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## WORKING PAPER NEW SERIES

### **EL TAJIN, AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MEXICAN WORLD HERITAGE SITE AND ITS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR TOURISM**

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# ***El Tajin, an archaeological Mexican World Heritage Site and Its Sustainable Development for Tourism***

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## **Introduction**

Among the endless number of ideas that motivate tourist to travel encountering other cultures continues being one of strongest for travelers because the tourist phenomenon is unquestionably a social phenomenon of the need for contact. The intention of this paper is to expose the experience of tourism in a Mexican region, one that possess a rich, tangible and intangible cultural heritage considered to be of universal value. This region is the protected area of the zone of archaeological monuments (pyramids) known as El Tajin. It is located to the north of the State of Veracruz, region whose population belongs in its majority to the ethnic group Totonaca. The purpose of the analysis shown in this document leads to a reflection of several topics: planning, social participation, and interculturality. This paper is the result of documentary research, field work, first-hand observations and surveys.

## ***Interculturality***

The contact between human beings of the same culture does not present great difficulty in its development; the challenge appears at the time of confronting a diverse culture other than one's own. Mexico, like many other regions of the world, is multicultural.

The multiculturalism is based on the differences among ethnic groups and national culture. Culture can be defined as “an intergenerational community, institutionally more or less complete, that occupies a territory or a certain mother country and shares a language and a specific history” Kymlicka (1996, p.36).

This multiculturalism sometimes can produce conditions of exclusion in a territory, based on the differentiation by the race or the cultural identity of its members. Nevertheless Lamo de Espinosa (1995, p.18), in a more positive sense, defines multiculturalism as a “coexistence in a same social space of identified people with varied cultures (...) and the respect to the cultural identities, [...] beyond simple coexistence, [...]”. In Mexico, different cultures coexist but the respect that is afforded to the differences among minority groups is part of a social construction that is being built in an adverse context. In many countries the persistence of the original settlers and lack of a positive intercultural attitude from those who are different and occupied the same territory later on in history, has made of those lands the ideal breeding place for misunderstanding, confrontation, inequality, poverty, intolerance, cultural racism and even war. Interculturality seeks to transform this phenomenon into an area of negotiation, consensus and acceptance.

Alsina (Alsina, 1997) establishes a differentiation between multiculturalism and Interculturality. He conceives multiculturalism as the coexistence of different cultures in the same place whether it be real or virtual space of information; Interculturality, on the other hand, is the result of the relationships that take place between diverse groups. That is to say, multiculturalism expresses the physical situation of a plural society, composed of cultural communities of differentiated identities; whereas Interculturality makes reference to the non-physical attributes or dynamics that occur between these cultural communities.

The understanding and the description of each concept is not simple, nor exact either, and is highly subjective. Bonoli makes an interesting reflection on Interculturality. He assumes it as a form of knowledge to understand and to describe cultures different from one's own; specifically in respect to its autonomy, diversity of language, world vision, beliefs and practices. The perception of the other culture depends in great manner on the cultural and historical horizon of the individual who perceives it. This perception is also intimately tied to the linguistic limitations for the interpretation of the concepts of the other culture. Sometimes our proficiency of the language can be insufficient or inadequate and we remain at the level of conjectures of our own judgments. Thus our appreciation of the other culture will remain subjective as long as we do not have the external means to validate our words and our interpretations of the codes of the other

culture. In these cases it is good to ask ourselves “what measure of our approach to interculturality is subject to our belonging to a determined cultural group and in what measure do we think we truly understand what we perceive and distinguish it from an inner projection of our cultural symbolic system (Bonoli, 2007) .

### *Interculturality and Tourism*

The regions where tourism is abundant can make for very interesting material from the point of view of observation and analysis of the interaction between different people. In these regions the interaction between the visitors and the visited ones produces verbal and nonverbal intercultural dialogue loaded with semantic connotations and codes. In these areas two types of actors interact: the tourist and the host. The tourist finds his origins to be in totally different culturally, socioeconomically, ideologically, and religiously. Due to this he (the tourist) cannot offer a universally accepted description of culture. The host cannot grasp a definition of culture either due to the very distinct physical and social geography the guests come from. Thus, the region where tourism is abundant is an area of confrontation between real, apparent and essential differences between hosts and guests and an area to confirm or discard some prejudices from the local culture. When this occurs the visitors and the ones being visited are faced with the task of trying to harmonize or adjust their own cultural symbolic references in order to get a better understanding of the each other’s culture. The interaction between hosts and guests of compatible cultures do not have a great need to adjust in order to understand each other. The level of difficulty of adjusting is pronounced when this encounter takes place between people of significantly different cultures, for example in territories with the presence of the original (native) inhabitants. In the areas where the native and non native inhabitants coexist, Pratt (1997,p. 26) has called it the “zone of contact”, describing it as “the space of colonial encounters, where geographically and historically separated (people) make contact with one another and establish lasting relationships [...] but it also implies the presences of coercion, radical inequality and insurmountable conflict where the coming together in space and time of people previously separated by geographic and historical divisions now coincide”. The zone of contact that we set out to study in this document is the protected area of the zone of the pyramids of the Tajin. In this paper our “zone of contact” is El Tajin.

If the regions of the world, where tourism and native culture are present, are placed under comparison, it would be possible to say that a very disadvantaged socio-economic situation is what is prevalent among them.

For example, access to health, education, basic services, property, employment, and other socio-economic factors is very limited. In theory it would be possible to say that many of the native towns are the proprietors of the raw materials needed for the production of tourist services such as natural and cultural resources. Many times this principle is not confirmed world-wide because the land of the native-peoples ancestors doesn't belong to the successors anymore. When young people do not own their land, they tend to migrate. Tourist services and products create employment, which provides for a diminished exodus of youth and diminished poverty since most tourist services belong to and are managed by local inhabitants.

There are many cases around the world where local populations transform their natural and cultural heritage into a valuable economic venture through tourism. Cultural heritage, with its new economic value contributes positively to the protection of its own livelihood and preservation. Cultural survival contributes to economic success and the economic success contributes to the survival of the culture. These success economic ventures are produced when native, or indigenous, people are both the owners of the land and provide services for tourists. Nevertheless, the more prevalent and more successful model of tourism is the one in which investments from non indigenous groups from outside the region predominate. Here, the native communities have very little control over the activities related to tourism. The members of the community have no economic, social or cultural equity (Butler & Hinch, 1996).

In Chile for example, the Conadi (The National Corporation for Indigenous People) considers that true indigenous tourism should be based on four basic conditions: (1) the natives present their own cultural identity to the visitors; (2) tourist activity takes place in the native's own territory; (3) Tourism becomes a economic activity that complements farming activities, for example, does not become the main economic activity and (4) culture revitalization is allowed and cultural identity is strengthened through intercultural dialogues where these dialogues improve relationships between visitors and original populations. For example, certain Amerindian communities of Canada like the Inuit of Nunavut, and some native people of

Western Australia like the Kalgoorlie for example, own the greater percentage of economic participation within the services afforded to tourism in their territories. In both countries the governments and the native people have established official organizations to stimulate tourism.

The most frequent difficulties indigenous entrepreneurs of those two regions still face is the ownership of property, availability of loans and management capacity of their companies. A good part Chile's ethnic and rural tourism is operated by indigenous entrepreneurs belonging to different ethnic groups: mapuches, aymarans, atacameños, kawésqars. These groups are located in several communities in the Araucanía region, to the South of Chile, supported by the government through Conadi especially. Some native inhabitants' families dedicated to providing tourists' services receive technical and financial support from NGOs.

In Mexico, the members of the Indigenous Network of Tourism of Mexico A.C. (RITA A.C.) officially operate since 1998. RITA is a network composed of approximately 32 social micro-enterprises who supply environmental and tourist services. These micro-enterprises composed of women and men from 16 different rural towns and indigenous cultures are located in 15 states of the country. Some other geographical regions experienced in ethnic tourism are Ecuador, Panama, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil, among others.

When tourism and its services are provided by people of different ethnic groups, it is necessary to develop effective intercultural communication, in order to make a successful and lasting contact with the host communities. This intercultural "competence" could be understood as (...) "the capacity to be able to exchange cultural meanings and to communicate in an effective manner regardless of the multiple cultural identities of the participants" (Chen & Starosta, 1996, p.358). This does not mean that absolute control of communication will be obtained nor that a communication free of ambiguities or difficulties will be achieved since not even between people of the same culture is this possible. There will always be some subjective interpretation and speculation based on the previous experiences of the cultural group that the person communicating belongs to.

Alsina (Alsina, 1997) considers that two dimensions exist that must be included in the acquisition and the development of a suitable intercultural behavior: the cognitive and emotional

dimension. In the cognitive dimension, intercultural communication requires one to be open minded in order to conceive of concepts with alternative points of view to the pre-established ones. Knowledge of the other people and their culture helps to diminish the tendency to stereotype and prejudice. This state of having more of an open mind will allow one to develop a more flexible perception of a culturally strange world and will facilitate the inquiry of different ideas.

In the emotional dimension, the concept that communication between human beings is charged with emotions that is expressed through oral expression has to be accepted. One could say that people have developed an emotional intercultural competence when " [...] they are able to project and to receive positive emotional expressions, before, during and after intercultural interface" (Chen, Starosta, 1996, p.359). An important element that facilitates communication when approaching others is feeling empathy; which is the capacity to identify oneself with the other, to understand him and temporarily feel like him using one self's cultural references (Alsina, 1997). Here we refer to a genuine interest in the others culture, more than just a simple curiosity. The quality of our empathy is based in part on the success of our intercultural emotional communication with those culturally different from us, by temporarily putting aside the ideals and concepts that reign in our own culture.

Interculturality recognizes that human diversity exists. That diversity might be expressed physically and non-physically. On the one hand we have physical and visual differences such as biological or genetic characteristics. On the other hand, the non-physically recognizable differences are produced by the human beings through the creation of culture.

One of the most important intercultural aspirations that concerns men and women is the ability to be free to make their own responsible decisions. Men and women develop a critical consciousness lacking of prejudices and intransigent attitudes that respect and favor differences and cultural diversity and look for equality and justice. Men and women comprehend their local and national reality better because they relate it to world-wide happenings and this permits a better understanding of the other culture as a whole. This creation of a fair, integrated, respectful and empathetic society is possible (Jiménez et al, 2007).

The main expectation that is necessary for tourism to flourish at indigenous destinations is that an intercultural atmosphere can be developed among encounters between tourists and the natives that go beyond the simple tolerance of the differences of the other or simple curiosity. The better we know the world and other cultures, the better we know ourselves and strengthen our personal identity.

### *The Evolution of Tourism and all Related Services at El Tajin*

Before entering into the study of progress of tourism in the region, it is necessary to offer some explanation of its historical context.

Throughout the past, the indigenous, racially mixed, Totonaca population in Mexico lived in settlements on their land. The indigenous communities developed unequal interethnic relations with regards to the ownership of land. Throughout their history, the Totonacas have confronted hard socioeconomic and political times. They've known oppression and dominion from pre-Hispanic and Hispanic neighboring towns. By the end of the era for Independence in Mexico, they began to experience the hardship of government policies that did not recognize the basic rights of the native population. They confronted great territorial loss. The Totonacas lost practically half of the territory they owned at the beginning of the Spanish invasion in 1519. In spite of this, Totonacas have been able to maintain a significant presence in the plural ethnic society of contemporary Mexico. In fact, they are one of the ten most prominent indigenous cultures in Mexico (Serrano, 2006).

In the beginning, when Mexico was independent from Spanish rule, indigenous people were not accepted as part of the concept of a Nation State as defined by XIX century intellectuals. The exclusion of the natives was more the norm than their acceptance and assimilation into society.

At present, almost two centuries later, things have not changed enormously in a nation inhabited and governed by a non indigenous majority. Indigenous people still cannot find their place in the socioeconomic life of present day Mexico. Even after the Federal Constitutional Reformation of August 14<sup>th</sup> 2001 they do not have social recognition and the government does not take them into account as one of their priorities. Evidence of this is that in the protected area of El Tajin, at the present time, most of the inhabitants do not have the basic services afforded the rest of the

population such as that of infrastructure, educational services and public health (Nahmad & Rodríguez, 2003).

Neither are they true proprietors of the area where the monuments are located, nor of the land where their houses are built. The land in the protected zone is the property of non-indigenous people; many of whom do not live there. At the beginning of the 1990's, the Government of the State of Veracruz encouraged inhabitants located within the protected area ("polygonal") to sell their lands, to the government, at a very low price. The government's purpose was said to be the presumable protection of archaeological sites. After the Federal Declaration of the Zone of Archaeological Monuments in El Tajin of 2000, the protected area originally of only 240 hectares extended to 1,200. Once the few people that lived there sold their lands, they had to move or migrate from the area. This phenomenon modified the cohesion between the indigenous and non-indigenous population and affected the traditional social organization of the inhabitants. A popular Mexican saying was confirmed: A dead native is worthier than a live native. The government protected the monuments but it obliterated the inhabitants from their lands. A case where totally the opposite occurred happened in Quinquén, Chile in 1992. To avoid evacuating the inhabitants from their lands, the Chilean Government along with the Conadi (Indigenous National Corporation) of Chile bought 27 thousand hectares of land allotted it to the natives to make them stay. Today they provide services for tourists on government land.

Now, we'll discuss the evolution of tourism in the area. The first evidence of interest shown to attract tourism towards the archaeological zone of El Tajin and its surroundings, by the government of the State of Veracruz, dates back to the year 2000. Taking into account the unfavorable economic conditions of the Totonaca indigenous communities to the north of the state of Veracruz, the State Program for Rural and Urban Development (PVDRU, 1999), proposed for the region tourism development that was neither planned nor previously consulted with inhabitants (Nahmad, 2005). It proposed a tourist development plan centered on a model of traditional tourism where economic benefits do not go to the host communities, nor are these communities engaged in the planning, decision making, or management process.

This project included the construction of a non-indigenous investor's hotel chain. Job creation programs wouldn't be suited for local inhabitants since they were not qualified for that kind of work. Finally this project was cancelled.

At the present time conditions for tourism development programs is limited. Due to many legal restrictions a tourist infrastructure development program is difficult to introduce into the area because most of inhabitants are not the owners of the land. On the other hand, there are legal obstacles for construction within the area protected by the Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and the Mexican Petrol Company (PEMEX). The Commission for Indigenous Development (CDI) since year 2005 by means of the “Program of Promotion and Development for the indigenous cultures” has offered economic support for community cultural projects through the purchase of costumes for traditional folk dances and musical instruments, traditional folk medicine, handicrafts, and traditional folk products made from natural resources. People living within the protected zone have received support for cultural projects. Other programs available through CNI is “Alternative Tourism in Indigenous Zones” that searches to encourage eco-tourism and rural tourism. Government grants support projects promoting conservation and sustainable use of the natural environment and cultural heritage. Unfortunately, people living within the protected area cannot access this program due to the conditions we just mentioned. Once a group of neighbors from San Antonio Ojital asked for financial support from the CNI for an ecotourism project, but the INAH did not authorize it. The INAH does not allow individuals to enter the excavation sites on the land located within the protected area due to the existence of archaeological vestiges of ancient cultures. Furthermore, the Mexican Petrol company also has prohibited certain amount of excavation in order to avoid breaking through the gas ducts. Both restrictions excluded the possibility of any kind of infrastructure created for the construction of lodging and restaurant services for tourists within the protected sector. Construction was only allowed before the year 2000. Strangely enough the Government of the state of Veracruz obtained permission in 2001 for the illegal construction of “Takilhsukut” a theme park erroneously called “theme park” which by definition is not.

As far as the future of planning for tourist programs goes, the INAH prepared in 2009 the called “Project for a Management Plan for the Archaeological Zone of the Monuments El Tajin” included planning to develop community tourism. Up until this point local inhabitants had not been included contrary to what UNESCO had recommended in the past.

The Center for the Formation and Development of Indigenous Arts of Veracruz, located in the theme park, has proposed the creation of a Community School of Tourism. We are not knowledgeable if any project related to a sustainable tourist development plan for the region is in fact being developed by teachers and students of the recently created Intercultural Veracruz University (UVI).

### ***What Tourists Demand***

“Historically, tourists themselves are the first actors in producing an industry for tourism in an area, by distinguishing and designating a region for this purpose and preference” (Équipe MIT, p.190). They are who initially create the space for tourism, besides other factors that will subsequently appear. Tourists *visit* El Tajin but El Tajin is not a designated area for tourism. “A area can be called a tourist site when the economic success, the presence and the use of the ground, the landscape, the infrastructural adjustments and services offered in the area, strongly contributes to the industry of tourism itself” (Montagné et al, 2000, p53). Thus, it could be said that the creation of a tourist area at Tajin is in its initial stages, therefore it is time to make wise decisions on how to go about it. A great number of visitors and tourists, who wish to spend the night, arrive during the festival known as “Cumbre Tajin” (Tajin Summit). The rest of the year the site is filled with visitors who attend only during usual business hours and do not spend the night *within* the protected area, but got to Papantla, a small nearby native town only 6 kilometers away, or go to Poza Rica, a small racial mixed city 12 kilometers away. Still others might continue their journey toward nearby beaches or simply return to their hometowns. This type of traveling limits the production and sale of tourist services by the local inhabitants but does respond to the Mexican tourist policy practiced during approximately the last 50 years encouraging infrastructure and promotion on beach-front tourist destinations.

According to the “National Survey of Practices, Habits and Cultural Consumerism” (Conaculta, 2010, p.69-79); 90% of Mexicans have not traveled for the purpose of discovering new cultures in the twelve months previous to the survey, and more than half of Mexicans surveyed had never visited an archaeological zone.

On the other hand, the “Strategic Study of Viability of Cultural Tourism in Mexico” (SECTUR 2002), considers that foreign or international tourists are mainly motivated to travel in order to discover culture are attracted to tangible heritage monuments such as archaeological zones as well as intangible heritage aspects such as traditions and customs. When we have found Mexicans to be attracted to intangible heritage aspects or tangible ones it is due to aesthetic interest rather than didactic purposes. Even then, when Mexican tourists are motivated by culture, the climate and the beaches, make for important factors in deciding their final destination. For El Tajin this concept is confirmed in a survey applied by the Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH, 2008).

According to Montagné (et al, 2000, p.49) “an area becomes a tourist zone when it corresponds to the tastes and myths of a society”. This archaeological zone has created and promoted the myth of the “recharging of positive energy” during the Spring Equinox, around March 21<sup>st</sup>, every year. According to INAH authorities, El Tajin attracted 19,000 visitors, precisely on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2010.

### *What El Tajin Has to Offer*

In addition to its exuberant natural environment and a group of semi virgin beaches in an area called the Emerald Coast, the region offers both tangible and intangible cultural heritage aspects. Through an Internet users contest in the year 2008, the site has been judged as one of the 13 “Wonders of Mexico”. That same year El Tajin was voted, through an Internet survey, to be included in the Mexican version of the game of “Monopoly”. In 2009, the ceremony of the ritual dance of “Los Voladores” (the flying men) performed periodically in the region, was registered on UNESCO’s list of intangible world heritage traditions. Even with all of these valuable advantages, and the label “World Heritage”, the archeological site can’t motivate Mexican visitors to stay longer than just a few hours to discover the rich intangible heritage they possess. The economic impact the site produces is not sufficient enough to fight against poverty and improve the quality of life of the inhabitants in this area as is expected in most of World Heritage sites.

### *Intangible Offer*

The arts, folk life-style and other elements of culture are what visitors look for the most. Mexican hand-crafts are said to be part of a specific cultural system where each piece has a symbolic meaning and traditional sense for the native hands that fabricate them. Crafts that are produced due to economic necessity in order to satisfy an external market change their symbolic meaning and no longer accomplish their original purpose. The obligation to sell the crafts alters the pleasure in making it, its ritual or personal sense in the native community and it becomes a sumptuary object. Sometimes the commercialization encouraged by tourist activity generates damage to art and crafts. In addition, natives are forced to reduce the price of the handicraft to be able to sell it therefore; quality manufacture can no longer be assured. The indigenous people are forced to produce more items in less time and to replace the use of local raw materials with imported products. In 2009 we evaluated artisan products and souvenirs items sold within the archaeological zone by the indigenous Totonacas. The artisan products manufactured there are few in number, as is local production, creativity, and use of traditional techniques.

We did a sample inventory and classification of those products. Certain products were made with local raw materials that were transformed into feminine decorative objects. Other products were artisan pieces that come from other regions of Mexico, especially from the State of Puebla, and are objects made of onyx stone. This material is nonexistent in the region so they glue plastic letters that form the word “Tajin” on to them. There are also artisan products from the rest of the country, and in fewer amounts there are artisan products of Asian origin. In order to encourage handcraft production, the federal Government counts on programs to provide incentives for the development of arts and crafts of the indigenous communities of the region through the Regional Unit of Popular Cultures of CONACULTA.

Moreover, in the Center for the Formation and Development of the Indigenous Arts of Veracruz several Totonacas artists maintain their artist production. The Center’s work leans on the experience of elder indigenous people who teach the techniques to the new generations. The artistic areas developed are: poetry and literature; traditional processes for textile techniques, traditional dress designing; folk music and dance, folk jewelry production, traditional agriculture, traditional medicine, gastronomy, community theater, cinematography and radio transmission in the Totonaca language.

### *Indigenous Cultural Festival “Cumbre Tajin”*

According to Brière (in Gagnon, 2003, p.34), “[tourist] displacements are not made in any particular direction, nor towards any place”, they respond only to attraction. Cazalais, establishes a differentiation between the terms: attractiveness and attraction. “Attractiveness” depends on the importance granted to an event or a place, whereas the word “attraction” sends us to a place equipped with the purpose of attracting people” (idem, p.36). The tourist demand found at El Tajin is mainly composed by day visitors; nevertheless during the Festival “Cumbre Tajin” an over population of tourists is produced. Then we can ask ourselves: are tourists attracted by the World Heritage archaeological site or by the Festival “Cumbre Tajin”? Montagné says, “we could think that, perhaps the site [to visit] is less valuable than the events that take place there or the knowledge that one can find [there]” (Montagné et al, 2000:49).

This annual Mexican native cultural festival “Cumbre Tajin” takes place at the theme park Takilhsukut” only one kilometer away from the native community El Tajin which is an indigenous Totonacas community. This community gets very little in return after the festival is over.. The festival takes place over five days in March. The essential concept of the Festival is based on two ideas: The Totonacas intangible and tangible aspects of their cultural heritage. The tangible aspects are represented by a number of large scale indigenous products such as: pottery; prehispanic weaving; production and engraving of handmade wooden masks; handcraft with paper, palm leaves, fiber and dried fruits; the manufacture of wooden toys, puppets, batik (a method of dying fabric with organic dyes), and figurines made with vanilla beans. There are also intangible aspects such as traditional songs, stories, myths and legends and community theatre, as well as pre-Hispanic leisure activities. In addition, there is a restaurant which serves Totonac cuisine and an exhibition of a reproduction of an “Akantillan” (a traditional house owned by grandparents) with external and interior decoration. A section of the theme park is dedicated to traditional medicine where one can consult traditional “medicine-men” certified by the Ministry of Health, Totonacs and other native-born people. Also it is possible to consult healers or shamans for spiritual health. The tangible aspects of the local culture is represented by the pre-Hispanic city of Tajin and a two hour night tour to the archeological site El Tajin with a sound and light show.

The tour includes several activities performed by Totonac Indians, a welcome ceremony at the entrance, a multimedia sound and light spectacle that tells the history of the site, a dramatization of Totonac mythology, cosmology and traditional dance, song and poetry. These representations are produced out of context. The festival's program also includes other *non-indigenous* or *post-Hispanic* activities such as workshops, gastronomy, national and international pop music and concerts. It mixes tradition with modern day culture.

### ***Origins and the Evolution of the Cumbre Tajin Festival***

The Government of the State of Veracruz created this festival in order to encourage tourism in the poor rural indigenous area. Therefore, the Festival also known as the "identity festival" is an event for government profit. The first event took place in the year 2000 with the help of the public treasury budget. The need for social development of the four local indigenous communities that are settled within the protected area is public knowledge. This fact was uncomfortable for some people. The event itself depends on voluntary work that is substantiated by mostly a regional demand.

The "Cumbre Tajin" Festival has experienced two different important periods in its history. The first stage goes from its creation in the year 2000 until 2004, the period when Governor Miguel Alemán was in charge. Its second stage goes from the year 2005 to 2010 when Governor Fidel Herrera Beltrán was in charge. In its first incarnation in 2000, all the activities of the Festival – artistic spectacles, sound and light shows, workshops, housing (in camping areas) and restoration – took place within the World Heritage site. All of the work carried out in order to offer all the services needed (setting up a stage for concerts, illumination, equipment, and massive visits) caused a certain amount of damage to the archaeological monuments. In reaction to this there was rioting before and during the event in order to express disagreement. Namely, the National institute of Anthropology and History, the institution in charge of the archeological site, was opposed. Residential inhabitants were excluded in all senses of the first elitist version of the festival. During its first run, some natives were not permitted to cross the archaeological site because it was closed to them, despite the fact that it was the shortest trajectory they could use to get to their homes.

The entrance fee was € 25, when a typical salary for natives in México is around € 2.50 per 8 hours of work a day. The all inclusive package for the 3 day event was € 200. Ironically, the local inhabitants, producers, protectors and heirs of the Totonaca culture, could not attend the celebration that was supposedly made to honor them.

Later on, some public disdain was against the damages to the tangible and intangible native heritage.

Its second version in 2001 (and subsequent versions up to date), took place outside the archeological site, in a specially built space: the theme park “Takilhsukut” which the government had built – contrary to the laws protecting the site. Initially the 17 hectares of infrastructure built with a capacity for 40 000 people, were only used once a year, during the Festival.

At the time of the government transition in 2005 there was uncertainty as to whether the Cumbre Tajin Festival could continue or not. Governor Fidel Herrera decided that the festival would continue. Later, Governor Duarte elected in 2010 decided to continue it probably for his next 6 years of government.

The 2005 version of the festival was less elitist and more inclusive. For the sixth edition of the festival, approximately one thousand native artists and mixed race Hispanic-Natives participated. The workshops were given by some of the Totonaca natives of the region. Six different regional ethnic groups were included in the program. Access to the park was free to all Totonaca inhabitants during the Festival, provided they were wearing their traditional costumes. They were also given free access to the site for the sound and light shows. Totonac indians have a legal right to the free transit in the monumental zone of the site throughout the year. The high production cost multimedia spectacle “Lights and voices of Tajin”, created by French artist Yves Pepin, was replaced by a less impressive one. The entrance price was reduced to € 6. Governor Fidel Herrera did not privatize the rights to the festival. He created a trust for the administration of the theme park which took on the responsibility of allocating the profits from the festival for social programs and scholarships in order to support the inhabitants of the region. The 2005 Cumbre Tajin Festival cost the government € 9 million while in the year 2000 the festival cost almost €50

millions. Salomón Bazbaz Lapidus, General Director, said the Festival is ranked number six of the 310 cultural events held in Mexico.

During the festival, ancestral Totonac culture is converted into consumer products. Traditions which can be seen in current Totonac life outside of the theme park are presented out of context. Festivals like Cumbre Tajin allow the spectator to experience culture without having the responsibility or involvement to the culture it is based on.

In general, the inhabitants of the areas bordering El Tajin have seen very few of the direct and indirect benefits of the Festival that the government has promised. The number of Totonacs included as artists or artisans is very few, most of them receiving a temporary employment during the Festival in non relevant activities such as cleaning, cooking, security, gardening, etc. In addition, they have to share their heritage but also adapt it to visitors' needs and world's perception. The physical space dedicated to their activities is reduced; for example, the workshop for the Totonac dances is smaller to those dedicated to other non indigenous dances and the spaces for performing some indigenous dances are under the sun in an uncomfortable area. The ritual dance of "Voladores" (the flying men), is performed during the Festival in several stages as a tourist show.

The festival does not have a positive impact on the local population's quality of life. It is not sustainable. It's attempts to demonstrate intangible culture is incorrectly directed. It represents an economic success only for the government and private sector. Indirect benefits for the locals are very few and far between and not generally and equitably distributed.

The Federal and State governments recognize sustainable development as a part of their policy. Sustainable development places man in the center of its concern in order to offer him the best conditions for his economic and social development. One of these social aspects includes the fundamental need for the safeguard of the cultural diversity of humanity.

Equal distribution of benefits is not produced either. This inequality is usually noticed within the minority groups, whom have lived in conquered and colonized countries.

The political discourse used to convince the population of one such investment was the promotion of Totonac culture. Nonetheless, the program of the event included few of the Totonac's many cultural expressions. In addition, gradually other people's cultural influences have infiltrated and have exceeded in number against the Totonac's indigenous expression. Even now, ten years later, at the theme park the number of Totonac natives cleaning the bathrooms and collecting trash is higher than those participating as exhibitors of cultural expressions.

After following up on this festival since its creation in 2000 up until the year 2011 through newspapers reports and participant observation for the past three years, we have come to understand that the controversy surrounding this festival is based on the incapacity to create economic, social and cultural sustainability. There are a lot of young people visiting the park. One has to wonder if their main reason for visiting is the Totonac culture or the night-time pop-artistic program that is offered during the festival.

***“Danza de los Voladores” (Dance of the Flying Men) an intangible World Heritage Aspect***

In every tourist area, there are elements that cause attraction but with no prior precedence for tourist attractions. "The fact that these elements become individually or collectively tourist attractions, produces added value to the tourist site, another function or vocation that is imposed upon the original function or vocation – causing sometimes transformation or alterations-" (Cazalais et al, 1993, p.21,23), as is the case of ritual dance of "Los Voladores".

Dances conducted in the celebration of the indigenous communities are a ritual of native origin and not a recreational event. It is at the time of its commercialization that these dances lose their essential value and take on an important economic value motivated by tourist demand; as is the case of the ritual dance of “Los Voladores”, Intangible World Heritage for UNESCO since 2009. The dance, as an act associated with religious and festive ceremonies and has been converted into a source of employment (Nahmad, 2005) exposing this performance to a process of transition into a commercial tourist show. Tourism produces an ambivalent influence for its conservation. At the entrance of the archaeological zone there is a group of five dancers ready to perform the dance, every day of the year, without claiming any salary or other social benefit except for the good will of the tourists in the way of tips. They do this for a living. When this

dance is performed at the entrance of the archaeological zone, before every performance, the dancers walk into the public to asking for a small tip before they risk their lives in doing the dance. However, after their addition to the World Heritage list, the Governor did offer them access to the State's medical services and other social benefits that they had never received up to date. When there are not enough national or foreign tourists in the area, these group of dancers (whom belong to a labor union), try to get hired out of the region mainly in tourist destinations like Cancun, Acapulco, or Mexico City. The dance then transforms itself from having a ritual cultural value to an economic value for the performers when shown out of context.

One of the problems of this ritual dance is the double perception that the dancers and the spectators have. The commercialization of this dance puts the integrity of the ritual and its deep spiritual meaning in danger. In respect to this point, we found the following declaration made by UNESCO: "The exotic beauty and the spectacular side of the flight being a risk to the lives of the performers during the ritual ceremony have in fact contributed to its permanence. Nevertheless, the dance is only one element of the ritual as a whole, the true risk taken is that people who do not know of this indigenous tradition only see the dance like a recreational event. This causes a demeaning value and the deformation of its authentic and essential meaning" (UNESCO, 2008).

### *Tourism Supply of Services*

At the moment, most of tourist services within the protected area and at the archaeological site are provided by Totonac natives. The exception is the "Hotel Campestre" whose owners are not of native decent and the services offered once a year at the theme park by the Government of the State of Veracruz. Out of the archaeological zone of monuments, the services provided are given by the thirty four members (including some women) of the Regional Organization of Crafts and Gastronomy. Nineteen (19) sell meals and fifteen (15) sell souvenirs and crafts. Guided visits into the archeological zone are offered in English and Totonaca languages by certified guides.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

Caution is strongly recommended for indigenous communities possessing tangible and intangible cultural legacy who would like to transform it into an economic or consumer value along with a value of cultural exchange for tourists. There is a danger of tourists having an influence in some local ritual events if there is not an ethics code. Gradually developing an intercultural attitude is the aim.

Tourism practiced in areas where native populations are present needs to be profoundly and scientifically studied in order to plan for its development and to cushion the impact of non indigenous visitors. Tourism itself can have an impact on tourist destinations. Negative aspects of this impact need to be anticipated. When tourism activities are thoroughly planned and developed within an indigenous territory, local communities must be included into the process. They need to be part of the process of evaluating conditions and part of the consensus that accepts or rejects government proposals.

The inequality of living conditions between the hosts (poverty level) and the guests (certain level of wealth) needs to be reduced by means of the practice of a responsible and equitable tourism program. The control of the goods and services supplied to the tourist by local inhabitants is a favorable condition for this model of tourism. At El Tajin the first steps are being taken but there is still a long way to travel.

Tourism practiced in this kind of cultural areas needs to be respected, more than just providing for tourists curiosity. The historically disadvantage relationship seen in Mexico between indigenous groups confronting mixed-race inhabitants, can and should be overcome at least in the field of tourism if and when intercultural attitude is applied.

Including, instead of excluding, indigenous communities settled within the protected area of the zone of monuments of El Tajin assures the beginning of a sustainable tourism program in the area.