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Discrepancies between defined and actualized ecotourism: bridging the gap between theory and reality

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Abstract

Ecotourism is a well-known term, but also an ambiguous word, misunderstood by tourists, tourism hosts and also academics. It has received expanding attention since it has become the quickest growing sector in the tourism industry. Literature published on ecotourism has spent much time and debate trying to define the term and pinpoint exactly what ecotourism is, theoretically. Many definitions have been proposed, ranging in complexity and preciseness, but none have been universally accepted. Much literature also exists on ecotourism case studies, but these have their own flaws since no one can really decide what ecotourism is or how it should look. A large gap exists between understanding and implementing true ecotourism, as well as understanding and experiencing what one believes to be ecotourism, but 'true' ecotourism is inevitably an impossible reality to many skeptics, both tourists and academics. However, this paper will still attempt to bridge the gap between ecotourism theory and reality by highlighting the discrepancies between them.

Útdráttur

Vistvæn ferðamennska (ecotourism) er þekkt en margrætt hugtak, misskilið af ferðamönnum, gestgjöfum þeirra og fræðimönnum. Það hefur vakið vaxandi athygli þar sem vistvæn ferðamennska hefur verið helsti vaxtarsproti ferðamannaiðnaðarins. Áhersla hefur verið lögð á að skilgreina hugtakið og afmarka það nákvæmlega í fræðilegum tilgangi. Margar skilgreiningar hafa verið settar fram, misflóknar og nákvæmar, en engin ein hefur náð almennri hylli. Bókmenntir á sviðinu hafa gjarna fjallað um tiltekin dæmi (case studies), en slík dæmi segja takmarkaða sögu þar sem enginn virðist geta kveðið uppúr um það hvað vistvæn ferðamennska sé og hvað hún felur í sér. Eitt er að skilja fyrirbærið og annað að gera "sanna" vistvæna ferðamennsku að veruleika, sem margur efasemdamaður bæði í hópi ferðalanga og fræðimanna telur óhugsandi. Þessi ritgerð freistar þess hins vegar að brúa bilið milli kenningar og veruleika hvað vistvæna ferðamennsku snertir með því að undirstrika misræmið milli þeirra.

Dedication

To my supervisors at UC Berkeley for their tremendous support in the beginning stages of what I thought would be a never-ending paper, and to Gísli Pálsson for being so willing and able to help a fellow Vestmann Islander.

Preface

Growing up as a child in Iceland, my parents were both very cosmopolitan, having lived in many countries, speaking a handful of languages, and traveling together even after starting a family. When I was eight years old, I moved to Canada to grow up most of my life and similarly start my own cosmopolitan, multi-lingual life. When I was fifteen, I had my first international experience alone, participating in a home stay in Tokyo, Japan. From then on, I have always thirsted for travel and international experiences – learning bits of new languages, experiencing different foods, participating in cultural exchanges, and most importantly, seeing different environments.

After almost eight years of regular traveling, the highlight of all my destinations has always been submerging myself in a new environment – a new climate, a new biosphere, new flora and fauna, and most times, a new culture. Traveling to unusual ecosystems, experiencing some of the worlds natural wonders, and treading uninhabited corners of the world has led me to a huge interest in ecotourism and traveling in a way that is environmentally responsible. Traveling inevitably means my carbon footprint is quite high, simply from air travel, ground and sea transportation – I do, after all, live on an island in the far north – so the concern for me to reduce my ecological footprint has been a personal point of conflict every time I decide to keep on traveling.

I often try and advocate eco-friendly travel principles to family, friends, and other travelers I meet along the way, and I still believe ecotourism is one solution to reducing the negative effects of travel and tourism. I also think ecotourism impacts individuals, communities and environments in many other ways – it also leads to cultural exchange, education, distribution of wealth, and appreciation for the environment that we might otherwise never experience if we never leave our homes, the safety of our cities, or the familiarity of our country.

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Abbreviations

ISO: International Organization for Standardizations.

TIES: The International Ecotourism Society

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1 Introduction

Martha Honey's (2008) *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development; Who Owns Paradise*, opens with a story of the Golden Toad from Costa Rica, an amphibian once abundant to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve and once the face of many ecotourism advertising campaigns for Costa Rica. Since 1989, there have been no sightings of the brightly coloured toad, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature has officially declared the species extinct. Biologists and other scientists have usually attributed global warming as the driver of extinction in this case, but Honey highlights the correlated timeline between the toad's declining population and the rise of ecotourism (Honey, 2008: 4). She raises the possibility that perhaps one of the tens-of-thousands tourists visiting the region may have brought in with him/her an introduced species or alien organism that caused a plague among the toad population. If true, this would both be ironic and saddening to realize, since ecotourism and the profits generated from it are actually meant to conserve and protect the habitat of such exotic species, not obsolete them.

I would like to share a more uplifting story, the story of the Baboon in Belize, to show how ecotourism can reach its goals in successfully protecting parts of nature like an endangered species. In 1985, a community baboon sanctuary was initiated by foreign scientists with twelve landowners in a rural village of fifty-five kilometers northwest of Belize City. It was a project intended to help protect the species through habitat conservation efforts, and involved the local community in order to help with development in the area. The private landowners were encouraged to manage land for saving the baboon – an endangered species of black howler monkey - by agreeing to leave forest strips and specific types of trees along the Belize river banks, between property boundaries, and in a large common area, untouched. This land dedication helped control riverbank erosion, and created a monkey sanctuary population of 1,000 monkeys. This increased tourism to the area, from only twenty-five tourists per month in 1985, to 6,000 in 1990, and exposure and funds from this expanded ecotourism market allowed for a greenhouse and a museum to be built. Not only have the conservation efforts facilitated by ecotourism allowed the baboon

to thrive again, but now the greenhouse further gathers data on plants and animals that have disappeared from the area to reintroduce them, and the museum provides local classes to children. (Horwich et. Al. 1993:132-168) The museum and the visitor centre located in the sanctuary educate locals and tourists about the local flora, fauna and ecosystem. [1]

My personal love for tourism combined with a growing concern for environmental issues like species extinction and habitat degradation leads me towards a more optimistic outlook on ecotourism. Although ecotourism could have directly or indirectly led to the extinction of the Golden Toad in Costa Rica, the Community Baboon Sanctuary in Belize offers us hope that ecotourism can also benefit the environment and local communities. I believe these success stories can be repeated in other cases of ecotourism, as long as it is properly understood, implemented and regulated.

While a substantial amount of literature exists on the theory of ecotourism, and books have been written solely to try and define the term, I would like to highlight the discrepancies which exist between theoretical and actualized ecotourism. Once realized, some ecotourism case studies show a lack of basic ecotourism principles since the term ecotourism is often misunderstood, misidentified, mismarketed and incorrectly applied. I will offer a set of indicators by which tourists and host populations can identify ideal cases of ecotourism and thus measure the effectiveness of ecotourism theory.

This paper will proceed in three parts. In the first, I will conduct a literature review which introduces the term and discusses the limitations of ecotourism. The second part will share the results of an ecotourism definition survey which highlights the discrepancies between defined and realized ecotourism from the tourist perspective. This chapter will end with a synthesis of the academic literature and case review studies, resulting in the identification of ten core elements ecotourism must exhibit to be considered truly effective and correctly applied.

1.1 Defining Core Concepts

In ecotourism, we talk alot about the environment, culture, and local communities. While the definition and working use of local community changes with every instance of

[1] Today you can follow the continued success and development of the Community Baboon Sanctuary at www.howlermonkeys.org.

ecotourism or case example, nature and culture are much more complex words that are sometimes loosely used. Please note that throughout this paper, the environment is synonymous with natural environment, since I am referring to the biotic factors of one's surrounding. It includes all the flora, fauna, living organisms and ecosystem services included in the natural environment, and assumes people are also part of the environment so human-altered environments are, to an extent, still considered natural environments.

The American Heritage dictionary (2005) specifies that the anthropological definition of culture includes essential features that distinguish humans from other animals (ie. language use, morality), but the exact definition of culture is a bit more vague and open for interpretation. Within ecotourism, culture tourism certainly exists, to smaller and larger extents in different regions, but when I refer to culture in relation to ecotourism, it is assumed to be the culture prevalent to the ecotourist area at hand. While it may include history, tradicions, customs, behavior, religion, diet, clothing, or music, the only necessary aspect of culture is society so someimtes culture can be considered totally absent from the discourse on ecotourism if there is no host community.

1.2 History and Background on Ecotourism

Ecotourism is defined a little differently by everyone, but is hypothesized to have been coined in the 80's by a Mexican architect who defined the term as:

> "Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features-both past and present). It is a type of tourism that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations." (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996:20).

While the term ecotourism may be a relatively new word, the use of it and tourism that could now, in hindsight, be defined as such is probably much older. The International Ecotourism Society claims it is the „world's oldest and largest international ecotourism association," yet it was only established in 1990 (TIES, 2010).

Ecotourism is argued to have been born in Kenya or Costa Rica, but realistically, these are the two countries who have most been case studied for ecotourism related research. They have the most and arguable oldest documented case studies in both ecotourism in theory and in practice. In both practice and theory, it is still a growing trend throughout the

world, and nature based ecotourism is sought by particular visitors which also encourages the tourist industry to be ecologically sustainable. The growth in demand for ecotourism experiences can be attributed to many factors, and ecotourism has arguable experienced the fastest growth of all sub-sectors in the tourism industry.

With the growing popularity and use of ecotourism in the travel industry, there are many incentives for green labeling, and green washing and falsely advertisited ecotourism are also growing problems. Currently there are many initiatives for national and international ecotourism certification, but accredidation programs are still largely ineffective and contreversial in meeting the goals and objectives ecotourism attempts to seek.

Even though there have been books upon books written on the theory of ecotourism, many criticize the fact that academics have spent so much time trying to define ecotourism that only dozens of vague, conflicting definitions have resulted and little else (Harrison, 1997:75). However, some say that a precise definition of ecotourism is perhaps unnecessary unless the term is to be used in legal or administrative documents (Buckley, 1994:664).

2002 was declared the International Year of Ecotourism, but since then many conferences and symposiums have been held on ecotourism. In Setpember of this year, the Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Conference (ESTC2010) will be held in Portland, Oregon, and is organized by the TIES. What is a concern for many and a valid issue to raise is that if noone can decide on a working definition of ecotourism, how successful is it to begin policy making or implementing successful models of ecotourism since noone really knows how to make the transition from theory to reality? I hope to stress the importance of this question as the discrepancy between defined and actualised ecotourism becomes more important in my paper.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Ecotourism

Since ecotourism is often seen as a facet of sustainable tourism, it is safe to say it rose in popularity after the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development released the Brundtland Report, stressing the necessity for sustainable development; shortly after, almost all industries – including tourism – became concerned with the notion of sustainability and the viability of their industry in an growing environmentally-conscious world. The notion of ecotourism emerged as a viable and potentially major segment of the tourism industry since it reflects global concern for environment and the quality of life for host communities. Ecotourism is long and difficult to define, but has risen in popularity – both academically and in the tourism industry – since it was considered a very attractive and compelling concept (Hall 1998: 92-93). As the concept of ecotourism has slowly become more scrutinized, the use and availability of ecotourism experiences is now a lot higher, and the reality is that ecotourism is not a passing fad, but growing in accessibility and popularity within the tourism industry as one of the most successful and marketable types of tourism.

There have been countless attempts to define ecotourism, and this has just caused more ambiguities around the true meaning of ecotourism. Ecotourism is essentially nature based tourism, with one component promoting a natural area's environmental conservation, and another component supporting its local community. One of the more recent attempts to define it, and one which is consistent with my own use of the term, is explained by Mbaiwa and Stronza: "ecotourism is tourism that attempts to minimize the negative impacts of conventional tourism and instead make positive contributions to environmental and social challenges." (2009:336).

Despite ecotourism having varying definitions, the academic controversy of defining the term is less important than the actual implementation and use of ecotourism. Thus, I do not want to spend too much time speculating the true definition of ecotourism, but noteworthy

is that even tough some very broad to extremely specific suggestions have been offered, where all relate is the inherent necessity of ecotourism to benefit the natural environment and local community (if there is a host population). Tourism is the largest sector in the world economy today, and ecotourism – also called nature tourism, alternative tourism, or green tourism, and sometimes synonymous with soft tourism, adventure tourism, or responsible tourism – is the fastest-growing sector (Cater and Lowman 1994: 89). This is because of increased environmental awareness in the global community, desire for tourists to have nature-based experiences, and the developing worlds' conviction that natural resources are finite and must therefore be conserved (Theobald, 1994).

Ecotourism is considered a response to mass tourism; mass tourism is large-scale, resource-heavy, culturally impersonal, environmentally degrading, and often surpasses carrying capacity limits to maximize profits and increase development of an area. Mass tourism tends to be foreign owned, erodes local economies, and over-consumes resources, and ecotourism can become an alternative form of travel where tourism choices create positive change in the industry from the bottom up (McLaren, 2003). Tourists want an alternative way to travel instead of packaged, all-inclusive, beach, cruise-ship, or coach-bus vacations, and avoid visiting destinations where the over-populated tourist crowds and their western needs are heavily catered. However, ecotourism carried out incorrectly can be just as (or even more) damaging to the environment, so regulating its application is important to keep it set aside from mass tourism. Although negative repercussions of any tourism activity are unavoidable, ecotourism can be considered a more sustainable alternative to mass tourism. Some see ecotourism as the way of the future for all tourism, so ecotourism should play a role in the transformation of mass tourism into sustainable tourism by demonstrating at a micro-scale the ability of the industry to become more ecologically accountable and responsible through the development of sensitivity to resource base and involvement of local people (Fennell 1999: 271).

Ecological changes resulting from nature-based tourism are also almost inevitable, but not all change is bad and the good resultant has to outweigh the damages. The benefits of ecotourism are numerable: promised employment, education, foreign exchange, income to local communities, and empowering pride in the local community (Whelan 1991: 4). The direct benefits of ecotourism include incentives to protect natural environments, rehabilitate modified environments, and provide funds to manage and expand protected

areas. There are unavoidable effects on the resources which ecotourism relies, but small allowances of environmental change that may or may not hurt the environment should be compensated by larger gains in the greater good for the environment. Ecotourism is one approach concerned with aims of lessening the impact people have on natural environments, by analyzing and addressing the problem of human impacts on environments (Daly and Cobb 1990: 93). Some skeptics essentially argue that all tourism is bad, but I believe a regulated tourism industry can benefit local people, the natural environment, ecotourists, and individual species like the Howler Monkey. Conservation efforts promoted by nature-based tourism encourages people to stop deforestation, keep their oceans cleaner, respect tourist-attracting wildlife populations tremendously, among a long list of other benefits ecotourism has the potential to offer.

While the idea of ecotourism became hugely popular with theorists in the early 90's and much of the academic discourse on ecotourism concerns its definition and how it should exist theoretically, now a wave of literature is being written on case studies of ecotourism and solving the problems arising from it. This shift in focus is seen in my own references throughout this paper; early references relate to the academic discourse and terminology discussion, while more recent references are less theoretical as they discuss the actual cases of ecotourism all over the world, making this literature more accessible to actual stake-holders in the ecotourism industry as it exists in reality. It is also interesting to trace the popularity and wide acceptance first of ecotourism as a theory by academics, and now, away from skeptical theorists to more accepting travelers, as ecotourism rises as the most fashionable way to travel with eco-minded or environmentally conscious tourists. There were many ideological pressures behind the discourse in the early 1990's, but now the pressure and much discussion is on the application of ecotourism in the real world.

2.2 The Limitations of Ecotourism, and Some Responses

Ecotourism, along with all other forms of tourism, "despite the efforts to date to improve its environmental performance, is still an industry which contributes more to the creation of environmental problems than it does to their solution… the inevitable conclusion is that the needs of the tourist and of the environment cannot be wholly and fully reconciled, non-renewable resources will be consumed and critical natural capital put at risk" (Stabler 1997: 299 – 301). Some preferences for ecotourism have been in response to mass tourism

as a form of mass consumption (Urry, 1990), but like any tourism sector, ecotourism is still a consumptive, money-making industry, and its possible negative impacts must be understood before we can capitalize on the positive outcomes. Succinctly described, ecotourism can essentially be seen as conservation through consumption; the ironic thing about ecotourism is the anthropogenic nature of both what it aims to do and what it aims to avoid or fix, since these two goals are slightly contradictory. The paradox of nature tourism is that "the prettier a site, the more popular it becomes, the more likely it will be degraded" (Mbaiwa & Stronza, 2009:338), or, similarly, "the more attractive a site, the more popular it may become, and the more likely it is that it will be degraded due to heavy visitation, which in turn may diminish the quality of the experience" (Hillery et al., 2001:853-854). Thus, too many tourists will destroy the very product that is marketed! We are ultimately trying to save the same places we are ruining, either directly through our travel, in our footprints on those places, and the growth of tourism infrastructure, or indirectly, through our western, carbon-heavy lifestyles half way around the globe that result in increase carbon output, climate change, and global warming in the places we want to preserve.

Our positive action is trying to fix the harm we have already done, but this is ironic since prevention seems better than cure, but having *no* tourism is not a viable idea since all tourism should simply strive to do more good than harm, thus balancing the scales in favor of a continued tourism industry. The history of national parks, which exemplify the apparent paradox between visitation and conservation, contains many lessons for the use of ecotourism as a conservation and development tool in the 1990´s. Having large sections of land protected from development but allowing visitation still results in human impact, like the need for tourism infrastructure (toilets, roads, camping grounds). A popular discussion reflecting this paradox is often brought up in Antarctica, having no form of tourism in sub-Antarctic islands may well be the most advisable management strategy, but unrealistic. To ensure natural areas are preserved we must allow people to visit these wild places so that policy makers can be persuaded to maintain their reserve status (Booth 1990). There is an indescribable sympathy and understanding of both the beauty and fragility of nature that arises from visiting those areas, and having first-hand, experiential understanding that nature should be valued in and of itself allows us to better appreciate and desire to protect areas like Antarctica.

Without certain travel, people would continue to mindlessly harm the natural world without ever seeing or understanding the size and power of the human ecological footprint on the world. Sailing to the fragile Antarctic islands is sometimes considered tourism that can never be beneficial, but the knowledge gained and concern generated for these pristine ecosystems and their grim fate is a valuable benefit to each visitor since it inspires individual change in each tourist that goes there. Tourism to this desolate, uninhabitable area undoubtedly leaves a lasting impression on the ecotourists that visit it, fostering greater education, concern and awareness for issues like global warming, rising sea-levels, depleting fish-stocks, and whale hunting.

I believe tourism functions as too important of a development tool to eradicate or minimize. However, one of ecotourism's main shortfalls is that economic gains often outweigh environmental protection initiatives, especially for underdeveloped areas. Ecotourism is ultimately a form of industry, with ecotourism describable as the marketing of the environment. Ecotourism is seen by some as only an economic opportunity, so it is unrealistic to expect ecotourism hosts in underdeveloped areas to put the interest of the environment at too high a priority. The short term gain of capital is enticing because the benefit is an immediate pay-off, where as putting environmental concerns secondary reaps negative consequences in the long-term.

One exemplary case where the environment is sadly put after economic initiatives is in the Galapagos Islands - one of the most famous and heavily visited marine reservations in the world, and one that is under serious public and scientific scrutiny for not regulating tourist numbers. I visited them in June of 2008 and was horrified to see just how many tourist-filled planes landed on the tiny Islands and unloaded hundreds of tourists that each paid a $100 park fee upon arrival. This fee was initially used as a way to deter people from coming, and keep track of the number of tourists arriving in order to regulate them, but none of the funds charged by Park Authorities benefit the park itself since it goes directly to the Ecuadorian Government (Galapagos National Park 2009). My Ecuadorian friend who traveled with me explained that the regulation was very corrupted, since many National Park Officials pocket the money (it is only payable in cash) and lie about the numbers arriving so it is not accounted for as missing, so who really knows exactly how many extra tourists are arriving contrary to what statistics show or regulation allows. What is most frustrating is perhaps that most tourists that travel to the Galapagos do not even

hesitate to pay this fee, and rumors in Ecuador at the time I was there circulated the idea that the fee may be increased to $400 to try and deter visitors. The reality is a lot of people will still continue to come, paying whatever it takes, so the government knows the economic gain is huge even though there should be other regulations to control the total number of tourists entering, like an actual cap in number, to ensure the environment is protected and degradation is lessened.

Another example of ecotourism effectiveness losing out to economic gain can be seen in the Pacific Islands. An ecotourism project launched mid 1990's in the Solomon Islands started with the right intensions, but turned foul when the environment became secondary to the need for economic sustainability of the venture. The project was designed by one NGO, two international conservation agencies from the US and New Zealand, and a travel agent from Australia. It was initially aimed to assist in rainforest conservation and provide income for Melanesian villagers, but when One World travel began organizing tours promoting responsible tourism on Makira Island, representatives from US Conservation International decided villagers would benefit more from a regular flow of visitors and decided to include mainstream travel agencies in the project. Local benefits to the community and environments thus became secondary to the economic gains (Hall 1998: 61). Even though intense economic pressure is put on people of certain ecotourism areas, appropriate ecotourism should not be viewed solely as an avenue for short-term financial gain (Whelan1991:3,79).

Rapid globalization is making travel an accessible, powerful tool, and although it is meant to be an alternative to mass tourism, one fatality in the ecotourism industry is that it sometimes leads to a slippery slope towards mass tourism. If ecotourism is not carried out sustainably and properly managed, ecotourism can have a greater, even worse ecological effect. This slippery slope can plummet ecotourism areas to suffer some of the same problems mass tourism destinations experience; ecotourism usually promises great benefits to hosts and guests, but can actually result in stark and painful consequences for local communities and the environment (McLaren, 2003). This is because its contribution to the degradation of fragile and pristine ecosystems is more apparent and direct, as greater numbers of people traveling to undeveloped, natural environments constitute a higher load on sensitive ecosystems. As soon as an ecotourist destination becomes popular enough or developed enough to support a big enough tourism industry, hordes of ecotourists respond

by traveling to the area, and some argue it is only a matter of time before tourists destroy the very resources they believe they are traveling to see and help. The benefits to the local community are overtaken by foreign investors and travel agents, and the mass marketing of their ecotourism destination brings tour guides and companies from abroad. However, even when an ecotourist destination or activity becomes mainstream or a host place for the 'masses,' isolated cases of successful mass ecotourism do exist. Off the coast of Australia are the Phillips Island, and their Penguin Parade – an ecotourist activity where bleachers fill with thousands of tourists each sunset to watch thousands of penguins hobble around on the beach below – won the Victorian Tourism Award for Ecotourism because it is ecologically sustainable and fosters environmental understanding, appreciation and conservation (Nature Parks Australia, 2009).

One final limitation of ecotourism success is that it is troubled by a lack of accountability. Ecotourism has often been falsely advertised, leading to accusations of green-washing. It is hypothesized by skeptics to actually be a hollow term, simply a buzzword for referring to regular tourism with a splash of nature. Harrison says ecotourism "has become something of a buzzword in the tourism industry... academics have so busied themselves in trying to define it that they have produced dozens of definitions and little else (1997:75). Eco-anything is, to many extents, a reflection of fashion, a current fad becoming increasingly popular, meant to trigger the environmental consciousness we are all meant to have. Ecotourism, as it is used today, is thus often mismarketed since it has become a trend marker. Greenwashing is an easy crime; much of what is marketed as ecotourism is simply a tiny sample of nature (for example, a one hour hike on one day of your 7 days all-inclusive cruise), things Honey refers to as 'ecotourism lite' (1999:443), or a small change in practice (hotels not washing your bed sheets daily, but every other day instead), or a total, grotesque exaggeration through false advertising (environmentally friendly pictures or policies that in actuality follow none of the principles or practices of sound ecotourism).

Lanfant and Graburn (1992) suspect all forms of alternative tourism are an advertising gimmick, since identifying one form of tourism from another (ie. mass vs. ecotourism) is a difficult line to draw, and though the label is attractive, it may be deceiving. Calling ecotourism an alternative form of tourism also implies the principle of the alternative – an excluded middle. Furthermore, ecotourism as a term and a theory is plagued with varying

definitions, so one person's idea or use of ecotourism may not be seen by others as ecotourism, so he or she may not have bad intentions or knowingly be mismarketing a product, but is simply ill-informed on what ecotourism actually is or should look like.

The purpose of my ten indicators is to overcome this; ecotourist host communities and travel operators will have the chance to model these specific requirements to legitimately market an ecotourist experience. I am not so interested in succinctly defining the term in a sentence or two, but allowing these ten guidelines to be imposed on ecotourism operations to prevent abuse of the term and identify actual instances of environmentally friendly tourism; these indicators will establish a minimum standard which true ecotourism must meet to be beneficial, effective ecotourism.

The Importance of the Ecotourist

While ecotourism can achieve a lot of good for both natural environments and host communities, it does face some constraints. One of the most important ways to overcome the negative consequences of ecotourism and implement the theory behind ecotourism as effectively as possible requires the participation of ecotourists themselves. Even though an efficient ecotourism industry needs to be managed by a responsible local community, a lot of power rests with the ecotourist to motivate and supply the resources necessary for the host population to properly manage an ecotourism area.

Ecotourists are known to be responsible travelers who are likely to contribute to local nature conservation efforts (Hall 1998:146). Ecotourists are an important key to the successful harmony between nature and travel. An ecotourist is defined as an environmentally friendly traveler who emphasizes seeing and saving natural habitat; they prefer simple facilities with minimal impact on natural resources, and show willingness to pay more for those services and products provided by environmentally conscious suppliers (Whelan 1991). Ecotourists are not looking at the price as much as they are concerned about environmental impact; they have started the rapidly growing interest in ecotourism and the desire to have an enlightening experience which incorporates a genuine sensitivity to the resources upon which it is based and furthermore, are willing to pay extra for the travel experience they desire (Cater and Lowman 1994: 51).

The 'green' movement has inspired all sorts of industries to be more environmentally aware, and ecotourism has similarly been a response in the tourism industry to become

more sustainable. The rising popularity of environmentally responsible travel is being driven by ecotourists, since critical consumer tourists are leading the demand for environmentally sound holidays (Shaw & Williams 1994); without their demand for alternative travel, the supply of more sustainable forms of tourism would inevitably be limited. Governmental regulation or trust in tour operators is not always an effective means to implement successful ecotourism, but putting responsibility in each individual is a powerful mover for change from the bottom-up. Imagine what the world would be like, or what tourism could become, if every traveler became an ecotourist and traveled as lightly and responsibly as possible? Imagine the knowledge that would be shared and spread around the world about how to act more sustainably, both as a traveler and as an every-day local? There would surely be a revolution of present-day tourism and the existing green movement, since mass tourism is certainly one of the worst industries for carbon emissions and exploitation of the developing world.

Travel and transportation are the highest inputs to ones ecological footprint, and eco-friendly travelers are more likely to be aware of this and either chose to travel slowly (ie. by land versus air) or offset their carbon emissions through programs offered by airlines (ie. tree-planting). Ecotourists must think locally once they arrive to their destination, since one problem that must be dealt with is that most of the tourist dollar rarely stays wihin the local community, but instead ends up in the pockets of outsiders, such as hotels, airlines, and tour operators owned and/or operated by foreign travel agents. Quie often, only a relatively small part of the tourist dollar remains at the actual destination, unless ecotourists make an effort to make sure their money contributes locally.

One responsibility ecotourists have that is often overlooked is the burden of costs arising from a tourism industry; a fair distribution of benefits and costs must be shared, or else the environmental risks and costs are unfairly burdened by the host community. To allow for ecotourism and the environment to coexist, the direct costs of ecotourism cannot be burdened wholly by the host population. The majority of ecotourism occurs in third-world countries, where the cost of environmental management, like environmental protection measures that prevent or restore degradation, is unaffordable and unfairly born by these underdeveloped countries since their resources and environmental carrying capacity are being exploited by non-locals (Cater and Lowman 1994: 77-78). “Not only should the tourist have to pay for the use of environmental resources but the developers of

accommodation units, etc. must be made to pay the full costs of… environmental maintenance… As countries charge foreign mining companies for extracting their oil and other minerals, so foreign tourists should be charged for extracting the benefits of an ecotourist site" (Burns and Holden 1995). How this can be done is of course a complicated question, but park fees, tourism visas and other means of taxing ecotourists is one way fiscal resources can be attained, and cost-exclusion can keep tourist numbers capped.

Education of the hosts might be one of the most valuable contributions ecotourism has to supporting the host community and sustaining their livelihood. In some cases, the host population can actually learn about ecotourism management and environment conservation when tourists visit the destination. Ecotourism is not just about educating the traveler, but an exchange of education. Ecotourists will usually have more experience with traveling to conserved areas and can assist with habitat maintenance and enhancement (Weaver 2001); they may be better knowledged to suggest improvements or alternative ways to protect and manage natural environments and teach the local community to be more sensitive to their environment. In some cases of effective ecotourism, it is often the initiative of a foreign eco-tourist or scientist that results in the funding and implementation of a properly managed ecotourism industry, but one that stays within the power and control of the local people.

Ecotourists´ travel decisions have an enormous effect on the travel industry; it is their responsibility, or at least volition, that leads to educated decisions, knowing about the destination, disturbing environments minimally, and learning how to travel more sustainably (Myburgh and Saayman, 1990). The tourists are the ones traveling, and ultimately, it is their footprints on people and places that make the ecotourist destination viable or not. Ultimately, it is up to them to leave *only* footprints, and take with them only memories (and photographs, if you like).

3 Surveying Ecotourism Complexities

3.1 Highlighting the Discrepancies

While a literature review has shone light on the many ways in which theoretical ecotourism is treated differently than case studies conducted on ecotourism instances, I would still like to further stress the ways in which defining ecotourism has become a completely separate academic endeavor compared to identifying and implementing effective ecotourism in reality. Instead of consulting more case studies, I will also consult ecotourists, since I have already explained the importance of the ecotourist in actualizing effective ecotourism.

Ecotourism Attitude Survey

I conducted an ecotourism attitude survey to try and discover how many ecotourists actually had a grasp on the theory of ecotourism, and also how many eco-minded academics had an idea on its definition but had not experienced ecotourism in practice. This means I had a selective participant group, but only to strengthen the validity of this survey since randomizing respondents meant including respondents who might not have had any experience of ecotourism theoretically or in reality which are not relevant to highlighting the discrepancy between them. I chose people who were currently studying in the environmental field, and included respondents from the faculty of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at UC Berkeley, and respondents from the Faculty of Environment & Natural resources at the University of Iceland. My other selective subset of survey respondents included people I met along my travels, all chosen specifically from activities or areas I considered ecotourism related. Most were people I met in Antarctica, Iquazu Falls, Iceland, South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia. My survey conclusions thus include respondents of the sample group who might not all be self-identified ecotourists, but are all people who either had exposure to ecotourism or eco-minded principles.

In order to successfully highlight the divide between theoretical and experienced ecotoutism, I asked four questions related to the definition and identification of ecotourism

to thirty-six selected respondents, both male and female, ranging in age from 20 – 65, some local, but most were middle to upper-class westerners (see Appendix A for the original survey). The questions were asked verbally and I wrote their answers verbatum, or the answers were received on paper or in email and the respondent wrote their answer down. The answers to each question and all the questions together both allowed me to discover what differences existed between people's thoughts on ecotourism as a theoretical principle versus people's personal experiences in ecotourism. Below is a discussion of the responses, followed by a table visually representing the conclusion of their answers (see table 1.1).

Question 1: A) Would you be able to define Ecotourism, if asked? B) If yes, please share.

Immediately the thing I find most interesting about this first question is that even though six respondents answered no, every single participant still answered the second question as to whether or not they thought all nature tourism was ecotourism. This seems proof to me that it does not require one to be able to define ecotourism in order to have a feeling of it or how it should be, since everyone had an opinion on whether or not nature tourism should always be considered ecotourism. It seems easier for tourists to identify ecotourism in reality than it is for them to say anything about it theoretically, since few respondents answered 1b. Even though they couldn't define the term, those respondents were still able to judge whether or not they thought all nature tourism was equivalent to ecotourism. For four who did answer positively, they still did not share what their definition actually was, and this might be for some unrelated reason like they were pushed for time or uninterested, but it could also reflect the difficulty and ambiguity in actually formulating a definition of ecotourism.

One ecotourist explained ecotourism is tourism that goes to places not usually visited by tourists, and is intended help the environment and ecosystem of the area. They then explained their ecotourist activites only involved ten Earthwatch projects all involving wildlife conservation. This makes ecotourism defined as a much more hands-on, participatory activity than simply travel for leisure.

Many were more concerned about defining ecotourism as a set of activities, in one case criticizing 'eco' advertised tourism for offering natural areas "as a background for extreme sports," so a national park offering parasailing can use nature-viewing as an attraction, but it is not the main attraction and the area does not gain from tourism.

I developed the upcoming Ecotourism Definition Survey after this attitude survey, but will use the format of comparing definitions in the same categories. I decided on eleven definitions that have, in one way or another, been used to define ecotourism in academic literature, and here I will use those same categories to compare what types of definition words ecotourism was given by participants.

Table 1.1 Attitude Survey Respondents' Definition Count

Definition	Attitude survey Respondents	Count
nature based	4,5,6,7,8,11,12,13,14,20,22,24,25,28,35	15
Sustainable	1,16	2
Alternative		0
Educational	20,24,28,36	4
Cultural	28	1
green or 'ecofriendly' or environmentally responsible	3,5,8,11,16,18,19,22,25,26,34,35,36	13
conservation/preservation/protection tool	4,6,7,13,22,23,28,29,31	9
small scale	19,23	2
Localized	1,3,6,19,31	5
to underdeveoped areas/promotes development	16	1
Political		0
aesthetic value/satisfaction	13	1

NB: See Appendix 2 for list of definitions surveyed

Even though the majority of respondents did not consider all nature tourism ecotourism, it was the most commonly used definition, with more than half of the respondents who answered yes to question one giving a definition that involved natural-attraction. The responsibility of the tourist and activity to not cause harm was the second most used definition, although it was probably the most broad category since this category was defined in many different ways. Only two respondens used the word sustainable or made a reference to the scale of the tourism, and only one respondent

considered ecotourism to involve cultural attraction. While many commented on ecotourisms contribution and support to local communities, only one made a more clear, explicit reference to ecotourism only existing in underdeveloped areas. Noone considered ecotourism to be alternative or political, but to keep these categories consistent with the upcoming table (some literature does use these definitions), I did not take them out of the table.

Question 2: Do you think all nature tourism is ecotourism?

Similar to defining ecotourism as a set of activities, one respondent explained not all nature tourism can be considered ecotourism because "snowmobiling in parks is an attempt to enjoy despoiling nature." Again the results of ones activities within a place are more important than the place, and this explanation also suggests that ecotourism, different than nature tourism, requires some form of protection or preservation. Another respondent also brought up nature tourism not being equivalent to ecotourism since the setting of a national park does not make an activity (like mentioned above, an extreme sport for example) an ecotourism experience.

One respondent answered negatively to this question explaining that places like Zoos and Seaworld are nature tourism that they would not consider ecotourism. This is an interesting comment because Seaworld is a distinct type of tourist attraction, but a more vague category like zoos or petfarms are often quickly blurred with more large scale places like national parks that may be fenced and run just like zoos, or game reserves run just like pet reserves. Many respondents listed National Park visitation as an ecotourist activity in question 4, but probably would agree going to the zoo is not. This is an interesting distinction because one can philosophize, at what point does a zoo become a Wildlife Safari Park or vice versa? At what point does a macro-managed, 100 acre game reserve with a high density of tame wildlife become a pet farm? Even though National Park visitation was heavily favored as an ecotourism setting, one respondent answered negatively to this question explaining "Yosemite & Yellowstone can be considered nature tourism in national parks, but I don't think they're ecotourism."

One considered nature tourism necessarily connected to preservation, and answered the forms of nature tourism that don't preserve nature while showing it to tourists can not be considered ecotourism. This raises important questions about the theory of preservation, since no nature is really untouched, pristine or unspoiled anymore, so is preserving it in its

present state enough? Or is preservation about improving the area, or more complicated yet, keeping it completely separate from human interference? The answer is unclear.

One respondent answered negatively to all nature tourism being ecotourism, stating the difference between the two was dependent on the behaviour of the tourists. They explained "a tour can be about flowers but participants litter on the ground," meaning the ecotourism experience was only correctly enjoyed by the more responsible ecotourist, and those who litter or do not contribute to conservation of the area are not experiencing ecotourism correctly applied.

Question 3: Do you think ecotourism is meant to be more sustainable than other forms of tourism?

This question was specifically phrased 'is ecotourism *meant* to be more sustainable' and some answered no, it *is* not more sustainable but is probably *meant* to be. Others took the question more literally and answered yes; one stressed this difference by directly commenting "[ecotourism] is certainly meant to be more sustainable." Another answered yes and commented "but I think it's more meant to *appear* that its more sustainable, I think the ecotourists want it that way, but not necessarily the ecotourism owners, employees or country people." This would arguably be one identification of green-washing, taking a more skeptical approach to the theory of ecotourism and complaining about the difference between actually being sustainable in reality versus just appearing to be more sustainable.

Some were unclear about the meaning of sustainable; one respondent agreed that ecotourism is meant to be more sustainable in terms of consumption, but not meant to be more sustainable in terms of ongoing business revenue. Another also answered positive, but stressed it is only more sustainable than *most* forms, not all. One answered negatively, commenting "it may be equally sustinainable as other forms of tourism." While this may have something to do with the ambiguities of people's understanding of the term or their personal experiences with ecotourism, I also think this is a strong example that people either do not understand the theoretical objectives of ecotourism, or think that the goals (like sustianability) of ecotourism are not being met in reality and ecotourism in practice is hardly different than other forms of tourism since a lot of it is mismarketing.

Question 4: A) Would you, in your recent travels (+/- 2 yrs), have ever considered yourself an ecotourist, ie. participated in an ecotourist activity? B) If yes, what thing(s) did you do/place(s) did you go?

Some of the responses show that tourists support a nature culture dichotomy by criticizing ecotourism for allowing human interference, thinking that a true or pure ecotourist is a detached,

uninvolved spectator. For example, one respondent explained they considered themselves an ecotourist because they visited National Parks and didn't destroy or disturb anything.

Some considered work related travel to ecotourism areas not ecotourism – an element of defining an ecotourist identity with purposeful, leisurely travel. The intent of the journey then becomes important to an ecotourist identity, and even though the respondent listed a set of destinations in 4b, said he "would normally" consider himself an ecotourist in those areas, but in this case would not since all their travel was work related.

Another respondent said he would consider himself an ecotourist if he had the option, explaining he identified as a nature tourist but would opt to be an ecotourist if "the financial premium is modest or non-existent." This shows that to some, ecotourism is a more luxurious, expensive form of travel, and thus identifying as an ecotourist is a cost-exclusive status. That is an excellent point since green washing or eco-labelling often does result in the exclusivity of a place, service or product, and even though it might not actually be more expensive in real money, you end up paying more you are also buying a trendy image or that warm-fuzzy, guilt-free feeling.

If people answered 4b, the most common answer for where people went included large areas like Antarctica and the Amazon, more contained areas like island groups or national parks, and all the way down to specific ecotourism lodges or activities like Manuakwena Resort or camping. One respondent listed their ecotourist activities as "chimp and gorilla tracking, big game safari, and climbing Virunga Volcanoes in Uganda; Hiking up Table Mountain and visiting penguin reserve in South Africa; Backpacking in Yosemite." Being an ecotourist then becomes much less about where you are than what you are doing, although all of the settings for the explained activities could arguably be ecotourist destinations in and of themselves.

A couple of respondents answered 4b with a place and then commented on the way that they behaved in that place, which means identifying as an ecotourist is about a way of acting. One respondent explained they "took care not to disturb the environment" in Antarctica, and another, mentioned previously, said they considered themselves an ecotourist because they visited National Parks and didn't destroy or disturb anything. This also came up with question 2; one respondent explained ecotourism is not necessarily more sustainable since "a tour can be about flowers but participants litter on the ground;" here

again the tourists actions define an ecotourism experience, not the setting or activity itself. One respondent did not answer the question directly since the response explained in what type of hypothetical situation they would consider themselves an ecotourist, explaining "I would go to the interior of… Guyana, to the Amazon region, see the Natives and help them learn better skills so as not to deplete resources." Here the ecotourist identity is also more involved, localized and behavioural dependent.

Some did not answer with a location or activity at all, but answered that they always considered themselves en ecotourist, suggesting that being an ecotourist is an identity or state of mind, not something that is only realized in practice. Respondents explained they considered themselves ecotourists "in general" or by always trying to "travel in environmentally conscious ways", for example taking „public transport, eating locally, and visiting naturally beautiful places without harming the area." Others answered the opposite, that being an ecotourist was temporary, an identity existing during the ecotourism visit. One respondent explaines, in past tense "I was an ecotourist. I went to Galapagos in 2008 and Kenya in 2009, to watch birds and wild animals." Here they state both a location and an activity to call themselves an ecotourist.

One respondent answered 4 "not sure," but in 4b listed Galapagos, Kenya and Antarctica, which highlights the confusion of people identifying themselves as an ecotourist versus being in a place that is, either on its own or for other tourists, an ecotourist place. Even if one is not familiar with the theory or reality of ecotourism, they connotate these places with the term since they are so often discussed in ecotourism literature.

Two respondents mentioned the efforts of the tour operator in their consideration of being an ecotourist. One explained of her Antarctica host "Quark was very conscience of the potential impact on the natural habitats; guides participated with the landings to ensure visitors remained in authorized areas" and added "our fellow Quarkers seemed to respect the environment." Then, an ecotourism identity is enforced by the other tourists actions around you, and somewhat forced onto you by the group and group management as a whole.

In general, the most surprising aspect of this question and the survey as a whole was that my sample group was a target audience, that is, people who did travel with either environmental reasons or environmentally popular destinations, and still twelve respondents said they would not have considered themselves an ecotourist in their recent

travels. Also, the intial purpose of this survey was to see how many were familiar with the theory of ecotourism but not ecotourism in practice or vice versa, and of all those who answered positively to question 1, seven said they could define ecotourism but still answered that they would not have considered themself an ecotourist. Inversely, one respondent expressed the opposite, that although they could not define ecotourism, still considered themself an ecotourist from experience.

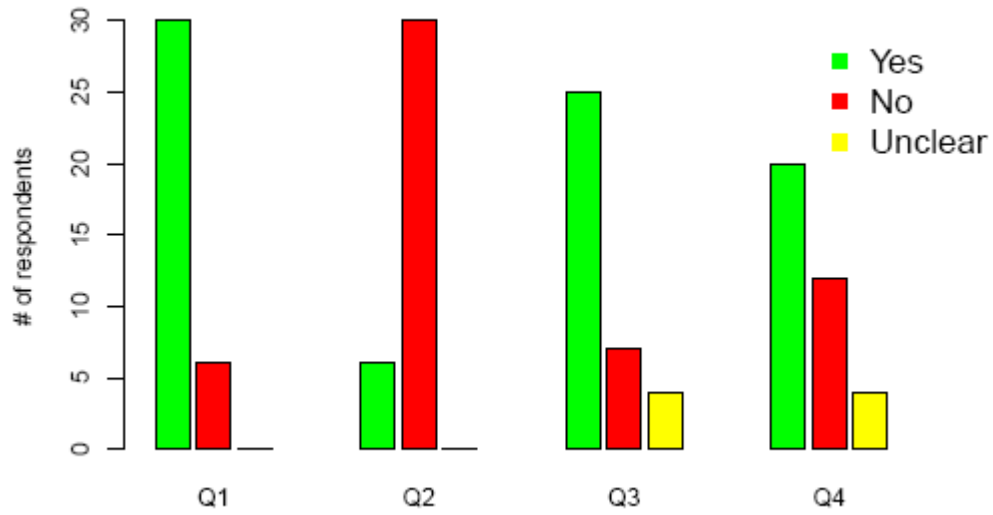


Figure 1.1 Visual Representation of respondents answers to each question

3.1.1 Ecotourism Definition Survey

After conducting the attitude survey, I was more interested in question 1 since defining the term ecotourism not consistent with those who identified as ecotourists or considered themselves having experienced ecotourism even though they could not define it. I decided to conduct another definition survey, this time consulting the literature again. I then compared the definitions used by the literature with the defintions used by the respondents. In this second survey, I surveyed the academic literature for words used in defining ecotourism. I compiled all the buzzwords I heard when ecotourism was described and tallied the time each was used in a definition. There was some overlap in definitions but the exact word use was different, so I tried to group them as simply as possible. Please Note: ‚Nature based' refers to the attraction of the tourism, and any reference to flora or fauna or generally ecology/ecosystems was counted as natural attractions. For simplicity's sake, I did not differentiate between nature that had to be exotic, wild, pristine or fragile (since some definition specifically singled these adjectives out) so these types of nature are also

counted here. ‚Alternative' was considered synonymous with any reference to ecotourism being an alternative or response to mass tourism or other forms of tourism.

Table 1.2: Academic Literature Definition Count

Definition	Sources	Count
nature based	1,2,3,4,5,9,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,20,21,22, 23,24,25,27,29,30,31,32	25
Sustainable	9,24,26,27,30	5
Alternative	3,6	2
Educational	1,5,9,21,24,26,27,30,31,32	10
Cultural	1,2,5,8,18,22,24,26,30,32	10
green or 'ecofriendly' or environmentally responsible	1,2,3,5,6,11,13,15,17,19,27,29,30,31	14
conservation/preservation/protectio n tool	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,14,21,26,27,28,29,31	18
small scale	1,14	2
Localized	1,2,3,4,5,7,9,10,11,13,27,28,30	13
to underdeveoped areas/ promotes development	1,2,28,31	4
Political	1,6,8,10,31	5
aesthetic value/satisfaction	5,7,8,9	4

Educational' included definitions explaining ecotourism as promoting or advocating understanding, respect or appreciation. ‚Conservation' was considered similar to protection and preservation, all three referring to a desire for ecotourism to maintain static, pristine, unspoiled or undisturbed areas. The more general definition 'green' was grouped with eco-friendly and environmentally responsible, and any reference to reducing impacts such as carbon or human footprint, and/or staying below carrying capacity was counted here; this definition is one that rests more on the behavior of the tourist themselves, versus conservation, preservation or protection are larger-scale and not directly responsibilities of an individual tourist. ‚Sustainability' was different from environmentally protective since it infers longevity or long term responsibility for environmental health and enjoyment of future generations. ‚Localized' is both benefiting the local community and hosted by a local community, thus refers to management, employment, involvement and/or financial or other benefits. Visitation to underdeveloped areas was considered synonymous to any definition referring to 'promoting development.' ‚Political' included any reference to human rights, democratic movement, or world peace. Some definitions required

visitor satisfaction or for the destination to be objectively aesthetically valued, so I counted when this was explicitly said but did not include definitions involving 'enjoyment,' 'appreciation' or 'admiration' since this seemed more subjective in nature.

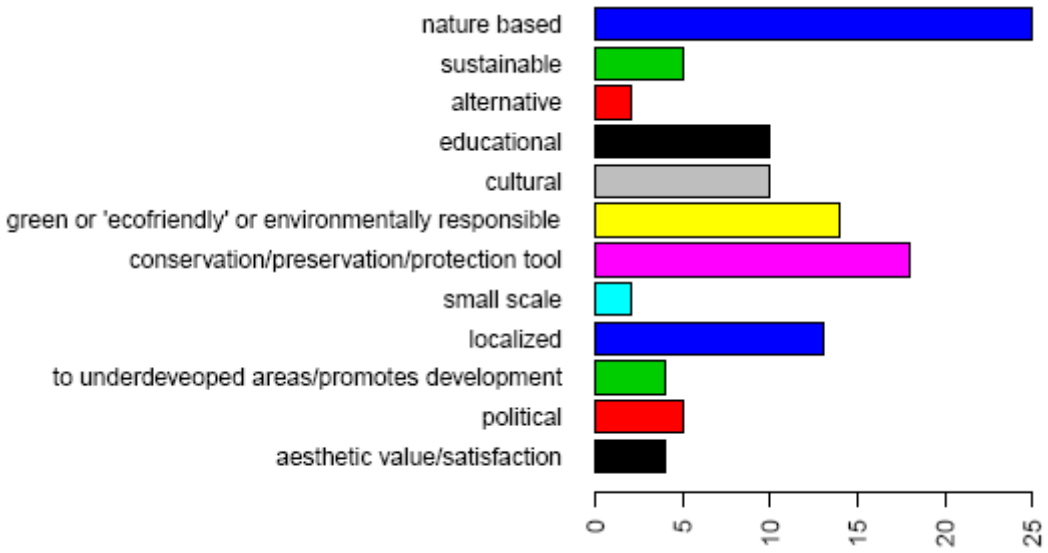
Out of thirty-two definitions surveyed, a huge majority included some reference to the tourism being nature based. The next most common definition was for ecotourism to contribute to environmental conservation, preservation of protection measures, followed by reducing impact through environmentally responsible or eco-friendly habits of the ecotourist. Ecotourism was defined ten times as involving a cultural element, and ten times as containing an educational component. In the attitude survey, only one respondent defined ecotourism as cultural.

The two other biggest differences were opinions on ecotourism being localized or a development tool. In the formal literature, all definitions were used at least twice, but in the attitude survey two definitions were never used (alternative, political), three definitions were only used once (aesthetic value, development, cultural), and sustainable and small scale were only used twice. Surprisingly, small scale was also only used twice in the academic definitions, probably most surprising, since the element of ecotourism being low-impact was brought up very often but never explicitly stated as small scale.

Two definitions that came up once each were that ecotourism should be subject to a management regime (Valentine, 1993), not specifically locating it but just in general, and another put a distance traveled requirement on ecotourism, saying one must be at least 40 km away from home to participate in ecotourism (Blamey, 1997).

Overall, the ecotourism attitude survey with 30 positive respondents only used combinations of these definitions totaling 38 uses of the words, significantly smaller than the formal literature using 112 instances of the words found in only 32 definitions – a great testimony to how wordy and vague the literature can really get on trying to define ecotourism. Interestingly enough however, when the visual graphs are placed above one another (note the differet scale of the x-axis), the differences between word usage in defining ecotourism is not as great as I expected.

One can imagine what a complex, but amazing tool ecotourism could be if it met *all* of the above definitions; if all of these things were seen in instances of ecotourism we certainly could agree it's worth implementing theoretically sound ecotourism in reality.



Formal Definitions

Versus

Survey Respondent Definitions

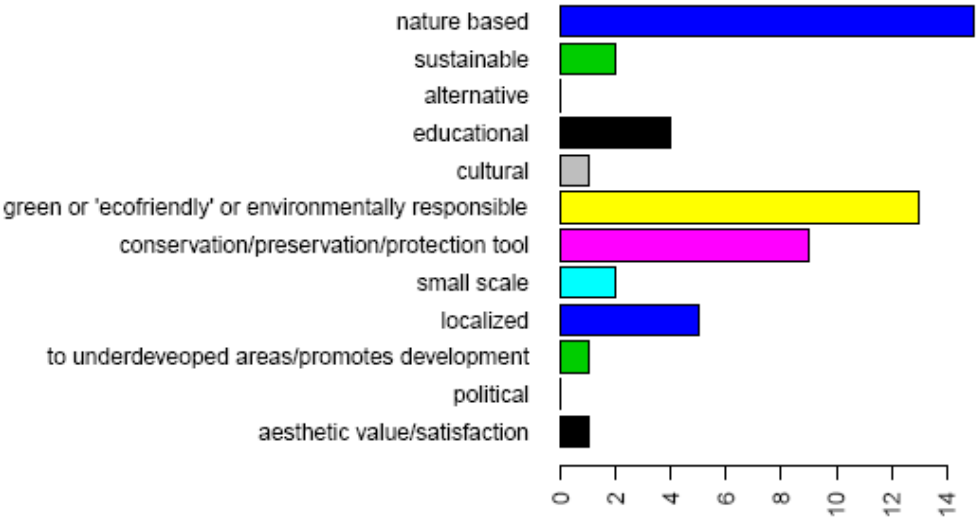


Figure 1.2 A comparison of academic and informal definitions of ecotourism

4 Synthesizing Theory and Reality

Now that the discrepancies between ecotourism as understood as a term and how it is experienced in reality have been highlighted, I will discuss the ways in which we can bridge the gap between theory and reality. There have been some attempts for certification or establishing ecotourism standards, but I will propose a set of indicators which can be used by tourists and tourism hosts on an individual and case by case basis to help understand and establish effective ecotourism.

4.1 Existing Standards

There have been attempts to certify ecotourism areas and activities, as well as eco-label other forms of tourism (lodging, tour operators, etc), and the benefits of a labeling schema are clear; it provides a marketplace for more environmental friendly industries, drives tour operators to gain credibility in growing environmental awareness, and provides consumers with valuable information on what they are purchasing and helps them make more informed decisions. However, there are also some inherent problems with certification schemes, since it is almost always a cost-exclusive schema (Mbaiwa & Stronza 2009:344); labeling costs are usually too high for small, local, or family-run tour operators. Ultimately, eco-labels are a marketing tool, and can be deceiving. They are also more difficult to monitor since they depend to a greater extent on voluntary certification or promises, and ecotourism is both an activity and a service that occurs in a dynamic environment versus a product, closed system or man-made environment that can be more tangibly rated.

Even though I have already criticised these existing standards, the most common labels deserve some mention. The most widely used and common certification schema in the tourism industry in general is Green Globe. They call themselves „The Premier Global Certification for Sustainability“ and have provided service since 1993. They were founded in the UK and certify through independent, voluntary verification and third-party auditors in accordance with ISO17021. It is popular with tourism industries probably because if supports the Global Sustinabale Tourism Criteria, which is the agreed international

standard for the sustinable operation and management of travel and tourism business; the Green Globe Standard exceeds all these requirements. (Green Globe, 2010)[2]

Since membership is voluntary, you simply have to pay a fee between $750-$5000US to register, and registration gives you access to the online system set of criteria for certification to use in self-evaluation. The committment to defining and keeping to a self-decided timeline for the certification process requires just your word, and then your business can label itstelf with the first level of Green Globe certification. This type of goal-oriented, future-delivery as a premise for certification has its obvious weaknesses, but also the cost-exclusion of smaller businesses is a serious problem. The business oriented nature of the entire certification schema is also exclusive, since many ecotourism activities or lodges are run by an individual, family, or handful of people that may or may not even qualify as a business.

The other certification schema used in the tourism industry is similar to Green Globe, perhaps even a copy since it used the web address greenglobe.org as a default web address to its actual internet site www.ec3global.com. It calls itself an intnernational environmental management and certification company with National Park agencies as clients, and advertises decreasing carbon footprints and increasing economic gain as its main objectives. The specific certification used by travel organizations is the EarthCheck Benchmarking and Certification program, which offers information and operational standards for both businesses and communities to develop an action plan and complies with ISO 14064 standards. (EC3 Global, 2010)[3]

While this accredidation schema may be more effective and approachable by smaller business or communities, it still costs around $400-1000US per year, and clients are just as driven for economic profit as they are for environmental protection, where as ideal ecotourism certification systems should focus much heavier on the latter and cost exclusivity should not be at the forefront of the labeling since being more sustinable should inherently mean reduced costs in the long run and potentially immediate savings simply by adhering to more environmentally friendly practices.

[2] For the complete Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, see: http://www.sustainabletourism criteria.org /index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=58&Itemid=188

[3] For complete details on this certification program, see http://www.earthcheck.org

Ecotourism & Certification, edited by Martha Honey (2002) outlines the basic challenges and strategies for establishing certification programs, but after reading it I realized trying to make the principles of ecotourism a reality through certification does not seem economically viable. It seems too complicated since certification schemes need trained auditors sent to every ecotourism area, and the cost is burdened on the hosts. A fair representation of a place where ecotourism is effectively carried out should not be exclusive only to those who can afford it. Furthermore, each scenario of ecotourism is so unique and distinct to the area, host community, etc, that setting general, practical and verifiable standards upon which all cases of ecotourism are comparable seems impossible. While it may be possible for certification to transform social or environmental practices, there are other more viable ways to effectively implement ecotourism practices. Honey explains that even though the number of third-party ecotourism and sustainable tourism certification programs are becoming more reliable, even the conscientious traveler can have a hard time understanding these certifications/labels, or identifying successful ecotourist destinations since travel information (guidebooks, marketing, labels) are not always accurate (2008:71).

The International Year of Ecotourism was officially declared in 2002 at the World Ecotourism Summit in May of that year in Quebec, Canada. The Quebec declaration (2002) on ecotourism outlined four elements of ecotourism:

1. Contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage
2. Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributes to their well being
3. Interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors
4. Lends itself better to independent travelers, as well as organized tours for small size groups.

Dowling (1996) says instances of ecotourism can be identified through five main elements:

1. They are primarily based on nature
2. They are ecologically sustainable
3. They are environmentally educative
4. They benefit the host community
5. They generate tourist satisfaction

While this is quite comprehensive, it is also a little vague and open to interpretation. Martha Honey (2008:29-31) comes up with a similar list, just a little longer, adding the necessity of ecotourism to generate financial benefit for conservation and that is supports human rights and democratic movements.

1. Involves travel to natural destinations
2. Minimizes impact
3. Builds environmental awareness
4. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
5. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
6. Respects local culture
7. Supports human rights and demographic movements

While these seven points are similar, I do not think it is fair for ecotourism to be politically loaded (a human rights mover). While ecotourism is a powerful tool reaping many potential benefits, I also think four, five or seven elements are not comprehensive enough to identify true instances of ecotourism, and furthermore, the identifiable indicators need to be more specific than these, including detailed elaborations.

4.2 My Vision for Ecotourism

I want the academic discourse to move away from theory and discuss actual implementation of ecotourism – provide something useful for both tourists and host communities to use to move towards both sustainable travel and sustainable development. My vision also includes a future of creating more responsible eco-minded tourists. My hope is for a win-win situation, that through low-impact, nature-based tourism, we can preserve biodiversity, alleviate poverty, sustainably develop host communities, and continue the growth of tourism as an important, educative tool. The paradox of ecotourism needs to overcome its internal conflicts and contribute to natural resource preservation while sustaining a viable tourism industry. While negative repercussions of ecotourism cannot be obliterated, I believe that if stricter guidelines could be outlined and the definitive traits of ecotourism were clearly understood, then the negative effects of ecotourism could be significantly decreased and ecotourists could make more responsible travel decisions.

I will list a set of ten indicators which I believe identify the core elements of applied ecotourism. Together, these supply a mechanism by which to improve the accountability of ecotourism as a theory, reduce the negative impacts of applied ecotourism, and allow tourists to evaluate an eco-travel destination, leading to more informed travel decisions. Ecotourists can use these indicators to better understand the principles of ecotourism, identify ideal ecotourism, and also contribute to their part in making ecotourism effective.

While I consider the indicators a basis by which to measure effective ecotourism, most of them are not individually quantifiable, so the ´measurement´ of each indicator is not necessarily possible, but each and every indicator must be present to some degree for an ecotourism area to be truly effective. While one cannot count how much local participation exists, or determine exactly what level of environmental soundness is acceptable, each of these ten indicators has to be considered for ecotourism to be successful. By successful, I ultimately mean two things; ecotourism should benefit the natural environment (through protection, conservation, restoration), and involve the local community in such a way that they also reap various types of benefits (financial, developmental, educational), and the benefits for both need to outweigh or respond to the negative consequences.

4.2.1 The Indicators

The basic tenets of ecotourism are for it to benefit the natural environment and the local community. However, the elements of ecotourism which affect the environment are usually so closely connected to activities of the local community that these two sub-categories of ecotourism cannot be separated. Therefore, my ten indicators are quite broad, but are explained in detail and how they pertain both to the natural environment, and the host community. Note that some of these may overlap or be interconnected, but to the best of my ability I have explained the differences and specifics of each of the ten ecotourism objectives I believe define its successful application.

1.) Small Scale

"Big Ecotourism is possible, but currently rare" (Buckley, 2003:240). Ecotourism is an alternative to mass tourism, so it has to be small scale, low key and low impact. Seasonal fluctuations need to be accounted for, since low season is predictably less impact, but during high season, tourists need to tread lighter and fewer. The environmental classic *Population Bomb* by Paul Ehrlich (1968) was a rude awakening

to the predicted impact population growth would have on the environment. The same alarms for too many people can be rung for tourism; too many tourists will inevitably lead to environmental degradation of the host area.

Fennell explains one simple goal for ecotourist management is to stay below carrying capacity (1999: 122), but the question of carrying capacity is but not a topic I can divulge in since it is hugely complicated, debated, and sometimes outright refuted. It is a difficult term to quantify or define, and the definition uses many vague terms like 'unacceptable degree of deterioration' and 'disturbing ecological balance' when no one has agreed at what level unacceptable degrees of change begin, or at what point is an ecological system in balance, if ever. Carrying capacity also has different measurements depending on what aspect of the tourism industry you are discussing. Coccossis and Parpairis (2000) describe carrying capacity in relation to the tourists expectation as the number of users that a recreation or tourist area can provide each year without permanent biological or physical deterioration of the area's ability to support recreation; ecologically, they define it as the maximum level of recreation use, in terms of visitor numbers and activities, that can be accommodated before a decline in ecological value sets in, and sociologically, carrying capacity incorporates a relationship between the amount of use and user satisfaction, as in, the maximum population that can be supported by a given resource base without appreciable impairment of the recreational experience.

The problems of measuring environmental impact are inherent, since valuing nature or ecosystem services is nearly impossible, and so is deciding on the extent to which degradation or environmental change can or should be tolerated. Also hard to control is quantifying the impact by the number of tourists, since different kinds of tourists have different levels of impact; one western tourist can often have the ecological footprint of five locals. Since carrying capacity is a difficult concept to define or quantify, I suggest ecotourism must execute the precautionary principle approach, keeping its tourism activities small-scale in relation to the size of the area and its ecological sensitivity, and avoid fishing for the 'maximum sustainable yield' of satisfied tourists.

Ecotourism development should be small-scale, locally owned activities (Weaver, 1991) instead of large scale, foreign owned operations; fostering greater awareness and concern for environmental issues is easier when tourists have an intimate, personal

experience with nature, and interact closer with locals who also relate intimately with the land. The bigger a tourism activity becomes, the more disconnected you become to it; one concrete example of this is whale watching. The more passengers going whale watching, the bigger the boat, and the further away the boat has to stay away from a whale. The smaller the boat, the fewer disturbances it causes, and the closer it can get with its passengers to look at them breach the surface and deep dive.

2.) Local Participation

First let me clarify that a 'local' is not limited to indigenous or native populations, but anybody or group of people that live and work in the area permanently. While this excludes scientists, scholars, or long-term travelers, it would include any immigrants (white, western, whatever) who chose to settle the area and integrate themselves into local life, both supporting and depending on the local tourism economy.

Socio-cultural health is a factor to mention here, since it is important the tourism industry involves both sexes and all ages, not a few specialized working men. Youth involvement is very important, since they are the next working class and will lead the tourism industry the way they think appropriate; instilling ecotourism values in them early will ensure the longevity of an effective ecotourism industry. Furthermore, the tourism industry should be shared by many since a centralized industry is not healthy either. For local participation, ecotourism can not be too centralized, (ie. by government or a handful of private tour operators/tour agencies) or be run by foreign tour operators, since the devolution of control from government and major tourism companies to local people has been shown to have a positive affect on conservation efforts (Stonich, 2000).

Furthermore, not only should local involvement happen from the host perspective, but also as local tourists; they should have easy access to all national parks, conservation centers, coral reefs, etc, without high costs excluding them, or worse, driving them out of the tourist area. Domestic tourism is very important, for locals to be educated and take pride in their land, and domestic tourism must be affordable to ensure this, with prices set to the affordability of locals, not rich foreigners (or a different price for each, which is commonly seen). The successful development of a tourism area usually means the cost of living is driven substantially higher, but this

should never happen at a rate higher or quicker than the local population can absorb with their simultaneously increasing economic benefit. Protective measures should be offered to locals (ie. in the form of stipends, land grants, tax breaks) living in a tourism area to ensure they are not driven out. A problem in the early 1990's in Costa Rica was when domestic tourism peaked with over 300,000 middle class Costa Ricans visiting national parks; but as the tourism industry shifted focus towards lucrative foreign travelers, the cost of accommodation near parks and reserves skyrocketed, so Costa Ricans were priced-out of vacations in their own country, a source of resentment towards ecotourism. One mentionable praise for the Galapagos Islands is that tourism to the islands is left as an affordable option for locals, since the park fee is only $6 for Ecuadorian adults, and $3 for children under twelve, instead of the $100US foreigners pay (Direccion del Parque Nacional Galapagos, 2009). Appreciation of the local tourist attractions needs to be felt by the locals if they are to truly value the natural resource base they have and understand why and to what extent they depend on their nature-based tourism industry.

Anthropologists agree with the idea that ecotourism has economic benefits, but explain the benefit of increased employment and wealth to local communities is much more complex; their involvement also leads to empowerment, increased sense of community, increased participation in management and knowledge of their environment. Local involvement is extremely important in ensuring ecotourism completes its objectives (Cater and Lowman 1994: 71). Sometimes local involvement has proved to be the only way a successful ecotourism industry can be established; for example, in Costa Rica and Kenya. In Costa Rica, the Costa Rican government had good intentions for developing ecotourism, but it lacked the funds to develop national parks and protected areas. They decided to provide natural resources to the private sector if they could provide services like visitor facilities, training guides, interpreters and basic management which the government lacked money to do, and in turn, the private sector (which included locals and scientists) reaped most of the financial benefits (Whelan 1991). In Kenya, ecotourism replaced hunting, the first form of tourism in Kenya, through a joint effort by the government, an international NGO and the locals. At first, tourists kept coming to hunt illegally, but since then, an international cooperation on ivory has led to a marked decline in illegally slaughtered

elephants, and ecotourism funds generated from national parks created direct payments to local communities to significantly decrease poaching (Whelan 1991: 17).

3.) Proper Management

In addition to local participation, the management of the area should be heavily participated by the locals. By 'proper,' I mean responsibly, efficiently, and without corruption. The ultimate protectors and advocates for the natural environment is the local community itself. They are the main stakeholder, and should be actively in control of making ecotourism both economically viable and environmentally sound (Myburgh and Saayman, 1999:205). Since they have the most intimate knowledge of the area, the local animals, plants and climate, they should be in charge of the local activities, both for tourism and for basic needs (fishing, farming, hunting). All of those involved in the tourism industry, including tour operators, tour guides, accommodation providers, and even parts of the transportation industry, need to be aware of the value their natural environment has in their economy, and exemplify proper training and knowledge of the tourism industry, as well as awareness of environmental issues.

Locals should run the majority of the tourism activities to ensure the tourist dollar reaches and stays with the hands of the locals, not foreign tour operators. The business profit and employment opportunities arising from the ecotourism industry should be benefits reaped by the local community, since this leads to enhanced regional self-sufficiency, and less foreign dominance or dependency on management or skill from abroad.

Proper management of the tourism industry is the responsibility of the host community, not visiting tourists or scientists. The local community needs to manage visitor impact (Mbaiwa & Stronza 2009:341); the host community will not necessarily implement a carrying capacity, but they should regulate the numbers of tourists to ensure they are controlled to a small-scale tourism market. For example, in Kenya, a lack of funding for park management and inadequate information about the carrying capacity led to mismanagement of ecotourism by the government, which then created unnecessary conflict between ecotourists and locals. Now the Kenyan government is trying to improve the management of parks by staying under the carrying capacity and getting locals involved (Whelan 1991: 17).

If the ecotourism industry is abused or incorrectly marketed, ecotourism can become just as harmful (or more) to the environment as mass tourism, but if properly managed, resource conservation and tourism development can be compatible and complementary (Cater and Lowman 1994: 43 – 47).

4.) Tourist dollar goes back to local Conservation Efforts

While it is important that the money generated from ectourism reaches local's pockets, it is also important that they use this money towards investing in the natural resources creating their jobs/incomes. Responsible management of the ecotourism area rests with the host community, and the value of their natural base must be protected over immediate economic gain since it is the source of their livelihood. The environment should be at the forefront of their concerns without compromise or trade offs for greater financial gain. The inherent involvement and importance of the local community in effective ecotourism has led conservationists to endorse ecotourism as a way to provide economic incentives for local people to respect their natural environment and protect their natural resources; conserving biodiversity and reducing poverty can happen simultaneously. Ecotourism can also be described as a form of recovery, since ecotourist destinations are not the pristine, un-touched paradises we believe them to be. Ideally, ecotourism should be a tool to save disappearing ecosystems, by preserving what is left and minimizing environmental damage.

As mentioned earlier, it is sad to know that the $100 park entrance fee charged at the Galapagos Islands is not used to fund conservation efforts. However, one response introduced in 2006 was another fee of $10 charged by the Instituto Nacional Galapagos for the Tourist Control Card; it is meant to track the number of tourists entering the Galapagos and control illegal immigration to the Islands. While this is good since it allows only local Ecuadorians to live and work on the islands, it is unclear whether or not the money collected is also used to benefit the natural environment. (INGALA 2009)

In the lower north shore of Quebec, Canada, the humpback whale and over 100,000 nesting sea birds are found along the coast of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The future of ecotourism in this area is completely dependent on the health and viability of the wildlife resource base. However, the proper management and protection of these wildlife resources is inversely dependent on the funds generated from whale and bird

watching tours in the area, and further research on the depleting numbers of whales requires the exposure and support it receives from visitation (Western 1993). While ecotourism does put pressure on natural resources, it is also the foremost activity of creating private reserves (Whelan 1991), and from this example we can see how important it is for ecotourism funds to go back to conservation efforts.

5.) Ecotourism Area and Activities Promote Learning

Educational benefits should reach all parties involved, since it promotes understanding and partnerships between all stakeholders, including the government, NGO's, scientists, locals and tourists (Cater and Lowman 1994: 39-40). Education is such a powerful tool, and both the ecotourists visiting and locals hosting them need to be equipped with appropriate knowledge of the surrounding ecosystem. Rules or regulations enforced in the area need to be well known by everyone in order for them to be followed, and appropriate conduct in certain activities (ie. jungle hiking) or fragile areas (ie. snorkeling around coral reefs) needs to be taught and practiced. This ties very closely to number 3, since proper management leads to similar results, but promoting education should also arise from tourism generated funds. The presence of visitor centers, science centers, schools or museums and educational tourist activities (ie. nature hikes with a botanist) are effective means to create more responsible tourism. Money generated from the ecotourism industry feeding into community learning initiatives is important since ecotourism is learning-oriented (Buckley, 2004). Learning centers also provide a place for people to socialize, which is the case of The Community Baboon Sanctuary; it has an Education Centre and museum within it, where locals meet to discuss the day's events, and visitors come to see informative displays on the rainforest and all its flora and fauna (Community Baboon Sanctuary, 2009).

Access to knowledge about conservation efforts, endangered species, or research being conducted in the area makes everyone more aware and concerned about environmental issues in the area. Knowledge of the area's native or endemic species makes people understand the importance of conservation efforts, and greater understanding also leads to greater tolerance - people are less upset if they cannot touch birds' eggs in an egg nest if they understand the consequences of doing so.

Learning about the local culture and traditions should also be an option available to ecotourists. This way, they can appreciate and respect their hosts more, and perhaps

learn about the intimate connection the society has had or does have with the environment. Learning about the religious value or cultural significance of an animal or plant provides interesting stories that create deeper appreciation for a species.

For visitors to understand the importance of conservation, information needs to be available about the ecological value of the area and about the ecosystem services provided. Furthermore, knowledge of the nature explains why protecting the flora and fauna is necessary - for locals to continue to have something to show visitors, and for visitors to continue enjoying the ecotourism destination for generations to come.

6.) Ecotourism industry leads to Environmental Protection

If we achieve proper management and appropriate levels of education, we should eventually end up with the protection of natural resources. Conserving forests for camping or hiking activities should become more popular than deforestation, avoiding habitat degradation to ensure species survival should be more important than land development (for housing or farming), and local arts and crafts should not be souvenirs made out of exhaustible resources or harmful harvesting practices (ie. ivory, turtle shell, teak tree, coral, narwhal tusks). If the visiting tourists gain an educational experience out of their ecotourist activities, the raised awareness environmental issues specific to the area will promote greater involvement in protection initiatives. Sometimes this happens through voluntourism – when tourists give back to the local community by donating their time and work towards conservation efforts, and other times through financial support – paying park fees, donating to a cause, or spending more money at a particular area/for a particular activity.

Jamal et al. (2006) claim conservation is both the ultimate goal and primary driver of ecotourism, with the social and economic benefits generated for the local community as the means to achieving this goal; in this way, this indicator is closely connected to 2 and 4.

7.) Tourism Infrastructure and Development has minimal impact on ecosystem

The environment should not be dramatically altered to accommodate things like highways, hotel resorts, golf courses, or huge building facilities. Any development in the area should be necessary development (housing, safe roads), not extravagant or catering to western needs. Accommodation amenities should be minimal – especially

important in rural or wilderness locations. Waterways, vegetation, coasts, estuarine systems and animals should not be rerouted, eliminated, polluted or harmed to the best of the host community's ability. Pollution and waste need to be properly disposed of and managed; waste water should not run into fragile marine or estuarine systems, sewage water needs to be treated before expulsion, waste should not be dumped into landfills or burnt near heavily inhabited or vegetated areas, and the local community should strive towards minimal garbage production through recycling, reusing, and composting practices. The generation of wastes that are a direct cost of ecotourism can be properly managed to minimize effects, and the impacts of permanent environmental restructuring can be kept to a minimum with smaller numbers of tourists (Weaver 2001).Waste can also be reduced through advocating less consumptive lifestyles and sustainable approaches to living.

The argument that ecotourism always results in harmful tourism facilities is primarily targeted at the fact that ecotourists are from developed countries, and the support facilities are built to equal their westernized standards. The infrastructure and service requirements local communities are trying to supply to ecotourists are often due to developed world tastes and needs, which is wholly unnecessary when one wants an intimate travel experience with the natural environment (Cater and Lowman 1994).

Even though I've explained why speaking in terms of carrying capacity is problematic, another way to look at infrastructure development is by deciding the threshold at which development becomes harmful; the carrying capacity of a tourist area can be considered the point where the minimum infrastructure/superstructure requirements and the natural resource assets which create demand become insufficient to meet the needs of both the resident population and the visiting tourists, whereupon the threat of environmental hazards appears (Coccossis & Parpairis, 2000).

The precautionary principle should be visible, since environmental risks should not be taken at the cost of greater, faster development; environmental protection should be at the forefront of the community and tourists concerns. When development must occur to create appropriate tourism infrastructure, environment impact assessment is one tool that can be utilized to ensure the natural environment is minimally harmed. One facet of environmental impact assessment is that visual impact must be low; this is why we know 20-storey casion hotels on tha Niagra Falls river bank goes against ecotourism

objectives, and why resource-heavy, 500-room hotel resorts painted bright pink on the beach in Cuba are not quite environmentally harmonious.

8.) Environmental Soundness

Ecotourism can not compromise the ecological integrity of protected areas or conservation parks. This does not mean the environment has to be untouched or in its absolute natural state, since the reality is that there are very few, or no, pristine, untouched areas anywhere anymore. Our goal should not be to return an ecosystem to its original state, but to conserve it as it is or recover its ecological health as best we can. The way any ecosystem is today is still natural, and any human-induced changes to the area are also ultimately natural since humans are – contrary to dichotomous views – just another part of nature, not suspended above it, but as intimately connected to it as any other species. Our attempts to stabilize or balance an ecosystem is not unnatural, but resisting all change or returning it to its original state would be in vain since the natural environment is an inherently dynamic system. We should instead look at environmental soundness as avoiding any changes that negatively alter a system, ie. avoid disturbance to flora or fauna, or improving an ecosystem, ie. eliminating pollution run-off or waste-dumping.

Environmental soundness also incorporates wildlife respect; fauna breeding grounds and feeding habits should not be interfered through taming, feeding, displacement, habitat loss, damming, disease, introducing foreign species, or poaching. Only in some cases (research, species rehabilitation) should they be interfered with.

While visiting a Botanical Garden somewhere in a big green house should not be considered true ecotourism (environmental soundness here is hard to measure since all flora and fauna have been removed from their natural environments and restricted to a closed place with many other, exotic, introduced species), a sound environment should still be an open system, whether or not it is controlled by humans or natural forces. It is ok if humans are involved, since ecotourism is essentially a form of management. Take for example any safari or game park in Africa; this is a powerful display of 'wild' nature, yet many animals are marked and handled my humans (scientists, park rangers) regularly, and the entire park is often fenced. Some might say they are more like big farms than natural parks since movement of herds is so restricted and such heavily

managed areas are less attractive as ´natural´ wonders. Even so, Etosha National Park in Namibia is still an exemplary location for ecotourism, and environmental soundness can still be considered present whether or not it is actively managed since the natural occurrence of breeding, food chains, migration, forest fires, floods, etc all occur beyond the control of any local management, and the free movement of birds and even land animals through fence holes is still ongoing.

Related to 7, ecosystem disturbance (from tourism development or just regular, every day activities) should be minimal, but acceptable disturbance levels are hard to define since the threshold varies for different ecosystems and I have already dismissed carrying capacity measurements as plausible. However, ecosystem disturbances should be insignificant, and in addition to minimal impact on the environment, the attempted or successful restoration of degraded areas should be noticeable.

9.) Sustainability

While Ecotourism is most plainly defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves natural resources and improves the well being of the local environment" (IES 2010), there is an aspect of sustainability that must be inherent in effective ecotourism. Related to 6 and 8, souvenir and other products should not exploit unsustainable resources, or represent endangered species or harmful harvesting practices.

The core concepts of ecotourism and sustainability are closely related, since both aim to reduce human impact and allow ecosystems to continue to sustain communities, flora and fauna now and for future generations (travelers and locals alike) (Buckley, 2003:ch.9). Relating back to the original definition of sustainable development as outlined by the Brundtland Report (1987), sustainable development of the tourism industry means that future host communities and future travelers to the area will not bear the costs of environmental degradation either. It rests on the shoulders of the current, living population to ensure ecosystems survive to be enjoyed by our children and grand children and great grandchildren, so we must ensure we are conserving natural areas well enough so that they can live on into the future of our next generation´s travel experiences.

Ecotourism should essentially be a type of sustainable tourism, or at least closely related to sustainable tourism, which Ahn et. al (2002) describe as improving the quality of life for

host communities, achieving visitor satisfaction, and protecting natural resources all at the same time[4]. The growth and development of the tourism industry also needs to happen sustainably; it cannot grow too big or too quickly. One problem with circum-polar tourism is that is has rapidly grown in popularity and accessibility in recent years due to global warming. Such unprecedented growth is very difficult to keep sustainable, but proper management and strict regulation are potential mechanisms by which tourism in environmentally sensitive areas can become sustainable (Hall and Johnson, 1996). While small scale tourism is an inherent part of ecotourism, it is arguable tourism in some areas should be completely avoided, but tourism to areas like this or other culturally or environmentally unique areas is almost inevitable; how it can be done as sustainably as possible is what I am interested in hypothesizing.

10.) Tourism must be nature-based, and when a host community is present, respect local cultures

Ecotourism is defined as nature-tourism that also benefits local communities, but ecotourism must first and foremost be nature-based since without a biotic factor, it is essentially just culture tourism; ecotourism can exist without benefiting a local community (ie. treks to the South Pole, Antarctica), but ecotourism cannot exist without a biotic environment. In my opinion, culture tourism is somewhat more exploitive than nature-based tourism; as economic benefits emerge, tourism is discredited by the transformation of culture into market value, loss of identity, desecration of ceremonies, debasement and falsification of arts/traditions (Smith and Eadington, 1992). Culture has certainly become a tourist attraction within ecotourism, as visits to Western Fijian Islands include village visits and involvement in their traditional rituals.

There is a certain amount of authenticity lost in cultural tourism, since it is very rare that these rituals are authentic or actual representations of cultures that have changed significantly after tourism exposure and development opportunities have become available. They are at least more staged than nature tourism stages, playing on stereotypes, tourist expectations and re-enacted traditions, and it makes one wonder if

[4] For further reading: An insightful review of the factors that work for and against the achievement of environmental sustainability in and through ecotourism (Hill & Gale, 2009).

everyone is just wearing traditional clothing for tourists or if it is truly a representation of their culture. Culture tourism usually benefits only a homogenous community (ie. the indigenous community), but ecotourism host areas are sometimes more diverse than this, and the economic benefits from ecotourism cannot rest with a certain ethnic group or indigenous people only. Ecotourism must respect and benefit all of the host communities, whatever or whoever they are culturally. Ecotourism development should follow ethical principles that respect the culture or traditional way of life of the local people, including each group of differently identified hosts.

Ecotourism must generate funds that contribute to conservation or protection efforts in the environment, not just the local community. However, this is not to say the local community isn't respected and benefiting from tourism, but they need to be hosting a nature-based tourism industry, not a culture-based tourist industry. The authenticity of the local culture should be respected, not exploited or changed to accommodate the tourist, but should not be the primary point of attraction to an area. Their traditions, language, food, and other cultural identities should not be over commercialized, but protected for the local community to preserve their traditional way of life or indigenous behaviors, and where this overlaps with their relationship to the natural environment, then ecotourism is again present. There may exist instances of tourism where the local community has cultural practices that are actually harmful to the environment (ie. seal pelts in Canada, Inuit hunting practices), and ecotourism activities should neither partake in these cultural practices or support them since ecotourism must primarily benefit the environment, then secondly, if compatible, the local community.

By nature based, I also mean the ecotourist destination cannot be resort-based (ie. casinos, all inclusive hotels) or city-based. It should also not be a zoo, a botanical garden, a museum, or a research centre (science station, laboratory), although a fair question may be ´when does a national park become a zoo or vice versa´. In the case of the Foster Botanic Gardens in Hawaii, they put trees "in a tree museum, and charged the people a dollar and a half to see them" (Mitchell, 1970), but because of the man-made, heavily managed nature of the garden, with more introduced species than native species, existing in a closed, staged environment, any visitor to these gardens is still a ways off from participating in effective ecotourism.

NB: While this list of indicators is meant to be comprehensive, it is not a perfect definition of ecotourism, nor is it an exhaustive list defining ecotourism as the *only* way ecotourism can exist. I have not provided examples for every indicator, and counter-examples certainly exist to refute some of my suggestions. However, these ten elements of ecotourism provide a basis by which we, as ecotourists or academics, can identify effective ecotourism from greenwashed tourism, and help maximize the positive benefits each instance of ecotourism can have. Ecotourism can and does exist with only one, two or five of the above facets, but in my opinion ecotourism is only truly effective (positive repercussions outweighing negative consequences) with all ten elements of ecotourism present to some degree. Ensuring each indicator is present, to its maximum potential, should be the goal of all environmentally concerned tourists, tourism hosts and tour operators. The involvement of the ecotourist should not be downplayed even though it seems we are simply the judges, since we are the drivers of the entire ecotourism industry, providing the resources and exchange of information required to continue it, and our pivotal contribution is the evaluation of each of these indicators at an ecotourist destination since it will influence others decisions and drive tour operators and tourism hosts to meet the requirement of effective ecotourism. These indicators should be a set of identification tools that tourists themselves can use to decide whether or not their travels are/will be beneficial or detrimental to the ecotourism area under speculation. It will not be a certification scheme by any means, since I do not think that ecotourism should evolve into an eco-label, but a set of guidelines which allows the tourist to decide whether or not their tourism footprint is going to impact in a positive or negative way. It will also provide a basis for ecotourism hosts to evaluate their own tourism industry management, and receive constructivecriticism on what areas they need to improve on to become more sustainable.

4.2.2 How the Indicators Can Be Used

In practice, we (ecotourists) need to ensure ecoutourist areas and activities follow a set of ideal principles. My vision for these indicators is for them to be the basis upon which we measure the effectiveness of ecotourism in certain areas, and for these ten indicators to be freely available to anyone interested or participating in ecotourism. This would increase understanding of ecotourism principles, which then slowly decreases the gap between theoretical and actualized ecotourism since each and every ecotourist or ecotourism host can begin to identify and implement effective ecotourism It should be easily accessible,

cost nothing, and be driven by tourists and their feedback from travel experiences of ecotourist destinations. Open participation would be advocated, and access should be web-based, like a wiki, yelp page or green guide, where ecotourism areas (not specific tour operators or hotels) are graded on all ten criteria. Examples of ecotourist destinations are parks, beaches, mountains, coral reefs, jungles, and islands.

For example, one page would be 'Galapagos Islands,' and each of the ten indicators would be listed below it with a Likert scale rating, starting at 1.) Not at all Present, and going up to 5.) Maximally Present, with 2, 3, and 4 gradually connecting these two extremes. There would also be room for commentary by third party users (not by hired or trained staff, or exclusive to members only), and travelers who are there or who have been there (recently) can rate and comment on the applicability or existence of each indicator. However, it would not be necessary to rate or comment on all, but only those which you feel comfortable in judging, and each rating would have to be justified (in the commentary section). This allows those who are more qualified in different fields to input only on the topics he or she is well-informed enough to do so. In this way, knowledge will be shared between travelers from different places with different educational backgrounds who input different ideas, viewpoints, and information on the different aspects of ecotourism, and these indicators will provide a democratic, decentralized, participatory engine by which travelers can help other ecotourists make well-informed travel decisions, travel more sustainably, and ensure that their travel is benefiting both the local environment and host population.

This will be useful in allowing travelers to critically reflect on their time abroad and what their travel ecological footprint was, but more importantly, allow other ecotourists to plan their future travels to the same places based on up-to-date, first hand experiences shared by others. They would know what to look out for, what to be wary of or avoid, who to support, how to ensure their dollar ends up with the local people, where to go and not to go, what activities are environmentally viable… etc.

Potential outcomes of a forum like this could hugely impact ecotourist areas, changing the reputation of some famous ecotourist destinations or elucidating areas we had never heard of or thought of going to. Ideally, both the natural environment and the local community should hopefully benefit from a forum like this, since it is ultimately trying to protect or improve both. This does not necessarily mean an increase in tourism activities,

and in fact, it may mean the opposite; more controlled, small-scale tourism would hopefully allow each tourist to invest more time and money in a place than more tourists spending less. It the ecotourist area is currently failing to be effective, then a shortage of (responsible) tourists (choosing not to go there) will allow the natural environment to perhaps flourish, or incline them to travel there with the goals of helping the local community better manage their resources, use generated funds for effective conservation, or teach them the importance of sustaining a healthy natural environment necessary for a tourism industry to continue since it may be a main source of revenue for many in the area.

Not only will it provide travelers with valuable information about a place to make informed travel choices, but it returns feedback to the host communities to know where they can improve or make changes to better their 'eco' image. If, for example, an entire beach area is rated badly for clean water and pollution dispersal, and ecotourist numbers start dwindling, then this would result in positive feedback for the host community to do something about it to ensure the longevity of their beach tourism market and the continuation of ecotourists to the area.

4.2.3 Exclusions

This set of indicators does not take into account travel to and from the area, thus, carbon accounting is unfortunately left out. While I understand this to be a weakness in my attempts at justifying ecotourism, I am more concerned with tourists actions when they arrive to an ecotourism area than how they get there. Responsible ecotourists know the difference between arriving to the Great Barrier Reef by an Airbus jetplane from London versus sailing to it from Brisbane, but these factors do not directly influence the ecotourist destination and their influence on it and the local people once arriving.

This is not meant to be a set of indicators used for specific tour operators or a single hotel, since an ecosystem does not operate separately in bits and pieces any more than a tourism industry does; an ecotourism host area is intimately connected to the natural surrounding area, the people living in it, and all tourism-related infrastructure, so an entire area should be looked at and graded for overall effectiveness as an ecotourism location. On the larger scale, it is neither meant to judge an entire state, province, or country on its implementation of ecotourism; national parks, beaches, and other conservation areas are all managed a bit differently, even if they still operate under the same rules, since each host

community is different, being influenced by different factors, and attracting different types of tourists.

This ecotourism identification schema avoids the risk of individual tour operators, hotel operators, or politicians falsely representing a place, and would not allow them to use the wiki as an advertisement place, since the combination of so many factors feeding into the overall effectiveness of ecotourism in a whole area means it does nothing for one to advance his or her own agenda; it matters very little if a hotel owner wants to comment on excellent local participation at their own hotel since they cannot give only themselves five stars for hiring only local people, but would need to justify their answer in the large scale of things and share whether or not all hotels, tour companies and tour guides servicing the area at large are locally staffed.

This set of indicators is also not meant to aesthetically value an area; it is not necessary to qualify the actual area according to natural beauty or aesthetic appeal, or unique interests since these are very subjective measurements. It also does not measure or require the area to satisfy a tourists needs, as expected by other definitions of ecotourism that I do not agree with.

While I explain each indicator must be present to some degree for an ecotourist destination to be fully effective, places like the North Pole or Antarctica arguably have no local community, but in this case, the host population becomes the individual ship or tour operator facilitating the journey.

The list of indicators is not meant to be a basis upon which to develop an ecotourist industry, but to judge an existing ecotourism area for exhibiting the core elements of effective ecotourism. Of course it can be used as a set of guidelines for an area just expanding its tourism industry to create an eco-friendly one, but there are other issues not addressed in a situation like that (ie. where does the original capital come from if ecotourism is locally run and operated).

5 Conclusions

Ecotourism is and should be continued to be used as an impetus in developing countries to expand both conservation measures and tourism development simultaneously; however, tourism activities should be conducted in harmony with nature, as opposed to more traditional mass tourism activities (Wight 1993: 3-9). My ecotourism indicators have attempted to explain how scale, proper management tools, fund generation, educational tools, environmental protection, development impact, environmental health, and sustainability will affect successful ecotourism; the presence of all ten indicators will hopefully allow ecotourism to reach its goals and objectives more effectively, to become increasingly environmentally friendly while sustainably supporting both hosts and tourists. These ten indicators provide a way to identify all the theoretically desired outcomes of ecotourism to be achieved in practice, both by will of the host community and the ecotourists.

Meeting these ten objectives of ecotourism would serve the interests of the environment, tourists, the entire host community involved in the tourism sector, local government through tax revenue, and even the overall needs of our planet. While any tourism activity is bound to have some impact on the environment and perhaps negative repercussions in the local human population and natural environment, we can only hope ecotourism can be used as an alternative, more responsible form of travel than mass tourism, and the benefits generated for the environment and host communities will outweigh the negative externalities.

Ecotourism is a popular form of tourism because it could *potentially* lead to all the environmental, economic and social benefits outlined below, but achieving the economic benefits is substantially simpler than effectively implementing ecotourism activities as a conservation tool. Ecotourism could, with its ten core elements, be a more sustainable replacement to traditional tourism while still offering economic development opportunities. Ecotourism should promote the core elements of sustainable development so that the

security of our ecosystem and human population can be safeguarded by our travel choices today, and ensure the longevity of both for future generations.

Martha Honey (2008:4) hails tourism as a possible panacea:

> "...a way to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instill environmental awareness and a social conscience in the travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist, and, some claim, build world peace."

The wide range of positive outcomes that ecotourism offers make it an appealing industry, both for new tourism markets and for existing tourism industries that could do things better. However, these indicators are not meant to result in ecotourism saving the world, but small, realistic goals which will accumulate over time and place to create a positive change in the tourism industry, and perhaps even overcome some of the negative repercussions of climate change and habitat degradation around the world. Once ecotourists and ecotourism hosts understand ecotourism principles both in theory and practice, the big gap between defined and actual ecotourism can slowly be bridged as each of us begins to understand ecotourism and its objectives better, while each doing our part to identify and implement effective ecotourism.A lot of weight rests with ecotourists, since they are the ultimate drivers of a tourism market and leave the lasting impressions on both host environments and populations after visiting. Succinctly put, we should all try to leave only footprints, and take only our great memories.

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Appendix A

Questionaire used in Ecotourism Attitude Survey

1. Would you be able to define Ecotourism, If I asked you to?

1.b. If Yes, please share

2. Do you think all nature tourism is ecotourism?

3. Do you think ecotourism is meant to be more sustainable than other forms of tourism ie. Mass tourism?

4. In your recent (last 2 years) travels, would you've ever considered yourself an ecotourist ie. participated in ecotourism activities? If yes, what thing(s) did you do/what place(s) did you go?

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