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Knowledge Management in a 'Southern' Development Context: Tracing the knowledge inputs to capacity-building interventions for sustainable small-scale tourism entrepreneurship in Costa Rica

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Abstract

It is increasingly realized that development interventions are usually taking place in highly complex environments. Where this is the case, knowledge could be pivotal for more effective development interventions. The right kind of knowledge management might help development organizations to better coordinate their endeavors and improve the effectiveness of their interventions in the face of complex challenges. But knowledge management for development (KM4D) is still relatively novel in development studies and practice.

So far, most KM4D approaches have embraced knowledge as a kind of transferrable object, and have been explicitly or implicitly based on the assumption that it is simply lacking in some locations, particularly in 'developing countries'. This has led to a wave of tool- and technology focused knowledge programs. More recently however, the field of KM4D has shifted towards a more social constructivist perspective on knowledge. This implies that good knowledge management should rather be concerned with the social contexts within which knowledge is applied, obtained, shared, generated, and ultimately converted into actual development policy. But much remains to be known about the implications of this for adequate knowledge management. This thesis provides empirical evidence of how the knowledge inputs for a certain type of development interventions have been managed by the involved actors. The objective has been to contribute to an understanding of how the management of knowledge inputs affects the effectiveness of development interventions and how it could be adjusted to attain better impacts.

The development practice that was looked at during a five-month qualitative field research consists of a range of capacity-building measures intended to support a specific brand of tourism entrepreneurship in Costa Rica: 'Turismo Rural Comunitario' is a type of community-based ecotourism in rural areas. It represents a key component of the country's sustainable tourism development agenda and is intended to simultaneously achieve poverty alleviation in rural areas and to gain the support of local communities for environmental conservation.

The approach of the research has been to trace and analyze the management of the knowledge inputs for these capacity-building interventions from both of the broader KM4D perspectives, the more conventional one that is technology-oriented, and the more recent one that looks at the social dimensions of knowledge management. It is found that even though these perspectives are conceptually irreconcilable, their sequential application for an analysis of KM4D in practice is promising. The two perspectives draw attention to different knowledge management aspects and shortcomings and serve to derive different policy recommendations that can be complementary. By providing policy recommendations for knowledge management adjustments, this work is also intended as a practical contribution to Costa Rica's sustainable tourism development.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACEPESA:	Asociación Centroamericana para la Economía, Salud y el Ambiente
ACTUAR:	Asociación Comunitaria Conservacionista de Turismo Alternativo y Rural
CANTURURAL:	Costa Rican Chamber of Rural Communtiy-based Tourism
CONAO:	National Commission of NGOs, and Social Organizations
CONARE:	Consejo Nacional de Rectores
COOPRENA:	Consorcio Cooperativo Red Ecoturística Nacional
CST:	Costa Rican Certificate of Sustainable Tourism
GEF:	Global Environmental Facility
ICT:	Costa Rican Tourism Board
INA:	Costa Rican National Learning Institute
KM4D:	Knowledge management for development
NGO:	Non-governmental organization
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Program
SGP:	Small Grants Program
SINAC:	Costa Rican National System of Conservation Areas
TRC:	Turismo Rural Comunitario
UNDP:	United Nations Development Program
WDR:	World Development Report

1. Introduction

Development interventions tend to take place within particularly contingent, uncertain environments. The interplay of highly dynamic social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological variables can turn development practice into such a complex undertaking that the course and effects of interventions become unpredictable. It is not surprising then that the increasing appraisal of complexity in development thought is accompanied by reinvigorated *doubts about the effectiveness of development practice* (Ramalingam et al. 2008). Such doubts may particularly prevail, where the practice consists of timely limited and seemingly little coordinated interventions carried out by a multitude of organizations of different types. The complexity of the addressed problems implies that uncoordinated interventions and envisaged simple solutions run the risk of wasted efforts and resources. In the worst cases development interventions can end up being squarely counterproductive. There clearly is a need for innovative approaches that might help to grapple with the complex challenges of development practice in a more coherent manner.

In this thesis, I focus on *knowledge management for development* (also 'KM4D') as a promising field to offer such innovative approaches. The basic assumption made here is that the effectiveness of development interventions is linked to the knowledge inputs on which they are based, and to how these inputs are managed by involved actors on all levels. Knowledge management encompasses *any processes and practices concerned with the creation, acquisition, capture, sharing, and use of knowledge, skills and expertise*. This comprises both measures explicitly labelled as knowledge management, and all the kinds of practices or processes that implicitly shape knowledge flows. Either way, the right knowledge management could be a key to better grasp the complex dynamics within which development interventions are usually situated. This might in turn help to increase the overall effectiveness of development practice. But knowledge management is also a relatively novel discipline in development studies and even more so in practice. Much is left to be explored, first, about the actual development impacts of the ways in which involved actors (knowingly or implicitly) manage knowledge inputs, and second, about the potential of increasing the effectiveness of development interventions through adequate knowledge management. The overarching research objective of this thesis has been to help filling these 'knowledge gaps'.

The main focus of KM4D programs (in theory and practice) so far has been on the deliberate accumulation, storage, retrieval and transfer of knowledge 'stocks' or 'assets' with the help of tools such as information and communication technology, manuals, and best-practices. But some critics have drawn attention to alternative conceptualizations of KM4D. These shed light on how the relations

and interactions between involved actors shape knowledge flows and thereby the development practice. From such a perspective, KM4D "should be considered as relating primarily to the *social* processes and practices of knowledge creation, acquisition, capture, sharing and use of knowledge, skills and expertise, and not to the *technological* components…" (Ferguson et al. 2008, p.8).

As a reflection of this, a quick glance through the knowledge management for development literature provides the reader with an impression of two irreconcilable streams of thought. The *rational* view on KM4D is geared towards closing knowledge gaps through the application of tools and technology, while the *post-rational* perspective cautions that the mere application of tools and technology might even deepen existing knowledge imbalances unless the underlying social processes of knowledge generation are addressed. Indeed, the two perspectives are based on different ideas of knowledge itself, of how it is generated or obtained, and of how it relates to development effectiveness. Notwithstanding this apparent dichotomy, *both of these theoretical perspectives are taken into account in this work*. In the analyzed case study special attention has been paid to post-rational perspectives, because the 'social dimensions' of knowledge management in development practice are still fairly unexplored. However, this does not mean that the more 'conventional' aspects of the rational perspective should be excluded from beforehand, as long as their pitfalls are taken into account.

The approach to pursue the research objective has essentially been to look at a specific type of interventions in a specific region, and to retrace the knowledge inputs on which these interventions are based. More precisely, I conducted a field research of approximately five months in Costa Rica, with the aim of obtaining a detailed picture of the knowledge management underlying the support interventions for a specific brand of ecotourism development ('Turismo Rural Comunitario'). The interventions looked are offered by a broad range of mostly Costa Rican development actors. They are understood as *capacity-building* interventions and include support measures such as financing, political advocacy, and training. The intended beneficiaries are local and mainly small-scale ecotourism entrepreneurs in rural areas.

The capacity-building primarily aims at increasing their competitiveness by addressing their lack of financial capital and their often limited educational and professional backgrounds in comparison to ecotourism entrepreneurs from other countries or Costa Rica's wealthier urban areas. The advancement of these local entrepreneurs under the label of Turismo Rural Comunitario ('TRC') prominently ranks in Costa Rica's sustainable development agenda: In the country's rural areas, TRC has been emphatically promoted as one of the most promising options to achieve poverty reduction and to simultaneously gain the support of local communities for environmental conservation. Furthermore, there is a certain urgency about truly sustainable tourism development in the country,

as clearly more unsustainable alternatives like more conventional mass or resort tourism continue to be on the rise. Furthermore, the country's ecotourism sector has itself not been free of sustainability debates (cf. Fletcher, 2013; Honey, 2008).

In this work, it is assumed that the management of the knowledge inputs that shape these capacity-building interventions in all their phases (design, implementation, evaluation, etc.) has a significant influence on their overall effectiveness. Be it knowledge management explicitly labelled as such or not. Based on this assumption, the field research proceeded along the lines of the following main research questions:

(1) *In what ways has the knowledge relevant to the capacity-building interventions for sustainable tourism in Costa Rica been managed by the involved actors?*

(2) *In how far has this knowledge management influenced the effectiveness of these interventions?*

(3) *How might the knowledge management be adjusted in order to increase the effectiveness of the considered interventions (if at all)?*

To provide answers to these questions, the field research has been designed as an exploratory case study with a focus on qualitative data. The data have mainly been derived from interviews with persons who have been professionally involved in the provision of capacity-building support for TRC entrepreneurs. But the beneficiaries themselves are also included in the analysis as an important category of actors who participate in the management of knowledge inputs. The obtained data have been used to describe and analyze the knowledge management and its impacts from two broader theoretical angles, with a 'rational' and a 'post-rational' conceptual framework (the latter is again split into two different approaches, one that is more pragmatic and another one more critical).

Although the rational and the post-rational perspectives are in theory irreconcilable, this work sets forth that the sequential application of both can be quite promising. This provides a more multifaceted picture than if just one conceptual framework had been applied – of the ways in which relevant knowledge inputs are managed, of existing shortcomings and possible adjustments. Each perspective draws attention to different knowledge management aspects and comes with its own drawbacks and advantages. Altogether it is also argued that from all of the applied perspectives considerable knowledge management shortcomings can be pointed out. These shortcomings are likely

to limit the effectiveness of the considered development interventions to a significant extent. Some policy recommendations are provided, which are also drawn from the different frameworks used, but which could complement each other in practice (The recommendations are sketched in the discussion and listed under bullet points in the annex).

2. Theoretical background:

The broader theoretical frame of this work is about the links between knowledge and development. The topic reached development mainstream at latest by the time when the World Bank released its 1998/99 World Development Report 'Knowledge for Development' (Ramalingam, 2005; McFarlane, 2006). The Bank's proposal to look at development problems from the angle of knowledge might seem quite straightforward at first. But when digging a little deeper into the literature, this impression turns into a rather blurry picture. To begin with, one might consider that there is there is neither an agreed-upon definition of knowledge nor one of development (cf. Powell, 2006; Jones, 2009).

Epistemological debates about the nature of knowledge can be traced back even further than the ancient Greek philosopher Plato and have famously featured in philosophy of science. On one extreme of these debates is the assumption that knowledge reflects an objective and universal truth and that it can be attained and reproduced as such. On the other extreme is the notion that knowledge is completely subjective and socially constructed (cf. Chalmers, 1999). In the context of knowledge and development, there are very diverging conceptualizations of 'development', too, as will be pointed out below. Modernist development thinking, conveying a quite unambiguous notion of development as opposed to underdevelopment, continues to play a role as well as post-development thought, where development is problematized as an artificial construct and arena of social power struggles (cf. Jones, 2009). Basing this thesis on narrow definitions of knowledge and development would only partially capture the overarching debates and therefore miss out on possibly significant aspects. Instead, the intention here is to expose some of the underlying conceptual debates about knowledge and development by zooming in on a concept that is primarily focused on the links between the two: *knowledge management for development*.

Arguably the least common denominator of KM4D approaches is the assumption that knowledge is a key to effective development work. Knowledge management can be rather broadly defined as encompassing a wide range of activities related to many different types of knowledge. More precisely, it is a concept that subsumes any "processes and practices concerned with the creation, acquisition, capture, sharing and use of knowledge, skills and expertise, […], *whether these are explicitly labelled as 'knowledge management' or not*" (emphasis added; Ferguson et al. 2008, p.8). Beyond that,

knowledge management for development approaches mirror different strands of development thought and epistemological positions.

2.1. Knowledge management in development thought: from rational to post-rational approaches

While the concept of knowledge management as such originates within the business sector (with the aim of augmenting the competitiveness and innovativeness of companies), the uptake of knowledge management in development thought can be interpreted along the lines of different development paradigms. In this section, knowledge management for development will be divided into so-called rational and post-rational approaches. The former might be considered as a manifestation of a rather modernist development vision, while the latter comprise a range of perspectives that appear to be inspired by complexity theory and post-development thought.

Rationalist approaches to knowledge management for development

The cornerstone of what authors like McFarlane (2006), Ferguson et al. (2008, 2010), and Jones (2009) have termed a rational approach to knowledge management for development is represented by the World Bank's attempt to mainstream a 'knowledge perspective' on development problems from the mid-1990s on, most notably with the release of the World Development Report 1998/99. As McFarlane (2006, p.289) points out in his critique, the Bank's view draws on a rather modernist vision of development that "perpetuates a North-South divide: 'poor' countries are to draw on the knowledge of 'rich' countries in order to develop." The report thus states that "poor countries—and poor people—differ from rich ones not only because they have less capital but because they have less knowledge. Knowledge is often costly to create, and that is why much of it is created in industrial countries" (World Bank, 1999, p.1).

This resembles post World War II 'developmentalist' or modernization thought (cf. Cypher and Dietz, 2008) to the extent that it advocates the import and subsequent re-production of technical know-how from 'developed' to 'underdeveloped' countries in order for 'underdeveloped' market economies to catch up to 'developed' ones. Development is defined here in a relatively clear fashion as primarily technological and socio-economic progress. In a related vein, Ben Ramalingam (2005) reminds that a similarly instrumentalist notion of knowledge for development can already be found in the former US President Truman's famous inaugural speech from 1948: "The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for the assistance of other peoples are limited. *But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and inexhaustible. I believe that*

we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life…" (As cited by Ramalingam, 2005, p.7).

From an epistemological point of view, the rational approach conceives of knowledge as objective and universal, scientifically provable and in a binary contrast to 'local' knowledge. A key term in this perspective is the 'knowledge transfer'. This describes the process of sending knowledge from one place to another as a kind of weightless commodity. In principle, it can thus be 'stacked up' and moved around unchanged. Knowledge is seen as a self-contained entity, unchanged by its location and context. As McFarlane (2006) puts it, knowledge is reduced "to a technology that can be applied, that is, a static entity that can be shifted around to do the job of development" (p.289). Similarly, one might describe the rational approach to knowledge management for development as a linear problem-solving exercise. Knowledge gaps are usually synonymous to a lack of the right sort of technical know-how, data, or valid information, and can be filled by the transfer and subsequent local reproduction of already existing knowledge from elsewhere (id.).

With the rational approach, knowledge management in theory and practice has been much focused on the implementation of best-practices and formal management tools as well as on making knowledge available through information and communication technology (McFarlane, 2006; Ferguson et al. 2010). Examples are the adoption of standards, the formal use of the logical framework for monitoring and evaluation purposes of development projects, or the installation of communication platforms for development organizations to share knowledge online (see e.g. World Bank, 1999; Ramalingam, 2005; McFarlane, 2006; Golini & Landoni, 2014). Knowledge management measures deliberately adopted as such have mostly taken place in larger 'Northern' development and donor agencies, corresponding to what Ferguson et al. (2010) name an 'engineering approach'. In this, knowledge sharing tools and technologies have been implemented rather from the top-down and managed in a command and control fashion (e.g. through formal reporting requirements).

Rational approaches to knowledge management have been heavily criticized in theory and in practice. For instance, it seems to be widely recognized by now that knowledge cannot be transferred unchanged 'one-by-one'. Factors such as language or the interpretation of knowledge according to individual contexts, needs and perceptions can significantly change the meaning of knowledge when it travels across different locations and time. Furthermore, much important knowledge is not easily made explicit (e.g. formulated in words or numbers and written down) and therefore difficult to share with others (Koskinnen et al. 2003; Bresnen et al. 2003; Fernie et al. 2003; Ferguson et al. 2008). Other factors, like the unequal distribution of and access to communication technology impose very practical limitations to the technologically oriented rational approach. These and other problems (e.g. a certain 'knowledge sharing fatigue', when the time constraints of practitioners collide with the formally

prescribed and potentially time-intensive requirements to participate in knowledge management initiatives) have been well-documented in relation to online knowledge sharing platforms in development contexts (e.g. Cummings et al. 2006; Powell, 2006; Ferguson et al. 2010).

Arguably, there are some good reasons to the dominance of rational approaches as an alarming tendency. A point in case is that the rationalist overemphasis on explicit / codified (e.g. written) knowledge and technical tools for data processing risks to miss out on important *tacit* knowledge flows. Besides, "many rationalist knowledge management programs assume that as long as the appropriate means and tools are provided, people can and will share knowledge" (Ferguson et al. 2010, p.1803). However, this is not necessarily the case, for instance, when only some people have access to these means and tools, while others remain without. But inequality of access is not the only social dimension of knowledge management off the radar of many rational programs. It is above all the (implicitly) assumed objectivity and universality of 'expert knowledge' that evokes criticism, particularly in the context of North-South relations (Mosse, 2007). Rationalist knowledge management for development approaches often diagnose a mere lack of expert knowledge and 'hard' data, which is to be tackled with tools such as improved ICT. Yet, this logic ignores the frequently one-directional (top-down) flow of 'expert knowledge' and comes with a tendency to sideline alternative 'non-expert' points of view. These are some of the reasons for which there seems to have been an overall shift towards alternative, so-called post-rational knowledge management approaches (in general and specifically in relation to development).

Post-rational approaches I: KM4D through the lens of complexity theory

The core assumption of complexity theory is that all complex systems are characterized by emergence. This "describes how the behavior of systems emerges – often unpredictably – from the interaction of the parts, such that the whole is different from the sum of the parts" (Serrat, 2009, p.4). Furthermore, all parts or 'agents' of a complex system adapt not only to the behavior of the system itself but also to each other, leading to emergent phenomena ('self-organization'). Based on these and other assumptions[1], complexity theory calls into question linear and simplistic problem-solving approaches.

From the perspective of complexity theory, many development problems emerge from a highly dynamic, constantly changing interplay of multiple variables and dimensions. There are seldom any development issues with only a few easily separable and unchanging causes, which could be effectively tackled in a narrowly defined and predicable way within a short time (Ramalingam et al. 2008). In fact,

[1] For a more detailed discussion of complexity theory and its relevance for development see Ramalingam et al. (2008), or Serrat (2009)

it seems to be widely recognized by now that the reality of development work is more chaotic: diverging interests, multiple stakeholders, uncontrollable local, regional, or global phenomena, spontaneous ideas, protracted negotiations, and hidden power relations are just some of the (often intertwined) factors that might lead even well-conceived development interventions to evolve in unpredictable ways (see e.g. Mosse, 2007). Serrat (2009, p.2) thus states that "when facing volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments such as those that characterize development work, mono-causal explanations founded on "rational choice," "best" specified top-down, are ever more recognized as inadequate, or at least insufficient". As a result, the "interest in applying concrete and practical complexity approaches to social systems, such as how organizations strategize and change, is growing" (id.).

In relation to KM4D, complexity theory is relevant on two levels: First, the assumption that development problems are complex calls for knowledge management approaches that go beyond the straightforward and linear rational perspective. Simplistic interventions reacting to a preconceived knowledge gap are insufficient. Rather than that, the unpredictability and nonlinearity of the development process requires *adaptive* problem-solving, based on a constant supply of up-to-date information and reconsideration of the ways in which an intervention might unfold (see e.g. Pasteur, 2004; Gordijn and Helder, 2013; Vogel, 2012 Whatley, 2013; Allana and Sparkman, 2014). Similarly, Jones (2009, p.30) concludes that "the challenge of complexity represents a strong but implicit theme running through the literature [on knowledge and development]" and that "decision-makers need to be given tools and capacities to help them make interventions adapted to local contexts and to ongoing signals about their effects, rather than applying 'narratives' and blueprints from the top-down."

Second, knowledge management processes tend to be complex themselves. This implicit assumption is at the heart of a distinction between rational and post-rational management. In contrast to the former, post-rational perspectives consider knowledge as situated, that is, context-dependent and socially constructed. Knowledge is not directly transferrable, but rather re-created through interpretation and the (re) creation of *meaning* (Koskinnen et al. 2003). The *practice-based* view on knowledge describes that knowledge gains meaning in practice and through social interaction. That is, the meaning of knowledge cannot be separated from the context in which it is generated and applied. This is further specified by the term *situated learning*, meaning that knowledge is appropriated and applied by individuals according to their situational needs and perceptions (McFarlane, 2006; Ferguson et al. 2008).

In contrast to rational approaches where learning is basically conceived of as process of gradual knowledge 'accumulation', the post-rational perspective treats *learning as an essentially social process* (id.). This view also allows for the co-existence of various 'true' knowledges at the same time – they are valid or not depending on different social contexts (Ferguson et al. 2008). What counts as scientifically proven and / or universal knowledge for members of a donor organization, for example, might be quite problematic for a development practitioner who is supposed to implement that knowledge at a community level (Mosse, 2007). The introduction of a water-saving agricultural method in a drought-prone region might thus mean a clear developmental progress for the donor while it may also signify a loss of cultural identity for a local farmer and supposed beneficiary. According to Powell (2006), in such a situation, the failure to 'validate' external knowledge in the local contexts typically contributes to the failure of development interventions.

Post-rational knowledge management perspectives thus recognize that the integration and reconciliation of different knowledge claims is affected by complexity. In development practice this might require practitioners to 'break down' the universal knowledge claims of donors to the local context in consultative processes with community stakeholders. What Ferguson and colleagues (2010) describe as an 'emergent' implementation approach of post-rational knowledge management is a clear distinction from the rational 'engineering' course of action. The attention is not exclusively on the formal but above all on the informal links and interactions between actors. In the emergent approach, "[w]here knowledge is perceived as culturally embedded, subjective and related to *emergent* daily practices, the role of managers is pushed to the periphery" (Ferguson et al. 2010, p.1803). Knowledge flows are not to be steered in a conventional command and control mode, but subtly facilitated through communication, networking, identity building and fomenting trust in social interactions (McFarlane, 2006; Ferguson et al. 2010).

Viewed through the lens of complexity theory, a post-rational perspective seems to better suited than rational perspectives to grasp the dynamic contexts within which both knowledge and development are embedded. But as various authors allude to, there is in reality no clear dividing line between rational and post-rational knowledge management for development. Hence, McFarlane (2006) cautions that it is not uncommon to find that, for instance, many World Bank officials take a mixed stance rather clearly endorsing the rational view of the WDR. Powell (2006), Mosse (2007), and Ferguson et al. (2010) all indicate that development practitioners are often indeed aware of the flaws of universalist 'Northern' donor knowledge framing interventions, but that there is much uncertainty about how to effectively address such flaws in practice. Narayanaswamy (2013) holds that whereas the technological outlook of conventional knowledge management has been thoroughly criticized, the

fundamental assumption of a 'Southern knowledge gap' that causes 'underdevelopment' has largely gone unquestioned. Finally, Jakimov (2008, p.319) states that "despite proclamations to the contrary, knowledge strategies have remained technical in nature, and have prioritized simple over complex, quantitative over qualitative, and universal over contextual knowledge."

In his 'state-of-the-art literature review on the link between knowledge and policy in development', Harry Jones (2009) elaborates a useful categorization of different streams of thought about knowledge and development. The distinction between 'pluralism and opportunism' and 'politics and legitimization' perspectives is particularly interesting. The former challenge rationalist conceptualizations of knowledge transfers and incorporate complexity theory in line with practice-based views on knowledge. Such perspectives accept that actors are in practice often faced with uncertainty and make pragmatic decisions, so that knowledge may be interpreted differently according to the context. But to a greater or lesser degree they retain an objectivist position by supposing that an increased knowledge uptake will eventually lead to a clearly identifiable development progress. 'Politics and legitimization' views conceive of knowledge as practice-based, too. But they go beyond the above by arguing that "power is infused throughout the knowledge process, from generation to uptake. Knowledge will often reflect and sustain existing power structures, and is used in the policy process in processes of contest, negotiation, legitimization and marginalization" (Jones, 2009, p.5). This distinction serves to interpret the comments listed in the previous paragraph:

While in practice there has indeed been a shift towards post-rational knowledge management for development, that shift appears to be largely in line with the more pragmatic pluralism and opportunism perspectives. Many rationalist knowledge management tendencies have remained. This reflects an incorporation of complexity theory into knowledge management to some extent. Apparently, this has not automatically lead to a more radical questioning of the underlying rationalist perspective on knowledge and development. To gain an impression of why some post-rational positions seem nonetheless more critical than others, it is useful to take a look into post-development theory.

Post-rational approaches II: KM4D with a normative agenda: Influences of post-development theory

Even if possibly underrepresented in theory and practice, some critical debates triggered by the post-development movement are clearly reflected in the strand of post-rational knowledge management for development approaches that Jones (2009) has termed 'politics and legitimization'.

When the pioneers of post-development thought advanced their all-out critiques of development in the 1990s, knowledge first moved to the center stage of more critical development debates. Inspired

by poststructuralists like Foucault and Derrida, post-development scholars such as James Ferguson, Wolfgang Sachs, and Arturo Escobar claimed that 'development' was itself an artificial concept that served the interests of the powerful. The essential argument was that the framing of crucial concepts, like what constitutes a development problem, solution, or progress, was based on socially constructed 'regimes of truth' that defined what knowledge is valid or not. Poststructuralists view these regimes of truth as part of a dominant *discourse*, produced by and at the same time structuring and reinforcing social interactions and practices (McFarlane, 2006). The dominant discourse is a reflection of the power relations that shape the social production of knowledge. But it also reinforces the same power inequalities on which it is based by establishing dominant paradigms (e.g. 'rational' scientific knowledge). Alternative knowledges of less powerful actors (such as diverging conceptualizations of development) are thereby sidelined and hardly taken into account. Knowledge and power are seen as closely intertwined.

Based on this reasoning, early post-development thinkers questioned the very concept of 'development', casting doubt on the presumed objective scientific knowledge on which it had been casted in polar opposition to 'underdevelopment'. Concluding that development was a biased concept that maintained or even reinforced the marginalization of the already marginalized, they advocated the rejection of the entire paradigm of 'development' and the search for 'alternatives to development' instead of 'alternative development' (Jakimov, 2008). In this context, they took a vivid interest in local cultures and knowledges, and in the defense and promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements (Ziai, 2015).

By now, the radical call for rejecting the concept of development altogether has been largely abandoned in development debates. Mainly perhaps, for a lack of concrete solutions going along with this (Jakimov, 2008). Still, some of the core assumptions of post-development have been maintained in more nuanced debates oriented towards feasible contributions to development practice. The 'knowledge agenda', as Jakimov (2008) names it, is a point in case. It "is far from being a consistent approach, and encompasses a broad range of activities utilizing knowledge in order to reduce marginalization and deprivation, [including] strategies that aim to transform how the development industry itself generates and utilizes knowledge to improve its own operations (id. p.314)".

It might be held that as a legacy of post-development thought, the 'knowledge agenda' serves to stress that knowledge for development is not only situated in practices and social interactions but fundamentally shaped by and reinforcing power relations. Taking into account its normative dimension, it is not enough to merely facilitate the circulation of knowledge within and across actor

networks. After all, these networks are on all levels structured by knowledge-power relations, too. Unless that is explicitly taken into account and tried to redress, knowledge management continues to uphold dominant knowledge paradigms (cf. Perkin and Court, 2005; Jones, 2009; Clappison et al. 2013). An emergent approach to knowledge management might, for instance, be inward-looking when knowledge sharing is facilitated *within* a network of 'development experts', while the perspectives of supposed beneficiaries *outside* the network continue to be misunderstood or downplayed (Ferguson et al. 2010).

In sum, post-rational approaches explicitly or implicitly informed by post-development theory can be seen as an extension to the recognition of the complexity concerning knowledge and development. Complexity theory might theoretically already comprise this additional 'power dimension' of the practice-based view on knowledge. However, that dimension seems to have been little incorporated in practice. As this has been strongly criticized, a post-development perspective sheds some light on where this criticism might stem from. But more importantly, it pinpoints a clearly normative orientation of knowledge management for development approaches. More precisely, the recognition that knowledge process are closely intertwined with unequal power relations is a reminder that development should be a fundamentally participatory process aiming to empower the disempowered and enabling people to partake in their own 'development' (cf. Powell, 2006).

In practice, the pursuit of this normative agenda requires an "active engagement of the power dimensions embedded in knowledge management for development, and recognition of otherness, as well as the fallibility of one's own beliefs" (Ferguson et al. 2010, p.1805). Ferguson et al. (2010) refer to this as *situated mutual learning*. It adds a mutual learning perspective to situated knowledge, whereby one deliberately reflects on the dominant assumptions that frame an intervention and that limit what is 'known' or seen as legitimate. Situated mutual learning thus implies that development practitioners should be open and willing to question the knowledge that is often taken for granted. Differing perspectives should be explored together with all stakeholders to define "complementary views, looking at the consequences of each and what makes a difference, and testing against experience in context" (id., p. 1806).

A similar view is expressed in Isabel Vogel's (2012) discussion of 'theory of change'. Theory of change can be thought of as a complementary tool to the often obligatory logical framework used to map interventions from inputs to outputs and development impacts. Its central idea is to make the underlying assumptions of the logical project frame explicit in order to better figure out how change is supposed to come about and to adapt the project logics accordingly. What is crucial however is not the possible product (such as a tangible more complex visualization of the project dynamics – a "log frame on steroids" – p.21) but the *process*. Theory of change would thus ideally be an ongoing and

often informal, self-critical, transparent and participatory learning process that serves to look beyond the pre-conceived frame of a development intervention.

With a view to participatory multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs), Gordijn and Helder (2013) furthermore underline the need for *reflective learning*. This need is viewed against the impression that participatory processes are commonly included in the project design and carried out to the extent that stakeholders actually get together and discuss, but often stop short of incorporating the lessons learned together into practice in a meaningful way. Reflective learning thus involves an explicit identification and proactive sharing and discussion of the lessons learned in participatory processes. According to Gordijn and Helder (2013), this part is often skipped due to an inherent tendency to 'jump on' simple solutions, even though the problems are complex. Once more, this indicates that an effective tackling of underlying knowledge-power relations (be it called reflective or situated mutual learning) requires the self-critical *willingness* to engage with conflicting perspectives.

Table 1 below summarizes the different approaches to knowledge management for development in relation to their epistemological background, relevant development theories, purposes, and possible implementation in practice.

	Knowledge management for development approaches		
	Rational	*Post-rational*	
		Pluralism and opportunism	Politics and legitimization
Epistemology	Objectivism / universalism	Practice-based mixed	Practice-based Social constructivism
Development theory	Modernization / 'Developmentalist'	Complexity mixed	Complexity + Post-development
Purpose	Knowledge transfer	Situated / social learning in networks (facilitation)	Social learning + normative / participatory
In practice	Engineering approach	Emergent approach (facilitation)	Emergent + situated mutual / reflective learning

Table 1: Summary of knowledge management for development approaches

2.2. Knowledge management for development – research gaps

As mentioned above, knowledge management research has shifted away from the strictly rational approach outlined in the 1998/99 WDR. While the focus on best-practices and ICT continues to be dominant in research (Jakimov, 2008), the share of contributions that focus on the role of social aspects of knowledge management (particularly on networks and communities) is steadily increasing (Bresnen et al.2003; Clappison et al. 2013). Still, empirical research that has been conducted on the social dimensions of knowledge management in relation to *development* is sparse, and often lacks a clear theoretical framing due to an overly pragmatic focus. This is particularly true when it comes to the role of power relations in shaping knowledge management for development (cf. Jakimov, 2008; Ferguson et al. 2008, 2010; Jones, 2009; Narayanaswamy, 2013).

Existing empirical contributions to the social dimensions of knowledge management for development have mostly concentrated on either the generation of knowledge or on the processes by which knowledge is incorporated into policy, or on both (Jones, 2009). However, these are often limited in scope to single organizations or departments (e.g. Speranza, 2014), to explicitly designed knowledge management interventions (e.g. Ramalingam, 2005), specific types of organizations like NGOs (e.g. Whatley, 2013), or overly focused on North-South relations ('international development'). The attention paid to power relations shaping knowledge processes seems to be strongest in considerations of how knowledge is handled between 'Northern' donor organizations and 'Southern' development 'partners'. However, this risks to miss out on the plethora of relations on all levels within the 'South' that play a role in knowledge management – specifically on unequal power relations between the supposed beneficiaries and development 'experts' and within target communities, too. In a similar vein, Nederveen Pieterse (2009) writes about the 'cultural turn' in development that the 'local', the 'Southern', or the 'community' still tend to be essentialized even though the rhetoric is all about empowerment and participation.

This thesis is intended to address not only the relative sparsity of empirical research about the social dimensions of knowledge management for development but also the lack of empirical work on knowledge management in 'Southern' development contexts. More particularly, the objective is to contribute to an understanding of the actual and potential impacts of knowledge management on development effectiveness. As Ferguson and colleagues (2010, p.1807) state it, "the realm of research in knowledge management for development is still wide open and has great potential toward helping organizations understand the barriers to and potential for greater development effectiveness".

In order to help filling this gap, I conducted field research on a case study of a specific type of (sustainable) development practice in Costa Rica. The scope was *not* limited to a specific (type of) organization, actor relation, project, or to explicitly labelled knowledge management initiatives. Rather than that, a more encompassing focus was maintained, building upon the different theoretical underpinnings summarized in Table 1 to trace the actual management of knowledge inputs by a variety of actors and stakeholders engaged in a specific 'field' of development practice. The following sub-section sheds some more light on the scope and background of the case study.

3. Development context: Capacity-building for sustainable tourism in rural Costa Rica.

Given the above described scarcity and usually rather narrow focus of research on cases of knowledge management in 'Southern' development contexts[2], and inspired by a field research that I had conducted earlier (see Reich, 2015), I decided to focus on a range of support interventions for sustainable tourism development in Costa Rica. The interventions looked at include different long-term programs and temporary projects aimed to establish and consolidate a specific brand of community-based ecotourism enterprises running under the label of 'Turismo Rural Comunitario'[3] (TRC).

In the case at hand, these programs and projects are commonly referred to as *capacity-building* ('capacitaciones'). They essentially comprise different training modules, financial support measures, political advocacy, networking as well as external support with commercial promotion, marketing, and with the legal formalization of TRC businesses. The enterprises are almost exclusively small-scale and run by local families and / or individuals and groups who belong to some sort of community-level organizations. External support actors are largely regional and national-scale NGOs or public entities like the state universities or the Costa Rican Tourism Board (ICT). But also other actors like private consultants and international NGOs, often with a conservationist orientation have played important roles. The most significant sources of funding for the capacity-building have been international or multilateral donors and the Costa Rican state (cf. Andreu, 2008; Trejos et al. 2008; Cubillo Mora and López González, 2009). A more detailed overview of TRC in Costa Rica is viewed after an elaboration on the context of sustainable tourism development in that country.

[2] For a notable exception see Harlan et al. (2013) who analyzed the knowledge management between different actors on the national, regional, and local level for Family Planning and Reproductive Health programs in Ethiopia.
[3] English for Turismo Rural Comunitario: Rural community-based tourism

3.1. Sustainable development and tourism in Costa Rica: 'Turismo Rural Comunitario' in perspective

Being internationally renowned as "ecotourism's poster child" (Honey, 2008, p.160), Costa Rica has become one of Latin America's most visited tourism destinations. Factors like the relative geographic proximity to the USA, the country's image as peace-loving, democratic and stable[4], one of the highest biodiversity densities in the world (estimated at around four percent of all known living species on only 0.03 percent of the earth's land territory; INBio, 2016), and successful public image campaigns by the state Tourism Board ICT, have all contributed to the country's (eco) tourism boom since the late 1980s (Honey, 2008).

In 2015, the country registered a record number of 2.660.257 international tourist arrivals, a more than tenfold increase since 1986 (according to official statistics of the ICT). In the previous year, the tourism sector provided around 5.3 percent of the annual Gross Domestic Product and at least 150,000 employments (El Mundo, 2015)[5]. Furthermore, it has been the country's first earner of foreign exchange since 1993 (Honey, 2008), generating a record high of more than 2.75 billion US dollars in 2015 according to ICT statistics. While Costa Rica's tourism industry is not exclusively based on ecotourism, it does indeed constitute a major pillar of the overall sector[6]. This does not mean that the country's (eco) tourism development is free of sustainability doubts. To gain an understanding of why and how TRC has been promoted as the possibly most sustainable type of ecotourism in Costa Rica, it is useful to trace the environmental and socio-economic contexts underlying the ecotourism boom.

The cornerstone of Costa Rica's ecotourism growth has undoubtedly been the country's spectacular biodiversity. The larger part of the ecotourism sector has thus been structured around the protected natural areas, and particularly around some well-famed national parks like Manuel Antonio or the Corcovado National Park (Honey, 2008). By now, environmental protection areas cover slightly more than 25 percent or 1.3 million hectares of Costa Rica's territory. Almost half of the protected land belongs to the 26 national parks that are managed under the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC). Conversely, the ecotourism boom has not only been based on natural attractions but has also "been expected to play a central role in saving the country from environmental havoc" (Reich, 2015, p.14). After all, Costa Rica's estimated 90 percent forest cover before the 1950s had dropped to around

[4] Notably, the 1987 winning of the Nobel Peace by former president Oscar Arias for his contribution to the termination of civil wars in Central America gained Costa Rica much fame. The country has furthermore been famed for its abolition of a standing army in the early 1950s, and for its relatively well-established democratic political structures and comparably high socio-economic stability.

[5] The actual number of tourism employments in the country is difficult to estimate due to strong seasonal variations and a possibly high number of informal employments

[6] According to official statistics from the ICT (based on tourist surveys administered at the exit of the country), the main tourism activity in the period from 2010 to 2014 has been categorized under the label of 'sun and beach' tourism. The observation of flora and fauna comes in the second place. Altogether, 53.6 percent of all tourism activities were assessed as 'ecotourism'. While the surveys may be criticized for methodological flaws, they nevertheless hint to the significant weight of ecotourism in the country's total tourism sector.

25 percent by 1990 (Evans, 1999). Since then, and roughly coinciding with the rise of Costa Rica's ecotourism sector, the forest cover has increased again to around 50 percent of the national territory (FONAFIFO, 2012).

While it is not possible to clearly separate the share of ecotourism in this recovery from other possible factors, it has generally been considered as an important one (Fletcher, 2013). Theoretically, its conservational importance is explained in the so-called 'stakeholder theory'. According to this theory, the inhabitants of local communities next to or within protected areas take a voluntary interest in environmental protection efforts to the extent that they receive a value (e.g. economic) in return. Ideally, this value should clearly exceed the opportunity costs implied by the protection (e.g. by foregoing the potential economic benefits of land conversion for agricultural purposes; Fletcher, 2009). In line with this logic, the conservational contribution of Costa Rica's ecotourism sector has been based on two premises. First, that successful ecotourism depends on an intact natural environment; and second, that local communities derive substantial economic benefits from ecotourism. Hence, the more local communities benefit economically from ecotourism, the more it will be in their own interest to protect the environment (Fletcher, 2009; 2013). This is particularly significant given that Costa Rica's restrictive environmental protection laws have led to persistent controversies about land-use rights. In addition to that, the so-called 'fortress' approach of conservation, based on the enforcement of environmental protection and often against the will of local inhabitants, has proven quite costly and many times little effective (Evans, 1999; Brandon, 2004).

A different context that has shaped Costa Rica's ecotourism boom in various ways is the country's 'progressive neoliberal restructuring' (cf. Edelman, 1999; cf. Fletcher, 2013). Similar to other Latin American states at the time, Costa Rica experienced a disastrous debt crisis in 1979, which was followed by three consecutive rounds of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) adopted under the pressure of international and multilateral donors[7]. On the one hand, this has been focused on reducing the previously quite inflated state-apparatus, thereby indirectly propelling the central role of ecotourism to gain local communities for voluntary environmental protection – reduced public spending implied some serious budgetary cutbacks (among other things for the funding of park rangers, equipment, surveillance, evictions and resettlements or compensation payments for previous inhabitants of protected areas) that undermined the already controversial 'fortress' model (Evans, 1999; Brandon, 2004).

On the other hand, and perhaps more significantly, the restructuring of the country has had wide-ranging socio-economic impacts with various direct and indirect consequences for the (eco) tourism

[7] The most important ones being the World Bank, the IMF, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID)

sector. Overall, the SAPs brought about drastic reductions in the public sector, a rollback of welfare expenses and domestic market subsidies (such as the state backed purchase of certain agricultural produce at fixed prices), and the simultaneous creation of incentives for private and foreign investment through a devaluation of the local currency, the removal of import barriers and red tape, and the relaxation in legal restrictions on foreign investment and landownership (Edelman, 1999). As elsewhere, the structural adjustment produced winners and losers. Directly influencing the ecotourism boom were the opening of the market to foreign private investment and landownership and the creation of incentives for tourism entrepreneurs (such as eased conditions for the creation of private natural reserves, or tax exemptions on imported equipment and construction materials for certain, though, mainly large-scale tourism businesses at the time; Honey, 2008).

On the indirect side, it is important to consider that the SAPs contributed to the impoverishment of large segments of the population, at least in the short to mid-term. Under the combined pressure of increased competition, currency devaluation, and the elimination of subsidies and guaranteed purchase prices, many small-scale agricultural producers in rural areas went bankrupt and sold their lands. At the same time, the expansion of large-scale agriculture for export purposes and the increase of foreign landownership led to price hikes for land in many of Costa Rica's rural areas. One of the most fundamental resources for ecotourism development, namely land, has thus often been unequally accessed, being out of reach for inhabitants of local rural communities. Instead, much of it has been sold to foreigners or wealthier Costa Ricans who have taken the lead in developing Costa Rica's ecotourism sector (Honey, 2008; Horton, 2009). This impression can be corroborated by the estimation that in the early 1990s around 80 percent of the officially registered real estates along the country's Pacific Coast were in the hands of foreigners (Music and Jordan, 2013)

Consequently, the unequal access to the market has been one of the main concerns regarding the sustainability of the ecotourism sector. There are heated debates about the actual socio-economic benefits of Costa Rica's ecotourism industry. While it is evident that its aggregate economic contribution is quite significant, it is controversial in how far the profits are being equitably distributed among the broader population, and specifically among the inhabitants of ecotourism destination communities in rural areas (Horton, 2009; Fletcher, 2013). Having been boosted by Costa Rica's 'progressive neoliberal restructuring' since the 1980s, access to the growing ecotourism market has not been equal for everyone. As a result, many people are employed in Costa Rica's ecotourism sector by now, but the larger profits do not seem to be too evenly distributed (id.).

This has been particularly relevant in places like the Osa Peninsula in the South Pacific region, which has been described as the place with the highest biodiversity density worldwide (Ankersen et al. 2006). Here, ecotourism seems to play an important role in gaining people's acceptance of the far-

reaching restrictions on land-use changes. While ecotourism has become the main pivot of the Peninsula's economy, it seems that the largest profits accrue to a relatively few high-end ecotourism entrepreneurs from outside of the area (Horton, 2009). The local Costa Ricans are mostly employed in the lower-paying ranks of the sector, as only a few have been able to compete with the financial capital and expertise of entrepreneurs who are mainly from the Capital region, Western Europe, or the United States (id.). At the same time, the relative poverty of the regional population implies that there are considerable socio-economic pressures to lift the restrictions on land-use changes in order to achieve economic progress. Cattle ranching, palm oil, and conventional mass tourism are some of the ecologically more damaging alternatives that might grow stronger in places like Osa if ecotourism fails to deliver on its socio-economic promises to local communities (Fletcher, 2013).

In cases like these, it is questionable if ecotourism can fulfill its integrative function of economic development and conservation. Even though the lower-paying positions of locals might be an economic improvement and many jobs created, the assumption of a 'trickle-down' effect that will gradually balance unequal market access is still debated. For one, Zambrano and colleagues (2010) elaborated first-hand quantitative data indicating that in locations like the Osa Peninsula even lower-ranked tourism employments pay more on average than most other jobs available in the region. For another, it is also evident that tourism development tends to come hand in hand with significant rises in consumer and land prices (Honey, 2008). In addition to that, tourism employments tend to be unstable (e.g. highly dependent on the season) and unequally distributed even within the lower-paying ranks (e.g. Zambrano et al. 2010 have hinted to a gender bias in tourism employments).

Last but not least, there have been some more sustainability concerns with Costa Rica's ecotourism and other types of tourism development. Around the popular Manuel Antonio National Park, for instance, tourism development has been little planned or regulated. Whereas the natural attraction of the Park might imply an ecotourism dimension, the ecological impacts appear to be problematic: For example, most of the wastewater from tourism businesses remains untreated, the small National Park is notoriously overcrowded, and certain animal species (especially monkeys) have become conditioned to feeding by visitors. These and other problems come on top of a highly competitive market dynamic that affects most of the country's established ecotourism destinations (Honey, 2008; Music and Jordan, 2013).

Meanwhile, some other places like the Northern Pacific Coast of Guanacaste have experienced a more 'conventional' mass tourism development, which has been actively incentivized by the state. Be it high-end mass tourism in luxury resorts as in the Papagayo area of Guanacaste (where a three billion dollar tourism complex with up to thirty thousand rooms and an integrated yacht-marina is being developed), cruise-ship tourism in Puerto Caldera, or 'party-tourism' in Tamarindo and Jacó – all of

these types of tourism development have been connected to negative sustainability impacts. While the development of mass and all-inclusive tourism in Guanacaste, for example, has been an impulse for economic growth, this has also been at the root of conflicts about scarce freshwater resources in the drought-prone region. One of the main issues with cruise-ship tourism has been that only little money is infused into the local economy, and 'party-tourism' has been related to persistent debates about drugs and sex-abuse (see e.g. Honey et al. 2010; Music and Jordan, 2013).

3.2. A Costa Rican brand of sustainable tourism: Turismo Rural Comunitario

The above review of (eco) tourism development in Costa Rica is not exhaustive by far, yet it serves to give an overview of the sustainability issues linked to it. Although there is no universal agreement on what constitutes sustainable tourism, most definitions of an ideal type refer not only to environmental sustainability but include socio-economic and cultural dimensions, too.

Martha Honey (2008), for instance, argues that truly sustainable ecotourism businesses should:

- *Involve travel to natural destinations* (e.g. national parks or otherwise protected or comparatively untouched places).
- *Minimize their environmental and cultural impacts* (this is related among other things to precautionary and preventive measures such as the provision of a code of conduct for employees and visitors, the use of low-impact materials for construction, the sustainable use of freshwater and energy resources, or to an ideally smaller scale of operations in terms of visitor numbers and infrastructure).
- *Raise the environmental awareness of tourists, staff, and local inhabitants* (e.g. through environmental education programs, or educational interpretations of guided tours).
- *Provide direct financial benefits for conservation* (e.g. by levying funds used to protect nature reserves).
- *Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people* (e.g. by proactively employing local people, ensuring the equitable distribution of tourism benefits, or encouraging local participation, control, and ownership of tourism projects).
- *Respect local culture* (e.g. minding local values, dress codes, or habits and behave in a less intrusive way than it is often the case with mass tourism).
- *Support human rights and democratic movements* (e.g. by avoiding financial contributions to authoritarian states).

Textbox 1: Martha Honey's description of authentic ecotourism (taken from Reich, 2015, p.5, based on Honey, 2008)

As hinted at above, Costa Rica's (eco) tourism boom throughout the 1990s and much of the 2000s has been accompanied by controversies about its sustainability in a number of ways. It is against this background that alternative models of tourism development gained momentum from the mid-1990s on (Zamora Mora and Aguilar Cartín, 2014). By now the most prominent of these alternatives is *Turismo Rural Comunitario*, a term that was coined in Costa Rica in the 2000s.

Whereas TRC is no homogeneous concept, there are certain characteristics that stand out. In principle there are many parallels to the concept of *community-based* ecotourism (cf. Reimer and Walter, 2012). The latter might be seen as a type of ecotourism specifically designed to address the problems frequently encountered in conventional ecotourism practice. It does so by taking an explicitly people-centered approach and putting a greater emphasis on the socio-economic and cultural components thought of in idealized projections of ecotourism (id.). Community-based forms of tourism stress the importance of local ownership and management of tourism initiatives in order to achieve an equitable distribution of benefits within destination communities. Another objective is the harmonization of the tourism business with local cultural values, and often also the incorporation of 'authentic' culture into the tourism product (cf. Scheyvens, 1999; Salazar, 2012; Tolkach et al. 2013).

- Planned, managed, and owned by rural communities, often represented by formally established local associations, cooperatives or foundations, but also possibly family-based or managed by individual members of rural communities
- Aiming to equitably distribute economic benefits through local production and value chains
- Based on some kind of natural and / or cultural attractive in rural areas
- Offers an 'authentic' tourism experience that builds, for example, on traditional local gastronomy, agricultural production methods, indigenous cultures, or arts and crafts
- Promoting local landownership
- Promoting the sustainable management of natural resources and the participation of local communities in it; minimize environmental impacts and provide environmental education
- Tourism activity often conceived of as a complement to and diversification of other economic activities (e.g. agriculture, fisheries)
- Usually small-scale, microenterprises
- Mostly organized in some kind of wider TRC network (e.g. for commercialization purposes) and political advocacy)

Textbox 2: TRC characteristics (cf. Trejos et al. 2008; Andreu, 2008; Cubillo Mora and López González, 2009; Ley Fomento del TRC, 2009; Hernández Navarro and Mora Sánchez, 2012; Aguilar Cartín and Zamora Mora, 2014)

The box above lists some frequently mentioned characteristics of TRC enterprises. The origins of the Costa Rican Turismo Rural Comunitario are in the early 1990s[8]. Back then, some rural community organizations with different purposes (e.g. agricultural production cooperatives or conservationist associations) had already ventured into tourism on a very small scale. Yet, this was usually limited to receiving groups of visitors with an interest in experiences of cultural exchange, student groups, or researchers, and little thought of as proper tourism. In 1994, an organization called Fundecooperación was created with the purpose of channeling funds for sustainable development projects, originating in the Dutch government's commitment at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Through this organization and a proposal by the European Center for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism, the interest in alternative, community-based forms of sustainable tourism gained leverage within a network of Costa Rican NGOs (the so-called CONAO). Soon thereafter, a first exploratory study about the topic was conducted (cf. Bonilla Moya, 2009).

Soon, a new-founded commission for sustainable tourism within the CONAO began lobbying for the idea of what was then named *Agroecoturismo Comunitario* ('community-based agro-ecotourism') – this would later on be renamed as Turismo Rural Comunitario. That brand of tourism was then established as one of the funding priorities of Fundecooperación, and soon other actors such as some of the tourism entrepreneurs, universities, state-entities, and other NGOs were involved, too (id.). In 1995, the Small Grants Program (SGP), implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and financed by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), started funding community-based tourism projects in Costa Rica as well. Within ten years it provided financial assistance to almost fifty initiatives that might be considered as TRC enterprises (Trejos et al. 2008).

In the first decade of the 2000s, the role of two community-based tourism networks, ACTUAR and COOPRENA becomes increasingly significant. Both of these are umbrella organizations that encompass a number of around twenty to forty members, all formally established community-based groups with TRC operations. COOPRENA is established in the mid-1990s as a consortium of rural community-based cooperatives active in tourism; ACTUAR is founded in the early 2000s as an association between different rural and community-based tourism groups that received financial support by the SGP (Andreu, 2008). In 2004, together with the National Peasant Board[9] and with the support of the SGP and the Central American non-profit organization ACEPESA, ACTUAR and COOPRENA initiate the 'TRC Alliance'. This informal alliance lasts until the end of the decade and contributes decisively to some of the following milestones of the TRC sector: the official declaration of TRC as an activity of public

[8] The concept of TRC originates in Costa Rica, but by now it can be found in variations in other Latin American countries as well.

[9] 'Mesa Nacional Campesina' – an association of farmers that seeks to defend the interests and the rights of farmers in the smallholder sector in Costa Rica

interest under the second administration of President Oscar Arias in 2007, the 2009 adoption of a law intended to provide institutional support to TRC operations[10], the organization of an annual Rural Tourism Exposition, and the formal foundation of the Chamber of Rural Communtiy-based Tourism (CANTURURAL) at the end of the decade (Trejos et al. 2008.; Aguilar Cartín and Zamora Mora, 2014).

By now, Turismo Rural Comunitario seems to be widely recognized as an own tourism branch in Costa Rica. The influential ICT, for instance, has declared TRC as one of the four touristic macro-products of the country, which it intends to develop and promote (id.). Concerning the size of the sector, there are different estimates. The fourth edition of the Costa Rican Community-based Tourism Guide jointly released by CANTURURAL, ACTUAR, and the ICT (with the financial support of the SGP) lists fifty TRC enterprises spread across six regions. Yet, the actual number might be much higher, since these are only businesses that are officially recognized by the ICT (most of them being member organizations of ACTUAR and / or COOPRENA). The recognition and demand for the sector is also mirrored in official statistics, showing that many tourists are increasingly seeking "genuine cultural experiences" (Honey, 2008b, p.206). Based on airport exit surveys between 2010 and 2014, the ICT thus estimates that 11.6 percent of international tourists in that period had participated in some kind of TRC activity during their visit. Most existing TRC operations appear to provide (a usually small number of) accommodations, ('typical' or traditional local) food, nature and culture-oriented guided tours (e.g. the 'Cocoa Tour', or observation of flora and fauna), or arts and crafts (e.g. indigenous-style masks) – oftentimes as a mixed offer (Aguilar Cartín and Zamora Mora, 2014).

In spite of the aforementioned achievements and the existing offer, it is unclear in how far the sector is actually financially (self-) sustainable. Overall, the economic share of the TRC sector in Costa Rica's tourism industry seems to remain rather insignificant. The main challenges for TRC enterprises have been to become more competitive and to gain market access, which has been related to some limiting factors. Many of the entrepreneurs, for example, have a rather low educational profile, little or no experience in tourism, and very scarce financial capital (Trejos et al. 2008). Such limitations are all the more significant when taking into the equation that Costa Rica's (eco) tourism market is highly professionalized, capital-intensive, and quite competitive (id.; Honey, 2008). Against this background, the capacity-building interventions of different support organizations seem to have been vital to the establishment and survival of the TRC niche (Cubillo Mora and López González, 2009).

[10] 'Ley Fomento del Turismo Rural Comunitario' (Law n° 8724, July, 2009)

Most of the organizations that have provided capacity-building support to TRC initiatives have done so with a logic similar to the stakeholder approach of environmental conservation. Hence, the overarching objective being the achievement of an integrated poverty-alleviation and environmental (to a lesser degree also cultural) development model. However, given the significant limitations hinted at above, this has not been an easy task to achieve. In line with the economic challenges encountered, the more immediate objectives of many support interventions appear to have addressed the market access and competitiveness of TRC enterprises in the first place. In other words, the financial self-sustainability of the concerned enterprises is a precondition for reaching the envisaged ecological, socio-economic, and cultural sustainability objectives of community-based ecotourism development. This does *not* mean that practices related to the environmental sustainability of TRC enterprises and themes such as the distribution of benefits have not been addressed. Altogether, the capacity-building has included the following lines of action:

- *Training and technical advice* (e.g. to equip TRC entrepreneurs with the necessary tourism know-how, organizational, marketing, negotiation and business administration skills, knowledge of quality standards and best-practices, increase environmental consciousness, increase self-confidence, familiarize entrepreneurs with legal and regulatory procedures, etc. Often in group workshops but also 'field visits' by 'experts', or excursions and internships at other tourism businesses)
- *Financial support* (e.g. small donations, microcredits, and low-interest loans.[1] Usually for investments in the physical structure and equipment of TRC operations)
- *Marketing and commercial promotion* (e.g. through the specialized travel agencies of COOPRENA and ACTUAR that sell the tourism products of their member groups)
- *Political advocacy* (Influence political decision-making on different levels to gain institutional backing from state agencies)
- *Networking* (e.g. creating links between different entrepreneurs, facilitate their access to decision-makers, donors, and travel agencies)

Textbox 3: Capacity-building for TRC: Lines of action

The above enumeration is also based on a previous research project that I conducted in Costa Rica in the first half of 2015 (an impact evaluation of a series of 1 to 3 years-long capacity-building programs for local tourism entrepreneurs on the Osa Peninsula and surrounding areas; cf. Reich, 2015). From the experience gained during that earlier project, I would contend that these capacity-building projects and programs could be described as 'knowledge intensive' development interventions taking place in

often complex rural contexts[11]. This reconnects to the basic underlying assumption of this work. Namely, that knowledge management is a key to the effectiveness of these capacity-building interventions.

With the background of the case study in mind, an addition can be made to the overarching research objectives of (1) exploring the actual development impacts of the ways in which involved actors (knowingly or implicitly) manage knowledge inputs, and of (2) specifying the potential of increasing the effectiveness of development interventions through adequate knowledge management. This thesis is not only intended to be a theoretical contribution to the field of knowledge management for development. The objective is furthermore to provide *policy* advice on whether and how the knowledge flows relevant to the success of the capacity-building interventions in question might be improved. After all, a successful consolidation of the TRC sector might be a significant contribution to sustainable development in Costa Rica and possibly inspire sustainable tourism development elsewhere.

4. Conceptual framework

In line with the research objectives and questions, it is helpful to create a conceptual framework to specify in what terms the capacity-building interventions in question might be considered as effective development, what knowledge inputs might be relevant to this, and how the relevant knowledge are managed. This section thus contains conceptual clarifications of successful capacity-building, of different knowledge types that might be distinguished, and two different conceptual frameworks to describe the ways in which knowledge management shapes the capacity-building interventions (from rational and from post-rational perspectives; cf. Table 1) While in reality knowledge management cannot be assumed to strictly correspond to one or another theoretical perspective, the application of different theories could yield a more comprehensive perspective on existing knowledge gaps and their causes.

4.1. Development effectiveness and capacity-building

The concept of 'capacity-building' is quite controversial in development thought. Especially in relation to the practices of many NGOs and development agencies it tends to be seen as a mere 'buzzword'. It

[11] The Osa peninsula serves as a good example: The capacity-building programs in this area take place against a background of protracted land struggles, nature conservation, multi-dimensional poverty, population growth, unresolved administrative issues, geographical remoteness, the presence of many different development entities, illicit activities such as homesteading and gold-mining in protected areas, and many other factors that shape the multifaceted local context.

appears oftentimes to be used in a narrowly defined way as a synonym for certain kinds of vocational or technical training, or else, as a sort of catch-all phrase that is applicable to almost any development practice (Eade, 2007). According to Deborah Eade (2007) neither of this is very useful in the development practice. Originally, the idea rests on a "belief that the role of an engaged outsider is to support the capacity of local people to determine their own values and priorities, to organize themselves to act upon and sustain these for the common good, and to shape the moral and physical universe that we all share" (id. p.632). Hence, an idea of externally induced self-determination or 'self-help'. But so-far this continues to be rather vague. What might be more helpful is a distinction between a substantial dimension of the thematic contents of capacity-building, and a procedural dimension that bears many participatory aspects. Both will be considered here.

- First, one might distinguish a dimension of capacity-building that is focused on the different categories of capacities which interventions should aim to strengthen. This side of capacity-building might be seen as substantial or outcome-related – it helps development organizations to draw a baseline of existing capacities, for example within a target community, and subsequently to intervene in order to increment this 'capacity-base'. Hereby, development impacts can be visualized by means of specific indicator categories. Eade (2007, p.633) enumerates relevant capacity-building categories that are "intellectual, organizational, social, political, cultural, representational, material, technical, practical, or financial – and most likely a shifting combination of all these".

  In a similar fashion, I drew on a framework of different types of capacities for an earlier research project, which was designed to measure the sustainability impacts of training programs for TRC entrepreneurs in a specific region of Costa Rica. Based on an article by Sastre Merino and Carmenado (2012) about capacity-building in rural development projects, I distinguished between different capacity levels (individual, group / entity) and categories (technical, behavioral, contextual, and financial / material). Individual technical capacities were described in terms of acquired skills (e.g. in bookkeeping, ICT, financial planning), whereas individual behavioral capacities referred to personal commitment, attitudes, and motivations. Group level capacities can be behavioral ('deepening social capital' – e.g. developing shared identities, norms and values) or contextual (adapting to 'the bigger picture' – e.g. by elaborating a common strategy and goals, pooling resources, establishing formal organizations, etc.).

- Second, instead of delving into this substantial dimension of capacity-building, Eade (2007) calls for what might be viewed as a participatory dimension. To follow her argument, it is helpful to consider Mike Powell's (2006) outline of an effective development 'sector' as a *knowledge industry* in contrast to *service industries*. According to this author, the framing of targets (like the Millennium Development Goals) in largely quantitative terms has, among other things, contributed to a view on development practice as a kind of service delivery industry. Effective development is frequently projected as a set of transferrable resources such as finance, health care, drinkable water, education, technical know-how, etcetera, that have to be efficiently provided to a target population (i.e. 'the poor'). However, such views portray supposed beneficiaries as passive receptors of aid, neglecting the possibilities for them to *appropriate* the process and to determine their own 'development'.

  Powell (2006, p.519) thus claims that effective development should be much more: "… the issue is not simply the provision of a service – clean water, for example – but the creation of socio-economic circumstances whereby clean water is produced on a sustainable basis. It is a process which cannot happen, and certainly cannot lead to the intended outcomes, unless it is based on *both* on a good understanding of the particular socio-economic reality that the 'development' is intended to change *and*, just as importantly, on an appreciation of the perceptions of local populations as to their options in that reality. Without such 'knowledge', interventions fail, as we have seen time and time again."

  In this view, development is a 'knowledge industry', the effectiveness of which hinges on taking into account and integrating the multiple perspectives of stakeholders into the development process. While there is no universal recipe on how to find the right balance between the different knowledge components involved, Powell (2006) highlights two aspects in particular: The need for collaborative approaches to knowledge production, where effective communication should be a two-way process on a horizontal level between the involved actors. And, as a key to the achievement of this, a self-critical reflective attitude by development professionals that requires paying more attention to how the frequently taken-for-granted assumptions of development practice are socially produced and possibly undermining the inclusion of marginalized perspectives.

  Eade's (2007) critique of capacity-building in development practice might be interpreted in line with Powell's (2006) critique of development as a service industry. She upholds that capacity-building tends to be a rather top-down process, a one-way transfer of resources, services, and knowledge intended to match a perceived need of 'the poor'. In consequence, "not even the best-intentioned NGOs are exempt from the tendency of the Development Industry to ignore, misinterpret, displace, supplant, or undermine the capacities that people

already have" (Eade, 2007, p.633). At worst, this vertical approach risks to create an upward dependence on development organizations and donors.

Instead of this, and similar to the concept of development as a knowledge industry, effective capacity-building requires the integration of multiple perceptions and opinions to better visualize the intended change within local contexts and the 'bigger picture'. Above all, this implies that there should be a meaningful participation process that exceeds the common formal requirements of development interventions. In many cases, consultation remains superficial or without effects, thanks to the upward accountability that development entities and staff in the 'field' have towards higher organizational levels (e.g. donors / central offices) (cf. Powell, 2006; Eade, 2007; Mosse, 2007). In many cases, this leads to a narrow-minded perspective, where long-term impacts will not be accounted for: "the workshops have been held, the participants gave positive feedback on their evaluation forms, and so capacity has been built" (Eade, 2007, p.636). Rather than that, the aim should be mutual accountability between all actors involved. This rests on horizontal communication processes that cannot be achieved unless development organizations commit to honest and self-critical reflection (id.).

Complementary to the above, one might conceive of successful capacity-building as the result of effective *learning processes*. Learning can in turn be seen as the result of knowledge management processes (Ferguson et al. 2010). Importantly, the learning process resulting from 'rational' knowledge management is not the same as the *social* learning process implied in post-rational perspectives. The latter seems to be much more relevant to a successful procedural or participatory capacity-building process, while the former is rather substantially or outcome-oriented.

The substantial level of capacity-building implies that development organization need to define the capacities that they aim to strengthen, and how this might be measured and implemented. If this is based on a purely rational knowledge management and learning process however, it might remain a top-down exercise of gathering information 'units' on developmental needs and applying one-fits-all solutions, with little regard to the context – a one-way transfer of services and resources 'downwards' that is in practice often returned 'upwards' with quantitative success-indicators and 'stories' that donors can use for fund-raising. This is unlikely to effectively contribute to participatory development (Eade, 2007). Without this 'procedural' dimension of capacity-building, it is likely to resemble a mere 'service delivery', which might eventually even undermine the already existing capacities. In line with certain post-rational knowledge management approaches, completely successful capacity-building also requires a *mutual or reflective learning process*, whereby the power imbalances that shape the production of knowledge are explicitly recognized and addressed.

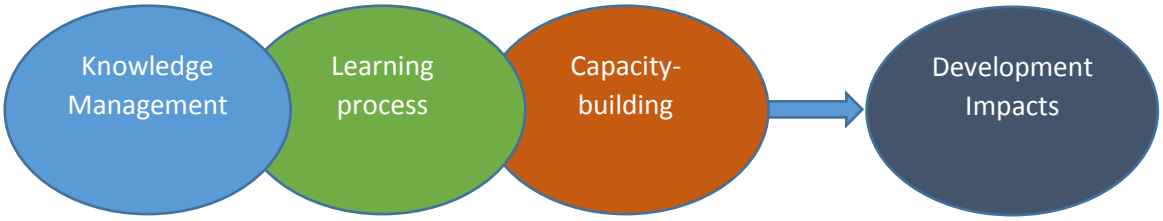

Figure 1: From knowledge management to development impacts of capacity-building – The success of capacity-building has a substantial and a procedural dimension. Here it is assumed that positive development impacts are much more likely if both dimensions are included. This requires not only a 'cumulative' learning process of information gathering but two-way social learning that takes place on a horizontal level between different actors involved. The kinds of learning processes that take place are determined by the ways in which knowledge is managed. While the strengthening of capacities could in itself be seen as a positive development impact already, this might also connect to indirect impacts in the long run.

4.2. Knowledge types

In order to specify the relevant knowledge which serves as input to the capacity-building interventions, it is useful to distinguish between different types of knowledge. A broader distinction that is commonly made in the literature is that between explicit (or 'codified') and tacit knowledge. *Explicit knowledge* is formulated or coded in a structured way in some language. This includes, for instance, written or recorded explanations and descriptions, mathematical and chemical formulas, statistics, or programming languages. The advantages of explicit knowledge are that it tends to be easily recorded, stored, 'transported' through different media (e.g. digitally, orally, or through books), and possibly decoded by knowledge receivers.

Tacit knowledge, in contrast, is knowledge which is often difficult to formulate in precise words or other linguistic elements (e.g. numbers or signs). Yet, it is tends to be seen as complementary to explicit knowledge, and also important on its own, often as a kind of instinctive knowledge that is crucial *in practice*. For example, the action of a professional soccer player kicking a football with a specific strength, length and curve is mostly based on tacit knowledge. This process is highly complex, involving factors such as the weight of the ball, gravitational laws, the interpretation of other players' movements, and the conversion of neuronal impulses of the professional's brain into a precise movement of the body. In the moment of action, only little of that knowledge can be explicitly recalled, and the 'expert' will probably not be able to completely explain why the ball flew exactly in this way or another. Similarly, a 'development expert' might correctly predict the failure of an intervention, but without being able, in that moment or even later on, to explicitly pinpoint all of the complex dynamics that lead to the failure.

Whereas explicit and tacit knowledge are overarching types of knowledge, one might also distinguish more specific sub-categories (which in turn involve more or less explicit and tacit knowledge). For this thesis, I distinguish three sub-categories (based on Asheim et al. 2011; Gordijn and Helder, 2013) that can be seen as combinable 'knowledge bases' underlying the perceptions and courses of action that actors take in practice:

1) The 'technical' knowledge base (cf. World Bank, 1999): *Know-how* refers to actors' perceptions of *how* specific things or processes function and should be handled. Examples are the 'expert knowledge' of the correct handling of technical machinery, knowledge of the functioning of the tourism market according to demand and supply curves, or of the organizational procedures needed to organize a workshop (how to invite participants, how to book a venue, how to calculate the financial costs, how to organize the staff, etc.).

2) The 'substantial' knowledge base: *Know-what* encompasses actors' perceptions of *what* development necessities to be matched and why ('what should be done?' But without necessarily knowing how, and how this might be decided upon or interpreted in different ways according to the context). As an example, development organizations might claim to know which health care services are needed in a particular location, basing this on the 'factual knowledge' derived from different health indicators such as life expectancy or the infant mortality rates (see e.g. Harlan et al. 2012).

3) *Interpretational knowledge* refers to actors' abilities of interpreting knowledge according to the contexts in which it is applied or generated (questions to be asked here are: 'who defines which knowledge is valid and how?' or 'what different meanings might the same 'factual knowledge' acquire for different actors and in different contexts?'). There is an important parallel to language, which has been described as a sequential process of sign interpretation between the different actors communicating with each other (cf. McFarlane, 2006). Examples of interpretational knowledge are communication skills such as the reading of body language, interpreting cultural norms, and language translations, or engaging in self-critical reflection on the validity of one's own assumptions (id.; Gordijn and Helder, 2013).

4.3. 'Rational' framework based on knowledge transfers

Based on the theoretical background outlined in section 2, a rational framework of knowledge management might be seen as the description of 'transferring' knowledge 'packages' from one actor to another, from a knowledge *provider* to a knowledge *receiver*. These can be either individuals or aggregate level actors such as development organizations or firms (see e.g. Whatley, 2013). The outcome of rational knowledge management is a cumulative (or *cognitive*) learning process, which is conditioned by the actors' abilities of abstracting "knowledge from the environment and relating it to the previously acquired frames of reference, to the cognitive map" (Koskinen et al. 2003, p.283). Meanwhile, the context within which these actors are situated is largely removed from the equation. One might compare the rational learning process to a puzzle that is gradually completed as the missing knowledge pieces are uncovered. These missing pieces only fit into the puzzle if it is 'objective' knowledge that accurately represents a pre-defined reality (id.).

Accordingly, the focus here is largely on *explicit knowledge* that can be transferred from a provider to a receiver. The incremental learning process functions through a chain of one-way and direct knowledge transfers on different levels. The main flow direction of knowledge is vertical: 'Objective' technical and substantial knowledge is supposed to be transferred from the global (or universal) to the local level, whereby the knowledge gap existing from the local to the global is gradually reduced. Where adequate, pieces of 'local' knowledge might also flow upwards to add to the existing pool of universal knowledge. What is furthermore decisive for a successful learning process is the *replication* of transferred knowledge in a horizontal direction. This is particularly important on the local level, since the replication of knowledge once it has 'arrived' will be much more efficient if it is passed from one receiver to another instead of creating an endless number of vertical transfer chains (Powell, 2006; World Bank, 1999).

Overall, there are a few aspects that can be linked to effective learning outcomes in a rational framework of knowledge management for development:

- Focus on 'gaps' of objective and explicit knowledge (especially substantial and technical)
- Focus on formal and direct links between knowledge providers and receivers (e.g. enshrined in production chains, agreements and contracts, written documents and laws)
- Preference for quantitative indicators for design, monitoring and evaluation purposes (e.g. economic income in dollars, life expectancy in years, water quality according to proportion of pollutants)

- Preference for the formal adoption of (scientifically) validated methods and tools to source, transfer, and replicate knowledge (e.g. formal adoption of the logical framework, internationally accepted standards of 'good governance', and best practices regarding the transparency and handling of data, formal evaluation tools and performance targets)
- Focus on technology for efficient knowledge transfers and storage (e.g. creation of databases, use of digital clouds for data storage, online communication tools to channel knowledge resources)

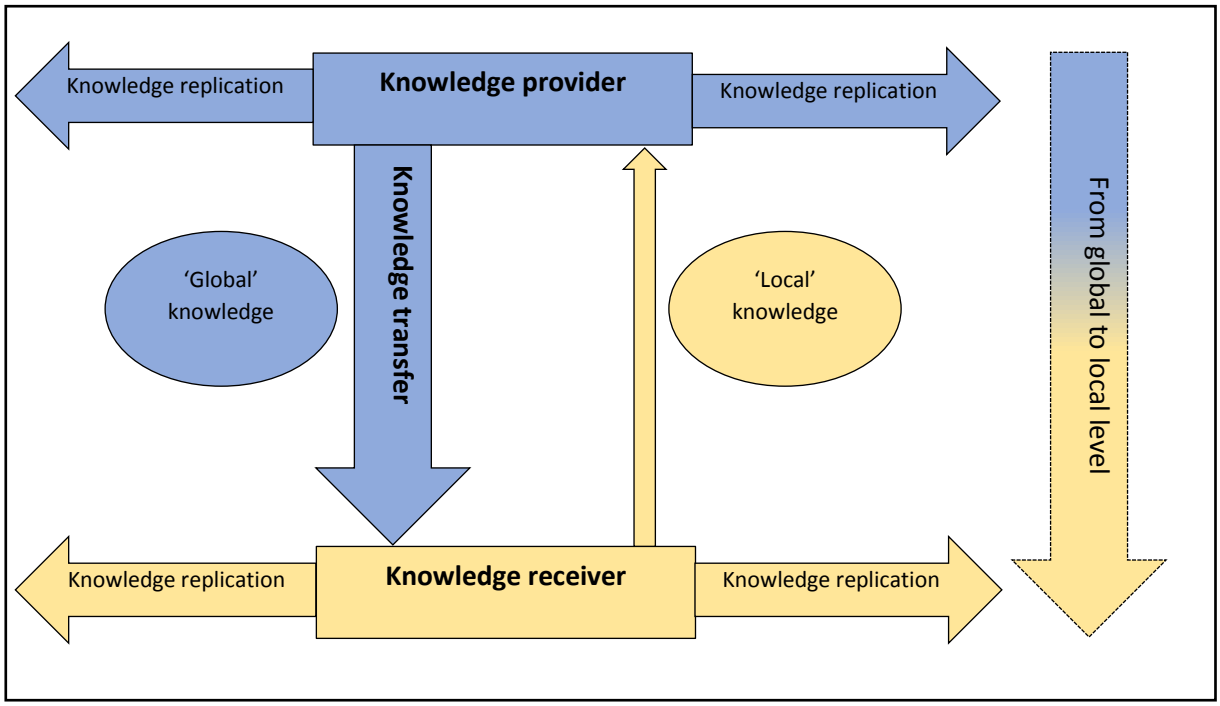

Figure 2: 'Rational' framework of knowledge management for development

As an example, one might consider the World Bank's (1999) vision of the connections between knowledge and economic market access: From this point of view, local entrepreneurs in developing countries tend to have difficulties to access to broader markets due to a lack of knowledge. Here, investments in the transfer and replication of state-of-the-art technical knowledge would increase the competitiveness of local economies through more efficient production and greater innovation potential. At the same time, producers in developing markets tend to lack up-to-date knowledge of market dynamics, which makes it difficult for them to match market trends like changing global demands. Conversely, quantitative indicators of local economies might be transferred upwards to produce a more accurate understanding of how different markets relate to each other on aggregate (national, regional, global) levels.

4.4. Post-rational framework: knowledge transformation within social learning systems

In contrast to the rational framework, post-rational views commonly reject the notion of objective knowledge creation as such. Rather than that actors make sense of particular knowledge 'packages' within practical contexts, based on their own experiences, perceptions and needs. But practices do not take place in a vacuum. They are situated in networks, where the individual knowledge interpretations are constantly negotiated with those of other actors and with socially established forms of knowledge. Learning results from an open-ended and social re-construction process of knowledge rather than from a mere addition of knowledge transfers. Hence, 'knowledge gaps' do not represent the lack of 'objective' knowledge in one particular location, but the failure to include, balance and align different knowledge perspectives of actors with each other in development practice (Ferguson et al. 2008; 2010).

In order to design a post-rational conceptual framework of knowledge management, it is useful to take into account McFarlane's (2006) distinction between knowledge and information. The two concepts have been used synonymously in rational frameworks, yet this author points out a crucial difference: Information is 'raw data' structured in some way that only becomes knowledge through the interpretation of actors. From this perspective, *knowledge without interpretation does not exist*. The flow of knowledge is never direct from one actor to another because it is inevitably mediated through an interpretation process, which is in turn situated in social contexts and practices. As a consequence, it becomes difficult to draw a clear conceptual separation between knowledge providers and receivers. Actors do not remain passive knowledge receivers that can either correctly decode a knowledge package or not. Rather than that, their interpretations are an active participation in the knowledge transformation process (id.).

Figure 3 (below) is a simplified illustration of the post-rational framework of knowledge management. Mind, that each actor's interpretation of the knowledge input is based on different knowledge needs and perceptions that are in turn shaped by the interplay of individual experiences and the social context of each. A successful knowledge transformation process between the two actors can only take place if the interpretation by one actor can be made sense of by the other actor, too. If a knowledge input is simply 'imported' and applied in a community without taking into account 'local' interpretations of such external knowledge, one might talk of a knowledge imposition instead of a transformation process (Powell, 2006).

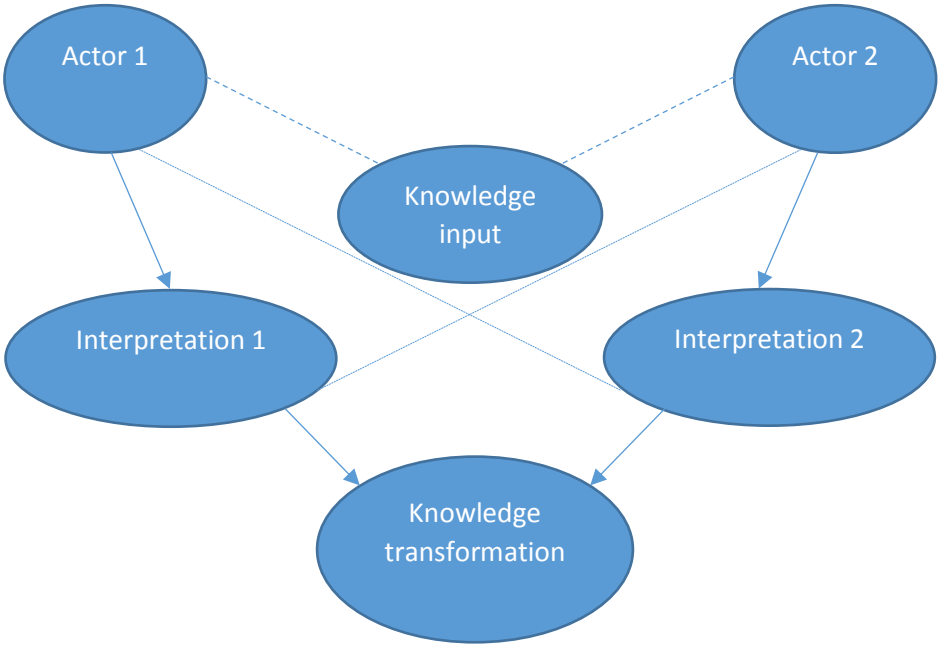

Figure 3: Simplified 'post-rational' conceptual framework: Knowledge transformation between two actors.

An effective learning process reflects a knowledge transformation that balances and accommodates different knowledge interpretations. But this learning process does not only emerge between two individual actors. Beyond that, it is situated in *social learning systems*, which are constellations of different smaller actor networks, so-called *communities of practice*. The meaning of knowledge is not only transformed through interactions within different communities of practice, but also through interactions across them (id.). Whereas there are many different possibilities to analyze social learning processes in actor networks (cf. Jones, 2009), the post-rational framework presented here describes knowledge management according to the concept of social learning systems by Wenger (2000).

Overall, the perspective of social learning systems is much in contrast to a rational learning perspective. Broadly, the focus is on *informal* communication and knowledge sources (formal processes can still play a role), on *tacit* (often interpretational) knowledge flows, and on the structures of organizations and networks to facilitate knowledge flows. According to Wenger (2000), social learning systems are structured in three dimensions: communities of practice, boundaries, and identities. Factors that shape the post-rational knowledge management processes and social learning outcomes can be found within these dimensions.

1) *Communities of practice* "are the basic building blocks of a social learning system […]" (Wenger, 2000, p.229). They are characterized by three elements: the *mutual engagement* of different actors in a shared practice (for example in a project or a specific department of a firm), a *sense of joint enterprise* (a collectively developed understanding of what that community is about), and a *shared repertoire* (e.g. shared ways of communicating, language styles, routines, and tools). Communities of practice specify how social learning takes place through the participation of actors in shared (development) *practices*. Here, social learning emerges from the interplay of individual experiences and socially defined competence. Within these communities, learning tends to correspond to a 'deepening' of existing knowledge (i.e. a very detailed understanding of a problem or situation). However, this can also lead to narrow-mindedness. The 'deep learning' within communities of practice might come along with an ignorance to perspectives from outside the community. Wenger (2000) points out three categories that encompass conditions for a successful learning process within communities of practice:

    - The *depth of social capital* within a community of practice is determined by the level of personal and professional trust between the actors and their mutual expectations of reciprocation.
    - The level of *learning energy* is characterized by the disposition of the members of a community of practice to actively search for, recognize and address knowledge gaps, and to remain open to other knowledge perspectives.
    - The *degree of self-awareness*: "Being *reflective* on its repertoire enables a community to understand its own state of development from multiple perspectives, reconsider assumptions and patterns, uncover hidden possibilities, and use this self-awareness to move forward" (Wenger, 2000, p.230)

2) Since mutual engagement in practice is the basic 'glue' of communities of practice, their *boundaries* are often unspoken, informal, and changing. While a deepening of knowledge tends to happen within communities, radically new insights and innovation tend to emerge at the boundaries. This includes above all interactions between actors across different communities. These interactions are potential learning opportunities but can also lead to knowledge losses through misinterpretation. In this dimension, effective learning is linked to:

    - The effective *coordination* of boundary-crossing practices to actively facilitate connections with other communities (for instance by setting apart spaces and time for

'inter-communal' personal relations, organizing exchanges such as platforms for discussion and knowledge exchange)

- The *transparency* about the meaning and the purposes of boundary processes (other actors should be informed or have access to information about the intention of sharing knowledge)
- The *negotiability* of boundary interactions is significantly influenced by power relations. A knowledge interaction between two actors should not be a one-way process. A development intervention might be coordinated through a detailed implementation plan and transparent regarding its objectives. But it might still lead to insufficient learning outcomes if it does not allow for any significant changes by negotiating with dissenting stakeholders.

3) *Identities* are the third structural element of social learning systems mentioned by Wenger (2000). An actor's social identity is crucial to knowledge interactions. It significantly influences the sense of belonging and trust and thereby the commitment to and modes of interaction across and within communities. "Navigating the social landscape defined by communities and their boundaries requires a strong identity. Progress can be described in terms of a few crucial qualities that must coexist to constitute a healthy social identity" (id. p.239):

   - The *connectedness* of an identity refers to the depth of social relations. It increases with factors such as shared experiences and histories, mutual commitments, affection, and reciprocity.
   - *Expansiveness* defines the scope of an identity. It should enable an actor to identify with and belong to various communities of practice and to 'cross bridges' to understand different social contexts.
   - *Effectiveness* means that an identity should empower actors to socially interact rather than to marginalize them. Self-confidence is an important factor for this. Furthermore, this implies that there are potential trade-offs between different qualities of an identity. A very expansive identity might at some point be counterproductive if it negatively affects the social depth and connectedness in social interactions. Conversely, the ever-increasing identification among members of a same group might lead to a high connectedness but decrease the willingness and opportunities to create bridges to other communities.

In summary, a successful social learning outcome in the post-rational framework depends on the balanced inclusion of different knowledge perspectives in a transformation process. That process takes place through the interactions within communities of practice or across them, within a wider social learning system. The texture of that social learning system is marked by constellations of different communities of practice, the boundaries between them, and the social identities of the involved actors.

5. Methodology and research methods

The field research on the knowledge-management shaping the capacity-building interventions for sustainable tourism was carried out over 5 months between February and July 2016 in Costa Rica. It was exploratory and geared towards obtaining qualitative in-depth insights into knowledge management in the development practice. The empirical data presented in the next sections have mainly been taken from a total of 40 semi-structured interviews. Participant observation at 5 different meetings and workshops and during a preparatory field trip for the design of a capacity-building program provided further relevant insights. The field research was single-handed, financed from the researcher's own resources and not affiliated to any organization other than Utrecht University. With the exception of two interviews in English, the field research has been conducted in Spanish.

The idea of the field research has been to gain a perspective on the knowledge management for the capacity-building programs 'from the inside'. That is, from the perspective of actors and organizations engaged in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the interventions in question. The 40 interviewees can be divided into 5 groups. The largest group is that of 16 actors who have been involved in one or another capacity-building intervention for sustainable tourism through (7 different) NGOs. For 7 of these actors, the NGO background might be considered as primarily conservation-oriented, while the other 9 are members of NGOs of which the main interest has been to support TRC and sustainable tourism initiatives in Costa Rica. Only two of these NGOs clearly act on an international level, one is a US-based conservationist organization, and the other one a Central-American initiative promoting integrated conservation and socio-economic development through different projects. The second largest group comprises 9 interviewees who have been involved as public officials representing 6 different Costa Rican state agencies. Only one of these agencies, the ICT, has its main focus on tourism. In the other 5 agencies, sustainable tourism forms part of the official agenda. The third group includes 6 interviewees who have been primarily involved as academics. 4 of them are from a public Costa Rican university, one is a scholar at a private institute, and the other one a teacher at a foreign university. The fourth group is that of 5 persons working for private for-profit consultancies, 2 of them as consultants on their own and the other 3 for one specific company. In the

remaining group, there are 4 employees of 3 different organizations that have been mostly involved as financial donors. One of these is based in the USA, one is a branch of a multilateral agency, and the other one is Costa Rican but largely operates on the basis of foreign funding.

Interviewee group	N° of interviewees (total: 40)	N° of entities represented (total: 22)
NGO	16	7
Public officials	9	6
Academic	6	3
Private consultancy	5	3
Financial donors	4	3

Table 2: Categorization of interviewees

The sampling of the interviewees was done in two parallel ways, through internet research and by asking for further contacts in the interviews and attended meetings. In total, 59 persons were asked for interviews via phone and / or email, 10 of whom did not respond at all. The remaining 9 could not be interviewed for different reasons (conflicting time-schedules being the main reason, difficult geographical access another one). 29 out of 40 interviews were conducted face-to-face in the metropolitan area of Costa Rica's capital San José, which is where most 'development organizations' in the country have their (main) offices. Of the remaining interviews, 9 were conducted face-to-face in different rural regions of the country, and 2 interviews were conducted via skype. 29 interviews were audio-recorded; written notes were taken in the other 11 interviews and during the phases of participant observation.

Participant observation was done in two different training modules and an organizational event of a capacity-building program for tourism entrepreneurs on the Osa Peninsula in February and March 2016. In April, I attended a meeting between different organizations and other stakeholders involved in the TRC sector in San José, where the results of a study were presented among other things. In June, I attended an info-event for a beginning capacity-building program in the South Caribbean region. Subsequently I participated in a field trip aimed to contribute to the design of the same program jointly organized by two Costa Rican state institutions.

Notes were taken for all obtained empirical data and coded with the help of the software NVivo11. The data were structured corresponding to the question categories covered during the interviews and participant observation. These categories were based on the main research questions and contained subquestions. Probing questions were used all along.

- *What knowledge is perceived as relevant to the success of the capacity-building interventions for TRC?* (Including questions like 'What are the most significant necessities of TRC entrepreneurs? How can these be matched through capacity-building interventions? What knowledge is most important for successful capacity-building?)

- *How has that knowledge been managed?* (From what kind of sources do the actors derive their knowledge? What methods do they apply to obtain knowledge? How has it been communicated between different actors? Which factors have affected the communication and application of knowledge? – also with an eye on the perception of different relations between involved actors and effective communication processes between them, power relations and funding)

- *In how far has this knowledge management process resulted in a successful learning processes?* (What relevant knowledge is seen as missing, ignored, wrong or excluded in actual capacity-building? What knowledge has not been applied even though it is relevant? What are the reasons for this? In how far has this been addressed?)

- *How has the learning affected the effectiveness of capacity-building?* (What are the perceived consequences of the ways in which knowledge has been managed? In how far has the capacity-building been successful or not? What persistent obstacles to successful capacity-building are there? What changes are recommended or not?)

In the empirical sections below, the findings are presented roughly following the order of the question categories listed here. Subsequently, learning outcomes of the underlying knowledge management processes are interpreted through the rational and post-rational conceptual frameworks elaborated in the previous section. The aim of that exercise has been to analyze the findings on a solid theoretical basis, and to provide answers to the main research questions. Before delving into the empirical findings, some methodological limitations will be considered.

6. Limitations

Perhaps most importantly, knowledge management is a topic with many concepts that are not easily operationalized in a development field research. The focus on knowledge and development is still relatively novel and fundamental concepts like that of knowledge itself tend to be elusive and abstract. To balance this, much weight has been put on the elaboration the theoretical and conceptual

frameworks. To avoid a negative impact of the challenging operationalization on the comparability between different interviews, semi-structured interviewing was the method of choice. This has allowed to cover the same concepts throughout the interviews with people in very different professional positions, leaving enough space for necessary clarifications and probing.

The exploration of possible causal connections between knowledge management and development impacts has been much (though not exclusively) focused on the shortcomings of knowledge management processes and learning. The fact that most of the respondents represent an institution implies however, that some might have been more inclined to highlight positive aspects instead of negative ones related to knowledge management 'failures'. To reduce such a possible bias, it was underlined that the researcher was financially independent and not accountable to any of the involved institutions. Anonymity as well as a confidential treatment of the data was guaranteed to the respondents. Furthermore it was highlighted that the research was itself also intended as a practical contribution to the development of the TRC sector.

The 'snowballing' sampling method carries the risk of reducing the representativeness of the sample. For this reason, in-depth internet and document research was conducted to complement the sample and reduce the possible selection bias. In fact, I had already sampled almost half of the contacts independently through online research before most of them were also recommended by other interviewees. This 'sampling convergence' could be taken as an indication that a good part of the total number of development professionals involved with the TRC capacity-building interventions is represented. This is furthermore likely, since TRC still appears to be a relatively small 'niche' within Costa Rica's tourism and 'development' industry.

Finally, it is worth noting that the perspective of capacity-building beneficiaries might be underrepresented in this research. Their role in the management of relevant knowledge is fundamental, however. To cover this at least partially, much weight has been put on the role of and communication with beneficiaries throughout the interviews. The obtained knowledge has also been cross-checked through participant observation.

7. Empirical findings

7.1. Relevant knowledge

Weaknesses and strengths of the TRC sector and enterprises

This subsection gives an overview of the knowledge that the interviewees considered relevant to the capacity-building measures in support of the TRC sector (not necessarily the knowledge that has been applied though). Overall, the largest focus appears to be on the knowledge of several perceived

weaknesses of the TRC sector. Within this, the lack of access to the tourism market seems to be the most pressing issue (highlighted by half of the 40 interviewees). The crux of it is alluded to by the statement of an interviewed consultant:

"After all, tourism is a business … the [sustainability] idea of Turismo Rural Comunitario might be very romantic, but there is also the blunt necessity of generating a stable economic income."

While the environmental and socio-cultural sustainability of TRC business seems to be less focused on by most interviewees[12], problems of economic (self) sustainability stand out as the main obstacle. These problems were in turn often directly related to the entrepreneurs' perceived lack of skills in marketing and business administration, and of 'professional' tourism knowledge.

With regards to marketing, interviewees indicated the need for entrepreneurs to attract more tourists, on what seems to be a highly competitive market. Supposedly, potential visitors seldom come to TRC business either because the existing offer remains unknown to them, or because TRC businesses do not match the marketing level of competitors who are better equipped to attract some of the same potential target groups (usually tourists interested in both natural and cultural attractions). One interviewee thus remarked that the generally low educational level of TRC entrepreneurs made it practically impossible for many to reach the highly professionalized level of marketing on Costa Rica's tourism market. Only few entrepreneurs are able to effectively sell their products online (e.g. via platforms such as TripAdvisor and booking.com or through an own website), and many of them seem to depend on the commercialization through specialized travel agencies such as those integrated in the TRC networks ACTUAR and COOPRENA. Another well-known necessity is that of integrating TRC into the product gamut of larger travel agencies operating on a broader scale[13].

Business administration skills have been highlighted as particularly relevant by 7 of the interviewees. A need for improvement is seen on two levels. On an operational day-to-day basis, a lack of knowledge about accurate pricing and accounting has been stressed. In this context, one interviewee told how a supported TRC cooperative had been receiving enough tourists, and noticed that they were still incurring losses, but without knowing why. In the end, it turned out that the guided tours that they had sold were priced so low that the sales did not cover the operational costs. If they had been familiar with some basic skills in book keeping, so the interviewee told, they would have

[12] This does not necessarily imply that the environmental and socio-cultural sustainability of TRC enterprises are taken for granted by all interviewees, although this might be an impression. One interviewee representing a donor organization, for instance, mentioned that the businesses supported through his organization were generally environmentally sustainable since they had been selected for their environmental protection activities in the first place. Specific studies of the TRC sector have focused more on a problematization these aspects.

[13] The agencies that have been mentioned most in this context are Travel Excellence, Horizonte Nature Tours, and Swiss Travel Costa Rica.

been able to address the problem on their own. Additionally, there is a perceived need to foment longer-term financial planning of TRC enterprises. An interviewee of a TRC network organization thus mentioned that less than 35 percent of the network's entrepreneur groups had implemented a formal business plan and less than 30 percent planned their annual financial budget.

The diagnosed lack of tourism specific knowledge has been stressed by 10 of the interviewees and is often related to the assumption that TRC entrepreneurs have neither had much experience as tourists themselves nor worked much in tourism before. Instead, most of them have a rather agricultural background, so it might be hard for them to intuit the preferences and tastes of (often relatively wealthy and travel-experienced international) tourists. In this context, at least 8 interviewees (most of them public officials) mentioned that the 'quality' of the tourism products in the TRC sector was a strong concern. Here, the focus is on improving the 'customer service', on elaborating security and other standards (e.g. emergency plans, sanitary standards, accessibility to handicapped visitors), and on remodeling the physical infrastructures (buildings and equipment) of enterprises.

Apart from the perceived need to build capacities in marketing, business administration and tourism specific skills, there are several other weaknesses that have been underlined. This is, for instance, the perceived need to spur the legal formalization of TRC businesses, particularly stressed by most of the state officials in the sample. On the one hand, it is stressed that the absence of formalization makes it more difficult for TRC entrepreneurs to obtain the official support of state institutions (and also in some cases that of non-state actors). On the other hand, it has been repeatedly recognized that the formalization of businesses is itself a delicate issue. This seems to be first and foremost connected to the fact that many entrepreneurs do not possess a legal land-title for the land on which their enterprises are situated. As one NGO member puts it:

"The major problem, which has been addressed but which remains unresolved is the issue of land-titles… on this it depends if you get a loan, if you get the tourism declaratory and other documents… otherwise you will always lag behind."

But even if a land-title is present, formalization remains an issue. One interviewee thus mentioned the anecdote of a TRC entrepreneur who had to file request at 11 different state institutions just to obtain a municipal operation permit for his enterprise. But with that, the formalization process was not finished yet, as even more applications had to be filed at the ICT in order to obtain the tourism declaratory (a document which in turn gives access among other things to possible tax breaks and the widely promoted certificate of sustainable tourism – CST –).

Regarding formalization issues, NGOs appear to underline the need for state institutions to be more flexible and adapt to the small scale and other particularities of TRC enterprises. For example, it

has been mentioned that for entrepreneurs in far-off rural regions filing an application at a state institution tends to be complicated: Due to poor transport and infrastructure it might involve longer travel times, overnight stays, and direct as well as opportunity costs (from the time off work). In contrast to this, some interviewees see a need for attitudinal changes on the side of the entrepreneurs. One official thus tells that:

"Even if the costs of formalization appear high to the small entrepreneur who is just starting business… some will always prefer to remain informal even if you create all the right conditions."

An NGO interviewee sees both sides of that coin:

"Many enterprises and organizations just don't continue the [formalization process] even if they could… because the people are lazy, they get bored and lose the motivation… but it is also complicated: for the people outside of San José it implies significant time and money to get there."

Another need for changes in attitudinal capacities concerns some entrepreneurs' supposed lack of entrepreneurial 'vision' (mentioned 5 times). In essence, this appears to be perceived as a commitment issue impacting on the previously mentioned points, as the following statement signals.

"… When we talk about business administration and online marketing, the 'campesino' [peasant] has to see him- or herself as entrepreneur and proactively use all these tools to sell the product… to grow with the enterprise."

Against this however, an interviewed academic cautions that such expectations are often ambiguous. While an original idea of Turismo Rural Comunitario is that of a complementary activity to agricultural production, there tends to be an assumption that the necessary commitment to the tourism business cannot go along with being a farmer. Similarly, it has been mentioned several times that what is needed is rather to reduce the prejudiced assumption of TRC as a kind of 'low-quality' farm-tourism.

Relevant knowledge of what needs to be addressed through capacity-building for TRC extends to another, particularly 'thorny' issue – that of finance. It appears to be widely recognized among professionals involved in the capacity-building that the lack of access to regular loans and other finance schemes (at all, or at acceptable interest rates) is a major obstacle to the development of the TRC sector. This is principally linked to formalization issues (for instance, without a land-title it seems to be difficult to obtain loans for the construction of business facilities). But also factors such as the common assessment of 'campesino' entrepreneurs in terms of low creditworthiness seem to play a role. As a result, many entrepreneurs simply lack the financial capital to invest in their businesses and therefore cannot react to market demands. An interviewed academic illustrates this need:

"Apart from training workshops, it is fundamental to provide funding. Because otherwise, their

ideas remain ideas. So the possibility of financing a person who has insufficient guarantees for a normal bank loan definitely has to be part of the capacity-building."

Even so this necessity is viewed with much caution by some. The main concern in this context is that easily obtained or 'free money' might rather result in a failure of a tourism project than in its progress. One interviewee noted that financial capacity-building through donations came with the risk of converting the TRC sector into a 'charity model'. This could turn out to effectively function as a disincentive to the entrepreneurial commitment in the sector. Furthermore, a few respondents reminded that many TRC enterprises are in the hands of (multi-purpose) grassroots organizations where some group members are more committed to the TRC business more than others. In such cases, easily obtained donations might spawn internal group divisions over money (e.g. if all members of a group feel entitled to receive their share, but not everyone has shown equal commitment to the TRC business). Nonetheless, the need for funding continues to be very relevant. Against the background of skepticism towards 'easy money', some middle-ground has emerged with considerations of micro-crediting, small donations, and low-interest loans.

The knowledge of the specific weaknesses of the TRC sector was often connected to the overarching need for stronger institutional support, particularly from state entities. Such claims were explicitly expressed by 11 interviewees. There has been involvement by the state, but one non-state interviewee with longstanding experience of the TRC sector complains that it has been rather sparse.

*"I feel that what has been missing is a **true** support from state entities to the TRC sector, specifically from the Tourism Board. There has been little support when the sector was just beginning to develop and to consolidate it later on… instead, NGOs and [other organizations] like COOPRENA, Fundecooperación, and the SGP have given most of the support… if it wasn't for organizations like these, TRC would not exist today."*

As illustrated by the following statement, this has been echoed by some public officials, too, though in a less drastic way:

"At the moment, support by the Tourism Board is minimal"

In addition to the above-mentioned formalization issues, interviewees mostly defined the need for stronger state support in terms of more continuous and more easily accessible capacity-building programs for TRC entrepreneurs. This includes financial support, training and to a lesser degree promotion activities (e.g. on tourism fairs).

A good example is the case of the INA ('National Learning Institute), which is often considered as one of the most important institutional actor with regards to training. The INA offers a large gamut of

courses that are either on permanent offer in the regional training centers, or tailor-made courses that can be carried out more geographically flexible upon request (e.g. at a local school or other facilities). A third support modality of the INA is the so-called 'technical assistance', in which 'expert' staff assists entrepreneurs on-site in order to tackle a previously defined specific problem (e.g. high operational costs). However, some of the INA's training offers have been perceived as very inflexible towards TRC entrepreneurs, implying many bureaucratic hurdles that effectively limit the access of many TRC entrepreneurs. Especially members of the TRC networks ACTUAR and COOPRENA have therefore insisted that formal access requirements (such as a minimum school education of nine years to access many of the permanent courses) should be lowered for TRC entrepreneurs. In addition to that, they have argued that more specialized courses should be on offer for the TRC sector, and made geographically more accessible to far-off enterprises.

Much of the knowledge about the capacity-building relevant necessities of the TRC sector is thus centered on specific weaknesses. In contrast to this, knowledge about the strengths of TRC enterprises appeared to be perceived as less relevant for the capacity-building (explicitly stressed by 10 interviewees). The interviewees who did so mostly shed light on the strengths when talking about the niche market potential of this 'culturally authentic' type of tourism that offered tourists not only natural attractions but also insights into the 'real' Costa Rican countryside by sharing time and experiences with host families. In this line of argument, the cultural background (e.g. being a 'campesino' or 'indigenous') and specific talents (e.g. skills in agricultural production, arts and crafts, cooking, knowledge of local history) of the entrepreneurs should be identified and encouraged. Here, the background of the entrepreneurs is seen as a potential competitive advantage (and notably also as a cultural sustainability value in itself) rather than a disadvantage.

Identification of capacity-building needs

Apart from the knowledge of capacity-building necessities that can be derived from the strengths and weaknesses of the TRC sector, many interviewees also signaled that it is important to know *how* to identify these necessities. This was seen as an important success factor for capacity-building. For at least ten interviewees this implied that the necessities should be defined and backed up with 'hard' facts and numbers. An employee of a state institution specifies how this should work:

"That is what we have been trying to ask from the TRC sector for many years already… that they provide us with diagnostics about necessities, but ***concrete*** *necessities, hopefully including numbers and names, for example, to tell us that 'in Osa, there are those five businesses that require training in*

customer service, and providing us with a justification of why they need this."

Similarly, for an official from an institution that was just starting to be involved in financial capacity-building it was urgent to get a concrete overview of which TRC enterprises were already existing in which region, what they were offering, and what were there annual balances, the costs of planned investments, and much more. The intention of this was to identify who really needed financial support for consolidation and who did not, and what would be the market potential of the enterprises invested in. Such information appeared to be particularly relevant to state institutions that were engaged in capacity-building on a nation-wide scale. But some NGO actors and donors underlined this need, too. It was pointed out by most of these interviewees that formal measurement tools were not only indispensable to determine the specific necessities of capacity-building but also to create a baseline and assess the impacts of their interventions.

Within the context of determining necessities, 3 interviewees reminded that it was very relevant to clearly define the conceptual basis of capacity-building interventions. For example, how to define the TRC sector itself (who is to be seen as a TRC entrepreneur and who is not), and how to specify the details of the sustainability impacts that capacity-building should achieve. A similar remark was made by an interviewee from the academic sector who advanced that it would be essential for any capacity-building measure to achieve conceptual clarity by taking a clear ideological stance:

"It is important to be explicit and honest about your ideological and political position, for example with regards to gender, ethnicity, class and land struggles, migration issues, the relation between humans and the natural environment, or the global political economy…"

3 interviewees explained that they found it particularly important to take into account that the necessities for the TRC sector would change a lot with time. It would, for instance, be relevant to adapt the capacity-building to the ever increasing digitalization of the tourism market – offer and demand on the market are nowadays matched through online communication applications, traveler platforms, among other things.

In principle, many interviewees seem to agree that the impulse for the support and definition of capacity-building necessities should come from the bottom-up. Particularly for state officials this means that strong civil society organizations on different levels (local, regional, national) are needed to push and guide capacity-building by state-actors. Capacity-building requests might be directly filed by TRC grassroots entrepreneurs or via intermediary non-governmental organizations and the regional offices of state entities. At the same time, most organizations seem to be inclined not to passively wait for requests but to actively seek the knowledge that might help them to design interventions. One

interviewee illustrates this with the following statement:

"One must learn how get that information on what [the actual or potential beneficiaries] really need… because sometimes they might be too shy to tell us"

Still, there are differing perceptions of how the knowledge of 'real' necessities should be attained in practice. At least partially with an eye on that question, two overlapping dimensions have been much referred to: Knowledge about how to communicate with (potential) beneficiaries, and intimate knowledge of the context(s) within which TRC entrepreneurs and the sector are situated.

Knowledge of contexts

The majority of the 19 interviewees that considered knowledge of the context of TRC enterprises as a key to the success of capacity-building referred in one way or another to the *local* context of the individual entrepreneurs and of their communities. What this might mean is illustrated by a former NGO employee who managed a capacity-building project that gained much prominence due to its perception as one of the first and most successful support projects for small-scale tourism entrepreneurs in Costa Rica.

"The reality of the people is different in every community… their reality might have to do with… the opportunities that the people there have, to access education, health, transport, communication… and many more aspects."

To give an example of this, it was repeatedly mentioned that in specific areas it would be paramount to take into the equation how some places in the country change depending on the season. In certain mountainous areas where coffee is grown, for instance, it should be known when the harvest is usually done, to avoid conflicting schedules with training programs. Alternatively, on the Osa Peninsula it might be quite difficult to enroll local tour-guides or other entrepreneurs in capacity-building programs during the high tourist season (roughly from December to April), since in that time of the year many of them may be busy earning the money that will help them through the low-season later on. These are only two of a possibly very long list of examples. What is crucial after all seems to be this: Rather than being able to name necessities on paper, knowing the particular reality of potential beneficiaries in a particular location is about…

*"…**understanding** the needs of the people… so that the execution of the capacity-building is based on the real needs of the people and not on what I have designed…"* (Stated by a private consultant interviewee).

Knowing the local 'reality' is thus about more than avoiding conflicting schedules and other

inconveniences. It is perceived by many as a fundamental factor to ensure that the interventions address necessities that are real and not just made up 'at some desk in a capital city office'.

Beyond the purely local context but encompassing it, some interviewees emphasized the importance of taking into account institutional contexts. On the one hand, they referred to various socio-economic, cultural or legal institutional barriers that confront many TRC enterprises with significant obstacles (e.g. the complicated web of laws that restrict land-use near many coastal strips and in protected areas; or lack of access to regular bank loans as a partial consequence of the cultural distance between 'urban bankers' and 'rural farmers'). On the other hand, this was linked to the perceived need of identifying and involving institutional actors that might fortify capacity-building interventions in various ways. This includes actors disposing of additional funding or technical support and possibly those who might be crucial when it comes to legal barriers: Several interviewees noted, for example, that the involvement of the SINAC (National System of Conservation Areas) could serve to avoid legal issues in projects in and around protected wildlife areas.

In a similar vein, relevant knowledge of other institutions that are involved extends to the assumption that effective capacity-building for TRC requires inter-institutional cooperation and coordination. The objective of this would be to avoid the duplication of capacity-building efforts and instead to join forces. An interviewed academic specifies, which kind of cooperation might be considered:

"I see this as one of the most important challenges: to achieve an alliance between public and private institutions that can be sustained in the longer term… rather than political campaigning, this should be based on a true interest in jointly developing [the TRC sector]."

It seemed to be clear to most of the interviewees that inter-organizational cooperation and coordination would require knowledge sharing. Not only in the sense of knowing what other organization are doing or could do regarding capacity-building but essentially in that of knowing what other organizations know. For instance, by exchanging data to better specify the necessities of capacity-building. Yet, when asked about the knowledge relevant to capacity-building, they hardly mentioned any specific ideas of *how* such sharing should be done (This is an important point however, returned to in the analysis of the management of relevant knowledge).

Communication knowledge

Partially overlapping with knowledge of the context, 15 interviewees indicated that knowledge about *how to communicate* with other actors within the course of a capacity-building program or project seemed quite relevant to them for successful outcomes.

6 out of these 15 explicitly referred to effective communication processes among different staff members. In this regard, they particularly pointed to the need for creating trust among the staff. Among other things, this would contribute to more flexibility in the implementation of an intervention. For instance, several interviewees mentioned that it could be very helpful to have enough space to adapt the content of a project, when unexpected issues emerged that were not addressed in the project design. This 'space' can be understood in different ways: Remaining mentally open towards adaptions, and providing the time and budgetary scope for being able to tackle unexpected issues.

Several interviewees furthermore elaborated on the advantages of different communication channels: Communication via WhatsApp, email, or other digital media might be quite relevant for efficiency, given that staff members tend to be in different locations most of the time (e.g. between the office, 'home-office', and in the ''field'). At the same time, they saw the availability of other staff for face-to-face communication and conversations on the phone as essential for effective communication on issues that require more in-depth discussion.

For 12 out of the above-mentioned 15 interviewees, it seemed to be very relevant to know how to communicate with the beneficiaries of capacity-building. Almost all of them strongly emphasized this aspect. It appears to be very much linked to the need to *understand* the local context, the views, and perceptions and ultimately the needs of beneficiaries. One respondent thus explained that…

"…what we have learned is that we have to get down to the level of the people in rural communities. Because they are people with different forms of communication and education. So if we go there with the perspective from [the capital city], we will never understand anything."

This view appears to imply a somewhat vertical difference between urban and rural perspectives. However, most interviewees who discussed this point advanced the need for essentially 'horizontal' pedagogical approaches, where there is no more or less value assigned to different points of view from beforehand. In this context, two interviewees (one involved as a public official and the other one a private consultant) explicitly drew on the writings of Paolo Freire. While they recognized that the underlying Maoist argument of much of that author's work might have been outdated, they highlighted what might be interpreted as a fundamental critique of a 'vertical' education system. In this view, the prevailing educational system imposes learning from the top-down – from the teacher that is a 'knowledgeable authority' to the scholars, who are supposed to memorize and repeat what is taught to them. This reproduction of knowledge is flawed however, since it serves to deepen socio-economic cleavages between 'experts' and 'non-experts', 'urban' and 'rural', the 'poor' and the 'elite'.

Departing from this, the 2 interviewees in question drew conclusions as to what would have to

be taken into account for successful capacity-building. Similar conclusions were echoed by other respondents, too. One staff member of a capacity-building project thus expressed that:

"We should always remember that they are dealing with people with their own histories, experiences, and realities. One cannot simply go there and ***impose*** *one's own reality on them… so one has to connect with the people… and see things from their perspectives to understand what they need."*

Instead of telling beneficiaries what to do and what not to do, this means that all of the involved actors should be open to jointly learning from each other to complement their views. Beyond the mere intention to do so, this also implies the need to actively try to comprehend the perspectives of beneficiaries. Several interviewees thus considered it very useful to spend time in the targeted communities in order to familiarize with the local context:

"You have to go to the [targeted] community, try to see and understand how life goes there" (statement of former capacity-building project manager involved through an NGO).

Another interviewee, a state official with many years of experience in agricultural extension programs, adds to this that such an understanding depends not solely on the time spent in beneficiary communities but essentially on the staff's disposition to *observe and listen* to the people, before deciding on what needs to be done. Some considered this to be a question of attitude. Some development professionals might, for example, be willing to stay overnight in a beneficiary community and share time with the beneficiaries even after the officially scheduled capacity-building activities, while others might prefer to stay at a hotel separate from the community or return to the city. Others linked a horizontal communication approach to specific skills, too, as indicated by the following statement of a consultant who has worked as a facilitator in training workshops with TRC entrepreneurs:

"Connecting with the people is for example much about knowing how to read the body language of participants in a session… reading if they understand me or not, if they agree with what I tell them or not, or if they are tired or bored."

Like in various interviews, this signals that face-to-face communication with beneficiaries might be most effective for a mutual understanding. Some also interpreted that it was necessary to question one's own assumptions and consider how these might be prejudiced, for instance through underlying socio-economic power differentials. One interviewee specified this in the following way:

"I think that there is a political connotation in believing that these 'campesinos' or rural entrepreneurs can indeed break this vicious circle of poverty. So I have to be aware that I might be a

part of this circle… to the extent that I believe that I am superior. If I continue to see myself as the engineer, the expert, then I contribute to the cycle of poverty by keeping my knowledge like a title for myself."

In addition to this, it was repeatedly remarked that interaction processes with the beneficiaries of capacity-building should be complemented by avoiding the use of abstract or academic language, by establishing links to lived experiences (e.g. through the intentional use of anecdotes and stories that beneficiaries might identify with in order to actively engage them in discussions) and to practice (e.g. preparing specific exercises for workshops, where the practice of a tourism business is simulated; or by discussing entrepreneurs' experiences in the business).

An understanding of the beneficiaries' perspectives has thus been deemed as paramount to successful capacity-building. Yet, this does not necessarily imply that all views should be incorporated without criticism. According to an interviewed consultant, it is decisive that criticism should be brought forward, but be constructive and negotiable. Similarly, an NGO project manager cautions that beneficiary perspectives should be taken into account in a balanced way:

"It is necessary to understand the needs of the people but this does not mean that each and every one's propositions have to be matched [in a capacity-building project]… after all the people tend to have many different necessities… and a clear vision has to be kept on the objectives… we are not a charity organization. We offer support to local entrepreneurs who want to develop environmentally and socially sustainable tourism enterprises. And tourism is still a business after all."

Knowledge of selection processes

There are two further knowledge branches that many of the interviewees estimated to be relevant for the success of capacity-building measures: Knowledge of *how to compose a good project or program team*, and knowledge of *how to select beneficiaries*. 9 interviewees stressed that the team selection process by project managers was central. First, the staff should be composed by experts in the relevant topics addressed. Ideally, a training instructor on tourism specific themes should have some professional experience in tourism sector; in a workshop on ecological topics, an expert in environmental sustainability might be helpful, and so on. Second, some mentioned that the partner organizations and staff should be empathetic towards participants and, if possible, be familiar with some of the local and overarching contexts.

It might, for instance be possible to identify and involve members of local NGOs that have already been active and successful in development activities in a community. One public official stated that his institution adopted some formal requirements when selecting instructors for TRC workshops (a

minimum of years of experience in a related tourism sector and as an instructor in training workshops). But what has been most emphasized in this context is the need to compose a team of people who are highly motivated and committed to capacity-building for TRC entrepreneurs. In this context, one interviewee underlines the role of project managers:

"We need a good leader behind the [capacity-building] process, someone who is clear about the objectives, but who is also sensitive towards the necessities and the context of the people… who is committed to the project… this commitment is what makes the difference… there might be someone with an excellent academic background and knowledge of the reality, but if there is no commitment… This is demanding. You need to dedicate your life to this process and be absorbed by it."

Likewise, commitment appears to be considered as an important ingredient when it comes to the selection of beneficiaries (knowledge of this selection process was stressed in 13 interviews). Behind this seems to be the assumption that the attainment of a self-sustaining tourism enterprise can be quite tough for people with usually a rather agricultural and limited educational background as well as little financial resources. This can be a tough and sometimes demotivating process in which tangible economic benefits might take a long time to match the investments. Not everyone will become a successful tourism entrepreneur and false expectations should be avoided when engaging with potential beneficiaries. Therefore, one respondent holds that the success of capacity-building requires…

"… to thoroughly consider if [the potential beneficiaries] might suit the profile of an entrepreneur, because not everybody has that capacity of saying: 'OK, I will built up an enterprise with the resources that I dispose of, and in the beginning I might not gain much in return'… so one has to define a clear vision of who could benefit from the capacity-building."

Another aspect mentioned by some with regards to the participant selection process: It should be considered that if a group of beneficiaries within a project is very diverse, their needs might also be quite diverse and therefore more difficult to match. Relevant 'diversity factors' that have been mentioned in this context are above all the *educational background of beneficiaries* (e.g. some might be illiterate while a few might have been to university), their *professional background* (e.g. some might have been agricultural day-laborers since a very young age while others might have already spent much time working in some ecotourism business), and the *operational phase of their enterprises* (e.g. some might still only have a vague idea of a tourism business while the enterprise of others might already have been operating for quite a while). Of course, the participant selection process can imply trade-offs, which makes it all the more important to be clear about the objectives.

Some interviewees furthermore insisted that the selection process could be an organizational

challenge. It was, for instance, seen as important to identify local partner organizations or community leaders who could 'spread the word' of a planned capacity-building intervention. Internal divisions within communities and grassroots organizations would also have to be taken into account for this. And some potential beneficiaries might not have any internet access or good phone coverage or difficulties of geographical access, so that they might be inadvertently ignored even if they would be interested. In the selection process it would thus be relevant to address such limitations. Regarding this, some respondents pointed out the advantages of adopting a clear methodology, including for example the creation of a formal participant profile with certain requirements, making field visits, and convoking information meetings in different communities through different media and intermediaries.

Awareness of empowerment objectives

A last point under the rubric of relevant knowledge for successful capacity-building shall be mentioned here. This is the need to explicitly think of capacity-building interventions in terms of *empowerment* (highlighted in one way or another by 12 interviewees, many of whom also stressed the need for a horizontal communication approach between capacity-building organizations and beneficiaries). Most of all, this was seen as related to the psychological development of beneficiaries in terms of their motivation, attitudes, and especially self-confidence. While some recognized the importance of selecting committed beneficiaries with an 'entrepreneurial vision', the focus on the psychological development of beneficiaries highlights that personal attributes like these should also be fomented through capacity-building. One consultant specifies this point of view:

"We all have an interior voice of skepticism that defines the limits of what we can achieve… so in all capacity-building projects that we do, be it in tourism or not, we start with the psychological development of the individuals to make them identify the obstacles that they have in themselves, to motivate them, and provide them a feeling of personal empowerment… this makes it more likely for them to accomplish."

Another interviewee from the same company describes that an objective of this is to avoid the dependency of beneficiaries on development organizations, which would rather be disempowering:

"… Empowerment can be understood in the sense that I have to attain the [state of mind] that I need to overcome my inner obstacles – and not to wait for someone to arrive and resolve those obstacles for me."

But empowerment was also understood on a group level. On the one hand, referring to the need for beneficiaries to encourage horizontal communication and joint learning among beneficiaries, too (not only between staff and beneficiaries). Fomenting trust, and the attainment of effective conflict

resolution mechanisms in beneficiary groups (also reminding that many TRC enterprises are managed by groups or families rather than individuals) were frequently mentioned hand in hand with this. Sometimes, group level empowerment was also linked to the explicit problematization of gender relations. On the other hand, 3 respondents referred this to the perceived need of fortifying the capacity of beneficiaries to organize (possibly in formal groups) and join forces to support each other's TRC enterprises. This might include political advocating for the TRC sector, creating marketing and promotion platforms, fund-raising and networking with other potential supporters.

Recap of relevant knowledge for TRC capacity-building

The relevant knowledge for capacity-building elaborated in the interviewees might be listed within six broader themes, each of which contains more specific aspects to be taken into account. This is summarized in the table below.

Table 3: Summary of knowledge considered relevant to capacity-building

Knowledge theme	*Specific knowledge aspects*	*Examples mentioned*
Knowing capacity-building necessities	Knowledge of TRC weaknesses	Lack of market access, marketing, tourism & business administration skills; formalization issues; finance; quality issues
	Knowledge of strengths	Authenticity and proximity to local culture; local traditional products and talents
	Need for institutional support	More continuous state support; better accessibility / facilitation & flexibility concerning formal requirements
Know how to identify necessities	Backing up knowledge with 'factual evidence'	Knowing numbers, names; providing structured data; formal adoption of methodological tools & conceptual clarity
	Preferred knowledge sources	Bottom-up impulse, requests and guidance by civil-society organizations; 'harvesting' grassroots knowledge 'from the top'
Knowledge of contexts	Local (individual / community level)	*Understanding* necessities from local perspectives; anticipating contextual (e.g. seasonal) limitations to implementation
	Institutional	Awareness of institutional (e.g. legal or cultural) barriers to TRC development; identification of relevant institutional actors and possible strategic allies; inter-organizational cooperation & coordination
'Communication knowledge'	Within capacity-building staff	Fomenting trust & flexibility for adaptation (budget, time, openness towards changes); using effective and efficient communication channels
	Between capacity-building 'professionals' and beneficiaries	Adapt to 'level' of beneficiaries; horizontal communication & pedagogical approaches: avoid imposition of 'expert' knowledge, be empathetic, self-critical, spend time and

		interact directly with beneficiaries, communication skills (e.g. reading body language), avoid academic and abstract language, use references to practice and experiences; use constructive criticism to balance perspectives
Knowledge of selection processes	Selection of project / program team	Look for experience, expertise, empathy, commitment (especially for team leaders)
	Selection of beneficiaries	Take into account diversity of possible beneficiaries (regarding e.g. educational background, professional background, and operation phase of enterprise); know how to convoke people & adopting selection methods (e.g. creating entrepreneurial profile, field visits, organizing information events)
Awareness of empowerment objectives	Individual level empowerment	Psychological development: foment motivation, self-confidence, and attitudinal change; avoiding dependency
	Group level empowerment	Encouraging horizontal communication, joint learning & conflict resolution among beneficiaries; address internal group divisions and gender issues; foment (formal) organizational capacity to foment TRC sector

In sum, the different knowledges considered relevant to (successful) capacity-building by the interviewees correspond to the different knowledge types and categories outlined in the conceptual framework. Both explicit and tacit knowledges seem to be considered as important. At the same time, all different knowledge bases, technical, substantial, and interpretational are present. It is worth noting that it is seldom possible to strictly assign a knowledge theme or aspect to only one conceptual type or category of knowledge. Rather than that, the above shows that the relevant knowledges seem to be much overlapping and complementary, containing different degrees of technical, substantial, and interpretational knowledge, which in turn represents a mix of explicit and tacit knowledge.

To give an example, the themes concerning capacity-building necessities are quite illustrative. The mere knowledge of 'typical' necessities of the TRC sector might be deemed a rather substantial knowledge base with a large explicit knowledge component, at least on the surface. When considering the need to back up the identification of necessities with 'factual' evidence, one might also identify a mostly explicit knowledge composition, although with a larger technical base (e.g. the adoption of methods on how to gather evidence). But apart from formal quantitative methods to provide 'hard evidence' on the necessities of grassroots organizations and entrepreneurs much tacit knowledge seems to be relevant. There is a large overlap here, for example, with the knowledge of different contexts, which might be more tacit / interpretational than explicit. Hence, the understanding of necessities within the local context is a mostly interpretational exercise (in turn much related to empathetic knowledge in horizontal communication approaches with beneficiaries) that might combine with a substantial (e.g. knowing relevant institutional actors and barriers that define the

context) and with a technical knowledge base (e.g. knowing how to carry out specific exercises that help to create trust in communication).

From a slightly different conceptual perspective, one might advance that the different perceptions on relevant knowledge represent both substantial as well as a participatory dimensions of capacity-building: There is not only much consideration of the specific capacities that should be built. A significant part of the sample puts quite some emphasis on the intended appropriation of the capacity-building process through participation, and primarily on a self-critical and horizontal communication approach. Up to this point, there seems to be quite some knowledge that might constitute a solid basis for successful capacity-building. But to assess whether this is really the case, it is necessary to consider how this knowledge is managed and in how far this might be linked to more or less successful learning outcomes.

7.2. Management of relevant knowledge

To assess in how far the relevant knowledge is linked to more or less successful learning processes and in how far this has contributed to effective capacity-building, this section provides an impression of the ways in which this knowledge has been managed by the involved actors. For this purpose, it is first outlined how the knowledge has been generated and applied in terms of its origins, storage, dissemination and interaction processes. After that it is considered what perceived knowledge losses there are. Some of the findings are then briefly triangulated with the evidence from participant observation, after which the next section views the knowledge management process through the rational and post-rational conceptual lenses.

Knowledge origins: Experience and deliberate knowledge sourcing

One might roughly distinguish between *two origins from which the relevant knowledge has been derived*: Individual experiences or backgrounds and deliberate knowledge sourcing by involved organizations. As with the relevant knowledge itself, these categories are not mutually exclusive but overlapping. Hence, specific knowledge sourcing practices of an organization can be supposed to contribute to the experiences of individual actors when these engage in knowledge sourcing. At the same time, the backgrounds of individual actors might shape how organizational knowledge sourcing proceeds in practice.

Many of the interviewees signaled that a good portion of the relevant knowledge derived from personal experiences, either 'in the field', or from elsewhere, for example, from university or other studies. Almost all of the interviewees hold at least one university degree, and for many of them the topic of their studies has significantly contributed to their engagement with the TRC sector. At least 12 of them have obtained a degree directly related to tourism (e.g. ecotourism management, sustainable tourism, often also studies related to both tourism and business administration or management), and 4 hold a degree in anthropology. Others hold degrees in administrative and business studies, agricultural- or bio-engineering, industrial engineering, communication studies, rural development, sustainable development, social development and planning, psychology, and biology. Particularly those who had studied tourism-related topics explained that their academic background significantly shaped their knowledge about the necessities of TRC enterprises on the tourism market. The focus of some on 'horizontal' communication and pedagogy, empowerment and participatory dynamics can also be partially explained with the academic background. One example has been hinted at before: The reading of Paolo Freire seems to have had an impact on 2 interviewees in their vision on capacity-building (although in their case the reading had to do more with their personal interest than with university studies).

For many interviewees the studies seem to constitute an entry point to their professional experience in TRC or a related areas (e.g. attainment of their jobs through internships). But even more than studies, it seems to be through professional experience 'in the field' that many of the perceptions of relevant knowledge have been formed. Various interviewees thus mentioned that even if they had studied a topic in theory before they tended to feel quite unfamiliar when first engaging with the same topic in practice. It is not only the professional engagement with *TRC capacity-building projects* that has been decisive, but also other work experiences. One interviewee, for instance, asserts that much of her communication knowledge relevant for the TRC capacity-building was based on previous community-work in poor urban neighborhoods:

"That was like my practice concerning 'what works and what doesn't, to change my approach when interacting with community-members… because... to tell them, for example about the theory and abstract concepts of leadership was completely in vain… it worked better when connecting this to practical exercises and their life-experiences, asking them to analyze in which moments of their lives they have felt like leaders or not."

Still, she points out that there are significant differences to the rural communities where she has worked on a TRC capacity-building project. Other statements seem to indicate that also the importance awarded to the local context has significantly increased for those interviewees who have spent much time interacting with beneficiaries in rural communities. While a few respondents had been practically

engaged with TRC capacity-building for less than a year, most respondents had already had professional experience in this or in a related topic for more than five years (up to more than twenty years, which is when the idea of TRC in Costa Rica emerged). At the same time, it is interesting to analyze that for some interviewees, usually those who had moved to target communities for longer time spans (or a few who had grown up in rural communities) relevant knowledge derived not solely from the professional engagement but also from the time spent there 'off-work'.

Apart from individuals' experiences, another broader knowledge origin is the deliberate sourcing of knowledge, usually within an organization or between different organizations in the frame of a (joint) project or program. This appears to be mostly done to obtain instrumental information for a single intervention, most frequently in the form of a so-called *diagnostic* ('diagnóstico'), to identify capacity-building necessities, to draw baseline scenarios, to create a sample and select possible beneficiaries, to write a proposal, design, evaluate, and monitor interventions. On a few occasions, organizations have produced studies on partial aspects of the TRC sector, which have not been specifically linked to a capacity-building project but with a more general outlook. One interviewee also composed a meta-review of TRC studies, intended as an input to the different training modalities that the INA offers to TRC entrepreneurs.

As explained by the interviewees, most of the knowledge sourcing is done by 'experts' (either externally contracted, from a local partner organization, or from the headquarters or a local branch of an involved organization) and proceeds on the basis of a variety of methods. Knowledge is often sourced on field trips with an exploratory design or in more frequent, routinely interactions with (potential) beneficiaries. An exploratory field trip is often preceded by the request for some kind of capacity-building from grassroots actors. It is then done before the start of a project or program, usually to make a pre-selection of participants, to specify the necessities, and to identify and possibly coordinate with other organizational actors. The main methods applied seem to be observation (e.g. in visits of TRC enterprises to assess the market potential of an enterprise and the quality of the offered products) and face-to-face interviews and / or group discussions (for instance in the context of pre-project information events). As an example, a public official illustrates the procedure on which the INA's technical assistance modules are based:

"After receiving a request we first create a technical diagnostic. So we send an expert to conduct a 'radiography' to diagnose the problem of the enterprise. Because the entrepreneur might believe that his problem is 'X' but the expert sees that it is actually connected to other problems, too… So [he

or she] first makes an interview with the person in charge of the enterprise… and then visits the site to assess this through observation."

Also surveys are a common way to obtain information (administered in different ways, face-to-face, phone, email, written), especially for the participant selection and capacity-building evaluation rounds. Overall, the review of written documents, for instance of previous projects or related studies appears to be done rather sporadically. Yet, in the cases of two longer term TRC capacity-building projects this has been an integral part of the design phases. An involved consultant explains that…

"… Reading studies, reviewing documents from previous programs and regional indicators are important as a theoretical fundament. But this can never substitute the knowledge from fieldwork."

Knowledge 'storage' and dissemination

One might suppose that much of the knowledge that is derived from individual experience is seldom made explicit and stored as such. Likewise, one NGO member declares:

"So, when you start with a project… there is usually no explicit baseline. All the information is in your head: 'I know that this [entrepreneur] group needs this, and that group needs something else, but there is no document that stipulates this, there has never been anything like that… I don't know if [other organizations] do something alike."

Much of the relevant knowledge thus appears to remain tacit. However, at least through deliberate knowledge sourcing quite some explicit knowledge seems to be generated, since some documents like evaluation forms of workshops, and monitoring reports or protocols on the use of funds are seen as a standard. In addition to that, there are also the diagnostics for baseline and impact assessments, selection profiles, studies, and other documents that are often mentioned, though not as a part of every project and program. One of the most frequently mentioned terms when it comes to the form in which such information might be gathered is the 'ficha técnica' (technical form). In these documents, information is usually listed in a brief form, quantitative or qualitative. Altogether, such explicit knowledge appears to be mostly used for (project- or organization-) internal purposes and procedures and is 'stored' either digitally (e.g. in Excel sheets, word- or pdf- documents), or in folders on paper, frequently also only temporarily. One interviewee, an NGO worker responsible among other things for the maintenance of a regional 'library' of his organization, expounds that most of the documentation eventually ends up as grey literature, the retrieval of which from the archives is rather the exception than the norm.

In principle, it seems that much of the elaborated explicit knowledge is available upon request, though, a few interviewees note that this might depend on the purpose. Information requests by external actors outside of a project or program seem to be rare though. In contrast to this, active knowledge dissemination does indeed take place, but also on a more or less sporadic basis. This is mostly done through project recap or proposal presentations at official meetings, or online (usually through descriptive texts and some data, for instance, on the number of participants, topics, and costs of a project on involved organizations' websites).

One specific NGO that operates on an international level has furthermore condensed much of its research on sustainable tourism into manuals and best-practice collections (including capacity-building for TRC, though not exclusively). In this case, the organization has taken a vivid interest in publishing and spreading its knowledge as much as possible – by making their documents publicly available online, and through formal and informal networking initiatives and meetings. While the respondent from that organization claimed that these documents were widely used by other support organizations, this could not be confirmed in other interviews. Rather than that most interviewees indicated that for the TRC capacity-building their organizations hardly relied on external documents, apart from instances where this comes from a partner organization in a joint project or program.

7.3. Actor relations relevant to knowledge management

Knowledge management takes place in interactions between different actors. Therefore, this subsection sketches some actor relations that seem to play a role when considering how the relevant knowledge (listed in Table 3) has been managed. Two broader categories of relations are distinguished, those with and among beneficiaries and those in which no beneficiaries are directly involved.

Interactions with beneficiaries

Direct communication processes between capacity-building staff or organizations and beneficiaries appear to be regarded as crucial for the generation of relevant knowledge by most interviewees. At first sight, this appears to be independent from the organizational background. Respondents from all interviewee groups signaled that there were frequent direct interactions between the respective organizations and beneficiaries. Even a representative of a donor organization described that...

"…our relation with the [grassroots] groups is direct. We are with them in training workshops and other meetings. Our work is in the field. I spent 90 percent of the worktime with these groups in their communities."

Yet, at second sight it becomes evident that there are indeed some variations in the ways that interactions with possible and actual beneficiaries takes place. Perhaps most importantly, it should be taken into account that most of the involved development organizations and capacity-building staff are based in the urban area of the capital city San José. This can be supposed to have a significant influence on the ways in which interactions with beneficiaries take place.

There is a considerable degree of geographic centralization in that sense, even though various interviewees highlighted that a shift had taken place. Whereas most capacity-building measures such as training units and promotion meetings had previously required TRC entrepreneurs to come to San José, this seems to be more flexible by now. Especially state institutions are deemed to have become more open to 'fieldwork' and capacity-building measures on the countryside. Confirming this, an official involved in a public tourism commission remarked that until a few years ago tourism entrepreneurs had to come to San José for an "audience" in order to enter in a direct dialogue with the commission. By now, the commission had a schedule of 'field trips', in which publicly accessible discussion rounds would take place on a regular basis in different regions of the country.

Still, direct face-to-face interactions between beneficiaries and capacity-building staff appear to be sporadic at times. After all, it implies time and monetary costs for both sides. Several respondents mentioned that under the given circumstances communication with beneficiaries via phone or email was common-practice, too. However, some of the entrepreneurs have no or little internet access and incomplete phone coverage, which can make these forms of interaction problematic.

It is also worth noting that there are hardly any organizations involved that focus exclusively on capacity-building for TRC enterprises. These measures are usually a part of wider projects or programs. Other activities thus tend to limit the attention, time and money spent on capacity-building for TRC. An interviewee from the academic sector points to this when stating:

"One limiting factor is the time that we have. We go [to the program site] every two or three weeks. Because here [at the university] we are also teachers and there are a lot of other things to take care of."

While many of the respondents frequently move between the capital region and on-site events or field trips, some of the involved NGOs with a rather regional focus (like the Corcovado and Neotrópica Foundations) have local offices and employees living in or nearby target communities, which allows for a more sustained direct communication with beneficiaries. Most public institutions and universities have regional offices, too. The INA for instance, has established regional offices in each larger region where courses from their regular and other programs are permanently on offer. According to one interviewee, requests from TRC entrepreneurs are often filed with those regional offices because they

interact more frequently and are geographically easier accessible. Still, especially in some state institutions it seems to be common that key interactions such as the initial 'problem diagnoses', program info-events in communities, and interviews for the participant selection are done by staff from the capital area.

A special role is played by the NGO networking organizations ACTUAR and COOPRENA. These are some of the few 'development organizations' exclusively concerned with fomenting the TRC sector. They are largely composed by grassroots TRC groups spread across the entire country, which have a member status and a formal share in decision-making through elected supervisory boards. Yet, on an operational level these NGOs are managed by a professional staff in the capital city and not by the entrepreneurs themselves. The staff in San José is responsible for the organization of capacity-building of the entrepreneurs. Interactions with the members take place on a regular basis, also because many of the enterprises are principally booked through the integrated San José-based travel agencies of COOPRENA and ACTUAR. Both of these organizations also interact with their member organizations for regular 'check-ups' on their progress and necessities. Yet, their resources are also limited and only very few member groups can be attended simultaneously. ACTUAR for example, has started to elaborate detailed and long-term 'working plans' for each member enterprise, which is defined in three working sessions with each group on-site. To complement this, they contracted a consultant to create an inventory of necessities and progress according to which most of their 36 member groups have been classified in a ranking. All this has required considerable resources and time, and is thought of as an open-ended process that needs to be constantly refreshed.

From the interviews it can further be derived that interactions between staff and beneficiaries are not only formal and related to official events, workshops, or the completion of forms and surveys for deliberate knowledge sourcing. Much of the communication takes place 'off the record' or outside of official meetings, which is deemed equally important by many to obtain knowledge. This seems to be especially true for those who have been 'in the field' on a more permanent basis or those who regularly interact with beneficiaries, for example as facilitators in training workshops. A point in case are feedback reactions by beneficiaries: While several interviewees remarked that written evaluation forms tended to be rather superficial, much of the actual feedback was rather informal. One respondent, for instance, described that the dialogue with beneficiaries was constant and frequently off working hours as the staff had provided participants with their contact details. Another interviewee similarly stressed the importance of informal interactions, in that case referring to training workshops.

"So at lunch time we eat together and talk a lot 'off the record'… that has contributed to a strong level of trust between us [the staff] and them [the beneficiaries]"

Besides direct interactions, some interviewees also remarked that the capacity-building was aimed to foment links between the supported entrepreneurs themselves. Among other things, this includes the sharing of experiences at meetings, short-term 'internships' whereby TRC entrepreneurs visit each other or participate in already established tourism operations, and perhaps most importantly, the encouragement of establishing formal associations. The idea of the latter is for beneficiaries to join forces and to independently continue the capacity-building process through their own organizations, representing their interests to other institutional actors. COOPRENA and ACTUAR might be seen as the earlier, and possibly the most prominent examples of such an appropriation process. Some more light will be shed on the challenges of this further below.

Interactions between support actors

Another set of relevant actor relations comprises interactions between different 'development' actors and organizations involved, but without the direct involvement of beneficiaries. Throughout the interviews it has become apparent that the organization of capacity-building projects rarely involves one (type of) institutional actor alone. An exception to this might be certain (though not all) university programs, where the funding, design, implementation and evaluation might all be realized within the same institution (also between different universities, or faculties and sites of the same university but remaining within the academic sector).

Notably, the Costa Rican public universities appear remarkably steady in their relatively isolated manner of conducting capacity-building for TRC entrepreneurs. This has been repeatedly hinted at by both academic and non-academic interviewees. An academic respondent specifies why this might be the case. First, the universities seldom struggle with the recruitment of staff for capacity-building, since they are able to draw on their own ranks of interested teachers and students (Students from the public universities might for example participate within the scope of a 'community service' that they have to absolve at some point of their studies anyway). Second, they can obtain the necessary funding for a project from the CONARE (National Council of the University Directors) whose funding is dedicated exclusively to the universities. As a result, the pressure for academics to cooperate with other types of organizational actors might be lower, as the following statement corroborates:

"These funds [from the CONARE] mean autonomy for us, so I don't work with NGOs or government entities that could lead to a loss of independence for me… I do my investigation and extension projects and if someone wants to join that's no problem – but it has to be with a certain critical attitude, constructive and with academic rigor, with a certain political and clear ethical position, too – and that is not so easy to find…"

The number of links between most of the other organizations involved seems to be much higher though. A crucial intermediary role is supposed to be played by many of the NGOs engaged with the TRC sector. Especially the interviewed public officials expect NGOs to channel information from the grassroots or TRC groups on to state agencies. Most of the relevant state actors dispose of much more personnel and funds than the involved NGOs. Yet, their portfolio of activities tends to be more diverse, too. They need to formally justify how many resources should be made available for what and why. For those public officials interested in supporting the TRC sector a strong bottom-up impulse might therefore not only be convenient to design capacity-building measures but furthermore to compete for resources with other departments and actors within the same institution. The coordination with and supply of information by NGOs can thus be a great help for officials to push the support of TRC enterprises up on the institutional agenda.

Particularly in relation to the links between state and non-state actors, interviewees from all sides see a potential key role in the CANTURURAL (the Chamber of Rural Community-based Tourism), which should function as an umbrella association of non-state TRC support organizations (ACTUAR and COOPRENA among them). The CANTURURAL in turn seems to be formally recognized as an overarching TRC representative by key state entities such as the ICT and the INA. In the latter institution, for instance, there is an official committee in which regular meetings are held with the representative chambers of different tourism sectors (e.g. the National Chamber of Tourism 'CANATUR', the ecotourism chamber 'CANAECO' and also the CANTURURAL) to coordinate and suit the training courses offered by the INA to the needs of the tourism industry. The CANTURURAL has been described by several respondents as one of the outcomes of a sustained *informal* cooperation process between different non-state actors throughout the first decade of the 2000s (the 'TRC Alliance').

In contrast to this much highlighted Alliance, most of the inter-organizational links are less sustained throughout longer periods. Especially when it comes to cooperation among non-state actors there seem to be hardly any long-term coalitions. A reason for that might be that many of the NGOs and private consultants participate in 'one-off' capacity-building projects directly or indirectly funded by a few international donors. Most of the interviewees from NGOs and private consultants confirmed that they were competing with each other for the funding of these projects. Some of them saw this as a significant barrier to knowledge sharing outside of the frame of joint projects, since the knowledge 'pool' of an organization might be considered as a competitive advantage over others.

In this context, it also seems worth noting that many interviewees remarked that international (so called 'cooperation') funding for TRC capacity-building had been widely available approximately between the mid-1990s and the end of the first decade of the 2000s. By now, the availability of international funds has been dramatically reduced however. Most of them concluded that this was

related to the ranking of Costa Rica as a middle to higher income country by important international institutions like the UN and the World Bank after a sustained period of macroeconomic growth. Another interviewee added to this that the financial crisis hitting the US and Europe in 2008 / 09 further drained the pool of available international funds for Costa Rica. The result is very briefly summarized in the following statement by an interviewed NGO member:

"It has become difficult to raise funds… this is my main 'headache' – there are hardly any international donors anymore who see Costa Rica as a priority!"

In spite of the competition, there are also numerous instances of (temporary) cooperation between different organizations. One reason for this seems to be the relatively small size of many non-state organizations and the generally small number of people professionally concerned with supporting the TRC sector. *When convenient*, organizations of all types coordinate with each other for capacity-building projects. They are usually too small or too narrowly specialized to provide sufficient staff or expertise for an entire project alone. On the surface, these interactions are frequently formalized by contracts or other written agreements (particularly when state actors are involved). But when digging a little deeper, the largest part of inter-institutional cooperation and coordination processes appears to rest upon informal communication processes between individual actors in different organizations.

An example for this is the cooperation between two important state institutions for a TRC capacity-building program that includes financing, training, and promotion mechanisms. The cooperation is stipulated in a formal written agreement between the two institutions, yet this does not seem to be decisive. The agreement had already been signed for the first time more than ten years ago but with little effect. According to a respondent from one of the institutions, the decisive trigger for the renewal of the cooperation process were staff changes in key positions of the two entities that led to an improved understanding on an informal level. When asked for the 'ingredients' for an effective cooperation process between these institutions, one of the officials in a key position of the process argued that…

"… This has to do a lot with human beings, with personal relations. We can have a formal agreement, but if that really leads us anywhere depends on the incorporation of that agreement into the operational plan of an institution through concrete actions… for that however, you need the disposition of the people to ***commit*** *to this process first… so it really depends on who is on the other side… we try to find the people who are disposed to work with us because we cannot work together with everyone, because there are too many other things to take care of."*

Many personal relations in the 'support sector' of TRC seem to originate from previous cooperation in capacity-building projects but also from official and unofficial meetings, presentations, shared

university studies and former employments, or from mediation through third parties. The resulting links range from the mere awareness of names and positions ('knowing which door to knock') to active friendships that might have an influence on the flow of knowledge. As one interviewee reconstructs, many personal links that are still relevant go back to the first TRC capacity-building projects (many of which received funding by the Dutch government).

"The project was interesting not for the money in it… but rather for the networking between the different actors involved… we made friendships that continue to exist. For example, I still see the current Minister of the Tourism sometimes, who was the involved in the project back then, too… most of these relations continue and help us to work together now. The point is that by now… we all know each other, and everyone knows what TRC is."

One might suppose that this is reinforced by the fact that most of the involved organizations involved are present in San José. Several respondents confirmed that the geographical proximity of many actors was an advantage for a continuous communication process as it allowed for more direct interactions. It was thus frequently mentioned that most of the relevant actors in cooperation processes were quite accessible via email, phone, skype, and also for face-to-face conversations. International donors without a physical presence in Costa Rica appear to be an occasional exception to that, but this has only been mentioned once. Usually it seems that even the communication with financial donors is relatively fluid and direct. As several interviewees signaled, the drastic cut in international funding has significantly reduced the number of organizations actively supporting the TRC sector in Costa Rica. Most of those who have remained are physically present in the country. The funding cuts might thus also have facilitated cooperation to a certain degree, even if competition over scarce international funding seems to be perceived as fiercer now. Furthermore, several respondents mentioned that meanwhile international funding was diminished, the role of Costa Rican state entities active in TRC capacity-building was on the increase.

At the same time that informal personal relations contribute to inter-organizational cooperation for the interventions in question, the contrary might also be true. An interviewee who had worked for an NGO 'in the field' for several years provided an interesting example for this. In this case, two larger NGOs had carried out two separate but similar capacity-building projects in the same geographic area in the Central Pacific region. When fieldworkers from the two organizations saw an opportunity to complement each other's projects, the responsible senior managers rejected such proposals because they had been personally antagonizing each other before. What made things worse according to this respondent, was that the communication between employees 'in the field' and the manager in San José was relatively ineffective because the manager was unfamiliar with the local context of the project and did not perceive the opportunity of cooperation in the same way. He concludes that:

"The links between organizations are very changing. When key persons leave, relations can change completely, from one day to the next."

7.4. Perceived weaknesses and strengths of the knowledge management process

Knowledge management weaknesses concerning interactions with beneficiaries

The knowledge management strengths and weaknesses pointed out in the interviews can be drawn parallel to the actor relations outlined above. Regarding interaction processes between beneficiaries on the one side and 'development' organizations and actors responsible for the organization of TRC capacity-building on the other, one main theme emerged: The challenge of establishing a balanced 'middle-ground' between bottom-up and top-down knowledge inputs to the interventions in question. In essence, this challenge seems to represent questions about how participatory development should look like in practice.

In principle, there is much agreement on the need for knowledge inputs from the beneficiaries. Some interviewees insisted that their organizations' approaches to capacity-building for TRC entrepreneurs were 'thoroughly participative'. Yet, even more (including some of those who considered their organizations' work as very participatory) indicated that in practice it was quite complicated to achieve a meaningful knowledge input by the beneficiaries and to simultaneously avoid overly top-down inputs. A representative of a donor organization describes this as a dilemma:

"The basic problem of these participatory dynamics is that it is expected that they somehow 'surge' from the bottom without any help or guidance from the top. But if in the communities they knew exactly what they need and how to achieve that, the capacity-building would be obsolete…"

The 'inability' of beneficiaries to clearly point out their needs has been echoed in one way or another in nearly half of the interviews. It has mainly been related to two causes: First, the lack of expertise and experience in tourism that has presumably made it difficult for TRC entrepreneurs to articulate some of their needs. Second, internal cleavages in TRC groups or communities have been assumed to provoke disagreements on what the capacity-building needs and priorities are from the outset. Referring to the first of these causes, an NGO member explains in retrospective that some of the first capacity-building programs for TRC entrepreneurs on the Osa Peninsula were characterized by a rather "passive participation" by the beneficiaries:

"[The design of the project] was intended to generate a real consultation process, not just on paper. But at that time, the people there had only very little experience in tourism, so they were not aware of their needs. So we had to define most of the criteria ourselves."

Although some interviewees mentioned that with the increasing practical experience of some TRC entrepreneurs their capacity to define their needs had improved by now, this remains a concern. The logic behind this appears to be quite straightforward: How can someone unfamiliar with the tourism business know what he or she needs in order to become a successful tourism entrepreneur? On the other end of this dilemma stands a different question, however: How can development organizations engaged in capacity-building for these entrepreneurs then define what the needs are without dictating them? The statement of an interviewed consultant illustrates that this continues unresolved:

"There is a complete lack of entrepreneurial vision in many rural communities. One has to… come from the outside and give them the idea of what they might develop."

The picture becomes even more complicated when taking into account divisions within communities that make it all the more difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the capacity-building needs. Most respondents were well aware of that. One interviewee from the academic sector specifies this issue:

"On many occasions there are communities that know perfectly what they need or not, but there are also many divided communities… with a history of internal and family conflicts related to ethnicity, politics and economics… all this tends to hamper the communication of their needs and the organization required to address these needs…"

Several interviewees add to this that similar problems are encountered within the same beneficiary groups that are often the collective owners of TRC enterprises or umbrella groups of different TRC initiatives (usually formal associations according to the Costa Rican Law n°218 of Associations). Internal divisions in these groups sometimes mirror the power struggles of the surrounding communities (frequently linked to questions of land-ownership). But a range of other problems have been mentioned, too: Disagreements about the distribution of benefits, costs, and risks, about development priorities and leadership, and the unequal commitment of different individuals in the groups. All this can make it quite difficult to clearly point out what the capacity-building needs are, which has been described by some as an 'internal' lack of articulation capacities in beneficiary groups.

In addition to this it has repeatedly been mentioned that knowledge losses tend to occur on the side of beneficiary groups *after* capacity-building, and particularly training interventions. In most of these cases training instructors and other staff noted that trainees were simply unable to recall what they had previously seen in a course. In other cases the problem was different:

"We started to notice that once people were sufficiently prepared they simply left the TRC initiatives to go to some other private enterprises. So we had to start the process all over again"
(Statement of an interviewed NGO member).

The above sheds some light on knowledge management challenges that seem to be related to the internal problems and capacities of beneficiaries and rural communities. Nevertheless, most interviewees who saw knowledge flaws in the interaction with beneficiaries put more emphasis on the side of support actors. This group is mainly represented by those respondents who stressed the importance of a 'horizontal communication' process. Here, the overarching perception seems to be that the lack of bottom-up knowledge inputs is much related to the inadequate and superficial participatory or pedagogical methods applied by support actors. In this context, it is seldom denied that there are problems on the side of beneficiaries. But it is highlighted among other things that these issues are insufficiently addressed and sometimes even reinforced through top-down approaches.

From the perspective of several interviewees it would thus be well possible to generate more relevant knowledge if support actors simply invested more time in a sustained and direct communication process with (potential) beneficiaries. An important aspect here is that 'development organizations' tend to interact most frequently with the leaders of communities and TRC groups. The contact to other (potential) beneficiaries tends to remain superficial, especially when there is a lack of time to communicate directly and in depth with all of them, as one interviewee puts it:

"The majority of professionals and experts in capacity-building will tell you: 'We don't have the time to observe everything and listen to everyone. We have to transmit the knowledge as fast as possible, because poverty doesn't wait. The faster we progress the better."

As a result however, support actors might obtain incomplete or biased knowledge of the local context, of the existing necessities, and also of who should benefit from an intervention, when the local contact acts as a 'gatekeeper'. Not surprisingly then, some respondents summarized that the capacity-building interventions usually tended to benefit the group leaders most, while those who were marginalized within the groups were sometimes those with the most urgent needs but those who benefitted the least. In addition to this, training measures would often simply be too short or inconsistent (lack of follow-up courses) so that the subject matter would only be touched in a superficial manner. In such cases it would be hard for entrepreneurs to retain any meaningful expertise from training modules.

But the critique goes largely beyond the mere time taken to communicate with beneficiaries. The focus is more on a communication approach that is perceived as one-sided and top-down. In this view the consultation process with beneficiaries and local stakeholders does not go deep enough to gain any meaningful insights, as expressed in the following description of supposedly participative evaluation rounds in capacity-building programs by a public official:

"In what way do we consider the capacity-building to be participatory in the end? We ask them: 'How did you like the presentation? Any doubts? Do you want to comment on anything?', but no one

says anything… that is still seen as participatory by the expert who says: 'Well… I told them to talk to me, but they didn't want to say anything!"

The point made by this respondent here is that support actors do not usually expect any meaningful answers at all, and pose their questions to beneficiaries accordingly. They implicitly assume that the most relevant knowledge is their own expertise. The aim is to transfer this expertise to beneficiaries or to diagnose by means of expert knowledge what the enterprises need. A knowledge contribution by the beneficiaries is expected to remain limited. The problem highlighted by this respondent is above all *attitudinal*: The (implicit) conception by support actors as knowledgeable experts or teachers goes hand in hand with the conception of beneficiaries as nonprofessionals. This can prevent a joint knowledge generation process, because the 'expert' is little disposed to engage with the perspectives of beneficiaries or to have his or her knowledge challenged by them:

"What happens is that the 'expert' is inclined to put the weight on the knowledge and not on the person supposed to receive that knowledge… unfortunately we commit the error of believing that we as 'experts' need to know the answers to all the questions, like politicians! But in reality, nobody knows about the community, the farm, the homes, the rivers and the forests like the people who live there…"

In a similar way, other interviewees have pointed out that direct interactions with beneficiaries in training workshops and official meetings often fail to reach a mutual level of understanding because of the continued use of abstract 'expert' language and the lack of references to the experiences and practices of the entrepreneurs. Knowledge exchanges in official dialogues might further be hampered due to the tendency of support actors to stick to the schedules and programmed content of consultation. In the worst cases, capacity-building programs seem almost ready-made from beforehand, and little attention is paid to emergent knowledge that is not already included in the design. An example is given by an interviewed scholar who blames that when it comes to the identification of necessities on-site…

"… [The project staff] arrives with a written 'guide' and to tick points off the list: 'This place has a good ventilation, television, and this and that'. But they don't sit down to really talk with the entrepreneurs about what they want to do, how they figure out the development of their projects. If you arrive there to tell them 'well, the curtain is in the wrong spot and the bathroom is dirty', that won't be of any interest to the entrepreneur who probably needs something else in the first place, and not to complete some form…"

In many instances the pitfalls of a one-sided knowledge management process in the interaction with beneficiaries appear to be more subtle than a blunt imposition of knowledge from the top. While most

interviewees had the impression that the capacity of TRC entrepreneurs to articulate their needs had much increased, at least 5 of them cautioned that this assumption might be misleading. It appeared to them that support organizations were often so eager to expose an increased bottom-up impulse for capacity-building that they were occasionally blind to the possibility that the 'requests' by TRC groups might just be a repetition of previous top-down knowledge inputs. A former NGO employee illustrates this with an example:

"When it came to defining an inventory of the capacity-building necessities of TRC enterprises, we usually asked them: 'So, what kind of capacity-building do you think you need?' many times they would just tell you something like 'oh, we need training for customer service'. But this might not be what they really need, they might just tell this because it they know it already from previous capacity-building, because it sounds nice to them, and because they liked the course that they already had. But probably they have more urgent needs, and sometimes this is hard to find out… you might have to conduct a kind of in-depth investigation for every single enterprise and get to know their realities."

One might derive from this that some TRC entrepreneurs are in a way already 'conditioned' to certain capacity-building measures on offer. Development organizations might tend to overlook this because on the surface at least it appears as participatory, and in-depth investigations for each individual TRC enterprise are quite costly. To corroborate this impression, several interviewees expressed that many TRC enterprises have been literally 'bombarded' with a multifaceted capacity-building offer by (competing) support actors, particularly when international funds were still widely available. Instead of *first* reflecting on what kind of support they might really need (or not), it seems that many entrepreneurs have been subtly suggested that they need this or that kind of capacity-building.

This 'imposition' of knowledge from above is also reflected in the transition processes of some capacity-building projects, where the intention has been for the participating entrepreneurs to appropriate and continue the capacity-building process by founding a formal association. A case in point is the important TRC entrepreneur network ACTUAR. An interviewee from one of the support organizations engaged in the foundation process of ACTUAR describes that they simply 'facilitated' and provided 'strategic support', while insisting that it was an essentially bottom-up process driven by the TRC entrepreneurs themselves. Still, another interviewee sheds some doubt on this perspective, claiming that the process was actually rather designed and implemented by an involved financial donor organization – the bottom-up impulse might have been much less than officially claimed. In a similar context, an interviewed academic forwards an open critique:

"What happens many times here… is that the campesinos don't really know, perhaps not even if they really want to do tourism, but they are told: 'You have a nice farm in a nice place, why don't you

organize [with other farmers], let's found a tourism association according to the Law 218…'meanwhile they still don't know what they are doing there, but by that moment the support institution has already arrived and set up everything for them…"

Some respondents claimed that there were little meaningful knowledge contributions from beneficiaries because of a 'dependency syndrome'. Instead of committing to their own development inhabitants of rural communities would thus tend to wait for support institutions to arrive and help. Whereas this might be true to some extent, the critique highlighted above indicates that it might also be connected to the continuing paternalistic approach of many support actors. As shown above, this paternalism is often rather subtle and based on suggestion, although in many cases it also appears as an outright imposition of knowledge justified by the 'expert' status of support actors.

Knowledge management weaknesses concerning interactions between support actors

As shown above, there seem to be quite some flaws in the interactions that define the management of relevant knowledge between support actors and beneficiaries. But the awareness of weaknesses that concern interaction processes between different support actors has been even more pronounced. The failure to effectively share knowledge among different support actors was undoubtedly one of the topics that were most stressed throughout the interviews.

All of the involved organizations have sourced at least some knowledge for their own purposes. Studies have been done, and some knowledge has been actively disseminated through presentations, and the publication of manuals, and other documents. Nevertheless, the interviews showed that every single organization involved occasionally misses quite some useful information. Some aspects that stand out are the perceived lack of structured and explicit information about capacity-building needs, about the impacts of interventions, and in more general terms, about the current state of the TRC sector. This was underlined by the impression that no interviewee appeared to be able to provide a well-founded estimate of the total size of the TRC sector in terms of numbers and types of enterprises, the employment and incomes connected to it, and so on. An interviewed NGO member expresses the resulting overall concern that has been similarly echoed by many respondents:

"There is no coherent communication about what is happening in the TRC sector, which are the opportunities, which are the threats, what kinds of capacity-building work or not… many things could move forward if there were a real communication… but that seems to be quite complicated."

The lack of information exchanges seems to be particularly problematic for public officials interested in supporting the TRC sector. Most actors see the responsibility for a more consistent and sustained capacity-building approach with state institutions (especially the ICT and the INA). After all, these

institutions dispose of the necessary material resources and personnel for this, and have a legal mandate to support the TRC sector through the 2009 TRC law. However, the law does not detail how this support should look like in practice, and the presumed failure of state institutions to implement it has been decried by many interviewees. For most of the interviewed public officials this has more to do with the lack of bottom-up knowledge inputs, and more specifically with the failure of intermediary non-state actors to provide guidance and to exert political pressure backed up with well-structured and explicit evidence. In theory, most respondents confirm that the CANTURURAL should fulfill this function as an umbrella organization of non-state TRC support actors. But the CANTURURAL appears to have troubles with fulfilling this role. An interviewed official from the INA states that…

"…The CANTURURAL has sent us studies that they have done… but these studies tend to be quite fragmented, sometimes they seem to include only the claim for some kind of training, but very briefly, without substantial evidence to justify their demands… They are very inclined to knock our door only to ask for this and that and much more but without offering any good reasons for it. When we arrive to do a course, we often notice that the [entrepreneurs] are not really interested in it… it seems like [the people from CANTURURAL] just asked us to do this or that course because someone from the community had told them that it would be nice – but in reality there was little weight behind their request because it was only one person who was interested in that course."

As a consequence it seems to be quite difficult for public support actors to garner the necessary 'in-house' support, e.g. from department leaders, even if they would like their institutions to be more proactive in the capacity-building. Two state officials have also connected this flaw to a perceived lack of professionalism on the side of NGO personnel. Their argument is that some achievements (most notably the TRC support law of 2009) had been easier to attain when the TRC support sector was still very 'basic' and when the main objective was to draw attention to the concept as such. But after this, the intermediary role would have had to become much more specific, nuanced and methodologically sophisticated to achieve further advances in negotiations with state actors. This argument has it, that most involved NGOs were unable to do so and that they still limit themselves to sweeping but little substantial requests. Interestingly, a former NGO employee who had been involved in the advocacy process which led to the adoption of the TRC law pointed in a similar direction:

"After the law had been adopted, we perceived that it was time to move to a different level. It was time to formalize the [previously informal] TRC alliance [in what became the CANTURURAL]… we also knew that it would be difficult to maintain the momentum that we had before… personally I felt that there was a moment when one had to separate from it to do something else."

On the level of non-state actors, the aforementioned TRC Alliance has been deemed a rather successful cooperation process. Yet, many interviewees recognize that by now knowledge exchanges between different organizations beyond single instances of cooperation in joint capacity-building projects are very limited. This limitation is in turn mirrored in the difficulty of the CANTURURAL to advance a common point of view, which is expressed in the statement of a former leader of the CANTURURAL:

"Let's say that the CANTURURAL as such is not a very integrated organization. Every member organization has its own interests… these interests are very diverse, so it is difficult to represent a common interest [through the CANTURURAL]. I tried to bring them closer together… but up to now there is a lack of clarity. At least the CANTURURAL continues to exist."

This statement hints at two problems of knowledge sharing between non-state organizations that have been mentioned. First, it requires time and resources that are often insufficiently available. Some respondents lamented for example that the CANTURURAL had very limited resources to fulfill its functions. It does neither have a physical office nor a currently functioning website nor properly paid employees. Rather than that the CANTURURAL is managed by employees of member organizations (especially ACTUAR and COOPRENA) who do this *in addition to* their actual jobs. The financing through membership fees seems to be insufficient. Second, and perhaps even more significantly, is the perceived *lack of interest* by different support actors to work together beyond the sporadic and convenience-based cooperation – not only within the CANTURURAL but also more generally. As expressed by one NGO employee…

"…It has always been the case that every organization takes care of its own businesses. That's like a personal and organizational egoism. 'I need this, and I will do that', but there has never been a mentality linked to the idea that we would all have a better reach if we joined our efforts."

This in turn seems to be related to competition and the frequently diverging objectives of the involved support entities. Some organizations are thus primarily concerned with environmental conservation and have been blamed by some to see TRC as a mere means to an end. Other entities like COOPRENA and ACTUAR are first and foremost concerned with the TRC sector itself, and environmental conservation might be a secondary objective for them. It is worth noting that there seems to be a kind of historical competition between these two influential network NGOs (undoubtedly their respective travel agencies are also in direct competition with each other and they represent some of the same TRC enterprises that are members of both these networks). As mentioned before, there are some apparent personal differences between individuals of competing organizations, which might hamper cooperation beyond the necessary in certain cases.

On top of all that, there are some diverging perceptions about which enterprises should benefit from capacity-building and which ones should be defined as TRC enterprises at all. Such disagreements in turn are particularly pertinent in the interaction between NGOs and state entities. Several non-state interviewees have blamed state entities of supporting only those TRC enterprises which are already advanced while abandoning those small tourism entrepreneurs who would urgently need capacity-building but whose enterprises are usually *informal*. For the public officials this can be quite a dilemma, as some of them insisted that they would act against their institutional requirements if they granted more support to informal TRC enterprises. As an interviewed official from the Tourism Board specifies, their maneuvering space is limited in this regard:

"To support informal enterprises from our position is very complicated. That would be like acting against the legislation! It's very risky and not well seen by our own colleagues… not because we don't want to cooperate but because we can hardly modify our internal standards without enough organized external political pressure…"

Support actors from Costa Rican public universities do not seem to have these troubles in contrast. However, their interests tend to be rather academic and more ideological in many cases. For some interviewees it has thus been difficult to cooperate with academic support actors, since they perceive them as little market-oriented. Nonetheless, it has been repeatedly stressed that universities are potentially valuable contributors to a better structured information exchange, given their abundant expertise and staff.

In short, the divergence of interests between the different support organizations appears to be quite a significant barrier to a more consistent and comprehensive knowledge exchange. This comes in addition to time and resource constraints and competition. All of these factors might also help to explain why the available information in studies, manuals, and other documents seems to be rather little used. There are only few examples where such documents have been further relied upon, within the own organization or by other ones, but this seems to be the exception, not the norm.

A possible consequence of the above-described knowledge sharing issues is the seemingly slow spread of innovative capacity-building methods from one organization to another. This was particularly lamented by a representative of a donor organization who advanced that it was hard to find implementing organizations able to move away from their routine and to consider capacity-building from a different angle. A point in case is the focus on the psychological development of groups and individual entrepreneurs in several capacity-building programs. While the applicability, the positive

experience and the usually high appreciation of this measure by participating entrepreneurs seem to be well documented, it is still not a standard in many capacity-building programs.

A further effect of the communication flaws between support organizations is the frequent duplication of efforts. In most cases it seems that the capacity-building organizations are little aware of parallel efforts that might overlap with their own program or project. With regards to the content as well as geographically. This might contribute to the already existing 'information-chaos' on the one hand. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents remarked at some point that the capacity-building interventions for the TRC sector have been very little coordinated and therefore inefficient (not necessarily ineffective though). Statements like the following one by an interviewed NGO member might be considered as typical:

"All in all, the capacity-building offer is totally unordered. There is no overarching structure between the different programs and only little planning between the involved organizations."

This lack of coordination might be problematic in another way, too. Namely, that it provokes a certain 'capacity-building tiredness' in target communities. In some places like Osa, the mistrust of some communities towards support actors might have been reinforced due to the impression that all kinds of organizations live off the funding that they receive for support projects. The description by an interviewed academic corroborates this:

"If someone arrives to the beneficiary community today to do a study of capacity-building needs that person is usually gone tomorrow. Then another person arrives to do a new study of the same kind. In the end the people in the communities do not want to participate in these studies anymore because there have been already five institutions doing the same thing. And there is no effective communication between these institutions that would lead one organization to build upon the already existing inputs from another one… this concerns all kinds of institutions, local or not, state or private… the people in the communities are tired of this…"

According to some respondents the poor coordination of capacity-building interventions concerns not only interactions between different organizations but happens within some institutions, too. This appears to be more troublesome for larger public institutions (including the universities), as reported by some interviewees with regards to information flows between different departments. Interviewees from smaller organizations hardly perceived any coordination problems within their organizations, which was mostly linked to the small size and the resulting direct and constant internal communication.

At the same time it seems that above all smaller organizations tend to struggle with processing all of the relevant information within capacity-building projects, which is again related to resource and time constraints. One interviewee from a consulting company stated, for instance, that the information derived from a larger capacity-building project in which they were involved remained somehow 'indigestible' when it came to the assessment of impacts. Similar concerns were expressed in other interviews, too. What appeared particularly inadequate to many was the common use of primarily quantitative indicators to measure the supposed success of capacity-building interventions (e.g. number of entrepreneurs 'trained', number of TRC groups financed). Another measurement problem was linked to the rather limited timespan of capacity-building projects that made it hard to define any long-term impacts.

As a last point in the context of knowledge interactions between different support actors, it is worth mentioning that 3 interviewees complained about the absence of a state office exclusively dedicated to the TRC sector, which might also help to coordinate and foment interactions between the involved support entities.

Summary of knowledge management weaknesses

In sum, the interviews point to several weaknesses in the management of relevant knowledge for the TRC capacity-building. These weaknesses can be drawn from the description of interaction processes between the different actors involved.

The main challenge of knowledge management interactions that involve beneficiaries is participatory in nature. It is about establishing a balance between knowledge inputs from the beneficiaries themselves and knowledge inputs from support actors, and about avoiding the paternalistic or subtle imposition of knowledge from the top. This does not seem to be easy. Knowledge management problems have been related to barriers on both sides. For support actors, this has been above all the diagnosed inadequacy of participatory and pedagogical methods.

It might be interpreted that the lack of time taken in combination with attitudinal factors (like the binary distinction of 'experts' and non-experts) have resulted in an often superficial and vertical communication processes with beneficiaries. In this approach, the focus seems to be more on substantial and technical, often explicit knowledge (e.g. quantitative indicators on needs and impacts, transmission of expertise to entrepreneurs). But this might come with a neglect for important tacit and especially interpretational knowledge components. It seems as though in many cases knowledge inputs are (unwittingly or not) imposed from above. In short, one might assume that the lack of

(applied) relevant communication knowledge and of the awareness of empowerment objectives by support actors leads to incomplete or skewed perspectives. This might negatively affect the identification of capacity-building needs, of the context of interventions, and of the selection of beneficiaries.

But for some, there are also significant knowledge management flaws on the side of the beneficiaries themselves. Factors such as the low initial level of technical knowledge and the internal cleavages within TRC groups and rural communities might impede the clear articulation and thereby the correct identification and transmission of capacity-building needs. Furthermore, some respondents considered the fluctuation of entrepreneurs within TRC groups and the difficulties of trainees to recall the taught expertise as another important reason for knowledge losses.

The focus of the interviewees on knowledge management weaknesses in interactions between different support actors was even more marked. In total, the principal challenge here is to achieve more sustained knowledge sharing through cooperation and coordination beyond mere convenience. This concerns above all knowledge sharing between different organizations, and to a lesser degree also within organizations. Most of the attention seems to be on the structuring and circulation of explicit knowledge for support actors to be better informed about the capacity-building needs. This would enable them to justify and adapt capacity-building interventions accordingly.

But factors such as time and resource constraints to process information, competition for funding and diverging interests, objectives and conceptual definitions (notably of TRC enterprises) seem to have led to a fragmentation between the different organizations. There is also a perceived lack of an overarching structure to coordinate cooperation efforts beyond individual projects and to share knowledge. While a few respondents claim that such a structure should be a specific governmental TRC office, for most interviewees the CANTURURAL should play such a role. But so far its reach seems to be limited due to the same above-mentioned factors. All in all, the focus is not only on data, but also on the better spread of innovative capacity-building methods and on augmenting the use of already existing studies, manuals, and other documents.

Knowledge management strengths

While the interviews have revealed many knowledge management weaknesses, there are of course examples of the contrary, too. Some of these shall be briefly mentioned here. On the level of interactions with beneficiaries, some interviewees remarked for instance that many rural communities in Costa Rica were actually well able to overcome their internal divisions and collectively articulate

their development priorities and needs. According to these points of view, many communities on the countryside have a relatively high number of local community organizations (e.g. religious, concerned with local freshwater-management, environmental, agricultural, etc.) that make for a generally vivid participation in local development issues. One academic interviewee pointed out that whereas there were indeed certain internal divisions that would have to be taken into account, in most cases the articulation of knowledge would rather be limited by the lack of links to more powerful actors on the regional or national levels.

Concerning the problem of knowledge losses due to personnel fluctuation within TRC groups and the capacity to retain knowledge from training there might be some strengths as well. An interviewed public official hints at this:

"Before, the level of many entrepreneurs was very basic… but there is an improvement precisely because many enterprises are now led by a younger generation, some of the descendants of the first generations take over the business, and they are on a different level… usually they also have a stronger educational background."

More significantly perhaps, there are several encouraging examples of capacity-building projects, where it appears as if an approximation to a more participatory input of 'bottom-up knowledge' has been achieved. In various cases, support actors have recognized the importance of spending more time in target communities to familiarize with the local context and enter into a more thorough communication process with beneficiaries. A key word in this regard is *trust*. A few interviewees thus told that a sustained direct communication with local stakeholders had been an important part of TRC capacity-building interventions. An example is the case of a foreign NGO employee who had accompanied an open-ended program on-site for five years. In retrospective, this respondent summarized that…

"…It was very important to establish close and direct links with the community by living there and 'being one of them'… like this it was much easier to gain their trust and establish a good dialogue. Because in the beginning there was a lot of mistrust… especially towards me as a foreigner, blond and white…"

In most programs and projects however, such a constant presence on-site does not seem to be possible. Still, some support actors appear to have found alternative ways of establishing trust and more meaningful knowledge exchanges. A representative of a donor organization, for instance, much appreciated the way in which a contracted private consulting company had attained close links with

the beneficiaries in the project 'Caminos de Osa':

"If you talk to [the consultants], they know the names and the surnames of all the participants by heart. They know the names of the husbands and of the sons, they know where they live and have taken the time to visit all of them more than once and whenever necessary… they know their worries, even if they are not related to the project… this exceeds what is normally expected from a consultant and what they are being paid for."

The interviewed employees of the consulting company in turn this related to the personal commitment and the enthusiasm that most of the staff members of the project had invested, also off working hours. They furthermore stressed the advantages of including locals in the project staff who might maintain the dialogue. Other elements that were considered as crucial by them were among other factors the maintenance of a self-critical attitude and formal and informal spaces for self-evaluation as well as the focus on the motivational and psychological development of the participating entrepreneurs in order to encourage their active participation. While similar dynamics were depicted in relation to a few other projects, the overall evidence remains quite mixed on participatory knowledge exchanges.

With regards to more effective knowledge sharing between different support actors and organizations, the informal advocacy process of the TRC Alliance still seems to be one of the strongest examples. The question of why that process seems to have stagnated after the transition from an informal alliance to the formal setting of the CANTURURAL remains relatively unclear to most of the respondents. Yet, many of them were aware that the advancement of the TRC sector continued to represent some common grounds for an improved knowledge exchange between the involved support actors. In principle, they appeared to be very positively inclined towards a closer cooperation process, and some renewed attempts for an overarching collaboration have recently been launched.

Several interviewees derived two crucial aspects from the process of the TRC Alliance: The importance of a good understanding of key actors, especially between the leaders of such a process; and related to this, the importance of the personal commitment of leaders in the cooperation process. Especially the latter aspect might indeed be significantly linked to resource and time constraints. After all, the reductions in international funding has increased the competition between different organizations and led to considerable financial insecurity. This might have reduced the incentives especially for members of the concerned NGOs to commit to cooperation. A former member of the TRC Alliance thus claims that the CANTURURAL could be much stronger if it had some properly employed staff working only for CANTURURAL.

"They need some kind of executive direction or something like that, because especially the topic of advocacy requires a lot of time. It does not have to be a large structure… just one or two people continuously dedicated it…"

But so far it seems to be unclear which organization should be responsible for the impulse of a more sustained cooperation process. For some of the interviewees the involved NGOs are responsible to provide the CANTURURAL with a more solid structure. For at least as many, the state has some responsibility to provide further momentum, too, particularly the ICT, which is understood as the main entity legally mandated to implement the TRC support law.

Participant observation

The participant observation was primarily intended to gain a more detailed impression of the interactions between support actors and TRC entrepreneurs. In total, four workshops with beneficiaries were attended, three of them in the context of already longer running NGO capacity-building projects on the Osa Peninsula, and one that was rather an initial information event attended by potential beneficiaries of a beginning state-backed program in the South Caribbean region. In the frame of this latter program, I also participated in a field-trip to different enterprises in the region, geared to select participants and identify their capacity-building needs. One more meeting was attended at the ICT in San José, at which different presentations were given, and which was attended by representatives of more than ten support organizations of all types and also by a few entrepreneurs. It should be kept in mind that the gained impressions are difficult to generalize, yet, they suit the exploratory purpose of the research.

First of all, the capacity-building workshops with beneficiaries in Osa as well as in the Caribbean were characterized by a rather friendly atmosphere. The group size ranged from about 15 to 40 participants and the ratio of staff to participants was about 1 to 5 and in the largest workshop slightly higher. All of the workshops lasted between seven and nine hours, from the morning to the late afternoon. In all cases, abundant food, refreshments and coffee were provided for free. Especially during the workshops on the Osa Peninsula it was possible to observe a good understanding between the staff and participants, and here it was noticeable that both sides were already familiar with each other from earlier workshops. All of the workshops also seemed to be relatively interactive, not only in the discussions but also with the help of occasional exercises and games. Nevertheless, it was also possible to distinguish some factors that negatively affected the communication between the actors.

Despite the clear intention of most of the staff to communicate on a same level with the entrepreneurs a certain gap always seemed to remain. This was above all perceivable in the frequent use of relatively abstract and technical language by staff members during official presentations, despite the apparent attempts by some to avoid this (e.g. by incorporating some jokes, anecdotes, or allegories of the 'campesino' lifestyle). In certain moments, it seemed very difficult for many participants to follow the content of the workshop, all the more so when taking into account the heat around noon and the sparsity of breaks in between (usually there would for example be no official break between the start of the workshop and lunchtime, and one presentation would follow another one during up to three hours). It also became evident that the different backgrounds of the entrepreneurs enabled some of them to participate more than others, especially when it came to technical aspects (an example was a training module with computers, where some of the entrepreneurs did hardly know how to switch the computer on while others had advanced skills in the use of software such as Microsoft Excel). The rather rare breaks in-between were also noteworthy, because when they were given much informal conversation took place, also between participants and the staff.

Perhaps little surprisingly, the communication gap was more marked throughout the workshop in the Caribbean, where the officials and the attendees hardly knew each other. An interpretational difference was apparent when some entrepreneurs complained that in this meeting as well as in other programs they had received a very short-term notification of the event, especially when taking into account that for many of them it took quite an effort to arrive there. Meanwhile, the organizers of the event were quite disappointed that less people than expected had come and insisted that many TRC entrepreneurs generally seemed to commit only half-heartedly to capacity-building offers (a point which earned them some vocal dissent as well as many ironic smiles, but despite the debate this misunderstanding did not seem to be resolved). A certain mistrust towards the staff in this case might also have been related to the fact that they represented state institutions, and that all of them were from the Capital region.

The latter impression grew stronger during the subsequent field visits to individual enterprises, which revealed some aspects that can be viewed in a more critical light. For one, it was evident that all of the support actors on the tour were rather unfamiliar with the region and its people, and it remained unclear why their colleagues from the regional offices (of both of the involved institutions) were absent. Next, the interactions with some of the visited entrepreneurs were very short and stayed on a rather formal level (more precisely: filling out a survey with information about the status and formalization of the enterprise). It seemed as though some of them were very hesitant to give away any meaningful information when it was apparent that the enterprises were informal and the staff

state officials. And finally, there was a clear bias towards a much more in-depth engagement with the more advanced entrepreneurs, while the interaction with others was quickly 'dispatched'.

Interestingly, the support actors were well aware of this tendency to favor the better-off entrepreneurs. On the one hand, they justified this with the intention to create a support-program for the *consolidation* of existing TRC enterprises, for which they saw much better success chances with more advanced enterprises. On the other hand, they lamented that this bias was related to their limited space of action within their institutions. Hence, they recognized the irony of not being able to support some of those who appeared to need this most desperately, in most of the cases because the informal status of their enterprises made an engagement de facto impossible – not only thanks to the mere existence of official guidelines, but also against the background of the difficulty of acting contrary to such guidelines when this could endanger their own standing in their institutions. On a more general note, they explained that adjustments of many of their official institutional guidelines and routines were overdue but that hardly any decision-maker was eager to kick off such a change because of the risk of ruining the own career.

At the meeting in San José there seemed to be no linguistic communication gap, much in contrast to the above-described interactions with beneficiaries. Although the language was quite technical throughout the event. No attendee seemed to have any particular difficulties to follow the presentation and debates. Here as well, much informal interaction took place during the breaks, with the remarkable addition that much of it seemed to be deliberate networking (many business cards were exchanged). There seemed to be no apparent tensions or major disagreements between the participants.

Overall, the focus of the meetings was very substantial to the extent that perceived weaknesses of the TRC sector were discussed and some quantitative and anecdotal evidence provided. More contentious aspects like the diverging conceptualizations of the TRC sector itself were avoided, perhaps indicating that the organizers were eager to gain some momentum for a renewed cooperation process between different TRC support organizations. However, some important organizations were absent from the meeting, and the level of interest seemed to greatly vary between different participants (as expressed for example through their active participation, body language, 'cell-phone distraction', or the time they stayed). It remains to be seen, whether this will be the beginning of a closer cooperation process within the support sector, at least, an NGO member who organized the meeting reiterated in an interview at a later date that this was the main objective of that meeting.

8. Management of relevant knowledge as learning process

8.1. Rational learning perspective

Based on the previous sections it might be interpreted that a significant part of the relevant knowledge for the capacity-building interventions in question and of the ways in which that knowledge has been managed, correspond to the rational learning perspective outlined in section 4.3. (See also Figure 2). Overall, much of the knowledge perceived as relevant seems to be conceived of as a kind of 'objective' expert knowledge, especially when it comes to the substantial knowledge of specific weaknesses and strengths of the TRC sector, and transfer of technical expertise to entrepreneurs. One might gain the impression that the capacity-building interventions are supposed to even out existing knowledge (and material) asymmetries to convert rural 'campesinos' into full-fledged tourism entrepreneurs. Where necessary, the capacities of TRC entrepreneurs should be 'upgraded' in order for them to gain access and catch up to the demands of a competitive tourism market. The broader capacity-building needs seem to be known from beforehand (as a kind of universal knowledge, e.g. of how the tourism market functions and how an enterprise is supposed to be ran). It is up to experts to apply and transfer their expertise from the top-down to induce progress on the local level. Direct top-down knowledge transfers of technical expertise are a large focus of training programs. Furthermore, many actors (especially public officials) seem to have a preference for explicit knowledge, particularly when it comes to the definition of capacity-building needs.

What might be considered as problematic with a view on the transfer of expertise is its retention, replication and accurate application on the local level. Even if the formation of formal entrepreneur networks and associations might help to reproduce technical knowledge horizontally on the local level, the limited educational background and professional experience of many TRC entrepreneurs are often perceived as causes for a limited capacity to retain and reproduce knowledge. Furthermore, the fluctuation of personnel in TRC enterprises might constitute a similar problem, resembling a 'brain-drain' syndrome that lowers the capacities once they have been built up. To counterbalance these knowledge 'losses', a continuous and well-coordinated capacity-building approach of complementary interventions is seen as necessary. The demand for an increased use of manuals and transfer of best-practices might also contribute to a 'completion' of the rational learning process on a local level.

But for all this, knowledge transfers from the bottom-up seem to be decisive, too. While a rational interpretation of the knowledge management process leads to the assumption that the broader capacity-building needs are already established as global knowledge, the responses need to be coordinated with factual evidence. Structured data on capacity-building needs according to specific regions, names of possible beneficiaries, the quantification of structural variables and impacts, or the identification of possible allies all make up information that might be deliberately sourced, made

explicit, stored, and then disseminated for support organizations to guide and calibrate their interventions. A solid foundation of such explicit knowledge would help to increase the efficiency of capacity-building efforts. For instance, by avoiding the duplication of projects, combining different support measures (e.g. backing up financial support with training, networking and promotion or marketing), and consistently deliver follow-up support to further increase already built-up capacities. All of these aspects seem to receive much attention by involved support actors on all levels. Yet, there are some major gaps in the learning process that might be diagnosed from a rational perspective.

The evidence backs the impression that there is in fact quite some relevant explicit knowledge available. Still, many support actors, especially public officials, lament that there are significant substantial knowledge gaps to increase the efficiency of the interventions. At the first sight, this might be puzzling when considering that there are formal structures in place on which efficient knowledge transfers could be based: The legal basis provided by the declaration of TRC as an activity of public interest, its recognition by the Tourism Board as an official tourism category, the definition of TRC enterprises and the legal mandate to support them through the TRC support law of 2009, formal agreements between different institutions on all levels within certain programs or projects, and the central umbrella organization CANTURURAL with its formal intermediary role and links to important state entities. There is also a certain preference by many actors for gathering explicit information and the use of quantitative indicators to diagnose capacity-building priorities, to evaluate and monitor interventions, and to assess their impacts. What are then the barriers that hamper the 'completion' of the knowledge picture through transfers?

Perhaps the most significant one is the failure to share and replicate the already existing explicit knowledge among the involved support organizations. One problem that has been repeatedly pointed out is the lack of an overarching methodological framework for the sourcing of relevant substantial knowledge. The continued use of different conceptualizations of TRC enterprises, for instance. This contributes to the suspicion that existing studies, manuals, and other documents are rather fragmented in their outlook, and hence, only to a limited extent useful as a knowledge input for the capacity-building interventions of other organizations.

An even larger gap seems to be related to the failure of many support actors to efficiently store and disseminate the relevant knowledge. This is sometimes viewed as an issue within organizations (particularly within larger state institutions with extensive bureaucratic structures), but above all on the level of potential 'knowledge hubs' like the CANTURURAL and the ICT. Even though there seems to be an existing formal structure for knowledge transfers on all levels then, this is often seen as dysfunctional. There is little of a coordinated systematization of relevant knowledge beyond individual projects and programs or beyond internal organizational purposes.

From a rational knowledge management perspective, this might result from the sub-optimal use of data storage and transmission technology. The evidence indicates, for example, that much of the existing explicit knowledge on capacity-building needs and evaluation is still stored on paper in many organizations. This might be particularly problematic if the information yield is massive. On the other hand, the information that is digitalized is hardly centralized, at least not between different support organizations. As a consequence, most of the existing explicit knowledge appears to be widely dispersed and might be rather difficult to retrieve (and more so under time constraints). All in all, the result from a rational perspective on knowledge management is an incomplete picture: The involved support actors dispose only of partial information packages that are not really put together. This incomplete cumulative learning process could be read as a major cause of the duplication of capacity-building efforts and the waste of resources.

To effectively address this, it might be necessary to invest in the capacity of the existing formal knowledge management structures to transfer information more efficiently, with special attention to key organizations such as the CANTURURAL. This could be done through a financial investment, for instance, to provide the CANTURURAL with an own office, staff, and a functioning website. There might be an opportunity for the creation and administration of a centralized and digital database for the purpose of making TRC capacity-building interventions at large more efficient.

8.2. Post-rational learning perspective

From post-rational perspectives, the management of the relevant knowledge outlined in the previous sections would correspond to an essentially *social* learning process based on knowledge interpretation and re-construction. The focus is on practice-based knowledge interpretations of the involved actors and much on the informal dimensions of knowledge interactions, on tacit and interpretational knowledge. To define in how far this social learning process has been successful or not in the reviewed case-study, it is considered how the relevant knowledge inputs to the TRC capacity-building interventions have been managed within a social learning system (based on Wenger, 2000; elaborated in section 4.4.). The considered components of such a system are communities of practice, boundaries between them, and certain aspects of the identities of involved actors.

Communities of practice: The 'support sector' as an overarching community?

In order to get a first idea of the structure of the social learning system within which the relevant knowledge inputs have been managed it is necessary to define different communities of practice of the involved actors. This can be done by looking at the mutual engagement between them, the

evolution of a shared sense of enterprise and of shared repertoires. First of all, the evidence seems to indicate that the learning system is fragmented into many smaller and frequently shifting communities of practice. It does not appear adequate to speak of a community of practice that spans the entire 'support sector' of organizations engaged in capacity-building for TRC.

At first sight, this might not seem so. There are indeed some favorable conditions for a high level of mutual engagement between different support actors. The relatively small number of professionals involved in similar interventions, concentrated in the metropolitan area of San José and the high number of links among them, formal and particularly informal, are an indication of this. Many of the individual support actors know each other through the participation in former or current joint projects, from promotion and knowledge dissemination meetings, or elsewhere. Furthermore, some routines like the creation of 'diagnoses' to identify capacity-building needs, the largely overlapping focus on specific TRC weaknesses like market access and also the academic backgrounds of most support actors might be interpreted as a sign of a shared repertoire. This impression has been corroborated through the participant observation and throughout the interviews: Above all the wide use of a specific 'expert' language or expressions in relation to TRC capacity-building is striking. When talking about the lack of entrepreneurial vision in the TRC sector, about the CST (Certificate of Sustainable Tourism), or the relevance of the 'tourism declaratory', for example, everyone in a meeting of support actors from different agencies seemed to understand what was being talked about without any further questions being posed. Most importantly perhaps, one might derive that there seems to be a shared concern for the advancement of the TRC sector among all of these actors, which might constitute a common sense of enterprise.

At second sight however, it becomes evident that there is no overarching community of practice encompassing the different support actors and entities. While there is much mutual engagement, this is often sporadic and convenience-based, or interrupted by the ephemeral character of many capacity-building projects (less within open-ended programs or longer-term projects though). Routines that form a shared repertoire might be very different from one organization to another, too. This is particularly the case when contrasting the bureaucratic and often formal procedures within larger state institutions to the more flexible division of work within smaller organizations. The complaints of public officials about the sparse and frequently anecdotal evidence provided by non-state actors is a point in case. But most significantly, the rather vague common objective of advancing the TRC sector seems to be insufficient as a truly shared sense of enterprise. The diverging interests when comparing different support organizations with an eye on the competition between them and their different objectives support this assumption. Also, the different definitions of fundamental concepts, like that of 'Turismo Rural Comunitario' itself, are an indication that the support sector is rather split into

different communities of practice within which the relevant knowledge is made sense of in very different contexts.

One might rather conceive of communities of practice that tend to be located within specific organizations or departments. Some communities of practice also appear to develop within the frame of specific projects and programs, where teams consistent of members of different organizations engage together in capacity-building measures with a common objective. But this does not automatically lead to a successful social learning process. By zooming in on specific communities of practice, it is possible to define a deepening of learning, where individual experiences are negotiated with collectively defined frames of reference. For example, the prioritization of contextual and communication knowledge by a few individual public officials seems to collide with the institutional prioritization of factual evidence. Whether meaningful learning processes within communities of practice take place or if they 'stagnate' might be determined by paying attention to the depth of social capital, the learning energy, and the degree of self-awareness.

Concerning the depth of social capital, the importance of informal interactions becomes clear once again. Trust and expectations of reciprocation among the staff of capacity-building projects do not seem to hinge on formal agreements. In most cases, social capital seems to have been deepened with direct, and specifically face-to-face communication among the actors. The evidence supports the impression that this usually works fine within smaller organizations and specific departments, where there is a lot of space for direct interactions. Furthermore, the duration of projects and programs might be important factors along with the fluctuation of staff. The informal TRC Alliance might be a good illustration of a process in which the mutual trust and reciprocation of various organizational leaders led to a vivid exchange and application of relevant knowledge for advocacy purposes. Still, the increased competition between non-state organizations seems to have had a significant impact on the mutual expectations of reciprocation, possibly deepening perceived rivalries like that between ACTUAR and COOPRENA, which are the key organizations in the CANTURURAL.

An interesting observation that can be taken from the findings is that the level of learning energy appears not only to vary with the *commitment* of individual support actors but also with certain *constraints* that they are faced with. There seems to be a high level of disposition to actively search for, recognize and address knowledge gaps within the academic sector, which might be related to the scholarly purpose of their practical engagement. NGO actors often seemed to be quite committed, but tend to lack sufficient resources and time to address their own knowledge gaps. One might consider the example of ACTUAR's elaboration of long-term 'working-plans' for its TRC member groups, which seems to be a rather lengthy process. Crucially, the learning energy within influential state-institutions like the Tourism Board could be much higher. They usually have the necessary resources and personnel

for this. Nevertheless, the formal and bureaucratic hurdles appear to significantly limit the learning energy that might be contributed to these entities by committed individuals. This is shown by the paradox that many public officials know about entrepreneurs' troubles to attain the formalization of their enterprises and that they are still relatively unable to apply that knowledge in practice. After all, an increased engagement with informal enterprises exceeds what many of them perceive as their legitimate space of action.

Overall, the degree of self-awareness seems to be rather mixed within different communities of practice in the TRC 'support sector'. The often superficial and formal interactions with beneficiaries on field trips, expert attitudes and the continued use of much abstract language in training workshops show that there are clear flaws in this regard. At the same time, many actors stressed the importance of a more horizontal communication approach and were well aware of the empowerment objectives of capacity-building. It seems as if much of the tacit and interpretational knowledge that originates from personal experiences is not consequently applied in the practice. The evidence indicates that two factors are particularly influencing the degree of self-awareness communities of practice: First, the commitment and self-critical attitude of staff members and particularly of the managers and those who engage in interactions with beneficiaries. As has been shown before, there are instances where the staff in the field does indeed develop a self-critical attitude towards the project-design but their attempts to change might be blocked in the headquarters. Second, the lack of time spent in the 'field', especially for informal interactions with beneficiaries, tends to lead to limited self-awareness – the reason for this might be that the own repertoire is less contested when there is no understanding of how it suits with the local context. Furthermore, the formal evaluation rounds with beneficiaries tend to yield only limited criticism even though it might actually exist.

Communities of practice: Beneficiaries

The social learning system within which the relevant knowledge inputs are managed seems to be characterized by a cleavage between support actors and beneficiaries. Most of the communities of practice are either on the one or on the other side, but hardly spanning support actors *and* beneficiaries. This has much to do with the overall relatively sporadic engagement between them, which is reinforced by the geographical distance from San José to the relatively far-off locations of many TRC enterprises (although the country is relatively small, travel times might be quite long, for example a trip from San José to some remote place on the Osa Peninsula by car easily takes half a day). It was also observed that the repertoire of TRC entrepreneurs and support actors might be quite divergent (e.g. regarding communication methods, language, or professional and daily routines). At

large, there is also not too much of a shared sense of enterprise: The needs and priorities of entrepreneurs are often much more immediate and connected to the own (economic) existence.

It is however in the interactions with beneficiaries that much of the crucial tacit knowledge of local contexts and communication knowledge is derived from practical experience, which is in turn key for the accurate identification of capacity-building needs. While the sustained mutual engagement with beneficiaries has thus been deemed very important by a significant number of interviewees, there are only a few cases in which support actors can be seen as members of the same communities of practice as the TRC groups. This points to the persistent lack of appropriation of the capacity-building process by beneficiaries. All too often, they tend to be seen (or see themselves) on the receiving end, and support actors as providers of knowledge and resources. This might reinforce existing dependencies and power inequalities between the supposed beneficiaries and support organizations.

To a certain extent, there has been a focus on fomenting the social capital within target communities and grassroots groups. For example in workshops on conflict resolution and the formalization of beneficiary associations. Still, this focus appears to be inconsistent at times, when taking into account that the communication with (potential) beneficiaries is many times overly centered on the perceived local leaders. This comes with the risk of ignoring internal power gradients within TRC groups and communities, and might result (among other things) in the skewed interpretations of capacity-building priorities or of the entrepreneurs that might be selected to participate in an intervention.

Knowledge transformation across boundaries

As hinted at above, the social learning system within which the relevant knowledge for the capacity-building interventions is managed seems to be structured by a multitude of different communities of practice whose boundaries are defined by different degrees of mutual engagement, shared repertoires and senses of enterprise. These boundaries can be shifting and do not necessarily coincide with the formal boundaries of organizations, departments or projects, although these should also be taken into account. Especially in joint projects boundaries tend to cross the margins of organizations and span different actor levels. From a broader point of view, one of the most significant boundaries largely separates the level of support actors from beneficiaries. Yet, there appear to be significant boundaries between different support organizations as well. The idea of considering the boundaries within the social learning system is to gain an impression of how the meaning of relevant knowledges is transformed across different social contexts. Each community of practice has its own structures within which knowledge is interpreted according to social contexts and practical needs.

Again, one of the most outstanding examples is the interpretation of the formalization issues in the TRC sector. As the evidence shows, the interpretation of this knowledge tends to be quite divergent in different communities of practice: For many TRC entrepreneurs, their difficulties to formalize their enterprises are interpreted as a failure of state actors to understand the often very practical constraints that they are faced with. For many public officials in turn, the lack of entrepreneurial vision and commitment by the entrepreneurs is a major problem in this context. Within NGOs like ACTUAR and COOPRENA there seems to be more of a tendency to balance these views: The lack of formalization of some of their member groups might be a very practical problem for their managers when negotiating about collaborations with travel agencies or state entities, so they push for more formalization, too. At the same time, they are often close enough to their TRC member groups to understand that a breakthrough on the formalization of TRC enterprises might require more facilitation and less geographic centralization by state actors. In order to estimate how effectively such different knowledge interpretations have been balanced across the boundaries within the social learning system, some insights into the coordination, transparency, and negotiability of boundary interactions are offered.

Coordination of boundary interactions

Two more sustained boundary interaction processes that are particularly worth harkening back to are the aforementioned TRC Alliance, where actors from different non-state organizations pooled their knowledge of contexts and capacity-building needs to jointly engage in political advocacy, and the subsequent formalization of the CANTURURAL. The apparent success of the former and difficulties of the latter with producing a clear articulation of relevant knowledges between different organizations is revealing. It might be interpreted that the social learning process across the boundaries of communities of practice depends much on the personal, and often informal relations between different community members, and especially on committed leaders.

This does not necessarily imply that the existence of formal links between different organizations is irrelevant for effective boundary processes. The wide recognition of the CANTURURAL as an intermediary entity to provide bottom-impulses to state entities seems to have been facilitated through its formal status. However, the failure of it to adequately fulfill this role is not only conditioned by the evidential resource constraints. The ‘unofficial’ competition and perceived rivalry between key actors in the coordination process also appears to be a factor behind this. The sometimes difficult underlying relations might in turn lower the willingness of leaders of involved organizations to commit already scarce resources to the CANTURURAL.

Boundary interactions between different communities of practice are furthermore crucial to create 'interpretational' bridges between the beneficiaries and support actors. The findings provide some reason for assuming that a more continuous presence of support organizations in the field might contribute to this purpose (e.g. through local offices, the permanent presence of project staff in or close to target communities, or the recruitment of locals as staff members). It is then also important to effectively coordinate with these 'bridging actors'. The evidence from participant observation on a field trip to identify capacity-building needs, where the staff from the local offices seemed to be absent, rather points to the contrary.

Even where a continuous presence is not possible, enough space and time for informal interactions with beneficiaries seem to be very important. As has been indicated before, merely formal settings and interactions often tend to result in more a superficial communication of knowledge. Apart from that, the formalization of beneficiary associations to act as bridges between TRC entrepreneurs and 'higher-level' organizations might constitute platforms for knowledge interactions across boundaries. One of the most pertinent challenges here has been for entrepreneurs to truly appropriate these associations to the extent that they are self-managed and sustained independent from 'strategic facilitation' or other top-down influences. This seems to require a smooth transition process, and much patience and commitment by all of the involved actors. The evidence remains mixed on the success of such transition processes, yet, what is rather clear is that it usually exceeds the time-frames of single capacity-building projects.

Transparency of boundary processes

With regards to the transparency of boundary interactions it is particularly noteworthy that formal interaction processes with beneficiaries often remain unclear. The frequent use of official forms for impact assessments, participant evaluation, and specifically for the diagnosis of capacity-building needs is in many cases insufficiently transparent (even if some purpose is normally attached or mentioned this does not mean that it is understood). In combination with the wide mistrust of inhabitants of rural communities in particular towards state institutions, such formal interactions might yield quite distorted knowledge interpretations. During the participant observation on a field trip with public officials for an information event and subsequent visits to individual enterprises, this impression was corroborated. Some entrepreneurs appeared to be very cautious about giving away information about their activities, which might have been influenced by the informal status of some of the enterprises. This is also reinforced by the 'tiredness' to participate in such interactions that is widespread in some rural communities, where support actors conduct their studies in a largely uncoordinated manner.

On the level of interactions between different support actors, it might be interpreted that the general disposition to share knowledge does not automatically lead to transparency. The mere publication of partial information in a small note in some subcategory of an organizational website, or the accessibility of grey literature through organizational archives seem to seldom achieve this aim. The active dissemination of knowledge could be a valuable contribution here. But so far, this seems to have been relatively ineffective due to the lack of functioning central knowledge hubs. As mentioned before, the CANTURURAL and the Tourism Board are perceived as the organizations responsible for pooling and disseminating information in a transparent way, but this has not happened in a very coherent or consistent fashion.

Negotiability of boundary interactions

The negotiability of different perspectives in the boundary interactions among actors involved in capacity-building interventions for the TRC sector can be interpreted as an important point when it comes to the balancing of knowledge interpretations. Remarkable is the relative inflexibility of public officials in negotiating the relevance of formalization issues. From the evidence it might be derived that this is not only influenced by the degree of political pressure from the bottom-up, but furthermore through internal power relations within state institutions. Even if disposed to engage with more marginalized entrepreneurs who tend to struggle with the formalization of their enterprises, this would often augment the vulnerability of the same support actors when it comes to organization-internal competition.

Meanwhile, the lack of state-entity engagement with informal TRC enterprises bears a certain paradox: The informal status of enterprises seems to be a significant barrier to further advances. Overall, this might contribute to the limited socio-economic power of the TRC sector. At the same time, the lack of socio-economic power appears as a significant limitation to the exertion of political pressure on state institutions necessary, for instance, to induce an increased understanding of the practical issues that TRC entrepreneurs are confronted with, even when they want to formalize their enterprises. On the one hand, this might be a factor on a macro-level: In comparison with other tourism segments, the TRC sector seems to remain economically rather insignificant and might therefore receive only little attention within influential institutions like the ICT or the INA. On the other hand, the lack of income by TRC enterprises also means that intermediary organizations specifically concerned with the TRC sector (like the CANTURURAL, ACTUAR and COOPRENA) continue to be dependent to a considerable degree on funding from outside the sector (mostly international cooperation funds or from Costa Rican state institutions). While this might limit their independence in

some instances (an assumption that could not be backed by concrete evidence in this study), it might also simply limit their overall space of action due to resource constraints.

In addition to this, the negotiability of relevant knowledge perspectives seems to be affected by power gradients in more subtle ways, too. There is quite some awareness by many support actors of the need to achieve a horizontal communication approach with beneficiaries and induce their appropriation of the process in a truly participatory fashion. But in the practice this appears to be easier said than done. The gradual and often unwitting imposition of development priorities and needs through the suggestion by perceived experts 'who know it better' illustrates this. To achieve a successful social learning process, much caution should be applied here. Perceived expert knowledge should be carefully validated through in-depth communication processes with beneficiaries, against the backdrop of an intimate knowledge of local contexts, and with a disposition for self-critical reflection. As the evidence signals, there are some examples where such a validation process might have been more successful. But all in all, this seems to remain exceptional. What is more, in the communication with beneficiaries close attention should be paid to the potential power differentials within TRC groups and target communities.

Identities

The findings remain relatively vague on identity aspects that structure the social learning system around the concerned capacity-building interventions. Nevertheless, a few aspects can be elaborated on. Above all, there appears to be a marked binary of support actors as perceived professional 'experts' on the one side and most beneficiaries as 'campesinos' or non-expert tourism entrepreneurs on the other side. This comes with certain variations. The expansiveness of support actors' identities towards beneficiaries seems to depend much on the time spent 'in the field' but also on the nature of the engagement. When interactions have remained on a very formal level, this might still be very limited. In other cases in contrast, support actors engaging in a more thorough and sustained direct communication process with beneficiaries even seem to feel a certain connectedness. The findings indicate that the more permanent presence of support actors in the field does not necessarily lead to a lower connectedness with staff members in San José. This might be taken as another argument for a more sustained on-site engagement to create 'knowledge bridges' with beneficiaries.

On the level of beneficiaries, their self-perception as 'campesinos' and TRC entrepreneurs can be a double-edged sword. In some cases it is seen as a strength, going hand in hand with a certain pride of local peculiarities, traditions, values, and so forth. In other cases, the pronounced 'rural' identities of many TRC entrepreneurs can be little effective though when it comes to interactions with support

actors, 'experts', state entities, and more generally urban-based institutional actors. Therefore, it seems all the more important to foment the psychological development of individual entrepreneurs and TRC groups, to enable a more participatory learning process and a strong basis for bottom-up knowledge inputs by the beneficiaries.

9. Discussion

In how far has the management of the relevant knowledge inputs to the considered development interventions contributed to their effectiveness, and are there any policy recommendations that could be given respectively? To answer these questions, it is useful to first discuss in how far the relevant knowledge inputs have been managed as seen from a rational and from post-rational theoretical perspectives.

9.1. Knowledge management from rational and post-rational perspectives

As has been pointed out in the theoretical background there are some well recognized flaws in rational approaches to knowledge management for development. Scholars like McFarlane (2006) or Ferguson and colleagues (2008; 2010) have brought forward some quite convincing arguments that highlight not only the ignorance of rational perspectives to many actual knowledge management aspects (like most of the social contextual influences on the interpretation of knowledge), but furthermore warn of the pitfalls and expectedly negative consequences of implementing rational knowledge management in the development practice.

And indeed, when skimming through the findings that the field research of this thesis has yielded, it quickly becomes evident that a rational knowledge management perspective implies an inevitable ignorance to many aspects. For example: A very significant part of the knowledge inputs that the interviewed 'development professionals' deemed relevant to the interventions in question can hardly be accommodated with a rational perspective. This concerns especially the importance granted by many to tacit and interpretational knowledge components, linked among other things to an intimate understanding of the contexts of an intervention, knowledge about empathetic and self-critical communication methods, or the implicit awareness of empowerment objectives. These types of knowledge are clearly less relevant (since mainly tacit) from a rationalist point of view. What does this apparent theoretical inaccuracy mean – is a rational knowledge management perspective useless or even counterproductive? I would argue that this is not necessarily the case.

After all, the findings indicate that, in the case at hand, many elements of the knowledge management, especially as it is perceived and implemented by the involved actors, correspond in fact to a rather rational perspective. The focus on the largely substantial and technical knowledge of TRC weaknesses and capacity-building needs is a strong point here. Many support actors appear to perceive such knowledge as 'objective' expert perspectives. Much of it might be traced back to their academic backgrounds and previous professional experience in the tourism sector.

Also the way in which many support actors (especially those from state entities) emphasize the importance of backing up capacity-building needs with hard evidence reminds of rational knowledge management. Overall, there seems to be a strong (implicit) tendency of many involved actors to view the circulation of knowledge inputs to these capacity-building interventions through a rather rational lens. From this perspective, the main direction of knowledge flows coincides with the transfer of expertise from support actors to TRC entrepreneurs, or with the application of 'objective' knowledge (e.g. for political advocacy or marketing and promotion purposes) on their behalf. At the same time, supposed bottom-up knowledge inputs are essential for the coordination and fine-tuning of interventions. These inputs are in turn often obtained through deliberate knowledge sourcing. Since such knowledge sourcing seems to remain relatively superficial in many instances (e.g. simply ticking points of a list or filling out questionnaires) it is *questionable in how far the resulting knowledge inputs are truly bottom-up*, although they are often seen as the outcome of participatory consultations.

Altogether, it is hard to define with the available evidence whether such rational elements outweigh other views. In any case, it could be claimed that the actual the knowledge management of many actors in practice justifies the rational analysis. One might consider an analogy with political sciences in this context: It is widely recognized that political realism, with its assumption of egoistic and rational calculations of political actors (among other things), is not only ignorant to many aspects of actual politics, but also dangerous to the extent that the implementation of such narrow-minded theory in practice can lead to 'self-fulfilling prophecies' (Wendt, 1999; Smith, 2004). However, this does not mean that analytical considerations from realist points of view are useless. Ironically, its usefulness might precisely derive from the frequent use of realist assumptions by political actors in practice (id.). One might therefore apply such an analysis in order to trace the thought inputs to the actual practice. Meanwhile, the flaws and pitfalls of such overly simplistic views should not be neglected. The application of rationalist theory in this work can be read in line with this reasoning.

While it has thus been shown that a significant part of the management of the relevant knowledge inputs can be captured from a rational perspective, the post-rational analysis seems to mirror the

management of relevant knowledges with more accuracy and complexity. By drawing on the concept of a social learning system, an idea is obtained of how the involved actors adopt knowledge inputs in practice within the specific contexts in which they are situated. The position of the involved actors in a social learning system is defined by factors such as the modalities and types of interactions with other actors, common interests and objectives, the level of trust, identities, and the ways in which boundaries between different groups of actors are handled and defined. In fact, all this seems influence the involved actors' needs and perceptions, and thereby how they acquire, adapt, prioritize, deem irrelevant, ignore, (mis)understand, apply, or in short, re-construct specific knowledge inputs.

Against this theoretical background, it is possible to explain why, for instance, the understanding of the local context of an intervention tends to vary considerably between different actors, even if there are formal mechanisms to 'transfer' such knowledge. It also helps to explain in how far some actors have difficulties to effectively apply their understanding of the local context previously acquired through experience 'in the field', when this collides with their institutional requirements. A very relevant example here are the difficulties of state actors to provide more consistent support to informal TRC enterprises, which hardly suits with their professional guidelines and rules. Oftentimes, the contextual knowledge management constraints are also directly related to a scarcity of time and resources, especially on the level of NGOs. While many support actors do indeed recognize the importance of a more thorough communication process and direct interactions with beneficiaries in their communities, they have only limited means available to act accordingly in practice.

The post-rational perspective draws much attention to the decisiveness of informal actor relations – the functioning of formal knowledge sharing mechanisms seems to depend much on factors such as the commitment of key individuals, on the trust and the ways of communication between them. In this context, the cooperation processes between different non-state actors serve as an illustration. The relatively sudden spending cuts by international donors might have sharpened the competition over project funding between local organizations and thereby made the relations between some of them more precarious. Still, it is interesting to consider that the geographic centralization of much of the TRC support sector in the area might actually be an advantage for good (informal) relations between different support actors, since it allows for more face-to-face communication and knowledge exchanges between them.

Authors like Jones (2009) have pointed out that there are many different ways of conceptualizing the contextual influences of social actor networks on the ways in which knowledge is managed. I would argue that the advantage of applying Wenger's (2000) framework of a social learning system has been

that it encompasses both 'pluralism and opportunism' and 'politics and legitimization' perspectives of the post-rational knowledge management perspective (see Table 1). In fact, the evidence corroborates the assumption that much of the relevant knowledge inputs to the capacity-building are managed in a more 'opportunistic' way. The knowledge derived from experience or deliberate knowledge sourcing tends to be deepened within communities of practice or shared across their boundaries where this convenient and easily accordable with the context. For example, it might be interpreted that the 'expert' knowledge of capacity-building needs and technical tourism expertise are knowledge components which are relatively easy to agree on within the San José-based support sector. Here, such expert knowledge, for instance, on how a tourism enterprises has to be administered and marketed, seems to be understood in similar ways by different development professionals.

The post-rational analysis done in this work points to the way in which the management of relevant knowledge perspectives is affected by underlying power relations, too. This seems to apply to interactions on all levels. Within larger organizations 'in-house competition' is an important contextual factor. Hence, state officials tend to be little flexible when it comes to the prioritization of alternative perspectives over the importance of the formalization of TRC enterprises. They might be afraid of losing their colleagues' support and putting at risk their own career prospects or the departmental budget obtained for the support of the TRC sector. On the other side, the TRC sector itself has a limited economic power to push for a higher prioritization of grassroots knowledge perspectives in state institutions, either directly or through strong and well-funded non-state organizations. Power relations within beneficiary communities are equally decisive when it comes to the articulation of capacity-building needs or the selection of entrepreneurs for a capacity-building support. But most pervasive seems to be the open or often rather suggestive imposition of top-down knowledge perspectives from all kinds of support actors, which seems to be much connected to their frequently perceived 'expert' position in contrast to that of TRC entrepreneurs seen as 'campesinos'.

9.2. Learning, impacts, and space for adjustments

The advantage of the rational perspective is that it straightforwardly points to various knowledge management shortcomings that lead to an incomplete 'cumulative' learning process: Especially within the support sector, different actors and organizations can be seen as each disposing of some relevant knowledge 'pieces' but which are subsequently not collated to 'complete the puzzle'. There is therefore no comprehensive and coherent overview of what is needed, where, for whom, what has already been done, which precise impacts have been achieved, and so on, even if the relevant information is partially available in different organizations and although there are some existing formal knowledge sharing structures. As a result, the capacity-building approach is much less effective in its

substantial dimension than it could be. Overall the lack of coordination and fine-tuning of many of the interventions translate into inefficiency, since resources and efforts are often wasted for support measures that are duplicated, inconsistent or not mutually complementary.

Equally straightforward are the adjustments to the existing knowledge management that can be recommended from this perspective. When taking into account the failure of support actors to effectively share their available information, it would seem adequate to invest in more efficient knowledge sharing technology, especially on the level of the CANTURURAL and of the ICT. These entities might be suitable for the creation of a digitalized and central database to gather precise and explicit information about capacity-building needs, beneficiaries and the progress of their enterprises, best-practices, and other relevant knowledge to better coordinate future interventions. Further recommendations that can be given are: to store all explicit knowledge within organization-internal digital databanks and not only on paper, and to introduce sector-wide evaluation standards and indicators to facilitate the subsequent knowledge sharing.

From post-rational perspectives as well, the current knowledge management processes underlying the capacity-building interventions can be supposed to limit their impacts to a significant degree. But in contrast to the rational viewpoint the diagnosed knowledge management shortcomings do not simply lead to an 'incomplete picture'. Rather than that, one might speak of social learning processes with many contextual constraints on actors to adequately apply the knowledge from own experiences in the field or to take into account other actors' knowledge perspectives. Overall, joint learning processes that lead to innovation or to a more detailed understandings do exist, but they are often limited to convenience-based cooperation in single projects or programs. Even if among the involved actors there should be a common overarching interest in advancing the TRC sector, the post-rational analysis shows that the social learning system is actually rather fragmented. This is the case already within certain organizations where the social context does not allow for knowledge inputs that collide with institutional standards, but above all between different actors and organizations with very diverging interests, needs, perceptions, problem definitions, priorities, routines, and resources.

From an 'opportunistic / pluralist' post-rational perspective, an engineered solution with a technology focus like the creation of a central knowledge system and database related to TRC capacity-building might make sense, but it would not be enough by itself. For such an approach to properly function, one would have to consider how it would fit within the social contexts of the involved actors. To facilitate a successful knowledge management process, less importance should be granted to formal structures (which might still be important as a foundation) and more to enhancing informal relations,

trust, and social capital. Two aspects that are particularly important for this are the disposition for and commitment to interaction processes, especially by key actors; and secondly: the availability of resources and time for more in-depth communication processes – for example to be able to dedicate more time and personnel to sustained on-site interactions with beneficiaries and acquire a better understanding of local contexts.

I would argue that such a 'facilitation' approach is not one of simple and fast solutions, but rather one that calls for a careful and gradual management to improve communication processes on all levels, and with a detailed view to informal and social dimensions. This might come with concrete recommendations such as making available physical or virtual platforms, time and resources to facilitate the common pursuit of ideas and knowledge exchanges through brainstorming sessions, meetings, and more thorough communication processes with other actors. On a more general level, the recommendation is for the involved actors and especially for project or program managers to go beyond or even attempt to overcome the more traditional command and control management. It is thus important *not* to turn the facilitation of interactions into strictly formal and obligatory processes that become a burden to the involved actors – the basic idea is that effective knowledge management *cannot* be forced.

More critical post-rational perspectives would further caution that the 'neutral' facilitation of actor relations would still be insufficient unless knowledge-power relations are explicitly taken into account and addressed. The findings show a considerable number of support actors who highlight the importance of a truly participatory communication with beneficiaries and the need for the capacity-building to transcend existing power-relations. Still, I would argue that when it comes to the actual interpretation of knowledge inputs in the capacity-building practice, there are only few cases in which the involved actors have actively sought to identify the underlying power relations in order to overcome them. For example, many support actors seem to readily describe the communication with beneficiaries as participatory even when consultation processes often remain quite superficial and top-down. Pronounced modernization views and an objectivist epistemology continue to influence this, too. As a consequence, many of the considered capacity-building interventions should be limited in their procedural or participatory dimension. The development effectiveness might be greatly reduced by the frequent exclusion, ignorance or misinterpretation of knowledge perspectives from less powerful actors.

A particularly important recommendation is thus that simply spending more time and resources for thorough communication processes with beneficiaries will not automatically lead to a more participatory knowledge management process. The contrary might even be the case, if the involved actors remain unaware of knowledge-power relations. Binaries such as between knowledgeable

'development experts' and unknowledgeable beneficiaries could be reinforced as well as local power inequalities if these are ignored. Otherwise the capacity-building support runs the risk of being mainly based on top-down knowledge inputs and therefore ultimately self-serving for support actors who remain in the position of 'service providers'. But also on other levels, the involved actors should be encouraged to reflect upon their own position and knowledge interests and become more aware of possible biases.

Crucially, the state entities that could achieve much larger substantial impacts than their NGO counterparts should become more flexible towards negotiating their engagement with informal TRC enterprises (given that the latter that are often caught in a dilemma: the costs and effort for formalization appear as relatively high to many entrepreneurs but so are the costs of not formalizing). Public officials tend to see the responsibility for such a change largely on the side of external advocacy actors. But the impulse might also originate from within state institutions if there were more space for self-critical debates and reflection. While informal processes are decisive in this, the formal encouragement of constructive dissent and self-reflection would also be a contribution, again, as long as this does not become a perceived obligatory exercise and thereby a burden for the involved actors.

10. Concluding remarks

All in all, this thesis has been intended to offer contributions on a theoretical as well as on a practical level. Various research gaps have been addressed by tracing the knowledge inputs of an entire 'development field' in a 'Southern' context (where most of the involved actors are not 'Northern' even though especially funding from Northern donors still seems to have significant impacts on the ways in which knowledge inputs are managed between different local and particularly non-state actors), and where knowledge is not managed within specifically labelled knowledge management programs.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, this work seems to confirm the higher accuracy of post-rational knowledge management perspectives when it comes to describing the ways in which knowledge inputs are managed. Clearly, a rational knowledge management perspective is relatively narrow and leaves out many contextual and social influences on the circulation of knowledge inputs. In that, this work confirms authors like Ferguson and colleagues (2008; 2010) who have prioritized the social dimensions of knowledge management for development. What is more of a novelty is the deliberate application of both a rational and a post-rational analysis. Interestingly, it becomes clear that even if the post-rational perspectives seem to describe the knowledge management as it happens in the practice more accurately, this does not mean that a rational perspective is inapplicable. Rather than that, the different theoretical perspectives used in this thesis point to different knowledge management

shortcomings, and to how these might limit the effectiveness of the capacity-building interventions in various ways.

Even if ultimately flawed, it could be defended that the advantage of a rational knowledge management perspective is precisely its narrow focus that straightforwardly points to some of the shortcomings perceived as priorities by many of the involved actors in reality. It also offers solution proposals that are quite tangible. Recommendations like the installation of a digitalized databank to centralize in an orderly way the currently dispersed information 'pieces' held by different actors across the support sector, are in principle easy to understand, can be based on clear mechanisms and a clear purpose (to reduce the uncoordinated capacity-building and improve substantial outcomes).

Equally significant, post-rational perspectives rightly capture some important drawbacks of rational knowledge management approaches, which is also underlined by the evidence provided in this work. Formal knowledge management processes do not work properly if they are 'out of sync' with the social contexts and the resulting knowledge needs and perceptions of involved actors. And the top-down tendencies that go along with the rather rationalist views of certain support actors seem to run counter to any meaningful bottom-up knowledge inputs, and hence, to the participatory effectiveness of the interventions in question. Nevertheless, it has been discussed above that this does not necessarily mean that the rationalist perspective and derived policy-recommendations should be thrown overboard. Instead, these recommendations should be complemented by post-rational perspectives. Rational knowledge management proposals alone are shortsighted and probably counterproductive. In combination with post-rationalist approaches however, they might contribute to the overall effectiveness of development interventions.

The different post-rational perspectives used in this work seem to be more suitable to adjust the knowledge management to the complex dynamics in which the considered interventions take place. These perspectives have yielded recommendations that could be crucial and necessary to improve the effectiveness of development interventions by focusing on knowledge inputs (especially the consideration and tackling of knowledge-power links). Yet, when standing alone these perspectives also appear to be more complex and less tangible than rational ones. The derived recommendations correspond to adjustments aiming at rather gradual changes through careful facilitation and normative choices that imply attitudinal changes and reflection. Recommendations like the encouragement of constructive dissent and self-critical awareness might remain vague or become watered down, or require uncomfortable self-criticism. They might thus be little attractive to decision-makers if they are proposed alone. The combination of rational and post-rational knowledge management analyses and policy recommendations might therefore be interesting to consider in further development research and practice.

Finally, it should also be reminded that significant methodological limitations apply to this thesis. Above all, knowledge management for development has been quite a challenging topic to operationalize in this empirical research, which limits its methodological precision. However, this might also be typical of an exploratory qualitative research. Future research could built upon this work to further specify, with more precision and also quantitatively, the ways in which knowledge management for development approaches could enhance the effectiveness of development practice. I furthermore recognize that the capacity-building interventions for community-based and sustainable small-scale tourism entrepreneurship in rural areas of Costa Rica might not be too representative of development interventions in other topics or locations. Yet, the broad mix of involved actors, and more or less consistent and coherent temporary projects and programs could resemble other development practices. The different ways in which the management of relevant knowledge inputs seems to be fragmented here might even be more pronounced where more actors are involved on all levels, and in more complex geographical, socio-economic, and political constellations.

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12. Annex

Policy Recommendations

- Elaborate and disseminate methodological standards and best-practices for deliberate knowledge sourcing practices for TRC capacity-building programs. Not only within individual support organizations but on the level of the entire support sector.
- Switch from outdated knowledge storage on paper to the digitalization of explicit information and knowledge.
- Increase efficient knowledge sharing within but above all between the different support organizations through a formal and central knowledge management system, possibly a virtual database maintained by the CANTURURAL or the ICT.
- Keep in mind that the functioning of such a technological and formal approach to knowledge management is essentially dependent on the underlying informal structures and social contexts.
- Foment the functioning of underlying knowledge management structures through the gradual facilitation of social interactions between the involved actors. Pay attention to aspects like trust, communication modalities, time and resource constraints, diverging institutional structures, ideological positions, objectives, and knowledge needs, competition for funds, and to the role of committed leaders and other persons in key positions. Move away from traditional command & control management approaches and acknowledge that an adequate knowledge management cannot be forced.
- Create formal spaces like interaction platforms, possibilities for joint activities off-work, and possible schedules for brainstorming sessions to foment informal knowledge management structures. But do not let such spaces become a burden or obligatory exercise.
- Explicitly identify and address power inequalities that affect the management of knowledge inputs, on all actor levels. Engage in self-critical reflection to identify own biases, subtle and more open instances of knowledge imposition. Deliberate 'training' modules for support actors might come into consideration for this purpose.
- More concretely, state institutions should be more disposed to negotiate their inflexibility on formalization issues of TRC enterprises, which will be difficult to achieve without external pressure and individual commitment from within, especially in the ICT.
- In the interaction with beneficiaries, support actors on all levels should avoid communicating only with community or group leaders. Time and resources should be made available for more in-depth and sustained communication with beneficiaries. An excessive focus on superficial interactions like the administration of surveys should be avoided. The validity of ones' own

'expert knowledge' should be reflected upon. The importance of interpretational and communication knowledge should be recognized, excessively abstract and technical language avoided and more breaks taken in workshops.

- Bear in mind that the mere consultation of stakeholders does not necessarily mean that a capacity-building intervention is truly participatory.
- On-site capacity-building interactions should ideally be accompanied by local staff members.
- Take into consideration that the isolated adoption of some knowledge management adjustments might be counterproductive, especially the adoption of technologically- or rationally-oriented and pragmatic 'facilitation' measures without a consideration of influencing power dimensions.

These recommendations should be seen as suggestions, not as prescriptions. As there are methodological limitations in this research, I do not intend to claim that these suggestions are 'infallible'.

List of organizations currently or previously involved in the capacity-building for Costa Rica's TRC sector[14]

State agencies:

- ICT (Tourism Board
- INDER (previously IDA) (Rural Development Institute)
- INA (National Learning Institute)
- INFOCOOP (National Institute for the Support of Cooperatives)
- MAG (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock)
- MEIC (Ministry of the Economy, Industry, and Commerce)
- MINAE / SINAC (Ministry of the Environment and Energy / National System of Conservation Areas)

Financial donors:

- Avina Foundation
- Brot für die Welt
- Conservation International

[14] The list is possibly not exhaustive

- CRUSA (Costa Rica US Foundation for Cooperation)
- Fundecooperación
- GEF Small Grants Program
- IADB (Inter-American Development Bank)
- The Nature Conservancy
- WWF (World Wildlife Fund)

Universities:

- Tecnológico de Costa Rica
- Stanford Woods Institute / INOGO (Osa & Golfito Initiative)
- UCR (Universidad de Costa Rica)
- UNA (Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica)

Other non-state organizations:

- ACEPESA
- ACTUAR
- ASCONA (Osa)
- ATEC Talamancan
- CANTURURAL
- CENECOOP
- CONAO
- COOPRENA
- Corcovado Foundation
- IsoEco, S.A.
- MarViva Foundation
- Neotrópica Foundation
- Osa Conservation
- Planeterra
- Rainforest Alliance
- RBA (Reinventing Business for All)
- Turismo Autentico

Map of Costa Rica[15]

[15] Source: wikipedia.org