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Understanding youths' contributions and perspectives in ecotourism. A pathway to achieve development?

A qualitative case study of the indigenous community San José de Uchupiamonas, Bolivian Amazon, exploring youths' contributions and perceptions of ecotourism's impact on learning and culture.

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This thesis is dedicated to the indigenous people of San José de Uchupiamonas, and to all indigenous people of the world.

May their culture and languages live forever on.

Esta tesis está dedicada al pueblo indígena de San José de Uchupiamonas y a todos los pueblos indígenas del mundo.

Que sus culturas y lenguas vivan para siempre.

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English Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics of youths' contributions in the ecotourism sector in the indigenous village San José de Uchupiamonas, located in the Bolivian Amazon. It examines the contributions that the youths of the community make to ecotourism. It also explores what knowledge they have gained from the sector, as well as how they perceive ecotourism to have influenced their culture. Through a qualitative methodology using fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis, the study reveals a complex, yet crucial role in what contributions they make, what the sector has taught them, and how it impacts their culture. Six interviews were conducted with individuals involved in the ecotourism sector of SJU.

The findings highlight that the participants perceive themselves as having crucial roles in the sector and have an interest in contributing to the sector. However, the findings show that there are also community youths who are not involved in the sector, creating a sense of division in the community. The participants have learned various skills, such as English. This learning process has motivated them to pursue further studies in other cities, contributing to their community. The study further suggests that by demonstrating their culture to outsiders, they strengthen their cultural identity. However, foreign cultural elements such as tourists' clothing are being introduced into the community.

This thesis contributes to the broader discourse in development studies and sociology on indigenous culture, youth participation, and ecotourism by providing valuable insights into the experiences of youth in the complex and multifaceted ecotourism sector.

Keywords: ecotourism, youth participation, indigenous culture, sustainable development, community development

Spanish abstract

Esta tesis explora la dinámica de las contribuciones de los jóvenes en el sector del ecoturismo en la comunidad indígena de San José de Uchupiamonas, ubicada en la Amazonía boliviana. La investigación examina las aportaciones que realizan los jóvenes de la comunidad al ecoturismo. Asimismo, analiza los conocimientos que han adquirido a través del sector y cómo perciben que este ha influido en su cultura. Mediante una metodología cualitativa basada en trabajo de campo, entrevistas semiestructuradas y análisis temático, el estudio revela un papel complejo pero crucial en cuanto a las contribuciones, los aprendizajes y los impactos culturales derivados del ecoturismo. Se realizaron seis entrevistas con personas involucradas en el sector ecoturístico de San José de Uchupiamonas.

Los resultados muestran que los participantes se perciben a sí mismos como actores clave dentro del sector y expresan un fuerte interés por contribuir al mismo. Sin embargo, también se identificó un grupo de jóvenes de la comunidad que no participa en el sector, lo cual genera una sensación de división. Los jóvenes involucrados han adquirido diversas competencias, como el aprendizaje del idioma inglés. Este proceso educativo los ha motivado a continuar sus estudios en otras ciudades y, posteriormente, a contribuir a su comunidad. Además, el estudio sugiere que al mostrar su cultura a visitantes foráneos, refuerzan su identidad cultural. No obstante, también se observó la introducción de elementos culturales externos, como ropa de turistas, dentro de la comunidad.

Esta tesis aporta al debate académico en los estudios del desarrollo y la sociología sobre la cultura indígena, la participación juvenil y el ecoturismo, proporcionando valiosas perspectivas sobre las experiencias juveniles en un sector tan complejo y multifacético.

Palabras clave: ecoturismo, participación juvenil, cultura indígena, desarrollo sostenible, desarrollo comunitario

Popular science abstract

In the Bolivian Amazon lies the indigenous village of San José de Uchupiamonas. In this village, ecotourism has been a central feature for decades. This thesis explores perspectives relating to youths' contributions in the ecotourism sector in the village. It also explores the knowledge they have gained from the industry and how they perceive it to have influenced their culture. Via field study and interviews, the results suggest that the youths have a crucial role in the sector, but that there is a group in the village who are not involved in the sector; therefore, creating a sense of division. The ones involved in ecotourism have learned various skills, such as English. While ecotourism has allowed them to express their culture, the sector has also introduced cultural elements from the outside world (such as backpacks and clothing). The study is an element of the broader discourse in development studies and sociology by focusing on indigenous culture and ecotourism.

List of abbreviations

ACETUR: Asociación Comunitaria de Emprendimientos de Turismo Responsable de San José de Uchupiamonas (Community organization of tourist companies responsible for San José de Uchupiamonas, my translation).
ALLEA: European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities
CI: Conservation International (Conservación Internacional, Spanish name)
CSR: Corporate social responsibility
NATIVA: Naturaleza, Tierra y Vida (Nature, land and life)
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
SJU: San José de Uchupiamonas
UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization
UN: United Nations

Table of Contents

1 Introduction 11

1.1 Aim, research objective and research questions 14

2 Literature review 16

2.1 Societal effects of ecotourism 16

2.2 Youth participation 18

2.3 Methodology 20

2.4 Bolivia 21

2.5 Conclusion of literature review 21

3 Theoretical framework 22

3.1 Sen's Capability Approach 22

3.2 Habitus and cultural capital 25

3.3 Conclusion of the theoretical framework 26

4 Methodological framework 27

4.1 Research approach 27

4.2 Case study and description 28

4.3 Fieldwork and sample 31

4.4 Operationalization of key concepts and interview questions 35

4.5 Interview setting 36

4.6 Generalizability 37

4.7 Limitations and delimitations 37

4.8 Ethical issues 39

4.9 Coding and data analysis 41

5 Findings and analysis 42

5.1 Contribution to the sector 43

5.1.1 Professional contribution to the sector 43

5.1.2 Societal management of ideas 47

5.1.3 Background explanations for the involvement 49

5.1.4 Youths who are not involved in the sector 51

5.2 Knowledge and education acquired via the sector 54

5.2.1 English 54

5.2.2 Professional development 56

5.2.3 Migration 59

5.3 Perceived cultural impact 61

5.3.1 Positive impacts 61

5.3.2 Negative impacts 63

5.3.3 Analysis of culture 65

6 Conclusion 66

6.1 Final discussion 66

6.1.1 Answer to RQ 1 “What do older youths in the San José de Uchupiamonas ecotourism sector perceive youths contributions to be?” 67

6.1.2 Answer to the RQ number 2: “What have youths involved in the ecotourism sector learned due to their involvement in the sector?” 68

6.1.3 Answer to the research question number 3 (RQ3) “How do older youths perceive the cultural impacts of the ecotourism sector in San José de Uchupiamonas?” 69

6.2 Theoretical methodological and larger implications 70

6.3 Study strengths and limitations 70

6.4 Future research 71

7 Reference list 73

1 Introduction

Ecotourism is one means for indigenous people to showcase their environmental practices and enhance cultural expressions. To achieve these benefits, it is necessary to allow the community to develop the sector (Miller, 2024: 74). These positive effects of the sector are crucial to discuss since the sector has been criticized for being influenced by Western values, as it adjusts its operations to meet tourists' expectations, thereby not benefiting local societies and their cultural practices (West and Carrier, 2004: 485, 491). One essential group in the tourism sector is the youth (UNWTO, 2022). Involving youths is central in promoting community change since they are critical thinkers (UNSD, n.d). The involvement of youths in ecotourism leads to the development of self-esteem and motivation to enroll in education for the youths, as well as respect for nature and the valorization of culture (Neleman and de Castro, 2016: 276, 277). The suggested impacts of ecotourism indicate a complex dynamic. This complexity and the importance of youth in the industry make it essential to analyze the impact of youth in the sector.

Ecotourism is central in many countries' development plans since it is a means to enable sustainable regional growth and employment (Wearing and Neil, 2009: 33). Wearing and Neil (2009: 32-33) argue that tourism can generate more income than traditional commodity production, leading to increased pollution and rising local prices. If a tourist destination lacks local capacity and resources for handling tourists, there is a risk of losing economic profits to foreign investors. Ecotourism has evolved as an alternative to mass tourism that can threaten local culture and environment (Wearing and Neil, 2009: 1; O'Neill, A.C, 2002: 527).

Ecotourism offers local communities the potential to achieve development through increased income and employment. Ecotourism can generate social benefits for a community due to increased incomes from the visitors (Wearing and Neil, 2009: 155, 177). The economic opportunities enabled by ecotourism can

also allow communities to minimize their dependence on harmful industries, such as mining (Samal and Dash, 2022: 9, 14-15). The tourists expect protection of the environment (such as high water and air quality); therefore, in order to maintain a sustainable destination and maintain the economic income generated from the sector, it is necessary to protect the environment (Wearing and Neil, 2009: 155, 117). The sector is also a means to ensure environmental conservation and reduce carbon dioxide emissions since it uses natural resources sustainably (Samal and Dash, 2022: 9, 14-15). Ecotourism improves community engagement and participation in decision-making and other activities that can lead to preservation of traditional culture (Samal and Dash, 2022:9,14-15). The sector does not harm the local culture, instead encouraging it (Wearing and Neil, 2009: 15).

While ecotourism has this beneficial impact on communities, it is also a complex issue since research suggests that ecotourism has various unfavorable outcomes. Greenwashing can, for instance, be a problem, which is when an organization wants to market itself as ecologically friendly (Samal and Dash 2022: 12) while still having the same adverse effects as mass tourism (O'Neill, A.C, 2002: 522). Effects of greenwashing include cultural exploitation, unequal profit distribution, and disputes over land and natural resources. Ecotourism has further been criticized for enhancing gender norms and therefore negatively affecting women, since males control the communities involved in ecotourism. Homestays I, where tourists stay in locals' houses can also lead to increased burden for women since they tend to clean, wash, and cook for the tourists (Samal and Dash, 2022: 12). One additional critique of the sector is that it is being influenced by Western values, as it adjusts its operations to meet tourists' expectations, thereby not benefiting local societies and their cultural practices (West and Carrier, 2004: 485, 491). There is also a risk that the influx of tourists can alter indigenous beliefs and practices and disturb the environment via pollution. Another risk is that small local enterprises can be outcompeted by foreign companies (O'Neill, A.C, 2002: 527).

To overcome the negative aspects of ecotourism, those responsible for the sector must understand the requirements and consequences of the sector. They must plan it effectively, consider environmental factors, and strengthen social, economic, and ecological outcomes (Wearing and Neil, 2009: 37-38). Another way to overcome the negative aspects of ecotourism is to allow the community to develop an ecotourism sector, enabling indigenous people to demonstrate their environmental practices and enhance their cultural expressions (Miller, 2024: 74). Tourist companies that are run by indigenous people include nature-based tours and cultural sightseeing and usually take place in remote areas such as national parks (Zeppel, 2006: 1-2).

The benefits of youths participating in youth programs are enhanced self-esteem and confidence, which can increase their skill development (Borden, Perkins and Villarruel., 2006: 199; Listen Inc., 2003, 16-17; Neleman and de Castro, 2016: 267,277). Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2023: 654-649) suggest that youths involved in ecotourism projects supported by CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) have better access to education and finance than those who do not. They also indicate that these projects can stimulate local economic development by creating more jobs and encouraging youth entrepreneurship. Youths involved in ecotourism projects can also enhance their self-esteem, entrepreneurial skills, motivation to enroll in education, respect for nature, and valorization of cultural values (Neleman and de Castro, 2016: 276, 277). Concerning the methodological approach in youth participation, the examined age range ranges from 16-30 years, suggesting that the older youths' perspectives have not been elaborated.

One country where tourism is crucial is Bolivia. In 2023, tourism in the country provided more than 326,000 people with jobs (directly or indirectly), meaning the sector is crucial for the country's economic growth (Johnson, 2024). The government has had a political desire to develop its tourism sector, especially in the Amazon region. The former "National Tourism Plan" (from 2006-2011) aimed at strengthening existing community-based tourism and marketing the tourism

sector of the country (Lima Cortez, 2010: 139-140). There are few academic studies about the ecotourism sector in Bolivia and no studies were found that specifically examine the contributions of youths. Therefore, there is an educational need to fill in the gap by analyzing youths' perceptions about the impacts of ecotourism on themselves and their culture given the sector's significance for Bolivia's economy.

As has been discussed, tourism is a complex phenomenon with both positive and negative impacts. One method to take advantage of the positive impacts of tourism is to boost ecotourism. Since tourism is essential for the Bolivian economy, it is necessary to understand Bolivia's situation better to improve the tourism sector. Because of the significance that the United Nations (UN) has stated that youth play in achieving development, it is relevant to analyze the youth's contribution and perceptions. The mixed results regarding the cultural impacts of ecotourism and the sector's impact on participants make it further interesting to expand the current literature with more knowledge about the youth's perceived contributions in the industry and their perceptions of its role for them to acquire more knowledge and how they perceive it has affected their culture. Due to the lack of research on older youths in youth participation, it is relevant to examine the perspective of older youths.

1.1 Aim, research objective and research questions

This study aims to explore the contributions of older youths in the ecotourism sector in Bolivia and the impact the industry has on them and the culture. The objective is to engage with older youths from San José de Uchupiamonas through a field study, to understand their perspectives. The research aim was developed after a discussion with my contact organization, Conservación Internacional (CI). CI has together, with the organization NATIVA (Naturaleza, Tierra y Vida (Nature, land and life), with which they have a project in San José de Uchupiamonas (SJU). The project is called "Plan de acción" (action plan, my

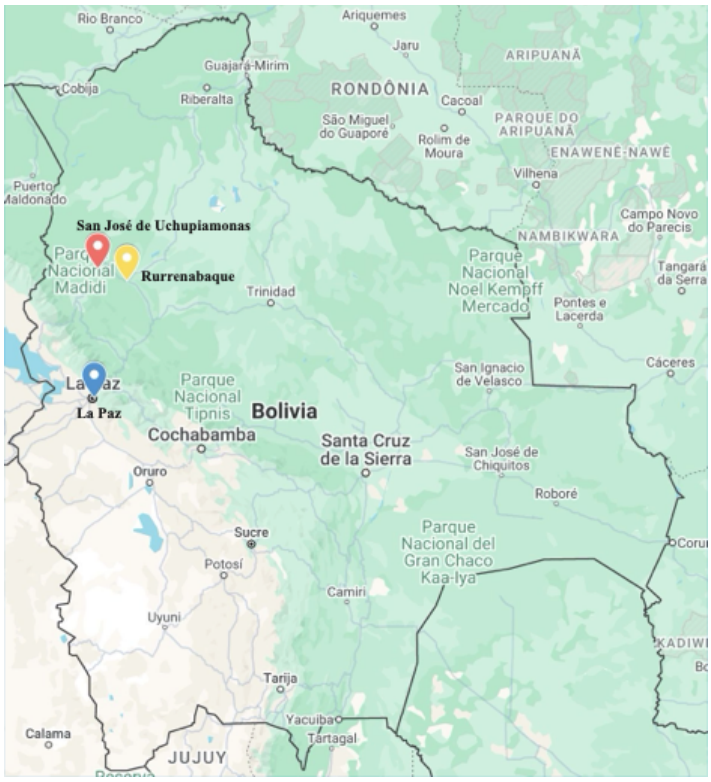
translation). In chapter, 4.2 (case study and description) a longer motivation for why choosing SJU will be presented. A longer description about SJU and its challenges will also be presented.

The research questions are, "**What do older youths in the San José de Uchupiamonas ecotourism sector perceive youths' contributions to be? What have older youths involved in the ecotourism sector learned due to their involvement? How do older youths perceive the cultural impacts of the ecotourism sector in San José de Uchupiamonas?"**

Conservación Internacional is a part of the international organization named "Conversation International" which works to protect the environment globally (Conversation International, n.d). NATIVA is a Bolivian NGO that works for environmental conservation and sustainable development (NATIVA, n.d).

I have a strong personal interest in these topics, including youth empowerment/involvement, tourism, and sustainable development. This is one of the reasons I chose this project. A personal interest in a topic is a reasonable reason to select a specific research project (Swedberg, 2024: 37-39; Hammett, Twyman, and Graham, 2015: 26).

Map 1 illustrates the village's location and the nearest town, Rurrenabaque.
Map 1



(Google Maps, 2025a)

2 Literature review

This chapter presents the literature review. First, a review of the current literature on the societal effects of ecotourism will be presented, followed by literature on youth participation. The review will continue with a methodological section followed by a section about Bolivia. Finally, a conclusion of the literature review will be discussed.

2.1 Societal effects of ecotourism

Ecotourism has been criticized for being influenced by Western and capitalist values, which causes the business to adjust to the expectations of tourists rather than prioritizing the benefits of local societies and their traditional practices (West and Carrier, 2004: 485, 491). Other unfavorable consequences of ecotourism are

the commercialization of the culture (Wani, etal, 2025: 12) and the creation of social-cultural conflict within a community due to differences in purchasing power between tourists and locals (Upadhaya, et al, 2022: 11). Miller (2024: 67) discusses how tourism has allowed the colonial area to continue since it includes developing nations that need to depend on foreign investment. This aligns with Tosun (2022: 248), who suggests that one possible suggestion for when locals have negative perceptions of the effects of ecotourism is when non-local operations are using their population and not including them in the planning of the industry.

Despite these suggested negative effects of the sector, there is research suggesting that ecotourism can be successful and have beneficial outcomes. One means of making tourism successful for a community is if the community builds the tourism sector via ecotourism, then the sector can enhance indigenous expressions, sustainable livelihoods, and their environmental practices (Miller, 2024: 74). Ecotourism can lead to cultural exchange and revitalization of local cultures (Upadhaya et al., 2022: 11). By demonstrating one's culture to outsiders, it strengthens the perception of what it is like to live within a specific community, thus enhancing their identity, pride, and cohesion. Ecotourism is also a means for locals to explore the culture of the outside world, therefore becoming more tolerant (Besculides, Lee and McCormick, 2002: 306). One way to use the industry to promote local culture is by holding shows (festivals). McKean (1978, cited in Besculides, Lee and McCormick, 2002: 306), states that if tourists have a genuine interest in the local culture, this creates a market for local traditional art, which is an aspect of strengthening the local culture.

The ecotourism sector generates income for flora conservation activities. Working for conservation is further crucial in creating a sustainable tourism sector. Therefore, people working in the sector become motivated to engage in flora conservation (K C, 2021: 2762). One perceived impact by locals with low income living in a community where ecotourism is common is that the sector generates

economic inequalities among locals (Upadhaya, etal, 2022: 8). The social impact of the sector is extensive, including perceived improved education standard, quality of life, language, and leadership skills. The rising income of the sector results in the locals being able to afford basic necessities (Upadhaya et al, 2022: 11).

2.2 Youth participation

Several studies have highlighted the importance of youth participation in development and community projects. Borden, Perkins and Villarruel (2006: 199) suggest that personal development, such as gaining confidence and self-esteem, is a central motivation for youths to contribute to communal youth programs. These traits result from these programs since they have a social responsibility to others. This aligns with Wong, Zimmerman and Parker, (2010: 101) who suggest that when youths see the results of their contributions, it can build confidence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem and Jekamo and Nuri (2025: 381-385), who further suggest that youth participation in development leads to increased confidence and increased civil engagement. When youths participate in community activities, they raise concerns about young people, which benefits society (Frank 2006, 369). This leads to a stronger connection to their community (Frank 2006: 362). Youths contribute to local development by offering solutions to community problems. They have a strong community awareness since they present proposed solutions that are beneficial for the whole community, rather than solely themselves (Freires, Faria, and da Silva, 2025: 424).

One negative aspect of youth participation is that youth can feel frustrated if their voices are not heard by officials (Frank, 2006: 369; Azmi, Wijaya and Basram 2024:85), this is evident in both rural and urban villages (Azmi, Wijaya and Basram, 2024:85); there is no difference in the level of youth participation in rural or urban areas. They have high participation in social activities and associations but low participation in expressing their opinions in decision-making processes

(Azmi, Wijaya and Basram, 2024:81, 82). Further, Jekamo and Nuri (2025: 380) suggest that limited political participation for youths negatively affects their confidence and self-awareness. Including youths in the decision-making process, it is crucial to have a supportive environment from the adults. Having supportive adults is crucial for youths to get access to roles in a community, such as advisors, decision makers, and planners (Scheve et al., 2006).

One description of youth participation is: “involving young people in institutions and decisions, as well as their active engagement and real influence in development” (Azmi, Wijaya and Basram, 2024: 80; Checkoway, 2011: 341). Morgan (2016, 178:179) suggests that NGOs can be crucial in providing meaningful activities such as health and community performance workshops for youths. These activities can, in the future, be perceived by the youths as educational and empowering, providing them with new knowledge that they can share with their communities. Neleman and de Castro (2016: 276, 277) suggest that in Curuçá, Brazil, an ecotourism project delivered a poor economic result and did not deliver a profitable income to those involved. However, their participation in the sector challenged them and helped develop personal skills in those involved, such as self-esteem, entrepreneurial skills, motivation to pursue formal education, respect for nature, and valorization of cultural values. These effects can lead to the emergence of new young leaders and sustainable development in forest towns (Neleman and de Castro, 2016: 276, 277). Youths can become excellent guides and contributors in the sector and therefore play a crucial role in ecotourism if they are engaged in traditional activities related to their culture, such as fishing, hunting, and tracking wildlife and plants. Therefore, ecotourism would enable a lifestyle that is not too different from their traditional way of life (Nepal, 2009: 190).

2.3 Methodology

Considering the methodological approach, according to Sana et al., (2023, p. 2148) more than 50% of the studies on ecotourism have employed a quantitative approach, which typically involves surveys. Within the topic of ecotourism and youth participation, this literature review can further confirm that multiple studies have been done with a quantitative approach, mainly consisting of surveys (Vicente, 2024: 549; Firman, et al, 2023:8-10; Uduji and Okolo-Obasi, 2023: 636; Chumphong and Embree, 2022: 556-558; Azmi, Wijaya and Basram, 2024: 79; Stanciu, 2002: 4,5). There have also been case studies regarding ecotourism. These case studies have been conducted in Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Dominican Republic, India, Jamaica, Nepal, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the United Kingdom, and the United States (West & Carrier, 2004; Miller, 2024; Neleman and de Castro, 2010; Lu & Nepal, 2009; KC, Ghimire & Dhakal, 2021; Wani et al., 2025; Upadhaya et al., 2022). Sana et al. (2023: 2150) state in a systematic literature review that the USA and Australia account for 49% of the investigated countries, while there was no article about Bolivia. It is therefore evident that more qualitative research is needed. Qualitative research would enable a study about perceptions of the sector and the participants involved in the sector, which is essential in developing the sector.

The age span of the participants in the reviewed studies on youth participation mainly includes younger youths. The age span of the sample provided by Borden, Perkins and Villarruel (2006: 191), Jekamo and Nuri (2025: 370), Freires, Faria, and da Silva, (2025: 414), and Morgan (2016: 178) focused on youths from 16 to 29 years old, while Azmi, Wijaya and Basram (2024: 80) examined how a specific community perceived youth participation among individuals aged 16-30. Consequently, the perspectives of older youths, particularly those over 30 years old, remain an underexplored area of research, representing a gap that this study seeks to address.

2.4 Bolivia

Although there is a significant academic interest in the topic of ecotourism, in Bolivia it has received limited attention. There has been a strong political desire to develop the country's tourism sector, especially in the Amazon region. Between 2006 and 2011, the government had a strategy named “National Tourism Plan,” partly aimed at strengthening existing community-based tourism and marketing the country's tourism sector (Lima Cortez, 2010: 139-140). The government's challenge was to enable sustainable development and recover indigenous practices (Lima Cortez, 2010: 142). In the Yacuma River Protected Area, ecosystem degradation will lead to further biodiversity loss, threatening the ecotourism industry. The only way to avoid this is for the public and private sectors to address this seriously (Arze and Holladay, 2017: 306, 307).

2.5 Conclusion of literature review

As can be understood from the literature review, although research on ecotourism and its benefits has been conducted, and numerous case studies exist, there is a notable lack of research in the case of Bolivia. Therefore, there is an academic need to complete the studies with more examples about Bolivia. Given the numerous quantitative studies on ecotourism, it is also necessary to conduct qualitative studies. By applying a qualitative study, this research seeks to understand individual perceptions about the youth’s perceived contributions in the sector and its perceived impacts on themselves and the culture.

Since the previous research has suggested that youths play an essential role in development, it is of further academic interest to evaluate the perceived contributions of youths in ecotourism projects. Interestingly, no studies have been found regarding youth’s participation in ecotourism projects in Bolivia. Regarding youth participation, existing research has focused on the benefits of including youth. This research aims to complete that research by focusing on youths'

perspectives, therefore contributing to youth empowerment theory. There are no articles about SJU, despite the significance of ecotourism for the community (Todos Nube, 2024) and the involvement youths have had in the plan de acción (which will be explained in chapter number 4.2 (case study and description of project) (NATIVA, 2023: 51, 61-63). Therefore, this thesis will explore the contributions of youths in developing ecotourism at SJU and their perspectives on its impact, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of their perspectives, which is a crucial aspect of youth participation. This will generate more knowledge about how ecotourism affects the community's culture and how the sector can contribute to the professional development of the community's youths, thereby generating more necessary knowledge about how to benefit the community's future. The results can be compared with cases from other indigenous communities with ecotourism worldwide to understand better how the sector can impact indigenous communities.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework. It combines Sen's Capability Approach and Bourdieu's habitus and cultural capital. First, the theories will be explained, followed by a critical discussion. Later, the use of the theories will be elaborated.

3.1 Sen's Capability Approach

Sen argues that development expands people's freedoms and does not focus solely on economic development. Freedom depends on factors other than economic growth, such as social and financial arrangements and political and civil rights (access to education and health care, and participation in public debate). Development is about removing unfreedoms, such as poverty, poor economic opportunities, systematic social deprivation, or lack of education (Sen, 1999: 3-4).

Sen identifies five different kinds of freedoms, so-called instrumentals: political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantee, and protective security (Sen, 1999: 10). In this analysis the relevant freedoms are economic facilities (opportunity to participate in economic activity) and social opportunity (educational arrangements) (Sen, 1999: 11, 39). They will be used to understand the youth's contributions to the economy and educational arrangements.

The instrumental freedoms enhance one's capability (Sen, 1999: 38). A person's capability is their freedom to achieve their desired lifestyle (Sen, 1999: 75). Individuals must have the freedom (i.e., capability) to do things they consider valuable since it is significant for their personal development and for the person's opportunities to have beneficial outcomes. Increasing individuals' freedoms is essential personal well-being and the individual's social effectiveness which enable them to influence the world, these are crucial aspects of development (Sen, 1999: 18). When people have freedom, they are natural parts in contributing to development (Sen, 1999: 4-5). Sen (1999: 40, 41, 129, 144) argues that increased capabilities lead to various societal effects, such as enhancing people's productive abilities. This can lead to increased economic growth, improved education, and increased literacy rates, facilitating social change. Public policy can strengthen the capabilities; on the other hand, public policy can also be influenced by the participatory capabilities of the public. Increased capability also enhances the ability of individuals to influence society and the world, which is crucial for development (Sen, 1999: 18). Institutional arrangements are enabled due to people's freedoms, i.e. people's liberty to participate in social choices (Sen, 1999: 5), but for people to be able to achieve objectives, institutional arrangements such as political liberties, social powers, basic education and encouragement of initiatives are necessary (Sen, 1999: 6). According to Sen (1999: 36), "expansion of freedom is viewed as both the primary end and the principal means of development". This underscores the importance of allowing agents to shape their desired lives.

One crucial aspect of Sen's work is the concept of agency. Sen describes an agent as individual who "who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives" An agent seeks to contribute to change and is a part of a community and involved in either social or political actions (Sen, 1999: 19). Development is dependent on free agency of people (Sen, 1999: 4). Weak agency is a consequence of unfreedoms (Sen, 1999: XII).

This theoretical framework is suitable for this study since it is a tool to measure whether the youth do something they do things they consider meaningful i.e.., high capability). In this study, high capability is measured by whether they are involved in activities that the participants consider valuable. The Capability Approach can later analyze whether this high capability leads to a desire to contribute to social change, and if it has positive personal outcomes. The positive personal impact will primarily focus on the educational opportunities this capability has led to for the participants. If they have high capability, they have high agency, and their agency will be analyzed by examining their will or willingness to contribute to the development of the community. This will enable the analysis to focus on the level of contributions the youth perceive they make.

In addition to economic and political freedoms. Sen (1999: 31-33) further discusses the role of the culture. Sen argues that economic growth can lead to cultural loss but that it is up to individuals to decide which cultural traits are valuable for them to preserve; a higher authority should not determine this. A potential conflict between economic growth and loss of culture must be solved via participatory solutions (i.e.., by the community). A participatory approach is a crucial aspect in achieving development. This theoretical tool is suitable for the thesis since it will serve to analyze the perceived cultural effects of the sector on the community and how these potential effects can be addressed.

3.2 Habitus and cultural capital

Habitus is the system of structures (dispositions) that enables an agent (which can be a person or organization) to act in the social world. The habitus is a product of history and is therefore formed by experience, and it creates individual and collective practices that are reproduced through everyday practices. The habitus helps agents navigate the social world and is constantly influenced by experiences; therefore, it is not static and can be adjusted. The habitus produces actions (practices) that reproduce itself. One crucial aspect of the habitus is that the agent never does it on purpose (Bourdieu, 1977: 72-95). An agent's habitus operates on itself, without conscious choices by the agents. One's habitus can be used to explain an agent's actions. The habitus is also adapted to the field. Agents understand what future fits them (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992: 129).

Bourdieu has developed various capital forms. In this thesis, cultural capital will be analyzed. It is a capital that exists in three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Cultural capital is acquired over time and refers to how cultural traits are transferred and reproduced (thereby forming the habitus) (Bourdieu, 1986: 243).

Bourdieu's theoretical contributions will be used to understand the perceived cultural effects on the community, examining whether the individual's and/or the community's cultural habitus is being affected and/or adapted due to tourists, and therefore changing. In this analysis, the interactions and everyday practices that the youths have with tourists and ecotourism are how this is measured. It also measures the influx and interactions of the tourists. The habitus is changing if the youths perceive cultural attributes from the outside world as being added to their own culture. The habitus will also deepen an understanding of possible background factors that are essential to the youth's contributions.

Bourdieu (1986: 243) describes the embodied state as “the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body”. It is the state where cultural dispositions are formed (such as speech, behavior, acting, etc.), a process that takes time (Bourdieu, 1986: 243-244). This state is gradually acquired through socialization and education over time (Bourdieu, 1986: 18). These are changeable and can be adjusted (Broady, 1991: 175). This relates to the discussion about habitus, which is not static but is dynamic. The objectified state is when the cultural capital manifests itself as objects, such as media, writings, monuments, etc. However, solely owning it gives no value; the owner must have the cultural competence to understand its meaning (Bourdieu, 1986: 245). The institutionalized state represents the formal recognition of cultural capital in the educational system, which can be academic degrees or titles. These credentials act as a means to prove one’s cultural competence in the legal system and an institutionalized means to manifest symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1986: 247, 248). In this study, the cultural aspects will be defined by the participants and later identified by me during the analysis of the material.

The cultural capital is suitable for understanding whether the different professional titles and degrees/qualifications the youths have affect their contributions and how people who lack these titles contribute to the sector. The embodied state will be used to investigate whether their culture changes due to interaction with tourists. The objectified state will analyze whether various cultural attributes from the outside world are being adapted to the community (via tourism). The institutionalized state will analyze whether the degrees or titles of specific people have affected their contributions to the sector.

3.3 Conclusion of the theoretical framework

The theoretical framework will provide a broad foundation for the perceived contributions of the youths in the ecotourism sector and how ecotourism has influenced them both personally and professionally and the community’s culture.

By implementing capabilities, we can understand the significance of the capability acquired through the sector and how it influences the participants' contributions and knowledge gained from the industry. Habitus and cultural capital will enable us to understand how the everyday practices within the field and sector influence the culture and determine possible background factors contributing to their contributions. It will also provide an analysis of how the culture is affected by the sector. Therefore, the theoretical framework is suitable for understanding youths' perceived contributions in the ecotourism sector and how they perceive that the sector influences them personally and culturally.

4 Methodological framework

This chapter presents the methodological framework. It will start with the research approach where the methodology will be discussed. This will be followed by a section on case study and description. Later, we find fieldwork and sample, section continued by operationalization of key concept and interview questions. The chapter will continue will a discussion about the interview situation continued by generalizability. After these sections, limitations and ethical issues will be presented. The last section of the chapter will discuss coding and data analysis.

4.1 Research approach

This is a qualitative case study done via fieldwork. Since one essential feature of qualitative research is to understand participants' perceptions of the social world (Bryman, 2016: 375), and since this research aims to understand participants' perceptions about their contribution in ecotourism, what they have learned from the sector, and how they perceive its impact on the culture – a qualitative approach was the most appropriate. Doing fieldwork enables the researcher to understand social structures and environmental and cultural conditions that is not possible in a desk study (Crawford, 2024 :1). Doing fieldwork was therefore

essential in order to gain a more profound understanding of the cultural contexts and social structures of SJU. Due to the importance of ecotourism for the community (which will soon be discussed) and previous research suggesting the importance of including locals to achieve beneficial ecotourism projects, it is crucial to gain a profound understanding of the topic.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews are suitable for this since they strive to obtain information regarding the participants' perception of a specific phenomenon (Kvale, 2007: 51), therefore being a necessary means to analyze and answer the research question. Furthermore, conducting semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow up on unscripted topics that emerged during the interviews and were relevant for the analysis, thus providing crucial flexibility in the interview setting. I have used inductive reasoning in this study since construction of the study has been driven by the empirical facts (Mason, 2018: 228). The interview questions were developed to understand the investigated topic and therefore involve inductive reasoning.

4.2 Case study and description

SJU is a village that has been positively impacted by ecotourism. In 1995, the village received a donation of $1.25 million from the American Development Bank to initiate an ecotourism project. This donation was used to develop infrastructure around the village and to train workers. This led to increased tourism, where the income led to improved education for the village locals, improved water quality, and the construction of a telephone mast. Ecotourism, therefore, helped to save the village from extinction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector reached its lowest point; today, the industry has partly recovered, although not to the extent it was during its peak in 2015 (Todos Nube, 2024). Given the village's significant reliance on tourism, it is worthwhile to examine aspects of the tourism sector.

NATIVA has, together with my CI, local organizations, authorities, and villagers of San José Uchupiamonas, developed the “plan de accion” (action plan, my translation). NATIVA has conducted workshops with the villagers to incorporate their knowledge. This also enables a plan that reflects the needs and desires of the villagers themselves. While developing the project, NATIVA has closely cooperated with the village, which values their ancestral knowledge, tradition, and relationship with the surrounding nature. The plan aims to promote sustainable development to strengthen the village’s governance, their rights, and territory management (NATIVA, 2023:4).

The village is an indigenous village located within a protected area and the national park, Madidi National Park (NATIVA, 2023:5). The village has 630 inhabitants (NATIVA, 2023:10). The report states that the village faces various threats from human activities. These threats include deforestation, the construction of projects such as roads and hydroelectric power plants, approved mines, commercial hunting and fishing, wildfires, the extraction of forest products, and unorganized tourism (NATIVA, 2023:23-24). One crucial aspect of the community is the occurrence of youths who migrate to other cities/countries. 86,67% of the families in SJU have at least one family member who has migrated. The four most common cities to migrate to are La Paz, Santa Cruz, San Buenaventura, and Rurrenabaque. A survey suggests that work and education are two major reasons for migration (NATIVA, 2022: 26-28).

The report suggests that four possible sources of income are agriculture, cattle, mining, and tourism (NATIVA, 2023:44). While developing the project plan, one workshop was organized for the youths to understand their perspectives on the most vital areas of work for the village and for their future. The youths stated that one of their most important activities is to learn languages to work in tourism (NATIVA, 2023: 51).

The project plan concludes with different objectives, which have actions and activities. One of the objectives is “establish a process of ongoing capacity in themes of tourism…” (my translation). The activity of this objective is “identification of themes of priority capacity regarding community tourism…” (my translation). Another activity with the same objective is to “Training for secondary school youth in tourism services” (my translation) (NATIVA, 2023: 61-62). As can be understood from the report, NATIVA has focused on the importance of including youths in the process, which is a further reason why the perspective of youths has been chosen. The indigenous people refer to themselves as “Uchupiamona”, which will occasionally be used in this thesis.

The reason for choosing SJU as the case study is due to NATIVA’s and CI’s project. CI was my contact organization and helped me with practical matters. While living in the capital of Bolivia, La Paz, I attended multiple meetings with CI to plan the field study. Selecting this site facilitated my access to the field, which otherwise can be a problem in fieldwork (O’Reilly, 2010: 6-7). Another reason was that there was literature available about the village and its work, which facilitated gaining knowledge about the topic and, therefore, creating the research questions.

Map 2 demonstrates the nearby area of SJU and Rurrenabaque.

Map 2.



(Google maps, 2025b)

There are two means to go from Rurrenabaque to SJU. One means is via the river, it takes around eight hours, but this depends on the weather conditions. Another method is by the road. In that case, one must go to the neighboring city, San Buenaventura, take a transport from there on road 16 to Tumupasa, and from there arrange transportation to SJU. This trip takes approximately four hours, but it depends on the weather conditions.

4.3 Fieldwork and sample

Purposive sampling was used as the sampling method since it is a beneficial method to ensure that the participants are relevant to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2016: 408). Sampling was made by contacting three tourist

companies working with SJU, two of which responded: Chalalán and Madidi Jungle. These organizations were chosen since my contact organization, (CI) recommended them. They are two of seven companies that form the organization ACETUR (Asociación Comunitaria de Emprendimientos de Turismo Responsable de San José de Uchupiamonas; (Communitary organization of tourist companies responsible for San José de Uchupiamonas, my translation), which is an organization that has a vision to protect the indigenous territory by ecotourism (NATIVA, 2022: 48). Chalalán was founded in the 90s and was founded by inhabitants of SJU. 50% of its income goes directly to the indigenous territory, which in turn is going to improve social aspects of the community, such as education, health (NATIVA, 2022: 47). The Madidi Jungle aims to minimize its environmental impact (NATIVA, 2022: 48) in its operations. It is run solely by indigenous people from SJU (Madidi Jungle, n.d). Expressed differently, these two companies are therefore run by locals.

CI informed me that six of the seven companies forming ACETUR had their headquarters in Rurrenabaque; therefore, I decided to start my field study in Rurrenabaque. Rurrenabaque is also (as previously mentioned) one of the major cities to which youths from SJU have migrated (NATIVA, 2022: 26-28). Due to the significance of Chalalán for the village and its good reputation, which I perceived from CI and in Bolivia, I decided to contact them to initially organize a meeting with them. I informed the company about the project's aim and how they could assist me. From there, they provided me contact information for multiple relevant people in my sample population.

Before going to the field, the study aimed to solely focus on youths between the ages of 18 and 35 years old, which is how the African union defines youths (African Union Commission, 2006: 11), albeit there is no universal definition of the youth age group (United Nations General Assembly, 1981: 15). The representatives of Chalalán, however, believed that this would not be feasible as the sample would be too small and. I interpreted that in their view; youths can be

older than 35 years old. This aligns with the UN who states that there is no universal definition of the youth age group (United Nations General Assembly, 1981: 15). Due to the difficulty of me solely recruiting participants younger than 35 years old, I had to adjust my aim and sampling strategy to allow participants who were older than 35 years old, even though the initial aim was to try to have participants between the ages of 18 and 35 years old. Due to the perceptions expressed that being older than 35 years old, one is still a youth, the sample remains relevant. Consequently, the focus of this study shifted from youths to older youths. Although in the sample, the aim was always to have participants not older than 35 years old.

The challenges of sampling were surprising. I expected it to be easy to find participants from 18-35 years old, given the ecotourism sector's importance to the community and to NATIVA's and CI's efforts to involve youths in the ecotourism sector (NATIVA, Conservation International, 2023: 5). This aligns with Blommaert and Jie (2010: 24-26), who suggest that the first time in the field can be chaotic for a researcher since it is not in accordance with his or her expectations, and that the researcher therefore had to adjust. Despite the adjustments, it was still challenging to find potential interviewees.

In total, eleven people were contacted, and six people expressed interest and were therefore interviewed. The interviewees' ages ranged from 31 to 46, all of whom were men; two of these were older than 35. The exact ages of the participants are not mentioned to ensure anonymity. After conducting six interviews, I considered that data saturation had been reached. Due to reaching data saturation and since Kvale (2007: 43, 44) argues that many studies would benefit from having fewer participants since it enables the researcher to focus more on the analysis and that a researcher should interview as many subjects as necessary to gain sufficient knowledge, I did not consider it necessary to interview more people.

Table 1, we can see the participants' (anonymized) names and their age range. Their exact ages and exact roles are not mentioned to ensure anonymity. One of these lived in SJU, four in Rurrenabaque and San Buenaventura. One of them lived both in Rurrenabaque and SJU. To ensure anonymity, the table will not specify which participant lives were. It is described whether they work directly within the sector or indirectly with it, and whether they have administrative tasks or practical tasks (practical tasks can be guides for instance). Since all of them are male, it is unnecessary to include the gender in the table.

Table 1

Name (anonymized)	Age span	Role in the sector
Leo	31-35	Administrative tasks (indirect work)
José	31-35	Administrative tasks (direct work)
Juan	36-46	Practical work (direct work)
Javier	31-35	Mixed tasks (direct work)
Carlos	31-35	Practical work (direct work)
Pedro	36-36	Mixed work (direct work)

Table 2 explains the dates during the fieldwork.

Table 2

Date	Place where I was located	Activity conducted
Friday, March 28, 2025	La Paz, Rurrenabaque	Going to Rurrenabaque, first meeting with Chalalán, first interview

Saturday, March 29, 2025	Rurrenabaque	Interviews
Sunday, March 30, 2025	Rurrenabaque	Interviews
Monday, March 31, 2025	Rurrenabaque	Meeting with the Madidi jungle, Interviews
Tuesday, April 1, 2025	Rurrenabaque, SJU	Going to SJU
Wednesday, April 2, 2025	SJU	Being in SJU, interview
Thursday, April 3, 2025	SJU, Rurrenabaque	Going back to Rurrenabaque, organizing the material
Friday, April 4, 2025	Rurrenabaque, La Paz	Going back to La Paz

4.4 Operationalization of key concepts and interview questions

"What do older youths in the San José de Uchupiamonas ecotourism sector perceive youths' contributions to be? What have older youths involved in the ecotourism sector learned due to their involvement? How do older youths perceive the cultural impacts of the ecotourism sector in San José de Uchupiamonas?

While studying contributions of youths, this study seeks to explore the perspectives of the older youths involved in the ecotourism sector. Still, their perspective of the contributions of youths includes both their contributions and

those of youths who are not involved in the sector. While analyzing what they have learned, this relates to skills they perceive to have acquired from the sector. The perceived cultural impact will be explored via how the participants perceive that ecotourism has impacted the community's and the participants' culture.

The questions asked were basic, such as names and to talk about themselves, their involvement in the sector, what they have contributed to the sector, what effects the sector has had on the community and themselves. Examples of some questions asked were "Tell me a little bit about yourself, what is your favorite part of the community? What role do you have in the ecotourism sector? What are you working with? For how long have you worked/been involved in the ecotourism sector? Why do you work/are involved in the sector? In what way do you think ecotourism has affected cultural practices in your community? How has working in the ecotourism sector affected your personal life? Can you give an example?". These questions enabled me to understand their contributions to the sector and their personal involvement in the sector and in the community. It also helped me to understand the perspectives of how the sector has contributed to themselves personally and professionally, as well as the culture.

4.5 Interview setting

The interviews were conducted in Spanish, as Spanish is the native language of Bolivia and the participants. If fieldwork is conducted in the participants' mother tongue, it can enhance the credibility of the researcher to those being researched, and it helps the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the studied society (Hammett, Twyman and Graham, 2015: 112). The interviews were therefore conducted in Spanish to build trust with the respondents and to enable me to gain a deeper understanding of the society. Another reason for conducting the interviews in Spanish was to facilitate a greater sample and allow the participants to express themselves more freely. I invited participants to choose the locations where the interviews would take place to ensure their comfort.

4.6 Generalizability

One common critique is that interview studies cannot be generalized (Kvale, 2007: 127). Kvale (2007:126, 127) argues that interview studies do not have to be generalized. What is interesting is whether the studies can be transferable to other situations. Therefore, this study does not strive to generalize an objective truth. It seeks to provide a perspective on the significance of the ecotourism sector and the youth's perspective on its impact. It aims to contribute to the field of these areas and, hopefully, with results from other studies, contribute to more generalizable knowledge, research, and long-term social change.

4.7 Limitations and delimitations

While in Bolivia, it was the rainy season, which made many roads inaccessible, including SJU. Therefore, I had to go to the field on other dates close to my flight back to Sweden. This made my stay at the field less flexible, and I could not participate in a meeting located in SJU about the ecotourism sector in SJU that was scheduled for Saturday April 5, 2025, since my return flight from La Paz to Sweden was three days after that and I did not want to risk missing the flight due to this. Participating in the meeting might have given me meaningful insights about the ecotourism sector, and I could have observed youths' perceptions in that meeting.

Another possible limitation of my study is that I could only stay in SJU for two nights, and it was decided on short notice whether I could go to the village. Due to this, I did not have time to find more participants in the village, which would have given me valuable insights about the youths in the community. This limited time in the community further made the observations insufficient to include in the analysis. By being in the village, I still learned about the life of the village, which was necessary to get a better understanding of the village. Important to note is that I still managed to interview one person who partially lives in the community.

One limitation of the sample is that all participants were men. Therefore, the results can miss crucial aspects, such as gender. Essential for notice is that since I used purposive sampling, and every individual I was recommended was male, it is reasonable to suggest that mainly males are involved in the sector. Due to the lack of women, it is harder to generalize the results of this study. Therefore, this study does not seek to generalize objective truth; it aims to generate a perspective on the ecotourism sector.

One delimitation of this study is that the interviews were conducted in Spanish, which is not my first language. I studied Spanish intensively during the upcoming months to do the interviews as smoothly as possible. A benefit of doing the interviews in Spanish is that the participants speak in their native language, facilitating their expressions, which creates stronger material. This also relates to the translation. Since the thesis is written in English, I had to translate the quotes from Spanish to English. Since I am not an authorized translator, this can cause incorrect translations. To solve this, as previously mentioned, I took intensive Spanish courses for months before I went into the field.

Another delimitation of this study is that I adjusted the research questions. Initially, the aim was to investigate the perceived impact that the youths' participation in the ecotourism sector has on the community. After collecting the material, I realized it was impossible to analyze those questions since the participants did not give clear answers, and I adjusted the research questions so I could analyze and answer them. This could possibly mean that it would be difficult to analyze and answer the research questions. However, I do not consider that a problem since in the collected material, questions were still asked about the participants' roles and contributions in the ecotourism sector and its perceived effects, as well as themselves and the culture; therefore, the material includes

context that can answer the research questions. Adjusting the research question can also be explained by inductive reasoning since the study has been developed regarding what has been collected (Mason, 2018: 228). It can also be explained by the fact that I did a field study, which means that various adjustments are made by the researcher (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 24).

4.8 Ethical issues

Throughout the research process, the researcher followed the ALLEA (European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities) code of conduct (The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity). The four ground principles of the ALLEA Context is reliability, honesty, respect, and responsibility (Allea, 2023; Vetenskapsrådet, 2024: 11). To ensure reliability, the research should be free of unjustified influence from other actors so it can create reliable answers (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024: 12). Therefore, no commercial interest was involved in planning the study. To enable respect and responsibility, the researcher must ensure that the research does not harm the participants (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024: 12, 13). Therefore, no participants were forced to participate, and no sensitive questions were asked in the interviews. To ensure honesty, the research should be published openly (as long as it does not harm), intending to share the results with the organization, participants, and communities (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024: 22). Two other essential aspects of qualitative research are that all participants are informed of the study before participating and that names are anonymized (Efron, Ravid, 2019: 108); therefore, no real names have been used while handling the material. The names were anonymized at the start, and no information that can be related to a specific participant will be shared in the transcript or in the thesis (for example, where they work). All participants agreed both orally and in writing that they understood the purpose of the study and that their participation would be anonymous. They also got information on how to contact me if they had further questions. They were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study whenever they want to. The participants were asked if they agreed the

interviews recorded. I emphasized that the recordings would not be spread to other parties and would be deleted once the thesis is approved. All the participants agreed.

While doing the research, reflexivity was a crucial part of the work. Ethnographies are constructed by humans who individually choose what to research and how to interpret their findings (O'Reilly, 2010: 189). One way to handle this is for the researcher to be detailed in their methodological section; this enables the reader to evaluate the research carefully (O'Reilly, 2010:192). Therefore, all choices are clearly justified in this methodological chapter. Another problem in field stud ies is that the researcher claims to have reached a truth about a phenomenon, therefore silencing other voices (O'Reilly, 2010: 189). Throughout the study, I have constantly reflected upon my role as a white Western, for example, whether I have stereotypes and perceptions, and how they can affect the results. I have always approached local traditions with humility, recognizing that I do not fully know and understand them. I was firm with my role as a researcher with the participants. Throughout the whole research process, I have constantly reflected upon my role as an outsider. I am not an Uchupiamona, nor have I lived there. Therefore, I do not have the full knowledge and understanding of society as Uchupiamonas does. To gain plenty of knowledge about the community, its society, and culture, I have studied various literature, and during my fieldwork, I met multiple Uchupiamonas both in Rurrenabaque and SJU and talked to them about their community, the significance of the ecotourism sector, and its culture.

In the analysis, the following features are anonymized to protect the identity of the participants:
Name
Service/product of a company (if it is not one of the tourist companies)
Name of the companies (if a participant's task can easily be linked to a specific person).

Town of residence (if it is a very small town and can therefore identify who the person is).
Certain experiences in life that can be attributed to a specific person.

4.9 Coding and data analysis

Coding was done to identify themes in the transcript. I manually coded the material by identifying themes and patterns in the transcriptions. Manual coding is beneficial because it allows the researcher to understand the material deeply and facilitates identifying themes (Mattimoe, et al. 2021: section 4.6, 5).

The coding was done with inspiration from Braun and Clark (2006). The coding was a thematic analysis which means that the researcher is identifying patterns in the material (Braun and Clark, 2006: 86). The coding technique was latent themes which means that the researcher interpreters underlying ideas and assumptions of the data and contextualizes it (Braun and Clark, 2006: 84), therefore during the work while identifying the themes, I contextualized the participants' statements, which facilitated writing the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006: 86) state that qualitative analysis guides should not be considered rules; therefore, their guidelines were not strictly followed. Throughout the entire process, my research questions guided me, and everything I found interesting related to how I can answer the research questions.

After each interview, I made notes about things I thought interesting and what I aspects could improve on as an interviewer (Braun and Clark, 2006: 86-87). During the transcription phase, I highlighted interesting sections. When all the transcripts were done, I reread them, highlighting codes relating back to the research questions. I summarized the findings in a separate paper and identified themes and patterns. In the final step, I reviewed the theme where I identified that several of these themes could be divided into sub-themes, and that some findings were not relevant for the themes (Braun and Clark, 2006: 91). The last step is

defining and naming themes which is to identify the essence of the content of themes (Braun and Clark, 2006: 92).

The themes identified and named were the following.
Contributions to the sector (main theme, answering RQ1),
Professional contribution to the sector (sub-theme),
Societal management of ideas (sub-theme),
Background explanations for the involvement (sub-theme),
Youths who are not involved in the sector (sub-theme),
Knowledge and education acquired via the sector (main theme, answering RQ2) ,
English (sub-theme),
Professional development (sub-theme),
Migration (sub-theme),
Cultural aspects and identity (main-theme, answering RQ3),
Positive impacts (sub-theme),
Negative impacts (sub-theme).

5 Findings and analysis

This chapter presents and divide the findings and analysis into three sections based on the three distinct research questions. In the sections, relevant findings are presented. The sections represent the themes that are described in chapter 4.9 (chapter and analysis). The different sections are further divided into various sub-themes.

The first section will answer to the first research question (RQ1), “What do older youths in the San José de Uchupiamonas ecotourism sector perceive youths’ contributions to be?”. To enable a deeper analysis, the section will analyze the section through the sub-themes of “professional contribution to the sector”

“societal management of ideas”, “background explanation for the involvement”, and “youths who are not involved in the sector”.

The second section will answer the research question (RQ2), “What have youths involved in the ecotourism sector learned due to their involvement in the sector?” To enable a deeper analysis, the, the section is divided into the sub-themes of “English”, “professional development”, and “migration”.

The third section answers the third research question: (RQ3) “How do older youths perceive the cultural impacts of the ecotourism sector in San José de Uchupiamonas? To enable a deeper analysis, the section contains the sub-themes “positive impact”, “negative impact”.

5.1 Contribution to the sector

5.1.1 Professional contribution to the sector

The youths contribute to the community's ecotourism sector in various ways. While some work directly full-time in the tourism industry, others work on temporary contracts, primarily as guides. They see their contributions to the sector as meaningful and essential for the community.

Leo describes how he works with the sector via his company and how it develops it.

“Look, the sector of ecotourism is a sector, as I said, very beautiful, very big, very interesting, and practically, the activity that we implement, we know that there are many people who come from other places and they want to, come and take a [product/service] from our company. Therefore, in this form, we believe that we are contributing to development in the ecotourism sector within the region.” (My translation).

Leo emphasizes that he considers the ecotourism sector to be big and complex. He considers it a positive sector. Due to its complexity, there are more ways for people to contribute to the sector than solely actively working in it. Although Leo does not directly work in the sector, his company has indirect activities that promote the sector, which he considers valuable. This statement of Leo, therefore, indicates that he believes he is making a valuable contribution to the sector.

While Javier highlights his desire to become a guide, it is because he wants to showcase his community.

“I am studying in order to train myself to become a guide”. While discussing why he wants to become a guide, he says “to share what I know, my experience, and to show it to those who visit” and “maybe because of the community. They demand it from us”. (My translation).

Javier wants to become a guide to show his experience of the community and of the territory. It is a means for him to express his experiences. He further reflects upon the fact that there is an expectation from the community that he and other members of the community should work in the ecotourism sector, indicating that the community has a desire to maintain the ecotourism sector. Javier, therefore, indicates that working in the sector, is a meaningful contribution to since he fulfills expectations, which is a way for him to show the community.

José discusses his dedication to the sector.

“…that’s why I am dedicated to tourism as well [...] The social, economic, and environmental content, [...] it is the only sustainable activity that you can [...] generate economic benefits, but also protect culture [...] conserve everything [...] so that is what motivated me and made me make an effort. A, contribute to, to ecotourism.” (My translation).

José considers the ecotourism sector a method for achieving all dimensions of sustainable development. The various positive consequences of ecotourism have motivated him to strive for the continued growth of the sector. Working in the sector is a means for him to contribute to developing his community. He therefore considers having an essential contribution to the sector.

These findings suggest that the participants consider their contributions as valuable, and working in the sector is a means to improve their community, which they deem essential. Relating it to Sen's concept of capability, the participants have high capability because they are doing something they consider valuable and have strong agency. Their strong agency and capability are a method to explain their desire to work in the sector, contributing to social change.

5.1.1.1 Environment

One crucial aspect of the participants' contributions to the ecotourism sector is the environment. They consider their commitment to the environment an essential feature of their involvement in ecotourism.

José highlights how ecotourism is crucial for sustainable development and what the company he is working for does for sustainable development.

"It is the unique sustainable activity [...] that can manage to benefit various sectors, different areas, whether it is social, environmental and economic" and " … since we are an ecological Albergue, we have always been responsible with that all activities that are done in [company], since we are trying to reduce the least amount of environmental impact" (My translation).

José emphasizes that one crucial aspect of his contributions to ecotourism is the environmental perspective, where he highlights that it can contribute to all dimensions of sustainable development. He describes how the activities of his

company (in this case, the accommodation) work to reduce the environmental impact. One vital aspect of his contributions to the sector is to reduce the environmental impact.

When asked about why he is involved in the ecotourism sector, Carlos emphasizes the importance of environmental protection for the work of the guides and how this related to their culture and way of living "... we are living in harmony with the nature, that is a little more easy for our work, it would be more to do tourism, since we are co-living with nature " he also stated, "the guide has to be, more of a conservationist type, not to cut the lianas" (My translation).

Carlos, states that it is crucial for the guides in the industry to care for the environment and not deliberately destroy it. He further describes his people as living in harmony with nature. Therefore, Carlos considers flora conservation a crucial aspect of his contributions to the ecotourism sector.

Juan also relates working with the environment as an aspect of the community's way of living. "... for us working in a very respectful manner, with the nature, with mother earth, that for us [...] reflect ecotourism, we are working in a sustainable manner." (My translation).

Juan emphasizes that it is crucial for the ecotourism sector to focus on sustainability for nature.

Since the participants highlighted how they live in harmony with nature, I wondered whether flora conservation and environmental protection are crucial aspects of preserving their culture, as they indicated. Could environmental protection and flora conservation be a means for them to preserve their culture? The findings can be interpreted as such. As will be presented in chapter 6.3, (perceived cultural impact), culture is vital for the Uchupiamonas. The participants describe how caring for the environment is one key aspect of working

with ecotourism. Therefore, considering their contributions to the ecotourism sector is meaningful since it helps to protect the environment.

As has already been mentioned, the participants have high capability. Therefore, according to the Capability Approach, they desire to improve society due to their high capability; one method is to improve the environment. When agents have freedom, they are a natural part of development. Since the youths have remarkably achieved freedoms, they are natural building blocks in developing the community. The commitment to the environment as a central aspect of their work in ecotourism is a central aspect of their habitus. Their habitus has been strengthened through their lives (which will be explained in the next section, 5.1.2, Societal management of ideas), eventually reaching the point where commitment to the environment and conservation are central features of their involvement.

5.1.2 Societal management of ideas

While contributing ideas to the sector. The participants describe it in an ambivalent way. The perceptions differ, where Leo describes the ideas by youths as being hard to implement, and Juan says that the national government does not take the ideas seriously. Carlos and Pedro describe how the community has welcomed and appreciated their ideas. For instance, Leo describes the obstacles of implementing ideas by youths:

We have many ideas, but the problem is carrying them out, right? [...] some time ago, a tourist project was implemented there, by other youths [...]. Other youths who tried to start something at the entrance [...] access was a problem for them and it was hard for them to proceed with it. Maybe it is about trying to gather people who can help promote the place and all that. Maybe another type of support." (My translation).

This indicates that youths have multiple ideas on how to contribute to the sector and that there is a desire to do so. However, he describes barriers preventing youth from implementing their ideas. Even though he does not explicitly explain why, the quote indicates that more encouragement and support from others were needed by the community to implement the project, or other type of support. This suggests that youth's contributions can, in some cases, face obstacles.

While Carlos highlights, "... what we have presented has been accepted, right. It has been accepted, there have been some further suggestions and opinions that have helped us to improve the goals we had last year." (My translation).

Carlos, therefore, says that the community and its leaders have accepted the youths' ideas. The leaders have worked together with the company to develop the ecotourism sector. This is, therefore, a case in which the ideas and contributions of youths are valuable and have been implemented and accepted by the community.

Due to these contrasting findings, I reflected upon what these different perceptions depend on. Why are there contrasting views about the contributions of youths? One possible explanation could be that Carlos works with administrative tasks for a company that directly works with ecotourism. Therefore, the community and its leaders take his ideas more seriously. Leo does not describe who the youths were, but it is possible that they did not have a leadership role in the sector, and therefore, their ideas were not considered serious by the rest of the community. The youths whose ideas were not being implemented may lack education and formal titles in the sector, and consequently, their ideas are not taken seriously. Juan's statement that the government does not take their ideas seriously is further interesting since it could mean that the government lacks interest in the community's welfare and the youth's voice.

These contrasting findings are also interesting to analyze in relation to the theoretical framework, since the youths have high capability, should they have the capability to accomplish social change? One possible explanation could be that the youths whose voices were not heard do not have high capability since they are not involved in the sector. This made me reflect upon what happens to development if various agents have strong capabilities? If the leaders and the government have strong capability in addition to the youths, do they use their agency and capability to strengthen others? At first sight, yes, but this example demonstrates that power dynamics can be involved. Possibly, actors such as the government have such strong agency that they do not consider it relevant to listen to the youths' ideas. This thesis does not seek to analyze this, and it probably has other explanations.

The contrasting findings help us understand that this is a complex issue in which the ideas contributed by the youths are managed differently by the community, possibly depending on the roles the youths have in the sector. If the youths have high capability and agency, their ideas are taken seriously, and if not, they are dismissed as unimportant.

5.1.3 Background explanations for the involvement

A sub-theme observed in the interviews was how historical causes can affect their contributions to today's ecotourism sector. They have, for instance, explained how relatives working in the sector can motivate youths to pursue higher education, and how exposure to ecotourism in their childhood benefited them as people.

Pedro discussed how relatives working in ecotourism can be a source of inspiration for why people want to enroll in education.

"In the topic of education, many youths have been inspired by this work and have chosen to educate themselves, right? To finish high school and go to university

[...]. Dad, mom, someone has been involved in tourism has made this possible for their children to get economic support to do something else". (My translation).

Leo continues the reasoning by saying "many youths have been inspired when they see a relative working with tourism, I want to educate myself, prepare myself, so many youths have been inspired by this sector"

Pedro states the importance of relatives in motivating youths to pursue education. This sparked my interest since this indicates that ecotourism can motivate youths to educate themselves, and the impacts of ecotourism can therefore be greater than expected. It also shows how seeing their relatives working in the sector is a means for them to keep working there. The motivations for the participants' perceived importance of their contributions can therefore be understood as having historical causes since they have been inspired by relatives working in the sector.

Leo also describes how the tourism in his childhood formed him: "I was strongly influenced by what I experienced during my childhood, in the topic of information by books [...] I think that tourism has awakened something inside me." (My translation).

Leo describes how ecotourism surrounded him as a child and how this influenced him. The presence of tourists motivated him to improve himself as a person and learn more about the world. One reason for his perceived positive and valuable contributions to the sector can be traced back to his positive experiences during his childhood with the industry.

These findings add a deeper dimension to youths' perceived contributions to the sector. Their contributions can be understood in relation to their exposure to the sector in their lives, both as children and due to inspiration from relatives. Their positive experiences with ecotourism throughout their lives and childhood can

explain their commitment and their contributions to the sector. Their contributions can therefore be understood in relation to their exposure to the sector.

According to Bourdieu's habitus theory, their habitus can explain this. Their habitus has been formed from childhood when the sector was constantly around them. Due to their experiences of the sector and their ongoing involvement in the sector, their habitus is continuously being reproduced. Their habitus, formed since childhood, can explain why they continue to be involved in the sector. The habitus has shaped them and therefore influences to how they act in the social world. Their commitment to the ecotourism sector can also be understood in a greater context, due to their involvement in the sector and developing habitus, they are further developing the habitus on a communal level, therefore enforcing the ecotourism sector for the whole community, since they are multiple actors (agents) in this process, they do it together. Their continually strengthening habitus has further enhanced their capability since they found it valuable working in the sector. Since their capability is further being strengthened, this strengthening they habitus, an ongoing circle that consolidates the processes. Their habitus is something they use to contribute to the sector.

5.1.4 Youths who are not involved in the sector

Despite the strong commitment and contributions, the participants have demonstrated to the ecotourism sector, they still discuss another group of youths in the community - those who are not actively involved in the sector. They describe them as not perceiving tourism as an alternative, and they believe that this has led to migration from the village.

José highlights that many youths do not believe in the sector and have therefore migrated to other places.

“And since then have even the youths of the village started having another view, they do not see tourism as an alternative, but they have left to the city” and “maybe it is that, one does not talk to the youths about it [...] because honestly, there are very few, as far as I have seen - who really believe and commit in/to this sector” (My translation).

José emphasizes how a group of Uchupiamona youths do not believe in the ecotourism sector and, due to this, have left the community. He further explains that in reality, few Uchupiamona believe in the sector. Therefore, my perception is that there is a division among society’s youths. Possibly, since the youths do not consider ecotourism as an alternative, they do not see a future in the village, indicating that they perceive the village as not offering other opportunities than ecotourism. This suggests that it would be inaccurate to argue that all youths have valuable contributions to the ecotourism sector; a group of youths are not contributing.

Pedro puts this in a greater context, that ecotourism is not for everyone, that families do not have the desire to work for it: “Ecotourism is not for everyone, only for the families that have the will, call and interest can work with it. If a family is not interested, wants to live a traditional live [...] it is their right”. (My translation).

Pedro highlights a lack of interest by various families in the ecotourism sector. Ecotourism is something that does not unite and involve the whole community. Therefore, this indicates that there are two groups in SJU, one involved in ecotourism in SJU and one that is not involved in it. Interestingly, it is reasonable to argue that these families consider ecotourism contradictory to living a traditional life. This made me think whether there can be a contradiction between ecotourism and maintaining the local culture. This will further be elaborated in section 5.3 perceived cultural impact.

These findings made me realize that despite the positive contributions, the youths have described previously. These contributions are by no means representative of all youths of the community. While some youths are actively involved in the sector, there are youths in the community who, due to a lack of interest and capability, are not involved in the sector. This means that the sector currently does not have a method to involve all youths. Can this also mean that there are class divisions within the community? Ecotourism may not have affected them in their childhood and life, meaning they do not understand it. This is interesting to relate back to my problems with the sample. Could this division be an indication of why it was challenging to find enough youths to interview? One possible explanation for the findings is that many youths in the community are not involved in the sector. These results surprised me since NATIVA and CI have stated the importance of involving youths in the ecotourism sector (NATIVA, 2023: 5). Another reason for my surprise is due to the significance the sector has had on the participants of this study. This aspect is crucial to highlight while answering the research question to problematize and deepen the answer since it gives a new dimension to the question.

This analysis cannot claim who these youths are or why they are not involved in the sector. However, due to Pedro's statement regarding how ecotourism is only for the families who have an interest and knowledge about it, it is reasonable to assume that the youths not involved in the sector, and who have left the village, do not have the experience from their childhood as Leo and José expressed. One possible explanation can be that their habitus has not been influenced by ecotourism and therefore is not interested in working in the sector. Their habitus is not influenced by ecotourism, and therefore, their lack of interest in the sector can be explained by their lack of habitus. This would suggest that their habitus consists of other traits and is formed by other life experiences. This further implies that in the village, there are (at least) two different communal habitus formed, one for those working with ecotourism and one for those not working in the sector. Ecotourism can in this context be understood as a means to contribute

to the village, but the ones who are excluded from the sector do not perceive that they can contribute to the sector, therefore weakening their habitus about ecotourism. These two different habitus hamper social change for the community as the youths who are not working in the sector leave the village, because they do not see other alternatives. It is therefore crucial to engage more people in the ecotourism sector for the community to accomplish social change and development. This further suggest that those who are not involved in the sector lack cultural capital, and therefore cannot manifest symbolic power, which could also be a possible explanation for why they have left the community.

5.2 Knowledge and education acquired via the sector

The participants have explained how their involvement and contribution to the ecotourism sector has served as a means for them to learn English and other personal and professional skills. An interesting theme to analyze is further migration since this analysis suggests that migration has unexpectedly affected the community. Therefore, the themes of this section are English, professional development, and migration.

5.2.1 English

Several participants highlight how ecotourism has been a means for youths to learn English. The participants discuss that knowledge of English strengthens their positions in the sector, which motivates them to learn it. The tourist companies and the influx of international tourists have played a crucial role in this process for the community members to learning English. Pedro mentions how ecotourism has challenged him to learn English, and that many SJU people speak English due to their contributions and participation in the ecotourism sector.

Leo describes how the guides have learned English by working in the tourist companies.

"...there were no universities to educate ourselves, so the only opportunity we had in that case, in San José de Uchupiamonas, was to learn English and to be, as the company grew, to become tourist guides" (My translation).

Leo explains that the indigenous people of SJU usually did not have access to higher education, which meant that learning English is a method to start working in the ecotourism sector, since there has been a lack of other opportunities. Learning English, therefore, motivates the youth to work in the ecotourism sector due to a lack of other opportunities. This suggests that learning English is one consequence of working in the ecotourism sector.

Javier expresses that he is learning English to work in the ecotourism sector. "... that is why I also started studying English, to change the work which is being a [work] and get to know more people through tourism. That is why I am studying English; I am already speaking English." (My translation).

Javier is therefore learning English to facilitate his work in tourism (by getting acquainted with more people through the industry). Thus, working in the sector motivates him to learn the language.

These findings suggest that involvement in the ecotourism sector is a crucial motivation for the youth to learn English. Therefore, it serves as a means to enhance their English proficiency. This sparked my interest since learning English is an opportunity that opens many doors. This can make the people keener on going to other places and therefore pursuing further opportunities, for instance by going to non-Spanish speaking countries, studying or working there. It can also facilitate communication with foreigners, enabling a development project in the community that can enhance its ability to provide more clean water and better education. This is interesting to analyze further in relation to culture. Since English is a global language, it could affect the culture of the community by

adding Western features into the culture. The perceived cultural consequences of ecotourism will be explained in the next section, 5.3 (perceived cultural impact).

This can be understood as a crucial aspect of the Capability Approach, which suggests that increased capability leads to beneficial educational outcomes. Having high capability is also crucial for a person's opportunities, which is demonstrated by the acquired skills. As previously mentioned, their habitus has been strongly affected by the ecotourism sector. Learning English is a means to strengthen one's position in the sector. Therefore, it aligns with Bourdieu's proposal that it is strengthening itself. This is further relatable to their capability and especially to the quote by Sen, "expansion of freedom is viewed as both the primary end and the principal means of development," since learning English as a reason to contribute to the ecotourism sector goes both ways. This means that one consequence of high capability is improved education; in this case, one result of the high capability is education in English. Meanwhile, since they have a desire to learn English, they strengthen their capability further. They consider their knowledge and competencies in English to be valuable and necessary for their work in the sector.

5.2.2 Professional development

The participants discuss how they have acquired various skills and knowledge through their involvement in the ecotourism sector. They have highlighted a will to improve themselves, administrative knowledge, and how this has enhanced their educational opportunities, such as university education, and that the tourist company Chalalán has helped them.

José explains this by highlighting the administrative skills he has acquired via the sector: "I am in charge of the administrative tasks, so I have learned myself to develop quite good skills that I previously did not have … in accounting" …

gaining more experience within all of these areas by administrative work, right?" (My translation).

José, therefore, highlights how the responsibility the sector has given him has led to the development of administrative knowledge, such as accounting. His involvement in the sector has equipped him with knowledge that he did not have previously. This underscores the role that the sector has had in José's professional development.

Carlos emphasizes that Chalalán and the influx of tourists have been crucial in educating the citizens.

Carlos also expresses how ecotourism has increased youth educational opportunities: "Chalalán has been a university to us, because there, they came, the tourists who were volunteers [...] they lived with us and taught us. They taught you to speak English, or the agronomist taught you how to produce vegetables." (My translation).

Carlos emphasizes how Chalalán has enabled an influx of tourists, which strengthens educational opportunities for the population. The influx of tourists led to increased knowledge of English and improved agricultural practices among the population. This is a further example of how ecotourism has benefited the community with knowledge.

Juan also highlights how, as an indigenous, ecotourism has been a unique opportunity for him to acquire education.

"I would say that ecotourism has helped me to keep on educating myself, strengthening ideas and knowledge" [...] for me, as an indigenous, there were previously no opportunities to study. But now there is [...] and all of this opens

doors to me, to be able to study and contribute, thanks to ecotourism." (My translation).

Juan, therefore, describes how ecotourism has been a method for indigenous people to pursue education, which was previously impossible. This highlights the importance of ecotourism for education opportunities for community members, since it has created a unique opportunity for them to access higher education. Therefore, it is clear that the sector has encouraged Juan to enroll in a university.

These examples prove that ecotourism has opened up the community and, therefore, enables further education for its people. These increased educational opportunities are an additional means for the youths to explore and understand more of the globalized world, making me reflect upon how this affects the local culture. Due to the influx of tourists and the increased opportunities for the youth to educate themselves, it is reasonable to assume that the culture of the community is changing, adding more foreign cultural aspects to its culture. This will further be analyzed in the next section, 5.3 perceived cultural impact. This further raises the question of what pursuing education in other cities can lead to in the long term for the community. It could be argued that this results to people returning and contributing to building the community, but also that they leave and do not come back due to greater opportunities elsewhere in the country and world.

This further suggests that ecotourism is an efficient tool for the youth to enhance their capabilities. Relating it to the cultural capital, it is also a means to acquire more cultural capital, since they are learning skills and acquiring titles and degrees. This gives them better skills to enforce social change and manifest power. By acquiring more knowledge regarding ecotourism, they strengthen their habitus, which makes their desire to contribute to the sector and their community stronger.

5.2.3 Migration

I found it interesting during the interviews because I quickly realized that a few of my participants live in SJU. As explained in chapter 4.2, case study and description most of my participants did not live in SJU. However, as has been explained, they still find their contributions to the sector meaningful.

Javier explains how he is currently studying in Rurrenabaque and wants to stay there while contributing to SJU.

"... I am studying right now and educating myself in English, right? I always want to help the youths there in society, by giving education about ecotourism [...]. I live here now (Rurrenabaque), but I do not live there because the future there seems to be… I want to go there to do a project that would create jobs for society, so they can start earning some money". (My translation).

Javier explains that one reason for living in Rurrenabaque is due to education. However, he still wants to contribute to the community by visiting occasionally and doing various types of projects to support the youth. His involvement in ecotourism can be understood as a motivation for him to pursue education.

Carlos also discusses how there are more opportunities in Rurrenabaque, but that he still wants to contribute to the community.

"... due to the topic of going, prepare more, always wanting to go to the city, right? Rurrenabaque is a town that has [...] access to university [...] but it is always about coming to the community, promoting San José, (company), and so on. And that means being there and also continuing to talk about what the community is like, contributing to that and making that known". (My translation).

Carlos emphasizes that the educational opportunities in Rurrenabaque provide him a way to contribute to his community. By pursuing education, he can go to

SJU occasionally to improve it, while living in Rurrenabaque to promote the community and spread information about it. This indicates that Carlos has moved to Rurrenabaque to leverage the educational opportunities for contributing to both the ecotourism sector and his community.

These findings highlight something interesting. Relating this back to the previous sub-theme. 5.2.2 (professional development), ecotourism has opened up the views of the members of the community. The participants are examples of how this has been made. Due to the increased ecotourism opportunities, they have pursued further opportunities in Rurrenabaque. Interestingly, in this case, these increased opportunities aim to participate in developing the community. The increased opportunities given by ecotourism are therefore not solely a method to improve a specific individual's life, but they can also be a method to enhance a whole community. This sparked my interest since a reasonable assumption is that one should live there if one wants to contribute to a community. However, these findings highlight that since the youths have moved to a nearby city, pursuing further education and opportunities, they contribute to the community in another way. However, the participants of this study lived in nearby cities, only a few hours' distance from SJU, which facilitates participation in developing the village.

Relating this to the Capability Approach, they have reached high freedoms in the aspects of economic facilities and social opportunities due to their increased educational and economic activities. Since the youths live in places where they believe they can make valuable contributions, they have reached a high capability. Therefore, this analysis suggests that what matters is not where they live, but whether they perceive the environment as enabling them to attain high capability. . The crucial aspect in achieving development is for the members of the community to perceive that they live a life they consider valuable. The capability approach argues that if the youths did stay in SJU, against their will, it would lead to lower capability and thus make them less willing to contribute to social change.

What is crucial in this analysis is therefore that one method to achieve development is via high capability. Hence, it is essential to mention that other youths reach high capability in different ways, for instance, if youths perceive they reach high capability by living in SJU, that can further contribute to social change. However, the participants of this study lived in nearby cities, only a few hours' distance from SJU, which facilitates participation in developing the village. Crucial to recognize is that this analysis does not state that migration from SJU only has beneficial outcomes; it certainly has adverse effects in addition, it is a complex phenomenon that must be further analyzed.

5.3 Perceived cultural impact

This section will answer the third question. Interestingly, the findings show that the perceived cultural impacts of ecotourism have both negative and positive influences on the community; therefore, the analysis is separated into positive and negative impacts.

5.3.1 Positive impacts

A typical pattern of positive impacts is how the ecotourism sector has enhanced the sense of local culture. The participants describe how it has reactivated the topic of cultural practice; when others come to the village, it becomes a source of pride for the villagers to manifest their culture. The tourists find it appealing when the locals demonstrate their culture.

Leo tells how the sector has enabled cultural practices to be reactivated since outsiders make it necessary for the locals to demonstrate their culture.

“I think that ecotourism has benefited the situation that I said, right? That is my idea, it has benefited more than it can reactivate the topic regarding cultural practices [...] when other people come from outside to visit our village, there is a

necessity to want to show them what we have done, what we are, and what our ancestors did. [...] there is a program operated by Chalalán [...] is called cultural night that shows the tourists more or less how our traditions are as a village." (My translation).

Additionally, Leo highlights that Uchupiamona youths are very proud of their culture and that they want to show their pride to outsiders, "I And practically, it is a pride, right? For all of us…" and "The youth in this time, we have [...] many friends now who are students. They, they are very identified with the village, and it is actually a real pride for them, right? To go somewhere and say, "Yes, I am Uchupiamona, I am from San José de Uchupiamonas." (My translation).

Leo highlights that due to ecotourism, the locals have felt a necessity to demonstrate their cultural practices, which has increased their awareness of their culture. What is interesting to discuss in the other quote is that this pride, created by ecotourism, has further led to a pride being demonstrated in other parts of society outside the ecotourism sector. Leo talks about his friends who are students and how they are proud of their identity as Uchupiamonas. This means that the participants perceive that ecotourism has increased cultural awareness among its citizens and is a source of pride.

Carlos emphasizes that one of the reasons he appreciates his job as a tour guide is that it enables him to show his national and indigenous identity.

"...I like the guide topic because I like it for many reasons. First, to promote, to show what my identity is, where I'm from, and also how Bolivia is, [...]. Also to show our culture, the culture of Bolivia, our identity as Uchupiamonas, as well as how the heart of the Madidi Park has started to develop tourism, ecotourism. (My translation).

Carlos works in the ecotourism sector because it allows him to express his identity, both as a Bolivian and as an Uchupiamona. This is interesting because it suggests that Carlos does not feel a conflict between being a Bolivian and an Uchupiamona. He feels a desire to show tourists around his country and his community.

These findings show that the participants perceive that ecotourism has significantly impacted the community's culture. It has created a source of pride, awareness of the culture, and a will to express the indigenous identity.

Analyzing these cultural findings concerning habitus, it is evident that certain cultural practices are being reproduced. One feature of the habitus of the agents of the youths is the culture. The community also represents the culture. Working in the sector becomes a means for them to reproduce their cultural practices and strengthen their habitus. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is reproduced as tourists interact with the workers in the sector, since they show aspects of their culture. Due to the participants' pride in their culture, it is further highlighted that demonstrating their culture is a means for them to strengthen their agency and capability since they are proud of their culture and want to show it. It further strengthens their habitus both as Uchupiamonas and workers in ecotourism. Therefore, these two different traits of the habitus strengthen each other.

5.3.2 Negative impacts

Despite the sector's perceived positive impacts, the participants demonstrate a negative impact of ecotourism. They express that the influx of tourists has led to the increasing prevalence of various cultural attributes from the outside world, such as clothing and backpacks.

When asked how ecotourism affects cultural practices, Carlos discussed the positive and negative effects. After describing the positive effects, he talked about

how ecotourism has changed the way of dressing for the Uchupiamonas: “It could be a culture where they have tattoos or their way of dressing. This is also evolving the community, right? Because they see this, and obviously, for us, it could be a trend, and we change our way of dressing.” (My translation).

Carlos expresses that since tourists have tattoos and a way of dressing, these traits become more common in the community. He does not explicitly mention it as negative, but as something that is changing the community’s culture. This means that he perceives ecotourism as changing the cultural traits of the community, adapting them to foreign culture, such as their clothing style.

Juan illustrates how foreign attributes, such as clothing and shoes, from tourists, influence the community’s culture.

… when ecotourism came, tourism brought many things, there was a radical change, I would say, right? When, let's say, young people come, for example, starting with clothing, what happens? The tourist, like you, let's say, foreign people come with very nice shoes. [...] A very good pair of pants, a very good shirt. [...] the indigenous person is barefoot. [...] He has no good clothes, no good t-shirt. [...] The indigenous person says, ah, look, he has very nice shoes. [...] so from there, the changes start. People started to change from there, they said, ah, I don’t want this. Now I want this, or I want this life, I don’t want this life, or I need this. So that’s why I say it’s a radical change, right? That’s to answer you, right?” (My translation).

Juan further describes how ecotourism has started a change in the community. The influx of tourists, which presents another type of fashion and shoes the community is not used to, has caused people to start using this type of fashion. It leads to community members beginning to want and demand more material things. This means that youths perceive ecotourism as slowly changing the culture of the community.

These findings mean that the culture of the community is changing due to ecotourism. The attributes of tourists, such as clothes, backpacks, and shoes, are becoming more common in the community. An interesting point for discussion in relation to this is whether this could serve as a starting point for a cultural change? This may be the beginning of a greater change in the community. For instance, while in the community, I noticed that almost all households have televisions and watch TV. Could this be explained by the influx of tourists? However, this section also made me consider whether the adaptation of these cultural aspects from the outside world necessarily indicates that the culture is slowly changing. These changes may be minor and insignificant in relation to the broader culture (see more in the conclusion).

Analyzing this with habitus, the analysis confirms the current habitus theory that nothing is static and that it can change. It also aligns with the aspects of cultural capital, claiming that it is adjustable. When the guides are exposed to these foreign cultural traits, they gradually acquire cultural capital through socialization. They have reached the objectified state by adopting these cultural objects and understanding their value. They therefore consider having gained high cultural capital, this can further be understood by Juan, who expressed "people started to change from there, they said, ah I don't want this. Now, I want this, or I want this life, I don't want this life, or I need this". This can further reproduce the habitus of the workers in the industry since they appreciate their high capital. Due to their high capital, it is reasonable to argue that they have acquired high capability.

5.3.3 Analysis of culture

This changed habitus can explain why they adapt to new cultural environments and can further be used to understand if other aspects of society have changed. The people working in the ecotourism sector seem to adapt their habitus according to where they are. When they are with tourists, they adapt it to show their cultural expression, but when they are within the community, they tend to

express foreign attributes. This aligns with habitus since habitus is something that the agents adapt regarding where they are.

This also highlights Sen's discussion about culture. It partly aligns with the statement that economic growth can further lead to cultural loss. The findings are interesting because they show contradictory results. It may go in both directions. The culture is enhanced, but certain cultural features from the outside world are being implemented into the local culture. But does this necessarily mean that the foreign cultural aspects brought into the culture will, per se, destroy the culture? The findings do not indicate that. However, what would be crucial, according to Sen, is for the community to have a deep discussion about this.

6 Conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusion. It will start with a summary of the results, followed by a presentation of answers to the research questions presented in relation to the theoretical framework and previous studies. Later, theoretical, methodological and larger implications will be examined, followed by a section on study strengths and limitations. The last section is future research.

6.1 Final discussion

This study aimed to explore the contributions of older youths in the ecotourism sector in Bolivia and the impact the industry has on them and their culture. The results suggest that the youths make strong contributions to the sector, they do it in various means such as with administrative tasks and working as guides. Their commitment to the environment is one form of contribution, and their contributions can be explained by background factors, such as their childhood and relatives who have worked in the sector. However, there is also a group of youths who are not involved in the sector, potentially causing tensions within the

community. The older youths engaged in the sector have acquired various skills from the sector, such as learning English. The perception of the cultural impact of the sector is both positive and negative while it provides an opportunity for them to showcase their culture, certain cultural elements, such as clothing are being influenced or introduced by outsiders.

6.1.1 Answer to RQ 1 "What do older youths in the San José de Uchupiamonas ecotourism sector perceive youths contributions to be?"

The results indicate that the youths perceive they are contributing to the ecotourism sector of SJU and consider their contributions valuable and essential. The contributions take different forms; some work directly within the sector, and some do not, but indirectly contribute. They consider the sector necessary for various reasons, such as achieving sustainable development. One crucial component of their commitment is the environment; by being involved in the sector they can protect the environment. One reason for their contributions is due to the ties the sector has to their childhood or previous relatives who have worked in it; their participation in the sector is a means to contribute to their relatives.

One essential contribution of the participants is the conservation and caring for the environment. While Neleman and de Castro (2016: 276, 277) suggest that ecotourism can lead to respect for the environment, this research suggests that the commitment to ecotourism and the environment are deeply interconnected; one way for the youths to express their commitment to the environment is via ecotourism. Since the ecotourism sector is built by the community, the environmental involvement aligns with previous research that suggests that ecotourism can enhance environmental practices (Miller, 2024: 74). However, the analysis does not find indications that the participants consider it crucial to work for the environment to enhance the sector itself, they have a genuine interest in the

environment, therefore this study does not align with KC (2021: 2762) who argue that flora conservation is essential to create a sustainable tourism sector.

Due to their substantial contributions to the sector and their lifelong exposure to it, their habitus is strongly affected by the commitment. As they perceive their contributions as meaningful, they have strong capability and strong agency, which leads to a will for the participants to contribute to social change (even though the analysis does not examine whether social change has happened).

However, despite these positive experiences and contributions to the sector, they express that the industry is not suitable for everyone. Some youths are left out and are not a part of the sector, and some have left the community. Their habitus is not affected by the sector and is filled with something else; thus it indicates there are two communal habitus in the village which I argue can be a potential source for social conflict. They do not have the cultural capital given by the involvement in the ecotourism sector, therefore having low symbolic power which can explain why they have left the community.

6.1.2 Answer to the RQ number 2: “What have youths involved in the ecotourism sector learned due to their involvement in the sector?”

The youths involved have learned a lot from being involved in the sector. These skills include learning English and other professional skills, such as administrative tasks. The sector has opened up the community to the outside world, enabling them to pursue higher education. This opening has, in turn, led to some of them migrating to other cities in pursuit of greater opportunities. This aligns with the previous research suggestion that ecotourism can lead to increased motivation to enroll in higher education (Neleman and Castro 2016: 276, 277). By seizing these opportunities, they have particularly reached the freedoms “economic facilities and social opportunity". They have strengthened their capability and habitus.

Their strong capability has led to enhanced personal opportunities, which are manifested through their acquired skills. Due to their strong capability, they continue to aim to contribute to social change for the community. By learning skills and obtaining titles and degrees, they have acquired higher cultural capital, therefore reached the institutionalized state which enhances their symbolic power.

6.1.3 Answer to the research question number 3 (RQ3) "How do older youths perceive the cultural impacts of the ecotourism sector in San José de Uchupiamonas?"

The perceived cultural impacts of ecotourism on SJU are, at first sight, a complex issue. The tourists are curious about the Uchupiamonas' culture, and therefore, there is an increased willingness for the Uchupiamonas to manifest their culture, strengthening it. Their pride is not solely manifested in the sector, it also exists outside the community. This aligns with (Besculides, Lee and McCormick, 2002: 306), who argue that a community's identity and pride can be strengthened by demonstrating it to tourists.

However, the influx of tourists also introduces cultural aspects from the outside world, such as clothes and tattoos. Interesting to discuss in this case is how these two perceived consequences on the culture of ecotourism can affect the community. I argue that these two developments do not necessarily have to contradict each other. The situation can be interpreted as the culture being enhanced while some foreign attributes are being added to the culture. In this case, the community must be aware of what cultural aspects of their culture are essential for them to maintain. This relates to Sen's theory, which argues that it is up to communities to decide how their culture should be. It further relates to the embodied state in the cultural capital since they are the cultural attributes from the outside world are affecting their culture.

This study does not find anything that proves the community's culture has been commercialized; therefore, it does not align with Wani, et al, (2025: 12), who argue that ecotourism can lead to the commercialization of culture.

6.2 Theoretical methodological and larger implications

This research provides a greater depth on how older youths participate in their community and its perceived impact on their knowledge and their culture, therefore contributing with these crucial perspectives to the youth empowerment theoretical framework. While other studies on youth empowerment have focused on younger youths; this study completes these studies by focusing on older youths and, thus makes a methodological contribution to the theory since the studies tend to focus on younger youths. This is essential for understanding youth empowerment in different age ranges.

This study has demonstrated that youths care about the well-being of their community, which aligns with previous research suggesting that youths have a strong community awareness (Freires, Faria, and da Silva, 2025: 424). It is therefore essential to listen to the youth's perspective as they can be a part of social change.

This study adds to the current literature on ecotourism. It will contribute with a youth perspective on the sector, deepening the understanding of the sector’s strengths and weaknesses and the role of youths. The study further deepens the understanding of how indigenous people can navigate in the modern world while still protecting their culture and communities.

6.3 Study strengths and limitations

A key strength of the study is that it involved fieldwork, which facilitated rich data collection by understanding the culture and its surrounding areas. It also

enabled physical interviews which were important for enabling more natural and in-depth discussions during the interviews. Another strength of the study was the theoretical framework since it supported a deep and multifaceted analysis.

One limitation of the study was that the research question was adjusted after data collection, which rendered some of the material in the transcripts irrelevant. But while doing a field study, the researcher constantly must adapt their ideas since the field can be chaotic (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 24). One other limitation was the weather conditions that were completely out of my control. This made me reflect on whether it is possible for a researcher to adjust the timing of the fieldwork to the seasons, as this can limit the risks of having the study affected by weather conditions.

Since this study does not generalize the results, the results of this study must be understood in a greater context. Further research on SJU is therefore needed.

6.4 Future research

The conclusion and the analysis propose that there are various aspects that need further research.

First, a long-term study is needed. A long-term study throughout the years that analyzes whether the youths contribute to social change or not, and if so, to what extent. This would complete this research by adding the real effect that their participation has.

The complex dynamic of migration is also needed where the consequences of migration are scrutinized. This would help the community to reason about how to handle the migration from the community, and if the migration can be bringing positive consequences for the community.

It is also important to analyze the issues of those who are not included in the sector are further important to analyze. The reasons why some people do not perceive ecotourism as a future for them, despite its beneficial consequences for those involved, must be understood. Creating more knowledge about this topic would help us understand how more people can grow due to the sector's beneficial consequences and, therefore, contribute more to the community and weaken division within the community.

Another aspect that requires further academic attention is the issue of gender. How come I could not find any female participants? Do women not feel unwelcomed in the sector and excluded? If so, why? These insights can be used to understand how more women can be included in the sector, and how this could affect the community.

Further research is also needed about the culture of the community. It is necessary to analyze how these contradictory results regarding culture can be explained and how to address these results in the long term, for instance, if it is possible to introduce cultural traits from the outside world while still maintaining a living and thriving culture.

Understanding the role of older youths in ecotourism is not solely relevant in the case of SJU. It offers valuable contributions to how youths in ecotourism can contribute to sustainable development in indigenous communities around the world.

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