

# **Learning to Walk Again: Creating a New Livelihood in a Lake Atitlan Community**

**Anna Fure-Slocum  
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Professor Jay Levi  
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Carleton College**

## **Abstract**

*Lake Atitlan has experienced rapid change in the past half-century. With the introduction of the largemouth bass, the over-fishing of the lake, and the increasing pollution of the lake, fishing is no longer a viable livelihood. The fishermen's association of San Antonio Palopó has been a proponent of looking towards new and supplemental incomes; tourism and the search for new markets. The association has come together to explore the new world of tourism and the possibilities that lay ahead of them. Redefining their role within the community and working towards economic development, the association's members have been forced to reconsider their relationship with the lake. This paper will detail the reasoning behind the transition away from fishing as a livelihood, the process of such a shift, and the goals of the association's work.*

## **Introduction**

“Vamos a encerrar los pescadores y el turismo<sup>1</sup>” (Luciano, Interview February 22nd, 2010). The vision of Luciano, the president of the fishermen's association, is just that. We pulled our plastic lawn chairs into a circle in the center of Luciano's textile shop. Surrounded by a myriad of brilliantly colored weavings, the meeting was taking form. Seven in total, the association had an impressive turnout compared to the usual numbers. Only one hour late, the meeting began with greetings and introductions in a blur of Spanish and Kaqchikel, the indigenous language of San Antonio Palopó. Some of the association members had arrived in their *traje*<sup>2</sup>. Their woolen brown skirts, checkered with white, and red-woven tops were exemplified by the casual jeans and t-shirts of the remainder of the group. Sitting slightly outside of the circle, this was the third association meeting that I had attended. We were discussing possible promotions of the new tourism project of the association.

San Antonio Palopó, a community within the department of Sololá, is a town of approximately four-thousand people. From above, on the mountain that shadows the community,

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<sup>1</sup> We are going to encircle the fishermen and tourism.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional dress

it appears condensed and compact; tin roofs covering the homes of nearly every family.

Containing only two roads, San Antonio sits length-wise along the Lake Atitlan shore and continues to rise above the lake on the mountainside. The female population of San Antonio wears, for the most part, a purple and blue *güipil*<sup>3</sup> tucked into their plain, in comparison to some, *corte*<sup>4</sup>. The atmosphere of San Antonio is friendly and welcoming, to say the least.

At night, or in the early hours of the morning, one can observe fishermen heading out on the calm, tranquil lake. Paddling out in a *kayuko*<sup>5</sup>, their nets in their laps, the fishermen of the town are both older and young men. Wearing either *traje* or sweatshirts, their work involves leaving at odd hours of the day, spent collecting and cleaning their nets, hoping against all hope that they bring back enough fish to provide for their families for the day. Sometimes there are fish, sometimes there are none.

The purpose of this study is to observe and understand the process of the association's shift to livelihoods outside of fishing. I became interested in understanding how and why they were no longer focusing on and working solely in fishing, therefore, my field research consisted of studying the obstacles of working as a fishermen and the role that the association plays in finding solutions to these obstacles. In this paper, I will attempt to illustrate the reasoning behind the shift in occupation, the transformation of a fishing association into one focused on creating and promoting tourism in their community as well as joining the formal markets of WalMart. All this is based upon the association's mission of working towards "el desarrollo de la familia."<sup>6</sup> Due to the pollution of the lake, the loss of an adequate fish population, and the difficulty of finding markets for their catch, the fishermen of the association in San Antonio Palopó have abandoned fishing as their subsistence, their livelihood. Shifting to a larger, global market, the association has

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<sup>3</sup> Traditional woven top worn by indigenous women.

<sup>4</sup> Wrap-around skirt used by indigenous women

<sup>5</sup> Wooden, dug-out canoe

<sup>6</sup> Development of the family; specifically economic development

transformed its role within the community now that it is no longer focused on fishing as an occupation.

### **Methods**

The orange juice sold in the plastic bottles in San Antonio, as it turns out, are not at all orange juice, but rather a sweet, sugary mixture with slight orange flavoring. However, my excursion to the *tienda del amanecer*<sup>7</sup> was successful in other measures. Having decided that day to study the fishermen of San Antonio Palopó, I asked the teenage girl behind the counter if there existed a place in which the fishermen gathered or could be easily found. She responded quickly in Spanish, her words escaping me, and left the shop window. A few moments later, the shop owner appeared, and I repeated my question. This man, Luciano, as it happened, is the director of a fishermen's association. He invited me to attend the next association meeting. It was there that I agreed to aid in the creation of a promotional brochure for the tours that would soon be offered by the association. It seemed to be a whirlwind of good luck; I eagerly awaited the first association meeting.

This study looks at the association's transition away from fishing; into tourism and larger markets. My methods of research consisted of formal interviews, informal interviews, and participant observation over the course of three weeks; February 14<sup>th</sup> to March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The majority of my findings are based in the association of fishermen of San Antonio. However, I continued to conduct my research outside of the realm of the association. Yet, since my study is focused on this specific association's shift, outside research was limited to basic and generic questions about tourism and work in the community. I will use only the first names of my informants so as to protect their identities and privacy.

I approached my research with three overarching questions. First, what are the obstacles to working as fishermen today? This question will be answered through background information on

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<sup>7</sup> Store of the dawn

the lake itself and the natural obstacles to the fish population and the occupation of fishermen.

Through my interviews and participant observation, I was able to obtain answers and information pertaining to the difficulties of the practice of fishing itself. Finally, the answers to this general question were often accompanied by opinion and personal experiences with regards to how fishing has changed over the past fifty years.

Secondly, what is the work of the association? This question covers the majority of my research and participant observation. By working with the association to produce a brochure about their tourism project, I had the opportunity to watch the shift of occupation and trade, as well as spend time working with the members of the association. Through my work with the brochure, I was able to learn of the obstacles that had pushed them to search for new or additional livelihood, the current projects of the association, and their opinions of the matter.

What are the future projects or goals of the association? This third and final overarching question was answered through formal and informal interviews for the most part. I was interested in learning of the future of the association, with regards to their current projects and future hopes and desires. The mission of the association is focused on “el desarrollo de la familia,” or the development of the family, with reference to economic development (Luciano Interview February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010). Therefore, I was interested in seeing how this played out and will drive the projects of the association.

Throughout my field research, I continued to attend the association meetings, one occurring every week of my stay in San Antonio Palopó. Although the meetings were conducted in Kaqchikel, they allowed me to meet and spend time with the other members of the association in a formal and structured setting. This acted as the location and background to many of my informal interviews. My questions were answered concisely in this context; however they were typically similar to those of the association’s vision and seemed to be nearly formulaic in word choice. This

may have been due to the presence of the other members of the association or the formal setting of the meetings.

Aside from the formal association meetings, I spent a portion of nearly every day with Luciano. He quickly became my key informant as he and I were working together to produce the brochure. Patiently, he explained the layout and formation of the association; its goals, purposes, history, and future possibilities. Due to my participation in the association, Luciano answered my questions without hesitation. I do not believe that this would have happened had I not agreed to participate in their tourism project and had instead conducted my field research through interviews and observations. Through a variety of formal and informal interviews, as well as the hours that I spent working with him, Luciano provided me with a clear understanding of his position with the association and its mission, as well as projects.

I believe it important to hear from a range of people and gain their voice. For this reason, I conducted both formal and informal interviews with other members of the association. By working with or speaking with other members of the association, including an onion farmer, I gained a wide array of voices and opinions on the associations work. However, I did conduct one formal interview with a group of four members of the association on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010; with questions pertaining to their work today and the shift over the past fifty years, the effect of tourism on San Antonio, and the reasoning behind shifting to tourism rather than another occupation.

My findings were limited by a variety of factors. First, as an outsider to the community of San Antonio, I was unable to communicate in Kaqchikel, the preferred language of the members of the association. Additionally, as a non-native Spanish speaker, some of my questions or comments may have been unclear or misunderstood by my listener. As a female, I was in the minority of the association members, as all members are male. This may have impacted the ways in which they allowed me to participate in the association or how they presented their lives and opinions to me.

Additionally, I approached my research with a considerable bias and lens. I entered the

community expecting to find a traditional Mayan town, and left with a clearer understanding of present day Mayan communities. However this bias may well have affected my research, as I often asked questions of tradition and culture during my initial investigations. Finally, the amount of time that I spent in the community was limited to four weeks in total, yet the majority of my research was conducted during the last three weeks of my time in the San Antonio Palopó. This forced me to limit my study considerably, therefore gaining a narrow perspective on the transition of trade for the fishermen's association.

### **Background**

Lake Atitlan has changed a great deal over the past half-century; both physical and biological changes. Referred to as a "sickness," the populations around the lake have been left to deal with the consequences of such pollution, which has, in turn, changed the viability of a variety of occupations and trades. Due to the inundation of chemicals and sewage, the introduction of a new species of fish, and the overfishing of the lake, the fish population has decreased greatly in both number and quality. Therefore, fishing in the lake is no longer profitable.

Lake Atitlan is not the pristine lake that is advertised in the many guidebooks to Guatemala anymore. "Harmful blue-green algae rose to the surface of Guatemala's Lake Atitlan in October and November 2009" (Riebeek). This time period, referred to as Black September, was a bloom of cyanobacteria, an algae that grows in still water with a high concentration of phosphorus and nitrogen. Phosphorus, present in soaps, human waste, and fertilizers, has been dumped into the lake in great quantity, "for example, the Highland lakes, Atitlan and Amatitlan, are increasingly polluted with chemical residues" (Hoy et al 1984:170). Similarly to Guatemala City, whose "sewage-domestic, industrial, commercial, and institutional—is dumped directly into streams and rivers," the sewage of Atitlan communities empties directly into the lake (Hoy et al 1984:170). The effects of sewage pollution, with its high concentration of phosphorus, include the reduction of the "recreational value of water, for example, Lake Atitlan...the growth of undesirable

biological life...and kills fish and other aquatic life” (Hoy et al 1984:170). The growth of the cyanobacteria in Lake Atitlan was due, in part, to the dumping of raw sewage and chemicals into the lake, causing the death of a large portion of the aquatic life.

Secondly, the introduction of the largemouth bass, the *Micropterus salmoides*, a game fish, has greatly affected the biological makeup of the lake. “For at least three centuries before 1958, Lake Atitlan, a large, tropical, and surely one of the world’s most beautiful lakes, had sustained fisheries for small native fishes...that provided the native Guatemalan Indian population with an important source of protein as well as a small extra cash income” (Zaret et al 1973: 450). However, the black bass, along with another, smaller introduction, fed on the native fish population, drastically reducing the former fish population of the lake. As of 1973, the fish and crab populations were decimated, and it has not improved since. Due to such small populations of aquatic life, the fishermen are forced to take the young and immature fish of the lake; worth little money and furthering the degradation of the fish populations because they are not allowed to reproduce. Therefore, a source of protein and income has disappeared, “clearly the ecological cost of this species introduction was great and the benefit slight” (Zaret et al 1973:450).

The initial introduction of the largemouth bass destroyed the local fish population of Lake Atitlan. When the cyanobacteria bloom occurred, the trade of the fishermen of the area lost many of the remaining markets for their small catches. Lake Atitlan has not had the opportunity to regenerate and become any less polluted due to its role in the daily lives of many; utilized for the washing of clothing, bathing, fishing, boating, and the drainage for sewage and other chemicals. For these reasons alone, the fishermen of the association in San Antonio Palopó have been forced to seek out new livelihoods.

### **The Obstacles of Fishing Today; the Creation of the Association**

Over the past fifty years, the lake has experienced rapid change and a major upheaval of its biological makeup. For this reason, and the shift towards a more global and capitalistic society,

fishing as a livelihood is no longer as viable as it had been previously. In 2005, the San Antonio Palopó fishermen's association was created to organize the fishermen of the community to work together to make their occupation more profitable and sustainable. According to Luciano, the director of the association, it was created to find ways to change the lives of the families of San Antonio Palopó, to make life a little better for them. Its purpose and orientation is one of social service, one of development (Conversation, Luciano February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010). Officially, the mission of the association is “1) Que la familia tenga un cambio de vida 2) La protección del lago y los derechos de su población 3) Que el turismo aumenta en San Antonio Palopó<sup>8</sup>” (Luciano, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010).

Miguel, second-in-command of the association, entered Luciano's shop followed by three other members of the group. We pulled out the plastic lawn chairs again, scraping them along the floor until we had formed a small circle. Juan, an elderly man, was the sole *traje* wearer of the group. I began the interview with questions of the change in the work of fishermen over their lifetimes. Juan was the first to answer my question after a long pause in which I mumbled out another form of the question. “Antes, había mucho pescado porque no habían muchos pescadores,<sup>9</sup>” causing the profitability of fishing to have decreased substantially (Juan, Interview February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010). He did not attribute the difficulties of fishing solely to the pollution of the lake; however, the problem has only worsened due to over-fishing of the lake. Fishermen have been forced to fish for hours on end so as to earn enough to support their families; fishing in a manner that is focused on quantity rather than quality. Luciano described that today fishermen are taking fish that are much too small to be of good quality, the fish can't grow and reproduce because they are being taken when they are very young and immature. “Por eso, no hay mucho

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<sup>8</sup> 1) That the family experiences a change of life 2) The protection of the lake and the rights of its surrounding population 3) The increase of tourism in San Antonio Palopó.

<sup>9</sup> Before there were many fish because there were not many fishermen.

pescado hoy en día<sup>10</sup>” (Interview February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010). Juan nodded his head in agreement at this comment, his hat falling lower over his eyes.

Lifting his hat ever so slightly, Juan pulled his chair forward and began to discuss his take on the problems in Lake Atitlán. “La contaminación fue la razón de la enfermedad del lago<sup>11</sup>” according to Juan; referring to the cyanobacteria outbreak of 2009 (Interview February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010). However, when I asked about why the lake was so polluted, the group fell silent. Only Miguel spoke up, however the opinions were not his own. “Algunos piensan que la bacteria empezó a causa de la clima o bastante basura en el lago<sup>12</sup>” (Interview February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010). When I tried for a more specific answer, more concrete reasoning, the association members failed to answer. They were seemingly unaware of the causes of the bacteria outbreak in the lake. Their attention was focused on the effects of this pollution on their work; the lack of fish to be caught and the difficulties of finding markets for the few fish that are caught. After the bacteria bloom, much of the population of Atitlán was hesitant to consume the fish of the polluted lake, although the fish had been tested for toxins and were not harmful to humans (Luciano, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010). Therefore the available markets dwindled significantly, making the already low profitability of fishing even lower. Fernando, speaking up from the corner of the group, said that “hay tiempos que hay y tiempos que no hay<sup>13</sup>” with regards to his catch (Interview February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010). The inconsistency of the work is a prevalent and obvious factor in the reasoning for their search for a new livelihood.

The fishermen’s association, although formally nameless and known only as the *asociación* by its members, is now the umbrella organization for *Servicios Turísticos Palopó*, the tourism project. Created to combat the inconsistency and uncertainty of the work of fishermen, it began as a community organization for fishermen; a way to work together to seek out new markets and

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<sup>10</sup> Because of this, there are not many fish today.

<sup>11</sup> The pollution was the reason for the sickness of the lake.

<sup>12</sup> Some think that the bacteria bloom started because of the climate or too much waste in the lake.

<sup>13</sup> There are times that there are and times that there are none.

solutions to providing for their families. The purpose of the association “es un cambio de vida para nuestras familias. Estamos en camino<sup>14</sup>” (Luciano, Conversation March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010).

The association began with ten members, all searching for a way to make their occupation a viable livelihood after years of struggling to provide. The fishermen of the association work in other occupations to supplement their earnings from fishing; working in construction, carpentry, transportation, and weaving (Miguel, Conversation February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010). However, when I asked each association member at the interview, excluding Miguel, if they would rather work in these other professions or work solely in fishing if possible, all answered that they prefer fishing over the variety of other occupations that they hold; however their solution to the lack of work in their preferred trade has led them to look outside of fishing.

Fishing is no longer the focus of the association’s work or discussions. *Servicios Turisticos Palopó* serves as the transportation organization of the association; private shuttles to and from San Antonio, as well as a variety of other locations in Guatemala. *Servicios Turisticos* began as a supplement for the members of the association; it serves as the livelihood for Luciano’s family for the most part. This is an expanding project, and will begin to encompass and benefit other members of the association as well as the community of San Antonio.

### **Current Project of the Association**

*Servicios Turisticos Palopó*, a member of the larger *Kaqchikel* tourist organization in Panajachel,<sup>15</sup> currently works solely in transportation. However, it will soon expand to encompass tours of San Antonio Palopó and Santa Catarina Palopó, a nearby town on the lake. This will include many more members of the association; employed as tour operators, guides, and transportation workers. Creating these new services “es como estamos aprendiendo a caminar de nuevo,<sup>16</sup>” according to Luciano (Conversation February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010). It is the start of a new

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<sup>14</sup> Is a change of life for our familias. We are on our way.

<sup>15</sup> A nearby town on Lake Atitlán that is often thought of as the tourist center of the department of Sololá.

<sup>16</sup> Is as if we are learning to walk again.

occupation; a new means of identifying one's self for the members of the association. Learning anew the methods of earning a living, the fishermen must redefine their role within the community and world.

The association is no longer solely made up of the fishermen of San Antonio, it now includes an onion farmer, a *petate*<sup>17</sup> maker, and others involved in transportation; a total of 17 members are a part of the group as of March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010. “Había una reestructuración de la asociación el año pasado, y ahora tenemos objetivos específicos para la desarrolla de la familia<sup>18</sup>” (Luciano, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010). The purpose of creating these tours is to improve the economy and job opportunities within San Antonio Palopó. Luciano was adamant in clarifying that all of the profits of the new tours would return to San Antonio as all members lived and worked within the community. “Si los turistas vengan, San Antonio va a prosperar,<sup>19</sup>” and it will change the lives of the townspeople. Even though it is the association that will be leading the tours, all of San Antonio will be beneficiaries of the project; tourists will become aware of the other possibilities in San Antonio, stay in the hotels, eat at the restaurants, visit the artisan shops of the town, and spend time in the community (Luciano, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010).

Just as San Antonio is emphasizing in its tours, the neighboring town of Santa Catarina Palopó, is characterized as “a traditional town by calling attention to textile weaving, fishing (a minor occupation today), mat weaving (not practiced today), and onion farming” (Little 2004: 238). The tours will define the traditional aspects of San Antonio, including the onion terraces, *petate* fabrication, and weaving. According to the association, these are the characteristics of San Antonio culture that are most pertinent to the tourists' interests.

The tours will begin in Panajachel, taking the tourists to the thermal waters in Santa Catarina Palopó, and then continue on to San Antonio Palopó via private boat, driven by a member of the

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<sup>17</sup> Woven indigenous mat, made of dried reeds. Often used as a mattress or a seat for women to use while weaving or cooking.

<sup>18</sup> There was a restructuring of the association last year and now we have specific objectives towards the development of the family.

<sup>19</sup> If the tourists come, San Antonio will prosper.

association. Upon arrival in the town, the tourists will be taken to the onion terraces of Jose, a new member of the association. However, Jose has never worked in tourism before, having worked as a farmer for the majority of his life. When I visited his fields to interview him, he invited me to help him with the planting of the onion seedlings in his terraces. With the soft earth under my feet and complete ignorance as to how to go about planting onions, he explained his participation in the tourism project of the association. As a father and grandfather, the family that he is providing for is continually growing; therefore he has decided to find supplementary work to his farming. By agreeing to give tours and an explanation of onion cultivation in San Antonio, he will be included in a portion of the profit of each tour. Tourism does not imply merely positive sentiments for Jose, but rather makes him uncomfortable; “los turistas vienen y sacan fotos de nosotros sin pedir, pero es la vida. Los vienen con dinero y una economía buena para el pueblo<sup>20</sup>” (Interview February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010). Tourism is not his preferred method of making a living, however he views it as a necessity for the town and beneficial to his family and community. His negativity towards the attitudes that the tourists convey and the utter lack of communication between the people of San Antonio and its visitors was the first comment that addressed the problems of having tourists in the community. However, his opinion of the actions and attitudes of the tourists did not discourage him from entering into the world of tourism; it is economically unavoidable for himself and his community. Jose ended our discussion with a joke that he wanted to try and enlighten the tourists with as a part of their tour, asking for my opinion, he sat me down on the earthen terrace wall and recounted the riddle to me.

*You poke me, peel me, cut me, and cook me. But afterwards, I will always make you cry. What am I? His eyes wrinkled with a smile, and I answered honestly that I had no guess as to what the answer was. He laughed and pulled an onion out of the ground. An onion!*

After visiting the onion terraces of Jose, the tour will move on to the house of a man, Santos, that makes the majority of the *petate* mats used and sold within San Antonio Palopó. Similar to the

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<sup>20</sup> The tourists come and take photos of us without asking, but such is life. They come with Money and a good economy for the town.

story of Jose, he no longer is able to provide for his family by solely harvesting *tul*<sup>21</sup> and creating *petate*. One enters his house through a gate fashioned by the material used to make tin roofs, and then steps through a low door into an adobe house. He will then give a demonstration of the pounding of the *tul* as he prepares to weave a mat. The tourists will be encouraged to take photos of these “traditional” aspects of San Antonio, although the creation of *petate* is currently practiced by only a small number of community members. Finally, the tours will visit a variety of artisans’ shops. Their senses will be inundated with an extraordinary amount of weavings, low prices, and colors; while at the same time, they will most likely be encouraged to buy from the shops so as to take home a piece of the indigenous culture of Guatemala.

The official association brochure (see Figure 1) gives a description of each aspect of the tour and its importance to the community. These were the aspects of San Antonio that the association determined to be of greatest importance and interest for tourists; a form of self-representation of their tradition and culture. As we were taking photographs for the brochure, Luciano began by working the loom in a green polo; however he realized part way through the shoot that it did not emphasize the indigeneity of his actions. He left the room to change into *traje* so as to have the photographs represent the indigenous culture of the town to the tourist; “among Mayas themselves, tradition refers to ongoing localized sets of life practices and social relations, not to some unchanging or past cultural practice” (Little 2004: 264). Luciano recognized that tourists buy their tickets for such traditional tours so as to see the cultures of the past, not the way in which the indigenous population lives today. For the Maya “do not think using such things as cellular telephones, computers, gas stoves, refrigerators, televisions, and cars makes them less Maya,” however to the tourist, they are not paying to see the modern day communities (Little 2004: 264).

Around Lake Atitlán, 50-60% of the population lives off of tourism (Rivera, Lecture January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010). On many drives back and forth to the internet cafes of Panajachel, to work on the

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<sup>21</sup> The reeds used to make the *petate*.

*trifoliar*,<sup>22</sup> we had many discussions of the motivations for creating the tourism project. Luciano's personal opinion is that jobs in tourism are more beneficial to a greater population. The goals of the project that he stated outright consisted of changing the lives of his family, his community, and creating jobs by doing this. "Queremos cambiar el destino de los turistas"<sup>23</sup> (Luciano, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010). Tourism is, to Luciano, a more profitable and applicable work. However, for Miguel, tourism is more than merely a livelihood. He enjoys the "variedad del trabajo y la oportunidad para visitar otros lugares"<sup>24</sup> (Conversation March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010). In Miguel's estimation, tourism acts as both an occupation and a passion; as he put it, working in tourism is a manner in which to enjoy life. Unlike the other members of the association, Miguel chose to work in tourism not only as a means of earning of living, but rather, he enjoys it with great zeal.

Tourism often changes or alters the communities that it touches. Therefore, during my formal interview with the four association members, one of my questions pertained to the effect of tourism on San Antonio and its present day culture. Would it destroy or revive the old practices and traditional culture of the region? This question itself was biased towards the tourists' idea of traditional, and the answer was fascinating in the face of this bias. Miguel was the first to answer this question; "habían algunas personas que casi no usaron sus *trajes*, pero los turistas vienen a ver los costumbres, y se usan otra vez."<sup>25</sup> Tourism has helped to maintain the use of the traditional, whether it is truly traditional or a creation of such tradition. For example; Luciano described to me how the weavings of today are an "arte moderna"<sup>26</sup> for the people of San Antonio. It had existed before as a practice of the women, however their weavings were for use only; "nuestros antepasados hicieron tejidos, pero ahora es una parte de la comercialización y mercados."<sup>27</sup> It was only with the start of the tourist markets that women and men began to weave for profit and sale

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<sup>22</sup> Brochure

<sup>23</sup> We want to change the destination of tourists.

<sup>24</sup> Variety of the work and the opportunity to visit other places.

<sup>25</sup> There were some people that were no longer using their *trajes*, but the tourists come to see the traditions and now they use them again.

<sup>26</sup> Modern art

<sup>27</sup> Our ancestors made weavings, but now it is a part of commercialization and markets.

(Luciano, Conversation March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010). Tourism has morphed traditional aspects of San Antonio culture into timeless parts of tradition as well as created new and enhanced cultural practices of the town.

### **Future Projects and Goals**

The association, outside of *Servicios Turisticos Palopó*, continues to work in other solutions to the lack of earnings that fishing brings in, as most members are not leaving the occupation all together, rather supplementing it with other manners of making a living. For this reason, the association is exploring the possibility of creating a fish farm; *estanques*<sup>28</sup> within the town of San Antonio Palopó. This expansion will further push the association members to become a part of the larger global markets; between tourism and the vending of the fish to newer and larger markets. Furthering the association's goal of working in social services, to help the families of the town, this fish farm will theoretically generate work for the community and connect San Antonio to other, more profitable markets. "Fish-farming is a less traditional but highly valuable activity. It can be developed in small or large ponds where still or flowing water is available, and it can utilize simple technology and land that is not suitable for agriculture" (Hoy 1984: 173).

Fishing in Lake Atitlán, traditionally a sufficient livelihood, is no longer a feasible means of sustaining one's self or family. Because of the cost of realizing such a goal, they are looking to outside donors to cover the costs of the creation of the fish farm; a total of 1,177,000.00 Quetzales for the construction and initial costs, the project can not be completed nor begun without generous funding. On a pamphlet meant for international and outside donors, the association stated its goals and purposes for the fish farm.

*Objetivo del proyecto: Identificar, producir y comercializar peces en el municipio para beneficiar directa económicamente a cincuenta familias, e indirectamente a todo el municipio. El mercado primario previsto para la comercialización es el mercado local, con el objeto de*

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<sup>28</sup> Tanks used for farming fish

*contribuir al mejoramiento de los índices de desnutrición del municipio y sus alrededores sin embargo, visualizan la necesidad de incursionarse en el mercado formal*<sup>29</sup>.

The association is looking to expand to the formal, larger markets of restaurants and companies in the future; something that would never be possible had they continued to earn their livelihoods solely from fishing in the lake.

Luciano's vision for the fish farm is that it will continue to grow until they are able to serve both local and formal markets. By using various types of fish from the lake, as well as another species from lake Amatlán, they will produce a variety of fish that is safe and healthy; one that may be sold to both locals and tourists. Beginning with the local markets, Luciano hopes that the sale of fish within local markets, in greater volume, will aid in the health of the people of San Antonio Palopó. Because of prices and a lack of availability, many families do not consume an adequate amount of protein and vitamins (Luciano, Conversation March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010). Therefore, the introduction of a greater volume of fish to local markets will supposedly help to decrease the amount of malnutrition within the community. The fish farm, serving as an employer of 50 families, will directly benefit them in terms of a consistent and predictable salary. However, by selling within local markets, the fish farm will serve the remainder of the community in Luciano's opinion.

Formal markets and future growth for the sale to companies is the final vision for the fish farm's production. Beginning with the local market, and establishing a reputation of providing safe and clean fish, Luciano hopes to eventually expand to the tourist market, by providing restaurants with their production. However, growth is the key to Luciano's goal for the fish farm. Having already joined the global market by creating the tours of San Antonio, he hopes to further integrate the association into the international by selling to the corporation of Walmart. By selling

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<sup>29</sup> Objective of the Project: To identify, produce, and sell fish in the municipality for the direct economic benefit of 50 families, indirectly benefiting the entirety of the municipality. The principle market that will be used for the sale of the fish will be the that of the local market with the objective of bettering the malnutrition statistics of the municipality and its neighbors. However, the project recognizes the necessity of joining the formal markets in the future.

to such corporations, the profitability of the fish farm will increase drastically, therefore allowing him to expand the project to include other families and new components (Conversation March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010).

### **Conclusions and Further Study**

*Roq*<sup>30</sup> our day at the beach, I ate my first fresh crab from Lake Atitlan. It was a kick-off party for the brochure that we had created. Grabbing the fresh and still very much alive crabs by their claws, one had to clean the mud off of their legs and backs. Finally, to add to any prior discomfort, I was told to let the juices out of the crab so that the soup would have more flavor. This was, theoretically to be done by pushing ones thumb through the belly of the crab. Not surprisingly, my crab ended up on the ground, facing the group with its claws up, scuttling back and forth, ready to attack. After an hour of boiling, I was eating my feisty enemy with a side of tortillas.

The fishermen's association, ready to begin promoting its newly created tours of San Antonio, was in the process of shifting its focus, the trades of its members. Lake Atitlan has experienced an incredible amount of pollution and degradation; a combination of an ill-chosen species introduction of fish and the constant drainage of chemicals and sewage into its waters. These factors have led to the over-fishing of the few forms of aquatic life that are left, and left the fishermen without sufficient work. Pushed to find a new trade, a new livelihood, the association of San Antonio has worked together to create tours of their community; hoping to bring in a large amount of tourists, large enough to aid the entire economy of San Antonio.

Working towards the economic development of the family, environmental protection of the lake, as well as the protection of the rights of its inhabitants, and the increase of tourism in San Antonio, the association is building up new projects. By creating the fish farm, the group will create jobs for 50 families however, by becoming a presence in the local markets, it will

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<sup>30</sup> Kaqchikel slang used to describe a vacation day when one makes a fresh mixed seafood soup

theoretically aid in bettering the nutrition of the town. Finally, the fish farm will seek out larger, more international markets, such as Walmart. This will allow the project to expand, including more families and creating more jobs.

The projects of the association all work towards their mission of economic development for the family, by creating jobs, and bringing in more markets to the community. Yet, in my study of this organization, I did not hear of or see any intentional work towards protecting the rights of the population around Lake Atitlan nor did I witness any direct environmental protection projects. However, as Congressman Oscar Vega stated, “one must always remember that we need shoes [economic development] before ties [environmental safeguards]” (Hoy et al 1984:163). Therefore, environmental and human rights may be the goal to work towards for the organization that is attempting to help to put the fishermen and their families back on their feet.

The association’s transformation has caused the fishermen and the other members to redefine their position in the world, their work, and the way that they identify; whether it is by how they classify the traditional within their tours or the work that they set out to do each day. An organization that was created to help to seek out new markets and to find ways to make fishing a livable occupation has now become one tied to global markets. By creating a tourism project, and looking towards a new and larger fish market, the members of the association have made a dramatic shift in their lives. The degradation and destruction of Lake Atitlan has led to this process of change and the new direction that the association is heading in; one of globalization and change.

Figure 1.



### Tour de Santa Catarina y San Antonio Palopó

- **Agua termal- Thermal Waters**
- **Taller de Artesanía- The Workshops of Local Artisans**
- **Fabrica de Petate- The Creation of Reed Mats**

**Servicios Turísticos Palopó Kaqchiquel**  
**Calle Prindpal al lago San Antonio Palopó Tel.44212261**

**Contactenos:**  
**Luciano Perez y/o Miguel Angel Perez**  
**5484-1925—40589712**  
**arttransturpalopo@yahoo.es**  
**arttransturpalopo.winnernet.net**  
**Transtourpalopo.winnernet.net**





La Artesanía de San Antonio Palopó. Es el principal trabajo artesanal de los ancianos, hombres, mujeres y jóvenes que tejen guipiles, cortes, bufandas, individuales, servilletas, manteles, y telas de primera calidad en colores vivos. Weaving is the principle work of the men and women of San Antonio, as well as the work of their ancestors. They weave "guipiles," the traditional shirt of women, skirts, scarves, place settings, table clothes, and cloth by the yard.

La Cebolla blanca, morada y los cebollines, son los principales productos orgánicos tipo gourmet de la producción artesanal de San Antonio Palopó, son también el sustento principal de muchas familias. La cebolla es un alimento nutritivo rico en vitaminas A B C y tiene muchos beneficios medicinales y afrodisíacos que lo dejaron motivado para visitarlos nuevamente. The red, white, and green onions are the principle organic product of San Antonio. They serve as a the main livelihood for many families of the area. Onions are rich in vitamins A, B, andC, as well as having medicinal uses and aphrodisiac components.

El Petate es usado como colchoneta para dormir y/o alfrombra por la comunidad de San Antonio Palopó, esta elaborado con la planta de Tul que sirve como filtro natural en la purificación del agua del lago de Atitlan todo esto a travez de un manejo sostenible y sustentable y también se vende como un producto decorativo natural. The petate is used as a mattress to sleep on and/or as mats for the community of San Antonio. They are made from the reeds that grow in the lake and serve as an filtration system for the water. The reeds are grown and harvested in a sustainable way, and serve as the principle livelihood for many around the lake. The petate is sold for decoration as well.



#### Itinerario:

09:00 Hrs. Salida de Panajachel  
 09:30 - 10:30 Tiempo para nadar en las aguas termales de Santa Catarina Palopó  
 11:00 Llegada a San Antonio Palopó  
 11:00-13:00 Visita a los talleres de artesanías, terrazas de cebollas y elaboración de petates  
 13:00 Traslado de San Antonio Palopó a Panajachel

**Schedule**  
 9:00 Leave from Panajachel  
 9:30-10:30 Swim in the thermal waters in Santa Catarina Palopó  
 11:00 Arrive in San Antonio  
 11:00-1:00 Tour of the artisan shops, the onion fields, and Petate creation.

¿Quiénes somos (Who we are)

Somos una organización integral de San Antonio Palopó que incluye transportistas, lanchareros, pescadores, artesanos, y agricultores, comprometidos con el desarrollo de nuestras familias. We are an organization of fishermen, artisans, farmers, and transportation operators from San Antonio palopó. We are working together for the development of our families and community.



**Precio por persona\$: 20.00 Us,**  
**Niños de 0 a 10 años 50%**

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