

Community-Based Tourism as an Approach to a Solidarity Economy

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Abstract: Tourism is an activity established as an alternative in the rural territory and there are few investigations that have contributed to the understanding of its development with the solidarity economy. Even tourism as an economic activity is of great importance; for this reason, research must be carried out to allow recognition of the relationship between community tourism and the foundations of the solidarity economy. For the development of this research, two theories of the social sciences were analyzed, on the one hand, the concept of solidarity economy and its main characteristics are reviewed, and on the other, the theories of community-based tourism in a rural context are reviewed. These two elements allow a discussion between the theoretical assumptions, the case study and reality. This allows describing the way in which the community manages tourism and how it incorporates the solidarity economy. The methodological structure used for this research is based on a mixed approach based on a case study. The research analyzes rural community tourism from a local perspective and with a socioeconomic point of view. This case study allows us to recognize the tourism phenomenon and the solidarity economy, delimiting the object of study to a geographical context, in which social and productive relationships are recognized. This study is analyzed from what was found in the Municipality of Gachala, located in the department of Cundinamarca in Colombia. For this, interviews were conducted with the people of the community to recognize the socioeconomic aspects that were raised for this investigation. A diagnosis was made to know the tourist services offered. In the same way, quantitative aspects were examined by means of an instrument for the measurement of community-based tourism. Where, aspects such as: employment, investment, training, value chain and the incorporation of tourism with the community are reviewed. In conclusion, tourism is an opportunity for rural communities to expand their sources of income and publicize their local activities and their territory in general.

Keywords: Community Based Tourism, Solidarity Economy, rurality

1. Introduction

Community-based tourism is an activity established as an alternative type of tourism, especially in rural areas (Mora *et al.*, 2019; Saavedra *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, studying the topic can contribute to the academic development of tourism in rural territories from a social and economic aspect, through a perspective of community integration in the supply of tourism services. The study of community-based tourism allows us to understand the relationship between tourism and a solidarity economy, a phenomenon that remains understudied. Recognizing the development of tourism through the self-management of the territory's inhabitants contributes to the construction of new positions and the consolidation of community tourism. Research related to community tourism in Colombia is scarce, and few authors agree that the field should be deepened to understand the relationships of this phenomenon (Crespi *et al.*, 2019; Sánchez, 2018; Galán and Rueda, 2019; Saavedra and Mora, 2022). Thus, this research describes the management of community-based tourism from a social and economic perspective; to understand how communities appropriate natural and cultural attractions through tourism.

Beyond that, the crisis caused by the pandemic increased the uncertainty about the situation of different destinations (Mora & Rodríguez, 2021). Tourists increasingly demand sustainable tourism services, where communities are involved in the care of their resources and traditions. In addition, there is a greater impact on the tourism experience of travelers when communities are the creators of recreational activities because there is more learning about natural and cultural resources (Liang, 2022).

This research analyzes elements of community-based tourism. For example, the high flow of visitors in a community sometimes affects their lifestyle and increases social tensions (Hwang *et al.*, 2012). In this way, community-based tourism is outlined as a way to have direct contact with the communities, allowing them to have an authentic tourist experience and recognize the traditions and customs of the people. Therefore, it is essential to generate proposals for communities so that they can carry out tourism projects where community tourism is the protagonist. Therefore, it is important to show the reality of the communities and how tourism appropriates spaces that previously had no tourist vocation, as well as to analyze how it is incorporated into the tourist growth and the new proposals. In this way, this research aims to describe the management of solidarity

economy and community tourism through the case study of Corgachalá, which provides its services in the municipality of Gachalá, located in the department of Cundinamarca in Colombia.

This research contributes to the academic development of community tourism and solidarity economy because it analyzes the relationship between these two aspects. In addition, it must be considered that these two categories are articulated with the social sciences, which allows generating a reflection on how processes of social appropriation can be generated from the resources established by the territory. Similarly, this research establishes through a case study the way in which tourism is managed through social organizations. This allows generating an approximation and academic analysis of two theoretical axes that have been little addressed in the academy.

1.1 Framework

This research is articulated with theoretical aspects of the social sciences, on the one hand, it performs an analysis of the literature on the development of the social economy, which considers the development of a small-scale economy. In the same way, the theory of community-based tourism is articulated in how the inhabitants of the territory empower themselves with natural and cultural resources. This allows to identify two theories that have in common the development of the appropriation of the territory. In short, this research adopts the theoretical elements of the social sciences and the theoretical discussion that arises is given from this perspective.

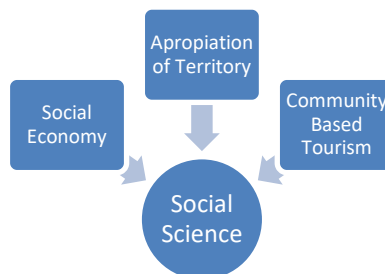


Figure 1: Theory aspects in the research

Own elaboration

1.2 Community-based tourism

Community-based tourism emerged in the 1970s as an option to mass tourism at a time of change in tourism demand, when the structure was strengthened, allowing the inhabitants to open their homes to urban visitors eager for new tourism and gastronomic experiences (Bringas and Ojeda, 2000). It should also be mentioned that community tourism is generally developed in rural environments, in areas far from urban centers, in order to explore and develop production processes and offer different services, focusing in this way on endogenous and exogenous factors of the territories, which allow the use of comparative advantages, taking advantage of their potential (Mejía, 2019).

To promote community tourism, it is necessary to facilitate progress in places with a potential for the development of activities that can positively impact the territory (Martínez et al., 2019). According to previous studies, community tourism should have aspects of emotional energy, security, and decision-making power to achieve partnerships with various entities (Yang et al., 2021). In addition, for the development of community-based tourism, adequate planning is required, which must be related to the management of land management, fully complying with policies, and ensuring the sustainability of the region and its natural resources; tourism development along with social economy strategies (Hu et al., 2021).

Community-based tourism has been the subject of academic studies from various perspectives, including socioeconomic ones. Well, community-based tourism is recognized as an activity that reconciles social equity and preservation of natural heritage; without risking the heritage of future generations (Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017; Mora and Rodriguez, 2019). Therefore, community-based tourism must establish its bases through economic democratization and socialization of tourism activities developed in the territory.

This type of tourism is an opportunity for communities to diversify their economic activities. From the academic perspective, community tourism is established as a way to know the reality in tourism research and economic and social studies (Fang, 2020). Hence, community tourism is a concept that has been developing towards social aspects (Lane and Kastenzholz, 2015). Nowadays, the rural environment is perceived as an area that offers experiences of rest, leisure, and safety. In this space, tourists make an economic exchange for acquiring tourism experiences with a socioeconomic perspective in the territory (Mora and Motato, 2019).

Community-based tourism is generally seen as a form of resistance by people against traditional economic models. In addition, it allows the development of great value activities in the territory. For this, traditional rural activities, such as agriculture and livestock, must be linked; commonly, this is the motivation of many travelers who want to learn about the countryside. It is also valid to highlight that tourism in the territory generates changes not only in the physical area but also in its social framework, which is why all community members must be involved (Deason et al., 2022). For this research, we accounted for the impact of tourism through a social organization.

Consequently, community-based tourism is established as a trend because people now seek to avoid crowds (Saavedra and Mora, 2022). However, actions are required for tourism to be sustainable, that is, to guarantee the present resources for future generations. Likewise, it is essential to establish the necessary measures to guarantee the health and safety of tourists, tourism service providers, and host communities.

1.3 Solidarity economy

A Solidarity economy accounts for the organizational aspects of a collaborative and equitable local development. One of the foundations is fair trade, which is considered a tool to change the current capitalist system's model, promoting local development (García, 2011). On the other hand, Chaves and Monzón (cited by Gómez and Gómez Álvarez, 2016) state that the solidarity economy is based on companies with decision-making autonomy and freedom of membership, which distribute profits fairly among partners. Generally, the solidarity economy is related to social responsibility and the common good. In addition, a solidarity economy emerges as an opportunity to achieve associative and cooperative local development. This is the case of this research, where community ownership generates social development. Similarly, the solidarity economy is articulated with the aspects of community-based tourism, given its high degree of responsibility to the environment and the community and the equitable distribution of profits and utilities.

For Fajardo García (2019), the solidarity economy is based on initiatives and models of economic organizations different from traditional business models. This economy focuses on solidarity and has acquired greater relevance in government policies. Also, the solidarity economy gives a new meaning to economic reflection and inclusion of the term solidarity in all processes of the economy, this in favor of disadvantaged populations, which did not benefit from the traditional economic model (Artavia-Jiménez *et al.*, 2019).

Besides, Núñez (2019) assures that the solidarity economy is how people express their struggle against exclusion from the labor market. It is also related to the search for an economy that is not predatory to nature but, on the contrary, that works for conserving and promoting values. Similarly, Gómez (2019) states that the solidarity economy is based on each territory's needs and economic characteristics. That is, the implementation of jobs, the correct distribution of wealth, the value of the human being, and respect for the diversity of identities bring a quality of life for people.

Solidarity economy groups all activities to promote the democratization of the economy in order to generate progress and welfare based on the productive resources raised through different initiatives in the various economic sectors of the regions, having solidarity and teamwork as a basis (Cárdenas Trujillo *et al.*, 2018). This puts the economy in perspective as a means for personal and community development. Therefore, axioms must be established for optimal development and as a strategic axis for rural growth (Silva, 2020). Similarly, Cárdenas Trujillo *et al.* (2018) state that a solidarity economy focuses on the implementation of cooperation and solidarity in organizations, institutions, and economic activities, which results in cultural and social benefits for the community.

Consequently, the solidarity economy is an alternative to capitalist economic development models and prioritizes the valuation of employment based on own resources through associativity and cooperation.

However, despite being presented under a fair scenario, this economy has several challenges in sustaining itself over time.

2. Methodology

The methodological structure used for this research is based on a mixed approach, and the type of research is descriptive, which teaches the reality of the tourist offer and the economic management of the case study approach. The research analyzes community tourism from a local perspective and a socioeconomic point of view. This case study makes it possible to recognize the tourism phenomenon and the economy, delimiting the object of study to a geographical context in which the social and productive relations are recognized.

The study is based on the findings at Corgachalá, located in the municipality of Gachalá in Cundinamarca, Colombia. Gachalá is a municipality located east of the department of Cundinamarca, Colombia. This municipality has its southern limits with the department of Meta, northeast with the department of Boyacá, and is in the Guavio Dam, which has high tourism potential. Corgachalá is a travel agency operator integrated by members of the community of the municipality of Gachalá, whose purpose is to develop community tourism.

From the theoretical point of view, two theoretical axes of the social sciences are addressed. On the one hand, the concept of a solidarity economy and its main characteristics are reviewed. On the other hand, the theories of community-based tourism in a territorial context are reviewed. These two elements allow us to discuss the theoretical assumptions, the case study, and reality; additionally, they make it possible to describe how the community manages tourism and incorporates the solidarity economy.

The fieldwork was conducted during the year 2022. The place of the case study was visited to identify the territory's tourism potential. In the same way, a structured interview was conducted to identify the aspects of tourism and the economy which can be seen in the results. This allow to make a quantitative diagnosis about the details of Pacheco *et al.* (2011), where aspects such as: employment, investment, training, value chain, and the incorporation of tourism with the community are reviewed. Additionally, elements of a solidarity economy were measured according to Espín Maldonado *et al.* (2017), in which the following aspects are reviewed: fair trade, equitable distribution of profits, associativity, and cooperativism, among others. The assessment was given through the observation carried out in the fieldwork and considering the interview answers with the community leader.

3. Results

The information described below is obtained through the interview with the leader of Corgachalá and the fieldwork carried out. To begin with, it is essential to mention that the initiative to carry out tourism arises from the community, which is solidary due to the bonds that the peasantry establishes and that Corgachalá establishes a social and economic link. Its members are interested in the proper development of tourism. However, according to the community leader, some people do not like to associate and prefer to provide services independently.

The tourism development implemented by Corgachalá has an educational orientation aimed largely at students from schools and universities. The tours and tourism workshops seek to generate environmental awareness through agrotourism and ecotourism, promoting the region's experience. Thanks to the location of the municipality, Corgachalá offers different tourist activities, such as: The winemaking festival; sanctuaries; churches and spiritual retreats; smells, colors, and flavors; cheeses, meats, and wines; waterfalls, mountains, and hills; Myths, culture, and handicrafts; honey; conservation and health of singing birds.

The members of Corgachalá have other economic income, independent of tourism. Tourism is a complementary economic activity that improves the finances of members and the community of the municipality of Gachalá that contribute to the various tourist activities provided by the organization. For example, depending on the place they visit, they have their restaurants in the region that take the tourists, in the same way, the people who provide guide and transport services are from the community, in addition, they promote among tourists the purchase of products and handicrafts from the region.

Thus, tourism activities are developed in harmony with the social environment and integrate the community members. In the same way, the income from this activity is distributed equitably and fairly among all members. The tourist offer of this place allows evidence of originality in their activities. For that reason, they can target a

different public, although mainly they are oriented to students of schools and universities. Also, they have had foreign tourists who want new experiences and national tourists who look for different tourism to the traditional sun and beach tourism.

Now, the prices are competitive in the market, and the community organized itself to provide a quality service without increasing costs. The advantage is that they work together for the same goal, allowing everyone to win. The tourists are satisfied with the service provided by the members of Corgachalá and by people from the municipality. According to the comments of the leader of the organization and the observation made during fieldwork, the community supports the tourism offer. However, collaboration is needed from public entities and academia in training processes and guidance in the development of tourism projects.

It is important to point out that the community has not conducted studies that allow them to measure the success or failure of their economic management by employing financial indicators. However, according to what was discussed with the community leader, an equitable organization is identified in the income distribution, with a clear definition of the roles of each community member. This favors the full development of tourism in the territory and avoids tensions among its participants.

Table 1 shows quantitatively the elements found in the management of community tourism and economic solidarity actions. For the quantitative diagnosis, three factors of compliance are proposed, where 0 indicates that it does not comply, 1 indicates that it partially complies, and 2 indicates that it complies.

Table 1: Quantitative results

Tourism and solidarity economy	Corgachalá
Economic benefit for the majority of community members.	2
The tourist activity generates direct jobs	2
The tourist activity generates indirect jobs	2
Financing for tourism projects by external actors	2
Financial resources available for social investment	2
Payback analysis	0
The price of the tour package is competitive	2
Distribution chain of the tourist product	2
Ease of access to the consumer market	1
New economic activities for the community	2
The tourism project includes investment in staff training.	2
Investment in advertising for the sale of the tourist package	1
Precedence of collective interests over individual interests	1
Associativity according to cultural identity	2
Social and solidarity economic knowledge by the community	2
Fairtrade development	2
Democratic control by members	2
Equitable distribution of profits	2
Accountability or surplus	2
Total	87%

Source: authors based on Pacheco *et al.* (2011) and Espín Maldonado *et al.* (2017).

The percentage of 87% shows that Corgachalá has the potential to develop a solidarity economy through community tourism. Besides, it requires guidance to have greater control of their finances, state support, or third parties to increase tourism publicity and finally must work on access to the municipality. However, it is not something that depends on them if it affects them directly. Gachalá is a municipality far from the main cities. The road does not have good signage and is not in good condition, hindering access to the consumer market. In the fieldwork, it is evident that the economic development of Corgachalá is based on cooperativism and associativity, elements that are axioms for its members. In addition, there is good management in the democratization that demonstrates an administrative and economic organization and equitable financial management among its members.

Corgachalá has information on social networks but does not have a website that provides information on tourism activities. It is suggested to invest in this aspect, which will allow them to increase the number of tourists and

therefore their income. Additionally, it is recommended to carry out studies that lead to a financial projection and planning of a commercial and economical strategy to consolidate community tourism in this territory. Although it can be argued that there is a good performance in the tourism activity of the agency, empiricism is observed in its members. This can be compensated with the orientation of the academy in research, training, and social projection processes. In this way, this initiative would have greater recognition and could improve its profitability.

As mentioned in the theoretical aspects, the solidarity economy is based on equity and associativity. In Corgachalá, there is a link between the community members, which allows tourism development as a small-scale economic activity in an associative way. Similarly, community organization favors the development of tourism activities in a cooperative manner, which can be described as community-based tourism.

4. Conclusions

Community based tourism has not been widely investigated with others academic areas, so this paper aims to provide bases for other researchers who want to continue investigating about it. In addition, it proposes an analysis between the relationship between Community based tourism and the solidarity economy, as elements that, developed together, allow the initiatives of the communities to be strengthened, proposing for the scientific and practical community a way to study the cases. In the same way, this research contributes to the academic development of the social sciences through two topics little addressed.

As described in this case study, community-based tourism demonstrates that communities are increasingly seeking new alternatives for achieving financial sustainability. They meet and agree to work together for their territory, respecting their customs, traditions, and resources. In the case of Corgachalá, tourism is not the main source of economic income, but it does represent an alternative source of income. The community tourism promoted in this case study involves the traditional and cultural activities of the municipality to make their territory known, seeking to generate a community tourism experience through experiential practices of their customs.

As a result of the fieldwork, it was identified that the members of Corgachalá understand the concept of associativity, solidarity economy, and fair trade and work hand in hand with the community of the municipality, using traditional resources and knowledge to provide an authentic tourism experience. It is recognized that the project has a wide variety of tourism activities that can be aimed at different audiences, the prices of the tourism package are competitive, and there is a distribution chain for the tourism product. However, it is recommended that they build and invest in a constant marketing and commercialization strategy that will allow them to increase visitors and tourists and thus improve their profitability. Additionally, they must perform a financial analysis that allows them to measure the financial strengths and weaknesses of the organization.

In conclusion, Corgachalá is an example of community tourism, where people gather looking for a different alternative economic activity and are with a possibility not only business but the growth of its territory, because they can make known their region, extolling their traditions, customs, and culture in general. All this is built in favor, not only of their personal benefits but of the collective benefits of the community. Therefore, they decide to have a solidarity economy, equitable, cooperative, and transparent, where together they work to achieve the goals and distribute the resources, always respecting the democratic control and fair trade.

Consequently, the communities must count on the collaboration of state and private entities, such as municipal and departmental mayors' offices, private and public tourism organizations, and universities. This collaboration will provide training and guidance to develop and strengthen the community's tourism projects. In general terms, community-based tourism is an economical alternative for regions seeking to increase their income. It allows the territories to be known and visitors and tourists to live the experience of their customs and traditions, thus preserving the local identity. For this, it is fundamental the teamwork of the community; it is here where the solidarity economy has a relevant role since it seeks the priority of the collective interests over the individual ones, finding the common good.

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