A case analysis of strategies in ecotourism development

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Abstract

Ecotourism is a form of tourism which focuses on contributing to the preservation of natural and cultural resources while promoting economic contribution to local communities. Certain factors have been identified in the literature to optimize both preservation and economic contribution, but the strategies to accomplish these factors have not been defined. The purpose of this research was to identify through case analysis how each of the success factors in ecotourism development (i.e. an integrated approach, planning and a slow start, education and training, maximize local benefits, and evaluation and feedback) have been implemented in ecotourism cases. A series of ecotourism cases were analyzed. The success factors were identified and the strategies described under each factor were recorded. The data collected for all cases were pooled for each of the success factors and a matrix of five success factors with the corresponding strategies was created. Strategies that appeared as ‘recommended’ in the cases were not included in the analysis. The results indicated that factors and strategies differed. Within each factor there is no predominant strategy. Success factors should be re-evaluated and factors identified using an ecosystem management approach which puts the health of the environment as the foundation of tourism development. Standards need to be set and then strategies assigned to maintain standards for preservation and economic well-being. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd and AEHMS. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Tourism; Comparative research

1. Introduction

Based on economic contribution, tourism is considered to be the largest industry in the world (Naisbitt, 1994). The tourism industry is made up of hotels, restaurants, attractions, retail operations, transportation, travel agents, marketing organizations, tour operators and a host of other businesses, organizations and components. Tourism has not been credited with attending to the well-being of natural and cultural environments; negative impacts to these environments have been the norm. Effects have arisen from tourism development, tourists and tourism activity (OECD, 1980; Smith, 1989; Inskeep, 1991; Gartner, 1996). In response to these negative impacts, a phenomenon called ecotourism has evolved which provides a mechanism to advocate for the natural and cultural environment while encouraging economic development (Kusler, 1991a,b; Sisman, 1994).

Ecotourism has been described as travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people (Boo, 1991; Cater, 1994; Wight, 1994). Ecotourism focuses on the natural beauty, geology, flora and fauna of a particular area along with its indigenous cultures. Locales around the world with pristine, unique or grand natural and cultural attributes are spotlighted in a ‘sustainable’
manner in order to preserve these attributes and at the same time generate revenue for the destination area. When choosing to take an ‘ecotrip’ or ‘ecotour’, the motivation of the tourist is to appreciate natural and cultural features, and to preserve these features while gaining knowledge and understanding (Wight, 1996a,b). The tourist not only contributes to preservation directly, but also provides an incentive to preserve the resources by their presence and economic contribution. Tourism management and government agencies contribute to preservation by promoting policies and providing expertise in order to balance conservation with support of local enterprises (Inskeep, 1991; Lindberg, 1991; Sisman, 1994).

Since the term and concept of ecotourism first emerged, it has been seen as a savior of the environment, but it has also been used as a marketing ploy. In some cases, ecotourism means sustainable development of tourism. In other situations the term is used as a method of increasing tourism traffic and economic impact (Kutay, 1989; Ceballas-Lascurian, 1991; Ceballas-Lascurian, 1996; Cater, 1994; Dimanche and Smith, 1996). Whatever the definition of ecotourism, it is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry (Kusler, 1991a,b; Higgins, 1996). Many tourism operations which have exploited the environment in the past are now supporting efforts to provide a ‘green’ or ‘alternative’ experience for traditional mass tourists (Cater, 1994).

The scientific community uses ecotourism as a justification for the preservation of resources. The importance of the scientific arena in this concept is the need to balance economic interests with the needs of the natural environment. The environment has been a foundation for tourism development, but has not always been the recipient of top priority status. Reports and descriptions have been published from all over the world which illustrate certain aspects of the development of ecotourism. Many identify the results and impacts of ecotourism (Boo, 1990; Glick, 1991; Post, 1994), but the manner of development has not been well documented. Another discussion focuses on what should happen or what should be done at a given site (Wight, 1994; Wallace and Pierce, 1996). Basic ‘how tos’ are enumerated by some professionals (Boo, 1990; Lindberg and Hawkins, 1993). Other researchers have identified specific success factors for ecotourism development (Ziffer, 1989; Kusler, 1991a,b), but how these indicators have manifested has not been investigated.

Ziffer (1989) advocated that five factors be incorporated into ecotourism development: (1) an integrated approach; (2) planning and a slow start; (3) education and training; (4) maximization of local benefits and (5) evaluation and feedback. The goal was for successful ecotourism development and operation and these five factors ensured that the goal was achieved (Fig. 1).

The integrated approach required that input should be sought from all concerned groups including government agencies, international aid organizations, beneficiaries, tourism operations and residents. Planning and a ‘slow start’ required that a business plan within land management should be developed where...
carrying capacity was documented, implemented and enforced with gradual growth and adjustment in development. Education and training involved tourists, tour operators, and local guides in training with an orientation toward conservation. Maximizing local benefits required that an equitable distribution system of economic benefits especially to local residents should be in place. Finally, evaluation and feedback required that actual and projected figures should be compared and management customized to address identified concerns and issues.

The actual strategies to fulfill the objectives of each success factor were not identified by Ziffer (1989). The purpose of this research was to investigate how each of the success factors have been implemented in ecotourism cases by identifying the underlying strategies implemented in different countries for successful ecotourism. 2. Methodology

This study was designed to identify how each of the success factors listed by Ziffer (1989) has been implemented in ecotourism cases. This study used case analysis in the fashion of Yin (1994) and also comparative research tenets from sociology (Warwick and Osherson, 1973; Pearce, 1993; Berg-Schlosser and De Meur, 1997; Goldstone, 1997; Goldthorpe, 1997). The results of comparative studies replace proper names of social systems (i.e. a city) by the relevant variables (i.e. health issues, crime rate and so on) and strive to identify factors and issues to be discussed. Comparative methods are used for problem selection and provide a basis for further research. The research process used the following steps.

2.1. Identification of ecotourism case studies

The database search criteria included:
1. Published descriptions in academic oriented journals, monographs, reports, book chapters, and conference proceedings.
2. ‘Ecotourism’ as determined by the authors themselves and also by the definition of ecotourism.
3. Cases which offered a comprehensive description of the ecotourism development.

Twenty cases were identified which satisfied the above criteria (Table 1). No procedures were applied to ensure geographic balance. Descriptions published in popular periodicals and nonacademic journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case #</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>North America:</td>
<td>America west</td>
<td>Bryan (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caribbean:</td>
<td>Windward Islands</td>
<td>Christian et al. (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caribbean Basin</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weaver (1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Central America:</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>Jacobson and Robles (1992)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rovinski (1991)</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Place (1991)</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Belize</td>
<td>Kangas et al. (1995)</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Woods et al. (1994)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>South America:</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Schluter (1993)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Europe:</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>Hall and Kinnaird (1994)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alpine area</td>
<td>Khan (1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Africa:</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Holt-Biddle (1996)</td>
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<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Odinda (1991)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Koch (1994)</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Asia:</td>
<td>Annapurna</td>
<td>Garung and De Coursey (1994)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Wells (1994)</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Tisdell (1996)</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Australia/New Zealand:</td>
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<td>Hall (1994)</td>
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<td>Craik (1994)</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Antarctic:</td>
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<td>Stonehouse (1994)</td>
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literature were not selected for the analysis. Two concerns when using comparative research are (1) the absence of multitudes of cases for comparison and (2) the presence of a large number of variables.

2.2. Cross case analysis

Cross case analysis was conducted by examining how each of the success factors were manifested in each case. This examination was necessary in order to provide a structure as required by case analysis. The success factors identified by Ziffer (1989) were used to locate different strategies and possible interactions in order to manage the potential for an overwhelming number of variables better. The success factors were used to identify rather than implying distinct causal relationships (Berg-Schlosser and De Meur, 1997). Each strategy identified was given a code name in order to synthesize the information.

2.3. Culling the data

‘Cases’ were read and reread to eliminate additions to the data which had not been implemented. Such items that were ‘recommended’, ‘advised’, and/or identified as ‘should be implemented’ were excluded from the analysis, but were recorded for discussion.

2.4. Use of qualitative and comparative research methods

An analysis based on qualitative and comparative research methods was completed. The cases were pooled and the strategies identified for the success factors were extracted by categorizing the implemented strategies firstly according to the five success factors.
factors and then by the emergent categories within each factor (Fig. 2).

2.5. Data analysis

The qualitative data were quantified and data analysis was conducted in order to identify variable dominance. The following questions were used to shape the quantitative analysis: (1) What success factor was implemented most? (2) Within each success factor, what strategy was implemented most often? (3) What was the number of cases implementing five/four/three/two/one success factors? A chi square statistic was used to address these questions.

3. Results

The results section contains emergent strategies displayed by each success factor followed by the results of the quantitative analysis.

3.1. Integrated approach

The participants involved in the process of ecotourism development were identified (i.e. initiator, interest groups, and stakeholders). The following strategies were identified:

1a. Self development [SELFDEVO] involves gradual building and growth. Capital investment is not needed because facilities present are utilized (Bryan, 1991; Garung and De Coursey, 1994; Weaver, 1994).

1b. Capital infusion [CAPINFUSE] from multinational businesses, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the government, private organizations, or other entities is needed when beginning an ecotourism enterprise. The goal is to institutionalize the development within the local economic environment (Olinda, 1991; Garung and De Coursey, 1994; Hall and Kinnaird, 1994; Koch, 1994).

1c. Consolidation of basic development [CONBASIC] (i.e. health, education, sanitation) with tourism. The infrastructure to promote human health and welfare as well as tourism facilities and services are supplied to the local community (Schluter, 1993; Garung and De Coursey, 1994; Koch, 1994).

1d. Agriculture, forestry and biodiversity [INC/AG/FOREST] needs and concerns of other major industry sectors are incorporated with tourism development and operation (Garung and De Coursey, 1994; Hall and Kinnaird, 1994; Khan, 1994; Weaver, 1994).

1e. Organizations are set up virtually independent [INDEPENDENT] of the area’s local government. They are given wide ranging powers to protect and enhance the ecological quality of the area and provide mechanisms to facilitate economic development of the area (Place, 1991; Hall and Kinnaird, 1994; Khan, 1994; Koch, 1994; Weaver, 1994; Kangas et al., 1995; Tisdell, 1996).

The emergent strategies for the strategy ‘Integrated Approach’ illustrate both a top—down and bottom—up approach to ecotourism development. There is a dependency on capital investment from individuals and organizations outside the immediate local area, and a fused effort in which more basic needs are connected with tourism. Although a critical consideration is the inclusion of the local residents in the process and final development, one case pointed out that local landowners were unaware of tourism development proposals (Hall, 1994).

3.2. Planning and a slow start

In order to identify strategies as part of this factor, an indication of a planning process was sought in the analysis. Creation of a ‘plan’ and the setting of boundaries or limits were recorded.

2a. A strategy is developed for zoning [ZONING] for the local residents and for tourists. Buffer zones, grazing areas, transition areas and tourist zones are designated in various sections of a site. (Olinda, 1991; Robles, 1992; Craik, 1994; Garung and De Coursey, 1994; Hall and Kinnaird, 1994; Christian et al., 1996; Tisdell, 1996).

2b. Fee collection [FEES] and distribution methods are institutionalized. Local management committees control prices and are responsible for safety, security of visitors (Place, 1991; Garung and De Coursey 1994; Koch, 1994). In one case Village Development Committees were instituted and
grew in number as their effectiveness was demonstrated (Garung and De Coursey, 1994).

2c. ‘Outside’ entities [SUPPORT] are allowed to support preservation efforts (i.e. planting trees, historic preservation) (Khan, 1994; Holt-Biddle, 1996). For example, in the Alpine region of Europe, a multinational cosmetics firm purchased land for butterfly sanctuaries.

2d. Regulations and codes [CODES] of conduct for both tourists and local residents are declared (Jacobson and Robles, 1992; Craik, 1994; Hall, 1994; Stonehouse, 1994; Weaver, 1994; Christian et al., 1996). In one case the local residents are allowed once per year to gather thatching for roofs within a national park area.

2e. Parks [PARKS] and reserve systems are developed (Rovinski, 1991; Weaver, 1994).

2f. Formal documentation [DOCUMENTATION] and established policies and procedures are setup and in some cases each organization or area is required to complete a formal development plan and enforcement plan (Craik, 1994; Hall and Kinnaird, 1994; Weaver, 1994; Holt-Biddle, 1996; Tisdell, 1996).

Although some indication of planning and display of a slow start was demonstrated, it was fragmented and difficult to ascertain. The need for restriction of uses and a proactive stance were seen as necessary in order to effectively integrate groups into the process.

3.3. Education and training

Following are training and education efforts being conducted in ecotour areas. The constituency receiving the training along with the training focus are noted.

3a. Employment [LABOR] as protected areas are developed, training is conducted in order to employ local residents for various personnel positions such as tour guide, gate keeper or fee collector (Olinda, 1991; Holt-Biddle, 1996).

3b. Private enterprise [LENTREPRENEUR] is necessary to support the demand for tourist services. Management and entrepreneurial training occurs so that local residents may own and operate trekking and guiding services or lodging establishments (Garung and De Coursey, 1994).

3c. Leadership [LEADERSHIP] training to facilitate self-governance and self-management of local community programs is provided so that ecotourism becomes a community organized and controlled industry (Garung and De Coursey, 1994).

3d. General conservation [LCONSERVATION] and environmental education programs are instituted into school curricula or as part of community organizations. Programs include recycling or park sponsored conservation lessons (Jacobson and Robles, 1992; Koch, 1994; Christian et al., 1996).

3e. Basic tourism theory [LTRSMTHEORY] is provided so that there is an understanding of the impacts of tourism, positive aspects of tourism and sustainable development doctrines (Jacobson and Robles, 1992; Koch, 1994; Christian et al., 1996).

Ecotourism as a concept focuses on travel for education of the tourists and also on the indigenous culture as an attraction. There is a lack of effective interpretation and educational programming at sites which should be a primary focus of ecotourism development. Local residents are the target for the training and education programs. The change that would occur to the indigenous culture because of such training and education is at cross purposes to preservation of culture.

3.4. Maximize local benefits

4a. The federal or central government [GOVERNMENT] provides financial incentives and assistance to develop small businesses (i.e. travel agents, tour operators) so that local residents and enterprises provide tourism services. (Olinda, 1991; Place, 1991; Hall, 1994; Weaver, 1994; Woods et al., 1994).

4b. The local labor force [LABOR] is offered preferential employment. Labor contracts, organized salary negotiation, and compensation benefiting the entire community were seen (Koch, 1994; Wells, 1994; Holt-Biddle, 1996; Tisdell, 1996).

4c. Local goods [GOODS] such as crafts, food stuffs, and building materials are utilized in the tourism development and operation. Routines were instituted which provide local residents access
Table 2
Strategies (S) identified for each success factor (F) by region and location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total F/S Factors (F) and strategies (S)</th>
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<td>Integrated approach</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Windward Islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>Costa Rica 1</td>
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<td>Costa Rica 2</td>
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<td>Costa Rica 3</td>
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<td>Belize 1</td>
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<td>Totals, strategies</td>
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<td>Strategies used, all factors</td>
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to markets for their goods (i.e. the parks, tourists, lodges and other businesses) (Khan, 1994; Koch, 1994).

4d. Money [MONEY] is funneled from tourists almost directly to local residents. For example, tour operators pay the community for each visiting tourist (Koch, 1994); five dollars per day fee is allocated to the community (Olinda, 1991). Twenty-five percent of park gate revenue goes to the community and donations are solicited from tourists for scholarships (Kangas et al., 1995).

4e. Expertise [EXPERTISE] present in the community is tapped in order to operate. Management contracts with local residents, direct partnerships, permit systems, and organized enterprises such as communal gardens, and craft cooperatives are developed (Garung and De Coursey, 1994; Hall, 1994; Koch, 1994; Tisdell, 1996).

The local community is part of the success of ecotourism. The ‘Integrated Approach’ assumes that local residents are included in the process, and as seen previously ‘Training and Education’ focuses on local residents. The additional efforts centered upon the local residents and their community seem to be the most affirmed factor. In one case it was pointed out that if offered idealism without cash, the resource owners decided to stick with the logging companies, that is, cash (Hall, 1994). This illustrates the necessity to provide economic incentives to local residents in order to ensure positive impacts of the ecotourism development. Formal agreements seem necessary between the tourism industry and local communities and a structure is needed to ensure proper handling of funds and individuals in the community.

3.5. Evaluation and feedback

All planning processes need an evaluation phase in which the development compares its goals and objectives to the actual outcomes of the development. An indication of some type of research or evaluation efforts was sought and the following topic areas emerged from the cases.

5a. Tourist impacts [IMPACTS] on wildlife and the environment whether or not by tourism development itself (i.e. road construction, lodges) (Olinda, 1991; Stonehouse, 1994).

5b. An inventory [INVENTORY] is conducted so that the topography, flora, fauna and other aspects of the natural environment are cataloged (Stonehouse, 1994).

5c. General ecological [ECOLOGICAL], species specific and biodiversity research (Garung and De Coursey, 1994; Christian et al., 1996) is conducted.

Very little evidence of any type of research or evaluation was seen.

3.6. Quantitative analysis

An analysis of strategies implemented in ecotourism development was conducted. The number of strategies implemented within each success factor ranged from three to six (Table 2). Six strategies emerged for ‘planning’ compared to five for ‘integrated approach’, ‘education and training’, ‘maximizing local benefits’, and three for ‘evaluation and feedback’. Strategies were implemented 80 times in the 20 case studies (Table 2). The pooled number of strategies implemented within each factor ranged from 5 (Evaluation) to 25 (Planning). Planning strategies accounted for 31% of the strategies implemented while Evaluation and Feedback strategies accounted for only 6% of implemented strategies. Differences in the pooled number of strategies implemented were significantly different among success factors ($\chi^2 = 16.2, p < 0.002$).

In the five factors, differences in the number of strategies implemented among the 20 case studies were not significantly different (Factor 1: $\chi^2 = 2.57, p < .05$; Factor 2: $\chi^2 = 5.47, p < .05$; Factor 3: $\chi^2 = 3.07, p < 0.05$; Factor 4: $\chi^2 = 1.78, p < 0.05$; Factor 5: $\chi^2 = 0.40, p < 0.05$).

Nevertheless, there may be a tendency towards organizations being setup independently of the area’s local government (INDEPENDENT, 1e; Table 2). In the planning factor a tendency to zone areas for local residents and for tourists as part of the planning process was observed. On the contrary, there was a general lack of outside entities allowed to support preservation efforts, and a lack of development of parks and reserve systems. With respect to Education and Training, a slight tendency towards providing basic tourism theory in terms of the impacts of tourism and the positive aspects of tourism was observed. However, private enterprise support and
leadership training were neglected. A slight tendency towards having federal or central government providing financial incentives or assistance locally was observed. A concomitant disregard for local goods utilization was also observed in the studied cases.

Two of the studied cases (10%) implemented all five success factors in development of the ecotourism project. The Annapurna project established 10 strategies out of the 24 strategies identified. Effort was focused on the ‘Integrated Approach’, with less emphasis on ‘Maximizing Local Benefits’ and ‘Evaluation and Feedback’. The Kenya project also implemented all five factors, but did not emphasize any one of them. This project implemented six of the strategies, at least one in each of the success factors.

In the China and Zimbabwe projects, four of the success factors were implemented. Even though the number of strategies varied for each country, six and nine, respectively, neither implemented strategies for ‘Evaluation and Feedback’.

Six of the studied cases implemented three of the success factors (Table 2). The number of strategies within each of these case studies ranged from three to seven. Of the number of cases that only implemented three success factors, only one implemented a strategy for ‘Evaluation and Feedback’ and only 34% implemented strategies for ‘Education and Training’. These lacks present potential problems for ecotourism development in these countries (Costa Rica, Alpine region of Europe, South Africa, Australia, Windward Islands, and the Caribbean Basin). All of these cases implemented strategies for ‘Planning and a Slow Start’, 83% implemented strategies to maximize local benefits, while 66% developed strategies for the ‘Integrated Approach’.

Four of the studied cases implemented two of the success factors (Belize, Antarctic, Costa Rica, and Eastern Europe). When only two success factors were implemented the number of strategies ranged from two to five strategies. Seventy-five percent of these cases implemented strategies for Planning and a Slow Start where most of the effort was on establishing ZONING and CODES. Little effort was placed on Education and Training or Maximizing Local Benefits and none on Evaluation and Feedback.

Finally, six of the studied cases implemented only one of the success factors in their ecotourism development project (America West, Costa Rica, Belize, Argentina, Nepal, and Australia). The number of strategies implemented when only one success factor was developed ranged from one to three. None of these cases focused on Evaluation and Feedback nor on Education and Training. If only one strategy is developed, it will be targeted towards the ‘Integrated Approach’, ‘Planning and a Slow Start’ or ‘Maximizing Local Benefits’. The specific strategy used varied from case to case.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to identify how each of the success factors identified by Ziffer (1989) have been implemented in specific ecotourism projects. Planning and a Slow Start have been implemented most in the studied cases. Within this success factor, ZONING and CODES were the most frequent strategies implemented. Evaluation and Feedback was least implemented which raises the question ‘how is success being measured?’. If evaluation is not a factor, then when is a site considered to be a successful ecotourism development? When implementing factors and strategies, a successful ecotourism project must consider the intrinsic characteristics of the site. For example, in some cases, the success of the project was directly attributed to extreme natural beauty or a unique wildlife resource (Olinda, 1991; Rovinski, 1991), to stable political conditions (Christian et al., 1996), or to proximity to major tourism markets (Rovinski, 1991; Christian et al., 1996).

The study revealed that problems threatening the success of projects related to lack of implementation of most of the success factors or sufficient strategies within each factor. For example, some of the authors (Koch, 1994; Weaver, 1994; Tisdell 1996) attributed problems establishing strategies to poor communication, transport problems, energy shortages, a lack of training and no marketing budget.

No one strategy may provide what is needed for a site to be sustainable or as a tourism development. For example, the integrated approach may be defined by a capital infusion to an area, but the capital and operation may be governed by an independent autonomous entity. Along with ecotourism development must come local self-development as the area develops.
gradually. Other industries such as agriculture and forestry must be allied with the organization and tourism development. Finally when development occurs, such basic needs as education, health services and sanitation must be a part of the agenda for the site.

Within the factor ‘Planning and a Slow Start’, authoritative and clear-cut programs need to be instituted. The site should be administered by an independent entity autonomous of other organizations. This independent entity’s goal and purpose should focus on development and maintenance of a viable ecotourism development. The cases we studied suggested that rules and restrictions of various kinds be instituted for tourists and local residents, that zoning and fee payment schedules be implemented, park systems setup with appropriate qualifications for use, and that all rules, restrictions, schedules and system setup be formally documented. An infusion of outside money should be provided to preserve sites.

Education and Training is generally an item which is deemed necessary for the ecotourist, but the target for education and training in all the cases we studied was the local resident. Intensive training in the area of ‘tourism theory’ will provide the local population with knowledge and understanding about the tourism industry and its local impacts. As well, education and training should include general labor, entrepreneurial leadership for self management and self governance and conservation and environmental education.

By definition, ecotourism projects must insure that local residents benefit from the development. The local labor force, goods and services and expertise should be tapped and the government should provide financial incentives to assist in the development of businesses to provide such if they are not present. Also, revenue generated from fees and other items should be funneled directly to the local population.

Most of the cases did not show evidence of evaluation and feedback is the most significant result of this study. Only four of the twenty cases evaluated the impacts of tourism and/or executed ecological research. This factor is a necessary part of planning and development and should be implemented and provided as part of the formal documentation. It alone provides the measure of a successful ecotourism development. Only one case carried out an inventory cataloging the flora and fauna of the area. As ecotourism projects around the world strive to protect and conserve the natural characteristics of a site, evaluation of the success of the ecotourism project should consider the health of the ecosystem. Bioassessment as well as habitat assessment should be part of the ecotourism project evaluation. In addition to these environmental indicators, cultural and economic indicators should be evaluated.

Ecotourism projects should be integrated into a more comprehensive ecosystem management plan for the area where quality of life, production and landscape (Savory, 1988) are the goals of the ecosystem management plan. Quality of life refers to the human dimension of the ecosystem and the inclusion of the human population in management of the ecosystem. Production goals refer to the uses humans have for the environment and ecotourism could be part of the production goal for an area. Landscape goals refer to how the land is partitioned in order to support quality of life and production goals. The objectives any valid ecotourism project will take into consideration ecosystem processes: succession, nutrient, water and energy cycling. Finally, the success factors and strategies discussed in this study should be part of the guidelines of the ecosystem management plan.

This study has provided a basis for further research by highlighting a gap in information about the development and management of ecotourism development. Future research may focus on those factors necessary for successful ecotourism development which were not identified in the studied cases.

5. Conclusions

Twenty-four strategies for successful development of ecotourism projects were identified. Strategies for the factor ‘Evaluation and Feedback’ were least implemented. Lack of implementation of this factor poses a threat to the health of the ecosystem. If ecotourism is not viewed as part of the whole ecosystem, its success could be threatened by damages to the ecosystem it is trying to protect.

References


