Of Huts and Houses – Negotiating Authenticity and Indigeneity in a Shuar Developmental Project in the Ecuadorian Amazon

De chozas y casas - negociando autenticidad e indigenidad en un proyecto de desarrollo shuar en la Amazonía ecuatoriana

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Abstract: How do tourists and Shuar project staff understand, negotiate and contest notions of authenticity and Indigeneity in the context of volunteer tourism? In this article I examine infrastructure as a privileged site for projections of authenticity and Indigeneity in an Indigenous tourism project in the Ecuadorian Amazon. While referring to the same physical infrastructure and services, such as running water, electricity, sanitary installations, houses and roads, for voluntourists and Shuar it represents divergent visions of Indigenous life. A focus on the mundane reality of infrastructure lends itself to teasing out differing yet intersecting notions of authenticity and Indigeneity as negotiated and contested in the Indigenous volunteer tourism project, while further highlighting how an anthropological perspective can add hosts' visions and perspectives to the discourse in volunteer tourism studies.

Keywords: Shuar; authenticity; Indigeneity; volunteer tourism; Amazon; Ecuador.

Resumen: ¿Cómo entienden, negocian y cuestionan los turistas y el personal del proyecto Shuar autenticidad e indigeneidad en el contexto de turismo voluntariado? En este artículo examino infraestructura como sitio privilegiado de proyección de autenticidad e indigeneidad en un proyecto turista indígena en la Amazonía ecuatoriana. Aunque refriéndose a la misma infraestructura física y servicios, como agua corriente, electricidad, instalaciones sanitarias, casas y calles, para los volunturistas y los Shuar representan diferentes visiones de la vida indígena. Un enfoque en la realidad mundana de la infraestructura se presta a desentrañar las nociones de autenticidad e indigeneidad que difieren pero se entrecruzan, tal como se negociaron e impugnaron en el proyecto de turismo voluntario indígena, al mismo tiempo que se destaca cómo una perspectiva antropológica puede agregar las visiones y perspectivas de los anfitriones al discurso de los estudios de turismo voluntario.

Palabras clave: shuar; autenticidad; indigeneidad; turismo voluntario; Amazonía; Ecuador

Intriguing infrastructure

> Mario told me that they have many ideas how to develop the project site with the help of volunteers. Maybe building a zipline or a playground. I understand that this brings money. But this tourism is not their true culture, their mission (Interview Brad 2013).

Brad, a student from the United States, said to me, reflecting his stay with the Shuar developmental organization Fundación para Desarrollo Communitatio Indígena de Pastaza (FUNDECOIPA). Brad and 13 others had just returned from a two-week-long volunteering vacation in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The college students undertook various construction activities with the purpose of developing two of the project sites. Even though their experience had been a positive one, Brad was concerned about the effect the project has had on the community. In his understanding, the newly erected and planned infrastructure posed a threat to the authenticity of the Shuar. Brad's concern articulated an implicit question of negotiation between volunteers and the hosting community: What is seen as 'authentic' or 'Indigenous' by voluntourists and the Shuar?

When Susan Leith Star proposed the ethnography of infrastructure as "a call to study boring things" (Star 1999, 377), she was in fact appreciating the potential to tease out the unseen relationships and practices that animate seemingly static material and immaterial structures. Infrastructures can be indeed be rewarding 'objects' of anthropological reflection, among other things illuminating networks between individuals, groups, organizations, States, technologies, goods and ideas, therein revealing power dynamics, semiotic attributions and appropriations (Larkin 2013). In this article I take inspiration from Star and examine infrastructure as a privileged site for projections, negotiations and contestation of authenticity and Indigeneity in an Indigenous tourism project. As I will show, both voluntourists and the Shuar consider the material presence of infrastructure as potent index of development. However, I argue that despite referring to the same physical structure and services, such as running water, electricity, sanitary installations, houses and roads, for each it represents differing understandings and visions of Indigenous life: For volunteers such as Brad, infrastructure is linked to Enlightenment notions of progress, representing broader processes of change and modernization (Larkin 2013, 332). Infrastructural development for them therefore calls into question the "primordial authenticity" of the Shuar as Indigenous people (Theodossopoulos 2013b, 403). This concern with authenticity, yet does not refer to the Shua directly, but instead links to the voluntourists' practices of distinction. To the Shuar, in turn, discourses of authenticity are one amongst many that they encounter when balancing infrastructure and Indigenous livelihood. In fact, other more pressing issues on a local and national level move their focus on autonomy and continuation that the very same infrastructure enables them to experience. For them (and other Indigenous groups of the Ecuadorian Amazon), the possibility to generate and maintain infrastructure by themselves, comes down to

self-determined continuation of Indigenous lifeways and resistance vis-à-vis a continued infringement of external forces and the persuasive infrastructures the latter bring along.

In what follows, I will first discuss the global practice of volunteer tourism, carving out the role authenticity plays in it, and portray FUNDECOIPA, as well as its infrastructure, before showing how the physical infrastructure is approached by the voluntourists and Shuar respectively. The focus on the mundane reality of infrastructure in both cases allows to us to tease out differing yet intersecting notions of authenticity and Indigeneity as negotiated and contested in the Indigenous volunteer tourism project, while further highlighting how an anthropological perspective can add hosts' visions and perspectives to the discourse in volunteer tourism studies.

Volunteer tourism – On paradoxical ambitions

Thus far, volunteer tourism has played a minor role in anthropological debates on tourism or authenticity. In fact, despite its occurrence in almost all regions of the Global South and therefore in many anthropologists' fieldsites, voluntourism does not figure prominently in the anthropological literature. With noticeable exceptions (Mostafanezhad 2014), existing anthropological research has been dominated by undergraduate or postgraduate studies. My own research is no exception to that. For lack of explanation, I can only suggest that the aversion anthropologists have harbored towards tourists, or the potential parallels to be drawn between tourists and anthropologist, may extend to volunteer tourism as well (Stronza 2001, 261). I would suggest that this contributes to a lamentable blind spot in volunteer tourism research, resulting in a lack of engagement with host perspectives (Tiessen and Heron 2012, 49). To date we know little to nothing about the precise arrangements that exist between host communities and volunteer tourism providers. A lack of critical engagement with local perspectives erases the strategic and agentive decision-making involved in their negotiations with development projects. The scholarly debate risks reifying the passivity attributed to host communities by volunteer tourism providers or voluntourists (Schien 2020). Therefore, I would argue that an anthropological lens could work to outbalance the hitherto significant bias in volunteer tourism studies by exploring local receptions of global phenomena and foregrounding emic forms of knowledge and agency.

It is important to first consider volunteer tourism as an industry and a practice. 'Voluntourism', as it is often called, is a global travel phenomenon that has developed from a niche to one of the fastest growing tourism branches globally (Mostafanezhad 2013, 485). It is defined as a vacation in which at least a part of the trip is spent volunteering in projects dedicated to poverty alleviation, care or conservation (Guttentag 2009, 538). Most participants, or 'voluntourists', range from 18 to 30s in age and come from countries of the Global North[1] (Vrasti 2013, 2). They tend to have middle-class

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1   South to South volunteer tourism is a lesser researched field. See Baillie Smith *et al.* (2018).

backgrounds[2] as well as access to higher education (Wearing and Grabowski 2011, 194). Volunteer tourism is a gendered tourism activity: Approximately 80 % of all participants are women (Mostafanezhad 2014, 25).

Voluntourism constitutes a singular volunteering and tourism phenomenon by virtue of its four central features. First, volunteer tourism differs from other forms of volunteer work abroad like governmental volunteering programs (such as 'Weltwärts' for Germany) or missionary stays in several ways (Vrasti 2013; Czarnecki *et al.* 2015). Most importantly, volunteer tourists pay, not only for transport and accommodation, but also for the opportunity to volunteer (Mostafanezhad 2013, 485). Second, given that it is a market-driven good, the ability to pay is the only selection mechanism. Other forms of qualification or preparation are rarely required (Guttentag 2009, 543). The spectrum of offers ranges from all-inclusive programs with travel agencies to small local initiatives for spontaneous travelers, varying according to budget and interest (Benson 2011, 1; Burrai *et al.* 2017). Third, stays are generally shorter, typically ranging from one week to a couple of months but also extending up to a year as part of 'gap year' experience (Simpson 2004, 681). Finally, the volunteer tourism market bears no substantial link to international development policies or standards of practice apart from allusions in marketing (Butcher and Smith 2010, 29). All agents act on a market that is lacking political regulations, certification or codes of conduct to protect vulnerable groups or environments (Smith and Font 2014; Burrai *et al.* 2017; Czarnecki *et al.* 2015).

By all accounts, voluntourism is a successful endeavor. No fewer than 800 volunteer tourism businesses and projects have been counted for the UK only (Vrasti 2013, 2) and estimates for annual participation in volunteer tourism range up to 10 millions in 2011 (Czarnecki *et al.* 2015, 6). The academic perspective at first reflected an optimism about the potential of volunteer tourism to contribute to conservation and developmental work (Wearing 2001). In fact, it was considered a win-win situation for local communities, the volunteer tourism industry and voluntourists (Vrasti 2013, 5). However, the initial hopefulness of these earlier assessments was soon rebutted by researchers who explored the structural effects of volunteer tourism from critical social science and postcolonial perspectives (Guttentag 2009), arguing that volunteer tourism contributed to the disruption of local economies (Mostafanezhad 2014, 119), depoliticization of poverty (Simpson 2004), processes of othering (Ingram 2011, 216), and the impact on local cosmologies and Indigenous identities (Meiser and Dürr 2014)[3] to name only a few.

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2   See Cheung Judge on volunteer tourism and marginalized youth (2017).

3   Anna Meiser and Evelyn Dürr (Meiser and Dürr 2014) have published on the case example of Arútam as well; Meiser has also done extensive research in the community, focusing on Christian churches and the Shuar (Meiser 2013). In the article the authors explore the adaption to scientific ecological discourses in the ecotourism program and its impact on the self-perception of the Shuar community.

A consideration of the impacts of voluntourism on Indigenous identity leads to questions around the forms of authenticity that are reflected, produced, and challenged in these encounters. An 'authentic' experience is in fact the central draw for many volunteers, who wish to learn about localized, Indigenous cultures while volunteering. Voluntourists get to "make a difference" (Tiessen and Heron 2012, 45) while simultaneously enjoying privileged insights into local communities. The motivations for both are not unlike other forms of tourism since voluntourists, just as any other tourists, are driven by a desire to visit different cultures and landscapes (Mader 2004a). Volunteer tourism is seen as particularly apt to generate this kind of experience because it brings voluntourists to places that are comparatively untouched by mass tourism (Broad 2003, 67). Moreover, the close contact to local communities and project staff is considered to give the voluntourists an impression of the real, "unedited version" (Vrasti 2013, 7) of people's everyday lives. Mary Mostafanezhad argues that this hunt for the real, everyday experience is ultimately a reframed pursuit for authenticity, no different from the concept of authenticity that is sought after in mass tourism (Mostafanezhad 2014, 110-111). Authenticity, coming from the Western philosophical debate about the realization of a true inner self, through Jean Jacques Rousseau came to be linked to places and people unchanged by Western society and later modernity (Theodossopoulos 2013a, 342).[4] Conventional tourism "has failed to deliver" such "authentic" experiences (Vrasti 2013, 7), as it has become discredited, among other things, due to staged performances, scheduled experiences and touristic infrastructure (Crossley 2012, 11). Volunteering in poor host communities in contrast implies authenticity by offering the everyday level of engagement in places supposedly unaltered by development. This, in turn, creates a paradoxical situation: In being successful, volunteer tourism potentially threatens to dissolve the very source of its authenticity (Mostafanezhad 2014, 112).

Authenticity in volunteer tourism, however, is no end in itself. It is also linked to narratives of distinction of self: Voluntourists achieve this in various ways. For one, they often make claim to personal growth and individual development sourced from experience of difference in terms of development and culture as well as self-reflection (McAllum and Zahra 2017, 292-294). Such narratives work particularly well as peers and family usually unanimously applauded the voluntourists. On the other hand, it is considered a resource for professional development because the volunteer stay is perceived as a valuable intercultural experience relevant for building a CV and successful applications on higher education and/or job markets (Vrasti 2013, 2). In both cases, the production of the self is a central outcome for voluntourists' textual and visual narratives of their travel (cf. Toomey 2017). In what follows it become apparent that voluntourists may draw on different notions of authenticity and distinction simultaneously (Theodossopoulos 2013b).

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4   See Theodossopoulos for an in-depth discussion of authenticity in anthropology (2012; 2013a; 2013b).

Volunteering in the Ecuadorian Amazon
Working towards tourism

Along the Via Macas, the interprovincial road that connects the provincial capitals Puyo and Macas of the Ecuadorian Oriente, on kilometer 48 precisely, lays the community of Arútam. It is a small village, nestled into an ascending hillside vis á vis the Cordillera Occidental and surrounded by subtropical forest. It is also the home of the Indigenous NGO FUNDECOIPA. FUNDECOIPA is the acronym for Fundación para Desarrollo Communitatio Indígena de Pastaza, the Foundation for Indigenous Community Development of Pastaza. It was founded by a Shuar man, Ernesto Vegas, who lives in Arútam with his first wife Juana and their extended family. Ernesto created FUNDECOIPA in responses to the pressing social, ecological and economic issues the community faced in the 2000s. One of the principal means by which the foundation accomplishes this is by successfully running a tourism project that offers medicinal, eco- and volunteer tourism for numerous national and international visitors that come to Arútam each year.

The origins of FUNDECOIPA have a longer history. In the 1970s, Ernesto moved from the banks of the Rio Pastaza to the area of Arútam when he married Juana and both began to work the land and raise livestock. Growing *naranjilla* (*solanum quitoense*), a fruit popular for juices and desserts in Ecuador, created good revenue for the family. However, the plant is susceptible for pest infestation in large scale cultivations (Rudel *et al.* 2002, 154). When Ernesto took seriously ill in 1993 and had to retire from farming, his family attributed it to the pesticides they had relied on for growing it. This triggered a fundamental decision: after recovering, Ernesto decided to take up on an offer by his cousin Sebastian Moya to create a forest reserve and start a tourism business on his territory.[5] Working in tourism and conservation held two promises for the Vargas family: First, creating a sustainable source of income in order to reduce their reliance on pesticide-intensive farming, and second, to fulfill the legal requirements that were necessary to keep their land. Since 1964 the Ley de Reforma Agraria y Colonización of Ecuador has mandated that land may not be left unexploited for longer than two years, unless it has been declared a nature sanctuary, a forest reserve or is flood-prone (Harner 1984, 39; CNE 2004, § 43c).[6] Therefore, the creation of a forest reserve implied an attractive touristic offer and a way to circumvent expulsion.

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5   Moya had been working with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the international developmental organization German Society for Technical Co-operation, and set up a forest reserve and the tourism organization Jawa Jee in his home community of Santa Ana in Pastaza.

6   The law had been implemented with the intention of settling Andean peasants in the lowlands, simultaneously addressing the scarcity of land in the Highlands and creating a continuous presence in the contested borderlands with Peru (Rubenstein 2001, 274; 2007, 370). But for the Shuar, unfamiliar with the concept of individual land ownership, it had impacted their capacity to claim the territories they have inhabited (Meiser and Dürr 2014, 158). As a consequence the Federación Interprovincial de Centros Shuar (FICSH), as the first federation of an Indigenous people in South America, was founded

In the years that followed, Ernesto and his family worked hard and gave up their individual land title to 2650 hectares of land, which was then declared as 'Bosque Protector Arútam', a forest reserve, in 1997. Afterwards, the family build on the initial cooperation with Sebastian, the GTZ[7] and other NGOs to improve their skills and enlarge the tourism project. Even though these cooperations have been a vital source for the growth of the project, in a manner of Shuar aspiration for autonomy (Buitron 2020), the family eventually decided to fund their own organization around 2005: FUNDECOIPA.

This choice also marks an essential difference between FUNDECOIPA and other volunteer tourism projects in which local communities do not have prominent roles in decision-making processes (Czarnecki *et al*. 2015). Members of FUNDECOIPA are indeed in full ownership of the project. This, however, also means that there is no external tourism provider to 'frame' the volunteer experience for potential visitors, who largely access information about FUNDECOIPA from the website and travel book information. This leaves both parties – the volunteers and the Shuar hosts – to negotiate their mutual expectations of volunteer tourism, development and associated issues of authenticity and Indigeneity.

Volunteering with a Shuar family

Since the foundation of FUNDEOCIPA, the family has been managing all local tourism by themselves. In the years 2011 and 2013, during which I spent a total of eleven months conducting fieldwork in Ecuador and collecting data by the means of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, it had been FUNDECOIPA's most popular program. More than 90 international tourists from more than 26 countries visited during these years; most of them voluntourists. Apart from Arútam, two additional project site Musap[8] and Irshim also offered different communities and projects to choose from.

To house their visitors appropriately, the family had invested in some basic infrastructure. In 2011, this included a volunteer house, a kitchen and hygienic facilities. The volunteer house was a two-story construction with a corrugated iron roof with eight small single rooms. Apart from the volunteer house, the facilities comprised brick-built sanitary installations, with running water,[9] water closets and showers, and a kitchen. In 2013 the voluntourists' accommodation had been moved to José's house (Figure 1). There similar adjunct facilities had been constructed. In Musap by contrast, at the time the visitors

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and the Shuar began to settle on collective land in so called centros (Rubenstein 2005, 37). Such collective land titles would not have helped the Vargas family as Arútam is not part of a centro.

7   See footnote 5.
8   In Musap, the Estación Biológica Shuar is run by the children of Ernesto's second wife Marcia. The collaboration with Ernesto's cousin Jorge Tunki terminated between 2011 and 2013.
9   Water and sewage have been installed and are maintained without institutional support.

would stay in the family house, sharing the kitchen and outhouse with the family. In Irshim, the volunteers had been accommodated in a separate house and provided with a rain sourced toilet and shower. However, lacking rain, an outhouse and the river had to do for daily hygiene. Both Musap and Arútam had access to electricity.

Figure 1. The volunteer house in Arútam, 2013 (photo: Stefanie Schien).

The infrastructure also served as a project for the voluntourists. Working on future or expanding existing infrastructure is a task frequently set for the voluntourists at all three project sites. On a given day, those might comprise tasks such as cutting wood for constructions, carrying building materials or cleaning overgrown spaces for construction sites. In the afternoon, in contrast, the tasks are oriented towards maintaining the existing infrastructure, like weeding paths or cleaning existing infrastructure. While I was there, the tasks were linked to the development of the village or to diversifying strategies for sustainable income such as constructing a new house for a member of the community or starting a cocoa planting. Others build on the broader visions the communities have for their respective project sites, like the zipline and playground Mario has envisioned for Musap. In this way, infrastructure becomes perhaps the most tangible notion of 'development' that voluntourists encounter, even though these might remain projections rather than a material reality.

Voluntourists – Desire for distinction

When considering authenticity, for the voluntourists, simplicity is often a hallmark of the material authenticity of a place, especially in contrast to urban landscapes and infrastructures. Far from sharing the urban quality of the provincial capital Puyo, the basic infrastructure in Arútam is striking to many voluntourists. However, the assessment is not primarily based on the comparison to the former, rather the voluntourists draw onto the differences between Arútam and the other project sites, Irshim and Musap, or on generalized assumptions about development and modernity when ascertaining or questioning the Shuar's authenticity.[10]

In both modes of comparison, simplicity of infrastructure plays a crucial role. Brad, whose doubts about Mario's plans for Musap opened this article, was concerned that Musap would change in ways that Arútam already had. In his description about the differences between both he stressed that "Arútam is pretty modern" (Interview Brad 2013). His judgement was mostly based on the infrastructure. The outhouse in Musap and bathing in the river, instead of the sanitary installations with running water provided in Arútam, made Musap more "genuine and original", in his eyes. It is exactly this simplicity he sees at risk in expanding the tourism activities in Musap.

Similar comparisons between Arútam and the other project sites have common among volunteers. In 2006, one blogs about her visit to Irshim:

> This weekend we made a trip to a neighboring Shuar community, even deeper into the jungle. After a tough near-5 hour walk I'm not sure that I had ever felt further away from civilization! Still it was a really interesting experience to hear and be shown a little more of the traditional way of life without the influences that the road close to Arutam [sic] has brought (eg. electricity, an easy link to modernity).[11]

Much like Brad, she points out differences in the infrastructure, in this case electricity and road access, that to her equals an acceleration of development from a traditional originality to a modernity that exists beyond the forest.

Other visitors form similar opinions solely on the basis of their visit to Arútam. Here, too, infrastructure is a concern. Lisa, a 22-year-old student from Germany, shared not only her disappointment but also her expectations about the Indigenous community she visited. When asked about her expectations coming to Arútam, she replied:

> Well, I was a bit… I was not actually disappointed but I was surprised that they have a TV, that they have electricity…With regard to the lifestyle I was a bit amazed that the people here are pretty progressive …I imagined it to be more simple…and…maybe cliché but that the people here wear loincloth and live in tipis[12] (Interview Lisa 2013).

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10 In this section I will include blog posts made by visitors. All blogs have been found and accessed through a search for Arútam and FUNDECOIPA via google.

11 Travelblog Pixiesp: "Puyo Travel Blog" (10.11.2006). http://www.travbuddy.com/pixiesp> (no longer available as of 2024).

12 All translations from German to English by the author.

For Lisa as well, infrastructure and consumer goods were markers of modernity that clashed with her expectations of simplicity.

In all of these examples, the infrastructure is seen as an index of the communities' position in a modernization process. In this essentializing understanding of authenticity, the Shuars' assumed primordial Indigenous way of life, characterized by simplicity and proximity to nature, is at risk of being lost in an unavoidable chain of development to modernity, resulting in a loss of authenticity. This understanding of authentic Indigenous life is related to the Western history of thought. As mentioned before, the concept of authenticity is linked to the search for a true inner self which can be realized in places distant to Western society (Theodossopoulos 2013a, 342). 'The authentic' by implication therefore must be present in pristine nature, which is framed as the antipode of modernity and progress (Theodossopoulos 2013b, 403). The romanticized imaginary about nature was extended to the cultures and people living in it, culminating in what came to be known as the Noble Savage trope: The morally superior native who lives unspoiled by the vices of civilization (Mader 2004b, 204-206). The voluntourists' expectations towards the Shuar conform to this imaginary and are expressed in such terms. Theodossopolous calls this notion "primordial authenticity" which is particularly attributed to Indigenous people who are understood to be "isolated by time and modernity in the frontiers of natural wilderness" (2013b, 403).

As becomes apparent when volunteer tourists come to Indigenous communities, staying for longer stretches of time and spend time with locals, the quest for authenticity (Mostafanezhad 2014, 110-112) associated with tourism and particularly independent travel (Vivanco and Gordon 2006) does not fade as the visitors gain better insights into the everyday livelihoods of the host communities. Instead, the attention shifts towards alternative "indexes of authenticity" (Conklin 1997, 712) other than cultural performances or traditional attire (Conklin and Graham 1995; Theodossopoulos 2012).

In their negotiations of authenticity, the voluntourists are effectively not concerned about the Shuar but instead with the distinction said authenticity may give to their own experience. It is for this reason that, voluntourists frequently reference the simplicity of local conditions, effectively othering the Shuar and their living conditions, by emphasizing the difference to their everyday experiences at home and thereby creating an extraordinary experience. For example, Lukas, another student from Germany, said about his experiences: "one can say that for a week one has lived as hundreds or thousands people in your surroundings never will; in the jungle under pretty simple conditions" (Interview Lukas 2013). This mode of distinction is also achieved by depreciating the infrastructure, portraying the two-story houses as wooden huts, describing the facilities as nonexistent or underscoring the lack of amenities like hot showers. In this train of thought, the simplicity of the facilities gives proof to the authenticity of the Shuar because of difference to the volunteers' usual surroundings in the Global North.

This distinction, in turn, qualifies the experience of the voluntourists as authentic. Such conceptualization of authenticity as distinction (Benson 2013, 521) connects to voluntourists' narratives of self, therein reflecting the aforementioned widespread tendency of distinction among voluntourists. Further, the various examples illustrate that voluntourists draw on differing yet interlocked notions of authenticity simultaneously.

Managing authenticity, living Indigenously

The Shuar are likewise concerned with infrastructure. In managing a tourism project and trying to provide sustainable income for the community, the members of FUNDECOIPA cannot plan too small. They have to provide sufficient and adequate accommodations for hosting multiple volunteers and other tourists at a time. Due to frequent use and tropical climate, the accommodations need updates and changes. All of this comes at a price. Everything apart from wood slats must be purchased. Apart from the occasional support from the municipal government or cooperation with external NGOs, those funds must be generated from the project.

As they plan these infrastructure projects, the Shuar are aware of the expectations about them as Indigenous people. In fact, they adapt to and contest these expectations with regard to different audiences. For example, José, the director of FUNDECOIPA in 2013, discussed the community's plans to build a museum in the style of a traditional Shuar house in Arútam with a museum anthropologist from Spain and me. Half serious and half smirking, he told us that the visitors would be very skeptical if they saw a floor made from concrete. Consequently, his idea was to use concrete flooring but to cover it with a sufficiently thick layer of dirt, so that the concrete could not be seen.

José's idea to work with hidden concrete had been revealing in several ways. For one, it shows his awareness of the expectation that Indigenous people are idealized to live close to nature and therefore should use natural materials to fulfill this imaginary. Also, his plan reflects a strategic reaction and adaption to expectations of authenticity and Indigeneity on the part of tourists who would be the primary audience of the museum. But more than this, he also addressed a second audience, the anthropologists, by deciding to inform us that he was knowingly accommodating these expectations. This was in no way a confession, but in fact a way of showing us – the two anthropologists who like so many other visitors had come to learn about the Indigenous community of Arútam – that he not only understood but subjugated the discourse to his own authority,[13] demonstrating his leadership in dealing with non-Shuar (Mader 1999, 414).

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13 Following Descola and Gnerre, this could also be seen as Jivaroan 'predatory' mode of relations in which power can derive from appropriating new, externally originated concepts and language (Descola 2004, 94; Gnerre 2009, 297).

It is indeed the encounters with non-Shuar, the *apach*, that play a crucial role in the Shuar's debate about infrastructure. Here, the infrastructure works as a manifestation of how the Shuar have to negotiate, protect and affirm their Indigenous identity – with clear material and political stakes involved.

Especially with regard to the Ecuadorian State, infrastructure has become a crucial symbol for the loss of autonomy and an infringement of Indigenous livelihoods in Arútam and beyond. The introduction of the concept of landownership and private property merged with the expansion and consolidation of the Ecuadorian state in the Oriente. Under current circumstances, with allotted lots and propertied parcels, living as their ancestors has become impossible for the Shuar. Decades of (neo)liberal initiatives to expand oil exploitation in the Oriente further threatened to separate the Shuar and other Indigenous groups from their lands. In fact, this led to the contamination and loss of Indigenous lands, the disruption of Indigenous livelihoods, and the displacement of communities. All of these impacts became tangible through the 'bare-bone infrastructure' of oil exploitation: Roads, pumping stations, refineries, oil wells, waste pits and worker's settlements (Sawyer 2004, 13). Even though the election of Rafael Correa in 2006 and the promotion of *buen vivir*[14] in the 2008 constitution created hopes for a change in Ecuadorian exploitative politics, what followed was not a fundamental rupture, but rather a shift in the ideological legitimization of extractivism. Like other leftish governments of the 2000s in South America, Correa's party, Alianza País, followed a neo-extractivist agenda that financed expenses in social welfare through exploitative royalties and yields (Altvater 2013, 23-27). Indigenous groups that opposed to the expansion of this exploitation[15] were framed as obstructing the 'revolución ciudadana' of Correa's administration (Deshoullière 2016, 221). One manifestation of this policy was the developmental building project *ciudad del milenio*, 'city of the millennium', financed by oil rent. These renovated or newly erected settlements provide free or cheap concrete houses with sanitary installations, access to water and electricity, schools, sport courts and other official services. The first ones were built in impoverished and often Indigenous communities in areas that have been severely affected by petrol extraction (Deshoullière 2016, 221). In the eyes of Indigenous groups, this incentive structure is not a housing scheme, but an acculturation scheme. During a workshop against the 11th oil-licensing round for 13 new oil blocks in Pastaza and Morena Santiago, which José, his father and I visited in Puyo in July 2013, the speakers were also concerned with the *ciudades del milenio* as a "site of persuasion" (Graham and Penny 2015,

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14 *Buen vivir* refers to the Kichwa concept *sumak kawsay*, the good life, based on a harmonious relationship between humans and nature (Davidov 2012, 12). It became to signify a model for national development that aimed at wellbeing for everybody, in an equilibrium of economic development, cultural survival and natural diversity in Ecuador (Escobar 2010, 22).

15 The Correa administration also concluded contracts for open pit copper mines with Chinese mining companies (van Teijlingen 2019).

4). In their opinion it functioned to alienate the *nacionalidades* from their Indigenous ways of life in trade for modern housing, basic services and integration into the market economy. Away from their gardens and the forest, the *ciudades del milenio* are perceived as means of removing Indigenous communities from their cultural practices and thereby exterminating Indigenous cultures and ways of life. These concerns are shared in Arútam. To Ernesto the *ciudad del milenio* is another way to circumvent the *consulta previa*.[16] Promises of rents, infrastructure and services were lies, he explained – instead he foresaw other scenarios like forests and streams contaminated by chemicals and refineries constantly belching fumes like the erupting volcano Sangay. He also didn't believe life there would be 'free.' After visiting a *ciudad del milenio* for the first time he insisted: "ahora soy libre yo, nadie por eso me gobierno que vamos hacer también, la comida si nosotros no tenemos producción. Casa no vamos comer" (Interview Ernesto 2013). Without gardens, what should they eat? The new houses offer nothing to live from. Food, yes, but also the hidden costs of electricity, water and taxes would be a burden, requiring a monetary income and therefore jobs. To him, these dependencies constituted a form of capture. In Arútam he could use as much water as he pleased. He could build houses from wood. He had clean air, safe water, fruit and meat to eat. He would not need much money. Along with his sons, he worried about what the future brings. He thought that tourism was helping – the income from the project and forest reserve brought momentary independence –, but also it signaled to the government that there was income here. This might take off the pressure for extractivists campaigns, at least for a while. Even though no new blocks had been opened for extraction in Pastaza by the time my fieldwork concluded, there were constant reminders of the lingering possibility: the precursory exploration for extraction in bloc 43 ITT near the Yasuní national park[17] and the Ronda Suroriente[18] as well as canvassers for the *ciudad del milenio*, working in the surrounding communities in Pastaza.

Against this backdrop, 'modern' housing and infrastructure have become critical indexes of change for the Shuar as well. However, to them it is not a question of loss of authenticity. Rather, in continuing to live their lives in the ways that they perceive to be Indigenous – be it in wooden or concrete houses – they fundamentally resist the attempt of erasure they foresee in the *ciudades del milenio*. Running the NGO in their understanding has allowed them to renounce intense agriculture, contest state persuasion and remain autonomous. In this sense, the infrastructure they can generate and maintain by themselves is a manifestation of Indigenous lifeway and resistance.

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16 Since 2002 all extractive activities in Ecuador require a free and informed consultation of the affected Indigenous communities. The concept and implementation of the *consulta previa e informada* has been repeatedly criticized for its vulnerability to manipulation and repression by Indigenous associations and federations (García Serrano 2014, 84).

17 For discussion of the Yasuní-ITT initiative and oil exploitation see Rival (2010).

18 For an overview about licensing and extraction activities in Ecuador see AIHE (2020).

Concluding thoughts

In this article I have examined how the physical infrastructure in the Shuar developmental project, such as houses, access to water and electricity, the proximity to roads and sanitary installations, is the object of projection to both voluntourists and Shuar. The former negotiate infrastructure as an index of authenticity. On the one hand, a hut becomes a house: Based on an essentializing notion of authenticity, the changes in infrastructure indicate a deviation from a previous primordial state of originality and the beginning of an irrevocable progression towards a unifying global modernity and consequently the loss of authenticity. On the other hand, a house becomes a hut in the voluntourists' othering narrative of the material reality of the community. In this framing the infrastructural simplicity works as a positive index for authenticity. The recourse to 'primordial authenticity' and 'authenticity as distinction' on part of the voluntourists also points to multiple overlapping notions of authenticity simultaneously in place. However, none of these approaches to authenticity and infrastructure is an end in itself; rather they expose the desire to mold their experience as a resource for distinction. This self-referential perspective on infrastructure in effect shifts the focus from the Indigenous communities' needs to the voluntourists' desire, thereby depoliticizing not only volunteer tourism but the encounters in which it is embedded. This reveals a power relation in which one party can afford to oversee the broader nexus of relations in which infrastructure exists in an Indigenous community in the Amazon and, on a global scale, the historical and contemporary processes that contribute to structural inequality. It is the very opposite for the Shuar. To them infrastructure encodes a different yet intersecting vision of Indigenous life, one of continuation as contestation and resistance. While they are aware of and strategically deal with expectations of authenticity, as the example of the museum project has shown, their project is an intrinsically political one. Since the appearance of State initiated infrastructure, it has become a symbol of infringement and loss of Indigenous life. This is particularly poignant in the *ciudades del milenio* which the Shuar and other Indigenous groups of the Ecuadorian Amazon perceive as a plan for acculturation and extinction of Indigenous life in the age of fossil fuel extraction. In the light of infrastructure as a means of persuasion, to the Shuar of Arútam therefore maintaining their own infrastructure and running a tourism project amounts to maintaining autonomy as Indigenous peoples.

Whether seen as huts or houses, in the spirit of Claude Lévi-Strauss, infrastructure is good to think with. By tracing power relations in this ethnographic case, it is possible to tease out the semiotic charging of material things as indexes for wider processes in which these relations are embedded. Here, infrastructure allows us to grasp one particular configuration, which refers to visions of Indigenous life in the Ecuadorian rainforest as seen from a local, national and global level. It also points us to the potentiality of an anthropological perspective on volunteer tourism, countering a singular focus on

discourses of voluntourists and their desire for authenticity, and thereby erasing host communities' intentionality and agency.

However, in the light of the more recent and ongoing crisis due to the conflicts with –and infiltration through– criminal structures of the international and national drug trafficking in Ecuador, the effect of the changed security situation on the national tourism economy and small projects like Arútam as well as the impact on the relationship between the state and the Shuar remain to be seen.

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