Empowerment for leisure
in a rural women's tourism co-operative
A case study in Monteverde, Costa Rica
Marieloz Bonilla Moya
Women and Gender

Abstract

Tourism services developed by groups of local women not only offer diversification for rural economies but opportunities for women's empowerment. This case study investigates how participation in a tourism handicraft' co-operative empowers women to experience leisure facing changes in traditional gender roles.   The co-operative consists of 150 women from 21 small communities around the Monteverde region. The actor-oriented qualitative methodology used focused on their everyday experience through social interaction. Data were gathered via observation and interviews. The sample included 40 women from six of the 21 communities due to the greater number of participants. Fifty percent of the women in each community were selected at random for the interview. Average age was 37. Findings show that participation itself was the main leisure activity and provides empowerment to enhance other leisure practices. They found motivation in being in a group that offers opportunities for learning, making friends, having an occupation and making crafts. The income increased their choice to go out enhancing autonomy to travel alone, with families and the acquisition of leisure materials and services. However, the extent of empowerment was questioned by constraints and even though positive changes have occurred, they still face a struggle. In conclusion, participation in tourism is a leisure activity that improves women's quality of life and their household. Benefits of leisure empower rural women to reflect on their autonomy to enhance leisure opportunities, causing changes on traditional gender roles in the households and on themselves.

1. Background

1.1. The Case of CASEM: an Artisans' Co-operative in Monteverde, Costa Rica

The rural Monteverde zone in Costa Rica comprises around twenty towns with 5,000 people. The region is well known for its commitment to conservation of cloud forest reserves and tourism. The estimation of visitors per year to Monteverde has increased to 55,000 persons (Monteverde's Biologic Reserve, 1999). Apart from tourism, local communities are still dedicated to dairy farms and agriculture (coffee). CoopeSanta Elena R.L is a co-operative with 750 participants consisting of four productive departments: coffee (100 people), commercial services (400), credit union (100) and handicrafts (150). The *Comisión de Artesanas de Santa Elena y Monteverde*- Artisans' Commission of Santa Elena and Monteverde- (CASEM) is the handicraft's department of this co-operative, the case study of this research. The extent of participation goes beyond Santa Elena and Monteverde. This case study includes women from Cañitas, Cabeceras, Guacimal and La Guaria as well.

CASEM was formed in August 1982, by eight women, which has grown to 150 members from 21 communities in the region. Women in CASEM started with basic embroidering, however, the group advanced into new techniques of this domain. They also learned new skills, such as painting, wood and leather crafts, sewing clothes, felt figures and other arts using natural materials, for instance, decorations, necklaces and earrings. They produce crafts at home (alone or in small groups) and bring them to a central building where they are sold. They maintain an office, a craft's material supplier and a workshop in this building.

2. Methodology

The general approach applied was actor-oriented because it focuses on the actor's process, "their cultural repertoires, their historical experiences and the interrelations as

created- in a conscious and/or implicit way" (Long and Van der Ploeg, 1994). An everyday analysis includes as well, " trivial aspects of immediate actors reality". Moreover, it suggests that a women's situation is not an "abstract moral condition" but a social, historic and daily experience" (Cartín, 1991). Taking these considerations in mind, the case study was based on participant observation and semistructured interviews. Participant observation took place during specific moments including: two general group meetings, three community meetings, women's households during interviews and a casual conversational style with them and the rest of the household members. Interviews were based on a list of items and included topics formulated into fully worded questions, which varied for each interview according to their respondences. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed complete *verbatim* (word-for-word). This technique allowed to compare data with other respondents in a "more methodical and complete manner than is possible with notes" (Veal, 1997). After completing all the transcriptions, information was ordered and summarised according to each topic. Emerging themes, which were the most repeated and indirectly addressed constantly, were considered as primers themes for analysis. These were used for discussion, which always returned to the research question, empirical and conceptual frameworks. This method of analysis throughout emerging themes is labelled by Veal (1997) as a 'recursive' approach.

The sample for this study was taken from the six communities that had the greater number of participants and interviewing fifty- percent of each, which resulted in 40 interviews. Average age of the women was 37, in a range from 20 to 54 years old. Most of them come from *campesino* (peasant) backgrounds. They completed elementary school and then worked on farms and in housework domains, economically dependent on their fathers and husbands. For most of them, participation in CASEM has been the first income generating activity.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Empowerment

"Empowerment can be defined as a process as well as a strategy"(Towen, 1996). As a practical effect of the concept for this study, empowerment will be defined as an instrument to judge the whole outcome of an autonomy process. The concept will evaluate the result of a participation process in leisure due to tourism. A central component considered is the ability and possibility of having more equity in the households and holistic autonomy towards leisure practices.

"Premises in the empowerment approach are that people reflect on social reality and are able to criticise the social system and its ideological concepts, and that this may lead to determined actions to change the situation"(Towen, 1996). If gender role changes locate women in this kind of equity position of being autonomous in the (own's and household's) decision making process, women have been empowered. Participation in tourism projects empowers women if it enables them to become *subjects* and partners. Ritsma (1996) refers that "the word empowerment captures a sense of gaining control, of participating and of decision making" (Ritsma, 1996). Empowered women are *subjects* of decisions, who have the strength and tools to challenge social structures, changing the patriarchal cultural system that traditionally has been treating them as *objects of decisions.* "In order to make a decision we have to know which alternatives may be used and what consequences we can expect from following each of these alternatives" (Ban van den and Hawkins, 1974). The assumption is that with the knowledge, ability and strength to make decisions women have been empowered to choose among different (leisure) alternatives in their daily lives, facing changes towards the gender role ideology.

4

3.2. Gender Roles Ideology: Patriarchy and *Machismo*

"The ideas about gender roles and gender relations are deeply engrained in social structures and becomes part of a person's self-image and identity" (Towen, 1996). Research by Carlos et al (1985) of Costa Rican households, shows that patriarchy and *machismo* have defined traditionally women's self-image in relation to the biologic and social reproduction in the households, developed in a private arena. Men built up their self-image and identity based on the provision of material goods in a public arena, as demonstrated through their leisure practices. Gender roles are settled on the economical households' provision and its reproduction. " Patriarchy structure finds the strengthen form this economical authority relationship, where men have a domination. Their authority is legitimised by the prestige and social links acquired by the material achievements" (Carlos et al, 1985).

Towen (1996) states that the feminist anthropology theoretical orientations were dominated by two discussions. On the one hand, the relationships between production/reproduction and the economic marginalisation of women, where the value of women's tasks being traditionally housewives are invisible. On the other hand, the gender ideology within the political and economic context of sex-roles, which is an expression of structural change and political participation. Nowadays, "recent research tries to encompass both aspects by emphasising the link between the socio-economic position of women and gender ideology" (Towen, 1996). This link is the central attention of the research. Women participate directly in income generation activities, which would change the traditional social image of households' caretakers into productive and autonomous women.

3.3. Gender roles in Costa Rican households: Housework and Motherhood

In 1979, Garbanzo's (mentioned in Alvarez et al, 1991) stated that Costa Rican households had different aspirations for their children according to their sex. Boys were raised as breadwinners and as the one in charge of giving direction to the household, while girls were raised for domestic labour or for occupations easy to leave once married. Authority is the role of men and tends to decrease as the socioeconomical level increases. Mothers are the first affective link in the children lives and execute the main socialisation activities. They develop emotions and confidence with their children, who are taught to respect their fathers and to become dependent on them. These conclusions coincide with two previous notions given by Alvarez et al (1991), where they saw mothers as the main socialisation agent, while fathers state at the margin. Carlos et al found (1994) that there is a perseverance of socialisation through games and toys traditionally assigned according to gender roles. Another aspect is that mothers from middle or low income give much importance to their children's education as a way to achieve greater well being. In general these authors found that a child's formation is mainly in the mothers' hands, but under the fathers' values and authority.

3.4. Autonomy to experience leisure

Leisure as autonomy is a "situation of choice, control and self determination" (Shaw, 1994) that allows the human being to increase health, the well being and the quality of life" (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997). "The psychological benefits of leisure are likely to impact both on people's physical health and indirectly on the vitality of their interpersonal relationships, the organisations of which they are part, their communities and society-at-large" (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997).

Being this concept such a relevant one, this study deals with the situation of how women make decisions about the use of their free time in leisure activities. "Leisure is

conceptualised as a desirable experience, and constraints to leisure participation are seen to arise out of structured gender relations" (Shaw, 1994). "Acknowledging power differentials which structure gender, leisure is posited as a potential site of struggle for gender diversity and gender equity "(Wearing and Kloeze, 1994). These statements are results of scientific research in Western countries where it seems to be clear evidence that gender roles constrain leisure participation.

There is not much known scientific evidence in Costa Rica. A reference from research by Barrantes et al in 1979 (mentioned by Vega, 1993) about Costa Rican working women and free time (not leisure) shows that free time was used by 38% in housework, 48% caring for husband and children (play, homework) and 14% resting. Definitely, these results give an impression of the relationship between leisure and gender roles. Findings refer to women's preferences and personal close contact of a household's leisure practice, where cultural patterns are defined mostly in rural areas.

Another finding shows that " *campesinas* have little possibilities to practice recreational activities" (Cartín, 1991). This author mentions that these activities are actually forbidden due to the lack of time or to the couple's relationship, husband's authority limits women to *pasear* (go out for a trip), or to go to *la plaza* (soccer field), because that is a "men business". Constraints due to gender ideology strongly interfere in the leisure practices. Nevertheless, there is not enough research done to assert this statement. Leisure as science in Costa Rica is full of assumptions. This is an innovative issue introduced by this research.

4. Results from Data Collection

At the beginning of the data collection process, questions were addressed to obtain information about autonomy to experience leisure and to see if they had some understanding of leisure as an activity different from work. However, the outcome of interviews revealed that leisure participation was related to CASEM itself. On a daily basis, participation in CASEM has become the most important leisure activity women have. The reasons are related not only to making handicrafts but also to group interaction, and all the activities developed through it. An important motivation is to get out of the housework's routine and its associated problems.

> " Daily I never do something to have fun…just when I come to meetings and we joke…but apart from it, nothing…when I am at home, I hurry to finish the housework and then I start to embroider" (Lorena, 36).

They admit making crafts as their work but when the question about their leisure activities was announced, they answered making crafts or coming to CASEM's meetings. They always call their participation "a job", " their work". However, when facing directly this question (is it a job or is it leisure?), answers were CASEM's participation is either a leisure activity or both, a job and leisure.

> " Both. I like to be busy. I like to make birds (crafts) because it was something I choose. It satisfies me to make them, it fills me and I see them beautiful. Each time I finish one I kiss it…but I have hours to work on that and I do it for economical reasons as well. Yes, I make birds because I have fun but because I like the money "(Betina, 38).

Due to this close interrelation, CASEM/leisure, it is not possible to separate leisure from work and autonomy to participate in CASEM. There is a strong symbiotic relationship between the two. However, when exploring other possible activities different issues were revealed.

4.1. Diverse leisure activities

" Daily it is the same, embroider, knitting belts, to be with my threads and my things of CASEM, that is my entertainment" (Noemy, 54).

This quotation is an answer to another question attempting to explore diverse leisure activities beyond CASEM. Nevertheless, assuredly, CASEM has come to organise the main leisure activity for these women. This organisation has fulfilled the leisure needs of the women, because it is a "structure" where they make crafts (alone or in a group) and attend meetings. These two aspects are essential for their leisure. They organise activities "out of work", such as parties and trips or even going out together for a drink. This last activity is totally out of tradition, because usually women, once they get married, just go out for a drink with their husbands.

"We do something different. Some started to get out of tradition and they look for new recreation ways…- *Ay*, no, I want to recreate but not in the *tecito de sras* (ladies tea break), let's go to the tavern or to that restaurant- " (Daniela, 46).

Personal income gives power to make decisions that affect leisure concerns. The sense of having the means to organise themselves and family members, give them the ability to travel more; not long trips but meaningful ones. The ability to visit their family and friends is significant and taken as a relevant leisure activity. Previously, due to the lack of money, they could not pay for buses or taxis nor buy gifts for them. They

needed to ask for money from their husbands. Now, the whole family has more opportunities to diversify their leisure through travel because the increased income. Families travel not only to visit their extended family and friends but to recreational centres, nature parks volcanoes or beaches.

"I almost do not have free time. Well, I do not have it, but I take it. When my husband does not have to work we travel around, the washing machine stays full but it does not matter" (Natalia, 36).

Contact with nature is an important referred issue quiet often. They enjoy taking walks in the forest, in the prairies or visiting natural attractions with their families. Some like to take walks and pay attention to birds in order to check the colours they paint them. (They do have a bird book as a guide). Some other activities mentioned for leisure were, visiting friends or family, taking children for walks, going to church on Sunday, visiting farms, watching TV, listening to music, eating in restaurants, reading, taking care of ornamental, aromatic or medicinal plants, participating in community committees, playing volleyball and dancing at parties.

"I made crafts from *tusa* (corn sheath). Pastimes, there are many…. to water crops. I love plants, orchids. I like to *pasiar* (go out), visit my family or anyone sick" (Leyla, 47).

4.2. Grouping as a leisure activity

Being in a group gives them the opportunity to improve the quality of their crafts because they support each other with new ideas and they talk about the organisation and try to solve personal or community matters. In that way, grouping is one of the most significant leisure activities they have. This was revealed through participation in community meetings. For example, the group in Cabeceras, brought up topics such as,

anecdotes, children's education, cooking recipes and nutrition. Those are "serious" topics, where they all share knowledge, yet they laugh and joke constantly about each, assuredly, they have fun. Laughing is a particular characteristic of these informal meetings, where the objective is to make crafts together. They do bring lunch, snacks and drinks, which are shared by everyone. However, if Cabeceras showed the strongest leisure behaviour, the same finding just with less intensity was observed in La Guaria, Guacimal and the CASEM store.

"Well it is an entertainment, yes, amusing because it helps one to share with others. It is so nice to go out of the house and meet here. We organise activities to make money for the group and when it is somebody's birthday we celebrate, we share much" (Nora, 35).

As a whole group, the finding is repeated. Participation in a general meeting shows that amusement and entertainment is a fact of life. While eating the home-made snacks and drinks they brought, they shared topics such as a trip to a water spring, vanity about bodies (jokes about male appeal), diet and exercise (jokes about silicone), a trip together to gym as a stress releaser, hair care, dance and music and sex (jokes about *viagra*). All these themes are part of "leisure talk" that women enjoy when they are together and that brings knowledge and ideology to discussions. They dialogue on self-esteem (how they can improve) and ideology, sex, exercise and amusement activities such as dancing. Being in a group is a leisure activity that improves the quality of life of women.

" We should organise the whole CASEM in small groups, not just some communities like now. I see that when I work in group I am happier…, when somebody comes and works with me, times flies and I do not realise" (Paulina, 49).

The act of making crafts is for most of them a leisure activity but what makes it complete is their preference for making crafts in a group, working together could be considered as the climax in a leisure situation.

4.3. Personal Constraints for leisure

In general, women have gained the independence to travel alone or with their families, to buy books, to eat out in restaurants or to go out with friends for a drink. However, there are constraints attached to the gender ideology of being women and being mothers. The dedication to the household, mostly the children's care is an example. There is a central interest and motivation where mothers would rather do things with their children than by themselves. A feeling of guilt occurs when they leave children alone to experience leisure by themselves. It was observed that women do not have an independent leisure time or activity due to their children, because they think more of children than of themselves.

> "I was in the church chorus because I enjoy singing but I did not feel good leaving the girls alone, even if they were happy with their father" (Silvia, 29).

In general, it is difficult for women to distinguish that they have the right to experience leisure. Sometimes, they have leisure but they do not accept it verbally. The reasons are related to their "lack of time" and being busy with the household. They seem to feel guilty participating in leisure related activities, while they accept being in CASEM openly because it is a "job". In this sense, this organisation has become the "leisure saving board" in their everyday life. Some examples in which women experience leisure but they do not realise it, are presented as follows:

" I watch TV sometimes, the soap opera but only in the evening because I do not have time" (Olga, 23) (at the time of the interview she was watching the soap opera at 11am).

" No, I do not have time. I have to do all the housework. The only thing I enjoy is to visit my daughters, once or twice a month. We go to bed at 9, by that time I am just finishing the housework" (Claudia, 36).

As a result of these kinds of responses, the question had to be rephrased (e.g., Do you enjoy reading?) Claudia, the same woman responded effectively, she loved to read. This leisure activity has been enriched due to CASEM. With the acquired income she could purchase new books.

" Ah. Yes. I like to read. Now I am reading a book called " a Desperate Shouting" it is a novel for personal growth. I will show it to you. I love to read about Costa Rican history. The other day I was reading about the Abangares mines" (Claudia, 36).

5. Discussion

Most of these rural housewives look for their first income generating activity. The central motivation to be in CASEM is to have the financial resources to accomplish the needs of the household members, and leisure is tenuously included. However, women have been discovering that they gain autonomy through having control of their own money and afterwards they appreciate it, as depicted by an expression as " I am happy of not having to tell my husband what I do with my money". Nevertheless, motivation goes beyond income acquisition. Being in CASEM, women escape from the housework routine. They join and make crafts together and that is a motive to be in the group because it enhances opportunities for learning, making friends, being busy and having

an organisation for the most relevant leisure activity. CASEM is recognised as a job and as leisure, both words match with the activity.

5.1. Autonomy to experience leisure

Findings whether women had autonomy to experience leisure and autonomy to participate in CASEM, had similar answers because being in CASEM is seen as leisure activity. Then, this participation is a "situation of choice, control and self determination" (Shaw, 1994). They have the opportunity to participate and then control it, even if they hide their leisure by calling it "a job". There is no doubt that they "increase the well being and the quality of life" (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997). In the same sense, if women participate in CASEM they are improving their quality of life, practising leisure and fortifying their autonomy. This organisation has fulfilled the need of leisure of women, because it is a "structure" where they make crafts (alone or in a group) and attend meetings. Grouping is essential to complete the sense of leisure. Laughing is a particular characteristic of meetings, where the objective is to make crafts together. They bring lunch, snacks and drinks, which are shared by all of them. They have "leisure talk" about different topics that bring knowledge and ideology challenge due to discussions. They inter-relate self-esteem (how they can improve) and ideology changes, specially talking about sex, exercise and amusement activities such as dance. Those are psychological benefits of leisure that are "likely to impact the vitality of their interpersonal relationships and the organisations of which they are part" (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997). Certainly, considered household an organisation where women take part, there are psychological benefits extended to its members. "My children are happier looking at me happier making crafts" (Noemy, 54).

From a more general view, income acquisition has changed leisure practise, enhancing possibilities for women to be autonomous for travelling alone or mostly with their

families. Families travel not only to visit their extended family and friends but to recreational centres, nature parks, volcanoes or beaches. They also buy books, eat out in restaurants or rarely go out with friends for a drink. Nevertheless, autonomy for leisure practise is questioned through constraints. "Constraints to leisure participation are seen to arise out of structured gender relations" (Shaw, 1994). Effectively, there are different manifestations of gender constraints, mostly originated from motherhood, which seem to confirm that in this case, gender structures need to be challenged to favour diversity and equity. "Acknowledging power differentials which structure gender, leisure is posited as a potential site of struggle for gender diversity and gender equity "(Wearing and Kloeze, 1994).

In relation to previous research in Costa Rica, findings of this study confirm that autonomy for leisure and gender roles are closely related. Barrantes et al in 1979 (mentioned by Vega, 1993) found that women used their free time to attend their households. In the same way, women in CASEM use their free time to improve their households; there is a strong motivation in improving the quality of life of children and infrastructure of the house. Cartín (1991) mentioned as well that "*campesinas* had little possibilities to practice recreational activities". That is not the case in CASEM, where even if women have double journeys, one is considered leisure. Cartín (1991) found that husband's authority limits women to go out due to leisure concerns (trips or soccer games) because that is a "men business". This situation has changed in the case of this research. In addition, there have been changes introduced by women's autonomy into practises of leisure, for example the previously mentioned, income, which has increased the power to decide to go out. And even a more challenging example is that in few occasions wives have gone out for a drink, which is a strong threat to patriarchy.

5.2. Gender Roles and Leisure

Alvarez et al (1991), declare that households in Costa Rica followed a patriarchal structure. Fathers are identified as economical providers. However, there has been a tenuous change where men are no longer the only breadwinners and their authority begins to be questioned (Vega, 1993). Definitely, patriarchal structure has slowly been changing with the diversification in the subjects of production in the public area, which used to be men (Carlos et al, 1985). Gender roles inside households are starting to vary due to the economical households' provision. Even if income obtained by women is not a big amount, this contribution has been recognised and developed as "helping each other". That is the main change they have obtained and it is the base to allow leisure practices. For instance, women have expressed changes in their autonomy as being able to relate with others of similar interests and going out more often.

Since studies about households started in Costa Rica (mentioned by Alvarez et al, 1991), mothers are noted as the first affective link for children. This statement is also reinforced by this study. Moreover, Alvarez et al (1991) states that "children formation is mainly in mothers' hands, but under fathers' values and authority". Men's authority is still strong, yet being in CASEM, women have favoured themselves to stand for their children's position. This authority has been modified and women participate actively in their children's decision-making matters. It has an influence on leisure practices, because as women open up alternatives children are always included, which at the same time becomes the main constraint for personal practices. Women are much dependent on children that they do not enjoy or open up their own opportunities for leisure. In the same way, women do not accept leisure publicly because "they are supposed to be busy in household matters" all the time. However, attending CASEM they do not feel that guilty because it is a "job matter". In this sense CASEM, alleviates guilty feelings to have leisure, because they are "working".

5.3. Women and Empowerment

Findings show that women have developed abilities and possibilities to have more equity relationships in the households and holistic autonomy to approach leisure. This empowerment is an outcome from their participation in CASEM, which has been a process and not a strategy (Towen, 1996). Meaningfully, through simple practices, women have had the chance to reflect on social reality, their reality as women within rural households, and develop techniques to criticise the social system (structure) and its ideological concepts with the introduction to their world of a new occupation. That has lead them to determine actions to change the situation (Towen, 1996) that can improve their lives and the lives of those they care about. Income and the recognition of having an occupation have made women feel more as partners in the decision-making process. They have been empowered because they have gained control over this process (Ritsma, 1996). One of the most valuable tools acquired has been self-confidence (personal decisions) that encourages self-expression (household's decisions).

6. Conclusion

Making crafts has been an important gender traditional activity for leisure. This case shows that it can become a leisure activity that not only produces an income. It also empowers women to access alternatives beyond other leisure practices, and even remaining constraints women face to challenge traditional patriarchal structures. This form of tourism has brought women a new opportunity in their lives and for the future generations, not only towards leisure practices but also to a broader concept of autonomy. Their children are being raised with the recognition of human values and in a more equity and balance of diversity in gender roles. The social movement provoked by these households can be promising for a more just society.

6. References

Alvarez, A. et al. (1991). Patrones de Crianza en la familia tica. San José, Costa Rica.

Ban, A. W. van den and H.S.Hawkins (1996). Agricultural Extension. Great Britain.

Carlos, M.J. et al. (1985). Machismo y Socialización: Un estudio de casos en familias universitarias. Universidad de Costa Rica. San Pedro, Costa Rica.

Cartín, N. (1991). El patriarcado en la familia campesina y su influencia en las prácticas productivas de la mujer. Universite Catholique de Louvain. San Pedro, Costa Rica.

Long, A. and van der Ploeg, J.D. (1994). Born from within: Practice and Perspectives of Endogenous Rural Development. The Netherlands.

Mannell, R.C. and Kleiber, D.A.(1997). A Social Psychology of Leisure. State College of Pensylvania. United States.

Ritsma, N. (1996). Communities, conservation and tourism. Critical Issues in the empowerment process of communities living in buffer areas. Wageningen Agricultural University, The Netherlands.

Shaw, S. (1994). Gender, Leisure and Constraint: Towards a Framework for the Analysis of Women's Leisure. National Recreation and Park Association (26) 8-22.

Towen, A. (1996). Gender and Development in Zambia: Empowerment of Women through local Non-Governmental Organisations. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands.

Turner, C. (1993). Rural Tourism in Greece. Presentation on Workshop: Recreation and Regional Development, Wageningen Agricultural University. The Netherlands.

Vega, I. (1993). Cambio Social, Estructura y Dinámica familiar en Costa Rica. Universidad Complutense de Madrid. España.

Veal, A. (1997). Research Methods for Leisure and Tourism: a practical guide. Great Britain.

Wearing, B. and Kloeze, J.W. (1994). Leisure and Gender. Leewarden: WICE. The Netherlands.