

Ethno-Development in Taquile

Kevin Healy

Peru's Taquile Island, 13,000 feet above sea level, is set against spectacular mountain scenery of the Lake Titikaka basin. Quechua-speaking Taquileños farm steep, eroded hillsides and catch fresh trout, pejerrey and catfish for their island economy. Some islanders are master boatbuilders for the Aymara and Quechua communities on the Peruvian side of Lake Titikaka.

Taquile's geography and vibrant folk culture attracts rugged tourists from around the globe. Over the past 15 years, the Island's 1,200 residents have developed a model for Native American community control of tourism, frequently a source of cultural distortions in societies the world over. In Taquile, islander control of tourism has helped them maintain a strong sense of cultural integrity while adding economically to their community. Their local enterprise includes motorboat transportation, housing, restaurants, handicraft stores, a local museum and tour guide services. By working through local families and community organizations, islanders maintain a scale of tourist activity consistent with a people-to-people approach and invite visitors to appreciate their local life and cultural values. The workings of this system has insured an equitable distribution of the economic benefits and dynamic practices of peasant self-management.

Taquileños' everyday attire attests to their thriving weaving tradition. Combining dominant Inca reds, Andean geometric symbols and other fanciful designs, they are among the best weavers in Peru. As a cottage industry weaving provides economic benefits to everyone on the Island. On ground looms women weave woolen belts, bags and ponchos of all sizes, while on treadle looms men weave cloth for peasant shirts. Men also knit vests and stocking caps.

Through their ethno-development strategy of tourism and textiles under Andean community control, Taquile has changed from one of the poorest Lake Titikaka communities to become one of its better-off during the past 20 years. Outside support for Taquile has come from the Inter-American Foundation, a congressionally

supported aid agency, which supports alternative community empowerment projects for socio-economic change.

Kevin Healy was a Peace Corps volunteer on Taquile Island in the late sixties. He subsequently wrote a book about rural development in Bolivia and since 1978 as a grant officer with the Inter-American Foundation has been funding alternative socio-economic development projects in the Andes, especially Bolivia. He has degrees from Notre Dame, Georgetown and Cornell.



Weaving is a major social and economic activity on the island of Taquile in Lake Titikaka, Peru. On a patio surrounded by living quarters a weaver spins sheep's wool with a traditional drop spindle. Photo by Olivia Cadaval