005; Coleus, 2005). While the American surfing population is growing and traveling, tourism scholarship not only lacks contributions about surf tourism, but about surf tourism in American surfers’ nearest tropical playground, Central and South America.

There has been a limited amount of scholarship on surf tourism. Ponting, McDonald, and Wearing (2005) and Buckley (2002a, 2002b) explored tourism in the Indo-Pacific Islands, focusing on the Mentawais (an island chain off the coast of Indonesia). The researchers individually discuss the growth of surf tourism and the growth of the surf industry into a heavily commercialized multi-million dollar industry. Ponting et al. (2005), for example, examined the
disparity between the wonderland that is portrayed in advertising and surf magazines and the actual lives of the Mentawai people (e.g., high rate of malaria, few resources, poverty). They found that surf tourism does not fit the ecotourism model at all. While not discussing surf tourism specifically, Mbaiwa (2005) echoes Ponting and colleagues (2005) when he addresses the issue of foreign dominance of the tourism industry in developing countries. He indicates that this dominance does not give all stakeholders equal access to the economic benefits they can receive from their natural resources (Mbaiwa, 2005). The local people feel disconnected and not able to get involved in the industry. As a result, Ponting et al. (2005) propose placing a greater emphasis on participatory approaches to future tourism development in the region. Buckley (2002a), on the other hand, advocates for a management plan that addresses carrying capacity and sets limits on the number of surfers allowed on various breaks at one time.

Dolnicar and Fluker (2003) looked at surf tourists and where they chose to go on surf trips. They define surf tourism as any travel that involves staying over at least one night, for the specific purpose of engaging in the recreational activity of wave riding (including surfing, body-surfing, boogey-boarding, surf-skiing, surf-kayaking, paddle-boarding, and any other forms of wave riding). They also mention that the motivation for surf tourism, as presented in popular surf culture and press (e.g., magazines, movies, websites), is “the search for the perfect wave” (also see Barilotti, 2002; Kampion, 2003; Lueras, 1984 for additional information). With respect to their study, Dolnicar and Fluker (2003) asked surfers about their level of ability, the types of waves they like to surf, and the destinations they had surfed. In general, they found that ability positively correlated with the types of waves surfers sought when choosing a surf destination (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003). Barilotti (2002) and Buckley (2002a) found that another driving force behind surfers traveling to surf was to get away from crowded surf breaks so that they could have more waves to themselves and more time to surf instead of waiting in the lineup. This search for surf is pushing surfers to more remote destinations and spreading the sport to destinations
worldwide where some communities have never even seen a surfboard. Whether the communities are involved in it or not, surfers are coming to find waves and there are more and more of them every year.

The fact that surfers travel to more remote destinations has made them aware of the conditions existing within local communities being exposed to surf tourism. In fact, one surfer, a doctor concerned about the poor health conditions he witnessed on a surf trip, started a non-profit known as SurfAid International (Barilotti, 2002; Ponting et al., 2005). SurfAid works with local communities to spread awareness about malaria and improve health conditions in general (SurfAid International, 2009b).

While SurfAid uses a community-based participatory development approach, it does not appear to engage residents in tourism planning or management. The organization’s community development model is based on “helping people help themselves” and development being community led (SurfAid International, 2009a). While residents may want improved sanitation and water systems, as well as more solutions for preventing malaria, if they do not understand something like surfing or surf tourism, which is coming into their communities, it may be difficult to initiate tourism development. This could be a barrier to expressing interest in being active partners in, and having more control over, something that foreigners seem to have already cornered the market on (Ponting et al., 2005).

**Summary**

Well-being includes various aspects of people’s lives and may differ for individuals, families, women and communities. Tourism is thought to contribute to well-being and improving the economic situation in developing countries, but the correlation is far more complex than that, as the literature illustrates. Women’s experience in tourism development differs from that of
men, as well as the benefits or costs of their involvement in tourism. Coastal tourism and the growth of surf tourism in the developing world breed new environmental and social concerns for communities.
Chapter 3

Study Context: Nicaragua

Nicaragua, like many Central American countries, has a long and complicated political history. The indigenous groups of Nicaragua were a mix of people including Meso-American indigenous groups in the Western part of the country and groups who traced their roots back to South America in the mountains to the East (T. W. Walker, 2003). The Spanish conquest of Nicaragua was part of the colonization of Panama where the Spanish began exploring starting in 1508. Throughout the colonial period, two centers of power were established: one in Leon and one in Granada. This conflict between the two lasted into independence (T. W. Walker, 2003). Nicaragua gained independence with the rest of Central America in 1823, and became sovereign in 1838. After independence, Nicaragua suffered from many years of foreign involvement from both the United States and Great Britain (T. W. Walker, 2003).

At the beginning of the 1900s, Jose Santos Zelaya gained control, followed by Benjamin Zeledon (T. W. Walker, 2003). The U.S. made multiple attempts to overthrow these governments and eventually succeeded; replacing liberal rule with various conservative regimes over the years (T. W. Walker, 2003). Augusto Cesar Sandino led a guerrilla war against the U.S. and government forces in the late 1920s and early 1930s (T. W. Walker, 2003). He did manage to get the U.S. marines to leave the country but was overthrown and Anastasio Somoza Garcia began what would be four decades under Somoza dictatorship (T. W. Walker, 2003). This ended with the Sandinista revolution, in which the Sandinistas took power from 1979-1989 (T. W. Walker, 2003). This also entailed multiple attempts by U.S. backed contras to overthrow the government, and a war which caused incredible hardship for the people of Nicaragua (T. W. Walker, 2003).

In 2000, the leader of the PLC (Constitutionalist Liberal Party) and Ortega, of the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front), negotiated a pact to share power between their two parties which led to electoral reforms that were in place for the 2006 elections (Lean, 2007). These institutional conditions assisted in Ortega’s 2006 presidential victory, which he won with 38% of the vote (Lean, 2007). These reforms affected the first round of elections, causing Ortega to avoid a run-off against the ALN (Nicaragua Liberal Alliance) candidate (Lean, 2007). The international community (highly invested in the elections) watched while the leftist president took power in 2007, without necessarily wide-spread support from the Nicaraguan people (Lean, 2007).

**Indigenous Groups in Western Nicaragua**

Ethnic identities have always played a role in Nicaraguan politics. Nicaragua is well known for its indigenous groups inhabiting the Caribbean coast. Most notably, the Miskito people were allied with the United States to fight against the Sandinista state; as a result, the Nicaraguan government granted them some degree of autonomy and land rights (Membreño Idiáquez, 1992). For the Western half of Nicaragua, indigenous groups were thought to no longer exist since they did not bear the same markers as the clearly defined indigenous groups on the east coast of the country, such as the Miskitos (Field, 1998; Membreño Idiáquez, 1992). The myth of the mestizo in Nicaragua, begun by Zelaya in the late 19th century, marginalized indigenous identity in the western half of the country in favor of a unified state (Field, 1998; Membreño Idiáquez, 1992).
The myth of Nicaragua mestizo is the “…belief that Nicaragua has been an ethnically homogenous society” which has been perpetuated since the late 1800s (Gould, 1993, p. 394). While many of the indigenous people were killed off during the early colonial period, due to disease, slavery, and exports to other Spanish colonies, many communities on the Pacific side of Nicaragua still consider themselves indigenous and descendents of specific indigenous lineages (Field, 1998; Membreño Idiáquez, 1992; T. W. Walker, 2003). In 1914 and 1918, years of Conservative rule between the Zelaya and the Somoza dictatorships, laws were decreed that indigenous communities could have their own legal status (Membreño Idiáquez, 1992). During this same period, communal lands were legalized which helped to solidify indigenous support of the Conservative party (Gould, 1993). In many of these communities, the same legal structure determined by those laws still exists today. Indigenous authority is made up of a president and a board of directors (Membreño Idiáquez, 1992). Despite these acknowledgements, the mestizo myth was maintained by the Somoza regime, as well as the Sandinistas, and perpetuated it throughout the 20th century (Field, 1998).

The loss of an indigenous language was one thing that perpetuated the myth, and eliminated one of the traditional markers of indigenous identity (Field, 1998). Elites saw this loss as an opportunity to take resources from the indigenous communities under the pretext that they were no longer indigenous (Field, 1998). Most indigenous groups residing along the Pacific coast fought for the Sandinistas and aided their success; however, their support of the government did not result in favorable land claims and cultural rights because they were not recognized as semi-autonomous indigenous groups (Field, 1998). Nevertheless, during the post-Sandinista period, indigenous groups in the Pacific coast have attempted to reclaim some of the social and political privileges granted to other groups (Field, 1998).
Tourism in Nicaragua

During the late 1970s and early 80s, international journalists, artists and activists traveled to the country to document, or be part of, the Sandinista Revolution (Babb, 2004). Therefore, the Sandinistas were engaged in international tourism as a means to disseminate their ideology and as a way to accrue much needed foreign income. Additionally, the Sandinista government appropriated much of former dictator Somoza’s property and turned some of his properties into resorts (Wallace, 1991). Ortega appointed the first Minister of Tourism after the revolution in 1979 and, over the following ten years, tourism became officially accepted as an economic generator for the Sandinista regime (Wallace, 1991).

Later, in the mid 1990s, tourism development was thought to be the solution to an economy that was weaker than expected. U.S. assistance was lower than anticipated and coffee prices were extremely low (Babb, 2004). INTUR (Instituto Nicaragüense de Turismo) worked with Nicaraguan universities to encourage more professional development in the field of tourism (Babb, 2004). National marketing efforts focused on emphasizing Nicaragua’s natural resources, such as the coastlines, volcanoes and lakes (Babb, 2004). While political tourism may have been a motivator for many Western visitors to Nicaragua thirty years ago, and souvenir shops still hold some remnants of the Sandinista revolutionary period (e.g., postcards, t-shirts), today much of tourism is focused on participation in adventure activities and on Nicaragua’s unique environmental resources (Babb, 2004).

In 2002, Barany, Hammett, Murphy, and McCrary (2002) conducted a study of four protected areas in the Pacific region of Nicaragua. In 2000, Nicaragua had decentralized its national park management and authorized co-management of the protected areas (Barany et al., 2002). Barany et al. found the areas to be ineffectively managed (some of them managed by NGOs, some of them private) and it documented the environmental implications of poor
management. They also noted that local communities were mentioned as project participants in the protected area laws, but recognized that if the communities are not involved in reality, they could attempt to destroy the resources outside development agencies are trying to protect (Barany et al., 2002).

More recently, Croes and Vanegas Sr. (2008) investigated the economics behind tourism as a form of poverty alleviation for Nicaragua. Using tourism data from 1980 to 2004, they concluded that tourism does lead to a reduction in poverty. They report that tourism has led to an increased GDP, economic expansion because of increased foreign exchange earnings, and an overall reduction in poverty (Croes & Vanegas Sr, 2008).

Hunt (2009) did an ethnographic study of an eco lodge in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. He investigated the “the socio-cultural influences on ecotourism outcomes” at the eco lodge (Hunt, 2009, p. 156). Hunt found that while the lodge marketed itself, and was lauded by international organizations, as a successful ecotourism establishment, the actual employees did not believe they all received equal benefits from the business. While they were supposed to receive greater benefits from this type of establishment, as opposed to a chain resort catering to mass tourists, they could not distinguish it from other tourism enterprises. Hunt (2009) cites a lack of “meaningful participation” of the local residents in the eco lodge as the reason for these negative attitudes (p. 162). While there was local support for tourism, he found that residents in San Juan del Sur faced increasing living costs and a loss of access to natural resources due to tourism.

Another form of tourism exhibiting significant growth in Nicaragua’s Pacific coast communities (Figure 1) is surf tourism. As described in Surfer Magazine, this region has great potential for surf tourism because “The water rarely drops below 75, the wind’s (sic) always offshore, and the waves on offer are world-class” (Weisberg, 2010, p. 108). This study focuses on Las Salinas, a community on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua.
Las Salinas

Las Salinas is a rural town on the southwest coast of Nicaragua. It is a small community of about 260 families one and a half hours away from the capital of the department of Rivas. The main road that runs through the town is a dirt one. The road leading towards Playa Guasacate, where most of the hotels are, is poorly maintained. Between the houses and the beach is about a

Figure 1: Surfing map of Nicaragua (Surfing Nicaragua, [nd])
mile of salt flats, where salt from the ocean is dried and cultivated and shipped off to be packaged. The community has a public school (elementary/primary and high school/secondary), a library, multiple churches, a health center, and several small tiendas (stores), one of which has access to the internet. In the community there are also hot springs which have been developed into bathing pools, and wash areas (by building cement structures around them) where some women go to do their laundry. The strip of beach where the hotels are located is further removed from the town, there is a cantina and bar with several rooms in the town, but most of the places to stay are in Playa Guasacate.

A river runs through the town and empties into the ocean, and most members of the community must cross this river in order to arrive at the beach. The strip of hotels is located on the north side of this river. To the south of the river is the surf break where surfing has become very popular, even among the locals in the town. There are several surf breaks, a beach break in front of the strip of hotels, a reef break near a large rock slightly north of Popoyo Reef, Popoyo Reef itself, and something everyone calls “the outer reef” (the locals say this in English), which is south of Popoyo. Along the strip of hotels are several foreign-owned surf camps and other tourist services (Popoyo Surf Lodge, 2008; Two Brothers Surf Resort, 2007). In addition, there are a couple of boat tour companies promising to take visitors to surf breaks along remote or private coastal properties that are inaccessible via vehicle and are consequently away from crowds (Popoyo Surf Lodge, 2008). Many surfers are buying vacation homes due to the low price of land and construction (Nicaland.com, 2008).

The town considers itself an indigenous community, which means it has its own government, despite the fact that it is under the government of the municipality of Tola. No one speaks an indigenous language anymore, so it is often thought people on the Pacific side of Nicaragua are mestizos (mixed – of Spanish and indigenous descent) and not indigenous, like their east coast counterparts, such as the Miskito Indians (Field, 1998). The local governing body
consists of an elected president and a board of directors (Membreño Idíáquez, 1992). Nearly all of the families in the community own chickens and many own pigs. They eat the chickens and the eggs, for the most part, or sell the eggs. The families are large; sometimes 11 people live in a three room house. This includes wives or husbands that move in once they marry family members, and the children they have. The men in the town primarily work in salt production in the dry season (December-April) and agriculture in the rainy season (May-November) or work as guards or cooks in the hotels. Many of the women are housewives. Some of them also work in hotels as cleaning staff, cooks, or they make bread with one of the panaderias (bakeries). Some of them run small tiendas. The main tourist season is March through November. Many of the American run businesses close December through February, the low tourist season, known most places as the “off season.”
Chapter 4

Methods

Before discussing methods, I must introduce the potential bias I bring to this study. I was able to gain access to this community through an acquaintance I have known for several years and is from my hometown in North Carolina, in the United States. She spends part of the year in Nicaragua working in the schools teaching art classes. She recently married one of the local Nicaraguans in the town and I stayed with her new in-laws during fieldwork. I found out what the local price was for room and board in locally owned hotels and paid them a similar price for staying with them. I paid rent to my host family when I was in the Peace Corps and since it was during the holidays and they had family members visiting as well, I thought it would be inconsiderate not to pay them rent. My acquaintance went to Nicaragua to do Christian missionary work so, while I was careful to not make religious references, it is possible that being associated with her could have affected how the community viewed me and could have affected the subset of informants that I recruited for the interviews. While I have to acknowledge this connection, I think the family realized early on that I was not close with her or associated with her mission work. She and her husband lived several miles from the family and I did not see her that much throughout my visit. I spent much more time with the family than with her. I did not attend church with her or the family. Most of the family did not go to church on a regular basis and so I did not feel compelled to go with the few members that did occasionally go to church. I went to an event on Christmas Eve at the church my acquaintance helped with primarily because the family went as well. Further, a member of the family, or one who had married into it, introduced me to other people, so much of the time I do not think they associated me with my
American acquaintance. Since I spent very little time with my acquaintance, people associated me with her in-laws more than with her.

I have spent a great deal of time living in Central America. I lived and worked in Guatemala for over two years with the Peace Corps (January 2006 to April 2008). I lived on my own and my projects involved working with Guatemalans. I worked with Guatemalans on projects they told me they wanted for their community. I feel that this experience made a positive contribution to my research. I learned how to speak Spanish and to integrate myself into a rural community. I became comfortable with the pace of life, social norms, washing my clothing in a *pila* (large sink/basin with washboards), and values, like the importance of family.

I am a white woman from the United States. I am not a native Nicaraguan, nor am I of Latin American descent. The fact that this community is so dependent upon tourism and foreigners is one potential reason for their negative attitudes towards the Nicaraguan government, which they perceive to be isolationist. Several of the respondents mentioned their dislike of the current government of Nicaragua. Ortega, a politically leftist president, and former Sandinista, was re-elected president in 2006 (Lean, 2007). It is plausible that respondents may have felt some pressure to express negative sentiments about Ortega to me, because such anti-Ortega comments would seem “pro-American.” However, I am convinced that this was not the case. I made an effort to explain that the study was for my thesis at a university in the United States, that I would not be sending their recorded interviews anywhere, and that it was confidential. I believe they perceived me to be someone they could talk to, and those that wanted to express disagreements with the government did so. I do not think they perceived of me as someone to be intimidated by. When family members explained to potential participants what I was doing, one of them even referred to it as *tarea*, which is “homework” in Spanish. I dressed in my normal clothing (tank tops, t-shirts, shorts or skirts right above my knees), not business professional attire. I tried to not come across as authoritative because in this context, I did not want to present
myself as superior. While I was accustomed to introducing myself as a “licenciada” (having a college degree) in Guatemala, so that I would be taken seriously in my work there, I did not say this to anyone in Nicaragua. Having to tell them I was doing this study for the university alone indicated that I was a student.

In addition, I am a surfer. I borrowed a board from my American acquaintance while I was there. She had told several of the family members who surf that I kayak surf competitively and they were fascinated by this. Knowing this about me, they would have thought it strange if I did not go surfing. So I did go, even though it had the potential to bias some of the responses people gave me when I asked about foreign surfers. Surfing was an accepted form of recreation in the town; a number of the local male residents surfed. Being involved in this form of tourism had the potential to bias my study, but my experience working with people in a similar community enabled me to listen to what they had to say and how surf tourism affected their lives. Surfing offered me an opportunity to get to know local surfers better, several of whom ended up being informants. Being in the water with the local surfers gave me a sense of the surf culture.

The local surfers are used to seeing women surfers, (a Mexican woman who owns a local surf shop surfs, along with other foreign women who live or vacation there). However, while I was there, there was not a Nicaraguan woman who surfed. The girls in the family I stayed with told me they did not know how to swim. While I did observe women playing in shallow water with children, for example, this occurred on New Years’ Day when the family went to the beach, and on other occasions, this may be a big barrier to them learning how to surf.

This leads to the other potential bias I bring to the study, which is that I am a woman. While I think my acceptance into the surf lineup was most likely due to the fact that I was a foreigner, this could have affected responses men had to my questions due to “machismo” within the Nicaraguan culture. However, many men had no problem telling me that the man is the head of the household and the woman needs to support him. Alternatively, my being a woman made
obtaining women participants much easier because they felt comfortable talking to another woman. I think it would have been much more difficult for female participants to respond to a male researcher.

Sample

The population I drew my sample from was Nicaraguan residents of the community of Las Salinas. I stayed with a local family who was connected to the local surf community by way of their two sons, who are surfers. Through this connection, I recruited more informants. In addition, through the family I was able to gain contact with other people they knew in the community who were involved in tourism, but who also worked other jobs and held various roles in the community.

I used purposive criterion sampling, which entails selecting participants based on established characteristics (Miller-Day, 2004). My initial criterion was to get an equal number of male and female participants in the study. As I began collecting data, other criteria emerged. I began looking for people who worked in tourism, but also people who worked in salt production and other occupations. As my sample increased, I found that I needed to talk with surfers and/or find more young residents. Things like age, occupation, and involvement with tourism emerged as variables which seemed to affect residents’ responses to the interview questions.

Data Collection

The data were obtained through personal interviews with residents. I asked participants for permission to audio record them and I took notes throughout the interviews. I conducted all of the interviews in Spanish. The translation of the interview questions was reviewed by two
people who speak Castilian Spanish and a native speaker from the Dominican Republic who is fluent in English (and also spent two years in Guatemala). It was important to have another reviewer, beside myself, familiar with Central American Spanish since it can greatly differ from European Spanish. Additional questions were added to the interview script if I felt more information was needed about something an individual mentioned or if I felt the need to probe further into an issue. Not every interview was exactly the same, but an effort was made to ask the same questions of everyone.

Twenty six of the twenty seven people I interviewed allowed me to audio record them. One woman did not allow me to record her interview; I simply took notes while I talked to her. I conducted four informal interviews with other people in the community, which I audio recorded. Recording the interviews contributes to objectivity and provides accurate records for an audit trail, which adds to the reliability of the study (Miller-Day, 2004). By becoming a part of a local family, I gained the trust of the family and those in the community. This trust enabled me to obtain interviews for the study I might not have been able to obtain otherwise. For many of the interviews, other people were present at the time, which may have influenced their responses. However, had people like the members of the family not been there, participants may have been even more wary of answering my questions or trusting me. Their responses may have even been more honest since I was associated with a local family who was well known and had been part of the community for many years.

The interview questions are presented in Table 1. The interview questions on well-being are based on questions from an interview protocol (developed using Alkire’s (2005) work) from the previously mentioned study conducted by Penn State Faculty on community-based natural resource management in Namibia (Morais & Zinn, 2010).
Living with a family and participating in their lives and holiday festivities added great depth and richness to the study. Participant observation offers a way to gain in depth knowledge of a culture one might not get simply from asking questions to informants (Dewalt et al., 2000). I became a part of a Nicaraguan family for three weeks. I went to a birthday party, a town baseball game, celebrated both Christmas and New Years’ with them, spent evenings sitting around and talking with them in their driveway, shared meals with them, surfed with some of the men, and went to the hot springs with the women. My documentation of my participant observation includes photographs of people, the community, and events. I also kept a journal with daily entries documenting events, progress, frustrations, thoughts and feelings. These data sources are part of data triangulation, which consists of using different sources of data to verify or provide context to the accounts presented in the study (Miller-Day, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well-being Interview Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Could you give me some examples of problems that affect health in the community?</td>
<td>Could you give me some examples of good things that affect/improve/have to do with health in the community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could you give me examples of some problems that affect prosperity, or work, in the community?</td>
<td>Could you give me some examples of good things that contribute to prosperity, or work, in the community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could you give me examples of some problems with relationships between friends and families in the community?</td>
<td>Could you give me examples of good things about the relationships between friends and families in the community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could you give me examples of some problems with the relationship of the community with nature?</td>
<td>Could you give me examples of good things with the relationship of the community with nature?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you give me examples of some problems with the community with the spiritual world/spiritual, religious things/religion?</td>
<td>Could you give me examples of good things with the community and the spiritual world/spiritual, religious things/religion?</td>
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Data Analysis

Analysis of the data began initially with transcribing the interviews. Two Colombian women assisted me in the transcription of the interviews, which are the main data source, into Spanish. I then listened to the interviews again and made corrections in the transcriptions since I was the one who conducted them and had notes from the interviews. The interview audio files did not contain the names of the participants, only codes which represented the participants, for purposes of confidentiality. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed in Spanish, since I did not want to lose meaning as I went through the analytic process.

In the analysis, I used constant comparison – each response is compared to previous ones to see if they are similar or different. If they are different, a new code is established and more evidence for that code can be sought after in other responses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding is organizing text, pictures and other data into categories, mostly chunking them in categories by a term (Creswell, 2003). The data were open coded under the a priori theme of well-being (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This theme was the basis for the interview questions, but since each interview varied and the questions were not the same for every participant, each question could not be individually coded. For example, one of the original questions about well-being was: “What are problems that affect health in your community that affect you?” No one understood this, so I had to change it to simply ask what the health problems were in the community. It was also difficult to ask “what were the good things that contributed to health?” Some people understood what I meant, but for others, I had to ask for things that “improve” health. These questions were based on prior research and theory. The data under the theme of well-being had to be open coded because there has not been extensive qualitative research on well-being, and the qualitative studies that have been done were in a different context and setting. No one had asked these questions qualitatively in rural coastal Nicaragua before and
I was not sure what I would find. As a result, I kept the codes open and flexible during the coding process and they were refined/modified them over the course of adding more and more interviews to the analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

Once I identified a code, for example, “trash,” I looked for all occurrences of variations of that idea in the person’s interview transcript. I then would search for and record instances of it in the other interviews. Sometimes if someone simply repeated something similar, I did not code it twice, but if they were discussing something different under the same idea, I recorded it. For example, if a person would say that tourism provided income for the community twice, I did not record the second instance. If they then said tourism provided work through construction, I did record that. After finding all instances of one code, I would move on to the next one and follow the same procedure. A code was often one word (e.g., trash), but sometimes it was a phrase, such as “there is no work.” I used NVIVO software, which organized all of the quotations using my codes. Once I had a list of codes in response to the well-being questions, I analyzed the list to see if codes could be combined. Often I had done this already in the process of coding. For instance, “conflict” included multiple Spanish words for “fight” (e.g., lucha and pelea). Pleito means conflict. Thus, I simply grouped all of these codes together, knowing they mean the same thing.

Preliminary analysis of the data from sixteen of the interviews also helped with this process, since I had been able to combine codes in that analysis. Once I had established categories and grouped the codes under them, I was able to put the categories under larger themes such as “seasons”, so “seasons” includes multiple categories (wet season, dry season) and codes (agriculture, salt).

Another researcher who also speaks Spanish read and became familiar with some of the transcripts and challenged my interpretations and assumptions in a process called peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000). He came up with a list of important themes he found, which we discussed. In qualitative research this is known as the corroborating or legitimating phase where the data is looked at again and different points of view are offered to challenge the findings.
(Miller & Crabtree, 1999). These codes were then organized under categories or themes (Creswell, 2003). We discussed relationships between the themes to develop a conceptual model (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Themes are the major findings in a study and by making connections among the themes, they help tell the story of the place and possibly support or extend theory (Creswell, 2003).
Chapter 5

Results

Nine themes about well-being in the community emerged through the data analysis. Los temporadas (the seasons), invierno y verano (the rainy season and the dry season), influenced many aspects of community life with regard to health and work. The community was very dependent upon the natural environment, and different subjects emerged when they discussed cuidar la naturaleza (how the environment was cared for) within the community. Personas de afuera (people from the outside) was another major theme which included turismo (tourism) and other extranjeros (foreigners). Both of these groups played a large role in the well-being of the community, with regard to work, health and nature. At the time of the study, la economia es muy baja (“the economy is low”) was a resounding theme as people described both no hay trabajo (unemployment) and pobreza (poverty). The gobierno, (government) had an influence on well-being in many respects: from land to work to community infrastructure. Religion was deemed a positive aspect of well-being in the community. Some of the problemas sociales (social problems) that emerged were actividades malas (bad activities), including substance abuse, as well as conflicto (conflict) among families and among friends over various issues. Overall however, most agreed that the community was peaceful and families united to help one another (comunidad unida). Few differences emerged between hombres y mujeres (men and women), and how they discussed well-being, but women did seem to be more cognizant, and vocal about, the problems they faced.
LOS TEMPORADAS

The seasons were an integral part of community life in Las Salinas. In tropical regions, communities do have the standard four seasons of winter, spring, summer, and fall. There is a rainy season and a dry season, literally translated as “winter” and “summer” in Spanish. Life tends to revolve around what time of year it is. Participants were asked directly about the relationship between community and nature but the seasons emerged in their answers to questions about other aspects of well-being. Whether it was the dry season or the rainy season, the season affected the types of work to be found, health problems, and environmental hazards.

Invierno

The climate in Nicaragua is such that it has a rainy season (invierno) and a dry season (verano). What season it was seemed to affect the types of illnesses that were prevalent and what jobs were available. Ten participants mentioned zancudos (mosquitoes) as a major problem that affected health. Mosquitoes were worse in the rainy season, and thus so were the illnesses that came with them. According to one young father: “Por la lluvia, mucha lluvia, se levantan…las enfermedades del dengue, la gente, los niños más enferman, porque muchos zancudos…acá a veces no es todo el tiempo que, pero cuando la salud esta más mal es en el invierno.” (For the rain, a lot of rain, increases…the dengue illnesses, the people, the children get sick more, because of the mosquitoes…it’s sometimes, not all the time, but when health is bad is in the rainy season). Several other people mentioned children got sick more than adults: “Allí, hay donde bastante calentura, bastante cosas para los niños…” (There, where there is plenty of fever, plenty of things for the children…). Diarrhea, cold, and flu were other illnesses people mentioned, not necessarily associated with mosquitoes. An older woman commented on there being many
mosquitoes during the rainy season and the many diseases they bring: “Si, y eso, pues, enferman las personas de fiebre, malaria y eso.” (Yes and that, then, makes people sick with fever, malaria and things like that). Several participants mentioned that the government would send people out to fumigate for the mosquitoes. Several also mentioned that having standing water around the house and not cleaning also brought in more mosquitoes.

Rain brought other problems but also benefits as well. Agriculture was the main source of work for many of the men in the rainy season: “…En el invierno nos dedicamos solo a la siembra de maíz, arroz, sorgo, que de eso sobrevivimos…” (...In the rainy season we dedicate ourselves to planting corn, rice, sorghum, we survive off of that...). However, according to many participants, there had been little rain that year, which had damaged the crops: “No, este año no llovió mucho porque la gente sembraron mucho y como no llovió, entonces, el grano no nació. Entonces nadie cosecho.” (No, this year, it didn’t rain much because the people planted a lot and it didn’t rain so the seed didn’t grow. So nobody harvested.) One man I talked with worked as a fisherman during the rainy season: “…Del veinte de mayo al veinte de octubre: trabajo en la pesca” (…From May 20 to October 20: I work in fishing). Another told me there were fewer fish in the dry season, meaning the high season was the rainy season. While some people sold fish, fishing seemed to be a subsistence activity for much of the community, several participants echoed this woman: “…Muchas personas en la comunidad viven de lo que es…la pesca” (…Many people in the community live off of that which is…fishing).

Rain brought flooding to the area, and hurricanes had also been a problem in the past. “El rio…viniendo de arriba, siempre está llenando todo aquí y es un problema con la naturaleza. En invierno.” (The river…coming from above, is always filling everything here and it’s a problem with nature. In the rainy season). Another woman also discussed the river flooding the town after rain from two hurricanes, as well as the ensuing destruction. The other natural disaster which she mentioned, and an older male participant (who had also discussed the hurricanes) did
as well, was a “maremoto” (tsunami), which had struck the town 15 years before: “Ese fue muy, guau, terrible. Porque todas las familias, las casas, toda la familia es destruido...” (That was very, wow, terrible. Because all the families, the houses, all the family is destroyed.)

Verano

Fewer participants mentioned this, but in the dry season, polvo (dust) is a problem. The main road to the town is not paved; only one road leading out towards the vacation homes, hotels, and lodges is paved, but is in poor repair. Dust has led to respiratory problems, mainly in children, according to two participants. According to one man, who did not think there were many serious illnesses in the community: “...A veces gripe, a veces por, por mucho polvo, por viento mucho polvo hay, y eso afecta la vira respiratoria.” (…Sometimes the flu, sometimes because of, because a lot of dust, there is a lot of dust because of the wind, and that affects the respiratory system). Several people mentioned how the strong wind would blow the dust around, causing the previously mentioned health problems. Again, children were more susceptible to these problems. According to another participant, it also blew the trash “por todos lados” (in all directions).

The dry season also was the time in which salt was cultivated. Ocean water was pumped into flat areas where it dries in the sun and leaves salt behind. Almost half the participants discussed the salt as a major source of work during the dry season: “Tambien, en eso, nos ayuda la sal en el verano.” (Also, in that, the salt helps us in the dry season). The men that worked in agriculture in the rainy season worked in the salt during the dry season: “Gracias a Dios tenemos dos climas, que es el invierno, para la siembra, y el verano, para trabajar...la sal” (Thank God we have two seasons, that which is the rainy season, for the planting, and the dry season, for the salt work). The same participant told me salt cultivation was what constituted the most
employment in the dry season. Several women mentioned that mainly men worked in the salineras (salt flats). One of them told me there used to be a packing plant, where everyone could work, but it was no longer there: “Si la otra vez estuvo aqui…hace muchos anos, un empacadora de sal” (Yes, another time here there was…many years ago, a salt packaging plant.) Construction work, which overlapped with the theme of tourism and will be discussed later, was also done in the summer: “…En el verano mucha gente aqui trabaja…en las construcciones” (…In the dry season, many people here work…in the construction projects).

CUIDAR LA NATURALEZA

As dependent as the residents of Las Salinas are on the seasons and the natural environment to live, when asked directly about some of the problems between the community and nature, people discussed how many in the community did not care about nature: “Aquí, la naturaleza no le ponen importancia” (Here, they don’t put importance on the environment). One of the most salient things was people cutting down trees; about half the participants mentioned it as a problem. “Sí, por ejemplo ahora está mucha maltratándose los, los arboles. Mucho despale…” (Yes, for example right now there are many that are damaging the trees. A lot of cutting down of trees…). Cutting down the trees near the river was a problem. One woman pointed out that removing trees could make water sources dry up, while another man mentioned that it got rid of shade, which was bad. Several participants mentioned that cutting down trees for wood was illegal: “Aunque tengamos nosotros las leyes que…nos dicen, verdad, que por ejemplo, eso de las prohibiciones de la corta...de los arboles…” (We still have laws that, we say, right, that for example, the prohibitions against cutting down the trees). One young man claimed population growth was causing people to have to cut down trees in order to build homes for their families.
The other problem with the environment in the community was trash. Various participants cited it as a problem: “No, no, botan basura, cosas así. Este problema se va...acumulando y afecta la naturaleza” (No, no, they throw trash and things like that. This problem keeps accumulating and affects the environment). Trash was also associated with contamination of nature, air and the river. Contaminated air was cited as one reason for illnesses. Animal waste was another culprit. A husband and wife, who were interviewed separately, both told me dead animals left near their home caused health problems: “…Hay personas que botan animales ahí, y nosotros sentimos ese, ese mal olor y nos enfermamos…” (…There are people that throw animals there, and we feel this, this bad odor and we get sick…). One woman said trash was a problem because people were poorly educated. However, others talked about trash not being a problem because it was controlled for. One teacher said: “Hacemos...comisiones para ir a recolectar basura” (We have commissions to go to collect trash). One person said the trash was taken to the municipality to be disposed of and another said there were groups organized to clean the streets. Several women told me an Argentinean woman, who lived in the town, organized kids to clean up the trash: “…Ella ejerce un grupo de niños con la limpieza de calle entonces, que eso ha venido mejorado...si, el rio también está limpio” (…She works with a group of children with leaning the street, so that has become better...yes, the river is also clean).

Other ways people took care of (or thought would improve) the environment, was to plant more trees: “Bueno, cuidarla, plantar, plantar mas arboles, y no dejar de que lo destruyan otras personas…” (Well, take care of it, plant, plant more trees, and do not let other people destroy it). Several people said that people in the community did plant trees, and it was better than it had been in the past. Foreigners that came to live in the town seemed to have an influence on the community since they liked to plant trees: “La mayoría de los Americanos que viven aquí en este lugar siembran bastante, le gusta bastante sembrar palos” (The majority of Americans that live here in this place always plant enough, they really like to plant trees). One teacher I
spoke with told me they taught the students and their parents about caring for the environment in school, but it was difficult at times. There was even an initiative in the school to encourage students to plant trees near their homes and in other places: “Y mandamos a sus hogares para que en los terrenos de ellos, o ahí cerca, por lo que pueden sembrar cerca...ellos lo siembran...ellos mismos los cuiden” (And we send them to their homes so that in their lands, or nearby, they can plant them close by, they plant them...they take care of them themselves).

**PERSONAS DE AFUERA**

Outsiders, mainly people from other countries, played a key role in the life of the community. Tourists were a growing presence in the community as many residents described tourism as an important economic force in the community. However, other foreigners also contributed positively to the community. These foreigners ranged from people that lived in the community for more than a few months out of the year to doctors and aid organizations that had helped the community over the years.

**Turismo**

One of the most prevalent themes that came out when people were asked about prosperity and jobs was tourism; well over half of the participants talked about it. “El trabajo es, como es, los turistas que han venido aquí. Creo que han dado trabajo y ha prosperado mucho la comunidad con este” (The work is, how is it, the tourists that have come here. I think that they have given work and the community has prospered much with this). Many in the community were reliant upon tourism for work, it was “la mayor fuente de ingreso” (the major source of income) for them. A few pointed out the seasonal nature of the work, but that it had diversified
the economy from what it had been previously. One man said: “…Con el turismo ha venido empleos para nosotros…antes aquí…eran la agricultura…y lo que es la zafra de sal” (…With tourism has come employment for us…here before…it was agriculture…and that which is the salt harvest). Many of the participants said that it helped the community and two of them spoke about the “beneficios” (benefits) that the community received from it:

Construction of vacation homes and hotels was something quite a few participants mentioned because it had brought work to the area: “…Las construcciones que están con los inversionistas” (…)The construction projects that are with the investors). Construction was always connected with “gringos” (people from the U.S. or Europe) because they were the ones that brought in the construction projects: “…Cuando vienen a construir gringos, así, hoteles, allí donde puede, hay trabajo para la comunidad. Para todos.” (…)When Americans come to build, like those, hotels, there where they can, there is work for the community. For all.)

One participant told me construction projects happened in the dry season, but tourism seemed to be confined to a large part of the year covering the rainy season and the dry season. March to November appeared to be the tourist season. This was a problem because those that worked in tourism did not have jobs part of the year: “En diciembre en la comunidad siempre es una época que no es muy bueno, por lo que las personas que brindan el trabajo salen para sus países y las personas de aquí solamente quedan sin trabajo” (In December in the community it is always a time that is not good, because the people that bring the work leave for their countries and the people from here just remain without work). Another woman said: “…si no están los hoteles abiertos, no hay trabajo” (If the hotels are not open, there is no work).
Extranjeros

Foreigners, not just tourists, were another theme that came up in regard to prosperity, health and, as previously mentioned, the environment. “Gringos” (slang term for North Americans or Europeans) and “extranjeros” (foreigners) made investments in the area and brought construction projects. Some of them lived in Nicaragua for half the year or more. Several that lived in the community started projects, such as the Argentinean woman that organized the trash collection. Others helped the school: “…Hay gringos Americanos que vienen aquí a este lugar y dan ayuda, por ejemplo, a la escuela” (…There are American gringos that come here to this place and give help, for example, to the school). This same woman told me about a foundation some foreigners had started to fund the library, and provide school supplies and scholarships, in some cases. Some Americans had even married members of the community and stayed there (for a large part of the year) instead of returning to the United States. These connections helped the whole family out because they would receive support from these foreigners: “…A través de que mi hijo conoció a la Jessica, hemos conocido muchos amigos…y son buenos ellos, hemos recibido regalía de ellos” (…Through my son meeting Jessica, we have met many friends…and they are good people. We have received gifts from them).

While I was in the town, a medical mission came through, and a number of participants mentioned this as something that contributed to health. “…Ahorita hay un ayuda de los Americanos, creo que son…si, son médicos que han venido a ayudar” (…Right now there is a help of the Americans, I think they are…yes, they are doctors that have come to help). One of the major advantages of the doctors coming was getting medicine from them since medicine is expensive, and the “Centro de Salud” (health center) often does not have adequate medicine and supplies. “Estos solo los que regalan medicamentos, que traen medicamentos, los regalan a
personas, sí, extranjeros pues, extranjeros” (Those are the only ones that give out medicines, that bring medicines, they give them to people, yes, foreigners, you know, foreigners).

Foreigners not only brought medical assistance, but other projects as well: “Aquí...se ha mejorado un poco el país por ayuda de proyectos que han venido de otros países” (Here...the country has gotten a little better because of help from projects that have come from other countries). One of the projects several women mentioned, which was funded by another country, was a water tank so the town would have potable water: “...ahorita, Las Salinas tiene un bomba de agua, esto fue un ayuda de otras países...no fue de la comunidad” (...now, Las Salinas has a water pump, that was assistance of other countries...it was not of the community). After the tsunami and hurricanes, other countries sent assistance to help Las Salinas recover: “…Vino ayuda de Costa Rica y compraron tierras para ubicar a los afectados” (...Help came from Costa Rica and they bought lands to relocate the affected).

**LA ECONOMIA ES MUY BAJA**

Many residents described the poor economic situation the community found itself in. Some of the problems included a lack of work, bad economy, and wrong time of year for tourists. Another issue they discussed was poverty. For different people, poverty may have been used to describe themselves, the community (and ones nearby), or the country.

**No hay trabajo**

One of the major problems cited by almost all the participants was the lack of work. Frequently I heard: “Trabajo, pero ahora, muy poco trabajo” (Work, but now, very little work) and “no hay trabajo” (there is no work). In some cases, this seemed to refer to the time of year it
was, but it some cases it seemed to be more general. Some people claimed that tourism had made things better; however, since the hotels were not open and construction projects were not happening at the time, there was little work: “Desempleo...porque a veces cuando paran de, las construcciones del las casas...” (Unemployment...because sometimes, when the constructions of the houses stop). Several men told me it was because of the economy: “Porque...lo que es la economía, es muy baja” (Because...that which is the economy, is very low), one specifically said it was the fall of the “economía mundial” (world economy). Another man gave this reason: “...No hay muchas fuentes del empleo” (…There are not many sources of employment). Others said that the government was responsible for unemployment, Ortega seemed to be discouraging foreign investment (which would bring more tourism to the area) because foreigners were scared of another Nicaraguan revolution: “…El extranjero no se siente tan seguro con el gobierno” (…The foreigner does not feel very secure with the government). One man said the government did not want to work with other countries that wanted to help Nicaragua. He claimed the government would not provide work for the people: “Los proyectos, también tu sabes la alcaldía esta con el gobierno malo. Están parando todo, no hay proyectos, no hay trabajo…” (The projects, also you know this municipal government is with the bad government. They are stopping everything, there are no projects, there is no work...).

**Pobreza**

One theme that many participants discussed throughout their answers to various questions was poverty and the poor: “...Esta comunidad aquí, es una comunidad muy pobre. Este país, pues, Nicaragua, ve, es muy pobre” (...This community here, is a very poor community. This country, then, Nicaragua you see, is very poor). Poverty often prevented people from getting adequate medical care: “...A veces se enferman nuestros hijos, no tenemos recursos...”
para...llevarlos a una clínica" (…Sometimes our children get sick, we do not have resources in order to take them to a clinic), which the man told me led to the children dying sometimes.

Another man echoed this in his interview, but noted that it happened more in the past. Since it was around Christmas when I was there, several people told me that some parents could not afford to buy gifts for their children. One woman told me many in the community could not get jobs because they were not educated, one reason she gave for this was: “…Porque son muy pobres y falta de, otras quieren y no tienen como, pues” (…Because they are very poor and lack, others want to but they do not have a way to pay, then). Several told me that tourism coming in had helped the poor: “El turismo ha traído construcciones, bueno, por medio de la construcción, uno tiene su empleo, y esa lo que...lo beneficia a uno pobre” (The tourism has brought construction projects, well, through construction, one has their work, and that is what…benefits one who is poor). Another man told me that countries such as Spain had had projects for poor families, but the current government did not want to work with other countries to help out the poor.

**GOBIERNO**

The government not only seemed to be responsible for the bad economic situation, but was involved in other aspects of community life as well. One man, who had fled to Costa Rica to escape fighting in the war, was particularly angered by Ortega’s government and claimed that lands had been taken from him when Ortega was formerly the president during the revolution: “El gobierno de antes, tenía unas tierras, que había confiscado que no es de el” (The previous government, I had some lands, that were confiscated that are not his). Another man, who had run for president of the community, also had a problem with how the current community government was handling the issue of land: “Entonces, ahora digo...presidente que no ahora tiene que los
tierras están privadas, vayan...los...de la comunidad, para que los ingresos sean para la comunidad, no podemos irselas a regalan a los turistas...” (So, now I tell the president that no, now that the lands are private, those of the community go, and in order for the income to be for the community, we cannot go giving them out to tourists). He knew that the lands near the beach were being sold to foreigners for very little money and the community was not seeing the income from the sales. Another woman claimed the municipal government got part of the money from the sale of private land and the community never saw any of it: “No hay un beneficio para la carretera, mejor nada” (There is no benefit for the road, nothing is better).

However, the government was not all bad. A younger participant told me the past president had provided the community with better infrastructure: “…Arnoldo, hizo un puente ahí...compuso las calles también y muchas cosas…” (...Arnoldo, he made the bridge there, he repaired the streets also and many things…” MINSA, the ministry of health also came and fumigated for mosquitoes: “MINSA está controlando eso...porque ellos traen, este, para matar el, la larva del zancudo” (MINSA is controlling that...because they bring, um, to kill the, the larva of the mosquito). The president of the community had also recently come and made a speech about the need to plant more trees and not cut them down, which may have been why many people discussed the issue. The president had also built pools and wash areas in the hot springs for the community to use: “Es el mismo gente que trajo ese proyecto y construyeron esa, esa lavanderos y pilas que hay en aguas termales” (It is the same people that brought that project and constructed those, those wash areas and pools that are in the thermal waters).

**RELIGION**

There seemed to be a consensus among the participants that religion was a good thing for the community: “Para mí...la religión es bueno” (For me...the religion is good). With religion,
there was no “desorden” (disorder), people did not “hace muchas cosas malas” (do many bad things) and they go to church where “no bailan, no toman licor” (they do not dance, they do not drink liquor). Many people described the different “types” of religions in the community to me: “…Van a religión...Cristiana, van a religión del católico, van a los testigos de Jehová, porque son religiones diferentes…” (…They go to the Christian religion; they go to the Catholic religion, they to the Jehovah’s witnesses, because they are different religions). Several people said that every religion was respected and “…cada quien elige por...donde quiere ir” (everyone chooses where they want to go). A man said, “no hay que el gobierno va a intervenir en cosas religiosas, no” (there is nothing such the government going to intervene in religious things, no).

While people claimed that there was no conflict and people got along, hostility was expressed by some people towards Catholics: “Porque los evangélicos no toman, no fuman...si no es mucho desorden como el católico que no...le importa” (Because the evangelicals do not drink, they don’t smoke…yes, it’s not a lot of disorder like the Catholic that doesn’t care). The majority of the participants were evangelicals; only one was Catholic. Many people told me there were few Catholics left in the community, one man said “Aquí hay un gran porcentaje de gente evangélica. Yo creo que podría ser un 80%” (Here, there is a great percentage of evangelical people. I think that it could be 80%).

**PROBLEMAS SOCIALES**

While residents mentioned listed problems throughout the interviews in response to questions about health, jobs, and the environment, the major social problems people cited were activities they considered harmful such as drinking, drugs, and parties. This led to disputes within families and among friends. Conflicts also arose (for various other reasons) within the community, and between the community and other nearby communities.
Actividades Malas

Drinking liquor was considered one of the problems in the community. A few others mentioned drugs as well: “Las fiestas, de que ellos se ponen a celebrar y siempre está el licor, drogas. Entonces en estas fiestas siempre están vendiendo licor, drogas, y cosas así” (The parties, that they put on to celebrate, and there is always liquor and drugs. So, in these parties, they are always selling liquor, drugs and things like that). The woman was talking about a party happening across the street when I was interviewing her. As previously mentioned, Catholics were accused of these activities, and since dancing went on at the parties, that is likely why the evangelicals claimed not to dance, because it was associated with other unhealthy activities. This was where participant observation was helpful because liquor appeared to be people’s main problem. Beer, for special occasions was fine. I drank beer with the family (who purported to be evangelical) for the abuelita’s (grandmother’s) birthday, Christmas, and New Year’s Eve. We also danced at the grandmother’s birthday and on New Year’s. Dancing among family appeared to be socially acceptable, as was drinking, provided one did not get drunk. The one son in the family who came home from a cock fight completely drunk on Christmas Eve, having missed Christmas dinner, obviously was not looked kindly upon by the mother.

Drinking led to problems, as in the example above, and, in more serious cases, abuse between children and parents and between spouses. “Pero también, miro familias que no son felices, si, mucho pleito, tal vez... el papa toma Ron, cada vez, una vez a la semana y...pleitos, horrible” (But also, I see families that are not happy, yes, many disputes, perhaps...the father drinks rum, every time, once a week and...disputes, horrible). I interviewed various members of one family individually, and all of them mentioned the father’s previous drinking problem: “Porque si el marido ha tomado, te lo pega, a Usted la rastro” (Because if my husband had drunk, he hit you, to your face). One woman told me if kids were doing drugs, they would come
home and hit their parents or their wives. One man, who was a recovering drug addict, referred to drug use starting after gringos came to surf Popoyo. He said, “…Mire que ya empezaron turistas venían, yo vi la juventud también hacia amigos con ellos, fue cuando empezó, estas cosas. Y afectaba la salud de la juventud!” (…I saw that when the tourists started coming, I saw the young people also make friends with them, that was when it started, these things. And it affected the health of the youth!) Drug use in the youth also led to theft, according to one woman.

**Conflicto**

Other sources of conflict were general arguments within families, such as parents disagreeing with their children or siblings fighting with one another. “Los padres con los hijos que tal vez no se entienden bien…” (The parents with the children that perhaps do not understand each other well). Another woman claimed people fought with one another because they had not been to school. Due to many people having animals, conflicts arose between neighbors: “…Tal vez algún amigo se da cuenta de que el vecino se le comió un animal a otro, aquellos se van a pelear” (…Perhaps some friend realizes that the neighbor ate his animal, there they are going to fight).

Land was a big source of conflict as well within families, but also with the government (local and national) and nearby communities. “Ahí compraron con dinero de la comunidad y se lo llevaron para la Virgen, vendieron tierras de la gente…” (There they bought it with money from the community and took it for La Virgen [i.e., community next to Las Salinas], they sold the people’s land). Another older man, who was part of the board of directors for the community, said that people were fighting over some land that was sold to a gringo. This particular gringo had bought some community land and was barring people from going on it, and several
participants told me he had only caused problems for the community. One man said they wanted to see if they could kick him off the land.

**COMUNIDAD UNIDA**

Despite all of the conflicts, overall the participants said that the families and the community were peaceful and united. “...*Hay familias muy, muy unidas, muy buenas*” (...There are families that are very, very united, very good). Another man said the community was “*tranquilo*” (tranquil). Las Salinas did not have problems other nearby communities had, such as murder. Families shared things with one another and helped each other out: “...*Siempre ayudan unos a otros...siempre la familia esta ahí dándole la mano a uno...*” (...They always help one another out...the family is always there giving a hand to one...). Another man said: “*Si uno no tiene una cosa, la otra le consigue al otro y así*” (If one does not have something, they will get it from another and things like that). Families helped each other find work and through times of crisis. Several people mentioned they enjoyed getting everyone together around the holidays, weddings and birthdays: “...*Cuando alguien se casa, cumple años, las familias se unen, todos están alegres, tranquila*” (...When anyone gets married, has a birthday, the families get together, everyone is happy, calm).

**HOMBRES Y MUJERES**

Women and men both discussed similar subjects with respect to well-being in the community. Women discussed women, in particular, or the problems facing them. The exception to this was one man who mentioned that sometimes one’s wife had to also work in order for the family to get by. Several women mentioned there was not much for women to do,
the men were the ones that worked in the main jobs in the community, which were agriculture and the salt fields: “…Las mujeres no tienen trabajo. Ahora que hizo su hotelito, si buscan un poquito más de mujeres pero aquí las mujeres no tenemos trabajo para nada” (…The women do not have work. Now that they made their little hotel, yes they look for women a little more, but here the women, we don’t have work for anything). This same woman told me that machismo was a problem for the community. She said women were expected to sit at home and wait on their husbands, but if they did not bring home any money, the family was in trouble. Another woman mentioned that latrines were bad for women’s health in particular, but it was all anyone had to use.

Land was something that several women briefly mentioned but the men that mentioned it were much more vocal about it and it tended to dominate the conversation. Three men in particular, whose sentiments have been shared previously, talked at length about it. One of them insisted the government had taken his lands. The two others discussed the problems with selling land to tourists and not seeing much benefit for the community. One of these men also discussed at length the conflicts over land with La Virgen, a neighboring community. These two men were elders in the community and had tried to become part of, or were involved in, community government.

Education was something that only women discussed. “Lo unico pues, que tenemos aquí, es la educación gratuita” (The only thing, then, that we have here, is the free education).

However, the woman who said this went on to tell me that once women get married, or even have a serious boyfriend, they can no longer attend the local school. They have to pay to go to a private school in Rivas, the department capital, or Managua if they wanted to continue their education. The woman who discussed machismo with me also said that big families are a problem. She told me when things were much worse for her, she could not afford to put all of her kids all the way through school: “…yo soy bien pobre, luchadora, y mis hijos, once hijos, hasta,
sexto grado, tercer grado, cuatro grado así porque no podía…” (I was very poor, a fighter, and
my children, 11 children, until, sixth grade, third grade, fourth grade, like that, because I
couldn’t). Another woman mentioned the help from residential foreigners in the community that
helped the school, and how they were also funding her son to go to school in Managua. Two
woman said that people being uneducated led to community problems, such as trash and conflicts.
One of these women said that some people could not afford school, and others did not want to go.
The one teacher I talked to was a woman and she mainly spoke about the environmental
education initiatives in the school.

Summary

The seasons influence many factors for the residents of Las Salinas. The wet season and
the dry season determine work opportunities, health concerns and environmental issues the
community might face. Residents shared thoughts on caring for the natural environment which
they rely so heavily on in their daily lives and how others treated the environment as well.
Outsiders from other countries were positive assets to the community, through tourism, as well as
other aid projects and community initiatives. The bad economic situation was not helping the
community, as they suffered from few job opportunities. This also did not improve the condition
of poverty for people in the community and Nicaragua. The government detracted from, and
contributed to, several aspects of community life, including the economy. Religion was highly
regarded in the community, and kept people from social problems. The social problems included
substance use and the ensuing conflicts. Conflicts among community members were also brought
about by other factors. Overall however, the residents revealed the importance of close family
relations and bonds in community life. Men and women faced described similar factors which
helped or hurt well-being in the community, but some differences did emerge in topics such as land and education.
Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The answers people gave me when I asked them about health, work, social relationships, nature and religion give a fairly comprehensive view of the things people feel influence well-being in the community of Las Salinas. The picture residents painted of the positive and negative aspects of life in Las Salinas helped respond to the research question. Which season it was seemed to be one of the biggest influential factors on well-being since much of the community’s health, work, and everyday life depended upon the natural environment. Residents spoke about caring for the environment and planting trees, as well as the apathy towards the environment some of them witnessed in the community. Similar to findings in the studies on well-being and natural resource dependence (Kusel, 1996; Morais & Zinn, 2010; Stedman et al., 2004), Las Salinas has a high economic dependence on natural resources. Las Salinas is still very much an agrarian-based community; despite the diversification tourism has brought to the economy. Rain can make or break the harvest season. Even tourism depends on natural resources because the tourists come there for the waves and the ocean.

The majority of families I observed own pigs and chickens which freely roam about in their yards. Life is lived outside in Las Salinas: the houses are small, there were thirteen people confined to basically three rooms in the house where I stayed. Houses have openings in various places with wooden roof beams and clay tiles. They are clay and cement basic structures more than insulated and enclosed houses. Cooking is done in a separate addition to the house made of
bamboo. The pila or sink, for doing dishes and laundry, is outside, as are the latrines and shower. No one stays inside during the day: meals are eaten on the porch or in the yard. It is no wonder children are susceptible to malaria and dengue since they spend most of the time outside. No one has central air or closes a door unless it is night time. This is common in other tropical regions; I observed this in Guatemala as well. Rural lifestyles are affected by what season it is because of their dependence on, and existence within, the natural environment.

People from other countries greatly contributed to well-being in many aspects. Without being prompted, the majority of the participants discussed tourism when they discussed jobs and prosperity in the community. Tourism seemed to positively contribute to economic well-being, according to many residents, providing a new source of work besides salt and agriculture. This would provide further evidence for studies on sustainable and pro poor tourism, that small scale tourism can provide economic benefits to financially poor communities and improve their quality of life (Fennell, 2008; Neto, 2003). Men and women residents said that tourism had diversified their economy and provided more opportunities for work, which is why organizations like the World Tourism Organization (2002) call it a method of poverty alleviation. These findings may also provide one picture of the situation on the ground behind the economic study which found Nicaraguan tourism was alleviating poverty to some extent: these are some of the voices behind the numbers, they are not simply GDP numbers (Croes & Vanegas Sr, 2008).

Las Salinas did feel more involved in surf tourism than the communities in the Mentawaian Islands who felt very disconnected from it (Ponting et al., 2005). Residents felt they benefited from being in a prime location for surfers. The wife of the only local Nicaraguan surf guide proudly told me Popoyo Reef was the 5th best wave in the world.

While residents did believe they benefitted from tourism, it was only for part of the year (March to November). This was mainly in the rainy season but spans part of the dry season as well. This left people, mainly men, two options in from December to April: construction work or
work in the salt flats. If tourism was down overall however, as several residents claimed, there were not many construction projects to get involved with if building had stopped. With tourism, they were not as dependent on the bi-seasonal nature of the tropics, but more on the nature of work and school schedules of tourists in the U.S. and Europe. However, surfers use surf forecasts and wave models to predict swells and the best time of year for waves, which once again makes weather and the seasons a factor in when the community is able to benefit from this activity.

Several women I talked to, who worked in the tourism businesses, cleaned rooms and worked as maids, which is provides additional evidence for studies that found that tourism provided an opportunity for women to earn money doing jobs they were used to doing in the home (Enloe, 2000; Gibson, 2001; Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995). The woman who mentioned that tourism provided women with employment opportunities, who previously had no options for work, echoed studies with similar findings on the economic independence women can gain from tourism (Nyaupane et al., 2006). Women also ran small shops and cafes, which may have helped them improve their business management skills as found in other studies where women run tourism businesses (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995).

Other foreigners, who brought projects or medicines, contributed to well-being of community members with regard to health and education through things like access to clean water, free medicines and medical care, and educational supplies and assistance. Some of these projects and initiatives came to Las Salinas most likely since it was just another remote rural community in Nicaragua (such as the medical missions and water pump). However, some of the foreigners who helped with the library and the scholarship fund, came to the community originally for tourism, or even owned tourism businesses. An Argentinean woman who started the educational foundation and also organized some of the trash collection was one of the examples of this. Several people mentioned her and her work with the school, but I was unable to attain whether she was involved in tourism or how long she had lived in the community. The
owner of Popoyo Surf Lodge was an evangelical Christian, and people who were friends with him told me they would go build houses for poor people in even more rural areas than Las Salinas.

As people mentioned the foreign aid projects, I was somewhat surprised, because in my travels between Managua and Las Salinas, I saw very few project signs from nongovernment organizations, foreign governments, or foundations that are commonly littered throughout developing countries advertising a development project or initiative. This surprised me because I was used to seeing them everywhere in Guatemala and I cannot name one I saw in Nicaragua. The one sign I saw in Las Salinas was for the children’s park which had been built near the baseball fields, and I did not look closely at the organization listed. Several people mentioned it, but even they seemed to be confused as to who had built it, because one person told me it was the past president (of Nicaragua, not the community) and another woman told me it was from what sounded like a foreign organization. The resident who was particularly vocal about his dislike of Ortega’s government may have been correct in his insistence that Ortega was not allowing foreign assistance in from those countries who wanted to help. The lack of NGO signage may have been an indication of this.

The bad economy was repeatedly cited as a detractor of well-being in the community. People thought there were different reasons for a shortage of work: off-season for tourists, the government’s fault, and little rain had come that year. One of the younger members of the family was working in Costa Rica in order to make a living and had come home for the holidays. Unemployment compounded the issue of poverty, which residents were well aware of as a problem in Nicaragua, which prevented them from getting medical care and being able to provide economically for their families. These findings offer qualitative support for Diener and colleague’s (2010; 1993) results in various studies which show that income is positively related to well-being. These findings also offer additional support for some of the family well-being studies, which emphasize the importance of child well-being (Armstrong et al., 2005; Parcel &
Menaghan, 1997; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000). Parents were most concerned about providing medical care for their children, who were more susceptible to illness. This proved to be difficult if they could not afford it.

Government (local and national) was shown to play a role in the well-being of the community in positive and negative ways. Several people blamed it for the lack of work, while others mentioned community projects it provided such as the infrastructure at the hot springs and the mosquito spraying. If the government of Nicaragua is encouraging tourism, as their law (La Asamblea Nacional De La Republica de Nicaragua, 2004) and marketing materials (which I picked up in Managua at INTUR, (Instituto Nicaragüense de Turismo) would imply, Ortega’s leftist government may not be very encouraging to investors, according to several residents in Las Salinas. As Mowforth and Munt (2009) imply, using Sen’s (1999) framework, government forces could be preventing residents from receiving benefits from tourism, which could help to improve their lives, because investors and tourists are afraid of the volatility of another Sandinista government. However, the government not only had a hand in mosquito management, which was a positive initiative for the community, but other aspects of environmental management as well. One woman told me the president of the community had recently made a speech on the importance of trees and not cutting them down. This came with the announcement of a tree planting project for the community. This may explain why cutting down trees was such a salient environmental theme for many of the participants.

Religion, according to participants, was a positive aspect of community life which made people lead healthier lives and not abuse substances or go to parties. Residents seemed to believe that the community was peaceful because they claimed the majority of the people were religious. This would agree with findings from Sirgy’s (2009) scale development which lists spiritual well-being as one factor which influences residents perceptions of community well-being. The influence of evangelical Christianity on the social life of the community is apparent not only in
the large estimated percentage of population residents provided, but in the social norms many residents cited in their interviews. There was only one Catholic participant in the study, the rest considered themselves to be evangelical. With as much tolerance as people claimed there to be, even she told me evangelicals kept trying to convince her but she would stay where she was.

Drinking, dancing, and going to parties were considered negative activities due to the social stigma religious doctrine had placed on them. This did not hold true for all situations, as my example from my experience with the family showed. The family was perhaps not as strict as many evangelical families in the community however, since many of the members did not attend church on a regular basis. I had one woman tell me, when I asked her about her abilities, she used to dance but since she became Christian she did not do that anymore. A younger participant told me he thought religion was a good thing and he did not drink anymore once he started going to church. Several participants shared their dissonant feelings about religion with me in other parts of their interviews and even in discussions I had with members of my host family, it was obvious they were aware of differences of opinion even within the evangelical faith. An older woman said there were always people criticizing others and using religion to do so. A younger woman told me about arguments she had with her minister because while that particular church said women could not wear jewelry or certain clothing, the Bible said nothing about this, and she was going to follow what she believed God would want, not the church.

Despite the prevalence of religion in the community, and the peace that residents claimed came with it, there were still social problems. Harmful or bad activities, such as drugs and drinking, often led to conflict. Conflict was brought on by other causes as well, such as land or animals. The biggest problem with substance abuse was domestic disputes, which could lead to physical violence. Three of my participants had been deeply affected by this, since they were all members of the same family in which the father had had an alcohol problem. The father told me how his drinking had caused problems for his work and the amount of money he lost, his wife
described her frustration with the physical abuse and poverty they found themselves in, and her
daughter told me about sleeping outside as a child and how her brother had to catch fish in order
for them to eat since they had no money. Several participants associated Catholicism with
alcoholism and drinking, so it is interesting to speculate about whether the decline of the religion
is influencing, or will influence, alcohol abuse rates. It did not seem to be a widespread problem
in the community, but one which people cited as a problem in some families. The drug problem
was new, according to several participants, but there is not enough evidence to conclude tourists
brought this in, as one resident claimed. He very well could be right, but without more
information on its history in the region, it is difficult to speculate. Surf culture has long been
associated with drug culture, especially marijuana use, and with the availability of it to tourists in
Central America, it would not be completely off base to suggest youth from Las Salinas picked
this up from surfers they befriended (Kampion, 2003).

Land and property disputes were also a source of conflict. Some of this leads back to the
designation of the community as indigenous and the fact that they have communal land
(Membreño Idiáquez, 1992). As several of the older men mentioned, the sale of land to tourists
for a low price was not helping the community economically. As one woman said, once people
sell their land and spend the money from it, they do not have anything to do, they can no longer
farm. Another man explained to me that someone would sell a gringo land for a very low price,
and then the gringo would turn around and sell it to another gringo for much higher. Las Salinas
being communal land has probably been an advantage to tourism encroaching in on it. Much of
the area where the hotels, shops and restaurants are along the beach is actually leased to people by
the municipality and is several kilometers from the center of the community. The property that
has been sold for vacation homes is also closer to this beach area and a distance from the
community, it may be under private property laws instead of communal property ones. Residents
explained the process of buying land from the community if one wanted to do it, they had to go
before the president and the board of directors and file a petition to buy the land. The community government had to agree to it before they would let anyone purchase communal land. In the actual community, there are a few shops, but only one hotel, which is owned by Nicaraguan people from the community. The salt flats occupy much of the land between the community and the beach. This lack of tourism development within community borders could be explained by the indigenous community designation and structure.

Despite the social problems, most residents discussed how close families were in the community. They enjoyed getting together and helping one another out. Several community well-being scales include family and social life as factors in community well-being (Christakopoulou et al., 2001; Sirgy et al., 2009). This may also be an example which supports Diener and colleague’s (2010) findings which showed that psychological factors (autonomy, relatedness, and competency) were associated with positive emotion more than income was. The solidarity people felt with their families may have fulfilled their need for relatedness and perhaps influenced their satisfaction with life. Family members helped each other find work and in times of crisis, according to residents. People I met in Las Salinas were incredibly friendly and welcoming, and despite the problems they discussed, overall they seemed happy. On New Year’s Day, they packed up food and the entire family went out to spend the day on the beach, along with many other families from Las Salinas. In the evenings, before and after dinner, we would sit around and talk in the yard or on the porch. Sometimes we would play cards, with various family members rotating in and out of the game. We would all watch television together during lunch or in the evenings.

For men and women, some differences did emerge with regard to women’s issues, land and education. Women were more conscious of the problems particular to them such as health, work, and social expectations. The issue of latrines causing health problems for women was only brought up by one woman, but I got to be part of an interesting conversation with my host family.
as we were sitting around in the yard one night. Somehow the topic of male enhancement drugs came up and this led to a discussion about sex, which I was surprised at and told the family so, because in Latin culture sex is not openly discussed. They agreed that they were more open and it was important to discuss such things. One of my host sisters, the one who worked in Costa Rica, said that they had programs there for women to learn about their bodies and women’s health issues and it was good.

As previously mentioned, one man did discuss how wives will also have to work in order to help the family survive but this is more of a problem related to poverty, not women in particular. Many of the jobs seemed to be only for men, as several women pointed out. Men worked in the salt flats, agriculture, and fishing. One woman told me that only if she did not have a man would she work in the salt flats, but there were very few of them. As previously discussed, tourism did provide women with other employment options in Las Salinas.

Some men openly discussed how women were there to support their men, who were the decision makers for the family. One man said everything he did was to support his family, and had to find work in the tourist off-season in order to do so. Machismo, which one woman mentioned, is an interesting concept that women in Latin America are faced with (Stevens, 1973). The idea of machismo is that Latin men are proud, always right, callous towards women, lustful and needing to prove their masculinity (by procreating with many different women), and arrogant (Stevens, 1973). Stevens (1973) argues that women tend to perpetuate this and become martyrs to their husbands in their attempt to be like the virgin Mary (marianismo). She also says that machismo tends to thrive in countries where significant mixing between those of indigenous and Spanish descent has occurred (Stevens, 1973). This is the case in Nicaragua, and despite Las Salinas being an indigenous community, there are members who are from other areas of the country that could claim more Spanish heritage than others. Stevens (1973) would say this woman, in complaining about machismo and its relegation of women to the home, is deliberately
perpetuating the idea of machismo and the dichotomous symbiotic relationship Latin men and women find themselves in.

Women were the only ones to talk about education. It was not always about their attendance in school however, some women spoke about education availability for others in the community, programs at the school, or problems sending their own kids to school. This would provide more evidence for the studies Hill and King (1995) discussed in which women’s education was found to be an important factor in their well-being as well as that of their families. Women in Las Salinas seemed to understand how important education was to better jobs and improving their lives. In other conversations, when asked what abilities they could improve, several women mentioned wanting to return to school and study more. Both of the older daughters in my host family had completed high school, and when I asked one of them about the men in the family, she told me they did not care as much about it. Most of them did not seem to have gone all the way through school. In taking an inventory of the jobs available in Las Salinas, it is most likely easier for men to get jobs if they do not finish school, because both agriculture and salt cultivation do not require a great deal of education. For women, an education may have allowed them to access the few jobs that there were for them that required more training and skill than jobs available for men.

Conclusion

This study examined well-being as the quality of life people perceive they have in their own lives and in their community (Christakopoulou et al., 2001; Diener et al., 2003). The factors that contribute to well-being are different for individuals, families, women and communities. Worldwide, but especially for people in developing countries that live in poverty, well-being includes more than the amount of money that they earn (Diener et al., 2010). Different factors
contribute to women’s well-being in the developing world and their involvement in income generating activities such as tourism (Hill & King, 1995; Swain, 1995). Tourism has long been touted as a solution to poverty and a way to help improve the quality of life for communities by generating income for education, healthcare, and other basic needs (Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Neto, 2003; World Tourism Organization, 2002). Nicaragua is promoting tourism as an economic development strategy and the country is experiencing growth in its nature-based tourism sector (Hunt, 2009; La Asamblea Nacional De La Republica de Nicaragua, 2004). One type of tourism is surf tourism, which is increasingly popular on the Pacific Coast (Weisberg, 2010). For communities who are seeing a growth in surf tourism, seeing if they are getting any benefit from tourism growth starts with finding out how they perceive well-being overall in their community and if tourism is a factor in it.

For Las Salinas, tourism is a major factor in well-being in the community. Without being prompted, the majority of the residents in the study described it as a positive force in the community that provided jobs for people. However, other factors contribute to their well-being, too. Like other community well-being studies found, there are many aspects of well-being (Christakopoulou et al., 2001; Sirgy et al., 2009). Agriculture and salt cultivation are still primary sources of work, but unemployment was a major problem many residents cited despite the opportunities that were available. Tourism helped, but the situation was still not good. Poverty in the community, compounded by the unemployment, meant families could not afford medication or treatment for their children if they needed it. Children were more susceptible to illness. As family well-being studies show, children’s well-being is a big part of family well-being (Armstrong et al., 2005; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000).

The seasons were interwoven into all of this, as well as caring for the environment. Like other resource dependent communities, the environment seeps into all aspects of life, not just the economy (Kusel, 1996). Which season it was determined threats to children’s health, job
possibilities, and whether there were tourists or not. Tourist season overlapped the rainy season and a part of the dry season but did not provide employment the whole year. Residents recognized that the environment they were so reliant on faced problems from the community, such as cutting down trees or waste management, which could lead to health problems or other consequences. Women’s issues overlapped with several themes as well. Tourism had provided opportunities to earn income for them, as it often can do in developing regions (Nyaupane et al., 2006), but they still had few options for work. Education was important to women, and it was a part of their answers to questions concerning well-being, while men did not mention it. Like other studies, women in Las Salinas seemed to recognize the importance of education for themselves and their families (Hill & King, 1995).

Positive aspects of life in the community were family solidarity and religion. Families could count on one another despite hard economic times, and they enjoyed being together. Evangelical religious beliefs discouraged negative behaviors, such as drinking, that would result in domestic conflicts. Despite health problems that they cited, overall residents seemed to think that health problems were not that bad for adults, and medical missions and the foreign-sponsored water pump project assisted with health concerns. Other projects and aid were positive contributions to well-being in the community. These included projects like the trash collection, organized by the Argentinean woman, and her scholarship foundation as well. Well-being is a complex concept and economics are not the whole picture. Residents told me about their lives, and despite their problems, life in Las Salinas seemed to be pretty good. Much like Diener and colleagues (2010) found, income is not everything.
Implications

Some of the implications that these findings tell us about well-being in a community who is experiencing small scale coastal tourism development is that despite foreign ownership, residents can still gain benefits from tourism since it diversifies the local economy, and provides them with more employment opportunities. The implications this study has for community well-being is that well-being can be very different depending on the context, it is unique for each community. Well-being is multi-faceted and tourism as a method to improve economic well-being in a community is only one facet. If tourism development disrupts family and social structure, which may be vital components in a community’s well-being, it would be negatively affecting well-being more than it is improving it. Tourism may improve well-being in non-direct ways as well. Foreigners who come to live in Las Salinas for much of the year have improved the local school, initiate environmental projects such as trash pick-up, and have even built houses for poorer members of the community. The dependence of the community on foreign assistance may be detrimental to them in the long run, since foreigners can leave at any time, taking aid with them, and the residents cannot.

Future Research

To really find out how the well-being of Las Salinas is and whether tourism is improving it or not, more of the community should be included in future studies. Objective measures of well-being, such as economic data, as well as health statistics, from the community or municipal government, might also be helpful in determining what is really going on there. Further analysis of much of the other data collected in this study is needed to contribute to not only the findings with respect to well-being but what the community perceives is actually happening with regard to
tourism development. Community members are reliant on the natural environment for their livelihoods and analysis of data concerning the importance of the ocean for them can add to the current findings. More information, such as that which can be gathered at town meetings, or by talking to community officials, could shed some light on the numerous land conflicts that came up in several of the interviews. Future studies in the community should be done over a longer period of time. Collecting data during high tourist season would also provide a different perspective on the community.

How surf tourism affects women in particular is something that could be further investigated. Men in the community have taken up surfing and have a great sense of ownership of the waves and the ocean in Las Salinas. Women in the community do not surf, and thus may feel a sense of ownership of the beach but not the ocean. This ownership may contribute to feelings of power and increased well-being in the community since they know it is why people come there to spend money. Further analysis of issues of ownership of tourism development and industry in the community could answer questions about how to better improve well-being. As other studies have found, increased participation and influence from a community in tourism development can increase the amount of rewards they get from it (Sofield, 2003). While residents are gaining benefits, if they had increased ownership of the industry, they could be receiving more. Being an indigenous community may be one way in which the community has retained some autonomy in their control of tourism development. This could be investigated further, as well.
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