Bursting Surf Travel's Bubble

*Guidelines to Stakeholders Awareness and Coordination
Promoting Sustainability in Emerging Surf Tourism Destinations*

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A Case-Study on Playa Gigante, Nicaragua

Master thesis International Development Studies

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Dear reader,

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Abstract

The sport of surfing is not excluded from issues that threaten its future existence in several places in the world. Although the oceans waves as an environmental resource will prevail in all times, the coastal areas of the world are under increased pressure. The way surf tourism has developed around several surf breaks presents a great case for how these unsustainable processes take shape. Especially in developing countries surfers have pioneered tourism developments in remote coastal areas with little infrastructure available. The availability of perfect waves, favorable climates, low prices and cheap lands have attracted entrepreneurs to these areas. In the process of marketing the new destination and increasing tourism infrastructure, the local communities who often live subsistence lifestyles are frequently ignored in decision making. Development occurs quite ad hoc, as it often does not take into account social and environmental capacities or waste management systems before new tourism amenities are built. In this sense surf tourism development can become a threat to its own survival. As unawareness to the needs of native residents generates conflict between locals and foreigners, unregulated growth creates over-exploitation of natural resources and possibly induces pollution, crime, drugs and prostitution. It also degrades the area that tourists come to visit and affects the residents that have, in the first place, settled for the economic opportunities and the tourist site's pristine environment. Within the discourse of sustainable development and sustainable tourism research emerged a field of research as a response to these unsustainable processes, which promotes sustainable surf tourism. Several researchers promoted a Framework Analysis for Sustainable Surf Tourism that presents indicators that should improve, rather than degrade coastal surf tourism destinations. These indicators consist of a distinct move away from economic neo-liberalism; the need for coordinated planning and limits to growth; the advantages of systematic attempts to foster cross-cultural understanding; the social benefits associated with the development of surfing at the village level; the need for surf tourism to contribute to poverty alleviation in host communities and improving environmental quality and justice. These indicators are used for the analysis of an emerging surf tourism destination in Nicaragua, called Playa Gigante. It is an excellent case for increasing the knowledge on the development stages of surf tourism destinations. Gigante, still a remote fishing village, will experience exponential tourism growth in the future due to its surf and mainstream tourism potential. It hosts a small community of about 580 residents with a few tourism businesses, but has already seen tremendous growth since tourism initiated. In response Project Wave of Optimism, a North-

American philanthropic non-profit organization settled in Gigante that aims to make sure "surfers are a catalyst for positive change in remote regions". Their programs have positively influenced the community's development paths and therefore contribute indirectly to Gigante as a tourism destination. Project WOO is included in the FASST analysis, that together with the tourism industry has been the case-study central to this thesis. To present answers on Gigante's development path, towards a sustainable or unsustainable destination, a research question has been formulated:

In which ways can stakeholders' awareness and coordination in emerging surf tourism destinations benefit local communities' well-being and ensure the destination's sustainability in Playa Gigante, Nicaragua?

It appears from academic literature that stakeholders which are aware of the local realities and collaborate to make coordinated decisions on a destination's tourism development can create local sustainable surf tourism management. The research question addresses in what ways this awareness and coordination is available with the stakeholders in Gigante that will give insights on the destination's development path. Through participatory observation methods the stakeholders of Gigante have been analyzed. They consisted of Nicaraguan and foreign tourism entrepreneurs, local governance bodies and project WOO staff and volunteers. The results of this analysis are presented through five guidelines that could be read as a policy report for stakeholders in Gigante or as a pragmatic approach to the broad FASST indicators. These guidelines are discussed below:

Burst the bubble: Acknowledging that surf travel impacts local environments

"I came to travel to Nicaragua, before it becomes over-developed like Costa Rica."

Many tourists travel to developing destinations before it becomes too developed, before it becomes over-exploited like what happened at Costa Rica's Pacific coast and other examples. Though tourists and all stakeholders that are involved in shaping a tourism site are involved in the process of coastal destinations exploitation, there is little recognition for the impacts of surf tourism on local environments and therefore awareness should be raised. To acknowledge the negative impacts of tourism that could create incentives for the use of alternative development models.

Bridge gaps of understanding

Large social differences and inequalities persist that prevent collaboration to implement alternative development models. Still quite small scale, Project WOO bridges these gaps effectively through WOO staff and volunteers that are immersed in the Nicaraguan community. Their model should be tailored for Gigante's tourism stakeholders as well, as it could empower the community to increase their stake in decision making processes.

Stakeholder coordination: Creating balance

Part of the community in Gigante has started to reclaim authority on the destination's development path through a community committee. There is a need to support this process of self-governance, and to have all stakeholders involved in this process. The host communities now consist of national, foreign, wealthy and poor residents that all have an interest in sustainably managing their living and working areas.

Linking to tourism development

Although WOO's work is successful, their impact on sustainable surf tourism development is still limited. The surf industry itself should contribute to sustainability, but at this point does too little. Project WOO is in a key position as they work closely with the community and local authorities. As foreigners they obtain the cultural capital that connects with the foreign entrepreneurs. They therefore have the possibility to expand their work only aimed at providing community development, to assist local authorities in leading coordination processes and to reconnect the tourism industry with the realities of their businesses surroundings. By doing so, they could increase their local support and legitimacy.

Determine capacities

If alternative models are in place, stakeholders could aim to agree on the destination's capacities, in order to determine the range of social change, contributions to the local community and management that improves the natural environment. It will require limits to growth according to these capacities. It is very challenging to be able to set capacities for sustainability where every stakeholder is completely satisfied. Though hopefully host communities that consist of nationals, foreigners, wealthy and poor, aware of tourisms impacts, all wish to preserve the natural beauty and a pleasant social environment to live in and for tourists to keep visiting.

Extracto

El deporte del surf no está excluido de los problemas que amenazan su futura existencia en varios lugares en el mundo. Aunque las olas del mar como recurso ambiental prevalecerán en todo momento, las zonas costeras del mundo están cada vez bajo mayor presión. La manera en la que el turismo del surf se ha desarrollado en torno a varios puntos de surf, presenta un gran ejemplo de cómo estos procesos insostenibles toman forma. Esto ocurre especialmente en países en vías de desarrollo, en los cuales los surfistas han sido pioneros en el desarrollo del turismo, en zonas costeras remotas que cuentan con una mínima infraestructura.

Olas perfectas, climas favorables, precios bajos y la venta de tierras a precios asequibles han atraído a estos futuros emprendedores a estas zonas. En el proceso de comercialización del nuevo destino y un aumento de la infraestructura turística, las comunidades locales, que a menudo viven estilos de vida de subsistencia, son simplemente ignorados en la toma de decisiones.

El desarrollo ocurre bastante ad hoc, ya que a menudo no tiene en cuenta los aspectos sociales y las capacidades ambientales o sistemas de gestión de residuos antes de que nuevas instalaciones turísticas sean construidas. En este sentido el desarrollo del turismo del surf puede convertirse en una amenaza para su propia supervivencia.

El hecho de ignorar a los residentes nativos crea conflicto entre locales y extranjeros; el crecimiento no regulado crea sobreexplotación de los recursos naturales y, posiblemente, induce a contaminación, delincuencia, drogas y prostitución. Degrada la zona que los turistas vienen a visitar y afecta a los residentes que se han asentado por las oportunidades económicas y la belleza de los destinos. Dentro del discurso del desarrollo sostenible y la investigación del turismo sostenible, surgió un campo de investigación como respuesta a estos procesos insostenibles. Un discurso que promueve el turismo de surf sostenible. Varios investigadores han promovido un Marco de Análisis del Desarrollo del Turismo del Surf Sostenible (FASST), el cual presenta indicadores que deben mejorar, en lugar de degradar los destinos turísticos de surf.

Estos indicadores consisten en un movimiento que se aleja del neoliberalismo económico; la necesidad de una planificación coordinada y establecer límites al crecimiento; las ventajas de los intentos sistemáticos para fomentar el entendimiento intercultural; los beneficios sociales a nivel local, asociados con el desarrollo del surf; la necesidad de que el turismo de surf

contribuya a la mitigación de la pobreza en las comunidades locales y la mejora de la calidad y justicia ambiental.

Estos indicadores han sido utilizados para el análisis de un destino turístico de surf emergente en Nicaragua, llamado Playa Gigante. Es el caso perfecto para aumentar el conocimiento sobre las vías de desarrollo de los destinos turísticos de surf. Gigante, siendo una remota aldea de pescadores, experimentará un crecimiento exponencial del turismo en el futuro, debido a sus olas y a su potencial turístico. Es todavía una pequeña comunidad de unos 580 residentes, con algunas empresas de turismo, pero ya ha experimentado un tremendo crecimiento desde que inició el turismo.

Proyecto Ola de Optimismo (Project Wave of Optimism en inglés) una organización sin fines de lucro norteamericana, se instaló en Gigante con el objetivo de asegurar que los "surfistas sean un catalizador de cambio positivo en las regiones remotas". Sus programas han influido positivamente en el desarrollo de la comunidad y, por tanto, contribuyen indirectamente a Gigante como destino turístico. Proyecto WOO está incluido en el análisis de sistema FASST, que, junto con la industria del turismo ha sido el caso central de estudio de esta tesis. Para presentar respuestas sobre el camino de desarrollo de Gigante, con el interrogante de si es un desarrollo sostenible o insostenible del destino, se ha formulado la siguiente pregunta de investigación:

¿De qué manera puede la concienciación de las partes interesadas y el actuar de manera conjunta contribuir positivamente en el bienestar de las comunidades locales, y asegurar el desarrollo sostenible de Playa Gigante, Nicaragua?

De la literatura académica se desprende que las partes interesadas que son conscientes de las realidades locales y colaboran para tomar decisiones coordinadas en pro al desarrollo del destino turístico favorece a la creación de un sistema de gestión local del turismo de surf sostenible.

La pregunta de investigación está enfocada en ver de qué manera esta toma de conciencia y la coordinación está disponible entre las partes interesadas en Playa Gigante. Las partes interesadas de Gigante han sido analizadas a través de métodos de observación participativa. Éstos consisten en empresarios turísticos de Nicaragua, empresarios extranjeros, los órganos de gobierno locales y el personal del Proyecto Ola de Optimismo y sus voluntarios.

Los resultados de este análisis se presentan a través de cinco directrices, que pueden ser tomadas como un informe político sobre las partes interesadas en Gigante o como un enfoque pragmático de los indicadores de FASST. Dichas directrices se discuten a continuación:

Explotar la burbuja: Reconocer que el turismo del surf tiene un impacto en las comunidades locales.

"Vine a viajar a Nicaragua, antes de que esté demasiado desarrollado, tal y como sería el caso de Costa Rica." Muchos turistas viajan a destinos en vías de desarrollo antes de que éstos estén demasiado desarrollados, antes de que estén sobreexplotados, como sería el caso de la costa del Pacífico de Costa Rica, y otros ejemplos. Aunque los turistas y todos los actores que intervienen en la configuración de un destino turístico están involucrados en el proceso de explotación destinos costeros. Hay poco reconocimiento de los impactos del turismo de surf en entornos locales y, por tanto, debe fomentar la conciencia. Reconocer los impactos negativos del turismo que podrían crear incentivos para el uso de modelos de desarrollo alternativo.

Establecer puentes para facilitar el entendimiento

Las grandes diferencias sociales y las desigualdades persistentes impiden que exista una colaboración para implementar modelos de desarrollo alternativos. Todavía muy a pequeña escala, Proyecto WOO elimina esas barreras de manera efectiva, a través de su personal y sus voluntarios, quienes están inmersos en la comunidad nicaragüense. Su modelo debería ser adaptado de una manera personalizada para el resto de las partes involucradas en el desarrollo de Gigante, ya que podría empoderar a la comunidad y aumentar su participación en los procesos de toma de decisiones.

La coordinación de las partes interesadas: Creando equilibrio.

Parte de la comunidad en Gigante han comenzado a reclamar autoridad en el proceso de desarrollo local, a través de la creación y representación de un Comité de la comunidad. Se debe apoyar este proceso de auto-gobierno, y que todos las partes interesadas se vean involucradas en este proceso. La comunidad está actualmente compuesta por residentes nacionales, extranjeros, ricos y pobres, todos ellos con un interés para la gestión sostenible de sus zonas de vida y de trabajo.

La vinculación con la industria del turismo

Aunque el trabajo de WOO es exitoso, su impacto en un desarrollo del turismo de surf sostenible es aún limitado. La industria del surf debe contribuir a la sostenibilidad, pero en el punto actual lo hace muy poco. WOO se encuentra en una posición clave en Gigante: con el experiencia con la comunidad y con las autoridades locales; tambien su personal son extranjeros que obtienen capital cultural extranjero para la vinculación con el industria del turismo extranjero. Por lo tanto, tienen una posición vital para expandir su trabajo únicamente destinado a proporcionar desarrollo de la comunidad, para ayudar a las autoridades locales en los procesos de coordinación y volver a conectar la industria del turismo con las realidades de su entorno. De esta manera, podrían aumentar su apoyo local y la legitimidad.

La industria podría informar a los turistas que viajan, por la diferencia colectiva hecha en Gigante, que se oponen al "business como usual" modelos de desarrollo. Este proceso se ilustra a través de un modelo que representa una etapa de equilibrio entre un enfoque de arriba hacia abajo para el desarrollo del turismo de surf, y la de un destino turístico de surf gestionados de manera sostenible (véase el capítulo 5.2).

Determinar capacidades

Si los modelos alternativos están en su lugar, las partes interesadas podrán comenzar a ponerse de acuerdo sobre las capacidades que tiene el lugar. Para determinar el cambio social permitido, contribuyendo a la comunidad local y a una gestión que mejore el entorno natural, se requerirán límites del crecimiento de acuerdo con estas capacidades. Es muy difícil ser capaz de establecer capacidades para la sostenibilidad en las que todos grupos de interés estén completamente satisfechos. Lo ideal será que acojan a todos los actores, tanto los nacionales, los extranjeros, ricos y pobres, y que todos deseen preservar la belleza natural del lugary un entorno social agradable para vivir y para que los turistas sigan visitando.

1.   **Introduction**

"It is important to be organized, having clear policy and solid leadership. Every surf destination has its own set of challenges. The end result justifies the effort. If we ensure the wave riding experience for future generations, we will perpetuate the dream of the surfing lifestyle." Wayne 'Rabbit' Bartholomew (in Borne & Ponting 2015)

The surfing sport and its lifestyle have been growing significantly since the 1960's. Especially the past decade has seen a tremendous increase in the popularity of surfing as a consumer product (Barbieri & Sotomayor 2013: 112). It became popular throughout the whole world, known for its tranquil lifestyle and connection with the oceans waves. The surfing sport has spread to at least 161 countries, with an estimated 23 to 35 million surfers to date and is said to be the fastest growing industry with 12 to 15% annual growth (Ponting & O'Brien 2014: 384-385; Martin & Assenov 2013: 275). But as 1978 world surfing champion 'Rabbit' Bartholomew mentioned there are critical issues with sustaining the expansion of this 'dream lifestyle'. Fetishisms to the surfing lifestyle have created a culture of consumerism: all over the world people started wearing surf apparel; experience surfing through one of the many surf schools and purchase surf trips that aim to mimic the search for perfect waves, through a 'cushioned adventure experience' (Barbieri & Sotomayor 2013; Ponting 2009; Mach 2014: 13). This industry consisting of manufacturing, surf schools and travel are having an impact on the surfing environments. Surfing as a consumptive good does not take many sustainability practices into consideration. Indeed, the ocean is there to be shared by all that want to experience riding a wave, but if this consumerism under the umbrella of surfing, eventually degrades the surfing environment that includes coastal communities, reefs and beaches it cannot ensure the same experience for future generations.

On the other hand the activity of surfing, riding waves, itself can be said to be seen as sustainable. Surfing truly immerses people into a natural environment and has shown to create social benefits and stewards for the oceans and coastal landscapes. Also, if well managed, each coastal community's unique wave resources can be used to generate revenue for their residents through surf tourism (Buckley 2002a,b). Facilitating all of this is now of utter importance with global structural social and economic inequalities (Blackstock 2005: 44), coastal exploitation, pollution and environmental degradation of the oceans, which affects human health as well (Worm et al. 2006).

Therefore raising the growing surf community's awareness on these issues, could mean an increase of "local empowerment and ocean stewards that address these issues and protect coastal resources that hold global importance", as stated by the President of the International Surfing Association, Fernando Aguerre (Borne & Ponting 2015: 40).

1.1   Surfing as a tool for sustainable development?

This thesis focuses on the consumption of surf tourism sites without considering the local context and tourism impacts, these processes apply to a tourism bubble, here the surf travel's bubble. As mentioned there has been an increased popularity for surf tourism, of surfers in search of a perfect wave (Ponting et al. 2005). Preferably the perfect wave is accompanied by a tropical climate and relatively low prices. These conditions occur in developing countries, where rural coastal communities have seen a rapid increase in surf tourism and surfing culture.

Figure 1: A surfer's dream

Development is often initiated by 'western' surfers who settle, establishing the first tourism infrastructure and marketing of the destination. If done properly it will lead to the destination's growth in tourism, an increase of wealthy foreign and national businesses and community members get hired to work in the service industry. Basically, surfers initiate wealthy foreign and national ownership that shapes coastal regions in the developing world, which often contains aspects of neo-colonialism (Ponting et al. 2005: 152). The change of coastal regions can have positive economic effects, but often it negatively impacts local communities and the environment. Planning for surf tourism often ignores local communities as an important stakeholder and increases construction and waste production without

adequate infrastructure in place, which can degrade the surfing environment (Buckley 2002a,b; O'Brien & Ponting 2013; Ponting et al. 2005; Ponting & Mcdonald 2013; Mach 2014). In response to these negative consequences a field of academic research emerged that aims to increase knowledge on creating sustainable surf tourism - surf tourism that moves away from 'business as usual' developing models, and actually contributes to benefit local communities and the environment (Ponting & O'Brien 2014). The first peer reviewed article available on surf tourism was a case study on boat charter surf tourism in the Mentawai's, Indonesia (Ponting et al, 2005). Now, similar studies have been done in all parts of the world (Martin & Assenov 2011). This thesis attempts to contribute to this growing body of sustainable surf tourism research. It focuses on the initial part of surf tourism development, where a surf tourism destination is still in its emerging phase of small scale developments and is likely to see a large increase in tourist arrivals because of its tourism potential. Putting sustainable tourism management in place before large influx of tourists could be crucial to its growth according to social and environmental capacities. A suitable case was found in the South-west of Nicaragua, in the rural fishing village of Playa Gigante.

1.2   Problem statement

Nicaragua is an emerging tourism destination, as it recently established dependence on the tourism industry, which includes surfing as well (Hunt 2011). With unique surfing conditions, especially in the South-West pacific coast, surf tourist arrivals are expected to grow substantially. Playa Gigante's Nicaraguan residents' main source of income is traditionally based on artisanal fisheries, but recently, due to its geographical location in between surf breaks, attracted an influx of surf tourists. After that, Gigante saw an increase in backpacker and mid to high-end tourism, that together with the surf tourism niche is said to grow exponentially (Earhart 2015). It could be a valuable source of alternative income for the Nicaraguan residents experiencing effects of decreasing fish stocks (Alvarado & Taylor 2014). However, several case studies have shown that, if unregulated, this expansion could lead towards unsustainable tourism practices, that negatively affect residents. These studies, among other studies on tourism and sustainability, indicate that stakeholders need to coordinate to achieve sustainable tourism development (Nyaupane et. al 2006; Mach 2014; Scheyvens 2000; Ponting 2007; Buckley 2002a,b; Ponting & O'Brien 2014; Usher & Kerstetter 2014). To do so, all stakeholders need to be well informed on the destination's limits.

Being aware of local limitations on growth enables local resources to thrive instead of degrade. In surf tourism and other forms of nature-based tourism, sustaining the resources tourism relies upon is key to a destination's sustainability (Honey 2008). This thesis attempts to find evidence of these developments in an emerging surf tourism destination.

Figure 2: Study area (Earhart 2015)

Another key factor for choosing Playa Gigante as a research site is the presence of a non-profit, Project Wave of Optimism (WOO), which aims to make sure that "surfers are a catalyst for positive change in remote regions". WOO focuses on community development in surf tourism destinations. They are a North-American philanthropic organization, established in 2006, aiming to "help to mobilize the community, facilitate comprehensive needs assessments, and support them in the design and management of projects to enhance their standard of living" (retrieved from projectwoo.org). Through their programs executed by staff and volunteers they have influenced Gigante's development path. The project is included in this thesis as a 'host organization', analyzed for its efforts that directly or

indirectly influence the destination's sustainability. To give an answer to how stakeholders influence Gigante's development, a research question was formulated:

In which ways can stakeholders' awareness and coordination in emerging surf tourism destinations benefit local communities' well-being and ensure the destination's sustainability in Playa Gigante, Nicaragua?

The research question is answered through these seven sub-questions:

- In what ways are current surf tourism developments sustainable/unsurisutainable?
- What are the main challenges for sustainable surf tourism development in Gigante?
- In what ways are stakeholders aware of the impacts of tourism?
- How does tourism benefit the local community?
- How is community involvement implemented by Project WOO?
- How do stakeholders engage in project WOO's activities, and vice versa?
- How can stakeholders collaborate to put together a framework to increase coordination, and who should be responsible for its implementation?

In order to answer these questions I have conducted a fourteen week long field research in Playa Gigante, here after referred to as Gigante. Data was gathered through participatory observation methods which included observations, informal conversations and twenty, in depth, face-to-face interviews. The retrieved data has been analyzed through the Framework Analysis for Sustainable Surf Tourism. The framework makes it possible to organize the field data which give insights to Gigante's current and future developments.

1.3   Relevance

As mentioned before, surf tourism research is an emerging field of research that is in need of an increase of analysis that aims to understand the processes that are part of the exponential growth of the surf tourism industry (Barbieri & Sotomayor 2013: 112). Therefore added scientific knowledge on these processes can be relevant to further develop surf tourism management models which improve, rather than degrade coastal communities (Towner 2013: 275-276). As for societal relevance, these improved surf tourism management models can be applied to destinations that suffer from mismanagement. This research aims to find what interventions are needed to apply these models to emerging destinations. This could help to prevent other tourist areas in the future from choosing a development path which disregards local communities and their resources. In addition, the findings in this thesis can be read as a policy report for stakeholders involved in governance of the Gigante area.

The conclusion provides guidelines that present critical steps towards an increase in sustainable surf tourism management of Gigante, and possibly similar areas in the same stage of tourism development.

1.4 Reading guide

From this point my paper will explore all facets of developments that occur in a surf tourism destination like Gigante. It starts with a literature review in chapter two that funnels from discourse on sustainable development, through a review on how this may be achieved through tourism, to literature that involves the case study specifically. Chapter three presents the research methodology: the approach, methods for data collection and analysis along with limitations and self-reflection. It is followed by the case study in chapter four, which presents an introduction to the study site and the analysis performed on the collected data through the Framework Analysis for Sustainable Surf Tourism. The fifth chapter presents a synergy between the literature review and the data analysis. It will conclude on the findings through outlining five guidelines, a discussion of the study's implications and presentation of potential paths for future research. In between chapters you will find pictures taken in and around the research site, these create a storyboard that fit to a specific chapter and the topics discussed.

HOSTEL ASK BAR
-BLUE SOL- 7 DAYS OPEN!
BREAKFAST LUNCH DINNER

-BLUE SOL-
HOSTEL·BAR·Y·REST.

BLUE SOL

2.   __Literature review__

This chapter presents an overview of the theories and discourse which can be applied to surf tourism research. It starts by presenting the main overarching theories of sustainable development and tourism discourse, narrowing them down to grassroots research in Gigante that have been influenced by the proposed overarching concepts. Most of the presented discourse is aimed at applicability of tourism in developing countries, giving importance to wealth inequalities, power inequalities and cultural differences.

2.1   Sustainable development

"The concept of sustainable development is the result of the growing awareness of the global links between mounting environmental problems, socio-economic issues to do with poverty and inequality and concerns about a healthy future for humanity (Hopwood et al. 2005: 39)."

The foundation for any development research, and that of many other research fields, should be to promote sustainable development, defined in the popular Brundtland report as seeking to "meet the needs of the present without comprising the ability for future generations to meet their needs" (WCED, 1986). Since that report there has been a tremendous increase in academics producing scientific consensus on the detrimental impact humanity is having on the earth's biosphere. The consequences and possibilities for positive future change jumped dramatically onto the priority agendas both politically and academically (Borne 2010: 29).

However, the concept of sustainable development lacks clarity as it is interpreted very differently by different stakeholders; therefore it needs to be well defined in its context (Hopwood et. al 2005: 38-40). To understand the way sustainable development is defined depends on a number of factors. "These can include scientific evidence of environmental degradation, utilization of this evidence, political designations, power dynamics, basic understandings of nature and much more" (Borne 2010: 32). To decrease the concept's confusion, Hopwood et. al. (2005) attempted to map the different ways that the concept of sustainable development has been used, distinguishing among status quo, reformist and transformationalist approaches. A status quo approach, fits to "business as usual" where supporters believe sustainable development can be achieved within the present structures. It is a dominant view supported by governments and business most likely working in the corridors of power talking with decision makers and business. Supporters see economic growth as part of the solution, with state deregulation and free market forces that will provide change. A reformist approach supports that fundamental reform is necessary, but without a

full rupture with the existing arrangements. Reformists believe that there are mounting problems, but do not consider that an ecological or social systems collapse is likely, or that fundamental change is necessary. A transformist approach embraces both social and environmental questions and recognizes that there are fundamental problems in our present society, which is based on the exploitation of most people and the environment by a small minority of people, a systemic problem that needs to be solved (Hopwood et. al 2005: 42-46).

Following a status quo approach, tourism has been used as one of the means to promote economic growth, especially in less-developed nations that have not seen substantial benefits from conventional development measures (Fletcher 2011: 445). However, in shaping the discourse of sustainable development it became clear that mass tourism often did 'more harm than good to people and societies of the third world' (Honey 2008: 10-11). Therefore measures have been taken to apply sustainable development to tourism development as well, which is further discussed in the next paragraphs.

2.2   Tourism, an industry with a need for sustainability measures

Since World War II the tourism sector has been able to grow towards the millennium from 25 million to 1233 million travelers a year globally, due to a growing middle class and improvements in mobility (Mowforth & Munt 2003: 82-86). The 2015 UNWTO report states that tourism currently makes up 9% of global GDP and 9% in global exports with forecasted growth of 3,3% yearly (UNWTO 2015). Compared to other industries travel and tourism contribute more in GDP than the automotive and chemicals manufacturing industry, providing employment for about 105 million people in 2014 and taking the global lead after agriculture, retail and education respectively (WTTC 2015). Figures like these should be read with care, but they do give an idea of the size and impact of this industry. The size of the industry's economic impact also represents its global social and environmental impacts. The search for exotic destinations that comply with the tourist gaze have next to economic opportunities changed regions, social structures, cultures and environments. The change that these and other destinations have made through tourism is reflected in a substantial body of research (Mowforth and Munt 2003: 82-85). Some of these have created several models to visualize the nature of tourism development. An introduction to these staged models is given by a quotation of a Thai journalist:

Stage 1: Start with a place of outstanding beauty . . . impose absolutely no controls. Allow get-rich-quick entrepreneurs to encroach on the beach, blow up the rocks, scatter garbage and pour concrete everywhere.

Stage 2: The resort is now popular but rapidly losing its natural charm. Add large quantities of sex and comfort. Build large, luxurious hotels. Import lots of girls.

Stage 3: By now the natural beauty is totally obliterated. The seafront is an essay in bad architecture. The hinterland is a shanty town of beer bars. Develop the remains as a male fantasy theme park. Add anything with testosterone appeal – big motorbikes, shooting ranges, boxing rings, archery. Bring in more girls (and boys). (from Mowforth and Munt 2003:84)

It clearly points out how tourism has historically changed localities, especially in the developing world. The most widely accepted models for staged tourism development, are those of Doxey (1976) who uses an 'index of irritation' for host communities moving from euphoria to antagonism and Butler's tourism area life cycle, used in this research (Mowforth and Munt 2003: 84). Butler describes how tourism areas seem to follow a common path of slow growth after discovery, followed by increased development as the area becomes better known. As development reaches the area's carrying capacity it usually leads to consolidation and stagnation of developments as the area's carrying capacity is reached, followed by decline in tourist arrivals, stabilization or possible rejuvenation (figure 3) (Butler 1980: 6-10).
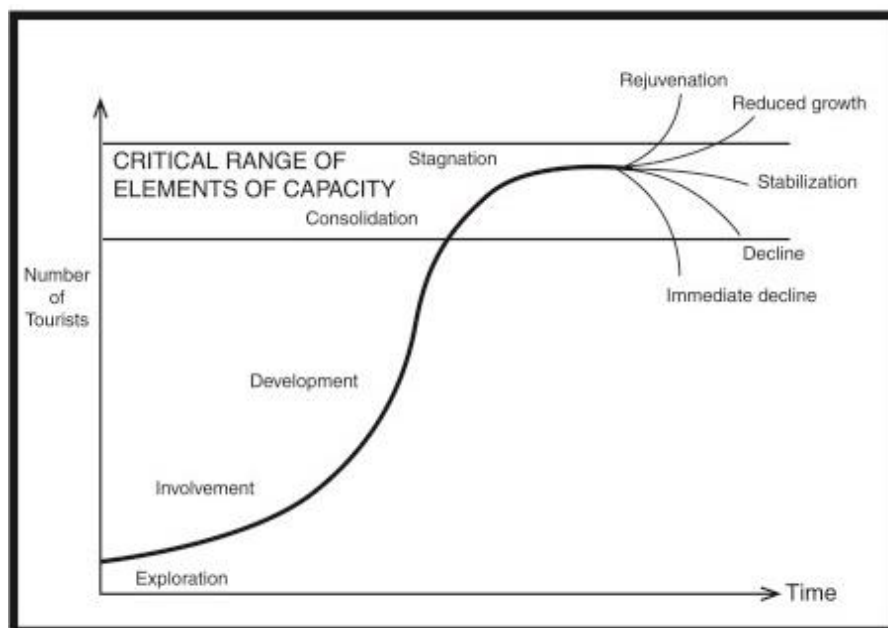

Figure 3:Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle West Virginia University 2014

Butler's model is used as a simplified indication for how tourism in general develops, recognizing that it does not give any specific information on a particular destination. However, it is able to give a clear overview of the overarching issues that a tourism area could face. Similar frameworks have been proposed by other researchers who have criticized the model, however these scholars could agree on the main four characteristics: an expected area's saturation level by tourists, like the carrying capacity; an s-shaped curve, recognizing slow growth and slow stagnation; the assumption of homogeneity of tourists and no conclusions on marketing strategies or actions by competitors, like external influences on development (Haywood 1986: 160). Fundamental to this research is the process of tourism development towards a destination's carrying capacity and the ability to have control over tourism development. The carrying capacity should be measured according to the environmental, social and cultural capacity of the natural area and its inhabitants to still be able to benefit from tourism. If tourist arrivals exceed the destination's capacity, most likely the original touristic attractiveness of the destination will be threatened (Butler 1999: 16). Often tourism development has led to problems of environmental, social and cultural degradation that have ignored local capacities. These have been researched extensively, resulting in a range of campaigns and global concern attributed to pollution, soil erosion and deforestation caused by tourism development (Mowforth and Munt 2003: 90). Common problems with tourism development are unplanned growth of tourism constructions, issues over land rights, unequal distribution of financial benefits, recourse exploitation and pollution that leads to environmental degradation (Fletcher & Neves 2012: 62). There is a clear need for the industry to move towards sustainability and away from its tendency to dominate, corrupt and transform nature, culture and society (Mowforth and Munt 2003:130). A solution to these issues was presented by connecting tourism to the sustainable development agenda to create an industry that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future and attempts to mitigate the negative effects of tourism development (TIES 2015). The concept of sustainable development is then applied to tourism defined by UNWTO and UNEP (2011: 2):

The term sustainable tourism describes policies, practices and programmes that take into account not only the expectations of tourists about responsible natural resource management (demand), but also the needs of communities that support or are affected by tourist projects and the environment (supply). Sustainable tourism thus aspires to be more energy efficient and more climate sound (for example by using renewable energy); consume less water;

minimize waste; conserve biodiversity, cultural heritage and traditional values; support intercultural understanding and tolerance; generate local income and integrate local communities with a view to improving livelihoods and reducing poverty. Making tourism businesses more sustainable benefits local communities, and raises awareness and support for the sustainable use of natural resources.

Sustainable tourism is defined to apply to any part of the tourism industry. Some parts of the industry used the principles to create a tourism niche. These relate to forms of responsible travel specifically aimed to 'do good', like ecotourism, ethical, geo and pro-poor tourism (CREST 2015).

However, true applicability of these concepts ask for a clear definition of sustainability in its context. As Mowforth and Munt (2003: 97) believe that there is no absolutely true nature of sustainability in tourism, that the concept is not definable except in terms of the context, control and position of those who define it. They observed criteria often used for sustainability in tourism, like the environmental, social, cultural and economic. For example tourism that contributes to education, local participation, and conservation. Environmental and social sustainability should be measured according to their in situ carrying capacities. Cultural sustainability is measured as the allowed change of a local culture as any influx of foreign visitors will most likely have an impact. Control on the most harmful effects and responsible behavior of the visitor, and prevention of distortion of local culture is assumed to be essential for sustainable tourism. A central problem statement in this study is Butler's (1999: 20) observation that to achieve any kind of improvements towards sustainability, all stakeholders need to be willing participants in the process. Therefore, the industry as well as the public sector, local residents and tourists themselves need to be willing to adopt sustainability practices. A large threat to the sustainable tourism paradigm is in its ambiguity where any form of tourism can in some way be called sustainable (Butler 1999: 19). To prevent misuse the term should be politicized, claim Mowforth and Munt (2003: 113), otherwise the term will be "hijacked" by the global neoliberal system which uses "green washing" to increase monetary profits. Global tourism, including several types of sustainable tourism can even be seen as one of the forces that sustains the capitalist system, endlessly searching for new touristic destinations for new capital to accumulate, sustaining economic growth by the capitalist class (Fletcher 2011). The greening of commodities or eco-branding has been a trend over the past decades, that led to the emergence of ecotourism, part of the sustainable tourism movement.

2.3   Ecotourism

It is worth discussing ecotourism specifically now, as it is a segment of the tourism sector that has a particular focus on environmental sustainability (UNWTO & UNEP 2015: 2). Therefore a lot of lessons can be learned from ecotourism development, applied to the environment around surf tourism and sustainability. UNWTO and UNEP (2015) report that "tourists are demanding the greening of tourism". Within tourism's "greening" ecotourism, nature, heritage, cultural and adventure tourism are taking the lead and are expected to grow rapidly over the next two decades. Ecotourism alone has seen rapid growth over the past decades, at a rate of 30%, three times the industry's average (Fletcher and Neves 2012: 61). Also, Honey (2008: 6) observed that "ecotourism is often claimed to be the most rapidly expanding sector of the tourism industry". Like sustainable tourism, ecotourism needs to be well defined preventing misuse. The term has become virtually synonymous with nature-based tourism, though advocates argue that the concept should be used more narrowly as "nature-based tourism that confers significant social and environmental benefits" (Fletcher and Neves 2012: 62). Sound ecotourism is defined by Honey (2008: 30) as: "involving travel to natural destinations; that minimizes impact; builds environmental awareness; providing direct financial benefits; provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people; respects local culture and supports human rights and democratic movements."

Ecotourism is widely recognized as another panacea for sustainable development, as a possible means to "fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instill environmental awareness and social conscience in the travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist, and, claimed by some, build world peace." (Honey 2008: 4). However, researchers point out that the reality seems far more complex. Infrastructure costs are high and social effects, like marginalization of women (Scheyvens, 2000), often great, local economic benefits are often meager and the uncontrolled influx of tourists can change natural environments drastically (Honey 2008: 4-5).

Carrier & Mcleod (2005) researched the concept of the ecotourism bubble that could be one of the explanations for these social complexities, as most travelers are 'stuck' in a bubble that manages to insulate them from important parts of their destination. The bubble focuses on "the interaction between ecotourists and the particular nature or culture they are visiting, which induces ignorance of the context of the visit." They present examples of tourists who

are unaware of the environmental costs of traveling to a destination, or socio-cultural aspects where the establishment of ecotourism parks and reserves have displaced or disadvantaged local populations. These costs are routinely excluded from the ecotourist bubble by those who discuss and support ecotourism (Carrier & Mcleod 2005: 316-317).

Explanations for the complexities of change in natural resources and environments is given by the concept of the common pool resources (CPR), intimately connected to commons theory. CPRs are resources that produce rivalrous goods from which others cannot be easily excluded. Too many takers of these rivalrous goods leads to the depletion of the whole resource. This leads to a tragedy of the commons, an unavoidable tragedy in the form of ever increasing over-exploitation and the eventual collapse of the resource (Laerhoven & Barnes 2014: 120). Waves, reefs and beaches can be seen as such resources (Mach 2014: 6; Ponting & O'Brien 2015: 2), as they will need to be shared by tourism stakeholders and local residents. With too much pressure on these resources, like construction, pollution and crowding, reaching the maximum visitor capacity would lead to decreasing attractiveness of the coastal destination. As a response, ecotourism is seen to provide the most important financing mechanism for environmental conservation, asserting that people will protect what they receive value from. On the contrary researchers have shown that such benefits are often deepening preexisting social inequalities, and even introducing serious problems of equity and social justice (Fletcher & Neves 2012: 64). These are often caused by the cultural differences between Western tourists and native tourism directors, who have a disadvantage compared to foreign entrepreneurs that possess the same 'cultural capital' as the incoming tourists (Honey 2008: 31). This brings a paradox, that the suggestive solution might be foreign assistance for locals to obtain insights into these differences (Fletcher 2014:162).

2.4   Community involvement and coordination

Part and parcel of the theoretically proposed panacea towards sustainable tourism development is the inclusion of local communities into tourism, or community-based tourism (CBT). To include the local community seems to be an issue in stakeholder coordination that is central to this research, whereas most often tourism in developing countries remains a foreign dominated activity that doesn't necessarily include the voice of native residents. The tourism industry is dependent on local resident involvement, through their role as employees, local entrepreneurs and on their goodwill towards tourists (Blackstock 2005: 39). In practice CBT seems to overlook complexities regarding the lack of success of the concept so far, that it tends to treat the host community as a homogenous bloc; neglects structural constraints to

local control of the tourism industry; and to take a functional approach to community involvement (Blackstock 2005: 40; Scheyvens 2000: 233). Therefore, several authors conclude that a focus should shift from sustainable tourism based on communities alone, to sector-wide coordination between all actors that are involved with or that experience impact from tourism development (Nyaupane et. al 2006; Mach 2014; Scheyvens 2000; Ponting 2007; Buckley 2002; Ponting & O'Brien 2013; Usher & Kerstetter 2014). To accomplish coordination, research can help to understand the relationship between local participation and local power structures (Blackstock 2005: 46), how cooperatives can share the burdens and benefits of tourism involvement equitably, "where thoughtful action and the cooperation between hosts, the government and non-governmental agencies" can lead towards sustainable development (Nyaupane et. al 2006: 1383).

2.5   Voluntourism

Volunteer tourism (voluntourism) is another modality deemed able to promote sustainable tourism practices, relevant for this case-study on Nicaragua. Voluntourism can be traced back to the British Volunteer Service Oversees and the US Peace Corps, established in 1958 and 1961. From then it developed as a new tourism market to the developing world: "For tourists that move beyond gazing at locals daydreaming, fantasizing and maintaining a trivial understanding of their daily lives – and moving towards truly experiencing and getting to know a new culture, while giving back" (Mach 2014: 226) - or even "aiding or alleviating of material poverty, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing 2001:1). This elusive win-win situation could impact destinations as "a catalyst for positive social-cultural change or facilitates neo-colonialism and dependency through tourism." On the positive side, researchers found that voluntourism has the potential to bring economic benefits and provide cross-cultural connections. On the critical side it could reinforce stereotypes of cultural superiority by western tourists obtaining cultural capital at the expense of local populations (Mach 2014: 227-228). Gray & Campbell (2007) and Brightsmith et al. (2007), present cases that show positive results of environmental volunteer tourism, the larger part of the volunteer holiday industry. It is related to ecotourism principles, capitalizing on volunteers' interest in wildlife and ecology. The authors primarily point out that voluntourism gives substantial revenue for nature conservation efforts by NGOs, and financial support for receiving host communities. Next to that, all stakeholder groups in the case of Costa Rica share similarly positive views of volunteer ecotourism, which could lead to the promised 'win-win situation' (Gray & Campbell 2007). Simpson

(2004: 690) presents one of the critiques and suggests that many 'gap year volunteers' are learning to sustain the "othering of the third world" in their experiences, where clichés like "poor, but happy", "luck" for explaining global wealth differences and persistence of the face of development that is determined by "western good intentions." She concludes that voluntourism projects ask their students too little concerning why there are global differences, or how people's lives in different places intersect. Mach (2014) is one of the first to conduct a case-study on voluntourism in the surf tourism industry. His research took place in Peru with the WAVES for Development project, which like other surf non-profits aims to "address issues of local exclusion from surfing and the surf tourism industry." WAVES is specifically involved in developing surfing at the village level, the provision of English classes, entrepreneurial training and health and educational support. Voluntourists with WAVES provide the project with structural funding, provide income to local homes that provided dinner to volunteers and cross cultural learning experiences through involvement with community members. Mach then analyses the voluntourism organizations performance, to conclude that the project could assist to provide limits to growth of tourism development to increase the destinations sustainable (self) governance.

2.6 Surf tourism and sustainability

Sustainable surf tourism (SST) as a discourse, a recent field of academic study, is the central part of this literature review. In this research surf tourism refers to tourists who plan their travels around surfing waves in coastal communities (Mach 2014: 370). Surfing is recognized as an adventure or extreme sport (Ponting & O'Brien 2014: 4), where the core activity consists of riding waves on any type of board or body alone. Most of the time surfers ride a surfboard standing up, aiming for a lengthy ride with maneuvers to maintain their speed.

An increased number of surfers travel to developing countries, creating social and environmental impacts. As a response studies started to look for sustainability of the surf tourism site, using very similar criteria as eco-tourism (Martin & Assenov 2013: 276). Surfing as an industry has seen a great increase in popularity in the past decades. Travelling has always been central to the sport of surfing, bringing surfing and the first stages of tourism to 161 countries. Also, it is a fast growing industry with 12 to 15% annual growth and an estimated number of 23 to 35 million surfers globally in 2014. This global industry is estimated to generate between an annual 70 and 130 billion dollars (Ponting & O'Brien 2014: 384-385; Martin & Assenov 2013: 275). Therefore SST needs its own field of research, as surfing generates "sufficient economic, social and environmental significance to justify

academic attention" (Barbieri & Sotomayor 2013: 112). From 1997 through to 2011, 156 researches have been documented, focusing on surfing in 10% of the countries in the world (Martin & Assenov 2013: 257). This led to the emergence of a Center for Surf Research in San Diego, in the United States, the Plymouth Sustainability and Surfing group, in the United Kingdom, and several academic degrees in surf resource management. Ponting (2005 et al.) was the first focusing his research on SST, in the Pacific around Asia. He has shown that surf tourism has become a highly commoditized global industry, where the value of control of these world-class surf resources in the developing world began to dawn on entrepreneurs, connecting to common pool resource theory. It led to an increase in conflicts with native host communities over these resources (Ponting 2007: 1; Ponting & Obrien 2014: 2). The main issue with surf tourism development over the years is that the increased commodification of surf tourism with an absence of traditional resource ownership has led to surf tourism management models that simply ignore local communities. Therefore, to develop SST, management models focused on stakeholders coordination should be implemented; these should respect local resource ownership (of reef, sea, land and freshwater) and prioritize local community's needs (Ponting 2007: 7; Ponting & Obrien 2014: 10; Buckley 2002b: 438-439; Mach 2014: 343; Usher & Kerstetter 2014: 330; Lavanchy & Tailor 2015: 1). How to create these is fundamental to my problem statement.

Following Ponting's work, several case studies on developing surf destinations have been done in and around Asia. Peer reviewed examples include Fiji (Ponting 2007; Ponting & O'Brien 2014), Indonesia (Buckley 2002a,b; Ponting et. al 2005;Ponting & O'Brien 2015; Towner 2014), Papua New Guinea (O'Brien & Ponting 2013) and the Philippines (Porter et al. 2015) but also Nicaragua (Usher & Kerstetter 2014). Next to published literature, several thesis and dissertations have been written on surf tourism in multiple destinations that are also used in this thesis. Most of these studies show that unregulated surf tourism in developing destinations leads to over-exploitation of natural resources shaped by mismanagement and crowding of waves, excluding local communities from supposed tourism benefits and privatization of surf breaks. Ponting and O'Brien (2014) propose measures for sustainable surf tourism management applied to Fiji, with the Framework Analysis for Sustainable Surf Tourism (FASST), which is further discussed in the methodology chapter. FASST is intimately linked to SST's best practice of the regulation of surf tourism in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The success in PNG can be attributed to the regulation by the Surf Association Papua New Guinea (SAPNG) that designed surf

management plans (SMP) for every surf break area. These plans include the recognition of local community wave ownership, development of surf clubs to promote local community involvement in the sport and quotas on the number of visitors that suit the area's capacities. All these measures are taken before the first tourist is allowed to enter the area. To fund the SAPNG's community development and environmental conservation projects, tourists are asked to pay a tourism tax. The outcome of SAPNG's work is a community that is enthusiastic about surfing, and working in the surf tourism industry. It created additions to local educational and medical infrastructure; upskilling for locals in sport and hospitality contexts; healthy living behaviors; and increased opportunities for youth, particularly female, sport participation. With an income from surf tourists, host communities decrease their reliance on less sustainable activities such as logging and mining. This case serves as a model that could inform policy and practice on sustainable approaches to using sport and sport tourism (O'Brien & Ponting 2013).

Fundamental to SAPNG's strategy has been the Abel Reverse Spiral Model by Abel & O'Brien (figure 4)(in Borne & Ponting 2015: 158-159). They present two models, on the left a spiral that shows the current world situation in which governments, investors and business have top down organized surf tourism, which excludes traditional resource custodians host communities. The right side shows a reversed spiral in which host communities become the central players in decisions regarding the use of their surf resources. Influence from host communities spiral up to the center of the model, where they meet with the governments, investors and business. It creates a point of intersection where "equitable and sustainable" decisions can be made.

On a destination level attempts to foster change towards negative developments can be achieved through four principles of local (self) governance that are discussed by Mach (2014: 210-227). The first and most proscribed solution is that of top-down control of wave resources and privatization schemes, shown in the model on the left (figure 4).
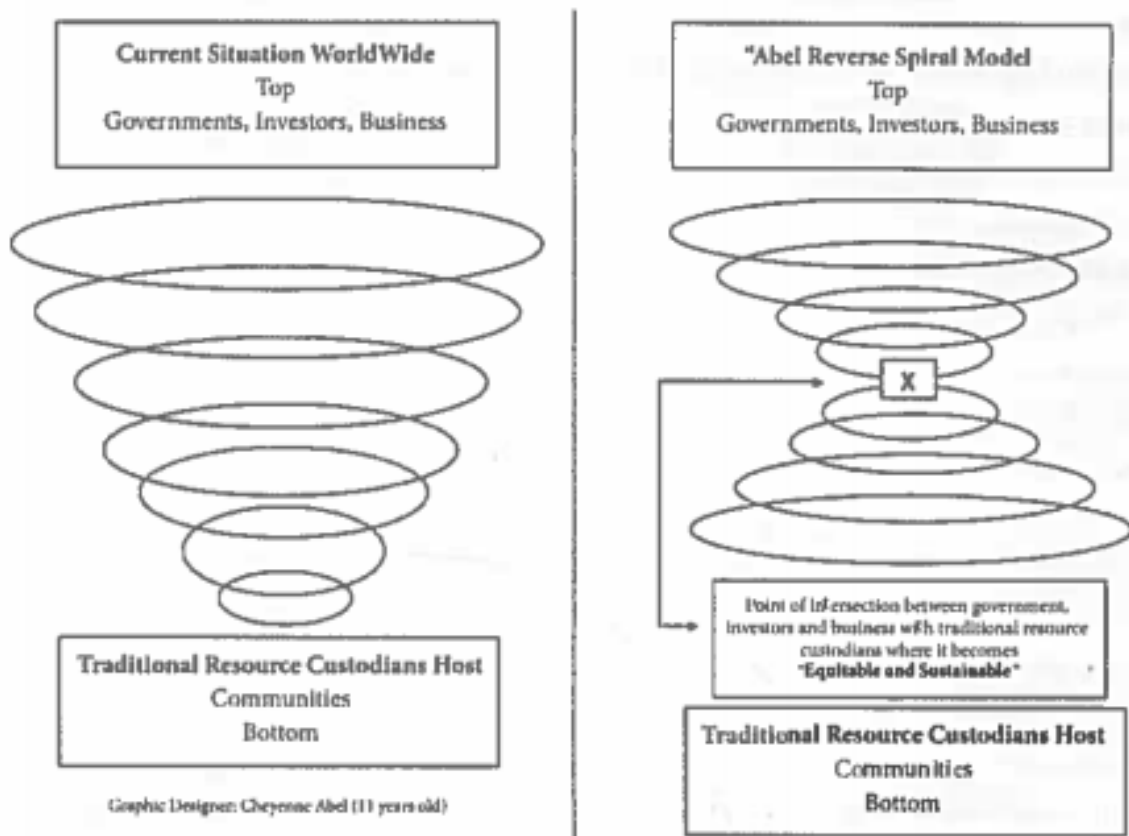
Figure 4: Abel Tasman Spiral's (Borne & Ponting 2015)

Next to that there are three other models for self-organization: local collective action, voluntary private sector initiatives and humanitarian and environmental organizations. Local collective action refers to the oldest way of surf governance, localism. This type of self-organization is characterized by surfers that feel ownership of specific wave resources and therefore do anything to protect and regulate that surfing environment. Often this comes down to aggressive and sometimes physical measures to prevent non-locals from disturbing their experience. Voluntary private sector initiatives are those entrepreneurs that decide to preserve the area, instead of degrading it. The 'lifestyle' entrepreneurs do not move to another country for business alone, they left their home country with the dream of a change in lifestyle (Kurronen 2012). They want a destination where the community and the environment thrives with the help of their involvement. The third is the non-governmental organization model of humanitarian and environmental organizations that aim to promote community self-organization. It connects to voluntourism organizations like project WOO and associations like SAPNG. Especially in the context of a developing country, where national and regional governments are close to non-existent, these modes of self-organization will be most successful for sustainable surf tourism destinations (Mach 2014).

2.7   Case study literature

The final part presents an overview of academic papers that have been written on the Gigante area; they give prior insights into Gigante's main issues. Including these papers into this thesis increases the conclusions' trustworthiness, as they can reflect on the multiple facets that involves the destinations development.

The Nicaraguan government has decentralized its environmental resource management, which focuses mainly on forestry, from central to municipal government authorities. In theory this should bring more regional specific decision making and management, but research found that municipalities are often reticent to take on these management responsibilities and that their primary actions and interventions are economically motivated (Larson 2002: 17). With this knowledge, it is possible that the local municipality for Gigante might not be able to support sustainable development in surf tourism. Furthermore land rights and ownership have been researched in Gigante, aiming to understand how the processes of tourism and real estate development are changing control over, and access to, land and resources in the area. It gives an overview of stakeholder relations regarding land development, and ownership of the common resources. It shows that there are issues in Gigante on land tenure, restricting marginalized poor native citizens from their rights to land, sea and fresh water (Sveinsdóttir 2014: 105-106). The ones creating part of those issues are lifestyle-entrepreneurs who have been researched in Gigante as well. From the viewpoint of their motives for starting up businesses in developing countries, they are portrayed as adventurers who have found their ways in the Wild West. The findings seem to be focused on the outcome of successful examples of starting up business, overcoming local hurdles in Gigante (Kurronen 2012: 78). The paper does not focus on any local effects of the businesses or local sustainability of the area as a whole, pointing out a possible lack of awareness of these effects by entrepreneurs or the researcher. Before discovering the potential of Gigante for tourism development, the town mainly relied on artisanal fisheries for its livelihood. Still the majority (80%) of the local citizens sustains their livelihood through fishing. The effect of tourism on the local fishing industry has also been researched. Similar to the issues with land tenure, the research focuses on community struggles over access of marine resources, reflecting on the issue of a proposed marine protected area by tourism operators in Gigante. It concludes that these new patterns of resource control have led to marginalization of local fishermen and may trigger unsustainable resource exploitation. Tourism has brought a shift in Gigante's residents with a weakening artisanal fishing industry towards an increase in paid

employment in the tourism industry (Alvarado & Taylor 2014: 53). Another pool resource in Gigante that has been researched, is the distribution of freshwater. Conflicts over water use are increasing as tourism enterprises take up more water than there is available. Increased conflict should be avoided, but this entails both organizational coordination by the stakeholders and the quantification of water resources. This gap entails both an organizational component for stakeholders and quantifying of water resources within the complex aquifer(s) to determine a safe yield for groundwater extraction (Lavanchy & Tailor 2015: 7).

Relevant to understand the perception of residents' quality of life in the region is a study done for nearby Las Salinas focused on the effect surf tourism can have on people's lives and how they perceive those. The researcher found that residents perceive surf tourism as beneficial for their community well-being and quality of life. Adding to this Las Salinas is still in Butler's tourism exploration phase, where negative effects of tourism haven't been felt by residents yet (Usher & Kerstetter 2014: 330). The most recent thesis on Gigante has been on surf tourism as well, following the path of Usher & Kerstetter (2014) on community benefits of tourism. It concludes that indeed tourism benefits the local Nicaraguans as a new means of income beyond fisheries alone. It also states that tourists enjoy all touristic activities in Gigante, which will probably lead to a tourism boom, once initiated by surfers (Earhart 2015: 89). The thesis doesn't reflect on how social and economic benefits are distributed between poor, wealthy Nicaraguans and foreign entrepreneurs. This is something that my research will contribute to. In order to find how to actually maintain these benefits for the future and therefore increase sustainability through tourism. Altogether these researchers have made it possible to gain prior knowledge on current tourism developments, their impacts, main issues and the future challenges. Conclusions in this thesis can therefore cover many areas that influence the sustainability of tourism in Nicaragua.

3. **Methodology**

This chapter provides the research methodology and provides a discussion on the choice of research approach, methods of data collection, limitations, reflection and methods for data analysis.

3.1   **Research approach**

This research aims to retrieve specific information on the status of sustainability in emerging surf tourism destinations, examining in what ways tourism stakeholder awareness and coordination could influence decision making in order to increase the community's well-being through tourism and ensure the tourism destination's social and environmental sustainability in the case of playa Gigante, Nicaragua. The collection of data to achieve the set aim took fourteen weeks of on-site participant observation methodologies. Participant observation is ordered under the umbrella of qualitative research that focuses on the human experience and seeks to understand the social world, recognizing this world for its richness in context, detail and experience (Scheyvens 2014: 59). Participatory observation methods are widely used within development fieldwork (Scheyvens 2014: 67), aiming to effectively identify and implement development objectives that reflect local peoples' analysis of development problems (Smucker et. al 2007:387). This requires researchers to "immerse themselves in the place/societies they are studying. By living closely with the people being studied, it is possible to empathize with their way of looking at and interpreting the world. The note-taking involved is rigorous and one is required constantly to test impressions and ideas" (Scheyvens 2014: 64). Qualitative and participatory observation are suitable as the research site is a delicate small fishing village, where discreet immersion can give valuable information on existing social structures that determine development, over quantitative data collection that often leads to a more dominant research position, making it harder to reflect on individual cases and personal feelings (Scheyvens 2014: 59-64).

The actual participatory methods used during field research were field observations, informal conversations and open interviews all written down in field diaries or were recorded and transcribed. The field observations and informal conversations were a guiding principal for determining which actors are involved in tourism and to locate the main issues and opportunities for the destinations sustainability. For in-depth information the open interviews revealed details on the issues and relationships between stakeholders and how these relate to project WOO.

3.2 Data collection: Immersion

Before departure to Nicaragua, initial contact was made with project WOO on possibilities for conducting research. Only a Spanish course and homestay was planned for the first month; the months after were quite unplanned to ensure flexibility in the field. After the first month of orientation I was offered the opportunity to engage with project WOO more intimately through volunteering at several surf related community and volunteer group activities, several staff meetings and community meetings. Through casual involvement in the project I was allowed to follow and join most activities and meetings WOO organized. I was therefore able to reflect on the relationship and the impact WOO has on the community and their promotion of sustainable surf tourism practices. On the other side I was given the opportunity to work part time in an all-inclusive surf resort as a surf guide. For two months, a few days a week, I took surf tourists on a boat trip to one of the 17 different surf spots in the area, together with a local and an expat boat captain. This allowed me to have intimate conversations with the captains, the surf tourists, other foreign surf guides, local kitchen staff and the foreign camp owner. I was able to follow the interaction with the Nicaraguan tourism workers in the enterprise and got a sense of how enterprises are organized in Gigante. The surf resort is in close contact with other foreign owned surf enterprises, which allowed me to build relationships and map that part of the surf tourism industry in Gigante.

Figure 5: Surf guiding in action

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And third, through my stay in a homestay family often used by project WOO and the Spanish School I have been able to build a good relationship with the particular family and the families surrounding that are related. This enabled me to continuously improve my understanding of the local culture, language and the common issues they face.

Figure 6: The family

This approach fits into becoming a peripheral-member researcher as described by Adler & Adler (1987). This methodology applies to researchers that "favor developing close relationships with their subjects, but also feel that this involvement should be tempered by certain restrains against over involvement" (Adler & Adler 1987: 40). I did not get involved too intimately with project WOO or the surf resort, to ensure that I kept as much of an external identity as a researcher in the community. A large part of the research consisted of participatory observation methods as for observations and informal conversations during my participation in all three previously mentioned areas. Towards the final three weeks of the fieldwork I started to conduct formal open interviews that gave insights to findings that were unclear, in need of confirmation or more depth. Throughout the fieldwork I have been open

and transparent to everyone I interacted with, about my research and in what ways I would use my findings. In Appendix 1 my research schedule is presented, outlining all research activities over the time of field work.

3.3   Qualitative interviewing

Twenty respondents were willing to participate in a face-to-face interview, to represent a wide variety that adds to the findings obtained through participatory observations. Ten of these interviews were performed in Spanish, the other half in English. All respondents contribute in some way to tourism or community development, like entrepreneurs, local governments, WOO staff and volunteers. My aims were to interview all respondents that fit into these categories that were within reach, similar to convenience sampling (Patton 2002). Only twenty respondents were willing to participate or were able to meet within my field work period. The interviews were unstructured, with open end questions. Ideally, an unstructured interview is a formal setting where both parties recognized to meet for an interview; the interviewer has a clear plan in mind regarding the focus and goal of the interview; there is no structure, which allows the respondent to open up and express themselves in their own ways on the topics (Fontana & Frey 1994). This approach was used for all interviews with the aim of achieving answers to the following topics:

- Tourism entrepreneurs (12) were asked about how they shape tourism in Gigante, what their relationship is with the community and how they see Gigante and their enterprise in the future.
- The local government (1) was asked how they want to regulate tourism in Gigante and the area. And what their future prospective is.
- WOO volunteers (4) were asked how they experience the cultural immersion, work with WOO and what it has done to their tourism perspective.
- WOO staff (3) was asked how they aim to see Gigante in the future, how do their projects now add to sustainability later.

Privacy

All interviews, informal conversations and other field data were handled and referred to with utter most care of privacy as far and necessary as possible to protect respondents. It appeared that most people did not want to be mentioned personally in this thesis - as it might possibly

change relationships between stakeholders that are reflected on in this thesis. Gigante is a small village, with gossip and conflicts that shape the towns' daily news. To avoid influence on these processes, respondents are referred to by their functions and roles in the community of Gigante. This should not degrade the quality of this research, as the respondents' roles in tourism are much more important than their actual identity and professional affiliation.

3.4   Limitations

Social science researchers who perform qualitative studies attempt to make sense of or interpret social phenomena in the terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2013). All retrieved data is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. Another filter is put onto the writing process, as it is a reflection of our own interpretations based on the cultural, social, gender, class and personal politics. All writing is positioned within a certain context. All researchers therefore need to accept this interpretation and be open about their possible influences (Creswell 2007:179). It brings limitations to any research on its validity and reliability, which needs to be accepted (Bryman 2012).

As mentioned Gigante is a small village with gossip and conflicts in the community. Nicaraguans have a grounded suspicion towards foreigners who have historically influenced and often negatively changed Nicaraguan society. Formal face-to-face interviews were not easy to arrange or conduct. I was unable to meet with managers from the largest surrounding tourism resorts, or with people from the regional or national tourism board. Therefore they do not represent the main body of data, which gives increased importance to immersion research as a valuable data source. This makes this research very locally oriented, giving insights to grass root processes in an emerging tourism destination. It brings limitations for applicability to larger scale tourism destinations, but can also be seen as a strength as it increases knowledge on the initial phase of the tourism area life cycle, which is quite unique.

3.5   Self -Reflection

The key factor that allowed me to immerse into Gigante's area surf tourism area is my own connection to surfing. It will not come as a surprise that for over a decade, I am a very active surfer myself. Having travelled to and lived in several rural coastal communities in Europe, Africa and Latin America, allowed me to have a perspective on surf tourism and its impacts on these communities. Involvement in surf sessions at Playa Amarillo have been key to a rapid integration into the surf community and initial informal conversations. In addition, my qualifications as international beach lifeguard and surf instructor enabled me to give surf lessons for Project WOO and lessons and guiding with the surf resort gaining inside perspectives.

Figure 7: A free-time surf at Colorado's

I genuinely feel that traveling for surfing can and must have a positive impact on the coastal communities' social and natural environments. Unfortunately this has not often been the case in my previous observations of coastal surf tourism destinations. I feel it is necessary to transform surf tourism developments as it generally occurs. With a minority of surf tourists, that without direct intentions, cause harm to local people and the environment. Surfers ultimately destroy their own surfing environments, which is very unsustainable. For better or worse, my views and experience for sure shaped my role as a researcher and presence in Gigante and therefore the data I was able to collect.

Before arrival to Nicaragua my Spanish was very basic, as mentioned before I immersed into a fulltime Spanish course and the community to increase my knowledge as rapidly as possible. I succeeded in this quite well, as I was able to hold conversations and interviews in Spanish when necessary and was able to translate those directly to English. Of course several details and local expressions were hard to understand, but I think it did not degrade the respondents' message as a whole.

3.6   Data analysis: FASST

The interview transcriptions, and field notes will be content analyzed on the characteristics of the Framework Analysis for Sustainable Surf Tourism (FASST). The framework consists of five variables presented by Ponting & Obrien (2014) and one added variable by Mach (2014). As far as I am aware it is the second time FASST is used for analysis, and the first time a sixth indicator is included into the framework. Because of little research application so far, the comprehensive framework is applied in a broad sense, so as to not have data excluded that do not narrowly fit to the given criteria. The FASST sustainability criteria are; a distinct move away from economic neo-liberalism; the need for coordinated planning and limits to growth; the advantages of systematic attempts to foster cross-cultural understanding; the social benefits associated with the development of surfing at the village level; and the need for surf tourism to contribute to poverty alleviation in destination communities (Ponting & Obrien 2014: 384). A sixth variable emerged from a case-study in Peru; of improving environmental quality and justice (Mach 2014: 8). FASST is a normative and anti-neoliberal approach, which like all sustainability discourse should be open for debate and evolve with circumstances. It sets out a derived set of broadly applicable management principles that are useful for organizing data of what is sustainable at different scales and in different contexts (Ponting & O'Brien 2014: 390; Mach 2014: 51). Each indicator will now be introduced by its characteristics to influence sustainable surf tourism management.

3.6.1   A distinct move away from economic neo-liberalism

In many ways surf tourism is a neoliberal phenomenon, making a market out of wave resources and opening new markets in often isolated coastal communities. Ponting et al. (2005: 150) established this indicator after research in Indonesia where a "rush to establish a foothold, foreign tour operators have colonized the Mentawai's resources with…unregulated free-market approaches to development" that "place local people as just one relatively powerless stakeholder group amongst many others". As a result the largest part of the money stays in the hands of foreign entrepreneurs and most of the environmental and cultural costs

trickle down to the local people. These neo-liberal processes in some sense become interchangeable with neo-colonialism. Neoliberal approaches have too often failed to promote sustainability, therefore a move away towards alternative models need to be implemented: "One that recognizes host communities as the traditional custodians of surfing resources who should share in the social and economic benefits derived from many commercial exploitation of such resources" (O'Brien & Ponting 2013: 160).

3.6.2 The need for coordinated planning and limits to growth

Unmanaged surf tourism growth has been found in multiple studies to lead to rapid expansion of surf tourism in once isolated coastal communities. As wealthy entrepreneurs claim their market share, they build hotels and resorts and establish surf charter boats to the point where the ecosystem struggles to provide sufficient sinks for waste; an ample quantity of clean drinking water; and typically growth leads to down market pressure on prices as areas become overcrowded, as all those new businesses need customers to remain viable (Mach 2014: 57). It is therefore important to consider what plans are in place that seek to take in to account that there are biophysical, socio-psychological, and cultural limits to growth to ensure a sustainable and desirable surf tourism industry for the majority of stakeholders involved (Buckley, 2002a). In future development planning the host community is left out of the equation, but Ponting et al. (2005) found that "the hospitality of the local community is vital to the tourism industry … [so] the destination should be developed according to the host community needs." It points out a need for coordinated planning that actively engages host communities as full partners to express their needs in a formalized long-term process.

3.6.3 The advantages of systematic attempts to foster cross-cultural understanding

O'Brien & Ponting (2013: 161) and Ponting & Mcdonald (2013) define a clear need for cross-cultural understanding that is incorporated in policy and planning. Host communities should be recognized as central players and encouraged to define their own involvement in the surf tourism industry. Also, the readiness of host communities to share their resources with tourists is a critical determinant in the success of sustainable tourism development. Such an approach requires mutual trust and open exchange of information between stakeholders, where potentially tourism agencies empower the host communities with information about tourism. Often tour operators avoid engagement with local communities as there is a belief of a local population that is 'primitive' and incapable of understanding tourism and that they are "content with their position in life and should be protected from the inevitable cultural decline that would ultimately see local people become bell boys and prostitutes serving the needs of the surf tourists". Many of these foreign all-inclusive tour

operators were more than happy to create 'tourist bubbles' to offer tourists the opportunity to hunt perfect waves with minimal opportunities to understand the realities of local communities. This has been shown to breed a lack of local support and resistance to the tourism industry. Mach (2014: 62) describes how tourists and hosts can each benefit from meaningful cultural interaction because it provides possibilities for each to crossover their own respective cultural boundaries. Cross-cultural understanding can help tourists to understand that host communities do not exist within static cultures, but are engaged in a process of cultural evolution. In interpreting, understanding, and thinking about developing world cultures differently, tourists can develop more thoughtful and sensitive approaches to interacting with people and environments. In this sense, cross cultural interaction can help tourists to free themselves from their own cultural and ideological shackles, which in effect can help to challenge dominant neoliberal economic organizing structures and establish new less damaging approaches to earning a living and traveling. On the other side host communities can use the presence of tourists as a mirror for reflecting back upon their own cultures. Through experiencing tourism and understanding tourists in a more holistic manner, host communities can reflect on what is worth preserving within their traditional cultures and have a dialogue concerning what may need to change to better their communities. In this sense, cross-cultural interaction, can become a catalyst for host communities to become powerful actors in representing and understanding themselves, which can help local communities to form stronger identities and also guide the future of tourism in their hometowns as individuals decide how, if, and under what terms they wish to be involved with tourism (Mach 2014: 62).

3.6.4 The social benefits with the development of surfing at the village level

This indicator was added when O'Brien and Ponting (2013) found how there are many social benefits with the development of surfing at the village level in Papua New Guinea. Short term benefits are to engage youth through sport in surf clubs that provide a general meeting area and can provide in communal surfboards. It has diverted youth from criminal activities and some have been able to participate in national and international surf competitions. For the long term, involvement in surfing can build local capacity to earn income from surf tourism and help locals become powerful stakeholders in future local and national decision making processes on surf tourism development.

3.6.5 Surf tourism contributing to poverty alleviation

Especially in the developing world surf tourism should ideally contribute to poverty alleviation, building on the work of Scheyvens and Russel (2012) on anti-poverty tourism. They use three indicators for poverty alleviation: opportunities, empowerment and security.

Surf tourism should provide 'opportunity' for people living where the waves are. There should be concerted effort and perhaps policy in place for locals to receive lease payments for the usage of their natural resources, like waves, reefs and beaches. Also, economic linkages are made from the surf industry to other local industries, like agriculture. And that those employed in foreign owned operations should earn a living full time wage and have opportunities for progression to higher paying positions. 'Empowerment' involves training for staff, respect for culture and traditions, and participation in decision making. It involves gender and race empowerment and empowering locals to make development decisions to define their own stake in the surf industry. Finally, security refers to job security, health care, measures to environmental and economic resilience, contribution to community groups and respect for traditional property rights where they exist or are perceived to exist (Ponting & O'Brien 2014).

3.6.6 Improving environmental quality and justice

The final indicator was added by Mach (2014), which quite simply states that environmental quality and justice is extremely important as it is part of the surfing environment, fundamental to the establishment of a surf industry. Tourism that degrades the reefs and beaches that produce perfect waves, or limits access to those will likely be unsustainable for the future of a surf tourism destination. Also, fresh water depletion, lack of waste management can be put under this new indicator.

In his conclusion Mach (2014) omitted the indicator for a move away to neo-liberalism and included this last indicator of environmental quality and justice. He found that the other indicators well reflect on moving away from neoliberal business models, as they all represent necessary interventions that are not free-market based. This thesis serves to be another test and will include all six indicators. The chapter on future research will conclude if the indicator should indeed be omitted or not.

The framework should be well suited to test a surf destination's sustainability as it was already applied to Indonesia (Ponting et al. 2005; Ponting & O'Brien 2015), Fiji (Ponting & O'Brien 2014), Papua New Guinea (O'Brien & Ponting 2013) and Peru (Mach 2014). Nevertheless the framework will remain open for possible new indicators that appear out of the collected data.

3.7   Coding

Qualitative content analysis is used as a coding methodology; this is done by assigning successive parts of the material to the categories of a coding frame. This frame is at the heart of the method, and it contains all those aspects that feature in the description and interpretation of the material. Three features characterize the method: it reduces data through coding into larger themes, it is systematic in following specific steps, and it is flexible in that the coding should always be matched to the material (Flick 2013:170). Sometimes references do not fit to one indicator alone, as they experience overlap. Still a decision has been made to 'drag' a reference to the indicator that fits the specific reference the most. The FASST analysis will give insights into the sustainability of Gigante as a surf tourist destination with proposed guidelines for improving awareness and coordination between all stakeholders to promote sustainable surf tourism development in developing countries.

NVIVO

As mentioned FASST is used as a thematic coding frame to assist data interpretation. To streamline the analysis this research uses Nvivo 10 Qualitative Data Analysis software. All the separate transcripts of interviews and field notes can be entered into the program from where the coding frame can be created, and modified or extended accordingly. The advantage of using data analysis software is that it increases the reliability of the analysis (Boeije 2010). All information from the transcripts are analyzed and 'dragged' into a specific coding theme. This resulted in a code tree, which can be found in the appendix (appendix 2). The code tree already gives some insights in the way the data is organized and gives quantitative information on the amount of 'references' each code contains.

RUTA TRIÁNGULO DEL SUR

BIENVENIDOS A

PLAYA
GIGANTE

Comunidad limpia y protectora del medioambiente

Fondo Carlos Pellas para la Excelencia Turística

FUNDACIÓN
CENTRO EMPRESARIAL PELLAS
PROYECTO RUTA TRIÁNGULO DEL SUR

4. Case study: Surf tourism and sustainability in Playa Gigante

This chapter will introduce the case study, presenting specific information on Nicaragua and its tourism industry, poverty development and current important events. It will also present specific information on Gigante as a surf tourism destination, with insights to Project Wave of Optimism as a host organization. The last part of this chapter presents the outcomes of data analysis of on-site findings.

4.1 Study site: Nicaragua

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America while being the least densely populated with 5.5 million inhabitants. The country suffered a harsh dictatorship from 1936 until the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979 (Zapata et. al 2011: 728). The civil wars up to 1987, despite the achievements of the social transformations during the 1980s, have kept the country in a fragile state. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America with 48% of its population living below the 1,25 dollar a day poverty line and one in seven living in extreme poverty (World Bank 2012). The war against the counter-revolutionary Sandinistas, supported by the CIA under the Reagan government; the effects of neoliberal policies in the 1990s; and the lack of infrastructural, technological, financial, and social capital are some of the structural factors behind poverty in Nicaragua. After losing free and fair elections in 1990, 1996, and 2001, former Sandinista President Daniel Ortega Saavedra was elected president in 2006 and reelected in 2011. The 2008 and 2012 municipal elections, 2010 and 2013 regional elections, and the 2011 presidential elections were said to contain fraud practices that was leading towards weakened democratic institutions within the Nicaraguan Government of Reconciliation and National Unity (CIA world fact book 2014).

Figure 8: Nicaragua's national flag

Nicaragua is primarily an agricultural country with 60% of its total exports historically based on cash crops such as bananas, coffee, sugar, beef, and tobacco. Since 2001 tourism has overtaken the coffee, meat, and other traditional product exports in economic importance (Zapata et. al 2011: 728). It generated 8.9% of total exports in 2013 and grew by 6,1% in 2014 (WTTC 2014). Tourism in Nicaragua became of national importance and from the 2000s the government viewed it as a passport to sustainable development (Hunt 2011: 265). In history many countries have tried to use tourism for development. Often governments have reduced their barriers to foreign capital, in order to support foreign tourism investments (Fletcher 2011: 456). The Nicaraguan government attempted the same, creating a boom in tourism development on the pacific coast. Hunt (2011) concludes that investments didn't provide the benefits Nicaraguans had hoped for, as tourism on the southwestern pacific coast "appears to be exacerbating inequalities by allowing greater accumulation of capital among both wealthy Nicaraguan elites and a growing number of foreign/ex-patriot investors, while furthering impoverishment of rural residents through increasing costs of living, land displacement, and legal marginalization (Hunt 2011: 276)." It shows that Nicaragua, like many other countries in the world provides for a capitalist elite that through tourism is able to increase their wealth.

4.2 Poverty alleviation

Indicators and figures on developing countries economic development and poverty alleviation, reflected by the governments and IMF/World Bank should be treated with care, as they don't necessarily include wholly correct data, but they do give an indication on current trends. Nicaragua's economy grew at an estimated average of 2.8% a year between 2007 and 2011, in line with the Central American average. Progress was made in the social area in terms of reduced levels of poverty and inequality. Nevertheless the poverty levels that remain have proven to be highly persistent. General poverty decreased by only 2% between 1993 and 2005 (from 50.3% to 48.3%), despite an increase of 33% in per capita income for this same period. Although there was a 7% increase in per capita income between 2001 and 2005, poverty also grew by 2.5%. The situation is similar among the poorest population groups. Extreme poverty rates only improved from 19.4% in 1993 to 17.2% in 2005, of which 2.1% occurred during 2001-2005. Poverty is more severe in rural areas and the Caribbean coast, notwithstanding their economic potential. Likewise, general poverty increased by 2.5% in rural areas and 3.2% on the Caribbean coast. This outcome stands in contrast with rural areas in western Nicaragua, which experienced poverty reduction in the

years between 1993 and 2005 as a result of benefits deriving from staple foods production programs and investments in the rebuilding of infrastructure damaged by Hurricane Mitch of 1998. In the same years the Caribbean coast displayed a sustained increase towards deeper poverty (IMF 2010: 8).

4.3 Current events

The way in which Nicaragua is covered by the global media will give an idea of the current state of the nation and current issues in order to put policy priorities discussed in the next chapters within the perspective of today's developments.

Nicaragua Interoceanic Canal

The most recent and probably most influential development in Nicaragua for the coming century is the start of construction of a shipping canal in the Southern half of Nicaragua. With the "opening of construction" ceremony past December 2014, Daniel Ortega signed a contract with the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Company (HKND). The company is led by the Chinese Wang Jing, who will fund the 50 billion dollar program. The canal is supposed to be a new waterway for the largest container ships that are not able to fit through the Panama Canal. Questions arise about the sustainability of the project. Ortega signed away one third of the country's territory for construction, crosscutting 40 mostly indigenous villages, UNESCO nature reserves like tropical primary and secondary forests and Lake Nicaragua. Since the start of the project thousands of activists have protested against the project in fear of being displaced. Despite these consequences Daniel Ortega promises that the project within the first five years can already lift 400.000 people out of poverty. At the moment these promises on economic development remain uncertain as for the first fifty years the majority of ownership will belong to the HKND; only after a century Nicaragua will have complete ownership of the canal (Gross, 2014; Maalderink 2014; Anderson 2014). The relevance of the canal for this research could be in the fact that the planned harbor on the Pacific Ocean lies just five kilometers from Gigante and several rumors of HKND buying up land in the Gigante area for tourism developments.

Figuur 9: Nicaragua Canal (retrieved from The Guardian in Anderson 2014)

Natural disaster

In addition to vulnerability to hurricanes and tsunamis, Nicaragua is also affected by droughts. An extreme drought in Nicaragua over summer in 2014 led to a famine where 600.000 people were undernourished, and 2500 animals died. This led the government to implement drought disaster plans and tax free imports of corn and rice. The rural poor that don't have the ability to adapt to these climatic events experience the biggest consequences, giving more importance for governmental policy to target this affected group (Boswinkel 2014). Gigante lies within this area showing signs of severe drought, with fresh water wells drying up and salinized freshwater reserves.

4.4   Tola and Playa Gigante

Before the revolution of the early 1970s, large parts of the municipality of Tola with the capital of Rivas, were part of an expansive estate owned by the Somoza dictatorship called 'Finca Güiscoyol', which was used by the family to run cattle and as productive farmland. The purchase of the land occurred during 1937 when the most productive farm and pasture land was reserved primarily for the Somoza family and other members of the Nicaraguan elite. The dictatorship held this extensive portion of coastline until they were overthrown during the revolution and forced into exile. The land was redistributed by the new Sandinista government in 1979 along with other large swaths of productive land in the area that had been held by elites. By 1994, through the legal means of the Sandinista government,

the land rights had been officially handed over to local fisherman and farmers who had moved into the area during the revolution (Earhart 2015: 19; Sveinsdottir 2014: 4; field notes).

Surfing

The municipality of Tola hosts several world class surf breaks, on its 54 km coast, that have attracted foreigners from all over the world. The region receives waves most of the year, with more than 300 days of easterly winds, created by Lake Nicaragua, that are perfect for surfing. Most famous breaks include Playa Colorado, Playa Popoyo, Manzanillo and Lance's Left, which attracts a large amount of surf tourists in the main surf season. These have created small scale surf towns, which often have basic accommodation and restaurants.

Figure 10: Tola's entry sign, welcoming surf tourists

Not all of Tola's coast is accessible for travelers and Nicaraguans as the area became a popular area for resort and residential tourism. Land was relatively cheap to buy, with government incentives to invest (Sveinsdottir 2014). There emerged four large scale resorts, which basically privatized the area, including several beaches and surf breaks, from access by

land. The "emerald coast," as the resorts have named Tola, has been unregulated where indeed illegal coastal development, often too close to shore, was possible. They are the major users of the area's fresh water reserves, with large golf courses and swimming pools in an area that experiences severe drought (Lavanchy 2014). The largest and most exclusive resorts in Nicaragua, if not Central America, are situated around Gigante, which experiences much of these effects. They do provide many Nicaraguans from the area with low-skilled jobs in tourism (field notes).

Figure 11: Playa Colorado, with restricted public access

4.4.1 Playa Gigante

Gigante is said to be a surf destination in its initial tourism phase, on the forefront of an increase in tourism development. Playa Gigante is the nearest public accessible beach in Tola from the municipal capital Rivas, the first beach on the road to Las Salinas, and the second biggest beach town next to San Juan del Sur. At this moment there are already quite some developments present, where on estimate at least 150 visitors can be accommodated in Gigante, with the biggest hostel catering to over 40 tourists (field notes). These numbers are growing by the month, as many Nicaraguans started to build accommodation next to their

houses or restaurants. Tourism development in Gigante evolved around surfing and surf culture, where tourists, surfers and non-surfers want to experience the beach lifestyle and the waves the area provides. There are four businesses in Gigante that cater especially for surf tourists, two being all inclusive surf tour resorts. Their main activity is to take tourists out to over 17 different waves in the area by boat. The other two cater for surfers that travel more independently providing reasonably cheap beds, board rental and surf lessons. Next to surf accommodation there is an increasing market for backpacker travelers and more wealthy tourists, picked up by entrepreneurs that established several backpacker hostels, mid-range and some higher end hotels that have entered town.

Figure 12: The bay of Gigante, with the Giant's Foot on the right

The beach of Gigante, a secluded bay, doesn't get much surf, therefore it makes a perfect natural harbor for boat tours to sail out and to go fishing. Most surfers who are not buying boat tours will surf nearby Amarillo beach, a fairly consistent beach break producing medium quality waves with limited crowds. Also accessible by foot from Gigante is the next beach north, Playa Colorado. This beach contains the area's most famous waves, highly consistent and world class but often crowded. The crowd consists mainly of tourists that stay in the Iguana Resort development, a high end surf resort that privatized all land around the famous surf breaks.

55

Surfers from Gigante surfing Colorado are few; most people feel the walk is too long of a trip and will stick with surfing Amarillo. The boat tour companies go to the beach a lot, which is just a five minute boat trip.
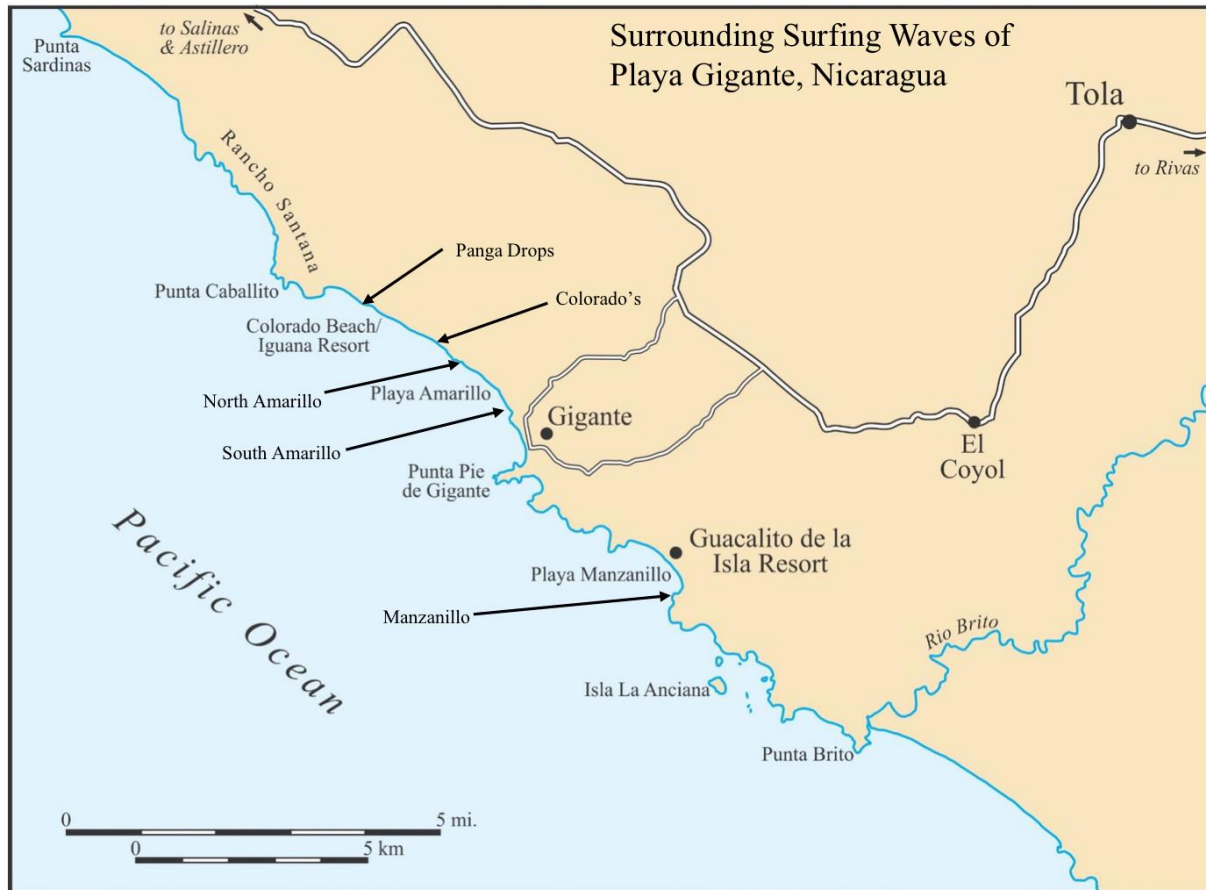

Figure 13: Near surf spots

4.4.2 Project Wave of Optimism

This thesis provides an analysis on Project Wave of Optimism (WOO), which functioned as my 'host organization'. The organization has contributed to this research through several informal conversations and interviews and provided the possibilities of joining several events, meetings and programs to be able to formulate advice on their strategies in the context of surf tourism in Gigante. Project WOO, a North-American non-profit, was established in 2006. The inspiration for starting the non-profit came after the event of "WOO's founders observing a turtle laying eggs, together with locals waiting for the same eggs to take them to eat. The surfers didn't think there was a right or wrong, but they figured there's a cultural gap of understanding between the two. They wanted to bridge the gap of understanding from both cultures. Enforcing cross-cultural learning for both tourists and local people" (field notes).

WOO has a mission to forge partnerships with emerging Latin American surf tourism destinations and delivers collaborative programs to improve the village's quality of life and engage the locals in the decision-making and management of their community's development. Due to the proximity of world-class waves, they have seen Gigante rapidly transforming into a tourism destination. Project WOO helps mobilize the community, facilitate comprehensive needs assessments, and support them in the design and management of projects to enhance their standard of living (Retrieved from website: www.projectwoo.org). Their efforts, based on these needs assessments, resulted in the achievement of the first public transportation out of town, a high-school bus; improvements in primary education; an English education program; and the establishment of a community health center and health education program. Next to these key achievements WOO works on community development programs ranging from a homestay program to community beach days. The larger part of WOO's funding comes from outside of Nicaragua from philanthropists in the U.S and a surf brand. Quite recently additional funding is found through short term volunteer holiday programs, often bought by corporate workers or private school groups (field notes). The next part of this chapter presents the findings of data analysis, that includes WOO's position in Gigante on the promotion of sustainable surf tourism and on the tourism industry of Gigante as a whole.
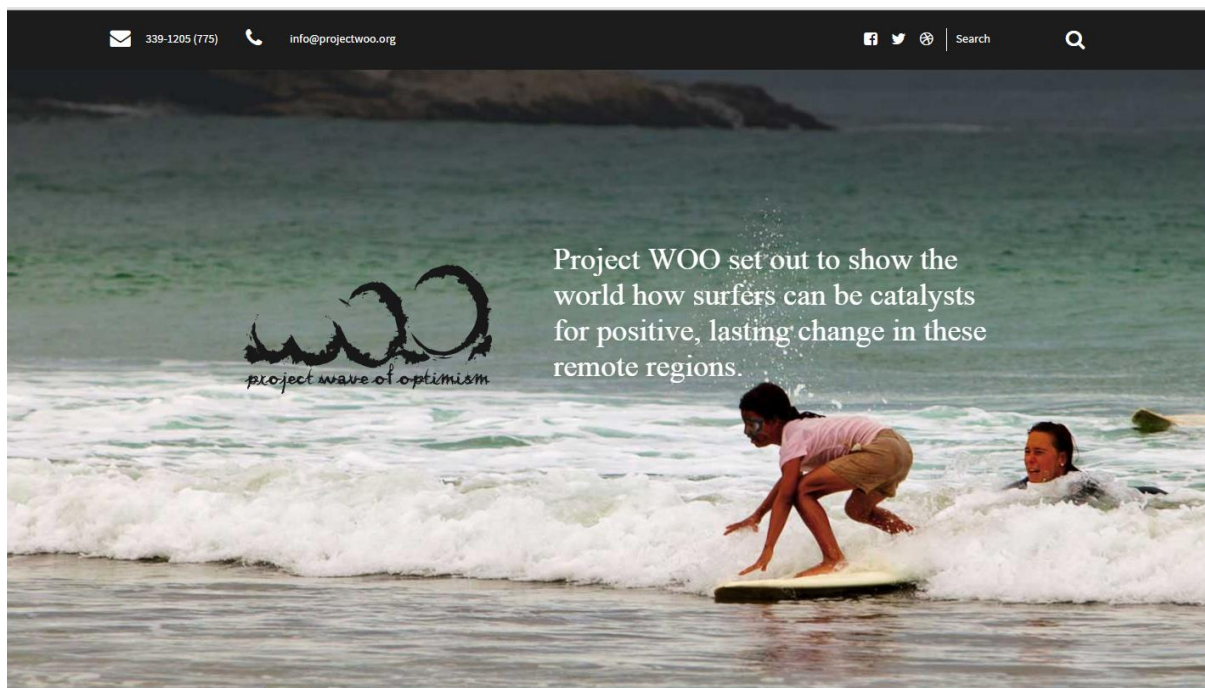
Figure 14: Project WOO's website and mission

4.5 Framework Analysis for Sustainable Surf Tourism

This substantive part of the case-study aims to analyze all data gathered in 3,5 months' time in Playa Gigante. Quotes and pictures (shot by the author) are used to illustrate findings with references to field observations, informal conservations and in-depth interviews. The interviews can be traced to a specific day, whereas the observations have taken shape over the whole period of field work. This chapter is grounded in six sustainable surf tourism indicators comprising the FASST framework explained before. They were content analyzed with use of software that produced a code tree (appendix 2). The code tree already gives some insight into the distribution of references; it appeared that most referenced were coordinated planning and limits to growth, surf tourism contributing to poverty alleviation and cross cultural learning respectively. Indeed those indicators are most significant to describe Gigante's state of sustainability in tourism. This chapter will further discuss each FASST indicator, with subtopics that seemed worth mentioning.

4.5.1 A distinct move away from neo-liberal approaches to development

The classic neo-liberal approach to tourism development is growth in tourism numbers in order to provide economic growth. Most respondents supported this view on development, referring to developments in Costa Rica or nearby San Juan del Sur as an example of good economic growth. One national hotel owner noted that:

"The future of Gigante looks great with growth in tourism and projects like the canal and the airport that will bring more investment into the area. And also more construction." (field notes 23-05-2015)

Indeed growth of tourism is expected, due to the increase of marketing through travelers' word of mouth, guidebooks and the internet; due to a new regional airport, a 20 minute drive away from Gigante; a paved road and possibly due to the proposed Canal project. This made a tourism service providing company's owner very optimistic:

"I think any business in the future of Nicaragua in itself looks positive, there is a massive opportunity here. I don't see anything negative, only positive. It's going to increase, it's going to do very well ... It will bring Nicaragua into the future. And it will sell a different place, not just surfing and tourism ... I sure believe that maybe within 5 years it is going to be unrecognizable." (field notes 22-06-2015)

All this optimism is explained by the director of Project WOO, as he explains ways to have community members involved in the project:

"You need to incentivize everything, the most popular incentive is money. So therefore people would just want [tourism] growth." (field notes 20-03-2015)

Especially in poor rural communities it makes sense that residents want to make money to provide for their daily needs. But FASST requires a move away from neo liberal economic growth only practices, as most often these "economic incentives" do not contribute as much to local communities as a result of all-inclusive tourism enterprises that are owned by wealthy national and foreign entrepreneurs that exclude small and micro business from benefits of tourism (Ponting & O'Brien 2014). In this sense tourism in Gigante seems to move towards unsustainable forms of tourism. The first local surf tour company in Gigante reflects on this:

"The benefit is that there will be more tourists, the business receive more economic income, the disadvantage is that everyone comes into town, it's possible that today it is a clean place tomorrow it can be a place that's very dirty." (field notes 28-05-2015)

He describes how quickly tourism, without regulation, could pollute the destination. Through observations, unregulated development has led to several sustainability issues, like little waste management efforts, water depletion, increases in criminality and drug use, illegal construction and privatization of natural recourses. Part of the issue could be little regulation on starting a business in the first place:

"First you buy a property, than you send your business plan to the Alcaldia (municipality) showing how many beds you have, what kind of structure you are building (rustique/modern etc), and what your services will be. Once you've done that, you can construct, do whatever you want." (field notes 23-05-2015)

As seen in the next chapter, weak regulation does not help to move beyond neo liberal "business as usual" models, requiring governance intervention and regulation on responsible businesses that work in fragile rural economies.

Homestays

Some tourists in Gigante use homestay families for all-inclusive accommodation. Homestays are in the first place used by project WOO to host their volunteers, part of the three month program. Also, volunteer groups that visit Gigante for a week of immersion into WOO's activities are often hosted in homestays. In the last two years the locally owned Spanish school started to provide homestay families for accommodation for their Spanish students. In both cases staying with a homestay family is meant to provide insights into the local culture,

possibilities to improve Spanish and provide interaction with foreign people for the families receiving the tourists. The prerequisites to be a homestay family are that they need to have at least one private room available and working sanitary systems, which a large part of the community still lacks. Currently thirteen homestay families are included in the network that receives tourists' a large part of the year. Homestays receive a fair amount from both institutions to be able to provide daily meals for their guests and some extra to be able to improve their housing situation. The two organizations use different payments, with WOO paying 91 dollars a week including two meals served, while the Spanish school pays 80 dollars for 3 meals a day. For the following year project WOO promised to add another dollar a week (field notes observations). It is observed that the families included in homestay housing have made clear improvements into their housing situation. Some have even started building extra housing facilities next to their own to cater for tourists looking for cheap accommodation and local immersion.

Figure 15: The homestay on the left was able to invest in the construction right, able to host four tourists instead of one

In this sense payments for homestays move away from a neo-liberalism business model. They go beyond the minimum payments for accommodation and meals, in order for the families to

maximize their benefits from tourism. Interestingly, according to WOO's volunteer coordinator, homestays did not cause conflict among poorer families, but with businesses:

"There's 13 families benefiting from being a homestay right now, but at the moment there's issues where the have-a-lots the Nicaraguan tourism enterprise owners complain about WOO taking away clientele from the regular hostels/hotels and restaurants." (field notes)

Clearly Nicaraguan business owners hold neo-liberal views of free market disruption because of the homestay program.

Enterprises

The most apparent form of corporate social responsibility going beyond a neo-liberal model in Gigante is shown by a foreign owned cybercafé that provides food and beverage as well. It was started in 2010 to serve as the first public internet access in Gigante, where next to providing internet for tourists it also provides internet and printing for the community. Local children can also do their computer homework for a small payment. The café hires local Nicaraguan staff as much as possible and products are organic and locally grown with as little use of plastic packages as possible. In the meantime internet has become mainstream in Gigante which changed the community's reliance on the café. The owners' views reflect on the way the company functions:

"For me working in tourism has always been a means to provide services to the community…It is important that tourism shows positive effects of Gringo's (western tourists) not only drinking, partying and using drugs. We need to show that there are people that care." (field notes 25-02-2015)

Figure 16: The Cybercafé

Other examples are less obvious, but there are other entrepreneurs who volunteer for communal activities, provide free yoga and art classes and sponsor sports teams. These good intentions reflect a will from most entrepreneurs to positively develop Gigante, though efforts are often uncoordinated, badly promoted and infrequently organized.

Competition

However, good intentions by tourism enterprises are still far behind the business model for profits. With growth of tourism enterprises, competition between businesses grows. Together they compete for the common resources available, which could potentially devalue tourism products. Respondents mentioned that competition in the first place is a good thing, as it diversifies the destination's tourism product. As noted by the Spanish school owner:

"I think it (sustainability) depends on the people responsible for tourism in every area. If there is 10 people that have the intention of opening a restaurant and every restaurant is different it's good, perfect. That with other tourism services helps to sustain a tourism area." (field notes 21-05-2015)

Obviously, if all would open the same type of tourism service, it would degrade a tourism area. Interestingly several business are providing all-inclusive packages, or want to do so in the future. Like one of the hostels only providing backpacker accommodation now:

"A [all-inclusive] surfcamp is better, because you get less people and they spend more money. But it will give more work too, you have to give the guests two surf sessions a day, transport and food." (field notes 19-05-2015)

Several nationals are looking to follow the all-inclusive, resort style business model, now only shown by more wealthy entrepreneurs. This could increase competition on the surf resort market, driving down prices. And more importantly surf resorts exclude smaller bars, restaurants, tourism services and shops from benefitting from incoming tourists. Like one restaurant owner noted:

"With all those enterprises that sell packages we don't earn anything." (field notes 25-05-2015)

Interestingly it seemed that respondents where just fine with some degree of inequality and foreign ownership, as illustrated by the national backpacker hostel owner:

"Like if you go to San Juan del Sur, most enterprises are foreign owned. Because they have more money to invest! That's way more difficult for a local, he has to work very hard to do the same thing. This is the life, la vida de negocio (the life of business). The people that have the money will take that advantage." (field notes 19-05-2015)

Figure 17: Nicaraguan's trying to build an Hotel step-by-step

4.5.2 Coordinated planning and limits to growth

At first sight Gigante seems to be an unplanned tourism site and therefore certainly lacking limits to growth, although there are emerging decision making processes that could change decision making as a response to a lack of planning in the past. Current trends and future opportunities will be discussed by topic.

Limits to growth

Gigante, in its initial phase of tourism development, is not looking at regulating the influx of tourists yet. At this stage there might not be an urge to constrain, as every new visitor brings in more money for businesses. On the other hand, Gigante is about to experience growth over the years that might exceed the destination's capacities. Though regulation to achieve limits to growth in the future seem to be far from reality as explained by Project WOO's director:

"For coordination and limits to growth you need a strong governmental institution, which is not corrupt. The Sandinistas do everything to create incentives for foreign entrepreneurs to come in, where there is a law on tax benefits for foreigners that want to start a business. There is no limits to growth in Gigante, and it is all very unplanned, because there is a corrupt government and a weak municipality." (field notes 14-05-2015)

Growth of tourism is definitely taking place along the lines set out by the municipal government. This can be seen from the granted construction of a regional airport, a 50 million dollar investment in the nearby Agua Wellness resort, a request for gas stations and more banks scheduled to open near the Iguana resort. The municipality has observed that the national market for beach tourism has been growing, with more and more Nicaraguans arriving with busses form the area (field notes 23-05-2015). Limits to growth is challenging and will probably more depend on local stakeholders then on the national and regional governments.

Figure 18: Playa Redonda: Agua wellness, large holiday homes and a 'private beach'

Some change might be on the way, however. The president of the International Surfing Association (ISA) met with President Daniel Ortega to discuss the future of surfing in Nicaragua. ISA's main message was:

"To keep the beaches the way they are, I've talked to the President (Ortega) and the Board of INTUR (Nicaragua's tourism association) that they shouldn't allow any more construction on the beaches, to keep the view we have now. The area needs to develop, but not directly on the beach, that should be a free space." (field notes 05-06-2015)

Figuur 19: Ortega meets Aguerra (ISA) in 2012 on the future of surfing in Nicaragua (ISA 2012)

This message was confirmed by the local municipality:

"There is a lot of investors that want to build big buildings, but we need to tell them it's not possible … No more development of two stories should be allowed. We want to preserve what we have." (field notes 05-06-2015)

Stakeholder coordination

It seems that the destination's sustainability cannot be determined by governmental agencies at this point. Therefore coordination between the destination's stakeholders is increasingly important to decide on a common agenda for the future of their living environments. This brings several challenges as the community of stakeholders consists of national residents, foreigners, rich, poor and tourists. These will be described below, including some recent developments that could help to develop SST.

Community members

The community is said to be unorganized, creating lack of agreement between its members on local issues. Only from the 1980's the first Nicaraguans settled in Gigante to start living from fishing and agriculture and already in the 90's Gigante started its involvement in tourism, not allowing much time to build community relationships. The community is spread out over 5 districts formed of many families with an estimate of 580 inhabitants. Respondents have described the community as unorganized, being unable to agree on set issues during community meetings. They are said to focus on short term benefits, unable to agree on long term community goals, because of self-interest preference. An example was a community meeting for installing a common potable water system for the whole village through digging a communal well. As a Nicaraguan community member noted:

"The community is unorganized, very different from other villages. Here the people are egoists … Like with the water meeting that didn't succeed." (field notes 20-02-2015)

The community was not able to achieve full agreement on purchasing land as a community to install the well, because not all members wanted to invest their money in a communal fund. This is the first and most clear example of how the community works. Other facets of community interactions are discussed in the next chapters.

In 2014, Gigante's residents installed a local committee of community members, which are included in decision making on the majority of issues in town. Although the members have not been democratically chosen, according to WOO, the eight members were the ones that showed interest in community leadership (field notes 20-03-2015). The committee represents nationally owned tourism businesses, fisheries and the community's residents. The aims of the committee are reflected by the committee's secretary:

"It will become like San Juan but smaller and better ... in San Juan it is all foreigners and here we want to preserve the Nacionales (Nicaraguans) and the natural resources we have. San Juan has about 20 years of development already and Gigante just about 4 years. But we want to be better, to preserve, to be a local town of Nicaraguans." (field notes 25-05-2015)

One of their main activities has been to start an association of small and micro businesses supported by the municipal government, as explained by the committee's secretary:

"The small and micro enterprises are now organized in an association that consist of 21 members. All entrepreneurs are Nicaraguan and from Gigante. The two main points of focus: A loan from the bank as an association to improve the small businesses; And making sure that all businesses are legal, in the sense that they fit in Gigante, pay taxes fitting to their services etc." (field notes 25-05-2015)

Figure 20: Small Nicaraguan tourism businesses slowly pop up on the northern end of Playa Gigante

The committee started the first coordinated efforts in Gigante to regulate and improve tourism, their focus is on national Nicaraguan businesses only, excluding all foreigners that are now also part of the community. Respondents specifically mentioned two meetings organized by the committee, where all stakeholders were involved: one on water management and the other on the issue of increased criminality. These events provide potential for the future of stakeholder coordination in Gigante if this shift is to be sustained and improved.

The president of the committee is said to be very influential and has a tourism business of his own. He has a major stake in local politics, which he seems to use for the good and the bad. One example is that he has been using his influence by spreading rumors on WOO's motives and personal interest into gaining profits from working with the community of Gigante. It followed after a conflict with WOO that didn't communicate effectively to the committee on their plans for communal programs. Fortunately they settled the conflict and aimed to improve their relationships (field notes). This event just shows how difficult it is to cooperate on a local level with different people with different cultures that leads to conflicting interests, feelings and local gossip. This lack of mutual understanding needs to be resolved to improve coordination, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Community involvement by WOO

Although WOO is observed to be very present into community building and improvements in community members' lives, several informal conversations pointed out that a large part of the community including entrepreneurs do not understand what WOO is doing, and why. Nicaraguans have degrees of historically grounded suspicion towards North-Americans coming down to aim to aid the poor. And the tourism industry doesn't have any buy-in to WOO's programs, which is part of creating partnerships for local coordination that WOO's director admits is lacking:

"But we didn't have the time for this, like other non-profits, we have been busy looking for funding, to be able to fund our short term goals. You need some space to be able to look beyond, to be able to create partnerships." (field notes 15-05-2015)

This leads to a lack of long term vision by WOO, not being able to show what they are actually aiming for in the long run, unclear for the community and their volunteers. Currently WOO's director is aiming to organize and restructure WOO for the long term, not taking on any new large projects. Recently WOO has started to improve the community's stake in the organization, to increase communal support. As *"we (WOO staff) understand tourists as we*

are travelers, and Nicaraguans understand the political and cultural context." (field notes 31-05-2015)

One example is that the community health center inaugurated in April 2014 is run by two Nicaraguans, one from Gigante, with assistance from a WOO staff member. Also, WOO plans to hire a Nicaraguan English teacher and Health Center Manager. To connect the community to the health program they aim to use a group of local women to provide health education and be a trust person in health consultations. A potentially very beneficial program is that of 17 scholarship students from Gigante who are obliged to perform eight volunteer hours a week with Project WOO to assist the community and learn following their studies preferences. The scholarship institute, named Fabretto, is a Nicaraguan non-profit from the capital Managua that partnered with WOO. They recently demanded the students to work with WOO, to build up field experience in their areas of studies. The students have been spread out over WOO's health program for medical students, English teaching for students studying language or tourism and voluntourism programs for students of tourism and communication. This program could increase the community's understanding of WOO through a direct stake in the community.

Project WOO is the only organization that works directly with the community members; the staff has ties with all entrepreneurs as well as the local government and community committee; and they are passionate surfers. Therefore they could have a great stake in assisting to make sure tourism development is coordinated between all parties, and takes notice of its national residents (field notes 31-05-2015). WOO's potential new strategy is described by WOO's volunteer coordinator:

"We need to start looking for opportunities to engage with business. Tourism industry. If we don't, I think WOO will be a small part of the community and stagnate with that. If we do, we have the potential to be something bigger ... I really see how the only thing that really incentivizes community members for program engagement is economic reasons. So should we not look at the best ways for the community to make money?" (field notes 31-05-2015)

Businesses

The businesses in Gigante involved in tourism don't have a clear platform where they all interact or are organized together, except for two community meetings mentioned earlier. It is observed that the influx of tourism enterprises is unlimited. Entrepreneurs are continuously starting new projects or improvements to their existing accommodation or restaurants to be

able to provide for more tourists. One foreign owned tourism firm known as the Hostel has the largest share of tourism revenues and property ownership, owning a large Hostel with two supporting accommodations, a hotel, a restaurant, sail yacht and a boat for surf and fishing tours. They are said to be most influential in tourism development, making sure that electricity provision improved in town, hosting major events and festivals. As one foreign hotel owner illustrates:

"I see it growing every year. I don't think it will ever be San Juan. It's a funny town, because it's a lot more Gringo businesses now. That seems to not take over the town but have really expanded." (field notes 23-05-2015)

San Juan del Sur is known for being foreign owned leading to large inequalities. Nonetheless Gigante's foreign entrepreneurs have taken over, predominantly with the Hostel, three inclusive surf resorts, 2 hotels and a bed and breakfast, that together receive the largest share of tourists that enter Gigante. Especially by resorts, that in the future will need to share, as stated by the municipality:

"Those resorts need to spend 1% in the resort and then 1% out of it. Like we do with Iguana, tourists always go to local restaurants next to staying in the resort ... The companies that don't let the tourists spend time outside the camp, we need to talk to them and regulate that they start doing that. So they also contribute to the local enterprises." (field notes 05-06-2015)

Including foreign owners into coordinated destination planning by local authorities is a must for inclusive destination governance that provides dialogue and mutual understanding on general issues like these.

Figure 21: One of the first surf resorts

Land ownership

Only since 2011 the municipality started to revise coastal tourism development pointing out issues like privatization, overdevelopment and exploitation of resources. Now no more construction is allowed closer than 50 meters to the median high tide line and no more construction at all on the Gigante's coast. Stated by the municipal government:

"Until four years ago Toleños (the municipality) haven't been in control, where tourism development has been determined by foreigners and rich nationals, growth has been unplanned." (field notes 23-05-2015)

The government is still in its implementing phase of new plans for tourism development. The problem is not turned around easily as resorts have settled in, with an absence of public roads to their beaches. Nicaraguans feel that they have lost ownership over these lands, illustrated by the Spanish school owner:

"Look at how much around here is privatized, we can't exactly say what is ours. A lot of people with more money and influence could come in here and privatize the area. But in Nicaragua the law says that beaches are public, but the resorts privatized the land around, so you can't enter. How can you enter? Like playa Redonda, it's a public beach, but now it's private as you have to go through several security posts. So, there's no public roads." (field notes 21-05-2015)

The current situation in Nicaragua is clear: the government's incentives have made it possible for wealthy entrepreneurs to colonize pieces of Nicaraguan coast.

Figure 22: Sign at Iguana resort, playa Colorado

Even the president of the ISA couldn't give a solution for the issue in a personal dialogue:

"There is no such thing as privatization of beaches, because by law a beach is publicly accessible. Santana and Colorados are in some way accessible and for Manzanillo you can take a boat."

Now that access by boat isn't really possible for Nicaraguans who cannot afford such a service, he responded:

"In those cases people (of Nicaragua) need to sue the resorts that block access. Like Guacalito that blocks access to Manzanillo. Which is difficult but they need to open it up somehow."

And then he concluded:

"Tourism brings in good and bad." (field notes 05-06-2015)

Gigante is surrounded by three resorts that have to some extent privatized public space, that also host some of the most perfect waves in the area. The challenge now is to make sure that beaches that remained undeveloped don't follow the same path. This process is actually taking place at Gigante's neighboring beach Playa Amarillo. The owner of the backpackers' hostel describes how it starts:

"Take for example Playa Amarillo, there's a cooperative there that are waiting to obtain the land titles by the government, to then sell it. They do not think of developing a business on the beach, instead they sell it for a low price, spending that in a short time. And they will then end up even poorer." (19-05-2015)

During my stay in Gigante this cooperative was blocking access to the beach for a long period of time, as a protest to demand their papers. When asked about reasons for selling the beach a cooperative member responded while rubbing her finger tips:

"We just want to have the plata, plata, plata (money)."(field notes)

Several respondents thought the cooperative would sell the land back to the government, to be developed into a tourism resort, part of the disputed Nicaragua Canal project. Local governments of Gigante and Tola don't have any influence on Amarillo's future, as it falls under national government rule alone (field notes 23-05-2015 and 25-05-2015). Amarillo is a very important part of Gigante's surf tourism, as it is the nearest accessible surf beach by foot

with decent waves. If it follows the path of privatization it would completely change the touristic product Gigante has to offer to surf tourists and beach goers.

Figure 23: Playa Amarillo, still pristine

Infrastructure

Gigante is about to obtain a paved road going almost all the way into town. Before, for about eighteen kilometers the road consisted of flattened dirt road, which would often wash out during the rainy season, obstructing most forms of transport into town and putting a halt to the tourist season.

Figure 24: Local system for public transportation used by Nicaraguans and budget travelers

Now with improvements in road infrastructure it will be possible to extend the tourism season and allowing more goods and more powerful construction machinery to enter town year round. A large part of the road construction is funded by the most high end resort south of Gigante, Guacalito de la Isla group. This is said to be one of the largest incentives for a near future growth in tourism arrivals and a growth in Gigante's tourism industry. Together with the constructed regional airport, it could extend the touristic season and improve year round accessibility. Some fear that this will lead to exploitation of the area, like in San Juan. One hotel owner sums up:

"In think it's only a matter of time, and it will make a huge difference … once that road is paved to Gigante…Some people think that's a good thing, some don't. Some are afraid that when the road gets paved, Gigante is going to be the next San Juan, but I don't think it needs to be that way. San Juan is much bigger, it's the atmosphere that they've grown to. Not the atmosphere that is growing here in this town. It's growing as a surfing community, a yoga community, fishing. Those kind of things. I don't see it growing into a nightclub party town. There are still great parties though." (field notes 23-05-2015)

As discussed earlier, no measures have been taken to limit the influx of tourism, to actually maintain the "atmosphere" that Gigante has now. As accessibility can create new opportunities to improve tourism services, it can also be a threat when it comes unplanned, as seen in San Juan del Sur, Costa Rica and other examples worldwide.

Criminality

A clear example of what an unplanned influx of tourism could do is shown by a dramatic increase in criminal activities in Gigante. This is often seen with tourism in developing countries with great economic inequalities. An increase in drug use and stories of drug trafficking go around town. The possible effects were described by the backpacker hostel owner:

"For example the parties and drugs. Like the majority of the tourists smoke Marihuana and maybe when a tourist is friendly with a local, he offers it. And he's like, hay que rico (that's nice)! And that's how he learns to smoke marihuana and starts to use drugs. This brings problems for him, for his family, he doesn't want to work anymore. And he'll have problems with the police." (field notes 19-05-2015)

This of course doesn't reflect reality in all cases, but it gives an idea of the issues respondents see with increases of drug use in town. Larger consequences are felt by an increase of robberies in the past two years. This has affected the sense of security for residents as well as for tourists. Due to lack of police in town there occurred several robberies reaching up to at least fifteen during my stay in Nicaragua. These range from robberies with guns, knives and burglaries without any legal prosecution or the possibility of doing an effective theft declaration as the nearest police station is eighteen kilometers away in the town of Tola. The police were never able to come to Gigante because of a lack of funding and available officers. As a private sector response two foreign owned businesses, the Hostel and a surf resort, hired private investigators to investigate robberies that occurred around and in their properties. Next to that the community committee offered to assist in future robbery declarations in Tola to bridge the language gap tourists might have.

The increase in criminal activity has clearly led to a sense of insecurity in Gigante. This shows from the fact that WOO volunteers have curfews at sunset, tourists are advised not to walk through town after dark and tourism entrepreneurs and residents improve their security by improving fencing, buying guard dogs and hiring security personnel. Several respondents were aware of the consequences to their businesses:

"Only sometimes the police shows up when there's robberies. But really they don't do anything. This brings serious problems to this place, because if you get robbed you will tell others about it to be careful, or that they shouldn't go to Gigante. That affects us (field notes 23-05-2015)."

A positive outcome of this issue is that for the first time there was a successful community meeting on the issue, which involved all stakeholders. If all stakeholders are able to coordinate to tackle the issue of criminality, there might be potential to tackle other issues on the destination's sustainability as well.

4.5.3 Fostering systematic attempts to cross-cultural understanding

Actual systematic attempts to cross-cultural understanding are key to project WOO's mission and up until now there has not been any other organization or business that has done so successfully in Gigante. The importance of cross-cultural understanding as a fundament to a sustainable tourism destination is discussed by the cybercafé owner:

"Well there's not a direct effect from [project WOO's] community building on tourism, but more indirect. In increased safety as everyone knows each other and a happier town where people are able to discuss difficulties and are able to live with each other (field notes 25-02-2015)."

He states that WOO's community building efforts are not necessarily contributing directly, but indirectly to provide a "happier and safer town". In his efforts to live up to their mission WOO's director observes that:

"when tourism just came to Gigante the community was curious on what the other cultures have etc. But now the gap is going to grow, because they also want a surfboard, ipad, computer like the tourists that come in." (field notes 14-05-2015)

He thinks that a gap between tourists might grow, as locals become aware of material inequalities compared to tourists. If this development occurs, attempts to cross-cultural understanding would be of even greater value to close the gap. This part of the FASST framework further discusses the impacts of WOO's programs and provides a piece on a lack of understanding that stands in the way of cross-cultural understanding.

Volunteer tourism

At the core of Project WOO's attempts to cross-cultural understanding is volunteer tourism: volunteers who work in and with the community executing several programs. They have seen a recent increase in the number of long and short term volunteers, which will probably persist. This has increased the amount of work that can be done and increased revenues retrieved from the volunteers to fund the project.

Figure 25: Volunteers working on health education

Long-term volunteers

The long term volunteers have the possibility to immerse themselves in Nicaraguan culture, tourism and surfing. The long term program runs only for volunteers who are available for three months or more, with an obligation to stay the first three months in a homestay family, to familiarize with the community and their culture. I observed the volunteers' daily activities, which consisted of volunteers working on organizing a summer camp for local youth, teaching at the primary school and assisting in activities done by short term volunteers. Cross cultural understanding is promoted through this program, and is shown by WOO volunteers that mentioned that they gained another perspective on their own lives, like one described:

"I think everything here is more straightforward and you have what you have and you do what you can with what you have, and that's it. In the U.S. everything is so busy, and on schedules. There is just so much hype, this is my personal perspective." (field notes 21-06-2015)

They show they have a greater understanding of the Nicaraguan way of life, the cultural differences and are able to put (especially economic) inequality into perspective. Living three months with a Nicaraguan family provides a large part of this understanding. Volunteers who stay longer than three months are able to live in town by themselves, which gives them another perspective, that of tourism in Gigante:

"Being out more at night you see a different side of things ... In my homestay, my mom is very religious, goes to church, there weren't any crazy parties in my house ... [Later] I spend more time with white people. The tourism side of Gigante right now is a fun culture I guess. Open mic, burger night, they are little Gringo niches. It was interesting to have a peek in those niches, and that they are not really connected to the community at all. It's kind of weird being the bridge between them. Which is kind of part of the experience, it's really interesting. It makes me question, like why don't you [tourists] interact with locals at all? Right? It doesn't have to be like, ok now we'll go and play soccer with local children or do a bread baking class. Just, like taking a walk through the community, listening to the church. Going to a different pulperia (shop) or so." (field notes 21-06-2015)

She highlights WOO staff's great position in Gigante, where they are the bridge between tourists and the Nicaraguan community. This gives potential to be involved in transferring cross-cultural understanding now only done through volunteer programs to the tourism industry as whole. However, being in this bridge position doesn't seem to be easy, as WOO also received a lot of critique and misunderstanding of their purposes from other stakeholders. It can make your work feel less rewarding if you get critique, while you aim to do "good". As mentioned by one of the long-term volunteers:

"I don't know if the work we do is actually good, everybody struggles with that. But I think the main thing that I value is the cultural exchange. If I can leave behind a paved way for new foreigners come in to connect to people in Gigante, that's great. Showing a different side of a foreigner." (field notes 02-06-2015)

It shows that WOO's efforts are still small scale, but on a personal level can have a great impact. The challenge is to be able to develop this model to Gigante's stakeholders, raising awareness on Gigante's realities.

Short term volunteers

Short term volunteers visit project WOO in groups of 6 to 15 people, travelling for a volunteering holiday or study. In a one to two week program the volunteers engage in local cultural activities and are obligated to engage in a service project ranging from organizing a community beach day to teaching English and construction work like building school classrooms or improving Gigante's health center. Short term volunteer groups are not able to grasp as much cultural understanding as long term volunteers, though especially if they have spent the week in a homestay family, they seem very much aware of the cultural and economic differences which they will take home. As a long term volunteer observed:

"I think WOO does a great job in teaching them about ... having consent of the locals by doing a project. Normally when you think of gringos volunteering in Central America you're thinking of church groups building wells, but this is very different what we're doing." (field notes 03-04-2015)

The difference with WOO's approach, and how it is received by a group, really depends on the groups. I have observed that immersion through homestay and in WOO's programs does promote awareness, as mentioned by WOO staff. Though groups of corporate volunteers, who try to combine holidays with "doing good" by building a classroom, cannot always grasp awareness on local issues. As one volunteer said while on a sailing cruise:

"I did not know doing good would feel so good." (field notes)

She is likely to fit into the paradigm of a western tourist coming over to the south, to come and alleviate poverty for a week, and be content with that afterwards. Although these groups do not promote cross-cultural learning as much, they do provide a large share of WOO's funding.

Volunteers for accommodation

The hype on providing volunteer possibilities also landed with three tourism enterprises, the foreign owned Hostel, a Nicaraguan backpacker's hostel and a foreign owned Hotel. Their philosophy is not on providing cross-cultural learning, but on cheap labor. Volunteers often help out with smaller chores that are not covered by full-time workers, or if for a longer time they start to run the bar, restaurants, cleaning etc. They work in exchange for free accommodation and often a daily meal. In this way travelers can extend their stay, without spending much money. I observed that doing smaller chores can be quite harmless, like art

projects and beach clean ups for example. And there might even be some positive interaction between local Nicaraguan workers and volunteers. However, issues could arise as volunteers start to run or manage a hostel for a few months, start waitressing or take tourists on trips. It could possibly take away jobs from local Nicaraguans that are well able to learn to do these jobs or for those that attempt to start to work in tourism. It could exacerbate conflicts, as it is an unequal treatment to Nicaraguans in need of an income.

Figure 26: One of the businesses that host volunteers

Homestays

As mentioned before, for tourists, living in a homestay in Gigante is one of the key methods to promote cross-cultural learning. As explained by WOO's director:

"Homestays they function like a business now, providing economic value and next to that promoting cultural exchange. Bringing foreigners and Nicaraguans closer to each other. As tourism has the tendency of creating a gap between tourists and locals, we have seen through the homestays that there is more understanding between the two, bridging that cultural gap of interaction." (field notes 20-03-2015)

Homestays have shown to promote mutual understanding, both with the (volunteer) tourist and the homestay family. As one volunteer commented on the 3 month experience:

"Incredible! I loved it! It helped my Spanish so much! It's so enlightening, to live with a family in this part of the world and experience how people live so differently here and realize how little you really need, it puts everything into perspective." (field notes 03-04-2015)

Also a homestay "mom" expressed her thoughts:

"I like to receive volunteers because I live alone and my son is not always there. It was great to have a volunteer in my house for three months, we would always eat together chat and so on." (field notes)

Of course, homestays don't always provide a connection this positive, as people do not always match with each other. As described by a WOO volunteer:

"One homestay mom is always really shy, Grace (volunteer) stayed with her and didn't really like it since it was so quiet all the time, she maybe thought she wasn't liked. Now bilingual volunteers came in for a week, they connected really well with her and she showed a different side of her, happy, open, communicative. Joining every activity that has been organized that week. Such a positive exchange!" (field notes 02-06-2015)

Next to cross cultural learning the main incentive for being part of the homestays in Gigante remains economic, as the payment for homestays provide for further improvements of a good economic living standard.

Also the Spanish school has discovered homestays to be a useful tool for Spanish learning students, to practice their phrases and learn about the Nicaraguan way of life. Most of the times it creates similar cross-cultural understanding to that of WOO's short term volunteers program. But there are threats to cross-cultural learning observed as well. Spanish students are not necessarily screened before entering a homestay, or told about Nicaraguan do's and don'ts. Here any tourist is allowed to enter inside of a Nicaraguan family, also able to transmit the tourists' bad habits to family members. An example observed is that of three Australians staying with a well-known homestay family. They hung around the house often, smoking marihuana, cursing and didn't show much respect for the family's children (field notes). This could also be part of learning about foreign behavior, but possibly with negative outcomes. It could create more of a gap between Nicaraguans and tourists than bridging it.

Figure 27: A most idyllic setting for a spanish school

Spanish lessons provided in Gigante are very useful to obtain cultural learning if the student is able to learn to have basic Spanish conversations, as all Spanish teachers are from the nearby area, providing extensive information on the local culture.

"We want to give a profile that's touristic, cultural, social and educative at the same time. Political, history, geographical themes are included in the lessons." (field notes 21-05-2015)

The Spanish school owner's aim was to provide work for Nicaraguan residents of Gigante, but up until now it was impossible to find educated residents that could do that job. This will hopefully change in the future, with help of WOO's programs. It could be an area for collaboration, promoting cross cultural exchange in the future between Spanish students and Gigante's residents.

Tourism bubble

The behavior of the Australians in the homestay fit into the stereotype of the majority of tourists who visit Gigante: tourists who remain inside a tourism bubble, unaware of their surroundings and tourism's direct influence on destinations. These tourists consist for the large part of surfers, travelling to Nicaragua for a short holiday, hunting for perfect and uncrowded waves. To return home with stories on their biggest waves, heaviest wipe-outs, tropical weather and beach parties. For a lot of surfers and travelers, Nicaragua is still a country where tourism and surfing is relatively off the grid, cheap and undeveloped. It still provides empty beaches, uncrowded waves and a genuine experience. Tourists mentioned that they found San Juan del Sur or Costa Rica already too developed, with busy beaches and crowded waves. Therefore, most travelers reason that you need to visit and discover a country before it's over-developed, like one surf tourist mentioned:

"I wanted to visit Nicaragua before it becomes developed like Costa Rica" (field notes).

They do not know, realize or care that their visits are part of paving the way for over-development, especially if future development occurs unregulated. They are uninformed about local issues that relate to their presence and in the short visit, are pretty much occupied with surfing waves and relaxing.

Figure 28: Surfers returning from a surf tour

On the other side they are somehow concerned with the environment, as tourists commented on plastics that cover the beach, and the access to waves, as mentioned by a group of surfers in one of the surf resorts:

"Preservation is about the spots, no pollution, reef preservation, beaches. Anything in order to preserve the wave and the atmosphere." (field notes)

If their stay did contribute to preservation of spots, the environment or the atmosphere they will never really know. There is no information found on how Gigante approaches these issues, and that there is a community, with assistance by WOO and some enterprises that care to improve the living conditions opposed to exploitation alone. An example of how detached surfers are from Nicaraguan realities was given by a group of surfers who stayed in nearby Iguana:

"My friend is looking to buy property to start a recreational project for the local kids. To give them something to do, because now their only entertainment is us driving by and honking as they stand waving on the side of the road." (field notes)

Throughout my fieldwork it seemed that people staying at Iguana are often detached from reality, the surf and golf resort is a gated touristic village right on Playa Colorado that produces perfect waves most of the year. It is difficult to find public access to this beach, which is enforced by their gates and security staff. From Gigante, it is possible to walk to Colorado passing through Amarillo and a rocky point. This isn't appreciated by Iguana's management as noted by a WOO staff member:

"One time after spending all day on the beach at Colorado I went to buy food at the Iguana beach club. The Nicaraguan security guard approached me stating that people from Gigante are not allowed anymore to enter the beach through the rocks. Because of a new policy. You can only enter when you have an invitation from someone that lives or stays there. "People that stay in Iguana want to be separated from other people", is what he said. I could understand that they need to guarantee security for the guests, but with not allowing people from Gigante you're not really building any community, right?" (field notes 30-05-2015)

The resort is actively promoting the tourism bubble, aiming to leave their guests detached from their surroundings, even from other tourists. It creates separation within Nicaragua's touristic areas, which indeed does not provide a good foundation for building a community that includes foreigners and Nicaraguans. Through informal conversations it appeared that

more and more surf tourists are aware of Colorado's reputation as a crowded, unfriendly surf break like a group mentioned:

"We don't want something like Colorado's, which gets good waves but you can never ride them. We want uncrowded waves, like we had in Manzanillo, and Playa Hermosa." (field notes)

Because of Colorado's atmosphere, several tourists left Gigante earlier than planned, like one who was enrolled in Spanish classes and living in a homestay. He observed how tourists at Colorado show behavior of wave ownership, also known as localism. It shows that the surrounding surfing conditions affect tourism in Gigante as well.

Because of the tourism bubble, it seems difficult to promote cross-cultural learning with tourists, as it is supported by the tourist gaze shaped by tourism businesses. Nevertheless it is fundamental for a destination's sustainability, for tourists to understand cultural differences and tourism impacts. To potentially help to raise awareness on common developmental issues that occur globally. Most long and short term volunteers and Spanish students stay with families do show awareness, which could be a model to at least inform visiting tourists on the efforts of local projects and communities that sustain their touristic experience.

4.5.4 Development of surfing at the village level

Gigante with its natural harbor provides the ultimate location for tourism boat trips, most carry surf tourists to the surrounding waves. Because of its ideal location three surf resorts, one restaurant and one tourism services business have made boat trips for surfing and fishing their main service. It is fishermen who have rebuilt their boats to be comfortable for tourists or work as a captain on boats owned by the company. Other towns in the area have followed this model, with one of the most iconic breaks, Lance's Left, receiving up to 20 boats on a good day, with an estimate of 5 surfers on each boat - 100 surfers is a lot. One of the boat tour companies' owners responded to increased crowds:

"Yes, there are a lot of people. But, there are waves that tourists don't know, we need to protect them when we need them when it gets to crowded. Still there are a lot of waves in Tola." (field notes 28-05-2015)

Protection of these resources can only be done by surfers themselves who are familiar with the area. There is a need for local surfers, surf guides and surf instructors to become stewards for the coastal resources, to manage crowding and over-exploitation (Ponting & Obrien 2014).

At the village level there is certainly a group of local young men who have made surfing part of their lifestyle and aim to make it their profession. Gigante hosts two junior 2014 national champions and two locally owned surf related businesses. It appeared that virtually every foreigner in town surfs, with three businesses focused on surf tourists. There is a clear group of local male youth that managed to own a surfboard given by tourists or obtained through WOO's earn a surfboard program, which the kids share between them.

Figure 29: One Gigante 'jovene' earning a WOO surfboard through learning how to make surf wax, possibly setting up a surf wax business

Although there is development of surfing at the village level, it remains unorganized. There has been no formation of a local surf club, local competitions or a certified local surf school. Informally there are Nicaraguans who provide surf lessons or surf guiding to tourists, and project WOO has given children their first surfing experiences during summer camps and community beach days. Many Nicaraguans fear the ocean, as it is a place with dangerous currents that only the fishermen know how to handle. On top of that, the majority of the community does not know how to swim. Especially girls are not present yet in the surf; a local surfer explains one of the possible reasons why:

"The reason why girls don't surf in Gigante is because they are afraid people in town start talking. As soon as a girl is with a guy, there is gossip about them having something with those guys." (field notes)

WOO's female staff is really passionate about getting girls to surf and now started to organize a girls surf club, with about five girls that own a surfboard and they are taken surfing frequently. Females who have been excluded from surfing is a nationwide issue as two, nine and thirteen year old, North-American sisters represent the females in the Nicaraguan surf team.

Figure 30: Nicaraguan surf team (white/blue and yellow shirts) during the World Surfing Games 2015, in nearby Popoyo

Next to WOO's efforts, another Hotel based in Gigante is active in supporting the Nicaraguan surf team paying for their subscription and transport to competitions.

"There is great talent in Gigante, where a few of the team won three medals. And we would like to help out if there would be a surf club starting up. The owner of the place is a surfer, and is always open to help the kids out!" (field notes 20-05-2015)

This Hotel could be a great partner with project WOO, and work as a catalyst for other surf business to support development of surfing at the village level. At this point all official surf instructors, lifeguards and guides are foreigners that came to work for food and accommodation. So, there is great potential for local Nicaraguans starting to work in the surf industry - to be able to earn an income from surf tourism, but also to be leaders in management of surf resources in the area.

4.5.5 Surf tourism contributing to poverty alleviation in destination communities

For the large part, surf tourism and tourism in the area in general has the potential to contribute to poverty alleviation, however in many cases it creates poverty as well. Clear signs of these are the conflicts in land ownership, discussed before; buying locals off their lands to then privatize coastal area's limiting access to resources has already happened. Now, tourism has started to give negative impacts, like a widely mentioned depletion of fresh water resources. Described by the secretary of the community committee:

"The thing we need now is a water project, now we use water from a well 4kms away. The poor in Nicaragua don't have money to buy fresh water, so they drink the water from the well, which is bad for their health." (field notes 25-05-2015)

Indeed, all stakeholders in Gigante, the community and tourism businesses, are dependent on wells for their fresh water. In the community, wells have been running dry for the past three years and aquifers have become salinized and polluted. In the meantime, the small and large tourism resorts provide their guests with hot fresh water showers, swimming pools and perfectly irrigated golf courses.

Figure 31: Iguana golf & surf resort, Playa Colorado

They are able to reach deep water resources with heavy machinery that community members don't have access too. As described by a touristic services company owner:

"They're digging wells with machetes (large knives) and shovels. And that's how they grab their water … when you run into a rock, a sheet rock or a blue rock you're going to have a problem. Devastating. That's what goes on around here." (field notes 22-06-2015)

It is the perfect example of unequal use of environmental resources. San Juan del Sur has suffered from the same issue:

"but now they drawn a pipe to Lake Nicaragua and a purification system funded by international projects and the local government. Maybe that's possible to do for Gigante and other communities." (field notes 21-05-2015)

Like many respondents the Spanish school owner is hopeful for outside stakeholders that want to provide fresh water infrastructure. They do not point at their own or the resorts' responsibilities for depleting local resources. Waiting for outside assistance to come and save the day. One surf resort owner involved in Gigante's water committee is skeptical:

"People believe in a dream of this water project, but it's not going to happen. Not in the way they would like to see it."(field notes 18-05-2015)

This issue shows how tourism can develop and impact local communities very quickly, as tourism develops much quicker than the local community is able to speak up, and be organized. It makes the local community, especially the poor, the first to be affected by resource exploitation.

Figure 32: Gigante's residents first affected, a contrast to surrounding resorts

This is fundamental to community development, as the backpacker hostel owner observes:

"It's about empowerment, which are opportunities for the government to develop with the local people. There should be an organization that helps to empower people, what to do with their land and how to involve in tourism. Because getting the money is not the hardest thing, it is hard to know how to be organized and develop a business." (field notes 19-05-2015)

The next part discusses threats and opportunities for poverty alleviation. Fundamental to project WOO's existence are the programs that involve community development for poverty alleviation. And increasingly businesses are involved in community development as well, that can be added to this part of analysis. Broken down to the indicators determinants: opportunity, empowerment, and security.

Opportunity

The influx of surf tourists and regular tourists visiting Gigante has only positively contributed to poverty alleviation in the sense of economic welfare. Tourism has provided the community with more jobs and another way of having a consistent income. Part of the success of this contribution is revealed by the fact of a constant increase of population of Nicaraguans that

are able to find jobs in tourism in Gigante. The other side of the coin is that because of tourism development the price of living has increased making the often paid minimum wage barely enough to be able to provide to the tourism workers' families. Being personally involved in an all-inclusive surf tourism resort I found how close economic inequality can come together in a surf tourism context:

One surf resort tourist spends around 285 dollars a day, interacting with a local tourism worker earning a staggering 8-9 dollars that same day. So the tourism worker earns only 2.8 % of the revenue that is gained. The amount of tourists that can be served is up to 6. Which can generate a daily revenue of 1760 dollars a day for the entrepreneur and an expenditure to the local worker remaining the same, making the worker earn only 0,47% off the daily revenues. With the minimum living wage in Gigante estimated by WOO at 7 dollars a day for one person, the local tourism worker is able to provide just for himself but not for his family after a week's work. To cope, the resorts boat captain works in construction and fishing to be able to earn a proper income (field notes).

So, surf tourism does provide opportunities for Nicaraguans to rise above poverty levels, but in this case are far below their full potential of a wage that fits to provide for the captain's family.

Gigante has a history of several agencies aiming to improve the lives and involvement into tourism of the community members. One of them is Andalusia, a Spanish non- governmental organization that in the past provided business management training, customer service instruction and cooking and hygiene classes. But most others failed. They have shown a clear sign of uncoordinated planning. One example has been the most high end resort in Central America, Guacalito, situated just south of Gigante that set up a tourism service learning project with Nicaraguans in the area working in tourism, including cooking classes and service learning. This program was supposed to last for four years, but without explanation, it was canceled after a year without any follow up. One hotel, owned by a wealthy Nicaraguan, wants to continue the effort in the near future:

"We want to help to increase capacity of the bars and restaurants in Gigante, assist in service learning. So they can give a better service. We will bring someone from Managua who has experience in that, and we invite the owners to come for the lesson (field notes 20-05-2015)."

It is the same company that supports the Nicaraguan surf team, and aims to only hire Nicaraguans, preferably from the community. There is still a challenge for surf tourism in Gigante to move beyond just hiring local Nicaraguans, but actually looking at improving people's long term well-being.

Empowerment

Fundamental to empowerment is allowing community members to access different types of education, most importantly primary and secondary education. This was also recognized by the owner of the cybercafé:

"Gigante's education level is very low, as it sometimes doesn't go beyond 3rd grade. I think that is the biggest challenge now and why interaction between tourists and locals is still impossible. They might be shy interacting or just not interested. As more kids go to school and the first ones are finishing high school there will be improvements to this. Though there might occur a brain drain of students coming from Gigante that graduate and do not find direct opportunities here, and will go and work in Rivas or Managua." (field notes 25-02-2015)

He effectively points out all opportunities and threats faced, to improvements in education at the village level. Going from support for primary education in town, providing access to secondary education and then to create possibilities for higher education and work in the community that prevents a brain drain. These are all aspects that WOO tried to cover, where at this point attendance has improved recently, explained by WOO's English teacher:

"There is definitely more attendance if you see that there is only 5 kids in 6th grade and about 30 in 1th [of primary school]." (field notes 30-05-2015)

Also numbers of youth attending secondary education rose with 81% through WOO's school bus, and now the first graduates are enrolled in University, with scholarships through WOO and Fabretto. WOO's director feels this is the most successful program so far:

"We are always trying to go back to developing with kids, as they are the new generation. It's more worth putting your energy in people you already have on board through earlier projects, than all the time trying to motivate people that don't really want to be involved." (field notes 14-05-2015)

In addition to their education program, WOO funds an English teacher at the primary school that also started to provide lessons for adults free of charge. These are shown to be successful through observations and were mentioned by WOO's English teacher:

"[Primary school] Teachers they definitely support the program, and ... there is a lot of interest for people to learn English. Not only because they want to work in tourism, an economic reason. But also because of interest, wanting to understand the language." (field notes 30-05-2015)

It is definitely a way to empower individuals to be able to interact with foreigners, possibly work in tourism, or just to promote cross cultural understanding.

Security

Tourism, if well managed and in consideration with the local community, can be very beneficial for diversifying incomes. In Gigante livelihoods are traditionally based on fishing, for local, national and international markets. Nevertheless often and more frequently fishermen return with little catch, receive little revenue and therefore are unable to support their families. Younger generations therefore choose to work in tourism, as this sector is growing. Predominantly one tourism service firm hires around thirty-five former fisherman, who work on boat tours and terrestrial tours. The owner has seen an increase in their housing and their lifestyles on which he tries to raise awareness:

"We speak to them, we give them classes. We explain to them the difference between creating and making a wrong decision how it's going to affect their outcome. Like drug use for example. That would eventually pass on to their sons ... Sometimes they don't realize that casual drug abuse ends up sometimes in destructive manner... The body starts breaking down and stops functioning correctly. It becomes risky in some sense, as it affects your entire family." (field notes 22-06-2015)

Surf tourism will be able to provide more jobs if the local surfers have learned to speak English and have been able to follow lifeguarding and surf coach courses, to ensure tourists' safety. The only family run surf tour business has already made vast improvements to their restaurant and has ambition to expand the business:

"We have plenty of clients, thank god. Part of our vision is to start a surf school for foreigners that want to learn to surf. Both my sons speak English and are also surf guides. Showing people where it is dangerous to surf and where it is good. This helps us out a lot." (field notes 28-05-2015)

This family could be a key stakeholder in developing surfing at the village level as well, to share their knowledge and passion for surfing with younger generation surfers.

Health

Another one of WOO's pillars after an assessment for the communities greatest needs was that of a community health center, which provides basic health services. The health center was inaugurated in 2014 and since then WOO has developed a community health program. The ministry of health prioritized health education, as most common diseases are preventable through education. So, rather than the health center just being a clinic, the doctor and assistants visit the primary school once a week for health classes, which through personal observations shows great results. Children seem most receptive to health information presented in a fun way. They transfer their new knowledge to their parents who become curious and even join the class in some cases.

Figure 33: Project WOO's health class in action, supported by north-american public health volunteers

4.5.6 Improving environmental quality and justice

A first attempt is made to assess if surf tourism in Gigante has an impact on the natural environment. Where most respondents have wished for a higher number of tourists visiting Gigante, there was particularly one elder who was aware of changes in environmental quality:

"If there is too many tourists than a community like us can handle, it can also destroy the place! With too much pollution, construction. In the north tourists already have a lot of concrete, they come here for the enjoyment of nature and the ocean. Before 30-40 years ago it wasn't as warm here, and there was more rain. It is capitalism that took all forests, cutting down for sugar cane, where rivers dried up because plants need so much water and the pesticides that are used to contaminate the aquifers, which brings even more destruction. It is always the rich countries that win, and the poor that lose." (field notes)

He points to all issues, and how the community is directly affected by environmental degradation, not only by tourism but also agriculture. Indeed, a lack of planning has allowed construction near the beach, potentially influencing coastal ecosystems. But, in its early stage no actual severe damage to the environment has been observed or mentioned by respondents because of constructions, which of course could be a threat in the nearby future when tourism numbers increase, as was mentioned by the Spanish school owner:

"It will for sure destroy the resources we have right now. For construction you need to take down trees, a lot of concrete, a lot of needs. Like for example a lot of water, which is now a big crisis in Gigante. Al the rivers that existed in Gigante are dry … So it could make the living system worse than it is now. But I don't know what alternatives there are." (field notes 21-05-2015)

A threat to the environment from tourism is that of garbage pollution, in town as well as on the beach. As tourism numbers increase, the local population increased as well. Together they produce more waste, mainly plastics and packaging, that without an adequate waste management system spreads through town. This has led to several private responses and education efforts that have improved the situation, but not really resolved the issue structurally. The first project was done by the local surf tour company and the first foreigner that settled in Gigante:

"We worked together on a waste program called Pueblo Limpio (clean village). For 4 years. From 2007 we helped the town with this program." (field notes 28-05-2015)

Because of a lack of funds, the project died. Then came Proyecto Ecogigante, a collaboration of the municipality, project WOO, regional non-profit Comunidad Connect and Guacalito resort. They provided extra bins around town, a team that cleans the beach, organize beach clean ups with children and provide education on waste management.

Figure 34: Proyecto Ecogigante bins around town

Still, waste is a major issue that becomes clearest on Sundays and during Easter holidays. Gigante is one of the most popular beaches for inland Nicaraguans to spend a day at the beach. After their visit, the beach is covered with litter, washing straight into the ocean. As a response local businesses organize clean-ups on the "days after" in their business areas. At that point several parts of the beach are left full of waste, and more importantly the majority has already washed into the ocean overnight. There has not been any coordinated efforts to inform Nicaraguan visitors on the pollution impacts, instalment of extra garbage bins during these events which seem to be simple solutions.

Figure 35: Easter crowds

4.5.7   Concluding

The FASST analysis has been able to point out challenges and threats for Gigante's sustainable development as a surf tourism site. The framework is built to give directions for surf tourism that contributes to a more sustainable surf tourism destination. The FASST has shown that this gives issues with Project WOO's work, as they are not directly linked to the surf tourism industry of Gigante. Therefore it is not surf tourism that contributes to the destination's sustainable development at this point. It has been project WOO alone that has provided community development, through systematic attempts to cross cultural understanding and poverty alleviation. Potential efforts of the local government and several enterprises give hope for the future, but they are far from actual coordinated efforts by all stakeholders aiming for sustainable surf tourism development.
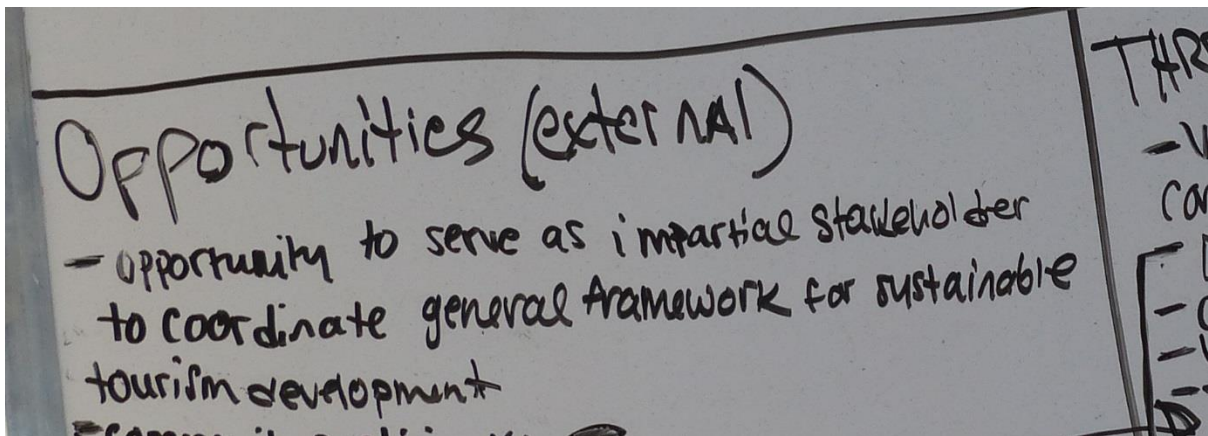

Figure 36: Output of WOO's future potential strategies meeting (May 2015)

SURF LESSONS AND SURF BOARD RENTAL

with local surfers

5.   Conclusion & Discussion

Surf tourism research has gained momentum over the past decade in order to explain processes of unsustainable development that have changed remote coastal areas. Especially in the developing world unregulated surf tourism has shown to exacerbate inequalities at the village level and negatively affect the natural resources that the surf tourism industry relies upon. As a response best practices arose out of applied surf destinations management models, which provide a more responsible and sustainable surf tourism site. If well managed, surf tourism could create alternatives for poor communities, diversifying their income from unsustainable industries like fishing, logging and mining. Fundamental to sustainable tourism management is an increased cultural understanding between local communities and foreigners that enter remote coastal areas. An attempt at this specifically is made by Project Wave of Optimism in Gigante which serves as the case study for this thesis. It is a means to illustrate best practice and possible challenges for increased sustainability in the emerging tourism industry. Literature on sustainable development, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, community based tourism, voluntourism and sustainable surf tourism points out that coordination between stakeholders is fundamental to sustainable practices. Awareness of tourism's impacts by those stakeholders could help to burst 'surf travel's bubble'. The concepts of coordination and awareness of stakeholders should then contribute to the local community's well-being and ensure the destination's sustainability. This thesis tests in what way these future determining concepts are already developed in Gigante. This was translated into a research question, already proposed in the introduction:

In which ways can stakeholders' awareness and coordination in emerging surf tourism destinations benefit local community's well-being and ensure the destination's sustainability in Gigante, Nicaragua?

5.1   Guidelines

What will follow is an extensive answer to this question through five guidelines, which relate to the sub-questions proposed in the introduction, as conclusion. The guidelines are the first important steps which can be followed to promote sustainability practices in Gigante and also serve as an example for similar cases of developing surf tourism sites. They can be read both as policy recommendations and as a first practical guide to sustainable surf tourism governance. This will be followed by a discussion on the research limitations and potential paths for future research.

Burst the bubble: Acknowledging that surf travel impacts local environments

The 'ecotourist bubble' discussed by Mcleod & Carrier (2005) is very significant to surf tourists and the surf tourism industry in Gigante. Many observations, informal conversations and interviews point out that Gigante is part of a 'surf travel bubble', ignorant of the context of surfers hunting perfect waves in developing destinations. One tourist gave the perfect example:

"I came to travel to Nicaragua, before it becomes over-developed like Costa Rica."

This is what I heard many surf tourists and other travelers say about their reasons to travel to Nicaragua. Many surf tourists want to experience uncrowded perfect waves in an area still undiscovered. Tourism development has made parts of Costa Rica or nearby San Juan del Sur increasingly unattractive for surf travel markets, giving legitimacy to 'search' for new destinations to develop, similar to the capitalist elite searching for new capital accumulation (Fletcher 2011).

Although the activity of wave riding is quite impact-less in and of itself, everything to cater wave use impacts environments locally and globally (Ponting & Obrien 2014). Many tourists know that inevitably destinations will not be the same after they leave, but they do not know, realize or care that their style of visiting is central to the destination's sustainability. It is the same for local communities that receive tourists, entrepreneurs and local and national governments. They do not fully understand the long term impact of tourism to their regions. Possibly the negative effects are not yet felt as much, because Gigante, like nearby Las Salinas, is still in its initial phase of tourism (Usher & Kerstetter 2014). Interestingly, no signs have been recorded of strong community resistance against tourism, which among other things, depletes their fresh water resources. Raising awareness and understanding on tourism's environmental, social and economic impact with stakeholders in early stages of development is therefore key to the destination's sustainability.

Bridge gaps of understanding

There remain large social differences and inequalities between stakeholders within a developing tourism destination; these gaps of understanding should be bridged to prevent conflict and further growing inequalities (Ponting & O'Brien 2014). In Gigante, Project WOO attempts to bridge these cultural gaps to show a positive side of surf tourists. Although their outreach is quite small, they bridge gaps effectively through WOO staff and long-term volunteer tourists that have become part of the community. Long-term volunteers who

participate in a minimum 3 months program become aware of global economic inequalities, are able to be critical towards tourism development and respect and learn from foreign culture. On the other side, community members who participate in WOO's programs see economic and social benefits through homestay earnings, interaction with foreigners, training their English, receiving education and health improvements. The surf tourism bubble stands in the way of the tourism industry to bridge these gaps. Therefore WOO's model for creating cross cultural understanding with volunteers and the community should be tailored for Gigante's tourism stakeholders as well, which could empower the community to increase their stake in coordination.

Stakeholder coordination: Creating balance

In Playa Gigante and many other coastal communities in the world, unregulated tourism development causes a rapid increase of investments and wealthy foreign and national entrepreneur's domination of land for tourism development, which can be predominantly seen by the large golf and surf resorts that have privatized beaches and over-use water resources (Sveinsdottir 2014; Lavanchy 2014). Also, the smaller scale hostels and all-inclusive surf resorts have the tendency to dominate tourism development as they obtain cultural advantages, more initial capital and therefore receive a larger share of tourists. Slowly, smaller national entrepreneurs are trying to reclaim authority by establishing a community committee together with the local government, in order to determine what tourism should look like in the future. In this process they have excluded foreign entrepreneurs in decision making, which could create unbalance as all stakeholders should eventually coordinate for sustainable surf tourism governance (Ponting & O'Brien 2014). Based on my findings, I suggest that since most surf tourism destinations now constitute nationals, foreigners, wealthy and less wealthy inhabitants they need to coordinate at early stages of tourism development to decide their common long term vision, which is challenging with a variety of stakeholders with different interests. However, a start has been made with a meeting to prevent criminality in Gigante that included all stakeholders. More advanced large scale models of development coordination are seen in Papua New Guinea, where local communities are consulted before surf tourists are allowed to enter. They are informed on and prepared for surf tourism impacts and are also involved in decision making that includes potential foreign investors, before the first tourists are allowed to surf in the area (O'Brien & Ponting 2013).

Linking to tourism development

Although WOO's work is successful, their impact on sustainable tourism development in Gigante has been marginal. This is one of the key findings after using the Framework Analysis for Sustainable Surf Tourism (FASST). In order to be sustainable, the surf tourism industry itself should contribute to sustainability practices, not the non-profit alone (Ponting & O'Brien 2014). WOO's focus is on community development work, financially supported by philanthropists from the U.S. and North-American corporate volunteers' contributions. They do not have financial support from the tourism industry, which ultimately relies on the goodwill of the community members. Gigante's tourism industry does not hold any stakes in WOO's organization and therefore the industry and community have shown a lack of understanding of WOO's purposes, creating suspicion, misunderstanding and a lack of committed local support. In the meantime Gigante sits in between 3 high-end resorts, and is said to have more foreign than local land owners waiting for the right time to develop their parcels (Field notes; Sveinsdottir 2014). Also they will most probably lose their last pristine beach to tourism development, because it is part of the Nicaraguan Interoceanic Canal project. Developments that will further exploit the area almost seem unavoidable. It makes awareness raising on tourism's impact fundamental. To not have residents that participate in community development efforts, aiming to improve their quality of life, be affected by tourism's negative consequences.

It would be valuable to link WOO's cultural gap bridging efforts to the destination's tourism industry and its community members. This requires responsible businesses which respect and understand local circumstances, contribute to community development and to environmental conservation. To prevent over-exploitation, regulation is needed by local authorities of the amount and type of tourism businesses (Ponting & O'Brien 2014), exampled by the Surf Association Papua New Guinea (SAPNG) (O'Brien & Ponting 2013). Project WOO could be a guiding partner for raising awareness and promoting coordination between stakeholders as they bridge the gap between the local community and foreigners. If the industry collaborates they could together inform visiting tourists on their efforts and the local conditions, spread awareness on tourism's local and global impacts, slowly bursting the bubble.

Determine capacities

Once coordination between stakeholders is achieved, tourism could further develop sustainably when limits to growth that fit the destination's capacities are in place. These can only be determined by local stakeholders, requiring coordinated decision making on the site's

future. These should not exceed environmental, social and tourism capacity to be able to sustain the destination and influx of tourists for revenue (Butler 1980; Ponting & O'Brien 2014). It appears that, the Gigante area at this moment already exceeds those capacities. Environmentally, only one beach in the area is fairly unexploited; although prohibited by law, tourism businesses have been constructed too close to the ocean and large resorts have illegally privatized beaches. Tourism facilities have already exploited water resources leading to drought, salinization and water contamination. This exceeds social capacity as well, as poorer Nicaraguans now lack access to fresh water (field notes; Lavanchy 2014). An excessive number of surfers on several breaks already lead to signs of crowding that decreases surf tourists' pleasure. Although by boat uncrowded surf can still be reached, by land empty waves already seem hard to find.

It is very challenging to be able to set capacities for sustainability where every stakeholder is completely satisfied. Hopefully, host communities that consist of nationals, foreigners, wealthy and poor, aware of tourisms impacts, all wish to preserve the natural beauty and a pleasant social environment to live in and for tourists to keep visiting.

5.2 Discussion: A spiral for balance

My findings suggest that there is a phase in Gigante that stands in between the current situation of Abel's Spiral top down model which shows domination by the tourism industry and the Reverse Spiral Model of sustainable surf tourism (Chapter 2.6; figure 4) where there exists a point of intersection between the community and the tourism industry. Here, collaboration for coordinated planning can take place. As shown in the model below, Project WOO could have a distinctive coordinative role, to add to their work with the Nicaraguan community and volunteers (yellow), to increase their links with local authorities (orange) and add a new linkage to Gigante's tourism industry (red)(figure 37). Instead of taking responsibility to coordinate tourism in Gigante alone, WOO should continue to create partnerships with private or public organizations that are experienced in either the sustainable tourism industry or local (self) governance of tourism.

As tourism grows in Gigante, more foreigners will enter to live in the community. Community development is therefore not only about Nicaraguans, it should also include expats in the process of community development. The Nicaraguan residents that are empowered to be traditional resource custodians should be prioritized, however it is certain that expats settling in the community will change the community dynamics, which needs to

be positive (yellow). WOO and partners could enforce their support for establishing local authorities that should consist of the municipal government, the community committee and a surf club or surf association (orange). Now, a surf club that engages youth into surfing to be future ocean stewards is non-existent. The community committee is managed by Nicaraguan entrepreneurs who focus on the establishment of the association for small national businesses in Gigante. A committee that truly represents all stakeholders who live in Gigante should also include representatives of Gigante's fishermen, residents, the foreign entrepreneurs and local surfers. If, within the committee, several stakeholders can collaborate on future planning, it could possibly engage community members from the bottom-up and the tourism industry top-down to meet in the center of the reversed spiral model for coordinated decision making. All in order to avoid exploitation of their common pool resources, which make the surfing and tourism environment. A third link needs to be drawn to the tourism industry consisting of businesses that provide services for surfers, backpackers and resort tourists (red). Foreign WOO staff members possess the cultural capital to communicate with the foreign entrepreneurs and tourists who show the largest gaps of understanding towards Gigante's realities. These entrepreneurs could be informed by WOO on their important position in Gigante's future. Ideally all entrepreneurs should contribute to support WOO's work through financial or non-financial support, as it improves the community and as a result their business environment. Structures like SAPNG's tourism tax, or profit sharing for community development out of corporate social responsibility could be ways to achieve these. It would at the same time increase WOO's legitimacy with buy-in from local business owners in WOO's programs that contribute to the common destination's environment - as opposed to current funding provided by outside philanthropists and volunteers. If this collaboration exists, it becomes possible to expand WOO's cultural gap bridging efforts to inform tourists, engaging them in the place they visit, making them aware of the efforts made to sustain the destination, which sustains a visit in the future as well; to not let the tourists who visit Gigante now, be the last to experience its attractive environment, before it becomes like Costa Rica or San Juan del Sur.

This could create a stage of balance, where the tourism industry is informed on its impacts and is limited in its growth while, the local authorities gain control over the processes that occur in their community. In addition, the community could start to show signs of empowerment, knowing how to be involved in decision making on future planning. WOO and potentially other partnering organizations, private or governmental, could assist to make

sure the local authority in establishing itself in the center of the model. In this way they can become the point of intersection between the tourism industry and the community, where planning takes place that considers sustainability and the limits of the tourism destination.
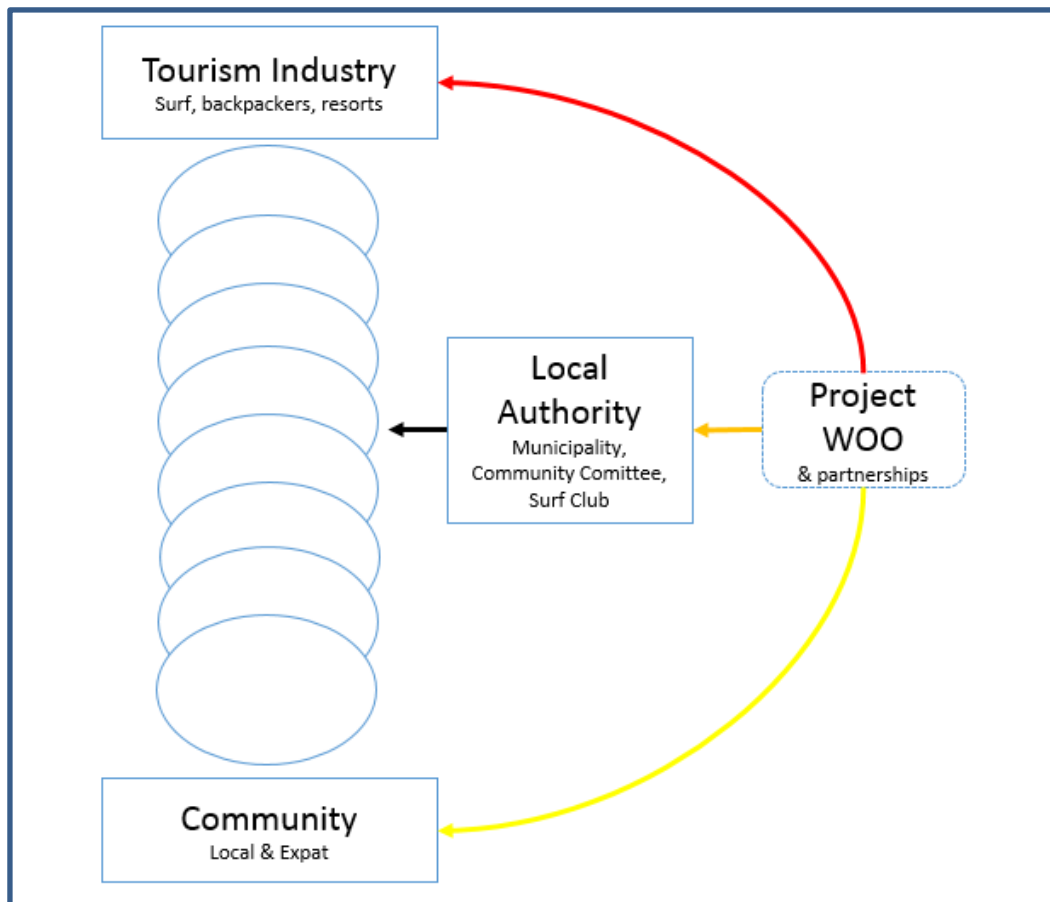
Figuur 37: Balance model inspired by Abel's spiral model

Concluding

Many surfers are conscious of their surfing environments, because of their interaction with the environment and coastal communities. However, a focus on hunting perfect waves and maximizing profits alone will widen the existing gap between tourists and local residents. Surf travel in the Gigante area seems to be trapped in a bubble, unaware or still uninterested in the impact tourism has on local environments. This shows the importance of destination management focused on sustainability in very early stages, to not follow the same path of the destinations exploitation.

5.3   Future research

Playa Gigante as a case-study has proven to be a good example of unsustainable practices with growing efforts to increase the destination's sustainable management, that could be a model for other coastal tourism locations. These dynamics are in itself worth another case-study to measure if indeed establishment of an increase of local authority and Project WOO, which is revising its strategies, add to sustainable surf tourism developments. At the same time, tourism infrastructure is improving, potentially leading towards the increase in amount of visitors and thereby pressure on the destination's communities and the environment. Gigante has shown to be beyond a tipping point of unsustainable tourism development, with rising issues with fresh water resource depletion, land conflict and criminality. It would be interesting to research in which stage this tipping point occurs in other destinations - at which point it is necessary to implement sustainable surf management models in a newly discovered surfing destination, without negative effects of tourism appearing first. This takes relevance as there is a continued search for new destinations that are marketed to the outside world that could follow the same path as shown by Gigante. That being said, there is still far too little knowledge on surf tourism: in what ways it occupies new areas and what determines its future sustainability.

The Framework Analysis for Sustainable Surf Tourism has shown to be reasonably effective for qualitative analysis of a surf tourism destination, making clear what is currently available and what is definitely lacking in the surf industry of Gigante. Mach (2014) suggested omitting the indicator for a move away from neo-liberal approaches towards development. And indeed, other indicators provide enough foundation for these alternative approaches. Especially coordinated planning and limits to growth refer to regulation interventions that are in itself a distinct move away from neo liberal free markets. A valuable aspect about this indicator is that it puts emphasis on mainstream surf tourism as a part of the capitalist system of endless growth and commodification of natural resources.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Field work schedule

Activities	Month	F				M				A				M				J
	Week	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Improving Spanish			■	■	■														
Participant Observation			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■						
Immersion						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Determine respondents								■	■	■									
Interviews												■	■		■	■			
Transcribe												■	■		■	■	■		
Analysis										■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Theoretical Framework					■	■	■												
Interim report									■	■	■								
Journalistic article																■	■		
Draft presentation																			■

7.2 Nvivo code tree

Name	Sources	References
Coordinated Planning and (Limits to Growth)	25	112
Stakeholder Coordination	26	74
Community involvement in tourism	17	45
Criminality	11	21
Poverty alleviation	22	65
Community involvement in projects	11	21
Cross cultural learning	18	46
Tourism bubble	18	56
Environmental equity and equality	17	46
Move Away from Neo liberalism	14	39
Surfing at the village level	11	32