

The Institutionalisation of Ecotourism: Certification, Cultural Equity and Praxis

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This paper offers a critical reading of the purpose, practice and institutionalisation of ecotourism. Tracing the evolving relationship between ecotourism and conservation, ecotourism and sustainable tourism, and ecotourism and certification/monitoring schemes as we do in this paper reveals conflicting values and possibly incompatible objectives. Sustainable tourism and ecotourism are rooted in notions of individual/societal and environmental well-being. Yet, our study indicates significant inequities in ecotourism practice, particularly with respect to cultural aspects such as human ecological relationships. It is argued here that various actions and programmes associated with ecotourism's inception and evolution have institutionalised a modernistic, commodified paradigm: the environment and its inhabitants (human and non-human) are dominated by scientific, industry and other interests that treat these primarily as means to an end, that is, instrumentally. The analysis suggests that ecotourism (and, by extension, ecotourism certification) needs to be re-oriented towards well-being, in other words, a social-cultural paradigm based on participatory democracy and equitable, meaningful relationships with the biophysical world. Suggestions are forwarded for re-envisioning ecotourism, particularly with respect to the notions of cultural equity, participatory practice and researcher praxis.

doi: 10.2167/joe120.0

Keywords: commodification, ecotourism certification, experience, modernity, participatory processes, cultural equity, researcher praxis

Introduction

Differences among ecotourism researchers, practitioners and proponents have given rise to a variety of meanings and interpretations of ecotourism. It has been used interchangeably with terms such as ecological tourism, sustainable tourism, alternative tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism and heritage tourism (Blamey, 1997; Cater & Lowman, 1994; Fennell, 1999; Herremans & Welsh, 1999; Weaver, 2001). The relative newness of the activity or term may be contributing to some of the lack of agreement on its purpose and practice, but examining the discourses of various players in relation to the concept of ecotourism reveals a much larger problem.

When we first commenced this study, it was as a collaboration between a planning and management specialist with expertise in community-based tourism planning in Canada and the US, a PhD student in recreation, park and tourism sciences who worked closely with grass-roots NGOs and community-based ecotourism in Brazil, and an anthropologist with applied research experience in community conservation and ecotourism in the Amazon. Our purpose was simpler then, to combine practical experience

and academic knowledge to address some troubled spots in defining and operationalising ecotourism. Closer examination from a critical rather than pragmatic perspective, applying some of the post-structuralist and modernity critiques beginning to infuse the tourism literature, presented a sobering picture of the market economic factors that influence travel and tourism. The basic characteristics of the system are well identified by social researchers:

- A logic of capital accumulation, economic growth and profit drives free market capitalism and globalisation initiatives (including global free trade). Physical and cultural objects and places are seen as commodities; they are treated instrumentally, as means towards an end, where the end is bottom-line profit above other values (Harvey, 1998).
- The same capitalistic logic shapes the discourses and practices of an international tourism industry. It, too, operates on a commodified paradigm and tourism research tends to follow a similar trajectory. Industry-driven research has perpetuated economic supply-demand and marketing-oriented definitions of tourism and shaped tourism research agendas (Franklin, 2003). Research paradigms are narrowly oriented towards commodified tourism products and the search for global profits and increased efficiency (Wearing *et al.*, 2005).
- The rhetoric of sustainable development calls for 'balancing' business and environmental interests, but it employs modernity's ideas of progress: technological and industry-driven growth, confidence in science as the dominant mode of knowledge; reliance on science and technology for (ecological) modernisation and resource management (Peterson, 1997). Sustainable tourism and tourism development remains embedded in early modernisation theory (Sharpley, 2000).
- Wearing *et al.* (2005: 425) note ecotourism's potential as an alternative paradigm, but also worry that too much of it has recently 'become just problem-solving with a narrow applied focus. An implicit rather than explicit philosophy is likely to become unconscious and muddled'. The future development of sustainable practices, they say, necessitates the development and application of alternative and decommodified research paradigms.¹

Wearing *et al.*'s article reflect a number of the concerns identified below. They focused on the commodification of tourism and opportunities for decommodifying and developing alternative paradigms for research and practice. We focused on ecotourism, but our analysis led to a similar conclusion: ecotourism is entrenched within the factors outlined above. Like tourism, it is being institutionalised as a commodified paradigm. Praxis-oriented action must therefore be directed to decommodify and develop its 'alternative' potential for environmental, social and cultural well-being. The question that follows, of course, is whether it is possible to have such a decommodified paradigm in a capitalistic system like the one described above. Harvey (1998) suggests that action and change have to take place within these capitalistic structures as they are deeply embedded and constitute social reality. We address this further below under cultural equity and praxis.

This paper examines the evolution of ecotourism, its historical influences and practices, and related institutional programmes such as certification and

accreditation. Based on this, it is argued that these programmes and other ecotourism practices institutionalise a commodified ecotourism paradigm and the contradictions within it. The main objectives of this study are therefore to:

- Examine the origin, purpose and practice of ecotourism and identify the discourses shaping this form of tourism.
- Provide a critique of ecotourism definitions and certification programmes, showing how an instrumental approach to ecotourism is being institutionalised.
- Draw on the above analyses to propose a revised ecotourism paradigm based on environmental and cultural equity, participatory practice and researcher praxis.

The next section examines the historical evolution and practice of ecotourism, specifically its conservation-driven purpose, intended benefits and the political landscape. The subsequent section provides an overview of ecotourism certification and accreditation practices. These two sections reveal a diverse range of interests and conflicting values that prevent ecotourism from realising its transformative potential and facilitating environmental, social and cultural equity. The instrumental reason privileged in such discourses particularly inhibit attending thoughtfully to self-other relationships (humans with their natural world included). The analysis raises the question: what would ecotourism management and certification look like if the paradigm is not driven by the instrumental reason of managerial and scientific interests but, rather, is envisioned on the basis of participatory democracy and human ecological well-being? How can ecotourism better attend to social and cultural equity in practice? These issues are taken up in the last two sections of the paper.

The Evolution and Management of Ecotourism

The instrumental purpose and logic of conservation

In 1983, Ceballos-Lascuráin was in Mexico City working for PRONATURA, a Mexican NGO lobbying for the conservation of a wetland area. His vision of tourism's role in ecological conservation and economic development was already evident then. Among the arguments he used to dissuade marina building around the Celestun estuary was the increased visitation to this area (especially from the United States). Convinced that tourists could play an important role in job creation and supporting the rural economy, as well as preserving the ecology of the area, he began using the word "ecotourism" to describe this phenomenon (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1993; Mader, 2000). Ceballos-Lascuráin's approach was instrumental in positioning ecotourism in the literature as a sustainable tourism activity (Boo, 1991; Fennell, 1999; Weaver, 1999). His view was warmly embraced by the conservation movement and is captured well under the alternative income hypothesis: if alternative, more sustainable, economic activities were made available, local residents engaged in unsustainable environmental activities could shift to these in order to generate income (Langholz, 1999). In addition to reducing resource exploitation, they could become stewards of the ecosystem. A growing global environmental

movement in the 1970s supported this view of ecotourism as an alternative, less impactful activity (Lawrence *et al.*, 1997).

Conservation was thus the primary motive in the early days of ecotourism's evolution, and the generation of economic benefits to local inhabitants was perceived to be a means to this end. Over time, ecotourism's alternative potential facilitated the creation, visitation and ecological management of new protected areas (Fennell, 1999; Western, 1993). A commonly held association of ecotourism with geographically remote areas and developing countries stemmed from tropical conservation concerns in areas like the Amazonian and African rain forests. Ceballos-Lascurain's activities and references to ecotourism in these distant and 'relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas' (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987: 14) were appropriated in several later definitions (e.g. Blamey, 1997; Valentine, 1993). Concerns about mass tourism's impacts on these distant areas grew along with the escalation of travel and tourism to developing countries (Cater & Lowman, 1994). Figure 1 shows some of the diverse and interrelated aspects in ecotourism's early phases (for example, that conservation and economic development goals were mutually reinforcing and interdependent relationships). The instrumental focus is clear here (the use of local people towards the end of conservation) as are the modernist assumptions that economic alternatives are the most important consideration towards 'progress' (to the exclusion of other aspects such as cultural impacts), and that scientists, NGOs and the industry knew best how to implement conservation and ecotourism.

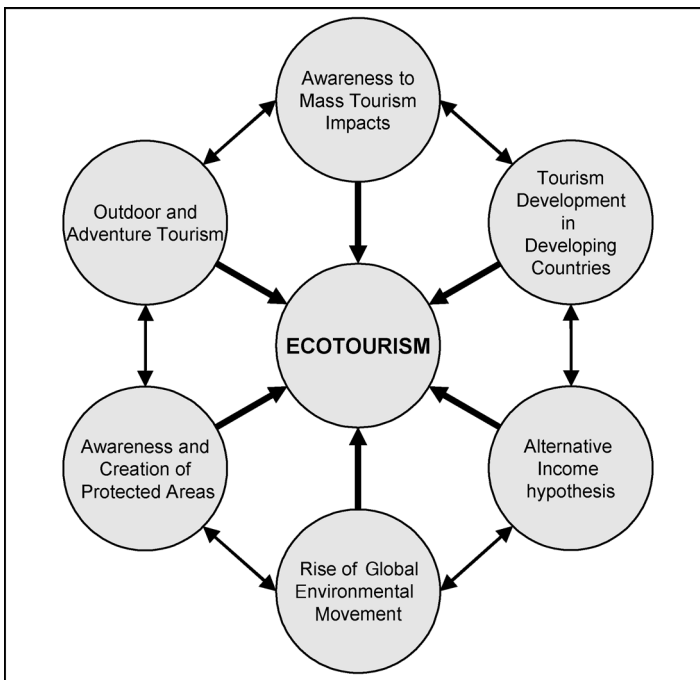


Figure 1 Major factors influencing the rise of ecotourism

The conservation and community development foci of ecotourism have much in common with sustainable tourism (Figure 2). Growth and awareness of the negative impacts of mass tourism lead to the advent of 'green tourism' and a call for 'alternative tourism'. While distinct in origin and identity (environmental conservation and nature-based experience being key foci), ecotourism principles fit well with both these forms and with the notion of sustainable tourism that was gaining currency as various institutions adopted the influential Brundtland Commission's Report on sustainable development (Bramwell *et al.*, 1996; WCED, 1987; WTO, 2002). Over time, a growing number of 'ecotourists' desiring the safety and comfort of highly catered nature tours and luxurious ecolodges provoked criticisms about increasing commodification and its impact on visitor experience as well as the environment. Concerns about the social benefits to local communities also arose as the study of sustainable tourism and social impacts brought new knowledge and awareness (Blamey & Braithwaite, 1997; Weaver, 1999).

The shaping of tourism by industry interests and the modernity-based principles of sustainable tourism dovetailed nicely with the discourses that were influencing ecotourism. A close examination of some commonly cited ecotourism definitions, principles and practices reveals some of its historical challenges, as well as a range of diverse interests and values enabling the commodification of ecotourism destinations and their inhabitants. The aim of the analysis below is not to generate a comprehensive list of definitions or content analysis (see Fennell, 2001; Orams, 1995 for these) but, rather, to identify some critical relationships between ecotourism's inception, development, management and research.

Ecotourism interests, values and benefits

Ecotourism is generally presented in terms of ethical principles revolving around conservation, education and economic benefits (Ross & Wall, 1999; Wight, 1993). Some definitions give priority to ecological preservation and conservation (Cater & Lowman, 1994), others emphasise community socio-economic and cultural benefits; while yet others focus on tourist experience and education (Blamey, 1997; Cater & Lowman, 1994; Fennell, 1999; Ross & Wall, 1999; Weaver, 2001). The multiple definitions and goals of ecotourism reflect not merely its historical inception, but also researcher, industry and institutional interests and values. Most definitions address environmental conservation, environmentally responsible behaviour by visitors (aided by a code of conduct, for instance), and by local inhabitants (not exploiting natural resources and engaging in conservation behaviour), community benefits (e.g. economic and social benefits), and a nature-based visitor experience (often described in terms of education, appreciation and knowledge). Yet, important aspects such as what constitutes an appropriate conservation or environmental ethic in ecotourism are persistently ignored by scholars, practitioners, policy makers and consumers. Should intrinsic value of wilderness/nature be considered essential as Holden (2005) argues? How well does the visitor understand (and experience) the different ways in which the environment is valued by humans? Is it ethical and sustainable to fly across the ocean (adding to atmospheric pollution and consuming non-renewable fuel

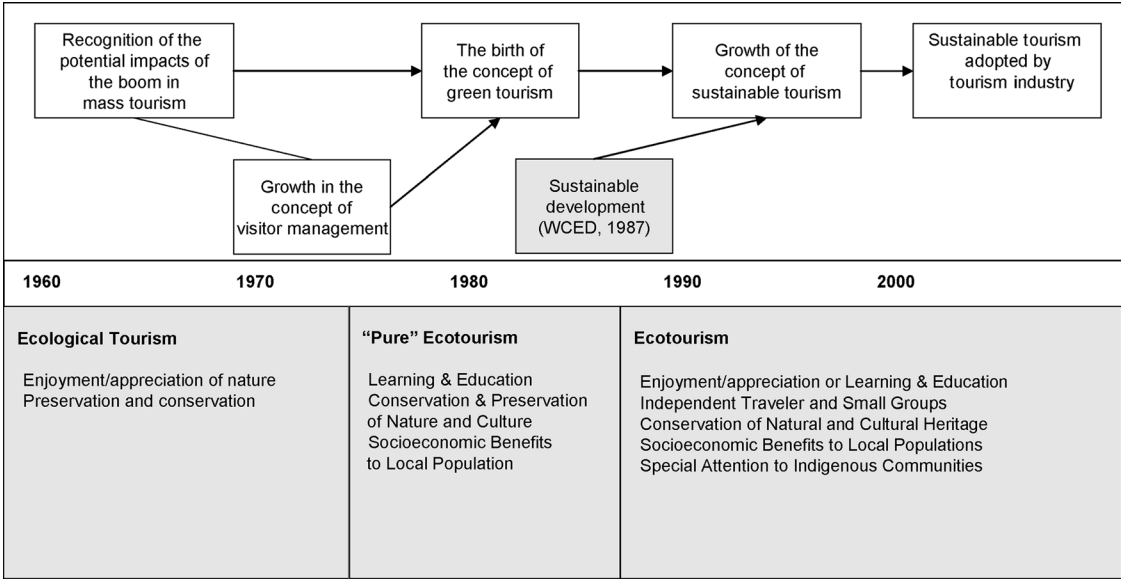


Figure 2 The chronological development of the concept of sustainable tourism and ecotourism

Source: Adapted from Swarbrooke (1999).

Note: ‘Pure’ ecotourism is perhaps best likened to Swarbrooke’s (1988: 323) notion of ‘sustainable ecotourism’, which focuses on long-term benefits, moral/ethical responsibility and behaviour towards natural, social and cultural environments, recognition of intrinsic value of natural environmental resources, ‘enlightening’ experiences. Distanced from the 1980s, ecotourism today reverts to the general discourse of enjoyment/appreciation, learning/education and a conservation focus.

sources) to merely 'appreciate' the nature-based trip, or should 'transformative' (Fennell & Weaver, 2005) behaviour be essential to the ecotourist's experience? Why does visitor experience seem to take such a well-defined space in ecotourism definitions, while important social and cultural aspects of the local residents are ignored or treated rhetorically (see below)?

Activities and experience

Ecotourism trips usually include interpretive programmes and guides in order to facilitate education and appreciation of the natural environment. It is difficult to determine from the plethora of definitions the necessary outcomes or benefits of an ecotourism experience – is enjoyment necessary or merely sufficient? Table 1 contains two definitions from Ceballos-Lascuráin (1993, 1996). The earlier one focused on visitor enjoyment and education (about nature and culture). Ten years later it shows a broader ethical scope where visitors were expected to exhibit environmentally responsible behaviour, and ecotourism had to promote conservation and benefit to local communities (the later definition does not address visitor education). The widely cited definition of the International Tourism Society in 1991 is similar to Ceballos-Lascuráin's definition in 1983, but is inclusive of 'understanding', mostly in the sense of learning about culture and natural history. Other socio-psychological aspects of visitors' experiences (such as how they relate humans with their natural world, and the transformations that might result) are rarely addressed in monitoring and certification schemes. It appears as if they are neither necessary nor sufficient to an industry interested in measuring 'visitor satisfaction'.

But there are clearly a range of possible experiences and benefits. 'Light' definitions promote a wide variety of nature tourism experience, in contrast to more rigorous definitions, or to continuums of soft-hard and active-passive ecotourism (Diamantis, 1999; Orams, 1995). For instance, ecotourism aimed at 'special interest' needs for bird-watchers checking off their 'life-list' and gaining detailed knowledge of specific birds, provides distinctly different educational/study benefit than does a general purpose ecotourism trip. The latter may strive for low impact, environmentally sustainable activity in which gaining factual knowledge/learning is a secondary benefit, but is not integral to obtaining an overall 'low impact, nature-based experience' (Hall, 1994). Appreciation may be an important benefit, but citing names, species, facts and numbers are not necessary for this type of 'green', low impact ecotourist.²

An increasing number of principles have been incorporated into ecotourism definitions over the years. Fennell's (1999) analysis of Ceballos-Lascuráin's (1987) definition reveals five principles; Fennell's own (1999) definition addresses 10 out of the 12 items on the list (except culture, and enjoyment/appreciation). EMBRATUR's (1999) definition discloses a strong ethical stance with respect to the well-being of the local population and the environment, where an ecotourism experience is such that it establishes 'an environmental conscience' (Table 1). But again, 'environmental conscience' and 'transformative' behaviour are not generally factored in ecotourism certification and management systems. Why some values and principles make it into industry practices and research, and other do not is not accidental. A close look at the local-global system shows an interesting political eco-scape.

Table 1 Ecotourism definitions

<i>Year and source</i>	<i>Definition</i>
1983, Ceballos-Lascuráin (Ceballos-Lascuráin 1993; Mader, 2000)	Ecotourism is that tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both past and present) found in these areas.
1991, The International Ecotourism Society, in Lindberg & Hawkins (1993)	... purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people.
Ceballos-Lascuráin (1996: 20), adopted by IUCN (see Mader, 2000)	Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.
1998, TIES	Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people (The Ecotourism Society, 1998).
1999, Honey	Ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the traveller; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights (Honey, 1999, 2002).
1999, EMBRATUR (Brazil)	The segment of tourism activity which makes use, in a sustainable way, of the natural and cultural heritage, promoting its conservation and seeking to establish an environmental conscience through the understanding of nature, and promoting the well-being of the involved population (EMBRATUR, 1999).
2001, Weaver	Ecotourism is a form of tourism that fosters learning experiences and appreciation of the natural environment, ... enhances the cultural resource base of the destination and promotes the viability of the operation (Weaver, 2001: 15, cited in Garrod 2003: 33).
2003, Fennell	Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented (control, benefits and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas and should contribute to the preservation of such areas (Fennell, 2003: 25).

The politics of ecotourism

When framed instrumentally in terms of 'travel to ...' (Table 1) and highlighting visitor experience in marketing terms, ecotourism definitions highlight travel industry interests and related research interests. How would it look if it were set in terms of a practice that does justice to human ecological relationships as well as the interests of environmental conservation? Honey's (1999) description provides for socio-economic and conservation benefits (a consistent theme in the definitions) and adds *political* empowerment of local communities, as well as 'respect for different cultures and for human rights'. Ross and Wall (1999) likewise address the sociopolitical realm, listing 'local capacity building towards self-sufficiency/decentralisation/local empowerment' and 'involvement and participation of local communities as two indicators of local socio-economic benefits from ecotourism. A Delphi study by Garrod (2002; cited in Garrod, 2003) showed that while over 81% of the final selection round said that local benefits should result from tourism, only 27% of the final selection of definitions contained the sustainable tourism principle that local people should participate directly in making decisions on the scale and distribution of those impacts. Garrod noted that Weaver's (2001) text-book definition 'does not explicitly mention that local people should participate in the decision making processes by which the success or otherwise in meeting the other elements of the definition must surely be ultimately determined' (Garrod, 2002: 34).

These observations about the lack of attention to local decision-making processes plus the other issues noted earlier raise again the questions: whose interests are most fulfilled by the way ecotourism is constructed (produced) and implemented? Why are principles and indicators addressing the relationship between locals and their natural world absent (Hinch, 1998; Zografos & Oglethorp, 2004)? The paradigm generally revolves around some broad environmental and social benefits, the type of development and the tourist experience (Table 2). A look at ecotourism's inception, particularly with respect to tropical conservation, offers some interesting insights into the 'management' values that have shaped the current trajectory of this alternative development form.

Postcolonial 'scientific management'

A close look at ecotourism development and practice shows that these are historically embedded in the global ecological concerns of 'First World' scientists and NGOs. As noted earlier, the overseas conservation movement channelled environmental conservation through aspects like the alternative income hypotheses, which meant that these goals came first – the economic well-being of the local people was viewed as a functional, necessary condition to attain conservation goals and behaviours. Two important criticisms have arisen about such efforts. Firstly, in both pre- and post-independent Tanzania, scientific wildlife management practices imposed new meanings and values on natural landscapes, and prevented local peasant and nomadic dwellers from accessing their natural habitats. The discourse of colonial conservation simultaneously denigrated African land use and natural resource practices, and promoted European forest and wildlife management techniques that 'relied on the ideologies of "scientific" resource management and racial

Table 2 Rank of ecotourism principles according to the frequency they were present in nine ecotourism definitions

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Interest in nature	9
Contributes to conservation	9
Reliance on parks and protected areas	8
Benefits local people/long-term benefits	7
Education and study	5
Low impact/non-consumptive	5
Ethics/responsibility	4
Management	4
Sustainable	4
Enjoyment/appreciation	3
Culture	3
Small scale	2

Source: Adapted from Fennell (1999).

interpretations of African culture' (Neumann, 1998: 108). In new postcolonial settings like East Africa, argued Neumann, the 'seizure of land by the independent state for conservation differs little in practice and symbolic terms from the initial loss of the same lands to European estates' (Neumann, 1998: 202).

Neumann's concerns revolve around colonial ideologies and the African landscape, i.e. colonialism's desire to ensure that its values dominated over local ones (exercised through various spaces including natural ones). The view that such areas should be cordoned off and protected from all but the scientific and tourist gaze was not familiar to the locals. One solution to this conservation dilemma was 'to educate the masses of people in surrounding villages, to teach them that wildlife has an important part to play in the national heritage' (TANAPA, Annual Report 1985–86; cited in Neumann, 1998: 203).³ A second and related critique of the inherent scientism and privileging of instrumental reason that infused 19th and 20th century colonialism is present here. The rapid advances of science and industrialism in the Enlightenment led to a strong belief in technology and science for enabling progress, and a supreme valuing of reason. Promoted through capitalism and colonialism, these symbols of modernity spread worldwide and relegated to the margins other beliefs such as those that saw humans are part of ecological-physical systems whose constituents have intrinsic value, i.e. not something to manipulate for human ends (Dryzek, 1997). Present day environmentalism and ecological sciences, it is argued, are rooted in the same materialist and scientific values that characterised modernism (Rutherford, 1999).

These values also enabled the assumption that conservation and income generation through sustainable resource management are mutually supportive activities. Oates (1999) attempts to show the incompatibility of economic development with conservation goals in West Africa. Conservation planners, he

suggests, need to revert to a key principle: valuing nature for itself (its intrinsic value). This view, in many ways, is also one shared and promoted by Western biologists, conservationists and scientists. Note, however, that many anthropologists have argued that Oates and others (especially Terborgh, 1999) are *the* colonialists and preservationists of the environmental community. Their talk of preserving nature 'for its own sake' is a Western 'deep ecology' mindset driven by scientific self-interest. Paradoxically, most indigenous groups are, in their own way, also very 'instrumentalist' in that they steward the natural environment because they use it and value its use, not because they see it as 'intrinsically beautiful.'

To summarise, scientific management principles, and the economic-ecological modernisation theses embraced by the conservation community and related ecotourism interests have made it difficult for alternative (non-modernist) narratives or non-anthropocentric perspectives like biocentrism to gain voice (Duffy, 2002; Holden, 2003; West & Carrier, 2004). The discourse of ecotourism evident in the definition, principles, and practices shows that it is steeped historically in modernistic and 'Western' (northern) perspectives. The dominant interests and values that have shaped it thus far have generated a commodified paradigm, oriented towards use-based conservation, industry profit and visitor 'satisfaction'. As the next section shows, the growing popularity of mostly 'self-regulated' ecotourism programmes and certification practices continue to institutionalise a modernity-inspired form of capitalism and progress worldwide.⁴

Institutionalising Practices and Certification Programmes

As ecotourism's various meanings continue to evolve, conflict and change, a variety of principles have emerged to codify appropriate visitor behaviour and to guide industry operators and host destinations.⁵ These movements have been influenced by the Brundtland Commission's report on sustainable development (WCED, 1987), and by growing awareness of tourism's impacts and the emergence of sustainable tourism. The rise of certification programmes and ecolabelling schemes reflect industry and operator efforts to gain credibility and visibility in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Honey, 2002; Sanabria, 1999; Sasidharan *et al.*, 2000; Synergy, 2000). Over 100 international, national and regional sustainable tourism certification schemes were being promoted around the start of the 21st century (Synergy, 2000). They used a variety of techniques to enable legitimation, including logos, trademarks, ecolabelling, certification programmes and higher-level accreditation.⁶

Institutionalisation has been carried forward by two types of certification programmes that have emerged (Table 3). While they differ in focus (process or performance based), both require audits. Performance-based systems establish a set of guidelines or standards that act as indicators or benchmarks to be achieved by the company being certified. The company is audited to see if the benchmark was achieved before it receives the certification award. Process-based schemes require some sort of Environmental Management System (EMS) that the company implements (note that process-based schemes (like the ISO family) are often criticised since a company may be certified for implementing an EMS even if its environmental performance does not improve).

Table 3 Types of certification programmes

	<i>Performance based</i>	<i>Process based</i>
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set specific performance indicators (benchmarks) that product must achieve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria are general, relies on commitment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow comparison among products or companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish how a product will be achieved
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental and usually sociocultural and economic indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not test end result
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use EMS
Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costa Rica, Blue Flag 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISO 14000, Eco-Management and Audit System (EMAS)
Example	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sewage treatment meets effluent performance standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operator commitment to implement a process to meet desired outcomes (e.g. interpretation plan)
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less expensive and more applicable to SMEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Versatile, applicable across industries
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to follow check lists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentive the investment in processes and technologies that reduce environmental impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow comparison amongst businesses and products 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve a range of stakeholders 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include product quality, therefore benefiting clients 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented by a range of stakeholders 	
Criticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater degree of ambiguity and imprecision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only reflect that EMS have been set up, not that it has been implemented
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some standards and criteria are qualitative, subjective and difficult to measure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not allow comparisons among products or companies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not tell how to do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less applicable to small businesses
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May ignore other stakeholders (community, visitors)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add consultant costs to implement system

Three well-known tourism certification programmes are the Australian Eco Certification Program (also abbreviated as ECP below) and the Costa Rican Sustainable Tourism Certification (STC), as well as a smaller programme, the Canadian Saskatchewan Ecotourism Accreditation System (SEAS) (Table 4).⁷ These are mostly performance-based, although the ECP and STC also use some process-based criteria. While the STC does not charge fees (it is non-profit and government sponsored), the other two charge application and annual fees. Once certified, businesses are allowed to use the programme's logo in marketing initiatives. In addition, the programmes also have an online database where potential customers can search for certified businesses or products. A significant number of micro-practices are thus employed to convey credibility and gain consumer confidence, interest and loyalty. Implemented in 1997 with support and funding from several national and international organisations such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Costa Rican STC is noteworthy in that its 152 sustainable tourism criteria include environmental, social, economic and quality indicators. Though new developments have been slow, this initiative sets a good example for other countries (Bien, 2003).

While standardising is useful to ensuring efficient and credible practices within the ecotourism industry, a discursive analysis of its modernistic influences exposes some of the power relations and conflicts that shape the meanings, practices and self-regulatory preferences of certain players. The steady ordering of the ecotourism domain through local to regional/national certification schemes continues through to the global level continues, aided by new players and accreditation initiatives.

Institutions and accreditation: From the domestic to the international

The structuring of the ecotourism domain globally is reflected in the rise of new organisations and NGOs like the International Ecotourism Society (active in the 1990s), plus the growing involvement of multilateral agencies and international organisations such as the World Tourism Organization (WTO), UNEP and IUCN. Environmental NGOs like the World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International, at first sceptical about ecotourism, are now major players in ecotourism initiatives. While some of these programmes and organisations arose from an environmental or conservation background, others arrived indirectly via the route of 'sustainable tourism' (UNEP-ICLEI, 2003). Criticism about programme credibility and effectiveness has led to the emergence of domestic and international accreditation bodies. For example, the Ecotour Providers Accreditation Program from the Ecotourism Society of Saskatchewan certifies ecotourism attractions and business from the Saskatchewan area, Canada. The Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC), a proposed global accreditation body promoted by the Rainforest Alliance, aims to 'certify the certifiers' under a single quality standard to improve the credibility of certification systems (Font *et al.*, 2003).

Two other global initiatives are worth noting: (i) a joint venture between Green Globe 21 and the Australian Eco Certification Program. Its main purpose is to create and distribute an International Ecotourism Standard (IES) and Ecotourism Accreditation (Certification) programme to other

Table 4 Sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programmes

	<i>Australia – ECP</i>	<i>Costa Rica – STC</i>	<i>Canada – SEAS</i>
Sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Products – tours, attractions, accommodations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodations. In 2002 initiated to certify operators but none certified so far 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotourism attractions and businesses
Evaluation criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hybrid (mainly performance based but also uses process based) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance based, but also uses some process based evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance based
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STC’s auditors evaluate businesses based on a list of 152 criteria to be achieved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEAS auditors evaluate based on a set of ecotourism criteria to be achieved
Certifier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third party audit. Initially via application document and then on site audit to check all ECP criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National certification council, with members from several government and non-government sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecotourism Society of Saskatchewan (self-accreditation)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A first assessment takes eight weeks to be accomplished 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit every six months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision usually made in eight weeks
Requirements	Fees vary according to amount of yearly turnover, ranging from \$198–730 for application and assessment fees, and \$320–1500 for annual fee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initially, it does not charge for the certification process (to motivate participation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$100 application fee
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awards a logo showing the company certification in one of the 5 levels contemplated by the programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$50 annual fee
Period and logos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logo valid for three years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company authorised to use logo once achieves one of the five certification levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company authorised to use logo once achieves the criteria

(Continued)

Table 4 Continued

	<i>Australia – ECP</i>	<i>Costa Rica – STC</i>	<i>Canada – SEAS</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two types of logos: ecotourism and advanced ecotourism 		
Companies certified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 49 hotels out of 195 solicitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not available

Sources: Eco Certification Program (ECP), CST (Costa Rica Sustainable Tourism), Synergy (2000), Ecotourism Society of Saskatchewan.

countries in the world (Crabtree *et al.*, 2002); and (ii) the *Mohonk Agreement*, a document drawn up by representatives of leading certification programmes from 20 countries. This international collaboration resulted in a set of general principles and criteria that could serve as a basis for sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programmes around the world. Recognising the need to be adaptive to each country's context, the framework is intended to provide minimum standards to enable consistency among certification programmes (Crabtree *et al.*, 2002; Honey, 2002).

Despite all the above initiatives, it appears that the issues identified earlier with respect to ecotourism definitions and purpose flow through to certification and other institutionalisation activities. Value conflicts suggest the domination of an economic-conservation paradigm (versus a social-cultural one). Corporate social responsibility also appears to be a problem. Font and Harris's (2004) empirical study of five certification programmes operating partly or wholly in developing countries indicates that 'social standards are ambiguous, the assessment methods are inconsistent and open to interpretation' (Font & Harris, 2004; 986). Their study focused on programmes that specifically claimed to include socio-economic considerations. The final sample included two larger organisations (the well-known Green Globe 21 and the non-profit, government funded Costa Rican STC), plus three smaller programmes that made community needs a priority. Font and Harris conclude that certification programmes must strive for a more comprehensive approach to corporate social responsibility that is meaningful to tourist consumers and host societies (Font & Harris, 2004: 1003). This aspect is explored further below.

Power and stakeholders: A post-structuralist view

The ecotourism landscape portrays a diverse group of players (stakeholders) that influence the conservation and use of eco-destinations. Deconstructing the language and manner in which ecotourism interventions are picked up and applied by public sector agencies, donor agencies and environmental organisations helps to identify the power relations that shape economic and social relationships in ecotourism. Mowforth and Munt's (1998, 2003) critique of new tourism forms (characteristic of a post-Fordist, post-modern era of global tourism) is insightful in this respect. They address four areas: (1) intervention and commodification; (2) subservience (domination and control); (3) fetishism; and (4) aestheticisation. Ecotourism as a new form, they argue, is

ego-tourism. Ego-tourists seek nature experiences that are highly aestheticised and able to assist in developing societal status and distinction from the masses. Ecotourism certification programmes address tourist experiences mainly from an instrumental perspective, facilitating positive conservation behaviour and 'satisfaction' from a marketing perspective. These 'positive' norms appear neutral or morally appropriate because the discursive structures that deliver them deflect questioning the kind of experience, or the social behaviours and types of human ecological relationships being formed.

Operating from a distance, accreditation programmes and international organisations like WTO set standards and codes of conduct for eco-tourists that effect a policing of specific practices and a normalisation of behaviour in the population. Rutherford's (1999) Foucauldian analysis of the role of government and environmental management techniques is helpful in seeing how this instrumental rationality becomes dominant. He points out certain discursive patterns, such as the 'pastoral' attitude of government, whose goal is seen as promoting the 'well-being of its subjects' by intimate regulation of behaviour, i.e. its concern is more with security than welfare. Tools like Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) set up frameworks for rationalising behaviour in particular ways, and fit well with the normative perspective embedded in almost all schools of environmental thought – 'the notion of wise stewardship as fundamental to the management of all-encompassing ecological relationships' (Rutherford, 1999: 58). Neo-liberal business policies use this form of scientific management to advocate greater corporate control and minimal government intervention. *Self-regulation* continues to be the preferred mode of environmental governance for private sector ecotourism interests, despite the fact that the study *Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainable Tourism* (WTO, 2002) found 104 certification schemes around the world (labels, awards, etc.). Of these, only 11% had begun before 1990 and 78% are located in Europe. Ecology becomes a powerful technique of social engineering managed through public-private 'partnerships' and various tools that institutionalise control and ordering of ecosystems and their inhabitants (Jamal *et al.*, 2003; Rutherford, 1999).

Ecological governmentality and the loss of wonder

Like EIA, ecotourism accreditation, certification and labelling practices also set up new relations of power through instituting positive norms of behaviour at both the institutional level and through what Foucault describes as a positive intervention on behalf of individuals (Darier, 1999a). The concern lies not in the direct visible policies and mechanisms of certification, but in the ways in which social relations to nature are normalised and rationalised through positive intervention strategies such as ecolabelling and ecocertification. Both instill an unquestioned 'rightness' or taken-for-granted legitimacy of the stakeholders and initiatives. An ecological governmentality is established through the institutionalisation of a scientificised form of ecotourism governance that makes it appear like the natural world and human relations with it are programmable, that the environment is inherently problematic and that it must be policed through positive interventions like ecocertification. Problem-solving is directed primarily towards developing better schemes and 'educating' local people

about the importance of managing ecological problems through scientific conservation and resource managerialism, or rewarding operators that measure up to such certification schemes. Instead of formal regulation of their activities (in public domains at least), a discourse of self-regulation and self-control is assured by such scientific and technological aids.

This governmentality makes it very difficult to raise questions about the criteria and principles contained in existing certification schemes, and about experience and interpretation of nature. Whose interests (and what interests) drive ecotourism? What does this do to visitor and resident relationships with their natural world? Ecotourism as it is practiced under the dominant paradigm not only treats nature instrumentally, it can also result in separating humans from their natural world. In *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment*, Evernden (1993) provides a lucid account of the loss of meaning in society's relationships to the earth, the loss of the sense of relatedness to the world. Berman (1981) and Taylor (1991) explain this loss or disenchantment of the world as being connected to the primacy of *instrumental reason*, the kind of rationality we use to most economically arrive at the means to a given end (where maximum efficiency is the measure of success). The loss of significance of our place in the world makes it easier for the rest of the natural world to be treated as instruments or raw materials, as Taylor discusses.⁸

Ironically, ecotourism practices can perpetuate this disenchantment through they kind of ecological modernisation and scientific managerialism described above. The domination of Enlightenment values (e.g. reason) and the local-global institutionalisation of a commodified ecotourism paradigm diminish ecotourism's potential to facilitate existential belonging and meaningful relatedness to nature. A concerted effort, we argue, is required to de-centre and re-situate ecotourism as a more equitable paradigm oriented toward *well-being*: an ethic of care in using, managing and living within the physical, social and spiritual systems that sustain our existence.

Re-envisioning Ecotourism: Equity, Practice and Praxis

Our study of ecotourism's historical antecedents and intervention strategies suggests that modernity's powerful narratives have inhibited ecotourism's healing or transformative potential to mend and re-connect us to the physical-ecological systems of Nature. A modernity-based critique of ecotourism paints a sobering picture. Influence by 'northern' interests since inception, its practices centre on *managing* experience, facilitating conservation and reducing business uncertainty with the help of scientific and marketing/management tools, and equating progress with economic growth. Driven by economic and marketing-oriented discourses, visitor experience is 'measured' by scale items seeking to gauge 'visitor satisfaction'. The local inhabitants' experiences and relationships with the biophysical world is hardly mentioned; their participation is addressed instrumentally – of course we are concerned about their social and economic benefits but, really, these benefits are also a way to engage them in conservation – the inhabitants become a means to the end of conservation. The form of ecological modernisation that results fits well with the managerialistic ethic of globally influential institutions like the World

Tourism Organization who disseminate a modern discourse of 'sustainable tourism' to the developed and developing world. In both of these concepts (ecotourism and sustainable tourism), 'experience' and experiential relationships with the natural world are subordinate to mechanistic doctrines and impact management actions (Darier, 1999a).

Foucault's response to the governmentality described above is to advocate an aesthetic of existence where 'self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination enables the individual to develop practices of the self and to monitor, improve and transform the self. It requires developing a heightened awareness of how we actively (performatively) constitute our relationship to the 'other'. However, even though his work offers valuable insights for reconstituting self-other relationships, the self remains central in Foucault's task. We therefore seek more equitable theories for re-envisioning ecotourism to a paradigm where both Nature and those who inhabit the biophysical world are treated more equitably, where Self-Other relationships are not predominantly driven by commodity value and scientific-managerialist discourses. The culture of Nature is not neutral, and ecotourism offers an opportunity to see it in cultural terms. Rotholz's (1995) study of conservation conflicts in the Northern Rockies shows the contested terrain of Nature:

... there is an ongoing struggle to acquire the authority to define what wilderness 'really' is and, by implication, what should be the legitimate place of humans in relation to it. Science has become the weapon of choice in this battle to negotiate the meaning to be attached to nature. Efforts to protect or exploit wilderness are almost exclusively couched in abstract and scientific terms. Claiming to have an objective understanding of what constitutes natural environments reveals much of the ethnocentrism of our modern, 'scientific' cultural orientation. Science can never be culture-neutral so long as it is practised by culture-bearing persons – a simple concept that is often overlooked by the drive to attain legitimacy through objectivity. (Rotholz, 1996)

What Rotholz says for conservation can be applied to ecotourism as well: 'If indigenous group relations with their natural environments have any application to the attainment of sustainable human-nature relations in the industrialized world, perhaps it is through the realization that cultural values, beyond strictly scientific ones, have a legitimate place in formulating sustainable conservation strategies' (Rotholz, 1996). The legitimacy of other cultural values, other views and other relationships is an opportunity for ecotourism to take up – it is after all supposed to be an 'alternative' form of development (we address this below under the notion of equity as fairness). Equity is well-noted in the discourse of sustainable development, most clearly indicated in the call for inter-generational as well as intra-generation equity, and in bridging the North-South divide so that development benefits can accrue to the poor (who thus far have incurred more than their share of global pollution created by industrialised countries and lost a lot of their resources to colonialists). However, there is little mention of equity with respect to the use, protection and valuation of environmental and cultural resources. Both sustainable tourism and ecotourism can be criticised for the same lack of attention

(especially ecotourism where the biophysical environment is the focal point for development and conservation actions).

The issues and concerns raised in the previous sections suggest three areas that merit closer attention in ecotourism certification programmes and practices: cultural well-being, community participation, and researcher practice. We commence with a short discussion of equity in these areas, recognising that what we are really calling attention to are the many topics where equity is touched upon yet not well-examined philosophically or theoretically in ecotourism studies. There is certainly a significant amount of empirical research and pragmatic management responses to various economic, social and environmental issues such as access to natural areas (e.g. ensuring that locals have access to protected areas that were once traditionally owned), enabling economic opportunities and gains for local residents, and ensuring that social benefits to flow not only to tourists but also to locals. But often missed in ecotourism certification programmes and lists of sustainability indicators are specific cultural issues pertaining to the inhabitants in the ecotourism destination, such as impacts on cultural heritage, identity, and belonging to ecological, physical and human-cultural landscapes. Human ecological relationships are similarly problematically ignored.

In the area of environmental ethics and ecotourism, for instance, discussion of the *intrinsic value* of nature/wilderness etc. as an equitable principle of resource conservation has yet to happen. Holden (2005) argues that acknowledging this intrinsic value is necessary in a conservation ethic for managing common pool resources, and for developing an environmental ethic for tourism. As he notes, codes of conduct and environmental audits illustrate conservation-oriented behaviour, but whether such a conservation ethic is a strong enough environmental ethic for tourism is uncertain. We take a stronger position than 'uncertain'. A conservation ethic, even one including the intrinsic value of nature, is inadequate as an environmental ethic, if the environmental ethic focuses primarily on the environment without clearly including human ecological relationships. Holden touches briefly on the environmental ethic, but it is not clear whether his view is as holistic as ours; we argue below that cultural equity is integral to an environmental ethic in ecotourism.

Cultural equity and human ecological relationships

Cultural sustainability has yet to be incorporated properly into the discourses of sustainable tourism and ecotourism (Robinson, 1999), and the same can be said for the notion of cultural equity. First of all, it is important to clarify what we mean by equity. As we use it here, 'equity' does not mean financial assets; rather, it relates to justice as fairness. Maiese's (2003) essay on 'Principles of Justice and Fairness' summarises this concept well. Taken in its broad sense, justice is action in accordance with the requirements of some law, for instance, some might believe this to be God's will or command, others might believe that justice is inherent in nature itself, or that that justice consists of consensus-based rules common to all humanity. In all cases, this broader sense of justice enables the development of some universal rule of conduct against which actions can be seen as 'just' or 'unjust'. The narrower sense of justice is a more context-bound notion of fairness which involves

paying due regard to the proper interests, property, and safety of one's fellows (people develop rules to work out a 'fair share' of benefits and burdens and a system of 'fair play'. Maiese also points out that John Rawls argues that

the fundamental idea in the concept of justice is fairness, and that this can be expressed through the notion of a social contract. His two principles of justice suggest that individuals have an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all, and that any inequalities are unacceptable unless they work to everyone's advantage. (Maiese, 2003; see also Rawls, 2001)⁹

Community capital can be categorised under human, social, cultural, financial and natural, and all five are important to include in capital asset evaluation and equity-oriented planning. Decisions need to be made to operationalise each dimension, a difficult task given that impacts can be interrelated. For instance, community and societal well-being are inextricably linked to human ecological relationships: they are embodied, situated and historical practices occurring in the biophysical domain. These human ecological relationships vary from group to group; some may be sacred and others quite pragmatic. For the purpose of this paper, we draw upon George and Reid (2005) to express culture as those physical, intangible, abstract, social and psychological aspects that have traditionally held deep significance, value and meaning to a community. They are often manifest in arts, crafts, morals, laws and customs of a society and have mutually reinforcing relations with the community's livelihood activities. In rural areas, these include working closely with the natural resources contained on land and in the sea (as George and Reid note), and living closely with it and within it.

Human ecological relationships thus include a phenomenological existentiality that is mostly intangible but contributes importantly to a sense of cultural identity and place in the world. It is these dimensions, too, that change as ecotourism activities commodify the community's various cultural aspects and activities. The process of cultural commodification involves the capitalisation of local culture in a way that discontinues its natural and continuing living culture, allowing the formation of a new touristic culture that contests and contends with the community 'collective conscience' (defined by George & Reid, 2005 as the mindset and principles upon which the original community culture evolved). Approaches are needed that provide an inclusive assessment tool to help community members to 'consciously and purposely construct (and manage) its own tourism product, controlling what is and is not to be commodified' (George & Reid, 2005: 105). Hence, the notion of cultural sustainability would have to include cultural equity – fair consideration of the changes being brought to the community's cultural fabric.

In the context of the modernity and human ecological relationships discussed above, an important dimension of cultural equity involves nurturing *meaningful* self-other relationships within the ecological systems in which tourism operates. As our earlier discussion about ecotourism definitions shows (Table 1), this is typically attended to by citing subjective benefits of tourist experience. Much needed are items that direct attention to human ecology relationships, not just of the visitor but also of the local *inhabitants*,

and factoring these into the overall sustainability picture: the environmental, economic, political, societal *and* cultural trade-offs that must be weighed when environments are commodified for ecotourism. Cultural equity is not achieved by paying 'equal' attention to visitor experience and resident experience. Rather, it requires (1) factoring all these experiential relationships (tourist and resident) and other potential cultural changes into the overall sustainability framework, and (2) effective participatory processes at the local destination level so that those who stand to be impacted by the development can make an informed decision (rather than a partial evaluation based on economic cost-benefit scenarios) on development projects and proposal.

Ross and Wall (1999) offer a useful indicator set under 'Nature of local-tourist interactions' which they list under the category of social welfare benefits. They even provide for transformative experience, i.e. 'transformative values nurtured from positive experiences with nature [by visitors and residents]', plus indicators to monitor objectives related to environmental education provision, and to promotion of environmental stewardship/advocacy. But again, the objectives remain primarily functional and managerialist; they are oriented instrumentally toward economic and conservation agendas, while potential (or actual) cultural costs or issues of cultural fairness (equity) are poorly acknowledged. For instance: how do conservation and ecotourism initiatives affect existential relationships with the natural world?

This is an important issue as it can be argued that modernistic practices of certification criteria result in an aestheticisation of nature rather than a participatory 'aesthetic of existence' (Foucault, 1982, 1988) by which meaningful human ecological relationships can be developed and experienced. Indicators and monitoring schemes pertaining to tourism and sustainability must address human ecological aspects such as the commodification of human ecological relations through ecotourism development, associated changes in meaning and related impacts on societal and conservation goals in the long-term. While much work has to be done to develop cultural relationship indicators, the community characteristics Ross and Wall's (1999) list of 'social structure/values' offers some useful items for tracking human-ecological relationship changes (e.g. religion, culture, traditional values, exposure/flexibility to change).

Social equity and participatory practice

Sustainability frameworks generally build upon three themes: (1) ecological constraints, (2) economic development, and (3) social equity (Swarbrooke, 1999). Under social equity, discussion revolve around community/societal concerns such as health care, social support services, education, housing, income/livelihood opportunities, access to resources and recreation and gender/ethnic issues related to these factors. It also includes equity in host-guest relationships, such as respectful encounters between visitors and locals. Social sustainability and social equity, of course, apply to both 'guests' and 'hosts.' Integral to a societal and community-based ecotourism focus is not just the tourist experience (which most industry-driven definitions are concerned about), but the experience of *all* participants – how various stakeholders relate to, live with, and are transformed by the mediating practices of ecotourism. Achieving

social equity involves providing fair (in the sense of equitable and just – equity is not synonymous to ‘equal’) opportunity for participants in the system to strive towards well-being and quality of life, Potts and Harrill (2002: 50) call for such a notion of social sustainability in their term ‘travel ecology’, where the relationship between community, ecology and travel can be used not only to sustain but also to enhance human communities.

While sustainability approaches have univocally advocated human ecological ties, ecotourism’s emancipatory potential of ecotourism may be better realised by adopting a stronger culture framework, addressing the culture of Nature and ensuring that societal and community (human and ecological) well-being are the central focus of ecotourism practice. Certification schemes evaluated under this perspective would be guided by principles and criteria based on a social-cultural paradigm rather than an economic-environment one. A socio-cultural paradigm means that social equity *and* cultural equity anchor conservation and economic development in ecotourism. Direct local participation in decision-making is a cornerstone of social equity, which also addresses benefits and access to natural area and resources (Swarbrooke, 1999).¹⁰ An example of this sustainability orientation is the partnership between the Native Community of Infierno in Tambopata, Peru and a private tour company (Rainforest Expeditions) to develop community-based ecotourism based on shared participation and responsibility in decision-making (Holle, 1998; Stronza, 1999, 2004).

Direct participation in decision-making is crucial to prevent ‘tokenism’ and, more importantly, to enable local inhabitants to participate directly in determining how much change in everyday relationships with the natural/social world they are willing to accept. In Medina’s (2005: 290) ethnographic study of local village residents and small business participants in Belizean ecotourism, Belizean entrepreneurs felt that ‘local communities should benefit from and exercise control over either cultural change or the maintenance of cultural tradition by representing their own cultures directly to tourists’. But, she felt participatory mechanisms in ecotourism development are currently inadequate, and planning forums and processes for effective participation by differently positioned stakeholders are greatly needed. Her study also points out that what counts as a ‘benefit’, who should count as a ‘local’ and what should count as ‘participation’ are problematic and require operationalisation in the ecotourism literature.

Participatory planning and local control are principles that have been addressed rhetorically at best in ecotourism development, and similarly in ecotourism certification. As Garrod (2003) points out: ‘The full and effective participation of local communities in the planning and management of ecotourism is, however, rarely a feature of ecotourism projects’ or a value advocated by ecotourism researchers generally. To remedy this problem, ecotourism certification schemes should include clear measures for direct community participation and collaborative planning.¹¹ These criteria should help ensure that destination residents are: (1) informed about the potential socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism development (e.g. how participation in ecotourism might influence their experience and relationships with the natural world); and (2) directly involved in ecotourism development, planning, marketing

and certification. The aim of such a 'participatory democracy' approach is to ensure that locals have deliberative voice in decision-making, but this does not mean to the exclusion of scientific and economic narratives – it is important that local participants are informed but not dominated by these other forms.

Ross and Wall (1999) offer examples of indicators assessing these participatory relationships in protected areas. They note the importance of implementing effective policies, management strategies and involving a wide range of organisations such as NGOs or development assistance agencies. But their proposed framework says little about how these concepts play out specifically in decision-making at the local level. Specific indicators need to be developed to address politically charged issues like: does the indigenous community being visited have self-determination and autonomy, or co-management rights? What importance is being accorded to conservation versus socio-economic well-being? How informed are the local residents of the potential impacts of tourism and its modernity-based influences (whose interests are being fostered)? What is the landscape of stakeholders that influence the political domain of ecotourism policy, planning and marketing in the local-global ecotourism system?

Reflexive praxis for eco-researchers

A post-structural critique of ecotourism certification questions how the 'nature' experience in ecotourism has become an unquestioned given, or why some organisations feel they have a duty to self-regulate, and who has the final authority on what should be considered appropriate forms of ecotourism and conservation behaviour. These are uneasy questions for some, but the conflicting values associated with ecotourism development and management needs to be taken up at some point by ecotourism researchers. A number of critically oriented studies on discursive and social constructions of nature (Cronon, 1996; Darier, 1999a, 1999b; MacNaghten & Urry, 1998) have paved the way for some of this work. Feminist theorists and post-structuralist scholars have started to examine micro-relations of power and influence that link local level bio-politics and eco-politics to macro-level population, social and global issues. Political ecology or political economy frameworks and a body of research outside of 'tourism studies' on *environmental justice* could help inform the study of class, gender and ethnicity, as well as social and cultural equity.

Also important to the research process is doing justice to the voices of those in the ecotourism research domain – the voices of the inhabitants, the inputs of interest groups (including NGOs), and the role of scientific and traditional knowledge in interpreting and managing 'nature' in protected areas. The tourism-related researcher, too, is embedded in power-knowledge relations (Foucault, 1980) and reflexivity is imperative. In other words, researchers must be clearly aware of their own assumptions, values, re-presentations and interpretations of 'the other' (e.g. nature), and how these influence their study practices. A number of questions arise in this regard: whose norms do proposed definitions and principles reflect? What do they say about moral issues such as the intrinsic value of wildlife and wilderness (Holden, 2003)? Is it increasing urgent for tourism researchers to become 'organic intellectuals'?

[Gramsci's (1971) term] involved in participatory research and praxis, i.e. participating directly in change-oriented activities in the study area rather than hands-off or abstract scholastic pursuits (Jamal & Everett, 2004)? Our (critical) analysis in this paper engages the institutionalisation of ecotourism and calls for participatory decision-making at the local level, and addressing social-cultural equity. It also calls for increased researcher reflexivity and sensitivity in attending to the ecotourist 'experience' and the human ecological relationships of inhabitants of ecotourism destinations. Incorporating these understandings into ecotourism programmes and certification schemes is an urgent task in revising ecotourism towards an equitable, caring and ethical practice.

The emphasis on studying and understanding *experience* is crucial to our argument. Certification cannot scientifically 'measure' (hence evaluate) these 'lived' aspects of ecotourism, and therefore avoids it, succeeding only at institutionalising modernity through 'objective' evaluation. This, in turn, reifies and strengthens power structures rather than overturns them (which is what ecotourism is supposed to do?). Researching lived experience, cultural relationships, and power in ecotourism will require greater interdisciplinarity in our research and practices – fortunately, there are many theoretical and methodological insights to be gained from 'other' academic areas as well as 'other' worlds outside academia. Critical social research as well as more critically oriented dialogue between teachers and students may help develop ecotourism's potential for healing modernism's schisms (to which it may ironically be contributing).¹² Freire's (1998) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has a great deal to offer ecotourism curricula and practice (other than the common ground his pedagogic praxis shares with a popular ecotourism destination – Brazil). As he said, a new [ecotourism] pedagogy must be formed *with*, not *for*, those who struggle to regain their humanity (Freire, 1998: 30).

Notions and practices of ecotourism will continue to evolve and change, and new paradigms of sustainability and certification will be needed as modernist traditions are contested by new social movements and the mobilisation of diverse cultural groups and values constructing new eco-aesthetics of existence and practice. New paradigms for inter-disciplinary research will be also needed as the modernist foundations of social-cultural research are challenged.

A Way Forward

In this paper, we examined ecotourism's purpose and evolution, and found it lacking in the very spirit that enthused many of us about its potential. Dominant discourses of modernity play out in conservation and neo-liberal agendas, shaping ecotourism origin and current trajectory. Engaging traditional and indigenous communities in natural resource and ecosystem conservation were among the early goals of ecotourism, but these were secondary to conservation and economic interests (viewed as mutually beneficial goals). Alternative income development strategies aimed at ecological *conservation* and socio-economic benefits were a necessary part of ensuring conservation ends. Our examination also shows a local-global institutionalisation of this instrumentally driven paradigm. Monitoring and certification programmes, driven by global profit-driven, neo-liberal policies, advocate

self-regulation and objective measures that do poor justice to intangible cultural aspects and relationships with Nature. Ecotourism and related certification programmes tend to: (1) associate visitor experience to education, learning and 'appreciation' (modernity's rational values) rather than to interpretive and existential meaning-making; (2) be less than attentive to the cultural transformations that may be occurring as resident relationships to the natural environment become commodified through ecotourism development; and (3) employ scientific management and resource managerialism that can further fragment human ecological relationships – an issue that is sadly under-examined in ecotourism research and in certification or monitoring initiatives.

So where do we go from here? As Wearing *et al.* (2005) note, neo-liberal free market economic policies and a global tourism industry are severely impacting finite planetary resources and exacerbating income disparities worldwide. States and trans-national corporations adopt a global capitalism where profit matters above all things; human well-being and ecological sustainability are narratives that must be taken up by other voices and other practices. If ecotourism is to realise its vision as an alternative and sustainable endeavour, it will require a radical de-centring of a commodified paradigm shaped by modernistic principles toward embracing such 'other' narratives. We propose a social-cultural-environmental paradigm based on intrinsic value (valuing things for themselves rather than for their economic use value) and human ecological well-being.

This alternative paradigm is situated in an ethic of care that includes not only the Self (tourist, local, ecotourism operator/guide...) nor just pragmatic 'benefits' for the Other (e.g. 'conserving' the natural environment/Nature, ensuring socio-economic benefits for local inhabitants), but also consideration of the relationships *between* Self and Other. Nature is more than the objective instrument of science and a commodity for capitalistic profit. Even though it is treated as a means to an end (a commodity) in a capitalistic tourism production system, it can and should also be valued as an end in itself (for its intrinsic value). Without this, how is it possible to understand Self-Other relationships in terms different from use-value and exchange value (the dominant discourse of capitalism), in terms of care and concern, for instance? As the sacred and religious relationships of various ethnic and indigenous groups with the biophysical world show, it is not an impossible task to be able to contemplate, respect and have such a relationship which is neither romantic nor instrumental but a caring one.

One of ecotourism's transformative capabilities lies in healing modernity's scars on the local and global inhabitants of our planet, but its practices have to be based on fairness and justice to the residents own human ecological relationships as well as those of visitors. It involves ensuring a *meaningful* ecotourism experience for visitors and it also involves attending to the historical-cultural experiences of residents with their land and the things in it. Such a holistic environmental ethic is clearly not incompatible with ecotourism's conservation goals, and may enable greater stewardship if these ecotourism spaces are understood in terms of well-being and an ethic of care. This is a challenge in a world system driven by commodity capitalism and neo-liberal agendas, but fairness of procedure can be accomplished through participatory

local practices that facilitate *effective* dialogue, communication and understanding of the intangible and tangible impacts of capitalism. Is it not important to warn inhabitants that commodifying their cultural traditions and relationships with the biophysical world for ecotourism can significantly impact their existential belonging and place identity (irrespective of the type of use they had been engaged in prior to the introduction of a capitalistic enterprise)? At the very least, a clear awareness of the new touristic culture being introduced may help towards finding ways to manage its effects on local cultural identity and ecological relationships.

Hence, returning to the institutionalising and monitoring practices described earlier in the paper, why are these vital cultural factors not included as important indicators in any ecotourism certification or monitoring scheme claiming to operate on sustainability principles? Post-structuralist and feminist studies show that it is no longer tenable to say that intangible objects are hard to 'measure' and therefore should be excluded. It suggests that ecotourism providers and researchers must engage in reflective praxis, attending to the experiences of residents, visitors and other participants (NGOs, scientists, policy makers, tour-guides and destination managers, etc.) and addressing the need for cultural fairness and environmental equity in the existing ecotourism paradigm.

Acknowledgements

Review processes are essential to evaluating the scholarship of manuscripts submitted to refereed journals. They often challenge the author(s) to make a stronger contribution to knowledge – in our case, it provided an opportunity to elaborate on the notion of cultural equity, and state more forcefully our concerns about various institutionalising practices. One of our referees summarised our thesis perhaps better than we might have done above. This 'other' voice is deserving of inclusion:

The paper examines the current discourses and institutionalisations of ecotourism, challenging the normative scientific-managerial discourses of ecotourism definitions and certification programmes. It suggests a need to shift the focus and incorporate issues such as social and cultural equity, meaningful and democratic participation, experiential and transformative visitor experiences, and human-relations with nature in our definitions and operationalisation of ecotourism and certification programmes.

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Notes

1. Wearing *et al.* are strong proponents of NGOs as being examples of best practice in decommodifying tourism; they see most NGOs as operating from an ecocentric rather an environmentalism perspective (dependent on modernity values favouring

- technological solutions, etc.). See Jamal and Eyre (2003) for a less romantic and not so universalising view of the NGO's agenda and approach.
2. Fennell's (1999) analysis reveals that enjoyment/appreciation was an important dimension of the ecotourist experience. He ranked the main principles contained in 13 ecotourism and two nature tourism definitions (Table 2 focuses only on ecotourism definitions). The first three principles address nature, conservation and protected areas; 'benefits to local people' appeared in more than half of the definitions. Three definitions addressed 'enjoyment/appreciation' while five dealt with 'education'. Content analysis by Fennell (2001) using 20 variables in 85 definitions indicated an increasing emphasis over time on conservation, education, impacts and local benefits.
 3. Neumann also mentions work by Nancy Peluso (1992) on peasant resistance to state control of natural resources on Java, which shows a comprehensive history of the development of state-controlled scientific forestry and exemplifies a typical pattern in colonial territories (Neumann, 1998: 214).
 4. Over-shadowed by the economic and scientific management discourses, cultural sustainability has also arrived late to the discourse of sustainable tourism (Bramwell *et al.*, 1996; Garrod, 2003; Robinson, 1999).
 5. A detailed set of guidelines can be found in the International Ecotourism Society's book *A Guide for Planners and Managers* (Lindberg & Hawkins, 1993). In general these principles reflect those already discussed: contribution to conservation and well-being of local people, provision of interpretive/learning experience, responsible action on the part of the tourist and tourism industry, and small-scale practices.
 6. As noted in the WWF-UK report (Synergy, 2000), Tourism Certification Programmes provide a logo to companies that exceed (or claim to exceed) a baseline standard. The logo allows businesses or destinations to demonstrate their environmental credentials to consumers, and is earned through engaging in recognised industry practices such as ecolabelling, earning a specific trademark or logo through a certification process involving a membership fee, self-assessed accreditation programmes, and third-party audit (Sasidharan *et al.*, 2000). Other industry organisations have also implemented environmentally-related certificate programmes for resources such as wood products (Lucier & Shepard, 1997; Vlosky *et al.*, 1999) and agricultural-based products such as coffee (Gobbi, 2000).
 7. The SEAS initiatives helped motivate the Sustainable Tourism Association of Canada to implement a Sustainable Tourism Certification Program in the country. Australia's ECP programme began in 1997 (as the Nature and Ecotourism Certification Program) and is probably the most innovative and comprehensive ecotourism and natural tourism certification initiatives (see Fennell, 2003).
 8. Note that the foundation of the national parks in the US, Canada and New Zealand (as well as Australia in some respects) hinged upon their economic potential for tourism (Hall, 1988). As such, their inception was instrumentally driven, as a means to an end (our benefit), rather than as ends in themselves (for their intrinsic value).
 9. While the community social benefits noted in ecotourism principles and definitions comport well with the narrow sense of fairness, the Rawlesian notion of fairness has much to offer for identifying ethical principles for 'sustainable development' in tourism and ecotourism. Our discussion of cultural equity encompasses both perspectives of justice as fairness.
 10. The Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism (WTO, 2002) resulting from the World Ecotourism Summit has clearly endorsed this in its second principle for ecotourism: 'Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation' and, furthermore, the participative planning mechanisms should allow these communities 'to define and regulate the use of their areas at a local level, *including the right to opt out of tourism development*' (italics in original). A key priority is developing participatory mechanisms for stakeholder and diverse knowledges (local, traditional and scientific) to effectively inform decision-making.
 11. Consideration of collaborative participation as well as the knowledge and experiences of other stakeholders such as the NGOs, scientists, tour guides, interpreters,

- administrators and tourism industry operators and marketers is an important dimension of the governance and well-being of human ecological systems.
12. Tourism research driven by industry-related interests will face an interesting challenge. Tourism industry providers need to control movement in order to minimise risk or injury to their clients, and still provide for 'visitor satisfaction'. Numerous marketing and media intermediaries appropriate, re-present and interpret 'Nature' to construct and meet visitor expectations. This may serve to further hinder meaningful encounters in the natural world, thereby exacerbating the crisis of modernity that Taylor (1991) and Berman (1981) describe.

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