Tourist Place San Cristóbal, Mexico

A place of international tourists, expats, ladinos, and indígenas

Jorn Engel

Master Thesis Cultural Geography

COVER: THE CATHEDRAL OF SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS, MEXICO.

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"Do not destroy a beautiful centre of ethnic tourism […]. Remain true to your own character. Do not become a bad imitation of what ethnic tourists try to escape from. Do not turn yourself into a Cancún-in-the-Mountains. First, it will not work. Second, it will be a terrible pity."

Pierre van den Berghe (1994: 156-157) on San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico

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Jorn Engel
S1684191
Thesis MSc Cultural Geography
Faculty of Spatial Sciences
University of Groningen

Supervision:

Supervisor: Dr. P.C.J. Druijven
Second Supervisor: Prof. Dr. P.P.P. Huigen
Faculty of Spatial Sciences
University of Groningen
Groningen, the Netherlands

Prof. Dr. J.L. Escalona Victoria
CIESAS Sureste
San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico

Preface

This thesis concludes my little career as a student of Human Geography and then Cultural Geography at the University of Groningen. They were years in which I learned a lot about varieties of subjects and I look back at those years with great pleasure.

For this master's thesis I have conducted fieldwork research in San Cristóbal de las Casas, in the southern state of Chiapas in Mexico. The town proved itself a very friendly and welcoming place, with lots of interesting themes for us as geography students. It's a place with many different layers, which at times made it difficult to gain an understanding of the social relations and the construction of the place, but the two months I spend there were very pleasant. I would highly recommend going to Mexico and San Cristóbal in particular, as there are so many other interesting topics to discuss. I would also like to emphasize that doing fieldwork can be a lot of fun and I think more cultural geography students should spend months abroad. In your own environment it might sometimes be difficult to see and understand cultural geographical concepts, which are better to be understood in a different context. In San Cristóbal's recent history the complex relations between people, place and power clearly have played an important role in everyday life.

This thesis is about the tourist place of San Cristóbal, as I have long interested myself in the relationships between tourism and places. The consequences of tourism on places can be immense and it has proven an interesting topic of research. At times doing research on tourism was problematic, as it is entangled with a wide variety of other social processes. However, I felt researching tourist place of San Cristóbal and the social relationships which make that tourist place has been an important and highly relevant assignment.

I have enjoyed studying cultural geography and I derived as much pleasure from writing this thesis and carrying out my research project. At times I might have gotten lost in all the different interesting and entangled aspects of both tourism and Mexico, but I never felt like I was lost. I hope I have translated some of my enthusiasm for both subjects in this thesis and that others will be encouraged to research tourist places and Mexico in the near future.

Jorn Engel

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San Cristóbal has been a very friendly and welcoming place during my fieldwork. I would like to thank Christine for helping me in the first stages of my fieldwork and providing me a place to stay with very friendly people; Don Juan and Hermana Maria Louisa. I would also like to thank Cesar, Milou, and Anita for being knowledgeable informants. There are many more people in San Cristóbal I should be thankful for, but I should not forget the numerous international tourists in San Cristóbal I've spoken and who wanted to talk about their travels and their experience of San Cristóbal.

I want to thank Peter Druijven, who provided useful feedback on my thesis back home in Groningen and who gave me the opportunity to go to Mexico. Not only did he provide useful feedback, I enjoyed the talks about the thesis and trivia on Mexico and tourism.

Lastly, I should name them all for their contributions, but I would like to thank friends and family for having the patience – most of the times – to listen to my talks about the research project and all of those other Mexican subjects. You have encouraged me to carry out my fieldwork and supported me to write this thesis.

Abstract

Mexico has been a tourism-conscious country, but tourism development remains strongly centred on remote coastal areas in which 'Clubmex' resorts are created. Tourism in other parts of Mexico is constructed in different ways, such as in San Cristóbal de las Casas, a town in the southernmost state of Mexico; Chiapas. Tourism in San Cristóbal has since long focused on the indigenous peoples of this region.

This research project is designed to unravel the ways in which tourist place in San Cristóbal is produced for and consumed by international tourists. Earlier research on tourism in the town by American Anthropologist Van den Berghe serves as a basis on which to build this research. He observed ethnic tourism; tourism motivated by the visitor's search for exotic cultural experiences through interaction with distinctive ethnic groups. He warned for San Cristóbal not to become a Cancún-in-the-mountains; a tourist bubble little connected to the surrounding environment and host-communities, a mere enclave of international tourists.

San Cristóbal in 2011 is mainly produced by governmental actors, negotiated by non-local and local actors who fit the image produced by governmental actors – those with power. They produce tourist place San Cristóbal as a colonial place and a place on which the indigenous peoples can be met and their cultural expressions can be experienced. This is reflected by texts in guidebooks and on websites of Dutch tour operators.

For this research, fieldwork has been carried out in the summer of 2011 – to find the ways tourists consume tourist place San Cristóbal. During the fieldwork, a survey has been held to find characteristics for the population of international tourists in the town. Key informants noted specific changes ascribed to tourism in the town and pointed to changing consumption patterns of tourists over the years. Various key informants were spoken, not just actors involved in tourism. A packaged tour group was joined to gain more insight information on their consumption patterns.

The consumption and production of a tourist place are interconnected processes, which was proven by the consumption patterns of international tourists. They mainly visited San Cristóbal because of the colonial town in which indigenous peoples could be met.

Since 1992 San Cristóbal nowadays offers tourists a bohemian tourist place as well. It are mainly expats and NGOs who have created this aspect on the tourist place, something which is little produced by governmental actors to international tourists. Since Van den Berghe's research the town's international tourist population has been more diversified, like the tourist product of San Cristóbal. Indígenas are no longer the prime attraction, although they still play a key role in tourism. Tourist place San Cristóbal has been diversified, and it has not become a Cancún-in-the-mountains.

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Motivation

Tourism is a worldwide phenomenon with massive impacts on places, host-communities and tourists themselves (Williams, 2009). It is one of the largest industries in the world (UNWTO, 2010) and it is estimated to be the fourth largest export product worldwide. For many countries – and most of them developing countries – tourism can be a very lucrative industry (UNWTO, 2010). The importance and value of tourism in socio-economic development has been recognized by international organizations, such as the United Nations. They granted the World Tourism Organization – WTO – the status of special agency of the United Nations in 2003.

Mexico is one of the developing countries that has since long understood the importance and the potential of the tourism industry for its economy (Van den Berghe, 1994). Since the 1970s the Mexican government has promoted the country worldwide for tourism gain (Clancy, 1999). According to the UNWTO (2010), in 2009 a total of 21.5 million international tourists had Mexico as their destination, encompassing 2.4% of the total number of international tourists. This made Mexico the tenth most visited country worldwide by foreign visitors in 2009. The estimated income from all tourism activities in Mexico – combining both international and domestic tourism – was an estimated 11.3 billion euros in 2009 (UNWTO, 2010). The vast majority of international tourists in Mexico are of North-American origin, some 85% in 2008. Just 5% of all the international tourists in the country are from Europe; the other 10% is mostly composed of tourists from other Latin-American countries. A large group of the North-American tourists had one of Mexico's beach resorts, such as Cancún or Cabo San Lucas – often referred to as 'Clubmex' (Casagrande, 1988) – as their destination, whilst a relative large group of Europeans visited other regions of Mexico (UNWTO, 2010) which were not sun-sea-sand destinations.

In the country 2011 was declared 'the Year of Tourism' (SECTUR, 2011a). During the opening congress in Cancún, the Mexican president Felipe Calderón declared that the federal government did not question the importance of tourism for the country and that Mexico showed a lot of potential to develop tourism even further. He subscribed this potential to Mexico's natural environment and cultural heritage. Tourism in Mexico was also said to contribute not only to Mexico in economic terms, it also fulfils social and cultural roles as tourism promotes the roots of the country and the natural and cultural diversity (SECTUR, 2011a). 2011 was declared the year of tourism to show other images of Mexico in light of the negative publicity the country had with the war on drugs (Mascareñas, 2011). It was aimed at both international tourists and Mexican themselves, for whom tourism creates and enforces a sense of belonging and pride (SECTUR, 2011a).

The Mexican government has promoted its country for tourism gain since the 1970s, however tourism development has been and still is highly concentrated in certain parts of the country; namely the 'Clubmex' described by Casagrande (1988). The Mexican government consciously developed hard-to-reach coastal places via FONATUR, the national Mexican trust for tourism development (Brenner, 2010). They enabled the construction of high-end and luxurious coastal tourist resorts that were created specifically for tourists. FONATUR concentrated on creating these resorts, as it made Mexico an important sun-sea-sand tourism destination, especially for the North-American market. This created a lucrative influx of affluent and well-spending tourists to these formerly poor and remote coastal areas. These places in turn then became little

more than enclaves, hardly connected to their surrounding physical and social environment (Brenner, 2010). In other parts of Mexico tourism is constructed in other, distinctive ways. Federal and private investors did not extensively develop tourism in other parts of Mexico, as the types of tourism were often seen as less lucrative (Van den Berghe, 1995). Tourists in Mexico who are not interested in the 'Clubmex' and all it has to offer are more often alternative tourists, who travel on a lower budget and spend less money in resorts or specified tourist places. The not-'Clubmex' Mexico does however offer tourists attractions such as the national environment and cultural heritage. One of these regions where tourism has been little developed and which is not about sun-sea-sand tourism is the state of Chiapas; the most southern state of Mexico, bordering Guatemala. See Figure 1-1: Map of Chiapas. Source: Prado & Chandler (2009)for a map of Chiapas, highlighting the physical geography, largest towns and archaeological sites found in the state.

FIGURE 1-1: MAP OF CHIAPAS. SOURCE: PRADO & CHANDLER (2009)

For Chiapas tourism differs strongly from the types of tourism found in the seaside 'Clubmex' resorts of the country. Since the 1980s the south of Mexico has been influenced by a type of branding for tourism purposes, promoting the region as 'Mundo Maya' (Groote & Druijven, 2005). The Mundo Maya project has been an ambitious regional project of five Central-American countries; Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras (Little, 2008). Aim of the project was to showcase and preserve the shared cultural, historical and natural heritage of these five countries and thus attract more tourists to the region. However, the Mundo Maya project was not supported with large-scale developments (Van den Berghe, 1994). Federal governments of the countries made clear that other goals of the project were to mobilize the

13

indigenous population of the region, but it has failed to do so (Ardren, 2004). To a certain extend this is due to the Mundo Maya project placing a group of peoples – the indigenous peoples of the region – in the spotlight as a product for tourist consumption (Little, 2008). An image of this region is created that links past and present and culture and nature, offering a diversified tourist product centred on a Mayan theme. Chiapas is one of the Mexican states that is promoted as port of the Mundo Maya region. The state is home to the largest group of indigenous peoples in Mexico in relative terms, as 22.3% of the total population can be identified as being 'indigenous' (INEGI, 2011). However, this number varies according to sources, as different definitions are in use by the institutions concerning themselves with the indigenous population. According to the nationwide census of 2005, some 957.000 indigenous peoples live In Chiapas (INEGI, 2011). This group is in itself very diverse, as there are many subgroups in Chiapas identified. INEGI (2011) classifies people as indigenous when they are able to speak one or more of the indigenous languages. Therefore, the term is not self-applied and thus backgrounds and lifestyles of the indigenous peoples can be very different from one another. Some of them live in cities and are fully integrated in a modern, capitalist society whilst others live in remote rural areas and in very impoverished conditions (Hervik, 1998).

Tourism is of both social and economic importance to Mexico and to the state of Chiapas it is of particular importance. Chiapas is located in a remote area and in economic terms it is the poorest state of Mexico (Benjamin, 2002). The total income of tourism for Chiapas in 2004 was estimated at 855.5 million pesos, or €45.5 million (DataTur, 2004), making it one of the important industries in the state. Integral to the tourism industry of Chiapas is the town of San Cristóbal de las Casas, located in the heart of the state. Both national and international tourists visit the town year-round (Prado & Chandler, 2009). One of the primary motivations for visiting the town is the presence of indigenous peoples, both in the town itself and in the surrounding villages (Van den Berghe, 1994; Prado & Chandler, 2009). In 2003, the Mexican Tourism Administration SECTUR awarded San Cristóbal the status of 'Pueblo Mágico', designating the town as one that offers visitors 'a magical experience' (SECTUR, 2011b). In 2010, the Mexican president Felipe Calderón even went so far as saying that San Cristóbal is 'the most magical' of the Pueblos Mágicos.

In 1992 American anthropologist Van den Berghe (1994) conducted fieldwork research in San Cristóbal de las Casas. He researched the tourist population in the town and observed 'ethnic tourism'. This is a type of tourism that involves meetings with or an interest in the 'pristine' or 'unspoiled' other. These tourists were especially interested in the indigenous populations found in San Cristóbal and its surrounding villages, mainly the marketplace towns of Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula. He noted the self-destroying mechanisms behind this type of tourism, as tourists actually spoil the other tourists' experience of the other by their presence alone. The perceived 'pristinity' of the other is affected as they encounter western peoples and western cultures, local merchants change the products on sale for tourists and the town will start to cater to and facilitate the influx of tourists. This is often paired with large-scale investments and at best an attempt to recreate the things these tourists want to see, whilst not offering something 'unspoiled' (Van den Berghe, 1994). This implies a change in the tourist population nowadays when comparing it to his findings; the international tourist population is likely to be more diversified as the place caters more towards tourism and is easier to reach. Van den Berghe (1994) expressed a hope that San Cristóbal could keep its charm and small-town atmosphere, without becoming a 'Cancún-in-the-

mountains'. The town would then in essence struggle with its own popularity and would be less attractive or less interesting for the former tourist population.

1.2. Research Aim and Questions

San Cristóbal de las Casas is the location for this case study research. As tourism is important to both the state of Chiapas and the town of San Cristóbal itself, the aim of this research is to gain an understanding of the tourist place of San Cristóbal by analysing the ways in which it is constructed by different actors and the ways in which it is produced for international tourists and consumed by international tourists. San Cristóbal de las Casas has been a centre of ethnic tourism in 1992, but nowadays the tourist place of San Cristóbal should be – according to Van den Berghe (1994) – much more diversified. Another aim of this research is to figuring out whether San Cristóbal has indeed become a 'Cancún-in-the-mountains' or not. Another research question is derived from research by Van den Berghe (1994) and assumes that the indigenous peoples of the region are an attraction of the tourist place of San Cristóbal.

The research question is: 'In what ways is the tourist place of San Cristóbal produced for and consumed by international tourists?' This research question has been divided into several sub questions:

- ■ Who are the producers of the image of tourist place San Cristóbal and which image do they produce?
- ■ How diverse is the international tourist population in San Cristóbal?
- ■ What roles does the tourist place of San Cristóbal play for international tourists?
- ■ How does a group of Dutch packaged tour tourists consume the tourist place of San Cristóbal?
- ■ Which roles do the indigenous peoples play in the production and consumption of tourist place of San Cristóbal?

1.3. Academic Relevance

Tourism is a phenomenon that can be seen as one of the largest migration patterns in the history of mankind, happening every year again. 'Because of tourism, capital and people have been deployed to the most remote regions in the world, further than any army was ever send' (MacCannell, 1992: 1). Tourism is a process that not only changed the world in economic and environmental terms, it has also influenced societies and cultures extensively (Williams, 2009).

For long, tourism research in the social sciences had been deemed as non-academic and too descriptive. Tourism research lacked strong theoretical background (Deery et al., 2012; Urry & Larsen, 2011). This has to do with tourism being intertwined with other societal processes and the concept transgressing boundaries of academic disciplines (Deery et al., 2012). Nowadays, research on tourism regains popularity because of the now recognized importance of tourism and the study of the social construction of tourism and the impacts of tourism on host-communities, tourists and places (Williams, 2009). Research on tourism focused on economic and environmental impacts for long, but nowadays more attention is paid to the socio-cultural impacts (Deery et al., 2012). Whilst tourism is an intensely geographic phenomenon, little attention from human geographers has been paid to the processes (Williams, 2009). Deery et al., (2012) urge more researchers to pay an interest in the socio-cultural importance of tourism, as it is crucial for actors in the tourism industry to understand how individuals in a host-community as well as host-communities overall perceive the benefits and disadvantages of tourism. They call for a more qualitative approach to

tourism, adopting theoretical backgrounds from various disciplines to grasp the intertwined and plural processes that form and constitute the mechanisms of tourism. This research takes the form of a case study, in order to better understand the social production of a tourist place – focusing on those intertwined and plural processes. It adopts theories from various academic disciplines.

1.4. Reading Guide

In chapter 2 the theoretical framework of this research project is presented. In the chapter the tourism concept is discussed and related to place and tourism based on interactions or meetings of indigenous peoples. Chapter 3 will present the methodology applied to answer the research questions, both before and during the fieldwork. It also features a discussion of issues in ethics and positionality. Chapter 4 and chapter 5 are the results chapters. In chapter 4 the production side of the tourist place is discussed – focusing on boundaries to the tourist domain of San Cristóbal and the images that are being produced by actors, chapter 5 focuses on the tourist population and the consumption of San Cristóbal itself. Chapter 6 will conclude the research, discuss the outcomes and give recommendations for future research.

2. Tourism, Places and Indigenous Peoples

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will provide the theoretical framework for this research project. First, the boundaries of the concept of tourism and the heterogeneity of the tourist population will be discussed. Then, places of tourism will be conceptualized as socially constructed places that are produced and consumed by actors. Thirdly, the indigenous peoples as 'objects' of the gaze of tourists will be discussed. At the end of the chapter the contents will be concluded with a conceptual framework for the research.

2.2. Tourism and Tourists

Tourism is a phenomenon with massive impacts on places, societies and cultures and it is heavily intertwined with other processes (Shaw & Williams, 2004). This makes it difficult to isolate and accurately define the concept and measure impacts of tourism on places and societal groups. The term 'tourism' is often used without specifically stating the boundaries of the concept. Many researchers in the field of tourism research therefore start with a definition of tourism as used in their research (Williams, 2009).

In tourism studies, tourism is often treaded as something exotic, as a set of specialized consumer products that occur at specific times and at specific places (Larsen, 2006). It is seen as something different from everyday life and as happening on other places; places that are specifically designed for tourism. They are places like resorts, attractions and beaches. One can only be a tourist for a short period of time – whether it is for a week or a month. In this timeframe of 'being a tourist' one is what one is not in everyday life, indicating a contrast between the ordinary and tourism (Larsen, 2006; MacCannell, 1976). According to Cohen (1979: 181) 'tourism is a no-work, no-care, no-thrift situation'. Studies of tourism produce fixed dualisms between the life as a tourist and the everyday life, as tourism has been seen as an 'escape from home, a quest for more desirable and fulfilling places' (Larsen, 2006: 21) for ages.

There is little consensus among researchers on the exact boundaries of the tourism concept. Recently, influential research argued that tourism is not just something exotic (Larsen, 2006; Urry & Larsen, 2011) and the everyday life should not be neglected. They point out that many tourism practices are both embodied and habitual and involve ordinary objects, ordinary places and ordinary practices. Tourism is subject to a diversity of meanings and interpretations (Williams, 2009). Overtime it has become something for the masses whilst it had been an elite activity until the twenty-first century. Current public discourse constitutes tourism primarily as a leisure activity (Williams, 2009), whilst there are arguably myriads of different motivations for being a tourist. This is reflected in the most widely accepted definition of tourism, as in use by the UN World Tourism Organization:

"The activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for no more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes."

 (Johnston et al., 2000: 840)

The definition by Johnston et al. (2000) allows adopters to make international comparisons. Business trips are included as being tourism, contrary to Cohen's (1979) remarks about tourism being a no-work situation. It also opposes public discourse about tourism. Another critique one can have on this definition is the use of term 'usual

environment', as it is unclear what constitutes the usual environment. Someone can for instance be seen as a tourist in his or her own municipality. The boundaries of tourism remain somewhat vague and tourism is intertwined with other societal processes, such as migration. Therefore, researchers have focused on tourists to describe the concept of tourism in more detail.

There are many different motivations for people to 'go out there and be a tourist'. As Williams (2009) points out the 'spatial patterns of movement and the concentrations of people as tourists at preferred destinations is not an accidental process, but is shaped by individual or collective motives.' Tourists have a certain motivation for travelling and a preference for a certain destination. This preference for a destination is only partially shaped by tourists themselves, to a large extend it is shaped by others who shape their preferences (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

In recent years the tourist gaze has been one of the most discussed and cited books in tourism research (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Tourism is conceptualized as ways of seeing; the pleasures of much tourism are grounded in the enjoyment of gazing or visually consuming places that are out of the ordinary in one way or another (Urry & Larsen, 2011). This idea has been criticized, as it would reduce tourism to an activity of sightseeing; neglecting other senses, bodily needs and adventures (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Edensor (2006) argues that tourism is about the extraordinary – like the tourist gaze – but adds that tourists encounter places through various senses; they eat exotic food, smell new odours, talk with friends, and get drunk. Many motivational theories of tourism are grounded in the concept a certain 'need' (Shaw & Williams, 2004); a need to escape everyday life or a need to go on a holiday and rest after a period of labour. Iso-Ahola (1984) argues that tourism is not an individual 'need', but is formed around a combination of stimuli that motivate a travel – a desire for a certain place on which to have rewarding activities and experiences.

One of the issues with the tourism concept is the heterogeneity of the tourist population. There is a large variety in motivations to travel to other places and to be a tourist. Others largely shape these motivations and tourism is intertwined with other societal processes, further problematizing the motivations for tourism. As they are so varied, researchers have seen the need to make typologies of subgroups of tourists to be able to make assumptions and categorize tourists. Smith (1977) provides one of the most well-known and usable typologies of tourists. She suggested a fivefold categorization of tourists. Categorizing tourists can be problematic, as Murphy (1985: 5) suggests 'there are probably as many types of tourists as there are motivations to travel'. However, Smith's (1977) typology is widely adopted amongst researchers, other typologies often fail to make distinctions between the groups of tourists and categories often overlap in some way or another (Williams, 2009). The typology of tourists by Smith (1977) is provided in Figure 2-1: Table of Tourist Typologies. Source: Smith (1977)

Table of Tourist Typologies

Recreational Tourism	Environmental Tourism	Historical Tourism	Ethnic Tourism	Cultural Tourism
Based on the three S's: sand, sun and sex.	Focusing on natural scenery or human-created landscapes.	Emphasizing relics of past cultures	Marketed to the public in terms of the 'quaint' customs of indigenous and other exotic peoples	Including the 'picturesque' and 'local colour'. A vestige of a vanishing lifestyle that lies within human memory.

FIGURE 2-1: TABLE OF TOURIST TYPOLOGIES. SOURCE: SMITH (1977)

In the classification by Smith (1977) the line between 'ethnic tourism' and 'cultural tourism' is especially problematic (Wood, 1984). Smith (1977) argues that cultures that interest cultural tourists are vanishing more rapidly than the cultures – here interpreted as the customs and relics – of the indigenous or exotic people that interest ethnic tourists. It is the difference between 'cultures' of the past – heritage – and the 'cultures' of remote areas and exotic people. The patterns of activities and behaviours that are associated with the different types of tourism may also lead to particular impacts on destinations and their host-communities (Williams, 2009). The cultural tourists engage in different activities on their destination then the recreational tourists, because they have different interests or motivations and different ways to fulfil their motives to travel.

Sharpley & Telfer (2008) have made efforts in linking tourist types with particular impacts on the places where tourism occurs. The position the 'explorer' tourists on the far left of the scale; they are the tourists who travel to remote and 'undiscovered' places. They are assumed to have only limited social impacts on their destination. On the far right of the scale are the 'charter tourists'; they care little for the places they visit and have maximum negative social impacts. However, a causal link between tourist types, behaviours and social impacts on the tourist places is a mistake. In less developed countries mass tourism is sometimes organized in the form of all-inclusive resorts, which arguably bring substantial economic benefits but only limited social impacts. On the other end, 'explorers' can have extensive social impacts in introducing western customs or relics to remote societies.

An understanding of tourism characteristics and motivations for their travel is fundamental to a study of tourism and place (Urry & Larsen, 2011), as it shaped the way in which they consume the places they visit as tourists and to what extend these places were satisfactory. Next paragraph will further discuss the complex concept of tourism by focusing on the places where it occurs. These places and images of these places where tourism is observed are fundamental to the practice of tourism (Williams, 2009).

2.3. Tourist Places

2.3.1. Production of Tourist Places

Studies on tourism have often focused on the tourists themselves, but little attention has been paid to the social construction of tourist spaces and places (Urry & Larsen, 2011). This paragraph explores the relationships between places and the practices of tourists. Tourist places are those places that are actively created for tourists:

"Ordinary places can become tourist places when they are attributed particular meanings and values to attract tourists."

(Young, 1999: 373)

Tourist places are social constructions, which are actively produced for and consumed by tourists (Young, 1999). They are constantly being created, abandoned and re-created (Shaw & Williams, 2004). Places themselves are socio-cultural inventions and the meanings of these places are both attributed by actors and consumed by actors, such as tourists (Urry & Larsen, 2011). As Young (1999) argues, tourist places are produced to attract tourists and when tourists are at the tourist place they consume these places. He suggests that once tourists arrive on a destination they are the primary actor in their consumption behaviour and in the negotiation of meanings of the tourist place. Before they arrive on that place an image of the place is 'sold' to attract them to the tourist place. Such an image is a representation; a selective, partial and distorted image of the place. Tourists can already have an un-negotiable image of the tourist place before they actually arrive, others might alter their image depending on sights and experiences (Urry & Larsen, 2011). This paragraph will discuss tourist places by first focusing on the production of these places and then shift to the consumption side of the tourist place, in which tourists are first targets and then the primary actors involved.

Tourism is an intensely geographic phenomenon as places are fundamental to the practice of tourism (Williams, 2009). Places need to serve a specific purpose to make them one of the places where tourists would want to go to; being places of fun or spectacle, memory or excitement. All these roles places can play are socially constructed and mediated, dependent on what role actors with power want these places to play (Shaw & Williams, 2004).

Many different actors are the producers of product places, including tourists themselves (Urry & Larsen, 2011). An important part of the production of the tourist place is the creation of an image of a place, in which fewer actors are involved – actors with the power to create these places. Governmental actors play a key role as those actors with power (Williams, 2009). Other actors resound these images of place, such as tour operators, websites and other promoters of a tourist place. Restaurants, hotels and other facilities aimed at tourists are increasingly promoters of the tourist place (Urry & Larsen, 2011) by using representations of their place on their website and more direct contact with potential tourists. However, they largely shape the functions of a place – dependent on the image of the place. Important actors in the production of the image of the place are tourists themselves who influence others back home in their travel-decisions by their experiences on that specific tourist place (Williams, 2009).

It has proven difficult to get to an understanding of tourists' travel motivations, but the demand for tourism emanates from perceptions of tourist experiences that are associated with particular places. Tourism is a visible manifestation of the perception of these tourist places (Shaw & Williams, 2004). All the time, governments and other

institutions try to sell specific places for different purposes, of which one of them is to attract tourists. Many places in the world are influenced by a certain marketing technique, aimed to attract more tourists to these places (Molina & Esteban, 2006). These techniques influence these places they market; they shape meanings – both of tourists and host-communities and eventually shape the appearance and functions of these places. It has been argued that the image tourists have of their destination strongly influences their behaviour on a tourist place (Molina & Esteban, 2006; Suvantola, 2002).

An image of a place is created to attract tourists to a place, but as it is selective parts of the meanings of the tourist place remain unconsumed and away from the gaze or consumption patterns of tourists (Young, 1999). The images that are created are constructed around certain features, such as products, sights and people of the destination (Urry & Larsen, 2011). These different geographical imaginations of tourists are key in understanding tourism. An important feature of the tourist place is the fact that it can only be consumed at the place of production and in fact tourists are part of this production process by making places and informing others about their experiences on the tourist place (Williams, 2009). The frequent exposure of tourist places to tourists lead to places that change; both functions and meanings of these places. The product of place is often controlled by governmental institutions, who to a large extend want to control these places. Tourism in turn is a complex form of consumption; at the heart of the tourist place and the practice of tourism lays no tangible purchase (Williams, 2009).

2.3.2. Consumption of Tourist Places

In order to understand the relationship between tourists and tourist places one must realize that tourists are above all consumers of these places (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Consumption is not purely confined to an act of purchase; it can also be an experience (Williams, 2009). Consumption is not just about goods that are manufactured and sold, as it is increasingly about ideas, services and knowledge. Places, shopping, eating, leisure, recreation, sights and sounds are all 'things' that can be consumed (Jayne, 2006). The ways in which tourists consume places is shaped by the product of the tourist place itself and the image of place tourists have; they shape, in essence, the ways in which they are to fulfil their travel motives (Shaw & Williams, 2004). The consumption patterns of sun-sea-sand tourists are for instance different from tourists who seek exotic cultures; consumption patterns of tourists can even change overtime during the same trip (Ryan, 2002). Others, like (Shaw & Williams, 2004), comment that tourists themselves shape their consumption patterns on a destination, but more recently Urry & Larsen (2011) support the idea the images of places – the production of the tourist place – shapes the consumption of that tourist place.

When tourists consume tourist places they attach meanings to the places they visit. To a certain extend this is mediated by other actors in advance by influencing the product of a place. The meanings that are created by tourists are primarily shaped by aesthetics and characteristics of a place, rather than by social interactions and everyday life experiences (Kianicka et al., 2006). However, Stedman (2003) points out that tourist places can be as deeply meaningful for tourists as for locals, notably as symbols of important experiences or because of the restorative value of these places.

One of the fundamental ideas to an understanding of the consumption of tourist places by tourists is the concept of the tourist gaze (Williams, 2009). Urry & Larsen (2011) argue that people leave their 'normal' places for other places to consume sights and experiences that are offered, because they anticipate that they will derive pleasure from the process and those experiences will in some way be different from their

everyday routine, out of the ordinary. The extraordinary can be distinguished in several ways:

- ■　　　In seeing a unique object or place;
- ■　　　In seeing unfamiliar aspects of what is otherwise familiar, for instance an insight in the lives of others;
- ■　　　In conducting familiar routines in unfamiliar settings.

(Urry & Larsen, 2011)

When places do not offer something out of the ordinary, they are not tourist places but places where there is 'nothing to see' (Williams, 2009). Tourism is a strongly visual practice, for instance reflected in postcards, guidebooks and brochures, and the taking of photographs. However, the consumption of place is not just guided by visual aspects and other senses – such as smells, tastes, and sounds (Shaw & Williams, 2004) – should as well be considered. The taking of photographs however plays an important role in the performative nature of tourist practices. They are the actions, behaviours, codes and preferences that tourists exhibit when they visit places (Williams, 2009). The subject of a photograph is to a large extend shaped by others – and derived from the image of tourist place created by them – and the production and the consumption of a tourist place are intertwined processes (Urry & Larsen, 2011). 'Tourism is a process which involves the on-going (re)construction of praxis and space in shared contexts' (Edensor, 2006: 59). Tourists possess a dynamic agency that continually produces and reproduces places through their acts or behaviour.

2.4.   Ethnic Tourism and Tourist Places

Tourists have different motivations fort heir travels and different ways to fulfil their travel motivations on a tourist place. In this paragraph, one of the five types of tourism presented by Smith (1977) is explored in relation to the place of tourism. The type of tourism that is motivated by 'others' – as exotic or indigenous peoples – is referred to as ethnic tourism. It has specific relationships with tourist places where it is observed and performed, as ethnic tourism typically leads to standardized attractions on these places. These places are then 'spoiled' for the tourists who where the first to arrive on those places, before a larger wave of tourists was observed (Adams, 1984).

This type of tourism, ethnic tourism, has gained a lot of academic interest over the years, especially from anthropologists. Van den Berghe (1994) observed this kind of tourism in San Cristóbal de las Casas in 1992. The anthropologists had an interest in ethnic tourism as the encounter with or the meeting of 'the other' is the primary motivation for the occurrence of this type of tourism. The other is being perceived as 'pristine' and 'authentic'; as a group with a different ethnic and/or cultural background (Harron & Weiler, 1992). Ethnic tourism is also often referred to as indigenous tourism as it is often targeted at indigenous groups, rather then 'exotic peoples'. A definition of ethnic tourism is provided:

"Travel motivated primarily by the search for the first hand, authentic and sometimes intimate contact with people whose ethnic and/or cultural background is different from the tourists'. "

(Harron & Weiler, 1992: 84)

The definition follows the meanings of the concept as given by Smith (1977) closely. However, they do not mention indigenous or 'exotic' people in their definition as 'the other' who interest ethnic tourists. Instead, they emphasize that 'the other' should only have a different cultural or ethnic background from the tourists'. The others do not

have to be classified as indigenous and/or exotic, implying they might play different roles in everyday life. Smith (1977) provided further examples of groups that ethnic tourists would be interested in to further illustrate this type of tourism. Interestingly, these groups can all be seen as indigenous and exotic: the Inuit of the Arctic, the Toraja of Indonesia and the San Blas Indians of Panama.

Ethnic tourism involves complex ethnic relations on the tourist places where it is observed. A division of labour in this type of tourism is made in three groups: the tourists, the tourees – the 'others', who make a spectacle of themselves – and middlemen, who mediate the tourist-touree encounter and cater facilities for tourists (Van den Berghe, 1995; Yang & Wall, 2009). See Figure 2-2 for a schematic representation of the division of labour in ethnic tourism.
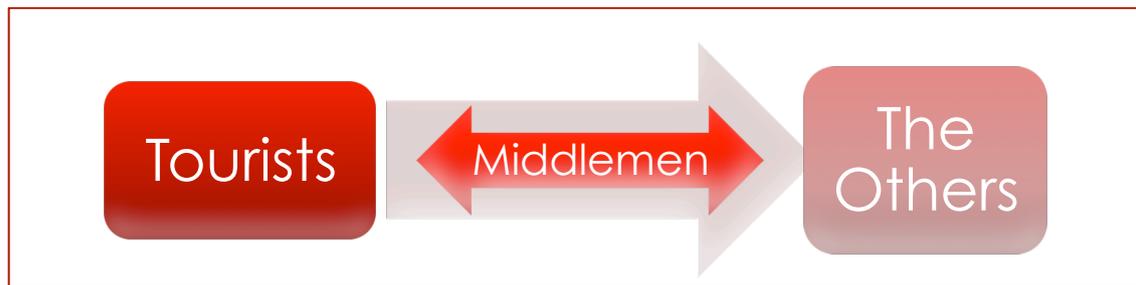
FIGURE 2-2: ETHNIC TOURISM AND THE DIVISION OF LABOUR. SOURCE: VAN DEN BERGHE (1995)

Problematic in the definition of the concept of ethnic tourism is the use of terms to describe and valuate cultural expressions, such as the term 'authentic' in the definition by Harron & Weiler (1992). Yang & Wall (2009) adopted a definition of ethnic tourism that refrains from the use of such terminology, as it is vague and unclear when contact with people is authentic or intimate. Their definition therefore seems most suitable for this research:

"Tourism motivated primarily by the visitor's search for exotic cultural experiences through interaction with distinctive ethnic groups. It includes trips during which the experience or consumption of artefacts, performances and other products associated with an ethnic group are important parts of the trip motivation and the activities undertaken."

(Yang & Wall, 2009: 236)

Yang & Wall (2009) argue that ethnic tourism is motivated by exotic cultural experiences, rather then the meeting of others; being exotic or indigenous. They shift a definition of ethnic tourism from the meeting of the others to interactions with distinctive ethnic groups. The exotic cultural experiences are to be had through these interactions, which are experiences or consumptions by the tourists. The things they experience or consume are primarily artefacts and performances, but can include other elements that are associated with an ethnic group. They place ethnic tourism as being motivated by exotic cultural experiences and not by first hand or 'authentic' contact with 'others', like Harron & Weiler (1992). Rather, experiences and consumptions of the distinctive ethnic groups by tourists can be – and is – mediated by others.

Most studies on ethnic tourism and the relations between them and the indigenous peoples are concentrated on visits to exotic and often peripheral destinations. These relations involve performances, representations, and attractions portraying or presented by small and often isolated indigenous groups (Moscardo & Pearce, 1999). Research has focused extensively on the indigenous peoples and related tourism in several regions of the world; namely the Arctic, Latin America and Southeast-

Asia (Ishii, 2012; Yang, 2011). There has been extensive research on ethnic tourism in Latin America in particular, as it has been described for the Andes (Meisch, 2002; Weismantel, 2001), Guatemala (Little, 2004), Mexico (Castañeda, 1996; Van den Berghe, 1994) and Panama (Tice, 1995). There has also been quiet extensive research on the phenomenon in Australia (Harron & Weiler, 1992). In Australia, research on ethnic tourism used to focus more on the ways indigenous peoples were represented in tourism – showing that images tourists had were partial and distorted, often presenting the indigenous peoples as 'noble savages'. More recently, studies in Australia on indigenous tourism – the preferred terminology there – focused on controlling tourism and limiting the impacts of it, whilst maximizing benefits for the indigenous host-communities (Harron & Weiler, 1992; Deery et al., 2012). Other recent researches on ethnic tourism in other places, such as China (Xie & Wall, 2002) also emphasize the importance of limiting impacts of ethnic tourism, whilst empowering the ethnic groups who are the primary target of ethnic tourism. This type of tourism is highly problematic, as the marginalization of the others is the primary motivation for the occurrence of ethnic tourism (Yang & Wall, 2009). The others are then often not those who profit the most from ethnic tourism, as they lack the power to fully facilitate tourism and create the infrastructure required. Much of the power and control over the production of the tourist place is in the hands of middlemen who mediate ethnic tourism (Ardren, 2004; Van den Berghe, 1995).

According to many researchers, 'authenticity' is considered an important valuation of cultural expressions in ethnic tourism (Xie & Wall, 2002). As noted earlier, the use of the term 'authentic' in defining ethnic tourism is problematic, as it is unclear what the exact meanings of 'authenticity' are. It is clearly not an absolute notion; authenticity is rather a relative, interpreted and socially constructed concept (Xie & Wall, 2002; Yang & Wall, 2009).

Van den Berghe (1994) noted, during earlier fieldwork in San Cristóbal, the self-destroying mechanism of ethnic tourism and ascribed this mechanism to tourists who affect the authenticity of the place. Culture, crafts and tourism become inseparable parts (Smith, 2003). Tourism can support and strengthen the continuation of local cultural production by buying goods and the general interest in those objects. There is some debate about tourists and crafts, as Smith (2003) argues that – cultural – tourists want to be assured that the crafts they buy locally are produced by a local craftsperson, reflecting traditional methods and designs. Some researchers argue however that a shift to mass-produced and commoditized artefacts (Smith, 2003; Mathieson & Wall, 1992) destroy and alter local cultural expressions and crafts. Mathieson & Wall (1992) further argue that the first phase of change in traditional art forms resulting from contact with tourists is the disappearance of traditional artistic designs, arts, and craft forms. In the end it will lead to the mass-production of souvenirs, but they point out that it can end with a resurgence of skilful craftsmanship, as a reaction to the mass-produced souvenirs and newfound interest in 'original', 'traditional', 'authentic', and locally crafted souvenirs (Mathieson & Wall, 1992). Authenticity then has importance in tourist discourse about places and experiences, and in crafts or souvenirs as well. The concept has little meaning as it can be assigned to a wide range of objects. Therefore, this research will refrain from the use of terminology such as 'authentic'. It however is a commonly used term to evaluate tourist experiences and crafts. It carries a positive notion, but remains rather vague (Xie & Wall, 2002).

Ethnic tourism and research on ethnic tourism has focused on exotic and often peripheral locations. Graburn (1978) suggest that whilst the other primarily motivates ethnic tourists, they are generally interested in natural sights as well. This criticises the

typology of tourists by Smith (1977) as they are not 'just' about 'the other'. Graburn (1978) argued that the interest in natural sights is what differs ethnic tourists from cultural tourists, indicating a clearer boundary between ethnic and cultural tourism. He used the example of Northern Finland as a place for ethnic tourists. Here, tourists can both meet the exotic people of Lapland and experience natural sights like the northern light. Ethnic tourists often visit places that are frequented by exotic people, rather than go through the process of seeking out families and forebears (Graburn, 1978).

It has often been argued that tourism is a highly performative activity (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Tourism takes place within confound borders, which are set-up by others. Tourists visit the same places and behave in distinct ways (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Ethnic tourism can often be observed on places frequented by exotic people rather then the place they call home (Graburn, 1978). Others, who are not the direct target of the tourists' gaze and enjoyment, mediate ethnic tourism. They cater the encounters between the tourists and the others and they occupy the social space between them (Van den Berghe, 1995). This translates to the places of ethnic tourism as places of the mediators – or middlemen – on which ethnic tourists encounter 'the other'.

For ethnic tourism a product of place is created (Williams, 2009), like for all types of tourism. The tourist place is one where tourists can consume sights and activities to fulfil their travel motivations. These products are selective images, negotiated in tourism representations and there is a tendency for actors who shape the meanings of these places to misrepresent societies, or over-simplify them. This is especially the case for societies that are distant from the western cultures of most international tourists, like for indigenous peoples (Williams, 2009). The created images obliges local people to represent – or rather misrepresent (Magnoni et al., 2007) – elements of their cultural expressions, such as music, crafts, and rituals. The middlemen thus represent 'the others' in a certain way, which forces them to live up to the created image in order to keep being interesting for international tourists (Williams, 2009). Therefore, images tourists see or experience become projections of the representations for tourists. This process is often referred to as commodification (Williams, 2009).

Ritzer & Liska (1997) see a 'McDonaldification' process in cultural expressions and experiences, viewing the world as growingly predictable. They argue that tourists want their tourist place to be 'McDonaldified' like their everyday life; being predictable, efficient, calculable, and controlled. Ritzer & Liska (1997) apply this idea predominantly to mass tourism, suggesting that it brings satisfaction to travellers and customers who accept and embrace these processes (Shaw & Williams, 2004). The increase of flexible tourism can be seen as mass customizations, which are again predictable, efficient, calculable and controlled. An example given is of the backpacker; he or she travels individually, but backpackers collectively use similar guidebooks and end up in the same places as other backpackers. These places in themselves are again more or less similar across the globe (Ritzer & Liska, 1997).

FIGURE 2-3: CREATING A MAYAN PLACE

MacCannell (1973), one of the pioneers of tourism research, argues that tourists in general are interested in 'authentic' experiences during their holiday. Nowadays, other researchers debate this idea, as it is unclear when experiences are authentic. However, MacCannell (1973) emphasized that other cultural groups on a destination – the tourees or the others – hide away certain cultural elements from the gaze of tourists whilst enhancing other aspects for consumption by tourists. This idea is still supported by other researchers (Urry & Larsen, 2011). By hiding away certain cultural elements host-communities could keep and maintain their own cultures and identities, whilst enhancing aspects to offer tourists what they seek of the interaction or meeting with them. MacCannell (1973) named the enhanced elements of the host cultures the 'frontstage' and the hidden elements the 'back stage' of the places of interaction of host-communities and tourists. He used the stage as a metaphor to typify these types of interactions as places of performance; the setting is staged and the roles of the actors on the stage are set.

2.5. Conceptual Model

In Figure 2-4: Conceptual Modelthe conceptual model for this research project is presented. It summarises the theoretical framework by noting the intertwined processes of place production and place consumption. A place becomes a tourist place by attributed meanings that the place offers something out of the ordinary, has attractions for tourists and that the place serves a certain role; for example as a place to meet the indigenous peoples. The tourist places have attributed meanings and values and functions are given to them in accordance with those meanings and values. The production and consumption of place are intertwined processes in which many different actors are included. In order to promote the tourist place an image of place is created by actors in the tourism industry; in the first place governmental actors, then local and non-local actors. The tourists themselves also create images of the tourist place as they visit the place and 'represent' the place in their own ways, according to their experience and expectations. The expectations of the tourists shape their place consumption patterns and the meanings, values and functions they demand of the place, as they want to fulfil their travel motivations on the tourist place.

In this research project the focus is mainly on the tourist place itself and its functions and attributed meanings and values; attributed mainly by international tourists. Other actors are producing an image of the place for them; that shapes their expectations, travel motivations and consumption patterns and in the end their evaluation of the tourist place.

Tourism and the creation of a tourist place are societal processes, entangled in others. It is therefore hard to grasp the various nuances and related developments. Therefore, this research project is limited to international tourists and domestic tourists are largely excluded from this research.

The creation of the tourist place San Cristóbal is the central theme of this research, but it is already known that the tourist place offered tourists an indigenous component. Therefore, this research project focuses on the indigenous population and related tourism – ethnic tourism – as components of the tourist place and tourist population of San Cristóbal.
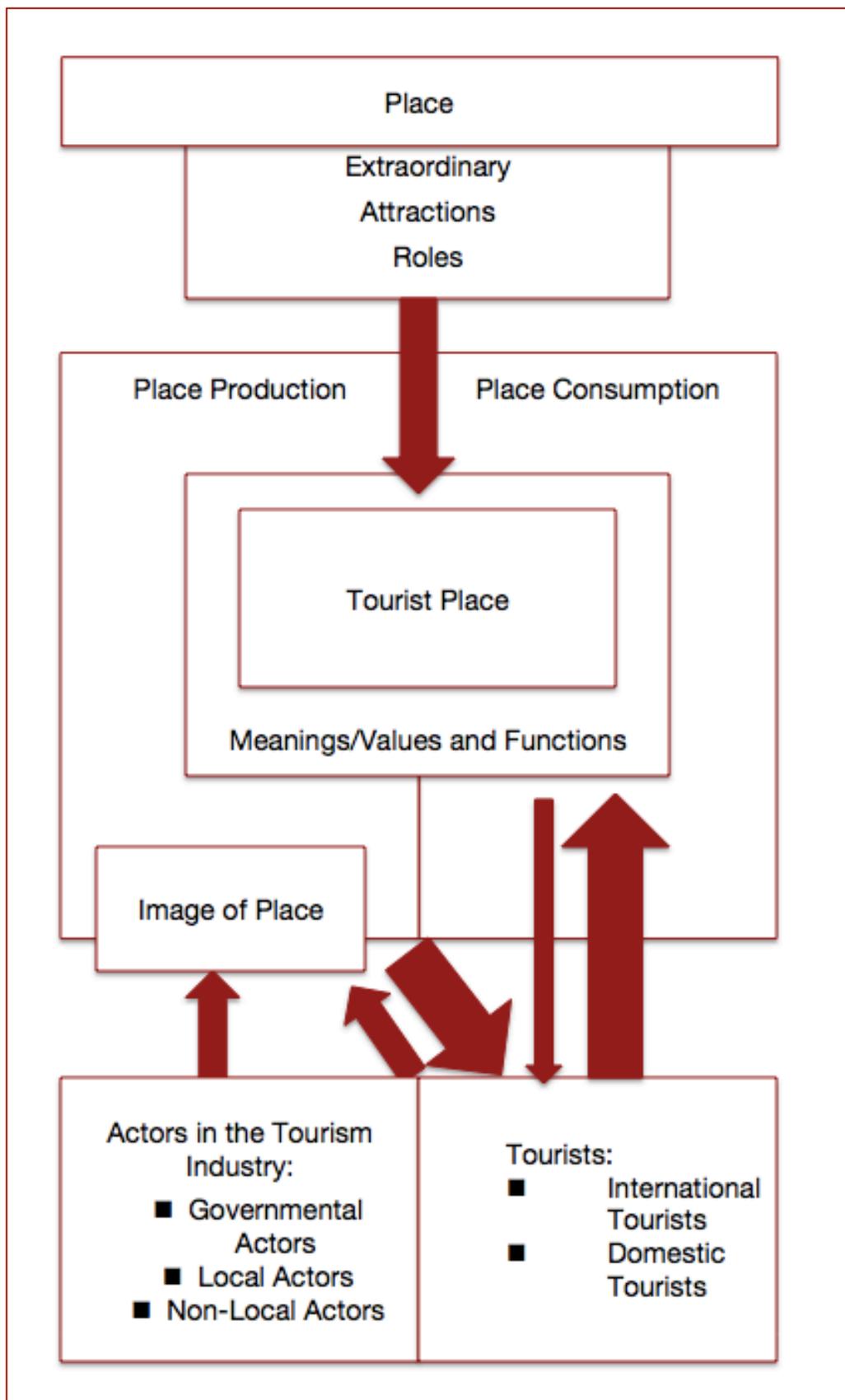
FIGURE 2-4: CONCEPTUAL MODEL

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter the methodology applied to answer the research question will be discussed. The research project takes the form of a case study research of San Cristóbal de las Casas, a town in the southernmost state of Mexico; Chiapas. Adopting this approach provided the possibility of finding outcomes for one specific case in-depth, but a disadvantage of this approach is that results cannot be generalized for different and other places (Stake, 1995). San Cristóbal de las Casas is a selection of a place and is not representative for other places. For this research fieldwork has been conducted in San Cristóbal over the course of eight weeks from June to August 2011.

San Cristóbal is an interesting location for a study on the production and consumption of a tourist place. Tourism is of both social and economic importance to both Mexico and the state of Chiapas. San Cristóbal plays an important role within the state of Chiapas as a place of tourism where it is motivated by the tourists' interest in exotic cultural experiences. This leads to social interactions and the tourists becoming part of the tourist place, as they shape the place by their presence. Furthermore, this type of tourism that Van den Berghe (1994) describes in 1992's San Cristóbal – ethnic tourism – is often said to be problematic for the development of those who are the subject of this type of tourism. Van den Berghe (1994) argues that the presence of tourists destroys the place for other tourists. Earlier research on the tourist place of San Cristóbal by Van den Berghe (1994) enables to compare results and comment on the construction of the tourist place nineteen years after his fieldwork in 1992. San Cristóbal nowadays is a more diversified tourist place, which combines various cultural and natural attractions and international and national tourists.

July and August are locally known as the high season for tourism in San Cristóbal, coinciding with the timeframe of the fieldwork in the town. A relative large group of tourists in San Cristóbal is of Mexican origin during these months. The town receives a steady influx of tourists year-round, but in other months of the year the percentage of international tourists will be higher, except for Mexican holidays such as Semana Santa and around Christmas. A disadvantage of the chosen timeframe was the observance of the rainy season in southern Mexico. Whilst tourists still visit and consume San Cristóbal they are likely to make other behavioural choices in San Cristóbal depending on weather conditions and therefore might be less visible on the streets.

During the fieldwork, the researcher was an outsider to local cultures; to their traditions and to their customs (Dowling, 2010). There was a language barrier, but Spanish courses had been taken to lessen the barrier somewhat. This research took place in a cross-cultural setting; one where people with different cultural backgrounds meet and interact (Gibbs, 2010). It requires respectful listening, difficult and challenging engagements, careful attention to nuances in the lives of others and 'a critical long-term consideration of the implications of methods in the construction of meanings' (Howitt & Stevens, 2005: 30).

Conducting fieldwork in human geography provides some other methodological issues (Katz, 2000). The construction of the field is based on boundaries and it blurs borders between the research and everyday life, between the field and what is not the field, and het between the scholar and the research subject. This is something many would experience, and there are no simple solutions for these issues (Katz, 2000). However, one of the potential solutions given is to keep a fieldwork diary (Dowling,

2000). This fieldwork diary contains reflexive observations, local observations and assorted collected documents. It is an aid thus in reflecting on the research and on phenomenological experiences of the researcher during the fieldwork.

In this chapter the applied methods of the research are further discussed, ordered in methodology applied before and during the fieldwork in San Cristóbal. At the end of the chapter a discussion of positionality and ethics is given.

3.2. Preparing the Fieldwork

This research project is roughly divided in two parts; preparing the fieldwork and conducting the fieldwork. As the researcher himself was a first-time visitor to San Cristóbal, the production of the tourist place was the subject of the fieldwork preparation. During the fieldwork the consumption patterns and the interactions of tourists and host-communities were the primary focus. More in-depth information about the place of San Cristóbal was required as well, especially in relation with tourism. This provided contextual information and prepared for the fieldwork in San Cristóbal.

A study of literature on San Cristóbal, Chiapas and tourism in the region has been integral to this research project. The context differed from the background of the researcher and as a first-time visitor to San Cristóbal he had to base expectations and make assumptions based on earlier research by orders. Fortunately, this region has been researched in the past and tourism in the Mundo Maya has been the focus of other research projects. Integral to a contextual understanding of the research subject were the researches of Van den Berghe (1994) and Little (2004). Van den Berghe (1994) conducted fieldwork research in San Cristóbal in 1992, researching ethnic tourism. His findings have proven to be material which could be compared with results of this research project to be able to answer if San Cristóbal ahs became a Cancún-in-the-mountains, something he hoped would not happen. His research provided a clear image of the tourist place as it was in 1992. Both of these works are works by anthropologists who did spend several months conducting fieldwork in this region and it proved challenging to translate their researches to a more cultural geographical context and a research project that was to be carried out over the course of seven weeks in San Cristóbal.

The produced tourist place of San Cristóbal beforehand has been analysed by a content analysis of both websites of Dutch packaged tour operators and international guidebooks. A content analysis is the most frequent method for analysing images or textual data. The choice for websites in this analysis was made because information on these pages is freely available to anyone and they have extensive power in the production of tourist places. They are not only just there to give information about these places, they are used to book accommodations, attractions and transportation as well (Timothy & Groves, 2001). As it are the governmental organizations that shape the products of tourist places primarily, this analysis has been designed to find how and if tourist representations of Mexican governmental actors can be seen in both websites of Dutch packaged tour operators and in international guidebooks. To contextualize these findings, comments of key informants on representations of San Cristóbal for domestic tourists were gathered during the fieldwork.

3.3. Conducting the Fieldwork

3.3.1. Key Informants and Own Observations

Doing fieldwork provided some methodological issues and considerations. During the fieldwork different research methods were applied to answer the various

questions posed in this research project. This paragraph will discuss the methods used during the fieldwork in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico, in which primary – or first-hand - data has been gathered.

The research project takes place in a cross-cultural setting; one were the researcher was an outsider to local cultures. To be able to answer the research questions and to gain a better understanding of the context in which the research takes place a key informant technique has been chosen as a primary source of data collection. The key informant technique is an ethnographic research method that has been frequently used in anthropological research. It is used in other branches of the social sciences as well, as it gained some popularity (Marshall, 1996). The method is centred on the key informants, who are expert sources of information. They are experts as a result of personal skills or their position within a society. They are able to provide more information and a deeper insight into what is going on around them (Marshall, 1996). Marshall (1996) describes some ideal characteristics for key informants, for which he followed earlier ideas about this method by Tremblay (1957):

- The key informants' formal role in the community should expose them to the kind of information being sought by the researcher;
- In addition to having access to the information desired, the informant should have absorbed the information meaningfully;
- The informant should be willing to communicate their knowledge to the interviewer and to communicate their knowledge as fully as possible;
- They should be able to communicate their knowledge in a manner that is intelligible to the researcher;
- Key informants should be objective and unbiased. The researcher should know any relevant biases.

Few of these ideal characteristics can be determined with certainty in advance. Therefore Howard (1986) advocates different selection criteria depending on the particular study. As the time period of this fieldwork was relatively short, the key informant technique was a preferred method of both gathering contextual information and necessary primary data. A principal advantage of the technique is that a high amount of qualitative information can be obtained in a relative short time period. A disadvantage of this technique is that the used informants can be unlikely to represent the majority view of individuals in their community Further, the key informants might only divulge information that is politically acceptable (Marshall, 1996). These disadvantages are however in some ways controllable for the researcher, as during interviews with key informants often questions of representation can be discussed. For this research, key informants were chosen who represent a certain part of the population of San Cristóbal relevant to the actors involved in the production and consumption of the tourist place San Cristóbal, see Figure 3-1 for an overview.

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Key Informants

> ➢ Cesar: A Mexican tour guide who takes both domestic and international tourists to the indigenous villages of Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula on a daily basis. Native to San Cristóbal, but lived in other places as well. Speaks English.
> ➢ Milou: A woman with a Dutch background who has lived in San Cristóbal since 1981. Does not work in the tourism industry.
> ➢ Christine: A local tour guide with a Belgian background. She has lived in San Cristóbal for 16 years and is primarily a guide for Dutch and Belgian tourists in Mexico.
> ➢ Jose Luis: A Mexican professor of anthropology at a research institute in San Cristóbal. As an inhabitant of San Cristóbal and because of his profession he could provide valuable contextual information.
> ➢ Anita: A Mexican indigenous woman with a Chamulan background, who lived in the suburbs of San Cristóbal. Sells products to tourists.

</div>

FIGURE 3-1: KEY INFORMANTS

Five different key informants had been chosen. A choice was made to include some key informants who could 'translate' the context of San Cristóbal to the researcher with a Dutch background. Therefore, Christine and Milou proved to be very helpful. Before the fieldwork, the researcher contacted the professor in anthropology and the Belgian tour guide. The latter provided other useful key informants, adopting a 'snowballing' approach for possible respondents or informants during this research. The informants all have different backgrounds and different roles in the construction of the tourist place San Cristóbal, providing the possibility to compare opinions and views on related topics. The backgrounds of the key informants differed, as did their relationship with the international tourist population in San Cristóbal. Because of methodological difficulties in finding key informants, missing groups who are considered important in the construction of the tourist place San Cristóbal are the expats who work with NGOs in San Cristóbal, the Ladino population of San Cristóbal that is not involved in tourism and institutions in tourism.

An interview with a representative of the Chiapas tourism secretary was held in Tuxtla Gutierrez. However, the language barrier proofed to be much of a problem. Furthermore, the representative reiterated the brochures and could not or did not want to talk about the background of tourism policies of the state. He could not be considered a key informant and therefore he is not included as such. An understanding of the policies and creation of the tourist place of San Cristóbal is to be had from representations. Consequence is the lack of background information on the production of the tourist place San Cristóbal, which arguably has something to do with the problematic construction of ethnic tourism, which is one of the important components.

3.3.2. Surveys

Earlier research on ethnic tourism in San Cristóbal by Van den Berghe (1994) provides a framework on international tourists and the tourism motivated by the indigenous peoples in San Cristóbal de las Casas. Therefore, it was valuable for this

research to know more about the population of international tourists in the town in the summer of 2011. The diversity of international tourists in San Cristóbal was an important research consideration. Tourists were surveyed about their reasons for visiting the town, their 'route' and their travel group. The survey was held on two different locations in San Cristóbal to be able to find differences between survey groups depending on the locations of the surveys.

For this survey the international tourist population of San Cristóbal was the target group. This provided some problems as it has already been established that tourism is intertwined with other societal processes. Tourists are therefore sometimes hard to identify, especially groups who stay with family in San Cristóbal or for example international tourists who carry out volunteer work in San Cristóbal. Van den Berghe (1994) provided a possible solution as he surveyed tourists during his fieldwork in San Cristóbal as well. He used a list of characteristics on which to include respondents or not, which was usable for this research as well. However, since his fieldwork in 1992 many things have changed. He used characteristics like taking photographs on the street as inclusion, whilst such an activity in 2011 is not longer just a tourist activity. Nowadays photographs can be taken by using smartphones or other small equipment, making it harder to notice as well. Another characteristic that proved unusable for inclusion were people who 'looked lost' or read a guidebook. Maps are provided by smartphones and guidebooks or other information about the place is far more easily accessible as it was 20 years ago. However, people who read guidebooks in the street could be included, as it would be a typical tourist activity.

The choice for inclusion in this survey was thus made on the respondents' appearance as international tourists – on which Van den Berghe (1994) provided helpful characteristics, such as the types of 'traditional clothing' many tourists in San Cristóbal tend to wear – and there was a bias to include those who spoke Dutch, English or another recognizable language different than Spanish on the streets as they were more often then not tourists. Also, families who travelled together and tourists who were seen carrying luggage were more often included. For the survey, the first question asked a possible respondent was 'Are you a tourist?' in either English or Spanish. Overall, there was no clear group who resented this tourist label, something that Van den Berghe (1994) warned for. Clearly, some people who lived in San Cristóbal for a longer period or for purposes other than leisure argued that they were 'not really just tourists', but they did not mind being included in the survey.

A lack of more qualitative data on the tourist population in San Cristóbal is an issue and one of the reasons why this survey was held. With this survey, an understanding of the diversity and the meanings of international tourists assigned to the tourist place San Cristóbal was gained. In the survey respondents were questioned about previous and next destinations – 'the route', the group size, and motivations for visiting San Cristóbal. Domestic tourists were excluded from the survey, because of difficulties in identifying them as tourists and because of the diversity. For domestic tourists, more often motivations for travelling to San Cristóbal are entangled with other social factors, among others they could be in town to visit family, had their roots in San Cristóbal or are visiting friends in the town or a place nearby.

As noted earlier, the survey was held on two different locations. The locations chosen were the Zócalo of San Cristóbal and the northern end of the 'Andador' walkway, near the Santo Domingo indigenous market. These places were chosen because they are places international tourists frequent and places most tourists go to, regardless of their travel motivations and ways to fulfil these motivations. Both surveys were held in the afternoon, during which both packaged tours and individual tourists are

in the town. The choice for two different locations was made because the Zócalo could be perceived as a more colonial and less indigenous setting; it is surrounded by colonial buildings and non-indigenous music, Marimba, is played in the bandstand on the Zócalo. The Santo Domingo market is an indigenous market, which may influence the appointed travel motivations of tourists themselves and the pool of respondents could be somewhat different because of more tourists who are going to the indigenous market. An illustration of the survey locations is given in Figure 3-2.

Survey Locations

The Zócalo is on the left; the indigenous market 'Santa Domingo' on the right.
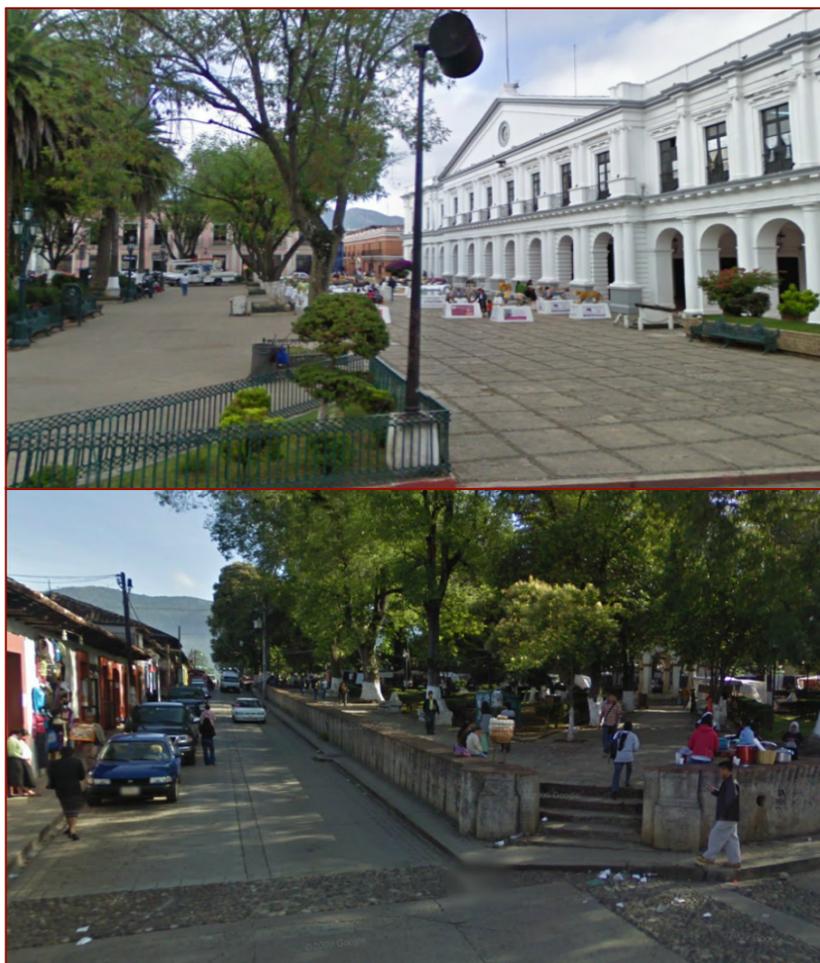
FIGURE 3-2: SURVEY LOCATIONS IN SAN CRISTÓBAL. SOURCE: GOOGLE STREETVIEW (2012)

3.3.3. Participant Observation

The diversity of the tourist population has been an issue in the recognition of consumption patterns of international tourists in San Cristóbal. Therefore, the choice was made to adopt a participant observation approach and join a group of Dutch packaged tour tourists in and around San Cristóbal. This was also beneficial for the research, because of the lack of packaged tour tourists included in the survey. This participant observation approach gave the opportunity to study the meanings and roles of San Cristóbal for a group of tourists in-depth. By adopting this approach thus more

could be known about the tourists' consumption patterns in San Cristóbal and the role the town played in the tour and for the participants in this tour.

The group consisted of 16 participants – 15 of them were from the Netherlands and 1 was Belgian. The tour was a 'single tour', offered by a Dutch tour operator; Fox Vakanties (Fox Vakanties, 2011a). A single tour differed somewhat from other, 'more typical', groups of packaged tours as it is a concept for 'singles that like to travel together and share their travel experiences with other singles in an organized context' (Fox Vakanties, 2011b). The tour operator notes that a 'single tour' is not a dating service, but more about sharing the experience and 'making new friends'.

The route of this tour, called the 'Viva Mexico' tour, is presented in Figure 3-3. An overview of locations the group visited during the tour is given in Figure 3-4.

FIGURE 3-3: SCHEMATIC MAP OF THE VIVA MEXICO TOUR. SOURCE: FOX VAKANTIES (2011A)

Route of the Viva Mexico Tour

DAY	ITINERARY
1	Amsterdam – Mexico City
2	Mexico City
3	Mexico City – Veracruz
4	Veracruz – Villahermosa
5	Villahermosa – Palenque
6	Palenque – Aqua Azul – San Cristóbal
7	Visiting San Juan Chamula
8	San Cristóbal – Canyon del Sumidero – Tehuantepec
9	Tehuantepec – Oaxaca
10	Oaxaca
11	Oaxaca – Taxco
12	Taxco – Acapulco
13	Acapulco
14	Acapulco – Mexico City
15	Mexico City – Amsterdam
16	Arrival in Amsterdam

FIGURE 3-4: ROUTE OF THE VIVA MEXICO TOUR. SOURCE: FOX VAKANTIES (2011A)

With this packaged tour the participants stayed in San Cristóbal de las Casas for two nights, like in some other places they visit during the tour. On the day of arrival they arrived in San Cristóbal at 4 p.m., after visiting the waterfalls of Aqua Azul and a long bus ride from Palenque. The day thereafter was a full day in and around San Cristóbal with an excursion to San Juan Chamula and Zinacantán – the two frequently visited indigenous marketplace towns near San Cristóbal – and free time to spend for the group in the afternoon. Beforehand the tour guide informed the tourists about interesting attractions in San Cristóbal, like the indigenous market of Santo Domingo, Museum Na Bolom, the centre itself with its restaurants and bars and the then-held festival of San Cristóbal on the San Cristóbal hill near the centre of the town.

During the participant observation the researcher joined as a participating tourist, which provided an insight in the roles San Cristóbal plays for the group of packaged tour tourists. It also presented the opportunity to gain an insight in the travel motivations

and expectations of both the tour and San Cristóbal in particular. The tour combined both cultural and natural attractions, which is problematic considering the typology of tourists by Smith (1977). The participating tourists were not easily categorized in one group or another, and showed an interest in combined attractions. The tour guide did however note that this particular group was often more interested in the hotel facilities then the attractions they visited. She commented that this was exceptional, as other groups of tourists were more interested in the attractions during the trip.

3.4. Positionality and Ethics

"The indigenous peoples of Chiapas are people with an own opinion and own cultures. They seem unwelcoming to tourists. Them resenting others – the Gringos – is the direct or indirect cause of scientific research. Their villages – namely Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula – have been flooded with anthropologists"

 (Ouweneel, 1995: 14-15).

Academics have since long been interested in the indigenous peoples of San Cristóbal and its surrounding villages. Extensive research has been carried out in those villages, which hampered relations between the visitors – including tourists – and the indigenous peoples, as Ouweneel (1994) argues. He warns for the potential unfriendly characteristics of the encounters between tourists and indigenous peoples in this region. In 2011, some of these problems still seemed to exist to some extent, although clearly attitudes differ from day to day, and from person to person. Feelings from expats and non-indigenous people in San Cristóbal on this subject varied. However, the notion of Ouweneel (1994) should be taken into account. Scientific research should never cause negatively changing attitudes (Kitchin & Tate: 2000, 35) and harm the research subject in any way.

The focus of this research has been on the place of San Cristóbal and a combination of host-communities and international tourists. During the fieldwork the researcher was often taken for a tourist; in fact he could even fit the definition of a tourist by Johnston et al. (2000). This appearance of being a tourist was used as an advantage whilst travelling with other tourists, surveying them and asking them questions about their experiences as a tourist in San Cristóbal. He was often not recognized as a researcher, but his position was a disadvantage in gathering information from some locals and the indigenous peoples, as potential answers were often geared towards tourists. Only on the Santo Domingo market, when making observations using a notebook and during the surveys the researcher was seen as a researcher.

As Kitchin & Tate (2000: 35) point out, 'the researcher should never harm the participating respondents' lives, values and/or believes in any way during the research'. This was somewhat problematic in the cross-cultural context of this research, as the researcher could not be fully aware of the values and/or believes of the respondents. It had however been an important consideration during the research. Interviews with key informants were taped if possible and if agreed upon by the respondent. No consent was given on anonymity and the issue was not raised during the fieldwork.

This research had been carried out from the perspective of a first-time visitor to San Cristóbal, with a western background. An important consideration for this research, as it takes place in a development context. Most of the underlying ideas, perceived processes and eventually the results of the research could differ somewhat if the research had a different background. For instance, Mexican students or San Cristóbal natives would be more familiar with specific customs and cultural expressions, which

were often so different from the researcher than his familiar context. His advantage however is the ability to look at processes with 'fresh eyes', potentially seeing processes that insiders would not be able to notice anymore (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005).

To conclude this paragraph, the background of many western visitors to San Cristóbal should be considered. Recently, many projects have been started to help indigenous communities in the region and the town itself. These projects are often met with criticism and they are sometimes perceived as neo-colonialism (Williams, 2009). As Valentine (2005) points out, the cultural and economic powers of the first-world countries influence relationships between North American and European researchers working in a development context. Informants may feel beholden to cooperate with the researcher. During this research, this seemed to not be the case. San Cristóbal is a place frequented by tourists and many people in the town are in frequent contact with visitors from other countries, which might 'ease' intercultural communications.

4. The Production of Tourist Place San Cristóbal

4.1. Introduction

It seems appropriate to start with the production side of the tourist place as the way in which the tourist place is produced motivates tourists to come and consume San Cristóbal. In this chapter a brief history of the development of tourism in San Cristóbal is presented, and then the tourist domain of San Cristóbal is introduced. This chapter will thereafter discuss the images of the tourist place that are produced to attract tourists to the town.

The town of San Cristóbal is a centre of tourism in Chiapas (Prado & Chandler, 2009). It was founded by Spanish conquistador Diego de Mazariegos in 1528 as Ciudad Real de Chiapa. Under command of Diego de Mazariegos the conquistadors sought a safe refuge in this remote region of Central America and they found one in the Jovel valley of he Chiapas highlands, at 200 metres above sea level (Ayuntamiento de San Cristóbal, 2011). The name of the town had been frequently changed overtime before the town was named San Cristóbal de las Casas. It is named in honour of Fray Bartolome de las Casas, a Spanish bishop who came to the town as a missionary and eventually became a defender of the indigenous' believes, cultures and traditions (Ayuntamiento de San Cristóbal, 2011). For long, the town had been the capital of the state of Chiapas, but nowadays the lowland city of Túxtla Gutierrez – 83 kilometres from San Cristóbal – serves as the capital of the state. The municipality of San Cristóbal, which encompasses a larger area than just the town itself, is home to some 186,000 people (INEGI, 2010).

From this chapter on the local indigenous peoples of San Cristóbal will be addressed as 'indígenas'. Indigenous peoples is a general term ascribing to all indigenous peoples of the Americas, whilst the term 'indígenas' has a strong linkage to the socio-economic situation of these peoples. The term 'indigena' is also the preferred term in academic writing (Magnoni et al., 2007). The non-indigenous population in turn will be referred to as 'ladinos', as it is the common local name for them in Chiapas and Guatemala (Little, 2004).

4.2. San Cristóbal and the Development of the Tourist Place

Before the 1970s, visitors to San Cristóbal were 'a mere trickle of well-heeled adventure tourists' (Van den Berghe, 1995: 569). They were North-American motorists on their way through Central America, Mexicans from nearby lowland cities in search for mountain scenery and a cool climate and many people with a professional interest in the indigenous peoples of the region: linguistics, historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists (Van den Berghe, 1995). However, in a few years much changed in the development of the tourist place San Cristóbal and this change was externally induced. The 'long-term-low-budget travellers' discovered the town of San Cristóbal, as Van den Berghe (1995) describes the mostly young backpackers and alternative tourists who were now visiting the place. They passed the word that the town was cheap, pleasant, and interesting, and that San Cristóbal combined a colonial atmosphere with interesting cultures and artefacts of the indigenous peoples in the surrounding villages. Since then, public and private attempts have been made to organize the production, distribution and promotion of the crafts of the indígenas, especially of pottery and weaving (Van den Berghe, 1995).

In San Cristóbal it took some time for the local population – the ladinos or non-indígenas – of the town to realize that the foreign tourists had come to see the indígenas rather than or besides the colonial town itself. San Cristóbal itself is primarily a town of ladinos, a place which was frequented by the indígenas as producers of agricultural

goods (Van den Berghe, 1994). Once the entrepreneurial elite of the town started to understand why the international tourists were interested by the indígenas they began to capitalize on it. They began marketing the indígenas as 'their indígenas', linking them to San Cristóbal, in a number of ways (Van den Berghe, 1995). For one, an explicit linkage was made between the living and the dead Mayas. The tourist discourse on the local indígenas as 'modern Maya' was created (Magnoni et al., 2007). Whilst accessible Mayan ruins are all several hours away, San Cristóbal began branding itself as the 'Gateway to Palenque', located 200 kilometres from the town (Van den Berghe, 1994). Hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies displayed archaeological posters or photographs of Maya sites or used Mayan names (Morris, 1984). Hotels and merchants for instance started using the Tzotzil name for San Cristóbal, 'Jovel'. Secondly, a re-evaluation of the indígenas' contribution to the town's economy had been made. Nowadays, they are much more seen as an asset to the town instead of a source of food products and of cheap agricultural labour (Van den Berghe, 1995). San Cristóbal owes much of its economic life – via tourism – to the presence of the indígenas. Before the first wave of tourists in the 1970s local ladinos saw the indígenas as backward, primitive, and impoverished, who came to town to trade but lived in the villages surrounding the town (Van den Berghe, 1995). A rigid etiquette of inequality and discrimination regulated the interaction between indígenas and ladinos (Van den Berghe, 1995). Van den Berghe (1995) comments that in 1992 discrimination was much less of an issue in San Cristóbal and the indígenas were developing socio-economically, something he saw as positive impacts of tourism. Although tourism has played a role in reducing discrimination in social interactions, it clearly still plays a role in local society.

The development of tourism and especially of international tourism in San Cristóbal has had much to do with the interest of travellers for the indígenas and Mayan cultures. The number of international tourists in Chiapas and San Cristóbal declined in 1994. The inequality of indígenas and ladinos and the marginalization of the indígenas in Mexico and Chiapas let to the Zapatista Revolution in Chiapas, on January 1th 1994. San Cristóbal was occupied by members of this movement and functioned as the communicative centre of the Zapatista movement (Ouweneel, 1994). The Zapatistas applied Marxist class rhetoric to communicate their ideas on a variety of subjects associated with the etiquette of inequality and discrimination that regulated indigena-ladino interactions. In the end one of the outcomes of the conflict was the militarization of Chiapas. Tourism to the region was in decline, as Chiapas made headlines. Tourists were however not the target of either Zapatista or federal forces (Ouweneel, 1994). Nowadays, the Zapatista movement still exists, supporting the same cause. It is supported by ladinos in San Cristóbal as well, like in other parts of Mexico. Signs and slogans referring to the Zapatistas are highly visible in the streets of San Cristóbal and it is actively marketed to tourists as well. The signs of the Zapatistas are not longer just reflected as slogans on walls or as part of an underground movement, they are also images on t-shirts and postcards sold to tourists. Oventik, a Zapatista stronghold in the vicinity of San Cristóbal even functions as the destination for organized day trips from San Cristóbal (Prado & Chandler, 2009). There are more leftists and Marxist institutions that deal with the same themes of discrimination and equality as the Zapatistas, indicating the continuing problematic nature of local social relations. However, the indígenas are the subject of respectful curiosity on the part of international tourists and ladinos began to modify their attitudes and behaviour towards indígenas in that light (Van den Berghe, 1995). Processes intertwined with tourism – such as the rise of NGOs and the expat-community in the town – should however not be neglected as important factors in the reduction of discrimination in indigena-ladino interactions. They play an

important role in shaping the tourist place of San Cristóbal in 2011, as discussed in the upcoming paragraph.

4.3. Tourist Domain of San Cristóbal

Many different actors can be involved in the production of tourist places, including tourists themselves. However, research on the relationships between these tourists and the tourist places, which they inhabit, are often based on locations which are exclusively constructed for tourists, such as the Mexican 'Clubmex' resorts (Casagrande, 1988; Deery et al., 2012). On those places interactions between tourists and the local communities are limited, comparing them to the interactions in San Cristóbal. This can pose problems for this research project, as relationships and interactions between tourists and the host-communities seem to play an important role for the tourist place of San Cristóbal. In fact, one of the primary motivations for tourists to visit the town in 1992 was because of their interest in the meeting with or encounter of 'the other'; a group of the host-communities (Van den Berghe, 1994). Shaw & Williams (2004) discuss tourism as an integral part of cultural formation, rather than a force that exists outside local cultures. They suggest that tourists indeed shape the tourist place. In this paragraph the actors involved in the production of the tourist place San Cristóbal are discussed. Thereafter, a geographical consideration of the tourist domain is presented.

One of the pioneers of tourism in San Cristóbal was a Swiss widow of a Danish anthropologist who lived in San Cristóbal. Her 19th century house has served as a combination of library, museum, hostelry and prime tourism attraction for nearly half-a-century and consciousness of the indígenas in the region was raised, also as them being a marketable resource (Van den Berghe, 1994).

From the pioneers of tourism on, expats have played and still do play an important role in facilitating and catering tourism in San Cristóbal, and international tourism in particular. The private sector in the town implements ideas about tourism and the ways in which the actors in the public sector produce the tourist place. As an image of place is created, restaurants, hotels, merchants and other actors who are directly involved in tourism are influenced by this image. In order to 'fit' the expectations and the meanings of the tourist place as ascribed to by tourists, they re-create the tourist place by changing names and products on sale. For San Cristóbal, both Mayan and colonial names are embraced by local merchants. In the town, tourism plays an important role and many actors are involved in tourism – both direct and indirect. This is for instance reflected in the number of workers in the tourism industry; according to DataTur (2004) in 2004 an estimated 27% of San Cristóbal's total workforce was working with tourists, both direct and indirect.

The governmental actors are often important actors – actors with power – in the tourism industry and the creation of a tourist place. This is the case in San Cristóbal as well. As noted earlier, the Mexican government is and has been extremely conscious about tourism and the potential of Mexico in this industry. This is for instance reflected in the 'Secretaría de Turismo', or SECTUR; the federal governing body regarding tourism (SECTUR, 2011). One of their tasks is the regional promotion of Mexico – both internationally and domestically. For San Cristóbal and the five southern states of Mexico the Mundo Maya program is in effect (SECTUR, 2012). The national objective of this program is the promotion of the region by developing new products and to consolidate the existing products in the context of sustainable tourism development, with the participation of public and private parties and incorporating local communities (SECTUR, 2012). The sustainable development of tourism in this region seems to the

problematic when regarding 'ethnic tourism', as others already noted the self-destroying nature of this type of tourism (Van den Berghe, 1994).

There are however other public actors that are primarily involved in the construction of the tourist place of San Cristóbal, they are at state-level of Chiapas and the town's municipality itself. They further enhance and implement federal policies regarding tourism on other levels of geographical significance. The state bureau of tourism in Chiapas seems to emphasize the diversity of attractions for tourists in Chiapas. On their website they list the various destinations, segments of tourist attractions and types of travel; for families, young people, elderly and religious vacations. They position San Cristóbal mainly as a centre of ethnic tourism, as they list the surrounding towns and the 'Maya presence' as two major attractions. San Cristóbal is not seen as a centre of nature tourism – often ethnic and natural tourism is combined (Graburn, 1978), but the town's cultural life is described in detail (Secretaría de Turismo Chiapas, 2012).

Figure 4-1: Map of Downtown San Cristóbal de las Casas, higlighting places interesting for international tourists. Source: Prado & Chandler (2009)presents a map of the centre of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Incoming tourists usually arrive from the Carretera Panamericana, in the far south of the map. Those who arrive by public transport get off the bus here along the carretera or in the bus terminal at the Carretera/Insurgentes. Most of the places tourists frequent are located north from here, around the Zócalo or central square of San Cristóbal. The main pedestrian walkways are highlighted in the map in grey; they are Real de Guadelupe, 20 de Noviembre and Miguel Hidalgo. The streets, known as 'el Andador', are the main tourists shopping areas of San Cristóbal and the streets intersect on the Zócalo and the adjacent square in front of the cathedral of San Cristóbal. On the northern end of the Andador is the indigena market of Santo Domingo. Tourism – both tourists and facilities for tourists – is spread out over the city centre of San Cristóbal, but when one goes further from the Zócalo less tourist activity can be seen. Only a small part of the city centre seems to be exclusively aimed at tourists, whilst in many other streets a mixture of facilities for locals and tourists can be observed. Van den Berghe (1994) noted that in 1992 a significant smaller part of San Cristóbal was aimed at tourists. There were few hotels, restaurants and other facilities; which were above all not exclusively for tourists, but aimed at the local population as well. Tourism nowadays is more widespread geographically and more intertwined in – shared - spaces.

FIGURE 4-1: MAP OF DOWNTOWN SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS, HIGLIGHTING PLACES INTERESTING FOR INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS. SOURCE: PRADO & CHANDLER (2009)

DOWNTOWN SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS

To Museo de la Medicina Maya

To Moxviquil Reserve and Orchid Garden

To Parador San Juan de Diós

COMBIS AND COLECTIVO TAXIS TO SAN ANDRÉS LARRAINZAR AND OVENTIK

COMBIS TO ZINACANTÁN

COMBIS TO SAN JUAN CHAMULA

EDGAR ROBLEDO

COLECTIVO TAXIS TO CHENALHÓ

COMBIS TO HUITEPEC RESERVE

DÍAZ ORDAZ

COLONIA REVOLUCIÓN

COMBIS TO TENEJAPA

HONDURAS

COSTA RICA

CALZ LÁZARO CÁRDENAS

EL MAYOREO

Mercado José Castillo

BERMUDAS

BARRIO DE MEXICANOS

ECUADOR ARGENTINA COLOMBIA

NICARAGUA

TEMPLO DE MEXICANOS

MUSEO DE LOS ALTOS DE CHIAPAS

SNA JOLOBIL

COMBIS TO TEOPISCA

DIAGONAL ARRIAGA

SIMOJOVEL

TONALA

BARRIO EL CERRILLO

SOL Y LUNA GUEST INN/ GALERÍA STUDIO CERRILLO

VILLAS CASA MORADA

LOS PINGÜINOS

KUKU RUTZ

REAL DE MEXICANOS

POSADA BELÉN

TEMPLO Y EX-CONVENTO DE SANTO DOMINGO DE GUZMÁN

AV. CRISTÓBAL COLÓN

CHIAPA DE CORZO

PICHUCALCO

NA BALOM

ROSSCO BACKPACKERS HOSTEL

LA CASA EN EL ÁRBOL

Plaza El Cerrillo

TEMPLO DE EL CERRILLO

TUXTLA

POSADA MOGUEL

HUIXTLA

BRASIL CANADA BELICE

VENEZUELA

TEMPLO DE LA CARIDAD

COMITÁN

HOTEL POSADA 5

PIZZERÍA EL PUNTO

CHICO

TAPACHULA

PLANET HOSTEL

GUATEMALA

ARTESANÍA MARKET

BELA'S B&B

CASA DE PAN PAPALOTL

LA CASA ROSADA

DR. NAVARRO

MUSEO/GALERÍA DE ARTE CONTEMPOREANO ELISA BURKHARD

ESCUADRÓN 201

EL LOCUTORIO

HOTEL CASA MEXICANA

POSADA LA CASA DE CARMELITA

EJERCITO NACIONAL

AV. 5 DE MAYO

AV. 16 DE SEPTIEMBRE

28 DE AGOSTO

AV. 20 DE

AV. GENERAL UTRILLA

AV. B DOMÍNGUEZ

REVOLUCIÓN CAFÉ

FLAVIO A PANIAGUA

TALLER LEÑATEROS

1 DE MARZO

HOTEL POSADA JOVEL

14 DE SEPTIEMBRE

AV. 12 DE OCTUBRE

EXPLORA ECOTURISMO Y AVENTURA

KINOKI

TEATRO DANIEL ZEBADÚA

MUSEO MESOAMERICANO DEL JADE

EL ZIRKO

CAFÉ MUSEO CAFÉ

AV. DIEGO DUGELAY

AV. VICENTE GUERRERO

HOTEL POSADA EL PARAÍSO

FALAFEL

EL KIOSKO

MA. ADELINA FLORES

NICOLÁS RUIZ

5 DE FEBRERO

LA CATEDRAL DE SAN CRISTÓBAL

LIBRERÍA CHILAM BALAM

PERFIDIA

HOTEL CASA VIEJA

To EL ROMERILLO, El Arcotete, Templo Carmen Arcotete, and Tenejapa

EL MERCADITO

CRAZY SCOOTERS

MUSEO DE TRAJES REGIONALES SERGIO CASTRO

LA CASA DEL BAGEL

SENDASUR

LIBRERÍA MAYAMBÉ

EL ANTRO DEL FOTÓGRAFO

GUADALUPE VICTORIA

To Cinépolis, Chedraui, Immigration Office, Teatro de las Ciudad, Huitepec Reserve, and SAN JUAN CHAMULA

LIBERINTO

BARRIO DE LA MERCED

TOURIST OFFICE

PALACIO MUNICIPAL

EL ZÓCALO

HOTEL CASA MARGARITA/ AGENCIA CHINCULTIK

SEE DETAIL

REAL DE GUADALUPE

LIBRERÍA SOLUNA

NAJEL

MEXICANA

iPOD TOURS

HOTEL POSADA REAL DE CHIAPAS

ISKRA

NEMI ZAPATA

PIERRE

To Ruta Nahual and Templo de Guadalupe

BARRIO DE GUADALUPE

LAVANDERÍA DEL SOL

PIZZERÍA EL PUNTO

CENTRO CULTURAL EL PUENTE/ CINEMA EL PUENTE

TEMPLO Y EX-CONVENTO DE LA MERCED

ÓPTIMA CAR RENTAL

Parque La Merced

DIEGO DE MAZARIEGOS

DOÑA ÁME TAMALES

FARMACIA SIMILARES

BANCOMER

CASA DE MAZARIEGOS

LATINO'S

FRANCISCO I MADERO

INSTITUTO DE LENGUAS JOVEL

MUSEO DEL AMBAR DE CHIAPAS

POST OFFICE

LA PARED

LA PALOMA

SANTÉ CAFÉ

GALERÍA DE ARTE FOTOGRÁFICO ALBERTINA

HOSTAL POSADA MÉXICO

CASA FELIPE FLORES/ FELIPE FLORES TOURS & TRAVEL

DR. JOSÉ F FLORES

CUAUHTÉMOC

LA PALMA

LA SELVA CAFÉ

HOTEL POSADA SAN CRISTÓBAL

AV. MIGUEL HIDALGO

BANAMEX

TEMPLO DE LA COMPAÑIA

TIENDA EL ARCO IRIS

AV. JOSEFA ORTIZ

AV. JM SANTIAGO

FRANCISCO LEÓN

NIÑOS HÉROES

CASA DE LAS ARTESANÍAS

ANABANANA

MADRE TIERRA/ ZAPATA TOURS

TEMPLO DE SAN FRANCISCO

PEDRO MORENO

IGNACIO ALLENDE

TEMPLO SAN CRISTÓBAL (EL CERRITO)

HNOS. DOMÍNGUEZ

CASA DE CULTURA

MERCADO DE DULCES Y ARTESANÍAS/EL COLETO TRANVÍA TURÍSTICA

JULIO M CORZO

LA ALMOLONGA

TEMPLO Y EX-CONVENTO DEL CARMEN

ARCO-TORRE DEL CARMEN

BARRIO DE SANTA LUCÍA

HOSPITAL REGIONAL

RAMÓN CORONA

ALVARO OBREGÓN

BARRIO SAN ANTONIO

AV. CRESCENCIO ROSAS

AV. MIGUEL HIDALGO

AV. INSURGENTES

TEMPLO DE SANTA LUCIA

AV. BENITO JUÁREZ

TEMPLO DE SAN NICOLÁS

SUPER MÁS

HOTEL SAN MARTÍN

TICKET BUS

BUGAMBILIA

REAL DE GUADALUPE

EL ZÓCALO

LA MILAGROSA

LA VIÑA DE BACCO

IL PICCOLO

RESTAURANTE CAFETERIA EL CENTRO

To Chiapa de Corzo, Cañon del Sumidero, Tuxtla International Airport, and Tuxtla Gutiérrez

BLVD JUAN SABINES GUTIÉRREZ (CARRETERA PANAMERICANA)

To Bungalows del Sol, Grutas de Rancho Nuevo, Amatenango del Valle, Comitán, and Palenque

SCALE NOT AVAILABLE

FIRST-CLASS BUS TERMINAL

© AVALON TRAVEL

San Cristóbal is not just a tourist place; it is a town where local communities life their everyday life, with or without tourists. To illustrate the socio-geographical boundaries of the 'tourist' San Cristóbal with the 'everyday' San Cristóbal, the tourist domain of Cancún is juxtaposed. Van den Berghe (1994) expressed a hope that San Cristóbal would not become a Cancún in the mountains, and the tourist places are very different in their geographical and societal boundaries.

The fourteen-kilometre long stretch of hotels on the island off Cancún's coast is a fine representation of a classic 'tourist bubble'; a place that has the best amenities, facilities and infrastructure and is a place where tourists stay and interact, primarily with other tourists (Torres & Momsen, 2005). Many tourists in Cancún never leave this bubble, remaining oblivious to socio-economic conditions of the local communities. The island is linked only on its northern and southern extremities with the mainland, ensuring privacy and exclusion for tourists (Torres & Momsen, 2005). For most of Cancún's population the tourist zone is an exclusive place of tourist consumption to be experienced only from a bus window, a kitchen or through the prism of some other subservient role (Torres & Momsen, 2005). For those who are not working in a tourism-related role the bubble is vivid in the geographical imagination – as a luxurious, inaccessible place providing sustenance to the city, a distant skyline (Torres & Momsen, 2005).

In San Cristóbal, the tourist bubble is definitely less obvious, but not non-existent. Tourists and local communities share the spaces in the centre of the town – partly due to its small-scale – but perform distinctly different roles. Restaurants, bars and shops in the centre are frequented by tourists – both international and national – but are seemingly too expensive for the local population. They go to other places, other bars and restaurants, which definitely do not cater to tourists. Restaurants in the centre sometimes have an English menu and offer international cuisine, shops have postcards, international books or products that appeal to tourists as souvenirs or camera equipment. The streets in the centre are cleaner, the shops more expensive and the products on sale are more internationally oriented. Also, travel agencies have prime locations on the main pedestrian streets; they offer relatively expensive day-trips from San Cristóbal to archaeological sites, indigenous villages or natural attractions.

Tourism is a phenomenon that is hard to isolate form other societal processes, something that has been discussed in the theoretical framework and something that resounds in the analysis of actors who construct the tourist place of San Cristóbal. Virtually anyone known to San Cristóbal is – up-to-a-point – an actor who constructs the place for – other – tourists. For the town, tourism is notably intertwined with other processes of internationalization. Some might even say that the expat community of San Cristóbal accelerates tourism, as the pioneers of tourism in San Cristóbal were expats who put the indígenas of the region in the spotlight. Nowadays, the expats play an important role in creating the tourist place as they are more aware of the things international tourists want to see or experience in the town and they start NGOs, for which international visitors work. Nowadays, they are the owners of international restaurants and organizers of day-trips from San Cristóbal.

The population of San Cristóbal tends to be progressive and bohemian, like the majority of foreign travellers and expats (Prado & Chandler, 2009). This might be more a feeling then a reality, as it are primarily those involved in tourism and the expats in San Cristóbal who seem to be progressive and bohemian. In San Cristóbal, they keep up facilities; there are numerous art-house theatres, coffee bars, cultural centres and international restaurants. San Cristóbal is home to myriad NGOs and research organizations. According to Prado & Chandler (2009: 71) 'this creates a unique social

milieu, one that is both thoughtful and a lot of fun'. These mentioned institutions are bringing visitors to San Cristóbal; visitors who are in town not just for leisure. The institutions themselves tend to be progressive and leftist, probably fuelled by a Zapatista sentiment that one can still 'experience' in the town (Prado & Chandler, 2009). San Cristóbal is home to expats from Europe, North American and Latin-American countries, and the town has a culturally diverse population.

4.4. Governmental Actors in the Production of the Tourist Place

Governmental actors play a key role in the production of the tourist place of San Cristóbal. Therefore, this paragraph discussed the ways in which those actors produce San Cristóbal and which instruments they use. The government of Mexico is very tourism conscious, but in terms of development investments are highly concentrated to certain areas along the coastlines of the country (Brenner, 2010). For the whole country the SECTUR – the federal secretary of tourism in Mexico – uses various programs to promote Mexico. They divide Mexico in certain regions, of which the 'Mundo Maya' is the region of San Cristóbal and the state of Chiapas (SECTUR, 2012). The Mundo Maya program was started in the early '90s as the Ruta Maya project, but was quickly renamed to Mundo Maya. It was an ambitious regional project designed to showcase and preserve the shared cultural, historical and natural heritage of the five countries that were to co-operate in this project; Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras (Little, 2008). There was a lot of interest for the Mayan heritage in the western world at that time (Groote & Druijven, 2005), which made the region show a lot of potential for tourism development. The highlights of the Mundo Maya region are the archaeological sites, but sun-sea-sand resort of Cancún became the most-well known tourist destination in the region (Groote & Druijven, 2005). For Mexico, only the five southern states are promoted as Mundo Maya; they are Quintana Roo, Yucatán, Campeche, Tabasco and Chiapas (Magnoni et al., 2007; SECTUR, 2012). These states all possess a share of Mayan archaeological sites, as shown with red dots in Figure 4-2.

FIGURE 4-2: ANCIENT MAYA SITES IN MEXICO. SOURCE: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, 2012

The principal idea of the Mundo Maya project was that the region should be promoted primarily as a Mayan region (Little, 2008; Magnoni et al., 2007). Different components, such as past and present, culture and nature were connected to one another within this concept. It also involved the creation of representations of Mayas as being timeless and linked with the region, which has been communicated through archaeological projects and the media (Little, 2008); eventually in tourist representations as well. It explicitly linked the present-day indígenas with the ancient Mayan cultures, whilst generally not discussing the ways in which the 'modern Mayas' live within these projects (Castañeda, 1996; Hervik, 1998). The Mundo Maya project has developed a network of sites ranging from pre-Columbian Mayan ruins to cities with Spanish colonial architecture and contemporary 'modern Mayan' towns and marketplaces (Little, 2008).

In 2011 the Mexican secretary of tourism still uses the Mundo Maya concept to produce tourist places in the South of Mexico. In 2012, the SECTUR launched a new marketing campaign for the Mundo Maya, to coincide with the renewed interest in the Mayas and the Maya calendar in the western world (SECTUR, 2012). Figure 4-3 shows the banner of the SECTUR on this program. The text on the right makes an explicit link with the 'end of the era'; an idea which is popularized and communicated in the western world. On the banner no images of indígenas are shown, contrary to the ideas of the Mundo Maya. There are only images of a Mayan archaeological site and artefacts. However, in a video clip supporting the Mundo Maya 2012 campaign by SECTUR (2012) more familiar images are shown; they combine the indígenas – often young and female – with archaeological sites. Fragments show indígenas running over ruins or having

celebrations on these locations – suggesting a linkage between the two. Other fragments show western tourists joining 'traditional' activities or as adventurers on top of an archaeological site. Examples of these images are shown in Figure 4-4. It is not until the end of the clip were other elements of these places that make the Mundo Maya are presented; representations of the colonial town of San Cristóbal and natural sights on Yucatán and in Chiapas are briefly shown. They seem to be less important then the Maya in this new campaign, which focuses more exclusively on the 'modern Maya' and the archaeological sites.

FIGURE 4-3: MUNDO MAYA 2012 BANNER. SOURCE: SECTUR, 2012

FIGURE 4-4: IMAGES OF THE MUNDO MAYA 2012 CLIP. SOURCE: SECTUR (2012)

4.5. Tourist Representations of San Cristóbal

The tourist product of San Cristóbal, the image of the place, which is created primarily by governmental actors in terms of values and meanings associated with Mayas, should resound in the ways San Cristóbal is represented by other actors in the tourism industry. In this paragraph tourist representations of San Cristóbal for international tourists on Dutch packaged tour websites and in international guidebooks is analysed. This is a selection of media, as it would be undoable to analyse all the different media in which San Cristóbal is represented. The websites of Dutch packaged tour operators were chosen because one of those groups was joined and because of the importance of representations of tourist places on websites. The guidebooks were chosen as representations for other more individual tourists who are on a lower budget. Tourists who do not travel in packaged tours often use them.

For representations by Dutch packaged tour operators both textual and photographic representations on their websites were used, combining them with the route that was offered in the tour. In Figure 4-5 the names of the routes, which were analysed, are presented. These tours were found by searching for tours to Mexico on their websites. When different tours to Mexico, or including a visit to Mexico, were offered the tour in which most time was spend in the south of Mexico was chosen.

- ‘The Search for Mayas and Aztecs’ (Fox Vakanties, 2012c);
- ‘The Mexico of the Mayas’ (Summum.nl, 2012);
- ‘Experience Mayan Culture’ (Djoser, 2012).
- ‘Mundo Maya’ (Oad Reizen, 2012)
- ‘Mundo Maya’ (Neckermann, 2012)

FIGURE 4-5: NAMES OF DUTCH PACKAGED TOURS TO SOUTHERN MEXICO

Some of these packaged tours are even offered as tours to the ‘Mundo Maya’, which shows that the specific branding of the region as a Mayan region is communicated via tour operators to tourists. All these tours specifically link the tour to the Mayas - often focussing on the Mayas of the past – and tour operators thus adopt meanings subscribed to the Mundo Maya by governmental actors. The tour operators differ somewhat from one another by the route they offer the participating tourists. Both of the ‘Mundo Maya’ named tours only visit Mexico and do not offer visits to other Mundo Maya participating nations, such as Belize or Guatemala. This has something to do with political instability and other organizational difficulties. Most of the tours offered are 15 days, so choices for places and different attractions have to be made. Whilst the other tours are named ‘Experiencing Mayan culture’ and ‘The Search for Mayas and Aztecs’ none of the tours present the ‘modern Maya’ as the primary attraction, whilst it is often named as one of the attractions. In these tours, there is not a strong focus on specific attractions and natural, cultural and ethnic attractions are combined in the tours. This present some issues with the typology of tourists by Smith (1977) as they have different ‘roles’ as tourists at different times and at different places.

All but one of the tours includes a visit to San Cristóbal and the tours that do visit the town spend at least one night in the town. The others include travel descriptions in which San Cristóbal is briefly mentioned, but the primary reason for visiting them town seems to be the indigenous marketplace villages of Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula. The tour offered by Neckermann (2012) does not include a visit to San Cristóbal. One of the primary reasons for not visiting the town is that this route only takes seven days and is designed for tourists to extend their stay in Cancún or the Riviera Maya. San Cristóbal is hard to reach from Yucatán; it can easily take 4 hours from Palenque by bus. The Neckermann (2012) tour neglects the ‘modern Maya’ in representations and instead

focuses heavily on archaeological sites, opposing some of the fundamental ideas of the Mundo Maya project. In Figure 4-6 the route of the Mundo Maya tour offered by Neckermann (2012) is presented.

During the fieldwork in San Cristóbal a group of Dutch packaged tour tourists was joined. They were on the Viva Mexico tour, offered by Fox Vakanties. As can be drawn from Figure 4-5 this tour operator offers another packaged tour more focused on the Aztecs and the Maya. The routes offered differ; the Viva Mexico tour is a round-trip from Mexico City to the South of Mexico, excluding Yucatán. The other trip takes participants from the capital to the South - places which are included in the Viva Mexico tour as well – but then onto the Yucatán peninsula where more archaeological sites are visited. For the Viva Mexico tour, photographic representations included in the travel description on the website of the tour operator are shown in Figure 4-7.
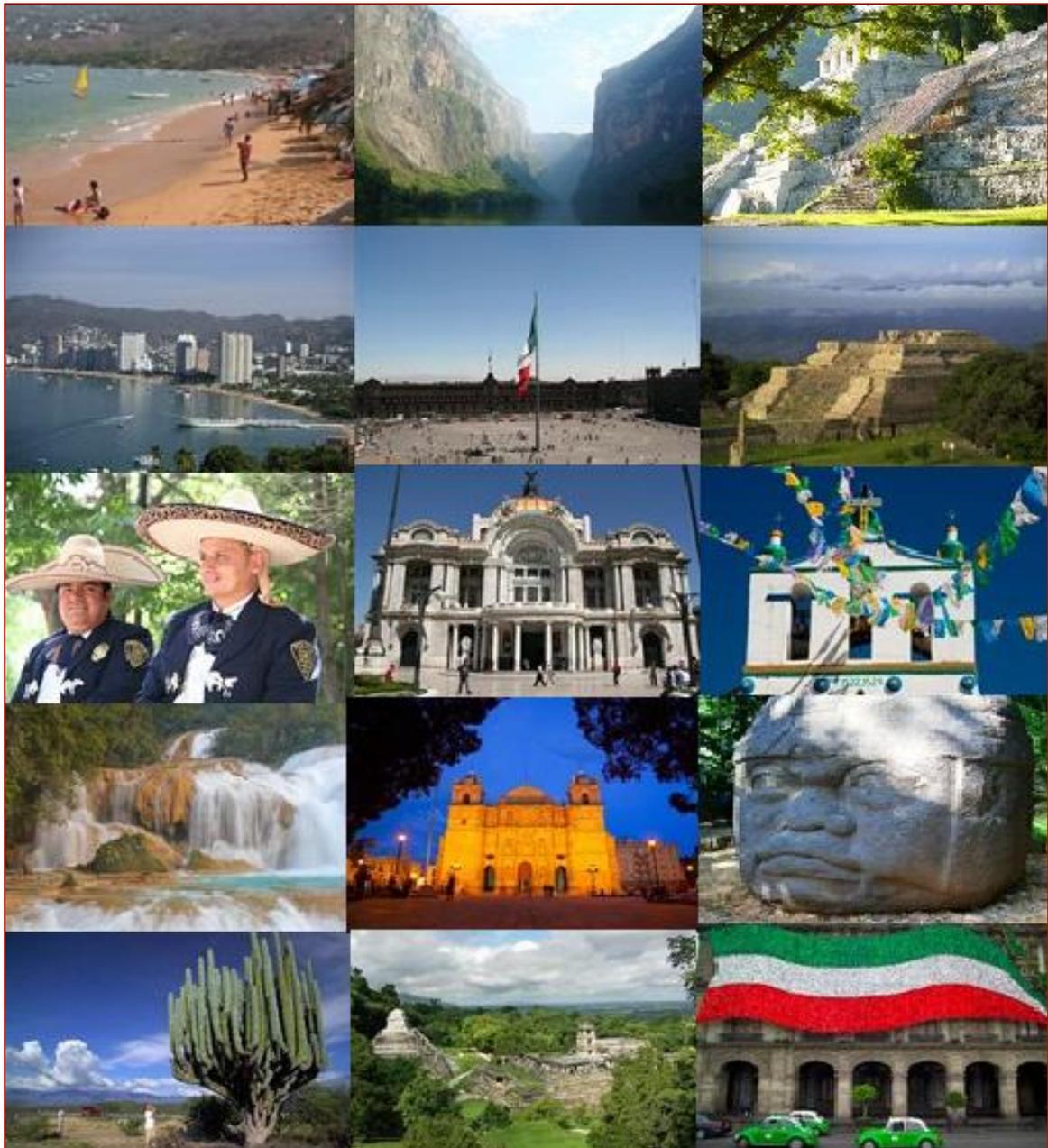
49

FIGURE 4-7: PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF MEXICO IN THE VIVA MEXICO TOUR. SOURCE: FOX VAKANTIES (2012)

The photos in Figure 4-7 provide an interesting mix of representations of Mexico; two images show the archaeological site of Palenque – first row on the right and the fifth row in the middle, and two images show sites near San Cristóbal; the Canyon del Sumidero is in the middle of the first row and the church of San Juan Chamula is on the third row right. No images of San Cristóbal itself were included in these photographic representations, whilst six of the representations show buildings, and an additional four show archaeological sites. The lack of people on the pictures is noticeable, as only one features them; officers wearing sombreros. There does not appear to be a specific link to the Mayas or indígenas. The church of San Juan Chamula is shown, but it does not feature specific indigena-elements on the picture. The representations suggest that the tour features diversified places and diversified attractions; from natural scenery to the Zócalo in the capital and an indigenous village. For the Chiapas part of the tour the

following descriptions were in the day-by-day travel schedule on the Fox Vakanties (2012) website:

<div style="background-color:#990000; color:white; padding:1em;">

Textual Representations of Chiapas in the Viva Mexico Tour

On day 5: "Today we'll go to the spectacular Mayan city of Palenque. We travel through impressing Mexican nature. During midday we arrive at Palenque, hidden in the jungle and one of the highlights of our travel! We'll visit these ruins in the afternoon."

On day 6: "This is one of the most beautiful routes of our trip, as we'll go on the highlands of Chiapas to San Cristóbal, an ambient colonial city at 2200 metres. En-route, we will visit the waterfalls of Aqua Azul; to swim in the incredibly blue waters. San Cristóbal de las Casas is located in a beautiful valley and is surrounded by colourful Indian villages. You'll find nice cafes, restaurants, markets and shops there."

On day 7: "We will visit the Indian village of San Juan Chamula. Entering the church will be some experience. The Tzotzil Indians have their own rituals: pine needles are on the floor, burning candles everywhere and the catholic sculptures have mirrors to reflect

</div>

FIGURE 4-8: TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF CHIAPAS IN THE VIVA MEXICO TOUR. SOURCE: FOX VAKANTIES (2012)

In these textual representations an image of the tourist place San Cristóbal is created in which the indígenas play a more prominent role. Fox Vakanties (2012) mentions the 'indian villages' and the rituals of the Tzotzils, whilst in the photographic representations only the photo of San Juan Chamula's church could be seen as an indígena-representation. San Cristóbal is clearly not just a tourist place that is centred on the indígenas; the cafes, restaurants, markets and shops are mentioned as well. Fox Vakanties (2012) has another tour that visits San Cristóbal, in which the town is represented textually as 'the heart of the Maya culture in Mexico […] with inhabitants in colourful clothing […] on the market you will find handmade souvenirs' (Fox Vakanties, 2012). In general, the indigena – who are not necessarily communicated as modern Maya – play a role in representations of San Cristóbal for packaged tour tourists, depending on the route and length of the tour. In different trips different images of the tourist place are produced, dependent on San Cristóbal's role in that tour.

In these representations on websites of tour operators places like San Cristóbal are often only briefly mentioned. Representations of tourist places are often visual and photos are frequently used to promote places. In these images San Cristóbal is often represented as a colonial town; showing small streets and low colonial houses. On the Fox Vakanties website, in the 'Search for the Mayas and the Aztecs' tour, San Cristóbal is represented with the image in Figure 4-9. It is an image of the Real de Guadelupe, one of the shopping streets in the tourist area of the town.

FIGURE 4-9: REPRESENTATION OF COLONIAL SAN CRISTÓBAL. SOURCE: FOX VAKANTIES (2012)

In some ways the packaged tour tourists could be considered more accidental visitors on the tourist places they visit then individual tourists. The latter group often makes a conscious decision for going to a certain tourist place, for which they often use guidebooks. In these guidebooks the facilities and the characteristics of tourist places are described. In Figure 4-10 representations of San Cristóbal in two guidebooks are presented.

San Cristóbal in Guidebooks

To illustrate the ways in which San Cristóbal is represented to international tourists – backpackers and tourists who use guidebooks – the way in which the town is described in two guidebooks is shown. The Lonely Planet Mexico, the most popular of the guidebooks, and the Moon Handbook which is promoted as an 'alternative and off-the-beaten-track' guidebook.

Lonely Planet

"It's a pleasure to explore San Cristóbal's cobbled streets and markets, soaking up on the unique ambience and the wonderfully clear highland light. This medium-sized city also boasts a comfortable blend of city and countryside, with restored century-old houses giving way to grazing animals and fields of corn. Surrounded by dozens of traditional Tzotzil and Tzeltal villages, San Cristóbal is at the heart of one of the most deeply rooted indigenous areas in Mexico. A great base for local and regional exploration, it's a place where ancient customs coexist with modern luxuries." (Armstrong et al., 2010)

Moon Handbook

"San Cristóbal is a city of many layers, a place to delve into, not merely admire. It is first and foremost a lovely colonial town, easily one of Mexico's finest. […] But San Cristóbal is more than just a pretty face; the indigenous presence is stronger and more visible then in any other Mexican city. […] San Cristóbal's non-indigenous population tends to be progressive and bohemian, as are the majority of foreign travellers and expats." (Prado & Chandler, 2009)

FIGURE 4-10: SAN CRISTÓBAL IN GUIDEBOOKS

For international tourists a product of the tourist place San Cristóbal is created of a place of indígenas and a colonial town. The indígenas in the town are sometimes explicitly linked to Mayas and placed in a Mayan framework, depending on the type of guide. San Cristóbal is for international tourists part of Mundo Maya tours, but it also features in tours of Mexico or Central America. The town is also seen as a base for local and regional exploration of the state of Chiapas (Noble, 2010), as there are indigenous towns and natural attractions in the region surrounding San Cristóbal. The Mundo Maya project resounds in the ways private actors promote San Cristóbal; as a place where the indigenous peoples of Chiapas can be met. They are however not explicitly linked to the archaeological sites on the websites of tour operators and in guidebooks.

To understand the product of the tourist place of San Cristóbal for international tourists a comparison with the product for domestic tourists is interesting. San Cristóbal and the state of Chiapas are actively marketed for tourism purposes in Mexico as well. San Cristóbal was for instance promoted by being the setting of Mexican telenovela 'Mi Pecado', something which was proudly pointed out by a member of the tourist office in the town. A song of Chiapas, 'Yo soy Chiapas' is also frequently used to promote the state and San Cristóbal plays a prominent role in the tourist image of Chiapas that is produced. When asked, the tourist board in San Cristóbal – which is run by the state's tourism secretariat – commented that San Cristóbal is promoted as being 'exotic' for domestic tourists. The indígenas play a prominent role in representations to Mexican tourists as well, and images, which are more seen as typical for Central-America as for Mexico, are attached to the tourist image of Chiapas. For most of the Mexican tourists Chiapas is said to be as exotic as for international tourists. This is for instance reflected in the way San Cristóbal is presented on the website of the Secretaría del Turismo Chiapas (2012). On their website they name attractions and ways of experiencing Chiapas and San Cristóbal; which is aimed primarily at domestic tourists. Similar attractions as for international tourists are named; 'business centres' in the town are however named as attractions for domestic tourists as well. The secretary of tourism wants the town to attract more business tourists. Another difference with the image of the tourist place created for international tourists is the 'Amber', which appeals primarily to domestic tourists. In general the product of the tourist place is quiet similar, but values and meanings of San Cristóbal that are communicated differ somewhat according to the source. The similarity of places that domestic and international tourists in Mexico visit (Brenner, 2010) seems to resound in these representations, as San Cristóbal appeals to domestic tourists like it does to international tourists.

FIGURE 4-11: SAN CRISTÓBAL'S CATHEDRAL. SOURCE: VISITMEXICO (2012)

This chapter discussed the production of the tourist place of San Cristóbal; from a brief history of the tourist place to the tourist domain and then the image of the tourist place which is created by governmental actors primarily, but communicated and altered by tour operators, in guide books and by other actors. The tourists themselves are important actors in this communication and production of tourist places. Their consumption patterns are said to be shaped by the image of place, and if these match tourists will have a better experience. Figure 4-11 presents an image of the colonial cathedral of San Cristóbal. This is an image that is often used as a photographic tourist representation of San Cristóbal – on websites of tour operators and by governmental institutions as well. It serves as a metaphor for the ways in which the tourist place San Cristóbal is produced; at first glance it seems to be an image of a colonial structure in Mexico, built several centuries ago. The façade of the church, however, features indigena elements. International tourists might often see only the colonial side to the structure, as the built environment of San Cristóbal is communicated as being colonial to these tourists. Next paragraph will discuss this consumption side of the tourist place of San Cristóbal and will shift focus to the international tourist population in the town and their interactions with the town – with ladinos, indígenas and expats.

5. The Consumption of Tourist Place San Cristóbal

5.1. Introduction

Last chapter discussed the ways in which San Cristóbal was produced as a tourist place by different actors, singling out governmental actors as those with the power to create the tourist place, which image is then used by actors who profit from tourism – tour operators, promoters and local actors as well. This chapter focuses on the other side of the interconnected process which makes a tourist place; the consumption of it.

In this chapter, the focus will first be on the tourist population in San Cristóbal. In 1992, Van den Berghe (1994) did not note a diversity of tourists. However, nowadays the tourist place is likely to be more diversified and the tourist population could be diversified as well. Thereafter the interaction of international tourists with other actors on the tourist place is discussed, comparing it with tourist place Palenque as well. Lastly, this chapter focuses on the indigenous peoples and their role in the consumption of the tourist place San Cristóbal by international tourists.

5.2. International Tourist Population in San Cristóbal

Tourist' travels are motivated in different ways and there are many different motivations to go out and travel. The population of international tourists in San Cristóbal is the focus of this paragraph and the diversity of this population can tell if the tourist attractions in San Cristóbal have been diversified as well. In 1992 the indígenas were the primary attractions for tourists in San Cristóbal (Van den Berghe, 1994), but nowadays the group of international tourists in the town is more diversified, according to Van den Berghe (1994).

" The colourful colonia town of San Cristóbal de las Casas seems at first hand a gathering place of would-be non-conformists who bore each other with badly chosen equations and feeble memories. They travel the world from the one San Cristóbal to the other and mainly interact with each other. However, after a few days it became evident that this type of tourists forms a minority. Rarely have I met such a diversity of visitors as in San Cristóbal. Because in the end everyone will visit this place."

(Van der Meulen & Duran de Huerta, 2005: 180)

San Cristóbal is a town that is visited by a heterogeneous group of tourists, with varieties of motivations. As suggested by Van der Meulen & Duran de Huerta (2005), 'everyone will visit this place'. They exaggerate, but others have noted as well that many of the international tourists in Mexico and southern Mexico in particular will eventually visit San Cristóbal. An important factor in that is the infrastructure in Chiapas; the route via San Cristóbal is one of the few ways to get to and from Yucatán from either Guatemala or Central-Mexico. Many packaged tours may visit the town primarily for this reason, but San Cristóbal is definitely more than a 'stop-over' for international tourists on their way to someplace else, it is itself a place for tourists. Neither is it a place just for ethnic tourists, who are searching for exotic cultural experiences. For some that might be the primary reason to visit the town, but others have varieties of reasons to come here. Other groups of international tourists stay for a longer period of time in town, those who work in NGOs or various cultural institutions, attend language schools, are engaged in welfare activities etc.

Arrivals and Lengths-of-Stay of Tourists in San Cristóbal

	2000	2001	2002	2003
Domestic tourist arrivals	129,047	119,736	182,025	214,580
International tourist arrivals	157,987	153,333	127,186	158,759
Average Length-of-stay domestic tourists	1.44	1.48	1.47	1.40
Average Length-of-stay international tourists	1.52	1.67	1.76	1.63

FIGURE 5-1: ARRIVALS AND LENGTHS-OF-STAY OF TOURISTS IN SAN CRISTÓBAL. SOURCE: DATATUR (2011)

The table in Figure 5-1 presents the arrivals and lengths-of-stay of both international and domestic tourists from 2000 to 2003. The numbers of tourists included are based on the tourists who stayed in hotels in San Cristóbal. In this figure an increase of domestic tourist arrivals and a stable number of international tourist arrivals can be observed. The lower number of international arrivals in 2002 coincides with a lower number of international tourist arrivals in Mexico. On average, the international tourists stayed longer than the domestic tourists in San Cristóbal, but the average length-of-stay of international tourists is between one and two nights. Unfortunately, no more recent data on tourist arrivals and lengths-of-stay was available, as key informants suggested recent years saw a decline of international tourist arrivals in San Cristóbal due to negative international publicity of Mexico (Mascareñas, 2011). Since 2002 the number of domestic tourist arrivals outnumbered the international tourist arrivals, which seems in accordance with Brenner (2010) who commented that domestic tourists often stay in the same places as international tourists in Mexico. Domestic tourism is a growing phenomenon, whilst the negative publicity has had a negative effect on international tourism in Mexico.

The lack of more recent qualitative data on international tourists and the need to get to know more about the international tourist population were primary reasons to make a survey in San Cristóbal. Figure 5-2 presents a table of the respondents, arranged by nationality. As shown in the table of the 38 respondents, 10 were Dutch – counting for 26.3% of all respondents. They are likely to be over counted in this survey as respondents were partly chosen on the language they spoke. For the Dutch, this was easily recognizable for the researcher. Likewise, international tourists from Latin-American countries were likely undercounted, as they were often perceived as being domestic tourists.

Most international tourists only stayed for one or two nights in San Cristóbal on average in 2001-2004. However, these statistics only considered check-ins at hotels in the town. In Figure 5-3 data collected on lengths-of-stay of respondents in the survey is presented. Some respondents were unsure about the number of nights they would be spending in the town, but 72% of the respondents stayed in town for no more than four nights. Groups of international tourists that stayed in the town for a longer period of time were for instance Mexicans who lived in the US and visited family in Mexico.

Table of the Nationalities of Respondents

	Frequency
Netherlands	10
Other Europe	17
United States	7
Other Nationality	4
Total	38

FIGURE 5-2: TABLE OF THE NATIONALITIES OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table of Lengths-of-Stay of Respondents in San Cristóbal

		Frequency	Per cent
Length-of-Stay in number of nights	1	5	13,2
	2	14	36,8
	3	5	13,2
	4	3	7,9
	5	1	2,6
	6	1	2,6
	8	1	2,6
	9	1	2,6
	10	1	2,6
	12	1	2,6
	25	1	2,6
	NA	4	10,5

FIGURE 5-3: TABLE OF LENGHTS-OF-STAY OF RESPONDENTS IN SAN CRISTÓBAL

Most of the international tourists included in this survey were travelling in small groups, with friends or family. Just five of the 38 respondents were travelling in an organized group or packaged tour and likely this group of international tourists is undercounted as well. This had something to do with the time of day when respondents were questioned. During the day, many packaged tour tourists are visiting places in the surroundings of San Cristóbal or have not yet arrived in the town. As many of them only stay in the town for one or two nights, the average number of nights that international tourists spend in San Cristóbal might be lower than those presented in Figure 5-3.

As international tourists spend few nights in San Cristóbal it has been suggested that San Cristóbal is part of a larger tourist route in Mexico or Central-America. This influences the role of San Cristóbal as tourists' expectations are changed according to what they have experienced. The largest group of international tourists had Palenque as their previous destinations, whilst other groups were mainly coming from Oaxaca or Guatemala. However, a wide variety of previous destinations were given; a notable number of respondents were travelling through the state of Chiapas. In general, tourists were mainly coming from other places in the state, including Palenque of which 13 of the 33 respondents had as their previous destinations. In total, 18 of the respondents visited Palenque before or after visiting San Cristóbal, indicating a combined attraction of these places. This in turn has to do not only with attractions, but with the infrastructure of Chiapas as well; it is a five-hour trip from Palenque to San Cristóbal and Palenque offers tourists an archaeological site and the waterfalls of Aqua Azul. Figure 5-5 presents Palenque and San Cristóbal as combined attractions; whilst the tourist places itself differ from each other. First, in Figure 5-4 a cross-table of previous and next destinations of the respondents in the survey is presented.

Cross-Table of Respondents' Previous and Next Destinations

Previous Destination	Next Destination					
	Palenque	Oaxaca	Mexico-City	Guatemala	Other Mexico	Other Chiapas
Palenque	0	8	1	0	2	1
Oaxaca	2	0	0	2	0	1
Mexico-City	0	0	1	1	0	0
Guatemala	2	0	1	0	0	0
Other Mexico	1	0	0	1	2	1
Other Chiapas	3	0	0	1	2	2

FIGURE 5-4: CROSS-TABLE OF RESPONDENTS' PREVIOUS AND NEXT DESTINATIONS

The Archaeological Site of Palenque and the Colonial Town of San Cristóbal as combined attractions

FIGURE 5-5: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF PALENQUE AND THE COLONIAL TOWN OF SAN CRISTÓBAL AS COMBINED ATTRACTIONS

During the survey, respondents were asked about their reasons for visiting San Cristóbal. They often mention the indígenas and their cultures as primary motivations, often combined with the attraction of the 'colonial town'. In Figure 5-6 a frequency chart shows the respondents' reasons for visiting San Cristóbal.
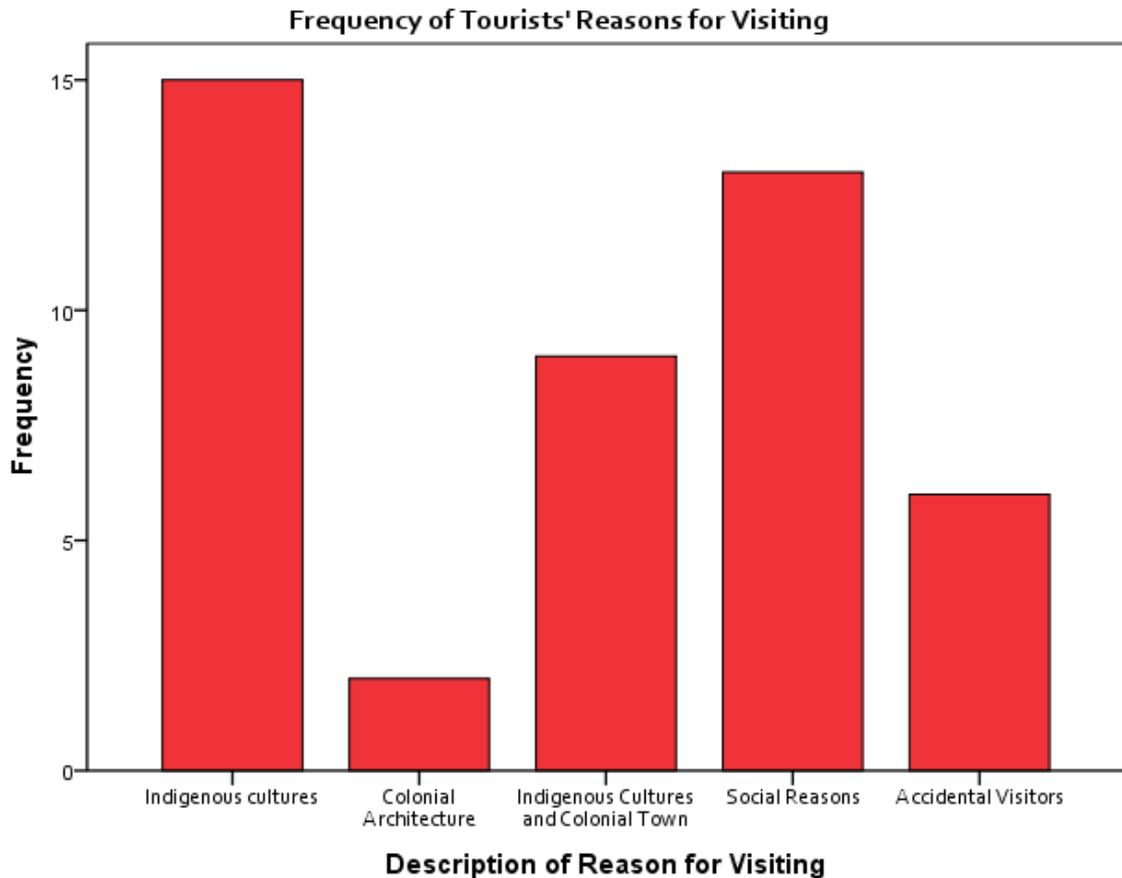

FIGURE 5-6: FREQUENCY CHART OF RESPONDENTS' REASONS FOR VISITING SAN CRISTÓBAL

The motivations for visiting San Cristóbal somewhat resound the production of the tourist place as a place of indigenous cultures and as a place of colonial architecture, being a place that appeals to ethnic tourists and cultural tourists alike. Some of the respondents could be both ethnic and cultural tourists as they name both indigenous elements and the colonial town as reasons to visit San Cristóbal. Other important reasons for visiting the town are 'social reasons' and 'accidental visitors'. Social reasons are assigned to the respondents who made a choice to visit San Cristóbal because others recommended it or because they were visiting relatives or had – volunteer - work in San Cristóbal. A large group had such reasons, indicating the importance of other tourists in the production of a tourist place and the creation of an image of that place. The group of accidental visitors consists of those who were in San Cristóbal primarily as a stop-over; who were not really interested in the town itself, but on their way to somewhere else.

The population of international tourists in San Cristóbal is heterogeneous in its composition. However, with this survey some characteristics to describe the population of international tourists in San Cristóbal were found. Most of the international tourists stays for a short period of time in the town; just one or two nights, two-third not spend more than three nights in the town. For the majority of international tourists San Cristóbal is part of a larger tour. As Van den Berghe (1994) noted, there are several routes in which the town can be seen as a common node:

- ■ 'The Grand Mundo Maya Tour': From Palenque to Guatemala v.v.;
- ■ 'The South of Mexico Tour': From Oaxaca or other places west of San Cristóbal to Palenque v.v.
- ■ 'The Panamerican Highway Route': From Oaxaca or other places west of San Cristóbal to Guatemala.

Nowadays, as seen in Figure 5-4, routes are more diversified. There are more international tourists who stay for a longer time in Chiapas and there even is a number of international tourists who only visit San Cristóbal and no other place during their holiday, in which San Cristóbal thus is not part of a larger route. The primary motivations to visit San Cristóbal are the indigenous cultures and the colonial town itself, indicating a differentiated tourist population when comparing it to the tourist population in 1992, Van den Berghe (1994) observed mainly ethnic tourists.

In the survey few packaged tour tourists were include. The respondents were mostly composed of tourists who travelled individually; some of them pre-booked accommodations in San Cristóbal, others did not. To note the motivations of packaged tour tourists a Dutch packaged tour 'Viva Mexico' was joined during the fieldwork. In this group motivations to go to Mexico were mixed. For all of them it was the first trip to Mexico and to Latin America, but in general the participants made other long trips and visited places out of Europe. Some comments on joining this tour:

"I went to Mexico because this is the only continent I have not visited before."

"Mexico sounded like holiday to me."

"I liked the variation; the temples, the cities, the mountains and the beaches of Acapulco."

In the group few specifically knew about the place San Cristóbal and the motivations for travelling to Mexico were more based on the diversity; making them not-fit any or fit all of the typologies of tourists by Smith (1977). However, none of the respondents in this group noted the Mayan cultures as primary reasons to go to Mexico, whilst the archaeological sites were mentioned. Those interested specifically in

indigenous cultures in Mexico would likely chose the other packaged tour of this tour operator, which focuses more on the Mundo Maya.

Like Van den Berghe (1994) noted ethnic tourism plays an important role in San Cristóbal. Many international tourists responded that they were interested in the indígenas and their cultures. However, there are certain degrees in being an ethnic tourist as there are different ways to experience exotic cultures. The experience of exotic cultures comes with consuming sights and activities in which the indigenous peoples are involved. Nowadays the tourist product of San Cristóbal is more diversified, not only centred on exotic cultures but on the colonial town as well. Tourists can adopt different roles as tourists during the day, being interested in different components and consuming both 'indigenous San Cristóbal' and 'colonial San Cristóbal' on the same day. Next paragraph will discuss this consumption of the tourist place San Cristóbal.

5.3. Composition of the Tourist Place

"San Cristóbal is a place of many layers. Not just a place to admire, but a place to discover and delve into."

(Prado & Chandler, 2009: 131)

Prado & Chandler (2009) invite international tourists in their guidebook to Chiapas to delve into the town of San Cristóbal, but international tourists often stay in town only for two nights, making it unable for them to 'delve' into the place and discover San Cristóbal beyond the borders of the tourist place itself. They consume the place in a short time period, in which their consumption patterns are largely shaped by their motivations to go to San Cristóbal. In last paragraph it was shown that travel motivations of international tourists resound the ways in which the tourist place San Cristóbal is produced. This paragraph will focus on the consumption patterns, by gaining an understanding of the various roles of groups of host-communities on tourist place San Cristóbal.

Tourism is a highly performative activity and for San Cristóbal consumption spaces of this activity are shared with others of the host-communities who work, live and commute on these places. The host-communities play an important role in the consumption of the tourist place San Cristóbal. They cater tourism, as they run facilities for tourists and have agency to influence meanings and values ascribed by international tourists to San Cristóbal. The host-communities of San Cristóbal can be categorized in three groups, as shown in Figure 5-7. The model is based on Van den Berghe (1995)'s model on the division of labour in ethnic tourism. Expats and ladinos facilitate the tourist place San Cristóbal for the indígenas and international tourists experience the exotic cultures of the indígenas on the tourist place San Cristóbal, but that experience is mediated and shaped by expats and ladinos. Increasingly, it are expats who are involved in the tourist place San Cristóbal and international tourists consume the 'colonial' San Cristóbal – as a ladino place – as increasingly mediated by expats. The tourist place San Cristóbal is in turn also physically shaped – in terms of functions and population – in places of expats, places of ladinos and places of indígenas. The centre of the town is primarily a place of ladinos, but increasingly expats create tourist infrastructure on this place, by for example opening international restaurants and travel agencies.
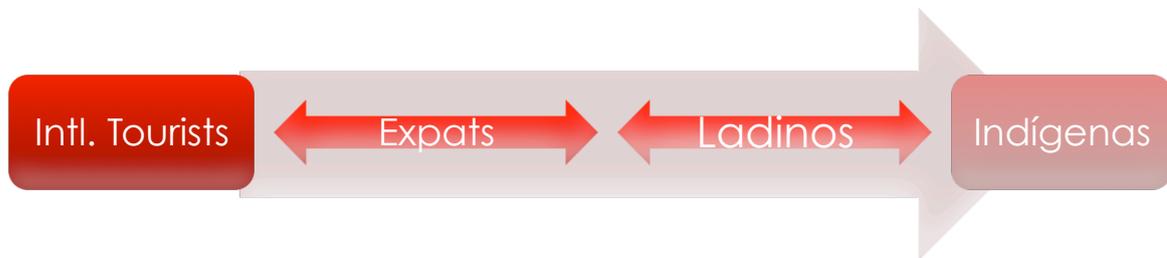
FIGURE 5-7: EXPATS, LADINOS AND INDÍGENAS IN SAN CRISTÓBAL

5.4. Bohemian San Cristóbal

The expats nowadays share a position as mediators in the international tourists' consumption patterns of indígenas in San Cristóbal and as actors in the production of the tourist place. Not all of the expats in the town work in the tourism industry, there is a growing group of pensioned North-Americans who live in the town and there are as well expats who have jobs which do not involve tourism. Many of the expats in San Cristóbal have an advantage for working in the tourism industry because of their shared linguistics with international tourists, their sense of what international tourists want to experience and consume and their ability to work in a modern, capitalist system. Ladinos in San Cristóbal tend to have less of an understanding what international tourists want, for example in terms of restaurants and their menus. In the centre of San Cristóbal one can find an Italian, French and Argentine restaurant. There are also numerous small terraces in the town, an example of which is show in Figure 5-8. They cater specifically for international tourists and some of the expat-community, and it was difficult to spot locals in these facilities. One of the key informants mentioned:

"I, like many other people here in San Cristóbal, rarely go to any of these restaurants in the (tourist) centre. They are quiet expensive for us who have to make a living here in Chiapas."

"The typical entertainment in the early 1980s on a Sunday afternoon was that those who owned a car paraded around the Zócalo. There was a band playing in the square and most people were chatting and enjoying themselves there. There was a bar in the town, but you didn't want to go there."

(Milou)

The expat-community thus played an especially important role in the creation of a tourist place that offers international facilities, aimed at – primarily – international tourists. They keep up and maintain much of these facilities that are not aimed at the Mexican population and create a 'bohemian atmosphere' (Prado & Chandler, 2009), with bars and restaurants and combined with NGOs, cultural institutions. Domestic tourists and day-trippers from Túxtla Gutierrez appreciate this 'bohemian' tourist place

as well. In the weekends many inhabitants of Túxtla Gutierrez, the nearby capital of Chiapas, arrive in San Cristóbal to enjoy the 'bohemian' aspects of the tourist place.

FIGURE 5-8: ONE OF THE SMALL TERRACES IN SAN CRISTÓBAL

There are more domestic tourists in San Cristóbal then international tourists and the play an important role in maintaining these 'bohemian' facilities in San Cristóbal as well. These places add something for the domestic tourists as well, as they offer them 'something out of the ordinary'. International tourists tend to go to these places and mediate the encounter with different cultures and cultural expressions.

As argued by Ritzer & Liska (1997) tourists want their experience and consumption of places to be more and more predictable, efficient, calculable and controlled. They named this process 'McDonaldification'. In San Cristóbal, this process can be noted when looking at the packaged tours that visit San Cristóbal and offer the same routes and attractions. They stay in hotels in the centre, which cater to international tourists. In other ways this process is noted as well, for instance in the products on offer for tourists at various shops – t-shirts, CDs etc. They are known products for tourists. For backpackers in San Cristóbal there is a process of mass customization; whilst they have more chances of own decision-making during their travels, they are often found in the same facilities as other backpackers; those described in guidebooks. Another phenomenon to them is that 'typical' backpacker places tend to be similar and predictable, such as the second-hand bookshop in San Cristóbal, which does offer some additional books on the *indígenas* and on Chiapas, but is quiet similar to others found around Mexico considering their catalogue and the way its run. This process of McDonaldification somewhat intertwines with globalization. The international restaurants in the town of San Cristóbal are predictable, calculable and controlled – preferred by international tourists – but Mexican tourists see them as an asset to the town as well.

Bohemian San Cristóbal is often a shared tourist place; combined with colonial or indigena elements. Much of the bohemian San Cristóbal, with restaurants, bars and terraces, is concentrated to the Andador and Real de Guadelupe, in the centre. For reference, see the map in Figure 5-9. These places are the spaces of colonial San Cristóbal as well.

FIGURE 5-9: MAP OF DOWNTOWN SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS, HIGHLIGHTING PLACES INTERESTING FOR INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS (2). SOURCE: PRADO & CHANDLER (2009)

5.5. Colonial San Cristóbal

The expats are the main actors in creating the bohemian San Cristóbal, like ladinos are in creating the colonial tourist place San Cristóbal. Interestingly, colonial San Cristóbal overlaps geographically with bohemian San Cristóbal, making these places both colonial and bohemian. Colonial San Cristóbal consists of small – colonial – houses, small cobblestone streets and old shops and hotels. An example of a colonial street in the centre of San Cristóbal is given in Figure 5-10.

FIGURE 5-10: A STREET SCENE IN COLONIAL SAN CRISTÓBAL

Tourism is primarily a visual activity, evident from the ways in which tourist places are primarily represented for tourists. The gazing of tourists on the tourist place is directed specifically by signs in the street, which are aimed at tourists and explain some of the history of these sights or places. However, other senses play a role in the tourist consumption of San Cristóbal as well. During the summer season, indigenous festivals accompanied with loud fireworks and the burning of wood was integral to the tourist consumption of San Cristóbal. For the group of packaged tour tourists it meant an early start to the day. Locals noted that the frequent use of fireworks by the indígenas from early dawn was something one gets used to.

San Cristóbal has been produced and is consumed as a tourist place and it has a role to play in the gaze of tourists. The town offers something out of the ordinary for most of the visiting international tourists. To better understand the role of San Cristóbal for the international tourists it has been compared to another place of tourism in Chiapas; the town of Palenque. This is a relevant comparison, because most of the international tourists combine a visit to San Cristóbal with Palenque. The town is mostly

visited because of the archaeological site, the Mayan ruins, near the town. Some of the international tourists who visit Palenque use the town as a starting point for a tour in the tropical rainforest, the Selva Lacandona, in the eastern part of Chiapas. The rainforest is interesting for ethnic tourists as well, as it is the home of some rarely visited 'pure and unspoiled' indígenas, the Lacandones. Some argue that they are 'more unspoiled' than the indígenas living around San Cristóbal, such as the Tzotzil and the Tzetzal groups. The archaeological site of Palenque is one of the most well known sites of the Mundo Maya.

In Palenque, international tourists rarely visit the town itself. The town is modern and built more for those who work in Palenque with tourists than for tourists themselves. The tourists in Palenque stay in 'enclaves', certain parts of the town which are zoned for hotels and apartments. More recent, hotels opened up along the road from Palenque town to the ruins. International tourists visiting the town often stay in their – luxurious – hotels or resorts. Tourism is differently constructed then in San Cristóbal; tourists stay in their own place instead of sharing some of the places with the host-communities. They visit Palenque for its archaeological site, rather than for the people in the town. Armstrong et al. (2010) comment on Palenque in the popular Lonely Planet guidebook:

"Modern Palenque town is a sweaty, humdrum place without much appeal except as a jumping-off point for the ruins."

(Armstrong et al., 2010: 750)

FIGURE 5-11: MAIN STREET OF THE TOWN OF PALENQUE. SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA (2012)

Figure 5-11 shows the main street of Palenque, which is noticeably different from the centre of San Cristóbal. Here, tourists will not find colonial houses and souvenir shops but facilities aimed at locals primarily. It seems to have done little to attract tourists and lure them into town, but currently the town is working on making the town more interesting for tourists. They expect a bigger income for the local communities when tourists actually go into town, and they expect the tourists to extend their stay. One of the examples of Palenque's unfriendliness for tourists was the sidewalk; tourists often wear flip-flops and the loose and crooked sidewalks were causing problems. The town was working on creating more tourist-friendly sidewalks in the summer of 2011 in an attempt to lure them into town.

FIGURE 5-12: FAST-FOOD RESTAURANT IN A COLONIAL BUILDING ON THE ANDADOR. SOURCE: GOOGLE STREETVIEW, 2012

The colonial centre of San Cristóbal overlaps with bohemian San Cristóbal in the Andador and Real de Guadelupe in both attributed meanings and functions. An example of an international or bohemian aspect of San Cristóbal combined with a colonial structure is given in Figure 5-12. Here, a fast-food chain opened a restaurant on the Andador, across the street of 'Bar Revolución'; a ladino bar which nowadays caters more towards international tourists.

San Cristóbal's centre is a tourist place that is both bohemian and colonial, and it is like a stage of tourism. Beyond the borders of colonial and bohemian San Cristóbal fewer tourists come; there are less facilities for tourists and it does not have a role to play in international tourism. The centre feels a stage, because of the indígenas – who live in those parts of San Cristóbal beyond the colonial and bohemian border – migrate to this centre to perform on this tourist place, creating the indigenous San Cristóbal.

5.6. Indigenous San Cristóbal

In the tourist consumption of San Cristóbal the indígenas of the region play an important role. They have done so since the early development of tourism in San Cristóbal, like the expats who started to commodify them for international tourists. They are nowadays produced in tourist representations as a subject of the gaze of international tourists, who want to experience exotic cultures. These international tourists can visit various indigenous attractions in San Cristóbal itself and in its surroundings, mostly marketplace towns that are easy to access. In the town itself, the indígenas are visible on the tourist place in various ways and in various roles.

It are the ethnic tourists in the typology of Smith (1977) who are interested in exotic cultural experiences through interactions with distinctive ethnic groups (Yang & Wall, 2009). The label of 'ethnic tourist' is given to a tourist based on their travel motivation and their behaviour on the destination. In the survey, most of the international tourists mentioned the indígenas or the cultural expressions of the indígenas as something which attracted them to San Cristóbal, which could lead them to being labelled an 'ethnic tourist'. However, many mention the colonial architecture of San Cristóbal as an attraction as well, combined with other reasons for visiting the town. Being an ethnic tourist seems more a role that can be played by tourists – both international and domestic. One is an ethnic tourist at a specific place and time, and it is not a state of being. There is more to the tourist place San Cristóbal in 2011 then the indigenous component. The indígenas are however an important aspect on the tourist place itself. The international tourists can for instance go to the indigenous market of Santo Domingo and thereafter go for a pizza in the tourist centre. Figure 5-13 shows the market of Santo Domingo, a place where tourists are assuming a role of ethnic tourist.

FIGURE 5-13: 'IN THE ROLE OF ETHNIC TOURIST': THE INDIGENOUS MARKET OF SANTO DOMINGO

Not only the tourists play different roles according to time and place, this is the case for the indígenas in the tourist place as well. On places that function specifically as a stage of interaction between tourists and indígenas the tourists actively seek out the indígenas. This creates a difference with places where indígenas are in the consumption of international tourists who do not actively seek them. It is a difference between the indigenous market and the Zócalo, for an example. In the latter place indígenas approach the tourists with products, whilst it is the other way around at the indigenous market of Santo Domingo. On the streets in the centre the indígenas could be seen as vendors; they are actively trying to sell their products, like the vendors on the indigenous market of Santo Domingo. However, some of them are part of the tourist place as non-vendors. They are not willing, trying or actively looking to be part of the consumption of tourists or they are fabricating products on the streets. These products are often knitted wears, such as small bracelets. These types of interactions between tourists and indígenas can be related to the role of ethnic tourist; on the indigenous market they chose to be ethnic tourist and on the Zócalo they do not.

The indigenous market of Santo Domingo is a place where the indígenas – more specifically the Chamulans – have some agency. Cesar, one of the key informants points out:

"The city tries to control the Santo Domingo market by clearing some of the stands that are on the parking lot or in the park. This is problematic, as the vendors there are strongly organized, not willing to give up their stalls." (Cesar)

The market of Santo Domingo is more a place of indígenas then the pedestrian streets in San Cristóbal are. Those places are more places of ladinos and expats, more colonial and bohemian than the Santo Domingo market. The various places where tourists and indígenas interact and the way they do so change during the day. Most international tourists arrive late in the afternoon or in the evening in the town and visit one or more of the indigenous marketplace villages before they spend the afternoon in town. This shapes the consumption patterns of international tourists in San Cristóbal, as they will re-evaluate their ideas about the traditions, cultural expressions and lives of the indígenas. San Cristóbal is a town where tourists can and often dos pend the evenings at one of the restaurants, bars, or cultural venues in the centre of the town. Until late at night, young indigenous boys can be seen roaming the streets with their wares – basically candy and cigarettes. At first glance, tourists will perceive them as being on their own and not supervised. However, someone from their community is often guarding them. One could question the boys' willingness to spend the late evenings on the streets trying to sell these products. They were said to sell more as the evening progresses, earning an income and eventually, as can happen, quit school to help earn his family an income. Leaving little chance to learn Spanish and to get formal education to learn other skills.

Another important role of the indígenas is as a source of cheap labour. They are often waiters in restaurants and hotels or have other occupations where they interact with tourists. Not always are they presented as being indígenas, but in some tourist facilties they are seen wearing traditional clothing or in other ways more prominently presented as being indigena.

As a tourist one can easily notice that gender roles play an important role in the division of labour among the indígenas; indigenous women and men have different roles in interacting with tourists. Touring the Santa Domingo market, almost all vendors are woman; the men who are working on the market seemed all too young to be actually called men. The street vendors were often female and young boys and girls. The young

girls sold colourful small bracelets and other small and colourful items, whilst the boys were holding a wooden tray with candy and cigarettes. Indigenous men were seen in the tourist area of San Cristóbal, but often walking around and they were generally not interacting with tourists. The indigenous women were often wearing their Trajes, the 'traditional' indigenous clothing. The men are wearing more western shirts, like the younger boys. In earlier research it was noted that 'Mayan women bear the burden of displaying the identifying symbols of their ethnic identity to the outside world, whether these be items of dress, aspects of language or distinctive behaviour.' (Smith, 1995: 723). In San Cristóbal, the way they dress fits this description. Little (2004) argues that this gender difference is based on particular historical conditions; such as the Trajes becoming an ethnic symbol and the way the relations between Indígenas and Ladinos were shaped. Men were used to wearing Trajes in many communities, but stopped doing so because of interacting in the local labour economy. Little (2004) adds that nowadays indígenas wear Trajes because tourists want to see them that way. In San Cristóbal, the key informants argued that this was not the case. Certainly, the indigenous were benefitting from wearing them economically as tourists were gazing these 'traditions', but the indigenous were said to be taking pride from wearing their clothing. Each town has its distinctive Traje, with different patterns and colours, and it shows that they belong to a certain community.

The indígenas are visible in the centre of the town as they are a primary attraction for international tourists in San Cristóbal. These places in the centre were international tourists meet the indígenas are at the same time colonial or bohemian places. On some assigned places the tourist place is primarily indigena, such as on the indigenous market of Santo Domingo. Most of the indígenas that tourists will see in the centre of San Cristóbal live in the outskirts of the town. Here, they form communities and the places they inhabit differ strongly from the centre of San Cristóbal. The indígenas are living here mostly involuntarily, having been expelled from their home communities for religious reasons. The largest group of them are Chamulans, but indígenas from other villages surrounding San Cristóbal live here as well. Anita – a key informant in this research – is one of them. She lives on the outskirts of the town, but regularly visits San Juan Chamula – where she is from – with tourists. Because of the religion she choose she was expulsed from the town. She can still visit the town to visit family and friends, but she is not allowed to spend the night in the indigenous marketplace town San Juan Chamula, like tourists. There are many institutions and people from other countries at work in NGOs in San Cristóbal and some of them work for religious institutions that convert some of the indígenas, which has severe consequences.

It seems to be a paradox that many international tourists come to see the indígenas and their cultural expressions in San Cristóbal, whilst they are actually staying in the part of the town where they do not live. The majority of the indígenas that can be seen roaming and vending the streets in the centre of the town take one of the mini-buses in the morning to those places and go back to their own communities in the evening. Most tourists won't know about these places and the living conditions of the indígenas, whilst they can be seen built uphill from the tourist place of the Zócalo in the centre of San Cristóbal. Ladinos were said to rarely visit these places, except for goods. In many ways the outskirt communities are the backstage elements of the indígenas' culture, whilst they present elements on the front stage in the tourist centre. Their role in the tourist place San Cristóbal is performative. Figure 5-14 shows the indigenous neighbourhood of 'La Hormiga; in the north of San Cristóbal. The centre of town, the colonial and bohemian tourist place, is visible in the distance. The neighbourhood itself

is built uphill from San Cristóbal and consists mainly of houses with corrugated iron roofs.

FIGURE 5-14: VIEW FROM 'LA HORMIGA'. SOURCE: GOOGLE STREETVIEW (2012)
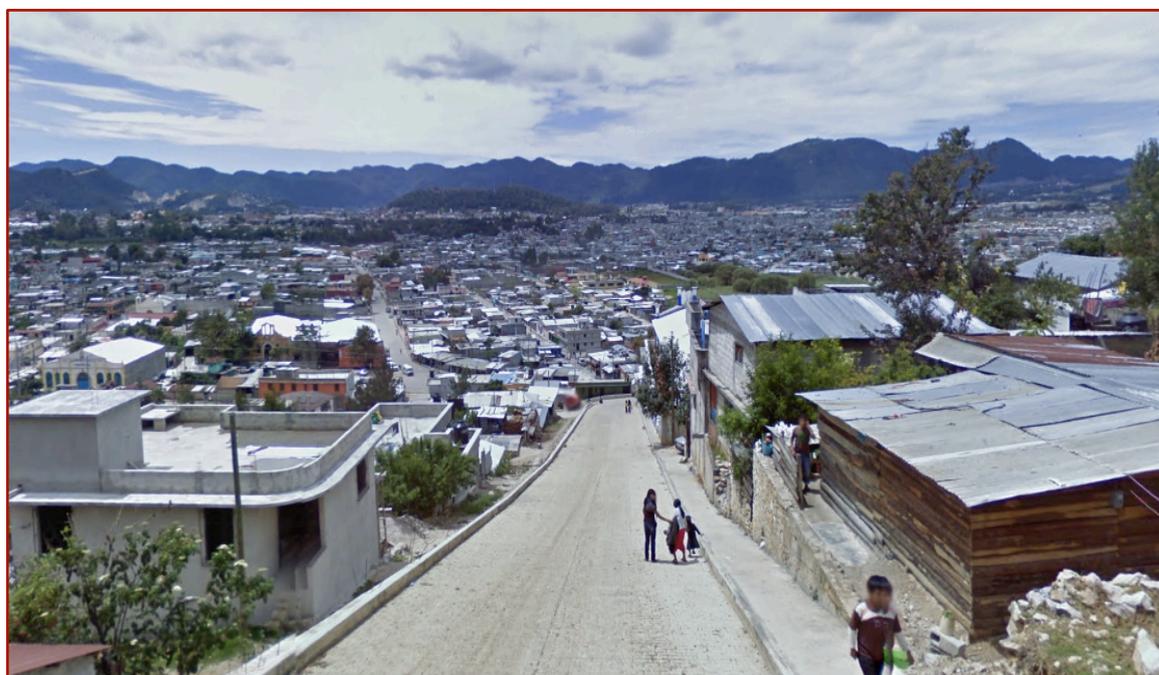
In San Juan Chamula, a backstage element has been constructed in the front stage of tourists' gaze. In this indigenous marketplace village that is often visited by tourists from San Cristóbal, indígenas control much of tourists' consumption. Tourists visit the market, the church and depending on who they are traveling with visit a family in the town. The place is controlled by the indígenas the tourists seek, and their image is constructed in different ways. In San Cristóbal, more elements of the indígenas' cultures can be hidden from the consumption of international tourists, as they do not go to places the indígenas live. In San Juan Chamula more backstage elements are visible to tourists, who noted the newer and luxurious houses and western amenities. Figure 5-15 shows an image of a house under construction in this town. Tourists used to walk this road to the town's square and from here they could see the square and the church of the town. Nowadays though, this house will be in their way. During trips to this town, international tourists often commented on the house suggesting that the town was not as 'indigenous' as they expected.

FIGURE 5-15: A BACKSTAGE ELEMENT IN SAN JUAN CHAMULA'S FRONT STAGE

5.7. Expansion of the Tourist Product

In 2011, San Cristóbal can no longer be seen as solely a place of ethnic tourism. The tourist place offers tourists a colonial place and a bohemian place as well. Comparing the tourist place to Van den Berghe's (1994) findings the tourist place has been diversified in attractions and aspects it offers to tourists. An important role in it is for the expat community and the NGOs in the town, who have created a bohemian San Cristóbal. This is an aspect in the consumption of the tourist place that has not been communicated by governmental actors and other actors in the tourism industry for international tourists. Without the indígenas San Cristóbal would be less appealing to the tourists, as they are still a prime attraction of San Cristóbal.

San Cristóbal has not, like Van den Berghe (1994) feared, become a Cancún-in-the-mountains. The town sees more tourists then in 1992 for a wider variety of reasons, but the tourist product has been diversified and ethnic tourism still plays an important role. Tourism in the town is still interconnected with other processes and international tourists still share the same spaces with ladinos and indígenas alike. However, more facilities nowadays cater specifically for tourists, and most of them are facilities run by expats. There definitely is some tourist bubble, but the town is not as disconnected from the surrounding environment as Cancún. To the contrary, San Cristóbal can even be seen as a base to stay during trips in and around Chiapas (Prado & Chandler, 2009); indicating that San Cristóbal's centre is a tourist place which is not too much out of the ordinary; it is a stage for tourism and a colonial and bohemian place where indígenas can be met and their cultural expressions can be experienced.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Tourist Place San Cristóbal

The aim of this research project was to gain an understanding of the tourist place of San Cristóbal and the ways in which it is produced for and consumed by international tourists. Tourism is important to the economy of San Cristóbal and the Mexican state of Chiapas and it has been said to be important to the cultural life of San Cristóbal (Prado & Chandler, 2009). It even has impacted the population of the town, as more expats have visited the town as tourists before and it played a role in changing attitudes of ladinos towards indígenas (Van den Berghe, 1995). This chapter will conclude the research project by presenting conclusions of this research by answering the research question and linking it to earlier findings by Van den Berghe to find if San Cristóbal has become a Cancún-in-the-mountains. After the conclusion a discussion of indígenas as a tourist attraction including recommendations for future research is given and then a reflection including recommendations for future research is presented.

The intertwined processes of the production and consumption of a tourist place played a key role in this research project. Actors with power, the governmental institutions, produce an image of San Cristóbal as a colonial town, in which the indigenous peoples and their cultural expressions can be met and experienced. San Cristóbal is marketed internationally as being part of the Mundo Maya project, and linked to other places in this region. San Cristóbal has a role to play for tourists, offers something out of the ordinary because of this combination of indigenous and colonial components.

The tourist population in San Cristóbal is very diverse and international tourists come from many different places and for different reasons. However, most of them stay just for one or two nights in the town and many are interested in the indigenous population. The consumption patterns of these international tourists are influenced by the ways in which the town is presented to them; as a colonial and indigenous tourist place. However, it is increasingly being consumed as a bohemian place; a tourist place that offers a variety of international restaurants, bars and cultural institutions.

Much of the bohemian tourist place is being created by expats, who have a role to play as facilitators of tourism. They operate facilities that are specifically aimed at tourists – domestic tourists as well – and know what international tourists want to see and experience in San Cristóbal. Ladinos operate other souvenir shops and restaurants in the centre, which are aimed at both tourists and the host-communities. The indígenas still play an important role in tourist place San Cristóbal, but there is more to the tourist place. The indígenas, Ladinos and expats in town all play different roles in the production and consumption of the tourist place, a varied tourist place which is reflected in the diversity of the tourist population.

Van den Berghe's (1994) fears that San Cristóbal de las Casas would become a 'Cancún-in-the-mountains' have not become a reality. As discussed in chapter 4, the tourist bubble in Cancún has created an enclave of a tourist place, little connected to the host-community and the surrounding environment. This is not the case in San Cristóbal; there definitely is a tourist bubble and more and more tourists visit the place, but development is small-scale and the tourist place product is diverse. San Cristóbal manages to attract a varied tourist population and local expats maintain a tourist place that is appealing to them. The tourist bubble is however visible in the centre of San Cristóbal, which is a place primarily for tourists, both domestic and international. They share spaces with the host-communities, but facilities cater mainly to the tourist

population in the town. In conclusion, San Cristóbal's tourist population and tourist product has been diversified since 1992, which is reflected in a diverse tourist population. San Cristóbal has increasingly become a place for expats and NGOs, who created a bohemian place. Since 1992, the indígenas are a tourist attraction in the town, but it is not the only tourist attraction anymore. The indígenas do however play a key role in tourist consumption patterns – which visit surrounding indigenous marketplace villages to experience their cultures or lifestyles.

6.2. Indígenas as tourist attraction

The centre of San Cristóbal can be seen as a stage for tourism, a place where tourism 'happens'. The town's colonial centre is the backdrop of the international tourists' meet or interaction with the indígenas. This might have been the case in 1992, but it is still visible. Beyond the borders of colonial San Cristóbal, there are few tourists and few facilities for tourists.

The indígenas the tourists come to see live beyond those borders of colonial San Cristóbal and commute to the centre – the stage of tourism – to perform a role in the consumption patterns of international tourists. Their role is mainly produced by other actors – governmental actors – and translated by both local and non-local actors in the tourism industry. Much of their behaviour is thus communicated in a way, which influences their behaviour. To fit expectations indígenas have to behave like is communicated, for instance by wearing traditional clothing or in Zinacantán weave 'traditional' patterns.

Ethnic tourism, at least here in Chiapas and San Cristóbal, is problematic. It is the extreme marginalization of groups of people that makes them a prime attraction for international tourists. Governmental actors argued that with the Mundo Maya project that the influx of tourism enables them to develop socio-economically, but are other actors really interested in that? Hasn't ethnic tourism become too important for the socio-economic life of other actors?

San Cristóbal's tourist product has been diversified, which is a good thing for both the sustainability of tourism in the town and the indígenas themselves. There are less indígenas who have to fit the product created by them and they can now for instance work in a restaurant without being presented as indigena. Some interest for them does not have to be a bad thing, as it would maintain aspects of their culture and cultural expressions. However, they have been overexposed and nearby San Juan Chamula, an indigenous village is flooded with touring cars full of tourists who come to see and experience their produced image, produced by others. Ethnic tourism remains somewhat problematic, but visits to these communities should be small-scale and tourists should be willing to adjust their image. Only then ethnic tourism can be sustainable and a way for the indígenas to develop in socio-economic terms.

6.3. Reflection

It is important to be reflexive; it is a fundamental characteristic of human interaction (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). Conducting fieldwork in a different country and a different cultural context has proven be both challenging and very interesting. During the fieldwork the researcher was an outsider to local cultures, and needed the help of locals – key informants – to grasp and understand processes and the context in which these processes were occurring. The fieldwork had to be conducted in seven weeks and because of that and because of the researcher not speaking fluent Spanish the choice for these research methods has been made. Even though physiological factors might have played an important role in the way respondents behaved and interacted

with the researcher. A Mexican researcher, one with more insight knowledge of on-going societal processes or someone with a less distinctive western appearance might have gotten different results. As a Dutch university student the impression could have been given that the researcher was a tourist – there for leisure activities – but that seemed an advantage in the participant observation with a group of Dutch tourists.

Before the fieldwork the researcher set out to get to know more about the indígenas and their relationship with tourists, but difficulties in power elations and a cultural barrier the research shift focus to the tourists place San Cristóbal rather than the indígenas themselves, who however do play an important role on the tourist place. In the end, the research gave a broader perspective on the tourist place and a tourist place in differentiated tourism, including ethnic tourism.

Doing fieldwork required a lot of flexibility in conducting scientific research and it gives choices and opportunities that were unexpected. This unreliability of circumstances and respondents in doing fieldwork in other cultural contexts might be a reason for researchers not to conduct fieldwork research. I however feel that it is a very important component in doing scientific research, especially in social sciences. A lot can be learned being there and carrying out the research, much more than just the research project. For geographers, it should be a requirement, as you will not only learn about other places, but about places back home as well.

6.4.   Recommendations for Future Research

This research has focused on the tourist place San Cristóbal and the various actors who produce and consume the tourist place. Cultural geographers have paid too little attention to the tourist places in which ethnic tourism occurs, as it involves many different actors and power relations in the creation of these places. It would be interesting to research other places of ethnic tourism and those relations to find the sustainability of ethnic tourism.

In San Cristóbal, more in-depth research is required on the roles of indígenas in tourism and on domestic tourism and their production and consumption of the tourist place. A research project on the interactions of tourists with children who work in the tourism industry would be difficult, but interesting. It would also be valuable to unravel the various actors and products that make the indigenous market of Santo Domingo, which is a mystery to both international tourists and ladinos in San Cristóbal.

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